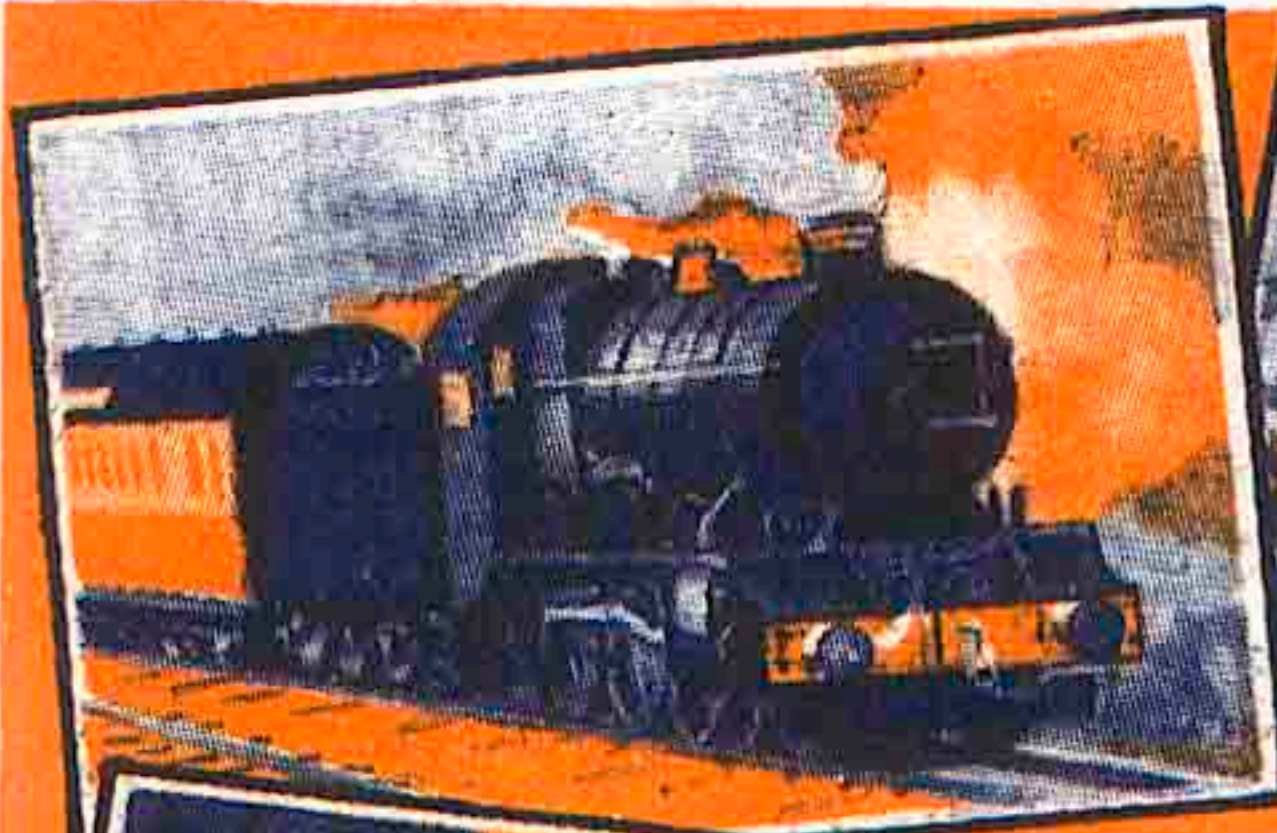
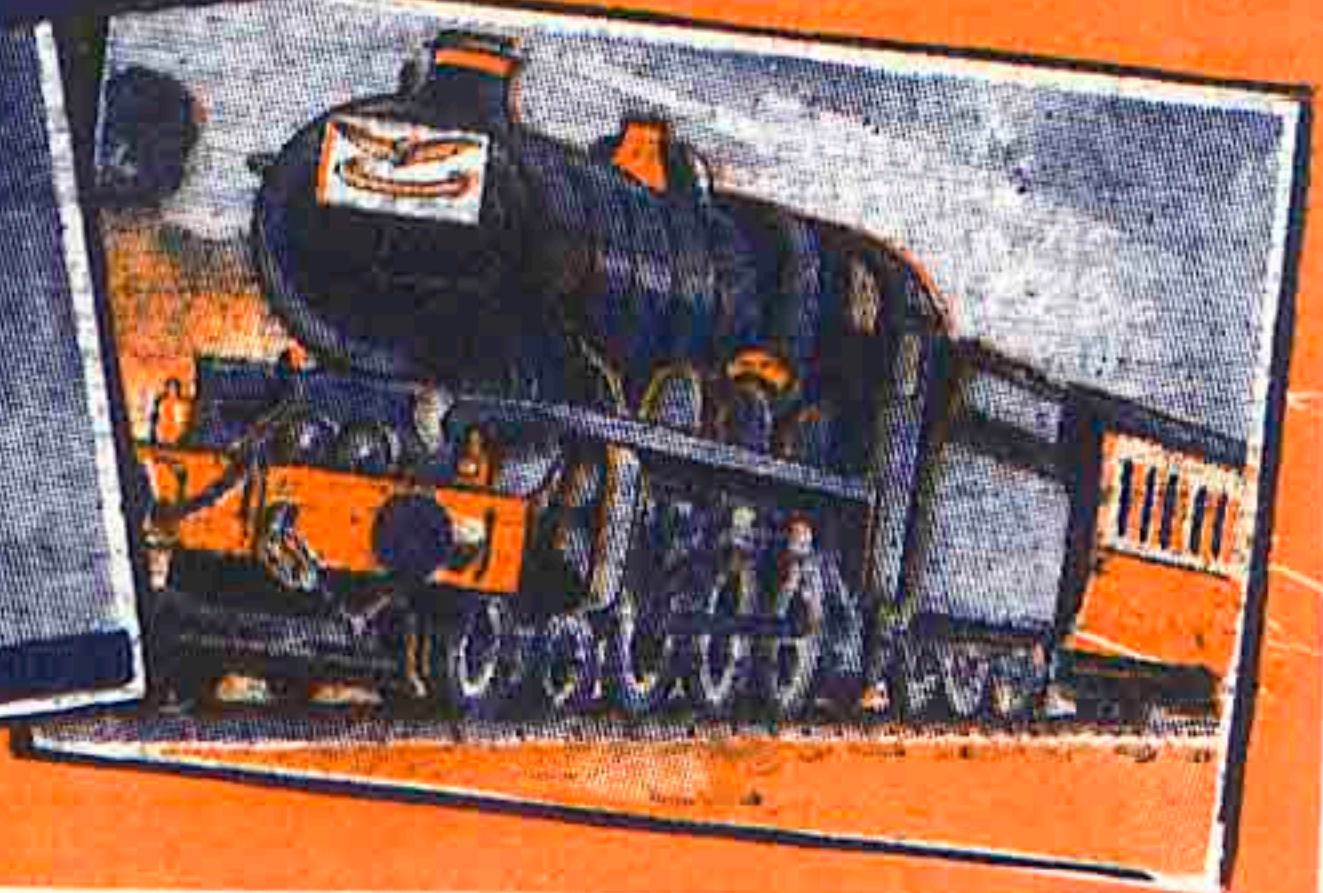
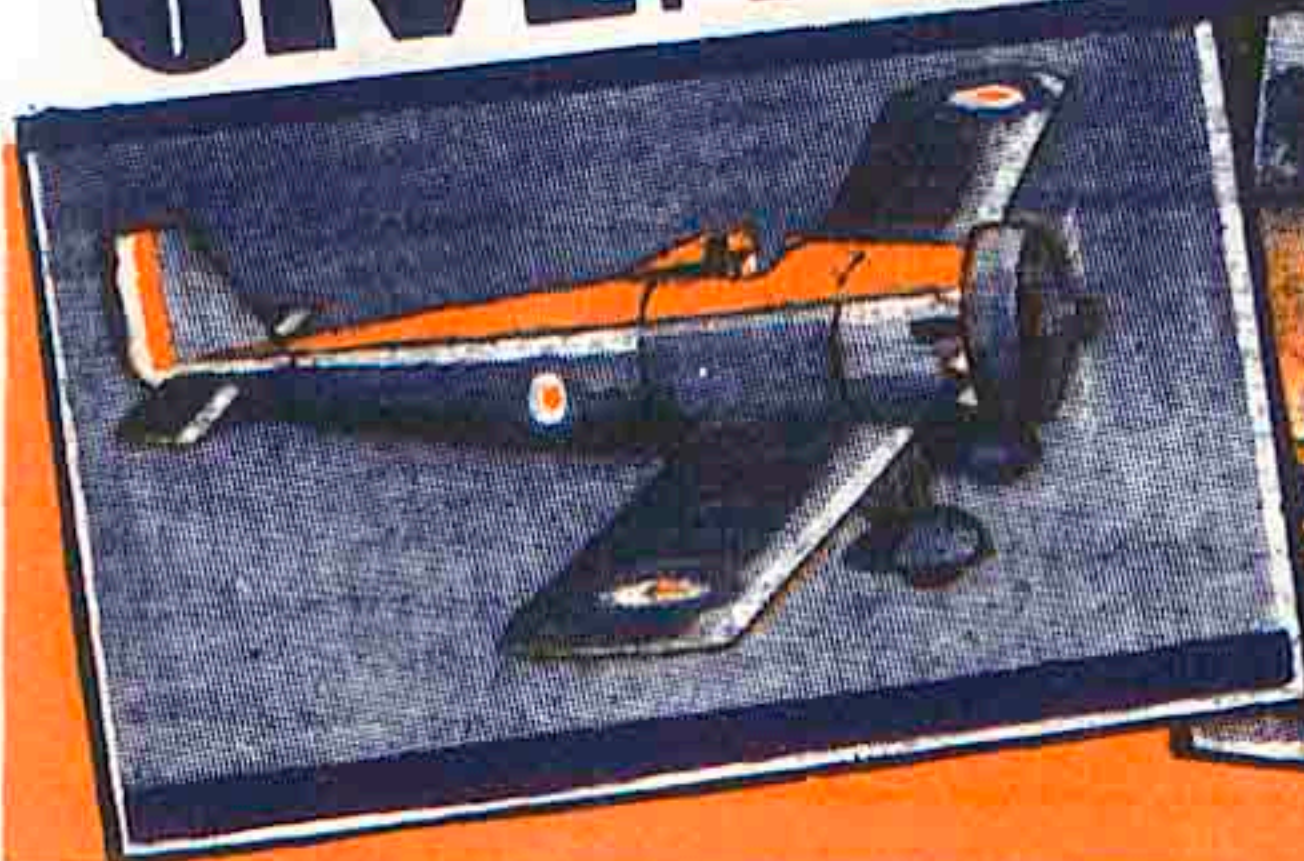


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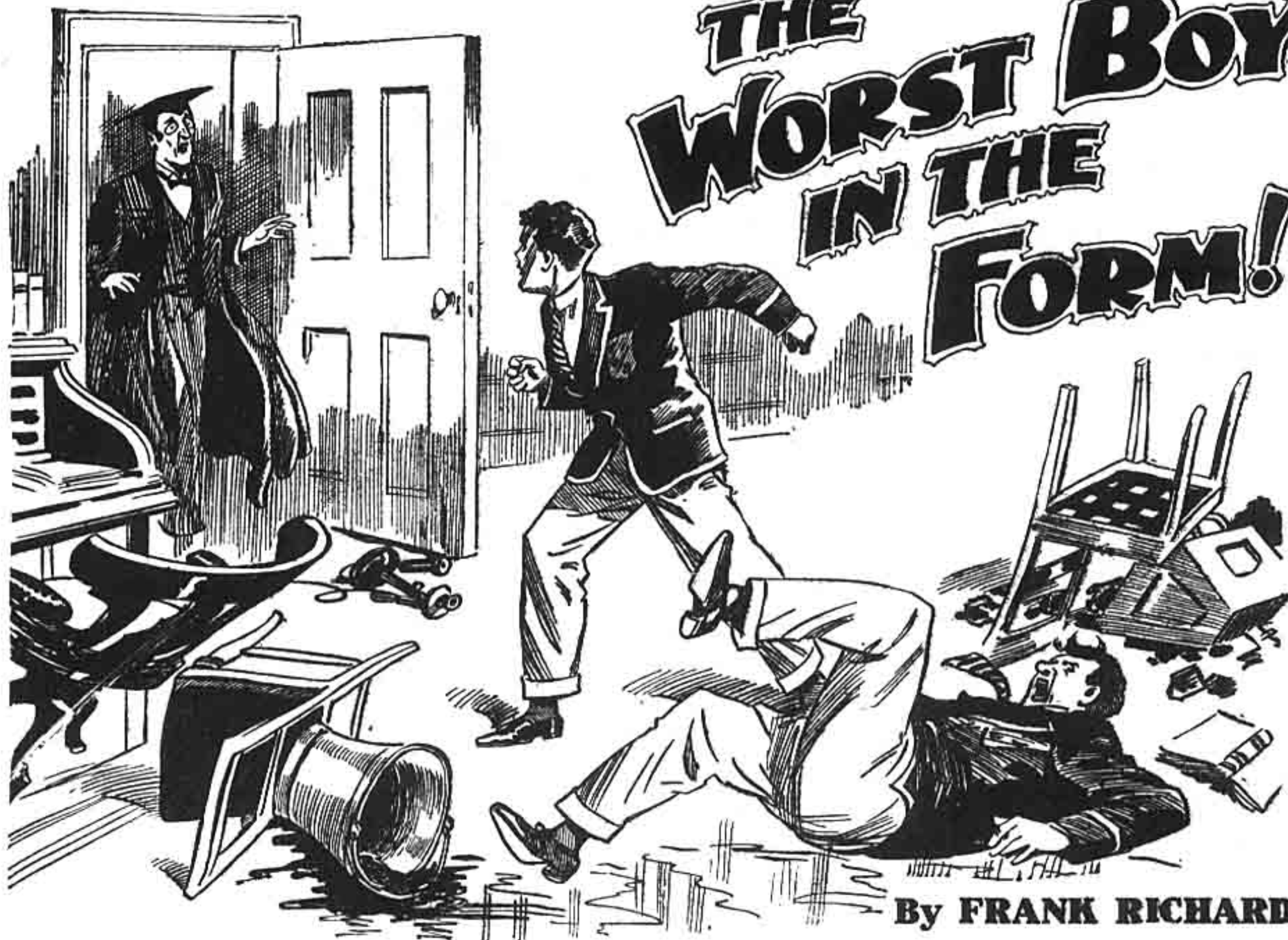
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PICTURE STAMPS
GIVEN FREE INSIDE**



THE WORST BOY IN THE FORM!



By FRANK RICHARDS

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Whose Seat!

"NO room!"
"Oh, really, Cherry—"
"Only room for one—"
"Well, I'm one, ain't I, you silly ass?" hooted Billy Bunter.

Bob Cherry shook his head gravely.
"You count as two, old fat man, in a railway carriage!"

"Or three!" remarked Frank Nugent.
"Or four!" grinned Johnny Bull.

There was a chuckle from the Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove and an angry snort from Billy Bunter.

Harry Wharton & Co. were occupying a carriage in which there was one vacant seat. It was the first day of term, and Courtfield Junction swarmed with Greyfriars fellows returning to the old school.

Dozens of fellows had looked into that carriage, spotting the vacant seat, and seeking to annex the same; but the chums of the Remove had cheerfully and politely requested them to pass on.

Two or three fellows who had obstinately butted in had found themselves sitting on the platform, after which they passed along the train, looking for a carriage less strongly garrisoned.

But Billy Bunter did not pass on. Billy Bunter planted his ample form at the open doorway, blinked at the Famous Five through his big spectacles, and declined to take no for an answer.

"You see, we're keeping this seat for

a pal, fatty!" explained Harry Wharton. "Roll on!"

"Ain't I a pal?" hooted Bunter. "First I've heard of it!"

"Beast!"
"Where's that ass Mauly?" asked Bob, glancing over the crowd of heads on the platform. "He will lose the train at this rate!"

"Never mind Mauly—" said Billy Bunter.

"But we do mind!" grinned Bob. "I suppose you'd rather have me than that ass Mauleverer!" said Bunter, with dignity.

"Oh, my hat!"
"Besides, it's all right. I happen to know that Mauleverer ain't coming back this term!" said Bunter. "So you can let me have the seat—see?"

"You fat villain, we saw him changing trains not five minutes ago!" said Nugent. "He's on the platform somewhere."

"Oh! I—I mean, Mauly's taken a taxi to the school," explained Bunter. "That's what I really meant to say."

"You fat fibber, he knows we're keeping a seat for him! Roll away!"

"Shan't!" roared Bunter. "I'm jolly well coming into that carriage! The fact is, Mauly's been taken suddenly ill, and he's in the stationmaster's room, and they've sent for a doctor. So he won't be coming on to Friardale by this train—see?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Will you let a fellow get in, you beasts?" roared Bunter. "I'm not

going to miss this train and wait for the next! Mauly doesn't want that seat! He's on the train farther down. I saw him get into a carriage with Smithy and Redwing."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Famous Five.

"If you can't take a fellow's word, you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Really, a fellow of the most trusting and confiding nature could hardly have believed all Bunter's statements on the subject of Mauleverer.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" snorted Bunter. "I can tell you it's pretty low to doubt a fellow's word! Well, I'm coming in!"

Bunter made a plunge at the carriage.

Bob Cherry, standing in the doorway, lifted his foot.

Gently, but firmly, he planted that foot on the widest part of Billy Bunter's extensive circumference.

Bump!

William George Bunter sat on the platform with a concussion that almost shook Courtfield Station.

"Oooooop!" roared Bunter.

A Sixth Form man who was coming along the platform paused. It was Gerald Loder, a prefect of the Sixth.

Loder's pal Walker was waving to him from a carriage farther up. But Loder paused to give his attention to the juniors.

The bully of the Sixth had had trouble with the cheery chums of the

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Remove last term, and he did not seem to have forgotten it during the summer holidays. Loder was not the man to forget or forgive offences, real or imaginary. This was a chance for Loder to exercise his authority at the expense of the juniors he disliked, and he was not the fellow to let it, like the sunbeams, pass him by.

"Stop that, Cherry!" he rapped out. "Beginning the new term with bullying—what?"

Bob gave him a glare. But he checked his strong desire to tell Loder of the Sixth what he thought of him. Sixth Form prefects could not be told what Lower Fourth fellows thought of them!

"There's a vacant seat in that carriage," went on Loder. "Let Bunter get in at once! Get up, Bunter, and get in!"

Billy Bunter scrambled up, with a triumphant grin on his fat visage.

"We're keeping this seat for Mauleverer, Loder," said Harry Wharton quietly.

"You can't keep seats in a crowded train for fellows who don't turn up," answered Loder coolly. "Let Bunter get in at once!"

"I can see Mauleverer now——"

"I've told you to let Bunter get in!" said Loder, in his most bullying tone. "If you want six all round, as soon as we get to the school, you've only got to ask for it!"

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at Loder expressively. They did not want "six" all round. What they really wanted was to collar the bully of the Sixth and bump him on the platform; but that, of course, was impracticable. Bob Cherry, breathing hard, stepped back from the doorway, and Bunter, grinning, clambered in, and dropped into the corner seat that had been intended for Mauleverer.

"Now, no more of this!" said Loder. "You're not allowed to act like hooligans, even on the first day of term. Bear that in mind!"

And Loder walked on along the train.

Lord Mauleverer ambled up.

"Hop in, Mauly!" said Harry Wharton. "Bunter's got your seat, but we can make room."

"Yaas," drawled his lordship.

"I say, you fellows, there's no room for any more!" objected Billy Bunter. "You cut along the train, Mauly!"

"Shut up, Bunter!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Shan't!" roared Bunter. "I'm jolly well not going to be crowded! There's no room for you, Mauly!"

"All serene! I'll wait for the next train, you men," said Mauleverer.

"You won't, fathead! Hop in!"

"You jolly well keep out!" hooted Bunter. "You can see that there ain't a seat for you!"

"We're going to find Mauly a seat," said Bob. "That's all right! Hop in, old bean!"

Bob reached out, grasped Lord Mauleverer by the arm, and hooked him into the carriage just as a porter came along to slam the door.

Doors slammed all along the train, the engine shrieked, and the train moved on out of the station.

"I'm not takin' a seat from you fellows," said Mauleverer. "It's all right; I'll stand."

