

"THE LORD OF LOST ISLAND!"

Brilliant New "Tec Story STARTS TO-DAY!

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The Magnet

2^d
EVERY SATURDAY.

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GOOD RIDDANCE TO BAD RUBBISH!

(A "morning" incident from the grand school story of Greyfriars, inside.)



CONFOUNDING THE CRITICS!

Naval architects were not too hopeful of Mr. W. F. W. Davies' idea of a hydro-glider, as shown in the photo above, being successful. In fact, some of them were scornful. But after five years of experimenting, Mr. Davies perfected his craft and succeeded in skimming the waters of the River Severn at a speed of thirty miles an hour. With a passenger, weighing fourteen stone, the speed was reduced to twenty-eight miles per hour. This glider is driven by an air-screw and a motor-cycle engine of only 5.96 c.c. Hydro-gliding is destined to be a thrilling and popular sport in the near future, and not too expensive at that.

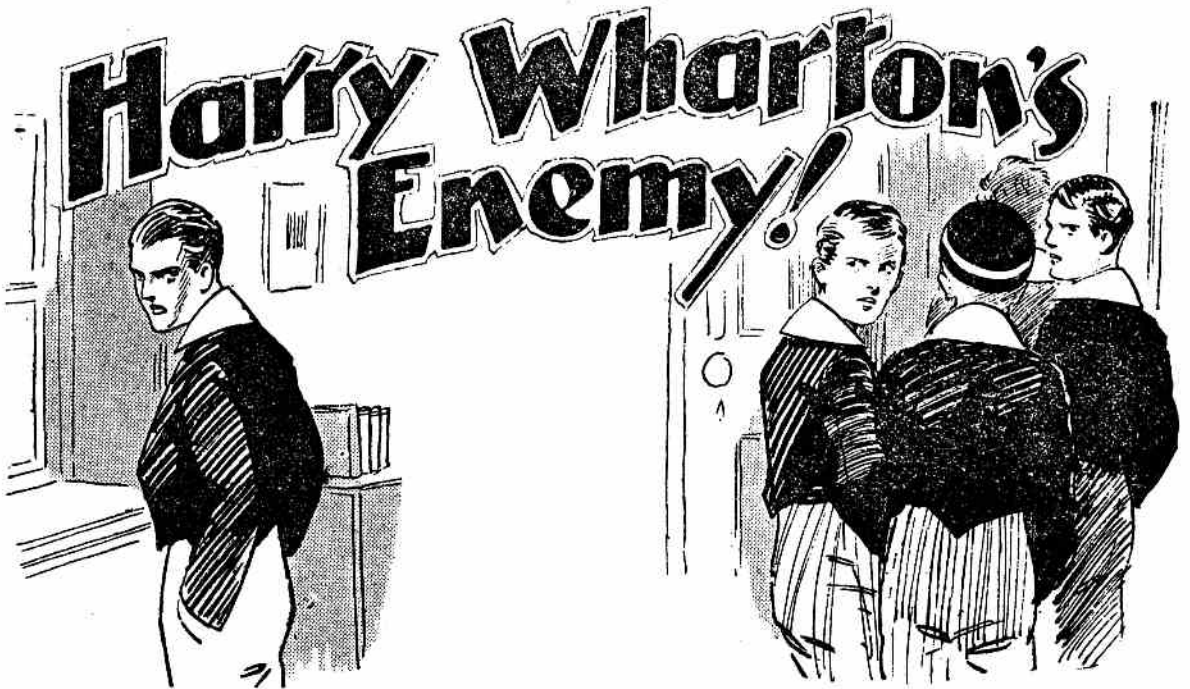


"LONGFELLOW!"

Here's a picture of Tommy Long, the world-famous stilt dancer, snapped with a "handful" of mischief in Berlin. Tommy can do almost anything on stilts, being as much at home on his wooden "perches" as you and I are on our feet. Stilt walkers, however, should be careful where they tread, and should bear in mind the plight of the youngster who found himself stranded in the middle of a swampy ground, unable to move either one "foot" or the other, and who was obliged to wait for a couple of hours until some boards could be put down over the treacherous ground and he could be rescued from his lofty perch.



THE FOURTH ATTEMPT! Three times has Da Costa, the boy from the East, laid a snare for his enemy, Harry Wharton, and three times has his victim escaped. But failure only makes Da Costa more keen than ever to carry out his nefarious purpose, and he springs his fourth attempt this week!



A rousing long complete school story of Harry Wharton & Co., the chums of Greyfriars, and Da Costa, the new boy from the East. By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter in Request!

WHARTON!"
 "Hallo!"
 "Where's Bunter?"
 Harry Wharton did not answer that question immediately.

He smiled.
 Coker of the Fifth paused, like Brutus, for a reply. Like Brutus, he paused in vain.

On the Remove landing five juniors of that celebrated Form were discussing the prospects of the Rookwood match when Coker of the Fifth loomed into the offing.

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent sat side by side on the balustrade. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull leaned against the wall. Hurree Janset Ram Singh sat in the window. The Famous Five of Greyfriars were in a cheery mood, due largely to the fact that Johnny Bull had received a handsome remittance from his Auntie Bull, which he was nobly expending in a study spread.

In Study No. 1, Billy Bunter was getting tea—on a large scale. Billy Bunter, having given himself an invitation to the spread, was assigned the task of getting tea—a task that was quite agreeable to William George Bunter. Few forms of exertion appealed to Bunter, but he could always be relied upon in a matter of that sort.

The cheery conversation on the Remove landing was interrupted by Coker.

With a red and angry face, Horace Coker came up the Remove staircase and hooted inquiry at the captain of the Remove.

A civil question required a civil answer; but Coker's question was not civil. Coker never could get the idea out of his head that the Remove men were fags, and could be treated just as a great man of the Fifth liked. Often and often had this belief led Horace Coker into thorny paths. Often and

often had it landed him in trouble. Now it looked like landing him again.

"Do you hear me, Wharton?"
 "I could hear you at the other end of the Remove passage, old bean!" said Wharton mildly. "Why yell?"

"I don't want any cheek!" roared Coker. "I've asked you a question! I've come here for Bunter!"

"You want Bunter?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Yes!" hooted Coker.
 "No accounting for tastes! Fancy anybody wanting Bunter, you fellows!"

"Where is he?" roared Coker.
 "If you're going to ask Bunter to tea, there's nothing doing!" remarked Wharton. "Bunter's teasing with us to-day!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Co., greatly entertained by the expression on Horace Coker's speaking countenance.

The suggestion that he might be asking a Lower Fourth fag to tea was really too much for Coker.

"You — you — you cheeky young sweep!" gasped Coker. "For two pins I'd mop up this landing with you!"

"I haven't any pins about me!" said the captain of the Remove regretfully. "But will you do it for nothing, Coker? Do!"

"Do!" urged Bob Cherry.
 "Oh, do!" implored Johnny Bull.

Coker breathed hard with wrath. He was tempted to rush on the Famous Five and smite them hip and thigh. Perhaps a recollection lingered in his mind of the last time he had smitten the Famous Five hip and thigh, however. On that occasion Coker had been reduced to a state beyond recognition by his dearest friends.

"I want Bunter!" gasped Coker. "The little beast has pinched a pie from my study!"
 "Oh!"

"Where is he?" roared Coker. "You know where he is! I know that! I haven't come here for you cheeky fags!

I want Bunter! I'm going to slaughter him! Where is he?"

Coker's powerful voice could be heard the length of the Remove passage.

Undoubtedly it was audible in Study No. 1.

But if Billy Bunter heard it, he heeded not. Bunter did not want to see Coker of the Fifth just then. Like Brer Fox, William George Bunter lay low and said "nuffin."

"I dare say you young rotters were in it with him!" added Coker, with scorn.

"In the pie?" asked Nugent, in astonishment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean, in the game with him to bag my pie! You know what I mean! I dare say you put him up to it! Anyhow, Bunter had it, and I want Bunter! Tell me where that fat slug is—see?"

There was a pause.

Billy Bunter had a weakness for other fellow's tuck. Cakes and tarts and pies never were safe when Bunter was in the offing. Nearly every fellow in the Remove had kicked Bunter for it—not once, but many times. Mr. Quelch, the Remove master, had caned him for it. Bunter was not of the stuff that heroes are made of, but he would run many risks for a pie or a bag of tarts. If Bunter really had bagged a pie from Coker's study, the Famous Five felt that Horace was entitled to kick Bunter. That was only fair; they kicked him for such things themselves, and Horace was entitled to a free kick.

Still, Bunter was a Remove man, though not exactly a credit to the Form. Coker was a domineering Fifth Form man. In ordinary circumstances, the fact that a pie was missing would have been taken as circumstantial evidence that Bunter was guilty. But in these circumstances, Harry Wharton & Co. decided that it was a matter requiring proof. A Remove man was not to be

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kicked by a Fifth-Former on mere suspicion.

"Now, let's have this straight!" said Harry Wharton. "If Bunter has been grub-raiding in your study, Coker, we'll hand him over to justice! That's only fair! You're sure the pie is missing?"

"Yes!" roared Coker.

"Did you see Bunter scoff it?"

"Was he likely to let me see him?" hooted Coker. "I've been down at the cricket. When I came in I looked in my study cupboard. The pie was gone. I haven't come here to jaw to you fags! I want Bunter!"

"How do you know it was Bunter?"

"I do know!"

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"You can't kick a Remove man on that, Coker! If you've got any evidence, trot it out! We'll give you a hearing!"

"The heartfulness will be terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "Go aheadfully, my esteemed Coker!"

Coker glared at the Famous Five. It was miles beneath his dignity, as a great man of the Fifth, to bandy words with juniors. Coker was not going to bandy words with them. Besides, he had no proof that Bunter had bagged the pie. Yet he knew Bunter of old. But that was not proof, and the heroes of the Remove wanted confirmation before they allowed a Fifth Form man to kick a Remove man.

"You're in with him!" roared Coker. "I've a jolly good mind to thrash the lot of you! But I'm after Bunter! I'll kick that fat scoundrel from one end of Greyfriars to the other!"

And Coker, resisting once more a temptation to smite the Famous Five hip and thigh, strode on up the Remove passage.

As his heavy footsteps approached the open doorway of Study No. 1 there was a terrified squeak from the study.

"I say, you fellows, keep him off!"

Evidently Bunter had heard!

"Oh, there you are, are you, you fat villain?" roared Coker of the Fifth.

"Ow! No!" roared Bunter. "I—I'm not here—I mean, I never had the pie! Yarooogh! Help!"

Bunter was in need of help. Coker rushed into the study. Like one man, the Famous Five of the Remove rushed after Coker. They were just in time. Coker's hefty grasp was closing on the Owl of the Remove, when five pairs of hands were laid on Coker. Bunter dodged round the study, with a terrified squeak. Horace Coker rolled on the study carpet, roaring.

He was still roaring when he rolled down the Remove staircase. He roared still more loudly when he reached the next landing. He sat up on that landing, and by his vocal efforts seemed to be emulating the celebrated bull of Bashan.

"Coming up again, Coker?" called out Bob Cherry cheerily.

"Oh, do, Coker!"

But Coker didn't!

Coker was still convinced that Bunter had had the pie. He still yearned to visit condign punishment upon the head of that unscrupulous scoffer of other fellows' tuck. Still more keenly did he yearn to mop up the Remove passage with Harry Wharton & Co. But he restrained these natural yearnings. Coker had had enough—enough to go on with, at all events. Instead of coming up, he went down, and a cheery chuckle from the Famous Five followed him.

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THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Tea in Study No. 1!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Where's Bunter?"

Harry Wharton & Co., having disposed of Coker of the Fifth, walked cheerily into Study No. 1. They were ready for tea, and they expected to find tea ready, and Bunter more than ready. But the Owl of the Remove was not to be seen.

"Bunter!" roared Bob.

"I say, you fellows!" A fat voice squeaked from under the study table.

"I say, is he gone?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The gonefulness is terrific, my esteemed funky Bunter," chuckled Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Crawl out, you fat frog!" said Nugent.

"Sure he's gone?"

"Yes, ass!"

Billy Bunter crawled out from his hiding-place. He blinked round uneasily through his big spectacles, evidently in dread of seeing Coker of the Fifth in the offing. But the coast was clear, and Bunter recovered his courage.

"Cheeky cad," he remarked, "making out that I had his pie! I had a jolly good mind to knock him down, you know."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Did you bag Coker's pie?" demanded Wharton.

"I hope I'm not a fellow to bag anybody's pie," said Bunter, with dignity.

"I hope I'm above such things! Besides, I should never have looked into Coker's study at all if you fellows had told me you were having a spread here. You see, I didn't know that at the time."

"Then you did bag the pie?"

"Certainly not. Coker is a suspicious beast. The fact is," said Bunter sorrowfully, "there are a lot of suspicious fellows at Greyfriars. Fellows pick on me. Look at the way that nigger fellow, Da Costa, made a fuss when his cake went. Practically accused me of bagging it. Me, you know!"

"And you didn't?"

"I never even knew the fellow had a cake. Besides, it was a measly cake, hardly a plum in it—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. As for Coker's pie, I never had anything to do with it. Serve him jolly well right to lose it, too; he's a bully. Oh, chuck up cackling, you fellows. Tea's ready. I'm standing my whack in this spread, as I told you."

"You told us so, certainly," said the captain of the Remove, laughing, "but I don't see the whack."

"The whackfulness is not visible to the esteemed eye, Bunter."

"That's all right—I'm fetching it in," said Bunter. "You fellows always make out that I never stand my whack. You'll alter your tune this time, when you see my pie—"

"Pie!" yelled the Famous Five with one voice.

"Yes, a topping pie. Enormous!" said Bunter. "A regular whacker of a pie. One of Mrs. Mimbble's very best! You fellows will like that pie."

Harry Wharton & Co. gazed at William George Bunter. Seldom or never did William George stand his "whack" in a spread; generally he contented himself with taking the lion's share of the spread. On this occasion, apparently, he was contributing a pie; and without being unduly suspicious, the Famous Five could not help thinking that that pie had been inexpensively obtained in the Fifth Form passage.

"I've got it in the box-room," said

Bunter. "I thought I'd put it there for safety till—till— I mean, just for safety, you know. There are fellows in the Remove who would scoff a fellow's pie and think nothing of it."

"My only hat!" said Bob Cherry. "You frabjous fat foolzer, it's Coker's pie, I suppose?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Is it Coker's pie?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"How could it be Coker's pie when it's my pie?" demanded Bunter peevishly.

"Don't talk rot!"

"Where did you get it?"

"It came specially from Bunter Court," explained the Owl of the Remove. "Our cook at home makes ripping pies. The mater had it made specially for me and sent here. See?"

"Great pip! And you've already said that it was one of Mrs. Mimbble's best pies," said Harry Wharton. "Has Mrs. Mimbble given up keeping the tuckshop here, and gone as cook to Bunter Court?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nunno! I mean—"

"Well, what do you mean?" demanded the captain of the Remove. "You've bagged Coker's pie, you fat fraud, and you were going to whack it out here. You can leave it where it is."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Keep your esteemed hands from the pickfulness and stealfulness, Bunter," advised Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"We ought to have let Coker scalp him, after all," remarked Johnny Bull.

"Look here, you fellows, do you want to whack out that pie, or don't you want to whack out that pie?" hooted Bunter. "It's a splendid pie—a really ripping pie! I'm standing it! I think you might be decent about it, when I'm standing the biggest whack in a spread."

"It's Coker's pie!" roared Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry! How could it be Coker's pie when I ordered it specially from Chunkley's in Courtfield?" demanded Bunter. "I—I mean, when it was specially sent from Coker's study—I mean, Bunter Court. It's pretty sickening that a fellow's own pals can't take a fellow's word."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why did they send him to Greyfriars instead of to a home for idiots?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Goodness knows!"

"Oh, really, you fellows—"

"You'll leave that pie where it is, Bunter," said the captain of the Remove. "After tea, you'll take it back to Coker's study. We'll jolly well see that you do."

"If you think I'm going to give Coker my pie, Wharton—"

"Shut up!"

"Beast!"

The pie, whether Coker's or Bunter's, did not figure on the festive board in Study No. 1. Fortunately, there was plenty without William George Bunter's promised "whack." Tea in No. 1 was going strong, when Hazeldene of the Remove came along the passage, and Bob Cherry hailed him through the open doorway.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Hazel!"

Hazel stopped and glanced in without entering the study, however.

"I say, Cherry, shut up, you ass!" said Billy Bunter, in a stage whisper. "We don't want any more to tea."

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Look here, it's a bit of luck that fellow Da Costa being out of gates—he would expect to join up if he was in. I say— Yarooogh! Stop stamping on my foot, you beast!" yelled Bunter.

"Trot in, Hazel, old man!" called out Harry Wharton. "Lots and lots, and room for a giddy guest."



"I say, Cherry, shut up, you ass!" whispered Billy Bunter, as Bob Cherry hailed Hazeldene. "We don't want any more to tea—" "Shut up, Bunter!" "But, I say—Yaroooh!" The Owl of the Remove broke off with a yell as Bob stamped on his foot. (See Chapter 2.)

Hazel did not come in. He glanced at the captain of the Remove, and there was a faint sneer on his face.

"Thanks all the same, I won't," he said.

And Hazel walked on up the passage. "What's up with Hazel?" asked Bob. "I know jolly well that he's stony, and looking for a tea up the passage. Why won't he tea in here?"

Harry bit his lip. Hazel was not a particularly agreeable fellow, his chief recommendation being that he was the brother of Marjorie Hazeldene of Cliff House School. But Wharton's invitation had been cheery and spontaneous, and Hazel's refusal anything but friendly.

"I say, you fellows, thank goodness he's gone," said Bunter. "I say, shut the door, Nugent. Pass the tarts, Wharton."

It was Bunter's custom to be the longest at a feed, taking care that nothing eatable was left on the table. But on this occasion Bunter, wondrous to relate, rose before the other fellows had quite finished.

"Well, I must be off," he remarked. "Sorry I can't stop longer; but my time isn't really my own, you know. You know how it is with a fellow with so many friends."

"Stop where you are, Bunter."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Kick him if he goes near the door, Bob!"

"You bet!"

"Look here, you fellows, I really must be off!" exclaimed Bunter. "I've got to go to the box-room—I mean I've got an appointment with Wibley in his study. He wants me to give him some tips about a Shakespeare recitation."

"Wibley can wait!" grinned Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter blinked wrathfully at the Famous Five. He was anxious to get to the box-room and place the pie in a safer quarter before the chums of the Remove had finished tea. Taking that pie back to Coker's study was not Bunter's idea at all.

He made a movement towards the door—and Bob Cherry made a movement with his boot. Bunter backed hastily.

"I say, you fellows, I've really got to go," he urged. "Quelchy told me to come to his study immediately after tea."

"Go hon!"

"A fellow can't keep his Form master waiting. Quelchy gets into no end of a bate if a fellow keeps him waiting."

"Quelchy will have to rip this time!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"The—the fact is I've got to see the Head!" gasped Bunter. "Dr. Locke stopped me in the quad, you know, and told me to come to his study. 'Don't be late, Bunter!' he said—just like that. I say, you fellows, it's frightfully bad form to keep the Head waiting."

"For once in your life, you'll have to be guilty of bad form!" said Frank Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you beasts, I've got to go!" roared Bunter. "I've got to see the Head in the box-room—I—I mean in his study, and—and—" William George Bunter approached the doorway again.

"Kick him, Bob!"

"What-ho!"

Bunter jumped back just in time.

"You—you beasts!" he gasped. "Look here, I'm jolly well not going to take that pie back to Coker—see? It's my pie! I paid Mrs. Mumble ten shillings for that pie in hard cash."

"Wasn't it rather extravagant to pay Mrs. Mumble for a pie that was sent specially from Bunter Court?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!"

William George Bunter did not leave Study No. 1 until the Co. were ready to accompany him. Then he rolled dismally to the Remove box-room in the company of five juniors. Bunter was a gregarious fellow, and as a rule he liked company. On the present occasion, however, he could have dispensed with it with pleasure. But his company was not to be dispensed with, and Billy Bunter and the Famous Five arrived at the Remove box-room together.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Out of Bounds!

