

"THE FORM-MASTER'S FAVOURITE!" Amazing Long Complete School Yarn of **Harry Wharton & Co.**

The Magnet 2^d



WANT TO HEAR SOME GOOD NEWS, CHUMS? THEN—



COME INTO the OFFICE, BOYS - AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the "Magnet," The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped, addressed envelope will ensure a reply.

WELL, chums, I can imagine how anxious you all are to read this week's chat. For did I not tell you last week that I had something up my sleeve—something that would make you sit up and take notice? I will, therefore, proceed to let the cat out of the bag.

FREE GIFTS ARE COMING YOUR WAY!

How's that for a jolly surprise? Naturally enough, you all want to know what form these FREE GIFTS take, so I guess I'll spill the beans, as our old friend Fisher T. Fish would say. A fortnight from now—in the MAGNET dated February 15th—every reader will receive ABSOLUTELY FREE a pair of

MAGIC SPECTACLES,

together with the first of a set of

PICTURES THAT COME TO LIFE!

The wonderful spectacles—a first-rate scientific novelty in themselves—cause the specially printed photographs, which are presented with them, to spring to life in the most amazing way. Further pictures, of a diversity of interesting subjects, will be presented to readers from week to week, and the whole set, together with the "magic" spectacles, will make up a most fascinating and intriguing gift, which will keep you and your friends amused for hours.

This is the most novel and interesting gift that has ever been presented with any boys' paper, so that it is up to you, chums, to tell your newsagent to reserve a copy of the MAGNET for you every week in order that you may make sure of getting

THESE SCIENTIFIC FREE GIFTS

and the complete set of Special Pictures. Seeing is believing, chums, so don't wait to hear what other boys and girls have to say about these marvellous FREE GIFTS—be one of the first to get them by placing a regular order for the MAGNET at the very earliest opportunity.

In conjunction with this greatest-ever free gift scheme I am arranging

AN EXTRA-SPECIAL PROGRAMME

of stories. Frank Richards is turning in a grand new series of Greyfriars yarns, in which a conspicuous part is played by a character so many of you have been wanting to meet again—Jim Valentine, who was more commonly known as "Dick, the Penman." You remember him, don't you? Jim Valentine was a character that will for ever remain in the minds of MAGNET readers. I know you will all be glad to renew your acquaintance with him in one of the finest and most exciting series of stories Frank Richards has ever penned. Now for the next special treat. George E. Rochester, who has written so many masterpieces for us, is contributing a tip-top tale of adventure on land, sea and in the air, with an

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entirely original plot. These together with our other features will make a strong programme, what? Make a note of the date so that you don't forget—February 15th issue, which, incidentally, will be on sale FRIDAY, February 7th, 1936.

I'VE received rather a poser from Charles Goom, one of my Berkshire readers, this week. He wants to know which are

THE BIGGEST AIRWAYS IN THE WORLD!

That's rather a peculiar question, because I am not quite sure what he means by "Airways." But he will probably learn what he wants to know from the following particulars:

The largest land plane in the world is the Soviet plane called the "Maxim Gorky." It carries 40 passengers, and has a crew of 23. It is fitted with a printing plant, a "movie" projector, and loudspeakers, and is used for carrying out educational work in out-of-the-way parts of Russia.

The longest air race in the world will be that which is being organised in America at the present moment. The course will be about 20,000 miles in length, and is called the "Around the Americas" course. From New York the aviators must fly round the east coast of the United States to Christobal. Then they must go around the east coast of South America as far as Buenos Aires, across the Andes to Santiago, and back via the west coasts of South, Central and North America, via Mexico City, San Francisco and Chicago.

It remains to be seen which will become the longest airway passenger route. At the time of writing, various countries are entering into competition with each other to provide transatlantic airway routes. The Graf Zeppelin now holds the record for the longest passenger route. But the big air companies of other countries are amalgamating their resources, and in a short while we are likely to see vast strides in the airways of the world.

SOME very strange things happen in this weird old world of ours. Here is a further selection of these curiosities which I have collected for you. Do you know that

ANTS CAN KILL ELEPHANTS?

Driver ants swarm in the African jungles, and do not hesitate to attack even elephants! The ants travel in armies comprising hundreds of thousands, and the elephant is so bulky that it cannot fight against such small enemies. If the elephant can gain the safety of deep water it can escape. If not fortunate enough, it is doomed. The ants make for the elephant's trunk, and drive the beast almost mad with pain. Hundreds of thousands more ants cover its body, and their numbers are so great that they can tear aside even the toughest parts of its hide. It is estimated that an army of driver ants can eat the whole of an

elephant, except the skeleton, in three days!

Here is another interesting paragraph concerning

THE GHOST CITY OF INDIA!

It is the city of Fatehpur Sikri, and was constructed by a famous Mogul emperor in 1569. It is built of marble and sandstone, contains a magnificent emperor's palace, an arch of victory, and extensive soldiers' quarters and stables. Altogether, it is seven miles in circumference, and yet, fifty years after it was built, it was abandoned, and no one has lived there since. Furthermore, although there are many legends about this ghost city, its true history cannot be traced. It is said that the reason for its abandonment was because the water supply was impure. Anyway, for well over three hundred years this strange city of ghosts has been deserted.

THINGS YOU'D HARDLY BELIEVE

have always been popular with my readers, so here are some more strange, but certainly interesting, facts:

A Whale with Two Heads was once caught off South Georgia, a British whaling station in the South Atlantic.

A Man who Ate his Boots! On the outbreak of the Russia-Japanese war a Moscow merchant bet that he would eat his boots if the Japanese were not beaten. He lost his bet—had his boots cooked—and kept his word by eating them!

A Man with a Billion Pounds is Richer than a Man with Seven Billion Dollars! A billion in Britain is a million million. In America a billion is only a thousand millions!

A Fish that has Four Eyes! The Anableps, a South American fish, possesses two pairs of eyes. One pair are near-sighted for use under water. The upper pair are long-sighted, and enable the fish to see insects when swimming with its head only partly submerged.

A Cavern Illuminated by Insects! Glow-worm Grotto, in the Waitomo Caves, New Zealand, is the haunt of millions of tiny glow-worms. The glow-worms provide all the natural light to illuminate the cave.

Men Buried within Growing Trees! In Borneo certain tribes cut out graves from huge trees, bury their chiefs inside, and then seal up the trees!

I guess the above paragraphs will give you something to think about, chums. And now I know what you are thinking about at the moment, and that is: "What has the MAGNET in store for next week?"

Something good, you may be sure. Your Editor, his staff, his authors and artists have been busier than ever lately, and we have something specially good in store for you next week. First of all there is

"THE REMOVE'S RECRUIT!"

By Frank Richards,

the final yarn in our present series, featuring Eric Wilmot. Up till now Wilmot has seemed a queer sort of fellow, but in this grand story he "pulls his socks up" with a vengeance! Like all Frank Richards' stories, this yarn is calculated to keep you enthralled from the first chapter to the last. There are lots of thrills in store for you, and lots of humour, too. Our serial, as mentioned earlier on, closes down with next week's chapters, but there's no scarcity of thrills, believe me. The smaller features follow as usual. A final word—place a standing order with your newsagent for the MAGNET right away!

Don't forget the Great Free Gift Programme for the week after next!

YOUR EDITOR.

The FORM-MASTER'S FAVOURITE!



By
**FRANK
RICHARDS**

Harry Wharton & Co., of the Greyfriars Remove, are only too pleased to welcome new boys into the fold. But a sulky, sullen and discontented fellow like Eric Wilmot—dubbed the Form-master's favourite—is a horse of a different colour!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Rag in the Remove!

"HENRY'S late!" remarked Bob Cherry.

There was a chuckle in the Remove Form Room at Greyfriars.

The Remove had come in for third school at the sound of the bell, but Mr. Quelch, instead of being punctually on the spot, as usual, was not to be seen.

Mr. Quelch rejoiced in the given names of Henry Samuel; but what he would have thought, had he heard a member of his Form speak of him as "Henry," was unimaginable.

What he would have done was more easily to be guessed! So it was rather fortunate for Bob that "Henry" was out of hearing.

"I say, you fellows, the old bean's talking to Hacker!" said Billy Bunter. "Hacker stopped him at the end of the passage."

"Good old Hacker!" remarked Johnny Bull. "I don't like Hacker's jaw myself, but let's hope that Quelch does."

"Let us hope that the jawfulness will be terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The Remove were by no means unwilling to wait for Quelch. Third lesson that morning dealt with Latin prose. Hardly a man in the Remove was eager to get on with Latin prose. Quelch was welcome to "jaw" with Mr. Hacker, the master of the Shell, as long as he liked—or longer.

Vernon-Smith glanced out of the doorway.

In the distance he had a glimpse of the two masters—Mr. Hacker talking, Mr. Quelch revealing distinct signs of impatience.

The Bounder grinned as he turned back into the Form-room.

"All serene!" he said. "Hacker's got him! More power to his elbow—I mean, to his jawbone!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites were not without resources to fill up the time of waiting.

A model Form, of course, would have sorted out their books and concentrated on study, absorbing knowledge so far as that could be done without the assistance of their "beak."

But the Remove were not a model Form!

Only Mark Linley, who was a bit of a swot, opened a school book—and Bolsover major promptly jerked it away and spun it across the Form-room. Smithy, coming back from the door, met it in transit, and neatly passed it with a prompt foot; and three or four fellows immediately rushed after it.

"On the ball!" chirruped Bob Cherry.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. Head boy of the Remove was supposed to keep some sort of order in the absence of the beak.

"Rats!" retorted the Bounder.

"Quelch may blow in any minute, you ass!"

"Oh, Quelch is safe enough," said Skinner, with a snigger. "If Hacker's got on the subject of his dear little Eric he won't let him off in a hurry."

At which there was a loud laugh in the Remove.

Eric Wilmot, the new fellow in that

Form, was sitting quietly at his desk. He did not look up, but his handsome face flushed. The fact that he was Mr. Hacker's nephew did not make things easier for the new junior.

It made them harder. For there was little doubt that Skinner was right. Fussy Mr. Hacker was just the man to stop Quelch on his way to take his class to talk to him on that very subject.

"Oh, shut up, Skinner!" said Frank Nugent, always good-natured. He did not like the new fellow—nobody in the Remove did; but he could feel for him on the subject of his fussy relative on the staff.

"My dear chap," said Skinner, "somebody chucked a snowball at Wilmot—I mean, Eric—in the quad in break. Think Hacker didn't spot it? Doesn't he spot everything that happens to Eric?"

There was another laugh, and Wilmot's ears burned.

"Bet you," continued Skinner, "Hacker's got Quelch on that very subject now. Bet you he's asking Quelch to hold an inquiry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mustn't touch Eric!" said Skinner, shaking his head. "Fellows may look, but they mustn't touch!"

Wilmot glanced round at Skinner.

"Shut up, Skinner!" he said.

He spoke very quietly. But his cold, steady look daunted Skinner, who remembered—in time—that this fellow had beaten the Bounder in a scrap.

Skinner, with an uneasy snigger, shut up and turned away.

Whiz!

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Mark Linley's Latin grammar was leading the life of a Soccer ball. It came back to Vernon-Smith, who kicked it again, landing it full and fair in the handsome face of Eric Wilmot.

"Goal!" chortled the Bounder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well kicked!"

Wilmot leaped to his feet.

He rushed out of the desks, straight at the Bounder. Before Herbert Vernon-Smith knew what was happening the new fellow had grasped him, whirled him over, and was banging his head on Mr. Quelch's desk.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Look out!"

"Stop that, Wilmot!" shouted Harry Wharton.

"Wildcat!" said Skinner.

The Bounder yelled with rage and struggled wildly. But Wilmot, in that passionate outbreak of temper, seemed to have the strength of two or three fellows.

The Bounder, tough as he was, crumpled up in his angry grasp. His hapless head banged against Quelch's desk.

Tom Redwing ran forward, to drag the angry fellow away from his chum. Wilmot released one hand and shoved him back—with a shove that made Redwing stagger. Then he banged Smithy's head again.

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked Billy Bunter. His big spectacles were turned on an angular figure that had appeared in the doorway. Mr. Quelch had got away from Hacker sooner than Skinner had predicted.

But nobody else noticed Mr. Quelch's arrival. All eyes were fixed on the Bounder struggling helplessly in the grasp of Eric Wilmot.

Bang!

His head smote again.

Mr. Quelch gazed as if transfixed for a moment. Then he strode into the Form-room, his eyes glittering.

"Wilmot," he thundered, "how dare you! Release Vernon-Smith at once! How dare you, Wilmot!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Wrathy!

"QUELCH!"

"Oh crumbs!"

There was a rush of the juniors to their places.

Almost in the twinkling of an eye the Removites were at their desks. Only two remained out of place—Smithy and Wilmot.

At the Form-master's voice Eric Wilmot released the Bounder instantly and turned a crimson face towards Mr. Quelch.

Vernon-Smith sprawled, panting, on the floor.

A few seconds ago the Remove-room had been full of sound. Now a pin might have been heard to drop there. For a moment or two the silence was almost awful!

Then Mr. Quelch spoke again.

"Vernon-Smith, go to your place!"

The Bounder scrambled up. He was red with rage. Even his Form-master's presence barely restrained him from hurling himself at the fellow who had handled him. But he choked back his fury and tramped away in silence to his desk.

Wilmot remained facing the Remove master. Evidently it was upon his head that the vials of wrath were to be poured.

Mr. Quelch's expressive face was set with anger.

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He had reasons for not desiring Wilmot in his Form at all. He had been bothered to the limit of patience by Mr. Hacker's fussy concern for his relative in the Remove. Only a minute ago he had been exchanging sharp words with the master of the Shell on that very topic. For it was true as Skinner guessed, that Hacker, from his study window, had seen his nephew's cap knocked off by a snowball in the quad, and with his usual tactlessness Hacker had taken that trifling incident up. Quelch had been driven to tell Hacker that his nephew had not come to Greyfriars to be dry-nursed—a remark which sent Mr. Hacker back to his own Form-room in a highly offended frame of mind. Equally annoyed, Quelch had come along to the Remove-room—to behold Hacker's nephew in the act of banging another fellow's head on his own particular desk!

Hacker seemed to be under the delusion that his nephew required to be protected in a rough-and-ready Form like the Remove. Really this did not look like it.

"How dare you, Wilmot!" repeated Mr. Quelch. "How dare you handle another boy in that ruffianly manner!"

"Sorry, sir!" muttered Wilmot. He realised that his angry temper had carried him too far.

"Only last week," said Mr. Quelch, "you were fighting with Vernon-Smith, and I received a complaint on the subject." He did not add that the complaint had come from Hacker, but all the Remove knew.

Wilmot's face, already crimson, burned.

"I never complained, sir—" he muttered.

"You had little reason to do so, I think, as I find you handling the same boy like a ruffianly bully!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

The Bounder gritted his teeth.

The knocking of his head on Quelch's desk had not been pleasant, but Smithy would rather have had it knocked off than have been supposed to be in need of protection from his Form-master. He jumped to his feet.

"If you please, sir—"

"You may be silent, Vernon-Smith, and—"

"I started the row, sir—"

"You will take a hundred lines, Vernon-Smith, and be silent."

"That fellow can't handle me!" said the Bounder savagely. "If he hadn't taken me by surprise—"

"If you speak another word, Vernon-Smith, I shall give you a detention for the half-holiday this afternoon."

The Bounder sat down again in savage silence. He did not want a detention. There was football that afternoon in the Remove.

"Wilmot!" Mr. Quelch fixed his gimlet-eyes on the new junior again.

"You have been more trouble to me than any other boy in the Form since you came here. You appear to have made yourself generally disliked by a sullen, sulky—I may say, evil temper. You will have to learn, Wilmot, to restrain that temper—in the Form-room, at least."

Wilmot did not answer. He stood silent, with the sulky expression that seemed habitual to his face settling there darkly.

"I shall punish you for this outbreak," went on Mr. Quelch, "by a half-holiday's detention. You will be detained this afternoon, Wilmot, from two o'clock till tea-time. Now go to your place."

Wilmot gave a start.

"Detained this afternoon, sir!" he repeated.

"Yes. Go to your place at once."

"But, sir—" stammered Wilmot.

He seemed quite taken aback by that sentence. Really it was not a severe one, in the circumstances. Most of the fellows had expected Quelch to order him to bend over and take six.

Neither was the loss of a half-holiday such a blow to Wilmot as it would have been to most fellows. He was not in the football, and he did not want to be. He had not made a single friend in the Form—unless Billy Bunter was to be counted as one—so he could have fixed up nothing in another fellow's company for that half-holiday. Indeed, he generally spent his half-holidays in solitary rambles.

But he seemed quite overwhelmed. Mr. Quelch, noticing it, paused. He was a severe gentleman, and at the moment he was very angry, but in matters of the Form games he was a very considerate master.

"Wharton!" he rapped.

"Yes, sir!" answered the captain of the Remove.

"Is there a football match this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir—a pick-up game."

"Is Wilmot playing in it?"

"Oh, no!" answered Harry, suppressing a smile. Some of the Removites grinned. Wilmot turned up unwillingly for games practice when that was compulsory, on other occasions he was never seen near Little Side. That added to his unpopularity in the Remove—if it needed adding to.

"Very good!" said Mr. Quelch. "Go to your place, Wilmot."

"But, sir—"

"If you say another word, Wilmot, I shall cane you!"

Wilmot turned and went to his place. His handsome face was darker than before.

Some of the fellows looked at him curiously. Why a fellow should seem so overwhelmed by a sentence of detention when, as a rule, he had nothing to do on a half-holiday was rather a puzzle, but it was plain that Wilmot was troubled and dismayed by that sentence.

The Remove were particularly good during that lesson. There was a glint in Quelch's gimlet-eye—and nobody wanted to catch that eye. Even Billy Bunter contrived to give a little attention; even Lord Mauleverer tried hard to take a little interest in Latin syntax. But Wilmot was letting his thoughts wander, and two or three times Quelch called him sharply to order, and every time he spoke to the new junior there seemed to be a more acid edge to Quelch's tongue.

When the Form were dismissed Wilmot lingered after the others. Mr. Quelch, busy with papers at his high desk, glanced at him icily.

Doubtless the new junior had lingered with some idea of making an appeal to be let off that afternoon, but that icy stare from Quelch discouraged him. It would have been futile, and he knew it.

Slowly he followed the other fellows from the Form-room.

They were going out into the keen, frosty air of the quadrangle. Nobody had a word to say to Wilmot. Fellows who had been disposed to be friendly—or, at least, civil—had given him up as a bad job. Only Bunter was hanging about for him—which did not seem to gratify the new fellow as he came along. The fat Owl gave him a cheery, fat grin.

"Oh, here you are, old chap!" said Bunter. "I say, tough luck getting detention this afternoon—what?"

Wilmot, with the curtest of nods, walked on. Bunter rolled by his side.

"Not that it will hurt you much, of course," went on Bunter. "You never have anything to do on a half-holiday, do you?"

No answer from Wilmot. He quickened his pace a little; so did Bunter.

"No friends or anything," went on Bunter. "Except me, of course. I stick to you, don't I, old chap?"

There was no doubt that Bunter did. But Wilmot's look did not indicate that it afforded him any pleasure. He walked a little faster. So did Bunter.

"But I was going to tell you something, old fellow," added Bunter. "I say, what do you think?"

Wilmot did not state what he thought.

"Guess!" said Bunter.

Wilmot did not guess.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Proof Positive.

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH burst into a loud laugh.

There was nothing, so far as the other fellows could see, to amuse the Bounder, and they looked at him in surprise.

The Famous Five of the Remove were talking in a group with Peter Todd, Tom Brown, Squiff, and two or three other Removites. The topic was Soccer—an interesting one to the Removites. Vernon-Smith was standing with them, his hands in his pockets, and a scowl on his face, not joining in the talk. Smithy, once a pillar of strength in the Remove Eleven, was hopelessly off his form this term, and had almost ceased to count in Remove football—a position that was a constant irritant to

shop. Temple of the Fourth was brushing a speck of dust from an immaculate sleeve. These things—and others—were to be seen in the quad, but there was nothing of a specially comic nature.

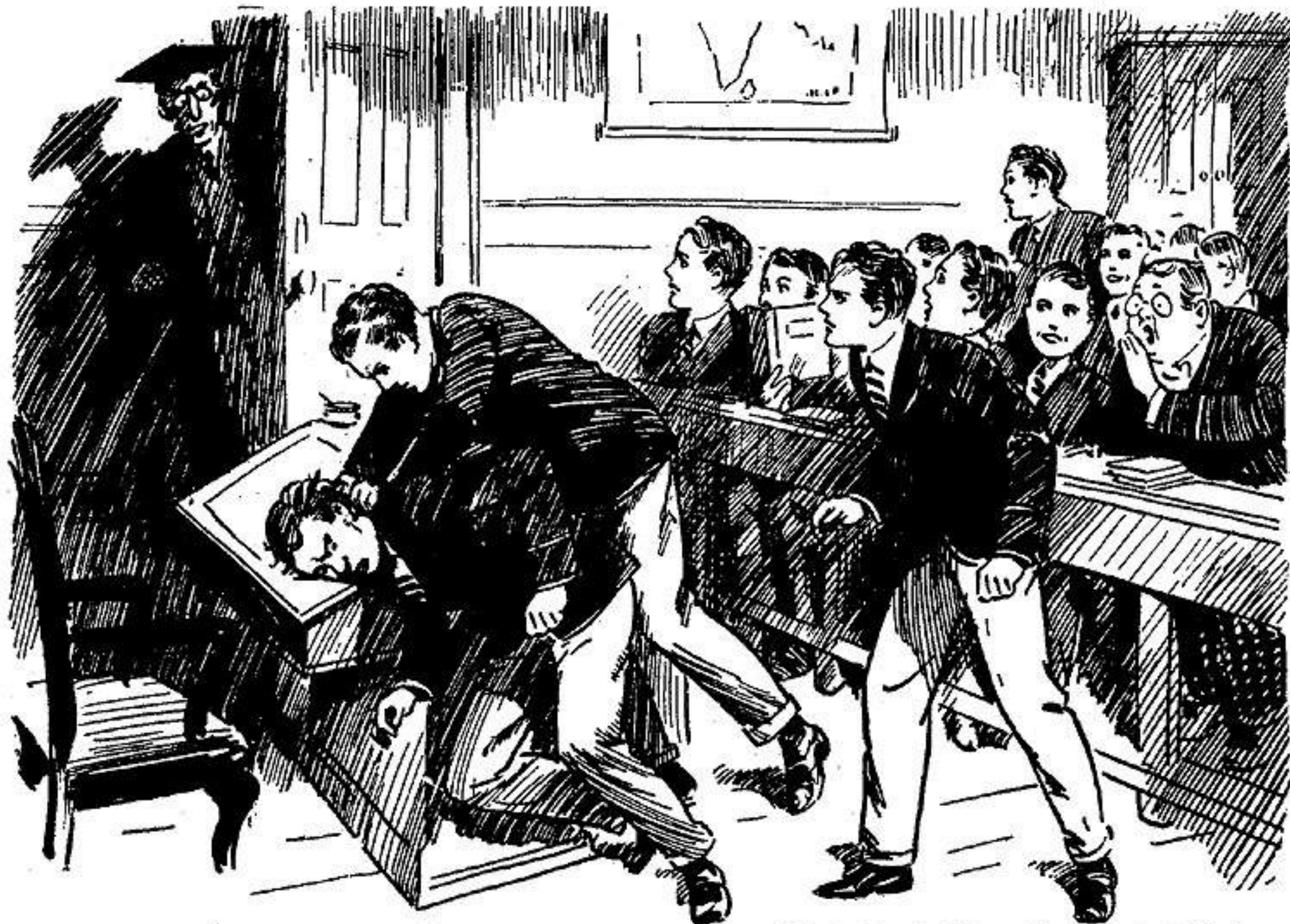
"That new tick!" said the Bounder. "Can't see him," said Bob. "What about him, anyhow?"

