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DOWN ON HIS LUCK!

BY FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Nothing Doing!

"'HEM!" Lord Mauleverer, the elegant ornament of the Greyfriars Remove, coughed.

"'Hem!"

He coughed a second time.

His lordship had ambled along the Remove passage and stopped at the door of Study No. 1.

The study door was partly open, and he could see Harry Wharton within.

Wharton was sitting at the table, with a pen in his hand and open books before him, apparently having sat down to work. But he was not working; he was staring straight before him, with a knitted and thoughtful brow. He seemed to be buried in thought, and, to judge by his expression, his reflections were not pleasant ones.

Mauly, looking in, seemed to hesitate to enter. Wharton did not observe him, and his lordship coughed twice without drawing the attention of the captain of the Remove.

"'Hem!"

Mauleverer coughed a third time, a little more emphatically. Third time was lucky, so to speak. Harry Wharton came out of his deep meditations with a jerk and looked up. He glanced at Mauleverer, and a momentary gleam of irritation passed over his face.

But it was only for a second; then he nodded and smiled.

"Hallo, Mauly! Trot in, old bean!"

Lord Mauleverer trotted in.

Wharton looked at him inquiringly.

Mauly, apparently, had come to the study for something, but he did not seem in a hurry to state what it was; he stood with his hands in the pockets of his elegant trousers, hesitating. His lordship seemed a little ill-at-ease—which was rather a new thing for Mauleverer.

"Well?" asked Harry at last, puzzled.

"'Hem!"

"Got a cold, old chap?"

"Yaas. I mean, no!" said Lord Mauleverer hastily.

"You seem to have a cough."

"Yaas. That is, no!"

Wharton glanced at his books—perhaps as a hint to his visitor either to get on or get out. Lord Mauleverer followed his glance. One of the books, propped open against the inkstand, was "Titus Livius"—a book not used in the Remove, being miles if not leagues beyond the Lower Fourth. Mauly gave a slight shudder as he saw it. Virgil was tough enough for Mauly—in fact, generally a little too tough. As a matter of taste, Mauly would have preferred Eutropius; though his private opinion was that Latin, being a dead language, ought to be buried also.

"Swottin', old chap?" he ejaculated.

Wharton coloured a little.

"Thinking of it," he answered briefly.

"What on earth for?"

"Well, we come to Greyfriars to learn things, you know," said Harry.

"Not if we can jolly well help it!" said Mauleverer.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Well, that isn't what you came to speak about, Mauly. What have you got on your chest?"

"'Hem!"

Lord Mauleverer coughed once more. He seemed to find an uncommon difficulty in approaching the subject, whatever it was.

"Go it, old bean!" said the captain of the Remove, more and more surprised.

"Well, look here," said Mauleverer, "you won't think me an impertinent ass, will you?"

"Hardly."

"You won't think I'm buttin' in?"

"No."

"After all, we're friends, ain't we?" said Mauleverer.

"I hope so."

"Well, then——" said Mauly.

"Yes?"

"'Hem!"

It was another cough.

Whatever it was Lord Mauleverer had to say, seemed as difficult to get out as a tooth.

Harry Wharton laid down his pen and sat back in his chair.

"I'll wait!" he said a trifle sarcastically.

"Well, I was goin' to ask you——"

"Fire away!"

"'Hem!"

"Well, my hat!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove.

"You — you see——" stammered Mauleverer.

"I don't—quite! If you want to ask me something, ask away! I'm not likely to say no to anything you ask, unless——"

"Unless what?" asked his lordship with evident anxiety.

"Unless you ask me for a place in

the eleven that's going over to Redclyffe," said Harry, laughing. "I should have to say no to that, old bean. But you're too jolly lazy to play football, anyhow. I suppose it isn't that."

"No fear!" said Lord Mauleverer fervently. A place in the Remove Eleven was about the last thing for which his lazy lordship was likely to ask.

"Well, if it's anything else you can call it a go," said the captain of the Remove encouragingly. "But give it a name."

"Well, if you're sure you won't think me a meddlin' ass——"

"Oh, quite!"

"Well, you—you know, I—I've got lots of tin, old bean——"

Wharton's face changed quite suddenly. The smile died off it, and it hardened, and his eyes seemed to become cold steel.

Lord Mauleverer broke off sharply, dismayed. The colour flushed into his cheeks, and he shifted uneasily from one leg to the other. There was a moment of silence, and then Harry Wharton spoke in a low, clear voice.

"What the dickens do you mean, Mauly? I know you've got lots of tin—tons of it. You haven't come here to offer me any of it, I suppose?"

"Oh! No! Not at all!" gasped his lordship. "For goodness' sake, old chap, don't get your back up and go off at the deep end before a fellow can get a word out of his mouth."

"Well, what do you mean?"

"I mean this." Mauly got it out in a rush. "Last week you borrowed Skinner's bike and got it smashed up somehow. Skinner's sticking you for five pounds to pay for the repairs. He's been sayin' in the Rag that the people are dunnin' him because the bill hasn't been paid yet. I'm not tellin' you anythin' you don't know—you've heard him. Well, if you're temporarily short of tin, let me lend you a fiver to see you through. Just a loan, old chap. I suppose you're not ass enough to suspect that I'm offerin' to give you money! A loan——"

"Oh!" said Harry.

"That's all," said Lord Mauleverer, evidently relieved to have got it off his noble chest. "Nothin' to be offended about. Only a fellow never really knows how you are goin' to take things—No, I don't mean that exactly, but—I mean——" His lordship floundered.

"You mean I'm a touchy ass, and likely to go off at the deep end for nothing?"

"No! Oh, no! Not at all! But——"

"Perhaps I am," said Wharton calmly. "Plenty of fellows in the Remove think so, anyhow."

"I'm not one of them," said Mauly. "But—well, look here, there aren't a lot of fivers knockin' about in junior studies at Greyfriars. Any fellow might find it a bit of a pinch. You'll get it along sooner or later, but you don't want that dashed bill hangin' over your head all the time. You can borrow it of a friend, and settle later in the term. That's what I came here to say—same as I'd say to any other fellow I knew. I shouldn't be offended if you made me the same offer in the same circs. So don't be an ass—and don't glare at a fellow as if you wanted to glare right through him. See?"

The grim look on Harry Wharton's face relaxed. A smile took its place, much to the relief of his noble lordship.

"Sorry, old chap!" said Harry. "I didn't mean to glare, but I believe I've been rather touchy the last few days. I—I've had a bit of a worry on my mind."

"Skinner's little bill—what?"

"That—and other things," said Harry. "You're a good chap, Mauly, and I'd accept your offer like a shot, if—if——"

"Cut out the 'ifs'!" suggested his lordship.

Wharton shook his head.

"Let me finish. I'd accept the loan from you with pleasure if I could pay it back this term. But I couldn't."

"Next term, then——"

"Nor next term, either," said the captain of the Remove quietly. "I couldn't pay it back at all, Mauly. So I can't take it. Thanks all the same!"

Lord Mauleverer blinked at him.

"But I don't see——" he stammered.

"There's been a change—at home," said Harry, in the same quiet tone. "I can tell you, old bean, because you're not the man to shout it out all over the Remove, though I dare say the fellows will be guessing before long. I couldn't pay five pounds any more than I could pay five hundred. So that's that!"

"Oh gad!" ejaculated Lord Mauleverer blankly.

"Much obliged, all the same, but there's nothing doing, you see."

"I—I see."

Lord Mauleverer turned to the door. But at the door he turned back again. Wharton looked at him.

To Harry Wharton, captain of his Form and one of its most popular members, Greyfriars is the best and happiest school in the world. Then, like a bolt from the blue, something happens which changes Wharton's view entirely.

"Is it really so bad as that, old bean?" asked Mauly.

"Quite."

"But—but you've got Skinner's bill to pay, all the same."

"I know."

"Isn't that a bit of a scrape?"

"A bit—rather. I shall manage, though."

"Look here, if you'd let me lend a hand—we're friends, old chap—I'd wait as long as you like—any old time!"

Harry Wharton rose to his feet. His eyes were like steel again, his lips hard.

"I haven't quite come down to Billy Bunter's level yet, Mauly," he said very distinctly. "I can't let a fellow give me money and call it a loan. I think you're rather forgetting yourself!"

"I—I never meant——"

"Shut the door after you!"

Wharton picked up his pen and turned his eyes on his books again. Lord Mauleverer gave him a rather long look, went out of the study quietly, and shut the door after him.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Smithy Asks for Trouble!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH, the Bounder of Greyfriars, winked at the other fellows in the brake. Some of them grinned and some of them frowned. It was the following day, and the Remove footballers were about to start for Redclyffe. Most of the fellows had packed themselves in; but Harry Wharton had stopped to speak to his Form master, Mr. Quelch—or, rather, he had stopped for Mr. Quelch to speak to him.

The Remove master had a few words to say to his head boy, and the footballers waited. Having finished with Mr. Quelch, the captain of the Remove came along, with a slightly irritated expression on his face.

Possibly Mr. Quelch, who was a very particular and punctilious gentleman, had had some slight fault to find. And Wharton of late had been in a mood to be irritated by trifles.

It was Billy Bunter's misfortune to roll on the scene just then, and catch Wharton by the sleeve as he was hurrying to the brake. What Bunter wanted to say did not transpire; probably it was a request for a lift in the brake, on the chance of scrounging a tea at Redclyffe.

Wharton had listened to Mr. Quelch, with suppressed impatience. In dealing with William George Bunter he did not suppress his impatience. Without waiting for the fat Owl of the Remove to unburden himself, he shook off the fat hand, and as Bunter made another grab, he took the fat junior by the collar and sat him down.

There was a surprised and indignant roar from Bunter:

"Ow! Beast! Wow!"

He sat and blinked after the captain of the Remove with an infuriated blink. He was strongly tempted to rush after Wharton and punch him. Only one consideration restrained the indignant Owl; the fact that if he did, his last state would be worse than his first.

Wharton, unheeding the fat Owl further, strode on to the brake with knitted brows. And Smithy winked at the other fellows.

All the Co. were in the brake—Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, Hurree Singh, and Frank Nugent—and they all frowned; but the other fellows grinned.

"Mind your eye!" murmured the Bounder. "His Nibs is cross! We shall get smacked all round if we don't jolly well take care!"

"Oh, don't be a silly ass, Smithy!" growled Bob Cherry.

"Only puttin' you fellows on your guard!" said the Bounder blandly. "His Tremendous Magnificence has got his jolly old back up. Isn't it a time for all of us to sit up and take notice?"

"Shut up!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"The shut-upfulness, my esteemed Smithy, is the proper caper!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The idiotic jawfulness is too much of a good thing!"

"What's the matter with the chap?" asked Squiff, with a curious look at Wharton's frowning face as he approached. "He doesn't seem to have been in his usual good temper for the last few days. You fellows been rowing?" he added, with a glance at the Co.

"No, ass!" answered Nugent.

"There is never any rowfulness in our esteemed and absurd circle!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, shaking his dusky head.

"Well, his jolly old temper doesn't matter a whole lot to me!" drawled the Bounder. "Hallo, there's Skinner! Watch Skinner askin' for it!"

Skinner of the Remove cut across to intercept Wharton before he reached the brake. Wharton's brow was already dark; it grew almost black as the cad of the Remove butted in. The fellows in the brake looked on with interest, some of them with uneasiness. For some reason—best known to himself—Harry

Wharton's temper had been tart and rather uncertain the last few days; every man in the Remove had observed that.

His friends were patient with it; but fellows like the Bounder rather liked to make it clear that they didn't care two straws for his temper.

"Hold on a minute, Wharton!" called out Skinner.

And as Wharton did not hold on, Harold Skinner planted himself directly in his path.

"Let me pass, you ass!" snapped Wharton.

"You can spare a minute," sneered Skinner. "I want to know about that bill for repairing my bike! The cycle-shop people are dunning me for it——"

"I've told you it will be paid!"

"That's all very well; but it's not paid yet! And I want to know——"

"Stand aside!"

"I tell you I want to know——Whoooop!" roared Skinner.

The captain of the Remove grasped him by the shoulder, and twirled him aside, with such vigour that the weedy Skinner staggered two or three yards before he stumbled over and sat down.

Harry Wharton came on, and took his place in the brake. The other fellows were exchanging glances and grinning.

Skinner scrambled up as the brake rolled away, and shook his fist after it. Wharton did not give him a glance.

The Bounder winked again. Skinner certainly had asked for it; whether he was anxious about that little bill or not, it was no time to tackle Wharton on the subject when the footballers were starting for Redclyffe. All the same, Wharton's methods had been a little drastic, and his friends wished that he had been more circumspect.

"What did Quelchy want, old bean?" asked Frank, as the brake rolled away from Greyfriars.

Wharton grunted.

"Oh, only some of the old idiot's rot!" he answered

Nugent's face became very grave. Really, that was not the way for a Remove man to speak of his Form master—especially a Remove man who held the rather responsible position of head of the Form!

"I had to mark some papers for the Form," added Wharton. "I'd forgotten! A fellow has plenty of other things to think of!"

"The plentifulness is terrific!" assented Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, but he looked very curiously at his chum.

Probably he was thinking that if a fellow was not keen on a head boy's duties, there was nothing to prevent him from leaving the job to someone else. But the Nabob of Bhanipur was far too tactful to utter his thoughts. Other fellows were not quite so tactful; indeed, the Bounder's sardonic humour made him find amusement in "drawing" the captain of the Remove.

"Bit of a bore, bein' head boy!" drawled Smithy. "Still, it keeps a man on the right side of the beaks!"

Wharton gave him a look.

"Who wants to keep on the right side of the beaks?" he snapped. "Don't talk rot, Smithy!"

"Don't talk—what?"

"Rot!" said Wharton tersely.

"My dear man, haven't you left somethin' behind?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Not that I know of! What do you mean?"

"I was alludin' to your manners!"

There was a chuckle in the brake; and Wharton coloured angrily.

"Don't be a silly ass!" he grunted.

"I won't say the same to you—I know you can't help it!" said the Bounder imperturbably. "Asses, like poets, are born, not made. But you may as well keep a civil tongue in your head, Wharton. We're not all Bunters and Skinners, you know—and there's no room in this brake for a fellow to throw his weight about."

Wharton opened his lips, evidently for an angry reply; but he closed them again. He sat in silence, staring at the woodlands bordering the road, already showing the green of spring, as the brake rolled on. He was not in a pleasant mood, that was clear; but certainly he did not want to be drawn into a wrangle with a member of his team.

"We're going to beat Redclyffe, you men!" remarked Bob Cherry, by way of starting a more congenial topic.

"The beatfulness will be terrific!" observed the Nabob of Bhanipur.

But the Bounder was not to be stalled off. When Smithy was bent on mischief, it was not easy to stop him. He cheerfully took up the new subject and pursued it in his own way.

"What-ho!" he said. "We're a jolly good team——"

"Hear, hear!"

"And there's nothin' like a really jolly, good-tempered, bright an' merry skipper to put heart into a team!" continued the Bounder.

There was another chuckle. The contrast between Wharton's moody look and the Bounder's playful description of him struck some of the fellows as comic.

Wharton's eyes turned on Smithy with a gleam in them.

"That's enough from you, Vernon-Smith!" he said curtly.

"Dear me!" said the Bounder, with exaggerated concern. "Don't you like my cheery an' genial conversation, old bean?"

"No, I don't!"

"May I suggest that you should lump it, then?"

"Shut up, Smithy, you ass!" muttered Frank Nugent.

"I'll shut up when I please, and not before," retorted the Bounder coolly.

"You may get shut up!" growled Wharton

Vernon-Smith laughed.

"If there's a man in this brake who can shut me up, I can only ask him to get on with it!" he retorted.

Wharton half-rose to his feet. Bob Cherry promptly pushed him back again. Wharton gave him an angry look; then he nodded, shrugged his shoulders, and gave the Bounder no further heed. But his brow remained dark as the brake rolled on, and he spoke hardly a word before the Remove footballers arrived at Redclyffe.

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THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Bounder's Way!

HARRY WHARTON'S clouded brow cleared when the whistle went and the ball was kicked off on the Redclyffe ground. Whatever was on the mind of the captain of the Remove, clouding his usually cheerful temper, he threw it aside when the game started.

As a matter of fact, a game of football in the keen wintry air was no bad cure for the "blues" or an irritable temper. Wharton had quite his old look as he "urged the flying ball" with his comrades; and the Co. were glad to see it.

What it was that had troubled him of late, his chums did not know, though Frank Nugent had an inkling of it. Whatever it was, it had told on his temper; though he was scarcely conscious of that. There were fellows in the Remove, especially Skinner and Co., who considered that the captain of the Form carried his head rather too high, at the best of times. Of late, even his best chums had to admit that there was some grain of reason in Skinner & Co.'s view.

Wharton had always been proud and rather sensitive; but of late he seemed to have become touchy, irritable, and even morose at times. Skinner & Co. asked one another whether fellows were going to have their heads snapped off and say nothing; and agreed that fellows weren't!

Fellows who liked Wharton exercised tact. The Bounder, in point of fact, rather liked Wharton; but he was not disposed to exercise tact. He was more disposed to show, as plainly as possible, that he did not care two straws for his temper. He did not exactly want a row with the captain of the Remove; but he was ready to enjoy the excitement of it if it came along. The Bounder was a fellow who liked things to happen; and did not care much what they were, so long as they happened.

He was quite prepared for "ragging" on the field of play, in Wharton's present mood; and more than prepared to give as good as he got. Perhaps he was a little disappointed when it did not come off. Wharton's face was bright and cheery now, and he had thrown himself into the game and dismissed less agreeable matters from his mind.

Fane and his merry men were in great form, and it was a hard tussle. Squiff, in the Greyfriars goal, had plenty of work to do, while for some time the home custodian stamped his feet and waved his arms to keep himself warm. Again and again the home forwards swept down on goal and the Australian junior was kept busy—but he saved every time. And, at length, Bob Cherry cleared with a mighty kick that sent the ball far up the field, and the struggle was transferred to the home half. And from the Greyfriars fellows who had come over to watch the game there was a cheer as the Bounder got away with the ball.

"Good old Smithy!"

"On the ball!"

"Play up, Greyfriars!"

"Bravo, the Bounder!"

It was like wine to the Bounder; he dearly loved making the fellows shout.

It was for that reason that Smithy, though in the main a good sportsman, sometimes erred on the side of keeping the ball too long. More than once his skipper had had to give him a strong hint that the ball was not his own peculiar possession, and that Soccer was not a one-man game; hints that Smithy never quite took in good part. On the present occasion, Smithy made that little error over again—though this time his motive was partly a mischievous desire to get Wharton's "rag" out.

The Bounder fairly raced up the field with the ball at his feet, beating man after man who strove to deal with him. The Redclyffe backs had him marked, however, and the Bounder, with the corner of his eye, looked for a man to take a pass in time. Only Harry Wharton was keeping up, and he was watching for Smithy to centre to him—which the Bounder assuredly should have done, for the Redclyffe backs were fairly rushing him down and he had not a chance in a thousand of getting through,

"To me!" shouted Wharton, as the Bounder failed to pass.

It was just like Smithy—Smithy all over, as the other fellows put it—to take the chance of shooting, when all the chances were against him, rather than part with the ball and let another man bag the goal. It was Smithy's "one-man" game again, quite out of place on the Soccer field. It was like the Bounder, too, to bring off a shot that looked next door to impossible—his luck was phenomenal.

He kicked for goal.

"You dummy!" panted Wharton.

How the Bounder got that shot through looked like a miracle. The Redclyffe goalkeeper certainly was not expecting it, and perhaps that was why it landed. The leather seemed scarcely to have left the Bounder's foot, when the backs rushed him over and he went sprawling. But the ball sailed true as a die; the man in goal jumped at it too late, and it landed in the net, amid a roar from the Greyfriars fellows round the field.

"Goal!"

"Bravo, Smithy!"

"Hurrah!"

Nothing succeeds like success! Bad play that came off was more likely to evoke a cheer than good play that didn't! The leather was in the net, and Smithy had put it there. It was first blood to Greyfriars; and the onlookers roared applause.

Smithy picked himself up, gasping.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Bounder!"

The whistle was sounding. Harry Wharton stared at the Redclyffe custodian fishing out the ball, as if he could hardly believe his eyes. He turned on the Bounder with a grim look.

"You howling ass!"

"Eh, what? What's bitin' you, old bean?" asked the Bounder, with an air of mild surprise.

