



Fighting for His Honour!

A Complete Story of School Life and Adventure

By **FRANK RICHARDS.**



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The New Boy.

BOB CHERRY paused on the School House steps, and looked across the green, sunny Close. Bob had a cricket-bat under his arm, and his cap at the back of his head. It was quite impossible for Bob Cherry ever to keep his cap on straight, and he had long ago given up trying. Bob had just finished writing out an impot, and he was hurrying out to join the cricketers on the junior ground, when the sight of a youth coming towards the house arrested him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob ejaculated.

The youth coming towards him looked up. He was a lad about Bob's own age—and a stranger at Greyfriars. He was not a nice-looking fellow. He had thin lips, which seemed to be drawn tightly across his teeth, and light brown eyes with a peculiar glitter in them, as if he were continually on the watch. He carried a bag in his hand and a rain-coat on his arm, and had evidently just arrived at Greyfriars.

"You're the new chap?" asked Bob Cherry.

The other nodded.

"I'm the new chap," he said. "At all events, I'm a new chap. I've only just got here."

"Your name's Heath?"

"Yes." The new boy looked Bob Cherry up and down. "Any more questions?"

Bob flushed.

"I'm not asking you out of curiosity," he said. "My Form-master told me that a new boy was coming into the Remove, and that he was to be put into my study. I thought I would keep an eye open and speak to you when you came."

"Oh, I see. Kind of you!"

"My study's No. 13 in the Remove passage," said Bob Cherry. "Anybody will tell you where the Remove passage is. I can't stop now as I've got to get down to cricket."

"Don't let me detain you."

Bob Cherry gave him a look. There was little in the words, but there was a great deal in the way they were uttered. There was something strikingly unpleasant about this new boy—a deliberate ungraciousness of manner that jarred on Bob Cherry. Bob was always thoughtlessly open and hearty, and he expected as much of others.

"Oh, very well!" he said. "I shall be

coming in to tea, and then I can look after you a bit, if you like."

"Thanks! I daresay I can look after myself!"

Bob Cherry restrained his desire to wipe the steps down with the new boy, and walked off to the cricket-field. He wondered why some fellows went out of their way to make themselves disagreeable. The new boy glanced after him carelessly, and went into the house.

Bob Cherry joined the cricketers.

"Nothing wrong?" asked Harry Wharton, noting the flush in Bob Cherry's cheeks, and the expression upon his rugged face of less than his usual pleasant cheerfulness.

"Well, no," said Bob. "I've just been talking to a chap who gets on my nerves, that's all."

"Billy Bunter?"

Bob laughed.

"No; the new chap. You remember Quelch told us there was a new chap coming to-day, and he was to be put into No. 13 Study, as there are only two of us there—Linley and myself?"

"Yes. Has he come?"

"He has. I'd forgotten about him, as a matter of fact, but as I came out of the house I met him," said Bob. "I wanted to make myself agreeable, but—well, the chap is a disagreeable bounder, that's all! It will be rotten having him in the study, but I suppose it can't be helped."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"He may be decent, all the same," he said. "Give the chap a chance, you know."

"Well, yes; but I know he's a beast!" said Bob.

"If you make up your mind that he's a beast now, you're not likely to see any good in him," Frank Nugent remarked.

"Yes, you're right; but—well, I'll try to be fair to him," said Bob. "But sometimes, you know, you dislike a chap instinctively. You feel that he's horrid mean. That's the sort of chap this is. But I'm going to be fair to him. I'm going to keep the peace in the study if I can."

"That's right," said Harry. "Look after him a little, as he's a new chap, and make

him comfy. Take in some grub for tea, and feed him. That's the way to bring out his good qualities if he's got any."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Well, I'll try it," he said.

Bob Cherry stopped at the school tuck-shop to carry out Harry Wharton's advice. The others went on their way. Bob expended the sum of two shillings—not an inconsiderable sum to a junior in the Lower Fourth—upon good things for the tea-table, and carried them into the house with him.

The new boy should have no cause to complain of the hospitality of No. 13 Study in the Remove!

With a parcel under one arm and a paper bag of eggs in the other hand, Bob Cherry went upstairs, and tramped along the Remove passage. No. 13 was almost at the end of the passage. Bob wondered whether he would find the new boy there.

Mark Linley, he knew, was gone down to the village with John Bull and Fisher T. Fish, so if the new boy was in No. 13, he was alone there.

That somebody was in the study was quite clear as Bob Cherry came along the passage. From the closed door came a sound that made Bob start in surprise. It was a loud and painful mew of a cat!

"Miau-miau-ou!"

"My hat!" Bob Cherry ejaculated. "That must be Mrs. Kebble's cat. But what on earth is it doing in my study? I suppose the poor thing has got shut in and can't get out!"

"Miau-miau-ou!"

Bob Cherry's brows darkened as he quickened his pace. The mewing of the cat might have been caused by the animal being shut up in the study, and trying to attract attention to get the door opened. But it sounded as if it were in pain. What was happening in No. 13 study?

Bob ran on and threw the door wide open. There was a startled exclamation within.

"What—I—"

Bob Cherry burst into a roar of rage.

"You hound!"

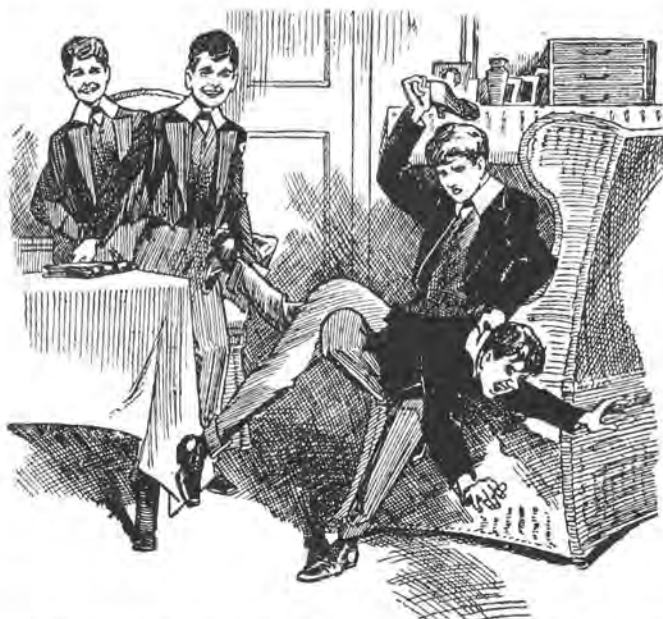
THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Rascal Well Licked.

THE new boy was in the study. He was evidently amusing himself. His idea of amusement was a peculiar one—though it might have been guessed from the spiteful curve of his lips, and the shifty, unpleasant glitter in his eyes.

The cat was tied up by the leg to a chair in the corner of the room. The new boy had a catapult in his hand, and he was evidently practising his shooting upon the unfortunate cat at close range. He could have practised just as easily at a mark on the wall. But that would not have inflicted pain, and, therefore, would have been useless to a boy of Heath's peculiar disposition. At such close range every pellet that struck the unlucky cat elicited a howl of pain from the animal, and it was springing and clawing wildly in its endeavours to escape. And Heath seemed to be a good shot. He was exactly the kind of boy to be expert with the catapult, and to be ever ready to display his skill upon some unfortunate bird or beast.

Bob Cherry was not in the least "soft" or goody-goody, and he was not given to criticising others, but to see a fellow torturing an animal was a little more than he could stand. And it was in his study, too!



"If you won't fight, you can take your licking like a kid in the First Form," said Bob Cherry. "So here goes!" (See page 307.)

Bob Cherry's hands trembled with rage as he laid his parcels on the table. The new boy looked at him with a sour grin.

"Like to have a shot?" he asked.

"What?" roared Bob.

"It's fun to see the beast hop!" said Heath. "I'm trying to get a shot at his eye, but he won't keep his head still."

Bob Cherry breathed hard with a loud noise. He felt that he was choking. He turned on the new boy with flaming face.

"Put that catapult down!" he said.

"What?"

"Put it down!" roared Bob.

Heath looked at him doubtfully for a second, and then threw the catapult on the table. Bob did not look like a fellow to be trifled with at that moment.

Bob took the catapult, and smashed it to pieces under his heavy boot. Heath gave a yell.

"What are you doing? That's mine."

"It's not much use to you now," said Bob savagely. "You cad! You coward! How dare you torture a cat—and in my study? You—you unspeakable beast!"

Heath sneered.

"I suppose you never do anything of that sort?"

"No, I don't!" roared Bob. "Only a dirty, low, mean, crawling viper would torment an animal—only a fellow like you."

Heath whistled.

"Thanks for your good opinion," he said.

"I suppose you're going to be a vivisectionist when you grow up?" said Bob.

"It's the sort of job that would suit you."

Heath grinned.

"I shouldn't wonder," he said. "I should like it, I think. It would be amusing to see the beggars wriggle, wouldn't it?"

Bob Cherry snorted.

"Well, I'm going to see you wriggle a bit now, and you can see if that's just as amusing," he said. "Put up your hands."

"What!"

"Put up your hands."

Heath backed away.

"Look here, I don't want to fight you," he exclaimed. "I'm not going to fight you. I don't like fighting."

"I dare say you'd fight a very small boy fast enough," said Bob. "Chaps who torture animals are that sort. But you're going to fight me now. You're bigger than I am, and you've got to put up your hands."

"I—I won't."

"Then you'll take the licking with your hands down—for you're going to be licked in any case, you worm!"

"Look here, I've got no quarrel with you," said Heath, backing away round the table. "It was only my fun with the blessed old cat—"

"This is only my fun, too," said Bob.

"I'll let the beast go. Look here, I'm not going to fight you. I don't like fighting, and I won't! I'll complain to the head-master if you touch me."

"You dirty sneak!"

"Sneak or not, I'm not going to fight you, or anybody else," said Heath, striding towards the door.

Bob Cherry grasped him by the shoulder and swung him back.

"Stay here!"

"I—I won't!"

Bob Cherry placed himself between the new boy and the door.

"Put up your hands," he said, between his teeth.

"Hang you!"

"Take that, then!"

Smack!

Bob's open palm smote the new boy full across the face.

Heath staggered back from the smack.

"Oh!" he gasped. "Oh!"

"Now will you put your hands up?"

Heath gave him a deadly look.

"No, I won't!"

Bob could only stare at him.

"You utter coward!" he said.

"I'm not going to fight you," said Heath, with a livid face. "I won't fight you! But I'll make you sorry for this—I'll make you suffer for it."

Bob Cherry laughed scornfully. He pointed to the cat, who was still mewling faintly in the corner.

"Set that cat loose," he said. "Mind, without hurting him."

Heath sullenly obeyed. He would gladly have kicked the cat as it scuttled joyfully out of the study. But Bob Cherry's eye was gleaming upon him. Heath made an attempt to follow from the study. But Bob closed the door.

"Now," he said, "you're going to have your licking. I may explain to you that we don't torture animals at Greyfriars. If the masters knew, you would be caned or flogged—you ought to be expelled. I'm not going to tell the masters, but I'm going to lick you. Will you put up your hands?"

"No."

"You coward! You can torture a cat, but you won't fight a chap smaller than yourself," Bob said contemptuously. "But if you think you're going to get off by being a coward, you're making a big mistake."

He advanced upon Heath.

The new boy dodged round the table. His face was white now, and his eyes gleaming with fear and spite.

He made a rush across to the door, and then Bob Cherry's grasp fell upon him. The new boy collapsed at once.

"Let me alone!" he shrieked. "Help!"

"You cad!"

Bob Cherry's face was grim with determination. He sat down, and dragged Heath across his knee and caught up a slipper.

"If you won't fight, you can take your licking like a kid in the First Form," he said.

"So here goes!"

Smack! Smack! Smack!

"Ow! Ow! Yow!"

Smack! Smack!

"Yaroo! Help!"

The slipper rose and fell with deadly persistence, and the dust came in little clouds from Heath's garments. Bob Cherry put all the strength of his strong arm into that thrashing.

It was well deserved, and it was well laid on. Heath yelled and writhed and squirmed, but the merciless slipper rose and fell till Bob's arm was tired.

He threw it aside at last.

"There!" he gasped, pitching Heath over on the carpet. "There you are! I hope you'll take that to heart, and drop your dirty tricks while you're at Greyfriars."

"Ow! Ow! Ow!"

"Oh, don't blub!"

Heath lay writhing and gasping and whimpering on the floor. His face was white, and twisted with spite. Bob Cherry went to the door. It was his own study, but he did not care to remain there with Heath.

Bob, with his face still rather excited, tramped down the passage, leaving Heath to his own devices. The new boy rose to his feet, and shook his fist at the closed door, his face convulsed with rage.

"Oh, you wait a bit!" he muttered. "You wait a bit! My turn will come—my turn will come! And you'll be sorry for this!"

Bob Cherry, with a clouded brow, tramped down the passage to No. 1. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent were there, having tea. They looked up at him with genial welcome.

"Come in, Bob!" said Wharton.

Bob Cherry walked in.

"Can I have tea with you chaps?" he asked abruptly.

"Of course you can, old son. Shove the kettle on again, Franky. But what's the matter, Bob? Haven't been quarrelling with Bulstrode, have you?"

"No!" Bob snorted. "It's that new chap! I can't stay in the study with him—he makes me sick!"

"Stay here, then, old son," said Harry. "You used to be here with us, you know—

and now Inky's gone there's plenty of room. But what's the new fellow been doing?"

Bob Cherry explained.

"He cad!" said Harry.

"The worm!" said Nugent.

"I can't stand him!" said Bob. "I knew I couldn't stand the unspeakable beast when I first saw him. It's simply awful to have him in the study. I shall ask Mr. Quelch to change me out—only it would be too bad to leave Marky alone with the beast! I don't know what to do!"

"Have tea—and some poached eggs," said Nugent. "They're prime!"

And Bob Cherry laughed, and had tea.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

No Success.

BILLY BUNTER looked in at the door of No. 13. Heath was sitting in the arm-chair, twisting very uncomfortably. Bob Cherry had thrashed him pretty severely, and the new boy did not like pain. He was still looking very white, and very savage and spiteful. He scowled at Billy Bunter as he came in.

Bunter blinked at him with the most agreeable expression he could muster.

"I say, you know," he began. "You're the new chap, ain't you?"

"Yes!" snapped Heath.

"I'm Bunter—Bunter of the Remove," the fat junior explained. "The fact is, you know, that it's a custom here for a new boy to stand a bit of a feed to the principal members of the Form," said Bunter. "I'm a principal member of the Form."

"You won't get any feed out of me!"

"Ahem! In this case, for the sake of—of hospitality, I'm willing to reverse the usual order of things, and stand you a feed instead," he explained.

Heath looked a little less savage.

"Now you're talking!" he said.

"You see, I always like to do the decent thing by new boys," said Bunter. "How would you like a nice little feed in the tuck-shop—say muffins and tea, and then some cake, and some sausage-rolls and dough-nuts, and plenty of jam puffs?"

"Good!"

"Come on, then. Oh, by the way, I forgot one thing," said Bunter, as if struck by a sudden recollection. "I've run out of cash. I'm expecting a postal order this evening, and if you care to advance me a few shillings, I'll hand you the postal order as soon as it comes. I suppose that will be all right?"

Heath had risen to follow Bunter. A very unpleasant expression came over his face now. Heath was far from being the kind of person to be taken in by Bunter's clumsy diplomacy.

"You fat cad!" he said. "So I'm to pay for the feed, am I?"

"Ahem! Only temporarily. You see, I was expecting that postal order this afternoon. It's from a titled friend of mine, and it's certain to come. If you care to advance me the ten shillings——"

"You cheeky cad!"

"Ahem! If you care to advance me the ten shillings—or, say, five shillings—if you care to advance me the two-and-six, you know, you can have the postal order immediately it comes, and it will be the same thing."

"Get out!"

"By the way, I should like you to come in my study, if you'd prefer it to this. You are just the kind of person I could chum with, and——"

"Outside, I tell you! I've had more than enough of you!" said Heath.

He was not afraid of the fat, short-sighted junior.

Bunter's expression changed. The agreeable grin faded away, and he looked very spiteful.

"You rotten outsider!" he exclaimed. "Catch me being chummy with a new boy again! You low bouncer! Ow!"

Heath twisted the fat junior round, and planted a kick upon his fat person that sent him staggering out into the passage. Bunter collapsed upon the linoleum with a wild gasp.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Beast!"

Heath slammed the door.

Bunter rolled away down the passage, groaning. He blinked in at the doorway of No. 1, and groaned again. The chums of the Remove grinned at him.

"Got on all right with the new chap?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Ow! He's a beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was very courteous to him, and he rushed at me like a wild beast and kicked me!" said Bunter. "Ow! I'm seriously injured! Ow! I think you chaps ought to rag him! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter snorted, and rolled away. There was evidently no sympathy to be had in No. 1 Study. Bob Cherry kicked the door shut after him.

"I've got an idea," Harry Wharton remarked. "You know my aunt is coming home from Switzerland and I'm going with my uncle to meet her to-morrow. I shall be away from Greyfriars at least a week. Nugent will be alone here. Suppose you two chaps dig in this study while I'm away, and leave Heath No. 13 to himself. Before I get back, you may be able to arrange about a new study for him."

"Good egg!" said Bob. "If Nugent doesn't mind——"

"I shall be jolly glad," said Nugent. "I don't want to dig here alone."

"What do you say, Marky?"

"I shall be glad."

"Then it's a go!" said Harry Wharton.

And so it was settled. On the following morning Harry Wharton was to leave Greyfriars for a time, but he little dreamed of what was to happen before he returned.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

On His Own.

THE next morning Harry Wharton did not take his place in the Form-room as usual. Just before first lesson the trap came round to take him to the station, and the juniors gathered to see him off. Bulstrode, the new captain of the Remove, was there, and he shook hands with Harry before the latter mounted into the trap.

"I'm sorry you're going," he said. "We haven't been very good friends, but—well, I'm sorry. Especially about the cricket. We shall miss you from the eleven."



Bob Cherry's face was dark with anger. "Who did that?" he exclaimed, in a choking voice.
 "Who did that?" (See page 322.)

"I'm sorry, too," said Harry. "I hope you'll pull it off all right with the Courtfield chaps. I shall be back in time for the next match with Highcliffe, if you want to play me."

Bulstrode grinned ruefully.

"Of course I shall want to play you!" he said. "I know some of the fellows expected me to act the giddy ox as soon as I became captain of the Remove, but I hope I've got some sense. Come back as soon as you can."

"Right-ho!"

"Good-bye, Wharton!"

Wharton waved his hand to the crowd as the trap drove away. He was sorry to be going away from Greyfriars himself just then, though at the same time he was looking forward to the holiday with his uncle. But it was to be only for a week. As he glanced back from the gateway Bob Cherry waved his hand, and that was the last Harry saw of the juniors of Greyfriars just then.

The Removees turned in to go to their Form-room.

"We'll get our books and things into No. 1 after first lesson," Bob Cherry said to Nugent.

"Good!" said Frank.

Heath was near them, and he turned quickly.

"Does that mean that you are leaving my study?" he asked.

"Yes," said Bob Cherry.

"What for?"

"Because I can't stand you!"

Bob Cherry was always frank. Some of the juniors laughed, and Heath turned red.

"Very well," he said. "I shall be glad enough for you to go, that's certain. Is the other fellow going?"

"Linley? Yes; he's coming with me."

"You can both go to the dickens, for all I care. I shall be glad enough to have the study to myself," said Heath.

"Well, you'll have it to yourself; till

Wharton comes back, at any rate," said Bob. "And I'll see if I can't get changed into another study then. It would make me ill to have to dig with you."

Heath sneered, but made no reply.

The looks of the other fellows showed that they shared Bob Cherry's opinion. Heath had not made a good impression upon the Form.

During the next day or two Bob Cherry and Mark Linley settled down very comfortably in No. 1 Study, in the place of Harry Wharton and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, both of whom were now away from Greyfriars. Heath had No. 13 to himself, and when he was there he was generally left alone. The Remove fellows did not take to him. If he made a friend at all, it was Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars—a fellow whose friendship was not much credit to anybody. And the Bounder only took Heath up when he had no other companion and needed one. At other times he seemed to be unconscious of Heath's existence—all of which added to the anger and spite that burned in the breast of the new junior.

