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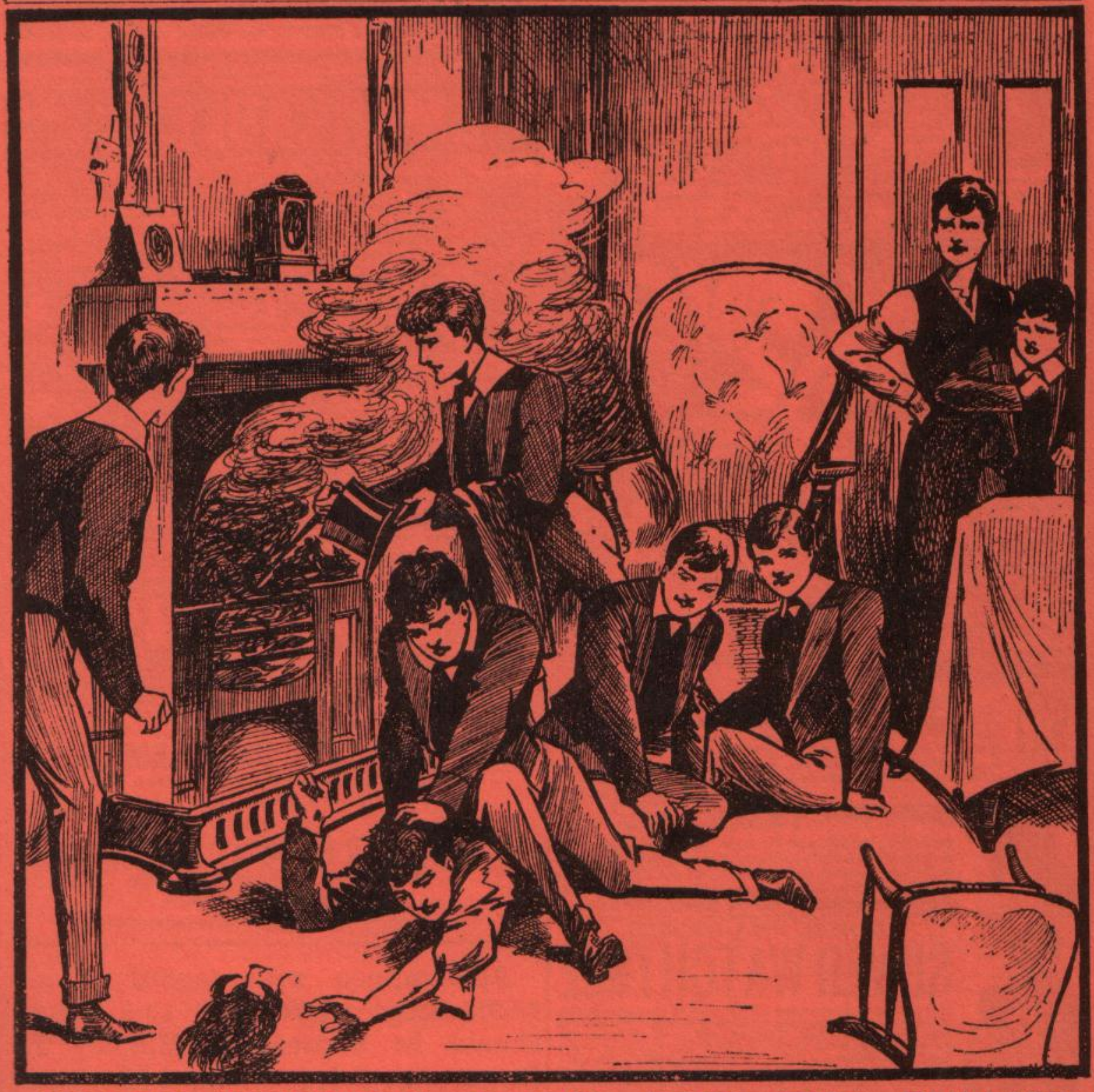
GRAND NEW, LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL TALE OF HARRY WHARTON & CO., SIDNEY DREW'S AMAZING SERIAL STORY, AND FERE COMIC SUPPLEMENT *In this Issue!*

No. 245. The Complete Story-Book for All. Vol. 7.



HARRY WHARTON & CO. RAID THE BULLY'S AMATEUR THEATRICAL COMPANY!

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For his Mother's Sake!

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

-- BY --

Frank Richards.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Trouble at Home!

"READY, Frank?"

Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, asked the question. He was looking in at the door of No. 1 Study in the Remove passage Wharton was in football garb, with his overcoat on, and a footer under his arm.

Frank Nugent did not reply. He was seated at the table in No. 1 Study, his chin resting on his palm. On the table before him lay an open letter; but Nugent was not reading it. His eyes were fixed unseeingly before him.

"Frank, old man!"

Nugent did not move. He did not seem to hear.

Harry Wharton looked more closely at his chum, and then stepped quietly into the study. His hand dropped gently on Nugent's shoulder.

"What's the matter, Frank?"

Then Nugent started out of his reverie. He shivered a little, and his hand closed upon the letter, as he looked up at his chum.

"Bad news, Frank?" asked Wharton.

"I—I don't know," stammered Nugent. "I—I've just had a letter from home. I can't quite make it out. I'm afraid there's something wrong."

"Sorry, old man. Anything I can do?"

Nugent shook his head. He rose from the table, and thrust the letter into his pocket. His handsome, sunny face was very pale now—paler than Wharton had ever seen it before.

Wharton's look was very concerned. One or twice before he had had a vague idea that there was trouble in Nugent's letters from home; but Frank had never spoken about it, and Wharton had never thought of asking him. But Nugent's face was so troubled now that Harry felt that he must speak.

"More trouble about your minor, Frank?" he asked.

"No," said Nugent, with a slightly bitter tone. "It isn't Dicky this time. I'm afraid it's something worse than that."

There was an awkward pause. Frank Nugent crossed to the window, and stood staring out into the old Close of Greyfriars. Wharton stood silent. He knew why Frank Nugent had turned his face away, to hide it. The silence in the study was broken by Bob Cherry's stentorian tones from the passage.

"You fellows coming? We're waiting for you!"

"Wait a minute, Bob!" called out Wharton.

"Oh, rats!" said Bob Cherry, looking into the study. "The Fourth are on the ground already, and it's time to kick off. What are you slacking about here for?"

Nugent did not turn from the window. Bob Cherry looked from one to the other in surprise.

"Not rowing, you chaps, are you?" he asked.

"No," said Harry.

"Then what's the matter?"

"It's all right—there's nothing the matter."

"Why, Franky hasn't changed yet!" said Bob Cherry, in an aggrieved tone. "Do go and get your things on, Nugent."

Nugent turned from the window. His lips were twitching, and he was evidently trying to keep his features in control.

"I—I don't think I feel quite up to footer this afternoon," he said unsteadily. "Put somebody else in, instead of me, Harry."

"Just as you like," said Wharton. "I—— Just buzz off, will you, Bob? I'll be down on the ground in a minute."

Bob Cherry nodded. He understood that something was amiss, and he quitted the study at once. His heavy footsteps rang away down the passage, and down the stairs.

"If you don't want to play, Franky, we'll leave you out," said Harry Wharton. "But it won't do you any good moping in the study, you know. Don't you think you'd better come down to the footer?"

Nugent was silent.

"Can't you tell me what's the matter, Frank? I don't want to be inquisitive, of course; but perhaps you're making too much of it, whatever it is. It's rotten to see you knocked over like this."

"I—I think I'll show you the letter," said Nugent slowly. "I—I've known for some time that things weren't going as they should; they haven't told me so, you know, but I can read between the lines. And—and this letter is so queer. Look at it—tell me what you think of it."

He drew the crumpled letter from his pocket. Wharton hesitated.

"You really want me to see it, Frank?"

"Yes, yes—I—I've been going to speak to you before, only—I couldn't! But I feel I want some advice about it now. Look at it."

Wharton took the letter quietly, and looked at it. Frank stood watching him, with strangely anxious eyes. The letter was written in a delicate feminine hand—Wharton knew Mrs. Nugent's writing—and he could see, by the unsteady lines, that it had been written under the stress of strong emotion. There were stains upon the letter; stains which Wharton knew must have been made by falling tears as it was written. There were but a few lines.

"My dear Frank,—I am coming down to see you to-day. I shall be at Friardale Station at five o'clock, and I want you to come there and meet me, and bring Dicky with you. Be sure to bring Dicky with you. I shall wait for you in the waiting-room at the station. You must not fail to bring Dicky with you.—Your loving Mother,

M. NUGENT."

"Mother wants to see Dicky; I'm only to take him," said Frank, as Wharton looked up from the letter. "I'm used to that—that's nothing. But—but why can't she come to the school, the same as she always does; what does it mean, waiting at the station? And—and she's been crying; you can see that in the letter."

Wharton nodded.

"It's queer!" he said. "But, perhaps she's only anxious about Dick for something, you know. The letter doesn't say that there's anything wrong."

"There is something wrong, Harry. Mother and the pater don't——" Nugent paused for a moment, with a break in his voice. "They don't get on as they used—I've seen that plain enough when I've been home. I'm afraid it's something serious now."

He choked.

"Don't think anything of the sort, old chap, till you're sure, anyway," said Wharton. "It may be nothing after all. You know how anxious your mater always is about Dicky. I dare say it's nothing, when you come to know what it is."

"I suppose I'm an ass," said Nugent, after a pause. "You're right, Harry—it may be nothing, after all. I—I was afraid——" He paused. "Well, anyway, it's no good meeting trouble half-way; it comes soon enough, without that."

"Your mater doesn't want to see you till five," said Harry. "That's two hours and a half from now. You can't stick in here moping over that letter all the afternoon, Frank. It will do you good to come down to the game; prevent you thinking about it, anyway. Try to put it out of your mind, and come."

Nugent hesitated.

"That's not so easy," he said, with a faint smile. "But you're right—it's no good moping. And if it turns out to be nothing, after all——" He put the letter into his pocket again. "You think it may be nothing, after all, Harry?"

"I think it's very likely."

"Good! Wait a tick while I change, and I'll be with you."

"I'll come and help you," said Harry.

Wharton's brows were knitted a little as he accompanied his chum to the Remove dormitory, and helped him change into his footer things. Dicky Nugent—Nugent minor of the Second Form—was his mother's favourite; and although Frank was not given to speaking on the subject, Wharton knew that he had often been wounded by it. Frank was by far the more serious of the brothers, and his affection for his mother was very deep. Dicky was a goodhearted little fellow enough, but he was happy and careless, and not in the least inclined to be sentimental. Dicky was fond enough of his parents; but he had confided to most of the Second Form that his "pater" was something of a fogey, and his mother a bothering old duck. Frank Nugent never forgot the weekly letter home; but he knew that his regular letters were not valued nearly so highly as the ill-spelt, hasty scrawl which Dicky would despatch about twice in the term. Wharton had seen how matters stood, and he had wondered at it; but it was not a thing he could speak about—there were some subjects that were "taboo" even between the closest chums.

Frank Nugent changed in silence, and his face was pale and troubled as he went down to the junior football-ground with Wharton. But Harry's advice was good; as soon as the game commenced, in the hurry and bustle of it, Frank Nugent's face brightened, and his trouble lay less heavy upon his mind and his heart.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Heart Bowed Down!

"PLAY up, Remove!"

"On the ball!"

It was a clear, sharp October afternoon, and ideal weather for football. The Remove were playing the Upper Fourth, and quite a crowd of juniors had gathered round the ground to watch the match. Harry Wharton's eleven were in fine form; and Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Upper Fourth were unusually fit that afternoon. A group of Second Form fags stood close up behind the Remove goal—Nugent minor, and Gatty, and Myers of the Second. Dicky Nugent had condescended to come down for half an hour to see his major play, and to eat toffee the while.

Frank Nugent was playing on the right wing, and Dicky watched his performances with a critical eye, and passed comments with brotherly frankness.

"Play up, Franky!" he yelled, as Temple of the Fourth robbed his major of the ball, and sped it away down the touch-line. "Are you going to sleep? Buck up!"

"Yes, play up!" howled Bolsover of the Remove, who was a spectator, too, and who firmly believed that he ought to have been played in the Form team—a belief that did not coincide with the skipper's. "Play up. Don't chuck the match away!"

The Fourth-Formers, as a rule, had very hard work when they played the Remove, and it was but seldom that they beat Harry Wharton's team. But they were gaining the advantage now. Temple, Dabney & Co. were in unusually good form, and Frank Nugent, who was generally a power to his side, was off-colour to a noticeable extent. In spite of himself, in spite of his resolutions, the worry that was upon his mind would swoop down upon him and fill his thoughts, and it was very bad for his game. Wharton had been right when he had said that playing would do Nugent good. It was doing him good. But whether it would do the team any good was another matter.

Nugent Minor turned out the toffee—a black and sticky mass. "Oh, gorgeous," said Myers. "It's got a smell like bloaters, but I suppose that's only a kind of added beauty." "It's not my fault," growled Dicky. "Somebody's been using the saucepan for bloaters, that's all. I washed it out with carbolic soap, but I couldn't quite get rid of the bloater niff!" (*See Chapter* 3.)

to mid-field, and the struggle was transferred to the enemy's half again. Frank Nugent captured the ball and bore it away goalward, and Wharton ran up to take the pass, but Nugent miskicked, and Fry of the Fourth sent the ball whizzing before Wharton could get near it.

Bolsover snorted. So did a good many other spectators belonging to the Remove.

"That's what they call playing," said Bolsover.

"Good many fellows standing here who could beat that!" remarked Vernon-Smith.

"I say, you fellows, I could beat that," said Billy Bunter, blinking at the rushing figures on the footer-field through his big spectacles. "It never does a team good to leave out a really first-class player from personal jealousy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I must say Nugent is mucking up the game," said Ogilvy. "He seems to be quite off his form."

"Oh, look at him!"

Nugent had received a pass right in front of the Upper Fourth goal, and he had kicked an easy kick. It glanced on the goal-post and rebounded into the field of play. There was a groan from the Remove crowd.

"Yah!"

"Rotten!"

"Where did you leave your shooting boots?"

Frank Nugent flushed crimson. The whistle went for the interval a few minutes later, neither side having broken its duck.

"You'd have done better to leave me out, Harry," Nugent said uncomfortably. "I'm not really up to the game, you know."

"You do seem a bit off your form, Franky," Wharton said anxiously. "But buck up. You'll do better in the second half."

"I can't help thinking!" muttered Nugent. "It's no good—I've tried to drive it out of my head, and I can't. I know there's trouble, and whenever I think of it it gives me a sort of catch—here." He touched his breast. "I shouldn't have played, Harry! I hope I sha'n't lost the match for you."

"No danger of that," said Wharton cheerily. "The Fourth can't beat us anyway. At the worst it'll be a draw."

"I say, Franky, old man, you are a cough-drop," said Bob Cherry, coming up. "Have you been playing football or hop-scotch?"

Nugent grinned faintly.

"I'm sorry, Bob; I'm out of sorts."

"You must be," chimed in Johnny Bull; and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur, remarked that the out-of-sort-fulness must be terrific.

Nugent coloured.

"I'll try to buck up in the second half!" he said.

"Do," said Johnny Bull.

The whistle went. Nugent played hard from the kick-off. He felt that it was too bad if his private worries, with which they had nothing to do, should cost his Form-fellows a footer match. For some time he seemed his old self; and he scored a goal in a masterly style from a long pass from Hurree Singh. There was a ripple of cheering from the Remove fellows.

"Goal!"

"Hurray!"

Bob Cherry clapped his chum on the back as they walked back to the centre of the field.

"That's better, Franky," he said. "Keep that up, old man."

But it was only a spurt. The gloom that was in his heart seemed to settle heavier and heavier upon Frank Nugent, and during the finish of the match he played like one in a dream. Harry Wharton saw that he could not be roused, and he changed Hazeldene out of goal, and sent Frank between the posts. Not that Frank was in a mood to keep goal with success; but the Remove players did not mean to let the enemy get too near the goal.

They played an attacking game all the time, and the leather was very seldom out of the Upper Fourth half; and Nugent in goal had nothing to do, excepting to smite his arms across his chest to keep himself warm.

"Well, if you call that footer, Frank," said his minor's voice behind the goal, "I should like to know what you call playing the giddy ox."

Nugent looked round.

"I want to see you when this is over, Dicky," he said.

"All right; we're going to have tea in the Form-room," said Dicky Nugent; "you can come to tea if you like; we're going to have herrings."

"I want you to come out with me."

"Can't be did; I'm going with Gatty."

"Look here——"

"Is this a footer match or a conversazione?" asked Bolsover sarcastically. "I've heard of some goal-keepers who keep one eye on the game."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Nugent flushed, and turned back to the field of play. He had forgotten for the moment that he was keeping goal for the Remove; but fortunately the Remove players kept the foe pinned up in their own half. Dicky Nugent yawned.

"Nothing doing here," he remarked. "Hardly ever saw such a rotten show! And the Remove have the cheek to say they wouldn't play the Second! Poof!"

"Let's get out," said Gatty.

And the heroes of the Second strolled away. The match ended a little later, with the score unchanged. The Remove had beaten the Fourth by one goal to nil; and that single goal had been kicked by Frank Nugent, so that the Remove captain had nothing to reproach himself with, after all. The Famous Four walked back to the School House together, and Frank Nugent was very silent, and his face very gloomy.

"You'll have tea before you go out, Frank," said Harry, as they came down after changing in the dormitory.

Nugent shook his head.

"It's half-past four," he said. "I'd better hunt up Dicky and get off, I think."

"Going out with your minor?" asked Johnny Bull, in surprise.

"My mater's coming down," said Nugent evasively.

"Coming here? We'll stand her a feed in the study!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"No; only to the station."

"Oh!"

Johnny Bull did not say any more. Nugent, with an uncomfortable flush on his cheeks, left his comrades, and went in search of his minor.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Dicky Declines.

"DON'T burn 'em, Gatty!"

"If you can cook herrings better than I can, Nugent minor, you'd better cook 'em."

"Well, I dare say I could; but I'm making the toffee," said Nugent minor. "What I said was, don't burn 'em. They're to eat, you know, not for fuel."

Gatty glared. He was holding two herrings before the Form-room fire, impaled upon pens. Gatty's face was very red, and the perspiration was rolling down his flushed cheeks. The weather was cold out of doors; but the Form-room fire was very large, and Gatty was very close to it. Indeed, it seemed as if Gatty would be almost as well done as the herrings, by the time he had finished.

Nugent minor had a small saucepan on the fire, and in that saucepan was a weird-looking compound. Nugent minor said that it was toffee, and as he was the manufacturer, his word had to be taken on the point. But it did not look like toffee, or smell like toffee.

There was a smell of burning in the fireplace. Nugent believed that Gatty was burning the herrings; while Gatty was of opinion that Nugent minor was burning the toffee. Myers, appealed to as umpire, declared that they were both burning the stuff, and that neither the herrings nor the toffee would be fit to eat when finished. Whereupon the amateur cooks glared at Myers; and, if their hands had not been full already, would probably have bumped him for his impartiality.

"I'll cook the herrings for you, you know, if you like," said Sammy Bunter—Bunter minor—blinking at them through his big round glasses.

"You can go and eat coke," growled Gatty.

"Shall I taste the toffee for you, Nugent minor?"

"No!" roared Dicky.

"Two of 'em done," said Gatty. "There are only four more. They'll make a jolly good tea, I think; though I don't know about the toffee to finish with."

"Don't you worry about the toffee," growled Dicky Nugent. "The toffee will be all right. I'm anxious about the herrings."

"Oh, rats!"

Gatty deposited the two finished herrings in a cracked plate in the hearth, and impaled two more upon the pens. The fags of the lower Forms had no studies to themselves, and when they wanted a feed in private, they had to cook it at the Form-room fire, at such times as the Form-room was not in use. The process was adventurous, but not wholly satisfactory from a gastronomic point of view. But youthful tastes are peculiar; and the fags had been known to enjoy the over or under-done morsels, cooked by themselves at the Form-room fire, with a relish they would never have shown for the finest dishes turned out by the school cook.

Nugent minor turned out the toffee—a black and sticky mass, with a smell that was almost indescribable. Dicky Nugent, however, appeared to be satisfied. He surveyed the result of his labours with considerable pride. Gatty, and Myers, and Bunter minor sniffed at it in a suspicious way, and Dicky glared at them.

"Well, don't you like it?" he demanded.

"Oh, yes," said Sammy Bunter. "It's better than nothing."

"Better than what?" roared Nugent minor.

"I—I mean, it's all right. Ripping!"

"Oh, gorgeous!" said Myers. "It's got a smell like bloaters; but I suppose that's only a sort of added beauty."

"It's not my fault!" growled Dicky. "Somebody's been using the saucepan for bloaters, that's all. I washed it out with carbolic soap that I borrowed from the housekeeper, but I couldn't quite get rid of the bloater niff."

"The carbolic soap must have given it a bit of a flavour, too," remarked Gatty.

"If you're going to grumble at everything, Gatty——"

"All serene," said Gatty. "You can try the toffee yourself first, and if you survive we'll have some. That's fair."

Nugent minor snorted.

The smell of the cooking had driven a good many of the

fags out of the Form-room, and the little party at the grate were almost alone in the big apartment. Frank Nugent opened the Form-room door and came in, and looked around him. He sniffed.

"Hallo!" said Dicky. "Come to tea, Franky? The herrings are not quite done."

It seemed to Frank, judging by the smell, that some of them, at least, were only too well done. But he did not make the remark.

"The toffee's done," said Gatty satirically.

"Look here, Gatty——"

"I want to speak to you, Dick," said Nugent abruptly. "Come over here a minute."

"Oh, what is it?" said Dicky irritably. "I hope you're not going to pitch a sermon at me, Frank. I don't like it. Besides, I'm fed up."

"I'm not going to do that, Dick I want you to come out with me."

"I can't. I'm going out with Gatty after tea," said Dicky. "We're going to see a man who has a bulldog to sell."

"You must come with me, Dicky," said Frank, in a constrained voice. "It's to see mother."

"The mater! She's at home!"

"She is coming down by the five o'clock train."

"Well, you can jaw to her for a bit, Frank, there's a good chap, and we'll get back before she goes," said Dicky. "Gatty wouldn't mind hurrying a bit, to oblige me."

"Not at all," said Gatty generously. "You stood by me like a brick when my uncle came down last week. If you hadn't been with me, he'd have kept me jawing much longer, I know that."

"Mother isn't coming here, Dicky," said Frank. "She—she can't stay long, I think, and she wants us to meet her at the station."

"Oh, what rot!" said Dicky, aggrieved. "What should she want us to meet her at the station for? I call that rot!"

"She does want it, Dick."

"Then I'll tell you what!" exclaimed Nugent minor, struck by a sudden inspiration. "You can meet her at the station, Frank, and give her my love."

"She asked specially in her letter for me to take you."

"Ye-e-es, that's all right. But you're the elder, and the elder ought to do these things. It's a certain amount of responsibility being a major—you told me that yourself," said Dicky triumphantly.

"Hear, hear!" said Gatty. "That's two more herrings done! Only two more. Look here, Nugent major! Have a herring before you go, and let Dicky alone."

"You must come, Dicky," said Frank, in great distress. The unwillingness of Dicky to go with him was a difficulty he had not foreseen.

"Now, look here, Frank, don't be a rotter!" said Dicky pleadingly. "You go and meet the mater at the station, and I'll do the letter home next week—I will, honour bright!"

"That's a fair offer," said Myers.

"Fair as a die," said Gatty.

Nugent smiled faintly.

"It won't do, Dicky! You must come!"

"I've told you I can't!" growled Dicky.

"Mother will be disappointed if you don't."

"Rot! If she wants to see me so badly, she can come here. Besides, she saw me a fortnight ago. It's all rot!"

"Dicky, you must come!"

"I can't."

