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A BOMBSHELL FOR THE REMOVITES!

(A Dramatic Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.)

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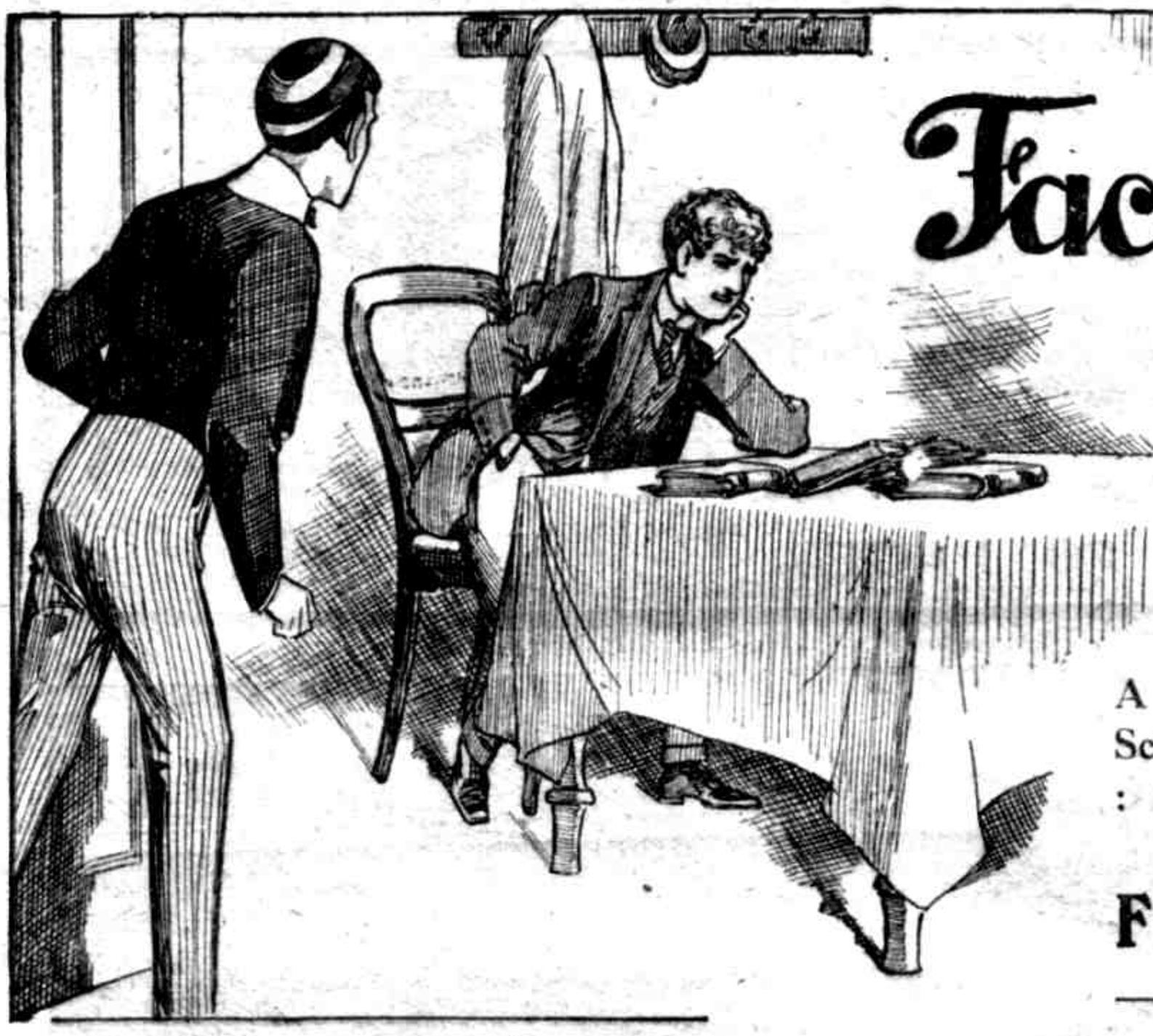

Facing the Music!

A Magnificent Long, Complete School Story of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School.

. . . BY . . .

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Information Received!

CLICK, click, click!

Buzzzzzz!

"Bless my soul!"

Buzzzzzz!

"Upon my word, this is really too bad!"

Buzzzzzz!

Mr. Quelch rose to his feet impatiently. The clicking of the typewriter ceased in the study of the Remove-master of Greyfriars. For quite a long time the machine had been clicking away industriously, and Mr. Quelch's literary work had been growing under his hands. It was, as he said, really too bad—not the literary work, of course, but the interruption. Mr. Quelch had had many interruptions that afternoon. Now, as the last straw, came the raucous buzz of the telephone-bell.

Greyfriars was unusually quiet that afternoon. It was Wednesday, and a half-holiday, and the Remove Eleven had gone over to Highcliffe School for a football match there. Most of the Remove had gone with them. Fellows in other Forms said that the Remove kicked up more row than all the rest of Greyfriars put together, and certainly the old school seemed very quiet without them.

But it was a fine day, and the beautiful weather had tempted crowds of other fellows out of gates as well. The quadrangle was almost deserted. Billy Bunter was rolling slowly across the quad with a disconsolate expression on his fat face. With nearly everybody out of gates, there was no one from whom the Owl of the Remove could hope to raise a loan; and even the prospect of a loan would not have tempted Bunter to walk over to Highcliffe. So the fat Removite loafed about the quad and groused.

And Mr. Quelch, with a glittering eye, went to the telephone, as the bell buzzed insistently. The telephone is not an unmixed blessing. It was quite probable that the ring was to be followed by "Wrong number; ring off, please!" or a gentle coo from the young lady at the exchange: "Did you ring? Oh, sorry you've been troubled!"

Mr. Quelch had had those experiences.

He grabbed the receiver off the hooks. There was no other word for it. The instrument nearly fell over as he grabbed.

He jammed it to his ear, and almost hissed into the transmitter:

"Hallo!"

"Hallo!" came the reply. "Is that Greyfriars?"

"Yes. What is wanted? Kindly be brief!"

"Who's speaking?"

"Mr. Quelch."

"Very good! I have something to tell you, Mr. Quelch."

"Please be brief!"

"Redwing, of the Remove, is detained this afternoon, I understand?"

"Redwing!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Yes; Tom Redwing."

The receiver jammed back on the hooks before Mr. Quelch's unknown interlocutor could get any further.

The Form-master rose from the instrument with a knitted brow, breathing hard.

"This is past all patience!" he ejaculated. "It is evidently a conspiracy. No fewer than five boys have interrupted me this afternoon, all on the subject of Redwing's detention. Now one has actually had the audacity to interrupt me on the telephone! Bless my soul! If I could guess his identity——"

Mr. Quelch sat down at the typewriter again.

He had not recognised the voice over the wires, but he guessed that it was a member of his own Form.

It was not surprising that Mr. Quelch was annoyed.

Tom Redwing of the Remove had been detained for the afternoon for accidentally "biffing" his Form-master with a cushion. And so he had lost his place in the football team Harry Wharton had taken over to Highcliffe School.

Vernon-Smith had tried to beg his chum off, in vain. Then Skinner & Co., from a peculiar sense of humour, had visited Mr. Quelch one by one on the subject, with the amiable intention of exasperating their Form-master, in which object they had succeeded perfectly.

The mere mention of Redwing's name was now, to Mr. Quelch, like unto a red rag to a bull.

His eyes glittered at the typewriter as he sat down to it, and his fingers wandered over the keys. It was not easy to catch the interrupted literary thread. And before Mr. Quelch had quite caught it there came:

Buzzzzzz!

It was the telephone again.

"Upon my word!"

The Remove-master fairly jumped from his chair.

Buzzzzzz!

Grab! The receiver was in Mr. Quelch's clutch again, and he almost shrieked into the transmitter:

"Who—what——"

"We were cut off, I think," came the same voice as before—a voice which the Remove-master vainly strove to identify, though he was sure it was familiar to him. "I have to inform you——"

"Who are you?"

"To inform you that Redwing is here at——"

"What?"

"At Highcliffe."

"Wh-a-at?"

Mr. Quelch began to understand.

It was not a "rag." Somebody at Highcliffe was giving him the information that Redwing of the Remove was there, Redwing, whom Mr. Quelch supposed to be grinding Greek in the Remove Form-room at Greyfriars!

Redwing had broken detention!

A deadly look came into Mr. Quelch's eyes. After the worry he had had on the subject of Redwing and his detention, this was the last straw.

"Redwing—there!" he stuttered.

"Yes, at Highcliffe."

"Who is speaking?"

"I thought I ought to mention it, sir, as I understand that the boy was detained for the afternoon——"

"He is certainly detained. He is, as I

believe, now in the Form-room at his detention task."

"He is here, at Highcliffe, playing football!"

"Impossible!"

"Really, sir, I have just seen him!"

"I cannot believe that Redwing has broken detention!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "He gave me his word not to leave the Form-room."

"He is here, all the same!"

"I ask you again, who is speaking? I shall certainly attach no credence to an anonymous statement."

"Look in the Form-room, then!"

That was all! Mr. Quelch spoke twice again, but received no reply. He put up the receiver.

He did not turn to the typewriter again.

The bare thought that Redwing had ventured to break detention made him set his lips with anger, but he did not quite believe it. Redwing had given his word not to leave the Remove-room, and Redwing was the soul of honour. But Mr. Quelch knew how disappointed he had been at not being allowed to accompany the footballers. It was easy enough to put this surreptitious information to the test. It was only a few steps to the Remove-room. With a grim brow Mr. Quelch left his study, and rustled away to the Form-room.

He threw open the door, and looked in grimly.

"Bless my soul!"

The room was empty.

Redwing's books and papers were on Redwing's desk. His Thucydides was left open. Evidently he had quitted his detention task in a hurry. And he was gone!

Mr. Quelch could hardly believe his eyes for some moments. His direct command had been disobeyed, his authority set at nought! Redwing should have been at work within those shady walls, and he was at Highcliffe, playing football!

An almost terrifying expression came over Mr. Quelch's face. He stood for some moments in the Form-room, staring at Tom Redwing's desk. Then he left, striding quickly down the passage. He paused only to change his gown for his coat, and to take his hat and stick. Then he hurried out to order the trap. To leave the disobedient, disrespectful junior to enjoy his freedom for the afternoon was the very last thought that would have entered the Remove-master's mind. Redwing had been gone, perhaps, an hour. The football match at Highcliffe could not have progressed very far. It was not to be finished, so far as Tom Redwing was concerned.

Mr. Quelch's brows were knitted, his jaw set squarely, as he sat in the trap, dashing away to Highcliffe at a rapid trot. There was a surprise in store for the Greyfriars footballers.

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THE SECOND CHAPTER.
A Startling Visitor!

"BRAVO, Wharton!"

"Well charged!"

"Good man!"

The crowd of Removites on the Highcliffe ground cheered loudly. Nearly all the Remove were there, to watch their champions playing the great game. Even Skinner, the slacker, was there—though Skinner had his reasons quite unconnected with football.

The Greyfriars Eleven were playing the game of their lives. The Highcliffe Eleven were one goal down at half-time, and the resumption of the game had begun in great style.

Harry Wharton was at the top of his form.

Frank Courtenay, the Highcliffe skipper, was here there and everywhere; but the captain of the Remove was equal to the test.

Again and again he had driven the ball down the field; and now he had kicked a near shot for goal.

And the Removites roared applause.

"Looks like our game!" Bob Cherry remarked.

"Early yet!" panted Johnny Bull.

"Well, it's a good beginning, anyhow!"

"The good beginfulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Simply terrific, old top!" grinned Squiff. "As terrific as your variety of the English language."

"My esteemed Squiff——"

"There goes Wharton again!" chuckled Tom Brown, of New Zealand. "Bravo! Well charged, sir!"

"Now we shall see how Redwing shapes!" remarked Bob Cherry, as the ball flew across to Tom Redwing.

"He will shape all right!" grunted Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars. "You needn't be afraid of Redwing."

Bob Cherry grinned.

As a matter of fact, he had some slight doubt as to how Tom Redwing would shape in a match against Courtenay's team; but anything in the nature of an aspersion upon his chum was sure of a tart rejoinder from Smithy.

"My dear man, I've no doubt he is a double-barrelled Meredith!" said Bob soothingly. "I was only wondering how many goals he is going to give us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!" grunted the Bounder.

Vernon-Smith did not seem in a good temper that afternoon. His face was clouded as he moved down the field with the rest of the players, every one of whom, excepting himself, looked very cheery.

"Same to you, and many of them!" answered Bob Cherry good-humouredly. "Did you leave something behind when you came over on your bike, Smithy?"

"Eh! No."

"Oh, I thought you might have lost your temper!"

"You silly ass!"

"Well, what's the matter with you, anyhow?" demanded Bob. "It's a glorious afternoon, and a glorious game, and we look like winning. What more do you want?"

The Bounder did not answer.

"Your pal Redwing got leave to come after all, and he's playing," continued Bob. "You ought to be looking chippy. I never thought for a moment that Quelchy would let him off detention."

Vernon-Smith coloured.

It was true enough that he seemed to have plenty of cause for satisfaction.

It had been a stroke of luck, Redwing getting into the Remove Eleven at all for such a match as that at Highcliffe, and the Bounder had set his heart upon seeing his chum play there. And he was there! Yet the Bounder did not seem satisfied or at ease.

Skinner, who was standing by the touch-line, looking on and listening, grinned.

He had a pretty clear idea of the cause of the Bounder's clouded look.

"Did Quelchy let Redwing off?" he called out.

Bob Cherry looked round at him.

"Of course he did," he answered. "Redwing's here, isn't he, fathead?"

"And playing well," remarked Frank Nugent.

"He's here right enough," assented Skinner, "but that doesn't prove that Quelchy let him off. He may have cut."

"Rot!"

"The rotfulness is terrific, my esteemed Skinner. The worthy Redwing would not cut against the esteemed orders of honourable Quelchy."

The Bounder gave Skinner a dark look, but did not speak. The cad of the Remove turned to him with a grin.

"Did Redwing cut, Smithy?" he asked.

"Oh, dry up!" snapped the Bounder.

"He came on after the team with you on a bike," insisted Skinner. "Why did he, if he had leave to come?"

"Find out."

"Looks to me as if he had bunked at the last minute," commented Skinner, with a shake of the head.

"Can't you mind your own business, you chattering fool?" exclaimed Vernon-Smith fiercely.

"Draw it mild, Smithy," said Bob Cherry quietly. "I hope there's nothing in this. There'll be an awful row if Redwing has taken French leave. It's about the last thing in the world Quelchy would forgive. It means a flogging at least."

"It's all rot," said Nugent. "Redwing wouldn't do it. Dash it all! Quelchy is a bit of an ogre at times, but it would be rotten bad form to treat him like that, and make him look a fool. Redwing wouldn't do it."

"I'm sure he wouldn't," assented Bob.

"Looks to me——" Skinner began.

"Bow-wow! Never mind what it looks to you," interrupted Bob Cherry. "You're always suspecting somebody of something, Skinner. Give your chin a rest, old scout, and watch the game."

"Blow the game!" snapped Skinner.

And he moved away to join Pousonby and Gadsby, the nuts of Highcliffe, who were lounging round the pavilion.

"Bravo, Redwing!"

Bob Cherry's doubts on the subject of Redwing were speedily set at rest.

Tom played like a Trojan when he chose to exert himself, and he was exerting himself now. And the Removites cheered him lustily.

Vernon-Smith's clouded face cleared a little as he watched him. His chum was doing well for the side, and that was a consolation to Smithy.

But the deep uneasiness in his breast never left him.

There was the reckoning to pay later, and Smithy could not quite get it out of his thoughts.

Nothing would have induced Tom Redwing to break detention and flout his Form-master's authority. Smithy had attempted to persuade him in vain. And Smithy had gained his point only by a deception that had made him sink in his own eyes. He had taken a pretended message from Mr. Quelch to the junior detained in the Remove-room; and Redwing, never dreaming of doubting his chum's word, had hurried off joyfully to join the footballers.

When the trouble came, Vernon-Smith fully intended to own up and exonerate his chum.

But that meant serious trouble for himself.

Such an offence could not be forgiven; the flouting of authority, accompanied by falsehood.

With the cool hardihood that was a part of his character, the Bounder was prepared to face the consequences of his reckless and unscrupulous action.

But the prospect was not pleasant.

He had succeeded, but the price had to be paid; and, with all his nerve, Smithy could not look forward to that with equanimity.

But the other fellows did not heed Smithy. They were watching Redwing with delight.

A French aviator recently attained the remarkable speed of 305 kilometres (over 190 miles) an hour in a trial flight near Paris.

