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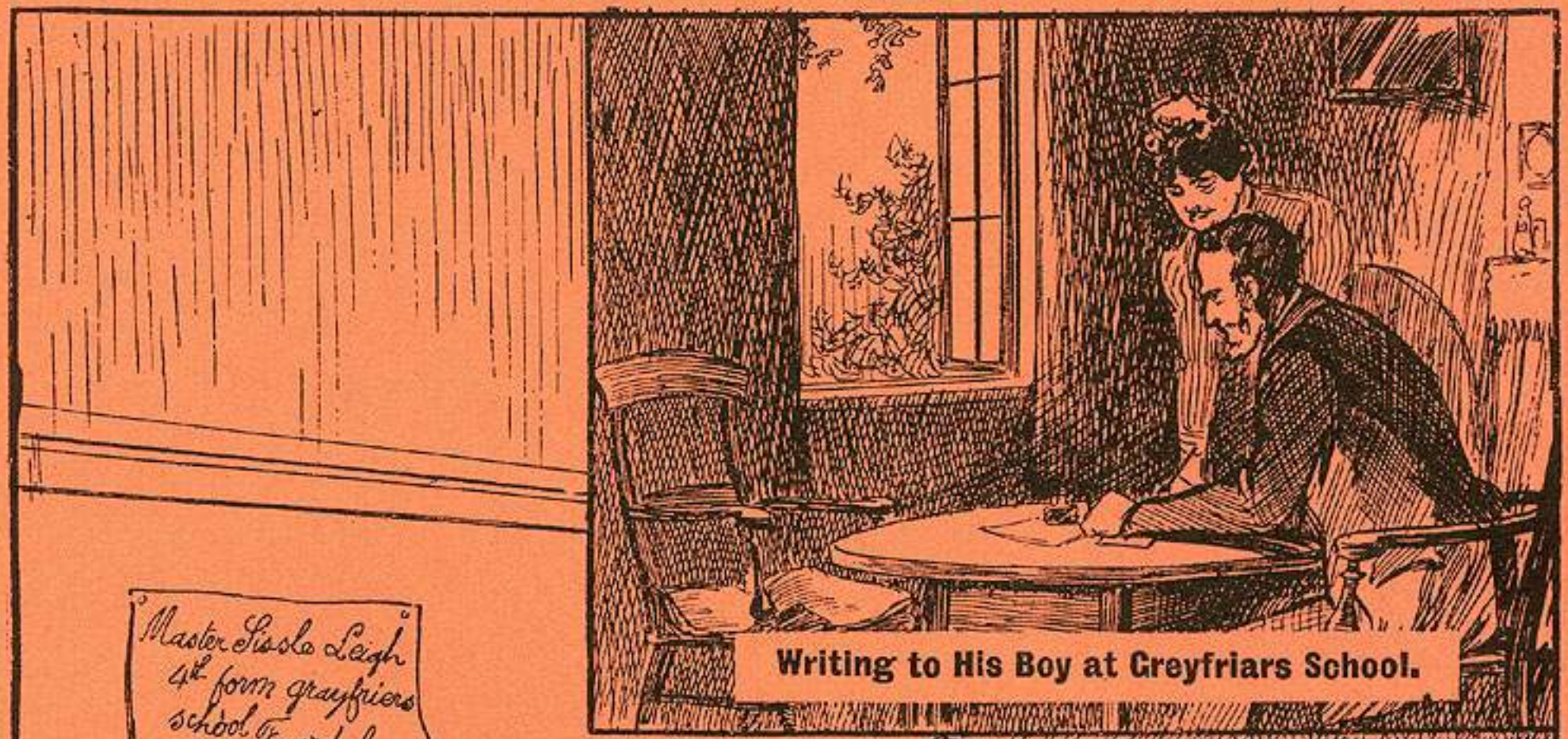

Writing to His Boy at Greyfriars School.

Ashamed of His Father.

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Ashamed of his Father!

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

BY - - -

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Rather Mysterious.

"LISTEN!"

"What on earth's the matter with him?"

Tramp—tramp—tramp!

Bob Cherry and Harry Wharton, of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, looked at one another in sheer astonishment. They were coming along the Remove passage when they heard that steady tramp—tramp of footsteps inside Leigh's study. Tramp—tramp! To and fro, up and down the narrow limits of the study went the steady pacing, and in the silence of the house on that still afternoon it was audible along the passage.

Tramp—tramp!

It was Wednesday afternoon—a half-holiday at Greyfriars. The School House was empty, or almost so—in the glorious autumn weather everybody was out of doors. Two or three slackers were hanging about the studies or the passages or yawning on the steps, but most of the fellows, seniors and juniors, were on the playing-fields or the river.

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry were going down to the footer-ground, and Bob had a ball under his arm, but they were going to call on Mauleverer first, and try to persuade him to come down to the footer practice. Not that they had much hope of success. Lord Mauleverer, the millionaire of the school, was accustomed to taking things easily—very easily—and although not exactly a slacker he was inclined to be indolent, especially when the weather was warm. And it was warm that afternoon. But Wharton and Bob Cherry

paused on their way to Mauleverer's room as they heard that incessant tramping to and fro from Leigh's study.

"Something's wrong, I should say," said Bob Cherry, in a low voice.

Wharton nodded.

"He's a rather rum beggar, anyway," said Bob. "He hasn't been here long, but you generally get to know all about a new kid pretty soon, but I'll wager that nobody knows very much about Cecil Leigh."

Tramp—tramp!

"Better give him a look in," said Harry Wharton. "He may be ill, or something."

"Hark!"

There was a voice from within the study—the voice of Leigh of the Remove, in hurried, petulant tones.

"I can't stand it—I can't stand it! It's impossible!"

"Phew!" Harry whistled softly.

"Toothache, perhaps," murmured Bob Cherry sympathetically.

"I don't think it's that."

"Well, let's give him a look in, anyway."

Bob knocked at the door.

The tramp—tramp inside the study ceased instantly. The two juniors in the passage heard a hurried breath on the other side of the door. Bob Cherry pushed the door open, and a startled face looked at them.

Leigh was alone in the study. He was a slim and somewhat handsome lad, very neatly dressed—indeed, he was inclined to be somewhat fastidious in that respect. His hair was parted in the middle, and it was very thick and flaxen in colour. His cuffs and collar were spotless, and his trousers preserved their original crease unimpaired.

He had caught up a letter from the table as the juniors entered, and he had it now crushed in his hand, as if he was afraid that other eyes than his own would see it. His look was far from pleasant as he bent his eyes upon the chums of the Remove.

"What do you want?" he asked aggressively.

"Nothing," said Bob Cherry blandly.

"Then what have you come into my study for?"

"Just for the pleasure of seeing you," said Bob, whose back was up at once at the tone of the other. "Is there any charge for admission?"

"Look here——"

"Shut up, Bob!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Don't be an ass, old chap! Look here, Leigh, we heard you tramping up and down like a giddy tiger in a cage, and we thought there might be something the matter with you. That's all."

Leigh looked as if he doubted the statement. Leigh's eyes were very narrow, and always had a somewhat suspicious look in them. It was the look of a fellow who was always on his guard, though what Cecil Leigh had to be on his guard about was a mystery. A junior in the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars was not likely to have any weighty secrets to keep. And, so far as was known, Cecil Leigh was very well placed at home. He had a way of talking of his father's "place" that was very impressive, and he had idly mentioned motor-cars and Channel crossings in conversation in a way that gave fellows the impression that he belonged to very rich people indeed.

"Oh, that's all, is it?" said Leigh.

"Yes, that's all!"

"Well, there's nothing the matter with me," said Leigh. "I was tired of sitting down, and got up to stretch my legs a bit. Nothing extraordinary in that, is there?"

"I didn't say there was," said Wharton mildly; "only——"

"Only you were inquisitive, that's all, I suppose?"

Wharton flushed. Inquisitiveness was certainly not one of his sins—there was no fellow at Greyfriars who troubled himself less about other fellow's affairs than Harry Wharton did.

"Nothing of the kind!" he exclaimed sharply. "I don't see what there is to be inquisitive about, either. You are not keeping any deadly secrets, I suppose?"

Bob Cherry looked round the study with a searching eye, and with an exaggerated air of interest. Leigh looked at him irritably.

"What are you looking for?" he demanded.

"The body."

"The what?"

"The body," said Bob Cherry calmly. "Where have you hidden the body? Young man, you drive me to the painful conclusion that you have committed a crime, and that it weighs heavily upon your conscience. The best thing you can do is to make a clean breast of it. Where is the body?"

Leigh gritted his teeth. Harry Wharton burst into a laugh.

"Oh, shut up, Bob!" he said. "Let's get out. Leigh doesn't want us here."

"You're quite right there," said Leigh, with an angry sneer; "and next time, perhaps, you won't come into a fellow's study without being asked."

"Oh, rats!" said Bob Cherry. "We thought there was something wrong with you, and we came in to see. But you can keep your rotten secrets, whatever they are. I don't take any interest in them, for one."

Leigh turned crimson.

"Secrets?" he exclaimed.

"That's what I said," replied Bob disdainfully.

"You—you—— How dare you say I have any secrets?"

"Well, what have you been telling lies for, then?" asked Bob, in his blunt way. "You said you were tired of sitting down, and got up to stretch your legs, and I know perfectly well that you haven't been in the study ten minutes, because ten minutes ago I saw you downstairs taking a letter out of the rack."

"You watched me!" said Leigh savagely.

"I didn't! I suppose a chap can walk through the hall without watching you?" said Bob scornfully. "But I don't want to have anything to say to a chap who rolls out lies as you do. Come on, Harry."

Leigh's face blazed with rage. He sprang towards Bob Cherry as the latter turned towards the door.

"You—you cad!" he exclaimed savagely. "You've been spying on me! I suppose you saw the letter, didn't you?"

"No, I didn't!" said Bob. "I never looked at it. That may be one of your little customs, but it's not mine. And I'm not accustomed to being called fancy names like this. I'll trouble you to take the word cad back."

"Go to the dickens!"

Bob Cherry laid the footer on the table and stepped towards Leigh. Bob was one of the best-tempered fellows at Greyfriars, but when he was angry he could be very angry indeed. And it was not the first time that Cecil Leigh had got "on his nerves."

Harry Wharton caught his excited chum by the arm.

"Hold on, Bob——"

"I'm going to knock his fancy names down his neck!" said Bob Cherry. "Let go my arm, you ass!"

"Hold on! The chap's got something on his mind, I dare say, and we came in when he didn't want us," said Wharton pacifically. "Let him alone, Bob."

"Look here——"

"Oh, let him come on," said Leigh savagely. "A chap who looks at another fellow's letters——"

Leigh got no further. Bob Cherry, with a roar of wrath, broke away from Harry and ran at him. Leigh put up his hands at once, but they were not much use against the champion fighting-man of the Greyfriars Remove. Bob Cherry grasped him in his strong hands, and Leigh resisted desperately, and the next moment they were whirling round the study in a terrific combat.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Hand to Hand.

HARRY WHARTON stepped back out of the way.

He had certainly had the friendliest feelings in the world towards Cecil Leigh when he entered the study, but he was feeling as angry as Bob now. The junior's suspicions were an insult, and Wharton felt that if any fellow in the school was in want of a licking that fellow was Cecil Leigh. And he looked like getting one, too. He had plenty of pluck, and was ready for a fight with Bob Cherry or anybody else, but he was no match for the sturdy Removite.

Tramp—tramp! Bump! Crash!

The fighting juniors reeled against the table, and it went over with a crash. Books and papers scattered on the floor, with a flood of ink over them from the upset inkstand. Their boots trampled over the wreckage as they struggled on.

"You cad!" panted Leigh.

"You worm!" gasped Bob.

There was a shout from the direction of the staircase.

"You fellows ever coming with that ball?"

"All serene!" called back Wharton. "Only a row! Wait a minute!"

But the word "row" was enough. A row was as interesting as football, and there was a hurrying of fellows along the Remove passage to see what was going on. John Bull and Mark Linley and Bulstrode were the first to arrive, and Frank Nugent and Tom Brown followed, and a dozen more after them. They crowded in the passage outside the open door of Leigh's study, looking in with great interest.

"Go it, Bob!"

"Pile in, Leigh!"

"Hurrah!"

Bob Cherry brought his adversary up against the wall of the study with a bump, and Leigh gasped for breath. Bob Cherry held him pinned there, struggling furiously, but powerless to escape.

"I say, you fellows, it's rotten to wreck a chap's study like this," yelled Billy Bunter indignantly. "Somebody'll have to pay for that ink!"

"Now, then," said Bob grimly. "Are you going to take back what you said just now?"

"No!" said Leigh, between his teeth.

"Then I'll buzz your napper against the wall till you do! You know perfectly well that I never looked at your letter, and if I had happened to see it, there would be no harm in it that I know of. If you've got some rotten secret or other you've no right to suspect decent chaps of trying to find it out. Are you going to take it back?"

"No!" yelled Leigh.

Bump!

Bob Cherry kept his word. Leigh's head bumped gently against the wall. There was a roar of laughter from the crowd outside. Leigh gave a yell. His passionate temper was well known in the Remove, and he was quite beside himself with passion now. But an uncontrolled temper did not impress the juniors in the least. They regarded it as a sign of weakness, and laughed at it.

"I say, you fellows——"

A fat junior pushed his way into the study and blinked round indignantly through his big spectacles. It was Billy Bunter of the Remove, who shared that study with Leigh. Bunter had had the study all to himself for a long time, but when Leigh came he was put into it, the other studies being full up. Other fellows were not anxious to "dig" with Billy Bunter, but Leigh had no choice in the matter. Bunter had welcomed him—the new fellow was supposed to be very well off, and Bunter was a borrower of the most redoubtable sort. Bunter had an allowance of a shilling a week pocket-money, but he always spent five or six shillings, and sometimes more. The process of extracting cash from unwilling lenders had been reduced to a fine art by Billy Bunter. But he had been disappointed in Leigh. Leigh, although reputed rich, had no money to give away—and so Bunter had found, much to his annoyance. During the days that Cecil Leigh had been a member of the Remove Form at Greyfriars Bunter had tried all his blandishments in vain, and had not succeeded in extracting a single shilling from him. Needless to say, Bunter was in consequence far from enthusiastic about his study-mate.

"I say, you fellows, it's rotten to wreck a chap's study like this," said Billy Bunter. "Somebody will have to pay for that ink."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!" grumbled the fat junior. "Ink costs money, and I can't afford to be ruined in this way."

As the spilt ink was worth a halfpenny at the most, Bunter's complaints did not seem very well founded. The juniors laughed. Bunter blinked at Bob Cherry, who was holding Cecil Leigh against the wall in an iron grip.

"I say, Cherry——"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter!" said Wharton.

"Biff number one!" said Bob Cherry. "You are going to get number two now, unless you take back what you said."

"Hang you!"

Bump!

"Ow!"

"That's right!" said Bunter. "Bump the cad! He's a mean beast! He actually refused this morning to lend me a shilling on my postal-order that's coming this afternoon. You can bump him as much as you like, Cherry. I sha'n't interfere."

There was a yell of laughter. The idea of the Owl of the Remove interfering with Bob Cherry was funny. Leigh made a desperate effort to get loose, but he had met more than his match. He sank back again, gasping, against the wall.

"Number three," said Bob.

Bump!

"Chuck it, Bob," said Harry Wharton. "He's an obstinate brute, but he's not worth the trouble Chuck it!"

Bob Cherry hesitated.

"He said I looked at his letter," he said.

"So you did!" yelled Leigh.

"There, you hear the cad!"

"Nobody will take any notice of his caddish words," said Frank Nugent. "Let the brute alone, Bob. We're waiting for the footer."

"Oh, all right!" said Bob.

He released the junior.

"I warn you you'd better keep your tongue between your teeth, that's all," he said.

"Hang you!" muttered Leigh. "Hang you!"

"Oh, rats!"

Leigh's eyes blazed. He made a rush at Bob Cherry, hitting out. It was scarcely fair, for Bob Cherry was turning towards the door; but Leigh was in too great a rage to think of that. His fists crashed on Bob's face, and Bob turned on him quickly. His right lashed out, and caught Leigh on the point of the chin. The junior gave a wild yell, and staggered back, and fell with a crash to the floor. Bob Cherry's eyes blazed down at him.

"You cad! Get up and have some more!"

"Come on, Bob!" Harry Wharton dragged his angry chum away. "Come on! He'll be sorry for this presently, and so will you! Come out!"

Leigh sat up dazedly. He was gasping for breath, and holding his chin and there was evidently no more mischief in him. Bob Cherry tramped angrily out of the study with the juniors, and Leigh was left alone, excepting for Billy Bunter. The Owl of the Remove remained, blinking at the fallen junior.

Bob Cherry's face was frowning as he left the School House with his chums. But his anger never lasted long. Before the footer ground was reached his face cleared, and the old sunny look came back.

"I—I say, Harry," he said hesitatingly, "I hope I didn't hit the beggar too hard! I landed out as if I were hitting Bolsover; but Leigh is a reedy chap."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I told you you'd be sorry, Bob."

"Well, he made me awfully wild" said Bob. "Fancy hinting that I wanted to look at his rotten letter! He might be a blessed criminal by the way he suspects people. Suppose a chap did see his beastly letter—there oughtn't to be any harm in it. But I hope I didn't hit him too hard, all the same."

And Bob thought about it, with a rather worried look, until he was playing footer, and then the game drove all thought of Leigh, and everything else but footer, out of his mind.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Very Odd.

CECIL LEIGH staggered to his feet.

He was feeling sick and dazed, savage with himself, savage with all the others. After the first moment of unjust and uneasy suspicion, he had realised that he had done Bob Cherry an injustice, but he was too passionate and obstinate to think of admitting it. And he had been punished for his obstinacy.

Billy Bunter regarded him with a sneering expression. Bunter did not like him. Leigh's imperviousness to the arts and wiles of the borrower made him quite obnoxious to Bunter, and the fat junior had several times turned the question over in his mind whether it would be safe to punch Leigh's head. He had decided, so far, that it would be too risky, but his opinion was changing now. Bunter's manner began to assume something of truculence Leigh rubbed his chin, and groaned

"Oh!"

"Serve you jolly well right," said Billy Bunter, blinking at him. "I've a jolly good mind to give you some more of the same sort myself. You accused me the other day of trying to read one of your letters."

"So you did, you cad!" said Leigh savagely. "You had the letter in your hand when I caught you."

"I had picked it up to see whose it was."

"Liar!" said Leigh. "I had left it locked up in my desk, and you got it out somehow."

"As for reading it, that would have been jolly hard, considering how it was written, and what the spelling was like," said Bunter contemptuously. "I didn't know you had any relations in the workhouse, Leigh."

Leigh's face flushed

He made a sudden rush towards Billy Bunter and grasped him by the shoulders. Bunter gave a roar. All his half-formed plans for punching Leigh's head vanished in a moment.

"Ow! Leggo!"

"You fat inquisitive hound——"

"I didn't read the letter!" roared Bunter. "I—I only saw that the writing was rotten, and the spelling bad, and—I mean, it was beautifully written, and spelt quite correctly. That was what I meant to say all along Ow!"

Leigh whirled the fat junior to the door. Bunter clung to the doorpost, and resisted feebly, gasping for breath.

"Look here, you're not going to sling a fellow out of his own study!" he gasped.

"That's just what I am going to do," said Leigh savagely. "Out you go!"

"Look here, this is my study——"

"Outside!"

"Oh, really, Leigh, it's not my fault if your relations write to you without being able to spell their words! Ow!"

Bunter went whirling into the passage. As he scrambled up, Leigh ran after him, and planted his boot fairly and squarely behind the fat junior. Billy Bunter went rolling along the smooth linoleum

"Yarooh! Yarooh! Oh! Beast!"

Leigh went back into his study and slammed the door hard. His face was pale with anger and excitement, and there was an ache in his head. Bob Cherry had not knocked it very hard against the wall, but hard enough to hurt a little. Leigh ran his hand over his thick curly hair, and threw himself into a chair.

The excitement died out of his face; his thoughts ran in the channel they had been following before the chums of the Remove entered the study.

A hunted, haunted look came into the boy's eyes, and a deep wrinkle appeared upon his smooth white forehead.

"I can't stand it!" he muttered. "He ought to have more sense! I know what he's done for me, and I'm not ungrateful—it's rot to say I'm ungrateful! I'm not! But I can't stand that! It would ruin me here—it would be utter ruin! He ought to have more sense!'

He took a letter from his pocket and read it over again——a roughly-written, ill-spelt letter, but breathing confidence and affection and generous thought in every line. But it was the writing and the spelling that Leigh was thinking about.

He crumpled the letter in his hand, and thrust it into his pocket again with an impatient exclamation.

"He can't come! I shall have to write to him and explain somehow! Good heavens! Why can't he have a little more tact? I don't want to wound his feelings—I should be a brute to do that; but—but he can't come! He ought to understand."

Leigh drew pen and paper towards him, and wrote. He wrote, and rewrote, a letter half a dozen times before he was satisfied. Even then there was a gloomy cloud upon his brow as he read it over.

He muttered the sentences aloud wondering whether they would do. He was so worried that he could not think very clearly on the subject at all, and he wondered what impression that cold, selfish letter would make upon the reader. He did not mean to be cold and selfish, either.

"Important engagements in all leisure time—trying to get on in the school—time greatly taken up by many friends—generally absent from school on half-holidays—don't come just yet—will arrange a time—meanwhile will get leave to come and see you on Sunday—longing for a sight of my dear old dad again. H'm!"

He muttered the letter over, and finally finished it, and sealed it in an envelope. Then he put on his cap and left the study, and hurried down to the school letter-box. He passed Billy Bunter in the hall, grunting breathlessly. It was likely to be some little time before the fat junior fully recovered.

"Beast!" grunted Bunter.

Leigh did not even hear him. He went out into the Close, and Bunter rolled towards the stairs. Bunter was not without hope of finding the study cupboard unlocked, and something to eat in it.

Billy Bunter entered the study and blinked round. There was a crumpled envelope lying on the floor, and the Owl of the Remove pounced upon it at once. He blinked at it through his big spectacles, and recognised it.

"My word! It's the one that was in the rack for Leigh! I wonder who it's from? Must be a relation, or he wouldn't be so wild about it."

And Bunter blinked over the letter with intense interest. The address was strange enough, considering that the letter was to one of the most lofty-mannered fellows in the Remove—a fellow who had an airy way of talking about himself and his people that gave one a vague impression of vast estates and boundless riches.

"Master Sissle Leigh, 4th Form, Grayfrires Skool, Friardale."

Bunter grinned as he blinked at the queer superscription.

"My hat!" he muttered. "Chap doesn't even know how to spell his own name! Sissle! He, he, he! Lemme see, what's the postmark? Sanford. Where's that? I wonder if Leigh's people live at Sanford? I'll find out. This is jolly odd, and it's my duty to get to the bottom of it. If that chap's a low rotter swanking round and telling lies about his people, I'll jolly well show him up—from a sense of duty. I wonder—— Yowp!"

Cecil Leigh had re-entered the study. As he saw how the Owl of the Remove was occupied, he turned crimson with rage and grasped the fat junior. The envelope was wrenched away, and Bunter was whirled round in Leigh's angry grasp.

"You spying cur!"

"Ow! Yow! Yowp! Leggo! I wasn't——"

"Outside, you rat!"

"Yarooh!"

And for the second time that afternoon Billy Bunter was hurled into the passage, and the door was slammed after him. He did not venture to re-enter, although it was his own study. Leigh was alone; the golden afternoon did not tempt him out of doors. He paced to and fro in the study, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, a gloomy frown upon his brow, his mind heavy with dark and unhappy thoughts.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

The same weary sound that had attracted the attention of Wharton and Cherry in the Remove passage an hour before was audible again. The junior seemed tireless, as he tramped to and fro in the narrow limits of the study—too restless to sit down, too disturbed to seek the society of the other fellows out in the sunny Close.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Lord Mauleverer Is Tired.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"What's the matter?"

"I forgot Mauly."

"By Jove!" said Harry Wharton. "So did I. Let's go and have him out."

The chums of the Remove had been passing and kicking for a long time. All their old keenness for the winter game was waking up. They had paused for a rest, when Bob Cherry remembered that he had not, after all, called upon his lordship as he had intended.