Nugent hesitated. He did not want to take Dicky along with him by force, with his hand on his minor's collar. That was not exactly the way his mother would like to see them. But it was pretty clear that that was the only way in which Dicky could be got to the station in Friardale.

Nugent minor evidently considered the matter settled. He had opened a big pocket-knife and was dismembering the herrings that Gatty had finished cooking. Myers cut up chunks of bread. Butter was lacking, but the fags were not particular. Their view was that it was better to have a dinner of herbs cooked by themselves than a stalled ox provided by the authorities and eaten in a civilised way at a table, under a master's eye. Sammy Bunter, with the air of a fellow doing the generous thing, added a sticky mass of aniseed-balls to the feed. Frank Nugent stood watching them with a perplexed brow. The quarter rang out from the clock-tower, and it was high time to start for the station, if he was not to be late.

"Won't you come, Dicky?" he exclaimed at last.

Dicky was busy with the herrings now.

"They're cooked all right, Gatty," he said graciously. "If you avoid the burnt bits, you'll find 'em all right. Will you have some, Frank?"

"Will you come, Dick?"

"No."

"But the mater——"

"Bring her on to the school," said Dick. "I don't understand this dodge of seeing us at the station. Chap's people ought to pay him regular visits, not drop in in this way, when he's going to see a man about a bulldog. It's not reasonable. Bring the mater on to Greyfriars, and you can take her to the station for a later train afterwards. I think that's a good arrangement."

"Dicky——"

"Oh, rats!"

Frank Nugent gave it up. He quitted the Form-room with a moody brow, and his hands thrust deep into his pockets. Dicky went cheerfully on with the feed.

Harry Wharton met Nugent as he crossed the Close on his way to the gates.

"You've not left yourself too much time to get to Friardale Station by five, Franky," he said, as he walked with Nugent to the gate.

"No; I shall hurry."

"Where's Dick?"

"He's not going."

"But I thought——"

"He won't come."

"Young bounder!" said Harry. "I suppose you can't march him along by the ears if he won't go? Well, so-long, Franky, old man! I hope it will be all right."

"Thanks, old chap!"

And Frank Nugent hurried down the long, white road that ran between high green hedges to the village of Friardale. Harry Wharton stood watching him till he was out of sight, and then turned back into the Close, with a clouded brow.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Black News.

FRANK NUGENT arrived at Friardale Station a little breathless. The train was in, and passengers were leaving the station as Nugent arrived there. He hurried in, and made his way to the waiting-room.

There was no light in the waiting-room as yet, and in the October dusk the interior was very shadowy. Frank stepped in and looked about him, and for a moment he saw nobody. But a figure in black in the far corner rose, and Frank recognised his mother. He ran towards her.

Mrs. Nugent was dressed entirely in black, and a thick veil covered her face. In the dusk, and through the veil, Frank could not discern her features. She raised the veil to kiss the boy, and he could see, then, that her face was very white.

"Where is Dick?"

That was her first question.

Frank felt a little throb of pain at his heart. He had spent a miserable, anxious afternoon thinking of his mother, and he would not have failed to come and see her as she asked, whatever reason he might have had for being kept away. Dicky had not come, because he was going with Gatty to see a man who had a bull-pup to sell. But the mother's first question, her first thought, was for Dick! It had always been so, and Frank had learned to be used to it, and he had never let his mother see how it wounded him.

"Dick can't come, mother. I'm sorry."

She caught her breath hurriedly.

"Dicky! Isn't he here, then?"

"No, mother."

"Frank! I told you to bring him! I told you it was important! You—you should have brought him with you!"

"He couldn't come, mother." Frank did not like to say that he wouldn't come. "He wants me to take you on to the school to see him. He's going out, but he's going to get back to see you when you get to Greyfriars."

"I cannot go to Greyfriars."

"Why not, mother?"

"I cannot. I—I shall never go to Greyfriars again, Frank. You will understand—later. But—but—but I must see Dick!"

Mrs. Nugent sank down upon the seat again. Frank knew that the tears were rolling down her cheeks under her veil, and his heart was full of pain.

"Mother," he whispered, "what's the matter? What's happened at home?"

"You will know—soon."

"Is father ill?"

"No."

"Has there been—trouble?" asked Frank hesitatingly. He felt a repugnance to speaking on such a subject as a quarrel between his parents. When at home, the poor lad had always affected to be blind to what was plainly visible to all who could see.

"Yes."

"But Dicky has nothing to do with it, mother?"

"I must see Dicky."

"Then come up to the school."

"I—I cannot! Frank, you must go back and send Dicky to me at once."

"I can't, mother; he's gone out by now, and I don't even know where he's gone. Besides, he wouldn't come," said Frank reluctantly.

Mrs. Nugent sobbed softly.

"Mother, dear, do tell me what's the matter," whispered Nugent, putting his arm round his mother's neck. "Can't I help you?"

"Nobody can help me," said Mrs. Nugent wearily. "But—but I must see Dicky. He must come with me."

Nugent started back.

"You are not going to take him away, mother?"

"Yes."

"Away from Greyfriars?"

"Yes."

"Take him home?"

"No—no!"

"You are going home, mother, aren't you?" asked Frank, with a strange, sickening feeling of fear—fear of he hardly knew what.

"No, Frank."

"But—but I don't understand," said Frank miserably, in bewilderment. "Where are you going to take Dicky, then?"

"You will understand soon enough, when you see your father," said Mrs. Nugent, her voice trembling. "I am not going home again."

"Mother!"

"I suppose you must know, Frank. I am leaving your father."

"Mother!"

"I—I have endured it too long, for Dick's sake, and—and yours," said Mrs. Nugent. "I know this will be a terrible shock to you, Frank, my boy. But it—it will be better so. Your father and I cannot agree; matters have been going from bad to worse for years, and I cannot—I will not—endure more."

"Where are you going, mother?"

"I am going to my father—your grandfather, Frank. I shall stay there for a time; I do not know how long. But I will never go back to the Lodge again—never! And—and I must take Dick with me. You will remain with your father; I shall take Dick. I cannot part with Dick."

"You can part with me!" Nugent could not help saying, in bitterness of spirit.

"That—that is different. You are the elder; you do not need my care as Dick does," faltered Mrs. Nugent. "But I—I am heart-broken to leave you, Frank. But there is no other way."

"Surely it can't be as bad as all that!" said Frank wretchedly. "Has there been a row?"

"Yes, a terrible scene, and before the servant, too," said Mrs. Nugent. "Don't talk to me about it, Frank; I can't bear it. You know what your father's temper is like."

Frank was silent. He was loyal to his mother, and he did, indeed, know that his father had a hot and hasty temper, and required managing. It was not the lad's place to tell his mother what her duty was. What had happened he did not know, but he knew that there were few things that could excuse the step his mother was taking. But he could not tell her so. He stood in miserable silence.

"Frank, go back to the school and send Dicky to me, as quickly as you can. Don't tell him what is the matter; simply tell him that I must see him. I will wait here till he comes."

Frank's lips quivered.

"You are going to take him away from school, and away from father?" he asked.

"Yes; I must."

"Does father know?" faltered Frank.

"No, no! He would not allow it if he knew. But I shall have Dick safe with me before he knows," said Mrs. Nugent, panting

"Mother, hadn't you better——"

"You will do as I tell you, Frank?"

"Mother dear, you—you oughtn't to take Dicky away without father's consent," said Frank. "It—it isn't right! What will father say?"

"I do not care what he says. I am past caring. I must take Dick. You will not disobey your mother, Frank?"

"But—but father——"

"I cannot consider him in this."

"But I must consider him, mother," said Frank wretchedly.

"What will he say to me when he finds out that I've helped you to take Dick away from Greyfriars?"

"Your first duty is to me, Frank. I command you to get Dicky here," said Mrs. Nugent. "I tell you he is to come."

Nugent was silent. What to do he did not know, and, with all his deep affection for his mother, he felt instinctively that his duty was to his father in this matter. Mrs. Nugent had left her husband, and, with a mother's instinct, she had resolved to take her youngest child with her, but evidently she had not paused to consider Dick in the matter at all. Nor had she considered the position she was placing the elder boy in, of opposition to his father—opposition before he even knew what the trouble was about.

"Go at once, Frank—at once."

"Mother, I—I don't think I ought to do it," muttered Frank. "Father has a right to say whether Dick shall be taken away from school——"

"You will not disobey me, Frank?"

"But father——"

"I do not want to hear you father's name again."

"Mother! Is it so bad as that? Can't you—can't you make it up?"

"Don't think of interfering in matters you do not understand, Frank. It is impossible; I shall never think of that."

"I—I know I don't understand all about it, mother. But—but I should think you might try, for Dick's sake and mine. Think of what this means for us. It will be all over the school; we shall be pointed at as fellows whose parents row in public," groaned Nugent. "I'm not thinking only of myself. But you can see how rotten it will be."

"It cannot be helped, Frank. I shall never go back to your father. I cannot. When I told him I was going, he said——" Mrs. Nugent sobbed.

"What did he say, mother?"

"He—he said: 'Go, and be hanged!'"

"Oh, mother!"

"Do you think I could ever speak to him again after that, Frank?"

"He didn't mean it, mother," said Frank. "People say things like that when they're ratty, but they don't mean them. Father is very likely sorry by this time."

"Then he can come to me and say he is sorry," said Mrs. Nugent.

Frank shook his head. He felt that his father would not do that. A strong nature can always make the first step towards a reconciliation, but Henry Nugent's was not a strong nature. He was the kindest of men at his best, but he was hasty, and he was obstinate. If it were left to him to make the first advance, it would never be made. Mrs. Nugent dried her tears, and her face became harder.

"Frank, you know what I want you to do. Will you do it?"

"Don't you see the rotten position you're putting me in, mother?" groaned Frank. "It's making me take sides against the dad."

"Then you think your mother is in the wrong?"

"No, no, no! But——"

"Will you send Dick to me, Frank, or will you not?"

"I—I don't think I ought to, mother."

Mrs. Nugent rose to her feet.

"Very well. Leave me, then, if you choose to disobey me. I will do without you."

"Mother!"

"I forgive you, Frank. You have always been under your father's influence——"

"Is that a fault, mother?"

"Go—go away, and leave me," said Mrs. Nugent. "If you will not help me, I must help myself. Go back to the school, Frank."

Nugent stood wretched and undecided. It went to his heart to refuse his mother anything, especially at such a moment, but he knew which way the path of duty lay. His mother gave him a last look, and drew the veil down over her face.

"Good-bye, Frank."

"Mother, isn't it—isn't it possible—to——"

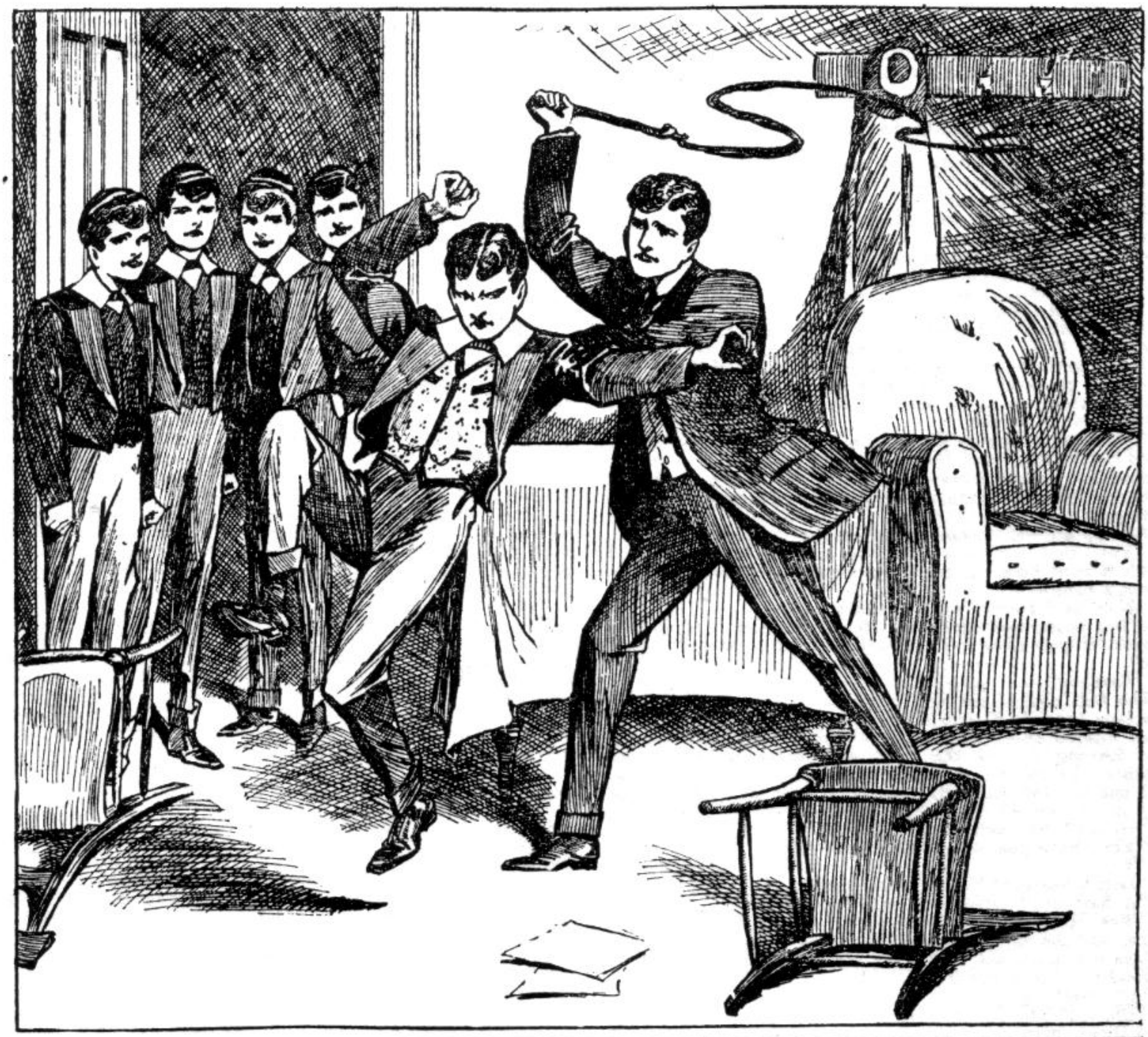
"That is all over, Frank. Good-bye."

The boy kissed her on the cheek, and went blindly from the waiting-room.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Great Expectations.

HARRY WHARTON was standing in the old gateway of Greyfriars, looking down the road in the deepening October dusk. He had come out there to wait for his chum's return, but Frank had not come back. Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry came down the path to the gate and joined him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry cheerily. "I thought we should find you here. Do you know that a



"What are you licking the Bounder for?" asked Ogilvy. "Lesson in good taste," explained Coker, thrashing Vernon-Smith with a dog-whip. "My taste in comedies doesn't agree with Smithy's, and this is my method of criticism. There! I think that will do!" He jerked the Bounder from the table and threw him, gasping, into an armchair. (*See Chapter* 11.)

rehearsal of the Remove Amateur Dramatic Society is due. How are we going to do 'Julius Cæsar' without either Brutus or Mark Antony?"

Wharton smiled.

"I don't want to rehearse now, Bob. Get on without me."

"Nugent still out?" asked Bob.

"Yes."

"What's the matter with him?"

"Trouble!"

"At home?"

"Yes. Mum, of course!"

Bob Cherry nodded.

"Poor old Franky!" he said. "It's beastly! I suppose he won't want to rehearse, either. Hallo, hallo, hallo, here comes that precious minor of his!"

Dicky Nugent and Gatty of the Second came up the road, and turned in at the gates. Dick Nugent was not looking contented. Apparently the negotiations about the bull-pup had not been a success.

"There's a telegram for you, Dicky," said Harry Wharton.

Nugent minor brightened up.

"Oh, good!" he said. "When did it come?"

"Ten minutes ago. It's in the house."

"I wonder whether the pater's taken to telegraphing tips," said Dicky, as he walked in with Gatty. "Blessed if I know what else anybody should telegraph to me for."

But there was a rather important look about Nugent minor as he went in to look for his telegram. Telegrams did not commonly arrive for fags of the Second Form, and it was a distinction to get one. Gatty stood by, looking quite impressed, as Nugent minor opened the buff envelope, and unfolded the telegraph form within.

Dicky whistled as he glanced at the telegram.

"Cash?" asked Gatty.

"No!"

"Oh!"

"It's from the mater," said Dicky, looking puzzled. "Look at it, Gatty, old man. What do you make of a giddy telegram like that?"

Gatty read the telegram.

"I am waiting for you at the post-office. Come at once. It is very, very important.—Your Mother."

"Just like a woman," said Gatty, with masculine superiority. "I could have crammed that into the twelve words."

"But what does it mean?" demanded Dicky. "Why can't the mater come here?"

"Better ask her!"

"I suppose I shall have to go."

"Better," said Gatty. "She says it's important. May be a hamper."

Dicky brightened considerably.

"Might be," he agreed, "or a jolly good tip. I don't see why she can't come on to the school; but I suppose I shall have to go. I wonder if Frank's seen her. If it's a hamper, I shall want somebody to help me with it."

"I'll come!" said Gatty cordially.

"Good!"

"You stood by me when my uncle came, and I'll go with you to see your mater," said Gatty. "It's only fair."

"Right-ho! Come on!"

Dicky Nugent put the telegram in his pocket, and the chums of the Second went out together. Myers and Sammy Bunter stopped them in the doorway.

"Got your telegram?" asked Myers.

"Yes; that's all right!"

"What's it about?"

"Going down to Friardale to meet my mater. Must be a hamper, I think," said Dicky, beaming. "It would be just like the mater to bring it down personally, so that the jars wouldn't get broken; though I don't see why she can't bring it right on to the school. But, if it's a hamper, it's worth a bit of trouble."

"I'll come with you, if you like," said Sammy Bunter.

"I don't like!" said Dick cheerfully.

And he walked away in the dusk with Gatty. Harry Wharton & Co. were still in the gateway; Nugent major had not appeared.

"Going out—eh?" said Harry, as the fags came by.

"Yes; that wire was from my mater," said Dick. "I think it must be a hamper. Did Frank say anything to you about a hamper?"

"No," said Harry, with a faint smile.

"You chaps can come into the Form-room, and have a whack, if you like, if it turns out to be a hamper," said Dick.

"Thanks!"

The fags walked out very cheerfully. They hurried down the lane towards Friardale. As they reached the little stile, Dick uttered an exclamation. A junior in a Greyfriars cap was leaning against the stile, and Dicky recognised his brother. Frank Nugent was plunged deep in thought, and did not see the fags. Dicky roused him with a sounding slap on the shoulder, and Frank started.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "Dicky!"

"Yes; have you seen the mater?"

"Yes!"

"Is it a hamper?" Dick asked eagerly.

"A hamper?" repeated Frank, puzzled.

"Yes. I've just had a wire from her from Friardale post-office, and she says she's waiting for me there," said Dicky. "Says it's important. That must mean either a hamper or a good tip. How much have you got?"

"I? Nothing!"

"Oh, rot! The mater must have tipped you five at least," said Dicky incredulously. "Was she waxy at my not coming with you?"

"She was not pleased."

"Well, look here, I'll tell you what I'll do," said Dicky generously. "Whatever I get, I'll go halves. It's not cricket to leave you out, Franky."

"Dick, do you know what mother wants to see you for?"

"Not unless it's a hamper."

Nugent major made a gesture.

"It's not a hamper, Dick, nor a tip. It—it's something serious. I—I don't know whether I ought to let you go. Goodness knows!"

Dicky Nugent chuckled.

"I don't see how you're jolly well going to stop me," he said. "It takes two to make a bargain, you know. I'm going!"

"It must be a hamper," said Gatty argumentatively. "As if a fellow's mater would wire to him, and fetch him out of the school for nothing. I suppose any of your relations haven't died, have they, Nugent major?"

"No," said Frank.

"I knew a chap once," said Gatty, "he got a wire saying that his father was coming down on a very important matter, and he thought it meant a new bicycle, and it turned out that it was his grandfather had died. He was sold, I can tell you. He had promised chaps rides on the bike."

"Come on, kid," replied Dicky, "we shall be late! Cheer up, Franky; it's halves, honour bright!"

Nugent did not reply. He stood in miserable indecision as the two fags went on towards the village. What he ought to do he did not know in the least. He knew what Dicky was wanted for, and he wondered whether his young brother would go. Dicky was accustomed to pleasing himself, and he certainly wouldn't want to leave Greyfriars. Frank hoped that he would refuse to go. He wondered whether he ought to interfere. But it was impossible to decide that question. While his parents were united, the path of duty was clear—but when they were in opposition, it was by no means easy to decide which one was entitled to claim his obedience.

He was still thinking it over miserably when Dicky and Gatty disappeared in the dusk. The unhappy lad remained by the stile in troubled thought. With a heavy heart, at last he walked back to Greyfriars. Troubles had come to him before—schoolboy troubles, home troubles—the little vicissitudes that come into every life—but never anything like this! This was his first glimpse of tragedy, and it seemed to the lad that it would darken his young life—darken it so that he could never be happy again.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
A Sudden Departure!

"HALLO, mater!"

That was Dicky Nugent's cheery greeting.

The post-office at Friardale was also a grocer's and a wine and spirit merchant's. It was a little old-fashioned place, with a big tree outside shadowing the shop-front, and from time immemorial there had been an oaken bench under that tree. The bench was carved with the initials of generations of Friardale boys. As his mother was waiting at the post-office for him, Dicky knew where to look for her, and he found her there, seated on the old bench in the deep dusk under the oak-tree. Mrs. Nugent started up as he came. Gatty raised his cap with Second-Form politeness, but Nugent's mater, as Gatty afterwards complained in the Form-room, never even noticed him. She was completely taken up with Nugent minor.

"Dicky—Dicky, my boy!"

The agitated woman clasped the fag in her arms, holding him almost convulsively. Dicky bore it with a good grace, though he secretly wished that his mother wouldn't be so demonstrative before one of the fellows. He knew that in an hour or two Gatty would be repeating "Dicky—Dicky, my boy!" to a grinning crowd of fags in the Second-Form-room, and he would have to punch Gatty's head to stop him, and endanger his friendship.

"Well, mater," said Dicky, releasing himself, "jolly surprise to see you down here! Why didn't you come up to the school with it?"

"With what, Dicky?"

"The hamper."

"What?"

"Isn't it a hamper?" asked Dick, disappointed.

"A—a hamper!" repeated Mrs. Nugent dazedly. "I don't understand you, Dicky. I have—have sent for you for—for a reason of dreadful importance!"

"Oh, dear!" said Dicky. "The pater crocked?"

"No, no!"

"What's the row, then? I—I say," exclaimed Dicky, looking agitated himself. "You don't mean to say that anything's happened to my white rabbits?"

"Your—your rabbits, Dick?"

"Yes. You know you said you'd take every care of them while I was at school," said Dick anxiously. "You and the pater both said so, you know. Are they all right?"

"Yes, yes, yes."

"Oh, good!" said Dicky, in great relief. "I don't see why I can't have 'em at Greyfriars. It's a lot of rot to say that rabbits can't be kept in a dormitory."

"Dick!"

"I've brought Gatty down here for nothing, if it isn't a hamper," said Dicky. "He was going to help me carry it back to Greyfriars."

"Oh, never mind," said Gatty, with a gigantic effort of politeness—"never mind, at all. It's a pleasure to see your mater, Dick."

Dick stared at him.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "Glad you look at it like that. I say, mater, you look pretty seedy. Feeling run down?"

"I am not well, Dick."

"Then you oughtn't to be taking railway journeys," said Dick, "or waiting out here in the evening air. It's getting chilly of nights. I'd better see you off at once."

"You are coming with me, Dicky?"

Dick Nugent jumped.

"Coming with you!" he repeated.

"Yes."