He attributed it all to Bob Cherry, and in that he was very unjust. Bob certainly had not held his tongue about the incident in the study, but the fellows were willing to give Heath a chance; but the new junior seemed to have no good qualities at all. He never by any chance fell into a fight with a fellow near his own size or age, but more than once he was found bullying little fags in the First or Second Forms. His love for tormenting animals was evidently a ruling passion, and several fellows who kept pets, and found him worrying them, fell out with him on that account. Two lickings a day was Heath's average for the first three days at Greyfriars.

By that time he was generally disliked and let alone. Bob Cherry never took any notice of him. The new boy would give him spiteful looks, in class or in the Close, but Bob did not look at him. Heath might have been an insect or a microbe for all the notice Bob Cherry took of him.

Heath did not play cricket, and he did not box; he did not run, he did not swim. He seemed to have no pleasures but hanging about with his hands in his pockets, smoking

cigarettes, tormenting animals, and speaking evil of other fellows behind their backs. Of all fellows, he was the least likely to get on in the Greyfriars Remove. And on the fourth day at Greyfriars his intermittent friendship with the Bounder came to a sudden termination.

Vernon-Smith came into his study with a furious face as he was at prep. that evening, and Heath jumped up in alarm at the look of him.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "Come in for a smoke?"

Vernon-Smith closed the door.

"No," he said, "I haven't come in for a smoke. I've come in about my canary."

Heath turned red.

"Your canary?" he stammered.

"Yes; it's dead."

"Sorry," said Heath. "I don't see what it's got to do with me. I can't bring dead canaries to life again, you know."

"You can stop catapulting live ones, though, you cad!" said the Bounder. "Tubb of the Third saw you doing it at my study window."

"I—I——"

"You've done for my canary, and now I'm going to lick you! Put up your hands, if you've got courage enough, you miserable cad!"

Heath, apparently, hadn't courage enough, for he dodged round the table, and tried to escape from the study; but the Bounder did not let him go. Vernon-Smith was in a towering rage, and one of the few soft spots in his nature had been for that canary. He piled upon the new junior furiously, pommelling him right and left; and when he left the study, five minutes later, Heath lay gasping and groaning on the floor. It was his seventh licking at Greyfriars, and the most severe of all.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Remittance from Todd!

"A LETTER for you, Nugent!" "Chuck it over!" said Frank Nugent.

John Bull took the letter down from the

rack and tossed it over to Nugent. Frank glanced at it, expecting to see Harry Wharton's handwriting. But it was not from Wharton.

"I guess I know that fist," said Fisher T. Fish, glancing at the superscription over Frank's shoulder in his cool, American way. "I guess that's from Todd."

"Hallo! hallo! hallo! A letter from Todd!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"I guess so."

Nugent nodded.

"Yes, it's Todd's hand," he said. "I'm glad to hear from him. I hope he's better than when he left. You fellows want to hear from Todd?"

"Yes, rather."

"Listen, then!"

Removites gathered round on all sides. They all wanted to hear from Todd. Alonzo Todd, who had been known as the Duffer of Greyfriars, had left the old school in a very weak state of health, and was likely to stay away for a very long time. The fellows naturally wanted to know how he was getting on. Alonzo had been very, very simple in his ways, but the fellows had all liked him. Many of them missed the kind, obliging, absent-minded Duffer of Greyfriars.

Nugent opened the letter.

"Dear Nugent,—I am sure that you will be very pleased to hear that I am getting on very nicely indeed, and that my Uncle Benjamin is quite satisfied with my slow but sure progress towards convalescence. The neighbourhood in which we have fixed our rural retreat is delightfully rustic and exceedingly conducive to repose. The state of my health precludes me from inditing a lengthy epistle, but I should be extremely delighted and, indeed, very gratified to receive communications from any of you fellows. I hope you are all enjoying your normal physical health at Greyfriars, and that you sometimes allow your thoughts to turn to your absent schoolmate. My Uncle Benjamin says that absence makes the heart grow fonder, and I am sure that I reflect upon Greyfriars with a very sincere, affectionate regard. I enclose a postal-order for the sum of ten shillings in

repayment of the kind loan you made me ere I quitted Greyfriars. My Uncle Benjamin has kindly provided me with the necessary financial aid for the repayment of this obligation. Kindest regards to all the fellows.—

"Always yours sincerely,

"ALONZO TODD."

The juniors grinned over the letter.

Alonzo Todd's delicate state of health had evidently made no difference to his love for long words, and had not simplified his Johnsonian phraseology at all. But it was a kind and sincere letter, and just like the Duffer of Greyfriars.

"Good old Todd!" said Tom Brown. "I shall be glad, for one, when he comes back."

"Yes, rather."

"What a giddy windfall!" said Bob Cherry, looking at the postal-order.

"Yes, rather," said Nugent. "I'd forgotten all about the ten bob. Chaps who leave school owing money don't, as a rule, send along the giddy postal-orders."

"Todd wasn't that sort."

"No; here's the cash. This will just get me my new bicycle lamp, and I sha'n't have to write to my pater," said Nugent, with much satisfaction.

"Good old Toddy!"

Heath, the new boy, was in the crowd listening to the letter. Heath did not, of course, know Todd, who had left before he arrived at Greyfriars. But there was an expression of keenest interest upon Heath's face. He was looking very thoughtful as he strolled away from the spot. Some thought was evidently working in his mind, and to judge by the gleam in his eyes, it was some thought that boded no good to someone else.

Nugent thrust the postal-order, along with the letter, carelessly into his inside pocket, and the Remove went to lessons.

After morning school, Bulstrode called the cricketers out to practice. Bulstrode was keeping the junior eleven very much up to the mark. The morrow was Saturday, when the Courtfield match was to be played again, for the third time, both sides having agreed to play and replay till the matter was decided

one way or the other. And Bulstrode, feeling sorely the loss of Harry Wharton from the junior eleven, meant to make all the others toe the line.

Nugent went up to his study to change his jacket for a blazer before going out. He hung his jacket on the door, carelessly enough. He was in a tearing hurry, for Bulstrode was calling up the stairs to him.

He had quite forgotten the postal-order for the moment. But if he had thought of it, he would hardly have taken the trouble to remove it from his pocket. He would never even have thought of a possible theft. Even Billy Bunter would not go so far as to take a postal-order out of a fellow's pocket.

Heath was in the passage as Nugent came out. Nugent glanced at him, but did not speak. He ran on, with his cricket bat under his arm, and joined Bulstrode in the lower passage.

"I'm ready!" he announced.

"Good! Come on! Come on, Cherry!"

"Right-o!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully.

The Remove cricketers went down to the juniors' ground. Vernon-Smith was in the team. The Bounder of Greyfriars, hopeless slacker as he always was, had proved on one occasion, at least, that he could play cricket with the best; and Bulstrode asked him to rejoin the eleven; whereat Vernon-Smith, as his nature was, swanked considerably, and consented in a very lofty way, and showed his great importance by turning up late for practice, and affecting to regard the whole matter as a bore.

Vernon-Smith lounged upon the cricket field with a cigarette between his teeth. That was sheer "cheek" on his part, for if a prefect had seen him he would certainly have been caned.

Bulstrode flushed as he saw him.

"Throw that cigarette away, Smith!" he called out. "What are you playing the fool like that for?"

"Oh, rats!" said Smith.

Bob Cherry, who was near him, jerked up his hand, and jerked the cigarette from his mouth; and with the same movement, accidentally or not, his knuckles came into hard contact with the Bounder's nose.

Vernon-Smith uttered a yell.

"Ow! You fool!"

"Only helping you to get rid of the cigarette," said Bob politely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Serve you jolly well right, Smith!" said Bulstrode. "Go on and bowl, and don't play the giddy goat here!"

Vernon-Smith sulkily caught the ball as it was tossed to him, and went to the bowler's end. Bob Cherry took the bat. There was a very spiteful expression upon the Bounder's face, and if Bob had been of a more suspicious nature he would not have stood up to the bowling at that moment.

But Bob was the last fellow in the world to suspect anybody of foul play.

Vernon-Smith set his teeth hard, and his eyes gleamed as he bowled. The ball did not go anywhere near the wicket. Perhaps Vernon-Smith's foot slipped. Perhaps it did not. Bob Cherry uttered a cry of pain, dropped the bat, and caught his ankle in both hands, hopping on one leg.

"Ow!" he roared. "Oh, ow!"

Bulstrode turned furiously upon the Bounder.

"What did you do that for?" he shouted.

"Accident!"

"You threw the ball! Do you call that bowling?"

"My foot slipped."

"Ow!" groaned Bob Cherry. "You cad! Ow!"

"I'm sorry!" said the Bounder. "Was that leg before wicket?"

"You know it wasn't!" said Nugent wrathfully. "You did it on purpose, you miserable worm; you know you did!"

Bob Cherry hopped off the pitch.

"I can't go on," he said. "I don't know whether Smith did that on purpose. I shouldn't wonder. If I thought he did, for certain, I'd smash him! Ow!"

And Bob sat on the grass to recover. There was a big bruise on his ankle. He had not been wearing pads, and the blow had been severe.

"Next man in," said Bulstrode.

Nugent shook his head.

"I'm not going to let Smith bowl at me," he said.

"Look here, Nugent——"

"One accident is enough," Frank said drily. "You can put a new bowler on, or you can drop me out. I don't want any Bouncer."

The Bouncer threw down the ball, which had been fielded and returned to him.

"Just as you like," he said. "I don't want to go on."

And he put his hands in his pockets, and walked away. Bulstrode looked worried. He did not want to lose a player like Vernon-Smith, but he knew it would be difficult to get the team to trust him after what had happened. The practice went on without the Bouncer; and Bob Cherry, limping a great deal, went off the field.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Nugent Misses His Postal Order.

"How's the ankle, Bob?"

Mark Linley asked the question, looking into No. 1 Study a quarter of an hour later. The Lancashire lad was fresh from the cricket field, and he had a glow of health and colour in his cheeks. Mark was rather given to working hard indoors, "swotting" at studies which were outside the usual curriculum at Greyfriars; and the cricket did him worlds of good. He clumped down his bat, and took Liddell and Scott off the shelf.

Bob Cherry was seated in the armchair, with his trouser leg rolled up, rubbing his ankle with Elliman's. He grunted.

"There's a beastly big bruise," he said.

"Hard cheese, old chap!"

"Yes, rather! I believe the Bouncer did it on purpose."

Mark looked at the bruise.

"It's rotten," he said. "I hope you'll be all right for the match to-morrow, Bob."

"Oh, yes; it's not so bad as that. I've been rubbing it for a quarter of an hour nearly, and it's done it a lot of good."

Nugent came in, and threw off his blazer.

"How's the old leg, Bob?"

"Getting on all right."

"Feel inclined for a trot down to Friardale

THE GREYFRIARS GALLERY IN VERSE

By Dick Perfold



No. II: Tom Dutton

Who never hears a word that's said
Unless you seize him by the head,
And yell enough to wake the dead?

Why, Dutton!

Who makes his fed-up schoolmates groan,
And murmur, in an undertone:
"My kingdom for a megaphone!"

Why, Dutton!

Who, when you seek a loan to beg,
Imagines that you pull his leg,
And bowls you over middle peg?

Why, Dutton!

Who, when you try to be polite,
Misunderstands, shoots out his right,
And sets the atmosphere alight?

Why, Dutton!

But who, in spite of his defect,
Is really one of the elect,
When games are played, or studies wrecked?

Why, Dutton!

Perhaps I'd better end this screed;
He cannot hear—but he can read!
And I don't want my nose to bleed

Through Dutton!

after dinner?" Nugent asked. "I've got a pass from Wingate to go down and get my new lamp."

Bob shook his head.

"No, I think not. I won't do much walking to-day, I think. I don't want to risk being crooked for the Courtfield match."

"Quite right," said Frank. "You come with me, Marky?"

Mark smiled, and shook his head.

"I should like to," he said; "but I've got some Greek translations to do. Mr. Quelch has promised to look over them for me, and he's setting the time aside specially."

"Oh, rats! I'll ask Bull, then."

"Hallo!" said the cheery voice of John Bull at the door. "Who's taking my name in vain?" And John Bull and Fisher T. Fish looked in.

"Come down to Friardale with me?" asked Nugent. "I'm going to the post-office to cash Todd's remittance, and blow it in a new bike lamp. There will be a tanner to spare, and we can have some ices."

"I'll come!"

Nugent put on his jacket, and felt in the pocket for the postal-order. He took out Todd's letter, and looked into it, and then felt in the pocket again. The pocket was empty!

"That's very odd!" he said.

"What's very odd?"

"I'd have sworn I put the postal-order into this pocket along with the letter," said Nugent. "I suppose I shoved it into another pocket. I'm getting as absent-minded as poor old Alonzo himself."

"Well, make sure you've not lost it before we start," said John Bull, the practical. "Don't want to amble down to Friardale for nothing."

"Oh, it must be here somewhere."

Nugent felt in the other pocket.

"My hat!"

"Got it?"

"It's not here!"

"Try your bags," said Bull.

Nugent felt in his trousers pockets. But the result was the same; the postal order was not to be found. Frank looked very much puzzled.

"Blessed if I can make this out!" he exclaimed.

"You've lost it?" asked John Bull.

"No, I haven't lost it. I put it into my pocket, and then I hung my jacket up here when I went down to the cricket."

John Bull whistled.

"My word! Do you mean to say that it's been taken from your pocket?"

"What else can have happened to it?"

"Phew!"

"Hang it all!" said Bob Cherry. "Hang it all, Franky; make sure about it before you say a thing like that outside the study."

"I have made sure," said Nugent, somewhat tartly.

The juniors looked at one another very seriously. If the postal order had been removed from Nugent's pocket in that way, it meant only one thing—that there was a thief in the school.

The fact that the name of the payee was not filled in on the order made it a very easy thing to cash it if it were stolen: the thief had simply to fill in his own name. The number of the order, of course, could be ascertained by writing to Todd, and it could be traced. But—

"The curious thing is that the fellow who took it must have been awfully quick about it," said Mark Linley. "You've been here a quarter of an hour, Bob?"

"Quite that," said Bob.

"And it's not more than twenty minutes since I hung the jacket up," Nugent said.

Bob Cherry nodded.

"That's right. I wasn't on the cricket-field more than five minutes."

"I've got it!" said Fisher T. Fish suddenly.

They turned upon him.

"You! You've got it?"

"I guess so."

"Hand it over, then, you fathead!"

"Eh? Hand what over?"

"The postal-order, if you've got it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, what are you cackling at, you silly image?" asked Nugent, whose temper was growing a little acid.

"I guess I didn't mean I'd got the postal-order, sonny. I mean I've got it—I've got it, who it was that's taken it."

"Oh, I see."

"You've seen somebody in the study?" asked Bob.

"Oh, no; I was at the cricket all the time. But I can guess."

"And whom do you guess?"

"Bunter!"

And each of the juniors nodded. It seemed only too likely.

"Bunter!" repeated Nugent.

"Well, I guess he's more likely than anybody else," said Fisher T. Fish.

"You're right."

"We'd better question Bunter before we go further," said Mark Linley quietly.

"Good! Will you come, Bob?"

"No, I'll stay here—I don't want to limp around."

"All serene!"

And leaving Bob Cherry to continue his treatment of the bruise upon his ankle, Nugent and Linley and Bull and the American left the study in search of Bunter.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Not Bunter.

BILLY BUNTER was discovered outside Mrs. Mimble's little tuck-shop, in the corner of the Close, behind the old elms. Bunter was looking into Mrs. Mimble's window with a longing eye. He had been inside the shop, trying to persuade Mrs. Mimble that a system of credit would be of immense service to her business. Mrs. Mimble did not see it in the same light. She had been very sharp with Bunter, and the Owl of the Remove had rolled out of the shop in a disappointed frame of mind. Mrs. Mimble had a fresh array of jam tarts that day, and the sight of them made Bunter's mouth water. He was looking in at the window, and feeling in his pockets in the desperate hope that some overlooked coin might yet linger there, when the four juniors found him, and Frank Nugent clapped him heavily upon the shoulder. Bunter jumped, and blinked round at him.

"Ow! Oh, really, Nugent——"

"I want to speak to you, Bunter."

Bunter's eyes glistened behind his big spectacles.

"Good!" he said. "Come into the shop,

will you; we can talk much more comfortably there. Mrs. Mimble's got a fresh lot of tarts——"

"Never mind the tarts now——"

"They're jolly good, and quite fresh——"

"Have you been feeding?" asked John Bull, with a searching glance at the fat junior's face. As a rule, Bunter showed signs of having had a feed.

The fat junior shook his head disconsolately.

"No; Mrs. Mimble is a most unbusinesslike woman. I've explained to her that I'm expecting a postal-order this evening, and that big businesses are always built up on a system of credit. But she can't see it."

"You haven't been cashing a postal-order, by any chance?"

"I haven't had one yet," said Bunter. "I was disappointed about a postal-order this morning. I was expecting one from a titled friend of mine, and it hasn't come—there's been some delay in the post. It's rotten! I've been thinking of writing to the Postmaster-General about it. Look here, if any of you fellows would advance me the ten bob, you could have the order when it comes, and——"

"Shut up, and come in!"

Nugent grasped the fat junior by the collar, and marched him into the shop. Mrs. Mimble came out of her little parlour.

She had a frown for Bunter, and a pleasant smile for the other fellows, so the expression upon her plump face was a little mixed.

"Did Bunter get in here immediately after morning school, Mrs. Mimble?" Nugent asked, coming to the point at once.

The good dame looked surprised.

"I think so, Master Nugent," she said.

"He was here very soon after half-past twelve."

"Before twenty-five minutes to one?"

"Yes, I am sure of that."

"H'm! Then he was here by the time I got to the study," said Frank. "How long did he stay, Mrs. Mimble?"

"Oh, quite a long time," said Mrs. Mimble.

"He was talking a great deal of nonsense to me about a credit system. He wanted me to give him some tarts, which I knew very well he would never pay me for."

"Oh, really, Mrs. Mimble——"

"You know very well you never intended

to pay me, Master Bunter. You owe me fourteen shillings and threepence halfpenny now."

"I am expecting a postal-order—"

"Nonsense, Master Bunter!"

"How long was Bunter here?" interrupted Nugent. "As much as five minutes?"

"Oh, yes, quite—nearer ten minutes."

"You are quite sure of that, Mrs. Mimble?"

"Quite sure, Master Nugent; though I really do not see what is the importance of it," said Mrs. Mimble, in wonder.

"It is really very important. You see, we suspect Bunter of having taken something, and if he was here ten minutes, he couldn't have done it, as it was taken just at that time," Nugent explained.

"I am sure he was here seven or eight minutes at least."

"Thank you, Mrs. Mimble."

"And I've stayed outside the shop all the time since," said Billy Bunter, in an extremely injured tone. "I've been waiting to see some chap who would be decent enough to lend me a few bob in advance upon my postal-order to-night—"

"Oh, rats!"

The juniors turned towards the door. They were satisfied upon the point they had set out to ascertain. Billy Bunter was not the guilty party, and they were done with the fat junior now.

But the Owl of the Remove was not so easily got rid of. He rolled after them, and caught Nugent by the sleeve.

"I say, Nugent—"

Frank jerked his arm away.

"Look here, you know, you suspected me of boning that postal-order, you know you did," said Billy Bunter. "It was jolly mean of you."

"It was your own fault for being that kind of a worm," said John Bull, in his direct way. "We shouldn't have suspected a decent chap."

The four juniors quitted the shop, and walked slowly towards the house. The bell was sounding for dinner.

"It wasn't Bunter," said Mark Linley, breaking a long silence, as they met Bob Cherry on the steps of the house. Bob Cherry was still limping.

"Proved it?" asked Bob.

"Yes; Mrs. Mimble's proved an alibi for him. He went to the tuck-shop immediately after lessons, and stayed there nearly ten minutes."

"Then he wasn't the chap," said Bob. "Whoever took the postal-order nipped into the study and took it after you left, Frank, and before I came in—and that wasn't more than five minutes at the most."

"Just so."

"Then we've got to find out who nipped into the study between twenty-five to one and twenty minutes to," said John Bull.

"And then we find the thief," said Bob.

"Exactly!"

"As to who it is—"

"I haven't the faintest idea, for one," said Mark Linley. "It seems impossible to believe that there is a thief in the Remove."

"It's horrible!"

"Suppose we say nothing about it till we've found out more," Bob Cherry suggested.

Nugent made a grimace.

"Too late!" he said.

"How so?"

"Bunter knows."

That settled it. Whatever Bunter knew was pretty certain to be known shortly over all the Lower School. Bunter came rolling in for dinner with a smear of jam on his face; and before dinner was over all the Remove knew that a postal-order—Todd's postal-order—had been stolen from Frank Nugent's jacket pocket in his study.

