

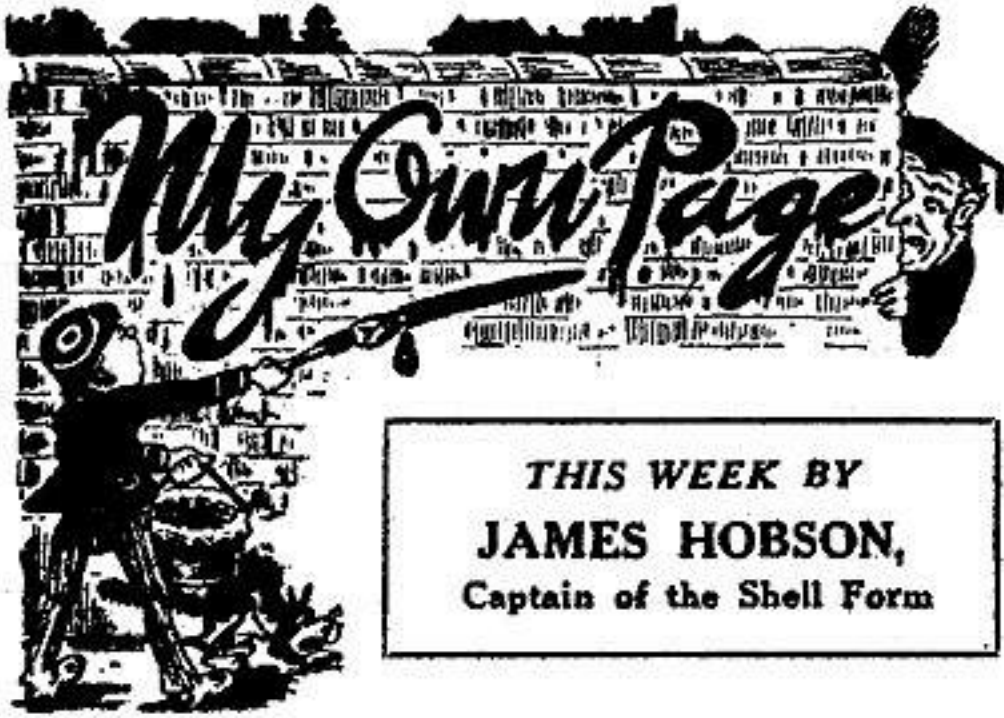
"THE MYSTERY MAN OF GREYFRIARS!" GREAT FRANK RICHARDS' YARN INSIDE

The Magnet ^{2^D}

*Billy Bunter's
Own Paper*



HOLDING THE FORT!



THIS WEEK BY
JAMES HOBSON,
 Captain of the Shell Form

WELL, I mean, I'm not much good at writing, you know. I don't do an awful lot of it, you know—except in class, you know, and then it's only exercises. Matter of fact, it beats me how fellows think out stories and things, you know, because I never know what to write about. I wish some of you chaps who are reading this could give a fellow a hand to write it.

The Acid Drop says that the only way to get anything into my head is by a surgical operation. The Acid Drop is our beak—Hacker, you know. He's a sarcastic brute. (I don't think masters read the MAGNET, do they?) He caught me carving my name on a desk the other day, and what do you think he did?

Sent for an old plank from Gosling's woodshed and told me to stay in after class till I'd carved my name on it ten times! Gosh, it took hours! I thought I'd starve, you know, grinding away at that old plank all through dinner. Of course, I suppose I oughtn't to have carved my name on the desk, but you know how it is—if you see a decent bit of wood and there's a knife in your pocket—well, I mean, you know how it is.

I can tell you I simply hated shifting out of the Upper Fourth into the Shell. Now old Capper was all right. He's a bit of an ass, but he's not a sarcastic brute like Hacker. I'd rather have Quelch than Hacker, and that's saying a lot. I'll be glad to get into the Fifth with Prout.

Well, I don't know what else to write about. The Editor's letter says: "Tell us something about yourself and your work as Skipper of the Shell, or you can write a story, or a poem, or anything you please." Yes, but the worst of it is, I can't! I'm not that sort of fellow, you know. I think I'm better at games than literary work.

MUSIC HATH CHARMS

I'll tell you about old Claude. He's a genius, you know—my pal, Claude Hoskins, I mean. He can write music. How on earth anyone can write music, which looks like a lot of leggy insects crawling out of tramlines, I can't imagine. It must be a fearful sweat, but old Claude can do it.

He can play it, too. Of course, I haven't a musical ear, you know—I mean, I don't know B flat from J minor, and music always sounds the same to me, especially old Claude's. But I know it's good stuff because he says so himself—and he ought to know. Fellows say his Fantasia in F sharp minor is like a cat's concert round the chimney-pots, but—well, I mean, old Claude wouldn't write it unless it were good. I admit it sounds to me like cats, but then music always does, so that doesn't count.

Anyway, people think a lot of Beethoven and Mozart, and fellows of their kind, so old Claude will be famous one day and have statues put up to him, and then I shall tell people: "Yes, he was my pal at the old school!" That'll make 'em stare.

THE FARMER'S BOY

That's what I am really, you know—a farmer's boy. Of course, they would call my pater "a gentleman farmer" because he lives in a big old house and is the squire and all that, but really, you know, we have to depend a good deal on the estate farm to

pay our way. I mean, what with rates and taxes and all that, we seem to have a big estate and no money to run it on. So we had to turn part of it into a farm, and now we've got about six hundred Berkshire pigs, and some of 'em win prizes, too, so you can guess they're pretty good.

I think I shall like farming. I'm fond of horses and dogs and things like that, you know, and I can deal with cows and bulls and so on. And that reminds me—there is a yarn I can tell you about last Vac. My pater had bought a young bull. We call him the Devonshire Devil because he's a red Devon bull—a really fine beast—but he's a killer if there ever was one. I thought I could manage him, but he nearly had me—I had to shin up a tree. He's the wickedest and worst-tempered bull I've ever struck, and my pater says the same. He's kept in a paddock by himself, and no one can go near him.

Well, one morning there was a fearful rumpus on the farm. My pater's head cowman has a little boy three years old, and this kid had got into the paddock. My pater rushed indoors to get a gun, while two of the men tried to attract the bull's attention. But, bless you, that kid didn't give 'em the chance. He made a bee-line for the bull to stroke it—a tiny little Arab toddling along towards that devil!

And now comes the funny part. Believe me, that bull was tickled to death. He let the kid lead him by the nose and fool about with his tail, and he was as pleased as a dog with a bone. There's no telling what any animal will do next.

Ever since then, whenever my pater wants the bull to be led away somewhere, he sends for this kid to lead it, while a dozen strong men shin up convenient trees. You see some jolly funny things on a farm, you know.

MEET MARIGOLD

And that reminds me of Marigold. She's a mare, you know, and a grand horse; but she has the worst sense of humour you could possibly imagine. We hitch her to the game-cart to take our light produce to the railway station, and I like to drive when I'm at home because it's good fun. Well, outside the station is a fruit-barrow, piled with apples, etc., and I've never known Marigold to pass it without knocking it over—just for the pleasure of seeing the apples scatter all over the cobbles.

Once we were held up by traffic lights just behind an open touring car with two very prim ladies in it. Marigold promptly bent over and lifted off their hats and dropped them in the road. The screech they set up! Marigold is always playing asinine tricks like that—yet she's as docile and friendly a beast as you could find anywhere.

PASSIONATE POEM

Well, that's funny. I was so interested in my home that I seem to have written quite a lot already. I suppose I might as well try a poem. I'm not good at it, you know, because I can't see any sense in poetry, if you get my meaning; but still, why shouldn't I have a shot? It can't be worse than some of the stuff we get in Literature Class—Milton and all that muck, you know. The rummy thing is that poets get paid for writing the tosh. Some chaps earn their money easily—what?



(Drawing by Skinner.)

THE TOREADOR!

Here's a health unto old Hacker,
 Who never has mercy on a slacker;
 He made me carve my name ten times on
 a plank
 Until exhausted back I sank.

His temper's hot and peppered,
 He springs at a chap like a leopard,
 But it is too painful to dwell
 On the awful time he gives us in the
 Shell.

We all like Greyfriars very much
 As a school it is the best of the bunch;
 It's lots better than Harrow or Eton—
 In fact, it can't be beaten.

I skipper the Middle School XI,
 And the job is anything but heaven
 I'm fond of playing footer, you bet!
 So tiddly-iddly-iddly-iddly-pet!

I couldn't think of anything to put in the last line, but otherwise that's not bad, is it? It took me a long time to do, so perhaps poets really earn their money, after all. I'd rather be a farmer, though—or even a pork-butcher, for that matter.

I really don't think you'll find the name of James Hobson in Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey. (I'm sure we shan't.—Ed.)

Well, anyway, my page is finished. Thank goodness for that!



J. Hobson.

JAMES HOBSON

SHELL
 FORM

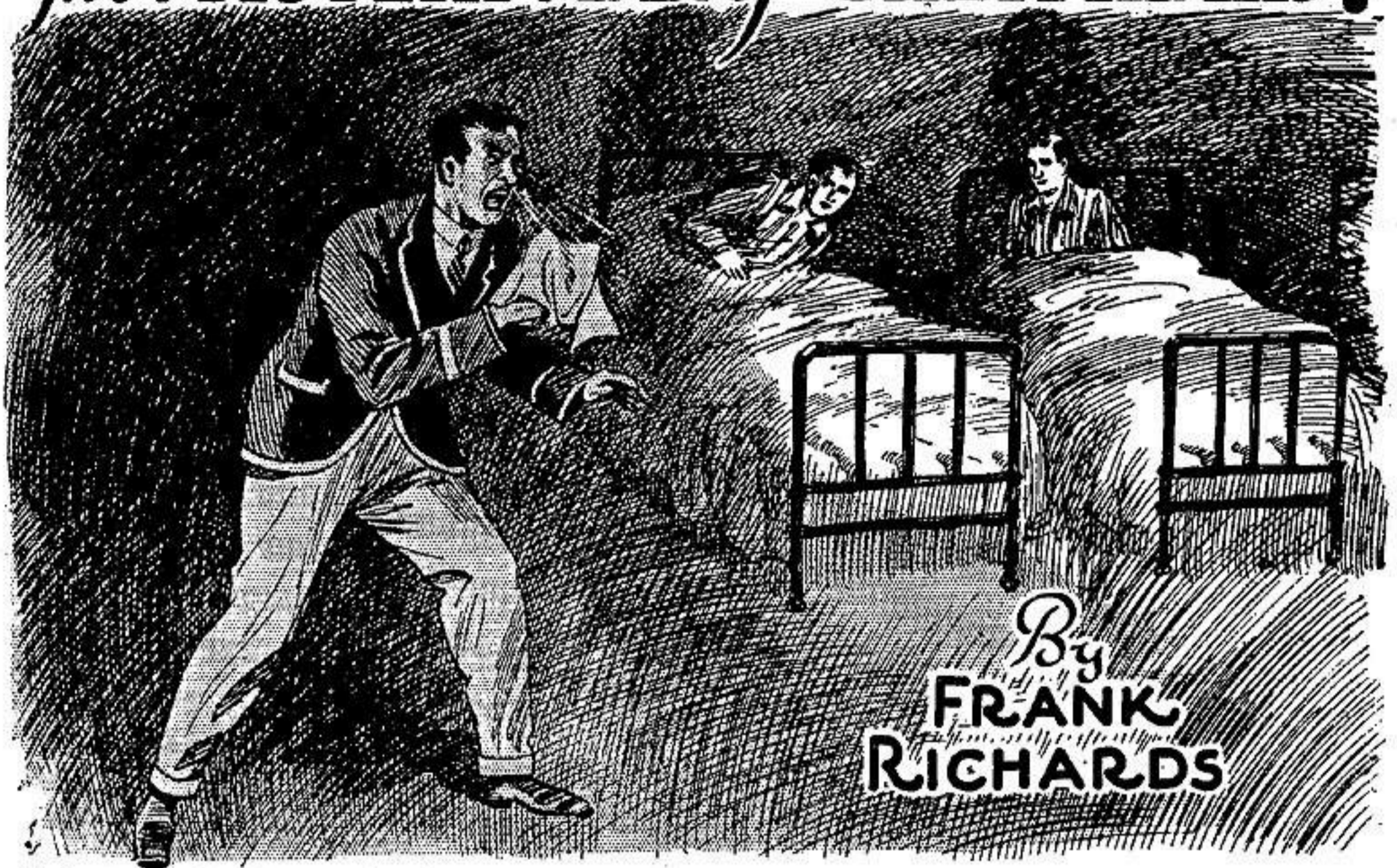
STUDY
 No. 5

James Hobson is Captain of the Shell Form and Middle School Football XI. In all that makes for manliness, good nature, and honesty, Hobby is an ideal skipper. In anything requiring brains, he's hopeless. He's an outdoor man, pure and simple—and, indeed, he is pure and simple. Everyone likes Hobby because he is the most open, honest, simple-hearted, unassuming, guileless fellow you could find. Claude Hoskins, his study-mate, is to him a musical genius of the first water, though all Greyfriars could tell him that Hoskins is merely an ass. When he leaves school, Hobby is booked for an open-air life as a gentleman-farmer on his own estate, and nobody is better fitted for it. He comes of the real old country gentleman type—with his dogs and his gun and his acres wide, but not much troubled with brains.

(Cartoon by HAROLD SKINNER.)

Prowling about after lights out in the hope of catching someone breaking a school rule, is one of Gerald Loder's pet habits. This week, however, he gets paid in full for his trouble! Worse still, he's got so many enemies—he just can't pick out

The MYSTERY MAN of GREYFRIARS!



By
**FRANK
RICHARDS**

Loder gurgled and sneezed as he staggered into the Remove dormitory in a descending cloud of mixed pepper and mustard. "Atehooh! Choo! Atishoo! Ugh!" The Removites sat up in bed, chortling.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Message On The Dart!

TAP!
Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, gave a little start, and glanced round. He was startled.

It was a cold and frosty morning at Greyfriars School. Any minute now the bell was due to ring for class.

But if the clang of the bell reached Smithy's ears, he was not going into the Form-room with the rest of the Remove. None of the Remove had seen Smithy that morning, and he had seen none of them. Smithy was locked in the punishment-room, high up in a remote corner of the ancient pile of Greyfriars.

When Smithy left that silent and remote apartment, it would not be to go into the Form-room. It would be to walk to the Head's study, in charge of his Form-master, Mr. Quelch, there to hear his sentence of expulsion from the school. It was for that that the Bounder of Greyfriars was waiting.

Trotter, the page, had brought him his breakfast in the punishment-room. Then the door had been locked on him again. Since then, he had been alone—pacing and pacing to and fro in the narrow confines of punny, the blackest of black scowls on his face.

His thoughts were black and bitter enough.

But that sudden and unexpected tap roused him from his dark and bitter reflections. It came from the window.

A tap at the door would have surprised him. All the Remove knew that he was locked up in punny, waiting for the sack. But he did not expect any

fellow to make an attempt to speak to him there. It was difficult, almost impossible, for any fellow to reach the punishment-room unseen to speak a word to him through the door.

Neither did he expect any fellow to want to do so, unless it was his chum, Tom Redwing. Redwing, perhaps, would have given him a word, before he went, had it been possible. But he had not come—if he had thought of it, he had not found it possible.

But if a tap at the door would have

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surprised him, a tap at the window was amazing!

That window was high up, and overlooked a blank wall. A cat could not have climbed to it.

Smithy stared at the little window. It was barred inside. So thick was the ancient wall that the window could not be reached by an arm stretched through the bars. Nothing was to be seen but a patch of steely wintry sky at the window.

Tap!

The startling sound came again as he stared. Something—he could not see what—had struck the glass on the out-

side, and fallen, too swiftly for him to discern what it was.

"Reddy!" muttered the Bounder.

Someone outside and far below had tossed something up to the window that had tapped on the glass. Obviously it was done to draw his attention; and he could guess that it was Tom Redwing who was below. No other fellow in the Remove, he reflected bitterly, was likely to be wasting a thought on him.

He stepped to the little window, as close to the bars as he could press. But it was impossible to see anything below. All that he could see was a patch of sky and the kitchen gardens in the distance. No one near the building could possibly come within range of his vision.

Tap!

Crack!

There were four panes in the little window. One of them cracked across at a harder tap from without. A fragment of broken glass fell and tinkled within.

"By gum!" breathed Vernon-Smith, his eyes gleaming.

He saw now what had struck the glass, catching a glimpse of it as it fell. It was a dart.

The fellow below was whizzing darts at the window with a sure hand. It was not easy to hit such a target at such a height.

But it was possible to a skilful dart-thrower. Smithy could not doubt now that it was Redwing. He had a dart-board in his study in the Remove, which Tom Redwing shared. Evidently Tom wanted to communicate

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with him, and had thought of the darts as a method.

Tap! Crack!

The cracked pane fell in under another knock, and this time the dart dropped just inside, falling amid a shower of glass splinters.

The winter wind blew in through the opening. And, a few moments later, a dart flew in, passing through the orifice in the broken pane, and dropping within easy reach of the Bounder stretching his arm through the bars.

"By gum!" repeated Smithy.

Round the shaft of the last dart was a paper, tightly tied on with thin twine!

Smithy did not need telling what it was. It was a note from his unseen chum below. Had Redwing shouted to him, his voice would have reached other ears sooner than Smithy's. But the flying dart had brought in the message—whatever it was!

Eagerly, the Bounder reached through the bars and grasped it. He could not imagine what his chum had to tell him, unless it was just a message of sympathy in his sore strait. There was no hope or help for the junior in the punishment-room; his chum could not help him. But a friendly word was something.

The Bounder cut the twine with his penknife and unrolled the paper from the dart. He read it eagerly.

It was written in Tom Redwing's hand. And what was written there caused the Bounder to catch his breath, and made his heart beat with at least a faint hope.

"Smithy, old man, if you never did it, and I believe you never did, there's a chance. I've telegraphed to your father. From what I hear, they're going to send you home, while we're in class, with a prefect in charge, with a letter to your father. But if you can stick it out, somehow, till your father gets here, there may be a chance. He's got my telegram before this, and you can bet he will come at once. It may help you; if you can stick it out somehow so that you won't be sent away before Mr. Vernon-Smith reaches Greyfriars.

"TOM REDWING."

The Bounder's eyes danced.

Again and again he had thought of his father as he paced and paced restlessly in the punishment-room.

His father was not to know that he had been expelled until he reached home in charge of a prefect. What was done could not and would not be undone.

But if his father came in time—before the sentence was pronounced—before the gates of Greyfriars closed on him—

What seemed certain beyond doubt to his Form-master and headmaster would not seem so certain to his father. His father would take his word. He would leave no stone unturned to get justice for his son. It was Smithy's one and only chance; and again and again he had thought of it; hopelessly, for he could send no message. Tom Redwing had thought of it, too—and done it!

"Oh, what a pal!" breathed the Bounder.

If he still had a chance, this was it! His father, when he got that telegram, would come as fast as a fast car could carry him. Smithy knew that. If he was still in the school, he might yet pull through—if only he was still at Greyfriars when Samuel Vernon-Smith arrived. Somehow, anyhow, he had to

prevent them from sending him away before his father came!

He took a pencil from his pocket, and scribbled on the back of the paper.

"Thanks, old man! You bet I'll stick it out till the pater blows in!"

He tied the paper on the dart again, snapped the head from the dart in case it should drop on the waiting head below, and tossed it from the broken pane.

Redwing had his answer. Redwing had done all he could, and the rest was up to the Bounder. As soon as the bell had rung for class, they would come for him. But it would be two hours, at least, before Mr. Vernon-Smith could reach the school. Somehow, anyhow, he was going to stick it out—and, with gleaming eyes, the imprisoned Bounder began to consider ways and means.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Punched Prefect!

"Oh what a surprise!

Two lovely black eyes!"

SKINNER of the Remove chanted that ancient refrain. But he was careful not to let it reach the ears of Gerald Loder of the Sixth Form.

Loder of the Sixth—as the happy possessor of "two lovely black eyes"—would not have been pleased.

Some of the Remove fellows grinned. But most of them were looking serious. A Remove man was to be expelled that morning on account of those two lovely black eyes, which was by no means a grinning matter.

The bell was ringing for class, and the Remove fellows heading for the House, when Loder was seen at his study window.

Loder was scowling out into the bright, frosty morning—his scowl all the blacker on account of those black eyes.

Fellows, naturally, looked at him when he was noticed there.

Black eyes were very uncommon at Greyfriars School. Sometimes one might be bagged by accident, but a single black eye was rare! Two together were almost, if not quite, unknown. Loder had two—and each of them was, as Bob Cherry remarked, a real corker!

Both eyes were absolutely black. There was a red swelling on the nose also! Obviously, Loder had stopped a most terrific jolt with his face. Whoever had hit Gerald Loder had, so to speak, gone all out!

Only a few fellows had glimpsed Loder that morning, so far. Now quite a number saw him—and they saw him with interest.

"I say, you fellows, Smithy must have punched Loder jolly hard!" grinned Billy Bunter. "Both eyes black—and his nose red—and he's looking fearfully blue!"