COKER of the Fifth halted suddenly. "Well!" he ejaculated. Potter and Greene of the Fifth halted also. They halted because Coker halted. It was not that they found Coker's company so fascinating that they could not bear to part with him. But the three Fifth Form men were heading for Uncle Clegg's shop in the village, where ice-creams were to be had—and Coker was going to stand the ice-creams. In these circumstances, Potter and Greene did not want to lose Coker. In other circumstances they might have lost him cheerfully, without taking the trouble to inquire what had become of him.

"Well!" repeated Coker. His tone was deep with surprise, indignation, and wrath. The three men of the Fifth were about to enter Friar-dale, and to enter the village they had to pass the spot where the Cross Keys public-house stood. The Cross Keys lay well back from the road, with a wide open space, several trees, and a muddy horse-trough in front of it. Any Greyfriars man who turned off the road in the direction of the Cross Keys was liable to all sorts of pains and penalties if discovered by the school authorities. Any public-house, of course, was out of bounds for Greyfriars men; and the Cross Keys was a place with a very specially disreputable reputation. Coker of the Fifth halted in front of the Cross Keys, and half-turned towards the building.

"I say, old bean, we can't go in there," said Potter. "Out of bounds, you know! Come on!"

"You silly chump!"

"Hem!" said Potter.

"If you think I was thinking of going into the disreputable hole, George Potter, it only shows what a silly idiot you are!" explained Coker.

"Well, come on, then!"

"Did you see that chap?"

"What chap?"

"A Remove kid."

"Blow the Remove kids! I didn't see one—and don't want to. Look here, what are we hanging about for?" asked Potter sulkily.

Coker was staring towards the Cross Keys. He had seen—he was sure he had seen—a Greyfriars junior emerge from a field-path into the side lane that ran up beside the public-house. He had not only seen the junior, but had recognised him, so there was no doubt about it. Such a sight naturally stirred Horace Coker's ire and indignation.

Had Coker been a Sixth Form man and a prefect, it would have been his business to look into such a matter. Being a Fifth Form man, and not a prefect, it was not Coker's business at all to look into such a matter. But that made no difference to Coker. It was Coker's way to take a kindly interest in many things that did not concern him.

"That young sweep has gone into that low pub!" said Coker. "I saw him cut across the field and go in at the back."

"No business of ours!" remarked Greene. "We're not prefects."

"We're not prefects," agreed Coker. "The Head doesn't see fit to make Fifth Form men prefects! Old-fashioned, you know—a bit stodgy! I've told you fellows before what I think of the Head's methods."

Coker had—many times! Potter and Greene could only hope that he was not going to tell them again.

"This won't do," said Coker. "That

kid is a foreigner, new to this country, and he's getting into mischief. His name is—Buster, or something—I forget. A sort of nigger, or half-nigger, or something of the sort. He would get a flogging if he was found out."

"Serve him right!"

"That's so—that's what he wants!" agreed Coker. "But we're not prefects, and we can't very well report him."

"I suppose the Fifth are not going to begin sneaking, like measly little fags, in the Second!" remarked Potter sarcastically.

"Don't be an idiot, Potter!"

"Hem!"

"We can't report him," said Coker. "But I can't allow this sort of thing to go on. That young sweep Da Costa is actually in the pub now."

"Do you want to go in and hook him out?"

Coker paused.

Coker was not much given to thinking. But even Coker paused at the idea of entering such a place as the Cross Keys. His motives were good, of course—Coker's motives always were good. But if he were seen entering such a place he might be misunderstood. In fact, it was pretty certain that he would be misunderstood. Certainly it would not be the first time that Coker had been misunderstood—a fellow who minded so many other fellows' business as well as his own could not fail to be misunderstood quite frequently.

Coker thought it out, while Potter and Greene watched him anxiously. They did not, of course, expect Coker to have any sense; they knew him too well for that. But they expected him to have a limit.

"I think I'd better look into the matter," said Coker at last. "I can't leave it where it is. If masters are careless, and prefects neglect their duty, somebody must look after things—what? I feel bound to look into this."

"But—" said Potter and Greene together, in dismay.

"Don't jaw! You fellows come along with me; I shall want you to back me up if there's a row or a shindy, you know, with those loafers who hang round the place."

Potter and Greene exchanged a look. The prospect of showing their way into the Cross Keys and having a row or a shindy with the loafers there made them feel quite faint.

"Come on!" said Coker briskly.

Potter and Greene did not come on. They went on. At an accelerated pace they walked into the village.

Coker stared after them.

"Potter!" he roared. "Greene!"

Potter and Greene turned a deaf ear each. The prospect of ice-creams at Uncle Clegg's was fading. Without Coker there would be no ice-creams. But a mountain of ice-creams, a Pelion of ice-creams piled upon an Ossa of ice-creams, would not have bribed Potter and Greene to join in a row at the Cross Keys. They did not answer Coker, or look round; they accelerated a little more, and disappeared into the village street.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Coker.

He hurried after Potter and Greene. Potter and Greene accelerated still more, and Coker was fairly running by the time he overtook them outside Uncle Clegg's tuckshop in the village High Street. At that point Potter and Greene halted, as if by instinct.

For five minutes Horace Coker told his faithless friends what he thought of them. He told them they were funks, frabjous fatheads, base deserters, and several other things like that. Potter and Greene listened meekly, with one

eye each on Uncle Clegg's shop. They were accustomed to letting old Horace blow off steam. It was the only way to live a peaceful life in their study at Greyfriars. When Coker paused for breath, Potter remarked reproachfully:

"You were going to tell us about that

late cut of yours, Coker."

Coker was taking in a supply of breath for a new tirade. But at that remark he paused.

Coker, who knew as much about cricket as the man in the moon, was always ready to give instruction on that topic. He was willing to give instruction on all subjects, of course—having, like Lord Bacon of old, taken all knowledge for his province. But games were his favourite subject. On that topic Coker was inexhaustible, and, to a certain extent, entertaining. The information he imparted might not be of much value; but it always made a fellow hilarious to reflect that Coker thought he knew something about cricket.

"Wasting time on Remove fags, when we wanted to hear about that late cut of yours!" said Greene, more in sorrow than in anger.

Coker melted.

"I've a jolly good mind not to now!" he said. "Still, I feel bound to help you fellows on in games. Let's get in out of this sun and sit down. An ice-cream wouldn't come amiss."

And all was calm and bright!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Mysterious!

BILLY BUNTER was adorning the doorway with his fat person, blinking out dully into the quad, when Coker of the Fifth came in. Bunter's face was clouded, and he seemed plunged into the deepest depression of spirits. The fat junior had been through an experience that was not only painful, but tragic.

To use Shakespeare's vigorous language, "On horrors' head, horrors had accumulated." The pie—Bunter's pie, or Coker's pie, whichever it was, no longer reposed in its hiding-place in the box-room. It did not even repose inside Bunter's fat circumference, which had been its intended destination.

Under the ruthless eyes of the Famous Five—stern as Nemesis, implacable as Fate—Bunter had carried that pie back to Coker's study in the Fifth Form passage, and replaced it in Coker's cupboard there. That huge and luscious pie, for which somebody, if not Bunter, had paid Mrs. Mibble ten shillings, was gone from Bunter's gaze like a beautiful dream. He could not forget it. Though lost to sight, it was to memory dear.

Many sad partings have been described in history and romance, such as the great Napoleon's parting with the throne that did not belong to him, Wolsey's farewell to his deflated greatness, and sad Calypso waiting when Ulysses went a-sailing. Such trifles as these were quite eclipsed by Billy Bunter's parting with Coker's pie.

If Bunter had had tears to shed he would have shed them now. Time is said to be a great healer; but time, instead of healing Bunter's grief, only made it worse. An hour having elapsed since the spread in Study No. 1, Bunter was, naturally, getting hungry again. Instead of Time's healing hand slowly but surely assuaging his sorrow, therefore, every minute that passed added to its bitterness.

Bunter looked on the quad, and the universe, with a dark and morose eye

and a pessimistic scowl, when Horace Coker came in. He blinked at Coker resentfully. It was the absurd fuss that Coker had made about that pie that was the cause of Bunter's present almost broken-hearted state.

Coker came in alone. After the ice-creams at Uncle Clegg's, Potter and Greene had mysteriously disappeared. Possibly they had heard enough about that wonderful late cut of Coker's.

Coker spotted Bunter and stopped. The Owl of the Remove prepared to dodge.

"Oh! You!" said Coker.

He gave the fat junior a grim look.

"You bagged my pie!" he said.

Bunter did not take the trouble to answer. The fellow was not worth answering. He stood ready to dodge if Coker proceeded to assault and battery. But that was not the Fifth Form man's intention. Coker had thought this matter over, and decided upon other methods.

"I was going to deal with you myself!" he said grimly. "I was ragged by a mob of fags when I came up to the Remove passage. Well, if you prefer a prefect to take the matter up, well and good! I'm fed-up with your pilfering tuck, Bunter. A fellow can't call grub his own with you around! If you'd taken the licking I was going to give you, I'd have dropped it at that. You've got yourself to thank for what's going to happen now."

And Coker, with great dignity and restraint, walked on to Wingate's study. Bunter blinked after him.

Slowly a fat grin overspread his visage.

His grief for the lost pie, which had seemed inconsolable, was assuaged at last. Horace Coker had assuaged it! Bunter, as he saw Coker tap on Wingate's door in the Sixth Form passage, was actually glad that the Famous Five had made him carry that pie back to where it belonged.

Coker entered Wingate's study. The captain of Greyfriars was there with Gwynne of the Sixth, and neither of the great men looked glad to see Coker. That did not matter to Coker, however. Fellows never were so glad as they ought to have been to see Coker.

"You're head prefect, Wingate," began Coker.

Wingate looked at him.

"Did you come here to tell me that?" he asked gently. "Thanks, but I was quite aware of it. Shut the door after you."

"I went to the Remove passage this afternoon to thrash a junior for bagging a pie from my study."

"Like your cheek!" said the captain of Greyfriars. "You have no right to lick juniors, and you know it as well as I do."

"I was ragged by a mob of fags."

"Good!"

"Oh, jolly good, no doubt!" said Coker saccatically. "But it happens that I don't like pies being scooped out of my study, and I'm jolly well not going to stand it, see?"

"If you're reporting the matter to me as head-prefect—"

"You've got it! I should have preferred to deal with the matter myself; but the fags were too cheeky! I decline to enter into shindies with cheeky fags. I report the matter to you."

Wingate of the Sixth yawned deeply. "I'm bound to take it up, then," he said. "Got any idea which kid bagged the—what was it—a pie?"

"It was a pie, and Bunter bagged it!"

"I'll call Bunter."

"The fat little beast is at the end of the passage now."

Coker stepped out of the study.

"Bunter!" he bawled. "Come here! Wingate wants you!"

Billy Bunter rolled in cheerfully. He blinked at the captain of the school with a self-possessed blink. Bunter's fat conscience was clear on the subject of that pie, owing to the intervention of the Famous Five. Bunter was not afraid of inquiry into the affair of that pie. In fact, Bunter courted inquiry.

"Did you bag a pie from Coker's study, Bunter?" asked Wingate, reaching for his ashplant.

"I hope I'm not the fellow to be suspected of bagging a pie from anybody's study, Wingate," answered Bunter, with dignity.

"What a hopeful nature," remarked Gwynne. "That chap's an optimist."

Wingate grimed. "Sure the pie's missing, Coker?" he asked.

"I suppose I ought to know whether it's missing."

"Of course! But you ought to know a lot of things that you don't know. Lots and lots!"

"Look here, Wingate—"

"I don't suppose the pie's missing, if Coker ever had a pie," said Bunter. "Coker's always making silly mistakes, Wingate."

"Why, you cheeky, fat sweep, I'll—I'll—"

"Order!" drawled Wingate. "This matter is in my hands now, Coker. Before Bunter's called to account for bagging the pie, we'd better make it clear that the pie is missing."

"I've told you it is!" hooted Coker.

"And I've told Wingate it isn't!" said Bunter.

"You young fibber—"

"Yah!"

"Shut up, the pair of you!" said Wingate. "I'll come along to your study, Coker, and see for myself."

"I've told you—"

"Exactly; don't tell me again."

Horace Coker suppressed his indignation with difficulty. It was just like the captain of Greyfriars to treat him like this, as if he were a fellow of no more account than any other fellow in the Fifth Form.

Coker stalked ahead to his study. Wingate ordered Bunter to follow; but the order was not needed—Bunter was ready to follow. He rolled on after Wingate quite cheerfully.

"Now, where was that blessed pie?" asked Wingate, as he entered Coker's study in the Fifth.

"In the cupboard!" snorted Coker. "Do you think I should put it on the mantelpiece as an ornament?"

"I haven't thought about it at all, dear man. Open the cupboard and let's see if the pie's missing," yawned Wingate. "You can hardly expect Bunter to be licked for bagging something you may have overlooked."

"Rot!"

Coker hurled open the door of the study cupboard and stood aside while Wingate looked into the receptacle.

"How many pies did you have here?" asked Wingate.

"One, of course," grunted Coker. "Do you think I keep a shopful of pies in my study?"

"I think you're idiot enough for anything. If you had one pie here, and there's one pie here now, what is the fuss about?"

"There isn't a pie there now!" shrieked Coker.

"Ass! Use your eyes!"

Coker used his eyes. He used them, though he could hardly believe them when he stared into the cupboard. The first thing that met his gaze was a large, luscious pie! Coker stared at that pie as if it mesmerised him. He was certain—he could have sworn—that that pie was missing earlier in the afternoon,

(Continued on next page.)

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when he had gone in quest of Bunter. Bunter, he had not had the slightest doubt, he scoffed that pie, or hidden it somewhere ready for scoffing. And here it was—as large as life—obviously unscuffed! Coker fairly blinked at it.

"Well?" stunted Wingate. "Is that the pie?"

"Eh!" gasped Coker. "Oh, yes! That—that's the pie."

"You silly chump—wasting a prefect's time and accusing a Remove kid for nothing! You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself, Coker!"

"I—I—I—" Coker could only stammer.

"I say, Wingate, I think Coker ought to apologise," squeaked Billy Bunter. "He wouldn't take my word! He made out that I'd had the pie! 'Tain't fair!"

"I think you'd better apologise to Bunter, Coker," said the captain of Greyfriars. "This is rather thick, you know—overlooking a thing, and making out that a fag had pinched it."

Coker gasped.

"I—I—I thought—" "I'm surprised to hear it. Didn't know you had anything to do it with," yawned Wingate. "But if you thought, as you say, you might have thought twice before accusing Bunter of bagging a pie that's in your study cupboard all the time."

"Well, I—I must have been mistaken, I suppose," stammered Coker. "The—the—the pie's there, all right! I—I suppose I—I was wrong! But—"

"I'll overlook this, Coker," said Bunter loftily. "I'll overlook it, but don't let it happen again."

"What?" roared Coker. "Don't let it happen again," said Bunter victoriously. "Next time you make out anything of the kind I shall appeal to the Head! You can't accuse fellows of things like this! I must say you're a rotter, Coker!"

And William George Bunter rolled victoriously out of the study. Wingate followed him; leaving Coker still staring at the pie in a mesmerised sort of way. If it had been the ghost of a pie it would not have astonished Coker more to see it there.

William George Bunter rolled away grinning. The discomfiture of Horace Coker almost consoled him for the loss of the pie.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

High Words!

HARRY WHARTON stopped at Study No. 2 in the Remove.

The door of Study No. 2 was open, and Hazeldene was there, scribbling lines at the table. Tom Brown, his study-mate, was out of the House; Hazel had the study to himself.

The captain of the Remove paused in the doorway and stood looking at Hazel. Wharton's face was rather grim.

The junior in the study glanced up and dropped his eyes to his lines again. He did not ask Wharton to enter, and took no further notice of his presence.

Darker grew the brow of Harry Wharton.

"Hazel!" he said at last.

"Well?" asked Hazeldene, without looking up.

"I want to speak to you."

"I'm rather busy."

"Lines for Quelchy?"

"Yes."

"A few minutes won't make much difference," said Harry.

"I'd rather get on with them."

Wharton entered the study without

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heeding that. A dogged look came over Hazel's face, and he laid down his pen.

"I've not asked you to come into this study, Wharton," he said in a low voice. "I don't want to be unpleasant, but I don't want you here. We're not friends, and we can keep our distance without quarrelling. Leave me alone, and I'll leave you alone."

"What do you mean, Hazeldene?" asked Wharton very quietly, though his eyes were gleaming.

"I mean what I say. I suppose you understand plain English."

"I don't understand this talk," said Harry. "If we're not friends, as you say, I'm more than willing to let it go at that; but we seem to have been friends as late as last week, when you came to me for help to get you out of a hole."

"It's like you to remind a fellow of that!" sneered Hazel. "I'm going to settle up that five pounds as soon as I can. I can't do it sooner."

"Never mind the money! You got into trouble with backing a horse, through a racing sharper at Wapshot, and you were afraid this man Spratt would come up to the school and dun you—that is, show you up. I was the fellow you came to for help. Were we friends then, or not?" asked Wharton, with a note of scorn in his voice that made Hazeldene crimson.

"I suppose we were," muttered Hazel. "Then isn't now. You know jolly well what I mean. What's the good of talking?"

"Since that time," said Harry, "you've given me the cold shoulder. I never noticed it specially till this afternoon, when you were asked to come into my study to tea and refused. Then it came into my mind that you'd been playing the same sort of game for a week or more. As for your friendship, any fellow can have that who values it—I don't! But I want to know what this means."

Hazel made no answer.

"I mean to know," added the captain of the Remove quietly.

"You know already," muttered Hazel. "I don't say I'm a very particular chap, but I draw a line somewhere."

"You draw it at me?"

"Yes, I do."

"And why?"

"You know why!"

Harry Wharton breathed hard and deep.

"You mean, that I've done something that you look down on—you, who came jolly near getting sacked for mixing with racing touts and betting and gambling."

"Rub it in, if you like," said Hazel. "I've been a bit of a fool, I know. I got in with that rotter Spratt; I've chucked him. I'm clear of all that. I know it would have been pretty bad for me if I hadn't paid him. You lent me the money! I know all that! If it had been your own money I'd have been grateful. You know whose money it was. What's the good of talking? Whatever I've done, I've never touched money that did not belong to me; and I'm not going to feel grateful for stolen money being lent me."

He started to his feet as Wharton, his face blazing, came towards him with clenched hands.

"Hands off, you rotter! You asked for it; I never wanted to speak about it! You made me put it plain."

With a great effort, Harry Wharton controlled his rage.

"I thought of this," he said. "That's why I wanted to have it out clear. I thought that foolery was still in your mind when you turned up your nose in

my study. Last week you told me that the number on the note I gave you was the same number as that of the note Mauleverer lost."

"I tell you so again."

"I pointed out that it was impossible," said Wharton, as calmly as he could. "The banknote I gave you came in a letter from my uncle, Colonel Wharton. I told you so at the time."

"I know you told me so."

"And you dared to doubt it?" "I believed it when you told me, or I'd never have taken the note. I took it for granted, at least, that the money was your own. You can't say I had any idea it wasn't. It was not till the number of Mauleverer's note was posted on the board that I knew."

"I tell you once more, Hazeldene, that you made a mistake in the number of the note," said Harry. "I never noticed the number on the note in my uncle's letter, but it cannot have been the same as that on the lost five. You made a mistake."

"I did not make a mistake."

"You hang on to that?"

"Yes."

"Then what do you believe exactly?" asked Harry Wharton, still speaking calmly, though his eyes were burning.

"What can I believe?" snarled Hazel. "I know that the note you gave me was the one Mauleverer lost. What am I to believe except that you found it, or pinched it from his study? Why you handed it to me, goodness knows. I suppose you meant to do me a good turn. I'd have been sacked from Greyfriars a dozen times over rather than have touched the banknote if I'd known it had been stolen!"

There was a short silence in the study. Harry Wharton stared at Hazel across the table. Hazel was uneasy and defiant at the same time. Obviously, he did not want a scrap with the captain of the Remove, who could have knocked him out in a single round. But he was facing that—the risk of it, at least. He believed what he was saying; and it was clear that he believed it, and that he looked on the captain of the Remove as any fellow might have looked on one who was dishonest.