And when the Form crowded out of the dining-room, the news went buzzing through the Lower School. There was a thief in the Remove, and it was no longer possible to disguise the fact or to keep it secret.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

Halves!

"FOUND your postal-order, Nugent?"

"No!"

"Found who's taken it?"

"No!"

Frank Nugent had the same answer to make every time he was asked, which was pretty frequently. The news had sent quite a thrill

through the Remove, and the fact that Billy Bunter's innocence was clear made the question all the more puzzling.

"Blessed if I can make it out," Bob Cherry said, talking it over with a group of fellows just before afternoon school. "The chap, whoever he was, nipped in and did it just in time. I don't remember seeing anybody near the study when I came in."

Some of the fellows looked at Bob Cherry curiously. He did not notice it.

As a matter of fact, it had already occurred to some of the Remove that the theft might not have taken place in that special five minutes.

Bob Cherry had been alone in the study for a quarter of an hour. He had had ample opportunity to take the postal-order if he had wanted to!

True, Bob was the very last fellow in the world, whom anyone would have suspected of anything savouring of dishonesty.

But, then, everybody else was really above suspicion too; and if suspicion was to fall upon someone, Bob could not expect to be exempt.

That thought was in several minds now, but no one had cared to give it utterance.

It did not occur to Bob himself. He went in with the rest to afternoon lessons without dreaming that the finger of suspicion might point to him.

Billy Bunter blinked at him in class several times, with a mysterious manner which caught Bob Cherry's attention at last and made him wonder. Bunter's manner seemed to him that he knew what he knew, so to speak.

There was an under-current of whispering in the class which could not fail to draw Mr. Quelch's attention during lessons.

The Remove master was very sharp with some of the class, and at last he rapped his desk impatiently with the ruler.

"What are you whispering about, Skinner?" he exclaimed.

Skinner started.

"I, sir?"

"Yes. You were whispering to Snoop."

"If you please, sir—"

"There seems to me to be something the matter with this class this afternoon," said Mr. Quelch, frowning.

The dead silence, and significant looks, that followed this

remark made the Form-master realise that he had hit the mark by chance.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed sharply.

"N-u-nothing, sir," said Skinner.

"Nonsense! You explain, Bulstrode."

Bulstrode stood up, looking very red and awkward.

"It's a—a rather unfortunate matter, sir," he said. "Nugent has missed a postal-order, sir."

"What!"



The outstretched hand of the Friardale postmistress pointed directly at Bob Cherry. "That is the boy, sir!" (See page 328.)

"Nugent had a postal-order this morning, sir, from Todd, who owed him ten bob—shillings when he went away. Somebody's taken the postal-order out of Nugent's pocket, sir, while his jacket was hanging on the door of his study."

"Good heavens! Is this correct, Nugent?"

"Yes, sir," said Frank, reluctantly.

"You do not know who has taken it?"

"No, sir."

"Are you sure you did not lose the postal-order?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"Kindly explain the full circumstances to me."

Nugent did so.

"This is a most unfortunate occurrence," said Mr. Quelch. "I prefer to think that some foolish boy has taken the postal-order for a joke. If this is the case, I call upon the boy in question to tell the truth, here and now, and I am sure Nugent will freely look over the occurrence."

"Certainly, sir," said Frank.

A silence followed.

No one was inclined to own up to having taken the postal-order, whether for a joke or not. Mr. Quelch's face seemed to grow very lined.

"I hope it is not possible that there is a thief in the Remove," he said. "It would be terrible to think so. I hope that the postal-order will be discovered. If it is not found by bedtime to-night, Nugent, kindly tell me so."

"Very well, sir."

The lesson went on.

The juniors were glad enough when classes were dismissed. The affair of the postal-order was in every mind, and weighed upon all thoughts. Billy Bunter gave Bob Cherry one of his mysterious glances as they came out of the Form-room, and touched the sturdy Removee on the arm.

Bob shook him off as if he were some troublesome insect, and the fat junior coloured angrily.

"Look here, I want to speak to you, Cherry," he said, in a shrill whisper.

"Oh, go and eat coke."

"Now, look here," said Bunter, lowering his voice cautiously, "I don't want to be hard on you."

"Eh?"

"I say I don't want to be hard on you."

"What?"

"I know how fellows come to do these things," said Bunter.

"What things?"

"Oh, you can't pull the wool over my eyes," said Bunter impatiently. "Don't play the giddy ox. I say I don't want to be hard on you. What I say is—halves!"

"Eh?"

"Halves!" said Bunter.

"Are you stark mad?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Look here, it's halves, or there will be trouble," said Bunter.

"Halves of what?"

"The ten bob."

"Ten bob?" repeated Bob Cherry, dazedly.

"Yes."

"What ten bob?"

"Oh, don't beat about the bush," said Bunter. "Ten bob is five for me and five for you; and if you don't go halves I'll tell Nugent you took it."

Bob Cherry stared at him blankly, Bunter's meaning slowly dawning upon his mind. When it had fairly dawned upon him, Bob Cherry flushed a sudden crimson, and his right hand rose and fell—and Bunter fell, too, going with a crash to the floor.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Under Suspicion.

BOB CHERRY stood over the Owl of the Remove, his face burning, his eyes flashing fire, his chest heaving with passionate anger. There was a rush to the spot of the fellows who had been watching the scene with great curiosity.

"What's the row?" asked Bulstrode.

"Oh!" groaned Bunter. "Ow! I'm killed—ow—I'm dying! Beast! Ow!"

"What's the trouble?" Nugent asked.

"Only this," panted Bob. "He says I took the postal-order out of your pocket, and he says he'll tell you unless I go halves."

"What!"

"My hat!"

Bunter sat up.

"I didn't!" he roared. "I never said anything of the sort! Ow! I said I knew it was Bob Cherry, and I'd give him a chance to put the postal-order back! Ow!"

"What makes you think so, you crawling worm?" asked John Bull.

"Because he was in the study, and I know he took it. Of course he did! Nobody else had a chance to take it."

"It's all rot!" said Nugent. "As if Bob would dream of touching money that didn't belong to him! The only likely chap was Bunter—"

"Oh, really—"

"And as it wasn't Bunter, it's a giddy mystery. But any chap who says it might have been Bob Cherry is a fool and a dummy, and that's plain English!" said Nugent warmly.

"Thank you, Franky," said Bob, in a low voice. "I know you're not likely to think such a thing of me, anyway."

"No fear!"

"Of course not!" said John Bull. "As for Bunter, if he doesn't wriggle away, I'll stamp on him, and burst him!"

"Ow!" gasped Bunter.

The fat junior scrambled away at top speed, leaving the fellows grinning. But the evil he had done remained behind him. The vague suspicion had been in many minds before. Now Bunter's words had crystallised it, so to speak.

Bob Cherry looked round at the faces of the juniors, and on many, many of them he saw the dark cloud of uneasiness and suspicion. There was a grin of malice on Vernon-Smith's face. He evidently enjoyed the situation. And Snoop, and Skinner, and Heath and other fellows who had never got on well with Bob Cherry, could hardly conceal their satisfaction. The Bunder did not attempt to do so.

"You fellows," said Bob Cherry, looking round, "you—you can't believe I did it!" His voice grew hoarse and husky.

There was a grim silence.

The juniors moved away one by one. But

Bob's own friends remained round him—John Bull, and Nugent, and Fisher T. Fish, and Tom Brown, and Mark Linley and Micky Desmond. They were not likely to believe a word against him.

Bob looked crushed.

To a free and frank nature like his own, a nature that was the very essence of honour and straight dealing, such an accusation was horrible. And the impossibility of proving his innocence, at all events until the actual thief could be discovered, occurred to him at once.

He ran his fingers through his thick shock of flaxen hair, a trick he had when he was worried or bewildered.

"Cheer up, Bob!" said Frank Nugent encouragingly. "It's all rot, you know—just Bunter's rot! And we'll have the real thief soon, anyway."

"The Remove can't believe such a thing of me," said Bob, in a broken voice. All his excitement was gone now.

"Of course not, old chap!"

"I guess not," said Fisher T. Fish. "I guess you are straight goods, Bob, from the word go! And we'll have the real rotter known soon, I guess!"

"It's horribly unfortunate that you were alone in the study so long," said Frank. "I didn't look at it in that light before. You see, you really had more time than anybody else for taking the beastly thing. Any other chap had to dodge into the study in the five minutes or so that it was empty, and you were there alone for a quarter of an hour. That makes the thing look rotten. But no one in his senses would imagine for a second that you did it."

Bob Cherry nodded gloomily. He could see that a great many of the Remove imagined that he might have done it.

"But look here, we'll jolly soon clear it up," said Nugent. "I'll wire to Todd to send me the number of the order. The thief must have taken it, I suppose, to cash it. Well, we can inquire after it when we know the number, and, if it is cashed, we shall get on to the chap who did it."

"Yes, if it's cashed," said John Bull.

"The thief may keep it back," said Mark Linley.

"That's not really likely; for a chap isn't likely to steal, and run the risk of being expelled, unless he was in pretty severe need of money," said Nugent, "and if he's hard pushed, he must use it."

"I guess that's correct."

"I suspect that it's some young ass who's in tow with Cobb and that gang at the Cross Keys," said Nugent. "Some fool who owes money on betting, or something of the sort. The postal order may have been sent to some cad at the Cross Keys already."

"Very likely."

"Buck up, Bob!"

Bob Cherry was not listening. He nodded absently to his chums, and walked away with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, and his head drooping. The shameful accusation seemed to have knocked him quite over.

The other fellows looked very glum.

"I say, this is simply rotten!" Nugent remarked. "It's beastly unfortunate about Bob having been in the study all the time!"

"He's taking it very much to heart."

"And all through that fat cad Bunter!"

"Well, I don't know about that; some of the fellows had been thinking of it, I'm sure," said John Bull. "I've seen it in their faces, though Bob never suspected it. But buck up and get the number from Todd, Nugent; Bob will be under a cloud until we've found out who really took the note."

"Come down to the post office, and I'll send the wire now," said Frank.

And a quarter of an hour later the wire was sent.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Broad Arrows.

HEATH, the new junior, looked out of his study window. Bob Cherry was crossing the Close, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets. Bob's attitude as he walked was very different from usual. He seemed like a fellow upon whom some heavy burden had suddenly fallen. To the frank, free nature, suspicion was intolerable, and Bob had all the feeling of an animal caught in a net from which escape was impossible. A cold, cruel smile crossed Heath's lips as he

looked at him. From Esau Heath Bob was not likely to get much sympathy in his misfortune.

Bob tramped down to the gates, and went out. He wanted to be alone; now that he knew that some of the Remove suspected him, the unhappy lad saw suspicion in every glance. Even his own chums, he felt, might allow cold doubt and suspicion to creep into their hearts.

Heath watched him till he was gone.

Then he turned from the window, and locked the door of his study, and opened a bag that lay upon his table.

For ten minutes or more Heath was busy in examining the contents of that bag; and then he left the study, carrying the bag in his hand, and he also left Greyfriars.

Half an hour later Nugent and his friends came in. They had wired to Alonzo Todd to send them the number of the missing postal-order. When the number was ascertained, further inquiry could be made.

Until then, nothing could be done.

"Where's Bob, I wonder?" Nugent said, as he glanced into No. 1 study, and found it dark and deserted.

"Bob! Bobby!" John Bull shouted along the passage.

"He's gone out," said Hazeldene, looking out of his study.

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Poor old Bob!" said Mark Linley. "He feels this awfully; it's too beastly of the fellows to get such an idea into their heads."

"It's rotten!" said Hazeldene.

"No good moping alone, though," said Bull. "We'd better look after Bob, and stick to him, and keep him from thinking about it too much. I wish Wharton were here; he might be able to help."

"I'll write to him to-night about it," said Frank.

It was some time before Bob Cherry came back. Heath had returned long before then, but no one was taking any notice of Heath's movements. Bob did not return till after the gates were locked, and he had to ring up Gosling, the porter, and was reported for missing calling-over. He had to go into Mr.

Quelch's study, and face the Form-master. The haggard expression of his face arrested Mr. Quelch's attention at once, and he laid down the cane he had picked up, and fixed his eyes upon the junior.

"Are you ill, Cherry?" he exclaimed.

"No, sir," said Bob.

"You are looking very strange."

"I'm all right, sir."

"Come, Cherry, what is the matter?" Mr. Quelch said kindly. "I can see that there is something wrong with you. Why did you miss calling-over?"

"I hadn't come in, sir."

"But why had you not come in?"

"I—I forgot about the time, sir."

"You were very busily occupied, I suppose?"

"N-no, sir."

"Come, my lad. You have stayed out till long after dark, a most unusual and reprehensible thing to do, unless you have a pass from a prefect. Why did you do it? What have you been doing?"

"Walking about, sir."

"Where?"

"In the lanes, sir."

"Why?"

Bob Cherry was silent.

"I think you had better explain, Cherry," said Mr. Quelch.

"I—I—I've been thinking it over, sir," said Bob miserably.

"Thinking what over?"

"About that postal-order."

"Ah, yes! But why should that matter weigh upon your mind, Cherry, more than upon anyone else?" asked Mr. Quelch.

Then Bob burst out:

"They suspect me of having taken it, sir." Mr. Quelch started.

"They suspect you, Cherry?"

"Yes, sir," groaned Bob.

"You are surely innocent?"

"Oh, sir!"

"Why should they suspect you?"

"Because I was in the study nearly all the time. Of course, I could have taken it easily if I had wanted to."

"It is ridiculous," said Mr. Quelch. "Utterly ridiculous! I should not entertain such a suspicion for a second. It is cruel and absurd."

"Thank you, sir," said Bob gratefully. "My own friends don't think it, but—but a lot of the fellows do."

"I hope they will think better of it," said Mr. Quelch, frowning. "The postal-order has not, of course, been found?"

"No, sir."

"I shall acquaint the Head with the matter this evening, then, and a searching inquiry will be made," said Mr. Quelch. "I do not think you need have any fear but that your innocence will be proved, Cherry."

"Thank you, sir."

"You may go."

And Bob Cherry went, unpunished.

But Bob's face was very gloomy when the Remove went up to bed. Bob's special enemies in the Form were in high feather over it. Vernon-Smith and Heath had made up their quarrel, for the special purpose of enjoying Bob's discomfiture together. They were grinning and chuckling, and Bob knew very well what they were whispering about.

There was little sleep for Bob Cherry at first, but towards midnight he fell into a deep slumber, and dreamed of postal-orders, policemen, and detectives. He did not wake again till the rising-bell was clanging through the sunny morning.

He started, and sat up in bed. Immediately upon waking the remembrance of the wretched happenings of the day before crowded into his mind. His face, usually as bright as the sunshine itself in the morning, clouded over.

He stepped out of bed, and reached for his clothes. Then a cry of rage escaped his lips. The clothes were not folded up neatly as he had left them.

Someone had disturbed them in the night. Bob Cherry caught up the jacket and trousers. He held them up, and looked at them in almost speechless rage.

Upon the dark cloth, broad arrows, in imitation of those upon a convict's garb, had been daubed in white paint.

Bob's exclamation brought all eyes in his direction.

"What on earth's that?" Bulstrode exclaimed.

"Broad arrows!" ejaculated Skinner. "Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a loud laugh from Vernon-Smith and Heath and Snoop. Bob's face was dark with fury.

"Who did that?" he exclaimed in a choking voice. "Who did it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What rotten cad did that?" roared Bob. "Hasn't he pluck enough to own up to what he's done?"

There was no reply.

"Was it you, Snoop?"

"No, it wasn't," said Snoop.

"Was it you, Heath?"

"My dear chap, don't ask questions."

"Was it you, you cad?"

"Well, no, it wasn't," said Heath.

"I believe you're lying."

"Thank you."

Heath turned away to his washstand. Many of the fellows were grinning. Bob threw down the clothes.

He dressed in another suit, and left the dormitory without speaking another word, either to friend or to foe. But the expression on his face was enough to give pause to those who felt inclined to "chip" him on the subject. Heath was the last fellow to leave the dormitory, and before he went he removed a little pot of white paint and a brush that had been concealed under his mattress, and concealed them under his jacket to convey them downstairs.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

"R. Cherry."

"HERE YOU ARE, Nugent!" said Ogilvy.

It was a letter for Frank, addressed in Todd's handwriting. Frank opened it in the midst of a crowd. The former Greyfriars fellow had not been long in answering. The letter ran as follows, as Frank read it out:

"My dear Nugent,—I was considerably astonished and perturbed by the receipt of your wire. I sincerely trust that by this time you have succeeded in recovering the missing postal-order. I proceeded immediately to ascertain the number of the order, paying a visit to the post-office where I purchased it for that purpose. The number is 00012468. I have requested my Uncle Benjamin to check

the number, in order to obviate any possible error in so important a matter.

"With kind regards from Uncle Benjamin,

"Always yours,

"ALONZO TODD."

"P.S.—I sincerely trust that the postal-order has not been extracted from your pocket by any person of dishonest proclivities. If such should prove to be the case, I should be glad to send some excellent tracts for the perusal of the unfortunate youth who has strayed into the paths of moral turpitude."

"Good old duffer!" said Tom Brown.

"The number's 00012468," said Nugent. "That's the important point. We'll get down to the post-office as quickly as we can, and see whether it's been presented there."

"Good egg!"

"Let's ask Mr. Quelch for leave off first lesson," said John Bull. "It's a jolly important matter, and it ought to be settled at once."

"Yes, we'll ask him."

Mr. Quelch readily gave leave to Nugent and John Bull, when he was asked, to go down to the village post-office instead of attending for first lesson. The Form-master was as anxious as the juniors could be to get the matter cleared up.

"It will be all right now, Bob," Nugent said.

Bob Cherry shook his head.

"I don't suppose the order has been presented," he said.

"Why not?"

"Well, after all this talk about it, the chap would be afraid to take it to the post-office for payment. I should think."

"But he must be in need of the money, or he wouldn't have stolen it."

"Yes; but—"

"Besides," said John Bull, "he may have cashed it before he knew that such a fuss was going to be made."

"Well, we'll see, anyway," said Nugent.

And Nugent and Bull went down to the gates while the other fellows were going into the Form-room. Bob Cherry went into the Form-room with downcast eyes. Fellows in other Forms looked at him very curiously, as well as the Removites.

Nugent and Bull walked quickly down to the village. They were anxious to see the post-mistress and get the matter over. If the post-office was drawn "blank," they would have to try further; but Nugent hoped to get a clue there.

They reached the post-office of Friardale, a small establishment that was also a grocer's shop. The post-mistress, a kind-looking, middle-aged lady in spectacles, peered at them over the little partition. "Yes?" she said.

"If you please, we want to know if a postal-order was cashed here yesterday," said Frank. "By one of the chaps from the school, I mean. A postal-order has been lost—and we're trying to trace it."

"Yes, certainly," said Mrs. Brett. "A postal-order for ten shillings was cashed here last evening by a schoolboy. I was here."

Nugent and Bull exchanged glances.

"We're on the track now," Bull murmured.

"By a Greyfriars chap?" asked Nugent.

"Yes; he wore a Greyfriars cap, at all events."

"That's certain enough, then. Do you know his name, ma'am?"

"I do not, but it is written on the order," said the postmistress. "I forget the name." She looked puzzled. "Is there anything wrong about it?"

"I'm afraid there is," said Nugent. "Is he a chap you know by sight, ma'am?"

"Yes; I have seen him here before, with you."

"With me?" Nugent exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, Master Nugent."

"B-b-by Jove!" said John Bull. "This is getting rather thick. I admit that I had a hope that it might turn out to be that new chap, Heath."

"It wasn't Billy Bunter, ma'am?"

"Oh, no."

"Was the name signed 'Heath'?"

"No."

"I suppose you still have the postal-order here?" Nugent asked. "I have the number of the one that

is missing. Will you tell me if it is the same?"

"Certainly."

The post-mistress opened a drawer, and took out a small bundle of postal-orders fastened in an elastic band. From the bundle she selected one.

"What is your number?" she asked.

Nugent read it out from Todd's letter.



"What on earth are you kids doing?" exclaimed Wingate. "Searching," said Skinner. (See page 348.)

"00012468."

"That is the number, Master Nugent."

"My hat!"

"It's the same," John Bull exclaimed. "It's Todd's postal-order that was cashed here last night, Franky. We've only got to find out the name of the rotter who cashed it, and all's serene."

"Good!"

