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THE PLOT AGAINST MARK LINLEY, THE LANCASHIRE SCHOLARSHIP BOY!

The sporting gentleman caught sight of the Lancashire lad, and staggered unsteadily towards him. "How's my ole pal, Marky?" he inquired affectionately. "I don't know you!" said Mark Linley, white to the lips, as he listened to the mocking laughter of the Greyfriars fellows. "Shame!" roared the juniors. "Stick to your old pal, Linley!"

Down on his Luck!

A Splendid New, Long, Complete School Tale of Mark Linley, the Lancashire Scholarship Boy, and his Chinese study-chum Wun Lung.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Very Queer.

"BOB!"

"Bob Cherry!"

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

Three or four juniors of Greyfriars were lounging in the old gateway of the school, looking idly down the long white road towards Friardale, and talking cricket, when Bob Cherry of the Remove came in. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent of the Remove greeted Bob as he came up from the direction of the village; but Bob Cherry did not reply. He was walking with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, and his brows knitted, and his eyes fixed moodily upon the ground. Bob Cherry was one of the cheeriest and sunniest juniors at Greyfriars, as a rule, and now his gloomy looks made the Removites stare.

"Bob, what's the matter?"

Bob Cherry walked right on without replying. Frank Nugent, who was leaning against the open gate, detached himself from his support, and stepped forward, and Bob Cherry cannoned right into him, and halted, with a gasp.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Walking in your sleep?" asked Nugent pleasantly.

"Eh? No!"

"Then why don't you answer when a fellow speaks to you?" demanded Harry Wharton.

"Eh? I didn't hear you."

"Getting deaf?" asked Johnny Bull.

"No, ass! Don't bother!"

The chums of the Remove stared blankly at Bob Cherry. He was so unlike his usual self that they were simply mystified.

"What's the matter with you, Bob?" the three juniors demanded, together.

"Matter with me?"

"Yes, fathead."

"Nothing."

"Then what are you scowling about?"

"Oh, rats!"

And Bob Cherry, jerking himself away from Nugent, strode on into the Close, and tramped away towards the School House. Harry Wharton & Co. looked after him in utter astonishment.

"Something's up!" said Johnny Bull sagely.

"Blessed if I can make it out," Harry Wharton said, with

a puzzled look. "It's not like Bob to cut up rusty like that. He looks as if he's had a shock."

"He's only been down to Friardale about a new net," said Nugent.

"It's jolly queer."

Without a glance back at his puzzled chums, Bob Cherry tramped across the Close. Two or three juniors called to him in the quad., but he did not reply or glance round. He tramped into the School House, with the same preoccupied and gloomy look upon his face. Temple of the Fourth accosted him in the passage.

"You've just come up from Friardale, Cherry?"

"Eh? Yes."

"Have you seen Gilmore?"

"Blow Gilmore!"

And Bob Cherry went upstairs to the Remove passage, leaving Temple of the Fourth in amazement. The rudeness of Bob Cherry's reply was simply inexcusable, and it was no wonder that the Fourth Former turned red with wrath. It was very evident that Bob Cherry was in a very worried frame of mind, and hardly knew what he was saying.

Bob Cherry went down the Remove passage with the same heavy tread, and threw open the door of his study, No. 13. Bob Cherry shared that study with Mark Linley, the scholarship junior, and little Wun Lung, the Chinese boy. Wun Lung was in the room when Bob Cherry entered—a queer little figure in his peculiar garb, with his little yellow face and sleepy-looking almond eyes. He was stooping before the study fire, making up some mysterious Oriental soup in a frying-pan, and he looked round as Bob came in. It was a warm summer's afternoon, and the fire made the study quite hot, and Bob Cherry, who was warm with walking, grunted discontentedly.

"Beastly hot in here!" he growled.

Wun Lung stared.

It certainly was hot in the study, but it was so utterly unusual for Bob Cherry to complain about anything, that the little Chinee was astounded. He had seldom or never seen the sturdy Removite in a bad temper before.

"What's that rot you're cooking?" demanded Bob Cherry crossly.

"Jolly good soup!" said Wun Lung.

"Oh, chuck it away!"

"Bob Chelly not hungly?" asked Wun Lung.

"Rats! No!"

"Allee light."

And Wun Lung quietly removed the pan from the fire. Bob Cherry made a gesture of extreme irritation.

"Let that fire down, for goodness' sake!" he growled. "It's like an oven."

"Allee light."

Wun Lung answered Bob Cherry's cross remarks with perfect patience and meekness. Bob Cherry had always been his friend and protector, and Wun Lung was devotedly attached to him. Bob had never been ill-tempered with him before, and the little Chinee understood that something very unusual must have happened to make his chum act like this. And he would not have answered in the same tone for worlds. He was only too anxious to do anything he could to please Bob.

Bob Cherry threw himself into the study armchair, and stretched out his long legs. He sat with a worried, frowning brow. Wun Lung looked at him timidly.

"Something the matter, Chelly?" he asked.

Bob growled.

"Yes. No. Oh, rats!"

"Me solly."

Bob Cherry seemed unable to find ease in the armchair. He rose, and crossed to the window, and stared out for a few moments into the Close. Then he grunted, and turned from the window, and strode up and down the study for a few minutes. Wun Lung watched him quietly, with growing amazement.

"Have you seen Linley?" demanded Bob Cherry, abruptly.

"No. Marky is gone out, me tinkee."

"Oh!"

Bob tramped up and down the study again. Wun Lung stood quiet, more and more amazed. He wondered whether there had been trouble between Bob Cherry and Mark Linley. They had always been the closest chums. But as a rule, Bob referred to him as "Marky," and the use of the surname seemed to indicate that something was wrong. And yet, how could there have been trouble? Mark Linley was the most peaceable fellow in the school. Certainly he had been in more than one row, for there were fellows in the Remove—and in other Forms—who were "down" on the scholarship boy. Some of the fellows could not get over the fact that Mark Linley had worked in a Lancashire factory before he won the scholarship which gave him three years at Greyfriars. But Bob Cherry had been his chum from the first, and he was always ready to hit out if anybody made a disparaging remark about the Lancashire lad in his presence.

"What are you staring at me for, you young ass?" Bob Cherry demanded suddenly.

"Me solly."

"Well, don't do it."

"Allee light!"

The meekness of the little Oriental disarmed Bob Cherry, bad-tempered and worried as he was.

"Sorry, kid!" he burst out, in his impulsive way. "Don't mind what I say. I'm frightfully worried, and that's the truth of it. Don't mind me."

Wun Lung grinned faintly.

"Allee light," he said. "You slang me much as likee; me no mind. Allee light!"

Bob Cherry laughed, in spite of himself.

"You're a good little ass," he said. "Oh, dear! You don't know when Marky—I mean Linley—will be coming in, I suppose?"

"No savvy."

"Did he tell you where he was going?"

"No tellee Wun Lung."

"I wish he'd come in."

Bob Cherry tramped up and down the study again. Wun Lung quietly slipped out of the room. He knew that Bob Cherry would prefer to be alone. Bob tramped to and fro, the worried look deepening on his face. He glanced at the clock, and at his big silver watch, alternately. Seven o'clock chimed out from the tower of Greyfriars. Bob Cherry seemed to grow more restless with every passing moment.

"Hang him! Why doesn't he come in! Who'd have thought it of him? Hang him!"

There was a footstep in the passage, and he swung towards the door. The door opened, but it was not Mark Linley who looked in. It was Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove.

"Anything wrong, Bob?" asked Harry. "I thought I'd give you a look in."

"Oh, it's all right. Have you see Linley?"

"No."

"All right then."

"Is there anything wrong, Bob? You look jolly queer."

"No—nothing to talk about, I mean. It's all right. If you don't mind, Wharton, I'd prefer to be alone just now. I've got something to think out."

"I can't help you?"

"No, no!"

"All serene, then!"

And Harry Wharton, very much surprised, withdrew and closed the study door. Bob Cherry resumed his restless tramping to and fro. The quarter chimed out from the clock-tower, and Bob Cherry grunted.

"Why doesn't he come in?"

The handle of the door turned. This time it was Mark Linley who came in. He walked into the study with a book under his arm, and a cheerful expression upon his face. He glanced at Bob, without noticing for a moment his study-mate's unusual expression.

"Hallo, Bob!" he said cheerfully.

Bob Cherry did not reply. He stood still, the frown deepening on his brow. Mark Linley looked at him again, and then his glance became fixed on Bob Cherry's face. He took a quick step towards his chum.

"Bob, what's the matter?"

Bob Cherry drew a deep breath.

"Where have you been?" he said. "That's what I want to know. Where have you been, and what have you been doing?"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

From Friends to Foes.

MARK LINLEY did not reply for a moment.

He gazed at Bob Cherry in surprise, and a flush came into his cheeks. Bob had not spoken in a pleasant tone, and it required an effort on Mark's part to reply without any show of anger. But when he did reply, his voice was calm and even.

"I've been out, Bob."

"Where?"

"In Friardale Wood."

"Not in Friardale?"

"No."

"That's not true."

Mark Linley took a step backwards. Bob Cherry's words seemed to come upon him like a blow in the face. He went quite pale.

"Bob!"

"You heard what I said!" said Bob Cherry grimly. "I didn't expect you to tell me where you'd been under the

Harry Wharton halted in the study door in amazement. Bob Cherry and Mark Linley, who had always been the best of chums, and had never been known to exchange an angry word, were fighting like tigers. "What are you up to?" shouted Harry Wharton. "What does this mean, Bob? What's the matter?"
(*See Chapter* 3.)

circumstances, but I hardly thought you'd tell a lie about it."

"A lie!"

"A fib, I suppose you'd call it," said Bob scornfully. "I call it a lie."

Mark Linley clenched his hands.

"If any other fellow spoke to me like that, Bob, you know how I'd answer," he said. "But I don't want to quarrel with you if I can help it. We've always been good chums. What are you driving at? If anybody has been fooling you, tell me what they've said? There are a good many fellows in the school who would be glad enough to break our friendship."

"Nobody's been telling me anything."

"Then what have you got against me?"

"What I've seen myself."

Mark Linley started.

"What you've seen?" he repeated. "I don't understand. Will you kindly explain what you are talking about?"

"You say you've been in the wood," said Bob Cherry. "I dare say you have, but you have been somewhere else as well."

"I don't understand you. I took my books into the wood to have a quiet hour over my Greek," said Mark. "I've often done so—it's nothing new. I study better lying under the trees, without any row going on near me."

"I saw you in Friardale."

"When?"

Bob Cherry glanced at the clock.

"Just about an hour ago."

Mark Linley shook his head.

"I wasn't there then," he said. "I haven't been in the village at all. You were mistaken, Bob."

Bob Cherry's lip curled.

"I suppose I know you," he said, "and if I didn't know you, I shouldn't mistake your clothes."

Linley coloured slightly. Certainly he was not so well dressed as the other fellows in the Remove at Greyfriars. The scholarship he had won entitled him to board and tuition at Greyfriars, and a certain yearly sum. But he had not the money the other fellows had; even of the money he won with the scholarship a portion went to help keep together the little home in Lancashire. For when Mark Linley left home to go to Greyfriars one of the wage-earners had gone from the little home, and times were harder there after he left.

Mark Linley had cut down his school expenses with the most rigid economy, in order to leave a part of his scholarship allowance for his family at home. And the result was that he could not dress so well as the other fellows. It was a rule at the school, as at most public schools, that the fellows should dress in dark clothes, if not in black; but Mark Linley's attire did not always conform to the rule. He was wearing a grey suit at the present moment—very clean

and neat and tidy, but showing signs of wear. He wore it on walks in order to save wear and tear of his Etons.

Bob Cherry watched his face.

"Well?" he said.

"I can only say you're mistaken," said Mark Linley. "I haven't been in Friardale to-day. But even if I had been I don't see why that gives you an excuse for catechising me. Friardale isn't out of bounds. Why shouldn't I go there if I chose?"

"No harm in that; but you know where you went."

"What do you mean?"

"I saw you coming out of the Bird in Hand, that rotten low pub. by the riverside," said Bob Cherry.

Linley turned crimson.

"You didn't!" he exclaimed.

"I did. You came out just as I was passing, to come home by the towing-path. You saw me, and dodged away round the pub., and I called after you, and you didn't answer," said Bob Cherry savagely. "I know a lot of the fellows have hinted that you've been humbugging me, and taking me in; but I've never listened to them. Now I know it's true."

Linley clenched his hands.

"I won't follow your example, and call you a liar!" he said bitterly. "I know you wouldn't say this if you didn't believe it. But it isn't true—you've mistaken somebody else for me."

"Perhaps I'm mistaken in thinking this is yours, then?"

Bob Cherry drew a little leather-bound book from his pocket and held it out. It was a small Greek testament, and it was well known as belonging to Mark Linley. It had been given to him by Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, and his name was written on the flyleaf.

Linley uttered a sharp exclamation.

"That's mine!" he said.

"You admit that?"

"I never thought of denying it," said Mark wonderingly. "Why should I? It's the Greek testament that Mr. Quelch gave me last term."

"You dropped it outside the Bird in Hand."

"What!"

"The fellow I saw—who you say wasn't you—dropped this as he dodged away, and I picked it up," said Bob Cherry coldly.

"I—I don't understand!" Mark Linley took the book, and glanced at it. "This is certainly my book. I don't see how anybody else got hold of it."

"I don't, either," said Bob cuttingly. "I suppose you will admit now that it was you I saw."

Linley's eyes flashed.

"I admit nothing of the sort. If you saw somebody you took for me, you were mistaken. If he dropped this book, I don't know how he got hold of it. I haven't used it for days, and I last left it in this study. I don't understand it at all, but I repeat that I haven't been in Friardale to-day, and most certainly have never been in the Bird in Hand."

Bob Cherry shrugged his shoulders.

"You don't believe me?" exclaimed Mark.

"Do you expect me to?"

"Yes, most certainly, if you call yourself my friend!" said Mark hotly. "I can't explain this, but I expect you to take my word."

"Well, I can't take it," said Bob Cherry shortly. "I'm bound to believe my own eyes. I suppose you won't tell me that you've got a double, who dresses in the same clothes as you do—and even so, how could he have got hold of your Greek testament, which you say you left in this study."

"I—I can't understand it."

"I can't, either—if you're telling the truth," said Bob Cherry drily.

"I am telling the truth!" said Mark steadily. "And if you can't take my word, our friendship is at an end."

Bob Cherry laughed savagely.

"That's at an end anyway," he said. "I'm not going to chum with a fellow who disgraces himself by hanging about low pubs. You've been doing what fellows have been expelled from the school for doing. You can't expect me to stick to you after that. You've been taking me in all the time. I might believe you if you said you'd been there for some reason—but when you say you haven't been there at all, I know what to think—as I saw you with my own eyes."

"That isn't true," said Mark Linley quietly. "You didn't see me. It's a mistake somehow. And if you tell a yarn about me like this in the Remove, I——"

"I don't intend to say a word. It's not for me to give you away. But very likely other fellows have seen you. I don't know."

"No one has seen me where you say; I haven't been there."

"Oh, chuck that, for goodness' sake! What's the good of piling on barefaced lies?" exclaimed Bob Cherry, in exasperation.

"If you call me a liar again, Bob Cherry——" broke out the Lancashire lad, his patience giving way at last.

"Well, I do!"

"Then I'll jolly soon stop you!"

The Lancashire lad sprang forward. Bob Cherry, nothing loth, met him, and in a moment more they were fighting fiercely. The trampling of feet and the fierce muttered exclamations in the study speedily brought a crowd along the Remove passage. Bulstrode threw the door open, and gave a shout of astonishment.

"My hat! Bob Cherry and Linley are fighting! My hat!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
A Broken Friendship.

HARRY WHARTON dashed along the Remove passage. He halted in the study doorway in sheer amazement.

Bob Cherry and Mark Linley, who had always been the best of chums, and had never been known to exchange an angry word, were fighting like tigers.

"What are you up to?" shouted Harry Wharton. "What does this mean, Bob? What's the matter?"

Tramp, tramp, tramp! went the heavy feet in the study. There was a sudden bump, and Bob Cherry went heavily to the floor, and Mark stood over him with flashing eyes and heaving breast.

Wharton and Nugent rushed into the study. Wharton caught the Lancashire lad and dragged him back, and Frank Nugent collared Bob Cherry as he scrambled to his feet.

Bob Cherry's nose was streaming red, and one of his eyes was half closed. He struggled furiously to reach his enemy.

"Let me go!" he roared.

"Hold on, Bob!"

"Lemme go!"

"Rats!" said Nugent cheerfully, locking his arms round Bob Cherry, and holding him back by main force. "You're not going to punch old Marky. Keep that other ass back, Wharton."

"Right-ho!"

"Let me go!" said Mark angrily.

"Why, he's as bad as the other fathead!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "What on earth is the row about? What are you two duffers quarrelling for?"

"He called me a liar!" panted Mark.

"So you are one!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"My hat!" ejaculated Bolsover, the bully of the Remove, grinning into the study with great enjoyment. "This is trouble in the happy family, and no mistake! Why don't you let them alone, you fellows? Let them have it out."

"Yes, rather; let 'em have it out, Wharton!" shouted Snoop.

"Mind your own business, confound you!" rapped out Wharton angrily. "Keep still, Mark. You're not going to fight Bob."

"He's not going to call me a liar."

"Don't tell lies, then," said Bob Cherry.

"Let me go, Wharton!"

"Let me go, Nugent!"

"You sha'n't go!" said Harry Wharton determinedly. "There's some silly mistake here. You know jolly well that Linley isn't a liar, Bob."

"I know he is!"

"Shut up, you ass! You seem to be off your rocker to-day," said Harry Wharton. "I'm blessed if I can understand you."

"He says he saw me coming out of a low pub. in Friardale," said Mark Linley, breathing hard. "He called me a liar when I denied it."

"And I did see you," retorted Bob Cherry. "I wasn't

going to say anything about it before the fellows, but if you prefer to have it out in public, I don't care. I saw you."

"You didn't!"

"You must be mistaken, Bob," exclaimed Nugent. "We all know that Linley isn't that kind of fellow."

"How do you know he isn't?" grinned Vernon-Smith, looking in from the passage. Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, had always been Mark Linley's enemy, and he seemed to be enjoying the storm in No. 13 Study very much. "My opinion is that the quiet chaps are always the deepest."

"Yes, rather!" said Bolsover. "I'm not surprised to hear it."

"Just what I expected," said Snoop.

"I guess it sounds rather thick," said Fisher T. Fish. "Are you quite sure you saw him, Bob? I guess it's steep, you know."

"I saw him as plain as I see you. When I called to him, he dodged round the pub, and ran. He dropped a book, and I picked it up. That book belongs to Linley, and he admits it."

"Phew!"

"That's jolly queer," said Harry Wharton. "If it wasn't you that Bob saw, Linley, how did the chap, whoever he was, happen to have your book?"

"I don't know."

"I guess that puts a different colour on it," said Fisher T. Fish, with a suspicious look at the Lancashire lad.

"You can't explain that, Linley?"

"No."

"You say the fellow you saw looked like Linley, Bob?"

"Exactly like—same clothes, too."

"My hat!"

The juniors were all looking very curiously at Mark Linley now. The scholarship junior had ceased to struggle in Wharton's grasp. He stepped back quietly, his passion gone.

"I can only say that Bob was mistaken," he said. "But I won't allow any fellow to call me a liar. I expect my word to be taken."

"That's all very well," said Wharton hesitatingly. "We take your word, of course. But it's jolly queer. Anyway, you fellows won't do any good by hammering one another. You'd better come along to our study, Bob."

Bob Cherry allowed himself to be led away, mopping his nose with his handkerchief. The Lancashire lad remained in the study. The crowd of Removites in the passage broke up, discussing the strange affair eagerly. Two of them remained with Linley—Wun Lung, the Chinee, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Indian, who shared No. 13.

Mark Linley looked at them, with a glitter in his eyes. The Lancashire lad was slow to move to anger. But his pride was wounded now, and his heart was beating hard.

"Do you believe what Bob Cherry says, you fellows?" he asked.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh shifted uneasily.

"The queerfulness of the matter is terrific," he remarked.

Linley frowned.

"Do you believe that I was in that pub.?" he demanded.

"I should preferfully remain the silent witness."

"That means that you stand by Bob Cherry against me?"

Hurree Singh was silent.

"Oh, speak out!" said Mark Linley angrily. "If you stand by him, and side against me, you might have the decency to say so."

The Nabob of Bhanipur coloured under his dark skin.

"Very well," he replied. "I do not think the possibleful-ness is great that the worthy Bob was mistaken. I think he is correctful in his statement."

"And you don't believe me?"

The nabob was silent again.

"Yes or no?" shouted Linley.

"No, then!"

"Then don't take the trouble to speak to me again," said Mark Linley between his teeth. "I don't want to be on friendly terms with a fellow who can't take my word."

"Quitefully so!"

And Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a frown upon his usually placid and urbane brow, quitted the study abruptly. Mark Linley fixed his eyes upon Wun Lung.

"What do you say, kid?"

"Me sayee notting."

"Do you believe Bob Cherry?"

"No savvy."

"Do you take my word or not, Wun Lung?"

"Me tinkee Bob Chelly mistaken," said Wun Lung. "He no tellee whoppee, and you no tellee whoppee. It is a mistake, me tinkee."

"I suppose it's a mistake," assented Mark, a little more amicably. "Bob wouldn't tell a lie, I know that. He's been taken in somehow—I'm blessed if I know how. But he had no right to doubt my word, and I'll jolly well never speak to him again."

Wun Lung nodded silently, with a worried look upon his face. He was equally attached to Bob and to Mark Linley, and the fierce dispute between them distressed the little Oriental deeply. But it looked as if the breach between the

chums would remain. Bob Cherry, in Wharton and Nugent's study, was still breathing wrath.

"We've been taken in, that's the long and short of it," he exclaimed half a dozen times, as he rubbed his swollen nose with the crimsoned handkerchief. "I've always stood up for Marky—I mean Linley—and lots of the fellows said it was pigheaded of me. I can see now that they were right. I've been an ass."

Harry Wharton wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"I'm blessed if I can make it out!" he said. "I should never have dreamed that Linley was that sort of chap. He's always struck me as being thoroughly decent, and I'd have taken his word for anything."

"You can't take it now."

"I can't help thinking that there's some mistake or trick in the matter," said Harry. "I wonder if any other fellow saw him as well as you? That would make it clearer. Do you know if any other chap was in Friardale about that time?"

