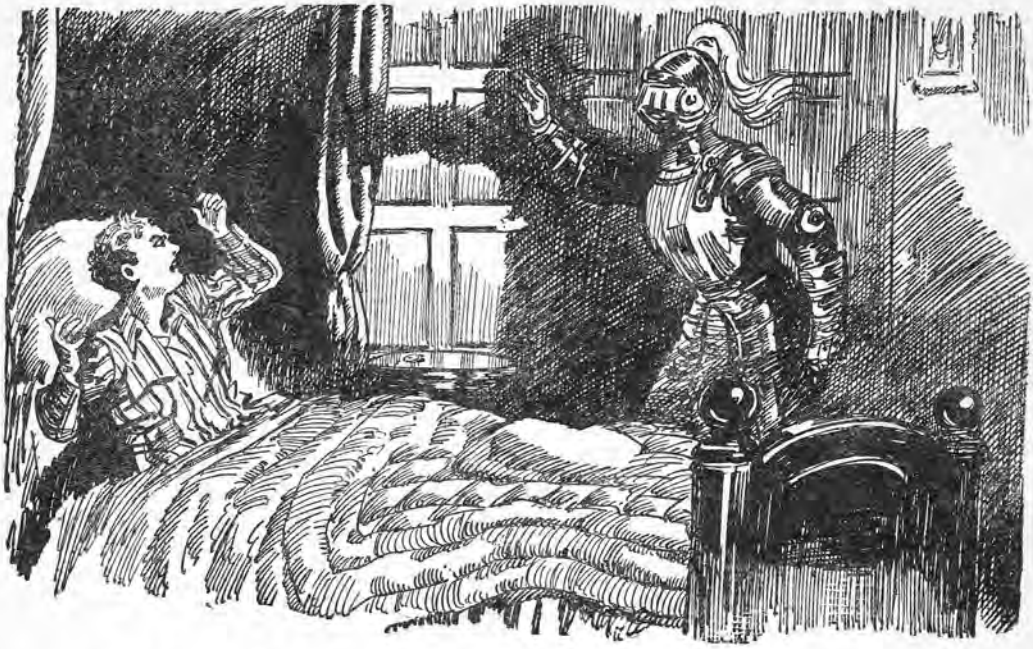
A Thrilling Yuletide Yarn of the Chums of Greyfriars.



Sir Fulke's Warning!

When the gauntlet drops from the armoured figure of Sir Fulke Mauleverer, it is a warning of death! And, on holiday at Christmas with Harry Wharton & Co. at Mauleverer Towers, Lord Mauleverer receives the dread warning!

By
FRANK RICHARDS

THE FIRST CHAPTER
MAULY IS MYSTERIOUS!

"'HEM!"

Thus Lord Mauleverer.

It was the last day of term at Greyfriars; on the morrow the old school was to break up for the Christmas holidays.

In Study No. 1 in the Remove a merry party had gathered, and the hubbub was terrific.

Harry Wharton & Co. were winding up the term with a final royal spread. Holly decorated the walls of the study and highly coloured bunting was looped over the cracked looking-glass, giving the study quite a festive appearance. The Famous Five of the Remove were all there, and Lord Mauleverer was a specially distinguished guest.

It was quite a festive scene, and the chums of the Remove were in the highest of spirits.

Only Lord Mauleverer, the distinguished guest, was rather silent—even more so than usual. Lord Mauleverer was not a great talker—he found

talking an unnecessary exertion, and the chief object of Mauly's existence seemed to be to glide through life with the smallest possible amount of exertion.

But on this festive occasion he was still more silent than was his custom, and there was an unusual shade of thought upon his brow.

His remarks for quite a long time were confined to the monosyllables "Yaas" and "No," and he made them at random. It was evident to the Famous Five that something was weighing upon Mauly's noble mind, and they wondered what it was.

So far as they could see, Mauly had nothing to worry about. He was going home for Christmas to the magnificence of Mauleverer Towers. That was ripping in itself; and if anything was wanted to make it more ripping, Mauly had it—for the Famous Five were going with him. That was enough to fill any fellow's cup of satisfaction to the brim.

"'Hem!" said Mauly again.

"Go it!" said Bob Cherry encouragingly.

"Eh, what?"

"Speech!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"The speechfulness of the esteemed Mauly is not terrific!" remarked Hurree Singh.

"'Hem!"

Harry Wharton burst into a laugh.

"Get it off your chest, Mauly, old man," he said. "If something's up, tell us, and don't worry. It's not too late to make some other arrangements, if——"

"Oh, is that it?" said Bob. "Dear old Mauly! Pump it up!"

Lord Mauleverer reddened.

"The fact is——" he said at last.

"Go it!"

"'Hem!"

"The 'hemfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"'Hem! You fellows are coming home with me to-morrow," said Lord Mauleverer. "I'm jolly glad you're comin'. But——"

"But——" said Harry Wharton.

"'Hem!"

"You'll be getting hem-stitched if you keep on like this, Mauly," said Bob Cherry.

"'Hem! I ought to tell you——" said Mauleverer.

"Go it, then!"

"But I—I'd rather not."

"Then don't!" suggested Wharton.

"But I must, you see."

"Oh, my hat!"

"You see, in the circs, I can't very well take you there without tellin' you, can I?" said Mauleverer dismally.

"That depends on what it is," said Harry, in blank wonder. "Is your guardian ill? Sir Reginald——"

"No, no! Right as rain."

"Has the ghost of Mauleverer Towers started walking?" asked Nugent.

"Nunno!"

"Have you asked Bunter to come?" inquired Bob. "We could stand even that, for the sake of your fascinating society, old chap."

Lord Mauleverer grinned faintly.

"No; Bunter isn't comin'."

"Hurrah!"

"But — but — but ——" stammered Mauleverer. "You see, if I'd known earlier—but I didn't—and now it's fixed—and I want you to come. Only—I feel I ought to let you know—only I don't want to mention it. But I can't let you meet the chap without lettin' you know—oh, gad!" Lord Mauleverer's voice trailed off disconsolately.

"Meet the chap!" said Bob. "Some other giddy guest?"

" Yaas."

" You told us you'd asked Drake, who used to be at Greyfriars," said Harry. " We'll be jolly glad to see old Drake again ! "

" Yes, rather ! "

" The ratherfulness is terrific ! "

" 'Nother chap," said Mauleverer.

" Well ? "

" Cousin of mine ! " gasped Mauleverer at last.

" Didn't know you had one."

" Never mentioned him," said Lord Mauleverer. " He's a bad hat."

" Oh ! "

" Well, even if your jolly old cousin is a bad hat, I suppose we can meet him and no harm done," said Bob Cherry in wonder. " Does he bite ? "

" Ha, ha, ha ! "

" You—you see——"

Lord Mauleverer rose from his chair, evidently in a great state of dismay and worry. He stood with his hands driven deep into the pockets of his elegant trousers, and blinked at the fire.

" I'm bound to tell you," he said. " I can't let you meet him without knowin'. It wouldn't be playin' the game. If you feel inclined to chuck it up an' not come, I shan't be offended. But what I'm goin' to tell you is in the strictest confidence, of course ! "

" Of course ! " said Wharton. " But don't tell us if you'd rather not."

" Must ! "

" Then cough it up ! " said Bob Cherry.

" He—he—my cousin, you know—he——"

" Yes ? "

" He—my cousin, Brian Mauleverer, has——"

" Well ? "

" He—he—he—well, he's been in—in—in——"

" In the soup ? " asked Bob.