"You see, ma'am," Nugent explained to the post-mistress, "I had that order by post, and the name of the payee was not filled in. Somebody boned it out of my pocket, and he must have filled in his name to cash it. Will you tell me what is the name filled in on the order?"

The post-mistress held the order up closer to her spectacles.

"R. Cherry," she said.

"What?"

"WHAT!"

Nugent staggered back.

John Bull stood petrified.

A thunderclap from the clear summer sky could not have startled them more.

"R. Cherry," said the post-mistress in surprise. "The order is filled in: 'Pay R. Cherry,' and it is signed 'R. Cherry.'"

"Good heavens!"

"Impossible!"

Nugent and Bull looked at one another in blank dismay. R. Cherry! Bob Cherry! What did it mean?

"Oh, I've got it!" John Bull exclaimed breathlessly. "I ought to have thought of it at first. Of course, the dirty thief wouldn't fill in his own name, would he? That would be giving himself away at the first shot."

"He'd have to, to cash it here," said Nugent, with a haggard face. "If any other chap came in and signed it 'R. Cherry,' it wouldn't be paid. Mrs. Brett doesn't happen to remember his name. But Mr. Brett knows him well, and so does young Sam Brett. A chap wouldn't risk coming in here and signing himself 'R. Cherry' unless——"

"Unless that was his name?"

"Yes."

"But it can't have been Bob."

Nugent did not reply. In spite of his firm

and loyal faith in his friend, a horrible doubt was creeping into his mind.

"It can't—it can't have been Bob!" repeated John Bull, but a faltering tone was in his voice now.

"Will you let me see the postal-order, Mrs. Nugent. I know R. Cherry—he's a chum of mine—I know his writing as well as my own. Let me see the postal-order, please."

"You may see it, certainly."

The post-mistress handed him the order. Nugent held it up to the light and looked at the signature.

"R. Cherry."

A wave of deadly paleness came over Nugent's face. For he knew the hand, and even in his heart there could be no further doubt. It was Bob Cherry's writing, or else the work of a skilled and cunning forger. And what skilled and cunning forger was there likely to be in a junior form at a public school? That was a wild supposition.

It was Bob Cherry's handwriting!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Fish Guesses He Knows.

NUGENT handed the postal-order back to Mrs. Brett without a word. He could not speak. He seemed stunned. Without even thanking the post-mistress, he walked out of the post-office with an unsteady step. John Bull followed him, in the same frozen silence.

Second-lesson was about to commence when they reached the school, and entered the Remove Form-room.

Mr. Quelch signed to them to come up to his desk.

"You have been to the post-office?"

"Yes, sir," said Nugent.

"What have you discovered?"

"The postal-order was cashed there last evening, sir."

"Is that certain?"

"I have the number from Todd, sir, and it's the same as that on the postal order the post-mistress paid out on."

"That is unquestionable, then. I understand that the payee's name was left blank on the order Todd sent you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then some false name was filled in?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was the name? If the thief filled in his own name his discovery should be perfectly easy," said Mr. Quelch.

Nugent's lips seemed frozen.

The Form-master looked at him in irritated surprise.

"Why do you not answer me, Nugent? You are wasting my time."

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"What was the name filled in on the postal order, then?"

"R. Cherry, sir."

"What?"

"R. Cherry, sir," said Nugent, in a low voice. But it was not too low for most of the class to hear. There was a buzz in the Remove.

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"Silence!" he said.

Bob Cherry sat immovable. He heard what was said, but the words hardly conveyed their proper meaning to his brain. He doubted his own senses.

"'R. Cherry' was the name filled in," said Mr. Quelch. "And the order, of course, was signed 'R. Cherry' by the person to whom the money was paid?"

"Yes, sir."

"Cherry, stand up!"

Bob Cherry stood up.

"Did you cash a postal-order at Friardale Post Office last evening, Cherry?"

"No, sir."

"Did you go to the post-office at all?"

"No, sir."

"You were not in the school when the postal-order was being cashed?" Mr. Quelch said, with a sudden remembrance of Bob Cherry's escapade of the previous evening.

"No, sir. I've told you where I was," said Bob dully.

"Were you quite alone while you were away from the school last evening, Cherry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then there is no corroboration of your statement that you spent so much time in aimless wandering in the lanes?"

"I hope my word doesn't need corroborating, sir," said Bob Cherry, with a flash of spirit. "I don't tell lies, sir."

"I am afraid that in so serious a matter as this, Cherry, proof will be required," said Mr. Quelch drily. "Did the post-mistress recognise Cherry, Nugent?"

"She said the order was cashed by a Greyfriars chap, sir, whom she knew by sight, that's all," said Frank.

"Did you see the order, Nugent?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did the writing look like Cherry's?"

"It looked like it, sir."

"Would you have taken it for Cherry's signature?"

"Yes, sir, if I'd seen it on anything else. Of course, I knew Bob wouldn't sign a postal order that didn't belong to him, so——"

"H'm! You may go to your place, Nugent."

Nugent and Bull went to their forms.

"I shall speak to Dr. Locke about this at once," said Mr. Quelch, addressing the class. "For the present, a prefect will take charge of the Remove. The post-mistress will be sent for immediately after lessons, and requested to identify the boy who cashed the postal order. If you are innocent, Cherry, you have nothing whatever to fear—no one who is innocent need fear anything. Mrs. Brett is a sensible woman, and not in the least likely to make mistakes in so simple a matter."

Mr. Quelch quitted the Form-room.

There was a buzz of voices the moment he was gone.

"I guess I can see the how of it now," said Fisher T. Fish.

"What do you know about it, Fishy?" demanded half-a-dozen voices.

The American grinned serenely.

"Jevver get left?" he said. "I guess I can see as far into a millstone as anybody. Of course, the chap who cashed the order knew all about Bob being already suspected by some of you fools——"

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"Some of you fools," went on the American imperturbably; "and of course, as he wasn't going to sign his own name, he signed Bob's, by choice. It was just the trick a cunning hound would think of."

"Of course," said Nugent, greatly relieved at the idea.

"What about the writing being just like Cherry's?" demanded Snoop.

"I suppose a chap could easily get hold of some of Cherry's writing to imitate?" said Fish. "He could get an old impot of Bob's, or he could get some old letter, and after a bit of practice he could imitate the signature. I guess it would be as easy as rolling off a log."

"Too steep," said Skinner.

"Rats!"

Wingate came into the Form-room.

"Order, here!" he exclaimed. "This isn't a conversazione."

And the juniors resumed work under the charge of the captain of Greyfriars. But all their thoughts were in the mystery of the postal-order. Bob Cherry gave his lessons no attention, but Wingate carefully passed him over. The Greyfriars captain knew of what the lad was suspected, and he knew what his state of mind must be, especially if he was innocent. Was he innocent?

It was a question that even his own friends were beginning to ask themselves now.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Identified!

AFTER lessons that day the Removites had expected to be thinking of nothing but the Courtfield match, arranged for the afternoon. But as it happened, hardly a thought was given to the Courtfield match now.

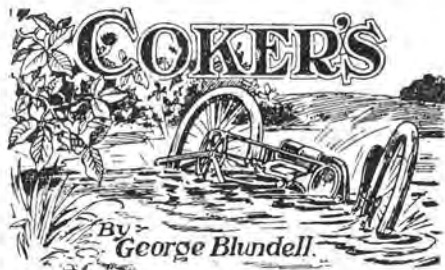
The question of Bob Cherry's guilt or innocence occupied every mind to the exclusion even of cricket.

Bulstrode, as cricket captain, was thinking about the match, but his suggestion of a little practice at the nets before dinner was disregarded.

Nobody wanted to go down to the nets.

The Remove knew that the post-mistress at Friardale had been sent for to identify the boy who had cashed the postal-order, and they wanted to be on the scene when she arrived.

Dr. Locke had sent a very polite request to Mrs. Brett to come up to the school, and had sent his own trap for her, and she was expected soon after lessons were over.



Coker had a motor-bike
His very own, you know.
And everywhere that Coker went
That bike refused to go!

He bought a petrol substitute,
'Twas jolly good, he said;
But when we nipped it from afar
We promptly turned and fled!

When Coker wished to make a trip,
On foot he had to trudge;
That motor-bike was like a mule—
It simply wouldn't budge!

He wooed the thing with honeyed words,
He called it fearful names;
But still the brute was obstinate—
His fury rose in flames!

He gave the bike a savage push,
And by its side he sped;
But when he threw his legs across,
The blessed thing stopped dead!

This game continued for a week,
And Coker grew quite mad;
But this was not surprising, for
He always is, poor lad!

But one day, when he tried the bike,
A startling thing occurred;
A bang, a roar, a blinding flash—
She went off like a bird!

The gates were open wide; if not
We should not dare to laugh;
And this would not be comic verse,
But Coker's epitaph!



Away went Coker, like a pea
Shot fiercely from a shooter;
He clung on wildly for his life,
And blindly pressed the hooter!

Away he vanished down the road,
Just like a streak of light;
A jolly lucky thing for him
No traffic was in sight!

Up hill, down dale, he swiftly sped,
And massacred a fowl;
The perspiration swamped his brow,
And he began to howl.

"Oh, help! Oh, save me! Stop, you
brute!"

The merry, mad machine
Refused to do so, till it reached
A duck-pond, wide and green.

Then came a most unearthly splash!
The water fairly flew!
And Coker's voice was heard to say:
"Yow-ow—gug-gug—yaroooooh!"

When Coker came to light again,
All rank with slimy weeds,
He looked like one who contemplates
Most dark and deadly deeds.

We towed him back to Greyfriars School,
And soothed his troubled mind;
But that amazing motor-bike
We had to leave behind.

When Horace buys another bike,
And tries to tame the joker,
I trust the roads will not be strewn
With little bits of Coker!

Bob Cherry stood alone.

Most of the Remove had made up their minds on the subject, after the report Nugent and Bull had brought back from the post office. Even Nugent himself was sorely troubled in mind.

Everything seemed to point to Bob's guilt, every fresh discovery made the case blacker and blacker against him.

What would the post-mistress say when she came?

Bob Cherry was to be placed in a row of boys in the Form-room, and Mrs. Brett was to be asked to pick out the junior who had been to the post office the previous evening with the stolen order.

If she identified Bob Cherry the case was complete.

"You fellows get into the Form-room," said Wingate, coming along. "All the Remove are to go in and form up."

"Righto, Wingate."

"Now we'll see what we shall see," said Heath, with a sneer.

Nugent turned on him quickly.

"What do you mean, you cad?"

Heath shrugged his shoulders.

"I mean that the truth's coming out," he said. "If it wasn't Bob Cherry did it, I'm sure I shall be pleased."

"Liar!" said John Bull.

"But you know what my belief is," said Heath.

"Oh, hang your belief!"

"Somebody's going to be found out, at all events," Hazeldene remarked as the juniors crowded into the Form-room again. "Mrs. Brett will identify the chap, whether it's Bob Cherry or not."

"It mayn't be anybody in the Remove at all," said Ogilvy. "I fancy it is, though."

Mr. Quelch came into the Form-room. He formed up the boys in a rank along the wall, ready for the identification.

The sound of wheels could be heard outside. Mrs. Brett, the post-mistress of Friardale, had arrived in the doctor's trap. She came into the Form-room with Dr. Locke. The Head's face was severe. Mrs. Brett looked worried and ill at ease. It was not a pleasant task that was before her. But it was a duty to be done.

Dr. Locke glanced along the silent, expectant Remove.

"You know why Mrs. Brett is here, my boys," he said. "She has kindly consented to help establish the truth by identifying the boy who cashed a postal-order for ten shillings at Friardale Post-Office last evening. If Mrs. Brett succeeds in identifying the boy, all doubt upon the subject will be set at rest."

There was a murmur.

All eyes were turned upon Bob Cherry. He stood erect, his eyes fixed straight before him, and a flush in his cheeks. But he did not look afraid.

Some of the other boys looked more nervous than he. It was no pleasant task to stand there and be scanned by a short-sighted old lady who might possibly make a mistake.

"Now, madam," said the Head.

"Ye-es, sir, I am ready," said Mrs. Brett nervously.

"Please look at the boys carefully, and tell me which is the one who came to the post-office last evening."

"Certainly, sir."

Mrs. Brett passed slowly down the line, peering at the breathless, expectant boys through her spectacles.

There was a deep, tense silence in the Form-room.

The Head stood like a statue. Mr. Quelch was grimly quiet. The boys were nervous and ill at ease, some of them standing erect, some shifting their feet.

Mrs. Brett scanned each face in turn.

She stopped half-way down the line.

There was an audible murmur again. The post-mistress of Friardale had stopped directly opposite Bob Cherry!

Bob's face showed a tremor for a moment.

Then it was firm again.

His clear, steady gaze met the peering eyes of the post-mistress firmly, bravely, unflinching.

"Well, Mrs. Brett," said the Head's deep voice, "have you found the boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Kindly point him out to me."

Mrs. Brett raised her hand, and pointed.

Bob Cherry grew deadly pale.

The outstretched hand of Mrs. Brett, the Friardale post-mistress, pointed directly at him.

"That is the boy, sir!"

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Condemned!

"THAT is the boy!"

Bob Cherry stood rooted to the floor. His startled gaze was fastened upon the post-mistress in a kind of fascinated stare.

Dr. Locke came forward.

"That is the boy?" he repeated.

"Yes, sir."

"Robert Cherry! What have you to say?"

Bob gave a hoarse cry.

"Oh, sir! I—I am innocent! There is a horrible mistake!"

The Head's face was as hard as iron. He turned to Mr. Quelch.

"I understand, Mr. Quelch, that Cherry was left alone in the study from whence the postal-order was stolen, and had more opportunity than any other boy for committing the theft?"

"Yes, sir," said the Remove master.

"The postal order was filled in with the name of R. Cherry, Mrs. Brett?"

"Certainly, sir."

"You have it with you?"

"It is here."

"Kindly let me see it."

The postal-order was handed to the Head. There was a dead silence in the room. The Head's brow was lined and dark.

"The number of this postal-order is 00012468," he said. "Was that the number of the postal-order sent you by Todd, Nugent?"

"It was, sir."

"Then this is undoubtedly the same order. Mr. Quelch, will you look at that signature. Is that Robert Cherry's handwriting?"

The Remove master looked closely at the signature. He nodded his head.

"That is certainly Cherry's handwriting, sir," he said.

"Very well! You positively identify this boy, Mrs. Brett, as the boy who came to the post-office last evening?"



Nugent minor greeted the juniors with a jammy grin, and jerked his thumb in the direction of the tuck-shop. "Better go inside," he said. "It's all free!" (See page 346.)

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Brett, looking very much distressed.

"Do you deny it, Cherry?"

"Yes," gasped Bob Cherry, in a dry, choking voice. "I—I deny it, sir. It's not true, sir. I never went near the post-office last evening."

"I cannot believe you, Cherry. I regard it as sheer impudence on your part to endeavour to cast doubt upon this good lady's word."

"I—I don't, sir! I think Mrs. Brett has made a mistake."

"You are quite sure, Mrs. Brett?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"You noticed the boy particularly?"

"I can't say that, sir. But I noticed especially that he had fair hair, and a great deal

of it, sir, and his straw hat on the back of his head. There is no other boy here with hair like that."

That seemed to settle it. Bob Cherry's shock of hair, that never would yield to brush or comb, was a standing joke in the Remove.

Belief in his guilt was written in every face.

What further doubt was possible? Even Mark Linley was staggered. Nugent could doubt no more—horrible, impossible as it seemed, Bob Cherry was a thief!

Bob Cherry had stolen the postal-order, Bob Cherry had written his name upon it as the payee, and Bob Cherry had cashed it.

There was not a loophole of escape left.

Doubt seemed impossible.

Up to the last moment, Nugent had entertained a hope that Mrs. Brett would identify

somebody else as the boy who had come to the post-office, or would fail to identify any member of the Remove at all.

But she had decided upon Bob Cherry at once—and Bob was not a common type of boy; he stood out from the rest in many ways.

Bob turned a haggard glance round him.

"Oh! What can I say?" panted Bob. "It's a mistake—it's a horrible mistake! Do you fellows all believe me guilty?"

Silence.

"Nugent, you're my chum—you've always said so—Franky, old man, say you don't believe that I'm a thief!" shrieked Bob.

Nugent groaned aloud, but he spoke no word.

Bob gave a wild glance at the boys.

The passion died out of his face, leaving it white, and drawn, and haggard, and strangely old.

"And there isn't one of you to stand by a fellow when he's down?" he muttered brokenly. "Not one!"

"There is one, Bob." It was Mark Linley's voice, and the Lancashire lad came out of his place towards Bob. "I believe you, Bob; I know it's a horrible mistake—I know it must be. I know you're innocent, old chap."

The Head's voice rapped out with unusual sharpness.

"Go back to your place, Linley."

Mark stepped back obediently.

"Cherry!" Dr. Locke's voice was deep and stern. "You are guilty; in the face of such conclusive proof, I marvel at your audacity in venturing to deny your guilt. You are guilty—of theft, of lying, of such rascality as I hope is very uncommon in one so young as you are! You are a thief, and not fit to associate with the boys of this school! You will be expelled from Greyfriars to-day, Cherry, in the presence of the whole school; and until then you will stay in your room."

The Head pointed to the door.

Bob Cherry gave one wild glance round, and then staggered to the door, and disappeared.

"The school will assemble in hall at four o'clock, to witness an expulsion," said the Head quietly; and then he, too, left the Form-room.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Expelled!

FOUR o'clock had struck, and the great hall of Greyfriars was packed. The school had assembled, all the Forms in their places, when Dr. Locke entered.

"Cherry!"

Bob stepped forward. His chest was heaving, his eyes blazing, and his face was burning. His breath came in short gasps.

"Cherry! You are going to be expelled!"

"I am not, sir!"

"What?"

"I am innocent, sir," rang out Bob Cherry's voice. "I am innocent, and I won't be expelled!"

Dr. Locke looked at Bob Cherry. All other eyes in the great hall were fastened upon him, too.

It was a scene such as Greyfriars had never witnessed before.

It had fallen to Dr. Locke to expel fellows once or twice, though it was rare. But never had he experienced anything like this.

Rebellion and resistance in the face of the whole school—a refusal to accept the sentence of expulsion—it was incredible!

But there it was. Bob stood the embodiment of fierce and indignant resistance.

There was an indefinite murmur from the school. They believed Bob Cherry to be guilty; yet they could not fail to admire his pluck. He was putting up a good fight for his honour, at all events.

"Silence!" said Mr. Quelch.

The murmur died away.

The Head was at a loss for words for some moments. He could only look at the panting boy, nonplussed.

But his anger was rising.

"Cherry," he said at last, "this disgraceful conduct will not help you in any way."

"I don't think a chap is called upon to submit to injustice, sir."

"You have been found guilty——"

"I am not guilty!"

"Silence!"

"I am sorry, sir, but I can't allow even you to say that I am guilty when I am nothing of the sort."

There was a gasp from the school. For cool, sublime "cheek," the fellows thought they had never heard this equalled.

"Cherry, it has been proved to my satisfaction, and to the satisfaction of Greyfriars, that you are guilty. The identification by the post mistress completed the proof against you, which was already overwhelming."

"I am innocent!"

"You are adjudged guilty. You will be expelled from Greyfriars——"

"I won't go!"

"What?"

"I won't go!" said Bob undauntedly. "I'm not guilty, and I won't go as if I were guilty. I won't leave Greyfriars unless I'm chucked out by force, and then you will hear from my people about it!"

"Silence!" thundered the Head. "Silence, you insolent boy! I am amazed at your impudence in asserting your innocence in the face of such proof. You have been found guilty of theft, of lying, of acting more like a grown-up criminal than a schoolboy. Robert Cherry, you are expelled from Greyfriars. Go!"

Bob did not move.

The Doctor's hand rose majestically, and pointed to the door.

"Go!" he thundered.

"I refuse to go, sir!"

"Cherry!"

"I am innocent—and I won't go!"

The Head's face flushed.

"The prefects will remove that boy," he said.

Wingate, Courtney, and two or three other prefects made a simultaneous movement towards Bob Cherry. They were looking very angry. Believing Bob to be guilty, like all the rest, they put his conduct down to desperate hardihood, and they were naturally indignant at seeing the authority of their headmaster flouted.

"Come out, you young cad!" muttered Wingate.

Bob sprang back, his fists clenched.

"I won't go!"

"Then you'll be taken, you young fool! Collar him!"

"Hands off!"

"Collar him!"

The prefects rushed upon Bob. The junior hit out desperately, savagely. His blood was up to boiling-point now.

