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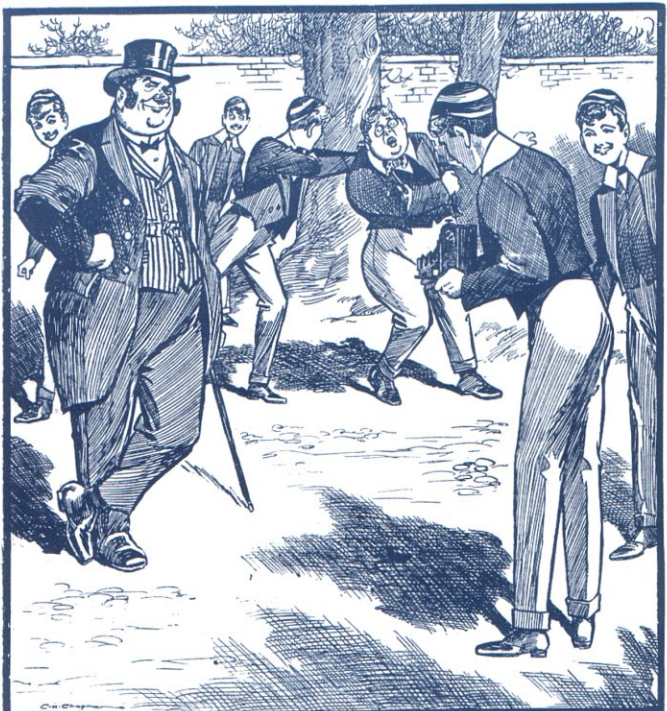
THE RISE AND FALL OF WILLIAM GOSLING!



GOSSY POSES FOR PEN!

(An Amusing Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.)

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The Rise and Fall of William Gosling

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

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Wharton is Wanted!

"MASTER WHARTON!"

"Hallo, Gosey!"

"P'raps, Master Wharton, you——"

Gosling, the Greyfriars porter, paused, and hesitated.

Harry Wharton was coming in at the school gates, when Gosling detached himself from the doorway of his lodge and stepped out to meet him. The captain of the Remove halted.

To his surprise, Gosling was turning red. His crusty old face was quite pink. No junior at Greyfriars would have supposed it was possible for Gosling to blush. But he was blushing now. Certainly, from the juniors' point of view, Mr. Gosling had plenty of sins to blush for. But he had never been known to blush for them.

"Anything up?" asked Harry, looking very curiously at the gnarled and weather-beaten old gentleman.

"Not 'zactly up, Master Wharton."

"Well, what is it?"

"P'raps——" began Gosling.

And then he paused again, his colour deepening.

Wharton eyed him.

"Nothing to report me for, old top!" he remarked. "I haven't been out of bounds, and I'm back in time for dinner. No chance for you, Gosey!"

"Which I wasn't thinking of reporting you, Master Wharton! Which I never 'ave reported a young gentleman if I could possibly help it!" said Gosling.

"Oh, my hat!"

As reporting juniors was Gosling's favourite relaxation, this was rather a surprising statement.

"And I'm sorry," went on Gosling, "that I 'ad to mention to Mr. Quelch last week about your football goin' through the greenhouse. It was jest in the way of duty, Master Wharton!"

"And it made your heart ache to do it?" asked Wharton, with great seriousness.

"Ye-es," said Gosling, looking at the junior rather doubtfully. "'Zactly! But the fact is, Master Wharton——"

Another pause.

"Would you mind coming to the point, old scout?" asked Harry Wharton politely. "There's Bob Cherry howling to me, and——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came Bob Cherry's powerful voice across the quad. "Come and help us punt this ball, Wharton, you slacker!"

"P'raps——" stammered Gosling.

"Well? Wait a bit, Bob! Go it, Gosey!"

"P'raps you wouldn't mind doing me a favour, Master Wharton?" Gosling got it out at last.

"Not at all!" said Harry, surprised but obliging. "What can I do?"

"You—you see——"

"No, I don't quite see so far! Suppose you explain?"

"Ye-es, sir, certainly! It's rather a delikit matter."

"My hat! Never mind—go ahead! You can speak to me as if I were your old uncle!" said Wharton encouragingly.

Gosling grinned faintly.

"P'raps you wouldn't mind steppin' into my lodge, Master Wharton?" he suggested.

"Oh, all right!"

The captain of the Remove would certainly have preferred to join the juniors who were punting Bob Cherry's footer about; but he was an obliging fellow, and he was a little curious, too, to know what Gosling wanted. He stepped into the lodge.

"Sit down, Master Wharton!" said Gosling, drawing a chair to the table for the junior.

Wharton sat down at the table.

He was growing more and more surprised. Indeed, he was inclined to suspect that Gosling had been paying his respects to the gin-bottle thus early in the day. That was more than surmised to be one of Gosling's little weaknesses.

"Course," said Gosling, eyeing the captain of the Remove uneasily—"course, this here is a secret, Master Wharton!"

"What is?"

"This here letter you're going to write for me!"

"Oh! Am I going to write a letter?"

"That's it! And it's a dead secret," said Gosling impressively. "I don't want it to become a joke among the young gentlemen. I should never 'ear the end of it. There ain't any young gent 'ere, Master Wharton, I'd ask excepting you. You're honourable, you are!"

"I hope I'm not the only honourable chap at Greyfriars," said Harry, laughing. "But certainly I sha'n't mention the matter, if I write a letter for you. What on earth is it about?"

"That's a promise?" asked Gosling.

"Of course! Go ahead!"

"It's in answer to a 'vertisement," said Gosling cautiously. "I—I say, Master Wharton, 'ow old would you think I was?"

Wharton jumped. This was a rather sudden change of subject.

"Blessed if I know!" he answered. "Less than a hundred, I'm sure!"

"What?"

"Some of the chaps say you were here when the place was founded by King Stephen," said Wharton gravely. "I believe that's an exaggeration!"

"You cheeky young rip!" roared Gosling. "I—I—I mean, ha, ha, ha!" Gosling laughed feebly. "You must 'ave your little joke, sir! Bless you, I don't mind! Boys will be boys! I was a boy once!"

"Were you?" ejaculated Wharton.

"Course I was!" said Gosling testily.

"Do you remember as long ago as that?"

Gosling's mouth opened for a forcible reply, but he closed it again. Wharton picked up a pen and dipped it in the ink. Pen and ink had been placed ready on the table.

"Well, you ain't answered my question, Master Wharton!" said Gosling at last.

Wharton smiled. He hadn't the faintest idea how old Gosling was; but he had the impression, general at Greyfriars, that Gosling was "jolly old." Gosling was an institution at the old school—almost like the grey old walls, and the quad, and the Cloisters. He had certainly been there before Dr. Locke became headmaster; indeed, it was not many years since Gosling's son was in the habit of alluding to Dr. Locke as the "new 'Ead." And the Head had been there longer than the memory of the oldest inhabitant in the Sixth Form.

But as Gosling was evidently anxious on the point—for reasons Wharton could not understand—the junior felt that it was up to him to "play the game." Gosling was somewhere, probably, between fifty and a hundred, but Wharton kindly made the lowest possible estimate.

He assumed a very reflective air, and scanned the gnarled face of the old porter, as if determined to get his estimate correct within a decade or two.

"Forty!" he suggested.

Gosling smiled.

"Well, p'r'aps more'n that!" he said, greatly gratified. "Yes, more'n that, Master Wharton. Still, they do say a man is as old as he looks, and Mr. Huggins at the Red Cow guessed me at thirty-seven. I asked him across the bar, standing 'im a drink. Thirty-seven, he said."

Wharton nodded gravely. He could not help thinking that Mr. Huggins would probably have made it twenty-seven for a second drink.

"Forty!" said Gosling, still very pleased. "Well hover that, but not so much hover as some might suppose, besides, if I was to have my fotygraf took, it could be touched up 'ere and there! P'r'aps you've got a camera, Master Wharton, and could take a fotygraf?"

"Fraid not," said Harry. "He would take you like a shot, if you asked him! But, about the letter—"

"Yes, the letter!" said Gosling, taking up a folded newspaper from the table. "It's goin' in answer to this 'ere advertisement, Master Wharton!"

"Not taking a new post, surely?" exclaimed Wharton.

"P'r'aps, and p'r'aps not, sir! It might lead to that!" said Gosling mysteriously.

"My hat! What would Greyfriars be without you, Gossy?"

"Greyfriars will 'ave to take its chance!" said Gosling rather loftily. "A man 'as the right to better 'self! Course, I don't like the idea of leavin' the 'Ead in the lurch! Who'll keep this 'ere gate arter I'm gone, and 'ow he'll do it, is rather worrying! But wot I says is this 'ere, a man is bound to look arter himself. If he don't, nobody else won't look arter 'im! Now, this 'ere is the advertisement, Master Wharton. You'll keep it dark?"

"Oh, certainly!"

"Not a word to nobody?"

"Not a soul!"

"Then, look at this 'ere!"

And Gosling—still with some hesitation—held up a marked paragraph before the astonished eyes of the captain of the Remove.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
Gosling's Little Game!

HARRY WHARTON blinked.

He stared at the marked paragraph, and blinked, and blinked again.

He was not merely astonished—he was dumbfounded.

He had hardly known what to expect. But he had supposed that, surprising as it was, the prevailing "industrial unrest" had penetrated even to so quiet and secluded a spot as the porter's lodge at Greyfriars. It was not that, however. It was not a new "job" that Gosling was looking for. The paper he held up for Wharton's inspection was entitled, "The Matrimonial Medium." And the paragraph marked with pencil, upon which Gosling had evidently been poring, was a matrimonial advertisement. It ran:

"WIDOW (middle-age), prepossessing, considered good-looking, licensee of prosperous public-house, desires to meet middle-aged gentleman, with a view to matrimony. Photograph (box X, 'Matrimonial Medium' Office, Swift Street, London."

Harry Wharton blinked and blinked at that outwitting paragraph, and looked at Gosling at last. He wondered, for one moment, whether that gnarled and serious old gentleman was pulling his leg. But Gosling was perfectly serious. Amazing as it was, he evidently considered himself a suitable "middle-aged gentleman" to please the coy fancy of a "widow of social disposition who was considered good-looking."

Gosling's unaccountable blushes were accounted for now.

Gosling, like many gentlemen of his profession, looked forward to spending a happy old age in contented retirement behind the bar of a prosperous public-house. And here was his opportunity. And why should he not have full his share? Certainly he was middle-aged enough—though the landlord of the Red Cow had guessed him at thirty-seven.

"You see, Master Harry," said Gosling, blushing again, "it's jest the chance I want to get settled. My nevvy give me this 'ere paper, and he says to me, says he, 'ere's a chance for you, Uncle William. Joking like, you know. But I says to myself, why not, I says."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Wharton.

A sunny afternoon had by a shock of hair, looked in at the open doorway.

"Why don't you come along, Wharton?" demanded Bob Cherry. "What the merry dickens are you up to?"

Gosling hastily put the paper behind him.

"You clear off, Master Cherry!" he said. "Master Wharton's doing something for me!"

"Nearly time for tiffin!" said Frank Nugent, looking in over Bob's shoulder.

"Buzz off, you fellows!" said Harry. "I'll come along presently. Sha'n't be a few minutes!"

"Oh, all right!"

Bob and Nugent disappeared, and Gosling resumed this "Matrimonial Medium" once more. Harry Wharton was rather nonplussed. It would have been rather disrespectful for a Lower Fourth boy to offer sage advice to a man of Gosling's years. But Wharton could not help feeling that William Gosling was making a fool of himself. However, Mr. Gosling had asked him for assistance, not advice.

"You want me to write a letter?" asked Harry, after a pause.

"That's it, sir! Answer to this 'ere," said Gosling. "My 'andwriting ain't so good as it was, and I ain't always sure about spellin' and such. It's best to spell. I mought get that grammar quite right, either. Now, you can put in first-class grammar, like you learn from Mr. Quelch."

Wharton suppressed a smile.

"I bought this 'ere notepaper a-purpose," went on Gosling. "Gilt hedges to it—very tasty and 'igh-class. You write the letter in a nice 'and for me, putting in grammar, and stops, and sich. See? You got a nice 'and; I've noticed that there."

Wharton dipped the pen in the ink again.

"What am I to say?" he asked.

"P'r'aps you could suggest 'ow it ought to be worded," said Gosling persuasively. "I ain't much of a 'and at letter-writin'. Something very nice and polite. S'posin' you was making up——"

"Eh?"

"S'posin' you was making up to a prosperous public-'ouse—I—I mean to a widder——"

"Oh crumbs! I—I can't quite suppose that!" gasped Wharton. "You'd better get me what to write, Gosling, and I'll do the best I can."

Gosling reflected deeply.

"Well, s'pose you tell 'em I'd like the job—I mean, I'd like to put in for the public-'ouse—and, the widder's middle-aged gentleman, you know, what 'as filled a responsible post at a public school for many years—needn't say exactly 'ow many. Considered good-looking——"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Stately," said Gosling.

"Stately!" murmured Wharton. "Oh crikey; I—I mean exactly! I—I see! I'll make a draft of it, and then copy it out on the—the gilt-edged paper."

"Thank you kindly, Master Wharton!"

Harry Wharton reflected a little, and began to write on a loose sheet of common or garden notepaper, so to speak. Gosling watched him anxiously, over his shoulder, and expressed his approval as the epistle proceeded, and put in occasional suggestions. It was Gosling's letter, not Wharton's; and the captain of the Remove did what was required—without stating his own opinion.

The epistle was composed at last, and Harry Wharton proceeded to copy it out on the gilt-edged paper, in a very neat caligraphy. It ran:

"The undersigned, a middle-aged gentleman, considered of stately appearance, who has held a responsible post for many years in a public school, would be glad to meet advertiser. Photograph enclosed. Reply, making appointment, to be addressed to the Lodge, Greyfriars School, Kent."

"Now you'll have to sign it," said Harry.

"Couldn't you sign it for me?" asked Gosling. "It would look better in your 'and."

Wharton shook his head.

"Couldn't be done. You'd better sign it, Gosling!"

"Well, all right, if you think so, Master Wharton."

And William Gosling signed the letter—the signature affording a startling contrast to caligraphy to the remainder of the letter.

"Now p'r'aps you'll address the envelope, sir. I've 'ad a letter returned once, 'cos the postman made out as he couldn't git on to what the address was."