" In — in — in —— " stammered Mauleverer.

" In what, for goodness' sake ? "

" Chokey ! "

" Wha-a-a-at ? "

" Prison ! " said Mauleverer dismally. " Now you know ! "

THE SECOND CHAPTER

A BAD HAT—AND A HOT TART !

" GREAT SCOTT ! "

The chums of the Remove fairly blinked at Lord Mauleverer. They had not known what to expect ; but most assuredly they had not expected this. That Lord Mauleverer, the schoolboy earl, the millionaire, master of Mauleverer Towers and unnumbered acres, had a relation who had been in prison, was about the last thing they would have suspected.

Lord Mauleverer sat down again, crimson.

It was out now ! And it was not surprising that Mauly had found it difficult to get out.

" Dear old man," said Bob Cherry, " you're dreaming. The ginger-beer's got into your head."

" It's true. I was bound to tell you, as you're comin' to my place, and you'll meet him," said Mauleverer dismally. " If you'd rather edge off, don't mind me. It'll be a disappointment ; but you've a right to. Not that there's any harm in old Brian, you know. Not now, at all events. He's a bad hat, of course. A remarkably bad hat. But I couldn't turn him down. Peace and good will at Christmas-time, you know—forgiveness, and all that. Couldn't turn him down. But I've no right to expect fellows to meet a—a—a gaolbird—not without lettin' them know. Oh, gad ! "

" Poor old Mauly ! " said Harry.

" So that's what you've had on your mind ? "

" Yaas."

" If you'd rather we didn't come with——"

" Oh, no ! I want you to come ! But I was bound to give you the warnin'."

" Suppose you tell us a little more?" said Nugent. " Of course, it will be kept in this study. We shouldn't jaw."

" We shall observe the golden silence that goes longest to the well, as the English proverb says," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Mauleverer grinned. He seemed a little cheered by the English proverb.

" It's a rotten yarn," he said. " Cousin Brian is years older than I am. He's next to me for the title and the dibs, you know. It really ain't quite fair for me to have such lots and old Brian nothin'. He had somethin' once, but it went—gee-gees and things. He painted the town too red, an' red's an expensive colour. He was always a miscellaneous sort of johnny. I've only seen him three or four times in my life, an' never liked him. But blood's thicker than water, isn't it ? "

His lordship paused.

" I've heard that he made things too warm for him in England, and went over the Channel," he resumed. " There he came an awful mucker. What he had left, and what he got out of Sir Reginald, he dropped at a Continental casino, tryin' to break the bank. The bank broke him. Then he stuck up another kind of bank, and was roped in and sent somewhere quiet for some years. He came out quite recently. It's a dead secret, of course ; he had the decency to go to chokey in France under another name. Now he's turned up, like a bad penny. Like the giddy prodigal, you know. Repented, an' all that. And —and when I heard from my uncle that he's turned up at the Towers, I wired back to nunky to keep him over Christmas. Couldn't do less, could I ? "

" Hum ! "

" He's quite a new character now, I believe," said Mauleverer. " Learned his lesson, you know—he's had a pretty severe one. If I find there's any harm in him, I shall set him travellin'. But I think not. Uncle says he's in good order, and anxious to get some sort of a job somehow. Can't imagine him doin' any work—but it's a good sign. If you fellows meet him, of course, you won't let him know I've told you ? But I was bound to let you know the sort of chap you're goin' to meet. But if you want to cry off, don't mind me."

Lord Mauleverer stopped, with a dismal look. He looked like a fellow who was awaiting sentence as he waited for the chums of the Remove to speak.

There was a brief silence in the study.

" Well," said Wharton at last, " it was decent of you to tell us, Mauly—I suppose you couldn't have done anything else. But I don't see that it makes any difference. If you're satisfied with the chap, I suppose we can be satisfied, too."

Lord Mauleverer brightened up.

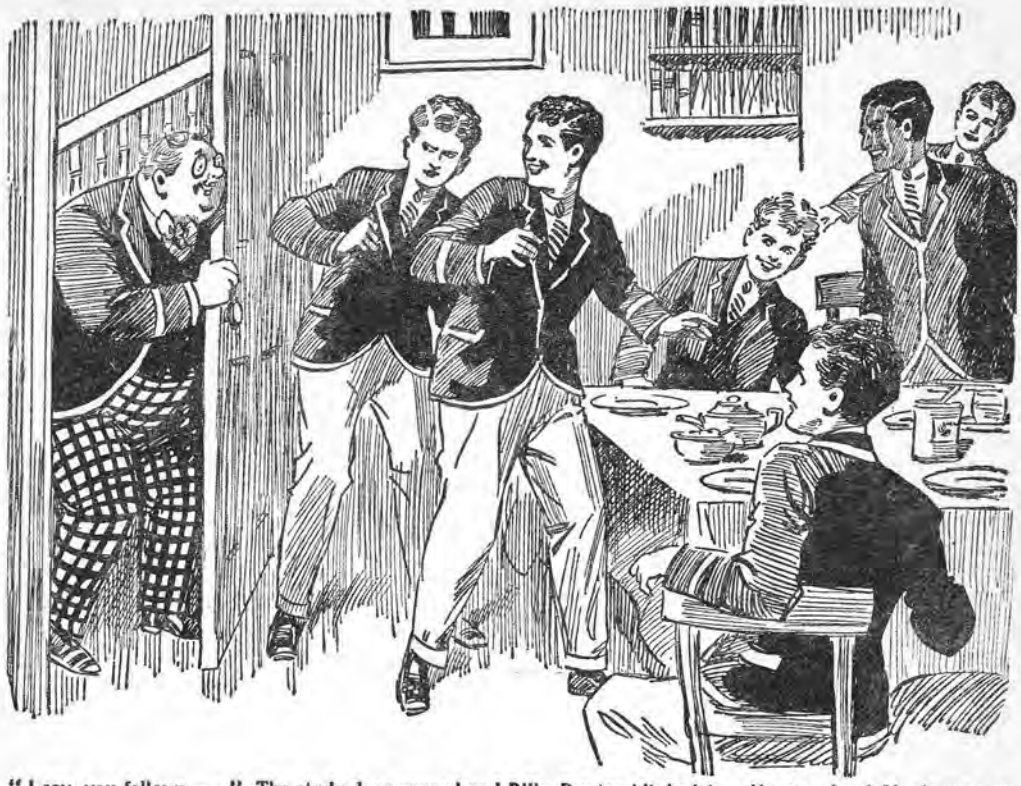
" That means that you'll come, all the same ? " he asked.

" If you want us," said Harry, with a glance at his chums, who nodded assent.

" Of course I want you ! " said Lord Mauleverer plaintively. " I shall feel awf'ly done if you let me down."

" That settles it," said Harry. " We're coming."

" Sticking to you like glue, old top ! " said Bob Cherry.



"I say, you fellows——" The study door opened and Billy Bunter blinked in. He gave Lord Mauleverer an affectionate grin. "I've been looking for you, Mauly," he said. "Now go and look for somebody else!" suggested Bob Cherry.

"Yes, rather!"

"We'll just forget what you've told us, and meet your cousin just as we shall meet old Drake," said Johnny Bull.

"That's it!" assented Nugent.

Lord Mauleverer looked immensely relieved.