"Penny plain, twopence coloured!" remarked Skinner.

"He, he, he!"

"Tain't a laughing matter for Loder!" remarked Lord Mauleverer mildly.

"Nor for poor old Smithy!" said Skinner. "Still, Smithy will be distinguished as the only fellow who was ever bunked for giving a prefect two black eyes."

Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove, fixed his eyes very curiously on the face at the window. Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, Frank Nugent, and

Hurree Singh, regarded Loder of the Sixth with equal curiosity.

The Famous Five did not doubt, any more than the other fellows, that Smithy had knocked out Loder in the dark the night before—a feat for which he was going to be sacked. But now that they saw Loder, they wondered.

Redwing had told them, and believed, or tried hard to believe, that he was sure Smithy hadn't done it. He declared that no junior schoolboy could have dealt so terrific a blow.

Now the Famous Five could not help wondering whether, by some possibility, Redwing might be right. For the force that must have gone into the knock was, at least, very uncommon in a Lower Fourth arm.

"By gum!" said Bob Cherry. "If Smithy did that, he's got a punch I'd rather not sample."

"The punchfulness must have been truly terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Harry Wharton nodded thoughtfully.

"From what Quelch said, when he looked Smithy out of the dormitory, he found Loder knocked out and unconscious," he said. "He was unconscious for some minutes, at least! Could Smithy—"

"Must be a stout lad, if he did!" said Bob.

"Of course, he was pretty desperate, Loder catching him in the Head's study in the middle of the night!" said Frank Nugent slowly. "But—"

"Nobody was there, except Loder and Smithy!" said Johnny Bull. "At least, nobody was seen—"

"Well, Loder couldn't see in the dark," said Harry. "He never saw Smithy, if you come to that. They got Smithy because he was gone down from the dorm at the time. I—I wonder if there's a spot of chance that somebody else was up—"

"Who?" asked Johnny. "Nobody but Smithy would be larking in the Head's study—and we all knew he'd sneaked the key of the study. Nobody could have got into it except Smithy."

"Yes, that does seem to settle it!" agreed Harry. "Redwing thinks that only a senior—and a hefty one at that—could have knocked Loder out with a single jolt! But no senior could have been there. Why should he?"

"Must have been Smithy! He was fearfully startled when Loder grabbed him in the dark, and hit out without thinking—and put all his beef into it."

"Blessed if I feel sure!" said Bob Cherry. "I've always fancied that I had a bigger jolt than Smithy—but I couldn't knock out a Sixth Form man with one punch, I know that."

Loder of the Sixth, scowling from the study, caught sight of the gazing juniors, and scowled more blackly, and turned from the window.

Evidently he did not like those black eyes meeting the general view. He was, in point of fact, a shocking sight.

There was, in the Remove, a good deal of sympathy for Smithy; natural in the case of a fellow who was up for the sack. But, after seeing Loder, the juniors had to admit that a fellow who had done that damage, was no fellow to be allowed to remain at Greyfriars School. Loder of the Sixth was a good deal of a bully, and generally unpopular, but no human face ought ever to have been hit in that sledge-hammer style.

The Remove gathered at the door of their Form-room with one exception. When Mr. Quelch arrived to let his Form in, Tom Redwing was not yet there.

The Remove went in, minus Redwing. Mr. Quelch's eyes glinted, and his brows wrinkled in a deep frown. Already, that morning, Redwing had angered him—Quelch had caught him in his study, just after he had telephoned a telegram to Smithy's father. Now he was late for class, and the Remove master suspected at once that he was seeking to communicate in some way with the prisoner of the punishment-room.

Quelch could feel for the boy's distress at the disaster that had overtaken his chum, but discipline was discipline.

"Wharton!" He addressed his head boy. "Do you know where Redwing is?"

"No, sir!" answered Harry. "He was in the quad ten minutes ago; I haven't seen him since."

"He went up to the studies, sir!" said Peter Todd.

"Oh!" Mr. Quelch's brow cleared. If Redwing had gone to the Remove studies, he had not gone in the direction of the upper corridor leading to the punishment-room. "Are you sure of that, Todd?"

"Yes, sir; I passed him on the Remove landing."

"Very well!" said Mr. Quelch; though he certainly would not have said that it was very well had he been aware that Redwing had gone up to the Remove studies to get a bundle of darts from Study No. 4 for his own purposes.

There was a patter of hurried feet in the passage.

Tom Redwing, flushed and breathless with running, arrived at the door of the Form-room and came panting in.

He was three minutes late. Unpunctuality to the extent of one minute was enough, as a rule, to draw forth the vials of Quelch's wrath. But on this occasion Quelch only signed to the late-comer to go to his place—little guessing whence he had just come.

Glad not to be questioned, Redwing went to his place. Mr. Quelch proceeded to set a Latin passage for translation by his Form. All the juniors knew that he would not be with them for that lesson.

It was no secret that the Bounder was to be dealt with while the school were all in Form, and sent away from Greyfriars before they came out in break. The affair had made sensation enough already, and there was to be no more, if the Head could help it.

"Wharton!"

"Yes, sir!"

"I shall now leave you in charge here," said Mr. Quelch. "I have other matters to attend to for a time."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Quelch left the Form-room, leaving the Remove to get busy with Latin translation under the care of his head boy.

Not a man in the Remove, however, gave a single spot of attention to Latin translation. Excitement was too keen on the subject of the coming expulsion.

"I say, you fellows, it's rather rotten, ain't it?" squeaked Billy Bunter, when the door closed on Quelch.

"Terrifically rotten for poor old Smithy!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Eh? I don't mean that! I mean, sneaking a fellow out of the school while we're in class, in this syrupstigious way!" said the fat Owl. "I'd much rather have an expulsion in Hall, in the old-fashioned way, you know! It's a lot more exciting! Besides, we should get out of class for jolly nearly half an hour."

"You fat villain!" said Peter Todd.

"Oh, really, Toddy——"

"You podgy piffler——" said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Shut up, you frabjous frog!" hooted Johnny Bull.

"Well, that's what I think!" declared Bunter. "Doing it like this is really syrupstigious. Much better have it in Hall, with the whole school, you know, and the Head saying—yarooooooh!"

A Latin grammar, catching Billy Bunter on his fat chin, cut short his views on the subject of Smithy's expulsion quite suddenly!

Bunter roared.

"Beast! Who chucked that book at me?" yelled Bunter.



Vernon-Smith cut the twine with his penknife, and then unrolled the paper from the dart. He read the message eagerly, his eyes gleaming as he did so.

"I did," answered Bob cheerily, "and if you want the inkpot after it, you've only got to go on wagging your fat chin!"

Billy Bunter did not go on wagging his fat chin! He rubbed it, instead.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

No Admittance!

MR. QUELCH rustled up the corridor, with a long key in his hand. He inserted that key in the door of the punishment-room.

Dr. Locke was waiting in his study, Loder of the Sixth was with him.

Mr. Quelch, as the Form-master concerned, had to take the culprit to the Head for judgment and sentence. He had come to do it.

There was no doubt, of course, about the judgment, or the sentence. It was not a matter for inquiry. Vernon-Smith's guilt was, or was supposed to be, perfectly clear and undeniable.

If he was, as he had declared, inno-

cent of the attack on Loder in the dark, his own headstrong proceedings had been his undoing; every known action of the Bounder's pointed to his guilt.

No one supposed for a moment that he was innocent. Even Redwing realised that his belief in the Bounder's innocence was against all the facts, and even against common sense; and, indeed, chiefly due to his distress at the idea of Smithy being kicked out of Greyfriars in disgrace.

Mr. Quelch, certainly, had not the remotest idea on the subject. He was only anxious to get this painful matter over. Many times he had had doubts whether a reckless, headstrong, self-willed fellow like the Bounder, always in some trouble or other, ought to remain at the school. Now the matter was settled, and he was going. And the sooner he was gone, and forgotten, the better in the Remove master's opinion.

He turned the key back in the lock, and pushed. To his surprise, the door of the punishment-room did not open.

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With an annoyed grunt, he pushed again, and yet again. Still the heavy door remained fast.

Quelch's eyes glinted. It was in keeping with the character of the rebel of his Form if he was, in his last hour at Greyfriars, adding to his sins by giving unnecessary and irritating trouble. The Bounder, if he was going, was the fellow to go with his ears up, defiant to the last.

"Vernon-Smith!" rapped Mr. Quelch. "Yes, sir!" came the Bounder's cool voice, through the oak.

"Are you holding this door shut?"

"No, sir!"

"Have you placed your foot against it?"

"No, sir!"

"Then why does it not open?" snapped Mr. Quelch. "Take the door-handle, Vernon-Smith, and pull, while I push; it must somehow be jammed."

"Yes, I think it's jammed, sir!" answered the Bounder, from within. "I'm afraid it wouldn't be any use pulling the door-handle, sir, while there's the back of a chair jammed under it."

"Wha-a-t?" Quelch's eyes, which had been glinting, now fairly blazed. "Vernon-Smith, if you have placed a chair-back under the door-handle, remove it at once!"

No answer.

"Do you hear me, Vernon-Smith?" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"I'm not deaf, sir."

"What?"

"Deaf!"

"Upon my word! Vernon-Smith, I am here to take you to your headmaster, to hear your sentence from Dr. Locke! Admit me instantly."

"Are you in a hurry to get it over, sir?"

"What—what? Yes, certainly."

"I'm not, sir!" explained the Bounder coolly. "I'd rather leave it till a bit later in the morning, if it's all the same to you."

"I order you to unfasten this door at once, Vernon-Smith! This impertinence will serve no purpose."

The Bounder did not answer that. He hoped, at least, that that "impertinence" would serve some purpose. He was not going to leave, if he could help it, till his father had had time to reach the school.

Outside the door Mr. Quelch breathed wrath.

Fellows had, on rare occasions, been locked in the punishment-room before. Certainly, it had never occurred to any such fellow to secure the door inside and keep out a beak who came for him!

Unless it was sheer insolence, a desire to make himself as troublesome as possible before he was turfed out, Quelch could not understand it.

As Smithy evidently did not intend to open the door, the Remove master put his shoulder to it, and shoved with all his strength.

There was a creak from the chair jammed under the door-handle. It shifted a trifle.

Then it stood firm again as the Bounder grasped it, and held it in place. He jammed it tight, and held it fast.

Mr. Quelch shoved, and shoved, and shoved. But the door did not stir. He desisted at last, panting for breath.

"Vernon-Smith!" he gasped.

"Yes, sir!"

The voice from within was respectful, though there was a faint inflection of mockery in it.

"You insolent young scoundrel, what is the purpose of this?" exclaimed Mr.

Quelch. "Your headmaster is waiting for you."

"I am sorry to keep Dr. Locke waiting, sir! If you will come back at about eleven, I will open the door."

"You will have left Greyfriars long before that, Vernon-Smith! It is the headmaster's intention to send you away at once," snapped Mr. Quelch. "No doubt you would like to create a scene before you go! You will not be allowed to do so. You will leave while the other boys are in the Form-rooms."

No answer.

"Will you open this door immediately?"

Silence.

The Remove master stood breathing hard. Seldom had he been so intensely angry. But he could not force the door open. That door was immovable. Nothing short of a crowbar, inserted between door and jamb, would have forced that door open, so long as the Bounder held the chair firmly in position within.

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Quelch, at length. "Vernon-Smith, if you refuse to release this door, I shall have no resource but to report your conduct to Dr. Locke. Do you desire to be flogged before you are sent away?"

Grim silence from the punishment-room.

"Do you hear me, Vernon-Smith?" Mr. Quelch fairly barked. "Open this door immediately!"

Silence.

Mr. Quelch turned from the door at last, and went. He could not get in; and, without getting in, he could not, obviously, take Herbert Vernon-Smith to his headmaster. And the Head was waiting.

He hurried down the long corridor and the stairs, and made his way to Dr. Locke's study.

In that study Dr. Locke was waiting; and Loder of the Sixth, with his bruised nose and black eyes, was waiting. Both of them looked at Mr. Quelch as he arrived with a flushed face—alone!

"Where is the boy, Mr. Quelch?" asked Dr. Locke, raising his eyebrows. "Why have you not brought Vernon-Smith here?"

"I am sorry to say, sir, that the boy has secured the door of the punishment-room on the inside, and refuses to admit me!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Dr. Locke. "Is it possible?"

Loder stared, blinking with his black, swollen eyes. Loder was waiting, with grim and bitter anticipation, to see the fellow who had blacked his eyes sacked. But he had to wait!

"I scarcely understand this, Mr. Quelch!" said the Head. "What can the boy's object be in thus adding to the trouble he has already caused?"

"Only a desire, sir, to add to trouble!" said the Remove master, compressing his lips. "That, I fear, is the nature of that boy."

"The door must be forced, then, and at once!" said Dr. Locke. "You had better call Gosling, and direct him to bring whatever implements may be needed, and lose no time. This disagreeable matter must be finished without delay."

"Very well, sir."

Mr. Quelch left the Head's study, and proceeded to call in Gosling, the ancient porter of Greyfriars. And the prisoner of the punishment-room, who so inexplicably seemed to desire to remain a prisoner there, was not long in hearing footsteps approach the door once more.

THE MYSTERY MASTER
BY FRANK RICHARDS

Some skillful-fingered Johnny, who moves like a shadow at night within the vicinity of Greyfriars, has been cracking cribs galore and getting away with his plunder. Who is this mysterious cracksman? Some of the Juniors at Greyfriars think he's posing as their new Form-master! You'll thoroughly enjoy reading this full-of-thrills yarn, starring the world-wide 'avourites—Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars.

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THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Smithy Holds The Fort!

HERBERT VERNON - SMITH stood in the punishment-room, a sardonic grin on his face, listening to the footsteps that came up the corridor.

Defiance of authority was rather in the Bounder's nature; it was that, in fact, that had led to his disaster.

Guilty or innocent, he would not have been in trouble now had he not left his dormitory, after lights out, to carry on his feud with Loder of the Sixth. And, precarious as his position now was, there was something enjoyable to the reckless Bounder in this last contest with the beaks—in whatever way it might end.

The door-handle turned, and the door was pushed.

Smithy gripped the chair again, to wedge it fast.

"Vernon-Smith!" came Mr. Quelch's voice, almost trembling with anger. "If you do not open this door immediately, it will be forced. Gosling is here with me to force it."

"Go ahead!" said Smithy.

"I warn you, Vernon-Smith, that you may be flogged for this insolence, before you are sent away."

"So it's settled that I'm to be sent away?" jeered the Bounder. "No idea of giving a fellow a chance. I've told you that I never touched Loder. I'd have liked to give the bullying cad a black eye, or two, but I never thought of doing it. I'm no such fool!"

"If you have anything to say, Vernon-Smith, you may say it to your headmaster!" snapped Mr. Quelch contemptuously.

"Think he will believe me?"

"Dr. Locke will certainly not believe palpable falsehoods, any more than I do, Vernon-Smith."

"And you're not going to make any inquiry?"

"There is nothing into which to inquire, as you are well aware."

"Oh, yes there is!" retorted the Bounder. "You can inquire who was up last night as well as me, and find out who punched Loder in his silly face."

"It was ascertained at the time, Vernon-Smith, that no other boy in the school was out of his dormitory."

"If that's correct, it must have been a Sixth Form man, then," said Vernon-Smith. "Better look in the Sixth."

"I will not bandy words with you. Will you, for the last time, open this door, before it is forced?"

"No, I won't!"

"Gosling!"

"Yessir!" came a grunt.

"Force that door immediately! Lose no time, Gosling! The headmaster is waiting for Vernon-Smith to be taken to him."

"Yessir!"

The Bounder set his teeth. He had gained, so far, about a quarter of an hour. He had to gain two hours, if he was to have his chance. Somehow, by hook or by crook, he was going to do it. At all events, he was not going to give in, so long as he had a kick left.

Bang! Clang! Bang! Clang! came from without.

Gosling had a crowbar and a hammer. He was driving the pointed end of the crowbar between door and jamb, with heavy smites of the hammer. Some damage was being done to both door and jamb. That could not be helped.

The Bounder could do nothing to stop that. He could only wait, knowing that when the crowbar was driven in, a powerful wrench on it would be too strong for the chair packed under the door-handle.

Bang! Clang! Bang!

Distant as the punishment-room was from the Form-rooms, that banging and clanging sounded and echoed all over Greyfriars, and reached the ears of the fellows in class. Tom Redwing, in the Remove-room, at least, could guess what it meant. They had not got Smithy yet.

Bang, bang, bang! Clang!

The Bounder, breathing hard, waited and watched. The door creaked; the chair back creaked. The smites of the hammer drove the crowbar farther and farther in till Vernon-Smith could see the point between door and jamb. Inch by inch it came farther, forcing open the door to the width of the thickness of the bar.

"Now, Gosling!" came Mr. Quelch's voice. The Remove master was waiting with intensifying impatience.

"Yessir!"

Gosling threw down the hammer, grasped the crowbar with both horny hands, and threw his weight on it, to wrench the door open.

Inch by inch the door yielded, forcing the jammed chair back along the floor under the pressure.

With every inch that the door yielded, the "purchase" naturally diminished; but by the time the bar was of no further avail, there was a space wide enough for Gosling to jam a boot in.

He jammed in a boot, laying aside the crowbar.

"Very good, Gosling," said Mr. Quelch approvingly. "Very good, indeed! Now pass your hand round the door, Gosling, and remove the chair from under the handle."

"Yessir!"

A large and horny hand was thrust through the aperture, followed by a wrist and a forearm. Gosling got a grip on the chair.

At the same moment, Herbert Vernon-Smith picked up the poker and gave Gosling a rap on his knuckles.

"Yarooop!"

The yell that came from William Gosling as he got the rap on his knuckles, rang farther and louder than the banging of his hammer. It fairly thundered.

"Yoo-hoo-hooop!" roared Gosling.

That hand disappeared as if by magic. Gosling, evidently, did not want another rap on the knuckles.

Instantly the bounder jammed the door shut again, and jammed the chair-back tight under the handle.

The door was as fast as before.

Outside, Gosling was howling wildly. Inside, the Bounder was grinning. Mr. Quelch's voice came in high, angry tones.

"Gosling—"

"Woo-hooop!" roared Gosling.

"What does this mean, Gosling?"

"Yow-ow-woooooop!"

"You have allowed the boy to close the door again!"

"Ow! Wow! Ooogh! Think I'm going to 'ave my knuckles rapped?" roared the exasperated Gosling.

"Wow! Ooooch!"

"The door must be opened!"

"Woooch!" yelled Gosling. "P'raps you'd like to have your knuckles rapped, sir!"

"Do not be impertinent, Gosling!" hooted Mr. Quelch. "You have foolishly allowed the boy to close the door again!"

"Ooooch!"

"The whole work must be done over again!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, in great annoyance. "Take the crowbar, Gosling! Take the hammer. And this time, when you are able to reach in and remove the chair, take care that you do so."

"Wot!"

"You are wasting my time, and the headmaster's time! Proceed at once, Gosling, and—"

"My heye! You think I'm going to put my 'and in at that there door agin, and get me knuckles rapped! Wot I says is this 'ere—I ain't! No, sir! That I ain't!"

"Gosling—"

"Which it ain't my dooty to stick my arm in at that there door!" roared Gosling. "And wot I says is this 'ere, don't you think it?"

"Gosling, you are not to go away! I forbid you to go away! If you go away, I shall report your conduct to Dr. Locke! Gosling, come back immediately!" Mr. Quelch's voice rose to a roar. "Gosling! Do you hear me, Gosling?"

The Bounder chuckled.

If Gosling heard, as doubtless he did, he understudied the ancient Gladiator, and heeded not.

He tramped away down the corridor, heedless of the Remove master's voice, and disappeared down the stairs. Gosling, it appeared, had had enough, and did not want any more. Gosling was gone!

"Upon my word!" the Bounder heard Mr. Quelch exclaim, in tones of intense vexation. "Impertinent—absurd! Upon my word!"

There was a sharp rap on the door.

"Vernon-Smith!"

"Yes, sir."

"Will you open this door?"

"No, sir!"

There was a pause, and then the Bounder heard his Form-master rustle away. Quelch did not seem disposed, personally, to handle hammer and crowbar, neither, probably, was he keen on getting his knuckles rapped with a poker. He was gone—doubtless to plan new measures for getting at the prisoner of the punishment-room; and the Bounder of Greyfriars was still holding the fort.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Up The Chimney!

CRASH, crash! Thud! Bang! Crash!

Greyfriars fellows, in the Form-rooms, started and listened. Form-masters found it hard to keep attention on matters in hand.

The Remove-room was in a buzz of excitement. It was known now that the uproar came from the direction of the punishment-room. The Bounder was up to something—kicking up a final shindy, apparently, before he went. As there was no master present with the Remove, the Form-room door was opened so that the juniors could hear better.

In the other Form-rooms the fellows had no such luck. But Hacker, Capper, Wiggins, and Twigg carried on under great difficulties, with the Shell, the Fourth, the Third, and the Second.

Even in the Fifth, a senior Form, there was a buzz of excitement that Mr. Prout could not suppress. Even in the Sixth, where Mr. Lascelles was imparting mathematical knowledge, Sixth Form men started and stared and whispered.