"On a holiday, do you mean?"

"Yes, yes, a—a kind of holiday."

"How long?"

"Oh, a long time—a long time, my darling!"

"You don't mean that I'm going to leave Greyfriars?"

"For a time, yes—for a time, Dicky. Do you not want to

come with your mother, Dicky?" asked Mrs. Nugent wistfully.

"Oh, of course," said Dick. "Always, of course. It's not that. Only—of course, I want to keep with the fellows."

"The fellows?"

"The other chaps, you know," explained Dick. "Besides, this is jolly sudden, isn't it? The pater hasn't said anything about my leaving. When am I to go?"

"At once—now."

"What about my box?"

"I will buy you another, Dick."

"And all my things, mater?"

"You can get more. All you need—anything you need."

"But I can't buzz off like this without even telling the Head," said Dick. "I'd like a holiday as well as anybody; but, look here, mother, I know your idea of a holiday. You took me to Aunt Drusilla's once for a holiday, and I had a rotten time. She cried when I got a black eye fighting the butcher's boy."

"You are not going to Aunt Drusilla's now. I shall take you to the seaside, Dick."

"Well, the seaside isn't much catch in October," said Nugent minor. "Still, look here, can Gatty come?"

"Gatty! Who is Gatty?"

"This chap is Gatty—you know Gatty," said Dick, somewhat resentfully. "He spent the last vac. with me, you remember, and busted the greenhouse with a cricket-ball."

"Oh, yes, yes! No, Dick, you must come alone."

"I'd rather not come, then," said Dick sulkily. "Look here, mother, it isn't the thing to take a chap away in the middle of the term like this. A holiday is all right when other chaps are having holidays, but a fellow doesn't want to mope about alone. I'd rather stay where I am. I'd rather have a hamper than a holiday now."

"I—I will take you everywhere you like, and get you anything you like, Dick," said Mrs. Nugent. "But I must take you with me now."

Gatty stood looking on in astonishment.

Dick looked thoughtful.

"I always wanted a pony," he said.

"You shall have a pony, Dick."

"Honest Injun?" asked Nugent minor, his face brightening up.

"Yes, yes, Dick."

"And will you try to fix it with the Head to let me have it at Greyfriars when I come back?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, you lucky bargee," muttered Gatty. "I don't get these things."

"All right," said Dick. "I'll come. I shall have to go back to the school and say good-bye to the chaps, and——"

"No, no! We must take the next train."

"It doesn't go for a quarter of an hour," said Dick. "Why not come up to the school and see the Head, mater. You ought to tell him, you know."

"No, no!"

Mrs. Nugent's hand closed upon her son's arm as though she feared that he would escape her. Dicky was not particularly observant, especially in matters of the emotions, but he could see that his mother was strongly agitated, and he wondered why.

"I say, mater, is anything wrong?" he asked.

"Yes, yes. I will tell you—presently. Come, Dick."

Dick cast a glance of dismay at Gatty.

"Come, come! We must not lose the train," said Mrs. Nugent.

"Oh, all right!"

"Jolly queer bizney," murmured Gatty, with a shake of the head. "I wonder what the fellows will think about this when I tell them?"

"Good-bye, Gatty, old man," said Dick. "I expect I shall be back soon. Tell Sam Bunter the bob he owes me can stand over till I come back; but if he doesn't shell out then, I'll give him a beautiful thick ear. And Myers——"

"Come, come, Dick!"

"I'm coming. Tell Myers——"

"Come, come!"

And Dick had to break off his instructions to his amazed chum, and he walked slowly and unwillingly beside his mother to the station. Dick was in a state of great surprise, and even the prospect of possessing the long-wished-for pony did not wholly reconcile him to this abrupt farewell to Greyfriars. His mother hurried him into the station, and on to the platform. She sat holding his hand until the train came in, and Dick, after one or two ineffectual attempts to release it, resigned himself to his fate.

As the train came in on the up line, and stopped, another train came in from the opposite direction. It passed out of the station, leaving a number of passengers who had alighted upon the platform. As Dick's train began to move, he uttered a sudden exclamation. Among the passengers who had alighted from the down train was a handsome gentleman, in a frock-coat and a silk-hat, with a worried frown wrinkling his brows.

"Dad!" exclaimed Dick.

Mrs. Nugent started convulsively.

"What—what did you say, Dick?"

"There's the governor on the other platform, mother. He's just come down by that train!" exclaimed Dick, jumping up and letting the window down. "I——"

Mrs. Nugent grasped him almost fiercely, and pulled him back into his seat.

"Sit down, Dick."

"But I want to call to the governor."

"You must not."

Dick stared at her blankly. The train was whizzing out of the station now, and it was too late, in any case.

"W-w-what's the matter, mother?" gasped Dick. "Why mustn't I speak to the dad?"

"You must not. You—you are going away from him."

"Going away from father!" yelled Dick.

"Yes."

"B-b-b-but——"

His mother's arms closed round the boy. Her tears fell fast upon his cheeks. Dick looked at her in a frightened way, feeling somehow inclined to cry himself, though the Second Form at Greyfriars would have been very much astonished at the sight of Nugent minor "blubbing."

"Mother—mother—what—what's happened?" gasped the boy.

His mother did not reply; but she sobbed over him, and her tears fell faster, till Dick, between terror and sympathy, began to cry, too. The train rushed on through the dusk of the deepening night, bearing the mother and son far from Greyfriars.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
The Shadow of Sorrow!

"HERE you are, Franky!"

Frank Nugent looked up with a gloomy brow, as he reached the gates of Greyfriars. The three Removites were waiting for him there, and Frank nodded to them without speaking. Harry Wharton slipped his arm through his chum's.

"We've been bribing Gosling to keep the gates open till you came in, Franky," said Bob Cherry. "Do you know you came near being locked out?"

"Yes. I didn't notice the time."

"We've bribed and corrupted Gosling with a bob," said Johnny Bull. "But you'd better come in now, or his conscience will begin to work, and he will want another bob."

"Which it's time to lock up," said Gosling, the porter, gruffly, coming up with his bunch of keys. "Wot I says is this 'ere——"

"Come in, Frank."

Frank walked in with Wharton, and Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry followed more slowly. The school-porter closed the gates with a clang, and locked them.

"Dick hasn't come in," said Wharton, as he crossed the dusky Close with Nugent. "Gatty came back, and said Dick had gone with Mrs. Nugent."

Frank nodded.

"I suppose he has," he said. "I—I've been walking about for a long time trying to think it out. I—I'm the most miserable rotter in the world, I think."

There was a catch in Nugent's voice. In the dusk of the Close, Wharton could not see his chum's face, but he knew that the tears were rolling down his cheeks.

"Don't let's go in for a minute, Franky," he said softly. "Take a turn round the Close. I hope it hasn't turned out bad."

"I may as well tell you, Harry. I suppose all Greyfriars will know about it by to-morrow," said Frank wretchedly. "My mother can't get on with the pater, and she's left him."

"Good heavens! I say, I'm sorry, Frank, old man."

"I know you are, Harry. She's taken Dick away, and—and the pater doesn't know yet. I shouldn't be surprised to see him down here. I—I don't know what will come of it. I knew there was a lot of trouble at home, but—but I never dreamed it would come to this.

"What's a chap to do, when his parents can't agree? He can't side with both of them, and he can't side with one against the other. And he can't be indifferent. I don't think a chap was ever in a rottener position."

"It's rotten enough, Franky. Is it really so serious as all that—not just a bit of a storm that will blow over?" asked Wharton anxiously.

Nugent shook his head.

"The mater says not. They've separated. It—it seems impossible, but there it is. There won't be any home after this, I suppose."

"Poor old Frank!"

"Dick's gone; but the mater will find him more trouble than she thinks. And—and very likely father will say that I ought to have kept Dick here—perhaps I ought. If I'd spoken to the Head, he'd have kept Dick here till he knew what father wanted in the matter. But I couldn't interfere with mother, could I?"

"I don't see how you could, Frank."

"I don't know what will come of it. Let me alone for a bit, Harry—I shall only make you feel as rotten as I feel myself! And—and don't let any of the fellows come looking for me—there's a good chap!"

"Right you are, Frank!"

Harry Wharton went into the house with a troubled brow, leaving his chum in the Close. He saw that Nugent wanted to be alone. Even his closest chum's company was irksome to him at that moment.

But solitude was as painful. The unhappy boy was trying to think it out; but there was no solution of the difficulty that he could arrive at. His father and mother had quarrelled and separated; there was nothing he could do. If love for their children could not keep them together and patch up a peace, it was not likely that they would listen to anything Frank could say. And, whatever the faults upon both sides, it was no duty of a lad to lecture his parents. Frank had nothing to do but to submit to Fate—to make the best of it.

He did not feel like making the best of it just then. On the morrow all the school would know about it—they would know why Dicky had left; they would look at him, they would jeer or be sorry, according to their natures; and the boy felt that he would be able to endure the jeers more easily than the compassion.

He wandered into the quiet old Cloisters of Greyfriars, and walked up and down there under the old stone arches, on the old stone flags that had been worn by the feet of generations of Greyfriars boys and generations of dead-and-gone monks before them.

His brows were burning; his eyes were heavy with unshed tears.

What was he to do?

How could he face the future, with a shattered home always in his mind? How could he take up his life at Greyfriars again and pursue it, knowing what had happened? He thought of the Form-room, of the study, of the footer-field, with a strange new nausea at the thought of them. He felt a longing to rush away from all who knew him—to bury himself in some distant place, where he could endure his sorrow unseen by mocking or compassionate eyes.

He paused, weary with his restless tramping to and fro, and leaned his burning, aching forehead against one of the old stone pillars.

The cool contact of the stone refreshed him—seemed to make him able to think more clearly.

He tried to decide what he should do. He felt that he ought to leave Greyfriars, yet to tear himself away from his friends, away from his daily associations—how was he to do that?

Yet to face the fellows, feeling that every one of them was thinking about his wretched misfortune—— He felt that he could not even enter the lighted School House now, and let the other fellows see his flushed and fevered face.

A voice called from the dusk of the Close. Someone was calling his name.

"Nugent! Nugent!"

He did not answer. He stood there, leaning upon the stone pillar, motionless, silent, almost dazed by the stress of emotion he had gone through.

"Nugent!"

"Frank!"

It was Johnny Bull's voice. Bull came striding into the Cloisters, and he caught a glimpse of the shadowy figure by the pillar, and hurried up to Nugent.

"Nugent, old man——"

Nugent looked at him without speaking. Johnny Bull could see the glimmer of his deadly white face in the darkness.

"Frank! Your pater's come!"

Nugent started.

"My father! He's here?"

"Yes. He's waiting for you in your study," said Bull. "I came out to look for you. I suppose you wanted to know?"

"Yes, yes; thanks!" said Frank confusedly. "Has he been here long?"

"I don't know. He's seen the Head, and then he came to your study. Wharton's with him, and he asked me to come and find you."

"Thanks! I'll go in now."

Johnny Bull hesitated.

"I—I say, Frank, I don't know what's the matter, but—but I'm sorry to see you crocked like this!" he said. "I wish I could do something or other!"

"It's all right, Johnny! Tell my pater I'm coming in."

"Right-ho!"

Johnny Bull disappeared in the shadows of the Close. Frank moved away wearily towards the fountain, and bathed his face in the cool water, and dabbed it with his handkerchief. Then he hurried towards the School House.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
Father and Son.

MR. NUGENT was in No. 1 Study, waiting for his son. Harry Wharton was with him, but as Frank entered, Wharton quietly left the study and closed the door behind him. Mr. Nugent was standing by the window. He fixed his eyes upon his son as Frank came in.

Frank could see that his father was very much disturbed. His face was paler than usual, and there was a troubled, angry frown upon his brow. Mr. Nugent looked like a man who found himself suddenly in an unexpected situation, with which he felt himself unable to deal.

"Well, Frank?"

"Well, dad?"

Mr. Nugent hesitated a moment, and then plunged into the matter.

"Have you heard from your mother lately, Frank?"

"Yes, dad."

"Have you seen her?"

"Yes."

Mr. Nugent started a little.

"Then you—know?"

"Yes," said Frank miserably.

His father frowned. He hardly seemed to know what to say to his son, and yet it was necessary to say something.

"You don't understand these things, Frank," he said at length. "I can assure you, however, that what has happened was not my fault."

Frank was silent.

"Do you think it was your father's fault, Frank?" demanded Mr. Nugent, raising his voice a little.

Like many men of irresolute nature, he felt himself stronger when he was angry.

"I don't know, dad. It's not for me to say either way," said Frank. "I know that it's made me very miserable."

"I suppose it has, my boy," said his father, softening again. "But it can't be helped. I should not have told you anything about it yet, only I was sure your mother would come here to see Dicky. Has she seen Dicky?"

Frank breathed hard. He wondered what his father would say when he knew that Mrs. Nugent had taken Dicky away from Greyfriars.

"Come, Frank; tell me! Has Dicky been told anything about it?"

"Yes, dad."

"What does he say?"

"I don't know. He's not here."

"Not here?" exclaimed Mr. Nugent.

"No."

"What do you mean? If he is not here, where is he?" exclaimed Mr. Nugent, his voice rising again.

"Mother has taken him with her."

"Taken him away from the school?"

"Yes."

"Good heavens!"

Mr. Nugent paced to and fro in the study for a few minutes in a state of angry agitation. Frank stood silent. Mr. Nugent stopped at last, and glanced at his son.

"Did you know your mother was going to take Dick away?" he asked.

"Yes. I saw her at the station, and she told me. She sent Dick a wire, and he went to the village to meet her. He hasn't come back."

"You should have warned me!" exclaimed his father angrily. "You should have kept Dick in. You should have told the Head."

Frank did not reply.

"You have done wrong, Frank!" said Mr. Nugent sharply. "You know very well that Dick should not have been taken away by his mother in this—this irresponsible flight. It was all about nothing, too—nothing at all but your mother's incredible obstinacy!"

Frank's look became resentful.

"I don't suppose it was all mother's fault," he said.

Mr. Nugent snapped his teeth.

"Ha! I expected that of you, Frank! You think I am to blame. Listen to me. It was all about nothing. I will not allow your mother to make you fancy that there has been anything serious!"

"Mother has not told me anything about it, except——"

"Except what?"

"Oh! Nothing."

"I insist upon knowing what she has told you!" exclaimed Mr. Nugent excitedly. "You may speak to me freely, Frank. I am a calm and reasonable man. I am not a foolish, flighty, and obstinate woman. I make it a point to keep my temper, and to remain patient, under all circumstances—even the most irritating circumstances. Only this morning I explained to your mother, in the most patient manner possible, that I should not allow her folly and obstinacy to irritate me, or to disturb my equanimity in any way. And after that, she has left home. It is incredible. I insist upon knowing what explanation she has given you. Probably she has complained of my temper?"

"Yes, dad, that was it."

"My temper!" exclaimed Mr. Nugent indignantly. "You know what a good-tempered man I am, Frank." Mr. Nugent looked very bad-tempered indeed, at this moment. "I appeal to you as my son. Have you ever, on a single occasion, known me to be hasty or obstinate?"

As Frank had never known his father to be anything else, he was in somewhat of a difficulty what to reply. Fortunately, Mr. Nugent did not require an answer. He was only pausing for breath, not for a reply.

"It is incredible!" he repeated. "Good heavens! I seriously think that your mother will be wanting a vote next, and breaking windows, and throwing articles at policemen. It would be in keeping with her present extraordinary conduct. What will people think of her leaving home? Naturally, they will think the fault is with me. It is not with me, Frank. I have been most reasonable—most reasonable. There is not the slightest doubt that the kidneys were burnt."

Frank gave a jump.

"The what?" he exclaimed.

"The kidneys," said Mr. Nugent.

"But—but what——"

"You are aware," said Mr. Nugent, "that I have bacon and kidneys for my breakfast every morning. I have done so all my life, ever since I can remember, almost; and I claim to be able to tell whether they are properly cooked or not. They were burnt."

"Father!"

"I suggested, in the gentlest possible manner, that the cook should be discharged. It would be far from me to interfere with your mother's proper authority in the household. I merely said, that unless the cook was discharged, it would be necessary for me to breakfast in the City. Your mother refused to discharge the cook. Refused, Frank!"

"Oh!"

"I was very calm. I make it a point to remain calm under all circumstances, as you know. I think that is the duty of the father of a family. It was quite by accident that I pushed the plate off the table with my elbow, and that it fell to the floor. Your mother promptly declared that a new carpet would be required. I stated immediately that I should not consider for one moment the purchase of a new carpet. If your mother had then admitted that she was in the wrong, and discharged the cook, there would have been no trouble at all."

Frank was silent.

The cause of the family trouble would have made him smile, if he had not been directly concerned by it. But a quarrel with the slightest and most frivolous beginnings might easily develop into a lifelong estrangement; and the quarrel in the Nugent household had gone far beyond its original foolish cause now.

"My temper!" said Mr. Nugent indignantly. "I have always been an exceptionally calm-tempered man. As I told your mother only this morning, my mother never found any fault with my temper. Somehow, that seemed to make her more angry. I must say, Frank, that your mother is a most unreasonable woman."

"Oh, father!"

"And I will not allow my lad to be taken away from the school in this absurd way," pursued Mr. Nugent. "It will be most awkward for me to explain to the Head. Nothing makes a man look more ridiculous than an appearance of discord in his home."

"If you tell the mater you're sorry, dad——"

"Sorry!" thundered Mr. Nugent.

"Ye-e-es."

"I am not sorry. I am sorry, certainly, that my wife is so unreasonable—and that I have already told her. I, myself, have been most reasonable and kind. I have nothing to be sorry for."

"Oh father!"

"Even now, I am willing to overlook the whole matter, if your mother will express some regret for what has happened," said Mr. Nugent magnanimously. "I am not an obstinate man. I shall insist that the cook is discharged, and that there shall be no suggestion of the purchase of a new carpet in the dining-room; otherwise, I am willing to give way on every point."

Frank did not speak.

"I suppose I must go and see the Head now," said Mr. Nugent. "It is awkward for me—most awkward. However, I shall assure him that Dick will return to the school immediately."

"Yes, father."

Mr. Nugent strode to the door and threw it open. There was a sudden exclamation in the passage, and a fat junior flopped on the linoleum almost under Mr. Nugent's feet. Frank uttered a cry of rage.

"Bunter, you cad! You've been listening!"

Bunter gasped.

"Oh, really Nugent——"

Mr. Nugent, with a glance of angry contempt, pushed Bunter aside and strode away. Billy Bunter scrambled up, and blinked nervously at Nugent.

"You rotten cad!" groaned Frank. "It will be all over the school now."

"I—I haven't heard anything," said Bunter. "I was stooping down to tie up my shoe-lace, that's all. I didn't know your father was here, Nugent, and I never heard him say anything about your mater bolting—— Oh!"

Bunter made a spring out of the study as Nugent ran towards him with his fists clenched. Bunter's footsteps died away down the passage.

Frank Nugent stood with knitted brows and set teeth. Bunter, the spy and tattler of the Lower School, had heard it all—in a short time it would be common property to all Greyfriars. Nugent groaned.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.
The Bounder Has An Idea.

VERNON-SMITH, the Bounder of Greyfriars, was in his study. Vernon-Smith's table was set for tea, and there was a pleasant scent in the study of broiled ham and eggs. Bolsover major and Snoop were there to tea, and they were looking very pleased with the prospect. Vernon-Smith's feeds were famous in the Remove; the Bounder was a very rich fellow for a junior, and when he was in the humour, or had any point to gain, he would spend money lavishly. The Bounder had a point to gain now. He was generally in opposition to Harry Wharton & Co., and his feeling towards No. 1 Study was very bitter just now.

"Wire in, old fellows," said the Bounder cordially.

"What-ho!" said Snoop. "Smithy, old man, you're a giddy prince. Nobody in the Remove stands feeds like you do—excepting Mauleverer."

"Mauleverer doesn't ask us to them!" grinned Bolsover major.

Vernon-Smith helped his guests liberally.

"Rotten footer match to-day!" he remarked.

Bolsover frowned over his ham and eggs.

"'Rotten isn't the word!" he said. "It's sickening. The Remove will never do anything at footer, or at anything else, so long as Harry Wharton is captain, and No. 1 Study takes the lead in everything. Of course, the team beat the Upper Fourth—any team could beat them. But if we had been playing Highcliffe we should have been wiped off the ground."

"Exactly."

"It was plain to everybody that Nugent was right off colour," went on Bolsover major resentfully. "But Wharton was sure to put his own pal in. I ask you, as reasonable chaps, whether I couldn't have kept goal better?"

"Of course you could!" said Snoop.

"Nugent was so rotten Wharton had to take him out of his place and put him in goal, because he knew the Fourth chaps would never get near the goal," said Bolsover. "It was simply one way of playing a man short. But he never thought of asking you or me to play in Nugent's place, Smithy."

"He wouldn't!" said Snoop, with his mouth full.

"The match was touch and go, ever with the Fourth," said Bolsover. "It would have been a dead loss, against a good team. What does Wharton care, though?"

"Nothing," said Snoop. "Pass the salt."

"No chance for any outsiders to get into the team, so long as Wharton is skipper," said the Bounder; "and no chance of getting rid of Wharton, either. We've tried that; and the Form insist upon standing by him."

"Silly asses!" said Bolsover.

"It's the same with the Remove Dramatic Society," pursued Vernon-Smith. "You fellows know that I can act, don't you?"

"Like—like anything," said Snoop, who knew nothing of the sort. "But you won't get Wharton to give you a look in. No fear!"

"They're getting up a play now," continued the Bounder. "I should be willing to come down handsome for scenes, and things, if I had a voice in running the show; but they'd rather look a set of rag-bags, than have me take a hand in it. Wharton's offered me a place in 'Julius Cæsar'—what do you think it is?"

"Brutus?" suggested Snoop flatteringly.

"No fear!"

"Mark Antony, then?"

"Not likely."

"Julius himself?"

"Oh, no!"

"There isn't any other part you could take," said Snoop. "No other part is up to your powers, Smithy, old man. Pass the toast, Bolsover."

"He's offered me First Citizen!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Not really!" exclaimed Snoop, in affected amazement. "He wouldn't have the cheek!"

"Yes; and he says I can come in later as an extra soldier."

"Cheek!"

"And they've refused to let me contribute anything towards the expense of producing the thing," said Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, rotten!" said Snoop. "Why, you could buy them up, lock, stock and barrel, if you liked, Smithy, without missing the money. Pass the pickles, Bolsover, when you're done."

"He's put in Nugent for Brutus," said Vernon-Smith. "He'll play Brutus, I expect, as well as he played footer to-day."

"Oh, it's rotten!" said Bolsover. "I'd suggest making a general opposition to No. 1 Study, and making things warm for them in the Form; only it's no good, you know. Somehow or other the Remove seem to stick to those cads."

Vernon-Smith nodded glumly. The Bounder of Greyfriars could influence a good many fellows in the Remove, partly by his cunning, and partly by his wealth. But the best part of the Form remained true to Wharton, in spite of the Bounder. Only once the Bounder had succeeded in shaking Wharton's position, and then he had failed at the finish. Wharton was firmer than ever now in the attachment of the Form.

The study door opened, and a pair of large spectacles glimmered in. Vernon-Smith cast an angry look at Billy Bunter. The Owl of the Remove had a gift for scenting out feeds that was almost miraculous.

"Get out, you fat cad!" growled the Bounder.

"I say, you fellows," said Bunter affably, apparently not hearing the remark, "I didn't know you were feeding. I haven't come here for a tea, though; I've had my tea, I've got some news."

"Oh, rot!"

"It's jolly interesting," said Bunter, blinking at Vernon-Smith. "Of course, I shouldn't mention it to you if Nugent had been civil about it. But when a chap goes for you with both fists, because you happened to hear about his family rows by accident——"

"Family rows!" said Bolsover. "Have they been having trouble in No. 1 Study?"