"You're awf'ly good, you chaps!" he said gratefully. "I really believe Brian has turned over a giddy new leaf. Nunky thinks so. If I find that he's at the old game, he goes quick enough. But I want to give him a chance, specially at Christmas-time. He's got an idea of takin' over a farm on the estate—gentleman farmer, you know. Rippin' if it turns out well. He's a rather agreeable chap, too, in his way; no end of a merry merchant. I shouldn't wonder if you like him when you see him."

"We'll make it a point to," said Nugent, laughing.

"I say, you fellows——"

The study door opened and Billy Bunter blinked in. He gave Lord Mauleverer an affectionate grin.

"I've been looking for you, Mauly," he said.

"Yaas."

"Now go and look for somebody else, Bunter," suggested Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

Bunter rolled into the study. Having found Lord Mauleverer, he did not

seem disposed to part with him. He blinked at the table, from which most of the good things had disappeared by this time.

" If you fellows had told me there was a feed on I'd have come," he grunted.

" That's why we didn't tell you, old fat pippin ! "

" If you think I wanted to come to a measly study feed, Bob Cherry, you're making a mistake. I say, Mauly, what time does the train go to-morrow ? "

No answer.

" You didn't think I was going to desert you for Christmas this time, did you, old fellow ? " asked Bunter affectionately.

" Yaas."

" Oh, really, Mauly——"

" I'll be gettin' along, you fellows," said Lord Mauleverer, rising.

" I hope you're not getting out because I've dropped in, Mauly ? "

" Yaas."

" Ha ha, ha ! "

" Beast ! I—I mean, I don't mind your little joke, old chap. He, he, he ! I'll come along to your study with you if you're going."

" Oh gad, don't ! "

" Look here, Mauly——"

" Won't you try a tart, Bunter ? " asked Bob Cherry temptingly.

Bunter's attention was transferred from Lord Mauleverer at once. His lordship took advantage of it, and escaped from the study ; and a moment later a key might have been heard to turn farther along the Remove passage. His lordship, apparently, was not yearning for the charming society of the Owl of the Remove.

Bunter held out a fat hand for the tart.

" Hold on a minute ! " said Bob gravely. " I'll put a bit of extra jam in it for you, Bunter. You like jam."

" Go it ! " said Bunter.

Bob Cherry ladled jam into the tart, thereby concealing the fact that he had already ladled mustard into it.

For days—in fact, ever since break-up for Christmas had drawn nigh—Billy Bunter had haunted Lord Mauleverer as if he had been the family ghost of Mauleverer Towers.

Now evidently he was only stopping for the tart before he pursued his lordship to his study and cornered him, as it were. Bob Cherry's idea was to give him something else to think about for a little while.

Bunter fairly grabbed the jammy tart, his eyes glistening behind his spectacles.

" That looks good," he said. " I say, you fellows, I understand that you're coming to Mauleverer Towers with Mauly and me. It'll be rather a crowd. You don't mind my mentioning it, do you ? But I think it's rather thick, the whole crowd of you sticking Mauleverer like this."

" What ? " ejaculated Wharton.

" Thick ! " said Bunter, shaking his head. " If there's a thing I always did despise it's fishing for invitations."

" My hat ! "

" Rotten, I call it ! " said Bunter. " I don't want to hurt your feelings, of course, but I feel bound to say I'm disgusted."

" You fat rotter ! " roared Johnny Bull.

" Oh, really, Bull ! Of course, you don't look at these things as I do," said Bunter loftily. " You're not sensitive. I hardly like letting my old pal Mauly be done like this——"

" Like what ? " breathed Nugent.

" Well, sticking him like this for

Christmas, you know," said Bunter. "I couldn't do it."

"Why, you—you——"

"Some fellows are not quite so particular as I am," said Bunter calmly. "But it's rather rotten—disgusting, in fact. I must say that I despise you!"

And having thus delivered his valuable opinion, Billy Bunter gobbled up the tart.

Bunter's mouth was capacious, and nearly the whole tart went in at the first gobble.

For a second the expression on Bunter's face was beatific. He liked jam, and the jam was thick.

But the next second there was a sudden awful change.

"Groooogh!"

"Like that tart?" asked Bob Cherry affably.

"Ooooooooch!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the row?"

"Yurrrrgggggghh!"

Billy Bunter spluttered and spluttered, and almost exploded. He grabbed the fragments of the tart from his capacious mouth with his fat hands, and gurgled and gasped and yelled.

"Oooooch! Groooogh! I'm burnt! Ooooooooch!"

"Don't you like mustard in your tarts?" asked Bob.

"Mustard! Oooooch! Beast! Groooooch!"

"Ggrgrgrgrgrgrrrrrr!"

Billy Bunter staggered out of the study, uttering wild, weird, incoherent sounds, in search of a tap.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now I fancy Bunter will give old Mauly a rest for a little while!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

And Bob was right.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

NO TAKERS!

GREYFRIARS SCHOOL was in a buzz of excitement the following morning. Motor-coaches rolled off laden with cheery fellows, everybody in good spirits and in a good temper. Even Coker of the Fifth shouted a friendly good-bye to the Famous Five, forgetful of unnumbered troubles

"Yurrrrgggghh!" Billy Bunter spluttered and gasped, and almost exploded. He grabbed the fragments of the tart from his mouth with his fat hands. "Oooooch! Groooogh! I'm burnt!" "Don't you like mustard in your tarts?" asked Bob Cherry.

with those merry youths. Even Loder of the Sixth looked genial, and did not cuff his fag that day. If any fellow in the merry swarm looked anxious, it was William George Bunter. But Bunter had some cause for uneasiness, as he had not completed his arrangements for the vacation. As a last resource, Bunter was going home ; but that was only a very last resource. Somehow, he did not seem to look forward to a happy Christmas with his brother Sammy and his sister Bessie. Mauleverer was marked down as his victim.

After breakfast he hunted for Mauleverer, but did not find him. With great indignation, Bunter realised that Mauly was deliberately keeping out of his way. Mauly found it very difficult to say " No " to anybody, but he was determined not to say " Yaas " to Bunter. So he dodged the Owl of the Remove ; and Bunter sought him up and down Greyfriars, but sought him in vain.

Fellows whom he asked after Mauly only grinned, and gave him humorous answers. They seemed to sympathise with Mauly. Vernon-Smith advised Bunter to look on the roof. Peter Todd suggested the coal-cellar as a likely place. Bunter came upon the Famous Five finishing their packing, but he obtained no information from them.

" Where's Mauly ? " he demanded.

" Echo answers, where ? " answered Bob, with a chuckle.

" The wherefulness is terrific," grinned Hurree Singh.

" He's keeping out of sight ! " roared Bunter.

" Shouldn't wonder," assented Wharton.

" Beasts ! Look here, I can't hang on here all day, hunting for a silly fathead——"

" Better not," assented Bob. " Why not phone home to Bunter Court for the Rolls-Royce, and roll home in state ? "

" Beast ! You can give Mauly a message from me," said Bunter. " Tell him he's a silly, fatheaded slacker——"

" Good ! "

" And that I refuse to come home with him——"

" Hurrah ! "

" And that I despise him ! "

" Bravo ! "

" And you, too ! " roared Bunter. " I despise the lot of you ! "

" Hear, hear ! "

And Billy Bunter rolled away, leaving the Famous Five quite unmoved by his crushing scorn.

Ten minutes later he blinked from his study window and frowned at the sight of the Famous Five in a crowded bus. Lord Mauleverer was with them ; he had turned up in time for the bus. His lordship was looking happy and genial, perhaps because Bunter wasn't there. The bus rolled away and disappeared from Billy Bunter's sight, and he gave a snort.

