

The Best School Story of the Week... "HIS RECORD CONDEMNED HIM!" By Frank Richards.

The Magnet 2^D



HIS RECORD CONDEMNED HIM!

By FRANK RICHARDS



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Letting Prout Know!

"SHUT up!" roared Coker. Coker of the Fifth was addressing his friends, Potter and Greene. But he might have been addressing all Greyfriars, to judge by his voice. Coker had a powerful voice, and when he really let it go, a megaphone had nothing on it.

"Sounds like an argument!" remarked Bob Cherry, with a grin.

It did!

Harry Wharton & Co. of the Remove, taking a walk in the quad after tea, heard Coker's dulcet tones from afar, as they came along the path under the old elms.

As their walk was taking them in the direction of the bench on which Horace Coker sat, they heard Coker's voice again, and yet again, as they drew nearer. And each time they heard it, Coker was saying "Shut up!"

Coker's vocabulary seemed limited. But what it lacked in variety, it made up in emphasis. He fairly bawled.

"Shut up!"

This was the fourth time. And still Potter and Greene did not shut up.

"For goodness' sake, Coker—" said Potter.

"For the love of Mike—" urged Greene.

"Shut up!" Coker was still repeating himself.

"But I say—"

"Old chap—"

Potter and Greene spoke simultaneously. But they had no chance to get further.

"I said 'Shut up!'" roared Coker,

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introducing a variation on the original theme, as it were.

The Famous Five of the Remove came to a halt, and looked on. The argument, evidently, was growing hot. Really, it looked as if it was coming to scrapping. If the Fifth Form men were going to scrap, naturally the juniors did not want to miss the entertainment.

Coker's rugged face was red and wrathful.

He had an open notebook on his knee, and a stump of pencil in his hand. On a page of that notebook, something had been pencilled in large capital letters. So large were those capitals, that the juniors could see them, from a dozen feet away. And what they saw was:

"OLD ASS PROUT!"

Which made them gasp a little. Mr. Prout was Coker's Form-master in the Fifth. That Coker regarded him as an old ass, was no secret. But this looked as if he had an idea of letting Prout know what he thought of him!

No wonder Potter and Greene were arguing with him! No fellow at school could let his Form-master know what he thought of him! It was altogether too dangerous!

"The howling ass!" murmured Bob Cherry. "If Coker were a pal of mine, I'd bag that silly rot and jam it down the back of his neck!"

Potter and Greene looked as if they were on the verge of taking such drastic measures. But they were not likely to go over the verge. Horace Coker was altogether too hefty and muscular a man to be argued with in that way.

Having reduced his friends—momentarily—to silence, Coker put the pencil in his pocket, and deliberately tore out the page on which he had written. He rose to his feet.

"That's that!" he said grimly.

"You can't do it!" almost wailed Potter. "A man might be sacked for checking his beak like that!"

"Don't be an ass, Potter! I'm not going to sign my name to it!" said Coker sarcastically. "When Prout finds this on his study table, he won't know it came from me. He will know that he's considered an old ass—and it's time he did!"

"Ten to one he'll spot you!" almost groaned Greene.

"Don't be a fathead, Greene! Nobody's going to know!"

"Nobody!" gasped Potter. "There's half a dozen fags staring at you this blessed minute!"

Coker did not even look round at the fags. Fags were inconsiderable microbes that Coker passed by, like the idle wind which he regarded not.

"Prout's gone out now," he said. "Safe as houses! I shall leave this on his table, and he will find it when he comes back. He will know what we think of him in the Fifth! Do him good!"

"But—" moaned Potter and Greene.

"I've had enough from Prout!" said Coker, breathing deep and hard. "A fellow has to be patient with a school-master, I know—they're a dense lot, and it's no good expecting any sense from them. But there's a limit! Am I going to let him keep jumping on me in the Form-room for nothing at all?"

"But it wasn't for nothing!" howled Potter. "He told us all to bring in"

the notes of the lesson yesterday, and you never brought any—"

"I did! I put those notes in my pocket before I went into class," said Coker. "I told Prout so! He didn't believe me, simply because I hadn't the notes!"

"Well, you hadn't them—"

"I had! It wasn't till afterwards that I found out that there was a slit in the lining of my pocket, and the paper had slipped through," said Coker. "I had the Latin notes all right, though I couldn't find them."

"Well, then—"

"And Prout jawed me for a solid five minutes!" went on Coker, with thrilling indignation. "Making out that I was careless and forgetful—even stupid! He used the word 'stupid.' Me stupid!"

"Coker stupid, you men!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Fancy that!"

And the Famous Five chuckled.

"You know he did!" went on Coker. "Called me stupid before the whole Form! Me! If Prout had as much brains in his head as I have in my little finger, we would get on better!"

"Oh dear!" moaned Potter.

"Prout's going to know where he gets off!" said Coker. "This will give him the tip! Very likely he doesn't realise what an old ass he is! I've often thought so. Now he will know."

"You can't—"

"You shan't—"

Coker was turning away, in the direction of the House. Potter and Greene jumped up from the bench. They looked quite desperate. Coker was a trial to his friends—a great trial! But they really did not want old Coker to be sacked for checking his beak.

Potter caught him by one arm, Greene by the other. They jerked him to a halt.

Coker turned on them in great wrath.

"Leggo!" he roared.

"For the love of Mike, Coker, don't—"

"Leggo—"

"Do listen to a chap, old man! For your own sake—"

"I said leggo!"

"Coker—" pleaded Potter and Greene together, still holding on.

Coker wrenched. He wrenched himself free—and he shoved! Potter and Greene, receiving hefty shoves on the chest, sat down on the bench again, quite suddenly.

Coker stalked away.

Potter and Greene gazed after him and gazed at one another. They had done all they could. Short of actual assault and battery, they had done everything. It was no use—it never was any use arguing with Coker!

Coker, victorious, marched off—to rush in where angels feared to tread, as fools are said to do! He passed the juniors on the path under the elms, and frowned at grinning faces.

"Coker, old man—" began Harry Wharton. Fifth Form men did not matter very much to the Remove; but nobody liked to see Coker rushing upon destruction like this. "I say, Coker—"

"Did you say Coker, old man?" asked Coker. "Don't do it again! I don't like cheek from fags!"

"Look here—" began Bob Cherry. "Shut up!"

Coker stalked away to the House. Harry Wharton & Co. watched him as he went. He disappeared into the House—evidently bound for his Form-master's study, with that remarkable missive for Prout! That Prout, when

he found that missive, would track it home to its perpetrator, nobody but Coker had the slightest doubt. This was going to be the long jump for Coker!

"Well, old Coker's the man to ask for it!" said Johnny Bull.

"We'll see him off to-morrow!" said Bob. "Poor old Coker!"

It was quite sad to think that within twenty-four hours old Coker was going to be turfed out of Greyfriars! But it could not be helped! A fellow who asked for it so earnestly, could not be denied that for which he asked!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter Wants to Know!

"CAD!"

Billy Bunter jumped.

"Rotter!"

Bunter blinked.

"Worm! Toad!"

"Oh crikey!" murmured Billy Bunter in astonishment.

Billy Bunter was standing in the Remove passage, near the door of Study No. 1. Bunter had tea'd with Lord Mauleverer, in Study No. 12, and, having cleared his lordship's table to the last crumb and the final plum, he

Anybody seen Prout's ten-pound note? The question is being asked up and down Greyfriars, but nobody can supply the answer. Suspicion falls on Eric Wilmot, who, expelled from his last school, has come to Greyfriars resolved to blot the bitter past out of his mind!

had rolled out of Study No. 12, much to his lordship's relief.

Passing Study No. 1 on his way to the stairs, it occurred to Billy Bunter that Harry Wharton & Co. might not have finished tea yet. They had not had such strenuous assistance as Maul.

If they hadn't finished, Bunter was prepared to help them finish. So he paused, to ascertain whether they were in the study.

Thus it came to pass that the fat Owl of the Remove heard the exclamations that proceeded from the study, and was greatly astonished thereby.

He knew the voice—Wilmot's. Wilmot, evidently, was alone in the study. He could not have been addressing such remarks to Wharton or Nugent, with whom he was on the best of terms; there would have been replies—emphatic replies, and probably punching. He was alone.

But that made it all the more surprising. Wilmot could hardly be telling himself what he thought of himself! He was calling somebody names—some person who wasn't present! Which was really remarkable!

"Oh, the cad! The rotter!" came the bitter voice again. "The rotten, rank outsider!"

Curiosity was Billy Bunter's besetting sin; and this was enough to make any fellow curious—any fellow like Bunter, at all events.

The door of Study No. 1 was ajar. Stepping to it, Billy Bunter pushed it a few inches farther open, and blinked in through his big spectacles.

He expected to see Eric Wilmot. But all he saw of Wilmot was the back of a dark head of hair.

Wilmot was sitting in the study armchair, with his back to the door. Evidently, he had not the remotest idea that the door was half-open, and that a fat, inquisitive junior was blinking in. Bunter gazed at the top of his head.

It was really amazing for a fellow to be sitting in an armchair, addressing such remarks, apparently, to the fireplace!

But a rustling sound of paper caught Bunter's ear. Wilmot had a letter in his hand, and was reading it.

Bunter remembered that there had been a letter in the rack for Wilmot that morning. No fellow in the Remove could get a letter without the fat Owl being aware of the circumstance.

That letter had borne the postmark of Topham, as Bunter had also noticed. From which he drew the correct conclusion—that it was a letter from some chap Wilmot had known at his former school. Bunter, like all the Remove, knew that Wilmot had been at Topham School before he came to Greyfriars, that term.

Bunter grinned.

Those extraordinary remarks of Wilmot's, it was clear, referred to some unknown Topham fellow, who had written to him!

"Oh, the rotter!" Wilmot exclaimed again. "By gad, if he does come over I'll kick him all the way back to the station!"

Then he was silent, apparently reading that unwelcome letter over again. Billy Bunter stepped forward silently.

He was simply burning with curiosity by that time. And when it was a question of gratifying his curiosity Billy Bunter had absolutely no scruples. Often and often had Bunter been kicked, in the Remove, for peeping into other fellows' letters. Now he was at it again—at the risk of another kicking.

Silently, behind the armchair, Bunter peered over Wilmot's head. The letter, in Wilmot's hand, was outspread under his inquisitive stare.

Bunter blinked at it with breathless interest. As the page had been turned, he did not see the beginning. But he read:

"—rather thought you might like to see a man from your old school. Your answer wasn't jolly civil. I don't want to rub it in, but there's precious few Topham fellows who would speak to you, or touch you with a barge-pole, after what you did here. You needn't be afraid that I shall give you away at your new show. I know how to hold my tongue, and—"

That was all Bunter could see. But it was a rich reward for his inquisitiveness.

His eyes gleamed behind his big spectacles.

Clearly, there was something fishy about this new fellow, Wilmot. Bunter realised that he might have guessed that one, so to speak.

The fellow had come to Greyfriars suddenly, after the term had started. It was odd, to say the least, for a fellow to start the term at one school and then be transferred to another.

And he had seemed to want to keep his old school dark, too. It was, at all events, quite a long time before it had come out—by accident—that he had been at Topham.

He had done something at his former school!

Bunter knew that now! How a fellow who had "done" something at Topham had got admitted to Greyfriars afterwards might have been a puzzle. But Bunter could guess that one, too!

Mr. Hacker, the master of the Shell at Greyfriars, was Wilmot's uncle! Hacker had managed it somehow.

In his eagerness to see more, the prying Owl almost leaned over Wilmot's head.

Only his deep absorption in that unwelcome letter from his old school could have kept Wilmot unaware of the fat junior behind him.

But he remained quite unaware of it. He turned the page, and Bunter saw more. He glimpsed the signature at the end—Crawley!

Crawley, then, was the name of the Topham fellow who had written! But what was written on that page, as well as the name, was not destined to reach Bunter's knowledge.

For Wilmot, with a sudden gesture of rage, crumpled the letter in his hand and rose abruptly from the chair—so suddenly, and so unexpectedly, that the top of his head established sudden and unexpected contact with a fat chin!

"Oh!" gasped Wilmot.

"Whoop!" roared Bunter.

Bunter had not intended to reveal his presence, of course. His idea had been to tiptoe out, as he had tiptoed in.

But that sudden crash on his fat chin disconcerted his plans! That fat chin felt as if it had been driven through the back of his fat head!

It hadn't. But it felt as if it had! Conscious only, for the moment, of a fearful pain in that chin, Bunter staggered back, clasping it with both hands, and roared.

Eric Wilmot bounded out of the chair. With the letter crumpled in his hand, he spun round, staring at Bunter.

"Ow!" roared Bunter. "Wow! Oh, my chin! Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Bunter—"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"What are you doing here?" shouted Wilmot.

He rubbed the top of his head. He realised at once what Bunter had been doing. His head could not have cracked on Bunter's chin unless Bunter's chin had been just over his head! That fat owl had been spying into the letter he was reading. He knew it at once.

He came round the armchair with a jump.

The expression on his face was alarming—so alarming that Bunter almost forgot the pain in his chin, and made a wild bound for the door.

He was quick, but he was not quick enough. Wilmot's hand grasped his collar and dragged him back. With the other hand, having shoved the crumpled letter into his pocket, he grabbed a ruler from the table.

Bunter, yelling, was twisted over the edge of the table, in a grasp that was like iron. Then the ruler rose and fell. The dust rose from Billy Bunter's trousers, and wild and frantic yells rose from Billy Bunter.

"Ow! Yaroo! Stoppit! Oh crikey!"

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

"Oh! Help! Yoop!"

Eric Wilmot had lost his temper. That was not surprising, in the circumstances. Pinning Bunter face down to the table, he swiped, and swiped with the ruler; and Bunter wriggled, and yelled, and howled, and kicked, and roared. But the new fellow did not heed his wriggling, and yelling, and

howling, and kicking, and roaring. Headless of the fact that the terrific uproar rang the length of the Remove passage, and beyond, he swiped, and swiped, and swiped.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Being Kind to Bunter!

"**H**OLD on!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "What—"

"Behold the esteemed and idiotic Coker!"

The Famous Five had come into the House. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh gave a nod of his dusky head, in the direction of Masters' Passage.

From that direction Horace Coker of the Fifth Form appeared.

The Famous Five smiled. Coker, evidently, had done it! He had stalked into the House, with the declared intention of planting that cheeky message on Prout's table in Prout's study. Seeing him coming away from Masters' Studies, the chums of the Remove could have no doubt that Coker had carried out his intention. It had been quite easy—easy as falling off a form. Coker had only to walk into Prout's study, land his scrap of paper there, and walk out again. Clearly that was what Coker had done.

Grim satisfaction was visible in Coker's rugged countenance. He had said that he would do it, and he had done it—all the more because his friends had sought to restrain him. Opposition to his lordly will and pleasure had that effect on Horace Coker. And it was done now—Prout was going to know what one fellow, at least, thought of him. Bestowing only a lofty glance of disdain on the smiling Remove fellows, Coker walked away to the stairs and went up the same. He disappeared from view, and the juniors exchanged more smiles.

"And that ass," remarked Johnny Bull thoughtfully, "doesn't even know that he's going to be bunked!"

"He will know soon after Prout comes in!" said Frank Nugent.

"The knowfulness will be terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "unless—"

"Unless what?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Unless a friendly hand steps in—"

said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I can see a hand stepping in!" chortled Bob Cherry. "Stepping is generally done with the feet, old bean! Didn't that jolly old moonshee who taught you English at Bhanipur tell you that?"

"My esteemed and idiotic Cherry, you—"

"And I can see either Potter or Greene stepping in with either hand or foot!" chuckled Bob. "They're Coker's pals, but they'll think twice before they barge in and get mixed up in this."

"He's done it now!" said Harry Wharton. "Can't stop him when it's done."

"But the donefulness can be reversed by the undonefulness!" suggested the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The esteemed Coker is a terrific ass, and we have lots of preposterous rowfulness with him; but we do not want to see him bunkfully sacked from the absurd school!"

"Can't stop a chap who sits up on his hind legs and begs for it!" said Johnny Bull.

"What have you got in your old black noddle, Inky?" asked Bob.

The nabob grinned.

"The esteemed Prout is out," he murmured. "What is to prevent a friendly hand from stepping in and abstracting the idiotic paper from the study?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Bob. "Jolly risky fooling about in masters' studies!" grunted Johnny Bull. "If Prout came in and caught a fellow there—"

"May be in any minute," said Nugent. "Might have caught Coker there, for that matter. Coker wouldn't think of that, with a brain like his!"

"Dash it all, Inky, a fellow would like to do that silly ass a good turn!" said Harry. "But if a fellow was caught there, with that fatheaded rot of Coker's—"

"But to save the absurd Coker from the terrific sackfulness—"

"He would jolly well kick you if he knew!" grunted Johnny Bull. "That's the thanks you'd get from Coker!"

Which was certainly true. Saving Coker from himself might be a kind and friendly act, but there was no doubt whatever that Horace Coker would go off at the deep end if he learned that cheeky fags had had the illimitable impudence to take a hand in his lofty and fatheaded proceedings.

But Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, it was clear, had made up his mind to do that friendly and kindly act. And his chums, after a moment or two of reflection, agreed that it was a good idea. It was, after all, up to fellows who had their five senses all in working order to lend a helping hand to a fathead like Coker, who did not even begin to guess what he was asking for.

"Go it, Inky, and we'll keep an eye open for Prout!" said Harry Wharton tersely.

And the chums of the Remove, from the end of Masters' Passage, glanced down it to see whether any beaks were about.

Fortunately, none was to be seen.

From Mr. Quelch's study could be heard the clicking of a typewriter, showing that the Remove master was there. But Quelch, busy on his typewriter, was not likely to look out.

Leaving his chums at the end of the passage, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh cut along to Prout's study.

With rather anxious eyes, his comrades watched him disappear into that study.

If Mr. Prout came in, it meant trouble. No Remove junior had any business in a senior master's study; and if Prout spotted a Remove man there, he was certain to be wrathful.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" murmured Bob Cherry suddenly.

"Oh crumbs!"

"Oh crikey!"

A door along the passage opened. It was Mr. Hacker's door. As somebody was coming out of Hacker's study, the juniors naturally expected to see the master of the Shell, which would have been bad enough. But it was not Hacker who emerged.

It was Prout!

The four juniors gazed at him in horror as the portly master of the Fifth, leaving Hacker's study, walked towards his own.

They had heard Coker say that Prout was out. They had supposed that Coker knew.

Too late, they realised that they might have known that if Coker supposed anything to be the case, it probably wasn't. Even in the most trifling matter, Coker could be relied on to make mistakes.

Prout had been out of sight, and Coker, no doubt had looked round for him, and concluded that he had gone out. Instead of which, Prout had only gone into the Shell master's study for a chat—and now he had emerged.

He had emerged, and was rolling, portly and majestic, towards his own

study, where, at that awful moment, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was picking up Coker's potty message from Prout's table.

A few seconds more, and Hurree Singh would emerge, meeting Prout face to face. Prout might even see Coker's slip of paper, and think that Hurree Singh was the author of it. What else, indeed, was he to think if he saw it?

For a fearful moment horror held the juniors spellbound as they gazed at Prout's portly back going down the passage.

It was Bob Cherry who woke to sudden action. Prout had to be stopped before he spotted Inky in his study.

Leaving his petrified chums, Bob raced down the passage. He overtook Prout, still yards from his study door.

to your Form-master, Cherry, and report you for this disorderly conduct!"

Prout, evidently, was very angry. That, really, was only to be expected. He grasped Bob by the shoulder and marched him up the passage towards Mr. Quelch's study, which was near the corner where the juniors stood.

At the same moment Hurree Jamset Ram Singh appeared from Prout's study. He had a paper crumpled in his hand.

He jumped almost clear of the floor at the sight of Prout. Luckily, it was Prout's back of which he had a sight.

Bob's strategy had been perfectly successful. Prout had turned round to march him up the passage to Quelch. Having turned round, his back was to his own study. Having, of course, no eyes in the back of his head, Prout did

of your Form, sir, rushing along the passage—Masters' Passage, sir—rushing along at headlong speed in the most reckless manner—"

"Cherry!" came Mr. Quelch's sharp tones. "You are well aware that juniors are not allowed in this corridor at all, unless sent for—and rushing down the passage—upon my word! Bend over that chair, Cherry!"

