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BOLSOVER MINOR STANDS UP FOR HIS BULLYING BROTHER!

Bolsover major sneered bitterly as he looked down at the dusty and dishevelled form of his brother who had been standing up for him so stoutly against the Third-Formers. "At it again, Hubert," he exclaimed harshly. "Good old Slum Alley! I suppose you'll never get out of it, you young cad!"

(See the long, complete school story inside.)

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NEXT TUESDAY: **"A TRAITOR IN THE SCHOOL!"** A Grand School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.

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Honour before All!

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

- - BY - -

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Apply to R. Cherry.

BOB CHERRY, of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, knitted his brows and looked worried. Bob Cherry did not often look worried. As a rule, he took things as they came, very cheerfully. But now, as he stood with his hands in his pockets, leaning against one of the old elms in the Close, there was a decided wrinkle in his boyish brow.

"Now, what the dickens am I going to do about it?" said Bob Cherry, aloud.

It was the sixth or seventh time he had asked himself the question. And he had not been able to find an answer to it yet.

"Bob!"

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull, his chums in the Remove, were coming back from the cricket ground, after practice. They looked very fit and cheerful in their white flannels, Wharton with a bat under his arm. As they came under the elms they caught sight of Bob, and halted in a row before him with inquiring looks.

"Oh, here you are!" said Nugent.

Bob Cherry grunted.

"Yes, here I am."

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing."

"Then what are you scowling about?"

"I'm not scowling, ass; I'm thinking," said Bob Cherry indignantly. "Look here——" He paused. "I suppose I had better tell you chaps."

"Of course you had better," said Nugent. "Confide in your uncle. What is it? Has Quelchy ladled out a thousand lines?"

"No, ass!"

"Loder or Valence fagged you?"

"No, fathead!"

"Got a little pain in your little inside?"

"No, you chump!"

"Then I give it up," said Nugent. "What's the trouble?"

"Shut up, Franky!" said Harry Wharton, seeing that

Bob was really worried. "What is it, Bob? Out with it, old man!"

"I've found something," said Bob Cherry slowly.

"Well, if it's a banknote, or one of Billy Bunter's postal-orders, come along to the tuckshop, and let's rejoice," said Nugent.

"Oh, don't be a giddy goat!" said Bob Cherry crossly. "It's a letter."

The juniors stared at him.

"Blessed if I can see anything to bother about in that," said Johnny Bull. "If you've found a letter, give it to the chap it belongs to, and come in to tea."

"But there's no name on the letter, and I don't know whom it belongs to," said Bob Cherry.

"Then stick it on the letter-rack for the owner to find," said Harry Wharton. "I don't see why you should trouble your head about it. You could pin it on the notice-board if you liked, with a large-size notice, 'Letter Found in Close by Silly Ass,' or something of that sort."

"It's his!"

But Bob Cherry did not laugh.

"I can't stick it on the letter-rack, or pin it on the notice-board," he said. "It's enough to get the owner expelled from Greyfriars if any of the masters or prefects saw it. Now do you understand?"

The juniors became grave at once.

"My hat," said Harry Wharton, "that alters the case! You could drop the letter where you found it, and have nothing to do with the matter."

"I've thought of that; but suppose Wingate or Courtney should pick it up, or one of the masters? There would be an inquiry about it. Of course, the chap it's meant for must be several sorts of a rotter, and a duffer, too, to drop his rotten letter in the Close, but—but I don't want to help to get a chap into bad trouble."

"Something in that," agreed Wharton. "Suppose you show us the thing, and we'll advise you like good uncles."

"Well, here you are!"

Bob Cherry extracted his hands from his pockets, and held up a fragment of coarse paper, which was roughly scribbled upon in pencil. There was no name upon the letter to begin with, but there was one at the end, which made the juniors stare, for the letter ran:

"In the Manor spinney at eleven.—Yores truly, J. Griggs."

"Phew!" said Johnny Bull.

"Griggs!" said Harry Wharton, with a deep breath. "Jeff Griggs, of course—the poacher of Friardale."

"That's it," said Bob Cherry. "The paper was lying here under the elms, and I picked it up, thinking some chap had dropped a letter, and I'd give it back to him. I looked at it to see what name was on it, and there's no name except that giddy poacher's name. And if the Head knew that a Greyfriars chap had made an appointment with the worst character in the district to break bounds and go to the spinney in the middle of the night, there would be a row!"

"My word, I should say there would!" said Nugent. "The Head wouldn't rest till he had sorted the rotter out, and sacked him from the school."

"It would be a jolly serious binsey for him, anyway," said Wharton, wrinkling his brows in thought. "You can't let that letter be seen. It's no business of ours to get a chap into trouble, whether he's a rotter or not."

"That's what I thought," said Bob Cherry ruefully. "If I leave the letter about, the chances are against the owner finding it before it's found by someone else, and if a prefect got hold of it, there would be trouble. At the same time I can't return it to the owner, as I don't know who he is. And I can't keep the letter!"

"Looks rather a puzzle," said Johnny Bull.

"Yes. The chap this letter belongs to must be a pretty rascal, breaking bounds to go out poaching," said Bob. "The ass might get into prison, as well as getting the sack from the school, if he were found out!"

"I think I know what you'd better do," said Harry Wharton slowly. "You can stick a notice on the board to the effect that you've found a letter, and that anybody who's lost one can have it by applying at Study No. 13 in the Remove. The chap who has lost this will be looking for it, I suppose, and he'll soon know where to come."

Bob Cherry brightened up.

"Good egg!" he exclaimed. "I'll do it. Let's get in. Marjory will have tea ready by this time."

And Harry Wharton & Co. walked into the School House. They were all looking very serious now. It was a serious matter, and they sincerely hoped that it was no one belonging to the Remove who had lost that dangerous letter in the Close. There were fellows in the Remove who might be the owner—Bolsover, the bully of the Form, or Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars—or perhaps Snoop, or even Hazeldene. But it was more likely to be a senior. Loder and Carne and Walker of the Sixth were black sheep, as the juniors knew well enough, though the Head did not. And there was Valence, too. Some of the juniors knew that Valence of the Sixth had been mixed up in a poaching affair once. It was quite probably Valence, but it would hardly have done to ask him if that were so, for if the letter was not his, the mere question would have been an insult.

Harry Wharton's suggestion was evidently the best thing to be done under the circumstances. Bob Cherry stopped at the notice-board in the hall, and tore the fly-leaf out of a book he had in his pocket, and wrote upon it in pencil, and stuck the leaf on the board with a pin.

Several juniors came round to see what it was about.

"NOTICE.

"Anyone who has lost a letter in the Close to-day can have the same by applying to R. Cherry, Study No. 13, Remove Passage," read out Bolsover major. "Why don't you stick up the giddy letter itself, Cherry?"

"Because I don't," said Bob Cherry.

"Some giddy secret about it?" asked Bolsover. "Look here, let's see the letter."

"Can't be did!"

Bolsover frowned. If it had been somebody else, the Remove bully would have taken the letter by force; but he could not do that with Bob Cherry. The chums of the Remove went slowly upstairs to Bob Cherry's study, and a crowd of fellows gathered round the notice-board in the hall to read Bob's paper.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
Not on View.

STUDY No. 13, in the Remove passage, was wearing a somewhat festive aspect. The table was spread for tea, and Mark Linley was industriously slicing a large loaf. Little Wun Lung, the Chinese boy, was at the fire making toast, and his face was warmed to the hue of the ripe apple. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur, was boiling jam out of a jar into a soup-dish ready for use.

The dusky junior grinned cheerfully at Harry Wharton & Co. as they came in.

"My esteemed chums are late for the excellent tea," he remarked.

"Better late than never," said Bob Cherry. "And I'm as hungry as a hunter. Those eggs look prime."

And the chums of the Remove sat down to tea. Bob Cherry's face had regained its customary sunny expression. He had done all that could be done in the matter of the letter, and he threw the affair off his mind. But the tea had fairly begun when there was a knock at the door, and Billy Bunter's face looked in. Bob Cherry made a threatening movement, and Bunter held the door ready to dodge.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Amazing thing how that fat bounder smells out a feed, like a giddy war-horse snuffling the battle from afar," said Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent!" Bunter blinked indignantly at Nugent through his big spectacles. "I haven't come for your rotten tea—though I wouldn't mind staying if you like—"

"We don't like!" said Bob Cherry promptly.

"I've come for my letter," said Bunter, glaring. "I'll trouble you to hand it over."

Bob Cherry paused, with his fork half-way to his mouth.

"Your letter!" he repeated.

"Yes. I've seen the notice on the board, and I want my letter," said Billy Bunter loftily. "Please hand it over—and mind you don't forget the postal-order."

"The what?" gasped Bob Cherry.

"The postal-order that's inside. You see," explained Bunter. "I've been expecting a postal-order for some time now—quite a long time—"

"Years, isn't it?" said Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent! As I've been expecting a postal-order some time; and I suppose the postman lost the letter, instead of delivering it. That would account for the delay. I'll trouble you for that postal-order."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Remove burst into a roar.

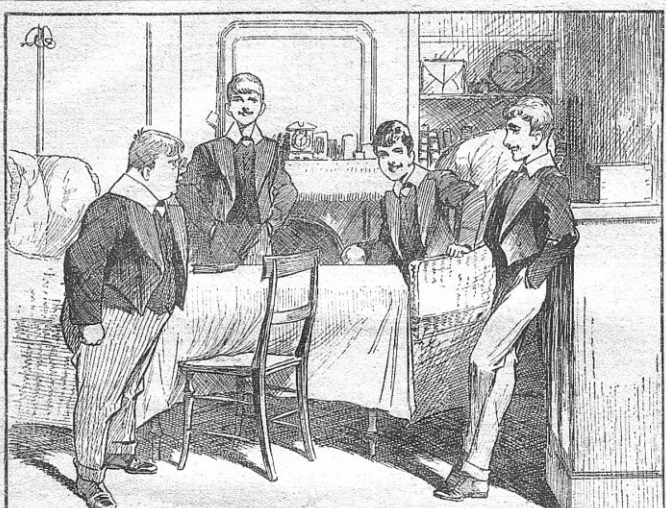
"I say, you fellows, I'm blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. If you don't jolly well hand over my letter I'll complain to Mr. Quelch."

"You ass!" roared Bob Cherry. "There wasn't any postal-order. There wasn't any envelope. It's just a pencil note."

"Oh!" said Bunter, his fat face falling. "Never mind, I expect it belongs to me. Hand it over, all the same."

"Rats! Buzz off!"

"Look here, Bob Cherry, I want my letter—"



"Let's see if Bunter's description fits the letter," suggested Nugent. "Did your letter have a crest in the corner, Billy?" "Yes," said Bunter eagerly. "Well, this one hasn't. Good-bye!" "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors as the fat Removite blinked at them wrathfully. *(See Chapter 2.)*

"Look here, you ass," said Harry Wharton, "the letter isn't yours, and we know it! It's not a valuable letter, you fathead!"

"Let's see if Bunter's description fits the letter," suggested Nugent. "Did your letter have a crest in the corner, Bunter?"

"Yes!" said Bunter promptly.

"Well, this one hasn't! Good-bye!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors, as Billy Bunter blinked at them in wrath.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Oh, get out!" said Bob Cherry. "You've proved that the letter isn't yours. The letter you want is from one of your titled friends, with a crest in the corner. This isn't one of that sort. Buzz off! I give you two seconds!"

Bob Cherry picked up a jug; and the two seconds were enough for Bunter. He slammed the study door and rolled discontentedly down the passage.

The chums of the Remove, grinning, went on with their tea. They wondered who would be the next applicant for the lost letter.

Their tea was interrupted several times. Fellows looked in, not to claim the letter, but to ask to see it, kindly offering to identify the owner from the look of the writing or the smell of the paper, on the Sherlock Holmes principle. But their curiosity remained unsatisfied. The letter remained in Bob Cherry's pocket. He had shown it to the Removites in the study at tea, because they were, as he put it, all in the firm, and could be depended upon to keep it quiet. But he did not intend to allow the strange letter to become the gossip of the Form. If the matter became public it meant serious trouble for somebody, and, naturally, Bob Cherry did not want to have a hand in bringing that about for anybody at Greyfriars, whether friend or foe.

The final visitor was Coker of the Fifth. Coker came in with something of a swagger, as if it were very condescending of him to visit a junior study—or, indeed, to admit the existence of such a place at all. He nodded loftily to the chums of the Remove as they stared inquiringly at him.

"Come to tea?" asked Bob Cherry affably. "You're too late for the toast, but there's some crusts left. I always leave my crusts when there's enough toast to go round."

Coker frowned.

"I do not generally have tea with juniors," he said loftily.

"Still, you'd like to have tea with a decent set once in a while," urged Bob. "It would be a change after the Fifth."

Coker allowed the subject to drop; he was not an adept in the war of words. He passed on to the matter that had brought him to the study.

"What about that letter?" he asked frowning.

"Lining," said Bob Cherry politely.

Coker stared.

"Lining! What do you mean by lining?"

"Oh, just lining," said Bob. "The lining of my pocket, you know. That's the only thing that's about it now, as there's no envelope to it."

"Look here," said Coker, "don't be funny. I'm rather curious about that letter, and I'm going to take charge of it. I don't believe in kids being mysterious about things like this. Your notice on the board reads as if you've been soaking yourself in newspaper reports, and they've got into your head. Better hand over that letter, and I'll look for the owner."

"Nice afternoon, ain't it?" said Bob Cherry.

"Eh?"

"Quite sunny, for so early in the season."

"What?"

"But I think we shall have rain before the end of the week."

"Look here——"

"If we don't, we shall have dry weather," said Bob Cherry gravely. "It's most likely to be one or the other, you know."

"You young ass!"

"Still, if it's dry, there won't be any rain; while, on the other hand, if it rains, it won't be dry, so——"

"Look here," roared Coker, "are you going to give me that letter?"

"Is that a conundrum?"

"Will you hand over that letter?"

"Fancy old Coker coming here to ask us riddles!" said Bob Cherry blandly. "I don't know any of the answers, but I like him to go on. Go on, Coker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker looked as if he were going into a fit.

"Are you going to hand me that letter, or are you not?" he asked furiously.

"Because one rode a horse and the other rhododendron," said Bob Cherry, persisting in his assumption that Coker was asking him conundrums.

Coker spluttered.

"You—you young cheeky bounder——" Words failed him, and he made a wild rush at Bob Cherry. A leg came from somewhere into his way, and he stumbled and fell, and in a moment more half a dozen pairs of hands fastened upon the great Coker, and he was lifted out into the passage, and set down there with a considerable bump.

Then the study door was locked, and all further inquiries after the mysterious letter were shut out for a time.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Valence Thinks of a Way.

WINGATE, the captain of Greyfriars, came in with Courtney, of the Sixth, and stopped to look at the notice-board, where a good many fellows were gathered. Bob Cherry's notice on the board seemed to be attracting general attention. Wingate read it and smiled.

"More simple to stick the letter up here for the owner to take, I should think," he remarked. "Have you lost any letter, Courtney?"

"No," said Courtney, laughing. "Have you, Valence?"

He addressed Valence, of the Sixth, who had just come in from the Close, with a moody frown on his brow. Valence started and looked at him.

"What—what did you say?" he asked.

"Have you lost a letter?"

"What on earth are you asking me that for?" asked Valence, turning crimson, much to Arthur Courtney's astonishment. "Have you found one?"

"No. Cherry, of the Remove, has found one. Look here!"

Valence looked at the notice on the board, and drew a deep breath. The colour deepened in his cheeks as he felt Wingate's and Courtney's eyes on his face.

"It's yours?" asked Wingate.

Valence hesitated.

"I—I don't know," he said. "As a matter of fact, I've mislaid a letter from—from my father. That might be it."

"Well, you can have it the same by applying to R. Cherry, Study No. 13," said Wingate, with a smile.

Valence nodded absently, and walked on. But he did not go to the Remove passage. He went into his own study, and closed the door.

When he was alone there, the shadow deepened upon his handsome face. His eyes had almost a haggard look.

"It must be the letter," he muttered. "What rotten luck that I should have dropped it! Now that young cad has got hold of it. Lucky for me it wasn't Wingate that picked it up, or Courtney—they would have guessed—or the Head, by Jove!" He shivered at the thought of the letter falling into the hands of Dr. Locke, the Head of Greyfriars. "But—but how am I to get it without letting the kid know that it's mine? If I give myself away to him by claiming the letter, he will have a hold over me. I should be done for here if the fags knew I had dealings with Jeff Griggs. Some of them had a suspicion of it before—the last time, hang them! What the dickens can I do?"

It was not an easy question for Valence to find an answer to. Unless he claimed the letter, he could not remove it from the dangerous hands it was in now; it would remain, and might rise up against him in evidence at any time. But he could not claim it without letting Bob Cherry know that it was he to whom the notorious poacher of Friardale had written making an appointment at nearly midnight in Sir Hilton Popper's woods. And what use might not the juniors make of their knowledge. It would not be a pleasant position to be under the thumb of a set of fags.

Valence strode to and fro in his study, his brows contracted, his eyes gleaming with anger and anxiety.

Suddenly a thought appeared to strike him. He opened his study door, and looked out into the passage and called:

"Fag!"

Bolsover, of the Remove, and Tom Brown, were visible at the end of the passage; but they did not even look round. It had been established at Greyfriars that the Remove did not fag for the seniors; that duty being left to the Third and Second Forms. Loder and Carne and Valence and some other Sixth Formers sometimes tried to fag them, all the same, but there was generally trouble. Valence frowned darkly as he saw the juniors at the end of the passage.

"Bolsover!" he called out.

Bolsover looked round insolently.

"Hallo!" he said.

"Tell your minor I want him."

"Don't know where he is," said Bolsover.

"Find him, then."

"Sorry, I've no time to fag for you, Valence. You know the rules."

Valence turned crimson with anger. At any other time he would probably have taken up a cricket-stump and gone out to explain things to Bolsover; but just then he was too anxious about the matter that was upon his mind.

"Very well, Bolsover, Brown, will you let Bolsover minor know that I want him, as a favour?" said Valence.

"Right you are," said Tom Brown cheerfully.

Valence returned into his study. He mentally promised Bolsover major a sound licking at some future date. Meanwhile, he paced the study uneasily, waiting for the arrival of Bolsover minor.

It was five minutes or so before the Third Form fag arrived. Then there was a gentle tap at the door, and a ruddy round face looked in.

"I 'ope I haven't kept you waiting, Valence," said Bolsover minor. "I was in the fives court with Paget and Tubby, and——"

"It's all right," said Valence. "Come in and shut the door."

"Orright."

Bolsover minor obeyed. Valence stood leaning against the mantelpiece, regarding the fag thoughtfully. His silence surprised the junior.

"Wot is it?" he asked. "You want me to get tea?"

"No!"

"Fetch something?"

"No!"

Bolsover minor was silent again. Valence's look puzzled him very much, and he decided to wait for the Sixth Former to speak. It was some minutes before Valence broke the silence, and all the time his eyes were scanning the fag's surprised face.

"You're a queer little beggar," said Valence at last. "I think you'll be useful. Let me see. The kids call you Billy, don't they?"

"Yes, sir," said Bolsover minor.

"I've heard about you," said Valence. "You were lost when you were a kid, and brought up in the slums, and only lately found and sent here."

"Yes," said Billy.

"Good! Now, I want you to do something for me, kid. You'd have more sense than the other fags, and you'll understand better."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Billy.

"I'm going to confide in you," said Valence. "If you

give me away, I shall deny having said anything of what I'm going to say, and shall give you the biggest larruping of your life with a cricket-stump. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Billy in wonder.

"Have you seen the notice on the board that Cherry, of the Remove, put up there?"

Billy grinned.

"Yes, we've all seen it."

"Well, that letter's mine."

"Yes," said Billy, wondering what it had to do with him.

"I want it, you see. It's rather an important letter."

"Master Bob would give it to you if you asked 'im," said Billy. "That's wot he's put the notice on the board for."

"It is a—a compromising sort of letter," said Valence slowly.

"A which?" asked Billy.

"It's a kind of letter that might get a chap into trouble," said Valence. "I don't want the Remove fellows to know that it's mine."

"Ho!" said Billy.

"So I want you to claim it for me."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. I'll give you half-a-crown when you bring the letter here," said Valence.

"I'm on!" said Bolsover minor promptly; and he turned to the door.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Valence. "You understand? You are to say that the letter is yours; and I'll give you a description of it, so that you can explain exactly what is in it, and prove your claim. You will let the Remove fellows think it is your letter. Then you will bring it here to me. Is that quite clear?"

Billy turned back from the door, his good-natured little face growing more serious. He began to understand now, and he was silent, his lip quivering a little.

"Is it clear?" asked Valence impatiently.

Billy looked at him steadily.

"No," he said, "it ain't!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Honour Before All

VALENCE made an angry, impatient gesture.

"What do you mean, you young cad!" he exclaimed. "Don't you understand? I want you to get my letter for me."

"You want me to go an' tell lies to Master Bob and Master 'Arry and the rest," said Billy. "You think I sha'n't mind tellin 'lies 'cause I was brought up poor and sold papers for a living in the streets up to a few weeks ago. Well, it ain't like that. Wharton and Bob Cherry 'ave been jolly good to me ever since I come 'ere—better'n some who 'ad more call to be careful of me, too." He was thinking of his elder brother, though he did not mention him. "I wouldn't think of telling lies to them. I can't do it."

Valence stared at him in astonishment.

"You young ass!" he exclaimed. "Tubb or Jones III. would go at once and do as I tell them. Don't be a fool!"

"You'd better send 'em, then."

"They wouldn't do. You see, I've got to make Cherry believe that the letter really belongs to the fag who claims it," said Valence. "He'd believe it of you, because you were brought up in the slums, and might be supposed to go in for this sort of thing naturally; but if any other fag went Cherry would guess he was simply sent by a senior for the letter, and might refuse to give it up."

Billy smiled bitterly.

"So I'm to go, because Bob Cherry would be ready to believe me a blackguard?"

"Well, yes, something like that."

"But I don't want 'im to think badly of me."

"Oh, don't talk that rot to me!" said Valence angrily. "What does it matter to you what a clumsy lout in the Remove thinks of you? If you want a friend, a Sixth-Former is more use to you than a Remove kid."