Wharton and Bob Cherry threw their coats on over their football jerseys and walked to the House. There was no sign of Lord Mauleverer in the Close or about the playing-fields, and it was pretty certain that the schoolboy earl was slacking in his study. The two juniors ascended to the Remove passage, and Bob Cherry grinned as they passed the door of Leigh's study.

"Hark!"

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

It was the same sound they had heard before—the tireless tramp to and fro of a fellow who had something on his mind. A repentant look came on Bob Cherry's face.

"I'm sorry I punched him," he said. "He was a ratty cad—but—but I believe he's got some trouble, Harry, and I'd rather help him than punch his head, if it could be worked. But he's such a touchy and suspicious beast that I don't see how a chap is to get on with him at all."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Better let him alone," he said.

"Yes, I suppose so."

They reached Lord Mauleverer's study. Lord Mauleverer had a study to himself at the end of the passage. It was a larger room than the rest, having been a box-room before it was added to the Remove passage. Lord Mauleverer had not spared expense in furnishing it; and the carpet, into which the foot sank, the curtains of the finest lace, the French clock, and the gilt mirrors, the mahogany chairs and table, the Japanese vases, were the wonder of the Remove. Ionides, the Greek, of the Sixth Form, the son of an extremely wealthy Greek merchant, was luxurious in his tastes, and his study was something to see; but he had neither the taste nor the means of Lord Mauleverer. The two pictures hanging in his lordship's study had cost twenty guineas apiece, and they were well worth the money.

Bob Cherry kicked open the door.

An elegant youth, in a flowered dressing-gown, with Turkish slippers on his feet, turned slightly on a luxurious couch under the window, and looked at them lazily.

"Hallo, my dear fellows!" he said.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry in his powerful tones.

Lord Mauleverer put his fingers to his ears.

"My dear fellow, don't!"

"What's the matter?" roared Bob.

"You disturb me!"

"Oh, that's nothing to what I'm going to do!" said Bob serenely. "Come and play footer, you lazy slacker!"

"Too much like work, my dear fellow."

"Well, of all the blessed slackers——"

"I'm not slacking, begad!" Lord Mauleverer explained. "I'm taking it easy. There's a great deal of difference there. What?"

Bob Cherry walked over to the couch and picked up one end in his strong arms. Lord Mauleverer's feet rose in the air along with the end of the couch. His lordship gasped.

"Hold on! By Jove, you know! I shall fall off!"

"Exactly!"

Bump!

Lord Mauleverer did fall off, and Bob Cherry tilted the sofa over. He bumped on the floor with a heavy bump, and rolled over on the thick carpet, entangled in his dressing-gown.

"Yow!" he roared. "You silly ass! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry dragged his lordship up. Lord Mauleverer rubbed his back ruefully. He sat on a chair, and gasped.

"Coming to play footer?" asked Bob.

"Ow! No!"

"Shall I help you up again?"

His lordship jumped up.

"Rats! No! Get out!"

"Why don't you come and play," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "It will buck you up."

Lord Mauleverer yawned.

"Well, I've got to go down to Friardale soon," he said. "I don't want to exhaust myself before I start."

"Ten minutes' walk," said Bob, with a snort.

"Then there's ten minutes back," said Lord Mauleverer argumentatively; "and ten minutes there seeing the tailor."

"Tailor! Rats!"

"And I had to run the last time I got to Friardale," said Lord Mauleverer plaintively. "That extremely unpleasant boy, who is employed by Mr. Pawker, the butcher, knocked my hat off. It was very unpleasant."

"You don't mean to say that you ran away from the butcher's boy?" demanded Bob Cherry indignantly.

"Well, you see, he was going to rub a pork-chop over my clothes," said Lord Mauleverer. "So what was a fellow to do? And I couldn't hit him, as I was afraid——"

"What!"

"Afraid of soiling my gloves——"

"Oh! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything amusing in it. Upon the whole, I think I will wear an old coat and an old pair of gloves to-day, and then I shall be ready for the butcher's boy," said Lord Mauleverer. "You see that it is quite impossible for me to play footer and exhaust myself now. But I'll tell you what—you fellows walk down to Friardale with me instead of playing footer."

"Rats!"

"Then please leave me to have a rest," said Lord Mauleverer, righting the sofa, and settling upon it again. "Don't be a rough beast, Cherry!"

Bob Cherry snorted.

"Well, I hope the butcher's boy will rub pork-chops all over you, and down the back of your blessed neck," he said. "Come on, Harry!"

The chums of the Remove quitted the study. Lord Mauleverer stretched out his legs restfully and yawned. His lordship spent quite a considerable time yawning. But he was not to be left to rest in peace. A quarter of an hour later, Cecil Leigh looked into the study.

Leigh had removed all the traces of his tussle with Bob Cherry, and the gloomy cloud was gone from his brow. The trouble that had been haunting him, whatever it was, seemed to be dismissed from his mind, too. There was an agreeable

smile upon his face as he looked into the schoolboy earl's study. Lord Mauleverer concealed a yawn, and turned a politely interested smile upon him. Lord Mauleverer was nothing if not Chesterfieldian.

"Coming out this afternoon, Mauleverer?" asked Leigh.

Lord Mauleverer nearly yawned, and stopped himself again.

"It's warm," he remarked.

"Well, you're not going to stick alone in the house all the afternoon, are you?"

"I've been trying to get a rest," said his lordship, with a sigh. "But first some silly asses were kicking up a row along the passage, and then Bob Cherry came in to drag me off to play football. Don't say football to me, please. The word makes me feel quite tired."

Leigh laughed.

"I'm not going to," he said. "I was going to suggest a punt on the river. You can lie on the cushions while I pole."

Lord Mauleverer reflected.

"It's such a blessed long way down to the river," he remarked. "More than five minutes' walk, I believe. Besides, I've got to walk to Friardale presently."

"I'll come with you, if you like."

Lord Mauleverer closed one eye and reflected. As a matter of fact, Mauleverer, although supposed to be a very simple fellow by most of his Form-mates, was deeper than he looked, and he saw more in Cecil Leigh than met the eye. Leigh's talk about his "place" and his "people" imposed upon Lord Mauleverer less than on the other fellows; and Mauleverer disliked humbugs. But his manners were by nature so polite, that it was hard for anyone to see whether Mauleverer did not like him.

"Thanks, I won't trouble you," said his lordship. "Besides, I don't know just when I shall start."

"I would wait for you," said Leigh.

"Not at all—it would be imposin' on you, my dear fellow."

Cecil Leigh bit his lip. He was determined to be upon good terms with Lord Mauleverer, the only titled fellow at Greyfriars. But the path was not easy. Somehow or another his lordship, although perfectly courteous, kept him at arm's length.

Leigh nodded, and quitted the study. Lord Mauleverer arranged a cushion under his head, and yawned. He took up a book, laid it down again, and yawned again. Then he looked out of the window, and then he closed his eyes, and went to sleep.

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THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Order of the Boot!

CECIL LEIGH came down to the junior football-ground with a coat over his jersey. Bob Cherry was sitting on the turf, rubbing his knee, which had received an accidental kick from Bolsover in the practice. Bob Cherry was not quite sure that the kick had been accidental; Bolsover was a very rough player, and frequently had little accidents like that in playing with fellows whom he disliked. But Bob would not take any notice unless he was certain. He was patiently rubbing his knee, when Cecil joined him. Bob Cherry looked up at him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he said affably.

Leigh stopped.

"I want to speak to you, Cherry," he said awkwardly. "I—I'm sorry for what happened in my study. I lost my temper—I'm sorry."

Bob smiled cheerfully at once.

"Oh, that's all right!" he exclaimed. "I'm sorry I slogged you—I knew there was something worrying you, and I should have kept my temper."

"I'd had bad news from home," said Leigh.

"I'm very sorry," said Bob, with a concerned look. "None of your people ill, I hope."

"Not exactly," said Leigh. "It's my father—he's been a bit hurt in a motor-car accident. It worried me a bit."

"It must have," said Bob Cherry. "I know I should feel rotten if anything happened to my pater. Not that he's likely to be hurt in a motor-car accident, though—unless it was somebody else's motor-car. Our funds don't run to automobiles in the Cherry family."

Leigh winced. Something in Bob Cherry's careless frankness seemed to touch a raw spot somewhere. But he went on evenly enough.

"My father's car ran into the park palings, that was all, and he was shaken up. But it worried me a bit. I'm sorry for what happened, as I said."

"All my fault," said Bob. "You riled me by saying that I'd looked at your letter; though even if I'd seen it, I don't see that it would have mattered when it was only about a motor-car accident."

"Quite so," agreed Leigh. "Only I was feeling batty all over."

"Well, it's done with now, and no malice on either side," said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "Are you going to play footer?"

"Yes, I was thinking of joining in the practice."

"You've played before, of course?" asked Bob Cherry, as he rose to his feet.

"I used to play Rugby," said Leigh, with an air as if Rugby were a most aristocratic game, which he had honoured by playing it.

"I prefer Soccer," said Bob. "We play Soccer here, anyway. You'll soon fall into the way of it. I'll give you some points, if you like."

"Thanks awfully, dear boy!"

Bob Cherry made a little grimace. He did not like Leigh's "dear boy." When Lord Mauleverer called him a dear boy or a dear fellow, it was all right. But it did not sound the same when Leigh did it. In Mauleverer it was natural; in Leigh it seemed like a manner purposely affected. But Bob made no remark on the subject. It was but seldom that Bob Cherry set up in judgment upon anybody.

"Hallo, you playing, Leigh?" said Wharton cheerfully. "Let's see you give a kick at goal. Look out, Hazel!"

"What-ho!" replied Hazeldene, who was between the posts.

Leigh kicked, and a very good kick it was. It beat Hazeldene easily, and the ball lodged in the net. Harry Wharton uttered an exclamation.

"By Jove! That's good. You've played before, of course."

"He's only played Rugger before," said Bob Cherry.

"Then it's extra good. Looks like a recruit for the Form eleven, Bulstrode."

Bulstrode, the captain of the Remove, nodded.

"Good! Let's see what you can do, Leigh," he said.

Cecil Leigh joined in the play with considerable keenness. Although he affected a bored and listless air, as a rule, he was in reality keen enough, and he evidently liked the great game. It was strange that he had never played Association before, considering how he played now, and the fellows all remarked upon it. But surely there was no reason for him to say that he had not played, if he had played. Deception on such a subject was so utterly without any apparent motive, that he could hardly be suspected of it.

"He shapes wonderfully well," Bulstrode remarked. "I think he will do jolly well in the forward line, Wharton."

"I think so, too."

"Oh, rot!" exclaimed Bolsover, the bully of the Remove. "If you put Leigh in the forward line, where are you going to put me?"

"Nowhere," said Bulstrode calmly. "I've told you already that you're not in form enough for a place in the Remove eleven."

Bolsover burst into an angry laugh. He was no longer cock of the walk in the Remove since Bob Cherry had licked him and lowered his colours. But it was not easy for the big, overbearing fellow to take a back seat and hide his diminished head.

"I'm going to have a place in the team," he said.

"Rats!"

"Or there will be trouble for somebody!" said Bolsover threateningly.

Bulstrode looked at him steadily.

"You won't have a place in the team," he said; "and if you think you can bully me into giving you one, you're mistaken. Shut up, or I'll have you chucked off the field now!"

Bolsover gritted his teeth. But several juniors were gathered round, evidently quite willing to lend a hand or a foot in the "chucking" process; and the bully of the Remove checked himself. It was impossible for even the burly Bolsover to defy the football captain on the football-ground. But there was an evil expression in Bolsover's eyes as he turned away. His glance fell evilly upon Cecil Leigh.

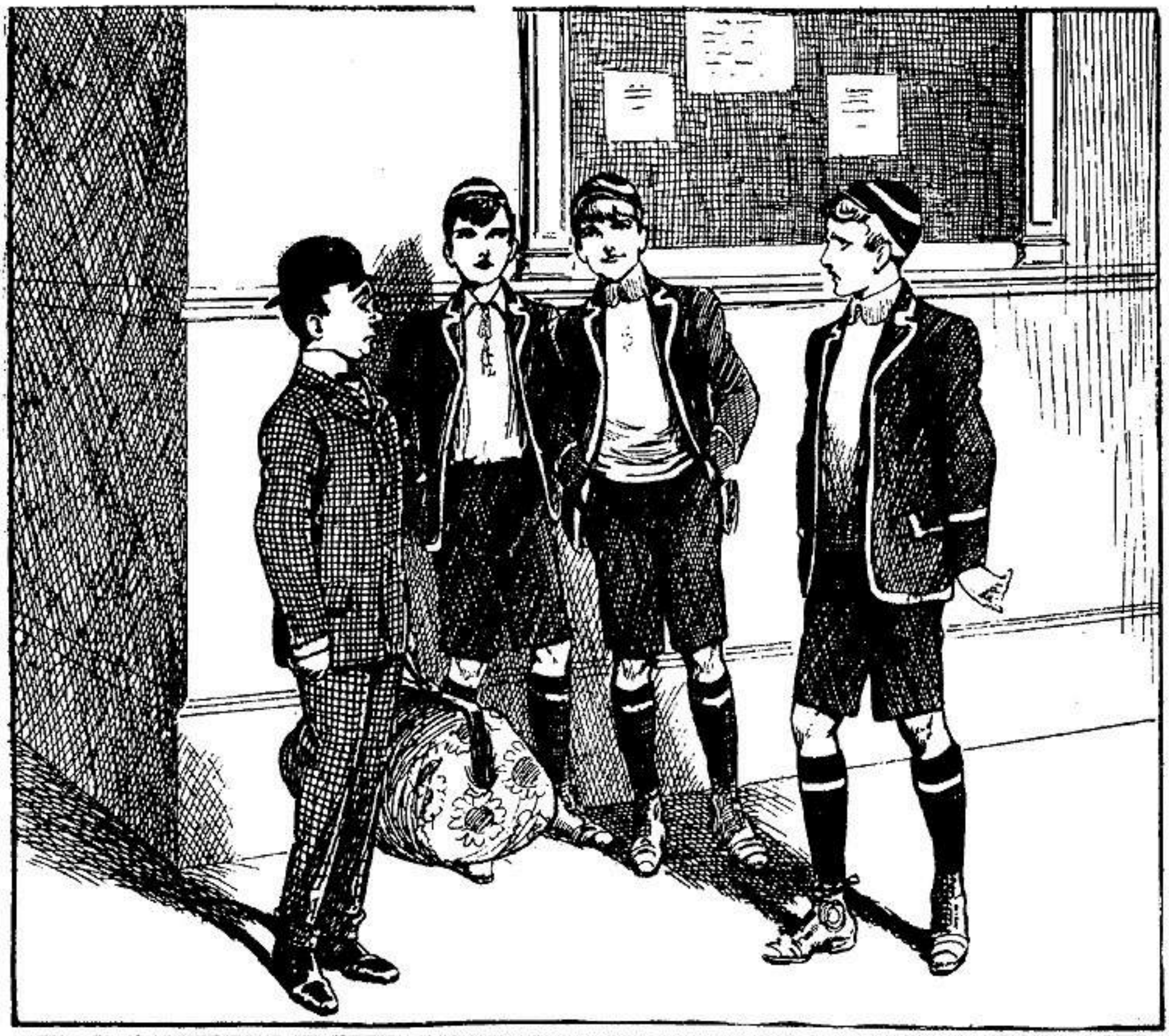
Bulstrode was forming up seven a side for practice, and Leigh was put in the forward line of Bulstrode's seven. Harry Wharton captained the other side, and Bolsover was with him. Bob Cherry kicked the ball off, and then played. Bolsover had his eye on Cecil Leigh all the time.

Leigh was playing wonderfully well. He captured the ball, and brought it up to the goal with a fine dribble, dodging and eluding his opponents in fine style. Bolsover rushed in to stop him, charging him from behind. Leigh, who weighed half Bolsover's weight, was sent spinning, and the bully of the Remove fell upon him heavily.

There was a shout from the other players.

"Bolsover! You cad!"

The bully of the Remove staggered up. He had fallen so heavily upon Leigh that he was considerably shaken up himself. The play stopped, and the juniors gathered round



The school page looked at Cecil Leigh quite expressively. "Some young gents ain't so werry generous as other young gents," said Trotter. "Good-bye, sirs! I 'ope as the new page will be werry dutiful to you!"
(See Chapter 5.)

the two, and Bolsover was a little scared at the expression upon their faces.

"You cad!" shouted Bob Cherry.

"It was an accident," Bolsover muttered.

"Yes, and your kicking me was an accident, wasn't it?" exclaimed Bob.

Harry Wharton bent over Leigh. The slim junior was lying on his side, his face very white, and gasping painfully.

"Are you hurt, Leigh?"

"I—I don't think so, much!" gasped Leigh, with an effort. "The brute! He fell on me on purpose."

"I know he did! Bulstrode, you saw it?"

Bulstrode's brow was black.

"Yes, I saw it!" he exclaimed. "Bolsover, get off the field!"

Bolsover drew a quick breath.

"I won't!" he said.

Bulstrode pointed with his hand.

"Get off! I order you off the ground! Go!"

"I won't!"

"Throw him out!" said the Remove captain.

There was a rush of the players. There were few of them who had not been roughly handled by the Remove bully at one time or another, and they were "fed up," as Bob Cherry expressed it, with his insolence. They rushed at Bolsover, and the burly Removite hit out savagely. One, two, three of the junior footballers went down heavily under his blows, and then he was rushed off his feet.

"Kick him out!"

"Throw the cad out!"

Bolsover struggled desperately. But seven or eight fellows had hold of him by his arms and legs and head. He was jerked and bumped and dragged along to the edge of the field and tossed over the line. He landed upon the ground with a heavy thud.

"There!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Now you keep off the grass, you rotter; if you come on here again, we'll squash you!"

Bolsover sat up, gasping. He was boiling with rage, but he had been too roughly handled to want any more just then. He gasped and scowled and gritted his teeth while the juniors returned to the field. Cecil Leigh had risen to his feet, and was leaning heavily upon Wharton's shoulder.

"I'm sorry this should happen at your first play here," said Bulstrode. "Bolsover is a rotten cad, and he'll be kept off the ground for some time for this. I hope you're not much hurt."

"I can go on playing, I think," said Leigh, with a gasp.

And he did go on, though he had been really hurt. There was no doubt that Leigh had plenty of grit and pluck. Bob Cherry wondered. He had heard Leigh tell lies, and he could not help sometimes suspecting him of "swank." That a liar and a swanker should be a keen footballer and a plucky fellow, too, was a matter of wonder to the simple Bob. The qualities did not seem to agree together at all.

Leigh's football was certainly good, and it won golden

opinions from all the Remove footballers—all the more because it was his first Soccer match. As the juniors rubbed themselves down afterwards Cecil was the recipient of a great deal of praise. He walked back to the School House with Wharton and Bob Cherry, on the best of terms.

Trotter, the page, met them in the hall. Trotter had his coat on, and a bag in his hand, and wore a most cheerful expression upon his face.

"I'm goin', Master Wharton," he remarked.

Harry Wharton stopped. Trotter was going on a fortnight's leave, and his place at Greyfriars was to be taken by another lad for the time. The new page had not yet arrived at the school, but he was expected that day.

Wharton felt in his pocket. Trotter was going on a holiday, and it was a time for tips. But funds were low in Study No. 1 just at that time, and Wharton searched his pockets for a silver coin in vain. He found only three coppers, which certainly would not have met the case.

"Lend me a two-bob bit, will you, Leigh?" he asked.

Wharton did not borrow, as a rule, and any little loan he contracted was always paid up scrupulously at the first opportunity. He had no resource now but to borrow a coin, or let Trotter depart tipless; which was not to be thought of.

"Same here," said Bob Cherry. "Lend me two bob, Leigh."

Leigh turned red. He thrust his hands first into one pocket, and then others, but his hands came out empty. The two juniors had spoken unthinkingly; they believed Leigh to be a rich fellow, and never doubted for a moment that he had plenty of money about him, or that, if he hadn't, he wouldn't mind saying so.

"I—I'm afraid I've left my money in my study," Leigh stammered.

"Cut up and get it, like a good chap," said Bob.

"Blessed if I haven't lost my key!" said Leigh, with an air of great surprise. "I always keep my money locked up, you know."

Wharton gave him a sharp look.

"Very well," he said quietly; "I'll get it from Mauleverer. Wait a minute, Trotty."

"Suttingly, Master Wharton."

Leigh looked red and uncomfortable. He had given both the juniors the impression that he would not lend them the money. He did not try to correct the impression, and he made no further effort to find the key.

John Bull came downstairs, and Wharton called to him. Bull made the loan cheerfully enough at once, and Trotter was tipped. John Bull added a two-shilling piece himself, and the page pocketed the coins with a great deal of satisfaction.

"Thank you kindly, sir," he said. "It's werry good of you."

"I hope you'll have a good time, Trotter," said Wharton.

"I 'ope so, sir. And I 'ope that Trimble will fill my place orlright, and look arter you young gents," said Trotter.

"Trimble!" said Cecil Leigh. "Who's that?"

He spoke very quickly.

"That's the noo page who's goin' to take my place, sir," said Trotter, most amiably. Leigh had not tipped him yet, but Trotter fully expected it. "He's comin' to-day, sir, and he's a most obliging feller, sir; he'll do anythin' for you, he will really, sir."

"Where does he come from?" asked Leigh carelessly.

"He was with me in my first place, in London, sir," said Trotter, "and a most respectable and respectful young feller, Master Leigh."

"Oh, he belongs to London, I suppose?"

"Ho, no!" said Trotter. "'E came from the country before I knew 'im—place called Sandown, or Sanville, or somethink——"

"Sanford?"

"Yes, that's it," agreed Trotter—"Sanford, in Essex; that's it. P'r'aps you know the place, Master Leigh?"

"Oh, no! I've never been in Essex in my life," said Leigh.

He walked away. The juniors could not see his face, but Harry Wharton had a curious impression that he had turned quite white. He did not understand Leigh at all.

Trotter looked after Cecil quite expressively.

"Some young gents ain't so werry generous as other young gents," said Trotter oracularly. "Good-bye, sirs! I 'ope as Trimble will be werry dutiful to you."

And Trotter walked off with his bag, the silver jingling in his pocket. Harry Wharton was frowning thoughtfully.

"I'll settle that two bob on Saturday, Johnny," he said.

"All serene, old fellow."

"Same here," said Bob Cherry. "I don't see why Leigh couldn't have tipped Trotter. He's new here, of course, but a chap rolling in money might spring a bob or so when a servant is going on a holiday, I think."

"Why wouldn't he lend us the money?" asked Wharton.

"He's lost his key."

"Hum!"

And Harry Wharton said no-more on the subject. But he thought a great deal. He was not suspicious, but the story of the lost key was too flimsy. Either Leigh would not make that little loan, or he could not. If he would not he was a disobliging fellow; and if he could not, what was to be thought of his stories of a wealthy home, of holidays on the Continent and motor-car trips in his father's car? Was it all swank from beginning to end?

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THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Little Joke!

IT was evening, and there was a crowd in the junior common-room. The nights were closing in earlier now, and chess and draughts were once more brought out to while away the hours till bedtime. Some of the fellows did their prep. in the common-room for the sake of company while they did it, and, needless to say, the prep. suffered in consequence.

Harry Wharton & Co., having finished their preparation in their studies, came down for a "jaw" before bedtime. Cecil Leigh was seated in a chair in the corner by himself, speaking to nobody. As a rule, Leigh was talkative enough, but something was certainly weighing upon his spirits that day. Ever since the football practice—or, at all events, since that talk with the departing Trotter—Leigh had been more depressed than ever. He would probably have retired to his own study, but there he would have had the company of Billy Bunter, who had his preparation to do. Leigh's brow was wrinkled, and he was silent and distraught as he sat in the corner by the window. Harry Wharton glanced at him as he came in, but Leigh did not look in a humour by any means for conversation, and the chums of the Remove did not speak to him.

Billy Bunter came down a few minutes later. He rolled into the common-room, and blinked round for his study-mate. His little round eyes glinted evilly behind his glasses as he caught sight of Cecil Leigh.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up!" said Frank Nugent, who was already deep in a game of chess with Wun-Lung, the Chinese boy.