Whack! Four fellows looked sympathetic, as Bob Cherry came out of Quelch's study, and rejoined his friends at the corner. Bob made a grimace, as he walked away with them, wriggling a little. Prout was going back to his study. Clearly, Coker's message of scorn and defiance had been abstracted only just in time. Coker had been saved from fearful trouble!



Unaware of the fact that Billy Bunter was looking over his shoulder, Wilmot crumpled the letter in his hand and rose abruptly from the chair. He moved so suddenly, and so unexpectedly, that the top of his head established sudden and unexpected contact with a fat chin. "Oh!" gasped Wilmot. "Whooop!" roared Bunter.

He stumbled as he overtook him, and barged headlong into Prout.

"Ooogh!" gasped Mr. Prout, staggering forward as he received that startling and unexpected attack in the rear.

He whirled round in the passage, spluttering.

"Oh, sir! Sorry, sir!" gasped Bob Cherry.

That was a perfectly true statement. He was sorry he had had to barge Prout!

The look on Prout's face showed that the consequences might be serious. Still, Prout had his back to his study now. That was the essential thing!

"Boy!" gasped Mr. Prout. "Cherry! You—you reckless, absurd, unthinking young rascal! How dare you rush down this passage! How dare you, I say!"

"I—I—I was in a hurry, sir—" stammered Bob.

"I repeat, how dare you!" boomed Prout. "You have given me a shock—a very painful shock! I shall take you

not see the dusky junior emerge, and remained in happy ignorance of the fact that Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was anywhere in the picture at all.

Reaching Mr. Quelch's study, he rapped sharply on the door, pushed it open, and marched Bob in. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh walked past the open doorway, and had another view of Prout's back as he passed.

"Narrow escape, old bean!" breathed Wharton, as the nabob rejoined his friends at the end of the passage. "Prout wasn't out, as that idiot Coker thought!"

"That blithering and preposterous ass!" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"He'd have had you if Bob hadn't cut in!"

"Listen to the band," murmured Nugent.

From Mr. Quelch's study came Prout's indignant boom. Quelch, busy on his typewriter, had been ruthlessly interrupted.

"... a very painful shock! This boy

Perhaps that was a comfort to Bob Cherry. At the present moment, however, he was feeling more inclined to kick Coker, than anything else. The Famous Five went up to the Remove passage. On the way up, Coker's paper, shredded into the smallest fragments, was dropped from the landing window. That, at all events, was that!

"Bother the silly ass!" grunted Bob Cherry, with a painful wriggle. "Wasn't it like Coker to fancy that Prout was out when he wasn't? There would have been an awful shindy if Prout had caught Inky in his study. What about going along to the Fifth, and jamming Coker's head in his coal-locker?"

It seemed rather a sound scheme to the Famous Five. But as they came across the Remove landing, Coker and all his works were driven from their minds, by a terrific outbreak of yells and howls from Study No. 1.

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"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What on earth's up there?" exclaimed Bob.

And the Famous Five, in great surprise, ran along to the doorway of No. 1—where they were still more surprised, to see Billy Bunter wriggling and squirming in the grasp of Eric Wilmot, and Wilmot laying on the ruler as if he fancied that he was beating a carpet.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Plain English!

"I SAY, you fellows! Draggimoff!" yelled Bunter.

Swipe, swipe!

Harry Wharton ran into the study.

He caught Wilmot's arm, and stopped it, as the ruler was coming down for the umpteenth time.

"Draw it mild, old bean!" said the captain of the Remove. "Enough's as good as a feast, you know."

Wilmot gave him a fierce look, for a moment. But it passed at once, and he released Bunter, and threw down the ruler.

"Perhaps he's had enough!" he muttered.

"Sounds as if he has!" remarked Nugent rather dryly.

"Let's ask Bunter," suggested Bob Cherry. "Bunter will know! Have you had enough, Bunter?"

"Yaroooh!"

"I think that may be taken as an answer in the affirmative!" said Bob.

"Bunter has had enough."

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

Billy Bunter squirmed round the table, promptly placing that piece of furniture between his fat person and Wilmot. He seemed to think that the

new fellow might recommence.

"Yow-ow-ooop!" gasped Bunter. "I say, you fellows, keep him off! Pitching into a chap for nothing! Beastly bully! Ow!"

"What have you been up to?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Nothing!" roared Bunter. "I just stepped into the study to—to—to speak to the chap, and he—he sprang at me like a tiger—"

"Fathead!"

"As for looking at his letter, I never even thought of it!" gasped Bunter. "You fellows know whether I'm the sort of chap to look at another fellow's letter."

"You fat worm!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! I tell you I never saw the letter!" roared Bunter. "He's a suspicious beast! Just because he banged his head on my chin, he fancied I was looking at the letter from behind him—"

"What was your chin doing there, then?" asked Bob, with a grin. "I think, after all, Bunter hasn't had enough. Better give him a few more, if he's been spying into a letter."

"I keep on telling you I haven't!" yelled Bunter. "I never knew Wilmot had a letter in his hand at all, and I wasn't looking at it, and I never read a word of it. What do you think I care what a Topham fellow writes to him? Wilmot pitched into me, because he's afraid that man Crawley may give him away here—that's jolly well why he did it."

"Crawley!" repeated Bob. "And how do you know the letter was from a chap named Crawley, if you haven't looked at it?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "I—I mean, I—I don't know anything about it! I've

never heard the name before. It's quite new to me."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"I hope you fellows can take my word!" said Bunter, indignantly. "I don't expect it of Wilmot—he's new here, and doesn't know me. But you fellows know me, I hope."

"Too well to take your word!" grinned Bob.

"Beast!"

Eric Wilmot had walked across to the window, and stood staring down into the quad, bright in the spring sunset. His handsome face was dark.

Bunter blinked at him uneasily, and moved a little, to keep the table between him and the new junior. Bunter wriggled painfully. There was no doubt that Wilmot had laid it on very hard. There was no doubt either, that the fat Owl deserved it, and more; but that was no comfort to Bunter.

Harry Wharton pointed to the door.

"Hook it!" he said briefly.

"Think I want to stay here, with that chap?" sneered Bunter, with a wary eye on Wilmot. "I'm a bit too particular, I hope! He may suit you and Nugent in this study! Perhaps you don't know why he was turned out of his own school."

Wilmot made a sudden movement.

That was enough for Bunter! He made one bound for the door, and vanished into the Remove passage.

He left an uncomfortable silence behind him.

Nugent kicked the door shut.

"Has that Peeping Tom found anything out, Wilmot?" he asked.

Wilmot turned from the window. His face was crimson.

"No! I've had a letter from Crawley, at Topham—Bunter spied into it over my shoulder—but there was nothing—or very little—"

"Thank goodness for that!" said Harry Wharton.

Wilmot clenched his hands.

"I ought not to be here!" he muttered. "It's decent of you fellows, to stand by me, knowing what you know. But—but—after I came a crash at Topham, I ought not to have come here! My uncle Hacker thought he was doing a big thing for me, getting me into Greyfriars, but—"

"So he was, old chap!" said Bob.

"What's the good?" muttered Wilmot.

"Things can't be kept dark. I kept it dark at first that I'd ever been at Topham—but it came out. The rest will come out, sooner or later. Every man at Topham knows that I was sacked for pinching a fellow's wallet in a dressing-room. I never did it, but I was buked for it—and if you fellows knew what the evidence was, you wouldn't believe a word that I've said—"

"Blow the evidence!" said Harry.

"We know a decent chap when we see one. Don't be an ass, Wilmot! Nobody in this study thinks you ever did such a rotten thing."

"What will the rest think?" muttered Wilmot.

"No need for them to know—"

"That fat fool has pried out enough to set him gabbling. Crawley didn't put it plain, thank goodness. But—"

"Look here, old man!" said Harry, quietly. "Topham's a long way from here, and nobody knows any Topham fellows. I can understand, of course, that you like to keep in touch—but surely it would be only sense to cut the connection entirely, in the circumstances?"

"My uncle has told me that," growled Wilmot.

"Well, Hacker's given you good advice, in that case—"



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"I've no choice! I've no friends left at Topham—the fellows there wouldn't touch me with a barge-pole," said Wilmot, bitterly. "It's not a friend that's written. Crawley never was a friend of mine—I barred him, and he always loathed me. A betting, black-guardly outsider—the blackest sheep in the school—a rank outsider and toad—"

"Blessed if I see why he should write to you then, if that's how you think of him!" said Bob, blankly. "Can't you call him some of those names in a nice, chatty reply, and bar him off?"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" snapped Wilmot. "Nobody at Topham was told where I was, or what had become of me—that cad Crawley nosed it out, because he knew I had an uncle a Form-master here! He's rubbing it in, because I barred him at Topham. It's pie to him, now. He came over to see me once, and I met him at Courtfield, and got him to go. Now he says he's coming over again on a half-holiday."

"Better stop that!" said Harry.

"I'm going to stop it, if I can pitch it strong enough to get through his thick hide!" said Wilmot, savagely. "But he jolly well knows that, if he comes over, I shall have to be civil to him—considering what he knows, and what he can tell the fellows here."

"Dash it all, Wilmot, no fellow could be such an absolute rotter as that!" said Bob.

"You don't know Crawley! Still, I'll bar him off, if putting it plain will do it!"

Wilmot sat down at the table and jabbed a pen into the ink. Under the eyes of the staring juniors he wrote:

"Keep your distance, you rotten cur. I can't breathe the same air with you. You make me sick.

"ERIC WILMOT."

"Great pip!" said Bob. "Are you going to send the fellow that?"

"Yes!"

"Well, it's plain English," said Bob, with a chuckle.

"The plainfulness of the esteemed English is terrific!" murmured Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

Wilmot jammed that brief letter into an envelope, addressed it, and walked out of the study with a black brow. The chums of the Remove looked at one another.

"Well," said Nugent, "I've never seen that chap Crawley—but whatever he's like I hardly think he will pay a friendly call after getting an answer like that."

"Hardly!" grinned Bob.

The Famous Five had no doubt about that. Whatever Crawley of Topham was like, he would be kept away from Greyfriars if plain English could do it. But Eric Wilmot did not feel so sure.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

What Prout Saw!

"**B**LESS my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Prout.

He stared.

Sitting in his study, Mr. Prout was staring at a letter he held in one hand and a banknote he held in the other.

He had taken the letter from the former, and was evidently very much astonished to see it.

"Bless my soul!" Mr. Prout repeated.

In a letter addressed to him by his nephew, Eustace Prout, the Fifth Form master might have expected anything—except a remittance! His last letter from Eustace had requested a loan of

ten pounds, which Prout, a kind old soul with all his pompous ways, had duly remitted. That last letter had also contained a promise of repayment at an early date. Prout had not attached much importance to that.

And here was the tenner!

"The dear boy!" said Mr. Prout.

He was surprised. And he was very pleased. A Form-master at Greyfriars had a good salary, but ten pounds was not a trifle. It showed, too, that Eustace could keep a promise of repayment, which few of his relatives expected of that rather irresponsible young man.

Mr. Prout laid the banknote on the table and put a paperweight on the corner of it; he was a careful gentleman. Then he stepped to the window to read the letter. The light was failing in the study, though it was still light in the quad, and not yet lock-up. There were still plenty of fellows in the quad—among them, Coker, of his own Form, if Prout had noticed him. But at the moment he was only thinking of the letter in his hand.

Standing at the window, Prout read that letter. Evidently it pleased him, for he read it over twice, and smiled, and almost purred with satisfaction when he put it into his pocket at last.

He was about to turn from the window when his attention was drawn to the quadrangle.

Coker, of his Form, was standing at a little distance with his eyes intently

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fixed on Prout's window. Coker's intent gaze might have indicated that he was interested in Prout's study, and in Prout himself at the window.

As a matter of fact, he was!

Coker was not only interested, but puzzled.

Prout, whether he had been out or not, was in now. Coker, with his own eyes, could see him in his study! He must have seen the message Coker had left for him on his table.

Yet nothing had happened.

Nothing had happened, of course, because a kindly Remove junior had done Coker a good turn by abstracting that idiotic message in time. But Coker was blissfully unconscious of that. Indeed, had he been aware that a Remove junior had ventured to intervene in his lofty affairs he would, at the present moment, have been hunting for that junior to whop him for his cheek!

So Coker was quite perplexed.

If Prout had seen that paper, as Coker had no doubt that he had, Prout was absolutely certain to go off at the deep end.

But Coker could see Prout at the window, and could see that he did not look at all shirty. On the other hand, he was looking pleased about something.

Puzzled, Coker stared at Prout's window, and at Prout. He was far too occupied in mind to observe five juniors who were converging on him in the quad. But Prout, at the window, observed them.

The pleased smile faded from Prout's portly face as he saw Harry Wharton & Co. Prout, of course, knew and suspected nothing of the inner history of that episode in Masters' Passage. He did not know that the ineffable Coker

had insulted him—that Hurree Singh had eliminated that insult in the nick of time—that he had nearly caught the nabob in the act—and that Bob Cherry had barged him to save the nabob! Not knowing any of these things, Prout was unaware that the Famous Five of the Remove had any special reasons for up-ending Horace Coker in the quad!

And that, from his study window, was what he saw them do.

He saw them, with astonishment and wrath.

Coker was a troublesome boy. A backward and an obstinate boy. He was a trial to Prout in the Fifth! Only that morning Prout had had to slang him for having forgotten some Latin notes that he ought to have brought into Form. Many a time Prout had slanged him for getting mixed up in shindies with juniors.

But now—so far as Prout could see—Coker was absolutely blameless. It was not Coker's usual headstrong obstreperousness that was at fault now.

He was simply standing in the quad near his Form-master's study window, with a thoughtful expression on his face—quite an intent expression, as Prout noticed. Thinking, perhaps, of the carelessness for which Prout had rated him and resolving to do better!

Anyhow, there he was, harmless and unoffending—when five juniors of Quelch's Form closed in on him, collared him, bagged him, and up-ended him under Prout's astonished and wrathful eyes!

Coker roared as he was up-ended—a roar that woke most of the echoes of Greyfriars School.

It reached Prout in his study. It reached other ears, too, for Prout saw Hacker, the master of the Shell, put his head out of his study window.

Mr. Hacker snorted.

"Upon my word!" gasped Prout, also putting his head out and staring.

Mr. Hacker glanced round at him.

Hacker was not a good-tempered man. He was a nervy and irritable man. Sudden roars in the quad annoyed him.

"Really, Mr. Prout—" he ejaculated.

"What—what?" said Prout.

"Really, sir, the continual disturbances caused by that boy of your Form—that boy Coker—" snapped Mr. Hacker.

Prout almost gurgled with indignation. Coker—blameless for once—was blamed, as usual! Troublesome fellow as Coker was, he was in Prout's Form, and his Form-master had to do him justice.

"Really, Mr. Hacker—" he snorted.

But the master of the Shell withdrew his head into his study. He did not seem to want to hear any more from Prout.

Prout snorted. He glared at the juniors. Coker, putting up a terrific struggle, did not seem to have much chance in the hands of the Philistines.

Bob Cherry had taken his legs like the shafts of a cart and was pulling Coker along on his back. The other fellows were helping Coker along with considerable energy.

Dozens of fellows were gathering round to cheer. Vernon-Smith and Peter Todd rushed in to help with Coker. Others yelled with laughter.

"Boys!" gasped Mr. Prout.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell.

"Boys!" boomed Prout.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it!"

"Help him along!"

"Travel, Coker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Even Prout's boom was drowned in the merry roar. Breathing wrath, the

Fifth Form master whisked across his study and whisked out at the door.

He went down Masters' Passage, his gown streaming behind him like a thundercloud.

Two masters were standing in the passage—Mr. Quelch and Wiggins, master of the Third. Prout caught their voices as he thundered down the corridor.

"Some disturbance in the quad-rangle—"

"A shocking disturbance—"

"A Fifth Form boy, I think—"

"I certainly heard a Fifth Form boy shouting—"

"Most objectionable—"

"That obstreperous boy Coker—"

"Oh! Coker!" said Mr. Wiggins, as if that explained everything.

Prout heard—but heeded not. It gave the finishing touch to his indignation, however. Quelch, whose boys—utterly unprovoked—were ragging Coker of his Form—Quelch made these remarks! Prout even suspected that Quelch made them on purpose for him to hear as he passed! Quelch did not seem to be aware that his own boys were in this riot at all! Purple, Prout thundered on, and thundered out of the House.

He thundered on the animated scene.

"Boys!" boomed Prout.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

The Vials of Wrath!

"O H!"

"Prout!"

"Ware, beaks!"

"Cave!"

One thing leads to another. In bagging Coker in the quad, the chums of the Remove had not really intended to cause all this furor.

They had agreed that it would be a sound scheme to visit Coker in his study, and jam his head into his coal-locker—as a sort of makeweight for the whop Bob had received from Quelch. But when they looked in his study he was not there—and they actually forgot his existence—Horace Coker's existence!—till, some time later, they came on him in the quad. Coming to the House for lock-up, they spotted him—standing there like a stone image, gazing at Prout's window. The opportunity seemed too good to miss—they closed in on Coker and bagged him!

But it was only playfulness really. All they were going to do was to up-end Coker and leave him to sort himself out.

The difficulty arose from the fact that Coker disliked the process of up-ending and was a tough subject for that process.

Coker, up-ended, clutched and grasped; and the Famous Five found themselves mixed up with Coker almost inextricably. Coker's object seemed to be to tie himself and the juniors into a sort of Gordian knot.

Hence the disturbance that had annoyed Hacker and caused Quelch and Wiggins to pass remarks. It was getting dusky in the quad; and in the mix-up it was difficult to see who was who, and what was what. But nobody could have doubted that Coker was in it. Coker's voice was heard far and wide in tones compared with which the roar of the celebrated Bull of Bashan might have been considered merely a stage whisper.

Coker, giving so much trouble, had to receive more than had been originally intended for him. Besides, even if the

Famous Five had been willing to let him go, Coker wasn't willing! If they let go, Coker hung on—and punched! In catching Coker they had caught rather a Tartar.

So Coker, determined to have it, got it! He was rolled, and bumped, and hustled, and rustled; and led across the quad by his legs. Coker's legs were rather long—Coker had developed most at that end.

A little short in the intellectual line, he was long in the leg, and large in the foot. Those long legs answered admirably the purposes of shafts. His big feet projected from under Bob Cherry's arms, as Bob marched—pulling him along. Coker followed—on his back; roaring.

And crowds of fellows, heading for the House, changed their course and bore down on the scene—highly interested. The bell was ringing; but it rang unregarded. Coker had the house, so to speak.

Thus it was that a small, harmless, playful little rag developed into something like a riot in the quad. Fifty fellows at least were cheering and yelling with laughter, when Prout arrived on the scene. The uproar might even have attracted the majestic attention of the Head, had the Head been in his study. Luckily, he wasn't.

Prout arrived, purple, indignant, towering with wrath, and booming. And then the fellows seemed suddenly to remember that the school quad really was not a bear-garden!

The uproar ceased—save for a few chuckles that could not be suppressed. Bob Cherry dropped Coker's legs as if they had suddenly become red-hot. Those long legs walloped on the earth with a crash.

"Oh!" gasped Bob.

"Whurr—urr—urgh!" spluttered Coker. "I'll smash you—I'll spifficate the lot of you—I'll—gurrgh!"

"Boys!" thundered Prout.

"Yes, sir!" said Vernon-Smith. "Anything the matter, sir?" That was like the Bounder's cool cheek!

"What—what?" boomed Prout.

"Boys—Wharton—Cherry—you young rascals—I saw you—from my study window—I saw you make a most unprovoked attack on this boy of my Form—utterly unprovoked—"

"Oh, sir!" said Harry.

"Do not deny it, Wharton—I saw you! I am amazed—astounded—at such reckless hooliganism, even in Quelch's boys! Coker! Rise!"

Coker rose.

He rose with some difficulty. He was a little short of breath. He had expended quite a lot in his imitation of the Bull of Bashan.

However, he staggered up. He blinked at his Form-master. He expected a volley from Prout! Naturally, Prout would find fault with him—Prout always did! Coker had given up expecting justice from Prout.

A defiant glare was gathering on Coker's rugged face, when Prout's next words astonished and disarmed him.

"Coker! I hope you are not hurt! My dear boy, I am amazed at this outbreak of—of—of ruffianism, of which a boy in my Form has been the victim. The offenders shall be severely punished."