"Look at Hacker's window!"

The juniors were standing not far from the windows of Masters' Studies. Many of those windows were open, to admit the bright, frosty sunshine of the winter morning.

Hacker's was open, and the interior of the study could be seen if anyone was interested therein. Nobody was—till what was passing there caught the Bounder's eye, and he drew the attention of the other fellows to it.

Mr. Hacker was in his study. Stand-



Vernon-Smith, tough as he was, crumpled up in Wilmot's angry grasp. His hapless head banged against Quelch's desk. "I say, you fellows!" squeaked Billy Bunter. His big spectacles had turned on an angular figure that had appeared in the doorway. It was that of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove!

"Well, I'll tell you," said the fat Owl. "Mrs. Mumble's got in a fresh lot of meringues! I had one in break, and I can tell you they're spiffing! I say, there'll be a rush on them when the fellows know! Come on!"

Wilmot did not come on.

He cut off.

"I say, Wilmot!" shouted Bunter.

Wilmot disappeared.

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter went to the tuckshop alone; but, owing to a lack of cash, or of a friend with cash, he was only able to feast his eyes, instead of his fat interior—which was very annoying to the Owl of the Remove, and made him feel strongly tempted to tell Wilmot what he thought of him. Still, there was tea-time to be considered; so, on second thoughts—proverbially the best—Bunter kept to himself what he thought of the sulky new fellow.

the Bounder's arrogant temper. His sudden harsh, sardonic laugh broke on the cheery chat.

"What's the joke, fathead?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Look round and see!" grinned the Bounder.

Bob and the other fellows looked round. There were plenty of fellows and some masters to be seen in the quad. Prout, master of the Fifth, was walking there, stately and portly, with Monsieur Charpentier, little and dapper. Wingate of the Sixth could be seen with Gwynne of that Form. Coker of the Fifth was talking to Potter and Greene, apparently laying down the law in his usual style. Nugent minor of the Second was scraping some remnant of snow from a corner, no doubt with hostile intentions towards some other fag. Billy Bunter was blinking in at the window of the school

ing before him was his nephew in the Remove—Eric Wilmot.

All eyes fixed on that little scene. The Bounder laughed again—a sardonic laugh.

"Caught in the act!" he chuckled.

"Oh!" said Harry Wharton, rather blankly.

"The sneaking tick!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Rotten worm!" said Squiff.

"The rottenness of the esteemed worm is terrific!" declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Harry Wharton, gazing at Hacker's window, frowned. Wharton was on the worst of terms with the new junior—all the more, perhaps, because Wilmot had been placed in Study No. 1 in the Remove, with him and Nugent, and so he had more than a fair share of the fellow's sulky looks. But Wharton had

never believed that Wilmot "greased" up to his uncle, the beak.

The Bounder was sure of it. But, as Smithy had had a row with him, and had been licked in a scrap, he was probably prejudiced on the subject.

It was known all over the Remove that Hacker "fussed," and that he had bothered Quelch about "Eric." Many fellows took the Bounder's view that Wilmot made the most of his relationship with a Form-master. But Wharton had inclined to the view that Wilmot thoroughly disliked Hacker's well-meant but tactless interventions on his behalf. He did not believe for a moment that the new fellow carried complaints to his uncle.

So it was a little startling to see him at the present moment in Hacker's study, deep in talk with Hacker. Remove fellows, of course, had nothing to do with the master of the Shell, and had no business in his study.

Wharton compressed his lips. He had refused to take the Bounder's view, and had, indeed, told Smithy that it was all rot, and malicious rot! Now he did not know what to say.

"What about it now?" grinned the Bounder. "I bet I can make a guess at what he's telling dear nunky."

"Oh, rubbish!" said Bob uneasily. "After all, the man's his uncle. Why shouldn't he drop into his study and speak to him?"

"Yes, that's it," said Harry, relieved by the suggestion. "I dare say Hacker makes him come in and jaw, too."

"Quite likely," agreed Nugent.

"The chap would show a little more sense in keeping away from Hacker's study, knowing what all the fellows think!" remarked Peter Todd dryly.

"Well, he doesn't care much what fellows think," said Bob.

"Then he jolly well ought to!"

"The oughtfulness is terrific!"

Vernon-Smith sneered unpleasantly.

"You don't think that cad is greasing up to Hacker at this very minute," he asked, "telling him tales of woe?"

"I don't see any reason to suppose so!" said Harry Wharton curtly. "I don't like the chap any more than you do, but I don't see calling him a greasy sneak without any proof."

"And you can't guess what he's telling Hacker?"

"No; and I don't want to!"

"Well, I can guess. He's complaining to Hacker about Quelch detaining him for the afternoon, and asking dear uncle to barge in."

"Oh, rot!"

"Shouldn't wonder!" said Todd. "He seemed knocked all of a heap by getting that detention, though goodness knows why; he doesn't have a fearful lot to do on a half-holiday."

"He will miss Bunter's company," suggested Squiff.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! There he goes!" said the Bounder, his eyes on Hacker's window.

"The dear boy's told his tale of woe! What's the betting that we don't see Hacker hike along to Quelch's study?"

"Rubbish!" said Wharton. "Look here, Smithy, chuck it! Fellows aren't supposed to stare in at beaks' windows, and—"

"Hacker's going!"

"Oh!"

Mr. Hacker was seen to leave his study almost immediately after Wilmot. The Bounder chuckled explosively. It was a sheer relish to him to see this apparent proof of what he had always said of the new fellow.

"Come along, you men!" grinned Smithy. "Quelch's window is open, by

good luck! Let's see Hacker barge in!"

"I'm not moving!" said Wharton curtly.

"Please yourself!"

The Bounder changed his position, so that he could look into Mr. Quelch's study instead of Mr. Hacker's. He had no doubt that Hacker, having listened to a tale of complaint from Eric Wilmot, was going to see Wilmot's Form-master about it. And he was very keen indeed to prove it.

Wharton, frowning, remained where he was. Whether the Bounder was right or wrong, Wharton had no intention of peering in at windows to find out. But some of the fellows went with Smithy.

They were rewarded by the sight of Hacker entering Mr. Quelch's study. They saw Mr. Quelch lay down his pen and rise to his feet, with a cold, grim expression on his severe face. That expression might have warned Hacker that he did not want to hear anything about Wilmot, if the master of the Shell had been able to take a hint.

"What did I tell you?" whispered the Bounder.

"Looks like a catch!" admitted Bob Cherry. "Blessed if I really believed that Wilmot was such a greaser!"

"I've said so often enough."

"You'd say anything of a fellow who punched your nose, old bean!" said Bob cheerfully. "But I must say it looks as if you were right."

The juniors were too distant to hear what was said in Quelch's study. But they saw Quelch's face darken, and a flush come into Mr. Hacker's face. It was quite plain that the conversation was not of a friendly or agreeable nature.

Mr. Quelch was indeed the very last master at Greyfriars to allow another beak to interfere in matters pertaining to his Form. It was much to his credit that he treated Wilmot with strict justice, in spite of his uncle's fussy interventions.

Vernon-Smith left the other fellows and cut towards the House. Nobody followed him. The Bounder, little scrupulous in matters where his personal dislikes were concerned, intended to know for certain what the discussion was about in the Remove master's study.

It was easy enough. Having reached the House, he walked along under the windows of Masters' Studies. Those windows were high up from the ground; Quelch's window-sill was above the Bounder's head. He was able to walk past without being observed from within. Under the window he stopped.

"Rotten trick!" grunted Bob Cherry; and he went back to rejoin Wharton.

And most of the fellows agreed.

The Bounder did not care. He had a deep and bitter grudge against Wilmot, and he was determined to have proof that the fellow was, as he called him, a greaser. As he stopped under the window, he had immediate proof, at least, that Hacker had called to see Quelch about his nephew's detention. Quelch's voice, raised a little in sharp tones, floated from the window.

"I must speak plainly, Mr. Hacker! I decline—I absolutely decline—to permit interference by another member of Dr. Locke's staff in matters of my Form! The fact that Wilmot is your nephew is immaterial!"

"Quite so, sir. But—"

"It would be for the boy's benefit, sir, to leave him to find his place without this constant mollycoddling!"

RED-HOT HORTON

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THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Just Like Smithy!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH came out of the House after dinner and sauntered in the quad, with his hands in his pockets and a wrinkle of thought in his brow.

It was a cold, clear afternoon, with a nip of frost in the air, and most of the Remove were thinking of footer with cheery anticipation.

Other thoughts, however, were in the Bounder's mind, and his chum, Redwing, joining him in the quad, could guess those thoughts, from the expression on his face. As they walked together, Smithy gave him a sidelong look or two, and Redwing broke the silence abruptly.

"Don't be a fool, Smithy!"

"Thought-reader?" grinned Smithy.

"The Rookwood date's not far off now. You've still got a chance of pulling up, and Wharton would jump at playing you, if you were anything like your old form."

wood, I'll stay in to-day and collect mud with the Remove. If not——"

Without finishing that remark, Vernon-Smith left his chum and cut across the quad, spotting the captain of the Remove in the distance. Harry Wharton greeted him with a cheery smile and nod.

"Kick off soon after two, Smithy," he said. "Ripping day for a game, what?"

"Um! Yes!" The Bounder coloured a little, thinking of what he was going to say, and noting Wharton's unsuspectingness. "But——"

"I was just thinking out the sides," went on Wharton. "Look here, Smithy, do try to pull yourself together a bit! There's still time, if you really put your beef into it. I don't want to barge into your personal affairs and give you sermons—but have a little sense! Cigarettes in the study are no good for a footballer! Nugent's keen and willing, and, of course, I'd be keen to play him, but we want you to help us beat Rookwood."

Smithy stood silent. As a salve to his conscience he had been trying to believe that the captain of the Remove was glad to edge him out of the team to make room for his own chum. He could hardly affect to believe anything of that kind now.

"Who said I smoke in the study?"

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intervene between him and his Form-master! In all my experience as a schoolmaster, I have never heard of such a thing!"

"If you will hear me——"

"I will not hear you, sir! I will not hear one word! I request you, sir, to leave my study!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, his voice fairly thrilling with indignation.

"One word, sir——"

"Not one word! Not one syllable! Nothing, sir, will induce me to rescind Wilmot's detention! If the Head himself made the request, sir, I would rather resign my position here than accede!"

"Mr. Quelch——"

"I will not hear you, sir! If you will not leave this study, I will leave it myself!" hooted Mr. Quelch.

That appeared to be enough, even for Haacker! Vernon-Smith, under the window, heard the study door close.

"Upon my word!" he heard Mr. Quelch exclaim. "Upon my word! Unheard-of! In all my career as a schoolmaster! Upon my word!"

The Bounder strolled away grinning. Before the dinner-bell rang, all the Remove had heard an interesting account of that conversation in Henry Samuel Quelch's study.

When Wilmot sat down, he could not fail to see the mocking grins, and hear the derisive whispers of the Remove fellows. And fellows who were not grinning were looking scornful and contemptuous. He glanced at Wharton, and the contempt he read in the face of the captain of the Remove brought a flush to his cheeks. "Greasing" to a beak was a dire offence in the eyes of all Greyfriars, and the fact that the hapless new fellow was incapable of such a mean action was not likely to be recognised in the face of what looked like proof positive.

"He's picked out Nugent for my place."

"Only as a makeshift, you know that."

"Think he'd turn his best pal down again if I pulled up in time for the Rookwood date?" sneered the Bounder.

"You know he would! Nugent himself would gladly stand out to make room for you, if you were worth the place."

"Well, according to Wharton, I'm not. And I don't see mucking about for an afternoon in a rotten pick-up, if nothing's coming of it," said the Bounder sullenly. "It's not as if it were a match—even a Form match. Mucking about in the mud for nothing——"

The Bounder was arguing with his own conscience, rather than with his chum. He wanted to get out of gates that afternoon on an excursion with Pon & Co., of Higheliffe. And he had the grace to be rather ashamed of himself.

Tom Redwing knitted his brows. When that kink of blackguardism was uppermost in the Bounder, Tom liked him least, and found it most difficult to keep patient with him.

"You've made an exhibition of yourself with your rotten temper, because you've been dropped out of the eleven," he said hotly. "That was really the cause of your scrap with Wilmot the other day. You were hunting for trouble. There's time before Rookwood for you to pull up, if you take care, and stick hard to practice. And you're going to let it slip——"

"I'm not going to waste time if I'm out of the eleven. I'll put it plain to Wharton. If he wants me for Rook-

he said, at last, sullenly. "Has Redwing been——"

"Don't be an ass, old chap!" answered Wharton. "Redwing isn't likely to talk about what you do. Nobody's said so—but a fellow has eyes! Last term you were as good a man as we ever had in the team! This term you're rotten!"

"Thanks!" sneered the Bounder.

"There's no other word for it," said Harry. "Even against the Fourth, the other day, you put up a rotten show. I know that a man is often off colour by no fault of his own—it might happen to any chap—it does, in fact, sooner or later, to everyone. But it's gone so very far in your case—and so I can't help thinking——"

"You mean that I'm not good enough for the Rookwood game?"

"None at all, as you are at present! I'd as soon play Skinner or Snoop."

"Why not say Bunter?"

"Well, it's not so bad as that, but I'd very nearly as soon play Bunter as you in your present shape, Smithy! But if you'd only manage to get back some of your real form——"

"If I keep slogging at practice, till I get as stale as a railway bun, I may have a remote chance of getting into the eleven again! Is that it?"

Wharton gave him a quick look. He knew the Bounder—and he knew the signs. Smithy was looking for trouble! Why, Wharton could not guess for the moment.

"That's not good enough!" said Vernon-Smith curtly. "Tell me I'm wanted for Rookwood and I'll slog and slog. But I'm not a man to be picked up one minute and chucked over the next. If I'm not in the eleven, I don't see slogging in the mud for nothing."

"Are you following Wilmot's lead, and claiming the right to slack except on compulsory days?" asked Wharton contemptuously.

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"Give a man a plain answer! Am I wanted for Rookwood?"

"Not on your present form."

"Then you can leave me out of the pick-up to-day!"

"Let's have this plain," said Harry quietly, but with a glint in his eyes. "You can't pull the wool over my eyes, Smithy. I know you too well. Have you got something on for this afternoon, and are you trying to find an excuse for cutting the pick-up for that reason?"

"I can do as I like, I think, without finding excuses. Leave me out of the eleven, and you can leave me out of your dashed pick-ups! That's that!"

"You're left out of both, then!" said Wharton curly. "I suppose it's no good telling you you ought to be ashamed of yourself! You know that! Don't talk to me any more—you make me ill."

The Bounder swung away sullenly. Wharton, who had been looking very bright and cheery, had a clouded face as he walked on.

He had had a strong suspicion that the Bounder's loss of form was due to a revival of old blackguardly manners and customs. More than once, that term, he had fancied that Smithy's bed was empty in the Remove dormitory after lights out, which meant a resumption of his old reckless escapades. Late hours and smokes fully accounted for the Bounder crocking up so hopelessly at football.

In such circumstances, it was sheer impudence for a fellow to kick up a fuss about being dropped out of the team. But the Bounder had not only kicked up a fuss—he had displayed his angry temper to all the Remove.

Wharton had been hoping that Smithy would pull up, and pull round, in time for the match with Rookwood School. He wanted his very best men to meet Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood. He realised now that there was no hope of that—and the Bounder was definitely marked off, in his mind.

The sight of Eric Wilmot in the quad, going down to the gates, brought another frown to his brow.

Wilmot had the build, and the look, of a good man at the game; he could have been a good footballer if he chose. According to his uncle, Hacker, he had played for his former school, and had been a great man at games there. At Greyfriars he seemed nothing but a slacker and a dud. But he might have been just the man his Form captain needed—if he had liked. Wharton disliked him—nobody could help disliking so sulky and sullen and discontented a fellow. But he would have welcomed him into the fold with open arms, if he had shown anything like keenness—which he never did.

But he wondered sometimes whether the fellow's fumbling at footer was genuine, or part and parcel of his sullenness. Everybody knew that he had not wanted to come to Greyfriars, and that he seemed bent on making the worst, instead of the best, of what could not be helped. He had wanted, it seemed, to stay at his old school, wherever that was, and why he hadn't was rather a mystery to Wharton. He could not help entertaining a suspicion that Wilmot had had no choice about leaving.

But, looking at him now, a new idea came into Wharton's mind. The Bounder had let him down, and that was that. If there was anything in Wilmot—if the fellow would throw over his sulky sullenness and try and

show what he could do—it was rather like catching at a straw. Then, as he stood looking at the fellow and thinking it over, Wharton remembered that Wilmot was under detention that afternoon—and he was going down to the gates with the evident intention of going out.

Wharton cut after him.

"Hold on, Wilmot!" he called out.

The new junior looked round.

"What do you want?" he snapped.

"Forgotten detention?"

"No bizney of yours!" said Wilmot, and he swung on.

Harry Wharton's momentary idea of speaking civilly to the fellow and asking him to play in the pick-up vanished at once. It was replaced by an impulse to punch his head.

Wilmot walked quickly to the gates. As he did so, Gosling came out of his lodge and stepped in his way.

"Sorry, sir—Mr. Quelch's horders!" said Gosling.

Wilmot gave him a fierce, angry look.

"What the dickens do you mean?" he exclaimed. "Let me pass at once!"

Gosling shook his gnarled head. Evidently Mr. Quelch had spoken to the school porter on the subject. That had been the outcome of Mr. Hacker's interference.

"You're in detention, sir," said Gosling. "You can't go out of gates, sir!"

"Let me pass! You can report me if you like!"

Another shake of Gosling's head.

"Mr. Quelch's horders, sir, you're not to go out!" he answered.

Wilmot looked for a moment as if he would shove the old porter aside by main force and go. But he thought better of that, turned, and walked back.

Harry Wharton called to him in passing.

"Look here, Wilmot—"

Without even a glance at him, Wilmot walked on. The Bounder, coming down to the gates, looked at one and then at the other and laughed. Wharton was left undecided whether to punch Smithy's head or Wilmot's. Fortunately, both were out of his reach before he decided.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Keeps It Dark!

"SEEN Bunter?"

"Bunter!" repeated Bob Cherry.

"That frowsy frump! I want to speak to him!"

"Don't say you're rolling that barrel into the pick-up, old man!" said Bob, in astonishment.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"No, ass! But I've been thinking about Wilmot!"

"That dud?" said Bob, still astonished.

"Is he a dud?" said Harry.

"Is he anything else? What the dickens are you getting at?" demanded Bob. "Dud, and slacker, and worm generally! Is this second childhood, or what?"

"I can't make up my mind about that chap, Bob!" said Harry Wharton. "You know what Hobby of the Shell told us before he came—Hacker told him Wilmot had been a great games man at his last school, and would make a figure in the footer here. I thought of him for the Remove Eleven then, before I even saw him. But afterwards—"

"When he turned out a sulky toad, and a slacker, and a dud—"

"Sulky toad, certainly," said Harry. "But—Hacker, must know whether he played for his last school or not, and he says he did. He made a silly fuss about the fellow being left out of the Form games, and jawed to Wingate, and I agreed to put him in a Form match last Saturday."

"And he never turned up!"

"I know. But—I've wondered a bit whether it's only his sulky temper, and whether Hacker may be right about him. After all, he's his uncle, and ought to know."

"Fat lot Hacker knows about Soccer."

"Next to nothing. But he said that he had seen Wilmot play for his last school."

"Some school—if that fumbling fooler played for it!" grunted Bob. "What school was it?"

"Hacker never said. But they must have been able to play some sort of game there. The fellow seems such a sulky brute that I've wondered whether his fozzling on the footer ground is only rotten sullenness!"

"Why?"

"Well, he seems to want to keep to himself and have nothing to do with the Form or any of its giddy works!"

"Then let him!"

"If he's a good man, we want him."

"He isn't good—he's rotten bad!"

"I'm not feeling sure of that! Bunter knows something about the fellow. He's talked of having seen him play footer, and play a great game!"

"Bunter's always talking rot!"

"I know. But he does know something of the fellow. He's the only chap Wilmot ever speaks to here of his own accord," said Harry. "Bunter's always spinning idiotic yarns. But that's a very queer yarn to come into his silly head if there's nothing in it! I've been thinking of asking Bunter about it, and getting the truth out of him."

"There isn't any in him!"

"Well, let's try," said Harry. "Where is the fat slug now?"

"The tuckshop would be a safe guess."

"Come on, then!"

It was quite a safe guess. Billy Bunter was discovered gazing at the window of Mrs. Mible's establishment, in the corner behind the elms. His little round eyes had a mournful look behind his big round spectacles. Like a podgy Peri at the gate of Paradise, Bunter was gazing at the good things beyond his reach.

But he blinked round hopelessly as Wharton and Bob came up.

"I say, you fellows, what do you think's happened?" asked Bunter. "I say, my postal order hasn't come! I was expecting it this morning!"

"Not really?" asked Bob sarcastically.

"Yes, really, old chap! It's rather surprising that it hasn't come!"

"It would be more surprising if it had!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"I've been looking for you, Bunter," said Harry.

"Oh, good!" said Bunter, brightening. "Is it a feed? I'm on, old fellow!"

"So likely to be a feed just before football!" said Bob.

Bunter's fat face fell again. It was not very long since dinner—but Billy Bunter was ready for a feed. In such matters his motto was the old Scottish one: "Ready, ay, ready!"



"If you happen to have half-a-crown you don't want, Wilmot——" said Bunter. "You fat ass!" snapped Wilmot. "I want to know whether Quelch has gone out of gates. I——" The detained junior broke off, as Bunter gave a sudden jump, and bolted. Wilmot, looking round, sighted Mr. Quelch approaching.