"Oh!"

Wharton addressed the envelope to "Box X, Office of the Matrimonial Medium, Swift Street, London, E.C. 4."

Then he rose from the table.

"Thank you kindly, sir!" said Gosling gratefully. "I wonder if you'd ask young Master Penfold about that there fotygrafy?"

"Certainly! I'll ask him to take you after dinner," said Harry.

"Thank you, sir!"

Harry Wharton quitted the porter's lodge with a smile on his face. His chums joined him as he started for the School House.

"Well, what's the game?" asked

Johnny Bull. "What did the ancient and venerable Gossy want?"

"Only a letter written," said Harry. "Let's get in!"

The dinnerful bell is ringing," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh; and the chums of the Remove hurried in. Wharton being rather anxious to avoid any inquiries as to exactly what Gosling had wanted.

The juniors knew that he had written a letter for the school porter; but the nature of that letter was to remain a deep secret. Gosling was not mistaken in supposing that, if the secret leaked out, he would never hear the end of the affair.

After dinner Harry Wharton joined Dick Penfold as the Removites came out of the dining-room. He had undertaken to enlist Pen's services as a photographer.

"Will you take a photograph for me, Pen?" he asked, coming to the point at once.

"Like a bird," answered Penfold. "Plenty of sunshine just now. Wait till I get my camera."

"I don't want to be taken; it's Gosling."

"Gosling?"

"Yes. He wants his photograph taken, and I said I'd ask you."

"Oh! What on earth does Gosling want to be taken for?" exclaimed Pen, in astonishment. "He can't suppose that his face is worth putting on record, surely?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"He might; you never know," he answered. "Anyway, he would like to be taken."

"Will he pay for any damage to the camera?" grinned Pen. "It will put it to rather a strain. All serene; I'll take him."

And Penfold went cheerily up to his study for his camera.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
An Occasion for Smiles!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

The Famous Five were chatting outside the School House when Billy Bunter joined them, with a fat grin on his ample visage.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "Wherefore that beatific grin?"

"He, he, he! I say, you fellows, Gosling's having his photograph taken!" chuckled Bunter.

"Gosling is?" ejaculated Johnny Bull.

"Gammon!" said Bob.

"I say, you fellows, I saw him! Pen's taking it," grinned Bunter. "You should see old Gosling; he's got a clean collar on——"

"Draw it mild!"

"And he's smiling!"

"He, he! It on!" said Bob Cherry incredulously.

"I tell you he's smiling," said Bunter. "Grinning away like a Cheshire cat! He, he, he!"

"My hat! This will be worth seeing," said Nugent. "Let's go and watch. Where is he, Bunty?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Chums, I came to tell you fellows," said Bunter, "Vernon-Smith was offering two to one that it would break the camera."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Four of the five juniors started for the elms. Harry Wharton hesitated.

"Come on, Wharton," called out Bob, looking back. "It will be worth watching, if old Gossy is smiling. It will crack his complexion. Come on!"

"Let's go down to the footer," said Harry. "Wingate's doing some practice at goal."

"Rot! Let's go and watch Gossy. Why don't you want to come?" demanded Bob, in surprise.

"Oh, all right! I'm coming."

And Harry Wharton followed his chums. Billy Bunter trotted along with the Famous Five, grinning widely. The chums of the Remove found quite a crowd gathered already on the scene.

Two or three dozen fellows of the Remove and Fourth Form had joined up to see the sight.

Penfold was arranging his camera, and Gosling was standing ready to be "took," as he expressed it.

Pen had had to select an open spot for the light, and the scene had attracted attention at once. Why Gosling should wish to have his photograph taken was a mystery to the Greyfriars fellows. The general opinion was that a permanent record of Gosling's features was far from being worth the price of a film. And some of the juniors humorously surmised that Pen's camera would be "crocked" by the process.

Gosling certainly hadn't wanted an audience; but it couldn't be helped. And when he frowned at the gathering array of sightseers, Pen rapped out:

"That won't do. Smile!"

And Gosling put on a smile as well as he could. He was not accustomed to smiling, and his gnarled visage broke up into a mass of wrinkles under it.

Pen looked at him over the cameras.

"I said smile!" he rapped out.

"Ain't I smiling?" demanded Gosling, rather warmly.

"Oh! Is that a smile?" ejaculated the photographer. "All right, if that's the best you can do."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, he's been brushing his hair!" squeaked Billy Bunter; and there was a loud chortle.

Gosling certainly looked smarter than usual. His collar was spotless, and his tie was quite neatly tied. He was very carefully shaven, and undoubtedly his hair was brushed as well as newly oiled. He looked red and self-conscious; but that was only to be expected under the ordeal of photography.

"A bit more to the left," said Pen. Gosling shifted to the left.

"Put your head straight."

"Ain't it straight?"

"No; looks like a cockatoo's head at present. Now, fire up!"

"Oh, all right!"

"Now smile again."

Gosling grinned hideously.

"Keep out of the way, Bunter. I'm not photographing porpoises!"

"Oh, really, Pen——"

"Kick that fat duffer out of the way, somebody."

"Yarooh!"

"Thanks, Nugent! Keep back all of you. Keep like that, Gosling, but look pleasant."

"Oh dear!" murmured Gosling.

"Now you're scowling!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, you fellows! Think of something nice, Gosling, and smile. Think of the face at the Red Cow."

"You young raskil——"

"What?"

"I—I mean no offence, Master Pen. Am I all right now?" asked the unhappy subject.

"Grin a bit more."

Gosling's grin grew more expansive.

"That's better. Keep like that."

Click!

"Is it done?" gasped Gosling.

"I'll take a second film in case of accidents. Put on your sweetest expression."

"Oh lor'!"

Click!

"There, that will do," said Pen. "You're a difficult subject to take, Gosling. But I think I've got you all right."

"Will it come out good-looking?" asked Gosling.

"No fear! Cameras always tell the exact truth."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gosling approached the photographer, and blinked at the camera rather uneasily.

"Can I 'ave it now?" he asked.

"Ha, ha! Not till it's developed and printed. I'll take it and develop it now," said Pen. "I dare say I can print you some copies this afternoon. I'll try."

"I—I say, Master Pen——" murmured Gosling.

"What?" asked Pen.

"I'd rape you could give it a touch or two," whispered Gosling. "Make it look as nice as you can, you know. It's himportant."

"I'll do my best," chuckled Pen. "I can't make it look exactly like Antinous, you know."

"I dunno who Tinnyoos was; never 'eard of 'im," said Gosling. "But I want that there photograph to look nice, Master Pen. If you liked, sir, I wouldn't mind payin' a shillin' for a really good one."

Pen chuckled.

"Never mind the shilling, Gossy; I'll do my very best for you," he said. "Do you want it mounted?"

"Oh, no! Jest to go in a letter," said Gosling.

"Right-ho!"

Penfold marched off with his camera to get the films developed in the darkroom in the School House. Gosling mopped his perspiring brow. The ordeal had been severe.

"Gossy's sending his photograph to somebody in a letter!" chuckled Billy Bunter. "I say, who is it, Gossy? Are you getting engaged?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Take care of the law, Gosling," said Vernon-Smith, shaking his head.

Gosling started.

"The law, Master Smith! There ain't no law again sending a photograph in a letter, that I know on."

"That depends," answered the Bounder of Greyfriars. "In your case it might amount to manslaughter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gosling snorted, and stalked away to his lodge, leaving the juniors chuckling. The Famous Five strolled away with smiling faces.

"What on earth is Gossy's little game?" said Bob Cherry. "What the thump does he want his chivvy taken for?"

"To send in a letter, he told Pen!" grinned Nugent.

"Yes; but it's jolly queer."

"Its chivvy? No mistake about that."

"Do you know, Wharton?"

"Eh? I?" ejaculated Harry.

"Well, you've been writing a letter for him, and now we hear that he's had his photo taken to send in a letter. It's really mysterious."

"Oh, bother Gosling!" said Harry, colouring a little. "Let's go and punt a ball about before lessons."

"I say, Wharton knows all about it!"

said Billy Bunter. "I can see it in his eye. Why can't you tell us, Wharton?"

"Go and eat coke!" was Wharton's answer.

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

The captain of the Remove walked away, and Billy Bunter gave a dissatisfied grunt. There was something "on," and Wharton knew—and Bunter didn't know—which was a very unsatisfactory state of affairs to William George Bunter. The fact that it was not his business did not make any difference to William George; he always wanted to know. And Billy Bunter was determined to know—and when he was determined to know anything he generally succeeded in knowing, in the long run.

Peter Todd yawned portentously.

He had grinned over the taking of William Gosling's photograph in the quadrangle; but the matter had passed from his mind since. He was not so deeply interested in everybody else's business as Billy Bunter.

"Bless Gossy and his photo!" he remarked. "Pass the biscuits."

"What biscuits?"

"Why, you owl, have you scoffed the lot?" exclaimed Peter indignantly.

"Oh, really, Peter——"

"Well, shove the cake this way!" growled Peter Todd.

"I was just going to have the cake, Peter——"

"Then I'm just in time," said Todd, reaching out and annexing the cake.

"You can whistle for it, my fat tulip."

"If you're going to be selfish, Peter——"

"I am, dear boy."

Billy Bunter sniffed.

"I'll have the walnuts, then," he remarked. "I say, it's jolly queer, Peter. Gosling is no end anxious about that photograph, and he grumbled when Pen said he would have to wait till the morning. Wharton knows all about it, too, and he won't tell me. I've asked him, and he simply called me names, like a beast. He was writing a letter for Gosling, and——"

"Give us a rest," suggested Peter. "What the dickens does it matter to you, fatty?"

"It doesn't matter, of course. I hope I'm not inquisitive," said Bunter, with dignity. "Still, it's jolly queer. I'd like to know who that letter's going to."

"You'd like to know who!" said Peter Todd severely. "You'd better let Quelchy hear you massacre grammar like that. Do you mean you'd like to know whom?"

"Oh, rats!" grunted Bunter. "I say, Peter, you help me find out——"

Peter Todd rose to his feet.

"I won't help you find out—I'll help you get out!" he said. "Where will you have it?"

Peter drew back his right boot. Instead of stating where he would have it, Bunter grabbed up what were left of the walnuts, and dodged out of the study. He paused in the passage to hurl back the word "Beast!" and rolled away. Peter kicked the door shut after him. From Toddy, at all events, the Owl of the Remove was not likely to receive assistance in gratifying his insatiable curiosity.

The fat junior looked in at Study No. 11, where he found Skinner and Snoop and Stott finishing their tea. Skinner pointed to the door.

"Cut!" he remarked laconically.

"I say, you fellows——"

"This study isn't a moneylender's, or an almshouse!" said Skinner pleasantly. "Try next door."

Skinner was knocked right and left by the captain of the Remove; and he rolled under the table and declined to come out again. "Exit Skinner!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Ha, ha, ha!" *(See Chapter 5.)*

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Skinner Makes Discoveries!

"IT'S jolly queer, Peter!"

"Eh? What's queer?" asked Peter Todd.

Billy Bunter had an unusually thoughtful expression on his fat face at the tea-table in Study No. 7. He had come out of deep reflections with the remark that it was queer.

"About Gosling!" said Bunter.

"What's the matter with Gosling?"

"He came along to see Pen after lessons this afternoon," explained the Owl of the Remove. "He wanted his photo. Pen couldn't let him have it, as the light wasn't good enough for printing out, he said."

"If you think I want to borrow any money of you, Skinner——"

"Well, don't you?" grinned Skinner.

"No, I don't!" roared Bunter.

"Fan me, somebody!" said Skinner.

"You silly ass!" growled Bunter, as Skinner & Co. chortled. "It's about old Gosling. I say, you fellows, it's awfully queer, you know. I'd like to know who—I mean whom—he's sending that photo to. Gossy's a beast, you know—always reporting a chap if he gets a chance. We could guy him no end."

"Well, ask him," said Snoop.

"I have asked him, and he only grunted at me like a Prussian Hun. I say, Pen's going to print off from the negative after lessons in the morning and give the photo to Gossy. Then I s'pose he'll post the letter. Wharton was writing a letter for him to-day. I say, you could find out, Skinner——"

"How could I find out?" said Harold Skinner.

"Well, you're a cunning rotter, you know——"

"What?"

"I—I mean you're an awfully clever chap!" stammered Bunter. "I—I say, Skinner, what—what are you going to do with that ruler?"

"Shy it at you!" answered Skinner.

"Oh, I say—— Oooooop!"

Bunter scuttled out of the study, and the ruler crashed on the door behind him.

"Come back and have the inkpot!" shouted Skinner.

But Bunter did not come back. Apparently he did not want the inkpot. Harold Skinner grinned as he eat down at the table again.

"It is rather queer about Gossy, and about Wharton having a hand in it," he remarked. "I'm going to look into it. It would be fun to pull old Gossy's leg, when we know whom the photo's going to."

"He won't tell you," said Stott.

"I'm going to find out, though."

"How?"

"By looking at the envelope, of course."

"He won't show it you."

"That's all you know, my son," answered Skinner. "There's more than one way of killing a cat. You'll see."

And the next morning, when Penfold was printing the photograph in the sunlight, Harold Skinner joined him, to look on. The photograph came out quite nicely, though the picture was not exactly good-looking. But that wasn't quite to be expected when Gosling was the subject. As Pen had told him, the camera couldn't lie.

"Taking it along now, Pen?" asked Skinner genially.

"Not till it's fixed, fathead."

"Oh, of course! I'll take it to Gossy, if you like."

"I don't like, thanks!" answered Pen laconically.

Skinner shrugged his shoulders. When the photograph was all ready Dick Penfold walked down to the porter's lodge with it. Harold Skinner strolled carelessly in his wake, Snoop and Stott keeping at a distance. Pen tapped at the door of the lodge, handed the photograph to Gosling, and walked away. The door closed, and Skinner strolled round by the window and calmly glanced in.

Gosling was slipping the photograph into an envelope.

Skinner walked away and rejoined his chums. Two minutes later Gosling came out and dropped a letter into the letter-box in the school wall. There was a slit inside the wall for letters to be dropped in; but the box was opened by the postman in the road outside.

"Come on," said Skinner, as Gosling went back to his lodge without even glancing at the trio.

"What's on now?" asked Snoop.

"Boggs will be along in about a quarter of an hour; we're going to wait for him."

