"THE REMOVE'S CHALLENGE."

"OWING TO MY SPLENDID FORM, BOTH AS BATSMAN AND BOWLER, THE FELLOWS WANT TO KEEP ME IN THE SHADE," EXPLAINED BILLY BUNTER.

The Remove's Challenge

A Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
A Challenge to the Remove.

"LETTER for you, Wharton!"

"Thanks!"

Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove at Greyfriars, caught the letter Bob Cherry tossed over to him from the rack. He did not immediately open it, however, for he was talking cricket with Frank Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, and cricket was an all-absorbing topic at Greyfriars just then.

Greyfriars was enjoying the finest of early May weather, and the summer game was in full swing. From the grave and reverend seigneurs of the Sixth down to the youngest and newest fag, the great topic was cricket. And the Remove, who were never behind the rest of the school in anything, were, of course, to the fore in this.

The Remove team bade fair to be one of the best in the school, and the Removites proudly declared that it could easily walk over the Upper Fourth team—the Upper Fourth being the next Form above the Remove. Indeed, some daring and enthusiastic Removites were even talking about challonging the Fifth.

A match with a local team had fallen through, and Wharton was discussing the matter of filling up the date. Of course, it was always possible to play a scratch match; but the Remove were not so much in need of practice as of laurels; they wanted to play an outside team.

"We don't want to waste the date, as a matter of fact," Harry Wharton remarked, holding his letter unopened in his hand as he went on speaking. "I've written to St. Jim's, as you know; but Tom Merry answered yesterday that they had Wednesday booked. Of course, we're playing them later, anyway. But——"

"I say, Wharton——"

"Shut up, Bunter! But the time's so close now, and everybody's got the dates filled up, so——"

"But I say, Wharton," persisted Billy Bunter, blinking at

the junior captain through his big spectacles, "you haven't opened your letter."

"Well, what does that matter?"

"Oh, really, Wharton! Suppose there is a postal-order in your letter, you might be able to make me a small loan. I could let you have it back to-morrow, when my remittance comes."

"Oh, ring off, Bunter——"

"But, really——"

"We're talking cricket," said Nugent, giving the fat junior a gentle poke in the ribs that made him stagger against the wall. "Don't tell us you're hungry; we know it; you always are. Dry up!"

"Ow!"

"I can't think of anything but challenging the Upper Fourth, Harry," said Nugent. "I know they're going to practise on Wednesday, and——"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up!" roared Nugent.

"Oh, really——"

Nugent made a reach at the fat junior, and Billy Bunter promptly dodged. He blinked at the Greyfriars chums from a safe distance, and snorted.

Wharton glanced at his letter. He started a little as he saw the postmark on the outside.

"Rylcombe!" he exclaimed.

"Rylcombe?" said Nugent. "That's the post-office for St. Jim's—Tom Merry's letters have the Rylcombe postmark. Perhaps it's from him, to say that they can play after all. That would be ripping!"

"The rippingfulness would be terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Wharton shook his head.

"It's not in Tom Merry's hand—in fact, I've never seen the writing before," he remarked.

"Most likely it's from some chap at St. Jim's, all the same."

"Well, I'll soon see."

And Harry Wharton slit the envelope and opened the letter.

Billy Bunter drew near again, blinking eagerly. Bunter was in his usual state of impecuniosity, and if there was a remittance in that letter he meant to have his "whack." The only possible importance a letter could have, in Bunter's eyes, was the fact that it contained, or might contain, a remittance. He would have given yards and yards of affectionate counsel and parental advice for the smallest size in postal-orders.

Wharton glanced at the letter, and uttered an exclamation.

"Hurrah!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, coming over towards him from the letter-rack. "Good news?"

"Yes."

"Is it from St. Jim's?" exclaimed Nugent.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up, Bunter!" roared three or four voices.

"Yes, but I say——"

"Ring off!"

"I suppose there's a postal-order——"

"Get out!"

"In that letter, or Wharton wouldn't be——"

"Bunk!"

"So excited about it. I'm rather short of money to-day——"

"Will you shut up?" shrieked Nugent.

"And I should like a small loan—— Oh!"

The exasperated juniors had lost patience. They seized Billy Bunter and bumped him—hard.

The fat junior gave a terrific yell as he was bumped on the hard floor.

"Oh, ow, oh!"

Bump!

"Oh!"

"There!" gasped Nugent. "Give him one more, and leave him to snort!"

Bump!

"Yow!"

And the juniors retreated, laughing, leaving Bunter gasping and puffing like a grampus. They stopped a dozen paces away, Bunter being in no condition to follow them. He sat blinking after them through his spectacles in a dazed way.

"Now, then, what's the news?" asked Nugent. "Is it from St. Jim's, saying that they can play after all?"

"That would be ripping!" Bob Cherry remarked.

"No," said Harry. "But it's just as good!"

"Good!"

"We can fill the date all right."

"Hurrah!"

"You've heard of Rylcombe Grammar School," said Harry. "It's a school near St. Jim's, and the fellows are generally on fighting terms with Tom Merry & Co., I believe; but at other times they make peace. They seem to be at peace at the present moment, to judge by this letter. I'll read it out."

"Go ahead!"

"It's from a chap named Gordon Gay, at the Grammar School. I don't know the name. I remember hearing Tom Merry speak of Frank Monk, and Carboy, and Lane, but I don't remember Gordon Gay."

"Perhaps he's a new chap. But get on with the letter. It was written in a strong, decided hand, and ran as follows:

"Dear Wharton,—I haven't had the pleasure of meeting you, but if you care to accept our challenge, that will soon be remedied. A match we had fixed for Wednesday afternoon has fallen through, and we've got the date open. Tom Merry of St. Jim's has heard from you that you've got the same date open, and hearing that our half was free, he suggested that I should write to you.

"We shall be glad to meet a junior Greyfriars eleven on Wednesday afternoon, if agreeable to you. We'll come over to you, or you can come over to us, just as you like. We should like to arrange a return match if possible. I believe you have never played the Grammar School before, but we hear from St. Jim's that you are good stuff. If you like the idea of a match on Wednesday, will you let me know as soon as possible, also on which ground.

"Yours sincerely,

"GORDON GAY."

"Well, that's a jolly decent letter," said Nugent, with a nod of approval. "I suppose we'd better go over; it would be more civil."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Yes; and I'd like to play the Grammar School, too. They play St. Jim's, and Tom Merry has told me that they put up a good fight. This is a stroke of luck."

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"I'll write for the next post, and accept, and tell Gay we're coming," said Harry.

"Right-ho!"

Billy Bunter came up gasping. He had almost recovered his breath.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Oh, sheer off, Bunter!"

"But, I say, I think you might lend a chap a few bob out of a jolly good remittance like that," remonstrated Bunter. "I've been disappointed about a postal-order, and I'm jolly short of tin to-day. I think——"

"But I haven't had a remittance," said Harry, laughing.

Bunter blinked at him in astonishment.

"You haven't had a remittance."

"No."

"There wasn't any money in the letter?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then what were you hurraying about like a lot of silly cuckoos?" demanded the Owl of the Remove indignantly.

"Ha, ha, ha! It's a challenge to a cricket match."

"A—a—a what?"

"A challenge to play a cricket match with Rylcombe Grammar School on Wednesday."

"Well, of all the dummies!" said Bunter. "You mean to say that you were yelling like a lot of hyenas over a cricket match!"

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

"I suppose you're dotty! I suppose——"

But the chums of the Remove did not stay to listen to the rest of Billy Bunter's suppositions. They walked away to No. 1 Study, to get the answer to Gordon Gay's letter written, and Bunter was left alone blinking in indignant disappointment.

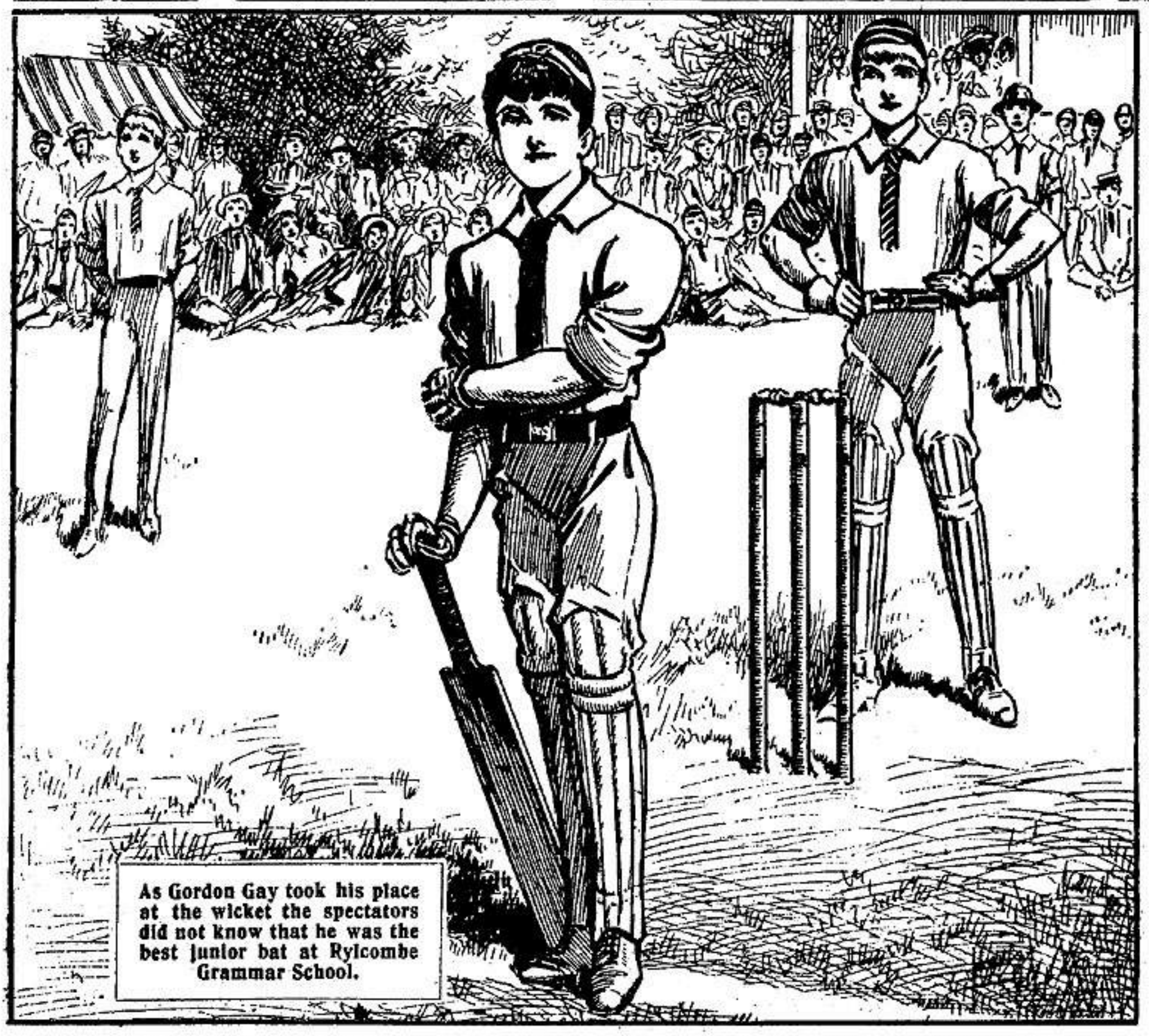
THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bulstrode Is Not Satisfied.

CRICKET was in full swing at Greyfriars now, as we have said; but so far, the Remove had not played any important out-matches. The Remove team was not in a finally settled state, so far, and many fellows were expecting, or hoping, to get their caps for it, and Harry Wharton would have had to play a sixteen or a twenty-two to satisfy them all, which was impossible. In fact, if every fellow in the Remove who thought himself entitled to play for the Form had been admitted into the team, the Remove cricket side would have resembled one of those astonishing sides in old-fashioned Rugby, when thirty-five or forty fellows would go out to play.

It was impossible to please everybody, and the Remove cricket captain wisely resolved to please himself.

Wharton picked out the fellows who could play best, and put the second best into the reserves, and some he passed over altogether.



As Gordon Gay took his place at the wicket the spectators did not know that he was the best junior bat at Rylcombe Grammar School.

Whereat there was much discontent; for, according to the most invariable rule, the worse a fellow played cricket, the better he believed he played it, and the rankest outsider was exactly the fellow who firmly believed that he ought to be cricket captain, if all had their due.

Even Billy Bunter, whose ambition was generally confined to getting in as many extra meals as possible, shared the cricket enthusiasm to some extent, and aspired to a place in the team, adding thereby considerably to the gaiety of Greyfriars.

But there were fellows with more serious claims than Billy Bunter who had to be excluded, and among them was Bulstrode, the captain of the Remove before Wharton's time, and a very good cricketer when he chose; but he did not always choose. Sometimes he would neglect practice, whether at cricket or football, for whole weeks, and then he would coolly expect to get into the side for a good match. Needless to say, that since Harry Wharton had been Form captain, he had been disappointed. Wharton was not likely to play anybody who did not put the best he had into the game.

The Rylcombe match was the first serious match of the season for the Remove, and when it was talked of in the junior common-room, it led to many applications for caps being made in No. 1 Study.

Harry Wharton had accepted the challenge, and intimated to Gordon Gay that the Remove team would be at Rylcombe on Wednesday afternoon at an early hour, the precise time to be wired later, as Harry hoped to get permission from the Head to start early, Rylcombe being a considerable distance from Greyfriars.

Gordon Gay replied by the next post that he was delighted, and that the Greyfriars team were expected. The chums of the Remove were at tea when the reply came, and it was brought up to the study by Tom Brown, the New Zealander, and Wharton read it out.

"Good!" said Brown. "I suppose you're playing me, Wharton."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"You're the fifteenth chap who's made that remark," he observed.

The New Zealand junior grinned rather ruefully.

"Well, if you think I ought to be left out, it's all right," he remarked. "I won't say I don't mind, because I do. But I'm willing to stand down for a better chap."

"Hear, hear," said Nugent.

"I wish some of the others were as reasonable," said Harry Wharton. "As a matter of fact, you're not one of the standers-down. I'm playing you."

Tom Brown's face lighted up.

"That's jolly!" he exclaimed.

"We want you to bat," said Harry. "As a matter of fact, we couldn't spare you. I've heard from Tom Merry that the Rylcombe chaps are hot stuff, especially three new fellows they've got there—three Australians, who were brought up on cricket—chaps named Wootton, two of them, and the third's Gordon Gay himself. Merry has told me about them in a letter yesterday. He says we shall have to take our best men, if we want to have a show. Of course I expect to win; but I'm not going to take any chances. I shall weed out the team as if we were playing a giddy county match."

"Well, so long as you don't weed me out, I think it's a jolly good idea," said Tom Brown, laughing. "My hat! I'm jolly glad to be in the team."

"The samefulness is also my honourable sentiment," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Yes, Inky's our prize bowler," Wharton remarked. "I

can do some batting myself, and so can Nugent and Bob Cherry. Inky's the best man with the ball, though."

"The flatterfulness of my esteemed chum is great."

"Not at all, old chap. You're the giddiest bowler in the Lower School, and I'd like to see you at the Sixth-Form wickets, too," said Wharton. "I'll wager you'd make some of their bails fly."

And Hurree Jamset Ram Singh blushed through his dusky complexion.

Tom Brown departed in high spirits, and shortly afterwards Ogilvy and Morgan looked into the study.

"I hear you're playing me," remarked Ogilvy.

"I don't know where you could have heard it, then," said Wharton. "The names are not up yet."

"But you want a good bowler," urged Ogilvy.

"We've got a ripping one—Inky."

"Well, Inky's all right," said the Scottish junior. "But you want another—and look here, am I playing or not?"

"Yes."

"Honest?"

"Of course."

"Hurrah!"

"Look you, I think you ought to put me in," said Morgan. "You see, a team can hardly be really up to the mark without a Welshman in it. You'll admit that, yourself."

"Willingly, as I happen to want you," said Harry, with a laugh. "Your name's down."

"Good!"

And Ogilvy and Morgan marched off cheerfully. Bulstrode was the next caller. The burly Removite came into the study with a very doubtful expression on his face. His look showed that there would be trouble if he were disappointed, and that alone was enough to put the cricket captain's back up.

"Playing me against Rylcombe?" asked Bulstrode.

"Sorry, Bulstrode; no."

"Why not?" demanded Bulstrode fiercely.

"Because there are better men to fill the places," said Harry, with undiluted frankness, and Nugent chuckled softly.

Bulstrode scowled.

"That may be your opinion," he said, with a sneer.

"Well, my opinion counts, you know, as cricket captain."

"You are playing Hazeldene, I believe."

"Yes."

"On his form?" sneered Bulstrode.

"Certainly! Hazeldene isn't a particularly good bat, and his bowling is average, but he's a clever wicket-keeper, and reliable at fielding."

"You don't pretend that his form is up to mine?"

Bulstrode's tone was decidedly unpleasant; but Wharton had resolved to keep his temper. It is one of the lessons a cricket captain has to learn. A fellow who cannot command himself will never command others.

"Not if you chose," said Harry, quietly. "You could play Hazel's head off, if you kept in form, Bulstrode, and I don't deny that."

"Yet you're playing him instead of me."

"You know why. You've been to the nets, I suppose, about twice since cricket started. You don't choose to practice, and you couldn't stand up against Third-Form bowling now. The best player has to keep himself in form, and that's a thing you never trouble to do."

Bulstrode gritted his teeth.

"The long and the short of it is that you're not playing me!" he exclaimed rudely.

"Yes, that's the long and the short of it, as you put it."

"Good! I prefer plain English, without excuses."

"I was not making excuses; they're not necessary. I was explaining."

"You needn't trouble to explain. Your motives are clear enough to anybody who chooses to see them," said Bulstrode, with a sneer.

"I don't quite catch on."

"You might leave me out for a chap like Brown, or even Linley, factory hand as he is—he plays good cricket. But Hazeldene——"

"Hazeldene is reliable, and obeys orders."

"And I don't."

"No, you're always carping at something."

"You mean, I don't knuckle under like the rest," sneered Bulstrode. "If you think I'm going to kow-tow to this study, like the rest of the Remove, you make a jolly big mistake, that's all."

"Then there's nothing more to be said, is there?"

"Only this. I know your motive for putting in a rotten player like Hazeldene. It's on account of his sister Marjorie, just to please her——"

Wharton rose to his feet, his face very dark. It was rough enough on Harry to have to take the responsibility of making decisions in such a delicate matter, without allowing himself to be accused of unfairness. Many of the fellows who wanted places in the team, and were disappointed, went away firmly convinced that Wharton was a fool. But no one except Bulstrode had thought of imputing unfairness.

"There are two ways out of this study, Bulstrode," said the Remove captain quietly. "You can go by the door or the window."

"I have said——"

"I know what you've said, and I want to keep the peace, if possible; but if you repeat it, you go out of this study on your neck."

"I do repeat it," said Bulstrode, between his teeth. "It's Marjorie. Hands off, confound you!"

Wharton's grasp was upon him, then.

Burly as he was, Bulstrode was swung off his feet, and he went whirling out of the study into the passage.

Crash!

He brought up helplessly against the opposite wall, and sank upon the floor in a sitting posture, staring blankly and dazedly at the angry face of Wharton in the doorway.

Only for a moment he sat there.

Then he leaped up, and rushed at Harry like a bull.

But Wharton was ready for him.

His blood was up now, and he was not disposed to stand any nonsense.

His right came out as Bulstrode hurled himself upon him, and his fist, hard as iron, crashed on the burly Removite's chest.

Bulstrode dropped like a log, and lay gasping.

Wharton waited a moment, and then closed the door of the study. The door was not opened again.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Eleven.

HARRY WHARTON was breathing hard as he sat down at the study tea-table again. There was a cloud on his handsome face.

"Don't bother about that cad," said Nugent. "Everybody knows you wouldn't do as he suggested. Bulstrode knows it himself in his heart."

"The knowfulness is great."

Wharton nodded.

"It's rotten caddish of him," he said, in a low voice. "none of the other chaps would suggest anything of the sort."

"I shouldn't let it worry me."

"I won't," said Wharton. "Only—only you can't help feeling a thing like that. Still, I don't believe Bulstrode thinks so himself, anyway, and I'm sure nobody else does. Hallo, Desmond."

Micky Desmond came into the study. He was grinning.

"Faith, and what's the matter wid Bulstrode?" he asked. "He passed me in the passage just now, and he was looking like a demon intirely."

"Only a little argument about cricket."

"Ha, ha! I've looked in to tell ye I'll play Rylcombe, if you like, Wharton."

"Go hon!" said Nugent.

"Faith, and you'll admit yourself that a cricket team isn't much good without an Irishman in it," said Desmond persuasively.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Exactly!" he agreed. "We've just heard, too, that it can't be considered much class without a Welshman. But you're in, Micky."

"Hurrah!" roared the Irish junior. "Hip-pip!"

"Mind the roof!"

"Ha, ha! Faith, and I'm in! We'll give the Rylcombe bounders socks, darling!"

And Micky Desmond rushed off to spread the good news

through the length and breadth of Greyfriars. Harry Wharton was making some notes upon a sheet of paper beside his teacup. It was a list of the players that he had selected for the Rylcombe match. He looked up again as Hazeldene and Treluce came in.

"Any chance for me?" asked Hazeldene.

"You're in, Hazel."

"Good!"

"What price me?" asked Treluce anxiously. "I don't want to put myself forward, you know. But it's occurred to me that to be a really good team, a side ought to have a Cornishman in it. What do you think?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the joke?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Treluce looked puzzled.

"Blessed if I see the joke," he remarked.

"It's all right—you're in, Tre."

"Jolly good!"