He spotted Sir Jimmy Vivian in the passage and bore down on him. Sir Jimmy was Mauly's relation, but apparently he had not departed with his noble relative. Bunter bestowed his most ingratiating grin on the schoolboy baronet.

" Overtaking Mauly at the station ?" he asked.

" No ! " answered Vivian.

" Catching the next train ? "

" Yes."

" Good ! I'll come ! "

" Will you ? " said Sir Jimmy, looking at him.

" Yes, old chap ! What time do you get to the Towers, Vivian ? "

" I don't get there at all."

" Eh ? "

Sir Jimmy grinned.

"You see, I'm going home with Newland for Christmas," he said; and he walked away grinning.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

An hour later Billy Bunter was at the station with his minor Sammy. Bessie Bunter, from Cliff House School, joined them there. And the three Bunters travelled home together and perhaps enjoyed one another's society very much. But they did not look as if they did.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

THE SCAPEGRACE!

"My cousin Brian, you fellows!" Lord Mauleverer coloured slightly as he spoke. But Harry Wharton & Co. had their best manners on, and not by the slightest sign did they betray the fact that they knew anything about Mr. Brian Mauleverer.

A big car from the Towers was waiting for the Greyfriars party when they came out of the railway station, and a young man was waiting by the car, smoking a cigarette; and that young man was presented to the Famous Five as Lord Mauleverer's cousin.

The juniors shook hands with him and they could not help regarding him with interest. He was apparently about twenty-five years old, though he had an older look at first glance. The life Mr. Brian had led had not helped him to preserve his youth. His face was a good deal like Mauleverer's in feature, but strikingly different in expression. His eyes had what the juniors could not help observing was a shifty look; and there were signs in the face that told of late hours and reckless living.

In the circumstances, the chums of Greyfriars had no choice but to swallow Mr. Brian whole, so to speak, and to dismiss from their minds what Mauly had told them about the unfortunate young gentleman. But they had their own opinion on the subject, and as soon as they saw Mr. Brian that opinion was strengthened. Mr. Brian certainly was a prodigal; but whether he was a repentant prodigal was a very doubtful question.

Harry Wharton's opinion was that the scapegrace, having run through every penny he possessed, had "landed" himself on his good-natured cousin for want of other resources. But that was Mauly's business, and the Greyfriars fellows were not called upon to sit in judgment upon the prodigal, repentant or not. Mauleverer had given them fair warning, and as they had decided to come to Mauleverer Towers all the same, it was up to them to treat Mr. Brian as they would have treated any other relation of Mauly's.

And the young man was quite agreeable and pleasant. He greeted Mauly with warmth, evidently glad to see him, and pleased by his kind and friendly manner. He chatted cheerily with the juniors as the car ran on to the Towers, smoking cigarettes incessantly the while, till the car was in a blue haze of smoke. The number of cigarettes that the young man consumed was amazing.

Harry Wharton & Co. were glad when they arrived at the Towers; the atmosphere in the car was getting too thick for comfort.

Sir Reginald Brooke, Mauly's uncle and guardian, met them at the door with a cheery smile and a hearty handshake. Lord Mauleverer conducted his guests to their rooms, Mr. Brian drifting away aimlessly into the gardens, still smoking cigarettes. A magnificent suite of rooms had been prepared for the guests, communicating with one another, and all of them opening with

French windows upon a long balcony. The change from the old dormitory at Greyfriars was startling, and the juniors smiled as they looked at their magnificent surroundings. Everything at Mauleverer Towers was on the grand scale, and undoubtedly Lord Mauleverer was a fortunate youth much to be envied.

" I hope you chaps will find yourselves comfy," said his lordship.

" We'll try ! " said Bob Cherry solemnly. " If there should be a crumpled rose-leaf or anything serious like that we'll let you know."

His lordship grinned.

" There'll be a late lunch," he said. " Amble down when you feel disposed. Look in for me first."

" Right-ho ! "

Lord Mauleverer ambled away to his own quarters. Before going down, Harry Wharton stepped out on the balcony, which was on the south side of the house and gave a wide view over stretching parklands. The December dusk was setting in, and a slight fall of snow had whitened the park—the leafless trees glimmering spectre-like through the gathering dusk. Frank Nugent came out of his room and joined the captain of the Remove.

" Rather topping, what ? " said Frank, with a smile.

" Yes ; Mauly's a lucky bargee."

" No end lucky," agreed Nugent ; " and the dear old chap never thinks of putting on side. What would Bunter be like if he owned a place like this ? "

" I wonder ! " said Wharton, laughing.

" What do you think of the jolly old cousin ? "

" I think he would be better for smoking a few less cigarettes," said Harry, with a smile.

" Not a bad chap, so far as one can see, though. He seems jolly good-tempered, and rather fond of Mauly."

" He was pleased to see him, anyhow, I think."

There were footsteps below the balcony, and a fragrance of tobacco floated up. The two juniors exchanged a glance. They guessed that Mr. Brian Mauleverer was walking below with his eternal cigarette.

Then a voice was heard ; the voice of Sir Reginald Brooke.

" Brian ! "

" Well ? "

" Dear me, Brian, you are always smoking. Don't you think you would be wise to smoke a little less ? "

Wharton and Nugent exchanged a smile.

" Certainly, sir," answered Brian ; " but I never was wise, you know. But if the cigarette offends you, there it goes ! "

" Now that there are schoolboys in the house, Brian, it would surely be advisable to be a little more—'hem—circumspect."

" I am not a schoolboy."

" No, but——"

" By gad ! A new character for me, settin' up as a model to youth." The young man laughed. " But you are right, sir. The scrubby little bounders shall not take any harm from me."

" Oh ! " murmured Nugent.

Brian's manner to the juniors had been pleasantness itself. It was rather a shock to hear him describing them as scrubby little bounders. And it was not agreeable.

" Really, Brian, I wish you would not speak of Herbert's guests in that way."

" My mistake, sir. I forgot I was on my good behaviour here. I'll promise not to talk horses to them, or to spin them any yarns of wild nights at Monte Carlo."

"My cousin Brian, you fellows!" said Lord Mauleverer. A big car from the Towers was waiting for the Greyfriars party when they came out of the station, and a young man was waiting by the car. The juniors greeted Lord Mauleverer's cousin.

"Be serious, Brian. I want to warn you once more to say nothing to Mauleverer concerning the incident of the armour——"

"That's all right!"

"Of course, there is nothing in it, but considering the old superstition attached to the armour of Sir Fulke——"

"I understand, uncle!"

"Neither need it be mentioned to the other boys——"

Wharton and Nugent went in quickly at the French windows. It dawned upon them that they were about to hear something that was not intended for their ears.

A few minutes later the Famous Five foregathered in Lord Mauleverer's den.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

THE UNREPENTANT PRODIGAL!

THE den of Herbert, Lord Mauleverer, was a den that Fortunatus himself would not have despised. The juniors found his lordship loafing before a leaping log fire, and he turned to them with a smile. On a previous visit to the Towers, Harry Wharton & Co. had seen Mauly's magnificent quarters, but they looked about them with much interest.

The room was extensive, and opened upon the same southern balcony where Wharton and Nugent had stood. Floor and walls were of dark solid oak, and the domed ceiling was painted in the Italian style. Tall French windows opened on the balcony, with another deep window on either side of the French windows. Between the windows stood two figures of ancient armour, complete even to the steel gauntlets.

On the walls hung several trophies of ancient weapons—weapons used

probably by old Mauleverers in days that were long gone by.