"The postman won't give you Gosling's letter," said Stott, with a stare.

"I don't want him to; I only want to look at it. I know Gossy's horny old fist by sight; that's enough!"

"But Boggs won't show you the letters!"

"Oh yes he will!"

Skinner & Co. strolled out of the gates, and waited for the postman. Mr. Boggs of Friardale came along at last to make the midday collection. Harold Skinner greeted him affably.

"Good-morning, Mr. Boggs!"

"Mornin', sir!" answered Boggs.

"By the way, Boggs, I've dropped a letter in the box without a stamp on," said Skinner. "Could you——"

"Can't give any letter back, once in the box, sir!" answered Mr. Boggs, very positively.

"My dear man, I don't want you to. You can let me stick this stamp on it, I suppose? You can hold it!"

"Well, no 'arm in that, sir!" assented Mr. Boggs unsuspiciously.

He unlocked the box, and took out the letters. Mr. Boggs was an obliging man, but he saw no harm in obliging Master Skinner in such a little matter. He was not aware how extremely Master Skinner's principles were opposed to those of the late George Washington.

He turned over the letters one by one, to find the one which hadn't a stamp. Skinner calmly glanced at the addresses as he did so. That was all the astute Skinner wanted.

Snoop and Stott, understanding his trick now, glanced over his shoulder. And all three of them jumped when they recognised Harry Wharton's handwriting on an envelope, of which the address was:

"Box X,
Office of the 'Matrimonial Medium,'
Swift Street,
London, E.C. 4."

"My hat!" ejaculated Stott.

Skinner made him a warning sign.

"Don't seem to have any letter 'ere without a stamp on, sir!" said the unsuspicious Mr. Boggs.

"Not really?" said Skinner carelessly. "Must have stamped it after all, I suppose."

"You must 'ave, sir!"

"Sorry to have bothered you, Boggs."

"Not at all, Mister Skinner!"

The three juniors went in at the gates, Skinner chuckling as soon as he was out of the postman's sight.

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

"There wasn't a letter in Gosling's fist," said Stott. "I should have spotted it if there had been. Wharton must have addressed the envelope for him, Skinner. We saw him post a letter!"

Skinner nodded.

"Perhaps Wharton addressed the envelope for him, and perhaps he didn't!" he answered coolly. "All I know is that Wharton's writing to a matrimonial paper."

"Well, he couldn't have written for himself," said Snoop, staring at Skinner. "It's as plain as anything that he wrote it for Gosling. That's what the old donkey wanted his photograph for. He's being taken in by some spoof advertisement in a matrimonial paper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Stott. "That's the giddy history of the mystery!"

"Never mind Wharton's fist!" insisted Skinner. "I think we have a right to conclude that Wharton was writing on his own."

"But we know he was writing a letter for Gosling, Bunter said so——"

"What Bunter says isn't evidence. It was Wharton's fist; and seeing is believing. I think this gives us a chance of taking a rise out of his Magnificence."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Might have guessed you were up to something!" chuckled Stott. "Good! Let's chip Master Magnificent Wharton on his matrimonial prospects."

The three young rascals yelled at the idea.

"He might hit out, though!" added Stott, as an after-thought.

"Oh, I wouldn't chip him!" said

To Mr. Prout's dismay and horror, Gosling put up his hands and squared up to him. "You 'ook it!" he exclaimed; "or let's 'ave it hout, man to man! I don't give tuppence for your hairs and graces, Prout! Who are you?" (*See Chapter 9.*)

Skinner. "I don't mean that. I'm simply going to ask Bunter what he thinks."

"Ha, ha! That will get it all over the Remove in next to no time. Where's Bunter?"

And Skinner & Co. proceeded to look for Bunter. They headed for the tuck-shop. That was the likeliest place in which to look for the Owl of the Remove.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Not Nice for Wharton

HARRY WHARTON frowned.

He did not understand it.

In class that afternoon he found himself the centre of many glances, and every fellow who glanced at him grinned as he glanced.

Wharton did not notice it at first; but the attention he was receiving became so pronounced that he could not help noticing it at last.

He grew rather restive under it.

He asked Bob Cherry, in a whisper, whether there was a spot of ink on his nose, or anything of the kind; and Bob assured him that there wasn't.

But it was evident that there was some joke on; and that Harry Wharton was the object of it.

Hence his frowns.

He began to glare a little when he found a grinning glance turned upon him, but his glares only seemed to entertain the Removites.

There was so much hilarity, more or less suppressed, in the Form, that Mr. Quelch observed it, and gave his class some grim warning glances.

Wharton's chums observed it, too, and they were perplexed. So far, the famous Co. were not initiated into the little joke planned by the humorous Skinner. Nearly every other fellow in the Remove, however, had heard it from Billy Bunter. To tell Bunter anything was equivalent to shouting it from the house-tops, especially if it was told as a secret. And what Skinner had confided to the Owl of the Remove was much too good to keep.

"What is the game?" Wharton whispered to Frank Nugent. "What's the joke, Franky?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Nugent, shaking his head.

"It's up against me!" said Harry, frowning.

"Looks like it!"

Wharton compressed his lips. He felt ridicule keenly, perhaps too keenly. It was not entirely without grounds that Skinner had nicknamed him "His Magnificence."

Bolsover major scribbled on a slip of paper and passed it along the desks. The slip found a resting-place on Wharton's desk.

He stared at it. Bolsover major had written the sentence:

"When is it to be?"

"What does that mean, Franky?" muttered Wharton.

"Ask me another, old chap."

"I say, Wharton——" came in a stage-whisper from Billy Bunter, when Mr. Quelch's back was turned for a few moments.

Wharton looked at the fat junior with grim inquiry.

"Well?" he snapped.

"Are you going to ask all the fellows?"

"What do you mean?"

"He, he, he!"

"Save up your old slippers!" murmured Skinner, and there was a chortle in the Remove, which caused Mr. Quelch to spin round, and fix a glance on his class that made the chortle die away with startling suddenness.

Harry Wharton's face was very grim when the Remove was dismissed from lessons that afternoon. As the juniors came out into the corridor there was a sound of chuckling.

"When do you expect an answer, Wharton?" asked Bolsover major, as he passed the Famous Five in the passage.

"An answer to what?"

"Your letter?"

"What letter?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bolsover major, and he passed on without further explanation.

Wharton made a stride after him, his eyes gleaming; but Bob Cherry caught him by the sleeve.

"Keep your temper, old chap!" he murmured.

"I don't like it!" growled Wharton. "The next fellow who grins at me will get a shock!"

"He, he, he!"

It was Billy Bunter's ill-luck that he was the next fellow. He came along, and not only grinned, but chortled, as he blinked at the captain of the Remove through his big spectacles.

Harry Wharton grasped him by one fat shoulder and shook him. Bunter's giggle changed into a roar.

"Yaroooop!"

"Now, what do you mean, you fat idiot?" exclaimed Wharton, shaking him.

"Yow-ow-ow! Leggo!"

"What's this idiotic joke?" demanded Wharton.

"Tain't a joke. 'Tain't my fault if you answer advertisements in matrimonial papers, is it?" howled Bunter.

Wharton jumped.

"Wha-a-at?" he gasped.

"What on earth is the fat duffer getting at?" exclaimed Bob Cherry, in amazement. "Is he potty?"

"The pottifulness must be terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"What do you mean, Bunter?" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

Bunter jerked himself away from the captain of the Remove, and blinked wrathfully.

"Wharton's been writing to the 'Matrimonial Medium'!" he said.

"You young ass!"

"Look at his chivvy!" chortled Bunter.

Wharton's chums stared at him blankly. His face was the colour of a beetroot.

"Harry, what the dickens——" began Nugent.

"So you've been spying, you fat rotter?" gasped Wharton.

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"You haven't really done anything of the kind, surely, Harry!" exclaimed Bob Cherry blankly.

"Of course not, you ass!" said Wharton savagely. "Why should I? But—but I'll explain. But—but this fat rotter oughtn't to know anything about it, anyhow! I'll scalp him!"

Bunter jumped back.

"It wasn't me!" he howled. "I never looked at the letters in the box! I only know what Skinner said!"

"Skinner!" exclaimed Harry.

"I say, you're jolly rumbustious, Wharton!" said Bunter, backing away and wagging a fat forefinger reprovingly at the exasperated captain of the Remove. "I'm really shocked at you! Besides, who'd have you?"

"Why, I—I—I'll——"

Billy Bunter fled

"I'll go and see Skinner!" said Harry, breathing hard. "The utter cad, to spy like that, and spread it all over the Remove!".

"But—but if you haven't——"

"I can't explain!" growled Wharton. "It's a promise! Where's that cad Skinner?"

"Oh," ejaculated Bob. "I tumble! You were writing a letter for that old ass Gosling yesterday, and——"

Harry Wharton strode away in search of Skinner. He was bound by his promise to Gosling to say nothing of the contents of the letter, and that made the affair all the more exasperating. He could not clear himself of the ridiculous imputation without breaking his promise to Gosling.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 617.

Skinner & Co. were found in the Common-room, in the midst of a grinning crowd of Removites. Skinner was grinning, but the grin died on his face as Wharton came striding up to the group. He did not quite like the look on Wharton's face.

"Here comes the giddy Lothario!" chuckled Bolsover major.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Skinner!" rapped out Wharton.

"Hallo, my lord?" answered Skinner. "Anything happened to disturb the lofty serenity of your high mightiness?"

"You seem to have started a silly yarn about me!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Not at all. If it's not true, you can say so."

"Of course it's not true!" said Peter Todd. "Say so, and then punch his silly nose, Wharton!"

"I'm going to punch his nose!" said Wharton grimly. "Skinner knows well enough it isn't true!"

Skinner shrugged his shoulders.

No. 5.—HORACE HENRY SAMUEL QUELCH, M.A.

The master of the Remove, and the headmaster's chief assistant. Strict and firm, though in every way an excellent master. Kind and sympathetic towards any boy who wants help or advice. Has for some time been engaged upon the tremendous task of writing a complete "History of Greyfriars."

"I only know what I saw," he answered. "I asked the postman to let me look at the letters, because I'd left one unstamped. No harm in that, I suppose? I happened to see your letter to the 'matrimonial paper by sheer accident."

"There wasn't any such letter," said Squiff.

"If there wasn't, Wharton can say so!" said Skinner maliciously.

"I suppose there wasn't, was there, Wharton?" said the Australian junior, puzzled by Wharton's look.

"I can't exactly explain," said Harry, with a crimson face, "not without breaking a promise. But Skinner knows he spied on the letters, and that he's made a yarn out of nothing!"

"Nothing of the kind," answered Skinner. "I may have mentioned the circumstance. It rather surprised me to find our respected Form captain writing to matrimonial agencies!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, Wharton!"

Harry Wharton made a rush at the humorist of the Remove. He couldn't explain how the matter stood, but he could "take it out" of Skinner, and that he proceeded to do.

Skinner put up his hands, as there was no help for it; but during the next few minutes he had ample reason to repent that Nature had endowed him with such humorous proclivities.

He was knocked right and left, and he rolled under the table, and declined to come out.

"Exit Skinner!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton looked round at the grinning juniors with a flushed face.

"I don't want any more silly rotting on this subject!" he said. "The next fellow who tries to pull my leg about it will have a fight on his hands, that's all!"

And the captain of the Remove strode angrily out of the Common-room. His ears tingled as a roar followed him:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton strode out into the quad, feeling greatly inclined to kick himself for having been so obliging to William Gosling the previous day. Certainly he could not have foreseen Skinner's trickery; but he almost wished that William Gosling and the widow who was considered good looking and the prosperous public-house were all at the bottom of the sea together.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
Great Expectations!

THERE were some "ructions" in the Remove the following day.

Harry Wharton did not take kindly to Skinner's little joke at his expense.

And Wharton's deep annoyance made some of the juniors quite keen to keep on the joke, with the consequence that the captain of the Remove had three fights on his hands that day.

The toughest was with Bolsover major. But Bolsover major was knocked out after seven rounds, with his glasses in the gym, and after that he let the joke drop. There were easier combats with Fisher T. Fish and Stott, Fishy lasting through only one round, Stott through two.

After that Wharton heard less of the "Matrimonial Medium."

The captain of the Remove was remarkably lefty with his hands, and it was no joke to stand up to him in the gym when he was in a state of exasperation. But, though less was said in Wharton's hearing, the joke continued "on," and Wharton could not quarrel with a fellow for smiling—and the Removites did a great deal of smiling. The way the captain of the Remove came made it all the more funny, in their estimation.

As a matter of fact, nobody in the Remove believed that Wharton had actually got into communication with a matrimonial agency. The truth of affairs was soon guessed, Gosling's anxiety about his photograph being the clue. Even Billy Bunter, on reflection, realised that Wharton couldn't possibly be thinking of matrimony.

But the knowledge of the real facts was just as annoying to Wharton, for he had promised Gosling that the matter should remain a secret, and now it was all over the Lower School. As soon as the pulling of Wharton's leg palled on the Remove it was probable that they would begin to chip Gosling on the subject, and Gosling would suppose that Harry had given him away. As soon as that thought occurred to Wharton's mind, he decided to explain the matter to Gosling, and after lessons one morning he started for the porter's lodge.

He found Gosling sitting in his doorway with a letter in his hand, which he was reading carefully, with his spectacles on. Gosling's face wore an expansive smile—a proof that there was something very satisfactory in the letter.

He looked up, and grinned amiably at Wharton.

"It's come!" he said.

"Eh—what's come?" asked Harry, rather abruptly.

"The answer about the widder."

Wharton guessed.

"Oh, that!" he said. He was not interested in the answer about the widow. "I say, Gosling, I'm sorry to have to tell you that the fellows know about this rot. Skinner spied on the letters in the box, and he's told everybody about that dashed 'Matrimonial Medium' bizney!"

"The young raskl!" said Gosling. "But the letter wasn't written in my 'and on the envelope, Master Wharton."

"No; Skinner recognised my fist, and he's making out that it's I who have written to the dashed paper," growled Wharton.

"Oh, my heye! Haw, haw, haw!" roared Gosling.

Wharton stared at him angrily.

"What are you chortling at?" he demanded.

Gosling laid back his head and roared.

"Haw, haw, haw! Oh, my heye! Haw, haw!"

"Does it strike you as funny?" snapped the captain of the Remove.