That anyone should dare to think him dishonest, should dare to speak of him and dishonesty in the same breath, roused Wharton's deepest anger. It was not easy for him to keep his hands off Hazel just then.

Hazel broke the silence.

"I'm going to pay you the five pounds. I've written to a lot of my people. I'm bound to get the money soon, here or there. I know I don't always settle up. You needn't rub that in. But I'm going to settle this, if I have to sell the shirt off my back. I'm going to hand you back the five pounds, and if you're decent you'll let Mauleverer have it."

Wharton clenched his teeth.

"You won't take my word about this?" he asked.

"I can't, when I know it was Mauleverer's note you gave me."

"You'd rather believe me a thief than think that you made a mistake taking down the number of the note?"

"No, I wouldn't. But I know I never made a mistake. I copied down the number from the banknote in my pocket-book, and it's written there now. You can see it, if you like."

"You copied it down incorrectly."

"I did not."

"As the matter stands, then, you believe that I am a thief, and you're turning me down for that?"

"Yes; I draw a line at that."

"If you'd drawn a line at gambling and blackguardism you'd never have seen my banknote at all," said Harry.



"I'll overlook this, Coker," said Bunter loftily. "I'll overlook it, but don't accuse me of bagging a pie again." "What?" roared the Fifth-Former. "Don't let it happen again," said the Owl of the Remove victoriously. "I shall appeal to the Head next time!" (See Chapter 4.)

"You've always been an ungrateful cur, Hazel; but this is the limit. A fellow gets an unexpected big tip, hands it to you to save your worthless skin, and you accuse him of having stolen it. If you believe it, you're a lower sort of worm than I've ever supposed. You've given me the cold shoulder, you cheeky rat! It won't do any good to smash your face in, I suppose, though you've asked for it."

"What's the good of rowing about it?" said Hazel uneasily. "I never wanted to mention it. I only wanted to keep my distance from you."

"You'll do that, after this," said Wharton quietly. "I had to get it clear what you'd got against me. I know now. Keep your distance. Don't ever speak to me again. You make me sick!" He breathed hard and deep.

"I let you have my fiver, not entirely on your own account, though I was sorry when you whined over the danger you were in. But it was chiefly because I respect your sister, and she's my friend, and Marjorie would have been cut up if you'd been kicked out of Greyfriars, as you deserve. You don't owe me any thanks, if that's any comfort to you. I won't smash you, you miserable rat. I'll leave you alone, after this."

Wharton went to the door, and left the study. Hazel stood looking after him till the door closed. Then he sat down to his lines again, feeling rather relieved. The matter had passed off without a fight, which would have been a surprise to any fellow who had heard the talk, and who knew Wharton's pas-

sionate temper. Hazel had risked getting the thrashing of his life, and he knew it.

It was that that puzzled Wharton as he went back to his own study. Hazel believed what he said, so firmly that he was willing, though not as a rule very plucky, to face Wharton's hefty fists, rather than have anything to do with a fellow he looked on as a thief. That was a proof, how firm was his belief. He would not admit the possibility of having made a mistake in the number of the note. Yet he must have made a mistake, it seemed to Wharton. The captain of the Remove was as perplexed by his obstinacy as enraged by his belief.

Frank Nugent was in Study No. 1 when Wharton came back there. He did not fail to notice the thunder in his chum's brow.

"What on earth's the matter, Wharton?" exclaimed Nugent, in astonishment and some alarm.

Wharton laughed harshly. "I've just seen Hazel."

"Not a row, I hope?" asked Frank anxiously. "I know Hazel's a bit irritating, but a row with him would make it jolly awkward with Marjorie. It bothers her a lot when Hazel quarrels with her friends."

"That's chiefly why I've stood the cur such a lot," said Harry. "I can't stand him any more. Not that it would be any good, for he's told me that he bars me."

"Only his rot," said Nugent, smiling. "We all know Hazel! What's the trouble? Is he ratty at not being picked out for the Rookwood match?"

"He calls me a thief!"

Nugent jumped.

"Wha-a-at?"

Harry Wharton explained quietly. His chum listened, with a face that grew crimson with anger.

"The low-down cur!" he said. He made a silly mistake in taking down the number of the note, of course. He dares— Nugent broke off. "Did you thrash him?"

"I haven't touched him."

"More ass you, then! I'll jolly well go along to his study and rub his cheeky nose in the coal-locker!"

"That won't do any good, Franky. It's horribly unfortunate that Mauly's lost banknote never turned up. I think Quelchy was right to cane him for losing it, all things considered. That worm Da Costa spread the yarn that it had been stolen, and I dare say that put it into Hazel's head in the first place. I suppose the note never will be found now."

"Not likely."

"Which means that Hazel will keep on thinking me a thief," said Harry.

"Let the miserable cad think what he likes. If he dared to say so in public it would be a different matter."

"He won't do that. But he's the fellow to whisper it in confidence to other fellows," said Wharton. "My hat! Fancy having a story like that spreading through the Remove!"

"I think—"

Arthur da Costa, the Errasian, came into the study, and Nugent broke off abruptly. Da Costa glanced from

Nugent's excited face to Wharton's grim, frowning brow curiously. "You fellows not rowing, surely?" he asked.

"No!" snapped Wharton. "I should be sorry to see it; you are such good friends," said the Eurasian amicably, in his silky voice.

"Well, you needn't bother; it's not likely to happen," grunted Nugent. "Coming down to the Rag, Harry?"

And the chums left Study No. 1, as they generally did when Arthur da Costa came there. The Eurasian shrugged his slim shoulders and smiled sarcastically. He was accustomed to the dislike and avoidance of his study-mates by this time, and he was not, perhaps, sorry for it; it made easier the task for which Captain Marker, in far-off India, had sent him to Greyfriars.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Letter from Mr. Spratt!

WHARTON!"

"Yes, sir!"

"You will follow me to my study!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

Harry Wharton did not look pleased. That morning, in the Remove Form room, Mr. Quelch had addressed him more than once with unusual sharpness.

Wharton was quite unconscious of having done anything to deserve it. His construe had been good—generally it was quite good, and this morning it had been unusually good. In other matters in class he had been quite up to the mark. It was not, indeed, in such matters that his Form master found fault. He seemed out of humour with Wharton personally somehow.

Neither was this the first occasion. More than one fellow had remarked, during the past week or two, that Quelch seemed to have a "down" on Wharton. Wharton had noticed it himself, and resented it. Severity from a master like Mr. Quelch was to be expected; injustice was not expected. It was rather unaccountable, too, for Mr. Quelch had never concealed his high opinion of Wharton, and it was only of late that he had adopted this remarkably acid manner.

The Remove were being dismissed for morning break when Wharton was told to follow Mr. Quelch to his study.

He compressed his lips as he went.

If this was going to be a "jaw" or a ragging from Quelch, the captain of the Remove did not mean to take it patiently. He was fed-up with sharp treatment for nothing.

Many eyes followed him as he went. His chums were rather concerned. Arthur da Costa smiled as he went out into the quad. Herbert Vernon-Smith glanced after Wharton very curiously.

"Wharton's for it!" remarked Skinner, with a cheery grin. "Quelch seems to be getting fed with his jolly old favourite!"

If a fellow deserved commendation from his Form master and received it, Skinner's description thereof was favouritism. Skinner and his friends, at least, were not sorry to see the captain of the Remove under the frown of the "beak."

"Quelch's got a down on him!" remarked Peter Todd. "Blessed if I know why!"

"Nor anybody else!" growled Bob Cherry.

"It doesn't seem much use trying to please Quelch!" grunted Johnny Bull. "He's got his back up with Wharton! What about, I'd like to know!"

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"Nothing!" said Nugent.

"The nothingfulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed Quelch is ratherfully a tartar!"

"Nothing?" asked Vernon-Smith, eyeing Harry Wharton's chums in a rather peculiar way.

"Well, what is there for Quelch to get his rag out for?" demanded Bob.

"Oh, nothin' that I know of, of course!" answered the Bounder.

And he walked away with Tom Rodding before any more questions could be asked. The juniors went into the quad, where the Co. hung about the doorway in a rather uneasy mood, waiting for Wharton.

Meanwhile, Mr. Quelch had rustled into his study, and Harry had followed him there. The junior stood waiting with a rather sulky brow, while the Form master fumbled in the drawer of his table. Mr. Quelch's hand came out of the drawer with a letter in it, and he fixed his eyes on Wharton. Never had Mr. Quelch's penetrating eyes looked so like gimlets as they did now.

"This letter came for you this morning, Wharton!" he said abruptly.

Wharton raised his eyebrows.

"Letters for us are generally put in the rack, sir!" he said.

"Quite so. But you are aware that supervision is exercised over all correspondence of junior boys."

"I know that, of course, sir. But that's no reason why a letter for me should be stopped!" said Harry stubbornly. "I've never had a letter at Greyfriars that anyone might not have read out to the whole school, so far as I know!"

"The letter in my hand could scarcely be read out to the whole school, Wharton! It is a letter that you must explain if you are to remain at this school!" said Mr. Quelch in an icy voice.

Wharton stared at his Form master.

"I don't understand!" he answered.

"Were you expecting a letter this morning, Wharton?"

"Not specially, sir. There might be a letter from my uncle or my aunt, I suppose."

"You were not expecting a local letter?"

"No—unless one of the Highcliffe fellows wrote."

"A letter from Friardale," said Mr. Quelch.

"I don't know anybody in Friardale who would be likely to write to me," answered Wharton, more and more surprised.

"Are you acquainted with a man named Spratt?"

Wharton started violently.

Spratt was the name of a racing man to whom Hazel had owed money. He was amazed to hear that name on Mr. Quelch's lips.

The Remove master's brow grew very grim.

"I see that the name is not unfamiliar to you, Wharton! You admit an acquaintance with this man?"

"Certainly not, sir!" exclaimed Harry indignantly. "I am not likely to know such a man, I hope! I've heard the name, that's all, and I was surprised that you asked me such a question! I think any fellow would be surprised!"

Mr. Quelch's eyes searched Wharton's face. Only angry indignation was to be read there, but Mr. Quelch was not convinced.

"Some short time ago, Wharton, it came to my knowledge that you had gone out of bounds and visited Popper's Island. A mere thoughtless escapade I

should think little of, but you went to the island in the river immediately after your headmaster had specially and solemnly warned you not to do so! That was an act of reckless disrespect which very considerably changed my opinion of you!"

Wharton flushed.

"I—I never knew you knew, sir!"

"The matter came to my knowledge in such a way that I could not properly take cognizance of it," said Mr. Quelch. "For that reason I said nothing. I was disappointed in you, Wharton!"

"If you'd let me explain, sir—" began Wharton, realising now why Mr. Quelch had been so extremely acid for some time past.

"You cannot explain away an act of deliberate disrespect to your headmaster! But, as I have said, the matter did not come officially to my notice, and we need not go into it!" said Mr. Quelch coldly. "I was disappointed in you, Wharton, and I had reason! Now this letter arrives, and it makes me doubt very strongly whether my former opinion of you was a mistaken one, or whether you have changed very much for the worse. You tell me that you are unacquainted with a man named Spratt?"

"Certainly!"

"You know that he is a man of disreputable character?"

"I have heard so."

"Do you state explicitly that you do not know the man and have no dealings with him of any sort?"

"Yes, sir; most certainly!"

"Then how do you account for this letter, which came by this morning's post, addressed to you at this school?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

He threw the letter across the table to the junior. Wharton, in blank amazement, picked it up, and he could scarcely credit his eyes as he read, in a scrawling hand on a beer-stained sheet of paper:

"Dear Master Wharton,—I got your note all right, sir. You can lay it to that I ain't mug enough to come too near the school to see you. I know it would get you into a row. When you want another little flutter on a 'orse, you 'op along the towpath to the usual place, and you'll find yours truly there, ready to oblige.—Yores respectfully,
J. SPRATT."

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Inexplicable!

HARRY WHARTON stared at the letter blankly. Mr. Quelch's eyes were fixed on his face as he stared at it.

Wharton could not speak. He was so utterly overwhelmed by amazement that words failed him.

"Well?"

Mr. Quelch rapped out the word.

Wharton tried to recover himself. His brain was in a whirl. His first thought was that the man Spratt had written to Hazeldene, and that Mr. Quelch had mistaken the name on the envelope. But there was his own name on the letter itself.

That was not the explanation. There seemed to be no explanation. A man he did not know, a man he had never spoken to, a man he had never seen to his knowledge, had written him this letter—a letter that was enough to get him sacked from the school if taken seriously by his headmaster.

"Well?" repeated Mr. Quelch.

Wharton gasped.

"Did this letter come for me, sir?"

"It came in an envelope addressed to you, and your name is written on it, as you see. My attention was specially drawn to the letter by the coarse hand in which it was addressed, and by the fact that the envelope was stained with beer, and smelt of tobacco," said Mr. Quelch sternly. "This letter was written to you by the man Spratt. It refers quite plainly to an acquaintance existing between you."

"I can't understand it."
"The man refers to a note sent him by you."

"I never sent him any note."
"He refers to an accustomed meeting-place."

"I have never met him."
"He speaks of a flutter, as he calls it, on a horse. That refers to some kind of betting transactions between you."

"I've never had anything to do with him."
"Wharton!"

"I know nothing of the man," said Harry steadily. "Why he should write to me is a mystery. I can't understand it. If there were any other fellow of my name here I should think the letter was for him. It can't be for me, anyhow. I don't know the man."

"The letter is for you, Wharton. There is no doubt upon that point."
"Then I can't understand it."

"You desire me to believe that a man you do not know, and have never seen, has written you a letter in a familiar strain. That he refers to your dealings with him, though you have had no dealings whatever with him."

Wharton panted.
"I know it sounds queer, sir, but that's it! The man must be mad, I should think, to write that rot to me. I don't see how he even knows my name."

"Neither do I, if he is totally unacquainted with you," said Mr. Quelch dryly. "Wharton, tell me the whole truth, frankly. I desire to keep my good opinion of you if I can. Have you ever been foolish enough to get into touch with a man of this character?"

"Never."
"Have you even had some quarrel or dispute with such a man? If you can tell me that you have even done that I might suppose that this letter was written in revenge, to get you into trouble at your school."

"I've no recollection of anything of the kind, sir! The man can't be an enemy of mine when I've never seen him."

"If this letter is a surprise to you, Wharton, as you say, and if you have had no dealings with the man, how do you account for this man Spratt writing to you at all?"

"I can't account for it."
Mr. Quelch took the letter back from the junior and placed it in his table drawer again.

"If that letter, Wharton, is well-founded, you will be expelled from this school," he said. "If it is demonstrated that you have deceived me to such an extent as this as to your true character, you are not a fit boy to remain at Greyfriars. But such a very serious matter must be dealt with carefully, and certainly not in haste. Some way may be found of accounting for this letter, which, on the face of it, condemns you as a thoroughly badhearted and deceitful boy. I shall consult your headmaster, and you will probably be called before him for investigation later. In the meantime you may go."

"I give you my word, sir, that I know nothing of the man, and haven't the faintest idea why he should have written to me," said the captain of the Remove earnestly.

"I should be glad to believe you,

Wharton, but such a very extraordinary statement requires proof. Unless this man Spratt is out of his senses, he would not write a meaningless letter to a person he did not know, referring to an acquaintanceship that did not exist, and to transactions that had never happened. How does he know even your name?"

"I don't know, sir."
"Very well, you may go, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch, with a sigh. "I trust that this matter may not turn out to your discredit."

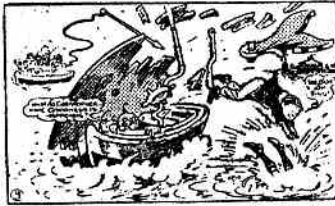
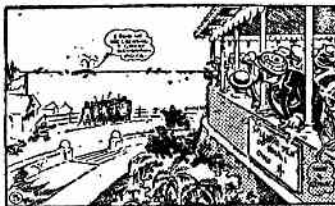
Harry Wharton left the study. It

Singh "Give it an esteemed name, my ludicrous chum."

"I don't know how to tell you," said Harry unsteadily. "I'm in disgrace! I don't know how or why! I can't make it out! You'll hardly believe me when I tell you. I can hardly believe it myself! But I'm in disgrace—you can take that as a cert."

"But what the thump—"
"Suppose I tell you that a man I've never seen, and never heard of except by name once or twice, has written me a letter in a familiar style, mentioning

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seemed to him that his brain was turning round and round as he went. The happening was so utterly inexplicable that he could not even begin to understand it.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What the merry thump!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the captain of the Remove came out into the quad.

"Harry, what on earth's up?" exclaimed Nugent.

Wharton's bewildered face drew the attention of his chums at once. They surrounded him with anxious looks.

"What's happened?" asked Johnny Bull.

"The happenfulness must have been terrific," said Hurrce Jamset Ram

all sort of things that have never happened."

"Draw it mild, old bean," murmured Bob.

"Well, that's what's happened," said Harry.

"You'd better make it a bit clearer," said Johnny Bull. "That sounds as if you're pulling our leg."

"I'll make it as clear as I can."

Wharton explained what had taken place. His comrades listened in deep amazement and incredulity. When he had finished the captain of the Remove looked round from face to face.

"What do you think of that?" he asked.

"It beats Banagher!" said Bob Cherry. "The man must be out of his mind to write such a letter. But if he's some giddy lunatic why has he fixed on you specially?"

"That's what Quelchy wants to know."

"It will want some explaining," said Johnny Bull.

Wharton gave him a quick look. "Does that mean that you think, as Quelchy does, that I know this man Spratt, and that the letter is genuine?" he asked very quietly.

Johnny Bull shook his head. "Don't go off at the deep end, old bean. I know it isn't that, but, as I say, it wants some explaining. You're quite sure you've never come into touch with this Spratt merchant?"

"Quite."

"But you say you know his name."

"I say that I've heard it."

"From whom?"

"What does that matter?"

"It matters this much, that it's the only connection you have with the man, and it shows that some Greyfriars chap knows him, if you don't. I suppose it was from some chap here you heard of him."

"Yes, of course."

"Well, who was it? No secret about that, I suppose?" asked Johnny Bull rather impatiently.

"No secret among ourselves, but certainly from anybody else," answered Harry. "Spratt is the man Hazel owed money to; you remember I let him have my uncle's fiver to settle. I don't know whether I mentioned the man's name when I told you about it, and put it to the vote about letting him have the fiver. Anyway, Spratt was the man. I've never heard of him except from Hazel."

"Hazel!" repeated Johnny Bull. "I think I see light, then."

"How?"

"Hazel's just the fellow to dip into blackguardly muck and be afraid of what he was doing all the time. Just the fellow to give a false name. Just the fellow to give another chap's name."

"What?"

"Suppose he gave a false name in dealing with that cad Spratt?" said Johnny Bull. "He might have used your name, or anybody else's, to screen his cowardly self."

"Even Hazel wouldn't—"

"If he did, Spratt would think that was his name, and might write to him as Wharton. Looks to me as if that's the only way out," said Johnny Bull. "Hazel's the only man here, so far as we know, who knows Spratt; the only Greyfriars man Spratt would write to."

The chums of the Remove looked at one another. That Hazel, in his dingy adventures outside the school, was exactly the fellow to use a false name, was true enough—if he had thought of it. But it seemed unlikely that he would use the name of another Greyfriars fellow—any false name would have served his purpose. Yet it was possible—and it was the only gleam of light where all seemed dark.

"We'll soon know, anyhow," said Bob Cherry abruptly. "We can ask Hazel, and make him tell the truth."

Harry Wharton nodded, and the Famous Five proceeded at once to look for Hazeldene.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
No Clue!

HAZELDENE was loafing under the elms, talking with Skinner and Snoop, when the chums of the Remove found him. His face set at once as Harry Wharton came up.

Skinner and Snoop exchanged a curious look. They knew already that Hazel "barred" Wharton, and did not know why, but were very curious to know why. Their private opinion was that it was like Hazel's cheek to "bar" the captain of the Form, compared with whom he was an insignificant nobody; and they did not think that Wharton would mind very much, except so far as it made matters awkward concerning his friends at Cliff House. But Skinner, at least, was glad to see it; Skinner was a fellow who thrived on trouble for others. If there was trouble, Skinner was ready to add a little fuel to the fire, if he could.