"You're going to take the seat we kept for you," explained Bob. "Shift, Bunter!"

"Why, you beast——"

"Shift!"

"The shiftfulness is the proper caper,

my esteemed fat Bunter!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Why, you beasts—— Yaroooh! Leggo!" roared Bunter. "Leggo my collar, Bob Cherry! Leggo my car, Frank Nugent! Bull, you beast, leggo my nose! Groooh! I'm jolly well going to—— Whoooooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter sat on the floor of the carriage. He roared as he sat. Lord Mauleverer, with a cheery grin, dropped into the vacant corner seat. The Famous Five sat down, smiling. Bunter, sitting on the floor, did not smile. He scrambled up, spluttering with wrath.

"Think I'm going to stand?" he bawled.

"The thankfulness is terrific."

"Well, I won't stand!" roared Bunter, "and if you don't gimme a seat I'll jolly well tell Loder, so there!"

"In that case we'd better give Bunter a seat," said Bob, rising.

"You'd jolly well better!" sneered Bunter.

"Here goes!"

Bump! Bunter sat on the floor again.

"Like it?" asked Bob.

"You—you—you idiot!" gurgled Bunter. "I didn't mean a seat on the floor!"

"I did!" answered Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you fellows want anything to rest your feet on," remarked Bob Cherry, "there's Bunter!"

"Hear, hear!"

From being head boy and captain of his Form, Harry Wharton finds himself plunged into overwhelming disgrace in the space of a few hours. . . . All through the scheming of a shady prefect!

"Keep your hoofs off me!" shrieked Bunter, as feet that seemed innumerable were planted on him. "Keep off, you rotters! I say, you fellows—I—I—I'll stand if you like! I—I really want to stand! I—I want old Mauly to have that seat! I—I'm pleased to see him sitting there! Honest Injun! Ow! Take your hoofs off me, you beasts! I—I—I really want to stand."

And as Bunter wanted to stand he was graciously allowed to stand while the train ran on to Friardale. But though he was allowed to do as he wanted he did not look pleased. He looked, in fact, extremely displeased. Fortunately, it did not matter.

**THE SECOND CHAPTER.
Trouble About a Ticket!**

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter had stood like a fat statue of wrath, giving the chums of the Remove devastating blinks through his big spectacles, while the local train hummed on to Friardale, the station for Greyfriars School. But as that station drew near the fat Owl of the Remove condescended to come out of his offended and dignified silence.

"Don't!" said Bob Cherry.

"Eh! Don't what?" asked Bunter peevishly.

"Don't jaw, old fat bean! You're ever so much nicer when you're quiet. Give your chin another rest."

"We shall be in Friardale in a few minutes," said Bunter, unheeding. "I've lost my ticket!"

"Gammon!"

"It was your fault! I've dropped it somewhere on the floor——"

"If it's on the floor we'll find it for you."

"I mean I must have dropped it on the platform at Courtfield, when that beast Cherry bumped me over! I hope you don't think I've travelled all the way from Lantham without a ticket," said Bunter, with dignity. "I'm not a chap to bilk the railway company, I hope."

"What a hopeful nature," said Bob Cherry.

"Well, what's going to be done?" asked Bunter.

"Looks as if the railway company's going to be done," answered Bob. "But if they catch you at it you're going to be done—done brown!"

"It's only half-a-crown from Lantham," said Bunter. "I take it for granted that one of my pals will lend me half-a-crown."

"You should have got into a carriage with your pals, then," said Bob, shaking his head. "But you would push in here."

"Oh, really, Cherry! Half-a-crown isn't much, after all I've done for you fellows! I can't very well go out without a ticket. The fact is they're a suspicious lot on this line. I was stopped once because I hadn't a ticket, and the man practically accused me of bilking."

"Well, I can tell you what to do," said Johnny Bull.

"What's that, old chap?"

"Give up bilking."

"You silly ass!" roared Bunter.

Apparently that resource had not occurred to the Owl of the Remove.

Billy Bunter was one of those rather numerous persons who regard a railway company as "fair game."

"It's up to you, Bob Cherry, as you made me lose my ticket," he pointed out.

"You never had a ticket, you fat villain," answered Bob. "If you get nabbed I hope they'll give you in charge."

"You can pay from Lantham, instead of giving up a ticket!" suggested Nugent.

"Oh, don't be an ass," said Bunter. "If I pay it will be near enough to pay from Courtfield. I don't believe in wasting money. But the fact is I'm entirely short of tin."

"For the first time in your life?"

"Exactly, old chap. In the hurry of getting away from Bunter Court I left my purse behind. Or else I left it in the Rolls when I went to the station—I'm not sure which. I took a ticket only as far as Lantham, and spent the rest on doughnuts!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Well, if you're too jolly mean to lend a man half-a-crown, one of you lend me a ticket," said Bunter. "You'd better lend me yours, Wharton. The man will take your word that you had a ticket and lost it."

"Oh crumbs!"

"I'll do as much for you another time, old chap!"

"I'm to help you swindle the railway company and tell the ticket-collector lies because you preferred to spend your railway fare on doughnuts!" ejaculated Harry Wharton, staring at the fat Owl.

"Oh, really, Wharton! That's a rather rotten way of putting it! I say, you fellows, here we are at Friardale!"

The train stopped.

"I say, Mauly!" howled Bunter.

"Wake up, Mauly!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

His lordship opened his eyes.

"I wasn't asleep," he said—"I heard all you fellows were saying! You're always talkin' football or something, ain't you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, Mauly, wait for me!" shouted Bunter.

"Oh gad!"

Instead of waiting for Bunter Lord Mauleverer displayed unusual activity in hopping out of the carriage and disappearing along the platform. As Mauly had nodded off in the carriage he was unaware of Bunter's dire extremity in the matter of a ticket. He supposed that Bunter was going to bestow his fascinating society upon him. He vanished almost like a ghost at cock-crow.

The Famous Five chuckled and followed him from the carriage. Billy Bunter rolled out after them.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Buzz off, Bunter!"

"About my ticket——"

"Fathead!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"There's Quelch on the platform," said Johnny Bull. "Go and ask him to see you through."

He nodded towards a tall and angular figure that towered over innumerable schoolboy heads. Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, had come down by the same train, as it happened.

Bunter blinked towards the Remove master, and grunted.

"What's the good of that?" he demanded. "Quelch would put it down on the account for my father to pay. Nice row I should get into at home if the pater knew he had to pay my fare one end and Quelch the other!"

"Hallo, you men!" Vernon-Smith came along with Tom Redwing. "Here we are again! Had good hols?"

"Topping!" answered Bob. "We've been doing Egypt with old Mauly——"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Fat as ever!" said the Bounder, glancing at Bunter—"or a little fatter! When are you goin' in for slimming, Bunter?"

"I say, Smithy, old chap, lend me half-a-crown——"

"Come on, Reddy! Time we got out to the bus. All the seats will be taken," said Vernon-Smith.

"I was speaking to you, Smithy——"

"Mind speaking to somebody else instead?" asked Smithy, and he walked on with Tom Redwing.

"Beast! I say, you fellows——"

But the Famous Five had turned away to greet Peter Todd and Squiff and Ogilvy and Tom Brown and Hazeldene and two or three other Remove men. Billy Bunter gave them a withering blink which produced absolutely no effect on the backs of their heads.

Then a sly glimmer came into his little round eyes behind his big round spectacles. Wharton had taken out his ticket ready to give up at the barrier, and was holding it carelessly between finger and thumb. Certainly it never occurred to him that that oblong of cardboard was in any danger.

But Billy Bunter was rather desperate. Ticketless, and with all his available financial resources expended on necessary refreshments, Billy Bunter simply had to do something—or "do" somebody. As Wharton's back was to him it was really quite easy. He rolled behind the captain of the Remove, coolly snapped the ticket from his fingers, and rolled away hurriedly into

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the crowd that swarmed on the platform.

Wharton gave a jump.

"What the dickens——"

He spun round.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the trouble?"

"Somebody's bagged my ticket—that fat villain Bunter! Why, I'll burst him all over the station!" exclaimed Wharton.

Bunter, going strong, was disappearing in the crowd. But he was not out of sight, and Harry Wharton rushed in wrathful pursuit.

"Here, lock out! Where are you barging, you cheeky fag!" roared Coker of the Fifth. "Look out!"

Leaving Coker of the Fifth staggering, Wharton rushed on. Temple of the Fourth stepped in the way—but the next moment Cecil Reginald Temple was strewn on the platform wondering how he had got there.

"Bunter!" roared Wharton. "Stop!"

Billy Bunter cast a guilty blink over his shoulder.

"Oh crikey!" he gasped.

He did not stop—he put on speed. Behind him the captain of the Remove fairly raced. Loud objections were heard on all sides. A crowded railway platform was really not the place for a foot-race. Mr. Quelch looked round with a frown. Mr. Quelch supposed that this was some schoolboy "lark," and the elderly and somewhat tart Form master had little use for larks. With a frowning brow, he stepped directly into Bunter's path and raised a commanding hand as a signal to him to stop.

But Bunter was going too fast to stop suddenly. He did not even see Henry Samuel Quelch till he charged headlong into him.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Quelch, as he went over.

Even a hefty footballer would have felt the shock of a charge with Billy Bunter's uncommon weight behind it. Mr. Quelch was long past the age for standing up to such charges. He did not stand up to it—he crashed down on his back.

"Ooooooogh!" gasped Bunter, as he sprawled headlong over Mr. Quelch.

Wharton tried to stop.

But he was fairly on Bunter's heels when the fat Owl crashed, and it was a physical impossibility to halt in time. A fraction of a second after Bunter crashed on Quelch, Wharton crashed on Bunter.

It was a terrific crash.

Bunter, sandwiched between Wharton and Mr. Quelch, gurgled horribly. But Mr. Quelch, sandwiched between Bunter and the hard surface of the platform, was even worse off—he could not even gurgle. He sprawled, breathless and winded, unable to utter a word, but with an expression on his speaking countenance that spoke volumes.

Wharton rolled breathlessly off and

gained his feet. Bunter continued to sprawl on the winded Form master and gurgle.

"You fat idiot!" gasped Wharton.

"Urrrrrrgggh!"

Wharton grabbed the fat junior by the collar and dragged him off Mr. Quelch. Bunter planted a knee in Mr. Quelch's eye as he rose, and a foot on his waistcoat. Then, luckily, he was off, and Wharton rolled him aside.

"Oooooogh!" gurgled Bunter, as he rolled.

Wharton hastily bent to give his Form master aid. A crowd of fellows gathered round. Many of them were grinning, as if they saw something comic in this painful episode. Mr. Quelch, it was clear, saw nothing comic in it. His expression was simply terrific as he sat up.

He found his voice at last. It came out in spasmodic jerks.

"How—how dare you? Bless my soul! Oooogh! Wharton, you—you—you unruly boy! How dare you?"

"Sorry, sir!" gasped Wharton. "I—I——"

"How dare you chase another boy along a crowded platform? I can—grooogh!—make some excuse for a foolish boy like—ooogh!—Bunter, but you, the head boy of my—ooooch!—Form—you should be ashamed of such stupid horseplay! Have you no sense of decorum?" hooted Mr. Quelch.

"I—I——"

"Silence—not a word!" The Remove master rose rather painfully to his feet, panting for breath and glaring at his head boy with a look that the fabled gorgon might have envied. "I am ashamed of you! Silence!"

Wharton stood crimson.

"Here's your hat, sir," said Skinner of the Remove officiously. "I'm afraid it's been rather trodden on, sir."

Skinner did not think it necessary to add that he had trodden on it before picking it up.

"Thank you Skinner! Wharton, go to the school at once and wait for me in my study. Wait till I see you there!"

"It was really not my fault, sir——"

"Silence!"

"If you'll let me explain, sir——"

"I have told you to be silent, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch, in a grinding voice. "Is it your desire that I should administer punishment here, in this public place?"

Wharton compressed his lips hard.

The Remove master turned away, anxious to get out of sight into a waiting-room, to set himself a little to rights. Billy Bunter, in the meantime, had disappeared. Being in possession of a ticket, Bunter was able to pass the barrier, and he had promptly passed it and vanished. Harry Wharton, with compressed lips and a clouded brow, and a glint in his eyes, went back to join his friends.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Hard Lines!

BILLY BUNTER, squeezed in a corner of the school omnibus, grinned a fat grin as the Famous Five wedged in. He noted the cloud on Harry Wharton's brow, and discerned that Wharton's temper was ruffled. Still, the captain of the Remove could hardly kick him in the crowded bus, so that was all right. By the time they got to Greyfriars Bunter hoped that Wharton would have recovered his good temper, or, alternatively, as the lawyers say, that he would be able to dodge the beast till he did recover it.

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"If you fellows want anything to rest your feet on," laughed Bob Cherry, "there's Bunter!" "Keep your hoofs off me!" shrieked Bunter, as feet that seemed innumerable were planted on him. "Keep off, you rotters!"

As Bunter had used Wharton's ticket, apparently Wharton must have paid over again at the barrier—but that was his own fault! Why couldn't the silly ass have stated that he had dropped the ticket? Bunter saw no reason why not—though no doubt Harry Wharton saw a good many. They would have taken Wharton's word, and that, so far as Bunter could see, was all that mattered.

But the affair of the ticket was not likely to worry Wharton long—it was the "slanging" from his Form master, before a grinning crowd of Greyfriars men and a good many strangers, that brought the angry cloud to his brow. Bunter, of course, was not going to bother about that. Old Quelch had left Bunter out of it and taken it all out of Wharton, and the fat Owl could not help considering that it had really turned out very fortunately.

So Bunter grinned cheerfully as the school bus rolled on down Friardale Lane to Greyfriars.

There was a buzz of cheery voices in the crowded vehicle. Harry Wharton did not join in it. He had a sense of injustice, which was uncomfortable and irritating, and he had the prospect of "sticking" in his Form master's study when he reached Greyfriars instead of joining in the usual rush and buzz of the first day of term. Quelch, it seemed, was not coming on to the school yet. Perhaps he was still in the process of recovery from the terrific shock Bunter had given him. Until he came the head boy of his Form had to wait for him, kicking his heels idly in the study, to face a sharp-tempered, tart Form master when he arrived. It was a rotten first day of term.

The bus rolled in at the school gates, and Bob Cherry gave Gosling, the porter, a cheery yell. Old Gosling, as gnarled and crusty as ever, regarded the returning swarm of Greyfriars men with a pessimistic eye. During vacation, William Gosling almost enjoyed life—there was hardly a boy on the horizon. The beginning of a term revived in Gosling's mind his old conviction that all boys ought to be "drowned."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, old bean!" roared Bob. "Many happy returns, Gossy!"

Gosling blinked at him.

"Did you men know it was Gosling's hundredth birthday?" continued Bob. "Doesn't he look fit, for a man that's made his century?"

"The fitfulness is terrific," grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But I think you are in error, my esteemed Bob. It is the excellent Gosling's hundred-and-fiftieth birthday."

"Which is it, Gosling?" asked Frank Nugent affably.

Gosling snorted. Gosling owned to the age of sixty. He had owned to that age for years. But he was not a hundred, and he knew that he did not look a hundred.

"Wot I says is this 'ere—" began Gosling wrathfully.

"Hundred and seventy-five, I think," said Johnny Bull, "and, considering his age, my opinion is that Gosling isn't half so doddering as a fellow might expect."

And the Famous Five left Gosling more convinced than ever that all boys ought to be immediately and ruthlessly "drowned."

The old quad, silent so long, hummed

and buzzed with footsteps and voices. Passages rang to tramping feet, study doors banged, fellows shouted to one another up and down staircases. Form masters were very busy—and rather crusty! Names had to be taken, medical certificates looked at; innumerable were the duties of the first day of term. Mr. Quelch, for once, was not early on the scene; the Remove, for the moment, had no master, and, like the ancient Hebrews in the days when there was no king in Israel, they did that which was right in their own eyes!

Fellows bagged their old studies in the Remove passage, or argued hotly with other fellows who wanted to bag them. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent took possession of Study No. 1 in that passage as a matter of course, and hoped that there were no new "ticks" to be "bunged" in on them.

Fisher T. Fish, who had spent his vacation at the school, having failed to "plant" himself on anybody for the holidays, walked up and down the Remove passage, talking to every fellow he met, till the fellows could bear no more. Fishy was bursting with bottled-up conversation, and it flowed from him like a "spate" on a Highland stream. Every voice in the Remove was heard, more or less, but the nasal tones of Fisher T. Fish were heard continuously. Like the little brook in the poem, they went on for ever.

In Study No. 1, Frank Nugent glanced several times, rather uneasily, at his chum as Wharton unpacked various things. Wharton seemed to have forgotten his Form master's injunctions.

"Hadn't you better cut off to Quelch's

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study?" asked Frank, at last. "He may come buzzing in any minute, you know."

"I know," said Wharton shortly.

"Well, he will expect to find you there."

"Let him expect!"

"It's rather rough, old chap," said Frank quietly. "But I wouldn't begin the term with a row with Quelch. The old bean's bark is worse than his bite, you know. And he did have an awful cosh at Friardale."

"That wasn't my fault!"

"No; but the fact is, Quelch was a bit damaged, and an elderly gent is liable to fly off the handle at such times," said Frank, with a smile. "One has to make allowances for Form masters, you know. They're like horses that have to be given their heads."

Wharton looked at his chum, and his grim face melted into a grin.

"I dare say you're right, Frank. In fact, I know you are! I suppose I'd better play up!"

"I'll get the study to rights, old bean."

"Right-ho!"

Wharton left the study, and went down the Remove staircase. Frank had succeeded in pouring oil on the troubled waters, as he often did. There was a stubborn strain in Wharton's nature; he rather resembled, perhaps, a high-mettled steed, that could be led but not driven.

Skinner and Snoop and Stott were lounging on the next landing. Skinner and Snoop exchanged winks as Wharton came down.

"Going down to wait for Quelch?" asked Skinner.

"Yes!" said Harry curtly.

"I jolly well wouldn't, if I were you."

"I think you would, Skinner," answered Wharton quietly.

"Rotten injustice," said Skinner, shaking his head. "Quelch seems to have come back in a bad temper this term—not that he's ever good-tempered! You looked no end of an ass when he was slanging you at the station. I wouldn't stand it."

"Same here," said Snoop.

Wharton went on down the stairs without replying, but with his cheeks burning. Skinner & Co. grinned at one another as he went. If the captain of the Form started the new term at variance with his Form master, Skinner & Co. were not the fellows to regret it.

Half a dozen fellows called to Wharton before he reached Mr. Quelch's study. But he had to pass them unheeded. He was the only fellow in the Lower Fourth who was not free to do as he liked just then.

Harry Wharton went into his Form master's study. The room had a "first-day-of-term" look. A bucket of water, left by some forgetful housemaid, stood in the middle of the room, and a brush lay in the hearth. Wharton glanced from the window. Plenty of fellows were to be seen in the quadrangle, and he sighted Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, laying down the law to Mr. Capper, master of the Fourth—and saw, though Mr. Prout did not see, that Capper was longing to get away to his duties, glancing round him dismally, and shifting from one leg to the other, as he listened to the ponderous Prout. But he saw nothing of Mr. Quelch.

He moved about the room restlessly.

Probably something had delayed Mr. Quelch's arrival. It was quite unlike him not to be on the spot to take his Form in hand, on the first day of term. If he was delayed, Wharton had to wait till the delay was over. It was irritating

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and irksome, and more than once he was tempted to leave the study and go about his own affairs. But he restrained that desire, and walked to and fro with a clouded brow.

He threw himself, at last, into Mr. Quelch's armchair, bored and dismal. He could not even help himself to a book; the bookcase was locked—if any of Mr. Quelch's rather weighty literature would have appealed to him. When the dickens was old Quelch coming in?

The door suddenly opened.

"Safe as houses!" said the voice of Loder of the Sixth. "Come in, Carne."

"But—"

"Quelch's not in yet; we can use his phone. Come in, I tell you."

Loder and Carne of the Sixth came into the study, and shut the door. Harry Wharton smiled rather sourly. Sitting in the high-backed armchair, the back of which was to the door, he was unseen by the two seniors. As they knew that the Remove master had not yet arrived, they naturally supposed that the study was unoccupied.

If Loder and Carne wanted to borrow Quelch's telephone, in his absence, it was no business of Wharton's, and he did not stir.