"Haw, haw! It do a bit, Master Wharton!" chuckled Gosling.

"Oh, rats! I don't see that it's funny. Anyhow, that's only a silly joke. The fellows know well enough whose the letter was—your playing the goat about your photograph was enough. I haven't said a word, as I said I wouldn't; but they know now. See?"

Gosling nodded, still grinning.

"That's all right, Master Wharton—it don't matter now. Let 'em know! I don't s'pose I shall be 'ere very long, anyhow."

"Not leaving?" ejaculated Wharton.

Gosling tapped the letter on his knee.

"I'm in 'opes of being the bowner of a prosperous public-'ouse afore long," he said impressively. "What the 'Ead will do for somebody to look arter this 'ere gate, I dunno. I'm sorry for 'im, but a man has to consider 'imself!"

It was Wharton's turn to chuckle.

Gosling had an unshakable belief that he was part and parcel of Greyfriars, and that the old school would be in danger of collapse if he withdrew his valuable support. Gosling had that belief all to himself. It was quite apparent to everybody else that Greyfriars would survive the withdrawal of Gosling.

Like Heratius of old, Gosling had "kept the gate" faithfully; but the keeping of the gate was not really the important business that Gosling supposed.

"Look at this 'ere, sir!" said Gosling. "You read it!"

Wharton glanced at the letter. It was headed in impressive type "The Matrimonial Medium," Swift Street, London, E.C. And it ran:

"Dear Sir,—Your letter and photograph have been handed to the advertiser, who informs us that she is very favourably impressed, and desirous of a meeting. We will arrange the same on receipt of £1 1s. (One Guinea), our usual fee for arranging an appointment. Kindly forward cheque or postal-order, and we will immediately acquaint you with place and time of the proposed meeting.

"Yours faithfully,

"THE MATRIMONIAL MEDIUM."

"Bit of orl right—wot?" asked Gosling with a grin of satisfaction. "No more blooming gates for me to open—wot? No more cheeky kids a'pulling of a man's leg. No more jore from a crusty old gent if a man 'appens to 'ave a niff of gin about 'im on a cold day. Mr. Quelch was speakin' to me yesterday—very 'aughty. I'll give 'im 'aughtiness'" said Gosling independently. "Nobody ain't going to be 'aughty to a genelman of hindependent means. Not if I know it!"

"You haven't bagged the pub yet, old top," said Wharton, laughing. "Don't count your chickens too early."

"Oh, it's all right now," said Gosling confidently. "If the widder's favourably himpressed with my fotygraf, that's all right. I'm going to send that guinea this afternoon. My heye! Why, I may be leavin' 'ere on Saturday!"

"Phew!"

No. 6 WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER.

The Owl of the Remove. His chief characteristics are an insatiable appetite and a habit of tying his bootlaces outside a study door so that his ear is just on a level with the keyhole. Always trying to borrow money on the strength of a postal-order which has never arrived. But, with all his faults, Greyfriars would not be the same without him. He is a good ventriloquist—which is about his only accomplishment, as he is no scholar. (Study No. 7.)

"It's a bit rough on the 'Ead," confessed Gosling. "I've been with the 'Ead a long time, and we get on. I get on with his missey, Master Perry, too, what's in the Army now. But a man is bound to look arter 'imself. That's 'ow I look at it. I don't quite know 'ow I'm going to break it to the 'Ead, but it's got to be broke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What you larfin' at, Master Wharton?" grunted Gosling. "Don't you larf at me, I tell you. I ain't standing any cheek from a kid in the Lower Fourth!"

"What?"

"You be respeckful!" said Gosling, waving a large and horny hand at the astonished junior. "You be respeckful, I tell you, or I may box your years!"

"B-b-bub-box my ears?" yelled Wharton.

"As soon as look at yer!" answered Gosling impressively.

Wharton blinked at him.

His good fortune—or his supposed good fortune—had made a change in William Gosling; he was changed with a vengeance.

"Box my ears!" repeated Wharton dazedly. "Well, my hat!"

"You cut orf!" said Gosling.

"You silly old ass!" exclaimed Wharton. "Do you want me to punch your nose?"

Gosling rose to his feet.

Gratitude for favours rendered did not enter largely into Gosling's composition, that was evident. He had already forgotten the services of the captain of the Remove—which had brought so much trouble on Wharton.

"'Nuff said!" he exclaimed loftily. "Cut orf, afore I box your years!"

Harry Wharton looked at him in great wrath; and then he reached out and gave Gosling a push on his ample waistcoat. The porter sat down beside his chair with a bump and a loud yell.

Then Wharton walked away.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Gosling Going Strong!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter burst into Study No. 1 at tea-time, with his fat face crimson and his little round eyes gleaming with wrath through his spectacles.

"I say, you fellows—don't you chuck that loaf at me, Bob Cherry, you beast—I say——"

"Oh, roll away!" said Harry Wharton.

The Famous Five were at tea, and they were not yearning for the society of William George Bunter.

"Stand steady while I catch you on the boko with this loaf, Bunter!" said Bob Cherry.

Bunter dodged.

"I say, you fellows—I've had my ear pulled!" he yelled.

"Not before it wanted it!" said Nugent.

"Gosling——"

"What?"

"Gosling's pulled my ear!" shrieked Bunter. "My ear, you know—Gosling, you know, a dashed porter, pulled my ear! I'm going to the Head! I'm not going to have my ear pulled by a blessed porter!"

"My hat! Gosling's pulled your ear!"

"Yes, the beast—fancy a school-porter pulling a gentleman's ear!" exclaimed Bunter in breathless wrath. "Why, it's regular Bolshevism!"

"Let's make this clear!" said Bob Cherry, lifting his hand. "You said he pulled your ear?"

"Yes, the cheeky rotter——"

"Did he pull anybody else's ear?"

"Eh? Not that I know of."

"Then who's the gentleman you're speaking of?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!" roared Bunter. "This isn't a time for your rotten jokes. He's pulled my ear! Laying hand on me, you know—a rotten school-porter. It's Bolshevism—Socialism—what, it's anarchy!"

"Worse than that!" said Frank Nugent gravely. "It's time for the skies to fall. If Gosling pulled your ear——"

"He has!"

"You'd better cut off and see him——"

"What?"

"And tell him to wash his hand. Then there'll be no harm done."

Billy Bunter glared at the grinning five with a glare that bade fair to crack his spectacles.

"I tell you, I'm not standing it!" he roared.

"But what made Gossy pull your ear?" asked Wharton.

"He was strutting about in the quad," said Bunter, "strutting isn't the word—he was fairly swanking. Something's happened—he looks as if he's come into a fortune. I asked him if he was squiffy—quite civilly, you know—and he pulled my ear! Actually pulled it! You could have knocked me down with a currant bun! Now, you know!"

And Bunter rubbed his ear tenderly.

Certainly, it was not the first time that Bunter's fat ear had been pulled—and not by means the first time he had deserved to have it pulled. But on this occasion it was an outrage on his dignity as well as on his ear.

Bunter felt more pain in his ear than in his dignity, perhaps; but undoubtedly his dignity suffered.

"We'd better go and see Gossy, and talk to him," said Bob Cherry. "He mustn't pull fellows' ears—even Bunter's. What's the matter with Gosling?"

"Must be squiffy," said Nugent.

Harry Wharton laughed. He could guess what was the matter with Gosling. Gosling was growing inflated with his good fortune, and, like the celebrated lady at the tea-party, he was "swellin' visibly."

Gosling, in fact, was going up like a rocket, and was probably fated to come down like the stick.

Billy Bunter found some solace in joining the Famous Five at tea. Tea finished, the chums of the Remove hurried down to the quad. They were rather interested in seeing Gosling "strutting."

Gosling was not in view, and they sauntered down to the gates. The gates were closed and locked rather early. It was not yet dusk.

Outside the bronze bars of the gate a burly figure was to be seen—that of Horace Coker of the Fifth Form.

Coker's face was red and wrathy.

The juniors could hear the bell tinkling in the porter's lodge as they came along, but Gosling evidently was not heeding it.

"Here, you fags!" shouted Coker through the bars of the gate.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Where's Gosling? Why doesn't he open the gate?" roared Coker.

"Better ask him."

"I've been ringing for five minutes!" bellowed Coker. "Is he asleep? Is he drunk? What's the matter with the old dummy? It isn't locking-up yet, either. What's he mean by it?"

"He means to leave you out, I should say," grinned Bob.

"I say, you fellows, Gosling's in his lodge," said Billy Bunter. "I can see him. The door's open. He's grinning."

"Call him!" raved Coker. "Tell him I'll report him to the Head if he doesn't let me in at once."

Bob Cherry looked in at the lodge. "Chap wants to come in, Gosling!" he called.

Gosling glanced at him casually.

"I knows that," he answered.

"Well, why don't you let him in?" demanded Bob.

"Them gates is locked," said Gosling calmly. "Them gates is staying locked. Master Coker—I mean, young Coker—should 'ave come in afore."

"Young Coker?" repeated Bob.

"Yes, young Coker, young Cherry!" retorted Gosling defiantly.

"Young Cherry!" murmured Bob dazedly.

"Young Cherry!" repeated Gosling, with relish. "You cut orf, young Cherry! I don't want you 'anging round my premises, young Cherry!"

"My hat!" murmured Bob.

He rejoined his chums in a state of great astonishment.

"Isn't Gossy coming?" asked Nugent.

"No. He's drunk or mad—mad, I think."

Ting-ting-ting-a-ling-a-ling. The bell was going strong in the lodge, as Coker of the Fifth performed an animated solo upon it.

"Why doesn't that thumping ass let me in?" roared Coker.

"I think he's gone on strike," answered Wharton, laughing. "You'll have to stay out, Coker."

"Why, you——"

Words failed Coker. He performed on the bell again, and then shook the bars of the gate. But it was in vain. Cerberus was not to be tempted out of his lair.

Coker's voice was a powerful one, and it was heard at a good distance. It drew fellows from far and near towards the gate, and a considerable crowd of juniors gathered round to look on.

"What's the name of this game, you fellows?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Gossy's on strike!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Industrial unrest at Greyfriars!" grinned Peter Todd.

"Not exactly. Gossy's on the high horse," said Harry. "Perhaps he'll tell you why, if you ask him."

Peter Todd looked into the lodge in great curiosity. Gosling made a commanding gesture.

"Hoff with you, young Todd!" he said.

"Coker's waiting——"

"Let 'im wait!"

"It's not locking-up yet, you know."

"I've decided to lock up hearly."

"You—you you've decided?"

"I 'ave!" said Gosling, with dignity. "My hat! But the Head hasn't said anything——"

Gosling's reply took Peter Todd's breath away.

"Blow the 'Ead!" said Gosling.

Peter almost tottered away.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Declaration of Independence!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Here's Potter!"

Potter of the Fifth came along to the gates to see what was on. Potter was Coker's chum and study-mate. Coker howled to him through the gate.

"Potter, make that idiot Gosling let me in!"

"Hallo! Gosling asleep?" said Potter, in astonishment.

"No; he's on strike."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What rot!" said Potter. "I'll see to it, Coker."

The Fifth-Former walked into the lodge, and the fellows crowded round to see what would happen. In the present remarkable humour of William Gosling there really was no telling what would happen.

Gosling was smoking his pipe, and there was a glass of gin-and-water at his elbow. His flushed countenance seemed to hint that he had been drawing inspiration from that delightful beverage. Possibly the gin-and-water combined with his glorious prospects to raise him to his present exalted state.

He looked grimly at the Fifth-Former.

"Gosling——" began Potter.

"Mister Gosling, if you please!" said Gosling, with the accent on the "Mister."

"Eh?"

"I don't want any low familiarity from you, young Potter!"

"Who the thump are you calling young Potter?" exclaimed the Fifth-Former testily.

"I'm a-calling you young Potter, young Potter," retorted Gosling. "And if you don't like it, young Potter, you can lump it! Wot I says is this 'ere, young——"

"Coker's at the gate."

"I know he is."

"Well, why don't you let him in?"

"I don't choose."

"What-at?"

"Gettin' deaf, young Potter?" asked Gosling sarcastically. "P'raps you'd like me to 'owl at you. I don't choose! Got it now?"

"Are you potty? Let Coker in at once!"

"Rats!"

"You'd better not let the Head see you tipsy!" exclaimed Potter angrily.

"Blow the 'Ead!"

"Are you looking for the sack, Gosling!"

Gosling laughed derisively.

"Blow the sack!" he answered. "P'raps you'd like to know, young Potter, that I'm going to be married shortly to a rich widder what keeps a prosperous public-'ouse. I'm done with this 'ere show. I ain't valued 'ere, not like I ought to be. We'll see 'ow Greyfriars gets on without me," said Gosling darkly.

"Well, a public-house ought to suit you," said Potter. "You'll be sure of one good customer, at least."

"When I'm a-setting be'ind the bar in my public-'ouse," said Gosling, "I'll be as good as hanybody—genelman of hindependent means, in fact. I won't take no lip from nobody. Wot I says is this 'ere, Master Potter—I mean, young Potter—don't you be cheeky! I'd sling you bout as soon as look at you!"

"Drunk as a lord!" murmured Potter. "You'd better go and lie down a bit, Gosling. I'll take the key and let Coker in."

Gosling started up.

"You let them keys alone, you young raskil!" he roared.

"But Coker's got to come in."

"Young Coker should 'ave come in afore. I'm master in this 'ere lodge, as long as I stays 'ere, which won't be long."

"It certainly won't be long, at this rate!" snapped Potter. "Stand aside, you old donkey! I'm going to take the key."