"I want you a minute, Hazel," said Harry, as he came up.

Hazel gave him a dogged look.

"I'd rather you let me alone," he answered.

"I must speak to you; come this way."

Hazel did not stir.

"I'm talking to Skinner," he answered.

"Skinner won't mind," said Harry. "Come this way, Hazel; I must speak to you before the bell goes."

"Well, I won't!"

Snoop looked rather uncomfortable and walked away. Skinner did not follow his example. Skinner wanted very much to be on in this scene. He scented trouble of a more serious kind than even he had hoped for.

"Hazel's with me, you know," drawled Skinner. "Hazel doesn't mind you speakin' before me. What's all this jolly old mystery about?"

Wharton compressed his lips.

"Do you want me to speak before Skinner?" he asked.

"I don't want you to speak to me at all," answered Hazel. "I've told you so, and that would be enough for any decent chap. Leave me alone."

"I must speak, and if you want it before Skinner you can have it," said Harry. "It's about a matter that you may not care to have talked up and down the Remove, though. If you like to trust Skinner with it, have your own way."

Hazel flushed hotly.

"You mean—" he stammered.

"Yes, I mean exactly that."

"You can't let that rest."

"As it happens, no."

"I'll come along with you," muttered Hazel, and he walked away with the Famous Five, leaving Harold Skinner simply devoured by curiosity—which was not to be gratified, however. Skinner was not a fellow Hazel would have cared to trust with knowledge of his sporting speculations.

"Now, what is it?" asked Hazel savagely, halting at a little distance.

"Get it over and leave me alone! I bar you, Harry Wharton, and you know why. Leave me alone!"

"You bar Wharton, you worm!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Do you know what you're talking about?"

"Wharton knows!" said Hazel bitterly.

Wharton's eyes gleamed at him.

"Nugent knows, too," he said. "You fellows may as well know. We put it to the vote about letting Hazel have that fiver that came from my uncle. He's got it into his head that it never came from my uncle at all, but that it was the banknote Mauleverer lost. He thinks I pinched it."

"Great pip!"

Bob Cherry clenched his hands.

"Have you got me here to rag me?" asked Hazel, between his teeth. "I'll yell for a prefect if you begin. If you want the matter shouted out all over Greyfriars, I don't care."

"Is the fellow mad?" asked Johnny Bull, in wonder.

"He says that the number of the note I gave him was the same number that Quelchy posted on the board when Mauly's note was lost."

"So it was!" said Hazel. "It was Mauleverer's banknote."

"How could it have been when it came in a letter from Wharton's uncle?" demanded Bob.

"It didn't! Wharton spun you fellows that yarn to account for having the banknote."

"Oh, my hat!"

"He admitted himself that his uncle never referred to it in the letter, and the letter wasn't registered," sneered Hazel. "I'll bet you'll find that Colonel Wharton knows nothing about it, if you ask him."

"You must be simply potty," said Bob. "Wharton's bound to mention it to his uncle, if only to thank him for sending it."

"I've done so already," said Harry quietly.

"You've written to your uncle to thank him for that banknote!" exclaimed Hazel, stupefied.

"Of course."

"Gammon! I don't believe it! Colonel Wharton never sent you the note, and you know he did not. It was Mauly's note."

Hazel spoke with savage earnestness.

"Why don't you knock the slandering cur spinning across the quad, Wharton?" demanded Johnny Bull. "He wouldn't call me a thief without having his features altered a bit."

"The fool believes what he says," answered Harry. "My uncle is coming to Greyfriars soon, and I'm going to make Hazel repeat this in his presence."

"I'd do that fast enough," jeered Hazel. "You don't dare to put it to such a test! You know that."

"We'll leave that over till Colonel Wharton comes here," said Harry quietly. "That isn't what I have to speak about now. Quelchy called me into his study to show me a letter written by your sporting friend Spratt."

Hazel turned white as chalk.

"A letter—from Spratt!" he muttered hoarsely. "The—the beast! I paid him—every penny! He can't have written."

"The letter was addressed to me."

"To you!" shouted Hazel.

"Yes, I don't know the map, or anything about him except what I've heard from you. It looks as if you must have used my name in dealing with him. That's what I want to know. Did you?"

Hazel stared at him.

"Of course I didn't! If I'd used a false name I shouldn't have used yours. I couldn't have used a false name, anyhow, as I saw him at the Cross Keys—and the men there know my name well enough."

"Oh!" exclaimed Wharton.

"I've seen a fat man in a gaudy waistcoat loafing about the Cross Keys," said Johnny Bull. "Is that the man?"

"That's the man," answered Hazel sullenly.

The chums of the Remove were silent. It was obvious that Hazel could not have used a false name at the Cross Keys, where his own name was quite well known to Mr. Cobb, the landlord, if not to others. Elsewhere he might have done so; but in that particular delectable spot it was impossible.

"So you've had a letter from Spratt, have you?" went on Hazel venomously. "You're mixed up with the man—after preaching at me for getting mixed up with him! And you'd like to put it on me; you'd like to make out that he



Potter and Greene looked up with smiling faces when Coker entered the study. He came home in one piece, but he felt as if he was in many pieces. "Had a good time, old man?" asked Potter genially. "Groooh!" "Did the fags cut up rusty?" asked Greene. For a long time Coker could only gasp and splutter. (See Chapter 10.)

wrote to me and not to you! You rotter! You won't land this on me, as you did the passing of a stolen bank-note!"

"Come away, you men," said Wharton. "I shall damage that cur if I hear any more from him! Come away!"

The Famous Five left Hazel. Johnny Bull's suggestion, which had seemed to let light on the strange mystery, was evidently groundless; Hazel had not used Wharton's name. That point was clear; but it only made the mystery deeper and more inexplicable. And though Harry Wharton did not realise it, the faith his chums had in him was being put to a very severe test. But it stood the strain.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Up to Coker!

"WHY not mind your own business?"

Potter of the Fifth made that suggestion.

Greene of the Fifth nodded.

To Greene it seemed a good idea.

Good ideas, brilliant suggestions, were wasted on Horace Coker. Horace Coker always knew better than other fellows; besides, minding his own business was not in his line.

"If you can't talk sense, George Potter, why talk at all?" asked Coker. "I've told you already that I'm taking this matter up."

"It's a matter for a prefect, not for a Fifth Form man," Greene pointed out. "It's nothing to do with the Fifth. You're not a prefect."

"That's the Head's fault—or his misfortune, as the case may be," answered

Coker. "I've told you before that I'm not satisfied with the way Dr. Locko runs this school. I could suggest a lot of improvements. I don't say that every Fifth Form man is suitable for a prefect's job. You fellows, frinstance, would be no good."

"Oh!"

"But I'm fairly cut out for it," explained Coker. "I've a short way with fags, and I know how to keep the scrubby little beasts in order. However, that's neither here nor there. I've gone so far, as you know, as to suggest to the Head that I should be appointed prefect. He declined—and not at all civilly, I can tell you. That ends that! It would be beneath a fellow's dignity to take the matter up again."

Coker paused, but not for a reply. Coker had no use for replies. Coker's conversation was generally a very one-sided affair.

"I can't leave the matter where it is," he said. "I saw a Remove kid sneaking in at the back way of the Cross Keys! I saw it with my own eyes."

"You could hardly see it with anybody else's!" remarked Potter, with a flippancy that was not in the least in accord with Coker's serious mood.

Horace gave him a freezing stare.

"If you're trying to be funny, Potter, chuck it! Take my advice, and don't try to be funny. It doesn't suit you. I saw that foreign kid Da Costa sneaking into the back way of a pub, as I've said. If I were a prefect I should report him to the Head. Not being a prefect, I can't very well do it. The fellows would misunderstand! They would make out that I was sneaking—like some snivelling little fag in the Second Form."

Coker shook his head sorrowfully. He

was not unaccustomed to being misunderstood. But he did not want to be misunderstood to that extent.

"The question is—what am I going to do in the matter?" added Coker thoughtfully.

Potter did not repeat his bright suggestion that Coker should mind his own business. He realised that it would be futile. Coker couldn't do such a thing. Many things Coker could do, but not that.

"I am bound, in the circumstances, to deal with the matter personally," said Coker. "Thrashing the dingy little beast may do him good. It would give him a lesson, anyhow. What?"

Coker rose from his chair.

"That's the best I can do. I'll give him a good talking-to and thrash him. It may keep him straight! It may keep him from disgracing the school. What do you fellows think?"

Coker asked his study-mates what they thought, prepared to approve of their counsel if it agreed with his own decision. If it disagreed with that decision, of course, it would only show that they were the duffers and chumps Coker had long ago realised that they were, and Coker would tell them so in the plain English on which he rather prided himself.

Potter and Greene knew better than to disagree. Besides, it was apparently Coker's intention to go in search of Da Costa of the Remove. That, at least, was so much to the good. If Coker got out of the study, it would give Potter and Greene a chance to get on with prep.

Prep was not an enthralling

(Continued on page 16.)



(Continued from page 13.)

occupation in itself; but it was positively delightful in comparison with the charms of Coker's conversation.

"I think you're right, Coker—better see the kid at once and deal with him as you think best," said Potter gravely.

"Right as rain!" concurred Greene.

Coker gave them an approving smile. "You men ain't always such utter fools as you seem to be sometimes," he remarked. "Well, I'm going."

Which was good news, at least.

Coker departed from the study, and Potter and Greene looked at one another across the table.

"Jevver see such a born idiot, Potter, in all your natural?" asked Greene.

"Never!"

"Jevver see such a meddling ass?"

"Never!"

"If he goes butting into the Remove he will get a ragging from the fags as likely as not," said Greene hopefully.

"More power to their elbows!" said Potter.

And Potter and Greene dismissed Horace Coker from their minds, and gave their attention to prep. Prep just then was beneath Coker's notice. When Coker had a duty to perform, lesser matters faded from his mind. Mr. Prout might rag him in class the next morning. It mattered little. Coker was accustomed to injustices from Mr. Prout.

Prep was going on in the Remove studies. No doubt that was the reason why Coker was able to walk into the Remove passage without an alarm being raised. Had Remove men been loafing in the passage, it was probable that the mere sight of Coker would have caused a rag—and the great man of the Fifth might have departed on his neck. As it was, Coker trod heavily and unopposed into the passage sacred to the Lower Fourth, and hurled open the door of Study No. 1 without troubling to tap first—tapping at a junior's door being, in Coker's opinion, rot.

Three Remove fellows looked up as Coker strode in; Wharton, Nugent, and Da Costa were all at prep there.

Wharton waved an impatient hand at the Fifth Form man.

"Cut off, Coker! No time for rags now! Prep!"

Coker, unheeding, closed the study door, and stood with his back to it. The Removites rose to their feet. What Coker wanted they did not know; but guessed that he was, as usual, looking for trouble. Nugent picked up the ink-pot, and Wharton selected a stout ruler.

"I've not come here for you kids," said Coker, with unexpected mildness. "It's Da Costa I want to see."

"Yess!" said the Eurasian, in surprise.

"Yes, you, you young scoundrel!"

"What?"

"You blackguardly little beast!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"I'm going to thrash you!" explained Coker. "You're setting out to get yourself sacked, and to disgrace the school you ought never to have been let

into. I'm going to stop you! See? You've pulled the wool over the eyes of your Form master and fooled the prefects! But I'm on to you, my boy! I'm going to give you a lesson! That's what I'm here for, you little sneaking, blackguardly, pub-haunting sweep!"

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Fed-Up!

ARTHUR DA COSTA stared at Coker. The colour wavered in his olive face. The plotting Eurasian had too much to keep secret for Coker's exordium to fail to alarm him.

Wharton and Nugent looked at Coker and looked at Da Costa. Coker had astonished the natives, as it were.

Neither of the juniors liked Da Costa; with all his cunning, he had never been able to hide the deep duplicity and dissimulation of his nature. Had Coker accused Da Costa of any kind of lying, or deceit, or tortuous trickery, the chums of Study No. 1 would not have been surprised. But if there was one failing of which Da Costa had never given the slightest sign, it was that of which Coker now accused him. Never once had he shown the slightest inclination to consort with the "sportsmen" of the Lower School; never once to be guilty of recklessness like the Bounder's, or dingy blackguardism like Hazel's. That he had gone in for "pub-haunting" was scarcely to be believed. Certainly it was not in keeping with his character.

"Did you dream this, Coker?" asked the captain of the Remove at last.

"Eh?"

"It's no business of yours if all the Remove walked into a pub and ordered Scotch-and-soda!" said Harry. "But as you can't mind your own business, I may as well tell you that you're making one of your usual idiotic mistakes. Da Costa isn't that kind of a fellow at all."

"Not in the least," said Nugent. "Go back to the Fifth Form dorm and dream again, Coker."

Da Costa drew a deep breath.

"It is not true, of course," he said.

"Of course it isn't," said Harry. "Now you've done your funny turn, Coker, get moving, will you? Prep, you know."

"I dare say you kids don't know about it," said Coker. "You're a pair of cheeky little beasts, and I've had to lick you for it; but I'll say this—you're decent. That grubby little beast Da Costa hasn't told you about his little games, I dare say. Well, I'm telling you now."

"But it's all rot!" said Wharton. "No business of yours if it was true; but it isn't."

"Do you think I can't believe my own eyes?" roared Coker. "I saw Da Costa yesterday afternoon sneaking in at the back way of the Cross Keys."

"Rubbish!"

"I saw him, I tell you, when I was going down to Friardale with Potter and Greene!" roared Coker.

"Utter rot," said Harry. "You saw somebody and took him for Da Costa, perhaps."

"Is there any other fellow here like that yellow-skinned little toad?" jeered Coker.

Wharton looked at Da Costa. Never once had he thought of suspecting the Eurasian of anything of the kind. But Coker's positive statement rather staggered him. There was little to be said for Coker's intellect but nothing was the matter with his eyesight. And the

olive-skinned, dark-haired Eurasian was not likely to be mistaken for any other fellow—there was no fellow whom he in the least resembled; and it followed that no other fellow was likely to be mistaken for him.

Da Costa had quite recovered his coolness now. He smiled.

"It is not true," he said.

"It's some mistake," said Harry decidedly. "I dare say Da Costa was here at the time you thought you saw him, Coker. What time was it?"

"After I came here after Bunter—about half an hour afterwards," said Coker.

Wharton started a little. He remembered that it was a long time after that that Da Costa had returned.

"Well, Da Costa was out of gates at that time, I think," he said. "Still, I'm sure he never went pub-haunting. You can take my word for it that you've made a mistake, Coker. Now travel."

"I haven't made a mistake!"

"Well, anyhow, travel! We've got our prep to do! What the thump does it matter to you, anyhow?" demanded Wharton. "You're not a prefect."

"It's up to me," explained Coker. "I'm going to thrash the young rascal as a warning."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"You've come here to thrash a Remove man!"

"Yes."

"I fancy you'll have to thrash all the Remove, then. Why not walk off while the walking's good?"

"Are you kids backing up that dingy little beast in his dirty tricks?" roared Coker.

"Rats! Get out!"

"I dare say you're all much of a muckness in this study!" hooted Coker. "That may be it! A set of precious young sweeps!"

"Are you going?"

"I've come here to thrash that disgraceful young scoundrel!" bawled Coker. "You chip in, and I'll thrash you, too."

Harry Wharton took a business-like grip on the ruler.

"Go out!" he said.

A fat voice squeaked in the Remove passage.

"I say, you fellows! Fifth Form cad! I say, Coker's come up here again!"

Evidently Coker's powerful voice had been heard beyond the confines of Study No. 1.

There was a shout in the Remove passage, and the sound of many doors opening. The alarm was given.

Peter Todd opened the door of No. 1 and looked in.

"Coker here! Bunter says—Oh, here he is!"

"He's come here to thrash the Remove!" grinned Frank Nugent. "He thinks he didn't get enough when he came yesterday!"

"Roll up, Remove!"

"Hurrah!"

Ragging Coker was a welcome relief from prep. Almost every man in the Remove rolled up to lend a hand. Once more it was borne in upon the powerful brain of Horace James Coker that he had bitten off more than he could masticate. Once more he travelled down the Remove staircase at express speed, assisted in his descent by more kicks and punches than he could possibly have counted.

"I say, you fellows, lemme gerrat him!" yelled Billy Bunter. "Let a chap have a kick at the beast! He had my pie! Lemme gerrat him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give him socks!"

"The sockfulness is terrific!"

"Good-bye, Coker!"

Potter and Greene, in their study in the Fifth Form passage, looked up with smiling faces when Coker came home. He came home in one piece; but he felt as if he was in many pieces. He collapsed into a chair and gasped.

"Had a good time, old man?" asked Potter genially.

"Grooogh!"

"Did the fags cut up rusty?" asked Greene.

"Ooooooh!"

Coker seemed to have lost his voice. For quite a long time he could only gasp and splutter, splutter and gasp. But he found his voice at last.

"Ow! All those little beasts stood by that little beast! Fancy that! Piled on me!"

"Fancy!" murmured Potter.

"I'm done with him!" said Coker.

"If the masters and prefects choose to let Remove fags go pub-haunting and disgracing the school, let 'em! I'm done with it. I'm not going to do their work for them! I shan't take any further notice! I mean that! If the whole Remove stay out all night and come home with the milk in the morning, I shan't take any notice!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Potter and Greene, quite taken by storm by the idea of the Lower Fourth, in a body, reeling home with the milk in the morning.

"You can cackle!" hooted Coker. "I mean it! I shan't interfere! Let 'em haunt pubs! Let 'em get sacked! Let 'em disgrace the school! I'm going to leave 'em to it! I'm going to let 'em get on with it! And if you silly chumps don't stop cackling!" roared Coker, "I'll jolly well start on you with a cricket-stump—see?"

And Potter and Greene, with a great effort, controlled their emotions.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Shock for Wharton!

"HARRY!"

Frank Nugent started to his feet.

Wharton came into the study with a letter in his hand.

There was a dazed expression on his face—the expression of a fellow still bewildered from a shock.

"Harry! For goodness' sake, what's the matter?"

Wharton looked at him. "I don't know!" he said huskily. "I begin to think that I'm going potty, or that the whole world's gone potty. I can't make things out now, and I'd better give up trying."

"But what—"

Wharton threw the letter on the table. "First there was that letter from the man Spratt! I've been before the Head about that twice. Now there comes this letter."

"That letter—"

"From my uncle"

"What can there be to upset you in a letter from Colonel Wharton?" exclaimed Nugent, in wonder.

"Read it!"

Frank picked up the letter from the table. He began to read it in sheer wonder; but as he proceeded something like alarm came into his face.

"Dear Harry,—Thank you for your letter. I am glad to hear that you are

anxious to see me at Greyfriars, and you may depend upon it that, I shall come as soon as I can. But I do not understand your reference to a tip in my last letter. If you are in need at any time, my boy, you are aware that you have only to tell your uncle so. But there was no enclosure in my last letter, and certainly I should not be likely to post a banknote in an unregistered letter. I really do not know what you mean, my boy.

"Your affectionate uncle,
"JAMES WHARTON."

Nugent laid down the letter, and stared at his chum. Wharton met his eyes with a look of hopeless bewilderment.

"What can a fellow make of that, Frank?"

"Goodness knows."

"All you fellows were with me when I opened my uncle's letter and took the banknote out," said Harry. "You might have actually seen me take it out."

"Well, I didn't see you take it out," said Frank. "But I know you did, of course, as you said so."

"What can it mean, Frank? I thought at the time it was odd for uncle to put a fiver in a letter without mentioning it. Now he says he never put one in at all. But it was there! I should think that I'd dreamed it, only all you fellows saw the fiver in my hand, and you know I gave it to Hazel. What can it mean?"

Nugent shook his head hopelessly.

The strange problem was beyond him.

"I was going to ask uncle, when he came, the number of the note he sent me to convince that fool Hazel!" said Wharton. "I can't now, as he says he never sent me a note! Why, if Hazel saw this letter, Frank, he would take it as proof that I never had a fiver from my uncle at all!"

Nugent started violently.

There was an almost frightened look on his face for a moment. Wharton caught it, and started in his turn.