And Treluce and Hazeldene went out. Hazeldene was looking very thoughtful. The chums of No. 1 Study were not destined to finish their tea without further interruptions, however.

Bob Cherry came in, with Mark Linley.

The Lancashire lad coloured a little as he met the glances of the chums of No. 1 Study.

"I hear you're putting the names down," said Bob Cherry. "I've brought Linley in. I suppose you'll be shoving him in?"

"Bob made me come," said Mark, laughing. "I didn't want to bother you, really. I suppose if you want me you'll say so. You know I'm willing to play."

"That's all right——"

"I suppose you don't think a team would be complete without a Lancashire chap in it?" suggested Nugent, with a grin.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, as a matter of fact, that is my opinion," said Mark candidly. "But it's for Wharton to decide, of course."

"It's all right, Linley, I've got your name in," said Harry. "Yours, of course, Bob. I'll read them out to you. Wharton, captain; Nugent Cherry, Hurree Singh, Brown, Linley, Morgan, Ogilvy, Hazeldene, Treluce, Desmond."

"A jolly good team!" said Bob Cherry emphatically.

"What do you think, Linley?"

"I don't see how it could be improved, very well," said the Lancashire lad thoughtfully. "You've got the pick of the Remove."

"So I think."

"The pickfulness is terrific!"

"I hear that Bulstrode is making a row on the subject," Bob Cherry remarked. "But you can leave him to stew in his own juice, I think."

"I'm not likely to take much notice of what Bulstrode says," said Harry, frowning a little. "He has accused me of favouritism——"

"The cad!"

"After that, I shall make it a point to take no notice of his opinion in any way."

"Quite right!"

Bob Cherry and Mark Linley went out, and several other juniors looked in to suggest themselves as excellent recruits, only to learn that the eleven was full up. The best of the disappointed candidates had their names put down as reserves, so that some of them had a little chance left of playing.

But there was one who was not satisfied to be a reserve, even if he could have been one, which he couldn't. That was William George Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove came into the study when the chums had finished tea, and he blinked indignantly at the cleared tea-table.

"You don't mean to say that you chaps have had tea!" he exclaimed.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?"

"Oh, really, Nugent, I must say I think it's mean. You're not always so jolly prompt. And you know I suggested to you to have tea later than usual this evening. I've been having tea in Skinner's study, and I wanted to have it here afterwards, as usual. I don't see why you wanted to be so beastly prompt. You've had eggs and ham, too. It was rotten of you!"

"Pig!"

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"Oh, shut up, Bunty, you make me ill! We may as well get into the Close for a blow before prep.," Nugent remarked.

"But, I say, you fellows, have you settled about the cricket team?" asked Bunter.

"Yes."

"Good! My name's down, of course?"

"Yes, of course—I don't think!"

"Look here, Wharton——"

"Don't be an ass, Bunter. You can play cricket as well as you can play football, and you can play football as well as you can stick to the truth. Ring off!"

"If you're going to put me down as a reserve——"

"I'm not!"

"You don't mean to say that you're leaving me out altogether?"

"Yes; that's exactly what I mean to say."

"I think it's rotten!"

"Well, it's a free country. You can think what you like, you know."

"You may need me as a reserve."

"I don't think it's likely," said Wharton, laughing.

"In any case, I suppose you want me to come to Rylcombe?" said Bunter. "You don't mean that you're going to leave me behind on Wednesday?"

"What's the good of your coming?" said Harry impatiently. "You can't play cricket, and you don't like the game well enough to watch it. The fare is a big one, and you haven't any money to pay it."

"I'm expecting a postal-order to-morrow morning——"

"Oh, rats!"

"Besides, one of you fellows could pay the fare, or you could make it up by a whip-round among you. I shouldn't object."

"Go hon!" said Nugent. And Hurree Jamset Ram Singh remarked that the go-honfulness was terrific.

"Look here, Bunter, the last time we took you on a match out, you disgraced us by gobbling up the whole lunch while we were playing footer," said Wharton. "We're not going to risk anything of the sort again. You can't come."

"But, I say——"

"'Nuff said. Shut up!"

"I suppose they'll have a pretty decent lunch for you chaps at Rylcombe?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"And you want to leave me out of it? Look here——"

"Well, you can come if you can pay your fare," said Harry resignedly. "I won't pay it, and I advise the other chaps to keep their money in their pockets."

"Jolly good advice!" said Nugent. "I mean to follow it!"

"The followfulness is great."

Bunter blinked at the chums of the Remove with great indignation. The fat junior never could understand that he had not an unlimited claim upon the personal possessions of others.

"If you're going to be mean about it——" he began.

"Well, we are—what you call mean," said Harry. "Hang it, if I could afford the tin, I would take some of the chaps who'd enjoy watching the game, not a fat waster like you, who only thinks of the lunch!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Besides, you're always playing some mean trick to get us into an awkward position," said Harry. "You can't expect us to take you."

"Well, I'm jolly well coming, anyway."

"Oh, rats!"

The chums went out of the study. Billy Bunter followed them to the door, red with indignation.

"I'm coming to Rylcombe," he repeated. "I'm expecting a postal-order in the morning, and I'll pay my own fare."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If it doesn't come, I'll—I'll borrow the money, or ride without a ticket!" howled Billy Bunter after them down the corridor.

Harry Wharton & Co. walked on without turning their heads.

"I'm coming, I tell you!" yelled Bunter. "Do you hear? I'm coming! Yah!"

The juniors went downstairs, and left him snorting with indignation. But upon one point Billy Bunter was resolved. He was going to Rylcombe, whether he could pay his fare or not.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Wingate's Help.

"WE shall have to put it nicely to the Head," Harry Wharton remarked the next day.

And his chums nodded assent.

"If we leave here usual time after dinner we shall get to Rylcombe awfully late to-morrow," went on Wharton. "We must get early leave somehow."

"That's so!"

"The mustfulness is terrific."

"I say, you fellows, if you like, I'll go to the Head and

explain it; and, of course, in that case, I should expect to come."

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"But I'm offering——"

"Dry up!"

"Oh, really——"

"Kick that porpoise out!" said Harry Wharton. And Bob Cherry kindly kicked Bunter into the passage amid a series of roars from Bunter that would not have disgraced the lions' cage in the Zoological Gardens. "Now, the question is, how are we to put it to the Head?"

"It's a delicate matter."

"The delicacy is terrific."

"The Head's a decent old sport," said Bob Cherry, coming back after ejecting Bunter. "He understands the importance of cricket matches, too. He's not one of the blessed fusty old pedagogues, who live and move and have their giddy being wholly in Latin roots and German irregular verbs."

"But you have to be tactful," said Nugent. "The Head mightn't see that a cricket match so far from home was very important."

"And we must be careful when we tackle him," Harry Wharton said thoughtfully. "After lunch is the best time, I think. He's always in his best temper after lunch, and before afternoon school."

"Yes; that's right."

"Suppose we all go together, in a sort of deputation," Hazeldene suggested. "He would see that the representative part of the Remove all wanted it."

"Hear, hear!"

"We might ask Wingate to put in a word for us," suggested Tom Brown. "He's a big cricketer himself, and he's got a lot of influence with the Head."

"True!"

"That's a good dodge, young Frozen Mutton. We'll speak to Wingate."

"Come on, then!"

Morning school was over, and most of the Greyfriars fellows were out of doors. The Remove chums had met in the study to discuss the difficult matter of getting leave early on Wednesday. Leave for eleven or twelve fellows was no light favour to ask, and they were justified in having their doubts as to how the Head would receive the modest request.

They looked into Wingate's study as they went down, but the captain of Greyfriars was not there. They sallied out into the Close. The Sixth Form cricketers were at practice at the nets, and the stalwart form of Wingate could be seen looking on. The captain of Greyfriars was watching the form of his men, being just as much occupied in selecting the Sixth Form eleven as Harry Wharton was in picking the fellows for the Remove team.

"I say, Wingate——" began Harry, as he came up with his chums.

"Good, Courtney!" exclaimed Wingate. "Well bowled!"

"Wingate——"

"Tackle him again."

"Wingate——"

"What? Eh—what?"

"Can I speak to you?"

"Yes, if you want to," said Wingate, who was all eyes for the senior cricketers. "I don't suppose I shall listen."

This was not very encouraging. The moment was not well-chosen, but there was no time to lose if the Head was to be tackled before the kindly effects of his lunch had worn away.

"I say, Wingate, we want to get off early to-morrow——"

"Play up there!"

"—as we're going to play an out match a long way off——"

"You've got your leg in front of your wicket, North!"

"—and we wondered——"

"Eh?"

"If you would speak to the Head for us——"

"Well bowled! Courtney, you're in splendid trim!"

"—and see if you could get leave——"

"Eh—what?" said Wingate, glancing round. "Were you speaking to me, Wharton?"

"Yes, I was. We want the Head to give us leave early to-morrow——"

"Why don't you field that ball, Loder?"

"—so that we can get to Rylcombe——"

"If you've come here to stand about with your hands in your pockets, Carne, the sooner you get off the ground the better."

"—early——"

"Eh?"

"Hang it all, Wingate——"

"Eh? Did you speak?"

"We want the Head to give us early leave to-morrow," bawled Wharton. "We——"

"Well, ask him."

"We thought——"

"You couldn't have thought, or you wouldn't come bothering me at a time like this," said Wingate. "Cut off!"

The Remove chums exchanged hopeless looks and walked away. There was evidently no more help than that piece of advice to be gained from Wingate.

"Let's go into the Head," said Mark Linley. "He'll be in his study now."

Wharton nodded.

"All right. We shall have to depend on ourselves."

"Come on."

And the juniors marched in, and with as bold a face as they could presented themselves at the door of the Head's study.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
No Leave for Bunter.

"COME in," said Dr. Locke.

Harry Wharton & Co. entered the study. The Head was sitting by the open window chatting with Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove. Both of them looked at the Juniors as they entered.

"Well, my boys, what can I do for you?" asked the Head good-humouredly.

The juniors exchanged glances.

"Go it, Wharton!" whispered Bob Cherry.

"Explain, Harry," whispered Nugent.

"All right. I——"

"Go ahead!"

"If you please, sir——"

"Go on, Wharton," said Dr. Locke, exchanging a perplexed glance with Mr. Quelch, who was trying to conceal a smile. "What is it? Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Not a complaint of any sort, I am sure?"

"Not at all, sir."

"Then what is it?"

"If you please, sir——"

"We want——"

"We should like to ask——"

"The likefulness is terrific——"

The Head smiled.

"Perhaps one of you had better speak at a time," he suggested. "Your meaning would probably become clearer."

Wharton coloured.

"Yes, sir. Quite so, sir."

"Yes, dry up, you chaps," muttered Nugent.

"Dry up too, ass!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Look here——"

"Oh, ring off——"

"Don't jaw," whispered Tom Brown. "I——"

"Cheese it——"

"If you please, sir," said Wharton, raising his voice a little to drown the whispering and muttering behind him—"if you please, sir, we've had a challenge to a cricket match from Rylcombe Grammar School—a team we haven't played before."

"Indeed!"

"We've accepted, sir."

"Very good!"

"Rylcombe Grammar School is as far off as St. Jim's, sir, which is the farthest away match we ever play."

"Quite so."

"And we wondered, sir, if you would allow us—ahem——"

"That's it," said Nugent. "If you would allow us, sir——"

"Exactly!" said Bob Cherry.

"Dry up, you chaps!"

"Look here——"

"Let Wharton get on with the washing."

"If you would allow us leave to go early, sir," said Harry diffidently. "It's a long journey, and we should like to get there in time for a good match, sir. There will be plenty of time to get home after, of course, as we shall chuck play—I mean draw stumps—at dusk. The earlier we begin——"

"The better, sir."

"Just so."

"And so, sir——"

Dr. Locke smiled his genial after-lunch smile.

"What time do you wish to leave Greyfriars, Wharton?"

"Well, sir," said Harry eagerly, "I—I don't want to ask a whole day, sir, but if we could leave after the morning recess at eleven, say——"

"That would be jolly, sir!"

"The jollyfulness would be absolutely terrific, honoured Doctor Sahib."

The Head pursed his lips a little.

"I will leave it to your Form-master to decide," he said. "For my own part, I have no objection. What do you say, Mr. Quelch?"

Mr. Quelch looked thoughtful.

"It is really a question which boys are going," he remarked. "Are you all here, Wharton—all who wish to go, I mean?"

"Yes, sir, except Russell; we're taking him as a reserve."

"Very well, if Dr. Locke gives his permission I give mine," said the Remove-master.

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

"Then mine is given," said the Head. "I hope you will have a good match, Wharton, and I am sure you will keep up the credit of Greyfriars."

"Oh, yes, sir!" said Wharton. "Rely on us for that, sir. Thank you so much!"

"Not at all."

And the juniors left the study in high glee.

"Ain't they just a pair of good sports?" said Bob Cherry. "As for the Head, he's worth his weight in toffee!"

"Yes, rather!"

"It's ripping!" said Harry. "We shall get the eleven-thirty train now, and get to Rylcombe early in the afternoon. I'll buzz off on my bike now and wire to Gordon Gay."

"Good!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Go and eat coke, Bunter!"

"I hear you've got some dodge of getting off early to-morrow," the fat junior remarked. "As I'm coming with you——"

"We've got early leave," said Harry.

"You've asked for it for me too, I suppose?"

"Of course not!"

"Well, of all the mean rotters!"

"Oh, cheese it!"

Wharton walked away to get out his bicycle, and Billy Bunter blinked at the other juniors. He was in a state of simmering indignation.

"I say, you fellows, are you serious?" he exclaimed. "Haven't you asked for leave for me too?"

"Of course not, you fat duffer! You're not coming."

"I jolly well am!"

"Oh, rats!" said Nugent, walking away.

"Look here, I shall jolly well go to the Head and ask for leave myself!" exclaimed Billy Bunter wrathfully.

"Ha, ha! Do!"

"You rotters! This is just rotten jealousy on your part. I'm disgusted."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors walked away, and Bunter, after an indignant glare after them, rolled away towards the Head's study. He tapped at the door, and the Head's voice bade him enter.

"Well, Bunter?"

"I say, sir, I want to go to Rylcombe with the cricket team to-morrow," said Bunter. "I suppose I have leave to go with the rest, sir?"

"I don't see why you should suppose anything of the sort," said Dr. Locke, a little tartly. "You are not playing, I presume?"

"No, sir. There's a lot of personal jealousy in the committee, and——"

"Nonsense, Bunter! Are you a reserve?"

"No, sir. Owing to my splendid form, both as batsman and bowler, the fellows want to keep me in the shade——"

"Don't be absurd, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, sir——"

"You are simply going as a spectator?" said the Head. "In that case, you are certainly not entitled to early leave. You can go just as well after school."

"Yes, sir, but——"

"That is unless Mr. Quelch cares to give you leave, as a reward for diligence or great prowess with your lessons."

Mr. Quelch smiled grimly.

"Not at all, sir," he said. "Bunter is the laziest boy in the Lower Fourth, and the most backward with his lessons."

"Oh, sir——"

"You certainly cannot have early leave, Bunter."

"But, sir——"

"That will do, Bunter——"

"Yes, sir, but——"

"Leave the room at once, Bunter!" rapped out the Head.

Bunter jumped.

"Ye-e-es, sir."

And he left!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Left Behind!

As much time as the Remove cricketers could put in at practice that day they did put in, and Harry Wharton was pretty well satisfied with the team he was to take to Rylcombe Grammar School to meet Gordon Gay's eleven.

The next morning the Remove eleven were in high spirits. Hazeldene was the only one who seemed a little preoccupied. Harry Wharton clapped him on the shoulder as they were going to the Remove class-room after breakfast, and Hazeldene looked at him with a start.

"Anything wrong, Hazel?" Wharton asked.

"Oh, no!" said Hazeldene, colouring a little.

"You're looking rather down in the mouth," said Harry anxiously. "If you don't feel fit, say so, you know; don't leave it till we get to Rylcombe."

Hazeldene laughed.

"I shouldn't, Wharton. I'm feeling first-rate. But"—he hesitated—"I think I'd better have it out."

"What?"

"It's—it's about what Bulstrode's been saying," said Hazeldene, going crimson. "I—I know there's nothing in it. You wouldn't put me in the team to please Marjorie?"

Wharton's brow darkened.

"I'd do a great many things to please Marjorie, as you know," he said, "but I wouldn't put a chap in a cricket team unless I thought he ought to go in; and you ought to know that, Hazel."

"Yes, I—I know it. It's all right, only what Bulstrode said made me feel rather rotten," said Hazeldene. "You don't mind my speaking about it?"

"Oh, no; it's all right!" said Harry, rather shortly.

Hazeldene looked very uncomfortable as they went into the Form-room. But Wharton's assurance had relieved his mind.

It is safe to say that the Remove cricketers thought more of cricket that morning than of their lessons. But they were careful not to be careless, as Micky Desmond put it; they did not wish to risk anything to prevent their getting off at eleven o'clock.

When the Lower Fourth were released for the morning recess the cricketers went up to get their cricket-bags, to walk down to the station. They were done for the day, the rest of the Form having to return to the class-room, but no one grudged them a relaxation which was to be spent in a long railway journey—excepting Billy Bunter.

The fat Junior came into No. 1 Study as Wharton was packing his bag.

"I believe I mentioned I'm coming with you," he remarked.

"I believe you did," assented Wharton.

"Well, I'm coming."

"All right."

"I've been disappointed about that postal-order, after all; it hasn't come."

"Go hon!"

"Will you lend me my fare?"

"No."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Don't bother."

"You see, I'm coming——"

"Have you got leave from the Head, ass?" asked Wharton, beginning to relent, as he generally did when Bunter bothered him long enough.

"Well, no, but—I can get it. I'll ask him again."

"Oh, get out!"

Wharton put the fat junior out of the study by his shoulders, and the chums packed their bags in peace. Billy Bunter joined them, however, as they went downstairs. He followed the party to the gate.

"I'm coming, you know," he said. "I think it's disgustingly mean of you to refuse to lend me my fare, Wharton. You can have it back out of my postal-order on Thursday."

"Oh dear!" said Wharton. "Why weren't you born dumb—or sensible, Billy? Look here, if you can get leave to come, I'll take you; and now shut up!"

"I'll buzz off to the Head at once. Wait for me."

"Rats!"

"But I sha'n't be able to overtake you, and——"

"Rubbish! Run!"

"Oh, I say, wait for me! I——"

"Bosh!"

The Remove cricketers tramped off down the lane. Bunter grunted, and rolled away in search of the Head. He caught sight of him in the hall, and hurried up to speak to him.

Dr. Locke looked down at the fat junior.

"If you please, sir," said Bunter, blinking up at the Head, "Wharton very much wants me to go to Rylcombe with him, and——"

"Did he say so?"

"In a way—yes, sir, certainly!"

"He should come and ask me, Bunter."

"He's gone, sir, but I——"

"Nonsense! You cannot go, so say no more on the subject!"

"But, sir——"

"You may go, Bunter!"

"Yes, sir!"

And Bunter rolled off.

The Head's last words simply meant that Bunter was to leave him, as Billy knew perfectly well. But Bunter chose to misunderstand. He would have the Head's own words to quote against him afterwards, and could take refuge in his reputation for stupidity.

He put on his cap, and scuttled down to the gates.

The cricketers were already out of sight.

Bunter tramped into the lane. The rest of the Remove returned to the class-room at the usual time for the resumption of morning lessons, and Mr. Quelch glanced over them.

He noted the absence of Bunter at once.

"Where is Bunter?" he asked.

"I think he went after Wharton, sir," said Lacy.

"Indeed!"

Bunter did not return, and the Remove-master mentally promised him an interview when he should condescend to show up at Greyfriars again.

Meanwhile, Billy Bunter was panting down the lane.

It was a hot day at the beginning of May, and the long, white road was very dusty. Billy Bunter was not in a condition for much physical exertion; he never was.

He gasped and panted as he rolled on towards Friardale.

Harry Wharton & Co. were long out of sight, and the fat junior began to feel very doubtful of overtaking them before the train started.

He panted and perspired on.

He came in sight of the village, and thought he caught a glimpse of moving figures disappearing into the station.

He hurried on, as fast as his fat, little legs could carry him.

He reached the station, and there was a shriek of a whistle from the direction of the platform.

"'Urry up, sir!" shouted the porter.

"All right!" gasped Bunter.

He tore upon the platform.

The train was moving.

The fat junior raced down the platform, and rushed for the train. A carriage window was crammed with faces, and the Greyfriars juniors grinned at him from the moving train.

He was too late!

"Stand back there!" shouted a voice.

But there was no danger of Bunter trying to board the train while it was in motion. Bunter had not that kind of recklessness in his composition.

He stood in dismay on the platform, the perspiration streaming down his face and his cheeks growing redder and redder till they outvied the beetroot. He blinked and blinked.

"Good-bye, Bluebell!" sang out Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good-bye, Bunter!"

"Oh, I say, you fellows——"

"Ta-ta!"

"Vale!"

"Adieu!"

And the train whisked away out of the station, and the Greyfriars cricketers disappeared from Billy Bunter's view.

"Beasts!" muttered Bunter breathlessly. "Rotters!"

Which was rather unjustly, for if Harry Wharton & Co. had waited for him the train certainly would not, and the cricketers would have sacrificed the advantage of early leave by losing that train—a thing they were not likely to do on Bunter's account.

"Next train quarter to one, sir," said the porter, passing.

Billy Bunter grunted.

It did not matter much to him what time the next train was, as he had no money to pay his fare.

He sat on the seat on the platform, his ruddy face streaming, and gasped for breath. When he moved, it was in the direction of an automatic machine. He had been left behind, but there was still comfort in chocolates.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise.

"WAYLAND!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, looking up from the "Pluck" he was reading in a corner of the carriage. "This is the giddy junction! We change here for the local line to Rylcombe."