The Highcliffe goal was being bombarded again, and the Highcliffians were battling wildly in defence, and all eyes were upon the players with breathless eagerness, and no one heeded a tall and rather angular gentleman who was hurrying towards the field. The Remove-master had arrived.

The ball smacked against the goal-post from a hard shot from Redwing's boot.

Crash!

"Bravo, Redwing! Hard luck!"

"Hurrah!"

The ball was passed from player to player, and Tom Redwing's face was flushed and happy. Just as the Caterpillar was preparing to clear the ball there was a commotion in the crowd, and Mr. Quelch strode upon the field, sublimely indifferent to the fact that he was interrupting a football-match in the full tide of excitement.

"Redwing, how dare you! Come with me at once!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Ordered Off!

HARRY WHARTON blinked at his Form-master.

Utterly unconscious of the trick the Bounder had played to get his chum to Highcliffe for the match, Wharton could scarcely believe his eyes as they fell on Mr. Quelch.

The sight of the Kaiser himself could hardly have astonished him more.

There was a buzz among the Removites.

"Quelchy!" stuttered Bob Cherry.

Vernon-Smith turned pale.

"After Redwing!" murmured Skinner, with a smile.

Skinner was the only fellow who had anticipated it. Skinner was the only fellow who knew that Mr. Quelch had been telephoned to from Highcliffe—for good reasons.

The game stopped at once.

The Caterpillar, who had just been turning himself into a catherine-wheel, straightened up, the ball still at his feet. He gave Courtenay rather a droll look.

Courtenay could only stare.

There was a dead silence on the Highcliffe football-field, broken only by Mr. Quelch's sharp, strident voice:

"Redwing, come with me!"

Redwing stood rooted to the ground.

He had forgotten football. He could only blink at his Form-master as if it was Mr. Quelch's ghost, and not Mr. Quelch himself, that had risen before him.

In the midst of a deathly silence, Mr. Quelch advanced towards the players.

"This is somethin' new in footer, isn't it?" the Caterpillar murmured. "What does his bony nibs want?"

"Redwing!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Ye-e-es, sir?" stuttered Tom Redwing, finding his voice at last.

"Come away at once!"

"I—I—I'm playing football, sir!" stammered the bewildered junior.

"I am aware of that, Redwing. You are here, playing football, when I supposed you to be in the Form-room at Greyfriars—when you had given me your word not to leave the Form-room!" thundered the Remove-master.

"I—I—I——"

Redwing stammered helplessly. It seemed to the hapless junior that either he or Mr. Quelch had taken leave of his senses.

Harry Wharton broke in.

"What has Redwing done, sir? He had leave to come here."

"Did he tell you so, Wharton?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Then he spoke falsely. He did not have leave to come here."

"Oh!" ejaculated Harry.

"I—I did not speak falsely!" exclaimed Tom Redwing indignantly. "You gave me leave, sir."

"You are perfectly well aware that I did not, Redwing. How dare you utter such impudent untruths!"

"But—but you sent me a message to the Form-room."

"I did not!"

"I—I——"

Tom Redwing floundered helplessly.

He was beginning to understand now.

He had received what he had supposed to be the message from Mr. Quelch granting him liberty for the afternoon. He had received it through Vernon-Smith. And his chum had lied! That was only too clear now.

The utter distress in the boy's face

About 170 square miles of forest land has been destroyed by recent fires in France.

seemed to calm a little Mr. Quelch's tempest of wrath.

His voice was less angry as he spoke again.

"Did anyone bring you a message which you believed to be from me, Redwing?"

"I—I——"

"I am aware that your friend Vernon-Smith attempted to persuade you to break detention. That is why I exacted your promise to remain in the Form-room. That promise you have broken by coming here."

"Oh, sir!" gasped Redwing, his face flooded with crimson.

"The dear old gent is very eloquent!" murmured the Caterpillar to Frank Courtenay. "He seems to take our football-ground for a giddy rostrum. Couldn't you give him a hint to move on, Franky?"

"Dry up, you ass!" whispered Courtenay.

"Well, this really isn't the game, you know."

"Dry up!"

The Caterpillar made a grimace, and dried up. A good many of the juniors round the ground were grinning now. The affair did not seem to them so awfully serious as it did to Mr. Quelch. And they wanted to get on with the game.

"Better clear off, Redwing!" said Harry Wharton abruptly.

"I—I thought I had leave, Wharton," stammered Tom. "I'm sorry!"

"I think I understand," said the captain of the Remove. "But get off the ground now."

"Yes, yes; I'm going."

"Redwing, you have not answered my question. If anyone brought you a false message from me——"

"I've nothing to say, sir," said Redwing steadily. "I'm ready to come away if you order me."

"Most certainly I do!"

"Very well, sir."

Tom Redwing followed the Remove-master from the field.

Vernon-Smith had made a movement to leave the field.

But he stopped.

He was quite prepared to take the burden upon himself of facing Mr. Quelch's wrath, but he remembered the game.

Greyfriars had to play one man short for the rest of the match; and if the Bounder owned up then it was quite certain that he would be taken back to Greyfriars as well as Redwing, and that meant the loss of the match without the shadow of a doubt.

So the Bounder set his lips and stood silent.

There was plenty of time. The affair was too serious for a mere caning. And reporting the matter to the Head, and receiving Dr. Locke's judgment upon it, meant delay. A public flogging in the morning was the most likely punishment. And, with his usual cool cynicism, the Bounder decided that Highcliffe might as well be beaten first.

The crowd opened for the Remove-master to pass, with the junior following at his heels, with crimson cheeks and hanging head.

It was a bitter enough humiliation for Redwing, and it was something like a disaster for the Greyfriars Eleven. Playing a man short against Highcliffe was another way of asking for a defeat.

Tom Redwing was thinking of that as much as anything else. But there was no help for it.

His chum had deceived him, but the thought did not cross his mind for a moment of betraying the Bounder.

He followed Mr. Quelch from the football-ground, and disappeared from the curious glances that were cast after him.

The game was resumed, with still a goal up for the Friars. How many goals Tom Redwing would have scored was a question. Probably enough to make all the difference between victory and defeat; but it could not be helped. Both in attack and defence he had proved his quality, and now he was gone.

The Friars were feeling worried and put out by the scene on the field—which was, perhaps, the reason why Bob was sent flying by Courtenay.

Vernon-Smith dashed forward with a dogged brow, but Courtenay was too clever for him, and the ball was slammed into the Friars' net.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Skinner is Pleased!

"TWO goals all!"

Skinner of the Remove made that remark to Stott, smiling.

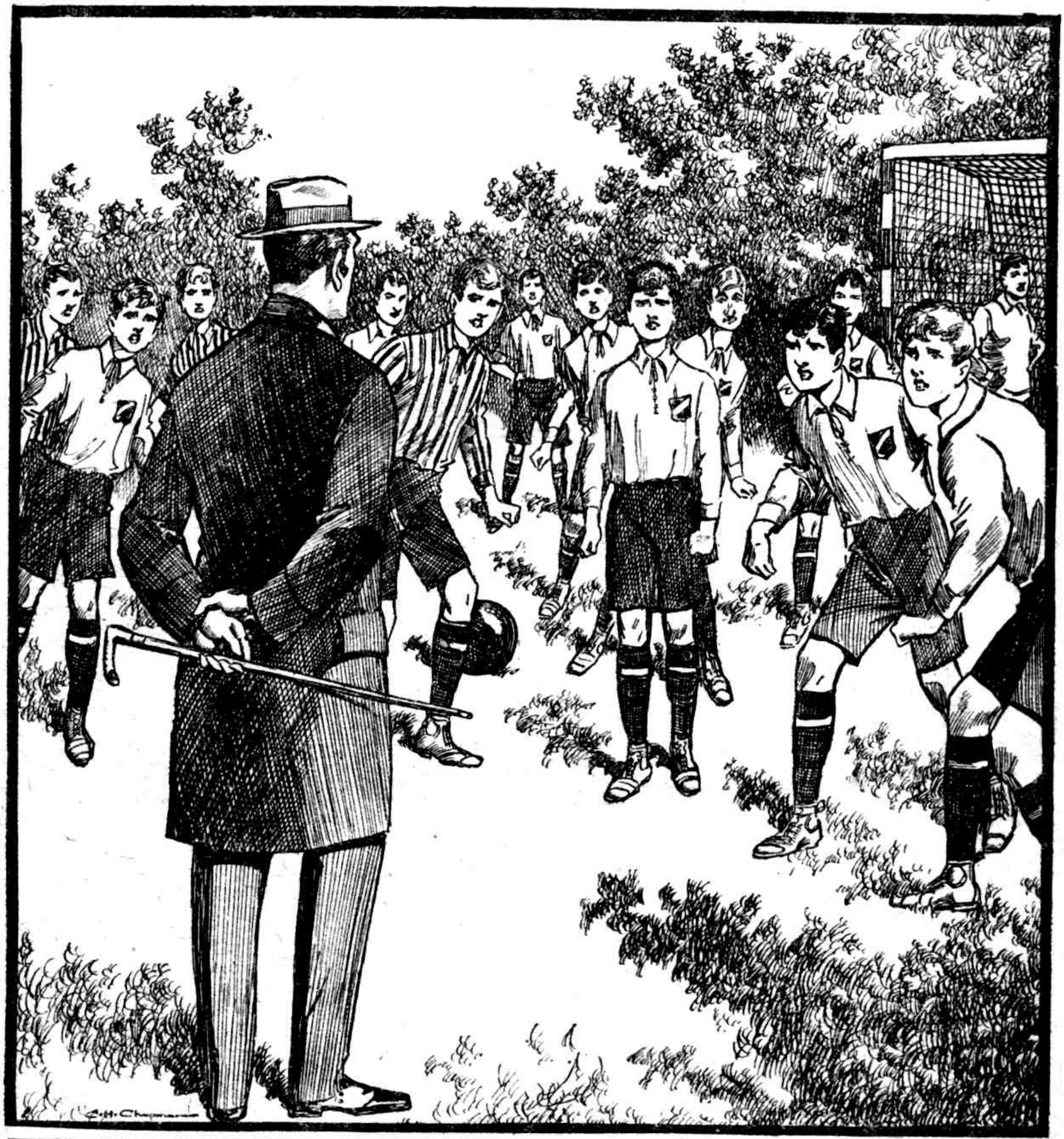
The Greyfriars style had broken down miserably enough.

The record price of 3,500 guineas has just been paid for a ten-months-old calf.

It could not be helped. The scene of the footer-field had had its effect on the players, and the knowledge that they were a man short for a hard tussle had its effect, too.

Courtenay, true, had offered to stretch a point to the extent of allowing Wharton to replace Redwing with another man, but the captain of the Remove had not felt entitled to accept the offer. He hoped to beat Highcliffe still, but as the game continued that hope grew fainter.

After such a scene on the field, it was not easy for the footballers to settle down



There was a dead silence as Mr. Quelch advanced towards Redwing. "Come away at once!" he thundered. "You are here, playing football, when I supposed you to be in the Form-room!" (*See Chapter 3.*)

to the game in the same cheery and confident spirit as before—and the Bounder, too, had failed. Vernon-Smith, usually a tower of strength, had failed—wretchedly. He could not help thinking of Redwing, now on his way to Greyfriars with Mr. Quelch, and of all the trouble that was to result from his deception. And so it came to pass that Smithy, who had been expected to make up for Redwing's loss, had been easily worsted by the Caterpillar, and the score had been equalised.

"Two goals all!"

"Rotten!"

"Smithy's off colour."

"It's Quelchy's fault—upsettin' everything like that!"

"Two goals all, and we're a man short!"

"Rotten!"

The Remove fellows round the field passed these comments, and many more. The disappointment was keen, after the excellent opening.

Harry Wharton's face was clouded.

His comrades did not look very cheerful.

They could not. The game was going to rags, and all the spirit seemed to have been taken out of it.

Skinner was the only Greyfriars fellow there who was pleased. He rubbed the bruise on his nose, and smiled. The Bounder had given him that mark, and Skinner did not forget it. But his chum, Stott, showed by his look that he did not share Skinner's views.

"It's a licking, after all," said Stott. "It was too rotten, Quelchy turning up like that. It's spoiled everything."

"Looks like it," said Skinner with a nod.

Stott gave him a suspicious look.

"How did Quelchy know that Redwing had broken bounds?" he asked.

"Missed him, perhaps."

"Did you telephone to him?"

"My dear chap!" remonstrated Skinner.

"You wanted me to, and you know it," grunted Stott. "Looks to me——"

"My dear man, don't think such things," said Skinner smoothly. "Of course I wouldn't do anything of the kind."

"I don't half believe you."

"Please yourself," yawned Skinner. And he strolled away, leaving Stott looking very suspicious and surly.

The Remove lined up, and the game was resumed.

Fortunately for Greyfriars, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was still in great form, and a grand run down the field by the Nabob of Bhanipur cheered up his comrades a little.

But Courtenay and the Caterpillar, when they were on the defence, kept the fort in great style, and even Inky strove in vain to drive the ball home.

The Removites seemed to have lost their grip of the game. Vernon-Smith was the worst. The Bounder was generally a good man, but he seemed as feeble as the veriest fag. The black depression of spirits that had settled upon him was the cause.

He missed a grand opportunity that would have put the Friars a goal up, but the Highcliffe skipper saved the situation. Harry Wharton glanced at the Bounder, but he did not speak. Wharton was not the kind of captain that "rags" a man during the match—he knew it was little use. The Bounder was doing his best, though it looked as if he were doing his worst.

Vernon-Smith tried to rouse himself, but he tried in vain. The knowledge was being borne in upon his mind that he had lost the big match for his school by his wretched deception.

But for Mr. Quelch's visit all might have gone well. But that dismaying scene had fairly "knocked" the Remove's chances.

And it was the Bounder's fault.

The match was as good as lost, and if he had not lied to Redwing as he had done all might have been well. It was his obstinate determination that his chum should play that had caused all the mischief. And that was not a comforting thought to the Bounder, who was very keen on scoring victories for Greyfriars.

With a good man gone, and one of his very best men hopelessly off colour, Harry Wharton had an uphill struggle before him. The Removites did their best, but their best was not sufficient, and the Highcliffians scored another goal after much battling in front of the Friars net.

There was an adjournment for a few minutes, when two of the players were badly winded, and at that time Harry Wharton spoke to the Bounder quietly but seriously.

"Try and pull yourself together, Smithy," he said. "The game's going to pieces, and we're pretty heavily handicapped already. For goodness' sake put some beef into your play!"

"I don't seem fit, somehow," said Smithy in a low voice. "I'm sorry. I'll do my best."

When the game was resumed the Bounder made a great effort to throw off his lassitude and play a good game. He succeeded for a time, and there were cheers from the Removites once more. But it was only a flash in the pan, and the end of the match came at last with the Highcliffians two goals up.

Highcliffe had won!

"Redwing's help would have done it!" said Bob Cherry rather bitterly.

"Oh, it's rotten!" growled Johnny Bull.

"The rottenness is terrific!"

"It's Redwing's fault, bless him!" said Peter Todd. "What the thump did he come for if he wasn't given leave?"

"He was told he had leave," said Harry.

"Who told him, then?"

"I—I don't know."

"I think I can guess," growled Toddy, "and that's the silly chump who's lost us the match!"

The Bounder flushed, but he did not speak. All the Remove players were feeling rather sore. The match had been theirs—they were all certain of that—and the unfortunate affair of Redwing had turned victory into defeat. There were quite half a dozen fellows who could have played well enough in Redwing's place and prevented this result.

As the field cleared Skinner came along from the house with Ponsonby and Gadsby, the nuts of Highcliffe. There was a bland smile on Skinner's face.

"Well, Highcliffe has won, after all, Pon," he remarked.

Ponsonby grunted.

"And I backed Highcliffe, you know," continued Skinner. "You and Gaddy owe me a quid each!"

"It's jolly rotten!" growled Ponsonby. "The game was in Wharton's hands when you made your bet with us, and I'd have put two to one on Greyfriars. It was old Quelch coming along that mucked it up for them."

"Yes, that helped, I dare say."

"That did the trick. Did you know Quelch was coming when you laid your bet?" asked Ponsonby morosely.

Skinner raised his eyebrows.

"How could I know?" he answered.

"Perhaps you gave him the tip that Redwing had broken bounds."

"How could I?"

Ponsonby grunted again. He was not at all satisfied with the result of his little sporting speculation on the match. But Skinner collected his stakes in cheery spirits—not at all troubled by the knowledge that he had swindled his dear friends the Highcliffe nuts. He sauntered away after the brake, as it left with the Remove footballers with a smile on his face—and he smiled more expansively as he noted the grim and gloomy face of Vernon-Smith in the brake. He rubbed his nose, which was still painful. The Bounder of Greyfriars had paid dearly, as it turned out, for the satisfaction of punching Skinner's nose—which was a very pleasant reflection to Skinner.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Under the Shadow!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter greeted Harry Wharton & Co. as they came into the School House at Greyfriars.