"Frank!" He caught his breath. "Frank, you're my pal, and you—you're thinking—"

"No!" exclaimed Nugent. "No! Never! I can't understand it! Goodness knows what it all means! But—but I know you had the banknote from your uncle; you said so, and that's enough for me! But—but—"

His voice trailed off.

He knew Wharton's uncle well enough—a rather stiff military gentleman, as hard-headed and practical a man as he well could be; the last man in the world to be careless in money matters. Unlikely enough to enclose a banknote in an unregistered letter without mentioning it, still more unlikely to forget

having done so. Mr. Vernon-Smith might have handed a fiver or a tenner to the Bouncer without noticing that he had a banknote the fewer in his well-filled case. Colonel Wharton was not like that. He was fairly well off in the world's goods, but he could not afford to part carelessly with five-pound notes, and most assuredly he would not forget

having done so in the short space of a week.

If Colonel Wharton had sent his nephew a five-pound note, Colonel Wharton was clearly aware of the fact, and could ascertain the number of the note without difficulty. Frank Nugent knew that. The letter on the table, therefore, was proof that Colonel Wharton had not sent his nephew a five-pound note.

Wharton followed Nugent's thoughts in his dismayed and troubled face. As a matter of fact, his own thoughts were on the same lines. There had been a banknote in the letter when he received it; that was certain, unless he was going out of his senses. But Colonel Wharton had never put that banknote in; that also was certain.

The resulting problem was hopeless. Wharton was beginning to doubt the evidence of his own senses.

"You think my uncle never sent me that note, Frank?" he asked, and his voice was dry and husky.

"He says he did not. He must know."

"Then how was it in his letter?"

"You—you're sure it was there, Harry?" Nugent hesitated. "You—you didn't have another note about you and—make a mistake?"

Wharton laughed harshly.

"Am I stuffed with banknotes like the Bouncer? You know I was stony—we were all stony! I hadn't a ten-shilling note, let alone a five-pound note!"

"It's unaccountable, then."

Wharton pressed his hand to his brow.

"Uncle says he never sent it. He knows. He never did send it, Frank, but it was in the letter. Hazel says the number was the same as the number of Mauly's lost fiver. Frank, put the two things together! Why, any fellow would think that I'd pinched Mauly's fiver and made out that it came in my uncle's letter to account for having it at all!"

Nugent looked at him.

In spite of himself, in spite of his strong faith in his chum, a chill of hideous doubt was in his heart.

But he drove it from him like an unclean thing. He could not, and would not, doubt.

There was a silence.

"What can I do?" asked Wharton hopelessly. "My uncle's puzzled at my thanking him for a note he never sent. No wonder! He may think it's a sneaking, roundabout way of hinting for a tip!" Wharton flushed. "Goodness knows what he thinks! He never sent the fiver, but it was in the letter! What fiver was it, Frank? Hazel says it was the same number as the missing note!"

(Continued on next page.)

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Frank, how did Mauly's lost fiver get into my uncle's letter—which I opened?"

"You're sure it hadn't been opened when you got it?"

"Quite! I slit the envelope with my penknife to open it."

"It seems like black magic!" said Nugent in a halting voice. "For goodness' sake, let's keep it dark! Any fellow would think that—that—"

"Do you think so, Frank?"

"Never! But—"

"I'm not going to talk about it, of course," said Harry. "I know what it looks like! Any fellow who didn't know me jolly well would think me a thief on that evidence! Hazel does know me well, and he thinks so! But our own friends must know, Frank. I'm not going to keep any fellow's friendship on false pretences! Any fellow who thinks me a thief, on any evidence whatever, is a fellow I shall never speak to again or touch with a barge-pole! Go and tell them to come here, Frank! They've got to know!"

Nugent nodded and left the study. He came back with Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, and Colonel Wharton's letter passed from hand to hand, and there was a silence of blank amazement.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

What the Nabob Knew I

HURREE JAMSET RAM SINGH broke the silence.

There was a deeply thoughtful shade on the dusky face of the Nabob of Bhanipur, and his dark eyes were gleaming.

"My esteemed friends," said the nabob, "the surprisefulness of this letter is terrific! But I have a few suggestive remarks to make."

Wharton looked at him.

"You don't doubt me, Inky, old man?"

"The doubtfulness would be terrifically preposterous!" answered Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Moreover, the matter does not puzzle me so ridiculously as it does your honourable self."

"Mean to say you know what all this means?" gasped Bob Cherry. "It's knocked me as flat as a pancake!"

"Me, too!" said Johnny Bull.

"And me!" said Nugent. "I can't even begin to understand it, unless there's black magic about. The fiver was Mauly's lost fiver. Hazel was right about the number. Isn't that much clear?"

"Can't have been a lot of fivers knocking about loose," said Bob. "If Wharton's uncle never sent a fiver, that fiver was the one that idiot Mauly lost! But, in that case, it couldn't have been in the letter."

Wharton's eyes glistened.

"I've said that it was in the letter!" he said in a low and very distinct voice.

"I mean, I don't see how it could have been in the letter! Don't get ratty, old man! We're here to help, not to rag!"

"It wants a lot of explaining how Mauly's fiver got into a letter from Wharton's uncle," said Johnny Bull—"a thumping lot!"

"I've said it was in the letter! Any fellow who doesn't believe me can get out of this study, and never come in again!"

"And I say again that it wants a lot of explaining!" said Johnny Bull stolidly. "That doesn't mean that I think you pinched the fiver, so don't

get your rag out! We haven't come here to see you doing one of your highfalutin turns, Wharton! Keep cool!"

"Steady, the Buffs!" said Bob Cherry.

"We've got to go into this coolly. We've got to find out what it means. Inky says he's got a suggestion to make. Inky's got his napper screwed on the right way! Let Inky jaw!"

The Nabob of Bhanipur smiled.

"If my esteemed friends will lend me their excellent ears I will proceed," he said gently. "It is preposterously clear that that fiver was Mauly's fiver, supposed to be lost."

"I think that," said Harry.

"The esteemed Mauleverer stated that he left the banknote in his study in a certain place. My own esteemed belief is that it was not lost; it was pinchfully stolen!"

"Inky!"

"It was pinched by the esteemed and ridiculous rotter who placed it in the colonel's letter!"

"But why," exclaimed Wharton—"why? If any fellow were beast enough to steal the fiver, why should he give it to me—for that's what it amounts to?"

"Can you answer that one, Inky?" asked Bob Cherry, with a faint grin.

"I think so. The esteemed Wharton gave the fiver to the ridiculous Hazel, which the thief cannot possibly have foreseen or thoughtfully imagined. But for that, Wharton would have changed the banknote at the school shop."

"I was going to," said Harry. "You remember—"

"Quitefully so. Had you done so, my ridiculous chum, Quelch would have found the note at Mrs. Mimbles's shop, and you would have been clearly proved to have stolen it, and expelled from Greyfriars."

Wharton's eyes flamed.

"Inky! Hang you, do you dare to say—"

"My esteemed chum," said the nabob reproachfully, "if you will not allow a fellow to speak—"

"Shut up, old chap!" said Frank. "Inky's working out something in his mind. Give him a chance."

"The esteemed Wharton was saved by the circumstance that he helped the preposterous Hazel out of a hole with that fiver," said the nabob. "Owing to that ridiculous circumstance, the stolen note never was found inside the school at all, and it was supposed to be lost by the excellent and fatheaded Mauleverer. It was a plot, and it missed fire."

"Oh!" exclaimed Wharton. "But who—who could have done such a thing? And how? I tell you my uncle's letter was unopened when it came into my hands."

"And I tell you, my esteemed fat-headed chum, that it must have been opened, or the stolen note could not have been planted in it."

"But I should have noticed—"

stammered Wharton.

"It was opened, whether you noticed it or not, because otherwise there is an impossibility!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Possibly the letter was sneakfully purloined before you got it and opened by the steamfulness of the common or garden kettle."

"Oh!" exclaimed Wharton.

Bob Cherry gave a roar.

"Good old Inky! I knew he'd work it out in his old black noddle! Inky's got right on the wicket."

"But who"—Wharton's voice was husky—"who could be villain enough—dastard enough—reptile enough—to lay a snare like that? There's nobody at Greyfriars—nobody outside a convict prison who would do such a thing."

"Da Costa!" said the nabob.

"What?"

"When the note was being searched for," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "I came to see the esteemed Da Costa in his study. I told him that if the banknote was found, and found in any of Wharton's pockets or property, I should know who had placed it there, and would proclaim the same all over Greyfriars."

"You did!" gasped Johnny Bull.

"I did, my esteemed chum! But the trick was not so simple as all that," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed Da Costa is deeper than I imagined. Had Wharton changed the banknote at the school shop, and had Quelch found it there, the esteemed Wharton's game would have been up. He would have been convicted beyond a doubt. By saying the ridiculous Hazel he saved himself."

"Oh!" gasped Wharton.

"But why—why?" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "If Da Costa is really such an awful villain as you make out, Inky, why—"

"It's impossible!" said Wharton. "Impossible! How could a fellow plan such awful villainy against a chap who's never harmed him? We rather bar one another, but that's all. I've never done him any harm."

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh smiled slightly.

"This plot seems to my esteemed friends an unheard-of and terrific thing," he said. "But in my own country, my worthy chums, it would be regarded as child's play. It is merely pie to the esteemed Da Costa. In the Indian law courts, my esteemed chums, no English judge ever dreams of believing a word that is said on either side, or of relying upon any document to which any party in the case may have had any possible access. He knows that the words are false and the document forged."

"Oh, my hat!"

"But why?" exclaimed Wharton. "Even a villain would not do such a thing without a reason. Why?"

"You have forgotten the esteemed Bunter—"

"Bunter?" repeated Wharton blankly. "The excellent and ridiculous Bunter, who bilked the honourable railway company by travelling under a seat the day Da Costa came to Greyfriars. He told us of the talk between the esteemed Eurasian and the honourable Mr. Gedge, the legal johnny."

Wharton stared.

"One of Bunter's silly yarns," he said. "Something about a man in India having sent Da Costa to Greyfriars to get me disgraced and sacked. I thought it was all rot, of course."

"Same here," said Nugent.

"The samefulness in my esteemed case was not terrific. I have been keeping a widefully open eye on the Eurasian," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "There is no proof against him—he is too sharp for that! But Da Costa is at Greyfriars, my esteemed Wharton, to get you sacked, at the order of a man named Captain Marker, who lives at Lucknow."

"Isn't that rather steep?" asked Johnny Bull.

"The steepfulness is great, but the exactfulness is terrific. You will remember how Da Costa jumped at the chance when the fatheaded Bunter hid Quelch's watch in this study. You are aware that somebody bagged Wharton's skiff at Popper's Island and left him stranded there out of bounds. You know that Da Costa was the one who persisted that Mauly's note had been stolen, and was the cause of bringing it



"You are Mr. Spratt, aren't you?" said Bob Cherry. "Well, I've come here to give this tart to you!" Smack! Bob Cherry gave Mr. Spratt the tart—on his crimson, fat nose, with a sudden smack. "Groooogh! Ooooooh! Gug-gug-gug!" Mr. Spratt started to his feet, gurgling wildly. (See Chapter 14.)

to the esteemed Quelchy's notice. What Bunter heard in the railway carriage was true. Da Costa is here to get our honourable chum Wharton sacked from Greyfriars, and he has very, very nearly succeeded, my worthy friends, in spite of my terrific watchfulness."

"The nabob spoke with quiet confidence. "But—but—" stammered Wharton. "If that's true, the reptile ought to be booted out of the school without a minute's delay," said Johnny Bull.

"It is true, but the esteemed reptile cannot be booted out of the school, because there's no proof," said the nabob quietly; "but he can be observably watched, and caught out the first time he makes a ridiculous slip."

Wharton passed his hand over his brow.

He remembered now the story Billy Bunter had told of the strange talk between Da Costa and Captain Marker's solicitor. He had dismissed that story as one of the most fantastic of Bunter's many inventions.

He would have dismissed it still had there been any other imaginable explanation of the mystery.

But there was none!

He had been, obviously, the victim of a treacherous plot on the part of some unscrupulous enemy. That much was clear.

That enemy was in the school! Evidently he had not been in the school before Da Costa came. Bunter's fantastic story of an overheard conspiracy had a new significance now.

There was a long silence in Study No. 1.

In spite of themselves, in spite of the

fact that Inky had furnished the only possible explanation, the juniors were incredulous—even Wharton himself! They simply could not realise that any fellow, even the boy from the East, could be such a monster of duplicity.

"There is no proof for the Head!" Hurree Singh broke the silence. "No proof for the esteemed Quelchy! We must keep our own counsel! But there is proof for our esteemed selves."

"And what is that?" "The letter from the esteemed and disgusting Spratt."

"That!" exclaimed Wharton. "You think Da Costa had a hand in that?"

"I know!" answered the nabob quietly.

"But he's never heard of the man—can't know anything about the fellow!"

"Why did the excellent and ridiculous Coker come ragging in this honourable study last evening?"

Wharton started.

"Oh! I told you—he said that he had seen Da Costa sneaking in at the back way of the Cross Keys."

"Where the esteemed Spratt lodges," said the nabob. "Coker was mistaken, as usual, in thinking that Da Costa was pub-haunting. He was not there to bet on horses like the preposterous Hazel, or to play billiards like the fatheaded Bounder. But he had an object."

"You think Coker really saw him?" exclaimed Nugent.

"Quitefully so! I think the ludicrous rascal was there to tip the esteemed Spratt to write that letter to Wharton. It was the next move in the game."

"Oh, my hat!" Wharton gave a gasp.

"Let's get out into the quad!" he exclaimed. "I want some fresh air after this."

Hurree Janset Ram Singh grinned. "Let us go down to play cricket for a little while, to get the taste of the esteemed reptile out of our absurd mouths," he suggested.

And the Famous Five went down to Little Side, and for the present they tried to dismiss the matter from their minds.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

News for the Remove!

"I SAY, you fellows!" Skinner yawned "What's the latest, Bunter?" "Heard about Wharton?"

Harold Skinner was interested at once.

"What about him?" "Well, if you haven't heard, perhaps I'd better not tell you," said Billy Bunter cautiously. "Wharton's a pal of mine, and I'm not going to spread anything about him, especially a yarn like this. Of course, I don't believe it myself. I'm sure that isn't why old Quelchy's down on him. As if Wharton would have had a letter from a bookie!"

Skinner's eyes gleamed. "Letter from a bookie—Wharton! My only hat!"

"Cough it up, Bunter," said Snoop. Five or six fellows gathered round in the Rag. William George Bunter was the centre of interest now.

"Out with it, Bunter," said Bolsover major.

"Mind, there's nothing in it," said Bunter. "Wharton's got his faults. Only yesterday he refused, quite uncivilly, to cash a postal-order for me. He made out a few days ago that I'd bagged a pie from a Fifth Form man's study. He's rather a beast. I must say that, though he's a pal of mine, and I like him."

"What would you say if you didn't like him?" grinned Wibley.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But what's that about a letter from a bookie?" demanded Bolsover major.

"I thought the fellows knew," said Bunter. "I shouldn't have mentioned it otherwise. I'm not a fellow for tattling, as you know. Da Costa mentioned it to me, as something he had heard the fellows saying in the passage. I don't believe it—still, it looks rather suspicious. All you fellows must have noticed that Quelch has a down on Wharton."

"Yes, rather!"

"He bites him at sight, these days," grinned Skinner. "I've noticed that Wharton has been called into the Head's study more than once lately, too. Snapped a fellow's head off when a fellow asked him what was up! I jolly well knew there was something."

"Well, of course, the Head would be waxy," said Bunter. "It's a bit thick, you know, a Greyfriars man getting letters from a racing tout."

"Oh crumbs! Is that it?" exclaimed Snoop.

"Mind, I don't think it's true," said Bunter. "Wharton's a pal of mine, and I'm standing up for him. In fact, I shouldn't mention the thing at all, except to say it isn't true. Still, the beaks are down on him. They wouldn't be down on him for nothing, would they?"

"Not likely!" grinned Skinner.

"Da Costa says he heard a fellow telling another fellow that Wharton had had a letter from a bookmaker, and Quelch opened it," said Bunter. "I dare say Da Costa got it all wrong. Still, the man's name is known—man named Spratt. Fat man who hangs about the Cross Keys. I've seen him."

"I've seen him, too," smiled Skinner. "I've got an idea that Hazel knows him, too. What about it, Hazel?"

Hazeldene, who was on the edge of the little group, walked away without replying. He did not want to discuss Mr. Joseph Spratt.

"Just what I say," agreed Bunter.

"Utter rot! Still, the beaks are down on Wharton. They must think there's something in it. Fellows seem to be talking about it up and down the passages. Nothing in it, of course. Still, I must say it looks jolly suspicious."

That evening there was not a fellow in the Remove who did not know about Mr. Spratt's letter.

Harry Wharton could not help noticing that he received a good many curious glances in the Form; but he did not pay much heed.

The captain of the Remove had plenty of matters to occupy his mind just then.

He had been convinced by Hurree Singh's elucidation of the mystery of the five-pound note. Yet incredulity still lingered. The nabob was right; he felt that the nabob must be right. Yet his mind wavered on the subject. He seemed unable to get it into his head that any fellow could play the part of a snake-in-the-grass.

Many times, since that talk in the study; he had observed Da Costa; but the olive-skinned junior from the East baffled his penetration. Looking at the fellow, Wharton simply could not

believe that he was guilty of such black treachery.

And yet the nabob must be right. There was no other explanation of what had happened.

One matter on which all the Co. had agreed was that the banknote given to Hazel was in reality Mauleverer's lost banknote; and, in consequence, that sum had to be returned to Mauleverer. Whether Hazel repaid the debt or not, Mauleverer had to be repaid.

That was a matter of some little difficulty, and gave the chums of the Remove food for thought.

Other matters were troubling the captain of the Remove at the present time. Several days had elapsed since Mr. Spratt's letter had been opened by the Remove master.

Wharton's direct denial on the subject perplexed both Mr. Quelch and the Head. The matter could not be dropped, yet it was difficult for the headmaster to decide how to proceed.

Several times the captain of the Remove had been questioned by his headmaster. He could only repeat the unvarying statement that he knew nothing of the man Spratt.

To mention Hurree Singh's surmise that Da Costa had "squared" the racing sharper to write that letter, to carry out a treacherous plot, was impossible.

There was absolutely no proof—not a vestige of proof. Even Wharton himself was not fully convinced.

Coker of the Fifth had seen, or thought he had seen, Arthur da Costa stealing into the back way of the Cross Keys the day before the letter was sent to Greyfriars. That was clue enough for the nabob, but it certainly could not be taken as anything like proof.

The supposed plot against the captain of the Remove, of which Hurree Singh had no doubt, rested upon what evidence? On a fantastic tale told by Billy Bunter of an overheard conversation—a tale told by a fellow known to be exaggerative and untruthful, and who had to confess that he had been eavesdropping when he heard the alleged talk.

It was all too nebulous and fantastic. Even Hurree Singh could not suggest any reason why a man in India would seek to harm a schoolboy in England whom he had never seen.

Such a story would be dismissed with contempt by the Head, as a matter of course. Wharton could scarcely expect anything else, when he could not wholly credit it himself.

Yet any fellow in the Remove could have seen that matters had changed for the worse for Harry Wharton since Da Costa had come to Greyfriars.

He was under the frown of his Form master; he was barred by a fellow he despised; and now there was a story current in the Form that he was mixed up with a bookmaker.

When the captain of the Remove came down to the Rag after prep that evening, every eye in the room turned on him. He noticed it without heeding it. Skinner & Co. were grinning maliciously. Squiff came over to Wharton.

"Something I'd better tell you, old bean," he said.

Wharton looked at him inquiringly. "You'd better know, I think, as you don't seem to have heard," said Squiff. "Fellows are saying that you've had a letter from a man named Spratt, and that Quelch's seen it, and that's why he's down on you. Better knock it on the head before it spreads all over the school."

Wharton started.

"So that's out, is it?" he said quietly. "Nothing in it, is there?" asked the

Australian junior, with a stare of surprise. "I took it for granted that there wasn't, of course."

"Nothing at all," said Wharton, in a distinct voice heard by every fellow in the Rag. "I've never seen Spratt; but he wrote a letter addressed to me, and Quelch stopped it. I think he was put up to it by a fellow who wanted to do me a bad turn. That's all I can say about it."