"Gilmore of the Fourth was," said Nugent. "I don't know whether he's come in."

"Let's go and see him, then," said Harry. "If he's seen anything, it will make the matter clearer. Come on!"

Bob Cherry grunted. He did not want any further proof, himself. But he made no demur, and the chums of the Remove proceeded to the Fourth Form passage in search of Gilmore of the Fourth.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Second Witness.

"BLESS that fellow!" said Temple, the captain of the Upper Fourth Form at Greyfriars.

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"He's a jolly long time!" said Fry.

Temple sniffed.

Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Fourth were in a Fourth-Form study—not their own. It was the study next to Temple's, and belonged to Gilmore of the Fourth. The three juniors had been waiting for Cecil Gilmore for some time, and they were getting very impatient.

"Where can the ass be?" growled Temple.

"He went down to Friardale."

"Well, he ought to be back. He'll be late for locking-up soon."

"Hallo, here he is!" exclaimed Fry, as footsteps came along the Fourth-Form passage, and stopped at the door.

"Hallo, Gilly—why, it's those Remove kids!" exclaimed Temple, in disgust, as Harry Wharton & Co. entered the study.

"What do you fags want?" growled Fry.

And Dabney made a strategic movement towards the poker. Relations were sometimes strained between the Upper Fourth and the Lower Fourth—the Remove.

"Pax!" said Harry Wharton quietly. "We haven't come here for a row. We're not looking for trouble this time."

"You may find it without looking for it, if you don't buzz off!" growled Temple.

"Oh, rather," said Dabney.

"Has Gilmore come in?"

"We're waiting for him," said Fry. "What do you want Gilmore for?"

"Only to speak to him. He's been down to Friardale, hasn't he?"

"Yes. He's seeing the costumiers about our things for 'Hamlet,'" said Temple, with some loftiness. "I suppose you know the Upper Fourth Dramatic Society are going to do 'Hamlet' next week?"

"Poor old Hamlet!" murmured Nugent.

"Look here, you cheeky fag——"

"Shut up, Franky," said Wharton. "We don't want a row with the Fourth now. There's enough bother without that."

"You look as if you'd been having a row with somebody!" grinned Temple, looking at Bob Cherry's swollen nose. "Where did you dig up that trunk, Cherry?"

"Oh, rats!" growled Bob.

"Hallo!" said a voice at the door, as Cecil Gilmore of the Fourth looked in. "Quite a reception, by Jove!"

"Oh, here he is!"

"You're frightfully late, you ass."

"Where have you been?"

"Doing your business," said Gilmore. "The costumes are arranged for all right. What do these Remove chaps want here? They're not going to be put in the cast for 'Hamlet,' I suppose?"

Cecil Gilmore looked inquiringly at Harry Wharton & Co. Gilmore was a good-looking fellow, though there was a hardness about his mouth, and a glint in his eyes, which would have shown a close observer that his good nature was all on the surface. He was somewhat smaller in build than most of the Upper Fourth, and indeed younger. There were older

fellows than Cecil Gilmore in the Remove, but he was keen and alert, and very well up in his classwork, and, indeed, some of the Fourth said that he could get into the Shell if he tried. Gilmore had not been long at Greyfriars, but he was one of the mainstays of the Fourth Form Dramatic Society, and even Temple, who fancied himself as an actor, had to admit that Gilmore could give him points and beat him easily. And Gilmore had no "backwardness in coming forward." There was a cool determination about him, and some unscrupulousness in gaining his objects, which made it easy for him to get a leading place among more easy-going fellows.

"Oh, they want the order of the boot," said Temple, in reply to Gilmore's question.

Gilmore laughed.

"We want to speak to you," said Harry Wharton. "Only to ask you a question, Gilmore. You have just come back from Friardale?"

Gilmore looked at him sharply.

"Yes," he said.

"Did you happen to come by the towing-path, or to pass the Bird in Hand pub. while you were down there?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I did, though I'm blessed if I know why you want to know," said the Fourth-Former. "Any of your friends at the Bird in Hand?"

Temple, Dabney & Co. chuckled.

"Did you see any Remove fellows about there?" asked Wharton.

Gilmore hesitated.

"Oh, answer them, and let them buzz off," said Temple. "We want to get on with the rehearsal. I've been mugging up Laertes' part."

"I'd rather know what they want to know for," said Gilmore. "It's rather a queer question, and I don't want to put my foot in it."

"I'll explain," said Bob Cherry. "When I passed the Bird in Hand coming home, I saw a Remove chap coming out of the pub. He denies that he was there, and we've had a row. I want to prove to these fellows that I wasn't mistaken, and to other fellows that I wasn't telling lies. If you saw anything to bear out what I say, we want to know it. I think you ought to tell us."

Gilmore looked very thoughtful.

"Well, if you put it like that, I suppose I ought," he replied, after a pause. "I wasn't going to say anything about it."

"Then you did see something?" asked Wharton quickly.

"Well, yes."

"What did you see?"

"I saw a Remove chap in the pub.," confessed Gilmore. "He was looking out of the parlour window, and I passed on the towing-path and saw him. I don't know whether he saw me, but I know I was so surprised that I stopped and stared at him a minute. You see, it wasn't Bolsover or Snoop, or any of the fellows one might have suspected of that kind of thing. It was a chap who's always been supposed to be straight."

Bob Cherry looked at Nugent and Wharton. Here was confirmation, if they wanted it, strong as proof of holy writ.

"And who was the fellow?" asked Nugent quietly.

Cecil Gilmore shifted uneasily.

"I don't know that I ought to tell you his name," he said. "I meant to say nothing about it."

"You can tell us. It's a question whether he was there, or whether Bob Cherry was making up a yarn about him," said Wharton. "That's how the fellows will put it. Besides, we know the chap already."

"I—I don't know about giving him away, all the same." Gilmore turned to Temple. "Look here, Temple, you're my Form-captain, and I'll take your advice. Shall I tell them the name of the chap?"

Temple nodded.

"Yes, tell them, for goodness' sake, and let's get on with 'Hamlet.'"

"Very well. It was Mark Linley, the scholarship chap."

"What did I tell you?" said Bob Cherry.

"Thank you, Gilmore," said Harry Wharton very quietly. "I suppose there's no mistake about the matter? You are sure it was Linley?"

"I suppose I know the chap by sight," said Gilmore. "Besides, I knew his clothes. He was in a shabby grey suit."

"That's Marky."

"And there was a scratch on his cheek, too, I remember," said Gilmore. "Beside the nose. I noticed that Linley had it this morning."

"Quite true!" said Bob Cherry. "He's got a black eye now, too."

"Now, if you Remove kids are done, will you kindly vacate the premises—in other words, vamoose the ranch?" said Temple. "We've got to rehearse."

The chums of the Remove quitted the study. Gilmore looked very thoughtful.

"This may turn out to be very rough on Linley," he remarked.

"He would get sacked if the Head knew," assented Temple. "Serve him right. I never did quite approve of scholarship fellows from nobody knows where coming to Greyfriars."

"I mean, he might lose his scholarship," said Gilmore. "That's one of the terms of the scholarship he holds. It's a Founder's scholarship, and is forfeited by bad conduct, you know."

"Oh, blow Linley and his blessed scholarship," said Fry. "Let's get on with the washing."

Gilmore laughed.

"Well, I suppose it's no business of ours," he remarked.

"Of course it isn't. You begin with 'What may this mean——'"

"Right-ho! What may this mean that thou, dread corse, revisitest thus the glimpse of the moon——"

And the Fourth-Formers were soon deep in their rehearsal. Harry Wharton & Co. returned to the Remove quarters. In a very short time the Remove all knew that Gilmore of the Fourth had corroborated Bob Cherry's statement that Mark Linley had been seen in the Bird in Hand public-house on the Friardale towing-path. And there were very few fellows after that who placed any credence in the Lancashire lad's denials. Even if Bob Cherry might have been mistaken, and the incident of the dropped book had been explained away, it was hardly likely that Gilmore of the Fourth could have been mistaken too, and in exactly the same way.

It was, as Fisher T. Fish remarked, too "steep." And Mark Linley's denial was received with sarcastic silence or open jeers, and the Lancashire lad withdrew into himself, as it were, and ceased to defend himself, and allowed his Form-fellows to think of him as they would.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Deserted.

DURING the next few days Mark Linley's experiences in the Remove Form at Greyfriars were not pleasant.

The Lancashire lad was very quiet. He said little or nothing, but under a mask of indifference he felt all the more deeply.

There had always been fellows at Greyfriars who were "down" on the scholarship boy. Not that possessing a scholarship was in itself deemed a disgrace. Several sons of wealthy men had scholarships at Greyfriars, and did not need them. They were all right. But the boy who had worked in a factory, and who had won the scholarship by hard work in the evenings when his day's labour was done, did need it, and needed it badly. That made all the difference.

True, the best set of fellows in the Remove had always steadily refused to have anything to do with the snobbishness of the other kind of fellows. Harry Wharton & Co. had stood by Mark from first to last. Bob Cherry had become his special chum, and Lord Mauleverer, the dandy of the Remove, was often seen with him. So long as the best of the fellows liked him and chummed with him Mark could afford to disregard fellows like Bolsover and Snoop and Vernon-Smith and Billy Bunter.

But it was changed now.

Harry Wharton & Co. had backed up the factory boy because they believed that he was decent all through. If he had deceived them, if he had secretly cultivated low associations, that altered the case. If he was guilty of "pub.-haunting," as the Greyfriars fellows called it, he was not fit for any decent fellow to associate with.

And they believed that he was guilty of it.

Bob Cherry was well-known to be the soul of truth and honour. Nobody would ever have dreamed of doubting his word. He might have made a mistake, but he could not have told a lie. And it was known, too, that he was very much cut up by the discovery about the Lancashire lad. The breaking-up of an old friendship was as heavy a blow to him as to Mark.

And there did not seem to be room for a mistake in the matter. Even supposing that Bob had been deceived by a chance resemblance in the dusk, how had Linley's book got into the possession of the unknown fellow at the Bird in Hand? He had most undoubtedly dropped it when he dodged away to avoid meeting Bob. Indeed, if he was not Linley, why should he have tried to avoid being seen at all?

Then there was Gilmore's evidence. Cecil Gilmore of the Fourth could not be supposed to have any bias against Mark Linley. They had had some rubs—Linley had once stopped Gilmore when he was bullying Nugent minor of the Second Form, and had knocked him down. Some of the fellows remembered that. But that was hardly sufficient to make Gilmore lie on the subject. Besides, he had been unwilling to speak, and had only uttered Mark's name after Harry Wharton & Co. had questioned him, and pressed him to give what information he could.

A window on the ground floor of the Bird in Hand opened, and a boy looked out cautiously, as if to see whether there was anybody on the watch. At the distance it was not easy to distinguish features, but the face was certainly that of Mark Linley. "My hat!" gasped Potter. "Look there!" *(See Chapter 9.)*

If Bob Cherry had been taken in by a chance resemblance, Gilmore could not have been at the same place and almost the same time. It was unthinkable. Either Mark Linley had been at the Bird in Hand or two fellows who knew him perfectly well by sight had made a great mistake, and a stranger who resembled him had somehow come mysteriously into possession of a book belonging to him. And Fisher T. Fish was quite right in "guessing" that such an explanation was too "steep."

Mark Linley found cold looks turned upon him on all sides, and he was too proud to seek after friendship that had been withdrawn. He buried himself in his work, and gave no sign.

Bob Cherry had cut his connection with Study No. 13. At an earlier date Bob had been an inmate of Study No. 1 with Wharton and Nugent, before the new studies were opened along the passage. With the consent of his old friends, he now returned to his previous quarters. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh went with him. Both of them did their work in Study No. 1 now. It was the only way of avoiding trouble. Bob Cherry was vehement both in friendship and in quarrel. If he had stayed in Study No. 13 he would have been at war with his old chum all the time, and Wharton and Nugent wanted to prevent that.

Fellows who had always been down on the scholarship boy hardly disguised their satisfaction at the discovery that had been made.

"We've got at his true colours at last," Bolsover said, to an assenting group of Removites in the junior common-room.

"Even Bob Cherry's seen through him at last, I said all along that he was too quiet to be genuine."

"So did I," said Snoop.

"Of course, he hangs about low pubs. and that kind of place," said Bolsover. Bolsover had once been very nearly expelled for doing so himself, but he found it convenient to forget that just now. "It's just what might be expected of him, considering his upbringing."

"I know it's what I expected of him," said Vernon-Smith.

"Hear, hear!" said a dozen voices.

"I say, you fellows," chirruped Billy Bunter, "the chap ought to be sent to Coventry, you know. He's a disgrace to the Remove!"

"He ought to have a dormitory licking," said Bulstrode.

"Hear, hear!"

Mark Linley came into the common-room while the juniors were talking. A hiss from some of the fellows greeted him, and he swung round, with his face flaming.

"How are your friends at the Bird in Hand?" called out Bolsover.

"How's Ratty Thompson, the bookie?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mark Linley stood silent, his chest heaving. For some days he had borne this kind of thing with silent patience. But it seemed at that moment as if his patience was giving out at last.

"It's a lie!" he said, and his voice rang out clearly. "I never was at the Bird in Hand, and you are slandering me!"

"Nice language from a factory hand!" sneered Snoop.

"He ought to be kicked out of the school! He could get a job at Hardinge's new jam factory at Courtfield End!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you say I'm slandering you, you'll get it in the neck, and jolly soon!" said Bolsover threateningly.

"So you are, if you say I know Ratty Thompson, or have ever been at the Bird in Hand," said Mark Linley steadily.

"The cheeky cad!"

"Bump him! He makes me sick standing there telling whoppers like that!" exclaimed Ogilvy.

"Bump the cad!"

There was a rush of the juniors towards the Lancashire lad.

Mark Linley sprang back, and put up his fists.

"Hands off," he exclaimed, "or——"

The juniors did not heed. They rushed him, and the Lancashire lad hit out with all his force. Bolsover caught his knuckles upon the point of his chin, and went backwards with a crash upon the floor. The next instant Vernon-Smith reeled across him, and fell, his left eye closing up.

But Mark had no time for more.

The grasp of a dozen fellows was upon him, and he was swung off his feet, and came with a crash on the carpet. Bolsover and the Bounder leaped up.

"Bump him!" yelled Vernon-Smith.

"Bump the rotter!"

Bump—bump!

Mark Linley, lifted in the grip of the Removites, was bumped heavily upon the floor—once, twice, thrice. The din brought a crowd of fellows rushing to the room, and among them was Bob Cherry. Bob changed colour a little as he saw his old chum in the grasp of the raggers.

"What's the row?" he exclaimed.

"We're bumping the pub.-haunter!" said Bolsover fiercely. "I suppose you're not going to interfere, Bob Cherry?"

Bob hesitated.

"Let him alone!" he said, at last.

Mark Linley turned a fierce look upon his former chum.

"I don't want any of your help, Bob Cherry!" he cried angrily. "You can keep away! I know how much your friendship is worth!"

Bob Cherry flushed.

"You hear him?" grinned Russell. "Bump the cad! You can lend a hand if you like, Bob."

Bob Cherry did not lend a hand. He stood with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, while the scholarship junior was bumped again.

There was a quick step in the passage, and Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, looked in with an angry brow.

"What's the row here?" he exclaimed angrily. "What are you doing to Linley? Let him get up at once!"

The Removites released Mark. The junior, dusty and dishevelled, rose slowly to his feet, panting for breath. Wingate looked at him curiously.

"What does this mean?" he demanded.

"Only bumping a rank outsider," said Bolsover.

"He's been disgracing the Remove," said Snoop.

Wingate's lip curled.

"You can generally do all that yourself, Snoop," he remarked. "Mark Linley's much less likely to disgrace the Form than you are."

"Look here, Wingate, if you knew——"

"I suppose this is the old trouble," said Wingate. "You're picking on Linley because of the scholarship, I suppose. I'm surprised to see you standing by and not lending Linley a hand, Bob Cherry."

Bob turned crimson.

"Linley doesn't want any help," he said sullenly.

"Do you mean that you are against him, too, now?" Wingate demanded.

Bob was silent.

"You don't know what's happened, Wingate," said Vernon-Smith.

"Tell me, then," said Wingate sharply.

"Well, we don't want to sneak."

"Let Snoop tell me, then; he doesn't mind sneaking."

There was a laugh, and the sneak of the Remove looked furious.

"I'll tell you myself," said Mark Linley quietly. "Bob Cherry fancies that he saw me coming out of a public-house the other day, and he won't believe me when I say he was mistaken. The other fellows have swallowed it."

"I wasn't mistaken!" said Bob Cherry.

Wingate gave him a sharp look.

"That's a serious accusation to make, Cherry," he exclaimed.

"I didn't accuse Linley. He brought this out himself. But I'm not going to take back what I've said. I've said that I saw him coming out of the Bird in Hand, and I did. Gilmore, of the Fourth, saw him there as well."

"He was mistaken, or else lying," said Mark.

Bolsover burst into a scoffing laugh.

"Yes, everybody was mistaken, or else lying, and you are an angel without wings," he exclaimed. "You won't get the Remove to believe that."

"No fear!"

"The no-fearfulness is terrific."

Wingate looked troubled.

"It's a very queer thing," he said. "Mark Linley is about the last fellow at Greyfriars I should have suspected of anything of the kind. Anyway, you fellows are to keep your hands off him. Do you hear? If there is any more of this, you will hear from me."

And Wingate left the common-room. Dark and taunting looks were turned upon the Lancashire lad. After what the Greyfriars captain had said, the Removites did not venture to bump him again. But they did not restrain their tongues. Mark Linley followed the captain of Greyfriars out of the room, and in the passage Wingate paused to speak to him, giving him a searching look.

"Is there any truth in that, Linley?" he asked sharply.

"No; none whatever!"

"Bob Cherry was mistaken, then?"

"Yes."

"And Gilmore, of the Fourth."

"He must have made a mistake."

"It's very queer."

Wingate passed on. Mark Linley went up to his study. He was aching in every limb from his rough handling among the Removites. But he was not thinking of bodily pains and aches at that moment. His heart was very heavy. The evidence was against him, and he could see that Wingate doubted him now. And Mark thought very much of the opinion of the head of the Sixth. Wingate had been very kind to him, and his kindness had helped Mark in the uphill battle he had to fight at Greyfriars.

A heavy sense of loneliness fell upon the Lancashire lad. He had been through more than one bitter struggle at the school, to which he had gained entrance by hard work and sheer pluck. But always before he had had friends to stand by him. Now he was friendless; his best chums had turned their backs. Bob Cherry, upon whose faith and loyalty he would have staked his life, had turned his back upon him first of all, and the rest had followed suit. He could hardly blame them, either—that was the bitterness of it—for the evidence against him was very strong—so strong that it required a very great stretch of loyalty to disregard it.

Had he a friend left in the great school? He entered his study with a heavy heart and a downcast face. A little queer figure rose quietly from the armchair, and two almond eyes blinked at him.

"Downee on luckee?" said the soft, purring voice of the little Chinee.

Linley forced a smile.

"Yes," he said. "I believe you're the only fellow in all Greyfriars who has faith enough in me to stick to me, Wun Lung."

The little Oriental nodded.

"Allee comee lightee in end," he said consolingly.

Mark Linley nodded, but not hopefully. He had been through more than one bitter struggle, and had emerged triumphant, certainly. But this time it seemed as if his fate were too strong for him, and he had little belief that it would come right in the end.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
Influence Wanted.

"GILLY, old man——"

Temple, Dabney, and Fry came into Cecil Gilmore's study in the Fourth Form passage, and they all spoke at the same moment.

Gilmore, of the Fourth, was sitting at his table. He had a little book in his hand, in which strange abbreviations and curious figures appeared on the pages; and as the chums of the Fourth came in, he hurriedly slipped it into his pocket. He turned a flushed face towards Temple, Dabney & Co.

"Hallo!" he said awkwardly. "What do you fellows want?"

"It's about 'Hamlet,'" said Temple.

"Oh, blow 'Hamlet!'"

Temple, Dabney, & Co. coughed. The Fourth Form performance of "Hamlet" was to them just then the most important event going on in the British Empire. The Derby or a Cup-tie final faded into insignificance beside it. It had been Temple's idea to give a great performance in aid of

the Titanic fund, and the idea had very much caught on in the Fourth. Whether the Titanic fund was likely to be greatly augmented thereby was doubtful; but at all events the Fourth-Formers of Greyfriars would have a chance of covering themselves with histrionic glory. And perhaps that was the chief object of Temple, Dabney & Co. Therefore, the performance was not to be a common or garden performance, as Fry remarked, but something very, very special.

"Busy, Gilly, old man?" asked Temple.

"Well, yes."

"What the dickens are you busy about, then?" asked Fry. "Not doing algebra in a pocket-book, were you?"

"Oh, rats!" said Gilmore. "What do you chaps want?"

"It's about 'Hamlet,'" said Temple, for a second time. "Look here, Gilly, you ought to enthuse about this, you know. The whole Form is enthusiastic. It's a jolly good idea, and it will knock spots off the Remove."

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney, with emphasis.

"You're practically a new boy here, too," said Temple, in rather an aggrieved tone. "We've taken you into the Dramatic Society, and given you a leading role. It isn't every chap who hasn't been half a term at Greyfriars who'd be given the part of Hamlet."

"Rather not!" said Fry.

"Well, I can act it," said Gilmore.

Temple coughed.

"I'm not denying that," he said. "We all admit that you are a good actor, and wonderful at doing impersonations. You made the whole Form shriek when you got yourself up as Coker, of the Fifth, voice and all. We all admit that you can act. It's not that. Still, it's a jolly big honour for you to play the title-role. We're going to make this thing go, Gilly. And we want you to buck up."

"Oh, all serene!"

"Now, we've got permission to use the lecture-room when we give the performance—date not fixed yet," said Temple. "We want to scoop in a big audience. The Remove have sometimes had the masters and even the Head to their rotten shows. We want to go one better than that."

Gilmore stared.

"Going to invite King George?" he asked.

"Ahem! No. But we thought we might get some of the governors down," explained Temple. "That would give the show a splendid send-off. If the governors came, or one of them, the Head and the whole staff of masters would be bound to come, too, and that means that the whole school would come to the performance. And as we're charging for admission—a bob to seniors and sixpence to juniors—we should simply coin money."

Gilmore laughed.

"That's where you come in," said Temple persuasively. "All expenses will be paid out of the takings before the balance is sent to that giddy fund; so you will be all right."

"And suppose it should be a frost?"

"Oh, it won't be a frost! But even if it were, you'd be all right, as your people are rolling in money."