And the Head, in his study, still waiting for the culprit to be brought before his judgment seat, listened with the deepest of deep feelings. And Gerald Loder caressed his black eyes, and found comfort in the reflection that that young rascal, Vernon-Smith, was making things all the worse for himself.

Bang! Crash! Thud! Crash!
It roared and reverberated all over Greyfriars.

Everybody knew by this time that the Bounder had fortified himself in the punishment-room, and refused to come out and be sacked. It was fearfully thrilling!

Only Tom Redwing knew Smithy's motive. To the rest of the Remove it was simply a case of the Bounder kicking up a last tremendous shindy while he was still at Greyfriars to kick it up. And the Remove fellows, with breathless chuckles, agreed that it was just like the old Bounder!

Bang! Crash! Bang!
In the punishment-room, Herbert Vernon-Smith's face was grim.

He had held the fort, so far; he was going on holding it, if he could. He had gained about an hour out of the two he wanted. All this time he had no doubt Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith, the millionaire financier, was on his way to Greyfriars—probably breaking speed limits right and left. He was sure that his father would come; he knew that he would come after getting Redwing's telegram. But he had to give him time to come.

And now the door was yielding fast! Quelch was not the man to be defied or defeated. Milder measures having failed, Quelch had resorted to heroic measures. They were not trying to force the door open with a crowbar now. They were smashing it open.

Gosling had been rounded up again. Trotter had been called in to his aid. Taking it in turns, they delivered hefty smites from axes on the wood round the lock.

Crash—crash—crash!
The din was terrific. It woke every echo within the school walls, and a good many without! It was intensely annoying and exasperating to Mr. Quelch. He stood looking on, with a grim brow and glinting eyes. But annoying and exasperating as it was, it had to be done if Vernon-Smith was to be dealt with. And the door was going!

Crash, crash!
The Bounder knew that the game was up, so far as holding the fort in the punishment-room was concerned. But he was not beaten yet.

In a few minutes more the dismantled lock would be dropping from the hacked and battered door; the chair-back would no longer hold. The door would fly open, and hands would be upon him—if he was there! There was no retreat by way of the barred window. But the Bounder was not caught yet. He had stamped out the fire in the old grate under the vast, old-fashioned chimney to keep open a line of retreat, if it came to that. It was a line of retreat that few fellows would have fancied. Smith certainly did not fancy it; but he was going to make use of it, all the same.

Crash, crash, crash! CRASH!
With a final terrific crash the lock went, falling from the door over the chair within. There was nothing to hold the chair back now. The door, pushed from without, flew open.

Mr. Quelch, with set lips, strode in. Gosling and Trotter, resting after their labours, gasped and panted.
"Now——" said Mr. Quelch grimly.
He broke off.
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He had strode in to grasp the prisoner of the punishment-room by the collar and march him off forcibly to the headmaster's presence. But where was the prisoner?

Mr. Quelch could scarcely believe his eyes as he stared round the room and found himself alone in it.

"Vernon-Smith!" he gasped.
He stared and blinked. Obviously Vernon-Smith was not under the table, or under the bed. Still, he stooped and looked to make assurance doubly sure. Then, suddenly comprehending, he stepped to the fireplace.

The fire had long been out and was cold. Over the dead embers lay a pile of soot, recently fallen from within the chimney. Evidently it had been dislodged by a climber within those ancient and sooty recesses.

"Is—is—is it possible?" gasped Mr. Quelch.

He stooped his head, put it under the huge old chimney, and stared up.

He could not see the patch of sky that should have been visible at the summit of the chimney-pot. The way was blocked! Only too plainly it was blocked by the Bounder of Greyfriars!

"Vernon-Smith!" shrieked Mr. Quelch.

"Hallo!" came back a voice, muffled by the chimney.

"You—you—you are there? Descend at once—at once! Do you hear? I order you to descend at once!" thundered Mr. Quelch, glaring up.

The Bounder did not descend. He ascended. But something else descended, dislodged by his foot. It was a large chunk of soot! It landed fairly in the midst of Mr. Quelch's scholastic features as he glared up.

Mr. Quelch had not expected that. Really, he might have, if he had been a little less angry and excited. But he hadn't, and it took him quite by surprise. He gave a horrible gurgle and withdrew his head from the chimney.

"Gurrrrggh!"
Gosling and Trotter stared in at the doorway as Mr. Quelch turned away from the chimney, black as the ace of spades, and spluttering soot.

"My heye!" ejaculated Gosling.
Trotter giggled. It was disrespectful, but really Trotter could not help it. He had never seen a Form-master looking like a nigger minstrel before.

"Urrrggh!" gurgled Mr. Quelch.
"Wurrggh! Oh! Ooogh! That young rascal—ooogh!" He clawed and dabbed at soot. "Wooogh! Upon my—groogh—word—Gooogh!"

More soot fell from the chimney as the Bounder clambered up. Mr. Quelch did not look up again. He had had enough soot.

Breathing wrath—and soot—the Remove master tottered from the room. Gosling and Trotter were left grinning.

For the next half-hour Mr. Quelch was busy. But he was not, for the present, bothering about that young rascal, Herbert Vernon-Smith. He was busy cleaning off soot. Quelch's pressing need at the moment was hot water and soap—lots of hot water and lots of soap—and that young rascal had to be left to his own devices.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Watching For Pa!

"I SAY, you fellows," squeaked Billy Bunter, "it's him!"
The Greyfriars fellows had come out in break.

Most of them, especially the Remove, were wondering what had happened to the Bounder.

Mr. Quelch had not returned to his Form-room. His head boy had had to carry on there till the bell rang for break. The amount of work that had been done in the Remove-room would have needed a microscope to spot it. The juniors were far too excited to worry about that.

Where was Smithy? Had he gone? Was he going? And Redwing wondered whether Mr. Vernon-Smith was coming. If the millionaire had started immediately on receipt of the telegram from the school, he might blow in at any minute now.

"It's him!" repeated Bunter, pointing with a fat finger.

"Smithy?"

"Eh? No. Look!"

In the gateway stood a figure, well-known to the juniors, though they had never seen the man till a few days ago.

"Crocker!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"That jolly old boy!" said Nugent.

"What the thump does he want here?" grunted Johnny Bull. "Like his cheek to butt in!"

"And what is he blinking at?" asked Harry Wharton, staring at the man in the gateway.

Randolph Crocker, once of the Sixth Form at Greyfriars, expelled long years ago, was not a welcome visitor at the school. He had, in fact, been chucked out when he had blown in.

It was rumoured that he had asked his old headmaster to give him a job; but as that headmaster had expelled him long ago for stealing, he had probably not expected to get it.

Since then, Randolph Crocker had located himself at the hiker's hut on the Abbot's Spinney, within sight of the school, for no reason that could be discovered except to cause annoyance to his old headmaster.

Greyfriars fellows had hardly expected to see him at the school again, but there he was. But it was not so much his presence, as his peculiar actions, that caused many eyes to turn on him in surprise.

Randolph Crocker was standing with his head thrown back, looking upward—gazing, it seemed, at some object high on the roof of the school buildings.

Some of the juniors looked up; but, being nearer the buildings than the man at the gateway, they could see nothing out of the common.

Crocker apparently could.
He was gazing at some object on the high roof fixedly, in amazement mingled with amusement.

"Something's up!" remarked Bob Cherry. "What the dickens can he have spotted up there?"

"Goodness knows!" said Harry Wharton, puzzled. "Let's see."

The Famous Five cut down to the gates. A good many other fellows followed them, all curious to see what it was that had fixed Crocker's attention.

"Oh gad!" exclaimed Crocker. He lowered his gaze and stared at the juniors. "Is this a new game?"

"What——"
"Oh, look!" roared Bob Cherry.
"Great pip!"
"Who——"
"Smithy!" yelled Bob.

"Oh scissors!"
The gathering crowd could now see the object at which Crocker had been staring. High up on the ancient red roofs of Greyfriars there were innumerable chimneys. From many of them smoke ascended. But from one of them—the one on which Randolph Crocker's eyes had been fixed—emerged something much more remarkable than smoke.

It was a head and shoulders that emerged!



A large chunk of soot landed fairly in the midst of Mr. Quelch's features as he glared up the chimney. "Gurrrrggh!" he gurgled. Gosling and Trotter stared in at the doorway as the Form-master, black as the ace of spades, spluttered soot.

There was somebody in the chimney! He was black with soot. Soot masked his face and smothered his hair and his clothes. But he was, obviously, a school-boy—a junior; and many of the fellows knew which chimney that one was—the chimney of the punishment-room. They knew now what had become of the Bounder! They knew where Herbert Vernon-Smith was! There he was—sticking out of the summit of the chimney!

"Smithy!"

"Must be Smithy!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"I say, you fellows, he's climbed up the chimney in punny!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Smithy!" chortled Skinner. "Ain't he a card!"

"The cardfulness is terrific!" chortled Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "It is the esteemed and ridiculous Smithy!"

A sooty hand was waved from the chimney. Under the soot on his face, the Bounder was grinning.

Whether these extraordinary antics were likely to improve his prospects or not, the Bounder was enjoying the excitement. He liked to make fellows stare and wonder at his nerve. He had made them stare now—there was no doubt about that.

"Is—is—is that Smithy?" gasped Redwing in dismay.

Redwing had counselled his chum to "stick it out," if he could, till his father came. But he certainly had not envisaged any such dodge as this.

"Jolly old Smithy!" said Bolsover major. "They haven't turfed him out yet! Ha, ha, ha!"

"He will want a wash before he goes!" grinned Skinner. "He's as black as jolly old Loder's eyes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

More and more fellows gathered as the news spread. Hundreds of eyes

stared up at the head and shoulders emerging from the high chimney. Herbert Vernon-Smith was the cynosure of all eyes. Fellows stared, and chuckled.

"But what's this game?" asked Mr. Crocker. The old boy of Greyfriars seemed interested and entertained. "Who's that kid?"

"Vernon-Smith of our Form," answered Bob Cherry. "He's giving the beaks a run for their money before they turf him out."

"Turf him out?" repeated Crocker.

"He, he, he!" cachinnated Bunter. "He's going to be sacked, same as you were! He, he, he!"

"Not for the same reason," said Harry Wharton hastily.

All the fellows knew why Sportsman Crocker had been sacked long years ago. He had been a bad hat at Greyfriars; and Smithy, too, was rather a bad hat. But Crocker had been expelled for pinching; and Smithy, with all his faults, would have cut his hand off sooner than that.

Randolph Crocker laughed.

No sense of shame seemed to trouble that old boy who had been kicked out of his school for dishonesty. Contempt, according to the proverb, will pierce even the shell of the tortoise. But Sportsman Crocker seemed to be thicker-skinned than a tortoise.

"What has he done?" he asked.

"Punched a prefect," said Bob.

"Sacking him for that?" yawned Crocker. "What a trifle!"

"Well, he punched him rather hard," said Bob. "You see, Loder of the Sixth caught him in the Head's study last night and grabbed him, and Smith hit out—"

"What?"

Randolph Crocker started—indeed, he jumped. He stared blankly at Bob.

"Last night?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"In the Head's study?"

"Yes."

"Oh gad!" Crocker whistled, and stared up again at the junior in the chimney. "That kid— Oh gad! And he's sacked for it? Hard luck!"

"A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind!" murmured Skinner; and some of the juniors laughed.

Perhaps Crocker, who had been expelled himself, felt a spot of sympathy for a schoolboy facing the same fate. Anyhow, it was clear that he seemed to have had a shock.

"I suppose they're sure he did it?" asked Crocker. "Was he caught out of his dormitory?"

"That's it."

"Young ass! What was he out of his dormitory for?"

"He was after that prefect, and that prefect was after him! I don't think Smithy meant to punch Loder, but he did!"

"He never meant anything of the kind!" exclaimed Redwing sharply. "He was going to mop a can of ink over him. And I know he never touched Loder, either. He's said he never went near the Head's study last night; he gave it up when there was an alarm. He's said so."

"Oh, yes! He's said so," agreed Bob.

"And it's true!" snapped Redwing. "Somebody else was in the Head's study—I don't know who, but I know that."

"Oh! You don't know who?" asked Randolph Crocker, his eyes turning very curiously on Redwing's flushed face.

"No; but I know somebody was," said Redwing. "I know Smithy never struck Loder that blow. I know he couldn't have done it."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Smithy calling!" exclaimed Bob Cherry; and all eyes turned again on the Bounder.

He was waving his hand, and shouting—
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ing; but the distance was great, and the words could not be caught. Then he shouted again, and the words floated down:

"He's coming!"

"Who's coming?" asked Bob. "Smithy can see the road from up there; he can see somebody coming, I suppose. But who—"

Redwing's face lighted up.

"His father!" he breathed.

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Does Smithy expect—"

"That's why he's doing this. I got word to him that I'd wired his father, and I knew Mr. Vernon-Smith would come. Smithy can see the car from up there, I suppose."

"I say, you fellows, is the old Obadiah coming to see the young Obadiah sacked?" grinned Billy Bunter.

"He, he, he!"

"Kick him!"

"Ow! Wow! Stoppit! Ow!" yelled Bunter.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Skinner. "Is Smithy's pater coming? Is that what he's watching for up there? Sitting on the chimney, watching for pa—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Watching for pa—watching for pa!" sang Skinner. "Sitting on the chimney, watching for pa!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here comes Quelch!" said Hazel-deno.

Mr. Quelch—newly cleaned from soot—came hurrying down to the gates. His gimlet eyes gleamed at Randolph Crocker.

"Go!" he snapped. "Boys, you are forbidden to hold any communication with that man, as you know very well! You—"

Quelch broke off as he discerned the figure at the chimney-top. His gimlet eyes almost started from his face as he stared up at the Bounder.

The Bounder waved a hand to him.

Crocker, grinning, strolled away. A moment later there was a honking from a car turning in at the gateway.

Redwing looked, with a bright face, at the plump and portly gentleman who sat therein. Mr. Vernon-Smith had arrived, and the Bounder was still at Greyfriars.

Quelch stared at the millionaire, with very different feelings. He compressed his lips hard.

Mr. Vernon-Smith did not glance at either of them; he sat, with a grimly frowning brow, as the big car rolled on up the drive to the House.

And the sooty Bounder, with a last wave of the hand, disappeared from the chimney. His father was on the spot, and Smithy was no longer, as Skinner expressed it, "watching for pa."

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

"What Have You Done?"

DR. LOCKE bowed courteously to the portly City gentleman who was shown into his study.

His face was a little set, and, courteous as he was, he could not look as if he was glad to see Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith.

But Mr. Vernon-Smith did not seem to want a warm welcome; he did not seem to want a welcome at all. His face was grimmer than the Head's.

A sudden call away from important affairs in the City, a drive rather like a race in a powerful car, and angry anxiety on account of his son, had not put the millionaire in a good temper.

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He was in a state of deep wrath, which he did his best to suppress, but which he did not wholly succeed in suppressing.

Mr. Quelch followed him into the study. His face was almost pale with annoyance. Loder of the Sixth was no longer there; the Head had dismissed him during that long wait for the culprit who did not arrive. But Loder was coming. From his study he had seen Mr. Vernon-Smith's arrival, and he did not need telling with what views the millionaire was there. And the bare thought of Vernon-Smith escaping the consequences of what he had done was fearfully exasperating to Gerald Loder.

"Dr. Locke!" Mr. Vernon-Smith did not waste a breath or a second in formal greeting. "I am here concerning my son. I received a telegram early this morning from a schoolboy friend of his—"

"Redwing had no right whatever to dispatch such a telegram!" broke in Mr. Quelch. "It was done without his headmaster's knowledge or my knowledge—"

Mr. Vernon-Smith stared at him.

"I am glad that the boy let me know!" he barked. "Was it the intention to send my son from this school without apprising me?"

"You would have been apprised, sir, by the letter I intended to send with him, when he was sent home in charge of a Sixth Form prefect!" said Dr. Locke. "I regret very much that you should have had the inconvenience and the pain of coming here on such an occasion—"

"Redwing's telegram informed me that my son was in bad trouble here. It was immediately followed by one from you, Mr. Quelch, informing me that my son was returning home at once—"

"Quite so, sir! I dispatched that telegram, in consequence of the one Redwing had sent, in the hope of preventing this unnecessary call—"

"Not unnecessary at all, sir!" barked Mr. Vernon-Smith. "I am here! Where is my son? Am I to understand that he is already sent away?"

"Certainly, he would have been sent away before this," said Dr. Locke, "but owing to—"

"Your son, sir, was locked in the punishment-room until the time came to deal with him!" said Mr. Quelch, taking up the tale. "He had the audacity—the effrontery—to secure the door within, and could not be reached—"

"Good gad!"

"The door, sir," said Mr. Quelch, in a deep voice, "had to be broken in! You will hardly believe that your son then climbed the chimney—"

"The chimney!" ejaculated Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"And remained at the summit, sir—"

"Good gad! I—I saw someone as I arrived—I supposed that it was a chimney-sweep—at a chimney— Good gad!"

"It was your son, sir!" said Mr. Quelch bitterly. "He has now descended, and is, I believe, changing his clothes after that exploit. The state he was in—"

"His motive in so acting is inexplicable!" said Dr. Locke. "Such audacity—such defiance of authority—"

Mr. Vernon-Smith grunted.

"Whatever his motive, sir, and whatever his action, it is not for that, I presume, that my son is expelled from Greyfriars. I presume that he was condemned before he was placed in the punishment-room, and his actions there, therefore, do not affect the issue."

"Nevertheless—" said the Head.

"Let me know at once, sir, for what reason my son is expelled!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "This is not a light matter to me, Herbert is my only son. He will some day fill a great place in the world. If it is clearly demonstrated that he had deserved this, I have nothing to say—I shall know how to deal with him. But what is his offence?"

A face adorned with two black eyes appeared in the doorway. Loder of the Sixth had arrived, as if in time to answer the millionaire's question.

Mr. Vernon-Smith started as he saw him. Loder's aspect was, undoubtedly, rather startling.

"Come in, Loder," said Dr. Locke. "I was about to send for you! Look at this Sixth Form boy, Mr. Vernon-Smith! That is what your son has done!"

"Good gad!"

"Any boy in this school who raised his hand to a Sixth Form prefect, entrusted by me with authority, would be expelled!" said Dr. Locke. "Vernon-Smith has not only struck this prefect of the Sixth Form, but has inflicted, as you see, a brutal disfigurement. Are you satisfied?"

Mr. Vernon-Smith stood looking at Loder. Loder blinked at him with his bruised and battered eyes. The millionaire breathed hard.

Obviously, the boy who had done this could not have been allowed to remain in any school.

"My son did that?" he asked at last.

"Ho did, sir," said Dr. Locke quietly, "and, I may add, he has not even the excuse, such as it might be, of provocation. Loder, at the time, was doing his bounden duty as a prefect."

Mr. Vernon-Smith sank into a chair. The truculence was gone from his manner. He had an overwhelmed look.

"Herbert did that!" he said. "My son did that! And that is why—"

"I regret very much, sir, that you should have been brought here and given unnecessary pain by this interview," said Dr. Locke. "The boy Redwing has been very much to blame."

"I cannot understand his motive in calling me in, if my son has done this!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "I am aware that he is my son's friend—and he has been a good friend to Herbert—but he must know that there is no hope, in such a case." He stared at the black-eyed prefect. "You say that this senior boy, Loder, was doing his duty as a prefect when my son struck him and inflicted such an injury. I am entitled to know precisely what occurred. Under what circumstances—"

"Yesterday," said Dr. Locke, "the key of this study was abstracted by some boy who could not be found. From some talk among the juniors, Loder had reason to suspect that it had been taken by Vernon-Smith for the purpose of breaking out at night by way of the study window—"

"I had no doubt of it, sir," said Loder, "and I thought it my duty to remain up and ascertain—"

"That night," resumed the Head, "I locked the study with another key. From what Loder has since reported, he remained up, with Walker, another prefect, to ascertain whether anyone attempted to pass through the study. They heard the study door unlocked and someone enter—and Walker then proceeded to the Remove dormitory, where he found that your son was missing."

The Head paused a moment. "Loder came to this study to investigate," he went on. "The boy who had entered had not gone out by the window—he was, for some reason, lingering in the study with a flashlamp. By its light he saw Loder and attempted to escape—and Loder seized him in the doorway."

"And then—"
"Then, sir, in escaping, he struck Loder a blow in the face—so terrible a blow that you see the result. Loder was left stunned—"

"Stunned?" gasped Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"Actually stunned, and he remained unconscious for several minutes. When he was found by Mr. Quelch and Walker, he had to be carried to his room."

"Good heavens!"
"In the meantime, your son had returned to his dormitory, and Mr. Quelch went there for him, and he was taken to the punishment-room, where he has since remained. You are now, sir, in possession of the facts, and I only regret that you should have been given the trouble of coming to Greyfriars to hear them."

There was a silence.
It was broken by a footstep in the passage. All eyes turned on the doorway as Herbert Vernon-Smith appeared there.

The Bouncer had cleaned off the soot and changed; but there were still some signs of it lingering about him. He stepped quietly into the study.