Nugent rose with a yawn.

"Jolly glad to change, too! It's a long journey!"

"The longfulness is terrific!"

"It's nearly over now!"

Harry Wharton opened the carriage door and stepped out, and from two adjoining carriages the Greyfriars juniors poured with their cricket bags. The juniors had been to the station before, to visit St. Jim's, and so they knew their way about.

They started off for the bridge to cross the line to the platform for Rylcombe. As they came upon that platform, Bob Cherry uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"What's the matter, Bob?"

"Look there!"

Bob Cherry jerked his thumb towards a youth who was standing in front of an automatic machine. He was not extracting toffee or chocolate from the machine, but adjusting his necktie before the small glass there.

The youth was well known by sight to the Greyfriars boys.

He belonged to St. Jim's, where he was the ornament of the Fourth Form, and his name was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

D'Arcy was the swell of the Fourth at St. Jim's, and on this occasion he was dressed with his usual elegance.

Nothing could have exceeded the shininess of his topper or the gloss on his boots, unless it was the set of his necktie or the elegant cut of his Etons.

"D'Arcy!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

The swell of St. Jim's looked round as he heard his name uttered.

"Bai Jove! So you've awwived, deah boys?"

He took his silk hat off with a graceful bow.

Not to be outdone in politeness, the Greyfriars juniors lifted their caps and straw hats solemnly, and bowed in return.

D'Arcy carefully replaced his topper, and in doing so dislodged his eyeglass from his right eye. He replaced the eyeglass with equal care, and then spoke again.

"Jollay glad to see you, deah boys!"

"Same here!" said Harry Wharton. "The train for Rylcombe isn't in yet, I see."

"No; it's two or thwee minutes yet," said D'Arcy. "I have been to Wayland to see about a new toppah, and as I knew you were comin', I thought I'd wait here and see you, deah boys, and wide to Wylcombe with you."

"Good!"

"I have to weturn to Wayland again about the toppah," explained D'Arcy. "There is a slight misfit—nothin' much, but a chap has to be wathah particulah in these mattahs. An ill-fittin' toppah is a howwah. Don't you think so?"

"Oh, yes, awful!"

"You see, it looks wotten, and it might make the head ache, too," explained D'Arcy. "Now, I always insist on havin' the thing exact."

"Good idea!" said Wharton gravely.

"They are goin' to stwetch it a bit, and I'm weturnin' latah," said Arthur Augustus. "If I had some of the fellows with me, I'd have stayed in Wayland, but as it is, I don't want to hang about for two or thwee hours alone. Tom Mewwy and the west wefused to come ovah with me. Blake said the cwicket pwactice before the match this aftahnoon was more important than my toppah. I wegard that as wot!"

"I should say so!"

"I'm cuttin' the match myself," said D'Arcy. "I said I mightn't be able to get back, and Tom Mewwy said I shouldn't be missed, so it's all wight. He thinks Weilly, of the Fourth, can take my place. Of course he can't!"

"No."

"But it isn't a vewy important match this aftahnoon, so I thought it would be all wight to let them play Weilly, you see, in case they should be tempted to leave me out of a weally important match. They can win this aftahnoon without me, but, of course, in a hard match I should have to be there!"

"I suppose so," grinned Harry Wharton.

"Bai Jove! Here comes the twain! Have you fellows lunched?"

"Oh, yes; we had a big lunch in the train!"

"Good!"

The train stopped in the station, and the Greyfriars juniors clambered in with their baggage. Wharton was glad

Billy Bunter had a horrid feeling that he would be asked to show his ticket, and he shrank back in the corner of the carriage each time a guard or a porter went by.

enough to meet D'Arcy there, not only for the sake of his company, but for the purpose of learning something about the team they were going to play. As a near neighbour of the Grammar School, D'Arcy should know something about Gordon Gay & Co.

As it happened, Arthur Augustus brought up the subject of the Grammar School himself.

"Gordon Gay mentioned to me about your wiah," he remarked. "That's how I knew you were comin' so early, you know. You know Gay?"

"Never met him."

"Bai Jove, no; of course, not! He's wathah a new kid at the Grammah School, you know. He is a wathah cheekay boundah, and we have had to put him in his place a lot of times."

Wharton laughed.

"Is that so?"

"Yaas, wathah! You see, the Wylcombe Gwammah School have a wathah cuwious ideah that they can stand up against St. Jim's. We're peaceable chaps, as a wule, but, of course, we can't allow any wot like that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So we give them a feahful lickin' evewy now and then! Now cwickot's commenced, though, we haven't had so much waggin', as we're wathah busay with the cwicket. As a mattah of fact, Gay is a decent chap, you know; they're

al decent chaps, if they would only wealise that St. Jim's it cock of the walk, you know!"

"I see," assented Wharton. "What sort of cricket do they play?"

"Oh, wippin'! We can beat them, of course; but any other team would find it wathah hard."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry.

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon the hilarious Bob.

"What's the joke, deah boy?" he inquired.

Bob turned red.

The roar had been irresistible, but he realised that it was not polite, and he was now under the painful necessity of explaining it away.

"You—you see——" he stammered.

"Yaas?"

"It's so—so odd that they should think they could stand up against a chap like you!" said Bob blandly.

D'Arcy nodded.

"Yaas, I suppose it is wathah comic; it's their conceit, you know. Othahwise, they're awf'ly all wight. There are thwee new chaps in the school, all fwom Austwalia—that's a place a long way off somewhah——"

"Yes, I think I've heard of Australia," said Wharton gravely. "I—I think I've seen it on a map."

"Yaas, of course. Well, these thwee chaps are awf'ly cheekay, but they're good cwicketers. Gordon Gay is one, and Jack and Harry Wootton are the othah two."

"They're in the Grammar School team?"

"Yaas, wathah. Gordon Gay is skippah. Then Frank Monk and Lane and Carboy are thwee chaps you will have to look out for. Carpenter and O'Donnel and Preston are good. I don't know the othahs."

"Good. It will be a good match."

"Yaas, and if you get licked, you will have the consolation of knowin' that we are wathah hard pwessed to lick the boundahs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, Bob."

"All right. I was thinking how comic it was that——"

"Well, you can do your thinking without going off like an alarm clock," said Nugent severely. "Dry up!"

"The dry-upfulness should be terrific."

"Anything more about Gordon Gay?" asked Tom Brown, who as a New Zealander was specially interested in the lad from the land of the Southern Cross.

"Yaas, wathah! He's a jolly good actor—as good as Kerr of ours—and I believe his governah is an actor or somethin'. He can make up as anybody, and take anybody in, you know. He's awfully clevah in that line, and so are the Woottons. They have a dwamatic company in the Fourth Form at the Gwammah School, and they give plays and things, almost as well as we do at St. Jim's."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cheese it, Bob."

"I am not surpwised at Chewwy wegardin' it as comic. It is weally wathah funnay that the Gwammah chaps should have such a good opinion of themselves, you know. They think the shows they give are better than ours. Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Here's Wylcombe."

The train slowed down into Rylcombe Station.

The Greyfriars juniors poured out upon the platform with Arthur Augustus. From the direction of the station exit, a youth in a silk-hat and an eyeglass advanced to meet them.

"Bai Jove! you fellows, I'm awf'ly glad to see you."

Harry Wharton & Co. simply jumped.

For the new-comer, in look, in dress, and in voice, was the exact counterpart of the elegant youth who had travelled with them in the train from Wayland.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
Two of Them.

HARRY WHARTON stared at the new D'Arcy, and then turned his head and stared at the other.

The Greyfriars juniors gasped.

The two youths were exact counterparts of each other; and which was the real Arthur Augustus it would have puzzled his own mother to tell.

D'Arcy I. stared blankly at the new-comer, and adjusted his monocle carefully, and stared at him again. He seemed at a loss for words.

D'Arcy II. adjusted his eyeglass with equal care, and took a slow and scornful survey of D'Arcy I., beginning with his boots, and finishing with his hat.

"Bai Jove!"

"Bai Jove!"

"This is wathah extwaordinawy!"

"This is most extwaordinawy!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"Gweat Scott!"

They stared at one another.

Harry Wharton found his voice at last. The other juniors could only stand and stare blankly. They were too astounded for words.

"Who on earth are you?" demanded Harry, turning to the late comer.

D'Arcy II. turned his eyeglass upon Wharton.

"D'Arcy of the Fourth at St. Jim's, of course," he replied. "Don't you know me?"

"But—but——"

"You've met me when you've played St. Jim's at cwicket, and at footah too."

"Yes, but——"

"And at a garden-partay at Cliff House, you wemembah."

"Yes," said Harry dazedly. "I remember."

"Awf'ly glad to see you again, deah boys."

"It's a feahful whoppah!" shrieked D'Arcy I. "I'm D'Arcy of St. Jim's."

"Weally, deah boy——" said the other.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Wathah not! You're an impostah."

"You uttah ass——"

"A wascally impostah."

"I wegard you as a beast. You have had the feahful cheek to dwess like me, and I wegard it as a piece of astoundin' nerve."

"Weally, deah boy——"

"I shall have no wesource but to give you a feahful thwashin', unless you immediately confess the twuth, and take yourself off."

"I wegard the suggestion as impertinent, you feahful impostah."

"Bai Jove!"

"Yaas, wathah," said D'Arcy II., giving D'Arcy I. a most severe look through his monocle. "Gentlemen of Gwey-fwiahs, this person is a wascally impostah."

"Bai Jove!"

"I twust you have not had your pockets picked."

"Gweat Scott!"

"He is some disweputable wottah who has dwessed himself like this to take you in," said D'Arcy II.

"Bai Jove!"

"Pway have nothin' more to do with him," said D'Arcy II., with a scornful glance at the swell of St. Jim's. "I have come to meet you on behalf of Gordon Gay & Co., deah boys. I have a bwake waitin' outside to cawwy you to the Gwammah School."

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged glances.

This looked genuine enough.

One of the D'Arcys was evidently an impostor, but which one the Greyfriars juniors could not for the life of them tell.

But the one who had a brake ready to take them to the Grammar School was far more likely to be the real Simon Pure.

"Blessed if I know what to make of it," said Wharton, at last. "I suppose one of you is got up like this for a lark."

"Yaas, wathah, that's it!" assented D'Arcy II. "Where did you meet that chap?"

"Bai Jove!"

"At Wayland Junction," said Harry.

"Ah, yaas! I shouldn't wondah if he is Gordon Gay or one of those Gwammah boundahs, got up like this for a lark. You know, they're always playin' twicks of that sort."

"I've got it!" shrieked D'Arcy I. "That chap is Gordon Gay——"

"Weally, you wascal——"

"He is takin' you in——"

"Wats!"

"Bai Jove, I shall thwash him. I——"

"Here, keep off!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, pushing back the excited D'Arcy I. as he was about to rush upon D'Arcy II. "No rows, you know."

"Welease me."

"Don't be an ass."

"I wefuse to be called an ass. I——"

"Here, let's get off!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "We don't want to be late for the match. If there's a brake outside we'll take it."

"Yes, rather."

"The takefulness is terrific."

"Come on, then."

"I assuah you, deah boys, that wascal is a fabwicatah——"

"That chap is a feahful impostah——"

"You wascal!"

"You wottah!"

"Wats!"

"Moah wats!"

And with a glare of mutual defiance, the two D'Arcys parted.

Harry Wharton & Co. followed D'Arcy II. to the road

outside the station, where sure enough there was a brake with three horses waiting.

D'Arcy I. was left on the platform, seemingly in a dazed state.

"Heah you are, deah boys!" exclaimed D'Arcy II.

"Good."

"I suppose you're the genuine article?" exclaimed Nugent. "But that other chap was got up wonderfully well."

"Yasa, I wathah think he must be Gordon Gay, you know," said D'Arcy II. "A most mischievous young wascal, that fellow Gay. Pway get in."

The Greyfriars cricketers tumbled into the brake.

The driver set the horses in motion, and they rolled away down the leafy lanes towards the Grammar School.

En route they passed a group of St. Jim's fellows strolling towards the village. The elegant youth in the brake waved his hand to them.

"Hallo, Kangawoo!" he called out.

Noble of the Shell at St. Jim's waved his hand.

"Coo-ey!" he called back cheerily.

"Is the silk-topper all right, Gussy?" sang out Glynn, of the St. Jim's Shell.

"Eh?"

"Is the topper all right? Or doesn't it fit?"

"I wegard your wemark as impertinent, deah boy."

"Why, I——"

But the brake rolled on, leaving Glyn staring.

Wharton looked curiously at the elegant junior.

He remembered that D'Arcy I., in the train, had told him about that silk-topper, and Glyn's words would imply that the D'Arcy of the train was the genuine article.

But Harry gave up trying to puzzle it out.

When they arrived at the Grammar School, at all events, it would probably be made clear, as Gordon Gay, of course, would know.

The great red-brick building, which offered such a contrast to the grey old walls and ivied towers of St. Jim's, was now in sight.

The brake rolled up to the big gates.

There was a crowd of Grammarians outside the gates, evidently waiting for the brake to arrive.

A cheer and a roar of laughter greeted it.

Two handsome and sturdy juniors, very like one another, came up as the vehicle slackened down. One of them hailed the Greyfriars juniors.

"Jolly glad to see you chaps," he said. "Let me introduce myself—Jack Wootton, of the Fourth. This is my minor, Harry. What's that chap doing in the brake?"

"It's D'Arcy, of St. Jim's," said Wharton. "You know him?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's brought us here in the brake——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the giddy joke?" demanded Bob Cherry.

The Grammarians shrieked.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!"

"Excuse us!" gasped Jack Wootton. "Can't help it. Look at the chap now."

The Greyfriars juniors looked round at the elegant youth.

He had taken off the silk hat and the monocle, and rubbed a damp handkerchief over his face.

The change it wrought was surprising.

It was no longer D'Arcy of St. Jim's who looked at the astounding juniors. The disguise was more in the management of the features than in the make-up. The make-up was gone now, and the features relaxed.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the elegant junior. "Excuse me. Ho, ho, ho!"

"Who are you?" gasped Wharton.

"Gordon Gay."

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

On the Cricket Field.

GORDON GAY grinned at the astonished Greyfriars fellows.

The brake rolled on into the Grammar School quad, followed by the crowd of laughing and chuckling Grammarians.

"You'll excuse this little jape," said Gordon Gay, calming down at last. "Of course, I never expected to meet the real D'Arcy at the station. I hadn't the faintest notion he was there. It was a shock to me."

"You didn't show it."

"Well, I tried not to," grinned Gordon Gay. "I had to bluff the jape through, then. You see, we do a lot of acting and making-up here in the Fourth. We've got a dramatic company that knocks spots off the same thing at St. Jim's."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Shut up, Bob!"

"And, as a matter of fact, we've been planning a jape on St. Jim's, and I'm to be disguised as Gussy," explained Gordon Gay. "As you fellows know Gussy by sight, I thought it would be a ripping test of the disguise to shove it on when I came to meet you with the brake. I thought that if it passed muster with you, it would be all right for japing St. Jim's."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Ha, ha! I see, now. It was rather rough on the genuine Gussy, though."

"Ha, ha, ha! That was an accident. What the dickens was he doing there?" said Gordon Gay. "But here we are!"

The brake stopped, and the Greyfriars fellows clambered down.

"Look after the chaps while I get these things off, Wootton major," said Gordon Gay. "I'll be down in a jiffy."

"Right you are!"

Gordon Gay was not long in changing.

In a very few minutes he came down in spotless white, with a cricket cap on his head, and the Greyfriars fellows were able to see what the young Cornstalk was really like.

Handsome and very sturdy, with a very pleasant face, was Gordon Gay, and the cricketers from Greyfriars liked his looks at once.

The Woottons, too, were very agreeable; and Harry Wharton soon discovered that the Three Wallabies, as the Australians were generally called at Rylcombe School, were the heads of the Fourth Form there.

Frank Monk, Lane, and Carboy, who had always been the leaders before Gordon Gay's time, seemed on the best of terms with them, however.

They were in the same team, and all were evidently bent on pulling together for victory over the visitors from Greyfriars.

The Greyfriars juniors looked over the ground. It was a very good one, especially for a junior ground, with a very fine pavilion.

It was a bright afternoon, but not too bright; warm, but not too warm; in short, a perfect afternoon for cricket.

And owing to the early leave from Greyfriars, Harry Wharton & Co. were on the ground early enough for the stumps to be pitched in good time.

A single innings match had been agreed upon, for there certainly would not have been time for two innings each, and neither side wanted to chance leaving the match unfinished.

A crowd of fellows were already gathering round the ropes, and it was clear that the match was to have a good audience.

"Jolly good show here!" said Bob Cherry, as he sponged the dust of the journey from his glowing face. "Awfully rough on Bunter to miss the feed. Ha, ha!"

"Serve him right!" said Hazeldene.

"Yes, just so; but I shouldn't wonder if he comes along after all," said Bob, with a shake of the head. "He can be as obstinate as a mule."

"He hasn't any money to pay his fare."

"That wouldn't stop Bunter if he could get into the train, and he's an artful dodger," remarked Nugent. "I shouldn't be surprised to see him turn up before the match is over."

"If he tries to take the journey without a ticket, he may finish it in company with a policeman," said Wharton, with a frown.

"Well, Bunter's bound to come into contact with the police sooner or later," said Ogilvy, with a grin.

Gordon Gay looked in.

"We're ready when you chaps are."

"Right-ho!" said Harry Wharton cheerily. "We're ready."

And the Greyfriars cricketers turned out, looking very handsome and fit in spotless white flannels.

The crowd round the ground had increased, and Harry Wharton noticed several fellows from St. Jim's among the Grammarians looking on. The matches on at St. Jim's that afternoon were not very important ones, and many of the Saints had had the curiosity to come over to see how the Grammarians played the team from Greyfriars.

Gordon Gay won the toss, and elected to bat first, and Harry Wharton sent his men out to field.

The ball was given to Hurree Jamset Ram Singh for the first over.

Harry Wharton tapped him on the shoulder as he delivered the round red ball into his dusky hands.

"Mind, we want a wicket every time," he said.

Hurree Singh grinned.

"The expectation of my worthy chum is terrific," he remarked, "and I will do my esteemed best to gratify it. But to judge by the appearfulness of our honourable Grammarian opponents, it will not be so easy to bowl them as to bowl the honourable rotters of the Upper Fourth at Greyfriars."

"They look a smart lot," Bob Cherry remarked.

"The smartfulness is terrific."

"That chap Gay looks as if he can play, too," Nugent observed. "I wonder how he will shape. Australians are strong on cricket."

"And there are three of them in the team," said Harry. "The Three Wallabies they call them."

"Well, Inky can get them out if anybody can."

"The tryfulness will be great, at all events."

"Well, here come Monk and Gay to open the innings."

The fieldsmen went to their places, and Inky carried the ball to his post. He was to bowl first to Gordon Gay, Frank Monk standing aside from his wicket with a slight smile on his face.

Monk had heard of Hurree Singh's powers as a bowler, but he thought that there was a surprise waiting for the nabob in the person of the young Cornstalk.

Gordon Gay took his place at the wicket in his quiet way.

There was nothing like swank about Gordon Gay. No one would have guessed from his manner that he was the finest junior batsman the Grammar School had ever turned out.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had a rather peculiar method of delivery. He had mastered every variety of bowling. He would take a little run, and sometimes turn himself into a catherine-wheel, and sometimes not. But till the ball left his hand, it puzzled the keenest judges to know exactly what kind of ball it was going to be.

Many and many a hopeful batsman had fallen powerless before the fast or slow bowling of the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Gordon Gay had heard of him from the St. Jim's fellows, and he was on the alert. His strong hands were on the willow handle of the bat, his keen eyes watching for the ball.

Hurree Singh took his little run.

Over went his arm, and down went the ball.

Straight for the middle stump it broke, but it did not reach its target.

Click!

The bat was there, just where it was wanted, and the ball dropped dead on the crease.

Harry Wharton caught Bob Cherry's eye, and nodded. The Wallaby knew how to stop a ball, that was clear.

The ball came back to Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, and the next one he sent down was as fast as a bullet.

But it glanced off Gordon Gay's bat, and Gay and Monk ran—and ran again—and two runs were up when the ball came whizzing in from the long-field.

Hurree Singh frowned a little.

He put all he knew into the rest of that over.

Fast balls and slow balls and medium balls, however, seemed all the same to the lad from the bush.

Into the last ball Hurree Singh put all his cunning. It came down with a twist on it that would have baffled many a county batsman.

But Gordon Gay was "all there."

The ball broke in at a most surprising angle, but the gleaming willow met it and sent it on its journey.

And the batsmen ran. One, two, three!

And they stood cheerily at attention as the ball came in to Hazeldene, keeping wicket.

Five runs for the over!

And as the field crossed over, Gordon Gay still had the bowling, and Tom Brown took the ball and went on to bowl, without much hope of shifting the young Cornstalk from the wicket, however.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

D'Arcy Goes.

"BAI Jove, I wegard that chap as wathah a good batsman!"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, who made that remark, and he addressed Jack Wootton, who was standing outside the pavilion, looking on.

The Grammar batsmen were ready, waiting their turn at the wickets, but with Gordon Gay and Frank Monk batting, they were likely to wait some time.

Hurree Singh was the best bowler the Greyfriars team had, and he had not succeeded in making any impression upon Gay's wicket.

Jack Wootton looked round with a grin.

"Go hon!" he remarked.

D'Arcy nodded.

"Yaas, wathah! I think I should find it wathah difficult to get Gordon Gay out, you know," he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus put up his eyeglass and looked at Wootton.

"I fail to see any cause for laughter in that wemark," he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Wootton——"

"Well, I think you'd find it rather hard to bowl Gordon Gay," grinned Jack Wootton. "What do you think, Harry?"

