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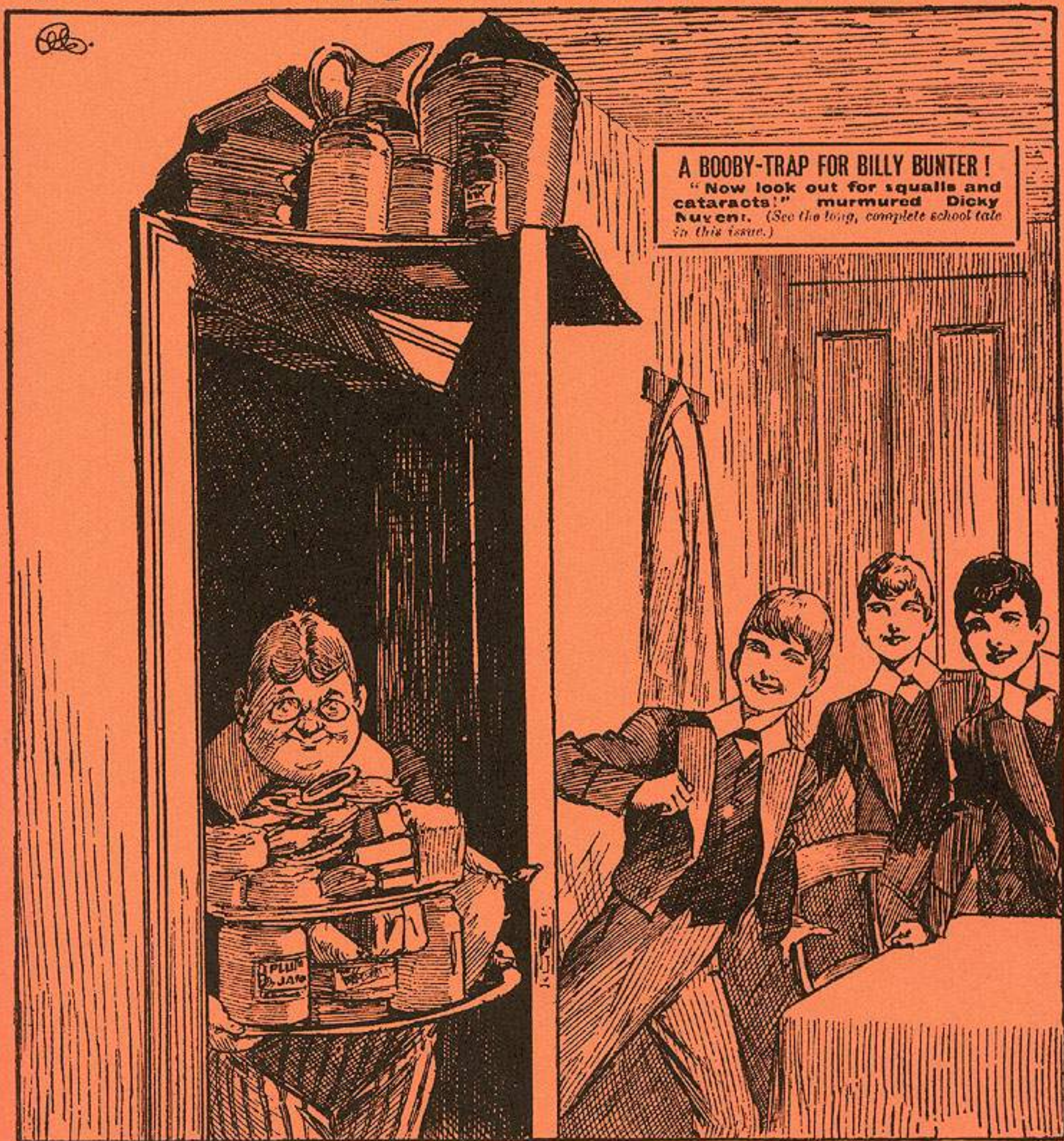
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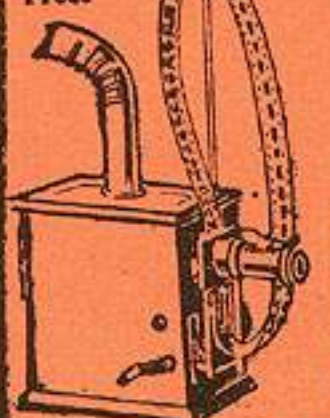
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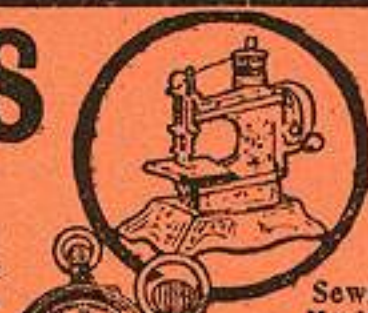
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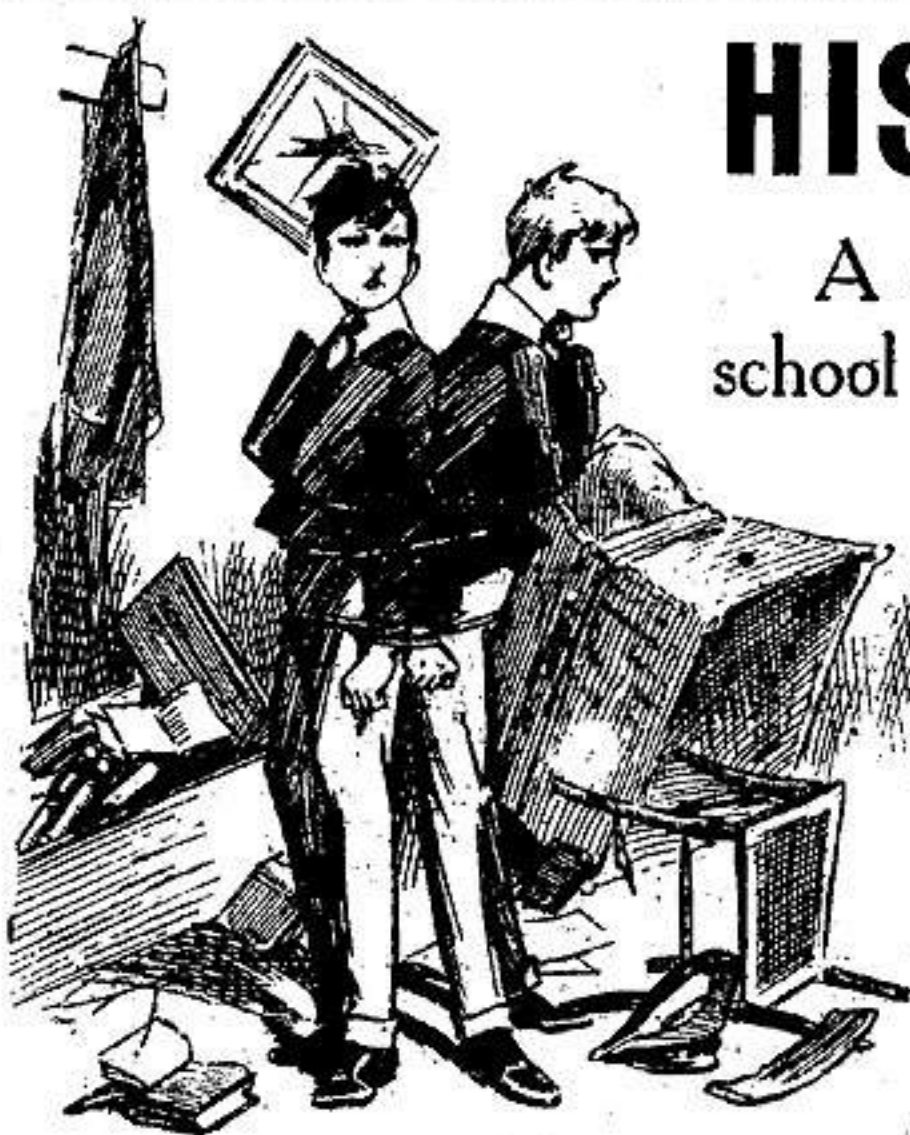
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A splendid, new, long, complete
school tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
and Mark Linley, the
Lancashire Lad.

By **FRANK RICHARDS.**



Leaving Bob Cherry and Mark Linley tied back to back in the middle of the room, the wreckers went out of the study. Bolsover turned in the doorway. He was the last to go, and he had a final taunt to hurl at his rival. "I think this finishes you, you factory cad!" he exclaimed. "I don't think even Wharton will speak to you after this! If you've a ray of decency left, you'll get out of the school!" (See chapter 15.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Nugent Minor Means Business.

"**W**HAT the dickens——"
Tramp, tramp!
Bang!
"What the——"

Harry Wharton jumped up in amazement. Wharton and Nugent were in their study, No 1 in the Remove passage at Greyfriars. Bob Cherry, of the Remove, was sitting on the table, swinging his long legs, and laying down the law on the subject of football. Bob was speaking in rather a loud

voice; he had to, for both Wharton and Nugent were speaking at the same time, and Bob wanted to make himself audible. The three chums of the Remove were discussing the off-side rule, and that is a topic upon which footballers frequently become unaccountably excited. The three animated voices were going strong, when the tramp of many footsteps sounded in the Remove passage, and there was a bang upon the study door which made the whole room shake, and very nearly brought down the pictures from the wall.

"What the dickens——"

Bang!

"Sounds as if somebody wants to come in," Bob Cherry remarked, with a grin. "Do your visitors generally announce themselves in that way, Wharton?"

"Blessed if I—— By Jove!"

Bang!

The door shook again. It was evident that a large number of feet had combined for the purpose of bestowing that bang upon the study door.

"Come in!" shouted Harry Wharton.

Bang!

The latch gave way this time, and the door flew violently open. Bob Cherry slid off the table, and pushed back his cuffs with an air of anticipation. Frank Nugent carelessly drew the fire-shovel towards him. Wharton picked up a cricket-stump. They fully expected a raid—from the Upper Fourth fellows, or from Bolsover & Co., the rival party in the Remove Form. Study raids were not infrequent at Greyfriars in the junior passages, and Harry Wharton & Co. were always ready.

The off-side rule was dismissed from their minds at once, and they stood ready to receive the invaders.

But the crowd of juniors who crammed themselves into the doorway of No. 1 did not belong to the Remove, or to the Upper Fourth, or to the Shell.

First of all came Dicky Nugent—Nugent minor—of the

Second Form. Then came Tubb, of the Third; and after these two a crowd of fags belonging to the Third and Second. They looked very excited, and they pushed and jostled one another after the manner of fags, and in a moment they had filled half the study, and the passage behind was crowded with more of them. It looked as if the whole of the Second and Third had come to pay a visit to Harry Wharton's study. The three Removites stared at them blankly.

"What on earth do you kids want?" demanded Harry Wharton.

Dicky Nugent sniffed.

"Kids yourself—I mean yourselves," he retorted. "We've come here on business, and if we have any rot we'll wreck the study."

"Dicky, you young ass—" began Frank Nugent.

Dicky interrupted his major without ceremony.

"Ring off, Frank! I've come here to talk, not to listen to you. You can give us a rest."

"Yes, give us a rest," said Tubb, of the Third.

And the crowd of fags gave a yell of encouragement.

"Go it, Dicky!"

"Yes for goodness' sake, go it, and then get out of the study!" said Harry Wharton. "I don't exactly want to lay this stump about you, but—"

"Better not!" said Dicky Nugent truculently. "We'll wreck the study for two pins, and wreck you Remove bounders, too. We mean business."

"Business!" repeated Gatty, of the Second, ferociously.

"Business!" roared the fags.

Harry Wharton laughed. It was clear that the fags had their backs up about something, but what it was Harry Wharton & Co. had not the faintest idea.

"Well, pile in!" said Harry, good-humouredly. "What's the trouble?"

"We're fed up!" said Dicky.

And the fags chimed in, like an operatic chorus:

"Fed up!"

"We've had enough!"

"Quite enough!" came the chorus.

"We're going to take you Remove swankers down a peg or two."

"Peg or two!" the chorus chimed in.

"And we mean business!"

"Business!"

"The fact is—" Nugent minor went on to explain.

"Fact is—" came the chorus.

But Dicky Nugent turned on his loyal supporters then.

"Shut up and let a chap speak!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, all right, Dicky; don't get your wool off!"

"Go it, Dicky!"

"Give it to them straight!"

"Pile in!"

"The fact is," said Dicky Nugent, waving his hand to the crowd of fags chidingly, like a conductor keeping down an eager orchestra—"the fact is, you've got to play."

"Play!" said Wharton, in wonder.

"Yes, that's it."

"That's it!" shouted the fags.

"Play what?" asked Bob Cherry. "Marbles?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dicky Nugent frowned majestically.

"No!" he said. "I dare say marbles is about your mark, but you've got to play footer. You've got to accept our challenge."

"Eh?"

"We've challenged the Remove to a footer match," said Dicky, "and you're afraid, and won't play. We're going to make you."

"This is the first I've heard of it," said Wharton, laughing. "And you must go to Bulstrode with your precious challenge. He's captain of the Form now."

"We've been to him!" shouted Dicky.

"Been to him!" yelled the fags.

"And what did he say?" asked Wharton.

"He said we could go and eat coke," said Dicky, with an aggrieved air—"said we could go and eat coke!"

"Eat coke!" chimed in the angry chorus.

"Said he couldn't play a team just out of the nursery."

"Nursery!" yelled the Third and Second.

"And declined."

"Declined!" roared Gatty. "Refused! Laughed!"

"Well, I'm not surprised that he declined, refused, and laughed," said Harry Wharton. "It was like your cheek to think of playing the Remove. If I were Form-captain now, I should decline and refuse and laugh."

"What-ho!" said Bob Cherry. "In fact, I feel like laughing now, anyway. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle," said Dicky Nugent crossly; "it gives me a pain. Bulstrode declined—"

"Then the matter's ended," said Harry.

"Rats! We talked to Bulstrode like a set of Dutch uncles, and the more we talked the more he cackled."

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A Grand New School Tale
Next Tuesday;

"No wonder! Ha, ha, ha!"

"We bumped him!" said Dicky fiercely. "We bumped him in his own study, and upset the ink-bottle over him, and left him lying under his bookcase."

"My hat!"

"And we'll do the same here if we have any cheek!" shouted Tubb, of the Third.

"Yes, rather!"

Harry Wharton took a tighter grip on the stump. Nugent brought the fire-shovel a little more into evidence, as it were, carelessly. Bob Cherry picked up a Latin dictionary by the corner.

"We've come to you," said Dicky Nugent, "to talk business. Bulstrode is captain of the Remove, I know; but you chaps are really the heads of the Form. You can make up a team and play us if you like."

"We're not likely to like," grinned Nugent.

"No fear!"

"We are ready to play you on Wednesday afternoon," said Dicky. "You've got an open afternoon then, as you've scratched your fixture with Highcliffe."

"Thanks; we'll keep it open."

"Will you play?"

"No fear!"

"You refuse?"

"We decline, refuse, and laugh—same as Bulstrode," said Harry Wharton blandly. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent and Bob Cherry. "We decline, refuse, and laugh. Ha, ha, ha!"

Then Dicky Nugent boiled over.

"Come on," he yelled, "bump them!"

"Look out!"

"Keep off, you cheeky young duffers!"

"Get out!"

"Bump them!" roared the fags.

And the heroes of the Third and Second made a wild rush.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Study Rag.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. lined up at once to withstand the onset. They were more amazed than alarmed by the outbreak of the fags. There had been much sore feeling of late between the Remove and the Lower Forms. Lately the Remove had made good their claim to be exempt from fagging for the Sixth, and the Lower Forms still fagged. That alone was sufficient to make Dicky Nugent warlike. And then, Dicky being a great footballer, and having ragged and worried his Form-fellows in making a really strong team for a junior Form, he was anxious to have the glory of meeting the Remove on the footer-field and vanquishing them. The Remove had played the Shell, and so why shouldn't the Third and Second play the Remove? That was how the fags looked at it, and the lofty bearing of the Removites, who affected to look down upon them as infants, exasperated the heroes of the Second and the Third. When the Second and the Third were not rowing with one another, they were always ready for a row with the Remove, and Dicky Nugent was fairly on the war-path now.

"Bump them!"

Three fellows, although the best athletes in the Remove, could not stand against the rush of innumerable fags, especially in the close quarters of a junior study. Five or six fags rolled over on the floor as Harry Wharton & Co. hit out, and then the three Removites were borne over by sheer weight of numbers.

They went down, with a crowd of fags sprawling over them.

"My hat!" gasped Nugent. "You cheeky young beggars!"

"Bump them!"

"Get out, you—"

"Bump them!"

Dicky Nugent had been knocked down in the first rush, but he scrambled up, holding one hand to his nose, which was streaming red.

The three Removites lay on the floor, helpless in the grasp of a dozen fags, but still struggling fiercely.

"Bump them!" said Dicky Nugent. "We'll teach them manners! Go it!"

"Hurrah!"

Harry Wharton was raised from the floor, in the grasp of Gatty, and Myers, and Tubb, and Dobbs, and several more. He descended upon the carpet again with a bump that brought up a cloud of dust, and elicited a wild yell from him.

"Ow!"

"Give him another!"

Bump!

"Yow!"

"Now Bob Cherry!"

Bump!

"Yaroo! I'll— Yaroo!"

"Now give my major one. No; give him two!"

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Crash! The trip was so unexpected, so utterly foul, that the Lancashire lad was not in the least prepared for it. He crashed heavily to the ground and lay there half stunned by the shock. (See Chapter 5.)

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump, bump!

"Groo! Ow!"

The three Removites gasped on the floor. They were quite powerless; the fags were too many for them. They gasped and ached after the bumping, and while they were held down by a crowd of fags, Dicky Nugent and several more proceeded to make a wreck of the study.

They turned out the bookcase, they upset the ashpan in the grate, they overturned the table, they dragged crockery and provisions from the cupboard. The displaced articles were scattered over the room, and over the Removites. Bob Cherry was favoured with the contents of a jar of jam. Frank Nugent received a bottle of lemonade, applied externally. Harry Wharton writhed and wriggled as a tin of syrup was inverted over his head, and the sticky fluid streamed down into his hair.

The fags were doing their work thoroughly.

"Ow!" roared Bob Cherry. "Help! Rescue, Remove!"

There was a scuffle in the passage.

Removites from the other studies were hurrying to the rescue, but the crowd of fags resisted, and they could not get into Study No. 1.

Dicky Nugent grinned as he looked round the study.

"I think we've made a pretty good job of it," he remarked. "What do you fellows say?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll think twice before you cheek the Second again,"

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said Dicky, glaring at the three writhing Removites. "Mind, we're going to play the Remove eleven, or you'll hear from us again."

"Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the fags trooped out of the study.

Harry Wharton & Co. sat up.

They were dishevelled, and they were dusty, and they were jammy, and they were treacly, and they were inky—and they were in exceedingly bad tempers.

"Well, if this doesn't beat everything!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Fancy the fags getting on their hind legs like this!"

"The cheeky young rascals!"

"We'll squash them for this!"

"That young brother of mine wants boiling," groaned Nugent, mopping lemonade out of his collar. "He wants jumping on with footer boots."

"Blessed if I know what you want to have a minor like that for," growled Bob Cherry. "He isn't safe!"

"You can have him!" grunted Nugent. "I'd give him away with a pound of tea, with pleasure. Ow! I shall have to go and change!"

"I shall never get this treacle out of my hair!" gasped Wharton.

"What about this jam in mine?" howled Bob Cherry.

"Ow! I feel horrid!"

"Beastly!"

"Let's go and get cleaned, before we have an army of

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fellows staring at us!" exclaimed Wharton, as a grinning face looked in at the door.

The face belonged to John Bull of the Remove. Bull had come to the rescue, but it was too late for rescue, and he laughed instead. Certainly the aspect of the three victims was comic enough. Bull roared.

The trio stared at him savagely.

"What are you cackling at?" demanded Wharton.

"You!" roared Johnny Bull. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three juniors strode out of the study, with frowning brows, leaving Johnny Bull holding on to the door and laughing. Mark Linley had come out of his study, and so had Bolsover and Stott and Snoop and Hazeldene and Tom Brown, and a half dozen more. They roared at the sight of the trio.

The three tramped away in exasperated silence. They did not expect sympathy—but if they had expected it, they certainly would not have received it. The rest of the Remove seemed determined to look upon the comic side of the affair.

"I—I say, you fellows, what's happened?"

It was the voice of Bunter, of the Remove. The fat junior came upstairs as the three wrecked juniors tramped on to the bath-rooms. He stopped, and blinked at them through his big spectacles in amazement.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Bob Cherry.

"I say, it's rotten to waste jam like that," said Bunter indignantly. "If you didn't want it, you might have given it to me."

"Oh, buzz off!"

"Well, you do look funny!" said Bunter. "Who's done it?"

"Mind your own bizney."

"You don't mean to say you've let the fags handle you like that?" gasped Bunter. "Ha, ha, ha! The Remove is coming to something!"

"Shut up!" roared Nugent.

"But I say, you fellows——"

The three exasperated juniors seized Bunter before he could get any further. They rubbed off a considerable quantity of the ink and jam and treacle upon him, and then bumped him on the linoleum, and left him sitting there.

Somewhat comforted, they went on their way.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. "Beasts! Yow!"

Wharton and Nugent and Cherry reached the nearest bath-room. The door was open, and clouds of steam came forth. Bulstrode, the captain of the Remove, was already there, half dressed, sousing himself in hot water. He turned a wet and crimson face towards Harry Wharton & Co. as they came in.

"Hallo! You, too!" he exclaimed.

"Thou, too, Brutus!" grinned Nugent.

"I'll smash those fags!" growled Bulstrode.

"Oh, we'll smash them! Meanwhile, we want a wash. Make room for your uncle," said Bob Cherry. "Groo! I'm jammy!"