"I am sorry, sir!" He addressed the Head respectfully. "Sorry I have kept you waiting, sir; but now my father is here—"

"Herbert," muttered Mr. Vernon-Smith, "what have you done? I came here in the hope that it was some matter that might be arranged—that your headmaster might make some concession. But—you foolish boy—what have you done?"

"Nothing, father!" said the Bouncer firmly. "I never touched Loder! I haven't the faintest idea who knocked him out—but I know I never did!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Was It Smithy?

MR. VERNON-SMITH sat staring at his son blankly.

Dr. Locke knitted his brows. Mr. Quelch set his lips. Loder of the Sixth stared at the junior with a contemptuous sneer.

In those three minds there was no doubt. But Mr. Vernon-Smith, after the first moment of surprise, caught at his son's words like a man catching at straws. The millionaire was quick on the uptake. His son's denial meant that there was, and must be, an element of doubt in the matter.

"You did not touch Loder, Herbert?" repeated the millionaire. "You say that you did not touch Loder?"

"I never saw him or went near him last night, father. This is the first time I have seen him, or been near him, since yesterday afternoon," said the Bouncer steadily. "I've said so—and Redwing, at least, believes me."

"This boy's prevarications—" said Mr. Quelch.

Vernon-Smith's eyes gleamed for a moment. But his manner was quite respectful as he turned to his Form-master. There was too much at stake for Smithy to think of giving way to his temper.

"Will you, sir, and the Head, give

me a hearing?" he asked quietly. "A fellow who is going to be expelled has a right to be heard."

"Most certainly!" exclaimed Mr. Vernon-Smith. "Dr. Locke, I concluded from what you said that the matter was beyond doubt—"

"It is beyond doubt!" said Dr. Locke coldly.

"Let my son speak! Herbert, I am told that you were missing from your dormitory last night. What have you to say to that?"

"That is correct, father."

"Why did you leave your dormitory at a late hour of the night, then?" asked the millionaire.

Smithy hesitated, but only a second. It was clear to him that his only chance lay in making a clean breast of the whole matter.

"I don't deny that I've broken rules," he said. "I expected a flogging if I was found out. But I've done nothing to be expelled for. I intended to tell my headmaster everything. I left my dormitory last night for a jape—I mean a rag—on Loder."

"What! You admit—"

"I admit that I meant to rag Loder," said Vernon-Smith, a gleam in his eyes. "I knew he was prowling, and I was going to mop a can of ink over his head as a lesson not to spy on fellows."

Loder's black eyes glittered.

"That statement is false, sir!" he said. "When Vernon-Smith crept into this study last night he certainly did not know that I was on the watch down the passage with Walker."

"If it had been me I should have known," said Vernon-Smith composedly. "Every fellow in the Remove, sir, knows that I came down to rag Loder. My friend Redwing got out of bed and tried to stop me. Wharton got up, too. Half the Form was awake, and they all knew I was coming down after Loder."

There was a brief silence.

"Loder," said the Head, "I understood from you that the boy who entered this study in the dark was unaware that you were watching, and that you took him by surprise."

"That is certainly the case, sir."

"Yet Vernon-Smith declares that he knew that you were on the watch."

"He is speaking untruthfully, sir."

"Every man in the Remove will back up what I say, sir," said Vernon-Smith. "They all know what I knew, and they know how I knew."

"And how did

you know?" asked Mr. Quelch, breaking another silence.

"I intend to explain the whole thing, sir. Loder suspected me because he heard me talking to some fellows yesterday. I spoke in his hearing on purpose to pull his leg—"

"To mislead him, do you mean?" asked Dr. Locke coldly.

"Yes, sir. You remember, sir, that you had put a notice up on the board putting the Abbot's Spinney out of bounds because that man Crocker has set up there. I let Loder hear me say something about sneaking a downstairs key and getting out to go and see the man. I never meant a word of it; it was only for Loder to hear."

"Did you take the key of my study?" rapped the Head grimly. "Do you admit that, or do you not?"

"I do, sir. Here it is." Smithy drew a key from his pocket and laid it on the headmaster's writing-table. "I took the key, sir, for no reason, except to make Loder take what I had said seriously. I never intended to use it, and never did use it. I never came near this study at all."

"The door was left locked," said the Head icily. "It was unlocked by the boy who entered, and a key must have been used."

"I cannot understand that, sir. I

(Continued on next page.)

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know nothing whatever about it," said the Bounder firmly. "I knew—at least, I felt certain—that Loder would be on the prowl—"

"What?"

"I—I mean, on the watch, sir—"

"You had better say what you mean, Vernon-Smith."

"Yes, sir. I was certain that Loder would be on the watch, believing that I meant to break out through this study. I meant to catch him in the dark and mop—I mean, throw a can of ink over him. I own up to that. When I went down from the dormitory I went to my study in the Remove to fetch the can of ink. I was coming away with it when I saw the lights go on, on the dormitory landing. I knew from that that the beaks—I mean, masters or prefects were up, and that it was no good thinking of carrying on."

Mr. Vernon-Smith did not speak; he listened, with his eyes keenly on his son's face.

"After that," continued the Bounder quietly, "I waited for a time, hoping that the light would go off. I went back to my dormitory at last. Up to then I did not know that I had been missed; but when I got back I found the door open and the light on and everybody awake, and the fellows told me that Walker of the Sixth had brought Mr. Quelch there, so I was found out."

"Is that all?"

"That is all, sir. Until Mr. Quelch came up again and accused me of having knocked Loder out I never knew that Loder had been touched at all."

Silence followed.

The Bounder's quiet and steady explanation had made an impression—especially upon his father.

That he had been guilty of wild and hot-headed recklessness was clear, on his own admission; but his father, at least, believed that there was nothing more.

"You say that you did not come to this study at all?" asked Mr. Quelch.

"I never even came down the lower staircase, sir."

"Then who," said Mr. Quelch grimly, "was the boy who entered the study, using a key?"

"I don't know, sir. How could I know? I only know that it was not I," answered Vernon-Smith steadily. "But if Loder says that the fellow did not know that he was on the watch it proves that it was not I; every man in the Remove knows that I knew he was up, and that that was why I came down."

Mr. Vernon-Smith broke in.

"Am I to understand," he said, "that Loder did not see and could not identify the boy who struck him?"

"I know that it was Vernon-Smith!" answered Loder.

"Did you see him?"

"I'm not a cat, to see in the dark," answered Loder sullenly.

Mr. Vernon-Smith's eyes glinted.

"I demand a plain answer," he said. "Did you see who struck you—yes or no?"

"No!" grunted Loder.

The millionaire drew a long, long breath of relief. He turned quietly to the headmaster.

"Dr. Locke, I had understood before I saw my son that the matter was beyond doubt; that it was known as a fact that Herbert had done this. It appears now that the blow was struck in the dark, and that Loder knows absolutely nothing on the subject."

"I know that it was Vernon-Smith," repeated Loder.

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"You know nothing of the kind, and I will not allow you to say so!" exclaimed Mr. Vernon-Smith. "Your belief that it was my son who entered the study in the dark is not evidence, and has nothing to do with the matter. You did not see him, and your belief on the subject is worth nothing. Dr. Locke, did anyone else see my son outside his dormitory?"

"He was not seen by anyone," said the Head. "He was missing from his dormitory at the time of the attack on Loder, and that is conclusive."

"It is very far from conclusive," said Mr. Vernon-Smith grimly. "Some other boy may have been out of his dormitory at the same time. It is, indeed, certain that some other boy was, if my son's statement is correct."

"Your son's statement is not correct, sir," said Dr. Locke dryly.

"My son, sir, had been foolish, reckless, insubordinate, and deserves punishment. But I believe every word he has said."

"I do not share your belief, sir," said the Head in the same dry tone.

"His schoolfellow, sir, may—indeed, will—bear out his statement that he was aware that Loder was up and on this spot."

"Possibly! Loder may be mistaken on that point. Your son, sir, admits that he came down to make some attack on Loder. He denies having made an attack—but an attack was made."

"By some other hand, sir, if my son was not here."

"Nothing could be more conclusive, sir, than the evidence on that point," said Dr. Locke. "Vernon-Smith was in possession of the key to this study. The door was opened with a key. He was missing from his dormitory at the time. No reasonable mind could require more conclusive evidence."

Mr. Vernon-Smith rose from his chair, crossed to the door, and intently examined the lock thereon; then he turned to the Head.

"This is far from an uncommon kind of lock, sir," he said. "It is quite probable that a key might be found to open it."

The Head made no reply to that. That suggestion did not weigh with him in the least.

Mr. Quelch spoke quietly.

"Possibly such a key may exist, Mr. Vernon-Smith. But it is known that a key was in your son's possession."

Mr. Vernon-Smith gave him a look; then he turned to Loder and fixed a grim, searching stare on his bruised face. Again he turned to the Head.

"You tell me, sir, that this senior boy, almost a young man, was stunned by a blow given him by the person he seized in this study."

"Precisely so; he was unconscious for many minutes."

"Is it credible, sir, that such a blow could be struck by a junior schoolboy? It seems more like a knock-out blow by a professional boxer."

"That is true, certainly," said Dr. Locke. "The boy, I suppose, was in a state of desperation at the moment, and it lent force to his blow. There is no doubt in my mind that Vernon-Smith struck it."

"There is no doubt in my mind, sir—or, rather, the certainty that he did not. My son, on his own confession, is deserving of severe punishment. But I am quite convinced that he never did this. Definitely, sir!"

The Bounder breathed hard.

His father, at least, was on his side. There was, at least, one to stand by him; Redwing had done that much for him.

It seemed to him, too, that some flicker of doubt was creeping into Mr. Quelch's face. It was only a flicker; but, at all events, his Form-master's firm belief had been slightly shaken.

"This matter, sir," went on Mr. Vernon-Smith, "is one for consultation and discussion."

"Really, sir—"

"If I believed, sir, that my son had done this, I would take him away with me immediately, and what he would receive from me would be more severe than any punishment meted out by you!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith grimly. "But I do not believe it—and you, sir, must desire as earnestly as I do that no injustice should be done. Send these boys away, sir, and let us consider!"

The Head compressed his lips. But he made a sign to Loder and Vernon-Smith to leave the study, and the door closed on them.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Mystery I

"I SAY, you fellows, what do you think?"

Bager eyes turned on Billy Bunter.

Bunter, as a rule, did not find eager listeners. But if the fat Owl had any news, everybody wanted to hear it now.

Excitement and keen curiosity reigned in the Remove. What had happened—what was going to happen—nobody knew. But it was all fearfully thrilling.

Third school was over. During third school, Mr. Vernon-Smith's car had been heard to drive away. The millionaire was gone, but whether the millionaire's son was gone with him or not, nobody knew.

If he was still at the school he was not to be seen. That he had been sacked, and that he had gone with his father, seemed fairly certain. Many fellows hoped that he hadn't—Redwing most earnestly of all. Nobody knew for certain—and everybody wanted to know.

So when Billy Bunter rolled up to a group in the quad just before dinner, all eyes and ears were alert. Bunter was the man to get the news, if there was any going, and for once everybody hung on the words of the fat Owl of the Remove.

"Heard anything?" asked Tom Reuwing eagerly.

Bunter grinned.

"Yes, rather!" he answered.

"What's the news, Bunter?" asked a dozen voices.

"I've just heard!" said the fat Owl, with a cheery grin of satisfaction on his plump face. "I thought I'd come and tell you fellows. I've just heard it from Trotter. In fact, I asked him about it!"

"And what—"

"Get it out!"

"Cough it up!"

"Throw it off your chest!"

"Buck up!"

"There's steak-and-kidney pie for dinner!" announced Bunter triumphantly.

"What?" yelled the juniors.

"Steak-and-kidney pie!" declared Bunter. "Ripping, ain't it? As we had steak-and-kidney pie on Monday, I hardly thought we should get it again on Thursday! But it's all right! Trotter told me!"

The juniors gazed at Bunter.

He grinned at them complacently.

This, apparently, was Bunter's news! He was not thinking about Smithy—

the topic that thrilled the rest of the Remove from end to end! He was thinking about dinner!

"It's true, you fellows!" assured Bunter. "Trotter knows, of course!"

"You—you—you pie-faced, pernicious porpoise!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Have you come to tell us about dinner?"

"Eh? Yes! I thought you fellows would like to know!" said Bunter,



Mr. Quelch's gimlet eyes almost started from his face as he stared up and discerned the figure at the chimney-top. "Bless my soul!" he ejaculated. "Vernon-Smith!" The Bouncer smiled and waved a hand to him.

blinking at him. "Steak-and-kidney pie—"

"You flabby, frumpious freak—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Do you know anything about Smithy?" yelled Bob.

"Eh? Smithy! No! I expect he's gone by this time!" answered Bunter, who had apparently forgotten the Bouncer's existence in the thrilling news of steak-and-kidney pie for dinner. "Poor old Smithy!" added Bunter compassionately. "Pity he couldn't stay for dinner, as it's steak-and-kidney pie!"

"You blithering Owl!"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Boot him!" hissed Peter Todd.

"Yaroo!" roared Bunter, in anguish and indignation, as several fellows did as Toddy suggested on the spot. "Why, you beasts, I thought you'd like to know—we don't often get steak-and-kidney pie twice in the week—yaroo!"

Billy Bunter retired hastily from the spot. His news—really thrilling news, from Bunter's point of view—had been most ungratefully received. Bunter really wished that he hadn't taken the trouble to tell those ungrateful beasts about the treat in store.

"What on earth have they done with Smithy?" asked Bob. "I suppose he must be gone—but—"

"I'm going to ask Quelch," said Tom Redwing.

"The old bean's still with the Head!"

"We shall see him at dinner, I suppose!"

Redwing's face was deeply clouded and troubled. He had banked on Smithy's father to pull him through, somehow; it had been, at any rate, the Bouncer's only chance of help. If that had failed, the Bouncer of Greyfriars

was done for at the school. But had it failed?

The dinner-bell rang, and the Greyfriars fellows went in—one fat face in their ranks bright with happy anticipation of steak-and-kidney pie!

But Billy Bunter was the only fellow in the Remove deeply interested in that subject, entrancing as it was. Every other fellow was thinking of Smithy.

Mr. Quelch came in as usual to take his place at the head of the Remove table.

All eyes fixed on him. His expression was grim. Grim as he looked, Tom Redwing ventured to address him.

"If you please, sir—" said Tom, in rather a faltering voice.

"What?" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"Will you tell us whether Smithy—I mean Vernon-Smith—has left, sir?"

"Vernon-Smith has not yet left, Redwing," answered Mr. Quelch, with another snap.

"Oh!" Redwing's clouded face cleared, rather like the sun coming out on a cloudy day. "Thank you, sir!"

Mr. Quelch glanced at him—and his grim face relaxed a trifle.

"The matter is not yet finally decided," he said. "Say no more, Redwing."

Tom sat down.

His face was brighter and his heart lighter. Smithy had not gone with his father! That meant, and could only mean, that he still had a chance! Tom was deeply glad that he had got that telegram off, and that he had warned his chum to "stick it out" till his father came. Smithy was still, at any rate, at Greyfriars, though not in public view.

Wherever he was, he did not appear

at dinner. Neither was he seen in the quad after dinner.

The juniors wondered whether he was in the punishment-room. Sounds of repairing had been heard from that direction. Considerable repairs were required if the room was to be used again for a prisoner.

When the bell rang for class again, the Remove trooped off to their Form-room, wondering whether Smithy was going to turn up for class.

He did not turn up! His place in the Remove Form-room remained vacant; and, as Mr. Quelch made no remark on the subject, it was evident that he did not expect Smithy there.

"Must be in punny!" said Bob Cherry, when the Remove came out. "Nowhere else he can be that I know of."

"They can't pack him in punny for ever!" said Harry Wharton. "Blessed if I can make out whether they're letting him off or not!"

"They can't let him off, after what he did to Loder! Dash it all, you can't black a prefect's eyes—even Loder's!"

"Well, if he isn't sacked, and isn't let off, what the dickens are they going to do with him?" asked Johnny Ball.

"It's a giddy mystery!"

It was quite a mystery and a puzzle to the Remove.

At tea-time, Vernon-Smith was not seen in the Remove studies. Obviously, he was not allowed to rejoin or mingle with his Form. He did not appear in the Rag after tea, and he did not appear when the Remove went up to

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(Continued from page 13.)

prep. But he was still at Greyfriars—that, at least, was certain.

What it all meant, and how it was going to end, the Remove fellows could only wonder—and Skinner opined that the Bounder's luck, which had always been phenomenal, was going to see him through after all. And a good many fellows hoped that Skinner was right!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Punch For Prout!

"SCANDALOUS!" said Mr. Prout.
"Shocking!" agreed Mr. Hacker.

"Outrageous!" continued Prout.

"Disgraceful!" said Mr. Hacker.

Harry Wharton & Co., as they heard that interchange of opinions between the master of the Fifth and the master of the Shell, exchanged a grin.

It was the following day, after class, and the Famous Five of the Remove, taking a little walk abroad, came on Prout and Hacker, doing the same.

The two beaks stopped at the corner of Friardale Lane, by the fence that enclosed Abbot's Spinney.

That was the spot where Sportsman Crocker, once of the Greyfriars Sixth, had taken up his quarters.

Prout and Hacker stood looking up at a board on the fence, which gave the information, to all who might or might not be concerned, that R. Crocker, formerly of Greyfriars School, was prepared to sole and heel boots and shoes, with promptness and despatch.

Prout glared at that board! Hacker frowned at it! And the Famous Five smiled.

The surprising proceedings of R. Crocker seemed rather a lark to many of the Greyfriars juniors. But the masters had no use for such larks.

What the Head thought about it, he had not stated. But the members of his staff discussed the matter at great length in Common-room, expressing the profoundest disapproval of R. Crocker and his proceedings.

"Boots and shoes!" said Mr. Prout, with a snort.

"Soled and heeled!" said Mr. Hacker, with a sniff.

"The impudent knave should be warned off!" said the Fifth Form-master. "He should be made to go."

"It appears that he has hired this place from the estate agent in Court-field, and cannot be made to go!" answered Mr. Hacker, shaking his head.

"Such insolence——" said Mr. Prout.

"Such effrontery——" said Mr. Hacker.

A figure in a leather apron, overalls, and an old hat, appeared in the doorway of the hiker's hut, which stood on the site of the Abbot's Cell of ancient times.

It was the cheery Mr. Crocker.

Prout turned a thunderous frown on

him. Hacker gave him a cold glance of contemptuous disdain. Crocker came lounging down to the gate. He had a boot in one hand—as if he had been at his work of cobbling.

That boot had been seen in his hand before. It did not seem to have progressed a lot since Mr. Crocker had started work on it!

Nobody, in fact, believed that Randolph Crocker did any cobbling at all. He had camped in the Abbot's Spinney, and set up his sign there, simply to make himself obnoxious, so far as anyone could see.

"Hold on, you men!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Let's watch this!"

"Mustn't loiter!" grinned Nugent. "Head's notice—nobody to loiter in this spot! Crocker's barred."

"Hold on while I tie a shoe-lace, then!" said Bob.

"How long will that take, fathead?"

"Just as long as Prout sticks there! He looks as if he's going to explode. Old Pompous is no end entertaining when he blows off steam."

And the clumps of the Remove held on.

They were rather interested in Prout's interview with that obnoxious old boy of Greyfriars, cheerily wondering whether there was going to be a row.

Crocker had passed through Prout's Form, in ancient days at Greyfriars, when Prout was a much younger man than he was now; but it was clear that Prout had no pleasant or affectionate remembrance of him.

"Good-afternoon, gents!" said R. Crocker cheerily, as he came down to the gate in the fence. "Soled or heeled, sir?"

Hacker, the Acid Drop, only sneered at this impertinence. But Prout, the portly and pompous, purpled.

"How dare you address me?" he snorted.

"You haven't brought boots or shoes to be repaired, sir?" asked Randolph Crocker.

"You are perfectly well aware that I have not!" boomed Prout.

"Just dropped in to speak a friendly word to an old boy?" asked Crocker, still cheery and genial. "Glad to see you, sir! Come in and sit down! Trade isn't brisk yet—there don't seem to be a lot of boots and shoes want soling and heeling in this quarter. Perhaps you could put in a word for me at the school, Mr. Prout, and get me some custom."

"Upon my word!" hooted Prout.

"Do come in!" urged Crocker hospitably. "A chat over old times would be so pleasant. Remember the time when you found soot in your Sunday hat, Prout? Did you ever guess I did it?"

"I believe you, sir, to be capable of that, or any other iniquity!" boomed Mr. Prout. "What are you doing here? Do not pretend to me that you are mending boots and shoes. You were always incorrigibly lazy and idle and shiftless——"

"How well you remember me!" grinned Crocker.

"And I do not believe you have changed!" boomed Prout.

"Neither have you, old thing!" said the cheery Crocker. "Same old pompous ass——"

"What?" gasped Mr. Prout.

"Only you're fatter!" said Crocker. "I remember that you could see your knees when I was at Greyfriars! How many years is it since you have seen them, old fat porpoise?"

Prout gurgled.