"I ain't thinking of the use."

"What are you thinking of, then? You want five shillings, instead of half-a-crown, I suppose?" said Valence savagely.

Billy flushed red.

"I don't want your money," he said. "And I wouldn't touch it, anyway. It ain't that. You oughter understand what it is. Them fellers in the Remove 'ave been decent to me. I can't go telling 'em lies."

"You have simply to say that the letter is yours."

"Well, it ain't mine!"

Valence's hand dropped on a cricket-stump that lay on the table. Bolsover minor saw the action, but he did not shrink. His blue eyes met the angry glance of the Sixth-Former fearlessly.

"Do you want the licking of your life, kid?" asked the senior menacingly.

"No, I don't."

"Then you'll go and get that letter for me."

"I'll get the letter, sir; but I won't say it's mine. I can't.

And I won't 'ave Master Bob made to think badly of me neither."

Valence gritted his teeth.

"I'll go and say I've been sent to fetch the letter," said Billy, after a pause. "And I won't mention who sent me."

"I want him to think that the letter is yours, to save any further inquiry or curiosity about the matter!" snarled Valence.

"Well, I ain't 'aving it!"

"You young hound! I'll teach you to check me!" shouted Valence, losing his temper completely, and he grasped the stump and made a spring towards the fag.

But Billy was just as quick. He whipped the door open and dashed out into the passage in the twinkling of an eye; and Valence paused in the passage as Billy went speeding along with the fleetness of a deer.

It was rather too undignified for a Sixth-Former to chase a diminutive fag along the passages; and besides, Valence did not want to draw too much attention to the matter. Courtney looked out of his study, and just caught a glimpse of Billy turning the corner, and glanced at the enraged Sixth-Former in surprise.

"Hallo! Trouble in the family?" he asked.

"I'll skin the cheeky young scoundrel!" said Valence, between his teeth.

"Why, what has he been doing?" asked the prefect.

"Cheeking me."

And Valence went back into his study without offering any further explanation. Courtney was the last fellow he would have wished to know anything about it. Billy, not knowing whether Valence was on his track or not, was dashing along the passages like a hunted deer, when he was suddenly brought up by a grasp on his collar, which swung him almost completely round before it stopped him.

"Ow!" gasped Billy. "Leggo! Oh!"

"Where are you running to, you young idiot?" It was his brother's voice.

Billy gasped for breath, and cast a nervous glance backward. But there was no sign of a pursuing senior with a cricket-stump. Bolsover major, the bully of the Remove, looked frowningly at the fag.

"What's the trouble?" he demanded.

"It's—it's Valence!" panted Billy. "He—he's an awful rotter! He—he's a cad! I think he's arter me! Lemme go!"

"Stay where you are! He's not arter you, as you express it in your lovely English," said Bolsover major coolly. "Stay there!"

Billy stood where he was, putting his collar straight, after his brother's rough grasp upon it. He winced. A sneer from his major cut him more deeply than from anyone else.

Tubb and Paget, his chums in the Third Form at Greyfriars, made very merry over his peculiar cockney dialect, and Billy took it quite cheerfully. But the fact that his elder brother was ashamed of him cut the little fellow to the very heart. There was a suspicious glistening upon his eyelashes as he stood there, silent.

Bolsover major looked at him keenly. He could see that something very unusual had happened to make the hero of Angel Alley, a mere fag in the Third, speak as he had spoken of one of the awe-inspiring Sixth Form.

"What has Valence done?" he asked.

"I—I dunno that I oughter tell, Percy," said Billy hesitatingly.

"Don't be a young fool!" said Bolsover harshly. "Tell me all about it, or I'll wring your neck, you slum bounder."

"He wanted me to tell lies for 'im," said Billy sulkily.

Bolsover laughed.

"And you wouldn't?"

"No; I wouldn't."

"You learned better in the slums, I suppose?" said Bolsover sarcastically. "Nobody ever tells a naughty story in Angel Alley, I suppose? The Moocher and Tadger and the rest are a giddy set of Georgie Washingtons, I suppose?"

Billy flushed.

"I dessay they does, and 'eaps of 'em," he said. "I never took to it, and I promised Master 'Arry I wouldn't neither."

"Don't call Wharton Master Harry, you cub," said the Remove bully. "Will you never learn that fellows here are all equal, and don't call one another Master this and that?"

"Orlright, Percy, but——"

"Tell me what Valence wanted you to do. You've no right to keep secrets from me; the pater told you that."

"Orlright, Percy. He's lost a letter."

Bolsover major started.

"The letter Bob Cherry found?" he asked quickly.

"Yes, Percy." Billy hesitated. "He wanted me to go to Bob Cherry and say the letter was my 'un, and claim it,

and let Master Bob—I—I mean Bob Cherry, think I was the chap it belonged to."

"What on earth for?" said Bolsover, puzzled. "Why can't he ask for it himself? Bob Cherry wouldn't think of keeping it back if he knew the owner."

"He says there's something fishy in it, and he doesn't want the Remove fellers to know he's the owner of it. He thought it wouldn't matter about me, 'cause I was brought up in the slums, and—and Master Bob wouldn't expect nothing better of me."

"Something fishy in it," said Bolsover major thoughtfully. "That's very queer. And you wouldn't do it?"

"No, I wouldn't."

"Why not?"

"I'm not goin' to tell Master Bob lies, and I ain't going to 'ave them fellers thinkin' me a rotter, neither," said Billy sturdily.

Bolsover laughed.

"Good!" he said. "Quite right! Your old slum friends would be proud of you, if they knew, I'm sure."

"You might let that drop, Percy. You know it ain't my fault I was brought up in Angel Alley," said Billy miserably. "I couldn't 'elp being stole when I was a kid, could I?"

"Oh, don't turn the waterworks on, for goodness' sake!" exclaimed Bolsover. "Look here, you can clear off, and I'll see about this."

He swung away towards the Sixth Form passage. Billy ran after him.

"Percy, where are you going?"

"I'm going to see Valence."

"But—but what for?" exclaimed Billy, in alarm. "You—you ain't going to tell them lies for 'im, are you, Percy? You ain't 'ave to call to, and——"

"Mind your own business, you cheeky guttersnipe," said Bolsover, flushing with anger. "I haven't had the great advantage of being brought up in Angel Alley or Murderers' Row, and it doesn't matter so much about me. Cut off!"

"But—but I say, Percy——"

The Remove bully clenched his hand, and Billy started back. He stood in the passage with a troubled brow, while his brother walked away towards Valence's study.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Bolsover's Bargain.

"WELL, bit! Bravo!"

The evenings were growing lighter, and there was daylight for cricket practice after tea, now.

Most of the Remove were on the cricket-ground, and Bob Cherry and Harry Wharton were batting, taking the bowling from Penfold and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. Bob Cherry was in great form, and he was slogging the leather all over the field.

"Go it, Inky!" called out Johnny Bull encouragingly, as the Nabob of Bhanipur gathered up the ball again.

The gofulness is terrific, my worthy chum!"

And the dusky junior sent down the ball again, and this time with more success. Bob Cherry saw his middle stump whipped out of the ground.

"How's that?" purred Hurree Singh.

"Out!" grinned Bob Cherry, and he handed the bat to Tom Brown, and walked off the pitch. Bolsover major was standing with a crowd of loungers by the ropes, and he moved to intercept Bob Cherry.

"Cherry, old man——" he began.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, in his powerful voice. "How long have I been Cherry, old man? Do you want to borrow twopence?"

Bolsover scowled.

"I want my letter," he said.

"Your letter! What letter?"

"The one you found in the Close."

Bob Cherry laughed.

"Same old game!" he said. "You're all mighty curious about that letter. Billy Bunter told me it was his, and a dozen chaps have asked to see it. My dear kid, I don't encourage inquisitiveness. That letter's waiting for the owner."

"I'm the owner."

"Rats!"

"Look here, Bob Cherry——"

"Oh, don't play the giddy goat!" said Bob Cherry impatiently. "It's too thin, I tell you. You saw me putting the notice up on the board, and you never said anything about it's being your letter then."

"I didn't know then that I had dropped it," Bolsover explained.

"Well, if it's your letter, you can tell me what's in it," said Bob Cherry, with a grin. "I don't hand this letter over to anybody who can't tell me word for word what's in it."

"I can do that."

"Eh! Go ahead, then!"

"Come this way, then. I don't want all the fellows to hear," said Bolsover, sinking his voice a little.

Bob Cherry stared at him, but he nodded, and followed the bully of the Remove round the cricket pavilion.

"If the letter's yours, I can understand that you don't want the fellows to know what's in it," he said, with a curl of the lip. "But you'll have to prove it. Tell me what's in the letter, word for word."

"The Manor spinney at half-past eleven.—Yours truly, J. Griggs," said Bolsover, as if repeating a lesson learned by rote.

Bob Cherry started. Bolsover had repeated every word that was in the letter, and he certainly could not have seen it since Bob Cherry found it, as it had been reposing safely inside Bob's pocket all the time. Bolsover had proved his claim—to Bob Cherry's satisfaction, at least. The hand of the junior groped in his pocket for the letter.

"You're satisfied?" asked Bolsover, with a sneer.

"Yes," said Bob quietly. "I'm satisfied. There's your letter. It's a letter from that drunken, poaching scoundrel, Jeff Griggs, and if the Head saw it it would be enough to get you flogged, if not sacked. I'd advise you to burn it, and not to keep that appointment, Bolsover."

"I'll ask you for advice when I want it," said Bolsover, putting the letter into his pocket. "Thanks! You can keep mum about this."

"Half a dozen of the chaps know," said Bob Cherry. "I've not said I'd keep it dark, and you've no right to ask anything of the sort."

"I mean, keep it dark about my claiming the letter," said Bolsover.

"You fellows will ask me if it's been claimed, and I shall certainly tell them the truth," said Bob coldly. "I don't know that it will go any further, but it's your own look-out if it does. But I'll tell you what I'll do. If you'll burn that letter, and promise me honour bright never to see Jeff Griggs, I'll make the chaps promise to keep the whole thing a secret."

"Starting in business as father-confessor?" asked Bolsover sneeringly. "I'm certainly not going to promise you anything of the sort."

"Look here, Bolsover," said Bob Cherry abruptly, "I'm not given to preaching to anybody; but this is too thick. Poaching is only one degree better than stealing; and you haven't got the excuse the Friardale poachers have—you're not in need. It's a dirty, blackguardly thing of you."

"Thanks!"

"Look here——"

"Oh, enough's as good as a feast!" said Bolsover. "Ring off, for goodness' sake! You'll make me feel as if I were in church soon!"

Bob Cherry bit his lip with anger, and was greatly inclined to hit out straight from the shoulder there and then. But he restrained himself, and walked back to the cricket-ground, with a moody wrinkle in his boyish brow. It was a shock to him to discover that Jeff Griggs' correspondent was, after all, a fellow in his own Form.

Bolsover sauntered away to the School House with the letter in his pocket. Most of the juniors were out of doors, and there was no one to observe Bolsover as he slipped into Valence's study. The Sixth-Former was there, pacing up and down, with a troubled brow, and he stood and stared an angry look upon the Removite as he entered.

"Have you got it?" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Yes," said Bolsover, with a nod.

Valence drew a deep, deep breath.

"Thank goodness!" he exclaimed. "And you got it without mentioning my name?"

"Yes, rather! Bob Cherry handed it over at once when I told him what was in it. He knew it was mine, then, you see!" Bolsover chuckled.

Valence laughed.

"Well, hand it over," he said.

Bolsover made no motion to obey. He stood with his hands in his pockets, regarding the Sixth-Former with a cool and familiar grin.

"There's no hurry," he remarked. "I've got the letter, and it's mine, so far."

Valence stared at him in angry surprise.

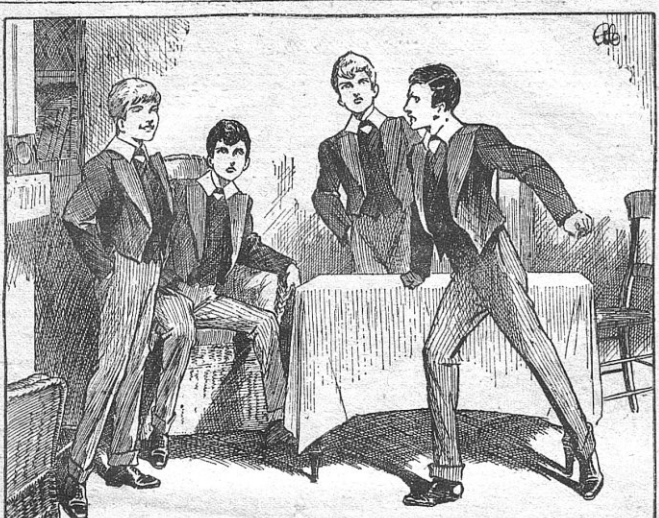
"What do you mean? The letter's mine!" he exclaimed. "Give it to me at once! I want to burn it—I ought to have done that before!"

"Yes, you ought!" grinned Bolsover. "Look here, you've had to confide in me to work this little game. You have been poaching with Jeff Griggs."

"That's no business of yours, you young cub!"

"What do you do with the stuff?" asked Bolsover. "You don't bring pheasants and rabbits back to the school."

"Never mind what I do! Hand me the letter!"



"Are you going to hand me that letter, or are you not?" asked Coker furiously. "Because one rode a horse and the other rhododendron," said Bob Cherry, still persisting in his assumption that Coker was asking him conundrums. *(See Chapter 2.)*

"I suppose you sell 'em," said Bolsover slowly. "I know there are men from the Wayland Market who hang round the pubs in Friardale and buy stuff on the Q.T. from the Friardale poachers. You turn an honest penny with old Hilton Popper's birds."

"Mind your own business, I tell you!" said Valence fiercely. "Now, hand me the letter, Bolsover, there's a good chap," he went on, softening his voice. "I'll give you half-a-crown for getting it for me."

"Rats!" said Bolsover cheerfully. "I've got as many half-crowns as you have, I dare say. Look here, I'm on in this thing!"

"What do you mean?" asked Valence uneasily.

"I've done some poaching myself, in a small way—knocking rabbits over with an airgun, and that sort of thing," said Bolsover, with a grin. "But this is ripping! I should like it immensely. Getting out of the school after lights-out and poaching on old Popper's estate. My hat! It's gorgeous!"

Valence was silent and unquiet.

"Make it a bargain," said Bolsover coolly. "I've got the letter for you, and I know the secret. Take me into the game, and I'm on. What do you say?"

Valence, like most weak and irresolute natures, had a vein of savage passionateness in him. His face went red with rage, and he sprang upon the Removite and grasped him by the collar with his left hand, and raised a cricket-stump in his right.

"Give me the letter, you cheeky cub, or I'll half kill you!" he ground out between his teeth.

Bolsover did not shrink. He made no movement to defend himself or to escape from the senior's grip. His eyes met Valence's with perfect coolness.

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"If you touch me once with that stump I'll go straight to the Head and tell him the whole story, Valence," he said quietly.

Valence's arm dropped to his side. Slowly his grip upon the Removite's collar relaxed.

Bolsover stepped back, and put his tie straight.

"Put that stump down, and be a sensible chap," he said calmly. "I tell you I want to come into this game. I like the fun and the excitement, and if there's money to be made, I don't see why I shouldn't make it as well as you. I'm coming with you to-night. Is it a go?"

Valence burst into a sharp, uneasy laugh.

"I—I suppose I've no great objection to taking you along," he said. "But—but if you'll take my advice, you'll keep clear of it. It's a risky game."

"No more risky for me than for you, I suppose," said Bolsover. "Less risky, I should think. The Head would flog a junior, but he would sack a Sixth-Former, as sure as a gun, if he were found out poaching at night!"

Valence winced.

"There—there's really not much risk," he said. "I shall warn Griggs not to write to me again at the school. That's risky. Look here, if you're bent on this——"

"I am," said Bolsover coolly.

"Then it's a go. I dare say you will be useful, too," said Valence thoughtfully. "I tell you it's a go! Now, give me the letter."

Bolsover drew the letter from his pocket, and handed it to the senior. Valence tossed it into the fire that was burning in the grate, and the two of them stood in silence and watched it consumed to ashes.

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THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
A Row in the Third.

TUBB, of the Third, snorted.

A mere sniff would not have expressed his feelings. He snorted.

Paget looked cross, too. Paget, with his well-cut, aristocratic features, and his slim, elegant figure, which showed up to great advantage among the other fags in the Third Form, usually assumed a repose of manner which is supposed to stamp the cast of Vere de Vere. Even when fagging with inky fingers in the senior studies, or cooking herrings impaled upon pen-nibs over the Form-room fire, Paget never forgot that he had earls and marquises among his relations, and he lived up to the knowledge. But just now Paget looked as cross as if he were descended from Adam and Eve, like everybody else.

"I'm fed up with it!" growled Tubb.

"Oh, quite!" said Paget.

"Look at him," said Tubb, raising a fat forefinger and pointing at the object of his wrath. "Only look!"

Paget looked.

Bolsover minor was seated at a desk in the Third Form-room. Lessons had long been over, and it was not yet time for Mr. Twigg, the master of the Third, to come in to take the Third Form in evening preparation. The fags had the Form-room to themselves, and there was the usual noise and buzzing of voices, and the usual smell of amateur cooking round the fire.

But Bolsover minor was not taking any part in the noise, or the cooking, or the life of the Form generally.

He was sitting at his desk, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his boyish brow wrinkled, and his eyes fixed upon vacancy. He was thinking hard, and quite unconscious of the eyes of his chums bent upon him.

"The young ass!" said Paget. Paget was quite a year younger than Billy, but that did not make any difference. "The young ass! What's the trouble with him now? Has he had any more letters from his old chums in the slums?"

"Blessed if I know," said Tubb.

"Is it his giddy major again?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Well, I'm fed up, same as you are," said Paget. "He's a good little chap, and I'm not going to have him down in the mouth like this."

"I've offered him some of the bloater-paste," said Tubb, with a sombre look, "and he just shook his head."

"The young ass!"

"Suppose we bump him," said Tubb. "Might knock some of the rot out of him."

"Let's jaw him," said Paget.

The two fags rose and walked over to where Bolsover minor sat. They were very cross with Billy; but, as a matter of fact, it was their friendship for him that was at the bottom of it. For an hour or more Bolsover minor had sat there, gloomy and preoccupied, and they were fed up with it.

A fag in the Third Form had no right to look as if he had all the troubles in the world on his shoulders, especially when there was bloater-paste for tea, and jam. Tubb had provided the bloater-paste, Paget stood the jam. And they were naturally exasperated to find that Bolsover minor could not be stirred to take interest in either.

"Billy, you ass!"

Bolsover minor came out of his reverie with a start, and turned round.

"Hallo!" he said. "Ole Twigg ain't come in. It ain't time for prep. yet."

"It's time for tea," said Paget.

"Oh!" said Bolsover minor, evidently not interested. "Go ahead, then."

"Look here," said Tubb, in a soft, persuasive voice. "There's bloater-paste."

"And jam," said Paget.

"Orlright," said Billy.

"Strawberry jam," said Paget temptingly, not wishing Billy to have any impression that it might be commonplace plum jam. "Real strawberry jam, Billy."

"And rolls!" added Tubb.

"I don't think I'll 'ave any tea, you fellows," said Billy. "Thank you all the same."

"You frightful ass!" said Paget. "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothin'," said Billy.

"Had any more letters from Angel Alley?!

"No."

"Seen the Moocher again?"

"No."

"Then it isn't the distinguished connections of your early youth that's worrying you," said Paget, with heavy sarcasm.

"No, it ain't," said Billy.

"Then it must be your major."

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Billy started, and turned red, and the fags knew that their guess was correct. They frowned darkly at one another.

"Your major," said Paget. "Of course; I knew! Has he been bullying you?"

"No, he ain't," said Bolsover minor.

"Then what are you bothering about him for?"

"I ain't bothering."

"You're looking like a silly boiled owl, anyway," said Tubb indignantly. "We're fed up with it. Anybody would think your major was a giddy angel by the way you worry about him. He's a beast, as a matter of fact."

"Several sorts of a beast," said Paget.

"Look 'ere, you ain't going to say anything agin Percy," said Bolsover minor, with a flash in his eyes. "I won't 'ave it."

"You'll have a beautiful thick ear if you're not jolly careful," said Paget. "Get up, and be cheerful. Come and have tea, and don't be a silly owl."

Billy grinned faintly.

"Oh, orlright!" he said, rising from the form.

"It's sickening!" said Paget. "I'm not going to see you in this state. Look here, Jones III. has been making toast. There's plenty of time to have a jolly brew before old Twigg comes in. Why can't you be cheerful?"

"I'm cheerful enough," said Billy.

"If that's your idea of cheerfulness, you've got it wrong," said Tubb. "And we're not going to have your major bothering you. We'll jolly well rag him into being decent."

"Impossible!" said Paget, with a shake of the head. "It's no good expecting miracles of Bolsover's major."

"Look 'ere, I won't 'ave it," exclaimed Billy angrily. "I tell you I won't 'ear you runnin' Percy down."

"You'll have to!" said Tubb. "I'm fed up with him, and pretty nearly with you, too. What has he been doing?"

"Nothin'."

"What do you think he's going to do, then?"

"Look 'ere—"

"Oh, I see!" said Paget scornfully. "You think he's getting himself into some trouble, as he usually is, and you're trying to think of a way of fishing him out of it. I know you, you young ass!"

Bolsover minor was silent.

"I jolly well wish he was sacked from Greyfriars," said Tubb. "He came jolly near it once, and I'm only sorry he didn't get the boot. Of all the cads—"

"Of all the rotters—" said Paget enthusiastically.

"Of all the bullies—"

"Of all the beasts—"

Biff!

Billy's knuckles rapping on Tubb's nose stopped his flow of eloquence. Tubb staggered back in astonishment.

"Why, I—I—I—"

"Well, you would 'ave it," said Billy resentfully. "Why can't you leave Percy alone?"

"I—I—I'll Percy you!" roared Tubb, in a fury; and he rushed at Bolsover minor, and clasped him round the neck as if he loved him, and hammered him with the other fist as if he did not love him at all.