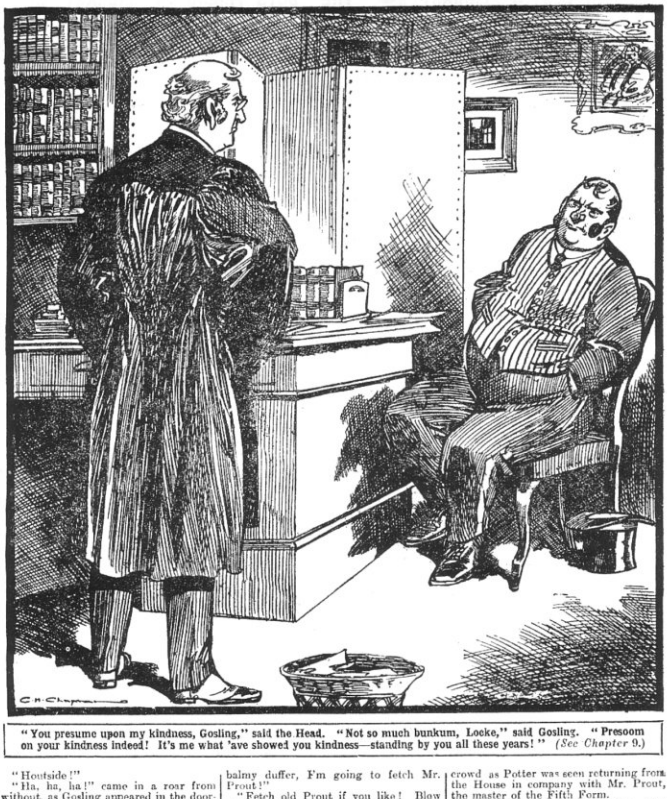
Potter made a grab at the key on the nail. Gosling made a grab at Potter at the same moment. And it was Potter who was grabbed.

The Fifth-Former yelled as Gosling seized him.

"Let go! My hat! I'll——"

"Hout you go!" said Gosling.

"Oh! Ah! Ow! Leggo!"



"You presume upon my kindness, Gosling," said the Head. "Not so much bunkum, Locke," said Gosling. "Presoom on your kindness indeed! It's me what 'ave showed you kindness—standing by you all these years!" (See Chapter 9.)

"Houtside!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar from without, as Gosling appeared in the doorway with Potter struggling furiously in his arms.

Potter was not quite a match for Gosling. The porter whisked him out of the lodge, with his arms and legs wildly waving in the air.

With a grunt, Gosling sent him down on the ground, in a sprawling heap.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Gosey! Bump him!"

Gosling glared round him.

"You young rips, clear orf!" he said. "I don't want you young 'ooligans 'anging round my lodge! You 'ook it!"

And Gosling went in, snorting, like a surly old lion into his lair. George Potter staggered breathlessly to his feet.

"He—he—he's mad!" babbled Potter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gosling!" yelled Potter. "You balmy duffer, I'm going to fetch Mr. Prout!"

"Fetch old Prout if you like! Blow old Prout!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Potter started for the School House at a run.

Half Greyfriars was on the scene now. Coker was outside the gates, staring blankly through the bars; inside were swarms of juniors and a good sprinkling of seniors. Gosling peered out of his lodge and grinned. He did not seem at all dismayed by the furore he was causing. In fact, he took it as a tribute to his own importance. Gosling's great importance had never been recognised before. It had to be recognised now. Even if the school-porter was not the keystone of the Greyfriars edifice, it had to be admitted that he was master of the situation at present.

There was an excited buzz in the crowd as Potter was seen returning from the House in company with Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth Form.

Mr. Prout was frowning and astonished. He could scarcely believe his ears when Potter informed him of what was going on at the gates. And he came down in a state of wrath. He took it for granted that Gosling was intoxicated—but in that he did not quite do Gosling justice. The gin-and-water had had its effect, doubtless; but gin-and-water would never have inspired Gosling "on its own" to his present state of mind. It was the glorious prospect before him that had turned his head.

After more years than he cared to count spent as a school porter he saw before him a dazzling prospect of prosperity—sitting at his ease behind his own bar, with the first call upon all the spirituous liquors in the establishment. That

glorious prospect was more than enough to turn Gosling's head—never very strong. He had been under-valued at Greyfriars, he felt—the full importance of his services had never been understood. Now Greyfriars could get on the best it could without him—that was Gosling's view. As soon as the little matter of the public-house was definitely arranged, he would shake the dust of Greyfriars from his feet. Meanwhile, he was going to let all Greyfriars, from the Head to the cook, understand who was who, and what was what.

It was twenty-four hours since he had rent his guinea to the "Matrimonial Medium." He expected the letter arranging the appointment by the next post. His dazzling prosperity was, there fore, close at hand. What time remained to him at Greyfriars would be well spent in letting the whole school see who was who, and what was what; that was how Gosling looked at it. In that mood he was not likely to be much impressed even by the impressive Mr. Prout.

Mr. Prout came up to the lodge with a stately stride, his eyes gleaming over his glasses. In the doorway of the lodge he struck an attitude reminiscent of that of Ajax defying the lightning.

"Gosling!" he thundered.

"Hallo!" came Gosling's voice from the interior.

"Don't answer me like that, my man!" snapped Mr. Prout.

"Oh, come off, old Prout!"

"What-a-at!"

"Old Prout!" retorted Gosling.

"Bless my soul! The man is in a state of—of—of disgusting intoxication!" stuttered Mr. Prout. "Gosling, the gates are to be opened at once—you have locked up too early!"

"Rot!"

"Open the gates at once, Gosling!"

"Sha'n't!"

"Give me the key, then," said Mr. Prout more mildly.

"Get out!"

"Gosling!"

Gosling appeared in the doorway. Mr. Prout backed away a little. The crowd looked on breathlessly.

Gosling held up a knotty but commanding forefinger.

"You 'ook it, Prout!" he said.

"Gosling!" stuttered Mr. Prout.

"A Englishman's 'ouse is 'is castle," said Gosling, "his 'is castle! The same applies to a lodge! You 'ook it!"

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Prout feebly. "But—but very good man, Coker cannot remain out of gates——"

"Master Coker—I mean young Coker, should 'ave come in heartier, then! Let him climb over!" said Gosling.

"But—but I command you, Gosling, to——"

"Ook it!"

"I——"

To Mr. Prout's dismay and horror, Gosling put up his hands, and squared up to him.

"You 'ook it," repeated Gosling, "or let's 'ave it hout, man to man! I don't give tuppence for your hairs and graces, Prout! Who are you?"

"Bless my soul!"

"I 'arsks you," said Gosling emphatically, "who are you? You're a man, and I'm another! Ain't I as good as you? Ain't I kep' this 'ere gate for twenty year come Lady Day? I 'ave! I ain't been paid a salary like you, cause why?—I've been heasy-going! Let's see wot Greyfriars will do without me, that's all! I'm sorry for the 'End—I own up to that! But I'm goin', old Prout—and while I'm 'ere I ain't standing any cheek! No, sir! You 'ook it, or else put up your 'ands, man to man!"

Mr. Prout backed hastily away.

"My—my—my good man——" he gasped.

Gosling laughed scornfully, and retreated into his lodge again. The door slammed almost on the nose of Mr. Prout.

"Bless my soul!" said the Fifth Form-master. "How! Disperse at once! This is not a laughing matter, Cherry! Disperse at once, all of you!"

Mr. Prout went to the gate.

"Coker! Perhaps you could manage to climb over—I will assist you from this side——"

"Yes, sir!" said Coker.

"I shall report Gosling's conduct to the Head at once! The ruffian will not be allowed to stay at Greyfriars! Bless my soul!"

Coker of the Fifth clambered over the gate, assisted by Mr. Prout from within. The crowd dispersed, eagerly discussing the amazing affair; and Mr. Prout

No. 7.—MARK LINLEY.

A scholarship boy, who had worked in a Lancashire factory before coming to Greyfriars. In consequence, much persecuted by the snobs. A real good fellow; plucky, straightforward, and slow to take offence. Bob Cherry's staunchest chum. A clever scholar, and a good sportsman. (Study No. 13.)

headed for Dr. Locke's study at once, to lay an account before him of what had happened. And the Head—erroneously attributing Gosling's startling outbreak to gin-and-water—decided to leave it till the morning before he called the porter upon "the carpet."

THE NINTH CHAPTER.
One Gentleman to Another.

GREYFRIARS was in a buzz with the story that evening.

In the studies of the Sixth and the Fifth, of the Shell and the Fourth, and the Remove; in the Common-rooms, and in the fag Form-rooms, it banished all other topics.

Gosling's great prospects were widely known now—there was no further secret about them. All Greyfriars chortled over the "Matrimonial Medium," the wealthy widow, and the prosperous public-house. And the furore had one good effect so far as Harry Wharton was concerned; Skinner's little joke against the captain of the Remove died a natural death. Gosling was the one and only topic.

"Of course, he'll be sacked!" said Vernon-Smith, in the junior Common-room.

"He won't mind that—considering!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"So he hands in that beautiful pub!" chuckled Johnny Bull. "But suppose he doesn't?"

"That's what I was thinking," remarked the Bounder. "These queer matrimonial advertisements are a swindle, as often as not. Besides, who'd have that old gargoyle, once they'd seen him? Pen's photograph was enough to give a cannel the hump—and it flattered Gosling! When the widow sees him she'll have a fit—if there's a widow at all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, Gosling can't be expected to know that!" chuckled Squiff. "I'd like to see his interview with the Head!"

"Yes, rather!"

"The entertainfulness would be terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But we cannot request the esteemed and ridiculous Head to allow us to be witnesses."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A good many fellows would have given a good deal to be present at the coming interview. But that was, unfortunately, out of the question. The interview did not take place that evening—the Head judiciously left giving Gosling time to cool down. And it had not taken place when the Greyfriars fellows went into the Form-rooms the following morning. But as the Remove were going in they sighted Gosling. He was coming towards the School House with a free and independent stride.

"Here he comes!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Good-morning, Gossy!"

Gosling gave the cheery Bob a frigid look.

"Good-morning, young Cherry!" he said distantly.

"Going to see the Head?" giggled Billy Bunter.

"Called over the coals—what?" asked Skinner.

Gosling sniffed.

"I'm going to call on the 'Ead as one genelman on another," he answered loftily.

And he walked on, with his nose up.

Mr. Quelch had some difficulty in reducing his class to a proper state of gravity in the Remove-room that morning.

Gosling, with a stately stride, advanced to the Head's study, where Dr. Locke was ready to see him.

He entered the study without knocking at the door, that, apparently, being Gosling's idea of the behaviour of one gentleman calling on another.

Dr. Locke glanced at him.

Gosling had intended to keep his hat on; but somehow, under the old gentleman's quiet glance, he felt constrained to remove it. He compensated himself for that involuntary concession, however, by an independent snort.

"Mornin', Locke!" he said.

"Eh?"

"Nice mornin', old feller!" said Gosling.

Dr. Locke seemed to find some difficulty in breathing for a moment.

"What did you say!" he gasped at last.

"Old feller!" said Gosling.

"Have you been drinking again this morning, Gosling?" asked the Head sternly.

"If I've 'ad a nip to keep hout the cold where's the 'arm?" inquired Gos-

ling. "I 'spose a genelman can do as he likes?"

"Bless my soul!" said the Head.

"Ain't you goin' to offer a man a cheer?" asked Gosling.

"You may sit down."

"Thank you kindly, sir—I—I mean, I don't mind if I do, old feller. I don't mind droppin' in for a chat," said Gosling, sitting down.

"I should have been afraid for some time that your drinking habits have been gaining on you," said the Head. "I have been very loth to speak severely to an old and valued servant. But this outbreak——"

"Not so much of your 'hold and valued servant,' Locke!" said Gosling. "I ain't never been properly valued 'ere. Twenty year come Lady Day I've kep' that 'ere gate, and little thanks I've 'ad. I tell you plain, Locke, I wouldn't 'ave stood it, 'cept for personal friendship."

"P-p-p-personal friendship?"

"That's it!" said Gosling. "That's why I've stood by you, sir—I mean, Locke. Well I knowed 'ow valyble my services was, though not so considered by huthers. I don't say as I ain't sorry to leave Greyfriars in the lurch. I mean up —I am sorry, and I says it as man to man. 'Ow the school'll get on arter I'm gone I dunno. But it will 'ave to take its chance. I'm sorry, as I said. But there it is!"

"Do you mean that you are leaving, Gosling?" asked the Head, realising at last that Gosling was quite sober.

"Never ain't no 'elp for it, sir," said Gosling. "With my prospects, I'm wasted 'ere. I'm giving you notice, sir —I mean, old feller."

"If you wish to go, Gosling, certainly I should not think of detaining you," said the Head. "Because of your long and faithful service, Gosling, I have closed my eyes to some very serious faults in your character. I have been very patient with you—perhaps too patient. And now, in spite of this unheard-of impertinence, I still feel a sense of responsibility towards you. Why I ask you, Gosling—not as your master, but as an old friend—what are the new prospects which seem to have deprived you a little of your balance of mind?"

"Which I'm a widder!" said Gosling.

"A—a—a what?"

"And a cosy little public-'ouse!" said Gosling.

"Bless my soul!"

"Speaking as man to man," said Gosling, "I bown up that I'm a bit uneasy about leaving you in the lurch, sir—old feller. I don't say as 'ow I wouldn't give you a look-in occasional, if you wanted, and anything in the way of advice I could give you, you'd be welcome to it. I says every man what can keep the gate of a school like this 'ere, and well I knows it. You won't get much of a feller in the run of a hundred—a good man ain't easy to be found. I bown up, sir, as that 'ave worried me."

"Pray don't be uneasy on that point, my good fellow," said the Head, blinking at Gosling over his glasses. "A successor will be found with the greatest of ease. The qualities required in a school porter are not—ahem!—remarkably uncommon."

"That's all you know!" said Gosling. "I know better! I shouldn't be surprised if the 'ole show 'ad to shut up shop once I'm gone. That's what 'ave worried me. I ain't never been properly valued in this 'ere school; but I'm a good-'earted cove, and I wishes you well. I only 'ope as you'll find a man what can do my work."

"Dear me!" said the Head.

"That's 'ow it is, sir!"

"I am afraid, Gosling, that I have been over-indulgent to you," said the Head. "You presume upon my kindness, Gosling."

"Oh, come off!" said Gosling.

"Wha-a-at?"

"Not so much bunkum, Locke!" said Gosling, rising. "Presoom on your kindness indeed! It's me what 'ave showed you kindness—standing by you all these years. Still, I'm a good-'arted man. I'll stay another week to oblige you."

"My good man——"

"But it's got to be understood," said Gosling firmly, "that I'm treated with proper respeck. No cheek from the young genelmen—I mean, the kids. No 'igh-and-mighty business from old Prout, or blinking snappiness from Quelch. Got that?"

"You certainly will not stay another week!" exclaimed the Head wrathfully. "You will oblige me by going at once, Gosling."

"And who's going to keep the gate?" inquired Gosling derisively.