"He's going to punch him!" breathed Bob Cherry, in intense excitement. "Watch!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Mr. Prout——" exclaimed Hacker. Prout did not heed him. Prout was purple with wrath. Crocker's impudent, grinning face was quite close to him. The temptation to hit it seemed too strong for Prout to resist. Prout's plump fist flashed out, as if of its own volition.

Biff!

"Gottim!" gasped Bob.

"Oh crikey!"

Randolph Crocker gave a howl as he got the biff! It seemed to surprise him. He tottered for a moment, spluttering.

The portly master of the Fifth, towering with wrath, glared at him.

"That for your impertinence!" he boomed. "And if you dare to repeat it, I warn you that I will—— Whooo-hoop!"

Crocker's fist shot out! Prout, big and heavy as he was, was lifted almost off his feet by a punch that landed on his portly chest. He spun, and crashed, and landed on the county of Kent, with a concussion that almost shook that county.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped the Famous Five together.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Muddy!

"OOOOOOOOH!" came in a

gurgle from Mr. Prout.

He lay on his back, in Friardale Lane, gazing up at the steely wintry sky. He gazed with dizzy eyes.

He did not seem quite to know what had happened to him. He lay and gurgled.

"Goodness gracious!" gasped Mr. Hacker, staring down at him. "Mr. Prout——"

"Ooooooooh!"

"My dear Prout——"

"Woooooogh!"

"How dare you?" exclaimed Hacker. "Ruffian—hooligan—rascal——"

The Acid Drop glared at Randolph Crocker. "You want some, my bony friend?"

asked the old boy of Greyfriars coolly.

"You've only got to ask!"

He made a forward movement. Mr. Hacker promptly made a backward one. Hacker, it was clear, did not want any.

"Stand back!" he gasped. "Hands off, you ruffian! Goodness gracious! You shall be given into custody for this assault! You—you——"

"Forget it!" said the Sportsman. "I've a good mind to have Prout up for assault and battery! Does he think he can biff my jaw because I was in his Form twenty years ago?"

Hacker did not answer that. He stooped over Prout to give him a hand to rise.

Crocker grinned at both of them. Prout continued to gurgle. Prout was massive, and he was heavy. It was not easy to heave Prout up.

"Lend a hand, you men!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. And the Famous Five ran to render first-aid.

Many hands made light work. Mr. Prout was heaved up, and landed on his feet. He stood on them, unsteadily, still gurgling for breath.

Probably by that time Prout repented of that hasty biff. Crocker had asked for it, and it had been a satisfaction to deliver it; but the result was simply deplorable for Prout. One punch had knocked him right out—almost as thoroughly as Loder of the Sixth had been knocked out by his assailant in the Head's study.

Leaning heavily on Hacker, who tottered under the strain, Prout gasped and gurgled for breath.

"Oooooogh!" mumbled Prout. "Oooogh! Upon my word! Oooogh! Wooooogh! Pray assist me, Hacker! Goooooogh!"

"Have another, old bean?" grinned Crocker.

Bob Cherry glanced round at the old boy of Greyfriars.

"Shut up!" he said curtly.

"Hallo! What's biting you?" asked Crocker, staring at him.

"I'll tell you!" said Bob, his eyes glinting at the grinning Sportsman.

"You're a brute and a hooligan, to hit a man of Prout's age as hard as that. You ought to be jolly well booted!"

Prout, still gurgling, was moving off, leaning on Hacker.

Evidently he was not in a state of carrying the matter farther. Prout's spirit was still high; but his scrapping days were long over.

He was, in fact, rather badly damaged; and the juniors, who had looked on the affair as a merry jest at first, were now feeling strongly inclined to give Randolph Crocker some of his own gruel, so to speak.

Crocker gave Bob a very unpleasant look. He did not seem to like Bob's plain speaking.

"Like to do the booting?" he jeered.

"Yes, I'd like to," retorted Bob,

"and if I were anything like your weight, I'd give you what you've given Prout, and some over. Prout's sixty, if he's a day, and you could push him over with your little finger—and you hit him like a prize-fighter, you brute!"

Bob turned away in contempt—and, as he turned, Crocker reached out and nipped an ear between finger and thumb.

"Oh!" roared Bob, as his ear was twisted.

He spun round and struck out with all his force.

Bob had a hefty punch. Crocker, as he received it, let go the ear and staggered back.

As he straightened up again, the look on his face was quite alarming. Under the grinning, sardonic good-humour that he affected, there was no doubt that Randolph Crocker, once of Greyfriars, was no more than a ruffian. He was not grinning now. With shut teeth and glinting eyes, he came at Bob—and Johnny Bull thrust out a foot just in time.

Crocker went over it, stumbled, and fell on his knees.

"Collar him!" shouted Johnny.

Before Randolph Crocker could pick himself up, the Famous Five fairly hurled themselves upon him.

A fellow who fancied that he could pull Remove ears, was a fellow who needed a lesson, in the opinion of the Famous Five; and they were going to give him one.

Crocker went sprawling in the grasp of five pairs of hands. He gave a howl of rage as he sprawled. He was strong, and he was wiry; and he struggled with savage vigour. But he was grasped on all sides; and Johnny Bull and Harry Wharton clung to his arms, holding them powerless.

Had he got a hand loose, there was no doubt of what would have happened—and none of the Famous Five wanted to stop such a punch as had landed on Prout. Whoever had stopped it, would probably have looked like Loder of the Sixth afterwards. They gave him no chance of that.

Wharton had one arm, and Johnny the other—Bob Cherry and Hurree Janset Ram Singh took a leg each, and Frank Nugent gripped the back of a collar. Thus held, even the wiry and hefty Sportsman was powerless, and he was swept off his feet.

"This way!" panted Harry Wharton. Struggling and kicking, yelling at the top of his voice, Randolph Crocker was carried bodily across the lane to the ditch on the other side.

"One—two—three—go!" gasped Bob.

And, with a swing, the old boy of Greyfriars went hurtling into the middle of the ditch.

There was a tremendous splash as he landed there in mud and muddy water, and half-melted snow.

He sat in the ditch up to the neck with muddy water flowing round him. He sat and spluttered.

"That's a tip, you cheeky rotter!" gasped Bob. "Like to pull my ear again, you swab?"

Crocker struggled and splashed, struggling to his feet. His hard face was livid with rage.

"Wait till I get out!" he gasped.

He came plunging to the side of the ditch.

What he was going to do when he got out, was only too clear. It was only prudent not to let him get out.

So, as he struggled up, five pairs of hands helped him back again, and he landed on his back in the ditch, this time disappearing completely under the oozy surface.

"Urrrrrgh!"

His head came up, muddy and oozy, streaming. He gurgled frantically.

The Famous Five left him to gurgle, and walked back to the school.

By the time he got out of the ditch, Sportsman Crocker was probably feeling the need of a wash and a change, more than of vengeance! He squelched his way back to the hiker's hut in the Abbot's Spinney—and his remarks, as he went, ought really to have turned the atmosphere blue! Old boy of Greyfriars as he was, it was only too clear that Sportsman Crocker was not a nice man!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Under Lock And Key!

HERBERT VERNON SMITH rose to his feet as the door of the punishment-room was unlocked, and Mr. Quelch entered.

Quelch's face was grim; but Smithy was glad to see even that grim face.

Two days in punny had made the Bounder of Greyfriars feel like Robinson Crusoe on his island—only more so.

He was glad—deeply glad—to have escaped the sack; though it was by no means certain that he had quite escaped it. But the alternative was very far from agreeable.

Only when the other fellows were in class, had he been allowed out for air and exercise—he was not allowed to see or speak to any other fellow at Greyfriars.

He saw nobody, in fact, but Trotter, who brought his meals; and his Form-master, who came to supervise his work—which he had to do in the punishment-room, instead of the Form-room or his study.

It was unpleasant enough; but the Bounder had no kick coming, as Fisher T. Fish would have expressed it. He was not, so far, punished for the injury he had done to Loder; expulsion would have been the punishment for that. But what he had confessed to merited severe measures—a fellow who broke dormitory bounds for the admitted purpose of ragging a prefect, could not expect to be dealt with mildly. If he got off with a few days in punny, he had little to complain of, and he knew it.

Mr. Quelch gave him a glance, and then stepped to the table and looked at the work the Bounder had done. He gave a nod of approval.

In Form, Smithy was a good worker, when he liked; but he did not often like. In punny he was doing his very best. Headstrong, cheeky, rebellious as he was by nature, the Bounder knew that his fate hung on a thread; and he was playing his most cautious game now. Once clear of this scrape, he was going to be the old Bounder again; but so long as he was in danger of the long jump, his game was to placate the powers that were.

"Very good!" said Mr. Quelch. "You are not, at all events, wasting your time here, Vernon-Smith."

"No, sir!" said the Bounder meekly. "May I ask, sir, how long I am to stop here—whether the Head has decided to—"

Mr. Quelch looked at him scrutinisingly.

"You still adhere, Vernon-Smith, to your statement that it was not you who struck Loder on Wednesday night in the Head's study?"

"Yes, sir! It was not I, and I don't know who it was," answered the Bounder steadily. "I've thought and thought about it, and I can't begin to think who it might have been."

Mr. Quelch coughed.

In point of fact, his own belief was shaken a little. Smithy's quiet and meek manners since his father's visit, had made a good impression on him.

"My father believes me, sir!" said Smithy.

"No doubt," said Mr. Quelch dryly, "and the headmaster has so far conceded the point to Mr. Vernon-Smith, that he has consented to give the matter further consideration. But—"

He paused a moment.

"If you were guiltless of that brutal act, Vernon-Smith, your present punishment is a light one for what you have confessed to," he said.

"I know, sir! I'm not complaining of that! But—"

He paused for a moment.

"Dr. Locke has consented, on your father's urgent representations, to allow the decision to remain in abeyance for a time!" said the Remove master. "During that time, every effort will be made, and is being made, to obtain further light on the matter. Your father hopes that some discovery may be made which will place the guilt on other shoulders, and exonerate you. If you are guiltless, this, of course, is very probable."

"I hope so, sir!"

"But I must tell you," went on Mr. Quelch, "that, so far, nothing has become known. Not the slightest evidence, or indication, can be found, that any other boy was out of his dormitory that night."

"He would keep it pretty dark, sir!" said the Bounder miserably. "He knows what to expect if he is caught."

Mr. Quelch coughed again.

In spite of himself, as it were, he was getting more and more the impression that Herbert Vernon-Smith was speaking the truth. Yet, if Vernon-Smith was guiltless, the affair was wrapped in utter mystery.

Against Smithy, there was what looked conclusive evidence. Against any other fellow, there was not the remotest spot of suspicion.

"This cannot go on indefinitely," resumed Mr. Quelch. "But Dr. Locke has consented to leave the final decision over for a week, while every possible investigation is made. He is as anxious, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,616.

as I am, to avoid the barest possibility of injustice being done. But—"

"A week!" repeated the Bounder, as his Form-master paused; and, rather to Mr. Quelch's surprise, his face brightened. "That means a chance for me, sir."

"I trust so!" said Mr. Quelch, very dryly. "But I hardly see—"

"Don't you, sir?" The Bounder's tone was eager. "It's certain, sir, from what happened, that some fellow was prowling at night—"

"That, at least, is certain!" admitted Mr. Quelch, still more dryly.

"You believe that it was I!" muttered the Bounder. "But—just supposing that it wasn't, sir—"

"Well?"

"Well, that fellow, whoever he was, must have had some reason for coming down that night! It wasn't to break bounds—he never got out. He was in the Head's study for something—perhaps for a rag! Or—or—" The Bounder hesitated.

Mr. Quelch gave him a sharp look.

"Speak plainly, Vernon-Smith! If you have thought of anything that may serve to clear this matter up, tell me at once!" he said.

"Well, sir, some of the fellows know that the Head keeps money in his study—"

"Vernon-Smith!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, starting.

The Bounder flushed crimson.

"I know it sounds rotten, sir! But that would be a reason for some awful rotter to be nosing in the study at night—and the fellow must be an awful rotter, to knock out Loder as he did, and leave it on me."

There was a look of extreme repugnance on Mr. Quelch's face. Obviously he did not like the suggestion the Bounder had made.

"What I mean is this, sir!" urged Smithy. "Whatever the fellow's reason was, he's still got it! Whatever he meant to do in the Head's study, he never did, through Loder interrupting him. Isn't it jolly likely that he's only waiting for this to blow over to try it on again?"

Mr. Quelch gave the Bounder a searching look. His gimlet eyes seemed almost to penetrate the junior.

"Granted that you are innocent, Vernon-Smith, what you suggest is quite possible, indeed probable!" he said at last, very slowly.

"A week gives me a chance!" said Smithy. "Nobody can say that I was mixed up in it if anything happens while I'm locked up here, sir! If anything is found to have happened in the Head's study while I'm here, sir—what will you think then?"

Again Mr. Quelch gave him that penetrating look.

"Last term, Vernon-Smith," he said very quietly, "a boy who was locked in this room for punishment, who has since left, contrived somehow to obtain possession of a duplicate key."

The Bounder started as if a serpent had stung him. Those words told him how deep was his Form-master's distrust.

"Oh, sir!" he panted. "You don't think—you cannot think—"

"You have no such key, Vernon-Smith?"

"No!" snarled the Bounder. "No! But I can see I'm done for—I can see that!" His voice rose in passionate anger and resentment. "If anything happens while I'm here, you're going to believe that I've got a secret key to the lock of this room, like Tracy had

las. term! Oh, it's a rotten shame! It's a shame—a rotten shame!"

"Calm yourself, Vernon-Smith!" said Mr. Quelch icily. "If I distrust you, if I believe you capable of deceitful trickery, whose is the fault?"

"Mine, I suppose!" muttered the Bounder bitterly. "I don't care—the game's up; I can see that now! I might as well have left when my father went! Whatever may happen, you'll fancy I did it to pull the wool over your eyes."

"I shall fancy nothing of the kind," said Mr. Quelch, "for, now that you have made that suggestion, Vernon-Smith, I shall direct Gosling to place a bolt on the outside of this door! The door will to-night and all subsequent nights that you remain here be bolted as well as locked on the outside. Nothing that may occur in the House, therefore, can be attributed to you while you remain here."

The gimlet eyes searched Smithy's face as Mr. Quelch uttered those words.

But the Bounder did not look like a fellow defeated in intended trickery. His face brightened up wonderfully. And Mr. Quelch relaxed.

He was more than keen enough to see that his words came as a relief and a comfort to the Bounder.

"That does it, sir!" said Vernon-Smith, and his voice and face were cheerful. "If that fellow puts his foot in it while I'm here, I'm all right! And he's jolly likely to get going under a week—why shouldn't he? He was going to do something that he was stopped from doing—and if he does it, he sees me clear."

Mr. Quelch's face when he left the punishment-room a few minutes later was very thoughtful.

He hardly knew what to think; yet the doubt was growing in his mind that it was not Herbert Vernon-Smith who had struck Loder that stunning blow in the dark. At all events, he was going to have his chance, such as it was—and that evening, while Smithy was doing his prep on his lonely own inside the punishment-room, Gosling, outside, was screwing a strong bolt on the door.

After which it was certain that if any fellow prowled at night in the school it would not be the Bounder of Greyfriars!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Painful For Prout!

MR. PROUT mumbled dismally. Prout could not sleep.

At one in the morning, Prout was generally safely bound by slumber's chain. But the portly Prout had been sadly and badly shaken by that terrific punch on his plump chest in the afternoon. It had thoroughly disturbed Prout—shaken him fore and aft, as it were. When Prout went to bed, his eyes refused to close.

On such occasions of sleeplessness Prout had a recourse; he would take a nip of whisky from a certain flask. Prout, really, was old enough to know better; but that was his recourse.

On this occasion, being fearfully wakeful, Prout took a rather large nip—and slid into slumber.

Now, it is true that a large nip of whisky will send a man to sleep. It is also true that it will wake him up later, when it turns cold on his unhappy inside, with a deadly wakefulness that is worse than ever.

Sleeplessness, temporarily banished, returns, like the evil spirit in the parable, with seven devils worse than itself!

Thus it was with Prout!

At one o'clock, he was so fearfully wakeful that it was quite hopeless to think of going to sleep.

He counted innumerable sheep jumping over a stile. Getting tired of sheep, he ran over in his weary mind all the verses he had by heart. But it booted not—he sat up, he mumbled, he grumbled, and he groaned. Sleep would not come.

He turned out at last. He really could not stand it any more.

He enveloped himself in a voluminous dressing-gown and put on slippers, opened his door as quietly as he could—for Prout was a considerate man, and did not want to wake anyone who was happy enough to be asleep—and went down.

Prout did not turn on lights as he went down. He did not want to illuminate the house at half-past one in the morning, and cause surprise or alarm to anyone who might wake and see light streaming under his door.

He knew every inch of his way, of course, and did not need a light.

With his ample dressing-gown swishing round his ample calves, Prout descended the stairs.

Here and there, a glimmer of wintry starlight fell in at a window and gave him all the light he needed.

All was shadowy and silent in the great building.

But Prout was not troubled by nerves. Moreover, his attention was occupied by the ache where Crocker's knuckles had landed and by the dull, deadly, sinking depression caused by the whisky within.

With swishing dressing-gown, Prout paced the length of Masters' Passage, and back again, slowly and ponderously.

He was going to pace, and pace, and pace, till he tired himself, in the faint hope that drowsiness might supervene. As a last resource, he was going to sit in his study and correct Latin proses for his Form.

To and fro went Prout, up and down that long passage, from the staircase at one end to the door of Common-room at the other—passing and repassing continually the corner of Head's Corridor.

That corridor was in the blackest darkness.

So, after Prout had been pacing for nearly half an hour—which seemed to him like two or three whole hours—he was quite surprised, indeed amazed, to catch a sudden twinkle of light in that corridor.

He stopped and blinked at it. Someone else was up!

It was the gleam of a flash-lamp that he saw. It was a tiny gleam, and nothing else was visible in the darkness.

For long moments, the astonished Fifth Form master stood staring at it in amazement. Someone was there—at the door of the Head's study!

Then the happy thought occurred to Prout that Dr. Locke, like himself, was sleepless, and had turned out, also like himself, and come to his study, probably for a book.

The Head's private house was at a little distance from the main building, but there was a connecting passage, closed by a baize door, by which Dr. Locke was accustomed to come to his study.

Apparently he had come!

Click!

The sound of the study door unlocking settled that for Prout. Only Dr. Locke had a key to that study.

True, a few days ago, a junior in the Remove had abstracted the study key,



“Look at Loder, Mr. Vernon-Smith!” said Dr. Locke. “That is what your son has done!” “Good gad!” Mr. Vernon-Smith started. “Vernon-Smith has not only struck this prefect, but has inflicted, as you see, a brutal disfigurement!” continued the Head. The millionaire breathed hard.

as Prout remembered. But it had been returned.

Prout could see nothing but the tiny twinkle of the flash-lamp in the deep dark. But clearly and distinctly in the silence he heard the click as the door unlocked. It must be the Head!

Prout breathed satisfaction.

Nothing, really, could have been more fortunate than this. A chat with another sleepless gentleman was much more attractive than weary pacing and counting the endless minutes.

Prout quite cheered up.

The Head, of course, would be as glad to see Prout as Prout would be to see the Head! At least, Prout did not doubt it.

Instead of one pacing the weary passage and the other sitting over a book they could have quite a cheery talk!

Prout turned the corner and progressed, happily, towards the Head's study. He reached the door.

It had been opened, as he knew, but it was closed again now. No glimmer of light came from under it—which was a little puzzling, as Dr. Locke surely would have switched on the light when he went in! However, Prout tapped at the door and turned the handle.

As he opened the door he caught, for an instant, a twinkle of light; it was the flash-lamp again. That was amazing! Was the Head looking for a book with a flash-lamp instead of turning on the light?

But in a split second that twinkle of light disappeared.

“My dear sir—” began Prout.

He heard a faint gasping breath.

“I trust I have not startled you, sir,” boomed Prout. “Being sleepless, like yourself, I— Ooooooooooooh!”

It seemed like a dream to Prout. He had the door half open, addressing, as

he supposed, the headmaster within! That door was suddenly slammed on him, banging on him and knocking him backwards.

Bemused with astonishment, Prout sat down with a sudden bump just outside the doorway.

The door shut; the key within turned. The door was locked on him. Prout sat flabbergasted.

The Head—it could only be the Head who was in that study—had slammed the door on Prout and locked him out. Unless Prout was dreaming, or the headmaster had gone out of his senses, there was no explaining it.

Prout was not dreaming! So it appeared that the headmaster must have gone out of his senses!

Gasping, Prout heaved himself to his feet. He was alarmed, concerned, amazed, dumbfounded. Still it did not occur to him that it was not Dr. Locke in the study. Who else could have unlocked the door?

Mr. Prout found his voice.

“Dr. Locke!” he gasped.

There was no reply from the study.

Prout tapped on the oak. Still silence reigned.

“My dear sir,” exclaimed Prout. “if I have startled you I am sorry. Being sleepless, I came down; and finding you also, sir, in the same case, I came here— Do you hear me, sir?”

No answer from the study.