And the three Removites washed away industriously.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

No Go!

WINGATE, of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, was in the passage when the juniors came down, with shining faces and clean collars. He looked at them with a grin, and they turned red. It was clear that the fags' raid was known all over the school, and had even reached the august ears of the head of the Sixth. Wingate was talking to Courtney, of the Sixth, but he stopped to speak to the chums of the Remove.

"Hallo! I hear you've been in trouble?" he remarked.

"Oh, it's nothing!" said Harry Wharton uneasily. "Just some cheek of the fags, that's all."

Wingate grinned.

"What was the row about?" he asked.

"They wanted us to play them at footer!" said Bulstrode.

"And didn't you?"

Bulstrode stared.

"Play the Second at footer!" he exclaimed. "Oh, really, you know, that's too thick! I suppose we shall be asked to play a Kindergarten next."

"Well, you play the Shell, and the Shell are as much above you as you are above the Second," said Wingate. "I don't see why you shouldn't play them."

Bulstrode grunted.

"They wouldn't have an earthly!" he said.

"Well, play them, and show them that they've no chance. That's my advice," said Wingate, turning away.

The juniors went on to the common-room. Bulstrode was

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frowning. He was captain of the Remove, and captain of the Form footer team, and he did not want any interference with his prerogatives, even from the captain of the school.

"It's not a bad idea," Bob Cherry remarked.

"What isn't?" snapped Bulstrode.

"Playing the fags."

"Oh, rot!"

"They won't be happy till they get it," said Frank Nugent; "and we should give them a frightful licking, which might bring them to their senses."

"We might as well," Harry Wharton remarked.

"Oh, rot!" said Bulstrode, again. "I don't see it. Besides, we can't let them have their way, after refusing; they'd get their ears up no end."

"It would be a lesson to them," observed Mark Linley.

"Rats!"

And Bulstrode walked away to finish the discussion. Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders. Frank Nugent frowned a little. He did not quite like Bulstrode's high-handed manner of disposing of the question.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea at all, playing the fags, and we have Wednesday afternoon open," said Mark Linley.

"But, of course, Bulstrode will have to decide."

"Oh, stuff!" said John Bull. "Let's put it before the footer committee."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"I don't want to interfere with Bulstrode, for one," he said.

And the subject dropped.

Wharton was perhaps a little over-careful on that point. He had been captain of the Remove, and Bulstrode had supplanted him. Many of the fellows wanted Wharton to be their captain again, but he had always steadily refused to cut the ground from under Bulstrode's feet. And he was always very careful to avoid any appearance of disloyalty to the new Form-captain.

But the general opinion in the Remove, as they talked the matter over, was that the match should be played, and the fags brought to reason by means of a tremendous licking on the football-field.

And that Dicky Nugent & Co. had by no means abandoned their scheme was soon clear. Nugent minor had made up his mind that the fags' eleven was to meet the Remove, and he did not intend to bury the hatchet, so to speak, until the Removites had agreed to play the match. The fags were on the warpath, and their warlike operations furnished amusement to all Greyfriars excepting the Remove. There had lately been trouble between the Remove and the Sixth, and the seniors had come off second best. And it amused them very much to see the Remove embroiled with the fags.

Bulstrode and a crowd of Remove fellows went along to the Second Form-room after tea, but they found the door locked, and a crowd of fags inside yelled defiance through the keyhole. Bulstrode & Co. hammered at the door till they were scared off by the approach of the Second Form-master, as he came to take the class in evening preparation. They retired to the junior common-room, baffled.

"They've got to be ragged," said Bulstrode savagely. "We shall never hear the end of this, unless we put them in their place."

"Or play them," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, rats!"

And Bulstrode turned the matter over in his mind. When the Remove went up to bed that night, Bulstrode had decided.

"Don't take all your things off, you chaps," he said.

"Why not?" asked Tom Brown.

"We're going to raid the Second dorm."

"Oh, good!"

The Removites turned in, most of them only half undressed. Courtney, of the Sixth, came in to turn the lights out, and there was a peculiar expression upon Courtney's face. The senior probably suspected that there would be raiding that night, and it was his duty as a prefect to see that there was nothing of the sort.

"Hallo, all in bed!" he exclaimed cheerily.

"Yes," said Bulstrode sleepily. "Good-night, Courtney!"

"Feeling sleepy, Bulstrode?"

"Yaw-aw! Frightfully," said Bulstrode.

"In a hurry to get to bed, I suppose?"

"Ye-es."

"I suppose that's the reason you haven't taken your trousers off," said Courtney blandly. "I don't see any sign of them here."

Bulstrode turned red. There was a chuckle from some of the other beds. Courtney remained as grave as a judge.

"You—you see——" stammered Bulstrode.

"It's horribly slovenly to go to sleep in your trousers," said Courtney severely; "and it utterly ruins the bags."

"I—I didn't mean to—to go——"

"You didn't mean to go to sleep?" demanded Courtney.

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"No—yes—I—I mean, I——"
 "You were going to remain awake all night, because you are sleepy?" suggested Courtney.
 "Well, you see I—I——"
 "Better take them off, Bulstrode, and fold them up nicely and neatly, like a good boy," said the prefect. "By the way, where are your bags, Cherry?"
 Snore!
 "Bob Cherry!"
 Snore!
 "Dear me!" said Courtney. "He is asleep already." He picked up the water-jug from Bob Cherry's washstand. "I suppose I had better souse him, to wake him up, as he is sleeping so soundly——"
 Bob Cherry sat up suddenly.
 "I—I—it's all right, Courtney," he stammered. "I—I'm awake!"
 "Very good! It's a bad habit to get into, going to bed in your clothes," said Courtney. "It cannot be allowed."
 Bob Cherry turned out and finished undressing without a word. Bulstrode was doing the same.
 Courtney looked at Harry Wharton's clothes.
 "It's a cold night, Wharton, isn't it?" he remarked.
 "Ye-es," said Harry.
 "I suppose that is why you have kept your underclothing on?"
 "Well, you—you see——"
 "It is a most unhealthy habit, Wharton, to sleep in the same underclothing that you wear during the day. Surely you know that?"
 Wharton flushed.
 "Of course I do," he said. "I—I——"
 "But you had forgotten it for once?" suggested Courtney sweetly. "If you are not warm enough in bed you can ask Mrs. Kebble for another blanket. But you really must not keep your underclothing on. It's horribly slovenly!"
 "Look here——"
 "Where are your socks, Nugent?"
 "On my tootsies!" growled Frank.
 "Better take them off. Sleeping in one's socks leads to having corns," said Courtney, "and it's a dirty habit, anyway."
 "Look here——"
 But the prefect was going on. By the time he had finished the Removites had nothing on but nightshirts and pyjamas. They turned into bed again, looking very sheepish. Courtney was still smiling very amiably.
 "By the way," he said, as his hand was on the switch of the electric light, "I shall be on the look-out this evening, and if any of you kids should go out of the dormitory you may expect to meet me—with a cane! Good-night!"
 "Good-night, Courtney!" mumbled the juniors.
 The light was turned out, and Courtney retired, closing the door. He paused for a moment in the passage to chuckle softly, and then went his way.
 The Removites, in the darkness of the dormitory, growled.
 "The game's up!" said Bolsover.
 Bulstrode snorted angrily.
 "Yes. He smelt a rat, confound him!"
 Harry Wharton laughed.
 "He knew what we intended to do, just as well as we did," he said. "We can't raid the fags now. Better go to sleep."
 And the Removites, after grumbling considerably, went to sleep.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Bolsover Objects!

"COME on, Marky!"
 Mark Linley paused.
 The Remove were coming out of their class-room after morning lessons, and the Lancashire lad was turning away towards the staircase. It was a bright, sunny, winter day, and Bob Cherry's first thought was of the footer-ground.
 "Where are you going?" he demanded.
 "I was going to do a little work, Bob."
 Bob Cherry sniffed.
 "Oh, rats!" he replied. "What on earth do you want to work for on a day like this? You are coming out for footer practice—twenty minutes before dinner."
 The Lancashire lad hesitated. There was a troubled expression upon his quiet, serious face.
 Mark Linley was a quiet, good-tempered fellow, but his face was perhaps never so sunny as that of his chum and study-mate, Bob Cherry. There were fellows in the Remove who never allowed Mark to forget that he was a "scholarship" boy, and that he had worked in a factory before he came to Greyfriars. Bolsover, the bully of the Remove, was especially eloquent on that topic, and Bolsover had lately been given a place in the Remove eleven. He made a good back when he chose to play well, though his temper was so uncertain that he was not a reliable player. Harry

Wharton would never have played him; but Bulstrode was skipper now, and Bulstrode had given him the chance.
 "What's the trouble, Marky?" Bob Cherry asked, looking curiously at his chum. "You're not swotting for a blessed exam. now, and you don't need to work."
 "The fact is, Bob——"
 Mark paused again.
 "Well?"
 "I'm going to drop footer for a bit."
 Bob Cherry stared at his chum open-mouthed and wide-eyed.
 "Drop footer?" he ejaculated.
 "Yes," said Mark quietly.
 "Dotty?" asked Bob.
 The Lancashire lad smiled faintly.
 "No, Bob."
 "Then what are you going to drop footer for?" demanded Bob warmly. "If you're not dotty what possible motive can you have for dropping footer?"
 Mark was silent.
 "Hallo! What's the trouble?" asked Harry Wharton, pausing in the passage, as he heard Bob's excited voice.
 "Not rowing, you two, surely?"
 "Oh, bosh!" said Bob. "Marky and I never row. Do we, Marky?"
 "No," said Mark, with a smile.
 "Only he does try a fellow's temper sometimes," said Bob Cherry. "He's talking about giving up footer now. Dropping it! Did you ever hear such rot?"
 "No, I never did," agreed Wharton.
 Mark coloured uneasily.
 "I know what the trouble is," Frank Nugent remarked. "Bolsover has been jawing since he got into the Form eleven. Marky doesn't like it."
 "Well——" began Mark.
 "You don't mean to say you're ass enough to care what Bolsover says?" demanded Bob Cherry, in amazement.
 "No, but——"
 "My hat!" said Bob angrily. "I'll hammer Bolsover till I make him civil. I'll——"
 Mark caught his chum by the arm.
 "Let Bolsover alone," he said. "It's not only Bolsover; but—but there are several chaps would be glad to see me out of the eleven, and—and——"
 "And you're going to let them have their way?"
 Mark was silent.
 "Well, you're jolly well, not!" said Bob Cherry. "You're coming out to practice now, or you will have a fight with me on your hands. Savvy?"
 "Bob, old man——"
 "Come on!"
 Bob Cherry grasped his chum by the arm and marched him out into the Close.
 Mark Linley went without resistance.
 "Oh, all right!" he said, laughing. "But——"
 "Blow your 'buts!"
 "Bulstrode's making up two teams now," said Wharton. "Bolsover's in his lot, and you can be in my team, Linley."
 "Right you are!"
 Most of the Removites were crowding down to the footer-ground. Bulstrode, the footer captain of the Remove, was making the footballers stick to practice with the most praiseworthy diligence. Fellows who "slacked" at practice did not remain long in the team. Bulstrode was making up two elevens for twenty minutes' practice before dinner, and half the Remove were called upon for the required number of players.
 Bulstrode nodded cheerily to Harry Wharton & Co. as they came down to the ground.
 "I want twenty-two," he said. "Nothing like full teams for good practice. Where are the rest of the fellows?"
 "I say, Bulstrode——"
 "Oh, you buzz off, Bunter!"
 Billy Bunter blinked indignantly at the captain of the Remove.
 As fattest and laziest fellow in the Form Bunter was easily first. At cooking and eating and borrowing Billy Bunter had no equal. But nothing would eradicate from the fat junior's mind the idea that he could play footer. On special occasions, when the Remove had specially hard matches on, Bunter would offer his services, adding considerably to the mirth of Greyfriars thereby.
 "Look here, Bulstrode——"
 "Go and tell Johnny Bull and Brown they're wanted, Bunter."
 "Oh, really, Bulstrode——"
 "Buzz off!" roared the Remove captain.
 "I say, Bulstrode, I'm quite willing to play. I don't mind where you put me—I can play forward, half, or back,

or I'll keep goal if you like. It's all the same to me. I could always keep my end up anywhere, if I were not kept out of the eleven by personal jealousy."

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

"You don't mind where I put you?" asked Bulstrode.

"Not in the least! Please yourself about that," said Bunter loftily.

"I will!" said Bulstrode.

He strode towards the fat junior and seized him by the collar. Billy Bunter yelled with alarm, as he struggled in Bulstrode's grip.

"Ow!" he roared. "Yow! Leggo! What are you going to do? Yaroo!"

"You said I could put you where I pleased."

"Yow! Yes! But—"

"Well, it pleases me to put you in this puddle!" said Bulstrode.

Splash!

The Owl of the Remove gave a roar as Bulstrode dropped him into a muddy puddle close by the pavilion. The Removites roared, too, with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groo! I'm wet! Yooooop!"

Billy Bunter scrambled blindly out of the puddle. His trousers were dripping with water and mud, and his fat face was crimson with fury. He put his spectacles straight on his fat little pink nose, and glared furiously at Bulstrode.

"Ow! Beast! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You said I could put you where I pleased," said Bulstrode, with an air of surprise. "I was only taking you at your word, you know."

"Ow! You know I jolly well didn't mean that! Yow! I'm wet!"

"Go hon!"

Billy Bunter rolled off the field, snorting with indignation. A yell of laughter followed him.

Bulstrode looked round over the Removites.

"Come on!" he said. "No good wasting time. Where's Bolsover?"

Bolsover came up.

"Here I am," he said. "Is Linley playing?"

"Yes. He's on Wharton's side."

Bolsover frowned.

"I suppose it's no good talking to you," he said. "I don't like that fellow in the team, and that's the long and the short of it! I think it's rotten that we should be called upon to play with a factory cad."

"He's a good player."

"There are others."

"Yes, but— Look here, Bolsover, don't make trouble," said Bulstrode peevishly. "Besides, you seem to have forgotten that I'm footer captain, and can play whom I like."

"You'll be playing Trotter, the page, next, I suppose?" said Bolsover sarcastically.

Bob Cherry broke in.

"Why not, if he could play?" he demanded.

Bolsover shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, don't mind me!" he said. "Play the blessed chimney-sweep from Friardale if you like! I've no more to say."

"That's a jolly good thing!" remarked Nugent.

"Look here, Nugent—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Line up!" said Bulstrode, interrupting the altercation. "Don't waste all the time jawing, for goodness' sake! You can jaw in the common-room after dark."

And the two sides lined up on the field. Bolsover's face was darkly scowling, and he gave the Lancashire lad a very unpleasant look. If they came in contact on the footer-field, and Bolsover had a chance, it was likely to go hard with the scholarship junior.

Mark Linley did not even look at the Remove bully.

So far as he was concerned Bolsover might not have existed at all. But under the calm exterior of the Lancashire lad his feelings were very bitter. He wondered whether the persecution would never end, and whether life at Greyfriars would be made intolerable to him after all by Bolsover and Snoop and fellows like them.

Billy Bunter rolled up to the ropes among a crowd of fellows who were looking on, and blinked through his big spectacles at the footballers. He snorted with indignant contempt.

"Fancy that!" he ejaculated.

"Hallo! What's the trouble with you?" asked Russell, of the Remove.

"Playing that factory cad, and leaving out a fellow like me," said Bunter. "What do you think, Russell?"

"I think you'd better shut up!" said Russell cheerfully.

And he emphasised the remark by flattening Billy Bunter's cap over his eyes, and the fat junior gasped, and retired to a different part of the ground to give vent to his discontent.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Foul!

BULSTRODE kicked off, and the game was soon going hard and fast. The Removites were fast players, but their play did not consist wholly of kick and rush. Some of them had studied football on its scientific side, especially fellows like Wharton, Nugent, and Mark Linley. There never was a finer junior winger than Mark Linley; his speed and his straight shooting were unequalled in the team. It was a picture to see him dribbling the ball down the field, seeming to wind round the feet of halves and backs, and it required a skilled goalie to stop the ball when Mark sent it in.

A crowd of fellows were gathering round the ground—the practice match was attracting a great deal of attention, which was quite unusual. But the fact was explained when the Remove players, looking round at the sound of shouting, observed that the spectators belonged mostly to the Second and Third Forms. Dicky Nugent & Co. had turned up in force, but not to cheer or admire.

Bolsover gave them their first chance of ragging the players. Bolsover was right-back, and he blundered clumsily when Mark Linley brought the ball past him, and the Lancashire lad sent it whizzing in.

"Goal!" shouted Harry Wharton. "Good old Linley!"

"Rotten Bolsover, you mean!" growled Bulstrode.

Dicky Nugent gave a yell.

"That's how the Remove play footer! Ha, ha, ha!"

And the fags laughed in chorus

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rats!"

"Boo! Boo!"

"Cheeky young sweeps!" said Bob Cherry. "Here, you fags, you run away and play!"

"Rats!"

"Boo!"

Affecting not to hear the disrespectful remarks of the Third and Second, the Remove players went on with the match. Bolsover's face was crimson with rage. He had shown up to the greatest possible disadvantage, and he attributed it to Mark Linley instead of to his own carelessness.

He set his teeth as the play restarted.

He was watching for an opportunity. If the chance came to score over the Lancashire lad no regard for fair play would stop Bolsover the bully.

His chance came!

Mark Linley had captured the ball, and was bringing it down the field at a pace that gave the opposing forwards no chance whatever. He dodged the halves in masterly style, and Bolsover rushed to intercept him. Mark Linley seemed to walk round the feet of the burly back, and ran on towards goal. Bolsover, with a face like thunder, ran right at him and tripped him up.

Crash!

The trip was so unexpected, so utterly foul, that Mark was not in the least prepared for it. He crashed heavily to the ground, and lay there half stunned by the shock.

There was a yell from the other players, and from the fags crowding round the ropes, and from everybody who saw the attack.

"Foul!"

Bolsover stood breathing hard, his teeth gritted. He had meant to foul Linley, but not quite so openly as that. Bob Cherry came tearing across the field. Play, of course, had stopped instantly.

"You cad!" yelled Bob Cherry.

Bolsover scowled.

"Foul!"

"Cad!"

"Turn him out!"

Bob Cherry paused for a second to glance down at the fallen junior, and then ran on, right at Bolsover. His right arm came swinging out, and Bolsover went down like an ox under a terrific drive straight from the shoulder.

Bump!

"Hurrah!" yelled Dicky Nugent, waving his cap.

Bob Cherry was leaning over Mark Linley the next moment, his face serious.

"Hurt, Marky, old chap?"

Mark Linley suppressed a groan. He was hurt, and giddy

ANSWERS

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"Really!" thought Bunter. "This is all right. I only wish the old beggar would go out for a bit." Mrs. Mimble proceeded with her work, quite unsuspecting of the tumult of thought which was raging in the fat junior's brain under her counter. (See chapter 6.)

with pain, but he would not give an audible sign of it. But his features seemed strangely twisted with the effort he made to command himself.

"It's all right!" he muttered.

"Oh, the hound!"

Bolsover struggled up, blazing with rage. He ran towards Bob Cherry as the latter bent over Mark, evidently to attack him. But Harry Wharton and Nugent and John Bull ran in and collared the bully of the Remove.

"Let me go!" roared Bolsover, struggling furiously.

The three juniors flung him from them. He crashed upon the ground half a dozen feet away, and this time he was not in such a hurry to rise.

Bob Cherry helped Mark to his feet. The Lancashire lad looked sick and giddy, and he leaned heavily upon his chum's arm.

Wharton stepped up to Bulstrode, who was looking red and confused.

"Are you going to order Bolsover off?" he asked.

Bulstrode hesitated.

"Well, you see——" he began.

"Do you mean to say that you will play him in the Form team after a foul like that?" shouted Wharton.

Bulstrode knitted his brows.

"I'll do as I like!" he said.

"If you play him you won't play me!"

"Nor me!" said Nugent.

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"Nor me!"

"Look here——" began Bulstrode uneasily.

"Hold on!" said Mark Linley quietly, and there was a tremor of pain in his voice as he spoke. "Hold on! Don't let me be the cause of a split in the footer team. This is my last match in the Remove."

"Look here, Marky——"

"I shall not play in the Remove eleven again!" said Mark Linley. "I don't bear malice, but I've made up my mind. That's the finish!"

And he walked off the field, helped by Bob Cherry.

The play ceased, and the juniors changed in silence. But the fags of the Third and the Second were not silent.

"That's how the Remove play footer!" Gatty remarked. "Blessed if I should care to play a team of hooligans like that, after all!"

"No fear!" said Myers.

"Yah!"

"Foul!"

The Removites' ears tingled under the yells from the fags. They made a charge at Dicky Nugent & Co. at last, and scattered them, but even then, from a safe distance, the heroes of the Third and Second continued to make unpleasant remarks.

Mark Linley was looking very pale as he came into the dining-hall to dinner. There was a set expression upon his face that the juniors had not seen there before. It was

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evident that the Lancashire lad had made up his mind. But after dinner Harry Wharton & Co. tackled him on the subject in the passage.

"You don't really mean to give up footer?" Harry Wharton asked.

Mark nodded.

"Look here," said Bob Cherry, "Wharton, and Nugent, and Johnny Bull, and myself, we're all going to resign from the team unless Bulstrode kicks Bolsover out. That will make it all right, Marky."

Mark shook his head.

"I don't want to be the cause of splitting up the team," he said. "Bolsover wouldn't venture to treat anybody else like that. He knows that a lot of the fellows are against having me in the eleven. If you want to do me a favour you won't let this make any difference to you. I'm going to stand out of the Form eleven, that's all. I shall keep up footer practice."

"But look here, Marky—"

"I've made up my mind," said the Lancashire lad quietly. "I've been thinking of it for a long time. This has finished it. But I want you fellows to take no notice of it. It would place me in a rotten position if the team were split up over my resignation, and you know the Remove are meeting the Courtfield team on Saturday. You don't want the Form to be licked."