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"Shut up! You interrupt me! I think I'll move my rook, and you won't get out of that easily, Wun-Lung, old son."

The Chinese boy smiled softly. There was no fellow at Greyfriars who could equal him at chess, or anything like it. Nugent moved his rook, and leaned back in his chair triumphantly. Wun-Lung pushed a piece forward and grinned, and Nugent's face was a study.

"Blessed if I saw that!" he exclaimed.

"Allee samee, matee, matee," said Wun-Lung cheerfully.

"Yes, it's mate," said Harry Wharton, who was looking on.

"If I'd moved my bishop——" began Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "But you didn't!"

"Oh, don't yell!" said Nugent crossly. "That ass Bunter had to come jawing just then, or very likely I should have moved my bish."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Allee samee," murmured Wun-Lung. "If you movee bishee, me movee lookee, and you matee in one movee allee samee."

"My hat! Well, perhaps I should have moved the

knight. Upon the whole, I should have interposed with the knight."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up, Bob! Don't roar! There isn't room for it indoors. If I had interposed my knight——"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Blessed if it isn't all Bunter's fault!" growled Nugent. "If he hadn't started jawing I might have interposed my knight."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry persisted in laughing, and Frank joined in it a minute later, as the humour of his contention struck him. He swept the pieces into the box.

"I say, you fellows," said Billy Bunter; "I've got something here I can't quite understand."

"That's not surprising, if it's anything past the alphabet or the multiplication table," grunted Nugent.

"Oh, really! Look here, I don't know if it's German or Greek, but it certainly can't be English," said Bunter. "I'll stick it up on the wall, so that you can all see it, and see if you can make it out."

"Oh, go ahead!"

The juniors gathered round interestedly. Fellows who knew German were glad of a chance of displaying their knowledge of that wonderful language, and the few who knew any Greek were still more keen about it.

Billy Bunter pinned a sheet of paper upon the wall, and took up a pencil.

"Go ahead!" said Fisher T. Fish, the American junior. "If it's Greek, I guess I can construe for you. I used to do a lot of Greek over there."

To which Bob Cherry rejoined:

"Rats!"

"Linley knows Greek, anyway," said Tom Brown; "but he's up in his study swotting. My hat! That's not Greek, you fat duffer, nor German, either!"

Billy Bunter, as soon as almost all eyes were upon him, had scrawled a "M" on the paper, of a very large size and irregular shape.

He followed it with several other letters, till the word "Master" was complete; but the writing was of a decidedly crabbed and spider-leggy appearance.

The juniors watched him in astonishment. They could not understand in the least what the Owl of the Remove was driving at.

"What's the little game, Bunty?" demanded John Bull. "Are you trying to pull our leg, you silly fathead?"

"Just you watch me."

"That's an English word, chump!"

"It's not much like English writing," grinned Nugent. "But it's pretty nearly as near to it as Bunter ever gets."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter's pencil worked on. The next word was "Sissle."

"What on earth does that mean?" said Temple, of the Upper Fourth. "That's not an English word, nor a German word, either."

"Nor Greek," said Wharton.

"No fear!"

"What does it mean, Bunter?"

"That's what I want to make out," said Bunter stolidly. "That's why I'm writing it up for you fellows to see."

He worked on. "Leigh" was the next word, and then the Removites understood. There was a general growl of disappointment.

"You utter ass!" said Harry Wharton. "Master Cecil Leigh with the Christian name spelt incorrectly. What are you getting at?"

Bunter did not reply. He went on pencilling. "4th Form, Grayfriers Skool, Frierdale." That was, apparently, the finish.

He turned round, in the manner of a showman, and indicated the strange writing with his pencil, and blinked in the direction of Leigh. Cecil Leigh seemed to have become just aware of what was going on. He was sitting bolt upright in his chair, staring towards the crowd of juniors gathered round Billy Bunter.

"There!" exclaimed Bunter. "Now, can anybody construe that?"

"You ass!"

"You fathead!"

"If that's a joke, I don't see where the point comes in," said Harry Wharton. "It's Leigh's name and address misspelt. That's all."

"Where did you come across it, Bunter?" asked Bolsover, with interest. The bully of the Remove seemed already to scent in it something up against the junior he disliked—the fellow who was to have the place he had hoped to take in the Form eleven.

"I found that inscription on an envelope," said Bunter airily. "I couldn't possibly understand what it meant, so I've written it down for you fellows."

And the fat junior blinked spitefully at Leigh. The latter had come forward, and was looking at the paper on the wall. He understood perfectly that this was Billy Bunter's revenge, and his eyes gleamed with anger and chagrin.

"You found it on an envelope?" said Skinner. "Some chap been writing to you from the workhouse, Leigh?"

Leigh calmed himself with an effort.

"It was a letter I received from an old servant of the family, asking me for help," he said. "There is nothing surprising in my father's old gardener not being able to spell correctly, that I can see."

"Same here," said Harry Wharton. "I should advise you not to set up as a funny man, Bunter. You're off-side every time."

Bunter grinned wickedly.

"If that letter was from Leigh's pater's old gardener, Leigh was making a jolly fuss about it," he remarked. "He was tramping about his study like a wild animal for a jolly long time afterwards, and he——"

"Oh, rats!" said Bob Cherry. "I can disprove that, anyway. What was worrying Leigh this afternoon was a letter from his father about a motor-car accident. He told me so himself."

"Was it?" said Bunter, his little eyes twinkling maliciously. "Leigh's only had one letter to-day, anyway. I know that, so his father and his father's old gardener must have put their letters in the same envelope."

There was a laugh from some of the juniors. Cecil Leigh turned crimson.

"I had two letters!" he exclaimed.

"Did you? I don't know where you got them, then," said Bunter evilly. "I was expecting a postal-order to-day, and we only get two posts, and I turned up for the postman each time, and looked over every letter in the rack to make sure whether it was for me. There was only one letter for you that I saw, and that was by the second post."

"I don't intend to discuss the matter with you," said Leigh, with an effort at a lofty tone. "It's like your cheek to meddle in my affairs at all. Ever since I've been in that study with you, you've been prying into my letters, and trying to get into everything I keep locked up."

"That's Bunter all over," said Harry Wharton. "He used to do exactly the same when he was in my study."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

Leigh jerked down the paper from the wall and tore it to pieces.

"Look here——" began Bunter. "I—— Oh!"

Smack!

A ringing box on the ear from Leigh's open hand sent Bunter reeling. He staggered back against the wall, and blinked furiously at the new junior.

"Ow! Yow! Beast! Keep your paws off me, will you? It's not my fault if your father never learned to read and write—— Oh!"

Leigh ran towards him furiously. Bolsover interposed, and pushed back the excited junior, with a very ugly expression upon his face.

"No you don't!" he said.

"Let me get at the cad!"

"You're not going to touch him!" said Bolsover virtuously. "I'm not going to have Bunter bullied because he's fat and can't help himself."

"Look here——"

"I know that letter was from his father, and he's in prison, or something!" howled Bunter. "Keep him off, Bolsover. I know his father's in the workhouse! Ow! I don't believe he's got a father at all! Yow!"

Cecil Leigh's face was convulsed with rage. But he thrust his hands into his pockets, and strode out of the common-room. Bunter rubbed his ear ruefully. The crowd of juniors broke up, laughing. In spite of Bunter's innuendoes, it was not likely to be believed that Cecil Leigh's father had written to him in that very curious orthography. But Bolsover dropped his hand on Bunter's shoulder.

"You're in Leigh's study, Bunter," he said, in a low voice. "The cad is going to take my place in the footer eleven. I never believed in him from the start. I know there's something fishy about him. Keep your eyes open, Bunter, and—and if anything turns up, you tell me. I'll see that Leigh doesn't hurt you."

And Bunter promised eagerly enough that he would keep his eyes open. If Cecil Leigh really had any secrets, they were certainly in danger now.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The New Page.

"BEDTIME!" said Courtney of the Sixth, looking into the junior room. And the fellows yawned and put away books, and papers, and chess, and draughts.

The Remove marched upstairs to the dormitory. Leigh was not with them, and Harry Wharton paused, good-naturedly, at his study to tell him that it was bedtime.

If that had been left for the prefect to do, Leigh would probably have been given lines.

"Bed, Leigh!" said Wharton, looking in.

Leigh started up.

"Is it bedtime?" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"Has—— By the way, has that new page chap come?" asked Leigh carelessly.

"The new boots—Trotter's substitute?" said Harry, with a smile. "No, I don't think so. He's late. I believe he's coming a long distance from the country."

"All serene; I'm coming."

Cecil Leigh followed Harry Wharton & Co. very slowly. There was a strange hesitation in his manner. It seemed as if he did not want to go to bed.

However, he entered the Remove dormitory with the rest, and undressed himself and turned in with the Remove.

Courtney extinguished the lights.

One by one the Remove fellows dropped off to sleep. But Cecil Leigh did not sleep. He lay awake, with a dark and anxious brow.

He was listening.

In the deep silence of the house he knew that he would be able to hear a ring at the bell in the servants' quarters. He was listening for that. Why he should have listened for it, why he should be in the least interested by the arrival of the new page, would have been a profound mystery to his Form-fellows.

A faint and distant sound came to his ear, and he started up in bed. In a moment he had slipped out and was dressing.

Bob Cherry looked sleepily out of bed. He was not asleep yet.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Who's that?"

"It's all right," said Leigh.

"What are you getting up for?"

"I've just remembered that I left some money on the table in my study. I'm just going to slip down and put it away."

"Oh! Thought you always locked your money up?" grunted Bob Cherry.

"Well, I—I do as a rule; but——"

"Don't let a prefect catch you, that's all."

Leigh dressed hurriedly and left the dormitory, closing the door behind him. But he did not proceed in the direction of the Remove passage. He made his way by the back stairs, so that he could look over the lower banisters and watch the new-comer.

A fat red-faced boy in a coat was standing in the gaslight, talking to Mrs. Kebble, the housekeeper.

Cecil Leigh could not see his face for a moment or two; but something in the figure and manner of the boy appeared to strike him as familiar, for his lips closed tight together, and he held hard hold of the banisters, as if he had suddenly recognised a dangerous enemy.

The new-comer turned his head a little, and Leigh looked down and saw his face.

He drew back quickly into the shadow of the staircase. It was a common enough face he saw—fat, somewhat like a dumpling, not striking in any way. But the grim visage of Banquo had no more unnerving effect upon Macbeth than the fat commonplace face of the new page upon Cecil Leigh.

The junior's very lips turned white.

"It's the same," he murmured. "Of course, I knew it! But—but what horrible luck—what fearful luck! Who could have thought of anything like this?"

He crept away silently.

In the distance, as he crept away, he heard the voice of the new page, explaining in squeaky tones how it was that he had arrived so late. But Leigh did not stay to listen. He had seen the new page, and he was satisfied—it was the person he had feared that it would be. Why should he fear? That was something that Cecil Leigh was not likely to explain, if he could possibly help it.

He made his way slowly back to the Remove dormitory.

The room was silent as he entered, save for the steady breathing of the juniors, most of them fast asleep.

Cecil Leigh turned into bed quietly.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came sleepily from Bob Cherry's bed. "Have you locked up the money safely, Leigh?"

"Yes, thanks, Cherry!"

"Careless ass to leave it about," grunted Bob Cherry.

"You ought to be more careful. You chaps rolling in money are always careless with it."

"Well, I've always had plenty," said Leigh. Even at that moment, troubled and tortured in mind as he was, he could not resist that reply. Swank was part and parcel of the boy's nature.

"Lucky bargee!" said Bob Cherry.

And he went to sleep again.

Cecil Leigh did not go to sleep so easily. He tried to do so, but it was hard. The fat, heavy face of the new page seemed to be glimmering at him from the darkness of the dormitory. The squeaky tones were still in his ears. He could not sleep—he could only think of the days to follow.

"If I knew him, he will know me!" he muttered again and again. "Oh, heavens! And he is to be here for a fortnight; I cannot possibly avoid him for all that time. It would be impossible. And if he talks——"

The junior groaned.

"My hat! Who's ill?" came a voice from Harry Wharton's bed.

Leigh was silent and trembling.

"Somebody groaned," said Harry, sitting up in bed. "I heard it. Is anybody ill?"

There was no reply.

"Is that some of your blessed ventriloquism, Bunter?"

Only a snore from the fat junior answered. Billy Bunter was asleep. Harry Wharton, very much puzzled, settled down to sleep again. If a fellow had a pain that made him groan out in the middle of the night, there was no conceivable reason why he should not say so. Wharton was perplexed.

Cecil Leigh lay silent, in miserable thought—but very careful not to give audible expression to his troubles again. It was long before he fell asleep, and then his sleep was very broken till morning. But he had thought of something; and when the Remove turned out in the morning he had something to say.

"The new page has come," he remarked, as he was dressing.

"He came after we went to bed, then," said Wharton, turning a wet and shining face from his washstand.

"Yes; I went down to put some money away I had left in my study, and I happened to see him in the passage."

"What the dickens was he doing in the Remove passage?" asked Frank Nugent.

"I—I mean the Lower passage; I heard them, and looked down. I fancy I've seen that fellow Trimble before."

"Oh!" said Wharton, with some interest. "Now I think of it, you seemed to know the name when Trotter was speaking of it yesterday."

"Yes; and I don't know any good about him, either," said Leigh.

Wharton looked at him directly.

"Does that mean that you do know bad about him?" he asked.

Leigh hesitated.

"I don't know that I ought to say that," he replied. "I'm not sure it's the same chap, as I—I've never seen him before. But I heard about a school-page named Trimble—at a school where a friend of mine was—being sacked for making up lying stories about one of the fellows in the school, and circulating them in the place. From what I heard, it seemed to be a sort of mania with him—he had a lively imagination, and he made up the most probable-sounding stories; and there was a row about it, and he was sacked."

"And his name was Trimble?"

"Yes."

"It's not a common name," said Bob Cherry. "This is quite possibly the same fellow. He ought to be asked about it."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Leigh hastily. "I don't think so. I'm not sure it's the same, and if it is, he may be trying to be decent now, and not do anything of the sort here. I just mentioned it to put you fellows on your guard, in case anything of the kind should happen here; you'd know just how much to believe if the fellow began any yarns about a chap in the school."

"I certainly shouldn't listen to him, for one," said Harry Wharton.

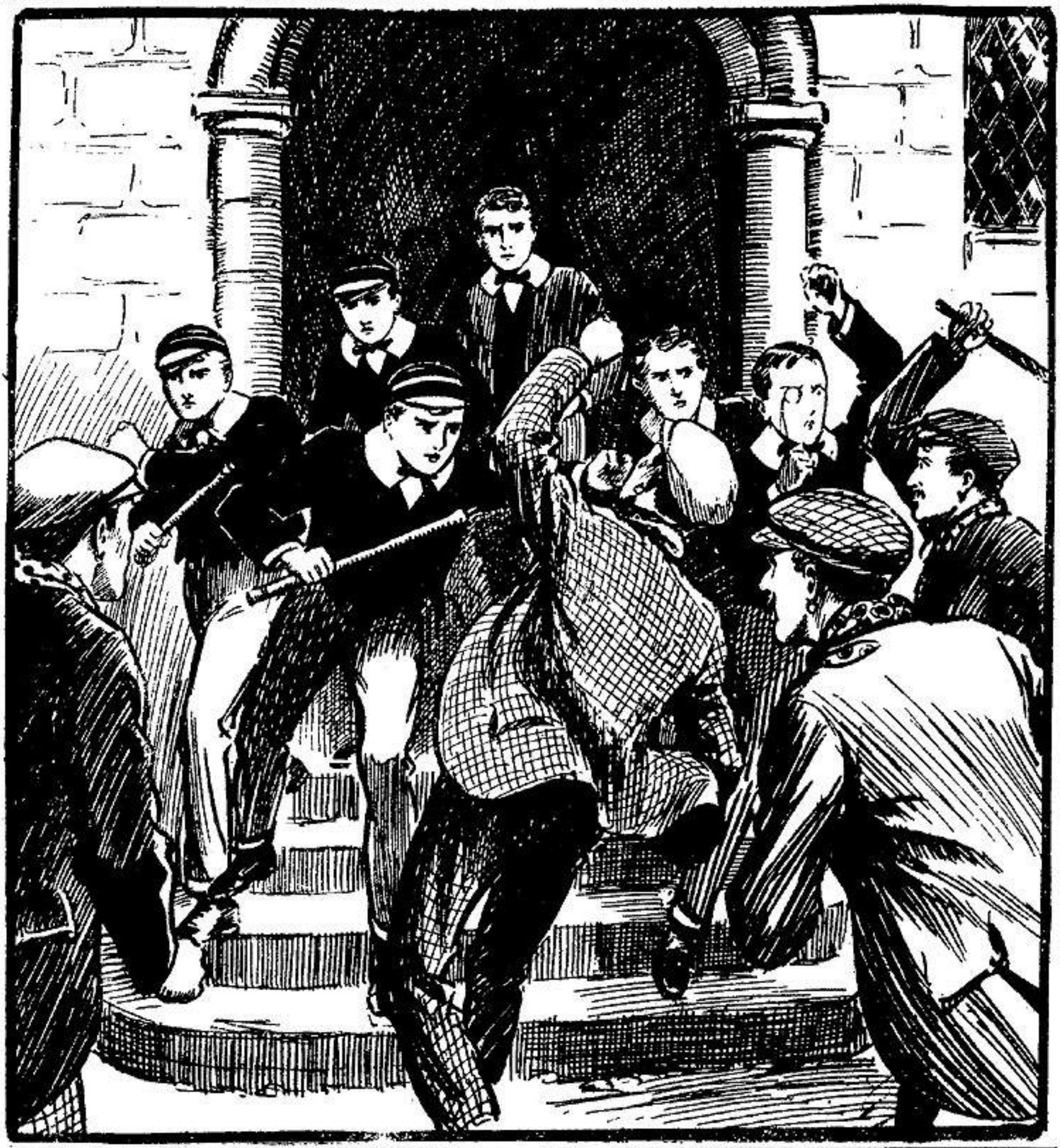
"Some fellows would; and it's just as well to know what to expect. But I don't think anything need be said to Trimble."

"I suppose you're right; but—hang it, this is rather unsatisfactory, you know. If the chap is such a rotter, he ought to be kicked out," said Bob Cherry.

"Suppose he's turned over a new leaf?"

"Hum!"

Cecil Leigh turned back to his washing. He had effected his purpose, at all events; if the new page should tell any unlikely stories of any fellow in the Remove, his stories would be looked upon with immediate suspicion.



The gipsy gang made a desperate rush, but the juniors stopped it. The cricket stumps lashed out heavily, for Tom Merry & Co. did not care how hard they hit. *(An exciting incident taken from the splendid long, complete school tale of Tom Merry & Co., entitled "The Gipsy Schoolboy," by Martin Clifford, contained in this week's issue of The "Gem" Library. Out on Thursday. Price One Penny.*

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
In Fear.

CECIL LEIGH, as a rule, was among the first down of the Remove, but on this particular morning he was the last. Not that he had anything in particular to do. He hung about the dormitory doing nothing especial; and finally went down, and directly into the dining-room, without going into the Close or lingering in the hall. Leigh's face was a little pale, and as he crossed the hall he held his handkerchief to it. Bob Cherry gave him a sympathetic thump on the shoulder.

"Toothache, Leigh?"

"Yes," said Cecil, making a wry face. "Beastly!"

"Sorry! Tried anything for it?"

"Oh, it will go away! I have these attacks, but they don't last long."

"It's rotten," said Bob Cherry. "I've got some menthol in my study. Shall I buzz off and get it for you?"

"Oh, it's all right; don't trouble."

Leigh took his place at the breakfast-table, still keeping the handkerchief to his face. A fellow more suspicious than Bob Cherry might have fancied that he was keeping his face concealed from view for some reason—yet what reason could he possibly have had? But over the handkerchief Leigh's sharp eyes were wandering up and down the room. It was the page's duty to help in serving the breakfast, but he was at the senior tables, and did not come near the Remove, or indeed glance towards them. Leigh's eyes fixed upon Trimble at once, and every few moments wandered round in his

direction again. He lowered the handkerchief from his face at last.

"Is that the new page over there?" remarked Bob Cherry, who was beside him.

"Yes, that's the chap," said Leigh carelessly.

"Toothache better?"

"Yes, much better, thanks!"

"Glad to hear it; it's a beastly thing," said Bob Cherry sympathetically. "I hope it wasn't that slog on the jaw yesterday that started it."

"Oh, no; that's all right!"

Leigh did not recover his ease of manner until the Remove were in the Form-room. There—perhaps because the new page could not possibly be there—he seemed to recover.

But the worry of manner descended upon him again when the Form were dismissed. The recess after third lesson he spent in the Form-room. But when morning lessons were over he had to go out with the Form. Bob Cherry saw him give a glance up and down the Form-room passage.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Looking for somebody?" asked Bob.

Leigh turned crimson.

"Certainly not!" he exclaimed. "What the dickens do you mean, Bob Cherry?"

Bob stared.

"I asked you a simple question enough," he replied. "No harm in it. If you're looking for somebody, I may be able to tell you where he is, that's all."

"Well, I'm not," said Cecil abruptly.

"All serene; keep your wool on!"

And Bob Cherry walked away rather huffily. He could not understand, and did not like, these sudden sharpnesses of manner in Cecil Leigh. Bob Cherry liked a fellow to be either a friend or a foe, so that a chap would always know how to take him. An uncertain and irritable temper got on Bob's nerves very much.

Leigh strode quickly towards the staircase, and ascended the stairs and went into his study. He remained there until the bell rang for dinner. When he came downstairs again to the dining-room he had his handkerchief to his face.

This time Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, who was at the head of the Lower Fourth table, remarked upon it.

"Is anything the matter with you, Leigh?"

"No, sir—only a slight touch of toothache," said Leigh, turning red.

"You had it at breakfast this morning, I think."

"Ye-es, sir."

"If there is anything wrong with your teeth, Leigh, you should see the dentist at once. The matter may become very serious if neglected."

"It's—it's all right, sir. I—I had a nasty jar on the jaw yesterday, and that started it," said Leigh hastily. "That's all, sir."

"Oh, very well!"

"My only hat!" murmured Bob Cherry.

Leigh caught Bob's eye, and became crimson. He had told Bob that morning that it was not the knock on the jaw that had started his toothache, and now he had told Mr. Quelch the direct opposite. It was evidently Bob's inquiry that had put the thought into his head. But why should he lie? Was he only pretending to have the toothache?

Bob Cherry felt a sense of disgust. There was a wiliness, a tortuousness, about Cecil Leigh that roused all his repugnance. The fellow had some good qualities—but why was he such an arrant liar?

Leigh was thinking little enough about the lie. He had embarked upon a course at Greyfriars that could not be followed without lying—and every fresh lie had to be supported and buttressed up by more lies. It flashed across Leigh's mind, sometimes, that he would have done more wisely to tell the plain truth at the start. But—— And, besides, it was too late now. He was committed to the line he had started to follow.

After dinner, Leigh walked down to the Cloisters, and remained there till the bell rang for afternoon school. During afternoon school he had had some repose, but the cloud settled on his face again when the Remove were dismissed. Nobody took any special interest in Cecil Leigh's moods and expressions; but had a youthful Sherlock Holmes been watching him, it would infallibly have been seen that Leigh was in momentary terror of meeting somebody who was in the house, and whom he might run against by chance at any moment.

And the bitter part of it was that he knew the meeting must come about some time. He was only staving off the evil hour.

But it gave him time to think. Not that thinking had helped him much so far. He could not think of a way out of the strange and troublesome dilemma that he found himself in. It was so utterly unexpected, so unheard of, he could not possibly have foreseen anything of the kind. What to do now he did not know, excepting to dodge as long as possible what he knew to be inevitable.

It came at last. He knew it must come, and he was prepared for it. He had hurried up to the Remove passage after school, while the rest of the Form swarmed out into the Close to make the most of what was left of the daylight.

Trimble, the new page, was coming down the Remove passage, with a basket of wood in his hand, fresh from laying the fire in Lord Mauleverer's luxurious study.

Mauleverer had started fires in the evening already, and Mauleverer's tips were so large that Trimble, like everybody else employed in the house, was only too anxious to serve him. The juniors built their own fires, as a rule, but Lord Mauleverer frankly confessed that he couldn't; but a fellow who gave a tip of half-a-crown for that little service was not likely to be under the necessity of doing it himself.