"Do you call that football?" snapped Wharton.

"I don't quite get you! Didn't we come here to take goals?" asked the Bounder innocently.

Wharton compressed his lips. Ragging a man on the field of play was not his way; moreover, a goal was a goal; the Bounder had the advantage there. Had that reckless shot failed, every man in the team would have wanted to kick the Bounder; and it ought to have failed, while, had the winger centred, as he ought to have done, the goal would have been practically a certainty. But Smithy had the advantage of a lucky success, and he was the man to make the most of it. As the shot had come off, it was at least arguable that the Bounder had acted with prompt and accurate judgment.

His eyes gleamed mockingly at the captain of the Remove.

With the ball at his feet, Wharton cut through the Redclyffe defence and then shot hard. "Goal!" The shout died away, however, as the leather struck the crossbar and rebounded into play.

"Sorry, skipper, if I've done wrong!" he said meekly. "But if a man's not to take goals——"

"That will do!" snapped Wharton.

The Bounder grinned as the players walked back to the centre of the field. He was enjoying this—enjoying the game, enjoying his lucky fluke, enjoying getting his skipper's rag out, enjoying putting Wharton in the wrong when he knew that he was in the right.

As it happened, it was the only goal taken in the first half. Squiff, at the Remove end, was too good for Fane & Co., hard as they attacked. When the whistle went for half-time the score was one to nil, and that one was the Bounder's.

In the interval Smithy fully expected a ragging, which he was only too well aware that he deserved; but to which he was prepared to reply in his best tone of irony. Wharton, however, said nothing, and did not even look at him, rather to Smithy's disappointment. If he had anything to say to the Bounder, he was keeping it till after the game.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

High Words!

"WHARTON!"

"Bravo!"

"On the ball!"

"Kick, you beggar, kick!"

There were a score of Greyfriars fellows round the field, and they were all shouting.

The second half had gone on, ding-dong, right up to the finish. Fane, of Redclyffe, scored once, and the tally was even. But, with all their efforts, Redclyffe could not beat Sampson Quincy Iffley Field a second time, and the game looked like ending in a draw, when fortune smiled on Greyfriars in the last minute.

The ball was at Wharton's feet, and he seemed to go through the defence like a knife through cheese. All eyes were upon him, and the Greyfriars crowd roared encouragement. It was the last chance of making a win of it, and it looked a healthy chance.

Wharton kicked.

"Goal!" the fellows were already beginning to shout; when the shout died away in a gasp. The ball struck the crossbar and rebounded.

"Oh crumbs!"

"Rotten!"

A Redclyffe back was on the ball like a shot, sending it away to midfield. Then the whistle went.

Harry Wharton breathed hard and deep. It had been as close a thing as it could have been without materialising; but a miss was as good—or as bad—as a mile.

"Oh, my hat!" Wharton heard the Bounder's voice. "Who's left his shooting boots at home?"

He bit his lip hard.

It was a deep disappointment, but Wharton was too good a sportsman to let it worry him, so far as that went. But the Bounder's jeer was hard to bear. His eyes gleamed at Herbert Vernon-Smith.

"Hard luck, old chap!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Rotten luck!" said Peter Todd.

"The rottenfulness is terrific."

"Rotten kick, you mean, don't you?" drawled the Bounder.

"No, I don't, Smithy!" said Bob Cherry sharply. "And you don't, either! Don't be a silly, swanking ass, if you can help it. We can't all fluke goals by rotten play." Bob, at least, was under no delusion as to the quality of the Bounder's success in the first half.

Smithy shrugged his shoulders.

"Our jolly old skipper can't, anyhow," he remarked.

"Oh, cheese it!"

"The cheesefulness is the proper caper, my esteemed idiotic Smithy."

Harry Wharton said nothing. He had nothing to say till the fellows had changed and clambered into the brake for the homeward journey. Even then he was not in a hurry; and it was the Bounder who started the ball rolling.

"We ought to have beaten them!" remarked Vernon-Smith, with a shake of the head. "We're better men than Redclyffe, and we ought to have brought off somethin' better than a draw!"

"Can't always win matches," said Johnny Bull philosophically, "and they were a jolly good crowd."

"We lost a lot of chances," persisted the Bounder, "and Wharton really ought to have bagged that goal. You kicked too high, Wharton."

"Are you going to teach me how to play Soccer, Vernon-Smith?" asked the captain of the Remove quietly.

The Bounder laughed

"Not at all; I know you're too high and mighty to think of taking a tip. But that goal would have come off if I'd had the ball."

"Blessed is he that bloweth his own trumpet!" said Squiff.

"The blowfulness of the esteemed Smithy's ridiculous trumpet is truly preposterous."

"You played a rotten game, Vernon-Smith!" said the captain of the Remove. "You're a selfish player, and you'd rather take the widest chance than let another man have the ball. You'd risk any match to keep the crowd's eyes on you."

"You didn't like my goal?" asked the Bounder blandly.

"No."

"My mistake! If I'd kicked a little higher I might have hit the crossbar, too!" said the Bounder regretfully. "I'll remember that next time."

Some of the footballers laughed, and Wharton's brow darkened.

"You know perfectly well that you ought to have passed, Vernon-Smith. It was a chance in a thousand that the ball got home. You know the game well enough, though you don't choose to play it."

"You think I ought to have centred?"

"I know it, and you know it, too."

"Then you'd have had the ball—and could have banged the crossbar with it!" remarked the Bounder. "Is that what we came over to Redclyffe for?"

"Shut up, Smithy, you fathead," said Bob Cherry, half laughing

"My dear man, I'm only askin' for information. I've heard of men bein' ragged for missin' chances—but this is

the first time I've heard of a man being called over the coals for takin' goals. In my simple innocence I thought that that was what we were after."

"After all, it came off," said Mark Linley. "I thought you were taking a fool's chance, Smithy—still, it came off, so perhaps——"

"The game's the game!" said Harry Wharton gruffly.

"Hear, hear!" said the Bounder cheerfully. "There was a jolly old physician once who would rather kill his patients accordin' to rule than cure them by irregular methods. Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows, I apologise all round—for savin' the match, when, accordin' to rule, we ought to have bagged a beatin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton set his lips.

"Fluking a goal doesn't make any difference," he said. "That sort of game won't do for the Remove, Vernon-Smith, and I shall have to think twice before putting your name in the next football list."

The Bounder's jaw squared. But he kept up his bantering manner as he answered

"I've apologised for takin' the goal! Now I know what you want, of course I shall play up. Give me another chance and I'll promise, honest Injun, not to bag any goals. Every time the ball comes my way I'll trundle it along to you for your crossbar stunts. Is that good enough?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the footballers.

"That's enough!" said Wharton. "You'd better chuck it now, Vernon-Smith."

"Why, if I don't choose?" said the Bounder coolly and contemptuously. "Do you think your black looks make twopennyworth of difference to me? If you fancy you can handle me like Bunter or Skinner, the sooner you cut it out the better."

"You're asking for a thick ear," said the captain of the Remove quietly.

"Hand it over!" said the Bounder. "I fancy I could give you one to match."

"Look here, chuck it!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "That's enough, and a little over. Shut up, Smithy!"

"Rats!" retorted the Bounder.

Wharton rose to his feet, his eyes flashing. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, who was nearest to him, promptly interposed.

"My esteemed and ridiculous chum," said the nabob gently. "Let the restraining influence of absurd commonsense mitigate the ludicrous infuriation. It is not the proper caper for the lion to roar in reply to the braying of the ass."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton sat down again, laughing. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's way of putting it had the effect of oil on the troubled waters. Only the Bounder gave the dusky nabob a dark look.

"You dashed cheeky nigger——" he began.

"That's enough!" interrupted Bob Cherry. "Shut up, Smithy! We don't want a row going home from a football match, and if you don't jolly well shut up, we'll drop you out to walk home."

"Go and eat coke!" growled the Bounder.

But he decided to shut up, all the same, and he was as silent as Wharton, as the footballers rolled homeward—not in their usual cheery mood.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Generous!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Get out!"

"Oh, really, Wharton

"Buzz off, you fat ass!" snapped Wharton.

Billy Bunter, in the doorway of No. 1 Study, stared at the captain of the Remove through his big spectacles in wrath and indignation.

"If that's what you call civil, you beast——" snorted Bunter.

"Shut the door!"

Bunter blinked round the study. It was not yet time for prep, and Nugent was not there. Wharton was alone in the study, and he had taken out his books, apparently to work.

"Lines?" asked Bunter.

"No, ass!"

"Well, it's not prep yet," said Bunter. "You're not going to work for the fun of the thing, I suppose?"

"Fathead!"

"I came up here to speak to you," said Bunter, with dignity. "It's rather an important matter—more important than mugging filthy Latin."

"What the thump do you want, then?" asked Wharton impatiently.

"First of all, I want civility," answered Bunter. "That costs nothing, you know. What the thump's the matter with you? You've been like a bear with a sore head for days now—ever since your uncle came to see you on Saturday. I know that Colonel Wharton didn't shell out a tip—and I can understand a fellow being annoyed. Still, there's a limit."

"You fat idiot!"

"I dare say he would have shelled out, if you'd given him a hint," said Bunter. "A fellow's relations need a gentle hint, you know. Did you give your uncle a hint?"

"Ass!"

"Well, if you didn't, what do you expect? I dare say the old bean thought you were glad to see him on his own—old jossers are like that! They never understand that a fellow would rather they kept away. But never mind your uncle——"

"Never mind him, certainly," said Wharton. "Are you going?"

"Not till I've finished, old chap. After all, I don't expect good manners in this study," said Bunter agreeably. "You were jolly uncivil to me yesterday, Wharton, when I was going to speak to you before you started for Redclyffe. I know what's on your mind——"

Harry Wharton jumped.

His look at the fat Owl was quite startled.

"What?" he exclaimed.

Bunter winked.

"I know all about it, old bean," he said.

Harry Wharton's hand went to his pocket, as if to make sure that something was safe there. Billy Bunter, the Peeping Tom of the Remove, had a deep interest in other fellows' affairs, and he had his own peculiar ways of acquiring information concerning them. As Skinner had remarked, Bunter would never lack information so long as keyholes were made to doors. And the fat Owl did not even understand that there was anything wrong in reading another fellow's letters.

Wharton seemed relieved after he had felt in his pocket. Whatever it was he had there, it was still safe from Bunter. But his look at the fat and fatuous Owl was far from pleasant.

"You know all about—what?" he asked quietly.

"The whole thing, old chap," answered Bunter. "I'm frightfully sympathetic, and all that, and I'm going to help you."

"Help me!" repeated Wharton blankly.

"That's it, old fellow! Rely on me,' said Bunter, with a wave of a fat hand.

"You benighted idiot!"

Wharton had been startled for a moment. The bare idea that the tattling Owl had discovered his secret trouble was disconcerting. There was trouble—deep trouble—on the mind of the captain of the Remove; but it was a solace that he had it to himself, and that it was not likely to become the talk of the Form and the school. If it came to Bunter's knowledge, that meant that it would come to the knowledge of all Greyfriars. And really, no fellow's private affairs were quite safe from the inquisitive Owl.

"I know how the matter stands, and as I've said, I'm going to help," said Bunter. "You're in a scrape——"

"You know nothing about it, if I am, you howling ass!" growled Wharton. "Tell me what you mean, you footling fathead."

"My dear chap, you can be frank, with a pal," said Bunter. "You're landed with Skinner's bill and you can't pay it. If you tried to stick your uncle for it, it never came off—but you're such an ass, old chap, if you don't mind my mentioning it, that I shouldn't be surprised if you let Colonel Wharton go without even trying it on. I—I say, what are you going to do with that cushion, old chap?"

"I'm going to buzz it at your silly head, if you don't clear."

"Oh, really, Wharton!" Bunter kept a wary eye open for the cushion. "I've told you I came here to help. You owe five pounds. You can't pay it. That's what's made you such an ill-tempered beast——"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Such an ill-tempered beast. Well, I'm going to lend you the five pounds, old bean."

"What?" gasped Wharton.

"I mean it, old chap!" said Bunter reassuringly. "You're my pal, and I can trust you. Rely on me for the fiver."

"And where are you going to get a fiver from, you benighted bandersnatch?" inquired the captain of the Remove.

"That's all right! I'm expecting a postal order——"

"What?" yelled Wharton.

"In fact, several postal orders," said Bunter, "from some of my titled relations, you know."

Wharton stared at him and burst into a laugh. Apparently it was Billy Bunter's postal order—that celebrated postal order which was always expected, but never came—which was to supply the necessary funds. Certainly Skinner's account would have become a very very old account, if its payment had depended on the arrival of Billy Bunter's postal order.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at," said Bunter, blinking at him. "I mean it, old fellow—every word! I'm going to lend you the fiver, when—when my postal order comes. But one good turn deserves another. You see that?"

"Oh, now we're coming to the milk in the coconut!" remarked Wharton.

"Well, it's quid pro quo, you know. You can't expect a fellow to lend you large sums of money if you're mean. At the present moment," explained

Bunter, "I'm short of tin. It's not a thing that often happens, as you know. But there it is. The tuckshop's not closed yet, and if you lend me five bob——"

"If!" agreed Wharton.

"You can rely on me for a loan of five quids, in a—a—a day or two. Say Saturday. What about it, old chap?"

Billy Bunter blinked inquiringly, and a little anxiously at the captain of the Remove. It was a generous offer—such an offer as a fellow might be expected to jump at. Wharton, however, did not jump. He poised the cushion in the air.

"I give you one second!" he said.

"Eh?"

"Hook it!"

"If you're going to be mean about five bob, Wharton, you can't expect me to lend you five quids——"

Whiz!

Bump!

"Whoooop!" roared Bunter.

He sat down in the doorway. The cushion had landed on his podgy chest, and Bunter was clean bowled.

"Shut the door after you!" said Harry.

"Yaroooh!"

Billy Bunter scrambled up. His fat face was red with wrath. He glared at the captain of the Remove with a devastating glare.

"You cheeky rotter!" he roared. "I've a jolly good mind to mop up the study with you."

"I've got another cushion here——"

"If you think I'm going to lend you a fiver now——"

Whiz! Bump!

Again Billy Bunter's flow of eloquence was suddenly stemmed, as the second cushion flew. This time he rolled out into the Remove passage, and landed there—hard.

"Oh! Ow! Beast!" Bunter sat up and roared. "Yaroooh! Come out of that study, you rotter, and I'll—dust the passage with you!"

"Coming!"

Harry Wharton appeared in the doorway. He picked up the cushions, and took aim with one of them. Billy Bunter gave him one blink, and changed his fat mind on the spot about dusting the passage with his Form captain. He started for the stairs as if he were on the cinder path.

On the landing he paused to blink back at the junior in the doorway of Study No. 1, and deliver a Parthian shot.

"Yah! I jolly well won't lend you anything now! No good trying to stick me for a loan, Wharton! Yah!"

And Bunter departed down the Remove staircase before a cushion could catch him.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Up Against It!

FRANK NUGENT came into his study, and glanced rather curiously at his chum. Harry Wharton had a sheaf of paper before him, "Titus Livius" propped against the inkstand, a dictionary to his right, a grammar to his left, and a wrinkle on his boyish brow.

In the Remove there were "swots" and "saps" and "smugs," as they were variously called, but their number was few. Certainly the captain of the Form, though a reasonably steady worker, had never been one of them. Wharton always had a good place in class. His "con" generally satisfied Mr. Quelch, and he did not regard the classical languages as a nightmare, as many Lower Fourth fellows did. But he was not the fellow to dig into the "Carthaginian War" as a matter of taste, as Mark Linley was, for instance. Yet of late Livy had been rather prominent in Study No. 1—a difficult author for a Lower Fourth fellow, and one that no Removite was obliged to tackle.

Frank had asked no questions, but he was puzzled, and as his chum vouchsafed no explanation, he continued puzzled. Now, as he came in, he glanced at Titus Livius against the inkstand, and at Wharton's wrinkled brow, and wondered still more. Prep was not yet due, and it was unusual for any Remove man to put in the hour before prep at work he was under no obligation to do. Chatting in the Rag, or ragging in the changing-room, or larking in the passages, was really more in the line of the average Remove man.

Wharton laid down his pen, and looked at Frank with a faint smile. Possibly he was not sorry to be interrupted.

"Prep?" he asked.

"Not yet," answered Frank. "Half an hour yet, old bean—unless a man's frightfully keen to get on with it. I'm not."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I came up to give you a look-in," said Frank. He shut the study door. "I passed Bunter on the stairs."

"I hope you kicked him."

Frank did not reply to that. Wharton's glance wandered to his books, though certainly not with yearning. Nugent hesitated a little.

"Am I interrupting you, old fellow?"

"Yes."

"Like me to get out?"

"No."

Wharton laughed again.

"I'm glad to be interrupted. This stuff makes my head ache a little. Old Linley goes through Livy like a knife through cheese. Blessed if I know how he does it! I'm no dunce, I hope; but I can't."

"Why tackle it at all, then?" Frank had been on the point of asking that question a dozen times; now it came out.

"Well, I'm not doing it for fun!" said Harry slowly. "I—I've got a reason, Frank. I don't mind you knowing, of course; but—but I don't want it talked about. Nothing may come of it, and a fellow doesn't want to look a fool."

"I don t quite follow. If you're going in for a prize, nothing to mind the fellows knowing about that, is there?"

"Bother the prizes! Catch me bagging a headache for a prize!" grunted Wharton. "It's more serious than that. Suppose I told you I was thinking of putting in for one of the Founder's Scholarships, next term?"

Nugent fairly jumped.

"What utter rot! You're not!" he exclaimed.

"Well, I am."

"It means frightfully hard work—fairly swotting! I dare say you can pull it off all right; but the game's not worth the candle to you. And—and besides——"

"Go it!"

"Well, old chap, I don't think you ought, if you ask me," said Frank honestly. "The Founder's Scholarships are meant for poor scholars—to help a chap whose people can't stand his full fees here. I know they're sometimes bagged by men who don't need them, but that doesn't alter the principle of the thing. Linley's got one, Penfold's got one; they both need them. Same with Wilkinson of the Fourth. But you don't."

Harry Wharton smiled—a bitter smile that made his chum stare at him harder.

"And suppose I told you that I needed it more than even Linley or Penfold?" he asked.

"I should say you were pulling my leg," said Frank uneasily.

"Well, I do tell you so, and I'm not pulling your leg," answered the captain of the Remove quietly.

There was silence in the study for a moment or two. Nugent seemed to be trying to assimilate that startling piece of information with some difficulty.

Wharton rose from his chair and stood leaning back against the mantelpiece, his hands in his pockets, his brow clouded.

"You can't mean it, Harry," Nugent spoke at last. "I know, from what you've told me, that your people have had money troubles—your uncle couldn't stand you that fiver you wanted, and—and—but dash it all, that's only a temporary trouble, you've told me! Everybody's feeling the pinch these days. And there's a good time coming."

"I'm done with my uncle."

"Harry!"

The dark, bitter smile flickered over Wharton's face again.

"That surprises you, I suppose?"

"Yes, it does. And, look here, Harry, what are you driving at? I know there's been something on your mind ever since your uncle came down to the school last Saturday. The other fellows know it, too, though they can't guess what it is. You can't be ass enough, ungrateful enough, to have turned against a man who's been as good as a father to you because of some miserable little disagreement."

Nugent spoke almost hotly.

"You remember, perhaps," said Harry, slowly and quietly, "that when my—my—when Colonel Wharton was here on Saturday I was out of gates and he waited in the study for me. That idiot Bunter barged into him in this study; he seems to have been filling in the time, while he waited for me, by going through the papers in his pocket-book."

"I remember," said Nugent, puzzled. "The papers were scattered about the study, and Bob picked them up for him; he told us."

"One had fallen under the armchair, and was overlooked. Bunter rooted it out afterwards, looking for paper to light the fire for tea. The fat idiot put it on the fire, and I grabbed it off; there was only a fragment left unburnt. I looked at it to see if it was one of my—of Colonel Wharton's papers, and—and——"

Wharton's face was pale now.