"Oh!" gasped Coker.

"I am aware, Coker, that you are not to blame—not in the slightest. I witnessed the whole occurrence from my study window."

"Oh!" gasped Coker again.

He could hardly believe his ears! Was this Prout—that old ass, Prout—who was always finding fault without

cause—Coker, of course, never gave him cause! Was he, after all, such a prejudiced old ass as Coker had supposed?

Was it possible that Coker was mistaken in his estimate of Prout? It seemed impossible—to Coker!—that he could be mistaken! Yet it really almost looked like it!

Prout was booming with angry indignation! Coker, for once, was not the object of it.

Coker just gasped.

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged dismayed glances. The crowd melted away. But the Famous Five, unfortunately, could not melt away.

Prout, like the Ancient Mariner, held them with a glittering eye!

"Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, Bull, Hurree Singh, you will follow me to your headmaster!" boomed Prout.

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Bob.

Evidently Prout was in a towering state! In ordinary circumstances he would have taken the Remove fellows to their Form-master. Plainly he did not regard these circumstances as ordinary. He was going to take them to the Head.

"Coker, go into the House! Do not think that I blame you in the slightest, the remotest degree! Go and make yourself tidy, my boy! You juniors will follow me."

"It was only a lark, sir!" ventured Nugent.

"A what?" boomed Prout.

"Just a lark, sir—"

"You describe a riot as a lark, Nugent! We shall ascertain whether your headmaster agrees with you!" said Mr. Prout, with devastating sarcasm. "Follow me at once."

"Perhaps the larkfulness was a little too terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, as the hapless five followed Prout. And his friends agreed that perhaps it was.

Prout, portly, purple, majestic, marched to the Head's study. Harry Wharton & Co. arrived at that dreaded apartment at his heels. Prout knocked at the door, opened it, and marched his flock in.

"Sir," he boomed, "I regret to interrupt you—I regret, sir, exceedingly to waste your time—but in view of the riotous conduct of these Lower Fourth boys, sir, I am bound to report—"

Prout had got as far as that, when he discerned that the study was empty. Dr. Locke was not there!

"Oh!" ejaculated Prout, vexed; all the more, because he detected lurking smiles on the faces of five juniors, who had noticed—before Prout—that the Head was not present.

Prout frowned.

He stepped back to the door and glanced into the passage. Then he turned to the culprits again.

The light was on in the study. That looked as if the Head had only stepped out for a brief space, and was about to return.

"Wait!" snapped Prout.

"It will be call-over soon, sir!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Wait!"

"But, sir—"

"Silence!" boomed Prout.

He sat down.

The juniors stood—and waited.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Done in the Dark!

"NOT a bad old bean!" said Coker.

"Eh?"

"Say what you like, Prout's not a bad old bean!" declared Coker.



Horace Coker was standing near his Form-master's study window when Harry Wharton & Co. collared him and up-ended him. Coker's roar reached Masters' Studies, and both Prout and Hacker looked out. "Upon my word!" gasped Prout. Hacker snorted.

"Oh!" said Potter and Greene.
 "You fellows can run him down——"
 "What?"

"Run him down! But what I say is, there are worse beaks than Prout—and he's jolly well got his good points!" said Coker firmly.

"Who's run him down?" yelled Potter.

"Don't yell at me, George Potter! I say that Prout is a decent old sort, in his own way—a bit of an ass, perhaps, in the Form-room, making out that a fellow can't spell, and all that—but not a bad old bean! And if you want to run him down, don't do it while I'm about, that's all!"

"Who's run him down?" shrieked Greene.

"Don't howl at me, Greene! Even that row this morning," said Coker, "Prout didn't know I had those rotten notes, as they'd gone through that hole in the lining—I didn't know myself at the time. I don't see making out that he was so much in the wrong, as the matter stood."

"Who made out——" howled Potter and Greene together.

"Don't bawl!"
 Coker, in his study, was brushing himself down, and getting his necktie from the back of his neck, and generally putting himself to rights.

To judge by his remarks, Coker was also modifying his opinion of Prout.

It was like Coker, of course, to put it the way he did! Realising that Prout, after all, was not a bad old bean, Coker preferred not to think that he, and he alone, in that study, ran Prout down. It was more agreeable to feel that he was a just-minded fellow,

defending a misunderstood Form-master from carping, captious fellows inclined to run him down.

"I thought he was coming down on me like a ton of bricks, as usual!" went on Coker. "And did he? He did not! After all, Prout's just! You can say what you like, but——"

"Who said——"
 "Nobody but you——"

"I wish you wouldn't keep on interrupting me. A fellow, doesn't get a chance to get in a word edge-wise in this study. You chaps are like a sheep's head—all jaw! Jaw, jaw, jaw!" said Coker. "As I was saying, Prout's just! He's taken those young scoundrels to the Head. Serve 'em right! A flogging will do them good! I believe in flogging fags. After this, I don't want to hear a word against Prout!"

"Who's ever——"
 "Nobody's ever——"

"Not a word!" said Coker firmly. "Not a word against Prout, after this. If we're to keep friends, don't you fellows run Prout down to me. I tell you plainly, I won't stand it!"

Potter and Greene looked at Coker, goaded, almost foaming. They looked as if they were going to collar Coker, and give him some more of what he had had from the Removites, only more so. That was what they felt like!

Banging Coker's head on the study table would have given them real pleasure at that moment.

Still, they could never have banged any sense into it. And it would have been a strenuous job of work. So they walked out of the study instead.

"Hold on, you men!" called out Coker. "I was going to say——"

Potter and Greene did not hold on. What Coker had been going to sa—

remained for ever unknown to them. They went along to the games study, went in, and banged the door after them.

Coker snorted.
 He could see that his friends were shirty. It was rather annoying for fellows to get shirty, simply because Coker told them he wouldn't hear Prout run down. He jolly well wouldn't, and that was that!

Prout had risen in Coker's estimation. In this new frame of mind, Coker was rather worried about that message he had left in Prout's study.

He would have undone that act if he could.

Prout, after all, was just. He was not a bad old bean—according to his lights, of course.

Coker did not think for a moment that he was a hot-headed, unreflecting, disrespectful ass. That did not occur to him. But he did think that it was a bit rough on Prout—in the new light in which Coker now saw him.

He would have given a week's pocket-money to recall that disrespectful message—now! Could he recall it?

That was what he had been going to discuss with Potter and Greene if they hadn't got shirty in that fatheaded way and cleared off.

It was pretty clear that Prout had not yet seen that paper on his table. The expression on his face when Coker had seen him at his window proved that he was nowhere near the deep end, off which he would assuredly have gone had he seen that paper.

How he had missed it was a mystery. Coker had planted it right on his study table for him to see when he sat down.

It was only a thin, flimsy slip of
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paper—a leaf from a notebook—and might have blown away—but Coker could not hope that that had happened. For he had foreseen that contingency, and had placed a paper-weight on the corner of it, on Prout's table.

It could not, therefore, have blown away. It must be still where he had left it, on Prout's table, secured by the paper-weight. By some miraculous chance, Prout had missed it, so far.

"By gum!" said Coker, as he thought it over.

He laid down the clothes-brush.

Prout had taken those young scoundrels to the Head. He was in the Head's study at this very minute.

"By gum!" repeated Coker.

He ran to his door.

A fellow could cut into Prout's study before Prout came back from the Head, bag that slip of paper, and nip out again.

Then Prout never would find it; never would know that some fellow in his Form had left him a message to the effect that he was an old ass!

Coker scudded down the stairs.

It was risky! If Prout came back while he was there—saw him with that paper in his hand—that thought made Coker pause. But he paused only for a second—and hurried on. He was going to get that paper back if he could.

He reached Masters' Passage.

In view of the possibility of Prout coming back any instant, and finding that awful paper on his table, Coker did not, of course, want to be seen going to Prout's study.

But the coast was clear!

Every door in the passage was shut—but one; and that was Prout's. And there was no light from Prout's open doorway.

Evidently the door was open as he had left it when he rushed out to intervene in the riot in the quad. He had not been back since. He could not have seen that awful paper yet!

There was time.

Coker cut down the passage. He whipped into Prout's study.

His heart was beating hard. To be caught in that study with that awful paper in existence was as good as admitting that he had done it.

But he required only a moment.

It was deeply dark in the study; dark outside, and darker within. Coker dared not turn on a light. But he did not need one.

He knew exactly where he had left that message for Prout—on the table, just in front of Prout's chair, with a paper-weight to keep it there.

He groped.

His hand came in contact with the paper-weight. His fingers closed on a rustling slip of paper, kept down by that weight.

It was the work of a split second to grab it and transfer it to his pocket.

Coker gasped with relief.

It was out of sight now, even if he was caught in the study. Prout hadn't—couldn't have—seen it yet—and now he never would. The minute he got back to his own study, Coker was going to burn it.

He jammed it deep into his pocket in great relief. Then he cut to the door. With that wretched paper out of sight, it was less dangerous to be caught there. Still, he did not want to be caught there.

But his luck was in; the passage was still deserted. Coker walked quickly down to the corner, his long legs whisking.

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Then he dropped into an easy saunter. All was serene now. Coker could not help feeling that he had handled this in a rather masterly manner.

With a cheery face, Coker went up to the Fifth, and to his own study. It was close on calling-over, but he had time to make an end of that wretched paper.

He felt in his pocket for it, with the intention of striking a match and putting it at once to the flames.

"Oh blow!" growled Coker, annoyed. The pocket was empty.

It was the pocket in which the lining was torn, and from which the Latin notes had mysteriously disappeared that morning—the cause of all the trouble!

In the hurried excitement of the moment, in Prout's study, Coker had forgotten that. A fellow could not think of everything.

"Blow!" repeated Coker.

That wretched slip of paper had slipped through the hole in the lining, and had to be hunted for. Coker remembered the trouble he had had in extracting the Latin notes when he had discovered how they had disappeared.

Still, as there was no help for it, he prepared to explore the hidden recesses under the lining of his jacket.

Clang, clang! Jangle!

It was the bell for calling-over.

"Blow!" said Coker, for the third time.

He left the study. The paper he had hooked off Prout's table remained where it was. After all, it did not matter. Nobody was likely to see a paper that was hidden inside the lining of Coker's jacket.

Coker went down to calling-over in Hall.

He was feeling cheerful and satisfied.

He would not have felt either cheerful or satisfied had he been aware that his message to Prout had been destroyed hours ago, and that he had bagged quite a different paper off Prout's table in the dark.

It would have made Coker jump had he known that a ten-pound note belonging to his Form-master was now hidden about him!

But Coker didn't know that!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Hard on Hacker!

"HE, he, he!"

That cackle came from Billy Bunter as five juniors joined the Remove going into Hall for call-over.

Those five juniors generally looked as merry and bright as any fellows in the Remove. At the present moment, however, they did not.

They wriggled considerably. They mumbled. They looked as if they had been through painful experiences.

They had!

Having waited, with Prout, in the Head's study, till the Head came in, the Famous Five had been faithfully dealt with by their headmaster.

They realised that they had asked for it. That rag on Coker had gone altogether beyond the limit. But it was painful. Even Bob Cherry did not look, at the moment, as if he was enjoying life.

Hence Billy Bunter's fat chuckle. Bunter seemed to find it amusing.

"I say, you fellows, did you get it hot from the Beak?" grinned Bunter.

"He, he, he! I say, you look like a lot of eels! He, he, he!"

"Shut up, you fat Owl!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"He, he, he!"

"That old ass Prout!" mumbled Nugent.

"That blithering idiot Coker!" growled Bob.

"Ow!" murmured Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "Wow!"

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter. "Ow! Wow! What beast is that kicking me? Wilmot, you rotter, if you kick me again, I'll jolly well yarooop!"

"Silence!" called out Wingate of the Sixth.

Billy Bunter suppressed his yelps. Prout was preparing to call the roll, it being the Fifth Form master's duty to take calling-over that evening.

The "execution" in the Head's study had been got over just in time, and Prout had rolled into Hall at the same time as the Famous Five. Coker, of Prout's Form, was the latest arrival, and Prout's eye dwelt on him for a moment, as he barged into his place in the Fifth, treading on Blundell's foot, pushing against Potter, elbowing Greene, and nearly upsetting Hilton. Coker's movements always resembled those of a bull in a china shop.

However, Prout proceeded to call the names. He got through roll-call as quickly as he could.

The fact was, that when the excitement was over, Prout remembered that in his hurried exit from his study he had forgotten all about the banknote he had left lying on his table.

Prout was not usually careless in such matters, but the circumstances were unusual.

Of course, the banknote was safe enough on his study table, pinned down by a paperweight; it could not blow away, though he had remembered that he had left his study window open.

Still, it was injudicious, to say the least, to leave banknotes lying about on tables, and Prout, now that he recalled it, was anxious to get back to his study and put it away safely.

So, quite contrary to his slow and stately custom, he did calling-over at a canter, got through, and left Hall, almost the first to go.

He walked away to his study.

He found both door and window open, and a draught blowing through from the quadrangle outside.

He switched on the light and stepped across to his table to pick up the banknote he had left there.

Then he uttered an annoyed exclamation.

It was not there!

Apparently the draught, after all, had shifted it, in spite of the paper-weight. It was very annoying.

Prout looked over the table, under it, and round about his study carpet. No banknote came to view.

With another exclamation of annoyance, the Fifth Form master stepped to the doorway and looked into the passage.

He stepped into the passage, and bent down, scanning the floor with meticulous care, for a slip of drifting paper.

He was growing more and more annoyed. This was the fault of those unruly juniors, causing him to leave his study in such a hurry! He was glad to remember that the Head had been severe in dealing with them. Where had the draught blown that wretched banknote?

Two masters, coming along from Hall to the studies, paused and gazed in astonishment at Prout, bent almost double in the passage. Bending was not agreeable or comfortable to Mr. Prout, whose circumference had grown with his growth, ripened with his years!

"Dear me!" said Mr. Quelch.

"What——" ejaculated Mr. Hacker. Prout looked up. His face was very red from exertion and bending, also from a realisation that perhaps he looked a little ridiculous in that attitude. He jerked upright quite suddenly.

"Have you lost something, Prout?" asked Mr. Hacker.

"Perhaps we can assist you!" said Mr. Quelch politely.

"A banknote——" gasped Prout.

"You have dropped a banknote?" exclaimed Hacker.

"I have not dropped it! It must have blown from my study!" said Prout.

"If you can see anything of it, I shall be greatly obliged——"

"Certainly!" said the Remove master. Mr. Hacker stared at Prout.

"Surely, Mr. Prout, you did not leave a banknote lying in your study where it might be blown away!" he exclaimed.

"I did not, sir!" snapped Mr. Prout.

"I placed a paperweight on it——"

"I do not quite see how it can have blown away if there was a paperweight on it," remarked Mr. Hacker.

"Neither do I, sir; but as it is no longer on my table, it must have blown away!" grunted Mr. Prout.

"The window and door, unfortunately, were left open, and there was a very strong draught."

Mr. Quelch looked at him.

He did not say, or think of saying, that this was very careless of Prout. But it was quite obvious that he thought so, and Prout's crimson deepened to purple.

"I was called away from my study suddenly and unexpectedly, Mr. Quelch!" he said, breathing hard. "I had taken the banknote from a letter and laid it on the table, secured by a paper-weight, while I read the letter—and I was interrupted, sir, by the riot caused by your boys in the quadrangle, and——"

"My boys, sir?" said Mr. Quelch coldly.

"Your boys, sir!" snapped Prout.

"Indeed! I understood that a Fifth Form boy——"

"Then you understood quite incorrectly, sir——"

"The banknote does not seem to be here!" interrupted Mr. Hacker. "Perhaps we had better look in your study, Mr. Prout."

"I have already looked there, sir, but I shall be glad of your assistance. Owing to the riot caused by the Remove boys——"

"Let us ascertain what has become of the banknote, sir!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Perhaps among your papers——"

"It is certainly not in this passage!" said Mr. Hacker.

Prout grunted, more and more annoyed. The three masters entered the study.

There were plenty of papers on the table. There were a few on the floor—shifted by the draught from the window.

Among them, however, was nothing that bore the remotest resemblance to a banknote.

"It is very singular!" said Mr. Quelch. "Is this the paperweight you placed on the banknote, Mr. Prout?"

"That is it, sir!"

Mr. Quelch lifted it, and weighed it in his hand.

"You are certain you placed it on the note, sir?"

"I am absolutely certain of that, Mr. Quelch!"

"Then, sir, it is an absolute impossibility that the banknote can have blown away!" said Mr. Quelch. "This paperweight weighs at least a pound, and no

draught could possibly move a paper pinned down by it."

That was, indeed, rather obvious. The fact that the banknote was gone had made Mr. Prout blind to the obvious.

He gave a grunt.

"Certainly it is very singular, sir!" he said. "But you seem to overlook the fact that the banknote is no longer there."

"I do not overlook that fact, sir!" said Mr. Quelch quietly. "But you can see for yourself that there are other papers on the table which have not been blown away by the draught, though secured by no paperweight."

Mr. Prout started.

He was not a suspicious man. Had he been, he certainly would have seen, before this, what was obvious to both the other masters.

"You—you do not mean, sir——" he stammered

"I am pointing out, sir, what is perfectly clear!" said Mr. Quelch. "If this paperweight was on the banknote, the banknote did not blow away."

"It was on the banknote, sir! I remember, with the greatest clearness, placing it there, while I took the letter to the window to read it."

Mr. Quelch drew a very deep breath.

He did not look at Mr. Hacker. He was careful not to look at Mr. Hacker. But he was aware that the master of the Shell had grown very pale.

Prout gave a gasp.

What was perfectly clear and obvious, forced itself, at last, into Mr. Prout's somewhat solid intellect.

"The—the note cannot have been taken!" he stammered.

Mr. Quelch was silent. But there was a sound from Mr. Hacker—a stifled gasp, almost a groan. Prout looked at him.

"Such carelessness, sir!" muttered Mr. Hacker. "Such carelessness with money, sir—placing temptation in the way of——"

"What do you mean, sir?" boomed Prout. The Fifth Form master knew nothing of Hacker's nephew, though the

Remove master, of course, had been informed of the circumstances in which Wilmot had left Topham.

"Such carelessness with money!" muttered Mr. Hacker.

"I do not admit that my action was careless, sir! The banknote was perfectly safe under a paperweight. I was suddenly and unexpectedly called away. As for placing temptation in anyone's way, sir, that is nonsense!"

"Mr. Prout!"

"Nonsense, sir!" boomed Prout. "Nobody who was not dishonest could be tempted by the sight of money; neither do I believe that there is a dishonest servant in the house—I am perfectly assured that there is not."

Mr. Hacker made no reply to that. He was not thinking of one of the servants. He was thinking of a boy who had been expelled from school on a charge of theft, and in whom he had persisted in believing, in whom he had been determined to believe, to such an extent that he had induced the Head to give that boy a chance at Greyfriars.

"I cannot understand this!" went on Prout. "It would appear that the banknote has been taken! I cannot believe such a dreadful thing! I cannot!"

"I am afraid, sir, that facts speak for themselves!" said Mr. Quelch. "Nevertheless, I recommend saying nothing of this extremely unpleasant matter until it is certain, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the banknote actually is missing."

"It is missing, sir! There is no doubt on that point. But I shall certainly be very slow to utter a word implying that there may be a thief in this school. Such a suspicion is incredible—incredible, sir!"

Quelch and Hacker left the study—leaving Mr. Prout in a very worried and unenviable frame of mind. Hacker's face was white as chalk as he went down the passage. The Remove master tapped him on the arm.

"My dear Hacker——" he said, in a low voice.

The master of the Shell looked at him, silent. His face was almost haggard.

"I can, of course, read what is in your thoughts," said the Remove master quietly. "In the circumstances, it is inevitable."

"I trusted him!" groaned Mr. Hacker. "I believed in him and trusted him. I prevailed on the Head to admit him here. And now——"

"I suggest keeping an open mind on the subject, for the present, at least. Wilmot has been here almost a whole term, in my Form. I confess that, considering the circumstances in which he left his last school, I was very unwilling to see him in the Remove. But——"

"Now——" breathed Hacker.

"But," said Mr. Quelch, "since he has been here, his conduct has been, in every way, above suspicion. I have observed him closely, Mr. Hacker, and have even come to the conclusion that some dreadful mistake was made, as you believed, when he left his last school."