But he realised that these silly asses were not likely to stuff jam tarts and cream puffs just before footer. Bunter would have swapped the English Cup for a jam tart. But he realised sadly that these benighted duffers had quite different ideas.

"Well, look here," he said. "If you can lend a chap a bob till that postal order comes——"

"You were talking about Wilmot the other day——" began Harry.

"I can't borrow anything of Wilmot now," said Bunter peevishly. "He's in detention, the silly ass! Can't go to the Form-room——"

"For the love of Mike, leave off thinking of food for a minute or two!" exclaimed Wharton impatiently. "Look here, you were saying that you saw Wilmot playing footer."

"Eh? So I did!"

"You said you saw him bag goals against a good team."

"What about it?"

"Well, was it true?"

"Oh, really, Wharton! Don't I always tell the truth?"

"Oh scissors!"

"If you doubt my word, Harry Wharton——" began Bunter, with a great deal of dignity.

"Look here, you fat ass, try to tell the truth for once, anyhow! If you saw Wilmot play football, it must have been before he came to Greyfriars—he's only fozzled at it here! When was it?"

"In the week before he came."

"And where?"

Billy Bunter did not answer that question. To the surprise of the chums of the Remove, he grinned, and favoured them with a fat wink.

"That's telling!" he remarked.

"Well, I want you to tell me, fat-head!"

"You can't pump me!" explained Bunter. "Wilmot's a friend of mine, and I'm not saying anything about him!"

"You howling ass, you can say where he played football, I suppose?"

"I can't—and won't!"

"Why not?"

"Well, you see," said Bunter cautiously, "if you knew that, you'd know the lot."

"The lot?" repeated Harry blankly.

"And what's the 'lot'?"

"Oh! Nothing."

"Nothing?" ejaculated Bob.

"Nothing at all, old chap! I say, about lending me a bob——"

"It must have been somewhere near Greyfriars, if you saw it at all," said Harry Wharton. "So far as I know, the only outside match you've seen this term, was the game at St. Jude's, when they played Topham. We were prevented from seeing that game, as we intended—but you saw it——"

"No, I didn't!" contradicted Bunter promptly.

"You blithering idiot!" roared Bob. "You've told us a dozen times that you did!"

"Well, that—that was only a—a figure of speech, old chap! What I really meant was, that I didn't!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"I never went there after all," said Bunter. "Catch me standing about in the cold, watching a silly footer match! Besides, I only went because you fellows said you would be there, and there would be tea afterwards at the Pagoda in Lantham, or somewhere. You let me

down, as you never turned up——"

"Then you were there?"

"Oh! No! I—I wasn't there!"

"You benighted owl——"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"You blithering bletherer——"

"Beast!"

Getting the truth out of Bunter seemed rather uphill work.

"Now, look here, you frabjous ass," said Harry, "I've got an idea that that man Wilmot can play Soccer, if he likes, as his uncle makes out. If it's true that you've seen him play a good game——"

"I'm not accustomed to having my word doubted, Wharton," said Billy Bunter loftily. "I can jolly well tell you, that Wilmot could play your heads off, if he liked. Blessed if I know why he doesn't play here, when he's such a topper! Sulks, I suppose. He could, if he liked."

"You saw him bag goals?"

"Lots."

"Where?" roared Wharton.

Bunter winked again.

"That's telling!" he grinned.

"What team was he playing for?"

"That's telling, too!"

"Oh, kick him!" growled Bob.

"Here, you keep off, you beast——"

Bunter jumped back.

"There's some sort of a secret between Bunter and that new tick," said the captain of the Remove. "That can be the only reason why he stands the fat freak. But——"

"You cheeky beast!"

"But Wilmot can't want him to keep it dark about a football match! Why should he?"

"That's all you know!" grinned Bunter.

"Does he, then?"

"Oh! No! Nothing of the sort!"

"We were going to play footer this afternoon," said Bob Cherry. "We'd better put it off till Saturday, at this rate—if it's got to wait till you get some truth out of Bunter. I told you there wasn't any in him."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

Harry Wharton looked fixedly at Bunter. The endless and complicated prevarications of the fat Owl showed one thing—that he had a secret to keep, concerning Wilmot. If Bunter really had seen Wilmot play a great game of Soccer it was incomprehensible that the fellow should want him to keep it dark. But Wharton was growing more certain that Bunter had.

"Will you tell me the truth, you fat idiot?" said Harry at last. "Can't you understand that I've got good reasons for wanting to know whether Wilmot can play Soccer or not?"

"I've told you he can—better than you can," said Bunter. "He could play your head off, and not half try. I've seen him!"

"Where?" hooted Wharton.

"I mean, I haven't seen him——" amended Bunter hastily.

"What?"

"The fact is, I know nothing at all about the chap, and he never asked me to keep it dark, the day he came!" declared Bunter. "Besides, I promised him I wouldn't let it out, and I'm a fellow of my word, I hope. Not that there's anything to let out, you know—I don't mean that! Nothing at all—absolutely nothing."

It was not perhaps surprising that Wharton, by that time, gave up the idea of getting the truth out of Bunter. If there was any in him, the extraction was too long and difficult a process.

He grabbed the fat Owl by the collar instead.

"Here, I say, leggo!" howled Bunter.

Squash!

Bunter's bullet head was pressed firmly against the school shop window, fairly squashing his nose against the glass.

"Yoop! Leggo! Wow!" yelled Bunter, struggling wildly.

Squash!

"Yaroooh!"

Bump!

Bunter sat down, hard.

He roared, and Wharton and Bob walked away, and left him to roar. The difficult task was given up; if there was any truth in Bunter, it remained there.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Caged!

ERIC WILMOT'S handsome face—marred by a sullen scowl—was framed in the Form-room window. He stood looking out into the quad, bright in the winter sunshine.

Mr. Quelch, with a grim unbending visage, had marched him in to detention at the appointed hour. He had set him a task to keep him occupied till five o'clock. Wilmot had not touched it; or looked at it.

It was the first time, since he had been at Greyfriars, that he had had anything particular to do on a half-holiday. But now it seemed to be very particular indeed.

Quite contrary to what the Remove fellows believed to be his custom, he had gone to the length of asking his uncle, the master of the Shell, to intercede for him.

It had failed; as he realised now that it had been bound to fail. Mr. Hacker's fussy interferences, time and again, had fed Quelch up, and he was adamant—ready, as it were, to fly off the handle, at a mere hint of intervention from Wilmot's uncle.

Toadying to a master—which the Greyfriars fellows called "greasing to a beak"—was not one of the new fellow's failings. But he had given the Remove what looked like proof positive that it was.

That occasion was the single occasion on which he had asked Hacker to intervene. The Removes believed that it was the only occasion on which he had been spotted doing so.

But Wilmot was not worrying now about what the Remove fellows thought. He cared little—and he had more weighty matters on his mind. He was going out that afternoon—from his own point of view, he had to go!

The question was, how? Breaking detention was not an easy matter—and it was a very serious matter. It was quite on the cards that he might be expelled for it; for, after what had already happened, it would be taken as an utterly reckless and insolent act of defiance.

Some Remove fellows came along and glanced at the handsome, sulky face staring from the window. Skinner winked at his friends, Snoop and Stott.

"Nunky couldn't wangle it after all!" he remarked. "Poor little Eric! Detained by a nasty Form-master after taking the trouble to tell tales to nunky!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Snoop and Stott.

Wilmot stepped from the window. Skinner & Co. passed on, chuckling.

When they were gone he looked out again. A fat figure came rolling from the direction of the tuckshop.

Billy Bunter blinked up, through his big spectacles, and gave Wilmot a cheery grin.

"Oh, there you are, old chap!" he said. "I say, Wilmot——"

"Has Quelch gone out?" asked Wilmot.

"Eh? I don't know——"

"He often goes out for a walk on a half-holiday," said Wilmot. "Look here, Bunter, find out if Quelch has gone out, will you?"

Billy Bunter had constituted himself Wilmot's pal in the Remove—with so little encouragement from Wilmot that any fellow but Bunter would have given it up as a bad job. This was the first time that his "pal" had asked anything of him, so Bunter might have been expected to jump at the chance of being pally. But he did not jump.

Bunter might, or might not, have sympathised with the fellow under detention. But his chief concern, as usual, was for his fat self.

"I say, old chap, don't you think of cutting!" he advised. "Quelch would be frightfully ratty. I say, never mind Quelch! If you happen to have half-a-crown you don't want——"

"Look here, Bunter——"

"What I mean is, I'm short of tin this afternoon," explained Bunter. "I've been disappointed about a postal order."

"You fat ass!"

"Oh, really, Wilmot——"

"I want to know whether Quelch has gone out of gates? I——"

Eric Wilmot broke off as Bunter gave a sudden jump and bolted, forgetful even of the half-crown he had desired to borrow.

Wilmot looked round, and sighted a tall, angular form coming round the

corner of the building. Instantly he stepped back from the window.

He no longer needed to inquire whether Quelch had gone out that afternoon. Obviously he hadn't, for there he was taking a walk by the Form-room windows.

With a black brow Wilmot dropped on his form. But he did not look at the task on the desk before him.

He was not going to touch that. He was going out—he had to go—Quelch, or no Quelch. But if the Remove-master saw him——

He waited about five minutes—long and impatient minutes—and then returned to the window. Mr. Quelch had passed on, and disappeared.

Plenty of fellows were to be seen in the quad. There were so many Remove men about that it was clear that the pick-up game had not yet started. In the distance some Sixth Form men could be seen. He recognised Wingate and Gwynne and Sykes. They were not looking towards him—probably would not notice him if he dropped from the Form-room window. But one of them was fairly certain to spot him, if he cut, before he could get away.

Did the prefects know he was under detention? More likely than not. Quelch had spoken to the school porter, which looked as if he had a suspicion that the detained junior might "cut."

Wilmot gritted his teeth. It was useless to clamber out, only to be taken by the collar by a big Sixth Form man, and marched in again to punishment. For the punishment he cared nothing; but it would defeat the end in view.

He saw Harry Wharton coming along the path by the windows. He was alone; his friends not with him as usual. Once more Wilmot stepped back from the open window; he did not want the head boy of the Form to see him there, and guess his intention.

To his surprise, his name was called. It was called from outside in rather cautious tones; but he heard, and he recognised Wharton's voice. In sheer surprise, he put his head out of the window.

Wharton gave him a smile. "You heard me?" he asked. "I couldn't shout. Mustn't speak to a man in detention, you know, if the beaks knew."

"You don't want to speak to me, I suppose?"

"I shouldn't have called you if I didn't," said Wharton dryly. "You're not too fearfully keen on a detention task to be able to spare a minute—what?"

"No. What do you want?"

"We're playing in a pick-up this afternoon, as you know. Like to play?"

Wilmot stared. "No," he answered curtly.

"I expected that," nodded Wharton. "That's your usual pleasant and chatty style, isn't it?"

"If you've got anything to say——"

"I have. I've been thinking it over, and I fancy there may be something in what Hacker has said about your being a footballer. Bunter seems to know something about it, though he tells so many idiotic lies that there's no making head or tail of what he says. But he knows——"

Wilmot changed colour.

"Bunter!" he breathed. "What has Bunter told you?"

Wharton could see, but affected not to see, that there was alarm in Wilmot's face. He was smitten by a sudden fear that the loquacious Owl had let out his secret, whatever it was.

"Only what he's said before, more than once—that he's seen you play Soccer and bag goals—"

"Oh!" said Wilmot, with undisguised relief. "I—I see."

He had dreaded, for a moment, that Bunter had told of having seen him play at St. Jude's in the Topham team. Had that become known, it would have become known that his former school was Topham, which he had had to leave, in circumstances which he trembled to think of letting Greyfriars learn.

"To come to the point," went on Harry. "I believe there's something in it. You've mucked about like an ass on the football field here, but I'm wondering whether you could play a good game if you liked. If it was only rotten, silly sulks, why not chuck it, and be a sensible chap?"

"Is that what you came here to say to me?"

"And some more," said Harry, determined not to notice the unpleasantness of the fellow's manner. "We've got room in the team for a man, if you're anything within miles of what your Uncle Hacker thinks you are. Most fellows would jump at the chance of playing Rookwood."

"I shouldn't."

"Well, why not?"

"I don't choose to play footer here. And you don't want a man, I suppose, who's generally found guilty of greasing to the beak?" said Wilmot, with bitter sarcasm.

"That's got nothing to do with footer. I never believed it of you till this morning, when it was made pretty clear. But—"

"Well, what?" snapped Wilmot impatiently.

"You seemed knocked over at being detained this afternoon. You've asked your uncle to butt in and get you off. If that means that you're getting a bit more keen—"

"Keen—on what?"

"Footer, of course," said Harry. "There's nothing else going on to-day that I know of. If you want to play footer, I'm offering you a chance in the pick-up. If you don't, I can't imagine why you care whether you're detained or not. You might as well be in the Form-room as slouching about scowling."

Wilmot stared at him. Wharton, of course, knew nothing of his having an urgent engagement out of gates that afternoon. He had never had one before, so it was not easy to guess.

With football filling his own thoughts, the captain of the Remove had drawn his own conclusions—quite erroneous ones, as it happened.

"If that's it," went on Harry, while Wilmot stared at him in silence, "I can help you out, I think. A man's let me down this afternoon, and I shall have to play another man in the side. You see, though it's only a pick-up game, we're playing a full team a side. Well, if I put it to Quelch that you're wanted in a game, ten-to-one he will let you off detention. There's one good thing about Quelch—he never crabs a game."

Wilmot gave a sudden start, and his eyes lightened.

"You could get me off detention?"

"I think so, by putting it nicely and tactfully to Quelch." Wharton smiled. "I'd jolly well do my best, anyhow. The fact is, Quelch is fed-up with your sulks, like everybody else, and I know he would be jolly glad to see you joining in a game with the Form of your own accord. I believe I could work it."

"I'd be jolly glad!" exclaimed Wilmot breathlessly.

"It's a go, then," said Harry. "I'll try it on."

And, feeling for the first time something like cordiality towards the new junior, the captain of the Remove walked away, and went into the House. He took it for granted that it was to play in the pick-up that Wilmot was to get out of detention. He did not guess the thoughts in the new fellow's mind as Wilmot watched him go.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Wharton Has His Way!

"YOU silly ass!"
"You chump!"
"The chumpfulness is terrific!"

"Wash it out, Wharton!"
Harry Wharton smiled. The other Remove footballers, it was clear, were not much taken with the idea. They had gathered in the changing-room to get ready for the pick-up. And there was a good deal of discussion going on about the Bounder's absence when Wharton looked in.

Nearly all the Remove were there. The Lower Fourth was a numerous Form, but, barring a few hopeless slackers, like Bunter and Skinner and a few others, all the Form was wanted to make up two elevens. Even Lord Mauleverer had turned up, though it was true that Bob Cherry had solemnly promised him to stick his noble head in the coal-locker in Study No. 12 if he didn't. His lazy lordship, choosing the lesser of two evils, decided on Soccer.

Nearly all the Remove were present, and nearly all the Remove told their skipper what they thought of him and his intellect in entertaining the idea of playing a dud, a slacker, and a sulky tick, even in a pick-up game.

"That slacker," said Bolsover major, On the present occasion Percy Bolsover had a chance of showing what he could do at back. He was, at all events, keen.

"That dud!" said Hazeldene.
"That greaser!" said Peter Todd.
"That toady!" grunted Johnny Bull.
"He's in detention, too!" said Squiff.
"Leave him there!" said Tom Brown.

"You're an ass, Wharton!"

"And a fathead!"
"And a footling duffer!"

"Thanks all round!" said the captain of the Remove imperturbably. "I've mentioned this to you men before speaking to Quelch, because I want you to be civil to the chap when he joins up."

"Is he ever civil to anybody?" inquired Ogilvy.

"Not often!" agreed Wharton.

"But you're not going to take his manners as a model, are you, Oggy?"

"Well, no, ass! But—"

"I've an idea that the man can play Soccer if he chooses," remarked Wharton.

"What an idiotic idea!" remarked Russell.

"The idiocy is terrific, my esteemed Wharton!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, shaking his dusky head.

"Bunter says—"

"Ye gods!" groaned Johnny Bull. "Are you going to take tips on Soccer from Bunter?"

"Have you asked Mrs. Kebble what she thinks?" inquired Ogilvy, with intense sarcasm. "Or Mrs. Kobbie's cat?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear men, be reasonable!" said Wharton. "If I'm making a mistake—"

"No 'if' about it!"

"You are!"

"Well, if I am, it's only a pick-up practice game, and no harm done. Just make the chap feel that he's welcome on the field, and don't take any notice of his sulky looks. Give him a chance—see?"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Frank Nugent. "Nobody wants him, I suppose—but nobody's going to be unpleasant to him."

"If he gets in my light—" said Bolsover major.

"Or in mine—" said Peter Todd.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and sportsmen," said Bob Cherry. "Wharton's a silly ass, as we are all agreed—"

"Hear, hear!"

"But let him rip, and don't make it hard for that tick if he's really showing some sign of decency at last. If he's really keen on footer for once, it shows that he isn't the utter worm he makes out that he is—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And it's quite true that he looked fearfully sick when Quelch gave him detention, so Wharton may be right—"

"Just a bare possible chance?" suggested Wharton sarcastically. "Well, I'll hike along and speak to Quelch."

Leaving the changing-room in a buzz, the captain of the Remove went along to Masters' Studies.

He gave a discreet tap at Mr. Quelch's door. He had seen the Remove master go in, after a walk in the quad, and hoped that that walk after lunch had had a soothing effect on him. But the bark that came as he tapped at the door did not sound very encouraging.

(Continued on next page.)

"I take my stand on this!" says 'ALLY PALLY' BARRATT'S MAJESTIC NOUGAT 2 1d AT ALL GOOD SWEET SHOPS S'MARVELLOUS

LET DAD SEE . . .

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"Come in!"

Wharton entered.

Mr. Quelch's face was grimly set, his eyes glinting. But his expression changed at the sight of his head boy.

Wharton guessed—correctly—that his Form-master had fancied that it was Hacker again. That Gorgon-like look had been turned on for the master of the Shell. Quelch changed it into a frosty smile for Wharton.

"Oh! Wharton!" he said. "Pray come in, Wharton! Are you not playing football this afternoon?"

"Just going to, sir," said Harry. "But there's a man who was going to play, who can't turn up, and——" He broke off.

It was true that Smithy had let him down; but that was not the only, or the chief, reason why he wanted Wilmot.

"Well?" said Mr. Quelch, a little puzzled.

"I was going to ask you, sir, whether you could possibly let Wilmot off to play football?" said Harry, taking the plunge.

Mr. Quelch's face hardened.

"I asked you in the Form-room, Wharton, whether Wilmot was in a match to-day, and you replied that he was not. What do you mean?"

"He wasn't, sir, then," explained Harry. "But I'm a man short, and I'd like him in the team. But that's not the only reason. I know you noticed, sir, that he seemed very sick at being detained; and that put a new idea into my head. He's never been keen on football before. If he's getting keen, it seems rather hard for him to have to cut the game." Wharton coloured a little. "I'm speaking now, sir, as head boy, as well as football captain. I know you don't like the way Wilmot has been going on since he came here——"

"I certainly do not!" said Mr. Quelch dryly.

"If he got into the football, and it led to his becoming a little more friendly with the other fellows, it would be a good thing for him, sir."

Mr. Quelch sat silent, thinking.

It was true, as his head boy knew very well, that he was concerned about the sulky, reserved fellow, who seemed to have chosen to be an outcast in his Form.

"You feel friendly towards this boy, Wharton?" he asked abruptly.

"Well, no, sir!" said Harry frankly. "I don't like him. But I hate to see any fellow shut up in himself like an oyster. It can't be good for any chap."

"That is certainly correct," said Mr. Quelch; "though in Wilmot's case there may be reasons——" He broke off sharply. "Undoubtedly, Wharton, it would be for this boy's benefit to take a share in the life of the Form. I had no idea whatever that he was thinking of football when he looked so dismayed this morning. I put the question to you. But if that is the actual fact——"

"I've spoken to him, sir, and he seems very keen." Wharton did not add that he had spoken to Wilmot after he had gone in to detention. That was a detail it was more tactful not to mention.

Mr. Quelch was silent again.

"Very well, Wharton," he said, at length. "On the understanding that Wilmot is to play football with his Form, I will excuse him from detention. You may tell him so, from me."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" said Wharton gratefully, and he left the Form-master's study with a light step and a cheery face.

Mr. Quelch was left looking very thoughtful.

Harry Wharton lost no time in getting to the Form-room. He found Eric Wilmot waiting impatiently.

"All serene!" said Harry, smiling in at the open door. "You're let off, to play in the pick-up, Wilmot. Official, from Quelch!"

"Oh!" gasped Wilmot.

"Chuck your books away, old bean, and come along to the changing-room," said Harry. "I'll wait for you."

"Don't wait!" said Wilmot hastily.

"Well, come along as quick as you can! It's jolly near time we got down to the field."

Wharton left Wilmot and hurried back to the changing-room. The new boy left the Form-room more slowly, giving him time to get out of sight. But it was not in the direction of the changing-room that he went.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

An Old Acquaintance!

"WILMOT!"

Wingate of the Sixth rapped out the name.

Eric Wilmot stopped. The Sixth Form man came up to him with a frowning brow.

"You're under detention, Wilmot!" he said sternly. "Your Form-master spoke to me about it. What are you doing out of the House?"

"I'm let off!" muttered Wilmot.

Wingate eyed him doubtfully and suspiciously. From Mr. Quelch's manner when he had mentioned the subject, the Greyfriars captain considered it very unlikely indeed that that statement was correct.

Had Wilmot been with the Remove footballers, the matter would have been easy to settle—a word from Wharton would have been enough. But he was not with the footballers when the prefect spotted and stopped him. The Remove footballers were in the changing-room—expecting to see Wilmot there! They were not likely to see him.

Wilmot breathed hard.

"Quelch sent Wharton to tell me, Wingate!" he muttered. "I suppose you can take my word for it."

"I'd rather take Quelch's!" said Wingate dryly. "Come along! I can speak to him at his window."

Wilmot hesitated a moment. He had a chance—an unlooked-for chance—to keep his mysterious appointment out of gates. He was already a little late, and dreaded to be too late—with consequences of which he dared hardly think. But it was futile to attempt to bolt under Wingate's eye, and he went back to the House with the Greyfriars captain.

That walk of a few minutes was a sheer agony to him. Every moment he dreaded to see Wharton looking for him. Wharton had got him off detention to play in the pick-up, and never dreamed of double-dealing on his part. But if he found him going out of gates——

But Wharton was not to be seen, and they stopped at the open window of Mr. Quelch's study. The Remove-master glanced round at Wingate there. He did not see Wilmot, whose head was below the level of the high sill.