"N-o," said Bunter. "I mean about Nugent's mater bolting."

"What!"

"You didn't know, I suppose——"

"What are you giving us?" said Vernon-Smith suspiciously. "You'd better not let Nugent hear you yarning about his mater, you ass!"

"Oh, really, Smithy! Nugent couldn't deny it, as it's true."

"True that his mater's bolted?"

"Yes."

"How do you know——"

"I happened to stoop down to tie up my shoe-lace while Nugent's pater was talking to him in No. 1," said Bunter. "I chanced to hear——"

Bolsover chuckled.

"I've no doubt about that," he remarked. "You happen to hear lots of things, don't you, Bunter—and your shoe-lace always wants tying, when you're near a keyhole."

"He, he, he!" cackled Snoop.

"Oh, really, Bolsover! I trust you don't think I would listen to a private conversation," said Bunter indignantly. "What I happen to hear is another matter. However, if you fellows don't want to hear about it——"

"Hold on, Bunter!" said Vernon-Smith cordially. "Have some ham and eggs, will you? We're quite well supplied. And some tea. And there's tarts to finish with."

"I don't mind if I do, Vernon-Smith, as you're so pressing," said Billy Bunter, drawing a chair up to the table, "I've had tea in hall but you know the kind of tea you get there. I couldn't have any in my study; I 've been disappointed about a postal-order, and I happen to be short of cash at the present moment. Yes, I'll have some ham—and you may as well give me three or four eggs at once; it will save the trouble of passing the dish again. And some pickles. And some toast."

Billy Bunter sat down to tea. The three juniors waited for him to go on with his information; but Bunter seemed to have forgotten it. He was very busy now with the ham, and eggs, and toast.

"Well," said the Bounder, at last, "about Nugent——"

"I say, you fellows, this ham is prime!"

"Yes; but about——"

"Is that tongue over there, Smithy?"

"Yes."

"I'll have some, if you don't mind."

"Here you are!"

"Thanks!"

And Bunter's jaws worked rapidly; but only in the way of eating. He seemed too busy to talk. Vernon-Smith waited some minutes impatiently. Bunter knew that Vernon-Smith's study was the place to retail anything to the disadvantage of Harry Wharton & Co., but now that he was feeding all other matters vanished from his mind.

"I'm waiting," said Vernon-Smith.

"Eh?"

"What's that about Nugent's mater bolting?"

"I really don't know whether I ought to tell you fellows, after all," said Billy Bunter thoughtfully. "Upon the whole, perhaps I'd better keep it dark." Vernon-Smith's hand closed upon the handle of the poker, and Billy Bunter went on rather hurriedly. "But if you'd care to hear about it, all right. I happened to hear all that Nugent's pater said to him in No. 1 Study——"

"Your bootlace happened to take a long time to tie up!" Bolsover major suggested, with heavy sarcasm.

Billy Bunter blinked at him, and nodded.

"Just so!" he agreed. "That's how it was, and I heard it all. There's been a row in Nugent's house, and his mater has bolted, and taken young Dick with her."

"By Jove," said Bolsover, "there's something in it—Nugent minor is gone!"

"There you are," said Billy Bunter, "old Nugent is going to tell the Head that he's coming back in a day or two. He's gone with his mater now. Old Nugent seems to be a ridiculous old duffer—he quarrelled with his wife about the kidneys and bacon being burnt for brekker, and she bolted. She's gone off on her own, and old Nugent is on his lonesome—a giddy grass-widower, you know. Nugent major is looking jolly down in the mouth about it, I can tell you!"

Vernon-Smith uttered a quick exclamation.

"My hat! I've got it!"

"Got what?" asked Billy Bunter.

"What I wanted—an idea," said the Bounder coolly. "But I'm not going to tell you, to babble it all over the school. You can clear off."

"Oh, really, Smithy——"

"Get out!"

"But I haven't finished my tea yet!" roared Bunter.

"You've finished enough for two, already," said the Bounder. "Get out! Will you walk out, or go out on your neck?"

"Look here——"

"And you'd better not let Nugent know that you've told us this," added the Bounder. "If I know anything of him, he'll scalp you bald-headed if he knows you've been talking about him. There's the door."

"I—I say——"

"Chuck him out, Bolsover."

"Certainly," said Bolsover, rising.

Billy Bunter jumped up. He grasped up a couple of jam tarts in one hand, and a cake in the other, and skipped to the door. Bolsover opened the door and raised his foot. The Owl of the Remove darted into the passage, and narrowly escaped the lunge of Bolsover's boot.

"Buzz off," said Bolsover, "and don't stoop down here to tie up your bootlace, either. If I catch you——"

"Oh, really——"

Bolsover slammed the door.

"What's the idea, Smith?" asked Snoop, as Bolsover resumed his place at the table, and his attacks upon the ham and eggs.

Vernon-Smith's eyes gleamed.

"What price bringing out a rival play?" he asked.

"A rival play?" said Bolsover major.

"That's the wheeze! I think if we brought out a really good comedy, it would cut out the heavy drama they're getting up in No. 1 Study. What?"

"I don't quite catch on," said Bolsover. "What comedy?"

"I shall write it myself."

"Oh!"

"And it will tickle the fellows immensely—a comic skit, you know, with personal applications to fellows we all know,"

said the Bounder coolly. "It will be called 'The Grass-Widower: or, Why Henry Left Home!'"

Bolsover and Snoop yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I rather think that will make No. 1 Study sing rather small, eh?" said the Bounder, with a chuckle.

And the Bounder's friends agreed cordially that it would.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.
The Comedy.

FRANK NUGENT did not come down into the common-room that evening. Neither did he do his preparation in the study. He spent the evening in listless, miserable thought. His father had gone from Greyfriars, assuring Frank before he went that Dick would be sent back the following day. Frank doubted it. He did not believe that his mother would part with Dicky; and he did not think that she would have a very happy time keeping him with her.

Dicky would not enjoy the part he had to play, of consoling a bereaved woman and sharing her solitude and grief. Dicky was too young and too careless to understand such things, and after a day or two he would certainly be pining for Greyfriars, and the excitements of life in the Second Form. But Frank was sure that his mother would not part with the boy and the matter would be a fresh cause of disagreement between his parents, and would probably end in making a reconciliation impossible.

Absurd as the cause of the estrangement was, the estrangement itself was serious enough; and Frank knew that every day it lasted would make reconciliation more difficult.

Frank Nugent was not seen again by the Removites until bedtime, when he went up to the Remove dormitory with the rest. He was pale, and very quiet. Wingate, of the Sixth, who was seeing lights out for the Remove, looked at him very curiously in the dormitory.

"Are you ill, Nugent?" he asked suddenly.

Frank Nugent coloured.

"No!" he answered.

"You are looking very seedy," said Wingate, with real concern. "You must take care of yourself, you know."

"I'm all right, thanks."

"I guess you want some medicine," said Fisher T. Fish, the American fellow in the Remove. "I guess if you tried Hiram K. Bubbs' purple pills they would set you up, Nugent. I get them at a reduction from over there, and I can let you have some cheap. Can we trade?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Nugent.

"I guess they're what you want," said Fisher T. Fish. "Yep! I guess——"

"Shut up, Fishy!" said Harry Wharton.

"Nope! I guess——"

"Shut up!" roared Bob Cherry. "We don't want any of your patent American mucks."

"I guess—— Ow!"

A pillow smote the enterprising American, and bowled him over on his bed; and no more was heard of Hiram K. Bubbs' purple pills.

"Turn in, you kids!" said Wingate, laughing.

The Removites turned in, and the captain of Greyfriars put out the light and retired.

There was the usual buzz of talk after lights out.

Frank Nugent was silent. He was not inclined to sleep; he was feeling troubled and restless. But neither was he inclined to talk. The amateur dramatists of the Remove began to chat on the subject of the coming representation of "Julius Cæsar," in the hope of interesting Frank and cheering him up; but he was not to be drawn.

Vernon-Smith was also talking to Bolsover and Snoop, who were in the beds on either side of the Bounder's.

"I shall put you down for the part of the Widower, Bolsover," said the Bounder.

"Right-ho," chuckled Bolsover. "I dare say I shall work it all right. Give me some good lines."

"Oh, rather! Snoop will have to take the feminine part."

"All serene," said Snoop. "What part do you take, Smithy?"

"I shall be the son and heir at school, you know. That will be a very important character," said the Bounder. "Bolsover's the grass-widower, and you're the widow, and I'm the elder son. I shall have to have a minor to make the caste complete. What about young Bolsover of the Third?"

"Good!" said Bolsover major. "My minor will do rippingly."

"Good, then!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as he caught some of the talk. "Are you fellows getting up a play, too?"

"Yes," said the Bounder; "nothing in your line. We're not worrying with Shakespeare. We are going in for something in the modern comedy line."

"Bernard Shaw?" suggested Johnny Bull, with a chuckle.

"Oh, no! I'm writing it myself!" said the Bounder airily.

"My hat! What is it called?"

"'The Grass-Widower.'"

"By Jove, that sounds funny!" said Bob Cherry. "I hope you'll make a success of it. You'd do better as a heavy villain, though. It would come more natural."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I dare say we shall make the thing comic enough!" said the Bounder. "There will be topical allusions, you know; they always go down. The full title is: 'The Grass-Widower; or, Why Henry Left Home!'"

"Ripping!" said Bolsover.

Frank Nugent started.

It seemed impossible that any fellow in his Form could be cruel enough, and cad enough, to make fun of his home troubles, even if he knew about them. But Frank could not fail to see the drift of Vernon-Smith's remarks. He lay very quiet, trembling a little.

"When did you think of writing that comedy first, Smithy?" asked Harry Wharton, in a tone which showed Nugent that he, too, understood.

"Oh, weeks ago!" said the Bounder airily. "I showed Snoop the first draft of it last week—didn't I, Snoopy?"

"Yes; beginning of the week," said Snoop cheerfully.

"We must begin rehearsing to-morrow," said the Bounder. "We're going to knock your heavy drama sky-high with our comedy, Wharton."

"You are welcome to do that," said Harry.

"I've thought out the opening lines," continued the Bounder, addressing his friends. "First scene, the dining-room at the Bolters. Enter Mr. and Mrs. Henry Bolter. Table laid for brekker—bacon and kidneys. Bolter speaks: 'Mary, the kidneys are burnt!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then Mary: 'Nonsense, my dear! It is your fancy. If you say another word about the kidneys, I shall take my cheo-yild and flee!'"

There was a ripple of laughter from the Remove fellows. Only Wharton and Bob Cherry understood the application of the Bounder's precious comedy to Frank Nugent's trouble at home.

Nugent did not speak. He lay quivering with rage and dismay. He could not speak. If he accused the Bounder of the caddishness he was guilty of, he would only turn his father and mother and their quarrel into greater ridicule. By showing that he was hard hit he would, in fact, be barbing the Bounder's arrows against himself.

The only thing he could do was to pretend not to hear, not to understand, while the Bounder knew perfectly well that he both heard and understood.

"It will go splendidly!" said Bolsover major.

"Blessed if I see much in it!" said Ogilvy. "If I couldn't write a better comedy that that, Smithy, I'd get a fag in the Second Form to write one for me."

"Oh, the topical allusions will make it go!" said the Bounder. "I'm quite satisfied with it."

"Faith, and it's easily satisfied ye are, then!" said Micky Desmond.

"What do you think of it, Wharton?"

"I think it's rot, and that you're a rotter!" replied Wharton.

"What do you think, Cherry?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"What do you think, Bull?" persisted the Bounder.

"I think you'd better shut up and let us go to sleep!" said Johnny Bull.

"What do you think, Nugent?"

There was no reply.

"I say, Nugent, how do you like my comedy?"

No reply.

"Are you asleep, Nugent?"

"Shut up!" said Harry Wharton. "It's time we all went to sleep. Will you be quiet, Smithy?"

"No, I won't! Nugent, old man—yarooooh!"

A boot came flying through the air, and the Bounder, who had raised himself on his elbow to call to Nugent, received it on his chin. He roared.

"Ow! Who threw that boot?"

"You'll have the foot as well if you don't shut up!" said Bob Cherry sulphurously.

"And mine!" said Wharton.

"And mine!" said Johnny Bull.

And the Bounder thought that, upon the whole, it would be better to shut up. But he had done enough. Perhaps even the Bounder, hard and cynical though he was, would have repented a little if he could have seen Nugent's face at that moment—pale, worn, wretched, with the hot tears rolling down his cheeks upon the pillow.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.
Coker's Opinion.

DICKY NUGENT did not return to Greyfriars the next day.

What the Head thought about the matter Frank Nugent did not know. Dr. Locke did not speak to him on the subject. Frank avoided any chance of meeting the Doctor's eye. He was a keenly sensitive lad, and he felt deeply the humiliation of having his home troubles known and discussed by strangers. There was no fault of his in the matter; he would have given his right hand to see his home happy and united, like other fellows' homes. It was a case of the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children. Perhaps both Mr. and Mrs. Nugent would have been a little more patient with one another if they had fully understood the trouble that their disagreement entailed upon their sons. Frank tried to face the thing out bravely, and to pretend not to know that the other fellows were discussing his intimate concerns, but it was a hard struggle. It would have been hard enough if all had been sympathetic and all tactful. But there were some who were neither sympathetic nor tactful.

All that Vernon-Smith saw in the affair was its absurd side, and the chance of scoring over a member of the "Co."

And Vernon-Smith had no intention of letting the opportunity pass.

Any open taunts on the subject would not have done. If the matter had come out into the open, Frank Nugent was a hard hitter, and he had devoted chums ready to back him up. And he was in a mood to let fly at a word. The Bounder's little game was deeper than that. He was getting on with his precious comedy, and against that it seemed impossible for Nugent and his friends to cope. Vernon-Smith kept up the fiction that he had thought of that little comedy a long while before, and did not utter a word to hint that it could possibly refer to Nugent in any way. He affected, indeed, to be completely ignorant of Frank Nugent's home troubles, to take no interest whatever in his private concerns. Frank could not even say for certain that Bunter had told the Bounder anything, though of course he was pretty certain of it. And if Nugent raised any objection to the comedy, on the ground of its being a slur upon his parents, he would be, in fact, admitting what he wanted to keep secret.

One or two tactless fellows, who had heard Bunter's story—for Bunter told it wherever he could find listeners—did ask Nugent if it was true, and if his "mater" had "bolted." The look they got in response was enough for them, without any words. The fellows in the Remove, and in the other Forms, too, talked of the matter, and made surmises on the subject. Paget of the Third, who was supposed to know all about high society, being related to any number of earls and marquises, said it wasn't an uncommon thing for a chap's pater or mater to bolt; he had had an uncle who had bolted, and there wasn't any trouble till he came back again.

Vernon-Smith's comedy became a subject of discussion, too, and the fellows could not help seeing its connection with the rumour about Nugent's people. Most of them grinned over it, and some of them asked Vernon-Smith if it was intended as a skit on Nugent. The Bounder shook his head when he was asked. He replied categorically that he knew nothing about Nugent or his affairs, that he didn't want to know, and that he didn't intend to know. He had chosen the Grass-Widower as a subject for his comedy because it was comic. That was a sufficiently good reason, he declared. Most of the fellows did not accept the Bounder's assurance on the subject, however. They knew that Vernon-Smith's word was far from being as good as his bond. And some of them told him, in beautifully plain English, what they thought of him. At which the Bounder shrugged his shoulders, or sneered, till Coker came to his study to deliver his opinion. Coker of the Fifth was a powerful fellow, and not to be shrugged at or sneered at with impunity. Coker of the Fifth was generally "up against" No. 1 Study, and he was generally regarded as an ass. But Coker took an exceptionally correct view of this matter, and when he heard of Vernon-Smith's comedy he came to Vernon-Smith's study to speak to him on the subject, and brought a dog-whip with him.

Harry Wharton & Co. met Coker of the Fifth as he came striding down the Remove passage, with the dog-whip under his arm. They lined up across the passage, prepared to dispute Coker's progress, naturally assuming that the big Fifth-Former was on the warpath.

But Coker waved his hand in a friendly way.

"It's pax!" he said.

"Is it?" said Harry Wharton suspiciously. "What are you going to do with that dog-whip?"

"Use it. I expect; but we shall see. I'm not after any of you fellows," said Coker. "I'm going to see a worm."

"Which worm?" asked Bob Cherry, laughing.

"The Bounder."

The Famous Four opened at once to allow Coker to pass.

"Oh, that's all right," said Johnny Bull. "Go ahead!"

And Coker grinned and passed on.

He arrived at Vernon-Smith's door, and planted his foot against it with a tremendous kick. The lock jumped open, and the door flew back, and Coker of the Fifth strode in. He kicked the door shut behind him, as Vernon-Smith jumped up from the table.

The Bounder had been writing busily. There were several sheets on the table covered with writing, and he had scattered a shower of blots over them as he rose hastily. He glared most unpleasantly at Coker.

"You startled me!" he growled. "What do you want?"

"Very likely I'm going to startle you some more," said Coker. "I hear you're writing a comedy?"

"Yes."

"What's it called?"

"'The Grass-Widower.'"

"What else?"

"'Or, Why Henry Left Home.'"

"Nugent's pater's front name is Henry," said Coker.

"Is it?" yawned the Bounder.

"You know it is."

"No, I don't think I knew."

"Rot!"

The Bounder smiled unpleasantly.

"I was busy when you came in," he said. "Would you mind leaving me to get my work done?"

"What's the work?"

"I'm writing my comedy."

"Is it a skit on Nugent's family troubles?" asked the Fifth-Former.

"I don't know anything about Nugent's family troubles."

"All the fellows are jawing on the subject."

"I don't have time to listen to the fellows jawing," said the Bounder. "I'm not interested in Nugent and his family troubles, you see. Didn't know he had any."

"I don't believe you," said Coker, with beautiful directness.

"No?" said Vernon-Smith. "Well, you can do the other thing."

"What are the characters in the comedy?" asked Coker.

To any other questioner Vernon-Smith would have said "Get out!"—but Coker did not look as if he would take an answer of that kind good-temperedly. Vernon-Smith was no coward, but the powerful Fifth-Former could have wiped the floor with him, and he knew it. He answered as civilly as he could.

"There's the grass-widower, Henry Bolter," he said, "and the grass-widow, Mrs. Bolter. Then there is Bolter major and Bolter minor, two schoolboys. That's all; it's a small caste, you know—just enough characters for Snoop, and Bolsover major and minor, and myself."

"Taking off Nugent's pater and mater, and Nugent major and minor, of course," said Coker.

"There might be a distinct resemblance," admitted the Bounder. "That's by chance, of course. I've made it a

The rehearsal was in full swing. The bully and his cronies were made-up in their parts—Bolsover in a ridiculous imitation of Mr. Nugent, Snoop in feminine attire, and Vernon-Smith, with his cheeks chalked and dabbed with pink in imitation of Frank Nugent's fresh complexion. Wharton hurled open the door. *(See Chap. 14.)*

point not to know anything about Nugent and his affairs. It's not my fault if his mater bolts."

"You're a cad, Smithy. Only a cad would hit a chap when he's down, and that's what you're doing."

"I don't see that it's any bizney of yours, Coker."

"That's where you make a mistake," said Coker cheerfully. "I'm making it my bizney, you see. Nugent is too proud to let anybody see that he's hurt by your tomfoolery, and his friends won't interfere on account of his feelings. I'm not a friend of his. He's a cheeky young bounder, and has ragged the Fifth often enough—ragged me, as a matter of fact. But he's a decent kid, and he's down. I'm sorry for him."

"You'd better go and tell him so, then," yawned the Bounder. "I dare say your sympathy will be duly appreciated. And I'll get on with my comedy."

"That's what you won't do, my son," said Coker. "As a senior, I take it as my duty to get on my hind legs in this matter. Savvy? You're acting like a rotten cad, and you're going to put that precious comedy in the fire."

"What?"

"Shove it in!" said Coker.

"What? I won't!"

Coker whirled the dog-whip in the air.

"I give you two seconds," he said.

Vernon-Smith glared at him furiously. Coker of the Fifth was a high-handed fellow, and he had often fallen out with the Removites for that very reason. But Vernon-Smith had never dreamed that even Coker would take this line.

"Look here," he roared, "you clear out! I'm not having any of your meddling in my affairs. Get out of my study!"

"Are you going to burn that rubbish?"

"No!" yelled the Bounder.

He made a spring at the grate, and caught up the poker. Coker was upon him in a second.

He grabbed the Bounder by the collar and pitched him across the study. Then he grasped up the written sheets from the table, jammed them into the fire, and stamped them down with his foot deep into the glowing coals. The valuable results of Vernon-Smith's mental efforts blazed up at once.

"Now, then——" said Coker. "Ah, would you?"

The Bounder was coming at him like a tiger. When Vernon-Smith's evil temper was thoroughly aroused he was utterly reckless He had caught up a chair, and he was rushing at Coker with that dangerous weapon whirling aloft. He brought it savagely down, and Horace Coker dodged round the table just in time. The chair crashed upon the table and broke, at the same time shattering the inkstand to pieces.

Before the Bounder could recover his unwieldly weapon for a second swipe, Coker seized him in his powerful grip.

The chair fell to the floor, and Vernon-Smith, whirled off his feet, was flung face downwards across the study table.

Then the dog-whip came into play.

It rose and fell, and each time it fell the Bounder struggled and kicked and yelled madly. But Coker's iron grip on the back of his collar pinned him down, and there was no escape for him.

Lash, lash, lash!

"Ow, ow! Yarooh! Help! Rescue! Help! Oh!"

Lash, lash!

The door of the study burst open, and a crowd of Remove fellows stared in. Had it been any other Removite who was suffering that infliction there would have been a rush to the rescue at once. But Vernon-Smith was not popular, and the leaders of the Remove—Harry Wharton & Co.—had not troubled to come along.

"Faith, and what are ye up to, intirely?" exclaimed Micky Desmond.

"Licking Smithy!" panted Coker.

"We can see that!" grinned Mark Linley. "But what's the trouble?"

"Ow!" roared the Bounder. "Help!"

"Let him alone, Coker!" exclaimed Bolsover major, pushing his way into the study in his most bullying manner.

"Yes, let him go, Coker," piped Snoop—taking care, however, to keep behind the crowd in the passage. Snoop was not of the stuff of which fighting-men are made.

Lash, lash!

"Yow! Help! You cowards, help! Rescue!"

"What are you licking him for, Coker?" asked Ogilvy.

"Lesson in good taste," explained Coker. "My taste in comedies doesn't agree with Smithy's, and this is my method of criticism. There, I think that will do!"

He jerked the Bounder from the table, and flung him, gasping, into the armchair. Then he turned upon Bolsover major, who promptly backed away. Coker grinned.

"There are comedies and comedies, you kids," he explained. "Smithy's is a comedy of errors, and I'm helping him to see the errors. That's all!"

And Coker strode out of the study.

"Collar him!" shouted Bolsover major. "All together! We're not going to have the Fifth ragging Remove chaps in their studies!"

But Bolsover's appeal fell on deaf ears. Nobody sympathised with the Bounder. Even those who had been most amused by his planned comedy considered that he deserved what he had received.

"Don't let him get away!" howled Bolsover.

"Rats!" said Mark Linley.

"Rot!" said Morgan. "I think Smithy wanted that, and I think he wants some more, look you, and if I were Nugent's chum I'd give it to him."

"Hear, hear!" said the other fellows.

And they streamed away, leaving Vernon-Smith and Bolsover major alone in the study. The bully of the Remove looked rather dubiously at the groaning Bounder.

"I say, that's rough, Smithy," he said. "I suppose you'll chuck the comedy now?"

Vernon-Smith ground his teeth.

"I won't! I can write it out again! And I'll make Coker sit up for this somehow! Ow!"