Trimble had a half-crown in his pocket, and a basket of wood in his hand, and a satisfied grin upon his fat face as he came down the Remove passage, just as Cecil Leigh ascended the stairs and reached the top.

They met face to face at the top of the stairs, almost running into one another.

Leigh started back, his face going white for a moment, but his lips coming firmly together.

Trimble was beginning to mutter an apology, when he looked at Leigh, and the words died on his lips. An expression of the most utter astonishment crossed his fat face.

Crash!

The basket of wood went to the floor, and the wood rolled out over the linoleum.

Trimble started back, still staring blankly at the junior of Greyfriars.

"Lummy!" he ejaculated.

"What do you mean?" demanded Leigh, in his loftiest and most crushing manner. "Are you speaking to me?"

"Lummy, if it ain't 'Opkins!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER.
An Old Acquaintance.

"'OPKINS!" said the new page, as in a dream. "If it ain't 'Opkins! Wot are you a-doin' 'ere, 'Opkins?"

Leigh breathed hard. His eyes were flaming. At that moment, if he could have silenced the page, there was little he would have stopped short of to do it.

But he could not. He could only brazen it out, with despair gnawing at his heart while the false words were on his lips.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed haughtily.

"Why, 'Opkins——"

"Are you mad? My name is Leigh. I belong to this school. How dare you address me in this way?" Leigh exclaimed harshly.

The page started. He stared at Leigh again, searching his face, evidently in a state of the greatest amazement.

"Leigh?" he repeated.

"Yes, that is my name."

"You belong to—to this 'ere school?"

"Certainly! I am in the Lower Fourth Form."

Trimble seemed dazed.

"Oh, come orf," he said at last. "You can't gammon me, you know. Blessed if I know wot you're doin' in Etons, 'Opkins! I s'pose you've been taking some of the young gent's clothes. But you're 'Enry 'Opkins, and you know you are."

"Fellow!"

"Fellow, eh?" said Trimble. "Wot do you mean by fellow? Ain't I as good as you?"

The page raised his tone angrily.

Leigh made a hurried gesture.

"Quiet!"

Trimble sneered.

"Wot am I to be quiet for?" he demanded. "If you're Leigh, of the Lower Fourth Form 'ere, and I'm the page, wot should I be quiet for? Why don't you complain to the 'ead or the 'ousekeeper about my impertinence in speakin' to you, eh?"

Leigh breathed hard.

"I don't want to get you into trouble," he began.

Trimble grinned.

"You mean you don't want me to get you into trouble," he said.

"Look here, Trimble, you think you recognise me——"

"I know you're 'Enry 'Opkins, if that's wot you mean," said Trimble. "If that's wot you mean, I do recognise you. You're 'Enry 'Opkins, and you was skipper of Sanford Athletic when I was half-back in the team. You know that."

"I've never played Association football in my life."

"My hye!"

"I've never even heard of a place called Sanford."

"Lummy!"

"My name is Cecil Leigh, and I belong to the Lower Fourth here. You can ask any of the fellows, and he will tell you."

"Oh, come orf!"

"Here's Mauleverer!" said Leigh desperately, as the schoolboy earl came out of his study. "Ask him. He belongs to my Form; he's a friend of mine."

Trimble chuckled.

"Why, 'e's a lord!" he exclaimed.

"I know he is."

"And he's a friend of yours, hey?"

"Yes."

"Gammon!"

"Ask him who I am," said Leigh.

"Mind, I will, if you stick it out."

"Ask him."

Lord Mauleverer paused as Leigh made a sign to him. Leigh's face was white, and there was a hunted look in his eyes.

"Will you stop a minute, Mauleverer?" he exclaimed.

"Certainly, my dear fellow! Can I do anything for you?" asked his lordship lazily.

"Yes. This youth—Trimble—thinks he has seen me before somewhere," said Leigh. "Will you tell him who I am?"

The schoolboy earl looked puzzled.

"Certainly!" he said. "You are Cecil Leigh, of the Remove—my Form. Is that all?"

"That's all, thanks."

His lordship nodded and passed on. Trimble almost staggered in his astonishment. Leigh watched his fat face narrowly.

"Well, are you satisfied now?" he asked.

"Yes," said Trimble slowly, "I ham!"

"You know I'm not the person you took me to be?" asked Leigh, with a breath of relief.

Trimble shook his head.

"Not that, 'Opkins," he replied; "I know you are 'Enry 'Opkins. Wot I'm satisfied about is that you've took them in at this school. You're 'Enry 'Opkins, and if you're calling yourself Cecil Leigh 'ere, it's because you're up to no good."

"You cheeky young scoundrel——"

"Better language, please," said Trimble threateningly. "I remember you was always high-falutin', though you was only a innkeeper's son in Sanford. You was always full of stories about grand relations and such like. I never believed 'arf of it, nor didn't the others, neither. I says——"

"Are you going to persist in this absurd story?" asked Leigh.

"Wot absurd story?"

"That you recognise me as some low rotter of your own class that you knew in your native village."

Trimble's eyes gleamed.

"I reckon," he answered emphatically, "I know you, 'Enry 'Opkins. You used to come it 'igh over me in the Sanford Athletic. I wasn't fit for you to speak to, 'cept in a patronisin' way, because my father was barman in the inn, and your father was boss of the Sanford Arms. But——"

"You are mad!" said Leigh hoarsely. "I tell you——"

"You tell me whoppers," said Trimble, raising his voice. "You was always a swanker and a liar, 'Enry 'Opkins. You was always——"

"Hush!"

"I'm not going to 'ush," said Trimble. "If I'm not telling the truth, go and complain to the 'Ead, and get me sacked."

Leigh clenched his hands. That was exactly what he could not do. He knew it, and the page knew it. Trimble chuckled softly.

"Well, why don't you go?" he demanded.

Leigh was silent.

"Yes, Master 'Enry 'Opkins, I know you——"

"Oh, silence!" muttered Leigh. "Silence! C-come into my study."

He almost dragged the page into his study, and closed the door. Bob Cherry came upstairs, and looked surprised at finding the passage empty.

"My hat!" said Bob to himself. "I'll swear I heard a row going on; but there's nobody here. H'm!"

And Bob went on to his study for his footer. As he passed Leigh's door there was a murmur of voices audible within; but Bob Cherry did not even notice it. He was not addicted to the little ways of Billy Bunter, and he would have scorned to listen to a word, even if he had allowed himself to be curious about the private affairs of others, which he never did.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Snob!

CECIL LEIGH came downstairs a little later, looking very pale.

Billy Bunter was waiting for him at the foot of the staircase. There was a very unpleasant grin upon Bunter's fat face.

"Letter for you, Leigh!" he exclaimed.

Leigh started.

"Thank you!" he said quietly.

He went over to the rack where the letters were stuck for the fellows to take them.

Quite a crowd of juniors had gathered there, and they were all looking at one letter—a letter addressed to Leigh in crabbed writing and queer spelling.

"Master Sissle Leigh, 4th Form, Grayfrires Skool."

Leigh turned scarlet

It was pretty clear that the fellows were interested in that letter. Nobody had touched it, but a dozen or more had seen the queer address upon it.

"Another letter from your father's old gardener," said Bolsover, with an ill-natured grin. "These old servants of the family never seem to give you any peace, Leigh."

And there was a general laugh.

Leigh took down the letter, and put it into his pocket without replying. Bolsover and Skinner and Snoop and several more fellows barred his way.

"Won't you let us see it?" said Bolsover, with a sneer. "We should be awfully interested in the troubles of your pater's gardener."

"It ought to be entertaining," remarked Skinner.

Leigh had a hunted look.

"Mind your own business!" he exclaimed. "I suppose you don't expect to be allowed to read my private correspondence."

"But a letter from an old gardener can't be very private," said Bolsover. "You might let us have a look at it."

"I shall do nothing of the kind!"

"I say, Bolsover, take it away from him," said Billy Bunter. "I know jolly well it's not from any blessed old gardener. That's a crammer."

But Bolsover would not go so far as that. Leigh strode away, the juniors making room for him to pass, and laughing loudly as he went. The general impression was that Leigh had some uneducated relation whose existence he was trying to keep a secret, but who tactlessly persisted in writing to him. There was nothing whatever to be ashamed of in having an uneducated relation, but the fact that Leigh was ashamed of it laid him open to ridicule.

The junior tramped out angrily into the Close. He stopped under the elms, and drew the letter from his pocket.

He read it through—through the ill-spelt and ill-constructed sentences—with an angry frown upon his brow. But the letter was so full of confidence and affection that the boy's face softened in spite of himself.

"He's a dear old chap," he muttered—"a dear old boy, and precious few fathers would do as much for their sons as he has done for me! But—but he doesn't understand—he can't understand! He won't understand! And—and I can't tell him; it would be too caddish! But—but what shall I do?"

"Leigh! Leigh!"

The junior turned round as his name was called. Bob Cherry was waving to him from the distance. Leigh thrust the letter into his pocket.

"Coming to the footer?" bawled Bob Cherry.

"Yes."

"Come on, then."

Leigh joined the junior footballers. The form he had shown the previous day had made him rather a marked figure among the Removites, and Bulstrode, the Remove captain, had decided to play him in the next Form match. Bolsover stood looking on with a scowl while the juniors were at practice. The bully of the Remove was not allowed to join in the practice with the rest of the Form now. He had stepped on the field once, and had been ordered off, and it was so evident that the footballers were only waiting for a pretext to pitch him off that he retired quietly.

But his heart was full of envy, malice, and all uncharitableness. He regarded Leigh as an interloper, who had taken his place, and he was longing for a chance to get even, as he termed it, with the new boy. And he suspected Leigh! Exactly what to suspect he did not know, but he had an impression that there was something "fishy" about him. If he could only catch him tripping! If such an opportunity came, the Remove bully was not likely to fail to make use of it.

Bulstrode had formed up two elevens from the Remove football club to play a practice match. There was not time before dark to play a full match out, but the first half was enough to show how the team would pull together. There was a Form match with the Upper Fourth due on Saturday, and Bulstrode wanted his eleven in fighting order by then. He called out to Leigh.

"You'll be forward," he said. "I think I'll try you at inside-right!"

"I usually play centre."

"Eh!"

"I—I mean——"

Bulstrode stared blankly at the junior. Only the day before, Cecil Leigh had said that he did not play Soccer, and had never played it before. There is an old saying about the necessity of good memories for those who depart from the truth, which Leigh would have done well to bear in mind.

"Blessed if I make you out," said Bulstrode. "You said——"

"I—I mean——"

"Well, I thought you played jolly well for a beginner," said Bulstrode. "But what on earth did you lie about it for?"

"I—I didn't. That was a—a slip. What I meant to say was that I'd rather play centre!" stammered Leigh.

Bulstrode gave him a very suspicious look.

"Oh, was it?" he said. "Well, I don't care twopence where you'd rather play. I think you'll do as inside-right; and I want an inside-right, and I'm going to try you there."

"Oh, very well!"

"You're outside-right, Linley!"

"Right you are, Bulstrode," said the Lancashire lad cheerily.

Leigh gave him a look. He had learned all about Mark Linley, the factory lad, who had come to Greyfriars on a scholarship which he had won by dint of hard work and sheer grit. There were some fellows in the Remove who never suffered Mark to forget that he had been a factory lad, and who never failed to inform new boys of the circumstance. Mark did not mind. He had the good sense to know that there was nothing to be ashamed of in his origin; and if he thought about the matter at all, he was proud of having worked for his own living, and of having been able to do it.

As a matter of fact, there were very few fellows at Greyfriars who could have earned their daily bread if they had been thrown suddenly upon their own resources. But there were snobs at Greyfriars, as everywhere, and they did not allow the factory to be forgotten. And, as will usually be found to be the case, fellows who had little secrets in their own family history were the roughest upon the factory lad.

Leigh glanced at Linley, and then stepped towards Bulstrode, who was turning away to speak to Bob Cherry. He touched the football captain on the sleeve of his jersey.

"Are you playing that chap—Linley?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Is he in the Form team?"

"Yes."

"Oh!"

"What about it?" demanded Bulstrode. "He's the best winger we've got, and if you play up to him all right, you'll do."

"I was thinking——"

"Get it off your chest," said Bulstrode, who was not famous for politeness on the footer field. A football captain has many little worries, and Bulstrode allowed them to roughen up his temper. "What is it? I've no time to waste."

"Well," said Leigh, "I don't want to be snobbish, of course."

"What are you talking about?"

"But I think that—well, that there's a limit," said Leigh. "I don't see playing a factory lad in a team of gentlemen's sons. That's what I mean, straight from the shoulder."

Bob Cherry began to glare. He was Mark Linley's special chum, and any word against Mark always touched Bob on the raw. Bulstrode glared, too, but rather uncomfortably. It was in Bulstrode's memory that, when Linley first came to Greyfriars, Bulstrode had joined most prominently in ragging the "factory cad." Leigh was following, though unconsciously, in Bulstrode's own footsteps; and it hardly lay in Bulstrode's mouth to rebuke him.

"Oh, don't talk rot!" said Bulstrode. "Linley's our best winger, and what does it matter whether he's the son of a factory hand or the son of a duke, so long as he plays good footer?"

"Well, there are such things as class distinctions, I believe," said Leigh loftily. "Come to that, there's no reason why Trimble shouldn't sit down to brekker with us; but he's not allowed to. There's no reason why Gosling, the porter, shouldn't shake hands with Dr. Locke; but he doesn't. It's not a question of reasons, but of customs, and what a chap is used to; and I tell you plainly that I don't care about playing in a team with a factory hand in it."

"Then, don't play!" burst out Bob Cherry, in a roar. "You disgusting snob!"

"What!"

"You—you rotten swanker!" roared Bob Cherry. "Do you think Marky isn't good enough to play beside you? Marky never told a lie in his life, and I don't believe you ever told anything else! Bah! You make me sick!"

"Look here, Bob Cherry——"

"Oh, don't talk to me!" roared Bob. "I won't listen to you! You're a creepy cad, that's what you are! Not play with Marky! The most decent chap in the school, bar none! The most decent and honourable chap a fellow ever knew. Why, it's you that's not fit to play with him! Do you think Marky would roll out lies as you do? It would make him sick!"

"'Nuff said!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "I'm going to play Linley, anyway. If you don't want to play, Leigh, you can stand out. But make up your mind about it at once."

"I think——"

"Oh, shut up!" roared Bob Cherry. "Don't let's have any more of your rot. I can hardly keep my hands off you, as it is, you horrible snob!"

"I——"

"Just because you happen to be a rich man's son, you want to look down on a chap whose boots you're not fit to clean," said Bob Cherry. "Bah! You are a cad!"

"I tell you——"

"You'll tell me nothing. It would make me ill to listen to you. Shut up!"

"I——"

"Shut up, I say, or I'll shut you up!" bawled Bob.

Fellows were gathering round from all sides now. Bob Cherry's voice could be heard almost as far as the School House. Leigh bit his lip hard.

"Cheese it, Bob, old son," said Mark softly. "I don't mind what he says. It's for Bulstrode to decide whom he's going to play."

"I've decided," said Bulstrode. "I'm going to play you, Linley. I'm not likely to leave the best winger out to please a new-comer. I don't care twopence whether Leigh plays or not. He can please himself."

"I shall play, of course, if I'm wanted in the team," said Leigh sulkily.

"Oh, I don't know that you're particularly wanted, if you come to that!" said Bulstrode coolly. "I'm willing to give you a chance, that's what it amounts to."

"I'll play."

"Then keep your head shut, and play," said the Remove captain.

Leigh was looking very sulky as he turned out with the Remove footballers. Bob Cherry was behind him at half, and Leigh, as they went into the field, spoke to him.

"I say, Cherry, I didn't mean——"

"Are you talking to me?" demanded Bob.

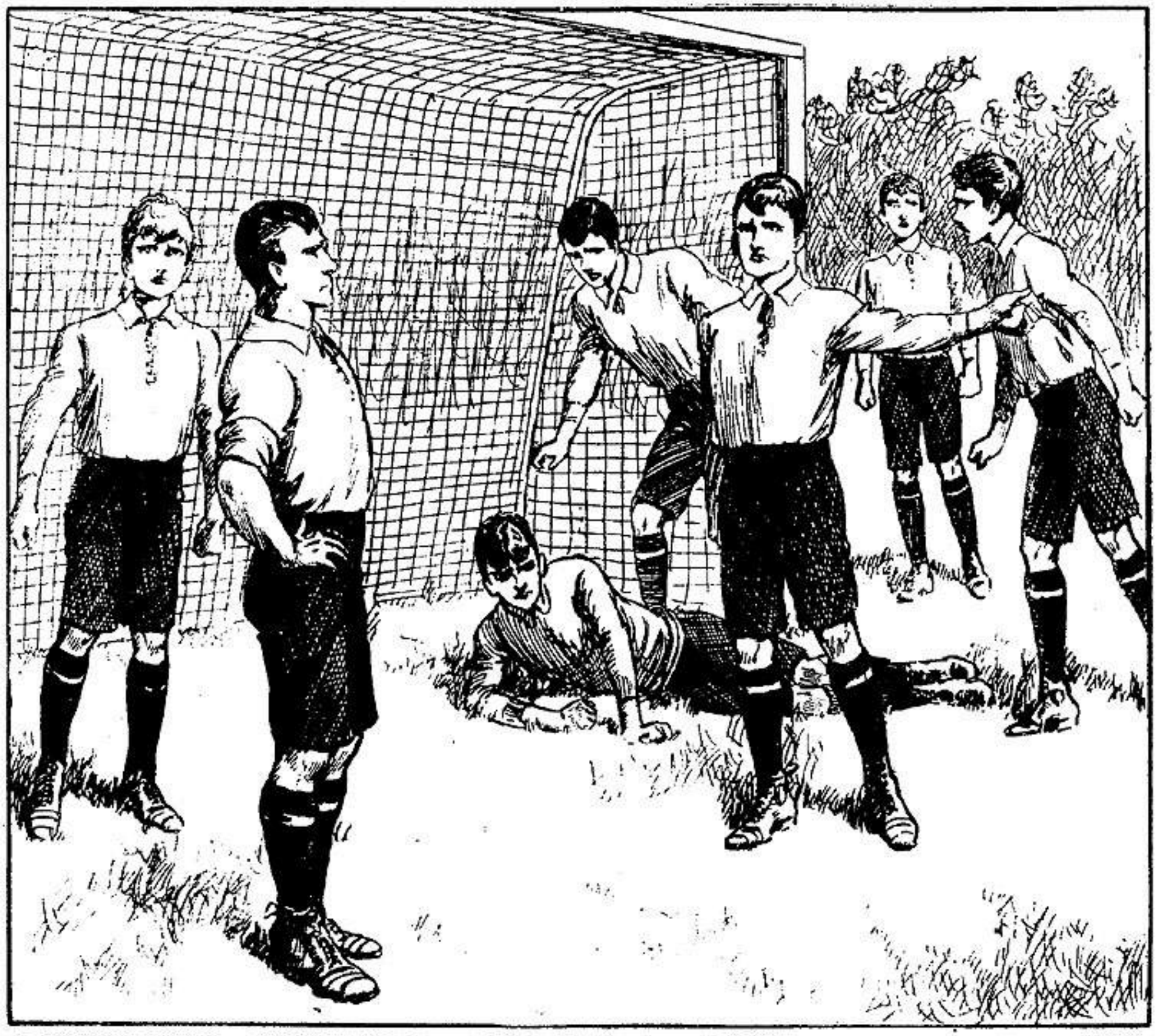
"Yes. I——"

"Then don't! I don't want to speak to you! You make me sick!"

"I meant——"

"Oh, shut up!"

And Cecil Leigh shut up. There was certainly no placating Bob Cherry until his anger had had time to evaporate. But in this instance Bob Cherry's anger did not evaporate so quickly as usual. There was a cloud on his face all through the footer practice, and when his eyes rested on Cecil Leigh there was resentment in them. And after it was over, and the juniors trooped off the field, Bob Cherry would speak no word to Leigh. When Cecil addressed him once, Bob turned his back, and after that Leigh gave it up. For once, Bob Cherry allowed the sun to go down upon his wrath.



Bulstrode pointed with his hand. "Get off, Bolsover! I order you off the field. Go!" *(See Chapter 4.)*

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Lord Mauleverer!

LORD MAULEVERER yawned, and rose from his easy-chair and stretched himself. Through the open window of his study there came the sound of the distant shouts from the football field. Lord Mauleverer opened his hat-box and took out a silk topper, and spent three minutes arranging it upon his head before the glass. Then he went downstairs and sauntered out into the Close.

Lord Mauleverer was going to pay his visit to the Friardale tailor. It had not come off, after all, the previous day, his lordship having yawned in his study till it was too late. But it had to be done some time, and the schoolboy earl was making a terrific effort to get it done now. He sauntered out of the gates of Greyfriars, swinging his gold-headed cane lazily, and strolled down the dusty lane towards Friardale.

It was not a long walk to Friardale, but Lord Mauleverer took a good deal of time about it. His tailor detained him some time longer, the subject under discussion being a most important one—whether Lord Mauleverer should, or should not, have an outside breast-pocket to his lounge jacket. True, outside breast-pockets had gone out of fashion long ago, and certainly the absence of them improved the shape of a lounge jacket.

On the other hand, the tailor assured Lord Mauleverer solemnly that they were coming in again. Lord Mauleverer, after deep and weighty consideration, decided that they should not come in again, so far as he was concerned. Having deliberated over the matter, he was of opinion that it was more advisable to follow the dictates of art than the dictates of fashion.

Fashion is ephemeral; art is eternal, as he explained to the tailor, who did not understand him in the least, but was willing to do as he was told. This most important matter settled, Lord Mauleverer, feeling considerably exhausted, strolled out of the tailor's again, and refreshed himself with a ginger-pop at Uncle Clegg's. Then he pulled himself together for the effort of walking back to Greyfriars.

It occurred to him about this time to look at his watch. He discovered that he had three minutes in which to get over a quarter of an hour's walk, unless he was to be late for calling-over, to say nothing of being locked out. He yawned portentiously as he made the discovery.

"Begad! How rotten!" he murmured.

And he began to walk quite quickly for him.

"'Ere, youngster!"

Lord Mauleverer paused. It seemed almost impossible that anybody could think of addressing the Earl of Mauleverer in that manner; but it was the case. A stout, ruddy-faced man in somewhat striking attire was standing at the cross-roads, peering up at the notice-board there in the dusk, and evidently unable to make out what was upon it.

"Did you speak to me, sir?" asked his lordship.

The ruddy-faced man nodded.

"Yes, young gentleman. I can't read this board. P'r'aps you would be so kind as to read it for me?"

"Certainly!" said his lordship politely.

The ruddy man was mopping an expansive brow with a red handkerchief. He wore a big white waistcoat, somewhat

dusty, and a white tall hat. This contrasted with the greenish hue of his coat and the purple of his trousers. His boots, which were of a very large size, and very square-toed, were covered with dust. But, striking as the stout gentleman was in many respects, there was an expression of genial good-nature and kindness upon his face that was more striking still. Lord Mauleverer's opinion, as he glanced at him, was that he was a jolly old boy, and as simple as a baby in his nature, though no fool, either.

"It's getting dark," the ruddy gentleman explained, "and it's not much schooling I 'ad in my young days neither."

Lord Mauleverer nodded genially. He rather liked the old gentleman at first sight.

"I was told at the railway-station," went on the old fellow, "that this was the way to Greyfrires. But 'ere's the cross-roads, and wot's a man to do when he can't see the signpost, young sir?"

"Oh, you are going to Greyfriars, sir?" said Lord Mauleverer.

"I should say I ham!" said the old gentleman. "I'm goin' to see my boy."

"Ah, indeed!"

Lord Mauleverer thought he understood. This was undoubtedly the father of Trimble, the new page.

"Name of 'Opkins!" exclaimed the old gentleman. "I'm goin' to see my boy 'Enry."

"Are you really?" said Lord Mauleverer, realising that the gentleman could not be the father of Trimble if his name was Hopkins.

"P'r'aps you know the school?" the old gentleman suggested.

The schoolboy earl laughed.

"Well, yes," he said. "You see, I belong to it."