The Owl of the Remove blinked at them inquiringly through his big spectacles and grinned. The looks of the returning footballers were a plain enough indication that they were not returning victorious.

"Licked?" asked Bunter.

"Oh, rats!" was Bob Cherry's reply.

"How many goals did they beat you by?" queried Bunter derisively.

"You fat idiot!"

"He, he, he! I knew how it would be!" said Bunter. "You can't say I didn't warn you, Wharton! I offered to play! I couldn't do more than that! Next time you may have sense enough to play a really good man when you've got the chance!"

"Fathead!" answered Wharton.

"Oh, really, you know——"

"Where's Redwing, Bunter?" asked Vernon-Smith abruptly.

Bunter chuckled.

"He, he, he! Redwing bunked, you know, and Quelchy found it out, and fetched him back. Was there a scene at Highcliffe?"

"Where is he?"

"In his study, I think. He was looking awfully down in the mouth when I saw him. I believe Quelchy was jawing him all the way home in the trap. I say, you fellows, Quelchy is in a rare wax."

The Bounder pushed roughly past Bunter and ran up the stairs.

He slowed down as he drew near Study No. 4 in the Remove passage.

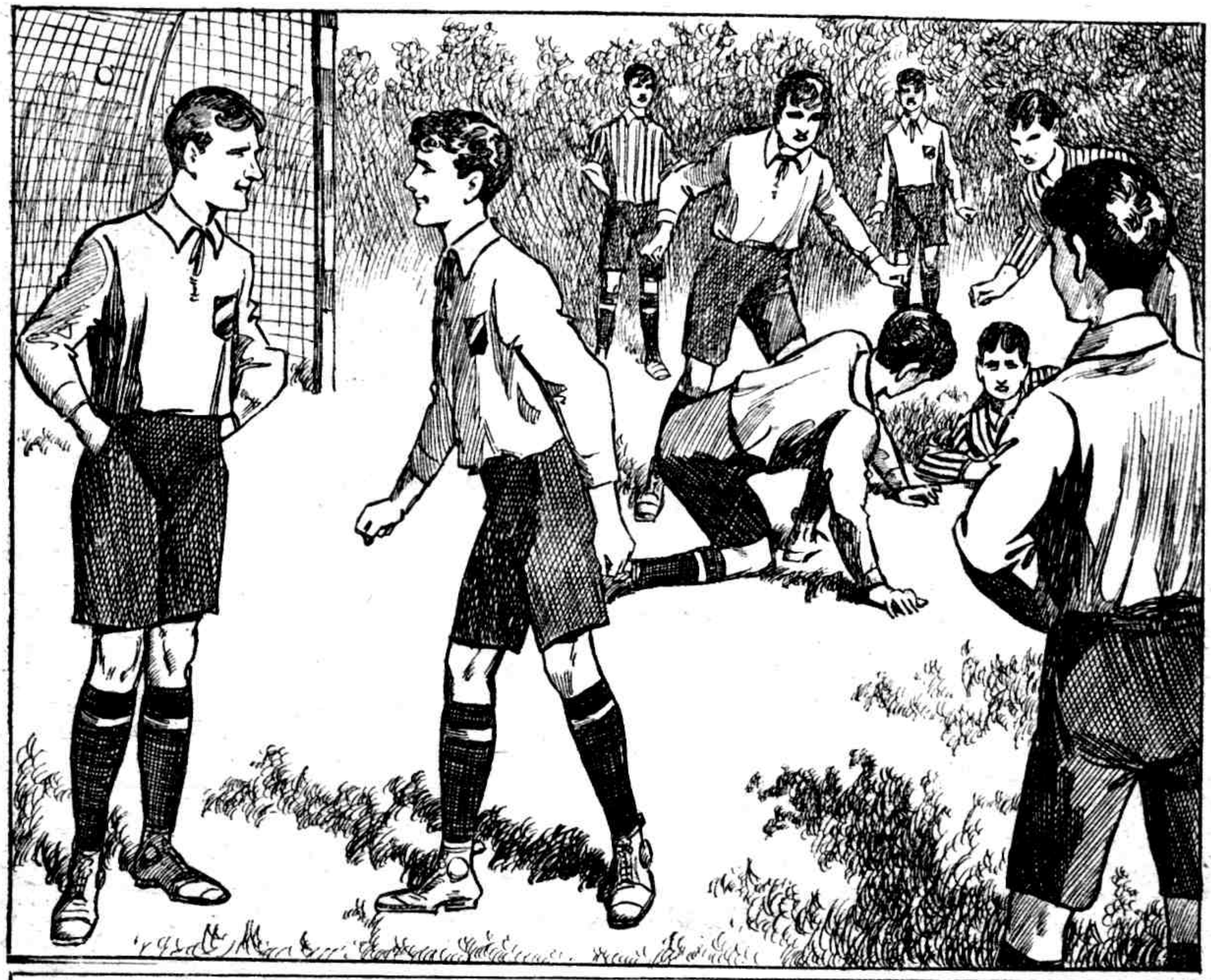
He was anxious to see his chum—but he dreaded the meeting a little. What he had done he had done for Tom Redwing's sake; but he knew that Redwing had very fixed ideas about the difference between truth and falsehood, and he wondered uneasily how the sailorman's son was going to take it.

But his hesitation was brief. Whatever he was called upon to face, the Bounder generally found hardihood enough to face it coolly.

He threw open the study door and entered.

Tom Redwing was there.

He was seated at the table with his Greek books before him, but he was not working. His chin had fallen into his hand, and he was deep in thought, his eyes fixed unseeingly upon the open page of Thucydides. He started as the Bounder came in, and rose to his feet.



"Try and pull yourself together, Smithy!" said Harry Wharton. "The game's going to pieces, and we're pretty heavily handicapped already. For goodness' sake put some beef into your play!" "I don't seem fit, somehow," said Smithy, in a low voice. *(See Chapter 4.)*

For a moment the two juniors looked at one another in silence. Tom Redwing was the first to speak.

"How did it go?" he asked.

"The match?"

"Of course."

"We lost."

"Oh!" said Redwing.

"It turned out a near thing, after all; they only beat us by two goals," said the Bounder.

"Then if I'd played——"

"We should have won."

"It's rotten, Smithy! I suppose the fellows must be feeling rather crusty about it?"

"Yes, rather!"

"It's rotten! If Nugent had played instead of me it would have been all right."

"Most likely."

There was silence again.

"What's happened since Quelchy fetched you away?" asked the Bounder at last.

Redwing coloured.

"We came back in the trap, and I finished my detention in the Form-room—with an extra hour."

"Is that all?"

"That's all, so far."

"But I suppose there's something more coming?"

"Naturally."

"Well, what?" exclaimed the Bounder impatiently.

"It doesn't matter," said Redwing.

"It does matter. I want to know. Have you told Quelchy that I brought you a spoof message from him, letting you off detention?"

"Certainly not."

"Then he thinks you broke detention on your own, and broke the promise you gave him to stay in the Form-room?"

"Yes," said Tom, colouring painfully.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"He suspects something," said Tom after another pause. "He could see that I thought I had leave to go—and he's asked me several times whether anyone told me so. Of course, I've said nothing. He's driven to the conclusion that I broke my promise to him. It was too bad of you, Smithy! What did you play such a trick on me for?"

"To give you your chance in the Highcliffe match."

"Not much use, as it turned out. It's practically thrown the match away as a result."

"That's how it's turned out. Of course, I couldn't foresee Quelch coming over to Highcliffe for you. I thought he was safe for the afternoon with his silly literary bosh, and I never dreamed that he would go nosing into the Form-room—especially as he had your promise not to leave. Somebody must have given him the tip, I think."

"Possibly!" said Tom. "He would have found it out later, though; he was pretty certain to come to the Form-room at the end of my detention and see if I'd done my task."

"That wouldn't have mattered; it would have been too late then for him to come over to Highcliffe and stop you playing."

Redwing smiled bitterly.

"Besides, I shouldn't have thought he'd have guessed you were at Highcliffe at all. Somebody must have told him, I think," said the Bounder, knitting his brows.

"That doesn't matter much now. I'm sorry about the footer match, but I can't help thinking more of—of what's happened to me. It's not pleasant to be supposed to have broken my word."

The Bounder made an impatient movement.

"Don't be an ass, Redwing! I'm going to own up, of course."

"I—I wish you hadn't done it, Smithy!"

"So do I, as it turns out."

"However it turned out, it would be rotten!"

The Bounder's lip curled.

"You mean, because I departed from the straight and narrow path of veracity in bringing you that spoof message?" he sneered.

"No good ever came of telling lies," answered Tom Redwing quietly.

"I shouldn't wonder if you're right. Anyhow, I'm going to tell Quelch the facts of the matter and face the music. What is it he's going to do? You're not let off, of course."

"I'm to be taken before the Head," said Redwing, flushing again. "I don't

know when—some time this evening, I think. It means a flogging, of course."

"You needn't mind that. I'm going to get the flogging."

"That's just as bad, Smithy."

"Oh, rot!"

"I—I'm afraid it may be worse for you than for me," said Redwing slowly. "What you did is a bit more serious than what I'm supposed to have done. I—I'm not asking you to own up, Smithy."

"You're willing to remain under the imputation of having broken your precious word?" grinned the Bounder.

"That's bad enough! But you——"

"I've told a lie, and taken my merry Form-master's name in vain!" sneered Vernon-Smith. "I suppose that's worse. Still, I did do it, and you didn't do it, and I'm going to tell Quelchy. Don't be an ass, Redwing. I suppose you never fancied that I was going to leave you to face the music for what I'd done?"

"No. But——"

"But you're willing to do it?"

"Yes."

"You're an ass, then!"

The Bounder turned to the door.

"Where are you going, Smithy?"

"To see Quelchy."

"To tell him——"

"Yes."

Tom Redwing said no more, and the Bounder quitted the study. Skinner was coming up the passage from the stairs with Stott. Vernon-Smith paused as he caught Skinner's grinning glance.

He strode up to the cad of the Remove with a look on his face that made Skinner start back a little.

"I want to ask you a question, Skinner," said the Bounder, between his teeth.

"Go ahead, old top!"

"Somebody told Mr. Quelch that Redwing had broken detention, and gone over to Highcliffe this afternoon."

"You don't say so!"

"Somebody sneaked!" said the Bounder. "Was it you, Skinner?"

"What a question!" smiled Skinner. "My dear man, you're dreaming! Surely you know me too well for that!"

The Bounder gave him a dark look, and walked on to the stairs. Skinner shrugged his shoulders and went into his study. It mattered little to him what the Bounder suspected, so long as nothing could be proved. But the matter was not yet ended, as Harold Skinner was destined to discover.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
Making a Clean Breast Of It!

"I SAY, Harry——"

"Oh, buzz off, Bunter!" exclaimed Harry Wharton rather crossly. And Frank Nugent pointed to the door.

Wharton and Nugent were in Study No 1, thinking of prep, when Billy Bunter blinked in at the doorway. Neither of the chums was in much of a mood for work; the affair at Highcliffe had left them feeling disturbed, and they were feeling some fatigue after a hard match. Naturally, they were not feeling inclined for William George Bunter's fascinating society.

"But, I say——" recommenced Bunter.

"Travel!"

"I came to tell you——"

"Bosh!"

"Quelchy wants you!" roared Bunter indignantly. "Quelchy's sent me to tell you to go to his study, Wharton!"

"Oh!" said Harry. "All right!"

And Billy Bunter rolled away with a snort. Harry Wharton followed him down the passage in an uneasy mood. He guessed that his Form-master wanted to see him on the subject of Redwing's escapade. He was sent for as head boy of the Remove. And the interview was not likely to be agreeable.

He tapped at the Remove-master's door, and Mr. Quelch's severe voice bade him enter.

"You sent for me, sir?" said Harry.

"Yes, Wharton! Come in, my boy!" said Mr. Quelch. "I desire to speak to you concerning Redwing's action to-day. I take it for granted that you did not know he had left Greyfriars without leave?"

"That is the case, sir!"

"Redwing passed his word not to leave the Form-room," said Mr. Quelch. "I required this of him, and he gave his word. Yet he went over to Highcliffe. I have always found Redwing an honourable lad, and it was a very great surprise and shock to me to find that he had not kept his word. I should never have suspected that he had left the Form-room had I not received positive information."

"You received information, sir?" said Harry, with a glint in his eyes.

"Yes. Someone telephoned from Highcliffe."

"Oh, sir!"

"Now, Wharton, from words Redwing let drop, and from my knowledge of his character, I have an idea that he supposed he had leave to quit Greyfriars and follow you to Highcliffe. I can get no explanation from him, which gives me the impression that he is shielding another person. It is quite possible that another boy took a false message to him, and made him believe that he was liberated. In that case, of course, Redwing cannot be blamed for his action, and it would be the height of injustice to report him to Dr. Locke for a flogging. If such a message was given him, and he believed it, he must be exonerated."

"Certainly, sir!"

"So, you see, Wharton, it is important for me to know the facts. Are you aware of the facts of the case?"

Wharton coloured.

He had a pretty accurate idea of the facts; but he could not say that he exactly knew what the facts were, and he decidedly did not wish to say so. He had his own opinion of Vernon-Smith's conduct, but it was not his business to betray the Bounder.

"I really know nothing, sir," he said at last. "When Redwing turned up at Highcliffe I thought you had given him leave to come, and—and I'm sure he thought so himself!"

"He could only have thought so if a false message had been given to him."

"I—I suppose so, sir."

"And you believe this to be the case?"

Wharton did not answer.

"As head of the Remove, Wharton, it is your duty to speak," said the Form-master. "You cannot remain silent and allow a severe punishment to fall upon a boy who may be quite blameless."

"Well, sir, I am sure Redwing was made to believe that he was excused detention," said Harry.

"That is what I wished to know. I will not ask you any further questions, Wharton. I have a very clear idea as to who gave the false message, if one was given. I have not forgotten that I heard Vernon-Smith urging him to break detention. You may go, Wharton; and kindly send Vernon-Smith to my study."

"Very well, sir."

Harry Wharton left the study, and came upon Vernon-Smith a few steps from the door. The Bounder looked at him.

"You're wanted, Smithy!" said Wharton.

"I was just coming to see Quelchy. Has he been asking you——"

"Yes; he suspects you of having deceived Redwing with a spoof message from him," said Harry.

The Bounder nodded.

"Quite a sharp old bird, isn't he?" he remarked coolly. "He's got it, right on the wicket. I suppose you guessed?"

"I guessed, of course," said Harry. "You'd better go in."

"Shocked — what?" sneered the Bounder.

"Yes," answered Wharton quietly. "I never thought you'd do such a thing, Smithy. It was rotten, and you know it as well as I do. As it turned out, too, it mucked up the match, and there's a defeat to go down in the Remove record instead of a win. But I don't want to slang you. I'm afraid you're booked for trouble."

"I know that!"

The Bounder lounged on, knocked carelessly at Mr. Quelch's door, and entered the study.

The Remove-master eyed him rather grimly as he came in.

It was a fact that Herbert Vernon-Smith was ashamed of the action which had caused so much trouble; but he did not choose to show it. There was a coolness in his manner that approached impertinence, and it brought a glint into Mr. Quelch's eyes.

"Vernon-Smith, I require to know ——"

"I know, sir!" answered the Bounder, interrupting him. "I was coming here to tell you when I met Wharton."

"What have you to tell me?"

"Redwing wasn't to blame for what happened to-day, sir. I gave him a message from you, telling him he was let off, and could go to Highcliffe for the football match, and he believed me."

"You told him a falsehood, Vernon-Smith!"

The Bounder winced a little.

"Yes, sir," he muttered.

"What was your reason?"

"I didn't want him to lose his chance of playing in the Highcliffe match. It was a big chance for Redwing."

"And for that reason you set your Form-master's authority at defiance and deceived your own friend."

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. I believe that Redwing was deceived, and acted in good faith, and I shall say no more to him about the matter. You are the guilty party, Vernon-Smith, and the punishment will fall upon you."

"I expected that, sir."

"I shall report the matter to Dr. Locke this evening. I shall request him to administer a flogging," said the Remove-master sternly. "You may go now, Vernon-Smith."

"Thank you, sir!"

And the Bounder went.