"Like his cheek to interfere," said Bolsover. "Of course, between ourselves, all the fellows know you are getting at Nugent in the comedy!"

Vernon-Smith scowled.

"I'll make it plainer still," he said. "I'll show Coker whether he can bully me into chucking it! Hang him! Ow! And we'll have a rehearsal this very evening. Ow! Or—or rather, we'll have a rehearsal to-morrow; I don't feel quite up to one this evening!"

And Bolsover grinned. Vernon-Smith certainly did not look quite up to a rehearsal just then.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

To the Rescue.

"LETTER for you, Franky!"

Bob Cherry handed the letter down from the rack to Frank Nugent. The address was in the big, sprawling hand of Dicky Nugent, and Frank flushed eagerly as he received it Several days had elapsed since Dicky's departure, and he had not returned. Neither had Frank received any news from him, or from his father or mother. What was happening he did not know; all he could be certain of was that his parents were not together, or he would have heard from them. Dicky had not troubled to write, either; Dicky was a very bad correspondent, excepting when he wanted something; and Frank was pretty certain that he wanted something now, or he would not have written.

Nugent went out into the Close, and, standing under the trees, opened the letter. He wanted to be alone when he read it.

The letter was characteristic of Dicky. Nugent frowned as he read it. The spelling was equal to the writing, and both were worthy of the scamp of the Second Form.

"Dear Frank,—I'm writing to tell you that I can't stick it any longer. I want some munny to get back to Greyfriars. I'm jolly well not going to be cried over all day long; it ain't good enough A fellow can't be expeckted to stick it. I was going to have a poney, but I haven't seen the poney yet, and don't seem likely to. And a poney isn't much good, anyway, if you have to ride him all by yourself, is it? I've spent all my munny, and I want some to come back with. I've ritten to some of the Second chaps as well, but I hope you will be Able to send me some. I want as Much as you can send me. I'm coming back. If you want to be cride over you can come here insted of me. DICKY."

Frank set his lips.

Dicky's letter would have made him smile at any other time. There was nothing sentimental about his minor; and Dicky had a healthy young animal's dislike for being cried over. In all probability his mother's grief was a puzzle and a worry to him, that he could neither understand nor sympathise with. He wanted to get back to Greyfriars, to the Second Form, and the other fellows, and the gym. and the footer-ground. He had not the slightest desire to be the sole comfort of a mother who had left her home. It wasn't, as he expressed it, good enough.

Frank Nugent sought out Wharton, and showed him the letter.

"Read that!" he said.

Harry Wharton read it, and smiled.

"Poor old Dicky!" he said.

"Poor old Dicky!" repeated Frank. "The young rotter! He's only thinking of himself; he doesn't care twopence how much cut up the mater is!"

Wharton shook his head.

"Not exactly that," he said. "I expect he cares, but he's not old enough to appreciate that kind of thing. Besides——" He paused.

"Besides—what?" asked Frank.

"It must be beastly for Dicky, shut up with a mother who does nothing but cry," said Wharton frankly. "He's too young to take on a thing of that sort. "I'm not surprised that he wants to come back."

"Do you think he ought to come back?"

Wharton was silent.

"I want your advice, Harry."

"Well, I suppose it would be better for the kid to come back," said Harry. "Your pater wants him to come back, too. Dicky won't be much comfort to his mother, if that's how he feels. They'll both have a rotten time, I should think."

"Do you think I ought to send him the money?"

"I don't know, Frank. That's for you to think out, old man. Your mother will miss him if he leaves her; but if he doesn't, she'll see plainly enough that he wants to, and that will make her feel as bad, I should think."

"I suppose so." Frank smiled bitterly. "If she had wanted me to go with her, I'd have gone—I'd have chucked Greyfriars, or anything else, to look after her. But she wants Dicky—and he doesn't want it."

"It's often like that, Franky."

"I know. But the young bounder ought to understand—he's got his duty to do," said Frank. "I'm not going to help him desert mother. He ought to stick to her; I would, and he must I shall write to him and tell him so."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"It's a bit difficult to know what you ought to do," he confessed. "It's rotten you should be put in such a position at all, Franky. I dare say you're right, though."

And Frank went to his study and wrote the letter. It was a letter that expressed his feelings on the subject; and indicated Dicky's duty, as Frank viewed it. Whether it was likely to meet Dicky's views, was quite another matter.

Meanwhile, two other fellows at Greyfriars had received letters from Dicky Nugent by the same post. They were Gatty and Myers of the Second Form. Gatty and Myers took their letters into the Form-room to read, being very eager for news from their missing chum, and two or three other fellows came in to read the letters along with them. It was

quite a meeting—a very sympathetic meeting. The two letters were almost word for word alike. Gatty's letter ran:

"Dear Jim,—I'm in an awful hole. I'm fed up. I want to get back, and I haven't any munny. I've ritten to my major, but he has queer ideas as you know, and very likely he won't send me any munny, but a lot of rotten advice. Will you see if you can raise a quid among the chaps and send it to me in a postal-order, so I can come back. I'll square up, honour brite, out of my first pocket-money after I'm back.—Yours always, NUGENT, MINOR.

"P.S.—I'm being cried over all day long.

"P.P.S.—Make it thirty bob if you can."

"Poor old Dicky!" said Gatty. "Rotten luck for him! If his mater wants somebody to cry over, she ought to cry over his pater. That's what I think!"

"Yes, rather," said Myers. "It's rough on Dicky. Let's see what we can do about the cash. I've only got a bob, but I'll lend it to Dicky with pleasure. He always shells out."

"We'll make a collection right through the Form," said Gatty.

And they did.

With Dicky's pathetic letters in their hands, they tackled the whole of the Second Form one after another. Most of the fags were sympathetic. Some of them contributed larger amounts, some smaller. Hop Hi, the Chinese boy, contributed ten shillings in a lump, which he borrowed from his major in the Remove. With that to start with, the fund soon increased, and before the evening Gatty was in possession of the sum of twenty-two shillings. And then, in a burst of friendship and generosity, Gatty sold his three-bladed pocket-knife to Hobson of the Shell for half-a-crown, and added that to the fund. Twenty-four shillings and sixpence was the total.

Gatty spread the money out on a desk in the Form-room when it was all collected, and the fags gathered round and gazed at it in great admiration. It was a very large sum; and the temptation to stand a feed with it instead of sending it to Nugent minor was strong. But Gatty & Co. manfully resisted the temptation.

"Twenty-four-and-six!" said Gatty. "That's splendid! I'll go down to Friardale and get a postal-order at once, and send it off!"

"Good egg!" said Myers. "I'll come with you! Dicky will be back here to-morrow."

"I've got all the amounts down on paper," said Gatty. "Dicky will settle up; he always pays. Poor old Dicky! Fancy being cried over all day long. It's enough to make a fellow wild, I should say!"

And Gatty and Myers went down to Friardale post-office, and invested the fund in a postal-order for a pound, and another for four shillings, and five stamps. The sixth penny of the odd sixpence was required for postage. Gatty extracted an envelope from his pocket, a sheet of considerably soiled paper, and a stump of pencil, and wrote a letter on the post-office counter:

"Dear Dicky,—Here you are. Twenty-four bob and fivepence. Come back as quick as you can, and mind your mater doesn't catch you on the hop.—Yours, GATTY and MYERS."

"There! I think that will do," said Gatty, as he folded the sheet and put it into the envelope and sealed it up. "I say, though, this ought to be registered."

Myers shook his head.

"Only got a penny stamp," he said. "Won't run to it."

"Well, we'll seal it up safely, then."

Gatty went through his pockets, and found a fragment of sealing-wax. On the bench outside the post-office the two fags sealed up the letter very safely. Myers held a lighted match, and Gatty melted the wax in it and applied it to the letter. Every possible point was safely sealed, till the chunks of wax added considerably to the weight of the missive. Myers lighted match after match, and Gatty did not leave off sealing until his piece of sealing-wax was too small to be held in the fingers.

"There! I think that's all right!" he said.

Myers weighed the letter in his hand.

"Weighs a lot," he remarked. "P'r'aps it won't go for a penny now."

"We'll ask inside."

The chums of the Second marched into the village post-office again with the letter. Gatty presented it in the post-office portion of that mixed establishment.

"Will that go for a penny, ma'am?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, quite easily."

"Thank you, ma'am. It's all right, Myers. Come on."

Gatty posted the letter outside the post-office, and the two fags walked back to Greyfriars feeling very well satisfied with their work. They felt that they had done very well indeed for their absent chum. When the village post went out that night, it bore two letters for Dicky Nugent—one containing his elder brother's good advice, and the other containing twenty-four shillings and fivepence. It was not difficult to guess which would be the more welcome to the recipient.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.
Dicky Comes Back!

"HA, ha, ha!"

The sound of the loud laugh came from Vernon-Smith's study in the Remove passage. Frank Nugent started as he heard it, and gritted his teeth. He knew what was the cause of the merriment of Vernon-Smith & Co. The Bounder and Snoop and Bolsover were rehearsing in the study; and Nugent knew what they were rehearsing.

But Nugent did not stop. He hurried on down the Remove passage.

It was the day following that upon which he had received the letter from Dicky. He wondered whether he would have a reply from his minor. Lessons were over at Greyfriars for the day, and Frank Nugent went out into the Close. He had fallen very much of late into lonely habits, and his chums, realising that he did not want company, let him alone. Frank walked under the elms with his hands in his pockets, thinking, with wrinkled brows.

Would Dicky stay with his mother?

If he did not, Frank could understand the misery of the bereaved woman. In her flight from her home, she had always had it in her mind that there would be Dicky; the thought of her younger boy had been her comfort and consolation. While she had him, she was not alone; his affection could console her at least for all she had given up.

But when she found that he was miserable and worried with her—that he pined after his own friends, fellows of his own age—that he did not want to stop with her, Frank knew what a blow that would be to the fond and foolish woman. What would she do then? Would her thoughts turn to her other son; the son who would have sacrificed anything for her, and would have been happy in the sacrifice? If she wanted him, Frank would go.

The humiliation of taking up the position of second best—of filling the place Dicky did not choose to fill, did not weigh with Nugent. He did not think of his own feelings, but of his mother. If she wanted him, he would go. But would she want him?

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! You back again?"

It was Bob Cherry's powerful voice, and Nugent swung round, and looked towards the gates. He started. Bob Cherry's greeting had been to a dusty fag who had just entered; and the fag was Nugent minor!

He had come back, then!

"So you've turned up again, young shaver," said Bob Cherry.

Dicky Nugent nodded.

"Yes, I've come back," he said, "and I'm jolly well not going away again, too. Frank can go and be blubbed over if he likes."

"Shut up, you young ass!" muttered Bob Cherry. "Frank's there."

"I don't care!"

Frank Nugent hurried towards his young brother. Bob Cherry nodded to him and strolled away. Frank caught Dicky by the shoulder.

"You've left mother, Dicky?"

"Yes, I have," said Dicky sulkily.

"You got my letter?"

"Yes, I did."

"And it didn't make any difference to you?" said Frank.

Dicky sniffed.

"I didn't write to you for a lot of rotten, grandfatherly advice," he said. "I wanted some tin to get back to school. You didn't send me any."

"Did you ask mother for it?"

Dicky chuckled for a moment.

"No fear. She wouldn't have let me come."

Nugent major started.

"Have you come away without telling her?" he exclaimed sharply.

"Of course I have!" said Dicky aggressively. "Do you think I wanted her crying over me at the station. There's been nothing but blubbing all the time I've been away, and I never got the pony, either. Gatty sent me the tin, like a decent chap, and I've come back. I left a note for mother to say I wanted to be back at school. It's what the pater

wanted, too. He came down to see us the day after we got to Scarcliffe, and said I was to go back; but the mater wouldn't have it. But I got fed-up. If you want to go, you can go. I don't! I've had enough."

"How is the mater?"

"Oh, she's all right! Only frightfully weepy."

"You—you——"

"Oh, don't you begin to slang me!" said Dicky resentfully. "I've had enough of it. The mater has worried me to death. Says I'm all she has left, and all that. Well, I ain't. If she misses the pater, why doesn't she make it up with him? I think it's all rot. Married people ought to put up with one another. Anyway, they ought to leave the kids out of their rows. I told her I was due to play for the Second in a footer-match with Tubbs' lot to-morrow. She didn't understand. Only cried."

And Dicky grunted.

"And you couldn't give up a footer-match for mother?" said Frank.

"You needn't put it like that. I could give up one match, I suppose, but not all of 'em. Besides, what good was I doing down there—dreary hole—nobody there but mother and a blessed deaf grandfather?" growled Dicky. "It was sickening. I can't help it if the pater and mater can't keep the peace, can I? Why should I suffer for it?"

"You're a young rotter," said Frank. "I would have stuck to mother."

"I dare say you would," agreed Dicky. "You ain't like me. I don't like weepy bizney at all. You always were a sentimental old codger, Frank."

Nugent was silent.

"I told mater you'd come, if she liked," said Dicky confidentially. "Blessed if I can see why you wouldn't do as well as me. Why wouldn't you? You could stand it better than I could. I told the mater so. Then she started weepy-weepy again!" exclaimed Nugent minor, in a tone of great exasperation. "Blessed if I can understand the mater. But I couldn't stand it—I simply couldn't! I was getting into frightfully low spirits. I've never had such a rotten time in my life. You can go down and take your turn. I'm fed-up!"

And Nugent minor tramped away across the Close in the dusk.

Frank Nugent stood still.

It had come to it, then—Dicky had come back, and his mother was alone. She had left her husband, and her son had left her! And what would she do now?

Would she think of him?

If only he could have done something to heal the breach—if only he could have thought of some means of bringing his father and his mother together again. He had thought that over and over and over again, till his brain was weary with it. There was no real cause of quarrel. Although Frank tried to think respectfully of the parents he loved, he could not disguise from himself that the trouble was due to foolish temper and impatience and obstinacy on both sides. But, alas! such obstacles were harder to overcome than real causes of dispute.

After all, could Dicky have been expected to stand it, living in that lonely place, with no companion but a sorrowing mother? It could not have gone on indefinitely, devouring a boyish life, as it were, to pay for the follies he had no part in. No, Dicky had only acted within his rights; nothing else could have been expected of him. Frank would have sacrificed himself; but Dicky was not of the stuff of which martyrs were made; and, as he would have said, he didn't see any sense in it.

Dicky had had, as he said, a rotten time, and he was fed-up. His face was clouded as he went into the School House. Perhaps he was not wholly satisfied with himself, but dissatisfaction with himself only gave him a feeling of exasperation at the idea that he should have been expected to play a sentimental part he was totally unfitted for.

The clouds left his brow, however, as he was greeted by his old chums. Gatty and Myers sighted him in the passage, and rushed up to greet him. They caught him by the arms, and danced him round in a kind of triumphal war-dance.

"Here he is!" roared Gatty.

"The giddy prodigal's come back!" shouted Myers. "Hip-pip!"

Dicky grinned.

"It's jolly to be back!" he exclaimed. "Got anything to eat? I'm as hungry as a giddy hunter."

"What-ho!" said Gatty. "I've been scouting round for cash, and we've got a feed in the Form-room, my son. What do you think of ham and tongue and hard-boiled eggs, and a big seed cake to finish with—eh?"

Dicky's eyes glistened.

"Oh, gorgeous!" he said. "You're real pals, you chaps. I should never have got away if you hadn't dubbed up."

"Don't mention it, dear boy," said Gatty. "Always stick to a pal. I know you must have been through it. Was it very rotten?"

"Beastly!" said Dicky, with a sigh.

"You've been cried over, ain't you?" said Myers sympathetically.

Dicky shuddered.

"Every night when I went to bed," he said solemnly, "I dreamed about blubbing, too. It was blubbing all the time. Blessed if I know what for. The mater said she wanted me—well, she had me! She said she didn't want to see the pater—well, she didn't see him! She had all she wanted, so far as I can see; but she wasn't satisfied. Blessed if I could make out the bizney at all. But, I say, I'm jolly hungry."

"This way!" said Gatty.

And Nugent minor was marched into the Form-room. His comrades dragged a form up to the fire for him, and Nugent minor toasted his toes, and ate ham and eggs, and tongue and cake till happiness beamed in his youthful face, and he forgot his late painful experience, blubbing and all.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.
Performance Cancelled.

HARRY WHARTON paused in the passage and glanced at the notice-board. Among the other papers pinned up there was one in the handwriting of Vernon-Smith, of the Remove. It had attracted a good deal of attention already, and a good deal of laughter. It ran:

"NOTICE!

"A performance of the new Comedy, 'The Grass-Widow; or, Why Henry Left Home!' will be given in the Remove Form-room this evening at eight precisely.

"Admission Free."

Harry Wharton's eyes glinted.

The Bounder was evidently ready for business now. The lesson Coker had given him had had no effect, and the precious comedy was ready for performance. There was no doubt that there would be a crowd to see it. The Bounder would certainly succeed in scoring over No. 1 Study if the performance took place; and the Bounder was not particular about hitting below the belt, so long as he succeeded in scoring.

Wharton knitted his brows as he went upstairs. As he passed Vernon-Smith's study in the Remove passage, he heard Bolsover's voice booming out. The comedians were having a dress rehearsal, the last before the performance.

"The kidneys were burnt, I tell you!" came Bolsover's voice, in the character of Mr. Bolter.

"Brute!" came Snoop's voice, high-pitched to imitate a feminine voice. "I shall go back to my mother! Boo-hoo!"

Wharton went on his way, and entered No. 13 Study—Bob Cherry's quarters. Bob Cherry and Mark Linley and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh were there.

"Have you seen the notice on the board?" asked Harry abruptly.

"Yes," said Bob.

"What do you think of it?"

"Rotten—and very like Smithy!"

"Caddish!" said Mark.

"The caddishfulness of the esteemed Bounder is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a shake of the head.

Wharton's eyes gleamed.

"Smithy knows that Nugent won't interfere, because he doesn't want to admit that the case is his," he said. "But I think, as Franky's pals, we're called upon to chip in."

"I'm ready," said Bob Cherry. "I don't know whether Franky wants us to, that's all."

"We won't ask him. I'll call up some of the fellows, and we'll drop in on them at rehearsal," said Wharton. "After we've done with them, they won't feel up to a performance to-night, and they won't have any props left!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Good wheeze!"

Wharton went along the passage, calling on his special followers. Johnny Bull and Penfold and Micky Desmond and Ogilvy and Morgan joined him at once, and Bob Cherry came out of his study with Mark and Hurree Singh.

The whole crowd of fellows went along to Vernon-Smith's study. There was a sound of loud laughter within, but it ceased as Bob Cherry kicked the door open.

There were four fellows in the study—the Bounder himself, Bolsover major, and Snoop, and Bolsover minor, of the Third. Bolsover minor was not looking happy. He did not like the part he had to play, but he was too much under his elder brother's influence to resist him.

The four amateur actors looked angrily at Harry Wharton & Co. as they crowded in.

"What do you fellows want?" demanded the Bounder, scowling.

(*Continued on page 20.*)

AN AMAZING GIFT TO EVERY BOY IN BRITAIN!

It Has Enabled Luis Hardt to Earn The SALARY of a CABINET MINISTER.

FREE TO EVERY READER OF "THE MAGNET."

WILL YOU HAVE ONE TO-DAY?

A fine photograph of Luis Hardt.

MOST REMARKABLE OFFER EVER MADE IN A NEWSPAPER!

Read what Luis Hardt, who has made the money, says:

Do you want to have the power to earn a huge salary?

Do you want to become one of the healthful, forceful, attractive, dominating men, whose health and strength enable them to make a success of the business of life? If so, read what the famous Luis Hardt says about how he rose from being a weak boy to the enviable position he occupies to-day, and write in at once for the gift of Seven Days' absolutely Free Use of a pair of Sandow's Spring Grip Dumb-Bells.

This wonderful little appliance, PRODUCED AND USED BY THE GREAT SANDOW HIMSELF, will be sent to every boy free by return post.

Use it like many of the most successful men of the day—follow the special directions drawn up by Sandow for the guidance of the users of his famous Grip Dumb-Bells, and see during a day or two the difference they will make to you.

In a couple of days a new strength, not only of body, but of mind, will begin to make itself apparent to you.

Your work will seem easier, your pleasure more delightful, and your ideas will be quickened. You will become more manly. In fact, you will realise that you are obtaining a rich supply of those qualities which command success and money for every boy when they commence business life.

We, Sandow's Grip Dumb-Bell Co., will send you these wonderful Spring Grip Dumb Bells entirely as a FREE TRIAL GIFT for seven days, post free, and you are under no cost or obligation whatever.

With every pair will be sent a Booklet of Exercises, showing in detail the way to perform each of the original exercises of the Sandow System, also a Chart showing how many times each exercise should be done daily by the average man or youth, together with hints on how, when, or where to exercise, how to take a cold bath, and other useful information.

The Chart contains One Month's Initiatory Course of Exercises, suitable for the average youth or young man, and it has been carefully prepared by Mr. Sandow for presentation and use with every pair of the Grip Dumb-Bells.

There are no romances that equal in amazing results the living romances of everyday life, and the story of Luis Hardt, which may be emulated by every boy reader of THE MAGNET to-day, is no exception to this rule. To quickly change from a weak-chested, delicate boy, lacking the most vital essentials of life, into a man whose beautiful development and astonishing feats of strength make him admired by all, and able to earn a huge income, is indeed a wonderful record.

Hear what Mr. Luis Hardt says:

"Dear Sirs,—It may or may not interest you to know that I cured myself of a weak chest by following your system of Physical Culture, and not only achieved perfect health, but such abnormal strength that I am now earning my living on the music-halls by performing feats of strength and showing my development acquired.

"Solely by your System of Physical Culture and using your Appliance, having appeared at every large town in Great Britain and Ireland, I would like to lay particular stress on the value of your Grip Dumb-Bells, which I consider the very finest aid to Physical Culture ever invented, and I would not be without them. Previous to my performances every evening I always warm up with a pair of Grip Dumb-Bells, always going through the Sandow System of Physical Culture.

"You are at liberty to use the above in any manner you think fit.

"(Signed) LUIS HARDT."

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You need not keep the Dumb-Bells after seven days unless you wish, but if, after using these Dumb-Bells for SEVEN DAYS ENTIRELY FREE, you decide to keep them, send a deposit of 2s. 6d., and promise to pay the remainder of the price at the rate of 2s. 6d. per month, which only means the small sum of ONE PENNY PER DAY, in order to gain the strength and stamina that command success.

If you are anxious to be among the boys who succeed, to take the big prizes of life, if you desire the confidence and the power that make for manliness, you will accept this offer.

CUT OUT, FILL IN, AND SEND THIS COUPON TO-DAY.

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Gentlemen,—Please send me by return one pair of your Spring Grip Dumb-Bells.

GENTLEMEN'S **12s. 6d.** Suitable for age 18 & upwards.
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This order is given on condition that after seven days' free trial, should I decide not to keep the Dumb-Bells, I may return them immediately direct to Sandow Hall, and no charge whatsoever will be made.

FREE *Signed* .....*Age* .....

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TRIAL.

.....

"We've come to the giddy dress rehearsal!" said Bob Cherry.

The actors retreated behind the table, uneasily. They were made up for their parts—Bolsover in a ridiculous imitation of Mr. Nugent, Snoop in feminine attire, and Vernon-Smith with his cheeks chalked and dabbed with pink, in imitation of Frank Nugent's fresh complexion.

Harry Wharton held the door open.

"You can get out, Bolsover minor!" he said.

"I—I——" stammered Billy, looking doubtfully at Wharton and then at his major.

"Don't go!" said Bolsover major.

"Chuck the kid out!" said Harry. "Don't hurt him! He's not a cad like the others—Bolsover has dragged him into this."

"I—I say——" said Billy.

"Outside!"

Two or three of the Co. grasped Bolsover minor, and deposited him in the passage without hurting him. The door was closed upon him. Bolsover major had moved forward to interfere, but Johnny Bull and Mark Linley stopped him. The bully of the Remove clenched his fists furiously.