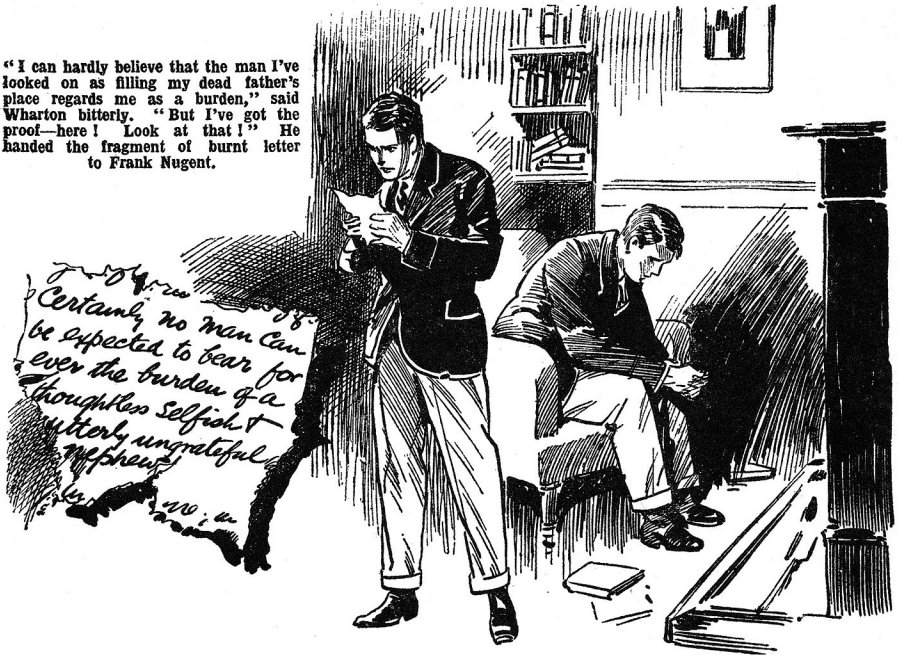
"I couldn't help seeing what was written on it, of course—only a sentence or so left unburnt. It was in my uncle's hand—a letter written, but not posted; written to me, or someone else—I don't know—or why it was not posted. But—but——"

Nugent waited.

"It referred to his nephew as selfish, ungrateful, and a burden!" said Harry in an almost inaudible voice.

"Harry!"

"I've told you now," said Wharton. "I—I was going to keep it to myself, but—but I'd rather tell you, Frank. I don't want anybody else to know—not even old Bob and the others. But we've been pals ever since I came, and—and we've never had secrets from one another. And—and I want you to back me up. I've got a hard row to hoe now."



"I can hardly believe that the man I've looked on as filling my dead father's place regards me as a burden," said Wharton bitterly. "But I've got the proof—here! Look at that!" He handed the fragment of burnt letter to Frank Nugent.

"It's impossible!" said Nugent. "It's simply impossible! Colonel Wharton isn't that kind of a man! He's a gentleman and a soldier—as decent a man as any in the wide world! I tell you he wouldn't—he couldn't——"

"He did!"

Nugent shook his head.

"There's some mistake," he said—"some ghastly mistake! Harry, old chap, for goodness' sake, don't let your touchy temper make a fool of you. Don't throw away your best friend for nothing. I tell you it isn't so."

Harry Wharton smiled—a hard, bitter smile, grim and sardonic, that made his handsome face look much less handsome.

"I'd give my right hand to believe that there was some mistake in it!" he said. "Do you think I want to believe that the man I've trusted has let me down—that the man I've looked on as filling my dead father's place regards me as a burden? But I've got the proof—here! Look at that!"

From his pocket Wharton drew a fragment of a burnt letter and handed it to Frank. Nugent looked at it with starting eyes. What remained legible was in the well-known handwriting of Colonel Wharton, and it ran:

". . . certainly no man can be expected to bear for ever the burden of a thoughtless, selfish, and utterly ungrateful nephew——"

That was all; the flames had consumed the rest. Frank stared at the fragment with almost unbelieving eyes. He caught his breath.

There was a tense silence in Study No. 1. In that deep silence there was a faint sound at the door, but neither of the juniors noticed it. Frank spoke at last.

"Good heavens!" he said.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bitter Blood!

HARRY WHARTON replaced the charred, crumpled fragment in his pocket. Nugent had a dazed look. He had suspected and feared that his chum's haughty temper was threatening to be his undoing, as it had been his undoing before. But he realised now that it was not that. What was written there, in his uncle's hand, had wounded Wharton to the very soul. It accounted—more than accounted—for his black mood ever since that Saturday afternoon when Colonel Wharton had come down to Greyfriars. In those moments Frank's heart ached for his chum.

"Good heavens!" he repeated. "Harry, old chap——"

He broke off. What was there to be said?

"Now you understand, Frank. After that I'm done for, so far as my father's brother is concerned. I've been a burden—I know that—a burden I always believed he was willing and glad to bear for his dead brother's sake and for my own sake. But now I know!"

Wharton choked.

"It's rotten!" said Nugent, between his teeth. "The man's no right——"

"I suppose he has a right! He's hard hit now, like everybody else, and I dare say that's made him feel this more. He's fed-up! Perhaps it's not surprising. He's had to sell his car and sack his chauffeur; it's as bad as that at Wharton Lodge! No wonder he kicks at a nephew at a Public school—an expensive school like Greyfriars! What he pays for my fees here would have kept on the car!" said Wharton bitterly.

"But you've your own money——"

"Not till I'm of age—and it's not much. My father was the younger brother, and our jolly old laws give everything to the elder. There was a lot of money once to come to me—a distant relation in India; he left an awful lot of money, but it went in a Bombay bank smash. I never thought much about it—it seemed so jolly far off—and it's not much use thinking about it now. That may have made a difference to the colonel, for all I know!"

Nugent shook his head.

"Don't let your feelings run away with you, old chap. If—if this is as it looks, your uncle is a weak-kneed sort of blighter who can't stand by his actions! But——"

Wharton winced.

"I hate to think that of him, even after—this!" he said. "But I suppose you're right."

Nugent was thinking now—hard! He could fully understand the bitter wound to his chum's pride—the humiliation, the deep resentment, that might have clouded any fellow's judgment. But Nugent was unprejudiced in the matter, and after the first shock he looked at it more clearly.

"Let's see that paper again," he said.

Wharton drew it from his pocket.

"It's your uncle's hand, right enough," said Frank.

"No doubt about that."

"But—he has no other nephew?"

"Think I didn't think of that at once? No: he has no other nephew—no other near relation at all, except Aunt Amy and my other aunts."

"But it's queer! It's right out of keeping with your uncle's character, Harry. It's not like what you know of him."

"Not like what I thought I knew of him, you mean!"

"It's queer!" repeated Nugent. "Why wasn't the letter posted? If it was written to you, why didn't your

uncle post it instead of coming down here last Saturday?"

"I don't know. Might have relented at the last minute or something. Might have felt jolly well ashamed of himself!" Wharton shrugged his shoulders. "Might have written it to somebody else—Major Cherry, perhaps; they're old pals. Might have been confiding to a friend what a burden his ungrateful nephew was!"

Wharton gritted his teeth at the thought.

"I don't get it," said Nugent. "If Colonel Wharton wrote that, and then kept it in his pocket-book instead of posting it, it looks as if he'd changed his mind, or at least thought he had pitched it too strong. Might have been upset or frightfully worried about something just when he put pen to paper or —or something—Income-Tax, perhaps My pater was raising Cane over the Income-Tax when I was home last."

Wharton smiled.

"You're a good chap, Frank. But there's nothing in it. I know he's pushed for money; it's a common complaint nowadays. But he wrote what he thought and felt; he couldn't have written anything else."

He shoved the paper out of sight again.

"You know where I stand now. My fees are paid here for this term—I can't alter that. Nothing's been said to me about leaving school, so I suppose Colonel Wharton intends to keep me here, burden as I am." Harry's lips quivered. "I don't know. He may mean to take me away. But, in any case, I shall not stay here at his charges. That—that's why I've been mugging up Livy. I don't want to leave Greyfriars, Frank. But if I stay here, I've got to stay on my own—like old Linley, like Redwing used to before he got his tin. I—I suppose I can do what other fellows have done. If swotting will do it, I'm going to swot!"

Nugent was miserably silent.

"You'll see me mugging up Latin, with a wet towel round my head, old bean." Wharton tried to laugh. "I'd rather do something with a little more sense in it—something that would come in useful later in life. But the terms of the scholarships were laid down ages ago, when classical knowledge was the jolly old latest thing If I get through this, I shall know all about the Punic Wars, anyhow; and if ever I'm looking for a job, I shall be able to tell them just how Hannibal got across the Alps." He laughed again. "I can see a business man in an office jumping to engage me, when I tell him that. What?"

"You've told me this, old chap, and I think you were right to tell me," said Nugent, unheeding. "I wish you'd told me before. I want you to take my advice, Harry."

"There never was a chap more in need of good advice," said Harry. "Get it off your chest, and I'll be glad of it."

"Get leave from the Head, and go to your uncle——"

"What?"

"Show him that bit of paper——"

"Frank!"

"And have it out!" said Nugent. "Harry, I know how it looks; but—but I can't get it, somehow! There's some ghastly mistake somewhere—and Colonel Wharton could explain it. Go to him, and——"

"Are you mad?" said Wharton.

"No, old chap; but I'm cool, and you're not!" said Frank earnestly. "I know how you feel—and when a fellow feels like you do now, what he wants to do is to listen to a cool-headed friend and follow his advice. I'm sure—I'm absolutely convinced — that Colonel Wharton is the man you've always believed him to be—and not the man you believe him to be now. I'd be willing to stake anything on it."

Wharton gave a scoffing laugh.

"Go to him—to the man who calls me a burden—the man who's fed-up with me, and sick of me! Go to him—and ask favours! I'm not a beggar, Frank!"

"That's not what I meant. An explanation——"

"What is there to explain? Even if he's ashamed of what he wrote, he's not the man to deny his own hand. Is he going to explain that he's got another nephew—that I've got a cousin I've never heard of! Don't be an ass!"

"No, no! But——"

"But what?" snapped Wharton savagely.

"I feel sure there's something in this you don't understand—something I don't understand! I can't believe——" Nugent hesitated. "I'm sure of it, Harry. And a few words to your uncle—— Go and see him!"

"I shall never see him again, if I can help it!" said Wharton deliberately. "I shall not go home—I mean, to Wharton Lodge; I don't call it home now—for the Easter holidays. I shall have to sponge on somebody for the hols, like Bunter—or stay at Greyfriars, as Fishy generally does. I shall never set foot in Wharton Lodge again."

"I think you're wrong, Harry——"

"Go to him, ask him what he means by calling me a burden, and an ungrateful nephew!" said Wharton, with savage mockery. "What's the good? Don't I know what he means? We don't learn much here that's of any use; but we learn the plain meaning of plain English, I suppose!"

"Yes, but——"

"Yaroooooh!"

A resounding yell in the passage outside interrupted Nugent. It was followed by a heavy bump, and another yell. Then the door of Study No. 1 opened, and Vernon Smith looked in, with a grin on his face.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter's Little Way!

HARRY WHARTON turned on the Bounder, with a blaze in his eyes. Anger and bitterness had been rising in his breast, added to by Nugent's advice, which, whether good or bad, was unwelcome and unpalatable. The sight of the Bounder staring into the study, with that grin on his rather sardonic face, fanned his anger to flame. He made a step towards Herbert Vernon-Smith, his hands clenched.

"What do you want here, you rotter? If you've come to give me any more of your impudence, put your hands up at the same time!"

The Bounder eyed him, with perfect coolness.

A taunting answer was on his lips, but he restrained it. The Bounder's eyes were keen—very keen. The passionate anger he could read in Wharton's face was not all that he could read there.

"Hold on, Harry!" exclaimed Nugent. "I think Smithy——"

"Hang Smithy! I'm fed-up with Smithy!" Wharton's eyes glittered at the cool face of the Bounder. "If you want what you've been asking for, Vernon-Smith, get on with it! If not, get out of this study!"

"My dear man——" drawled the Bounder.

"That's enough! Get out!"

"Harry——"

"Oh, ring off, Nugent! I tell you I'm fed-up with the cheeky rotter! What does he want here?"

"Nothin', old bean," said the Bounder, his eyes very curiously on Harry Wharton's face. "Only givin' you a tip——"

"Keep it!"

"Bunter——"

"Hang Bunter, and hang you!"

"Yow-ow-ow!" came a howl from the passage. "You beast, Smithy! You know jolly well that I wasn't listening! I never heard a word in the study! Ow! I was just stooping to tie my shoelace, you beast! Wow!"

Harry Wharton started, and the Bounder laughed.

"Sorry to butt in where I'm not welcome," he said, with ironical politeness. "But if you fellows were discussin' anythin' private, you might be glad to know that Bunter had his ear to the keyhole."

"I hadn't!" yelled Bunter from the passage. "It's a whopper! I—I was stooping to pick up half-a-crown I'd dropped——"

"Oh!" breathed Wharton.

"I found him there when I came up, and shifted him with my boot!" drawled the Bounder. "I looked in to tell you—that's all!"

He turned and walked away up the Remove passage to his own study.

"Oh!" repeated Wharton.

He stood as if rooted to the floor. Outside in the passage Bunter was still yelping. The Bounder had kicked him, and apparently he had kicked hard. Bunter was feeling hurt.

"That spying rotter—he's heard!" Wharton muttered the words. "It will be all over the Remove now! Oh!"

Nugent, with a grim face, stepped to the door. Billy Bunter, rubbing the place where the Bounder's boot had landed, blinked at him through his big spectacles.

"I say, old chap, don't you believe that beast Smithy!" he gasped. "You know I'm not the fellow to listen at a door——"

"You fat rascal!" said Nugent.

"Oh, really, Franky, old chap! I never heard a word! I—I wasn't anywhere near your door! I can tell you, I'm awfully sorry for poor old Wharton—frightfully sorry that his uncle's turned him down, you know!" Billy Bunter blinked past Nugent at the still figure of the captain of the Remove. "I—I say, Harry, old chap—nothing to be waxy about! I'm jolly sympathetic, I can tell you. Awfully sorry, and all that!"

Wharton pushed past Nugent.

Bunter gave him one startled blink. The expression on Wharton's face fairly frightened the fat Owl. One blink was enough. With a yelp of terror, Bunter ran for the stairs.

Wharton made a stride in pursuit, stopped, and turned back. Kicking the fat Owl was not of much use now. Bunter, evidently, had been curious, and he had indulged his curiosity in his usual way. Evidently he had heard all that had been said in Study No. 1. The Bounder's arrival on the spot had been too late to prevent that.

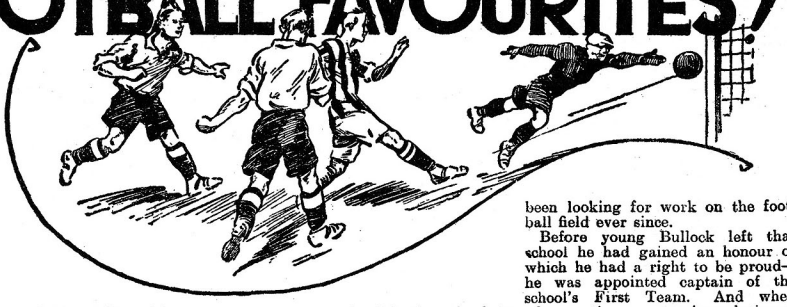
"I'm sorry, old fellow!" muttered Nugent. "I—I suppose that prying fool heard——"

"It's my own fault!" said Wharton bitterly. "I was a fool to speak about the thing at all. Well, it will be all over the Remove now—a jolly topic for Skinner and his friends. Let's hope

(*Continued on page 12.*)

HERE'S ANOTHER INTERESTING FOOTER ARTICLE BY "OLD REF."

FOOTBALL FAVOURITES



No. 20.

NORMAN BULLOCK,

centre-half and skipper of BURY F.C.

A Proud Record!

I DO not suppose that in the minds of my young followers of football the name of the Bury club is associated with records. In recent times this Lancashire side has had to play a sort of second fiddle; has not been included among the "fashionable" teams the mention of whose name sends a thrill through the spine.

Some of us who are getting on in years, however, remember the day when the Bury Football Club was indeed a power in the land. Do you know that Bury have twice won the English Cup. Do you also know that Bury share with Preston North End a very proud record—that of having won the English Cup without a goal scored against them in the whole of the competition? This was done by Bury in 1903. And in that year Bury, meeting Derby County in the Final Tie, won by six goals to nothing. And that, chums, is a bigger score than any other club has ever put up in a Cup Final. So you see there were days when Bury were very much on the map in the football sense. And this season Bury have threatened to come on to the football map again. Their doings in the Cup have attracted attention For a period at the beginning of the season they were at the head of the Second Division, and when I last talked to the players in general they were hopeful that at the end of this season they would gain promotion—take the old club back to the giddy heights of the First Division.

The most enthusiastic member of the side concerning this ambition I found to be Norman Bullock. And the special reason why Norman was hoping that this season would be a red-letter one in the history of the Bury club arises from the fact that Norman is the captain of the side. No club has ever had a more conscientious servant than Bury have had in the person of Bullock. There are footballers—you know of them—who always seem to be wanting to flit about from club to club much as the butterfly flits from flower to flower Bullock, however, is not that sort. There is only one football club for which he has played as a professional, and that club is Bury.

Bullock has already had two benefits, and among his ambitions is that of qualifying for a third reward, which means that he hopes to stay with Bury for fifteen seasons at least.

But although Norman of the square shoulders has not had a career associated with changes of clubs, the story of his life in football is a most interesting one.

Sound Advice!

AT a very early stage of Norman's life his parents moved to Seedley, which, in case you don't know, is on the outskirts of Manchester. And little Norman, as he then was, went to the Seedley Elementary School.

The one lucky thing about the Seedley school, from Bullock's point of view, was that the master was extremely keen on football. Each of the standards in that school, from Standard No. 1 upwards, had a football team. There was a big piece of spare ground near the school on which the boys could play, and they got their footballs and their football attire by saving up their ha'pennies and pennies.

In the various standards, as he learnt the school lessons, Norman played football, and he recalls now that he has never ceased to benefit from a piece of advice given to him by his schoolmaster. "In this game of football," said Norman's master, "you want to keep moving about. Find some useful work on behalf of the side—go looking for that work if it doesn't come to you." And Norman has been looking for work on the football field ever since.

Before young Bullock left that school he had gained an honour of which he had a right to be proud—he was appointed captain of the school's First Team. And when he left the school to take up the more serious duties of life Norman was the recipient of a souvenir from his schoolmates which, so I gathered, is still his most prized possession. And that is saying something when I tell you that Norman rose in due course to play for England.

"I think many boys fail to progress in the game," Norman told me, "because they are content to stay in the same class of football. This is a mistake. Much more likely is a player to develop if he changes his club—finds better and better teams, and in them meets better and better opponents."

Rapid Progress!

WHEN Norman was playing in Sunday School League football in the Manchester district he felt that his football was not improving—that he was inclined to go back rather than forward. So he began to fly his kite higher and higher, and one day was very happy to accept an invitation to have a trial with the Bury club. He satisfied to the extent of being signed on as an amateur, and, having assisted them in an unpaid capacity for several months, Norman was duly booked up on the professional staff. That was in the season of 1920.

All this time Bullock was playing as a centre-forward, and such rapid progress did he make that in 1923 he was chosen for one of the really big games—to lead the English League attack against the Scottish League. As a leader of the attack he came to the height of his power in the season of 1925-26, when he scored thirty-one League goals for Bury. In that same season he realised another ambition—that of playing for England in a proper International. He got two such caps—one against Wales, and later another one against Ireland.

As a centre-forward he showed something of his versatility, for it used to be said of him that he could play two entirely different games. He could do the dashing "bull at the gate" stuff down the middle, and shoot as hard as the best of them. He had another type of game—that of being a real leader of the attack, scheming cleverly, making openings for his colleagues as well as accepting the openings which his colleagues made for him.

A Change for the Better!

THE life of a centre-forward is specially hard. There comes a day in the career of most leaders of the attack when they have to make a move to some other position In 1928 Bury secured from Bolton J. R. Smith, the famous centre-forward, who had played for Bolton in two Cup Finals. So Bullock had to make his first real move, and for a spell he played as an inside-right and inside-left alternatively.

Then Tom Bradshaw, the centre-half of the team, was injured, and the club officials, being in a quandary, naturally consulted their oldest servant. "I'll play at centre-half if you like," said Norman. The offer was accepted, and Bullock played so well that when, a little later on, the Bury club, hard pressed for cash, transferred Bradshaw to Liverpool, Bullock became the regular centre-half, and the skipper of the side.