"Go it, Tubby!" shouted Paget, clapping his hands. "Hurrah! It will wake him up and do him good! Go it!"

The two fags, fighting furiously, rolled over on the floor, and rolled out of the open Form-room doorway into the passage. The fags gathered round in great excitement. There had been trouble between Billy and Tubb when the little waif first came to Greyfriars, but since then they had been firm friends. But friendship in the Third Form-room was an uncertain thing at best.

"Hurrah! Go it!" yelled the fags, as the two combatants rolled on the linoleum in the passage, collecting up great quantities of dust. "Hurrah!"

"Give him beans, Tubby!"

"Go for his boko, Billy!"

"Hurrah!"

A burly form came along the passage from the Remove-room. It was Bolsover major. He paused as he saw his brother rolling over in deadly conflict with Tubb, of the Third.

"Hallo! At it again!" he exclaimed.

Billy wrenched himself away from Tubb, and staggered to his feet. Tubb sat gasping on the floor, with one eye closed. Billy's nose was streaming red, and there was another stream from the corner of his mouth. He looked dusty and dishevelled, and scarcely respectable, and Bolsover major sneered bitterly as he looked him over.

"Good old Slum Alley!" he sneered. "I suppose you'll never get out of it, you young cad! This brings back happy memories of the fighting outside the pub, I suppose."

"He he, he!" cackled the fags.

Billy knuckled his streaming nose, and sniffed. Tubb staggered to his feet. He shook a dusty fist at Bolsover minor.

"I'm done with you!" he yelled. "If you stand up for your rotten major in this Form-room, I'm done with you! Wah!"

And Tubb tramped furiously into the Third Form-room. Bolsover major burst into an unpleasant laugh.

"So you've been standing up for me, have you, Hubert?"

"Yes," muttered his minor, "I have."

"More fool you!"

And Bolsover major passed on, leaving Billy dabbing at his mouth and nose with a fair from clean handkerchief. Paget cast a scornful glance after the bully of the Remove.

"You heard that, Billy?" he said quietly.

Billy nodded, without speaking.

"Then what do you want to keep on with such a rotter for?" demanded Paget warmly. "If I had a major like that I'd boil him in oil, I'd——"

"You shut up 'bout Percy!" growled Bolsover minor.

Paget stared at him.

"You—you unspeakable young ass!" he gasped. "You don't mean that you're standing up for him now?"

"Yes, I do," said Billy sturdily.

Paget snorted.

"Then you're potty!" he retorted, "and I say the same as Tubb. I'm done with you."

"I don't care."

Paget turned back wrathfully into the Form-room. Billy looked after him for a moment, and then turned away. He went slowly up to the Third-Form dormitory to bathe his face, and his heart was heavy. Whatever his major did, it might shake, but could never destroy his loyal affection; but the tears ran down Billy's cheeks along with the soap-suds as he washed his face in the Third-Form dormitory.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
Bolsover Major Defies Harry Wharton.

HARRY WHARTON & Co. looked suspiciously at Bolsover when the Remove went up to the dormitory at bedtime. They were thinking of the letter.

Mr. Cherry had explained to the Co. that the poacher's letter had been claimed, and that Bolsover major was the owner.

It scarcely surprised the chums of the Remove, though it was a shock to them. There had been no date on the letter, and it might, of course, refer to an appointment that had been kept, and was over and done with.

But if the letter had been received that day, and the appointment with the Friardale poacher was for that night in the Manor spinney, it meant that the Remove bully intended to break bounds that very night.

They wondered.

Bolsover's manner was quite careless and ordinary, but if he intended to break bounds at nearly midnight, he would, of course, be careful not to show his intentions to the other fellows.

Wharton was somewhat worried over the matter. As captain of the Remove, it was his duty to interfere with anything of the sort if he knew that it was going on. When Bolsover had been Form-captain, he had interfered once by force to keep Bolsover from breaking bounds, and Harry Wharton & Co. had backed him up.

As the Remove bully sat on his bed, taking his boots off, Harry Wharton came over to him.

Bolsover met him with a sneering smile. He could guess what was coming without much difficulty.

"About that letter," said Wharton abruptly.

Bolsover shrugged his shoulders.

"What about it?"

"Does it mean that you are getting out of the Form to-night?" asked Wharton directly.

Bolsover laughed.

"Does that question mean that you would feel called upon to interfere?" he asked, with a sneer.

"Yes," said Harry Wharton.

The Remove bully laughed again.

"Well, you needn't worry your head about it," he said, in the same sneering tone. "The letter was two days old."

Harry Wharton looked at him steadily for a minute, and then turned away without speaking. Bolsover yawned, and kicked his boots off.

Loder, the prefect, looked in, and put the lights out. The Remove were all in bed, and chatting as usual before going to sleep. Had Bolsover major spoken the truth? Harry Wharton wondered. He did not like to doubt even Bolsover's word; but a fellow who would make midnight assignations with a poacher, would probably not scruple to tell a falsehood about it. But Wharton did not care to remain awake

and watch Bolsover. That was out of the question, and he had to leave the matter where it was. If he awoke, and found the Remove bully going out, he would stop him. But he could not make up his mind to more than that.

And Bolsover, who intended to leave the dormitory when the hour of eleven chimed out from the clock-tower, knew that it was necessary to be very careful.

He lay awake, but presently he began to breathe very heavily, and, indeed, simulated sleep so well that he very nearly dozed off.

He came to himself with a start as half-past ten chimed out.

By that time the whole dormitory had long been asleep, and Bolsover's eyes were the only ones that were open.

He propped himself up on his pillow, and waited.

He did not dare to lay his head down again, lest he should fall asleep. Ten minutes seemed like hours to him as they passed.

At a quarter to eleven he pushed back the bedclothes, and stepped silently out of bed. He had laid his clothes and a pair of boots all ready. He did not venture to dress in the dormitory, for the slightest sound might wake one of the juniors.

He took the boots in his hand, and the clothes over his arm, and crept noiselessly towards the dormitory door.

It opened in his hand without a sound.

A chill breath of air came from the passage, and he shivered a little; and there he hesitated. He knew that he was going to do wrong—serious wrong. He was going to break the rules of the school, and besides that, the laws of the country. But a feeling of lawless adventure was upon him, and besides, if he did not go, Valence would think that he was afraid. There was a slight sound in the dormitory behind him, of some sleeper moving in his bed. Bolsover stepped out into the passage, and closed the door quickly and quietly behind him.

He paused in the passage to listen. The house was very silent; no light shone from under a door. Greyfriars was sleeping.

Bolsover moved away towards the stairs, to descend to the Sixth-Form passage. He stopped suddenly, and listened. There was a sound on the stairs—a slight, indefinable sound.

Someone was there on the staircase in the gloom, he knew that. The thought of a burglar flashed through his mind. Or was it Valence? Valence had agreed to wait for him at the window at the end of the Sixth-Form passage, but he might have come to meet him. Bolsover stood some moments straining his ears to listen.

Then he whispered softly:

"Who's there?"

If it was Valence, the senior's voice would reassure him; but it was not Valence's voice that came back from the darkness of the staircase.

"Percy!"

Bolsover's teeth came together with a snap as he heard it. It was his minor who was there on the stairs, waiting for him.

"Hubert!" muttered the Remove bully savagely.

"Yes, it's me, Percy!"

"What are you doing out of bed?"

Bolsover stared into the gloom, and he could just make out the form of his minor in the deep shadows. He knew that Billy must have come out of the Third-Form dormitory to wait for him there.

"I—I'm waitin' for you 'ere, Percy," muttered the fag.

"I—I guessed wot you was going to do, Percy. That rotter, Valence, has got you into this, and you're goin' out poachin' with 'im."

Bolsover drew a deep breath.

"Go back to your dorm.," he said.

"You're goin' out, Percy?"

"Mind your own business."

"Percy! I know it ain't for me to tell you, but jest think of wot you're doin'," said Billy, in a low and trembling voice. "You'll git into trouble. You know you nearly did before. Suppose you was found out——"

"Hold your tongue!"

"What would father say, if you was sent home from school for this?"

Bolsover ground his teeth with rage.

"You slum brat, are you setting up to teach me lessons?" he said between his teeth. "If you don't shut up, and go back to bed, I'll pitch you down the stairs. Do you hear?"

"But——"

"Will you go?" muttered Bolsover furiously.

"But I says——"

The Remove bully, his eyes glittering with rage, clenched his hand hard, and came nearer to the dim form of the fag.

"Will you go?" he muttered.

"Percy, I can't let you go out!"

"Then take that!"

A savage blow was struck in the darkness. There was a low cry from the fag, and a thud as he fell heavily upon the stairs. Bolsover stood over him, his eyes blazing.

"Now, go back to bed, you young cad!" he muttered. "If you meddle with me again, I'll give you the licking of your life!"

Only a sob came from the dim form on the stairs. Bolsover passed the fag, and went on his way, and groped silently along the Sixth Form passage. To the alarm the fag stayed, choking back his sobs lest he should break the silence, and give the alarm which would mean ruin to his brother.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
The Poachers!

THERE was a dim glimmer of moonlight in the deep wood. Where the trees were thick, blackness lay unbroken, but where the branches parted overhead, the moonlight glimmered through, and silvered the grass and the undergrowth. In the deep and silent wood, there was hardly a sound—faintly, from afar, came the chime from the village telling the hour.

A man in a velveteen jacket, a fur cap and gaiters, with a thick stick under his arm, and a ragged cur at his feet, stirred from leaning against a big tree, and listened. It was Jeff Griggs, the poacher, and the worst character in the vicinity of Friardale and Courtfield. There was a whiff of tobacco in the air, and a glow from the bowl of his short black pipe.

The poacher was waiting for his schoolboy associate. There was a footstep in the wood, and Jeff Griggs gave a soft, cautious whistle. The dog at his feet lifted its sharp ears for a moment, and then, as if satisfied, laid down again. Two figures came across a patch of moonlight, and the poacher started.

"Who's with you?" he asked, in a low voice.

"I've brought a—a friend," said Valence. "He will be all right. He wants to have a hand in the game."

The poacher grunted.

"Well, if he's safe, it's all right," he said.

"I'm safe enough," said Bolsover coolly. "You can rely on me. I'm glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Jeff Griggs."

Griggs gave another grunt.

"Well, enough jaw," he said. "We've got to be mighty careful to-night. Sir Hilton Popper has been round to all his keepers blowing them up over the poaching. He's got a nose like a 'awk's beak. It ain't only the birds, but if there's a blessed rabbit missing, he seems to know all about it. As if a poor man can't get a rabbit or so."

Bolsover chuckled. He knew that the poacher made a good living by stealing game from the big estates in the neighbourhood—everybody knew it, but Griggs had, so far, been too careful to be caught, though some time in the past he had been in prison.

"There's Benson, the 'ead keeper, out to-night, lookin' for me specially," said Griggs. "He spoke to me at the Cross Keys to-day. He said he'd 'ave me, sooner or later, if I didn't let Sir Hilton's preserves alone. He's more likely to 'ave my cudgel across his skull than to 'ave me!"

Bolsover started.

"You—you wouldn't hurt the man!" he muttered.

Griggs laughed savagely.

"Not if there was witnesses," he said, "and not if he could swear to me. But if I could git a good crack at his skull from bo'ind, it would be 'ard lines on Mister Benson."

"Oh! I say——"

"You don't like the game—ch?" said the poacher.

"No, I'm blessed if I do."

"Then you'd better cut orf, and get back to your bed, young 'un."

"I'm not going to do that. I'm going to take back some rabbits for a feed in the Remove dormitory," said Bolsover.

"There isn't another fellow in the Form who has the nerve to go out and get 'em of a night, and I'm going to do it."

"Well, it's your own look-out," said the poacher. "Hallo—there!"

The ruffian caught the stick from under his arm, and hurled it with a sudden but unerring aim into the undergrowth. There was a sharp sound, and the poacher called to his dog.

"Fetch 'im, Nell!"

A moment later the dog laid a dead rabbit at his feet.

"You can have that, young 'un, for a beginnin', said the poacher.

"Good egg!" said Bolsover.

He picked up the still warm rabbit, and hid it under his coat. His admiration for the skill and quickness of the poacher was great. He was evidently in good hands for learning the noble profession.

"I suppose we're going after the birds, Jeff?" said Valence.

"Yes, Master Valence. I've got a good order from the trader in Courtfield, and I'm goin' to let him 'ave all he wants. Unless that hounder Benson drops on to us, we shall make a good 'aul to-night—as much as we can carry, all of us. It will mean some pounds in our pockets—and suthin' for your young friend, too, if he lends a 'and."

"Oh, good!" said Bolsover.

"This way!" said Griggs. "And silent does it!"

"Right-ho!"

The poacher led the way out of the spinney, deep into the midnight darkness of the woods. It was amazing to Bolsover that Griggs should be able to find his way without light or apparent guidance of any sort.

But the poacher knew the woods like a book, and he never faltered or paused for a moment.

In five minutes Bolsover had lost all sense of direction; he could not have told where lay Greyfriars or Friardale or Courtfield, it was to him as if he were plunged into the heart of a primeval forest.

But to the poacher the ways were as clear as if he were treading a high-road in broad daylight.

He paused at last on the edge of a glade, suppressing his very breathing for silence, and peering cautiously ahead.

The moonlight fell into the glade, and as the dog Nell moved on through the grass Bolsover could hear a movement and see the fluttering shadows of disturbed birds.

Valence's eyes gleamed.

"What a haul!" he muttered.

Jeff Griggs chuckled softly.

"Old Popper will be wild to-morrer!" he muttered in Valence's ear. "I shouldn't wonder if 'e sacks Benson. I know he's threatened to if the poachin' ain't stopped. And all the better for us—fur Benson's the sharpest keeper in the county. He——"

The poacher paused.

He scarcely breathed as he made a sign to the others to be silent.

Valence and Bolsover understood, and they lay low in the thicket. Nell had disappeared; the well-trained dog of the poacher knew how to take cover. Valence and Bolsover could see nothing, hear nothing, save the faint rustle of the leaves in the night wind. But they knew that Jeff Griggs heard something.

Bolsover would have asked a question; but the poacher, as if divining that he was about to speak, put a heavy hand over his mouth.

Bolsover understood that it meant danger, and he lay still, his heart beating hard.

There was a thrill of excitement in it; but the thrill of apprehension was stronger. In that moment Bolsover realised his folly.

What if he were caught?

To be locked up in an outhouse of Sir Hilton Popper's residence for the rest of the night, and taken either to the county gaol or back to Greyfriars in the morning in charge of a keeper—that was what he had to expect.

In either case, instant expulsion from the school!

The enemy side of a schoolboy-poacher's life was thus suddenly presented to him, and Bolsover would have given a great deal at that moment to be safe back in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars.

But it was too late to think of that now. He lay silent, palpitating, his uneasiness growing with every second that passed.

Five minutes elapsed.

Valence and Bolsover were growing cramped and chilled from crouching in the damp grass, but they dared not move. Jeff Griggs had not made a movement, and they knew that the danger was not past.

What was the danger? Was someone watching the glade? Was there a keeper near at hand? What did it mean?

They heard Jeff Griggs draw a long breath, and a sort of shiver ran through him. The danger, whatever it was, was near and real.

Suddenly there was a sound in the glade, and two men stepped from the black shadow of a tree into the dim glimmer of the moonlight. They were so close to the trio that, in spite of the dimness, every outline of their forms could be plainly seen. They were dressed as keepers, and one of them had a gun in the hollow of his arm.

Bolsover understood now. The two keepers were close at hand and watching, and they had heard something, and they had lain low, waiting for the poachers to show themselves; but Jeff Griggs's caution had baffled them.

"I'm sure I heard someone, George," said the man with the gun; and Valence recognised the voice of Benson, the head keeper on Sir Hilton Popper's estate.

"I'm sure of it, sir!"

"But they've gone, I think. Go down towards the spinney, George, and whistle me if you see anything. I'll stay here."

"Yes, sir."

The man George plunged through the wood, passing within

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 221.

"Mother dear, don't!" muttered Dick Brooke. "I'm expelled, but I shall have to stand it, that's all." Outside in the darkness a big dog sprang towards the window, as if in sympathy with the poor woman sobbing within. His master heard the sounds of grief, too, and stopped. "Master Brooke, you're in trouble!" (*For the above dramatic incident see the grand, long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co., at St. Jim's, entitled, "THE SHADOW OF SHAME," which is contained in this week's issue of our grand companion paper "The Gem" Library. Out on Thursday. Price One Penny.*)

two paces of the forms that crouched in the thicket. Only a screen of underbrush hid them in shadow from his sight.

Bolsover's heart beat almost to suffocation. The fear was in his breast that the keeper would actually stumble upon them as they lay there—and it might easily have happened.

But he passed, and his faint footsteps died away in the wood.

The head keeper remained where he was, standing quite still, his feet firmly planted, without a motion, without a sound, his head slightly bent, evidently still listening intently.

He was within a few paces of the crouching trio. Had he stepped towards them, he must have seen them, in spite of the darkness.

His suspicions were evidently not allayed, and how long

NEXT TUESDAY "A TRAITOR IN THE SCHOOL!" By FRANK RICHARDS. Order Early.

he would remain there was a question. Jeff Griggs made no movement, save to grip his cudgel more tightly, ready for use. Valence and Bolsover were still and silent; but the cramp was growing upon them, and Bolsover, at least, felt that he could not endure it much longer. Some insect of the wood had crawled into his trousers, and Bolsover felt an irritating tickle, and he felt that he could not remain still. Yet to move meant to make a sound; and any sound, however slight, would draw the watchful keeper's attention.

He dared not move.

No sound came back from George, who had disappeared in the direction of the spinney.

The anxiety was growing intolerable to Bolsover and Valence, and perhaps to Jeff Griggs as well. Would the keeper never go?

He stood like a statue, still, waiting. He knew or suspected that they were near at hand, that they were in hiding, and he was waiting for a sound to guide him. They were three to one, but what if he used his gun? What if he fired in the direction of a sound? Bolsover turned cold at the thought of a charge of shot rattling through the underwood.

The schoolboy poacher could endure no more. He was cramped, and aching in every limb. He moved in spite of himself, and there was a rustle. He gasped. The motionless figure in the glade had swung round towards him, and the gun was at the shoulder now, levelled towards the spot.

"So you're there!" said Benson grimly. "Come out! I give you one second to show yourself, before I pull the trigger!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Tragedy of the Wood.

BOLSOVER'S heart throbbed.

He would have obeyed the order, in sheer terror, but the grip of Jeff Griggs was upon him, and held him back.

Did the keeper mean it, or was he bluffing? Would he dare to fire? Bolsover tried to crouch deeper into the earth, his whole body trembling and quivering in fear as he listened for the report of the gun.

Benson's voice rang out again.

"Come out!"

There was a movement. Jeff Griggs, in the blackness of the underwood, was rising upon his knees, the heavy cudgel in his hand. His hand was thrown back, and Bolsover, who felt rather than saw what he was doing, knew that he was about to hurl the stick at the keeper, as he had hurled it at the rabbit.

"My—my Heaven!" muttered Bolsover, in horror. "Don't—don't!"

Whiz!

The cudgel flew through the air.

Bolsover heard the sound of a blow—he heard the sharp, short cry of the stricken man, and saw the burly form reel and stagger, the gun falling from the nerveless hands.

Bang!

The gun exploded as it fell, with a report that seemed to the boy's strained ears like thunder.

It rang and echoed through the wood, and wild echoes answered back from every direction.

The keeper lay in the grass, the discharged gun beside him. The moonlight glimmered down upon a white face from which consciousness was gone, and upon which a thin stream of red trickled from under the thick hair.

"Oh, heavens!" stammered Bolsover.

Then Bolsover felt Griggs spring forward to regain the cudgel he had hurled; but what happened next he did not know, for blackness swam over him, his senses whirled, and he knew that he was fainting. He tried to fight it off, and he felt that the struggle lasted whole minutes; but it was in reality only a single second, and then he knew nothing.

He came to himself, how long afterwards he did not know, but it could not have been long—perhaps a minute.

He was alone!

He felt round in the gloom for his companions, but they were gone.

He peered into the moonlight glade.

The still form of the keeper lay there—still, with an awful stillness. Was he dead? The moonlight flickered on the white face, and the features seemed to move. But the eyes were closed, and the red stream was thicker on the brow. Jeff Griggs had fled; Valence had fled. Doubtless they had supposed that Bolsover was following them. They had no time or thought to give him, with their own safety at stake; it was every one for himself.

There was a crashing sound in the wood, a sound of rushing through bush and briar, and Bolsover thought at first that it was made by his fleeing companions. But he realised that the sound was coming closer, and it dawned upon him that the other keeper had heard the shot in the glade, and was speeding to the rescue.

Bolsover started up, shuddering.

If he were caught there now——

The others were gone, and he would be supposed to be the one who had struck down the keeper; and if he were killed——

Bolsover choked back the cry of terror that rose to his lips. The keeper George bounded into the glade, and gave a cry as he caught sight of Benson.

"Are you hurt, sir?"

He flung himself down beside the motionless form, and again his voice rang out in words that seemed to sear themselves like a hot iron in Bolsover's brain.

"Good heavens! He's killed!"

Bolsover leaped to his feet with a scream, and dashed away.

The keeper heard him and jumped up, and stood hesitating whether to follow the fugitive or to remain by his injured chief. He stood in the glade and shouted, and shouted again, and shouts and whistles answered from different parts of the wood.

The whole body of keepers were alarmed now, and Bolsover knew that there were six or seven employed on the estate. The wretched boy, not knowing whether he was pursued or not, not knowing in what direction he was running, dashed on at full speed, bursting madly through bush and thicket, stumbling over trailing branches, falling, rising, and falling again, scrambling and running in frantic haste, with the strength and speed of utter terror.

A form rose out of the shadows, and a hand reached out to grasp him, and Bolsover found himself struggling with an unknown foe. There was a hoarse shout.

"Got one of 'em!"

It was a keeper. Bolsover, with the strength of despair, drove both his fists into the chest of the keeper, and the man dropped with a grunt. He dragged Bolsover down with him, but the boy wrenched himself away, and darted into the wood. The man sat up, gasping, and shouting to his comrades.

"This way—this way! He's running towards Courtfield Lane!"