"Great Cæsar!" ejaculated Squiff. "And who's the fellow?"

"I can't give his name without proof. I've nothing more to say about it."

Squiff eyed him rather dubiously and said no more. Skinner winked at his friends.

"So it's got out!" said Bob Cherry, later, when the Famous Five were together in the study.

"Blessed if I know how," said Nugent. "We've not let a word drop where anyone could hear."

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh shrugged his shoulders.

"There was one fellow who knew!" he said. "The fellow who caused the preposterous Spratt to write the letter. He has told someone, and it has spread."

Wharton clenched his hands.

"Da Costa?" he said.

"Quitefully so."

"I suppose it's so; it must be so! And yet—yet, what can a fellow do? If I told the chaps that, they'd ask how I knew—how I could prove it. There's no proof! It would look like a silly lie to account for that letter of Spratt's. How can I say that Da Costa put him up to it, when I can't even feel certain myself?"

"You cannot, my esteemed chum," said the nabob gently. "You will have to bear it grudgingly until our chance comes and we can catch the ridiculous Eurasian on the esteemed hip."

"I shall tell my uncle the whole thing when he comes down to the school," said Harry. "But I hardly dare do that! What will he think of such a story—what can he think? I can't believe it myself really."

There was a step in the Remove passage, and Arthur da Costa came into the study. The chums of the Remove shrank away from him as if from a reptile, with an instinctive movement of loathing.

"Let's get out of this!" said Harry.

They left the study at once. Da Costa stood motionless, looking after them. That he was playing the part of a snake-in-the-grass, the fellow from the East knew only too well. Yet the scorn and loathing in the faces of the juniors stung him to the very soul.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Catching a Spratt!

"THAT'S the rotter!"

Johnny Bull made that remark. It was Saturday afternoon, and the chums of the Remove were sauntering down to the village. Outside the Cross Keys a fat man in a gaudy waistcoat, with a bowler hat on one side of his greasy head, was loafing under the shade of a tree.

"That's Spratt!" said Johnny Bull. "I've seen the rotter loafing about here before."

The juniors looked at the man. Mr. Joseph Spratt glanced at them carelessly. Evidently there was no member of the Famous Five that had any interest for the fat man.

Having given them that careless glance, Mr. Spratt gave them no

further heed. He lighted a cigarette and blew out a little cloud of smoke.

The juniors walked on. There was a thoughtful look on the dusky face of Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"What about collaring that fat brute and ducking him in the horse-trough?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"Good egg!" said Johnny Bull. "It would mean a row, but it's worth it. Let's."

"My esteemed chums," murmured the nabob, "a wheezy idea has occurred to me."

"Give it a name," said Wharton, with a smile.

"The esteemed and disgusting Spratt wrote a letter to Wharton. But Wharton does not know him, and he does not know Wharton! You saw how he looked at us; you could see that he did not recognise any of us."

"Well?" asked Nugent.

"The esteemed Spratt is a newcomer in this honourable neighbourhood," said Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "He has come here for the Wapshot races, like other preposterous sharpers and touts. He was put up to writing that execrable letter to fall into Quelch's esteemed hands. But he doesn't know the absurd Wharton by sight."

"I don't see how he could," answered Harry. "Da Costa gave him my name, I suppose; but he could never have pointed me out to him. He would not dare to be seen with the man out of doors."

"Exactly."

"Well, what are you getting at," Inky?" asked Bob.

"My excellent chums, suppose the rascally Spratt could be made to admit that he does not know Wharton by sight? Would not that knock his ludicrous letter on the head?"

"Of course! But catch him admitting it!" said Bob. "A man who would write a thing like that for a tip, wouldn't mind telling a few lies about it."

"But he might be made to admit the esteemed fact."

"How?" asked Wharton.

"Suppose we ask him to walk to the school with us—"

"My hat! He wouldn't!"

"We could refusefully decline to take no for an answer!" suggested the nabob, with a dusky grin. "There are five of us, and that fat and boozey Spratt is not an athlete."

"Oh scissors!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Suppose we walked him to the school, to the honourable presence of the absurd headmaster, and demanded that he should point out Wharton?"

Wharton gave a gasp.

"Oh, my hat! That would jolly well prove that his letter was all bunkum and that I've never had anything to do with him. But—"

Bob Cherry's eyes danced.

"It's a ripping wheeze! You're worth your weight in currency notes, Inky. It's a go!"

"Hold on!" said Wharton. "It's a good idea, if we can work it. But if we collar that brute where he's loafing now, it means getting mixed up in a shindy with the crew at that pub."

"There are more ways of slayfully terminating the career of an esteemed cut than by chokefully suffocating it with cream," said Hurree Janset Ram Singh cheerfully. "Listen to the words of wisdom, my esteemed chums."

Hurree Janset Ram Singh proceeded to explain, and the chums of the Remove listened to the words of wisdom.

There was a general chortle.

"It will work like a charm!" said Bob Cherry. "Leave it to me! You

fellows cut round by the fields and get between the Cross Keys and the school all ready to chip in."

"What-ho!"

Bob Cherry was left sitting on a fence while his comrades departed. Bob waited there, with a grinning face, for ten minutes, to give the Co. plenty of time to make a detour and get back to the other side of the Cross Keys. Then he prepared for business.

Mr. Spratt, loafing on the bench under the tree in front of the inn, smoked his cigarette in peace and contentment. His restful ease was interrupted by a schoolboy who came along from the village. That schoolboy stopped directly in front of Mr. Spratt.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he said.

"Allo!" said Mr. Spratt, staring at him. "What may you happen to want, young shaver?"

"Look at this!" said Bob Cherry.

He came closer to Mr. Spratt and held out his hand. Mr. Spratt stared at the hand and what it contained. It was a large and juicy jam-tart, recently purchased at Uncle Clegg's shop in Friardale.

"That's for you!" said Bob.

"Eh?"

Joseph Spratt blinked at the junior. To say that he was astonished would be to put it mildly.

"I've come here to give this tart to you, Mr. Spratt," said Bob. "You are Mr. Spratt, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am, but if you're a blooming young lunatic, you go back to your asylum," answered Mr. Spratt gruffly. "Don't you come playing your larks about 'ere, young feller-me-lad! Cut orf!"

Smack!

Bob Cherry gave Mr. Spratt the tart. He gave it to him on his crimson fat nose with a sudden smack.

Mr. Spratt started to his feet, gurgling and gasping wildly. Jam-tart was plastered all over his fat face.

"Grooogh! Ooooooh! Gug-gug-gug—"

Bob Cherry made a hurried snatch at Mr. Spratt's rakish bowler. He grabbed the hat from the greasy head and fled.

Hat in hand, Bob Cherry raced up the lane towards Greyfriars.

Mr. Spratt stood gurgling, almost petrified with amazement for some moments. Then, with a roar of wrath, he rushed in pursuit of the schoolboy.

"Grooogh! You young villain!" he roared. "Stop! Give me that 'at! You 'ear me? Bring back that 'at!"

Bob Cherry turned and waved the hat at the fat man. His other hand he placed to his nose, with the fingers extended—a gesture of mockery that was really unworthy of a Remove man of Greyfriars, but which had an exasperating effect on Mr. Spratt.

"You young 'ound!" gasped Mr. Spratt. "Why, I'll smash you! I'll limb you! I'll—I'll—I'll—"

Without wasting more breath in words, the fat man chased after Bob Cherry. Bob waved the hat triumphantly until the fat man was quite close; then he ran up the lane.

Mr. Spratt laboured after him, bursting with fury.

Bob Cherry could have run the fat man off his legs quite easily had he so desired. But he did not so desire. He ran just fast enough to keep a few yards ahead of his pursuer, and every now and then slacked down to let Mr. Spratt come quite close. Every moment Mr. Spratt expected his grasp to close on the collar of the cheeky schoolboy who had jammed his face and annexed his hat. But that grasp never quite closed.

A hundred yards from the Cross Keys,

hidden by the thick trees that bordered the lane from that building, Bob halted. Mr. Spratt, with a face thick with jam and crumbs, and wild with rage, rushed right on him.

"Now I've got yer!" he panted.

And he grasped Bob Cherry at last. At the same moment four active figures leaped from the hedge and grasped Mr. Spratt.

"Bump!"

Joseph Spratt went down in the road with a concussion that shook every ounce of breath from his fat body. In a dazed state Mr. Spratt sprawled there and blinked up dizzily at the Famous Five.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Under Escort!

WALK!" Harry Wharton rapped out the order.

Five pairs of hands assisted Joseph Spratt to his feet—not gently. Five pairs of hands grasped him so hard that he had no chance to resist, even had he had the breath left for a struggle.

Mr. Spratt gasped wildly.

"Leggo! Let a man go! What's this 'ero game?"

"Walk!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Look 'ere, you lark with me and I'll come up to your school and complain to your 'cadmaster—I will that!" roared Mr. Spratt.

"That's what we want!" grinned Bob. "We want you to take a little walk with us this nice afternoon, Mr. Spratt."

"You young rip—"

"Hold him, Wharton!" said Johnny Bull, addressing Bob Cherry.

"You bet!" answered Bob, tightening his grasp on Mr. Spratt's dingy neckcloth.

Mr. Spratt's eyes glinted. The name evidently struck him, and he stared at Bob for a moment, twisting his head round to look at him. The juniors were playing up to the "wheezy idea," that Hurree Janset Ram Singh had so sagely propounded. That Spratt did not know Wharton by sight was absolutely clear now, for Johnny Bull's addressing Bob by that name obviously gave him the impression that the name belonged to Bob.

"Bring him along!" said Harry. "Will you walk, Mr. Spratt? Or will you be kicked along the lane?"

"I ain't going—yaroooh!" roared Mr. Spratt, as Harry Wharton planted a hefty kick on his fat person.

"Will you walk now?"

"Elp!" roared Mr. Spratt.

"The helpfulness will not be terrific, my esteemed rascally Spratt," chuckled Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "The excellent and loathsome rotters at the Cross Keys cannot hear you, my absurd friend. Come onfully."

"This 'ere is a plant!" gasped Mr. Spratt. He realised—rather late—that he had been deluded into chasing Bob Cherry up the lane, in order to fall into this ambush far from aid.

"Exactly!" said Hurree Singh. "Get an esteemed move on."

"I won't—yooop!" howled the unfortunate Spratt, as a couple of boots fairly rang on him.

Mr. Spratt had said that he would not, but he decided that he would. There really was no arguing with the drastic methods employed by the Famous Five.

Mr. Spratt walked up the lane, puffing and gasping, the chums of the Remove still grasping him safely. They turned

off the lane into a field-path, and Mr. Spratt's hope of getting help from chance passers-by vanished.

As he stumbled and puffed and blew on his way to Greyfriars, Mr. Spratt tried to imagine what was the meaning of this extraordinary prank. But he could not fathom it. He could only attribute it to a "lark," the outcome of the schoolboys' exuberant spirits. The juniors turned into the road again quite near the school; but Mr. Spratt could not believe that they were actually taking him to Greyfriars until he was jerked into the ancient gateway of that scholastic establishment.

"You young idjits! Whatcher bringing me 'ere for?" he gasped.

"You're such a nice man," explained Bob Cherry, "we want our headmaster to make your acquaintance."

"You young lunatic! If I see your headmaster, I'll see that he wallops the lot of you for this 'ere!"

"Well, you're going to see him!" grinned Bob. "Come on!"

There was a shout in the quadrangle when Mr. Spratt was sighted there. Fellows swarmed up on all sides.

One fellow—Hazeldene of the Remove—turned quite white at the sight of Joseph Spratt. He cut off out of sight as fast as he could. Another fellow, looking from the window of Study No. 1 in the Remove, stared in blank amazement at the scene, his olive face startled, his dark eyes dilated. Arthur da Costa stood petrified at the study window.

"Heave ahead, my hearties!" chuckled Bob Cherry; and the fat and perspiring and enraged Mr. Spratt was hustled on to the School House.

By that time half Greyfriars had gathered round. Wingate of the Sixth came striding up, with a frowning brow.

"What does this mean?" he shouted. "How dare you bring this man here? What do you mean?"

"We've brought him to see the Head," answered Bob.

"What?" gasped Wingate.

"Well, this is the limit!" said Coker of the Fifth to Potter and Greene.

"This is the outside edge!"

"You young rascals!" thundered Wingate. "How dare you! Let the man go at once! Who is he? What—what—"

"Call Mr. Quelch!" said Bob. "Mr. Quelch will see that the Head sees him! He's got to see him!"

"Let a man go!" roared Mr. Spratt. "I'll 'ave the law on yer! This 'ere is kidnapping, this 'ere is! Let a cove go!"

Mr. Quelch, with thunder on his brow, came striding out. There was a hush on the excited crowd at once. Never had the master of the Remove looked so furious.

"What does this mean? What is the cause of this riot?" thundered the Remove master. "Who is this man?"

"Esteemed sahib—"

"Explain this at once, Wharton!" thundered the Remove master.

Wharton gave no sign. Bob Cherry answered promptly. The little deception was being carefully kept for the benefit of Mr. Spratt.

"This is the man Spratt, sir!" said Bob.

"Spratt! Spratt!" repeated Mr. Quelch.

"That man who wrote that letter to Wharton, sir!" said Nugent. "We've made him come here to own up that it was a trick, sir!"

"Bless my soul! If that is your object— But, goodness gracious!

Spratt, if Spratt is your name, have you anything to say to me?"

"I've got this 'ere to say!" roared Mr. Spratt. "I'll 'ave the law on you! Kidnapping a bloke when he's smoking peaceful outside a pub! I'll 'ave the law on you, old covey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" almost roared the Remove master. "Silence at once! This riot—this—this unprecedented uproar—Silence!"

"Mr. Quelch," said Johnny Bull steadily, "that man wrote a letter to Wharton, making out that he knew him—making out that Wharton knew the rotter! It was all lies, and we can prove it! He doesn't know Wharton by sight!"

"What? What?"

"Tell him to pick out Wharton, sir," said Nugent. "If he knows him, as he said in the letter, he can pick him out. Tell him to do it."

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

But the thunder had left the Remove master's brow. Undoubtedly Mr. Quelch was anxious to have the truth of that matter established, even by such extraordinary methods as the Removites had employed.

"Spratt—Mr. Spratt—if you are the man who wrote a letter to Wharton—I presume you are—you must be

SPECIAL FOR NEXT SATURDAY:

"PLAYING THE GAME!"

By Frank Richards

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acquainted with the boy, unless your letter was a dastardly trick. I command you, immediately, to point out the boy named Wharton among all these boys."

"Course I can!" hooted Mr. Spratt.

"There he is, 'ang him!"

And Mr. Spratt's stubby, unclean forefinger pointed at Bob Cherry of the Remove.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Truth Triumphs!

HARRY WHARTON & CO had released Mr. Spratt. They stood round him, in front of the House steps, on the lowest of which Mr. Quelch was standing. Round them was a swarm of fellows—a mob of excited juniors, with a good many of the Fifth and the Sixth. The outbreak of uproar in the quadrangle had drawn attention from far and near. Most of the masters were on the scene, or looking out of their study windows. The fellows expected, every moment, to see the Head himself arrive on the spot.

It was quite a sensation; and the Famous Five of the Remove, and Mr. Spratt, were the centre of the picture. Full in view of the bleary eyes of Mr. Spratt stood the five juniors, from whom he had to pick out the fellow he claimed to know—the fellow to whom he had written in familiar strain—the fellow named Wharton! And there was a gasp from some of the crowded Greyfriars fellows, and a laugh from some others, as the stubby forefinger pointed at Bob Cherry.

Mr. Spratt, of course, had no doubts. He knew none of the juniors by sight—indeed, could not have said positively that they were Greyfriars fellows at all, till they marched him into the school.

Bob had been addressed by the name of Wharton by the other fellows in the rascal's hearing. Naturally it had never occurred to him that the juniors were "stuffing" him to show up his roguery. Had he known Wharton, as his letter claimed he could not have been "stuffed." He demonstrated now, with the utmost clearness, that he did not know him.

Mr. Quelch gazed at the rogue almost in stupefaction. Both he and the Head had pondered deeply on the matter, unable to credit the junior's denial of all knowledge of the man who had written to him in such a strain, yet unable to decide that Wharton was guilty of hypocrisy and deception. To what decision the two masters would ultimately have come can hardly be said, but for the utter exposure of Mr. Spratt's falsehood. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's "wheezy idea" had turned up trumps.

There was a rustle behind Mr. Quelch, and a murmur ran through the excited swarm of Greyfriars men.

"The Head!"

"What does this extraordinary scene mean, Mr. Quelch?" asked Dr. Locke quietly.

"These juniors, sir, have brought this man here—the man Spratt; a most extraordinary proceeding on their part; but it would appear, sir, that the man is a rogue—a rogue of the most amazing effrontery—"

"Oh, dror it mild, guv'nor!" interjected Mr. Spratt. "I never wanted to come 'ere, did I? I was 'ustled 'ere by these young rips! I could 'ave the law of you for this 'ere, and so I tell you!"

"This man, sir," resumed Mr. Quelch, unheeding the rascal, "wrote the letter I handed to you, sir, addressed to Wharton, and opened by me. You will recall, sir, that he claimed to know Wharton well, to have met him in an accustomed place, to have had dealings with him. Now it transpires that he does not even know Wharton by sight."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed the Head.

"It is absolutely certain."

"Come off, guv'nor!" said Mr. Spratt.

"Ain't I a-pointing out the covey at this blessed minute?"

"Fellow, the boy you indicate is not Wharton!"

Mr. Spratt started.

"Oh, my eye!" he stuttered. "Them other blokes called him Wharton, and chance it."

"Just pulling your leg, old bean," grinned Bob Cherry. "If you knew Wharton, you wouldn't fancy I was Wharton."

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the Head.

"Spratt—if you are Spratt—point out Wharton at once, if you know him."

"Oh crimes!" said Mr. Spratt.

He had not the faintest idea which of the juniors was Wharton. He blinked uneasily round him, and cast a longing glance towards the distant gates.

"Wretch!" said the Head in a deep voice. "You do not even know by sight the junior boy with whom you claimed to be closely acquainted."

"My eye!" said Mr. Spratt. "This 'ere is a fair do, this is! Look 'ere, you tell these young coveys to let a man go! I been made to come 'ere, and you ain't a blooming magistrate to ask a man questions, that I know of. I ain't going to be jawed by a blinking schoolmaster! I'll 'ave the law of you, and so I tell you!"

The Head's look of majestic scorn almost withered Mr. Spratt.

"Rascal!" said the Head. "Your infamous letter, addressed to an honourable lad, with whom you are totally unacquainted, amounts to a slander. I shall take legal advice on the subject,



"Spratt—Mr. Spratt—if you are the man who wrote a letter to Wharton, you must be acquainted with the boy," said Mr. Quelch. "I command you to point him out." "'Course I can!" hooted Mr. Spratt. "There he is, 'ang him!" Mr. Spratt's stubby, unclean forefinger pointed at Bob Cherry of the Remove! (See Chapter 15.)

and ascertain whether you can be prosecuted for having written that letter. You shall receive the most rigorous punishment that the law provides!"

Mr. Spratt turned quite sickly to the view. Mr. Spratt and the law were on the very worst of terms. Whether that letter was actionable Mr. Spratt hardly knew, but he did not want to put the matter to the test. Very much did he not want to do so.

"Guv'nor," he whined, "it was only a joke—only a little joke, s'elp me! I never meant any 'arm. Look 'ere, you let a bloke go! I got an appointment at Wapshot this afternoon."

"Take the man away," said the Head. He turned back into the House, accompanied by Mr. Quelch.

The Greyfriars fellows closed in on Mr. Spratt rather like the waves of the sea on a wreck.

The Head had said "Take him away." The Head had not specified who was to take him away, or in what manner he was to be taken. But the Greyfriars fellows decided for themselves. That letter of Mr. Spratt's was the talk of the school now—all the fellows had heard of it, and they now knew, beyond doubt, that it had been written by this rascal, for some unknown reason, to blacken a Greyfriars junior's character. And they testified unto Mr. Spratt what they thought of such a thing.

A shouting crowd of fellows surged towards the gates. Somewhere in the midst of them was Mr. Spratt.