"Excuse me one moment, sir!" said Wingate. "Wilmot tells me that he is let off detention—am I to take his word?"

"Yes, that is correct, Wingate," answered the Remove-master.

"Very well, sir!"

Wingate stepped away from the

window. He gave Wilmot a nod and a smile.

"You can cut!" he said.

Wilmot was only too glad to cut. He fairly ran. A fat squeak floated to his ears as he headed for the gates again.

"I say, Wilmot——"

Deaf to the voice of Billy Bunter, he hurried on.

Like a lion from his lair, William Gosling hopped out of his lodge.

"Now, Master Wilmot!" said Gosling. "This 'ere is the second time, and I'll report yer! Wot I says is this ere——"

"Let me pass, you old fool!" almost hissed Wilmot. "My Form-master's let me off detention!"

"He ain't told me so!" grunted Gosling. "And if you was allowed out of gates, Mr. Quelch would 'ave sent me word."

Wilmot panted. It was another obstacle in his path. He was not, in fact, free to go out of gates; Quelch supposed that he was with the footballers.

Arguing the matter with Gosling meant further loss of time. He turned round and walked back, leaving the old porter grunting and eyeing him very suspiciously.

"I say, Wilmot old chap——" squeaked Bunter.

Wilmot hurried on. Bunter rolled in pursuit and followed him into the old cloisters.

"I say!" yelled Bunter, puffing and blowing. "I say, old fellow, don't you cut detention, old chap! You'll get into a fearful row! I say, lend me a bob before you go! Beast!"

Bunter was still at a distance, when, with the aid of his big spectacles, he spotted Wilmot clambering over an ivied wall.

Headless of Bunter's squeak, Wilmot dropped on the outside, and cut away at a rapid run.

In a couple of minutes he was on the Courtfield road, and going at a steady trot, heading for the town across the common.

He was clear of Greyfriars now. The miserable trick he had played on the captain of the Remove caused him some compunction. He had not said that he would play football; Wharton had taken that for granted.

Only on that plea was it possible to get off detention; and Wharton had practically been led to giving his word that he was in the pick-up game.

If this was not double-dealing, it was perilously like it. Still, he had not actually said that he would play, and he drew what comfort he could from that.

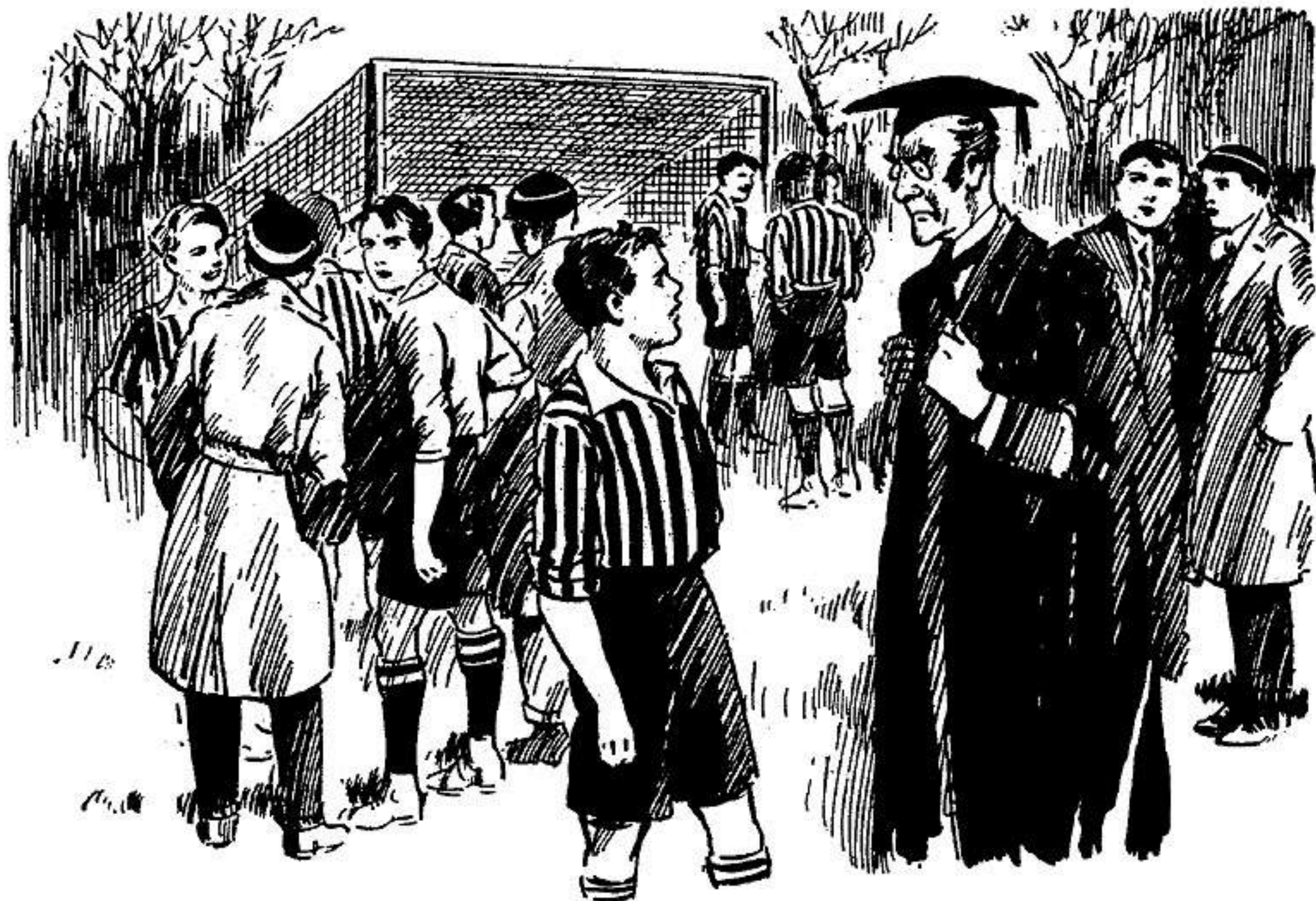
A bunch of fellows, on the Courtfield road, stared at Wilmot as he passed. He recognised Herbert Vernon-Smith, but did not know his companions—he had never seen Ponsonby and Gadsby and Vavasour, of Highcliffe School, before. The Bouncer stared and burst into a mocking laugh.

"Great pip! Did Hacker get you off, after all, Wilmot?" he called out.

Wilmot made no answer; he ran on, leaving Smithy and his Highcliffe friends staring after him. They were far out of sight, when he sighted another fellow on the road, strolling along from the direction of the town.

That fellow, a rather weedy-looking specimen, with narrow features, and sly, sharp eyes—waved his hand at the sight of Wilmot. The Greyfriars junior slowed down.

"Coming along, after all?" asked the weedy fellow, with a grin, as they met.



"Is Wilmot not here, Wharton?" asked Mr. Quelch, very quietly. "No, sir!" answered the junior skipper. "Am I to understand that you have deliberately deluded me?" continued the Form-master. "I hope not, sir!" said Wharton, with burning cheeks. "I expected Wilmot to turn up, or I shouldn't have begged him off detention!"

"Yes," muttered Wilmot. "Can't you see, Crawley?"

Crawley nodded and grinned.

"I thought I'd walk part of the way and meet you!" he drawled.

"You mean that you were coming on to Greyfriars, if I didn't meet you in Courtfield, as you said in your letter that you would!" said Wilmot, in a low, bitter voice.

"You're not pleased to see a Topham man again?" asked Crawley.

"You know I'm not!"

"I don't see why you shouldn't be! Especially me!"

"Especially you!" muttered Wilmot. "I never could stand you at Topham! We've never been friends. I always barred you—as every decent chap at Topham did!"

"I'm the only Topham man willing to speak to you, all the same—any other fellow there would cut you dead as a doornail, after what you've done!" said Crawley, with a sneer.

"I've done—nothing!" said Wilmot, between his teeth. "And I believe you know it, Crawley!"

"Nothing! That day at St. Jude's—"

"Nothing!" repeated Wilmot. "And you know it!"

Crawley stared at him.

"How should I know it?" he demanded. "I was there to see the match, but I never saw what you did, or didn't do, after the match—"

"You know it! You're a rotter, Crawley, as I've told you often enough at Topham, but if you believed that I had picked a pocket in a dressing-room, you wouldn't speak to me again—not even you!" said Wilmot, with intense bitterness.

The weedy Topham fellow stood look-

ing at him. A slight flush of colour came into his sallow face.

"You wouldn't speak to a chap after such a thing?" he asked.

"I! No! I'd not touch a thief with a barge-pole!" said Wilmot forcibly. "I'd boot him if he dared speak to me!"

Crawley laughed uneasily.

"Lucky for you I'm not so particular!" he remarked.

"You don't believe it—you can't! I don't see the luck, anyway! I barred you at Topham—and I don't want to see you now! You know I don't! I never told you I was at Greyfriars—you guessed, because you knew I had an uncle a master there!"

"You wouldn't have known even that if you'd minded your own business! Other fellows had seen my uncle, when he came to Topham, without nosing out that he was a schoolmaster! You never could mind your own business! What have you come here for?"

"Shall we walk on to the school?" drawled Crawley.

"No!" answered Wilmot fiercely.

"Let's walk back into the town, then—there's a rather decent teashop near the station—"

Wilmot nodded curtly, and they walked on together to Courtfield.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Fooled!

HARRY WHARTON was looking pleased. He was the only fellow among the Remove footballers who was.

Every other fellow thought—and said—that it was a rotten idea to put Wilmot in the game! Only

that day it had been proved conclusively—at least, to the satisfaction of the Remove—that the Bounder's accusation was true—Wilmot "greased to a beak."

Unless the fellow was pretending—for no imaginable reason—he couldn't play Soccer, and didn't want to! All he wanted, apparently, was to sulk and make himself disagreeable.

If he had agreed to play it was only to get out of detention—and he would fumble and fizzle, as usual, and get away the minute he could!

That being the general view, Wharton could not expect much enthusiasm over his new recruit!

Nevertheless, a conviction was growing in Wharton's mind that there was more in the sulky new fellow than met the eye.

He suspected that he had had some trouble at his last school; which explained, if it did not excuse, his sullenness of temper. From the confusion of Bunter's prevarications, one fact seemed to emerge—that the fat Owl had, somewhere or other, seen Wilmot play football and capture goals. And Hacker declared that he had played for his former school—and Hacker must know.

It was, at least, worth while to try the fellow out.

And if it did prove that he could play, that he was a good man for the eleven, it would be a good thing for Wilmot, a good thing for the team, and a good thing all round.

So Harry Wharton was pleased—though he had the pleasure all to himself. He was only anxious that the fellows should be civil to Wilmot when he came in—rather a doubtful matter,

(Continued on page 16.)

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The FORM-MASTER'S FAVOURITE!



(Continued from page 13.)

as Wilmot had made a good many enemies and no friends. Still, if he was going to try to do the decent thing, plenty of the Removeites were ready to give him a chance.

Certainly, if he dropped his sulks, and played up like other fellows, it would make a big difference in his favour.

The juniors changed, and were ready. But Wilmot had not come in. Harry Wharton glanced at the door a good many times.

He expected Wilmot to follow him to the changing-room almost at his heels, and could not understand the delay.

"I suppose he's coming?" said Bob Cherry at last.

"Of course he's coming, fathhead!" said Wharton, rather tartly.

"Well, old bean, he hasn't come!"

"I know that, ass! He's coming, though!"

But Wilmot did not come. Wharton went to the door and looked out. Wilmot was not in sight. Looking round, he saw Ogilvy wink at Bob, who laughed.

"He's coming!" said Harry, with all the more positiveness, because a slight doubt was dawning in his own mind.

"See him coming?" asked Bob.

"No!"

"He's taking his time!"

"Well, he'll come!"

"Let's all sit round and wait for him, shall we?" asked Bolsover major. "In about an hour or so, Wharton will begin to see that the chap was only pulling his leg."

"What do you mean, you silly ass?" asked Wharton gruffly.

"I mean what I say!" retorted Bolsover. "The tick's not coming at all! You got him out of detention with that yarn to Quelch, and he let you do it—but he loathes football, and he won't play if he can help it."

"Looks like it!" said Squiff.

"The lookfulness is terrific!"

"Well, I must say it does look like it," said Bob Cherry. "You've had your leg pulled, old fellow."

Wharton stood silent. A gust of anger swept through him. It did look like it—he could not doubt that now. Never a suspicion had crossed his mind. But why did not Wilmot arrive?

"I don't believe it!" he said slowly.

"I can't! No fellow could be such a rotter—making me go to Quelch, and practically tell him lies. He couldn't put me in such a position. No fellow would!"

"No decent fellow!" said Nugent.

"A fellow who greases to a beak will do anything!" said Hazeldene. "He just wanted to get out of detention, that's all!"

"He was let out to play football—no other reason! If he doesn't play, he will have to get back to it!"

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"Bet he's out of gates by this time!" said Hazel.

Wharton's eyes gleamed.

"Rot! He wouldn't—he couldn't! If he has— But he hasn't! Perhaps old Hacker has nobbled him—he's always working his chin. Look here! You men get down to the ground, and I'll have a look round for Wilmot. I'll bring him along with me."

"I don't think!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, rubbish!"

Some of the fellows were grinning as they went, some frowning. Every fellow there believed, by this time, that Wilmot had pulled Wharton's leg, to get out of detention, and had no idea whatever of taking part in the pick-up.

Wharton could not, and would not, believe it; but the conviction was growing at the back of his mind.

He threw on his coat, and went to look for Wilmot. He ran to the Form-room first; but, as he expected, the fellow was gone. Then he went out into the quad, and looked about him.

Wilmot was not to be seen. But Mr. Hacker was to be seen at his study window, and Wharton stopped there to speak to him. Hacker might know what had become of his nephew.

"Can you tell me where Wilmot is, sir?" asked Harry.

The master of the Shell raised his eyebrows.

"I understood, Wharton, that my nephew had been detained by his Form-master!" he answered stiffly.

Evidently Hacker knew nothing. He supposed that Wilmot was still in detention. Wharton went on his way, to look farther.

"I say, old chap, ain't you playing football?" Billy Bunter, coming back from the Cloisters, blinked at him through his big spectacles. "I say, Harry, old man, if you've got a bob you don't want—"

"Seen Wilmot?" asked Harry.

Bunter grinned.

"Yes, rather! I say, he'll get into an awful row with Quelch! He's cut!"

"He was let off!" said Harry.

"Was he? Smithy said he heard Hacker asking old Quelch, and the old bean bit him, and refused. If he was let off, what did he want to climb out over the Cloister wall for?" asked Bunter.

"Has he gone out?"

"Yes."

Bunter blinked at Wharton, astonished by the expression that came over his face.

"You're sure?" breathed Wharton.

"Yes. I called to him, but he wouldn't stop!" said Bunter. "I thought he was breaking out of detention—cutting off like that, and getting away over the wall. But if he was let off, why shouldn't he go out, if he likes?"

Wharton did not answer that question. There was no doubt about it now; he had been made a fool of. The fellow had simply taken advantage of his unsuspectingness, to make use of him. The passionate anger in his face startled Billy Bunter.

"I say, old chap, what are you getting shirty about?" asked the mystified Owl. "A chap can go out on a half-holiday if he likes, can't he?"

Wharton did not speak. He was trying to think it out. He had begged Wilmot off, with Quelch, to play football. Not for any other reason would he have done so, or dreamed of doing so; nor, indeed, could he have done so. Mr. Quelch, in that belief, had made a great concession. Wharton, quite unin-

tentionally, had deceived him. What was Quelch going to think, if he found out?

Wharton's anger at the knowledge that he had been tricked, was so intense that he could hardly have spoken. He had been deceived; he had deceived his Form-master in turn, and all the fellows were laughing at his simplicity at being taken in. Yet he could not blame himself.

The fellow had been feverishly keen to get out of detention, and for what reason? A solitary ramble on his own could not have been a very great attraction. He could hardly be supposed to have any important business to attend to that afternoon. Had he done this out of sheer, sulky malice? It looked like it.

Turning away from the astonished Owl, Wharton strode down to Little Side. The Remove men were waiting for him there, and they grinned at one another when they saw him come alone. Not a man expected to see Wilmot coming with him. They would have been surprised had Wilmot appeared.

"Found him?" jeered Bolsover major.

"No!"

Wharton's look did not encourage jesting on the subject. Even Bolsover, after a glance at his set face, let the subject drop.

Wilmot was dismissed from discussion, if not from mind; and the juniors settled down to the pick-up game. But the captain of the Remove, for once, gave less thought to the game, on the football field, than to other matters. The outcast of the Remove had made a fool of him, and got away with it—but there was a reckoning in store.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Where Is Wilmot?

MR. QUELCH laid down his pen, rose from his table, and stood at his study window, looking out into the frosty sunshine. He had a glimpse, in the distance, of youthful figures in active motion.

Quelch smiled genially. He was in a genial mood. The new boy in his Form, with his sullen, reserved ways, had been a trouble on his mind; all the more, because he knew why Wilmot had had to leave Topham, and could hardly approve of the boy being admitted to Greyfriars.

It was possible, of course, that Mr. Hacker's belief in his nephew was well-founded; that some terrible mistake had been made. The kind old Head, though probably with many misgivings, had acceded to Hacker's earnest entreaty to give the boy a new chance. Naturally, he had told Mr. Quelch the circumstances, as Wilmot was placed in Quelch's Form, and requested the Remove master to observe him somewhat particularly. Quelch had done so—and what he had observed had dissatisfied him more and more.

The boy's sulky gloom might be the result of a wounded spirit, suffering under unjust suspicion and condemnation. It might be the result of a guilty conscience. Mr. Quelch tried to keep an open mind on the subject.

It was, at all events, a relief to him, if the boy was changing his sullen, sulky ways, and trying to make the best instead of the worst of things. If he was guiltless, he was to be pitied. If he was guilty, he had had a lesson to last a lifetime. It was up to him to pull himself together, and live in the present and the future, instead of brooding on

the dismal past. It looked now as if he was doing so—and Quelch was relieved and pleased.

In that unaccustomed, genial mood, Mr. Quelch left his study, and the House, and walked down to Little Side to give the footballers a few minutes of his valuable time. He often looked on at Remove matches—quite unlike Hacker, who seemed hardly to know that the Shell played Soccer at all. Now he expected to see Wilmot, no longer a sullen outcast, joining in a cheery game, and making a new start, after the thoroughly bad start he had made.

Looking at the active figures on the field, Quelch tried to pick out Wilmot—and failed!

There was some mud about, and some faces were spattered with the same. But after a few minutes' observation, it dawned upon Mr. Quelch that Eric Wilmot was not on the field at all.

He was puzzled at first. It was not likely to occur to him in a hurry that his head boy had deceived him with a lying tale to get a fellow off detention—especially a fellow who was no friend of his.

A player might have had a knock, and gone off. In a pick-up, he might have been replaced by another man; it was only a practice game, with all Removites playing. But Wilmot was not to be seen anywhere about, and Mr. Quelch gradually grew doubtful.

He was not the man to interrupt a game. Hobson of the Shell was referee in the pick-up, and Mr. Quelch waited till Hobby blew the whistle for half-time. Then he called to Wharton.

As the Remove master had been on the spot more than ten minutes, by then all the fellows knew, of course, that he was there. Wharton's feelings, when he saw him, may be better imagined than described.

When Mr. Quelch called him, at half-time, the captain of the Remove came over to his Form-master, rather wishing that the football field would open and swallow him up.

The other fellows exchanged glances. "Wharton's for it!" murmured Hazel. "Well, he's asked for it!" remarked Bolsover major. "He let that tick take him in—or was he taken in? Must have been a fool, if he was."

"Of course he was, fathead!" growled Bob.

"Well, Quelch may believe he was!" jeered Bolsover. "More likely to think Wharton was pulling his leg to get the fellow off."

Wharton stopped before his Form-master. He knew what was coming.

"Is not Wilmot here, Wharton?" asked Mr. Quelch very quietly.

"No, sir!"
"Where is he?"
"I don't know."

Quelch's eyebrows rose expressively. "You do not know, Wharton!" he repeated, in a rising tone that reached the ears of the other footballers. "Has he been here at all?"

"No, sir!"
"He has not played in the game?"
"No!"

"And you do not know where he is?"
"A fellow told me he had gone out. I don't know anything more than that."

There was a moment of tense silence. "Am I to understand, Wharton, that you have deliberately deluded me?" asked Mr. Quelch very quietly.

"I hope not, sir!" said Harry, with burning cheeks. "I acted in good faith. I thought he was coming here to play in the pick-up, or I shouldn't have spoken to you about him."
"Did he say so?"

"Yes—no!" Wharton tried to remember what Wilmot had said at the Form-room window. Bitterly and intensely angry as he was, he wanted to be fair to the fellow. "He said he'd be jolly glad, I remember! I thought, of course, that he meant about the football."

"I understand!"
There was another silence.

"I—I seem to have been mistaken, sir!" said Harry, red as a beetroot. "I'm bound to say that Wilmot never said he would play—never said he wanted to—I took it all for granted! I—I thought he understood that it was only on account of the football that I could beg him off. But he may not have understood—he's now here, and so—"

"Quite!" said Mr. Quelch grimly. "I will not interrupt your game, Wharton—and please do not think that I blame you for having been, as I fear, deceived by an unscrupulous boy. I would rather see any boy in my Form trustful than suspicious. It is possible, as you say, that there was a misunderstanding on both sides, the boy being new here—"

"Yes, sir, that's quite possible," said Wharton eagerly. His own private intention was to make Wilmot sorry for that deception; but he had a schoolboy's natural repugnance to giving a fellow away to a "beak." "I—I was so full of it myself, sir, that I never really gave him a chance to speak. I can see now

that I was taking a lot for granted—"

"Quite so, Wharton."

Mr. Quelch gave his head boy a kind nod and walked away. Harry Wharton went back to the footballers.

"You're in luck, old man," said Bob Cherry. "Some beaks—"

"Quelch knows that Wharton wouldn't deceive him," said Redwing.

"Yes," said Harry, with a deep breath. "He knows I'm not a rotter, so he must think I'm a fool. It's one or the other."

"Well, you were a bit of an ass, to be taken in like that," said Hazel.

"I know that!"

"More than a bit!" said Bolsover major. "A silly fathead, if you ask me!"

"Nobody asked you!" snapped Wharton.

"Well, I think—"

"No, you don't!" said Bob Cherry. "You can't do it, old man, with a head-piece like yours. If you could think, you'd think of some dodge for playing back less like a mad elephant."

Hobson of the Shell weighed in.

"Is this a football match, or a conversation?" he asked. "Don't mind me—I only want to know."