“Dr. Locke!” boomed Prout.

Silence.

“Sir, will you favour me with an answer?” exclaimed Prout. He was getting indignant now. “I regret having startled you, if I have done so. I will go at once. I will leave you, sir, as you do not seem to desire my company! But at least, sir, I think you might address one word to me.”

No word was addressed to Prout from

the locked study. The Fifth Form master breathed hard and deep.

“Very well, sir,” he said with a great deal of dignity, “I will go!”

And, breathing indignation, Prout went!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Not The Head!

“QUELCH!”

Mr. Quelch's eyes opened and blinked in sudden light.

“Quelch! Are you awake, Quelch?”

Mr. Quelch sat up.

His door was open, the light switched on, and in the doorway stood a portly figure, looking immense in a voluminous dressing-gown. The Remove master stared blankly at Mr. Prout.

“What—” he stuttered.

“Ah! You are awake, Quelch?”

“You have awakened me!” answered Mr. Quelch acidly. “What is the matter, Prout? Is there a fire, or what?”

“I am sorry to disturb you, Quelch.” Prout rolled in, breathing heavily. “Something very extraordinary has happened! Something unparalleled—in fact, unprecedented.”

“Really, Mr. Prout—”

“Has it ever occurred to you, Quelch,” asked Mr. Prout in an agitated voice, “that our chief—our respected chief—Dr. Locke, whom we all respect, and, indeed, revere—has it ever occurred to you that—that—that—”

“That what?” snapped Mr. Quelch. Sad to relate, he was wondering whether the agitated Prout had been drinking!

“That he is not quite—quite—quite—I hardly like to utter it—but not quite—quite—you understand, Quelch?”

"Not in the least," answered the Remove master. "Possibly if you made your meaning clear I might understand."

Prout, with a plump forefinger, touched his forehead in a very significant way.

Quelch gazed at him.

"Prout!" he gasped.

"Hear me," said Mr. Prout. "Hear me, Quelch, and judge for yourself. Being sleepless, I came down. The Head, apparently, was sleepless also—at all events, he came to his study. I proceeded to his study, Quelch, naturally supposing that a little company, in such circumstances, would be as agreeable to him as to me. But—"

"Well?" said Mr. Quelch blankly.

"But," said Prout in almost a hollow voice, "he slammed the door in my face—"

Quelch almost bounded out of bed.

"He did—what?" he stuttered.

"Slammed the study door in my face—"

"Impossible!"

"Knocking me over—"

"Mr. Prout!"

"My nose, sir, was struck by the door!" said Prout. "The effect is painful. It is painful in the extreme! I hardly noticed it, in my astonishment, at the moment. I notice it now! It is exceedingly painful. I fear that there is a mark. Look at my nose, Quelch."

Mr. Quelch looked at Prout's nose. Like Marian's in the ballad, it was red and raw! Clearly it had had a tap.

"I was overturned," said Prout in the same hollow tone. "I sat down on the floor, Quelch. And—if you can believe it—the Head locked the door on me and refused to speak one word!"

"Impossible!" said Mr. Quelch.

"I should have said so, Quelch! I should have said so! A gentleman of such courtesy, such urbanity, as Dr. Locke—a chief whom we all respect! Is there any explanation, Quelch, except that—?" Prout gave that significant tap on his forehead again.

"Absurd!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Some mental aberration, Quelch—we must hope and trust, temporary—but undoubtedly some mental aberration."

"Will you hand me my dressing-gown, Prout? Dear me, where are my slippers? I am glad you called me—very glad—"

"You will come with me, Quelch? Perhaps you may prevail on him to unlock the door! You have more influence over him than any other member of the staff! Some temporary mental affliction—"

"Do not talk nonsense, Prout!" said Mr. Quelch, as he bundled into his dressing-gown.

"Eh?"

"If what you describe has occurred it is obviously not Dr. Locke who is in that study! Dr. Locke could not have acted in such a manner!"

"Some aberration—"

"Nonsense! It cannot have been the Head!"

Prout blinked at him.

"It was the Head, Quelch—"

"Did you see him?"

"I did not see him. But no one else has a key—"

Mr. Quelch's eyes gleamed.

He was glad now, very glad, that he had had that bolt put on the door of the punishment-room.

Someone was up—someone was in the Head's study, as someone had been a couple of nights ago—but this time, beyond doubt or cavil, it was not Herbert Vernon-Smith. Who it was Quelch did not know yet—but he was going to know!

Prout, in the fixed belief that it was the headmaster, could only suppose that it spelled mental aberration. Quelch did not suppose for one moment that it was the headmaster.

"He opened the door with a key?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"I heard him do so, Quelch. He entered, and shut the door before I reached it. Only the Head has a key—"

"So we have hitherto supposed!" said Mr. Quelch grimly. "But as the Head cannot imaginably have acted in the manner you have described, Prout, it is obviously not the Head who is in that study."

"But the key, Quelch—the key—"

Prout broke off suddenly. "Oh! Upon my word! You think that some boy may have abstracted the key again, as happened before—some boy in your Form—"

"No, sir; not some boy in my Form!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "Much more probably some boy in another Form—perhaps the Fifth—"

"Really, Mr. Quelch—"

"That is, if a key has been abstracted at all. No mention has been made of a missing key. It appears that some other key exists—in the hands of some unknown person. But we shall see."

Quelch hurried from the room.

Prout lumbered after him.

"My dear Quelch, I will come with you! Quelch!"

But Quelch did not wait for the slow motion of the ponderous master of the Fifth. He almost flew down the stairs, his dressing-gown whisking round legs that were long and slim, and much more active than Prout's.

Prout puffed and blew after him.

Quelch was at the door of the Head's study before Prout was half-way down the stairs.

He switched on the corridor light. He remembered what had happened to Loder of the Sixth, and he had no mind to stop a sudden blow in the dark.

The door was locked. Whether the mystery man was within, or whether he had scuttled out after Prout went, it was impossible to say. Quelch hoped the former, but he knew that the latter was more probable.

He rapped sharply on the door.

"Who is there? Is anyone there? Answer me!"

There was no reply from the study.

Quelch stood, grim and watchful, as Prout came panting down the corridor.

"Quelch! Is he still there?" gasped Prout.

"There is no answer."

"If it is not the Head—"

"It is not the Head."

"Then, if it is not, we have caught him, whoever he is!" gasped Prout.

"He cannot escape, with both of us here—"

"Unless he has done so already!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "How long is it since you were here, Prout—"

"Ten minutes—a quarter of an hour."

"One minute would have been enough!" said Mr. Quelch bitterly. "I have no doubt that he is gone. The young rascal would not be likely to delay after the alarm was given. Whoever he is, I have no doubt that he is back in his dormitory long ago, and perfectly safe from detection."

"But if—if, after all, it is the Head—"

"Rubbish!"

"Really, Quelch, I am not accustomed to hearing my remarks described in such terms!" exclaimed Mr. Prout, with indignant wrath. "I shall proceed at once to the Head's house, and, if he is there, ask him for the key, and thus the matter will be placed beyond doubt."

"Do so!" grunted Mr. Quelch.

Prout did so, disappearing by the baize door that led to the Head's house.

He came back after ten minutes with a key in his hand.

Quelch unlocked the door of the Head's study, and the two masters, with grim faces, surveyed an empty room.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

All Right For Smithy!

DR. LOCKE sat in his study, in the misty February morning, with a deep and troubled frown upon his face.

Mr. Quelch, standing by the table,

YOU MUST MEET—

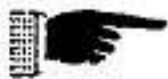
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looked equally troubled, but, at the same time, a little relieved.

"This is a very painful matter, Mr. Quelch!" said the Head, breaking the silence.

"Very, sir!" said the Remove master.

"From what occurred, to Mr. Prout's knowledge, there is no doubt that some boy came down in the night and entered this study, unlocking the door with a key."

"None whatever!"

"It cannot have been Vernon-Smith on this occasion."

"Impossible, sir!"

"It was some other Greyfriars boy, Mr. Quelch; and if that is the case, it was possibly—indeed, probably—some other boy on the former occasion."

"That must be admitted, sir," said Mr. Quelch.

"The conclusive circumstance, in adjudging Vernon-Smith guilty, was his possession of the key. It is now apparent that some other person has a key which will unlock the door."

"Quite, sir."

"It was by Vernon-Smith's own reckless conduct that suspicion was brought upon him, and only he is to blame if an error was made," said Dr. Locke. "Nevertheless, sir, it is very painful to reflect that, but for his father's intervention, he would have been sent away that day, judged guilty, though his guilt of the attack on Loder is now very doubtful indeed."

"The boy brought it upon himself, sir, and has no right to complain," said Mr. Quelch. "If he had not left the dormitory at forbidden hours he would not have come into the matter at all. Nevertheless, I am glad that his father came that morning, and that you acceded to his request to give the matter further consideration."

"That, at least, is very fortunate!" said Dr. Locke. "The fact is, Mr. Quelch, that I am now satisfied that Vernon-Smith is cleared of the attack on Loder. The person who slammed the door in Mr. Prout's face, knocking him over, was the same person who struck Loder, in my opinion. The brutal and violent action is so very similar."

"I agree, sir."

"I have sent for the boy," said Dr. Locke. "Wingate will bring him here. You agree with me that Vernon-Smith is now to be considered cleared of the charge on which he was so nearly expelled."

"Wholly, sir! The young rascal who was in this study last night was the same who was here on Wednesday night—I am convinced of that."

"But who, Mr. Quelch—"

"I have so far no idea, sir. Certainly not a boy in my Form. Only Vernon-Smith was missing from the Remove dormitory on Wednesday night. It was not, as it proves now, Vernon-Smith. It was not, therefore, a Remove boy at all."

"That appears clear," assented the Head. "A boy in some other Form—but who? He must be discovered, Mr. Quelch."

"Undoubtedly, sir. And I cannot help attaching some importance to Mr. Vernon-Smith's remark that the blow struck at Loder was extraordinary if struck by a junior boy."

Dr. Locke pursed his lips.

"A senior," he said—"a boy in the Fifth or the Sixth Form."

"It seems at least probable, sir."

"But what, Mr. Quelch, can have been his object here? For what strange and mysterious reason does this boy desire to penetrate secretly into my study?"

Mr. Quelch remembered the sugges-

tion the Bounder had made, and coughed.

"On both occasions, sir, this prowler has been interrupted immediately after entering the study," he said. "His object can therefore only be guessed at. You have found nothing here amiss?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing is missing?"

Dr. Locke started.

"Nothing, Mr. Quelch. Nothing has been disturbed at all, so far as I have been able to ascertain. It is inexplicable to me."

There was a brief silence. It was broken by a rap on the door.

"Come in!" said the Head.

Wingate of the Sixth opened the door.

"Vernon-Smith, sir!" he said.

"Thank you, Wingate!"

The Bounder stepped into the study, and Wingate drew the door shut and went.

Vernon-Smith gave his Form-master a quick look, and then fixed his eyes on the Head. He was breathing quickly.

Of what had happened in the night he knew, of course, nothing. He did not know why he had been fetched from the punishment-room to the Head's study. But he dreaded to hear that his fate had been decided upon, and that he was to leave the school.

"I have sent for you, Vernon-Smith," began the Head. "I must tell you that I have decided—"

Smithy caught his breath.

"I understood, sir, from Mr. Quelch that I was to be given a chance," he said bitterly. "Mr. Quelch mentioned a week—"

"Kindly do not interrupt me, Vernon-Smith! I have decided to order your release from the punishment-room, as your Form-master and I are now satisfied that it was not you who attacked Loder on Wednesday night."

"Oh!" gasped the Bounder.

"In view of this, no further punishment will be inflicted, and your foolish and reckless conduct will be pardoned," said the Head. "I shall trust that this will be a warning to you, Vernon-Smith. By your own folly and recklessness you placed yourself in such a position that it was impossible to avoid adjudging you guilty of what occurred on the night you were out of your dormitory. You had better reflect on this, and decide to amend your conduct, Vernon-Smith!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" stammered Smithy. His eyes danced. "May I ask if the fellow has been found, sir?" Smithy knew now that something must have occurred during the night, though he did not know what.

"The offender," said the Head stiffly, "has not been discovered, Vernon-Smith. But as it transpires that some boy entered this study with a key last night, while you were in the punishment-room, I am taking the view I have stated. You may now go. Your father will be informed immediately of my decision."

"Thank you, sir!" gasped Smithy.

He left the study like a fellow walking on air. At the corner of the passage Tom Redwing was waiting—breathless.

"Smithy! I saw Wingate taking you—what—" he exclaimed.

"All the best!" chuckled the Bounder.

"Reddy, old man, the best day's work you ever did in your life was getting my father here that day! That saved my bacon, Reddy, old man! Hurrah!"

"But what—"

"The pater made the Head leave it over!" grinned Smithy. "They gave me a week. I hoped that rotter, whoever he is, would get going again—and he has! He was prowling last night,

Reddy—more power to his elbow! They know—now! Reddy, old bean, you've pulled me through!"

Redwing's face was shining.

"I'm glad, Smithy, old man! But who—do they know who—"

"Not a thing!" The Bounder chuckled again. "They know it wasn't little me, as I was parked in punny, with a bolt on the door! Reddy, I'm the only man at Greyfriars above suspicion—now!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Might be anybody else!" chortled the Bounder. "Couldn't be me—might be any other man at Greyfriars! Might be you, Reddy—"

"Fathead!"

"Or dear old Wharton—"

"Ass!"

"Or Bunter—"

Redwing laughed.

"Or Coker of the Fifth, or Hobby of the Shell, or the great and only Cecil Reginald of the Fourth! Anybody you like!" chuckled Vernon-Smith. "Anybody but little me—who was so jolly nearly sacked for it! Gorgeous, ain't it?"

"I wish he'd been caught—"

"Well, I'm not so sure! He blacked Loder's eyes—can't say I'm sorry Loder stopped that jolt—now they're not going to bunk me because somebody else jolted him! Anyhow, they haven't got him—all they know is that it wasn't this infant. Wasn't you, was it, Reddy?"

Redwing laughed. With a bright face, he walked out into the quad with his chum—where a howl from the Remove fellows greeted the prisoner of the punishment-room, now free as air and restored to his Form!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

No Luck For Loder!

GERALD LODER stared.

Loder could hardly believe his eyes.

Those eyes were still black—though the black was slowly changing to a rather horrid shade of bluish green. Still, Loder could see with them—and what he now saw made him stare, and doubt their evidence.

Loder was in the quad. He hated displaying those black eyes, but a fellow could not stick indoors for ever. He could not go out of gates—he did not want those eyes to leap to all other eyes in the vicinity. He took his walks within the school precincts—and the merest shadow of a grin on a face when he passed it had an exasperating effect.

Some of the fags seemed to think that black eyes had something comic about them. If they had, Loder could not see it. His temper, never of the best, was sorely disgruntled these days. He gave his ash a good deal of exercise. But he had one consolation—the young scoundrel who had knocked him out was going to be sacked for it!

The delay in sacking him irritated Loder extremely. He knew that it was due to Mr. Vernon-Smith's visit, and that the millionaire had somehow prevailed on the Head to postpone the final decision. That, to Loder, seemed utter nonsense—and very irritating nonsense.

Still, Vernon-Smith was locked in punny, with the sack to follow; it was a sheer impossibility that he could escape the consequences of what he had done. But now—

Loder stared, with his black eyes! In the quad, surrounded by a crowd of Remove fellows, stood Herbert Vernon-Smith!

He was grinning cheerfully, like a fellow who had not a care in the world. He was talking, and so were a dozen other fellows, all at once.

Excitement reigned. The Remove crowd, obviously, were surprised to see Smithy in the quad! They all wanted to know!

Loder was more than surprised! He was astonished and enraged. And he bore down on the buzzing group with a glitter in his black eyes. If that young rascal had somehow got out of punny, Loder was the man to see that he returned there, without the loss of a moment.

"So it's all right, Smithy?" Harry Wharton was exclaiming, as the black-eyed prefect strode up.

"Right as rain!" grinned Smithy.

"I say, you fellows, here's Loder!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

Loder pushed roughly through the crowd of juniors.

Vernon-Smith looked at him, with a cheery grin. He had not forgotten his feud with Loder—and that pair of black eyes rather amused him.

"You young rascal!" hooted Loder. He grabbed the Bounder by the collar. "What are you doing out of the punishment-room?"

"Let go my collar, Loder!" said the Bounder quietly, but with a gleam in his eyes.

"I shall take you in to Mr. Quelch at once!" snapped Loder. "Come!"

"I'm let out!" howled Smithy.

"Don't talk rot! Come with me at once!"

"It's true, Loder!" exclaimed Tom Redwing.

"That will do! Come with me, you young scoundrel!" snapped Loder, and he dragged Vernon-Smith away towards the House.

The Bounder resisted savagely.

"Let go, you bully!" he shouted. "By gad, I'll hack your shins if you don't let go my collar, you rotten bully!"

"Smithy!" exclaimed Redwing. "Don't be an ass! You've only got to see Mr. Quelch! Go in quietly."

It was good advice, and the Bounder, fortunately, had sense enough to realise it, angry and excited as he was. Hacking a prefect's shins was not the sort of thing that could be done with impunity, even when the prefect was going rather over the limit.

Setting his teeth, Vernon-Smith ceased to resist, and walked quietly to the House, Loder's grip still on his collar. The Remove crowd followed in a buzz of excitement and doubt.

"I say, you fellows, Smithy ain't let off!" grinned Billy Bunter. "He's got out somehow! He was only gammoning."

"Is it straight, Reddy?" asked Harry Wharton doubtfully.

"Hasn't Smithy said so?" snapped Redwing.

"Well, yes, but—um!"

"Is the straightfulness terrific?" inquired Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a dusky grin. "It would be posterously like the esteemed Smithy to get out of punny, and play the ridiculous ox."

"Oh, rats!" said Redwing. "You'll soon see."

Harry Wharton & Co., and a good many other fellows, followed Loder and his prisoner into the House and to Mr. Quelch's study. They could not help doubting a little.

It was, as the Nabob of Bhanipur declared, quite in Smithy's style to get out of punny, if he had the chance, and

parade himself in the quad, the cynosure of all eyes, until he was rounded up again.

Loder, at all events, had no doubt on the subject. And he hooked Smithy along to Quelch's study, with a grip on his collar to make sure that he did not escape again!

He tapped at the door with his left hand and threw it open. Still gripping Smithy's collar, he marched him in. Outside, a rather breathless and excited crowd waited.

"This boy, sir—Vernon-Smith—" panted Loder.

Mr. Quelch rose to his feet, staring in astonishment. And he frowned.

"Let go that boy's collar, Loder! That is not the way to bring a boy of my Form to my study!" he said severely.

"He will dodge away if possible, sir!" said Loder. But he released the Bounder's collar, standing between him and the doorway.

"Vernon-Smith! Is it possible that you are in trouble again so soon?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch sternly.

The Bounder suppressed a grin.

"Not at all, sir!" he answered. "I've done nothing that I know of! Perhaps Loder can tell you why he has brought me here."

The Remove master turned a puzzled look on Loder.

"Please explain, Loder," he said. "Why—"

"I don't understand you, sir!" said Loder, staring. "I've caught this young rascal out of the punishment-room and brought him to you. I suppose Trotter must have left the door unlocked. Anyhow, he—"

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "Is that why you have brought Vernon-Smith here, Loder?"

"Certainly!" grunted Loder.

"Did not Vernon-Smith tell you that he had been released?"

"He did. I did not believe him, of course."

"Nevertheless, it is the fact, Loder," said Mr. Quelch. "You are aware of what occurred last night, as all the prefects have been informed—"

"That has nothing to do with Vernon-Smith."

"It has a very great deal to do with him, Loder, as it is taken by his headmaster that he is not the boy who struck you on Wednesday night," said Mr. Quelch sharply. "That boy was in the headmaster's study again last night, and he certainly was not Vernon-Smith. This boy is quite cleared in the matter."

There was a buzz from the passage. "Official!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"All right for Smithy."

"Hurrah!"

Loder stood staring at the Remove master, his black eyes fairly popping. He was too exasperated to keep his temper in control.

"Do you mean to say that Vernon-Smith is let off—that he is not to be expelled?" he gasped.

"Precisely!"

"After what he has done!" yelled Loder.

"Please do not raise your voice in my study, Loder. I have told you that your headmaster is satisfied that Vernon-Smith never struck that blow, or—"

"Rubbish!" roared Loder. He was too enraged to care what he said.

Mr. Quelch jumped.

"What—what did you say, Loder?" he stuttered.

"If that young scoundrel has deceived the Head and deceived you, he cannot deceive me!" roared Loder.

"I know that he knocked me out that night. I've got two black eyes. Is a young rascal going to be allowed to black a prefect's eyes, and get by with it? I call it disgraceful!"

"Loder!"

"Look at me!" howled Loder. "Look at me—disfigured for weeks! And that young hooligan is to be let off, laughing in his sleeve!"

"I have told you that this boy never—"

"Rubbish! Rot! I know he did!" Mr. Quelch's eyes glittered.