A gasping voice was faintly heard in wild protest. Mr. Spratt's protests were not heeded.

Bumped and thumped and hustled and bumbled, rolled and dragged and shoved and jerked, Mr. Spratt made his way towards the school gates—breathless, dizzy, hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels.

"Chuck him out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump!

Mr. Spratt landed outside the gates.

He sprawled there, gasping and gurgling, a sorry sight. If Mr. Spratt had been under a lawn-mower he would probably have looked a good deal like he looked now. He sat up, blinking and gasping.

"Ow, ow, wow!" spluttered Mr. Spratt. "Ow! Yow! Grooogh!"

"Kick him back to Friardale!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Hurrah!"

"Ow! Wow! 'Elp!" spluttered Mr. Spratt; and he staggered to his feet and ran. Terror lent him wings, as a novelist would say, and Mr. Spratt, wrecked as he was, fairly flew up the road and disappeared.

"That's that!" remarked Harry Wharton, as the chums of the Remove walked back cheerily to the House.

"The thatfulness is terrific," grinned Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

Mr. Quelch met the juniors as they came in. He called to the captain of the Remove.

"Wharton!"

"Yes, sir," said Harry.

"You and your friends adopted—hem—somewhat unusual methods in this matter," said Mr. Quelch, with a cough. "I am, nevertheless, glad that you did

so, as the matter turns out. You are absolutely cleared in regard to that wicked letter written by the man Spratt. His motive is quite inexplicable to me; but it is clear that the letter was a tissue of falsehoods. You are absolutely cleared in connection with this matter, Wharton!" added Mr. Quelch, raising his voice a little so that many ears should hear.

"Thank you, sir," said Harry.

Bob Cherry thumped the Nabob of Bhanipur on the back as the juniors went up to the Remove passage.

"Good old Inky!" he chirruped.

"Inky did the trick—we've put paid to the jolly old enemy this time."

Bob halted at the door of Study No. 1. He had spotted Da Costa's face at the window of that apartment. He threw open the door and bawled:

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! You there, Da Costa?"

"Yes."

"You'll be jolly glad to hear that Wharton's got out of that Spratt affair with flying colours, dear man!" chortled Bob. "I thought I'd drop in and mention it, because it would make you happy! Ain't you glad?"

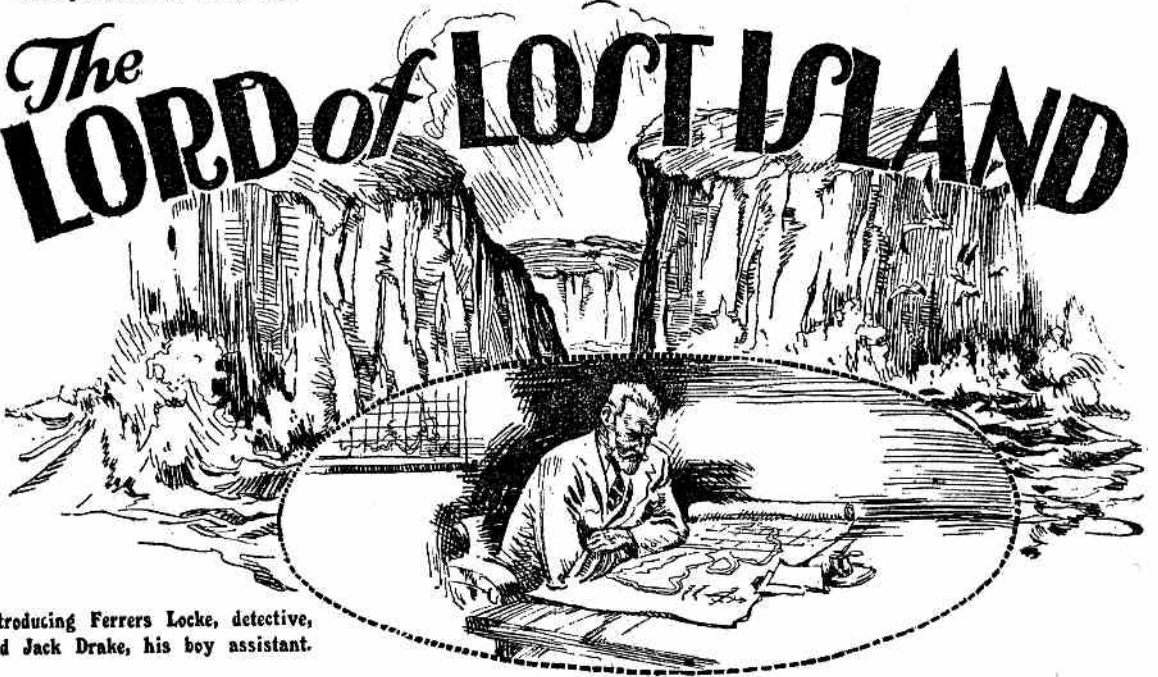
Without waiting for an answer Bob slammed the door and walked on up the passage after his chums, to tea in Study No. 13.

Hazeldene met Harry Wharton and Nugent as they came away from Bob Cherry's study after tea.

(Continued on page 28.)

LOST WITH ALL HANDS! Ships have been "disappearing" with alarming frequency in the Pacific—no wreckage, no survivors! And it's Ferrers Locke's job now to discover what's happened to these vessels and their crews. Join forces with him, boys!

The LORD of LOST ISLAND



Introducing Ferrers Locke, detective, and Jack Drake, his boy assistant.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Summons!

"I DO not think that our visitor can be coming to-night, Jack!" said Ferrers Locke, the famous Baker Street detective, glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece. "It is ten-thirty, now! We'll give him till eleven and if he hasn't put in an appearance by then, you turn in!"

"Right-ho, gov'nor!" replied Jack Drake, his boy assistant. "Any idea what the chap wants?"

Ferrers Locke shook his head.

"I was on the point of leaving my office in Baker Street this evening," he replied, "when I received an urgent telephone call from Lloyds! They asked me if I would allow their representative, a Mr. Joshua Pennyfold, to call on me here, at my flat, at nine o'clock to-night!"

"Why couldn't he call at the office some time during the day?" demanded Jack.

"Exactly what I wished to know!" replied the famous detective, with a smile. "But I was given to understand that the matter upon which he wishes to consult me is one of primary importance and that there is a very substantial reason why he should not call upon me at my office. This reason was to be explained to me by Mr. Pennyfold!"

"Strange that he hasn't turned up!" commented Jack. "I hope it's nothing serious, gov'nor! I think I'd get on my hind legs and howl if anything occurred to dish our cruising holiday!"

"Don't worry, lad!" replied Ferrers Locke. "It will have to be something extraordinarily serious to interfere with our cruise in the morning!"

"That'll be ripping, gov'nor!" chuckled Jack. "I'll—"

He broke off as the telephone bell trilled sharply. Ferrers Locke crossed to the instrument and, unhooking the receiver, placed it to his ear.

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"Hallo!" he called.

A strained, jerky voice came over the wire.

"Locke—is that Locke?"

"Yes! Ferrers Locke speaking!"

"Locke—Pennyfold speaking—they've got me—"

The voice blurred and became indistinct. Then it came again, more strongly.

"—Come quickly—fifty-one—Middle—A-ah—"

The voice died away in a choking gasp and there came across the wire a faint thud as though someone had fallen heavily.

"Hallo! Hallo! Are you there?"

Ferrers Locke's voice was grim, but no answer came from the other end of the wire.

Clapping one hand over the mouth-piece, the Baker Street detective turned to Jack.

"Get your hat and coat on, my boy! he said sharply. "I'll get the exchange! I must find where that call came from!"

Jack dashed from the room. When he returned, ready to sally out into the night, Ferrers Locke was in communication with the telephone exchange.

"Fifty-one Middle Park Street!" he was saying. "Thanks!"

"Get down to the garage, Jack!" he said quickly, hanging up the receiver. "Start the car up! We haven't a minute to lose! I'll join you there!"

A few minutes later Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake were roaring across London in the former's high-powered car.

Rain was falling heavily, and the wet, glistening roads were slippery and treacherous.

"Fifty-one Middle Park Street—is that the place?" asked Jack.

"Yes! It lies near Hyde Park Corner!" replied the detective.

Within fifteen minutes the car swung into a wide street, flanked by large houses standing a little distance back.

Number fifty-one, in front of which the car came to a grinding halt, looked

desolate and deserted. The windows were shuttered and the house had all the appearances of being unoccupied.

A policeman, his cape glistening in the light of an adjacent street lamp, came to a surprised halt as Ferrers Locke leapt out of the car and fumbled with the gate leading into the small garden which fronted the house.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "but that house is empty and has been this long while!"

Ferrers Locke clicked open the gate; then paused an instant to hand the policeman his card.

"I'm going in, constable!" he said grimly. "You had better come with me!"

"Certainly, Mr. Locke!" replied the policeman, a note of respect in his tone; for Ferrers Locke had often worked with Scotland Yard. "But what's the trouble?"

"Murder, I think!" replied the detective, and led the way quickly towards the house.

The front door was locked, obviously bolted from the inside. But an entry was quickly forced by way of the basement window, and the trio found themselves in a large, spacious kitchen.

Nothing stirred in the house. The silence was unbroken save for the whirr of a passing taxi on the road outside.

Flashing the beam of his electric torch round the kitchen, Ferrers Locke took in its details at a glance, then led the way upstairs to the ground floor.

A rapid search of the rooms revealed nothing. The rooms were furnished, the furniture being covered with dingy dust-sheets.

"You're sure, sir—" began the policeman, then relapsed into silence as Ferrers Locke said sharply.

"Quite sure! There is no mistake!"

With that the Baker Street detective mounted to the first floor, Jack and the policeman at his heels. Throwing open a door at the end of a carpeted landing, Ferrers Locke swept the room with the beam of his torch.

The next moment the policeman uttered a sharp exclamation, for lying face upwards on the floor near a small writing bureau was the figure of a man.

There came a click as Ferrers Locke pressed the electric light switch near the door and the room was flooded with light. For, unlike the rooms on the ground floor, the electric light fittings in this room carried bulbs.

Crossing the floor the detective dropped on his knees by the side of the prone figure and raised the head.

"Dead!" he said quietly. "Struck down from behind!"

Regaining his feet, he turned to the policeman.

"Ring up Scotland Yard, at once!" he said. "Jack, you remain here!"

With that he left the room abruptly. The policeman picked up the receiver of a telephone which stood on the small bureau, and in a voice which shook slightly, asked to be put through to Scotland Yard.

As he took stock of the room, the sheet-covered furniture of which suggested that it had been used as a smoke-room or morning-room, Jack subconsciously heard the policeman saying into the telephone:

"Yes, sir—murder—fifty-one Middle Park Street—Mr. Locke is here—very good, sir—"

Ferrers Locke re-entered the room as the policeman was hanging up the receiver.

"Inspector Pycroft, of the C.I.D., is coming right along, sir!" said the latter. His eyes wandered to the still form on the floor. "Any idea, sir, as to the identity—"

He left the sentence unfinished. Ferrers Locke nodded.

"A Mr. Joshua Pennyfold!" he replied and, stooping down, withdrew a thin silver card-case from the waistcoat-pocket of the dead man.

Opening it he brought to view a few gilt-edged visiting-cards inscribed with the name of Mr. Joshua Pennyfold.

"This house is on your beat, of course?" he inquired of the policeman.

"Yes, sir!"

"You saw no car nor any vehicle draw up at the house this evening?"

"Nothing at all, Mr. Locke, and I've been in the vicinity off and on for three hours! There's valuable property in this street and a lot of people who live in the street are away on holiday so I keep my eyes open!"

"Who owns this house?"

"Sir Eustace Fitzclarenc, sir! A young gentleman! He hasn't lived in it for a long time. Trying to let it, I believe!"

Ferrers Locke nodded.

"You had better go downstairs then, constable, and open that front door. Inspector Pycroft should be here any moment!"

The constable withdrew, and his heavy tread was heard going down the carpeted stairs.

"What do you make of it, guv'nor?" asked Jack, in a low voice.

"Briefly this, Jack! Mr. Pennyfold was to visit me at my flat. He failed to keep the appointment and rang me up in a distressed state, giving me to understand that he was being forcibly detained. It is obvious that he was struck down from behind whilst telephoning to me. By some means or other he had got hold of the telephone before his captors were aware of his intentions! They killed him, but killing him was not part of their programme!"

"How's that, guv'nor?"

"Because they made no effort to hide his body. Realising that he was dead, and realising that his telephone-call would, in all probability, bring someone hot-foot to the house, they cleared out without loss of time. A body is a cumbersome thing to dispose of, Jack, when every second is precious. No, they were not prepared for Pennyfold being killed, and when he was killed they cleared out in haste!"

"And in panic?" suggested Jack.

"I would not say that. They brought Pennyfold into the house by the back entrance—there is fresh mud in the passage—and they probably left that way. Daylight will show us if there are any footprints leading from the house! But their going suggests not so much panic as a callous disregard of consequences!"

"Then in that case they must be

pretty certain of their ability to cover their tracks!"

"Undoubtedly!"

"I suppose that there must be some direct connection between Mr. Pennyfold's death and his proposed visit to us!"

"Yes! I will ascertain from Lloyd's, at the earliest possible moment, upon what business Mr. Pennyfold wished to interview me. Someone, obviously wishing to prevent that interview, brought Pennyfold here. Who that someone was, I do not know, but he must have been aware that you and I were leaving London early to-morrow morning. My theory is that his intention was to hold Pennyfold till an interview with me was made impossible by my departure from London. If the murder of Pennyfold had been contemplated then it would never have been executed in such a hasty, clumsy manner!"

"You think then that he was merely being kept a prisoner till we had left London to-morrow?"

"I certainly do, at the moment! But here comes Inspector Pycroft!"

The muffled tread of feet were heard coming up the stairs, and the murmur of voices. The room door was thrown open and Inspector Pycroft, of the C.I.D., accompanied by a uniformed sergeant of police, entered the room.

Ferrers Locke and Inspector Pycroft knew each other well, and after a firm, brief handshake, the inspector turned and grimly surveyed the still figure on the carpet.

"Well, Mr Locke," he said, "this looks a bad business for somebody! What are the facts?"

The Interview with Sir Richard!

SIR RICHARD TEMPLEMAN, who occupied a distinguished position in the service of Lloyd's, sat plunged in the depths of a comfortable armchair in front of his library fire.

Sir Richard seemed strangely ill at ease. An unlighted cigar was between his teeth and his long, tapering fingers

The policeman uttered a sharp exclamation, for lying face upwards on the floor near a small writing bureau was the figure of a man!
(See this page.)



beat an impatient tattoo on the arm of his chair. More than once he rose to his feet and took a hasty turn up and down the floor.

A discreet knock at the door brought him up sharply during one of these perambulations.

"Come in!" he called curtly.

The door opened to admit Higgins his butler.

"Mr. Ferrers Locke to see you, sir!" murmured the latter, proffering a small silver salver upon which lay one of the detective's cards.

"Mr. Ferrers Locke—alone?" demanded Sir Richard.

"Yes, sir! Mr. Ferrers Locke is alone!"

"Thou show him in here, at once!" was the sharp reply.

The butler withdrew, and, reappearing within a few moments, ushered the Baker Street detective into the library.

Waiting until the butler had withdrawn and they were alone, Sir Richard turned to Ferrers Locke.

"Pray, be seated, Mr. Locke!" he said. "You have, of course, seen Mr. Pennyfold? I confess that I expected his returning here!"

"Mr. Pennyfold is dead, Sir Richard!" replied Ferrers Locke curtly. "He has been murdered!"

"Murdered?" repeated Sir Richard slowly, as though he could not credit what he had heard. "Pennyfold murdered?"

He stood staring at Ferrers Locke as though stunned.

"Yes, murdered. Certain papers which we found upon him indicated that he was in your department, so I have come on here to see if you can throw any light on the affair!"

Sir Richard slumped heavily into an armchair.

"This is terrible, Mr. Locke!" he said hoarsely. "Terrible! Tell me exactly what has happened!"

Briefly Ferrers Locke sketched the events of the night beginning with the failure of Mr. Pennyfold to keep his appointment and concluding with the decision arrived at between the Baker Street detective and Inspector Pycroft to lay the facts of the case before Sir Richard without a moment's delay.

"And now, Sir Richard," wound up Ferrers Locke, "if you can tell me the nature of Mr. Pennyfold's mission to me, it will undoubtedly throw some light on this extraordinary affair!"

"Mr. Pennyfold was one of our most trusted representatives!" replied Sir Richard. "Following a meeting late this afternoon, between my colleagues and myself, Mr. Pennyfold was instructed to consult you on a matter of the most primary importance!"

"And that matter, Sir Richard?"

"Was this. You are doubtlessly aware, Mr. Locke, that during the past six months there has been a most extraordinary and unaccountable loss of shipping in the South Pacific!"

"I have but recently returned from aboard, Sir Richard," replied Ferrers Locke, "and have therefore heard no details!"

"Ah, yes!" nodded Sir Richard, then, leaning forward in his chair as though to lend emphasis to his words, he went on: "Within the last six months ten vessels have been lost with all hands in the South Pacific. Six of those ships were British, homeward bound from Australia via the Panama Canal! And those six were registered at over twelve thousand tons burden. We, as the underwriters, have lost enormous sums of

money owing to these mysterious and terrible disasters!"

He paused, and Ferrers Locke waited in silence for him to continue.

"Now the extraordinary point about these disappearances is," he went on, "that the meteorological reports indicate that, in almost every case, the weather was good in the roughly defined areas where the ships vanished. The ships were, without exception, well-found and thoroughly seaworthy. Yet"—Sir Richard spread out his hand in a hopeless gesture—"they are missing with all hands!"

"And what is your theory?" asked Ferrers Locke quietly.

"I and my colleagues are convinced that it is not the hand of God, but the hand of man which is accountable for these disappearances!" was the terse reply.

"You mean—piracy?"

"Yes, piracy!" Sir Richard thumped on the arm of his chair with clenched hand. "How else can you explain it, Mr. Locke? I tell you the ships were first-rate sea-boats, and, as far as we can trace, encountered no rough weather! If they were rendered unseaworthy by striking some submerged derelict, or by striking some new volcanic reef, why did the crews not take to the boats? But no boat has been either picked up or even sighted! Ten ships, Mr. Locke, have vanished completely, and we wish the matter investigated. It was for that reason we sent Mr. Pennyfold to you."

"I see! You had, of course, some reason for not wishing to consult me at my office?"

"Yes! We decided to keep the fact that we were enlisting your aid, a close secret!"

"Why?"

"Because we did not overlook the fact that, if we and the owners of the vessels are the victims of some extraordinarily clever piratical gang, that gang may have spies who are watching to see what move we take in the matter. For it is a matter which cannot be allowed to rest!"

"I understand! Such foresight was extremely creditable!" replied Ferrers Locke.

"I was in a fever of impatience whilst waiting to hear from Pennyfold the result of his interview with you," continued Sir Richard. "You have seen what has happened to him, poor fellow! You will handle this case for us, will you not, Mr. Locke?"

Ferrers Locke was silent for a few moments. Then he said slowly:

"Had the case not involved the murder of Mr. Pennyfold, I think that I should have had to regretfully decline, Sir Richard. I have a lot of work on hand, and to-morrow I intended to take a short holiday. But there are features in this case which interest me. I will give you my decision first thing in the morning."

He rose to his feet and held out his hand.

"Good-night, Sir Richard!" he said.

"I will give the matter my most earnest consideration. You can rest assured, however, that Scotland Yard will leave no stone unturned to trace the murderers and bring them to justice!"

"There is just one question which I would like to ask, Mr. Locke!" replied Sir Richard. "Do you personally think that there is any connection between the missing ships and the death of Pennyfold?"

"It is quite possible!" replied Ferrers Locke, non-committally. "But at this

juncture, Sir Richard, I prefer to say nothing."

The Line of Inquiry!

LEAVING the house, Ferrers Locke joined Jack Drake, who was waiting in the car outside.

"Where to now, guv'nor?" asked the boy assistant, as the detective took the wheel and pressed the self-starter.

"I'm going to see Sir Eustace Fitzclarence!" replied Ferrers Locke. "He has a house in Mayfair. He may not be at home, but I'll find him, even if I've got to search London for him to-night!"