Mr. Hopkins started.

"You belong to Greyfrires?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh! Then I've bin talking too much," murmured the old gentleman. "May I ask what Form you belong to, young sir?"

"The Lower Fourth—the Remove, we call it."

"That's 'is Form," assented Mr. Hopkins.

"Ah! Your son is in the Remove?" asked Lord Mauleverer.

"He is, young sir."

"I don't remember a fellow named Hopkins in the Remove," said Lord Mauleverer thoughtfully. "There is a Hodgson and a Hodson."

"Name of 'Opkins," said the old gentleman. "But—but——" He paused, evidently in great confusion, and mopped his heated brow again.

"New fellow, perhaps?" asked Lord Mauleverer, with interest.

"Well, not long at the skool," said Mr. Hopkins. "But——"

"I dare say I've never heard his name, then," said Lord Mauleverer. "Of course, a fellow doesn't know every chap in his Form, but he generally hears the names, if only at calling-over. But if you're going to Greyfriars——"

"I ham."

"Then I'll show you the way, sir, if you wouldn't mind walking quickly, because I'm late for call-over already."

"Thank you, young gentleman." Mr. Hopkins did not stir, however. "I—I beg your pardon. Would you mind telling me your name?"

"Mauleverer."

"Not Lord Mauleverer?" exclaimed Mr. Hopkins, in surprise.

"Yes," said his lordship, with a smile.

"Then it's all right. I can speak hout to you, as you're one of my son's best friends," said Mr. Hopkins.

Lord Mauleverer looked astounded.

"One of your son's best friends?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"But I don't know anybody of the name of Hopkins!" exclaimed Lord Mauleverer, in complete bewilderment.

The old gentleman smiled slightly.

"'Enry always had aristocratic tastes," he said. "He was always a cut above his family, my boy was. I was never ashamed of my name—'Opkins is a good, honest British name, which the same is true of 'Enry. But 'Enry never cared to go to the big school with the name of 'Enry 'Opkins, and likewise he said that it would be necessary to make a break with his old connections. Not with his old father, you know; 'Enry would never think of a thing like that. My boy 'Enry is one of the best; he wouldn't be ashamed of his father if he was the friend of princes and dukes."

"I should hope not," said Lord Mauleverer.

"Which I'm very glad to make your acquaintance, my lord," said Mr. Hopkins. "Mighty strange, my running across 'Enry's best friend in this way! But, of course, you don't know 'im as 'Enry. But as you're his closest chum at Greyfrires, there's no 'arm in my telling you. 'Enry says in his letters that you're as thick as anything, and have hardly any secrets from one another. Now, just you think of your best friend at Greyfrires, and you'll know the boy whose real name is 'Enry 'Opkins."

Lord Mauleverer looked at the old gentleman to see whether he was in his right senses. That any boy could be silly enough to be ashamed of a name he was born to was a surprise to Lord Mauleverer. And that it should be one of his intimate friends in the Remove was more surprising still. It did not occur to Lord Mauleverer for the moment that some conceited junior might have been "swanking" in his letters home about his friendship with the only titled fellow at Greyfriars.

"Not Bob Cherry?" said Lord Mauleverer.

Mr. Hopkins shook his head.

"Harry Wharton?"

"Oh, no!"

"Frank Nugent?"

"That's not the name."

"John Bull?"

Another shake of the head.

"Tom Brown or Mark Linley?"

"Not bit of it," said Mr. Hopkins. "I've 'eard some of them names before in my boy's letters 'ome, as intimate friends of 'is. But you ain't mentioned 'Enry's name yet. You see, 'e has a right to the name, as it was his mother's. My boy wouldn't tell a lie; that wouldn't suit 'Enry."

"Blessed if I can guess it, then," said Lord Mauleverer. "I've run over the names of all the fellows I'm intimate with. I'm not likely to miss a close chum. There are other fellows I'm on friendly terms with—Bulstrode, Hazeldene, Ogilvy, Morgan——"

"It ain't any of them."

"Then perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me the name?" suggested his lordship.

The old gentleman nodded.

"Queer that you ain't mentioned it, when you're such thick friends," he remarked. "Of course, you won't let it out in the school? 'Enry would be annoyed if all the boys knew about his name bein' really 'Opkins."

"Of course I shouldn't think of mentioning it, especially if the chap was a friend of mine," said Lord Mauleverer, very much puzzled. "Please tell me the name."

The old gentleman lowered his voice, with a very sly look.

"Cecil Leigh!" he said.

Lord Mauleverer gave quite a jump.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Leigh's Father!

"CECIL LEIGH!" exclaimed Lord Mauleverer.

Mr. Hopkins nodded.

"That's the name, my lord."

Lord Mauleverer looked at him hard. Quick words were on the schoolboy earl's tongue, but the kind confidence in the ruddy face of Mr. Hopkins stopped them. Lord Mauleverer was supposed at Greyfriars to be very simple in some matters, but he was no fool. He understood what was the case. Leigh, in his conceited, flighty way, had pretended to be on intimate terms with Lord Mauleverer for the sake of impressing the people at home; and simple old Mr. Hopkins had never dreamed of doubting. Leigh, of course, had not foreseen anything of this sort. Lord Mauleverer could understand that Leigh had never intended his father to come to the school.

Lord Mauleverer smiled grimly.

But for that lie in his letters home, about his intimacy with the schoolboy earl, Mr. Hopkins would certainly never have made this confidence to his lordship. He was speaking freely to Lord Mauleverer, under the impression that Mauleverer was Cecil Leigh's most intimate chum.

As a matter of fact, of course, he was nothing of the sort. Leigh had left no stone unturned to become intimate with the schoolboy earl, but Lord Mauleverer had always kept him at arm's-length. He did not like Leigh, and he did not trust him. Like many simple natures, Lord Mauleverer had an instinct which warned him when deception was in the air. He had never liked Leigh, and it was surprising enough that Leigh should have had the nerve to pass him off as an intimate friend in his letters home.

But as he looked at the cheery old face before him, Lord Mauleverer felt that he could not undeceive the swanker's father. It would be too cruel to shake the simple old gentleman's faith in his son—to show him that his idol was of worthless clay. It was easy enough to see how shocked and amazed Mr. Hopkins would be if he found a single flaw in the character of the boy he idolised. And to be told that

the fellow was a liar and a boaster—Lord Mauleverer could not do it.

They were walking on towards Greyfriars while these thoughts were passing through Lord Mauleverer's mind. He did not speak for some minutes, and Mr. Hopkins, who was a little short of wind, panted on by his side without speaking, either.

"So Cecil Leigh is your son?" Lord Mauleverer said at last.

"That's so, my lord; and a good son he is to me," said Mr. Hopkins. "When he was a little nipper he was always after his books, and he was so keen on learning, you can't imagine. And he was always so superior. Not that he'd turn up his nose at his father's trade, neither. He would wash up the glasses behind the bar as cheerful as you like, and he'd have stayed up to any time I liked doing it when we was busy on market days, only I wouldn't let him.

"I've always took good care of 'Enry, and he'll always take good care of me. Not that I'll need to be took care of, so far as money goes, you see, me being in a fair way of business, with the Sanford Arms paying well and a long lease. I've done very well out of the pigs this summer, too, and that means a bit of a nest-egg for 'Enry. Of course, he don't 'ave as much pocket-money as the other boys at Greyfriars, but I said to 'im afore ever 'e come to the school, I said "'Enry,' I said, 'you won't 'ave so much money as the others, but you'll 'ave the same education,' I says, 'and that's wot you've got more brains than them to make use of.' Begging your pardon, my lord."

Lord Mauleverer smiled.

"Leigh is a clever chap," he said.

"Ain't he?" said the proud father. "And a good boy, too. He comes out top in everything. He was captain of the Sanford Athletic Football Club, too, he was; he always came out at the top."

"A Rugger club, I suppose?"

"Oh, no; Association!" said Mr. Hopkins, in surprise.

Lord Mauleverer wrinkled his brows. He had heard the talk in the Remove of the wonderful form Leigh had shown at footer, having never played Soccer before coming to Greyfriars. The fellow seemed to involve himself in a tangle of lies for the mere pleasure of it. But doubtless all the lies flowed from one source—a feverish, uneasy desire to cover up every possible clue to his origin and real name.

Leigh, the swanker; Leigh, whose talk about his "place" and his "people," about his father's car and his father's land, often excited admiring envy among the juniors. Leigh was the son of a small village innkeeper, and his real name was Hopkins. It seemed to Lord Mauleverer too comic for words. Nobody but an idiot, in Lord Mauleverer's opinion, would have been ashamed of the name of Hopkins, or of the business of a village innkeeper. Yet Leigh was not an idiot. Lord Mauleverer simply gave up the effort to understand it all.

It occurred to Lord Mauleverer, as he drew nearer to Greyfriars with his strange companion, to wonder what Leigh would think of the visit.

Leigh could never have intended his father to come, that was certain. It would be a terrible blow to him, Lord Mauleverer could not doubt that. In spite of his amusement and scorn for the windings and turnings of the boaster, Lord Mauleverer could find it in his heart to be sorry for him.

"Does Leigh know you are coming, sir?" Lord Mauleverer asked, as the lights of Greyfriars came in sight through the dusk of the lane.

Mr. Hopkins laughed softly.

"No," he replied; "I was coming before, but he wrote me—he didn't want me to take the long journey, you see. It's difficult getting here from Essex, on the country trains—you see 'ow late I've got 'ere to-day. 'Enry was anxious about his old father, and wouldn't 'ave me take the trouble. That was just like 'Enry. But I ain't said a word—I've just come. It will be a pleasant surprise for 'Enry."

Lord Mauleverer thought that it would certainly be a surprise, but whether a pleasant one or not was more doubtful.

"Is that the school?" asked Mr. Hopkins.

"Yes; that's it."

"It's a big place."

"Yaas, a good size," assented Lord Mauleverer.

Mr. Hopkins rubbed his plump hands.

"It's all right for 'Enry," he said—"it's all right! You wouldn't believe me, my lord, 'ow I've scraped to save up the money to pay 'Enry's fees 'ere—but, bless his 'eart, he's a good boy, and he deserves it all! My landlord took a lot of notice of 'im, too, and he recommended him to Dr. Locke, or perhaps he mightn't have come 'ere, even though I could pay the fees. Old Sir Robert frowned a bit when he found that 'Enry wanted to take his mother's name at the school, but he agreed. Arter all, it wouldn't do for every Tom, Dick, and 'Arry in the parish to know that 'Enry was at Greyfriars, would it?"

"I suppose not," said Lord Mauleverer.

"He knew he'd make good friends 'ere," said Mr.

Hopkins—"friends like you, my lord! That was one reason, though, why he didn't urge me to come, as he said—because all his spare time was spent out of doors with his friend Mauleverer, and he couldn't depend on being home to see me if I did come. He didn't want me to risk making the long journey for nothing, you know."

Lord Mauleverer's sarcastic smile was hidden in the dusk.

"Very kind and considerate of him!" he said drily.

"That's wot 'Enry always was—kind and considerate!"

The gates of the school were in sight now. Lord Mauleverer slackened pace, late as he was for calling-over.

He could not help feeling sorry for Leigh. If the snob and swanker of the Remove had this old gentleman sprung upon him suddenly, Lord Mauleverer could guess what effect it would have upon him. It would surprise Leigh out of his humbug, and would undoubtedly make him show plainly enough to his father that he was ashamed of him. And that was a suffering that Lord Mauleverer would have been very unwilling to see inflicted upon the kind and simple old fellow. Truly, Mr. Hopkins might have been gifted with a little more tact; but, after all, it was in the innocence of his heart that he was paying this unexpected visit to Greyfriars. And but for Leigh's boasting, no harm need have come of it.

Mark Linley had never concealed his origin, and, excepting with a few snobs in the school, he was as well thought of as anybody else. That his father was an honest and steady workman was a fact of which the Lancashire lad was proud, and he would have laughed at the idea of being ashamed of it; but Cecil Leigh was made of different stuff.

Lord Mauleverer felt that it would be only kind to let Leigh have some warning in advance of what was coming.

"Of course," Mr. Hopkins went on, "I sha'n't ginmy name as 'Opkins there. You'll keep that dark, young sir, as 'Enry's friend!"

"I'll certainly keep it dark?" said Lord Mauleverer.

"Right-ho! You simply say that it's Leigh's father come to see 'im, do you see, and that will be enough. I sha'n't stay long, and I sha'n't go in to see the 'Ead. It's just my boy that I want to see, to know 'ow he's gettin' on at the big school, and so far from 'is 'ome and his own people," said Mr. Hopkins, a little wistfully.

"If you like, I'll fetch Leigh out to see you," said Lord Mauleverer. "You could wait in the porter's lodge while I call him."

"You're werry kind, my lord! That will suit me down to the ground," said Mr. Hopkins gratefully. "You're a werry kind young gentleman, and I'm glad that 'Enry has you for a friend!"

Lord Mauleverer did not reply to that remark.

They came up to the gates of Greyfriars, and Lord Mauleverer rang. Gosling came out to open the gates, but he was not frowning as he would have frowned if any other junior had rung him up. Lord Mauleverer abounded in tips, and Gosling expected quite a substantial one this time. But the porter stared in surprise at Mauleverer's companion.

"Come in, my lord—come in!" said the school porter. "I'm afraid you're late, my lord, and I fear your lordship will 'ave to report yourself to Wingate, my lord!"

"Very well," said Lord Mauleverer.

"Not that it isn't a pleasure to me to hopen the gate for your lordship. Wot I says is this 'ere—— Thank you, my lord! Werry kind of you, my lord!"

"What a blessed lot of lords!" said a voice in the dusk of the Close. "Have all the giddy House of Lords come to see you, Gosling?"

"Really, Master Skinner——"

"Hallo! Who's this?" exclaimed Skinner, staring at Mr. Hopkins.

"Leigh's father," said Lord Mauleverer awkwardly. "He's come to see Leigh. Gosling, do you mind if this gentleman waits in your lodge a few minutes?"

"Suttingly, my lord—suttingly!"

And Gosling obsequiously showed the Sanford innkeeper into the lodge. Skinner, of the Remove, watched Mr. Hopkins with wide eyes. He noted his attire, his complexion, his manners and customs, so to speak. His astonishment kept him silent for a minute or two, and then, as Mr. Hopkins disappeared into the porter's lodge, Skinner burst into a loud and prolonged chuckle.

Lord Mauleverer raised his hand quickly.

"Shut up!" he muttered.

"Is this a joke?" breathed Skinner.

"Joke! No. What do you mean?"

"Is that really Leigh's pater?"

"Yes."

"His pater! My only aunt! Oh! Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner went off into a series of cackling cachinnations which he seemed unable to suppress.

"I don't see anything to cackle at!" said Lord Mauleverer

coldly. "He is a thoroughly decent and respectable old gentleman!"

"I don't say he isn't. But—but after the yarns that Leigh has told us!" breathed Skinner. "What price his father's land and his father's car? Why, my hat, only yesterday he was saying that his father had been hurt in an accident, through his car colliding with the park palings! The park palings! Whose park palings? Ha, ha, ha!"

Lord Mauleverer was silent. Cecil Leigh had certainly tangled himself pretty deeply in his wretched attempts to make out that his home was as "classy" as the homes the other fellows came from.

"This is simply too good!" murmured Skinner. "This will make the fellows shriek! I—— Look here, Mauleverer, you're not pulling my leg, are you? He's really Leigh's pater—not Trimble's or the cook's?"

"Oh, find out!" said Lord Mauleverer sharply.

And he walked away quickly towards the house, first to report himself to Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, for being late, and then to look for Leigh. Skinner hesitated a few moments. He was a suspicious fellow, and fond of practical jokes himself, and he was not in the habit of believing anything easily. Finally, he put his head into the porter's lodge.

Mr. Hopkins was seated there, talking affably to the porter. He turned his ruddy face in Skinner's direction as the junior looked in.

"Excuse me, sir," said Skinner, with great respect. "Would you mind telling me, sir, whether you are Leigh's father?"

Mr. Hopkins nodded.

"I ham!" he replied.

Skinner gasped.

"Oh, you ham, ham you?" he jerked out. "Thanks! That's all I wanted to know!" He backed away from the door, gasping and chuckling. "Oh, my only hat! This will knock 'em! This is too good to keep! Ha, ha, ha!"

And the amiable Skinner sprinted off towards the School House.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.
Trimble's Terms.

"'OPKINS!"

Cecil Leigh paused in the Form-room passage. Trimble, the page, had come from the side corridor, and signed to him to stop. It was common enough, certainly, for a Greyfriars fellow to sign to the House page to stop, but for the page to return the compliment in this way was galling in the extreme. There was something so utterly insolent in Trimble's gesture, as he carelessly beckoned with his fore-finger to the Removite, that it made Leigh tremble with rage. It was so perfectly clear that Trimble knew that he dared not disregard the beckoning hand.

"'Opkins!"

Cecil Leigh stopped, his heart beating with rage and terror, and cast a rapid glance up and down the passage. There was no one in sight; in fact, Trimble had made sure of that before he used the obnoxious name.

"How dare you!" muttered Leigh. "You cad! How dare you call me by that name?"

Trimble grinned.

"I always called you 'Opkins at 'ome!" he said.

"Silence!"

"I don't mind calling yer another name 'ere, if you like," said Trimble. "But don't you try to come it hover me, Mister 'Opkins! I 'ad enough of that when you was skipper of the Sanford Athletic, and treated me like dirt! It's my turn now!"

"If you must speak, come into the Form-room, where no one will hear us!" muttered Leigh.

Trimble shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

"Jest as you like," he said. "I've got nothink to 'ide, I know that. Them as claims to be better'n their own friends, they may 'ave!"

Leigh opened the door of the Remove Form-room. The room was deserted at that hour, and the setting sun cast its last red rays through the high windows from the west. Most of the room was in shadow. Leigh closed the door, and turned upon the new page with clenched hands, fury in his face and misery and despair in his heart.

"What do you want?" he muttered. "Why are you worrying me again? I've made terms with you—I gave you, this afternoon, every shilling I had!"

Trimble chuckled.

"I've been 'earing about you," he said. "When cook told me about your father's car, I could 'ave fell on the floor! You've swanked a lot 'ere, ain't you, 'Opkins?"

"That's my business!"

"Not a paying business, neither, when you might get found

hout!' said Trimble. "Suppose your father was to come and visit you?"

"He will not!"

"Suppose an old friend comes along?" grinned Trimble. "You see, it might 'appen."

Leigh ground his teeth.

"I was a fool—a fool not to tell the plain truth at once!" he said wretchedly. "But—but it's too late now, and it places me in the power of a worm like you!"

"Not so fast with your fancy names, Mister 'Opkins!" said Trimble angrily.

"Bah!"

"You give me," said Trimble, jingling the coins in his pocket—"you give me twelve bob?"

"It was all I had, and I shall have to write and ask my father for some more," said Leigh. "Part of that was to pay a debt with."

"You don't 'ave much money, then?"

"I have a shilling a week. It is all my father can afford. The fellows all think I have much more, and some of them think me stingy," groaned Leigh.

"You spend more'n that," said the page suspiciously.

"I do not!"

"Wot about football club subscriptions, and so forth?" demanded Trimble, with the air of a detective extracting information.

"My father pays them."

Trimble shook his head.

"It won't do!" he said. "You've made the boys 'ere believe that you've got money, and if you ain't, it's your own look-out. One thing's certain, and that is that you're such a liar I can't believe a word you say, 'Opkins."

Leigh clenched his hands hard.

"I dessay you can raise the money if you like," said Trimble. "I don't see why I shouldn't make something out of this. I've found you out. You'd kick me out of the school without a character if you could. Why shouldn't I make something out of you?"

"There's nothing for you to make," muttered Leigh. "I tell you I've given you every shilling I had, including some I'd no right to part with."

"I want a sovereign," said Trimble.

Leigh started.

"Are you mad? I've never had a sovereign of my own in my life! Where do you think I'm to get it from?"

"I don't care, so long as you do get it. You 'ave the run of the studies, where fellows keep lots of money," said Trimble callously. "You might find it. Nobody would suspect Master Cecil Leigh, with his aristocratic connections, of pinching a tuck-'un."

Leigh's fingers worked almost convulsively.

"You cad!" he ground out. "Are you recommending me to steal money from my Form-fellows?"

"You can do wot you like; but if I don't 'ave a sovereign to-night, all the school will know to-morrow mornin' who 'Enry 'Opkins is," said the page threateningly.

"You horrible, blackmailing cad!"

"Why should I keep your rotten secrets?" demanded Trimble, raising his voice. "If I came 'ere callin' myself Montgomery or de Vere, would you 'ide my name of Trimble for me? You know very well you'd give me away at once, and feel that you was doin' of your duty. You know you would!"

Leigh was silent.

"And it's my duty to give you away, and show you up for a liar and impostor, wot you are, Mister 'Enry 'Opkins!" said Trimble, with emphasis. "If I don't do it, it's because I'm tender 'arted."

"Because you want to screw money out of me, you scoundrel!"

"Better language, please, 'Opkins."

The repetition of the hated name seemed to drive Leigh beyond all self-control. He made a sudden spring at the page, and grasped him by the throat with both hands, and bore him backwards. Trimble crashed upon the floor on his back, and Leigh sprawled upon him, still grasping savagely at his throat.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.
Money Wanted.

"OH! Ow! 'Elp! Murder!" gasped Trimble.

The last word, perhaps, brought the furious junior to his senses. His grasp upon the page's throat relaxed, and he drew back a little. Trimble still lay under his weight, however, gazing up at him with wide, frightened eyes.

"'Opkins! Let me alone!" he panted.

"Hold your tongue!"

"If you don't lemme get up, I'll yell murder!" muttered Trimble, in concentrated tones of rage and fear.

Leigh rose to his feet.

Trimble staggered up, and made a movement towards the Form-room door. Cecil Leigh quickly interposed.

"What are you going to do?" he muttered.

"Wot I like!" said Trimble fiercely. "You stand out of the way, 'Opkins! I'm done with you, you murderous young 'ound!"

"You shouldn't provoke me, then," muttered Leigh. "Call me Leigh if you must call me anything. Let me alone—that's all I ask. Trimble——"

"Har you going to let me pass?"

"Not till we come to some settlement," said Leigh.

"If you don't let me get out of this room I'll yell murder!" said the page shrilly.

Leigh's eyes blazed.

"Make a sound over a whisper, and I'll bash your head against the wall!" he said. "You know I can do it. I've licked you in Sanford, when you were a cheeky cub, trying to out yourself on a level with your betters—a dishonest, cheating young scoundrel, too, I licked you then, and for two pins I'd lick you again. Mind, you can give me away if you like, but as soon as you've done it, look out for squalls. I'll smash you!"

Trimble backed away a step or two.

"I don't wanter give you away if you make it worth my while," he said. "I ain't going to back you up in tellin' lies for nothin'."

"I've given you all I can afford—and more."

"You'll 'ave to find another sovereign to-night," said Trimble, recovering his courage a little. "As for lickin' me, I dessay the masters could protect me when I've explained the facts of the case. I dessay the boys you've lied to will be down on you, too. They will be glad to 'ear that your father's landed estate consists of a kitchen-garden be'ind an inn, and that your father's car is an old chaise that he lets out for beanfeasts."

And Trimble chuckled.

Leigh clenched his teeth. He had been a fool—an utter fool—to lie, and to place himself in the power of this miserable wretch. But the humiliation of exposure—he could not stand that.

He had to make terms with Trimble. But how—how? He had no money, and what Trimble wanted was money. How were his demands to be satisfied? Well enough the junior knew that his father could spare little more. It was a strain upon the resources of the village innkeeper of Sanford to keep his son at a school like Greyfriars.

"Well," said Trimble aggressively, "am I to 'ave that sovereign?"

"I—I don't know," muttered Leigh. "I don't know where I'm to get it."

"Lord Mauleverer has a pot of money," Trimble suggested.

"I'm not on sufficiently friendly terms with him to borrow a sovereign," Leigh muttered wretchedly.

"You might find one."

"Hold your tongue! Shut up, you poisonous cad!" said Leigh hoarsely. "Do you think I could steal, as you have done, you horrible brute?"

Trimble looked sullen.