Gilmore knitted his brows for a moment.

"My people aren't rolling in money now," he said. "My father's had losses, and my pocket-money has been cut down. As a matter of fact, Temple, I wanted to see you, because I want the Dramatic Society to pay up the five quid I advanced at the beginning of the term to buy costumes."

"Oh!" said Temple.

"That was a subscription to the club," said Fry warmly. "It was understood at the time that it was a donation."

"I meant it as a loan."

"Oh, come, now; don't be mean," said Temple. "You made a speech on that occasion, and said what a pleasure it was to you to be able to help the club in any little way you could. That wasn't the way to put it if you meant the fiver as a loan."

Gilmore bit his lip.

"Well, it was a loan, and I want it back," he said decidedly.

Temple seemed to swallow something.

"If you want it back, you shall have it back; you needn't be afraid about that," he said, his lip curling. "We'll have a special subscription to meet it. The Fourth Form Dramatic Society doesn't want to be under obligations to anybody. As a matter of fact, I've put in more than five quid altogether myself, to buy properties, and I don't swank about as the son of a giddy rich stockbroker. But you shall have your five quid back, if you have to have it out of what we raise by this performance. It can go down among the expenses."

"That's a good idea," said Gilmore. "I'm sorry, but I must have it. And as I say, I meant it as a loan."

"Ahem! Well, leaving the question of the money out, there's another thing you can do," said Temple. "We want to get the governors down to the show—or one of them, at all events. You've got an uncle on the governing body at Greyfriars?"

Gilmore nodded.

"Does your uncle think much of you?" asked Temple.

"I don't know; I don't think much of him!" said Gilmore. "We don't see him very much. He was my mother's brother, and my mother's been dead ten years. I don't see him more than once a year. He takes a certain amount of interest in me—about enough to give me a quid on my birthday. Why do you ask?"

"Because we want you to ask him down."

"Oh, I see!"

"Write him a nice, nephew-like letter," explained Temple. "Tell him we're bucking up to raise a fund for helping the Titanic sufferers. That's bound to interest him, and make him think you're a generous chap. Don't ask him for a subscription—I dare say that would alarm him. I've got uncles myself, and I know they have to be handled carefully. Just ask him as a special avuncular favour to come down and see the performance, as that will give it a swing, and make the receipts bigger."

"Well, I might try."

"It will sound well to put on the programme: 'Sir Arthur Benyon, Patron,'" said Temple. "Titles are very impressive. It isn't every fellow at Greyfriars who's got a baronet for an uncle, and a member of the governing body, I think you ought to make the most of it, for the good of the Form."

Gilmore laughed.

"All serene," he said; "I'll do it."

"And if your giddy nunky could make the other governors come——"

"I dare say he could, if he liked. He's got a lot of influence on the governing body," said Gilmore.

"Good egg! That would wipe the Remove right out!" said Temple eagerly. "They've never been able to get a governor of the school to their shows."

"I'll write to him and try."

"Good egg! And if the affair goes with a swing, you're sure of your five quid—if you really want to have it back."

"I jolly well do want it!" said Gilmore. "I tell you I'm hard up."

"All right; you shall have it."

And Temple, Dabney & Co. quitted the study. As they closed the door, Gilmore took the little book out of his pocket, and began conning it over again, with a wrinkle in his brow. He had a strange expression upon his face as he did so—the look of a man rather than of a boy—the look of one whose thoughts were not upon boyish matters.

Temple, Dabney & Co. re-entered their study. Temple was looking very satisfied. His desire to "go one better" than the Remove was stronger than his desire to give a good performance of "Hamlet." The rivalry between the Upper and Lower Fourth at Greyfriars was very keen.

"I think that's all serene," said Temple. "If Gilmore can get his uncle down here for the performance, it will simply go with a bang. The whole school will turn up in honour of a member of the governing body."

"Oh, rather!"

"And Gilly will make a good Hamlet. It's a bit of a wrench, letting him have that part," said Temple, with a sigh, "but I suppose we must."

"Blessed if I like it, either!" said Fry with a sniff. "Gilmore is a worm. He gave that five pounds to the Dramatic Society, and gave it with a jolly big flourish of trumpets, too. There never was anything said about it's being a loan. If all of us who've dubbed up to get things for the Society claimed that we'd only loaned the money, and wanted it back, there would be a pretty bill to pay!"

Temple nodded.

"You're right," he said. "It is rather thick of Gilly, I must say. But the Upper Fourth Dramatic Society doesn't want any of his rotten money if he doesn't want to give it. He's going to have his fiver back."

"Oh, rather!"

"It's rotten mean, all the same," said Fry, "and if he doesn't succeed in getting his uncle to promise to come to the show, I vote that we take the part of Hamlet off him, and let somebody else have it. There are a good many fellows in the Fourth who'd make a better Hamlet than Gilmore, I think."

And Fry looked at his reflection in the glass, with the very evident belief that he was one of the fellows he referred to.

"Yes," said Temple thoughtfully. "I had really marked down the title-role for myself——"

"Ahem!" said Dabney. "I was thinking that the Prince of Denmark was a part just cut out for me, you know."

"Oh, rats!" said Temple and Fry together, warmly. "Don't be an ass, Dab!"

"Yes, Dab's an ass!" said Temple. "If we take it off Gilmore, we'll give it to——"

"Me!" said Fry.

"You're as big an ass as Dab, Fry," said Temple severely. "A thing of this kind has to go by merit. If Gilmore doesn't play Hamlet, I do!"

To which Fry and Dabney rejoined, with great unanimity: "Rot!"

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
A Surprise Visitor.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Who on earth's that?"

Bob Cherry's exclamation of surprise was echoed by several other fellows. Afternoon lessons were over at Greyfriars, and the fellows were crowding into the Close in the bright summer sunshine. A peculiar figure had entered at the school gates, lurching into the old quad., and the general attention was turned upon the new-comer at once. He was a little man, in a coat of a sporting cut, with a bowler hat on the side of his head, and evidently much the worse for drink. He came in with a staggering gait, and blinked round him with watery eyes.

Coker of the Fifth, who was near the gates, took it upon himself to demand the stranger's business. The big Fifth Former strode up to him, and steadied him with a grasp upon his shoulder.

"Hallo! Who are you?" demanded Coker.

The man blinked at him.

"I'm orl righ'!" he announced thickly.

"Yes, you are all right, and no mistake!" said Coker with a snort. "We don't want your kind here. Get out!"

"I've come to see my pal."

"My hat!" ejaculated Bolsover of the Remove. "He must be a pal of Gosling. Gossy, old man, here's your old pal come to see you."

Gosling, the porter, came out of his lodge, pink with indignation.

"He ain't no pal of mine," he exclaimed. "That's Ratty Thompson, from the Bird in 'And. He ain't no business 'ere. Wot I says is this 'ere, Master Coker—kick 'im out!"

"P'r'aps he's a pal of Linley's," suggested Temple of the Fourth. "Linley is quite at home at the Bird in Hand, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is that it?" asked Gilmore. "Whom do you want to see, my man?"

Ratty Thompson gave Gilmore of the Fourth a peculiar look

"I wanter see my ole pal," he stuttered.

"But who's your old pal?" asked Coker.

"Marky!"

"My hat! Marky what?"

"Master Linley," said the man. "Ain't he 'ere? I wanter see 'im."

There were exclamations on all sides. A crowd of fellows had gathered round the intoxicated rascal. Ratty Thompson, the biggest blackguard in Friardale, was well known by sight to a good many of the fellows, and his coming to the school and demanding to see Mark Linley caused a sensation.

"Get out, you fool!" said Harry Wharton fiercely. "Can't you see that you're doing Linley harm by coming here?"

"I dont want to do 'im any 'arm," said Ratty, blinking at Wharton. "He's an ole pal of mine, Marky is."

"Go away at once!"

"I ain't going without seeing my ole pal."

"Kick him out!" said Nugent.

Ratty staggered against the wall of Gosling's lodge, and put up his hands in a clumsy way, blinking defiance.

"I ain't going!" he said. "Where's my ole pal Marky?"

"Fetch Linley," exclaimed Vernon-Smith with a grin. "If the man's his pal, he ought to be allowed to see our dear Marky."

"Good egg!" said Temple. "Some of you cut off and get Linley here."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all rot!" said Coker. "I don't believe Linley knows the man. It's just a drunken fancy he's got into his silly head."

"He seems jolly pat with the name, anyway," said Gilmore.

"Yes, rather!"

"Where's Linley?"

A crowd of fellows were already dashing away to fetch Linley. To confront Mark Linley with his supposed friend from the Bird in Hand seemed an excellent joke to some of them. Mark Linley had gone up to his study after lessons, and the juniors found him there. Bolsover threw open the study door, with a crowd at his heels.

Mark Linley looked up quickly from his work. His first thought was that it was another ragging that was intended.

"Here he is!" shouted Bolsover.

"Come on, Linley!"

"You're wanted!"

Mark Linley rose to his feet.

"Who wants me?" he asked quietly.

"An old chum of yours; he's come specially to Greyfriars to see you," grinned Bolsover.

"Better come, Linley," said Ogilvy. "If you don't come, he's coming up to the house."

"Ha, ha, ha! There will be a row if the Head sees him."

"I don't understand this," said Mark; "and I certainly sha'n't come. I have my work to do. Will you fellows kindly clear out and leave me alone?"

"But your old pal wants to see you," said Bolsover. "It's Ratty Thompson, from the Bird in Hand."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mark Linley flushed.

"I don't know the man," he said, "and I shall not come. Do you mean to say that that man has come here and asked for me?"

"Yes, rather!"

"He's coming up to the School House if you don't come out," said Bolsover. "If you don't want him to meet any of the masters, you'd better come quick."

Linley hesitated for a moment.

"There is some ridiculous mistake," he said. "It cannot be me that he wants to see. But perhaps I had better come."

"Perhaps you had," grinned Bolsover. "If he comes reeling into the house here, asking for you, there will be trouble, I fancy."

Mark did not reply. He left the study, and walked out of the house, with Bolsover & Co. following. There was a big crowd of fellows round Ratty Thompson at the school gates now. The man was talking in a rambling way, and most of the fellows were laughing. There was a shout as Mark came up.

"Here comes Linley!"

"Here's your old pal, Whiskers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ratty Thompson caught sight of Linley, and detached himself from the lodge, and staggered very unsteadily towards the Lancashire lad.

"How d'ye do, Marky?" he inquired affectionately, holding out a very large and very dirty hand.

Mark Linley did not take it. He stared hard at the rascal.

"Do you know whom you are speaking to?" he asked.

Ratty chuckled.

"You're my ole pal Marky."

"I don't know you," said Mark, pale to the lips as he listened to the mocking laughter of the Greyfriars fellows. "I have never even spoken to you."

Ratty cast a pathetic look at the crowd.

"He won't own his old pal," he said. "Marky is going back on his old pal, arter all the 'igh old times we've had together."

"Shame!" roared Bolsover. "Stick to your pals, Linley."

"He is no friend of mine, and you know it," said Mark angrily. "I have seen the man before, but I have never spoken to him. He doesn't know me. Either he is doing this because he is drunk, or it is a trick to injure me."

There was a roar of laughter.

"We can't expect Linley to own him before us," grinned Vernon-Smith; "and he's certainly doing it because he's drunk—he wouldn't come here sober, that's a cert. He's given the whole show away by coming here. You're bowled out, Linley."

"Clean bowled!" said Bolsover.

Mark clenched his hands.

"I tell you, I don't know the man!" he said fiercely.

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Draw it mild!"

Ratty seemed on the point of shedding tears.

"Goin' back on his ole pal!" he murmured. "I never thought that of yer, Marky. Arter all I've done for yer! Arter the way I paid up when you beat me at nap at the Bird in 'And. I'm ashamed of yer, Marky."

"Shame!" yelled Bolsover.

"Just the kind of pal one would have expected Linley to have," Snoop remarked. "But you really might be more careful to keep 'em away from Greyfriars, Linley."

"I tell you I don't know the man!" shouted Mark.

"Rats!"

Tom Merry's fist crashed on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's ear at the same moment as Jack Blake's smote him a terrific round-arm blow on the nose, and the unfortunate peacemaker let out a yell, and dropped as if he had been shot. "Good," remarked Glynn, churning away at his moving-picture camera for dear life. "Gussy's given me a fine wind-up to a rattling good film." (*See the grand, long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co., entitled "THE ST. JIM'S PICTURE PALACE!" by Martin Clifford, which is contained in this week's issue of our splendid, popular companion paper, "The Gem" Library. Out on Thursday. Price One Penny.*)

"Too thin."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is this man doing here?" demanded Courtney of the Sixth, striding up through the crowd with an angry brow. "Get out of here at once, you ruffian!"

"I come to see my ole pal."

"He's Linley's friend!" yelled a dozen voices. "He's come to see Linley. They're old pals at the Bird in Hand."

The prefect stared at the Lancashire lad.

"Is that true, Linley?"

"No!" exclaimed Mark passionately. "I've never spoken to the man before. I don't know how he knows my name. This is a trick to cause me injury. Somebody has put the rotter up to this!"

There was a yell of derision from the crowd.

"Draw it mild!"

"You don't expect us to swallow that, Linley!"

The prefect turned to the reeling Thompson. Ratty eyed him dubiously.

"Did you say you'd come here to see Linley?" demanded Courtney.

"That's kerrect, guv'nor."

"What do you want to see him for?"

"He's my ole pal."

"You mean that you know him outside the school?"

"That's so," said Ratty. "He's gone back on his ole pal. He won't own me before his swell friends—arter all I've done for 'im, too."

"If you are really his friend, it's the worst thing you could do for him, to come here like this," said Courtney.

Ratty appeared to be trying to collect himself. It was as if a glimmering of reason had entered into his soaked brain.

"I don't want to do an ole pal any 'arm!" he muttered thickly. "If I've come at the wrong time, Marky, I'm sorry. I ain't a man to do any 'arm to an ole pal, I ain't. That ain't Ratty Thompson's sort, that ain't. I'll go!"

"You'd better go," said Courtney drily.

Ratty staggered towards the open gates. He reeled out into the road. Then he faced round, and looked uncertainly at the grinning crowd.

"It's orlright," he said thickly. "Marky is one of the best. He's a good old pal, and I savvy, you bet. I shouldn't 'ave come 'ere. It's orlright. P'r'aps I've 'ad a drop too much."

"Ha, ha, ha! Perhaps you have!" roared Bolsover.

"I'm goin'," said Mr. Thompson. "I don't want to do an ole pal any 'arm. That ain't my sort. Marky, ole man, I'm sorry I come 'ere, and I 'ope it won't make no difference to our friendship."

And Ratty Thompson staggered away down the road, zigzagging wildly in the direction of Rylcombe.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Quelch Asks Questions.

MARK LINLEY stood as if petrified.

He could not understand it. It seemed as if he were in the grip of a relentless fate, which was closing round him in spite of himself.

What had brought that man to the school?

Had the rascal been bribed to come there and pretend to recognise him as an old friend? If so, who had done it—who could have been rascal enough to do it? Mark had enemies in the school—but whom could he suspect of baseness such as this? Bolsover—Snoop—Vernon-Smith—it was unlikely. Was this merely a drunken fancy in the mind of a drunken man—a whim of a wandering mind. That did not seem likely, either. Mark Linley was utterly amazed.

The other fellows were amazed, too, but it was only at the recklessness of the drunken rascal in reeling into Greyfriars in that way, and disgracing Linley before the school. If anybody had doubted Linley's connection with the low gang at the Bird in Hand before, they could not doubt it now, when the greatest reprobate in Friardale had claimed him as a pal before all Greyfriars.

Courtney watched the intoxicated rascal out of the gates, and then turned to Mark Linley with a frowning brow.

"Is there anything in this, Linley?" he asked roughly. "Do you know anything about that man?"

"Nothing, Courtney," said Mark, his eyes meeting the prefect's fearlessly.

"How does he come to know your name, then?"

"I don't know."

"Why should he ask for you, more than for any other fellow? Is this only a drunken whim, and he doesn't know what he's doing?"

"I don't know, unless some enemy of mine has put him up to it."

"A likely story!" sneered Bolsover. "I suppose Linley will be accusing one of us of bribing Ratty Thompson to do what he's done."

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Linley quietly.

"That is all nonsense," said Courtney brusquely; "and I can't help taking this in connection with the fact that two fellows have seen you at that public-house, Linley."

"They were mistaken."

"They declare that they were not mistaken. I'm afraid this matter will have to be investigated," said Courtney drily. "You had better come with me to your Form-master."

"I am quite willing."

Mark Linley walked away with the prefect. He felt the crowd of Greyfriars fellows in a buzz behind him. Most of them were laughing, and very many of them were glad, as they said candidly, that Linley had been bowled out at last. Bolsover claimed that he had guessed something of the sort all along, and a good many other fellows said the same. Harry Wharton & Co. were silent. They could not defend Linley. The evidence against him was piling up too thickly for doubt on the subject.

Bob Cherry had seen Linley leaving the Bird in Hand. Gilmore of the Fourth had seen him at the parlour window of the public-house. Now Ratty Thompson, the disreputable habitue of the Bird in Hand, had claimed him as a pal before all the school. There could not be quite so many "mistakes" in succession.

"It seems jolly clear!" Harry Wharton remarked quietly to his chums. "But it surprises me very much, all the same."

"I should never have thought it of Linley, for one," said Nugent. "But you never can tell!"

"It's plain enough," said Bob Cherry gloomily. "He's taken me in more than any of you; but I'm done with him now."

"He will be having a rotten time with Quelchy!" Johnny Bull remarked uneasily. "I suppose he is an awful rotter, but one can't help feeling sorry for the poor beggar."

Johnny Bull was quite right; Mark Linley was not having a pleasant time in the Remove-master's study. The scandal on the subject of the Lancashire lad had been going the rounds of Greyfriars since the day when Bob Cherry had seen Linley—or Linley's double—leaving the Bird in Hand. It had come to the knowledge of the whole school, and reached the master's ears last. Mr. Quelch had been inclined to pooh-pooh the story, for he had a very high opinion of the scholarship junior. And so he had taken no notice of the story officially as yet, expecting that it would die away in a few days.

But it was necessary to take notice of it now. Courtney had called to Wingate in the passage, and the captain of Greyfriars came into the Remove-master's study with the prefect and Mark Linley. Mr. Quelch met them with knitted brows. From his study window he had seen what had passed outside, and although he did not know all, he knew enough to be very angry.

"What is it, Wingate?" he asked.

Wingate explained.

Mr. Quelch listened quietly, without looking at the Lancashire lad, who stood pale and silent, with a troubled brow.

"Courtney thought you ought to know about it, sir," said Wingate. "I think so, too. This kind of thing can't be allowed to go on, of course."

"Most decidedly not," said Mr. Quelch. He turned to the junior. "Have you anything to say, Linley?"

"Only that I am quite innocent, sir. I was in the wood studying Greek when Bob Cherry fancied he saw me leave the Bird in Hand, and when Gilmore thought he saw me at the window there. I suppose they saw somebody like me."

"The person Cherry saw dropped a book belonging to you, and Cherry picked it up," said Wingate.

"Yes; that is strange."

"You do not doubt Cherry's statement?" asked Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, no, sir!" said Mark Linley at once. "Bob Cherry wouldn't tell a lie. Besides, he was always my friend until this happened."

"He is not your friend now, then?"

"No, sir."

"Do you doubt Gilmore's statement?"

"I don't know, sir. I don't think Gilmore is very truthful, but if Bob Cherry saw somebody who looked like me, Gilmore may have seen him, too."

"You say you do not know this man who came here claiming to know you?"

"Not in the least, sir."

"Can you explain why he should come and make such a statement, then?"

"Not unless somebody put him up to it, sir."

"In that case," said Mr. Quelch coldly, "you declare that the whole affair is a plot against you, by some enemy or enemies?"

"Yes, sir."

"And in that case again, Cherry of the Remove must be a party to it, since it was his recognising you at the public-house which started the affair.

Mark looked very troubled.

"Well, it would look like that, sir," he said. "Only I know Bob wouldn't be a party to anything mean—even if he had a motive, which he certainly hadn't in this case, for we were good chums. Bob Cherry has acted in good faith."

Mr. Quelch looked at the junior very hard.

"If Bob Cherry has acted in good faith—as you say, and as I firmly believe—then there is very small room for doubt that you have been guilty of the conduct imputed to you," said the Remove-master sternly.

Mark Linley did not flinch.

"I am not guilty of it, sir."

"I hardly know what to say," said Mr. Quelch. "You have borne an excellent character up to now. I know that you have some enemies here, through no fault of your own. Yet the evidence is so strong that it seems folly to doubt it. I admit that I do not know how to act in the matter—I cannot do justice without the risk of doing great injustice. You may

leave this matter to me," Mr. Quelch added, glancing at the two prefects.

Wingate and Courtney left the study.

"Sit down, Linley," said the Remove-master quietly.

"Thank you, sir!"

"Now, Linley, I am going to speak to you very plainly," said Mr. Quelch, in a kind but very firm tone. "It looks to me as if you have allowed yourself to be led into low and degrading associations. But the evidence, though very strong, is not complete enough for me to condemn you. I tell you plainly, that if the case were fully made out, it would be ruin to you. You would be flogged, and perhaps expelled from Greyfriars. But expelled or not, you would have to leave this school, for if you were proved to be guilty of the conduct attributed to you, your scholarship would be taken away."

Mark Linley compressed his lips.

"I know it, sir," he said, in a low voice.

"You know the terms of the Founder's Scholarships at Greyfriars," continued Mr. Quelch. "If the holder is guilty of any conduct causing disgrace to the school, if he shall by any action forfeit his good character, the scholarship is taken away from him, and may be conferred upon any other boy in the school who is deemed worthy of it, entirely at the option of the governing body. This has happened before at Greyfriars. A Bishop's Scholarship was taken away from a boy who was guilty of gambling, and was given to another lad some years ago. I should be sorry to see this happen to you, Linley. You have made a very brave fight so far. You won the scholarship by your own efforts, and if you keep it, it will mean very much to you in the future. But if you are guilty of such conduct as that now imputed to you, it will be taken from you, and will remain in the gift of the governors, to be bestowed upon anyone they select for the remainder of the term it has to run."

"I know it, sir."

"I wish you to bear it in mind. If you lose your scholarship, you must leave Greyfriars, for even if you were allowed to remain, you have no means to pay the fees, I understand?"

"That is quite true, sir."