"I think it would be a trifle difficult, even for Gussy," said Harry Wootton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But how jolly of you to come over and watch the match, Gussy," said Carboy. "You've got a match on at St. Jim's, haven't you?"

"Yaas, but I'm not playin'. I'm givin' some of the othahs a chance, as it's not a vewy important match," explained D'Arcy. "Besides, I've got to see to my new hat at Wayland. That's a most important mattah."

"I suppose so."

"Yaas, wathah! But I came along here not only to watch the match—though it's always vewy intewestin' to watch youngstahs playin', of course——"

"To watch what?"

"Youngstahs!" said D'Arcy innocently.

"Looking for a thick ear?" asked Lane pleasantly.

"Weally, Lane——"

"Cheese it, Laney!" said Carboy. "Remember that Gussy is a guest, if he doesn't know how to behave himself."

"Weally, Carboy——"

"Just so," said Wootton I. "Go on, Gussy!"

"I was wemarkin' that I had anothah motive in comin' ovah heah. There is a chap who has been disguisin' himself as me——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I know the wottah came here with the Gweyfwiahs chaps ——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I have come ovah to give him a feahful thwashin'."

"Go hon!"

"If you know the wascal, I should be obliged to you if you will point him out, so that I can administah a severe chastisement," said D'Arcy, in his most stately way.

"Oh, Gussy! Don't be cruel!"

"I have no desiah to be cwuel, deah boy, but a chap must defend his own personal dig. I wegard that twick as an infwaction of my dig."

"Horrid!"

"So if you will point out the wottah——"

"There he is!"

Jack Wootton pointed out Gordon Gay, who was just passing Frank Monk in the middle of the pitch, scoring his tenth run.

Arthur Augustus put up his eyeglass, and stared at Gordon Gay.

"Bai Jove! Then it was he!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Lane, with a delightful imitation of Gussy's noble accent.

"Bai Jove! I shall be sowwy to intewwupt the game, as a sportsman, but I feel that I am bound to give Gordon Gay a feahful thwashin'!"

And Arthur Augustus was putting one leg over the ropes, to step on to the field of play, when Jack Wootton grasped him and hauled him back.

"Hold on!" he remarked.

"Pway welease me, deah boy!"

"You ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass!"

"Well, chump, then——"

"I wegard chump as an equally oppwobwious expwession ——"

"Keep off the grass!"

"I am going to thwash Gordon Gay!"

"Ass! Do you want to interrupt the game?"

"As a twue sportsman, I shall wegwet doin' so, vewy much, but a fellow is bound to considah his dig."

"Hold him, Jack!"

"I've got the duffer!"

"Weally, Wootton——"

"Leave it till after the match," suggested Lane, with a grin, as D'Arcy struggled in the grasp of the Wallabies. "You can lick Gordon Gay afterwards, you know."

"But I cannot stay for the finish of the match. I have to go to Wayland about my new silk toppah."

"Bump him!" said Jack Wootton.

"I wefuse to be bumped. I uttahly wefuse. You will wumple my jacket, and soil my twousahs."

"Never mind——"

"You uttah wottah! Ow! Welease me!"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Carboy. "Here's a telegram!"

A lad in uniform was making his way to the cricket-field from the direction of the house. He had taken the telegram there, and so it was evidently for one of the fellows on the ground.

"Bai Jove! It may be fwom my hattah, to say the hat is weady!"

"I—I say, you fellows, I've come just in time, haven't I?" said Billy Bunter, nervously. "I—I say, I'm awfully hungry, you know."

"Ha, ha! How would your giddy hatter know you were here?"

"Bai Jove! I novah thought of that!"

"More likely it's from Miss Phyllis," said Lane. "It may be to tell us whether she and Miss Vera can come this afternoon or not."

"Very likely!"

"Master Gay!" said the telegraph-boy.

"Right-ho!" said Lane, taking it. "Gay told us to open it if it came." He slit the envelope. "Don't make a row while I'm reading a telegram, Gussy!"

"Certainly not, deah boy!"

Lane read out the telegram:

"Coming by 3.15, Wayland.—PHYLLIS."

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Jack Wootton.

For Miss Phyllis Monk, the Head's niece, and Frank's cousin, was very popular at Rylcombe School, as was her friend, Miss Vera Stanhope.

Miss Phyllis was staying with Vera Stanhope, but when that match was fixed up with Greyfriars, Frank Monk had done his best to induce the two girls to come over and see it, promising them that it would be worth watching.

The girls, who were very much interested in the junior cricket at the Grammar School, had promised to come if they could.

The telegram told that they could.

Jack Wootton knitted his brows thoughtfully.

"Pity they couldn't let us know sooner," he remarked. "Just like the girls, of course——"

"Weally, deah boy——"

"Oh, don't keep on interrupting, D'Arcy!"

"I cannot allow that wemark to pass unchallenged," said the swell of St. Jim's firmly. "I appeal to all the gentlemen pwesent. A dispawagin' wemark concernin' the gentle sex is wotten bad form——"

"Look here——"

"And unless you withdraw it, Wootton, I shall have no alternative, as a gentleman, but to administah a fealiful thwashin'."

"You ass——"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy pushed back his cuffs.

"Are you weady, Wootton?" he asked, with icy politeness.

"You chump——"

"Then I shall stwike you!"

"Shoer off!" grinned Harry Wootton. "Don't be an ass. Jack didn't intend to say anything disparaging, did you, Jacky?"

"Of course not, ass!"

"Vewy well, I accept the explanation," said D'Arcy gracefully. "I will now cawwy out my owiginal intention, and thwash Gordon Gay——"

"Hurrah!" roared the crowd.

Gordon Gay was scoring again. His individual score was at 22 now, and he looked like going on.

The Greyfriars' fieldsmen were being given a great deal of leather-hunting; but they took to it very kindly, and played up cheerfully and well.

But the fieldsmen and the bowlers did not seem to be able to touch Gordon Gay. He was batting away like a Fry and a Hayward and a Jessop rolled into one.

"Hurrah!" roared the Wootton's. "Hurrah!"

"Well hit!"

"Bravo, Gay!"

"Yaas, wathah! It was wathah good, and I am sowwy I shall have to intewwupt Gay by givin' him a thwashin'," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"By George!" said Lane. "Who's to meet Miss Phyllis and Miss Vera at the station? We can't go, now that the match has started, and we're batting first. We may be wanted any minute."

The Grammarians exchanged a grin, and pronounced one name in a kind of chorus:

"D'Arcy!"

"Bai Jove!"

"D'Arcy, of course," said Carboy. "D'Arcy is just the chap. You know his graceful way with ladies——"

"Weally, Carboy——"

"And he's only a looker-on in Vienna, as Shakespeare puts it; and besides, he's got to go to Wayland about a silk hat, or a dog, or something!"

"A silk hat, deah boy!"

"You'll explain to them that the match had started, and our side was batting, so we couldn't possibly get away."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then off you go. Much obliged."

"Not at all, deah boy. It's a pleasure!"

And the swell of St. Jim's started off, leaving the Grammarian batsmen grinning.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Hat Trick.

HARRY WHARTON was beginning to look serious.

He had expected a pretty tough match with the Grammarians, after the account he had had of them from St. Jim's.

But he had not looked for a batsman of the quality of Gordon Gay. Lad as he was, the young Cornstalk really seemed to be fit to take his place in an Australian eleven at Lord's.

His batting seemed to be perfect, and he stood up against the deadly bowling of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh without turning a hair. His score was now at 30, to say nothing of 12 which Frank Monk had put up.

With 42 runs scored for the Grammar School, and not a wicket down yet, the outlook was not encouraging for Greyfriars.

"My only hat!" murmured Bob Cherry, passing Harry as the field crossed after an over. "They'll be declaring at tea-time, without a blessed wicket down!"

Harry forced a smile.

"Hardly as bad as that," he said. "But it doesn't look exhilarating for us, and that's a fact."

"Inky, you duffer, why don't you take some wickets?"

The nabob made a pathetic grimace.

"The wishfulness is great, my worthy chum, but the bowlfulness is not sufficiently terrific."

"Take the ball for an over, Harry," said Nugent.

Wharton nodded.

"I may as well," he remarked. "My bowling isn't up to Inky's, and no better than Linley's, but it's different—that's one thing."

"Yes, go it!"

"The gofulness is terrific."

Wharton went on to bowl.

Gordon Gay faced the bowling in his easy, but not overconfident way.

Wharton sent down the first ball of the over with plenty of vim, and Gordon Gay stopped it dead on the crease.

The second ball was stopped dead, too, and the third cut away over the boundary for 4.

The fourth was a tougher morsel, but Gordon Gay saved his wicket, and the ball flew, and the batsmen ran—but what did that yell mean that was going up—that shout, and that craning of necks?

Mark Linley, at cover-slip, was backing away, with his head bent backwards, and his clear eyes on the sky—or on the round spot that was sailing down to him from the sky.

His hands were up—ready—his glance never wavered.

He backed away—away—there was a hiss of deep-drawn breath.

Click!

A soft sound, between a click and a kiss—and the ball reposed in the palms of the Lancashire lad.

Mark Linley had caught Gordon Gay out!

There was a roar.

"Well caught!"

Even the Grammarians, in the moment of their leader's fall, could admire that splendid catch.

Gordon Gay stopped, and stared.

He had not expected to be caught out, that time at all events, and the roar from the crowd came as a surprise to him.

"Caught!"

"Oh, well caught!"

"Bravo!" roared Bob Cherry, rushing up to Mark Linley and giving him a slap on the shoulder that made him stagger. "Hip pip!"

"Ow!"

"You giddy catcher! Hurrah!"

"You ass!"

"Ha, ha! Hurrah!"

And Harry Wharton's face lighted up.

The terrible batsman was down at last, but with a score of thirty-four runs to his own name, Gordon Gay went out with great credit.

Harry Wootton took his place at the wicket.

He lived through the over, and added a couple of runs to the score, and in the next over Hurree Singh took the ball again, bowling to Frank Monk.

Monk was caught napping this time; but, really, the bowling was so good that there was plenty of excuse for him.

His middle stump was whipped out of the ground, and reposed with the bails, and Monk carried out his bat for twelve runs, a decent enough score against bowling like that of the Greyfriars juniors.

Two down!

The Greyfriars juniors had made a beginning, at all events, and they realised that they had got rid of two of the toughest customers on the Grammarian side.

Gordon Gay and Monk were both warmly greeted by their comrades when they came off. Lane went in to join Wootton II.

"You've done splendidly, Gay," said Jack Wootton. "The Greyfriars kids will find it hard to get up to our score, I rather think."

"I hope so," said Gordon Gay cheerfully, fanning his perspiring face. "It's not so bad for a start, anyway. By the way, has there been anything from Miss Phyllis?"

"Yes; a telegram."

"They're coming?"

"Yes."

"Somebody ought to meet them at the station," said Gordon Gay, a little anxiously, and Monk nodded.

Jack Wootton chuckled.

"That's all right," he replied. "Somebody is meeting them. We've sent Gussy."

"Gussy!"

"Yes. He came here to give Gay a fearful thrashing, and we've sent him to meet the girls at Wayland instead."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! Well hit!" roared Jack Wootton.

Lane had sent the ball whizzing, and the batsmen were crossing the pitch at top speed.

Once, twice! And thrice——

"Too late!" muttered Gordon Gay.

But the warning did not reach the batsmen, who were running for the third time—once too often, as it proved.

For the ball was coming from the field, from the hand of Harry Wharton, straight and true as a die, and it crashed upon the wicket a few seconds before Lane's bat reached the crease.

Crash!

Two stumps and the bails were down, so that there was no doubt, as Bob Cherry humorously remarked, whether the batsman was out or not.

"How's that?" roared Greyfriars.

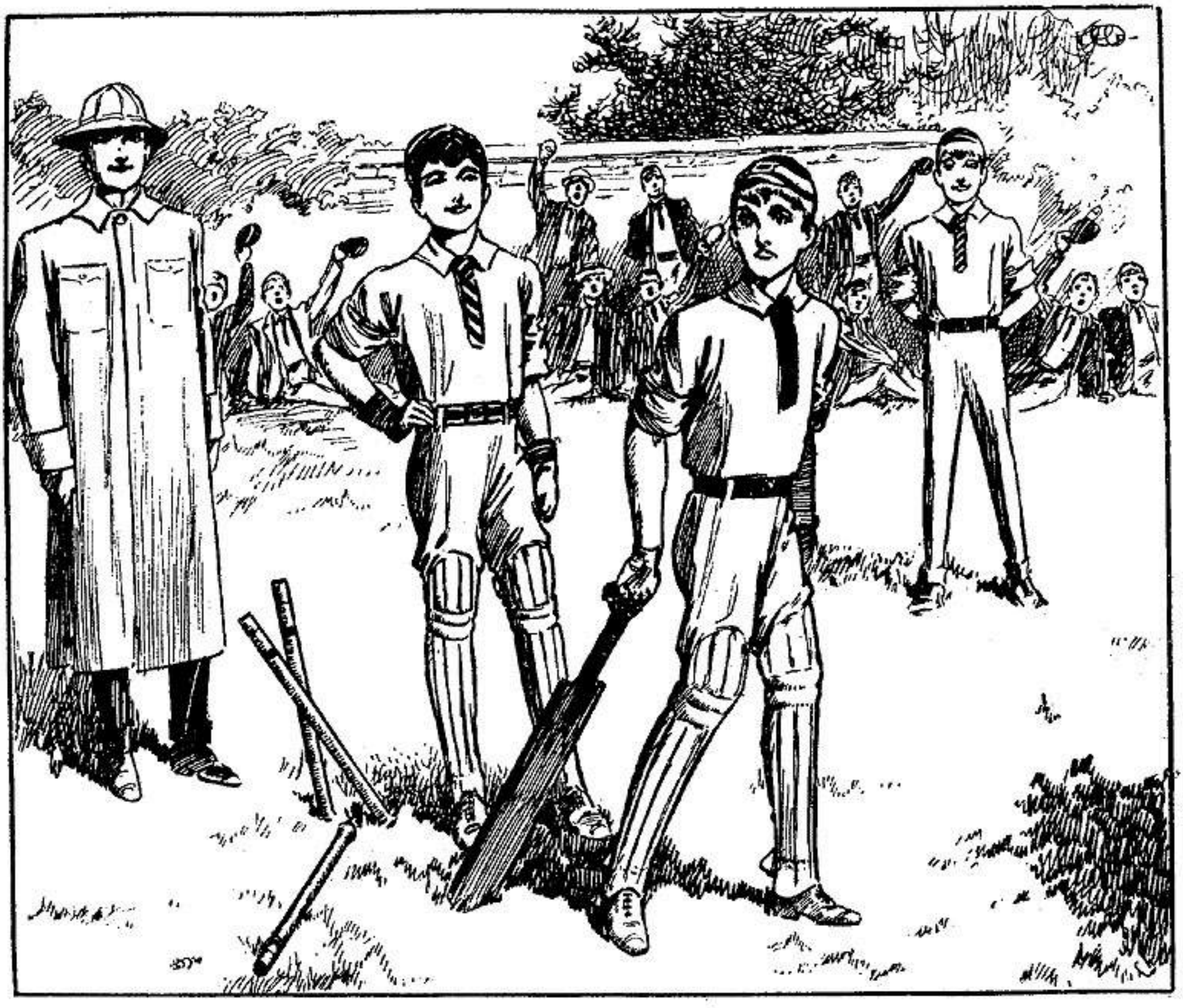
And the umpire grinned.

"Out!"

And out it was.

Lane gave a humorously doleful glance at his wrecked wicket, and walked off the pitch, and as he went, sarcastic voices among the Grammarians asked him the market price of duck's eggs; a query which was scarcely just, as two runs had been taken before the wicket went down.

"Never mind, old chap," said Gordon Gay, as Lane came out with a very pink face. "Better luck next time. You're next man in, Carboy!"



Tom Brown stood dazed, with his bat on the crease, and the umpire chuckled. "You're out!" he remarked.

"Right-ho!"

And Carboy went down to the wicket.

But the Greyfriars bowlers were getting into form now. They seemed to have taken the measure of the Grammarian batting at last.

Mark Linley had the ball, and Linley was out for scalps, as Bob Cherry joyously remarked when Carboy's wicket went down in a heap at the first ball of the over.

"Good old Lancashire!" chirruped Bob.

And Mark Linley smiled.

Hanks came in to take Carboy's place. Hanks was not a strong batsman, and was put into the team for his fielding.

He had no chance whatever against Mark Linley's bowling.

The ball came in from he knew not where; all he really knew was that it never touched his bat, and that his bails were flying.

"How's that?" shrieked Greyfriars.

"Out!"

"Yah! What price duck's eggs?" howled the Grammarians, as poor Hanks carried out his unused bat.

And Hanks's complexion understudied the beetroot.

"Next man in, Carpenter!" said Gordon Gay.

Carpenter nodded, and buttoned his glove, with his bat under his arm, with rather a swanking air as he went to the wicket. Carpenter meant to show both Greyfriars and the Grammar School what batting really was like.

Unfortunately, he had no chance of making the intended display just then, for the first ball from Mark Linley whipped his middle stump up and left him stranded.

Then Greyfriars yelled!

"Hurrah!"

"Hip, pip!"

"The hat trick! Hurrah!"

"Good old Lancashire!"

"Bravo!"

Mark Linley had performed the hat trick, and the Grammar School were six wickets down. Things were looking up for Greyfriars at last.

But the Grammarians smiled again as Jack Wootton went in to join his brother. When the two Wallabies were together, the innings was likely to have a long life. Both the Cornstalks knew how to keep their end up.

And the Grammarians believed that another surprise was in store for Greyfriars, and that in the two Woottons Harry Wharton & Co. would run up against something exceedingly hard.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Finds Friends.

"WAYLAND!"

"M-m-my hat! This is the blessed station!"

It was Billy Bunter who made that remark, as he blinked out of the carriage window into the station, and blinked nervously along the platform.

The dusty state of Billy Bunter's clothes showed that he had made part, at least, of the journey, under the seat in the carriage.

We are sorry to relate it, but Billy Bunter was travelling without a ticket; and, as was only just in the circumstances, he travelled in an incessant state of fear and trembling.

Every time a guard or a porter glanced into the carriage, Bunter had had a horrid feeling that he was to be asked to show his ticket, and each time he prepared mentally an explanation, how he had lost it, how he had not had time to take one, how he had had his pocket picked—whichever yarn seemed to him most advisable at the moment.

It must be related that Billy Bunter had no great regard for the truth; but, as a matter of fact, the fat junior was really too stupid to see exactly where truth ended and falsehood began.

But he had not been asked to show his ticket, and he had avoided one or two dangerous encounters by hiding under the seat. He had travelled on that journey before, and knew the points at which tickets were most likely to be examined, and he had passed those points under the seat.

He had had great luck. Bob Cherry always maintained that there was such a thing as "fool's luck," and that Bunter had a full share of it.

Bunter had had to change trains, and he had done so undetected; and now he had arrived at Wayland Junction, where he was to change into the local train for Rylcombe.

He would be expected to show his ticket there, before he was allowed to cross the line on the bridge for the other platform, for Rylcombe.

The fat junior blinked out of the carriage, and alighted. He knew that the Rylcombe train would not be in just yet, and he stood on the platform, debating his chances.

If he crossed the line, instead of the bridge, he would escape the unpleasant questions of the ticket collector; and that he decided to do.

It was a dangerous feat for a short-sighted person, as expresses sometimes came whizzing through the station, and Bunter could not see the signals.

But he was not destined to cross the line, for as he slid one leg down towards the railway track, a porter roared to him from up the platform:

"Keep back there!"

Bunter scrambled back upon the platform.

"Cross over by the bridge!" said the porter, glaring at him.

"Oh, all right!" said Bunter.

He could hardly confide to the porter that he had no ticket. He drifted away towards the end of the platform, where the bridge was—and also the ticket collector.

Billy Bunter was in a most unpleasant frame of mind.

He was hungry, and he had no money; he had no ticket, and he had to pass the ticket collector somehow.

He walked up to the bridge with all the coolness he could muster, and walked past the collector, hoping to escape undetected; but a grasp on his shoulder swung him back.

"Ticket, please!" said the collector.

"Eh?"

"Ticket, please!"

"What?"

"Ticket!" roared the collector.

Bunter fumbled in his pockets for the ticket he knew was not there. First in one pocket, and then in another, the ticket collector watching him all the while with a frown of grim disbelief.

"Dear me," said Bunter, at last. "I'm—I'm afraid I've lost it."

"Ticket, please!"

"I've lost it."

"Then you can pay the fare," said the collector grimly. "Where are you from?"

"Friardale—I mean——"

"Yes, you mean Friardale," said the man, with a grin. "Pay the fare!"

"I—I've lost my ticket——"

"Then pay the fare!"

"I've lost my money, too," said Bunter, feeling in his empty pockets. "I'm afraid I've had my pockets picked on the train."

"Likely story!" said the man scoffingly.

"I hope you do not doubt my word," said Billy Bunter, with a great deal of dignity.

"Pay the fare!"

"Look here——"

"You're blocking up the way," said the collector. "These ladies wish to pass. Get back on the platform."

"But I want to cross the bridge."

"When you've paid, yes."

"But——"

"Get back and let the others pass," growled the collector.

"Yaas, wathah, dear boy!" said a voice Bunter knew. "You're weally blockin' up the way, you know."

Billy Bunter whirled round.

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's. Bunter knew him well, of course; and, as a matter of fact, had once honoured him with a special visit at St. Jim's.

"D'Arcy!" exclaimed Bunter, in a tone of great relief.

He hardly noticed D'Arcy's companions—two very pretty girls, one on either side of the swell of St. Jim's. They were Phyllis Monk and Vera Stanhope, and they had, as a matter of fact, travelled part of the way in the next carriage to Bunter's.