And the second half started.

The pick-up was played out to a finish, and the Remove fellows went back to the changing-room. There the one topic

(Continued on next page.)

(1)

David Morgan comes from Wales,
Yes, that's his nationality!
The land of bards and fairy tales,
The gallant Principality!
The men of Harlech marching still
Through mountain mists and mystery
Have set their seal on every hill
And left a book of history.

(2)

And from this land of harp and drum
Has come our own Welsh warrior,
His country's name, now he has come,
Is not a whit the sorrier,
For he's a credit to the land
That I have praised so wordily,
And for his country he will stand
To guard her honour sturdily.

(3)

He isn't often to the fore
In any Greyfriars chronicle,
He's not a fathead, not a bore,
And doesn't wear a monocle!
The hero's line is not his style,
And yet it's undeniable
That he adorns the rank and file,
So steady and reliable.

(5)

A china basin stood in view,
And in its near vicinity,
Were cinders, ink and liquid glue,
A really horrid trinity!
I watched the silly fathead mix
These odorous ingredients.
"My word," I said. "Of all the tricks!
That's downright disobedience!"

GREYFRIARS INTERVIEWS

English, Irish, Scotch and Welsh—they all come under the eagle eye and pen of the Greyfriars Rhymester. This week our long-haired poet selects
DAVID MORGAN,
the Welsh junior of the Remove.



(4)

I called to see him yesterday,
He greeted me with brevity,
His voice and features, sad to say,
Contained no trace of levity!
"Sit down," he said. "Don't interfere!"
And if you'd seen the business
That occupied him, you would fear
His brain had turned to dizziness!

(6)

It was I Upon his study door
He perched the basin fraggily,
While I moved back along the floor,
And moved, I tell you, aggily!
I asked him: "Why the booby-trap?"
And Morgan started yammering;
"For Coker of the Fifth, old chap!
He promised me a hammering!"

(7)

"And what do you want, anyway?"
He asked, and I with merriment
Decided that the chance would pay
To try a small experiment.
"You're wanted on the phone, old scout!"
I told him, and no sooner, all
His plans forgot, he hurried out!
Well, that was Morgan's funeral!



was Eric Wilmot—and what was going to happen to him.

Harry Wharton did not join in the talk. He was too deeply incensed to talk about it. But he was very anxious—more anxious than the other fellows—for Wilmot to return.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Called To Account!

MR. PROUT, master of the Fifth, took roll-call in Hall that evening.

When Prout's fruity voice called "Wilmot," a quiet "adsum" came from the ranks of the Remove.

Eric Wilmot was there in his place; his manner as quiet and self-possessed, with a touch of disdain, as usual, seemingly unconscious of the fact that he was the object of general attention in his Form. He could hardly have been unaware of it; but his face, at all events, expressed nothing.

Harry Wharton had given him one look when he came in; that was all. He noticed that Wilmot coloured for a moment under his glance; the fellow had the grace to be a little ashamed of his trickery.

For the moment, however, the captain of the Remove took no further notice of him. He was going to deal with him after Hall; but, as it happened, Mr. Quelch came first!

When roll was ended the Remove master curtly told Wilmot to follow him to his study, and the new junior disappeared at the heels of Henry Samuel Quelch. Some of the Removites noticed that Mr. Hacker had his eye on both of them as they went; and there were smiles and winks—Hacker, evidently, was concerned about his precious Eric! He certainly had cause on this occasion.

Mr. Quelch did not address the delinquent till they were in his study, where Wilmot stood before him with the same steady, calm face he had shown in Hall. Possibly the junior did not know what was coming to him.

Nobody in the Remove had said a word to him so far, so he could not have known that Quelch had gone down to the pick-up and missed him. Possibly, he was wondering what Quelch had called him in for. He was soon enlightened, in that case.

"You have been out of gates, Wilmot!" said the Remove master.

"Yes, sir!"

"Where have you been?"

"To Courtfield."

"And what did you do in Courtfield?"

"I had tea at the bunshop there."

Quelch gave Wilmot a searching look. Perhaps a suspicion had been in his mind that the new fellow had had some business out of gates of a questionable kind that afternoon. But, with all his faults, Wilmot had never given any sign of being a reckless scapegrace like Vernon-Smith, or a dingy black sheep like Skinner.

"You were in detention this afternoon, Wilmot!" went on the Remove master, after that searching look.

"I understood from Wharton that I was let off, sir."

"That is correct, Wilmot! You were released from detention to play in a football match, at your Form captain's request. For no other reason should I have thought, for one moment, of excusing you. I think you were aware of that."

Wilmot was silent.

His face was dark and bitter. The thought was in his mind that Wharton, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,459

in his resentment of the trick that had been played on him, had reported his trickery to the Remove master. It was quite easy for Mr. Quelch to read that thought in his face, and his own brow darkened.

"I went down to the football ground, Wilmot, and missed you," said Mr. Quelch, with icy coldness.

"Oh!" muttered Wilmot, flushing.

"Wharton believed that you were eager to join in the game—for that reason he begged you off detention, and for that reason I acceded. There is a remote possibility that you misunderstood one another. I require a plain and truthful answer from you, Wilmot! Did you suppose, for one moment, that you were released from detention to do as you pleased—that you were free to go out of gates like any other boy on a half-holiday?"

Wilmot hesitated a moment.

"No, sir!" he admitted.

"You knew that you were released for one reason and one reason alone—your Form captain's request that you should be allowed to play football?"

"Yes!"

"I am glad you are frank, at all events!" said Mr. Quelch. "It follows, then, that you took advantage of Wharton's faith in you to deceive him, and cause him to deceive me, on this subject?"

"I never said I would play in the pick-up, sir."

"You allowed your Form captain to believe so?"

"Well, yes."

"You knew that otherwise he could not have ventured to ask me to release you?"

"Yes," said Wilmot, in a low voice.

"Do you not consider that an unworthy deception, Wilmot?"

"Yes," breathed Wilmot.

"I am glad you can see it. I judge by your look that you are ashamed of having been guilty of such a wretched and contemptible subterfuge."

"Yes," muttered Wilmot again, his face scarlet.

"Very well!" said Mr. Quelch. "If you had answered me untruthfully, Wilmot, I should have taken you to Dr. Locke and requested him to send you away from Greyfriars. As you have admitted your fault without any attempt at prevarication, I shall not do so."

"Thank you, sir!"

"I shall, however, report your action to your headmaster, and you will receive a public flogging!" said Mr. Quelch. "You may now go."

Wilmot went in silence.

As he came out of Masters' Passage he found a number of Remove fellows waiting for him at the corner.

He would have passed them, but two of them stepped towards him and took his arms—Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull.

"This way!" said Bob.

Wilmot resisted angrily.

"Let me alone!" he snapped.

"You're wanted in the Rag!" said Harry Wharton.

"I'm not coming!"

"I think you are. Take him along!"

"Ware beaks!" said Peter Todd. "If Hacker's about—"

"Bother Hacker!"

Wilmot was resisting, but he ceased suddenly to do so, and went quietly with the Removites. They walked him into the Rag, and the door was shut.

Nearly all the Remove were there.

"Oh, you've got him!" grinned Bolsover major.

"Here he is!" answered Bob.

"Didn't he howl for Hacker?" jeered Bolsover.

"No."

Wilmot's arms were released when he was safe in the Rag. He put his hands in his pockets and faced the grim-looking Removites.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked calmly. "Not my company, I suppose?"

"Hardly!" said Bob Cherry.

"Nobody's likely to want your company, I think," said the captain of the Remove contemptuously. "If I fancied, for a minute, this afternoon, that you might possibly act like a decent fellow, I've found out my mistake."

Wilmot winced.

"I owe you an apology," he said, in a low voice. "I know I took you in, and I'm sorry for that. But—"

"But what?"

"Oh, nothing," said Wilmot wearily. "Go ahead, whatever you want! If it's a ragging, I can stand it."

"It's not a ragging," said Harry. "You made a fool of me, and might have landed me into a fearful row with Quelch. I suppose you expected to be called to account for it."

"I dare say I should have, if I'd thought about it!"

"And you didn't?"

"No, I've other things to think of." Wharton breathed hard.

"Well, you'd better think about it now," he said. "First of all, though, I want to know what Quelch is going to do."

"Better ask him."

"I'm asking you. If you're getting teco from Quelch you won't want any more from me."

"Oh, I don't mind!" said Wilmot, with cool disdain. "I've no doubt you're a very terrifying fellow, but I'm not feeling all in a tremble. I almost fancy I could survive your wrath."

"He, he, he!" from Billy Bunter.

That cackle was followed by a loud howl as somebody kicked Bunter.

"Quelch would have known nothing about it if I could have helped it," said Harry. "But he found out, and he's bound to do something. He's told you, I suppose, as he called you into his study? Cough it up!"

Wilmot shrugged his shoulders.

"Head's flogging!" he said briefly.

Harry Wharton paused. His knuckles were almost itching to land on the cool, disdainful face of the fellow who had made him look like a fool to all the Form, but he restrained himself.

"Very well," he said, "if you're getting that we'll call it a day. You've asked for it, and it serves you jolly well right."

"I know that. But don't let me off if you don't feel disposed," said Wilmot coolly. "I licked that fellow Smith the other day, after he started in to mop up the school with me. I think I could put up some sort of a feeble show, even against your high mightiness."

"Oh, punch his head!" growled Johnny Bull.

"The punchfulness is the proper caper!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Rot!" interposed Frank Nugent hastily. "What does the fellow's check matter? If he's getting a flogging from the Beak, leave him alone."

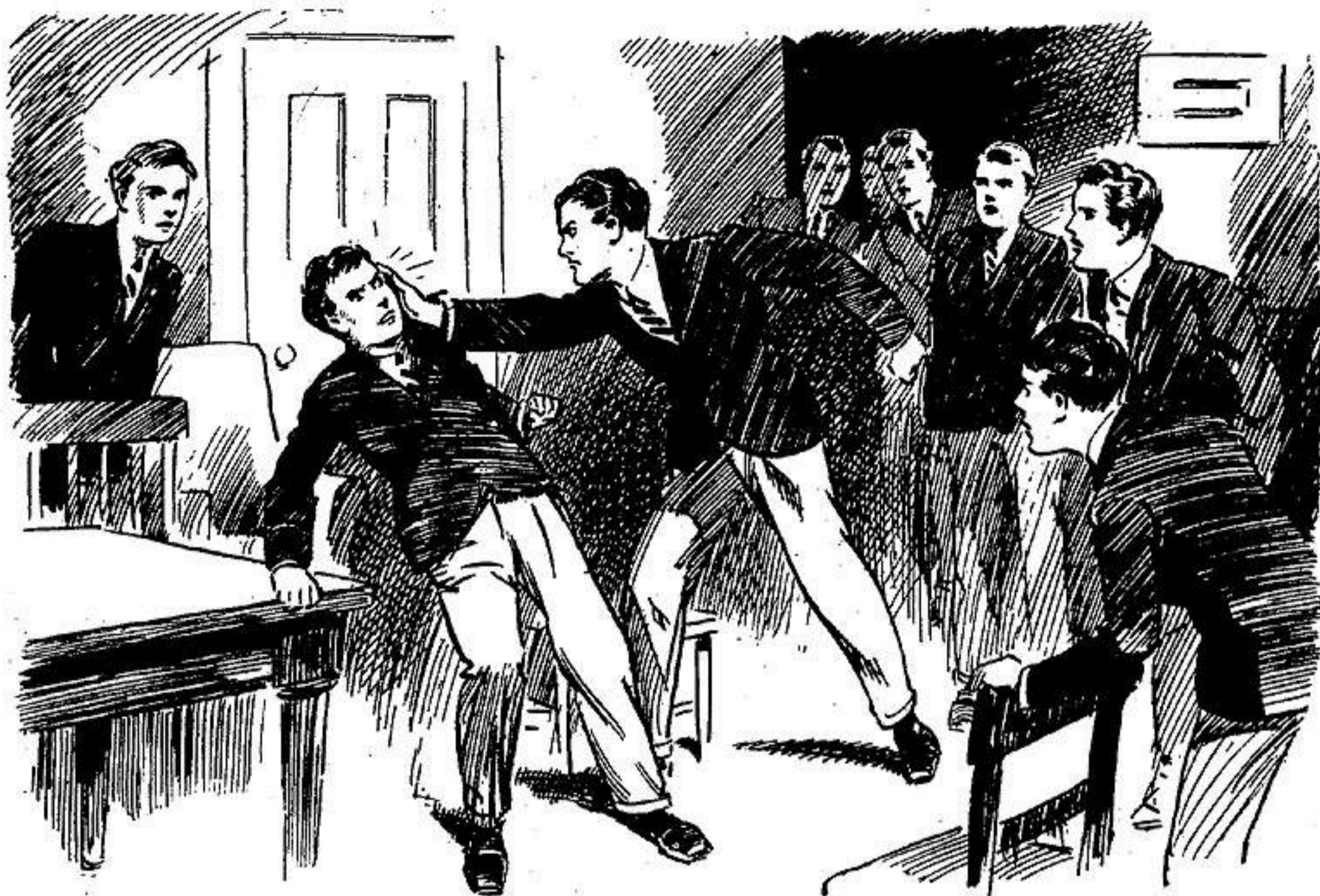
"I'm going to," said Wharton, with a deep breath. "He's not a fellow I'm anxious to touch, anyhow."

"He won't get that flogging!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Why won't he, fathead?"

"Because he will grease up to Hacker, and Hacker will get him off," sneered the Bounder.

"Oh!" exclaimed Wharton.



"You've got to listen to me, Wharton," said Wilmot. Wharton struck his hand aside. "Keep away from me, you cur!" he snapped. "Don't talk to me!" Smack! With a sudden movement, Wilmot struck the captain of the Remove across the face with his open hand. The smack rang through the Rag almost like a pistol-shot.

Wilmot turned fiercely on the Bounder.

"That's a lie!" he said, between his teeth. "And if I've treated Wharton badly to-day, as I admit, I haven't treated him so rottenly as you have. He would never have asked me to play in the pick-up, or thought of me for football at all, if you hadn't let him down—and you did it because you're a disgraceful blackguard, who ought to be kicked out of the school."

"Oh, gum!" said Ogilvy. "Wilmot hasn't been here long, but he's got to know you pretty well, Smithy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Bounder, with a flaming face, made a stride towards Wilmot.

Tom Redwing caught him by the arm and pulled him back, and Wharton interposed.

"Hands off, Smithy!" he snapped.

"You heard what he said!" yelled the Bounder furiously.

"Yes, and it was true, every word of it. If you don't like it, you can lump it! If Wilmot gets off that flogging, through Hacker, he will have a fight on his hands—with me. You've acted worse than he has, and you ought to be jolly well booted!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry.

"You can cut, Wilmot!" added Wharton scornfully. "I don't know whether Hacker will get you off—"

"Nothing of the kind. I—"

"Well, if he does you can get ready for a scrap, that's all! Now cut as soon as you like—and the sooner the better!"

Hisses followed Wilmot as he left the Rag without another word. Dislike and contempt were in almost every face, and he did not seem to care. Perhaps the thought was in his mind of how much worse it would have been had the Greyfriars fellows known more—had

they known what Crawley of the Fourth Form at Topham could have told them!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Washed Out!

"NOT to-day!" sneered Smithy.

"Nor any day!" jeered Skinner.

It looked as if Smithy was right in his declaration.

It was the following day, and nothing more had been heard of the sentence passed on Eric Wilmot.

That Quelch had his back up, and would report him for a flogging, nobody doubted. He had asked for it, and he would get it, if it was left in Quelch's hands. But nobody doubted, either, that the master of the Shell would barge in and do his best with the Head.

So, in the minds of the juniors, the matter was uncertain. A fellow "up" for a flogging was never left long in suspense. If it was coming off, it would come off in the morning.

But it did not come off in the morning. Neither had it come off in the afternoon.

Many eyes, turned on Mr. Quelch's face in the Form-room, read grimness there, but nothing else. He took no special notice of Wilmot. And when classes were over for the day and nothing had happened there could be no further doubt that Hacker had butted in—and with success.

Nobody, certainly, wanted a fellow flogged. Even an outcast like Wilmot would have received some sympathy had he been called on to suffer under the Head's birch before a sea of eyes in the Hall. But for a fellow to get off a flogging, or anything else, by "greas-

ing to a beak" was the limit. Favouritism, always unpopular, was more than ever unpopular, in Wilmot's case.

After school that day, when Mr. Quelch finally dismissed the Remove, some of the fellows wondered whether he was going to make any reference to the subject.

As he did not, no one could doubt further that the affair was at an end—that Wilmot was let off, and the matter dropped. Hence the Bounder's sneering remark and Skinner's jeer as the juniors went out.

Eric Wilmot paused on his way to the door. He was more surprised than the other fellows by his escape. He knew, of course, to what the other fellows attributed it, and the Remove would have been astonished to learn how little satisfaction his escape gave him.

He hesitated a few moments at the doorway, and then went back into the room and stopped at Mr. Quelch's desk. Mr. Quelch, busy with papers there, glanced up at him with an icy glance.

"What do you want, Wilmot?" he asked.

"You told me yesterday, sir, that I was to be reported to the headmaster for a flogging," said Wilmot in a low, even tone. "I have heard nothing further about it, sir."

"I imagined you were aware that your sentence was rescinded, Wilmot," answered Mr. Quelch, with great dryness of manner. "Has not Mr. Hacker told you so?"

Wilmot crimsoned.

"I have not seen Mr. Hacker to-day, sir."

He did not add that he had carefully avoided seeing the master of the Shell. Indifferent as he seemed to the opinion of his Form, he could not have liked

being condemned by all the Remove as a toady.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Quelch, with a touch of irony. "I was not aware of that, Wilmot, or I would have spoken to you. The sentence is rescinded. You may go."

Wilmot did not go.

"May I ask why it is rescinded, sir?" he said quietly. "I have no right to be treated differently from any other fellow."

"That is true, Wilmot. But—"

"If my uncle, sir"—Wilmot's cheeks burned—"if my uncle has interfered, sir, I hope you will believe that I never asked him to do so, or wished him to do so. I do not want to be flogged, of course; but I would rather be flogged a dozen times than—than—" He stammered, and went on again: "If my uncle spoke to the headmaster, sir—"

"Your uncle spoke to me, Wilmot. He made an explanation that caused me to decide not to report the matter to Dr. Locke. The Head has therefore not been acquainted with the matter at all."

"Oh!" gasped Wilmot.

"Your conduct," said Mr. Quelch icily, "was inexcusable. But, in view of what Mr. Hacker has said, I am compelled to make allowances. Had I been aware of the circumstances at the time, I should have given you leave out of gates yesterday afternoon."

"Oh!" repeated Wilmot.

"If you had told me your reason, I should have understood," went on Mr. Quelch. "The whole situation is unusual, disagreeable—indeed, almost intolerable! But I understand your difficulty. From what Mr. Hacker says, it seems that a boy belonging to your former school was so thoughtless and inconsiderate as to pay you a visit yesterday—"

"That was why I asked my uncle to speak to you, sir. I have never asked him before—"

"Possibly—possibly! Certainly, in the very peculiar circumstances, it would be injudicious for a Topham boy to come here," said Mr. Quelch. "I fail to see why you could not have written to him to tell him not to come."

Still, as it appears that he arranged to meet you in Courtfield, and said that he would come on to Greyfriars if he did not see you there, I should certainly have given you leave to go out, had you explained."

"I did not know that, sir."

"But such a thing had better not occur again," said Mr. Quelch. "If you have friends at your former school who desire to keep up your acquaintance, in spite of what has happened, it would be wiser to warn them to leave you alone here, Wilmot. If the facts become known in this school, I scarcely see how you can remain here!"

"I never wanted to come here, sir!"

"That was not for you to decide, Wilmot. You have been given a chance that you had no right to expect, and you should be grateful. You may go."

Wilmot opened his lips, closed them again, and left the Form-room in silence. He understood now why the flogging was washed out. Hacker had not gone to the Head and begged him off, as the Remove believed; he had explained the boy's strange position to Quelch. A dozen floggings would not have hurt and humiliated his proud spirit so much.

Neither was it an explanation that could be given to the school. The Greyfriars fellows had to be left in the belief that it was favouritism.

After tea Wilmot went into the Rag. Harry Wharton & Co. were there with other fellows of the Remove, and the new junior went directly up to Wharton.

The captain of the Remove eyed him with cool contempt as he came up. Wilmot spoke quietly and calmly.

"I've heard that the flogging is washed out, Wharton."

"Nobody needs telling that!" answered Harry, with a curl of the lip.

"Gratters!" said Johnny Bull sarcastically.

"The gratterfulness is terrific, my esteemed greasy Wilmot!" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Wilmot took no notice of the Co. His eyes were fixed on Wharton's scornful face.

"You told me yesterday that you were going to call me to account if the

flogging did not come off," he said.

"Well, here I am!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Oh, that's washed out, too!" he answered. "You see, you've got a friend at court. Much good may it do you!"

"I don't understand you."

"I fancy you understand pretty well."

"You can't mean that my uncle has spoken to you—or that you'd take any notice if he did!"

"Hardly!" said the captain of the Remove. "I'd like Hacker to barge in. I'd be glad of the chance of telling him to mind his own business!"

"Then what do you mean?"

"I mean, if you want to know—and if you don't know already—that Quelch sent for me to-day, and asked me to let the whole matter drop!" snapped Wharton. "I dare say he guessed that something would be on. Anyhow, he asked me to let it drop, and I said I would, so that's that!"

Wilmot stood silent. Wharton turned away from him, with open contempt. There was a laugh from some of the fellows in the Rag.

"Dear Eric mustn't be touched!" said the Bounder. "It's getting pretty thick, isn't it?"

"Wharton!" said Wilmot.

The captain of the Remove did not seem to hear.

"Wharton!"

Wharton's back remained turned to him. He stepped forward, and laid his hand on Wharton's shoulder.

"You've got to listen to me," he said.

Wharton struck his hand off.

"Keep away from me, you cur!" he said. "Don't talk to me!"

"You've told Quelch you'd let the matter drop," said Wilmot. "That's your affair. I haven't said that I would let it drop."

"You!" snapped Wharton. "I suppose you're pretty keen to let it drop, as you seem to have wangled it with your uncle!"

"I've done nothing of the kind!"

"Oh rot!"

"You fellows can think what you like—I don't care much!" said Wilmot disdainfully. "All the same, I'm going to prove that I had nothing to do with getting the matter dropped—so far as you are concerned, at least, Wharton!"

"And how are you going to do that?" asked Harry contemptuously.

"Like this!"

Smack!

With a sudden movement, Wilmot struck the captain of the Remove across the face with his open hand. The smack rang through the Rag almost like a pistol-shot.

Wharton staggered.