At the farther end of the room a door opened into Lord Mauleverer's bedroom. There was another door from the bedroom to a corridor.

The electric light was on in Mauly's "den," glimmering on the polished oak, and the armoured figures, and the old weapons on the walls. Half a dozen deep armchairs stood about in the ample space, and three or four almost priceless Persian rugs glowed in colour on the oaken floor.

"And Mauly never grumbles at the study at Greyfriars!" remarked Bob Cherry, with an amused glance round.

"Eh? Why should I grumble at the study?" asked Mauly. "It's a jolly good old study, isn't it?"

"Bit different from this!" grinned Bob.

"Oh, yaas."

Bob walked up to the armoured figures. He tapped the nearest one on the breast-plate.

"Nobody at home, I suppose?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lord Mauleverer did not join in the laugh. For some reason his lazy face became very grave.

"That's old Sir Fulke's armour-plate," he said.

"Who was Sir Fulke?" asked Bob.

Wharton started a little. He remembered that name, uttered a few minutes before by the old baronet.

"One of my giddy ancestors," answered Mauleverer, "that lived before there was an earldom. He used to chop the Saracens in the good old days, in that very set of tin ribs."

"Good man," said Bob. "And who's the other johnny?"

"That's the armour of Sir Gilbert, his brother. They weren't a credit to the family, I believe," said Mauleverer. "There's an old yarn about Sir Fulke——" He paused.

"You shall spin us the yarn, Mauly," said Bob. "Is it a ghost story?"

"Yaas."

"Jolly old Sir Fulke revisits the glimpses of the moon, what?" asked Johnny Bull, with a grin.

"Well, of course, he doesn't," said Mauleverer slowly. "But——"

"But——" asked Johnny.

"Well, it's an old yarn, and, of course, there's nothin' in it," said Mauleverer. "We don't believe such things nowadays. But a fellow is bound to give his own family legends some respect, you know. But, dash it all—never mind ghost stories — you fellows must be famished."

"Hungry as Bunter, or a wolf," confessed Bob.

"Let's get down."

The Greyfriars party went down to a very late lunch. Brian did not join them; but Sir Reginald presided at the table with a beaming, cheery face. But the beaming smile faded from the old gentleman's countenance when Bob Cherry made some allusion to the ghost story. Bob was a little interested in the legend of the ghost of the Towers, though he did not dream of taking it seriously. But the sudden gravity in the old baronet's face made the juniors realise, to their astonishment, that Sir Reginald did not take the matter with the same lightness.

"We want Mauly to spin the yarn," said Bob. "It will make no end of a merry Christmas if the giddy ghost walks on his beat."

"I am afraid the tale is not a very pleasant one," said the old baronet. "They were lawless days when Sir Fulke Mauleverer lived. Herbert

would do well to dismiss the legend entirely from his mind."

"Oh, yaas," said Herbert.

And Bob Cherry let the subject drop at once. But when he strolled out on the terrace later with Wharton, he expressed his amazement to the captain of the Remove.

"Mauly can't be ass enough to believe in the ghost story, surely?" he said.

"Well, it's a family ghost," said Wharton, laughing. "Perhaps Mauly feels that it's up to him."

"I'd like to hear the yarn all the same," said Bob. "I dare say the Brian-bird knows, and he'll spin it for us."

Bob Cherry walked up to the armoured figure and tapped it on the breast-plate. "Nobody at home, I suppose?" he asked. "Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the other fellows.

And when Bob went in he asked a manservant where Mr. Brian Mauleverer was. He was directed to the billiards-room, where he found the young man idly knocking about the ivory balls. There was a discontented expression on Brian's face.

He rapped at the ball viciously, but made a good shot. Bob Cherry stopped to watch the shot, and for the moment the scapegrace of the Mauleverer family did not notice that he had entered. The young man placed the balls in a difficult position, and brought off a cannon from the top cushion—with a deftness that showed that a considerable portion of his youth had been misspent.

As he caught sight of the junior, however, the discontented look left the young man's face, and he smiled genially. It was like a mask being put on a face.

Bob Cherry suppressed a grin.

He was not blind to the fact that Mauly's scapegrace cousin was bored to extinction at the Towers, and saw no prospect of enjoying Christmas in company with a crowd of fellows from school. Much older and wilder company would have been required to

make it a happy Christmas for Brian Mauleverer.

But it was evidently Brian's cue to affect a satisfaction with his surroundings that he was far from feeling. In his personal dealings with the Greyfriars juniors, he certainly gave no hint of the fact that he regarded Mauly's friends as "scrubby little bounders."

"Like a game, kid?" he asked genially. "Let me see, your name's Berry, isn't it?"

"Cherry!" said Bob.

"Sorry—always forgettin' names. I'll give you fifty in a hundred."

"Done!" said Bob.

Bob played billiards in a schoolboy fashion. He was rather proud of leading off with a break of fifteen. Interested in showing his skill, he forgot all about his intention of asking Brian concerning the ghost story. Brian followed him with a break of twenty-five, and then potted his own ball clumsily enough. Bob followed on with ten, and again the scapegrace played badly, and Bob ran out with his hundred, having started with fifty to his score. The schoolboy of Greyfriars felt very pleased with himself.

"Good man!" said Brian cordially. "You can play."

"Not so bad, was it?" said Bob, innocently.

"Jolly good. I'll give you fifty again, and try you once more," said Brian. "Let's have a pound on the game to make it interestin'?"

Bob Cherry started a little. He shook his head.

"Can't be done," he answered in his direct way. "Never play a game for money."

"Oh, great gad!" groaned Brian Mauleverer. "Where have I landed?"

Bob laughed.

"Sorry," he said. "Play you for love, if you like."

"I'll put up a fiver against your quid," said Brian. "Let's have somethin' to put life into it."

"Nothing doing," said Bob tersely. And as Nugent looked into the billiards-room just then, Bob nodded to the scapegrace and walked away with Nugent.

Bob was no fool; and a little reflection showed him that Brian had played very badly—after displaying great skill in practice shots. He had, in fact, allowed the schoolboy to win the game, and, obviously, for the purpose of tempting him to play for money. It was pretty clear that whatever kind of a prodigal Brian Mauleverer was, he was not of the repentant kind. His conduct, in fact, was that of a billiards sharper; nothing less or more.

"Poor old Mauly!" Bob said to himself. It was pretty clear that the schoolboy earl was being imposed upon by his rascally relative.

But it was not Bob's business; and he did not mention the incident even to his comrades. But he showed no desire after that to seek Mr. Brian Mauleverer's company.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

A LEGEND OF OLD TIME!

"You fellows look awfully jolly." Brian Mauleverer made that remark. He stood in the doorway of Lord Mauleverer's den.

Certainly the fellows looked jolly.

Round the blazing log fire on the wide hearth, half a dozen deep, big chairs were drawn, and the Greyfriars party sat in a merry half-circle, with the firelight playing on their cheery faces.

The evening was growing old, and the party had gathered in Mauly's

den for a " jaw " before going to bed. Sir Reginald Brooke was already in bed, and Brian was out of doors when the juniors gathered there. Now he looked in on the party with a smiling face.

Lord Mauleverer turned a smiling look of welcome on his cousin.

" Trot in, old fellow!"

" Do ! " said Wharton. " We're spinning a yarn, Mr. Brian."

The young man sauntered in.