"You know better than I do what a blow it would be to your parents if the scholarship were taken away from you," said Mr. Quelch. "For their sakes, as well as for your own sake, I ask you to be careful, Linley. Now you may go."

Mark Linley rose.

"I shall be careful, sir," he said. "But I have done nothing that I need be ashamed of. But I shall certainly be careful. Thank you, sir!"

Mark Linley quitted the study. Mr. Quelch remained in a thoughtful mood. He wondered whether he had done right in allowing the matter to rest where it was. If the boy had made one slip, was it not better to give him a chance of redeeming it? Surely! But if there were any more trouble of the same kind—— Mr. Quelch's brows knitted at the thought. Mark Linley had been given a chance, and if he did not take advantage of it, he would have to suffer the consequences—and there would be no mercy for him!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Almost Caught.

"COLLAR him!" muttered Coker.

It was the day following the surprising visit of Ratty Thompson to Greyfriars. Coker, Potter, and Greene of the Fifth were strolling along the towing-path in the direction of Friardale. It was a half-holiday at Greyfriars, and the chums of the Fifth were "taking it easy." Coker had suddenly halted at the sight of a Greyfriars cap above the bushes close at hand.

Coker made a sign to the others to be silent. The Greyfriars cap had appeared for a moment, and disappeared again in the thickets. Someone belonging to Greyfriars was making his way towards the nearest building of the village—the Bird in Hand public-house—and keeping in the bushes to avoid observation. The thought came into the minds of the Fifth-Formers at once that it was Mark Linley.

"We'll show him up!" murmured Potter.

And Coker muttered, "Collar him!"

The cap appeared again for a moment, and the three Fifth-Formers made a sudden rush into the thicket. The next moment a youth in Etons and a Greyfriars cap was struggling in their grasp.

But it was not Linley of the Remove.

"Oh, rot!" exclaimed Coker, releasing his prisoner as he recognised him. "We're offside! It's not Linley!"

"Gilmore of the Fourth!" growled Potter.

Gilmore wrenched himself away from the Fifth-Formers. He was looking very startled, as was natural under the circumstances.

"What on earth are you up to?" demanded the Fourth-Former angrily.

"We thought it was Linley, sneaking to the Bird in Hand," Coker explained. "That's why we jumped on you. What are you doing here, anyway?"

Gilmore was silent for a moment, and then he chuckled.

"I'm on the same track," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Linley's gone out for the afternoon," said Gilmore. "He said something about going up the cliffs to read. I know jolly well where he's gone. He said I lied when I said I saw him at the parlour window of that pub. I'm going to bowl him out this time. I know he's there, and I'm going to spot him. I'll jolly well show him whether I told lies about him or not."

"Rotten game, spying on a chap," said Coker loftily.

Gilmore sneered.

"He said I lied. It's only fair to catch him in the act."

"Well, there's something in that," said Coker. "Are you sure he's there?"

"Quite sure."

"How do you know?"

"Because I saw him coming in this direction. I lost him in the wood, but I know where he is right enough."

Coker whistled softly.

"If Linley is playing such a rotten game as that, he ought to be bowled out and shown up," he said.

"He's been shown up pretty well already, I fancy," said Potter. "I can't understand why Quelch is so easy on him."

"We'll catch him in the giddy act!" said Coker, with a chuckle. "What price marching into the pub. and asking to see him, and running him to ground?"

"Good egg!"

"The pub.'s out of bounds, you know," said Greene doubtfully.

"Not at a time like this. This is a special occasion. We shall be doing our duty to Greyfriars if we show him up. Besides," said Coker sagely, "you know the rules of the scholarship. If Linley's forfeited it, it ought to be taken away from him, and I'd go in for it myself. I should get a jolly good tip from my aunt if I won a scholarship."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" demanded Coker warmly.

"The idea of you winning a scholarship!" roared Potter. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker doubled up his big fists.

"Look here, you silly ass——"

"Oh, chuck it!" said Greene. "There's nothing to row about. You couldn't get the scholarship, Coker."

"How do you know I couldn't?" demanded Coker truculently.

"Against the rules," said Greene pacifically. "If a scholarship is forfeited, it isn't competed for again. It's in the gift of the governors, and they can bestow it on anybody they like for the time it has to run, generally on some chap whose people are hard up. You don't come under that head."

Coker grunted.

"Well, I suppose I don't," he agreed. "But the governors can bestow it on any distinguished scholar in the school, if they like."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You don't come under that head, either!" shrieked Potter.

"Look here, you idiot——"

"If you chaps want to catch Linley, I'll show you how you can do it," said Gilmore. "Wait a bit about here to see if he comes out, and if he doesn't——"

"He might catch sight of us, and sneak out the back way."

"I'll go round to the back," said Gilmore. "There's only one way out there, through a narrow lane, and I can watch there. You fellows stay here and watch the front of the house. He won't stay long, most likely, and you can nab him as he comes out."

"Good egg! Cut off, then, and mind you keep your eyes open. If he comes out at the back, come and tell us."

"Right-ho; but it's not likely, if you keep in cover."

"We'll do that."

Gilmore disappeared into the thickets, making his way round to the back of the public-house, which stood in its own gardens by the bank of the Sark. There was no other building near at hand, with the exception of the stables belonging to the Bird in Hand and a small boat-house. The chums of the Fifth took cover in the boat-house to watch the front door and windows of the Bird in Hand.

A quarter of an hour passed, and Coker grew very impatient.

"Dash it all," he said, "let's go into the place and have him out. Blessed if I like cooling my heels here."

"Oh, wait a bit!" said Potter. "They might hide him if we went in to look for him. We can't make them let us search the house."

"He'd slip upstairs, and they'd say he wasn't there," said Greene.

"Well, we're wasting a lot of time!" growled Coker.

But he admitted the reasonableness of his chums' advice, and they waited. Coker & Co. watched the public-house for

another five or six minutes. Then Potter uttered a sudden exclamation.

"My hat, look there!"

A window on the ground floor of the Bird in Hand had opened, and a boy looked out, cautiously, as if to see whether there was anyone on the watch.

At the distance, it was not easy to distinguish features, but the face was certainly like that of Mark Linley. There was a scratch on the cheek, and a discoloured mark round one eye, and the boy wore a shabby grey suit and a Greyfriars cap. He looked out of the window for a moment or two, and then, as if alarmed, drew back and closed the window sharply. Dimly through the glass the Fifth-Formers could still see the form in grey.

Coker drew a deep breath.

"There's no doubt about that," he said. "I'd know that suit anywhere. That was Linley."

"Yes, rather!" said Potter, with emphasis.

"He's taken the alarm, and he doesn't mean to come out. Let's rush him."

"If we get in pretty quick, we'll catch him before he has time to hide," said Greene, with a nod.

"Come on, then!" exclaimed Coker.

The three Fifth-Formers rushed across the green sward to the doorway of the Bird in Hand. In the sanded entrance they were met by Mr. Ratty Thompson, who barred their way.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"We want Mark Linley," said Coker.

"He ain't here."

"That's a lie!" said Coker promptly. "We saw him at the window. Let us pass."

"You ain't got no right to pass in 'ere," said Ratty Thompson. "Don't you push me, young gents. I'll call the chucker-out if you don't clear."

Coker & Co. paused. They had no right to force themselves into the place, and force would certainly be used against them if they tried it.

"Tell Linley we want to see him," said Potter.

"He ain't 'ere."

"I tell you we saw him at the window!" roared Coker.

Ratty Thompson shook his head with a grin.

"You must 'ave been mistaken," he said. "That's the pot-boy who was in the parlour."

Coker snorted.

"Don't tell such awful whoppers. We recognised Linley."

"Well, you can't going in," said Ratty.

A barman and a stableman had come up the passage by this time, and the Fifth-Formers realised that it would not do to persist. They turned back angrily, and quitted the public-house. With knitted brows they made their way round to the lane at the back of the house, where they expected to find Gilmore. But the Fourth-Former was not to be seen. He had evidently failed to stay and keep watch.

"The rotter!" exclaimed Coker wrathfully. "I'll dot him on the boko when I get back to the school. He hasn't watched at all, and very likely Linley dodged out of the back after all, while we are talking to those rotters at the front of the house."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Potter.

"Anyway, we've spotted Linley here," said Coker, "and I think Greyfriars ought to be made too hot to hold him. Let's get back to the school."

And the three Fifth-Formers walked back to Greyfriars in a very excited state of mind.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.
Coker Decides to Put His Foot Down.

TEMPLE, DABNEY & CO. pounced upon Cecil Gilmore as he came into the Fourth Form passage at Greyfriars later in the afternoon. They grasped him, and marched him into their study, frowning.

"Where have you been?" demanded Temple.

"Out," said Gilmore cheerfully.

"Wasting time, instead of attending to business," said Temple severely. "You know jolly well that we fixed this afternoon for a rehearsal of 'Hamlet'!"

"Forget all about it," said Gilmore blandly.

The three enthusiastic members of the Fourth Form Dramatic Society sniffed.

"Well, if you forget all about it again, we'll jolly well take the part of Hamlet away from you, and you'll have to play First Gravedigger!" growled Temple.

"Sorry," said Gilmore, "but I was thinking of something else. We jolly nearly caught Linley, of the Remove, at the Bird in Hand."

"Coker's been here inquiring for you about that," said Temple. "He said you arranged to wait in the lane at the back and watch, and you weren't there when they went round."

Gilmore nodded.

"That's so. Linley came out, and I followed him, and he gave me the slip," he replied.

"Then you saw him come out?" exclaimed the Fourth-Formers breathlessly.

"Yes."

"My hat, what an awful rotter that chap is!" said Temple. "After the way he's been shown up lately, too, to go there again. What a nerve!"

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"I expect he's pretty thick with Ratty & Co.," said Gilmore, with a grin. "He may not be able to keep away. What can you expect of a factory chap."

"Quite so," agreed Temple. "I always had my suspicions of him. I dare say he was in the habit of hanging round pubs at home."

"Of course, he was," said Gilmore. "I never liked him."

"I know you didn't," chuckled Temple. "He hammered you once, didn't he, when you were twisting young Dicky Nugent's arm?"

Gilmore scowled.

"Oh, shut up!" he said. "I've had that brought up a dozen times, as if that was the reason that I saw him at the pub. He never hammered Bob Cherry, and Cherry saw him there, too. Now, Coker and Potter and Greene have seen him. It's a clear case."

"Clear enough!" agreed Temple. "The fellow ought to be kicked out of Greyfriars. I think the Head will take the scholarship away from him if this gets out."

"Oh, it's bound to get out!" said Fry. "Coker's talking it all over Greyfriars."

"Chance for some of us to bag that scholarship," said Temple thoughtfully. "It's open to all Forms below the Fifth. I'd like it myself. It means a good deal of pocket-money to a chap, besides the giddy glory. As you've got an uncle on the governing board, Gilly, you could use your influence for me."

"If I had any influence, I'd jolly well use it for myself," grinned Gilmore. "By the way, I've had a letter from Sir Arthur. He'll come to the performance."

"Hurrah! That will be one in the eye for the Remove."

"He says he thinks it's a very worthy object," said Gilmore. "I dare say it is—giving the Remove one in the eye."

"Ha, ha, ha! Now let's get on with 'Hamlet,'" said Temple. "Have you got the soliloquy all right?"

"I think so," yawned Gilmore.

And he started.

"To be or not to be—that is the question.
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing, end them."

There was a rush of feet in the Fourth Form passage, and Coker and Potter and Greene, of the Fifth, burst into the study.

"Here he is!" roared Coker.

"Now, you bounder, what do you mean by it?"

Gilmore retreated round the table.

As Gilmore turned to the cupboard, Wun Lung picked up the glasses of lemonade and changed them. The manœuvre was done so quickly and so suddenly that the Lancashire lad barely had time to see it. Mark stared at the Chinese junior blankly. (*See Chapter* 15.)

"Hallo, what's the trouble?" he exclaimed.

"You jolly well know what the trouble is, and we're jolly well going to bump you for it," said Coker. "You agreed to watch for Linley to come out, and you bunked instead."

"Well, I did watch, and I followed him when he came out."

"Oh!" said Coker, somewhat taken aback. "Then you did see him come out?"

"Yes."

"That alters the case," said Potter. "As we didn't find you there, we thought you'd chucked it without waiting."

"Well, I didn't," said Gilmore.

"All serene," said Coker. "If you saw the rotter come out, that's all right. We're going to make the school too hot to hold the bounder. Greyfriars is going to the dogs, and the Remove are doing it. It's high time something was done. There was Bolsover, of the Remove, mixed up in a poaching affair, and he was let off without being sacked. I thought that was rotten."

"And Vernon-Smith, too, ought to have been sacked long ago," said Potter indignantly. "The Remove are always cheeking the Fifth, and they're disgracing the school now."

"Somebody will have to put his foot down," said Coker. "We're going to do it. You Fourth Form chaps can back us up if you like."

"I don't want to be mixed up in it, thanks," said Gilmore. "I had a row with Linley once, and I can't say anything without it being put down to spite."

"You can go and eat coke, then," growled Coker. "This isn't a time to think of little personal considerations of that sort. Greyfriars is going to the dogs, and we think it's somebody's duty to stop it."

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"That rotter Linley is still out," said Coker. "When he comes in we're going to make a demonstration. We'll jolly well show him whether he can do as he likes, and bring his rotten factory tricks into this school."

And Coker & Co. stamped out of the study wrathfully.

Gilmore looked very thoughtful.

"Looks as if Linley is booked," he remarked.

"Oh, rather!"

"Well, all the better; we don't want him here," said Gilmore, with a shrug of the shoulders. "The best thing he could do would be to resign the scholarship quietly, and get out without any fuss, without waiting to be sacked."

"Better advise him to do it," grinned Temple. "I can imagine the reception you would get."

"It would be the best thing for him," said Gilmore. "I've a jolly good mind to see him when he comes in, and put it to him as a friend."

"Just as you like, old chap; but let's get on with the rehearsal now. We've got to be letter-perfect by the time your giddy uncle brings the governors down to see us do 'Hamlet.'"

And the rehearsal continued in Temple's study. Good as the opinion of Temple, Dabney & Co. was of their own acting, they had to admit that Gilmore was faraway ahead of them. He did not assume the role—he lived the character. His very features seemed to change with the character he wished to assume.

"My word," said Temple, in admiration, "you were born to be an actor, Gilly! If you play up like that when we give the performance we shall simply knock 'em!"

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"Let's see you do some of your impersonations," said Fry.

"I like to see you as Coker, Gilly. It would be a good chance to go into his study as Coker, and watch his face when he found you there."

Gilmore shook his head.

"I think I'll go and see Linley," he said.

"Oh, blow Linley!"

"I feel rather sorry for that chap, and I should like him to be let down lightly," said Gilmore. "Ta-ta!"

He left the study. Temple glanced after him with a peculiar expression.

"First time I've ever heard Gilly sympathise with a fellow who was down on his luck," he remarked, "and I know he hates Linley like poison. More likely he'd like the factory bounder to clear out quietly, so that he could bag the scholarship. He'd have a good chance of getting it, with an uncle on the governing board."

And Dabney and Fry agreed that it was quite probable.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.
A Hostile Demonstration.

"BAH!"

That elegant and graceful monosyllable, shouted by two score of fellows, greeted Mark Linley when he returned to Greyfriars in the summer dusk.

The Lancashire lad started a little as he entered the School House. He had been seen crossing the Close, with his book, as usual, under his arm, and the demonstrators were ready for him. Coker & Co., of the Fifth; Temple, Dabney & Co., of the Fourth; Hobson, and several other Shell fellows, and quite a crowd of the Remove, were massed in the passage, waiting. And they yelled as he came in.

"Yah!"

"Go back to your pub.!"

"He's scuffy!"

"Rotter!"

"Yah!"

Mark Linley walked right on. He took no notice of the demonstration, till Snoop, emboldened by the crowd, ventured to push him as he approached the staircase. Then the Lancashire lad's ready right hand shot out, and Snoop rolled along the floor with a yell.

It was the signal for a rush.

"Collar him!"

"Collar the pub.-haunting cad!"

"Down with him!"

Mark Linley faced round. At that moment Mr. Quelch's study door opened, and the master of the Remove came out, with his eyes glinting.

"Cease this disgraceful noise at once!" he cried.

The rush was stopped, only just in time, for in a moment more the scholarship junior would have been struggling in the grasp of the raggers.

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch angrily. "How dare you make such a disturbance in the passage?"

"It's Linley, sir," half blubbered Snoop. "He's been drinking at the pub. again, and we were telling him what we thought of him."

"You sneaking cad!" muttered Harry Wharton.

"Linley!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Where have you been?"

"In the woods on the Black Pike, sir."

"What have you been doing?"

"Reading Greek, sir."

"Come here!"

Mark approached the Remove-master, and Mr. Quelch scrutinised him searchingly. Then he looked frowningly at the boys.

"Linley has certainly not been drinking," he said. "That part of the accusation is untrue. How dare you say such a thing, Snoop?"

"We all know where he's been, sir," stammered Snoop.

"Indeed! Where?"

"At the Bird in Hand," said Snoop, with a venomous glance at the pale, cold face of the Lancashire lad.

"Did anyone see him there?"

"Coker did, and Greene, and Potter, and Gilmore, of the Fourth."

"Come forward, the boys named!"

Coker & Co. came forward. Gilmore was not to be seen. The three Fifth-Formers were looking somewhat uncomfortable. Angry and indignant as they were, they felt that giving evidence against Linley to a master amounted to sneaking, and they did not like the position they had got into. But there was no help for it now.

"Did you boys see Linley in the place named by Snoop?" asked Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir."

"This afternoon?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me all the circumstances."

Coker, Potter, and Greene all explained at once. Mr. Quelch listened attentively until they had finished their excited narrative.

"What have you to say, Linley?" he asked.

"It is not true, sir," said Mark quietly.

"You call me a liar, you boozing cad?" roared Coker excitedly. "I'll——"

"Silence, Coker!"

"Yes, sir. But he——"

"You think that they were mistaken—that there is some boy like you who has been mistaken for you again and again, Linley?"

"It looks like it to me, sir."

"Here's Gilmore, sir," exclaimed Temple, of the Fourth, "he saw Linley close at hand, sir."

"Gilmore, what do you know of this?"

"Linley passed quite close to me in the lane at the back of the Bird in Hand, sir," said Gilmore calmly. "It was Linley right enough."

"Did you speak to him?"

"I called to him to stop, sir. Instead of stopping, he dodged away and ran. He passed so close that I could have touched him."

"And you are assured that it was Linley?"

"Yes, sir. He had that scratch on his cheek, and the eye that colour—exactly the same."

"Just the same, sir, when we saw him," chorused Coker, Greene, and Potter.

Mr. Quelch pursed his lips.

"Then it appears, Linley, that if you have a double, he also has a scratch on his cheek and a discoloured eye, the same as you have," he said drily.

"I can't understand it, sir."

"It is indeed past understanding, if your denial is truthful," said the Remove-master. "Go to your study now. I must consult with the Head about this. Boys, I forbid you to make any further demonstration against Linley. If he is guilty of disgraceful conduct, he will be dealt with by the authorities of the college."

Mark Linley went upstairs to the Remove passage, and Mr. Quelch, with a very troubled brow, returned into his study. Gilmore chuckled softly.

"I think Linley's about done for now," he remarked.

"Yes, and you're glad, you rotter!" said Dicky Nugent, of the Second Form indignantly. "I believe it's all lies. I know Linley stood by me like a brick when you were twisting my arm, you beastly bully."

Gilmore made a threatening gesture. Frank Nugent took a step forward, and Gilmore's arm dropped to his side again.

"You'd better cheese it, Dicky," said Frank to his minor. "It seems to be pretty clear about Linley. It's not only what Gilmore says. I wouldn't believe him without evidence. But Bob Cherry says the same, and now the Fifth Form chaps have seen Linley there."

"All the same, I don't believe it," said Dicky obstinately.

Mark Linley went into his study in the Remove passage. His face was gloomy. He began to realise that matters were growing very serious for him at Greyfriars. Unless this scandal was stopped, he could not remain at the school. The scholarship junior sank wearily into a chair, tired in body and mind, and feeling very despondent. Little Wun Lung came quietly into the study, and Mark looked at him dully.

"Wun Lung solly," said the little Chinee sympathetically.

Mark forced a smile.

"You don't believe them, Wun Lung?" he said.

Wun Lung shook his head.

"But what does it mean?" said Mark wearily. "Who can this chap be who is being taken for me? I never knew I had a double. And how did he get hold of my book the other day? And how does he come to have a black eye and a scratch just when I've got them? It's enough to make me believe I've been walking in my sleep and going to the Bird in Hand without knowing it."

Wun Lung grinned.

"Me tinkee all lies," he said.

"But it's not all lies, Wun Lung. Coker is a silly ass, but he's not a liar; neither are the other fellows, excepting Gilmore."

"Allee light, 'cepting Gilmole," said the little Chinee, with a peculiar glitter in his eyes. "Gilmole logue."

"Gilmore may be a rogue, Wun Lung, but the others are not."

Wun Lung nodded.

'Gilmore lascal, all the others fools," said the little Chinee sententiously.

"Do you mean that Gilmore has got this up against me?"

"Me tinkee."

"But how could he manage it?"

Here Wun Lung had to shake his head. It was beyond him.

"No savvy," he confessed.

"And why should he do it? Not because I punched him for ragging Nugent minor? That isn't enough to make a chap lay a scheme like this."

"No savvy."

"It's all a horrible mistake," said Mark. "I don't trust Gilmore, of the Fourth, but the others are speaking in good faith. I can't make it out, kid, but there's one thing that's jolly certain. This means that I shall have to leave Greyfriars."

Wun Lung looked alarmed.

"Leave Gleyfliais!" he ejaculated.

"It's not true what they say, but they've made it look as if it is," said Mark miserably. "I'm done for here."

There was a knock at the door, and Gilmore, of the Fourth, came in. Mark Linley clenched his hands.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.
No Surrender.

GILMORE looked at the Lancashire lad, and noted the clenched fists. He closed the door behind him, and leaned on it carelessly, his hands in his pockets. Little Wun Lung sat in the armchair, curled up in its ample space in his usual manner, with half-closed eyes. But between the half-open lids the little Chinee was watching Cecil Gilmore with a keen, unwavering scrutiny.

"What do you want here, Gilmore?" Mark Linley asked abruptly.

Gilmore laughed lightly.

"I haven't come for a row," he said. "I only want to speak to you. I'm sorry for what's happened. I never meant to say a word against you in public, but you can see that I was driven to speak. I had to answer when Mr. Quelch questioned me, and I had to tell him what I knew."