Wingate, the powerful athlete of the Sixth, staggered back from a furious blow, and fell. There was a gasp of amazement from the school. Wingate had been knocked down—by a junior! But the other seniors closed on Bob, and he was grasped by many hands, and whirled away off his feet towards the door.

Wingate staggered up. A struggling crowd of fellows whirled doorwards, Bob Cherry, fighting like a madman, in the midst.

Dr. Locke looked on with a stony face. The masters shouted to the boys to keep their places.

But the excitement was too great. The fellows crowded round the struggling group, exclaiming and shouting.

The hall was the scene of the wildest disorder and uproar now.

Bob Cherry was got to the door at last, and he went sweeping through, in the grasp of the prefects, and the whole bunch of them rolled over in the passage outside.

"Out with him!" gasped Courtney.

With a last big effort, Bob Cherry was whirled out of the house, into the sunshine of the Close, and sent sprawling on the gravel walk.

He lay there for some moments, half-stunned.

He staggered up at last, to see the steps and the doorway crowded with hostile faces, to see scores of fists shaken at him, to hear derisive words and shouts.

"Get out!"

"No thieves wanted!"

"Kick him out!"

Bob tried to find his voice. But only a dry, choking sound came from his throat. His voice was gone.

Twice he tried to speak, but no sound would come, and the yells of scorn and derision were growing louder.

The unhappy lad turned away, and staggered through the sunshine, with scornful shouts ringing behind him.

He was expelled!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Harry Wharton's Task.

HARRY WHARTON stepped out of the train at Friardale Station, and ran across the platform. He had a bag in one hand and a ticket in the other. He threw the ticket to the old porter at the barrier, and dashed out of the station, and the old Friardale porter scratched his grizzled head, and looked after him in slow amazement. Wharton rushed from the quiet little station, and shouted to the driver of the ancient, time-worn hack that stood outside.

"Hack! Driver! Quick!"

The old driver slowly detached himself from a post, and took a pipe out of his mouth.

"Yes, Master Wharton!" he said. "Ack, sir?"

"Yes—quick!"

"Werry good, sir!"

And the old driver rolled towards his old horse, and Wharton jumped into the old hack. Horse and driver and hack seemed as if they had been outside Friardale Station from the Dark Ages, and seemed part and parcel of the slow, sleepy old place. But Wharton was wildly impatient now. The slowness seemed horrible to him. He put his head out of the hack as the driver gathered up his reins in a leisurely manner.

"Quick!" he shouted.

"Yes, Master Harry."

"I'm in an awful hurry! It's fearfully important!"

"Yes, Master Harry."

"Oh, do move!"

"Yes, Master Harry."

And the hack started at a jog-trot, but it was faster than walking, to a lad tired from a long journey. Harry Wharton had travelled fast and far that day. He threw himself back on the old smelly leather cushions, panting. The bag had dropped to the bottom of the hack. Harry Wharton drew a letter from his pocket, and looked at it. It was in Frank Nugent's hand.

"Poor old Bob! Poor old Bob!"

It was Nugent's letter—the letter that had told Harry of the happenings at Greyfriars School; a letter that was full of trust in Bob

Cherry. It had been written before the identification scene in the Form-room.

Of what had happened since, Harry Wharton, of course, knew nothing. But immediately he had received Nugent's letter, he had explained matters to his uncle, and had started off to return to Greyfriars. His only thought was to get back to his chum, and stand by him in this terrible hour.

Travelling, even by express trains that flashed through the shimmering landscape, seemed too slow to Harry. He was wildly impatient to reach the school. What had happened since Nugent wrote?

Had Bob's innocence been proved, or—Wharton hardly dared to think of the alternative. Could circumstantial evidence have proved so strong that Bob had been adjudged guilty?

It seemed impossible; yet such things had happened. Oh, if he were only at Greyfriars to stand by old Bob and help him in this difficulty, and assure him that one chum, at least, still believed him, and would believe in him and be loyal to him to the last, whatever happened!

The hack seemed to crawl, though the old horse was going at a speed that astonished itself. Wharton looked out again.

"Hurry up! Hurry up!"

"Yes, Master Harry!"

The hack rolled on. The green hedges glided by; the grey old tower of the school rose into view among the trees.

Greyfriars at last!

Wharton leaned out of the window. He could see the tower over the trees, and now the great stone gateway, and—what was that in the road?

A schoolboy's box, and a fellow sitting on it in an attitude of utter dejection and exhaustion. It was Bob Cherry!

Harry leaped from the hack without waiting for it to stop, and ran.

"Bob!"

Bob Cherry looked up at the sound of the voice and at the footfalls. He started to his feet, his face flushing deep scarlet.

"Harry!" he stammered.

"Bob, old man, what's happened?"

"Harry!"

Bob made a gesture towards the box.

"Can't you see?" he said bitterly.

"Your box, Bob, and you out here! You—you haven't left the school?" Harry Wharton exclaimed, in dismay.

"I've had to!"

"Not—not—not expelled!"

"Yes."

"Oh, Bob!"

Harry Wharton looked at his chum, the words dying on his lips. Bob Cherry expelled from the school—driven from Greyfriars! It seemed impossible.

"How did it happen, Bob?" he gasped, at last. "What are you so mucked up for? Have you been licked?"

Bob Cherry glanced down at his dusty, disordered clothes.

"I didn't give in," he said. "I made them chuck me out. I was innocent, and I wouldn't stand it. That's how it was."

"And the other chaps—some of them stood by you, surely?" Wharton exclaimed indignantly. "Surely the Remove stood by you, Bob?"

"Mark Linley was the only chap who stood by me," said Bob heavily, "and he was ordered to go to his study for speaking a friendly word. They all think I'm guilty—masters and fellows—everybody but Marky. Oh!"

"Good heavens, Bob!"

"The evidence is strong enough," said Bob drearily. "I dare say you'll believe me guilty, too, when you've heard it."

Wharton shook his head.

"Never!" he said.

"You haven't heard it yet!"

"I don't care! I shall never believe anything against you, Bob, while you tell me that you're innocent."

"I am innocent, Harry!"

"I know you are! This must be some plot. It can't be all circumstantial," said Harry. "Some cad has fixed it up for you—Vernon-Smith, perhaps, or Snoop, or that new chap, Heath. Tell me about it."

The hack was standing in the road, the driver stolidly smoking his pipe. Standing there in the sunny lane, Bob Cherry told his chum what had happened.

Wharton's face went pale as he listened.

He would not allow doubt to creep into his mind. But he could not help seeing how terribly strong was the chain of evidence that had wound itself about the unfortunate junior.

"You see," said Bob miserably, "whoever took the postal order must have nipped in in those few minutes that the study was empty, and I was there a long time. That was the first thing that made the fellows doubtful. Then it turned out that the villain had signed my name on the order, and imitated my handwriting, so that even Nugent didn't know it from the original."

"The scoundrel!"

"Then a chap looking like me cashed the order. You see, there's no doubt that Mrs. Brett was telling the truth, so far as she knew it, when she identified me."

"And she knows you well by sight, Bob?"

"Yes, I can't understand it," said Bob desperately. "She must have mistaken some other chap for me—and there isn't a chap in the Remove much like me—or at Greyfriars at all, for that matter. She made a special point of having noticed my hair—and that's not like any other chap's in the Remove."

And Bob ran his fingers helplessly through the shock of flaxen hair that was now untidier than ever.

Wharton's brows contracted. The whole thing seemed to him a hopeless, horrible puzzle. He had not expected anything like this when he came back to Greyfriars.

"The truth's got to be found out," said Bob. "I've been kicked out of Greyfriars, but the matter doesn't end here. My father won't let it rest. My people won't see me disgraced like this. There will be an inquiry, and the police will have to undertake it. I know my pater well enough. He won't leave a stone unturned!"

"Quite right, too," said Wharton. "And while your pater's doing that, Bob, I'm going to work for you at Greyfriars, and see if I can't find the villain out."

Bob shook his head.

"He's covered up his tracks too well, Harry, whoever he is."

Wharton gritted his teeth.

"I am going to try," he said. "I've got a

pretty clear theory, anyway, of what was done, and the thing is to find out the chap who did it, and bring it home to him, so that he can't wriggle out of it. And you, Bob—"

Bob drew a deep breath.

"I'm going, Harry," he said. "I shall have to go now. But God bless you for what you've said, old chap. It's put new life into me!"

"Take the hack, Bob. You'd better go. But you'll come back to Greyfriars soon—come back with your name cleared—and all the fellows will tell you they're sorry they were such fools as to suspect you."

"I don't care for them," said Bob bitterly. "A chap who can't believe in me can do the other thing! I don't want to speak to any of them again. Let them go. You and Marky are the only two who've stood by me. I shall remember that!"

Wharton did not reply. Bob's bitterness was natural enough under the circumstances; but in the happy day when his innocence should be proved there was no doubt that he would forgive those who had failed him—those to whom the terrible mass of evidence had proved overwhelming.

The box was lifted upon the hack. Bob stepped into the old vehicle, and it turned round in the road. Harry Wharton shook hands with his chum at the door of the hack.

"Good-bye, Bob, old son—and keep your pecker up!" he said. "Remember you've got friends here working for you—working to clear your name."

Bob squeezed his hand.

"Thanks, Harry; thanks, old man! Good-bye!"

Wharton signed to the driver, and the hack rolled away.

Bob Cherry was gone!

Harry Wharton stood in the lane looking after the hack as it rolled slowly off, till it disappeared beyond the turn of the lane, and the sound of the slow rolling wheels died away in the distance.

Harry Wharton's face was pale, and his eyelashes were wet. Bob Cherry was gone—Bob, the frank and free-hearted, the last fellow in the world to do any mean action—

he was gone, in black disgrace, with a stain upon his name, a shadow upon his honour.

Would that shadow ever be lifted?

Harry Wharton was determined that it should. His face was set and resolute as he turned and strode towards the school gates. His holiday was over. He was going back to Greyfriars—to seek out the unknown plotter, to bring the truth to light, to fight for the honour of his chum!

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Major Ramps.

DR. LOCKE was in his study.

He was expecting to receive a visit from Major Cherry, but it was not a state of happy expectation.

To meet a boy's father, and explain to him how his son had been convicted of theft, and expelled with ignominy from the school, could not have been at any time a pleasant task. It could not have been pleasant, even if the father had been convinced of the truth of the charge.

But it was doubly unpleasant in a case like this. For Major Cherry, so far from being convinced of the truth of the charge, scouted the mere idea of it. Any evidence which told against Bob was, in his eyes, no evidence at all.

It was useless to attempt to convince a man in that frame of mind. The Head looked forward to the interview with great uneasiness.

Trotter had orders to show the visitor in the moment he arrived, and the sound of wheels in the Close warned the Head that his visitor was coming.

He coughed, shifted a little in his chair, and coughed again.

The door opened.

"Major Cherry!"

The major came in. He was so stout and powerful, and red-faced, and excited, that he seemed to breathe up, as it were, all the atmosphere in the room, and leave the unfortunate doctor gasping.

Dr. Locke rose to his feet.

"Good-afternoon, major—"

The major waved his hand.

"I have not come here for polite formalities, sir," he said, in a voice that could be distinctly heard at the end of the passage; "I have come here to speak about the flagrant wrong and injustice that has been inflicted upon my boy, sir!"

"My dear sir——"

"And to speak in plain language, by Jove, sir!"

"Pray be seated."

"I decline to be seated," said the major. "I have but little to say, sir, and that will soon be said. A charge has been trumped up against my son——"

"Sir!"

But the Head's most terrifying frown had no effect whatever upon the major.

He struck the table with his fist.

"I repeat it!" he roared. "A charge has been trumped up against my son. I demand to know the particulars of that charge, sir, so that I can dash it to pieces, sir!"

"If you will be calm——"

"Calm!" roared the major. "Do you expect a father to be calm, sir, when his son is branded as a thief, sir, and driven from school, sir? Calm! I am quite calm."

And the major made that statement in a voice that was far from being evidence of calmness.

"My dear major——"

"I demand to know the particulars of this disgraceful business, sir. By Jove, sir!"

"I am perfectly ready to explain, Major Cherry," said the Head. "Surely you must know that this whole occurrence is as painful to me as it can be to anyone. You do not imagine that I decided lightly, and without careful consideration, that your son was guilty of the charge made against him."

"He was not guilty!"

"The evidence was crushing."

The major snapped his fingers.

"Bah! That for the evidence. But let me hear this precious evidence. I will dash it to pieces, by Jove, sir!"

"Very well," said the Head, with a sigh.

"In the first place, a postal-order was missing from the pocket of a jacket belonging to Nugent, of the Remove—your son's form. Your son was in the study at the time it dis-

appeared—it could only have been taken at a certain period—and during that period of twenty minutes, your son was in the study for a quarter of an hour, leaving only five minutes in which a possible thief might have entered and taken the order."

"Five minutes would have been enough, sir—five seconds, by Jove, sir!"

"Very well. The next point is, that the order was filled in to R. Cherry, the name of the payee happening to be left blank before, and was signed 'R. Cherry' by the person who presented it for payment."

"I suppose it is not the first time that a forgery has been committed?"

"The post-mistress at Friardale Post Office, a most respectable lady, whose statement is unimpeachable, has positively identified Robert Cherry as the boy who cashed the postal-order."

"Stuff!"

"Cherry was placed in a row with the whole of his Form, and the post-mistress picked him out at once, without the slightest hesitation."

And the Head leaned back in his chair, as if he had thoroughly disposed of the matter now. But the veteran of Bengal was not so easily disposed of.

His white moustache curled up as he sneered.

"Do you call that evidence?" he demanded.

"I call it complete and incontrovertible evidence," said Dr. Locke tartly. "In a law-court, no further evidence would be wanted."

"Very well, sir. I take it that the governors of Greyfriars uphold you in the action you have taken."

"Unquestionably. I consulted with the chief governor before expelling Cherry."

"Very well. They will take the consequences."

The Head looked at him.

"The consequences? I do not understand you, sir. The matter is closed now, and ended."

"Closed! Ended!" The major trembled with rage. "Closed! Ended! And my son's career is closed and ended, I suppose? He is to sit down quietly under the imputation

of being a thief, and to have his character blackened for ever. You will shortly learn, sir, that the matter is not closed; that it is by no means ended. My solicitors are already preparing to take action, sir."

"Your—your solicitors?" stammered the Head.

"Yes, sir. You and the governors of this school will be called upon to face an action for libel, sir, for defamation of character."

Dr. Locke sank back into his seat.

"An action! Libel!"

"Yes, sir," thundered the major. "And unless you can prove your charge against my boy, sir—prove it up to the hilt, you will have to pay damages, sir—heavy damages—and be held up to the scorn and contempt of all England, sir."

"Good heavens!"

"That is what you have to prepare for, sir; that is the warning I have to give you," the major roared.

And he stamped out of the room, and closed the door with a bang that rang through the school.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER

A Clue at Last.

HARRY WHARTON was in No. 1 Study doing his preparation. Frank Nugent shared that study with him. Just lately Nugent had kept out of the study a great deal; relations had been a little strained. Nugent had his tea with John Bull as a rule, and did his prep. in Bull's study.

Harry Wharton was not alone, however. Mark Linley was with him. Linley properly belonged to Heath's study; but he could not stand Heath, and Wharton was glad of the Lancashire lad's company.

Wharton looked up with a pleasant expression as Nugent came in. The breach had been widening between them, owing to the difference of opinion over the case of Bob Cherry, much against Harry's wish. He could not give up his own belief in Bob to please anybody; but he could not induce Nugent to share that belief.

"Hallo, Franky!" he exclaimed. "Coming to do your prep.?"

Nugent shook his head.

"No. I've got news for you."

Wharton jumped up.

"About Bob?"

"Yes."

"Have they discovered anything?"

"No," growled Frank, "they haven't! What is there to discover?"

"Proof of his innocence."

"Rats!"

"Look here, Frank—"

"Oh, don't let's argue about that!" Nugent exclaimed impatiently. "We shall only quarrel. Let's agree to differ."

"Very well. But what's the news?"

"Cherry's people are beginning an action against Dr. Locke and the governors of Greyfriars."

"My hat!"

"The whole blessed case is going to be dragged through the Law Courts," said Frank. "Dr. Locke will have to appear and give evidence. They'll have the head governor up, too, and most likely I shall have to go, as it was my postal-order that was stolen. Nice, isn't it, for a decent school?"

"It's rotten!"

"I should think you'd drop backing up that blessed family now," said Nugent.

Wharton shook his head.

"No fear," he replied. "It's rotten, certainly; but Major Cherry isn't to blame. If I were a father, and my son were charged as Bob has been, I'd fight tooth and nail to clear him, and carry the case on to the very end, and spend every blessed penny I'd got on it."

"That's all very well, if the chap were innocent."

"Well, his father believes he's innocent, at all events, and he's bound to act on that belief," said Mark.

Nugent sniffed.

"I'm sick of the whole bizney," he said. "It would have been much more decent of the Cherry family if they had shut up about it, and not dragged their own name, and the name of Greyfriars through the mire."

"I can't agree with you, Frank," said Harry. "Bob's good name and his whole career are at stake. After being expelled from Greyfriars on a charge like that, he wouldn't be admitted to

any decent school. You can't expect his people to take it lying down. I know mine wouldn't."

"Oh, rats!"

"Now, look here," said Harry quietly. "Why won't you talk the matter over sensibly, Frank, and let's see if we can get to the truth of it?"

"We've got to the truth of it, and all the talk in the world won't make any difference," said Nugent heatedly.

"I was away from Greyfriars at the time," said Wharton. "If I had been here, I think I should have looked into it somehow, and upset it. Nobody seems to have tried to take up Bob's point of view, except Mark here."

"And I couldn't find out anything to help Bob," said the Lancashire lad.

"I stood by Bob as long as I could," said Nugent doggedly. "You can't expect a chap to stand by a proved thief."

"Look here, Frank, why should Bob have stolen your postal-order?" said Wharton earnestly. "If he'd been so badly in want of money you'd have lent it to him if he'd asked you—or even given it to him."

"He couldn't very well ask that, I suppose."

"Better than stealing it, I should think. That would be a last resource even with a dishonest chap, and you know Bob wasn't that."

"He's proved that he was."

"I think he had a right to expect more faith from you, Frank. I don't believe that he would ever have doubted you."

"He would never have had any reason to," said Frank tartly.

"I believe you could help me get at the truth, if you would," said Wharton. "So far as I can see, the case concentrates on this point. You hung your jacket up in this study at twenty-five minutes to one, and left it, and Bob came in at about twenty to one, and stayed in here. He was still here when you looked in your pocket for the postal-order and found that it was missing. But it would have been perfectly easy for anybody to nip in during the five minutes the study was empty."

"Easy—not likely, though."

"Did you see anybody hanging about the study when you left it, Frank?"

"There were several fellows in the passage."

"Where were you going at the time?"

"I was going down to the cricket."

"Then I suppose most of the fellows in the passage were going out, too?" Harry Wharton asked.

"I suppose so," said Nugent impatiently. "What the dickens are you getting at?"

"Patience, a minute. I think I am getting at something," said Wharton. "When you came into this study, and went out again in a blazer, the chaps in the passage would naturally know that you had left your jacket here."

"Yes, if they noticed me at all. I don't suppose they would."

"Most of the Remove had seen you put the postal-order in your jacket pocket along with Todd's letter?"

"Yes, most of the Form had been standing round, listening to my reading Todd's letter out," said Nugent.

"Good! Then we may take it that all the fellows in the passage knew that the postal-order was in your pocket, and that your jacket was hanging up here, with nobody in the study?"

Nugent yawned.

"Oh, I suppose so," he said.

"Most of the fellows, too, would be going down to the cricket," said Harry. "That would leave the passage empty?"

"Well?"

"Unless there was some chap who didn't go down to the cricket," said Wharton.

Nugent started a little.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Take the fellows who don't play cricket," went on Harry steadily. "Take, say, Bunter, and Snoop, and Heath, and Skinner. Any one of those, you will admit, was much more likely to steal the postal-order than old Bob was."

"I should have said so then, of course. I've changed my opinion since. As for Bunter, Fish suggested him first of all, and we investigated, and Mrs. Mimble proved that he had been in the tuck-shop all the time."

"Leave out Bunter, then. Did you see Snoop, or Skinner, or Heath about the passage on that occasion, or any other fellow of the same style?"

"I saw Heath."

Wharton gave a jump.

He had hoped to hear something of this sort—he had hoped for a clue. But he had not expected instant success—he had not dared to expect it.