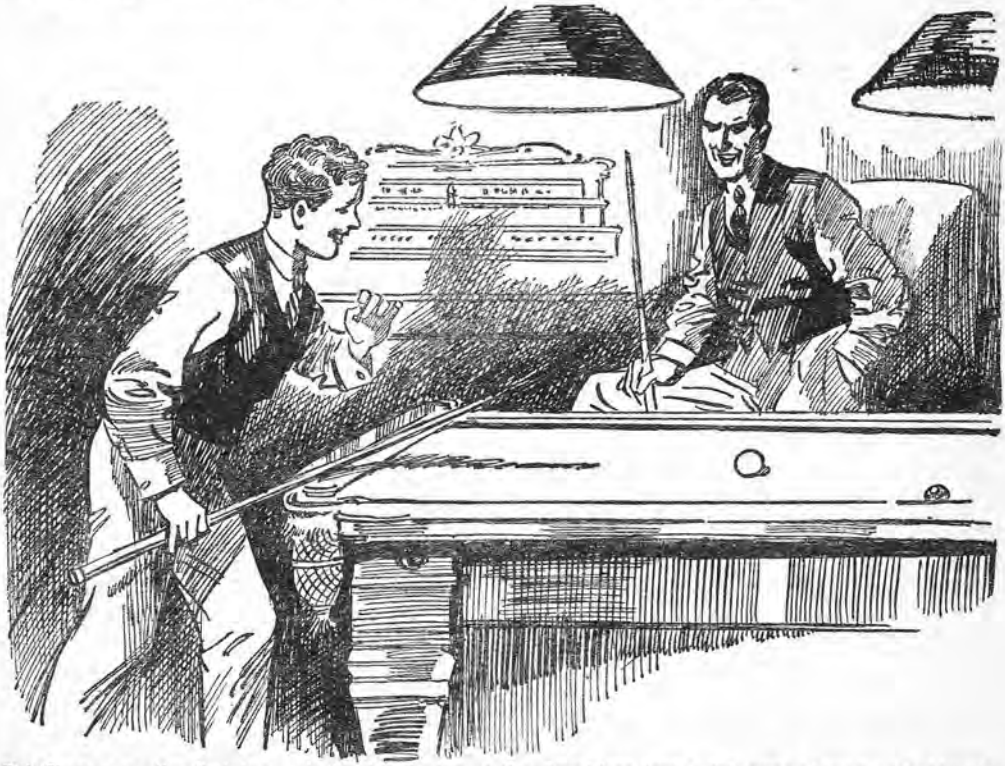
Bob jumped up and pulled another big chair into the circle. Brian sat down in it, crossing one elegant leg over the other. As he sat, he was almost facing the gleaming suit of armour that in ancient days had been worn by Sir Fulke Mauleverer. The firelight glimmered on the shining coat of mail and on the closed visor of the helmet ; it needed little imagination to suppose that the figure was real and living. Brian's eyes dwelt upon it curiously for a moment or two, and then he lighted one of his endless cigarettes.

His coming did not damp the party in any way. The schoolboys felt, in fact, a little flattered at an experienced man of the world like Brian Mauleverer seeking their company. Johnny Bull had been spinning a yarn and he had just come to a conclusion.

Mauleverer glanced at his cousin.

" Your turn, Brian," he said.

" Good ! " exclaimed Johnny Bull. " You've seen a lot of the world, Mr. Mauleverer ; you must have a good many yarns to spin."



Bob Cherry was the first to reach the hundred, and the Greyfriars junior felt very pleased with himself. " Good man ! " said Brian cordially. " You can play."

Brian laughed.

" I'm afraid many of my yarns would not do for this company," he said, " but Christmas is the time for ghost stories—what ? "

" Good ! Let's have a ghost story," said Bob.

" I'll tell your friends the legend of Sir Fulke, Herbert—what ? " asked the young man, with a careless glance at Lord Mauleverer.

Wharton, looking at his lordship, had an impression that Mauly would have preferred to avoid that subject. But Mauly nodded cheerily.

" Go ahead—if they'd care to hear," he said.

Brian took his cigarette from his mouth, and the juniors settled themselves down to listen. They glanced a good many times at Sir Fulke's armour, towering by the shadowy windows. Outside the house, the December wind wailed along the terrace and creaked the branches of the old trees. Wharton threw a fresh log on the fire.

Brian told the tale in a low, clear voice, staring at the fire most of the time and allowing his cigarette to expire. It was a strange old tale of battle and murder and feud—a tale of the " good old times " when life was held cheaply.

Sir Fulke Mauleverer's career in the reign of Richard the First had been an exciting one, according to the story. He had added field to field and manor to manor with a strong hand, and a life of cruelty and bloodshed had ended in violence. In the old stone tower, the ruins of which still stood, he had fallen by the hand of his brother, Sir Gilbert. The fratricide, haunted and conscience-stricken, had found death on a Saracen battlefield, leaving the great Mauleverer estate to his son, the ancestor of the dandy of the Remove, who was sitting silent, staring at the fire, as Brian told the tale.

" The spirit of the wicked old knight, slain by his brother's hand, could find no peace," went on Brian in his low, clear voice. " For ever afterwards the Mauleverers were a haunted race, even to this day. When death is coming to a Mauleverer there is always a sign from Sir Fulke. And the legend tells that more than one Mauleverer has met his death at the hands of the wicked old knight, whose restless spirit has returned to inhabit the armour that he wore when he was a living man."

He paused a moment.

" More than once a Mauleverer has been found dead, with the iron grasp of Sir Fulke on his throat——"

There was a sudden movement from Mauly. But he smiled as the juniors glanced at him.

" A steep yarn, begad ! " said his lordship.

" There can't be any truth in it, of course," said Wharton, looking oddly at Brian. The young man had spoken with the deepest seriousness.

Brian shrugged shoulders.

" There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy," he remarked. " A great poet has told us that. And it is at least certain that the death of a Mauleverer, in recent times, has been hinted at by the figure yonder."

The juniors' glances turned involuntarily towards the figure.

" Before the last Earl of Mauleverer died—killed in the hunting-field—a gauntlet dropped from the armoured figure," said Brian. " It had held its place from time immemorial. It fell with a crash on the evening before the last lord met his death ; and last night——"

Lord Mauleverer started violently. He turned a quick, searching look upon his cousin.

"Last night!" he exclaimed. "What happened last night, Brian?"

The young man hesitated. Wharton and Nugent, remembering the chance words they had heard on the balcony, exchanged a quick glance.

"Nothing," said Brian at last. "I—I—in fact——" He stammered a little.

Lord Mauleverer sat bolt upright in his chair. There was a trace of pallor in his cheeks.

"Tell me!" he said quietly.

The juniors looked at Brian. He seemed overwhelmed with confusion.

"I did not mean to allude to it," he said at last. "Sir Reginald asked me not to tell you, Herbert. But after all, it is only a legend. Why should you be afraid?"

Mauleverer flushed.

"I am not afraid," he answered. "But if anything happened, I ought to know. What was it?"

"I suppose I had better tell you, as the matter has been mentioned," said Brian at last reluctantly. "I heard a noise in my room—you know I have a room at the end of the corridor. I think I had been dreaming—perhaps the legend was in my mind while I slept. I heard a sound of—of——"

"Of what?"

Mauleverer's voice was sharp.

"Of armoured feet treading."

"Oh, gad!"

"I jumped out of bed and ran here," said Brian. "I looked in and flashed on the light; and I thought that——"

He paused.

The juniors felt an eerie sensation. All eyes were fixed on the towering armour-clad figure.