"Now——" muttered the master of the Shell.

"Keep an open mind, sir, till the facts are ascertained beyond all possible doubt!" said Mr. Quelch. "That is all I can say."

Hacker nodded, and went into his study. To his mind, there was no doubt about the facts, and it was an overwhelming blow to him.

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THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Latest!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" murmured Bob Cherry. It was the following morning, and the Remove were coming out in break. By that time Harry Wharton & Co. had almost forgotten their painful visit to the Head's study, and were as merry and bright as usual. They came out of the House with Eric Wilmot, who, as a member of Study No. 1, was often with the Famous Five.

In the quad they passed Mr. Hacker, master of the Shell.

Hacker glanced at his nephew. It was the look on his face that caused Bob Cherry to murmur, and it caused the other fellows to stare.

Wilmot started. Mr. Hacker's face, that morning, looked troubled and harassed, as if he had some sort of worry on his mind. Often, indeed, he had, for he was of a fussy and worrying disposition.

But as he saw his nephew his brows contracted darkly, his eyes gleamed, and he set his lips in a tight line. That expression on Hacker's face, it was clear, was involuntary; it leaped there at the sight of Wilmot. It was such a look of scorn and loathing as might have made any fellow start to see it.

As if recollecting himself, the master of the Shell turned abruptly aside, and walked in another direction.

Wilmot stared after him blankly. Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another in uncomfortable silence.

Wilmot, after watching his uncle out of sight, turned to them. His handsome face was a little pale.

"Did you fellows see?" he muttered. "Something's up with nunky," said Bob, with an attempt at lightness. "Turned out of bed on the wrong side this morning, what?"

But Wilmot did not smile. "What can have happened?" he said, in a low, troubled voice.

But the Famous Five could not answer that question. It looked as if something had happened; but they could not begin to guess what.

When Wilmot was first at Greyfriars, early that term, his Uncle Hacker had displayed not merely kindness, but a fussy concern for his welfare, which had made things rather uncomfortable for him. Fellows had nicknamed him the "Form-master's favourite," and the "greaser," in consequence.

Wilmot, however, had made it unmistakably clear that he did not want favouritism, which had a little offended Hacker, and caused him to go rather to the opposite extreme, and totally ignore his nephew.

Now, it was clear, there was another change; for Hacker's sudden and involuntary look plainly indicated, not indifference, but angry scorn and active dislike.

"You haven't been checking him, I suppose?" asked Harry, at last.

"I haven't spoken to him for a week," answered Wilmot. He coloured a little. "I'm not ungrateful, I hope, for all that my uncle's done for me," he added. "But we hardly ever speak to one another here. Certainly I should never do or say anything that he could think disrespectful. I can't understand—"

"He's got his back up about something," said the captain of the Remove. "Blessed if I make him out!"

Wilmot nodded, and walked away by himself. It was evident that he was very much disturbed.

Vernon-Smith lounged over to the

Famous Five, his hands in his pockets, a grin on his face. He glanced after Wilmot, as he went, and then at the chums of the Remove.

"You fellows know about it?" he asked.

"About what?" asked Harry.

"Wilmot."

"What about Wilmot?" asked the captain of the Remove, rather sharply.

"No need to bite a man's head off," drawled the Bounder. "But he's in your study, and you're rather pally with him, so I thought you might know."

"You haven't said what yet."

"Whether he was sacked from his last school, I mean."

The five looked at Smithy. They did know that circumstance, though they certainly had no intention of telling Vernon-Smith, or anyone else.

Harry Wharton compressed his lips.

"You've no right to say anything like that about any fellow, Smithy," he said curtly. "It's not like you, either. What the thump do you mean?"

"Haven't you heard Bunter's latest, then?" grinned the Bounder.

"Bunter!" repeated Harry.

"There's no smoke without fire, as a rule," remarked Vernon-Smith. "But if Bunter's made it up, I should advise Wilmot to kick him hard. Bunter's telling the wide world that Wilmot did something at Topham that he had to leave for. I heard it last evening in the Rag; but it's not a short story, it's a serial, and Bunter's going on with it now."

The Bounder laughed.

"I can see that you fellows know something," he said. "Your jolly old speaking countenances give you away. No bizney of mine; but if it's true, Wilmot must have been an awful ass to let Bunter get hold of it. Might as well have shouted it from the house-tops."

The Bounder, still laughing, walked away, leaving the Famous Five exchanging dismayed glances.

"How the thump could Bunter know?" said Nugent, when Smithy was out of hearing.

"Is there anything he doesn't know, with his spying and his prying?" said Harry savagely. "He must have found out something from that letter in the study yesterday. You remember Wilmot swiped him for spying over his shoulder when he was reading a letter."

Bob Cherry whistled.

"If Bunter's found it out, all the fat's in the fire," he said. "But Wilmot said there was nothing much in that letter—"

"Enough for Bunter, it seems." Wharton compressed his lips. "Come on!" he added abruptly.

Billy Bunter could be seen, at a distance, in the midst of a little crowd of Remove fellows. Some of them were grinning, some looked very serious. Harry Wharton & Co. could guess Bunter's topic now. His fat voice reached them as they walked towards the group.

"I say, you fellows, it's true! I always knew there was something fishy about that chap Wilmot. Now I jolly well know that he did something at his last school, and had to get out."

"And how do you know, you fat freak?" demanded Peter Todd.

"Did Wilmot tell you?" grinned Skinner.

"All bunkum, of course," said Squiff.

"Utter rot!" said Tom Brown. "Wilmot's all right; and Bunter can't

possibly know anything about him, anyhow, before he came here."

"Seeing is believing," said Bunter. "I can jolly well tell you I've seen it in black and white!"

"Wilmot wrote it down for you?" asked Skinner; and there was a laugh.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Bunter.

"Another chap wrote it down, I can jolly well tell you—a chap who knew him at his last school. Not that I saw his letter, you know. I don't mean that. I hope I'm not the chap to look at another chap's letter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I never saw the letter, and never knew that Wilmot had had a letter from Topham at all. The beast pitched into me for nothing—absolutely nothing!"

"Oh, he pitched into you, did he?" said Skinner. "That accounts for the milk in the coconut. So you made this up about him, because he whopped you."

"No!" roared Bunter. "It was in the letter—"

"The letter you didn't look at?"

"Yes. I—I mean—I—I mean—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle," said Bunter; "but I think it's pretty thick for a fellow to butt into Greyfriars, when he's had to get out of another school. It's plain enough that he was bunked. That fellow Crawley said that he'd done something, and the fellows at Topham wouldn't touch him with a barge-pole. Those very words!"

"Who on earth's Crawley?" asked Snoop.

"The chap who wrote that letter from Topham—"

"The letter Bunter didn't see, you men," said Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You prying worm, nosing into a man's letter!" exclaimed Hazeldene.

"I didn't!" roared Bunter. "I never looked at the letter! You might do that sort of thing, Hazel. I hope I'm above it. Wilmot thought I was looking at his letter, because he's a suspicious beast. He pitched into me with a ruler. I couldn't sit down at prep last night."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sheer ill-temper," said Bunter indignantly. "Making out that a fellow was reading his letter, you know. As if I'd look at his letter!"

"He saw what was in it without looking," said Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Anything in this, Wharton?" asked Skinner, glancing round at the captain of the Remove. "Do you know why Wilmot left Topham?"

Harry Wharton did not answer that question. He pushed through the crowd of Removites, and grabbed Billy Bunter by the collar.

There was a roar from the Owl of the Remove.

"Ow! Beast! Leggo!"

Shake, shake, shake, shake!

"Urrrrgh!" gurgled Bunter.

Shake, shake!

"Gurrgh!" Bunter spluttered wildly.

"Urrgh! S-s-stop shook—shook—shaking me, you beast! If you make my specs fall off—"

Shake, shake!

Bunter swayed like a fat jelly amid a yell of laughter from the juniors. He gasped and gurgled.

"Urrgh! If they get bub-bub-broken, you'll have to pi-pip-pay for them! Will you— Urrgh! Gurrgh! Leggo!" gurgled Bunter.

Wharton did not let go! He shook



"There is no need for words!" said Mr. Hacker. "Give me the banknote, to return to Mr. Prout." "The—the banknote!" gasped Wilmot. "What banknote?" "The one taken from Mr. Prout's study last evening!" snapped the master of the Shell. Wilmot reeled. "I am no thief!" he said huskily.

and shook. Bunter spluttered frantically in his grasp, and the other fellows roared.

Whether the fat Owl was stating facts or not, it was clear that he had been, as usual, spying and prying. On that point, at least, there was no doubt. He deserved something more than a shaking. But the shaking was rather severe.

"There, you fat ass!" gasped Wharton.

"Gurrgh!"

Having shaken the fat junior till his arm was tired, Wharton dropped him, and Bunter sat down with a bump.

"Yoop! Urrgh! Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "Beast!"

"You fat rotter—"

"Urrgh!"

"Any more of that," said Harry, glaring at the gurgling Owl, "and you'll get more than Wilmot gave you yesterday for spying into his letter."

"Grooogh! I never— Urrgh!"

"Then there was a letter?" said Skinner.

"Keep that in mind, you spying worm!" snapped Harry, taking no notice of Skinner's question.

"Urrgh!"

"Only Bunter's rot. I suppose," said Hazel, as the captain of the Remove turned away. "Nothing in it?"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Hazel!" was Wharton's reply.

And he walked away before any more questions could be asked.

Fellows who wanted further information were unable to obtain any from Billy Bunter. The breathless Owl was gurgling, and he was still gurgling when the bell rang for third school.

Quite a number of Remove men gave Eric Wilmot curious looks when the

Remove went to their Form-room. Wilmot did not notice it; he was thinking of that strange look his uncle had given him, and wondering, with deep uneasiness, what it might mean. But he did notice that Mr. Quelch's eyes dwelt upon him several times with a very penetrating look. And he knew, as well as if he had been told, that something had happened—something that was known to the masters, but of which he knew nothing. What was it?

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Handling Horace!

"SHIRTY, old ass!" said Coker.

Coker looked cross as he came out of the Fifth Form Room that morning.

So, as a matter of fact, did a good many other fellows in the Fifth. For it was an undoubted fact that Mr. Prout had been "shirty" in the Form-room.

Only the day before Prout had risen in Coker's estimation. Already he had fallen again! He had remained on the lofty pinnacle of Coker's esteem less than twenty-four hours!

He had been, as Coker considered it, worse than ever in Form that morning. On a simple matter of English spelling he had caught Coker up, jawed him, and scarified him. Coker thought there was a "k" in oxygen. Prout fancied that there wasn't. And, as usual, Prout made out that Coker was wrong, and jawed him!

Nobody in the Fifth was surprised at Prout getting stuffy with Coker. Coker was enough to turn a Form-master's

hair grey, if not to cause it to come out at the roots. But Prout had been shirty, ratty, stuffy, as they variously described it, generally. The old bean, so far as the Fifth could see, was worried about something, and took it out of his Form.

Generally, Prout was placid and easy-going. Blundell and his friends often talked games in class in low voices, and either Prout didn't hear, or tactfully pretended that he didn't. But a worried Prout was a changed Prout.

Even Blundell, captain of the Fifth, was told not to talk in class—a command that made Blundell stare blankly—surprised, hurt, and dignified. Price—a less important man than Blundell—was given lines for whispering to Hilton. Hilton was given lines for raising his eyebrows. Three or four men were ordered to write papers over again. Altogether, it had not been a happy morning in the Fifth.

So not only Coker, but quite a lot of Fifth Form men, frowned when they came out. Something was worrying Prout—and making him shirty—that was clear to all the Fifth. And some of them fancied they knew what it was.

So, as Coker stalked forth into the quad and told Potter and Greene that Prout was, after all, a shirty old ass, six or seven of the Fifth followed on Coker's track.

"The old donkey!" resumed Coker. "Obstinate old ass, you know—"

"Who's running Prout down now?" inquired Potter, sarcastically, mindful of Coker's remarks in the study the day before.

(Continued on page 16.)

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HIS RECORD CONDEMNED HIM!



(Continued from page 13.)

"Don't be a silly ass, George Potter! I can tell you, I'm getting fed-up with the old ass! It's jolly well time he was told where he got off; and I've a jolly good mind—"

"You silly ass!" said Potter.

"You burbling chump!" said Greene.

"Eh!" ejaculated Coker. "What?" He stared at his friends; he did not often hear painful truths like this from Potter and Greene.

"The old bean's like a bear with a sore head to-day," snarled Potter, "and it's all your fault!"

"My fault!" repeated Coker.

"Insulting him, you silly, cheeky ass!" said Greene. "He's said nothing about it—too dashed dignified, I suppose—but it's made him fearfully shirty."

"What the thump—"

"Here's the silly fool!" It was Blundell's voice; and the captain of the Fifth came up with half a dozen other seniors. "Here, Coker—"

Coker stared round angrily and in surprise.

First of all, Potter and Greene unexpectedly told him what they thought of him, then Blundell called him a fool; and now a crowd of the Fifth surrounded him with grim and hostile looks. Coker did not catch on.

"Look here—" he began hotly. "What—"

"We've all been through it this morning!" said Blundell, glaring at Coker. "Nice time we've had, haven't we? What?"

"Is that my fault?" hooted Coker.

"Yes, it jolly well is! What do you want to rag the man for?" snorted the captain of the Fifth. "Prout's all right if he's let alone. Well, let sleeping dogs lie, see? That's a proverb."

"Look here—"

"It's what you did yesterday, of course," said Blundell. "That silly rot you were talking in the games study about—"

"I never—"

"You jolly well did!" snorted Potter. "You told Greene and me that you'd done it."

"Yes, but—"

"Everybody knew!" said Blundell.

"But I never—" gasped Coker.

"You jolly well did!" said Price.

"What's the good of telling whoppers about it, Coker?"

"If you make out I'm telling whoppers, you cheeky cad, Price—" roared Coker in wrathful indignation.

"Snaffle him!" said Blundell.

"Prout's an ass, all right; but if telling him so is going to make him rag us in class, Coker has got to learn to keep off the grass—"

"But—" howled Coker.

Coker was given no time to explain. Fifth Form men collared him on all sides, and proceeded to knock his head against a tree.

Coker roared wildly.

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In the games study the previous day Coker had talked of that message he intended to leave for Prout in his study, and the Fifth Form men had laughed. Potter and Greene, like good pals, had tried to dissuade him—in vain!

Coker had done it! Potter and Greene knew, and most of the Fifth knew that he had done it!

What they did not know yet was that Coker, afterwards experiencing a change of spirit, had undone it!

So Prout being in an unusual shirty state that morning, they took it for granted that it was Coker's insulting message that had done the trick! No doubt it would have produced such an effect had Prout seen it.

Believing that he had, and that he was shirty in consequence, the Fifth Form men dealt faithfully with Coker! Blundell declared that they were going to knock a little sense into his head, if they could!

That was by no means an easy proposition! But whether any sense could be knocked into Coker's head or not, at least it could be knocked—and it was, hard!

In fact banged!

Coker, a hefty man, struggled; but in the grasp of five or six big seniors, even Coker's muscular powers were of little use.

His hapless head banged on the elm, and banged again, and yet again. He roared frantically.

"Give him a few more!" said Blundell.

Bang, bang!

"Oh crikey! Ow!" roared Coker. "I tell you I never— Ow! Wow! I didn't— Yow-ow-ow! It wasn't that that made Prout shirty— Yaroooh!"

"Oh, don't be a fool!" said Blundell. "Do you think you can leave a man a message in his study that he's an old ass without making him shirty?"

"I never—"

"You jolly well did!" said Potter. "I'm surprised at you, Coker! You told us you did—"

"Yes, you silly ass!" howled Coker. "But I went and took it away again before Prout saw it—"

"Eh!"

"What?"

"Oh!"

"Did you?"

The seniors ceased to bang Coker's head! Coker rubbed it!

"Ow! Yes, you dummies!" he gasped. "Prout didn't see it when he came in—he was reading a letter or something, and missed it—and then he butted in when those fags were ragging me, so I changed my mind and went and took it away— Ow! And he never saw it at all."

"Oh!" gasped Potter.

"Oh!" gasped Greene.

"Oh!" said Blundell. "Sure he never saw it? Then what's made him so jolly shirty to-day?"

"How should I know?" roared Coker, rubbing his head. "I know he never saw that paper—I went and took it away, while he was in Locke's study—it was just where I'd left it—"

"Then if it wasn't that, what's the matter with him this morning? Anybody can see that he's fearfully upset about something."

"Can't be merely Coker's spellin'," remarked Hilton. "Prout's hardened to that!"

"Something's happened to upset him," said Blundell. "Well, I thought it was your silly rot, of course, Coker! If we've banged your head for nothing,

you can take it as a tip not to be such a goat, see?"

"You silly ass!" howled Coker.

He was left rubbing his head. It felt rather painful on the outside, though inside there was, perhaps, little to damage.

The Fifth were left quite puzzled to account for what was the matter with Prout. Nobody had the remotest idea that he had missed a banknote from his study, and that the conviction was forcing itself slowly but surely into his mind that a theft must have been committed, and worrying him fearfully.

Ignorant of that, the Fifth were simply perplexed. If he hadn't seen Coker's idiotic message, it couldn't be that.

Prout's Form could only hope that he would be better after dinner, but they were disappointed. Prout wasn't better after dinner; he was worse.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Sticky!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Get out!"

"If you call that civil—" said Billy Bunter warmly.

"Kick him!"

William George Bunter, it appeared, was not "persona grata" in Study No. 1 in the Remove that day.

Not uncommonly, fellows did not want to see Bunter at tea-time. But on this occasion the Famous Five of the Remove not only did not want to see Bunter, but they gave him deadly glares when he presented his fat face and big spectacles in the doorway.

Eric Wilmot gave him a quiet look, but did not speak; the Famous Five, however, all spoke at once—and with emphasis.

"You fat, fozzling frump—" said Bob Cherry.

"You prying worm!" said Johnny Bull.

"Get out!" snapped Nugent.

"Kick the fat bluebottle!" said Harry Wharton. "You're nearest, Inky!"

"The kickfulness is the proper caper," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, getting out of his chair.

"Oh, really, you fellows—" protested Bunter. "I say, what are you getting shirty about, you silly fatheads? What's up?"

They glared at him. By that time what Bunter had learned from Crawley's letter was known to all the Remove and talked up and down the Form.

It had, of course, reached Wilmot's ears by that time. Several fellows had spoken to him about it, receiving curt replies, or no replies at all.

It was a dismaying state of affairs to the new junior.

The fact that nothing was known at Greyfriars of his disaster at Topham, except to the Famous Five, and that the famous Co. gave him their friendship and complete trust, helped him to believe that there was still a chance for him. He had resolved to blot the bitter past out of his mind as much as he could and look to the future, making the most of the chance given him by his uncle's influence with the Head of Greyfriars.

But if he was to make good at Greyfriars, it depended on the miserable secret remaining a secret.

Bunter certainly had not learned the facts, but he had learned enough to make Wilmot the talk of the Form, and to make many of the fellows wonder whether he had been "sacked" from his last school.

He could only hope that when the

topic had been talked out it would die away and be forgotten; meanwhile, he had to endure being an object of curiosity and a subject of discussion.

He wondered, too, whether it had reached Mr. Hacker's ears and caused that black and bitter look Hacker had given him that morning. The master of the Shell had done a big thing for him in getting him into Greyfriars. It would be an intolerable state of affairs for Hacker if a story spread in the school that his nephew had been expelled from another school.

Harry Wharton & Co. were intensely exasperated. They believed in Wilmot—and he had trouble enough on hand, without having it added to by Billy Bunter's prying and tattling.

"Give him one for me!" growled Johnny Bull, as the Nabob of Bhanipur rose from his chair.

"And one for me!" said Bob Cherry. Billy Bunter blinked warily at the nabob.

"I say, you fellows, don't play the goat!" he urged. "I haven't come here to tea, if that's what you fancy. I never knew you had a cake—"

"Turn round, my esteemed and idiotic Bunter."

"Oh, really, Inky— Ow! Leggo!" roared Bunter, as Hurree Jamset Ram Singh grabbed him by the collar and slewed him round. "I say, you fellows, I came here with a message—"

"Kick him out, Inky!"