Carne sat on a corner of the table, and Loder crossed to the telephone, which was near Mr. Quelch's desk. From that spot he would have seen Wharton in the armchair, had he looked in his direction; but, standing at the telephone, he had his back to him. He took off the receiver, and gave a number. Wharton, naturally, did not know the telephone number of the Cross Keys at Friardale, so it meant nothing to him. So far as he gave the matter any thought at all, he supposed that Loder was going to ring up his people at home, to tell them he had arrived at the school, or to give some harmless message. He gave quite a jump when Loder spoke into the transmitter.

"Is that you, Banks?"

Wharton did not know the telephone number of the Cross Keys, but he knew the name of the frowsy racing man, Mr. Joseph Banks, who made that delectable establishment his headquarters. He realised that he was going to hear something that was not only not intended for the general ear, but which Loder would be extremely disconcerted to know that a Lower boy had heard. Gerald Loder's reputation as a sporting man was not unknown in the Lower School.

"Hold on, Loder!" said Harry Wharton quietly.

Loder of the Sixth gave quite a convulsive jump, and the receiver dropped from his hand, hanging at the length of its cord. With a gasp of startled affright, Loder spun round towards Wharton.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Fight with a Bully!

HARRY WHARTON rose to his feet.

His face was cool and contemptuous.

For a moment Loder stared at him, fairly frightened. The sportsman of the Sixth was losing no time in getting into touch with his shady associates of last term. No doubt he had some pressing business to transact with Mr. Banks, of the Cross Keys! But if the Head, or any master, had learned that Loder had dealings with Mr. Joseph Banks, Loder would not have been likely to complete that term at Greyfriars. He would probably have had to shake the dust of Greyfriars from his feet on the very first

day of term. That sudden voice from the armchair had sent an icy chill down Loder's back.

But alarm gave place to rage, as he stared at the captain of the Remove. Carne stared at him, too, and then quietly slipped from the table and left the study.

"Wharton!" Loder gasped. "What are you doing here?"

"Waiting for Quelch!"

"You prying little scoundrel!" said Loder.

Wharton's lip curled.

"Don't be a fool, Loder," he answered curtly.

"What?" roared Loder.

"If I'd wanted to hear any of your shady rot I could have let you run on," said Wharton scornfully. "I stopped you!"

"Get out of this study!"

"I can't! I've got to wait for Quelch!"

The telephone was buzzing. Loder hastily picked up the receiver. The voice coming from it was plainly audible in the study.

"Hallo! You there? I'm 'ere, sir! Are you cut off, or what?"

Loder jammed the receiver on the hooks. He did not want Joe Banks' remarks to be heard by a Remove junior. Mr. Banks, at the Cross Keys, could only conclude that his sporting friend had been cut off at the exchange.

The bully of the Sixth fixed his eyes on Wharton again, with a savage gleam in them.

"Will you get out of this study?" he hissed.

"No!"

"I order you, as a prefect!"

"I've my Form master's orders to stay here!"

"I will explain to Mr. Quelch."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Yes—I can see you explaining to Mr. Quelch that you turned me out of the study because you wanted to talk to a bookmaker on his telephone!"

Loder clenched his hands.

"I was ringing up my home about a bag I've forgotten," he said. "I was speaking to the butler."

"Whose name is Banks, and who has a Courtfield number?" asked Wharton contemptuously.

Loder stood silent. It was not much use to lie; he knew that the junior knew to whom he had been speaking. He knew, too, that if Wharton had not chosen to warn him of his presence, the junior would have overheard his conversation with the dingy racing man.

But Loder was not thinking of gratitude for that warning. He was almost trembling with rage. Loder was a prefect, and about the last prefect at Greyfriars to take "backchat" from a Lower boy, if he could help it. He looked as if he would spring on the captain of the Remove like a tiger.

But he was more anxious than anything else to get rid of the junior, and get through to Mr. Banks again. It was a very pressing and important matter about a "gee-gee," and Loder was anxious to be "on." It was rather a dangerous matter to use a school telephone for such a purpose, so it was rather a stroke of luck for Loder that Mr. Quelch's delay in arriving placed the Remove master's instrument at his service. Wharton's unexpected presence in the study spoiled it all.

"I've told you to get out!" said Loder at length.

"I'd be glad enough," said Wharton coolly. "I suppose you don't think I want to stick here!"

"Well, go!"

"I won't!"

(Continued at foot of next page.)

**HERE'S SOME GREAT NEWS FOR YOU, SO—
COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS!**

HALLO, CHUMS! I expect the first thing you looked for in this extra-special number of the MAGNET were the first Six Super Stamps given away free in our Record - Breaking Collecting Scheme. And I can imagine you all smiling with joy when you caught a glimpse of them, for aren't these Super Stamps grand? Far better than I promised, eh? I made up my mind that MAGNET readers should have the finest Free Gift Scheme ever devised for British boys, and I must say these colourful Stamps, showing Every Boy's World in magnificent pictures, have surpassed even my wildest dreams. The scheme will turn out the finest collecting boom of the century!

A SIXPENNY ALBUM FREE!

All MAGNET readers are now started on the fascinating hobby of collecting the whole series of Super Stamps. The six complete sets of Stamps—beautifully coloured pictures of railway engines, aeroplanes, ships, dogs, roughriders, and the art of self-defence—comprises the mammoth total of 144 Stamps. Every one of you, I know will be tremendously keen to collect the six full sets, but you will want to keep the Stamps clean and in a safe place.

Well, as I have already told you, a magnificent Album has been specially prepared to hold the whole series of 144 Stamps, which, by means of their gummed backs, can be affixed in the Album. This Album is priced at sixpence, but every Magnetite will have the opportunity of getting it FREE! It is a wonderful offer, and none of you should miss the great chance of obtaining it. All you have to do is to buy to-day's issue of the "Modern Boy," price 2d, and you will find inside this special Free Album. But not only this—the "Modern Boy" also contains six

more Super Stamps, so you will have the grand Album and twelve Stamps with which to start off your collection. You can, however, improve on this start, for our companion paper, the "Ranger," on sale to-day, price 2d., also contains six Super Stamps—that is, eighteen Stamps and an Album from the three publications.

"SWAP" YOUR SPARE STAMPS.

Week by week, for fifteen more weeks, the MAGNET, "Modern Boy," and "Ranger" will each contain six Stamps. To obtain the whole series of Stamps it will be necessary to take one or other of the companion papers I have mentioned, each week, in addition to your usual copy of the MAGNET; then, by the end of this record scheme, you will have collected four complete sets of Stamps. Now, you will have enough spare Stamps over to enable you, by judicious "swapping" with other boys, to complete the two remaining sets. You'll like this "swapping" scheme immensely, for it adds no end of interest to the collecting of the Stamps.

Here are a few points to bear in mind, chums:

If you take two of the three papers—the MAGNET, the "Modern Boy," and the "Ranger"—each week for the next fifteen weeks, you can, by judicious "swapping" of your spare Stamps, complete your six sets and so fill the Album.

By taking all three publications you can complete two entire Albums. Therefore, two pals clubbing together to take the three papers between them, could each possess a full Album by the end of the scheme.

This Free Gift Scheme is the finest that has ever been presented to British boys, chums, so don't keep a good thing to yourselves—tell all your pals about it! Don't forget—this Stupendous

Scheme is confined to Britain's Best Boys' Papers:

**THE MAGNET,
THE MODERN BOY,
THE RANGER.**

On Sale Saturday. Price 2d.

**THE SUBJECTS OF THIS WEEK'S
SUPER STAMPS.**

The world's fastest train! That's the proud record of the G.W.R.'s famous Cheltenham Flyer, which makes such an imposing picture of Stamp No. 1 of the railway set. This train travels the 77½ miles from Swindon to Paddington in 65 minutes, and it touches over 90 miles an hour in places!

Not quite so famous, perhaps, is the Cornish Riviera Express, also belonging to the G.W.R., the subject of Stamp No. 2 of the railway set. The Cornish Riviera Express travels to and fro from Paddington to Penzance, and it does the 305 miles in 6½ hours, which means that it travels over 46 miles per hour.

The Ankle Throw, which is Stamp No. 1 in the self-defence set, is a very useful wrestling trick to know, and you can throw an opponent to the ground in a twinkling if you master it in the right way. Practise it on your pals.

Those of you who are keen on aeroplanes will get quite a "kick" out of this week's fine picture. It shows one of our leading scouting planes, which is capable of high speeds, and can give any invading aircraft more trouble than is altogether pleasant, in times of war.

The Thames Tug, those fussy little craft that snort up and down the River Thames, towing many barges laden with merchandise, makes the impressing picture of Stamp No. 11 of the ships set.

The Dalmatian, or "Plum-pudding Dog," as it is known, makes a stately picture in No. 10 of the "dogs" set.

The Dalmatian appears to have originated in a cross between a hound and a pointer. It has a white coat, which is besprinkled with either black or brown spots.

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"Then I shall deal with you myself! Find me a cane!"

"Find it yourself if you want it!" Loder glanced round the study. A cane was generally in evidence there in term time. But Mr. Quelch had not yet arrived to sort out that very necessary article. There was no cane to be seen.

"Go to my study and fetch my ash-plant," said Loder. "You'll find it on the table."

Wharton made no movement; he stood and watched Loder with a cool face, and a lurking smile. The bully of the Sixth was obviously hardly able to keep his hands off him.

"Will you go?" roared Loder, his temper almost at breaking-point.

"No!" Loder said no more. He made a spring at the junior, and grasped him by the shoulder, spinning him towards the door.

It was not much use for a junior, sturdy and strong as he was, to put up a fight against a big Sixth Form man. But Wharton's temper was as fierce as Loder's now, and his blood was up. He struggled desperately, and junior as he was, he was not easy for Loder to handle.

Up to that point there was no doubt that the captain of the Remove had been in the right in the dispute. But at that point there was equally no doubt—as reflection would have told him—that it was time to give in. Mr. Quelch had

ordered him to stay there, but certainly he would not have expected him to resist a Sixth Form prefect who was removing him by force. The responsibility would have been Loder's.

But the junior was hardly in a mood for calm reflection with the Sixth Form bully's grasp on him.

Loder spun him to the door, and he twirled round Loder and got back into the middle of the room. There was a crash, as he collided with the forgotten housemaid's pail. The bucket went over, and the water swamped on Mr. Quelch's carpet. Wharton stumbled over the bucket and fell, Loder sprawling over him. There was a yelp of pain from the senior as he knocked himself on the bucket.

"You young hound!" breathed Loder. He scrambled up, dragging Wharton to his feet, and swung the junior to the door again. Wharton grabbed at the furniture as he went for a hold, and two or three chairs crashed over in turn. They bumped on the door together, Wharton still resisting fiercely.

Loder had almost forgotten the cause of the dispute now, and quite forgotten where he was. His temper was boiling over. Harry Wharton barely dodged a blow that would have hurt him considerably had it landed, and Loder gave a frantic yell as his knuckles crashed on the door an inch from the junior's head.

The next moment Wharton hooked his

leg, jerked him over, and Loder sprawled on his back with a crash.

Wharton stood panting. He was still determined not to go, savagely determined, though it was certain that he was going to get damaged when Loder got on his feet again. All the stubbornness in his nature was roused now.

It was at that moment that the study door opened from outside. Mr. Quelch had arrived at last!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Loder Lies!

HENRY SAMUEL QUELCH stared into his study as if he could not believe his eyes.

Perhaps he could not, for a moment or two.

It was an extraordinary scene that met his gaze.

He had expected to find Wharton in the study. But he had not expected to find him ruffled and crimson and panting and dishevelled. And most certainly he had not expected to find a Sixth Form prefect there, sprawling on his back in the water upset from the housemaid's bucket. As it dawned on Mr. Quelch that he had arrived to interrupt a "scrap" in his study—a

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fight between a senior and a junior—thunder grew in his brow.

Mr. Quelch had arrived in an irritable mood. He had been annoyed and disturbed by the incident at Friardale. He had failed to obtain a taxi, as there had been a rush on those useful vehicles on the first day of term, and not one was available. He had walked to the school, a tiresome walk, not enlivened by the reflection that he was late to take his Form in hand, that the Remove would be running wild on the first day of term, and that if the Head noticed it he would, at least, elevate his eyebrows.

Tired and irritable, Mr. Quelch arrived to find his study looking as if a tornado had struck it, and a panting junior glaring at a sprawling prefect on the floor! Perhaps it was no wonder that Mr. Quelch's irritable ill-humour was transformed at once into deadly wrath.

His lips set like a vice as he stepped into the study.

Loder scrambled up.

In the Form master's presence, he could not venture to hurl himself at the junior, as otherwise he certainly would have done. But it was with great difficulty that the bully of the Sixth checked his rage.

"What does this mean?" Mr. Quelch's voice was not loud, but deep. "What does this disgraceful and unexampled scene in my study mean?"

"I—I—I—" panted Loder.

"Wharton! Is it possible that you have so far forgotten yourself as to strike a prefect?"

"I pitched him over, sir!" panted Wharton.

"Upon my word!"

"I'm sorry for this, sir," said Loder. He had himself in hand almost at once. "I found this junior in your study, sir, and supposing that he was here to play some trick in your absence, I came in and ordered him out. He refused to go, so—"

"Did not Wharton explain that I ordered him to remain in the study?"

Loder coughed.

"He said so, sir, but it is so very unusual, on the first day of the term, that I did not believe him. If I made a mistake I am sorry; but I offered to explain the matter to you when you returned—if you had indeed commanded him to remain here."

"I see no reason, Loder, why you should not have taken Wharton's word on the subject."

"The fact is, sir, that the Remove boys have been running rather wild, owing to your absence, and there has been so much larking—"

"No doubt," snapped Mr. Quelch. "Nevertheless, it is a fact that I ordered Wharton to wait for me in this study. However, he should certainly have left it when a prefect told him to do so, and left you to explain the matter to me. Why did you not do so, Wharton?"

"I did as you told me, sir!" answered Harry. "And Loder did not think I was here to play any trick in the study, either."

"What? You have heard him say so!"

"He has spoken falsely, sir."

"Wharton!"

"Loder came here to use the telephone," said Harry. "He told me to clear out while he did so. I refused, as I had your orders."

"I did not think, sir, that you would object to my using your telephone to speak to my people about some things I had forgotten," said Loder. "The

matter hardly concerns a boy in your Form, at all events."

"Certainly it does not!" said Mr. Quelch. "Wharton, you are very well aware that you were bound to obey the order of a prefect of the Sixth Form."

"I fancied that I was bound to obey your orders, sir."

"What—what? Is that meant for impertinence, Wharton?" rumbled Mr. Quelch. "How dare you make such an answer?"

"I only want to know, sir," answered Wharton. "You told me to remain in this study, and I told Loder so. He knew that it was the truth; he knows that I am not a liar, like himself."

"What?" thundered Mr. Quelch. "That is the kind of language I had to listen to from this junior, sir," said Loder. "I leave it to you to judge whether it is proper language to address to a Sixth Form prefect."

"How dare you, Wharton?"

Wharton was doggedly silent.

"As Wharton refused to go at my order, I was taking him out of the study," said Loder. "He resisted. That is all, sir."

"Wharton! Even if you supposed that you had a right to remain here in defiance of a prefect, because of my order, did you suppose that you were expected to resist a prefect by force? Dare you say so?"

Wharton did not speak.

"Answer me!" thundered Mr. Quelch. Wharton drew a deep breath.

"I suppose not, sir. But—"

"You should have obeyed Loder's order, in the first place, and left him to explain to me. You are perfectly aware of it. But, passing that over, you cannot have had the slightest doubt that when Loder proceeded to remove you from the room you should have gone quietly."

Wharton said nothing.

There was, in fact, nothing for him to say.

The fact was that at the beginning of the dispute he had been in the right, but that, under great provocation, he had lost his temper and placed himself in the wrong.

He stood with a set face and lips.

"You will leave my study now, Wharton!" added Mr. Quelch, as the captain of the Remove did not speak. "I shall deal with you later, after fully considering the matter. I have now no time for it."

Wharton left the study without a word.

Loder looked—and felt—uneasy as the door closed on the junior. He had no doubt that he was going to hear something unpleasant, now that the junior was no longer there to hear it. He was right.

Mr. Quelch fixed his gimlet eyes on the bully of the Sixth with a grim and frowning brow.

"Wharton has acted very recklessly and foolishly, Loder," he said. "I shall have no resource but to deal with him severely. But I cannot help seeing that your distrust of his word was the cause of the trouble. You should most certainly have accepted his statement that he had my orders to remain in this study, and you should have left him here undisturbed. You could have had no real reason to doubt the word of a boy known to be truthful and honourable."

"If I have made a mistake, sir," said Loder smoothly, "I am sorry. Wharton was extremely impertinent, and for that reason, perhaps, I did not give

his statement the attention I might have done."

"Possibly, but—"

"As it turns out, sir, I am sorry, and in the circumstances I should be glad if you would let the matter drop. So far as I am concerned, I am quite willing to overlook Wharton's conduct and say nothing more about it."

Mr. Quelch's frowning brow cleared.

He was in a rather awkward position, under the necessity of punishing a boy who had, after all, only obeyed his orders, though in a hot-headed and reckless way. Loder had suggested a way out. Mr. Quelch's opinion of Gerald Loder improved on the spot.

"I am glad to hear you say so, Loder," said the Remove master cordially. "Wharton has been very much to blame, but he has the excuse that my orders to him were very precise. Such reckless insubordination as forcible resistance to a Sixth Form prefect could not possibly be overlooked. But if you make the suggestion—"

"I do, sir!" said Loder. "In my opinion, sir, a little wildness on the part of Lower boys, on the first day of term, is a matter that may very well be overlooked and forgotten."

"Very good!" said Mr. Quelch. "I shall, then, see that Wharton expresses his regret to you personally, Loder, and the matter closes."

"If you will allow me to say so, sir, I would leave that to the junior's own sense of propriety," said Loder blandly. "I am sure that when he is cool he will realise that he has acted very badly and will be only too willing to make amends."

Mr. Quelch's eyes were fixed on Loder with a rather penetrating look. He did not, as a matter of fact, hold Loder in very high estimation. Certainly he had not expected this from him.

"Very well, Loder," he said, after a pause, "let the matter close here and now."

Mr. Quelch had quite a thoughtful look when Loder left his study. Such a sense of magnanimity, such a forgiving spirit, surprised him in Loder. He could not help feeling that he had hitherto done Loder less than justice in his estimate of him.

Loder of the Sixth breathed more freely when he was outside the study. The matter was ended. He had had to let that cheeky young scoundrel off, but he would find some way of making him squirm later on. The matter was at an end—that was the chief thing. There was no danger now of the junior, called over the coals by his Form master, mentioning what he had heard Loder say on the telephone.

Certainly Loder was prepared to deny, if necessary, that he had called up Mr. Joe Banks, at the Cross Keys, on the phone. Lies cost Loder very little. But, obviously, it was safer for that little matter to be left unmentioned; the less that was said about Joe Banks in connection with Loder the better!

Letting Wharton off punishment was disagreeable enough, but Loder's maxim was "Safety First!"—a very necessary maxim to a fellow who was trusted by his headmaster to maintain the laws of the school, and who flouted all those laws in secret.

Mr. Quelch was revising his opinion of Loder upward, as it were. Had he been aware of the prefect's thoughts he certainly would have revised it downward!



"Oh!" gasped Mr. Quelch, as Bunter charged headlong into him. The Remove master crashed down on his back, with Bunter sprawling over him. A fraction of a second later Wharton crashed on Bunter, fairly sandwiching the fat junior.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Difference of Opinion!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry's powerful voice boomed into Study No. 1. He arrived there in his usual cheery mood, with Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh at his heels. But the bright cheerfulness faded from Bob's ruddy face a little as he looked at Wharton and Nugent.

Wharton's brow was like thunder, and Nugent looked worried. Something was evidently amiss.

"Anything up?" asked Bob, rather uncomfortably.

Wharton did not answer, and Nugent hesitated.

"You fellows haven't been rowing, surely?" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"No, no!" said Nugent hastily.

"The rowfulness between such sticky and ridiculous friends would not be the proper caper!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh solemnly. "But what is the cause of the ludicrous frownfulness on your idiotic brow, my absurd Wharton?"

That question had rather the effect of dispelling the "frownfulness" on Wharton's brow. He grinned for a moment.

"Only a row with Quelch!" he said.

"Only!" said Johnny Bull.