He compressed his lips as he walked down the passage. He had expected this—there was nothing else to expect. But now the blow had fallen the Bounder realised the situation more clearly. He had acted recklessly and unscrupulously; but it was for friendship's sake, and that had seemed some sort of a justification. But the plain facts of the matter were that he was condemned to a humiliating punishment for disobedience and falsehood. Somehow, he had not quite realised before how the matter precisely stood, but he realised it now. His face was a little pale when he came back to his study. He forced a smile as he met Tom Redwing's anxious glance.

"Well?" asked Redwing.

"Just as I expected," answered the

Bounder, with a lightness he was very far from feeling.

"What——"

"I'm going to be flogged by the Head!"

"Oh, Smithy!" said Tom Redwing miserably. "I—I wish you'd left the matter where it was."

"Rot!"

The Bounder threw himself into a chair. He did no prep that evening; and when Redwing was finished work the Bounder did not go down with him. He did not care to face the curious eyes in the Common-room. Tom hesitated at the door.

"Coming down, Smithy?" he asked.

"No."

"Shall I stay?"

"No; I'd rather be alone for a bit, if you don't mind," grunted the Bounder. "Cut off!"

Redwing paused, and then left the study slowly. Vernon-Smith was left to his own thoughts—which were gloomy enough. He was not seen again till the Remove went to their dormitory—and then, under the eyes of his Form-fellows, the Bounder's manner was as cool and nonchalant as ever. Whatever he might be feeling inwardly, the Bounder of Greyfriars was not likely to wear his heart upon his sleeve for daws to peck at.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
Flogged!

"ALL hands on deck, I suppose?" grinned Skinner the next morning after prayers.

And Stott chuckled.

"Oh, dry up, you rotter, Skinner!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "There's nothing funny in a fellow being flogged."

"Not to the fellow himself!" agreed Skinner.

"I've an idea that somebody else ought to be flogged as well as Smithy," growled Bob. "Some cad telephoned from Highcliffe and gave Redwing away yesterday. I'd like to know who it was!"

Skinner started a little.

"What rot!" he said. "What put that silly idea into your head?"

"It's a fact!" said Harry Wharton quietly. "Mr. Quelch told me that the information was telephoned to him from Highcliffe."

Skinner breathed rather hard. Wharton's eyes were resting on his face very sharply.

"Do you know who telephoned, Skinner?" he asked.

"How should I know?"

"Well, you were there."

"Plenty of other fellows were there," said Skinner, with a sneer. "If you mean that you suspect me——"

"Well, I won't say that," answered Wharton. "It wouldn't be fair to suspect you without any evidence, certainly."

"Thanks!" said Skinner sarcastically. "You're really kind. Of course, I know nothing about it."

"I'd like to know who it was," growled Bob.

"One of the Highcliffe chaps, most likely," said Skinner carelessly.

"They wouldn't know that Redwing had broken detention."

"I happened to mention it to some of them—about his being detained, I mean. You see, I was rather surprised to see him turn up at the last minute. Lots of them knew."

"Well, it was just like Ponsonby to play such a trick," said Harry. "I dare say he did it, or one of his friends. I admit the thought crossed my mind that you might have given Redwing away, Skinner—and if you didn't, I'm sorry."

"Oh, don't mind me!" said Skinner airily.

There was some curiosity in the Remove as to whether it would be a case of "all hands on deck," as Skinner described it. But as it turned out it was not a public flogging for the Bounder. Wingate of the Sixth called him to the Head's study, and the Bounder followed the Greyfriars captain with a cool saunter, apparently quite unconcerned. Gosling, the porter, was there when he arrived—Gosling's duty being to hoist the delinquent for his punishment.

Some of the Removites lingered in the passage.

Skinner was the only fellow who did not feel at all concerned for the hapless Bounder. Nobody thought of justifying what Smithy had done; but the juniors could not help feeling sorry for him.

The fellows who lingered in the passage did not, however, hear any sound from the victim as the punishment was administered.

They caught the sound of the swishing of the birch; but there was no cry from the delinquent under the infliction.

The Bounder was hard all through, and not a cry left his lips.

He was a little pale when he appeared in the Form-room with the Remove that morning, and that was all.

Tom Redwing, indeed, looked more distressed than his chum.

Wrong-headed as the Bounder had been, he had acted for his chum's sake, and Redwing could not forget that. And that, too, was some sort of an excuse in the eyes of the Removites.

Mr. Quelch ignored the Bounder in class that morning; the junior had done no prep the previous evening; but the fact did not transpire. He was not called upon to construe. He had had his punishment, and the Remove-master left him to himself till the effects should have worn off.

Vernon-Smith quitted the Form-room as soon as he could when the Remove were dismissed, and went out into the quadrangle by himself. Tom Redwing joined him there, and found the Bounder pacing to and fro under the elms with a dark and gloomy brow.

"Feeling bad, old chap?" asked Redwing softly.

"Yes."

"I'm awfully sorry, Smithy."

"Oh, rot! It doesn't matter! I've had floggings before," said the Bounder. "I was often enough in hot water before you came to Greyfriars, Redwing. I'm not thinking of the licking. I'm thinking of Skinner."

"Skinner!" repeated Tom. "Skinner has nothing to do with it, has he?"

"Lots, I think."

"I don't see——"

"Somebody telephoned from Highcliffe that you were there yesterday," said Vernon-Smith. "That's how Quelchy knew. But for that the match would have gone off all right; and Quelchy might never have discovered that you broke bounds after all. I believe it was Skinner who telephoned."

"It's hardly fair to put it down to him on suspicion, old chap. And it doesn't matter much now, does it?"

"It does—to me. Whoever sneaked to Quelchy is going to suffer for it."

Redwing had an uneasy look.

"Why not let the matter drop?" he said. "Look here, old fellow——"

"Oh, give us a rest!" interrupted the Bounder savagely. "You haven't had the flogging. I have!"

"That doesn't make any difference to me," said Redwing, colouring. "But you did wrong, Smithy, knowing what might follow——"

"Oh, I know—I know! But sneaking is barred in the Remove, and whoever gave us away is going to have as bad as I've had—or worse!" said the Bounder, between his teeth. "I believe it was Skinner, and I'm going to find out somehow, and then——"

Redwing was silent.

"You don't think I ought to be revengeful—what?" sneered the Bounder.

"I wish you'd put the matter right out of your mind. It's over now."

And the Bounder walked away with a moody brow. Tom Redwing sighed, and followed Harry Wharton & Co. to the football-ground. His chum did not want his company just then, preferring that of his own moody and bitter thoughts.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
The Benefit of the Doubt!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Highcliffe cad!"

That remark was drawn from Bob Cherry by the sight of Cecil Ponsonby of the Highcliffe Fourth strolling in at the gates of Greyfriars after lessons that day.

Ponsonby glanced at the Famous Five, who were chatting in the quad. He had not heard Bob's remark, but perhaps he guessed its purport.

He came towards the chums of the Remove.

"Skinner about?" he asked.

"I don't know where Skinner is," answered Harry Wharton, rather abruptly. "I dare say you'll find him in the House."

"Thanks!"

Ponsonby sauntered towards the School House, and found Skinner and Stott lounging in the doorway. They nodded to him.

"I've dropped in to see you, Skinney," said Ponsonby.

"Well, here I am!"

"Might as well go up to your study, I think."

"Come on, then!"

Ponsonby evidently had something of a private nature to communicate. He followed Skinner up to the Remove passage, and into Study No. 2.

He closed the door, and fixed his eye upon Skinner with a smile that was not wholly pleasant.

"You owe me two quids," he re-

marked—"one for me, and one for Gaddy! Will it suit you to pay up?"

Skinner stared at him.

"What are you driving at?" he asked. "I don't owe you any money, Pon."

"You won two quids from us yesterday over the football-match," explained Ponsonby. "You bet on Highcliffe against your own school——"

"And won!" said Skinner.

"Exactly! Owing to your merry Form-master droppin' in and baggin' Redwing off the field!"

"That's got nothing to do with it."

"A little, I think. It seems that Redwing was out of bounds, and somebody told Quelchy——"

"Well, I didn't tell him. I was at Highcliffe."

"I've been thinkin' that out, you see," said Ponsonby, smiling. "I smelled a large-sized rat, and I've been inquirin'. And it occurred to me that you knew what was goin' to happen when you laid your bet; it looked like a win for the Remove when you laid it, and I couldn't understand at the time why you were so jolly reckless with your money. I know now. You telephoned to Mr. Quelch from Highcliffe. I've asked Mr. Mobbs, and he's told me that you asked leave to use his telephone."

Skinner set his thin lips.

"I did use the telephone——" he began.

"Oh! You admit that?"

"I 'phoned to the bunshop in Courtfield about some stuff they're getting for me."

"Give us a rest, old top! I know jolly well where you 'phoned! It was a catch! You spoofed us over the bet! You laid your money against Greyfriars, makin' sure they'd lose by playin' that trick! If you call that fair play, I don't! It's up to you to hand back the stakes, Skinner. You can't expect us to be swindled like that!"

Skinner shrugged his shoulders.

"You staked your money with your eyes open," he answered. "Even if it's as you think, the bet stands."

"Then you won't pay up?"

"Certainly not!"

Ponsonby's eyes glittered.

"It's a swindle!" he said.

Skinner yawned.

"You've diddled us out of two quids!" said the Highcliffe "blade." "I've come over to collect the money, Skinner!"

"I'm afraid you've had your trouble for nothing, old top!" replied Skinner agreeably. "Still, it's nice weather for walking! I dare say the exercise has done you good!"

"Is that all you've got to say?"

"That's all."

"You'll repent it!"

"Bow-wow!"

Ponsonby gave the cad of the Remove a dark look, and stepped out of the study. Skinner smiled after him. The Highcliffe junior went down the stairs, leaving Skinner smiling.

But Ponsonby did not start for the gates at once. He looked round in the quadrangle, and spotted Tom Redwing, and came up to him.

"I've some news for you, Redwing," he said.

Redwing gave him a cold look. He had neither respect nor liking for the dandy of Highcliffe, and his look showed that he did not want any of Ponsonby's conversation. But the cheery Pon had his own purpose to serve, and he did not heed Redwing's look.

"I suppose you got pretty well ragged by the gay old Gorgon yesterday?" went on Pon.

"Are you speaking of Mr. Quelch?"

"Yes."

"Well, please don't call my Form-master names to me!" said Redwing.

"My mistake! I forgot I was speakin' to Good Little Georgie, who always loved his kind teachers!" said Ponsonby, unabashed. "To come to the point, old Quelch—my mistake again, I mean, Mr. Quelch—Mr. Quelch was brought over to Highcliffe after you by Skinner telephoning to him that you were there. Mr. Mobbs, my merry Form-master, lent him his 'phone. See?"

"I see!"

"I thought I'd tell you," said Ponsonby, rather puzzled by the calmness with which Redwing received the information.

"Thank you!"

"My hat! I should have thought that you'd be a bit ratty about it, as you must have got a lickin'!"

"Oh, I can guess why you've told me!" answered Redwing contemptuously. "You needn't tell me any more!"

He turned his back on Ponsonby and walked away, leaving the dandy of Highcliffe gnawing his lip. Evidently Redwing was not inclined to be of use to Ponsonby. The Highcliffe junior stood for some moments nonplussed, and then, as he caught sight of the Bounder in the distance, he brightened up. He was pretty certain that Vernon-Smith would not take the news so quietly as Redwing had done.

Vernon-Smith gave him a sour look as he came up, but his expression changed as Ponsonby imparted his information.

A glitter came into the Bounder's eyes.

"You're sure of this?" he asked.

"Quite sure. You can ask Mobby, if you like."

"What are you tellin' me for?"

Ponsonby laughed.

"Because Skinner diddled Gaddy and me out of a quid each on the match, and won't hand back the tin. I don't like bein' welshed!"

"I see!" said the Bounder.

Ponsonby nodded, and walked away to the gates. He had lost his money, but he had the satisfaction of knowing that he had made things warm for the sneak of the Remove. The Bounder's look was a sufficient guarantee of that.

Vernon-Smith joined Harry Wharton & Co., after some reflection, and repeated Pon's story to the Famous Five.

"What do you think of that?" he said.

"Is it true?" asked Wharton.

"Pon says so."

"Pon's as untruthful as a Hun, and, on his own showing, he's got a quarrel with Skinner about some rascally bet. I wouldn't hang the Kaiser on Pon's evidence!" answered the captain of the Remove.

"That's all very well, but it's clear enough!" said the Bounder angrily. "I suppose rotten sneaking like that isn't going to be passed over?"

"Not if it's proved."

"If it's proved, Skinner will get a Form ragging!" said Bob Cherry. "But Ponsonby's word isn't good enough, Smithy!"

"The provefulness is not great, my esteemed Smithy!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The Bounder set his teeth. He believed every word that Ponsonby had told him, but it was a good deal because he wanted to believe it. He was well aware that Pon's statements were, to say the least, unreliable.

"You can ask Mr. Mobbs whether Skinner used his telephone," he said. "Old Mobbs will tell you that."

"That's so. But even then we don't know that Skinner telephoned to Mr. Quelch. I know it looks like it, but——" Wharton hesitated. "Look here, Smithy! I don't like Skinner any more than you do, but I should want a lot of proof before I believed that a Greyfriars fellow would play a trick to dish his own side in a football match."

Skinner came out of the School House, and Wharton called to him. There was a very wary look in Skinner's shifty eyes as he came up. The cad of the Remove had watched Ponsonby from his study window, and he was on his guard.

"Did you use Mr. Mobbs' 'phone at Highcliffe yesterday, Skinner?" asked the captain of the Remove abruptly.

"Yes."

"Oh!" Wharton was a little taken aback by that candid admission. "You did? Will you tell me whom you telephoned to?"

"The bunshop at Courtfield."

"Will they say so, if they're asked?" sneered the Bounder.

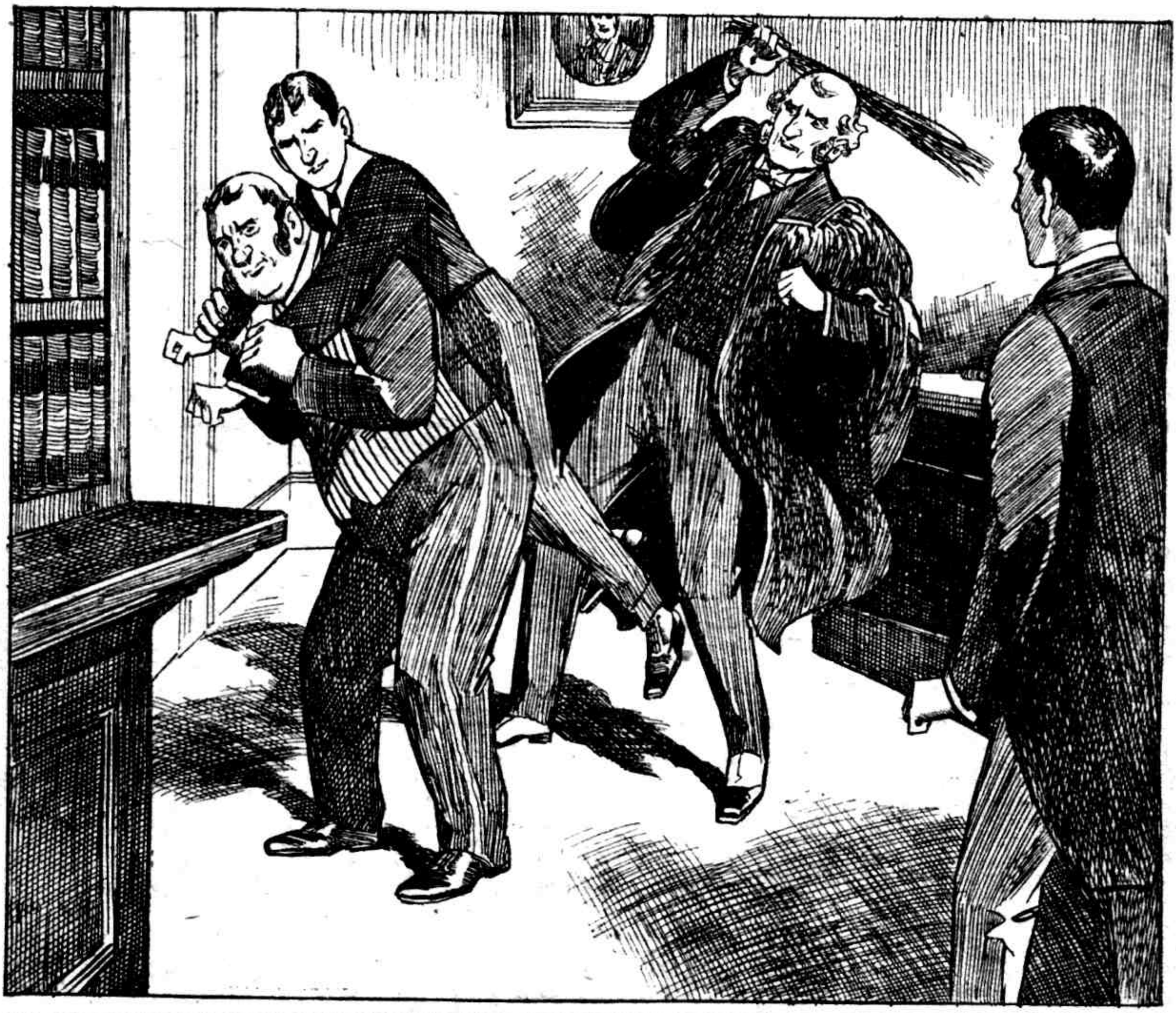
"You can put it to the test if you like to walk down to Courtfield," answered Skinner airily.