The next moment he was leaping at Wilmot, and the next they were fighting furiously.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Hammer and Tongs!

"A FIGHT!"

"Shut the door!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut that door! Wingate's in the passage!"

The door of the Rag slammed. Three or four fellows lined up with their backs to it, so that it could not be easily opened from without.

Wingate, or any other prefect, was not wanted in the Rag just then. With eager, excited faces, the juniors gathered round the combat.

Lord Mauleverer sat upright in the armchair in which he was gracefully taking his ease.

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Speed and Sport.

"What about the gloves, you men?" he asked.

But Mauly was not heeded.

The Bounder grinned at Redwing.

"Wharton barged in and insisted on the gloves when I had my scrap with that cad!" he remarked. "He seems to have forgotten that!"

"No wonder," said Tom. "I hope he'll knock the cad into a cocked hat!"

"More power to his giddy elbow!" chuckled Smithy. "The brute's asked for it, and no mistake! Blessed if I can make that worm Wilmot out, though. He can't have sneaked to the beaks for protection, and then walked in and asked for it like this!"

"I suppose he wants to make that clear," said Tom.

"Well, he's making it clear—but it's going to cost him a record hiding!" said Vernon-Smith. "I could have handled him that time if I'd had sense enough to keep my temper. Wharton can handle him!"

"They ought to have the gloves on!" muttered Nugent uneasily.

"No good chipping in now," said Bob Cherry.

That was plain enough. Not only were there no gloves, but there were no rounds in that fierce fight.

Harry Wharton's temper was at boiling-point. He had been badly and unscrupulously treated, and he had let the matter drop, at his Form-master's request. That smack in the face before a crowd of fellows had been the result. For the moment, the captain of the Remove was conscious of nothing but a fierce desire to give the fellow what he had asked for.

But angry as he was, he kept a cool head, so far as the scrapping was concerned. He was not going to ask for a licking, throwing away his chances in sheer hot-headed rage and excitement as the Bounder had done.

Wilmot, on his side, was equally bitter and determined. He had been sorry for his trickery of the previous day and ashamed of it. He had only been guilty of it under the pressure of what seemed to him unavoidable necessity. But contempt was hard to bear.

He was proving, at all events, that he had not sought protection from the consequences of his action.

Nobody could suppose that now.

But he was proving it at a cost, as the Bounder had sardonically remarked. Whether he was a match for Wharton or not in other circumstances, he was no match for him now.

For three or four minutes the fight went on, hot and strong, with such punishment given and taken as was seldom seen in a schoolboy scrap. Then Wilmot went with a crash to the floor.

Wharton stood panting.

"Man down!" grinned the Bounder.

"Good egg!" gasped Bob Cherry.

Wilmot lay on his back, gasping for breath, dazed and dizzy. Nobody approached him, till Billy Bunter rolled forward.

Friendly attentions from the fat Owl, however, did not seem very welcome to the outcast of the Remove.

He pushed Bunter's fat paw aside and staggered to his feet. He stood unsteadily, almost rocking on his legs.

"Shove the gloves on!" said Nugent, making advantage of the pause. "You can't go on with the knuckles!"

But before he had finished speaking, Wilmot had recovered a little and was springing forward again.

Harry Wharton met him with left and right.

"By gum! Some scrap!" said the

Bounder, with glistening eyes, as he watched. "It's Wharton's fight! But I'll say this for that rotter—he's got pluck!"

The door-handle turned. Someone was trying to get into the room. The fellows at the door braced their shoulders against it.

The door was angrily pushed.

"Let me in at once!" came the sharp voice of Wingate of the Sixth.

"We can't hear that!" murmured Squiff. "Stick it!"

And the shoulders remained braced at the door, and the captain of Greyfriars pushed, in vain, at the outer side. Meanwhile, the fight went on, hard and fast and furious.

"Will you open this door, you young sweeps?" came the Greyfriars captain's angry roar.

The fellows inside still turned a deaf ear. Wingate's voice was heard calling:

"Here—Gwynne—Sykes—Blundell—lend me a hand here!"

There was a mighty heave at the door. Under the hefty shove of three

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or four big seniors it flew open, and the juniors inside went scattering and stumbling.

Wingate of the Sixth strode in with a frowning brow. He stared in surprise and wrath at the fight.

"Stop that!" he roared.

Neither of the combatants heeded if they heard. Fierce blows were still being exchanged when Wingate strode at them, grasped them by their collars, and fairly wrenched them apart.

Wharton staggered in one direction, and brought up against Bob Cherry, who extended a helping hand and caught him. Wilmot staggered in another—but there was no helping hand for him, and he stumbled over and fell. He picked himself up again, panting.

"You young rascals!" said Wingate. "Fighting—with bare knuckles! You know better than this, Wharton! Is that the sort of example you set, as head boy, in the Remove?"

Wharton gasped for breath.

"Will you let us finish with the gloves on, Wingate?"

"No, I won't, you young hooligan! You've done damage enough—and so has Wilmot—from the look of both of you! I'd give you six each, only you'll get something more from Quelch when he sees your faces!"

"Oh, Wilmot won't get anything!" said the Bounder, laughing. "Wilmot's got a friend at court!"

"Take a hundred lines for cheek, Vernon-Smith! Say anything of that kind again, and I'll give you a lick with this ash!"

"I'm mum!" said Smithy. "I won't say another word till I get a relation on the staff!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The next moment the Bounder yelled, as Wingate made good his word—a hefty lick of the prefect's ashplant making Smithy almost hop.

"Any more, and I'll give you six!" snapped Wingate. And the Bounder wisely said no more.

"Now, Wharton and Wilmot, go and bathe your faces. And mind, no more of this!" said Wingate sternly. "If I find you scrapping again, I'll take you both to the Head! Mind, I mean that. Get out of this, both of you!"

Frowning, the Greyfriars captain shepherded both the damaged juniors out of the Rag. The fight had not come to an end—though there was little doubt how it would have ended had not Wingate intervened.

"Bit of luck for that worm Wingate barging in!" Bob Cherry remarked.

"He has a lot of that kind of luck," said the Bounder sarcastically. "How did Wingate happen to be on the spot? We've had plenty of scraps here without a prefect butting in. Of course, he was tipped to keep an eye on dear little Eric!"

"Hacker!" grinned Skinner.

"Of course!"

As a matter of fact, Mr. Quelch, foreseeing probable trouble in his Form, had asked Wingate to keep an eye on the Rag. But the fellows there had no doubt that the Bounder was right.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Puzzle—Find Eric!

"**W**HERE'S Eric?"
"Locked in Gosling's woodshed."
Mr. Hacker started

violently. Walking in the quadrangle, the master of the Shell came within earshot of Vernon-Smith and Skinner—talking together, with grinning faces.

They did not seem to see him, and certainly they did not lower their voices as he came by. He heard both question and answer quite plainly.

It was Skinner who asked the question—the Bounder who answered it. Both of them chuckled.

Mr. Hacker turned towards the two juniors, and strode up to them.

"Vernon-Smith! Skinner!" he rapped. Smithy and Skinner spun round.

"Oh!" gasped Skinner.

"Yes, sir!" said the Bounder.

"I heard what you said!" thundered the master of the Shell.

"Did you, sir?" said the Bounder coolly. "Well, we're allowed to talk in the quad, sir!"

"What?" exclaimed Mr. Hacker. "I heard you say that you locked my nephew in the woodshed, Vernon-Smith!"

"I never mentioned your nephew, sir! I wouldn't touch him with a barge-pole if I could help it!"

"How dare you utter such impudent falsehoods, Vernon-Smith? You were certainly speaking of my nephew! Is there a single other boy at Greyfriars whose name is Eric?"

"Not that I know of, sir!"

"Then what is the use of such a falsehood, Vernon-Smith! I shall report this to your Form-master! But first, give me the key of the shed, so that Eric—my nephew—can be released first."

"I haven't the key, sir!"

"Have you returned it to Gosling?"

"No, sir!"

"Then what have you done with it?"
"I haven't had it."

Mr. Hacker fairly gasped with wrath. After what he had heard, he was not likely to believe that statement.

"Vernon-Smith, I command you to hand me that key instantly!"

"I can't give you what I've not got, sir," said the Bounder. "And I tell you again—that I've not touched your nephew! He's not a nice chap to touch!"

"I think he's gone out of gates, sir," said Skinner blandly. "I rather think I saw him go out after dinner."

"Skinner, you are as untruthful as Vernon-Smith! I heard you ask Vernon-Smith where Eric was, and he answered that my nephew was locked in the woodshed. How dare you utter such palpable falsehoods?"

"I don't think Mr. Quelch would like fellows of his Form to be called liars, sir," said Skinner.

"Silence, Skinner! Once more, Vernon-Smith, I order you to hand me the key to release my nephew, otherwise, I shall take you immediately to your Form-master, who will compel you to do so."

"I've said I haven't the key."

"That is enough! Come with me!"

Mr. Hacker dropped his hand on the Bounder's shoulder, and hooked him away towards the House.

Vernon-Smith winked at Skinner as he went. Skinner was left grinning. Dozens of fellows stared at the Bounder as he was led away.

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked Billy Bunter. "I say, Smithy's in a row again! Hacker's got him!"

"What the dickens is the row now?" asked Harry Wharton.

But his friends shook their heads. Nobody knew what the row was.

But everybody was curious to know, and a crowd gathered and followed the master of the Shell and Vernon-Smith.

"Here, Wharton!" called out Smithy.

"Yes," answered Harry, coming towards him.

Football difficulties had caused rather a strain between the captain of the Remove, and that wilful and reckless member of the Form. But every Remove man was up against meddling by the master of the Shell.

"Do not speak to this boy, Wharton!" snapped Mr. Hacker. "I have no time to delay! Come with me, Vernon-Smith!"

"You're head boy of the Remove, Wharton," said the Bounder coolly. "Will you tell me officially whether I'm bound to let myself be walked off by a beak who isn't my Form-master? I suppose you know."

"You'd better go, anyhow," said Harry.

He had to follow on to answer the Bounder, as Hacker was marching him on without a pause.

"You don't think I'm entitled to knock Hacker's paw off my shoulder?" asked the Bounder.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors, within hearing.

Smithy, of course, was only asking that question to "check" Hacker.

"Don't be an ass!" said Harry Wharton.

"Well, I only want to know," said the Bounder. "You know what a stickler I am for law and order, and all that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence, Vernon-Smith!" hooted Mr. Hacker. "How dare you be so insolent! I order you to be silent!"

"I take orders from my Form-master, sir, and from no other!"

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answered the Bounder, with cool impertinence.

Mr. Hacker came very near boxing his ears at that. But he refrained. Possibly he suspected that Smithy would have liked nothing better, not, of course, the actual smite, but the row with Quelch that would indubitably have followed had Hacker boxed Remove cars.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Quelch!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Mr. Quelch appeared from the doorway. No doubt he had spotted the excitement in the quad from his study window.

Quelch was always calm. But it was a dangerous calmness now as he came quickly to meet Hacker and the Bounder.

"What does this mean, please?" he asked, in a voice that would have made a refrigerator seem warm and genial. "Mr. Hacker, will you have the kindness to release this boy of my Form?"

"I was bringing this boy of your Form to you, sir," hooted Hacker.

"I am assured that the boy would have followed you, sir, without being practically dragged across the quadrangle."

"Certainly, sir!" said Vernon-Smith, with respectful meekness.

Smithy was not always meek and respectful, even to his own beak. But it suited him now to be both.

Mr. Hacker dropped his hand from the Bounder's shoulder. More and more fellows gathered round—not only Remove, but Fourth and Shell, and seniors and fags. The scene was getting a very numerous audience.

"Now, Mr. Hacker, if you will kindly acquaint me with—"

"My nephew, sir," spluttered Hacker.

"Upon my word, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Wilmot again! Vernon-Smith, have you been quarrelling with Wilmot?"

"No, sir. I'm very careful indeed not to quarrel with Wilmot, sir," said the Bounder meekly. "I know Mr. Hacker doesn't like it, sir."

"This boy has locked my nephew in the woodshed, and refuses—insolently refuses—to hand me the key to release him!" almost shouted Mr. Hacker.

"If you have played such a foolish prank, Vernon-Smith—"

"I haven't, sir!"

"Have you locked Wilmot in the woodshed?"

"No, sir!"

"Is he there at all?"

"I don't know where he is, sir."

"You see, Mr. Hacker—"

"I see, sir, that this boy, Vernon-Smith, has no scruple in uttering the most unscrupulous falsehoods!" gasped Mr. Hacker. "He has locked my nephew in the woodshed, and I demand the key!"

"For what reason, Mr. Hacker, do you suppose that Vernon-Smith has done anything of the kind?" exclaimed the Remove-master.

"Because, sir, I heard him say so with his own lips," snorted Mr. Hacker. "He was telling another Remove boy what he had done when I passed him a few minutes ago."

"If you are sure of that, sir—"

"I can believe my own ears, sir. I demand that the key be given to me at once! I will not allow such malicious pranks to be played on my nephew, sir."

"If you have the key, Vernon-Smith, I—"

"I haven't, sir!"

Mr. Quelch gave him a searching look. He knew the unpopularity of Wilmot in his Form, and he knew that

Vernon-Smith was the fellow to play that jape, or any other. And Hacker's statement was positive.

"We had better proceed to Gosling's shed, Mr. Hacker!" he said curtly. "I can scarcely believe that Vernon-Smith would venture to speak to me untruthfully; but it is easy to ascertain."

"Very well, sir!" snorted Mr. Hacker.

"Follow me, Vernon-Smith!"

"Certainly, sir!"

Mr. Hacker whisked away, and Mr. Quelch whisked with him. Hacker's face was red with wrath; Quelch's set with grim vexation. He was more than tired of Hacker's fussy concern for that member of his Form; but he had no choice about taking up this matter.

He had told Vernon-Smith to follow him; but he had not told the rest of the Remove. However, they followed. Quite an army marched away after the two masters.

The sight of such a procession naturally drew the general attention. More and more fellows joined up. Dozens of voices inquired what was on. The news spread that Wilmot had been locked in Gosling's woodshed by the Bounder, and that Hacker was barging in again. Most of the fellows were laughing.

Any jape on the most unpopular fellow in the Remove was likely to be generally approved. But nobody envied the Bounder if Hacker's nephew really was discovered locked up among Gosling's faggots. The more Quelch was fed-up with Hacker and his nephew, the more certain he was to come down hard and heavy on any fellow who set Hacker going.

"Smithy's asking for it this time," remarked Bob Cherry. "Must have been a fool to let Hacker hear him."

Harry Wharton laughed. "Whatever Smithy is, he isn't a fool!" he said. "I fancy he never let Hacker hear anything he didn't want him to hear."

"Oh, my hat! Do you think he's pulling Hacker's leg, somehow?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

The army arrived at the woodshed. Mr. Quelch tried the door, and found it locked. There was nothing unusual about that. Gosling kept that shed locked, except when he forgot to do so. There was a window, but it was fastened. Mr. Quelch rapped sharply on the door.

"Wilmot—are you here, Wilmot?"

There was no reply from within.

The woodshed appeared to be untenanted. Mr. Quelch turned impatiently to the master of the Shell.

"No one is here, Mr. Hacker. Evidently you must have misunderstood whatever it was you heard this boy say."

"I did not misunderstand, sir! Vernon-Smith, do you dare to deny that you said to another Remove boy, in my hearing, that my nephew was locked in Gosling's woodshed?"

"Certainly I deny that, sir!" said the Bounder.

"You—you—you deny it?" gasped Mr. Hacker, hardly able to believe his ears. He knew what he had heard Smithy say to Skinner.

"Yes, I deny having spoken about your nephew at all, sir."

Mr. Hacker almost gurgled.

"Mr. Quelch! This boy's impudence and untruthfulness pass all bounds! I repeat that I distinctly heard him—"

"Wilmot cannot be here, sir, or he would answer me!" said Mr. Quelch, and he rapped on the locked door again.



Under the hefty shove of three or four big seniors, the door of the Rag flew open, and the juniors inside went scattering and stumbling. Wingate strode in, with a frowning brow. "Stop that!" he roared. Neither Wharton nor Wilmot heeded, if they heard. They were fighting furiously.

"Wilmot! Are you there? Are you there, Wilmot?"

"Wrong number!" murmured Skinner, and there was a chortle.

"Silence! Mr. Hacker, it is clear that your nephew is not there—"

"I am not assured of that, sir! He is possibly prevented from answering. That Vernon-Smith locked him in this shed, I know, on Vernon-Smith's own statement. He has the key on him—"

"Have you the key, Vernon-Smith?"

"No, sir."

"Wharton! Please go to Gosling's lodge and request him to step here, bringing with him the key of the woodshed."

"Certainly, sir!"

Harry Wharton cut off. The rest of the fellows remained, with the two masters, outside the door of the woodshed. Mr. Hacker had a mental picture of his nephew, with a duster stuffed in his mouth, perhaps tied to Gosling's bench in the woodshed. That so far as Mr. Hacker could see, was the only way of accounting for his silence—as he was absolutely convinced that Eric was in the shed. Mr. Quelch suspected nothing of the sort. All Mr. Quelch suspected was, that Hacker was a fussy old donkey.

However, they waited, till Gosling arrived, grunting, with the key of the woodshed in his horny hand.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

"Eric, or Little by Little!"

"UNLOCK this shed, please, Gosling!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Yessir!" grunted Gosling.

Gosling did not know what was the

matter. He was surprised, and not pleased, by the sight of a numerous crowd gathered round his woodshed. He could not begin to imagine why two members of Dr. Locke's staff were interested in the interior of that building. Privately, he thought it a check on their part.

Gosling never butted into a master's study—so why should a master butt into Gosling's woodshed? Not being in a position to say what he thought, Gosling grunted expressively, and fumbled slowly with the big iron key.

"Lose no time, Gosling!" snapped Mr. Hacker. "My nephew has been locked in that shed! I am here to release him."

Gosling blinked round at the master of the Shell.

"There ain't nobody in this 'ere shed, sir!" he grunted.

"I have told you that my nephew is there! Lose no time!"

"Ow'd he get in, then, sir?" demanded Gosling. "The winder's shut! Mr. Quelch, sir, if that young limb's playing tricks in my woodshed, sir—"

"He has been locked in by another boy!" snapped Mr. Hacker. "You are very much to blame, Gosling, for allowing the key to go out of your hands."

"Wot I says, is this 'ere, sir—"

"You have allowed this boy, Vernon-Smith, to take your key—"

"I ain't, sir!"

"Has the key been out of your hands to-day, Gosling?" asked Mr. Quelch.

"Course it has, sir!" answered Gosling.

"I knew it!" exclaimed Mr. Hacker. "You say that Vernon-Smith has not had it, but you admit that it has been out of your hands. Where has it been, while it was out of your hands?"

"In my trousis pocket," answered Gosling.

"Wha-a-at!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the whole audience. Even Mr. Quelch smiled.

"In—in—in your trousers pocket!" gasped Mr. Hacker. "Nonsense! Absurd! Open that door at once, Gosling! You are wasting time with your foolishness!"

Gosling, with an emphatic grunt, fumbled with the key. He was in no hurry to oblige a gentleman who described his remarks as foolishness.

However, the door was thrown open at last.

Pushing Gosling aside, Mr. Hacker rushed in. Mr. Quelch followed him. Fellows packed themselves round the door to stare in after them.

Mr. Hacker's mental picture of Eric, with a duster in his mouth to keep him from calling for help, did not materialise.

The woodshed was empty—save for its customary contents.

There were logs, there were faggots; there was Gosling's bench with some tools lying on it—there were other such things, but there was no human inhabitant.

One thing, perhaps, was a little unusual. A book lay on the bench. Gosling was no reader of books, and, had he been, he would not have been likely to select a volume that looked like a schoolboy's prize book, as that volume did. But no one, for the moment, noticed that trifle.

Mr. Hacker stared round the interior of the shed. Staring at logs and faggots, however, could not turn them into what he sought.

Even Hacker had to admit that Wilmot was not there.

"Well, sir, are you satisfied now?" asked Mr. Quelch tartly.

"No, sir!" said Mr. Hacker, with bitter wrath. "I am not satisfied! I am very far from satisfied! Gosling!"

"Yessir!" grunted Gosling, as disrespectfully as he dared.

"Has my nephew been in this woodshed at all?"

"Not as I know of. I'd report him to Mr. Quelch, if he come messing round my woodshed."

"Has Vernon-Smith been here?"

"Yessir."

"Oh! He has been here! And why was he here, and when?" demanded Mr. Hacker, with a lingering hope that he was on the trail of something.

"Master Vernon-Smith looked in when I was 'ere after dinner, sir," grunted Gosling. "He give me a book!"

"A—a—a book?"

"Yessir! He says, says he, an aunt give him that thore book at Christmas, and he don't want it, he says, and he says, says he, p'r'aps I could get a bob for it, he says, and I says, leave it 'ere, I says, and thank you kindly, I says."

Mr. Hacker snorted. It was very probable that Smithy would dispose thus of a volume given him by a kind aunt at Christmas—especially if it was a volume of an improving nature. But Hacker did not want to hear about it.

"Really, Mr. Hacker—" said the Remove-master.

He was more conscious than the angry master of the Shell, of the array of grinning faces in the doorway.

"Mr. Quelch! My nephew is not here!" exclaimed Mr. Hacker. "Either he has been here and is now gone, or—"

"Does anyone know where Wilmot is?" asked Mr. Quelch, with a glance at the army outside.

"He went out of gates after dinner, sir!" answered Skinner. "I told Mr. Hacker so when he asked us—"

"Really, Mr. Hacker, if Skinner told you—"

"I did not believe Skinner's statement, sir, in view of what I heard Vernon-Smith say. I regarded it, sir, as a palpable attempt to deceive me."

"But Wilmot's really gone out, sir!" cut in Hazeldene. "I saw him go out after dinner."

"So did I," added another voice.

"There appears to be no doubt of it, Mr. Hacker—"

"No, sir!" said Mr. Hacker bitterly. "I see that now, sir. I am driven to the conclusion that it was not, as I supposed, by chance, that I overheard Vernon-Smith make his statement in the quadrangle. I believe now, sir, that he saw me coming, and affected not to do so, and spoke in my hearing, sir, to mislead me—"

"Pulling the old bean's leg!" said a voice from the back of the crowd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "If the matter is as you suppose, sir, Vernon-Smith will certainly be punished for having played such—such an inconsiderate prank. Vernon-Smith!"

"Yes, sir!"

"I demand to know exactly what you said, which Mr. Hacker appears to have misunderstood—"

"I did not misunderstand, Mr. Quelch. There was no question of misunderstanding a plain statement—"

"Did you state, in Mr. Hacker's hearing, that you had locked Wilmot in this woodshed, Vernon-Smith?"

"No, sir; I never mentioned Wilmot."