"You thought——"

"I thought, for a second, that Sir Fulke moved," said Brian in a low, shuddering voice. "No doubt the sudden light deceived me; no doubt I had dreamed the sound of iron footsteps. Sir Reginald thought so when I told him this morning. He did not wish me to tell you. Forgive me."

Mauleverer laughed lightly.

"I'm glad to know," he said. "It was a dream, of course. And I'm not afraid that Sir Fulke's gauntlet will fall and warn me of my death——"

Crash!

Mauleverer stopped, the words dying on his lips, his face ashy pale. With a loud metallic crash a gauntlet dropped from the armoured figure on to the polished oak. Through the silent room the crash rang like thunder.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

THE SPECTRE KNIGHT!

LORD MAULEVERER sat fixed, motionless, his eyes staring at the figure of Sir Fulke and the gauntlet that lay on the floor. The juniors started to their feet with suppressed exclamations.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Brian.

He sprang up.

Then there was silence; and for some minutes no one spoke. Lord Mauleverer was making painful and visible efforts to pull himself together. The crash of the falling gauntlet had rung like a knell of doom in the ears of the schoolboy earl.

"Good heavens!" breathed Bob Cherry at last. He hurried across to the armoured form, that seemed to tower threateningly over him.

For some moments he had felt a superstitious thrill; but his sturdy common-sense came to the rescue.

He picked up the heavy gauntlet.

"Just come unstuck!" he said, with an attempt at humour.

"It has not happened since—since——" Brian Mauleverer was muttering. He broke off without finishing.

"Quite a dramatic climax to Brian's yarn," said Lord Mauleverer calmly. He was smiling, but there was a quiver in his lips. "The dashed thing couldn't have given way at a more appropriate moment, by gad! I fancy somebody has been monkeyin' with that armour!"

"Who would touch it?" said Brian.

Lord Mauleverer shook his head. Wharton looked at him; Mauly was calm, smiling, but there was a dew of perspiration on his forehead. It came as a shock to Harry to realise that Mauleverer was not untouched by superstitious belief in the legend of his family.

"Mauly, old chap——" he said.

"There's no cause for alarm," said Brian, with a curious look at his cousin. "The thing became detached, and fell. The same thing happened a day before your poor father was killed in the hunting-field, Herbert—when you were a baby. Sheer chance, of course."

"Oh, of course," said Mauleverer, but his lips twitched. "Brian, old man, you tell a ghost story well; and Sir Fulke plays up like a little man to increase the effect. You fellows know it's getting on for twelve? We're riding in the mornin', and Drake's comin' to-morrow. What price bed?"

And the party broke up.

Brian Mauleverer said good-night to the juniors, and went away to his own quarters, at the end of the old wide corridor upon which all the juniors' rooms opened. Harry Wharton stayed last to speak to Lord Mauleverer after the other fellows had gone.

Mauly was cool and calm and smiling; but he was not completely hiding the effect of the fall of the gauntlet upon him. And Wharton was feeling a little uneasy about his chum.

"You're rather an ass to have your giddy ancestor in your den, Mauly," he said. "I'd have him shifted."

Mauleverer smiled and shook his head.

"He's stood in this room for a hundred years," he said. "I've heard that he used to stand in the gallery; but people were frightened by a ghostly iron-clad tread in the dead of night. The jolly old dog has never walked in my time. Brian was dreamin' last night——"

"Of course," said Harry. "But how——"

"All serene, old top! Good-night!"

"Good-night, Mauly!"

Wharton went along to his own room, and Mauleverer's door closed. The schoolboy earl, as soon as he was alone, dropped the mask of smiling nonchalance. His face set gravely, and he walked up to the armoured figure and stood before it for some minutes, in silence, regarding it. The gauntlet still lay where it had fallen.

For some time Mauleverer stood regarding the figure in silence, strange thoughts passing in his mind. Then he turned off the electric light and passed into the adjoining bedroom.

He turned in and put out the light; but sleep did not come soon.

The old legend of the Towers, which Mauleverer had known from childhood, had a strange effect on his mind. He did not exactly believe in it; but it weighed with him, and the falling

" I'm not afraid that Sir Fulke's gauntlet will fall and warn me of my death," said Lord Mauleverer. Crash ! With a loud metallic crash a gauntlet dropped from the armoured figure on to the floor ! The juniors started to their feet with suppressed exclamations.

of the gauntlet seemed too strange to be a coincidence. Last night Brian had heard the ghostly tread of the wicked old knight; to-night the gauntlet had fallen—as it had the night before the death of Mauleverer's father. It was chance—it must be chance—and yet while Mauleverer's brain told him that there was nothing more in it, something in his heart seemed to tell him a different tale. Something, somewhere in his nature, responded to the call of superstition that his mind rejected.

He slept at last, but it was uneasily. A light sound would have awakened him from a slumber tormented by dreams of a wicked old knight, whose evil eyes glittered through the holes in his visor. Suddenly Lord Mauleverer awakened——

He sat up in bed, his very flesh creeping.

What was it that he heard ?

Outside, there was a faint wail of the winter wind. But what he heard was closer at hand.

It was the tread of iron feet.

In the darkness he sat, his heart throbbing, the sweat running down his face. Was he dreaming—was he mad ?

Tramp ! Tramp !

It was no dream. Unless he was mad, he heard it. The tramp of a man in armour—approaching the door of his bedroom, from the room where the figure of wicked old Sir Fulke stood——

The door opened.

A thrill of horror and dread ran through the unhappy boy in the bed. He would have stretched out his hand to the electric switch, but horror held him motionless. He could only stare in the gloom—still, dumb, in unspeakable horror.

From the open doorway came a gleam of firelight—the log fire yet burned. It played through the doorway, glimmering. What was it that the firelight glimmered on ?

On a figure in armour—the figure of Sir Fulke Mauleverer—towering in the gloom.

A wild shriek broke from Herbert Mauleverer, and he fell back in a dead faint.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

THE HORROR OF THE NIGHT !

HARRY WHARTON leaped from his bed.

A shriek was ringing in his ears—a fearful cry that had awakened him, and yet rang and echoed and throbbed in his brain.

That terrible cry came from Mauleverer's room—he knew it !

What had happened ?

Wharton did not stop to think. He stopped for nothing. He raced out of his room into the corridor, only pausing a fraction of a second there to switch on the electric light.

Another second, and he was at the door of Mauleverer's den and had hurled the door wide open.

He switched on the light in the room..

It showed the room exactly as the juniors had left it—the armchairs still ranged round the red embers on the hearth—the two armoured figures standing between the windows.

The door of Mauleverer's bedroom was shut. No sound came from beyond the closed door.

Yet Wharton was certain of the cry he had heard. Something had happened to Mauleverer—something that was terrible.

" Harry ! "

It was Bob Cherry's voice behind Wharton.

" You heard it, too ? " gasped Harry.

" Yes—was it——"

" Mauly ! "

Evidently Wharton had not fancied it. Bob had heard it, too; and the doors of three other rooms were opening—Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Singh hurried out. All had heard that terrible cry.

" Wharton—what——"

Harry Wharton dashed across the room and threw open the door of Lord Mauleverer's bedroom. All was in darkness ; but in a moment he had found the switch and turned the light on.

" Mauly ! "

Lord Mauleverer lay across the bed, motionless. The bedclothes were thrown back. Wharton ran to him.

" Mauly ! " he exclaimed, huskily.

No sound, no word, no movement ! Mauleverer was insensible.

" He's fainted ! " said Harry.