"You didn't ring up the house to ascertain whether or not he is in?" inquired Jack.

"No! I want him to have absolutely no inkling of what has happened till I see him!" replied Ferrers Locke grimly.

"But you don't think that he's mixed up in the murder of Pennyfold, guv'nor, do you?" demanded Jack, in surprise.

"No! Sir Eustace is a perfectly harmless type of silly young ass with more money than is good for him!" replied Ferrers Locke. "He's got some shady friends whom he accepts as real good fellows. Unfortunately he cannot see that it's his money and not himself which attracts them! On the other hand he has some very decent friends, and it's possible that we'll find him in the company of a smattering of both."

"Isn't he the fellow that financed an Atlantic flight a few months ago?" inquired Jack thoughtfully.

"Yes! He's always financing something. The machine, a seaplane, was never heard of again after leaving the west coast of Ireland! But, listen carefully, for I want you to know what Sir Richard Templeman said!"

Ferrers Locke plunged at once into an account of his interview with Sir Richard, and concluded just as he drew the car in towards the kerb in front of a large house in Mayfair.

"Here we are!" he said. "You wait with the car, Jack, and keep your eyes open!"

A few minutes later the Baker Street detective was confronting Sir Eustace's butler, a surly, sallow-faced individual who answered the door in response to his ring.

"Is Sir Eustace at home?" he demanded.

"Sir Eustace is at home, but he is engaged, sir!" replied the butler civilly enough.

"Tell him I wish to see him urgently!" replied Ferrers Locke, curtly handing the butler his card.

The latter took it, glanced at it, then shot a quick look at the Baker Street detective.

"I am afraid it will be impossible for Sir Eustace to see you, sir!" he said. "He is engaged! Perhaps I could take a message!"

"You'll take that card, my man!" retorted Ferrers Locke coldly. "And you will take it at once!"

The butler hesitated a moment, then, as Ferrers Locke stepped past him into the hall, he closed the door, and without a word, retreated with the card.

The detective had not long to wait before the butler returned.

"Please come this way!" said the latter tonelessly, and the detective followed him into a small, cosy study on the ground floor.

Scarcely had the butler withdrawn than a young, fair-haired fellow entered the room. He was clad in immaculate evening-dress. If there was a certain

air of foppishness about him it was belied by a frank and open smile.

"Good-evenin', Mr. Locke!" he said, coming forward with outstretched hand.

"Er—what—er—" "You have a house in Middle Park Street, Sir Eustace," said Ferrers Locke abruptly, "number fifty-one?"

"Yes, that's right!" "A man has been found murdered there to-night."

Sir Eustace recoiled a step. His jaw dropped and he literally goggled at Ferrers Locke, horror in his eyes.

"Wh-what?" he gasped. "A—a chappie found dead in my house!"

"Yes; a Mr. Joshua Pennyfold," replied Ferrers Locke, his eyes on Sir Eustace.

"This—this is awful!" babbled Sir Eustace. "Awful! Pennyfold, you say? Never heard of the chappie. Who slaughtered him? Why did they do it? And, oh, why"—his voice rose to almost a wail—"why did they choose my house? Dash it! Why my house?"

"That is exactly what I wish to ascertain," replied the detective. "You are endeavouring to let the house, I believe?"

"Yes, that is right!"

"Oh, yes, certainly—by all means!" babbled Sir Eustace. And he stretched a trembling hand towards the bell.

But before his fingers had pressed on it there came a quiet knock at the door, and a white-haired, kindly-looking man entered the room.

He stopped short at sight of Ferrers Locke, and, with a murmured apology, was about to retrace his footsteps, when Sir Eustace said eagerly:

"Don't go, professor! I'm in the very dickens of a mess! Come in and sit down!"

"I was not aware that you were

fessor quietly. "What, I wonder, could be the motive for such a murder?"

"That must be a matter for investigation," replied Ferrers Locke crisply.

"Sir Eustace, if you will grant me a short interview with your secretary I shall be much obliged." He paused a moment, then added deliberately: "I must be getting back to my flat as soon as possible."

Sir Eustace pressed the bell, and when the butler appeared in response to the ring, directed that Scrivener should attend in the study.

Twenty minutes later Ferrers Locke was in possession of a complete list of the names of all those who had obtained from Scrivener details of the house in Middle Park Street.

As he was leaving, Sir Eustace accompanied him into the hall.

"Good-night, Sir Eustace!" said Ferrers Locke. "There is no need for worry on your part. By the way, how long have you had your present butler?"

Sir Eustace started.



Allowing his voice to trail deliberately away, Ferrers Locke stretched out a foot and hooked it round a chair. Then he pulled gently till the chair crashed to the floor. In grim silence he waited, his ear to the receiver.

(See page 28.)

"Are you endeavouring to let it privately, or have you placed it in the hands of agents?"

"I'm letting it myself. At least, Scrivener, my secretary, is doing the necessary, you know. Lots of wealthy chappies are after it, so it was a waste of money giving the letting of it to agents—what?"

"You mean that some of your own circle of friends are interested in the house?"

"Yes, that's right!"

"You have, of course, allowed them the keys, in order that they might look over the house?"

"Yes, I suppose so. Scrivener will know, I say!" Sir Eustace's voice became horror-stricken. "You—you're not suggesting that—that any friends of mine are—mixed up in this ghastly business?"

"We will talk of that later," replied Ferrers Locke. "You had better hear all the facts."

For the second time that night the Baker Street detective gave an account of the murder, although he missed out certain details which he had told Sir Richard Templeman.

"And now," he concluded, "I will see your secretary, Scrivener."

engaged, Eustace, otherwise, I would not have intruded," said the elderly man courteously.

"That's all right! You're not intruding. This is Mr. Ferrers Locke! Mr. Locke—Professor Chalmers!"

Professor Chalmers shook hands with the Baker Street detective and seated himself in an armchair. His kindly eyes looked troubled as they wandered from Sir Eustace to Ferrers Locke, and then back again.

Ferrers Locke had never previously met Professor Chalmers, but he knew him, by repute, to be a wealthy philanthropist. He was popular with all classes of society, and spent a great portion of his immense wealth on hospitals and other such excellent institutions. He was quiet and reserved, shunning, whenever possible, the limelight of publicity.

Wildly, almost incoherently, Sir Eustace told him what had happened at the house in Middle Park Street.

"The house you once thought of taking, professor!" he concluded. "Dash it! Isn't it just too ghastly for words?"

"It seems almost incredible that such a thing could happen," said the pro-

"You don't think—" he began.

"No, no!" replied Ferrers Locke. "I merely thought I recognised the man."

"Oh, yes; perhaps you did recognise him. Professor Chalmers, who is interested in the hostels for poor down-and-outers, induced me to give him a chance. He was a butler before, but started to drink, and boned a chappie's silver. He's gone straight enough since I've had him."

"It was good of you to give him a chance," replied Ferrers Locke. "Good-night, Sir Eustace!"

The Trap!

"HOME now, Jack," said Ferrers Locke, slipping into the driving-seat; "but we will park the car at a garage near my flat and walk the remainder of the way. I do not want to arrive at the flat too soon!"

"Too soon, gov'nor?" questioned Jack, in surprise.

"Yes. I have a certain theory in my mind, Jack, and I am curious to ascertain whether or not it will prove correct. Consequently, we will walk casually home from the garage."

"I don't follow, guv nor!"

Ferrers Locke smiled enigmatically, and pressed the self-starter. He did not explain further, but during the journey sat plunged in thought, his hands gripping the steering-wheel and his eyes gazing sombrely ahead.

Leaving the car at a small garage he and Jack set off on foot through the quiet, almost deserted streets, towards the flat. The walk proved uneventful; but, pausing near the outer door of the flat, Ferrers Locke thrust an automatic into Jack's hand.

"Tread quietly, Jack!" he said, in a low voice. "Keep your gun in your hand!"

Noislessly he approached the door. There came the faintest of faint clicks as the key turned in the lock. Then, swinging the door open, Ferrers Locke stepped quickly into the room, and switched on the electric light.

"H'm! No one here, Jack!" he murmured, glancing round the room. "Let's have a look round!"

A thorough search of the remaining rooms revealed the fact that there was no one lurking in the flat. Slipping his gun into his overcoat pocket, Ferrers Locke led the way back to the sitting-room.

"I expected visitors, Jack," he said, taking up a position in front of the fire, "and I allowed them plenty of time to get here. Hallo!"

He broke off sharply, and, crossing to the telephone, bent down and scanned the mouthpiece closely. Then, taking off his overcoat, he drew on a pair of rubber gloves and unscrewed the mouthpiece from its holder.

"Look at this, Jack!" he said quietly, holding the mouthpiece in his hand and indicating a thick, oily substance smeared inside the mouthpiece. "What do you make of that?"

"Poison!" hazarded Jack slowly. "Yes, poison!" replied Ferrers Locke grimly. "This grows interesting, Jack!"

Defily the Baker Street detective scraped the oily substance off the vulcanite, and placed it on a clean sheet of white paper. Then, thoroughly cleaning the mouthpiece, and taking the precaution of washing it with a strong disinfectant, he replaced it on the holder.

"I will analyse this stuff later!" he said. "In the meantime, make some strong coffee, Jack! I will wait here for the telephone call coming through."

"What call?" demanded Jack. "Look here, guv nor! I can't make head or tail of this!"

"I will explain it all later, Jack! The call I am expecting is one which will come from the persons who doctored the phone. They will ring me up, believing that, as I answer the call I will be drawing in through the mouth-

piece the poisonous fumes from the stuff which was placed there!"

"Has all this anything to do with Pennyfold?" asked Jack. "Is it the same crowd?"

"Yes!" Jack nodded, and busied himself in preparing some hot coffee. Scarcely had he finished than the telephone-bell trilled sharply.

Picking up the receiver, Ferrers Locke placed it to his ear and called quietly:

"Hallo!" "Hallo! I wish to speak to Mr. Ferrers Locke!" came a voice across the wire.

"Ferrers Locke speaking!"

"This is Sir Richard Templeman speaking, Mr. Locke! Since seeing you, I have spoken over the phone with my colleagues. The death of Pennyfold having opened up new issues in the case, we have decided to place the whole matter in the hands of Scotland Yard!"

"I see."

"You will therefore not interest yourself in the case, Mr. Locke. I am sorry, of course, but you understand?"

"Quite! I—I—"

Ferrers Locke allowed his voice to trail deliberately away. Stretching out a foot, he looked it round a chair and pulled gently till the chair crashed to the floor.

Then, in grim silence, he waited.

"Hallo, hallo!" came the voice impatiently. "Are you there, Mr. Locke? Hallo!"

Then came silence as, after a few moments, the person at the other end of the wire rang off.

Ferrers Locke waited a few minutes, then called the exchange.

"Can you please tell me what number has just rung me up?" he inquired.

After a slight delay the answer came:

"Gerard 0009!"

"Thank you very much!"

Ferrers Locke hung up the receiver, and turned to Jack.

"The call was supposed to come from Sir Richard Templeman," he said.

"The voice was very like Sir Richard's!"

"But you can soon find out where it really did come from!" replied Jack.

"I'll look up Gerard 0009 in the directory!"

"There is no need," replied Ferrers Locke quietly. "Gerard 0009 is Sir Richard's number!"

(The first round in the battle between Ferrers Locke and the mysterious organisation responsible for Pennyfold's tragic end has been fought, and Ferrers Locke is the victor. There are hundreds of perils and adventures ahead of him, boys, some of which you will read about in next week's exciting instalment. Don't miss it!)

HARRY WHARTON'S ENEMY!

(Continued from page 23.)

"I've got it!" he muttered. "Here." He shoved an envelope into Wharton's hand.

"What—?" "It's what I owed you. I said I'd square—that's it!" And with that Hazel turned and walked quickly away and went into his own study.

Wharton, in astonishment, opened the envelope. Five pound notes were inside it. Frank looked at them and whistled.

"Fancy Hazel settling!" he said, with a grin.

"It's because—?" Wharton frowned and broke off. "Anyhow, he's settled the worm! This is Mauly's, Franky, and he's going to have it."

"Yes, rather."

Harry Wharton tapped at Study No. 12, and went in. Lord Mauleverer was taking a rest on his study sofa after tea. He looked round rather apprehensively—perhaps in dread of seeing Billy Bunter. But he smiled cheerily at the sight of the captain of the Remove.

"Trickle in, old bean," he said affably.

"Take a pew."

"I've dropped in to settle, Mauly."

"Eh?"

"I owe you five pounds."

"Do you?"

"Yes, and here it is."

Mauleverer blinked at the captain of the Remove in astonishment.

"But you don't owe me anything, old bean," he protested. "I'm sure I should remember it if I'd lent you a fiver. Quite sure."

"Take my word for it, old fellow," said Wharton, laughing. "It's your lost fiver, Mauly! I'll explain if you insist on it, but I'd rather not."

"Oh, gad!" said Mauleverer. "If you give me your word it's mine, of course I—"

"I do!"

"That does it, then; all serene, no need to explain," said Mauleverer placidly.

And so that matter was settled.

In the Rag that evening Harry Wharton looked curiously at the olive face of Arthur da Costa. That inscrutable face expressed nothing. What the Eurasian thought of his defeat, whether he was thinking of it at all, could not be read in his impassive features. Once more the snake-in-the-grass had struck, and once more he had missed, and there were keen eyes on the watch for him if he should venture to strike again.

THE END.

(Now look out for the next story in this brilliant series, chums, entitled: "Playing the Game!" which shows Da Costa in a new light. If you miss this treat you'll feel like kicking yourself when your pal-tells you how good it was.)



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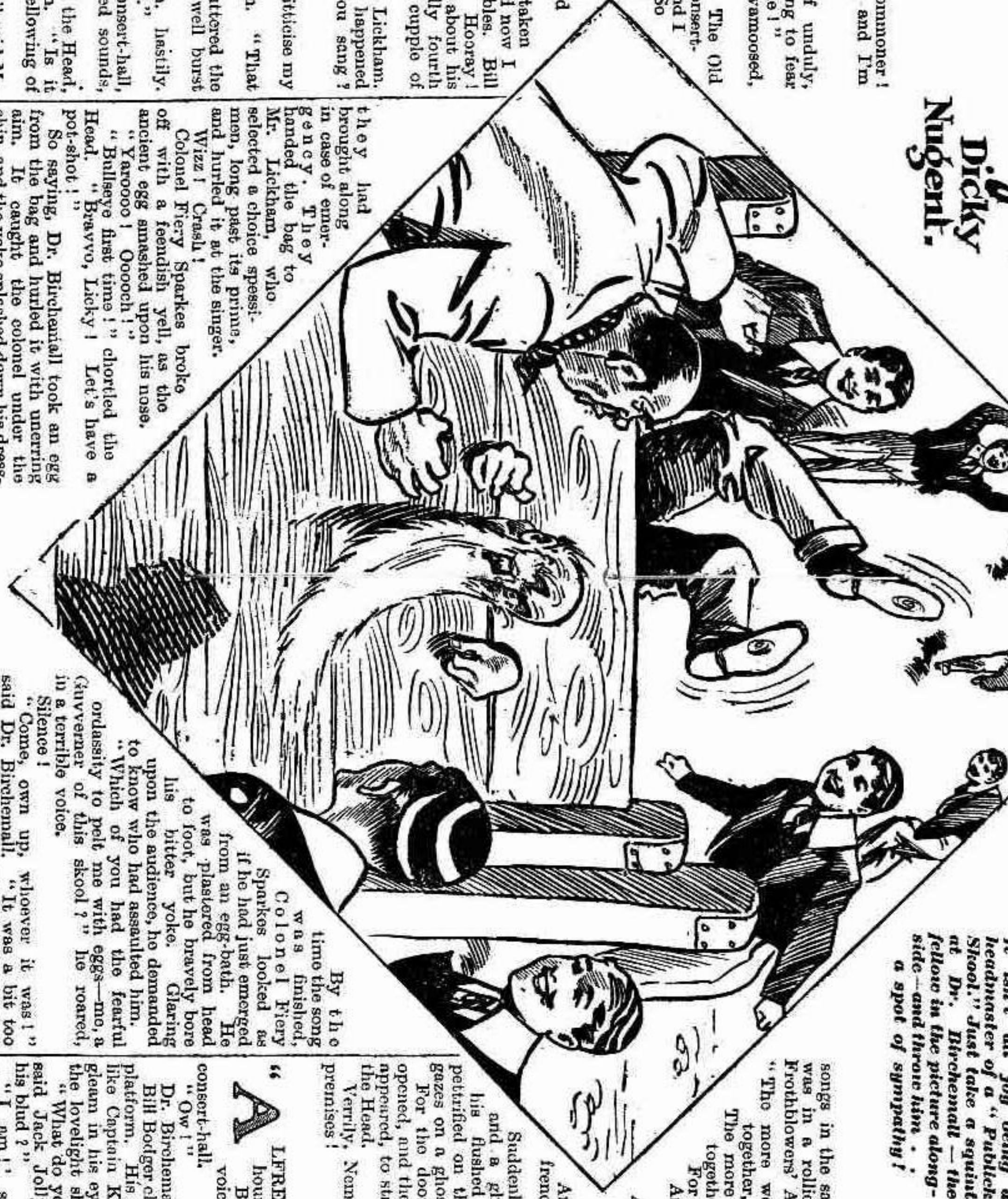


WHO PUT THE WIND UP DR. BIRCHEMALL? READ THE AMUSING AND AMAZING STORY BELOW, CHUMS!

AN IT FOR AN IT!

by Dicky Nugent.

It isn't all fog being a hoodlum of a "Public Street." Just take a squint at Dr. Birchemall—the fellow in the picture alongside—and throw him a spot of sympathy!



platform, and hurried away to get a much-needed bath and change!

"An' now, after waiting patiently all these years, I'm goin' to rivo Dr. Birchemall a tastro of his own methism!"



BANG! Crash! Wallop! At the sound of that jentle ratter-tat on the door of his study, Dr. Birchemall uttered a yelp of terror. His face turned so ghastly as to be almost ghostly. His neeze rattled together like the bones of a skelington. The inspiration stood out in grate beads on his horrid forehead.

"No, no!" cried the Head, in a panick. "Go away! I'm not here!"

"I am Mr. Lickham!" said the astonished Form-master. "Oh!" The Head gave a grate gasp of relief, and spoke in his hatcheral voice again. "It's you, Licky, is it? I was afraid it was that other scoundrel, Bill Bodger. Trot right in, Licky!"

"How can I trot in, when you've locked the door?" demanded Mr. Lickham. "I don't happen to have my berylerly tools on me, at the moment."

He stepped to the door, unlocked it, and seized Mr. Lickham by the coat-tails, and dragged him into the study. Then, with a lightning movement, he slammed the door again, locked it, and sank into his chair. His face was haggard; his eyes had a hunted, haunted look.

"Licky!" he cried dramatically. "I go in fear of my life!"

"Why, nobody would harm a hare of your head!"

"Reticulus!" said Mr. Lickham. "Why, nobody would harm a hare of your head!"

"They couldn't very well, seeing as how I'm bald," said the Head, with a faint smile. "But there is a man staying at this school, Lickham, who has got his knife into me."

"Do you mean Bill Bodger, the Old Boy?" asked Mr. Lickham. "Dr. Birchemall nodded.

"Once upon a time," he said—"and this is no fairy-tail, Lickham—I sacked Bill Bodger from St. Sam's, for hitting a master on the head with a hammer. He has never forgiven me. It has rankled in his breast all these years, and he has vowed vengeance! Ever since the Old Boy came, I have been on tender hooks, waiting for the blow to fall. But nothing has happened. And as it happens to be the last day of the Old Boy's visit, THE MAGNET LIBRARY—No. 1,065.

"I deemed it prudent to lock myself in my study. I have a horror of being finally assaulted. Of course, in my young days I could have wiped up the floor with Bill Bodger, big and bery though he is; but when a man gets to ninety years of age, he duzzet fight with his dookles."

"Is Bill Bodger a dook, then?" asked Mr. Lickham, in surprize. "Is he really a pier of the realm?"

"Rattus! He's a common commener; and you wouldn't find a commener! Bodger is a prizefighter's son, and I'm afraid he means mischief."