"Vernon-Smith, leave my study! All of you go away at once! Shut the door! Now, Loder," continued Mr. Quelch quietly, when the door had closed on the Remove fellows, "I can make allowances for you. You have had a severe injury, and it has warped your judgment. But I will not tolerate any such impertinence as this from any boy in the school!"

"I tell you—" hooted Loder.

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Either you will apologise to me, Loder, here and now, or I will take you to your headmaster, and repeat what you have said to him. I warn you that, in that case, you will certainly not be allowed to remain a prefect, if you are allowed to remain at Greyfriars at all. Now, sir, take your choice!"

Loder looked at him. Quelch's face was like iron. It was not easy for the bully of the Sixth to control his rage; but he knew that he had to.

"I believe that he did it!" he panted. "I know—"

"You may believe what you choose, Loder, if you are regardless of what amounts to conclusive evidence, and have no respect for your headmaster's judgment. But you will not be allowed to use such language to me. I shall take you to the Head—"

Loder choked.

"I—I—I apologise, sir!" he gasped.

"Very good! Leave my study!"

Loder left the study, almost suffocating his fury. His temper was as black as his eyes as he went. With the deepest of deep feelings, Gerald Loder stamped away to his study, and banged the door with a bang that woke every echo in the Sixth Form passage.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Getting Ready For Loder!

WHO was it?

That question was asked, up and down Greyfriars School. But nobody could find an answer.

Only one thing seemed certain—that it was not Herbert Vernon-Smith. The Bounder, who had been nearly—very nearly—sacked for it, was now almost the only fellow at whom the finger of suspicion could not point.

Loder of the Sixth could disregard the evidence if he liked—and he did! Loder's judgment, no doubt, was warped—by the decorative state of his features. But everybody else was satisfied. The fellow who had banged the Head's study door on Prout's portly nose was the fellow who had knocked Loder out. Really, the thing spoke for itself.

Loder had caught him, and he had knocked Loder out. Prout had nearly spotted him, and he banged Prout over. It was the same man. But what man it was, among the hundreds of "men" at Greyfriars, was a baffling mystery.

That mystery was discussed all over the school. It quite banished Randolph



With Crocker's jaw so close to him, the temptation to hit it seemed too strong for Prout to resist. The Fifth Form-master's plump fist flashed out. Biff! "Got him!" gasped Bob Cherry. Crocker gave a howl.

Crocker as a topic. It almost put Soccer in the shade.

Who had given Loder that jolt? Who had banged the door on Prout's nose? And what did he want in the Head's study, anyway? And would he—whatever it was that he wanted there—get going again? That was quite a thrilling question.

"It's a giddy mystery," said Bob Cherry, at tea in Study No. 1. "Sort of thing for Ferrers Locke to handle—if the Head's jolly old relative happened to be around."

"Or Drake, if he was still here!" remarked Frank Nugent. "I dare say he could worry it out. Beats me hollow."

"The hollowfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "There is no clue to the esteemed mystery man, and even the absurd Locke or the ridiculous Drake could not get going without a clue."

"Oh, detectives find clues that other fellows don't spot!" said Bob. "If young Drake was still at Greyfriars, I'll bet he'd spot the man. But he isn't!"

All the juniors knew that Jack Drake, formerly of the Greyfriars Remove, was now the assistant of Ferrers Locke, the famous detective.

"The Head might do worse than send for him, if he wants to find the man," remarked Johnny Bull.

"Not much use," said Harry. "Everybody knows that Drake is a detective now, and if he came here, you can bet that the mystery man would guess why. He wouldn't do any more prowling while Drake was here."

"But who the dickens is the man?" asked Bob. "We know that it wasn't Smithy now, but who—"

"The whofulness is terrific!" "I say, you fellows, Loder thinks he knows!" grinned Billy Bunter. There

was cake for tea in Study No. 1, so there was Bunter for tea, also. "Loder believes it was Smithy. I've heard him saying so."

"Loder's an ass!" said Bob. "Loder wants to make somebody sit up for those black eyes," said Harry. "He won't be happy till he gets somebody. But he won't get Smithy."

"I suppose even Smithy will have sense enough not to break out again till this has blown over," remarked Johnny Bull. "If he gets copped out of the dorm again, it will look as if he might be the man, after all."

"Smithy's no fool," said Harry. "He will be jolly careful now."

But when the Remove were in their dormitory that night, Harry Wharton rather revised that opinion. Mr. Quelch saw lights out for his Form, and ten minutes after the Remove master had gone, some fellow was heard getting out of bed.

A dozen other fellows sat up at the sound.

"Who's that?" rapped the captain of the Remove.

"Don't yell!" came back the Bouncer's sarcastic voice.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Is that you, Smithy? Are you potty enough to play the goat again, after what's happened?"

"Quite!"

"Smithy, old man—" came from Redwing's bed.

"Well, some fellows ask for it," chuckled Skinner.

"They do—they does," said Peter Todd.

"I say, you fellows," came Bunter's fat squeak—"I say, do you think it was Smithy, after all? I know Loder thinks so. I say, was it really you, Smithy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Blessed if I see anything to cackle

at! Looks to me as if it was Smithy, after all," said the fat Owl. "I say, Smithy, what was it you wanted in the Head's study?"

"You blithering Owl!" hissed the Bouncer. "Shut up!"

"Oh, really, Smithy—I say, you'll get copped this time! I'll bet you that Loder will be keeping an eye open."

"Go hon!" said the Bouncer sarcastically. "As it happens, that bright thought has occurred to me, too, and if Loder comes spying in this dormitory, Loder is going to get a surprise."

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry. "You're not going out?"

"Fathead! I've been as near the sack as I want to be! I'm not anxious to catch a train home. And I've had enough of punny for this term."

Most of the Remove were sitting up now, peering at the Bouncer. There was a glimmer of the moon through the high windows, and they could dimly make out the figure in pyjamas.

Smithy had not dressed. Evidently he was not going out. What he was going to do the Removites did not know, but they were very curious to know.

The Bouncer went along to the big cupboard at the end of the dormitory. He came back with something in his hand. Then he unlatched the door, and placed it an inch or two ajar.

He placed a chair within and stepped on it. Then all the juniors could guess what Smithy was going to do.

Dimly they could see him arranging something on the top of the door. He stepped down and replaced the chair by the wall. He was heard to chuckle as he went back towards his bed.

"What have you stuck up there, Smithy?" asked five or six voices.

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"Only a paper bag," answered Smithy. "If it's still there in the morning I shall take it down. I fancy it won't be!"

"Well, you ass," said Hazeldene, "what's the good of sticking up a paper bag to drop on Loder's nut if he pokes it in? A paper bag won't hurt him."

"I don't want to hurt the poor dear!" answered Smithy. "Only to give him a gentle hint not to come spying in our dorm."

"Anything in the bag?" asked Bob, with a chuckle.

"Only some pepper."

"What?"

"Mixed with some mustard."

"Oh crikey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a ripple of laughter up and down the dormitory. Smithy turned in, happily satisfied with his preparations for Loder—if Loder looked in.

In his fixed belief that Smithy was the night-prowler, it was very likely that Loder would. If he did! The juniors chuckled at the thought. They rather hoped that Loder would give them a call.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Loder Looks In!

"YOU coming, Jimmy?"

"No," answered Walker of the Sixth, with emphasis.

Loder gave an angry grunt.

It was eleven o'clock—at which time even prefects of the Sixth Form were supposed to be asleep in bed.

But Gerald Loder had not gone to bed, and his pal, James Walker, had sat up with him to keep him company. They had whiled away the time with banker and cigarettes—such being the custom in Loder's study. But at eleven, Gerald Loder rose and threw the stump of a cigarette into the fire.

"It's rot, old man!" said Walker. "Goodness knows who gave you those two black eyes the other night, but it wasn't that Remove kid."

"I know it was!" answered Loder savagely.

Walker shook his head.

"It's clear enough," he said. "The man Prout got after was the same man, and that wasn't young Vernon-Smith. Have a little sense!"

"If it wasn't Vernon-Smith knocked me out, who was it?" snarled Loder.

"The fellow Prout bagged last night, whoever he was—goodness knows who!" answered Walker.

"How do we know Prout bagged anybody?" sneered Loder. "The old ass may have dreamed it. He never saw anybody; and fancied there was somebody in the Head's study. There was nobody there when Quelch came down. The old goat was half-asleep and dreamed it."

Walker made no reply to that. A fellow who was obstinately determined not to be convinced was beyond argument.

"Besides, for all I know, young Vernon-Smith may have got out of punny, if Prout spotted anybody at all," added Loder, changing his ground, as it were. "There was a kid last term got out of punny at night."

"Quelch had a bolt put on the door."

"Might have been left unfastened."

"Gerald, old man, you're talking out of your hat! Chuck it up and go to bed, as I'm going to do," said Walker, yawning.

Loder passed a hand over his eyes. There was a bitter, vicious glitter in those darkened eyes.

"I'm going to get that young scoun-

drel!" he said, between his teeth. "He has some stunt on in the Head's study—a rag, I suppose, unless—well, everybody knows there's money in that room."

"Don't be a fool!" said Walker unceremoniously. "That kid's a cheeky young rascal, but Greyfriars men don't pinch."

"There's an old Greyfriars man, camped in the Abbot's Spinney this minute, who was sacked for pinching," retorted Loder. "What's happened once might happen again."

"One swallow doesn't make a summer!" snapped Walker. "Get that rotten idea out of your head. That man Crocker was a bad egg; there's no man like that in the school now. Pinching! Why, that young sweep Vernon-Smith is a millionaire's son, and has all he wants and more."

"I've got a strong suspicion that he gambles, and a fellow who gambles never has enough," sneered Loder.

James Walker looked at him, looked at the cards on the study table, and burst into a laugh.

"Nice for us!" he said. "You're fearfully amusing, old man!"

"Oh, don't be a fool! I don't know what he's after in the Head's study, but he's after something. And he's got tons of nerve. Look at that game he played the other day to stick here till his father came. They've let him off for that—along with the rest. But if I catch him out of dormitory bounds—"

Loder snapped his teeth.

"You won't!"

"He's got nerve enough to carry on—tons of nerve! But I'm not going to watch for him in the dark this time, and get another jolt like the last one. I'm going up to his dormitory."

"More fool you! Quelch will make a fearful row if you disturb his birds in their roost at this time of night without anything to go on."

"I'm not going to ring an alarm-bell or bang at the door!" said Loder sarcastically. "I'm going to look in. If he's there, all right. If not, I've got him! I'm going on every night till I get him. No kid in the Lower Fourth is going to black my eyes without getting the chopper for it. First time I get him missing from his dorm at night he can tell the Head what he likes, but he won't be given another chance. Coming?"

"No."

"Go and eat coke, then!"

Gerald Loder left the study and proceeded to the staircase. Walker left it also, and went to his own study to bed. Walker did not believe for a moment that Vernon-Smith would be discovered missing from his dormitory, and he did not want trouble with the Remove master.

Neither did Loder, for that matter; but he did not consider that there was much risk of trouble. If, when he looked into the Remove dormitory, Herbert Vernon-Smith was in bed, as he ought to be, Loder had only to retire without awakening anyone. If, on the other hand, the young rascal was missing, his visit of inspection would be fully justified.

The black-eyed prefect went very quietly up the stairs in the dark. Softly he crossed the dormitory landing.

He arrived, without a sound, at the door of the Remove dormitory.

There he paused and listened intently. From within the long, dark room came a sound of a rumbling snore. Billy Bunter, at least, was fast asleep. In the intervals of that rumbling snore the faint sound of the steady breathing of many sleepers was audible in the silence of the night.

Loder's eyes gleamed in the dark like a cat's. It struck him very forcibly that he would not have heard those faint sounds had the thick oaken door been shut and latched. He realised that it must be partly open.

"By gum!" breathed Loder.

Softly he groped with his hand over the door. He was right—it was several inches open!

Loder grinned in the darkness.

It was past eleven o'clock, yet that dormitory door was unlatched—open! That Mr. Quelch, when he saw lights-out for his Form, had left it so, was unimaginable. Quelch was a careful man, and dormitory doors, of course, were never left open. If a dormitory door was, by chance, discovered open in the night hours, it was a matter for very strict investigation.

"By gum!" repeated Loder, under his breath.

He was certain that Smithy was the man, and he knew the Bounder's nerve. Still, he had rather expected that even that iron-nerved young rascal would let a night or two elapse before he prowled again.

A night had elapsed between the two prowling visits that had been made to the Head's study. Loder had not really hoped for much luck this time; he was only making sure. But luck, it seemed, had come his way.

That door had been opened by a Remove fellow after lights-out. So much was certain. Evidently—to Loder—it had been opened by a fellow who had gone out of the dormitory and left it unlatched to avoid noise, going and returning. What else was Loder to think?

That, at all events, was what he did think. And he drew a deep, deep breath of triumphant satisfaction.

That young rascal was out of the dormitory, and what was Quelch going to say when Loder demonstrated that fact?

All he had to do now was to step in, switch on the light, and disclose the undoubted fact. If, by a remote chance, Smithy was, after all, in bed, one glance would be sufficient, and he would switch off the light instantly and back out. But he knew—at least, he had not the slightest doubt—that Herbert Vernon-Smith was not in bed—that he was out prowling; probably in the Head's study at that very minute!

Loder pushed the door wide and stepped in. In another second he would have switched on the light. But in that second something utterly and entirely unexpected happened.

Something, as the door opened, swooped down on Loder. And Loder of the Sixth forgot all about catching Herbert Vernon-Smith as he staggered and tottered and howled and gurgled and sneezed, in a descending cloud of mixed pepper and mustard.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Hot Stuff!

"AYTISHOOOOOH!"

A sneeze that roared almost like a foghorn awoke echoes in the Remove dormitory.

"Atchooh! Choo! Atchooh! Aytishoo! Ugh! Gurrgh! Wurrgh! Atchooooo!"

Loder, tottering in the dark doorway, was going strong.

"Whooooo! Ooooo! Oh gum! What—whooooo! Ooooo!" spluttered Loder. "Oh, gig-gig-gad! Ooooooch! Goooooch! Gurrgh! Aytishooooo!"

There were startled movements, and

startled voices, up and down the Remove dormitory. The uproar from Loder awakened the whole Form—it would have awakened the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. Even Billy Bunter awakened.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"What the thump—"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, my hat! Is that Loder?"

"Atchoooh! Aytishoooh!" came anguished sneezes, going off almost like musketry. "Ooogh! Woogh! Woocoooh!"

"Oh crumbs! It's Loder!" gasped the Bouncer. "Caught!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was too dark to see anything. But the terrific explosions of sneezes, coughs, and gasps told their own tale!

Evidently Loder had looked in!

Having looked in, he had received what Smithy had prepared for him! And every fellow was of opinion that it served him right! Prefects were not supposed to spy and pry; and if a prefect did, he could take what was coming to him! Gerald Loder had no right whatever to poke his nose into the dormitory at half-past eleven at night.

Probably he was sorry he had done so! That nose was suffering sadly! Loder blew blasts on it like a trumpet!

The Remove sat up in bed, peered through the gloom, and chortled.

Nobody turned out. It was fairly certain that that terrific uproar would soon bring others on the scene, and nobody wanted to be caught out of bed. Neither did any fellow want to be suspected of being the author of the booby-trap. They sat and chortled.

Loder leaned on the doorpost, panting for breath, in the intervals of sneezing and spluttering. He hardly knew what had happened to him, for a time. He was too busy sneezing to be able to think.

He sneezed, and sneezed, and sneezed. He spluttered, he spluttered, and he blew!

"I say, you fellows, he's got it! He, he, he!"

"Hot stuff!" chortled Skinner.

"The hotfulness is terrific!"

"Listen to the band!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ooogh! Ooogh! Atchooooooh! Grooogh! Aytishoooh! Woogh! Oh, gad!"

A light gleamed in the dark passage, and there was a hasty footstep. Loder, in the throes of gargantuan sneezes, noticed neither; but the Removes did.

"Quelch, you bet!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Better all be asleep!" chuckled Smithy.

"It's Quelch! Listen!"

"What is that? Who is that? What does this disturbance mean? Is some boy up in this dormitory?" It was Mr. Quelch's sharp voice, in raised and angry tones. "What—who— Bless my soul, who is that?"

"Gurrrrgh! Aytishoo! Ooogh!"

"Who—what—" gasped the astonished Remove master. "There is a smell of—of pepper! Atchooooooh!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bob. "Quelch has got a whiff of it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What—atchooh!—what is this disturbance? The boys are awake, and—aychooh! Who—ooooogh! What—"

Mr. Quelch reached in, and switched on the light at the door. Sudden illumination flooded the Remove dormitory.

The juniors blinked in the light—with one exception. Herbert Vernon-Smith had his head on his pillow and his eyes

closed. He was, apparently, asleep. Smithy did not want to catch his Form-master's eye.

"Who—who—who is that?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, staring at Loder of the Sixth, crimson, watery-eyed, still frantically sneezing. "Who—who— Is that Loder?"

"Atchooooooh!"

"What are you doing here, Loder, at this hour?"

"Aytishoooh!"

"Will you answer me?"

"Choo—choo—choooooooop!"

"Upon my word! I—I—atchooooooh!"

Quelch sneezed again. He grabbed a handkerchief from his pocket and jammed it to his nose. He stared at a torn paper bag and a sea of pepper and mustard on the floor. He stared at them in blank astonishment. "Loder, what—"

"Woocoooooh!" gurgled the unhappy Loder.

"Loder, is it possible that you, a Sixth Form boy and a prefect, came here to play a foolish, an insensate trick with a bag of pepper?" shrieked Mr. Quelch. "Answer me at once, Loder! What have you to say?"

"Grooooooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came rippling up and down the dormitory. The Removes were enjoying this, if Gerald Loder was not.

"Loder, I insist upon an explanation!" roared Mr. Quelch. "What are you doing here? What is this—atchoooooh!—pepper doing here? Upon my word—a prefect of the Sixth Form playing childish pranks in the middle of the night—startling junior boys in this unheard-of manner! I shall report this to your headmaster, Loder!"

"Urrgh!" Loder struggled to speak. "Grunugh! I—I never—I mean to say—aytishoooh! I mean—grooogh! I came here to—ooooooch!"

"I am amazed—astonished! A Sixth Form prefect—such infantile pranks at—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" hooted Mr. Quelch, with a glare into the dormitory. "The insensate folly of this Sixth Form boy is not a matter for laughter! Loder, how dare you—I repeat, how dare you bring a bag of pepper to this dormitory? What were you going to do with it, Loder, if you had not dropped it, as you appear to have done? I insist upon an answer!"

"Woogh! I never—I didn't—yooooooch! Ooooh! It wasn't—gurrgh!" gurgled the wretched Loder. "It was a bib-bib-bib—"

"What do you mean by a bib? Are you in your senses?"

"It was a bib-bib-bib-booby trap!" howled Loder, getting it out at last. "It fell on my—groogh—it fell on my—ooooooch!—it fell on my head when I pushed open the—aytishooooooh!"

"Oh!" Mr. Quelch began to comprehend. "You did not bring the bag of pepper here with you, Loder?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Loder, I insist upon a plain answer!"

"Oogh! No!" shrieked Loder. "I tell you it—wooch!—it fell on my head from the did-dod-dud-door—ooogh!"

"I scarcely understand this!" said Mr. Quelch. "If this be true, Loder, it appears that you were expected here! What does that mean? Did you tell these juniors that you were coming here at this late hour?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! I say, silence! Answer me, Loder!"

"Of course I didn't!" gurgled Loder. "I—aytishoo!—I came here simply to—wooooooch! Ooooh! That young

scoundrel, Vernon-Smith, must have fixed this up when he went out of the—groooooh!"

"Vernon-Smith?"

"Grooogh! He's gone out, and he left this for me!" gasped Loder. "I found the door partly open, so I knew that he had gone out—and he must have fixed this up in case anyone came—after he had—oooooch!—gone!"

Mr. Quelch gave him a look, and then—with the handkerchief pressed to his nose—passed him and entered the dormitory.

"Vernon-Smith!" he rapped.

No answer.

"Upon my word! Is it possible that the boy is out of bounds!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"I know he is!" gasped Loder. "He fixed this up when he went, the artful young scoundrel, and I—wooooooch! Ooooh!"

"Smithy's in bed, sir!" said Tom Redwing, as gravely as he could. Mr. Quelch had said that it was not a laughing matter, but it struck the Remove fellows in quite another light. They thought that it was!

"Oh!" Mr. Quelch almost whizzed across to Vernon-Smith's bed and gazed down at a peaceful face with closed eyes. "Loder! Vernon-Smith is here!"

"What?" gasped Loder.

"The boy you have named is here, fast asleep in bed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! There is no need to wake this boy, or any others who may be sleeping! I command you all to be quiet. Loder, what have you got to say now?"

"Aytishooooooh!"

Loder sneezed, and blinked at the Bouncer! Whether Herbert Vernon-Smith was asleep or not, he was obviously not out of the dormitory—for there he was, in bed, his head peacefully at rest on his pillow.

"Oh!" gasped Loder. "Ooogh! I thought—oooch! I thought—groogh! Oh!"