"Heath!" he repeated.

"Yes," said Nugent irritably. "I remember Heath was in the passage. I remember seeing him there for a moment. I think he was going to his own study. But I suppose even Heath could be in the passage without intending to burgle a chap's study."

"Heath didn't go to the cricket-ground?"

"You know he doesn't play cricket."

"But did he come to look on?"

"So far as I remember, he didn't."

"Then he probably remained up here while all the other fellows were out."

Nugent seemed a little struck by this remark. He looked thoughtful.

"Well, it's quite possible," he said; "but I don't see——"

"And as the study was quite empty for five minutes before Bob Cherry came in, Heath had every opportunity, if he wanted, of nipping in and taking the postal-order?"

"I suppose he had the opportunity; so had many others, if they had chosen to take it," said Nugent.

"I'm speaking of Heath now. Heath is a cad—a rotten cad, mean enough for anything, and he had a special feud with Bob Cherry. Bob licked him for tormenting Mrs. Kebble's cat, and we all know that Heath said he would make him suffer for it."

"Oh, fellows say those things, and forget all about them."

"Heath isn't the chap to forget a grudge."

Nugent made an impatient gesture.

"It seems to me that you're willing to suspect anybody of anything rather than Bob," he said. "You can't suspect Bob of theft; but you're ready to suspect Heath of theft, forgery, and impersonation without a shred of evidence."

"He's that kind of chap."

"Oh, rot!"

Wharton flushed.

"Well, I can't say you're very civil about it," he exclaimed. "I should have thought

you'd be glad of a chance of helping to clear Bob."

"You can't clear a guilty chap."

"I tell you——"

"And I tell you——"

"Look here——"

"Rats! I——"

"No good quarrelling about it," Mark Linley suggested quietly. "We shall get at the truth some time; and I'm sure that's what we all want."

"I'm not going to have Wharton saying that I've gone back on a friend, and treated him badly," said Nugent angrily. "I should have stood by Cherry if he had been innocent. Wharton's practically accusing me of slandering a chap."

"You've made a mistake."

"Yes; all the school has made a mistake and you two are in the right," said Nugent savagely. "You two know all about it; and Dr. Locke and all the masters and all the fellows have made fools of themselves!"

"I don't say that——"

"Yes, you do. And I've had enough of it! I don't want to hear Bob Cherry's name again."

And Frank Nugent flung out of the study, and slammed the door behind him, with a slam that rang the length of the Remove passage.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Cash in Advance.

HEATH was busy in his study in the Remove passage.

Heath's occupation was a peculiar one, and would have surprised the fellows if they had seen him engaged as he was.

He stood in the study looking round him. There was not a corner of the room he had not diligently searched, and not for the first time, either. Every day, perhaps twice in a day, Heath had been searching through his study.

More than once a fellow looking in from the corridor had found him so occupied, and wondered.

Heath had snappishly explained that he had lost a letter from his father—a letter containing a remittance.



"I am innocent, sir," rang out Bob Cherry's voice. "I am innocent, and I won't be expelled!" (See page 331.)

If that was the case, he had certainly not found it. His long and frequent searches of the study had led to nothing.

He knew, he realised, that the searching was in vain. What he was seeking could not be in any nook or cranny of the room. Yet, in desperation, he had searched again and again. It might have been pushed into some nook—it might have been concealed by chance between the leaves of a volume; there was a chance. But every fresh search had the same result.

"Hang it! Hang it! Where can it be? I know I didn't destroy it—I'm certain not! Yet it must be in the study, if I didn't! Where can it be? Suppose somebody else got hold of it?"

He seemed to turn sick at the thought.

The door opened, and Heath turned round furiously. The fat face of Billy Bunter glim-

mered in from the passage, and Bunter blinked at the new junior through his big spectacles.

"I say, Heath——"

"Get out!" shouted Heath. "Get out, you fat ead! What are you spying here for?"

Bunter was one of the few fellows in the Remove of whom Heath was not afraid. Heath clenched his hands and advanced towards him as he spoke.

"I—I say, hold on!" said Bunter. "I only want to speak to you! What makes you think I'm spying? What is there to spy on?"

Heath checked himself. His excitement, apparently about nothing, was the best way to cause suspicion. He knew that.

"I—I—— What do you want?" he snapped.

"Have you found it yet?"

"I—I haven't been looking for anything."

Bunter grinned.

"I've been watching you through the keyhole for the last five minutes, and I heard what you said to yourself, too," he replied.

"You—you cad!"

"I've watched you half a dozen times before, if you come to that," said Bunter. "And I've heard Micky Desmond mention about hearing you rummaging over the room—his study is next, you know—and Bulstrode and Skinner have both found you turning the study out at different times."

"I've been looking for a letter from my father."

"Rats!"

Heath tried to recover his nerve. His little evil eyes gleamed very evilly at Bunter.

"What do you mean, you cad?" he asked.

"You're not looking for a letter," said Bunter coolly. "You're looking for a sheet of foolscap."

Again Heath's face grew deadly white.

"How do you know?"

"Because I've got it."

Heath sprang up.

"You've got it!" he shouted.

"Yes."

Heath did not speak again. He made a rush straight at Bunter. The fat junior skipped round the table.

"Hold on, you ass!" he roared. "I haven't got it with me! You don't think I should be idiot enough to bring it here, do you?"

"Oh!" Heath paused. "Oh! Where is it then?"

"Where you won't find it," said Bunter breathlessly. "And if you go for me again, I'll jolly well hand it over to Wingate!"

"You—you young villain!"

"I know which is the villain of us two," said Bunter, with a sneer. "I haven't sat down in my study making copies of a chap's signature—"

"Silence!"

"Well, you shut up, then," said Bunter. "Of course, I dare say you were only amusing yourself, whiling away the time, as it were, by scrawling 'R. Cherry' over a sheet of paper—"

"Hold your tongue!"

"But it would look jolly suspicious if anybody saw the paper. Don't you think so?" said Bunter, with a grin of enjoyment as he blinked at the trembling cad of the Remove.

"It—it was only a pastime," said Heath, and his voice trembled and stuttered. "I—I—. But how did you get hold of the paper?"

Bunter chuckled.

"I found it."

"You stole it, you mean," Heath hissed. "I hid it under a heap of foolscap on my table, when I was called away suddenly; and I always lock my study door and take the key out when I go."

"You see, you're not half so deep as you think," grinned Bunter. "And you're new to Greyfriars, too. These two studies—Nos. 13 and 14, are new rooms, built out of old lumber-rooms that used to be at the end of the passage. The same chap put the locks on, and he put on the same pattern locks. I was in No. 14 at one time, and I had a key. That key fits this lock as well as the lock in No. 14."

"And—and you unlocked my door while I was out?"

"You see, I wondered why you locked it," Bunter explained. "I naturally suspected that you were having feeds here on your own, and you didn't want to share out. Under the circumstances, I thought I was entitled to look in the cupboard. That's why I came in. I didn't know you were amusing yourself by practising forgery."

Heath panted.

"I—I—"

"When I found there wasn't any grub, I just investigated matters," Bunter went on. "And I found the sheet of paper. As Bob Cherry had been expelled that same day, it seemed to me very odd that there should be a sheet of paper in this study covered over with 'R. Cherry,' in handwriting very like his—like yours at the top of the page, and getting more and more like his towards the bottom."

"Oh!"

"And I shoved it in my pocket," said Bunter cheerfully. "You see, I didn't quite know what to make of it, but I thought it might be useful. Since then, I've kept my

eyes open. When I found that you've been searching up and down the study ever since, again and again, it's not hard to guess what paper you're looking for."

Heath gave a groan.

"Of course that—that had nothing whatever to do with the case against Bob Cherry," he said.

"Of course not," agreed Bunter, with a malicious grin.

"Why haven't you said anything about it before?" said Heath slowly.

"Because"—Bunter blinked at him across the table—"you're such a cunning hound. I didn't know what to make of it at first; and when I thought it over afterwards, I was afraid to do anything. I knew you were a born criminal, and I was afraid you might be able to fix it on me if I showed it."

Heath's eyes gleamed.

"And I could—and would—and will!" he said. "You've got no proof that you found the paper in my study. I'll swear I've never seen it. My hat! I'll make you suffer if you don't give it up! I'll make out that you've written it yourself to extort money from me!"

"Just exactly what I thought," said Bunter. "I knew you'd work up something like that, and get me served in the same way as Bob Cherry. And as lots of fellows have a prejudice against me, they'd be sooner down on me than they were on Bob Cherry. Two or three fellows I've had little loans from because—because I knew little things about them, would come forward to speak against me. You rotter, I could see myself being sacked from the school!"

"You'll see it yet, unless——"

"Hold on," said Bunter coolly. "You've forgotten that circumstances have changed now. Major Cherry is bringing an action against the governors of Greyfriars."

"What about it?"

"I rather think his lawyers would be glad of some evidence," said Bunter. "It's all different now. If I send that paper to Messrs. Sharpe & Keene, and offer to give evidence about finding it here, I think that will settle you. You won't be able to stand up in a court of law, on your oath, and lie as you

would in the Head's study. And those lawyers are so jolly sharp, they'd bowl you out in no time, and make you give yourself away. You know you would! You know you daren't stand up before a lawyer and a judge and commit perjury."

Heath's lips trembled.

He did know it—he knew it only too well. He could lie himself out of a scrape at Greyfriars, but the thought of the crowded court, the wigged judge, the stern-eyed, examining lawyer, made him tremble and feel sick.

"You young hound!" he muttered. "What will you take for the paper?"

Bunter chuckled.

"So you're coming to terms?" he asked.

"Yes, of course. I—I was only writing that paper for fun," stammered Heath. "I—I wanted to see whether it was possible to—to copy a signature, because—because Linley was saying that that was what had been done. It was only in fun, and it was after—after what happened about the postal-order."

"You can tell that to a judge and jury if you like."

"What will you take for it?"

"A sovereign," said Bunter.

"Bring it here, and——"

Bunter laughed.

"No fear! Cash in advance."

"I won't! I——"

"Very well! Will you lend me a stamp?"

"A stamp!" said Heath, staring. "What for?"

"To stamp my letter to Mr. Sharpe."

Heath caught his breath.

"Here's the sovereign," he said. "Now bring me the paper immediately, Bunter."

And Billy Bunter quitted the study with a sovereign in his waistcoat-pocket. He left Heath shaking and trembling like one with the ague. There was a smile of fat satisfaction on Bunter's face. He knew that Heath was well off, and he anticipated that the new junior would prove a regular horn of plenty for him now—at all events, so long as the case of Bob Cherry should occupy the courts. As for the utter baseness of what he was doing, Billy Bunter did not seem to realise that at all.

Bunter's idea was to avoid all trouble for

himself, and make as good a thing for himself as he could. It did not seem to occur to him that there were any other considerations in the matter at all.

In excuse for the fat junior, it must be said that he was too dense and too stupid to know really what was right and what was wrong, and that he generally preserved the highest possible opinion of himself through his shadiest adventures.

Bunter did not go to his study for the paper now. He quitted the School House, and headed for the tuck-shop.

Heath remained in his room, waiting for the return of the fat junior, but waiting in vain. Billy Bunter was far too busy to think of returning, and he had nothing to return for. For he had no more idea of really handing the incriminating paper to Heath than he had of paying his debts with the sovereign he had extracted from the cad of the Remove.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

On the Track.

HARRY WHARTON rose and put his books away, with a determined frown upon his face. He had been thinking over the mystery instead of getting his work done, but he could not help it.

The affair of Bob Cherry was in his mind all the time; he could not get rid of it. His promise to Bob to work hard to clear his name at Greyfriars was never out of his thoughts. And as yet, in spite of the time that had elapsed, he had done nothing—there seemed to be nothing to be done. Yet there must be some way of penetrating the veil of mystery that hung over the business of the stolen postal order. One clue he had obtained from Frank Nugent—extracting it from him, as it were, against his will—the fact that Esau Heath had been near Study No. 1 when the postal order was stolen. But even before that, his suspicions had turned upon Heath.

Mark Linley looked up from his *Anabasis*.

"Going down?" he asked.

"Yes, and out."

"Shall I come?"

"Yes, rather. I'm going to the post-office."

"About Bob?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Brett greeted the juniors very civilly in the little grocery post-office of Friardale. The kind old lady regretted very much the part she had taken in the downfall of Bob Cherry, but she had been bound to speak the truth, or what appeared to her to be the truth.

"Good-afternoon, Master Wharton!" she said.

"Good-afternoon, Mrs. Brett! I want to speak to you about that affair," Wharton said abruptly. "Can you give me a few minutes?"

The good lady looked distressed.

"Certainly, Master Wharton! I'm very, very sorry about that, indeed I am, but I could only tell the headmaster what I knew, couldn't I?"

"Of course," said Harry. "I don't blame you. But I think there must have been a mistake in the identity, Mrs. Brett."

The post-mistress shook her head.

"It was Master Cherry sure enough," she said. "I remember him specially by his hair—flaxen colour, and bunched upon his forehead. There was no other boy in all those I saw who had hair anything like it."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Yes, I know that sounded jolly convincing at the time," he remarked, "but since then it's occurred to us, Mrs. Brett, that the chap may have been disguised."

"Disguised, Master Wharton?"

"Yes. I believe it was in the dusk when he came in?"

"Yes, it was getting dusky."

"The shop hadn't been lighted then?"

"No, not for another ten minutes."

Wharton looked at Mark with satisfaction. The facts were certainly working out to fit his theory. An impersonator would certainly choose the half-light to effect his purpose, if he possibly could. Many little points that might be visible in the daylight, or in the lamplight, might escape observation in the dark.

"But it was Master Cherry," the post-mistress added.

"He was just Cherry's size?" asked Wharton.

"I did not notice particularly, of course; but he was a very big lad for a junior boy."

"So is Heath!" murmured Mark.

"How was he dressed?" asked Harry.

"In Etons, with a cap."

"Cap on the back of his head, I suppose, and a mop of hair sticking out under it?" Wharton asked.

The post-mistress smiled.

"Yes, Master Wharton."

"Well, that was Bob's style, at all events. Did he talk much?"

"No: he seemed to have a slight cold."

Wharton started eagerly.

"He had a cold!" he shouted.

"He did not say so, Master Wharton, but he mumbled a great deal, and spoke very little, and kept his handkerchief over his mouth."

"My hat!"

Wharton's eyes were blazing now. His theory was correct, beyond a doubt. For a flaxen wig, and a touch of charcoal on the eyebrows would be a sufficient disguise, so long as the lower part of the face was covered. Heath's thin, spiteful mouth and sharp chin did not resemble Bob Cherry's in the least, and could hardly be made to do so. But the device of affecting to have a cold had covered up all that.

"Bob never had a cold," said Mark.

"Didn't he take the handkerchief away from his face all the time, Mrs. Brett?" asked Harry.

"I think not, sir; but he was only in here a minute," said Mrs. Brett. "He seemed to be in rather a hurry to get the money, and I served him at once."

"Did you notice his necktie?" asked Harry.

Mrs. Brett made an effort to remember.

"Yes, it was a bright blue one," she said.

Wharton nodded. The impersonator had been as thorough as he could. Bob Cherry, in spite of the rule at Greyfriars that the fellows should dress very quietly, had a taste for flaming neckties, which he frequently gratified. The unruly flaxen hair and the bright blue necktie had been quite enough to identify Bob.

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Brett," said Harry. "I suppose, now, you will admit that it was possible, at least, that another chap about Cherry's size may have impersonated him."

"I—I suppose it's possible, Master Wharton. I never thought of such a thing till this minute."

"That's all right. Thank you very much!"

And the two juniors quitted the village post-office.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

The Unknown.

MARK LINLEY looked inquiringly at his companion as they came out into the old High Street of Friardale, and stopped under the big elm outside the post-office.

"What's the next move?" he asked.

"This way," said Harry. They walked down the street. "Look here," Wharton went on abruptly, "suppose a chap at Greyfriars made up his mind to play this trick, what do you think would be his first move?"

"To get the disguise, I suppose."

"Exactly. A flaxen wig to look like Bob's would be easy to pick up at any costumier's, of course; but it's not the thing a fellow would have about the house ready. The rascal would have to get it—and where would he get it? We've got a lot of props. among our amateur theatrical things at Greyfriars, but not a wig of that sort. He would have to get it outside the school."

"That's so."

"It would be safest to have it from London by post, certainly; but there couldn't have been time for that. The postal-order was cashed on the evening of the day that it was stolen, I understand?"

"Yes, the same evening."

"Then the chap must have got his flaxen mop close at hand. There's a costumier's in Friardale—old Moses, who runs the second-hand clothes shop, does the costume business, too. He keeps things for the fancy-dress balls, and so on, that are given in the neighbourhood. Unless the chap got the wig there, I don't see where he could have got it. He might have gone over to Courtfield, but if we draw Moses blank, we can go over to Courtfield, too, and see."

"Good!"

"Here's Moses' place. Come on!"

A stout little gentleman of the Hebrew

THE
GREYFRIARS GALLERY
IN VERSE

By Dick Penfold



No. 12: George Wingate



Who stands for what is right and true,
A sportsman, keen to dare and do?
A chap whose actions are true blue?

Old Wingate!

Who leads his stalwarts on the field,
Resolved to fight, and not to yield?
Who ever stands our strength and shield?

Old Wingate!

Who, in the dim and distant past,
By Gerald Loder was surpassed?
A startling change—which didn't last!

Old Wingate!

Who tucks us in our little beds,
And piles up pillows round our heads,
Then softly from our presence treads?

Old Wingate!

Who keeps a nasty-looking cane,
Which gives the victim so much pain
He feels he can't sit down again?

Old Wingate!

Who, though he sometimes gives us "gyp,"
Is qualified to steer our ship?
So give three cheers—and let 'em rip

For Wingate!

persuasion, with a fat, good-natured face, greeted the juniors as they entered. When the amateur dramatic fever had been strong in the Remove at Greyfriars, Harry Wharton & Co. had been good customers of Mr. Moses, and he was glad to see them.

"Goot afternoons, shentelmens!" said Mr. Moses, rubbing his hands. "Vat can I do for you this afternoons, shents?"

"It's about that wig," said Harry.

Mark Linley glanced at him. Wharton was taking a bold line.

"That wig?" repeated Mr. Moses.

"Yes—you remember a flaxen-coloured wig you sold to a Greyfriars chap last week," said Wharton.

Mr. Moses nodded his head.

"My gootness!" he said. "Is not the young shentelman satisfied with that wig? I sell it to him at less than cost price, my gootness!"

Wharton's eyes glittered.

His shot had struck home.

A Greyfriars fellow had purchased a flaxen wig at Mr. Moses' place the previous week. Matters were going splendidly.

"I tink that wig was splendid," said Mr. Moses, "and I am sure that the young shent took enough of my time trying on every wig in the place, and complaining all the time if it was not curly enough. And he would have nozzing but that particular colour—no ozzzer colour would suit him in the least. My gootness!"

"Have you any more wigs like it?" Harry asked.

"I have vun more," said Mr. Moses, "but not so good—not so curly. Here it is."

He brought out a wig on his dusty counter. Wharton took off his cap, and put the wig on his head, and looked at it in the dusty, cracked mirror.

The resemblance it gave him to Bob Cherry was amazing.

He put up his handkerchief to his face, and covered his mouth and nose, and then only his eyes remained to show that he was Harry Wharton and not Bob Cherry.

"Good!" said Mark.

Mr. Moses watched them in some surprise.

"Is not the young shent satisfied with the

wig?" he asked. "I sell it to him very cheap, as low as cost price, to please a customer."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Harry. "The chap I'm speaking of—by the way, what was the name of your customer?"

"He gave me no name, sir."

"He was a junior?"

"About your own age, Master Wharton."

"H'm!" said Harry. "Was he a fellow

you knew well—one of our set, I mean?"

Mr. Moses shook his head.

"No, sir, I had never seen him before, but I knew that he came from the school, of course. He had a Greyfriars cap."

"Had he a thin mouth, with a sort of spiteful look?"

Mr. Moses grinned.

"I don't know, Master Wharton. I think he had a cold, for he kept his mouth covered with a handkerchief."

"Good!"

"You do not want the wig?" Mr. Moses asked, as Wharton laid it on the counter.

"Thank you, no; as a matter of fact, we want to find who it was bought that wig of you," said Harry frankly. "There's been a

rotten trick played, and we want to get at the chap. Would you know him again?"

Mr. Moses hesitated.

"I think so," he said. "Yes, perhaps, I suppose. But he keep his mouth cover all the time, you see. Perhaps he not want me to know him."