"What you did not know, rather," said Mark bitterly. "You certainly never saw me come out of the back of the public-house, as you told Mr. Quelch."

Gilmore coughed.

"Well, we'll let that pass," he said. "Just for the sake of argument we'll admit that there's a fellow exactly like you who hangs round that pub., and who carries your books in his pockets, and gets scratches and black eyes at the exact same moment that you do. It sounds rather steep, doesn't it?"

Mark was silent. It did sound "steep," as Gilmore said; so steep, indeed, that Mark almost wondered, for one dizzy moment, whether he was in possession of his right senses, and whether he had not indeed gone to the Bird in Hand in some moment of mental aberration.

"Leaving that aside," said Gilmore, "I've come to speak to you as a friend. I've been forced to say what I know, and I'm sorry it's injured you. I don't want you to think it's because of that row we had some time back. I'd forgotten about that, and any of the fellows will tell you that I was unwilling to give evidence against you."

"Possibly," said Mark. "I don't know."

"You believe me?"

"I don't know. I don't trust you, Gilmore," said Mark frankly. "I never could trust you. You don't look the kind of fellow one could trust."

Gilmore laughed again.

"Thank you!" he said. "But I'm quite sincere when I say I've come here as a friend, to give you some jolly good advice."

"You can go on."

"You're in bad odour now. You'll never get out of it, and it's coming to the Head's knowledge now. The evidence against you is more than strong enough to ruin you."

"Perhaps."

"No perhaps about it," said Gilmore. "It is! You will have to leave Greyfriars, and your scholarship will be taken away. I'm sorry for you, as I said. I advise you to leave the school without waiting to be kicked out."

"Thank you!"

"You can resign the scholarship; that's a good deal better than having it taken away from you for bad conduct," said Gilmore. "Then you can leave the school of your own accord. The matter will die away and be forgotten. You can start fair somewhere else, without the disgrace clinging to you of having been expelled from Greyfriars. You see that?"

Mark looked at him steadily.

"Yes, I see that!" he said.

"If you hang on here, the scholarship will be taken off you and you will be sacked, and it will cling to you all your life," said Gilmore. "You will never be able to win a scholarship for another school after being sacked from this one. But if you go of your own accord, you've always got a chance. What you've done once you can do again."

Mark nodded.

"It's because I feel sorry for you that I give you this advice," said Gilmore, with an air of great frankness. "I think you've been hardly treated. And if, as you say, you are innocent, it's jolly hard. But if you're innocent, that's all the more reason why you should leave the school without a stain on your name."

Mark was silent.

"Well, don't you think that's jolly good advice?" asked Gilmore.

"I dare say it is."

"You'll act upon it?"

"No."

Gilmore compressed his lips.

"Why not?" he asked.

"Because I don't intend to leave Greyfriars unless I'm forced out," said Mark quietly; "because I don't mean to give up my scholarship while I can cling to it. If they condemn me and turn me out, I can't help it, but I won't go otherwise. I am innocent, and nothing would induce me to act as if I were guilty. That's why."

"Now, be a sensible chap——"

"I've got nothing more to say on that subject, Gilmore, and I don't want to hear anything more about it. And I don't trust you, either. You may have a good motive in coming here and giving me this advice, but I don't trust you. If you mean me well, I don't want to appear ungrateful, but I can't believe that you mean me well. That's all."

Gilmore gritted his teeth.

"Then you won't go?"

"No!"

"Better think it over——"

"I don't need to think it over. I've done that."

"Very well," said Gilmore. "If you won't go on your own, you'll get the order of the boot, and serve you jolly well right."

"That's enough," said Mark, rising; "I'll trouble you to get out of my study."

Gilmore gave him a savage look. For a fellow who had merely been offering good advice in a matter that was no immediate concern of his own, he looked very annoyed. He opened the study door, and closed it after him with a slam. Mark Linley sat down again, knitting his brows. Little Wun Lung chuckled softly, and Mark started.

"What are you thinking about, kid?" he exclaimed.

"Gilmole tellee big lie," said the little Celestial. "He no fliend of yours."

"I suppose he meant well with his advice, Wun Lung."

"No tinkee."

"I suppose he wants me to go, like the rest of them," said Mark wearily. "That's very likely at the bottom of it."

"Quitee so. Me tinkee Gilmole awful lascal."

Mark smiled faintly. His one staunch champion was attached to him by affection, not by reason, and he was inclined to consider all Mark's enemies rascals. Wun Lung curled out of the big armchair.

"Me keepee eye on the lascal," he said.

He disappeared without waiting for Mark to reply.

Mark frowned and half rose; the little Oriental's ideas were not English ideas, and it had never been possible to make him understand that it was wrong to watch people, and to listen at keyholes. Wun Lung was a thoroughly good little fellow so far as his lights extended, but beyond that he was a heathen. But Mark sat down again; he was too weary and troubled in spirit to bother himself about what Wun Lung might be doing.

Gilmore had returned to the Fourth-Form passage with a scowling brow. He came into Temple's study, and found Temple, Dabney & Co. conning over scribbled "parts." The "scrip" of the Fourth Form Dramatic Society was in a very tattered and inky state, and it sometimes led to confusion in the renderings. Dabney's voice was going strong as Gilmore came in.

"What may this mean
That thou, dead horse, again in complete steel——"

"That isn't right!" roared Temple.

"It's written here!" said Dabney.

"Well, it ain't right—it's dread corse, not dead horse!"

"Oh, all right! 'That thou, dread corse——' Hallo, Gilly!"

"How did Linley take your fatherly advice, Gilly?" grinned Temple.

Gilmore growled.

"He won't go!" he said.

"I knew he wouldn't! He'll hang on here till he's booted out—that's his sort," said Fry. "Can't expect otherwise."

"Well, he will be kicked out," said Gilmore. "Did you fellows know that he keeps spirits in his study?"

"No!" said Temple incredulously.

"Well, you know it now."

"You don't mean to say you've seen——"

"I don't mean to say anything," said Gilmore. "Let's get on with the rehearsal. We've got to get this play all right by the time my uncle comes down to see it."

And Gilmore would say nothing more of what he had seen or had not seen in Mark Linley's study. But he had said quite enough; Temple, Dabney & Co. did not fail to spread the report, and ere long Billy Bunter was relating to all Greyfriars that Linley of the Remove had bottles of whisky and brandy and rum in his study. And all Greyfriars swallowed the story without the slightest hesitation. And Wun Lung, who had heard enough to know that Cecil Gilmore had started the story, returned to Mark Linley's study with his little queer countenance screwed up in a most peculiar way, somewhat to the surprise of the Lancashire lad when he saw him.

"What's the matter with you, Wun Lung?" asked Mark.

Wun Lung shook his head

"Me tinkee," he said mysteriously.

"But what are you thinking?"

"Me tinkee muchee."

Mark Linley smiled.

"You're a mysterious little beggar," he said. "Do you mean to say that you've made any discovery, kid?"

"P'l'aps."

"Do you suspect somebody?"

"P'l'aps."

And more than that Wun Lung would not say.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Gilmore Wants to Know.

HARRY WHARTON came down the passage past the door of the Head's study, and paused suddenly. Outside the Head's door a form was bent in an attitude of listening, and a dark frown gathered on Wharton's brow. He made a quick stride forward, and caught the listener by the shoulder, and there was a sharp startled cry. It was Gilmore of the Fourth.

Gilmore straightened up, panting for breath.

"You startled me, you ass!" he muttered. "I thought for the minute that it was Quelch."

"Serve you right if it had been," said Wharton scornfully. "What do you mean by listening at the Head's door."

"No business of yours, I suppose," said Gilmore, with a sneer.

"It's everybody's business to stop caddish tricks of that kind," said Harry. "You're jolly well not going to do it again."

Gilmore clenched his hand for a moment. Wharton's eyes gleamed; he was quite prepared to wipe up the floor with the Fourth-Former. But Gilmore's expression changed the next moment.

"All serene!" he said. "No need to row. I suppose you don't know what's going on in there."

"No, I don't—and I don't want to," said Harry sharply. "That's no business of mine, at any rate."

"Linley's in there," said Gilmore, unheeding. "The Head's calling him over the coals about what Coker told old Quelch. Linley is stuffing him up with whoppers."

"That's no reason why you should listen!" retorted Harry.

"Well, I wanted to know whether Linley was to be sacked or not."

The door opened, and Mark Linley came out of the Head's study. His face was pale, and his look downcast. He started a little at the sight of the two juniors.

"What's the verdict?" asked Gilmore.

Mark smiled bitterly.

"There's no verdict," he replied. "The Head hasn't sacked me, if that's what you mean."

Gilmore's eyes snapped for a second.

"Then you've convinced him that Coker was mistaken?"

"No."

"But if he believes Coker, he is bound to sack you," said Gilmore.

"He says he reserves his judgment; he is puzzled," said Mark quietly. "I've got a chance to find out the truth yet."

"The truth!" said Harry Wharton. "Do you still deny that Bob Cherry saw you at the Bird in Hand, Linley?"

Mark met his eyes calmly.

"Yes," he said. "I deny that anybody saw me there. I don't understand the business yet, but I'm going to try to get to the bottom of it. And the Head knows I'm not that kind of fellow, and he's going to give me the chance."

"I'm glad of that," said Harry, sincerely enough. "If there is any mistake in the matter, nobody would be more pleased to have it proved than I should. But——"

"But you don't believe it's all a mistake—you think the same as the other fellows do?" said Mark contemptuously.

Wharton flushed.

"I don't see how I can doubt it, or anybody else, either," he said.

Mark Linley made no reply. He turned and walked away. The study door opened again, and the Head glanced out.

"Ah, is that you, Wharton? Come into my study; I wish to speak to you."

"Yes, sir."

Harry Wharton entered the study. The Head's face was very grave and troubled. He seated himself, and Harry Wharton waited.

"You are aware of his story about Linley?" the Head said abruptly.

"Yes, sir."

"You have always been Linley's friend, I believe?"

"Up till now, sir," said Wharton hesitatingly.

"And no longer?" asked Dr. Locke.

"Well, no, sir."

"Then you believe the charge against him?"

Wharton coloured uncomfortably.

"I hardly know what to say, sir. I would never have believed Linley was that kind of chap, and I believe in sticking to a fellow who's down on his luck. If it was only Gilmore's evidence against him, I should believe in Linley. But Bob Cherry saw him, and now there's Coker and Potter and Greene. I don't see how a fellow can doubt it."

Dr. Locke nodded thoughtfully.

"I have weighed and sifted the evidence very carefully, Wharton," he said. "If Mark Linley had been a boy of indifferent character, I should not have had a doubt. But up till the past week he has always borne an unimpeachable character."

"That's quite correct, sir. We were astonished, all of us, when we found this out."

"The evidence seems conclusive," said Dr. Locke. "But there is the possibility—the bare possibility—of an error. It would be a terrible blow to Linley and his family if his scholarship were taken away and he were compelled to leave Greyfriars. For that reason I am giving him every chance. I feel that I cannot condemn him on evidence even as strong as this, while there is even a remote possibility of an injustice being done. Why I called you in, Wharton, was to ask you what his own Form-fellows think of the matter, yourself among the number."

"I'm afraid the Form is against him, sir."

"All of them?"

"Yes, sir—excepting Wun Lung."

"Is it possible that the judgment of the juniors is prejudiced a little by the fact that Linley is a scholarship boy, and that his people are very poor?" asked the Head gently.

"Some of them, certainly, sir, but that wouldn't make any difference to me, or to a lot of the fellows. We've stood by Linley for a long time, up till now."

"Yes, that is true. But please bear in mind, Wharton, that this may turn out to be a case of mistaken identity—some peculiar chance resemblance—and that, if Linley is really innocent, this is very hard upon him. You may go."

"I will remember it, sir."

Harry Wharton left the study. He opened the door and stepped into the passage, and almost stepped upon Cecil Gilmore, who had risen hurriedly to his feet from the keyhole.

Wharton flushed angrily.

"You rotten cad! Listening again!" he said, as he closed the door behind him.

Gilmore shrugged his shoulders.

"I want to know what's going on," he said. "Look here, the Head must be simply off his rocker! The evidence against Linley is strong enough to hang a man. I suppose the Head won't believe anything against him unless he comes home drunk to Greyfriars some day. The fellow ought to be sacked."

"You want him to be sacked, I can see that," said Harry. "You've always been up against Linley. The Head says there's a possibility of doubt."

"That's all rot!"

"Better tell the Head so," said Harry contemptuously.

He walked away, leaving Gilmore scowling, and made his way to Mark Linley's study. The Lancashire lad had gone back to his preparation, and little Wun Lung was curled up in the armchair as usual. Mark fixed his eyes upon Wharton as the latter entered the study. He did not speak or nod to him.

"I've just seen the Head," said Harry awkwardly.

Mark did not speak.

"He thinks there's a possibility of doubt in this matter," said the captain of the Remove. "Goodness knows, Linley, I don't want to be unjust to you. We've always been good friends, and you can't deny that I've stood by you a good many times when the Remove were down on you."

"I don't deny it," said Mark coldly.

"Well, look here; can't you give any explanation? Can't you make any suggestion as to how this story got up?" Harry asked. "If it isn't true, what does it all mean? How did your book get into the hands of the chap Bob Cherry mistook for you?"

"I don't know."

"It's jolly hard to believe——"

"I don't ask you to believe me," said Mark. "I'm down on my luck just at present, and all you fellows have turned on me. I don't want to have anything more to say to you."

"Well, if you put it like that——"

"I do put it like that. Please leave my study."

Wharton turned crimson.

"You won't have to ask me to do that twice," he said.

And he went out of the study with knitted brows. Mark Linley turned to his work again, with a pale, set face. Little Wun Lung regarded him from the armchair with half-closed eyes, but did not speak.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.
Gilmore's Little Game.

MARK LINLEY kept very much to himself for the next day or two. The Remove wanted to have nothing to do with him, and they showed it plainly. The only fellow who ever came to his study was little Wun Lung. Some of the fellows tried to explain to Wun Lung that it was "up" to him to leave Linley alone, but the little Chinee took refuge in failing to understand. Quite a crowd of the Remove gathered round him in the junior common-room one evening, to explain to him his duty—from their point of view. Little Wun Lung seemed, however, curiously obtuse.

"Linley's a rank outsider," Bolsover explained to him. "He's a pub-hunting rotter. No decent fellow ought to speak to him. Do you understand?"

"No savvy."

"It's up to the whole Remove to let Linley alone," said Vernon-Smith. "Every fellow is giving him the cold shoulder except you, you rotten little heathen!"

"Me no savvy."

"Look here, you can dig in my study for a bit, if you like, until Linley's sacked," said Ogilvy.

"No savvy."

"I'll teach you to savvy!" said Bolsover threateningly. "Look here, you've got to give Linley the go-by."

"No savvy."

"Will you keep out of that cad's study?"

"No savvy."

"Do you want me to cut your silly pigtail off?" roared Bolsover.

"No savvy."

"Will you leave Linley alone?"

"No savvy."

The next moment Wun Lung squealed, as Bolsover's heavy grasp descended upon him. But Bob Cherry strode forward, and grasped Bolsover in his turn, and dragged him off. The Remove bully glared at him furiously.

"What are you interfering for, Cherry?" he roared.

"Let Wun Lung alone."

"He's not going to chum with that factory cad!"

"Let him alone!"

"I won't!" bellowed Bolsover.

The next moment he was fighting with Bob Cherry, and Wingate descended upon them, and gave them two hundred lines each. Meanwhile, Wun Lung slipped quietly away. Whether he "savvied" or not, he did not mean to desert his old chum.

Life was hard enough for Linley in those days, without the desertion of his last faithful friend. Not only were the Removites down on him, but the other Forms had taken the matter up. Temple, Dabney & Co. declared that his presence in the school was a disgrace to Greyfriars, and Coker incessantly advocated a deputation of all Greyfriars to the Head to demand that the factory bounder should be sacked. The prefects of the Sixth were rough upon him, too, and upon the whole Mark's life was far from being a bed of roses.

He kept very quiet, and worked harder than ever. That was the only consolation he had now—to work hard. Buried in his studies, he could forget the troubles that were accumulating thicker and thicker upon his devoted head.

The juniors were in a state of simmering indignation on the subject. Fellows had been expelled from Greyfriars for doing what Mark Linley was accused of having done, and here was that rank outsider doing it with impunity! Two or three voices were raised for the unfortunate junior, but they were drowned in the general chorus of condemnation.

Meanwhile, Mark kept carefully within the school walls. So long as he did not go out on his accustomed walks, no one could declare that he had seen him at the Bird in Hand; while he was under the eyes of all Greyfriars he was safe from that. And if the whole affair was, indeed, some cunning plot against the scholarship scholar, Mark's caution was a complete defeat for the unknown plotter. Mark was convinced by this time that he was in the toils of some cunning and unscrupulous scheme, though he could not fathom it, and he wondered what the next move would be.

Wun Lung said nothing. The little Chinee had a gift of silence, but there was sometimes a knowing glitter in his almond eyes which showed that his thoughts were busy. Two or three days passed, and nothing more was heard of the scandal, so far as new facts were concerned, but the feeling on the subject had not died away. It was rather growing in intensity as time passed on.

Very much to Mark's surprise, there was one fellow besides Wun Lung who showed him some friendship, and that one was Gilmore of the Fourth. Gilmore dropped into the Lancashire lad's study several times and spoke to him. Mark was very cold to him at first, but the subject of Gilmore's talk was the possibility of the whole thing being a case of a chance resemblance, and he proposed plans for finding out, and Mark's distrust wore away after a time. Little Wun Lung would watch Gilmore very curiously when the Fourth Former was in the study, but he never spoke. If Gilmore glanced at him, he found the almond eyes almost closed, and Wun Lung looking sleepy and certainly unsuspicious. But Mark knew that the little Celestial suspected Gilmore, though he would not say of what he suspected him.

"Going out this afternoon, Linley?" Gilmore asked, after morning lessons on Saturday.

Mark shook his head.

"You haven't been out much lately," said the Fourth Former.

"I'm not going out."

"But why?"

The scholarship junior shrugged his shoulders with a bitter smile.

"Because if I do somebody will say afterwards that he has seen me at the Bird in Hand," he replied. "They can't say it so long as I remain in the school."

Gilmore's eyes gleamed in a peculiar way.

"How long are you going to keep that up?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"Well, I'm going out," he said. "Look here, can I come to tea with you in your study when I come in?"

Mark looked at him searchingly.

"Yes, if you like," he said. "I can't quite make you out, Gilmore. A lot of the fellows are down on you for talking to me."

"I don't care."

"We've never been friends," said Mark. "It's very odd that you should stick to me like this, when my own friends have deserted me."

Gilmore laughed.

"Does that mean that you think I am spoofing you?" he asked.

"No," said Mark, after a pause; "I don't see why you should spoof me, as you call it. I don't want to doubt you, Gilmore. Only it's very strange. But I shall be glad if you'll come to tea."

"Good egg! I'll bring my whack of the tommy," said Gilmore. And he sauntered away whistling.

Mary Linley told Wun Lung a little later that Gilmore of the Fourth was coming to the study to tea. The little Chinee grinned.

"Nicee fellee, Gilmole," he said. "He stickee to you because you downee on luckee. Nicee boy, Markee."

"What have you got in your noddle, Wun Lung?"

"No savvy!"

"I mean, what do you think about Gilmore?" said Mark abruptly. "You think that he's playing some game with me. Why should he?"

"No savvy."

And more than that it was impossible to extract from the little Celestial.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.
Wun Lung Knows Something.

TEA was ready in Mark Linley's study when Gilmore of the Fourth came in. Gilmore was looking very cheerful, and he had brought with him his contributions to the feed. Little Wun Lung had made a pile of toast, and now he was curled up in the armchair by the fire, asleep

—or pretending to be asleep. Gilmore gave him a careless glance. Mark Linley put his books away.

"Ready!" said Gilmore cheerily. "Hot, ain't it?"

"Yes, it's pretty warm," said Mark, cheered, in spite of his secret and ineradicable distrust of Gilmore, by receiving a visitor in his solitude. "All's ready. What have you got there?"

"Jam-tarts and lemonade," said Gilmore, putting them on the table. "Better than tea in this blazing weather, old man. This is some of Mrs. Mimble's best home-made lemonade, and she's lent me the jugs. Smells ripping, doesn't it?"

"Jolly good!" said Mark.

"Trot out the glasses!"

Gilmore placed two stone jugs, filled to the brim with lemonade, on the table. Mrs. Mimble, who kept the school tuckshop, was famous for her lemonade, and on warm days there was generally a run on it by the Greyfriars juniors. The two jugs, with pieces of lemon floating in them, certainly looked very cool and nice on that hot summer's afternoon.

Gilmore had carried them with great care from the tuckshop across the Close, with a bag of jam-tarts under his arm as well. Little Wun Lung's almond eyes opened a little, as he listened to Gilmore. He was watching the Fourth-Former like a cat watching a mouse, but Gilmore was quite unconscious of it.

There was a suppressed excitement in the Fourth-Former's manner, which did not escape the keen eyes of the little Celestial. Mark did not notice it. He only thought that Gilmore was very gay and cheerful, and he felt cheered by it himself. The solitude of the past week had weighed very much upon the spirits of the Lancashire lad, who was very sociable by disposition.

Mark Linley took the tumblers out of the cupboard.

"Will you have some, Wun Lung?" he asked.

The little Chinee snored.

"Wun Lung!"

Snore!

"Oh, let him sleep!" said Gilmore. "Blessed if I ever saw such a dormouse as that chap! Here you are!"

He filled two tumblers, one from each jug, keeping one on his own side of the table, and the other standing by Linley. The lemonade gurgled into the glasses with a cool, refreshing sound.

"Now, then——" began Gilmore.

Wun Lung started to his feet, rubbing his eyes.

"You wakee me!" he exclaimed. "Me thirsty. Me dlinkee lemonade."

And he reached out to Mark Linley's glass.

Gilmore uttered an exclamation.

"Don't drink that—that's Linley's!"

"It's all the same," said Mark. "I can have another glass."

"Oh, rats!" said Gilmore. "I'll fill another one for the Chinee."

"Nodder glass in cupboald," said Wun Lung.

"Wait a tick, then."

Gilmore turned to the cupboard to get another tumbler.

The instant his back was turned, Wun Lung picked up the two glasses of lemonade from the table and changed them.

Mark Linley stared at him blankly.