"What have you rotters come here for?" he shouted.

"We're going to muck up the performance!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully.

"Get out of this study!" yelled Vernon-Smith.

"So we will—when we're finished!"

The Bounder gritted his teeth.

"Look here! How dare you interfere with us?" he demanded. "We haven't interfered with your rotten Shakespeare tragedies."

"And we sha'n't interfere with you—if you play Shakespeare," said Harry Wharton. "You are going to play a skit on Nugent's family, and we're going to stop you!"

"Does Nugent object?"

"Nugent has said nothing."

"Well, if he's said nothing, what has it to do with you?" demanded the Bounder. "If Nugent has any objection to make, let him come and make it himself!"

"You know that he won't do that," said Harry Wharton contemptuously. "You are taking a rotten, cowardly advantage of him!"

"Oh, mind your own bizney!"

"This is my business!" said Harry. "Take off those things!"

"Sha'n't!" said Bolsover.

"Take them off!"

"What do you want to do with them?" demanded Vernon-Smith.

"Burn them!"

The Bounder jumped.

"What!" he yelled. "Burn them! Burn my property! Do you know these costumes cost me three pounds and more?"

"I don't know, and I don't care! I know I am going to burn them! If you suffer any loss, you can put it down to your own caddishness!"

"Hear, hear!" said the Co.

"I won't have it!" shrieked the Bounder. "If you lay a finger on my property, I'll call in Mr. Quelch! I'll complain to the Head!

"Lock the door, Bob!"

"Right-ho!"

Vernon-Smith made a spring towards the door. Bob Cherry pushed him roughly back, and turned the key in the lock. Then the whole Co. advanced upon the three comedians.

"Are you going to take those things off?" asked Wharton quietly.

"No!" yelled Bolsover.

"Then we'll strip you!"

"I—I say, hold on!" stuttered Snoop. "I—I don't mind taking them off!"

"Don't be a coward, Snoop!" bellowed Bolsover.

"Well, I—I can't fight half a dozen of 'em!" said Snoop. "You can try, if you like! It's not good enough for me!"

"Funk!"

"Oh, rats!"

Snoop stripped off the feminine attire, and put his own jacket on. Bob Cherry picked up the costume, and jammed it in a heap into the study fire. Vernon-Smith made a spring forward to save his belongings, and was instantly grasped and hurled back.

Bolsover clenched his fists, and began to hit out; and in a moment he was upon the floor, and two or three juniors were sitting upon him. Held fast by many hands, the cads of the Remove looked on in helpless rage at what followed.

Bob Cherry stirred the costume down into the fire with the poker. The material was inflammable enough, and it burnt up. The study was filled with a pungent smoke as it burned, and Ogilvy opened the window to let it out.

"Phew!" gasped Bob Cherry. "It's getting rather thick! But we'll be through soon!"

"I'll make you pay for this!" shrieked the Bounder, writhing with rage in the grasp of the Removites.

"All serene; we'll chance it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry stirred away industriously. Slowly but surely the costume of Mrs. Bolter was reduced to smoking ashes. Bob Cherry, panting with the heat and exertion, retired to the window to cool himself.

"Your turn now, Bolsover!" said Harry Wharton. "Yank those things off him!"

Bolsover struggled furiously, but it was in vain. The frock-coat and striped trousers were yanked off him, and the false beard and whiskers and wig. All of them were jammed into the fire, and Johnny Bull took his turn at stirring them in. Bolsover, his brow black with rage, dressed himself in his own clothes.

The study was smokier than ever, and the juniors' eyes were smarting by the time Bolsover's costume was reduced to smoky ashes.

Harry Wharton looked round the study. Sticks of greasepaint, false hair, and chalks and charcoal, lay upon the table, and all of them were swept into the fire, and rammed well in.

"Oh, I'll make you pay for this!" said Vernon-Smith, grinding his teeth.

"I—I—I'll smash you!" stuttered Bolsover.

"Oh, good!" said Bob Cherry. "But we're going to do the smashing at present. You want to give the fellows a funny show. We've mucked up this one for you, but we'll give you a chance to give 'em another! Yank them over here! Never mind Snoop; kick him out!"

The struggling pair were dragged over to the hearthrug. Bob Cherry rubbed handfuls of the blackened remains of the costumes over their faces and hair, while they gasped and writhed and yelled. Snoop had fled, only too glad to escape.

Bob Cherry was very liberal, and by the time he had finished Vernon-Smith and Bolsover major were scarcely recognisable.

Seven o'clock rang out from the clock-tower, and Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Performance booked to begin in an hour," he remarked. "I don't think the company will be ready."

"Faith, and ye're right; unless they go on as nigger minstrels, or the 'Wild Man from Borneo' Company!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think they've had enough!" grinned Harry Wharton. "They won't get all that muck off before eight o'clock. Only remember this, Smithy. If there's any attempt to give that comedy minus the costumes, we shall be on the scene, and we'll give you such a time that you won't feel like comedy!"

"More like tragedy, bedad!" grinned Micky Desmond.

And the avengers unlocked the door and streamed out of the study. They left the cads of the Remove writhing on the floor exhausted with their struggles, blackened with soot and ashes, and panting with rage. Bolsover sat up and looked at Vernon-Smith. Vernon-Smith sat up and looked at Bolsover. They did not speak; their feelings were too deep for words. They both crawled away to a bath-room to clean themselves.

Downstairs, fellows who passed the notice-board found that there was an addition to the notice posted up by Vernon-Smith. A slip had been pinned across it, and upon the slip were written the words, in Bob Cherry's sprawling hand:

"PERFORMANCE CANCELLED!"

And it remained cancelled.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.
For His Mother's Sake!

FRANK NUGENT was in No. 1 Study when Harry Wharton returned there. Wharton was a little flushed with his exertions, and breathing rather quickly. Nugent glanced at him inquiringly.

"What's the row about?" he asked.

"Oh, only a little unrehearsed scene in Smithy's comedy," said Harry. "There won't be any performance to-night."

"Thank you, old man," said Nugent gratefully. "The cad! He knew it was impossible for me to say anything about it."

"It's all right, Franky; I don't think he'll start anything of the kind again. But, I say——" Wharton looked at his chum in surprise. Frank Nugent had his overcoat on, and there was a bag lying on the table. "Are you off somewhere?"

Nugent nodded.

"Where are you going, Franky? Not—not leaving?"

"Yes."

"Leaving the school?" exclaimed Wharton, in dismay.

"For a time, anyway."

"But—but, I say—what about the Head?"

"I've asked the Head's permission, and he's given it to me," said Nugent quietly. "I must go, Harry. I'm going to my mother."

"Frank!"

"Dicky's left her—I suppose it wasn't to be expected he'd stay," said Nugent wearily. "I know she doesn't want me so much as she wants Dicky; but—but somebody will have to stand by her. I'm going down to Scarcliffe to-night!"

"It's rotten for you to go, Frank. When will you come back?"

"I don't know. Not so long as the mater wants me."

Wharton looked troubled.

"You're chucking up everything here," he said. "Your work—and everything—all the footer matches, too. We shall miss you, Frank."

"I shall miss you, too, and—and the other chaps. But I must go—I can't let the mater feel that she's deserted," said Frank. "She—she's awfully sensitive, you know; and she's not over strong, either. She might be ill, and—and—after all, a chap is supposed to make a bit of a sacrifice if necessary for his mother's sake, Harry."

"I suppose so, Frank. But——"

"So I'm going. I wanted to say good-bye to you, Harry. I don't know when I shall be back—or whether I shall be back at all. You—you might keep an eye on my minor. He's always getting into scrapes, and he won't have anybody to back him up when I'm gone."

"I'll look after him, Frank."

"Good-bye, then."

"I'm coming down to the station with you, anyway," said Harry. "Wingate will give me a pass-out, or Courtney. Wait at the door for me."

"Right-o!"

The chums of the Remove descended the stairs. Nugent waited outside the door, in the deep October dusk in the Close. Harry Wharton joined him in a few minutes, with his coat and cap on.

They walked across the Close, and Gosling let them out at the gate. Harry Wharton was deeply troubled, and he was silent; and Nugent did not speak.

"Does your mother know you're coming, Frank?" asked Wharton, after a long pause, when the lights of the village came in sight.

"Yes; I've wired."

"And your pater?"

"I've written to him."

"He won't like this, Frank!"

Nugent sighed.

"I don't know. When a chap's father and mother can't get on together, it's frightfully difficult to know what to do. But I can't leave the mater alone. If she doesn't want me, I can come back. But—I think she will want me."

"I should think so, Frank. But—well, it's rotten all round."

"I'm not sorry to get away from Greyfriars for a bit," said Nugent abruptly. "The fellows all know about what's happened—there are only a few like Smithy, who want to make capital out of it—but they all know. I can't bear it. It's too rotten. I sha'n't be sorry to get away. I—I hope I shall come back, though. Anyway, we shall meet again somewhere."

They reached the station.

Wharton waited on the platform with his chum till the train came in. Nugent stepped into the train, and tossed his bag upon the rack. He gripped his chum's hand through the doorway.

"Good-bye, Harry!"

"Good--bye, Frank, old man; and good luck!"

The porter closed the carriage-door; the whistle shrieked, and the train moved out of the station. Wharton waved his hand from the platform; the train disappeared into the night—Nugent was gone.

Gone!

It had all been so rapid, that Wharton could hardly realise yet that he had lost his chum. Would Nugent ever come back to Greyfriars? Was his place at the old school to remain empty? Wharton knew what a difference it would make to him, if his chum's place remained unfilled; he would miss Frank at every turn, at every hour of the day. But still, he did not think of himself; his thoughts were with Frank, and the heavy sorrow that had come into his young life. What was to be the end of it all? Wharton's brow was clouded, and his heart was heavy, as he walked slowly home to Greyfriars alone!

Nugent's heart was as heavy as his chum's, as the train bore him away into the darkness and silence of the night.

He had thought out what he was doing; and he had decided. But there was so much for and against the step he had taken, that he could not decide, to his own satisfaction, whether he was acting wisely.

He had thrown up everything, so far as he himself was concerned, in order to go to his mother.

It was Dicky that she wanted. But in her loneliness and desertion, she must be glad to see her elder son; and his devotion must be a comfort to her.

Frank was sure of that.

And if he could lighten her trouble, was it not his duty to go, without stopping to consider himself?

He thought so.

But he was sad and despondent as the train rushed on.

Perhaps it was the trouble that had hung over him for the past week that had thrown him into a state of nerves; but as he sat in the carriage, rushing on, a dark presentiment was weighing upon his mind. He did not know it, but he was not far from being ill, and the future was clouded and full of trouble to him; the shadow of disaster seemed to brood over this sudden, rapid journey through the night.

The train stopped at station after station; he did not notice them. Later in the evening it began to rain, the windows of the carriage were blurred as it stopped in the stations, he could not see the names of the places.

He looked at his watch at last.

Half-past nine!

It was time that he was near Scarcliffe now.

When the train stopped again he let down the window and looked out into the gloomy station, with the rain-drops falling round him.

"Is it far to Scarcliffe now?" he called out to a shadowy porter.

"Next station."

"Thank you."

He sank back into the corner of the carriage again.

His heart was beating strangely.

A few minutes more, and he would be at Scarcliffe—probably his mother would be at the station; he would see her. Only a few minutes more, and he would know whether she was glad he had come——

Crash!

Crash!

A jarring, grinding shock ran through the train, and then it seemed to Frank Nugent as if the world were falling into pieces about him.

Darkness rushed upon him—he had a vague knowledge that he was springing up—that he was struggling—that something was weighing upon him—crushing him—he was fighting for his life——

Then darkness—vacancy!

Again lights flashed in his eyes. His eyes were open wide, staring—he was wondering dully where he was, what had taken place! To his swimming senses nothing was clear. He had been charged over in a football match—the players were piling on him—he was crushed—suffocated—— No! It was not a footer-field; something hard lay across him—something that pinned him down. In the darkness and the rain there was a buzz of strange voices, a glimmering of strange faces.

Was he dreaming? Was he in bed in the old dormitory at Greyfriars, in the grip of a torturing nightmare?

But the pain he was suffering was real; his face was wet—wet—wet with rain, and wet with blood; he knew that it was blood upon his face, although he could not see it.

"Lift him out!"

He heard the deep voice, only half understanding.

What had happened? Recollection came back—he was in the train, in the rushing train, speeding to meet his mother. What had happened? He tried to cry out, but his voice was dumb—a heavy weight seemed upon his tongue, upon his heart, upon his mind!

He knew that he was only half-conscious; he kenw that he had been in an accident; he wondered dully, dimly, without fear, whether he was dying! He felt himself lifted up; he was being carried in the arms of strong men; he felt himself laid down—down—and darkness swam over his vision again.

Then a sharp cry—a woman's cry! It pierced the heaviness that was sinking upon his senses, it brought him to keen remembrance. His eyes opened again, dizzily. He tried to raise himself, to hold out his hands; but he could not move. There was no strength in his limbs. He was feeble—weak—weaker than a little child.

A woman's face, wet with rain and with tears, startled, terrified eyes looking down upon him—a cry, a sob.

Frank's lips moved.

"Mother!"

Then all was darkness again.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.
The Valley of the Shadow.

SLOWLY, strangely, through the mists of sleep and suffering, Frank struggled back to consciousness. His first consciousness was of pain—hard and bitter pain, that gripped his limbs as he lay, and made him cry out in anguish; but no cry passed his lips. He was crying out voice-

lessly, and there was no sound. Stay—there was a sound in the room; a low, soft sound of a woman sobbing.

He was in a room now—he was in bed. He must have been placed there, then, while he was insensible.

Where was he?

He tried to raise himself, to look about him.

He could not move. And the mere effort made his senses reel, and he felt himself sinking back into oblivion. There was a rustle; a face bent over him—his mother's face.

"Lie still, my dear boy—lie still! You are safe now."

The face vanished into darkness.

Again light.

Frank, without attempting to move, looked round him, his eyes wandering on every side. He could see a window, with the sunlight streaming in. It was morning then; or, rather, it was afternoon—the sun was in the west. A new day had come—how many new days since he had been struck down—how many? Had he lain upon that bed of suffering for hours, days, weeks—or centuries? His glance wandered weakly from side to side. He was in bed still, and it was daytime, that was all he could understand at first. Then a sound of voices in the silence.

"Hush!" It was his mother's voice. "You will wake him!"

"Mr. Nugent is downstairs, madam."

Silence.

The silence seemed to Frank interminable.

His father was there, then. His father! He had forgotten his father! He remembered now that he had written to his father before leaving Greyfriars, his father would know that he was at Scarcliffe? Had he come there for him then? Why had he come? Why did not his mother answer?

A voice at the door—Nugent could not see the door where he lay, he could not move to look at it; but he could hear.

"Mary!"

His father's voice.

"Henry! Hush! He is sleeping!"

"What is it, Mary?" The voice was whispering now, but Frank could hear. "What has happened? I hear that there was an accident on the railway last night, the train from Courtfield——"

"Yes."

"Is Frank here?"

"Yes."

"Mary! He—he was not in the accident?"

"Yes."

"Oh! Good heavens! But not—not——"

The voices died away; the boy was unconscious again. He did not know that his father bent over him; he knew nothing now. It was as well. Mr. Nugent's face was white, terror-stricken, as he bent over the insensible boy and saw the white face, the bloodstained bandages.

The man turned from the bed with a groan.

"Mary! He is not—not——"

Mrs. Nugent shook her head.

"No. The doctor says 'No.' But—my God! How I have suffered this night—and this day! This is my punishment—and yours."

"Mary!"

"You must not speak here, you will wake him."

"My poor boy!"

Mrs. Nugent signed to him to pass into the adjoining room. He went unsteadily, like a drunken man.

Mrs. Nugent followed him. Her face was deadly white; her eyes were heavy, there were dark circles round them. The marks of suffering and fear were very plain in her looks. She stood looking at her husband. Mr. Nugent, still in his travelling-coat, stood with one hand upon the table, looking at her.

"Mary!" he said. "Oh, Mary! This—this is terrible!"

"He was coming to me," said Mrs. Nugent quietly. "Dicky left me yesterday, to go back to the school. Poor little fellow, he was wearied of his dull life here."

"And Frank——"

"Frank came to me. Poor boy! But you——"

"I had a letter from him to-day," said Mr. Nugent. "He wrote to me from Greyfriars last night, before he left. He told me Dick had returned, and that he was coming here. I—I came to——" He broke off. "Oh, heavens, if he should die!"

Mrs. Nugent shivered.

"If he should die, his death lies at our door," she said. "We have done this."

"Mary!"

"I will not say that you have done it," she went on. "We were both to blame. Our folly—yours and mine—has brought this to pass. What is our foolish dispute now—what does it matter—now that our boy's life is in danger?"

"His life!" muttered Mr. Nugent. "Oh, if he should die——" His voice broke; the tears were rolling down his cheeks.

There was a long silence.

"Mary!" Mr. Nugent broke the silence. "Mary, dear, I—I am sorry. If — if I could have foreseen anything like this——"

"And I," she said. "But we had our duty to do, whether we could foresee or not. What did our disagreements matter—we had no right to trouble our children with them. This is a punishment—just, so far as we are concerned; but, poor Frank——"

"He will not die," murmured the man. "He must not—he cannot! Mary, we will save him between us."

Mrs. Nugent sobbed; her self-possession was breaking down. Her husband drew her into his arms.

There was a faint voice a little later.

"Mother!"

Mrs. Nugent hurried to the bedside.

Frank's eyes were open again; he had found his voice. Mrs. Nugent, concealing her tears, bent beside him.

"Yes, Frank darling. Quiet—you must not move."

"I—I thought I heard father's voice."

"Yes, he is here."

"I am here, Frank," said his father, trying to speak calmly, "I am here, my dear lad."

He was holding his wife's hand, and Frank saw it, and understood.

He smiled.

"Am I very bad?" he asked. "I mean, am I——"

"No, no, no!"

"You may as well tell me, mater. I'm not afraid."

"No, no, no!" wailed Mrs. Nugent. "No, my dearest boy! It is not so bad as that. There has been a terrible accident. You were pinned under the wreck of the train; but Heaven was kind to us. You might have been crushed; but you were not. You are ill, Frank, my dearest; but—but there is no danger."

Nugent smiled again.

He understood.

There was danger, but they did not dare to tell him. It was clear enough to him; his mother was speaking from her hope, not from her knowledge.

"It's all right, mater," said Frank feebly, but with a strange cheerfulness. "I'm going to put up a fight, anyway—won't be bowled first ball, you know. Are you staying down here, dad?"

"Yes, Frank."

"And—and——"

"Yes, Frank," said his father, understanding. "That is all over. You have brought us together again, Frank; and, please Heaven, the future shall not be like the past. My eyes have been opened, Frank."

"That's all right," said Frank, "I'm jolly glad, pater."

"My dear lad!"

Frank's eyes closed again.

He slept.

It was a peaceful sleep; his heart was lighter; a happiness that had long been strange to him had come back to the boy. If he suffered, he did not suffer in vain; what he had gone through, what he risked, had brought back peace and love to his home, and that was something—that was as much as he would have asked.

Long, dreamless sleep—then wakefulness again—and the grey light of an early dawn. Another day had come. Frank lay watching the sunlight strengthening at the window, too weak to move, but strangely peaceful. There was someone sitting beside his bed; it was not his mother. He started as he recognised who it was——

"Harry!"

Harry Wharton turned towards him. His hand sought Frank's.

"Yes, I'm here, old man," he said. "Buck up, Frank. You mustn't talk; I'll do all the talking."

"When did you come, Harry?"

"Last night. I heard from your pater, and the Head let me come at once. I'm going to stay with you till you're on your feet again, Frank. You'd like me to?"

"What-ho!"

"You've come a regular cropper," said Wharton, "but you're on the mend—the medical johnny told me so. The others chaps are coming down to see you when you're better; I'm going to stay all the time. I've got a letter from Dicky; shall I read it to you?"

"Yes, do—do!"

Wharton extracted a crumpled sheet of impot. paper from his pocket, and Frank recognised the scrawl of his minor.

"Dear Frank,—I'm sorry to hear you're crocked. I'd come down to look after you, but the mater thinks I should make a row, and you've got to be kept quiet. You know the mater—she always says I make a row, but I don't. Buck up, old man. Gatty and Myers are very sorry, too. Gatty says

(*Concluded on page 26.*)

OUR THRILLING NEW SERIAL STORY. START THIS WEEK!

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.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

"BY FOUL MEANS OR FAIR, I'LL WIN!"

Nathan Gore, millionaire and jewel-collector, clenched his hands furiously and raved like a madman on the deck of the liner Coronation. He had started specially from America in order to be present at the sale-room in London where the costly diamond, "The World's Wonder," was to be put up for auction. "A telegram for Mr. Gore," a voice rang out through the darkness. The American was told the message, and as he listened, his face came over deathly pale, and he gave vent to a terrible oath. The message was: "Ferrers Lord purchased 'The World's Wonder' privately. No bidders. Price unknown." "I'll win yet," shrieked the man. "By foul means or fair, I'll win!"

"THE WORLD'S WONDER."

In the magnificent drawing-room of Ferrers Lord's house in Park Lane was assembled a varied collection of individuals. First of all there was the celebrated millionaire himself, and close to him sat Ching-Lung, a Chinaman, busily engaged in making paper butterflies. Hal Honour, the great engineer, was sipping tea, and Rupert Thurston yawned in a chair. "How much did you pay for that great diamond?" presently asked the latter. The millionaire smiled. "Money and fair words, Rupert," he replied. "By the way, you have not seen it yet?"

The priceless gem passed from hand to hand. A thousand fires burned in its crystal heart; a thousand colours, ever changing, leaped from every facet. "I guess it would have been more money and less fair words if old Gore had turned up," remarked Ching-Lung sagely.

"I'LL TAKE THE CHALLENGE!"

The millionaire's house was wrapped in silence. A faint light shone from the drawing-room. Ching-Lung pushed open the door, then a cry broke from him. A man lay face downwards on the floor. There was a ghastly crimson stain on his collar. The man was Ferrers Lord. "Ching—the diamond!" came in a hoarse voice. Ching opened the drawer which Lord indicated, but there was no diamond there. But a message had been left behind: "To Ferrers Lord,—Knowing that you would not sell 'The World's Wonder' I have taken it. Do your worst. I defy you. The stone is mine.—Nathan Gore." The millionaire rose to his feet. "I take the challenge, Ching," he said. "I'll hunt him down and bring back my diamond." He begins the chase after the diamond thief, and for five months pursues Nathan Gore through Europe, New Zealand, Teneriffe, and back to London, never once being able to catch him up. While in London, he hears that Nathan Gore has bought from the Dutch a remote island named Galpin. Lord immediately purchases an island four miles south of Gore's, christening it Ching-Lung. Learning that Gore is fortifying his island, and has actually fitted out warships for his own use, Ferrers Lord arranges a hurried expedition, and in a few hours the whole party are aboard the Lord of the Deep, bound for the island of Ching-Lung. Gan-Waga is caught by the new French cook while trying to obtain food from the galley, and out of revenge quotes poetry about the Battle of Waterloo to him. For a moment the cook seems stunned, and then he rushes at Gan-Waga, and shows him how to fight in French fashion, with arms and legs going at the same time.

(Now go on with the story.)

Monsieur's Duel.

Settling down to his work, monsieur put both his slippered feet on Gan's face at the same time, and rubbed the egg well into Gan's head, as if it had been some new hair-restorer.

It was the Battle of Waterloo over again on a small scale. The attack was frenzied, glorious, and irresistible. Battered and beaten, the Eskimo army was flung back, which, in other words, means that Gan collapsed, and, seizing a large metal dish-cover, used it as a shield to save himself from a shower of cups, saucepans, sieves, and jugs, which descended from the shelves and hooks.