"Very likely," said Wharton drily. "What day was it?"

"Friday."

"In the afternoon or evening?"

"In the afternoon."

"How did he take the wig away—in a parcel?"

"No, in a bag," said Mr. Moses—"a bag with a lock and key, and he was very careful to lock the bag, I remember."

"Thank you very much."

"Not at all, young

shents, always pleathed to see you and do bithneth," said Mr. Moses, with a wave of his hand.

The chums could not contain their satisfaction as they went into the street again. Harry Wharton had thought out the matter thoroughly, and he had decided upon this line of investigation—and it was yielding unexpected results.

"It's splendid," said Mark.



The major struck the table with his fist. "A charge has been trumped up against my son," he said. "I demand to know the particulars of that charge, sir, so that I can dash it to pieces!" (See page 335.)

"Gorgeous," said Harry. "I wonder what the Head would say if he knew that a Greyfriars chap had bought a wig in Friardale, just like old Bob's mop, on the afternoon of the day the postal-order was cashed."

"It would make a difference."

"Yes, rather; but we've got to get the proof complete before we talk," said Harry. "I feel certain it was Heath—but whether it was Heath or not, we've got to unearth that wig. The question is, where is it? A wig isn't so jolly easy to get rid of, you know. It would make a smother burning it in his study, and there's nowhere else he could burn it, so we can take it, I think, that it isn't burnt. There's the value of it, too; and Heath, though he has plenty of money, is the meanest rotter in Greyfriars, and awfully keen after getting value for his money. I should say he's keeping the wig."

"Then if we can find it——"

"That ought to settle him. If he's keeping the wig, we'll find it; if he's hidden it, we'll rout it out. If it's destroyed, that will be a bit of a set-back; but I don't suppose it is."

Mark nodded cheerfully.

"Even then we can have Mr. Moses down to see Heath, and see if he's the chap that bought the wig," he said. "Heath can explain then what he bought it for, and what he's done with it."

Wharton laughed.

"Yes, we can have a new identification scene, with Heath in the principal part instead of Bob Cherry. Ha, ha, ha!"

In much more cheerful spirits than of late, the two juniors entered the gates of Greyfriars. There seemed to be some little excitement going on in the direction of the school shop in the corner behind the elms, and they turned in that direction. Nugent minor, of the Second Form, and Tubb, of the Third, met them, both the fags eating jam tarts from paper bags under their arms. Nugent minor greeted them with a jammy grin, and jerked his thumb in the direction of the tuck-shop.

"Better go and have your whack," he said.

"What's happening, Dicky?"

"Bunter's in funds."

"Bunter!"

"Yes. His postal order's come at last, and

he's standing jam tarts to all the Remove," said Dicky Nugent.

And he marched off munching jam tarts.

THE TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

Above Board.

PREP. was over, but Harry Wharton and Mark Linley were still in Study No. 1. The feeling against them in the Remove was so strong that they did not care to go down to the common-room. And Harry Wharton's plan with regard to a search for the flaxen wig remained to be carried out. Harry was very much exercised in his mind over that matter. To find the wig, if it was hidden in Heath's quarters, meant a search of Study No. 13. Heath, of course, would oppose the search, if he knew of it. Indeed, the mere suggestion of it would make him resort to any desperate measures to destroy the wig, if it was still in existence. It must be done without his knowledge—but the idea of searching through a fellow's quarters without his knowledge was utterly repugnant to both Wharton and Linley.

"It's rotten!" said Wharton restlessly. "It seems such an utterly caddish thing to do, to look through a chap's room when he's away."

Mark nodded.

"I don't like the idea any more than you do," he said. "It's horrible—it seems like spying—it's the kind of thing Heath himself does; and we despise him for it."

"The question is, whether the end justifies the means," said Wharton. "We have jolly good reason to suspect that Heath impersonated Bob——"

"True."

"If he did, the wig would be the most incriminating evidence possible, and it ought to be found."

"True again."

"And it can only be found by searching for it without Heath knowing what we're up to."

"Quite so."

"And so it comes to this, that we must sneak into a chap's room when he's not there, and look through his belongings like a pair of

blessed thieves," said Harry, biting his lip. "They say that the end justifies the means—and it really seems fair to use any method of clearing Bob. But——"

"But there's a but," said Mark, with a rueful smile. "I don't feel as if we ought to do it. Wharton, and that's a fact."

"Yet for so jolly good a purpose——"

"I don't want to preach," said the Lancashire lad in his quiet way. "But we are told in the Good Book that we should not do evil that good may come of it."

"Quite right. If people generally started doing rotten things with good intentions, I suppose it wouldn't do."

"It wouldn't."

"I suppose a blessed detective would do it—but then, we're not blessed detectives," said Harry restlessly. "We can't do it."

"I'm afraid we can't."

"But we've got to find the wig. We've got to look for it. The only thing is to do it openly and above board in an honest way."

"I suppose so. That will place Heath on his guard at once."

"It can't be helped. It's no good thinking we can do mean things with good intentions," said Harry. "Better be open about it. We'll tell Heath just what we're going to do, and wring his neck if he tries to stop us."

Mark laughed.

"Very well."

"We'll jolly well have it out before all the Form, too," said Harry, his eyes flashing. "They shan't be able to accuse us of being underhanded."

"Good!"

They left the study. Heath's study was dark, so he was evidently not there. The chums went down into the junior common-room. It was crowded with fellows chatting before going to bed.

Most of them looked round when Wharton and Linley came in. The two were coming to be very marked personages in the Greyfriars Remove.

"Here they come, the champions of injured innocence!" sang out Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look out for your pockets!" said someone.

And there was a fresh roar of laughter.

Wharton turned red, but took no notice of the taunt. He recognised Heath's voice, but it was not his cue to quarrel with the cad of Greyfriars just then.

"Keep near the door, in case he tries to bolt, Marky," he whispered. "He may dodge off to the study to get the wig, if it's there, when I begin."

"What-ho!" said Mark.

The Lancashire lad leaned on the doorpost in a careless attitude, but quite ready to dispute Heath's passage if he tried to get out. The cad of the school was not likely to be able to pass the sturdy lad from Lancashire.

Wharton looked round at the hostile, mocking faces.

"I have a theory——" he began.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A theory that a fellow impersonated Bob Cherry in cashing the postal order at the post office in Friardale——"

Heath burst into a scornful laugh.

"So that's it, is it?" he exclaimed. "And you're going to accuse me of having passed myself off as Bob Cherry?"

"What rot!" said Bulstrode.

"Utter rot!" said Hazeldene. "Why, Heath isn't anything at all like Bob Cherry. He's about the same size, only he's got short, dark hair, and you all remember Bob Cherry's light-coloured mop."

"Yes, rather!"

"If you haven't anything better than that to suggest, Wharton, you'd better shut up," said Vernon-Smith. "I suppose you got that idea out of some blessed newspaper serial story?"

"I thought it out," said Harry. "I knew Bob didn't cash the postal order, so I worked it out that he had been impersonated."

"Rats!"

"But Heath isn't in the least like Bob Cherry," said Bulstrode. "I really think you must be right off your rocker to suspect such a thing!"

"Not quite. He was disguised, of course."

"Oh, this is a six-shilling novel!" said Vernon-Smith. "Chaps don't disguise themselves in real life."

"Shut up a minute, please. A chap who

put a wig on his head, and kept a handkerchief over the lower half of his face, could pass himself off as Bob Cherry, in the twilight, to a short-sighted old lady."

"Ahem!"

"It's too steep, really, you know!"

"Oh, let him prove it!" said Heath. "He's brought this accusation against me out of sheer spite. Let him prove it!"

"That's right!"

"Prove it!"

"Prove it, Wharton!"

"That's what I want to do," said Harry. "Is Heath willing to let a party of fellows search his belongings, to see whether there's a wig hidden away there?"

"Phew!"

"What do you say, Heath?"

And all eyes were fixed upon the cad of the Remove.

THE TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER.

The Search-Party.

HEATH did not falter for a moment. Guilty or innocent, he had his nerve in control now; and he did not flinch before the general gaze that was turned upon him.

"Are you willing, Heath?" asked Bulstrode.

Heath nodded carelessly.

"Quite willing," he said.

Wharton's face fell for a second. If Heath was willing for his study to be searched, it was pretty certain that the wig was not hidden there, at all events.

Heath saw his expression, and sneered.

"I'm quite willing," he repeated, "Perfectly willing. You can turn my study inside out, and upside down, if you like. You can take up the floor-boards if you like, and send a fag up the chimney."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you find any wigs, or false beards, or revolvers, or anything of that kind——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll undertake to eat them!" said Heath.

"Well, that's fair enough," said Bulstrode, "and if nothing is found, I should think that Wharton would have the grace to apologise."

"Yes, rather!"

"Let's look through the study first," said

Harry. "I could have searched it myself, without saying a word, but I wanted everything to be fair and above-board."

"I'm ready," said Heath.

"Come on, you fellows!" said Bulstrode.

Quite a crowd of fellows accompanied Heath and Wharton upstairs. Wharton was feeling a keen sense of disappointment. He meant to go through with the search of the new boy's study; but he had little hope now that it would yield anything.

The juniors crowded into the study.

The fun of the thing rather appealed to them—and Heath had always been so secretive, keeping his study door locked on most occasions, that many of the fellows were keen to lend a hand in turning it out.

There was no doubt that the search would be a thorough one.

Skinner started by pitching the books out of the bookcase in a heap on the floor, and Snoop dragged out the drawers of the table, letting them, with their contents, fall in a heap on the floor.

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Heath. "I didn't bargain for that sort of thing. You needn't wreck the place!"

The noise of bumping furniture brought a prefect along the passage by the time the ragers had finished.

It was Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars. He looked into the disordered study in blank astonishment.

"What on earth are you kids doing?" he exclaimed.

"Searching," said Skinner.

"What are you searching for?"

"A wig. Wharton thinks that Heath impersonated Bob Cherry at the post-office——"

"What?" shouted Wingate.

"And he thinks he wore a wig, and keeps it hidden here. Heath's given us permission to search his study."

"But not to upset it in this way, I should think."

"Well, the things were bound to get a little disturbed."

Wingate turned to Wharton. There was a deep frown upon his brow, and an angry light in his eyes.

"Look here, Wharton," he exclaimed,

"you're keeping up this rot too long! Bob Cherry's guilt has been proved, and you're doing no good to anyone by keeping the matter alive in this way. How dare you bring such an accusation against Heath!"

"I believe it's true."

"Have you any evidence against Heath?"

"Not very strong evidence. But——"

"I think you should be ashamed of yourself," said Wingate. "You seem to be willing to bring the wildest accusations against anybody, rather than admit the plain truth against Cherry."

"I——"

"Hear, hear!" said the juniors in chorus.

"You'd better let this matter drop. I warn you, Wharton," said Wingate. "You'll get into trouble if you don't, and that's flat."

And, with a warning frown to Wharton, Wingate strode away.

The juniors crowded out of the study. They had searched every inch of it, and certainly proved that the supposed wig was not there. And they had left it in such a state that it would take Heath hours to put it right.

Wharton and Linley went along to No. 1. They had received a check, and it was a bitter disappointment. But they were far from losing hope.

"I don't believe the wig is destroyed," Wharton said. "I believe the rascal has

hidden it somewhere. When you come to think of it, Marky, he wouldn't hide it in his study. It might be found there by the maid—or Bunter might rummage about. He's put it in a safer place than that."

"But now he knows that it's being searched for, I think he is very likely to attempt to destroy it," the Lancashire lad remarked.

"Yes, very likely."

"In that case, he will have to go to its hiding-place——"

"Certainly."

"And if we watch him——"

Wharton's eyes gleamed.

"Good! We'll take it in turns to watch the cad, and never have our eyes off him—night and day. If he's got the wig hidden somewhere, he's most likely to try and get at it by night. You see, he may have hidden it immediately after using it, and not dared to go near the spot since. We'll watch the cad!"

And after that always one or other of the

chums was within easy distance of Esau Heath, keeping an apparently careless eye upon him—but never allowing him to escape observation.

THE TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Financial Mystery.

"IT'S a giddy miracle!" said Ogilvy.

"It must be."

"I can't understand it."



Wharton took off his cap, and put the wig on his head, and looked at it in the dusty, cracked mirror. The resemblance it gave him to Bob Cherry was amazing! (See page 344.)

"You see," Ogilvy went on, "his people are not rich. We know perfectly well that his people are jolly poor."

"Quite so."

"His yarns about receiving postal-orders are all bunkum; we know that."

"I guess so."

"Then where is he getting the money from?"

"It's a mystery."

"He can't be boning it, or someone would be complaining of losing money." Frank Nugent said thoughtfully. "But he's had three pounds in one day."

The juniors were discussing Bunter.

Billy Bunter had often surprised and exasperated the Remove. But he had never surprised them, never puzzled them, so much as now.

Bunter's stories of great wealth and titled friends were a joke in the Form. But the fat junior was really in funds at last.

"I say, you fellows——"

"We were just wanting to see you, Bunter——"

"Good! I was looking for you, too. Who says ices?"

"Ices!"

"Come on, then," said Bunter. "Mrs. Mimble's got a fresh lot of ice-cream, and it's simply ripping. I'm standing treat."

"You are?"

"Yes, rather! Come on, every one of you."

"So you've got some more money?" said Nugent.

"Yes," said Bunter, blinking at him.

"I've just had a postal-order."

"You've just had a postal-order?" repeated Hazeldene. "By post?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"A sovereign."

"You blessed fibber," said Hazeldene. "The last post isn't in yet, and your last sovereign came by the other post. The postman hasn't been since."

"My hat! So he hasn't," said Bulstrode.

"Where did you get that postal-order?"

"I—I—I——"

"Let's see it," said Nugent.

"I've cashed it," said Bunter. "Here's

the pound note, if you don't believe me." He held up a Treasury note between his fat finger and thumb. There was no doubting the genuineness of the note, and the juniors could only stare at it.

"That's real enough," said Tom Brown.

"I guess so; that's the right article, sonny."

"Look here," said Bulstrode, "this is getting serious. Where did you get that quid, Bunter?"

"I've had a postal-order——"

"Don't tell crammers. The postman hasn't been."

"I—I meant to say that there were two in my last letter, and I cashed only one of them then," said Bunter. "Now I'm using the other, as I expect to have some more in the morning, you see."

"Oh!" said Bulstrode.

"Who cashed this order for you, then?" asked John Bull suspiciously. "You certainly haven't been down to the post-office."

"I—I asked a fellow to cash it for me."

"What fellow?"

"Oh, really, Bull—— I—I say, you fellows, I—I forgot, you know. I remember now. It was Heath!"

"Heath?"

"Yes."

"Will he say so himself?"

"Oh, really, of course he will! Just you ask him."

"Well, we'll give you one more chance," said Bulstrode. "We'll ask Heath. Is Heath here?"

Heath was not there. But two or three fellows volunteered to fetch him; and they went in search of him, and Billy Bunter waited, with Bulstrode's hand on his collar, for Heath to appear.

THE TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Upper Hand.

HEATH came in a few minutes, with Micky Desmond and Frank Nugent on either side of him. They had not told him what was wanted of him; he had merely been told that Bulstrode wanted to speak to him. Heath was naturally suspicious, and he felt uneasy;

but he had no choice about coming. His little eyes were scintillating like a rat's with anxiety as he joined the crowd of juniors in the Form-room passage.

Bulstrode beckoned to him.

"Come here, Heath," he said. "I want to ask you a question. Bunter says that you cashed a postal-order for a pound for him. Did you?"

Heath's eyes gleamed on Bunter.

"You remember, Heath," panted the fat junior. "I came to you in your study about ten minutes ago, and—asked you to cash an order for a pound, as—as it was too late to go down to the post-office."

Heath nodded.

"Yes, I remember," he said.

Bulstrode started.

"Then it's true?" he said.

"Yes," replied Heath.

"You cashed a postal-order for Bunter—an order for a pound?"

"Yes."

Bulstrode released the fat junior.

"Well, if that's the case, it's all right," he said. "If you've really had the postal-orders, Bunter, I suppose the money belongs to you."

"Of course it does," said Bunter, in a very injured tone. "Of course it does, Bulstrode! I really think you might take a fellow's word for it—especially such an honourable chap as I am. I don't like having my word doubted, you know."

"Oh, rats!"

"Look here! The offer's still good," said Bunter. "Any of you fellows that would like to have some ices can come along—"

"What-ho!"

And the juniors thronged off towards the tuck-shop. Heath made a sign to Billy Bunter to stop.

"I want to speak to you about—about that postal-order, Bunter," he said.

"Can't stop now, Heath—"

"It's important."

"Oh, all right; I'll join you fellows in a minute," said Bunter. "Tell Mrs. Mimble to put it down to me."

"Right-ho!" said Skinner.

Harry Wharton and Mark Linley had been

spectators of the scene, without taking part in it. They walked away now, as Heath's suspicious eye turned upon them. They did not desire to play the part of eavesdroppers. Heath drew Bunter into the recess of a deep window, and there, out of the general view, he grasped the fat junior by the shoulder, and shook him till he gasped.

"Ow! Oh, really, Heath!" stammered Bunter. "Leggo! Yow!"

"You fool—you fat fool!" said Heath, in low, savage tones. "You mad idiot! Can't you see that you're making this matter the talk of the Form?"

"Oh, really—"

"You've had four pounds out of me now, altogether—"

"I'm going to repay it all when my postal-orders come," said Bunter. "I'm expecting several remittances from some titled friends—"

"Stop that rot!" said Heath savagely. "You're getting this money out of me because you've got that paper. Each time you've promised to give it up, and you haven't done it."

"I've mislaid it—"

"Liar!"

"Oh, really—"

"If you won't give me the paper," said Heath, in a choking voice, "will you be a bit more careful about keeping up appearances? It will be as bad for you as for me, if the truth comes out. You are making the whole Form excited and curious by swanking about with all that money."

"Oh, that's all right. It's supposed to come from my titled friends."

"Do you think anybody believes those rotten lies!" said Heath savagely.

"I decline to listen to language of this sort," said Bunter loftily. "And I've said before that I don't care to keep up your acquaintance in public, Heath. If I want to speak to you, I'll come to your study."

And he rolled away, leaving Heath trembling from head to foot with rage and fear.

The way of the transgressor is hard, as the schemer of the Remove was beginning to find out.

THE TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER.

Caught!

HARRY WHARTON and Mark Linley went upstairs. There was no light in Heath's study, as Harry Wharton glanced at the door. But there was a light under Billy Bunter's door, and Wharton started as he observed it.

He pointed to the streak of light under the door, glimmering out upon the dimly lighted passage.

"Somebody's in Bunter's study," he said.

"Heath!"

"Well, we know it isn't Bunter, as he's in the tuck-shop with the fellows, and we know Bunter has no study-mate," said Harry.

"Bunter has the study to himself."

"Heath," repeated Linley.

"Suppose," said Harry, in a low voice—"suppose Bunter had found something—say the wig, for instance—that might be the reason—"

"The reason for the four pounds."

"Exactly."

"I shouldn't wonder."

Wharton paused outside the door. There was a sound within the study that was unmistakable—a sound of rummaging. Shelves and drawers were being turned out by an eager searcher, the sounds proved it clearly.

"It's Heath," said Harry, setting his lips.

"He's looking for something in Bunter's study. Something that belongs to him, perhaps."

"Open the door."

"Good!"

Wharton flung open the door of the study. There was a startled cry from within.

Heath was bending over the drawer of Bunter's table, going through the contents with eager, quick fingers, when the door opened.

He started up, his face becoming chalky white, and his startled eyes gleaming upon the two juniors like a frightened cat's.

"What are you doing here?" exclaimed Harry Wharton sternly.

"Oh, I—I—"

"What are you doing?"

"Mind your own business!" cried Heath

angrily. "You can get out! This isn't your study, is it? Mind your own business."

"What are you looking for?" asked Harry.

"Nothing."

"You are turning the study out. What are you searching for?"

"Find out?"

"I am going to," said Harry quietly. "I'm going to find out how you have succeeded in blackening Bob Cherry's name, and driving him from school. You're getting to the end of your tether, Heath."

"Hang you—hang you! Leave me alone!"

"Marky," said Harry quietly, "go and tell Bunter that Heath is searching his study. I'll keep the rotter here while you're gone."

"Right-ho!" said Mark.

He ran quickly along the passage. Heath clenched his fists convulsively.

"I'm not going to stay here," he said.

"You are!"