Shouts answered from the black woods.

Bolsover tore on.

The keeper's shouts, intended to warn the pursuers, had enlightened Bolsover. He had had no idea where he was, but now he knew that Courtfield Lane lay ahead of him. If Courtfield Lane was ahead, Friardale was on the right; and he swerved to the right, and went plunging through the thickets in another direction.

Loud shouts seemed to ring from all directions. How many pursuers were at work, seeking him? It seemed to the boy's terrified ears that there must be hundreds. Every shadow in the wood hid a foe to his fearful eyes—every sound was the footstep of an enemy. Oh, if he could but get out of that entangling wood—if he could but get a straight run to Greyfriars, and hide himself from all this!

He was gasping painfully now as he ran. How long could he keep this up? Where was Jeff Griggs? In safety, no doubt. Where was Valence? Had he succeeded in getting to the school? If he were caught, would he betray Bolsover? These thoughts raced through his brain with other thoughts—of what would happen to himself if he were captured—and the terrified fear that the man who had grasped him for a moment in the wood might have recognised him.

There was a gleam of light ahead of him—it was the moonlight upon an open lane. He knew now that it was Friardale Lane, and he clambered madly up the high palings that separated him from the road.

There was a crash in the wood, and a yell.

"There he is!"

"Come back, you young scoundrel!"

"After him!"

Bolsover was clutching the top of the railing. He knew that someone unseen was rushing to seize his legs and drag him back before he could get over. He made a fearful effort, and dragged himself over the top, and rolled down breathlessly into the lane. He was hurt; he was aching with the fall, but he did not linger even to draw a breath. He was up in a flash, and speeding down the lane in the direction of Greyfriars.

Breathless, exhausted, streaming with perspiration, he ran and ran, with his heart thumping against his ribs, and a sharp pain growing in his side, his throat dry and husky, his head swimming.

But he ran on, and on, and on, and the shouts had died away now, and at last, in sheer exhaustion, he slackened down.

He was close to the school now, and he limped on, casting backward glances over his shoulder.

The cry of the keeper in the glade rang in his ears.

"He's killed!"

Killed!

Had murder been done in the black, shadowy woods that night? Was Benson dead? He was sick with horror at the thought. He tramped on wearily, and suddenly he paused and listened. Was that an echo of his own footsteps upon the hard road? He stood quite still and bent his head, straining his ears. It was not an echo, for his own footsteps were now silent, and the sound continued. There was still a pursuer on the track—it was the sound of running feet on the road.

Bolsover's heart throbbed with renewed fear, and he broke into a limping run. He came up to the school walls breathless, panting, aching with fatigue.

The wall was high, but if Bolsover had been in his usual condition, he could have climbing to him to take a short run, and leap high enough to catch hold with his hands, and then draw himself over.

But now, as he looked at the frowning wall, shadowed by the trees within, his heart sank. He knew that he could not do it. He was utterly spent, and he could not jump a foot from the ground, even if that had been half enough.

He stood panting, his breathing coming loudly and in jerks, as he listened. Down the dark road came that steady patter of running feet. The sound was coming nearer.

To be caught now—after all! Bolsover uttered a groan. He made up his mind to a desperate effort, and retreated across the road, ran hard at the wall, and leaped, with his hands up to catch.

His desperate fingers scraped on the bricks three or four inches below the top, and he slid down the wall, and thudded upon the road.

"Patter—patter!

As he lay gasping, the running feet sounded nearer.

It was all up!

He staggered wearily to his feet. What should he do—keep on in a hopeless race down the road, or plunge into the shadowy woods again? He shuddered at the thought. The grim shadows of the wood were haunted, for him, with that white face upturned to the moonlight—the still, white face, with that dreadful smear of red on the forehead.

But to race on down the road, with failing limbs—to leave Greyfriars, his only refuge, behind——

In his despair and perplexity, the wretched boy groaned aloud. And then, like a voice heard in a dream, came a whisper from the top of the wall.

"Percy!"

It was the voice of Bolsover minor.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.
In the Hour of Need.

"PERCY!"

Bolsover staggered, holding on to the wall for support. Was it indeed a dream, or was it the voice of his young brother, whom he had left on the dormitory stairs, quivering under his savage blow?

"Patter—patter!"

"Percy, I'm 'ere! Let me 'elp you up!"

"Hubert, kid!"

Bolsover panted out the name in choked tones. It was his brother—it was the help he wanted in his hour of need.

"Give me your 'and, Percy, old man. I've been waitin' 'ere for you!"

The uncultivated voice, the dropped H's, did not jar on Bolsover major's nerves now. The voice was as the sweetest music to him. The Third Form fag was leaning on his chest on the top of the wall, with his arms down outside the bricks, and Bolsover, reaching up, could grasp his hands.

"Patter—patter!

"Quick, Percy! Is that somebody arter you?"

"Yes," muttered Bolsover.

"Quick, then."

Bolsover grasped his brother's hands. Billy pulled at him, but the Removite's weight was too great. The fag gave a gasp.

"'Old on to me, and climb, Percy!"

"Hold tight, then."

"Orlright—quit quick!"

"Patter, patter, patter!"

Bolsover climbed with the strength of desperation. He grasped Billy's arms as they hung, and they gave him a hold. He drew himself up, and caught Billy round the neck, and then gained a grip on the edge of the brick wall.

"I've on!" he muttered. "Now help me over."

Billy sat astride of the wall, and dragged Bolsover up. The Removite climbed, and Billy pulled, till the burly fellow was on top of the wall, spent with the exertion.

"Quick!" muttered Billy.

Bolsover rolled over inside the wall, caught a hold, and dropped into the close. The fag dropped beside him lightly.

"Quiet, now!" he whispered.

Patter, patter!

The running feet, distinct on the hard high-road, were very close now. They came closer—closer—closer. Bolsover's heart was throbbing in unison with them. Would the pursuer guess that the fugitive had climbed the school wall, and stop? Had he caught a glimpse of him doing it? Bolsover's heart beat to suffocation as he listened.

Patter—patter!

The sound was growing fainter.

The running man had passed, and was running on, towards Courtfield, unknowing that the fugitive was now behind him.

Patter—patter—pat!

The footsteps died away into the silence of the night.

Silence!

The stillness was as a gift of Heaven to Bolsover. The man was gone, the danger was past. He was safe—he was saved. From the clock-tower of Greyfriars came a deep and heavy boom.

One!

Bolsover started and shivered. His strength was coming back, and with it his nerve. He rose to his feet, leaning heavily against the wall, and breathing hard.

"How did you come here, Hubert?"

He muttered the question huskily. His amazement was as great as his relief. His brother had saved him—saved him for the time, at least. At least, he had not been caught in the act, though he trembled to think of what the morning might bring.

"I—I didn't go back to bed, Percy. I—I thought p'r'aps you would be getting into trouble, goin' out poaching," muttered the fag. "I followed you and Valence as far as this, and I waited 'ere for you. If you 'ad been all right, I was going to shove you in all, and you wouldn't 'ave known I was 'ere. But—but when you tried to jump, and I 'card somebody arter you, I knew you wanted 'elp."

"You've been here all the time?"

"Yes."

"Has Valence come in?"

"Yes, Percy."

Bolsover ground his teeth.

"The coward! He deserted me in the wood," he muttered.

"Did he see you when he came in, Hubert?"

Bolsover minor shook his head.

"No. He's taller than you, you see, and he got over the wall easily enough. I keep back in the dark there, and he didn't see me, and I waited for you. I didn't know that nothin' was wrong, only I was afraid fur you, Percy, especially when Valence kem back alone. I knew he wouldn't stick to you if there was trouble. He ain't that sort."

"He's gone in, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Hang him—the coward! He didn't care if I was caught!" muttered Bolsover bitterly. "But if I had been hauled up, I'd have given him away jolly soon. I wouldn't have gone to the county gaol by myself."

"Could you 'ave proved that he was with you, Percy?" asked Billy quietly.

Bolsover started.

"Proved it? I—I suppose so. Griggs knew he was there, and so did I. What do you mean, you young idiot?"

"S'pose he denied being there?"

"Why, I—I——"

Bolsover broke into a hard laugh.

"Yes, I suppose he'd do that, and he'd say I was slandering him, and it would make it all the worse for me to try to drag him in," he said. "You learned to be sharp in your slum, Billy. I never thought of that. Thank goodness I've got out of it! I suppose I should have had to go through it alone. Thank goodness I'm clear now!" He seemed to have forgotten already that his brother had saved him. "I shall have to see Valence before I go to bed, about that keeper." He shuddered as the face of the fallen man came floating back to his memory.

Billy started, and caught him by the sleeve.

"The keeper, Percy! Wot keeper? Wot's happened?"

"Never mind," said Bolsover. "The less you know the better. Let's get in; and, mind, not a word to a soul about to-night."

"Won't you tell me wot's happened, Percy?"

Bolsover shook off his brother's hand roughly.

"No, I won't!" he said. "Get in!"

Billy was silent as they crept back to the house. The window was still unfastened, and they entered the silent house without a sound. They crept upstairs on tiptoe, and Bolsover halted at the landing.

"Ain't you going to bed, Percy?" whispered the fag.

"I've got to see Valence first."

"I 'speet he's gone to bed."

"He won't be asleep, I fancy."

"Wot's 'appened, Percy? Tell me."

"Go to bed, and hold your tongue!" growled Bolsover; and Billy, with a heavy heart, crept up to the Third Form dormitory. Bolsover stole on tiptoe down to the Sixth Form

passage, and stopped at Valence's door. There was no light under it. He did not tap, but opened the door quietly.

There was a husky voice from the shadowy room.

"Who—who's that?"

"It's me—Bolsover!"

There was a gasp of relief from Valence.

"You got away all right, then?"

"Yes."

Bolsover closed the door, and came towards Valence. The senior was sitting on the bed, with his boots off, but otherwise fully dressed. In the dim glimmer of moonlight through the window, faint as it was, Bolsover could see that his clothes were wet and splashed thickly with mud.

"Thank goodness you got clear!" breathed Valence.

"No thanks to you."

"I—I couldn't help you! I—I didn't know you weren't running with the rest. I missed you at the lane!" muttered Valence. "Why didn't you run when we did?"

"Well, I didn't," said Bolsover. "Where's Griggs?"

"He cut off towards Pegg. He's got to get up an alibi ready for to-morrow," said the Sixth-Former. "He's to have a crew of drunken roughs at Pegg all ready to swear to-morrow that he spent the night drinking with them."

"Then he's clear?"

"He's always clear. He's too deep for them," said Valence. "He wasn't seen, and I wasn't seen. Don't say you've been idiot enough to be seen?"

"A man caught hold of me in the wood, but I got away. But—but the keeper!" Bolsover muttered. "What about him?"

"Well, what about him?" snarled Valence.

"The man who found him said that he was killed!"

There was a faint cry from Valence, and he fell back limply on the bed. Bolsover stood looking at him with a kind of gnomish satisfaction. At all events, if he was the prey of a terror that seemed to sap the very strength out of his bones, he did not suffer alone. He had communicated his fear to Valence, and the blackguard of the Sixth seemed to have even less nerve to bear it than he had.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.
The Shadow of Fear!

"KILLED!"

The words came in a hoarse, frightened whisper from Valence.

The senior's voice hardly seemed like a human voice at all, so husky and broken it was.

He lay on the bed, as if he had not strength enough even to sit upright, and shudders were running through him from head to foot.

But suddenly he sprang up, and grasped Bolsover by the shoulder, and shook him fiercely with sudden passion.

"You lying young hound!" he muttered, grinding his teeth. "You're lying—you're lying! You're saying this to scare me!"

"Hands off, you fool!" said Bolsover, between his teeth. "Do you think I want to make matters worse than they are? Hands off, I say!"

Valence, his sudden passion spent, released him. He stood staring at Bolsover with white, strained face, and terrified eyes in the darkness.

"Killed!" he muttered. "Dead!"

"The man said so, but he might have been mistaken. I hope he was, goodness knows."

"Did you—did you see him?"

"Yes."

"What did he look like?" breathed Valence. "Did he look as if—as if——" He could not finish the question.

"He was quite still, and white, and there was blood on his face."

"Oh!"

"You know how Griggs killed the rabbit—one lick with his cudgel. He downed Benson the same way, and if the result was the same——"

"Don't—don't!"

"We've got to face it," said Bolsover roughly. It was strange enough for the junior to be taking the lead, while the older boy shivered and trembled, and hid his face in his hands. "Don't be a cowardly fool now. If the man's dead, Griggs killed him, and we shall be the witnesses. We can make it pretty clear that we never thought of anything of the kind, if it all comes out. But is there any chance of keeping it dark? That's what I want to know!"

"It—it must be kept dark," groaned Valence. "Don't you understand that it's ruin to us both? The man can't be dead. Griggs wouldn't be such a madman. He was stunned, and the fool of a keeper heard the shot, I suppose, and fancied that he was dead. He may have thought Benson was shot. You know the gun went off when he fell."

Bolsover nodded, with a feeling of relief. He had not thought of that before, but he realised now that the man George had very likely supposed that the head keeper had been shot, and so jumped to the conclusion that he was dead when he found him lying still and bloodstained on the grass.

"I think you're right," the junior muttered. "Griggs wouldn't be mad enough to put a rope round his neck if he could help it. I suppose he was stunned. I hope it was no worse than that. But, in any case, there will be a frightful row about it. If Griggs is caught, will he give us away?"

Valence tried to think.

"No," he muttered. "He would if it would help him, but it wouldn't help him. In fact, it would make matters worse for him to make out that he was leading schoolboys into his rotten game. The magistrates would be harder on him if they knew that. No, Griggs will hold his tongue. Besides, he's too deep for them, I tell you. He won't be caught."

"Then, if we're safe in that quarter, the question is whether they recognised us as Greyfriars fellows," said Bolsover, with a deep breath. "You say you weren't seen?"

"I am sure not."

"I was caught for a moment; but the man couldn't have recognised me in the dark—and it was only for a moment. Then they spotted me as I got over the palings into the road; but they only saw my back, and I had a coat on. But a man followed me all the way to the school——"

"Good heavens!"

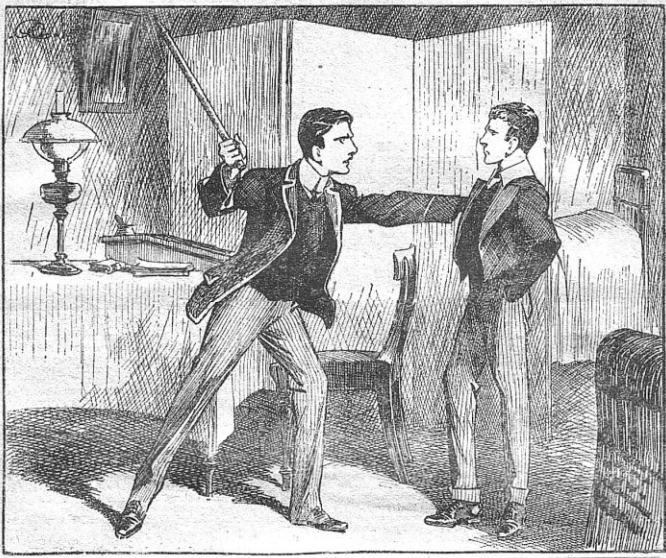
"I got in over the wall, and he passed on towards Courtfield. He couldn't have seen me get in, or he'd have stopped," said Bolsover. "He might suspect when he found I wasn't on the road ahead of him—I don't know."

"If you've brought 'em to the school after us, you can stick it out alone!" said Valence savagely. "You would come—against my wish! You forced yourself into this; now, if they've spotted you, you can face the music! Don't drag me into it!"

Bolsover looked very unpleasant.

"We're going to face the music together, if there's any to face," he said. "Don't make any mistake about that. Look here, if they come to the school in the morning inquiring, what are we going to say? We'd better arrange beforehand."

"Nothing! You were in bed all night, and don't know anything about it," said Valence huskily. "That's the only thing you can say."



Valence's face went red with rage, and he sprang upon the Removite, and grasped him by the collar with his left hand, and raised a cricket stump in his right. "Give me the letter, you cheeky cub, or I'll half kill you!" he ground out between his teeth. *(See Chapter 5.)*

"I suppose you're right. We're smothered with mud. Better get our clothes brushed, and put 'em out of sight. The mud's all wet; it won't come off to-night," said Bolsover.

"I—I forgot that."

"Hide the clothes, then; and I'll do the same. We know nothing; we never woke up in the night, and we stick to that!" asked Bolsover.

"Yes, yes! It's the only way!"

"That's settled, then. Pull yourself together and have a little nerve; if you show a face like that to-morrow it will give you away at once."

And Bolsover left the room and crept away on tiptoe to the stairs. Valence went to bed miserably enough. It was Bolsover's first essay as a poacher; but Valence had made a score of such excursions, and his good luck had made him come to believe that he would never be in real danger. But the danger had come at last—and it found him utterly without courage to face it. He had not so much courage as the bully of the Remove, the junior who was creeping on tiptoe through the silent house.

Bolsover paused in the dormitory passage. He had to pass the Third Form dormitory on his way to his own, and as he passed, the sound of voices within reached his ears. The fags were awake, then!

Bolsover stopped, his heart beating with a new fear. He bent to the door, and put his ear to the keyhole to hear what was said within.

It was the voice of Paget that came clearly to his hearing.

"Look here, Billy, what's the game? You've been out a long time. I tell you I woke up more than an hour ago, and you were gone then. And Tubb and me made up our minds to wait up for you. Didn't we, Tubby?"

"Yes, we did," said Tubb. "I told the young ass this evening that I was done with him. All the same, I'm not going to have that rotten major of his getting him into trouble. He's been out with his major—or for his major, anyway. Bolsover major is at the bottom of it—and I know that!"

"So do I," said Paget. "What have you got to say, Billy?"

"Nothin'," said the voice of Bolsover minor.

"You've been out?"

"Don't you ask me no questions, and I won't tell you no lies, Paget. Jest shut up and go to sleep."

"Have you been with your major?"

Silence.

"He won't say a word, the obstinate brute!" said Tubb. "This is what he was looking like a sick cat all the evening for. His major's getting him into trouble. We all know jolly well about Bolsover major going down to the Cross Keys. Now he's getting Billy into it. That's my belief."

"It ain't nothin' of the sort!" said Billy.

"Then what is it?"

No answer.

"Aren't you going to tell us, Billy?"

"No, I ain't!"

"If it wasn't so jolly late I'd get out of bed and bump you for your cheek!" said Paget. "What have you been up to in the middle of the night?"

No answer.

"Well, we'll see about it to-morrow," said Paget. "I suppose we shall find out then. You're a cheeky young villain, Billy!"

"Oh, let a chap go to sleep when he's tired!" said Billy.

"Go to sleep—and go and eat coke!" growled Tubb. "I've done with you!"

"You've said that afore!" grunted Billy, with a slight chuckle.

"Well, I mean it this time!" growled Tubb. "You're a rotter!"

"Orl right, I'm a rotter, then! Good-night!"

"And a cheeky cad!" growled Tubb.

"'Ear, 'ear!" said Billy. "Good-night!"

"Oh, good-night, you fathead."

And the mumble of voices died away in the dormitory. Bolsover rose, and went on silently. Two fellows, at least, in the Third Form knew that Bolsover minor had been out of his bed that night; but the loyal fag had not said a word about his major—and Bolsover knew that he would not say a word. He was safe so far as Billy was concerned. But if Tubb and Paget chattered on the morrow! Bolsover was weary with thinking it out, and he drove the matter from his mind. All was silent in the Remove dormitory as he entered on tip-toe, and he undressed and crept into bed without awakening any of the Removites. But it was a long time before Bolsover slept. A white face with a smear of crimson upon it, upturned to the moonlight, haunted him, and the fear of the morrow was heavy upon his heart. It was not till near dawn that he fell into a troubled slumber, troubled and broken by haunting dreams of horror.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.
A Police Inquiry.

BOLSOVER was awake before the rising-bell clanged out in the morning; but he did not rise. He was particularly anxious that morning to do nothing whatever that could draw unusual attention to himself. He lay quietly in bed till the rising-bell rang across the wide Close, and then he turned out with the rest of the Form, yawning.

He looked in the glass over his washstand as he washed. His face looked much the same as usual, save for a worried line that he could not keep out of his forehead. If he were upon his guard all day, there was no reason why he should give himself away. His courage had returned, too, and he felt that he would be able to go through questioning with a good nerve. He was more worried about Valence than about himself. Not that he cared two pins what happened to the Sixth-Former. But if Valence betrayed himself, he would betray Bolsover, too; that was the danger.

Bolsover would gladly have seen Valence, and given him a word of caution, but it was impossible to seek out the Sixth-Former. It might be observed, and remembered afterwards, at a time awkward for both of them. Besides, all that needed to be said had been said the previous night in Valence's room.

Bolsover went down with the rest of the Remove, chatting to Vernon-Smith. The Removites had no suspicion that anything was wrong, so far. Even the Bounder of Greyfriars, keen as he was, did not guess from his companion's manner that a deep and heavy trouble was preying upon his mind. Bolsover kept up appearances well. And all the time a dreadful question was hammering at his brains—was the head-keeper of the Manor estate really dead, and was Griggs a murderer, and himself an accomplice in crime? Was there to be an inquiry into the poaching affray that would reach the school, and involve him?

Anything was better than anxiety, and Bolsover almost wished that something definite would happen, in order that he might know the worst.

In chapel he caught a glimpse of Valence among the Sixth. The senior looked very pale and worn. He was not "sticking it out" like the hardier junior. Valence looked as if he would break down under questioning, and Bolsover ground his teeth as he saw it.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry exclaimed, as the juniors came out of the dining-room after breakfast. "What's the trouble now?"

Mr. Quelch was talking to Wingate of the Sixth with a very grave face. Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, turned to the juniors.

"School assembles in hall before lessons," he said.

"Phew! Anything wrong, Wingate?"

"Yes."

"What's the matter?" asked Bolsover, with white lips.

"You'll know when you get into hall. Pass the word round to the fellows."

All the school knew in a few minutes.

There was much muttered comment as the Greyfriars fellows streamed into the school hall, wondering what was the matter.