"I shall manage about that very well. It is not so important a post as you seem to suppose, Gosling."

"Rot!"

"Bless my soul! Leave my study at once, Gosling!"

"Which I'm ready for to do so, old feller, and willing. I'm going on Saturday," said Gosling. "I ain't kep' the appointment—so I'll make it Saturday. Arter that you can git on the best you can. I washes my 'ands of it!"

And William Gosling quitted the Head's study, and closed the door after him with a bang—to show what an independent gentleman he was. Dr. Locke stared blankly at the door for a few minutes, and then murmured "Bless my soul!" once more, and started for the Sixth Form-room.

No. 8.—JOHN BULL.

The fifth member of the Famous Five of the Remove. A sound and generous-hearted chum. An all-round sportsman—a good boxer, a good footballer, and a good cricketer. Painfully candid at times, and inclined to be a grumbler; at the same time, one of the most popular characters at Greyfriars. Considers himself a professional concertina player. (Study No. 11.)

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Asking For It!

GOSLING was the object of great attention that day at Greyfriars. When the juniors came out of the Form-rooms most of them paid a visit to the lodge to have a look at Gosling. When that crusty gentleman was on view he was more crusty than of old, and very lofty in his look and manner. He was a little perplexed by the delay in the appointment with the good-looking widow, but he was not yet uneasy on account of the prosperous public-house. Gosling looked on that as a certainty.

Although not grateful as a rule, Gosling deigned to speak a gracious word to Penfold of the Remove. He tapped that youth on the shoulder in the quad and gave him an affable grin. Penfold gave him a stare in return.

"I'm obliged to you, Master—young Penfold," said Gosling.

"Are you really, old Gosling?" inquired Pen.

"That fotygraf did the trick," said Gosling. "Course, it wasn't quite 'andsome enuff for me, but it must 'ave been a good one. Cause why? It's done the trick. I'm obliged to you, young Penfold, and next week, if you remind me, I'll give you 'arf-a-crown."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Penfold, quite overcome by that offer.

"I know your folks is poor," went on Gosling. "You can tell your father, young Penfold, that he's welcome to drop in at my public-ouse later on, and 'ave a drink with me, at my expense."

"Why, you cheeky ass!" exclaimed Penfold indignantly.

"No lip, now!" said Gosling.

Penfold walked away. There was a giggle from Billy Bunter, who was looking on.

Gosling turned towards the Owl of the Remove.

"What you larfing at, young Bunter?" he inquired majestically.

"You haven't got the pub yet, you old donkey!" said Bunter. "Unless that widow's blind she won't have you. He, he, he!"

"You impernent young rip!"

"Don't you be cheeky, Gosling," said the fat junior, wagging a podgy and reproving finger at the gateman. "Don't you keep your place. And if you lay hands on a gentleman again—— Yarooooooh!"

Gosling laid hands on Bunter, at all events.

Whack, whack!

"Yoop! Beast! Ow!"

Bunter fled.

Gosling walked away majestically to his lodge. Mr. Quelch was walking in the quadrangle, and he had witnessed Gosling's proceedings with stupefied eyes.

"Gosling!" he gasped, as the old porter passed him.

Gosling stopped, without touching his hat. Gosling did not intend to touch his hat to Form-masters—not, at least, unless something went wrong with his glorious prospects.

"Hallo, Quelch!" he said.

"What—what—what did you say, Gosling?"

"I said 'Hallo, Quelch, old feller!'"

"Gosling! How dare you address me——"

"You addressed me, didn't yer?" said Gosling. "Ain't I as good as you, Quelch? I arsks yer, as man to man."

"Upon my word! I—I——"

"Keep a civil tongue in your 'ead, old codger, and I'll do likewise," said Gosling.

"My—my—my good man——" stuttered Mr. Quelch.

"Not so much of your good man! I ain't your good man, nor anybody else's," said Gosling truculently. "None of your blinking familiarity, Quelch!"

And Gosling walked on, leaving Mr. Quelch petrified.

"The man is mad!" said Mr. Quelch at last, addressing space. And he went into the School House rather hurriedly to consult the Head.

Gosling walked, or rather strutted, back to his lodge, his fat red chin well elevated—"pride in his port, defiance in his eye," as the poet expresses it. A grinning crowd of juniors watched him.

"Ain't he a beauty?" said Bob Cherry admiringly. "Banter would be like that if he became a millionaire, wouldn't you, Bunty?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Now we know what Lenin and Trotsky are like when they're at home!" grinned Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gossy's burning his bridges behind him," remarked Vernon-Smith. "What will he do if the pub doesn't come off?"

"My hat! Gossy will have to join the unemployed in that case," said Harry Wharton. "The Head can't look over his playing the goat like this."

"Hardly!" said Bob.

"And the pub won't come off!" grinned the Bounder. "Poor old Gossy!"

"Young Wharton!"

It was Gosling's voice. He was calling from the doorway of his lodge. The captain of the Remove stared at him.

"You 'ear me, young Wharton?" called out Gosling.

"I hear you, you cheeky ass!" answered Harry.

"I'm expecting a letter what hasn't come," said Gosling. "I want one of you kids to run down to the post-office for me."

"Eh?"

"You can go, young Wharton."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I'll give you a shillin'," said Gosling generously.

"You—you—you'll give me a shilling!" gasped Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean it," said Gosling. "Nothing mean about me. Now, then, look sharp and 'ook it. I don't like to be kep' waiting."

"Go it, Wharton!" chuckled Skinner. "There's a chance for you to earn an honest bob."

"My esteemed friends," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The excellent and ludicrous Gosling is asking for it! Is it not up to us to bestow upon the esteemed Gosling what he is asking for?"

"Hear, hear!" said Johnny Bull.

"I think it's about time," said Wharton. "Come on!"

The Famous Five made a rush for Gosling.

"I don't want all of yer," said Gosling, misunderstanding. "I only want one kid, and I'm only 'anding out one bob! Why—what —— Yarooooh!"

Five pairs of hands were laid upon William Gosling. Before he was quite aware what was happening he was bumped in his doorway.

"Wooooop!" roared Gosling. "Why, you limbs—— Leggo! Yowp!"

Bump!

"There!" gasped Wharton. "Will you have another?"

"Yow-ow-wooop!"

The Famous Five walked away, and left William Gosling struggling to get his second wind.

When the postman came that afternoon there was still no letter for Gosling. But the Greyfriars porter possessed his soul in patience, convinced that it must come in the morning.

He went to bed quite cheerfully that night, and dreamed golden dreams of a cosy public-house bar, with himself sitting in state therein.

As a matter of fact, the letter was coming in the morning, and there was a surprise in store for William Gosling. After his meteoric rise, the decline and fall were at hand.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Decline and Fall.

"Oh, lor'!"

That ejaculation, in tones of the deepest despondency, caught the ears of the Famous Five of the Remove.

It was the following day—Saturday. On that day, it was supposed that William Gosling was to shake the dust of Greyfriars from his feet. After morning lessons the Famous Five strolled down to the lodge to see whether the porter was still there. It was understood that Mr. Mimble, the Head's gardener, was to take on Gosling's duty till a substitute was found; but Gosling was not gone yet. It was Gosling's voice that the Removites heard as they came along; and from the sound of it they guessed that something had happened to dash Gosling's glorious vista of prosperity and gentlemanly independence.

"Oh, lor'! Blinking swindle! That's wot it is—blinking swindle! I've been took in!"

Gosling was apparently communing with himself, and his tones were dolorous.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Something's gone wrong with the works, I fancy."

"The wrongfulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Singh. "Let us offer our ridiculous and benevolent sympathy."

Harry Wharton knocked at the door. A disputed voice came from within.

"Come in!"

Then Gosling opened the door himself. There was a letter in his hand, and a lugubrious expression on his face. He grinned feebly at the juniors.

"Mornin', young genelmen!" he said. "Ow are you this mornin', Master Wharton?"

"Hallo, has Wharton been promoted?" asked Bob Cherry. "He was Young Wharton yesterday."

"Don't you mind a little rove makin' his little joke, sir," said Gosling. "I takes it back! I does reely."

"What's happened?" chuckled Nugent. "Did the photograph have fatal effects? You might have expected that."

"I've 'ad this 'ere letter, genelmen," said Gosling. "P'r'aps you wouldn't mind looking at it, Master Wharton, and tellin' me wot you think of it."

The unfortunate Gosling was so crestfallen that the juniors could not help taking compassion on him. A deflated balloon was "not a circumstance" to Gosling at that moment. All the "gas" was departed from him, and he looked deplorably flabby.

Harry Wharton took the letter, and the chums read it together, Gosling watching them anxiously. When they had read it they did not need telling the cause of Gosling's deflated appearance. It ran:

"Sir,—In connection with our earlier communication, we regret to inform you that the lady in question has accepted another offer. No appointment can, therefore, be arranged. We shall be very pleased to put your name upon our books for the small charge of five shillings, and will then communicate to you any suitable offer that may come upon our list.

"Yours faithfully,

"THE MATRIMONIAL MEDIUM."

"It's a swindle, of course!" said Harry. "You might have known that, Gosling!"

"If you'd had the sense of a bunny-rabbit!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Shall I get my guinea back?" inquired Gosling hopefully.

"Ha, ha! Not likely! They don't even ackowledge its receipt! You can write for it if you like. Only costs three-halfpence!"

"Then you wouldn't send the five bob, 'ave my name put on the books?"

"Of course not!"

"Oh, lor'!" said Gosling. "I—I thought it was a swindle when I read that there letter. They've rooked me for a guinea, and werry likely there wasn't any widder at all, and wasn't any public-house!"

"Not likely!"

"Oh, lor'!"

Gosling groaned.

In the full confidence he had felt in his great prospects he had burned his bridges behind him, as the Bounder had remarked. And now the prospects were gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream.

It was a crushing blow!

The grandeur of Gosling was gone. The decline had come, and the fall was near! Harry Wharton & Co. could not help smiling a bit at the same time the utterly forlorn look of the hapless porter touched them.

"Well, you've put your foot in it, and no mistake!" said Nugent. "What on earth did you play the giddy goat for like that, Gossy?"

"Ow! I wish I 'adn't!" groaned Gosling. "I—I thought it was a cert! Now I've got the sack!"

"Not so bad as that, perhaps," said Harry Wharton comfortingly. "The Head may let you stay on——"

"I—I—I've checked him!" moaned Gosling. "I—I called 'im ' old feller!' in his hown study——"

"Phew!"

"Course, it wouldn't be a good thing for Greyfriars if I was to 'ook it!" said Gosling hopefully. "I wondered 'ow the Head may let you stay on without me! P'raps he'll look at it like that!"

"I wouldn't build on that," said Bob Cherry. "You'd better go and ask his pardon, and tell him you're sorry. I suppose you are sorry, aren't you?"

"Ow! Yes!"

"Then tell the Head so, and ask him to look over it. He's a good old boy, and he might."

Gosling shook his head doubtfully.

The crushing of his rosy hopes had quite disturbed him. He was not feeling quite so sure now of his immense value at Greyfriars—certainly the Head had not seemed utterly dismayed at the prospect of losing him. Gosling could not help realising that.

"You'll catch him in his study now, after lunch," said Bob Cherry encouragingly. "Go and tackle him, and for your own sake don't give him any of your silly cheek!"

"I—I'll try!" mumbled Gosling.

The Famous Five escorted him to the School House. The change in Gosling's looks drew glances from all sides.

"Anything happened to that pub, Gossy?" asked Skinner.

"There ain't any pub, Master Skinner!" mumbled Gosling.

"What about the widow?" grinned Vernon-Smith.

"There ain't any widder!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gosling stumped away heavily to the Head's study in a very unhappy mood. This time he tapped respectfully at the door, and this hat was off.

"Come in!"

There was a grinning crowd at the end of the passage as Gosling entered the Head's study. Gosling crept in, hat in hand, with his eyes on the carpet. Dr. Locke glanced at him.

"Oh, is it you, Gosling?" he said coldly. "You have come for your wages, I presume, before leaving? I——"

"Nunno, sir! I—I——"

"I have the exact sum here," said the Head.

"I—I dunno wot'll 'appen arter I'm gone, sir!" said Gosling.

"You need not trouble about that, Gosling!"

"But—but who's goin' to keep that there gate, sir?"

"It really does not concern you, Gosling; but I have arranged with Mr. Mimble to take over your duties until a new porter is engaged."

"Oh, sir! That there Mimble can't do the work, sir! He can't really——"

"That is quite a mistake on your part, Gosling."

"Oh, sir!"

"At all events, you need not concern yourself about that. Here is your money, Gosling! Good-morning!"

Gosling did not even look at the money.

"I—I say, sir," he stammered, "I've been porter at this 'ere school for twenty year come Lady Day!"

"Well?"

"Young Master Percy would miss me, sir, when he comes 'ome from the Army!" murmured Gosling. "I never did think, that you and me would part in our hold hage, sir!"

"I fail to understand you, Gosling! I have not discharged you; you have yourself terminated your service here, in a very insolent manner."

"Do—do—do you think, sir, as heverything will go on, sir, all right 'ere arter I'm gone?"

"Certainly!"

"Oh, lor'!" said Gosling.

The Head looked at him over his glasses.

"Why do you not go, Gosling?" he inquired mildly.

"I—I—I don't want to go, sir!" groaned Gosling. "I—I—I wanter stay, sir! Twenty year come Lady Day——"

"But you informed me that—that——"

"I've been took in, sir—took in something cruel! There ain't any widder, and there ain't any public-house; and I've been rooked out of a guinea, sir! I've been cheeky to you, sir, and cheeky to Mr. Prout and Mr. Quelch. But you won't be 'ard on an old man, sir, what has served you faithful, 'cos he lost his 'ead for once!"

Dr. Locke's brow relaxed.

"You have been very foolish, Gosling!" he said coldly.

"Which I knows it sir!"

"You have thrown up a good place, where you are treated with consideration beyond your deserts, because of some foolish fancy of bettering yourself. Even if your hopes had been well founded, you should not have lost your civility, Gosling—you should have acted in so outrageous a manner!"

"Well I knows it, sir!" mumbled Gosling. "I've been and played the goat, sir, and I howns hup!"

The Head coughed.

"Well, well, if you are sorry for your foolish conduct, Gosling, I will see what can be done. In—in fact, you may keep your place," he said. "I should have been sorry to part with you after so many years. I will dismiss the whole matter from my mind if your future conduct is exemplary. You may go!"