"Is my word to be taken, sir, or the word of that unscrupulous boy?" almost shrieked Mr. Hacker.

"Your word, certainly, is to be taken, sir!" said Mr. Quelch. "But it is clear that some misunderstanding has arisen. It was Skinner, I think, to whom Vernon-Smith was speaking. Skinner!"

"Yes, sir!"

"What did Vernon-Smith say about Mr. Hacker's nephew?"

"Nothing, sir! He never mentioned Mr. Hacker's nephew."

"Take care what you say, Skinner! Vernon-Smith must have used a name in speaking of anyone. Did he use Wilmot's name?"

"No, sir!"

"You are sure, Mr. Hacker, that you heard Vernon-Smith utter the name of Wilmot?"

"He uttered the name of Eric, sir! There is no other boy at Greyfriars named Eric, so far as my knowledge extends."

"Or mine!" said Mr. Quelch. "Now answer me carefully, Vernon-Smith! If you used the name of Eric, you were obviously alluding to Mr. Hacker's nephew. Do you deny that you uttered that name?"

"Oh, no, sir!" said Vernon-Smith. "I spoke the name of Eric, sir! So far as I remember, Skinner asked me where Eric was, and I said, locked in the woodshed."

"That is so, sir!" said Skinner.

Mr. Quelch gazed at them. Hacker glared at them. The army outside, cramming the doorway, gazed. So far as anyone could see, the Bounder was admitting the whole charge. But he seemed quite cool and cheerful.

"You said, in Mr. Hacker's hearing, that Eric was locked in the woodshed," repeated Mr. Quelch.

"It's not my fault that Mr. Hacker heard me, sir! I couldn't know that he was listening behind my back."

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Bob Cherry.

Mr. Hacker gurgled.

"Mr. Hacker overheard you by chance, as you are well aware, Vernon-Smith," said Mr. Quelch, sternly. "You can have made such a false statement only to mislead him—"

"It was not a false statement, sir!"

"Not!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Certainly not, sir! Mr. Hacker's nephew isn't the only Eric in the world."

"There is no other boy at Greyfriars of that name, Vernon-Smith."

"I know, sir! The chap I was speaking of to Skinner wasn't a Greyfriars man."

"Not a Greyfriars man! You are not pretending, Vernon-Smith, that you locked a boy belonging to some other school in this woodshed."

"Not at all, sir! I never said I locked him in. I said Eric was locked in the woodshed. It was Gosling who locked the door. I tried to explain to Mr. Hacker, sir, that I wasn't speaking of Wilmot, but he wouldn't take any notice!" said the Bounder, meekly.

"You see, sir, Skinner knew that I'd been given a copy of Eric at Christmas—"

"A—a—a copy of Eric!"

"Yes, sir, a very well-known book, often given as a present to good boys like me, sir. It's called 'Eric, or Little by Little'—"

"Eric, or Little by Little!" repeated Mr. Quelch, like a man in a dream.

"Yes, sir! There it is, on the bench."

Mr. Quelch turned an almost dazed eye on the volume lying on the bench, which the Bounder had received from a kind aunt at Christmas, and which he had turned over, unread, to Gosling.

In gilt letters on the cover, was the title: "Eric, or Little by Little."

Mr. Quelch, of course, had heard of that celebrated and eminent work. He

had, indeed, had a copy of it presented to him in his far-off boyhood, which he could remember that he had, like Smithy, omitted to read.

Quelch gazed at "Eric, or Little by Little," Mr. Hacker gazed at it. They seemed bereft of speech.

"Skinner thought he'd like to look at it, sir, knowing I had it," said the Bounder, meekly. "He asked me where it was, and I said it was locked in the woodshed! You see, sir, I'd already given it to Gosling, as I didn't want it."

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Hacker.

"I was quite surprised, sir, when Mr. Hacker thought I was speaking of Wilmot," said the Bounder. "I told him I wasn't—so did Skinner! We both told him we'd locked nobody in the woodshed. He wouldn't listen, sir."

The cram at the doorway gazed at Smithy.

They knew that the Bounder had a nerve; but they had never suspected him of nerve to this extent.

Every fellow there knew that he had worked the whole thing—first giving the book to Gosling, then fixing up a conversation for Mr. Hacker to overhear—knowing that that fussy and hasty gentleman would fall blindly into the trap. Mr. Quelch probably, suspected as much.

Nevertheless, the Bounder was not to be blamed. The whole fault was Hacker's. He had overheard words spoken among juniors, had misunderstood them, and refused to listen to denials and explanations. He had made a complete and egregious fool of himself—a fact of which he was, by this time, well aware!

Hacker's face was like unto a newly boiled beetroot in hue. He could not even be sure that the Bounder had tricked him. Smithy and Skinner had been—ostensibly, at least—speaking of the book that lay on Gosling's bench. It was difficult to prove otherwise. They had told him that they were not speaking of his nephew—they could do no more than that!

Without another word, Mr. Hacker strode out of the woodshed, shoved his way through a grinning crowd, and disappeared.

"Vernon-Smith!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir!" said the meek and respectful Bounder.

Mr. Quelch paused. What was he to say? How could he blame either Smithy or Skinner, because their harmless words had been overheard by a fussy and suspicious man who had misunderstood them?

The whole thing was utterly ridiculous. Mr. Quelch wisely decided to leave it where it was, and he hurried away after Mr. Hacker. Gosling, grunting, locked his woodshed again. Fellows who had tried to suppress their merriment, in the presence of Mr. Quelch, let it go when he departed. As he hurried back to the House, the Remove master heard a hilarious roar behind him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That ass, Hacker—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That old donkey, Hacker—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Eric, or Little by Little! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fancy Hacker making such a silly mistake!" said the Bounder. "Thinking a chap was speaking about his precious nephew, when he was only speaking about a book—a well-known book, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You didn't mean him to make that mistake?" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"My dear chap, am I the man to pull a beak's leg?"

(Continued on page 28.)

DAN of the DOGGER BANK!

By DAVID GOODWIN.

The Groping Hand I

KENNETH GRAHAM, son of a millionaire shipowner, is rescued off the Dogger Bank by the crew of the fishing trawler, Grey Seal.

His past life a blank, he is given the name of "Dogger Dan," and signed on as fifth hand under Skipper Atheling, Finn Macoul, Wat Griffiths, and Buck Atheling.

Aware of his nephew's fate, and knowing that he will be heir to the shipowner's money when his brother dies, Dudley Graham engages Jake Rebow and his cutthroats of the Black Squadron to get Kenneth out of the way for ever.

Following a series of thrilling encounters with Rebow's confederates, Dan and Buck Atheling are wrecked on Baltrum Island, where they meet a wealthy old Dutchman named Jan Osterling, who is later brutally attacked by the squadron men and left to die.

Before breathing his last, Jan asks the boys to hand over his savings to his nephew Max, in return for which he hands them a chart disclosing the whereabouts of a hidden treasure worth £5,000, to be divided between them.

Dan and Buck rejoin the Grey Seal, after which they go out fishing in the ship's boat. The craft is overturned, however, and the boys are picked up by a passing yacht, the owner of which is none other than Dudley Graham.

Dan's memory returns as the result of meeting his uncle, but Dudley denies relationship.

Making friends with Jack Ward, the mate, Dan tells the story of his adventures, and then asks the man to signal to the first passing ship, telling her to broadcast a message to Donald Graham, telling of his son's whereabouts.

"Whew!" whistled Jack Ward. He stared at Dan in amazement. "You ain't pulling my leg? Is that straight?" "Straight as the mast! I'm Kenneth Graham! And it'll be the best day's work you ever did in your life."

"Never mind that, lad," returned the mate gleefully. "I'm with you! I see the game. It's you Dudley Graham's after. He's got you set here. Watch yourself below, lad, an' I'll watch you on deck. There's one more thing, too. If he can't make away with you—an' he won't do it openly, for he'll not give the crew the chance to hang a murder charge over his head for the rest of his life—he'll soon have you out o' these waters. Have you any notion where he might go?"

Dan thought for a moment, and an idea flashed into his head.

"Baltrum Island, and within three days' time!" he answered. "Add that to your signal."

"The first vessel that passes after day-break shall have it!" said Ward.

And, after a quick hand-grip, Dan and the mate parted.

Buck was at the foot of the ladder. "Tell me, Dan," he said anxiously, "is all this true?"

"Every word of it," said Dan. "And Dudley Graham, who makes out that he does not know me, will take the first chance he gets of putting me out of the way. Now you have the key to all we've gone through—and all the rest of it!"



As the blade buried itself in the Japanese rug, Dan grasped the wrist with all his force and clung to it!

Dan also told Buck what he had arranged with Jack Ward.

"Good work!" said Buck. "You've got the machinery moving, an' if it works, should anything happen to you here, Dudley Graham will pay the bill. Now, come and see him. Don't let on, but just lie an' watch!"

"Ship's fare, my lads," said Dudley pleasantly, as the boys entered the dining-saloon and sat down to a table laid with gleaming silver and crystal, "or yacht's fare, if you like to call it that."

"That's nearer the mark, sir," said Buck, as a dainty first course was set before them—"at least, it ain't what we call ship's fare on the old Seal."

Dudley motioned the steward to withdraw, and the trio dined in private.

Dudley made himself agreeable, and towards the end of the meal, as Dan filled his glass with mild claret—for he had refused to tackle anything stronger—Dudley drank to his health.

"Here's to a successful voyage to Baltrum!" he said. "Cheer-oh, lads!"

And the meal continued.

"By the way," said Dudley, before they rose, "would you allow me to look at that chart of yours again?"

Dan unconsciously passed his hand to his breast pocket, as though to take

out Jan Osterling's plan, which Buck had returned to him.

He stopped, however, in time, but not before Dudley noted the movement.

"I'd better make you a copy of it," said Dan, buttoning up his coat, "then we shall both know a bit more about it."

He had not the slightest intention of doing anything of the sort, neither did he mean to let Dudley finger the chart again. He realised full well that it was too complicated for any to keep its bearings accurately in memory.

Dudley smiled.

"I expect you're pretty tired after your experiences," he said, "so I won't keep you up. The steward will show you to your state-rooms. Breakfast whenever you like. Good-night!"

The steward conducted the boys to two different rooms.

As soon as Buck had inspected his quarters he joined Dan again.

"Is this yours?" he said, looking round the cabin. "Ah! Next to the owner's room." He lowered his voice. "Let's have a look at your bunk."

The sleeping-berth was a recess in the wall, and by one side hung half a dozen hooks for clothes.

"This berth must jut into the next room," said Buck. "Yes, there's a cupboard beneath it on the other side

of the wall. Queer arrangement! Those hooks are the only ones in the room. Well, you just hang your clothes on them. Don't do anything silly!"

"Not if I can help it," said Dan.

"An' there's one thing more, old son," said Buck in a low voice—"don't turn in! Sit up for a spell an' watch. I'm goin' to. If there's anything wrong, shout, an' I'll be with you in two shakes!"

He departed quietly, and closed the door. For quite half an hour Dan stood by the candle-lamp thinking. After a while he withdrew the plan from his pocket, tore the blank half-sheet of parchment off, and with pen and ink, began copying old Jan's chart carefully.

It took him some time, after which he put out the candle, undressed in the dark, and hung his clothes neatly on the pegs by the bunk. A suit of clean pyjamas lay in the berth, and he put them on.

The lamps, still burning in the alleyway outside—for a ship's passage lights are never put out at night—shed a dim light through the cabin. When Dan's eyes got used to the gloom he found he could see pretty well.

He did not get into the berth, but merely disarranged the bedclothes. Then he took a seat on a chair on the opposite side of the little sleeping-room, holding himself ready.

Tired as he was, he fought with his drowsiness, and did not allow sleep to overcome him. But it was a hard struggle. Hour after hour seemed to crawl by.

Dan was nodding, when a faint, tiny scratching sound set all his senses on the alert.

He fixed his eyes keenly on the spot whence it came.

Suddenly a small square of a panel by the side of the bed opened like a trapdoor, and slowly but gently a long, brown hand slid through it and groped around, feeling softly about the clothes that Dan had hung on the hooks.

The hand stopped at the pilot-cloth jacket, and deftly ran over it till it reached the inner breast pocket, into which it groped.

Dan watched as though fascinated. His nerves were strung to breaking-pitch, and all his muscles were tense.

The long, brown hand rose slowly from the pocket, drawing out, tightly held between its first and second fingers, the yellow parchment on which was the secret of Jan Osterling's treasure.

Signalling The News!

THE parchment trembled a little between the two fingers that held it, as it was drawn clear of the coat-pocket.

Dan watched the hand as if fascinated, as it felt round about the little trapdoor in the panelling of the cabin. The fingers deftly laid over the flap of the hanging coat again, and left it just as it had been.

"Just as I thought!" mused Dan. "Buck was right. I'd no idea there was an opening just there, though. I must have a good look at it later on."

The hand began to withdraw slowly and noiselessly with its booty, but Dan made no sign. He watched the precious parchment disappearing, without moving a muscle. A curious smile played about the corners of his mouth, but he made no effort to rescue the chart that held the secret of Jan Osterling's treasure.

The hand vanished, and the little trapdoor closed without a sound.

Dan bestowed on it one solemn wink. Then, thoroughly worn out, he surrendered himself to the charms of sleep, and dozed off lightly where he sat.

For some hours he remained thus, opening his eyes only when the first streak of dawn began to struggle through the porthole. Then, seeing that the open day had come to banish all deeds of darkness, he climbed confidently into his bunk, and was soon sleeping peacefully.

It was nearly ten o'clock when he rose and dressed. As he opened the door he met Buck about to enter. At the same moment Dudley Graham came up the alleyway and bore down on the two boys.

"Breakfast is just ready, lads!" he said. "Come along!"

Dudley Graham led them into the dining-saloon, and the three seated themselves. The boys were civil, but cool, and Dudley wore an air of joviality.

There was a gleam of triumph in his dark eyes which he could hardly suppress, and Dan, watching him carefully, sized up his feelings pretty accurately. Dudley was plainly pleased with himself at having secured the treasure-chart.

"I'm not quite certain where we shall make for to-day," he said, "but I think the sooner we get to Baltrum, and look into the business of this treasure of yours, the better!"

"Right-ho!" said Dan quietly. "Hope we shall find it when we get there! Might take a bit of doing, sir!"

"Oh, your chart ought to make that simple enough, if the gold really exists. By the way, did you lock your state-room door last night?"

"No," returned Dan, "I didn't. Why?"

"I ought to have warned you to," said Dudley. "There's a thief somewhere on this vessel. I've lost several things out of my pockets while my clothes have been hanging up at night. But although I've done my best to find who the thief is, I have not been successful."

"I think I could lay my hands on him pretty easy!" thought Dan.

But he contented himself with remarking that he would lock his door another night.

When breakfast was over Dudley withdrew, and the boys went up on deck.

Buck drew a long breath.

"It's like sitting and smoking in a barrel of gunpowder to take one's meals with that fellow and listen to his talk," he said. "He's beastly pleased with himself this morning, somehow. I wonder why?"

"You wouldn't wonder if you'd been in my room last night," said Dan.

And he told Buck all that happened in the state-room.

"What!" said Buck, aghast. "He got the chart, then?"

"Yes," said Dan. "He did that!"

"Couldn't you do anything to stop him, you young chump?"

"I didn't try. It wasn't my chart he got. It was a copy that I'd made. There was a pen and ink in the room, and I tore the blank half-sheet of parchment off the plan and made a pretty good imitation of the real thing. He didn't spot the difference, or he wouldn't have been so pleased this morning. If he follows the fake plan, he'll be dig-

ging holes for the treasure on the other side of the island."

"Good!" exclaimed Buck, with a chuckle. "O.K., Dan! Here's the mate. They're changing the watch."

"Mornin', lads—'mornin'!" said Jack Ward. "They ain't cut your throats yet, then?" he added cheerfully. "No, they ain't done it, 'cos they don't dare! Dudley don't want no evidence! But if you smell trouble, shout for me. I'll come and drill holes in anyone as offers to touch ye!"

He hitched his right side coat-pocket as he spoke. The outline of something heavy and hard showed in it.

"But ain't that a steamer we're raisin' on the weather bow?" he continued, staring out over the sea. "A Hull packet, by her looks. I'll bear away down on her and let her have your signal."

"Thank you, Mr. Ward!" said Dan. "I'll never forget your kindness. And now—"

"And now," put in the mate, "look out for squalls! If Dudley tumbles to the game, there'll be feathers flying! You kids had better go below, out of harm's way."

"Not us," said Dan softly; "we'll stay put!"

With a shrug of the shoulders, the mate fetched the code-book out of the charthouse, and called up a deck-hand to hoist the code-flag. The skipper was below, for he had been sober for some three hours, and was making up for lost time.

Down towards the steamer swept the Ercildoune, and slowed down about two hundred yards from her. The strange vessel was a fast Hamburg packet, bound Englandward.

After a rapid glance at the code-book, the yacht's mate gave his orders to the sulky dago deck-hand, with a couple of kicks, as a warning to get a move on.

Up fluttered the four flags, snapping and cracking in the breeze, as they flew from the gilded vane of the yacht's foremast.

There was a stir aboard the steamer, a pause, and then her answering pennant was run up.

Another signal took the place of the first on the Ercildoune.

"They've got it, lads!" said the mate triumphantly. "Your father'll know what's happened now. That steamer's bound for Hull."

"Hull!" cried Dan. "Buck, my father's yacht lies there—the Valhalla!"

"Valhalla!" exclaimed Buck. "Why, she's a thousand-ton ocean-goer! I've seen her! What about Dudley Graham now?"

"Don't crow too loud, my lads," said the mate grimly. "If ever you leave this craft alive, it'll be a miracle, whatever happens to Dudley. There, the steamer's answerin'. Now to let 'em know where to find you. Baltrum Island, you said. Sure o' that?"

"It's that, or nothing," said Dan. "Make it Baltrum!"

Up went the signal, and the steamer acknowledged it with a flutter of her code pennant.

At that moment Dudley Graham stepped up from the companion-way.

As he did so, the mate turned to the surly signalman.

"Down with that signal, you snuff-coloured sweep!" he roared. "D'yo hear me? And get a move on!"

Dudley's eye ran aloft in a moment. He read the letters of the four flags and cast a glance at the Hull steamer.

Then, with a suspicious stare at the mate, he pounced upon the signal-book, and looked up the code message to get its meaning.

After discovering what he wanted, he shut the book with a slam, his eyes blazing, his dark face pale with fury. Then he leapt forward as if he would seize Jack Ward by the throat.

The mate turned coolly, looking his aggressor in the eyes.

"Steady there, mister!" said Ward quietly.

"You dog!" said Dudley, in a low voice. "Would you dare?"

"I'm in charge o' this bridge," said Ward unpleasantly, "and if you're not off it by the ladder in ten seconds, you'll go over the rails instead—with my boot to give you a lift!"

"You insolent blackguard!" raged Dudley. "I'm the owner of this vessel, and I'll go where I choose!"

"Ten seconds, I said!" repeated the mate, lifting his foot. "One—two—three—four—five—six—"

Dudley turned and walked sullenly down the ladder.

"Nine—ten!" concluded the mate. "You only just did it, mister! Better move sharper next time, or you'll be wanting a stretcher to take you below!"

"You ruffian!" cried Dudley. Then, turning to the crew, he roared: "Find the captain, some of you! Don't stand staring like fools!"

After some delay, during which Jack Ward attended coolly to his business, the dago captain came unsteadily along the deck.

"Put that insolent scoundrel in irons for mutiny!" shouted Dudley, pointing to the mate. "And shove him into the empty bunker!"

But the sallow-skinned captain, after taking a good look at Ward, pulled his fuddled wits together, and whispered into the owner's ear, a twinkle of cunning in his ferrety eyes.

Dudley's anger seemed to cool down. "You're right," he said viciously; "safest, after all. See to it at once!"

With a savage glare at the mate, he went below.

More Treachery!

THE dago skipper, turning unsteadily to Ward, gave him a course to steer that brought the vessel's head right round. Then he slunk below, while the crew gathered in groups, whispering.

"That's the stuff to give 'im, Ward!" said Dan. "You've put the wind up him!"

"I mean to keep my own end up as long as I'm alive to do it!" returned the mate grimly. "I don't know how long it may last, so I'm makin' the most of it!"

"What course was that the skipper gave you?" asked Dan.

"It'll take us pretty near Baltrum," replied Ward. "What we're going there for beats me. You seem to know more about it than I do!"

"I'll tell you," said Dan. "There's five thousand pounds buried there, and Buck here told Dudley about it before he knew who the rascal was."

"Whew!" said the mate.

"You may well whistle!" said Dan. "Dudley pinched the chart showing where it's buried from me last night. He'll get plenty of exercise digging!"

"Five thousand pounds!" murmured the mate. "Is that straight, young 'un?"

"Straight," said Dan. "And you can have your share if you help get clear of this den of thieves. It's ours by right!"

"This cruise looks like panning out

better than I thought," commented Jack Ward; "though, at the best, we're more likely to see the sea bottom. Dudley'll be on to it like a wild-cat!"

"We've got a biggish crowd against us," said Buck.

"Shipload o' dagos!" said the mate. "I'd think shame to be put out o' the way by them. It's the Black Fleet I'm thinkin' of. Two o' the hands are spies o' theirs, and Dudley's hand-in-glove wi' 'em."

"But he'll never let the blacks into the game with five thousand pounds to win," said Dan. "He knows he wouldn't get much of it to finger."

"No; he'll use it as a bait to get you into their hands an' a knife into your back!" said the mate. "You know what the Blacks are. They've a thousand pounds to get by putting you out o' the way. Once they get you on that island, you'll mighty soon be food for crabs. What does Dudley care for five thousand pounds when he'll win a couple o' million by putting your light out!"

He broke off suddenly as from the bows of the ship shone the gleam of a match. A moment later a signalling torch shot a series of flashes into the darkness.

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"Keep your eye on the steersman!" muttered Ward to the boys, darting down from the bridge. "I'll stop that game!"

Buck stood by the man at the wheel and saw that he kept his course.

In the gloom of the high bows, Dan saw a scuffle and a heaving of dark figures. There was an Italian oath, a yelp of pain, and then somebody went rolling across the fore-deck.

Shortly afterwards an electric torch was flung overboard, and vanished in the dark waters.

Jack Ward stepped back on to the bridge.

"I reckon I cured him of signalling without orders from me!" he remarked. "His nose'll never be what it was again. But I'm afraid the mischief's done."

He peered out over the dark sea, watching anxiously. Far away on the weather quarter two faint, short gleams and one longer one winked in the gloom, mere points of light on the horizon.

"My Sam!" said Dan. "That's the Black Fleet's night signal!"