That there was something unusual "on" was quite certain. Billy Bunter declared that he had seen a police-constable go into the Head's study, and Snoop averred that he had recognised Inspector Grimes of Courtfield at the Head's study window.

"But what can they want here?" said Harry Wharton.

"Somebody's been doing something," said Nugent sapiently. "Perhaps it's some of Vernon-Smith's little betting transactions."

The Bounder of Greyfriars scowled, and the other Removites grinned.

"Perhaps it's one of Bolsover minor's old friends from the slums has been picking pockets to pay his way on a visit here," suggested Snoop.

And there was a laugh. But Bolsover major, touchy as he usually was on the subject of his minor's early associations, did not appear to notice the taunt. He was very much preoccupied. Bob Cherry slapped him on the shoulder.

"Can't you suggest what it is, Bolsover?"

Bolsover started back.

"I! How should I?" he exclaimed. "What do you mean, confound you?"

Bob Cherry stared at him.

"Keep your wool on!" he exclaimed. "What are you getting ratty about?"

Bolsover flushed. Bob Cherry's words had gone home without Bob intending it. The Remove bully saw that he had very nearly betrayed himself.

"Oh, all—all serene!" he muttered. "You startled me!"

Bob looked at him very curiously.

"You don't really know anything about it, I suppose, do you?" he asked.

"Of course, I don't, you silly ass!"

"You haven't been up to any of your giddy poaching excursions—eh?"

Bolsover's jaw dropped, and he turned so white that Bob Cherry could not help seeing that he had hit the right nail on the head.

"Shut up!" muttered Bolsover.

"Great Scott! You don't mean——"

"Shut up, for goodness' sake!" Bolsover saw now that Bob Cherry guessed something, and he was in an agony lest the other fellows should hear. "Mum's the word."

Bob Cherry nodded shortly, and turned away coldly enough. He did not know what to make of it; but he could see that Bolsover had a secret to keep, and he certainly wanted to know nothing at all about it.

The school gathered in hall, and the Head entered by the upper door. Dr. Locke was looking very grave, and there was a stern line in his brow. A thrill ran through the school at the sight of three men who followed him in. One was Inspector Grimes, of Courtfield, the second was a police-constable, and the third was a man in the garb of a keeper.

"My hat," murmured Johnny Bull, "I know that chap! His name's Berry, and he's one of Sir Hilton Popper's keepers on the Manor estate."

"It's some poaching bizney, then," muttered Harry Wharton.

"Looks like it."

Wharton's glance turned towards Valence, of the Sixth. Wharton was one of the fellows who knew about Valence's old escapade, and how Arthur Courtney, of the Sixth, had rescued him from it by taking the trouble upon himself. Was it Valence who had been up to his old game again, Wharton wondered. And as he saw the almost haggard look upon the face of the blackguard of the Sixth, Wharton felt pretty well convinced that his surmise was correct.

"Valence is in this, Bob," he whispered.

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Yet that note from Griggs that you found in the Close belonged to Bolsover," Wharton said. "It's very queer. Did Bolsover go out last night, I wonder?"

"I wonder," said Bob Cherry.

"I didn't know he was thick with Valence," said Nugent.

"No, I didn't, either. But you never know—they're birds of a feather, anyway."

"The featherfulness of the honourable rotters is terrific," murmured Hurree Singh.

The Head raised his hand for silence, and the murmur of voices died away. There was a strained and painful silence in the big hall.

"Boys," said the Head, in his quiet tones which reached to every corner of the great apartment, though his voice was not loud. "Boys, I have a very serious matter to speak to you about, a dreadfully serious matter. A boy belonging to this school has been accused of poaching in Sir Hilton Popper's woods last night, and of being concerned in a brutal assault upon the head keeper, Mr. Benson."

Bolsover drew a deep, deep breath.

The head keeper was only hurt, then. It was not as he had dreaded—the awful word that had rung in his ears since that scene in the glade had haunted him for nothing. It was a case of assault and injury—no worse than that.

And to Valence the relief was greater than to Bolsover. He had felt more keenly the terrible fear that the man had been killed. Valence raised his head higher, and a little colour stole back into his cheeks.

"One of Sir Hilton's keepers has come here to identify the boy," said Dr. Locke. "He declares that he saw him distinctly on two occasions, once when he seized him for a moment in the wood, and again when the boy was climbing the palings to escape. He states that he followed the boy, who ran away, down the road as far as the school wall, and then missed him. He suspects that the boy climbed the school wall; he ran on as far as Courtfield without finding him. I am very loth to believe that a Greyfriars' boy can have been mixed up in so disgraceful and lawless an affair; but for the sake of the school's good name, every facility must be afforded for inquiry."

There was a pause.

"I hear from Sir Hilton, moreover, that some time ago a Greyfriars boy—a senior boy—was found poaching on his estate, and took a horsewhipping from him as an alternative to being reported to me. Sir Hilton then promised to let the matter drop, and he cannot, therefore, tell me the boy's name. It is only too probable, however, that it is the same boy. If this be the case—if, indeed, it is true that a Greyfriars boy was out of the school last night at all—I call upon him to stand forward and confess."

Silence!

The Head was waiting as if for a reply, but none came. Some of the juniors at the back of the hall grinned a little.

"It's not good enough," murmured Vernon-Smith. "An offer like that wouldn't tempt me. Stand forward and be expelled—ahem!"

"No takers!" grinned Snoop.

And there was a faint chuckle.

A prefect glared along the ranks of the juniors, and the chuckle died away, and there was silence.

The Head waited a few moments.

"Then, as no one has anything to confess, the investigation must proceed," he said. "Mr. Berry, you are at liberty to make any examination you please. All the boys belonging to this school are assembled here, and if you can identify the boy in question, the matter may be cleared up."

And a thrill ran through the assembled school again. Bolsover's jaw squared, and Valence shivered a little. There was dead silence.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.
Yes or No?

THE keeper looked at the long ranks of boys, ranged in their Forms, and hesitated. Among the hundreds of boys, how was he to pick out the fellow of whom he had caught an uncertain glimpse in the moonlit wood?

His hesitation was evident, and some of the fellows began to grin, as the tension was relaxed. Whether the accusation was true or false, the keeper's task was not easy.

He came down off the dais with slow steps, and moved along the ranks of the Greyfriars Forms, scanning the boys with keen eyes as he passed them, but evidently puzzled.

Bolsover met his searching glance with perfect coolness. He passed Bolsover, and the bully of the Remove drew a deep breath. He looked much more keenly at the senior Forms, and the boys could see that he was under the impression that the culprit would be found there. He looked long and hard at Valence, whose pale looks attracted his attention, but gave a slight shake of the head and passed on. Valence almost gasped. Certainly he was not the boy whom the keeper had seen in the wood, and doubtless the man had some idea of what the boy was like, and the mental picture of him did not fit in with Valence.

Berry turned back slowly and unwillingly towards where the Head stood. Dr. Locke was waiting patiently.

"Well?" said the Head.

"I—I don't seem to be sure about him, sir," said the keeper, a little confused. "There be so many of them 'ere. That's how it is. But——"

He was evidently not satisfied.

"Are you sure that it was a Greyfriars boy whom you saw?" the Head asked, with quiet patience.

The keeper nodded decidedly.

"Yes, sir."

"How was he dressed?"

"He 'ad a coat on, sir."

"Then you could not see whether he was in Etons?"

"No, sir. But he 'ad a Greyfriars cap."

"You are sure of that?"

"Yes, sir, quite sure. I've seen enough of the Greyfriars caps to know one when I see it again," said the keeper sturdily. "I'm willing to swear to that before the magistrates. It was a Greyfriars boy, and if I saw 'im alone I'd pick him out quick enough. But there be so many."

The doctor pursed his lips. Inspector Grimes spoke to him in a low voice, something that the boys did not catch. But they soon knew that the keen-witted police-inspector had made a suggestion to the Head.

"Very well, Mr. Grimes," said the doctor.

He turned to the assembled school again.

"Boys, I call upon you to tell me whether any boy here was out of bounds last night?"

Silence!

"If any boy was out of bounds, and did not go to the Manor woods, I will forgive him for the breach of the rules," said the Head. "I am only anxious to discover whether a Greyfriars boy was mixed up in this poaching affair."

Still silence.

"No boy has anything to confess?"

No reply.

The inspector murmured something again, and the Head looked a little uneasy for a moment.

"Boys"—his deep voice was heard again—"you will be questioned personally and separately by your Form-masters on this subject. Each boy will be asked whether he was outside the walls of Greyfriars last night, or whether he knows if any other boy was outside the school."

"Oh!" murmured the school with one voice.

Wingate stood out for a moment from the Sixth.

"May I speak, sir?"

"Certainly, Wingate."

"Is it quite fair on the boys, sir, to question them about other fellows?" said Wingate courageously. "It amounts to ordering them to sneak; and that's a thing no Greyfriars fellow wants to do, I think."

There was a murmur of applause in the crowded hall.

"Bravo!"

"Good old Wingate!"

The Head held up his hand for silence.

"You are right, Wingate; but in such a terribly serious matter as this, we must use what means we have for getting at the truth. If any boy here took part in what happened last night in the Manor wood, he is little better than a criminal—indeed, he is a criminal. It is the duty of every boy here to tell what he knows, and, in fact, the affair has passed out of my hands now. Inspector Grimes is in charge of the investigations, and he demands this, and I cannot refuse him. It would not become the headmaster of Greyfriars to place any obstacle in the way of the law."

"Very well, sir," said Wingate.

"The Form-masters will not question their Forms, beginning with the Sixth," said Dr. Locke.

And the Head himself questioned the Sixth.

They passed before him, and the inspector, in turn, and to each of them the Head put the same questions. The answers were all the same.

"Were you out of bounds last night?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know whether any other boy was out of bounds?"

"No, sir."

Valence answered in the same words as the rest.

The Fifth Form was questioned next, singly, by Mr. Prout, their Form-master, Inspector Grimes watching them closely the while. It was evident that the inspector, like the keeper, expected to find the culprit among the senior boys.

But the Fifth passed through the ordeal cheerfully enough. They had not been mixed up in the affair, and they knew nobody who had, and they were able to speak up with clear consciences.

The Shell went through the ordeal next, and a momentary diversion was created by Hoskins of the Shell. Hoskins was a youth of peculiar proclivities, and a great performer upon the piano. Hobson, who was also in the Shell, was seen to look hopelessly at Hoskins when the second question was put to him, and he mumbled over the answer. Inspector Grimes' eyes gleamed at once, and he made a step forward.

"Pray allow me to question this boy!" he said.

"Certainly!" said the Shell-master.

"Were you out of the school last night, my lad?" demanded the inspector, bending his heavy eyebrows upon Hobson.

"Certainly not," said Hobson.

"You know somebody who was, then?"

"N-no, sir."

"Speak out, my boy. Everyone here can see that you are trying to conceal something," said the inspector, in a scaring voice.

"Speak out, Hobson," said the Head.

"Well, sir, a—a fellow got out of the dorm., sir, but he didn't go out of the house, so far as I know!" stammered Hobson. "That's all, sir. There wasn't any harm in it, and it wasn't worth mentioning."

"Who was it?"

Hobson cast an agonised look at Hoskins. Hoskins spoke up.

"It was I, sir."

"Did you break bounds?"

"No, sir."

"You left your dormitory at night?"

"Yes, sir."

"At what hour?"

"Half-past ten, or a quarter to eleven, I think, sir."

"For what purpose?"

"To go into the music-room, sir."

"The music-room!" demanded the inspector, in amazement.

"Yes, sir. I had been practising the piano, and I remembered that I had forgotten to close it," said Hoskins innocently. "It's a very strict rule about closing the piano after using it, sir. So I sneaked down and closed it, sir."

The Head smiled, and the Shell-master smiled, and some of the juniors chuckled. The inspector turned red, and stepped back to his place. He had given Hoskins a searching glance that satisfied him. Hoskins, with his long hair and his far-away dreamy look, was not the kind of fellow to enter upon midnight poaching adventures, certainly.

The Shell were finished with, without any further discoveries. Then Mr. Capper took his turn with the Upper Fourth.

"Is it worth while questioning the junior boys, inspector?" asked the Head.

"I would prefer to go through to the end, sir, if you have no objection."

"Very well. I have no objection at all."

And the questioning went on. The Upper Fourth having been disposed of, the turn of the Remove came. Bob Cherry was feeling a little worried. It had seemed to him, when he spoke to Bolsover that morning, that the Remove bully had betrayed himself. But that vague feeling was surely not a just reason for speaking of Bolsover. He knew nothing—and after thinking the matter out he felt that he was bound to say that he knew nothing. And so he answered up with the rest—after Bolsover, who replied quite calmly to each question with a steady:

"No, sir."

And now came the turn of the Third. The ordeal, which had been anxious enough to many of the fellows, had been worst of all to two fellows, at least, among the Third Form fags. Paget and Tubb were looking pale and worried. They knew that Bolsover minor had been out of the Third Form dormitory for at least an hour the previous night, and they believed he had been away longer. They could not suppose that he had left the dormitory to hang round the dark passages in the middle of the night. That was absurd. He had been out—he was the fellow who had broken bounds.

To Paget and Tubb it was only too certain that it was Billy who had been mixed up in the poaching affray—Bolsover minor, of whom the policemen and the keeper were in search. The knowledge was terrible to them, but they had resolved to say nothing—till the questioning began. Now they were looking at one another, with pale and anxious faces.

What were they to do? As the turn of the Third Form came nearer their anxiety increased.

They had told Bolsover minor more than once that they had done with him, owing to his devotion to his brother, the bully of the Remove. But it was only talk; in their hearts there was a sincere friendship for the waif of Greyfriars, and secretly they admired him for his loyalty to his major, though it exasperated them. They wanted to stand by him—poacher or not. But how were they to dodge the questioning? To stand up in the full view of the school and tell deliberate lies to their Form-master was an ordeal they were not prepared to face. But it was only by the most barefaced lying that they could shield Bolsover minor now.

Paget pulled the fag by the sleeve, and Billy turned a miserable face upon him.

Billy was suffering enough. It was all out now—what Percy had gone out for the previous night, and what he had done. He had been mixed up in a murderous attack upon a keeper—the natural outcome of a poaching raid. It was certainly a matter for expulsion from the school—and might be a matter for prison. Billy was scared for his brother so much that he had hardly time to think of himself.

"Billy," Paget whispered huskily, "they're coming to us next."

Billy nodded.

"What are we to say, Billy? You—you were out last night."

"I—I wasn't out of the school, Paget."

Paget looked hard at him.

"You were inside the school walls all the time, Billy?"

"Yes."

"Honour?"

"Honour bright."

"Then you—you weren't mixed up in the poaching?" Tubb whispered.

In spite of his trouble, Bolsover minor grinned faintly.

"Of course I wasn't, you ass! Do you think I'm such a silly mug as that? I tell you I wasn't outside the school walls after lights out."

"Then—then you can explain," muttered Tubb, in relief. "It sounds a bit steep, Billy, but I believe you. I know you never tell whoppers, especially to us. You can explain to Mr. Twigg what you were doing, and it will be all serene."

Billy looked worried.

"I—I can't!" he said.

"What were you doing, Billy?"

"Never mind."

"But Twigg will ask you. You can't tell him lies."

Bolsover minor flushed.

"I don't mean to tell him lies, Tubb."

"I know you don't, Billy. But when he asks you, you'll have to admit that you were out of the dorm. We shall have to admit it if he asks us first. You don't want us to lie, do you, Billy, old man?"

"No, I don't."

"Then you'll have to explain."

"I can't!"

The Remove had been finished with by now, and Mr. Twigg, the master of the Third, began to question his Form.

There was a slight smile upon Mr. Twigg's good-humoured face. It seemed to him simply an absurdity to suppose for a moment that a fag of the Third Form could have broken bounds at night to poach in Sir Hilton Popper's woods. But the Courtfield inspector insisted upon the questioning going through the school from the top Form to the bottom, and Mr. Twigg had no objection to make. He merely regarded it as a waste of time.

Tubb and Paget looked as if they were in a state of mental agony. They did not want to betray Billy, and they could not make up their minds to tell Mr. Twigg a lie. Even if they had wanted to, they had not the nerve to do it in the assembled school, under the eyes of the Head and the grim police-inspector.

Billy gave them a miserable look, and shifted his place in the Form, so that he would be questioned first. Mr. Twigg was coming along the line, speaking to the boys, and he would have arrived at Paget and Tubb before he reached Billy. Billy's movement left his chums to be questioned after him, and saved them from their predicament.

Mr. Twigg came to where Bolsover minor stood, and, carelessly as he was conducting the questioning, he could not help being struck by the fag's haggard look.

From the ranks of the Remove, Bolsover major fixed his eyes upon his minor. Would Billy be sensible? he wondered—being sensible meaning to Bolsover major, would Billy tell the necessary lie. He could not be at all sure of it. Billy was such a queer little beggar, as Bolsover regarded it.

Mr. Twigg paused a little, and looked very curiously at the pale and troubled face of the fag, and he gave Bolsover minor more attention than he had given the other fags.

"Bolsover minor!"

"Yes, sir!" muttered Billy.

"Were you out of bounds last night?"

"Not out of the school, sir."

Mr. Twigg gave him a sharp look.

"Does that mean that you were out of your dormitory, Bolsover minor?"

"Yes, sir."

"But you did not leave the school?"

"Certainly not!"

"Very well. Then that may pass. Do you know whether any other boy was out of bounds?"

Silence.

A slight buzz ran through the crowded hall. Every fellow there heard the question, but there was no answer to hear.

Mr. Twigg elevated his eyebrows a little.

"Did you hear my question, Bolsover minor?" he said, raising his voice a little.

"Yes, sir," faltered Billy, turning crimson as he felt the eyes of the whole school upon him.

"Then answer it, please."

Silence.

"You have not answered me, Bolsover minor."

"I—I ain't nothing to say, sir."

Bolsover minor's faltering tones were heard by all. There was a deep, deep silence; for a moment a pin might have been heard to drop in the big hall of Greyfriars.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.
Nothing to Say.

"BOLSOVER MINOR!" said the Head, in his quiet, deep tones.

Billy started, and turned towards the upper end of the hall.

"Yes, sir."

"Come here!"

Billy dragged his heavy feet up the hall, between the ranks of staring boys. Every eye was upon him, in amazement and wonder. The silence was broken by a buzz of voices.

"Bolsover minor!"

"The young bounder!"

"So it was he?"

"A fag, by George!"
"A giddy poacher in the Third Form, by Jove!"
"Silence!" said the Head.

Silence was restored as Bolsover minor tramped miserably upon the dais. His brother gave him a look in passing—a look in which anger and anxiety were mingled.

Billy did not meet his eyes. He passed on with his head down, his eyes downcast. His cheeks were crimson as he stood upon the platform before the Head.

"You need not be afraid, my boy," said Dr. Locke, in his kind tones. "There is nothing for you to be afraid of. If you know anything about this wretched matter, it is your duty to tell it to the inspector. You say that you were not, yourself, out of bounds?"

"I wasn't, sir," muttered Billy.

"But someone else was, and you are aware of it?"

Billy was silent.

"Come, Bolsover minor," said the Head gently, "this is no time for stretching scruples. It is not a case of sneaking. I have explained that already. The whole school lies under a very unpleasant and disgraceful imputation unless this matter is cleared up. For the sake of Greyfriars, you must tell what you know. And you are not informing a master. This matter is out of our hands. You are called upon to give information to an officer in his Majesty's Police Force, to aid in the law of the country. It is your duty to speak out frankly to the inspector."

Billy's lips did not move.

"Come, Bolsover minor, Inspector Grimes is waiting for you!"

"I ain't nothing to say, sir."

"Let me take him in hand, sir," said the inspector suavely. "It's pretty plain that he knows who the boy was, [illegible] Now, young fellow, make a clean breast of it."

"I ain't nothing to say."

"You know that a boy belonging to this school went out with the poachers last night?" demanded the inspector gruffly.

Silence.

"Were you the boy?"

"No, sir."

"You left your dormitory late at night?"

"Yes, sir."

"When did you leave it?"

"I don't exactly know, sir; 'bout arf-past ten, I think."

"When did you return?"

"I think it was 'bout arf-past twelve."

"Then you were out of the dormitory all the time that this affair was taking place in the Manor woods, and had ample time to get there and back?"

"I s'pose so, sir."

"Did anyone leave the dormitory with you?"

"No, sir."

"Did you go out quite alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you go?"

"Out in the Close, sir."

"Do you mean to tell me that you stayed in the Close for two hours last night, and did not pass outside the school walls?"

"Yes, sir."

"What were you doing all the time?"

"Nothing, sir."

"I suggest," said the inspector grimly, "that you had arranged to help somebody who had gone out, and to wait for his return, if you did not go out yourself?"

"No, sir. I didn't arrange nothing."

"Oh, oh! But you knew someone had gone out, and you waited for him to come back?"

No answer.

"Either you are shielding the guilty party, or you are the guilty party yourself!" said the inspector sharply. "Mr. Berry, will you kindly take a close look at this boy. Is he the boy you saw last night in the Manor woods?"

The keeper was scanning Bolsover minor keenly.

"I couldn't say, sir," he replied. "I thought the feller was bigger, but, then, he 'ad a coat on at the time. It might 'ave been this boy. It was dark in the wood, and the moonlight mighty uncertain. But I'll swear to the Greyfriars cap, and it might 'ave been this boy, though he looked bigger, so far as I see."

The inspector bent his head a little, scanning Bolsover minor. He raised a fat forefinger, and pointed to him.

"Where did you get those marks on your jacket and waistcoat, my boy?"

Bolsover minor started. He glanced quickly downwards. He had lain with his chest on the school wall the previous night, trying to pull his brother up. And the rough bricks had left unmistakable signs, which the keen eye of the inspector had noted. Dr. Locke noted them, too, now that they were pointed out, and he frowned.

"You climbed a wall last night," said the inspector

triumphantly. "Your waistcoat has been scraped and torn by the bricks."

"I—I——"

Bolsover minor broke off. Inspector Grimes turned to the Head.

"I think it's pretty clear now," he said. "This is the boy who was in the wood last night!"

There was a murmur in the hall. The Head silenced it with a gesture. His kind old face was very dark and troubled.

"But a mere boy, inspector—a boy in the Third Form!"