D'Arcy had been too occupied looking after the two girls to notice the fat junior get out of the train.

And he was not particularly pleased to meet the Owl of the Greyfriars Remove now. D'Arcy did not quite approve of Billy Bunter.

"I'm jolly glad to see you, D'Arcy."

"Weally!"

"Yes, rather. You can answer for me to this duffer. He thinks I'm trying to swindle him, because I've lost my ticket," said Billy Bunter, with virtuous indignation.

D'Arcy looked at him through his eyeglass.

"Weally, Buntah, I don't know about bein' able to answah for you," he remarked. "You are an extwemely unweliable person to be answerable for, I must say."

"Oh, really, D'Arcy——"

"I don't believe he never had no ticket," growled the collector. "He's an arrant young thief, that's what he is."

"You are insolent," said Bunter. "I shall use my influence with the company to get you discharged. I say, D'Arcy, you might pay the beast, will you, and I'll settle up with you afterwards?"

D'Arcy looked at the fat junior rather grimly. He had very strong doubts about that settling ever taking place.

But D'Arcy was generous to the finger-tips. He paid Bunter's fare, and the collector allowed him to pass.

Billy Bunter blinked with satisfaction as he accompanied D'Arcy and his two fair companions across the bridge.

"This is jolly lucky, meeting you like this," he remarked.

"Weally, Buntah!"

"Yes, rather. You see, I've had my pocket picked—I mean I forgot to bring my money, and you will be able to lend me some."

"Bai Jove!"

"As a matter of fact, I haven't any to pay my fare to Rylcombe," said Bunter. "I suppose you will stand it."

"Ya-a-as."

"And if you like to lend me five bob, it will be all right. I'm expecting a postal order to-morrow at Greyfriars, and I'll send it straight on to you."

"This way, deah gals," said D'Arcy.

"I say, D'Arcy——"

"Bettah come into the waitin'-woom, the twain will be a few minutes yet."

"Certainly," said Phyllis Monk, with a smile.

"I say, you know——"

"We shall be quite comfy here," said Vera Stanhope.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"D'Arcy! I say, D'Arcy——"

"Bai Jove! Did you speak, Buntah?"

Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles.

"Yes, I did. I was saying that if you liked to lend me five bob, I would settle it up to-morrow out of my postal order. You see——"

"Bai Jove! The twain's signalled."

"There's a buffet at this station," said Billy Bunter eagerly and hurriedly. "Would the ladies care for any refreshment before going on to Rylcombe?"

"Not at all," said Miss Phyllis.

"Oh, no!" said Vera.

"I suppose you're hungry, D'Arcy?"

"I am not hungwy, Buntah."

"Well, I am," said Billy Bunter, coming out into the open at last. "I say, D'Arcy, I'm fearfully hungry. I've had no lunch, you know, only a roll or two and some cake. You see, I got out of Greyfriars early to come with Wharton and the rest, and missed them at the station, and I couldn't go back for lunch, or I should have been collared. So——"

"Bai Jove! Here's the twain."

"I say, D'Arcy—Gussy——"

"Come on, deah gals!"

And D'Arcy placed his fair charges in the carriage, and followed them in. Billy Bunter blinked after him in great disgust, and slowly climbed in, too.

The train rolled towards Rylcombe.

On the way, Billy Bunter made several attempts to bring up the subject of a small loan, to be repaid out of a postal order which was to arrive at Greyfriars on the morrow. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy seemed to be under the influence of a new and unaccountable attack of deafness.

He pursued an interesting conversation with the two girls, without appearing to hear any of the remarks of William George Bunter, and the fat junior of Greyfriars relapsed into sulky silence at last.

"Rylcombe!"

"Bai Jove, here we are!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, breaking off in the middle of an elaborate description of a

cricket match between St. Jim's and Greyfriars. "This is the station, deah boys—I mean deah gals."

And they alighted.

Billy Bunter nudged Arthur Augustus as they walked down to the exit from the platform.

"There's a buffet at this station, D'Arcy."

"Is there weally, Bunter?"

"Yes. I suppose you're feeling peckish?"

"Not at all."

"Well, I am——"

"I'm payin' for this chap from Wayland," said D'Arcy, to the ticket-collector, and the party passed out of the station into the sunny street.

"I believe there's a jolly good tuckshop in the High Street, D'Arcy," Billy Bunter remarked, in an imploring tone.

"Yaas, it's Mothah Murphy's," said D'Arcy. "Keep wight on towards St. Jim's, and you'll pass it. We're goin' the other way."

And the two girls smiled.

"Oh, really, D'Arcy——"

"Beautiful aftahnoon for a walk, isn't it?" said Arthur Augustus, as they started.

"Lovely," said Miss Phyllis and Miss Vera.

"I wondah how the cwicket match is gettin' on? I expect the Gwammah innings is ovah by this time. This way, deah gals."

And D'Arcy marched Miss Phyllis and Miss Vera off, followed by the discontented Bunter, who emitted a dissatisfied grunt at nearly every step.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Well Done, Wallabies!

"HURRAH!" shouted Gordon Gay.

Jack Wootton had just cut away the ball for three.

Wharton fielded the ball, and it came in to the wicket-keeper, but Jack Wootton's willow was on the crease in easy time.

The two Woottons had been making the fur fly.

They were old partners at batting, and knew each other's play perfectly, and they backed one another up in wonderful style.

The runs piled up, and the Grammar School were still only six wickets down, with a score of sixty runs.

The Greyfriars fieldsmen were beginning to show signs of fatigue.

Gordon Gay and Frank Monk had given them plenty of leather-hunting, but the two Woottons were piling on the exercise.

The Grammarians looked on in great glee.

"Go it, Kangaroos!"

"Advance Australia!"

"Hurrah for the Wallabies!"

"Well hit!"

"Oh, well hit!"

The last roar as the round red ball sailed away from Jack Wootton's bat, and flew far beyond the reach of cover-point.

"Run, you beggars, run!" gasped Gordon Gay.

And they ran—how they ran! One, two, three, four—yes, and five!

"Five!" gasped Monk.

But was the fifth one too many?

Ogilvy had fielded the ball, and sent it in to Harry Wharton, and Harry Wharton had sent it in straight for the wicket.

Jack Wootton felt rather than saw that it was coming in, true as a die, from the hand of the Greyfriars skipper.

He put on a spurt, and his feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground. His bat was outstretched—would he be in time?

The Grammarians caught their breath.

Thud!

The bat was on the crease.

Crash!

The next second the ball was on the wicket, and the bails flew far.

The umpire shook his head.

"Not out!"

And Jack Wootton panted with relief, and mentally resolved not to cut it quite so fine next time.

Gordon Gay grinned.

"Good old Jackie! That was a run, if you like!"

"Greased lightning," grinned Lane. "Bravo, Wallaby!"

And the crowd cheered.

"Go on, Inky!" said Mark Linley, tossing the ball to Hurree Singh at the end of the over. "Get at the sticks, for goodness' sake!"

The Nabob of Bhanipur grinned doubtfully.

"I shall honourably try my bestfulness," he remarked; "but the batfulness of the esteemed Grammarians is terrific."

"Oh, you can manage it, Inky!" urged Bob Cherry.

"Don't you remember how you bowled me at practice yesterday?"

The Indian nodded.

"My worthy chum is right, but there is a difference between his batfulness and the batfulness of the esteemed Wallabies."

"Why, you inky waster——" began Bob Cherry wrathfully.

But Hurree Jamset Ram Singh grinned and went to the bowler's pitch.

The dusky nabob put all he knew into that over.

But it was unavailing.

The two Wallabies seemed to be glued to the wickets.

They knocked up seven runs between them for the over, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh tossed the ball to his captain with a comical grimace.

"The esteemed rotters are impossible to move, my worthy chum," he remarked. "Make an esteemed attempt yourself."

"Go it, Harry!" said Nugent. "You settled Gordon Gay, you know, and he was a giddy coughdrop."

Harry Wharton nodded, and went on to bowl.

Harry was best at the wickets, but he was a good and reliable bowler, and he had a way sometimes of putting a spin on the ball that was very baffling.

He tried his best with the Woottons.

The over did not seem to pan out very well for Greyfriars. The first ball gave Jack Wootton three runs. The second gave his brother two.

The third was stopped dead, likewise the fourth.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Bob Cherry. "This giddy circus is going to last all the time, I can see, unless they declare at tea-time."

But Bob Cherry was not among the prophets on this occasion. For the very next ball whipped up Harry Wootton's leg stump, and deposited his bails on the ground, and Wootton II. glanced at his wicket with an expression of amazement that brought a roar of laughter from those who saw it.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Well bowled, Wharton."

"Oh, well bowled!"

Harry Wootton carried his bat out. Gordon Gay clapped him on the shoulder as he came up to the pavilion.

"Well done, kid."

"Blessed if I know how that chap bowled me," said Wootton minor. "Look out for a giddy break that just takes you where you're not expecting it, Weeder."

And Weeder grinned and said he would.

Doubtless he did: but his looking-out did not serve him well, for his wicket fell to the next ball, the last of Wharton's over.

"Bravo, Harry!" exclaimed Nugent, as the field crossed, the faces of the Greyfriars fellows considerably brighter now. "Well done!"

"Jolly good luck," said Wharton, with a smile.

"Good luck be blowed; it was good bowling."

"The goodfulness of the bowling was terrific."

"Yes, rather. Bravo, Wharton!"

"Here you are, Inky; go in and get the other Wootton out."

"The tryfulness is great."

Jim Preston had joined the elder Wootton at the wickets. Jack Wootton received Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's bowling, and lived through it, adding well to the score.

But Preston's wicket fell in the next over to Mark Linley.

The Grammarians were now nine down for 98. Gordon Gay turned to Nicky O'Donnell.

"Last man in," he said.

"Faith, and I'm ready," said O'Donnell cheerfully.

"Back up, then, and don't try to score too much," said Gordon Gay. "Give them some stonewalling, while Wootton makes the runs."

"Bedad, and I will, darling."

"Good! We want runs now."

And Nicky O'Donnell went to the wicket.

The Greyfriars fellows were looking cheerful The partnership of the two Woottons had been broken, and they did not expect the innings to last much longer.

The Grammarians had done very well, but unless the score was greatly increased in the final innings, the Greyfriars fellows had every hope of equalising or beating it.

Jack Wootton speedily proceeded to increase it, however.

O'Donnell loyally backed him up by simply defending his wicket, leaving it to the Wallaby to get the runs, and Wootton got them.

Run after run was added to the score, and it passed the hundred, and went up by ones and twos till it was at 110.

Then fate overtook Nicky O'Donnell. A neat throw-in from Micky Desmond at mid-wicket stumped him as clean as

a whistle, and the umpire uttered the fatal word that closed the innings.

"Out!"

"Faith, and it's hard luck," said Nicky.

And the last of the Grammarians carried out their bats, Jack Wootton being not out, and in form to go on batting all the afternoon if there had been anybody to bat with.

"Jolly good," said Gordon Gay. "110 for the innings is a good figure, and I don't think the Greyfriars chaps will get past it easily."

"We'll try," laughed Harry Wharton

"The tryfulness will be terrific."

Gordon Gay glanced at his watch.

"It's just four," he remarked. "Good time to have tea, before you chaps commence your innings. What?"

"Yes, rather."

"Very well, we——" Gordon Gay broke off suddenly, and darted away across the field. The Greyfriars fellows gazed after him in surprise, wondering whether he had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

But he had not He had suddenly caught sight of three forms advancing towards the junior ground—those of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and his two companions. A fat and panting junior was following at some distance in the rear.

Gordon Gay came up panting, and raised his cap.

"So jolly glad to see you," he exclaimed.

And Miss Phyllis and Miss Vera were escorted to the pavilion, to join the Grammarians and the Greyfriars fellows at tea.

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THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Cricket Tea.

"I SAY, you fellows."

"My only hat!"

"Bunter!"

"William George!"

"The one and only Greyfriars porpoise."

"Oh, really, you fellows——"

"How on earth did you get here, Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton, looking at the fat and perspiring junior.

Bunter blinked at him with indignant reproach.

"A lot you jolly well care how I got here," he grunted. "I might have been arrested for travelling on the railway without a ticket for all you cared."

Wharton's brow darkened.

"Do you mean to say that you travelled without a ticket, you young cad?"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Did you travel without a ticket?" exclaimed Harry, taking the fat junior by the shoulder, and shaking him violently.

"Ow! Oh, really, Wharton! I—I wish you wouldn't shake me like that. You might make my glasses fall off, and if they get broken you'll have to pay for them."

"You young rotter!"

"I—I don't think you ought to call me names, Wharton, be-because I wanted to come here and see Greyfriars play," said Billy Bunter, in an injured tone. "Besides, suppose one of the chaps had got hurt, you'd have wanted a reserve."

"You dummy!"

"You've cheated the railway company——"

"Oh, that's all right; D'Arcy paid my fare. He's treated me a lot more decently than chaps in my own study do," said Bunter, with an aggrieved look.

"Better than you deserve, you mean."

"Well, now you're here, you'd better get off again," said Nugent. "None of your mean tricks here, you know."

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"One of us must settle with D'Arcy before he goes," said Harry Wharton, with a frown. "We can't have him sponged on by a Greyfriars chap."

"Oh, really——"

"Tea's ready," called out Gordon Gay. "You chaps coming in?"

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"I—I say, you fellows, I've come just in time, haven't I?" said Billy Bunter nervously. "I—I say, I'm awfully hungry, you know."

"You fat waster!"

"I—I haven't had any lunch, you know," said Bunter pathetically, "and you know I've got a weak and delicate constitution, and can only be kept up at all by plenty of good nourishment."

"Rats!"

"Did you get leave to come here?" asked Wharton.

"Oh, yes, I asked the Head!"

"I can't understand his letting you come."

"Well, he said I might go," said Billy Bunter. "He said it plainly enough."

"Then why didn't you go back to Greyfriars for your lunch when you had missed the first train?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Because I was afraid I should be collared—I—I mean, because I—I didn't, you know," stammered Billy Bunter.

"You fat sweep!"

"I—I'm awfully hungry, you know. I feel like a chap in an open boat at sea," said Billy Bunter pathetically. "I must say you're heartless."

"I suppose we had better let the worm feed here?" said Wharton. "Come in, Bunter; but mind, none of your caddishness, or you'll get the order of the boot, and sharp."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Shut up, and come in!"

Billy Bunter was willing even to shut up for the sake of being allowed to join in the cricketers' tea.

He followed Wharton to the tea-tables. A merry party was gathered there. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who seemed to have forgotten all about his ferocious intentions towards Gordon Gay, was seated between Miss Phyllis and Miss Vera.

On the other side of Miss Phyllis Gordon Gay sat, and on the other side of Miss Vera, Harry Wharton was given a place.

The rest of the juniors, Greyfriars and Grammarians, crowded round in the greatest good-humour.

The Grammarians were in excellent temper, because they had made a good score which they did not think for a moment Greyfriars would beat.

The Greyfriars fellows were equally pleased, because they had not the slightest doubt of getting right ahead of the Grammarian score.

So both parties were pleased. And, indeed, on a glorious afternoon, with the green field before them, and a cheery tea-table with two bright girlish faces adorning it, it would have been hard for the young cricketers not to be pleased.

Gordon Gay glanced at Billy Bunter.

"It's a chap from our school," Harry Wharton hastened to explain. "I suppose he can come in? He's followed to see the match—or, rather, to join in the feed, as a matter of absolute fact."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

Gordon Gay laughed merrily.

"The more the merrier," he remarked. "Sit down, chappy!"

"Name's Bunter," said Wharton. "Now, Billy, eat and shut up."

It was not very courteous, but Bunter did not mind. The table was heavily laden with good things, and that was all Bunter cared about.

He started, and his performances as an eater filled some of the Grammarians with astonishment, though they were too polite to appear to notice anything.

Bunter was a terrible eater when he had not missed a meal. But to-day he had missed his lunch. The result may be imagined.

He started eating with a quiet and steady determination, and he allowed nothing whatever to take his attention off that serious and important business. He did not join in the cheery chat at the tea-table.

What was it to him?

He was enjoying himself!

Merry enough was the chat round Bunter, though it fell upon deaf ears as far as he was concerned.

The juniors talked cricket mostly, and as Miss Phyllis and Miss Vera took an intelligent interest in the great summer game, they were able to enter into the subject, too, and they showed a knowledge of it that rather surprised the Greyfriars fellows.

"By Jove, I wish you would come and see one of our matches at Greyfriars, Miss Vera!" Harry Wharton exclaimed.

The girl smiled.

"Very likely I may," she said, "if you play a return match with Rylcombe."

"And we shall," said Tom Brown. "Eh, Gay, old fellow?"

"Yes, rather!" said Gordon Gay. "We want to give you your revenge, you know."

"Our what?"

"Your revenge for to-day," said Gordon Gay innocently; and the Grammarians chuckled.

"My hat! You haven't beaten us yet," said Tom Brown, rather warmly.

"No, not yet!" grinned Gordon Gay.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The tea was a merry meal, and all were sorry when it came to an end, although the cricket was welcome to follow.

The Greyfriars fellows rose to get ready for their innings

at last; but Billy Bunter did not leave the table. He was still busy.

Nugent clapped him on the shoulder.

"Get up, Billy."

"Eh? Lemme alone!"

"Tea's over."

"Mine isn't."

"Oh, come, porpoise; you've had your tea."

"No, I haven't," said Bunter, with his mouth full. "I've just had my dinner, and I'm just going to begin my tea."

"Let him keep on," said Gordon Gay, with a good-natured laugh. "Go it, Bunter."

"Thanks, I will!" said Billy Bunter, blinking at him.

And Nugent gave it up in disgust.

When the Greyfriars innings commenced, Billy Bunterl had no eyes for it; he was still busy.

And the Greyfriars eleven were soon busy, too.

The Grammar School had scored 110 for their innings, and Harry Wharton & Co. were grimly determined that they would score 111.

And with the bright eyes of Miss Phyllis and Miss Vera looking on, Gordon Gay & Co. went out to field, and Tom Brown and Bob Cherry opened the innings for Greyfriars.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Kindly Explains.

MISS PHYLLIS and her friend were seated in front of the pavilion, to watch the second innings of that great match, and round them were gathered a group of juniors. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of course, was conspicuous, standing in a very graceful attitude by Miss Phyllis's chair, and explaining to her the noble game of cricket, and pointing out the failings of the players. Miss Phyllis probably knew as much about the great summer game as the swell of St. Jim's did, but she was too polite to say so, and she listened with great interest to D'Arcy's explanations and criticisms. So did the Greyfriars batsmen, who were waiting for their turns at the wicket; but they grinned as they listened. They seemed to find something amusing in Arthur Augustus's free criticisms.

"You should see a St. Jim's side play, Miss Phyllis," said D'Arcy enthusiastically. "That is weal cwicket."

"Is it really?" asked Miss Phyllis sweetly.

"Yaas, wathah! You should see Fatty Wynn takin' the wickets, or Tom Mewwy standin' up to the bowlin', or anothah chap—I won't mention his name, but his battin' has been compared to Fwy and Jessop's."

"Oh, I should like to know his name," said Miss Phyllis.

"Yes, rather," said Miss Vera.

D'Arcy coloured.

"I am afwaid I cannot mention the name," he said. "It would look like swankin'."

"Dear me! It was yourself!" exclaimed Miss Vera, with a dancing gleam in her bright eyes.

"Bai Jove! How did you guess that, Miss Vewah?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, as a mattah of fact, it was myself," said D'Arcy. "I don't want to bwag, you know, but I can bat, and I wathah fancy myself at the wicket, you know. I was battin' against Dig's bowlin' one day, and Blake said—and Blake knows all about cwicket, you know—he's a Yorkshire chap—Blake said: 'Bwavo! Jessop or Fwy never batted like that in their lives!' He did weally!"

Miss Phyllis laughed softly.

"Did he really?"

Perhaps the girl saw more in Blake's remark than D'Arcy did.

"Yaas, wathah! And Blake knows about cwicket, you know. He can stand up against my bowlin'."

"My hat!" said Nugent. "That's wonderful, if you like."

"Amazin', deah boy!"

"Hallo! There goes a wicket!"

The ball had found Bob Cherry's middle stump, and Bob was down for three. He came off the field with his bat under his arm, looking a little downcast.

"Bad luck!" said Wharton.

"Rotten!" said Bob, with energy. "That chap Gay can bowl, though."

"Yaas, wathah! He bowls vewy well," D'Arcy remarked. "But you should see Fatty Wynn bowl!"

"Oh, blow Fatty Wynn!" said Bob Cherry, walking on.

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass after Cherry in surprise.

"Bai Jove! Chewwy seems to be annoyed about somethin'," he remarked.

Nugent chuckled.

"Perhaps he isn't particularly exhilarated by losing his wicket," he remarked.

"Bai Jove, you know, I nevah thought of that."

"You're in next, Linley," said Harry Wharton.

The Lancashire lad nodded, and carried his bat out of the pavilion.

He joined Tom Brown at the wickets, and stood up to the bowling of Gordon Gay.

Mark Linley was a good bowler, and a good fieldsman himself, but at the wicket he was especially strong. He had been watching Gay's bowling, too, and had taken its measure.

He stood up to it for the rest of the over in good style, and knocked up a couple of runs, and Arthur Augustus was pleased to nod his head with approval.

"I wegard that chap as bein' wathah a good batsman," he said.

"Go hon!" replied Nugent.

"Yaas, wathah! Pewwaps he wants a little of the finesse we have at St. Jim's; but, on the whole, I appwove of him."

"The kindfulness of the honourable asinine D'Arcy is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, in his most honeyed tones.

D'Arcy fixed him with his eyeglass.