"That's what it is!" said Ward, while Buck stared gloomily out over the heaving sea. "It's a long way off, though. That rat daren't go below to report, an' you can bet I shan't shift my course. We may lose 'em yet. Are you boys goin' to turn in to-night?"

"Yes," said Buck. "We've got to get some rest, or we shan't be fit for much. Besides, it'll rouse too much suspicion

if we don't turn in. Shan't get much sleep, though—"

"You're quite right. Best to turn in. But be mighty careful. Good-night, lads!"

"Look here, Dan," said Buck, as they left the bridge, "that bunk of yours doesn't please me, with its underside opening over Dudley's cabin. Don't you get into it, an' mind you yell for me if anything goes wrong. We'll take the offensive ourselves when it does. We're best at that."

"Rather!" said Dan.

And after dinner—at which Dudley did not join them—they parted, and went to their cabins.

The only thing Dan took off was his jacket. He had an idea that Dudley Graham, having what he wanted, might be tempted to try quick measures under cover of darkness.

The knowledge that in a few hours the news of Kenneth Graham's whereabouts would reach his father, if it had not done so already, would drive him to extremes.

"I'll have to find a substitute to lie in this little bed," said Dan, disarranging the blankets.

He picked up the Japanese rug from the floor, and rolled it up, grinning the while. Then he wrapped a pyjama jacket round it artistically, and placed it under the sheets. It was very dark in the bunk. A sponge, half-covered by the counterpane, did duty for a head, and Dan, drawing back, surveyed his handiwork with pride.

"Wish you luck!" he said to the figure under the clothes. "You're Kenneth Graham, son of the millionaire, an' you're used to a soft bed an' white sheets, so lie there an' take your chance."

Dan turned the light out, and sat waiting patiently. The wash of the seas on the outside of the vessel made a soothing lullaby, and Dan, secure that he had at last nothing to lose, now that he had quitted the dangerous bunk, and had the chart of the treasure inside his vest, felt very sleepy.

Dan had had little rest lately, and very soon drowsiness overcame him, and he dozed into unconsciousness.

He awoke with a slight start. How long he had been asleep he did not know; but a glance at the porthole showed him that dawn was beginning to filter through the blackness of night. It was still dark.

A gentle creaking in the bulkhead, so faint as to be hardly audible, aroused the danger-signal in his brain.

His eyes, trained to the gloom, were fixed on the matchboarding that lined the back of the bunk over the clothes hooks.

Slowly and quietly the trapdoor he had seen the night before opened out.

The well-shaped, muscular brown hand was thrust through, as before. But it was less innocent this time. Its wiry fingers gripped the haft of a long, dull steel knife.

The little finger was turned downwards, and softly as the touch of a woman it traced the outline of the bundle under the clothes, till it stopped over the place where the sleeper's breast should be.

Slowly the hand was raised, higher, and yet a little higher. Then the blade descended like lightning, and buried itself in the Japanese rug.

Springing forward like a panther, Dan grasped the wrist with all his force and clung to it.

"Buck!" he yelled. "Buck!"

(For the concluding chapters of this great adventure yarn, chums, see next Saturday's MAGNET.)

THE FORM-MASTER'S FAVOURITE!

(Continued from page 24.)

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd streamed back to the quad, howling with laughter. Hacker, shut up in his study, heard the sound of hilarity. Only a deaf man could have failed to hear—and he would have had to be very deaf! Perhaps Hacker enjoyed that sound of boyish merriment. But he did not look as if he did!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Too Late!

"NO!"

"Look here, Wharton—"
"Oh, get out!"

Eric Wilmot, coming up the Remove passage from the landing, heard that exchange of words, at the doorway of Study No. 1.

Herbert Vernon-Smith was standing in the doorway of the study, with a scowl on his face. Wharton evidently, was within. The captain of the Remove, in fact, was seated at the study table, going over the list of men for the Rookwood match, now near at hand. Smithy had interrupted him—and was getting the reception he might have expected from the skipper he had let down.

"Cut it out, Smithy!" came Wharton's voice curtly. "You've let us down once, and you're not having a chance of doing it again."

"I'll stick to games like glue—"

"Unless you happen to have an appointment with Pon & Co. to play billiards somewhere!" said Wharton sarcastically. "Don't talk rot!"

"You've got to make up a team somehow," said the Bounder sullenly. "You're not still thinking of that greasy toad Wilmot, I suppose?"

"Hardly!"

"Nugent's no good for the Rookwood game, and you know it as well as I do!"

"He won't conk out through smoking cigarettes just before the game, anyhow. You might!"

"Oh, go and bag a licking from Rookwood if you like!" snarled the Bounder. "I'll come and watch them score five or six to nil!"

"Do!" said Harry. "It will do you more good than frowning about with smokes. Anyhow, you're out of the team, and you stay out! Clear off, and leave me to work it out; you've made it harder for me."

"I'm willing—"

"Well, I'm not! For goodness' sake, give a fellow a rest!"

The Bounder, with a black brow, swung away from the study and tramped up the passage, Eric Wilmot glancing after him as he went; then the new junior, in the study doorway, looked in.

Wharton sat at the table, with a wrinkled brow over his football list.

He wanted, if he could, to take a winning team over to Rookwood, and it was a worry on his mind that the best man in the eleven had let him down. The Bounder had failed him, and the brief hope he had entertained that Wilmot might prove to be the right man in the right place had failed him also. It was Nugent or nobody, and, keen as he was to play his best chum, he was afflicted with doubts.

He rose from the table and put the list in his pocket, and as he did so became aware of the new junior in the doorway.

His face hardened. Since the interrupted fight in the Rag the two had not exchanged a word. Wilmot was seldom in the study, and when he was there a freezing silence reigned. The feeling on Wharton's side was aversion and contempt; on Wilmot's it seemed to be disdainful indifference.

But there was a change in Wilmot's look at the moment. He opened his lips to speak, but closed them again uncertainly, and Wharton came towards the door. Wilmot stepped in.

"I'd like to speak a word," he said.

Wharton halted impatiently.

"What do you want? You're barred in this study, and you know it! Get it off your chest if you've got anything to say, and cut it short!"

"I treated you rottenly the other day," muttered Wilmot.

"Has that just occurred to you?"

"No," said Wilmot quietly; "I knew it at the time. But if you'd known how much I wanted to get out of gates that afternoon, I think you might make allowances. I had a particular reason, though I can't tell you what it was—"

"I don't want to know."

"Leave it at that. I had a row with you afterwards, but you needn't worry about that. You had the best of it, and I was very nearly done when Wingate butted in and stopped us—"

"Well?"

Wharton rapped out the curt word impatiently. Wilmot coloured. He had rejected every friendly advance, and he could hardly wonder that the captain of the Remove was fed-up with him, and only wanted to keep shut of him. Now that he seemed to be changing his tactics he met with no encouragement whatever. But he went on quietly:

"I've said I was sorry for that trick I played you—"

"No need to say so again."

"I'd like to make up for it if I could."

"What rot!"

"You don't make it easy for a fellow," said Wilmot. "But, look here, you're in a difficulty over the football."

"Do you take enough interest in the game to have noticed that?" asked the captain of the Remove sarcastically. "Don't tell me you care a brass button about it. I shouldn't believe you."

"From what I hear, Vernon-Smith was your best winger, and he's let you down—"

"What about it?"

"You want a man in his place," said Wilmot. "Any use my offering?"

Wharton stared at him.

"You?"

"Yes... I don't know what Vernon-Smith is like when he's good; he's put up rotten football ever since I've been here. But I think I'm as good as he ever was. I won't ask you to take my word for it, but if you care to put me in a pick-up game I'll let you see for yourself. I never meant to play Soccer here—I was going to chuck that, along with everything else—but it's not long since I was playing, and I was considered pretty good."

Wharton looked at him.

"Then it's true what Bunter says—that he's seen you playing Soccer, and seen you bag goals against a good team?"

"Yes, that's true."

"Then I was on the right track, after all?"

Wilmot smiled faintly.

"Yes," he answered. "I'll prove it if you like. And if you want me I'll fill that place in the team for the Rookwood game."

"And you think I'd trust you?" said the captain of the Remove contemptuously. "I don't know whether you mean what you say, or whether you're pulling my leg again—but I know I wouldn't trust you an inch. You've made use of me once; but once bitten is twice shy! Is that all you've got to say?"

"Yes," said Wilmot in a low voice, "that's all."

"Then I'll clear."

Harry Wharton walked out of the study; Wilmot was left standing with burning cheeks.

THE END.

(The final yarn in this grand series, featuring Eric Wilmot, is entitled: "THE REMOVE'S RECRUIT!" Be sure to read it, chums. And on no account forget February 15th—the date of our BUMPER FREE GIFT ISSUE of the MAGNET. Make sure of your copy by ordering it NOW!)



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DROPPING IN ON MARS!

Instalment No. 2 of Dicky Nugent's Amazing Serial: "St. Sam's in the Strattersphere!"

"Lumme!" It was Mr. I. Jolliwel Lickham, of the St. Sam's Fourth, who made that exclamation. He had been sitting in an armchair in Professor Potty's steel rocket, reading the newspaper he had brought with him to while away the jerney to the moon, when something made him sit bolt upright with a sudden startled gasp.

"Lumme!" he repeated. "Lickham! Lickham! How many more times am I to tell you not to use common eggpressions like Lumme!" cried Doctor Birchermall wearily. "Let us keep to civilised standards, Lickham, even though we do happen to be a couple of thousand miles off the earth! If you want to eggpress serprize, say 'Grato pip!' or 'Oh, my giddy aunt!'—not 'Lumme!' What's the trouble, anyway?"

"Trubble enuff, sir, I can give you my word!" whimpered Mr. Lickham. "I've just remembered that the new moon's only two days old! Do you realise what that means, sir? It means that there will hardly be enuff of it for us to see—let alone land on!"

Doctor Birchermall whistled.

"Few! I never thought of that!" he gasped. "Lemme see!"

He darted across to the winder of Professor Potty's rocket, where Jolly and Merry and Bright and Fearless and Barrell of the Fourth were gazing out into the strattersphere. One glance was suffisiant. It was only a crescent moon, and a jolly thin crescent moon at that! The Head gave a snort of disgust.

Jack Jolly & Co. looked round.

"Hallo, hallo, sir!" cried Jack Jolly. "What's up?"

"We are—and I jolly well wish we'd stayed down, now!" growled the Head. "It's a new moon, boys! There's hardly anything of it!"

"Oh, grate pip!"

"Half a minnit, sir!" broke in Frank Fearless. "Haven't you always taught us at St. Sam's that the moon is always there, even when there's only a slice of it showing?"

"Probably I have," said the Head, with a rye grin. "But it's one thing to believe that while you're in a class-room at St.

Sam's, and quite another to believe it when you're actually on your way to the moon!"

"Oh, crums! What's going to happen, then, sir, if we don't land on the moon?"

"Presumably we shall go careering on in a straight line till we hit something—and then we shall see stars!" said the Head, with a roguish twinkle in his eyes.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A howl of terror from Mr. Lickham interrupted the juniors' laughter.

"Yarooooo! I want to go back! Let's man the lifeboats!"

"Unforchunitly, my dear Lickham, we omitted to bring any! However, we can throw you out, if you like, and see what happens to you!"

"Woocooop! Leggo, bust you!" shrieked Mr. Lickham, as the Head jokingly reached forward.

"I'm not going floating about in the strattersphere without visible means of support, to please you or anyone else! I won't stand!"

"Then sit down, old bean!" grinned the Head, putting the Fourth Form master gently but firmly back into his seat. "And talking about visible means of support reminds me—we haven't had supper yet! Barrell!"

"Ye-es, sir!" stammered Tubby Barrell, who was wobbling like a jelly with fright.

"Just grill a few, sossidges and make some coffy, will you? Then we'll all sit down and have supper."

"Yes, sir," said Tubby, brightening up. "But I'm afraid we'll have to have the coffy black. We've run right out of milk."

The Head frowned for a moment. Then he crossed over to the winder and chuckled.

"Bless my sole! It couldn't have happened at a better time!" he eggclaimed. "Give me a jug, somebody!"

Tubby Barrell handed Doctor Birchermall a jug, and the Head cautiously opened the winder and held the jug out into

space. When he drew it back a moment later the juniors were serprized to see that it was full of milk!

"What the thump—they ejaculated.

"Serprized, boys, eh?" larfed the Head, as he deposited the jug on the table. "There's no need to be, though, really, you know. As it happens, you see, we are at present passing through the Milky Way. So the obvious thing to do, as we had run short of milk, was to dip the jug and help ourselves!"

"Grate pip!"

"Now get on with those sosses, Barrell!" ordered Doctor Birchermall.

Everybody cheered up wonderfully under the warming inflewance of supper, and by the time the last crum had vanished, even Mr. Lickham was looking quite happy. But the Head soon reminded him of his troubles again, when he spoke to Tubby.

"Why, Barrell," the Head said, "you look a new man after your feed. Your fizz is beaming like a full moon!"

"Groooo!" groaned Mr. Lickham. "That reminds me again that there's only a new moon at present! Let's have a look and see if we're near it by this time!"

He led the way to the winder. When he looked out, a hollow moan escaped his lips.

"I knew it!" he cried. "We're not going to land on the moon at all! We're just passing through it!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Doctor Birchermall and the boys could see for themselves that what Mr. Lickham had said was only too true. In spite of what the text-books at St. Sam's said about it, the crescent moon was only a crescent, and nothing more—and there wasn't the slightest hoop of landing on it!

"That shows how much reliance you can place in dashed astronomers!" remarked the Head bitterly, as they saw the moon gradually reseeded from them. "I'll jolly well tell 'em what I think of 'em when we get back."

"When?" groaned Mr. Lickham. "You mean 'if' don't you, sir?"

"Well, anyway, even if it comes to the worst, I eggpect we shall land on one of the hevvenly bodies

going to happen if we land on a hevvenly body from which we can't return?"

"In that case, I suppose the only thing to do will be to stay there," grinned the Head. "I dare say we shall find plenty to amuse us. After all, it will be rather fun, eggploring a new planet for the rest of our lives, won't it?"

"No, it won't!" roared Mr. Lickham. "If you imagine I want to spend the rest of my days hiking round a blessed star, you've made a jolly big mistake, I can tell you!"

"Land ho!" sang out Frank Fearless at that moment, happily interrupting an argewment that looked like developing on rather heated lines.

All eyes were directed out of the winder again, and there was a mormox of interest from the adventurers as they saw that they were approaching a big planet.

"Bless my sole!" eggclaimed Doctor Birchermall. "That's Mars!"

"Isn't that the planet that's supposed to be inhabited, sir?" asked Merry.

The Head nodded.

"Quite right, Merry. It is said that those lines which you can see clearly are canals. We shall see whether that idea holds water or not."

"My hat!" cried Mr. Lickham. "We're rushing towards it at a dickens or a speed now! I suppose we're being drawn down on to the surfs of the planet by magnetick force, sir?"

"Eggactly. Our position is one of grate gravity," said the Head. "Strap on your crash helmets and cushioned suits, lads! It won't be long now before we land!"

(What is going to happen to our old pals now? For the answer, read the full-of-laughs instalment of "St. Sam's in the Strattersphere" in the next issue of the Herald.)

round the quad and through the Cloisters. Then it came back to the House, glided up the stairs again, and returned to the Remove passage. And, believe it or not, it finished up by turning into Study No. 7!

I plucked up courage and followed it in before it could shut the door! Then it threw back its hood and revealed to my astonished gaze the classic features of dear old Alonzo Todd!

"What the merry dickens—" I gasped.

"Good-evening, my dear Brown!" beamed Lonzy.

"What's the idea of the disguise?" I asked in amazement.

"Disguise, my dear Brown? I assure you I had no intention of disguising myself! Are you referring, perchance, to my unorthodox habiliments?"

"Just that!" I nodded. "What's the idea of 'em, Lonzy?"

Alonzo Toda beamed.

"I can easily explain that, my dear Brown, and I hasten with pleasure to do so. You see, I am at present suffering from a form of dyspepsia which requires that I should take a walk after tea each day."

"Well?"

"But the doctor has forbidden me, on account of a cold from which I am also suffering, to go out of doors after dark unless I am well wrapped up!"

Don't worry any more about the Hooded Horror of the School House, you kids! I've tracked it to its lair and found out all about it, and you can take my word for it, there's nothing to be scared of!

It needed a bit of nerve to follow it up, I don't mind admitting! As those who've seen it know, it's a pretty weird sight in a wintry dusk.

There's a hood over its head and a wrap round its mouth. A long, nondescript garment hangs over its body and flaps around its feet. It shuffles along with a spook-like step—down the Remove stairs, through Big Hall, then out into the shadowy quad. Smoke can be seen coming away from it in thin wisps at times!

But I overcame my fears and followed it. I wanted to find out its secret.

After leaving the School House, it went for a walk

around the quad and through the Cloisters. Then it came back to the House, glided up the stairs again, and returned to the Remove passage. And, believe it or not, it finished up by turning into Study No. 7!

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The GREYFRIARS HERALD

No. 174. EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON. February 1st, 1936.



COKER SHOULD WEAR A LABEL!

Declares BOB CHERRY

I've always said that Coker is a menace to himself as well as to the general public, and what happened this week proves it beyond all doubt.

It was Sam's escape from captivity that did it. Sam is a gorilla, and one of the stars of Barley & Bainham's circus, which has been pitched on Courtfield Common all the week. When the news went forth that Sam had escaped, there was a bit of a panic in the district, believe me!

They said the tricks that Sam did in the ring would be nothing compared with the tricks he'd get up to with the first human being he had in his clutches. So everybody was jolly anxious to see Sam safely under lock and key again, and armed searchers started scouring the countryside to see if they could find him.

Mr. Prout headed one party from Greyfriars. Mr. Prout carried his celebrated Winchester repeater, and the seniors with him were armed with rifles belonging to the school cadet corps.

Coker headed another party—consisting of himself only! Even Potter and Greene weren't risking an afternoon with Coker while he was carrying a loaded rifle!

Mr. Prout's party spent about two hours before they got on the track of anything, but at the end of that time their patience was rewarded, and they discovered unmistakable signs that a big biped had been treading down the undergrowth and crashing through the bushes in Friardale Woods. Of course, they followed the trail without waste of time.

It wasn't long before they caught up with their quarry. There he was, crouching behind a tree, just as though he was waiting to fall on some victim and rend him limb from limb! Mr. Prout made a sign for silence.

"Quiet, boys!" he said, as he raised his rifle. "The creature is obviously in wait for somebody. There is no alternative but to kill him."

"Kill him?"

"Yes, leave it to me!"

The seniors nodded and examined their own guns—just in case Prout missed.

"Ugly-looking brute, what?" Blundell murmured.

"What-ho! Something uncannily human about him, though," said Tomlinson major. "Reminds me of someone I know—can't quite think who."

Potter screwed his eyes up and examined the beast more closely. Then he jumped.

"Half a minute, sir—"

"Please do not talk, Potter, while I am taking aim!" grunted Mr. Prout.

"Yes, but half a minute, sir! Are you sure it's the gorilla?"

Mr. Prout lowered his gun and examined his target again.

"Why, undoubtedly it is!" he boomed. "The figure and the physiognomy are most certainly those of a gorilla, Potter. What do you imagine it to be?"

Potter hesitated.

"I'm not sure, of course, sir. It's very much like a gorilla, I know. But it looks a lot like Coker, too!"

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Prout. "Surely it cannot be—"

"Let's go a little closer and see," suggested Blundell.

The entire party moved forward, and sure enough when they examined the crouching figure closely they found that it was none other than Coker!

Needless to say, the thought that he had almost shot one of his own pupils gave Mr. Prout quite a shock. He returned to Greyfriars without troubling any more about Sam—which was just as well, since it afterwards turned out that circus hands had trapped the missing animal earlier in the afternoon!

Well, that's all, lads. But it does give you an idea of the danger Coker's continually running, doesn't it? To me, it seems idiotic that he should go about like an ordinary human being when he's in such dire danger all the time of being mistaken for an escaping gorilla. He's a giddy danger to the public and a danger to himself!

Why shouldn't he be made to wear a label? Either that or a mask!

THE TRUTH ABOUT the HOODED HORROR

By TOM BROWN



Don't worry any more about the Hooded Horror of the School House, you kids! I've tracked it to its lair and found out all about it, and you can take my word for it, there's nothing to be scared of!

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(Continued from previous column.)

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(What is going to happen to our old pals now? For the answer, read the full-of-laughs instalment of "St. Sam's in the Strattersphere" in the next issue of the Herald.)

WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?



Mr. Prout looked very proud when he returned from a shooting expedition, having brought down a hare. Skinner, who watched the feat, spread the story that "Prouty" had, in reality, been aiming at a pheasant. When he heard it, Mr. Prout's ears burned. Why? That was the "burning" question!



Parts of Greyfriars are very old, having been built by the monks themselves in the twelfth century. It is said that the ghost of the last abbot still walks in the cloisters—and it is a fact that nervous fags won't go near the spot after dark! Bunter refuses to go "cloister" it, either!



Though Loder and Walker of the Sixth are "pals," there is no love lost between them. When Walker lost money gambling at the Cross Keys, Loder said he should have been more careful. When Loder backed a "loser," Walker chuckled. A pair of "drop of water from a pond" sportsmen—quite different to Wingate!

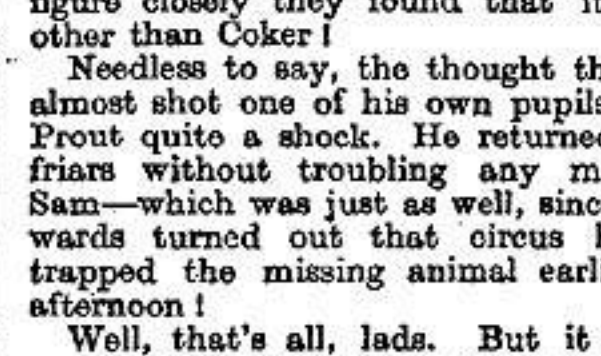


A microscope presented to him by his uncle—so fascinated Alonzo Todd that he was late for class. Questioned as to why he had forgotten it was time for the study of Roman life, Lonzy said he had been studying minute life in a drop of water from a pond! Mr. Wharton & Co. went "up in the air" with excitement!

GREYFRIARS FACTS WHILE YOU WAIT!



Removites were keenly interested when Lord Conway, brother of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of St. Jim's, flew over in his new monoplane. Conway dropped a message "hot" from Tom Merry at St. Jim's—an invitation to a footer fixture. Harry Wharton & Co. went "up in the air" with excitement!



Billy Bunter says better menus are needed at Greyfriars. Bunter's idea is to turn the dining-hall into a non-stop snack counter, catering day and night! Peter Todd says Bunter would like to live at the meal table. His sole supporter in his "campaign" is his equally greedy young brother, Sammy!