"We shall very likely get licked if you don't play," said Nugent.

Mark smiled faintly.

"Oh, I'm not so valuable as all that," he said. "But if you fellows resign the Remove won't have a look in, and it would be absurd to resign and then withdraw your resignations in time for the match. Better let things alone."

"I suppose you're right," said Bob Cherry reluctantly; "but we'll make you think better of this, Marky. We won't resign, but you'll play many a footer match with us yet for Greyfriars."

Mark Linley shook his head, but he did not reply.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

No Luck for Bunter.

BILLY BUNTER wore a majestic frown.

Bunter very frequently felt injured. It was a way he had. The number of wrongs that the Owl of the Remove suffered would have melted a heart of stone, or ought to have done so, but hearts in the Greyfriars Remove must have been made of a harder material than stone, for Bunter never received any sympathy. Whatever happened to him, the fellows declared that it served him right, which was very unsympathetic indeed.

Annoyances had piled thickly upon Bunter lately. His valuable services as member of the Remove footer eleven had been declined, without thanks, and, indeed, with contumely. Fellows to whom he related the heartrending story of Bulstrode's intentional misunderstanding only roared with laughter. Bunter had taken Bulstrode a little account for spoiled trousers, with a request for immediate payment. Bulstrode had proceeded to spoil a second pair of Bunter's trousers—the pair he was wearing—with his boot this time. That was all the satisfaction that the fat junior received. He sat in the Form-room during afternoon school frowning, and was very nearly snappish with Mr. Quelch, the Form-master, only the terror of Mr. Quelch's cane keeping him from being quite so. After school was dismissed Billy Bunter rolled out of the Form-room frowning majestically. He was a very injured person, and he could not complain of his wrongs without receiving more of them. It was indeed a hard case.

"Ill?" asked Bob Cherry, as Bunter groaned in the passage. Billy Bunter blinked at him.

"Yes. I think I've caught a cold from sitting in that puddle," he said. "I think I'm going to be seriously ill. If I were to die—"

"Oh, don't!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"I'm sincerely sorry to harrow your feelings, Cherry, but if I were to die—"

"You're not harrowing my feelings," exclaimed Bob Cherry, in astonishment. "You're raising my hopes, and I'm afraid of being disappointed, that's all."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

Bob Cherry walked away grinning. Billy Bunter blinked round, and caught hold of Harry Wharton's sleeve and dug him in the ribs in the objectionable way he had.

"Ow!" gasped Wharton.

"I say, you know—"

"Yow! Don't puncture me, you ass."

"I'm expecting a postal-order this evening, Wharton—"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"If you'd like to advance me a few bob—"

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"I wouldn't!" said Harry Wharton, jerking his arm free and walking away.

"Beast!" muttered Bunter. "I say, Nugent, would you care to advance me a few bob off my postal-order? I was expecting it this morning, but there's been some delay in the post. It's bound to be here this evening. If you'd cash it for me—"

"With pleasure," said Nugent blandly. "How much?"

"Ten bob," said Bunter eagerly, holding out a fat hand.

"I—"

"Right-ho!" said Nugent. "I'll cash it when it comes." And he walked on, leaving Billy Bunter gazing after him speechlessly.

"Beast!" murmured Bunter, at last.

The fat junior drifted out into the Close, and crossed over to Mrs. Mimble's little tuckshop under the elms. Mrs. Mimble had long ago refused all credit to Bunter, for the very sufficient reason that he owed her a long account already. And Bunter had signally failed in his efforts to prove to Mrs. Mimble that all modern business was built up upon a system of credit, and that, therefore, the more goods she allowed him to have on "tick," the more profit she would make in the long run. Mrs. Mimble never would see it, and Bunter knew it was useless to enter the tuckshop without hard cash in his pocket. But the tuckshop drew him with a magnetic attraction. There was always a slight, faint hope that Mrs. Mimble would relent, and place some faith in the story of a belated postal-order, and allow Bunter to add to his already long account.

Bunter assumed his most agreeable smile as he entered the little shop.

"Good-evening, ma'am!" he said, in his sweetest tones.

Then he gave a grunt. The tuckshop was unoccupied, and the door of Mrs. Mimble's little parlour was closed. Bunter's sweetness had been wasted on the desert air. The fat junior looked round the shop, and his mouth watered. Like Tantalus of old, he saw just beyond his reach tempting viands that he could not touch.

"It's blessed rot," murmured Bunter, slowly yielding to temptation. "Suppose I take a few tarts, and settle this evening out of my postal-order—ahem! It would be all right—it's not my fault if Mrs. Mimble is an unbusiness-like woman." And Bunter, with a cautious peep towards the little parlour, clambered over the counter, and dropped, with beating heart, on the inner side. But, like Moses, he was fated to have but a glimpse of the Promised Land.

Creak!

The door of Mrs. Mimble's little parlour opened suddenly. Billy Bunter looked round quickly for an avenue of escape. He saw that he could not hope to gain the other side of the counter in time. Mrs. Mimble would see him in another moment, certain.

There was nothing for it but to dive under the counter. He did so, squeezing his fat body in as close as possible.

Mrs. Mimble came in just as he dragged his leg out of sight.

Peering cautiously from under the counter Billy Bunter saw that she was carrying a tray laden with tarts. They were the pastry shells, so to speak, baked ready for receiving their compliment of jam. Bunter's eyes glistened expectantly. There were possibilities in the situation that he had not hoped for.

"Really," he thought, "this is all right!"

Mrs. Mimble proceeded with her work, quite unsuspecting of the tumult of thought which was raging in Billy Bunter's brain under her counter.

Billy Bunter's mouth watered as he heard the jam spoon diving regularly into the large jar from which she filled the tarts.

"I wish she'd go out for a bit," he murmured.

Mrs. Mimble, turning for a moment, warned him that he would have to be more careful.

But Bunter's appetite was a thing very hard to resist—for Bunter. He was very hungry, this afternoon, to use his own expression. Further, he could smell the pastry and the jam.

"Really, this is too bad!" he thought. "She ought to go out of the shop for a moment."

Bunter was finding the cramped position very trying. He considered it highly unfeeling of the old lady to stop so long in her own shop.

"I would pay her for them afterwards," he thought.

Then he stopped thinking suddenly as he reflected that Mrs. Mimble did not not believe in his postal-orders any more than most persons at Greyfriars.

A rather heavy sigh escaped him, and his face became lively with emotion as the old lady muttered something about "them mice."

He hoped she would not decide to lay a trap. To his relief she went on with her work, saying she must get a cat, and a good mouser at that. Bunter resolved to wait

patiently and escape at the first opportunity. But the opportunity did not come so readily.

Mrs. Mimble took great pride in her tarts. She considered she had a reputation to lose.

"I'll just peep out and see how many more she has to do," murmured Billy Bunter.

And he did, to his great discomfort, Mrs. Mimble having a nasty sideslip with a spoonful of jam, and Bunter getting it down the back of his neck.

His face went purple as he stifled expostulations. But he must do it, or be found out.

The cramped position was telling on him more than hours of hard work might have done.

His legs began to get what is known as pins and needles in them. He felt that he must move or cry out. He tried moving, putting his fat fingers out on the floor to steady himself. Mrs. Mimble trod on them.

Bunter pulled his hands back and crammed them into his mouth to stifle his pain and his cries with one effort.

Mrs. Mimble began to hum an old country tune. Billy Bunter never felt so glad in his life. It gave him an opportunity to give vent to a few feeble groans.

They were not loud enough to be heard above the old lady's crooning, and they soothed his feelings a great deal.

"How much longer is the old beggar going to be?" he murmured. "I'd like to—"

What Bunter would have said was checked by the shop-bell ringing, and a customer entered.

"I'll take sixpennyworth of those tarts, if you please, Mrs. Mimble," said the customer.

Mrs. Mimble found that she had run out of bags in the shop. Bunter's heart rejoiced. She would have to go into the house for some more, he knew.

He grinned in a sickly fashion, still hugging his trampled fingers as she went through the little parlour door. Carefully peeping out from his hiding-place he reached out his hand to the corner of the tray.

"She'll never miss one," thought Bunter.

She didn't. The tray was still hot from its recent sojourn in the oven. Bunter drew his fat paw back with a little squeal. The customer noticed it, and looked over the counter.

"Oh, it's them mice again!" said Mrs. Mimble, reappearing with the bags.

"Sounded like rats to me," said the customer.

"How many did you say?" asked Mrs. Mimble, not at all relishing this reflection on her establishment. "Sixpennyworth?"

"Yes, please."

In another moment the customer was gone, and Bunter breathed freely again. He had expected the customer to suggest a search under the counter.

"The cheek of 'im!" said Mrs. Mimble indignantly. "Rats, indeed!"

And she walked close up to the counter to resume her work of filling the tarts. She came very near, unfortunately for Bunter, and her knee coming in contact with his little snub nose he drew it back with a gasp. Mrs. Mimble gave a little scream.

But after the recent conversation with the customer she dared not look under her counter.

She approached cautiously and extended her hand.

"Ow!" yelled Billy Bunter, as she took a firm hold of his hair, and dislodged his big spectacles with her plump thumb. "Ow!"

Mrs. Mimble jumped back as if she had received an electric shock.

"Oh!" she gasped.

In her alarm and excitement she tightened instead of letting go Bunter's hair, and, as she staggered back, she dragged the fat junior out from his hiding-place under the counter.

"Yow!" roared Bunter. "Yaroo! Leggo! Mrs. Mimble—you—Yow! Ow!"

"Master Bunter!"

"Yaroo!"

Mrs. Mimble let go Bunter's hair, and stared at the fat junior in amazement, which very quickly changed to anger. She guessed Bunter's motive for being there.

"Ow!" groaned Bunter, rubbing his head. "Oh, really, Mrs. Mimble—Ow!"

"You dishonest young wretch!" Mrs. Mimble exclaimed. "You came here to steal my tarts—"

Billy Bunter wished that he were safe on the other side of the counter. Mrs. Mimble was reaching towards a hand-broom that lay behind the counter.

"Oh, really, Mrs. Mimble—"

The good lady picked up the hand-broom, with a business-like gleam in her eyes.

"I—I trust you do not suspect me of being here to take a few paltry tarts, madam!" said Bunter, with a great deal of dignity.

"What were you here for, then?"

"I—I—I—Ow!"

Mrs. Mimble grasped the fat junior, and bent him over her

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knee. Smack, smack, smack! came the hand-broom. Bunter roared and wriggled.

"Yow—ow—ow!"

"There!" gasped Mrs. Mimble. "Now let me catch you on this side of my counter again!"

But she never did.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Nugent Minor Eats His Words.

NUGENT minor stood in the Second Form-room. Lessons were over for the day, and it was near tea-time; but the fags of Greyfriars were not thinking of tea. They had other and more important matters to think about. Sammy Bunter—Bunter minor—was baking potatoes over the Form-room fire; but Sammy, like his major, never allowed the dream of meal-times to fade from his mind. No one was taking any notice of Sammy Bunter. The Second Form, and a crowd of the Third, were gathered round Dicky Nugent.

Nugent minor held a sheet of thin cardboard in his hand, upon which was an inscription in sprawling characters. He was holding it up for the fags to read—which they were doing with a great deal of satisfaction. Dicky Nugent, with the aid of a brush and a bottle of ink, had taken a new step in the campaign against the Remove. The inscription on the card ran as follows:

"Who's afraid to play footer? The Remove! Yah!"

"I'm going to pin that up in Bulstrode's study, to greet him when he goes in to tea," grinned Dicky Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll keep it up," said Dicky. "We won't give the bounders a rest till they agree to play us. And then we'll lick them at footer."

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurrah!"

"I say, can we lick them, though?" said Tubb, of the Third. "We want to play them, of course; but about licking them—"

Dicky Nugent snorted.

"Rats! They've licked the Shell, so why shouldn't we lick them?"

"B-b-but if they've licked the Shell, that's a reason why we can't lick them, not why we can," said the bewildered Tubb.

"Oh, rot! If they can lick a team two Forms above them, can't we do the same? The Remove are the Lower Fourth—two Forms above us."

"But—"

"Oh, don't croak!" said Dicky Nugent crossly. "Besides, even if we don't beat 'em, we'll give 'em a tussle, and it's a score, anyway, to make the Remove play us, and recognise our existence as a football Form. They've always pretended to turn up their noses at Second-Form footer! We'll show 'em!"

"Yea, rather!" said Gatty.

Nugent minor quitted the Form-room, with his placard concealed under his jacket. He made his way to the Remove passage, and glanced up and down cautiously. The coast was quite clear; and in another minute he was inside Bulstrode's study.

He grinned as he looked round him, selecting a spot to pin up the notice. He decided upon the wall facing the door, and had just driven in a pin, affixing the cardboard to the wallpaper, when the study door opened.

Nugent minor swung round.

Bulstrode and Hazeldene entered the study. Hazeldene carried a bundle under his arm, and Bulstrode had a bag of eggs in his hand. The study-mates had evidently just come from the tuckshop with supplies for tea.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Bulstrode, catching sight of the fag.

"What are you doing in my study, you young sweep?"

Nugent minor cast an uneasy glance towards the door.

He had a faint hope of escaping before Bulstrode should see the notice on the wall. But even as the thought passed through his mind, Bulstrode's glance alighted on the card.

"My hat!"

"What's that?" asked Hazeldene.

"Look there!" roared Bulstrode. "Read it!"

"Who's afraid to play footer? The Remove! Yah!" read out Hazeldene, with a grin. "Well, my hat, if that doesn't take the cake!"

Dicky Nugent made a sudden rush for the door; but Bulstrode's powerful grasp was upon him, and he was swung back.

"No, you don't!" said Bulstrode genially. "Have you

ever heard of cheeky bounders being made to eat their words?"

"Ye-es," said Dicky, eyeing him warily.

Bulstrode grinned.

"That's what you're going to do, my son."

"I—I—"

"Take it down, Hazel."

Hazeldene obeyed.

"Now eat it!" said Bulstrode, picking up a cricket-stump from a corner. "You'll bolt it, or I'll whale you with this stump! You can take your choice."

"Look here, Bulstrode!"

"Are you going to eat it?"

"I—I can't!" gasped Dicky Nugent. "Don't be an ass! It'll make me sick! Ow!"

"All right, I'll lather you instead! Jam him across the table, Hazel!"

"What-ho!" said Hazeldene cheerfully.

"Hold on!"

"Are you going to eat your words, then?"

"I—I—"

"Collar him!"

"I—I—I'll try!" gasped the unfortunate fag.

"Ha, ha! Go it!"

Dicky Nugent took a gingerly bite at the corner of the cardboard, and mumbled it in his mouth. He made an exceedingly wry face at the taste of the ink, and Bulstrode and Hazeldene roared with laughter.

"Ow! Groo! I can't!"

"Very well, I'll—"

"Hold on!"

Dicky mumbled away. His cheeks bulged out with mumbled cardboard, which he could not bring himself to swallow. The two Removites watched him, with grinning faces. The door opened, and Tom Brown came in. He stared at the scene in amazement.

"What on earth—" he began.

"Nugent minor's eating his words!" said Bulstrode blandly.

Tom Brown took a glance at the card, and burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow!" murmured Nugent minor. "Groo! Oh! Ow! Ugh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mumble, mumble, mumble!

"Go it!" said Bulstrode encouragingly. "It's taken you five minutes, so far. The whole lot will take you about two hours at that rate. Wire in!"

"Bolt it!" said Hazeldene.

"Groo! Ugh!"

Dicky Nugent cast a wild glance round, but there was no avenue of escape. A whistle sounded along the Remove passage, and the fag's eyes flashed. He recognised Gatty's signal whistle. His comrade of the Second Form had come to look for him.

"Rescue, Second!" he yelled.

"Hallo!" said Bulstrode. "Are there more of them about? Lock the door!"

But it was too late.

The door was flung open from the outside, and Gatty and Myers and a crowd of the Second rushed in. In a moment Bulstrode and Hazeldene and Tom Brown were bowled over by the rush of the fags, and Dick Nugent was rescued. He spluttered and spluttered out the mouthful of chewed cardboard. Bulstrode staggered to his feet.

"Come on!" gasped Gatty. "Bunk!"

"Wait a second!"

Nugent minor grasped the bag of eggs from the table. His arm swept through the air. Bulstrode halted, and dodged, but too late.

Smash! Squelch!

"Groo! Ugh! Ow!"

Bag and eggs smashed upon the prominent features of the Removite. Bulstrode appeared to be weeping broken eggs. The fags, yelling with laughter, crowded out of the study, and fled, while Bulstrode frantically gouged the yolk of eggs from his eyes. Tom Brown and Hazeldene stared at him, and burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" roared Bulstrode.

But Hazeldene and Brown had no breath to explain with. They were expending it all in laughing. Bulstrode glared at them through a mist of eggs.

"You—you utter asses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you— Groo! Ugh!"

Bulstrode rushed out of the study to plunge his face under the nearest tap. An almost hysterical shriek of laughter followed him down the passage.

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THE EIGHTH CHAPTER. The Earthquake.

"HUSH!"

"Look here, Nugent minor!"

"Sh!"

"Sh yourself!" retorted Gatty.

"Yes, rather!" said Myers. "You 'sh! But what is there to 'sh about?"

Nugent minor held up his finger.

"I think they're coming!"

The three heroes of the Second needed to be cautious. They were in No. 1 Study in the Remove passage, about an hour after the little misadventure of Bulstrode. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, to whom the study belonged, were, of course, out, or the fags would not have been there. The study door was partly open, and the chums of the Second had set an elaborate booby-trap over it. The unsuspecting comer who pushed the door open would receive upon his head a shower of various articles, and he was not likely to enjoy the experience.

The three fags had arranged the booby-trap with great care. Having arranged it, they had to remain on the inside of the study door till the catastrophe occurred; but in the surprise of being caught in the trap, Nugent and Wharton were not likely to be able to stop them when they rushed to escape.

Footsteps sounded in the passage.

Gatty listened and shook his head.

"That's not Wharton," he said. "That's Bolsover; I know the way his hoof comes down. I jolly well wish he would put his head in here, instead of Wharton."

The footsteps passed on.

"They won't be here for a bit," said Myers. "I heard Wharton and Nugent in the tuckshop arranging some things for a feed. Bunter has bothered them into letting him get it ready. You know what that means."

"The lion's share for Bunter," grinned Dicky Nugent, "I know! Hark!"

Footsteps again.

The fags grinned expectantly.

Dicky Nugent crept to the door, and peered through the opening for a second to observe who was coming.

He gave a sudden gasp, and staggered back into the study, with a peculiar cackling sound proceeding from his throat.

"What's the matter?" muttered Myers.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass, what are you cackling at!" demanded Gatty.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You chump!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Oh, my hat, it's Bunter!"

"He's coming here?"

"Ha, ha! Yes. And he's got the things!"

"The feed?"

"Yes, on a tray."

Myers and Gatty stared at Nugent minor for a moment, and then burst into a simultaneous chuckle. The idea of Bunter entering the study with a laden tray, and getting the booby-trap down upon him, tickled the fags immensely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quiet!" muttered Dicky Nugent. "Don't alarm him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's close here now!"

The heavy footsteps of the fat junior sounded close at hand. Billy Bunter had a tray well loaded in his hands, and he was plodding carefully along the passage. The sound of voices was heard outside the study.

"Oh, really, Snoop, don't push into a fellow!"

"Hallo!"

"Oh, is that you, Vernon-Smith? I took you for Snoop. Please don't push me, or I shall have the tray over, and Wharton will think I did it on purpose."

"Oh, that's for Wharton, is it?" said the voice of Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars.

"Yes; I'm standing them a little feed," said Billy Bunter modestly. "They used to stand me feeds sometimes when I was in No. 1 Study with them, and now I'm returning the favour."

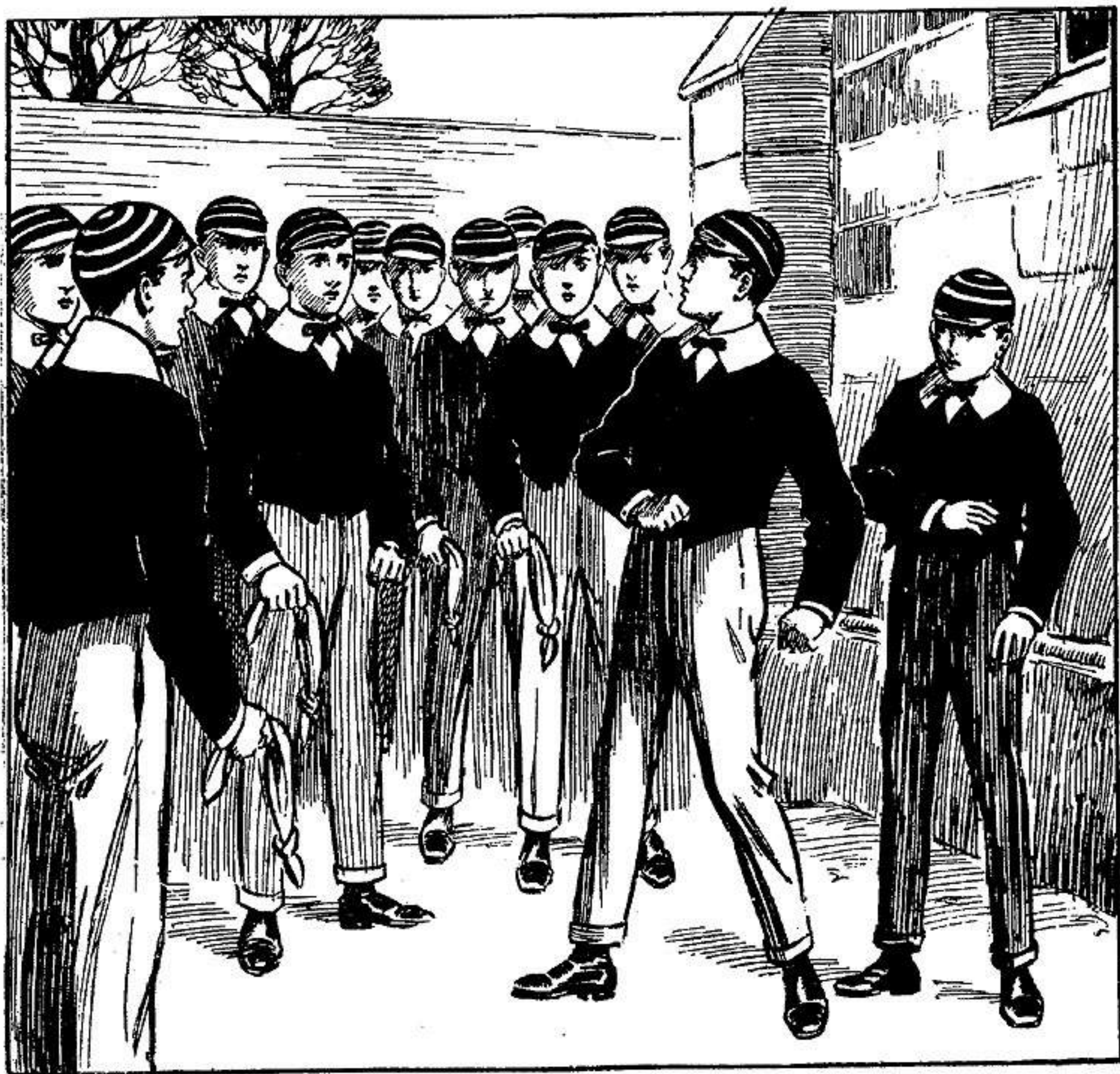
"My only aunt!" murmured Dicky Nugent, inside the study. "The awful Ananias! I saw Wharton pay Mrs. Mumble for the things, with my own eyes."