"I presume," said Mr. Quelch grimly, "that somebody here guessed that you would be so officious, Loder, so unwarrantably officious, as to pay an unauthorised visit of inspection to this dormitory, and in consequence played that trick on you! You have only yourself to thank, Loder! You had no right whatever to come here. I shall not allow you to do so. To cause a disturbance at this late hour—"

"I—I knew—I—I mean, I—I thought—ooooooch!"

"Obviously, you knew nothing, as you are foolishly mistaken; and whatever you may have thought is no excuse for your action!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "Leave this dormitory at once, Loder, and do not return here. If you repeat this action, Loder, I shall lay the matter before the headmaster."

Loder went—sneezing his way down the passage.

Mr. Quelch gave an angry snort—and then a sneeze. He glanced rather grimly up and down the dormitory, and then he glanced at the sea of pepper. However, he made no inquiries on the subject of the booby-trap. Holding his handkerchief to his nose, he trod out of the dormitory again.

"Good-night, my boys!" he said. "I am sorry that you have been disturbed in this way!"

"Good-night, sir!"

The light was shut off, the door closed. Then the Bouncer woke up.

"Think Loder will call again?" he drawled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Remove dormitory echoed with merriment. Loder of the Sixth was a sticker, and it was clear that he was on the Bounder's trail like a bloodhound; but it seemed improbable that he would be in a hurry to put his head in at the Remove dormitory again.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Copped!

"I SAY, Smithy!"

"Shut up, you fat ass!"

"But, I say——"

"Are you talking in class, Bunter?" came the deep voice of Henry Samuel Quelch.

"Oh! No, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I wasn't asking Smithy for anything, sir! I only said——"

"If you speak again, Bunter——"

"Oh! Yes, sir! No, sir! I wasn't, sir, and—and I won't again!"

"Be silent!"

Billy Bunter was silent after that, for a good five minutes.

But it really was not easy for Bunter to keep silent, in the circumstances. Bunter knew that Herbert Vernon-Smith had a packet of toffee in his pocket, because he had seen him drop it in, before the Remove came in to third school that morning. And Bunter could see no reason whatever why Herbert Vernon-Smith should not pass at least one chunk of that toffee along, under the desks, to a fellow whose mouth watered for toffee.

Smithy, probably, saw lots of reasons. It was quite likely that, having bought that toffee at the tuckshop in break, he wanted it himself. Moreover, it was not safe, at all, to pass tuck along under the gimlet eyes of Mr. Quelch.

Bunter was willing to take the risk! Smithy wasn't! Tuck in the Form-room was strictly forbidden.

So Smithy turned a deaf ear to the voice of the charmer. Quelch, apparently, did not, and he had spotted Bunter whispering. So for five long and weary minutes, Bunter tried to give his attention to the Latin paper, and to keep his fat thoughts away from the more enticing subject of toffee.

It was several days since Vernon-Smith's release from the punishment-room. During that time the night-prowler had not, so far as anyone knew, prowled again.

The general impression was that he was scared by two narrow escapes, and had given up prowling or, at least, put off his next prowl till the excitement on the subject had died away.

Some of the fellows suspected, though they could not be sure, that watch had been kept, for two or three nights; and no doubt the prowler, whoever he was, guessed as much.

Anyhow, he seemed, as Bob Cherry expressed it, to have retired from business. Fellows wondered whether he would begin again; but interest in the mysterious matter was dying out, as nothing happened—except in one quarter. Loder of the Sixth still nourished a hope of snaffling the mystery man for whom the Head's study had so curious an attraction—and to Loder, at least, there was no mystery about him—Loder was still quite certain that it was Smithy.

Other fellows, however, let the matter pass from their thoughts. Harry Wharton & Co. were thinking mostly of football. Vernon-Smith, sad to relate, was thinking chiefly of football coupons!

Smithy, keen fellow as he was in other matters, was still ass enough to fancy

that he might, by some wonderful stroke of fortune, bag the big prize in Snooter's Penny Pool. The wish was father to the thought—for Smithy really had sense enough to know how excessively remote that chance was.

The fact that any fellow who was found to have football coupons in his possession would be sent up to the Head did not worry the reckless Bounder. His narrow escape from the sack had not made much difference to his accustomed recklessness.

At the present moment, Smithy was thinking a great deal more about Snooter's Penny Pool than about the Latin paper on which he was supposed to be at work.

Billy Bunter, for his part, was thinking no more of Latin than Smithy; but he was not wasting his bright, intellectual processes on any such nonsense as penny pools. Bunter was thinking of the toffee!

Five minutes seemed an awfully long time to a fellow who knew that there was toffee practically within reach.

The fat Owl gave Quelch a cautious blink, through his big spectacles. Quelch was sitting at his high desk, and seemed busy with papers.

Still, you never can tell with Quelch. His gimlet eye had a way of glinting round in the most sudden and disconcerting manner.

But he seemed occupied at the moment, and Bunter chanced it. He leaned in Vernon-Smith's direction and whispered:

"Smithy, old chap!"

The Bounder paid no heed. Neither, for the moment, did Quelch. This time the fat Owl of the Remove seemed to be getting by with it.

"I say, Smithy!" breathed Bunter.

"Shut up, you fat ass!" whispered Bob Cherry.

"Beast!"

"Quelch will spot you in a tick, you frabjous chump!" whispered Harry Wharton.

Bunter gave Quelch another cautious blink. The Remove master's head was still bent over the papers at his desk.

"Smithy, you beast!" hissed Bunter. "Greedy pig! I know you've got that toffee in your pocket! I jolly well saw it! I jolly well know you can hear me, you beast!"

Smithy, no doubt, heard, but he did not heed.

Billy Bunter gave him an intensely exasperated blink through his big spectacles. He had to draw Smithy's attention if he was going to get a chunk of that toffee.

The Bounder was out of reach of a poke or a prod from a fat paw. Bunter took his pen by the handle, leaned over towards Smithy, and prodded with the nib.

That reached Vernon-Smith! It rather startled him as it reached him. A pen nib suddenly jamming into his shoulder was enough to startle any fellow. The Bounder jumped and gave a sharp yelp. Quelch's eyes were on him before he had finished one short yelp.

"Vernon-Smith! What——"

"Somebody prodded me with a pen, sir!" gasped the Bounder.

"Bunter!"

"It—it wasn't me, sir!" exclaimed Bunter, in a hurry. "I haven't got a pen in my hand—I mean, I was writing with this pen, sir, when I prodded Smithy——"

Mr. Quelch left his desk and came towards his Form, with a grim expression on his face.

Billy Bunter blinked at him uneasily. "Why were you trying to draw Vernon-Smith's attention, Bunter?" he inquired.

"I—I wasn't, sir! I—I wasn't going to ask him for anything, sir!" stammered Bunter. "I wasn't speaking to him before, sir, when you heard me——"

"You will tell me, this instant, what you were going to say to Vernon-Smith in class, Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch. "Otherwise, I shall call you out before the Form and cane you."

"Oh crikey! I—I wasn't going to say anything, really, sir," gasped Bunter, "except—except that it was a—a—a fine day, sir!"

"What?"

As a drizzle of rain was weeping on the windows of the Form-room, Quelch was not really likely to believe that statement.

"A—a fine day, sir—I—I mean, a—a—a wet day, sir!" gasped Bunter. "That's all, sir! I wasn't going to ask Smithy for anything! He hasn't got anything, that I know of! Have—have you, Smithy, old chap?"

Quelch hardly needed telling more than that! Tuck, though strictly forbidden in the Form-room, was not uncommonly to be found there!

Quelch turned to the Bounder, and bored him with gimlet eyes.

"Stand up, Vernon-Smith."

The Bounder sullenly stood up.

"Now turn out your pckets on your desk."

Vernon-Smith stood very still. Many eyes turned on him curiously. It was lines for conveying tuck into the Form-room. But lines were not likely to worry Smithy very much. Every eye—including Quelch's—could see that Herbert Vernon-Smith was worried by something more serious than lines!

"Do you hear me, Vernon-Smith?" asked Mr. Quelch, very distinctly.

Skinner winked at the fellows near him. He suspected cigarettes in the Bounder's pockets. Perhaps Quelch did, also. His face was growing exceedingly grim.

Vernon-Smith put his hand into his pocket, and drew out the packet of toffee, which he laid on his desk. But it did not end there; as, really, the Bounder could hardly hope that it would.

"Proceed!" said Mr. Quelch grimly.

"That is all the tuck I have about me, sir!" said the Bounder.

"Possibly!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Nevertheless, I have directed you to turn out your pockets on your desk, Vernon-Smith, and you will immediately do so."

There was a tense pause.

Obviously, to all the Remove, and to their Form-master, Vernon-Smith had something in a pocket that he was extremely reluctant for Quelch to see! Billy Bunter—unintentionally and unexpectedly—had landed the black sheep of the Remove in a bad scrape.

"If you do not obey me this instant, Vernon-Smith——"

Quelch's voice rumbled like distant thunder.

Setting his lips, the Bounder drew a folded printed paper from his pocket, and in savage silence laid it on the desk. There was no help for it.

Mr. Quelch stared at that paper! He picked it up, unfolded it, and stared at it harder. He hardly seemed to know what it was.

But the juniors knew. Tom Redwing's face was deeply dismayed.

He knew, as all the fellows knew, that it was a sheet of football coupons. Once before, Tom had pitched such a sheet into the fire, just in time to save it from a prefect's eye. But he could not help his wayward chum now.

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Bob

Cherry. "The ass—it's a fair cop this time!"

"Oh crikey!" breathed Billy Bunter. "Silence! Vernon-Smith, what is this?" Slowly, it dawned on Quelch, and thunder grew in his brow. "This—this— Does this mean, Vernon-Smith, that you have been gambling on football pools? Upon my word! You—a school-boy—you could not do this, Vernon-Smith, without the use of a false name and address, thus deceiving the persons concerned. Upon my word!"

The Bouncer stood crimson and dumb.

"Stand out before the Form, Vernon-Smith!"

The Bouncer came silently out.

"Take this paper!"

Smithy took back the coupon sheet.

"You will now proceed to the headmaster's study," said Mr. Quelch quietly. "This is a matter for the Head to deal with. You will wait in Dr. Locke's study till he returns from the Sixth Form room, and you will hand him that paper!"

In deep silence, Herbert Vernon-Smith slipped the coupon sheet into his pocket, and left the Form-room.

He was "sent up to the Head," and his face was dark and set as he went.

"Oh lor!" murmured Billy Bunter, as the door closed on the Bouncer.

Bunter wished that he had never seen that toffee—which Mr. Quelch now tossed into the wastepaper-basket! The Bouncer was for it, though that did not worry the fat junior so much as a dismal anticipation of what the Bouncer might pass on to him, after he was through with the Head!

Third school went on, in the Remove-room, Billy Bunter giving less attention than ever to the acquirement of classical learning! He was no longer thinking of toffee. He was thinking, sadly and apprehensively, of the Bouncer's boot, and the probability that a little later it would land, hard, on the tightest trousers at Greyfriars School.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Not Loder's Lucky Day!

L ODER of the Sixth gave a start. He blinked—with his darkened eyes!

Loder was not in Form. In his present dilapidated state Loder was getting rather an easy time. He had only to complain that his eyes troubled him to be excused from class. Those eyes were getting better—they were now more blue-and-green than black—but they were still in a rather bad state.

As Loder was a slacker of the first water, he did not fail to make the best use of that excuse, so long as it lasted. And now, as the Head was taking the Sixth in Thucydides, and Loder loathed Greek, his eyes had started troubling him once more, and his considerate headmaster kindly let him off.

So there was Loder, slacking about instead of working, which suited him very well. As it was raining, he did not go out of the House; and that was how he happened to be loafing about the passage—and, in surprise, that speedily changed to gloating triumph—spotted a junior going into the Head's study!

Loder had not had a lot of luck on the Bouncer's trail, so far. But this was an unlooked-for stroke of luck!

From a distance, he saw Herbert Vernon-Smith—saw him, and watched him, as he went to the headmaster's study, and entered.

His darkened eyes glittered.

"By gad!" breathed Loder. "By gad! The nerve of it—by gad, the nerve! But I've got him now!"

Loder saw it all! This was Loder's lucky day!

The night-prowler had not dared to prowl again by night! Whatever mysterious object he had, in the Head's study, had never been put through.

Now he was at it—not by night, as before, but in broad daylight! Easy enough for an artful young rascal to make some excuse for leaving his Form-room—a forgotten book, or a forgotten map. Loder had made lots of such excuses in his time, and he knew all about such tricks.

(Continued on next page.)



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.

W ELL, chums, here we are again for another jolly old pow-wow!

Everybody merry and bright? It certainly seems so, as there are no letters of complaint in my mail—a sure sign that the MAGNET is keeping up its high standard. What a record, eh? It was on February 15th, 1908—31 years ago, all but a few days—when the MAGNET first saw the light of day, and it's been the leading school story paper ever since. Hats off, then, to Frank Richards, our star author, who has kept the flag-flying all this long time.

Frank Richards and I often think how nice it would be if we could meet all you girls and boys in some vast hall and have a personal chat. But, gee, it would have to be some hall, what! A Cup Final crowd would be nothing compared to the vast number of readers who never fail to get their copy of the MAGNET first thing Saturday morning. As we cannot possibly get together in this way, it's a consolation to know that we can have a cheery chin-wag through the medium of this corner. It keeps us in touch with one another in happy thought if not in the flesh. May we always remain one cheery band of chums.

In my mail this week there is a letter from a reader living in Croydon who asks me if a "sky pilot" has anything to do with the Royal Air Force. No, chum, most certainly not! A "sky pilot" is a sailor's nickname for the chaplain. Here are some more nicknames which are not so widely known: the coxswain is "Tommy Pipes," the carpenter "Chippy," the electrician "Sparks," and stokers "Clinker Knockers." "Poultice-wallopers" is the name given to sick-berth attendants, while the doctor bears the unkind name of "Butcher." "Moneybags" is the paymaster.

The next query comes from Dennis Markham, of Bexley Heath, who asks what is a Public school. The term "Public school" is applied to a school where the headmaster is a member of the Headmasters' Conference. There are something like 200 schools in Great Britain which come under this classification, and this number includes not only the big schools like Eton, Harrow, and Rugby, but also

a large number of provincial High and Grammar schools. Talking of "grammar," here's a chuckle for you. A certain school inspector called at a house to make inquiries as to why a boy hadn't been to school. The boy himself happened to answer the door, and the inspector asked to see his mother. "She ain't in," was the reply. "Not nohow." Whereupon the inspector asked indignantly: "Where's your grammar?" "She's upstairs having a lay down!" came the unexpected answer.

A brief reply to Tom Harris, of Wales. Sorry, we have no back numbers of the MAGNET as far back as 1930. With regard to your query as to how you can increase your height, the following exercise is a good one. Directly on rising every morning stand in front of an open window with hands on hips. Then slowly draw into the lungs, and raise yourself gradually on tip-toe. Next, slowly empty your lungs and bend your knees, keeping the trunk upright all the while. Done every morning about a dozen times, this exercise will help to build up your body in every way.

Getting near the end of my space, so now for a brief say-so about next Saturday's attractions.

"THE HOAXING OF HACKER!"

By Frank Richards

is the title of our grand long school yarn of Harry Wharton & Co. Horace Hacker, of the Shell, more commonly known as the "Acid Drop," has got it stuck in his silly head that the Famous Five are a shady lot. In consequence of this, Bob Cherry leads the suspicious master "up the garden" with a vengeance. Laugh! You'll be tickled to death when you read all about it. There's heaps of amusing and amazing situations in this lively yarn and you'll just revel in it. "My Page," which will be filled with the literary efforts of Monsieur Henri Charpentier, sparkles with real good humour, so reserve some laughs for it. As regards the "Greyfriars Herald"—well, it's always good, and that's that!

Meet you all again next week, chums.

YOUR EDITOR.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1.616.

He fairly gloated. He saw it all! The young scoundrel had pulled his Form-master's leg, somehow, and got out of the Form-room! Now he was sneaking into the Head's study, to do whatever it was he had to do there, where he had been twice interrupted at night! It was absolutely clear—to Loder!

Grinning with triumph, Gerald Loder trod quietly down Head's corridor! Vernon-Smith had gone into the study and shut the door after him. He was not going to be allowed to dodge out—not this time! Loder was going to take care of that!

Softly, Loder reached the door. He opened it suddenly. There was a startled exclamation within as the Bouncer looked round. It was still ten minutes to the end of third school, so he did not expect the Head yet!

He gave quite a jump as he saw Loder.

Loder gave him a gloating look. "Stand there!" he rapped. "Don't try to get out of this study, Vernon-Smith!"

"Eh?"

"I fancy I've got you this time!"

"What?"

Loder jerked the key out of the inside of the lock. Under the Bouncer's astonished gaze, he inserted it in the outside. "This will be the finish for you, you cunning young rascal!" said Loder. "You've come into this study—you'll stay here till I fetch the Head. I'm going to lock you in! I'm going at once for the Head! What lies are you going to tell him this time, you lying young sweep?"

And, with that, Loder slammed the door and turned the key on the outside.

Vernon-Smith, staring blankly at the door, heard the prefect's footsteps recede down the corridor.

Loder hurried away to the Sixth Form Room.

Thucydides was still going strong there; but Loder ventured to interrupt. This was not a matter that could wait.

"If you please, sir—"

"What is it, Loder?" The Head was not pleased. "Really—"

"I am sorry to interrupt, sir, but I thought I ought to tell you that the boy who has been prowling at night is now discovered!" said Loder.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Head; and all the Sixth stared at

Loder. Dr. Locke laid down Thucydides!

"He is now in your study, sir!" went on Loder. "I happened to see him, sir, as I passed the corridor, creeping up—"

"Creeping!" ejaculated the Head.

"Creeping into your study, sir! He must have tricked Mr. Quelch into giving him leave from class—"

"One of Mr. Quelch's boys?" exclaimed Dr. Locke.

"Yes, sir; Vernon-Smith." Loder could not keep a note of triumph out of his voice. "It is Vernon-Smith, sir!"

"Bless my soul!" repeated the Head

"I have turned the key on him, sir, to keep him there till you arrive."

Leaving the Sixth Form staring, Dr. Locke hurried from the Form-room, with Loder triumphant at his heels.

The key was in the outside of the lock when the Head reached the study. That somebody was within was certain, for a sound could be heard; it was rather an unexpected sound, in the circumstances—a chuckle.

The Head unlocked the door and pushed it open; he strode in, followed by Loder. Full in view stood Herbert Vernon-Smith—the fellow who had been so nearly sacked as the prowler, and who, Loder had no doubt, was now going to be quite sacked.

Dr. Locke's eyes fixed on him grimly and sternly.

"So you are here, Vernon-Smith!" he said.

"Yes, sir," said the Bouncer meekly.

"Here—in my study!" The Head's voice was deep. "You are out of your Form, Vernon-Smith, during class—"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you will explain your presence and your object here," said the Head grimly. "What were you about to do here, Vernon-Smith, when Loder found you? What are you doing in my study?"

"Waiting for you, sir," answered the Bouncer coolly.

"Wha-a-at?"

"I thought I had to do as Mr. Quelch told me, sir," said Smithy, with the greatest meekness. "Mr. Quelch told me to come here, sir, and wait till you came, and hand you this paper, sir."

Dr. Locke stared at the sheet of football coupons that the Bouncer drew from his pocket; then he stared at Vernon-Smith; then he stared at Loder.

"Loder!" The Head's voice was

deeper than ever. "Loder, you stated to me that you saw this junior creeping into the study—"

"I—I—I—I certainly thought—I—I—was sure—I—I—" Loder seemed to be afflicted with a bad stutter.

"It transpires that he was sent here by his Form-master to report a serious delinquency. He had no choice but to enter the study and wait here. You—"

"I—I—I—"

"You have interrupted class in the Sixth Form! You have brought me here for nothing! You have wasted my time! You have made an utterly unfounded accusation! You have obstinately and foolishly persisted in an unfounded belief concerning this junior, regardless of your headmaster's judgment!"

"I—I—I—"

"I am extremely displeased with you, Loder. If there should be any repetition of this I shall have to consider very seriously whether you can be allowed to continue as a prefect."

"I—I—I—"

"You may go!" snapped the Head. Loder went. His face as he went was like unto that of a demon in a pantomime. It was not, after all, Loder's lucky day.

"Had it bad?"

"Ow! Yes."

"Then what are you grinning at?"

After third school the Remove fellows found Vernon-Smith in the quad—experiencing, apparently, very mixed emotions. He wriggled and he chuckled at the same time.

"Birch nice?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Not very. Ow! The old bean laid it on! Wow! But you should have seen Loder's face. Ha, ha, ha!" The Bouncer yelled. "It was worth a guinea a box! Ha, ha, ha!"

And when he told them, the Remove yelled, too.

Loder, looking from his study window, had the pleasure—or otherwise—of seeing a crowd of Remove fellows doubled up with merriment. Perhaps Loder enjoyed that happy sight. More probably he didn't!

THE END.

(Now look out for a screamingly funny yarn of your old favourites next week. "THE HOAXING OF HACKER!" You'll fairly burst your sides laughing when you read it!)

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