"I've known young rips in the village to poach afore they were ten, sir," said Mr. Grimes, "and you never can tell. This boy, too, doesn't seem quite like the other boys here. He speaks differently."

Dr. Locke nodded.

"That is true, Mr. Grimes. This boy has a curious history. He was lost in his early childhood, and brought up among very questionable people. He has not been long at this school."

Mr. Grimes smiled triumphantly.

"That accounts, sir. I dessay this is an old game with him, then."

"But—but you would not imply that this lad was guilty of that brutal assault upon the keeper?" the Head exclaimed.

"There were two of them, at least, in the wood," replied the inspector. "There might have been more—three or four, perhaps—but the keepers swear they heard two at least. They separated when they ran. I fancy that one of the gang was [illegible] character in these parts, whom we've been anxious to get hold of for a long time. This kid can tell us if it was so, and be a witness against him."

"I—I wasn't in the wood, sir," faltered Billy. "I swear I wasn't."

The inspector smiled again.

"I'm afraid that won't do, youngster," he said. "It's pretty clear, and, anyway, there's enough evidence for you to be detained upon suspicion."

The Head turned quite pale.

"You wish to take this boy away, inspector?" he asked.

"If you please, sir."

Dr. Locke drew the inspector aside, and they spoke together for some minutes in low tones. Mr. Grimes evidently wished to do all that he could to spare the Head's feelings, but not at the cost of losing any chance of convicting Jeff Griggs. For that was the name of the "bad character" the inspector had in his mind.

"Well, sir," Mr. Grimes said at last, "I know this comes 'ard on you, sir. Goodness knows, I wouldn't give you this bother if I could help it. I'm willing to do as you say, sir, on the distinct understanding that the boy isn't allowed to leave the school and that he's here when I want him."

"I undertake that that shall be so, Mr. Grimes."

"Then I leave it to you, sir."

Dr. Locke turned his troubled face to the boys, and dismissed them. Bolsover minor remained with the Head.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Harry Wharton Takes a Hand.

GREYFRIARS was almost in an uproar.

It was an hour at least before the masters could get the school settled down to work, and then lessons were carried on in a very desultory fashion.

Bolsover minor was absent from his place in the Third.

The police were gone; but it was known that Inspector Grimes had only left Bolsover minor there as a special favour to the Head. The miserable fag was locked in a room by himself, to await his fate—whatever it was. Tubb and Paget looked pictures of woe. They suspected that somehow or other Bolsover major was at the bottom of the whole business, but their suspicions did not seem to be worth much. Billy would not speak a word; and unless he spoke he was adjudged guilty. Paget and Tubb had faith in the word of their chum, but to most of the Greyfriars fellows it seemed pretty certain that Billy was the poacher's confederate.

Snoop, of the Remove, pointed out with convincing logic that it was really only what was to be expected of a kid brought up among thieves in a slum. It wasn't as if it was one of the genuine Greyfriars fellows who had done it. But this guttersnipe who had come to the school—what was to be expected but that he would break out into this sort of thing? And many fellows agreed with Snoop; indeed, some of them felt sorry for Billy on that account, as the poor little rascal evidently didn't know any better and was only living up to his old training.

What would become of Billy? Would he be arrested? Would he turn evidence against the notorious poacher who was supposed to have been his companion in that raid upon the preserves of Sir Hilton Popper?

When morning classes were dismissed, the juniors gathered

in the passages and in the Close in excited groups, discussing the matter.

It became known somehow—probably through Billy Bunter's proclivities as a listener—that the Head had visited Bolsover minor in his room during the morning, and had talked to him, and had not succeeded in getting anything out of him.

"Obstinate young rotter!" said Snoop.

"Oh, shut up!" growled Coker, of the Fifth. "You don't want to go for a kid when he's down, do you?"

Bolsover major went to his study and stayed there. There was nothing surprising in that; his young brother's trouble might naturally be supposed to worry the Remove bully. In his study, Bolsover paced to and fro in miserable anxiety and remorse. What would happen to Hubert? Whatever happened was his fault, and every law of honour called upon him to own up and save the chivalrous fag who was shielding him. But he could not do it. He told himself that Billy shouldn't have interfered in the matter at all. Why couldn't he have kept out of it? Yet if he had kept out of it, Bolsover major would have been caught by the keeper on the road the night before. Bolsover tried not to think of that.

His study door opened, and Valence, of the Sixth, came in and closed the door behind him. Bolsover gave him a fierce look.

"What have you come here for?" he demanded angrily. "Do you want all the fellows to notice something?"

"I must see you!" muttered Valence. "What's all this about your young brother? You weren't fool enough to take him into it yesterday, were you?"

Bolsover gritted his teeth.

"He shoved himself into it. He had an idea of saving me from going out with a rotter who would get me into trouble." Valence flushed. "I jolly well wish I had taken his advice now," said Bolsover savagely.

"Does he know—everything?"

"Yes. He helped me over the wall last night—I was done in and couldn't climb an inch—or the keeper would have had me. He saw you climb in, too."

Valence shivered.

"He saw me! Then he knows?"

"Yes: all!"

"Good heavens!"

Valence remained silent for a few minutes, his pale lips trembling.

"I've been through a rotten time," he said at last. "Courtney has been asking me questions; he's suspicious of me. But I've stuffed him all right. I lied like a trooper; there was no other way."

"I think we've both done that," said Bolsover. "If Hubert had done the same, we should all be safe enough. If he's determined to set up as a Georgie Washington, let him face the music for it. Hang him!"

"But—but will he face it?" said Valence. "Why should he? He's sure to give us away, to save his own skin, now he's suspected."

Bolsover gave a short laugh.

"You don't know that kid," he said. "He's a queer little beggar. Wild horses wouldn't drag a word out of him against me. And as he can't give you away without giving me away, too, you're all serene."

"You're sure he won't talk?"

"Quite sure."

"I don't understand it," said Valence.

Bolsover shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know that I do, quite," he said. "But there it is. He's a loyal little beggar. That's all right."

"They've taken up Jeff Griggs on suspicion," said Valence, after a pause. "I've just heard. He's got an alibi, and he's safe enough, unless there's evidence against him from this quarter. If we hold our tongues——"

"That's what we're going to do."

"But your brother——"

"He'll hold his tongue."

"But—but what will become of him?" faltered Valence.

"He must take his chance," said Bolsover, frowning. "I can't help him. I know it's rotten. I'd give anything for it not to have happened. But—but I can't take his place to get him clear, and that's the only way I could do it."

"It's horrible, Bolsover."

"I know it is. About time you gave up poaching as an amusement, isn't it?" asked the Remove bully, with a savage sneer.

Valence shuddered.

"I sha'n't meddle with it again, you may be sure, if I get clear out of this. You shoved yourself into the matter, anyway. You've got yourself to blame."

"Oh, it's no good jawing. Get out, before somebody sees you here."

There was a knock at the door, and it opened. Four juniors of the Remove looked into the study—Wharton, Nugent, Bob Cherry, and Johnny Bull. Bolsover glared at the Famous Four. He was in no mood for visits just then, especially from Harry Wharton & Co.

"What do you want?" he demanded angrily.

"A few words with you," said Harry Wharton quietly. "We're willing to wait till Valence has finished, though."

"You—you've been listening," muttered Valence, white to the lips.

Wharton flushed.

"We have not been listening," he said. "But what is there to be scared about if anybody heard what you were saying to Bolsover? What's the secret?"

"There—there isn't any secret!" stammered Valence, realising that he had made a mistake. "I—I was talking to Bolsover about—about cricket."

"And you turn as white as a sheet, because you fancy somebody has overheard you talking to Bolsover about cricket," said Nugent sarcastically.

Valence bit his lip.

"I don't want any of your cheek," he said, with an attempt at bluster; and he strode out of the study, leaving the Removites alone with Bolsover.

Bolsover pointed to the door.

"That's your way, Wharton," he said. "I don't want to be bothered now. I'm worried about the fix my young brother has got himself into."

"So are we," said Wharton quietly. "That's what we've come to see you about. Bolsover minor has got to be got out of this fix. We've been his friends, and stood by him, ever since he came to Greyfriars, and we're going to stand by him now. We're not going to see him sacrificed."

Bolsover started. He asked himself wretchedly how much Harry Wharton & Co. could know; but he assured himself that they could know nothing—they could only suspect.

"What do you mean by sacrificed?" he demanded.

"Your minor did not go poaching last night; we're sure of that. He knows who did, and he won't tell."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Bolsover.

"And you know, too," added Bob Cherry.

"What do you mean?" shouted Bolsover, blustering. "How should I know?"

"Valence has just been here, and anybody can see that he's in a blue funk about something," said Wharton. "We happen to know that Valence was mixed up with the poachers some time ago. Courtney of the Sixth got him out of the row somehow, but we know he was a poacher. He's just been here in a blue funk. You and he are in this together."

"You've no right to suppose."

"Have you forgotten that letter?"

"What letter?"

"The letter from Jeff Griggs that Bob Cherry found in the Close, and which you claimed as your property."

Bolsover drew a deep breath.

"What has that got to do with it?" he asked.

"It's got this to do with it," rapped out Harry Wharton. "If that letter from Jeff Griggs was for you, you are the fellow at Greyfriars who goes out poaching in the Manor woods—not Bolsover minor. It means this—that you lied to me last night when you said that the letter was an old one, and that the appointment was not for last night. It means that you went out last night with the poacher, and that your minor knows it, and is shielding it, as the poor little beggar has done before. It means that you are skulking behind Billy, and that you're going to let him be expelled to save your own rotten skin."

"It—it's not true," muttered Bolsover, between his dry lips.

"It is true," said Harry Wharton, a blaze in his eyes; "and if you think we're going to stand by idly while that kid is expelled from Greyfriars in disgrace, you're jolly well mistaken."

"Quite off-side," said Bob Cherry.

Bolsover stared at them with unsteady eyes.

"What do you want me to do?" he muttered.

"Own up!"

"The only thing a decent chap could do, under the circumstances," said Bob Cherry.

"Own up—to what?"

"To the truth. That letter to you from Jeff Griggs proves it."

"It wasn't to me," said Bolsover desperately. "If Cherry hadn't been a silly ass, he wouldn't have believed that it was to me when I told him. When he put up the notice on the board, I didn't claim the letter. You know that. The chap it belonged to wanted to keep his name dark, so he told me what was in the letter, so that I could describe it to Cherry, and made me claim it."

Wharton looked at him hard.

"I think that's likely enough," he said. "I had a doubt all along about the letter. It didn't seem to me that it was for you, though I believed your statement. I'm quite

willing to believe that Jeff Griggs didn't write that letter to you. But if what you say is true, you know to whom the letter belonged."

"Yes, of course."

"I think I can guess who it was, too, knowing what I do about Valence, and after seeing him here in a blue funk just now," said Wharton scornfully. "It was Valence, of the Sixth."

Bolsover was silent.

"Valence or not, Bolsover knows who it was," said Nugent. "The same fellow who had that letter was the fellow who went out poaching last night. If it wasn't you, Bolsover, you know who it was, and you're bound to say so, to save your minor. You couldn't let your own brother be expelled from the school to save a chap who's nothing to you."

"You—you don't understand."

"I think I understand," said Wharton quietly. "Whoever the letter belonged to, your minor knows that you were in it. He is shielding you. I suppose the truth is that you went out with the other chap."

Bolsover started. It was pretty clear to Wharton, and did not require much guessing. Bolsover minor was facing expulsion to save someone, and that one could only be his brother. If the letter was for Valence, Bolsover major must have gone out with Valence: that was the explanation. And the look upon the Remove bully's face showed the juniors that this surmise was correct.

"Well, Bolsover?"

"Well?" said the burly Removite sullenly.

"What have you got to say?"

"Nothing."

"You admit that you went out with the poachers last night?"

"No, I don't—"

"Do you deny it?" demanded John Bull.

"Yes," said Bolsover, setting his teeth. "I deny it. That's flat! Now prove it if you can, and be hanged to you!"

Wharton's eyes gleamed.

"Very well," he said. "I'll take you at your word. Your minor sha'n't be expelled for nothing, I promise you that. He's willing to face anything to save you, but we won't let him be sacrificed. If you don't go to the Head and tell the truth, we will!"

"So you are going to sneak?"

"This isn't a school matter; it's a police inquiry. If fellows commit crimes, they must expect to be found out. Witnesses in a police-court aren't accused of sneaking. But you can call it sneaking if you like. You sha'n't skulk behind that kid, and ruin him to save your own skin. We should be a set of rotters to allow it, knowing what we do. If you don't tell the Head the truth about the letter, we will, and he can start his investigations from that."

Bolsover clenched his hands.

"Or if you prefer it, we'll explain to Inspector Grimes," said Wharton. "You won't call it sneaking, I suppose, to tell the police what we know about a gang of poachers who have half murdered a keeper!"

"If—if you say a word, they will fix it on me," muttered Bolsover.

"They will fix it in the right place, if they fix it anywhere," said Harry Wharton. "They have fixed it in the wrong place now."

"What do you want me to do?" said Bolsover again.

"Tell the truth!"

"It's enough to get me sacked from Greyfriars."

"Better the guilty than the innocent—though if you were led into this by a senior, you will get off more lightly than he does."

"You—you want me to go to the Head?"

"Either you—or us!"

The chums of the Remove quitted the study, and left the wretched boy to himself. Guilty as they knew him to be, they pitied him—but they could not falter. It was a question of the guilty suffering, or the innocent—and they could not let the innocent suffer when they knew the guilty one.

"Do you think he'll own up?" muttered Nugent, as they went down the passage.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"I think so; it will be better for him. But if he doesn't—"

"We must?"

"Yes."

And the chums of the Remove went out into the sunny Close, to wait for Bolsover's decision.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.
Justice!

BOLSOVER major remained alone in his study. He was trying to think.

But try as he would, he could hardly get his thoughts to run consecutively. His brain was in a whirl. It was said of old that the way of the transgressor is hard, and the schoolboy poacher was finding it truly so. He had lied, and lied, and he had believed that he had lied himself successfully out of the scrape—at the cost of letting the punishment fall upon another. And now his lies had come home to roost, as lies generally do in the long run. For however skilful a falsehood may be, there is always some chink in the armour of it; lying is always the most dangerous of resources. Bolsover's position was worse than if he had told the truth in the first place, and he was now at the end of his lies, and was driven to tell the truth at last.

If he owned up—

Valence, certainly, would get the greater part of the blame; if the senior was expelled, perhaps the junior would only be flogged. He would escape the worst punishment. But—but he shrank from the thought of it—from the scornful looks. If there were only some other way! What if he defied Harry Wharton & Co. to do their worst? When the Head knew about the letter, and that Bolsover had claimed it as his, his connection with the poacher would be established: he could only exculpate himself by inculpating Valence. And if he betrayed Valence, Valence most certainly would bring him into it again; if all were discovered, the blackguard of the Sixth would not suffer alone. He would tell everything he could, to mitigate his own punishment as much as possible. Besides, through Valence, Jeff Griggs would be found out, and the poacher, if he were betrayed from Greyfriars, would tell all he could about the Greyfriars fellows—he would revenge himself upon both of them as much as possible.

Whichever way he turned, Bolsover saw the same answer—inquiry the Famous Four would start upon the subject of the poacher's letter.

He realised it at last, and made up his mind.

If the truth was to come out, he could, at all events, have the credit of making a voluntary confession—and he could tell his story before Valence told his—he would have that advantage.

The half-hour had elapsed when Harry Wharton knocked at the study door. Bolsover turned a haggard face towards him as the door opened.

"Have you decided?" asked Harry.

"Yes."

"Well?"

"I'm going to the Head."

"Good!"

And Bolsover tramped away heavily to the Head's study. Dr. Locke was there with Mr. Quelch. The two masters were discussing the case of Bolsover minor, and both of them looked very grave and worried. Dr. Locke looked kindly enough to Bolsover. He could see the stress in the junior's face, and he attributed it to anxiety on his brother's account.

"What is it, Bolsover?" he asked gently.

Bolsover gasped. His task seemed harder than ever now that he was in the presence of the Head and his Form-master. But he had to go through with it.

"I've got something to say, sir," said Bolsover huskily.

"I've come to confess, sir."

The Head started, and Mr. Quelch bent a peculiar glance upon the Remove bully.

"Confess, Bolsover?" repeated Dr. Locke in wonder.

"Yes, sir. I—I can't have my minor expelled for—for standing up for me, sir."

"For you?" exclaimed the Head.

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Quelch broke in.

"Do you mean, Bolsover, that it was you who were out with the poachers last night, and that your minor is shielding you?"

"Yes, sir," groaned Bolsover.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Head in amazement.

"Tell Dr. Locke all about it, Bolsover," said the Remove-master quietly.

"I—I went out with another chap last night, sir," said Bolsover miserably. "I—I thought it was only a lark, to bag a few rabbits. I had no idea it was going to turn out like this. My—my minor found out I was going, and he hung about to try and stop me—and I wish I'd listened to him now."

"It would have been better for you," said the Head quietly.

"Well, sir, I went, and—and two met the poacher, and—and then the keeper showed up, and there was trouble. I had no idea it was going to be anything of that sort. I never thought about the keepers—at least, I thought a chap might have to cut and run, but—but I never thought about that brute bashing him with a cudgel. I—I fainted when I saw him in the grass, sir, and the others ran and left me, and I hardly know how I got away. My minor didn't go out. He knows about my going out, because he tried to stop me. And—and that's all, sir."

"Your minor seems to have acted a very noble part, and

I understand now his obstinate refusal to speak," said the Head. "Who was the boy you went out with?"

"Must I tell you, sir?"

"If not me, you must tell Inspector Grimes, Bolsover. I have told you that this is a police matter. I shall telephone for the inspector at once, and you will tell him what you have told me. Don't you understand that you will be required as a witness before the magistrates? You will have to tell the name of your companion, and of the poacher whom you met in the wood—who, as you say, struck the keeper down."

"It was Jeff Griggs," faltered Bolsover.

"Ah, I thought so! And the boy who left Greyfriars with you?"

"Valence, of the Sixth, sir."

"Will you call Valence here, Mr. Quelch?"

The Remove-master nodded, and quitted the room. In a few minutes he returned with the Sixth Former, white as death, and almost staggering as he walked. Valence knew when the Form-master fetched him to the Head's study that all was up. And the terrible blow that had fallen upon him seemed to crumple him up like a leaf. The Head fixed his glance upon the senior more in sorrow than in anger.

"Valence, Bolsover has confessed."

Valence muttered something inarticulately.

"You went out with the poachers last night, Valence, and you took this junior boy with you!"

Valence moistened his dry lips.

"He would come!" he said. "I didn't want him. He knew about me, and forced himself upon me. I—I——"

"I thought it would be a lark, sir," said Bolsover.

"I can quite believe," said the Head, "that neither of you dreamt that the matter would turn out so dreadfully serious. I am quite sure that neither of you had hand or part in the assault upon the head keeper. I am sure the magistrates will take the same view. But to clear yourselves the guilt must be fastened upon the right shoulders. You will both have to appear as witnesses against the man Griggs. I shall do my best for you with the magistrates, and I have every hope that they will take a lenient view, and regard you as a pair of reckless, foolish boys, led into trouble by a wicked, lawless man. And in that case you will be discharged with a caution."

"And—and then, sir?"

"You will leave Greyfriars, Valence. You can hardly expect to be allowed to remain here after bringing this disgrace upon the school. Bolsover, as a junior boy, is less responsible, and it counts also in his favour that he has owned up and saved his brother from unjust punishment. Bolsover will be flogged in public, and given a chance to mend his ways."

The Remove bully drew a deep, deep breath of relief. He was not out of danger yet, but he could see light. But Valence, overcome by what had befallen him, slunk from the room with a face like a ghost. And boys in the Sixth Form passage, some time afterwards, could hear a sound of miserable sobbing from the schoolboy poacher's room.

* * * * * * * * * * *

Billy was released from the locked room a few minutes later. The fag hardly understood at first the turn events had taken, but he learned that the truth was all known, and that he had been saved by Bolsover major owning up to the Head. Harry Wharton & Co. told him that much, and did not tell him more. They did not feel called upon to tell in public of the pressure they had brought to bear upon the Remove bully. Bolsover major was in deep disgrace enough, and they were willing to let him have any credit he could get from his confession. And Billy's delight was so keen when he heard that his brother had saved him by confessing that they would not have had the heart to tell him more. The fag rushed away at once to find his brother, and he found him haggard and miserable, in his study. Bolsover looked at him grimly as he rushed in.

"Percy!" gasped the fag.

"Well!" said Bolsover harshly.

"You've saved me, Percy! It's orlright now. I—I knew you'd not let me be sacked, Percy," said Billy timidly.

Bolsover smiled grimly.

"Oh, you knew that, did you?" he said.

"Yo-e-es, Percy. I mean I 'oped it, anyway," said the fag. "It was splendid of you to own up and get me off, Percy."

The Remove bully burst into a savage laugh.

"Well, I didn't own up to get you off, you young ass," he said; "I owned up because I had to, so you needn't thank me. Get out!"

And Billy got out. Tubb and Paget met him in the passage and linked arms with him, and marched him off in triumph.

"All screne now!" grinned Tubb.

"Yes, through Percy playing the game like that," said Bolsover minor.

Tubb snorted.

"I expect he couldn't keep it dark," he said. "I fancy—oh—ow! Lemmy nose alone, you silly young ass! Oh!"

"Well, you let Percy alone, then!" grinned Bolsover minor, releasing Tubb's nose. "Don't jaw—come and licker up in ginger-pop to celebrate."

And they did.

Greyfriars learned later, not without satisfaction, that Jeff Griggs had been sent to prison for a considerable term for the assault upon the head keeper of Sir Hilton Popper, the evidence obtained from Valence and Bolsover being conclusive. Valence left Greyfriars, and Bolsover major duly took his flogging, and bore it with his usual hardihood. Whether the flogging was likely to do the Remove bully much good was a question, but certainly he was not likely to try his hand again as a Schoolboy Poacher!

THE END.

OUR GRAND SERIAL STORY!

THROUGH TRACKLESS TIBET!

CHING-LUNG IN THE FORBIDDEN LAND.

A Wonderful Story of Ferrers Lord, Millionaire, Rupert Thurston, and Gan-Waga.