"You can do that, Smithy," said Wharton.

The Bounder made an impatient gesture.

"Can't you see the trick?" he snapped. "Skinner 'phoned to Quelchy, and then 'phoned to the bunshop to account for his having used the telephone if it came out."

"What an idea!" smiled Skinner. "You're really making me out an awfully



The fellows who lingered in the passage caught the sound of the swishing of the birch ; but there was no cry from the delinquent under the infliction. The Bounder was hard all through, and not a cry left his lips. *(See Chapter 7.)*

deep fellow, Smithy. I think a deep dodge like that is more in your line than mine, really, you know."

Vernon-Smith clenched his hands.

"My own idea is," pursued Skinner, in the same airy tone, "that Ponsonby telephoned. I'd mentioned Redwing's detention to him, and he may have thought it would be a lark to give him away. Just in his line, you know. Besides, as it turned out, it made you lose the match, and, of course, that would please Pon no end."

"I must say that looks likely enough," remarked Johnny Bull, after some reflection.

"It was Skinner!" said the Bounder savagely.

Wharton shook his head.

"There's no proof," he said. "It may have been Skinner, but, as he says, it's very like one of Pon's rotten tricks."

"You mean you're not going to take the matter up, as captain of the Form?"

"Not without some better proof than Pon's word, certainly."

"Then I'll take it into my own hands," said the Bounder, his eyes glittering.

"Look here, Smithy——"

"Skinner gave us away, and Skinner is goin' to pay for it!" The Bounder made a stride towards the cad of the Remove. "Put up your hands, you rotter!"

Skinner put his hands into his pockets.

"I've fought you twice, Smithy," he said coolly. "I've given you best. I'm not going to fight you again!"

"Will you put up your hands?"

"No, I won't!"

The Bounder trembled with rage. The proof against Skinner was enough for him, if not for the other fellows, and now he was even deprived of the satisfaction of hammering Skinner with his own hands.

"Coward as well as sneak!" he said, between his teeth.

Skinner shrugged his shoulders.

"Every chap in the Remove knows that I'm not a match for you, Smithy," he said. "I've stood up to you twice. That's enough! I'm not going to fight you every time you get a whim into your head."

"Take that, then!"

The Bounder struck out full at Skinner's face, but Harry Wharton interposed, and knocked up his arm.

"That's enough, Smithy!" he said coldly. "You know Skinner couldn't stand up to you for two rounds, and it's not fair to make him. If it's proved that he sneaked, the Form will deal with him; but till then, let him alone!"

"Get aside!"

"Bosh!"

The Bounder eyed Wharton savagely for a moment or two, and it looked as if he would spring upon the captain of the Remove. But he controlled himself with an effort.

"It will keep!" he muttered.

And he turned on his heel and swung away.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.
Bitter Blood!

SKINNER had been given the benefit of the doubt; but he soon found, from the looks of his Form-fellows, that most of them entertained little doubt on the subject. But that did not trouble the cad of the Remove very much. The matter was not likely to remain long in the minds of the Remove fellows, and Skinner brazened it out with his usual effrontery. He was only uneasy on the score of the Bounder. Vernon-Smith, like Skinner himself, had a long memory for injuries, and a flogging was rather too serious a matter to be soon forgotten. But the Bounder seemed to have dropped the idea of obtaining satisfaction by "hammering" Skinner. There was, indeed, little enough satisfaction in that method; for Skinner, if he had been forced into a fight, would not have stood up to more than one round. Whether any other scheme was working in the

Bounder's implacable mind Skinner did not know, but he was uneasy.

Harry Wharton & Co. gave little more thought to the affair. But Tom Redwing was as uneasy as Skinner, though from different motives. Since his flogging Smithy had grown much more silent and reserved. The humiliation seemed to have made him bitter. Redwing often found him in moody silence in the study, and he knew what was in his thoughts. For some time the matter was not mentioned in No. 4, but Redwing came to it at last. It was on Saturday afternoon. The Remove were playing football with the Fourth, and Vernon-Smith was standing out of the team. Redwing found him brooding in the study when the Remove went down to Little Side to meet Temple, Dabney, & Co. of the Fourth.

"You're not playing, Smithy?" he asked.

"No."

"Coming out for a spin, then?"

"I'd rather not, thanks."

"What are you going to do?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"Not much good mooching about on a half-holiday, Smithy, is it? Come for a spin down to Hawkscliff with me."

"I don't want to."

"What are you thinking about?" asked Redwing abruptly. "That wretched old affair at Highcliffe, I suppose?"

"Exactly."

"Isn't it about time you chucked it, Smithy? Even if Skinner played a rotten trick it's not worth while keeping it up like this. He's not worth your thinking about."

"I had the flogging."

"Well——" began Tom. He paused, and began again. "Look at it squarely, Smithy! I agree that it was most likely Skinner who gave us away. Let it go at that. But—but you had the licking, old chap, because of what you did. Skinner couldn't have done any harm if you hadn't——"

"You mean I ought to blame myself for the old bizney?"

"Well, it does come to that, doesn't it?"

The Bounder's lip curled.

"I dare say you look at it like that—I don't!" he replied. "I'm not grumbling at getting my gruel for what I did. I knew I should most likely have to face the music for that. But I was betrayed, and Skinner betrayed me, and lost us a match for the sake of a rotten bet! I shall be satisfied when——" He broke off.

"Well, when?" said Tom interrogatively.

"When Skinner has had a flogging, too," said Vernon-Smith.

Redwing raised his eyebrows.

"You could punch him, if it were worth while," he said. "But you can't get him a flogging."

"We shall see."

"What on earth have you got in your head, Smithy?" asked Redwing uneasily. "You're talking in riddles."

"Nothing I intend to explain to you," answered the Bounder coolly. "But Skinner is going to get a flogging, the same as I had. I sha'n't be satisfied till then."

"I wish you'd forget about the whole bizney!"

"So I will—when Skinner's had his flogging!"

"I dare say he's deserved enough of them," said Tom. "He would get flogged fast enough if the Head knew about his card-playing and other tricks. But you couldn't give him away."

"Skinner gave me away!" said the Bounder unpleasantly.

"That's different! You're a decent chap, and he isn't; you couldn't descend to his level!"

The Bounder laughed.

"You don't know what level I could descend to when my back's up!" he answered. "I believe in hittin' back when I'm hit!"

"Not below the belt, though!" said Redwing quietly.

The Bounder did not answer.

Redwing remained in the study a few minutes; the Bounder staring from the window and paying him no heed. The sailorman's son left the study at last, with a troubled brow.

What was in the Bounder's mind he could not guess; but he was deeply uneasy, and a little alarmed.

He had seen the Bounder in these black moods before; and he knew how much bitterness there was in Vernon-Smith's nature when it was roused. He walked down to Little Side to see the football-match, but he was thinking of his chum, and wondering what black thoughts were passing in the Bounder's mind, alone in the deserted Remove passage.

The Removites were making hay of Cecil Reginald Temple's eleven. Cecil Reginald prided himself upon his football—but Fry of the Fourth murmured to Dabney that the great man was, in point of fact, delivering them into the hands of the Egyptians. And Dabney said, "Oh, rather!" There were a good many

of the Removites on the ground, grinning at the "show," as Bolsover major called it; and Tom Redwing soon found himself interested in watching the game, and the Bounder passed from his mind for the time.

"Rotten show—ain't it?" remarked Billy Bunter, joining Redwing on the touch-line.

"On the Fourth Form side, certainly!" agreed Tom.

"The kicking ain't up to much," said the Owl of the Remove sagely. "Look at Bob Cherry, f'rinstance!"

"What's the matter with him?" inquired Redwing, with a smile. Bunter in the role of critic was rather entertaining.

Billy Bunter sniffed.

"Not my style!" he said.

"That's so, certainly!"

"By the way, Redwing, have you noticed whether the postman's come?"

"Never thought about it."

"I'm expecting a postal-order!" said Bunter, blinking seriously at Redwing. "Until it comes, I'm rather short of tin!"

"You'll be short of tin for some time, then, I expect!" said Tom, with a laugh.

"I don't know what you mean, Redwing!" said Bunter, with dignity. "What I was going to say is, have you half-a-crown about you that you don't want?"

"No; I want all my half-crowns!"

Bunter gave a peevish grunt.

"I mean——" he recommenced.

"I know what you mean," assented Tom Redwing. "Leave it till your postal-order comes, Bunty. You can ask me again then—not before!"

"Oh, really Redwing——"

"Well kicked, Wharton!"

"Bravo!"

"If you could make it a bob, Redwing——"

"I couldn't!"

"Of course, I might have known that you were hard-up—a blessed scholarship bounder like you!" said Bunter disdainfully. "Where's Smithy?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" grunted Redwing. And he moved farther away.

"Beast!"

With that complimentary farewell the Owl of the Remove rolled away.

Billy Bunter was in low water that afternoon. Five or six of the Remove had been tackled already without results. Billy Bunter's postal-order was a little too well known for anybody to be willing to cash it in advance. The fat junior looked round for Vernon-Smith. That fortunate youth had plenty of money—if he could be induced to part with any of it. Bunter was a duffer in many things; but it could not be denied that he possessed a wonderful gift as a borrower. As Orpheus, with his lute, drew iron tears down Pluto's cheek, so the fat junior hoped with his eloquence to draw a loan from the Bounder's well-guarded supply. Smithy was not to be seen on the football-field, and Bunter inquired for him of Skinner & Co., who were lounging about with their hands in their pockets.

"Seen Smithy, Skinner?"

"Blow Smithy!" was Skinner's reply.

"Oh, rats! Have you seen him, Stott?"

"Sulking in his study, I believe!" grinned Stott. "Smithy hasn't got over his flogging yet. Better mind how you tackle him, Bunter. He bites!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter rolled away towards the School House. He was prepared to risk Vernon-Smith "biting" for the chance of getting an advance upon his celebrated postal-order.

"I say, Smithy——" he began, as he rolled into Study No. 4 in the Remove passage.

Then he paused. The study was empty.

"Beast!" murmured Bunter.

He blinked disconsolately into the Remove passage. The passage was quite deserted; there was no sound from any of the studies. On that fine half-holiday there was no fellow belonging to the Remove indoors excepting the Bounder—and Bunter. Bunter glanced up and down the passage in the hope of seeing someone whom he could "touch" for a loan—and his eyes fell upon Vernon-Smith coming quietly out of No. 11.

Bunter started, and blinked at the Bounder very curiously.

As Skinner & Co. were on the football-ground, and as Smithy was on bad terms with them anyway, it was odd enough that he should have been visiting their study.

And there was something curiously stealthy in the Bounder's manner as he came out of Skinner's study.

Bunter was not particularly observant, by any means; but he could not help observing that.

He grinned.

"Fairly caught!" he murmured. "Playing a trick in Skinner's study—he, he, he!"

The fat chuckle of the Owl of the

Remove caught Vernon-Smith's ear, and he gave a violent start. He glanced round quickly, but did not see Bunter for the moment—not expecting to see him in the doorway of his own study. Bunter rolled out into view, and the Bounder saw him then.

"I say, Smithy——"

Bunter stopped. The look on the Bounder's face was almost terrifying, and the Owl's words died on his lips.

"You spying cad!"

The next moment Vernon-Smith's angry grip was on the Owl of the Remove, and he was shaking him savagely.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Too Late!

"YAROOOOH!"

"You spying rotter!"

"Yoooop! Help!"

Shake, shake, shake!

"Yow-ow-ow! Help! Fire! Murder! Thieves!" roared Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove shook like a very fat jelly in the Bounder's powerful grasp.

"Yow-ow-wooop! Leggo! Oh crikey! Beast! Yarooooh!"

Billy Bunter's dulcet tones rang along the Remove passage. Vernon-Smith seemed to have lost control of himself for the moment—though why he should be so infuriated was a mystery to Bunter.

But as the fat junior's yells rang through the passage the Bounder seemed recalled to himself, and he released Bunter so suddenly that the Owl collapsed, and sat on the floor with a heavy bump.

"Yoooop!"

"Shut up, you fat fool!" hissed the Bounder. "Do you want to bring all Greyfriars here?"

"Yaroooh! Help!"

Vernon-Smith gave him a furious look. Bunter was still roaring at the top of his voice—and his roaring was certainly heard far beyond the confines of the Remove passage.

"Will you be quiet?"

"No, I won't!" roared Bunter. "What were you doing in Skinner's study, you rotter! Help! I've found you out, you cad! Yaroooh! Help!"

There were footsteps on the stairs. Vernon-Smith had made a step back towards Skinner's study; but he stopped as he heard the footsteps. Whatever it was that he had done in Skinner's quarters, it was too late to undo it now.

"Shut up, Bunter!" he panted.

"I won't! Yaroooh! Help!"

"What's all that thundering row about?" came a voice from the staircase. It was the voice of Patrick Gwynne, a prefect of the Sixth Form.

"Yow-ow! Help!"

Gwynne appeared in sight at the end of the passage with an angry face. The Bounder drew a quick breath of desperation. He bent over the sprawling Owl of the Remove.

"Bunter——"

"Yah! Keep off! Help!"

"I'll stand you a quid——"

"Eh?"

Bunter's roaring ceased suddenly. His round eyes twinkled up at Vernon-Smith through his big spectacles.

"Not a word!" whispered the Bounder hurriedly.

"You've been playing some trick on Skinner——"

"Hush!"

Gwynne was striding towards the two juniors, coming along the passage with great strides. But the Bounder had been in time; the mention of a "quid" was enough for Billy Bunter. He gave the Bounder a fat wink.

"All right, old top! A quid, mind——"

"Hush!"

"Now then, what does this thumping hullabaloo mean?" demanded Gwynne, striding up. "Are you bullying Bunter?"

"No, no! Only a—a—a joke."

"Bunter doesn't sound as if it was a joke," growled the prefect. "Are you hurt, Bunter?"

Billy Bunter scrambled up.

"N-n-not at all, Gwynne!" he gasped. "It—it—it's all right."

"What were you making that fearful row about if it's all right?" demanded the Sixth Former.

"I-I-I-it was a—a—a joke——" stammered Bunter.

The "quid" had made all the difference to William George!

"A joke, was it?" snorted Gwynne. "You've brought me upstairs for a joke, have you?"

"Ye-ee-es, exactly!" gasped Bunter.

"Then, I'll show you exactly how much I appreciate jokes of that kind!" growled Gwynne.

He had his ashplant in his hand, and he proceeded to lay it about Billy Bunter's fat person. Bunter burst into a roar again and fled into his study.

"Let me hear you again, that's all!" said Gwynne. And he tucked his ashplant under his arm and stalked away in great dudgeon.

Billy Bunter did not let the prefect hear him again. He remained in No. 7 till Gwynne's footsteps died away down the stairs. Then he came out to look for the Bounder. Vernon-Smith gave him a black look.

"Where is it, Smithy?"

"Where's what, you fat owl?"

"The quid."

Vernon-Smith did not reply. He seemed to be thinking hard. Bunter honoured him with a wink.

"I'm not going to say anything about your being in Skinner's study," he grinned. "I don't care what you've done. Have you been ragging his books?"

"You fat rotter!" said the Bounder. "I haven't been in Skinner's study at all."

"Eh?"

"If you fancied you saw me you had better put the idea right out of your head," said Vernon-Smith. "Do you understand?"

Bunter chuckled.

"Certainly, old top. Rely on me! Where's that quid?"

The Bounder silently handed the fat junior a pound note. Bunter winked again.

"Rely on me, old top," he said, and he rolled away towards the stairs. "I don't care what you've done. In fact, you haven't done anything. He, he, he!"

The Bounder looked after him with a black brow. As soon as Bunter was out of sight he turned back towards Skinner's study. But there was a sound of footsteps and voices in the passage, and Skinner, Snoop, and Stott came along from the stairs. Vernon-Smith stopped. Skinner and Co. glanced at him with grinning looks, and went into No. 11.