"May I twouble you to wepeat that wemark?" he said politely.

"The kindfulness of the honourable asinine D'Arcy is terrific," said the Nabob of Bhanipur, with an immovable smile upon his face, as if he were paying the swell of St. Jim's a compliment.

"I twust you do not mean to hint that I am an ass, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, in a rather perplexed way.

"Inky is a little bit mixed in his English," Nugent hastened to explain, with a warning look at the nabob.

"Weally, deah boy——"

"The mixfulness is great," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a bland smile. "I have the fearfulness that I express myself with unfortunate inaptitude, but I am sure my honourable and esteemed asinine friend will forgive me."

"Weally, Huwwee Singh ——"

"The kindfulnes of my worthy friend's esteemed heart is only equalled by the extraordinary asininefulness of his august head," said Hurree Singh.

D'Arcy gave him a long and searching look, but for the life of him he could not make out whether the dusky junior was pulling his leg or not.

He turned his eyeglass upon the cricket field again.

Mark Linley was standing up to the bowling of Jack Wootton now, and keen as the bowling was, he was facing it well, and knocking up runs off it.

D'Arcy was pleased to nod approval again.

"That chap has a good style," he remarked. "He would do ewedit to St. Jim's."

"He, he, he!"

Billy Bunter, having finished what there was left to eat, had joined the group outside the pavilion, looking very fat and shiny.

He contributed that fat little giggle to the discussion.

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon him.

"What is the joke, Buntah, deah boy?" he asked.

"Oh, don't start Bunter on his jokes," said Nugent. "He has to be thrown out when he starts in that line."

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"He, he! I was only thinking about that chap being a credit to any school!" grinned Bunter. "You don't know who he is, Miss Monk?"

Phyllis looked surprised.

"No," she said. "What do you mean? I can see that he is a good cricketer, and he looks like a very nice boy—one of the best."

Miss Phyllis spoke with unusual warmth, for there was something in Bunter's tone that seemed to imply that he was about to speak against a fellow behind his back, and that was a thing Miss Phil abhorred.

"So he jolly well is!" exclaimed Wharton. "One of the finest chaps at Greyfriars!"

He gave Bunter a look as he spoke, but as he was standing in full view of both of the girls, he could not make it as expressive as he wished.

Billy Bunter blinked at him.

The fat junior did not like Mark Linley, who never had any patience with his mean ways, and never would lend him any money—not being able to afford it, for one reason—as Bunter was never known to repay a loan.

But Bunter's chief reason for making himself disagreeable now, was to get even, as he put it to himself, for having been left behind by the Greyfriars party, and for their extremely ungracious reception of him on his arrival at Rylcombe School.

True, he had had a feed—and a record one—but he had gone through untold agonies of mind before he was certain he should have it—to say nothing of the agonies of hunger on the journey, and the uncomfortableness of hiding under the seat in the carriage, and dodging porters.

In the presence of the two girls it was impossible for Bunter to be bumped by his indignant Form fellows, as he very well knew.

He was quite secure, and whenever he felt secure, Bunter always began to be impertinent.

Wharton's look was quite lost on him; and, indeed, it was difficult for Harry to look ferociously threatening with one side of his face, and cordially smiling with the other.

"You jolly well don't know him!" said Bunter, with a chuckle.

"Indeed!"

"Yes. He's not a gentleman, you know," said Billy Bunter confidentially. "He's a factory chap. He used to work for his living. He, he, he!"

"How clever of him!" said Miss Phyllis.

"Eh?"

"And how fortunate for you that you don't have to," said the girl, with a glance at Bunter, which would have made any other fellow scarlet, but which had no more effect upon Bunter than it might have had on a tortoise.

"Of course, I shall never have to work," said Bunter importantly.

Phyllis's lip curled.

"We treat him well, of course," went on Bunter; "but he's not one of us. You mustn't imagine that he's a chap like me, you know."

"I should not be likely to imagine that," said Miss Phyllis.

"No, no; of course not," said Bunter fatuously. "You know a gentleman when you see him, of course, Miss Monk."

"Yes—when I see him," assented the girl.

"But we treat him well," said Bunter. "I take a lot of notice of him. He came to Greyfriars on a rotten scholarship, you know. If I had my way, I'd abolish that system of scholarships in public schools. It lets in such rotters, you know."

"Don't they get in in the ordinary way, too?" asked Miss Phyllis.

"Oh, yes, I suppose there are some rotters among the other chaps!"

"I thought so."

"But a chap who has worked for his living is such a rank outsider, you know," said Bunter. "Fancy soiling your hands with work, you know! Awful, isn't it?"

"You fat worm!" burst out Nugent, unable to contain himself any longer. "If you say another word I'll sling you out, ladies present or not!"

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"Shut up!"

"But——"

"Hold your tongue!"

"Look here——"

Nugent looked appealingly at the girls.

"Would you mind looking the other way, while I slog that awful cad?" he asked.

"Certainly!" said Miss Phyllis.

"With pleasure," said Vera.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"Now then, you fat cad——"

Bunter dodged in between the two girls.

"Look here, Nugent!" He caught hold of the back of the chairs. "Look here——"

Nugent hesitated.

"Will you shut up, then?"

"I—I——"

"Bravo!" came a shout from the field. "Well hit!"

And attention was turned from the Owl of the Greyfriars Remove to the cricket.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter Is Not Popular.

MARK LINLEY had cut away the ball deep down into the long field, and the fieldsmen were hunting the loather. The Greyfriars fellows had had their turn of leather hunting during the home innings, but they were giving back as good as they had received, now.

The batsmen were crossing the pitch in fine style.

Tom Brown and Mark Linley ran well—very well. They seemed to cross like lightning. One—two—three!

Then the ball came in.

The wicket-keeper jammed it on the stumps, but too late! Mark Linley's bat had clumped down on the crease.

"Not out!"

Harry Wharton clapped his hands, and a ripple of hand-clapping went round the field.

"Bravo, Linley!"

"Well run!"

"Good old Frozen Mutton!"

Tom Brown grinned. The New Zealand junior was in fine form, and knocking up runs in excellent style. He and Mark made a strong pair.

The Greyfriars score was already 18 for one wicket.

"Yaas, wathah, that chap can bat!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Go hon!"

"I hope you will bwing him ovah when you play us," said Arthur Augustus. "I should like to see him facin' Fatty Wynn's bowlin'."

"We shall!" laughed Wharton.

"Blessed if I see why they make such a fuss of that chap," Billy Bunter confided in a lower tone to Miss Phyllis and Miss Vera, with a grunt of disgust. "It's just as I told you, you know; he's a factory chap."

Miss Phyllis turned her clear eyes upon him.

"Aren't you ashamed of speaking in that way, Bunter?" she asked.

Bunter almost staggered.

"Eh—eh?" he gasped.

"Are you not ashamed of yourself?"

"I!" said Bunter, with a gasp of amazement.

Being ashamed of himself was the last thing the fat junior had ever thought of. He was generally very well satisfied with himself.

"Yes, you," said Miss Phyllis seriously. "Mark Linley is a nice boy, and you are not."

"Oh!"

"Go it, Phil," murmured Miss Vera, sotto voce.

"You are nothing like him," pursued Miss Phyllis, with alarming frankness. "He is a very nice boy, I think, to judge by his looks, and the way all his friends seem to like him. You are a backbiter."

"Miss Phyllis!"

"You ought to understand that it is to his credit if he has worked for his living," said Phyllis. "It shows that he is brave and clever. Suppose you had to work for your living—what would you do?"

"Oh, really——"

"You would starve; you could not do it. And every boy who is worth anything at all looks forward to working for himself," said Miss Phyllis. "The man who wants to live without work is a slacker and a coward."

"Oh!"

"Whether he is rich or poor; that makes no difference."

"Oh!"

"You should try not to say these caddish things, you know," said Miss Phil kindly.

Bunter stood overwhelmed.

Miss Phyllis turned a very pink face towards the cricket-field again. Now that the indignant words had passed her lips she felt that she had spoken too warmly, and taken too much interest in Linley, a boy she hardly knew. She had spoken from her heart, but now she was feeling very confused.

"Good for you!" whispered Vera.

Miss Phyllis blushed.

Harry Wharton came nearer to her chair. He gave Bunter a look which promised volumes of what he would say to him later.

"I'm so glad you've put it straight to that wretched cad, Miss Phyllis," he said.

"I—I had no right to speak as I did, though," faltered Miss Phil, her face crimson.

"Yes, you had; and I'm glad. The young rotter doesn't belong to us," said Wharton. "We didn't bring him here, and we're all ashamed that he's a Greyfriars fellow."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"There isn't another fellow in the Remove, or in all Greyfriars, like him," said Wharton anxiously.

"Oh, really——"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"As for Mark Linley, he's one of the best chaps who ever handled a bat, and that fat worm isn't fit to clean his boots," said Wharton.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Lancashire!"

The Greyfriars fellows were shouting again. Mark Linley had knocked up another four for his side.

The girls clapped their hands.

"Ripping!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

Billy Bunter blinked at the girls, and blinked at Harry. His fat face was very dark and angry. He had never been so taken down in his life before, though he had often richly deserved it.

Wharton gave him a glance again.

"Get out!" he said.

"Oh, really——"

"Buzz off, I tell you!"

"Yaas, wathah! I didn't want to say a word against a fwiend of yours, Wharton, but as he is not a fwiend of yours I can delivah my opinion. I wegard him as a weptile. If we had him at St. Jim's we would wag him awf'ly."

And Billy Bunter, with a crimson face and a discontented grunt, rolled away.

His little round eyes were twinkling with rage behind his spectacles.

"The rotters!" he murmured. "I wonder what this country is coming to. It must be that blessed Socialism that's being so much talked of now; people catch it like measles, I believe. Fancy sticking up for a factory chap against a gentleman! Now, I wonder what it means. I suppose, as a matter of fact, Miss Phyllis is rather struck with me, and wanted to keep the other chaps from seeing it."

And Bunter grinned complacently.

He had walked round the corner of the pavilion while pursuing his thoughts, and Frank Nugent had walked after him.

There was a vengeful look on Nugent's face.

Billy Bunter's first intimation of his presence was a kick that sent him reeling forward, and he gave a gasp and whirled round.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"You young fat rotter!"

"Oh, is it you, Nugent! What the——"

"You cad!" exclaimed Nugent. "We told you not to come, because you'd be certain to disgrace us. Now you've disgraced us worse than ever."

"Oh, really——"

"You want a jolly good licking, and——"

"Ow!"

Bunter ran as if for his life.

Nugent ran after him, assisting the progress of the fat junior, and accelerating it, with kick after kick.

Billy Bunter howled and ran, and ran and howled.

The kicks were not very hard, but they hurt, and Nugent meant them to. Bunter howled and ran, and caught his foot in a rope and went reeling.

He curled up on the ground, his spectacles flying off, howling wildly.

"Stop it! Yah! Yow! Help! Murder! Yow!"

"Oh, shut up, you cowardly rotter!" said Nugent savagely.

"Help! Yah! Murder!"

"Dry up!"

"Help!"

Nugent strode away angrily. He was inclined to give Bunter about a hundred more kicks, but it was clear that Billy Bunter could not be punished there without alarming the whole neighbourhood.

The fat junior sat up as Nugent walked away, and blinked, and groped for his spectacles. He found them, and jammed them on his fat little nose.

"Ow!" groaned Bunter. "Yow!"

He rose slowly to his feet, rubbing his aching bones. He was sore in body and savage in mind.

"I'll jolly well make 'em sit up for this," he murmured.

And when the ventriloquist of Greyfriars set himself to it, he generally succeeded in causing trouble.

Nugent returned to his friends in front of the pavilion with a flustered face.

Bunter's howls must certainly have been heard there, but Miss Phyllis and Miss Vera were looking steadily at the cricket, and seemed to have observed nothing else.

Mark Linley and Tom Brown were still batting.

The score was at 35.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.
A Little Ventriloquism.

BILLY BUNTER came towards the ropes a little later, his eyes gleaming behind his spectacles. The Greyfriars ventriloquist was on the warpath, and he meant mischief. The other fellows did not even look at him, and he kept a distance from them. The crowds of Grammarians were watching the game with keen interest. With Greyfriars 35 up for one wicket, the prospect for the visitors was decidedly rosy. It really looked as if Greyfriars had a good chance of winning with wickets to spare.

Mark Linley and Tom Brown, too, were getting well set, and seemed likely to stay at the wickets, as Bob Cherry put it, for years. Bob Cherry was grinning and clapping his hands at every good hit, quite untroubled by any jealous comparisons between his poor little three and the score Linley and Brown were making.

Gordon Gay had taken the ball again to bowl.

The Wallaby meant to get the batsmen out somehow, and he put all he knew into the bowling. But the wickets were impregnable.

Only the batsmen did not score much off his bowling. Billy Bunter blinked at the game, an idea working in his mind.

The ball had come down several times to Mark Linley, and he had stopped it on the crease, the bowling giving him no chance.

Tom Brown simply waited for Linley to make the running.

Mark had now sent a ball into the slips, but it was not worth a run, for Frank Monk was already almost on it.

But it was at that moment that a voice called "Run!"

Tom Brown ran.

It was Mark Linley's voice, or a voice so like it that there was no distinction between them, and it bade the New Zealand junior run.

He did not hesitate.

He would certainly never have run for that ball himself, but as Linley's voice called on him he did not waste a second.

He darted down the pitch.

He fully expected, of course, that Mark Linley would cross him there.

Linley did not stir from his wicket.

He stared in amazement at the New Zealand junior running, and hesitated whether he should attempt to save Tom Brown's wicket by running. But he had not the slightest chance of reaching it in time. The ball was already in the grip of Frank Monk.

He waved his hand to Tom.

"Go back!" he shouted.

Tom Brown halted in amazement.

He would never have run at all had not Linley's voice called to him, as he believed, and now it looked as if he was to be run out.

He whirled round and dashed for his wicket.

But he was a third of the way down the pitch, and the ball was coming in from the grinning Monk.

Crash!

The wicket flew to pieces.

Tom Brown's bat came thudding on the crease whole seconds too late.

"How's that?" roared Monk.

The umpire grinned.

"Out!"

And from the Grammarians round the field came a roar:

"Bravo, Monk!"

"Well thrown, sir!"

"Hurrah!"

Glad enough were the Grammarians to see the partnership broken. But Tom Brown's face was a study.

He simply could not understand it. He stood dazed, with his bat on the crease, and the umpire chuckled.

"You're out," he remarked.

Tom gave a start.

"Yes, of course. All right."

He put his bat under his arm, and walked away towards the pavilion. He joined the fellows there without looking at Linley.

"Next man in!" said Harry.

And Morgan went in.

"What on earth did you run for then, Brown?" asked Nugent, unable to restrain his curiosity, though Harry Wharton said nothing. Brown had done well, and Harry would not seem to imply a criticism, though he could not understand the New Zealander's apparently reckless action in the least.

Tom Brown scratched his head in a puzzled way.

"Linley called to me," he said.

"What!"

"Linley did?"

"Yes. Didn't any of you fellows hear him?"

"I thought I did," said Hazeldene.

"And I," said Ogilvy, "though I thought I must be mistaken, as there wasn't the ghost of a chance of a run."

"Linley called, right enough," said Tom Brown. "As he was batting, I ran. I couldn't pass it over as he called and, of course, I thought he would run, too. But he didn't."

"It was odd."

"I can't understand it," said Wharton, shaking his head. "I should think you had dreamed it, Brown, if the other fellows hadn't heard Linley. He must be off his rocker. He must have known there wasn't any chance."

"I suppose he realised it, and that's why he stopped at his wicket, and told me to go back!" said Tom bitterly. "My wicket's gone, anyway."

Harry shook his head.

"I simply can't get on to it," he said. "If Linley called on you to run, he's not the chap to leave you in the lurch. He must have thought there was a chance, or he wouldn't have called. You're sure he did call?"

"I heard him," said Hazeldene again.

"Then I give it up."

It did indeed seem a hopeless puzzle. Mark Linley himself was puzzled, and he looked worried as he faced the bowling again. He knocked away a ball into midfield, a short ball, that gave the batsmen no earthly chance to do anything but sit tight. But again that call came along the pitch:

"Quick, Morgan! Run!"

This time nearly all the Greyfriars fellows heard it—Linley's voice, to the life!

Morgan started running.

Crash!

Down went his wicket, and he stopped, staring at Mark Linley, who had not left the crease. Morgan did not take it as calmly as Tom Brown had done.

"What did you call me to run for, whatever?" he roared.

Mark Linley stared at him in amazement.

"I?" he ejaculated.

"Yes, you!"

"I didn't!"

Morgan snorted.

"You're dotty!" he said. "You're off your rocker, look you! You're not fit to play cricket! You ought to go home and play marbles! Yah!"

And Morgan carried out his bat, snorting with wrath.

Micky Desmond was next man in.

The Grammarians were grinning now. The dispute between the Greyfriars batsmen was nothing to them. But Greyfriars were now three wickets down, and that was something.

Harry Wharton was perplexed.

He could not understand Mark Linley in the least. His denial of having called to Morgan was strangest of all. Was it possible that the bright sun on the cricket-field had affected the Lancashire lad's head?

Micky Desmond looked at his partner at the wickets rather grimly. If Mark Linley called on him to run, he did not mean to run unless it suited his own ideas to do so. He was quite decided about that.

Micky had the bowling for an over, and knocked up a couple of runs, and then Jack Wootton bowled to Mark Linley again.

The Lancashire lad was looking worried and troubled.

The curious occurrence had bothered him a great deal, and he had no time to think out an explanation of it.

Jack Wootton sent down some balls that required all his care to stop, however, and he contented himself with stopping them without hitting out.

But the last ball of the over gave him a chance, and he swiped it away past the outstretched fingers of cover-slip.

"Run!" he called out.

And he ran down the pitch.

But Micky Desmond had taken warning by the fate of Tom Brown and Morgan, so he stopped and looked round in a leisurely way to see what the chances were like before he ran. Which was not the way to score!

"Run!" gasped Linley, as he ran.

"Faith, and I'll suit myself about that," said Micky Desmond coolly.

He satisfied himself, unfortunately, that there was no chance. Indeed, by the time he had made his observations the ball was in Lane's hand, and he was about to toss it in to the wicket-keeper.

"Go back!" said Micky.

Mark Linley stopped in dismay.

Micky had not run, and unless he could recover his own wicket in time, he was certain to be stumped.

Setting his teeth, the Lancashire lad raced back.

But he was too late!

Lane had tossed in the ball, and it was in the wicket-keeper's hand, and it crashed the bails off before Linley's bat was within a yard of the crease.

"How's that!" shrieked half the Grammar School.

"Out!"

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter is Bowled Out.

"OUT!"

There was no doubt about it. It certainly was out.

Mark Linley looked at his wicket, and then quietly carried out his bat. The Grammarians grinned at one another.

The innings which had opened so well for Greyfriars seemed to be going absolutely to rot.

What was the cause of it?

Linley had batted like a young Fry to begin with, and then, by a series of inexplicable blunders he had lost his side three wickets, including his own.

But the Grammarians cared little what it meant. That was a puzzle for the visitors. The Grammar juniors only cared for the result, which made them chuckle with satisfaction.

"Next man in, Nugent!" said Harry Wharton shortly.

And Nugent nodded, and went in to join Micky Desmond.

The Greyfriars fellows looked grimly enough at Mark Linley as he joined them. The Lancashire lad was looking very pink.

"What giddy game have you been playing?" demanded Ogilvy.

"I don't understand you!"

"And I don't understand you!" said Harry Wharton tartly. "What did you mean by losing Morgan and Brown their wickets like that?"

"They ran——"

"You called on them to run!"

"I didn't!"

"What!"

"You must be dreaming!" said Mark. "I heard somebody call; but I certainly did not call, and they shouldn't have run!"

"You did call, look you!" said Morgan warmly.

"I tell you I didn't!"

"You'll say you didn't call to Desmond next!"

"Yes, I did call to him, and he ought to have run, but he wouldn't leave his wicket. He played the giddy goat."

"No wonder, after the way you had played it with two wickets," said Ogilvy.

"I tell you, I never said a word!"

"And I tell you I heard you!"

Mark Linley passed his hand over his brow.

"Either you're dreaming, or I am," he said. "I don't catch on to this at all."

And he went into the pavilion.

Harry Wharton knitted his brows.

"Can it be sunstroke?" said Bob Cherry.

Wharton nodded without speaking.

Whatever it was, it had cost the Greyfriars side three wickets, and that probably meant the game. They could not afford to give away three wickets in a match with a team like the Grammarians of Rylcombe.

Nugent, too, had bad luck.

He was caught out, after knocking up a few runs, by Carboy at short slip.

He came out looking blue.

Greyfriars were five down now for forty-two runs, a score that was very different from that which the opening of the innings had led them to expect.

"It's rotten!" muttered Nugent. "I ought to have done better."

"Bad luck, kid," said Wharton. "Can't be helped."

"It's Linley playing the giddy ox that's done us in, if we get done in," said Hazeldene. "I can't understand him."

"The giddy oxfulness was terrific."

Ogilvy joined Micky Desmond on the pitch. Their partnership lasted five minutes longer, and then Micky was caught in the slips, as Nugent had been, and he came out looking quite as blue as Nugent.

And the Grammarians roared.

"Well caught, Wootton!"

Six down for the same score!

"Get in, Treluce!" said Wharton shortly.

The Cornish lad went to the wickets.

The Greyfriars lads were less cheery now. They were sportsmen, and could take a licking as well as a victory, but they could not take it so cheerfully.

And the unaccountable happenings in Linley's innings worried them. They felt that they were not losing to a better side, but to cruel luck.

Miss Phyllis and Vera were sympathetic—tactfully, by saying nothing. But, naturally enough, they were glad to see the home team winning.