"You're calling me some pretty names," he said. "I don't know that I've ever done anythin' worse than you 'ave—lyin', and boastin', and 'umbuggin'. I——"

"Hold your tongue!"

"I ain't going to 'old my tongue, 'Opkins! You're goin' to lemme 'ave that sovereign to-night, or you look out for squalls! Wot's it to be?"

"I—I'll try and borrow it," muttered Leigh.

"Orlright."

Leigh stepped away from the door, and the page quitted the Form-room, with a maliciously triumphant grin upon his face.

Cecil Leigh followed slowly. He almost ran into Harry Wharton in the passage. Wharton glanced at him.

"Hallo! Been confabbing with Trimble?" he asked.

"N—yes," stammered Leigh.

"Is he the fellow you took him for, after all?"

Leigh started.

"The—the what—who?"

"The fellow you told us about, of the same name," said Harry. "You remember—the page who was turned out of a school for slandering one of the fellows?"

Leigh muttered something under his breath. He remembered, now, having told that story as a safeguard in case Trimble should talk. But he had told so many lies lately that he was growing confused and bewildered in the tangle they made.

"Yes—no," he said—"I mean, I'm not sure yet. I hope to find out."

"I don't know that it matters, so long as he behaves himself here," Wharton remarked. "If the fellow is trying to be decent, one might as well give him a chance."

"Yes—yes, certainly," muttered Leigh. "By the way, Wharton, I—I—excuse me, will you allow me to ask a favour of you?"

"Go ahead."

"I'm hard up to-day," said Leigh, flushing scarlet. "I—I want a sovereign to-night very particularly. Of course, it's ridiculous. My father would send me anything I asked for, only I forgot to write to him. I believe I have some banknotes in my study, too, only I've mislaid them. Could you lend me a quid?"

"Sorry; I couldn't lend you a bob," said Wharton. "I had to borrow of Johnny Bull, yesterday, to tip Trotter, and I can't settle with him till Saturday. We're all stony."

"Never mind. Thanks, all the same."

And Leigh walked away. He reflected as he went, and walked to Lord Mauleverer's study. The schoolboy earl was not there. He had not yet come in. Leigh went to Vernon-Smith's room next. Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, had shown some disposition to be on friendly terms with the new junior, and although he bore a bad reputation in the Form, he was rich, and Leigh had paid court to him. It pleased him to be able to say in his letters home that he was intimate with the son of Samuel Vernon-Smith, the Cotton King and millionaire.

The Bounder of Greyfriars was at home, as a haze of tobacco-smoke, as Leigh opened the study door, showed plainly enough. He nodded genially to Leigh.

"Shut the door and have a fag," he said.

Leigh closed the door, but did not take the proffered cigarette. He had plenty of faults, but secret smoking was not one of them. But he was not candid enough to speak out frankly on the subject.

"No, thanks," he said, "not just now. My throat's a bit sore. Another time I'll be glad. By the way, Vernon-Smith, a remittance from my father has been delayed in the post, and if you could lend me a quid. I should be greatly obliged."

Vernon-Smith looked at him sharply.

He had taken in Leigh's stories of a wealthy home, as most of the Remove fellows had. The junior told them so well.

But the Bounder of Greyfriars was no fool. As soon as a fellow started borrowing, the Bounder knew that there must be something fishy in his stories of wealth. And there was a suppressed uneasiness in Cecil's manner that gave him away to the keen eye of the Bounder. A grim smile came over Vernon-Smith's face.

"Remittance not arrived—eh?" he asked.

"No; it's very unfortunate."

"Yes; it sounds like Billy Bunter. He's always expecting a postal-order that never arrives," the Bounder remarked.

Leigh flushed hotly.

"I hope you don't put me on the same level as Bunter?" he exclaimed.

The Bounder laughed.

"Not at all. But it's very unfortunate, as you say. I haven't a sovereign to spare this evening. I hope your remittance will come along soon."

And the Bounder turned to his cigarette again.

Leigh hesitated.

He dared not face Trimble again without the sovereign, and although it went very much against the grain with him to eat humble pie to a fellow like the Bounder, he felt that he had no choice in the matter. If he had known the Bounder better, he would have known that the more he was asked the less the Bounder was inclined to give.

"Look here, Vernon-Smith, I'll return the favour some time," said Leigh, slowly, and in a low voice. "I'm really stuck up for want of a sovereign."

"Sorry!"

"Can't you manage it—really?"

"Sorry—no!"

"Say you won't, and have done with it!" exclaimed Leigh, in a burst of anger.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

Cecil Leigh turned and left the study. He had humbled himself to the most unpleasant fellow in the Greyfriars Remove, and he had humbled himself in vain. It was a bitter price to pay for being a boaster.

He went along the passage miserably enough. Where was he to get the sovereign? He knew Trimble's spiteful and vicious nature, and Trimble had too many old grudges from the old days in Sanford to pay off to be likely to spare him now, unless it was made well worth his while. It would afford Trimble great pleasure to show him up before the school as Henry Hopkins, the son of the village innkeeper in a remote Essex village.

And even if he paid the sovereign, he knew, too, the page's greedy and unscrupulous nature.

The first bribe had only whetted Trimble's appetite for more. What effect would the sovereign have upon him?

Would it not simply make his demands rise? He knew, too, that Leigh had little or no money; but he thought that he could borrow it from wealthy fellows in the Remove, or —or obtain it by even less creditable means. To borrow without the means of ever repaying was little better than stealing, but Trimble did not care if his victim should actually become a thief. Trimble was gloating now over the fellow who had lorded it over him in the old days; it was Trimble's turn, and he was making the most of it. Leigh could not wonder at it. But what was he to do?

There was only one gleam of hope. Trimble was to stay a fortnight only at Greyfriars. When he was gone, his power of injury would go with him—unless, indeed, as a last act of spite, he betrayed his victim ere he went, as was quite possible. Leigh felt as if he were in a net from which there was no escape, but he clung to hope as a drowning man clings to a straw. If he could pay Trimble now, it would at least give him a respite—a breathing space, in which to think something out.

John Bull or Lord Mauleverer—they were the only fellows rich enough and careless enough with money to be likely to lend him a sovereign on his word alone. If they both failed him — But he would not think of that yet. John Bull was in the common-room, playing chess with Wun-Lung, the Chinee, and Leigh turned away in disappointment after looking into the room. He could not very well approach the subject just then. He went down the passage again, wondering where Lord Mauleverer was.

A junior came in, and met him face to face near the door. Leigh uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Mauleverer, I was looking for you!"

Lord Mauleverer looked at him coldly.

"How curious!" he said. "I was looking for you!"

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

News for Leigh.

LEIGH did not notice the schoolboy earl's peculiar tone or his peculiar look. He was too much engrossed with his own thoughts for that. The worry that was upon his mind excluded everything else at present.

"Looking for me?" he repeated. "Oh, good!"

"I want to speak to you."

"I want to speak to you, too," said Leigh. "Come into the Form-room; there's nobody there at present."

"Right-ho!"

Lord Mauleverer followed Cecil into the Form-room. It was very dusky there, but the juniors did not need light to talk by. Leigh closed the door, and Lord Mauleverer wondered whether the fellow had got wind of the fact that his father had arrived at Greyfriars. But Leigh's first words showed him that that thought had not even entered the mind of the junior. He was thinking of himself, not of his father.

"I'm in a hole, Mauleverer," he said. "I was expecting a cheque from my father this afternoon, and it hasn't come. Could you possibly oblige me with a loan of a sovereign?"

"Certainly!" said Lord Mauleverer.

Leigh's heart beat more freely.

"Oh, thanks!" he exclaimed. "It's jolly good of you."

"Not at all," said his lordship. "So you are expecting a cheque from your father, are you?"

Leigh nodded.

"Yes. I'm looking for something extra this time, too. My father has just disposed of part of the estate to good advantage, so he tells me, and I imagine that he has made a good many hundreds by it."

"Hundreds eh?"

"Yes; thousands, I shouldn't wonder!" said Leigh confidentially. "You see, our land joins another estate, and the old fellow it belongs to has wanted a piece of ground for a long time to round off his park. He must have come down pretty stiff, too, to make my father part with it. He doesn't like selling land, as a rule. Of course, that land has belonged to the Leighs since the time of the Plantagenets, and it's rather rotten to cut any of it off."

Lord Mauleverer's expression could not be clearly seen in the dusk of the Form-room, or Leigh would certainly have stopped.

"I'll settle this up when I get the remittance," he said. "I suppose it will be here to-morrow. Thanks!"

Lord Mauleverer extracted a sovereign from a little leather purse that contained twenty or more of them, and passed it to Leigh. The junior slipped it into his pocket.

"Of course, it's only fair for me to have a whack out of it," he went on. "My consent had to be asked to the sale, as all the Leigh property is strictly entailed. I——"

"Hold on a minute!" said Lord Mauleverer coldly. "I didn't mean to let you run on, telling these cramming——"

Leigh jumped.

"What!"

"You heard what I said."

"Do you mean to say that you doubt my word, Lord Mauleverer?" asked Cecil Leigh, drawing himself up in his loftiest way.

"Oh, come off!" said his lordship. "I never doubted you before specially, but I know it's all gammon now. I've met your father."

Leigh staggered back.

His expression was so stricken that Lord Mauleverer, disgusted as he was, could not help feeling sorry for him. Leigh's face showed up white and ghastly in the dusk.

"What!" he muttered. "My father! What do you mean?"

"I met your father in Friardale Lane."

"It's—it's not true!" muttered Leigh hoarsely. "My father's at home, in Essex. He—he's laid up from an accident to his car——"

"Cheese it!" said Lord Mauleverer. "Begad, you ought to be a lawyer. Anybody would believe you were telling the truth, begad, and it's all lies! I tell you I met your father in Friardale Lane, and he was coming to the school."

"Coming to the school!"

"Yaas. And he's here now."

Leigh leaned heavily against the wall. His breath was coming and going in short, quick gasps. He could not doubt Lord Mauleverer's statement.

His father was at Greyfriars!

It seemed to the wretched boy as if the dusky class-room was turning round him—desks and forms whirled in a haze.

"Pull yourself together," said Lord Mauleverer sharply. "It's not so bad as all that. What's the matter with you?"

"My—father—here!"

"Yes. Why not?"

"Heavens!"

Leigh groaned out the words in utter despair.

Lord Mauleverer looked at him, his eyes glinting with scorn; yet he was sorry, at the same time, for the wretched fellow whose air-castles of falsehoods were so suddenly tumbled about his ears.

"I've left him in the porter's lodge," said Lord Mauleverer. "We became quite friendly, walking to Greyfriars. When he learned my name, he told me all about himself——"

"Oh! The—the fool!"

"Don't speak of your father like that," said Lord Mauleverer sternly. "How dare you! He would have told me nothing, but for your silly lies. You had palmed off a story on him that we were close chums, when you know perfectly well that I never could stand you. I always felt you were insincere. If you hadn't piled those lies on your old father, he wouldn't have been confidential with me. And I'm not going to let it go any further. It's all in confidence, of course."

Leigh breathed again.

"This is a—a blow to me," he muttered.

"I don't see why it should be if you hadn't lied. Your father is a thoroughly decent old fellow, and if his money's good enough to pay for you here, he's good enough to come and see you, I should think."

Leigh groaned.

"You—you don't understand!" he muttered. "The pater's a splendid old fellow, but—but he couldn't understand, either. What will the fellows think if they know that my father is a village innkeeper, who can't even spell his own name?"

"Rather a come-down, I suppose, after all your rot," said Lord Mauleverer. "But, in my humble opinion, a truthful innkeeper is a cut above a lying public schoolboy!"

Leigh winced.

"Oh, pile it on!" he said. "I suppose I've exaggerated a bit, but it was only to keep my end up with the other fellows. After all, they all pile it on a bit."

"Not as you do, I hope. Motor-cars, Continental holidays, landed estates and entailed property! Begad!" said Lord Mauleverer. "You ought to be a journalist!"

"I suppose it's all coming out now?" groaned Leigh. "I—I tried to keep him away, because—because——"

"Because you're ashamed of your own father!" said Lord Mauleverer sternly. "Hang it all, that's too thick! Haven't you any decency at all, you poor rotter?"

"He—he's different, you see, and——"

"Mark Linley's father is a bit different from Linley, I suppose," said Lord Mauleverer; "but I've never heard Linley tell any lies, and he's not ashamed of his father! Linley nevr said that his factory in Lancashire was a gilt-edged palace, left him by William the Conqueror; or that his father was lord-lieutenant of the county, that I know of."

"Linley is very different from me——"

"Begad, he is!" said Lord Mauleverer.

"I—I mean, he's not ashamed of things I should be ashamed of, because—because——"

"Because he's a decent, sensible British boy, and you're a weak-kneed, snobbish bounder!" said Lord Mauleverer, with more emphasis than he was wont to show.

"Oh, pile it on!" said Leigh wretchedly. "I dare say there's something in what you say. I know—I wish I'd had as much sense as Linley now, and hadn't tried to keep any rotten secrets. It's all up now."

"I don't want to pile it on," said Lord Mauleverer, softening again. "I'm sorry for you, and especially for your governor. If he found that you were ashamed of him it would cut him to the heart. He would feel that more than anything else, I should say. To save him from an experience of that sort, I'd help you if I could. I've left him in the porter's lodge, and told him that I'd fetch you."

Leigh seemed to breathe more freely.

"Thanks!" he muttered. "I—I can see him there, and get him to go. Luckily, he's come after dark. Don't think I'm not fond of my father, Mauleverer. I know what he's done for me, and what a hard scrape it's been to him to help me to realise my ambition. I know how he felt parting with me, too; but—but things are different here. This isn't the old inn at Sanford. If I can get him to go ——"

"You can do as you think best about the matter now," said Lord Mauleverer shortly.

"What would you advise me to do?"

"Bring your father into the school, and show the fellows that you're not ashamed of him," said Lord Mauleverer at once.

Leigh shivered.

"I couldn't."

"Then go to him, and try to keep it dark from him what a weak-kneed worm you are!" said Lord Mauleverer shortly.

And he quitted the Form-room.

Leigh made his way with slow and unwilling steps towards the porter's lodge. A form passed him, running in the dusk of the Close—running towards the house. It was Skinner, but Leigh did not take any particular notice of him. His thoughts were full of his present wretched difficulty. He reached the porter's lodge, and drew a long breath and entered.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Sufferings of a Snob.

MR. HOPKINS was seated in Gosling's room, with his white hat on the table beside him, and his knobbly hands, innocent of gloves, resting upon the large handle of his umbrella.

Leigh suppressed a groan as he saw him. It was true that he had a strong affection for his father, and admired his honest and sterling character—feeling many times how much more worthy it was than his own. But—but—— There was a but—always a but. The old man, undoubtedly, was out of place in Greyfriars. Gosling, the porter, was already looking upon him with a patronising air, and Gosling's look was far from respectful as Leigh came in. Gosling had a persuasion, common enough in these modern days, that he was just as good as anybody else; and at the same time, he was quite determined never to show any respect to a man who had sprung from his own class. That contradictory feeling is not at all uncommon; Gosling sinned in numerous company in that respect. Gosling's look was quite impertinent when Leigh came in.

"'Ere's your father," he said, without adding either "Sir," or "Master Leigh."

Leigh's eyes flashed for a moment. But it was worse than useless to make an enemy of Gosling; he did not want the porter to talk too much.

He affected to take no notice of the man's impertinence.

"Father!" he said.

Mr. Hopkins rose to his feet.

His red, honest face beamed with affection at the sight of his son. He held out his arms, and fairly hugged the junior. Then he held him at arm's-length and looked at him with beaming and admiring eyes.

"'Enry!" he exclaimed.

Leigh made a hurried gesture.

"Oh, I forgot!" murmured Mr. Hopkins apologetically. "C-c-c-cecil!"

Gosling looked very curious. Leigh felt that he was looking curious, and feeling curious, too; but if he explained, it would show a regard for the porter's opinion, which would look more suspicious than anything else.

And yet—— As a criminal is impelled by some secret force to leave a clue, and a liar always leaves some chink by which he may be detected, so a deceiver can never let ill alone, but is impelled to make matters worse in attempting to make them better.

Leigh glanced at Gosling, who was listening intently.

"My father always calls me Henry," he said, with a smile. "I have two Christian names, you see—Henry Cecil."

"Ho!" said Gosling.

Leigh flushed red—by speaking familiarly to the porter he had given the man the right to be familiar—to doubt his word if he liked. If Bob Cherry's father had come to the school, and called Bob "Arthur" or "James," Bob would never have dreamt of explaining it to the porter. The result of Leigh's new lie was to make the porter suspicious instead of curious.

To remain at the lodge under the porter's keen eye was impossible. But to take Mr. Hopkins up to the School House was almost equally painful. For a liberal tip, indeed, Gosling would have allowed the junior to have the place to himself. But with the exception of Mauleverer's sovereign, which Trimble was to have, Leigh had no means of bribing the porter.

"Come, father," said Leigh.

"Yes, my boy."

They left the porter's lodge. Gosling sniffed expressively as they went.

"Wot I says is this 'ere," he murmured. "Greyfriars is coming to somethink. That's wot I says, and I don't care who 'ears it!"

What to do with his father was a puzzle to Leigh. He paused under the elms near the porter's lodge. The moon was coming out over the old clock-tower, and the grey old buildings looked very fine and imposing in the silvery light. Mr. Hopkins looked round him with great admiration.

"Good place you're in now, 'Enry."

"Yes, father."

"Better'n the old inn at Sanford—hey, 'Enry?"

"Don't call me Henry," said Leigh, with sharpness in his voice. "You nearly gave me away to the porter just now."

Mr. Hopkins looked penitent.

"That was a slip," he said. "I didn't mean to, 'Enry—I mean Cecil. But Cecil doesn't come easy to my tongue. 'Enry—ahem—Cecil! But I'll remember."

"If the fellows suspected, it would be very rough on me here."

"Would it? But that friend of yours—your titled friend, Lord Mauleverer—he didn't seem to think any the worse for knowin' your name was 'Opkins."

Leigh muttered something.

"I like that lad," said Mr. Hopkins. "I'm glad he's such a close friend of yours, 'Enry, as I told him myself."

Leigh groaned inwardly.

"Yes, dad."

"Now lemme look at your fixings in the skule," said Mr. Hopkins. "It's a long way 'ere from Essex, 'Enry—Cecil—and I sha'n't be able to make the journey often. But I did so want to see how you was fixed at the grand school. That's why I come. I knew you was so kind and thoughtful, always thinking of your old father, you wouldn't 'ave let me take the trouble. But bless you, I was bound to come."

"I—I suppose so," murmured Leigh.

He started and listened.

From the direction of the School House came a sound of many footsteps, and a murmur of many voices. A dim crowd of fellows loomed up in the moonlight, all coming in the direction of the porter's lodge.

"I tell you, I saw him!" It was Skinner's voice, and every syllable came to the ears of Cecil Leigh. "He's there."

"But he can't be such an outsider as you say. Leigh looks decent." That was Trevor's voice.

"But he is! I tell you, I've seen him. Such a lark!"

"Yes, rather!" broke in the bull voice of Bolsover. "And I suspected something of the sort all along. Let's have him out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Leigh drew his father into the deepest shadow of the elms. He was glad now that they had left the porter's lodge. It was clear that Skinner had seen Mr. Hopkins there, and was taking a crowd of fellows of his own kidney to show them Leigh's father. Cecil's heart beat almost to suffocation.

"Wot's all that mean, hey?" asked Mr. Hopkins. "Some of the young gentlemen's larks, hey?"

"Yes, yes," stammered Leigh. "It's—it's a jape, you know—a lark up against a—a man who's come to visit Gosling—the porter, you know—a man named Leigh, as it happens—very odd, isn't it? Let's go on to the house, father, and I'll show you my study."

"Right you are, my boy."

Skinner & Co. had passed on without a suspicion that Leigh and his father were in the shadow of the trees. They disappeared towards the porter's lodge, and Cecil hurried his father up to the house. He did not want to take him there. But it was the only refuge now; and he hoped fervently that

he would be able to get the old gentleman up to his study unnoticed.

Harry Wharton & Co. were in the hall, and they naturally looked at Leigh and his father as they came in. Leigh was white as chalk.

The juniors wondered who it was with him. The contrast between Mr. Hopkins and the slim, elegant lad in Etons was very striking. Mr. Hopkins paused and nodded genially to the juniors.

"Some of your friends, hey?" he asked.

"Yes, yes," muttered Leigh. "Come up to the study, father."

"I should like to speak——"

"Yes, yes, afterwards."

"Jest as you like, 'En—ahem—Cecil!"

Leigh hurried his father up the stairs as fast as he could. That was not very fast, however, as the old gentleman was short of wind, and not disposed to negotiate a long staircase easily. The juniors in the hall looked after them in surprise.

"Who on earth is that with Leigh?" exclaimed Bulstrode.

"Blessed if I know!"

"Can't be his pater," said Russell.

"Ha, ha! No!"

"Perhaps that old gardener chap he was talking about, the one who wrote him in that queer spelling," Harry Wharton remarked.

Bob Cherry sniffed.

"Old gardeners don't as a rule visit their masters' sons at school," he said.

"Why, what's the matter with you, Bob?"

"Nothing! But since Leigh chose to cut up caddishly on the footer field about Marky, I don't like the beast," said Bob Cherry. "I never could quite stand him, for that matter; and now I'm convinced that he's a worm."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Oh, draw it mild, Bob!"

"Well, he's a snob, anyway."

"I suppose he is a bit that way——"

"What's that?" asked Lord Mauleverer, who was standing near. "What's that about Leigh cutting up rusty? About Linley, too?"

"Yes," said Bob Cherry, with a growl of wrath. "He said Marky wasn't good enough to play footer in the same team with him; because Marky has worked in a factory, you know, and came here on a scholarship."

"Begad!" murmured his lordship, almost overcome. "He said that, did he?"

"He did—the worm! And every time I speak to him, I shall let him know my opinion of him," said Bob Cherry. "He won't find me mincing my words, and I'm ready to back them up, with or without gloves, any time he pleases—the snob!"

"The snob'!" murmured Lord Mauleverer. "Snob! Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?"

"Oh, it's too thick, that's all! Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lord Mauleverer. "Leigh setting up in business as a snob! Ha, ha, ha! My only aunt! Ha, ha, ha!"

And Lord Mauleverer walked away, still laughing, leaving the other fellows rather surprised at his merriment on the subject. They were soon to be enlightened as to the reason, however; though not by Lord Mauleverer.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.
The Lowest Depth.

CECIL LEIGH—alias Henry Hopkins—showed his father into his study in the Remove passage. He had hoped to find the room empty, but, as ill-luck would have it, Bunter was there. Billy Bunter certainly had a right to be there, as it was his study as much as it was Leigh's. But his presence at that particular time was distinctly exasperating to the unfortunate snob of the Remove.

Bunter rose to his feet, blinking at them through his big glasses, as Leigh brought his father in.

"Oh, really, Leigh, I think you might——"

"Get out of the study for a bit, will you, Bunter?"

"Certainly not," said the fat junior promptly. "I'm going to do my preparation, for one thing. Who's this man?"

"I'm his father, my lad," said Mr. Hopkins, before Cecil could reply. "Name of—ahem—ahem! Don't turn the young gentleman out, my boy. He won't do any 'arm."

Bunter blinked with eyes nearly as large as the lenses of his glasses in astonishment.

"His father!" he gasped.

"Yes, I should say so," said Mr. Hopkins proudly.

"My word!"

Cecil Leigh gave the Owl of the Remove a fierce look.

"Get out!" he muttered.

"Rats!" said Bunter defiantly. "I'm not going out of my own study. I—— Ow! Leggo!"

Leigh was not in a humour to bandy words with the Owl of the Remove. He seized Bunter by the collar and swung him to the door, and sent him whirling into the passage. The fat junior rolled over on the linoleum with howls of pain.

Leigh, with a flushed face, closed the door. Mr. Hopkins had watched the strange proceedings of his son in utter wonder.

"'Enry!" he ejaculated.

"Sit down, father."

"'Enry, my boy——"

"That fellow is a wretched cad!" said Leigh, breathing hard. "It's beastly hard luck to have him in my study at all!"

"Oh, I see!" said Mr. Hopkins. "But wasn't that a little bit 'igh-'anded, all the same, 'Enry?"