Vernon-Smith probably guessed as much, too, for he chuckled as he went on down the passage. Billy Bunter came plodding on to the door of No. 1 Study, and as he approached nearer and nearer the fags thrilled with expectation.

There was a push on the half-open door.

"Now look out for squalls and cataracts!" murmured Dicky Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"



Tom Merry threw himself between the raggers and their intended victim. "Before you rag Wally, you'll have to rag me!" he said coolly. And there was a pause. (An incident taken from the Grand Double-Length School tale of Tom Merry & Co., entitled "The Ghost of St. Jim's," which is contained in the Christmas Double Number of "The Gem" Library. Out on Thursday. Price Twopence.)

The door swung open, and Bunter came in with the tray.

Crash!

Bang!

Bump!

"Yaroooh!"

The booby-trap had claimed its victim.

A shower of articles descended upon Billy Bunter and upon the tray he held in his fat hands.

The Owl of the Remove staggered back with a wild yell, and the tray was dashed from his hands, crashing upon the floor with a terrific smash.

Crockery and eatables rolled in all directions from the clanging tray, and Billy Bunter sat down in the doorway, scared out of his wits.

There was a yell of laughter from the fags.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help!" shrieked Billy Bunter. "Fire! Murder! Police! Earthquakes! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the fags.

"Yaroooh! Fire! Rescue! Help!"

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"Come on!" gasped Dicky Nugent. "We'd better bunk! The whole Remove will be here in a minute."

The fags ran round the squirming, yelling Bunter, and ran down the passage. They had only just time, for Removites were pouring from their studies on all sides.

"Fags!" yelled Bulstrode. "Collar them!"

But it was too late. Dicky Nugent and his chums were gone. The Removites gathered round the door of No. 1 Study. They yelled with laughter at the sight of Billy Bunter sitting, dazed and gasping, in the midst of ruins.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. "Help! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton and Nugent came upstairs, and they ran quickly up at the sight of the crowd round their door. They stared in amazement and wrath at the Owl of the Remove.

"You—you ass!" gasped Nugent. "You've messed up the feed!"

"You fathead!" roared Wharton. "What did you do that for?"

Billy Bunter put his spectacles straight upon his fat little nose, and blinked at them.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Yow! I can't help it if there is an

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earthquake, can I? It's lucky we weren't all killed when the walls shook, and the floor heaved up. Yow!"

"What?"

"It's an earthquake——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fat duffer——"

"I distinctly saw the floor of the study heave up before me," said Bunter. "The table rocked on one leg, and the pictures hung away from the walls. I was hurled to the floor by a terrific shock."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really——"

"You shrieking duffer!" exclaimed Wharton. "It wasn't an earthquake—it was a booby-trap, you ass, and you walked into it like the dummy you are."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Br-r-r!"

Billy Bunter staggered to his feet, and blinked round him through his big spectacles. As his nerve returned, he realised that it had been a booby-trap, and not an earthquake. Even Bunter looked a little sheepish.

"Well, you see——" he began.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It seemed like an earthquake——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nice mess you've made of our feed!" growled Wharton. "Pick up the fragments, you fathead. Who set that booby-trap?"

"It was set for you, most likely," grinned Vernon-Smith. "Dicky Nugent & Co. have just vanished along the passage."

"The young rascals! Look here, Bulstrode, you'll have to play them at footer, and let us lick them. I'm getting fed up with war with the Second."

"Oh, rats!" said Bulstrode.

And he went into his study.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Taking up the Gauntlet!

BULSTRODE was as obstinate as ever, but the general opinion in the Remove was that the fag's eleven should be played. It was absurd to be on fighting terms with the fags, and the Removites felt that keenly. And all over Greyfriars, in the passages, and even in the Remove Form-room, notices were stuck up by Dicky Nugent & Co., announcing the fact to the whole school that the Remove were afraid to play footer with the Second, and advising the Remove to "chuck" footer and take to hop-scotch or marbles. All the Remove were getting "fed-up," as they expressed it, with the persecution, and the easiest way of ending it was to play the fag eleven. There could be no more complete way of putting Nugent minor & Co. in their places. For the fags, of course, could not possibly stand against the Remove, who had beaten the Upper Fourth and the Shell, and firmly believed they could beat the Fifth if they were given a chance. To meet the fags on the footer field, and pile up a ridiculous total of goals against nil—surely that was the best way of "sitting" on Nugent minor. Bulstrode did not like the idea, but he yielded at last to the general opinion.

"Well, have your way, then," he said ungraciously, in the junior common-room. "The affair will be utterly ridiculous. We shall walk over the young duffers."

"That will be a lesson for them not to get their ears up in this way," said Bob Cherry.

"But if we let them score a single goal against us, we shall be laughed out of Greyfriars," said Bulstrode uneasily.

"They won't score!"

"They might. Nugent minor is a little demon at footer, and some of the others are good, like Tubb and Dobbs of the Third. And a single goal against us would make us look asses, even if we lick them hollow."

"They won't get a single goal," said Hazeldene. "Not if you put me between the posts."

Bulstrode grunted.

"They won't get past me at back. I'll answer for that," said Bolsover.

Bob Cherry looked at him.

"You'd foul them first, I suppose," he suggested sarcastically.

Bolsover was about to make an angry retort, but Bulstrode went on hastily.

"Well, we'll play them, and you can go and tell them so, some of you. I shall select the strongest possible team we can raise in the Remove, in case of accidents. Footer is a mighty uncertain game, and if we should happen, by some rotten chance, to get licked, I know how you chaps would turn on me for allowing the Remove to be made the laughing-stock of Greyfriars."

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"I shouldn't," said Harry Wharton quietly.

"Well, a good many would, anyway," growled Bulstrode. "I'm fed up with being footer captain, I think. If we win this match there's no credit in it, and if we lose it we shall be grinned to death."

"We can't lose it," said Bolsover.

"Well, I'm running no risks," said Bulstrode. "I'll drop into your study presently, Wharton, and have a jaw about making up the team."

"Right-ho!"

"Why can't you talk that over here?" demanded Bolsover suspiciously.

"Because I don't choose."

And with that reply the bully of the Remove had to be content.

Frank Nugent and Bob Cherry dropped into the Second Form-room a little later to announce the intention of the Remove. They found most of the fags there, and they were greeted with a general grin. The Second seemed to have some inkling of what was coming.

"Hallo, Franky," said Nugent minor cheerfully. "Come to your senses yet?"

"We're going to play you," said Frank.

"Hurrah!"

"Hear, hear!" chorused the Second.

"Honest?" asked Gatty. "You're not rotting? Does Bulstrode say so?"

"Yes."

"Good! To-morrow afternoon?" asked Dicky.

"Yes, Wednesday afternoon; kick-off at half-past two," said Frank. "You kids can prepare for the biggest licking you ever heard or dreamed about."

"Rats!"

"You'll have your way, and you'll be sorry for it when you've done!" grinned Bob Cherry. "If you score a single goal, my sons, I'll eat the footer you do it with."

"Rats!"

"Yah!"

"Swank!"

And Bob Cherry and Nugent quitted the Second Form-room, followed by a shower of remarks of that sort. But when they were gone, and the door was closed, some of the fags looked at one another a little dubiously.

"We—we're going to play them!" said Tubb of the Third.

"Looks like it!" assented Nugent minor. "I'll have one of those spuds, Bunter minor, when you've finished baking them."

"Will you?" said Sammy.

"But—but it's a bit thick, isn't it, playing the Remove?" remarked Dobbs.

"Oh, rot!"

"Oh, it's only for the sake of making them play," said Gatty. "We can't beat them."

Dicky Nugent gave him a withering look.

"Well, you ass!" he exclaimed. "What's the good of playing them if we don't beat them? We've got to beat them by hook or by crook."

"But——"

"We'll make up the strongest team we can," said Dicky. "We can find eleven good players in the Second and the Third, and we've got a good skipper."

"Me?" hazarded Tubb.

"No, ass—me!"

"You said a good one," Tubb remarked innocently.

"Look here, Tubby——"

"We can make up a good eleven for Second and Third," said Gatty, "but the Remove are too strong for us. I tell you they've beaten the Shell."

"And we're going to beat them, or try hard. Even if we draw that will be something," said Dicky Nugent. "Besides, the Remove were at full strength when they beat the Shell. They had Vernon-Smith, and he's dropped out of the team since. And they had Mark Linley, who's better than any other player in the Form, and now he's dropped out."

"I don't suppose he'll stay out."

"Oh, rats! He won't play if Bolsover does, anyway, and you know that brute won't drop out. I believe he frightened Bulstrode into letting him into the team at all," said Dicky, with a grin. "It will be all right for us if Bolsover plays. He's sure to lose his temper and foul some of you."

"Eh?"

"Suppose he should trip you up, Gatty, in the penalty area!"

"Look here, Nugent minor!"

"Then we get a penalty-kick," said Dicky. "I should take it myself, and I can tell you I shouldn't let Hazeldene stop my putting the leather right in."

"And what should I get?" roared Gatty.

"Oh, you'd get hurt, I expect," said Dicky Nugent carelessly. "But it's all in the day's work, you know. If you're afraid of getting hurt you'd better chuck footer, and take to crotch-work."

"Look here—
"My dear chap, Bolsover will be a gold-mine to us if they play him," said Nugent minor. "I only hope Linley won't change his mind and play. We're going to beat the Remove, by hook or by crook—"

"I've got an idea," said Sammy Bunter, looking up from the fragrant potatoes that were baking on the bars of the grate.

"Play you?" asked Dicky, with a grin.

Sammy snorted.

"No; but that chap Hazeldene, in goal—he's hard-up."

"I believe he always is."

"Lend him ten bob, and he'd let a ball through like anything," said Sammy Bunter.

Dicky Nugent rose to his feet, with a glint in his eyes.

"Well, that's the kind of idea I might have expected from you, Bunter minor," he said. "I ought to give you something for that idea. Where will you have it?"

"Look here, Nugent minor—Ow—yow—groo!"

Bunter minor was squashed down in an iron grip, and a baked potato was floured on his fat nose. He was left to rub it off at his leisure. He did not make any more suggestions.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

To Play or not to Play.

BULSTRODE knocked at the door of No. 1 Study, and came in. Wharton and Nugent were at their prep., and Bob Cherry was in the study, eating roasted chestnuts, his prep. being done. The chums of the Remove left their work at once as Bulstrode came in. There was a serious expression upon Bulstrode's face. The way his brows were knitted showed that he was troubled.

"About the footer team," he began abruptly. "I suppose you fellows agree with me that we must make up the strongest possible team, in case of a possible reverse?"

"Yes, rather," said Bob Cherry emphatically.

"Certainly," said Harry Wharton.

"Well, then, about Bolsover?"

The chums were silent. Bolsover was Bulstrode's business. It was the footer captain's prerogative to decide whom he played or did not play. But Bulstrode was evidently in need of counsel.

"Bolsover's in the team," said the Remove captain. "He's big and heavy, and he's a good back when he keeps his temper. But—"

"But he doesn't," said Nugent.

Bulstrode grinned ruefully.

"That's it. If he plays, Linley won't. I think perhaps Linley won't, anyway; but I'm going to ask him. I should like Vernon-Smith, too, but he's seedy lately, and he says he can't play. But if we leave Linley out, we give the fags a chance."

"Yes, rather," said Bob Cherry emphatically.

"We can't expect Linley to play if Bolsover does, I know," said Bulstrode; "but I don't want to drop Bolsover unless Linley will come in. Would you advise me to ask him?"

"Certainly," said Harry Wharton.

"You'd be an ass to play Bolsover, anyway," said Nugent.

"He will lose his temper, and play foul, and we shall get an award against us. We shall have an independent referee, and he may give the fags a penalty kick."

Bulstrode nodded.

"I've thought of that. If Linley will play, I shall drop Bolsover. Will you fellows walk along with me and ask him."

"What-ho!"

And Wharton and Nugent rose at once. Bob Cherry, with a quiet grin on his face, led the way to the study, which he shared with Mark Linley and Little Wun Lung, the Chinese boy. Mark Linley was alone there when they entered. The Lancashire lad was at work at the table, but he laid down his pen as the four juniors came in.

"You're wanted," said Bob Cherry.

"Yes?" said Mark inquiringly.

"To-morrow, I mean," Bob Cherry explained.

Mark understood, and he shook his head.

"I want you to play," said Bulstrode. "We're going to play the fags to-morrow afternoon, and I want the strongest team I can possibly make up, in case we should get a reverse. If by any chance the fags licked us, we shouldn't be able to hold up our heads again at Greyfriars. We can't afford to allow them the slightest chance. I want you to play inside right, Linley."

"I'm sorry—"

"You can't refuse."

"You remember what I told you," said the Lancashire lad quietly. "A lot of the fellows want me out of the team. Some of them want it so much that they'd do anything to clear me out. You've had a sample of that. What's the good of playing me when fellows on my own side—"

"It's only Bolsover—"

"Well, Bolsover is enough. It's impossible for me to play

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with a fellow who fouled me deliberately. I believe he would do the same thing even if he were playing on the same side."

"Bolsover will not be playing."

Mark started a little.

"Have you turned him out, then?"

"I am dropping him for this match, at least. We want you to play, Linley. You can't have any objection if Bolsover's dropped. I don't think you ought to refuse."

"You must play, Marky," said Bob Cherry.

The Lancashire lad hesitated.

"I don't want to make trouble," he said. "If you really seriously want me—"

"I shouldn't take the trouble to come here and ask you if I didn't want you," said the Remove captain.

Mark smiled faintly.

"I suppose that's so," he said; "but—but—"

"You must play, Marky," said Bob, again. "Hang it all, you can't leave your Form in the lurch, you know, when you're wanted."

"Do you fellows think I ought to play?"

"Yes," said Wharton and Nugent together.

"Very well," said Mark quietly, "I'll play."

Bulstrode drew a breath of relief.

"Right-ho!" he exclaimed. "I sha'n't forget this, Linley. As a matter of fact"—Bulstrode coloured—"I'm as nervous as a giddy hen about this match. If we were licked I should never get over it, I think; and I know jolly well that the fellows would never let me hear the end of it."

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"That's true enough," he said. "That's one of the pleasures of a footer captain. If the team wins, it's due to this chap's shooting, or that chap's dribbling, or the other chap's passing; but if the team loses, it's the captain's fault all the time."

"I jolly well know that!" growled Bulstrode. "But I've made up a list of players who could lick the Fifth, I believe. Look, here, what do you say to Hazeldene in goal? He has been keeping goal very well lately."

"Good!"

"Then, backs: Morgan and Desmond."

"They're all right," said Harry Wharton.

"Halves: Bob Cherry, myself, and Johnny Bull."

"Ripping!"

"Forwards: Nugent, Linley, Wharton, Tom Brown, and Ogilvy."

"Jolly good!" said Bob Cherry. "I don't see how that team can be beaten—not by a gang of fags, anyway. Of course, there's not the slightest doubt that we shall wipe up the ground with the silly young duffers. We'll pile up a score of goals that will make them look silly."

"Good egg! I'll go and break it to Bolsover now," said Bulstrode, with an uneasy grin. "I dare say he will cut up rusty, but that can't be helped."

"I'll come with you, if you like," said Bob Cherry.

Bulstrode shook his head. He knew what Bob Cherry meant. Bob was the only fellow in the Form who could lick the bully of the Remove, and Bolsover might lose his temper and hit out. But Bulstrode, whether he could lick Bolsover or not, was not afraid of him.

"It's all right," he said, "I'll go alone. If Bolsover should try any funny business we'll give him a dormitory ragging. A chap can't expect to punch his way into a footer eleven, I should think."

"Ha, ha! No!"

And Bulstrode went to break the news to Bolsover.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Knows!

BOLSOVER was in his study. He was sitting there with his feet on the fender, staring angrily into the fire. Bolsover was in an uneasy mood, and a very unpleasant temper. He had heard some whispers of the footer captain's intention to ask Linley to play, and he knew that there was no room for the Lancashire lad and himself in the same team. Mark Linley might forego his determination not to play again for the Form, but not if Bolsover played. The thought of being dropped to make room for the scholarship boy maddened the Remove bully. That Mark Linley was far and away the better player did not matter to Bolsover.

His size and strength made him able to "swank" over the Removites, as a rule, and he did not see why he should not swank on the football field as well as in the passages and the Form-room. But if Bulstrode once made up his mind to drop him, nothing could be done. He might hammer Bulstrode, true; but that would not get him reinstated in the team. A bitter hatred of the Lancashire lad was burning in the bully's heart, as he sat there with a scowling face. The scowl deepened as there came a tap at his door, and Bulstrode came in.

Bulstrode's manner was not easy. He had an unpleasant task to perform, and he was far from wishing to quarrel with a fellow who could throw him neck and crop out of the study if he wished. A dormitory licking would avenge such an injury, but that would not make it any more pleasant to experience. Probably that reflection had induced Bulstrode, so far, to concede a very great deal to Bolsover. If so, he had come to the end of his concessions now; his mind was quite made up.

"Well?" said Bolsover unpleasantly.

Bulstrode coughed.

"I've made up the list for the fags' match to-morrow," he said.

"Well?"

"I sha'n't be able to play you?"

"Oh!"

"Linley is playing, and you can't expect him to play with you after what happened yesterday," said Bulstrode. "I suppose you see that for yourself, Bolsover?"

"I don't see what you want to play that factory cad for."

"He's the best player in the Form—that's why."

"You've plenty of forwards. What's the front line?"

"Nugent, Linley, Wharton, Brown, and Ogilvy."

"You could easily put in Mauleverer or Smith minor instead of Linley."

Bulstrode shook his head.

"Or, if you must have a scholarship cad, there's Penfold," sneered Bolsover. "He's a very decent footballer. And there's Leigh. He's good."

Another shake of the head.

"Or Duck Russell, or Trevor—both good," said Bolsover.

"Quite good," assented Bulstrode; "but not a patch on Linley. I'm sorry you don't see it in a reasonable way, Bolsover, but it can't be helped. I've made up the team."

Bolsover's hands clenched.

"And you've come here to tell me that you've dropped me for the match?" he asked.

"Yes."

Bolsover made a step towards him. The Remove captain faced him with unflinching eyes.

"Better keep your hands off," he said. "You can't bully your way into the Form eleven, Bolsover, and if there's any rot you'll get a Form licking. You've had one before, and you know what it's like."

"Hang you! I—"

"That's enough," said Bulstrode, and he turned towards the door.

Bolsover watched him with glowering eyes as he left the study. The door closed, and the bully of the Remove was alone. He strode to and fro in the study, with his hands clenched, gritting his teeth.

The door opened again. A fat face, adorned with a pair of big spectacles, looked into the study. Bolsover scowled at Billy Bunter.

"Get out!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, really, Bolsover—"

The Remove bully raised his hand threateningly. Billy Bunter receded a pace, with his hand on the door, ready to bolt. But he did not go!

"I—I say, Bolsover, I—I've got something to say to you—something important," he said confidentially.

Bolsover burst into an angry laugh.

"Yes, I've heard it all before!" he exclaimed.

"You're expecting a postal-order this evening, and you want me to make you an advance on it."

"Oh, really—"

"Get out, you fat bouncer!"

"It's about Linley."

Bolsover looked at him sharply.

"Come in!" he said.

Billy Bunter blinked at him doubtfully, and then came in and closed the door. He kept the table between him and Bolsover. Interviewing the bully of the Remove was very like paying a visit to a lion in his cage.

"Now, what is it?" said Bolsover. "Something up against Linley? I know you don't like him any more than I do."

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"A gentleman can't be expected to like a factory cad," said Billy Bunter. "I asked him only to-day for a small loan, and he answered me quite rudely. Of course, he had no chance to learn manners in his factory. But—"

"Come to the point."

"Bulstrode's going to play him and leave you out of the team," said Bunter, not without a slight trace of satisfaction in his tone. "Of course, it's disgraceful. I think it ought to be prevented."

Bolsover's eyes gleamed.