"When I was a centre-forward," said Bullock, "I always tried to remember the advice of my schoolmaster to keep moving about, looking for useful work to do. Perhaps that has helped me as a centre-half, the difference being that in this position there is no necessity to look for work—it is always on hand. First you are helping the defence, and a minute later you are up with the attack."

DOWN ON HIS LUCK!

(*Continued from page 10.*)

they will enjoy it! My hat! I don't know that I shall be sorry, altogether, if I have to get out of Greyfriars at the end of the term."

"I—I wish——"

"You wish I'd take your advice and eat humble-pie to the man who's turned me down!" exclaimed Wharton savagely. "Well, I won't, and that's that! I was a fool to tell you! I might have expected something like that from you!"

Nugent breathed rather hard.

"That's hardly fair," he said. "Let it drop. We can speak of it again some other time."

"No need to speak of it again at all. We've talked too much as it is," growled Wharton.

There was a tramp of feet on the Remove staircase. The fellows were coming up to the studies to prep now. Harold Skinner stopped at the open doorway of Study No. 1, and looked in, with a sour face.

"Look here, Wharton——" he began.

"That's enough! Get out!"

"That bill's not paid yet!"

"I've told you that's enough!" exclaimed Wharton. "Another word, and I'll bang your cheeky head on the door!"

"If you think——" began Skinner savagely.

He got no farther. Wharton's temper had been sorely tried; and now it boiled over. He grasped Skinner by the collar, and there was a loud crack as the cad of the Remove's head came in contact with the door. And there was a fiendish yell from Skinner.

"Oh! Ow! Yaroooh! Oooop!"

"Now leave a fellow alone, unless you want a scrap on your hands!" rapped Wharton. "If you do, I'm more than ready!"

Wharton's hands were up, and his eyes blazing over them. Several fellows stopped in the passage to stare. Skinner backed promptly away from the door, rubbing his head, his eyes burning malevolently at the captain of the Remove.

"You rotten bully!" he panted.

Wharton shut the door with a bang.

Frank Nugent sat down quietly to prep. Wharton followed his example, with a flushed face. There was silence in the study for some time. It was not easy for the captain of the Remove to put his mind into work. And he stirred uneasily, restlessly, and at last spoke.

"Frank, old man!"

Nugent looked up.

"Don't mind me, old fellow," said Wharton. "I—I'm afraid my temper's a bit out of hand. I—I suppose I ought not to have banged that rotter's napper like that. But—but I'm worried, old chap. I'm going to take my bike down to Courtfield to-morrow and sell it for what it will fetch, and settle that confounded bill! That's the only way. And—and—and be as patient as you can, old bean. I know I'm putting rather a strain on your temper."

Nugent smiled.

"That's all right, fathead! But I wish——"

"I can't do as you advised me—I can't! I don't think it would be any good if I did. Anyhow, I can't do it. And—and I'm going to try not to be like a bear with a sore head in the study."

Prep went on in silence after that.

When it was finished Frank Nugent rose, and looked inquiringly at his study-mate.

"Coming down to the Rag?"

Wharton shook his head.

"I think I'll give jolly old Livy another run," he said.

"Don't overdo it, old bean. Starting a race at top speed isn't the way to stay the distance."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I know. But I'll pile in, all the same. You leave me to it."

"Rot! I'll help."

"My dear chap——"

"Two heads are thicker than one," said Nugent, with a grin. "Let's dig into the jolly old bosh together. I'll chuck it as soon as it makes my head ache."

There was a heavy tramp of feet outside, and the door was hurled open, and Bob Cherry's ruddy face looked in.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! You men coming down?"

"Not yet. We're doing some Livy," said Frank.

"Some what?" roared Bob.

"Livy."

"Oh, help!"

And Bob tramped on and left them to it.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

News for the Remove!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH strolled into the Rag with his hands in his pockets, and lounged across to the fire.

There were a good many Remove men in the Rag after prep. Three members of the famous Co. were there in a group with Peter Todd, Squiff, Tom Brown, Mark Linley, and others of the footballing fraternity, talking about the Redclyffe match of the day before. That football match was a very live topic in the Remove. Skinner and his friends, who took very little interest in games, as a rule, were keenly interested in that particular match. They even regretted that they had not taken the trouble to go over to Redclyffe to see it played, as they certainly would have done had they foreseen that trouble would occur.

Smithy's goal was the subject of hot discussion in the Remove. The dispute in the brake coming home, which had nearly led to "scrapping," was also a matter of great interest.

It looked like serious trouble between the captain of the Form and the Bounder, and that prospect was quite a delightful one to the amiable Skinner. Skinner & Co. were always up against the captain of the Remove. But they were negligible members of the Form, and Wharton regarded them with a contempt he was hardly at the pains to conceal.

The Bounder was a fellow of a very different order—a great man at games, an almost indispensable member of the Form Eleven, and the only fellow in the Remove who, if he had thought of "giving Wharton a fall," as Skinner expressed it, had a chance of success. And at the merest hint of trouble, Skinner & Co. were ready to back up the Bounder, or anybody else who was likely to serve their turn. Skinner had made many sarcastic remarks about fellows being threatened with the "sack" from the team for taking goals. He was whole-heartedly on the Bounder's side, though probably Smithy was not very proud of such support.

Vernon-Smith listened for a few moments to the remarks of the footballers, without making any remark himself, which was rather surprising, for Bob Cherry and the rest were discussing his play in far from complimentary terms. It would have been like the Bounder to weigh in with some sardonic sneer, instead of which he lounged over to the fire, and dropped into a vacant chair with a thoughtful expression on his rather hard face. Tom Redwing joined him, glad and relieved to see his chum in an unusually peaceable mood.

"Wharton's not come down, Reddy," remarked the Bounder.

Redwing glanced round the room.

"No," he assented.

"I hear that he's started swottin'."

"I've heard so, too," said Redwing, with a smile.

"What's the matter with the chap, Reddy?" asked the Bounder, in a low voice.

Redwing stared.

"Is anything the matter with him?" he asked.

"You haven't noticed it?" asked Smithy, with a touch of sarcasm.

"He seems to be a bit out of temper lately," said Redwing. "I dare say that affair of Skinner's bike is worrying him. Skinner makes himself as unpleasant as he can about it."

"That isn't all." The Bounder pursed his lips thoughtfully. "I was rather keen on makin' it clear to him that his jolly old tantrums wouldn't go down in the Remove. But if a man's in real trouble, a fellow doesn't want to take it out of him."

"What trouble could Wharton be in?" asked Redwing, in astonishment.

"Ask me another. Something's up. I saw it in his face when I looked into his study before prep. It's not only his silly temper. If it was only that, I'd find it rather amusin' to draw him, and see him make a fool of himself. But what the dooce can have hit him, Reddy?"

"Goodness knows—if anything has!"

"Something has."

The Bounder said no more on the subject, but he remained in a very thoughtful mood. Billy Bunter rolled into the Rag, and blinked round him through his big spectacles.

"I say, you fellows, is Wharton here?" asked Bunter.

"Wharton's swotting in his study," said Skinner, with a laugh. "Settin' us all a good example, old fat bean! I hear he's taken up Livy. That will give him a leg-up with Quelch."

"Greasing up to the beaks," said Snoop, with a sniff.

"Prize-hunting, I suppose," said Bolsover major. "Catch me mugging up Livy for a rotten prize."

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter. "'Tain't prize-hunting, or greasing up to Quelch, you fellows. He's up against it."

"What do you mean, you fat owl?" asked Bolsover major, with a stare.

"I'm awfully sorry for the chap," said Bunter commiseratingly. "He's rather a bad-tempered beast, and a bit of a rotter, and all that, but when a man's down on his luck, you know——"

"Is Wharton down on his luck?" asked Skinner.

"Well, when a fellow's dependent on a relation, and the relation turns him down, you know——"

"What is the fat idiot burbling about now?" asked Stott.

"And when he's got to leave at the end of the term——" continued Bunter.

"What?"

"That is, unless he can bag a scholarship, like Linley, and stay on——"

"Wharton bag a scholarship!" ejaculated Bolsover major.

"He, he, he! That's what he's taken up swotting for. Fancy Wharton sapping like Linley!" chuckled Bunter. "There's one of the Founder's scholarships going next term, and Wharton's after it. He, he, he!"

Not only Skinner & Co., but a good many other fellows were interested in Bunter's remarks now. This was news for the Remove. Bunter rather prided himself on getting news before the other fellows; and there was no doubt, that owing to his peculiar methods of acquiring information, he was often first in the field.

"The fact is, Wharton's told me all about it," explained Bunter. "He confided in me, you know, and—and asked my advice. He's frightfully cut up at his uncle calling him a burden, and all that. Got his back up to an awful extent——"

"You fat piffler!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, striding over to the Owl of the Remove, his face red with wrath. "What the thump do you mean?"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Here, you let him get on with it!" exclaimed Skinner, deeply interested now. "Tell us all about it, Bunter."

"Wharton told me all about it; at least, I was present when he told Nugent——"

"With a door and a keyhole between—what?" asked the Bounder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Smithy——"

"Get on with it, Bunter!" exclaimed Snoop.

"You see, it's like this," explained Bunter. "Old Wharton seems to have told young Wharton that he was fed-up with him, and wasn't going to stand him any longer, and told him that he could jolly well shift for himself. Told him he was an ungrateful nephew, and that he was done with him, and—and that he could go and eat coke."

"Yes; I fancy I can hear Colonel Wharton putting it like that!" remarked Peter Todd

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, perhaps they weren't the exact words, but that's what it comes to," said Bunter; "and Wharton said that the old blighter could do as he jolly well liked and be blowed to him, and —— Yaroooooh!"

Billy Bunter's interesting tale was interrupted by a grip on the back of his collar. He blinked in alarm at Bob Cherry's red, excited face.

"Ow! Leggo!" he roared.

"You fat fibber——"

"Ow! Wow! Make him leggo, you fellows!" howled Bunter.

"Look here, leave Bunter alone!" exclaimed Skinner.

Bob Cherry did not heed Skinner. With a grasp of iron on Bunter's collar he yanked him to the door of the Rag. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh opened the door.

Thud!

"Whooop!" roared Bunter, as Bob's heavy foot landed and he fairly flew out of the Rag.

There was a bump and a yell outside. Hurree Singh, with a dusky grin, closed the door on Bunter

"You cheeky ass!" exclaimed Skinner.

"What the thump right have you to turn a fellow out of the Rag, I'd like to know."

"Do you want to go after Bunter the same way?" demanded Bob.

"Look here——"

"If you don't you'd better shut up!"

The door of the Rag re-opened, and a fat face and a large pair of spectacles glimmered in.

"I say, you fellows——"

The Bounder's hand jerked up with a hassock in it. The hassock flew with deadly aim.

"Yoooop!"

Bunter disappeared again. This time he stayed disappeared!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Taking the Plunge!

HARRY WHARTON noticed—he could hardly have helped noticing—that Remove fellows regarded him with unusual interest the following day. He had quite expected it, after learning that Billy Bunter had overheard his talk with Nugent in the study.

Bunter was not the fellow to keep such an item of news to himself. Rather was he the fellow to shout it from the house-tops.

Wharton, as captain of the Remove, filled a prominent place in the eyes of the Form. Fellows had been keenly interested in his little trouble with the Bounder, and speculated whether it would go any further; some of them hoping that it would. But they were still more keenly interested to hear that the captain of the Form was "up against" it to so serious an extent that he might have to leave the school.

Skinner remarked that there would be plenty of dry eyes if he went. But Skinner spoke only for himself and a very few others. All the fellows were interested in the revelation, but most hoped that it was only some more of

Continued on page 16.)

The door of the Rag re-opened, and a fat face and a large pair of spectacles glimmered in. "I say, you fellows——" Bunter got no further, for Vernon-Smith's hand jerked up, with a hassock in it, and the missile flew with deadly aim. Biff! "Yoooop!"

Greyfriars Herald

Edited by HARRY WHARTON, F.G.R.

LATEST EXTRA GOOD EDITION

No. 88. LAUGH AND GROW FAT. March 12th, 1932.

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CAN YOU BEAT IT?

"ADVERTISER" writes: "Some weeks ago I inserted a small ad. in your paper, offering to supply free feeds to the first 10,000 applicants. Believe me or not, I had 150,000 replies the first day!"—Verb. Sap.

ADVERTISE IN THE GREYFRIARS HERALD!

NEWS IN BRIEF

DRY UP, BUNTER!

Bunter informs us that for a wager he has just drunk a quart of rainwater.

It may be true, but it takes a lot of swallowing.

SNOOP "TAKES NOTE."

Snoop, who found a fiver in the quad last week, has had it confiscated by Dr. Locke.

Apparently Snoop's sudden wealth has gone to his Head!

SMITHY'S FULL STOP.

Despite accusations of "swank," Vernon-Smith still refuses to do away with the hyphen in his name.

Yet we always thought he was fond of cutting a dash!

NEW TWIST TO OLD TAG.

What Potter and Greene said to the man-eating tiger:

"Go and eat Coker!"

WATER BRAINWAVE!

A stoppage in the drains has resulted in the tuckshop being completely surrounded by water.

We understand that Mrs. Mimble is applying for permission to change its title to the Tuck Ship.

OBVIOUS LEG-PULL!

After a recent performance of "Dick Turpin," it took three fellows half an hour to take off one of Wibley's riding-boots.

We feel sure they must have been pulling his leg!

PROWLING PREFECT'S PREDICAMENT

Midnight Scene on Landing

A strange episode on the landing outside the Remove dormitory one night this week ended in an assaulted prefect lavishing praises on the fellows who had assaulted him!

The incident is all the more noteworthy in that Loder, the prefect in question, had only a few hours before got the same juniors booked for a Head's licking each after prayers the following morning.

Wharton and Cherry and Bull and Vernon-Smith probably felt sleepless at the uncomfortable prospect. At any rate, they found themselves on the landing somewhere around the midnight hour, waiting for a cat burglar Smithy said he had heard climbing up the ivy.

They hadn't waited long before a shadow appeared against the window at the end of the passage and a mysterious stranger opened the window and stepped cautiously in.

His arrival was the signal for the four Removites to attack. Regardless of personal danger, they flung themselves at the nocturnal prowler and brought him violently to the floor, sitting on him afterwards to keep him quiet.

Mr. Quelch arrived on the scene a minute later. Vernon-Smith hastened to explain.

"It's all right, sir," he said. "We've captured a burglar."

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "Keep a firm hold of him, my boys! Let me have a look at him!"

He switched on the light and peered at the juniors' prisoner. Then he emitted a yelp.

"Nonsense! This is not a burglar! It's Loder of the Sixth Form!"

Naturally, the juniors were awfully surprised. Nobody, of course, had ever dreamed that Loder was the kind of fellow to break bounds and get back via the ivy at something after midnight. It would have been dreadful to suspect such a good, kind chap as Loder of that kind of thing!

(Short interval to enable writer to recover from a fit of choking).

Loder, of course, was allowed to rise immediately.

"A most unfortunate mistake, sir," he remarked, looking considerably distressed. "A sound woke me up and, thinking of burglars, I dressed and walked round the House to investigate. Evidently these juniors also heard it and mistook me for the burglar!"

"Extraordinary!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Not a very pleasant experience for me, sir," said Loder, with a hollow sort of croak which was evidently intended to be a laugh. "But I'll pay these juniors the tribute of saying that, considering they thought I was a desperate burglar, they acted with wonderful bravery."

"Indeed, Loder!"

"Their courage was truly magnificent," said Loder, whose face was, for unknown reasons, working convulsively. "I should very much like, if you approve, to ask the Head to cancel the caning they're booked for to-morrow."

Mr. Quelch did approve!

Loder visited the Head first thing next morning and worked the oracle. The licking was cancelled, and the Head sent for the juniors and personally congratulated them on their courage.

Isn't it gratifying to think that a chap like Loder, who has never been an admirer of the Remove, should suddenly realise what heroes we are?

We're all awfully bucked over it.

REDSKINS *versus* COWBOYS

Fierce Fight in Friardale Woods

Surprising scenes were witnessed in Friardale Woods at the Full Dress Rehearsal of the "Cowboy and Indian Spectacle" arranged for the forthcoming Boy Scout rally.

Leader Wharton, who was official producer as well as captain of the cowboy squad, selected a clearing in the woods for the rehearsal, and directed that the Redskins should attack them at 3 o'clock.

"Don't be too earnest about it, of course," he told the Chief Minnehehe. (Tom Brown). "Remember you outnumber us by about two to one, but we drive you back and lick you all hands down in spite of that. Savvy?"

"Oh, rather! I mean, huh!—I savvy the palefaces dog!" corrected Minnehehe, remembering his native tongue.

He then led his Redskin braves away to give them their detailed instructions—in particular, the instructions that they were not to forget, in the heat of the fight, that the palefaces had to win.

At 3 o'clock the cowboys held themselves in readiness for the attack.

Nothing happened, however, for a considerable period—in fact, it was about half-past three, and Leader Wharton and his men were just beginning to wonder what could be the matter, when the ringing war-whoops of the Redskins sounded through the woods and a horde of yelling "savages" burst into sight.

A most realistic battle then developed.

Leader Wharton was surprised to see how realistic it soon became. He had been anxious, of course, to get plenty of realism into his Full Dress Rehearsal, but he hadn't quite bargained for its being quite so realistic as it turned out to be.

When one of the "braves" bashed him on the nut with a tomahawk and another grabbed him by the ears and sat him down on the ground, Wharton came to the conclusion that the joke had gone far enough.

"Ease up, you silly asses!" he yelled, scrambling up again. "Don't you realise that we're supposed to win the battle?"

But, strange to say, the Redskins heeded him not. Their only response was to yell louder and fight harder!

It was only when numbers had told and the palefaces were all biting the dust with Redskins sitting on them that the truth occurred to Leader Wharton.

"My hat!" he gasped. "These chaps aren't our men at all! They're Trumper and his pals from Courtfield!"

It was true! The Redskins, whom they had naturally assumed to be Tom Brown and his men, were Dick Trumper and his pals from the Courtfield Council School!

Amid much groaning and moaning from the prisoners, Trumper then revealed himself by removing his feathery headgear and explained that he had left the original Redskins tied up on the other side of the woods and borrowed their disguises in order to give Leader Wharton and his followers what he described as a "pleasant surprise."

"Now we'll do the same for you and leave you to it," he said cheerfully. "We'll ring up Greyfriars later on in the day and tell 'em where to find you!"

But the best-laid plans are apt to miscarry. No sooner had Trumper explained what he proposed to do than a fresh chorus of war cries rent the air and a crowd of Redskins—minus head-dresses and other articles of Indian wear—appeared in the clearing.

It was Tom Brown and his men! Some hikers had found them tied up where Trumper had left them and had released them.

Needless to say, the combined Greyfriars forces speedily overcame the Council School chaps. Dick Trumper and his followers were put back on the road and tied up in a long line by their hands and feet like a chain-gang of convicts. So it turned out all right, after all!

The Full Dress Rehearsal is still to be held. Where it will be next time we don't know. But we fancy it won't be in the Friardale Woods!

BOXING ON ROLLER-SKATES

SKILL IN NEW SPORT

The first exhibition of boxing on roller-skates was given to a large and enthusiastic audience in the gym. on Wednesday evening, when Johnny ("Basher") Bull met Percy ("Battling") Bolsover in a three-round bout.

The ring is somewhat bigger than in ordinary boxing and occupied almost the whole of the gym.

On the call of "Time!" the two seasoned old veterans of the ring, who were to demonstrate the new sport, shot through opposite doors and flew for each other at fifty miles an hour. Meeting half-way with a loud concussion, they waltzed dizzily round the ring till the end of the round, being apparently unable to stop themselves without assistance.

In the second round, the intrepid principals made terrific efforts to reach each other, but without success. As fast as one hit out, the other would shoot across the ring, and the round closed without a blow being struck.

Round Three opened promisingly, the two skating boxers rushing at each other as though they really meant to get busy. Both feinted at the crucial moment, however, and no harm was caused, apart from injuries to the spectators into whom they landed.

Towards the end of the Round, when it seemed that the encounter was doomed to end without either of the contestants having given or taken so much as a thick ear, a violent and unexpected collision took place between them, Bolsover flicking Bull's chin and Bull grazing Bolsover's nose. Both shot off at a tangent and collapsed at opposite ends of the gym., to the accompaniment of frenzied cheers of the excited crowd.