"Oh, no; that's all right!" said Leigh. "Never mind Bunter. Look here, you've got here very late, father. What train are you catching home?"

"I shall have to put up the night in London," said Mr. Hopkins. "I can stay with you an hour or so, 'Enry, if you like."

Cecil groaned silently.

"Of course I like!" he said. "It's not a question of that, father, of course. But you know you don't like hotels, and if you could possibly get back to Sanford to-night——"

Mr. Hopkins beamed upon him affectionately.

"That's jest like you," he said, "always thinking of your old dad. But I couldn't get back to Sanford; I shall 'ave to stop the night in London, anyway. I shall get back there pretty late. I sha'n't be able to make this journey often, 'Enry."

"Oh, father!"

"It's too long, and cross country, too," said Mr. Hopkins, shaking his head. "But you'll come 'ome in the 'olidays, though I dessay your chum Mauleverer will make you go with him to spend a good part of the time at his princely mansion wot you told me about in your letter."

Leigh winced. Nothing was less likely than that Lord Mauleverer would ask him home for the holidays.

"I—I don't think that's likely, dad," he said. "You—you see, I couldn't very well accept hospitality that it would be impossible for me to return; and I could hardly ask a fellow like Mauleverer down to the village inn at Sanford, could I?"

"I s'pose you're right, 'Enry," said Mr. Hopkins—"I s'pose you are. You've got the 'ead to think of these things. It's 'ard on you, 'Enry. A boy like you ought to 'ave a splendid 'ome fit to ask a duke to; that's wot you ought to 'ave, 'Enry."

Leigh laughed shortly.

"Well, I haven't it," he said. "It's good enough for me, dad, but it's not good enough to ask Greyfriars fellows to. They would expect a lot more."

"I wish I could do it for you, 'Enry," said Mr. Hopkins, with a sigh

"I know you do, dad," said Leigh, with a burst of genuine feeling. "But you've done more for me than I've any right to expect. I know how you've had to scrape, and I know your work's harder now I'm not there to help you. But I'll repay it all some day, dad, somehow. You have given me a chance precious few fellows in my position get, and I sha'n't ever forget that, dad."

Mr. Hopkins' face glowed with pride and happiness as he listened.

"It's worth it all to me to 'ave a son like you," he said. "Jest to 'ear you talk, too, and to look at you; as good a gentleman, though I say it, as the best of them, 'Enry."

"Do you think so, dad?"

"I know it. Blessed if a stranger would be able to tell which was the lord, you or your chum Mauleverer!" said Mr. Hopkins fondly. "I think you're the more helegant of the two, myself. 'Ullo! Per'aps this is your noble friend come to see us."

There was a step outside the door of the study. Leigh ran to the door at once. He was desperately anxious to keep anyone from entering just then. The door was opened without a knock, but Leigh's hand was upon it, and his foot was behind the door, and it opened only a few inches.

"Here he is!"

It was Skinner's voice.

Skinner & Co. were there, in full force—Skinner and Snoop, and Stott and Trevor, and Bolsover and Bunter, and several more fellows, all of them grinning. They had missed the visitor to Greyfriars at the porter's lodge; but Gosling had borne out Skinner's statement that it was Leigh's "pater" who had come, and the juniors had come on to Leigh's study to see if he was there.

He was there! He rose from his seat to greet the fellows with a friendly smile and word when they entered. The simple old gentleman little dreamed of the thoughts and feelings of Skinner & Co. upon the subject.

Leigh did not let the door open. Skinner and his friends

were pushing from outside, but Leigh kept his boot against the door.

"What do you want here?" he said huskily.

"Only called to see you," said Skinner blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We hear that your pater has come down to see you, and we should like to make his acquaintance," sniggered Snoop.

"Let them in, 'Enry," exclaimed the old gentleman, in his hearty way—"let them in! I'm sure I should be glad to make the acquaintance of any friends of yours."

Leigh had little choice about letting them in. The juniors were all pushing on the door, and Leigh was forced to let it open. He faced the fellows as they swarmed in, his face white with rage and shame.

"Here he is!" grinned Bolsover. "Leigh's pater, by Jove! How do you do, sir?"

"Quite well, I thank you," said Mr. Hopkins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leigh's pater! My hat!"

"Leigh senior! Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's—it's not the case!" muttered Leigh desperately. "He'—he's not my father. It's—it's a mistake."

He muttered the words so that the old gentleman could not hear him. The juniors stared at him. Leigh tapped his forehead, and motioned them out of the study. Skinner & Co., in amazement and alarm, backed away, and Leigh followed them into the passage. His face was strangely working.

"Keep out, you duffers!" he whispered. "Don't come in and excite him. It's all right; he has to be kept calm."

"Great Scott! What's the matter with him?"

"He's mad!"

"Oh!"

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

The End Crowns All.

THE juniors were willing enough to back away then. Leigh pulled the door of the study shut. He hardly knew what he was saying. He would have said anything, done anything to avoid owning up before all Greyfriars that this man was his father. To such a length had snobbishness brought the boy, that he denied his own father.

"Look here, you're gammoning!" muttered Skinner.

"I'm not!"

"Who is he, then?"

"Does he look as if he were my father?" said Leigh, with a miserable laugh.

"Well, no; but——"

"Who is he, then?" demanded Bolsover.

"He's the man who wrote me those letters—my father's old gardener. He's dotty; got sunstroke in South Africa," said Leigh. "He imagines that he has some claim on me, and I—I humour him, by my father's wish. I want to keep him calm and get him away to the railway-station as quickly as possible."

"By Jove!"

"I say, that's beastly rough on you!" said John Bull, who had come out of his study at the noise. "What do you think, Wharton?"

Harry Wharton had joined the crowd, with Nugent and Bob Cherry. They all looked very hard at Leigh. It seemed impossible that any fellow could be so incredibly mean as to deny his own father. And truly they would never have imagined that the man they had seen come in with Leigh was Leigh's father. He certainly did not look the part, so to speak. Surely Leigh was telling the truth!

"I suppose it's as Leigh says," said Wharton.

Bob Cherry was silent.

"I say, it's jolly rotten a fellow like that coming here, then," said Skinner. "I thought he was your father, Leigh; Gosling says so."

"I—I'm humouring the old chap, you see."

"You do it jolly well, then," said Skinner suspiciously.

"Well, whether he's Leigh's father or not, you fellows have no right to force yourselves into the study," said Harry Wharton. "Clear off!"

"I'll clear off quick enough if Leigh's got tame lunatics in his study," said Skinner. "You'd better bar off the rest of your father's dotty old retainers, Leigh."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Oh, buzz off, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—— Look here, the man said he was Leigh's father, and——"

"He's dotty, I tell you," said Leigh.

"More likely he's your father, and you're ashamed to own him," said Bolsover. But it was merely a sneer; he did not think so. Even Bolsover would have stopped short of such a thing as that, and he did not really believe that Leigh was so base.

"Oh, come away!" exclaimed John Bull.

The juniors crowded off.

Leigh watched them go with a haggard face, and then reopened the door of the study. He did not think that the old gentleman within could have heard anything, although in his excitement he had hardly been so careful as he might have been, and indeed some of the others had spoken in loud tones enough.

"It's all right, dad!" said Leigh, assuming cheerfulness with a great effort. "They were a lot of chaps who had come here to rag me, but I explained that you were my father, and—and—— Father!"

He broke off with a cry.

Mr. Hopkins was standing by the table, upon which his large red hand rested. His face was almost grey in hue, and his hand was trembling. His lips were twitching, as if he would have spoken, but no word came from them. He was not looking at his son; he was staring straight before him with glassy eyes.

Leigh looked at him, stricken with horror and remorse.

He did not need telling that his father had heard—that the old gentleman had heard enough, at all events, to know that his son had denied him—that the boy he doted upon had been ashamed to own him before the school.

And that blow had gone straight to the heart of John Hopkins.

In those few minutes old age seemed to have descended upon him. His hand trembled, his face was grey and lined, deep lines were upon his ruddy forehead. He did not speak; it seemed as if the power of speech had left him.

"Father!"

The old man did not speak or move.

Leigh came closer to him. As he looked into the kind old face, stricken now with bitterness worse than death, remorse came upon the wretched boy like a flood.

What had he done?

For what had he wounded this kind old man to the very soul? For what had he denied his father—the father whose kindness and love had never failed—the father who had pinched and scraped in order that his boy might have better chances than he had ever had? For what had he done that? To keep up false appearances which were half seen through already by those he tried to impose upon; to persist in a course of lying and boasting; to—to—— Oh, what had his motives been? What was anything worth to him if it made him inflict this suffering upon his father? All that was best in the boy's nature woke at that moment, and he sprang towards his father with a low cry. But then John Hopkins moved; he raised his hand, and waved the boy back.

"Don't!" he muttered huskily.

"Father!"

"Don't touch me, 'Enry! I—I didn't understand," said the old man dazedly. "I never ought to 'ave come 'ere. I've disgraced you. Yes, I can see it now. I—I never thought you'd 'ave changed so much, 'Enry, among your new friends. I—I'm a disgrace to you. You're ashamed of your father!"

"Father!"

"Where's my—my 'at?" said Mr. Hopkins, looking round blindly. "I—I'll go! Lemme get out quietly, 'Enry—let me get out! Oh, I—I want to get 'ome!"

"Father!"

"I don't blame you, 'Enry; I—I oughter understood," said the old man. "This ain't no place for me. 'Enry, I'm going! Good-bye, 'Enry! And don't think that I'm angry with you, or that this will make any difference to—to your stayin' 'ere. That's all right. Your old father's proud of you, 'Enry, though you ain't proud of 'im. You ain't got no reason to be, goodness knows. I ain't much to boast of, I s'pose, only—only I thought—I thought my own boy cared for me too much to care what I was like. But—but I orter known better, I s'pose. It's all right, 'Enry, I'm going!"

He groped to the door.

"Father!"

"Good-bye, 'Enry!"

But the boy ran after him, and his arms were round the old man's neck. He was sobbing as if his heart would break, as he clung to his father, and John Hopkins gazed at him in wonder.

"'Enry! What's the matter? 'Enry! !—I can't bear to see you like this!" stammered the old man. "It's all right, 'Enry, I'm going. That's wot you want, ain't it?"

"Father!"

John Hopkins smoothed the boy's fair hair back from his brow with a touch that was as tender as a woman's.

"What is it, 'Enry? I'll do anything you want—only tell me what it is."

"Oh, if you'd only be angry with me, if you'd kick me, trample on me as I deserve!" groaned Leigh. "If—if you'd see me as I am, not fit for you to touch, father! I'm a liar and a cheat. I've lied to the fellows here. I've bragged, I—I—— Oh, father, I'm the rottenest cad in existence! Why don't you hate me? Why don't you cast me off, father?"

"'Enry, my boy, I don't bear no malice. It's all natural, I reckon. Don't take on like that, 'Enry. I—I ain't 'urt. I know it's natural."

Leigh grasped his arm.

"Come with me, father."

"Where? What are you goin' to do, 'Enry?" exclaimed the old man in alarm.

But Leigh only dragged at his arm.

"Come—come with me!"

He hurried the old man into the passage, down the stairs, into the common-room, crowded now with the juniors, discussing what had happened. Every eye was turned upon them as they came in, the old gentleman unwillingly following his son. There was a general exclamation.

Leigh faced the crowd of fellows, his face chalky white, his eyes burning.

"Look here!" His voice was loud and clear. "This is my father, you fellows; the best father a chap ever had, though he's got the worst son a man ever had. This is my father. My name is Hopkins—Henry Hopkins—and I'm the son of the village innkeeper at Sanford. Now you know!"

The words came busting out wildly from the boy's twitching lips. John Hopkins tried to stop him, but it was impossible. Lord Mauleverer ran forward.

"Begad, Leigh, then you are a decent chap after all!" he exclaimed. "By Jove, give me your hand, dear boy!"

"Bravo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "You ass, I knew it all the time, but I never thought you were as decent as this! There's some good in a snob, after all. Bravo!"

The tears were streaming down the face of old John Hopkins. He had been proud of his boy before, but never so proud as now; and never, certainly, had he had so much cause for pride.

"My boy! 'Enry!" he murmured, almost inaudibly. "'Enry!"

And then Leigh, with his hand in his father's horny hand, walked proudly out of the room by the side of the old gentleman, leaving the crowd in a buzz.

. . . . . .

Leigh had expected that that announcement in the common-room would be his ruin at Greyfriars; and he did not care, so long as he was set right with his father. But it turned out far otherwise. John Hopkins was not allowed to leave Greyfriars till the last train from Friardale. Harry Wharton & Co. rallied round him, so to speak, and the old gentleman was entertained to a glorious feed in No. 1 Study, Lord Mauleverer handsomely planking down a banknote in the tuckshop to stand the "exes" for the occasion. Leigh and his father were the guests of honour. The snob of the Remove felt like a fellow in a dream; it seemed all unreal to him. But it was real enough. By that one act of manliness he had won the respect of his Form-fellows. There were a few, perhaps, who might sneer and gibe, but the best fellows in the Form stood by him; and Lord Mauleverer, whom in his conceit and miserable vanity he had passed off to his father as his chum, confided to Wharton that he really did feel like chumming with Leigh now.

"A fellow who could speak up, as he did then, must have a lot of good in him," said Lord Mauleverer sagely. And Wharton agreed.

A crowd of juniors walked down to the station to see Mr. Hopkins off. After their return, Leigh returned Lord Mauleverer the sovereign he had borrowed; and when Trimble approached him on the subject again, the rascal was met with a right-hander that levelled him with the floor, instead of the bribe he had expected. And finding that the whole story was now known, and Leigh unharmed by it, Trimble was careful to give his former victim a wide berth during the remainder of the time that he stayed at Greyfriars. And Leigh, much to his own astonishment, found himself walking to the Form-room the next morning arm-in-arm with Lord Mauleverer. His lordship was chumming with the fellow who had been—but no longer was—ashamed of his father!

THE END.

("SENT TO COVENTRY!" is the title of next week's long, complete tale of Harry Wharton and Co. at Greyfriars, by Frank Richards. Please order your copy of "The Magnet" Library in advance. Price 1d.)

ATTRACTIVE TALES.

(Told by "THE MAGNET.")

LACKED SECOND SIGHT.

Old Skimpenny was a bit of a miser, and especially so in the matter of food. He had hot beef on Sunday, cold beef on Monday, minced beef on Tuesday, beef-tea on Wednesday, beef-tea and water on Thursday, water on Friday, and on Saturday he fasted. By these means did he contrive to make a small joint last the week.

One day he invited "company," whose cultivation would be financially beneficial, he calculated.

"My fare is very plain," said old Skimpenny apologetically, as they sat down to dinner—"very plain indeed, you know."

"Never mind," assured his business friend: "I'm not accustomed to dainties."

"There," said old Skimpenny, as two exceedingly small chops were placed on the table, "you see your dinner, sir?"

"Quite so," replied the friend, cheerfully forking them on to his plate, "but I don't see yours."

THE TONGUE AND THE WAG.

Binks and Jinks met in the Strand yesterday, and got talking.

"I was on top of a tram the other day," said Binks, "puffing quietly at my cigar, when suddenly a lady sitting by me calmly snatched it away from me and aimed it overboard. 'You've no right to smoke on a tram,' she said. 'It is not allowed.'"

"Well?" said Jinks.

"Well, I was rather taken aback at first; but in a minute I grasped the poodle she was carrying in her lap, and dropped it over the side. 'You have no right to have dogs on a tramcar,' I said. 'It is not allowed.' She glared, and then we both looked over into the road, and there was the poodle running along the side of the tram, and what do you think it had in its mouth?"

"The cigar?"

"No," said Binks; "its tongue."

WHAT DID HE DO?

The dear, white-haired old veteran, who fondly imagined that his audience was reposing implicit faith in his veracity, proceeded with the recitation of his military monstrosities.

"I recolleck," said he, "havin' one o' the most exciting times of my life at the battle of Halma. I was alone—the last Britisher on the field o' battle—and the enemy was pursuing me with cries that 'ud curdle yer marrer to 'ear the echo of. Bullets were showering by me like rain, cannons roared like a thunderstorm, and there was I, Jack Junkett, alone, at the mercy of the Rooshians!"

The dear old veteran paused.

"Well," said a listener, "what did you do?"

"Do?" answered the old fellow. "I did a mile in four minutes!"

ALL'S WELL.

Mr. Taswell turned over in bed and began to snooze. It was four o'clock, and this was the first wink of sleep that Taswell had been able to snatch.

A violent banging on the front door, however, aroused him. He dashed over to the window and opened it.

"Is it fire?" he roared.

"I want Mr. Taswell," came the answer.

"I am Mr. Taswell. What is it?"

"I have an important matter which concerns your good name, and must not let it reach other ears. Come down quickly!"

In a moment Taswell, in his pyjamas, was at the front door. The winds whistled coldly.

"Well?" he gasped.

"Well," replied the disturber of Taswell's peace, "don't you think your name would be as well without the 'T'?"

Then he disappeared into the darkness, and the comments of Taswell were not at all well.

"The toughest part of the job is still to come." The plumber gathered up his tools and sighed wearily. "I have yet to make out and collect the bill!"

House-Owner: "You failed to pay your rent last month. What are you going to do about it?"

Tenant (thoughtfully): "Oh, I suppose I'll do as you said when I rented it!"

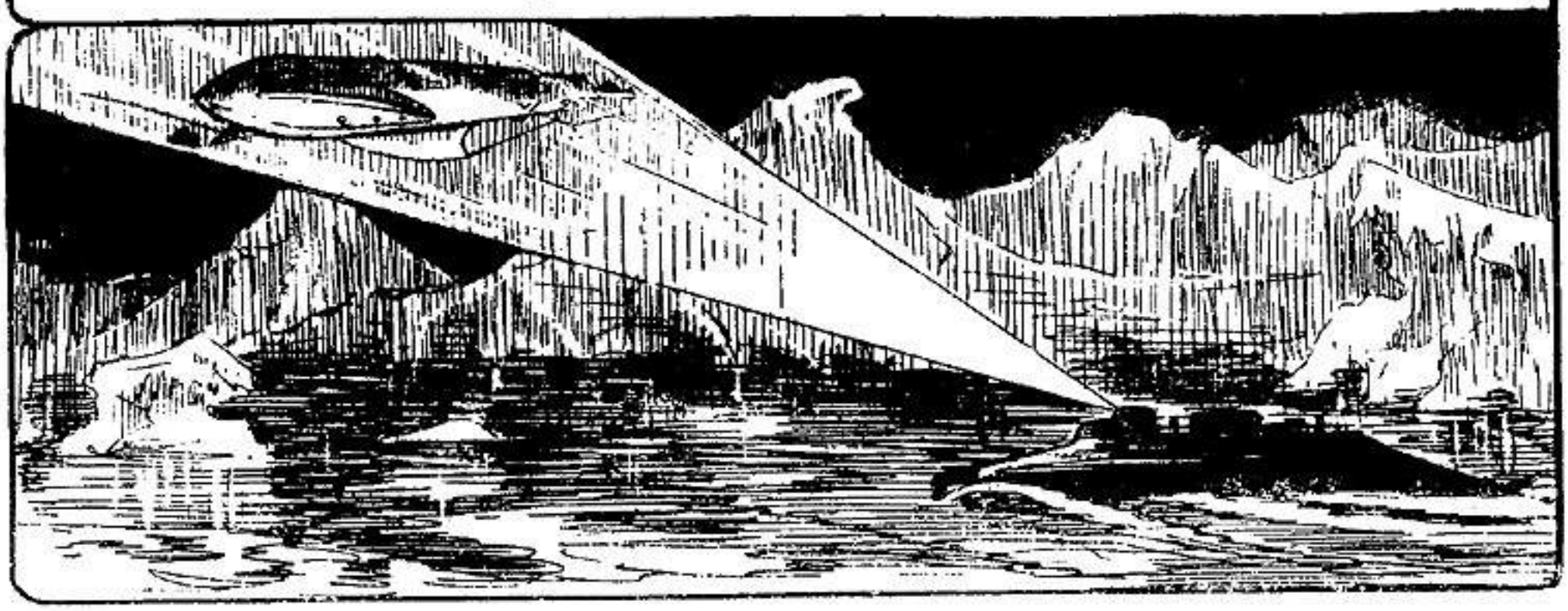
House-Owner: "What did I say?"

Tenant: "You said I must pay in advance or not at all."

"BEYOND THE ETERNAL ICE!"

A Thrilling Story of the Amazing Adventures of Ferrers Lord, Millionaire, Ching-Lung, and Rupert Thurston.

By SIDNEY DREW.



THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

Ferrers Lord, the famous multi-millionaire and inventor, startles the world by entering the lists against Professor Hugley, the celebrated American scientist, who is about to start in search of the North Pole in his wonderful airship the Cloud King. Lord announces his intention of starting for the Pole at the same time in his mysterious submarine the Lord of the Deep, and makes a match of it with the professor for the gigantic sum of a million pounds! The preliminaries are settled, and two judges are appointed—one to travel on board each of the two strange competing craft. Ferrers Lord is accompanied by all his old friends on the Lord of the Deep, including Ching-Lung and Rupert Thurston; while Professor Hugley has a Cuban named Paraira with him, and Estebian Gacchio, a negro. The two scoundrels murder Professor Hugley and five of the crew on the voyage, assume command of the Cloud King, and plot against the life of Ferrers Lord.

While out hunting Ferrers Lord discovers an underground forest of giant vegetable-ivory fungi. Accompanied by Thurston, Ching-Lung, Van Witter, the American umpire, and Gan-Waga, an Eskimo, he explores the forest, and comes across the tracks of a mammoth. The mammoth is eventually killed; but during the fight Ferrers Lord loses his compass, and the party is left helpless in the underground forest.

(Now go on with the story.)

Lost in the Awful Darkness.

Where do you think you lost your compass?" asked Rupert Thurston.

"I do not know."

"Why not go back and look for it?"

"Useless," said Ferrers Lord. "There are a thousand chances to one against finding it. I walked ahead, and if I dropped it there, you would have trampled it into the sand. Here is my suggestion: This is, I think, an offshoot of the channel we saw. By following it we must gain the main channel. Then, by following that, we shall come upon our own tracks."

"The very thing," said Ching-Lung. "That's a rattling idea!"

But the millionaire was hiding something else. The side channel might only penetrate into the cavern a mile or two. Were they on the right side of it? If not, they were steadily getting away from safety and wasting precious light. He muttered a prayer.

He strode on ahead. Ching-Lung moved to his side and whispered:

"Old chap!"

"Yes, Ching?"

"How long will the lamps burn?"

"Hush!" said Ferrers Lord. "Don't let them hear you, or it will take the heart out of them. Only for a couple of hours. And, Ching, if we're on the wrong side, Heaven help us! It's all my fault. I ought to have left that brute alone!"

Ching-Lung pressed the millionaire's hand.

"Oh, we'll scrape out of it somehow," he said, "so keep your pecker up! We're all of us born to be hung, so we can't very well die of mumps or measles. There'll be a rescue-party, too, when our absence begins to scare them. Unless it snows they'll find the cave, and they know we've gone exploring underground Trust Prout and Maddock. They'll have us out if they have to dig up the whole disgusting mountain. And the next time you go shooting in a coalpit, let me know, will you, and I'll arrange to be out to tea somewhere?"

An exclamation broke from the Yankee.

"Anything wrong?"

"Waal, my pesky lamp's about a corpse!" drawled the Yankee.

It was almost out, burning only a dull red. Thurston's eyes met Ching-Lung's. Thurston, too, had realised the awful truth. He put out his own lamp. One must suffice now; their lives depended on it.

"I say," drawled the Yankee impatiently, "we seem to be going a dickens of a way, and these clothes ain't the slap-up things for walking in! I'm about tired of it, and I've got a thirst I wouldn't sell for a dollar I'm going to have a rest and a smoke."

He flung himself down into the soft sand. The millionaire faced him angrily.

"Get up!" he said roughly.

"Eh?" cried the startled American, dropping his cigar-case. "Are you talking to me?"

"Yes, sir, I am."

"Oh, I thought you were addressing one of the dogs! I have always found you a gentleman, but——"

Ching-Lung stepped between them.

"Wait," he said. "Do you speak French, Mr. Van Witter?"