"How could it be prevented?" he asked eagerly. "I know you are a cunning little cad, Bunter. If you could think of a dodge for downing that bouncer I'd make it worth your while."

Bunter coughed. Bolsover's description of him was not exactly flattering. But the fat junior was not easily offended.

"Ahem! Suppose—"

"Well?" said Bolsover impatiently.

"The fags are frightfully anxious to win the match," said Bunter, sinking his voice. "They'd win it by any means they could, and—"

"They can't win it," said Bolsover; "that's rot!"

"They might, if—if—"

"If what, you stammering dummy?"

"If one of the Remove players helped them."

Bolsover stared at the Owl of the Remove. His wits were not rapid. Bunter's meaning did not dawn upon him for some moments.

"What!" he ejaculated at last. "You—you mean that Hazel might let the ball in, or something of that sort?"

"I don't know about Hazeldene," said Bunter. "I dare say he'd do it; I know he was in a plot with the Highcliffe fellows once, to give away a match. But I wasn't thinking of Hazeldene."

"Linley?" exclaimed Bolsover.

"Yes."

The Remove bully drew a deep breath. For a moment the thought dazzled him. If he could prove his rival guilty of such black treachery to his team— But it was not possible. Much as he hated Mark Linley, Bolsover believed him to be fair and square and straightforward. He could not believe that the suspicion was more than an idle figment of Bunter's fertile brain.

"Rot!" he said.

Bunter sniffed.

"That's all you know," he said. "You know the factory cad is as poor as a church mouse, and he wears old clothes till they nearly fall off him."

Bolsover grinned savagely.

"Do you mean to say that the fags would bribe him to play the Remove false?" he exclaimed.

"That's it."

"But—but—"

"Don't you think he would do pretty nearly anything for a quid?"

"Yes, I dare say he would. But where could the fags get a quid from?" said Bolsover. "Quids are precious scarce in the Second and Third."

"Nugent minor has plenty of money, and young Hop Hi, the Chinese—Wun Lung minor, you know—is rolling in money. He stood the whole cost of new goalposts and nets for the Second this term," said Bunter. "He would hand over quids and quids to Nugent minor if he asked him. They're thick chums."

Bolsover nodded.

"Yes, I suppose Nugent minor could raise the money," he said. "But—but would he do such a rotten, caddish thing? I can't believe it."

"They're simply wild on winning the match, you see," Bunter explained. "If they lose, they'll look silly asses to all Greyfriars—and they must lose! Nugent minor will be ragged by the lot of them for getting them into such a scrape."

"Yes, I shouldn't wonder."

"They'd do anything to win—and they know Linley is frightfully hard up!"

"Look here," said Bolsover abruptly. "Do you know

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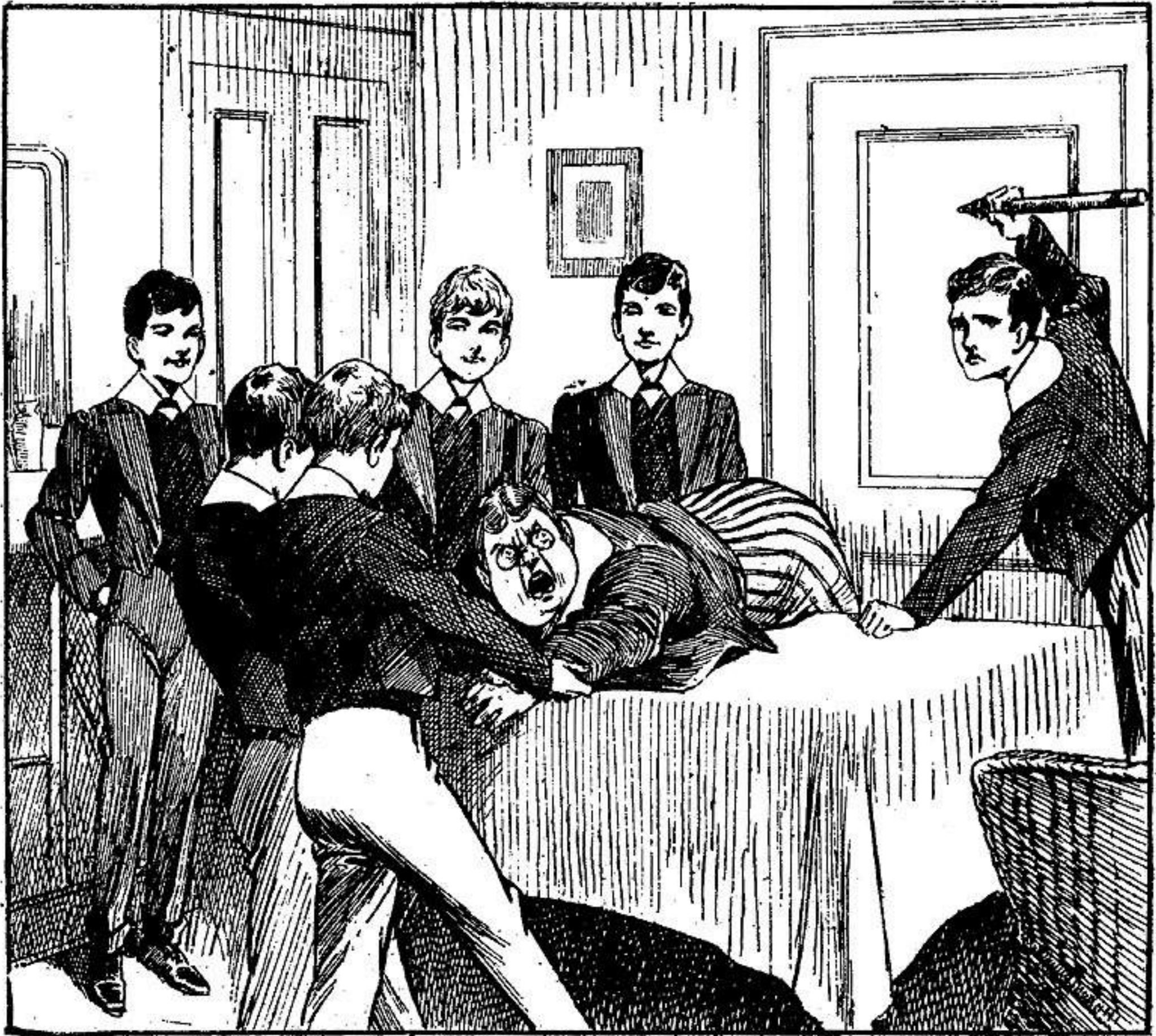
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Thwack! thwack! thwack! Bulstrode uttered the admonishing word at every whack, and the dust rose from Bunter's trousers. "Yow! Yow! Yow!" Billy Bunter's yells kept time with the whacks. (See chapter 18.)

anything about this—or are you gassing on suspicion? Can you give me any proof?"

"Perhaps!"

"Perhaps is no good. If you could give me any proof to lay before the fellows——"

"I think I could."

"Then I'll make it worth your while."

"It's a lot of trouble, and a lot of risk," said Billy Bunter hesitatingly. "I—I think I could oblige you, Bolsover, if—if you could oblige me in turn. I'm expecting a postal-order to-morrow morning, for—for a pound! Could you cash it for me in advance?"

Bolsover smiled grimly.

"I'll cash it for you, in advance, when you've given me the proof of what you've been saying," he said.

"Done!" said Billy Bunter.

And, with a reassuring blink, he quitted the study. Bolsover remained in deep thought. It seemed impossible that the Owl of the Remove would be so assured in his statement unless he had something to go upon. And if he had—if Linley had really taken a bribe to betray his side, and it could be proved against him—— Bolsover's eyes glistened and gleamed at the thought. It would be ruin—utter ruin for the Lancashire lad at last. He had said that yesterday's match was his last match in the Remove; and if this black treachery could be proved against him it would indeed prove to be his last match.

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THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Proof!

SOME of the fellows looked very curiously at Bolsover when he came down.

He was known to be so arrogant by nature, and to have so uncontrolled a temper, that many of them fully expected him to break out into violence when he was dropped from the Form eleven. Some of them anticipated, not without satisfaction, giving the Form bully a dormitory licking to teach him manners. Bolsover had been through that before, and it had had quite a taming effect upon him. Quite a number of the Removites were willing to go to the trouble of giving him another.

But to the surprise, and perhaps disappointment, of the would-be ragers, Bolsover was perfectly quiet, and, in fact, appeared quite good-humoured. In their surprise, they asked him questions, and Bolsover affected to be astonished.

"Of course, if the footer captain says I'm not wanted, that's an end of it," he said. "I don't see how I could insist on being played."

"Oh!" said Snoop. "We—we expected you to go for Bulstrode, you know, or Linley."

"What rot!" said Bolsover. "If Linley's a better player, let him play. If Bulstrode chooses to leave me out, and put in a factory cad, let him. I don't care."

It was pretty plain that Bolsover did care, but he was

certainly taking it very well. Bolsover had his own reasons. The better temper he showed about it now, the more chance he had of being put into the team again when Mark Linley was kicked out of it—and that he would be kicked out of it, Bolsover felt sure now. The wish was father to the thought, of course; and Bolsover would not allow himself to doubt.

"Bolsover's not going to give any trouble, after all," Bob Cherry remarked to his friends. "I shouldn't have been surprised if he had gone for Mark; and I was ready to chip in and give him a first chop lambasting."

"I don't quite understand it," said Wharton. "This isn't like Bolsover. I suppose he can't be up to any tricks."

"He hasn't brains enough," said Bob Cherry serenely. "Besides, what could he do?"

Wharton had to confess that he could not see what Bolsover could do. But he did not trust the unusual urbanity of the Remove bully.

Billy Bunter did not turn up in the common-room that evening till nearly bedtime. When he came in, Bolsover gave him a quick look.

Bunter apparently did not see it. It was not till the Remove were going up to bed, that Bolsover found an opportunity of speaking quietly to the fat junior.

"Have you got the proof?" he asked.

Bunter blinked at him cautiously.

"I can get it," he said.

"There is proof, then?"

"Oh, certainly!"

"Why can't you get it now, then?"

"I've got to get it out of Linley's study."

Bolsover started.

Two or three fellows looked round. Bolsover went on, in a loud voice:

"I don't believe you've got any postal-order coming."

Bob Cherry chuckled as he heard it.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's Bunter springing his giddy postal-order on Bolsover now," he remarked. "He won't get much blood out of that stone."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Removites, quite unsuspecting of the real nature of Bolsover's conversation with Bunter, walked on, leaving them alone in the passage. Bunter blinked intelligently at the bully of the Remove.

"Look here, what does the proof consist of?" said Bolsover uneasily. "It's no good your telling a yarn about something you've heard at a keyhole. The fellows wouldn't believe a word of it."

"Oh, really, Bolsover—"

"They know what a liar you are, and they know you dislike Linley," said Bolsover impatiently. "Don't be an ass! There will have to be real proof, not your word."

"There is real proof."

"What is it?"

"Writing."

Bolsover caught his breath.

"Do you mean to say that they've been idiots enough to put it into writing?" he asked.

"They couldn't help themselves," Bunter explained.

"Linley's not to get his quid till the match is lost; and he's afraid then that Nugent minor might not hand it over. So they've written it down. Of course, the fags can't trust him, and he can't trust them."

"The idiots! It's enough to ruin them both if the paper were seen. Linley would never dare to show it, even if Nugent minor didn't shell out."

"I—I suppose they haven't thought of that."

Bolsover looked at him suspiciously.

"If you're gammoning me, Bunter, and there isn't any paper at all, I'll make you wish you had never been born," he said savagely.

"Oh, really, Bolsover—"

"Is there really such a paper?"

"I dare say you'll believe it when you see it," said Bunter, with an injured look. "If you don't trust me, Bolsover—"

"Of course I don't trust you, you cad!" said Bolsover.

"How did you know anything about the matter in the first place?"

"I happened to—to hear—"

"Yes, you happen to hear lots of things, don't you?" said Bolsover, with a sneer. "Well, how are you going to get the paper?"

"I'm going down to Linley's study to-night to get it," said Bunter.

"Good!"

They went into the dormitory. Billy Bunter's fat face was somewhat troubled as he went to bed. Perhaps he was thinking of the difficulty of abstracting that paper from the Lancashire lad's study.

The Owl of the Remove fell fast asleep; and he did not awaken again until the morning. Bolsover had slept soundly.

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too; but when he awoke at the clang of the rising bell, he sat up in bed and looked across eagerly at Bunter.

Billy Bunter gave a guilty start.

Bolsover's look was inquiring; but Bunter did not meet his glance after the first moment. Until that moment, the whole matter of Mark Linley and the supposed paper had passed from the mind of the fat junior.

Bolsover dressed quickly, and made signs to Bunter to follow him from the dormitory. Morning ablutions never occupied Billy Bunter long, especially in the cold weather. He joined Bolsover in the passage outside the Remove dormitory.

"Well?" said Bolsover, in snappish tones.

Bunter blinked at him nervously.

"I—I forgot it last night," he stammered. "You see, I—I fell asleep, and—and—"

"You fat slacker!"

"Oh, really, Bolsover—"

"Go and get the paper now. Linley—"

"Hush!"

Mark Linley was coming out of the dormitory. He heard his name spoken, and glanced at the two, but passed on without speaking.

"He's gone into his study," said Bunter, blinking over the banisters. "You know what a disgusting swot he is. He's going to work before breakfast."

"Then you can't get the paper."

"I'll get it at eleven o'clock."

Bolsover knitted his brows.

"Mind you do!" he said, between his teeth. "By the Lord Harry, Bunter, if you've been fooling me—"

"I—I haven't, Bolsover," said Bunter. "I really—"

"Mind you get the paper at eleven, then."

Billy Bunter looked very worried during breakfast, though he did not forget to eat as much as usual. During morning lessons he was worried; but not about his work, as he received fifty lines from Mr. Quelch for construing with unusual stupidity.

The Forms at Greyfriars usually had a recess from lessons at eleven o'clock in the morning. When the Remove came out, Bob Cherry marched Mark Linley off to the footer-field. The coast was clear, and Bolsover gave the Owl of the Remove a significant look. Billy Bunter nodded.

"I—I say, Bolsover," he whispered.

"What is it?" muttered the bully of the Remove. "We'd better not be seen talking too much together, or the fellows may smell a rat."

"Yes, yes, I know—but—"

"What is it? Sharp!"

"Could you—er—make me that little advance on my postal-order now?" murmured Bunter. "It is certain to come this afternoon, and—"

"Get the paper."

"I'd rather—er—"

Bolsover turned on his heel and strode away, with a frowning brow. Bunter's unwillingness for the task he had set himself was quite evident, and unpleasant doubts were in Bolsover's mind as to whether the fat junior had been deceiving him all the time.

"Beast!" muttered Billy Bunter.

He tramped slowly upstairs. Bolsover, keeping an eye on him, saw him enter Study No. 13, and close the door. The Remove bully strolled out into the Close, his eyes glinting. Was Billy Bunter looking for the paper now?

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bolsover Speaks.

MARK LINLEY joined in the kicking and passing on the football field for the quarter of an hour that the Remove had at their disposal. The Lancashire lad was in fine form, and never had he seemed so good a player. His speed was wonderful, his skill unequalled in the team. He showed no signs of the late mishap. It was evident that he had completely recovered from the effects of Bolsover's foul. Fellows looking on at the Remove team at practice laughed aloud at the idea of the fags meeting them. Even Dicky Nugent looked a little serious as he came away from practice himself, and looked at the Remove.

"Still going to lick us, kid?" asked Lord Mauleverer of the Remove, patting Dicky on the shoulder.

Dicky looked defiant.

"Yes, rather!" he exclaimed.

Mauleverer laughed.

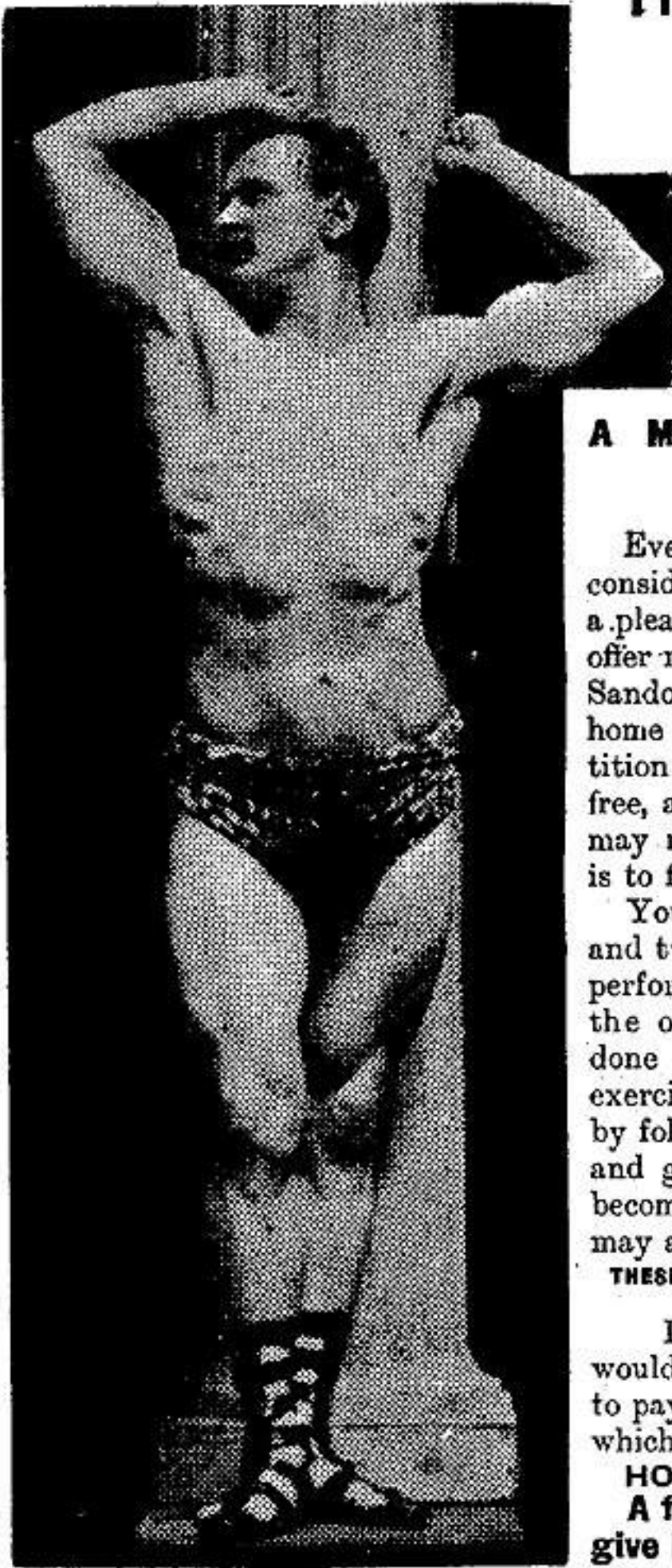
"You will have to ask the goalie to let some of the balls pass through, then, Dicky; or perhaps you have an arrangement with our backs to let you pass."

And there was a laugh.

Nugent minor snorted.

"You'll jolly well see what you will see," he retorted.

(Continued on page 18.)



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And as this was indisputable, no one disputed it, but the Removites laughed the more.

It was evident to all who had eyes to see that the fags had not the ghost of a chance, and that the match would be a walk-over from start to finish.

The fags knew it well enough, but Dicky Nugent would not allow himself to be convinced. He realised that he had bitten off more than he could chew, as Fisher T. Fish, the American junior, expressed it. But he would not admit it. He maintained an air of confidence, which at first amused, and then puzzled the Removites.

Bob Cherry scratched his chin thoughtfully about it.

"The young ass seems to think that he really has a chance," Bob Cherry remarked to Bulstrode. "Young Tubb, too, seems jolly well assured."

"Of course, it's all rot!" said Bulstrode. "Unless they tried some tricks like the Highcliffe fellows the other day, and got away with some of our players, they won't have a look in."

"Greyfriars fellows wouldn't do that, and the fags couldn't."

"No; it's only swank."

"Pure cheek," said Russell.

"Faith, ye're right!" said Micky Desmond. "Nugent minor is only thrying to save his face in his own Form, intirely."

"I suppose that's it," agreed Bob Cherry. "The young ass!"

"That's all you know," said Bolsover, unable to resist the temptation of hinting at what he knew.

The juniors stared at him.

"What do you mean?" demanded Bob Cherry, not very cordially. "Do you mean to say that you think the fags have a chance?"

"Now Bolsover's not playing, of course!" grinned John Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bolsover flushed angrily.

"I don't mean that," he exclaimed; "but I do mean that Nugent minor may have reason to believe that he will get a chance to win."

"In what way?" asked Bulstrode curiously.

"He might be given a chance."

There was a dead silence for a moment. Bulstrode broke it.

"What are you driving at, Bolsover?" he demanded abruptly. "Are you hinting that the Remove players, or some of them, might throw the game away?"

"Perhaps!"

"Nugent minor is going to stand Hazel a chunk of toffee for every time he lets the ball get into the net," grinned Ogilvy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not a bit of it!" said Hazeldene, laughing. "I assure you that I haven't been bribed and corrupted by the Second, Bolsover."

"I didn't say you had," said Bolsover, with a stress on the word "you."

"Does that mean that somebody else has?" demanded Bob Cherry sharply.

"Perhaps."

"Blow your perhappes! If you are hinting at foul play in the Remove team, you'd better say what you know, or admit that you're gassing."

Bolsover gritted his teeth.

"He knows nothing," said Harry Wharton contemptuously.

"It's utter rot to think of such a thing. It's all gas."

"It's not gas!" said Bolsover savagely.

"Do you mean to say that somebody in the Remove team is going to play into the hands of the enemy?" demanded Bulstrode.

Bolsover drew a deep breath.

"Yes," he said, very distinctly.

There was a hum of amazement.

"Very well," said Harry Wharton; "you've said that, and now you'd better prove it. Who's the chap?"