Vernon-Smith drew a deep breath.

It was too late now! Whatever it was he had done in Skinner's study, it was too late to remedy it. It was done beyond recall. With a sombre brow the Bounder of Greyfriars went down the stairs.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Skinner's Sentence.

"WHARTON!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Step into my study, please."

Harry Wharton and Co. had come into the School House together, after beating the Fourth by a comfortable margin of eight goals. The chums of the Remove were in a merry mood; but their cheeriness was considerably subdued by the expression on Mr. Quelch's face as he called to Wharton.

The captain of the Remove left his companions, and followed the Formmaster into the study. Mr. Quelch looked rather agitated, and very angry indeed. His brows were knitted, and his eyes glittered under them.

"I have been out this afternoon, Wharton," he said. "During my absence someone has entered my study and interfered with my manuscripts."

"You—your what, sir?"

"My manuscripts, Wharton."

"Oh!" said Harry, comprehending. Mr. Quelch was alluding to the typewritten sheets of his literary work. That literary work was more or less of a joke among the Removites; but it was a very serious matter to their Formmaster.

"The manuscripts were left in the table drawer, as usual," continued Mr. Quelch. "They have been taken out, some of them torn, and a number of sheets are missing. It is an outrage, but I have no doubt that it is intended as a foolish joke by some utterly thoughtless and unscrupulous boy."

Wharton was silent. He wondered who could have been ass enough to play such a trick—and reckless enough!

"You do not know who has done this, Wharton?"

"No, sir."

"The culprit must be discovered," said Mr. Quelch. "It was undoubtedly a boy in my Form, I think. Wharton, kindly make it known that if the missing sheets are returned uninjured I will deal as leniently as possible with the offender. The punishment will, of course, be severe. If the missing sheets are not returned within a quarter of an hour a strict inquiry will be instituted, and the offender will be flogged."

"Very well, sir."

Wharton left the study with a very grave face. There was serious trouble ahead for somebody, and Wharton could not feel very sorry for him whoever he was.

The "jape," if jape it was, was certainly a most unfeeling one.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the row now?" inquired Bob Cherry.

Wharton explained, and Bob whistled expressively.

"Whoever did that is going to get it in the neck!" he said. "What could the ass have taken away some of the merry manuscripts for? They're no good."

"Quelchy thinks they are!"

"But they wouldn't be any good, anyhow, to a Remove chap. It was simply asking for trouble," said Bob, puzzled. "Better spread the glad news, old chap, and give the idiot a chance to own up."

The news was spread fast enough.

There were serious looks among the Removites when it was spread. They all regarded Mr. Quelch's literary work with a humorous eye; but they knew how Mr. Quelch regarded it.

"Rotten trick!" said Bolsover major. "Was it you, Skinner?"

"No, it wasn't!" growled Skinner. "What the thump do you mean?"

"Well, it's like one of your tricks, isn't it?"

"No, it isn't, you fathead!"

"If you did it, Skinner, it will be safest to own up," said Harry Wharton. "Quelchy is a downy old bird, and he's bound to find out sooner or later."

Skinner gave an angry growl.

"I don't see why I should be picked on. I don't know anything about his rubbish! As if I'd touch it!"

"Where were you while Quelchy was out?"

Another growl from Skinner.

"On the football-ground part of the afternoon. I was with Snoop and Stott most of the time."

"Not all the time," said Sidney James Snoop. "Don't try to drag us into it, Skinner."

"You silly idiot!" roared Skinner. "I'm not dragging you into it. I tell you I don't know anything about it."

"Well, if you don't you're all right," remarked Frank Nugent. "But if you do——"

"Hang you, I don't!"

Skinner swung away sullenly. He was feeling extremely uneasy; for in the matter of any ill-natured trick he was suspected as a matter of course, and the same suspicion might occur to his Form-master as to his Form-fellows.

Mr. Quelch waited in his study a quarter of an hour. But nobody came there to confess, or to return the missing typed sheets. Mr. Quelch was not unlike a lion in his lair during those fifteen minutes. When the interval of grace expired he came out, and called to the captain of the Remove.

"Wharton, all Remove boys will remain downstairs," he said. "A search will be made."

"Yes, sir."

"Lot of good that will be!" murmured Bolsover major. "If any chap has boned his silly manuscripts he won't have left them round his quarters."

"Might have hidden them for a lark," remarked Vernon-Smith casually.

"Not the kind of lark I'd go in for," said Bolsover. "If it was Skinner, he's put his foot in it this time."

"Mightn't have been a Remove chap at all," suggested Redwing.

"We shall soon see."

The Remove were soon collected at the foot of the staircase, and they looked with keen interest after the Form-master as he went upstairs with two prefects of the Sixth to help him in the search. As they disappeared above a good many eyes were turned on Skinner. He looked back savagely at the juniors.

"It's not too late," said Johnny Bull. "If you've got the things in your study, Skinner, you'd better——"

"What should I want the rubbish for, you duffer?" hissed Skinner.

"Well, you're always playing tricks. You took a fellow's impot once, and altered words in it—what you called a lark."

"That's different. I shouldn't do that with Quelchy's bosh. Too jolly dangerous!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Quelchy!"

There was a hush as Mr. Quelch looked down the staircase.

"Skinner!"

Harold Skinner gave a jump.

"Yes, sir?" he gasped.

"Come up here at once!"

Skinner's steps faltered as he ascended the stairs. The Remove fellows looked at one another, and there was a giggle from Billy Bunter.

"I say, you fellows, it was Skinner! I thought so all along."

"Looks like it!" said Bolsover.

Skinner almost limped along the Remove passage to his study. Mr. Quelch preceded him there. Wingate and Gwynne were standing in the room with grave faces. Wingate had a charred fragment of paper in his hand, upon which a few typewritten letters were discernible.

Mr. Quelch pointed to an open desk.

"That is your desk, Skinner?"

"Yes, sir," stammered Skinner. "I—I——"

"How came some sheets of my typewritten manuscript in it?"

Skinner staggered.

"I—I—— They're not—they can't be!"

"Look for yourself, Skinner!" said Mr. Quelch, in a grinding voice. "There are four sheets there. They were hidden under some other papers. One sheet has been burnt in the grate. Wingate holds a fragment of it in his hand. No doubt, Skinner, you purloined those sheets with the intention of burning them all, but your courage failed you. Is that the case?"

"No, sir. I—I——"

"Perhaps you were interrupted before you had completed your task of vandalism!" thundered the Remove-master.

"I—I—I did—I didn't——"

"I can only conclude, Skinner, that you were interrupted while burning my manuscripts, and thrust them into your desk to conceal them. Wretched boy! This is, I suppose, a petty revenge for some punishment I have administered. Are you not ashamed to look me in the face?"

Skinner's knees knocked together.

"I—I—I—never——"

"Follow me, Skinner! I shall take you to Dr. Locke! I cannot trust myself to punish this outrage. I shall take you to the Head!"

"But I—I—I——"

"You need not waste your breath in wicked falsehoods, Skinner. Follow me at once!"

Mr. Quelch swept from the study, and the hapless Skinner followed him. There was a hush among the Removites as Mr. Quelch rustled away to the Head's study, with Skinner limping at his heels.

"Caught out!" said Bolsover major. "Well, I can't say I'm sorry for him. Quelchy's scribble is all rot, of course; but it's too bad. Just like Skinner, too—full of tricks as a monkey!"

"Must have been potty, I think," said Johnny Bull. "Like robbing a giddy lioness of her cubs to touch Quelchy's bosh. Silly chump!"

"I—I suppose he did it?" said Tom Redwing.

"Quelchy seems to think so."

Redwing glanced at the Bounder. Vernon-Smith met his eyes and smiled. The Bounder was looking very cheery.

There was silence among the juniors as they waited to see Skinner again. He came back at last, his face very pale, and a hunted look in his shifty eyes.

"What's the verdict?" asked Bob Cherry.

Skinner clenched his hands.

"I'm to be flogged on Monday morning!" he said. "Flogged, you know—and I never did it! I never knew Quelchy's rubbish was in my desk. Somebody put it there for a rotten joke on me!"

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"I tell you I never touched it!" shouted Skinner. "Never thought of it! Quelchy suspects me, anyhow; he always does. He'd have suspected me if he hadn't found it there. I'm going to be flogged, and I don't know anything about it!"

"That's rather too thick!" said Hazeldene.

Skinner glared at the unbelieving Removites.

"You don't take my word!" he snarled.

"Well, what's your dashed word worth?" said Johnny Bull. "You always tell crams when you're in a corner. You denied telephoning to Quelchy from Highcliffe. It can't be proved, but we all know well enough you did it. If you want to be believed you should stick to the truth sometimes for a change."

"I never did it! I never——"

"Rats!"

Vernon-Smith strolled away and went upstairs. He was humming a merry air as he came into his study; but it ceased as Tom Redwing looked in. Redwing's face was tense.

"Smithy——" he began.

"Hallo, old top!" said the Bounder cheerily.

"Skinner's going to be flogged," said Redwing in a low voice.

"Yes; happy prospect for him over the merry week-end, isn't it?"

"Smithy!"

"Well, old scout, you're looking jolly serious. Anything up?"

"Did he do it, Smithy?"

"Quelchy thinks so. The evidence seems to be pretty clear, too. What's your opinion?"

Tom Redwing's face was troubled.

"Smithy, you said you were going—I mean, that—that Skinner—you said he would be flogged!"

"Quite prophetic, wasn't it?" said the Bounder, with a smile. "I said he was going to be flogged, and he is going to be flogged. Quite a coincidence."

"But did he do it?" said Redwing.

"How should I know?"

"That's the question—do you know, Smithy?" asked Redwing slowly.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear chap, you're talking in conundrums," he said. "Let Skinner drop. I'm fed up with him! What about tea? Ready for tea?"

Redwing shook his head, and turned away. The Bounder gave another shrug. But Tom Redwing's face was deeply troubled as he went down the Remove passage. In spite of himself, a black suspicion was in his mind—a suspicion he strove to dismiss, but which would not be dismissed. But to the other fellows no word passed his lips of what he suspected.

THE END.

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By PERCY LONGHURST.

SYNOPSIS.

Harry Rhodes, a miner and amateur boxer, of Lexborough, a mining village, meets Joshua Martin, the manager and principal backer of Anthony Hanna—"Cast-Iron Tony"—a wonderful Scottish light-weight boxer, who has come to Lexborough to train. Harry lives with an uncle, James Rhodes, who has trained him, and who had himself been a boxer years before. He had left the Ring through some tragedy of which Joshua Martin knows the facts, much to James Rhodes' alarm.

At a small gymnasium one night Harry Rhodes issues a challenge to anyone in the place to three rounds. The challenge is accepted by a stranger, who proves to be Tony Hanna.

After a thrilling contest the famous Scottish boxer is defeated by Harry.

Hanna hates Harry Rhodes for this, and makes an attempt upon the life of the amateur boxer. It is unsuccessful, however, and Harry gives Hanna a severe thrashing.

Later, a meeting is held between the miners and the mine-owner, to settle a strike which has lasted for some time at the pit where Harry works. After some time no settlement has been reached, when Harry suggests a fight for it—Mr. Durham, the mine-owner, to put up a man, and the miners to choose one from their number to meet him.

The result of the fight is to settle the strike. Bertram Godfrey, Mr. Durham's friend, strongly supports this idea.

(*Now read on.*)

The Miner's Man.

GODFREY'S high spirits, personality, and cheery good humour, had impressed the miners. From all sides came assurances that, on their part, the issue of the fight would be respected. With his son eagerly whispering in his ear, the anger of the coal-owner became weakened by hesitation.

"It's downright folly!" he protested, however, again and again.

"Maybe," agreed Godfrey readily; "but it's the kind of folly that pays—will pay you, or I don't know anything about human nature. Besides," he added persuasively, "the game's as good as in your hands. D'you suppose there's any chap here amongst these fellows who'd have anything but the slenderest of chances against Bob?"

"You know, father, I'm not altogether a dud at the game," put in young Robert Durham modestly. "And I should just love it."

The elder Durham gave Bertram Godfrey a queer look.

"Have it your own way, then, confound you!" he said. "You're the most wily-tongued rascal, Bertram, I've seen in my life!"

Godfrey, taking young Durham by the arm, led him to the edge of the platform.

"Gentlemen," he called, "your offer is accepted. The challenge you've thrown down is picked up, and here is our man—Mr. Bob Durham!"

And then all the noise that had been made before was as but a whisper to the shouting that greeted the announcement.

"There's just one stipulation," announced Godfrey, when he could obtain a hearing. "The contest must be brought off at once—in a day or two from now. We don't want to keep the business hanging about, and we do want to keep it private. It's just an affair between ourselves, so don't open your mouths too widely about it."

"That's aw reet, master!"

"An' what aboot t' weight?" cried Ben Moseley.

"What you like," returned Godfrey, "so long as it's nothing over twelve stone. Our man's a good man, but he's only a light middle-weight."

It was acknowledged that this was only fair.

"Right-ho, then!" went on Godfrey, who seemed fairly in his element, his eyes sparkling and snapping like diamonds. "Form a committee—not too many of you—and come up and see me at the Crown Hotel, and we'll get the details, referee, and all that, fixed up between us. We'll have the contest in the open air, if you're willing, then everybody'll be able to see. Everybody agreed?"

"That'll be all right, sir," agreed one of the miners. "Th' committee'll meet ye, sir, at th' Crown in an hour's time, if that'll do. We'll have our man chosen by then."

"Right-ho, lads! And we'll hope nothing'll go wrong to prevent the best man winning."

"Deuce of a fine thing you've landed us in for," grumbled Durham, as the party left the platform. "If I'd known what you were going to do I'd have seen to it you stayed at home to-night!"

"You're right, sir," agreed the unabashed Godfrey "It is a fine thing I've done for you—and you'll say so. You didn't want this blessed lock-out to go on. And you didn't want to sell up your pits, either. Why, you said as much after dinner last night. Only you're so fond of getting your own way——"

"That'll do!" Durham interrupted, but he laughed, none the less. "I'm not the only obstinate man hereabouts!"

"No," grinned Godfrey. "I've seen one or two others. But you've nothing, sir, to complain of. Now, honestly, who do you suppose here is capable of taking down Bob's number as a boxer—public schools champion, inter-'Varsity champion, and the best——"

"Shut up!" interjected Mr. Robert Durham, digging an elbow in Godfrey's ribs.

"Well, we're going to see some good sport, anyway," said Durham senior. "These Lexboro' fellows are wonderfully keen on boxing, and I've no doubt there are some dangerous fighters among them. Not but what I believe Bob can trim any of them."

"I'm glad he's the weight he is," commented Godfrey.

He was thinking that, had Bob Durham been a stone lighter, there might have been a chance of his coming up against Harry Rhodes, in the event of which, in spite of Bob's science, he wouldn't have been so confident as he was that Mr. Durham was going to settle the dispute on his own terms.

He had seen Harry Rhodes fight.

Meanwhile, Harry Rhodes, apparently forgotten, as many another originator of a brilliant scheme has found himself, had slipped from the hall, and was on his way home.

There he gave his uncle a full account of what had taken place at the meeting, and James Rhodes' first words had been:

"What is this young Mr. Durham's weight?"

"A light middle-weight, so Mr. Godfrey said."

"H'm!" said James Rhodes. "And who's the chap the miners are going to put up against him?"

"A committee will select him," Harry answered. "They're Ben Moseley, Tom Boughen, Schofield Fisher, and old Joe Harwood. I wonder whom they'll select?"

And then uncle and nephew went over the names of the likeliest men of the weight, weighing up their qualifications, and arguing their chances.

The subject was continued as they sat at supper, in the middle of which meal came a knock at the door. A sudden cloud came over James Rhodes' face, as he got up hurriedly and went to open it.

"Who is it?" he asked of the foremost of several men outside.

"Me—Joe Harwood, lad," came the answer. "Let us in, lad; we willun' keep tha long."

The four men tramped solemnly into the cottage, and Harwood, the spokesman, faced Rhodes.

"Tha'st heard, Jimmy Rhodes, o' what took place up at Foresters' Hall t'-neet?"

Rhodes nodded.

"Well, we're t' committee for selection of our champion," went on the veteran. "We knaws tha'rt a good man, an' tha judgment's worth hearing. Who, would tha say, is t' best chap we could have?"

"You want me to say who I believe is the boxer having the best chance of beating young Mr. Durham?"

"That's what Ah mean, Jimmy Rhodes!"

For an instant Rhodes hesitated; then he turned quickly, a forefinger extended.

"That'd be my choice!" he said quietly.

His finger pointed to Harry Rhodes.

Tom Boughen let loose a shrill whistle of delight.