Both were counted out, and afterwards carried out!

Volunteers are now being asked for in connection with the forthcoming Boxing-on-roller-skates Carnival. We should imagine there'll be an awful rush!

BUNTER—VICTIM OF MELANCHOLY

Friends of William George Bunter are seriously perturbed by the unaccountable attack of melancholia which seems to have attacked him recently.

With a view to investigating the cause, a "Greyfriars Herald" representative called on him this evening.

"Cheer up, old fat bean!" our representative said consolingly. "After all there's plenty to smile about, when you come to think about it."

Moan!

"Let me tell you a few funny riddles, old chap, and perhaps you'll feel better. Here's a new one: Why did the chicken run across the road?"

Groan!

"Ha, ha, ha! You'll never guess the answer! It's 'To get to the other side!' Screamingly funny, ain't it?"

Moan!

And that was all our representative could get out of Bunter! Try as he might, he simply couldn't get Bunter to smile.

After ten minutes of tremendous effort, he gave it up as hopeless and withdrew. Bunter was still moaning as he left.

What can be causing this terrible attack of the blues is a puzzle. We haven't given up all hope of finding the answer to the problem yet. To-morrow morning after he's had the Head's flogging he's booked for we'll interview him again and if we can get a clue to the mystery,

Nightmare of News

Last night, the following events took place:

The Head won a game of marbles against Nugent minor in the Second Form room.

Gosling was given the rank of a prefect.

Mr. Quelch served behind the counter of the tuckshop.

A relative of Bunter's died in Australia and left him half a million pounds.

The writer performed a steeplechase over the beds in the Remove dorm, mounted on a sky-blue charger.

That's the sort of nightmare sub-editors have when they're unwise enough to eat cold college pudding going to bed! Lucky it doesn't happen every night, isn't it?

THE IDOL OF THE FANS

"Goal!"

The cry goes up from 40,000 throats. Arthur Tapwell, captain and centre-forward of the Maimall Wanderers, has just scored the winning goal, with the result that his club has won the League Championship.

See the proud flush on the Maimall skipper's handsome face as he leads his men back to the dressing-room! Note the easy grace of his movements as he passes through the cheering crowd of wildly enthusiastic supporters! He has been kicked in the face, trodden on, and tripped up all over the field, but he shows not a scratch.

How does he manage it?

That's his secret, of course. But we don't mind telling you he's wearing a pair of CHUNKLEY'S FOOTBALL BOOTS, price 15s. upwards.

Stretcher Wanted

Send it along to Bunter in the Rag. He'll need it by the time I've finished with him!—By order, P. BOLSOVER.

RUMOUR DENIED.

We are asked to deny the rumour that Dabney of the Fourth recently held up the footer match between the Fourth and the Remove. The rumour apparently arose out of the circumstance of a player stopping to bathe his injured knee—a case of "dab knee," not Dabney!

DOWN ON HIS LUCK!

(*Continued from page* 13.)

Bunter's "rot"; Bunter being well known as a purveyor of startling news that was generally unfounded. And if it turned out to be true, most of the Remove were ready to sympathise. Even some fellows who generally followed Skinner's lead had no desire to score over a fellow who was down.

"If it's true, I'm jolly sorry!" Bolsover major declared. "Wharton's a bit uppish, in my opinion, and he never gives a man a chance in the matches—or hardly ever. But if he's got it in the neck I'm sorry, and I shall jolly well tell him so, too."

"Guard with your left when you tell him!" suggested Skinner.

"Eh, what?" Bolsover stared. "What do you mean, you ass?"

Skinner grinned.

"I mean what I say, old bean! Guard with your left when you tell his Magnificent Mightiness that you're sorry for him. His thanks for your jolly old sympathy may take the form of a biff on the boko."

When the Remove gathered at their Form-room door for first school Harry Wharton was only too conscious of what was in the thoughts of most of the fellows.

His own face was impassive.

Wharton had been hard hit, as the keen-eyed Bounder had discerned, but he was not the man to wear his heart on his sleeve for daws to peck at.

It was bitterly irritating to him for his personal affairs to be the talk of the Form; but no topic lasted long in the Lower School, and he could only hope that something else would turn up soon to take the attention of the Remove from him.

Certainly he was not the fellow to ask for sympathy, or to want it; or even, perhaps, to accept it very civilly if offered.

His own friends had not spoken to him about the matter yet, though they were feeling troubled and uneasy. If they expected him to speak first, they were disappointed. Only Nugent knew how matters stood; the rest of the Co. only knew what Bunter was tattling up and down the Form. But all the Co. remembered that Wharton had had some sort of a shock the day his uncle had visited him at Greyfriars, and they were worried. And it was no secret that he had failed to get the five pounds he needed from his uncle, and that Skinner's little bill was still hanging about unpaid.

The captain of the Remove did not seem to see the curious glances that were cast at him, or to hear two or three rather audible whispers among the juniors But he was glad when Mr. Quelch came along and opened the Form-room door and they went in to class.

Mr. Quelch was very pleased with his head boy that morning. It was usual for Wharton to hand out a pretty good construe; he was no slacker, either in class or out. But on this particular morning, his "con" was absolutely faultless, and showed that he must have worked hard in prep. Which was sufficiently uncommon in the Remove to please the Remove master, and Mr. Quelch gave Wharton some very warm words of commendation.

"Smug!" murmured Skinner to Snoop.

"Beastly sap!" agreed Snoop.

"Looks as if Bunter's right, and he's after that schol!" grinned Skinner. "Fancy our high-and-mighty Form captain sapping for a schol! Thus are the mighty fallen!"

And Sidney James Snoop giggled.

When the Remove were dismissed for break, Harry Wharton stayed behind to speak to his Form master. That was not uncommon, as head boy often had some matter of duty to discuss with his Form master; but on this occasion it was quite another matter. Mr. Quelch, with that excellent "con" in his memory, gave him a very kind glance as he stopped at the high desk.

"What is it, Wharton?" he asked.

"May I have my name put down for the vacant Founders' Scholarship next term, sir?" asked Harry.

Mr. Quelch started a little.

"You desire to enter for it, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir."

"The examination will take place during the Easter vacation. You have not left yourself a great deal of time to prepare for it—and it is a very difficult examination."

"I know, sir! But with your permission——"

"I am very glad to see one of my boys desirous of gaining such a distinction," said Mr. Quelch graciously. "But——" He paused and coughed, "you are aware, Wharton, that the object of these Founders' Scholarships is chiefly to assist poor scholars—though the rule is not strictly adhered to."

"Yes, sir."

"If, therefore, you are merely seeking a distinction, which I am very glad to see, I should rather recommend you to enter for something else—such as the headmaster's Latin prize—as you are in no need——"

"I am in need, sir," said Harry quietly, but with a spot of colour in his cheeks.

Mr. Quelch started a little.

"I do not quite understand, Wharton!"

"There's been a change, sir—a—a—a change at—at home." Wharton's tongue jibbed at the word; he no longer looked on Colonel Wharton's house as his home. "I shall not be able to remain at Greyfriars, sir, if it depends on Colonel Wharton to keep me here."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, shocked and distressed. "Is that really the case, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir!"

Mr. Quelch looked at him hard.

"I saw Colonel Wharton last Saturday," he said. "I spoke to him for a few minutes. He gave me no hint of this."

Wharton breathed a little hard.

"He has not told me his intentions, sir! But—there has been a change, as I said—and even if he wishes to continue to pay my fees here, I could not possibly go on being a—a burden to him."

"I am very sorry to hear this," said Mr. Quelch. gravely. "In these circumstances, my boy, I approve heartily of your entering for the Founders' Scholarship. I should be extremely sorry to lose you—very sorry indeed. I will give in your name to-day; and any assistance in my power, I shall be only too pleased to render."

"Thank you, sir. You're very kind," said Harry. And he left the Form room, feeling rather lighter at heart now that the die was cast Mr. Quelch was left looking very thoughtful.

"I say, you fellows!" Wharton heard Billy Bunter's fat voice as he came down the corridor. "I tell you it's jolly well true! Only yesterday, he was after my postal order——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I can jolly well tell you it's true! I told him there was nothing doing! The fact is, he's ungrateful—his own uncle said so——"

"Look out, you ass!" muttered Skinner. catching sight of the captain of the Remove coming away from the Form room. "Here he comes."

"Oh crikey!" Billy Bunter spun round in alarm. "I—I say, Wharton, old chap, I—I wasn't saying——"

Harry Wharton passed on, apparently blind and deaf. And Billy Bunter, already squirming in anticipation of the kick he so richly deserved, gasped with relief.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

Just Like Smithy!

"ROT!"

"My dear chap——"

"Rot!" repeated Harry Wharton.

He was frowning.

The Famous Five were gathered in Study No. 1 to tea. Bob Cherry was not, perhaps, wholly pleased and gratified to hear his remarks characterised as "rot." But the cheery smile remained unchanged on his ruddy face. Now that the Co. knew that their chum and leader was in deep waters, they were prepared to bear with him with exemplary patience.

Even Johnny Bull, who was not famous for tact, was very tactful now. If Wharton wanted to blow off steam, as Bob had said privately to his friends, why not let the old fellow blow it off? If a fellow who was up against it couldn't slang his own pals as a relief to his feelings, whom could he slang? That was Bob's cheery view, and his comrades agreed.

"Not at all, old nut," said Bob. "Leave this to your Uncle Robert."

"Rot!"

"The rotfulness is not terrific, my esteemed and absurd Wharton," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur. "I am in full agreement with the esteemed Bob's ludicrous suggestion."

"Same here!" said Johnny Bull. "Why not?"

"I think it's a good idea, Harry," said Frank. "If you take your bike down to a dealer in Courtfield, it will go for next to nothing."

"So long as there's enough to pay Skinner's bill, that's all right," answered Harry.

"There mayn't be!" said Bob. "It's quite easy to give fifteen pounds for a bike; but it's not so easy to sell it second-hand for five."

"That's so!" agreed Johnny Bull. "Besides, a study auction is one of our jolly old customs here. Fellows who are leaving always hold a leaving sale."

"I'm not leaving—yet, at all events," said Harry, curtly.

"I don't mean that, ass! Don't be touchy," said Johnny, with a momentary forgetfulness of his new acquirement of tact.

Wharton's lips set.

Three fellows gave Johnny Bull warning glares. Johnny remembered.

"I—I didn't mean that, old chap!" he said hastily. "Did I say touchy? I—I never meant touchy! I—I meant——" He stammered a little.

"Oh, don't worry!" said Wharton, forcing a laugh. "I dare say I'm touchy. I've been told so pretty often, and once more won't hurt."

"Well, I mean, when a fellow's hard up, it's not uncommon to sell things in the studies," said Johnny Bull, "Smithy had a sale once when he was in his pater's black books and the tips didn't come in. Why, I've heard that old Mauly once called in old Lazarus from Courtfield to buy things when he was hard up. Not that I mean you're hard up, old bean!" added Johnny hurriedly, fearing that he had put his foot in it again.

"I am hard up," said Harry calmly, "as hard up as a fellow could be, I think. It's no secret now that Bunter has babbled it all over the Remove. But——"

"Well, then, take my tip and let's hold an auction in the Rag," said Bob. "We could put a reserve price on the bike, so that it won't go for less than you could get from a dealer. With the summer coming on, lots of fellows will be keen on bagging a good bike cheap. I've heard Smithy say he was getting a new bike for next term——"

"Bother Smithy!"

"Mauly wants a new bike, since he lent his jigger to Bunter," went on Bob. "Any man who lends a jigger to Bunter wants a new bike. There'll be lots of offers. Leave it to me. I rather fancy myself as a jolly old auctioneer."

"It's a rotten idea," said Wharton, frowning. "A fellow doesn't want to advertise to the whole school that he's up against it."

"Well, if you sell your bike in Courtfield, it comes to the same thing," said Johnny Bull. "Fellows won't think you've sold it because you've got lots of money."

Wharton stared at Johnny Bull for a moment, and then burst into a laugh.

"Well, that's so," he said. "I suppose I may as well own up that I'd be glad to get more for it than a dealer would be likely to give. I'm not getting any allowance now——" He broke off sharply. "Have it your own way, if you like, Bob—— I leave it to you."

"Right-ho!" said Bob. "I'll jolly well bag nine or ten quid for that jigger—a good many fellows might go to that."

"No such luck, I'm afraid—but we'll hope for the best," said Harry. "Anyhow, it's in your hands now."

After tea, three of the juniors went down; but Frank Nugent lingered. Wharton was getting out his books. "Swotting" was now the order of the day in Study No. 1. Now that Wharton was definitely down for a difficult examination, due in a few weeks, he had no time to waste; and he did not mean to waste any.

"Harry, old chap—did you mean that about your allowance?" asked Frank. "Isn't your uncle——"

"I've written to him that I shan't need it any more," said Harry.

"But—you do need it."

"Not from him!"

"A fellow doesn't need to spend a lot of money here," said Frank. "But—a fellow must have some, Harry!"

"I can manage—especially if old Bob gets a good price for that jigger—as he thinks. I can make it last. If I get that schol. for next term, I shall pull through all right. A cash allowance goes along with it—same as Linley has."

"I—I can't help thinking that there's some wretched mistake somewhere, Harry, and that your uncle never meant——"

Wharton's face hardened.

"Chuck it, Frank," he said.

He turned to his books, and Frank Nugent followed his friends from the study. Bob Cherry had gone down to the Rag, where he was already busy with pen and paper. Having drawn up a notice to his satisfaction, Bob pinned it on the door of the Rag, for all the Remove, and other Lower School fellows to read at their leisure.

THIS CLEVER GREYFRIARS LIMERICK

which has been sent in by James Dumbreek, of 2, Union Road, Linlithgow, Scotland, wins one of this week's

FINE LEATHER POCKET WALLETS!

Said Bunter to Toddy at tea:
"Is this measly sardine for me?
I'm not on a diet."
Said Peter: "Be quiet,
You know that you're getting it free!"

Now YOU try your hand at writing a limerick, chum, and post the result to me.—EDITOR.

A little later a crowd of juniors were reading it.

"NOTICE!

AUCTION SALE IN THE RAG! FIRST-RATE BIKE, GOOD AS NEW!

The above sale will be held in the Rag after prep, and all Greyfriars is invited to roll up and bid.

AUCTIONEER: R. CHERRY.

N.B. The bike can be seen in the shed at any time before lock-up.

P.S.—It is Wharton's bike."

"I say, you fellows, Wharton's selling his jigger!" chortled Billy Bunter. "What did I tell you fellows?"

"If you have tears, prepare to shed them now, my beloved 'earers," said Skinner. "Sic transit gloria mundi—thus does a potent panjandrum come a jolly old cropper!"

"Must be up against it, if he's selling his jigger," said Bolsover major. "Sorry for the chap."

"I jolly well shan't buy it," said Bunter positively. "I'd have seen him through, you know, if he'd been civil. But chucking cushions at a chap——"

"He won't be frightfully keen on a bid from you, old fat bean," said Peter Todd. "He would hardly let it go for twopence."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Toddy——"

"And if he would, who'd lend Bunter the tuppence?" asked Skinner.

"Beast!"

"It's a jolly good bike," remarked Hazeldene. "I'm jolly well going to bid. If it goes for two or three pounds—— Hallo, Smithy! Looking for a chance to bag a jigger cheap?"

The Bounder strolled into the Rag. He joined the little crowd staring at Bob Cherry's notice. He whistled softly.

"Well, I want a new bike," he said. "Might go to a fiver, perhaps."

Herbert Vernon-Smith strolled out of the Rag again. His face was very thoughtful as he went up to the Remove passage. Tom Redwing met him on the Remove landing.

"Aren't you coming out, Smithy?" he asked.

"I've got to speak to Wharton first."

Redwing frowned.

"Look here, Smithy, let him alone! It's pretty clear now that the chap's down on his luck. Let's get out."

The Bounder gave his chum a rather curious look.

"I've got to speak to his nibs. I've heard that he's thinking of chucking me out of the Rookwood match when it comes along as he was not satisfied with my game at Redclyffe the other day."

"Serve you jolly well right if he does," said Redwing, more sharply than it was his wont to speak to his wayward chum. "Let him alone, anyhow."

"Rats!" said the Bounder, and he went on to Study No. 1.

Redwing, with a very uneasy face, followed him up the passage.

The Bounder stopped at No. 1 and looked in. Harry Wharton was hard at work. He looked up for a moment, and then went on with Titus Livius, ignoring the junior in the doorway.

"Busy?" asked Smithy blandly.

"Yes!" answered Harry, without looking up again.

"Don't want to be interrupted?"

"No!"

"Especially by me!" grinned Smithy.

"Exactly!"

"Well, I haven't much to say——"

"Go and say it to somebody else, whatever it is."

"Somebody else wouldn't do! Somebody else isn't captain of the Remove."

Wharton gave him an impatient stare.

"About that goal I kicked at Redclyffe——" resumed Vernon-Smith.

"For goodness' sake, let's hear the end of that!" exclaimed Wharton. "I'm fed-up with it, and with you. Cut!"

"I hear that you're thinking of chucking me out of the Rookwood fixture——"

"That's no secret!"

"Oh, quite! Well, if you do——" The Bounder paused.

"Well, if I do?" said Wharton, with an unaccustomed sneer. "If I do, what are you going to do about it, confound your impudence?"

"Nothin'!" said the Bounder lightly. "If you do, old bean, you'll be doin' exactly what I should do in your place, if I were football captain, and a man played the goat as I did at Redclyffe."

"Eh!" Wharton stared. "What?"

Tom Redwing, in the passage, stared, too. This was not what he had expected from the Bounder of Greyfriars. Certainly Wharton had not expected it. He could only stare at the Bounder.

"I was rather an ass," said Smithy calmly. "I played the goat and might have lost the match for the side. It was no thanks to me that we drew with Redclyffe—that goal was the rottenest fluke I ever saw. But I needn't tell you that

—you know it! I'm sorry I played the fool."

"Oh!" said Wharton blankly.

"If you chuck me out of the Rookwood game, I shan't kick! But if you like to put me down to play, I'll give you my word not to play the goat again. That's all!" said the Bounder.

He turned and walked away with Redwing, before the astonished captain of the Remove could make any rejoinder. Tom's face was bright as he went down the Remove staircase with his chum. He was as astonished as Wharton; though he realised, on reflection, that it was just like Smithy!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

"Sale Now On!"

BANG!

"What the thump——"

"Only that ass Cherry——"

Bang!

The poker in the vigorous hand of Robert Cherry represented, apparently, the auctioneer's hammer. It came down on the table in the Rag with a resounding bang.

There was a crowd in the Rag after prep. The Remove had rolled up, almost to the last man, for the auction. Harry Wharton was not present; the auction was left in the capable hands of Bob Cherry, and Harry had no desire to witness the proceedings.

The auction of the bike confirmed—if confirmation was needed—the tale told by Billy Bunter. All the Remove knew that the Form captain was up against it. It was known now that his name was down for the Founders' Scholarship next term—an explanation of his new and surprising stunt of "swotting." In most of the fellows' homes, money was "tight" in these days; there were arguments—even heated arguments—from parents, about the many items that came under the head of "extras" in the school bills. But if Wharton was so severely "up against it" that he could only stay on by getting a "schol," it was something more than a pinch at home—it was something like disaster. There was plenty of sympathy—though fellows were rather wary of expressing it. Skinner's warning to Bolsover major to "guard with his left" if he sympathised with Wharton was not wholly unnecessary.

Certainly the captain of the Remove did not want compassion, and preferred not to be given even sympathy. His pride, which had always been high, was higher now than ever—and though he was not exactly looking for offences, he was undoubtedly in a "touchy" temper. A hint of patronage was enough to make his temper flame; and the dividing line between sympathy and patronage was not always clearly marked. Most fellows realised that it was better to mind their own business and to leave Wharton to mind his.

Several fellows, however, had determined to bid for the bike, not so much because they wanted a bike, as to help on the sale; with the idea of helping a lame dog over a stile.

Other fellows, as well as Remove men, were in the Rag; Temple, Dabney and Co. of the Fourth, and Hobson and some of his friends of the Shell. "Auctions" were not uncommon; every fellow who left held a leaving sale, at which uncommonly good prices were often given for articles of which the value was a little dubious. Billy Bunter had held a sale, once, in Study No. 7; though as most of the articles he disposed of did not belong to him, there had been a lot of trouble afterwards. A sale in the Rag was sufficient to draw a crowd; and the room was unusually well filled when Bob Cherry banged the poker on the table as a signal that proceedings were about to proceed.