"I'm afwaid the Gweyfwiahs team is goin' to wot, Miss Phyllis," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, and the girl nodded.

"Bai Jove, that fat boundah doesn't seem to mind, anyway," the swell of St. Jim's added, as he caught sight of an unpleasant grin on Billy Bunter's plump face.

Wharton's brows contracted as he saw it, too.

Bunter certainly lacked loyalty to his side. He seemed more pleased than otherwise that the Greyfriars team were getting it "hot."

Bob Cherry gave him a dig in the ribs.

"Bunter, you rotter——"

"Ow! Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Take that oily grin off your chivy."

"Ow!"

"Do you hear?"

"Ow! Beast!"

And Billy Bunter retreated. There was a spiteful expression upon his fat face, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy noticed it.

The swell of St. Jim's kept his eyeglass turned in Billy Bunter's direction.

Bunter leaned on a post, blinking at the batsmen. Treluce and Ogilvy were keeping their end up, but the runs were not coming.

Two or three had been added, but the bowling was so hard and fast that there was little chance for any but a first-class bat to score, and these were not the giants of the team.

They made a good show, however, inasmuch as the sticks did not fall.

Suddenly, as Treluce knocked the ball away towards long-on, he heard Wharton's voice call behind him—or a voice that appeared to be Wharton's, at all events.

"Run! Run, Treluce!"

The Cornish lad ran. He did not hesitate for a second to obey the orders of his cricket captain.

He ran.

Crash came the ball into his stumps before he had fairly started, and his wicket fell into a wreck.

"Well, my hat!" murmured Gordon Gay. "Is that what they call cricket?"

"Bai Jove!"

Wharton's face was a study.

Seven down for Greyfriars.

It was getting serious—more than serious.

Hazeldene went in, and Billy Bunter turned away from the field of play with a grin on his fat, shiny face.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy tapped Wharton on the shoulder. The Greyfriars skipper turned to him a little impatiently. He was not in a mood for talk.

"Well?" he said shortly.

D'Arcy was looking very serious.

"I think I wemembah, when I was at Gweyfwiahs, that Bunter used to do ventwiloquial twicks," he remarked.

"Yes. What about it?"

"Has he given it up?"

Wharton started.

"What! Do you think——"

"I was watchin' him just now, and I believe——"

"Thank you, D'Arcy!"

Harry Wharton strode towards the fat junior and grasped him by the shoulder. Billy Bunter gave one look in the Greyfriars captain's furious face, and turned quite white.

He saw that he was discovered.

"I—I didn't do it!" he panted.

"You cur!" said Wharton, in low, concentrated tones. "You cad! You've been playing tricks, to make us lose the match!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"I was a fool not to guess it! But how was I to suspect a Greyfriars chap of being such a cowardly cur?"

"I—I——"

"If we weren't on another team's ground I'd thrash you within an inch of your life, Bunter!" said Harry, between his teeth. "You cad! You coward!"

"Oh, really, I—— It was only a joke, you know——"

"A joke! A joke that may lose us the match."

"Well, it's only a cricket match, you know—— Ow!"

Wharton flung him savagely away.

Bunter staggered against the pavilion with a crash, and slid down into a heap, gasping with sheer terror, and blinking at Wharton.

"Ow!" he moaned. "I—I'm hurt! I'm dying! Ow!"

"Get off this field!" said Harry.

"Ow! I can't move!"

"I give you one minute to get out," said Wharton. "Here, take this—it's the return half of a ticket. I'll get a new one. Go back to Greyfriars."

"But——"

"Go, I tell you! I can't trust myself near you! Do you want to be half killed?" muttered Harry, his face white with rage. "Go, if you know what's good for yourself!"

He turned on his heel.

Billy Bunter staggered to his feet. He clutched the ticket, and ran. Wharton's tone had stricken fear to his mean little soul.

He ran—and vanished. The next train from Rylcombe bore him away, and the Greyfriars team were left to save the match if they could, untroubled, at all events, by the Greyfriars ventriloquist.

But could they save it?

As Wharton strode back to the field there was a roar from the Grammar crowd.

"Well bowled, Monkey!"

And another Greyfriars batsman carried his bat out.

Eight down for Greyfriars for forty-eight runs.

It looked desperate.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Last Man In.

HURREE JAMSET RAM SINGH went to the wickets with a grim expression upon his dusky features.

Although it was as a bowler that he excelled, the dusky Nabob of Bhanipur could be relied upon to keep his end up at the wickets, and especially to back up a more powerful batsman than himself.

But his partner at the wickets was Hazeldene now, and Hazeldene was very far from being a powerful bat.

Wharton's brows were knitted.

At almost every ball he expected to see Hazeldene's wicket go to pieces, and then he would go in as last man.

Then he and Hurree Singh would be left with a huge score to make if they were to tie with or beat the Grammarians.

Wharton knew what he could do himself, and he knew that he could rely upon Hurree Singh. But the prospect was desperate, for the Grammarian bowling was keen, and seemed to be growing more dangerous all the time.

The chances were ten to one that Billy Bunter's rascality had cost his side the match. The fat junior had doubtless not thought of it in that light. His only idea was to play a trick on the side, and get "level" with them for his supposed harsh treatment.

But, as is often the case, he had done more harm than he intended when he once started doing it.

Bunter was no sportsman, and he did not understand the importance of a big match to the keen cricketers of the Remove.

"Hard luck!" said Tom Brown, as Wharton joined him, gloomy and silent.

Wharton nodded without speaking.

"It's rough," said Bob Cherry. "I wouldn't mind being licked so much, but it looks like our being licked with about fifty runs to spare. That's rotten!"

"What was that row with Bunter?" asked Nugent. "He's gone."

Wharton snapped his teeth.

"Yes. It was he who played those tricks—he's been giving us some of his confounded ventriloquism. Linley, old man, I'm sorry I thought you were playing the giddy ox. It was Bunter."

Mark Linley nodded quietly.

"It's all right, Wharton, as far as I'm concerned. It's rough on our chances. We're miles behind the Grammarians."

"That fat young villain has mucked up the match."

"Oh, we'll make him wriggle for it!" said Bob Cherry, between his teeth. "Where is he?"

"Gone back to Greyfriars."

"Then he can wait till to-night, the rotter!" Bob Cherry clenched his fists. "By James, we'll make him sit up if we lose the match!"

"There's a chance yet," said Linley.

"Not much of a one. Hazel's wicket's going."

"Wharton and Inky will put up a good innings."

"We shall try to pull the match out of the fire," said Harry. "How it will work out goodness knows!"

Nugent wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"It's not fair on us," he said. "If we explained to Gordon Gay he would——"

Wharton made a hasty gesture of dissent.

"I dare say he would, but we couldn't ask it. Hang it all! Besides, could we tell the Grammar chaps that a fellow belonging to Greyfriars mucked up the match for his own school out of mean spite?"

"Hardly!"

"Impossible!"

"We must take our chances," said Harry; "and if it's a licking we'll take a licking, that's all."

"And take it out of Bunter later," added Nugent grimly.

"Yes, rather!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There goes Hazel's wicket!"

A masterly ball from Jack Wootton had knocked Hazeldene's wicket to a wreck, and Hazeldene came out, looking decidedly rueful.

"Sorry, Wharton," he said; "I know it's rotten!"

"You've knocked up six," said Harry. "Not so bad."

"Better than my show," grunted Bob Cherry.

"Yes; but considering what were wanted——"

"Well, that wasn't your fault."

"Go in and get them, Wharton, old man!" said Tom Brown.

Wharton smiled.

"I'm going to do my best," he said.

He went to the wicket, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh greeted him with a rueful grin. The score stood at 56 now.

Fifty-four more runs were wanted to tie, and fifty-five, of course, to win.

And Greyfriars were last man in!

The Grammarians grinned at the mere idea of their getting the required runs. It was, as Monk confided to Jack Wootton, a simple matter of arithmetic. If nine batsmen had picked up fifty-six runs for nine wickets, how many runs were the two remaining batsmen likely to pick up, especially as the fall of a single wicket meant, of course, out for both of them?

Wootton replied that he gave it up, to which Monk rejoined that the Greyfriars fellows might as well give it up, too—an opinion in which the Cornstalk fully concurred.

But Greyfriars had no intention of giving it up.

While there was life there was hope, and the Greyfriars motto was "Never say die." Harry had pulled desperate innings out of the fire before, and there was no reason why he should not do so again, though the Grammarian bowling was really deadly.

Wharton's face was grim as he took up his position at the wicket, and faced the next over from Gordon Gay.

The Grammarians looked on cheerfully.

They expected the redoubtable Cornstalk to make short work of the Greyfriars "tail," but Gordon Gay, good as he was, had got hold of a tough morsel now to chew.

He felt confident himself, but not over-confident. It looked as if the Grammar School were booked for an easy victory, but Gordon Gay never counted a victory as won until he had won it.

He bowled to Harry Wharton with all the skill he had, and Harry stopped the first two balls dead. The third he snicked away through the slips for two. The fourth he met with a mighty swipe that lifted it fairly over the boundary, and there was no need to run.

Bob Cherry gave a yell.

"Bravo!"

"Good for you, Wharton!"

"Go it!"

And Gordon Gay grinned.

He realised that he had met a foeman worthy of his steel this time.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Saving the Match.

"BRAVO!"

"Well hit!"

"Well hit, Wharton!"

Another shout from the Greyfriars fellows, as Wharton made another mighty swipe, and the leather went on its long journey.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh looked quickly at his comrade at the wickets.

But Wharton shook his head.

"No need to run, Inky!"

And there was no need. Wharton knew that it was a boundary without even looking.

Two boundaries in the first over!

Things were looking up for Greyfriars now that the young captain of the Remove was wielding the willow.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his monocle admiringly upon Wharton. "That chap can bat!"

Bob Cherry gave the swell of St. Jim's a terrific slap on the shoulder.

"Go hon!" he cried.

"Ow! Yow!"

"You're quite right!" said Bob. "Absolutely on the mark! But where do you pick up this surprising judgment?"

"Weally, Wobert Chewwy, I wegard you as an ass!"

"Same to you!" said Bob genially.

"You uttah duffah——"

"And many of them!"

D'Arcy turned away, rubbing his shoulder. It was no use arguing with Bob Cherry. The swell of St. Jim's strolled round to the other side of the girls, taking care to keep a safer distance from the enthusiastic Removite.

But, as D'Arcy had remarked, the chap could bat!

He knocked Gordon Gay's bowling all over the field, and then an odd run at the finish gave him the bowling still, and he faced Jack Wootton, and made hay of him in the same way.

The Grammarians looked at one another.

Several things in the Greyfriars play had surprised them, but Wharton's batting was the biggest surprise of all.

He stood at ease, in a willowy and graceful attitude, but he lashed out when his bat was wanted with the force of a Jessop.

Again and again the ball whizzed away, and the batsmen ran.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh manfully backed up his comrade.

Between them the comrades had to pull the game out of the fire, and the Nabob of Bhanipur meant that no effort should be wanting.

The Greyfriars fellows cheered their bats again and again. And even the Grammarians, not pleased as they were by the unexpected turn the innings had taken, cheered, too.

It was a splendid display, and worth a cheer or two!

Again a single gave Wharton the bowling, for the third over, and this time Frank Monk went on to bowl against him.

Twice Wharton drove away the leather for four, and then came the first chance of the Grammarians to score.

He cut the ball into the slips, and there was a gasp from his comrades in front of the pavilion.

"It's a catch!" muttered Bob Cherry.

Carpenter was at slip. He made a catch at the ball. Linley or Wharton in his place would have made the catch—probably Gordon Gay or Jack Wootton would have done it. But Carpenter, of Rylcombe, couldn't.

He muffed the catch, and the round, red ball dropped into the grass.

"Butterfingers!" muttered Gordon Gay.

But he took it cheerfully. Greyfriars had had worse luck than that, and were fighting bravely against it.

Carpenter turned red. He picked up the ball, and threw it in with a very heightened colour. The Grammarians round the field did not spare their comments. But, after all, it was not a catch that every fieldsman could have made, and it is easier to do these things in the mind's eye, looking on, than to bring them off on the actual field of play—which let armchair critics please note!

To blame or not to blame, Carpenter had muffed the catch, and the danger was over, and Greyfriars breathed easily again.

Harry Wharton profited by his narrow escape, and he did not give the enemy another chance. He did not hit out again unless he was quite sure. It was better to risk a draw from want of time to finish than to throw the game into the hands of the other team.

But Wharton's hopes were rising high now.

Runs were piling up, and he never felt more secure, more sure of himself, and, at the same time, he had never been more careful, after that one slip.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was backing him up loyally.

When the nabob had the bowling, he would steal a single run if he could, and give it back to Wharton, and then Wharton would make hay of it.

The Grammarians laboured against him in vain.

Thirty runs for Wharton, and six for the Nabob of Bhanipur—all in the space of twenty minutes.

Things were looking up for Greyfriars, and no mistake.

Ninety-two!

Eighteen wanted to tie, nineteen to win!

Bob Cherry rubbed his hands with glee.

"We shall do it!" he muttered.

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It begins to look like it, you know. I wegard Hawwy Wharton as a vewy faih bat, Miss Phyllis!"

Miss Phyllis smiled.

"Yes; though never compared to Jessop or Fry!" suggested the girl, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes.

"Yaas, wathah! Hardly up to St. Jim's form, pewwaps, but fine—vewy fine!" said the swell of the School House.

And Miss Phyllis and Miss Vera laughed softly. They had an idea that Harry Wharton was quite up to the form of Gordon Gay, and that Gordon Gay could play D'Arcy's head off on the cricket-field; but they did not say so.

The field crossed over once more, and Gordon Gay exchanged a comical glance with Jack Wootton.

"They seem pretty well set," he remarked.

Jack nodded, with a grim smile.

"Yes; looks as if it's no good trying to shift Wharton. May have a chance with the Christy Minstrel, though."

"Well, try!"

"I'm on!"

Jack Wootton took the ball, and went on to bowl against Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. The Nabob of Bhanipur watched him, with a gentle grin.

Jack Wootton threw all he could into the bowling. The Grammarian fieldsmen stood round, hungry for catches.

But the smiling nabob did not give them any. He knew what his comrades expected of him, and he fulfilled their expectations.

Wootton's bowling was dangerous, but Hurree Singh played it with keen caution. He stopped each ball dead on the crease, with cool persistence and a deadly deliberation that showed the Grammarians that there was no chance.

They might as well have tried to bowl over a brick wall with a pea-shooter as to dislodge Hurree Jamset Ram Singh from his wicket.

The dusky junior was smiling, and immovable.

Jack Wootton grunted as he left the bowler's wicket at the end of the over, during which not a single run had been scored, and Hurree Singh's stumps had not once been in serious danger.

"Well?" grinned Gordon Gay.

"Rotten!" said Wootton.

"You can't shift the Christy Minstrel—eh?"

"Oh, he's a giddy fixture! Try from the other end with the run merchant!"

Gordon Gay took the ball once more, to bowl to Harry Wharton. The Greyfriars juniors looked on eagerly.

With luck, that over might see them out.

Gordon Gay did his level best. He had himself been hard to shift from the wicket during the home innings. But Harry Wharton, of Greyfriars, seemed a still harder nut to crack.

The first ball broke in most cunningly, but it found the batsman prepared for it with a neat late cut that sent it on its journey.

Two for Greyfriars!

Then a blank, and another blank! Then another mighty swipe, and the ball sailed away till it was lost to the straining eye.

And then came Harry's cool, crisp:

"Don't run, Inky; it's a boundary!"

And so it was. And the Nabob of Bhanipur grinned all over his dusky face, and reposed at his wicket.

Ninety-eight up!

"My only hat!" said Bob Cherry. "How's that, my sons? How's that, ye cripples?"

"Ripping!" said Mark Linley.

"Splendid!"

"Bravo! There he goes again!"

Away went the last ball of the over, and the batsmen were running. Scott—how they ran! They crossed the pitch like lightning—once—twice—yes, and thrice. Ah, but the ball is coming in—straight for the batsman's wicket. And Harry Wharton is still yards off—that last run was a near thing.

Greyfriars held their breath.

Will he do it?

The ball is coming in—swift as a bullet, straight as a die—from the hand of Jack Wootton. Wharton does not see it—does not hear—but he knows—knows that all depends on the next second—and he puts on a wild spurt. The bat thuds on the crease—crash!

The wicket flies to pieces.

There is a breathless "How's that?" But the umpire shakes his head. The bat was on the crease ere the wicket was touched.

"Not out!"

Saved again!

"Hurrah!" gasped Bob Cherry; and Phyllis and Vera clapped their hands, and the Grammarians gave a cheer—well-earned, too.

A hundred and one runs—9 wanted to tie. And the stumps not to be drawn for three-quarters of an hour, if necessary to prolong the game so long. It will not be necessary, they all know that. One way or the other, the match will be settled in the next few overs. If Wharton goes on hitting, all serene—for Greyfriars; if he is caught napping, the reverse—but in any case it cannot last long now.

Frank Monk is bowling once more, and still Harry Wharton has the bowling—and he is playing cautiously for a chance. Once the ball drops dead on the crease, and the seconds seem like years to the anxious Greyfriars fellows.

Then Wharton lets himself go once more, and the ball sails beyond the boundary. A hundred and five!

"Good egg!"

"Bravo, Wharton!"

Gordon Gay is looking grim. The bowling is good, the fielding first-class. Yet nothing seems to be able to break that partnership at the wickets.

Round the field the crowd are breathless. Seniors have come up in twos and threes to watch that exciting finish. How will it end? There goes a rumour that Dr. Monk himself is looking out of his window. How will it end? There is hardly a word from the crowd; the anxiety is too deep now. How will it end?

Down came the ball, to drop like a doornail on the crease—then again, and a single run is added.

A hundred and eight!

Frank Monk looks more hopeful. Chance against Wharton he feels he has none, but now he is facing Hurree Singh. He tries his best on the smiling, dusky junior. But his best fails him now. The ball is cut away for a single, and the batsmen have changed ends again, and the score is at 109. One wanted to tie—two to win!

The field crosses over, and Hurree Singh has the bowling again, from Gordon Gay. Four balls he stops with imperturbable coolness, without turning a hair. The fifth he knocks away into the long field, and the batsmen cross.

A hundred and ten.

Greyfriars have tied.

From the Greyfriars fellows comes a long gasp of relief.

Whatever happens now, they are not beaten. The Rylcombe match cannot be a defeat, at all events.

But it is going to be a victory surely. The batsmen seem to be set as if for centuries. Wharton is to have the last ball of the over, and he is standing ready for it.

Gordon Gay draws a deep breath.

Upon that ball depends the match—a draw or a defeat for the Grammarians—a draw or a victory for the visitors from Greyfriars.

Gordon Gay retreats a little and grasps the round ball. Then a little run—and he turns himself into a kind of catherine-wheel—and the ball, for good or ill, is on its journey.

A gasping intake of breath round the field—how will it go? Every eye is on the Greyfriars batsman.

Wharton looks as cool as ice.

Click!

The willow has met the leather, and the ball is sailing away. Across the pitch go two fleeting figures in white.

Jack Wootton stoops in the grass, clutches the ball, and whirls round, sending it in in the same movement.

But it is too late.

It crashes upon the stumps, but the batsmen have made good their ends, and the leather has arrived too late.

Wharton has scored.

The score is at 111.

Greyfriars have won the match!

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

The Conquering Hero.

FROM the Greyfriars fellows burst a yell.

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo, Wharton!"

Then they rushed on the field and bore their skipper off shoulder-high. He deserved that, or any other honour they could do him.

He had pulled the match out of the fire when it was as good as lost, and the juniors of Greyfriars felt that they could not do him honour enough.

Wharton laughed breathlessly as they rushed him up to the pavilion.

"Chuck it," he gasped. "Let me down."

"Rats!"

"Hurrah!"

"See the conquering hero comes!"

"Bwavo, Hawway!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy cordially. "Bwavo!"

"It was splendid," said Phyllis softly; and Miss Vera added more emphatically: "Ripping!"

Wharton struggled to his feet. Gordon Gay came through the crowd and grasped him by the hand.

"It was a jolly good match," said Gordon Gay frankly. "You've licked us——"

"Narrowly, old chap."

Gay laughed.

"Yes; a near thing—still, you've done it. Better luck for us in the return match, perhaps. Anyway, it was a ripping tussle, and I'm glad we've played you!"

"Same here!"

"The samefulness is terrific!"

The match had certainly been a hard-fought one, and the Grammarians took their defeat in a sportsmanlike spirit. There was nothing to be ashamed of in it; they had played up like men, and the margin of defeat was narrow. Another over might have seen a Greyfriars wicket down, and the verdict reversed.

But narrow or not, the victory was won, and the Greyfriars fellows rejoiced, though without a trace of crowing.

Then the Greyfriars team prepared to leave—after rest and some refreshment under the elms in the sunset—a crowd of Grammarians accompanied them to the railway-station at Rylcombe.

Miss Phyllis and Miss Vera also did them the honour to accompany them to the station, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came along to look after the ladies.

"Bai Jove, deah boy!" he said, to Harry Wharton, as they shook hands at the carriage door when the Greyfriars party were aboard the train. "Bai Jove, I wegard you as a weally wipping batsman, and I shall be vewy pleased to take your wicket when you play St. Jim's. I shall wegard it weally as a feathah in my cap."

Whereat Harry Wharton laughed cheerfully.

The whistle blew, and the juniors crowded back away from the train.

"Good-bye!"

"Au revoir!"

The train rolled out of the station, the Greyfriars cricketers cramming the windows and waving caps and straw hats and handkerchiefs in reply to the parting wavings of the Grammarians. And almost the last the Greyfriars fellows saw was Arthur Augustus, waving his silk hat, and Phyllis and Vera fluttering their handkerchiefs.