"Name! Name!" shouted the juniors.

"The fellow's here, and he's one that you all seem a jolly lot wrapped up in," said Bolsover bitterly. "But I can't prove it. I only know what I've been told."

"You can't prove it because it's not true," said Harry.

"I may be able to prove it."

"When?"

"Before the match," said Bolsover.

"Better do it before the match; we can see for ourselves afterwards," said Bulstrode, with a grin. "Don't be an ass, Bolsover. You're talking out of your hat, and you know you are."

"You will see."

The bell was ringing for classes, and the juniors hurried towards the school. Nugent minor passed Bulstrode, and gave him a defiant grin.

"Getting ready for a licking?" he called out.

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Bulstrode did not reply, but his face suddenly became serious. He dropped behind the others, and walked with Bolsover.

"Is there really anything in what you said just now, Bolsover?" he asked. "I know it's odd that young Nugent should be so cocky about it, when he must know that he hasn't an earthly."

"You'll see."

"If you know anything, you ought to tell me," said Bulstrode sharply. "I know you've been dropped out of the team, but that doesn't excuse you for leaving me in the dark. I can't believe that any Remove chap would give his Form away; but if it should be so, I want to know. What do you know?"

"I've told you I can't prove it."

"Tell me what you suspect, and I'll judge for myself," said the Remove captain.

Bolsover hesitated for a moment.

"Well, it's Linley!" he said.

Bulstrode's lip curled.

"Oh, I might have expected that!" he said. "Of course, this is in return for Linley's coming into the team again, and your being dropped out."

Bolsover turned crimson.

"It's nothing of the sort," he said. "I don't know that I'm a very particular chap, but I wouldn't accuse a fellow of a thing like that unless I believed it. You might give me credit for that, Bulstrode."

"Oh, you'd believe anything against Linley," said Bulstrode carelessly. "The wish is father to the thought, you know, as Shakespeare puts it."

"Suppose I prove it?"

"Well, if you prove it I'll believe it, but not till then. Why should Linley do anything of the sort? He has no reason to back up the fags."

"You know how hard up he is."

Bulstrode stared.

"Do you mean to say that you think the fags have paid him to let us down?" he ejaculated.

"I believe Nugent minor has."

"What utter rot!"

"Very well; wait till I prove it."

"I will," said Bulstrode scornfully; "and until then I should advise you to keep your head shut on that subject. This sort of rotten slander won't make you popular."

And Bulstrode stalked away and went into the class-room. Bolsover followed him, with a knitted brow. He felt that he had been premature in making the disclosure. Even Bulstrode, who certainly did not like Linley, though he valued him as a member of the team, laughed the accusation to scorn. Unless Bolsover could produce some proof of his assertion he was likely to hear some very bitter and plain-spoken comments upon his accusation. Bulstrode had called it a slander already, and unless he could prove his words the scorn of the whole Form was likely to be poured out upon him. And for proof, he depended upon Billy Bunter, the slippery, untruthful, unreliable Owl of the Remove. But surely Bunter could not have been deceiving him all along the line!

Surely not! But Bolsover, though he repeated it to himself, could not feel easy. The remainder of the morning's lessons passed anxiously and uncomfortably for him. He had never been so glad to hear Mr. Quelch dismiss the class. As the Remove went out of the Form-room after lessons, Bolsover grasped Bunter's arm with a grasp that made the fat junior utter an exclamation of pain.

"Owl! Oh, really, Bolsover—"

"I want to speak to you, Bunter," said Bolsover, between his teeth.

"I—I say—"

"Have you got the paper?"

"Yes," said Bunter. "It's—it's signed by Linley, after all, not by Nugent, but—"

Bolsover's heart leaped. He interrupted the Owl of the Remove.

"You've got it?"

"Yes," said the fat junior peevishly, "it's in my pocket. I wish you wouldn't grip my arm like that, Bolsover. I found the paper in—in the Second Form-room, not in Linley's study."

"Give me the paper!" muttered Bolsover. "Hang where you found it! Give it to me!"

"Hand over the quid."

Bolsover muttered something below his breath. He had forgotten that part of the bargain.

The Remove were trooping out into the open air, and the two were left alone in the passage.

Bolsover extracted a sovereign from his waistcoat pocket, and handed it to Bunter. It disappeared at once into Bunter's pocket.

"The paper!" said Bolsover, breathing thickly. "Quick!"

"I—I say, Bolsover; don't—don't you think we might let

Linley down lightly," said Billy Bunter hesitatingly. "I—I've got the paper here, but—suppose we have mercy on him, you know. He was brought up in a factory, and he hasn't a sense of honour like—like us, you know. Suppose we let him off. I—Ow!"

"Give me the paper, you fat cad! If you've been fooling me—" hissed Bolsover, almost maddened with rage at the thought.

"I—I haven't!" gasped the terrified Bunter. "Here's the paper. Ow!"

Bolsover grasped the paper from the hand of Billy Bunter, and strode away. Bunter stood blinking uneasily after him through his big spectacles. The Owl of the Remove was evidently in a very unquiet frame of mind.

"Beast!" he murmured. "Well, it's not my fault; he would have the paper. And—and Linley is a low cad, anyway, and ought to be sent to Coventry. It can't be helped now."

Bunter extracted the golden coin from his pocket, and his round eyes gleamed behind his spectacles at the sight of it. It opened out a vision of unlimited tuck. He made a straight line for Mrs. Mimble's little tuckshop behind the elms, and in a few minutes more he had forgotten Mark Linley, and Bolsover, and the football match, and everything else excepting Mrs. Mimble's jam-tarts and ginger-beer.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

In Black and White.

"MIGHT as well kick the ball about for ten minutes before dinner," Bulstrode remarked. "Hallo, Bolsover! What have you got there?"

Bolsover came up breathlessly.

He had a paper in his hand. His eyes were gleaming, his cheeks were flushed, and he was panting. He was labouring under the keenest excitement, and all the fellows who were going down to the footer with Bulstrode stopped and stared at him. Mark Linley was not there, as he had gone back to his Greek in No. 13 Study, but nearly all the Remove footballers were with the Form captain.

Bolsover held up the paper.

"Well, what is it?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Proof!"

"Eh? Proof of what?"

"Not Linley?" exclaimed Bulstrode, in amazement.

"Yes!" panted Bolsover.

"What's that about Linley?" exclaimed Bob Cherry sharply. "If you've got anything to say about my chum you can say it out before me, Bolsover."

"I mean to!" said Bolsover grimly.

"What is it?" asked Harry Wharton, with a scornful look at the bully of the Remove. "Is Bolsover making some accusation against Linley?"

"Yes," said Bulstrode reluctantly. "Am I to tell them what you have said to me about it, Bolsover?"

"Yes. I tell you I can prove it."

"Oh, all right! Bolsover says that the fags are so cocky about the match, because some of them—or one of them—has made an arrangement with one of our players to give the match away—or, at any rate, to help them all he can."

There was a burst of derisive laughter from the footballers. "Oh, he's dotty!" said Ogilvy. "I never heard anything quite so steep before! It sounds like one of Bunter's fairy tales!"

"Did he name the player?" said Bob Cherry, with a dangerous gleam in his eyes. "Was it Mark Linley?"

"Yes, it was Linley."

"And what did you answer, Bulstrode?"

"I said it was a rotten slander—or words to that effect."

"Good!" said Bob Cherry between his teeth. "And I repeat what you said. It's a rotten, dirty, cowardly slander, and Bolsover shall stand up to me for saying it about my chum!"

Bolsover sneered savagely.

"I'll stand up to you fast enough," he said. "But we'll have this matter settled first. Bulstrode said that if I found proof he wanted to have it. And I've found it."

"Lies!"

"I've got complete proof—"

"More lies!"

"Hold hard, Cherry!" said Bulstrode. "Give the chap a chance!"

Bob Cherry's eyes blazed.

"Give him a chance to slander Marky!" he exclaimed fiercely. "Do you think I don't know why he's made up that rotten story?"

"I think we all know," said Harry Wharton.

"Faith, and ye're right!"

"It's because Marky's playing, and he's kicked out of the team," said John Bull. "This is on a level with his fouling Linley the other day."

"The fellow's a rotter all through!" said Mauleverer. "Begad, he isn't fit to touch, you know!"

"Give him a chance!" said Bulstrode quietly, pushing Bob

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Cherry back. "Give him a chance! He says he's got proof!"

"Lies!"

"If it's lies you can soon show it up to be lies, and no harm done," said the Remove captain. "Lies will only recoil on Bolsover himself. Give him a chance."

"Well, let him produce his proof, then!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Is that it, Bolsover—that paper?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"First of all, look at that signature," said Bolsover, folding down the edge of the paper. "Look at it, and tell me whose it is, before you see the paper."

He held up the folded paper. The bottom half of it showed, and upon it was written the name of Mark Linley.

Half a dozen fellows recognised the signature.

"It's Linley's name," said Bulstrode.

"Let Bob Cherry look at it."

"I've looked at it," said Bob Cherry impatiently. "It's Marky's fist."

"You admit that?"

"Admit it? It's clear enough! I suppose lots of the fellows know Marky's handwriting without my evidence on the subject," said Bob. "What are you getting at? Mark's written his name on a bit of paper. What does that prove?"

"I wanted it quite clear that it's his signature, that's all," said Bolsover. "You can see the rest of the paper now. Take it, Bulstrode."

Bulstrode took the paper and unfolded it. He glanced over it, and gave a jump, and then read it again, with blank amazement in his face.

"My only hat!" he ejaculated.

There was a yell of inquiry at once. The curiosity of the juniors was excited to the highest pitch.

"What is it, Bulstrode?"

"Read it out!"

"Show it to us!"

"I'll read it out," said Bulstrode, in a quietly ominous voice.

"Go it!"

"Listen!"

The juniors were breathlessly silent.

In a steady voice, in the same ominous tones, Bulstrode read out the paper:

"In consideration of having received £1—one pound—payment in advance, I agree to do my very utmost to lose the footer match to the fags' eleven. MARK LINLEY."

A thunderclap could not have startled the juniors more.

Dead silence for some moments followed the reading out of the strange paper.

Bob Cherry staggered.

"It's a lie!" he shouted, breaking the silence. "A forgery! A lie!"

"It's all rot!"

"It can't be true!"

"Faith, it's a fairy tale!"

"Rubbish!"

But Bulstrode's face was hard and stern.

"It's Linley's signature," he said, in a steady voice, his brows knitting together. "The paper is written out in round hand—written out, I suppose, for Linley to sign. That's his signature, with Bob Cherry's own evidence about it."

"It's a forgery!"

Bulstrode shook his head.

"It's not a forgery," he said. "That's Mark Linley's signature. I can understand how you feel, Cherry; but it's no good accusing Bolsover of forgery. It's not good enough. This paper was signed by Mark Linley."

"Let me look at it!" muttered Bob Cherry thickly.

"You won't damage it?"

"Hang you, of course not!"

Bulstrode passed the paper to Bob Cherry. Several other juniors craned over his shoulder to read it with him.

There was the writing—in a sprawling, round hand such as a fag would write—and below that the signature of Mark Linley.

Mark Linley!

The paper seemed to dance before Bob's dazzled eyes.

The signature was real! If it was not real it was so skilful a forgery that only a master of that curious art could have written it.

It was absurd to suspect Bolsover of it. Bolsover was notorious in the Remove for his clumsy writing—he wrote as clumsy a "fist" as any fag—and he could not have made that well-written, graceful signature to save his life. Weeks of practice would not have made him able to do it. And this

paper had evidently been written within twenty-four hours—since Bulstrode's decision to play the fags' eleven, in fact!

Bob Cherry's brain was in a whirl.

Mark Linley agreed to sell a Form match! The thing was wildly impossible. Yet there was his own signature in proof of it!

"Well?" said Bulstrode harshly.

"It's false!" said Bob, in a husky voice.

"It's true!" said Trevor.

"Yes, it's plain enough!"

"It's false!" shouted Bob Cherry. "I wouldn't believe it if I saw Marky write it! I should think I was dreaming! It's false! I'll go and let Linley know! He will be able to prove somehow that it's lies!"

Bob Cherry strode away towards the School House. He went alone. The rest of the juniors gathered round Bulstrode, who had the paper in his hand again now. In almost every face there was belief. Even Wharton and Nugent and Bull, strongly as they were attached to the Lancashire lad, did not know what to say!

Bolsover's eyes were gleaming with triumph. His turn had come at last!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Ragged by the Form.

BULSTRODE held the fatal paper in his hand.

He read it again and again. At each reading his brows grew darker, and his eyes gleamed more angrily.

"It's plain enough," he said. "We all know that Linley is frightfully hard up; it was hard cheese on the poor wretch to send him to a school where he would be among rich fellows and would feel his poverty so much. I don't know that one ought to blame him. But this is really the limit!"

"The cad!"

"The sneak!"

"The Judas!"

"The rotter!"

"The scoundrel!"

It was a roar of condemnation.

Harry Wharton held up his hand for silence, but it was a full minute before he could obtain it.

"Hold hard!" said Wharton. "Let's have all the facts out before we go for Linley. That certainly is Linley's signature. There was a chap here once who forged a signature—that fellow Heath. But it's pretty certain there's not a fellow now at Greyfriars who could do the same so well as this. Admitting that this is Linley's fist——"

"That admits the whole show," said Hazeldene. "I suppose Linley never signed the paper with his eyes shut, did he?"

"Hold on! Let's have it all out! Where did this paper come from? Bolsover can explain where he got it."

"I don't see that it's necessary," said Leigh. "The paper speaks plainly enough for itself, and that's enough."

"Quite enough!" exclaimed Stott.

"We'd better have the whole story," said Bulstrode. "This is a serious matter for Linley. I suppose, after this, no decent chap in the Remove will ever speak to him again. Where did you get the paper, Bolsover?"

"I got it from Bunter."

"Oh, Bunter!" exclaimed Frank Nugent, in a tone of relief. "That settles it! It's some new dodge of Bunter's. We all know that he's up against Linley."

"Do you think Bunter could forge a signature?" asked Bolsover.

Nugent was silent.

The impossibility of Billy Bunter ever reproducing the delicate calligraphy of Mark Linley was apparent to all. It was as much as Bunter could do to write legibly at all.

"The idea's absurd!" said Trevor.

"I think Nugent will admit that Bunter couldn't do it," said Bolsover, with a grin.

Nugent bit his lip.

"But how did Bunter get the paper?" asked Wharton.

"Let's have the whole story," said Bulstrode.

"There's nothing to hide," said Bolsover, with a defiant glance at the chums of the Remove. "Bunter told me he suspected something last night. I don't mean to defend the way he gets his information. I believe he was listening at a keyhole. But anyway, he heard something between Linley and a fag in the Second Form about the match. He knew that they had a paper signed. At first he thought it was a paper signed by the fag, promising to pay Linley the money for selling the match; but it turned out to be that Linley was paid in advance, and signed a paper acknowledging it. Of course, the fags wouldn't trust him—a chap who was capable of selling his side. They made him give the receipt,

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Next Tuesday:

so that they could make him keep to the bargain. That's how I look at it. Anyhow, here's the receipt."

"You said a fag," said Nugent. "You don't give his name. Did Bunter give his name?"

"Yes, he did."

"What name was it?"

"I don't intend to say. I'm not accusing the fag. There's nothing to prove it against him but Bunter's words, and the word of a chap listening at a keyhole isn't worth much. I'm not going to be accused of bringing unfounded accusations. I'll leave the fag's name out."

"That's all right," said Bulstrode. "But this paper?"

"Bunter handed me this paper to-day. He had looked in Linley's study for the paper that was signed, and as it wasn't there he looked in the fags' quarters, and found it. This turned out to be the paper."

"Where's Bunter?"

"I don't know, and don't care. This is proved clearly enough," said Bolsover savagely. "Even Linley won't have the cheek to deny his own signature."

"We'd better see Bunter," said Harry Wharton.

"You can see Bunter if you like," said Bulstrode. "Seeing Bunter won't make any difference, that I can see. I'm going to see Linley."

"Yes, rather!" said Russell.

"I'm going to tell him what I think of him," said Bulstrode. "You can go and look for Bunter if you like. I don't care whether Bunter was listening at a keyhole or listening at a chimney. I know Bunter couldn't have written that signature, and I know that Bolsover couldn't have, and you know it."

"I know; but——"

"If they didn't, who did?"

"Mark Linley!" shouted Snoop.

"Linley!" yelled the juniors.

"The cad!"

"The outsider!"

"The factory rotter!"

Harry Wharton and Nugent walked away. They went in the direction of the tuckshop. Billy Bunter was most likely to be discovered there. The chums of the Remove were worried and downcast. Strong as their faith in the Lancashire lad had been, it was shaken now. They could not doubt that the hand was Mark Linley's. He could not have signed the paper without knowing what he was signing. What could it mean but that he was guilty? Yet, in a faint hope of discovering something to Linley's advantage, they looked for Bunter.

But the others were satisfied without further examination. The old suspicion and jealousy of the scholarship boy, which had slumbered so long, awoke with new vigour in many breasts. But anger, scorn, contempt for the black treachery was the predominant feeling.

Mark had often been sneered at for his poverty, but never so much despised for it as for this method of relieving it. The fellow who could betray his side in a match was too base for words.

Words, in fact, did not possess power enough to express the feelings of the Removites on the subject. They intended to proceed from words to actions. The whole crowd of them followed Bulstrode into the house.

"It's lucky we found it out before playing the match," Bulstrode said, with a deep breath. "We should never have suspected Linley, and he would have given them so many chances they would have scored easily. It's quite easy for a leading player to let his side down even to a very weak team. What an awful cad! Why, they might even have beaten us; and, at any rate, they'd have scored goals enough to save themselves from looking fools. It was worth a sovereign to them."

"Faith, and you're right!"

"We'll give Linley a lesson," said Bulstrode grimly, as he led the way up to the Remove passage. "We'll rag him, and wreck the blessed study. Bob Cherry's told him all about it by this time, and he'll be concocting some lie, but——"

"No need to waste time listening to his lies," said Bolsover.

"Rag the rotter!"

"Right you are, Bolsover!"

"If Bob Cherry takes his part we'll rag him, too," said Bulstrode, between his teeth. "We'll rag them, and smash up the blessed study from end to end. Don't leave a single thing whole."

"What do!"

"It will be a lesson to the factory cad," said Bulstrode savagely.

And the Removites, with vengeful faces, crowded along the Remove passage, and reached No. 13. Bulstrode grasped the handle of the door, and threw it violently open.

The juniors crowded into the study. Their faces were grim and savage.

"Collar the cad!" exclaimed Bulstrode.

Bob Cherry sprang forward.

"THE STOLEN CUP!"

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"Hold hard, Bulstrode!" he exclaimed.
 "Oh, rot, Bob Cherry!" cried several of the juniors.
 "What's the matter with you?"
 "Nothing," said Bob Cherry. "But you're not touching him just yet, that's all."
 "We'll see about that, Cherry," said Bolsover.
 "Let him jolly well explain," said Bulstrode. "Or perhaps you would like to do it for him, Cherry?" he continued sarcastically.

Bob Cherry's eyes flashed.
 "You're not jolly well all of you crowding on him while I'm here," he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 Bob Cherry clenched his hands and stood defiantly facing them.

"Perhaps I had better explain, Bob," began Mark Linley.
 "We don't want your explanation," said Bolsover.
 "We've had it, and we don't think much of it. Do we, chaps?" he concluded, turning to the crowd.

"No."
 "Let him deny that this is not his writing, Cherry," said Bulstrode excitedly. "Let him deny that he did not sign that paper."

"I haven't signed anything," said Mark Linley quietly.
 "The thing is a trick."

"Rats! Ha, ha, ha, ha!"
 "Collar 'em, kids!"
 "You'll be sorry, Bolsover," said Bob Cherry determinedly, "though you are three to one."

"Look here, Cherry, don't be an idiot," said Bulstrode.
 "You know as well as us that it is Linley's writing."

"The signature is, but you've not proved that," retorted Bob Cherry.

"Oh, rats to gassing!" said Bolsover. "We didn't come here for that."

"Really, Bob, if you'll let me explain I can convince them," said Mark Linley.

"We'll not jolly well listen to you," said Snoop.

Bob Cherry's lip curled with scorn. If their accusers had all been like Snoop, he knew that he and Mark Linley would have had no difficulty in clearing the study.

"Sock it to 'em if they begin, Mark," said Bob Cherry grimly.

Mark Linley's eyes glittered. He was not afraid.
 "We'll begin all right, Cherry," said Bulstrode.

And he suited the action to the word.
 "Hang you!" he exclaimed, as Bob Cherry sent him reeling into the arms of Bolsover.

Russell and Snoop both rushed at Mark Linley. But the Lancashire lad was ready for them. They went down one after the other under left and right drives from him. He and Bob Cherry knew that they could not hope to win, but they were determined to make things warm before they were overpowered.

"Leave him to me, Bulstrode," said Bolsover, steadying the captain of the Remove, and advancing on Bob Cherry.

"We'll soon put this right."

But the bully did not find it as easy as he had expected. Bulstrode was quite willing that Bolsover should tackle Bob Cherry. After a preliminary stumble over Snoop and Russell, he rushed at Mark Linley. The Lancashire lad countered like lightning, and Bulstrode went spinning right between Bolsover and Bob Cherry. He howled as he received two fearful knocks on each side of his face at the same time.

"Into 'em, Marky!" yelled Bob Cherry.

And the two chums, making a determined rush at their adversaries, bundled the "champions" over. But their success was only momentary. Snoop, Russell, and Ogilvy woke up, as it were.

Led by Bolsover and Bulstrode, they crowded on to the chums, and in a moment they were securely held. Bob Cherry even then made a manful effort to free himself. But it was no use. He had to console himself with the thought that he had considerably enlarged Snoop's nose.

"Yank 'em here!" cried Bulstrode, indicating the centre of the room.