Bang, bang, bang!

"Chuck that fearful row, you ass!" howled Temple of the Fourth.

"Yaas, for goodness' sake, draw it mild, old bean!" exclaimed Lord Mauleverer, stopping his noble ears.

Bang, bang!

"Gentlemen, chaps, and sportsmen!" roared Bob Cherry. He stood on a chair, by way of a rostrum. "Gentlemen——"

"Cut it short!" suggested Skinner.

"Gentlemen, sportsmen, and Skinner——" recommenced Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you cheeky rotter——" howled Skinner.

"Gentlemen, most of you have read the notice on the door," said the auctioneer. "The sale is now about to take place. I am offering a bike—gent's bike—in splendid condition, completely renovated since last being lent to Billy Bunter——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Gent's bike, two speeds, free wheel, check action. A1 at Lloyd's——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"What offers for his splendid bike, gentlemen, chaps, and fellows? I can recommend this bike. I would buy it myself if I had any money. Did you say forty pounds, Temple?"

"Great pip! No, I jolly well didn't!" gasped Temple of the Fourth. "Forty bob if you like."

"I am waiting for offers for this splendid, magnificent, splendacious jigger, gentlemen. Don't all speak at once."

"Five bob," said Skinner.

"Kick Skinner, somebody——"

"Yarooh! You rotten, cheeky beast, Bull——"

"Quid!" said Bolsover major.

"Gentlemen, I am offered one quid for this munificent—I mean magnificent—bicycle. What do you say, Fry?"

"Nothing, old bean," answered Fry.

"Thirty bob," said Hazeldene.

"Thirty bob I am offered." Bang, bang! Bob Cherry was warming to the work, and the poker was considerably in evidence. What advance on thirty bob, gents?"

"Thirty-five!" said Dabney of the Fourth.

Bang, bang!

"Good! I'll be glad to have it at thirty-five bob," said Dabney.

"Eh? It's not sold yet, ass!" answered the auctioneer.

"It jolly well is! You've knocked it down to me!" exclaimed Dabney warmly.

"I haven't, you fathead! Next offer——"

"You silly ass, what are you banging for if you haven't knocked it down? Auctioneers bang when the sale's over."

Bang, bang, bang!

Bob Cherry's idea seemed to be that the auctioneer's hammer furnished an accompaniment to his remarks.

"Shut up, Dabney! What advance on thirty-five bob?"

"Two quid!" said Hobson of the Shell.

"Two quid I am offered! Going at two quid—going—going—— What did you say, Ogilvy?"

"I said you were kicking up a fearful row, old bean."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order! Members of the public are not allowed to interrupt the auction with frivolous remarks! Gentlemen, roll up and bid! This is not a common or garden bike that I am offering for sale; it's a jigger that's worth any fellow's while—two speeds, batteries complete, tunes in to any station by a mere flick of the dial——"

"Oh, great pip! Does the fathead think he's selling a wireless set?" ejaculated Temple.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, I'm having that bike! Not that I really want a bike, you know; but I'm going to help poor old Wharton now he's down on his luck."

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Five pounds!" squeaked Bunter.

"Where's the five pounds, you fat idiot?" roared the auctioneer, with a devastating glare at the Owl of the Remove.

"Oh, really, Cherry! I'm expecting a postal order——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kick Bunter, one of you fellows!"

"Whoooop!"

"Gentlemen, I am offered two pounds for this magnificacious bike! What advance on two miserable pounds for a bike worth fifteen? Did you say two-pound-ten, Russell?"

"I jolly well didn't!"

"Then shut up! Gentlemen——"

"Three quids!" said Hoskins of the Shell.

"Good! We're getting on," said the auctioneer. "Three quids I am offered for this unequalled, first-class, splendacious jigger!"

Bang, bang, bang!

"What did you say, Mauly?"

"Oh dear! I said I'd scrag you if you didn't ease off with that poker."

"You silly chump! Next offer——"

"Three-ten!" said Stewart of the Shell.

"Three-ten — three-ten! Going at three-ten! Is that Fishy there? Fishy, what offer are you making for this splendid bike? You're a business man and an American, so you naturally want to get in on the ground floor. What are you offering for this bike?"

"Nix, I guess!" answered Fisher T. Fish.

"Gentlemen," cried Bob Cherry, "I am offered thirty bob for this munificent—I mean magnificent—bicycle." Bang! "Any further offers?" Bang! The auctioneer was warming to his work, and the poker was considerably in evidence.

"Kick, Fishy, one of you chaps!"

"Yoop! Jerusalem crickets! I guess— Yaroooooop!"

Bang, bang!

"Gentlemen, we're losing time! What advance on three pounds ten shillings for this munificrous bike?" roared the auctioneer.

There was a pause in the proceedings. Three pounds ten shillings was not a large sum for the article offered, but it was a large sum for most Remove fellows. Lower Fourth financial resources were limited.

The Bounder was leaning on the mantelpiece, his hands in his pockets, and he had not spoken yet. Lord Mauleverer was sitting on the end of the table, with a thoughtful expression on his face.

Now, as there was a pause—filled in by vigorous bangs of the poker—the Bounder chipped in.

"Four pounds!"

"Five!" said Lord Mauleverer.

"Six!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Seven!" said Mauly.

"Thank goodness, we're going at last!" chuckled the auctioneer. "Gentlemen, I am offered seven pounds for this magnificent, munificent, marvelious jigger! Who's going over seven pounds? Going—going——"

"Eight!" said Smithy.

"Nine!" said Lord Mauleverer.

"Ten!"

"Twelve!"

There was a buzz of keen interest in the crowded Rag. Bids were getting far beyond the resources of the juniors now. Only Smithy and Lord Mauleverer were able to go into these figures.

Bob Cherry was grinning with glee. He had hoped that the price would run up as far as ten pounds—which would have been a pretty good price for a bike, which, although well cared for by its owner, was, after all, a second-hand jigger. But the ten pound mark was passed now, and the bids were approaching the original cost of the machine.

"Twelve quids I am offered by a jolly old Peer of the Realm," said the auctioneer.

Bang, bang, bang!

"What advance on twelve quids?"

"Thirteen!" said Vernon-Smith.

Tom Redwing gave his chum a curious look. The Bounder's face was expressionless.

"Thirteen's an unlucky number for you, Mauly, if Smithy gets this splendacious jigger!" roared the auctioneer. "Going—going——"

"Fourteen!" said Lord Mauleverer. "I'm not goin' to be beaten, dash it! Fourteen quids, old bean!"

"Fifteen!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Bravo, Smithy! Go it, Mauly!"

"Play up, Mauly!" roared the juniors, keenly interested in the contest between his lordship and the Bounder. "Don't let Smithy beat you, Mauly!"

"No fear!" said Lord Mauleverer, "I'm frightfully keen on baggin' that bike! My jigger's never been the same since I lent it to Bunter——"

"Oh, really, Mauly——"

"Going—going——" Bang, bang, bang!

"Sixteen!" said Lord Mauleverer.

"Seventeen!" said Herbert Vernon-Smith.

"Eighteen!" said Lord Mauleverer. "No—hold on a minute! I forget whether I've got enough tin."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Buck up, fathead!"

Lord Mauleverer extracted his Russia-leather note-case from his pocket, and examined the contents. It was well filled with currency notes. Except for the Bounder, Lord Mauleverer was the only fellow in the Remove who carried a note-case wadded with those useful slips of paper. Still, even in Mauly's case there was a limit.

"Oh gad!" said Mauleverer, "I shall have to make it seventeen pounds ten! That's my limit."

"Eighteen!" said the Bounder coolly.

"Gentlemen, eighteen pounds I am offered for this splendacious jigger! What advance on eighteen pounds? Going—going at eighteen pounds——"

The auctioneer paused. But there was no further bid. Any fellow who offered more than eighteen pounds for a jigger that had originally cost fifteen, had, in the general opinion, more money than sense. A fellow like Smithy, who had heaps of money, and who hated to be beaten in any contest into which he entered, might do it—but nobody else was likely to follow his example.

"Going—going at eighteen pounds—going—going—GONE!" The poker banged on the table. "Gentlemen, this magnificent bike is knocked down to Smithy for the sum of eighteen pounds."

"Fools and their money are soon parted!" remarked Skinner.

"Shut up, Skinner!"

Bang! Bob Cherry gave a final bang with the poker in sheer exuberance of spirits, and jumped down.

"Smithy, old bean, the bike's yours! Squeeze out the quids, old nut."

Many eyes were on the Bounder as he extracted three five-pound notes and three pound notes from a case that still contained some of both, and handed them over to the auctioneer. The sale was over—the most surprising and successful sale that ever had been held in the Rag.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Unexpected!

TRAMP!

Harry Wharton laid down his pen, pushed Livy away, and rose from the study table as there was a heavy tramp of feet outside Study No 1.

He had been swotting hard, and had almost forgotten the sale that was to take place in the Rag after prep. But the tramp of feet outside the study reminded him.

The door burst open, as if a battering-ram had struck it.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry.

Bob tramped in with a tramp reminiscent of the "huge, earth-shaking beast" in Macaulay. Nugent and Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh followed him in, with smiling faces. The Co. had good news for the fellow who was down on his luck, and they were glad to be the bearers of it.

Wharton smiled faintly. He was tired, and a little dispirited, and it did him good to see the cheery faces of his friends. Wharton had never been a slacker in class, but swotting for an examination was a different matter, and there was no doubt that it did not agree with him.

"You can chuck jolly old Livy now, old bean," boomed Bob. "It's dorm in a quarter of an hour, anyhow! We've had the sale."

"The salefulness was terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed Bob is a terrific and preposterous auctioneer."

"Well, I fancy I can push a sale all right!" said Bob, rather complacently. "I can tell you I made the men buck up! We've sold the jolly old jigger, Wharton."

"Good!" said Harry.

"You'll never guess what I've bagged for it!" grinned Bob.

"If you've bagged five quids, old chap, I shall be satisfied," said Harry. "That's all I really want."

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Guess again!" he said.

"Well, if it's more than that, the more the merrier," said Wharton. "The fact is, the jigger was practically as good as new, and a fellow who really wanted one would not lose by going up to ten quids. Not that you've got ten, of course."

"Ha, ha, ha! Guess again!"

Wharton stared.

"Not more than ten, surely?" he asked. "The jigger only cost fifteen, and that was some terms ago."

"Auctions are auctions," chuckled Bob. "Fellows bid against one another, and don't choose to be beaten, see? That's where we come in. Mauly kept the bidding on to seventeen pounds ten——"

"What?" exclaimed Wharton.

"But Smithy beat him to it——"

"Smithy!"

"What do you think of that?" chortled Bob, laying out three five-pound notes and three pound notes on the study table. "Eighteen quids, old bean! Eighteen jolly old quids. What!"

Harry Wharton stared blankly at the notes. His chums looked at him, with smiling faces, expecting a responsive smile. But the captain of the Remove did not smile. After the first stare of astonishment, his brow darkened.

The cheery grin faded from Bob's ruddy face. He realised that something was wrong, though he could not yet guess what it was.

Wharton's lips set hard.

"Let's have this clear," he said. "Are you telling me that Vernon-Smith has paid eighteen pounds for a jigger that he jolly well knows only cost fifteen?"

"You see, in an auction——"

"Smithy and Mauly got excited over the bidding, and started out to beat one another!" explained Johnny Bull. "If Mauly hadn't run out of tin, I believe he would have gone over twenty."

Frank Nugent eyed his chum anxiously. He had a glimmering of what was in Wharton's mind, which the other fellows had not yet guessed. Harry Wharton's face was hardening.

"I'm much obliged to Mauleverer!" said the captain of the Remove quietly. "But I should have expected a little more tact from him."

"Tact!" repeated Bob blankly.

"Yes—Mauly isn't a bounder like Smithy, as a rule."

Bob Cherry stared.

"Blessed if I know what you're getting at," he said rather testily. "And I don't see why you want to call Smithy names. He's bought the bike and paid up——"

"Why?"

"Why?" repeated Bob. "Because he wanted the bike, I suppose. I knew he was getting a new jigger next term; he said so."

"He can afford to buy a new one if he likes—or a dozen new ones, as the fellow's reeking with money," said Wharton, with a curl of the lip. "He doesn't want a second-hand jigger."

Bob looked rather grim.

"Don't be an ass, old chap! Smithy had as much right to bid as any other fellow, I suppose, even if you did have a row with him over a football match the other day."

"It's you that's the ass!" said Harry coldly. He made a gesture towards the notes on the table. "You can take that money back where it belongs."

"What?" gasped Bob.

"My esteemed chum——" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Look here," growled Johnny Bull. "What the dickens are you driving at, Wharton? What the thump do you mean, I'd like to know?"

Wharton's eyes were smouldering.

"I'll tell you what I mean, if you're too dense to understand. All the Remove knows that I'm hard up—but they ought to know, too, that I'm not an object of charity——"

"Charity!" repeated Bob.

"What do you call it?" exclaimed Wharton fiercely. "Do you think I'm going to take Vernon-Smith's money, confound him? Hang the fellow and his cheek!"

There was silence in Study No. 1 after that outburst. Bob Cherry was breathing rather hard.

"I suppose you mean that Smithy ran up the bidding like that to help a lame dog over a stile?" said Bob at last.

"What else, you fathead?"

"Well, if he did, I think it was jolly good-natured of him, especially as you were ragging him the other day."

"You can call it good-natured if you like. I call it rotten impudence! Does he think I'm a fellow to be patronised because he's putrid with money?" exclaimed Wharton savagely.

"I don't see that it's patronising."

"Rot!" said Johnny Bull. "Fellows often give more than a thing's worth at a study sale. Utter rot!"

"Not to this tune, anyhow," said Harry.

"Well, perhaps Smithy spread himself a little. But I think it was jolly generous of him if he did."

"He can keep his generosity! Take that money back to him and tell him the sale's off, and he can go and eat coke!"

Not one of the juniors moved to touch the notes on the table. Johnny Bull's look was one of grim disapproval. Nugent and the nabob were distressed, and Bob Cherry did not conceal his annoyance. After the trouble he had taken with the auction, and the unexpected success he had had, this reception from the captain of the Remove was neither grateful nor comforting.

"If that's what you want, you can handle the matter yourself, Wharton," said Bob gruffly. "I'm certainly not going to insult a chap because you've got your back up about nothing."

"The sale's over now, Harry," said Nugent. "I—I don't think you can call it off—not without Smithy's consent, anyhow."

Wharton's eyes glinted.

"He will call it off fast enough if I tell him what I think of him," he said. "Where's Smithy now?"

"He went to his study——"

"Will you take his money back to him, Bob?"

"No," said Bob curtly, "I won't!"

"Then I will."

And Wharton, gathering up the notes in a crumpled handful, strode out of the study, leaving his chums gazing at one another in dismay.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Blow for the Bounder!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH, leaning back in the armchair in his study, selected a cigarette and lighted it. Redwing had not come up to the study. Had he been there the Bounder would not have smoked. His bad habits were seldom displayed under the eyes of his chum. With the cigarette in his mouth, Smithy leaned back, his hands clasped behind his head, a rather thoughtful wrinkle in his brow.

Good and evil were strangely mixed in the Bounder, and at present the good had decidedly the upper hand. A few days ago he had been deliberately provoking trouble with the captain of the Remove, on no ground except a suspicion that Wharton was seeking to "throw his weight about," as the Bounder expressed it. Smithy had wished to make it clear—very clear—that he at least was not to be hectored. Now he was rather ashamed of that wish. Wharton, really, had not hectored; and if he had been a little impatient, even a little disagreeable, there was ample explanation in the disaster which, as Smithy now knew, had fallen on him.

Smithy knew the facts of the matter no more than any other Remove man; but it was plain to all that Wharton, like Lucifer, Son of the Morning, had fallen from his high estate, and great was the fall thereof.

Wharton had never been wealthy, like Mauly, or Newland, or the Bounder himself, but he had been well off in this world's goods—the nephew and heir of a man in good circumstances, with something of his own to come when he was of age. Obviously, the change had been far-reaching when it was now known that he could only stay

on at Greyfriars if he bagged a "schol," like Linley, or Penfold, or Wilkinson of the Fourth.

The Bounder was not a fellow to sympathise deeply with a "lame duck." But he was not by any means the fellow to hit a man who was down. Wharton was down now, and Smithy was sorry that he had added to his trouble by ragging him. He had made what amends he could, so far as that went, and he had weighed in at the "auction" in the Rag with the idea of doing the chap a good turn. The same idea had obviously been in Lord Mauleverer's mind. His lordship had bid over the value of the jigger, and it was not because he did not know its value.

Eighteen pounds was a large sum, even for the wealthy Bounder. He was not sorry by any means that he had spent it as he had done, but it meant that he would have to "draw in his horns" in some other directions. That was what he was thinking of now, as he smoked the cigarette in his study, and he smiled rather sarcastically as he thought it over. The fellows mostly took the view that he had bid so recklessly at the auction because another fellow had bid against him, and he hated to be beaten. And that, indeed, was quite in keeping with Smithy's character.

That had not, however, been his motive. His motive had been to help a lame dog over a stile in a way that would spare his pride and not place him under any obligation. It was a motive that came naturally to a fellow like Mauly, but not so naturally to the Bounder, and he was rather inclined to mock himself for having been what he would have called "soppy." Still, it was done now, and he did not regret it.

Helping "lame ducks" was not much in his line, and the sum he had parted with was large; but on the whole he was satisfied. And the Bounder was thinking, too, that for the rest of that term he would be a bit tactful with Wharton, and give him no trouble if he could help it. The chap had enough to stand, without ragging in the Remove.

A sharp knock at the study door interrupted Smithy's unusually amiable reflections

He sat up as the door opened, and Harry Wharton came in. He took the cigarette from his mouth, and stared at the captain of the Remove. His face flushed a little. He disliked to be caught smoking, like a silly fag, and he did not miss the expression of contempt that flashed over Wharton's face as he saw the cigarette.

He threw the half-smoked cigarette into the study fire, and sat with his eyes fixed on Wharton's face. He did not like the look on that face the least little bit, but his good resolutions were still fresh in his mind.

"Hallo, old bean!" he said casually. "Take a pew! How's jolly old Livy goin' on?"

Wharton did not take a "pew." It was quite clear that he had not come to Study No. 4 with any pleasant intentions. But the Bounder, for once, was determined not to quarrel if he could help it. If the fellow's worries and troubles made him nervy, Smithy was going to be tolerant.

"Never mind that," said Harry. "I've just heard from Bob that you bought my bike at the sale in the Rag."

"Yes, that's so," assented the Bounder, wondering what on earth was the cause of the pale, concentrated anger in the face of the captain of the Remove. "I was going to get a new jigger this summer——"

"You can wash all that out!" said Wharton curtly. "The sale's off."

"Eh?"

"There's your money."

Vernon-Smith stared blankly as Wharton laid, or, rather, threw, the crumpled banknotes and currency notes on the study table.

His eyes glinted.

"I don't quite catch on," he said. His voice was cool. But the Bounder was getting angry now. "The sale's not off. I've bought the jigger."

"You don't want the jigger, and you know it!"

Smithy raised his eyebrows.

"That's my bizney, I suppose?"

"Mine, too," said Wharton. "You know that the bike cost only fifteen pounds new, and you've given eighteen for it. Do you think I'm a fool?"

"Well, yes. As you ask me, I do," said Smithy coolly. "I bought the bike fair and square, after a lot of bidding. If you think it went too cheap——"

"You know I don't think so."

"Blessed if I know what you think!" drawled the Bounder. "Blessed if I care much, either!" Smithy's good resolutions were fading away. "If you've come here to rag——"

"I've come here to tell you the sale's off and to hand you back your money. There it is!"

"It isn't my money, it's yours. The jigger's mine."

Wharton trembled with anger.

"I tell you the sale's off! Do you think I'm taking your money? You've heard Bunter's tattle——"

"Has Bunter been sayin' anythin'?" yawned the Bounder.

"There's no need to jaw." Wharton controlled his anger. "I dare say you meant well—in your own way. I don't know. Whether you meant well or not, it comes to the same thing. Do you fancy that I'm a fellow like Bunter, or Skinner, to be patronised?"

"Who's patronisin' you, old bean?"