BY SIDNEY DREW.

(READ THIS FIRST.)

Wishing to explore the practically unknown land of Tibet, Ferrers Lord, millionaire, makes up a party, including Prince Ching-Lung, Rupert Thurston, Gan-Waga, the Eskimo, and a number of the crew of the Lord of the Deep, to travel with him across Tibet to Kwai-Hal, the capital of Ching-Lung's province in China.

The party, conducted by an Afghan guide named Argal-Dinjat, have just crossed the Himalayas into the Forbidden Land, when, on reaching a Tibetan village ruled by an Irishman named Barry O'Rooney, they are attacked by the notorious pirate and outlaw, Storland Sahib, and a band of his ruffianly followers. Things are looking serious for the party when they are rescued by Ferrers Lord's wonderful aeronef, the Lord of the Skies. They are flying over the crater of an extinct volcano, when the engines suddenly stop working, and they are sent hurtling down through the crater into an underground lake. The damage caused is so great that Ferrers Lord gives up hope of ever getting the aeronef out of the cavern. Hal Honour, the engineer, however, makes a strange promise, and says that within two months he will rescue the whole crew. Punctually to the hour, Honour fulfils his promise, and the miniature aeronef he has constructed rises from the black crater into the sunshine above with the first load of passengers, consisting of Ching-Lung, Gan-Waga, and O'Rooney. The aeronaut rescues the remaining members of the crew, and goes back once more for Ferrers Lord and the stores. He fails to return, and Ching-Lung is just making up a search party, when he receives a message, saying that the aeronef is delayed, but all is well. Ching-Lung is captured by Storland Sahib. Gan-Waga starts off to rescue his friend, and on the way makes one of Storland Sahib's soldiers a prisoner.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Escape.

"I goin' blow yo' fat face off!" Gan-Waga remarked. "It look better blowed off."

He took careful aim at the Mongol's flat nose. With another yell the wretched man fell flat upon the ground, scraped a hole feverishly with both hands, and plunged his head into it, just as ostriches are supposed to do. Then he began to hammer with his toes in a wild fashion.

A grin covered Gan-Waga's face from ear to ear. He would have grinned more had he known the prisoner was calling him "Immortal one," "Beautiful stranger with the face of the morning sun," "Glorious chief," "Ruler of the flying dragon" (the aeronef), and other poetical names.

Gan-Waga could not make up his mind how to proceed. He felt proud of having taken a prisoner, but he was saddled with a white elephant. What could he do with the man?

He did the most sensible thing to commence with—looted the prisoner's bandolier of cartridges and his knife. Then he distinguished himself by another brilliant action—an action that showed his brains were in excellent working order. He removed the man's shoes.

It was a master-stroke. The sand bristled with sharp flints, and even a Mongol could not run on spiky stones barefooted. He was just wondering what else to do, when the matter was decided for him in startling fashion.

Plink-plonk, plink-plonk, plink-plonk!

Preceding the reports came the "tss, tss, tss!" of bullets that missed and clattered into the wood. Gan-Waga stood dazed for a second.

"Run for it, Gan—into the wood, you dear old idiot! Do you want to be cold meat?"

There was no mistaking Ching-Lung's voice; and, with his arms flying like flails, Gan-Waga bolted. They were firing at him from the far end of the village street, after a vain pursuit of Ching-Lung. The prince had let no grass grow under his nimble feet. As Prout often said, once his Highness began to move, nothing could catch him up, except a bullet or a flash of lightning.

A dozen men were in pursuit. From their position they could only see Gan-Waga's head and shoulders, for the barricade built when Storland Sahib made his second attack was in their way.

"Where are you, Chingy?" gasped the Eskimo.

"Here, you rascal! Make your stumps travel, or you'll be a corpse!"

Gan-Waga saw the figure of his friend at the end of a dark glade. They ran on, one behind the other. The shouting grew louder behind them. On the open ground Storland Sahib's wolves were coming on rapidly, while the undergrowth hampered the fugitives. And every instant the undergrowth grew denser and more impassable.

"By Jove!" muttered Ching-Lung between his teeth. "We've lost the way to the river! I've done it now!"

What was that?

Both men paused and looked at each other. From right and left cry answered cry. The Mongols knew the woods. They had found paths which Ching-Lung was ignorant of. They were closing in.

Then the shots rang out ahead.

Gan-Waga's jaw dropped.

"We can't get to the river, Ganus," said Ching-Lung cheerfully, "so we'll have to play at monkeys again. Give me that rifle, and keep your pecker up. Here's the very tree!"

The tree he had selected had a tremendous trunk, and high up its dense foliage shut out every glimpse of sky. A mass of creepers rendered it as easy to climb as a ladder. Higher and higher they went.

"That'll do," said Ching-Lung. "Lie down on this big branch, sonny, and play 'possum."

He looked down. The ground was seventy feet below them. A few figures appeared in the open space. Then they heard Storland Sahib's angry voice. He spoke so fast in the native tongue that Ching-Lung could not catch his words; but he was in a boiling passion.

He remained beneath the tree, fuming and pulling at his beard, while his frightened followers began to search the undergrowth. Then he bent down, and as sharply looked up. His flashing eyes became fixed on the trunk of the giant tree.

What had he seen?

It was the bruised stem of a creeper. Higher up, another creeper was detached from the trunk. He stepped back out of sight, and the next moment a whistle pealed shrilly through the wood.

"He's found our tracks," thought Ching-Lung, "and knows we're up here. This is where we don't enjoy ourselves. Hallo!"

He was looking towards another tree quite twenty yards away. A great rope of creepers joined it with the branch on which he lay. And what he saw was a triangular hole in the trunk. The hole could not be seen from the ground, or the creeper itself, so thick was the foliage. He knew the whistle had sounded to recall the hill pirates.

"Gan," he whispered, "dare you follow me across that?"

He pointed to the natural rope of twisted stems.

"'Fraid of nothin' wid you, Chingy."

"Good man! You're a hero, Ganus. Follow me, then."

It was impossible to cross the creeper hand over hand; it was far too thick to grip. Ching-Lung coiled both arms and legs round it, and began to shuffle along. Gan-Waga followed, his eyes tightly closed.

"Eureka!" muttered Ching-Lung.

There was ample room to pass through the hole. But was the trunk hollow all the way down? Ching-Lung was too cautious to risk a seventy-feet drop into the heart of a tree. His feet touched a spongy mass of rotting wood.

"Eureka! In you come, Gan!"

He dragged in the Eskimo. All was silent below. Ching-Lung reached out with his rifle. Their refuge was quite a spacious one, but very dark.

"We'll be as merry as a couple of owls in here, Gan," said Ching-Lung. "All the same, I should like to know what their game is. They're pretty quiet—too jolly quiet. What are they up to?"

There was a rustling, scraping sound.

"Climb tree," whispered the Eskimo. "Look! See him?"

"You're right."

Perhaps Storland Sahib thought his foes unarmed, or in the distance he had mistaken Gan-Waga for Ching-Lung. He knew Ching-Lung was weaponless. Or perhaps it was his element of human life that allowed him to send his wolves on such a perilous mission.

Certainly they were climbing—a dozen of them. Dark eyes flashed through the leaves. Slowly they came up, armed with knives and revolvers, and from below Storland Sahib cursed them, and told them to go faster.

"They don't seem to have much stomach for the job," grinned Ching-Lung. "do they, Gan?"

"Dey don't not, Chingy," murmured the Eskimo.

"Do you see him—do you see him?" cried Storland Sahib impatiently."

"No, sahib—not yet. The dog hides well."

"Higher—higher!"

Ching-Lung felt that the hiding-place they had found so luckily was fairly secure. One of the Mongols—a lithe, sinewy fellow—was emerging. He climbed like a monkey. He paused and stared at the creeper, or liane, by which Ching-Lung and Gan-Waga had gained their refuge. His little beady eyes followed the natural rope keenly.

"I believe the beast has seen something," muttered Ching-Lung. "What's he watching? Stick in your tuppeny, Gan, or he'll spot you. Hallo, hallo! That won't do!"

The native was testing the strength of the liane with his foot.

"He's coming across, Gan."

"Den he catch us."

"Will he?" growled the prince. "Watch him jump."

Ching-Lung pursed his lips and imitated the angry hiss of a snake.

"Tsssss!"

To the Mongol it sounded close at his ear. He uttered a frightened cry, sprang round, lost his hold, and fell crashing through the branches. He thudded from bough to bough before he struck the ground. There he lay senseless.

Ching-Lung chuckled. They had got rid of the suspicious gentleman. If Storland Sahib had not been there, he could have frightened the superstitious Mongols out of their skins by filling the branches with voices. The Mongols would take the sounds for the voices of devils; but he could not hoodwink the renegade Englishman, and he was too wise to try.

"Do you see him?" roared Storland Sahib.

He received the same answer, and began to stride up and down savagely. Gan-Waga took out his knife and crawled across the spongy floor of the hole. He tapped the inner wall of the tree with the knife-haft here and there. Then he gave a dig and a twist with the point of the blade, and a ray of sunlight burst in.

"Chingy!"

"Yes, Ganus?"

"Can see boys?"

"What?"

Ching-Lung put his eye to the hole. There was a vista between the trees, and he could distinctly see the brown mud of the island and the dense mass across the river. The water was falling swiftly now. Only the indistinct figures were moving about. All at once a tree toppled forward and fell.

"What dey doin'?"

"Cutting trees to make a raft," said Ching-Lung grimly. "That's a risky game, tallow-eater."

"Why dat was risky, Chingy?"

"Because, you mass of blubber," answered Ching-Lung, "once they get the thing afloat Storland Sahib will dose them with lead-pepper. They can't manage a raft in a current like that. I suppose the dear old asses are anxious about us. But," he added firmly, "they've got to be stopped."

"Take 'um long time build raft, hunk, Chingy? Got no nailses and ropeses."

"They'll manage somehow. There's bark on some of those trees just like fibre. It's good enough to tie a few spars together with. They won't be afloat for some time yet, and lots may happen before our whiskers turn grey. Let's take another peep at the other lot."

The climbers had retreated—baffled. Ching-Lung grinned as he listened to the wrathful voice of Storland Sahib. There was a crashing of undergrowth trodden down by many feet. Silence followed. Then Ching-Lung laid his hand on Gan-Waga's shoulder and wept tears of joy and mirth.

"Dey goned, Chingy?" grinned the Eskimo.

"My beautiful, blubbery youth, dey have goned. They have vamoosed, slid, bunked, bevelled, hooked it, got, sloped, shot the moon, flitted, cleared, and otherwise made themselves scarce."

Gan-Waga's eyes rounded in amaze.

"Do all of 'um mean 'goned,' Chingy?"

"They do."

"Den I not try learn English no more," said Gan-Waga solemnly. "It too much. Don't like him."

"Bosh, my sweet candle-chewer! You speak it like a phonograph. Can you say this three times without stopping, 'The sea ceaseth, and that sufficeth us; so she sells sea-shells on the seaside shore'? That's what you call a tongue-twister."

"Want ten tongueses fo' dat. Can you say 'Tchlakoilayesimeshaywktcha'?"

"Great Jupiter, no!" gasped Ching-Lung. "What does it mean?"

"Him Eskimo fo' whisky."

"Never mind," said Ching-Lung; "if I can't say it, I can drink it. I wonder if those beggarly Mongols have really slipped the cables? I'll have a little stroll. This is what you can't do, Ganus."

"What dat?"

"Dat is dis, my fat one."

Gan-Waga stared and stared in mingled terror and delight. Ching-Lung stood erect on the great rope of creepers, and then tripped along it with the skill of a Blondin. He turned and came back.

"Gan," he said, with a sweeping bow, "why don't you applaud? When I first performed that trick in a London music-hall I was presented with several acres of land by the delighted audience."

"Oh, my, dey was pleased!"

"Yes," said Ching-Lung, "they must have been. They gave me the land in handfuls—a handful of mud at a time. They also gave me a few cabbages to plant on it. But just notice the ease—— Oh, murder! Chuck me a rope!"

Ching-Lung flung up his arms, and, as he fell, the horrified Eskimo thought it was all over. But Ching-Lung's toes caught the liane in ample time, and as he swayed head downwards, he lighted one of Storland Sahib's cigars with a match that had once belonged to the renegade.

"This is a lovely cure for corns, Gan," he said. "I could sleep like this."

"Make de blood go into yo' head."

"No such thing. There's no room for blood in my head, on account of the brains. It's lovely to smoke a cigar upside-down, for you don't get the smoke in your eyes. Good-bye!"

He fell. His hands clutched a branch below. The next moment he was up again like a monkey, lying at full length on the liane, enjoying his cigar.

"What are those boys doing now, Gan?"

The Eskimo went to the hole.

"Some standing in water," he said. "Dey tyin' logs up togedder."

Ching-Lung looked up dreamily. Far above him another creeper joined the topmost branches of the two trees together two hundred feet from the ground. The liane seemed no thicker than a pipe-cleaner. A mad longing to perform on it seized Ching-Lung. He was in a reckless mood, and he did not pause to think twice.

"Gan!"

Gan-Waga's head was thrust out of the hole.

"I listenin', Chingy."

"I'm going upstairs."

"Where he live?"

"Up to the top of the tree," said Ching-Lung. "Come and play the monkey-on-the-stick business, Ganus."

He climbed swiftly. Gan-Waga panting after him. Twice the Eskimo had to rest.

"Tired—eh?"

"Bustled," panted Gan-Waga. "Had 'nough."

"Oh, come on a bit further," said Ching-Lung cheerfully.

Thus encouraged, Gan-Waga puffed and gasped his way upwards. Ching-Lung had not forgotten the rifle. The tree was one of the tallest in the whole forest, and its green crest stood high above its fellows.

Ching-Lung reached the liane, passed it, and swarmed higher. There was a rattle of rifles, a chorus of wolfish yells. His eyes dilated as he turned his head to stare down. The raft was afloat and whirling down the current. Three or four figures were huddled on it. And from the bank the pirates were firing madly.

The Aeronef Reappears from its Underground Prison—Brilliant New Plans to Reach Kwai-Hai—"The King of the Roads"—O'Rooney Tells a Thrilling Story.

Most of the men were still on the island. The raft, by some mischance, had broken loose before it was completed,

carrying with it Prout and three of his comrades, who had been working at it. The logs were awash, offering a difficult mark for the Mongol bullets. Those on the island who still had their rifles replied with a spattering fire.

The current was drifting the raft closer. Then Ching-Lung saw that there were no figures upon it. The men had taken to the water. Amid cheers from their comrades, and yells of rage from the foe, they regained the patch of mud. Then a shell went hissing towards the island.

Ching-Lung, on his lofty perch, heaved a sigh of relief. He saw the mud fly up in a black, blinding shower as the shell exploded. He could even, through the leaves, see the muzzle of the seven-pounder that had belched out the missile.

All at once he heard a sound that quickened the beating of his heart. He climbed like a squirrel to the very summit of a tree.

"Frrrr! F-r-r-r-r! F-r-r-r-r!"

They were cheering on the island. Ching-Lung tore off his blouse with feverish haste. He could see right over the forest—the village, the white, glaring ground, the dazzling peak, the shining sky—and between earth and sky hung a flying object—the aeronef!

She had come at last. Ching-Lung wanted to yell and shriek and howl and bellow. A shout, however, might have attracted a shower of bullets in his direction, so he thought he would curb his excitement and delight, and give vent to it on a less dangerous occasion. He knotted his silk blouse to the barrel of the rifle.

"Frrrr! F-r-r-r-r! F-r-r-r-r!"

The drone and buzz of her suspensory screws and propellors were the sweetest strains Ching-Lung had heard for many a day. It was delicious music. She was heading for the river. He could see moving forms on her deck. She rushed over the stream, came back, sank, and there was a deafening shriek of terror.

Cr-ack! cr-ack! cr-ack! rang her rifles, and then the cartridges began a race through the breech of her Maxim with a prolonged crackling scream that echoed and rattled through the trees, and six hundred bullets swept the bank in one minute.

One minute was enough, and Storland Sahib's wolves fled. Fierce as the fire had been for that brief time, it had not been very successful, for the shelter had been too good. The Mongols left five men dead, the seven-pounder, eleven rifles, and some ammunition behind.

The aeronef was swinging round. Ching-Lung snapped his rifle off, and waved his flag.

"The impudent rascals!" said Ferrers Lord. "Do they still want to fight?"

"Over there," said Hal Honour laconically.

"Where, Honour?"

"Big tree."

The millionaire lifted his field-glasses.

"By Jove," he cried, "it's Ching-Lung!"

Hal Honour forced down the wheel. The aeronef halted about ten yards above the tree. Ching-Lung grinned up at the astonished faces that looked over the rail.

"Hallo!" said Ferrers Lord. "What in the name of nonsense are you up here for?"

"Gathering nuts!" said Ching-Lung.

"Me too, Chingy!" gurgled a voice from the green depths. "Me gatherin' nutses ditto!"

"What? Two of you?"

"Me and another, old chap, which makes two odd ones. The gentleman who rents the floor below is Gan-Waga, Perspire——"

"Exwire, please, Chingy!" remarked Gan-Waga.

"Well, aren't you perspiring, idiot?"

Gan-Waga was, and did not deny it.

The men began to grin, and Hal Honour's eyes twinkled.

"Waga, Perspire," went on Ching-Lung, "who rents the rooms below and never pays for them, is nothing more than a criminal——"

"I ain't not!"

"Oh, shut up, and let me talk! I repeat he is a criminal and a fugitive from justice. He met a poor man with a rifle, assaulted the man in a brutal fashion, and boned the gun. At that moment the hounds of justice got on his scent, and we got up here out of the way."

"And do you intend to stay there?" asked Ferrers Lord, smiling.

"Well," chuckled Ching-Lung, "we don't like the house very much, and are thinking of leaving. The stairs are steep, its draughty, and there's no water laid on. I think we'll go, if you'll sling us a line. Higher up, Gan, my giddy one."

A series of grunts heralded the appearance of Gan-Waga's face, which shone like the morning sun. A sling was lowered. Gan-Waga took his seat in it, and strong arms hauled him on board. Ching-Lung followed, to have his hand shaken and his back patted a score of times.

The aeronef headed for the muddy island, where a group of lunatics were dancing and yelling.

"Hurrah! hurrah!"

"Hip, hip!" roared Ching-Lung.

"Yow-ah!" bellowed Gan-Waga.

The little vessel halted in the clearing, and hovered over the ooze. Honour's clear voice rang out:

"Logs!"

His gesture was enough. He wanted some foundation for the aeronef to rest upon. Prout set to work with his axe. As the raft had only been half-completed, many other logs were lying about. They were quickly laid in a square. The aeronef descended as lightly as a feather, and grounded.

There was unlimited food aboard her. What a meal the hungry men made, and how delicious tobacco tasted afterwards! Gan-Waga had a pound of candles all to himself, and his face grew oily with joy. The sun was so hot that an awning was erected on deck. There, with a magnum of champagne, which had been cooled in the river, and cigarettes, Ferrers Lord, Rupert, Hal Honour, and Ching-Lung sat together.

The millionaire had little news to tell. The overheating of the aeronef's bearings had caused more trouble than they had expected, but nothing unusual had happened underground. Argal-Dinjat, the Afghan guide, was almost well, but very sullen.

But Ferrers Lord's face grew grave and stern when Ching-Lung told what he had learned from Storland Sahib during his short captivity.

"Bad," he said—"very bad! The Chinese Court is very bitter against you. We must push on to Kwai-Hal, I can see. The state of affairs gets more urgent every day."

"But O'Rooney says no money will buy horses.

"Why?"

"Storland Sahib again," answered Ching-Lung gloomily.

Hal Honour, silent as ever, filled his glass. Then he stroked his chin.

"Useless brutes!" he said suddenly.

The three men were surprised. Very rarely indeed did the steersman speak unless spoken to.

"You mean horses?" said Ferrers Lord.

The handsome engineer nodded.

"In some respects they are," admitted the millionaire, "especially in war. I love horses, but they certainly have their shortcomings. They require an enormous amount of food, are prone to disease, go lame just when you want them most, and stampede just for the fun of the thing. I wish we had let you bring bicycles, Honour. Bad as the roads are, we could have got through. A man can always carry a bicycle over difficult places. Call O'Rooney.

"Barry!"

"Yis, sor!"

"Come here!" cried Ching-Lung.

O'Rooney pulled his forelock.

"You think, O'Rooney," said Ferrers Lord, "that we have little chance of getting hold of horses or ponies?"

"Niver the tail o' wan, sor. There's not six widin a hundred moile."

"That is awkward. But why not?"

"Oi'll tell yez, sor," said Barry. "Loike the poem says:

"'Oi cannot marry Biddy,
For, faith, ut is no go.
She's the swatest little widdy;
But Oi'll niver marry Biddy,
'Cos she always hollers "No!"'

"Well, sor, that's how ut is. Storland Sahib, the ugly thafe, hollers, 'No!' He's collectin' horses from all over the shop. He's got bushels of thim hid away in the hills."

"By Jove, Honour, why should we not explore and find them?"

The engineer was silent, but Barry grinned.

"Ut wouldn't be an aisy job, sor, Oi'm thinkin'," he said. "Safe foind—Oi mane, 'Safe boined, safe foined,' is his motto, the rascal!"

"Very well; that will do, O'Rooney."

Barry saluted, and went to sit on a log to think out a poem he had in his head.

"Well, Ching, what can you suggest?"

"How many will the aeronef carry, old chap?"

"Ten, at the most."

"Why not leave me here with the men," said Rupert, "while some of you make a dash for Kwai-Hal? There's plenty of food and ammunition left on the old airship, and we could build a fort."

Honour and the millionaire looked inquiringly at Ching-Lung.

"That might be done, Ching."

"But it won't be done," said Ching-Lung determinedly. "Outlawed or not, I won't have it. If we go at all, we all go together. I won't hear of it."

Hal Honour put down his glass.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you can get no horses."

"That seems to be the condition," answered Rupert.

"And it is most important for his Highness to go to Kwai-Hal?"

"It's life or death!" groaned Ching-Lung.

The engineer slowly struck a match.

"I will make you a horse," he said.

Ching-Lung leapt to his feet.

"A motor-car!" he cried. "Is that what you mean?"