"Well, Quelch had rather a bump at Friardale," grinned Bob. "I noticed he was rather like a gargoyle when he was calling over the Form. What has he given you—two hundred lines, or six of the best?"

"Nothing! It's not that. Quelch

seems to have forgotten about that idiot Bunter bumping him over. Perhaps it's dawned on him that it wasn't my fault if a fat chump butted into him," said Wharton bitterly. "I've had a scrap with Loder in Quelch's study.

"Oh crikey! Scrapping with a prefect!"

"Scrapping with a rotten bully and blackguard!" said Harry.

"Um!"

"Nugent thinks I was to blame, and I dare say you fellows will think the same," added Wharton, with a curl of the lip.

"I didn't say you were to blame, Harry."

"You think so."

"Gentlemen, chaps, and sportsmen," said Bob. "What's the good of argument? Some old johnny said once that argument was knowledge in the making! He was clear off-side! Argument is a way of letting off steam, and nothing else in the wide world. A better way of letting off steam is punting about a footer. Come on, and let's!"

"I'll tell you fellows," said Harry, unheeding. "You know Quelch ordered me to stay in his study till he came. I wasn't going to, but Nugent advised me to play up, and I did."

"Lucky for you you had a pal with some gumption, then!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Loder knew that Quelch was away, and he came into the study to ring up a racing blackguard at the Cross Keys."

"Draw it mild, old man!" said Bob. Wharton looked at him.

"Does that mean that you don't

believe me, Bob Cherry?" he asked, very quietly.

"Don't be a silly ass, if you can help it," answered Bob unceremoniously. "You jolly well know that it doesn't mean anything of the kind."

"What does it mean, then?"

"It means that I think you must be mistaken! We all know that Loder is a bad hat; but using a Form master's telephone to talk to a racing man is pretty thick, even for Loder!"

"He rang up before he saw me in the study. As soon as he spoke the name of Banks I knew what he was at, and warned him that I was there."

"Lots of people named Banks."

"Yes; Loder said it was the butler's name at home!" said Wharton scornfully. "But he gave a local number and I heard Banks' voice. I've heard his voice before."

"The man must be mad to take the risk!" said Bob. "He might be heard at the exchange. He must be frightfully keen to get in touch with Banks."

"Do you still think I was mistaken?"

"Not after what you've said, of course. What's the rest?"

"Loder ordered me out of the study, and I refused to go."

"Well, he had a right as a prefect—"

"I had Quelch's orders to stop there."

"Um!" said Bob.

"Loder tried to sling me out, and I scrapped with him. Quelch came in while it was going on. He blamed me."

Harry Wharton's chums looked at him.

"Didn't you expect him to blame you?" asked Johnny Bull quietly.

"For carrying out his orders?" asked Wharton.

"A man might be expelled for scrapping with a prefect! You ought to have gone, and explained to Quelch afterwards."

"That's what Nugent thinks," said Wharton bitterly.

"You'll think the same when you're cool."

"I'm cool now! I wasn't going to be bullied by Loder, I know that! Quelch would take a rather different view if he knew that Loder was calling up a boozy blackguard at a pub!"

"You didn't tell him that?"

"I'm not a sneak—even about a cad like Loder!"

"Well, Loder's a pretty thorough rotter; but it's no business of the Remove," said Bob. "You can't give a man away! They'd sack him like a shot if they knew what a dozen fellows could tell them. But what's the upshot? Mean to say you're up for a flogging?"

"I don't know yet! Quelch is busy to-day, and hasn't time for me," said Wharton satirically. "I'm to hang on waiting till he has time to consider the matter, and then, I suppose, I'm to know whether I'm going to be flogged because Loder couldn't get through to his bookmaker!"

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"That isn't how Quelch will look at it," he said. "If you mention Banks, Loder will swear black and blue that he's never heard of such a man. He can't afford to tell the truth, even if he wanted to—a fellow can't carry on the way Loder does without being a pretty thorough liar."

"I'm not going to mention Banks. I'm not at Greyfriars to help the Head manage the Sixth Form, that I know of!"

"Well, you've put yourself in the wrong, old chap! It was no business of yours what Loder was up to; and, dash it all, a Lower man has to hop when a prefect tells him to hop!"

"You'd have hopped?"

There was a perceptible sneer in Wharton's tone.

"Yes," said Bob quietly. "I'd have liked to give Loder one in the eye when he butted in at Courtfield to-day. But I don't quite see how they'd run a school if a junior dotted a prefect in the eye every time he felt inclined. Come to that, fellows often feel like dotting a master in the eye. Coker of the Fifth got into a fearful row once because he gassed that he was going to punch Prout. I think there's a limit, Wharton, and so long as we're in the Remove it's up to us to toe the line. If we don't like Greyfriars, we can ask our people to take us away, and they might—perhaps! But so long as we're here we know what we've got to stand!"

This was quite a long speech for Bob Cherry. Wharton listened to it with a sarcastic smile on his face.

"Well, I'm not quite so good and obedient," he said; "and if I get a Head's whopping, I'll make that cad Loder sit up for it somehow! Loder's a rotten cad and a bully, and glad of a chance to get me into a row with Quelch. And I dare say Quelch is glad to find somebody to rag on the first day of term—a beak generally is!"

"Wharton!"

Five juniors in Study No. 1 jumped fairly clear of the floor as that name was uttered in the doorway. They spun round, to stare in absolute dismay at Henry Samuel Quelch.

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Mr. Quelch stood in the open doorway, his face a picture of wrath.

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Bob Cherry.

It was clear that the Form master had heard Wharton's unthinking speech. Coming up the passage to a study, of which the door was wide open, he could scarcely have avoided doing so.

Wharton's face flushed crimson, and then paled. A dogged expression came over it. He had spoken without thinking—words that he certainly would not have uttered had he dreamed that Mr. Quelch was within hearing. What on earth Quelch was there for was a mystery! A fellow had a right to speak in his own study without taking precautions not to be overheard. If Quelch chose to butt in where he was not expected, or wanted, it was his own look out.

"I heard what you said, Wharton," rumbled Mr. Quelch.

"Did you, sir?" Wharton's tone was icily calm.

"I am surprised, pained, shocked, to hear such expressions on the lips of my head boy!"

"Are you, sir?" asked Wharton, in the same tone. "I didn't know, of course, that you were listening, sir."

If Wharton's chums had been dismayed before, they were horrified now. They dared not look at Mr. Quelch as Wharton made that answer.

"What—what!" Henry Samuel Quelch seemed unable to believe his ears. "Wharton, what did you dare to say?"

"You heard me, sir."

"Yes," said Mr. Quelch; "I heard you, Wharton. You have returned to school this term, Wharton, in a very strange mood. You have implied that your Form master was capable of injustice. As I have heard these words unintentionally, by accident, I cannot take note of them; but I am very disappointed in you, Wharton. I am shocked and surprised. I shall say no more."

Wharton stood silent.

"With regard to your reference to Loder," went on Mr. Quelch sternly, "I came here, Wharton, to speak to you on the subject of Loder. You are very well aware that you would be flogged for fighting with a Sixth Form prefect. Boys have been expelled for such lawless outbreaks of temper. But Loder himself has requested me to pass over the matter, and to allow it to be forgotten."

He paused.

"That matter, therefore, closes," said Mr. Quelch, "and I trust, Wharton, that you will express your regret to Loder and a sense of your gratitude to him, for having so kindly and generously spoken in your favour."

No answer.

Mr. Quelch gave his head boy a long, hard look, turned away, and left the study without another word.

Silence followed.

"Well, that's that!" said Bob, at last. "Thank goodness it's done with, anyhow. Unusually decent of Loder."

"I fancy he had his reasons," said Wharton, his lip curling. "Loder doesn't want any talk about Banks."

"Oh!" said Bob. "If that's it—"

"Do you think Loder would let me off for any other reason? He would be glad enough to get me flogged. He can pull Quelch's leg, but he can't pull mine."

"Well, let's get out," said Bob.

Getting out of doors was Bob Cherry's

cure for all ills, and not a bad cure, either. There is nothing like fresh air for blowing away worries and troubles, sulks and discontents.

"You fellows get out," said Harry. "I don't feel inclined for kicking a ball about now."

"Better come out—"

"I've got some things to do," said Wharton curtly.

"Oh, all right!"

Bob Cherry tramped away with Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh, and Nugent, after a doubtful glance at his chum, followed. Harry Wharton was left alone, but the "things" he had to do did not seem to occupy him. He stood staring from the study window, with a clouded and moody brow. The new term was not opening well for Harry Wharton, and his present mood was one that was more likely to make matters worse than better.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Comes in Useful!

GERALD LODER came tramping into his study, with a heavy step and a frowning brow. He hurled the door open and marched in, and slammed the door behind him, apparently not caring that the slam rang the length of the Sixth Form passage, and apprised all within hearing that he was in a savage temper. There was no doubt about the savage temper. Loder, scowling, kicked a chair across the study, and it fell with a crash. And a fat junior of the Remove, who was in Loder's study, where he certainly had no business, gave a squeak of sheer terror. And Loder, staring at Billy Bunter, undoubtedly looked as if Bunter had cause for terror.

Loder's temper had been sorely tried that afternoon. Owing to Harry Wharton, he had failed to get through to Joey Banks at the Cross Keys. He owed it to that cheeky junior, Wharton, of the Remove, and he was strongly tempted to take his ashplant and visit that cheeky junior in his study, and give him what he had asked for, and a little over.

Without some sort of a pretext, however, even the bully of the Sixth could not go to that length. So Loder came into his study feeling angry and savage, and in a mood to "whop" any luckless junior who came in his way. It was rather like Billy Bunter to walk into the lion's jaws, as it were. Why he was in Loder's study was a mystery; but there was no doubt that Loder was glad to see him there. He wanted to whop somebody, and the fat Owl was there to be whopped. And Loder reached for the ashplant on his table.

Billy Bunter eyed him through his big spectacles in terror. For two reasons Bunter wished he hadn't come to Loder's study. In the first place, there wasn't a bag of jam tarts on Loder's table, as Skinner of the Remove had led Bunter to believe; in the second place, Loder had caught him there, and was evidently in one of his worst tempers. Bunter quaked as he edged round the table, to keep that article of furniture between him and Loder, and cast a longing blink towards the door.

Loder grinned at him savagely, and swished the cane in the air.

"Well, what are you doing in my study, you young rascal?" he asked.

"Nothing!" gasped Bunter. "I—I

(Continued on page 12.)

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THE WORST BOY IN THE FORM!*(Continued from page 10.)*

never came here for the jam tarts, Loder."

"For what?" ejaculated Loder.

"Skinner never told me you had a bag of jam tarts," groaned Bunter.

"Bend over that chair!"

"I—I say, Loder, it—it was a rotten joke, you know. That beast Skinner was pulling my leg," groaned Bunter. "I—I—I wouldn't have touched your tarts, if there were any. The—the fact is, Loder, I—I came here to speak to you. It was nothing to do with jam tarts—nothing whatever. I—I wanted to thank you, Loder, for—for getting me that seat in the train to-day. It was so—so kind of you."

Loder pointed to the chair with his cane. Billy Bunter remained on the safe side of the table, blinking at him dismally.

"I—I thought you'd like me to thank you, Loder. It was so—so nice of you—nice and kind. I never thought you did it just because you wanted to take it out of those chaps. I don't think you're a beastly bully like other fellows do, Loder."

Loder, looking across the table at Bunter, changed his expression as a new thought seemed to come into his mind. Much to the fat junior's relief, he laid down the ashplant.

"C-c-can I go, Loder?" gasped Bunter.

"Hold on a tick," said Loder, quite genially. "The fact is, Bunter, I want a kid to take a message for me."

Bunter gasped with relief. He would have taken dozens of messages gladly to get out of Gerald Loder's study unwhopped.

"I'll take it with pleasure, Loder!" he gasped.

"It's down to the village," said Loder, eyeing him keenly.

"Oh lor'!" groaned Bunter.

He did not want a walk to Friardale.

"You're willing to go?" asked Loder, his hand straying towards the ashplant again.

"Oh, yes! Yes, rather!"

A walk to the village was better than a whopping.

"Not just yet," added Loder.

"About half-past seven, in fact."

"That's after lock-up," said Bunter.

"I believe fags sometimes sneak out after lock-up."

"That's all right; you can give me a pass out of gates, being a prefect," said Bunter.

Loder smiled grimly. He was not likely to give a junior a prefect's pass to take such a message as Bunter was to take.

"The fact is, it's a rather private matter," said Loder quietly. "You'll say nothing about it among the other fags. I can't possibly get away myself—there's the prefects' meeting, and a lot of other things, first day of term. You can cut out."

"Ye-e-es!" said Bunter dubiously.

He grasped the fact now that he was to break bounds—and that, officially, Loder of the Sixth was having nothing to do with it. That meant a whopping if he was spotted. Still, an uncertain whopping was better than a certain whopping, and Bunter realised very clearly that if he did not agree to oblige Loder, he would be whopped before he got out of the study.

"Of course, it's quite a harmless matter," went on Loder, eyeing the fat Owl sharply—and a little uneasily. "A man I know is staying in the village,

and he happens to have put up at a place that is out of bounds."

"Oh!" said Bunter.

"There's no time for a letter, as he simply must get my message this evening."

"I—I see."

"I'll dash off a note, and you can take it for me," said Loder carelessly. "I'd be obliged, Bunter."

Billy Bunter blinked at Loder through his big spectacles. Billy Bunter's fat face indicated that the brain within was not of the most brilliant variety. But if Loder supposed that even Bunter was fool enough to believe that he was sending a "harmless" note to a place that was out of school bounds, he did even Bunter's fat intellect an injustice.

Bunter knew more about the sportsman of the Sixth than Loder fancied. The fat Owl was quite well aware that he was to take a note to some one of Loder's shady acquaintances outside the school.

"You see how it is," said Loder genially, but watching Bunter like a hawk. He was wondering whether Bunter was really such a fool as he looked.

To his surprise, and not to his pleasure, Bunter gave him a fat wink.

"My dear chap," said Bunter. "I see how it is! I'll do it. Leave it to me."

Loder made an almost convulsive grab at the ashplant. "Dear chap" from Billy Bunter, and a confidential wink, were rather a great deal for Loder to stand from the fatuous Owl.

But he restrained his natural desire to thrash the fat Owl and pitch him out of the study. He had to get word to Joey Banks—it was awfully important, if Loder was going to be "on" in the race at Wapshot on the morrow. He had to make use of somebody.

Taking no notice, therefore, of the impudent familiarity assumed by the fatuous Owl, Loder sat down at the table to write a note.

Bunter watched him, with a fat grin.

The note was written and sealed in an envelope that bore no superscription.

Loder handed it to Bunter.

"I've told you that it's a rather private matter," he said. "You'll keep that dark till you deliver it."

"You bet!" grinned Bunter.

He slipped the letter into an inside pocket.

"There's a call-over at seven," went on Loder. "After that you can slip away easily enough—there's no prep to-night."

"That's all right."

"You'll go down to the village, and—" Loder paused and went on:

"You know the inn, the Cross Keys?"

"Don't I!" grinned Bunter.

"Tap on the side door, and hand that note to whoever opens it, and say it's for 'Mr. B,'" said Loder.

"Right-ho!"

"No answer—just cut off when you've handed it in."

"I get you, old bean!" said Bunter breezily.

"Come and tell me when you get back. There'll be a bag of jam tarts in the study then," added Loder, with a very genial smile.

Bunter's eyes glistened behind his big spectacles.

"Rely on me," he said.

"Not a word, mind!"

"That's all right."

Billy Bunter rolled out of the study. He was glad to get out safe.

Loder shut the door after him, and lighted a cigarette, with a thoughtful look.

Even a fool like Bunter was capable of dropping over the Cloister wall,

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"You will come with me, Bunter!" said Mr. Prout, grasping the Owl by the shoulder, "Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter in horror as he heard the voice of the Fifth Form master. "I—I say, sir, I—I haven't been to the Cross Keys!"

taking the note to Mr. Banks, and getting back undetected, especially on the first night of term, when there was a good deal of confusion before things had settled down. But in case the young ass made some bloomer, and was caught out, there was nothing in the note to endanger Loder.

He had his own code for communicating with Joey Banks; Loder was not fool enough to put himself into the power of the racing man.

When he wrote to Joey Banks, as he often did in term time, he wrote in "print" letters that bore no resemblance whatever to his own handwriting, and he signed himself "X." Had Mr. Banks ever thought of turning to blackmail, he could have made no use of Loder's letter against him. Loder certainly was a fool to have any dealings with Mr. Banks at all, but he was a good deal more of a rogue than a fool.

It was all right, Loder concluded; anyhow, he ran no risk, and he dismissed the matter from his mind, and strolled along to Walker's study for a game of banker to pass the time till the prefects' meeting.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

No Bunk for Bunter!

"HARRY old chap—"

Harry Wharton uttered an impatient exclamation.

He was not in the best of tempers, and certainly in no mood for Billy Bunter.

He was walking by himself in the old Cloisters, a quiet and secluded spot, after call-over. The House was not yet locked up, and though fellows were supposed to be in the House after call-over, there was some laxity on the first day of term.

Wharton was in a troubled frame of mind.

Also, he had been curt, to say the least, with his friends, and they had let him alone since. That was not agreeable. He knew that they would welcome him, without dreaming of taking offence, if he joined them. That was all right, but it was rather like making allowances for a fellow with an unreasonable temper, and Wharton did not like admitting, even to himself, that he was a fellow with an unreasonable temper.

He was taking a walk in the fresh autumn evening to think it over, which was about the best thing he could have done. Then Bunter happened.

The fat junior came rolling into the Cloisters, blinked at Wharton, and joined him. There was an air of secretive slyness about Bunter, which would have revealed to anyone who had observed him, that the fat Owl was "up" to something.

"I saw you mooching this way, old fellow," said Bunter. "Just what I want. Give me a bunk, will you?"

"A what?" ejaculated Wharton, staring at him.

"A bunk up, old chap! This way!"

"You're not going out of bounds, I suppose?" said Wharton, in astonishment.

"Ask no questions, and I'll tell you no fibs," said Bunter astutely. "What I want is a bunk over the wall!"

"You fat chump! Go back to the House!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! I think you might give a fellow a bunk over the wall! Never broken bounds yourself, I suppose?" added Bunter, with a sneer.

"Don't be an ass, Bunter," said Wharton patiently. "You'll get six if you're spotted."

"Well, they're not likely to spot a man first night of term," said Bunter. "Besides, a man can go out after lock-up with a prefect's leave."

"If you've got an exeat, there's no

need to sneak over the wall. You can ask Gosling to let you out at the gate."

Bunter grinned.

"Likely!" he said. "I should get into a fearful row!"

"Then you've not got an exeat?"

"Well, Loder wouldn't be likely to give me one, considering!" chuckled Bunter. "Too jolly deep for that. Ho, he, he!"

Wharton started.

"You're going out for Loder?" he exclaimed.

"That's telling!"

Wharton stared at the fatuous Bunter blankly.

"You utter idiot!" he said. "If Loder's sending you out of bounds—"

"No bizney of yours," said Bunter independently. "I can oblige a friend in the Sixth Form if I like, I suppose? Besides, it's not a note for Loder that I'm taking out. I shouldn't tell you if it was. Loder told me specially to keep it dark."

"Where are you taking a note for Loder?" asked Harry quietly.

"Find out!"

"Look here, Bunter—"

"I didn't ask you to meddle with my personal affairs, Wharton," said the fat Owl, with dignity. "I asked you for a bunk over the wall."

"Well, I won't bunk you over the wall," said Harry. "That cur isn't going to send a Remove man on his shady business if I can stop him."

"Look here, you cheeky beast—"

"Is that note for some racing man?" asked Wharton. "It can't be anything else." He started again. "Of course, that's it—Banks! Loder couldn't get through on the phone to-day—and he's sending a message. Bunter, you born idiot, it's a flogging if you're caught."

"I shan't be caught!" said Bunter.

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(Continued from page 13.)

"I'm pretty cute, you know. Besides, I'm only going to hand in the note at the side door."

"Listen to me, Bunter." Wharton spoke patiently and kindly. "Don't get mixed up in anything of the kind. Can't you see that it's a rotten, disgraceful business?"

Bunter sniffed.

"I didn't ask you for a sermon, Wharton! Loder may fancy I believe that a man he knows has put up at the Cross Keys—he, he, he! I jolly well know what I know! I know who Mr. B. is! He, he, he! Loder's having a flutter! Well, I rather like a flutter myself, at times."