"You're trying to, at least. I was rather an ass to let Bob have his way, but I never thought of anything like this. I'm taking that jigger down to Courtfield to-morrow to sell it to the dealer for what he will give. That's that!"

Wharton turned to the door.

"Hold on!" said the Bounder. "You seem to forget that it's my jigger now, bought and paid for."

Wharton turned back again, his eyes flashing.

"I've told you the sale's off."

"That's for me to say," answered the Bounder coolly.

"You mean to say that you want to put a fellow under an obligation, whether he likes it or not? You rotten outsider!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith rose to his feet. His face was grim, and his eyes gleaming. This was the outcome of his departing from his usual manners and customs, and helping a "lame duck." The Bounder was quite as angry as Wharton now.

"Better language, please!" he said, setting his lips.

"I shan't mince my words with you. Who the dickens asked you to butt in? There's your money! Keep it!"

"I'll keep it!" said Vernon-Smith. "I shan't be sorry to, as a matter of fact. You can call off the sale if you like. If your beggarly pride is all you've got left, make the most of it. And get out of my study before I throw you out."

Wharton gave him a fierce look. The Bounder's lip curled tauntingly. But with an effort, the captain of the Remove controlled his anger, and strode out of the study. The door closed after him with a bang.

Vernon-Smith drew a deep breath.

"So that's that!" he muttered.

Slowly, he gathered up the notes from the table, and thrust them into his notecase. His lips were set, and his eyes gleaming. For once, he had followed a generous impulse, and his generosity had been thrown back in his teeth. The Bounder was not likely to err in the same manner again, in a hurry.

His good resolutions were thrown to the four winds now. Generally, when the Bounder was mixed up in a row, he was in the wrong; as he coolly and cynically admitted to himself. This time, he was not in the wrong. If he had erred, he had erred in good company, for Lord Mauleverer had certainly had the same intentions. Smithy gave a harsh laugh. He had meant to do the fellow a good turn—certainly not to patronise him—he had meant to go easy, to make things as easy as he could for the fellow who was down on his luck—and this was his reward. If it pleased the captain of the Remove to ask for trouble, Herbert Vernon-Smith was not the fellow to say him nay. The Bounder was implacable now.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Short, But Not Sweet!

HARRY WHARTON wheeled out his bicycle the following afternoon, and rode away to Courtfield. It was Saturday, a half-holiday, and as a rule the Famous Five of the Remove were together on a half-holiday. Wharton went off, on this occasion, without a word to his chums, and Bob Cherry, who saw him go, looked a little grim.

Bob was feeling rather sore. He had

made an unexpected success of the auction in the Rag, and instead of being pleased thereby, Wharton had cut up rusty, "rowed" with Smithy, and called the sale off. It looked as if Wharton, in his present mood, was prepared to scent patronage in anything and everything; at this rate, a fellow would have to be wary even about asking him to tea. It was quite at variance with Bob's own cheery and unsuspicious nature, and he did not like it.

When the captain of the Remove returned to Greyfriars, he was on foot. The bike, evidently, had been disposed of at last. He went directly to Skinner's study in the Remove.

Most of the fellows were out of the House, on a bright spring afternoon; but Skinner & Co. were in No. 11—being very much given to frowsting. Wharton rapped at the door, threw it open, and walked in—into a haze of cigarette smoke.

Skinner and Snoop and Stott glared at him. His sudden entrance had startled the frowsters of the Remove.

"Oh! Only you!" said Snoop, replacing in his mouth the cigarette he had hastily withdrawn as the door opened.

"What the dickens do you want?" demanded Skinner surlily.

Wharton threw a paper on the study table. It was a receipted bill.

"That account's settled," he said curtly. "There's the receipt. That's all."

Without waiting for a reply, he left the study. Skinner picked up the receipt, stared at it, put it in his pocket, and shrugged his shoulders.

"So he's paid up—at last!" said Snoop.

"Looks like it! Time he did, I think," grunted Skinner. "It was up to him, after getting my bike smashed up. They've been dunning me to pay. Like his cheek to let it hang about so long."

"The dear man's hard up!" giggled Snoop. "I can't make him out, though. I hear that he called off that sale, and chucked Smithy's money back at him. I'll bet he didn't get half so much from a dealer."

"Must be an ass!" said Stott. "Smithy's money is as good as anybody else's, I suppose."

"He's rowed with Smithy over it," said Skinner. "Goodness knows why. He doesn't seem so pally with his own friends as usual, either. I dare say they're getting fed-up with his rotten temper. I know I should."

Quite indifferent to the opinion of Skinner & Co., Harry Wharton went along to his own study.

Skinner's little bill was off his mind now, which was a relief. That bothering affair was over and done with.

But his face was clouded, as he stood at the study window, looking out into the bright sunshine of the quad.

A Form match was due that afternoon, with the Fourth, the captain of the Remove was standing out of it. The game was already starting, and he could see the footballers in the distance.

Certainly, his help was not needed, to beat Temple & Co., of the Fourth. Vernon-Smith, as vice-captain, was taking the command. Wharton would have been glad enough to join the footballers, however, a game in the keen air would have done him good. But his books lay in a pile ready on the study table; that afternoon was to be devoted to "swotting."

It was necessary; but it was irksome enough. He was not in a hurry to begin swotting.

He took a letter from his pocket and read it over, for the fifth or sixth time. It was from Colonel Wharton.

"Dear Harry,—Your letter surprised me very much. You seem to have taken an unduly serious view of what I told you. Circumstances are not so bad that I cannot afford your usual allowance. That is an absurd idea. You will, of course, receive it as usual.

"Your affectionate uncle,
"JAMES WHARTON."

It was a perplexing letter. It was such a letter as Harry would have expected from his uncle, had Colonel Wharton been the kind and affectionate guardian he had always believed him to be. But it was not what he expected from the man who had referred to his nephew as selfish, ungrateful, and a burden.

A twinge of painful doubt came into his mind, in spite of himself. Was it possible that, as Nugent supposed, there was some ghastly mistake in the matter—that his angry pride was up in arms without cause? Nugent, after all, was unprejudiced, and Wharton realised that his own passionate temper was likely to lead him astray.

But his face hardened again.

There was no room for a mistake. How could there be a mistake? How could he doubt what he had seen written in the man's own hand?

To go to his uncle, as Frank counselled—to go as a poor relation anxious and alarmed at finding himself out of favour—his cheeks burned at the thought.

He crumpled the letter in his hand and tossed it into the study fire. That was that.

He was sitting at the table, pen in hand, when Frank Nugent came into the study.

"Jolly old Livy?" asked Frank.

"No; I'm writing a letter. Aren't you playing footer?"

Nugent shook his head. He did not add that the Bounder had told him to stand out.

Wharton finished the letter. It was brief.

"Dear Uncle James,—I do not need my allowance any further, and have made up my mind not to take it.

"Your nephew,
"H. WHARTON."

He addressed the envelope, with a grim face, Nugent watching him rather uneasily.

"That's to your uncle, Harry?" he asked.

"It's to Colonel Wharton."

"I—I hope you haven't——" Nugent paused.

Wharton tossed the letter across the table.

"Read it," he said.

Frank's face was very grave as he looked at it.

"I wouldn't send that, old chap!" he said. "You know what I think—and the more I think about it, the more I'm convinced that you've got it all wrong somehow. That letter will hurt your uncle."

"I hardly think so," said Wharton, with a curl of the lip. "Anyhow, I've got to make it clear that I'm taking nothing more from him."

"I wish you'd see him instead——"

"What rot!"

Wharton sealed the letter, and went to the door. Nugent, in great uneasiness, caught him by the arm.

"Look here, Harry," he said earnestly, "you know I'm your friend, and you know I've got a level head. Take my advice and don't post that letter——"

"I'm going to catch the collection with it."

"It will offend your uncle."

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Let it!" he answered.

"I tell you, I believe you've got it all wrong somehow! I can't explain how—but I'm certain of it. You're acting like a hot-headed ass!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Thanks for your opinion!"

"Look here, Harry——"

"Oh, rats!"

Wharton shook his arm free and left the study. A few minutes later the letter was dropped in the post.

When he came back to the study Frank was no longer there. The captain of the Remove sat down to Livy and that ancient war, "Quod Hannibale duce Carthaginienses cum popolo Romano gessere." It was not a happy afternoon.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER
Asking for It!

"WHARTON!"

"Yes, sir!"

It was Monday afternoon, and the Remove had come into class. Mr. Quelch had something to say to his head boy before the lesson began, and his expression was very kindly as he addressed him.

"I have received a telephone call from your uncle, Colonel Wharton," he said. "The colonel is coming to the school this afternoon to see you, and will be here soon after class."

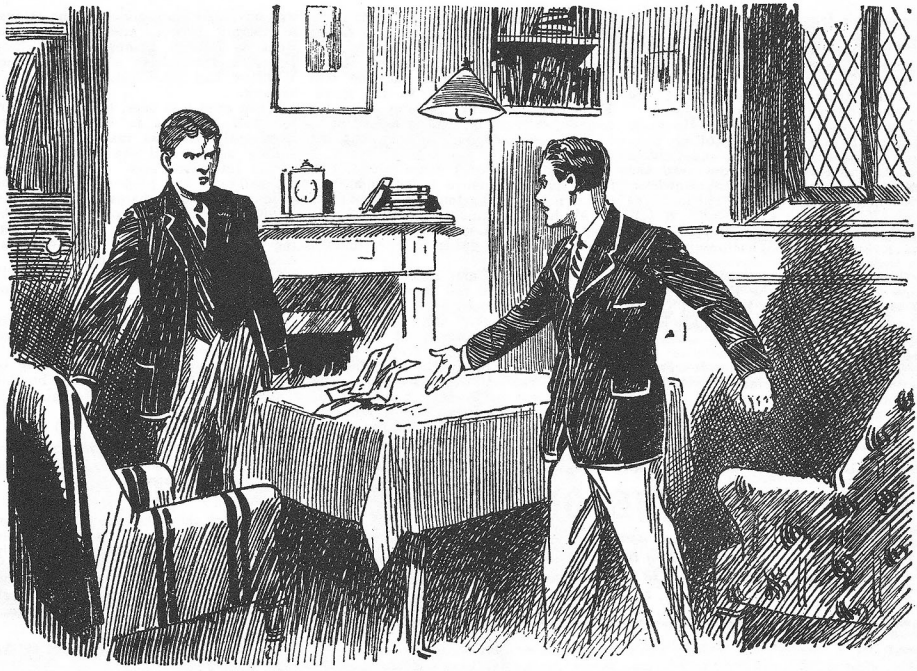
Wharton started a little and compressed his lips.

"You had better, therefore, remain within gates after class to-day, Wharton!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Very well, sir!"

After which the lesson commenced. Wharton, however—though of late a model pupil—did not give much attention to the lesson.

No doubt Nugent was right, and the colonel had been offended by that curt reply to his letter. Perhaps he had been perplexed also. Anyhow, it was clear that that was why he was coming down to Greyfriars again so soon. His nephew—that selfish, ungrateful nephew, as Wharton reflected bitterly—



"I've just heard that you bought my bike at the sale," said Wharton curtly. "Well, you can wash all that out! The sale's off!" "Eh?" "There's your money, Vernon-Smith!" The Bounder stared blankly as Wharton tossed the crumpled banknotes and currency notes on to the study table.

was to be called over the coals apparently.

Frank Nugent glanced at his chum several times in class that afternoon. He could see that Wharton was thinking—not about his lessons—and he was uneasy.

Immediately the Remove were dismissed Wharton took his cap and went out into the quad. Nugent and the rest of the Co. joined him at once.

"One of you fellows lend me a bike?" asked Harry casually.

"The lendfulness will be a terrific pleasure, my absurd chum!" said the Nabob of Bhanipur cheerily.

"Thanks, Inky; I'll borrow yours, then. I'll try not to get it crocked like Skinner's!" added Wharton, with a smile.

"The crockfulness would not disturb my ridiculous equanimity, my esteemed Wharton."

"You're going out, Harry?" asked Nugent.

Wharton was already making for the bikeshed, and his comrades walked with him.

"Yes," said Harry.

"But you haven't forgotten what Quelch told you——"

"Not at all!"

"Well, your uncle may be along any time now——"

"I know!"

"But you'll miss him, at this rate!" said Bob Cherry.

"Quite!"

"But look here, old chap——" said Johnny Bull.

"I'm afraid I can't stop to talk now, old bean," said Wharton politely. "I want to get clear."

"Before your uncle comes, do you mean?"

"Before Colonel Wharton comes—yes."

Harry Wharton went into the bikeshed, and his friends stopped in the doorway, worried and disturbed.

"This won't do, you men," said Bob in a low voice. "Blessed if I can make the chap out these days—but he can't treat his uncle like that, a governor of the school, too."

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh shook his dusky head.

Wharton lifted the nabob's bicycle from the stand and drew it to the door. The four juniors there did not move.

"Let a fellow pass, you chaps," said Harry.

"My esteemed and idiotic chum," said Hurree Singh earnestly, "the boot is on the other absurd leg. Your absurd and excellent uncle——"

"You can't do it, Harry!" said Nugent.

Wharton looked at him with steely eyes.

"I'm the best judge of that!" he answered. "I can't keep him away from Greyfriars if he chooses to come, but I can keep from seeing him when he comes—and I'm going to."

"He will wait——"

"He will not see me if he does!"

"Quelch told you to stay within gates——"

"He said I'd better—but I'm the judge of that, too. I don't think it would be better!" said Wharton coolly.

"The esteemed Quelch will be infuriated," said Hurree Singh in distress, "and your absurd uncle will have his ridiculous back up."

"That needn't worry you. Will you let me pass?"

"Look here!" exclaimed Johnny Bull gruffly. "Don't be a fool! You can't carry on like a goat, and you know you can't! Chuck it! I jolly well wouldn't lend you my bike to dodge your uncle!"

"I haven't asked for it. But if Inky says the same——"

"My esteemed Wharton——"

"Are you lending me this jigger, Inky?"

"It is not the proper caper to go for a ridiculous spin at the present absurd moment," said the nabob, shaking his head.

"As you like!"

Wharton replaced the bicycle on the stand. He came back to the doorway where his worried chums were still grouped.

"Let me pass!" he snapped.

"Look here, Harry——" began Nugent.

Wharton's eyes glittered.

"This is my affair," he said. "I haven't asked any of you fellows to butt in, that I know of. When I ask you, it will be time enough. Now let me pass."

And, as the Co still did not stir, the captain of the Remove shoved unceremoniously through them and left the bikeshed. They stared after him as he went down to the gate. The nabob ran after him.

"My esteemed Wharton, if you have made up your absurd mind to play the giddy ox, the lendfulness of the jigger would——"

"Keep it!"

Wharton turned out of the gate and disappeared. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh

rejoined his friends with distress on his dusky face.

"The absurd fat will be in the ridiculous fire now!" he said.

Johnny Bull grunted.

"I'm getting fed-up with this!" he growled.

The Co. walked back to the House in silence. It was a quarter of an hour later that a taxi drove in, and Colonel Wharton alighted and went into the House. The Co. had a glimpse of him, and noted that his bronzed old face was unusually grave in expression. A few minutes more, and Trotter, the page, was seeking Harry Wharton—who was not to be found.

"I say, you fellows!" Billy Bunter came grinning into the Rag after tea. "I say, old Wharton's here, and young Wharton's gone out; and old Quelch is looking as fierce as a tiger. He, he, he!"

"The young Obadiah doesn't want to see the old Obadiah!" remarked Skinner. "But what a neck!"

Colonel Wharton was rather an object of interest to the Remove fellows for some time afterwards. He spent some time in Mr. Quelch's study, and called on the Head; and after that he was heard pacing the visitors' room. Later Billy Bunter announced that he was walking up and down in the quad. Evidently he was waiting for his nephew to come in, and it looked as if his nephew intended to stay out till calling-over.

But when call-over came round, one fellow in the Remove failed to answer to his name. Wharton was absent!

"My hat!" murmured Skinner. "He's keeping it up! Look at Quelchy's face! Looks as if he's going to bite, doesn't he?"

"Wharton's the man to ask for it, and no mistake!" said the Bounder, with a grin. "Quelch looks as if he will give him what he's askin' for."

When the Remove went to their studies to prep, Frank Nugent found himself alone in Study No. 1. Wharton, who had cut call-over, seemed to be going to cut prep also. No doubt he was making sure that Colonel Wharton would be gone before he returned. It was obviously impossible for the colonel to remain longer, and some of the Remove fellows grinned when they heard a taxi drive away. Colonel Wharton had gone without seeing his nephew.

When prep was over, however, Wharton had not put in an appearance. Apparently he was making assurance doubly sure. All the Remove were keenly interested now. A fellow who cut call-over and prep was booked for serious trouble, whatever his motive might be. And there could be no doubt about Wharton's motive. He was dodging a meeting with a relative who was also a governor of the school.

"I say, you fellows, he's come in!" Billy Bunter howled into the doorway of the Rag at a quarter-past nine.

"Blessed if I didn't begin to think he was going to cut dorm, too!" grinned Skinner.

The fellows crowded out of the Rag to see Wharton. He looked tired, but his face was calm and cool. He raised his

(*Continued on page 27.*)

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS!

Always glad to hear from you, chums, so drop me a line to the following address: The Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

FROM a reader who merely signs himself "Z," and gives no address, comes a query regarding

THE HIGHEST WIRELESS AERIAL.

He wants to know the height of the Daventry wireless poles. They are 500 ft. in height. He also asks which are the highest in the world. I am not quite sure on this point, as the exact figures are not available. I should think, however, that the distinction probably belongs to the Eiffel Tower, which is 985 ft. high.

Several of my readers have written, asking me for more

THINGS YOU'D HARDLY BELIEVE.

So here goes:

There is a railway that runs over the sea! The Key West Railway runs from the mainland of Florida to Key West, an island 111 miles from the coast. It crosses innumerable coral islands on the way, each of which is connected by long, low bridges.

Some flakes of snow are as large as a soup tureen! They have been known to be fifteen inches in length, and eight inches in thickness! Hailstones which weighed over a pound a-piece have also been experienced.

A man who can make smoke come out of his ears! He was "on show" at a fair in London recently, and hundreds of people flocked to see this almost unbelievable achievement.

There is a sea that has no shore! The Sargasso Sea, situated in the North Atlantic, has no shores. It is entirely surrounded by the waters of the Atlantic.

Insects are more deadly than the wildest of animals! Statistics show that more people die in the Tropics as a result of insect bites than are killed by wild animals.

And here is a piece of information which deserves more than a few lines. Have you ever heard of the Piranha, otherwise known as

THE CANNIBAL FISH?

Would you believe that a fish that is only eight or nine inches in length, is a greater man-eater than the shark? It's true, nevertheless!

The Piranha, which is found in the River Paraguay, will attack swimmers and waders, and once a Piranha has drawn blood, hundreds of others rush to the attack. They will rend and devour any wounded man or animal who is in the water. On one occasion, a boy was devoured alive by them before help could reach him. On another, the skeleton and clothes of a missing man were discovered in a ford. The Piranhas had eaten him completely, swimming in under his clothes, and picking the skeleton clean without damaging the clothes!

HERE is a selection of

RAPID-FIRE REPLIES

to some of the queries which have been put to me:

How many words are there in a "book-length" story? (J. D., of Minehead): It depends, of course, upon what you call a "book." The average book of fiction contains between 50,000 and 75,000 words. But if you count the Bible as a "book," there are no fewer than 773,697 words in it!

How much silk does a silkworm produce? (Ada Tompkins, of Balhall): A single silkworm produces only about a fifth of a gramme of silk. It takes 2,300 of them to produce a pound of silk!

How long can a man stay under water? (Harry Teed, of Edmonton): The record is held by a Frenchman named Pouliquen, who stayed under water for 6 minutes 29 and 4-5th seconds.

How many stars are there? (K. M., of Harlesden): It is impossible to say. On an ordinary night about 6,000 can be seen with the naked eye. But, of course, there are millions more than that!

How many muscles has a man? (L. H., of Brighouse): There are 527 muscles in the human body. There are eight muscles in a man's jaw alone!

Are there such things as black swans? (P. G., of Manchester): Yes, but they are only found in Australia.

DO you remember me telling you of the variety of objects which were discovered in an ostrich recently at the London Zoo? Well, here is a yarn that beats that—and it's perfectly true! It concerns a man who has well earned the title of:

THE HUMAN OSTRICH.