"I reckon every well-bred American parley-voos a trifle. Still, I don't see——"

"Patience—patience!" said Ching-Lung, in perfect French. "Mr. Lord spoke roughly to you because he has got us into a scrape, and he is blaming himself for it. You are a brave man, and you can face danger, I know. We are in terrible danger, old fellow. The light cannot last long, and our lives hang on a thread. If you're tired, hang on my arm."

The Yankee whistled softly. He did not look alarmed in the least.

"Then you parley-voooed to keep that Eskimo from knowing?" he drawled. "You don't want to frighten the poor chap. And though I heard you say a bit back that you hadn't a cent's worth of skin on your ankles, you offer me your arm. Waal, we Americans don't reckon to think much of a Chinee, but you're about the best bit of grit I ever saw, and there's my hand on it. Here's my hand for you, Mr. Lord. I'm sorry to keep you waiting."

Gan-Waga was alone ignorant of their terrible plight. It

was plain they had come the wrong way. The path to freedom must lie the other side of the creek. Feverishly they retraced their steps. As they passed the carcase of the mammoth the second light went out.

Only one lamp remained.

"Faster—faster!" cried Ferrers Lord.

They toiled on through the yielding sand, clambering over the fallen stems, plunging deeper and deeper through the forest.

"At last!"

They had gained the jungle of white grass and the hard-beaten track trodden by the mammoth. They hurried along, and reached the little stream. Their own footprints showed plain and clear.

"Saved!" cried Thurston. "Say——"

The words died on his lips as the lamp went out. And then the horrible, impenetrable darkness closed down upon the ghastly cavern like a pall.

Light! Light!—A Strange Raft.

One hope remained—the hope of rescue. Tom Prout and Maddock would strain every nerve to find them. But in the vast cavern, with its many turnings and its hampering darkness, would they come in time? They sat down in the sand. The silence was terrible, and yet it seemed full of strange rustlings, like the beat of unseen wings. A sudden crash made them start with dread. Perhaps the slain mastodon had a mate. If so, they were at the mercy of the brute, for it could see them in the darkness.

"Do not be alarmed," said Ferrers Lord. "It is only the falling mushrooms. I noticed that several were on the point of falling."

Gan-Waga was still moaning and muttering, and the dogs, huddled together, kept up a strange whimpering.

"Waal," drawled the Yankee, "this is pleasant. I say, Lord, how long do you think we'll have to stay in this pesky hole?"

"Not long, I hope. Prout will——"

He stopped. A dull, distant roaring trembled and quivered through the darkness. Ferrers Lord's hand clenched convulsively.

"A match!" he said hoarsely. "Show a light here!"

Thurston struck one. It's wavering gleam hardly made the darkness visible. The millionaire dragged a folded paper from his pocket. It was so much soaked by water that it tore as he opened it.

"The date?" he gasped. "What is the date?"

"The nineteenth," said Ching-Lung.

"And the time? My watch is stopped."

"Eight minutes to four."

The roaring sound grew louder, and a cool breath of air brushed their cheeks. The match flickered out.

"My friends," said the millionaire, "I do not want to frighten you, but if my theory is correct, our position is desperate. The highest tide of the year in these latitudes comes this morning. It will be full at six. By a natural law, water always finds its own level. Therefore it will rise here exactly to sea-level outside. The noise is the sound of the incoming tide forcing its way up the channel."

"Then you think it may reach here," muttered Van Witter.

"No; I have given up thinking. I hope and pray that it may not."

Thurston and Ching-Lung shivered as they listened to the thunder of the tide. Death seemed creeping down upon them. They sat in dumb and silent despair, deafened by the crash of tumbling waters. Something cold touched the millionaire's foot. He reached forward and felt his fingers wet. The tide was upon them.

"It's here," said Van Witter. "Waal, I reckon we'd better chance it and get back a bit."

Rupert struck a second match. The water had closed round them on every side. As yet it was only a few inches deep, but it was rising rapidly. The light flashed on their white faces, and on the narrow circle of dry sand.

"Stand aside!" shouted Ferrers Lord, seizing his axe. "Quick with another match. This stuff should burn."

He attacked the stem of the fungus, working like a demon, sending white splinters in all directions. Van Witter was the first to grasp his meaning.

"Pile up the sand! Scrap it together!" he gasped. "We shall have a light, at least. Hurry! Hurry!"

Gan-Waga and Ching-Lung feverishly flung the sand into a heap with their hands. Thurston lighted match after match, while Van Witter collected the splinters and piled them into heap with their hands. Thurston lighted match after match, they burst into flame. They cracked and burned like vulcanite, with a strong, pungent smell, and their glare shone red and ghostlike upon the flood. They had light—light!

"Out of the way, lads!"

The great mushroom swayed and fell with a hollow crash. Three axes slashed and cut at its trunk to obtain more fuel. That precious, glorious light. It revived their despairing spirits like a draught of champagne. Thurston laughed hysterically.

"Where there is life there is hope!" he cried.

"Where there's light there's hope, you mean," said the Yankee. "Say, I've got an idea! Here's the Eskimo's hide-rope—lariats, we call 'em over there. The trunks of those pesky mushrooms are a trifle too slippery to cling to, but we could cut this chap into three-foot lengths and tie cross-pieces on to four trees out of reach of the water. We could sit on them all right, I guess, and be out of danger."

"Splendid!" cried Thurston.

"Wait," drawled Ferrers Lord.

He turned on his heel, the glow of the fire behind him, and splashed into the water. The head of the fallen fungus towered above him, like an umbrella laid on its side. It had not broken in its decent. To his touch it felt like tough, coarse-grained cork, and he guessed roughly that it was nine or ten feet in diameter. He hacked a piece away, and dropped it into the water.

It floated buoyantly.

"Thurston! Van Witter! Ching!" he called.

They hastened to him.

"Gentlemen," he said, pointing to the great mushroom, "here is a natural raft. It is not large enough to carry all of us, but there are plenty more at hand. Fell those three and work as you have never worked before in your lives! Four of them fastened will soon save us all."

He set the example by hacking at the stem of the fallen mushroom about four feet from its socket. Standing knee-deep in water they plied their axes. Gan-Waga had pulled himself together, and had placed the rifles out of danger for a time by building a second pillar of sand to rest them on. He replenished the fire, and kept it blazing merrily.

Clack! Clack! Clack! rang the axe-blows. Ching-Lung brought his "tree" down first, and Ferrers Lord went to the aid of Van Witter. Presently the four stems were down, and their tops cut away from their parent stems. They righted them, but it was a difficult task. As yet the water was not deep enough to float them properly.

"We want a lever," said Ferrers Lord. "Ah, the very thing!"

He chose a half-grown fungus with a slender, tough stem. The perspiration was rolling off the others, and they were breathless and panting. But Ferrers Lord knew no fatigue. In a twinkling he had brought the stem down.

It formed a magnificent lever. Aided by the increasing depth of the water, they levered the great fungi together, each with its four-foot stem sticking up like a tiny mast. Four slender stems were selected and cut. These were placed in a square, and lashed firmly to the uprights with hide-roped handkerchiefs and the harness of dogs.

A sudden swell rolled across the dark tide. The strange raft shook and rocked.

It was afloat.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" shouted Ching-Ling. "It floats! It floats!"

Thurston and Van Witter took up the cry, and gripped the millionaire's hand. The dogs began to bark joyously.

"We have not finished yet," said Ferrers Lord. "We must have light. Take that small fungus, and cover it ten or twelve inches deep with wet sand. Put dry sand over that. We'll take our fire with us."

He seemed to forget nothing. He stripped off his seal-skin coat, and cut two or three lengths of hide from it. These he knotted together, while the others prepared the strange floating fireplace. The wet sand was patted down and smoothed, and the dry placed above it. Thurston moulded it hollow, and lifted the fire into it with the blade of his axe.

A supply of food was placed on the raft, and the dogs put aboard. The structure seemed firm and solid, and wonderfully buoyant. A second wave came rolling out of the blackness, submerging the place they had just left. Ferrers Lord seized the stem they had used as a lever, and pushed off, towing the fire after them.

"Queer travelling," he said lazily. "I think you are the proud possessor of the cigars, Ching. If one cannot eat it is not a bad thing to smoke. Thank you very much. I must trouble you for a match, Rupert."

Van Witter, though as true-hearted and brave as a man could be, was perpetually thinking of ways and means to make money.

"Waal," he said, "we've not done so badly up to now, I do reckon, and I'm pretty sure we'll come out on top. If

we do it will be worth the trouble. Supposing the sea don't shift that mammoth, we must get the hide and tusks off him. That ought to fetch ten thousand dollars, and dirt cheap at that. Then there's the great vegetable-ivory company coming along, and a book of our adventures should draw in the cash. Why didn't I bring my camera and flashlight apparatus with me? A few snapshots of us in this raft, or a cinematograph picture of us shooting that mammoth, would knock the earth."

Ching-Lung grinned as he puffed at his cigar.

"It's a pity," he said, "but it can't be helped. It must be grand to knock the earth. I knocked it once myself," he added dreamily.

"Did you now?" asked the Yankee, with great interest. "Made a big boom, I guess. How was that?"

"I told a gentleman he was a li—I mean, I hinted to him that I didn't quite believe he spoke the truth. It was in the room of a hotel in Cairo, on the second floor. He was a big man, and—well, I knocked the earth."

"Eh?" said Thurston.

"You see," went on Ching-Lung, "he chucked me out of the window. I don't know about a big boom, but I made a big bump—on the back of my head."

Thurston laughed and then grew silent. Ching-Lung's face had suddenly hardened, and there was a dangerous gleam in his eyes.

"He was a half-caste, I believe," continued Ching-Lung, "and a giant. He took me unawares. I was stunned, and when I came to my senses he had gone. But I shall find him some day."

"Do you know his name?"

"Yes," said Ching-Lung. "Estebian Gacchio. Why, Lord, what's the matter?"

The millionaire had started.

"Nothing," he drawled strangely; "except that I almost dropped the pole. The sand is soft here."

The Horror of Clement Morwith on Board the Pirate Flying Ship—A Wild Carouse—Meeting—Gomez Paraira Shows that he is Master.

"All's well!"

Clearly the cry rang through the Cloud King. The mockery of it! Sir Clement heard the musical cry as he sat behind the locked door of his cabin, listening to the whir of the fans and the buzzing of the screws. The cry was taken up by a second voice.

"All's well!"

A tramp of feet followed, and then silence, except for the incessant drone of the machinery. They were changing watch.

Sir Clement did what he seldom did—poured out a glass of brandy. He was the most temperate of men, but a growing horror was shattering his nerves. Out of a crew of fifteen who had left Tarrah Island, only ten remained. Professor Hugley was missing, and five men were dead. To be placed on the watch or at the wheel meant death. All these luckless wretches had been found there frozen stiff and stark.

It was foul play; and he knew it—was certain of it. Otherwise, if to take duty was to court death, the others would have mutinied and turned the vessel's head south. It was colder now than it had ever been, and yet the steersmen, when relieved, were hale and hearty. The others had been killed—murdered.

The baronet was white and haggard with gnawing horror. When would his turn come? His hair, only slightly grizzled before, was turning grey. He drew a sheet of paper towards him, dipped a pen into the ink, and, with trembling hand, began to write.

"The eighteenth—I have been eleven days on this accursed ship. I pray to Heaven that my piteous message may reach the hand of Ferrers Lord. A glimmering of the horrible truth is beginning to dawn on me. Gacchio is an out-and-out villain, though I know little against Paraira. Six deaths have taken place in four days. They will use me as a cats-paw, and endeavour to make me sign a paper to the effect that they have reached the Pole, so that they may obtain the money.

"I shall never consent, for I have my revolver. If I did it I should seal my own doom. My revolver is my only hope. Let them try to force me if they dare! I will do justice by shooting them down—one of them, at least, come what may. The ghastly horror of it all is killing me by inches. If I was only sure of what I dread—if I felt sure that these scoundrels intend to use this awful fighting-machine for piracy—I would blow it up, and gladly sacrifice my own life to save the world from their bloodthirsty——"

He thrust the papers away and locked them in a drawer as a knock came at the door.

"Caramba! Sir Clement!" drawled Paraira's voice. "What a hermit you are! Are we never to see you or have the pleasure of your company?"

The baronet opened the door, and the Cuban entered, bowing. The love of finery was in his southern blood, and he looked handsome, though rather theatrical, in his velvet coat and gold-laced waistcoat. A scarf of rich blue silk was knotted round his waist, and a sword dangled at his side. He wore his lace ruffles, beloved alike of the old-fashioned Cuban planters and the Mexican haciendado, or a wealthy native ranch-owner. He flourished his slouch hat, with its band of blue and gold, and blew a cloud of smoke out of his nostrils.

"My friend, Senor Estebian, is longing to see you," he went on. "His admiration for you is marvellous. A dozen times he has said anxiously that you must be unwell. Bah! All the calamities are enough to unnerve a heart of steel even like yours. But you must not rob us of your society, amigo carissimo" (dearest of friends) "you must not, really. Like all of us, the crew are getting restless. The old Roman emperors were wise, senor. When the populace were angry and mutinous they gave them panem et circenses. My latin is not good, but I think that means 'bread and games.' I intend to give my crew rum and games to-night."

"Your crew?"

"Yes, senor," answered the Cuban, with another bow. "My crew. You must understand that the regretted professor and myself had equal shares in this vessel. He is dead, poor fellow, and therefore I take his place. To keep the crew in order we must unbend for once. We are well over the ice, and I request your company humbly, senor, to celebrate this great event."

For a moment Sir Clement was silent. He was at this man's mercy, as helpless as a child. It would be madness to refuse and risk his anger. He must gain time—he must learn more.

"I will come, senor," he answered.

"A thousand thanks!" sneered the Cuban. "We—Senor Estebian and myself—will expect you there in ten minutes. And perhaps, senor, we shall need your aid. Caramba! Mutiny is an ugly word. You must stand by us, senor."

He went out, bowing once more. Sir Clement stared at the door, a wild hope in his heart. Perhaps some of the crew were true and loyal, or why did Paraira talk of needed help and mutiny? If he could only speak to them secretly, and tell them that their comrades had been murdered!

The strains of a fiddle reached him, and, slipping his revolver into his pocket, he strode heavily towards the forecastle.

The Cloud King was motionless, her vertical fans keeping her poised a few hundred feet above the level of the ice. Through a glazed porthole the midnight sun poured its feeble rays through, and a few electric lights were burning.

The burly negro greeted him with his most sweeping bow, and made room for him at a table on which stood champagne and cigars. He looked round at the faces of the crew, and every ray of hope vanished from his heart. Vice and wickedness was stamped on every feature—villainy, cruelty, wickedness of every kind. One great giant had broached a cask of rum, and was ladling it out with a generous hand. Paraira saw Sir Clement's look of repulsion.

"A handsome lot—eh, senor?" he drawled. "I fear the poor professor had no eye for manly beauty when he engaged them. Come, take this chair. Estebian, do the honours, and set free the wine. Ah, our big friend is going to sing. Silence, there!"

The crew, each man with a pannikin of rum, squatted round the walls, and the fiddler struck up a tune. Draining his mug, the evil-visaged giant began to roar out a song. The chorus, bellowed by everybody, made Sir Clement shiver:

"When we fly the Jolly Roger at the truck, my boys,
When the skull and crossbones flutter o'er the sea,
There'll be blood to spill, there'll be gold to win,
And we'll risk the gallows tree."

Paraira and Gacchio applauded and laughed uproariously.

"A pretty song, senor," drawled Paraira, "and a rousing song. The West Indies knew it long ago in the old piracy days. Caramba! Many a fellow was strung up at Kingston or Port Royal, singing too gamely when they were in the very act of jerking into eternity. I believe one of Senor Gacchio's ancestors departed this life suddenly by strangulation."

"That is so," answered the negro. "Poor Capitano Stephano! He was my great-grandfather, I think. They called him 'Black Stephano,' and he had the reputation of sparing neither man, woman, nor child. A fine fellow, senor, and a funny dog. He used always to lunch on deck when they were making people walk the plank. He said it gave him an appetite to see the sharks feeding."

The men, as they drank deeper, forgot the restraint of

Paraira's presence. The noise of tongues grew louder. When the first keg was drained they brought in a second at once. Clouds of evil-smelling tobacco-smoke filled the forecastle. One man was singing, another dancing, some playing cards and quarrelling. Once a knife was drawn, but a harsh word and an oath from Paraira sent it clicking back into its sheath again.

"Grash looks ugly," muttered the Cuban.

Grash was the giant who had sung. He was drinking deeply, and his coarse, evil face was flushed and angry. It was Grash who had drawn the knife. He was a gaol-bird, and, to his shame, an Englishman. Twice he had received the "cat" for robbery with violence. He was the bully of the Cloud King, but his massive strength made him not only feared, but admired, for, however they deny it, all men envy and admire strength.

Suddenly the giant rose to his feet, flinging the cards away. He lurched towards the table.

"Spy!" he cried.

He pointed his great forefinger at Sir Clement Morwith. Paraira and the negro looked at each other, and the Cuban shook his head.

"You dog!" roared Gacchio, who understood the gesture. "Back to your kennel!"

The man was drunk—dangerously drunk. Paraira's fingers closed upon his revolver. The noise of voices ceased.

"Who are you to call me a dog?" roared Grash. "You confounded nigger, you're only fit to lick a white man's boots! Keep your distance, or I'll knock you down! Dog, am I? You hear that, mates? If I'm a dog, we're dogs in the eyes of that black pig. Are we going to let a nigger who ought to be picking cotton order us about?"

A threatening murmur came from the drunken crew. Paraira laid his hand imploringly upon Gacchio's arm.

"Patience, amigo!" he whispered. "Think what depends on this! I swear I'll revenge you!"

He pushed the table aside.

"What do you want?"

"Want?" snarled Grash. "I'll soon tell you! We want to be free: we want to get to work. Hang all this tomfoolery! What's the good of going to the Pole? Take us down south in the track of the vessels, and we'll show you. We don't want to die of scurvy and starvation. Fly the flag, and turn south. If you ain't fools, clap a pistol to that fool's head and make him sign that we've won the race. Then poison him or throw him overboard. We don't go north another yard—them's the terms!"

The truth at last—the awful truth! Sir Clement turned as grey as ashes. So they meant to force his signature, and then murder him. Paraira bared his teeth, and rolled a cigarette with his left hand. His right was in his pocket fingering his revolver.

"Caramba!" he drawled. "This is pleasant! Your only excuse, Grash, is that you are drunk. It is mutiny."

"Hang your mutiny! Can there be mutiny on an outlawed vessel?"

Nine voices responded in murmurs of approval.

"The fellow is mad with drink, senor," said Paraira, turning to the baronet, with a smile. "I have often noticed that a big man gets drunk sooner than a small man. Of course, I except amigo Gacchio. The fool is raving. Fancy calling you a spy and the Cloud King an outlawed vessel! Patience, Estebian—patience! Grash, get to your hammock. I will talk to you when you're sober. By St. Sebastian of Toledo, go! Do you want me to clap you in irons?"

The giant doggedly folded his arms.

"There's not a man aboard this pirate who dared do that!" he growled. "We've talked it over between us. Not a yard further north do we go. That's our verdict. Make that spy sign."

Paraira took another step forward. It was sink or swim now. He was a good judge of character, and he knew that nothing would make Sir Clement sign.

"Caramba!" he hissed. "We shall see who is master here! Grash, go to the deck and take the wheel. You others get to your posts. Madmen! Do not goad me too far! To your posts!"

They did not stir, and Grash laughed insolently.

"Did you hear me?" asked the Cuban hoarsely.

"Yes, cap.," growled the giant, "we did. Are you going south?"

"North! I say we are going north!"

"And I say south! I say——"

He never spoke again. A revolver flashed and cracked, and he fell like a log, stone dead. There was a sudden hush of horror. Gacchio was at Paraira's side. Knives were whipped out. Uttering hideous cries, the men dashed forward.

The mighty negro raised the lifeless body in his hand, swung it above his head, and flung it from him. Six went down like ninepins. They staggered to their feet, white and trembling. Three revolvers pointed at them.

"To your posts!" cried Gomez Paraira. "I'll shoot the man who disobeys! Full speed to the north!"

There was no fight left in them. Cowed and shivering, they crept away. Gacchio laughed as he filled his glass.

"Sapristi, camarado," he said, "that was exciting while it lasted! It was bound to come. I think we have given them a fright. Drink, amigo, drink!"

Sir Clement stepped over the body and left the room. A volley of oaths left the Cuban's lips.

"You seem angry," said Gacchio, laughing again. "What has ruffled you?"

"Can you navigate or take reckonings?" snarled the Cuban.

"No."

"Grash could!"

"Caramba!" gasped the negro. "You have not left us without a navigator?"

"There is only the Englishman left."

"Then he must do it."

Paraira drank down the wine at a gulp.

"You may take the horse to the water," he answered, "but who can make him drink? He must guess by now who we are and what our plans are. That carrion, with his piracy song and his talk of an outlawed ship, was enough to spoil all. All Britishers are as obstinate as mules. Supposing he refuses?"

Gacchio laughed again.

"There are ways and means, amigo," he answered. "You come of a Spanish stock, and if you look back you will remember that the Spanish had wonderful genius for inventing tortures. The Inquisition was one of their little pleasantries, and the real slave trade another. It is an easy thing to die, you know, Gomez, but a different thing to be tortured. I rather fancy we can persuade him to navigate the vessel. So far, I have never failed to get what I wanted."

"And the signature?"

"I will forge that when he is no longer any use to us! Open the window!"

The vessel was moving north, high above the ice. Without moving his cigarette from his lips, Estebian Gacchio lifted the body, and forced it through the port-hole. He leaned out, the biting wind taking away his breath. A dark spot on the ice, rapidly dwindling away, marked the mangled body of the mutineer.

"Bah!" said Gacchio. "You're surely not going to leave a bottle of good wine behind you?"

The Cuban turned back.

"Killing that fellow may be an awkward thing for us," he said.

"Why?"

"This Britisher may be even proof against torture."

"Bah!" said the negro. "He will not be proof against some of the tortures that I will teach you!"

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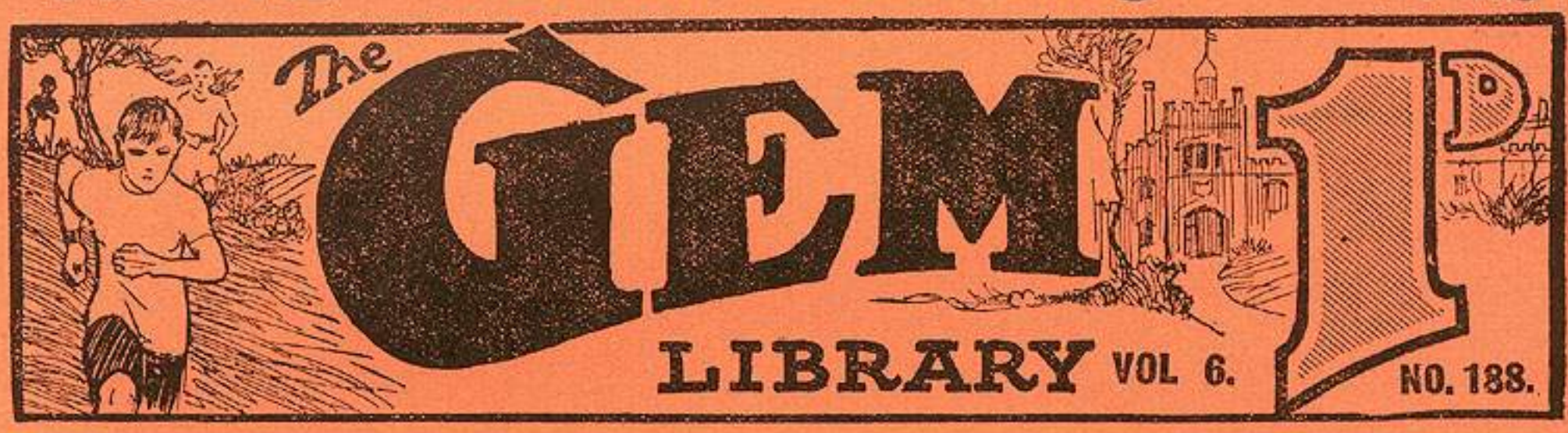

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