"Thank you kindly, sir!" mumbled Gosling.

And he went.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Has the chopper come down?" asked Bob Cherry, as Gosling, in a greatly relieved frame of mind, passed the crowd of juniors in the passage.

Gosling shook his head.

"Not at all, Master Cherry! The Head's looked over it, and werry kind of 'im it was! Course," added Gosling, "the Head knows as well as I do that Greyfriars would be left in a pretty 'ole if I went!"

"Well, my hat!" said Bob. "If the Head heard that——"

"Lucky he didn't!" said Wharton, laughing. "We're not going to lose our beloved Gossy after all! The Head's a brick to let him stay!"

"He is—he are!" agreed Bob.

And even Gosling acknowledged that the Head was a brick; though he remained unconvinced that Dr. Locke was at least partly influenced by the fear of what would happen to Greyfriars if he left!

THE END.

(Don't miss next Monday's Grand Long Complete Story of Greyfriars School, entitled "ALONZO'S AGENCY." By FRANK RICHARDS.)

FOR NEXT MONDAY:

"ALONZO'S AGENCY."

By Frank Richards.

This story describes how the simple-hearted Alonzo Todd was led away by a fraudulent individual calling himself the Rev. Jeremiah Slagg. Alonzo under-takes to collect funds for the Cannibal Conversion Society. Either T. Fish, the American junior, offers to assist him, and his wonderful scheme, and what came of it, provides screamingly funny reading.

"Alonzo's Agency"

is a clever and most amusing yarn, and you should take care not to miss it.

A THOUGHTFUL LETTER.

A friend of mine at Goole asks me to decide which is the most popular author—Mr. Frank Richards or Mr. Martin Clifford.

I am disposed to ask for an easier one; or, at least, to say that in the race the result would be a dead-heat. Both writers are at the top of the tree. Both are undoubtedly masters of their craft.

By the way, there is another thing my Goole correspondent says. He is suffering from Synovitis in the left knee-joint, and he wants to hear of a cure other than that the doctors give him—namely, rest. Sometimes he can walk all right. Then the weather changes, and he has to go into dry dock. He is twenty-one, and the thought of doing nothing, of lying up all day, is horribly depressing to him.

The question comes to him, "Of what earthly use am I to my parents?" I know this friendly correspondent will excuse my reference to his family and welcome note. He must, of course, do exactly as the doctors tell him. That is where his best chance lies.

For the rest, there is enough good, virile stuff in his letter to convince me that he will see as time goes on the old, old truth about duty. Sometimes it takes the form of examples, sometimes of action all the time. But there it is—the fellow who is temporarily laid by may be, and is, of just as much use as anybody else. He cannot always work. He can show such fortitude, though, that he puts heart into everybody else.

His turn for a fresh trick at the wheel of life will come along, never fear. He has just got to take heart, and to realise that he is useful all the time.

In the days of enforced inaction he is thinking out matters, and, after he has come out of his sad trouble, he will be more than making up for time lost—no, not lost. Time is never lost when there is such grit and earnestness of purpose as I find in the letter before me.

INKY!

"Dear Editor,—I read your book called the MAGNET, and I think it is very interesting, but please, sir, if I were you I would not use The wrathfulness is terrific my esteemed and ridiculous Bunter.' Please, sir, I hope I am not cheeky."

Not in the very least; but, after all, the Nabob of Bhanipur does speak in that way, so what is the use of objecting? And then the fellow from India is such a good fellow all round that it is impossible to object, whatever tricks he likes to play with the King's English.

I hope I shall hear again from Jim Jones. Next time he might send his address along!

WHERE ARE THEY?

There is such Al interest in the yarns that correspondents want all the characters kept in view.

"Where is Dick Hilary of the Remove? Can't we have a story about him? Also, I want to ask you where Yakama is?"

That is just the puzzle. They are waiting in the wings, as it were, ready for when the author gives them a call. There is no keeping level with all the proceedings of each and every one. But, of course, when I get a special reminder that some fellow is wanted I try to meet the need.

AN AUSSIE GIRL.

She tells me she had five brothers in the war, and three went down the long road to the West, the route of glory and of sacrifice. They all liked the Companion Papers, for the stories were the best things they had to keep away the blues.

"We have been getting the MAGNET since the Bunter yarns started. We never knew what we were missing till then. We have several girl chums who read the tales, and my father and mother both do the same, and join in good wishes for the continual success of the papers."

Many sincere thanks to my Australian girl chum for her fine letter, in which there is so true a ring of courage and the grand spirit of pluck and duty.

FROM EDINBURGH TOON!

"I have read the 'Holiday Annual,' and I think it ripping," says a correspondent in Modern Athens, "and, if you will excuse my saying so, the only thing wrong in it, in my opinion—which may not count as much—was that there was too much about Greyfriars and too little about St. Jim's."

I will excuse the remark, rather; for one wants to hear different views. Maybe next year the balance can be adjusted. Anything to oblige!

A PLAIN STATEMENT.

"It just goes like this Mr. Editor—how I became a reader of the Companion Papers. My cousin told me I ought to read them, and before I thought them tuppers, but now I know they are ripping."

As for the "Greyfriars Herald," my correspondent means to help that weekly forward by sticking bills on the trees. He asks me what I think of the plan, and, really, it seems very excellent, for the plan will not hurt the trees, and may act as a cheery reminder to passers-by that all they have to do to pass a pleasant hour is to get a copy of Harry Wharton's famous paper.

IN WALKED BANGER!

Banger was the office-boy, and he appeared in the printing-room with "copy" in his hand, and asked Geoff—that is my correspondent—if he had got anything to read, because if he had not he had better get the Companion Papers, quick.

The tip was taken, and now Geoff has a standing order. I am much obliged to my chum for his cheery note—also my thanks are due to that good, all-round sportsman, Banger. May his shadow never grow less!

HE WANTS THE PRINTING BLACKER.

There is a complaint about the faint printing of a copy of the MAGNET which came my friend's way. Occasionally a few copies do not get as deep an impression as others, but I think if any fair-minded critic looked at the paper he would feel that there was no sound reason here for complaint.

Now and then—though certainly at rare intervals—one copy may lack in this respect, but so it is with all papers that come from the press.

THE NORTH POLE.

You would not think the Arctic was the kind of place to feel warm towards, at any rate, just now. But a friend tells me he wants a good yarn of exploration in the land of the Polar Bear.

I have often felt, myself, that stories of the snowy North get monotonous. There is too little to see up there, and the heroes who venture into the nippy latitudes have to struggle to keep the pot boiling and to prevent their marrows freezing.

But, of course, a stirring tale of the Frozen Seas might be popular. What do my readers think?

Yours Editor

VENTRILOQUISM IN A MONTH.

A GRAND ARTICLE EXPLAINING HOW YOU MAY BECOME A VENTRILOQUIST.

VENTRILOQUIAL FIGURE MANIPULATION.

Always adhere to a prearranged order of ventriloquial figures. If you commence your entertaining career with the old man on the right knee and the old woman on the left, keep to that arrangement all along. A change will inevitably result in putting the wrong voice into the wrong mouth, and the result will be disastrous.

Bear in mind that all the while the endeavours of the figures are to make you appear ridiculous in the eyes of the audience, and they should turn all your sensible remarks into nonsensical ones, so that the laugh is always against yourself. Of course, the audience will join in the laugh against you, and it is the taking of this in the proper spirit that will signalise your success as a ventriloquist.

When putting words into the mouth of an automaton, its face should be turned towards you; inversely, whilst you yourself are talking the automaton should be engaged in looking curiously about him at the audience, as if taking not the slightest interest in your remarks. Suddenly, however, he will snatch the opportunity of scoring off you, to the great enjoyment of his partner, the old woman.

Immediately you have finished speaking in your natural voice, keep your lips absolutely fixed during the time the figure is supposed to be talking.

It is not proposed here to give specimens of ventriloquial dialogue, because the humour of these depends so much upon the natural ability of the performer in presenting the joke or funny story.

Undoubtedly the best plan is to form a cutting-book out of the tit-bits extracted from the humorous periodicals of the day, and to paste them in. In this way a voluminous collection of anecdotes, tales, and riddles will be made, and by a judicious combination and selection of these enough material can be speedily gained to last months without fear of repetition.

The most entertaining form of presenting riddles is for the "old man" or "little boy," whichever is being used, to propound them, and the entertainer to give some practical answer to them. The real point of the joke should be brought out by the "lay" figure to the accompaniment of considerable mirth.

Home-made automata are not recommended, because the cost of purchasing really serviceable "dummies" is so small as not to make it worth while spending a deal of time and trouble, to say nothing of money, on their construction. Moreover, the great point about the "lay figure" is that it should possess a funny face, and such expressions are rather difficult for an amateur to obtain.

Many entertainment emporiums deal largely in ventriloquial outfits, and reliable "dolls" ought to be procured, **fully dressed, for about £1 each.**

VOICE FOR "LITTLE BOY."

When a child speaks he almost invariably does so in a high-pitched tone, more or less directing the sound through his nose.

This being so, the "theek" voice is the one most suitable for him. The similarity between it and the speech used for the "old woman" may be avoided by speaking in a somewhat lower tone, and in a simpler and more disjointed fashion.

Suppose, for instance, that you ask the little boy a question. Get him to repeat that question after you, and give the answer in short, jerky, broken sentences.

For the "little girl" use a slightly higher tone, without directing the sound through the nose. In her case also the mode of expression must be childish, but with slightly more refinement.

The voice for the "coster" and the "nigger" are both of the "grunt" order. For the former, the "old man" voice is used, with the addition of the peculiar coster twang; whilst for the latter, employ speech of a much lower and more resonant tone.

Place the chords as when using the "grunt" voice, breathing rather heavily, and force the sound as far back in the throat as possible, at the same time contracting the muscles of the stomach while the breath is being expelled.

The word "yah, yah!" is a very good one upon which to practise, and the vowel sound should be sustained to some length.

THE "DISTANT" VOICES.

By this time the young ventriloquist should have attained sufficient proficiency in the art of manipulating "knee" figures to feel confident of venturing on the far more difficult and relatively more important "distant" voices.

The real test of ventriloquial power is when the performer is capable of making sounds appear to come from a distance—i.e., so modify his utterances that they appear to the audience to proceed from some point remote both from the entertainer and from themselves.

The basis of real ventriloquism, as apart from polyphony—i.e., "near" effects—is known as the "bee drone," because the first sound of which the vocal chords are capable when placed in the required position much resembles the droning of a bee in full flight.

The "bee drone" should be practised in loosely-fitting clothing, so that neither the muscles of the throat nor of the chest are unduly hampered.

From a natural, upright position, inhale in a short, jerky manner, making what is best described as a retching noise at the back of the throat. Unpleasant as the practice of this undoubtedly is for the first few minutes, after a short while the noise emitted will settle down to a softly sustained hum. The tongue should lie flat, so that the sound-waves produced partly in the larynx, and partly in the back of the throat are forced upwards by the action of the abdominal muscles and directed towards the roof of the mouth, the latter acting somewhat as a sounding-board—modifying the sound, and conveying to the ears of a listener some distance away a "distant" effect.

The continuous practice of the word "ah," with the vocal chords in the position just described, will speedily produce the necessary droning quality.

It remains now only by a contraction of the throat to regulate the quality of the tone and the distance from which you wish it to appear to come.

From this point progress will be found rapid and satisfactory. The various modifications of the bee drone produce respectively:

1. The "roof" voice.
2. The "level" voice.
3. The "floor" voice.

The "roof" voice is extremely useful for illusions of all kinds, and perhaps is the easiest of the three to acquire. Its purpose is to make sound appear to come from any point above the audience, and the entertainer practises it at first by standing erect, taking in a deep breath, and then drawing backwards and downwards the lower-jaw, holding it by muscular contraction in that position. With the lips about an inch apart say your words, whatever they may be, just as you would the "ah" of the bee drone, concentrating your mind on the effort of directing the sound-waves towards the roof of the mouth. In this case, however, exhalation should take place very slowly, while the speech is uttered with unusual clearness.

The effect of the illusion, however, is destroyed if, whilst using the "roof" voice, you look either straight before you or down to the ground.

The ventriloquist must bear in mind that it is important to deceive the audience, just as a conjurer does.

Let him, therefore, when "throwing the voice" to the roof, glance sharply upwards as soon as the words are uttered, and turn his head in a listening attitude; his example will be followed immediately by the audience, who naturally fall into the trap prepared for them, and, for the time being, are quite satisfied that the sounds do really come from the roof.

This is an advantage on which the ventriloquist can trade to an enormous extent, because the ear is so easily deceived. How difficult it is when listening within a closed room to a street organ playing outside to tell whether the music comes from up or down the road. So with ventriloquism. The performer has but to modify the position of the vocal chords as indicated, and to fix his eyes upon the roof, when lo and behold! everybody is perfectly satisfied that the speech does come from above.

(This grand article will be continued next week.)

THE MINERS' CHAMPION

A Stirring New Tale of the Ring.

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—Coal-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.

Hanna, who is a thorough scoundrel, becomes Harry's sworn enemy.

A strike at the pit where Harry works is settled by means of a boxing contest between Harry and Bob Durham, the mine-owner's son.

Bertram Godfrey, a friend of Mr. Durham's, interests himself in Harry Rhodes.

Hanna returns to Lexborough that night, and makes an attempt on Harry's life. It is unsuccessful, and Hanna escapes. Harry finds a letter in his room, stating that his father was a murderer. James Rhodes enters the room, and Harry asks him who his father was. "I am!" was James Rhodes' reply.

(Now read on.)

James Rhodes Explains.

"BUT I thought—you always said—that you were my uncle," said Harry.

"I did. That was what I wanted you to believe."

"But why?"

"I did not want you to know the truth. I have always been afraid you would know it."

"But I don't understand," said Harry, fairly bewildered. He continued staring at James Rhodes with wide-open, still incredulous eyes. "Why shouldn't I know you were really my father? Were you ashamed of me?" he cried suddenly.

And quick came the answer, voice raised in protest of such a suggestion:

"No, no, no, my boy! Ten thousand times no!"

"Then—"

"It was myself I was ashamed of," said James Rhodes in a whisper, lowering his head.

"But—"

Harry stopped, the words dying on his lips, as there rushed upon his recollection the rest of the amazing information in the bit of a letter.