He was operated upon recently at the Chester Royal Infirmary, and this was what the doctors discovered inside him: 146 nails, 23 pins and needles, 67 rivets, a spring, 2 hob-nails, and 7 other articles.

Doctors tell us we should "eat iron"—but I don't think it advisable to swallow it in these quantities! I don't know whether this fellow had a weight on his mind or not, but he certainly had one in his stomach, for this miscellaneous assortment of articles totalled more than 163 grammes!

You fellows are inundating me with questions, and as I have explained before, though it is not possible for me to answer your questions the week after I receive them, because the MAGNET goes to press several weeks in advance, the answers will appear in due course. So, if you have to wait a little time for an answer, don't get impatient.

WELL, I mustn't over-run my space, or I won't be able to tell you about

NEXT WEEK'S MAGNIFICENT PROGRAMME.

The grand yarns of the Greyfriars chums which Frank Richards is giving us week by week seem to get better and better, don't they? He touches high-water mark in the next, which is entitled:

"HARRY WHARTON'S DOWNFALL!"

As you know, I don't believe in spoiling your enjoyment of these fine stories by telling you too much about them. I prefer to let Frank Richards speak for himself. But you'll be sorry if you miss this yarn, so take my advice and order your copy now!

There'll be another special instalment of our grand flying story, "Wings of War," and, of course, the shorter features. The "Greyfriars Herald" will appear as usual.

And shoot along your questions for me to answer, chums!

YOUR EDITOR.

WINGS OF WAR!

BY HEDLEY SCOTT.

The Secret Service Agent!

"ACH! The smell of this accursed place grows worse," growled the officer, seating himself at the kitchen table, and preparing to write out a report. "Bring me wine, you enivelling dog!"

"The very best, mon capitaine!"

The peasant departed noisily, his wooden sabots echoing on the flagstoned floor. On his return he placed before the German a bottle of wine and a glass. Again the lieutenant sniffed, murmured something about the combined stench of onions and garlic, and drained a glass of wine at a gulp. As he set the glass down, the raftered kitchen echoed to a mighty sneeze.

The peasant's eyes hardened. The sneeze had come from Thorburn, who was cramped up in the musty confines of the cupboard. The officer, however, jumped to the conclusion that it was the peasant, for his back had been turned when the tell-tale sneeze rang out.

Anxious seconds ticked by, but beyond a string of abuse from the officer at the temerity of a pig of a peasant daring to sneeze in the presence of a gentleman, Thorburn's lapse was unnoticed.

The bottle of wine was well nigh finished when the lieutenant had finished his report, but he clanked out of the kitchen at last and started for the village.

From behind a dirty, curtained window in the upper regions of the old building the peasant watched him go. Then, as the uniformed figure receded into the distance and was lost to view altogether, the age which seemed to fit the peasant's grey locks and rounded shoulders so aptly, fell from him like a cloak. In a bound he was out on the narrow landing and hurrying down the rickety staircase. Once more he was in the kitchen.

The key grated in the lock of the cupboard, the door swung open noisily, and Thorburn staggered out.

"Holy snakes!" he gasped. "Talk about the Black Hole of Calcutta! It's a treat to get a breath of air again, even if it's got a mighty overdose of onion flavouring about it!"

The peasant laughed shortly.

"You are lucky, my friend, to be alive to enjoy even such air as this! That sneeze nearly betrayed you!"

"I know!" agreed Thorburn ruefully. "I heard some dashed German fellow doing the heavy, and I wanted to sneeze I stuck it as long as I could, and, well——"

"It's not safe to talk here," broke in the peasant. "Follow me!"

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

After a course of training in the Royal Flying Corps three youngsters, Jim Daniels, Ron Glynn, and Bruce Thorburn, are appointed to commissioned rank and ordered overseas to join 256 Squadron—a "Bristol Fighter" squadron of great repute. The following morning the three chums take part in escorting a bombing squadron to Arleux. En route they are sighted by German scouting planes and a "dog-fight" ensues. Thorburn, whose observer is fatally wounded, is forced down in enemy territory. Setting fire to his plane, he then seeks sanctuary in a farm building tenanted by a middle-aged peasant, who hides him in a cupboard. A moment later a squad of German infantrymen appear on the scene. The officer in charge, satisfied that the British pilot has perished in the blazing plane, dismisses his men, and stamps into the farmhouse to write his report.

(Now read on.)

Again he mounted the old staircase, Thorburn close at his heels. Finally they halted in a roughly furnished room, and the peasant closed and locked the door. In the middle of the room was a circular table and a wicker chair. Against one wall was a bed upon which were a number of blankets. A rush matting covered the floor, and a cat, perched on the window-sill, completed the list of things inanimate and animate that came within Thorburn's all-embracing glance.

He seated himself on the bed and eyed his rescuer quizzically.

"You're a dashed good fellow," he said at length, "if you'll pardon me sayin' so. Really, all I had to expect if I got out of that crash alive was imprisonment in some filthy German camp. Then, like the good fairy in the pantomime, along you come and do the needful. You're not Belgian, of course?"

The peasant broke into a string of explanation, this time in the Belgian language; and while Thorburn, who did not know enough of the lingo to follow it was telling himself that he had made a mistake, the peasant switched off into pure French. From this he dived into the patois spoken by the people of Alsace and Lorraine, and finally wound up with a roll of guttural murmurings which Thorburn, who was a good German scholar, was able to follow. And what he heard made him jump.

"You are a bit of everything?" he gasped. "That's what you are saying!"

The peasant's face relaxed into a broad smile.

"Exactly!" he returned, this time in English. "I am a nondescript collection of identities, nationalities——"

"A spy?" Thorburn put the word shrewdly.

"Not exactly," came the reply "But a Secret Service agent. At present, however, I am Adolph Menille, farmer peasant!"

"Good gad!" Thorburn's enthusiasm was very boyish. "We've heard in England about the awfully fine work you chaps do, but I never thought I should have the luck to meet one in the flesh! Shake!"

They gripped heartily.

"It was lucky for you that you chose your landing-place on my hayrick," smiled the agent. "The conceited young officer the authorities sent along to investigate was satisfied that you had perished in the flames!"

"Well, I'm mighty thankful," said

Thorburn, "but I suppose I had better be moving along. I can't stick here—it will be putting you in danger!"

"And where would you go?"

Thorburn shrugged.

"Blessed if I know," he admitted frankly. "But I could take my chance of wriggling through the lines, somehow!"

"And take your chance of collecting a few stray bullets into the bargain, what? No, son, we shall have to think things out. For the moment you had better lie up here"—he pointed to the raftered loft—"until I can fix things. Perhaps I can persuade the commandant to let my nephew from Lille, who is sick and shell-shocked, come to stay with me a while to recuperate and help on the farm!"

"You have a nephew at Lille?"

"At the moment—no! But with the aid of forgery, and remembering the old saying that 'All's fair in love and war,' doubtless I can contrive to possess one. Do you think you can play the part?"

Thorburn jumped.

"I see the idea," he whooped. "By jingo, watch me!"

He picked up a blanket from the bed, draped it round him, and hobbled painfully across the matted floor. A well-assumed shaking of the limbs, and a chronic cough added to the impersonation.

"How's that?" asked Thorburn, straightening himself.

"Not at all bad, my son," was the reply. "But you will have to be dumb, too——"

"Oh!"

"You don't speak the lingo. You'd be bowled out first time. So dumb you will have to be!"

"You think of everything. Just like those jolly old detectives you read about in fiction!"

Thorburn's benefactor laughed lightly.

"Well, perhaps it is not so wonderful to think of all these things, in the circumstances, for until war broke out I was indeed a detective! You may have heard of Ferrers Locke——"

"Well——" Thorburn's voice trailed off in a murmur of excitement and admiration. "Ferrers Locke——"

"But never mind that now. Tell me a few things about yourself. I see you belong to 256 Squadron——"

"How the dickens did you know that?"

"By the identity markings on your machine. A Secret Service agent has to know many things, my son!"

Full of admiration for his new-found friend, Thorburn plunged into an account of the morning straffe and the manner of his exit from it.

"Bad luck, on your first show with Jerry," was Locke's sympathetic comment. "Still, with reasonable luck, you'll be able to try your hand again. For the time being you will have to play the part of the dumb nephew suffering from shell-shock!"

From a trunk under the bed was withdrawn a makeshift suit of clothes, patched corduroy trousers, wooden sabots, patched blouse, and somewhat grimy neckerchief.

"Just get yourself into those for a start!"

Thorburn obeyed. Then behind his benefactor he mounted the ladder which gave access to the loft, and looked round at what were to be his quarters for the next few days until the "nephew from Lille" materialised.

"You'll have to keep your head ducked here," whispered Locke. "These beams are old, but they are tough. Don't take any notice of the onions and the garlic, don't sneeze, and don't let the rats frighten you!"

"Rats?"

Thorburn, who had a horror of rats, shuddered involuntarily.

"You'll get used to them, my son, never fear," said the benefactor. "Now for orders. You are not to leave this loft under any pretext unless I bid you. You are not to show yourself at this window"—he pointed to an opening in the thatched roof about a foot square—"at any time. You must not sing to pass the time away; you must not make any more noise, in short, than is absolutely necessary. In the evenings and the nights you must sleep. Got that?"

Thorburn nodded.

"We can't be too careful," went on his benefactor. "If we're caught, it means a firing-party. Now, catch hold of these blankets and settle down. I'll bring you some food in a moment, and I promise that you won't have to stay in such unpleasant quarters any longer than I can possibly help."

In the half-light of the loft Thorburn saw his benefactor descend the ladder, saw the hatch pushed back into place, heard the ladder taken away and hung up on a staple in the wall of the room below, counted the number of steps Ferrers Locke took to cross the room, and then settled himself on his blankets.

Send along your joke or your Greyfriars limerick—or both—and win our prizes of leather pocket wallets, penknives, and books. All efforts to be sent to: c/o "Magnet," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C. 4 (Comp.).

An Important Conversation!

IDLY Thorburn wondered what his chums at Squadron 256 were doing. They were back at the drome now, doubtless filling in their reports, which told of the attack of the Fokker squadron and of the identity of the victims who had fallen before them. His own name would as likely as not appear in the casualty list.

And while he lay there reflecting thus as the weary hours passed, there came to him from below the sound of footsteps and guttural voices, mingling at intervals with the more plaintive tones of the peasant.

"You will prepare our room at once, son of a pig!" Thorburn's knowledge of German—for the newcomers spoke in that language—came in useful. "We wish to be together, understand that."

The footsteps came from close at hand now, and voices rose from the very room beneath which Thorburn lay in hiding.

"But this is my own humble and wretched apartment, mon capitaine. Surely you will select my guest-room?"

Peering down between a crack in the flooring of the rafters, Thorburn saw two well-set-up officers in German uniform, each with the rank of captain. His eyes widened as he noted they were flying officers and that each sported the coveted Iron Cross. They strutted up and down the room, ignoring the protests of Ferrers Locke, and commenting in strong terms on the dirtiness of the room, and its scanty appointments.

"Bring another bed in here, pig dog!" snapped the elder of the twain. "Thunder and lightning! Don't stand there mumbling, or I'll have you flayed at the cart wheel every morning for a week!"

Locke made one more attempt to turn the attention of the two officers to his "guest-room."

"Dog!" It was the younger officer's turn now, and he struck the cringing peasant a hearty thwack across the face with the back of his leather gauntlets. "Do you dare to question our commands? Get another bed! Get a pail of water, and go down on your knees. This hovel is fit only for a pig, but soap and water and a little energy will soon alter that! Begone!"

The peasant backed hastily out of the room. Thorburn saw him return in a moment with a dismantled bed. This he propped against the wall, whilst he betook himself again to the kitchen. When he returned he was carrying two buckets of scalding hot water and a mop.

Under the eyes of the two German officers and spurred on by their gibes at his nationality, his imbecility, and his probable fate when Germany had won the War, he scrubbed and scrubbed at the old wooden flooring and the panelled walls till the perspiration oozed out of him in streams. Then he assembled the second bed. From some ancient chest on the landing he brought to light fresh curtaining, which he carefully hung at the window, made the two beds with clean linen, spread an ancient, but clean cover over the table, and refuelled the swinging oil-lamp.

"Light the fire!" grumbled one of the officers, taking off his jack-boots and stretching himself on the bed. "Methinks, Carl, we are better off here than at the aerodrome. And this old fool can play the soldier's servant just as well as any good son of the Fatherland. Pig"—this to the peasant in a bullying voice—"bring food and wine!"

The old man shuffled out again, and the two officers fell to discussing the War and the progress the troops of the beloved Fatherland were making in the cause of Kultur. Thorburn was hard put to it to keep himself in hand; dearly would he have liked to jump from his hiding-place and sail into the braggarts in good old British style. But the complete humility and subservience of Ferrers Locke gave him his cue.

These two flying officers were "big guns" in their own way, that was certain. Any complaint from them to the district kommandant would mean a severe punishment for the peasant who dared to resist them in any way. That would not suit Ferrers Locke's present plans.

Food and wine were placed before the officers; and silence, save for the heartiness with which they attacked the viands, reigned in the old farmstead. The peasant was dismissed with a peremptory gesture, and, bowing and scraping, and apologising for the ladder, which he intimated he had forgotten to remove from the presence of such lordly and high-placed officers, he retired, with a thudding of wooden sabots, taking the offending ladder with him.

Once outside the door of the room, however, Ferrers Locke straightened himself. A glint came to his eyes—the glint of desperation. In his heart of

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hearts Thorburn's benefactor knew that unless a miracle or its equivalent happened, the discovery of the British flying man he had sheltered was certain.

While he stood on the landing he heard the key grate in the lock. Evidently his two officer "billets" desired secrecy.

Seated at the table the pair of them pulled maps from their cases, flattened them out, and began to converse in low tones.

Up above, Thorburn heard every word of that conversation, and his eyes glistened. Into his mind a desperate plan was forming. Fate had thrown in his path a risky, desperate chance of getting back safely to the British lines—to 256 Squadron—to his pals Ron and Jim!

Again and again the important details of that conversation were repeated by the two German captains. Then, closing their maps, they signified their intention of turning in for a few hours' sleep.

Thorburn, up above, heard the stifled yawns of the two, saw them discard their tunics, and stretch themselves between the blankets, and became conscious for the first time that dusk was setting in. And with the dusk came the youngster's first experience of the rats.

Faintly at first he heard a scratching near at hand. It grew in volume. Then some dim shape, long and grey, brushed across his face, squeaked shrilly at the unexpected presence of warm human flesh, and was gone. At the same moment Thorburn let out an involuntary cry that seemed to be magnified a thousand times in t' t confined space, shuddered, and stiffened like a statue.

Had he been heard?

A scurrying of feet and voices below told him the worst.

"Gott in Himmell!" came a strident voice. "Someone is up there! Carl, light the lamp! Quick!"

(It looks as if Thorburn's put his foot in it, doesn't it, chums? Will he be discovered? If he is, what will become of both him and Ferrers Locke? Be sure and read the next instalment of this thrilling story—you'll enjoy every line of it!)

DOWN ON HIS LUCK!

(Continued from page 24.)

eyebrows as the crowd of juniors stared at him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here you are, then!" said Bob Cherry.

"Here I am!" assented Wharton.

"It's all right, old bean—the jolly old fossil's gone!" chuckled Skinner.

Wharton did not seem to hear that.

Wingate of the Sixth bore down on him, with a frowning brow.

"So you've come in, you young sweep! You're to report yourself in your Form master's study at once!"

"Yes, Wingate," said the junior calmly.

He walked away to Mr. Quelch's study, many curious eyes following him.

"Plenty of nerve, anyhow," remarked the Bounder.

"Quelch will give him something to cure all that!" grinned Skinner. "If you have tears, my beloved 'earers, prepare to shed them now."

"Oh, shut up!" growled Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton tapped at Mr. Quelch's door, and entered. The Remove master rose from his table, and looked across at his head boy. Never had Mr. Quelch's face looked so grim. The fabled basilisk of old might have looked as Henry Samuel Quelch looked at that moment.

"Wharton, you have absented yourself from calling-over, from preparation, and returned almost at bed-time!" Mr. Quelch's voice was very deep. "Your uncle has had to leave without seeing you, though he came specially for the purpose. You were aware of it—I told you to expect him. Wharton, I require to know what this means."

"I did not wish to see Colonel Wharton, sir!" answered the captain of the Remove evenly.

"What your reason may be, Wharton, I cannot pretend to guess; but you are well aware that that is not a matter for you to decide."

"I think it is, sir."

Mr. Quelch almost jumped.

"What? What? What did you say, Wharton?"

"I think it is, sir!"

Mr. Quelch drew a long, long breath.

"You—you think—— Upon my word!" he gasped.

"I am sorry to have cut call-over and prep, sir. But I wanted to keep out of Colonel Wharton's way, so I had no choice."

Mr. Quelch set his lips.

"You had no choice? You assume the right to break the rules of the school with utter recklessness, for no purpose but to display disrespect towards your relative and guardian! I can scarcely believe my ears, Wharton. Are you out of your senses?"

"I hope not, sir."

"You do not imagine, I presume, that this—this unexampled insolence will pass unpunished?" rumbled Mr. Quelch.

"No, sir!"

Mr. Quelch picked up the cane from his table.

"I have been considering," he said, "whether to take you to your headmaster for a flogging. I shall certainly do so, Wharton, if you should ever repeat such conduct. I will, however, deal with you myself. Bend over that chair!"

Remove fellows, venturing as near as they dared to the Form master's door, heard the heavy swishing of the cane. But they heard no sound from Harry Wharton. It was as severe a caning as Mr. Quelch had ever handed out to any member of his Form, but the captain of the Remove went through it with Spartan stoicism.

"I say, you fellows, here he comes!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

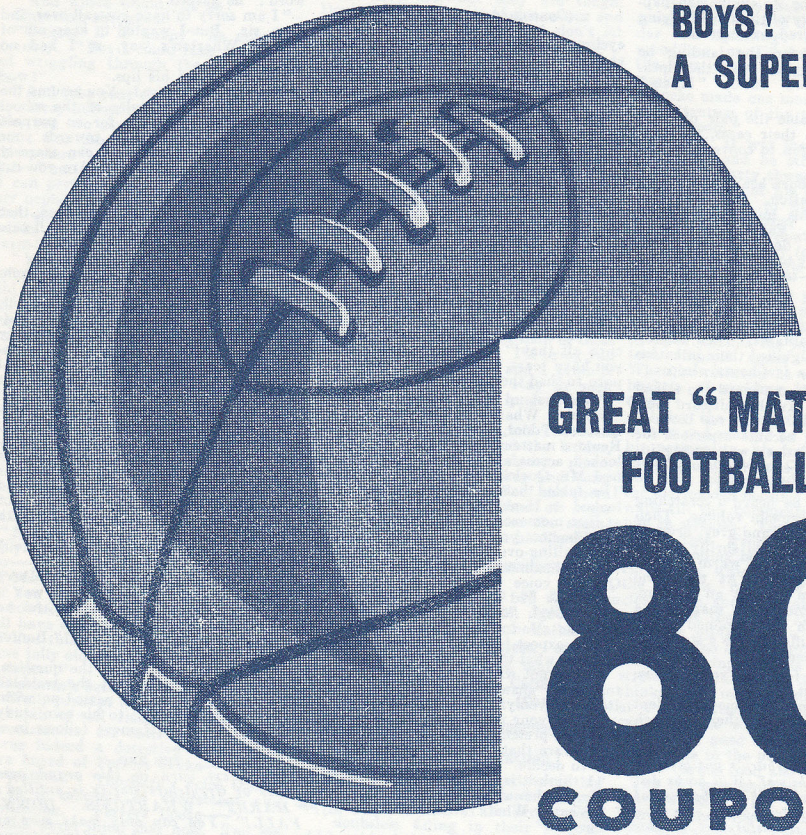
Mr. Quelch's door opened, and Harry Wharton came out. His face was a little pale, but still impassive, and he walked steadily up the passage.

"I say, old chap, did it hurt?" Bunter wanted to know.

Wharton did not answer the question. Neither did he glance at the troubled faces of his chums. He passed on without a word, and went to his own study alone, leaving the Remove fellows in a buzz behind him.

THE END.

(The next yarn in this grand new series of Greyfriars stories is entitled: "HARRY WHARTON'S DOWNFALL!" You can only make sure of reading it, chums, by ordering your copy of the MAGNET *well in advance!)*



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