When the shower was over, the cook planted one foot on Gan's prostrate form, folded his arms, smiled darkly at Joe, and cried:

"A-r-r-r-r! I am ze victor-r-r! I haf conkure—I haf von! A-r-r-r-r! Ze honour of me is revenge; ze insult of me is—how you say him?—is leeked! Zat dear France is triomph! A-r-r-r-r!"

Joe scraped a few egg-splashes off his classic countenance, and remarked that it looked pretty much like it. Gan did not say anything. Of late, Fortune had not been wholly kind to him. It would be folly to egg the Frenchman on any more. Gan was egged quite enough himself. In fact, he was practically under the yoke, for the Frenchman still stood in the same victorious attitude; and, oddly enough, the portion of Gan's face that was not under the yolk had a good deal of white about it.

"A-r-r-r!" hissed the chef.

"Ow, ow, ow, ow!" moaned Gan faintly.

"I am desolated! Eet is grief to me thus abuse ze great strength!" said Yard-of-Tape. "But ze insult I bear nevaire! In my rage, I am ze fire-eater, ze wild tigaire of ze jungle, ze warrior! Ze insult to me I could forgif, but ze insult to zat dear France is too mooch! Nevaire! A-r-r-r!"

"You're a terrible chap—a tarter!" answered Joe solemnly.

"I am ze tartaire!" laughed the Frenchman. "Ver' good! Ha, ha! Bien, bien! Cur-r-r!"

"The curr-r!" was addressed to Gan. Gan was muttering jerkily.

"Soak 'em! Battle of Waterloo! Ow, ow! British Frenches knocks snails off them! Wottle of Barterloo! Ow, ow! Makes 'em scoote likes snails! Ow, ow, ow! Bootle of Looterwaw! Ow, ow, ow! Oh mi, oh mo, oh-oo mi! Soakes snailses scooting nots a few! Frogmettel Frencheloo! Ow, ow! Oh mi!"

"The egg-juice must have got into his head!" said Joe. "If he ain't 'ard-boiled, he seems a trifle 'ard-baked—I mean, 'alf-baked!"

The victor hissed "Cur-r-r!" again, and wrenched away the dish cover.

Gan was in a deplorable state. His hair was of a rich golden colour, and so was the greater portion of his face. He appeared to fancy he was in a band, for he was muttering into the spout of a coffee-pot and working his fingers, just as if he were playing a tune.

"Behold ze base dog I haf chastise!" said the chef.

"Looks as if he'd been in a dog-fight!" said Joe.

"A-r-r! Ze punishment haf been given! Cur-r-r!"

"Wottle of Barterloo!" muttered Gan. "Ow! Soaks snailer scoots!"

"He wants a drink!" grinned Joe. "He's had some hard ware!"

This was a fact. The hardware lay around Gan in piles.

"Tootle of Laterloo!" lisped the Eskimo vacantly. "Snailses runs soaked frogses! Ow!"

"Hallo! What the Hanover is this? Joe, what the—— What have you been doing to the lad?"

Joe and the Frenchman saluted as Ching-Lung oame in.

"It was like this 'ere, your 'Ighness," said Joe, with a chuckle. "Gan comes into the galley, and starts bowin' and gigglin' and kissin' his flipper at Mossoo. Mossoo tells him perlite to shift his limpers!"

"Do what?"

"Waggle his mud-sloshers, sir! To twinkle his toddlers—to shake his shin, if you like!"

"What on earth do you mean, Joe?"

"Well, sir," said Joe, "in scientific language, to locomote his pedal integuments briskly in a direction diametrically opposite to the precise latitude and longtitude of this particular locality—in fact, to hop it!"

This was not bad for Joe. It was well worth the cigar Ching-Lung handed to him.

"Proceed, Joseph!"

"I will, sir; but that's what Gan wouldn't do! Patriotism," said Joe, who was coming out in hopes of another cigar, "is the brightest jewel that was ever pawned! Love of country is the sweetest flower that grows in a 'uman 'art. The 'art is full of arteries, I have been told, and flowers and vegetables can grow there."

"How do you make that out?"

"Well," said Joe, "every 'art has beats, sir, and a beet is a vegetable! Thank'ee, sir!"

Joe pocketed the second cigar. He deserved it.

"Proceed, Joseph!"

"Feller citizens," cried Joe, warming up, "to see a man wi'out patriotism—wi'out love of country, would bring a salt and bitter tear to the eye of a kidney pertater! To offend a man's patriotism is like bitin' a big chunk out of the apple of his eye! It gives a man the pip! Thank'ee, sir!"

Joe pocketed the third cigar, and Gan moaned something about snails and a "Snottle of Blooterwar!"

"Resume, Joseph," said Ching-Lung.

"Well, citizens and feller men," grinned Joe, "the chap who lies there playin' 'Toll for the Brave' on that coffee-pot has tore up the sweet flower of patriotism by the roots, and trampled it under his number twenty-fives till even a small catterpillar couldn't find a breakfast to chaw off it. He has trod the sparklin' gem under his 'ob-nailed trotter-cases. He declared in vile poetry that the French eat snails and frogs."

"Horrible!" said Ching-Lung.

"A-r-r-r!" hissed the chef. "He insult zat dear France."

"He said, sir, that the French got mopped up at——"

"Tottle of Tooraloo!" sobbed Gan. "All soaked snailses—ow! chasings frogses. Oh, mi!"

"Did he dare to say that the French were beaten at Waterloo?"

"He did so, sir," cried Joe, banging his fist down on the table, "and, if he didn't speak the truth, I'm a l-l—I'm a liver-pill, sir!"

"Shocking, shocking!" said the prince sadly.

"And I suppose there was a fight? Dear, dear! Pick him up, Joe, and wash him!"

Gan was placed in a chair and sponged down. His nose was very much swollen. As he kept on jabbering about soaked snails and Wattles of Barterloo, help was called. They carried him to the swimming-bath, and threw him in.

Barry in Love—Gan Gets His Own Back with the Cook.

Barry and Prout were removing vast quantities of cold meat, pickles, and beer into their interiors, and smiling at each other about half an hour after the "Wottle of Barterloo" had come to an end. They preferred to lunch in private, and not in the general mess. Barry blew the white froth from the tankard of ale, and his crooked little finger rose higher, until nothing could be seen in the bottom except a twinkling reflection of his own twinkling left eye.

"Ah," said Barry, "that's better! Ut's swate to eat, and swate to dhrink, and ut's swate to have a pocket full of chink!"

"By hokey, that's so!" said Tom Prout, as he carved away at the beef.

"Tom," remarked Barry dreamily, "Oi belave Oi'm in luv!"

"Wha-at, wi' that face?"

Prout dropped his knife and fork.

"No; wid another face. Her name is Jane."

Prout's features slowly relaxed into a grin. Jane was the pretty housemaid in Park Lane.

"I've wrote a little poem about her," went on Barry. "Oi think ut's a gem. Not havin' done much in the love-makin' loine, Oi thought Oi'd ax yer opinion. Ut begins:

"Swatest of colleens that iver was borrn,
To whisk round a dustpan and broom,
Ut will bust me ould hearrt av we e'er have to parrt,
Or yez winks at that fool of a groom!
Ut's Jane
Oi mane, who lives in Parrk Lane."

"Beautiful!" said Prout.

"So Oi think, Tommy. Ut goes on:

"That groom has a squint and a pimply nose,
And his legs are all bony and squiffy;
And, bedad! av Oi catch him wance smoilin' at yez,
Ut's a coffin he'll nade in a jiffy!
That's plain,
My Jane! Jane, of Parrk Lane."

"Lovely!" said Prout, selecting a pickled onion.

"But the last verse is the gem of all, Tom. Harrk to ut:

"Whoy can't Oi ate a bit of food——"

"'Ere, choke it off!" said Prout. "You can't, 'cos you've shifted enough for six already."

"Whisht! Ut's only in the poem, yez chump!"

"By hokey, I thought it was inside you!" said Prout.

"Ut's in the poem, Oi repate. Listen to this:

"Whoy can't Oi ate wan bit of food?
Whoy can't Oi slape at noight?
'Tis thy dear face that haunts me, luv,
From eve to morning's loight——"

"Why don't you punch it?" inquired Prout. "I should, jolly soon, if it kept me awake."

"Ut's only in the poem, yez silly owl!"

"Oh, I fancied it was in bed you meant!" said the steersman. "Go along."

"From even to morning's loight.
Oh, Jane, 'tis thou!
And moy hearrt whispers——"

"Ow—ow—ow—ow—ow!" groaned a voice.

They both turned round. What looked at first sight like a monstrous tortoise was painfully crawling in their direction. The monster advanced on all fours, leaving a wet trail behind it. It also uttered mournful sobs, accompanied by a swishing sound. A closer inspection showed it to be a human being, with a slab of ice attached to it, and a still closer inspection proved it to be Gan-Waga.

"Oi belave he's in pain," said Barry.

"Enough to make him, by hokey, if he heard any of that poetry," said Prout.

Gan said:

"Ow—ow—ow—ow—ow—ow!"

He sank down beside the locker which the two seamen used for a table, and closed his eyes, opened his big mouth, and let a long, weird, melancholy howl that covered several octaves on an ascending scale.

"Oh—ah—o-o-oh! Ow—o-o-oh—o-o-o-oh—o-o-oh! Wa—wo-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-oh!"

It was ghastly. Barry and Prout, frozen with horror, gazed at him stonily. Without opening his eyes, Gan took a long breath and started to come down the scale again.

"Wa—ow-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-oh——"

Barry saved his reason and some lunatic asylum a couple

of paying guests by thrusting the end of a roll of butter into the Eskimo's mouth. Gan bit off about four inches of it, and opened his little eyes.

"He's balmy, Tom!"

"Off his rocker!" said Prout.

"Snoozled!" said Barry.

"Howlin' mad!" growled the steersman.

"Bottles of Tarterloo!" lisped Gan as he swallowed the butter.

"What did he say?"

"He'd swallowed a bottle of castor-ile," answered Barry.

"Faith, av he's done that Oi don't wondher he faals a thrifle off his nut!"

"Bottles of snailfogses socks Frenches—ow!" spluttered Gan-Waga.

Barry and Prout became quite alarmed.

"Oi belave he's doiein'!" gasped O'Rooney. "He's wandering in his mind! What's a snail-frogses Frenches?"

"Eskimo, I expect."

"Throttle of Frogleroo!" groaned Gan.

"He's smoilin'!" cried Barry.

Gan was. It could hardly be described as a smile, but he certainly looked better. Candles and butter were the joy of Gan-Waga's heart, and the butter was soothing him. He swept his hand across his brow, sat down on the lump of ice, and opened his eyes.

"What is ut? Where's ut hurtin' yez?"

"Where's the pain, Gan?"

"Bad enough—awfuls!" sighed Gan. "I nearly deads! Oh, Barry, I love yo'! I gotted treats dreadfuls! He knock me down wid a club and jumps on me faces-ker-bump! Just like dat. Den he stabses me wids a pistols and shoots bullets out of a knifes——"

"Oi say, go gently!" said Barry. "Ut's mixed yez are gettin'."

"But who did it, blubberbiter?" inquired Prout.

"Dat Frenchmans."

"Whoy?"

"I tellses you'," said Gan mournfully. "I axes fo' some cangles, and he nots gives me somes. Oh, he calls me norrible namses! Him go 'Ar-r-r!' and rush at me wid bigs saucepans. His says he kills fifty Englishmans in him lifes alreadys, and not afraids of dirty Eskimos. I say I fetch braves Irishmans to him, and Irishmans flatten hims up."

"Yis?" remarked Barry eagerly. "What thin?"

"Den he say he started kill Irishmans when him a boys, and if I mean Barry Looneys, wid the ingyrubbers face, he make penwipers of him in two moses."

"Bedad!"

Barry emptied the tankard with terrible slowness, keeping one eye fixed on Prout.

"Shud Oi, Tom?" he inquired.

Prout evidently understood the meaning of the question, for he answered:

"By hokey, that I would!"

"Ingyrubber face!" muttered Barry. "Sowl of Santy Claus! Ah! Starrted killin' Oirishmin whin he was a bhoy! Pinwoipers! Oh! Pinwoipers in two half-mo's! Oi've hearrd that there's sorrer on the say, Tom, and boy the boy the bones of—— Troth, there's goin' to be sorrer under the say about just now. Pinwoipers! Oi'll give him pin-and-ink! Oi only hope he's no relations to mourn his dith!"

"Kill him quick," advised Prout. "Don't torture him."

"He'll be a cowld corrpse in fifty-foive noinetieth parrts of wan sicond boy a new patent stop-watch!" said Barry. "Come wid me and see, Gan. Oi'll revenge yez, me swate bhoy! Finish the butther."

Gan was not slow about doing that.

"Come!" said Barry.

They followed him to the battle-field. Barry strode into the galley, his mighty arms folded, and stood still. The chef was there grinding away at a mincing-machine. Barry went close up to him.

"Wan, to be ridy," he remarked; "two, to be stidy; and three, to be off!"

With that he seized the chef's long nose between his thumb and fingers and gave it a mighty tweak.

"Horraire of horraires!" howled the Frenchman, passing both hands over his nose. "I am wounded to ze death! I die! I peg out! Ze corpse of me expire! Murdaire! Gendarmes! Help!"

"Oi'm quoite prepared to hilp yiz to some more," said Barry.

"Vat haf I done?" screamed the cook. "Vat haf I—— Ar-r-r!"

"Ow!" howled Barry.

The cook's right leg shot over the table, and the cook's foot clipped Barry under the left ear with a beautiful neatness of aim. The kick knocked Barry's head sideways, and the cook promptly put it right with a left-leg kick. Then seized Barry by his pointed beard, and jerked him clean over the table. After that, for several seconds, it was quite impossible to tell which was which, or who was whom. Arms and legs could be seen flying and flapping in the atmosphere, and Irish growls and French howls in the atmosphere. Then the two unravelled themselves a bit by mutual consent, and called for a halt.

Both men were a trifle damaged about the garments, and both were hot and panting. The chef rolled his eyes wildly, and Barry made sure that all his right ear was left—we mean that his right ear was not altogether missing.

Gan giggled with joy, and Prout took the pipe from his mouth and said:

"By hokey!"

Then Barry spoke.

"Tom," he said, "did yez see him punch me?"

"By hokey, I did!" said Tom.

"And, faith, what d'yez think of ut?"

"I should say it hurt," remarked Prout. "Did it?"

"Hur-rt be blinked!" roared Barry. "What has the hur-rtin' to do wid ut, at all—at all? Oi want a fair foight—not a mixture of futball—Rugby and Association—wid dog-foightin' and cat-sparrin' thrown in!"

"Zen fight me wis ze rapier—wiz ze pistols!" hissed the cook. "You haf insult ze honaire and black ze eye of me! Fight wiz me ze duel to ze death! Ar-r-r!"

"Or-r-r!" said Barry.

"Ha, ha! He ter-emble—he pale!" laughed monsieur mockingly.

Barry's knees were certainly knocking together. He staggered into Prout's arms.

"'Ere, 'old up!" growled the steersman.

"Oi—Oi! Ut's the ould pain comin' on!" moaned Barry.

"He shivaire—he shake! Cowar-rd! Ze sword and ze pistol strike ze terriare to ze craven heart of him! But I vill make him fight, or gif ze apology on ze knees of him! Ar-r-r!"

The chef, swelling with triumph, strutted forward, and gave Barry's nose a tug.

"Ow! Spare me!" sobbed Barry.

"Zen ze apology or ze battle!"

"Bucksups and fights him, Barry!" said the amazed Gan-Waga. "What de matters, hunk?"

"Come, come!" said Prout. "What's got 'old of you?"

"Oi—Oi can see a coffin!" wailed Barry.

"Where?"

"In me moind's oie!"

"You'll see the Frenchy's fist in yer face's both eyes if you don't pull yourself together! Are you going to apologise or fight?"

"Go ins and socks him!" advised Gan.

"Oi'll foight him!" said Barry wearily. "Wan of us must doie! That's what the coffin meant! So be ut! Oi fancy Oi can choose the weapons?"

"Ar-r-r! Zat is so!" hissed the chef. "Ze place, also ze time!"

"In the fo'c's'le, thin," said Barry. "Twinty minutes from now! Lade me away!"

He leaned heavily on Prout's arm, and staggered so much that Gan had to help them on the other side. Then a grin crept over his face, and he winked several times.

"Tom," he said, "yez must be my sicond in this awful affair! Wippons—hosepipes! Go and see the Frenchy's sicond, and be quick! Oi shud advoise yez to put on oilskins."

Prout, as solemn as an owl, returned to the galley. The cook elected to have Joe as his second. Joe was found, and immediately volunteered his services. He returned a few minutes before the time, and brought the chef.

Yard of Tape was pale.

"Is it to be to ze death?" he asked.

"Yes," said Joe sadly. "He's a terrible chap, that Irishman. He won't hear anything else. Oh, dear—oh, dear! And I—I was getting so f-f-fond of you!"

Joe's voice broke. and he sobbed loudly. The chef paled several shades more.

"Any last request you've got, old chap, I'll attend to!" said Joe. "There's no hope! He's a dead shot!"

"Zen—zen it is ze pistols?" faltered the chef.

"I've seen him hit a sixpence at thirty yards nine times out of ten," said Joe. "Well, it can't be 'elped! It ain't 'ard to die! Look what millions of people have done it without makin' a fuss! Come along!"

The chef felt a shakiness in his legs. Joe wrung his hand and groaned.

As they went down the passage, Gan-Waga caught them up. He was carrying a chest of surgical instruments, bandages, and a basin. It was not a cheerful sight at all.

They reached the forecastle. Several men were awaiting their arrival. The light was dim, and their faces looked ghastly. Prout advanced to meet Joe, and they whispered together.

"Gentlemen," said Jo, "a deadly insult has been given,

and blows have been struck! The hend must be horful! Again I entreat Mr. Prout to axe his man to apologise."

"My man won't!" said Prout.

"And if I said my man would?"

"Then, by hokey, my man won't have it!"

The chef's knees gave way as if they were tied on with string. The sailors came up to him one by one, sighed deeply, and shook him silently by the hand. Some of them wiped their eyes.

These proceedings, which seemed to hint at an early termination of his earthly career, did not make him very cheerful or comfortable.

"Acting for Mr. O'Rooney," said Prout, "I now gives the terms of this 'ere dooil. Mr. O'Rooney bein' sich a dead-shot, we have made a plan to give his adwersary a chance. The lights is to be put out, and the weppings to be placed in each man's 'and. All of you do a bunk then. When the whistle sounds, start blazin' away! The firin' is to last till the whistle sounds again. Arter that the funeral will take place."

The men filed out, all except the two seconds. Then the lights were extinguished. Barry had not shown himself.

"Here's the gun!" whispered Joe, pointing a long, cold metal object into the Frenchman's hand. "Shoot yer best when the whistle goes!"

"Ar-r-r!" said the cook. "Oh, dear—oh, dear! Vere is ze triggaire?"

"It's a quick-firer!" said Joe. "You screw that round part round to the right. Good-bye!"

He pressed the cook to his breast.

"Be quick wid that signal, and let me slay the thafe!" cried the voice of his foe.

"In a jiffy!" answered Prout. "Are you ready, Joe?"

"Quite!"

"Then get out! Good-bye, cook!"

"G-g-g-good-bye!" sighed the cook faintly.

"I'll write and tell your mother about it," said Joe, "and send her a lock of your 'air."

"Sure, am Oi to wait all night?" yelled Barry.

The door shut with a crash, and the terrified cook dropped on his hands and knees. The weapon felt like a small cannon. He tried to locate Barry by his voice, and levelled the supposed gun in that direction.

Barry had an unfair advantage. He knew where the cook was, and the cook didn't know where he was.

Clear and shrill rang the whistle, and the chef screwed frantically. The jet of water hissed through the darkness. The donkey-engine had been working for several minutes, and had got up a splendid pressure. Down went the cook like an Aunt Sally. His legs got entangled in the hose, that was jumping about like some lively snake. He lost the nozzle in the fall, and the nozzle opened a flank fire on him, which absolutely washed him across the floor. Above the roar of the torrent his wild howls sounded, until Barry silenced every yell out of him. The water drained away under the gratings into the swimming-bath, until the whistle sounded time. Then the lights were switched on, and the solemn-faced men trooped in.

Monsieur, who strongly resembled a very thin gorilla who had tried to swim Niagara Falls, sat in a corner with the hose-pipe twisted round his neck. Barry, the victor, muffled in oilskins, stood with the nozzle of his weapon under his arm, smiling sweetly.

"Did he die easy?" asked Prout.

"Oi didn't hear him squeal much," grinned Barry.

The cook stared round him, and muttered in his mother tongue. Joe picked him up.

"He's a bit out of curl," said Prout. "It must have been raining."

They rubbed him down with towels and gave him a drink. Then they helped him to dress. All the time he never said a word. They placed him in a chair and carried him to the galley fire.

The chef stood up. He went across the galley and opened a cupboard. Then he spun round and felled Barry to the earth with a bag of flour, filling the air with the white dust. Next he seized a large frying-pan, and gave Joe a smite that made him yelp. In three seconds he had cleared the galley, and a shower of hams, eggs, and loaves of bread rattled round the retreating men.

When Prout came back to inspect the position the galley-door was shut. On it was written in chalk:

"Notice, Beware!
I have a loaded revolver within.
My spirit is roused with great anger.
I will shoot!"

(*Another long instalment of this grand serial in next Monday's issue of the "Magnet."*)

FOR HIS MOTHER'S SAKE!

(*Continued from page 22.*)

you should try a mustard-plaster, but I dare say your doctor knows. The mater was going to buy me a pony, but she didn't buy me one, and you can have it.—Your affectionate minor, DICK.

"P.S.—Honest Injun about the poney."

Frank Nugent chuckled, quite his old chuckle. The letter of his minor seemed to have a very cheering effect upon him.

"Good old Dicky!" he said. "I say, Harry, if you stay down here you'll miss the match with the Shell on Saturday."

"Blow the Shell!" said Harry.

"Yes, but the match——"

"Blow the match!"

"It's jolly good of you, Harry, old fellow!"

"Rot!" said Wharton cheerfully.

"I'm not sorry," said Frank, after a long pause. "I—I suppose you've noticed—my people, you know—the pater and mater have made it up. That's a jolly good thing."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"I'm glad, Frank."

"Yes, it's jolly, isn't it? It was worth while getting crocked."

"And you'll be back at Greyfriars in a week or two, Frank. The fellows have all sent messages to you. Inky says his sorrowfulness is terrific."

Frank smiled.

"Even the Bounder's sorry," said Wharton. "He came to me before I started, and asked me to tell you that he was sorry; and he'll tell you so himself when you're back."

"He's not such a bad sort," said Frank.

"No; even the Bounder has his good points," said Harry, nodding. "Bolsover said the same, too, and he meant it. But you mustn't talk any more; I've got to see that you don't."

"Right-ho, Harry!"

Frank lay silent.

He was in pain, and he was very weak. He believed that he would recover, but it would be a long time; he had pain and suffering before him. But he was happy. What he had not dared to hope for had come to pass, and that was enough to bring happiness to his heart.

. . . . . .

It was a week or more before Frank Nugent left his bed. A good constitution had pulled him through, and he was rapidly mending now. When he left his bed it was only to go out in a bathchair, with his chum walking with him, but every day saw an improvement, and Frank was very cheerful.

And what made him happiest was to see the new footing upon which his parents stood. Mr. and Mrs. Nugent, one or both, hardly ever left him. The suffering and anxiety over Frank's sick-bed had drawn them together, and the bond had been so strengthened that it was never likely to be broken again. They had had their lesson, and they had profited by it; and they thanked Heaven, with full hearts, that it had been no worse.