The manœuvre was done so quickly and so suddenly, that Mark himself had barely time to see it, and Wun Lung was looking sleepy and perfectly innocent when Gilmore turned round from the cupboard with a third tumbler in his hand.

Mark was about to speak, when Wun Lung kicked his foot under the table. The Lancashire lad uttered an exclamation. He understood that Wun Lung had had some object in changing the glasses, and that the little Chinee did not want Gilmore to know it. Mark was utterly amazed, but he took the cue from Wun Lung—in fact, he was too astonished to speak.

"Here you are," said Gilmore, setting the tumbler on the table, and filling it from one of the jugs—the jug, as Wun Lung's keen eye noted, from which he had filled his own glass, but not Mark's.

"Me tankee."

Gilmore picked up the tumbler before him—the one he had filled for Mark, but which was now in the place of his own.

"Here's to us, and an end to all our troubles," he said, laughing. "Drink it right down, mind; it's a toast."

Mark smiled.

"With pleasure," he said. "I'm thirsty enough."

And the three juniors drank the lemonade, emptying the glasses. Three empty tumblers were set down on the table.

"Nicee nicee!" said Wun Lung.

A peculiar expression came over Gilmore's face, and he licked his lips.

"Tasted jolly strong," he said.

"I didn't notice it," said Mark.

"You didn't?"

"No."

"Have some more?"

"Yes, if you like."

Wun Lung reached across the table, as if to take a jug, knocked his arm against them, and sent both the jugs flying to the floor. There was a crash and a splash.

"You clumsy young ass!" shouted Gilmore.

"Me solly!" said Wun Lung penitently.

The jugs were both smashed, and the lemonade was soaking into the carpet.

"Well, never mind," said Gilmore. "By the way, Linley, will you excuse me if I don't have tea with you after all? Temple has been worrying me to attend a rotten rehearsal of 'Hamlet,' and he'll come here routing me out if I stay."

"Just as you like," said Mark.

"Good, then."

Gilmore turned to the door, and as he moved towards it there came a strange stagger into his walk, and he caught at the door to support himself. He turned a wild, startled glance upon Mark.

"What—what's the matter?" he muttered thickly.

Mark looked alarmed.

"Are you ill, Gilmore?"

"Ill! No!" muttered the Fourth-Former. "What do you mean? Hands off! I'm going!"

He opened the study door, and went out unsteadily, muttering to himself.

Mark was utterly amazed. The moment Gilmore was gone he turned to Wun Lung. The little Chinee was grinning with a kind of gromish glee.

"What does this mean, Wun Lung?" demanded Mark, in bewilderment. "What did you change the glasses for?"

Wun Lung chuckled.

"Me no foollee!" he murmured.

"Look here——"

"Gilmole startee story that you keepee spuds in studee," explained Wun Lung, with his queer little chuckle. "Fellows sayee some day you dlunkee in school. If that happen, you gettee sackee."

Mark laughed.

"I should jolly well deserve the sack, too," he said. "But ——"

"Gilmole bling two jugee lemonade," said Wun Lung. "He filee youl glass flom one, and his glass flom the other."

"But you were asleep—how do you know——"

"Wun Lung sleepee one eye open," grinned the little Celestial.

"Do you mean to say that Gilmore had put something in the jug he filled my glass out of?" demanded Mark breathlessly.

"Me tinkee."

"But—but what?"

"Stlong dlink, me tinkee—lum, or blandy, or whisky."

"Good heavens!"

"Dat why he sayee dlinkee all of it, leavee none," grinned Wun Lung. "Dat why he not lettee me dlink youl glass. Only wantee you dlunkee. Dat why he not stay to tea. When you dlunkee, he no wishee be here. He bling fellows see you dlunkee. You get sackee."

"But it's not possible!" exclaimed Mark, aghast. "A fellow couldn't be such an awful rascal. And why should he do it?"

"No savvy; but me knowee. Wun Lung cutee."

"And that's why you changed the glasses?"

"Allee light."

"Then Gilmore has drunk the stuff he intended for me?"

"Me savvy."

"Then—then if what you say is true, Wun Lung, Gilmore is going to be drunk?"

"Jollee sure!"

"That's why he staggered as he went out," exclaimed Mark, in alarm. "You must be right. Good heavens! If he had succeeded, kid, I should have been sacked from Greyfriars."

"Jollee sure!"

"The awful rascal! But if he's in that state now, he may get into trouble. I'd better go and see."

"Lats!"

"He might tumble downstairs."

"No loss if he bleakee neckee!"

"You young ass!"

And Mark Linley ran out of the study in search of Gilmore. Wun Lung followed him. The little Celestial evidently could not understand Mark Linley's concern for the unscrupulous rascal who had so cunningly plotted his ruin

ano had come within an ace of success. It did not take Mark long to find Gilmore. For the plotter, who had been caught in the toils of his own plots, was sprawling upon the staircase, and a crowd of amazed fellows had gathered round him.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Self Betrayed.

BOB CHERRY had been standing at the foot of the stairs, talking with a group of Removites, when Gilmore, of the Fourth, came down. The chums of the Remove had just come in from the cricket-ground, and Bob Cherry had a bat under his arm and a ruddy glow on his face. But his usually sunny expression was not there. His estrangement from his old chum was weighing upon Bob, though he would not say so.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob exclaimed, as he caught sight of Gilmore on the stairs. "What on earth's the matter with Gilmore?"

The juniors looked up the staircase in amazement. Gilmore was coming down, clinging to the banisters, a strange glow in his face, his features strangely set, and a peculiar glazed look in his eyes. He seemed about to fall at every unsteady step.

"He's ill!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

Bob Cherry ran up the lower stairs to catch the Fourth-Former. He grasped Gilmore, and steadied him.

"What's the matter, Gilmore? Are you ill?"

"Lemme alone! I'm a' righ'."

"Great Christopher Columbus!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, aghast. "He niffs of whisky, horrid! He's been drinking."

"My hat!"

Gilmore jerked himself away from Bob Cherry, lost his footing, and sprawled on the stairs. He lay there, blinking and gasping, and muttering incoherently. The juniors gazed at him in utter amazement and disgust. There was no doubt of it. The wretched boy was under the influence of drink.

"Intoxicated!" said Lord Mauleverer. "Begad!"

"Drunk, by Jove!"

"Phew!"

Gilmore blinked at them unsteadily.

"It's a lie!" he mumbled. "I ain't drunk. Who says I'm drunk? Ratty wanted me to have a drink, and I wouldn't. I said it was too risky. Lemme alone!"

"What is he talking about?"

"Mark Linley's drunk," muttered Gilmore. "He ought to be sacked. I'm going to have his scholarship. I've got an uncle on the governing body. I'm going to have his scholarship when he's sacked."

"He's giving his giddy secrets away," grinned Vernon-Smith. "Go ahead, Gilly! This is as good as a comedy. Has your uncle promised you Linley's scholarship when he's sacked?"

"No, he ain't," said Gilmore; "but that's all right." He blinked round confusedly. "If Linley gets drunk in the school, that will finish him, won't it?"

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"Then the scholarship will be forfeited," mumbled Gilmore. "You understand that? The governors can give it to whoever they like. I've got an uncle on the governing body. Ugh! What's the matter with my head? Ow! It's turning round."

"He's got it bad," said Bob Cherry, in a low voice. "Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

Mark Linley came down the stairs.

"Do you know anything about this, Linley?" asked Harry Wharton.

Mark nodded.

"Yes. Gilmore brought two jugs of lemonade into my study just now. Wun Lung suspected him, and changed the glasses after he had filled them. Gilmore drank what he had intended for me. There was something in it."

"Great Scott!"

"But for Wun Lung," said Mark Linley quietly, "I should be in that state now, and all you fellows would have taken it as proof positive that the stories about me were true."

Bob Cherry caught his breath.

"Do you mean to say that Gilmore planned to make you drunk by putting spirits in your lemonade?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"Me makee him turnee back, and changee glass," chuckled Wun Lung. "Allee lightee! Lettee him talkee; he tellee truth now, and not knowee."

"Phew!"

"Go on, Gilly," grinned Vernon-Smith. "This is jolly interesting."

"Shut up, Smithy!"

"Oh, let him run on," said the Bounder. "It's only fair to Linley, too."

Gilmore blinked blindly at the juniors.

"Why can't you keep still?" he mumbled. "How many are there of you there, Wharton? I can see two—three of you."

"Only one," said Harry, smiling in spite of himself.

"It's a lie! I'm going to have the scholarship when it's taken off Linley. He's a cad, anyway, and I owe him one for hammering me over young Nugent. I don't see why a factory cad should have a valuable scholarship when I'm hard up."

"My hat, I thought his people were rich!" said Ogilvy. "He's always said so."

"He won't get over this," said Gilmore, his thoughts evidently running on his plot against Mark Linley. "Drunk in the school; that's enough to finish anybody. And they've all seen me at the Bird in Hand, and took me for that cad. He, he, he!"

"Seen you?" said Wharton. "What do you mean?"

The wretched boy chuckled with drunken cunning.

"I'm not giving it away," he said. "Temple says I can act. So I can. I made up as Coker once. He, he, he! They don't know I can make up as Linley! He, he! I'll settle that factory cad's hash. That fool Cherry thought it was Linley. He, he, he!"

"Oh!" muttered Bob Cherry.

"What is this?" exclaimed Wingate, pushing through the crowd. "What's the matter with Gilmore?"

"Squiffy!" grinned the Bounder.

"What?"

Mark Linley explained.

Wingate listened, with amazed looks. He scanned the wretched Fourth-Former; there was no doubt as to the state he was in.

"Get up, Gilmore!" he said sternly.

"You lemme 'lone! I ain't drunk. Linley's drunk—drunk as a lord. He'll come staggerin' out of his study soon, the bound! He'll get sacked, and my uncle will give me the scholarship. I'll settle him! Temple! Where's Temple?"

"Here I am," said Temple, of the Fourth, coming forward, with a shocked and troubled face. "What do you want, Gilly, old man?"

"I want my five quid."

"What does he mean?" asked Wingate.

"He's talking about five pounds he subscribed to the Fourth Form Dramatic Society," said Temple. "He said the other day that he wanted it back, because he was hard up. I think his father has had losses on the Stock Exchange, and Gilly's pocket-money has been cut down."

"It's a lie!" said Gilly unexpectedly. "I'm rich. I've got plenty of money. Where's my five quid? I'm going to have that back. I tell you my pater's done in, and I've got to leave Greyfriars unless I can get that scholarship. Why should that rotten factory cad have the scholarship, I want to know? My uncle will see that I have it. I know that, when that cad is kicked out of the school. Groo-ooh!"

Wingate's brow grew hard.

"So that's it, is it?" he muttered.

"He's just confessed that he made himself up as Linley and went to the Bird in Hand," said Frank Nugent. "He says it was himself that Bob mistook for Linley there."

"Who says I can't act?" demanded Gilmore, blinking round defiantly. "If you'd seen me, you'd have thought the same as Cherry. Coker did, and so did Potter. They thought I was watching the back of the house. He, he, he! You should have heard Ratty laugh. He, he, he!"

"My only aunt!" said Coker of the Fifth. "So that's how it was! We seem to be getting at the truth now."

"Coker's a fool!" said Gilmore. "Bob Cherry's a silly ass! I spotted him picking up that book! The silly chump! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get him to the dormitory, Temple," said Wingate. "There's been enough of this. Take him and put him to bed."

"Very well, Wingate."

Temple, Dabney & Co. lifted up Gilmore to lead him away. But by this time the fumes of the liquor were fairly in Gilmore's brain, and he became wildly excited and quarrelsome. He struggled furiously with the Fourth-Form fellows, and Wingate and Courtney had to help to get him to the dormitory, struggling and kicking and yelling wildly all the way upstairs and along the passage.

Courtney and the Fourth-Formers remained with him while Wingate hurried down to fetch the Head.

There was a murmur from the crowd of fellows in the hall as, a few minutes later, Dr. Locke came by with a very stern face. Wingate had told him all, and the Head was going to see the wretched junior.

Mark Linley stood silent, with all eyes upon him, when the Head passed. Dr. Locke paused for a moment to speak to him.

"Linley," said the Head, "the truth has now been revealed in a dreadful way. You stand clear of all suspicion of bad conduct. I am sorry that you ever were suspected. I hope that your schoolfellows will say that they are sorry, too."

And the Head rustled upstairs.

Bob Cherry stood still for a moment, with strange emotions in his face, and then he came towards the Lancashire lad and held out his hand.

"I'm sorry, Marky," he said, in a low voice. "I couldn't suspect this. It seems almost impossible to believe it now. Gilmore is an awful rascal. How were we to know that the young villain had made himself up as you? We couldn't suspect it."

Mark Linley raised his head.

"You might have taken my word," he said.

"I—I know I might," said Bob Cherry miserably. "I ought to have. I deserve to be kicked for doubting you, Marky, and—and you can kick me if you like."

"Samo here," said Nugent.

Mark's face broke into a smile.

"I won't do that," he said. "If you're sure you were mistaken about me, and think you can take my word now——"

"Of course, Marky!"

"Then there's my hand."

And Mark Linley shook hands with his old chum frankly enough. The bitterness that had been gathering in his heart during the past few days vanished at once. Bob Cherry's contrition was very evident. He wrung Mark's hand hard.

"I'm sorry!" he said. "I've been an ass! I'm sorry!"

"We're all sorry, I think," said Harry Wharton. "We've all been taken in. It was a rotten plot of that awful cad to get your scholarship. He ought to be put in prison."

"The prisonfulness ought to be terrific for the esteemed beast," said Hurree Singh. "Will you do me the esteemed honour of shakefully taking my worthy hand, my dear chum?"

Mark smiled, and shook hands with the nabob. The juniors were all crowding round the Lancashire lad to say that they were sorry, and to shake hands with him. It was a happy moment for the persecuted junior.

Meanwhile the Head was in the Fourth-Form dormitory. He had seated himself beside Gilmore's bed. The wretched Gilmore had ceased to struggle now, but he was still rambling on incoherently. His wild ramblings told the whole story.

Gilmore's father had had heavy losses in speculation, and the junior had learned that he must leave Greyfriars at the end of the term. It was then that the plot had come into his head. He had thought of a scholarship, but there was none open just then.

His dislike of Mark Linley had turned his thoughts in that direction—he knew the terms of the Founder's Scholarships at Greyfriars, and that if the holder was found guilty of bad conduct the scholarship would be forfeited, and would remain in the gift of the governors, to dispose of how they chose. The fact that his uncle was on the governing body made Gilmore certain that he would get it if it were taken from Linley. His uncle was not a kind man, and would not hand out money to help his nephew remain at school, but he could be depended upon to help him in a way that cost him nothing. Undoubtedly Sir Arthur Benyon would have influenced the governing body to bestow the scholarship upon Cecil Gilmore if it had been forfeited.

Gilmore's skill as an actor and in the art of impersonation had stood him in good stead in carrying out his plot. He had long had shady dealings with Ratty Thompson at the Bird in Hand, and that rascal had helped him in his scheme, which explained his visit to Greyfriars, that had told so heavily against Mark Linley at the time. All this, and much more, was made evident by the mutterings of the boy stretched upon the bed, not knowing what he was saying.

Gilmore fell into a deep sleep at last. It was hours later when he awoke, with a fearful headache and a sick taste in his mouth, wondering what had happened. He soon knew. He soon learned that he had been hoist by his own petard—that under the influence of the liquor he had intended for Linley he had babbled out the whole story, and that nothing remained for him but to leave the school in deep disgrace.

Utterly crushed, sick in body and sick at heart, the wretched plotter left the school, and all Greyfriars seemed to breathe more freely when he was gone.

And after that it seemed that the Remove could not make enough of Mark Linley. The plot had come so near to succeeding that it made Mark shiver to think of it. But the clouds had rolled by now, and his repentant chums were never likely to doubt his honour again. And the hero of the hour was little Wun Lung, the only fellow in the Remove who had steadily refused to hear a word against his chum, and who had stood unfalteringly by the Lancashire lad when he was Down on His Luck.

(Another splendid, laughable, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co. next Tuesday, entitled "The Greyfriars Gardeners" by Frank Richards, also the second long instalment of our grand new serial "TWICE ROUND THE GLOBE," by Sidney Drew. Order your copy of the MAGNET well in advance. Price One Penny.)

THROUGH TRACKLESS TIBET!

By SIDNEY DREW.

CONCLUDING CHAPTERS.

The Native Army.

The enemy had no field-guns. Many of them were armed with quaint halberts, and knives strapped to sticks.

Once more the millionaire touched a lever. The buzz of the suspensory screws became a scream. A dense fog closed round them, and the fierce cold made their teeth chatter, and chilled them to the marrow. They were sailing in the clear sunshine above the clouds, and the army was blotted from their sight.

Gan-Waga yelled with joy. The mist from the clouds was freezing on the decks. He scraped up the hoar frost, and began to swallow it delightedly.

"Butterful, butterful, butterful!" he grinned. "Oh, lubly joy!"

Barry turned up the collar of his coat. At such a height it was freezing hard. Hidden by the clouds, the aeronef put about.

"We shall do it!" said Ching-Lung.

"I hope so, Ching!"

The motor-car had retreated several miles. There was the danger of discovery in remaining near the camp. The aeronef kept well above the clouds, and the intense cold and the rarefied air, which made the breathing difficult and even painful, caused Barry to wish he had remained behind.

Not until the army was more than twenty miles away did the little aeronef sink groundwards. The car had halted on the edge of a little wood.

"Now, Maddock, my haddock!" said Ching-Lung. "Buck up! I could eat the leg of a piano!"

"I'll hurry, sir!" said Ben, as he dragged out half a side of bacon, and sharpened his knife. "I'm peckish, too."

They selected the driest sticks they could find, in order to make as little smoke as possible. The two fires were lighted in holes sunk in the ground. Over one fire the kettle boiled merrily; over the other, in Maddock's great frying-pan, toothsome rashers of bacon began to splutter and hiss.

Gan-Waga served out biscuits and pannikins of steaming cocoa, and after that the men stretched themselves on the dry grass to chat and smoke.

"What did you see, Oirish?" asked Joe.

"An arrmy," said Barry; "and, bedad, it was millions strong!"

"Draw it mild, Oirish!" said a dozen voices.

"The base insinuation that Oi don't spake the thruth," growled Barry indignantly, "Oi hurrls back in yez teeth. Oi repate millions sthrong!"

"Oh, shut it," grinned Joe; "that's too strong!"

"Well, Oi'll say a million, to plaze yez. The arrmy was a full-sized one, composed of min, hosses, an' guns. Ut has two flanks, a rear, and a front."

"Has it got a canteen?" inquired a voice.

"Ginerally speakin'," said Barry thoughtfully, "the major part of an army consists of men. Whin me ould grandfather doied, and Oi was life-tenant of the farrm——"

"Smack him with a brick, do!" moaned Prout. "He's trying to make puns."

A biscuit whizzed through the air, and struck Barry's helmet with a loud crack.

"Av Oi knowed the feller that did that," said Barry, "Oi'd be rude to him. As Oi was saying, whin I was life-tenant of the farrm——"

Someone tilted Barry's helmet over his eyes, and hammered it down tightly.

"Let me be!" roared O'Rooney, losing his patience.

"Let me be yer honeysuckle!" chirped Joe.

Barry jerked off the helmet with an effort, but the next moment it was hammered down hard and fast. Gan-Waga, to the delight of all, seized the frying-pan, and, beating time with it on Barry's broad back, burst into a beautiful Eskimo song that sounded like this:

"Flikflak yampayampa jug-jug-jugg kik,
Blikoosh kwatch acksh yapa gurrh-gurrkik,
Oiyos woyos slall-al kekiki yam-yam-yam,
Bhoosha, woosha, klikak yam, yam, ya-a-a-a-am blik!"

Barry got up and danced, but every time he tried to move his helmet a blow from the frying-pan drove it down tighter. Though Barry's sight was veiled, his mouth was free, and he howled out blood-curdling threats of vengeance as he clutched blindly at his tormentor.

(To be concluded.)

TWICE ROUND THE GLOBE!

THE STORY OF THE GREAT MAN-HUNT

BY SIDNEY DREW

Ferrers Lord, millionaire, and owner of the "Lord of the Deep.

Prince Ching-Lung, Adventurer, Conjurer and Ventriloquist.

Nathan Gore, Jewel collector, and multi-millionaire, Ferrers Lord's terrible rival.

SPECIAL NOTE.—Whether it be the wonderful daring and skill of Ferrers Lord, millionaire, jewel-collector, and adventurer, the screamingly funny tricks indulged in by Ching-Lung, or the eccentric doings of Gan-Waga, the Eskimo, this story, in one way or another must appeal to all the readers of this paper. Sidney Drew, the talented Author, has written many successful stories, but, as he admits, "TWICE ROUND THE GLOBE!" excels all his former efforts. Not one reader of "The Magnet" Library must miss reading the opening instalment of this wonderful serial story.

EDITOR.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Fog in the Channel—The Mad Millionaire—A Tempting Offer—Too Late—Nathan Gore Resolves to Win.

The great liner was moving slowly up the crowded Channel. A sudden mist had gathered to the utter despair of captain and crew. The splendid new vessel Coronation was only on her second voyage. On her outward journey she had broken all records from Southampton to New York, and, except for the tantalising fog, she would have won the double crown.

And now she was crawling eastwards, still an hour ahead of the record time for the homeward journey, but with no hope of victory. The miserable fog had spoiled all.

The captain bore his keen disappointment gallantly, and the crew grumbled and made the best of it.

But there was one man on board the Coronation who tore his long, white hair, and stamped and raved. He was Nathan Gore, jewel collector and multi-millionaire.

He rushed on deck, and shrieked for the captain. His cracked voice rose shrill above the incessant roar of the siren.

"Where are you, captain—where are you?"

"Here, sir!" And the captain's figure loomed through the mist. "What is it?"

"When shall we reach Southampton?"

"Not before midday, sir."

"Not before midday!" screamed the wild-eyed old man. "You must—you must! The sale is at midday. I'll lose the great diamond, the 'World's Wonder.' Confound it! You promised to get me here with three hours to spare!"

"No man can rule the weather, sir," said the captain. "Is there no chance of the mist lifting."

"I can't see any, sir," answered the captain gloomily. "I wish I could."

"And you're going to keep creeping like this?"

"I've got seven or eight hundred lives to look after, sir," said the skipper.

Nathan Gore clenched his hands furiously. He had rushed from America to buy the glorious jewel he had coveted for years, the enormous diamond known as the "World's Wonder."