"That's tha candid opinion, Jimmy Rhodes?" Harwood asked.

"Ay."

"An' we thowt th' same," returned Harwood. "Coom oop along, lad," turning to Harry, "to the Crown, an' we'll introduce tha to Mr. Godfrey."

Harry, his skin tingling with a delight that seemed to fill every inch of him, looked at his relative. James Rhodes' candid opinion was one thing, his willingness to allow Harry to accept the choice made was quite another.

Rhodes returned the glance. Then he made a slight movement of his head, and Harry's heart leaped.

The unthinkable had happened. His uncle had consented!

The Fight Begins.

FOR two days Lexboro' had been simmering with a hardly-repressed excitement. There was but one topic of conversation—the contest between Harry Rhodes and Robert Durham. Even the women talked of it as they stood gossiping at cottage doorways, or when they met in the little shops.

But then, the women had not forgotten that, whatever the outcome of the battle, the end of the miserable lock-out was assured. Whoever was the winner, there would be work at the pits again. There would be wages to earn.

It must be admitted that the majority of the men and the bigger lads did not concern themselves very seriously with this aspect of the contest.

There was some grumbling, some display of jealousy, when the choice of the representative of the miners became known. That was only to be expected. More than one young man believed he had a better claim than Harry Rhodes, but the majority upheld the committee's decision.

Bill Carter, a hulking young face-worker, a full twelve-stoner, and who had the reputation of being the strongest man of the village, was very indignant that the choice had not fallen on him—and he said so. Why had the committee made selection of a champion actually lighter in weight than the coal-owner's son?

Old Joe Harwood told him.

"We be sportsmen, lad. Tha's a twel'-stun man—good. Young Mr. Durham's nobbut a shade over eleven stun. 'Twouldn't be fair of us. There's nowt that's fit to stand against him—him wi' his boxing championship an' all—at his weight, so me an' t' rest thowt that a fighter as we knaw is a good man were a better choice, even though he is givin' away a bit. There tha art; an' if tha don't like it tha can loomp it."

A Saturday afternoon was chosen as the day, and the place was on the moor, well away from all casual observation, and where a big, bowl-shaped depression permitted of the erection of a twelve-foot square ring on clear, level ground, and the sloping sides would allow of every spectator having an uninterrupted view.

But only Lexboro' folk would be present, for the meeting had been jealously kept a secret.

Some of the veterans of the village were reminded of old times, when more than one battle with the "raw 'uns" had been fought out on the same spot.

With the consent of the miners' committee, Bertram Godfrey had telegraphed to a friend, a man with a European reputation as a referee, asking him to undertake that important office, and the acceptance had come with all haste.

The choice of Harry as the miners' champion had come to Godfrey as somewhat of a shock. He had seen him battling in dead earnest and up against a good man; he had had opportunity to gauge Harry's ability, and, high as was his opinion of the lad, he felt sorry for him, honestly believing that the lad was overmatched.

He had seen Bob Durham in action a dozen times. He knew the extent of his science, his quickness, the hardness of his hitting, and his skill in ring generalship. And he was sorry for Harry, firmly convinced that he was in for a bad thrashing.

With a genuine liking for the boy, he sincerely regretted the part he himself had played in bringing about the contest.

But he had scrupulously refrained from exchanging a word with Harry.

Yet Harry himself was confident. A dozen times he had been asked the question, "Will tha win, lad?" And his answer had been, "I'm going to do my best to win, and until I'm licked beyond all dispute I shall believe I'm going to win."

He was serious enough, though. The importance of his opponent's advantage in age and weight was not forgotten. But he was going to justify his uncle's unqualified belief in him.

When he entered the ring with his seconds, James Rhodes and Tom Boughen, he showed some traces of nervousness that some of the miners noted and judged a bad sign.

They forgot that nervousness is not of necessity a sign of fear or want of self-confidence. It is only your dull-brained, animal kind of man who has never known what nervousness means.

Tom Boughen shoved a chair inside the ring in one corner, and Harry sat down. From outside the ropes hundreds of eyes were regarding him with critical curiosity, scanning his face. He knew that they were talking about him, and the knowledge made him still more nervous.

He wondered at himself. He hadn't felt so in Ben Moseley's gym the night of the competition. But then he was competing only for his own satisfaction; this time there was something more at stake.

There was no nervousness about his opponent when, a couple of minutes later, he made his appearance outside the ropes, his father and Bertram Godfrey on either side. He was smiling cheerfully, and, with a laugh on his lips, he leaped upon the stage and ducked under the ropes.

Durham sat down, wrapped the big dressing-gown about his long legs, and looked about him with open curiosity.

He saw Harry, took a lengthy look at him, caught his eye, and smiled. Getting up, he walked lightly across the boards to his opponent.

"Glad to meet you!" he said pleasantly, holding out his hand. "Fine day for our bout—what?"

Harry returned the hand-grip. He had stood up, to find that Bob Durham was at least a couple of inches taller than himself. He seemed to have a long arm also.

"It is a fine day," returned Harry. "You are well, I hope?"

The inter-'Varsity champion regarded him curiously. Then he laughed.

"Yes, thanks, fit as a fiddle!" he said. "So are you, by all appearances. Fit to fight for a kingdom—eh?"

"Or a colliery!" smiled Harry.

Durham laughed again.

"One to you!" he said; and then: "But, I say, you're jolly young, aren't you?" he asked. "I mean," he explained, "you're a goodish bit younger than I am. I'm twenty-two."

"I shall not be that for some years yet," Harry returned.

"H'm!" said Durham thoughtfully. "Well, I hope our audience won't be disappointed. They seem interested enough."

He smiled, nodded, and went back to his corner.

"I say, Bertie," he said, as he sat down, to Godfrey beside him, "you stage-managed this show, didn't you? Don't seem to have done it altogether fairly, far as I can see. He's a well-grown, biggish one, true; but, for all that, this is only a boy you're putting me up against. Makes me feel a bit of a rotter—what?"

"No affair of mine. I didn't select the miners' champion," answered Godfrey. "You'd better go and rag the committee. But I can tell you this, my son—that boy, as you call him, isn't quite the harmless infant you seem to think him. If you'd seen him, as I did, wiping the floor with Cast-Iron Tony Hanna, you'd be thinking of him with more respect."

Dob Durham whistled.

"H'm! Did he?"

The gloves were brought into the ring, selected, and fastened on by the seconds, and while this was in operation a stout, good-tempered-looking man with a fair moustache mounted into the ring.

"Gentlemen," announced the miner M.C. in a stentorian voice, "the referee, Mr. Walter Cory—fra Lunnon!"

The introduction was greeted with noisy cheering.

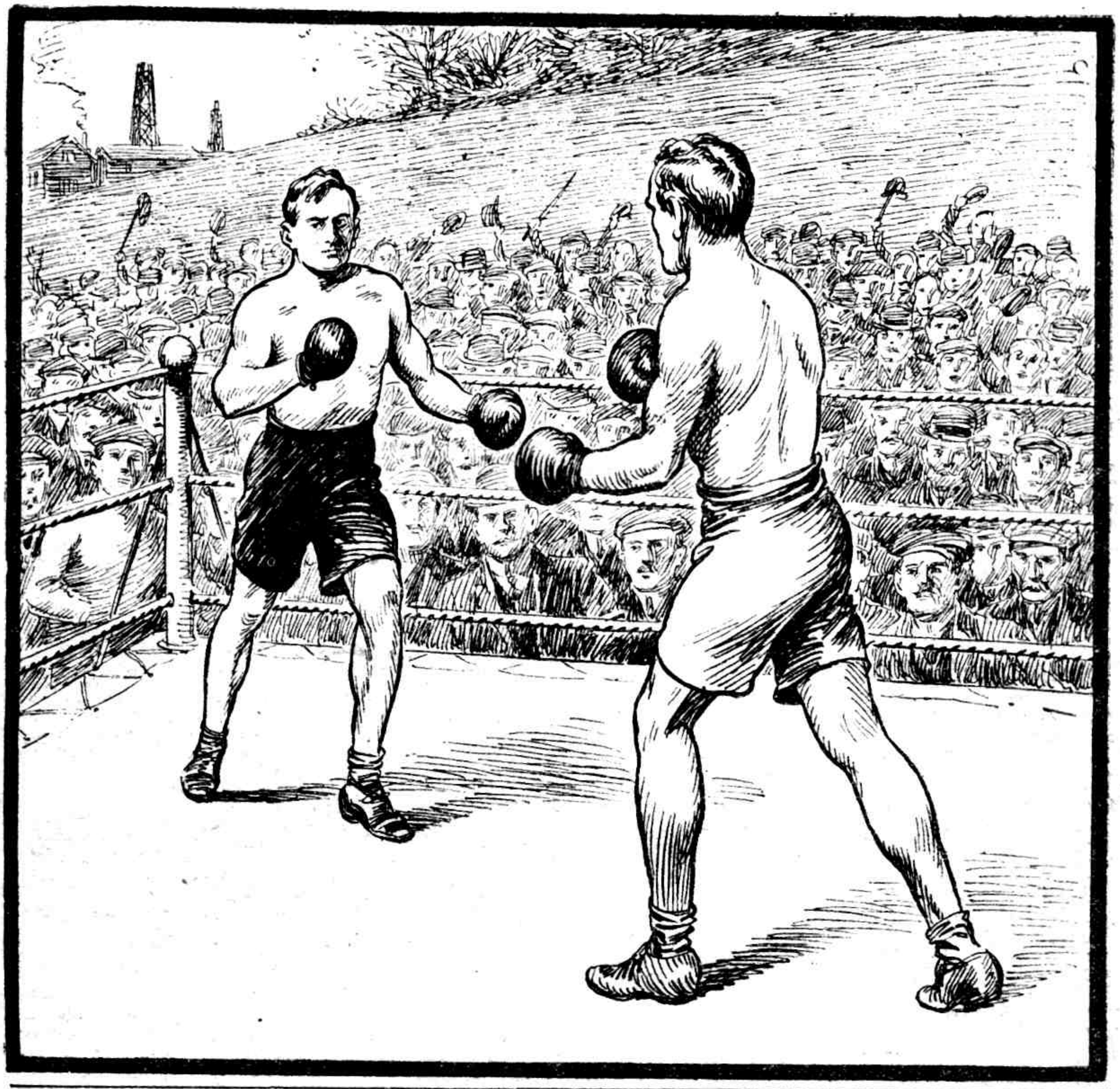
Joe Harwood took his place as time-keeper, and the two principals, throwing aside their wraps, awaited the signal of commencement.

The period of waiting was not long, but sufficient for Harry to form an idea of his opponent's physical make-up.

Bob Durham was a boxer of the greyhound type, and at first glance apt to make one wonder where he carried his hundred and fifty-four pounds of weight. The truth was that he was well-proportioned, so that no part of him appeared really large. You had to catch him sideways to get the depth and capacity of his chest. Then you noticed that his shoulders carried plenty of muscle. He was long of limb, big-boned, and seemed built for quick movement.

"All wire and whipcord," thought James Rhodes, summing him up after an expert's examination. He leaned his mouth to Harry's ear. "Take care, lad. Find out what he's like before you begin to fight him; and don't let him force you into playing his game if you can help it."

Harry nodded. He pinned his own faith to out-fighting, but it looked as though he had in Bob Durham an opponent who was as likely to be as fond of those tactics as himself. This was a very different customer from Tony Hanna, who had but one method of fighting, and stuck to it, so that it was not difficult to foresee what he was going to do. Bob Durham suggested a fighter who relied as much on his brains as his hands.



The contest was certainly not going to be tame, but it occurred to Harry that it was more likely to be bitter than sensational or dramatic. "Time!" suddenly shouted Joe Harwood. And the two champions rose simultaneously to their feet.

who had an infinite variety of attack and plenty of resource.

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And the two champions rose simultaneously to their feet.

A Champion on His Mettle.

THERE are some boxers who go into the ring with a plan of action all ready. They intend to do this, that, and the other, having satisfied themselves the plan is the very best. And they keep on pegging away on the arranged lines—or as nearly to it as they are allowed. And they believe they are clever, brainy fighters.

Sure, they have a method, which is more than the slap-bang, get-one-in kind of fighter has, but the fact is they're not quite so clever as they believe themselves.

They forget that a boxer's—any boxer's—scheme of action must depend to a very large extent upon what the other fellow chooses to do For it is only the really great glove-fighter, the born champion, who is ever able to make his opponents fight as he wants them to fight instead of as they wish.

The mechanical cut-and-dried boxer will win contests, certainly, but as soon as he comes up against a fellow who's wholly unorthodox in his methods, who persists in doing things he wasn't expected to do, then those cut-and-dried boxers come badly to grief.

James Rhodes had found out that, and he had worked hard to make his nephew a fighter without cut-and-dried methods.

As soon as Harry's gloves touched those of Bob Durham in the preliminary handshake, he drew back quickly. Left hand well up, right across, but not jammed up against, his body, he spent a few seconds taking stock of the man opposed to him.

Then, lightly as a dancer, he began to move towards his right. He wanted to try this champion of the 'Varsities, to see what he could do—to gain a line on the style of boxing he favoured. Unlike some men in the ring, he didn't forget the caution and advice of his seconds as soon as business actually commenced.

Presently he feinted with his left. Durham simply drew back his head. He was doing a bit of stock-taking on his own account.

To tell the truth, Harry's pose, his carriage, rather made Robert Durham wonder. He hadn't expected to find in this village youth an opponent carrying those outward signs of mastership of his craft which another good man can always recognise.

He was no hot-head himself, and although he felt himself the better, he wasn't going to throw away any chances.

As Harry changed position, so he shifted his, until—thud, thud! Harry's left glove was in his face before he was well aware a blow had actually started. Mechanically, but the fraction of a

second too late, he tried to guard, but the glove got home on his cheek, and, instantly following, he felt the impact of a stiff right-hander upon his left ribs.

There came a hearty cheer in acknowledgment of this initial score by the pitmen's representative. "Follow 'im oop, lad!" shouted an enthusiast, but a spring backwards had already taken Durham out of danger.

Both blows had made themselves well felt.

He led himself, was neatly stopped, tried a lightning-like right, which was taken on Harry's left elbow, and then stepped in with a double left punch—a tricky attack that had won him a point or two more than once. At forehead and chin he directed the blows—and neither landed. Instead, he caught a nasty jolt under the right breast. Harry followed up with a fine, straight left that was only partially evaded by a sideways bend.

Stepping out of distance, Durham shook his head. He was smiling slightly. This was going to be a good fight. He took no pleasure in boxing with duds, or those harum-scarum air-beaters that give a clever man hardly a decent chance of proving his skill.

"A tame round," was the comment of a half-score critics when Harwood's voice sent both contestants to their corners.

But these were the hasty thinkers. Others, having a better knowledge of the game, were well satisfied.

"Cautious chap, this youngster!" granted Bob Durham as he dropped into his chair.

Bertram Godfrey, who was acting as chief second, nodded.

"No mug, is he?" he said, plying the big sponge. "Not giving much away."

Durham assented.

"Have to make things easier for him," he grinned.

And such were the tactics he adopted when they met for the second session. He gave tempting, but not too obvious, chances; affected to be puzzled, as though unable to make up his mind what to do, but it was not until the second minute that Harry fell into the well-baited trap.

Durham, on the retreat, dropped his hands for an instant, and with a spring Harry darted in to take advantage of the opening. Out shot his left, but it touched nothing. A cunning shift of the head, and the glove went harmlessly over Durham's shoulder. But Durham was stepping in as he ducked; his left arm went forward, rigid as a bar of steel, and his glove landed with tremendous force squarely on Harry's forehead, with a force to which the lad's own forward movement lent double power.

So forceful, so unexpected the shot, that Harry was sent down flat on his back. A cry of angry dismay broke from the miners.

"One—two——" began the timekeeper.

A yell followed hard on the heels of the cry. Surprised rather than hurt, Harry was on his feet again in a single movement. And the yell was prolonged to a continuous cheer as the lad, disdaining to attempt retreat, met his opponent's instant rush with a straight left, and, standing toe to toe, engaged in an exciting, hard-hitting rally.

With reddened faces, panting, the two boxers drew back as though by mutual agreement, and for the next half-minute both were glad to spar for wind. Then at it again, but at long bowls, in the exchange of which there was little to choose between them.

"Don't you get caught like that again!" James Rhodes said sharply, as Harry sought his chair. "Don't you forget it, this man is no hard-slamming ruffian like Hanna; he's a boxer. If that blow had been lower and two inches to one side, one of your eyes wouldn't be much use to you!"

Harry nodded to show he understood, too shrewd to waste his breath in words.

"Feint and draw him," went on Rhodes. "Make him come for you. He's only young, but your wind ought to be better, and I reckon he's in no better training than you are. This isn't a ten-rounds contest; this is a fight to a finish."