"Well," said Bob Cherry, settling himself comfortably in a corner seat, "I think that's been a jolly good match, and we've had a good day!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Now we've only got to slay Bunter when we get in——"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"We've won," he said; "we can afford to give Bunter a free pardon this time—as we've won. We'll take care he doesn't have a chance to serve us a trick like that again."

"Well, I was just thinking the same. We've licked the Grammarians, and they're a good team. I feel more like standing anybody a feed just now than licking him—even Bunter."

And the rest of the cricketers agreed. And when they

arrived at Greyfriars they found that the fat junior had, as a matter of fact, already been licked.

His explanation of his absence had not proved satisfactory to the Head. Bunter had a reputation for being stupid, and for misunderstanding the plainest things but Dr. Locke declined to believe that Bunter had really misunderstood on this occasion. And Bunter had gone to the dormitory smarting from a severe caning, and he was blinking with painful grimaces from the bed when the cricketers crowded in, in high spirits.

"I—I say, you fellows," he murmured, "I've had an awful licking. The Head forgot that he had given me permission to go with you, and——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you fellows——"

"Shut up, Bunter," said Harry Wharton. "Thank your lucky stars that we beat the Grammar School after all, or you'd get another licking now that would make your hair curl!"

"Oh, really——"

"Shut up!"

And Bunter thought he had better; and the Remove cricketers went to bed that night in the highest of spirits over the result of the Rylcombe match.

THE END.

(Another Long Complete Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars next week, entitled "The Bounder of Greyfriars." Please order your copy of the "Magnet" Library in advance. One Penny.)

The First Chapters of a New Serial.

STANLEY DARE
The Boy Detective

INTRODUCTION.

Stanley Dare, having just returned from a trip to Australia, is staying at an hotel in Deal, when a man comes to him, grievously wounded, with a story of a girl being in danger of her life. The stranger collapses into unconsciousness before he has time to go into details, and the young detective is left with no clue to the mystery except the torn scrap of a note written on the back of an envelope. The case interests him, however, and with the help of his friend, Professor MacAndrew, he begins to investigate, but without much result. He falls to thinking over the case deeply.

Trapped!

But Stanley Dare's mental studies of the problem were fated to an early interruption. He was standing near the end of the parade, with his head bent and his hands in his pockets—his usual attitude when deep in thought—when a man came up to him, and, touching his cap in a sort of nautical way, asked if he wasn't Mr. Stanley Dare, the famous young detective.

"I can't lay claim to being famous," replied Dare, who disliked anything in the nature of a compliment from a stranger; "but I am the person you refer to."

"Well, sir," pursued the man, "I was sent to you by the landlord of the Lugger Inn. I went up to the Southdown Hotel, but they told me you had gone out, and I thought maybe I should find you here."

"The landlord of the Lugger Inn?" echoed Dare. "I don't know him. What does he want with me?"

"He heard you were in Deal," replied the man, "and if you are at liberty he would like to engage you professionally. His niece has suddenly and mysteriously disappeared, and he says that even if you are unable to take up the case, you perhaps would be kind enough to step down to the inn and advise him how to act."

"I have no objection to doing that," said Dare; "although the only advice I'm likely to be able to give him is to place the matter in the hands of the police. Why didn't he come to see me himself?"

"He hasn't got anybody he can leave in charge of the inn," was the reply. "There's a pretty rough crowd collects there sometimes, and it ain't everybody who can manage them. But Joe Drecker, he can do it."

Stanley Dare remembered having noticed the Lugger Inn during his walks round the older parts of Deal. It was a one-storied building of moderate size, situated about a quarter of a mile from the pier, and about a couple of hundred yards up from the beach

In the old smuggling days, when about one-third of the population of Deal were either directly or indirectly in the smuggling trade, the Lugger Inn was a favourite resort of some of the worst of those gentry, and bore an evil reputation.

Whether it had any sort of reputation now, either good or evil, Stanley Dare did not know.

The landlord met them at the door. He was a big, raw-boned individual, with dark hair and beard, who, had he been dressed in high boots, petticoat trousers, and rough pilot coat, might well have stood as a living representative of one of the bygone smugglers.

"I am glad you have come, sir," he said, with an attempt at being civil-spoken and polite, which seemed to sit awkwardly upon him. "I am feeling very worried about my niece, and I should like your advice as to the best way to set to work to find out the cause of her disappearance, and what has become of her."

"Have you communicated with the police?" Stanley Dare inquired.

"Not yet, sir," replied Drecker. "But I've had a good search made for the girl by friends and customers. Hearing you were in the town, I thought I'd like to have your professional advice before putting the matter in the hands of the police."

The young detective wondered whether the landlord's niece was the girl who had appealed to him for help. It was possible, though it hardly seemed probable, as the more natural action on her part would have been to make an appeal to her uncle.

They had ascended a flight of creaking wooden stairs, and the landlord had ushered Dare into an upper room, somewhat roughly furnished as a sitting-room. He placed a chair for the young detective, but remained standing himself.

"Did your niece live here at the inn?" asked Dare.

"No, sir," answered the lanlord. "She was staying with some friends in the town. It ain't hardly a place for a young girl, you see, for my customers are a rough lot—seafaring men, most of them."

The sounds that came up from the bar certainly bore out the landlord's words. Oaths, ribald songs, drunken shouts could be heard, and it struck Dare that the customers of the Lugger Inn were seafaring men of the worst class—the riff-raff of a seaport town.

"How long has your niece been missing?" pursued Dare.

"Since yesterday afternoon."

"Have you a specimen of her handwriting in the house?"

Joe Drecker shook his head. He had nothing of the sort. His niece never wrote to him, he said.

Dare had wanted to compare her handwriting with the specimen he had on the torn envelope. By that means he would have been able to tell whether the missing niece and the unknown girl who had appealed to him for help were one and the same person.

Taking out a pencil and pocketbook, he leaned back in his chair and looked the landlord straight in the face.

"What did you say her name was?" he asked.

There was an appreciable interval before Joe Drecker answered the question. It almost seemed as though he was not quite certain what her name was. He returned the young detective's look with a steady stare, which, however, was quite expressionless. His eyes had that peculiar quality of remaining open without a single blink of the lids when he so chose, on which occasions they were as vacant-looking as an owl's in daylight. The effect was extraordinary, and on these occasions it would have puzzled the cleverest of thought-readers to guess what was passing in his mind.

"I don't seem to remember having mentioned her name," he said slowly. "But it is Mary."

"Mary Drecker?"

"Why, yes. She is my dead brother's child, you see. That is why I am so fond of her."

The tone of his voice did not seem to convey the impression that he could be very fond of anything, but that, of course, was not a matter that concerned Dare one way or the other.

"Exactly," replied Dare. "But we don't seem to be getting on very fast. Have you nothing to tell me except that your niece disappeared yesterday? Perhaps it would be better if I went to see the persons with whom she is staying."

"Perhaps it would," said the landlord; "but you were asking to see a specimen of her handwriting just now. When I come to think of it, I remember that she made out some bills for me the other day. One of 'em is in the bar-parlour now. I'll run down and fetch it. And if you'd care for any refreshment——"

"Nothing, thank you!" interrupted Stanley Dare.

"Well, you're quite welcome to anything you fancy, if it's in the house."

"I am much obliged. I don't care for anything."

The landlord quitted the room and closed the door softly to. There were some magazines on the table, so Dare picked up one and glanced through its pages. One of the stories interested him, and he read it through. By this time the landlord had been absent about a quarter of an hour.

"This bill that he has been talking about seems to require a good deal of finding," he mused.

The noise in the bar grew louder. Rough voices were stammering, clamouring with drunken insistence for a song. Stanley Dare tried to read again, but could not fix his attention on the book. He rose from his seat, stretched himself, and glanced round the room.

Where was the door?

He rubbed his eyes, wondering what tricks his sight was playing with him. The door had been on his left as he sat at the table. Now there was nothing there but worm-eaten oak panelling, black with age. All round the room it was exactly the same, except there was a couple of barred shutters, which presumably closed over a window, although no part of the window was visible.

Then for the first time it flashed across Stanley Dare's mind that he had fallen into a carefully-prepared trap. As likely as not the story of the missing niece was a fabrication, and her very existence a myth.

There was no bell in the room, and, what was more significant, no fireplace. The oil-lamp which provided the light seemed to be going out. Swiftly but cautiously he passed his hands over all the panelling, but could not discover a crack or join which would serve to indicate where the door was.

"There is a deeper and darker mystery connected with this business, and the unknown girl is in worse peril than I at first expected," muttered Dare. "That villainous landlord and his associates have not trapped me for the mere sake of a commonplace attempt at robbery. There is some more cogent reason for their action, and unfortunately I am unarmed; but I can surely make my escape from this den by way of the window. Those shutters are only secured by a wooden bar."

He crossed the room and lifted the bar from the sockets in which the ends rested. Then he caught hold of the brass knob and pulled the shutters open. No sooner had he done so than his eyes were dazzled by a blinding flash of light, and he received a shock right through him which sent him reeling backwards. He felt his senses leaving him. He clutched at a chair for support, but it fell over with a crash, and he dropped limply across it.

Then from down in the lower part of the house he heard the hoarse revellers roaring out the chorus of a song—a weird song it must have been. A part of the chorus rang clearly in his ears:

"Four jolly fishermen, so stout and so strong,
They fished up the corpse and they carried it along."

It was the last sound he heard before he sank into unconsciousness.

Alone on the Shivering Sands—Doomed!—On the Flood Tide.

"Where am I? What has happened?"

Stanley Dare roused to consciousness with the fresh night wind blowing across his face. As his eyes slowly opened, and he stared upwards, he found himself looking at a group of pale stars and some light clouds drifting high up in the heavens.

The rippling sound of waters reached his ears, and far away he heard the shrill hoot of a steamer's siren.

"Where am I?" he repeated.

But there was no one to answer his question. His idea was that he must be lying on a sandy part of the Deal beach, but why he was there he could not understand. He was conscious of a soreness over his whole body, as though he had been beaten with a stick, and for this he could not account.

And at present it was a trouble for him to think. His brain had not resumed its normal activity. He lay there on his back, gazing up at the stars, and made no effort to rouse himself further. He had not the strength just then, either mental or physical, to do so.

But after a time the soul resumed its sway. His brain quickened into activity, and strength came back to his numbed limbs. He rose to his feet, and cast a glance around him. Then a cry of amazement and despair broke from his lips.

He was on a sandbank—a detached portion of the Goodwins, as he knew by the lights of the lightships. The particular strip on the highest part of which he was standing was no more than thirty yards in length by twenty in breadth. And it was diminishing in size every minute, for there was a strong flood-tide making, and at high tide the bank was covered by about eight feet of water. Between four and five miles away he could see the lights of Deal. Away on his right was the East Goodwin Light vessel; in front of him the North Sand Headlight; and behind him, as he stood, the South Sand Head—all flashing their warning rays across the water to warn seamen of the dangers of the dreaded Goodwin Sands.

There were two or three steamers in sight, but they were all a long way off, and there was no possibility of gaining assistance from any of them. The nearest lightship was the East Goodwin, and that was fully a mile and a half away. With the tide running so strongly it would be impossible to reach it by swimming, even if he could do the distance, which in his present condition was extremely doubtful.

To make himself heard that distance was, of course, equally impossible. The most absolute stillness would have to prevail for a man's voice to carry a mile and a half.

His clothes were dry, and his watch and money were in his pockets. The scoundrels who had trapped him were cautious. If his body was found there must be no suspicion of foul play. There would be no marks of violence upon his body, and his valuables would be untouched. Dare had a morbid fancy as he stood on the sand ridge to picture to himself the verdict of the coroner's jury—"Accidentally drowned."

But he soon shook off the feeling, though his nerves were certainly considerably unstrung.

"This won't do!" he said to himself. "It's a long time since I felt so shaky as I do now. It must have been that electric shock which I experienced, for without a doubt, when I pulled open that shutter, I started a powerful electric current in some way, which bowled me over. Perhaps they meant it to kill me. A nice gang of scoundrels there are located at the Lugger Inn. They are a power to be reckoned with, for they seem to have plenty of resources, and a diabolically clever man at their head. Those shutters were not in front of a window after all, but I suppose merely screened a recess where the electrical apparatus was hidden."

He drew his watch from his pocket and looked at the time. It was two o'clock.

He remembered it was half-past nine when he was sitting alone in the upper room of the inn. Four hours and a half had elapsed since he had received the shock of electricity which had rendered him unconscious.

"They brought me out here in a boat, leaving me on the dry sandbank at low-water," he mused, "believing that as the tide rose I should be drowned before I recovered consciousness. Perhaps, even, they supposed I was dead. In any case, it was a diabolical scheme, though I wonder they took the trouble to bring me right out here when they might easily have dropped me from the boat into deep water, and have settled the matter at once."

But he was soon to learn the reason that he had been brought out on to the sandbank instead of being flung overboard into deep water, and he was to realise that the scheme of his would-be murderers was even more diabolical than he had at first imagined.

The tide was rising fast, and the sandbank was now scarcely twenty yards in length by ten in breadth. From the moment

that he had risen on to his feet Stanley Dare had scarcely shifted his position; now he moved a little, and he noticed that the sand, which had been fairly hard ten minutes ago, was so soft that his feet had sunk into it several inches.

Close to the edge of the bank, perhaps about a yard from the water, a piece of wood was lying, that had evidently been flung up just before low water by the receding tide.

For no particular reason the young detective fixed his eyes on this piece of wood as it lay there. Presently he found himself watching it with a sort of horrible fascination.

It was only a small fragment of timber, probably not weighing more than five or six pounds, but for all that it was heavier than the surface of the sand could support.

It was slowly sinking. Even as he watched it vanish from sight the quivering sand had swallowed it up, as it swallowed up everything on its surface.

"Great Heavens!" cried Dare. "I am on a quicksand!"

A more terrible position could scarcely be imagined. Already the treacherous sand was beginning to shiver in a horribly suggestive manner, as though some awful monster was stirring in its unknown depths, rousing up to seize its prey.

The nature of the quicksand is such that as water—the rising tide, in this instance—percolates through it, it becomes unstable, and whatever happens to be upon its surface is slowly but surely engulfed. This, then, was the reason the miscreants had taken the trouble to bring him out there. They would make assurance doubly sure. The "shivering" sand would swallow up all evidence of their crime, for whatever sank into the "shivering" sand—as it was aptly named by seamen—was never again seen by mortal eyes.

How many of their victims were already hidden in its oozy depths?

Every moment the utter hopelessness of his position was borne home fully upon him. Had he been the best swimmer in the world his skill in that direction would have been of no avail. He could not reach the water

He made the attempt, for it was only a few yards from him, but at the second step he sank up to the ankles, and at the third step he sank to the lower part of his calf. With the utmost difficulty he regained the centre of the ridge, which was as yet comparatively firm. But even there, if he stood for over a minute in one position, he sank down several inches.

Was there no hope of rescue?

He gazed wildly round him, but there was nothing nearer than the East Goodwin Light, which seemed like a monstrous green eye winking mockingly at him out of the velvety darkness.

The tide rose higher, cruel and relentless, not to be stopped though a thousand lives were in danger. And the treacherous sands all the time drew Stanley Dare slowly and surely down. He moved about as much as possible, but at each step he sank deeper. It was as though some horrible monster clutched at his feet, dragging him to his doom.

At last he was unable to drag his feet clear any more. The water had reached him, and now covered the whole bank. He was up to his knees in the shivering sand, and being sucked down more rapidly every moment.

"Help! Help!"

The cry was wrung from his parched lips—an agonised cry that was carried away on the wind for no one to hear, and for no one to respond to. The death which threatened him was horrible. It was with difficulty now that he could retain his balance in an upright position. He knew that if he fell he would never rise again. The temptation came to him to fling himself down, and so end his agony more speedily; but he resisted the temptation. He was no coward, and he would not give up hope till the last. But his nerves were unstrung from the shock of electricity he had received at the inn.

He was gripped in the sand up to the knees, and the water was now a foot deep in his immediate vicinity; but deeper, of course, over other parts of the bank. Once again he looked out towards the East Goodwin Lightship.

Had it been daylight there was a possibility that he would have been seen, but at night it was only possible if anyone on board the vessel happened to be looking through a powerful telescope in that direction. And there were a hundred chances to one against that.

Suddenly he felt something scraping against his right thigh, and, looking down, he saw a large piece of wreckage, which had been carried against him by the tide.

With an exclamation of joy he caught hold of it. Surely it was a special act of Providence that had sent this large piece of planking, all that was left perhaps of some half-forgotten wreck, floating over the submerged sandbank at that time! He believed now that he would be saved. But it was necessary to go to work cautiously, for there was only just enough water at present to float so large a fragment. Leaning his body well over it he worked his legs to and fro, and as much as possible in a circular movement, until he had loosened the horrible grip of the quicksand upon them.

Then he gave several jerks; again and again, with all his strength. Once more they were clear! Both his boots had been dragged from his feet in that last desperate effort. He thanked Heaven that it was not his body that was held in the depths of the shivering sand.

* * * * * * * * * *

The piece of wreckage made a splendid raft, and the young detective was able to stretch himself on it in a fairly comfortable position. The tide carried it well inshore of the North Sand Head Lightship, and finally stranded it on the beach close to the North Foreland.

Day was breaking as Stanley Dare, almost exhausted with the cold—for there was a sharp north wind blowing—the exposure, and the general rough usage he had received from the time he was trapped in the Lugger Inn, scrambled on to the shore, and made for the foot of the cliffs.

When he reached the summit he sank down for a spell of rest before walking back into Deal. He preferred for the present that no one but the professor should know anything of the peril he had encountered, and from which he had so miraculously escaped.

The scoundrels who were engaged in carrying out some villainous and mysterious schemes would be off their guard, believing him to be dead; but a terrible awakening would be in store for them when the time came for him to reveal himself and strike the blow which should crush the gang and save—if she was alive to be saved—the unknown girl who had appealed to him for aid.

* * * * * * * * * *

Professor MacAndrew was not given to worrying himself over a prolonged or unexpected absence of the young detective on ordinary occasions, for he knew very well that in the course of his investigations he might have to make a journey at a minute's notice, or the following up of a clue might take him into queer places, from which it would be impossible for him to convey any information regarding his whereabouts to his friends.

Consequently the professor felt no anxiety at first on account of Stanley Dare's continued and unexplained absence, and turned into bed at eleven o'clock, fully expecting to see the young detective sitting opposite to him on the following morning at the breakfast table

But as Stanley Dare did not put in an appearance, and there was neither letter nor telegram from him, the professor began at last to feel a bit anxious on his young comrade's account. The case on which he was engaged was a peculiar and exceptional one, and might well be sown with utterly unforeseen dangers. MacAndrew came to the conclusion that it behoved him now to make some inquiries.

But inquiries from the hotel officials only elicited the fact that Dare had gone out for a walk after dinner, but none of them even knew the direction he had taken.

(Another long instalment of this thrilling serial next week.

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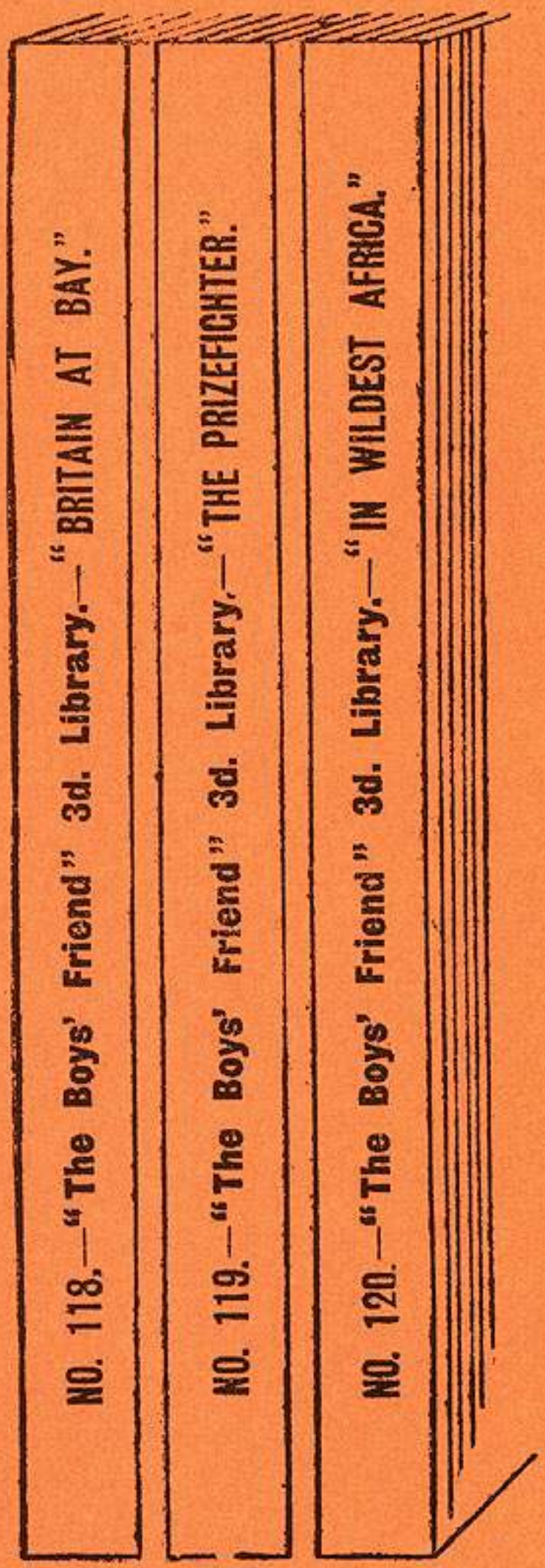

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