"A message from Hacker!" roared Bunter. "Honest Injun!"

"Oh, hold on, Inky!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. If there was really a message from Wilmot's uncle, it had to be delivered before Bunter was kicked out.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh released the fat junior's collar. Billy Bunter gave an angry grunt.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Cough it up, you fat fool!" snapped Wilmot. Since his uncle had given him that strange look in the quad that morning he had not seen Mr. Hacker and had heard nothing from him.

Bunter blinked at him.

"You needn't call me names!" he said scornfully. "I haven't jolly well been sacked, anyhow—like you have!"

"Have you a message from my uncle?" asked Wilmot, between his teeth.

"Yes. I say, you fellows, is that strawberry jam?" asked Bunter, with his eyes and spectacles on a pot of jam that graced the tea-table. "I say—"

"Get it out, you fool!" exclaimed Wilmot.

"Beast! You're to go to Hacker's study," snorted Bunter. "He stopped me as I was coming up and told me to tell you. Like his cheek, I think, sending Remove men on messages to his rotten relations! You can tell him from me that he's a cheeky old ass! See?"

Wilmot, leaving the tea-table, crossed to the door; as he went he let out his foot, and there was a roar from Bunter.

"Ow! Yaroooh!"

Wilmot left the study and hurried to the stairs.

"Cheeky cad!" said Bunter. "Lucky for him he's gone: I'd have mopped up the study with him! I say, you fellows, I'll stay to tea now that cad's gone."

"Will you?" said the captain of the Remove grimly.

"Yes, old chap! I shouldn't care to tea with a fellow who was turned out of his school, of course! I say, what do you think it was Wilmot did at Fopham? I didn't see that in the letter. Do you fellows know?"

"So you own up to reading the letter, you prying porpoise?"

"Eh? No, certainly not! I hope I'm not the chap to read a chap's letter. I'm a bit more particular than some fellows I could name! I say, is that strawberry jam?"

"Yes, it's strawberry jam—"

"Good! I like strawberry jam—"

"You shall have it," said the captain of the Remove. "You fellows agree to let Bunter have the jam before he goes?"

"Yes, rather!" grinned Bob.

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"Good egg!" said Nugent. "Let him have the lot!"

Billy Bunter beamed. It was a two-pound pot of strawberry jam, and Bunter liked all jam—and especially strawberry. He could hardly believe in his good luck when the Famous Five without a dissentient voice agreed to let him have the whole lot. He did not yet know how it was to be given.

"I say, you fellows," he gasped, "got a spoon? A tablespoon will do—I say, wharrer you up to? Leggo! I say—"

Johnny Bull grasped the fat Owl by

the neck; Harry Wharton picked up the jar of jam. Bunter wriggled wildly.

"Ow! Wharrer you up to?" he roared.

"Giving you the jam!" answered Harry.

"Groooooogh!"

Bunter liked jam; he liked it in bulk. But he did not like it swamping all over his fat face and mixing with his hair. Taken like that, Bunter disliked even strawberry jam.

But that was how he got it.

"Gurrrrrrrgh!" gurgled Bunter as he got it.

"Let him have the lot!" chuckled Bob. "Bunter likes jam! He likes jam as much as he likes reading other fellows' letters—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gurrrrrrrggh!"

"Shove some down his back!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wurrrrrggh!" gurgled Bunter. "Oh! Grooogh! Ooogh! I'm all sticky! Wooogh! Oh, you beast! Gurrrggh!"

"Now all kick together!"

(Continued on next page.)

(1)
He is portly and plump, is Paul Pontifex Prout.
And the Fifth is the Form he inhabits,
He tells us incredible stories about
His prowess at shooting and putting to rout
Many bears (or more probably rabbits).
Far off in the Rockies he faced undismayed
All the wild grisly bears without running.
What wonderful skill at that time he displayed!
But judging by what we see now we're afraid
That his hand has lost much of its cunning!

(2)
And now, when he sometimes takes out
of its case
His Winchester sporting repeater,
A wistful expression breaks out on his face
As his thoughts travel back at a furious
pace
To a life that was younger and sweeter.
Ah, those are the moments he really
enjoys,
When he blithely escapes from the
present,
To find once again his old bearing and
poise
As he strode forth to meet, not a parcel
of boys,
But of bears, which was rather more
pleasant!

(3)
And he thinks to himself (or I fancy he must),
"Though the shooting of bears is permitted,
And bears, inoffensive, may fall in the dust,
I still mustn't shoot (which is surely unjust)
Any boys, though they drive me half-witted!
Not even the biggest congenital ass
Such as Coker can even take benders;
I long for the day which is coming to pass
When I may produce my repeater in class,
Just to pick off the biggest offenders!"

(5)
I tapped at his door and he answered:
"Come in!"
So I did, and I told him my mission.
And that was enough, for he started to chin
While I stood and heard his monotonous din,
With its endless and vain repetition.
"Ahem! H'm! Of course! So you're
going to write
A poetic description Byronic?
A saga, or epic cantata? Yes, quite!"
I thought the old chump would continue all
night,
For his talking machinery's chronic!



(7)
The cause of it all I don't know, I confess,
Though I have my own personal feeling.
But Prouty stopped short with a cry of
distress,
The study was filled with a terrible mess,
As down came a lump of the ceiling!
The plaster and mortar hit Prout on the
dome
And it burst like a bomb in the action;
Oh, great was the fall like the fall of old
Rome,
And in two seconds' time I was hurrying
home,
With my heart full of glad satisfaction!



GREYFRIARS INTERVIEWS
He's the greatest gunman the world has ever known . . . says our clever long-haired poet.
Who is? Why
PAUL PONTIFEX PROUT.
the master of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars.



"Oooogh!"

A jammy Bunter bounded out of Study No 1. Five feet, all landing together, helped him out.

The door slammed on him.

It was tea-time, but for the next half-hour Billy Bunter was not thinking of tea; he was washing off jam.

Bunter did not like washing, but he washed and washed and washed till he was quite tired, and even then Bunter was still sticky—especially about the hair. That end of Bunter was still jammy.

Bunter never seemed able to learn that the way of the transgressor was hard; but he could not help learning after that application of jam that such transgressors had a sticky end.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Condemned!

ERIC WILMOT felt a throb of uneasiness as he entered Mr. Hacker's study.

It was a long time since he had entered that study—not, indeed, since the time when he had made it clear that he did not want favouritism, and had thereby given offence to the fussy master of the Shell. Something must have happened to cause Hacker to send for him—especially after that look he had given him in the quad. What had happened? Had some echo of Bunter's tattle reached Hacker? But he felt, he knew, that it was something more serious than that. But what?

Hacker's look was not reassuring.

He was standing, his hand resting on a corner of the study table. He signed to Wilmot to close the door without speaking.

The junior did so, and stood waiting.

Hacker's eyes were on him—hard, penetrating, searching. The master of the Shell must have had affection for his nephew, to have done so much for him, after his disgrace at Topham. But there was no sign of affection in his look. There was aversion—scorn—something like loathing. His expression brought the colour in a flood to Wilmot's face.

As Hacker did not speak—it seemed as if he could not—the junior broke the silence at last.

"You sent for me, sir?" he asked.

"Bunter said—"

"Yes!" Hacker's reply came like a whip-cut. "I sent for you! I have not done so, to speak of your ingratitude—your hardened rascality. Yet, after what happened at your last school, one might have expected you to make something of the chance I gave you."

Wilmot almost staggered.

"What have I done?" he muttered.

"Don't prevaricate! You know what you've done."

"I've done nothing."

Mr. Hacker made a gesture of repulsion.

His nephew looked at him, almost wildly. He was beginning to understand now. Something had happened—he already knew that. It was something terrible—and he was suspected because of what had happened at Topham.

"Oh!" he panted. "Oh!"

The colour was drained from his face. "There is no need for words!" said Mr. Hacker. "Give me the banknote, to return to Mr. Prout."

"The—the banknote?"

"Yes!" snapped the master of the Shell.

"What banknote?"

"The one taken from Mr. Prout's study last evening."

Wilmot reeled. He caught at the table for support. So that was it.

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"You—you think——" His voice came husky and broken.

"Don't waste words. Do you think it is pleasant to me to speak to you on such a subject?" snarled Mr. Hacker. "Give me the banknote! I have waited—hoped against hope, that you might repent of what you did, and bring it to me of your own accord—and confess! But you are too hardened, I see that."

"I have taken nothing."

"After what happened at Topham, I trusted you—believed in you! I am not naturally a trustful man—but I could not, I would not, believe that my nephew was a thief! But now——"

"I am no thief."

"So you said at Topham, when another boy's notecase dropped from your pocket, with the money missing! I believed you, in spite of evidence that forced your headmaster to expel you," said Mr. Hacker bitterly. "Do you ask me to believe you now?"

"I never——"

"There is a thief in this school!" said Mr. Hacker. "Was there a thief before you came? Give me the banknote."

Wilmot tried to pull himself together. He was almost overwhelmed. There had been a theft—a theft! What was Hacker to think? What was the Head to think—and Quelch? He remembered how sharply, keenly, Quelch had looked at him in the Form-room. He knew now of what Quelch had been thinking. He was condemned—unheard! But what were they to think? If there had been a theft, of whom were they to think, but of the fellow who had been expelled from another school on such a charge?

Inevitably it came home to him. Guilty or not guilty, it came home to him. In his uncle's mind, he was condemned without a doubt.

Mr. Hacker held out a thin hand.

"Will you give me the banknote?" he asked harshly.

"I can't give you what I haven't got," said Wilmot thickly.

"Do you dare——"

"I never know a banknote had been taken. I've heard nothing of it. I—I can't believe it now."

"Nothing has been said, so far. Mr. Prout is still trying to believe that no theft has been committed," said the master of the Shell, with a bitter curl of the lip. "He knows nothing of your past, and thinks, perhaps, that suspicion might fall on his own Form. He will not face that, unless he is driven to it."

Wilmot caught his breath.

He could not help the thought coming into his mind, if only Hacker had been more like Prout.

But doubt and suspicion came naturally to Mr. Hacker. It was against all his own suspicious instincts that he had kept his faith in his accused nephew—crushing down doubts. Now he had gone to the opposite extreme.

"Nothing need be said," went on Mr. Hacker. "Dr. Locke has not yet been informed of the occurrence. Your Form-master, of course, knows how matters stand—at least, I have no doubt that he does. If the banknote is returned, scandal may be avoided—my name and reputation need not be brought to shame by my nephew's conduct. But it must be returned—at once! You must leave Greyfriars——"

"Leave Greyfriars!"

"Can you imagine that I will allow you to remain after you have repeated your exploits of Topham here?" exclaimed Mr. Hacker. "Are you out of your senses?"

"I've done nothing——"

"I will not listen to that. I order you to give me the banknote at once. You will leave the school in the morning.

There need be no open disgrace—even you, hardened as you are, must be glad of that," said Mr. Hacker bitterly.

Wilmot's eyes gleamed.

"You cannot send me away," he said, trying to speak steadily. "You are not my headmaster—not even my Form-master. I have a right——"

"What?" breathed Mr. Hacker.

"I have a right to justice. I have a right to appeal to my headmaster. I will not go without that. I will not!"

Mr. Hacker gave him a look of concentrated bitterness.

"Then you do not even desire to avoid a scandal—you are prepared to drag my name in the mire, after I have taken the risk of bringing you here, to give you a chance you never deserved."

Wilmot winced.

"If you persist in this," said Mr. Hacker, "you must have your way. I have no power to prevent you from crying this matter from the house-tops, if you wish. If you prefer to leave the school branded as a thief——"

"Won't you listen to me?" panted Wilmot. "You believed in me once, when the evidence was so strong that my headmaster, all my friends, turned me down and believed me guilty. Can't you try to believe me now?"

"I cannot!" said Mr. Hacker. "A boy condemned for theft has been admitted here—his coming is followed by a theft! That is enough."

Wilmot winced again, as if a blow had been struck. He could see how it looked in Hacker's eyes.

"But—but give me a chance!" he almost whispered. "What is the evidence now—have you any reason to suppose that I have ever been near Mr. Prout's study?"

"I require none!"

"I've not been in the study at all, that I remember. I've never had any reason——"

"Any boy can enter a study if he chooses, unseen, and you have chosen to do so. As for witnesses, you would hardly select a moment when eyes might be upon you," said Mr. Hacker bitterly. "I do not expect evidence to be found—unless, indeed, you should be as careless as before, and allow what you have taken to fall from your pocket, like the Topham boy's notecase," added the master of the Shell, with savage sarcasm.

"Don't!" muttered Wilmot. He gasped for breath.

"I have no desire to prolong this interview. Give me the banknote, to be returned to Mr. Prout, and then——"

"You say that Mr. Prout is not sure there has been a theft. He may have lost the banknote—everybody knows he is careless in some things. It may be found——"

"Do you imagine that I have willingly come to the conclusion that my faith in you was a mistake? The banknote has been searched for—Mr. Prout's study has been examined, every inch of it carefully scrutinised—the corridor searched from end to end. The banknote is gone."

"But—but——" stammered Wilmot.

"It was left on Prout's table under a paper-weight. Such carelessness—but never mind that! Mr. Prout clings to a hope that it may have blown away, as his window was open—he is willing to distrust the evidence of his senses rather than believe in a theft! The paper-weight weighs more than a pound; the banknote was placed under it. Yet he chooses to fancy——" The master of the Shell broke off with an angry grunt. "He knows nothing of your past, or he would know what to think. Your Form-master——"

"I don't believe Mr. Quelch thinks so,

I can see now that he has doubts, but I don't believe—"

"Enough! Will you return the banknote?"

"I cannot! I never—"

"Listen to me, Eric! Unless the banknote is returned, the matter will be made public. Prout may believe what he chooses—others will know what to believe. All Greyfriars will know there has been a theft! Dr. Locke will take the matter up—"

"Let him, then! He may find who has really taken the banknote, if it has been taken—"

"He will reach the conclusion that I have reached! Can he do otherwise?"

"I—I hope—"

"I wondered," said Mr. Hacker, with concentrated bitterness, "that, knowing that you must be suspected, you ventured to do this. I see now that you are more hardened than I dreamed. You are prepared to face shame and disgrace, to keep your plunder."

"Uncle!"

"Go!" Mr. Hacker pointed to the door with a trembling hand. "Go! I have done my best—I would have saved you from open disgrace! You choose it of your own accord! Go! The matter is not in my hands—once the matter is made public, I can do nothing. You choose to face disgrace, which I must share with you. Go!"

"I give you my word—"

"Leave my study."

Wilmot gave him one look, and went out of the study. His face was like chalk as he went, and many curious eyes turned on him as he went blindly out into the quad.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Suspected!

"**P**ROUT all over!" grunted Coker of the Fifth.

"Just like Prout!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"Prout's latest!" said the Bounder.

"Old ass!" said several fellows.

They were gathered before the notice-board, on which was a paper in Mr. Prout's hand. Fellows read that paper, and commented on it, and agreed nem con that it was just like Prout, and Prout all over! The paper ran:

LOST!

"In the vicinity of Mr. Prout's study, a banknote for £10. Anyone finding the same, please return to Mr. Prout!"

"Isn't he the giddy limit?" Horace Coker wanted to know. "Strewing banknotes all over the shop!"

"The strewfulness is not terrific!" remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "There is only one esteemed banknote lost."

"Chucking banknotes all over the place!" said Coker, unheeding. "I must say it's like Prout!"

"I knew there was something up!" remarked Blundell. "I suppose that's why the old bean has been so shirty all day!"

"That's it!" agreed Potter. "He ought to be more careful with his silly banknotes."

"Careful!" jered Coker. "Catch Prout being careful about anything! He will be losing the back of his head next!"

"Well, it's a bit thick, taking it out of his Form, because he loses banknotes!" said Greene. "I call it thick! I suppose it ain't the fault of the Fifth that he's lost his tenner?"

"It's somebody's fault!" grinned Price. "Banknotes don't walk away!"

"Oh, shut up, Pricey!" said Hilton. Price shrugged his shoulders.

"All rot!" he said. "What's the good of a man saying that a banknote was lost near his study? If it was there he could pick it up. Old Prout hasn't been like a bear with a sore-head because he's lost ten quid. He knows jolly well that if a tenner went out of his study, somebody helped it go. That's what's the matter with him."

"Shut up, Price!" said a dozen voices.

Price walked away, shrugging his shoulders. As a matter of fact, he had only voiced what was in a good many minds. A banknote lost near a study could be found. If it couldn't—

"Price ought to be kicked!" said Coker, staring after him as he went. "Is he suggesting that somebody may have pinched Prout's tenner? He jolly well ought to be kicked."

Harry Wharton & Co. left the group by the notice-board, and went out into the quad. There they looked at one another.

"Impossible!" said Frank Nugent.

"Terrifically impossible!" declared Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"The chap's all right!" said Bob.

"I'm sure he's all right!" said Johnny Bull, more slowly, however.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"It's plain what Hacker thinks," he said, in a low voice. "He knew of this, of course. You remember that look he gave Wilmot this morning."

"I remember!" said Frank uneasily.

"I—I—I suppose, knowing what he does, he can't help thinking—"

"We can, I hope, whether Hacker can or not!" said Harry quietly. "It's no good saying that it doesn't look rotten—because it does! But I can't and won't believe that Wilmot is a wrong 'un! I can't—and I won't!"

"He's not!" said Bob. "But where's the dashed banknote? That cad Price was bound to say something nasty; but still, banknotes don't walk away, just as he said."

"I've heard that Prout's given them a beano in the Fifth to-day!" said Johnny Bull. "Of course, he's fearfully worried if he thinks—"

"Prout's a gentleman, with all his funny ways!" said Harry. "He won't believe such an awful thing unless he's driven to it. It's pretty plain that he's stuck that notice on the board as a sort of forlorn hope."

"Knowing all the time—" muttered Bob.

"Well, he must know that banknotes don't walk away, as that measly bounder Price put it! If it was dropped about his study, it must have been looked for pretty thoroughly before Prout would stick that notice on the board. If it's been looked for, and not found—"

Bob shivered.

"Somebody's got it," he muttered.

"Well, it looks as—"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, blow away, Bunter!" snapped Wharton. "Do you want to be jammed again?"

"Beast! You can jam a chap's head, because he's down on a fellow coming here after getting sacked from his own

show!" sneered Bunter. "But I'd jolly well like to know what you say now."

The Famous Five looked at Bunter! They had forgotten for the moment Bunter's "latest." But it rushed into their minds, at once, that other fellows would not be long in connecting Bunter's latest with Prout's missing banknote!

The fat Owl blinked at them through his big spectacles.

"That's what I want to know!" he declared. "What do you say now? Wilmot did something at Topham, and was kicked out. Now there's somebody pinching banknotes out of beaks' studies!"

"You fat idiot—"

"You can call a fellow names," sneered Bunter, "but I think it's pretty thick! Chaps coming here pinching banknotes—"

"Shut up!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Yah! I jolly well know who's got that tenner, and I can jolly well say— Yarooogh! Whooogh! Whooop! Leggo, you beasts!"

Leaving Bunter sprawling and roaring, the Famous Five walked away. Herbert Vernon-Smith came along with a grin on his face.

"You men still pally with that chap Wilmot?" he asked.

"Yes, we are!" said Harry gruffly.

"Right-ho! Give him a tip, then!" suggested the grinning Bounder. "I suppose you know what Prout's notice means? If a chap walked into his study and told him he had picked up that banknote, and brought it in, Prout would swallow it whole—hook, line, and sinker! He'd be glad, too! That's that Topham man's best guess—if he's got it!"

"And if he hasn't?" said Harry sagely.

"If he hasn't, all serene!" said the Bounder, laughing. "But fellows aren't sacked for nothing. I suppose the Big Beak at Topham knew what he was about when he pushed the chap out into the wide world, what?"

"You've no right to suppose," muttered Harry. "Bunter's tattle—"

"Oh, don't be a goat!" said Smithy. "Some things speak for themselves! Why did the chap start the term at Topham, and come here in the second week? Why did he never mention Topham, till it came out by accident that he'd been there? If what Bunter says he saw in that letter isn't true, why doesn't Wilmot knock it on the head? Think I'd let a fellow go round saying that I'd been sacked from another school?" The Bounder sneered. "He hasn't even denied it—only tells fellows to shut up, or to mind their own bizney, if they ask him anything. It's true enough."