"What?" ejaculated Wharton.

"I'm rather goey, you know," said Bunter breezily. "I'm a bit of a rorty dog at times, old bean. Not namby-pamby like you, you know."

"You babbling fathead—"

"That's enough," said Bunter. "If you won't give me a bunk, you won't, and you can go and eat coke. Mind your own business."

And Bunter rolled on into the shadow of the Cloisters, leaving the captain of the Remove staring after him.

A moment more, and Wharton ran to overtake the fat Owl. Whether it was Wharton's business or not, he could not let the foolish, obtuse Owl be made use of like this, at his own risk, by an unscrupulous rascal. He caught Bunter by the shoulder, as he was blinking at the Cloister wall, selecting a spot to climb.

"Look here, Bunter—"

"Ow! Leggo!" squeaked Bunter.

"You can't go—"

"Will you let go, you meddling beast?" demanded Bunter. "I tell you I'm jolly well going!"

"And I tell you you're not!" said Harry Wharton. "If you haven't sense enough to keep out of such a thing, I'll keep you out. You're going back to the House!"

"I'm not!" roared Bunter.

"You are!"

And Bunter did. With Harry Wharton's grasp like iron on the back of his collar, the Owl of the Remove had no choice in the matter. He went—loudly and wrathfully expostulating as he went. But he had to go.

"Will you leggo, you beast?" roared Bunter, as they neared the lighted door of the House. "Mind your own business, you rotter. Leggo!"

"Get in, fathead!"

Bunter got in, gasping with wrath. Then Harry Wharton released his collar. Billy Bunter gave him a glare that almost cracked his spectacles.

"You—you—you cheeky beast!" he gasped.

"Cut off, ass!"

The door of the House was wide open,

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and Harry Wharton stood in the doorway. Billy Bunter eyed him in speechless wrath. He was going—and he wanted to get it over! Afterwards there was to be a bag of jam tarts in Loder's study. If that was not a good reason for obliging the bully of the Sixth, Billy Bunter did not know what a good reason was.

He made a rush to get round Wharton. The captain of the Remove caught him by the collar again.

"Leggo, you rotter!" yelled Bunter.

"Upon my word!" Mr. Quelch came out of Masters' passage, frowning portentously. "Wharton! You seem to have a peculiar desire to make scenes! Are you under the impression that the House doorway is a proper place for horseplay?"

Wharton flushed crimson and released Bunter's collar.

"I warn you, Wharton, that better behaviour than this is expected of the head boy of a Form!" said Mr. Quelch sternly.

"Very well, sir!" said Wharton quietly, and taking no further notice of Bunter, he went towards the stairs.

"Bunter! You must not leave the House!" said Mr. Quelch. "It is now lock-up."

"I—I only wanted to cut across and post a letter, sir, only Wharton began ragging—"

"Oh, very well! You may post the letter," said the Remove master. "Return to the House immediately!"

"Yes, sir!"

Bunter rolled out. Mr. Quelch walked away with a knitted brow. It looked to him as if his head boy had changed very much for the worse during the vacation. This was the second time that day he had found him ragging a fat, helpless fellow—first chasing him headlong along the platform at Friardale Station, and now preventing him from cutting across to the school box to post a letter—probably a letter home to tell of his safe arrival at the school!

These two incidents, added to the scrap with a Sixth Form prefect, and the expressions Wharton had used to Loder—actually calling the prefect a liar—made Mr. Quelch shake his head very seriously. Most keenly of all, perhaps, rankled the words he had overheard at the door of Study No. 1—words which he felt to be unjust as well as disrespectful. It was only the first day of term, but Mr. Quelch was already wondering whether he could continue to trust Harry Wharton in the position of head boy of the Form.

There was a sarcastic smile on Wharton's face as he went up to his study in the Remove. Bunter had gone out again—most assuredly not to post a letter. He was on his way to the Cross Keys, with a note from Loder of the Sixth to a bookmaker! Wharton had done what he could to stop him; as head boy, as captain of the Form, and as a decent fellow, it had been up to him to save the egregious Owl from his own folly if he could! Quelch fancied that he had been "ragging" Bunter—practically bullying him—that was his reward for an intervention of which Quelch certainly would have approved had he known the facts.

He did not know the facts. But he might have trusted his head boy; he might have known that Harry Wharton was not a bully, and that if he ragged, it was not a fat and helpless fellow like Bunter that he would pick out to rag.

That seemed to be Quelch's opinion of him! Wharton sarcastically told himself that if that was Quelch's opinion, he

was welcome to it. He could do without Quelch's good opinion, if it came to that.

Study No. 1 was empty and dark. Wharton turned on the light and frowned round the study. His friends, no doubt, were in the Rag—Nugent, at least, might have given him a look-in. He did not go down to the Rag to join the merry crowd there. He was feeling angry and sore.

But the cloud faded from his face as a hurrying footstep came along. Frank was coming up to look for him!

But it was not Frank! It was Herbert Vernon-Smith who looked into the study. The Bounder was grinning.

"Only you here?" he asked. "Join up, old bean!"

"What's on?" asked Harry, without much interest. He had supposed that it was Nugent coming, and he was disappointed and rather miserable.

"Rag on the Fifth!" said Smithy. "Coker's been asking for it—"

"What's Coker been up to?"

"Blessed if I know," confessed the Bounder frankly. "But the fellows are going to rag his study—first night of term, you know—there's always a rag. Come on and lend a hand. Old Prout's out—the coast's clear!"

Wharton hesitated a moment. The Bounder, utterly reckless at the best of times, was the fellow to take the utmost advantage of the licence allowed on first night of term. It was not Wharton's way to join in Smithy's hare-brained escapades. Indeed, as head boy of the Form, he was expected to exercise a restraining influence. But his hesitation was brief. If he was to be judged a reckless ragger, he might as well have the fun of ragging. So he told himself, at any rate. His friends were leaving him alone, and he did not want to be odd man out on the first night of term. Smithy was better than nobody!

"I'm on!" he said.

"Good man!" said the Bounder. "Come on."

And Wharton followed him.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Caught!

MR. PAUL PROUT, master of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars School, stopped in his portly and majestic progress, and stared before him.

Mr. Prout's eyesight was not so good as it had been in the old, old days before the hair had thinned on the top of his majestic head, and when he had been able to see his knees.

He doubted now whether his eyes had not deceived him.

Prout had walked down to Friardale to call at the station about some luggage which ought to have been sent on to the school, but which had not been sent on. Having completed his business at the station, Prout was rolling homeward at his usual slow and stately pace. His homeward way took him past the disreputable establishment, the Cross Keys, which lay back from the lane outside the village. And as Prout came along by the Cross Keys from one direction, a podgy figure came along from the other, turned from the lane, and cut into the dark path beside the inn.

It was no wonder that Prout wondered whether his eyes deceived him. The person he had seen was a Greyfriars junior, in a Greyfriars cap, and, from the ample outlines of his form, Prout had little doubt that he had recognised him as one of Mr. Quelch's boys—Bunter to wit!

(Continued on page 18.)

"LINESMAN CALLING!"



Do you know that there is a football law broken in almost every match? The Linesman, whose first cheery chat is full of interesting football facts, tells you all about it. He will be pleased to hear from MAGNET ohms who have problems to solve. Write to him at The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

THE other day your Editor asked me to entertain his readers with some weekly chat on the greatest of winter games—football.

"You can start off," he said, "by answering that."

Now "that" was a letter from a reader which contained the following conundrum:

"There is a football rule," the letter began, "which is broken in hundreds of football matches every Saturday, but nobody ever takes the slightest notice. Can you guess which rule it is?"

A MISLEADING LAW.

I got out my football rule book, put on my thinking cap, which is really a towel soaked in cold water, and went through the rules with a small toothcomb, as it were. And I am happy to tell you that I think I discovered the rule which is the point of my friend's conundrum.

It is football law number three, and it reads as follows:

"After a goal is scored the losing side shall kick off."

Now supposing a side is losing a match by five to nothing, then that side which is losing scores a goal. The side which is losing by five goals to one doesn't re-start the game from the centre of the field. The other side—that is the winning side—kicks off. And the referee never stops them from doing so.

Of course, the trouble with this football law is that it doesn't really mean what it says. It means—and this is the way it is carried out—that the side losing that particular goal shall then kick-off from the centre of the field. It is possible that there are other laws of the game which are broken every week, but I am very glad to have been able to solve this conundrum, and if I have not solved it correctly I hope the reader will write and tell me which rule he had in mind.

Incidentally, I want to say, this first week, that I am always "at home" to any reader interested in this game of football. If there is anything you want to know about the rules of the game—how to play the game in any particular position, or about any of the first-class players in whom you are interested, write to me. I shall enjoy being of assistance.

WEAVER, THE WONDER.

It is often said that there is nothing new, and possibly this statement may apply to football. But while there may be nothing new, there are interesting developments, from time to time, of old ideas. The readers who like to see something out of the ordinary should take an opportunity, if possible, of watching the Newcastle United team this season—or at least, one particular member of it. I refer to Sam Weaver, the left half-back.

This footballer is at least a champion in one direction,

He can throw the ball from the touch line, legitimately, farther than any other player I have ever seen.

His throw-in is so powerful, and the ball goes so far, that when Newcastle United have a throw-in on Weaver's side of the field, it is almost as good as a free kick to them.

I had a chat with Weaver the other day about this throw-in of his, and he assured me that he can throw the ball for forty yards. He has actually thrown it that distance in a First League match.

On a full-sized pitch a throw of forty yards from near the corner-flag means that the ball would land about level with the far goalpost before it touched the ground. Now you can see why Weaver's throw is as useful to his side as a free kick.

PRACTICE AND PATIENCE.

There is nothing extraordinary in the way the throw is done. Weaver told me that when he went to Newcastle the idea occurred to him that he ought to be able to throw the football much farther than he did. So he started practising. He used to stand on the edge of the penalty area—that is, eighteen yards from goal—and try to throw the ball over the crossbar. At first he could scarcely do it at all. Then he began to do it occasionally, and now, of course, he could do it every time. Here there is a little lesson in what practice and patience can achieve.

I don't think Weaver is specially strong, nor has he very big hands or ultra-powerful arms. It is all a matter of timing.

In making this extraordinary throw Weaver takes the ball right back behind his shoulder blades, and bends his body well back, too. Then, as he comes over with his arms, the body comes forward, so that the full strength of the body and arms are behind the throw.

FOOTBALL'S PETER PAN.

There are footballers who seem to grow old when they are still very young. There are others who never seem to grow old. In the latter category must be placed Bob Kelly. I shall follow Kelly with special interest this season. He has joined up with Preston North End, and the idea is that his experience will help the side back to the top class and make them worthy once more of the title "proud Preston."

Kelly has been in first-class football just over twenty years, and it is indeed strange that he should now become a Preston North End player, for therein lies an interesting story.

When Kelly was a lad of eighteen, playing with St. Helens, he was such a knowing forward that big clubs began to be interested in him. Among these clubs were Preston North End and Burnley. That meant there was a little affair of a transfer fee to be arranged.

Preston North End could then have had Kelly for less than three hundred pounds, but Burnley made an offer which was five pounds more, and so Kelly went to Burnley.

I wonder how often, in intervening years, during which Kelly has been worth thousands of pounds, the North End officials have regretted they did not spring the other five pounds when Kelly was a boy. He has been a consistent goal-getter for both Burnley and Huddersfield, and his scheming play has resulted in many more goals being scored. Also, he has been capped no less than thirteen times for England. So Preston must feel pleased that they have got this player on their staff at last.

THE LINESMAN.

"GOLLY! Where's my HOLIDAY ANNUAL?"



Bunter is distinctly perturbed. Somebody's "pinched" his HOLIDAY ANNUAL—and that's no joke! You'd hate to lose yours, wouldn't you? You all know what a grand budget of stories of School-life, Sport and Adventure it contains. There are all the fun and thrills of a lifetime between two covers. There are breezy poems and articles, and a clever little play for amateur actors. In case you haven't got yours yet, here's a tip—See your Newsagent right now!

The GREYFRIARS
HOLIDAY
Annual - 6/- NET
Now on Sale at all Newsagents



THE WORST BOY IN THE FORM!

(Continued from page 16.)

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Prout. There are black sheep in every flock, as Prout knew—though, like most Form masters, he was persuaded that the black sheep at Greyfriars were not in his own particular flock, the Fifth Form. But for a fellow to break bounds after lock-up, on the very first night of the new term, to visit a public house, was very "thick" indeed!

Prout was not wholly satisfied with the way any Form at Greyfriars was managed, with the solitary exception of the Fifth! Often and often did Prout give his colleagues ponderous advice on the subject of their Forms. This advice was seldom received with gratitude—sometimes, indeed, Prout's colleagues showed a feeling quite of bitterness on the subject! Quelch, the master of the Remove, was bitterest of all when Prout kindly and ponderously butted into what did not concern him.

Quelch had no use for advice from older and wiser heads—but even Quelch could scarcely expect the Fifth Form master to pass on, unregarding, when a Remove boy was breaking the laws of Greyfriars right and left. Quelch could hardly maintain that all was right in his Form, and that he had no need of assistance from a more experienced colleague, when one of his boys was spotted—and caught—haunting the forbidden purlieus of a "pub."

For Bunter was going to be caught. Prout was determined on that! From a sense of duty as a Greyfriars Form master he was going to catch the young rascal, and march him in for judgment. Mingled with Prout's sense of duty was a happy anticipation of the look on Quelch's face when he marched Bunter in.

Prout's ponderous figure moved on, and came to a halt again at the corner, where the path beside the Cross Keys turned from the lane.

There, deep in the shadow of a spreading beech, Prout waited.

Bunter of the Remove had gone in without the slightest suspicion that he had been seen. He would come out and walk right into Prout's hands.

Prout waited patiently.

He was prepared for a long wait. But, as it happened, he did not have to wait many minutes. Billy Bunter had not gone into the Cross Keys, as Prout supposed. He had delivered a note at the side door.

That duty done, Bunter rolled away, thinking certainly not of Prout, but of a bag of jam tarts in a Sixth Form study.

He gave a squeak of alarm, as passing under the branches of the beech towards the lane, he felt himself suddenly grasped by the shoulder.

"Oooogh!" squeaked Bunter.

"You will come with me, Bunter!" said Mr. Prout's deep and fruity voice.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He blinked at Prout through his big spectacles, in horror. Prout jerked him towards the lane.

"Come!" he boomed.

"I—I—I say, sir," gasped Bunter. "I—I say—"

"You need say nothing!" boomed Prout. "I shall take you to your Form master, Bunter! Anything you have to say may be said to Mr. Quelch."

"Oh lor'!"

Still with a plump hand on Billy Bunter's shoulder, Prout walked along

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the lane in the direction of the school. Bunter's fat heart almost died in his podgy breast as he went.

He was "copped." That was how Bunter expressed it to himself, though Prout would not have described it so.

The thought of Mr. Quelch's face when he got in, was unnerving. Bunter quaked from head to foot.

"I—I say, sir, I—I was only taking a—a—a walk!" he stuttered. "I—I haven't been to the Cross Keys."

"I saw you go there, Bunter!"

"I—I—I was just passing—"

"I saw you go to the building, Bunter!"

"It's—it's quite a mistake, sir," groaned Bunter. "I—I've never been to such a place, I—I wouldn't! You—you fancied it, sir!"

"What?" boomed Prout.

"P'r'aps your sight ain't very good, sir," suggested Bunter. "You're awfully old, you know, sir!"

If Bunter hoped to improve matters by that happy suggestion, Bunter was disappointed. A sound came from Prout that resembled the growl of the Great Huge Bear. It sounded as if Prout was waxy—Bunter did not know why.

"You see, sir—" pursued Bunter.

"Silence!" boomed Prout.

"But, I say, sir—"

"I repeat, silence! Not another word of impertinence, Bunter."

"Oh lor'!"

Prout, evidently, was waxy. Billy Bunter tramped on by his side, in the lowest of spirits. Not another word was said till they reached the school.

The Fifth Form master did not go to Masters' gate, to which he had a key. He rang the bell for Gosling to let him in at the School gates. Almost it might have been suspected that Prout was willing to draw the general attention to the fact that one of Mr. Quelch's boys had been caught in an act of serious delinquency.

Gosling came grumbling down to the gates. He touched his hat to Prout, and stared at Bunter.

"My eye!" murmured Gosling.

Prout marched Bunter on to the House. He marched him in, and marched him to Mr. Quelch's study. Bunter went with lagging footsteps. Daniel, going into the den of lions, must have felt very much like the hapless Owl of the Remove felt at that moment.

Tap! Prout knocked at Mr. Quelch's door, and opened it. Mr. Quelch, who was busy unpacking books and papers, glanced round, not with a pleased expression on his face. He looked still less pleased when he saw Prout.

"Mr. Quelch," said Prout heavily, "I have brought Bunter to you—"

"I can see that you have brought this boy of my Form to me, Mr. Prout," said the Remove master acidly. "I shall be glad to learn your reason. I have mentioned many times, I believe, that I require no assistance from my colleagues in the management of my Form!"

"As a master of Greyfriars, sir, as a member of Dr. Locke's staff, sir, I am bound to intervene when I find a Greyfriars boy acting in a manner calculated to bring disgrace upon the school, sir!" boomed Prout.

Mr. Quelch's lips set in a tight line. "What has Bunter done—if he has done anything?" he asked.

"Nothing, sir," said Bunter hastily. "I haven't been out of bounds, sir! Besides, I only went for a walk."

"Has this boy been out of bounds, Mr. Prout?" Grudgingly, Quelch had to admit that if Prout had found a

Remove boy out of bounds after lock-up he was bound to bring him in.

"This boy, sir, was not only out of school bounds, but I saw him, sir—saw him with my own eyes—enter a place that no Greyfriars boy is allowed to enter—or even to approach!" boomed Prout. "I refer, sir, to the disreputable public house, sir, known as the Cross Keys!"

Mr. Quelch breathed hard. The look on his face made Billy Bunter cringe. The thing itself was bad enough, but to have it reported to him by Prout was the unkindest cut of all. Only too well Mr. Quelch knew that Prout's fruity voice would soon be booming in Common-room, telling the other masters what he thought of Quelch's Form.

"I leave the boy in your hands, sir," said Prout. "I felt it my duty, sir, to bring him back to the school and to report his iniquitous conduct, sir! No doubt the matter will come before the headmaster, in which case, sir, I am at your service whenever you desire."

"Thank you, Mr. Prout," gasped the Remove master. He was not feeling thankful.

Prout rolled ponderously out of the study. Billy Bunter yearned for the study floor to open and swallow him up. But the study floor, of course, did not oblige. He cringed and quaked under the gleaming eye of his Form master. Seldom, or never, had Mr. Quelch been so intensely angry. It was a score for Prout, which was extremely irritating. It was a surprise and a shock to Mr. Quelch to discover that one of his own boys was a "pub-haunter"—and so confirmed a young rascal that he ventured on wrong-doing on the very first day of the term. There was a long pause, during which Bunter fairly shivered under Mr. Quelch's eye.

"Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch at last. "I shall not trouble Dr. Locke with this matter to-day; he is far too busy to deal with you. You will come before your headmaster in the morning. Whether you will be expelled, or flogged, is for Dr. Locke to decide—I wash my hands of the matter. You will be sent to the punishment-room for the night; to-morrow morning you will be judged by your headmaster."

"Oh lor'!" groaned Bunter.

Mr. Quelch stepped to the door and opened it.

"Follow me, Bunter!"

In the lowest of spirits, Billy Bunter followed his Form master.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Bad for Bunter!

GERALD LODER breathed hard. Loder had been waiting rather anxiously for Bunter to return and report that his precious note had been safely delivered to "Mr. B." at the Cross Keys. The prefects' meeting was over, which Loder had been obliged to attend, and he was hanging about, wondering why the fat junior was so long, when he saw Bunter come in—with Mr. Prout!

With feelings that were far from enviable, Loder of the Sixth watched Prout take the fat Owl to his Form master's study. Bunter, it was clear, had been caught by that meddlesome old ass out of bounds! If he had been caught with the note on him—

There was nothing in the note to incriminate Loder; he was too careful for that. But he was deeply uneasy and alarmed. He hung about the end of Masters' passage and saw Prout come away from Mr. Quelch's study. A few minutes later the Remove master

emerged, with Bunter trailing behind. Had the fat idiot said anything about Loder—had Quelch believed him, if he had said anything?