And Harry obeyed, confident in his uncle's judgment. By shifting and retreating he forced Durham to assume the offensive, persuaded him into the belief that the knock-down had made him apprehensive and timid, so much so that the miners about the ring began to fear that their champion's courage as well as his strength had suffered.

For two and a half minutes the 'Varsity champion had—apparently—so much the better of the argument that the bulk of the onlookers saw a clear prospect of return to work upon the employers' terms. Suddenly, however, came to them an unexpected encouragement.

Side-stepping near his own corner, Harry dropped a light left into Durham's ribs. His arm dropped automatically, and then Harry's right sped forward with the swiftness of well-greased lightning. It took Durham on the side of the throat, a little below the ear, and his body lurched.

Now was the moment, and Harry seized it as a terrier seizes a rat. He crowded in a volley of blows just above the belt, forcing Durham to give ground until he was close against the ropes, where, for the first time, came a spell of in-fighting. Chin lowered, keeping his elbows well in, Harry kept up the assault, with a shoulder-swing to each blow to add to its force, until even the uninitiated might see that the champion of the pit-owners was in distress.

And then Joe Harwood's voice ended Harry's advantage.

There was a thoughtful expression on Bob Durham's flushed face as he sat in his corner. He was not feeling satisfied with himself. Up to now, the contests in which he had been engaged had been no more than three-round bouts, in which he had experienced no difficulty in outpointing his opponents—those that had escaped the knock-out.

This young Lexborough pit-worker had never looked like being knocked out—yet, anyway—and in the matter of points the young man was anything but certain he held an advantage.

Harry Rhodes was proving himself not only a clever boxer, but a dangerous fighter. The soreness young Durham was feeling about his ribs was proof enough of the strength of his hitting. And he didn't seem to tire.

"I'll have to go for him more—bustle him—make him fight," was the conclusion Durham arrived at during his minute of resting.

And immediately the next round commenced he set to work to carry out the plan.

He attacked fiercely, and Harry gave ground. But he was far too cunning to allow himself to be driven to and held on the ropes. By clever footwork he kept himself in the open, and even although he was fighting on the retreat, he contrived to put in much execution.

In the seventh session, by James Rhodes' advice, Harry elected to stand and fight. His right guarded a straight shot at his head, and a left-hand counter just touched Durham on the chin.

For the moment Durham seemed to go weak; he gave ground, giving plain evidence of tiredness. But Harry had been victimised once already; he was not prepared to fall a second time into such a trap. He abstained from a rush, and Durham, seeming to collect himself, sprang forward.

It was precisely this move on which Harry had been reckoning.

Stepping in, he met Durham with a blow a shade quicker than his own, landing heavily. But the other would not be denied. Again he came in, and his right got through Harry's guard, landing above the "mark." But in payment he took a flush hit that almost blinded him, and, before he could recover himself, a right under the chin sent him staggering.

"Go on! Into him, lad!" chorused a hundred excited pitmen, and Harry did "Go on!" It was his chance, and he made the most of it. Sailing in with both hands, with a flush hit on the throat he sent Durham on the boards.

"Stand back—stand back! Let the man get up!" shouted the referee, coming forward.

Up to now he had been little more than an interested spectator. There had been no call for the exercise of his authority. Not once had he been called upon to deliver the command to "break away," for it had been one of the cleanest fights within his recollection, with neither boxer seeking relief by hanging on or clinching.

Hands down, but ready, Harry awaited the rising of his opponent. Durham was slow to regain his feet. He made no move until the timekeeper had reached "eight," and then he stood upright, but swaying to and fro, gasping painfully for breath.

"Fight on!" called the referee, stepping back.

But, instead of going in to finish his man—as, indeed, was his right, as a clamour of voices called upon him to do—Harry still remained waiting, watching his adversary.

"By Jove, that's chivalry *if you like!*" muttered Bertram Godfrey, watching from outside the ropes.

But there were others who had another name for it, who plainly thought Harry a fool for not taking the advantage due to him.

Slowly Durham's hands were lifted. There was a look of surprise in his face.

"Ready?" asked Harry, and the other nodded.

And again they were at work.

Reinvigorated, Durham once more attacked. His respect for his opponent was increased, but this was no reason for not doing his best to beat him, and in the remaining minute Durham put all he knew into accomplishing that object. His boxing became a revelation. Never had he showed to such advantage, and Harry, for the moment, was overmatched. His foot slipped even as he parried a tremendous right-hander. He never even saw the stroke that followed. Squarely on the point of the jaw it caught him, and he went down as if poleaxed.

(There will be another splendid instalment of this grand new boxing story in next Monday's issue of the MAGNET. *Order your copy in advance.)*

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VENTRILOQUISM IN A MONTH.

THE FIRST OF A SERIES OF ARTICLES EXPLAINING HOW YOU MAY BECOME A VENTRILOQUIST.

THERE is one form of entertainment which perhaps makes a stronger appeal to the average boy and young man than almost any other. It would not, in a sense, be wrong to say that ventriloquism is, and has been for a great number of years, the most envied of all accomplishments incidental to the art of the amateur and semi-professional entertainer.

True, ventriloquism for many centuries was regarded as an adjunct to wizardry and the exponents of black magic; but the great success achieved by the writer of "Valentine Vox," the central character in which was endowed with the most wonderful and extraordinary powers of voice-throwing, brought the subject of ventriloquism at once under general notice, and ever since it has steadily won its way into universal favour, with the result that, at the present time, it easily eclipses in popularity most other forms of amusement.

Despite this, however, the misconceptions existing regarding this branch of vocal phonetics are extraordinarily numerous and widespread, due, perhaps, in a measure to the fact that the amount of valuable written instruction on ventriloquism is so small, while the number of people who have swallowed the fascinating and improbable adventures dealt with in the book just referred to are correspondingly large.

To a very considerable extent, then, it is the object of this chapter primarily to dispose of the many existing fallacies concerning ventriloquism, because by so doing alone is it possible to commence a study of the subject with the hope of attaining proficiency and success.

The first idea which the would-be ventriloquist has to dismiss from his mind is that, by following out a stated course of exercises, he will be able to "throw" his voice, or, in other words, to upset the equanimity of peaceable old gentlemen snoring quietly in the farthest corner of the railway-carriage, or ruffle the temper of some aged lady by producing facetious remarks concerning her appearance—from a long distance away; not that those who approach this subject have any particular desire to be a disturbing influence to other people, but it is safe to say that more take up ventriloquism with the idea of practical joking than for any other purpose.

In point of truth, the real art of Valentine Vox does not lend itself very easily to the production of such illusions. Even when the performer is capable of producing ventriloquial sound he will discover that the "distant" effect depends almost entirely upon his situation at the moment of utterance, and whether or not those around him are prepared to give the credence he desires to his efforts. In other words, a ventriloquist cannot throw his voice wheresoever he will as if it were sound bottled up, only to come out and be heard when it is some distance away. The best he can hope for is to make that sound so deceptive to the ears of his audience that, to them, it seems to come from someone other than the actual speaker.

It cannot, however, be denied that the stock-in-trade of the clever ventriloquist is so unusual and superior to that of his fellow-worker in any other branch of entertainment, that he is capable of producing the most humorous and arresting situations. Moreover, it is a power which once gained can never be lost; and although a ventriloquist may, from various causes, give up the pursuit of his favourite subject for a period of many years, yet he can pick it up again at the point where he left it, and find himself still possessed of the same wonderful and extraordinary skill.

All Born Ventriloquists.

Unhappily, there are other very prevalent misconceptions to be removed before instruction can either be given or undertaken. The marvellous and almost incomprehensible powers attributed by the late Mr. Henry Cockton to his popular character doubtless gave rise to the idea that ventriloquism was a gift natural only to those possessing unusual formation of the throat and vocal organs. Modern research and investigation, however, have proved that everyone is a born ventriloquist, and the power to make sounds appear to emanate at a point remote from the speaker is universal, and that all those who study the subject from a proper and sensible standpoint can easily acquire the art.

Then, again, it has long been supposed by the uninitiated that ventriloquial practice is injurious to the throat and capable of harming the lungs. Exactly the opposite is the case. The exercises necessitated by the proper study of the art are such as will serve not only to train the vocal organs, but also to induce proper breathing—a practice neglected by many—and to strengthen and invigorate the lungs.

From many years' personal experience the author can testify to the truth of this fact. He has known a number of young men who, possessing lung and throat troubles, and acting on the foregoing advice, have followed out a practical course of ventriloquial training, and have obtained much material benefit thereby.

Of course, it cannot be denied that some possess a natural aptitude for the correct expression of ventriloquial sound, and it is they who make the cleverest exponents. Therefore, from the start, it should be assumed that a ventriloquist has only to cultivate the vocal qualifications with which he has been endowed in order to shine as a public entertainer.

Careful and systematic attention to the instructions subjoined will not only strengthen the throat and respiratory organs, but will also endow any young man or young woman with the power of giving a highly-amusing entertainment. Probably many who give this article attention will do so with the idea of taking up the subject for the purpose of making a living, and in that respect it may truthfully be said that ventriloquism is one of the most paying forms of entertainment. While the number of conjurers, comic singers, etc., is legion, those capable of giving a really good ventriloquial entertainment are comparatively few, with the result that a clever ventriloquist is always certain of obtaining engagements at fees which he, himself, can fix and command.

The Initial Stages.

Just as the successful illusionist is called upon to devote many, many hours of his time to the speedy and finished manipulation of cards, coins, and billiard-balls, so the young ventriloquist has an equally uninteresting course to traverse.

The primary difficulty to be overcome is incorrect breathing. Possibly nine out of ten, when they come to read this, will discover that their method of breathing is faulty. Most people, from lack of proper instruction and through carelessness, breathe through the mouth, and this fault must be remedied at once.

For ventriloquism, as with singing, breathing must take place through the nostrils. The necessity for this—apart from hygienic reasons—is that because the ventriloquist, particularly when he is performing with a "lay" figure, is called upon to conduct a dual conversation, and the supposed interchange of remarks between him and the automaton is so rapid that mouth-breathing would interfere with the continuous flow of words.

Breathing Exercises.

These should be undertaken regularly every day, preferable early in the morning and in the open air. Stand erect, shoulders drawn well back, arms hanging loosely at the sides, and then, closing the mouth tightly, draw in a deep breath, refaining it for some seconds in the lungs. Not infrequently it happens that the ventriloquist, when performing, is called upon to keep a conversation going for quite a minute and a half without the opportunity of re-charging the lung-cells with a fresh supply of oxygen. From this it will easily be understood how important deep and sustained breathing is.

At first difficulty will be experienced in holding the breath for more than five or six seconds. By the end of a week, after ten minutes' practice every morning, the chest will be so expanded and strengthend that "half-minute breaths" may be taken with ease. Continne the practice of this exercise until only one inhalation and exhalation takes place every forty or fifty seconds. Somewhat dry, indeed, sounds this part of the ventriloquial study. Nevertheless, it is of the utmost importance, and will well repay the time, trouble, and perseverance devoted to it.

(This grand article will be continued next Monday.(

FOR NEXT MONDAY.

"THE RIGHT THING!"
By Frank Richards.

Next week's story is one of the best that Mr. Frank Richards has ever given us. It tells how Billy Bunter succeeds in getting Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, under his thumb.

The whole affair is a complete mystery to the rest of the school. The Bounder triumphs in the end, and Bunter comes off very badly indeed.

You will thoroughly enjoy reading

"THE RIGHT THING!"

and will, I am sure, agree with me that it is in every way a magnificent story.

BUNTER'S LATEST.

Bunter informs me that he is writing up his adventures. He put it that he was keeping a dairy. Of course, he meant a diary. A little mistake of that sort would not worry the porpoise.

I should rather like to see that diary, though Bunter's writing is none too easy to read, and his spelling is what the naturalist calls various.

But about Bunter's chronicle. Most likely Mrs. Mimble would appreciate a glimpse of it. She might discover something about Bunter's outstanding debts. He must owe the old lady a rare lot.

WHAT IT MIGHT BE.

It would be something like this—if Bunter is a faithful recorder, which is problematical:

"Got out of bed, yawned, washed, and had breakfast. Borrowed five bob from Bob Cherry to get a snack. Wharton refuses to believe in my postal-order."

Of course, this is not a bad programme. It is just what most folks do, but they manage to put in some real hard work between meals—a feat which Bunter never does.

Come to think of it, if some of the grousers had their alleged wishes, and could live and eat and sleep, and then begin again without bothering about putting their noses to the grindstone, most likely they would not really enjoy the programme. They would get bored, fed up, and soon sigh for a job.

At least, this is true of the majority. It is quite an art to be a person of leisure and live for dress and victuals alone. Most fellows who have been workers cannot stick the new kind of existence. They take up other occupations, and it is just as well for the world it is so. Where would the old country be if everybody went for a morning walk, had lunch and a nap, and then began to prepare for dinner?

BUNTER'S EXAMPLE.

Take it that Bunter is writing a diary, his new hobby is a good one. Do you keep a diary? It is just as well to do so. I do not mean the sort of diary that gets published. You cannot waste your time setting down everything you thought and so forth; but a crisp record of what you did and where you went is always useful.

If you live in the country, a few jottings about the seasons come in really handy. It is futile to make your memory do everything. It is a good worker, but it need not be imposed upon. Besides, the diary with its written record helps the memory—does the donkey work, so to speak.

A few words are all that you need in order to enable you to picture everything. The trained mind is a business asset. You may not be able to take a long course such as one sees advertised; but it is up to a fellow to second his brain as much as he can.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Well, a good deal, according to a friend of mine. He writes to me to point out that Lewis is about the best and most patriotic name to give an English boy. It is, of course, the Anglo-Saxon form of Louis, the name of eighteen French kings—nineteen, if you count Louis Phillippe. Why is this so? Just this:

L stands for London.
E for England.
W for Wales.
I for Ireland.
S for Scotland.

And there you have it! Lewis for ever!

CORRESPONDENCE.

It was a real pleasure to hear from a Port Elizabeth correspondent about the much used and also much abused Correspondence Column.

My friend in South Africa tells me that he received a great number of letters in answer to his request for correspondence. He did his best, but he could not reply to them all. He thinks, moreover, that some people advertise their names merely for the sake of seeing their requests in print.

That may be so in a few cases, but certainly it is not a general thing. It all raises rather a quaint question, for, no matter what happens, some letters cannot be answered. A certain correspondent is suited, and he assumes that others who have written to him will take silence as a sufficient answer.

I am not sure that this is quite fair. But if there are dozens of letters, the business of replying individually is pretty well out of the power of the recipient.

I think we must take it that there must be disappointments. It would be very good to have every letter answered, but it is the way of the world to be slack in these things.

THE LEVISONS.

A very earnest and well-read correspondent in the North of London begs me to have more about the Levisons.

I know readers of the MAGNET know the three characters quite well, so I need offer no apology for speaking of the matter here. Says my correspondent:

"Poor old Doris seems to be a laughing-stock of your readers, and I think it's a cruel shame. I suppose this accounts for her staying in the background. Readers have not heard enough of her to understand her true value yet.

"Why Doris should be regarded as weak and tearful, I do not know. Look at the pluck she showed some time back in that grand story entitled 'The Heart of a Hero.' When she thought she was lost in the vaults with Cardew, what did she do? Did she cry out in despair? No fear! She was thinking of her brothers all the time; and I remember her asking Cardew to leave her and try to save himself.

"How many girls in real life would have done that? Only those who have real pluck and grit and don't talk about it. Others would have died of fright."

I thank my correspondent for her splendid letter. If I am not able to meet her wishes with a Levison yarn just yet, she must forgive me. The fact is, in a story series there has to be a lot of waiting for some characters; but, though not heard of, they live and are remembered. I have this tribute as a proof.

A REQUEST FROM WALES.

Why do I not have another Welsh boy in the stories?

Well, I should be very glad to oblige, but it is impossible to have boys from every part of the world.

During the cricket tour I was deluged with requests for the team to visit towns and districts north, south, east, and west.

For one thing, no season would be long enough for it to be possible to comply with the demand. Not but what it would have been pleasant enough to meet the wishes of everybody. There is nothing so pleasant in life as to do what folks want.

And there is a great compliment underlying all this, too. Writers like Frank Richards and Martin Clifford have seen so deeply into human character that their creations are taken as almost real, and it is natural enough this wish to have more such fellows as those drawn so unerringly by the two great story-tellers.

I know quite well that Mr. Frank Richards could make a good yarn out of the doings of a boy from the Welsh mountains. The new-comer would be a smart and clever chap, gifted and imaginative, as Welsh boys generally are.

Yours Editor

15-11-19