Smithy chuckled.

"And you fellows know it!" he added coolly.

(Continued on next page.)

"THE DAINTIEST MIXTURE I EVER SAW" says ALLY PALLY "and Oh! Boy! Aren't they delicious?"



BARRATT'S
LITTLE
PRINCESS
MIXTURE



2 ozs. 1d.

"Wilmot's a better chap than you've ever been, or will be!" snapped Bob.

"Very likely!" agreed Vernon-Smith. "I don't set up to be a plaster saint. But that's not the point, as you jolly well know. The point is, did he do something at his last school that he had to get out for? It looks as if he did—and if that's so, you fellows could tell Prout if you liked, the likeliest man to ask for his tenner."

And the Bounder walked away laughing.

"Where's Wilmot?" asked Nugent uneasily. "He never came back to the study after going down to see Hacker. Anybody seen him since?"

"Nobody had!"
"I—I suppose we can guess what Hacker wanted to see him for now!" said Harry. "Let's look for the chap and let him know that we're standing by him, at any rate."

The Co. agreed to that; and they looked for Wilmot.

He was not easy to find. It was close on time for calling-over when they came on him, at last, in a secluded and dusky corner behind the elms.

He was walking to and fro, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his face white and tormented. A flush of colour dyed it, for a moment, as he saw the Famous Five.

"Looking for you, old bean!" said Bob, as cheerfully as he could.

"Better leave me alone!" muttered Wilmot.

"Why?" asked Harry, very quietly. "You haven't heard, of course! You will soon! Prout's lost a banknote, and my uncle thinks I know where it is!"

The Famous Five stood silent. They could see that Wilmot had not seen Prout's notice yet; he did not know that the matter was public, and all sorts of surmises running riot.

"You'll hear soon!" said Wilmot drearily. "Hacker's certain that I had it! He stood by me over the Topham business, but this has put the lid on! I'm not surprised! What is he to think? What is anybody to think? You fellows—"

He choked. Perhaps there was, in the hearts of the chums of the Remove, an icy chill of doubt. If so, they drove it away.

"Bunter's gabble might have been forgotten," went on Wilmot. "It won't be forgotten now! Fellows will soon be putting two and two together—if that banknote isn't found! I'm done for here—the same as I was at Topham! It's like Fate!" He gave a groan. "You remember you said once, Wharton—once a thief, always a thief! That made me hope that whoever played that dirty trick on me, might be found out some day! But now—now—now you'll think—you're bound to think—"

"Never!" said Harry. He took Wilmot's arm. "There goes the bell for call-over!" he said. "Come on!" "Then—then you—"

"Don't be an ass! Come on!" It was unlike Harry Wharton to be demonstrative in any way, but on this occasion he walked into Hall for calling-over, with his arm linked in another fellow's—and that fellow was Eric Wilmot! Glances were exchanged among the Remove fellows. Skinner winked at Snoop, who grinned. The Bounder winked at Redwing, who frowned. Two or three fellows moved a little, to keep clear of Eric Wilmot. But the Famous Five stood with him, and after roll-call they walked out with him; and it was made unmistakably clear, to all whom it might concern, that whatever surmises might be going the rounds, on the subject of the fellow from Topham, Harry Wharton & Co. were sticking to him, and standing by him.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Plain Enough to Coker!

HORACE COKER looked thoughtful in the quad the following morning.

He was not, perhaps, thinking exactly. Coker's mental processes could hardly be described as thinking. But his rugged brow was wrinkled, and

his intellect, such as it was, was at work. Potter and Greene noticed it, and exchanged a look. They wondered dismally whether old Horace was hatching some new stunt for the discomfiture of Prout. All the Fifth were fed-up with Prout, Coker most of all. Prout, that morning, was as shirty as ever—or even shirtier!

For a brief space of time Prout had been reinstated in Coker's good opinion. It had not lasted long. Now he was down to zero again.

"I've got it!" said Coker at last, quite suddenly.

"Oh dear!" said Potter, or rather sighed.

"For goodness' sake, Coker," said Greene earnestly, "don't start playing the goat again! Prout's shirty enough already over that putrid banknote."

"Eh! That's what I mean," said Coker.

"Y-you mean the banknote?" stammered Greene.

"Yes!" Coker nodded. His two friends came to a halt, and stared at Coker. They could hardly believe their ears.

"You've got it!" gasped Greene.

"I fancy so!" assented Coker.

"If you're not mad, Coker," said Potter, in measured tones, "tell us what you mean, if you mean anything at all."

"Don't be an ass, Potter! I mean what I say. I generally do."

"Well, if you've got it, you'd better take it straight back to Prout—"

"What?"

"What did you take it for?" howled Greene.

Coker blinked at them.

"What did I take what for?" he demanded.

"Prout's banknote."

"Prout's banknote!" repeated Coker, bewildered. "Gone potty, or what? Are you making out that I've taken Prout's banknote? Do you want me to mop you up, or what?"

Evidently there was a misunderstanding! That was not uncommon when Coker was concerned.

"You said you'd got it!" shrieked Greene. "I know you haven't, of course. But you said you had."

"You silly ass!" said Coker. "You don't catch on! When I said I've got it, I didn't mean that I'd got it. Isn't that clear?"

It did not seem so clear to Potter and Greene as it apparently did to Coker. They could only gaze at the great Horace, mute!

"I'll put it in words of one syllable if you like," said Coker sarcastically.

"I mean I've got it! Not the banknote, you fathead—I mean I've got who got it."

Coker's meaning was not always easy to follow. But his friends realised that Coker meant that he had spotted the person or persons unknown who had done the snaffling act, so to speak.

"Oh, rot!" said Potter, when he got it down.

"Rubbish!" said Greene.

Coker glared.

"You can say rot and rubbish!" he snorted. "It's like you—a pair of silly idiots with less brains in your nappers than I've got in the toes of my boots. But I've got it all the same. That unwashed tick, Price, makes out that it was pinched. Well, it's like him! It wasn't!"

"Everybody seems to think so by this time!" remarked Potter.

"Everybody's wrong, then," said Coker. "They're cheeky little beasts, but making out that they're thieves is all bunk."

This was simply mysterious to Potter



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and Greene. Coker, it seemed, was following his own train of thought, forgetting that he had not yet acquainted his chums with the mighty workings of his powerful intellect.

"Cheeky little beasts!" repeated Potter mechanically.

"Yes, they've checked me often enough," said Coker. "They were standing round sniggering while I was

writing that message for Prout on a leaf of my pocket-book—you remember—under the elms—"

"You're speaking of Wharton's gang in the Remove?" asked Greene.

"Of course I am! Have a little sense!" said Coker testily. "Cheeky fags—I've whopped them often enough for it. Well, I've been thinking over this—"

Potter and Greene refrained from asking Coker what he had been doing that with! They only doubted the statement.

"Thinking over it," resumed Coker. "And I remember that when I came away from Prout's study, after putting the message on his table, the whole gang of them were hanging about
(Continued on next page.)



COME INTO the OFFICE, BOYS - AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the "Magnet," The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped, addressed envelope will ensure a reply.

ONE of my readers, who gives no address, puts up a rather peculiar query to me this week. He asks:

WHAT IS DRAUGHTING?

As a matter of fact, there are over twenty different meanings to this word, so it is a bit of a puzzle for me to guess exactly which one my reader requires. The most likely one appears to be the making of a preliminary drawing, design, or plan for a work to be executed. But the term is also used in stone-masonry, and the word "draught" is applied to the chiselled strip which is always cut along the edges of a squared stone, and to which the face may be dressed off if required.

The act of dragging with a net is also termed "draughting," and a "draught" is the quantity of fish taken in one sweep of a net. Among other meanings is the depth to which a ship sinks in water. I am afraid I haven't enough space at my disposal to give all the meanings of this greatly-used word.

From William Foster (no address) comes the following request:

HE WANTS TO BE AN F.R.P.S.,

and asks me how to go about it. The letters stand for "Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society," and if my chum is really interested in photography, it should not be difficult for him to become an F.R.P.S. The headquarters of this society are at 35, Russell Square, London, W.C.1. If "W. F." writes direct to the Secretary at that address, he will obtain all the information he needs.

ANOTHER CAREERS QUERY

comes from R. H. H., of Birkenhead. This reader wishes to take Holy Orders, and wants to know how to go about it. Naturally a thorough knowledge of Divinity is required for this, and R. H. H. will have a lot of study in front of him. The best advice I can give him is to call on his local vicar and explain what he wants. I feel sure that the vicar will give him the best possible advice available.

From another "Magnetite" comes a request for advice on

LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES!

The best way, of course, is to attend one of the many language schools in this country, preferably one where the teachers are natives of the country whose language it is desired to learn. But if my chum

wishes to study at home, he should have no difficulty in getting plenty of books on the subject. Any bookseller will supply him with a list, out of which he can pick the ones which will fit in with the amount of money he wishes to spend.

With regard to the same reader's second query concerning the collecting of foreign coins, he should write to either the British Numismatic Society, 1, Upper Montague Street, London, W.C.1, or to the Royal Numismatic Society, 22, Russell Square, London, W.C.1. They will be pleased to put him into touch with dealers in foreign coins.

NOW for a few RAPID FIRE REPLIES.

A "Boys' Only" Club: Glen Bamber, of "Voltaire," Blackpool Road, Lea, Preston, is the secretary of a "Boys' Only" Club, which has recently been formed. He will be pleased to send full particulars to all readers who are interested, if they will send him a stamped, addressed envelope.

How is the Height of Mountains Measured? By means of trigonometry after taking sextant angles. In low altitudes a barometer is sometimes used, as the barometer falls 1" for every 900 feet of ascent.

What is the Highest Town in the World? The town of La Paz, in Bolivia. It is situated at the top of a mountain 11,800 feet above sea level.

How Big is the Sahara Desert? This is the largest desert in the world. It is estimated to cover an area of no less than three million square miles.

What is the Relative Rank of an Air Vice-Marshal? He ranks with a Naval Rear-Admiral, and with a Major-General of the Army.

Do Penguins come from the North Pole? No, there are no penguins in the Arctic. The ones associated with snow and ice come from the Antarctic, but there are others which come from warm climates, such as South America and South Africa.

What is "The Volcano of Death"? The Japanese volcano of Mihara-yama, on the island of Oshima. It was given this name because no fewer than 350 people committed suicide by jumping into its crater in two years! No less than 1,386 other people have been dragged back and prevented from flinging themselves to their doom in this burning pit of death!

From John Read, of Salford, comes the following query:

WHAT IS A SEA-BUTTERFLY?

Sounds a peculiar sort of thing, doesn't it? The term "sea-butterflies" is applied to a group of sea snails which have a wing-shaped fin on each side of the head and neck. There are several varieties, some having no shells, while others have elegant transparent shells composed of calcium carbonate. They are very small and are found floating on the surface of the ocean in all parts of the world. In the Arctic and Antarctic regions they form much of the food of whales. Their proper name is Pteropoda.

And now for a query that has been sent in by Harry Barnes, of Sunderland.

WHAT ARE PEEL TOWERS?

They are towers which were built in the Border counties of Scotland and England between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. In those days raiding bands from both countries were frequent, and the Peel Towers formed a fortified place of security against sudden attacks. Eventually, villages and small towns grew up around them. Peel Towers were usually square buildings with turrets at the angles. The lower part was vaulted so that horses and cattle could be driven in and locked up in security from the raiders.

One of my Swansea readers is trying to "pull my leg" this week. As the catch which he sends along will probably interest other readers, here it is:

Write down
ER

Now ask your chums if they can add a stroke to these two letters, and make a boat. When they have given it up, just draw a line in front of the two letters, and you will have

— ER

You then explain that you have made the two letters into "liner"!

AND now for next week's programme. You can take it from me, chums, there's some real "good stuff" in store for you in:

"NOT WANTED AT GREYFRIARS!"

next week's great yarn of Harry Wharton & Co. All sorts of rumours have been going the rounds at Greyfriars as to why Eric Wilmot, the new boy in the Remove, left his last school. Now, like a bolt from the blue, comes Wilmot's enemy—Crawley by name and crawley by nature—bent on trading the miserable secret for a price! Let me tell you, chums, that this is one of the finest yarns Frank Richards has yet written for us. If you'll take my advice you'll order your copy without further delay.

If it's thrills you want, you'll find plenty of them in our magnificent yarn "The Lost Squadron!"

There'll be another "Greyfriars Herald" as usual, together with another snappy poem by the Greyfriars Rhymester, and I shall be in the chair waiting to have another chat with you.

Cheerio till next week, chums.
YOUR EDITOR.
THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,469.

Masters' Studies. I noticed them—and noticed that they had something on."

"Their clobber?" asked Greene flip-pantly.

"Don't be a goat, Greene! They were grinning and whispering together—you know what fags are like when they've got some game on. Well, soon afterwards Prout bagged one of them, in that very passage, and took him to Quelch to be whopped. That was why they kicked up that shindy in the quad afterwards."

"Well?" said Potter and Greene.

"Well," said Coker. "Isn't it clear, even to your feeble brains? What they were up to was a rag of some sort. Put two and two together if you've got intellect enough for that! A mob of juniors ragging in Masters' Passage—and a banknote disappearing about the same time! Of course, they were ragging in Prout's study, and that was how it happened. It's plain enough to me!"

"But they wouldn't—"

"I know they wouldn't touch it, you silly ass! As I've said, they're cheeky little brutes, but they're not thieves! But Prout must have left it about the study, for it to be lost at all. Lying about, it disappeared while they were ragging. See? Knocked under something—or perhaps they hid it for a lark! They haven't got much sense."

"Um!" said Potter.

"It's clear enough," said Coker, "that some of that gang went to Prout's study after I left—not long afterwards, either. It turned out that Prout hadn't gone out, as I thought—he was right on the spot, or he couldn't have grabbed one of them as he did. See? He left the banknote there—careless old ass!—and that's how it all came about. Those kids know where that banknote is—and I'm going to make them own up—before there's a lot of rotten talk about a theft, see?"

Coker looked round the sunny quad.

"There they are!" he said, as he spotted the Famous Five, with Wilmot, in the distance. "Come on!"

"You haven't had enough rowing with fags in the quad?" inquired Potter. "You want another shindy?"

"If you do, we'll take front seats, but we're not joining in the performance!" said Greene emphatically.

Coker, snorting, marched off. Potter and Greene remained where they were and watched. They had no idea of filling in morning break with a shindy with a mob of Removites. They were content to watch, and leave the performance to Coker.

Coker, regardless, marched up to the Famous Five, convinced that his powerful intellect had worked out the problem, and that nothing remained except to bring those cheeky fags to book.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Coker Asks for More!

BOB CHERRY grinned.

"Coker wants some more!" he remarked.

And his friends smiled.

Harry Wharton & Co. were not looking quite so merry and bright as usual, that sunny April morning. Wilmot's face was clouded, and that cloud was rather reflected on the faces of his friends.

There was no news of the missing banknote. If Prout had hoped that his notice on the board would produce it, Prout had been disappointed.

That it had been "pinched" looked

very probable now, even to fellows who were not suspicious like Price of the Fifth. Fellows were looking forward, with discomfort, to the most unpleasant kind of a "row."

In the Remove hardly a fellow spoke to Wilmot, except his five faithful friends. Bunter's tattle had produced its effect. Fellows might despise prying and tattling; but facts were facts! A fellow who had "done something" at his old school, for which he had to leave suddenly, was inevitably the fellow to be thought of in circumstances like these. What was it Wilmot had "done" at Topham? Something like what had just happened at Greyfriars! It was impossible to ignore what it looked like.

In their present rather clouded mood the Famous Five were not displeased to see Horace Coker bearing down on them. If Coker wanted another shindy, they were prepared to welcome a little comic relief.

But when Coker arrived he fairly took their breath away by his first remark.

"Where's Prout's banknote?" he inquired.

They gazed at Coker. Wilmot's face went first crimson, then white. He was the first to speak.

"You cheeky fool!" he said. "Do you dare—"

Coker glanced at him.

"Eh! You shut up!" he said. "I'm not speaking to you! I'm speaking to these young sweeps! You just shut up, see?"

Wilmot was dumb from sheer astonishment. So were the Famous Five. They would not have been surprised had Coker heard something of the tattle in the Remove, and come to speak to Wilmot about it. But that, evidently, was not it. Coker had heard nothing. He was not interested in Wilmot. His interest was concentrated on the Famous Five.

"I'm not saying you've pinched it!" added Coker graciously.

"Oh!" gasped Harry Wharton, finding his voice. "You're not saying we've pinched it! Thanks!"

"The thankfulness is terrific, my esteemed and idiotic Coker!" murmured Hurreo Janset Ram Singh.

"You blithering idiot—" began Johnny Bull, in a deep, growling voice.

"Hadn't your relations better be told about this, Coker?" asked Bob Cherry. "You want looking after, you know."

Coker's rugged face crimsoned with wrath. It did not seem to Coker, as it did to the juniors, that his proceedings savoured of a sudden attack of insanity.

"I don't want any cheek!" said Coker. "I want to know what you've done with Prout's banknote before there's a lot of rotten talk on the subject. Some of you went to Prout's study after I was there, as I jolly well know—"

"Oh! You've guessed that one, have you?" asked Harry.

"You own up to that, then?" demanded Coker.

"You silly idiot, you'd be sacked from the school by this time if we hadn't barged in!" hooted Bob Cherry. "What do you think Prout would have done if he'd found your idiotic foolery on his table!"

Coker blinked at him.

"I don't quite see how you know, Coker," said Harry. "Anybody but you might have guessed that that silly message had been snaffled when Prout didn't kick up a row about it. But you're not expected to see anything."

"Hardly!" agreed Bob.

"The sackfulness would have been terrific, my esteemed Coker, if my absurd self had not abstracted that ridiculous message," said the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The grateful thankfulness from you is the proper caper."

Coker could only blink.

In the fixed belief that he had, himself, abstracted that cheeky message from Prout's study, he was simply bewildered by this statement that the Remove men had abstracted it.

"Is that what you've come here to kick up a row about?" asked the captain of the Remove. "Can't even you see that there would have been an awful row if Prout had found your cheeky rot in his study? You ought to be jolly glad that Inky got it away in time."

"What the thump do you mean?" gasped Coker at last. "If you had the cheek to butt in and fool about with my affairs, I'd jolly well whop you all round! But you never did anything of the kind. I fetched that paper away myself—"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"I changed my mind about it after Prout stood up for me, and fetched it away!" bawled Coker. "So what do you mean?"

"The question is, what do you mean, if you mean anything?" said Harry. "You certainly never fetched that cheeky paper away, because Inky did, and we tore it up and chucked it out of the landing window."

"Mad!" said Bob sadly. "Wandering in his poor old mind! He says he changed his mind—but he can't have—it's the same old potty one!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't snigger at me!" bawled Coker. "I haven't come here about that paper, as you jolly well know, but about Prout's banknote. I'm not saying you pinched it—"

"You'd be found dead soon afterwards if you did!" growled Johnny Bull.

"The deadfulness would be terrific!"

"I don't think so, and I don't say so!" said Coker. "But the banknote was there when you were ragging in Prout's study—and either you lost it or hid it—you can see for yourselves—"

"We weren't ragging in Prout's study!" shrieked Wharton. "Only one of us went there, and that was to take away your idiotic foolery—"

"Don't tell untruths, Wharton! If you tell lies, you'll make me suspect that you did pinch the banknote."

"What?" yelled Wharton.

"Well, what does it look like when a fellow tells lies?" argued Coker. "Innocent people don't tell lies."

"You—you—you unspeakable idiot!" gasped Wharton. "Don't I keep on telling you that only Inky went into the study, and that it was to take away the silly rot you left there for Prout—"

"Well, that's not true!" said Coker. "You're cheeky enough, I dare say; but I happen to know that you never took away that paper, because I did myself—"

"You didn't!" raved Wharton.

"I did—and it's in my pocket now, if you want to know! So that's that!" said Coker. "Now, what I want is the truth! I warn you that you're putting yourselves under suspicion by telling silly whoppers. What I want is—"

Coker had no further opportunity to state what he wanted. He was interrupted—by receiving suddenly what he didn't want!