Hal Honour nodded.

"Give it three cheers!" yelled Ching-Lung. "We'll call him the 'King of the Roads'! Three rousing cheers for Hal Honour and the 'King of the Roads'! Let 'em go! Hip, hip——"

"Hurrah!"

They could not doubt the quiet engineer's words. He had built an aeronef, and he would build a motor-car. While the men, wildly excited, were talking about the startling scheme, Hal Honour and the millionaire were already busy at their calculations.

"We have ample material," said Ferrers Lord.

"Ample. To carry all the men, one car would be too heavy and cumbrous."

"If we draw a car behind us, that will be awkward over the bad roads," said the millionaire. "I think I have a better idea than that. We had better build two four-wheeled cars, each independent of the other. We can attach or detach them at will by a leather arrangement similar to those in corridor-trains."

"I think that is the best plan. I cannot promise you much of a pace."

"Why not? We have the aeronef."

Honour started.

Ching-Lung, who was watching them, burst into a laugh.

"Good enough, chaps," he said. "Why, you don't really want any motors at all, only the cars! The aeronef can tow them. Towed through Tibet—what a glorious idea!"

"Grand!" said Thurston. "I once saw a carriage towed by kites in America, but it was useless where there were telegraph-wires or bridges to go under."

"But we sha'n't be worried by such things."

Hal Honour spoke again quietly. He had been making calculations once more.

"The aeronef is quite capable of towing a car four times as heavy as the one we shall require," he said; "but it will be quite as well to put a motor in it, so that it may be independent of the aeronef, if necessary. I see no difficulty in building the car. My difficulty will be with the tyres. I am a worker in metals, not in rubber; but I do not intend to be beaten. We have no lack of rubber."

"I should think not," said Ching-Lung, "when the airship is lined with it. What about the motors?"

"They will be similar to those that drive the aeronef. I must overhaul the wrecked airship again."

There was a long discussion. Finally, it was decided to return to the cavern again. They had their furnace there, and coal. Just at dusk the aeronef made its last journey, and the men again in the cavern that had once been their [illegible]

"Good old coalhole!" said Ching-Lung, as he leapt out on the sand. "I'm going fishing again to-morrow."

"I'm your man!" said Rupert.

"Oh, I don't want you, sonny. You might go barmy again. Once is enough for a lifetime. I think it's blacker down here than ever. Strike a match, and let me see whether my watch is ticking. Hooray! There goes the light!"

Two of the arc lamps on the wreck blazed out, throwing their bluish glare across the water and beach. Ben Maddock built a gallant fire, and soon hungry nostrils smelled the appetising odour of bacon. After a sleepless night and an anxious day they were glad enough to gather round the fire.

"Now," said Prout, "tell us a yarn."

"A ghost-yarn," chimed in several voices. "Now, Barry, you're the man!"

O'Rooney's finger and thumb were apparently fireproof, for he picked up a glowing coal and placed it in the bowl of his pipe.

"Oi cud tell yez tales to freeze yer blud," he said—"tales to make the hair of yez sthand up loike the bristles of a brush—tales to make yer teeth chatter and yer eyes dhrop out wid horror!"

"Spout away, then!"

"Ah, thin, Oi will!" said Barry. "Silence all! Oi know not wan of yez iver hearrd this."

There was quiet at once. Barry cleared his throat.

"Wance upon a toime," he began, "there was a little girl named Little Rid Roidinghood, and——"

A chorus of groans stopped him.

"Can ut be," said Barry, in pretended astonishment, "that yez have hearrd ut afore?"

"Heard it before, you Irish idiot!" growled Prout politely. "We heard it in our cradles."

"But yez niver hearrd about the Three Bears and Little Curly Locks, or Jack and the Banestalk, or——"

"Rats! rats!"

"Thin Oi'll tell yez somethin' fresh," chuckled O'Rooney, "and no chaff. Ut may be an ould sthory, but Oi know ut's thrue, bekase ut was towld me boie me granddad, who was dumb and bloind and parachuted—Oi mane, paraloised—at the toime. Not bein' able to spake, he niver towld a loie. I gives yez fair warnin' to prepare to trimble!

"Ut was Christmas Eve in Ballybigboite Castle, a big counthry mansion, near Corrk, where the loifebelts come from. The great drawin'-room was darrk. Outsoide the wind howled, droivin' the snow agin the winders. Ut was darrk insoide, bekase the loights had been turned down; and, sated round the foire, the ladies and gints, in evenin'-dhress, was listhin' to the ould squoire tellin' about the ghost what haunted the castle.

"'At dead of noight,' sez the squirre, in tones that made the girrls cuddle closer to the min, 'the ghost comes forth. Chains rattle, and holler groans fill the haunted room. Ut is death to see the grisly phantom. Those of me ancestors who have seed him have been found nixt day cowld and stiff, wid horror in their glassy oies, and black fingermarrks on their swollen throats. The spectre appears wid a dagger in his hearrt and chains hangin' from his bony wrists. He walks to-noight!'"

Barry paused in his thrilling narrative for a moment; then he continued:

"That made the girrls cuddle closer, and gave the min of the company a cowld shiver at the back of their westkits.

"'Dhrops of blud,' wint on the squirre, 'marrks the phantom's course. At midnoight every Christmas Eve he comes forth. And there goes the clock!'

"They all shuddered as the clock struck twelve. Thin the blud of ivry sowl of thim turned cowld. There was a clattering, clankin' noise overhead—the rattle of chains. The squoire turrned pale; the girrls screeched and catched howld of the nearest objict, which was generally a young min.

"Clink-clank! Rattle-clink! Clink-clank!

"'The spectre!' gasps the squoire. 'Ut's the haunted room!'

"The chain clanked wusser, and there was a horrid sound like a body bein' dragged about the flure. Thin a young gint from London turrns up the loight, and grabs a poker. The girrls all grabs howld of him, and prays him not to go to his dith; but he shakes 'em off. Bein' a young min, wid money and a noice moustache, the girrls don't want to see him kilt. After him they goes, and after thim goes the rist, as scared as rooks whin a gun goes off.

"Clink-clank! Rattle-clink-rattle!

"They reach the dure of the haunted room. The young gint burrsts ut open. A sickenin', awful smell, loike the smell of decayed corrpses, floats out. Girrls screech and faint on the firrst weskits they can foined, and sthrong min grow pale.

"The brave young gint peers into the darrkness. Horror [illegible]"

Barry paused again.

"This is what he sees. A darrk, awful, shapeless object is crawling over the flure, dhraggin' a chain behoind ut. A woild maniac laugh rings through the castle. The nixt instant the min is struggling woildly in the darrkness wid the fearful thing. Then he whips a revolver from his pocket, foires, and all is still! And that's all."

"Did he kill the ghost?" asked Prout.

"Here, hang it all," said Joe, "end it up properly! What was the ghost?"

"Yes, Barry, what was the ghost?"

Barry rose and shook the sand from his clothes.

"Well," he said, "yez see, they used the haunted room for a koind of lardher. Whin loights were brought, the young gint found that he had shot the ghost dead. Ut was the Gorgonzola cheese, and ut had broken uts chain and got loose. Ut was havin' a foight wid a sthring of Limburger sausages whin he came along!"

It was not a very new story, but it was new to the men, and the cavern rang again with their laughter.

Hal Honour was very thoughtful, and they had all been long asleep before the engineer's eyes closed. Practically he had a far easier task before him than the magnificent one he had already accomplished in building the aeronef.

"I'll start to-morrow," he muttered.

And the morrow came almost too soon for many of the tired men. There was a good deal of yawning, stretching, and rubbing of drowsy eyes. Gan-Waga and Barry O'Rooney absolutely refused to budge from their soft, warm couches in the sand.

"Get up, Barry!" said Prout.

A snore answered him.

Tom shook the Irishman, and a sleepy voice murmured:

"'Oh, lit me slape for iver,
For Oi only wake to wurrk,
And ut hurrts.'"

"Lazy old rascal!" growled Maddock. "'Ere, up, Gan, and help me wi' the breakfast."

Gan snored on, and so did Barry. Prout and Maddock dragged the Irishman into a sitting posture.

"Will you get up?"

"Do Oi drame?" lisped the sleeper. "Or is it the honey-swate voice o' Nora McGuire, for luv of whom me heart's a-foire."

"Shake him!" said Prout.

They banged and bumped and shook. A soft smile hovered on Barry's lips. Then his eyes opened.

"He—hello!"

"Oh, you're awake at last, are you?" growled Maddock.

"Oi am; but whoy did yez rouse me from me rest? Oi dhramed Oi was playin' 'kiss-in-the-ring' wid a lot of beautiful heiresses. Go and lave me whoile Oi finish out the dhrame."

"Heiresses playing 'kiss-in-the-ring' with that! Look at it!" said Prout.

"Jump on it!" grunted Maddock. "Let him dream on; he's nicest when he's asleep."

Barry lay down and began to snore again, his head on Gan-Waga's breast.

"Tom," said Joe, with a grin, "let's turn 'em up in their little cots."

"How do you mean?"

"I'll show you. Give me a lift with them."

Prout lent his assistance, and they propped the two sleepers up, sitting back to back. Two or three of the crew looked on in the semi-darkness.

"A rope, quick!"

Barry was lashed firmly to the Eskimo. He absolutely refused to awaken. Smothering their laughter, the men seized their shovels, and swiftly buried the two men in sand up to their chins.

"That's what I call putting 'em to bed nicely!" chuckled Maddock. "Aren't they a pair of sleepin' beauties!"

"The little pets!" laughed Joe. "I could hug 'em!"

"Oi luv her! Oh, Oi luv thee!" murmured Barry.

"What's that he says?"

"That he loves somethin'."

"I'll bet it's not work, then!" grinned Prout.

Joe went on board the wreck of the Lord of the Skies, and returned with a selection of paint-tins and two cocked hats. He coloured Gan-Waga's face red, white, and blue; and Barry's green, white and yellow. Then he put a cocked hat on the head of each.

"We want a notice up," said Prout.

"I'll soon settle that, Tom," answered the carpenter. "Find me a piece of board."

Maddock Gets It in the Ear.

Joe painted "Kindly shy something at us!" on the board in big letters, and stuck the notice in the sand. The light was so dim that only a few of the men were aware of what was going on. But all at once a searchlight flashed out from the aeronef's deck and illumined the strange sight.

The crew began to inspect the strange objects.

"What is it?" asked Ching-Lung. "What a curious thing!"

"I believe it's a kind of cabbage, sir," said Prout.

"It strikes me as being more like a turnip."

"Or some kind of fungus," put in Rupert. "I say, Mr. Honour, what is this?"

Hal Honour pushed his way forward, and inspected the two heads.

"Dear me!" he began. "I——"

"Oi am yer honeysuckle," murmured Barry, "an' yez are me wasp—Oi mane, me bee!"

"Honeysuckle!" said Joe. "Oh, pip! What's the other, then?"

"Hunk!"

Gan-Waga's eyes were open. He was astounded as he stared round the circle of grinning faces.

There was a roar of delight that woke Barry up. He, too, gazed round in amaze.

"Bedad, Oi—luk here—Oi—who am Oi, at all?"

"You are my bee!" grinned Ching-Lung.

"Let go of me!" roared Gan-Waga, trying to get up.

But Gan's feet were tied, and the weight of the sand kept him down. He could not even free his arms. But he managed to screw his head round. O'Rooney was trying the same thing, and they saw each other.

"Howlin' horrors!" moaned Barry. "Take ut away an' scrape ut!"

"Is it a ghost?" gasped Gan.

Something that was of deep interest to them was taking place. Maddock had discovered a keg of apples, and some of the apples were very far from being sound—in fact, they were soft and decayed.

"Three shots a penny, gents! Three shots a penny!" roared the bo'sun. "And a cigar for every bullseye!"

He was at once surrounded by eager customers.

Rupert, however, interfered.

"This won't do, lads," he said.

"But laziness must be punished, sir."

"I think so, too," said Ching-Lung. "But it'll have to be from a long mark. Give me that candle, Tom. I'll put it on a stick beind the prisoners, and the man who knocks it down gets five shillings. The distance will be thirty yards, and only soft apples must be used."

He paced the distance carefully.

Prout prepared to throw.

"Hold on again!" said Ching-Lung. "Every man who throws must walk across in front of the target when another man is throwing, so as to give the prisoners a fair chance. He can dodge, but they can't. Do you agree?"

Prout, Maddock, and Joe did not like the terms in their heart of hearts, but they said nothing.

Ching-Lung handed round the apples, and during the process many of those apples disappeared up his sleeves and into his pockets.

"Are you ready?"

"Oi protests!" shouted Barry. "Oi won't be made a cock-shoy!"

"Nor me, Chingy!"

"Then you should get up in time," said Ching-Lung. "Executioner, proceed!"

The candle was lighted and placed on a stick behind the two heads.

Prout sent an apple whizzing through the air. It missed.

"Next, please," said Ching-Lung. "Across you walk, Tom."

Prout growled as he began to pace across the sand. It was Joe's shot. The steersman got ready to dodge the apple.

"I'll give Barry one in the ear this time," said the carpenter.

"Go, then!"

Joe's apple was never really thrown at all, but Joe did not know it.

Ching-Lung, who stood a few yards nearer the target, caught it with a quickness that the darkness rendered doubly skilful. And then his arm gave a jerk.

And, with a yell, Prout clapped his hand to the back of his neck. A horribly sticky apple had struck him, plastering his neck and hair with a layer of decayed pulp. He scooped the stuff away, and then rushed at Joe.

"You did that a-purpose!"

"Did—did I hit yer?" asked the astonished carpenter.

"Hit me? Why, you tried to hit me! I saw you!"

Joe murmured under his breath and scratched his head.

"If I did, Tom," he said, "then me eyesight is gone!"

"But you did!" roared Prout. "Don't tell me you didn't, if you don't want scalpin'! I could murder——"

"Easy—easy, there, lads! Next, please; and your turn to walk, Joe."

Maddock seized an apple.

"You might give me the five shillings afore I shoot, sir," he said. "I never miss."

"We'll see about that."

Maddock took a run, and prepared for the delivery of a deadly shot. Somehow he tripped, and dived headlong into the sand. It may have been Ching-Lung's foot that was, strangely enough, in his way; but, whatever it was, Maddock ploughed up a few yards of sand with his features, and the apple—or, rather, another apple—broke to juicy fragments on the point of Joe's jaw, and Joe began to dance and yell.

"W-what's it all about?" sighed Maddock, sitting up. "Did—did I slip?"

"Oh! He's broke me face!" spluttered Joe.

"Never moind av ut ends 'appley!" grinned O'Rooney. "Foire away, and niver moind the expense!"

There was a mystery about the two events that set Prout and Rupert thinking. They decided to watch Ching-Lung. Maddock was not permitted to have another shot, and Ching-Lung told one of the men to go next.

(Another long and thrilling instalment of this splendid serial in next week's issue of "THE MAGNET" Library.)

My Readers' Page.

GRAND, NEW, WEEKLY FEATURE.

"A TRAITOR IN THE SCHOOL!"

This is the title of Frank Richards' latest fine story of school life at Greyfriars, which will appear in next Tuesday's MAGNET Library. The famous Remove Form find themselves temporarily under the sway of a master whom they find it hard to respect, and Harry Wharton & Co. become suspicious, with the result that the startling discovery is made that there is

"A TRAITOR IN THE SCHOOL!"

Order your next week's copy of THE MAGNET Library, containing this grand complete school tale

IN ADVANCE!

TO ALL MAGNETITES.

In spite of the notice already published notifying my readers of the closing down of the "Free Correspondence Exchange," I continue to receive requests for correspondents, which my readers ask me to publish under this heading. From this I conclude that there are a number of my readers who are still unaware that this "Exchange" has been discontinued, so that I am referring to the matter again for their benefit. It was indeed a great disappointment for me to have to take the step of discontinuing a feature which had won for itself, in "The Gem" and "MAGNET Libraries, an immense measure of popularity, while I hardly dare think of the effect this drastic step must have had upon hundreds of my chums who were thereby precluded from taking advantage of the splendid "Exchange." The action of a few—happily, a very small minority—readers in abusing the privileges I freely offered them through the "Exchange," left no alternative but to inflict a cruel disappointment upon myself and hundreds of loyal readers. It was another case of the many having to suffer for the sins of a few, and I hope my disappointed readers will realise that I took the only honourable course open to me in closing the "Exchange" down forthwith.

HOW I FIRST CAME TO READ "THE MAGNET."

This week another reader sends me the story of the chance circumstances which led him to become a "Magnetite."

"Doncaster.

"Dear Editor,—I would like to tell you how much I appreciate reading your book, and its companion, "The Gem" Library. I notice in this week's issue the novel way in which E. L. H., of Chichester, was introduced to THE MAGNET, and I would like to tell you how I became one of your readers.

"About three years ago I was walking by myself in a country lane, feeling rather downcast and lonely, when I saw a piece of paper caught in a hedge. Without thinking, I liberated it, and commenced to read it, and found it to be a school story. I read as far as I could, and, like most serial stories, it finished in a most interesting point of the story. My curiosity was aroused, and I looked at the top of the page, and saw it was a book of the name of THE MAGNET. I immediately made my way to the nearest newsagent and purchased the copy, which I read and was delighted with. Ever since that I have been a most ardent reader of THE MAGNET.

"While writing, I would like to say how pleased I was with Harry Wharton's splendid victory in the fight for the captaincy of the Remove. Let us hope he will reign unopposed now he is in his right place.—Yours, etc.,

"P. H. P."

Many thanks for an interesting letter, P. H. P. What a lot of enjoyment you might have missed if you had not happened to pluck that scrap of paper from the hedge!

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

"Loyal Canadian," Vancouver—Thanks for your suggestion, but I am afraid many of my readers would not appreciate the absence of an exciting serial story in the good old MAGNET. However, the gist of your idea is the same as that of my Birmingham reader, to which I referred in last week's Chat—namely, to have the first "Harry Wharton" series reprinted.

"Jolalanck."—I am sorry to learn from your letter—which, by the by, expresses your views with more emphasis than politeness—that you did not like "Saved From Disgrace." In spite of your assertion to the contrary, I am afraid you are somewhat prejudiced against Jews; otherwise, why your objection to this story? You are mistaken in thinking that Frank Richards is of Jewish nationality; it happens that he is not.

SOME CRICKET HINTS.

The sway of King Cricket has begun once more, and now that so many of my readers will be turning their attention to the great summer game, a few hints and remarks upon this wide subject may possibly be helpful to them. We will commence by enumerating a few

Ways of Getting Out.

There are no less than nine of these, as most batsmen know to their cost. They are:

1. Being clean bowled. This is perhaps the most satisfactory way of getting out—if any way may be called satisfactory. Out, at least, there is no doubt about it.
2. Being caught out.
3. Being stumped out.
4. Being run out.
5. Leg before wicket.
6. Hit wicket—i.e, the batsman knocking down his own wicket with his bat.
7. Hitting the ball twice, except in defence of the wicket.
8. Obstructing the field.
9. Handling the ball.

Of all these ways of losing one's wicket, perhaps the most annoying is to be given out "leg before," as there is often an element of doubt in such decisions. Cricketers, however, should remember that whether there is, in their own minds, doubt or not, the decision of the umpire should be considered as final. It is the worst of form to dispute any decision of the cricket-field.

After a season's football, perhaps the point which the young cricketer finds it hardest to master is the matter of judging the speed of the cricket-ball, and the batsman finds difficulty in "timing" his strokes correctly. Accurate "timing" entails not only hitting the ball at the proper moment, but also instantaneously making up one's mind, while the ball is on its way, how it shall be played—whether with a forward or a back stroke, to leg, or to the off, etc. In accurate timing, and in making up one's mind while the ball is still in the air, how it shall be played, lies the whole secret of successful batting. Beginners usually make the mistake of resolving what they will do before the ball has left the bowler's hand, with the result that they make use of the wrong stroke, and fail. They should remember that an experienced bowler seldom allows the batsman to guess what style of ball he is going to bowl, until the leather has actually left his hand. Constant practice—and constant practice only—will enable a batsman to judge as if by instinct how to play every style of ball. This is where the value of constant net-practice comes in; such practice should be indulged in regularly by every one ambitious to be a good batsman. An hour a day regularly will work wonders in this direction. It is at the nets, too, that faulty strokes can be practised and perfected. It is no use waiting for a match to begin trying experiments with the willow. Young batsmen should beware of giving way to the inclination to draw back from the wicket when a fast ball is being delivered by the bowler. This inclination is very strong to commence with, but it must be conquered. It is generally known as "running away." Whatever happens, the right leg should not be allowed to move back—only forward.

No batsman who is in the habit of "running away" can possibly acquire the "straight bat" which is the mark of a good batsman.

THE EDITOR.

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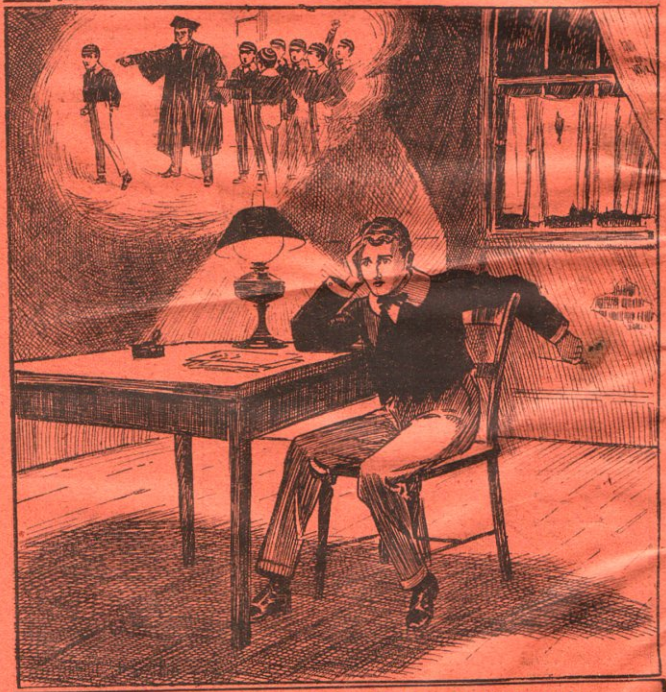

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