"I didn't want you to know that you were my son, Harry," went on his father reading aright the meaning of the sudden stop, "because—because I thought, I feared, that if ever you did know the truth you would want to go away from me."

"Why should I?"

"Because I once was the cause of a man's death—a murderer, as this letter says."

There fell a long silence. At length Harry broke it.

"Then it's—it's true?"

James Rhodes bowed his head.

"I am not able to deny it."

"But what if it is true?" said Harry suddenly. "Why did you believe it should make any difference—father?"

James Rhodes looked up quickly at the last word.

"—I didn't know!" he stammered. "I thought——"

"Thought I should turn against you?"

"Something like that, Harry. And I didn't want—I mean——"

"Well, you shouldn't, father." And, to his amazement, James Rhodes realised his son was smiling. "If I had known it wouldn't have made any difference. We should still have been the same. I couldn't——"

"Wait, my boy!"

James Rhodes' eyes were wet, but his voice was firmer, and he seemed less miserable. The truth he had so carefully concealed from Harry for so long was made known at last, and he was glad. The deception it had cost him so much to practise was finished at last, and the knowledge was a relief.

"Wait until you have heard all the truth, my son, and then you shall judge," went on the man. "I had meant that one day you should know; but I was afraid, and I kept putting off the day. Well, it's taken out of my hands now. You know, and you say you're not ashamed of me. Harry, I thank you for that!"

"No, no, father!"

"But I do, my boy," said the father. "And now I will let you know the whole miserable story."

And he sat down on the bed, and Harry sat beside him, first throwing his own jacket over his father's shoulders.

"It happened two years after you were born," the man began. "Your mother was alive, but she died soon after. I think it helped to kill her. I was a boxer—a good one, too. There would have been backing for me to win the championship if—if this trouble hadn't arisen. There are a few men to-day who still remember James Rhodes. Yesterday you saw one—Mr. Cory. Joshua Martin is another. I'd got on well. I fought for good stakes, and I had never been beaten.

"But I hadn't been satisfied with just glove-fighting. At that time there were a number of wealthy sportsmen who had some idea of reviving all the old glories of the Prize Ring. There were plenty of knuckle-fights brought off in those days, though it wasn't often that the police knew anything about it. There was money to spend, and not too many persons in the know, and the prize-money was tempting.

"It tempted me. And in those days I would just as soon have fought bare-handed as with the gloves. It was harder work, maybe, more punishing work, but I didn't mind that. And they couldn't find a man to beat me with the bare knuckles any more than they could with the gloves. Between the two I made money—a deal of it, and quick.

"At last I was matched—old style—with a man named—no, it doesn't matter; I won't mention his name. But he was a good man. Everybody said we were well matched. He was heavier than I was—about eleven stone. My backers told me that if I won he'd certainly put me up for the championship with the gloves. That was what I wanted. I felt that if I could have championship belts to show round, I'd done all there was to do. I meant retiring from the game after that—if it came off.

"Well, I and my opponent met. He was a good man—very good indeed. It was the toughest battle I'd ever had, but I believed myself just a bit too good for him. I was winning, and I knew it. After thirty-four rounds I was still feeling as fresh as paint and as strong as a donkey.

"Then the accident happened.

"I'd broken away from a hard rally just near the ropes, and the other man came after me. He dropped his guard as he came in, and I let him have it hard with the right. It took him on the throat under the chin, and he went staggering back. He was still going back when I got in another—just a light tap with the left on the chest.

"He stepped back. He caught the lower rope at the back of his knees, and fell clean out of the ring between the upper and the lower ropes. And why it should have been, Heaven alone knows, but when he came down, fair on the back of his head—having tripped by the rope, you see—there was a big, sharp flint stone, half buried in the turf, for the back of his head to fall on.

"He was picked up, but he couldn't come to time—was still unconscious.

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And so he remained until he passed away the next day. The sharp stone had injured his brain, so the surgeon said.

"That was what happened, Harry. And that was my last fight. I couldn't go into the ring again without thinking of that poor chap—thinking that what had happened once might happen again. I went into hiding for a time, and the police never found me, hard as they looked. While I was hid away your mother died. Then, when I thought it had blown over, I came up here and buried myself in this little village. I wanted to call myself by another name, but I couldn't. And no one here troubled about me. They knew I'd been some sort of a fighting-man, but of that awful misfortune they knew nothing.

"And it was because you should never know that it was your father who'd once been wanted for causing a man's death that I pretended I was your uncle. Seemed to me, if the truth ever did come out, and I was put on my trial, you wouldn't mind it so much if it was your uncle, and not your father, that was being tried.

"And that's the truth, my boy, and all the truth."

"Father, I'm glad you've told me," was all Harry said, when the tale was concluded, "but I wish you'd told me earlier."

"It was for your sake, my son."

"And it's for my own sake now that I say I'm glad and proud that I can call you 'father' instead of 'uncle'!" cried Harry.

And, getting up, he held out his hand.

Immediately James Rhodes had gripped it in both of his, shaking it as though he would never let it go, and murmuring brokenly.

"And had your refusal to let me go in for any competitions or to take up boxing as a profession anything to do with my secret, father?" asked Harry, five minutes later.

"Yes," was the answer. "Refrain from teaching you all that I knew I could—and I knew I was a good pupil —couldn't be a better. And perhaps because you were my son, perhaps because of my teaching, as you grew up I feared that you would become just such another as I had been—a hard, punishing hitter; one of the kind that punishes his man without making a deal of show of it. And I was also afraid that some day ill-fortune would do by you the same as she's done by me—that one day you might hit an opponent too hard. And I didn't want you to suffer as I have done for that day's work. I thought I'd be able to keep you away from the risk of it happening, but circumstances have been too much for me."

"I'll give it up now, father, if you really wish it," said Harry readily.

"No; I will not have you do what father said decisively. "It is what you would like. It is what you were built for. And beyond that, I have given my word, not only to you, but to Mr. Darrell and Mr. Geoffrey, and I won't go back from it. I was the fool to suppose that my son wouldn't want to travel in his father's footsteps. It's your destiny, my boy.

"And you'll go further than your father, Harry. He just missed winning the championship. You will win it, if my teaching and knowledge can do anything to help you. But you will not find it all so easy. You will have plenty against you. Already you have enemies as well as friends. What is the meaning of this attempt to-night? Who was the man who escaped from this room? I can't say; but this I can tell you—this bit of torn letter that you showed me is in the handwriting of Joshua Martin. I'd know his hand amongst a hundred. He has threatened me already—said he'd inform the police where Jimmy Rhodes might be found if I didn't agree to your helping Tony Hanna to train. He'll be your enemy, too, my boy. Hanna's defeat—"

Harry interrupted with a sudden exclamation.

"What is it?"

"The man who was in here just now, who had the handkerchief—it was Hanna himself!" cried Harry.

"If you're right, then," said his father, "you'll be in danger wherever you go. I had made up my mind to let you go to London with Mr. Godfrey to look after you, as he promised he would do; but if things are as you say, then I'll come, too. If Joshua Martin can get at me through you he'll be quite satisfied, and I must come to prevent that happening. And Hanna has his own grudge against you.

"Yes, my place is with you, Harry; and I'm going to take it, even if it does happen there's a bit of risk—not only for your good, but because of the way in which you've taken the truth to-night about your father; because you aren't ashamed of him because he's a man who, as Martin says, ought to be doing time. I owe you something, my son. I'm now going to try and pay the debt!"

And for the second time he took Harry's hand in his and squeezed it.

Harry Comes to London.

THE manager of the National Boxing Club was entertaining Bertram Godfrey in his private room on the club premises—a very ordinary-looking building in a small by-street in the West End of London, but for all that known to every sportsman in the United Kingdom as the headquarters of English boxing talent, amateur or professional.

The conversation had been going on for several minutes, and it wasn't proceeding at all amicably as one of the two gentlemen concerned wished. That one was Godfrey. Dropping his cigar in the ash-tray, he leaned forward in his easy-chair.

"Judging from your last remark, Connie, I should say you are under the impression that I'm trying to get you to do me a favour," he said.

Conrad Bowman, stout, shrewd-looking, and barely recognisable as the wonderful young amateur who had carried off the feather-weight championship twenty odd years earlier, smiled gently as he tapped away his cigar-ash.

"Speaking as an unprejudiced person, I should say it does rather look like that," he agreed.

"Then if that's what you're thinking, the only thing I can say about you, Connie, is that you're a chump of the first water!" returned Godfrey warmly. "Why, man alive, the boot's on the other leg! I'm trying to do you a good turn!"

"I haven't the slightest doubt that you think so," was the cool rejoinder.

"Then if that's so, why are you in such a confounded hurry to avoid having it?" demanded Godfrey.

"Because, my dear fellow, it happens that both of us aren't thinking precisely alike."

Godfrey looked up at the ceiling as though wondering why a big slab of it didn't at once fall upon his companion's head and knock some of the stupidity out of it.

"Now, look here," went on Bowman, good-humouredly. "You come along here and ask me to give a trial—and you've the nerve to suggest that I shall make it a special night, too—to a young fellow whose name I've never heard of—whose name hasn't once appeared in any sporting paper—"

"Not his fault. Neither does it make him any worse or better than he is," interjected Godfrey.

The manager waved the interruption aside.

"Who may be all that you say he is—ready-made champion! Weren't those your words? Of whom nobody knows anything—"

"Pardon me. I do—a lot!" interrupted Godfrey again.

Bowman smiled.

"Enthusiastic," he murmured. "And you expect that I, without making any further inquiries, without even seeing this nonsuch, will make you the promise to give him an introduction to London right away, and from this club! Why, do you know, my friend, that there are dozens—scores—of well-known boxers, good ones, undoubtedly—men who've made some reputation, whom I couldn't bring here? And wouldn't—that's more! We do our best to encourage boxing, but, hang it all, it's too much to expect that the National Boxing Club is going to make a special night for an utterly unknown boxer—a novice!"

"A novice! Ye gods, listen to the man!"

"Well, what else is he?" asked the imperturbable manager.

"Novice!" snorted Godfrey disgustedly. "Why, you've never had a man inside these blessed doors, within half a stone of his weight, whom Harry Rhodes couldn't whip, and without going into training for it!"

"That's your opinion, old man. Very well, let this Harry Rhodes do something to justify it. Then, if he proves half as good as you seem to think him, then perhaps I'll begin to consider giving him a show here."

"Connie," said Godfrey solemnly, "it'd serve you jolly well right if I made a solemn vow to do my level best to prevent him from ever giving you the chance to get him in here!"

"I might survive it!" laughed Bowman.

"Good heavens! Is it possible to get this man to listen to reason?" cried Godfrey despairingly. "I'll give you another chance, Connie. You'll admit I do know something about boxing, won't you?"

"I should say you're a certainly above-the-average judge of a boxer," the manager admitted.

"Thank you. Yet you won't admit even the possibility of what I've told you about Harry Rhodes. Now, I expect, I look here, you know Bob Durham—heard of him, anyway?"

"Rather. Won the middle-weight inter-Varsity championship last year. Public Schools championship, middle and heavy-weight, year before that. Yes, I know Bob Durham well enough. Seen him spar. He's a member."

"And he said of a boxer that he's a rattling good one, you'd believe him?"

"Durham knows a good man when he sees him—yes."

"And what sort of boxer would you call a fellow who could beat Bob Durham—eh?"

"There's no amateur of his weight in England could do it," answered Bowman emphatically; "and the professional who'd get anywhere near doing it would have to be a top-notcher. What's that to do with it?"

"Durham believes Harry Rhodes the finest boxer he's ever seen."

"Well, that's worth something," said Bowman hesitatingly.

"Harry Rhodes licked Bob Durham in as fair and fine a stand-up fight as ever took place," said Godfrey quietly.

"Eh?"

Bowman suddenly became so excited he dropped his cigar on the floor. Picking it up, he stared incredulously at his companion.

Godfrey nodded, grinning.

"Fact. Bob'll tell you the same."

"Must have been a fluke, an accident," the manager declared curtly, relighting his cigar.

"Ask Bob the next time you see him. Well, as you feel inclined now, after hearing what I've told you, to do as I asked and have Rhodes here?"

"No!" And Bowman closed his lips obstinately. "Let this wonderful discovery of yours make some sort of a reputation, and then my club won't be backward in promoting his interests."

Godfrey got up hurriedly. He was feeling more than a little annoyed. Bowman and he were good friends, but the former's pigheaded disbelief had made him angry.

"All right, Bowman," he said, in an off-handed manner. "Just as you like. I'd like to wager a hundred pounds that one of these days you'll revise your opinion. And then, maybe, it'll be too late to do you and the club any good."

"I'll take the risk, old man," was the cheerful reply.

Getting into his waiting car, Godfrey made a run for Highgate. He had a house there, and Harry Rhodes and his father had gratefully accepted his invitation to make it their home and headquarters until such time as it was necessary to come to some other arrangement.

A large studio was attached to the house, and this Godfrey had fitted up as a gymnasium. There he found father and son engaged together in a bout with the gloves. They stopped as soon as he entered the room.

"Well, sir, what luck?" asked James Rhodes.

"None," replied Godfrey disgustedly. "I spoke to Bowman, as I said I would, and the man's a fool. Didn't even begin to believe me when I told him about Bob Durham. He'll live to regret his stupidity."

"I'm not surprised," said Rhodes. "You see, Mr. Godfrey, I've been through it myself, and I know how hard it is to convince people even when you've actually got the goods you claim. Still, I don't suppose Harry is much disappointed. I've been telling him he mustn't expect too much."

"I didn't tell him about Hanna, though," went on Godfrey. "I didn't on purpose. Wonder what he'd have said if I had? We'll save that up for him, so that he'll appear a still bigger ass later on. Can either of you suggest any means of creating an excitement and taking Bowman's number down? I'd give a tenner cheerfully to feel I'd assisted in making the idiot regret the cool and pompous manner in which he refused even to consider the proposition I put before him."

"Well, Mr. Godfrey," Rhodes said, "it's a lot easier to think of the things we don't want to do. Here's too good to go to one of the little promoters somewhere in the East End and ask for a trial. It's the way many a good lad has been ruined, sir, that. But I can't see my boy doing that kind of thing—beating a fellow who hardly knows which part of the glove to hit with, and getting half a crown for his trouble."

(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.)*