Five fellows jumped at Coker,



"It's ten thousand to one that paper in your pocket is the banknote that Prout's missed!" said Potter. "Rot!" said Coker, drawing a crumpled paper from his pocket and holding it up. Next moment his eyes fairly bulged from their sockets as he realised that it was not the paper he had written for Prout. It was a Bank of England note for ten pounds!

grabbed him, and rolled him over. They brought him down with a bump that almost shook the quad.

Coker had not succeeded in tracking the lost banknote. But he had succeeded in exasperating the chums of the Remove, and now he got the benefit of it.

"Rag him!"
 "Scrag him!"
 "Spiflicate him!"
 "Bump him!"
 "Thump him!"

It seemed to Horace Coker, of the Fifth Form, that earthquakes and tornadoes were happening to him. Ragged, scragged, spiflicated, bumped, and thumped, Coker hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels.

Potter and Greene, at a distance, gazed on. They remained at a distance. They had not the slightest desire to share Coker's hectic experiences. If Coker asked for these things, Coker was welcome to them, all to himself.

Six fellows were handling Horace—Wilmot lending a ready and willing hand. They ragged him and scragged him, they spiflicated him, bumped and thumped him; and instead of getting tired, strenuous work as it was, they seemed to warm to it, and gave him more and more.

Fortunately, they were nowhere near Masters' Studies this time. No official eye fell on the scene. The juniors had Coker all to themselves—and they dealt faithfully with him.

What Coker meant, if he meant anything, they neither knew nor cared; but they knew that he had asked for this, and they gave it him, hard and hot and heavy.

Indeed, Coker might have been almost left for dead, had not the bell for third school interrupted the performance.

Then they left him, a spluttering heap.

They walked off to the House, rather breathless. Coker was left without any breath at all. He could only gurgle.

Potter and Greene came and picked him up. It was a breathless, untidy, dizzy Coker that limped into the Fifth Form Room—to be greeted by an angry glare from Prout, as he came in late. Prout—shirtier than ever—promptly gave him a hundred lines; which, as Coker bitterly reflected, was just like Prout!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Unexpected!

"PINCHED!"

"Pinched?"

"Pinched!" said Coker, with a shake of the head. "I'm afraid there's no doubt about it—now! Pretty awful, isn't it?"

After third school, Coker of the Fifth walked his friends out into the quad, with the air of a fellow who had serious matters to communicate. Potter and Greene, resigning themselves to their fate, gave him his head. Coker's mysterious mental processes, it seemed, were still going on, and had led him to a fresh conclusion.

He halted, on the path by Masters' Studies—apparently choosing that quiet spot because of the seriousness of what he had to communicate. His face had the solemnity of an owl's.

Potter's and Greene's hadn't! They smiled—only wondering what bee old Horace had got in his bonnet now!

"It's not a laughing matter!" said Coker sternly. "Those fags—"

"For the love of Mike," said Greene, "leave those fags alone! There won't be much of you left, old man, if you keep on hunting trouble with the Remove."

Coker was still looking a little flustered from his late exciting experiences.

He had a collection of aches and pains that made him give an occasional wriggle. Potter and Greene could not help thinking that Coker had had enough, if he could only catch on to it.

"I can hardly leave them alone. Greene, if they've got Prout's tenner!" said Coker calmly.

"But they haven't, old man!" Potter pointed out.

"That's all you know!" said Coker. "You saw how they mobbed me in break—What are you sniggering at, you silly idiots? Is there anything funny in a Fifth Form man being mobbed by a gang of fags?"

"Oh! No!" gasped Potter. "Not at all! I say, was that Blundell calling me—"

"Never mind Blundell! Look here, they told me a pack of lies, about why they went to Prout's study," said Coker. "What does that look like? Why should they tell lies about it, if they've got nothing to hide?"

"That's an easy one!" said Potter. "They didn't!"

"They did!" said Coker. "And I'm afraid it means that they pinched that tenner. Otherwise, they'd have told the truth. They told me lies—"

"Well, what lies did they tell?" sighed Potter.

"They said they never ragged in Prout's study, and that only the nigger went there at all—and what do you think they pretend he went for?" Coker paused dramatically. "They make out that he went to get away that paper I left for Prout."

"Jolly good-natured, if he did!" said Greene.

"I should call it cheek, Greene. But the point is, that it's not true!" explained Coker. "They say that Hurree Singh fetched that paper away, and they tore it up! What do you think of that?"

"Well, if they say he did, he did!" said Greene.

"Don't be a silly ass, Greene! I've told you that I fetched that paper away myself, while Prout was in the Head's study. It was there, on the table, just where I left it."

"Oh!" said Potter and Greene.

"Now, what are they telling lies for?" said Coker. "It can only be to cover up what they really did in the study."

"Sure you got the right paper?" asked Greene.

"Don't be a dummy, Greene! It was there on the table, under the paper-weight, just where I left it."

"Hold on, though," said Potter. "You're such an ass, Coker—"

"What?"

"I mean, did you look at the paper and make sure—"

"Don't be a fathead, Potter! I'm not a cat to see in the dark."

"In the dark?" repeated Potter and Greene together.

"Think I was going to turn on a light in Prout's study, you ass?" snapped Coker. "I've got some sense, I hope."

He stared at his friends. They were looking at him, with such extraordinary expressions on their faces, that even Coker could not help being struck by it.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded. "What are you goggling at? Is there a smut on my nose, or what?"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Potter faintly.

"You went groping on Prout's table in the dark for a paper—and there's a banknote missing—"

"Oh scissors!" moaned Greene.

"What the dickens do you mean?" snapped Coker. "The paper was just where I left it, under the paper-weight. I didn't need a light—"

"It wasn't there if that kid took it away!" groaned Potter. "And, of course, he jolly well did, or they wouldn't say he did! In the name of all that's idiotic, Coker, what paper did you snaffle off Prout's table in the dark?"

Coker jumped.

The awful thought that had come into the minds of his friends dawned even on Coker's solid brain now.

"Why, you— you— you blithering idiots!" he gasped. "Mean to say you think Prout might have put the banknote there, under the paper-weight, and I—"

"He put it somewhere, and if he had any sense, he'd put a paper-weight on it," said Greene. "What did you do with it?"

"I put it in my pocket, of course! Think I was going to walk out of the study with it in my fist, for Prout to see if he blew along?"

"Didn't you look at it afterwards?" shrieked Potter.

"I was going to burn it, but, you see, you fellows remember that slit in the lining of my jacket pocket. You remember those Latin notes getting lost—"

"Yes, yes, yes! Keep to the point, for goodness' sake!"

"That is the point!" explained Coker. "I shoved it in my pocket, you see, and when I was going to take it out, it had slipped through the same hole. Then I had to go down to call-over, and forgot all about it."

"You forgot all about it?"

"I don't see that it matters. Prout's not likely to nose into the lining of my jacket and find it, I suppose!" granted Coker. "In fact, I've a jolly good mind to fish it out and stick it on his table again! It's time somebody told him what an ass he is!"

"Leave it to me!" said Potter.

He picked up the banknote and walked towards the study windows with it in his hand. He tapped at a lower pane of Prout's window. Coker and Greene watched him, in silence, from a distance.

"You blithering chump!" hissed Potter. "That paper isn't the paper you put in for Prout—the fags got that away, just as they said. It's ten thousand to one that that paper in your jacket is the banknote that Prout's missed."

"Rot!" said Coker.

"Well, sort it out and see!" hissed Potter.

"What utter rot!" said Coker disdainfully. "I'm likely to take all that trouble because you silly chumps—"

"Will you sort it out?" hissed Greene.

"No," answered Coker; "I won't! Such an absolutely silly idea—"

"Can't you see—" shrieked Potter.

"No! I can see what you fellows are thinking, of course, and it shows what silly fools you are!"

"If you don't sort out that paper at once, Coker, we'll have that jacket off you, here and now, and rip the lining to rags!" said Potter in concentrated tones. "Now, you silly idiot—"

"I'd like to see you do it!" said Coker. "Still, just to show you what silly fools you are, I'll sort it out, and you'll see that it's the paper I wrote for Prout—a leaf out of my notebook, with what I wrote on it. Then I hope you'll own up what asses you are!"

"Let's see!"

Coker, with an impatient snort, turned out the torn lining of his jacket pocket. The rent in the lining was very much in evidence.

He shoved his hand through the rent and groped in the hidden interior. He grunted again, and yet again, with impatient annoyance. It was not easy to track a small crumpled piece of paper in the recesses between the lining and the jacket, especially while he was wearing the garment. However, he got on with it—just to show Potter and Greene what fools they were.

His groping fingers came at last in contact with a crumpled paper.

"Here it is!" he snorted.

He drew it out.

He held it up!

Then, jumping nearly clear of the quad in his astonishment he spread it out, gazing at it with eyes that bulged from his head.

It dropped from his nerveless fingers and fluttered to the ground.

"Oh!" gasped Coker.

It was not the paper he had written for Prout. It was nothing like the paper he had written for Prout. It was a Bank of England note for £10.

"Oh!" repeated Coker, quite faintly.

"Oh gum!" breathed Greene.

"Oh scissors!" murmured Potter.

"It—it—it's a bib-bub-banknote!" stuttered Coker. "Who'd have thought it? I—I—I never saw it, you know, in the dark! Oh crikey!"

"Thank goodness, it's found!" said Potter. "Old Prout was right all the while—it never was pinched! But who'd have guessed that a silly idiot was walking about with it? Isn't it Coker all over?"

"Oh dear!" said Coker.

"You born idiot!"

"Don't be a cheeky ass, Potter! Anybody might have made a mistake like that—"

"Anybody named Coker!" agreed Potter.

"Look here—"

"What on earth's going to be done?" asked Greene, in dismay. "It's found—but what—"

"Leave it to me!" said Potter.

Tap, tap!

Mr. Prout, in his study, threw up the sash with a bang. He glared out, still shirty.

"What—?" he boomed.

Potter held up the banknote.

"I've just picked this up in the quad, sir!" he said—which was a perfectly true statement, and all that Potter considered it necessary for Prout to know.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Prout.

He reached out and took the banknote. He smiled genially. "Shirtness" vanished from Prout's portly face as if wiped off by a duster.

"Thank you very much, Potter!" he said. "This is a great relief to me! I was sure—absolutely sure and convinced—that the note had blown away by accident. I had not the slightest doubt on the subject. I am very much obliged to you, Potter!"

"Not at all, sir!" said Potter.

He winked as he rejoined his friends.

"I say, you fellows!" yelled Bunter. He rushed up to Harry Wharton & Co. in the quad just before dinner, spluttering with excitement.

"I say," he said—"I say, that banknote—"

Bunter was interrupted.

The Famous Five and Eric Wilmot all collared him together, and sat him down with a heavy bump.

"That's enough about the banknote, Bunter!" said Harry.

"Urrgh! I was gig-gig-going to sus-sus-say—"

"Give him another!" said Bob Cherry.

"I was gig-going to s-s-say that it's found!" shrieked Bunter, just in time.

"What?"

"Fuf-fuf-found!" gasped Bunter.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Found?" exclaimed Wilmot.

"Prout's banknote found?"

"Yes, you beast!" gasped Bunter.

"Pitching into a chap for coming and telling you— Groooogh!" He spluttered for breath. "A Fifth Form man picked it up in the quad and took it to Prout! Oooogh! Of course, it blew out of Prout's window—I thought all along that that was what had happened—"

The chums of the Remove did not stay to hear more. They rushed off for confirmation of the news. It was soon confirmed. Prout's notice was gone from the board. The banknote had been found—lying about the quad near Masters' windows! Prout had been right all the time—it had simply been lost, and now it was found. And that was that!

It was good news for the Famous Five, and better still for Wilmot. It made a good many fellows in the Remove sorry for what they had been thinking—what some of them had been saying. And it came as a startling surprise to Mr. Hacker, who wished, no doubt, that his faith in his nephew had been more equal to the strain put upon it.

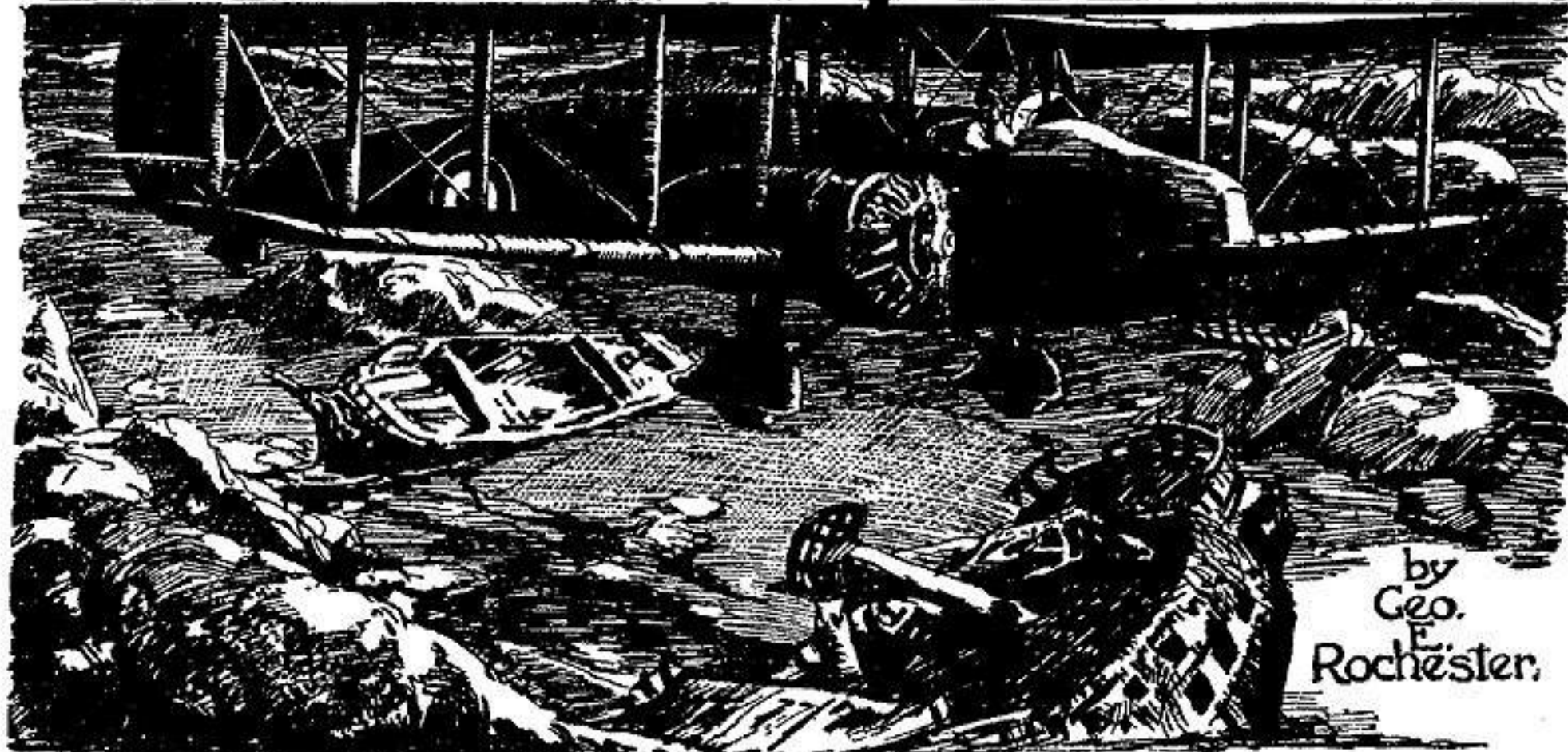
"All serene now, old bean!" said Bob Cherry, smacking Wilmot on the shoulder.

Wilmot nodded and smiled. But he wondered. He doubted now whether the shadow of the past ever could be blotted out—doubted and wondered. He was soon to know.

THE END

(On no account, chums, should you miss: "NOT WANTED AT GREY-FRIARS!" next week's powerful long school story, featuring Eric Wilmot and the chums of Greyfriars. It's a yarn you'll remember for some time to come!)

THE LOST SQUADRON!



by
Geo.
E.
Rochester.

Rescue at Last!

CAST away on the desert stretch of land which has risen up from the bed of the English Channel as the result of a huge tidal wave, Squadron-Leader Akers, Flight-Lieutenant Ferris, and three more castaways—Sam, Baines, and Crawley—discover that England and Western Europe are submerged beneath the sea.

After making their headquarters in the age-old ruins of Camelot, they meet Captain Anstruther, who, together with seven more survivors, has discovered a seam of gold in the rocks. Later, more castaways drift into the camp, among them Hans Larsen and a gang of toughs who, together with Baines and Crawley, make a fruitless attempt to seize Anstruther's claim. Ferris' arm is broken during the scrap. Immediately after this, Akers and his companions are rejoined by old acquaintances in Coles, Buck, and Jim, a burly negro, from whom they had separated in consequence of Coles having looted stranded derelicts.

Ferris did not find sleep come so easily to him that night, for his broken arm was paining him considerably.

After a fruitless hour spent in wooing slumber in vain, he gave it up as a bad job, and, throwing back his blankets, rose, dressed, and stepped out into the darkness.

It was a calm and serene night, with nothing stirring to break the deathly stillness and the brooding hush. Up on the hill above Camelot the signal fire glowed through the darkness, a blood-red beacon, and it was towards it that Ferris turned his steps.

Ascending the hill, he found Morrison on duty; and, seating himself on a boulder, he sat conversing with him for some time. Eventually, with the arrival of Morrison's relief, he rose to his feet, and the two men turned to descend the hill to the encampment.

Scarcely had they taken half a dozen paces than both halted, tense and rigid.

For out there on the night-enshrouded sea a rocket was soaring up into the darkness, leaving a tail of vivid crimson in its wake!

"A ship!" gasped Morrison.

"Thank Heaven!" breathed Ferris, and in spite of himself, his eyes were moist.

For a ship it was. Plainly now they could see her lights shining like distant pinpricks through the darkness. It meant that the long and weary days of watching and waiting for rescue in this drear, dead land were now at an end.

From whence the ship had come neither Ferris nor Morrison knew, nor did they care. All that mattered at the moment was that it had arrived and sighted their signal fire. As another rocket soared crimson into the night, Morrison gave vent to a great shout of excitement and joy, and went running madly down the hill followed by Ferris and the man who had come to take over duty at the fire.

"A ship!" they yelled, as they gained the encampment. "A ship!"

The cry roused the castaways and brought them rushing from their tents to make pell-mell for the beach, shouting, singing, and laughing. For a ship meant rescue: meant that their sojourn in this barren land of rock and sand was at an end.

As the men and women of Lucknow must have felt when they heard the distant sound of the pipes which told that relief was coming, so did these castaways feel now, as, shouting madly and joyously, they rushed in the direction of the shore.

Reaching the water's edge, they stood peering out into the darkness, and a great cheer burst from them as they saw the dim shape of a ship's boat steadily approaching the beach.

As the bows grounded, they rushed knee-deep into the water, seizing the gunwale the while they shouted frenzied questions at the four seamen seated at the oars, and at the reef-jacketed and sea-booted man who had risen to his feet from the stern-sheets.

"Who are you?" they cried. "Where are you from? What land is left?"

Astonished at the reception which had greeted them, the four seamen and their officer could only stare in amazement at the eager press about the boat.

"We are from Halifax, Nova Scotia," said the officer, as the excited, babbling voices reiterated the questions. "We

were bound for the Mersey River, but raised this land. What has happened?"

Stepping between the seamen, the officer jumped ashore, and incredulously he listened to the dreadful story of the submersion of England and the accompanying upheaval of the ocean bed.

"We got what must have been the fringe of the storm," he said, convinced at length that he was listening to grim, stark truth. "The eastern seaboard of Canada and America were swept by terrific seas during the early hours of that same morning. Hundreds of ships were lost, and millions of pounds' worth of damage done."

"You must have wondered over there why all communication with Britain and Western Europe had ceased?" said Akers.

"We have," replied the other. "We couldn't understand it at all. But so great was the damage done, even in harbours, that for days there was scarcely a boat available for sailing, either through harbour mouths being blocked or through having to dock for repairs. But ships are coming now; coming as hard as they can steam."

This news brought another cheer from the castaways, for they knew beyond all doubt that their sufferings and privations were now almost at an end.

Accepting Akers' invitation, the newcomer walked with him to the encampment. His name, he informed Akers, was Captain Roberts, and his ship the *Montcalm*. He would be only too glad to take aboard as many castaways as he could and return with them to Canada.