"You cads!" cried Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tie them up!" continued Bulstrode. "We'll show the beggars!"

"So will we, later on," said Bob Cherry defiantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Several of the juniors ran to fetch cords, and Mark Linley and Bob Cherry were securely bound back to back. Hands and legs were firmly secured.

"Now," said Bulstrode, surveying the work with satisfaction, "we're going to show you what it means for any fellow who signs papers like that, Linley."

And the raiders proceeded to make "hay" in Linley's study. Bolsover discovered wonderful destructive powers. The fellows were simply amazed at the way he smashed things. They had not hoped for anything so good when they joined Bulstrode in this matter.

"Don't leave a giddy thing whole!" said Bulstrode. "The rotter must be taught a lesson."

Bolsover grinned. Tables, chairs, ornaments were ruth-

lessly smashed. Books were thrown about and trampled on. In five minutes the study was a wreck.

"That'll do!" said Bulstrode, after a while.

And, leaving Bob Cherry and Mark Linley tied back to back in the middle of the room, they went out of the study. Bolsover turned in the doorway. He was the last to go, and he had a last taunt to hurl at his rival.

"I think that finishes you, you factory cad!" he exclaimed. "I don't think even Wharton will speak to you after this. If you've a rag of decency left, you'll get out of the school. You'll jolly well be sent to Coventry while you stay here, I know that. You rotten, unspeakable cad!"

And Bolsover followed the rest, slamming the door after him. Bolsover's heavy footsteps died away down the passage. Bob Cherry and Mark Linley struggled to their feet. They stood back to back, bound and helpless, in the midst of their wrecked study.

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "This beats the Dutch, as Fishy says. My word!"

Mark Linley was silent.
 "Marky, old man—"

"Yes, Bob?"
 "I know you never signed that paper."

"I am innocent of what they think, Bob, and I think I could have explained if they would have listened. It was a plot; but I shall not take the trouble to explain now. Let them have their way," said Mark, setting his teeth. "You see, Bob, I was right after all; I have played my last match for Greyfriars."

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THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Wages of Sin.

"JAM-TARTS!" said Billy Bunter.

Mrs. Mimble frowned. The tinkle of the shop-bell had brought her out of her little parlour, but she did not give Billy Bunter the genial smile she generally bestowed upon a customer. She frowned instead. Billy Bunter's adventure under the counter was still fresh in her mind, and she had not the slightest belief that the fat junior had any money to spend. She expected a new attempt to prove to her, by eloquent explanation, that modern business was built up on a system of credit, and that the most business-like thing for her to do was to give Bunter unlimited "tick" on the faith of an apocryphal postal-order.

"And ginger-beer!" said Bunter.

Mrs. Mimble's fat finger pointed to the door.

"Go out at once, Master Bunter!"

Bunter blinked at her in astonishment.

"Oh, really, Mrs. Mimble—"

"Go away! You are a bad boy!" said Mrs. Mimble angrily. "You are dishonest, and you would take something as soon as my back was turned, drat you!"

"I hope you don't think that I've come here to ask for credit," said Billy Bunter, with a great deal of dignity. "I trust I am not in the habit of asking favours of social inferiors, Mrs. Mimble. I would as soon ask a factory cad like Linley for a loan. I have plenty of money."

"Nonsense!"

"I've had a postal-order—"

"Don't talk such nonsense to me, Master Bunter. Oh—"

Mrs. Mimble broke off at the sight of a golden sovereign, as Bunter laid it impressively on the counter.

"Jam-tarts and ginger-beer, please!" said Bunter loftily.

"Oh! I—I hope you came by that money honestly, Master Bunter."

"Oh, really, Mrs. Mimble—"

The good lady picked up the sovereign, and rang it on the counter. She seemed to have a lingering suspicion that Bunter might have made it himself. But the sovereign was a good one, and Mrs. Mimble put it into the till.

"How many tarts, Master Bunter?" she asked, with much politeness, and a gleam in her eye which might have alarmed Bunter if he had not been too short-sighted to see it.

"Oh, a dozen to begin with—twopenny ones," said Bunter.

"And ginger-beer?"

"Six bottles."

"Very well, Master Bunter."

Mrs. Mimble pushed the ginger-beer and the tarts across the counter, and then counted out the change. She handed Billy Bunter three shillings.

The fat junior ceased eating tarts for a moment to blink in astonishment at the small amount of change.

"Fourteen and six more, Mrs. Mimble," he said.

Mrs. Mimble's jaw set squarely.

"You owe me fourteen and six, Master Bunter," she said, very firmly.

Bunter's jaw dropped.

"Oh, really, Mrs. Mimble—"

"You promised to pay me out of your postal-order," said

Mrs. Mimble. "There is your change, Master Bunter. Fourteen-and-six for the old account, two shillings for the tarts, and sixpence for the ginger-beer—that is seventeen shillings—three shillings change out of a sovereign, Master Bunter."

"Oh! Oh, really——"

"Can I get you anything else, Master Bunter?" asked Mrs. Mimble politely.

"You can get me my change!" roared Bunter, almost choking over a mouthful of jam, in his wrath and dismay.

"There is your change, Master Bunter."

"I'm going to settle the account out of another postal-order—this one isn't the one I was referring to, you see——"

"This one is good enough for me, thank you," said Mrs. Mimble blandly.

"As a matter of fact, this wasn't a postal-order at all; it was a—a loan from a friend," said Bunter. "Look here, give me my change. When my postal-order comes I'll settle up as I agreed."

"You have settled up, Master Bunter."

The fat junior glared wrathfully. But it was pretty clear that wild horses would not drag the fourteen shillings and sixpence out of Mrs. Mimble's till. Bunter had wild thoughts of complaining to the Head; but certainly the Head would have ordered him to pay his account at the tuckshop instantly. There was no redress, and the Owl of the Remove had to swallow his wrath along with the jam-tarts.

"I'll have some more tarts," he said sulkily. "I think you might give me one in a shillingworth."

At which Mrs. Mimble shook her head. Mrs. Mimble might not be a business woman from Billy Bunter's point of view, but from her own she knew how to look after her little business. The fat junior sulkily devoured tarts, and he was getting towards the end of the supply when Wharton and Nugent came into the tuckshop.

Bunter blinked round at them with a jammy smile.

"I say, you fellows, if you'd like a tart between you, you're quite welcome."

"Thanks, no," said Wharton. "We've come for the pleasure of a little talk with you. So you are in funds, are you?"

"Master Bunter has paid up his account," said Mrs. Mimble, with a satirical smile.

"Oh!" ejaculated Wharton. "Quite a large sum, I suppose?"

"Fourteen and six," said Bunter loftily. "Rather a large sum to part with at once, but I'd promised Mrs. Mimble to settle up as soon as I had my postal-order, and I'm a fellow of my word, and I've done it."

"So you've had a postal-order?"

"Oh, yes!"

"When did it come?" asked Nugent. "Not by the last post, because I was there when the postman came. And not early this morning, because I heard you grumbling about not getting a letter."

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"You'd better explain where you got that money from."

Mrs. Mimble looked distressed.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed. "I have it here, Master Nugent, if Master Bunter has stolen it. I know he is dishonest enough."

"Oh, really——"

"You'd better explain, Bunter."

Billy Bunter gave an angry snort.

"As a matter of fact, it was a loan from a friend," he said.

"You said it was a postal-order"

"That was only a—a figure of speech."

"Oh," said Wharton. "And what friend lent you so much money? Fourteen-and-six, besides what you've spent in guzzling."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"It was a sovereign, young gentlemen," said Mrs. Mimble.

"Who gave you a quid, Bunter?"

"I decline to say. It's no business of yours," said Bunter, bolting his last tart in a great hurry, as if in fear that it might be taken away. "I decline to make you acquainted with my private affairs, Wharton."

"Do you?" said Wharton grimly. "Then you'll come to Mr. Quelch, and explain how that sov. came into your possession."

"It—it was a loan!"

"Don't tell crammers. Nobody who knows you would lend you a sovereign. If anybody did he wouldn't mind admitting it. Who was it? If you didn't steal that sovereign, where did you get it?"

"Bolsover lent it to me, in advance on my postal-order," said Bunter defiantly.

"I thought so!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—197.

A Grand New School Tale
Next Tuesday!

"Oh, really, Nugent, I don't see why you should think so."

"It's plain enough now," said Nugent. "Bolsover gave you that sovereign for helping him to make up a pack of lies about Linley."

"Oh, really——"

"Now," said Wharton, dropping his hand heavily upon Bunter's shoulder. "Bolsover has produced a paper that he says you gave him, signed by Mark Linley. It's supposed to be a receipt given by Linley for a sovereign paid him to lose the footer match this afternoon. Bolsover says you found that paper in the Second Form-room."

"So I did!" growled Bunter.

"Where did you find it?"

"It was in a locker."

"Whose locker?"

"Nugent minor's," said Bunter desperately.

"Then Nugent minor gave that sov. to Linley to lose the match?"

"Ye-es."

"Bolsover says you heard a fag talking it over with Linley. Was that fag Nugent minor?"

"Ye-es."

Frank Nugent's face was red with rage, and his hands were clenched. It was all that he could do to keep them off the person of Billy Bunter.

"You don't believe this, Wharton?" he exclaimed. "You don't believe that my minor would do such a rotten thing, even if Linley would consent."

Wharton shook his head.

"Of course I don't," he said. "If Bunter had said that his own minor, Sammy, had done it, I might have believed it. I know Dicky wouldn't do it. He's been cocky about the match, but he would kick any chap who suggested this kind of thing to him. Bunter has been lying from start to finish."

"I say, you know——"

"Come on, Bunter."

"I—I—where?" gasped Bunter, attempting to extract his fat shoulder from Harry Wharton's hard grip.

"You're going to repeat what you've just said, before Nugent minor," said Wharton.

"I—I—I really——"

"Enough said; come on!" Wharton marched the fat junior out of the tuckshop, in spite of his gasping expostulations. "Frank, will you find your minor? We will see whether Bunter dares to repeat this before him."

"Right-ho!" said Frank Nugent.

"I—I—say!" stammered Bunter.

"Come on, you cad!"

And Bunter was marched off at a speed which left him only breath enough to gasp.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Shown Up.

BULSTRODE & Co. came swarming downstairs, grinning gleefully. They had punished Mark Linley for his supposed treachery, and Bob Cherry for having stood by him against the Form.

Bolsover looked the most satisfied of all. He was already sure of his place in the team again, one of the backs having been moved to make room for him. Bulstrode had already told him so. It was only just, after his great service in discovering and exposing the intended false dealing. The Removites came crowding out into the Close, just as Wharton came up with Bunter in his grasp.

"Hold hard, you fellows!" Harry explained. "I've been asking Bunter questions."

"Oh, blow your questions!" said Bulstrode. "The matter's over and done with now. We've ragged Linley for his rotten tricks, and dropped him. It's all settled."

Wharton knitted his brows.

"You'll be sorry for ragging Linley when you know the facts!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, rot!"

"Fair play!" exclaimed John Bull. "Hang it all, you might take the trouble to listen to the other side. What has Bunter got to say?"

"Listen to him, by all means," said Bolsover, with a sneer. "He will bear out all I've said. I know that."

"Not without another sovereign, perhaps," said Wharton bitterly.

Bolsover started.

"Eh? What's that about a sovereign?" exclaimed Bulstrode sharply.

"Ask Bolsover whether he has given Bunter a sovereign to-day?"

There was a murmur in the crowd of Removites, and every eye was turned upon the bully. He flushed scarlet.

(Continued on page 24.)

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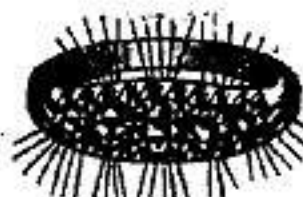
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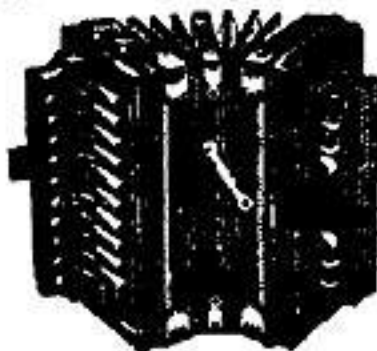
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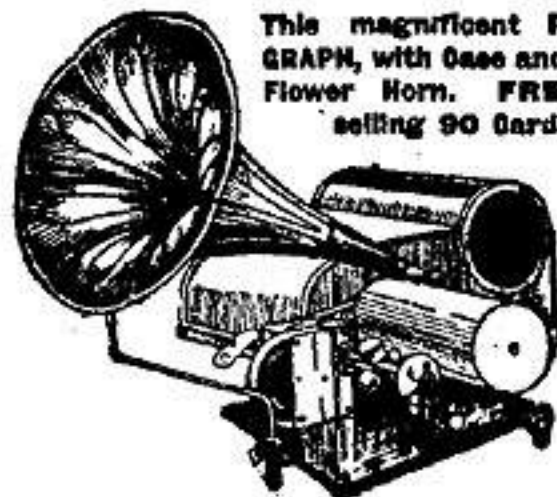


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"Have you given Bunter a sovereign, Bolsover?" asked John Bull.

"Yes, I have," said Bolsover defiantly. "What about it? He said he knew where that paper was, and he wouldn't look for it unless I made it worth his while. That's why I gave him the sovereign—to get at the truth."

"Not to bribe him to tell lies?" asked Tom Brown.

"No!" said Bolsover fiercely.

"I don't see that it alters matters at all," said Bulstrode. "The matter rests on that paper, signed by Linley. Nobody will believe that Bunter could have forged Linley's name if he had wanted to. It doesn't make any difference."

"Here's Dicky!"

Frank Nugent came up. Nugent minor, very red and excited, was with him. Dicky Nugent made a straight line for Bunter, and the Owl of the Remove promptly dodged behind Bolsover.

"I—I say, you fellows——"

Bulstrode dragged the excited fag back.

"Order!" he said sharply.

"Let me get at him!" shrieked Dicky Nugent. "I'll smash him! He says I've bribed a chap to sell a match! I'll squash him! I'll pulverise the horrid toad!"

"Cheese it, Dicky——"

"I won't cheese it! I'll smash him! Let him stand up to me!" roared Dicky. "He's twice as big as I am, and he can take his glasses off! Let him come out from behind Bolsover!"

Dicky Nugent's indignation was too genuine to be mistaken. The most sceptical of the Removites could not doubt that, so far as Dicky was concerned, Bunter's story must be false.

"Quiet, kid!" said Wharton. "You can punch him afterwards——"

"Ow! Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Shut up, Bunter! We've got to get at the facts now," said Harry. "You deny, of course, that you made any arrangement with Linley about the match?"

Dicky snorted contemptuously.

"Linley would have kicked me out of his study, and serve me jolly well right, if I had breathed a word about such a thing to him!" he said.

"Very well," said Harry. "Now, Bunter, you said that you heard Linley and Nugent minor talking it over. Where did you hear them?"

"In—in Linley's study."

"At what time?"

"I—I don't remember."

"You'd better remember sharp!" said Wharton. "Was it in the morning?"

"N-no."

"In the afternoon?"

"N-no."

"In the evening, then?"

"Ye-es," stammered Bunter desperately.

"At what time?"

"I don't remember."

"Where were you in the evening, Dicky?"

"Gatty and Myers were with me the whole time, and I never went into the Remove passage at all," said Dicky Nugent promptly. "I spent part of the time in the Third Form-room, as Tubb and Dobbs and a lot more will prove. Then I was at prep. with our Form-master, and after that we had some footer practice with an old ball in the passage. Ask any of the fellows—they'll tell you that I couldn't have gone to see Linley without some of them knowing it."

"I dare say they're all in the game," sneered Bolsover.

"You've no right to say that," said Wharton quietly. "Now, about Linley. If he was talking to Nugent minor in his study in the evening, when was it? A lot of us went to see him about playing in the match, and Dicky certainly wasn't there. After that, Bob Cherry stayed with him to do his prep., and he wasn't alone. It was about eight when we went there, Bulstrode?"

Bulstrode nodded.

"So this imaginary conversation about selling the match must have taken place before eight——"

"We're taken in prep. at half-past seven, and I was in my Form-room," howled Dicky Nugent, "and a dozen fellows can prove where I was up to evening prep. I never went near Linley's study."

"I think that makes it clear——"

"I—I say, you fellows, I—I'm not sure that it was Nugent minor talking to Linley in his study," Bunter stammered.

"I—I heard voices, that's all—I didn't see him. I wouldn't swear to Nugent minor's voice."

"That's reasonable enough," said Bolsover.

"Climbing down, are you, you fat cad?" said Dicky

Nugent. "But what about finding the paper in my locker in the Second Form-room, eh?"

Bunter started. He had forgotten for a moment the useful old adage about the good memories that are essential for liars.

"He says he got the paper from my locker," said Dicky, glowering at the fat junior. "I've got the key of my locker in my pocket, and I always keep it there. How did he open the locker, then? Go and look at it, and see if the lock's broken. It jolly well isn't! How did he get at the inside of the locker, eh?"

"Explain that, Bunter!" said Bulstrode sharply.

"I—I—I—that was a mistake!" stammered Bunter. "I—I meant I was going to look in Nugent minor's locker when I found the paper on—the floor, lying beside the locker, you know. I—I supposed that Nugent minor had dropped it there when he was—was going to put it in the locker for safety, you know."

"Well, if that doesn't take the cake!" exclaimed Wharton, in amazement. "He tells a different story every minute. I suppose you fellows can see now that he is lying?"

"He's lying right enough," said Bulstrode. "But the paper—here it is. Wherever Bunter found it, here it is, and it proves——"

"It proves that Bunter made up the whole story," said Wharton. "He did it to get money out of Bolsover for slandering Mark."

"Yes, rather!" said Nugent.

Wharton laughed scornfully.

"You've ragged Linley without giving him a chance to explain?" he exclaimed.

"Well, it seemed clear enough, and we expected only lies——"

"Let's hear what he has to say."

"Oh, all right!"

The crowd of Removites, intensely excited now, trooped indoors. The bell for dinner had begun to ring, but in the excitement no one noticed it. Billy Bunter made an attempt to slip away, but Wharton's grip closed like iron on his shoulder, and he was marched up to the Remove passage.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Last Match.

BOB CHERRY was scarlet and panting with the efforts to break loose, and with the rage that boiled in his breast. Back to back, the chums of Study No. 13 stood as the raggers had left them—they had not been able to free themselves. They ceased their efforts as there was a trampling of many feet in the passage, and the door was thrown open, and the juniors crowded in. Bob Cherry gave them a furious look.

"You confounded rotters——" he roared.

Wharton turned towards him with an angry exclamation.

"I didn't know this was going on, Bob!" he exclaimed.

"Let me loose!"

"Right-ho!"

Wharton's knife soon severed the cord, and Bob Cherry and Mark Linley were free. The Lancashire lad was very cool and steady, but his chum was raging. Wharton had to hold Bob Cherry back from rushing upon the raggers.

"Hold on, Bob!" he said. "We've been trying to get at the truth of this matter. It all rests on a yarn of Bunter's, and we've proved that he was lying——"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Hold your tongue, Bunter! We've proved plainly enough that Bunter was lying, but we can't get over the paper. It looks like Linley's signature——"

"It is my signature!" said Mark Linley quietly.

"He admits it!" shouted Bolsover.

"I admit the signature."

Wharton was a little taken aback.

"Well, then, if it's his signature, that settles it," said Bulstrode. "I don't care how Bunter came by the paper. He can't help lying—he's built that way. But there's the paper right enough, and Linley admits signing it——"

"I don't admit that."

"But you just said——"

"I said that the signature was mine, and so it is. I wrote my name on that sheet of paper, and I suppose Bunter found it. Someone else filled in the paper above the signature with what is written there—Bunter most likely."

"Oh, really, Linley——" Bunter muttered feebly.

"What on earth did you write your name on a blank sheet of paper for?" demanded Bulstrode.

The Lancashire lad smiled faintly.

"It wasn't exactly like that. The paper has just been round to be signed by all the chaps who are entering for the Noble prize, and I had to sign my name along with the others. As the paper goes before the Head, I was a little

more careful than usual about my signature. I dashed off my name on a sheet of exercise paper first, merely to see that the pen was quite in order—"

"My hat!" said Bulstrode, with a start. "I did exactly the same thing myself! There's a bit of paper with my name on it crumpled up in my waste-paper basket now unless it's been cleared away."

Mark smiled again.

"I signed the Head's paper; and Courtney took it away," he said. "The piece I had dashed off a line on lay on my table till I noticed it, and then I crumpled it up and threw it away. I suppose Bunter may have seen it. Now I come to think of it, it was at that time that he came into my study and tried to borrow some money, and went away offended because I would not give him any."

"Oh, really, Linley—"

"The paper has been crumpled, too," said Bulstrode, taking it from his pocket. "I notice that now. And—and the name is written across the middle, just where it would be if it had happened as Linley says. The other writing is all on the top half. I—I say, it looks as if we've been a bit hasty."

The other fellows thought the same. Their faces wore decidedly sheepish expressions. Even Bolsover understood that Linley's explanation demolished the elaborate net in which he had been caught. Bunter had deceived him—or, rather, he had deceived himself in his eager desire to be revenged upon the Lancashire lad.

"Linley's innocent!" said Bulstrode between his teeth. "That's plain enough now. We've been taken in. The cad might have worked this yarn up against me quite as easily as against Linley. Shove him on the table!"

"Oh! Ow!"

"Hand me that cricket-stump, Russell."

"What-ho! Here you are!"

"Ow! Help! Yow!"

"Hold him across the table."

"Yaroo! Help!"

Billy Bunter was stretched across the table, and held down by strong hands. He writhed and yelled in anticipation. Bulstrode grasped the stump.