"I won't! I—I refuse! Let me pass!" shouted Heath, coming towards the doorway.

Harry Wharton stood in the open doorway, his hands up. His eyes were fixed upon the furious, passionate Heath.

"You are not coming out," he said. "You came here of your own accord, and you are staying here till the owner of the study returns. You can explain to him."

"Let me pass!"

"You shall not pass."

Heath made a rush to force his way out. Wharton caught him by the shoulders, and, with a single swing of his strong arm, sent him spinning across the study.

Heath fell against the wall, and slid to the floor. He lay there, gasping and panting, his eyes glittering like a rat's.

"Oh, hang you!" he groaned.

"I don't want to handle you," said Wharton quietly; "but you don't leave this study. You have been searching it. You can explain to the owner what you've been searching it for."

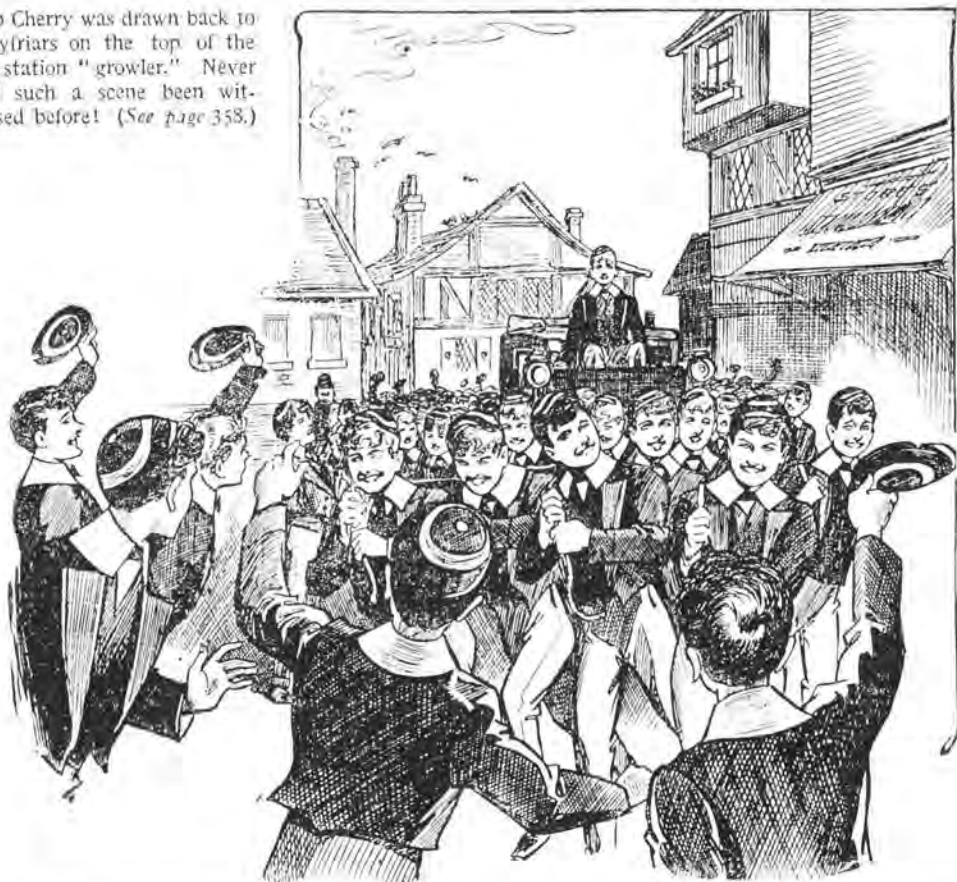
"I—I had Bunter's permission."

"Then you can stay and see Bunter."

"I tell you, I—I won't stay! Look here!"

Wharton squared his shoulders. He stood in the doorway, truly a lion in the path.

Bob Cherry was drawn back to Greyfriars on the top of the old station "growler." Never had such a scene been witnessed before! (See page 358.)



Heath could no more have moved him than he could have moved the solid walls.

The cad of the Remove threw himself sullenly into a chair to wait. Bunter, apparently, was not in a hurry to come. Perhaps the tuck-shop held him with a peculiar fascination. But there was a sound of footsteps on the stairs at last.

Heath started to his feet.

"Will you let me pass?" he hissed.

"No!"

The new junior caught up the chair he had been sitting upon, swung it into the air with both hands, and rushed furiously at Wharton.

Harry started back a pace.

But he did not flinch further. As Heath brought down the chair with desperate force,

the active junior dodged the sweeping blow, caught the chair by the rail, and jerked it out of the other's hand.

The chair went to the floor with a crash, and the next moment Wharton's clenched fist was planted upon Heath's jaw, and he rolled on the carpet.

"I—I say, you fellows!"

Bunter had arrived. He came running up the Remove passage with three or four other fellows. He blinked into the study through his big spectacles. His little round eyes were glimmering with rage behind his glasses.

"Heath, you worm! You've been searching my study, have you?" he exclaimed. "Has he found the paper, Wharton?"

"What paper?"

"The—the—I—I mean, I don't mean a paper!" stammered Bunter, realising that he was speaking too freely. "Has he found anything?"

"I don't know."

"I wasn't searching the study," said Heath. "I—I was looking for—for a postal-order—one you said you wanted me to cash. I've got a pound note ready to give you for it."

Bunter blinked at him.

"Hand over the quid," he said.

Heath handed it over.

"I'll look for the—the postal-order myself and let you have it," said Bunter, slipping the note into his pocket. Now get out of my study."

Heath slunk out.

The other fellows followed, and Bunter locked the door after them. In the passage, Wharton and Linley exchanged glances.

"So it's a paper," Wharton muttered.

Mark nodded.

"Yes, some paper that Bunter holds, that Heath pays him to keep quiet. What on earth can it be?"

"If it's nothing to do with Bob Cherry," said Harry, "it's no business of ours. But if it concerns this case, we're going to know all about that paper."

"Yes, rather."

"After this, I don't think Bunter will trust it in a hiding-place. He will carry it about with him," said Harry in a low tone.

"I should say so, and that—"

"That's where we come in," said Harry Wharton.

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER.

In the Dark Hours.

HEATH, as a rule, was able to keep a mask of indifference upon his face; but just now the anxiety he was labouring under could not be concealed. When the Remove went up to bed, Heath was pale and harassed-looking.

During the night and the day following, he had to regain possession of that paper, or else face the consequences of what he had done. He realised that very clearly.

Heath watched Bunter as he went to bed.

Bunter put his waistcoat under his mattress, so that he would be lying on it all through the night. That was enough to convince Heath that the paper was now in a pocket of the waistcoat. But there was little likelihood that he would be able to get at it during the night without waking the fat junior.

Still, Bunter was a heavy sleeper, and there was a chance; and that chance Heath meant to try as soon as the Remove were all asleep.

As a matter of fact, the Remove were not likely to be all asleep at any time that night. Wharton and Mark Linley were going to watch the cad of the Form, and they had arranged to take it in turns.

Loder, the prefect, saw lights out, and the Remove, after the usual chatter, settled down to sleep.

There was a glimmer of moonlight in at the high windows of the dormitory, and it was possible to see objects dimly. If a fellow should leave his bed, Harry Wharton knew that he would see him.

Wharton did not sleep. He was sleepy; but he was keenly alive to the necessity of keeping awake. The clearing of Bob Cherry's name might depend upon it.

An hour passed—and another.

Occasional low sounds in the dormitory warned Wharton that at least one of the Form was awake, and moving restlessly while the dull minutes crawled by; and he had little doubt that it was Heath.

Half-past eleven!

Heath sat up in bed.

"You fellows asleep?" he asked, in a low voice.

There was no reply. Wharton had been expecting it, yet it thrilled him strangely to hear the low, cautious voice in the darkness.

There came no sound but regular breathing in answer to Heath, and after a pause of a minute or more, the new boy stepped cautiously out of bed.

Wharton lay on his elbow, breathing hard.

Dimly he saw the form of the junior move towards Bunter's bed. Heath knelt down beside the bed, and a faint rustling sound showed that he was trying to insert his hand under the mattress without waking the fat junior.

Wharton rose silently to a sitting posture. He reached out towards his washstand, and grasped the sponge, and raised his hand in the air. As Heath bent towards Bunter's bed, Wharton hurled the sponge. In spite of the gloom, the aim was unerring.

The sponge struck Heath on the back of the head.

The blow was, of course, not severe; but coming suddenly and totally unexpectedly as it did, it hurled Heath forward, and he sprawled across Bunter's bed with a startled cry.

There was a yell from the fat junior.

Bunter threw out his arms, and grasped Heath as he scrambled back from the bed.

"Ow!" yelled Bunter. "Help! Burglars!"

"Let go!" muttered Heath, in a stifled voice. "It was only a lark! It's not burglars! Let go! You ass, let go!"

"Help! Help!"

Frank Nugent jumped up and lighted a candle.

Heath was striving to tear himself away from Bunter's grasp, and he was nearly dragging the fat junior out of bed in the effort.

Bunter relaxed his grasp as the light flared up.

"Help!" he gasped.

"What the dickens—"

"It's—it's only a jape!" stammered Heath.

"I—I—I was going to mop Bunter with a sponge, that's all! It was only a lark."

"It's a lie!" roared Bunter. "He was going to rob me."

"Shut up!" roared a dozen voices.

And Bunter grunted, and shut up. Heath got back into bed, and he did not stir from it again that night. But there was little sleep for him through the long hours of darkness.

THE TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Triumph of Truth.

HEATH was the first out of bed in the morning. The rising-bell had not yet clanged when he rose and dressed himself. Wharton watched him from his bed quietly. That Heath had intended to leave the dormitory during the night, if Bunter had not caused an alarm, Harry felt sure. And Wharton guessed

shrewdly enough that what Heath was now concerned about was the hidden wig.

The expression of the junior's face showed how worry and stress of mind were telling on him. He was feeling driven into a corner, with his cowardly plot in danger of falling about his ears at every moment.

He glanced along the line of white beds. No one was stirring. Heath left the dormitory quietly, and closed the door behind him.

Wharton leaped out of bed.

"Marky!"

Mark Linley started out of a doze.

"Yes, Harry!"

"Up you get!"

The Lancashire lad did not stop to ask questions. He rose quickly, and began to dress. Harry Wharton ran to the window, and dressed with one eye on the Close. The figure of Esau Heath appeared in sight.

He was tramping away from the house across the Close.

Wharton watched him while he dressed.

Heath disappeared at the ruined chapel—that relic of ancient times which was the pride of Greyfriars. He passed in at the little low door, and vanished. Harry Wharton's eyes gleamed. That place, of all at Greyfriars, was fullest of odd nooks and crannies where any small article might be hidden in perfect safety.

"Come on, Marky."

Bulstrode sat up in bed.

"Hallo! Where are you fellows going?"

They did not stop to reply. They left the dormitory, and ran down the passage and the stairs. An early housemaid was the only person about. Through the open doorway the keen, fresh air of morning blew in from the Close.

Wharton and Linley ran across to the ruined chapel. They reached it in a minute or less. The stone stairs that led down to the crypt were before them. The opening had been covered by a modern wooden trapdoor for safety's sake. The trapdoor was raised now, and from below came a glimmer of light.

Someone was down there with a candle or a lantern. The juniors did not need telling whom it was.

Even as they looked down the stairs, Esau Heath came into sight. He was carrying a

bicycle lantern in one hand, and in the other he had a parcel wrapped in brown paper.

The two juniors stepped back quickly.

Heath was coming up the stairs from the crypt, and he had not seen them. They drew back into the cover of the shattered masonry, and waited for the new boy to emerge from the crypt.

Heath came up, extinguished the lantern, and concealed it in a crevice in the stonework.

Then he turned to the door of the chapel.

At the same moment, Wharton and Mark Linley stepped from their cover, reached him, and pinioned him by either arm.

Heath started convulsively.

"You—you—" he muttered. "Oh!"

"Caught!" said Wharton grimly. "What's in that parcel, Heath?"

"The—the parcel?"

"Yes. What's in it?"

"Some—some things belonging to me," said Heath, with white lips and stammering voice. "Nothing of any value—it's of no importance."

"Very well, come on."

"W-w-what do you mean? Why should I come with you?"

"Because you've got no choice," said Wharton grimly. "You're going to open that parcel in public, and show the contents. If they're of no importance, as you say, it won't hurt you their being shown."

"I—I—"

"Come on."

Heath resisted feebly. Wharton and Mark Linley took no notice of his resistance. They marched him on forcibly towards the School House. The rising-bell was clanging out now, and a few early risers were already up. Heath was marched by sheer force into the House, up the stairs, and to the door of Wingate's room.

Wharton knocked at the door.

"It's all right!" called out the captain of Greyfriars. "I'm up!"

"Want to speak to you, Wingate."

"Wait till I'm dressed."

"Buck up, then."

In a few minutes Wingate opened the door. He was in shirt and trousers, and he stared in blank astonishment at the juniors and their prisoner.

"What the Dickens does this mean?" he exclaimed. "Is this a jape?"

"No," said Harry.

"Then what—"

"You remember I told you I suspected that Bob Cherry was impersonated at the post-office by a chap who got himself up in disguise?"

"Well?" said Wingate irritably.

"We've inquired in Friardale, and Mr. Moses is willing to give evidence that he sold a flaxen wig to a Greyfriars chap last Friday."

"Oh!" said Wingate.

"We suspected Heath, and we've watched him. He fetched this parcel out of the old chapel crypt just now. We want you to see what's in it. We suspect that it's the wig. Then we want Mr. Moses to be brought here to see if he can identify Heath as the chap who bought the wig."

Wingate looked hard at the white-faced, shivering Heath. If ever guilt was written on a fellow's face, it was written on Esau Heath's then.

"Are you willing for the parcel to be opened, Heath?" Wingate asked sternly.

"No," said Heath, gaining courage a little, "I—I refuse."

"Then," said Wingate sharply, "I shall open it by my authority as head prefect, and I'm willing to answer to the Head for what I do."

He took the parcel from Heath's nerveless hand, cut the cord, and opened the paper. A tightly-rolled wig of flaxen colour rolled out.

Wingate's eyes gleamed.

"It is a wig—a wig just the colour of Bob Cherry's hair."

"I own up to that," he said. "I—I got it for private theatricals. I—I was scared when I heard Wharton suggesting that—that a chap had worn a wig and impersonated Bob Cherry. I—I knew he would bring some accusation against me if he could. So I—I hid the wig in the crypt. That's all."

Wingate's hard glance never left his face. It was an ingenious lie, but it was evidently a lie on the face of it.

"You admit buying the wig of Mr. Moses?"

"Ye-es."

"On Friday, before the postal-order was cashed at Friardale post-office?"

"Ye-es."

"Very well. I am afraid you will find it a little difficult to convince the Head that you bought it for private theatricals," said Wingate drily. "Wharton!"

He looked round. Wharton had disappeared. Mark Linley met his glance.

"Wharton's gone for Bunter," he said.

"Bunter! What has Bunter to do with this?"

"I believe he knows a great deal."

"He—he doesn't!" Heath exclaimed, in a hoarsely shrill voice. "What could Bunter know? You know what a liar Bunter is!"

"We know that you gave Bunter four or five pounds yesterday," said Mark Linley coldly. "We know you did not do it for nothing."

Wingate gave a start.

"You gave Bunter such a sum as that, Heath?"

"I—I cashed postal-orders for him," stammered Heath.

"Oh! You are asking me to believe that Bunter had postal-orders for four or five pounds in a single day?" said Wingate drily. "Well, if Bunter can give me the names of the senders, and they can answer inquiries, I will believe it—no otherwise."

Heath groaned.

There was a squeaky voice heard from the passage.

"Ow! Oh, really, Wharton! I'm coming quietly—I tell you I'm coming! You might let a chap fasten his beastly braces! Ow! Leggo my ear!"

"Come on, then," said Wharton angrily.

"Oh, really—Ow!"

Billy Bunter, with evident reluctance, was marched into Wingate's room. He stood there half-dressed, palpitating with anger and fear.

"We want you to question Bunter, Wingate," said Wharton. "It's better for you to do it; you can't be suspected of working things for Bob Cherry. We might be. Bunter has a paper about him, and Heath has been paying him pounds to keep it dark. I don't know what it is, but I feel pretty certain it bears on this case. I think you ought to make Bunter show you the paper."

"Give me the paper."

Bunter handed the paper over. Heath flung himself into a chair, and covered his face with his hands. All was over now, and he knew it. Wingate opened out the paper, and he and the juniors looked at it eagerly.

"R. Cherry!"

Bob Cherry's name was scrawled on the paper over and over again. At the top it was unmistakably in Heath's writing, but as it progressed down the page it grew more and more like Bob Cherry's, till at the bottom it was a fair imitation of Bob's own signature.

Heath had evidently been practising from a copy of Bob's signature, and he had certainly shown great aptitude for the peculiar work of a forger.

Wingate's face grew as black as thunder.

"You young hound!" he said. "You unspeakable worm! I don't think we need any further proof that Bob Cherry's name was forged, and that he was impersonated at the post-office—and that you did it! You utter cur, come with me!"

His strong hand on Heath's shoulder dragged the wretched boy to his feet. Heath looked at him with a face like death.

"I—I suppose it's all up now," he said, in a husky, broken, whispering voice. "I—I did it because—because he licked me, and I hated him! I said I'd make him suffer, and—and I did! I—I suppose I shall be expelled."

"You're not likely to be allowed to remain at Greyfriars," said Wingate drily. "If you don't go to prison, you will be lucky. Come with me—to the Head."

Heath groaned, and followed the captain of Greyfriars.

Of that interview between the Head of Greyfriars and the wretched boy whose sins had come home to him, we need not speak. Heath's grovelling terror, and his half-sincere repentance now that punishment was about to fall, did not make a pleasant spectacle. His confession, which was hardly needed now to establish the truth, was full and complete. It more than exonerated Bob Cherry. The whole wretched plot was exposed to the light of day. Greyfriars heard it and wondered.

Heath could not save himself, and he did not spare Bunter. Bunter's well-known stupidity saved him from sharing Heath's fate—expulsion from the school. The Head reasoned that the fat junior had been hardly conscious of the full wickedness of his conduct, and he was sentenced to a flogging instead. That flogging was administered severely, and Bunter did not forget it soon. For hours afterwards groans were heard proceeding from Bunter's study; but as no one took any notice of the groans, they ceased at last. Bunter seemed to be surprised when he found that no one in the Remove would speak to him afterwards. His discovery of the paper bearing the forged signatures had certainly helped to clear Bob Cherry; and the fat junior seemed to expect that a great deal of credit would be given him. He was disappointed!

And Bob Cherry?

Needless to say that, when Bunter had been flogged, and Heath expelled from Greyfriars, Bob Cherry was recalled. Dr. Locke wrote immediately to Major Cherry, explaining the matter, and asking Bob's pardon in the most sincere manner—in a way that even the fiery and exacting major could take no exception to.

Major Cherry arrived with Bob the same afternoon. And then, when nearly the whole school had been to see Bob's father off from the station later in the day, Bob Cherry was drawn back to Greyfriars on the top of the old station "growler." Never had such a scene been witnessed in Greyfriars before.

The libel action, of course, was stopped. The question of damages—and the major had, in his wrath, intended to claim enormous damages from the governors of Greyfriars—was waived. The fullest compensation was

made for the expenses he had been put to, and there the matter was suffered to drop.

As for Bob, he was too happy at having his name cleared to care for anything else. He seemed to be walking on air when he came back to the school.

In his bitterness at the injustice that had been done him, Bob had thought he would never be able to forgive the friends who had failed to stand by him in his hour of need. But in this joyous hour, he could realise that they were not wholly unjustified, at all events, in being swayed by so strong a mass of evidence. And their repentance was frank and sincere.

Nugent and John Bull, and Fish and Tom Brown, and the rest, gathered round Bob as he came into the junior common-room with Wharton and Mark Linley.

"We've been a set of silly asses, Bob," said Nugent humbly. "You can kick us all if you like, and we won't say a word."

"I guess not," said Fisher T. Fish. "Kick away."

"It's all right, kids," he said. "When you come to think of it, the evidence was awfully strong, and you haven't so much sense as Wharton and Marky, so what could a fellow expect?"

"Ahem!"

"It's all over now—by-gones are by-gones—and I dare say we shall all get on famously now that boulder is gone."

"Hear, hear!"

Fish held out his hand. "Shake!" he said. And Bob "shook." And with a hearty handshake all round, the past was buried. Never again were the juniors likely to waver in their faith in Bob Cherry's honour.