Loder was soon reassured on that point. Mr. Quelch glanced at him and stopped. Loder's heart beat unpleasantly for a moment; but the next moment he was relieved.

"Loder," said Mr. Quelch, "if you are not occupied at the present moment—"

"Not at all, sir."

"Please take this junior to the punishment-room. Here is the key. I have to give directions for the room to be prepared for occupation for the night. Please lock Bunter in and bring back the key to my study."

"Certainly, sir."

"That old ass Prout copped me," he mumbled. "Oh dear!"

"Where?"

"Coming back to the lane."

Loder breathed more freely.

"You'd been to the Cross Keys?"

"Yes," groaned Bunter. "I handed in your note, Loder, and the man said it was all right. That awful beast Prout must have seen me going in—he was waiting for me, and copped me as I came away. Fancy that silly old ass mooching about there! I say, Loder, Quelch says I'm going to be sacked or flogged! Oh lor'!"

Loder eyed him grimly.

"You won't be sacked," he said.

"They won't sack a Lower Fourth fag—on the first day of term, too. You'll get off with a flogging."

Billy Bunter jumped.

His little round eyes fairly goggled at Loder through his big round spectacles.

"Wha-a-a-t?" he gasped.

"If you are thinking of spinning any silly yarn like that," said Loder deliberately, "you'd better think twice about it, Bunter! You will be flogged for breaking bounds and going to a pub. But you'll be sacked like a shot if you tell lies about a Sixth Form prefect."

"L-l-lies!" gurgled Bunter.

"If any Sixth Form man sent you to that place, Bunter, that man will be expelled from Greyfriars," said Loder. "But it will have to be proved. Can you prove it?"

Bunter gasped.

"Why, you—you—you beast! You jolly well know—"



Mr. Quelch started almost convulsively as he made the unpleasant discovery that it was a Remove rag. Potter and Greene were sprawling on the floor, with Remove men sitting on them, and Coker was struggling heroically in the grasp of five or six other juniors.

Mr. Quelch handed the big key to the prefect and returned to his study and rang for Trotter. Loder signed to Bunter to follow him, and led the way to the long corridor that gave access to the punishment-room, a room at a distance from studies and Form-rooms.

"I say, Loder—" began Bunter.

"Hold your tongue!"

Billy Bunter held his tongue until the punishment-room was reached. Loder unlocked the door, threw it open, and signed to Bunter to enter. The fat junior rolled dismally in.

Loder, after a glance back along the passage, followed him in and shut the door. He turned on the light, and fixed his eyes on the fat face of the dolorous Owl.

"What's happened!" he asked briefly.

Bunter groaned.

Bunter squeaked.

"I—I say, Loder! I—I can't be flogged, you know! It—it hurts."

"What did you expect?" asked Loder.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Look here, Loder, I'm jolly well not going to be flogged for taking a message for you," he squeaked indignantly. "If you tell Quelch—"

"If I tell Quelch what?" asked Loder quietly.

"I suppose you're not going to leave me to it," exclaimed Bunter warmly. "You'll have to tell Quelch that you sent me. Then I shall get off all right—I'm bound to do what a prefect tells me, see?"

"I don't quite understand you, Bunter," said Loder, in a very distinct voice. "Are you making out that I had anything to do with your going to that disreputable place?"

"I know nothing whatever about the matter," said Loder calmly, "and if you try to make out that I do, you'll be called on to prove it."

Bunter goggled at him.

It dawned upon his fat and obtuse brain that the sportsman of the Sixth would not, and could not, see him through. Bunter was up for a flogging, there was no doubt about that. Loder was booked for the "sack," short and sharp, if his part in the affair came to light. It was hardly likely that the black sheep of the Sixth would face that, to save the junior from a flogging.

"Say a word about me," went on Loder, in a low tone of menace, "and I'll see that you get it in the neck. If you're fool enough to be caught out of bounds, you can stand the racket. Bring me into it if you dare!"

"You—you villain!" groaned Bunter.
 "That's enough!" said Loder. "Think over what I've said—if you've got brains enough to think."

"Oh dear!"
 Loder turned to the door. But he turned back, perhaps with some twinge of compunction.

"Look here, Bunter," he muttered. "I'll make it up to you. Stick it out, like a good kid, and hold your tongue—you can't give a man away that's trusted you. I'll make it up to you later; you can rely on that. A Sixth Form prefect can do a lot of things for a fag. You'll find it useful to have a friend in the Sixth. Stick it out, and stand the racket."

"But—but it's a flogging!" groaned Bunter, "and Quelch will be down on me all this term. Oh lor'!"

"A flogging's better than the sack! And I warn you that it's the sack if you try to bring me into it!"

"But if you told Quelch——"
 "Don't be a fool!"

Loder left the punishment-room, locked the door after him, and departed. Billy Bunter was left to his reflections—which, to judge by his groaning and mumbling, were not at all pleasant.

A quarter of an hour later Mr. Quelch arrived with Trotter, the page. Bunter blinked at him dismally, but the Remove master took no notice of him whatever. He superintended Trotter preparing the room for the fat Owl's occupation that night; saw Bunter's supper brought in on a tray, and then sent the page away and retired, locking the door; all without a single word to Bunter.

Once more the fat Owl was left alone. "Oh lor'!" groaned Bunter.

He sat down to supper. Matters were going badly with William George Bunter, but there was consolation in supper, at all events.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Rough on the Remove!

"SCANDALOUS!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

Prout frowned.
 He had "had" Quelch! Now it looked as if Quelch "had" him.

Prout could not deny that there was an uproar going on in the Fifth Form passage. On the first night of term there was generally a good deal of noise before fellows had settled to the collar, as it were. Uproar in junior studies was rather the rule than the exception. But senior men were supposed to know better than thoughtless juniors. It was not at all the thing for a terrific din to be echoing and ringing from Fifth Form studies. Prout, indeed, was coming along personally to give the rioters a hint to moderate their transports, so to speak, and it was distinctly disagreeable to him to find the Remove master bound on the same errand.

Quelch, as a rule, was not the man to interfere with another man's Form. He had more tact than Prout. But no doubt he believed in the idea of a Roland for an Oliver. Prout had done his painful duty in "copping" Bunter. Now Quelch was going to perform a painful duty in quelling the uproar in the Fifth.

The two masters met at the end of the Fifth Form passage, and Prout frowned as Quelch declared that it was scandalous. He couldn't deny that it was indeed scandalous. Indeed, if any but the Fifth had been concerned, Prout would have said that it was unparalleled.

"This must cease!" said Quelch firmly.

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"You may leave matters appertaining to my own Form in my hands, sir," said Prout, with dignity.

"That, sir, I should be only too willing to do," snapped Mr. Quelch, "if the boys of your Form, sir, would remember that Greyfriars is a public school and not a bear-garden."

And as Prout marched along the Fifth Form passage towards the study from which the terrific uproar proceeded, Quelch determinedly marched along with him. Sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander; Prout could not have it all his own way. Heedless of the expressive looks of Prout Mr. Quelch marched on, and reached Coker's study at the same time as Prout.

Mr. Prout halted at the door, put his hand on the door-handle, and turned to Quelch with almost Olympian dignity.

"Pray leave this matter in my hands, Mr. Quelch," he said.

"I have no desire or intention to do otherwise, sir!" said Quelch. "But I must see that this uproar ceases."

"It will cease, sir, at a word from me!" said Prout. "My Form, sir, is more amenable to discipline than a junior Form."

"I am glad to say, sir, that no such uproar as this is likely to be heard in the Remove studies, even on the first night of term. Remove boys, sir, have some sense of propriety——"

"Really, Mr. Quelch——"

"Really, Mr. Prout——"

Prout snorted and threw open the study door.

A startling scene was revealed.

The study was crowded—not to say crammed! But it was not crammed with Fifth Form men, as both the masters had naturally supposed. There were only three Fifth Form men present—Coker, Potter, and Greene, to whom the study belonged. The rest of the distinguished company were Removites, and Mr. Quelch started almost convulsively as he made that unpleasant discovery. It was not a Fifth Form riot. It was a Remove rag!

Potter and Greene were sprawling on the floor, with Remove men sitting on them to keep them there. Coker of the Fifth was struggling, heroically but vainly, in the grasp of five or six more Removites. Harry Wharton held his right arm, Bolsover major his left. Skinner had hold of one of his ears, Ogilvy of the other. Russell gripped his hair, Squiff his collar. Tom Brown and Hazeldene held his legs to keep him from kicking. Horace Coker, hefty as he was, was powerless in the hands of the Philistines. Herbert Vernon-Smith, standing in front of the helpless and infuriated Coker, was painting his face with a mixture of soot and gum and ink.

Coker evidently was not enjoying the process. Roars of laughter showed that the Removites were enjoying it. Roars of a different kind from Coker demonstrated that he wasn't!

Scuffling and trampling, yelling of laughter and roaring of wrath, filled the study with din. A rag was not an uncommon occurrence on the first night of term. But this rag was rather a record; undoubtedly the juniors had let themselves go to an uncommon extent. Warming to their work, as it were, they had forgotten that there was a limit even on the first night of term.

"Uuuurrrgh!" spluttered Coker of the Fifth, as the Bounder dabbed the sooty, gummy, inky brush into a mouth that was opened for a roar. "Yurrrrgh! I'll smash you! Urrrrrrgh!"

"He's beginnin' to look quite nice,"

said Smithy. "You'll never be a beauty, Coker, but this is improving you. The best thing you can do with features like yours is to keep them out of sight."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll spifficate you!" gurgled the hapless Coker. "I'll pulverise you! Potter, you idiot, back up! Greene, you dummy, lend me a hand! Urrrrgh!"

Potter and Greene could not back up and lend a hand. They were safely sat on. They were almost hidden from sight by the number of Removites who sat on them.

"Upon my word!" gasped Prout.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Ogilvy. "Ware beaks!"

"Oh, what rotten luck! Prout!"

The juniors stared round in dismay at the door. More dismaying than even the Fifth Form master was the face of Henry Samuel Quelch at his side. Mr. Quelch was almost pale with anger.

He had come there to give Prout "tit for tat." And he discovered that his own boys were responsible for the riot. Prout had him again. It was an overwhelming blow for Mr. Quelch.

Prout was not the man to lose such an advantage. After the first moment of astonishment Prout smiled. He could not help smiling. It was as if Quelch had been delivered into his hands bound hand and foot.

With overpowering dignity he turned to Mr. Quelch.

"Mr. Quelch, will you have the kindness to order these boys of your Form to leave this study? Will you be good enough to instruct them to keep their horseplay, their ruffianism, their hooliganism, confined to their own quarters? Far be it from me, sir, to interfere with a colleagues' Form. But this is intolerable, sir; I repeat, intolerable!"

Sudden silence had fallen on that uproarious study. Potter and Greene, released, rose to their feet, red and ruffled. Coker, released at the same moment, dabbed at his gummy, sooty, inky face. The Removites stood as if frozen under the baleful eye of their Form master. Through the sudden silence Prout's fruity voice boomed victoriously.

Mr. Quelch's feelings were almost too strong for words. His gimlet-eye singled out Wharton. He spoke.

"Wharton!"

"Yes, sir!"

"You are the head boy of my Form. It is your duty to see that some sort of order is kept in the Remove. On the first night of term you are expected to exercise a restraining influence. Yet I find you taking a leading part in this—this riot!"

"It was my idea, sir——" said the Bounder.

"Silence, Vernon-Smith!"

"Wharton only joined up like the rest——"

"Will you be silent, Vernon-Smith? Wharton, whether you are the leader in this outrageous riot, or whether you have allowed yourself to be led into it by a reckless and undisciplined boy, is immaterial. You are no longer my head boy."

"Very well, sir."

"Every Remove boy present," said Mr. Quelch, "will go at once to my study. I shall administer the most condign punishment for this riot! Go!"

The Removites went.

Mr. Quelch followed them.

He did not speak a word to Prout—he could not. But Prout's voice followed the Removites.

"Intolerable! I am bound to repeat——"

intolerable. Such ruffianism—such unheard-of hooliganism! Upon my word, I hardly know what expressions to use! Words fail me!"

Although words failed Prout he continued to utter a good many so long as Mr. Quelch was within hearing. Henry Samuel Quelch was glad to get out of the range of Prout's fruity voice.

Proud rolled away to Common-room to bestow his eloquence on the other "beaks," and to ask them whether they did not think that the conduct of Quelch's boys was scandalous, unprecedented, unheard-of and unparalleled. The other beaks agreed that it was.

Perhaps Mr. Quelch thought so, too! At all events, he acted as if he thought so! In Mr. Quelch's study there was a scene of woe! Six of the best were handed out to every one of the delinquents. Harry Wharton, considered the chief delinquent as head boy, came first and received the severest strokes. It was an extensive punishment—an unusually large order, as the Bounder remarked afterwards, and Mr. Quelch, though he had had a great deal of practice, was a little tired and breathless when he had finished. Some of the fellows wondered where the old bean packed the muscle.

Dismal raggers trailed dolorously away from Mr. Quelch's study when it was over. They trailed away dolefully to their own studies in the Remove. And for a long time afterwards the Remove passage echoed to the sounds of lamentation.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

What's Happened to Bunter?

CECIL REGINALD TEMPLE of the Fourth Form, smiled as he strolled into the Rag with Dabney and Fry, of that Form. Cecil Reginald seemed amused. He seemed surprised, too, as he saw Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and the Nabob of Bhanipur standing in a group with Lord Mauleverer and two or three more of the Remove. Cecil Reginald raised his eyebrows.

"So you weren't in it!" he remarked. "First time I've ever heard of you keepin' quiet, Cherry, when there was a row on."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What row's on?" asked Bob cheerily.

In the Rag, far away from the studies, the uproar in the Fifth had not been heard.

"You're generally with Wharton," said Fry.

The Co. sat up and took notice, as it were, at once.

"Wharton in a row?" asked Nugent quickly.

"Oh, rather!" grinned Dabney.

"Some row, believe me," said Temple, chuckling. "They've been ragging Coker of the Fifth, paintin' him up like a Red Indian or a Black Hottentot, or somethin', I hear, and Quelch has scalped the lot. I've just watched 'em trailin' wearily home! They looked a jolly crew!"

"Wharton was in it?" asked Bob.

"In it to the neck, I fancy—he looked as if Quelch had given him a few of the best, and a few more, and a few over!" smiled Cecil Reginald. "Do him good, I hope—fags want a lot of whackin'."

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"The more they whack fags the better for the fags," said Fry solemnly. "I've always believed in whackin' fags!"

The Co. were rather anxious to see their leader and ascertain precisely what had happened. But they spared a moment or two for Temple, Dabney and

Fry. They collared those smiling youths, bumped them for their cheek, and kicked them for their neck, and smacked them for their impudence. Leaving Temple & Co., no longer smiling, in a dusty and spluttering heap on the floor of the Rag, the four Removites hurried out of that apartment and repaired without delay to the Remove passage.

That the news was well founded was evidenced by the sounds of woe, and the sights of tribulation that greeted their ears and their eyes. Skinner was in the passage, looking as if he was trying to fold himself up like a pocket-knife. Peter Todd leaned on the wall, breathing hard and deep. Hazeldene hung on the banisters, saying continuously: "Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow!" Squiff, in his study doorway, wriggled; Smithy, in his study doorway, writhed. From many studies came ejaculations, yelps, and mumbling groans. It was clear that quite a lot of the Lower Fourth had been through it.

A PENKNIFE FOR A LAUGH!

Toddy (after hearing Bunter's holiday experiences): "Wasn't that a magnificent gorge in the mountains?"
Bunter: "Yes, it was the squarest meal I've ever had!"

E. Gibbs, 13, Tyer's Terrace, Vauxhall, S.E. 11, has been awarded a very useful penknife for providing MAGNET readers with a chuckle or two. There's plenty more of these penknives to be won. Send YOUR joke along to-day.

"Where's Wharton?" asked Frank, as the Co. passed Hazeldene on the landing.

"Ow! Ow! Ow!" answered Hazel.

"Ow! Wow! Ow! Wow!"

They passed on.

"Where's Wharton?" asked Nugent again, addressing Skinner.

"Blow Wharton! Wow! Bless Wharton! Yow!"

"Had it bad?" asked Bob Cherry sympathetically.

Skinner gave him a glare.

"You fathead! Think I'm doing this for fun, you burbling idiot? Wow!"

Sympathy did not seem of much use to Skinner.

The Co. arrived at Study No. 1. The door was closed, and no sound came from within. But the captain of the Remove was there, as they saw when Frank flung the door open.

Harry Wharton stood by the table on which his hand rested. His face was pale, and he twisted slightly. He looked at his friends, but did not speak as they came in. It did not need a second glance to see that Wharton had

"had it" more severely than the other fellows, though he was not likely to make a fuss about it. He was standing it quietly, but there was a glint in his eyes that his friends did not like to see.

"You look as if you've been through it, old chap," said Bob.

Wharton nodded.

"Temple says it was a rag on Coker," said Johnny Bull.

Another nod.

"What had old Coker done this time?" asked Bob.

"Nothing that I know of." Wharton spoke at last.

"My dear man, you weren't ragging Coker for nothing?"

"Why not?" said Wharton. "I dare say he had been throwing his weight about—he generally is. I don't suppose he's changed this term."

"Um!" Bob felt rather uncomfortable. "Well, after all, what's life without a rag at times? If Coker didn't ask for it this term he did last term. Jolly old Horace can do with a lot of ragging."

"Quelch got you?" asked Nugent.

"Yes. The old fool came along, I think, fancying that he was going to take a rise out of Prout. He was fairly dished when he found it was the Remove ragging in a Fifth Form study, and he went off at the deep end."

A silence followed that. Lower Fourth fellows at Greyfriars were not particular in their choice of expressions. But no self-respecting fellow ever thought of speaking of his Form master as an "old fool."

It was utterly unlike Wharton.

Perhaps he saw in the faces of his friends that he had shocked them. It was not difficult to see. The bitterness in his pale face intensified.

"There's one good thing, at any rate," he said. "I'm no longer head boy of the Remove! I'm glad to be out of that."

"Has Quelch—" exclaimed Nugent in dismay.

"He has—and I'm glad of it! I'm fed-up with Quelch. He seems to have picked on me this term, but even a beak can't have it all his own way. There are ways of hitting back."

"I dare say he will come round in a day or two," said Frank. "Quelch really thinks a lot of you, Harry."

"Does he? He has a queer way of showing it, then. I'm going to show him what I think of him, too!"

"Well, old fellow," said Bob slowly, "if you were caught ragging the Fifth Quelch was bound to weigh in with six."

"He wasn't bound to take it for granted that I was to blame, or to give me more than he gave the rest. It was Smithy's stunt, and Smithy told him so. But he took most of it out of me," said Wharton savagely.

"Well, as head boy, you know—"

"You needn't trouble to tell me that you think I was to blame—I know that in advance. I'm always to blame, it seems! I was to blame for staying in Quelch's study when he ordered me to stay there; I was to blame for chasing Bunter when he pinched my ticket at Friardale Station."

"Quelch never knew—"

"He might have asked before he slanged me in front of a crowd of Greyfriars men—and strangers, too!" said Wharton bitterly. "But that's not the whole sum of my sins. I caught Bunter trying to break bounds after lock-up, and walked him into the House, and Quelch slanged me for ragging him! Ragging Bunter! Head boy is supposed to keep fellows from ragging a fathead

in the Fifth Form, first night of term, too. But it seems that he's not supposed to stop a silly young idiot from getting himself into serious trouble. I can't quite make out what head boy really is supposed to do, and I'm glad to be shut of it!"

"Bunter," said Bob, remembering, and perhaps willing to change the current of the talk—"I haven't seen him for some time. I heard a Shell man say he'd seen Prout bringing Bunter in after look-up."

Wharton gave a harsh laugh.

"If that's so, Prout must have caught him out of bounds, the fat ass! I remember Smithy said Prout was out when he called on me. Prout would be glad of a chance to score over Quelch—the beaks are like a lot of old cats trying to scratch one another. Bunter must have got it hot and strong if Prout took him to Quelch."

"Queer that we haven't heard him on his top note, then. Bunter isn't the man to take six without telling the world."

"May be the sack," said Wharton coolly. "Fellows are sacked for pub-haunting, and that was Bunter's game. Perhaps Quelch will be satisfied if he gets a man sacked on the first day of term, and may let other fellows have a rest."