Jewel-collecting was a mania with the old man. His one craving was to possess the finest and most valuable collection of precious stones in the world.

He had the wealth, but one man equally wealthy and equally determined stood in his way—Ferrers Lord, the English millionaire.

At present they stood neck and neck in the race for the earth's richest gems. Gore owned "Siva's Wealth," the monstrous Burmese ruby. Only another stone matched it, the "Crimson Soul of Buddha," and Ferrers Lord held that.

It was the same with a hundred other gems. In weight, lustre, value, and historic worth the two collections were identical. The battle between the rival collectors had awakened intense excitement in both Europe and America.

Who would win—Britain or America? The ownership of the "World's Wonder" would decide whether the old country or the new should boast of the richest collection.

The "World's Wonder" came from the treasury of the Rajah of Salanpore. For centuries the sacred stone had been jealously guarded by the priests.

Enormous offers had been declined. The young rajah, however, educated in England, laughed at the superstition of the priests. He was in need of money, and at midday the "World's Wonder" was to be sold by auction in the famous rooms of Messrs. Charter and Lowndes, the well-known firm of jewel valuers.

The sale was quite an international event.

A slight illness had kept the American champion from sailing earlier. Nathan Gore would have given his right hand to obtain the stone. Little wonder he bit his lips and raved.

If he could not reach the auction-room in time, the gem would become his rival's property almost without a struggle, for no other collector or dealer would care to bid against Ferrers Lord, whose wealth was fabulous.

And if Ferrers Lord obtained the "World's Wonder" his collection would be unrivalled, for the diamond was matchless. That mist in the Channel was disastrous to the American millionaire.

The cable had flashed the news to New York: "Dense fog in Channel. No hope of Coronation arriving in time. Auction cannot be postponed."

There was disappointment in London also, for all had

keenly anticipated a fierce fight between the two men of wealth.

There would be no such battle now. A few bids would be made, and then the tall, pale-faced, quiet Englishman would drawl out a sum that would silence all further bidding, and claim the jewel.

The diamond that Europeans had vainly tried to obtain possession of for more than three hundred years would be his. Many wished that the auction could be postponed, but that was impossible.

The rajah had given his instructions, and merely placed a reserve price on the stone. Once the reserve price was exceeded, the gem would fall to the highest bidder, according to the rules of the sale.

Nathan Gore, frantic with rage and disappointment, paced up and down the deck. He had never seen Ferrers Lord, but he hated him. He cursed the weather, the ship, and the captain.

The long, gaunt, wild-eyed man was on the verge of madness. He had drunk more brandy than was good for him. His collection of jewels was his god, his very life. He gloated over them as a miser gloats over gold, fondled them, kissed them, worshipped them.

"Captain!" he screamed.

"Yes, sir," said the captain patiently.

"If you went at full-speed," said the millionaire hoarsely, "when should we be in?"

"About nine, sir."

Nathan Gore seized him by the coat.

"Get in by ten," he muttered eagerly, "and I'll give you ten thousand dollars!"

"Listen, sir!" said the captain, raising his hand.

Honk, honk, honk, honk! came the dull, warning echoes of sirens. The Channel was packed with vessels.

"Twenty thousand dollars—four thousand pounds! Think of it! Four thousand pounds!"

"Not for forty thousand!" said the honest British sea-dog. "I've got ladies and children aboard. I am responsible for their lives. Not for a million, Mr. Gore, not for a kingdom will I go a knot faster! Keep your dirty money, sir, and much good may it do you! I'm a poor man, with a wife and family to work for, but I'm honest. In my way, I'm losing as much as you. All I can say of you," he added indignantly, "is that you're a mean cad to try and tempt me with your gold! Get below, sir, and don't let me see you again till we're in port. I shall report this, and if you want to travel on the company's boats again I think they'll look at you twice before they find you a berth."

"You mad fool!" hissed the millionaire. "Come, ten thousand pounds—a fortune to you! Fifty thousand dollars."

"Go below!" roared the captain, losing his temper. "If you don't, I'll have you put below. Millionaire or no millionaire, I'm boss here. You dirty, bribing scoundrel, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

And so the vessel crept on through the thick white mist, and the hours slipped away. The water was quite calm, but the fog grew denser instead of dispersing. Shadowy ships crept by like ghosts, and the wireless telegraph kept bringing messages from the unseen shore.

"It'll be three o'clock before we make harbour!" groaned the captain. "It's hard lines—hard lines!"

"Telegram for Mr. Gore, sir!" said a voice.

"Read it!" said the captain, leaning over the rail.

"Ferrers Lord purchased 'World's Wonder' privately. No bidders. Price unknown."

The captain chuckled.

"Take it down to the old rascal, with my compliments," he said, "and tell him I'm darned glad to hear it."

"Yes, sir."

Nathan Gore tore the paper to shreds. Then he began to laugh wildly. His gaunt face had turned grey, and madness shone in his eyes. From his bag he took a revolver, and pressed the cold barrel against his temple.

And then, with a fierce oath, he hurled the weapon away.

"I'll win yet," he shrieked—"I'll win yet! If I have to kill him, I'll win!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

In Which Old Friends Reappear—The World's Wonder—Ching-Lung Causes Some Excitement in the Park—The Jewel Vanishes—Nathan Gore's Defiance.

In the magnificent drawing-room of Ferrers Lord's house, in Park Lane, several old friends had assembled. The millionaire himself was standing at the window, watching the carriages whirl by in the Park.

Ching-Lung, ruler of the Chinese province of Kwai-Hai, had twisted about twenty cigarette-papers into the shape of butterflies, and by waving a fan which he had picked up he was making the scraps of paper dance and whirl in the air as if alive. Hal Honour, the great engineer, was drinking tea, and Rupert Thurston yawned in an easy-chair.

"How much did you pay for the big diamond, old chap?" asked Thurston.

The millionaire turned with a smile.

"Money and fair words, Rupert—and nothing more."

"I'll bet there would have been more money and less fair words if old Gore had turned up," said Ching-Lung. "I reckon you're mighty proud of your little self now you've got the gem—eh?"

"Not particularly," answered the millionaire. "By the way, I haven't shown you the stone. I simply wrote the cheque, and stuck the World's Wonder into my pocket, and walked home. Why, great Scott!"

Ferrers Lord thrust his hand into his pocket, and whistled.

"You've not lost it, surely?" gasped Thurston and Hal Honour in one breath.

"By Jove, I have!"

"All my eye!" grinned Ching-Lung.

Honour and Rupert uttered cries of amaze and delight. A ball of quivering fire shot into the air—a ball of living flame. It fell; and, darting his little yellow face forward, Ching-Lung caught it in his eye, and held it there. It seemed to fill the whole room with trembling, radiant light.

"You rascal!" said Ferrers Lord. "Where did you get my diamond?"

"Borrowed it when I met you on the stairs!" laughed Ching-Lung. "How do you like my eyeglass? Smartish, isn't it?"

The priceless gem passed from hand to hand. Its lustre dazzled them. It was badly cut by some long-dead Eastern workman, but it quivered and danced like a living orb of light.

A thousand fires burned in its crystal heart; a thousand colours, ever-changing, leapt from every facet.

Ferrers Lord took it from Honour at last, and tossed it carelessly into a drawer.

"So much for the World's Wonder!" he said. "I wish we had something to do. I hate these lazy, profitless times."

"Let's pawn the giddy diamond!" suggested the incorrigible Ching-Lung. "Anything for excitement!"

"Don't be an ass!" said Rupert. "I'm like Lord—I've got the hump."

"You do look a bit like a camel about the face, sir!" grinned Ching-Lung.

"Oh, shut it! I'm not an idiot, like you! I can't amuse myself by blowing bits of paper about."

"If you'd blow a few bits of paper in the shape of Bank of England notes my way," said Ching-Lung, "I'd amuse myself for hours picking them up. You do look a miserable crowd, for certain! Have a game at ping-pong?"

"Rats!"

"Dominoes, then?"

"Oh, get out!" said Thurston, with a sigh. "What a sickening place London is! I don't want theatres and balls; I want adventure and excitement. How do you feel, Honour?"

"Lazy," said the engineer.

Ching-Lung's butterflies vanished up the chimney in a cloud.

"You're a miserable crowd," chuckled the prince, "and I decline to make myself miserable by staying with you any longer! I'm off for a turn in the Park."

"On horseback?"

"No; on my tootsies. And I'm going to take my old Barry O'Rooney with me."

"Mind you don't get into mischief," said Rupert. "I'll drive my motor along about four, and look out for you."

Ching-Lung slid down the banisters, to the horror of the gorgeous footman in the hall, and turned a somersault on to the mat.

Ching looked much stouter than usual; in fact, he was quite fat. He was dressed in a plain white calico blouse, and very baggy blue trousers.

A bow of blue ribbon set off his neatly-plaited pigtail, and the only sign of his rank was the peacock's feather, fastened in his cap by a diamond and ruby brooch.

"Salaam, yellow-legs!" said Ching-Lung to the footman.

"Salaam, your Highness!"

"First chop nicee half-bakee soltee facee you gottee, ole yellow-legs," went on Ching-Lung pleasantly. "Tellee Mister O'Looney I waitee for himee."

"Yes, your Highness," said the footman.

He wore a massive gold watchchain across his red waistcoat, which vanished, together with a large silver watch, into one of Ching-Lung's wide pockets.

Then, from the lower regions of the house, came the sound of a gruff voice.

"Plaze till his Highness, wid moy compliments," said the voice, "that Oi'll be wid him in wan swate moment, whin Oi've had another go at the roast mutton."

"Barry!" roared Ching-Lung.

"Comin', sor, comin'!"

A great red face came out of the darkness. Barry had a mutton-chop in one hand, and a tankard of foaming ale in the other. Behind him walked the fat figure of Gan-Waga, the Eskimo. Gan-Waga had also a mutton-chop and a tankard, but Gan's tankard contained ginger-beer, for the Eskimo was a teetotaller.

"You seem to be enjoying yourselves, my bounders!" chuckled the prince.

"All butterful and joyous, Chingy," said Gan-Waga.

And Barry remarked, after a pull at the tankard:

"There's ham, there's lamb, there's bafe, and mutton, and
lots of jam,
And niver in yer loife did yez see the spalpeens cram
As we do whin we all sit down."

for Barry about the same number of sizes too small. Then he swiftly slipped the footman's watch and chain into Barry's waistcoat.

"Are you ready? Eyes right, there, toes out, and noses in front! Quick march!"

The door of the mansion was flung open, and, with a big cigar in his mouth, a gold-rimmed eyeglass in his eye, and a cane in his hand, Ching-Lung strode down the steps. Barry and Gan-Waga followed arm-in-arm. Thurston and Hal Honour, watching them from the verandah, were in convulsions of laughter.

They entered the Park, a string of amused urchins at their heels. It was Barry O'Rooney's first visit to the great city, and also Gan-Waga's.

A cry broke from Ching-Lung, and he reeled back in terror. A man lay face downwards on the carpet, and there was a crimson stain on his white collar. The man was Ferrers Lord! (*See page 27.*

"Ho, ho, hoo!" laughed Gan-Waga. "Me like London. Me ated forty-six cangles last nightee!"

"Well, chuck it before you eat yourself to death," said Ching-Lung, "and we'll go for a walk. You'll have to put on tall hats. All gentlemen wear them in London. Hurry up!"

"Hurroo!" yelled Barry, hurling the chop after a boy in buttons, who was descending the stairs.

"Yow-yo!" bellowed Gan-Waga, pocketing his for a future occasion. "Me all ready, Chingy."

There were hats in plenty in the hall. Ching-Lung gave Gan-Waga one about four sizes too large, and selected another

"Hallo!" said a dirty-looking man. "'Ere's the Hemperor of China and his blessed lord 'igh cook and bottle-washer! Hi, you with the big 'at, why don't yer soap yer face?"

Ching-Lung stopped and smiled sweetly at the dirty man.

"Dis lubly pelson, my fliends," he said, "am de ownel ob de Park. Salute de ownel ob de Park."

Barry and Gan-Waga, scenting fun, took off their hats and bowed gravely.

"It gib me gleatest joy to gleet a gleat man!" said Ching-Lung, seizing the dirty gentleman's hand.

The grin left the dirty man's face. His features became screwed up with horror and agony. He began to dance and

struggle and yell. Ching-Lung's grip was like the bite of a rabbit-trap.

"Murder! Let me go!" howled the dirty man. "Ow! Ye're breakin' all me bones! Help! Perleece! Pull him off me!"

"Novel had gleatel joy!" murmured Ching-Lung. "Gleatest joy on ealth! Goodee-bye!"

He blew the gentleman a kiss, and they left him dancing and sucking his fingers, and wondering if he'd been run over.

Their appearance caused a good deal of excitement. As it was afternoon, there were not many people in the Park. They walked along the Serpentine, and, taking a float and line from his pocket, Gan-Waga sat down only a yard away from a board which read, "No fishing allowed," and baited his hook.

"Me gotted him!" he grinned.

Down went the float, and out came a fine fat roach. The next moment a big, strong hand seized Gan-Waga's shoulder.

"Got yer, 'ave I? Copped yer in the hact—eh?" said the gruff voice of a policeman. "This is cheek, this is, by Sam!"

Gan-Waga looked up cheerfully.

"Yo' hab him if yo' likes. Catch plenty lots more," he answered calmly, putting another pellet of bread on his hook.

"Well, I'm blowed if that ain't cool!" gasped the constable. "Don't yer know there ain't no fishin' 'ere?"

"Yo' barmy, buttons," said Gan-Waga. "Lotees ob fish in 'ere. Me justee cotching one."

"Look at that!" roared the policeman, pointing to the board. "Can't yer read? It says 'No fishin' allowed!'"

"I not fishin' aloud!" grinned Gan-Waga. "Not makin' no noises at all. Yo' makin' noise, fat face!"

Ching-Lung and Barry had taken possession of a seat, and were grinning at each other. The constable could not bear such impudence. He seized Gan-Waga by the collar. At that moment Gan hooked another roach and gave a wild snatch. The roach left the water in a great hurry, shot over Gan-Waga's head, and cannoned into the policeman's face. Then the line got twisted round his neck, and the fish flapped on his chest like a large animated silver locket.

"Drat you!" yelled the policeman. "What are yer doin'? Come along, you villain! You'll get a month for this, by Sam!"

"Don't yez think we'd better sthop ut, sir?" said Barry to the prince.

"Not likely! Let's have the fun while we may. We can easily explain."

"Come along!" said the policeman, jerking Gan-Waga violently.

"Like bein' here bestest, t'ank yo'. Where yo' want me go—hunk?"

"To the lock-up—to gaol. By Sam, you'll get fourteen years!"

"Wot fo'?"

"What for? Why, for fishin' and assaultin' the police. Come along quiet, or I'll biff yer. D'yer 'ear? Come hon!"

"I not," said Gan-Waga, taking out the gnawed chop and offering it to his captor.

"Hab a bite ob dis, and be friendses."

"Help, help! Murder, murder! He's killing me! Oh, I'm stabbed! I'm stabbed! Help, help, help!"

The horrified policeman freed Gan-Waga and absolutely jumped into the air. The agonised, thrilling screams came from the depths of a thick bed of laurels about twenty yards away. A blood-curdling, choked groan followed, and then an awful silence.

"A murder!" gasped the policeman. "By Sam, it's a ghastly murder in broad daylight!"

He rushed to the spot, blowing his whistle frantically. Men and women came running up.

"H-h-help, h-help, help! I'm stabbed! Oh, I'm stabbed!" The voice was weaker.

The brave policeman, still blowing for aid, entered the bushes on hands and knees.

"Now we'll go!" grinned Ching-Lung. Come along, Ganus. If they find that corpse I'll bake my pigtail in a pie! I reckon I did the wounded gentleman pretty well."

"Ut was great," said Barry. "Ut was loike loife. How on airth do yez manage ut, sor?"

"With my mouth, Irish," laughed the prince. "Oh, Christopher, they've got five policemen and about forty people looking for the remains! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Leaving the police to discover the victim of the tragedy and to catch the murderer if they could, they walked round the lake. A very fat man was throwing bread to a swan, and the fat man's wife was admiring the bird. Ching-Lung and his queer-looking companions paused and seemed to be deeply interested perusing a notice-board on which were printed the bye-laws of the Park.

"What a graceful creature it is, Josiah," said the stout lady. "The curve of its neck is the very poetry of shape."

"If I had a neck like yours, you old frump," said the swan, or, rather, Ching-Lung, "I'd go home and wash it."

"Good gracious!" screamed the stout lady. "It—it spoke, or I'm mad! Oh, Josiah!"

The stout man jumped back with such velocity that his hat jumped off, and with it his wig, showing a polished bald head.

"There's 'air! there's 'air!" crowed the swan. "Ha, ha! There's locks for you, and golden tresses!"

The stout gentleman jumped again at this astounding remark, tripped over a stone, and sat down on his hat.

"Mercy me!" moaned the lady.

"Sit down and make yourself at home, rubber-face," said the swan. "There's no extra charge for seats."

Seeing that there was no more bread to be obtained, the swan sailed away. The stout lady was on the verge of swooning.

"M-M-Maria!" groaned the fat man. "Fetch me a d-d-doctor! I'm—I'm going off it!"

Leaving him to think it out, the three went on. Ching-Lung's hand stole in the direction of Barry's waistcoat, and secured the watch and chain.

"Hallo," he said, "there's a nice motor!"

Barry and Gan turned to look. When they glanced round again, a tempting watch and chain lay in the pathway. They saw it together, and dived for it. The watch and chain shot skyward, and their tall hats met with a crash that flattened them from crown to brim, and drove the mangled remains of Gan-Waga's headgear right over his chin.

"Howly smoke!" groaned Barry. "What about me beautiful chapow, which is Frinch for topper? Luk at ut. Bedad, Oi cud use ut for a concertina and play 'God Save the King' on ut. Faith, that was a mane thrick to play on a pore man all alone in London."

Gan was tying himself into knots in his frantic attempts to free his head. Ching-Lung dragged him all over the place before he managed to remove the headgear. Gan was almost black in the face.

"Where him gone, Chingy?" he panted.

Ching-Lung pointed to a tree of medium size. The watch and chain was dangling from one of the topmost branches.

"Keep on pointing and looking at it," said the prince, "and we'll soon have some people round. Steady on, my bounders, here's another man in blue. Thanston will be along soon. I'm off up that tree."

Ching-Lung embraced the trunk with his arms and legs, and began to climb.

"I say, come down, China! None of that!" cried the man of law.

"Begee youl paldon," said Ching-Lung bowing to the very ground; velly muchee chop sad, but mustee climbee."

"You can't climb 'ere!"

"Losee watchee and chainee!" sobbed Ching-Lung. "Wind him blowee it out of pocketee, and sling him up badee chop tlee. Oh, mistel policemanee, wotee shall do?"

"Watch up the tree—nonsense!"

"Lookee den. Wind blowee him upee. It quite a tlue lie. Lokee and see him."

"Great Klondike," said the constable, "it is a watch and chain!"

"Wind blowee——" began Ching-Lung.

"Wind be blowed! None of them yarns!" said the constable. "Now, 'ow the hokey-pokey did that get up there? I'm on that! That Chinee is tryin' to cheat the law. Spotted it, and then starts a yarn about the wind. Cunning rogue! I'll bet he prigged it furst, and then slung it there. I'm on it like a cat on mice. 'Ere, come down!"

"I notee," said Ching-Lung. "I go aftel my watch and chainee."

"Come down!"

The constable seized Ching-Lung by the left leg of the trousers. The trousers came off in his hand. There was a second pair beneath. Giving a leap, the constable seized them. They, too, came off, revealing still a third pair.

"Holy haddock!" shrieked the policeman, "it's a walkin' wardrobe! Come down, you pigtailed villain!"

"Why don't yaw let the poor little foreign boy alone, yaw cowardly fellah?" remarked a drawling voice at H P 92's elbow.

The policeman sprang round and gazed fiercely at a young swell who had just sauntered up.

"Wot d'yer mean by hinterfering with me when I'm a-doin' my dooty?" yelled the officer.

The swell had not said a word, and he was too amazed to speak.

"You big-footed bounder, let the kid alone!" remarked a sweet girlish voice.

Round jumped the policeman again. He could hardly believe either his eyes or his ears. The person who had apparently spoken so rudely was a pretty, stylishly-dressed young lady. And before he could collect his thoughts, a

pimply-faced youth with a pigeon-chest threatened to knock his head to putty if he didn't leave the poor child alone.

The policeman pounced on that youth like a hawk on a sparrow.

"Threats!" he roared—"threats agin the law! So you'll knock my 'ead to putty, will yer?"

"L-l-lemme go!" gasped the pimply-faced one. "W-w-what are y-you doing?"

"You threatened me with personal violence!" yelled the policeman.

"On—on my s-soul I n-never spoke!"

"Make way, please, make way!"

A magnificent two-horse brougham was waiting to pass. The policeman made a grab at Ching-Lung. Ching-Lung left one of his numerous blouses in the constable's clutch, dived into the brougham in the wake of Gan and Barry, and shouted "Home!"

"Never!" howled the policeman. "That pigtailed villain is my prisoner. Move at yer peril!"

A liveried coachman bent down.

"Here, sergeant!"

"What d'yer want?" growled the constable.

"Keep mouth shut—get sack if don't—Ferrers Lord—Park Lane—big Chinese nobleman—war with England—don't insult him—pal of the King—call round back door—ask for Sneeks—that's me—quid for you—beer—lots of grub—don't forget. By your leave there, by your leave! Make way for his Imperial Highness Ching-Lung!"

The crowd raised a cheer at the well-known name. They had not forgotten that Ching-Lung had pratically saved China from Russia's clutch, and that he was the staunch friend of Great Britain.

When they reached home, Ching-Lung pinned the watch and chain to the footman's coat-tails, and slipped Gan's half-eaten mutton chop into the gentleman's pocket. Then, looking as if butter would not melt in his mouth, he tripped upstairs.

"Had a good time, Ching?" asked Rupert.

"Slow," said Ching-Lung. "Have you been lively?"

"About half as lively as a funeral," answered Thurston gloomily. "I can't stand inaction. Lord has been talking about an expedition through the Australian deserts."

"Hoo-diddledy-ray! When do we start?"

"I don't know. Nothing is settled. I tell you, sonny, my mouth watered when I heard him chatting. He says Central Australia is almost a sealed book. It has been crossed, of course, but you can't learn much of a country by making a bee-line through it. Lord thinks that ages ago the inhabitants of Central Australia were highly civilised. There was plenty of water there in those days. Honour is as keen on it as we are."