"You dirty, mean, little, fat bounder!" said Bulstrode, punctuating his sentence at every word with a swipe of the cricket-stump, which made the dust rise from Bunter's trousers, and brought a wild yell from his lips. "You—mean—rotten—cad! You—are—as—bad—as—a—forger!"

Thwack, thwack, thwack! kept time with the remarks, a whack at every word.

"Yow, yow, yow!"

Bunter's yells kept time with the whacks.

"You—ought—to—be—expelled!" proceeded Bulstrode, in the same system. "But—you're—going—to—have—a—good—licking—anyway!"

"Yaroo! Help! Fire! Murder!"

Bulstrode laid it on with the cricket-stump till his arm was tired. Then he desisted, and Billy Bunter was suffered to roll off the table, groaning with anguish.

Bulstrode tossed the stump away.

"Ow, ow, ow! Groo! I— Yow!"

"Get out!" roared Bulstrode.

And Billy Bunter got out.

Bulstrode turned rather awkwardly to Mark Linley.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I know we've been hasty, and done you wrong. I own up, for one. I'm sorry!"

"Sorry!" came a general chorus.

Mark Linley smiled bitterly.

"Sorry—till the next time!" he exclaimed. "I don't bear any malice, and I'm glad you're satisfied that I'm innocent. But you are too ready to suspect me, and I intend to keep out of the reach of suspicion after this. I've played my last match for the Remove."

Bulstrode uttered an exclamation.

"You'll play to-day?"

"Look here—" began Bolsover.

"Oh, shut up!" said a dozen voices promptly.

And Bolsover, after an angry stare round, put his hands in his pockets, and tramped sullenly out of the study. He would not tell Mark Linley that he was sorry. He was not sorry—or sorry only that Bunter's wicked accusation had broken down.

"You'll play in the match this afternoon?" said Bulstrode. "You've given me your word, Linley."

Mark flushed.

"You've dropped me since then—"

"I hold you to it; you must play. Besides, we want you!"

"Play, old chap!" said Harry Wharton.

Mark nodded his head wearily.

"Very well, if you want me I'll play, but it will be for the last time," he said. "I've made up my mind about that."

"I hope not," said Bulstrode.

Mark made no reply.

The shouting voice of a prefect had been audible for some time in the passage. It announced that the juniors were

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long late for dinner. They crowded down to the dining-hall, and were rewarded with fifty lines each from Mr. Quelch for being a quarter of an hour late.

After dinner all thoughts were given to the fags' match, which was to begin at half-past two. When the footballers went down to the ground, Mark Linley walked down quietly with them, his face very pale and set.

Mark meant to keep his word—to play for the Remove in that match, and to play his hardest. But that would be the finish. The readiness with which the juniors had suspected him of baseness, the haste with which they had found him guilty, without giving him a chance of proving his innocence, had wounded the Lancashire lad bitterly. The iron seemed to have entered into his soul at last. He did not bear malice; but he could not forget, though he could forgive.

Dicky Nugent & Co. came upon the field, and quite a crowd gathered round to see the remarkable match. Coker of the Fifth had condescended to referee, and he grinned as the teams lined up. The fags had brought out their best men, but they were very much overtopped by the Remove players.

Even Dicky Nugent's hopes were slight. If Mark Linley had been left out, and Bolsover had been played, the fags might have had a chance, at least, of breaking their duck. As it was, they had none—or very little.

But Dicky Nugent meant to do his best.

He exhorted his followers to play up, and they did—as well as they could.

But from the kick-off they were overpowered.

The Remove forwards had the ball all the time, and they brought it up to the goal in spite of the strongest defence the fags could bring to bear. Mark Linley simply walked through the fags' defence, and put the ball in before the game had been going five minutes.

"Play up, for goodness' sake!" exclaimed Dicky Nugent, as the sides lined up again, the Remove all grinning.

"Oh, rats!" retorted Gatty crossly. "You've got us into a precious hole with your swank!"

"Shut up!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

Mark Linley scored the second goal in two minutes. Three minutes later Harry Wharton put it in; and then came Bulstrode's turn. The halves scored very nearly as many goals as the forwards, and even the backs claimed one apiece. Indeed, Hazeldene was tempted to come out of the Remove citadel and score one himself.

The spectators round the field roared with laughter.

The efforts of the fags were heroic, but unavailing. They did not have a look-in. In the first half the Remove total amounted to nineteen goals to nil. They had kicked goals all the time, and as many as they wanted.

In the second half the Remove players took the game humorously. They played with their hands in their pockets, and did cake-walks down the field after the ball, and played all sorts of fantastic tricks that made the spectators yell with merriment, but gave the fags no chance to get through. By the time Coker, choking with laughter, calmed himself sufficiently to blow the whistle for the finish, the Remove score was twenty-five goals, and it might have been fifty if they had chosen.

Phip! The whistle rang out, and the play stopped. The fags, who had been almost run off their legs, stood about, gasping. The Remove, as fresh as paint, marched off the field, roaring with laughter.

"Well, my only Aunt Janetta!" said Nugent minor. "I—I think we've been licked, after all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass!" roared Gatty, shaking his fist in Nugent minor's dismayed face. "You champion, first-chop, double-action ass! You—you are nine kinds of a chump!"

"Ass!"

"Fathead!"

"Yah!"

And having thus elegantly expressed their opinion of the leader who had led them to their Waterloo, the fags tramped off. A roar of laughter followed them. Even Mark Linley was laughing; he could not help it. Twenty-five goals to nil was a score that brought irresistible smiles to the gravest faces; and the Lancashire lad enjoyed a hearty laugh over the result of his last match.

THE END.

(Next Tuesday's grand, long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co., by Frank Richards, is entitled "THE STOLEN CUP." Please ORDER your copy of "The Magnet" Library well IN ADVANCE. Price One Penny.)



"Beyond the Eternal Ice!"

A Thrilling Story of the Amazing Adventures of Ferrers Lord, Millionaire, Ching-Lung, and Rupert Thurston.

BY

SIDNEY DREW.

The millionaire tugged at the ropes and the two flags fluttered out side by side. "Three times three for Ferrers Lord!" shouted Ching-Lung. "Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!" "And a salute!" Crash! The crew of the Lord of the Deep fired their rifles into the air. (See page 28.)

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

When Professor Hugley, the renowned American scientist, startles the world by announcing that he is off to find the North Pole in his wonderful air-craft, the Cloud King, there is only one man who dares to enter the lists against him on behalf of Great Britain, and that man is Ferrers Lord, the famous millionaire and inventor. Lord pits his wonderful submarine, the Lord of the Deep, against the Cloud King in the most amazing race the world has ever seen; the goal is the North Pole, and the prize a million pounds!

The preliminaries are soon settled, a judge is appointed to accompany each of the competitors, and the great race commences.

With Ferrers Lord are Ching-Lung, Rupert Thurston, and Gan-Waga, an Eskimo, while Hugley is accompanied by Paraira, a Cuban, and Esteban Gacchio, a huge negro. These latter soon show themselves in their true colours, and the Cloud King no sooner reaches the region of ice than Hugley, and such of the crew as are loyal to him, are murdered, and Paraira and Gacchio assume control of the airship.

Ferrers Lord discovers an underground passage which he believes leads to the Pole. The Lord of the Deep makes her way through this tunnel, and at length emerges into daylight. Cries of astonishment escape the lips of the crew at the sight that meets their gaze.

(Now go on with the story.)

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How the Travellers Entered the Wonderful City of Shazana —A Right Royal Welcome—Britannia Wins.

It was fairyland indeed. The Mediterranean never looked so blue. The Isles of Fiji, earthly paradise though they are, never looked so beautiful, and the twittering of birds made the air musical.

It was a city without smoke and without chimneys. They feasted their eyes upon it in silence.

"Wonder of wonders!" said Ferrers Lord dreamily. "There lies the secret of our metal jar, Ching-Lung—the City of the Four Suns. We have come from the hidden lands. How will they welcome us?"

Van Witter was out of his invalid-chair. Churning slowly onward, the Lord of the Deep neared the island. A blue expanse of water, flanked by quays of white stone, led the way into the city. Ferrers Lord raised his rifle and fired two shots.

The quick reports startled the city into life. People in long white robes came running towards the quays, shouting and gesticulating. Through his glasses the millionaire could see they were armed with spears, bows, and battleaxes. He uttered a sharp command, and Maddock blew his whistle.

The submarine was slowed down, and the crew, with bayonets fixed, fell into their places. A maxim was run forward.

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They saw the armed citizens, their bows strung in readiness.

"Waal," drawled Van Witter, "it doesn't look as if they were going to love us like brothers, does it?"

"Not much," said Ching-Lung. "That metal jar seemed a bit of a fraud, old chap."

Ferrers Lord reversed the screws.

"They take us for foes," he said, "as is only natural. Up with the white flag, Prout!"

The flag shot up to the track. They waited to see the result. Suddenly a long galley, with an eagle for a figure-head, moved over the water, propelled by a dozen long sweeps.

Ferrers Lord stepped forward, and stood at the prow of his vessel. The galley came nearer. An old man, with flowing white beard, rose and lifted his hands above his head. The millionaire imitated the gesture.

"Bring the jar, Ching!" he cried. "I don't suppose I shall be able to understand the language, but the jar may explain why we have come."

The boat halted within pistol-shot, its occupants seeming afraid to come any nearer. Ferrers Lord beckoned them. He took the jar, and poised it for a throw.

"I think you had better do this, Ching," said Ferrers Lord. "You will get it closer than I can."

"All right, old chap!"

It was an underhand throw, so perfectly measured and cleverly delivered that the jar struck the water right under the sweeps.

"Bravo, Ching!" shouted Thurston. "You'd break all records for putting the weight. It was neat!"

They saw the old man drag the jar from the water. He looked at it and gave a shout, which the oarsmen took up. The crowd on shore answered it again and again. Then the galley shot forward, and the old man mounted the ladder.

Smiling, Ferrers Lord advanced to meet him.

"Welcome!" he said.

The old man knelt before him, muttering in an unknown tongue. Other galleys, filled with cheering people, swept down the waterways and surrounded the Lord of the Deep. Silken banners waved, trumpets blared, and handfuls of scented flowers were flung over the submarine's deck.

Pressing both hands over his heart, the old man jabbered and chattered.

"Can you make anything of it?" asked Ching-Lung.

"A word here and there only," drawled the millionaire. "It is like a mixture of Sanscrit, and Eskimo. 'Fanlish' means city, I know, and 'zedi' a king. His drift is that the king invites us to his city, Shazana. What about our jar now, prince?"

"Wonderful, old chap! Do you intend to accept the invitation of the gentleman with the whiskers?"

"To be sure. Why not?" He looked at the old man, and pointed to the city. "Shazana?" he asked.

The greybeard nodded.

"And zedi?"

"Vathmoor."

"We are getting on splendidly," laughed Ferrers Lord. "The city is Shazana, and its king is Vathmoor. That is not a bad start. Hallo, Ching! You've frightened him!"

Ching-Lung had lighted a cigarette, and the sight of the blue smoke puffing from the prince's nostrils made the old man stare with horror. The millionaire's smiling face reassured him that Ching-Lung was not on fire inside.

The galleys, with their white-robed passengers, had formed in a circle. They stared in wonder at the strangers and their vessel. They were a handsome, fair-haired race, though few of them were more than five feet six in height. They wore a profusion of bangles on their wrists, and each carried a quiver at his hip and a bow over his shoulder.

"Not a bad-looking lot," drawled Van Witter. "They remind me of the old Vikings on a small scale. But they haven't got the girth and muscle of those old sea-dogs. I feel just as if I was going to wake up and find it a dream. No, don't pinch me, Thurston. By Jove, look at the flags going up!"

"They mean to give us a rousing time, it seems!" laughed Rupert.

The screws began to churn, and, accompanied by its retinue of galleys, the Lord of the Deep made her way triumphantly up the channel.

Beyond the quays, nestling among luxurious gardens, lay houses of pure white stone. The whole population of Shazana, the City of Four Suns, was there to welcome the strangers. The blue channel wound in and out like a broad ribbon of turquoise silk, with a white edging, the edging being the quays on either side.

"By gad," said Ching-Lung, "that's a fine place!"

"The palace, no doubt," drawled Ferrers Lord.

It was a building with four white domes, a sun of some yellow metal flashing from the summit of all the four.

He pointed it out to the old man.

"Kashlit!"

"The temple, Ching, not the palace," said the millionaire.

"I suppose they are sun worshippers."

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"Four of them ought to keep them busy. What's the word for palace in their lingo?"

"Zediana, the place of the kings. And here's the market square, by Jove!"

He dashed into the wheelhouse. His excited voice came ringing over the deck.

"Van Witter! Ching! Rupert!"

They darted in after him. He was bending over the chart.

"What is it? What's the matter?"

Ferrers Lord was flushed with excitement, and his eyes were aglow. He thrust a pencil and a paper covered with figures into Van Witter's hands. The Yankee seemed to have forgotten his wounds.

"Check these!" gasped Ferrers Lord. "Here's a copy of them for you, Rupert. I may have blundered, but I think not. Ching, my boy, you have a head for mathematics; here are my reckonings since Van Witter took his last one. Quick, check them!"

He had brought the vessel up, and the attendant galleys had halted. Pacing to and fro, Ferrers Lord awaited the result. Ching-Lung had finished first. He rushed to the millionaire and gripped both his hands.

"You've won, old chap," he shouted—"you've won!"

"By hokey, it's true!" said Van Witter. "What do you make it, Thurston?"

Thurston flung up his cap.

"The Pole—the Pole! Hip, hip! We've done it!"

They looked at one another with shining eyes. To the right lay the paved square, with a fringe of green palm.

"We'll float our flag there!" drawled Ferrers Lord.

The vessel touched the quay, and was made fast. Prout yelled and shouted orders until he was red in the face. Brand new uniforms were served out, and Ching-Lung dressed himself in his princely robes.

As if by magic the Lord of the Deep was covered with bunting. Prout and Maddock slapped each other on the back, and shook hands with everybody. Rupert appeared in the silk hat and frock-coat of an Englishman, and Van Witter donned the uniform of a captain in the United States navy.

The citizens of Shazana watched in wonder. A bugle sounded, and the band struck up "Rule, Britannia!" Headed by the band, the procession streamed out of the wheelhouse, and crossed the quay.

After the band came six sailors, carrying the flagstaff on their shoulders. Then came Ferrers Lord, with the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes. Ching-Lung, Thurston, and Van Witter followed; and then, four abreast, marching with fixed bayonets, tramped the crew of the Lord of the Deep.

"Halt!"

The puzzled citizens of Shazana lined the square, wondering what this strange procession meant.

The music of the band seemed to please them, for they laughed and cheered. The flagstaff was raised erect, and with a crowbar Ferrers Lord prised up a flag.

"Now, Prout!" he cried.

Prout swung the pickaxe above his head, breaking up the loose earth, and Maddock followed him with a spade. The pole, shod with aluminium so that it could not rot, was slipped into its place. With his own hand Ferrers Lord made fast the flags.

"Gentlemen," he said, "to-day we have achieved a triumph. At this moment we stand on that mysterious spot, the dream of explorers, the place that till now has baffled every effort of the bravest to attain. I am proud of you all for the great pluck and steadfastness you have shown. It is a great victory—a marvellous victory!"

"I am proud that the honour belongs to the country we love, and I am prouder still that the man who has shared the victory with us should be a cousin of ours in fact and truth, for Columbia is England's daughter, and her citizens are our cousins. Give me your hand, Van Witter."

Their hands met.

"I cannot say that I am proud of China but for one thing, and for that one thing I honour it. It is the birthplace of my dear friend Prince Ching-Lung. I am not a man to praise, though I am quick enough to blame. Nor do I say that China joins us in our victory, but only Ching-Lung and the district he governs, which is the best-governed district in China."

He paused, smiling round at the beaming faces, and beckoned with his hand. Maddock saluted, and Lord handed him a leather-bound box. He opened it. Embedded in a velvet pad were gold medals, with the letters "F. L."—Ferrers Lord—and the year set in diamonds.

"Mr. Van Witter," he said, "as an honoured friend and an honoured guest."

Bareheaded, Van Witter stepped forward, and the medal was pinned on his breast.

"And you, prince," said Ferrers Lord.

Thurston was decorated next, then Prout and Maddock,

and the rest of the crew. The reverse of the medals showed the Union Jack flying on an icy peak, with the Lord of the Deep in the foreground. The inscription read: "The Great Race for the North Pole. Won by the British vessel Lord of the Deep. Presented to — by Ferrers Lord, captain and owner. 'Rule, Britannia!'"

The millionaire tugged at the ropes, and the two flags fluttered out side by side. They stood bareheaded, the band playing "Rule, Britannia!" The strains died away.

"Three times three for Ferrers Lord!" shouted Ching-Lung.

"Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!"

"And a salute!"

Crash! They emptied their rifles into the air. Then the flags of victory fluttering behind them, and the band playing "God Save the King," the winners of the great race marched back to the ship. The white-robed crowd streamed across the square to stare at the pole and its flaunting flags, and to wonder what it all meant. Most of them seemed to imagine that they had witnessed a religious rite. And, with the four suns beaming overhead, the conquering vessel sailed slowly on.

A Visit to Vathmoor, King of Shazana.

Compared with the great temple of the Four Suns, the palace was a small place. It stood right over the channel, built on arches of white stone, through which the water ran. Hanging gardens surrounded it, filled with shady walks, statuary, and murmuring fountains. Strong square towers rose at every corner.

"All is not peace even in this paradise, Ching," said Ferrers Lord. "Look at those drawbridges there and those strange catapults there, powerful enough to hurl rocks weighing a ton."

"Perhaps there are some other lands here," said Ching-Lung, "whose inhabitants are hostile. It would be rather fun to see an invasion. Wouldn't Van Witter take some photographs?"

The Yankee had been taking photographs for the last half-hour. He now appeared with an enormous camera, one of the sailors carrying the tripod legs.

"Get your faces out of sight, lads!" said Ching-Lung.

"Here comes the man with the gun!"

"What on earth are you going to do with that weapon?" asked Thurston.

"Waal," drawled the Yankee, "I reckon real live kirs don't come my way every minute, and I don't mean to let the chance slip. I'm going to take his Majesty's photo, and interview him for the 'New York Eagle.'"

"But you don't know the lingo."

"That doesn't matter," said Van Witter, with a wink. "I can make up the interview as I go along. He can't write and deny it, can he? Not much!"

The Lord of the Deep passed under the central arch. There was a landing-stage here, draped with crimson cloth. Behind, a massive door lay open, revealing a flight of steps. Sentries, armed with battleaxes, guarded the doorway.

"This is evidently the entrance," said Ferrers Lord. "Maddock, you are in charge. Gentlemen, take your revolvers. Two rifles here!"

The old man walked backwards, bowing at every step.

A covered way led into the palace. More sentries were here, leaning on their glittering weapons. They stepped aside, and the travellers entered. The great doors closed behind them with a clang.

They were in a long, low hall, lighted with perfumed lamps. The floor was of polished wood, covered here and there with skins of bears, wolves, and foxes. At the far end was a raised platform, and behind it hung heavy curtains of purple cloth, embroidered in gold.

The old man raised his hands high above his head.

"Zedi Vathmoor!" he cried.

A dozen voices took up the cry, and the old man sank down upon his knees. Unseen hands dragged aside the curtain, and they were face to face with Vathmoor, King of Shazana.

He was much taller than any of his subjects he had seen. He wore a suit of glittering chain armour, and a two-handed sword dangled at his hip. Vathmoor's hair, a pale straw colour, fell over his brawny shoulders, and his beard was closely cropped.

He advanced gravely and bowed. When Ferrers Lord extended his hand, a puzzled look came into the king's honest, blue eyes. He did not understand the European style of greeting.

"Try the rubbing noses business, old chap!" said Ching-Lung, in a whisper.

Ferrers Lord laughed, so did the king. Then they all laughed.

"He seems a merry old buck," said Rupert, "and I like his looks. How old do you think he looks?"

"Forty-four, at the outside," drawled the Yankee. "Here, let me start the interview!"

Vathmoor looked more puzzled still when Van Witter began to put the camera together.

"Mind he doesn't take you for an Anarchist, Van, and have your head," tittered Ching-Lung. "I'll bet you a sovereign you cannot make him understand what you want."

"Taken!"

Van Witter stepped up to the king, and placed a photograph of Thurston in his hands. He pointed to Thurston, to the king, to the camera. Vathmoor shook his head. He could not understand.

"Waal, I won't be licked!" drawled the Yankee. "Just stand in front, Ching."

He popped his head under the cloth, and focussed Ching-Lung on the ground glass. Then, seizing Vathmoor by the arm, he beckoned him to do the same. After some persuasion the king took a gingerly peep, then a longer one, and at last a longer one still.

His face beamed, and again Van Witter produced his photograph of Thurston. It dawned upon his Majesty at last that the camera was an instrument for making pictures, and that the stranger wanted to make a picture of him. He stood before the camera, leaning upon his sword, and the photograph was taken.

"There's your sov., old chap," said Ching-Lung, "and you deserve it!"

"Guess I do!" laughed the American.

Again the closed curtains were wrenched aside. There was another room beyond. In a gallery some musicians were playing softly on some stringed instruments. A long, low table filled the centre of the room. It sparkled with dishes and jars of gold.

The king bowed invitingly, and they followed him. Prout and Joe, the carpenter, remained behind. Guessing that they were slaves, the king spoke to the greybeard. Men appeared, carrying a smaller table and a pile of cushions. A smell of savoury viands made Prout smack his lips.

"It smells good, doesn't it, Joe?" he said, cycling the covered dish.

"Like tripe," said Joe. "And what's this stuff in the jug?"

"Try it," suggested the steersman.

(This thrilling adventure story will be continued in next week's number of "The Magnet" Library. Order early. Price 1d. "The Ghost Ship," by Sidney Dyer, now appearing in the "Boys' Friend," 1d., should be read by all readers interested in "Beyond the Eternal Ice!")



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The Editor

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