"Oh, rot!" said Bob uneasily. "I—I think I'll go and look for him. Dash it all, the silly fathead can't be bunked!"

Bob left the study, and Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh followed him. It was clear that Wharton did not want their company, and it was judicious, too, to leave him to himself till he had recovered a little from that severe "six." Frank Nugent lingered. He was uneasy and distressed, and a little alarmed by the look on his chum's face. A faint gasp escaped Wharton as he leaned on the table. He set his lips savagely.

"It's rotten, old chap!" said Nugent at last. "We didn't know the rag was on. I wish we'd all been in it!"

"You must have been pretty deaf not to know that it was on. Most of Greyfriars seems to have heard it."

"Well, we didn't hear it!" said Nugent a little tartly.

"All the better for you!" said Wharton. "You'd better keep on Quelch's safe side while he's in his present temper."

There was a tone in Wharton's voice that brought a flush to Nugent's face. He opened his lips, and closed them again. Quietly he left the study without speaking. Wharton looked after him with a hard face. It was because his friends had left him to himself that he joined Smithy in that wild rag. They had left him when he wanted them, and they could leave him now that he did not want them; that was the bitter thought in his mind.

He did not see the Co. again till dorm, as he did not care to go down to the Hall supper. In the Remove dormitory fellows were talking of the rag on Coker, and its painful outcome. But that topic was dismissed when it was discovered that Billy Bunter had not turned up for dorm. Wingate of the Sixth came in to see lights out, and as he made no remark on Bunter's absence it was plain that the Owl of the Remove was not merely late for bed. Apparently he was not coming to the dormitory at all.

Bunter was nobody in particular, but a rumour was spreading through the Remove that a man was "up" for the sack, and Bunter's absence seemed to confirm it. Bob Cherry ventured to put the question to Wingate.

"Bunter's not here, Wingate," he said.

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"I know that!" answered the captain of Greyfriars. "Tumble in!"

"Isn't he coming?"

"No!"

"He came back to-day," said Bob. "He was in the train with us. Look here, Wingate! Is anything up with Bunter?"

"Yes; he's in the punishment-room," said Wingate. "Now turn in."

The juniors turned in, and Wingate put out the lights and went. There was a buzz of excited talk from bed to bed. The rag on Coker, and the record whopping in Quelch's study, paled into insignificance beside this news. If a fellow was taken away from his Form, and shut up in "punny," it could scarcely mean anything but an intended expulsion. "Bunking" a man at the beginning of the term was unheard of, but it looked like it.

Harry Wharton did not join in the talk. But if he said less, he was thinking the more. Wharton knew, what the other fellows did not, that Bunter had been sent out of bounds by a prefect of the Sixth Form. It was fairly clear that the fatuous Owl had been caught in the act, and that meant a flogging, if not the sack. Loder was a "rotter," but surely even Loder would not leave the wretched Owl to his fate! If he did—

If he did, the fellow who knew the facts had to intervene.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Up to Wharton!

BILLY BUNTER did not appear in the Remove Form room the following morning. First and second school passed off without Bunter. When the juniors came out in break they were all discussing Bunter. By that time there was no mystery about the matter. Prout had talked in the Common-room, fellows had picked up news here and there, and everybody knew that Bunter had been caught at the Cross Keys the night before. Some fellows were shocked, some amused, and all surprised.

Billy Bunter had plenty of faults, but amateur blackguardism was not supposed to be one of them. Bunter, it was true, rather fancied himself as what he was pleased to call a "rorty dog." But that had only caused merriment among fellows who had heard the fat Owl thus talking out of the back of his podgy neck. It was a real surprise for the Owl of the Remove to be caught "pub-haunting." Really, such a thing was not in Billy Bunter's line at all.

But there was no doubt about it, and fellows wondered what was going to happen to Bunter.

"They can't sack him!" declared Skinner. "That's all rot! Sticking him in punny to give him a scare, I fancy! A night in punny will cure Bunter—but they can't turf him out!" Skinner shook his head. "No such luck!" he added.

"Head's floggin', and a royal jaw!" said the Bounder. "Fancy that fat duffer breakin' out like this—first day of term, too! Seems to have been in a fearful hurry to bag a beak's whackin'."

"Poor old Bunter!" said Squiff. "There's a notice on the board—Big Hall after third school. That must be for Bunter—"

"We shall hear him wakin' the jolly old echoes!" remarked Skinner. "The Bull of Bashan won't be in it with Bunter when the beak gets going with the birch!"

"Can't quite make it out, though," said the Bounder thoughtfully. "Bunter's just the idiot to play the goat

if he is in funds; but did he come back this term with anything he didn't spend on tuck?"

"I know he diddle Wharton for his ticket," said Bob Cherry. "Bunter never had any tin to blow on playing the goat. He was stony, as usual. I believe he blew his railway fare, or some of it, on tuck, on his way here yesterday."

"Then it's rather weird," said Smithy, shaking his head. "I've heard of fellows—bad fellows—really naughty fellows—who sneak down to the Cross Keys and get a man there to put somethin' on a horse for them—there are such fellows present at this moment—"

Some of the juniors laughed. The Bounder himself was one of the "bad fellows" to whom he alluded.

"But what would be the good of goin' without a bean?" said Smithy. "Think Bunter wanted to put that postal order he's expectin', on a horse?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But he went," said Bob. "He was caught there, Smithy. Prout gobbled him fairly on the spot!"

"Looks to me as if the silly ass was a catspaw! I fancy some sportsman sent him there with a message or somethin'—some jolly old sportsman like Carne, or Loder, or Hilton of the Fifth!"

"Oh, my hat! I shouldn't like to be that sportsman, then," said Bob, with a whistle. "Bunter will shout it all out. He's not the man to take a flogging to oblige anybody."

"No fear!" chuckled Skinner. "If Smithy's right, we may hear somethin' interesting when Bunter comes up for the execution. If it comes out that it was a senior man sent him, there will be a bunking, after all. The Head would come down like a ton of bricks."

"I fancy somebody in the Sixth or Fifth is sittin' on pins this mornin'!" grinned the Bounder.

"He'd be a fool, though, to give the man away!" said Skinner. "The Head would want a lot of proof before he believed it. He knows jolly well that a chap like Bunter would say anything to get out of a flogging! If it's as you think, Smithy, Bunter's best tip is to keep his mouth shut."

"Catch him keepin' his mouth shut!" said the Bounder derisively.

"Well," said Bob Cherry slowly, "if a senior man sent him to that den, he oughtn't to have gone. But he oughtn't to give the man away."

"How often does Bunter do as he ought?" inquired the Bounder.

"The man who sent him ought to speak out," said Harry Wharton, who had been listening to the discussion without speaking so far.

"That's likely!" said Skinner, laughing.

"The likefulness is not terrific!" remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh, with a shake of his dusky head.

"He's bound to," said Harry. "The rottenest rotter couldn't let a silly duffer like Bunter go through it to save his own skin. You can depend on it that the man will speak out before Bunter gets his gruel."

The Bounder chuckled.

"If you'd bet on that, I'd give you long odds," he said.

"Oh, rot!" said Wharton curtly, and he left the group of Removites and went into the House.

The captain of the Remove was in a troubled frame of mind. He had plenty of troubles of his own at present, but he could not help thinking of Billy Bunter's parlous plight.

It was clear that Bunter had said nothing so far about Loder. A sense of loyalty might have kept him silent, though that was not much like Billy



"Wharton! How dare you?" The Head, birch in hand, regarded him with a look of thunder. "I've got to speak, sir," said Wharton. "Bunter was sent out of bounds last night by a Sixth Form prefect!"

Bunter. More likely he was afraid to give Loder away.

In either case, it was plain that it was up to Loder to speak out, and save the miserable Owl. He had taken unscrupulous advantage of Bunter's stupidity, in getting the obtuse Owl to carry his message to the Cross Keys. Now that Bunter was "for it," Loder had to admit his part in the transaction, and see him through.

It was difficult for Wharton to imagine himself in the place of a black-guard like Gerald Loder. But he knew that if he had been in Loder's place, he would have owned up at once, rather than have allowed a heavy punishment to fall on his dupe. That Loder was a rank outsider he knew well enough, but he could not believe that he was outsider enough to leave Bunter to his fate.

The bell for third school called the fellows back to the Form-rooms. Bunter was still absent from his place in the Remove. Evidently he was to remain in "punny" until he was brought into Hall to be dealt with by the Head.

After third lesson the Greyfriars fellows headed for Big Hall. It was still unknown whether they were assembled to see a flogging or an expulsion, and excitement was keen. The prefects of the Sixth were all in their places—the masters present with their Forms.

Harry Wharton glanced across at Loder of the Sixth. There was nothing unusual in Loder's look—he certainly did not appear to be a fellow with a trouble on his mind. If he was feeling inward uneasiness, he did not betray it.

There was a stir as the door of the upper end of Big Hall opened, and the Head entered. He was followed by Gosling, carrying the birch, and Billy Bunter, whose fat face was the picture of woe.

All eyes were fixed on Bunter.

Even unfeeling fellows like Skinner felt compassion at the sight of the wretched Owl's dismal face.

Bunter was not the fellow to stand punishment with equanimity. He had none of the iron hardihood of the Bounder, or the stoical stubbornness of Harry Wharton. He was the fellow to hunt for trouble, and to crumple up when the trouble accrued. He was now in an absolutely crumpled-up state. His fat face was long and lugubrious; his fat little legs seemed disposed to totter and let him down. He blinked round through his big spectacles, with a miserable blink that might have moved a heart of stone.

Wharton's eyes turned from him to Loder, and he saw the prefect set his lips hard. Even Loder was not unmoved.

But Loder gave no other sign.

Surely he was going to speak—even a rotter, even a villain, could not leave the wretched Owl to it! But it was borne in upon Wharton's mind that Loder was not going to speak.

His eyes gleamed at the Sixth Form sportsman.

Loder was thinking only of himself, thinking only of saving his own skin. Bunter was "for it." The Head's voice was heard in the silent Hall:

"Bunter!"

There was a faint squeak from Bunter.

"You have been discovered in the very act of disgraceful conduct—disgraceful to yourself, disgraceful to your school!" said Dr. Locke, in a deep voice. "I have considered whether to expel you from Greyfriars. I have decided to administer a flogging—"

"Ow!"

"Your punishment will be severe, Bunter. I have no choice but to make it severe, as a warning to you, and as a warning to others. Gosling, take up that boy!"

A Head's flogging at Greyfriars was not merely a matter of "bending over." The culprit was "taken up" in the old-fashioned way, which was no doubt supposed to be more impressive. That duty fell to Gosling, and was perhaps not an unwelcome duty.

Billy Bunter gave a despairing blink in the direction of Loder. Loder had sent him on that hapless expedition. A fag could not stand up against a Sixth Form prefect—it was all Loder's doing! Loder ought to own up, and tell the Head!

Loder did not look at him.

Bunter's lips opened—and closed again. It was useless to speak, and could only make matters worse for him. He had no vestige of proof to offer—and the Head would require the strictest proof of such an accusation. He would no more believe it about Loder than he would have believed it about Wingate, or Gwynne, or any other Sixth Form prefect. He would have believed it from Loder himself, but most assuredly not from Bunter. He would simply regard it as a reckless falsehood. Any fellow in such a position could have spun

such a yarn—about anybody! And Bunter, unfortunately for himself, had a reputation for untruthfulness that was well known to all Greyfriars!

Bunter did not speak. He only groaned as Gosling hoisted him.

Wharton looked on. He looked at Loder of the Sixth with a scorn and loathing in his face that were beyond words. He looked at Bunter. He had said to himself, the previous night, that if Loder did not speak, he had to intervene. Knowing what he did, could he allow this to go on and say nothing? Whether it was a mistaken sense of loyalty that kept Bunter silent, or whether he was too foolish and frightened to speak out, was it for the fellow who knew the truth to hold his tongue and let that scared, squirming, miserable young duffer take another man's punishment?

It was not easy for Wharton to decide what he ought to do. But as the Head grasped the birch, an impulse of indignation settled the matter for him. He left his place in the Remove, and strode up the Hall—amid stares of astonished eyes.

"Wharton!" Mr. Quelch's voice was almost fierce. "Go back to your place!"

"Harry!" breathed Nugent.

"Cheeky fag—" murmured Coker of the Fifth.

Heedless of commands, stares, and murmurs, the captain of the Remove marched steadily up the Hall. The Head, birch in hand, regarded him with a look of thunder.

"Wharton! How dare you?" rumbled the Head.

"I've got to speak, sir," said Wharton, in a clear voice that was heard in every corner of Big Hall. "Bunter was sent out of bounds last night by a Sixth Form prefect, and I'm bound to tell you so!"

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Birch for Bunter!

DEEP silence in Hall followed Harry Wharton's startling words.

Billy Bunter, already hoisted on Gosling's broad back, squirmed round to look at the captain of the Remove. Gosling stared round at him. The Head gave him a fixed, petrified stare. Every fellow in Hall, senior and junior, gazed at him blankly. One senior—Loder of the Sixth—gave a start and shut his teeth hard together. For a moment terror gripped the black-guard of the Greyfriars Sixth. What did Wharton know—what could he prove? If he could prove anything—

The silence lasted only a few seconds, but it seemed like an age to the breathless school.

Astonishment was depicted in the Head's face. But astonishment gave place to anger—deep anger.

"Wharton! How dare you make such a statement?" he exclaimed.

"It is true, sir!" said Harry.

"Bunter has not said so."

"I believe he's afraid to say so! Anyhow, it's true."

"Oh crikey!" breathed Bunter.

"If your statement is true, Wharton, which I cannot possibly believe for one moment, you must have some proof to offer," said Dr. Locke sternly. "I will not allow you to mention names—I will not allow the name of one of my trusted prefects to be uttered in connection with a wild and shameful accusation. But I will hear you. Tell me what you know of this matter, if indeed you know any-

thing, but take heed of my command that you mention no name."

"I don't want to mention it, sir—I'd rather not! But the man is present here, and if he had any decency he would speak out!"

"It is for you to speak, boy, and offer proof of your wild words!" rapped the Head. "You have made an utterly incredible statement. If you have any reason to believe that this boy Bunter has been a victim in this matter, make your statement at once!"

"I stopped Bunter from going out of bounds after lock-up last night," said Wharton. "He let out that he was being sent out by a prefect of the Sixth. I brought him into the House, and should have kept an eye on him, but—"

"But it appears that you did not!" snapped the Head. "If you were aware of Bunter's intention, it was your duty, as head boy of the Remove, to see that he did not carry it out."

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"My Form master fancied that I was ragging him, and ordered me to leave him alone," said Wharton bitterly. "After that I lost sight of him, and he must have dodged out again."

Mr. Quelch gave a little start as he heard this, and compressed his lips.

"Then what you know of the matter is what Bunter told you?"

"Yes."

"Bunter told you that a Sixth Form prefect had sent him out of school bounds, after lock-up, to a disreputable place?"

"He did not mean to tell me. He let it out."

"Have you any knowledge of the matter, apart from what Bunter told you, or let out, as you choose to express it?"

"No."

"You are aware, Wharton, that I should require the strictest proof before I could believe such an accusation against a Greyfriars prefect?"

"I suppose so, sir."

"Yet you are prepared to make such an accusation, before all the school, on no better grounds than some unreflecting words uttered by Bunter?"

"I believed him, and believe him now. I could not stand silent and see him punished because a rascal landed him in this," answered Harry Wharton steadily. "I thought up to the last minute that the man would own up. He hasn't—and I had to speak."

"I have no doubt, Wharton, that you believe what you say. If I did not think so, I should expel you from the school for having dared to make such a statement. But you should know better than to hold such a belief, or rather, such a wild and foolish suspicion," said the Head sternly.

He turned to the school porter.

"Gosling, you may put this boy down."

Bunter was landed on his feet again.

He blinked at Wharton, and blinked at the Head. Wharton's intervention was as utterly unexpected by Bunter as by the rest of Greyfriars. He hoped that it might be for his benefit, but his hope was very faint.

He quaked under the Head's stern eyes.

"Bunter, I am about to question you," said Dr. Locke. "I warn you to think before you answer. If Wharton's extraordinary statement has put into your mind any thought of attempting to deceive me, I warn you to dismiss it. You will tell me the truth."

"Oh lor'!" groaned Bunter.

"If you were acting under the influence of an older boy in what you did last night, tell me the truth. But take care that you do not attempt to mislead me, as you seem to have misled your Form-fellow."

The hapless Owl blinked at him dimly. Loder's threats were still in his fat ears. He was going to be flogged, but if he made an accusation he could not sustain, he was going to be sacked. Loder was too deep for him.

"Speak!" thundered the Head.

"Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter.

"Had a Sixth Form prefect anything to do with your breaking bounds last night? Yes, or no? Reflect before you answer."

Bunter gurgled.

"You have nothing to say?" rapped the Head.

Bunter blinked at him in great distress. He had plenty to say, if he had dared to say it. He was in the extraordinary position that if he told the truth, he would not and could not be believed, while if he told an untruth, it would be accepted unquestioningly. That was not a position with which Billy Bunter's fat intellect was capable of dealing.

He gasped and blinked at the Head, and gasped again.

"For the last time, Bunter, have you anything to say in support of the statement that Wharton has made?"

"Yes, sir," gasped Bunter. "I—I mean, no, sir! Oh lor'! I—I wish I hadn't gone! Oh dear!"

"I am waiting for your answer, Bunter."

"Yes, sir! No, sir! Oh lor'!"

The Head set his lips. Bunter's distress and trouble implied only one thing to his mind—that the untruthful young rascal was tempted to back up Wharton's statement as a means of escape from punishment, but dared not take the plunge. He turned to the captain of the Remove again.

"Wharton, you have acted very foolishly, and very wrongly in interrupting your headmaster. I believe that you have acted in good faith, and I shall, therefore, not punish you. Go back to your place."

Harry Wharton, with burning cheeks, walked down the long Hall again. He was keenly conscious of the sea of eyes on him, and of whispers and nudges and grins. Skinner winked at the other fellows as he came back into the Remove, and some of them sniggered.

Mr. Quelch gave him one look—a hard, grim, almost deadly look. It was no time for him to speak; but he was too angry to have spoken, in any case. Wharton, catching that look, stared back at his Form master with hard defiance in his face. The Remove master appeared to be on the point of choking. He turned his eyes away.

Swish, swish, swish!

The sound of the Head's birch was heard next.

Louder than the swishing of the birch, came the yelling of Billy Bunter.

Often and often did Bunter yell with little cause. But he had plenty of cause for yelling now. The Head laid on every stroke hard.

Bunter wriggled and roared and kicked.

Gosling had a difficult task to keep him in position for the flogging. He received three or four frantic kicks from the wriggling, squirming Owl. Every rafter in the old Hall echoed back the voice of Billy Bunter.

The Greyfriars fellows looked on in silence. Most of them sympathised, but every fellow knew that the Head had no choice but to punish with severity such an offence as Bunter's. The fat junior had asked for it, and was getting it, and that was all there was about it.

But Harry Wharton's feelings were quite different. He knew—what some of the others suspected—that Bunter had been made use of by an older and deeper fellow than himself—that his fatuous stupidity had been taken advantage of by a cunning rascal who had left him in the lurch. And Wharton, who had tried to help him out, was sternly condemned by his headmaster, and plainly had an unpleasant interview coming with his Form master, while most of the school seemed to think that he had butted in from sheer impudence. He could see that even his own friends, his nearest chums, thought that he had acted foolishly and recklessly. Perhaps he had. But how, he asked himself, could he have done anything else?

Swish, swish, swish!

The castigation was over. Bunter, howling lamentably, was put down by Gosling. The school was dismissed. Sympathetic fellows led Bunter away to his study. And for a long, long time there were dismal sounds of woe from that study.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Trouble!

WINGATE of the Sixth came out of the House, glanced round the quad, and walked across to Harry Wharton. Some of the Remove were punting a footer about before dinner—the Co. among them. Wharton had not joined them. He was in a black mood, and disinclined for cheery company. He was walking under the elms, his hands in his pockets, his brows knitted, when the captain of Greyfriars called to him.

"You're wanted!" said Wingate gruffly.

"Yes, Wingate," said Harry, civilly enough.

He liked and respected Wingate, as all Greyfriars did, and last term he

had had nothing but kindness from the Greyfriars captain.

But there was no kindness in Wingate's honest, rugged face now. There was anger and a touch of contempt, and Wharton coloured as he saw it.