"Then he's pretty keen," grinned Ching-Lung. "Where are they?"

"Down below in the laboratory. They're working at something, but they won't let on what it is."

"Sly rogues!" said the prince. "I've got the hint, though. They're trying to build a kind of cross between the Lord of the Deep and the Lord of the Skies—a vessel that will swim in the water and below it, and fly in the air as well."

"Great Scott!" said Rupert, with a laugh. "They've got some sauce!"

"More than a spoonful, my boy. Hallo, there's the bell!"

He rushed through the open French windows and leaned over the verandah. Three brawny sea-dogs were there—Tom Prout, Joe the carpenter, and Benjamin Maddock, boatswain of the submarine vessel Lord of the Deep.

"Cheero, you scallywags!" cried Ching-Lung, as he dropped a flower-pot on Prout's new tall hat.

"Must be rainin'!" said Maddock, saluting. "Good-day, your highness!"

They floundered into the porch to escape any further missiles; but Ching-Lung was too quick. He shot down the banisters like a rocket into Joe's arms.

"Just arrived?" he asked. "Wired for, eh?"

"Just," said Maddock. "Caught an express at York, and we ain't been in London 'alf an hour. Where's old Gan and Barry?"

"Comin', darlints, comin'!"

"Oh yes, we camining!" roared Gan-Waga.

Gan and Barry O'Rooney dived up from below, and welcomed their comrades with handshakes and yells of delight.

"I luvs yez—oh, I luvs yez!" said Barry, "and that is moighty plain. Oi'd sooner run agin' a pal than run agen' a thrain. Give me yer fists, and softly press yer swatest lips to moine. The partin' ut was bitther sad, to mate agen is foine! There's lots of bafe and grub downsthairs, and barrels full o' beer, so come and jine yer dear ould pals, and share in our good cheer."

"He's as bad as ever," groaned Prout.

"Wuss," said Maddock.

"'Orrible!" sighed Joe. "I wish we could break him of it."

"Tom Prout, dear chap,
Got on him no flieses—yow-hoo!
Got ugly face, but nicee.
Like him—tell no lieses—yah-hoo!"

Gan-Waga was the poet this time.

"Oh, murder! Gan's caught it!" moaned Ching-Lung. "Yah-hoo! Hit me with a feather, Tom, and knock my brains out!"

"I so joyfulness must sing," crowed Gan-Waga. "Can't helping it. I goin' singer."

"Thin Oi'm goin'!" yelled Barry. "Oi don't wish to doie just at wance."

"So am I!" cried Ching-Lung, Maddock, Joe, and Prout in one single breath.

They fled, Ching-Lung upstairs, the others to the regions below. Prout, Joe, and Maddock had been guarding the Lord of the Deep in a cavern on the Yorkshire coast. Their unexpected arrival in London seemed a proof that Ferrers Lord had some scheme in hand. Six weeks in London had bored Ching-Lung and Thurston to death. They pined for excitement and adventure. They were restless spirits, bubbling over with health and energy, and life in the great city seemed like life in a prison to them.

Rupert changed into evening-dress when the gong sounded, and Ching-Lung put on his gorgeous robes. The gong boomed a second time, and they entered the splendid dining-room.

"We are invited to Sandringham on Wednesday, Ching," said Ferrers Lord. "A letter written and signed by his Majesty himself. Here it is."

"Right-ho!" answered Ching-Lung calmly. "We'll be there. Is it a public affair?"

"No, quite private."

"Then I shall enjoy myself," said Ching-Lung "He's a true gentleman, and a splendid king, and that's the very worst I can say about him. Is Ru invited?"

"Yes; and Honour as well."

"All the better. By the way, I bought the Rendlesham Estate."

"Never!" cried Thurston.

"Did, old boy. Gave seven hundred thousand for it. Why shouldn't I have a home in England?"

"Why, it's one of the finest places in the country."

"That's why I bought it," laughed Ching-Lung. "I'm going to win the Derby next year. Give me some fiz."

"Ching-Lung's health, gentleman!" said Ferrers Lord.

"To the best of the very best!" cried Rupert.

"Now, gentlemen," said Ferrers Lord, "his Majesty has graciously put the Royal box at the opera at Ching's disposal. If you care for good music, the carriage is waiting."

"I'm going to take Gan and the lot of them," said Ching.

"Hear, hear!" said Rupert.

"Do as you like, lads," said the millionaire, with a smile. "Honour and I must work."

On reaching home, Ching-Lung and Rupert sat down in the billiard-room for a final smoke and chat before retiring.

"They're still pegging away at their everlasting invention—Lord and Honour, I mean," said Thurston.

"Then they're fonder of work than I am, Ru. What's the time?"

"Five minutes to one—time for bed, old chap!"

"Right! I'll go down and see what Lord's doing presently. Good-night!"

Ching-Lung put on pyjamas and a silk dressing-gown, and went downstairs. He saw a faint light in the drawing-room, and pushed open the door.

A cry broke from him, and he reeled back in terror. A man lay face downwards on the carpet. There was a ghastly crimson stain on his white collar. The man was Ferrers Lord.

Ching-Lung staggered to the millionaire's side, his heart like ice, and dropped on his knees beside the silent figure.

The prince caught his breath as he raised his friend's head.

"Thank Heaven!" gasped Ching-Lung.

"Ching—the diamond!" came the hoarse whisper. "Is—is it gone? In the drawer—there!"

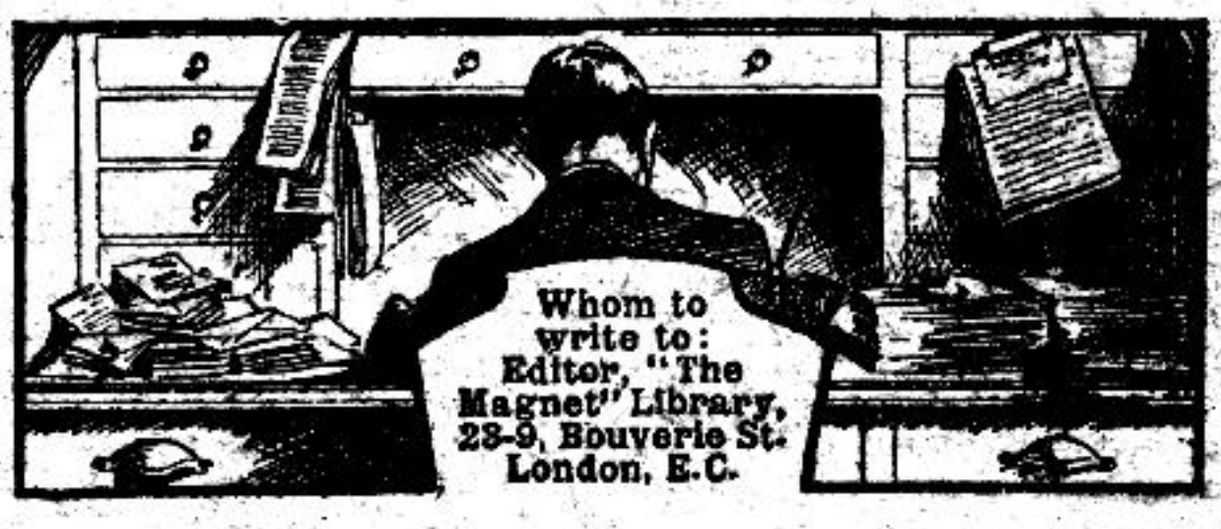
The drawer was open, but there was no diamond there. Then Ching-Lung started, and ran towards a tall mirror. Scratched deep into its surface were a few lines of writing:

"To Ferrers Lord. Knowing that you would not sell the 'World's Wonder,' I have taken it. I will never restore it. Do your worst. I defy you! The stone is mine. My bankers have orders to pay you twice the sum you paid for it. If you attempt force you will have to reckon with a power as great as your own—the power of Nathan Gore."

"I take the challenge, Ching!" he said grimly. "I'll hunt him down, and win back my diamond, if I have to follow him to the ends of the earth."

(Another long instalment of this thrilling serial story next week.)

My Readers' Page.



GRAND, NEW, WEEKLY FEATURE.

NEXT WEEK'S STORY.

"THE GREYFRIARS GARDENERS!"

By Frank Richards. This, our grand, long, complete school tale for next week, will be a peculiarly seasonable story, full of humorous incidents and unexpected developments. The famous chums of Greyfriars take up their latest hobby with their usual enthusiasm, with results that are in some cases curious, to say the least of it. My readers can look forward to a rollicking schoolboy story next week in

"THE GREYFRIARS GARDENERS!"

MORE ABOUT TWO IMPORTANT PROJECTS.

The large majority of my numerous correspondents these days make anxious inquiries in the course of their letters on the subject of the two notable projects which have been mooted lately in the Chat pages of both THE MAGNET and "The Gem" Libraries alike—viz., the reprinting of the old, far-back stories of Harry Wharton & Co. and Tom Merry & Co.; and the publication of a new serial story dealing with the further adventures of those famous and popular schoolboy characters, Gordon Gay, Monk & Co., of Rylcombe Grammar School. In regard to the first of these important matters, the best suggestion that has reached me so far is that the original stories of the chums of Greyfriars and St. Jim's should be republished story by story, together with other interesting reading matter, in the form of a third little companion journal to THE MAGNET and "The Gem" Libraries. Hundreds of my readers have enthusiastically advocated this idea, and assured me that ample support would be forthcoming for such a companion journal were the scheme to be carried out. The time is not quite ripe for a definite statement on this all important subject, but I can assure my eager chums that the idea is occupying my thoughts every day, and that I will try my very best to give them what they ask for. In regard to the second matter—that of the Gordon Gay serial—preparations are, I am glad to say, in a more advanced state, but the best advice I can give ardent Gordon Gayites is to watch "The Gem" Library very carefully for the next few weeks, and

Look Out for a Great Surprise!

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

A. W. G. (Wood Green).—In reply to your letter, I must tell you that the correct pronunciation of the Greek senior's name is "Ionidees"—with the accent on the last syllable.

Sydney A. B. (Peckham).—I thank you for your letter, and am pleased to hear you so enjoy reading THE MAGNET stories. In answer to your queries, I must tell you that Dutton, the deaf boy of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, is still at the school. Alonzo Todd has left—for the present, at least. You say you read and enjoy odd copies of our popular companion paper "The Gem" Library. May I suggest that you become a regular subscriber?

J. Johnson (Ontario, Canada).—Thank you for your letter. Messrs. A. W. Gamage, of Holborn, London, publish a good book on hypnotism at the small cost of about one shilling.

J. C. R. (Dublin).—It is impossible to answer your question definitely. Many claims have been made to the title of the world's strongest man, but it is generally considered that Mr. Sandow has done more than any other man to justify his being accepted as such.

E. T. O. (Bradford).—Thank you for your long and interesting letter. The competition you propose will be considered amongst the many others of its kind that I receive.

W. Simon (Staffs.).—Thank you for your letter. You will hear more about the characters you mention in THE MAGNET Library in due course.

A. E. B. (Mold, N. Wales).—I have taken note of the suggestion you make regarding a certain type of story in THE MAGNET Library.

BACK NUMBERS WANTED.

Miss L. Bexdell, 35, Summersley Street, Earlsfield, S.W., wishes to obtain the first twelve numbers of the half-penny MAGNET.

F. Linging, 87, Gloucester Road, Newcastle-on-Tyne, has a number of old "Gems" and MAGNETS which he is willing to sell at half price.

W. Scott, Winslow, Basingstoke, wishes to exchange late numbers of "The Gem" and THE MAGNET Libraries for back numbers.

Miss L. Ensor, Nuneaton, Warwickshire, has Nos. 169, 176, 179, 183, 184, and 186 of "The Boys' Friend" 3d. Library for sale at half price.

C. T. Richards, 10, Railway Cottages, Falmouth, Cornwall, wishes to obtain back numbers of "The Gem" and THE MAGNET.

H. Burth, 13, Park Road, Brentwood, Essex, has back numbers of THE MAGNET and "The Boys' Friend" 3d. Library for sale at half price.

E. Clarke, 32, Nelson Street, Fishpool, Bury, wishes to obtain No. 30 ("Tom Merry & Co.") of "The Boys' Friend" 3d. Library.

HOW TO PRESERVE BIRDS' EGGS.

To those especially who have never before attempted to clean out an egg, the following hints will be found to be very helpful. First obtain a number of small drills from a naturalist, and a glass blowpipe. This latter can be made at home, only a small piece of glass tubing being necessary. Heat this over an ordinary gas-burner, and when sufficiently heated pull out one end almost to a point, at the same time bending it until it is almost a right angle. Then break the glass at the end of the bend, and the blowpipe is ready for use. When heating it do not pull out to too fine a point, or the tube will probably become a thin glass rod, and be of no use.

Then obtain a basin of clean warm water and commence "blowing" the eggs. The first egg should be carefully examined for the best-marked place, and with a very fine needle a tiny hole should be bored directly opposite this place. Then enlarge the hole with one of the small drills. This hole is to let out the inside of the egg, and, as it is surprising what a lot of matter can be forced out of a small hole, it should, if in a large egg, be not more than an eighth of an inch in diameter, while if it is in a small one it should not exceed a sixteenth.

When the hole is bored the egg should be held over the dish of warm water, with the hole facing downwards. Place the narrow upturned end of the blowpipe under the hole, and blow steadily until all the inside matter of the egg has been forced out by the air pressure.

Next draw water into the glass tubing until it is nearly full. Turn the egg so that the hole is on top, and force the water into it and wash by shaking it. Repeat this operation until every scrap of the egg has been removed. To make sure that every particle of the inside has been ejected some collectors pour a small quantity of acid into the shell in the same manner as the water, and rinse with that. This is not absolutely necessary, however. When the washing is finished place the cleaned eggshell on to a piece of white blotting-paper, with the hole facing downwards, so as to allow the water to drain out and the shell to dry.

If the hole bored in the shell were left uncovered it would disfigure it. To overcome this difficulty a small piece of gummed paper, bearing the name and the particulars of the finding of the egg, should be fastened over it.

Then, when a number of eggs have been obtained and cleaned, they should be placed in a cabinet. If the reader has not already a cabinet suitable for storing these eggs, one can easily be made by procuring a shallow box and dividing the inside into a number of small compartments, about two inches square, and lining each one with cotton-wool. Then fix a glass lid to the box, and a small cabinet suitable for a beginner is complete.

THE EDITOR.

Printed and published by the Proprietors at 23, Bouverie Street, London, England. Agents for Australia: Gordon & Gotch, Ltd., Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, and Wellington, N.Z.; for South Africa: Central News Agency, Ltd., Cape Town and Johannesburg; Canada: 175, Queen Street West, Toronto. Subscription, 7s. per annum. Saturday, June 8th, 1912.

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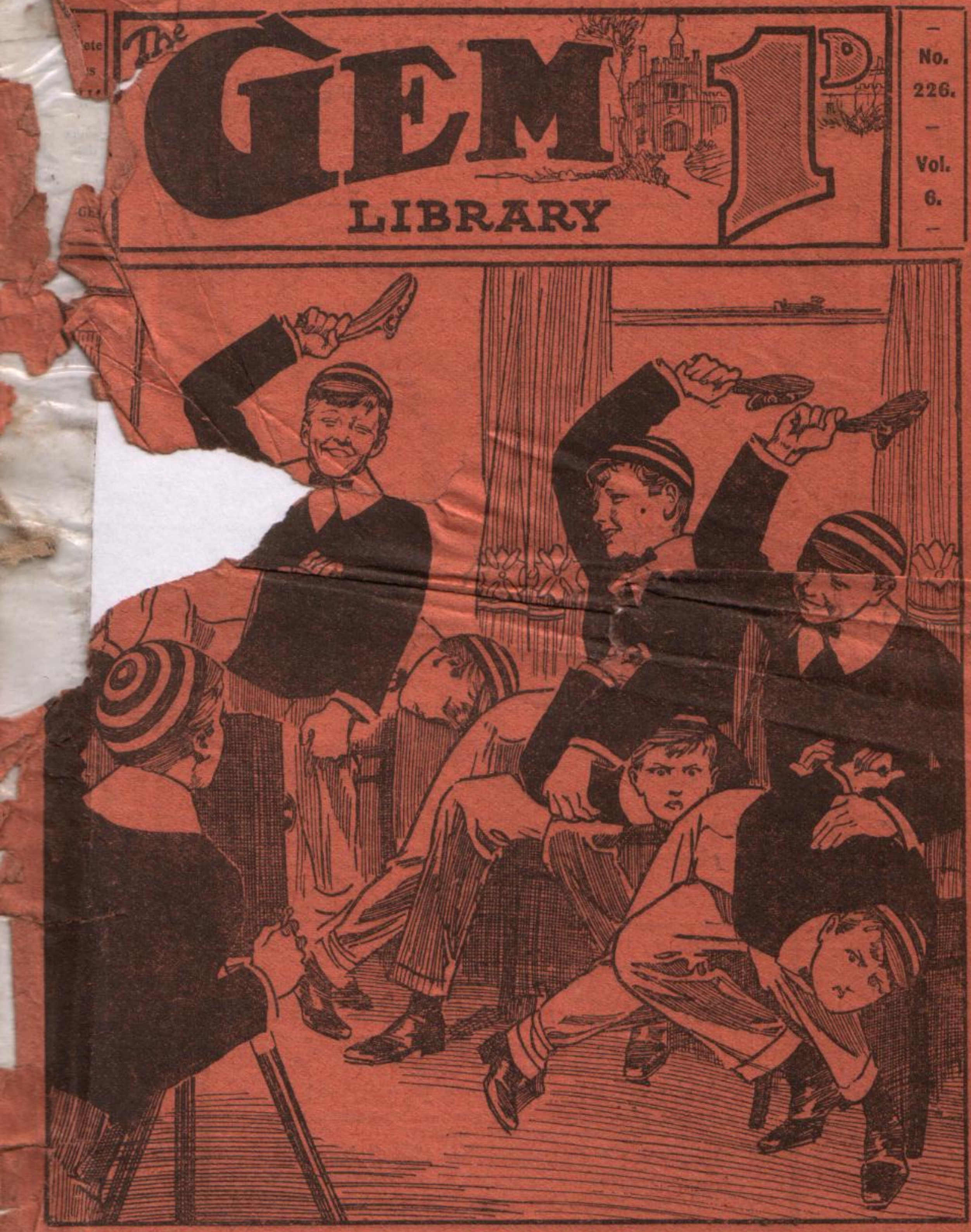
is the title of the grand, long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co., by Martin Clifford, which is contained in our popular companion paper, "The Gem" Library, the cover of which is reproduced below. Out on Thursday. Price 1d.



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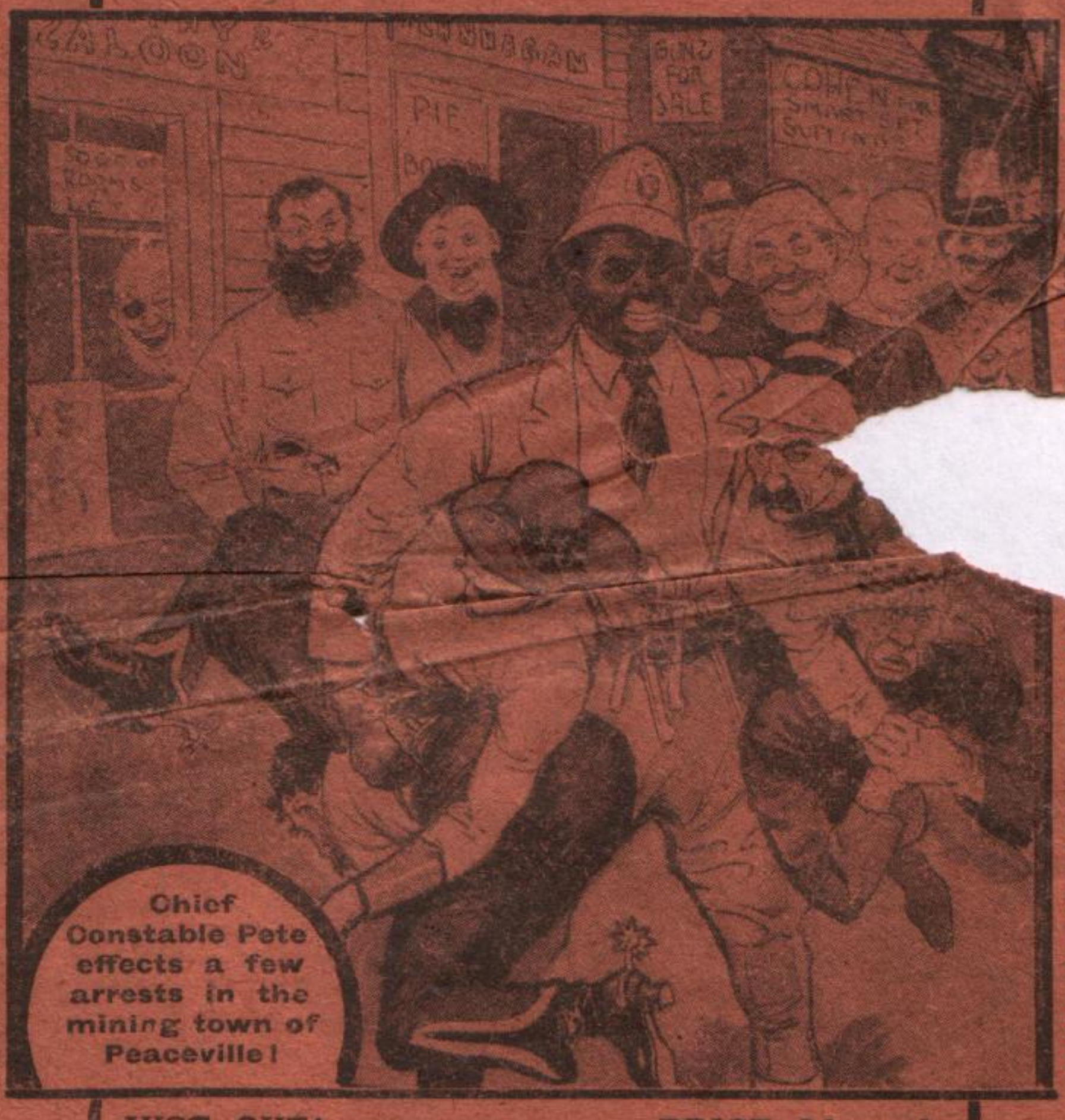

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