The day came at last when Frank was able to return to the school. He was not quite his old self yet, but he was well, and growing stronger every day. His father and mother and his chum came to Greyfriars with him, and Frank Nugent was given a rousing welcome by his comrades of the Remove. After his people were gone there was quite a reception in No. 1 Study. Coker of the Fifth came to shake hands with him and to congratulate him, and so did Wingate, and the Head himself. Vernon-Smith came into the study later in a rather shamefaced way.

"I'm sorry, Nugent," he said. "I hope you'll forget all about it."

Frank shook hands with the Bounder.

"It's all right," he said. "Thank goodness, it's all over now."

Half the Remove crammed themselves into No. 1 Study to the feed which was stood by the Famous Four to celebrate Frank Nugent's return. Billy Bunter, claiming his rights as Nugent's firmest pal, who had stood by him in time of trouble, insinuated himself into the feed, and greatly distinguished himself in clearing the festive board. But Frank was so happy now that he was cordial even to Billy Bunter.

Frank had suffered; but, like most who suffer for the sake of others, he had had his reward. Peace and love in his home were his reward, and an ample recompense for what he had suffered for his mother's sake.

THE END.

My Readers' Page.

YOUR EDITOR HOPES ALL READERS OF THE "MAGNET" LIBRARY WILL CONTINUE TO BUY THE "PENNY POPULAR," OUT EVERY FRIDAY.

AN EXPLANATION TO READERS OF "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY.

Since the first announcements regarding our new companion paper—THE PENNY POPULAR—have appeared, I have received many hundreds of letters and postcards from Magnetites expressing keen disappointment at the fact that there is no story dealing with Harry Wharton's early schooldays in this new publication. All these reader-friends of mine, however, admit that the combination of Tom Merry, Sexton Blake, and Jack, Sam and Pete is a very splendid one, and without exception they have promised me their practical support in undertaking to subscribe to "The Penny Popular" every Friday.

This is pleasing indeed to me, as Editor of these three weeklies, and in return for such loyalty as shown by all Magnetites I promise they shall not be disappointed.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. ARE NOT FORGOTTEN,

and, in due course of time, complete stories dealing with their early schooldays will appear within the pages of THE PENNY POPULAR. EDITOR:—"THE MAGNET" Library.

"THE TERROR OF GREYFRIARS."

This is the title of next Monday's splendid, long, complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co. The "Terror," by the way, is nothing more awful than the representative of a newspaper conducted upon novel lines, and the manner in which Harry Wharton & Co. entertain the young man makes very amusing reading.

Please order your copy of THE MAGNET Library in advance, and pass your copy, when finished with, on to a non-reader.

"THE PENNY POPULAR."

Well, our new companion paper has been launched, and No. 1 has sold like hot cakes. For this I have to thank all my staunch readers who take such a friendly interest in the ever-popular MAGNET Library. and its Editor.

However, like Oliver Twist, I ask for more, and this week I want my reader-friends to order No. 2 of "The Penny Popular" in advance, and at the same time to order a copy for a friend of theirs who does not happen to read Mr. Frank Richards' and Mr. Martin Clifford's wonderful tales of school life.

The story of Tom Merry & Co. contained in No. 2 of "The Penny Popular"—out on Friday, is entitled:

"A Fight to a Finish!"

and deals with the amusing adventures of Tom Merry in his early schooldays at Clavering.

The other features in No. 2 of our new companion paper are two more splendid complete stories of

Sexton Blake, and Jack, Sam, and Pete.

and are stories which all Magnetites will thoroughly enjoy reading.

Therefore, if you have not already bought No. 1 of "The Penny Popular," buy it to-day, before it is out of print, and, at the same time, ask your newsagent to save you a copy of No. 2, out on Friday.

THE DUTIES OF A REFEREE.

Many fellows, after they have left shool and started business life, often drop football altogether, simply because they have no time for practice and training. If not actually playing, it is sometimes desirable to keep in touch with the game as much as possible, and this can be done by officiating in some capacity or other, such as acting as referee or linesman.

Many would, no doubt, do this, but for the fact that they are not well versed in the duties, and what is expected of a referee. Therefore, perhaps the following few hints may prove of use to those who wish to act as referee or linesman on the football field.

A referee's life is certainly not all honey, as when he is on the field a great deal of responsibility rests upon his shoulders. Therefore, a cool-headed and quick-eyed fellow makes the best referee. When on the field he must, of course, be strictly impartial and fair in all his decisions, even though he be a staunch supporter of the losing team. Again, he must have a thorough knowledge of the game, and the governing laws, especially those out of which knotty points are likely to arise, such as, for instance, the off-side rule—which is perhaps the hardest to understand.

The referee has a great deal of power, but he must be extremely careful how he uses it, as otherwise he is likely to irritate players in each team, and also the spectators. He should show the team that he has strength and determination, and thus gain their confidence and he will soon find the game run smoothly right through.

With regard to the power of the referee. This official is appointed to see that the game is conducted in a gentlemanly and orderly manner, and in accordance with the rules set down by the Football Association, and to decide all points of dispute which are likely to arise. He also has the power to dismiss a player from the field; but he should let this be the last resource to quell any insubordination. Except in the case of violent conduct on the part of one of the players, the offender should always be warned first that if his conduct does not improve he will be dismissed from the field. The referee also has the power to suspend or stop the game for any suitable reason, such as failing light, interference on the part of the spectators, etc. In the event of a team belonging to a league, this stoppage must be reported to the governing officials. So also must any misconduct on the part of the players.

The two linesmen are really helps to the referee, and their duty is to signify when the ball crosses the touch-line, and to decide which side is entitled to the throw-in or corner-kick, as the case may be. Linesmen are somtimes called upon to help settle any dispute which might have arisen, so their undivided attention should be given to watching play and players. At the same time the linesmen should not offer their advice unasked.

A MESSAGE FROM SOME SPECIAL FRIENDS.

I have received particularly interesting and most welcome letters and suggestions from readers who sign themselves as follows: "Irish Boy"; William H., Southport; Lewis Benabo; E. H. W., Kennington; "Well Wisher," Highgate; S. Chown, Northampton; "Manxman," Manchester; "Arthur," Kent; F. E. W., Wolverhampton; "Scotch Lad," Glasgow; H. F. S., N; S. C. C., N. All the above have my very best thanks, and I shall be delighted to hear from any or all again soon.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

B. O. B. (New Malden).—It will cost you 2½d. to send six copies of "The Magnet" Library to Canada.

Miss L. G. (Cardiff).—Thank you for your letter. Alonzo Todd may reappear at some future date.

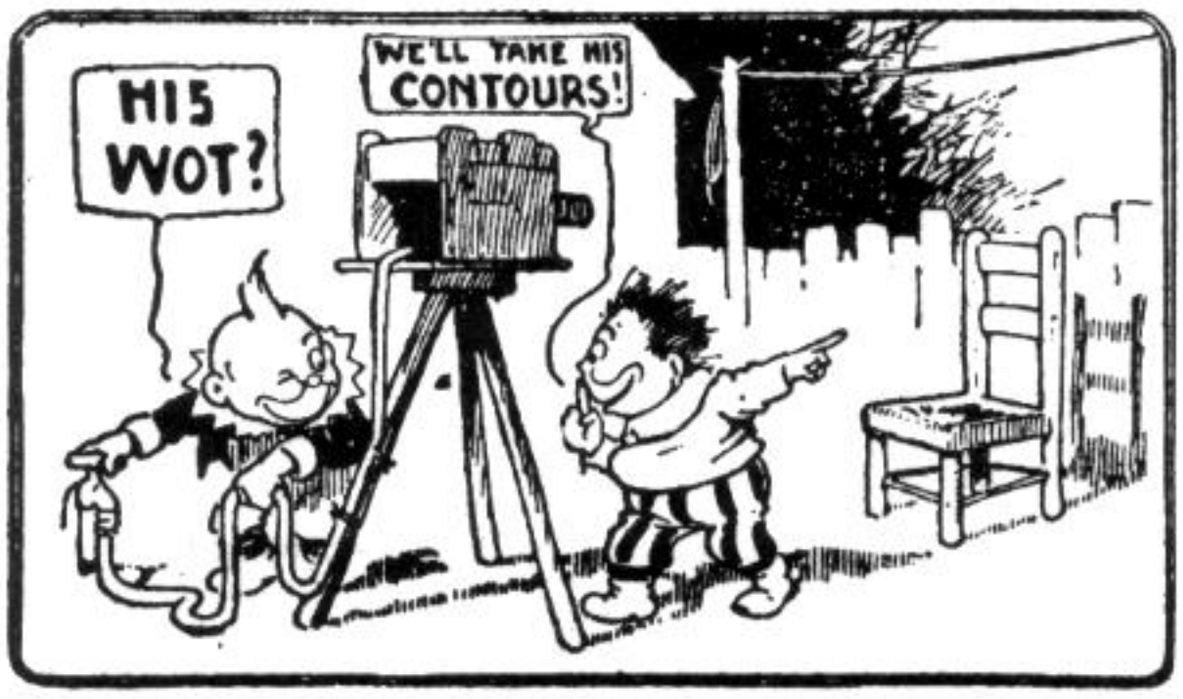
G. Palmer (Bow).—I am sorry I cannot supply you with the information you require from the particulars you supply. You might write to the Editor of "The Exchange and Mart"

J. H. R. (Aberdeen).—Thank you for your letter. A good stamp firm is Stanley Gibbons, 391, Strand, London.

THE EDITOR.

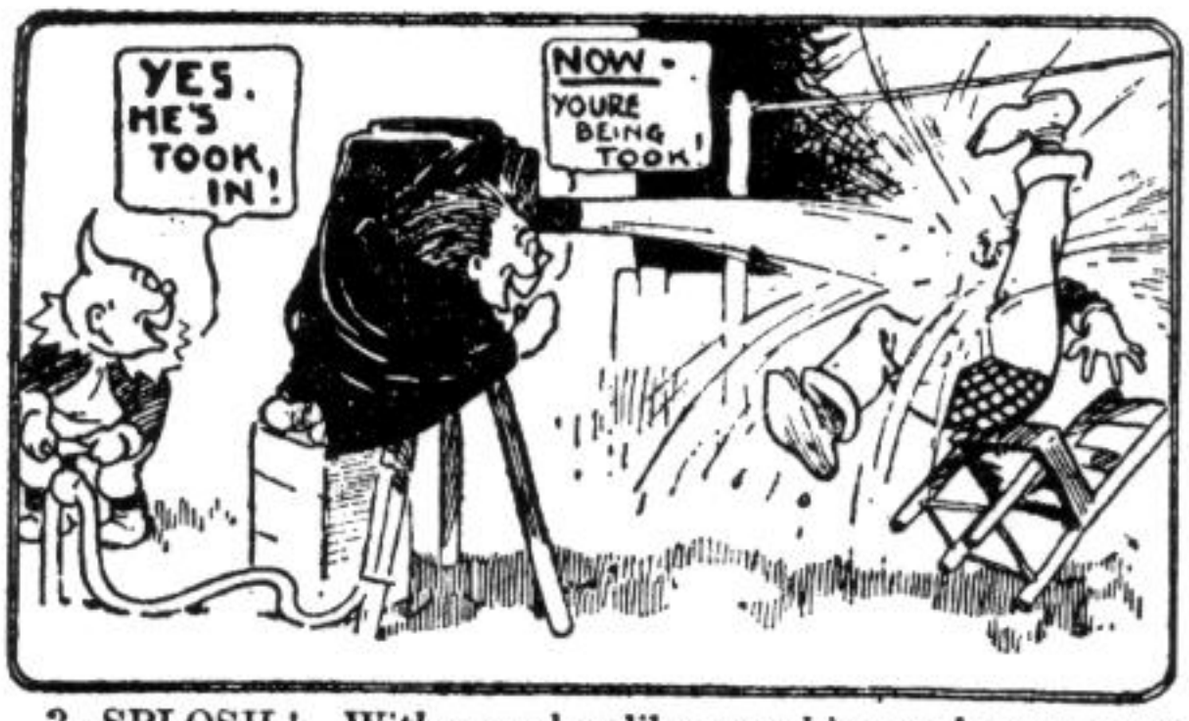
OUR SPLENDID NEW FEATURE!

SPECIAL COMIC SUPPLEMENT.



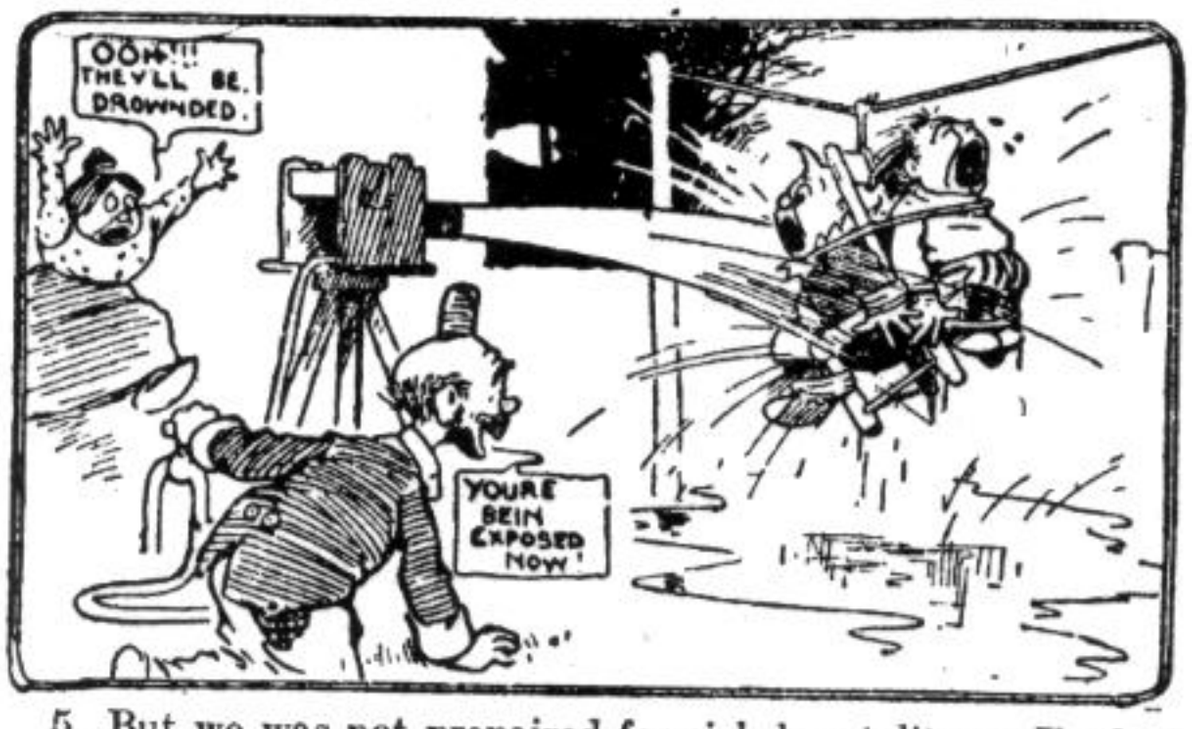
1. Deer Reeders,—We got a pare of old trowsis, a sope-box, and a milk-tin, and maid a nise-lookin' kamera—wid patent wetmatic attachment, as per picture. Sed me: "Let us now take Ike's fotygraff, regardless of expense."

2. Tharefore, we henced to seek him—no, soke him, I meen. But not so much as presently. "Thare's a studdy for a skulpter's koke-hammer," sed me, as Ike posed. Wid that Georgie got the water-tap reddy, and Ike waited pashently for the—



3. SPLOSH! With a socker like smacking a pleeceman on the cheek that liquid kame down on Ike's tomato-kan. "Thare!" said me, huffy like. "Now you've spoiled the pikture throo moovin." "Gurr-rr-rr!" bawled Ike, "I've been assassidgenated!"

4. "Heer's a fine thing!" I sed haughtily, as Ike put me and Georgie closer than bruthers. "We kum out to take yure fotygraff, and this is how you reward us! Oh! You ungratitood, you!"



5. But we was not prepaired for sich brootality as Ike had up his sleev for us. Squish! He turned the tap, and we kopt about fiftyteen gallons of nise, fresh drink in the kollar-stud. "How do you like it?" ast Ike. "It'll be all over in half an hour, deer boys, so don't git flurried."

6. Reeders, why is it that littel boys—and good ones, too—nevver has thare part taken? We wonder. Insted of ma takin hold of Ike, and gettin' him reddy for the hospital, blest if she diddent lissen to his yarn, and BELEEVE wha the tole her!"

FERDY, The Bunsey Boy.

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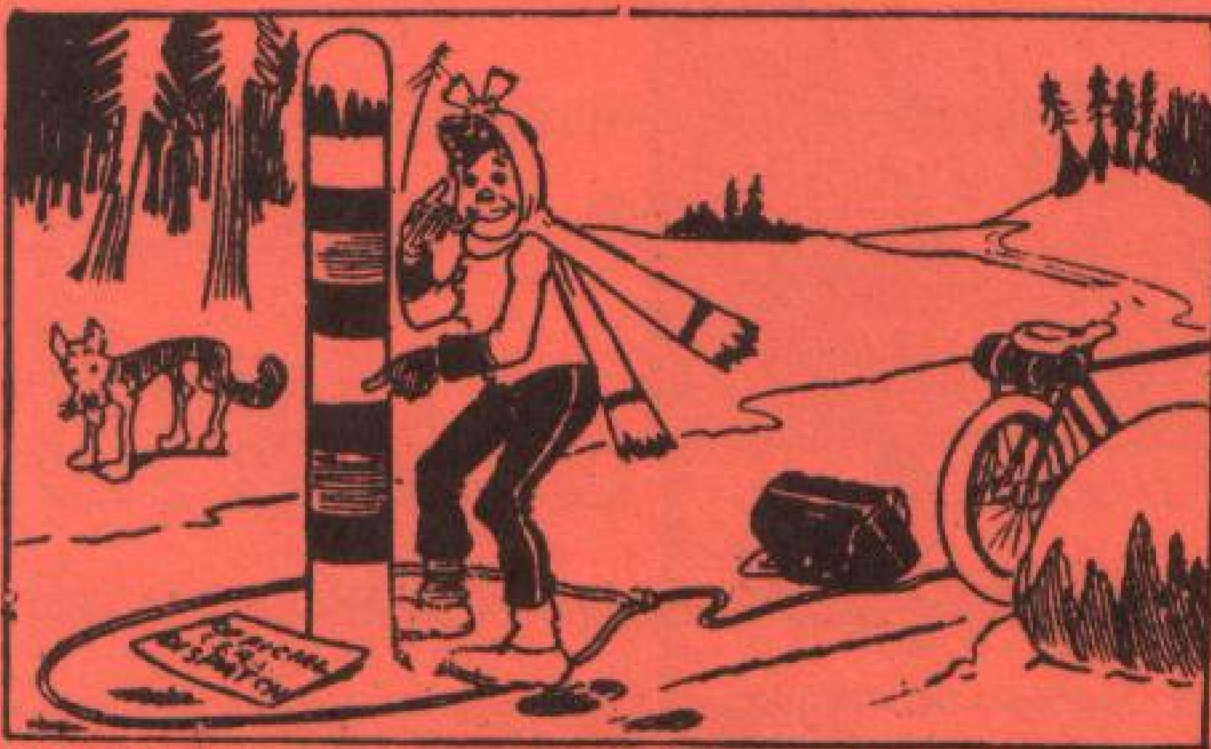
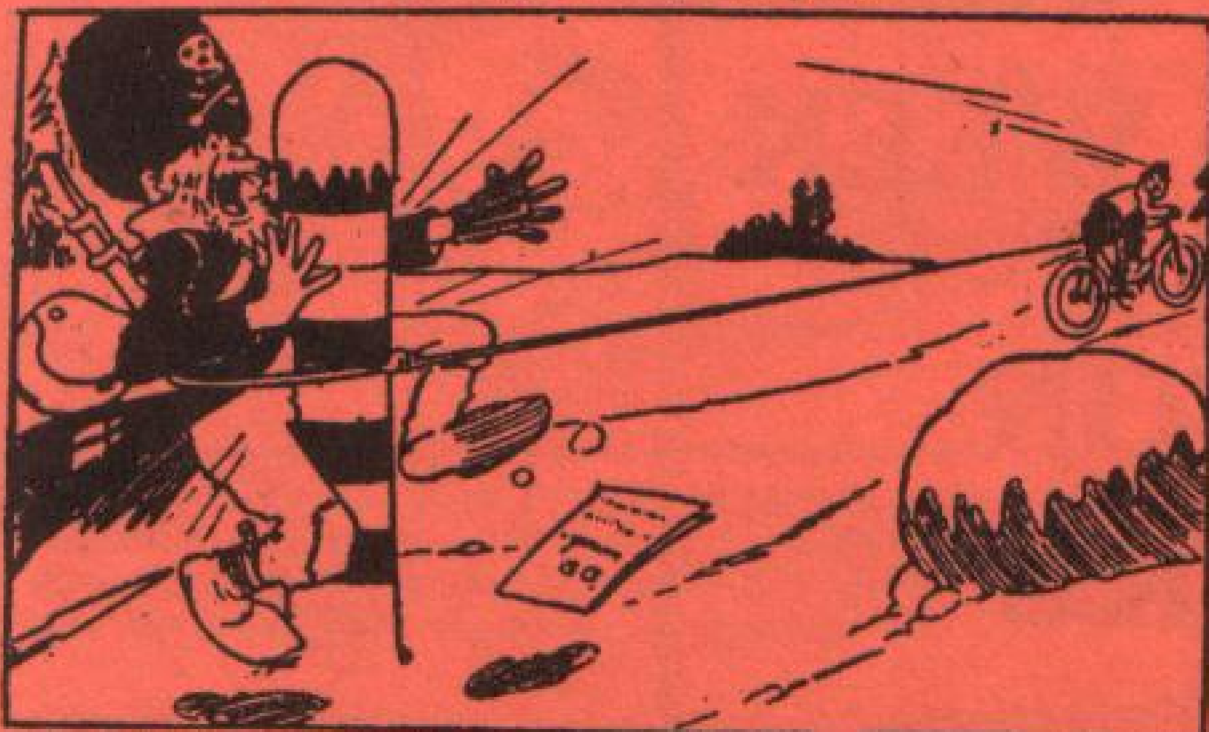
A POLE-ISH RUSSIAN STORY!



1. Bobby Bang was scouting in Russia, where the Cossacks come from. And one of the Cossacks was hot on Bobby's track. "What ho!" chortled our young hero. "Half a mo', whiskers, I'm getting it ready for you."

2. Then did the bright Bobby fix up his little trap. Concealing his cycle behind a handy lump of rock, he arranged a loop, so, and waited. "Great Scottski! Notabitofackovitch," gurgled the Cossack, as he picked up the dispatch.



3. "Not so fast, old son!" tootled our merry Boblet, as, jumping on his bike, he brought the Russian gentleman up with a nasty bang. "You're beaten on the post this time, old fellah, I think."

4. "Now, then, laddie, right—left—right—left, back to camp," cried Bob. "You've got a bigger tying up than you expected, haven't you?" And the Cossack said,——"phoo! we couldn't tell you even if you understood Russian."

A "WIRELESS" JOKE!

1. "Thank goodness!" gasped the explorer. "There's a telegraph pole. I thought I was lost in the wilds! What a relief. I'm on the right track to civilisation after all."

2. But after he'd climbed up to it and found this was what he thought was a telegraph pole, he *was* wild, and said some strong words.

HALF SHARE!

"Pa said we were to use the sleigh between us."

"So he did, and ain't I following his instructions? I will go down the hill on the sleigh, and you can pull it up again."

HIS FATAL BEAUTY!

Lady: "And what has brought you to this condition?"

Weary Willie: "It's me fatal gift of beauty, mam. All the ladies fell in love with me, and I 'ad to spend all me money givin' 'em presents."