"Your Form master wants you," grunted Wingate; and he turned away. Then he turned back. "You young ass! What the thump did you mean by saying what you did in Hall? Did you want to get all the prefects in the school down on you for the term?"

"I did what was right," answered Wharton sullenly.

"That's enough! Go to your Form master's study!"

Harry Wharton went into the House. He set his lips, and his eyes glinted as he went to Mr. Quelch's study. If injustice was piled on injustice he could stand it, and nobody should see him flinch. Like Pharaoh of old he hardened his heart.

It was not in a submissive or respectful mood that he stood before his Form master.

"I hardly know what to say to you, Wharton!" Mr. Quelch's voice was sharp and acid. "You appear to have returned to school this term determined to forfeit the good opinion of all placed in authority over you. Your conduct on the first day of term was outrageous. You are quite well aware of it without my telling you."

"Not at all, sir," answered Wharton coolly.

Mr. Quelch's gimlet-eye gleamed. "I have already come to expect insolence from you, Wharton," he said. "I warn you to be careful. What you have done this morning is a culmination of your offences. You dared to interrupt your headmaster in Hall, to make a wild and foolish statement reflecting upon the honour of the whole body of prefects. I am surprised that you are not ashamed of yourself."

"I've nothing to be ashamed of, that I know of," answered Wharton. "I told my headmaster the truth. I thought that a fellow was bound to tell the truth."

"Wharton!"

"If I was mistaken, you have only to tell me so, sir," said Wharton coolly.

Mr. Quelch breathed hard.

"You may have believed that what you said was the truth, Wharton, but

you are quite alone in that belief. Some foolish words of Bunter—a most untruthful boy—seem to have put the idea into your mind. I cannot help thinking that you acted as you did from a spirit of insolence and disrespect—a spirit you have displayed very prominently since you returned to Greyfriars this term."

"You may think as you like, of course, sir."

Mr. Quelch rose to his feet. This was more than the most patient of masters could have tolerated, and Henry Samuel Quelch was not a patient man. He picked up the cane from his table.

"Your reckless insolence, Wharton, has brought contempt upon yourself, and upon me as your Form master," he said. "I shall punish you for what you have done. Bend over that chair!"

Wharton's eyes glittered.

"You are going to cane me, sir?"

"Assuredly!"

"For speaking as I did in Hall?"

"Yes, Wharton."

"Then I shall appeal to the Head, sir."

"What?"

"I shall appeal to the Head," said the rebel of the Remove, with icy coolness. "The Head said that I was not to be punished. I have a right to appeal to him."

There was a tense silence.

The Remove master had never been so angry. But he realised, in an instant, that this rebellious junior had him on the hip, as it were. Obviously he could not punish a boy for an offence which the headmaster had pardoned.

For once the Remove master had placed himself in a false position in dealing with a boy of his Form. And the young rascal was in a mood to take merciless advantage of it.

The cane trembled in his hand.

Harry Wharton eyed him coolly with a glimmer of mockery in his eyes. Mr. Quelch's face was pale with anger and mortification. But he was in a false position, and he had to retreat from it. He was beaten in a contest with a junior boy.

He laid the cane down at last.

"Leave my study, Wharton!" he said, in a choking voice. "You are the worst boy in my Form!"

Wharton left the study.

He went down the passage with a light step. He had made an enemy of his Form master, and he knew that he would not be forgiven. And he did not care. He whistled as he walked out of the House.

THE END.

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THE RED FALCON!

By ARTHUR STEFFENS.



Escape!

THE Runners!" cried Jerry McLean, and before either he or Hal Lovett had a chance to escape, Bow Street Runners, led by Martin Cosgrave, came running into the room of the Swan With Two Necks, in which were Jerry, Hal, and their good friend, Peter Davey, the landlord.

Martin Cosgrave advanced towards the two pals. "I arrest you in the King's name, Hal Lovett and Jerry McLean!" he said.

Hal and Jerry looked desperate. Wrongfully convicted of theft, they had been sentenced to deportation, but in a revolt of convicts they had managed to make their escape from the prison ship, to which they had been sent. The charge against them had been a "frame-up." Both suspected that Hal's ne'er-do-well father, Sam Lovett, was at the bottom of the plot and that the mysterious tattooed shape of a red falcon on Hal's chest had something to do with it. Now it looked as if their efforts to escape had been all in vain. But there was still a chance.

It seemed to Hal that Martin Cosgrave's hand moved lazily in the work of arrest. So in a moment Hal had ducked and was away, slipping under his arm like an eel.

And McLean, throwing two of the

other Runners aside with astonishing ease and quickness, tripped a third before he sent Tom Kinch, the potman, flying on to his back with a punch like the kick of a mule.

Darting into the passage Jerry saw at a glance that the way to the inn yard was guarded by two Runners. He swung away from it and pounded up the stairs followed by Hal.

To their surprise, they found Peter Davey waiting for them on the first floor landing.

"After them! Bar the doors! They can't get away, so don't fire!" They could hear Mr. Cosgrave shouting from the hall below. "We must take 'em alive."

The stamping of feet on the run told them they were being pursued.

"This way," cried Peter Davey, darting along a passage which seemed to end in an outer wall.

But there was a false door at the back of a large wardrobe. Peter pressed upon a spring, and the back of the heavy piece of furniture opened.

"Quick! Go through! The stairs lead down to the stables," said Peter.

Through they went, and as the door of the wardrobe swung to with a click behind them, they heard the muffled echo of running feet and Peter Davey crying: "They went that way—out of

the window. If you're smart you'll catch 'em."

Jerry and Hal raced on, came to a stairway which wound its narrow way down to the ground floor. They opened a door and found themselves in a horse-box. And there, ready saddled and to Jerry's hand, was Galloper, with his new saddle strapped about his middle, and in a corner hung Jerry's riding-coat, hat, and sword.

Jerry buckled on the sword belt and slipped into the overcoat. Then he whipped open the stable door and peered out cautiously into the inn yard.

It was crowded with steaming horses, but not a single Bow Street Runner was to be seen. But judging from the hullabaloo that rang echoing through the inn, they were all there, joining in the chase.

The ostler, chewing a straw, was leaning against a post.

"Quick, get your grey horse, Hal!" said Jerry hoarsely.

"If I may make a suggestion, sir," said the ostler, keeping a wary eye on the door leading into the Swan, "the young gentleman would be better advised to borrow the chestnut wot is a standin' nigh the entry. It belongs to Mr. Cosgrave. The grey don't last. Your friend will find 'is things in the next stall, sir."

Hal dived into the stall, buckled on his sword, and slipped on his riding-coat and hat. He cast an envious glance at the grey who bore the new saddle Jerry had bought, but knew that he must abandon the horse. His primed and loaded pistols, which were in the holsters, he slipped in a twinkling into his side pockets, and then ran along the yard.

In a moment he had set his foot in the stirrup and swung himself on to the back of Martin Cosgrave's fine chestnut and urged it out into the road, having to duck his head to dodge the cross-beam of the gate.

After him came Jerry McLean riding Galloper, who was eager for a run.

The ostler gave them one swift, approving glance, and then vanished into Galloper's empty box and shut the door. He did not want to be seen.

One second later, out into the inn yard streaked half a dozen Redbreasts, who were just in time to see Galloper gain the road.

One of them tried a chance shot, but only succeeded in bringing down a patch of plaster from the ceiling of the coach yard.

In front of the house the treacherous potman, Tom Kinch, who was no doubt alive to the secrets of the inn, showed himself at the door, and pointing at the two horsemen, shouted:

"They're escaping. Quick!"

"And on Mr. Cosgrave's Bow Street Beauty!" howled a Runner as he recognised the horse Hal Lovett was riding. The man leapt from the inn steps out into the road and seized the reins as Hal flew by.

Hal did not hesitate a moment. His life was at stake, and Jerry McLean's, too. And so he whipped a pistol from his pocket, and swinging it by the barrel, brought it down on those clinging hands.

The Runner stumbled and plunged down, the horse's progress being hindered for a moment by the figure of the man it dragged dangling from its reins.

Then a hoof struck the Runner, and he let go his hold and slithered on his face in the dust.

Hal Lovett urged Bow Street Beauty into a swinging gallop and tore along the road, followed by the gasping cries of the yokels, who had been tasting their ale at the tables outside the inn.

Jerry McLean had purposely lagged behind. He wanted the boy to be safe away before he took his chance of escaping. And so he was able to see and hear what happened as Peter Davey joined Tom Kinch at the door.

"Kinch," Jerry heard Peter roar, "I'm finished wi' you!"

Tom Kinch laughed derisively, and suddenly drew out a pistol from his pocket and aimed it point-blank at Jerry.

Jerry ducked, but he was lucky in that the pistol missed fire. But the shot he sent in answer grazed a furrow along the top of Tom Kinch's scalp, and as the wounded potman rolled screaming in the dust, Jerry cried:

"That's by way of a warning! The next time you try to injure me I'll send the bullet through your heart."

Then Jerry McLean swung his fine horse into a smashing gallop, and tore along the road followed by a perfect hail of bullets from the Runners, who came pouring out of the Swan With Two Necks.

At the Four Cross-Roads!

FROM the squalid neighbourhood of Wych Street and the Clare Market neighbourhood to the open Kentish roads was a pretty big jump for Hal Lovett, but the boy had learned a lot since chance had thrown him into intimate contact with Jerry McLean.

For instance, whereas Hal had only been able to stick on to the back of this or that tradesman's horse which drew a cart about the mean streets of London, Jerry had taught him in theory how to ride properly.

He could not at that stage of his highway career have ridden such a spirited horse as Galloper, but he was well able to hang on to the Bow Street Runner's charger, Bow Street Beauty, even if that well-trained and noble beast might have resented the rough and ready methods of its rider.

So they made good progress, what time the angry Runners were getting astride their horses and urging them into a headlong gallop.

In the gathering dusk Jerry and Hal rode like the wind, causing many a trudging yokel to gape as they flew by. And as they rode they turned in the saddle to gaze behind. Moving figures back in the dusk showed where the posse came riding in hot pursuit. But Galloper was no ordinary steed, and the chestnut which Hal rode, in spite of a hard day's riding, moved with an easy springiness of stride that spoke of speed as well as stamina. Their pursuers began to lag farther and farther behind.

Then, suddenly, ahead of them appeared an ugly barrier—a toll-gate. Jerry McLean cried out to Hal and slackened speed as they drew close to it.

"Mustn't alarm them by being in too great a hurry, boy," said he, as he felt in his pocket for a guinea.

He dropped the gold piece into the open palm of the gateman, who pushed wide open the swinging gate.

"There are some Bow Street patrolmen behind, friend," said Jerry, "but you need not have seen 'em go by if they ask. We might have tumbled down the by-road to Mottingham."

And the man, touching his forehead with his forefinger, pocketed the money with an understanding grin.

The latch clicked into its socket as the gate clanged to behind them, and they rode onward at the same swinging pace, Jerry riding with a graceful ease which spared Galloper and suiting his pace to Hal's.

With a word here and there he helped Hal with his riding, and in this way they covered a few more miles before Jerry, seeing a way into a wood, opened a gate and led the horses through.

And there, behind a leafy screen, they waited, listening with straining ears for any sound of pursuit.

Perhaps five minutes later the Bow Street Runners came, but moving at a jaded pace. Their foam-flecked horses were tired and the chase, to them, seemed lost. With a broad grin, Jerry saw that Martin Cosgrave was mounted upon Peter Davey's grey.

They had slowed to a canter, and as they neared the gate they came suddenly to an abrupt halt, remaining clustered in the middle of the road.

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"I don't think they could have come this way," Hal and Jerry heard Martin Cosgrave say. "That toll-keeper must have been right."

"H'm, there's a gate here," said a Runner. The man detached himself from the ring, rode up to the barrier, and peered over it into the depths of the wood. "Supposin' we give a look around!"

"Waste of time. The nags are beat. We'd better get back to the Swan With Two Necks Inn," said Mr. Cosgrave gruffly.

"You'll be arresting Peter Davey for aiding the convicts' escape, I take it, sir?" said another of the Runners.

"Why, no," answered Cosgrave. "Peter owed something to Jerry McLean. Besides, he's an honest man, and who's to prove anything against him? But, gadzooks, I wish that boy had not stolen my horse."

With that, the whole posse wheeled about and began to retrace their steps, talking as they led their horses, in order to rest them, along the lonely country road.

Hal and Jerry had scarcely dared to breathe while they listened to the Runners who were clustered in the road, but the moment they had gone Jerry led the way to the gate.

"That was a well spent guinea I gave at the toll-gate, Hal," he said gaily. "Now we can travel at our ease."

"But where are we going? We need shelter, and housing for the horses, Jerry," said Hal. "Our luggage has been left behind at the Swan With Two

Necks. We need money. What are we going to do?"

The boy's anxiety seemed to tickle Jerry McLean, for he set back his handsome head and laughed uproariously. But as they walked their horses on he sobered down, and producing a black mask from his pocket, removed his hat and slipped it over his head so that his eyes glowered like live coals through the slits. Then, clapping his three-cornered hat down upon his head again, he whipped one of his pistols from its holster, and spinning it in the air, caught it by the butt as it came down.

"Here's the way of it, boy!" he cried. "It's the hulks or a hanging for you, if you're caught; and transportation or Tyburn for me if the Redbreasts seize hold of me. So, my boy, we'll stop the first traveller who comes along and take his purse. For the rest we'll shelter at one of the safe inns Peter Davey spoke about."

The moon had risen, but it was mostly hidden by scudding clouds. Now, as the two friends urged their horses into a canter, the silver disc swept into view, flooding the country road with light.

On their right lay a belt of close-growing trees, so dense and dark that they could scarcely see into it. On the left were open fields silvered by the moon.

The road curved to the right, and presently, as they swung round the end of the wood, they saw four cross-roads ahead of them.

Here beneath a signpost lurked a horseman. As they came up, Jerry intending to find the way from the pointers of the board, the horseman rode right at them.

And as the rider brought his horse up with a sharp pull of the reins and dropped the leather bands to free his hands, they saw that he was masked.

The horse stood rigid, and the rider's hands swung up. In his clutching fingers he held two pistols, which he aimed in one movement at Hal and Jerry.

His voice, obviously disguised, rapped out a hoarse command.

"Your money, gentlemen! And be quick about it, for my finger itches on the trigger. Your money! Nobody ever refuses when Colonel York commands. Come, sirs, your money, if you please!"

And as if he entertained some doubt as to whether he would get their money unless he adopted forceful measures, he fired his pistol right across McLean's face.

But Jerry, instead of showing terror, pulled out his pistol again and covered the highwayman with it. And so mask covered mask. And whilst the robber hesitated in doubt, Jerry McLean rang out a challenging reply.

"Would dog eat dog?" he cried. "Then why not hand me your money, Colonel York? My name is Jerry McLean!"

Shadowed!

NO man could have been more surprised than Colonel York, the highwayman, when he suddenly found the tables turned upon him.

He had fired his pistol across the face of Jerry McLean because he sensed danger in the man. And now, with the pistol in his right hand empty, and that in his left held high above his head, he sat his horse as still as a bronze statue, and his eyes seemed to burn as he looked at Jerry McLean.

Hal Lovett, urging Bow Street Beauty nearer to the man, glanced from

him to Jerry doubtfully, before the latter rider spoke again.

"So, you see, two can play that game, colonel," he said mockingly. "If you would rob me, why shouldn't I rob you?"

The highwayman's eyes roved over Jerry, took stock of his fine horse Galloper, and noted the holsters at the saddle bow and the sword which hung at Jerry's side.

"The devil only knows what's going to come of the highway game if every convict escaped from the hulks reckons he's going to take a hand in it," he grumbled. "You and your pal are from the hulks at Woolwich—damme if I know your record, McLean."

"I've only just started," answered Jerry, with a laugh.

McLean still kept the colonel covered, but in spite of that the highwayman swung his left hand down. Hal Lovett, watching him closely, saw him change his pistols over. And so the boy urged Bow Street Beauty round to York's other side, and pulled his horse up close.

"I met Pryse after he'd robbed the Maidstone coach," York went on, ignoring Hal, and keeping his eyes fixed on Jerry McLean. "That was a smart bit of work. He told me about you and your pal. And so you're going in for the Road—eh?"

Jerry McLean still had his pistols raised, but he lowered them now, and laid them easily across Galloper's neck.

"To be sure, colonel, and if you can give me any tips, why—"

"I can, curse you!" answered Colonel York as he brought his pistol up and straightened it at Jerry's heart. "Dog eat dog, eh? Now, out with every penny you've got, and smart, too, or I'll drive a ball clean through you! I'll teach you to threaten Colonel York."

Jerry threw his masked head back and laughed.

"So! That's your kind, eh?" he rejoined. "It seems I was a fool to have given you an inch of rope."

"I'll have your money or your life," the highwayman went on, "be you highwayman or not, Jerry McLean. Now hand over your cash!"

"Not likely!"

Hal saw Jerry's hands begin to move, the pistols to rise.

Colonel York saw the movement, too, and pulled trigger. The pistol was pointed right at Jerry's heart. Scarcely four paces lay between them.

But Hal was ready. Instinctively he knew that York meant to kill Jerry, and so, urging Bow Street Beauty in, he struck York's right arm up with a swing of his left arm, and the bullet was wasted in the air. The flash was blinding, and the report of the shot echoed loudly along the road.

"Curse you for a meddling fool!" howled York, as he wrenched his sword from its scabbard after swiftly thrusting the discharged pistol into its empty holster. "I'll have your life for that!"

The highwayman's speech was thick and his seat unsteady. He had been drinking. He paid no heed to Jerry's ringing command to put his sword back, and ignored the pistols which Jerry had again levelled at him. His sword blade flashed in the bright moonlight, and in a moment he had struck a blow at Hal which would have cut his head in two had not the lad moved Beauty aside quickly.

Colonel York struck no second blow, for Hal urged his horse in close, and with the butt of his pistol, knocked the villain from the saddle.

The lad put all his strength into the blow, and the pistol beat in the crown of the highwayman's hat and toppled him sidewise from his horse into the road. As he fell his sword clattered upon the stones. And there he lay in a heap, scowling dazedly up at Hal and Jerry.

"It would serve you right," said Jerry, as he pointed a pistol at the rascal, "if I drove a bullet through your heart, York, and so saved the hangman a job. But I'm letting you off this time. I'm not even going to rob you. There should be honour even among thieves. But I warn you to be careful if we should ever meet again."

Jerry then slipped the pistol into its holster, wheeled his horse about, and took the nearest fork of the four cross-roads with Hal Lovett riding after him.

When they stopped and looked back from a distance of a furlong, Colonel York was still sitting on the flint road

whither Hal had knocked him. His horse was waiting patiently, nosing at him, making no attempt to bolt.

For a moment the two friends watched and then rode on again.

"Hal, boy," said McLean, "I owe you my life. That rascal meant to slay me!"

"I thought so, too! That's why I was ready. But the fool was drunk."

"Drunk or sober, boy," answered Jerry McLean, "the man's a rat. I know his record. He's a bully and a coward, and if report speaks truly, a murderer. I'd shed no tears if they took him on a ride to Tyburn. When we turn highwaymen, lad, we'll rob like gentlemen, or we'll not rob at all."

McLean brought a hand down with a swinging slap on Hal Lovett's shoulder and peered intently into the boy's eyes. And it seemed to Jerry that Hal had changed. The youth had become a man. The world was hardening Harry Lovett. The ragged boy of Wych Street could not be recognised in this muscular, handsome, stalwart youngster who seemed almost as at home in the saddle now as Jerry himself.

"We're into it now, boy, right up to the hilt," he said. "Horse-stealing is punished by death. And here you are astride Martin Cosgrave's Bow Street Beauty. We must watch our steps. That horse will soon be recognised. We'll have to sleep by day and work by night."

"To be sure," answered Harry Lovett with a breezy laugh. "But where are we heading for now, Jerry?"

"Where fate may choose to take us," answered Jerry, urging Galloper into a canter.

They journeyed on at an easy pace for miles. But as they went a horseman, who always kept in the shadows at a discreet distance behind, followed.

The shadowing horseman was Colonel York, and there was murder in the colonel's heart!

(Hal and Jerry have made a vicious enemy of Colonel York, and the highwayman is out for revenge! Don't miss next week's thrilling developments in this grand serial. And don't forget that six more picture stamps will be given away FREE!)

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