"I can give passage to a dozen comfortably," he said. "I would take more, only ships will be arriving any time now, and will take off those of you who are left. But this is indeed a terrible catastrophe. England gone. It's incredible!"

He stayed long at the camp, and it was dawn before he left to return to the *Montcalm*. With him went the twelve castaways he was to take back to Canada, and on the beach he paused for a parting word with Akers.

"I am sailing at once," he said, "and

will get into immediate wireless communication with every possible vessel."

With that, and a firm, brief handshake, he stepped into the boat which was waiting for him, and soon the Montcalm, a four thousand ton boat, was standing southwards down the coast.

"Well, with any luck we ought to have at least another ship here to-day," said Akers, as he walked back to the camp with Ferris. "The next one had better pick up the Anstruther party, I think. I'll send a message to Anstruther to-day telling him that rescue ships are coming—"

Abruptly he broke off as he saw striding towards him the burly and bearded figure of Larsen.

"Hallo!" he said sharply, as Larsen halted in front of him. "What do you want?"

"I want to know how I stand," said Larsen bluntly. "Zangarro, Baines, and Crawley, and me haf got tired of drifting about by ourselves. We did not know, though, that the rescue ships were coming when yesterday we decided to return here and ask you what you intend to do."

"You mean about the attack on Anstruther's camp?" said Akers.

"Yes."

"I do not intend to do anything about it at all," said Akers. "The attack was unsuccessful, and all you got out of it was a bullet through you and a thrashing. It would have been a different matter if you or your men had killed any of the Anstruther party. But you didn't, and as far as I am concerned you can please yourself what you do."

"Then we can stay here?"

"You can stay if you wish to," replied Akers. "But I warn you, Larsen, if we have any more trouble with you, you'll go to Canada in irons. Are Baines, Crawley, and Zangarro here with you?"

"Yes."

"Then you can tell them the same thing. They can stay here if they want to, but if they start any more trouble they'll be punished."

"You do not haf to worry," growled Larsen. "All we want is to be taken off this cursed land. We will make no trouble!"

With that he turned on his heel and strode away.

"Aren't you being a bit too lenient with that fellow?" said Ferris, staring after Larsen's retreating form.

"No, I don't think so," replied Akers. "There's nothing to be gained by trying to put him and his pals under arrest. The attack they made on Anstruther was unsuccessful and they certainly got the worst of the scrap."

"Well, you know best," said Ferris. "Anyway, with the ships coming, the fellow won't have time to make more trouble even if he wants to."

In that assumption Ferris was more or less correct, for that afternoon a second rescue ship arrived, and a third appeared as dusk was falling. The former was the Texan, a large six thousand ton cargo vessel, whilst the latter was a fast and powerful deep-sea tug named the Rosa.

After the storm, the Rosa had put out of St. John's, Newfoundland, in search of vessels requiring assistance. Learning by wireless, however, that all communications with Britain and Western Europe had ceased, the captain of the Rosa, a bluff and hearty Scotsman, named McAllister had abandoned

savage work and laid a course for England in order to discover for himself what had happened.

And that night, together with his crew who came ashore with him, he listened in amaze amidst the ruins of Camelot to the story of the disaster which had overwhelmed Western Europe and swept into oblivion millions of souls.

"It's terrible, terrible," he said, when the tragic tale was finished. "I picked up a message from the Montcalm this afternoon, but I couldn't credit what she told us. Mon, it's unbelievable!"

"It is only too true, I'm afraid," said Akers grimly.

He told McAllister then about the Anstruther party encamped farther up the coast, and the tug skipper readily assented to pick them up first thing the following morning.

"I'll no' sail in the darkness," he said, "because apart fra' the possibility of missing the camp, I'd like my men tae have a few hours ashore here. A tug's a small craft, and it's long days at sea we've been since we sailed from St. John's. Mr. Anstruther and his party are no' in distress, are they?"

"No, not at all," replied Akers. "But they'll be delighted to see you all the same."

"Ay, I dinna doubt we'll be verra welcome," observed Captain McAllister, "after all they've gone through."

In Search of an Ally!

LARSEN, sitting in his tent that same night with Baines, Crawley and Zangarro removed his pipe from between his bearded lips and peered out through the open flap.

"So we sail to-morrow aboard the Texan," he growled, replacing his pipe and resuming his slow puffing. "She's taking everyone away. Well, it'll be good to see wharves and docks and buildings again."

"Where's she bound from here?" inquired Crawley.

"New York," replied Larsen. "There'll be plenty of dollars for us when we get there. The newspapers'll pay us well for tales of this cursed land."

"Won't it be better for us to lie low and say nothing for a bit?" said Baines.

"If that Anstruther affair comes out we might find ourselves in the hands of the police."

"That is not so," retorted Larsen ponderously. "It cannot be. Neither American law nor any other law rules over here. Akers and his council are the law, or—with a snoot—they think they are, and they haf said that the affair is to be forgotten."

"Yes," grumbled Baines, "but you never know. Once he gets over to America, Anstruther himself might start raking it up. No, when I get over there I'm not going to advertise myself none."

He broke off as there came a soft step outside and the black and beaming face of Jim Crow was thrust into the tent.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Larsen sharply. "What in thunder do you want?"

"I hopes I doan't intrude, gents," grinned Jim, "but it's you, Larsen, what I've comed to see. I'd like a word wid you."

"What about?" snapped Larsen.

"Well, it's kinda private," replied Jim. "If you'll come outside I'll tell you."

Larsen hesitated a moment, then rising to his feet, he stopped out of the tent.

"Well, what is it?" he demanded, knocking out his pipe against his calloused palm and stowing it away in his pocket.

"Let's go where dere ain't no listenin' ears," said Jim. "Dis is sumfin' mighty important, Larsen, an' it's gotta be kept secretive."

"All right," grunted Larsen. "Come on!"

Swinging on his heel, he led the way from the encampment, eventually halting beside the ruins of what had once been part of the castle wall.

"I'll jest see dat dere ain't nobody snooping around," said Jim. "Us cain't be too careful 'cos dere's wealth undreamed of concerned in dis, Larsen."

"What?" snapped Larsen.

"I'll tell you in a minute," promised Jim, and Larsen had to wait with what patience he could muster whilst the big negro took a good look round in the darkness.

"Dere ain't nobody heah," said Jim, eventually retracing his steps to where Larsen was standing. "Now, den, Larsen, you've had one try to get rich, ain't you, an' it didn't come off?"

"If you've brought me out here to talk about that—" began Larsen, his fists clenching menacingly.

"I ain't bringed you out heah to talk about dat," interposed Jim reassuringly. "What I've brought you out heah for is dis. I know where dere's money and jewels buried to de value of more'n a hundred thousand pounds."

Larsen caught his breath.

"You do?" he ejaculated.

"Yes, sah; I sure do," replied Jim. "Dat money an' dem jewels was took from de safes and cabins of derelicts by three fellers. But dem same three fellers am now in a jam."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean if dem fellers sail aboard de Texan in de mawnin', and take de swag wid dem, they'll sure, an' for certain, be made to hand it over."

"Yes; they will if Akers is aboard," replied Larsen.

"Well, den," proceeded Jim, "dose three fellers have been thinkin', and dey've gotta scheme whereby dey kin sail away from dis plumb awful land, and take all de loot wid dem widout anybody being able to stop dem."

"Yes; go on," said Larsen very interestedly.

"But dat same scheme," went on Jim, "cain't be carried out widout some help."

"And it's me you want to help you?" cut in Larsen quickly. "You're one of the three fellers, of course?"

"Yes; I'm one of de three," admitted Jim. "And as for you helping us, Larsen, dat's what I'm heah to discuss. Yore price might be too high."

"I'll name it now," said Larsen promptly. "It's an equal share with you and your two mates of this loot which you say you haf collected."

"Den dere's nothing doing," retorted Jim. "Us'll find somebody what ain't got such fool ideas as to think we're gonna give him a quarter of de loot for himself. Besides, if you stand in on dis you've gotta bring a pal along, and he's gotta be paid."

"How much do you offer, then?" growled Larsen.

"A tenth share for you," replied

Jim, "and a twentieth share for de pal what we want you to bring."

Larsen was silent a moment.

"Just where is this loot buried?" he demanded.

"Larsen, doan't waste time askin' fool questions what you know blamed well I ain't gonna answer!" pleaded Jim. "What I wanna know is dis. On the terms I'm offerin', will you help me an' my two frien's—Coles an' Huck—to get de stuff away from heah?"

"It depends on what sort of help you want," growled Larsen.

"It's dis," replied Jim bluntly. "We're aimin' to take possession of de Rosa."

"You're what?" exclaimed Larsen.

"You heered what I said," returned Jim. "We're gonna take de Rosa. De skipper and nearly all his crew am ashore, and five of us can easily board her an' take possession."

"Suppose I was to go and tell Akers about this?" said Larsen.

"He wouldn't believe you," replied Jim confidently. "And if he did, it wouldn't matter, 'cos he couldn't do nothin' as we've not attacked de Rosa. You go and tell him, and you'll only do yourself out of a share of de loot."

"How much d'you reckon my share'll come to?" inquired Larsen.

"Nothing under ten thousand pounds," replied Jim. "Us found some mighty rich pickings, Larsen, in dem safes and fust-class cabins."

"You must have done," said Larsen unsteadily. "Ten thousand pounds, you say?"

"It won't be a cent less," Jim assured him. "Well, Larsen, am you on, or am you not?"

"Yes; I'm on," assented Larsen emphatically. "Now what's your plan?"

"It's dis," replied Jim. "Huck, Coles, an' me am going right now to dig up de loot. You and a man what you can trust will meet de three of us on de beach in an hour from now. Dere's boats lying there from de Rosa and de Texan. We'll take one, put de loot aboard, and row quietly out to de Rosa which we'll board and seize."

"What about weapons?" demanded Larsen. "I haven't got a gun."

"We doan't want no guns," replied Jim. "Dey would give de alarm to de people on de Texan. Dere cain't be more'n three fellers left on de Rosa, an' if we take dem by surprise, we can silence dem mighty quick wid our fists, or wid a belaying pin. We doan't want no fuss nor noise over dis job, Larsen."

"I know that," agreed Larsen. "But do you think five of us can manage the Rosa once we get her?"

"Course we can," responded Jim. "Huck knows most eberything 'bout engines, and Coles has bin a seaman, an' knows enuff about navigating to keep her heading west for America."

"That's where you intend to make for, is it?" demanded Larsen.

"Sure!" replied Jim. "Dere ain't no other place for us to make for. Us'll land somewhere on de coast, split de loot, and den disappear. Well, now, Larsen, I've gotta be goin'. Have you gotta feller you can bring along like what I've suggested?"

"Yes; I know the very man," replied Larsen.

"O.K., den!" said Jim. "Be on de beach wid him in an hour, and, meanwhile, keep yore mouth shet 'bout what I've told you."

With that the negro moved softly away into the darkness, and was gone.



"A ship! A ship!" The cry roused the castaways and brought them rushing from their tents to make pell-mell for the beach, shouting excitedly!

The Attack on the Rosa!

FOR some moments Larsen stood where he was, deep in thought; then, with a peculiar grin on his bearded lips, he moved slowly away in the direction of his tent where he found Baines, Crawley, and Zangarro waiting for him.

"What d'you think that nigger wanted me for?" he demanded.

"Dunno," said Baines. "We've bin wondering."

"He wanted to give me the tip that one of the sailors off the Texan brought some rum ashore unknown to his skipper and Akers," lied Larsen.

Picking up a tin billy he handed it to Zangarro.

"Go round to the back of the tent that Krunz used to have," he said, "and get as much of the stuff as you can."

With alacrity the dago departed. Waiting until he had gone, Larsen grabbed Baines and Crawley by the arms.

"Come on, let's get out of here!" he grated. "We're on a winner."

"What d'you mean?" demanded Baines blankly.

"Never mind, I'll explain outside," said Larsen, literally dragging Baines and Crawley from the tent. "We don't want that fool, Zangarro, in on it."

"But look here," protested Baines, "I want some of that rum."

"There is no rum, you fool," snapped Larsen. "That was only an excuse to get rid of him. Come on, this way!"

Still clutching the bewildered Baines and Crawley by the arms, he set off hastily through the darkness in the direction opposite to that taken by the unsuspecting Zangarro.

"This'll do," he said, releasing his companions' arms as he halted in the black shadow of a massive boulder.

"Now, you fellers, you listen to me!" "We're listening," said Crawley, a trifle grimly.

"That nigger and a couple of mates of his," went on Larsen, "haf bin looting ships. They've cached the loot somewhere, and at the moment they're busy digging it up."

"And you want Crawley and me to come and help you knock 'em over the head and get it, I suppose?" interposed Baines bitterly. "No, thanks, Larsen, I've had enough of that sort of game for a bit."

"Keep your mouth shut until I've finished," said Larsen savagely. "We're not going to knock them over the head—at least, not yet. These three fellers haf got the idea that if they sail on the Texan they'll haf to give up the swag."

"Which they will," observed Crawley.

"Yes; well, their idea is to seize the Rosa and sail her away," went on Larsen. "They've asked me to help them, and bring along a mate, to make the thing more sure. I'm bringing along two mates—and that's you two fellers."

"I'm not having any," said Baines abruptly. "I had enough when we attacked Anstruther's camp. Another thing. You know what Akers said. Any more trouble from us, and we'd go to America in irons."

"To blazes with Akers!" snapped Larsen. "This is easy. The Rosa doesn't carry more'n about half a dozen hands, and most of them are ashore. There'll be no more'n three men, at the most, aboard her. The thing's easy."

"Yes, but what are we going to get out of it?" put in Crawley pointedly.

Larsen grinned.

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"The whole of the swag," he answered. "From what the nigger told me, they've managed to collect about a hundred thousand pounds' worth of money and jewellery."

"How much?" gasped Baines.

"About a hundred thousand pounds' worth," repeated Larsen. "What they're offering me to help them is a tenth share, and the mate I bring along is to get a twentieth share. What we're going to do, the three of us, is share the whole of the loot between us."

"You mean," said Crawley, "that you're going to double-cross them?"

"You can call it that, if you like," retorted Larsen. "What I'm going to do—and you two fellers are standing in with me, is help the nigger and his two pals take the Rosa, and get her away from here. Once we're nearing the American coast—that's where we're going to head for—we'll find a way, somehow, of bashing them over the head, and getting all the loot for ourselves. What about it?"

"Suits me!" grinned Crawley.

"I dunno," said Baines dubiously. "I can't help thinking of that Anstruther raid."

"Aw, forget it!" snarled Larsen. "They outnumbered us then, and, what's more, they took us by surprise. We won't be outnumbered this time, and it's us what'll do the taking by surprise."

"Yes, but look here," said Crawley, "they asked you to bring one pal along, and you're bringing a couple. Won't that make them suspicious?"

"No, it won't. I'll say that you were the feller I asked, you being a good seaman, and handy in a scrap, and that you refused to come without your shipmate, Baines, what you've sailed with for years. Gosh, but if that nigger ain't lying about the loot—and I don't think he is—we'll be rich for life."

"Yes, it's a lot of money," nodded Crawley. "I'm standing in, Larsen."

"What about you, Baines?" demanded Larsen.

"I'm in it, if you two fellers are," said Baines. "But I hope things don't go wrong, like they did when we tried to get hold of the gold seam."

"If you mention that cursed gold seam again," said Larsen furiously, "I'll knock your teeth down your throat."

"You will?" said Baines defiantly. "What about that busted shoulder of yours? That's what I was thinking of when I said things might go wrong. You ain't the man you was, Larsen, since Anstruther put a bullet through you."

"Ain't I?" jeered Larsen. "I'm still man enough to thrash you, Baines, busted shoulder, or no busted shoulder. Well, if you're coming, say you're coming, because if you're not we'll get Zangarro."

"Oh, I'm coming," said Baines. "Where are we meeting the nigger?"

"On the beach, in about an hour," said Larsen. "So, till then, let's fade. We don't want to bump into Zangarro and have a lot of awkward questions asked about that rum I sent him for."

During the ensuing hour the trio sat on the beach smoking and conversing in low, rumbling tones. They took care, however, to keep away from the vicinity of the ships' boats drawn up on the sand at the water's edge.

Suddenly at a muttered word from Larsen they rose to their feet, and, moving along the sand towards the boats, waited until there loomed into view through the darkness the figures of three men. Two were laden with bulging sacks, and Larsen recognised the foremost of them as the giant negro.

"Dat you, Larsen?" said the latter guardedly, coming to a halt.

"Yes, it's me," growled Larsen, "and I've got two mates with me."

"Whaffor?" demanded Jim. "I told you to bring only one."

"I couldn't," returned Larsen. "I asked Crawley, here, who's the sort of feller you want in a rough house, but he refused to come unless this shipmate of his, Baines, came."

"I only wanted two of you," reiterated Jim.

"Aw, what's it matter?" cut in Coles. "Six of us'll stand more chance of taking the Rosa than five will. Anyways, we just pays the same, a tenth share and a twentieth share."

"That suits us," Larsen assured him. "We're not asking you to pay Baines anything."

"Ain't you?" said Jim suspiciously. "I tell you I doan't want this feller Baines—"

"Well, I don't go if he doesn't go!" put in Crawley.

"Aw, cut out the argufying and let's go!" snapped Coles. "Some guy'll be along hyar in a minute and that'll bust everything. Come on, Jim. Six is better'n five."

"You can please yourself," said Larsen, as the negro still hesitated. "I did the best I could for you, but Crawley won't come without Baines. What are you scared at, anyway?"

"Nuthin'!" returned Jim shortly. "Come on!"

He led the way down to the nearest boat, and after he and Coles had dumped their bulging sacks in the stern-sheets the boat was pushed off, and the six clambered aboard.

It was Jim himself who took the oars, and through the pitch blackness of the night the boat crept silently towards where the Rosa lay at anchor.

Soon the dark bulk of the tug loomed up ahead, and, laying the boat quietly alongside, Jim stealthily shipped the oars.

"You fellers wait heah," he whispered. "I'll take a look round."

With the agility of a cat, he swung himself up on to the low deck above, and crouching against a stanchion, he

peered about him, listening intently for the faintest sound.

Through the open door of the fo'c'sle glimmered the sickly illumination of an electric bulb, and to Jim's ears there came a muffled snore. His bare feet making not the slightest sound on the iron deck, the negro crept nearer until he could see into the lighted fo'c'sle.

At the heavy table inside a man was seated darning a sock. A pipe was between his lips, and he was bent assiduously over his task. Another man, clad only in shirt and trousers, was lying on a bunk snoring lustily.

These two, as far as Jim could see, were the sole occupants of the fo'c'sle, and, turning away, he moved silently aft. The bridge and deck-house were deserted, and softly Jim descended the iron ladder which led down to the engine-room and the boilers.

That someone was down there was evident, for the negro heard the sudden metallic clang of a boiler door. Motionless in the black shadow near the top of the ladder he waited, listening intently for some rumble of voices.

But he heard none, and coming to the conclusion that in all probability the man below was on duty alone to see that steam was kept up, Jim turned and softly ascended to the deck.

With the stealth of a cat he crossed to the side where the boat was waiting.

"Come on!" he whispered. "Dere's only three fellers aboard. See to the sacks, Coles!"

Without waiting for Larsen and the other four, Jim turned and stepped briskly in the direction of the fo'c'sle. In the doorway he paused, and stood grinning amiably at the man seated darning. The latter, a stockily built fellow, seemed to become suddenly aware of Jim's presence, for he looked up and sat staring for a moment with needle poised.

"Who'n heck are you?" he demanded roughly, recovering from his first astonishment at sight of the giant negro.

His gleaming teeth still showing in a grin, and his massive arms hanging limply by his sides, Jim advanced into the room.

"I'se mighty sorry, chum," he drawled, "but us am gwyne to dispossess you of dis heah tugboat."

What the man thought he meant by that remark is problematical, but, dropping his darning, he rose to his feet.

"You get out of here, nigger," he said threateningly, "or I'll—"

That was as far as he got before Jim's clenched fist whipped upwards, taking him full on the point of the jaw and lifting him backwards to crash a limp and huddled heap on the floor against the bunk tiers.

(This is an audacious step on Jim Crow's part, isn't it, chums? Whether or no he meets with success, you will learn when you read next week's thrill-packed chapters of this popular adventure yarn.)



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