" But what—what can have happened ? " asked Bob Cherry, in a low, scared voice.

" Heaven knows."

There was a faint moan from Mauleverer. His eyes opened, and he stared wildly round him. For the moment he did not seem to recognise the chums of the Remove.

He shuddered violently.

" Mauly ! " breathed Wharton. He threw his arm round the schoolboy earl and drew him to a sitting posture on the bed. " Mauly, old fellow——"

A long and terrible shudder ran through Mauleverer's limbs again. He muttered something incoherently.

" Better call Sir Reginald," said Nugent.

Mauleverer made a movement then.

" All right in a minute," he muttered. " Don't—don't call my uncle. Don't ! Stay with me a bit, you fellows——"

" Of course we'll stay," said Harry. " Get into the other room, to the fire, old chap ; you're shivering. Stir the fire together, Bob."

" Right ! "

Mauleverer seemed scarcely able to move. Wharton caught up a dressing-gown and placed it on the shivering junior, and half led, half carried him into the adjoining room. Bob was stirring the embers into a blaze.

The faces of the juniors were scared and startled. They asked themselves what could have happened, without being able to find an answer. Something had struck the schoolboy earl with horror and fear—what, they could not even guess.

Mauleverer sank into a chair by the fire, still shivering, and the juniors noticed that he kept his face turned away from the armoured figures by the windows.

" Wharton ! " whispered Mauleverer at last.

" Yes, old fellow ? "

" Is he—is he still there ? "

" He ? Who ? " asked Harry, wondering whether Mauleverer's mind was wandering.

" Sir Fulke."

Mauleverer scarcely breathed the name.

Wharton started. His eyes turned on the armoured figure.

" It's still there, of course, Mauly."

" Has it moved ? "

" Moved ? " said Harry. " Of course not ! "

Mauleverer shuddered.

" Look at it, Harry ! Look at it closely, old chap, if you've the nerve. Tell me if it—if it seems to have moved—even an inch——"

In silence Harry crossed over to the figure of Sir Fulke.

So far as he could observe, it was standing exactly in its old position. There was no sign of its having moved. How could it have moved ?

Each of the armoured figures looked exactly as when the juniors had seen them last.

Mauleverer did not speak, but his eyes seemed to beseech Wharton, as the captain of the Remove came back.

" It's not moved," said Harry.

" Sure ? "

" Quite sure, old chap ! "

Mauleverer stared into the fire. Bob had fanned it into blaze, and was heaping up half-burnt embers. But the schoolboy earl still shivered, as if the cold were in his very heart.

Wharton closed the doors of the room. The juniors did not think for a moment of leaving their chum. No one else in the house seemed to have heard the cry that had awakened them. The servants' quarters were at a distance ; only Brian Mauleverer's room was occupied within range of hearing. But Brian had not turned out.

Wharton thought of him, and asked Mauleverer whether he should call his cousin.

The schoolboy earl shook his head.

" No ! What's the good ? "

The juniors gathered round the fire. The night was cold, and they were

clad only in their pyjamas. For a long time there was silence, but Mauleverer spoke at last.

" A dream," he said. " Was it a dream ? You fellows will think me mad, or a funk. But I saw—I saw—I——" He shuddered.

" What did you see, old fellow ? " asked Nugent softly.

There was no vestige of colour in Mauleverer's waxen cheeks. But he was calm now, and his voice was steady as he answered.

" I think I fainted. Did you fellows find my bedroom door open ? "

" No ; shut."

" Was Sir Fulke in his place ? "

" In his place ? Of course ! "

" Was there—was there anybody in the room, or—or anything ? "

" Good heavens ! " murmured Wharton under his breath. Aloud he said : " No, old fellow, nobody—nothing that's not here now. If there'd been anybody, he couldn't have cleared. I heard you cry out, and came at once."

" Then it wasn't a trick ? " said Mauleverer.

" A—a trick ? "

" Harry, old man "—Mauleverer's voice grew husky—" as I'm living, my bedroom door opened and Sir Fulke came in—Sir Fulke Mauleverer——"

" Mauly ! "

" Unless I'm mad, I saw him ! " Mauleverer shivered. " I remember I cried out ; then I must have fainted. You fellows know I'm not a funk, to be frightened by a shadow. I saw Sir Fulke—in armour——"

The juniors exchanged alarmed glances.

" You'd been dreaming, old chap ! " said Bob, uncomfortably.

" I had—I know I had ! But it was he—the signal of death to a Mauleverer ! " muttered the schoolboy earl.

" Well, I'm not afraid ! It was only the horror of it——"

" Mauly ! " exclaimed Wharton sharply. " Look here, old man, if you saw the armoured figure, there was somebody inside it——"

" I've thought of that. It might have been a cruel trick. But you say yourself that there was nobody here——"

Wharton crossed over to the mail-clad figure. The armour was empty.

" Look about the rooms, you fellows," said Harry. " It's barely possible——"

The juniors searched, though without expectation of making any discovery. Every recess was looked into. There was not the remotest trace of an intruder.

Yet if someone had played a trick with the mail-clad figure it was evident that he could not have escaped unseen. Wharton had been on the spot at once—his chums close behind him. The corridor had been flooded with electric light. The upper end of it was a blank wall and shuttered window : and in the other direction any fugitive from Mauleverer's room must have passed the doors of all the rooms occupied by the Famous Five. A trickster could not have escaped unseen, that was certain.

The juniors gathered round the fire again. Every face was grave. There was little doubt in their minds that Mauleverer had cried out in the grip of a terrible nightmare.

But they did not say so.

Bob Cherry heaped more wood on the fire. The juniors were sleepy, but they did not think of bed. But Lord Mauleverer rose to his feet at last.

" I'm keepin' you fellows up," he said. " You're tired. I'm goin' back to bed."

" Not alone," said Harry.

" It's all serene, old fellow."

Wharton shook his head.

" Whatever it was—dream or not—you're not being left alone again to-night, Mauly. There's room for two or three in that big four-poster of yours. One of us is going to stay with you."

Lord Mauleverer smiled faintly.

" It's rotten to worry you fellows like this," he said. " A jolly Christmas I'm givin' you, begad ! "

" Rot, old chap ! "

And when the other fellows went back to bed Harry Wharton went with Lord Mauleverer, quite determined that the schoolboy earl should not be left alone.

Wharton kept the electric light on, and in a short time he was glad to see that Mauleverer was asleep. He did not sleep so soon himself ; he lay thinking of the strange occurrence. And suddenly he gave a start. For a moment it seemed to him that he heard a sound in the adjoining room—a sound of movement. He started up in bed, listening intently, with throbbing heart. But the sound was not repeated ; he heard nothing but the faint wail of the wind.

He slept at last, fatigued with watching, and he did not open his eyes again till the sun of the winter morning was glimmering in at the windows.

THE NINTH CHAPTER
DRAKE ARRIVES !

HARRY WHARTON & Co. were feeling a little heavy-eyed when they came down in the morning. But a good breakfast and a spell of skating on the frozen lake made them feel quite themselves again —with the exception of Lord Mauleverer. Mauly was quiet and calm, and even cheerful in a way ; but the juniors could see plainly enough that the strange events of the night had told on him. At Mauly's request nothing was said to Sir Reginald Brooke on the subject ; he did not wish the kind old gentleman to be distressed. And the juniors mentioned none of the circumstances to Brian Mauleverer. The least said, the soonest mended, was Mauleverer's

The firelight glimmered on a figure in armour—the figure of Sir Fulke Mauleverer—towering in the gloom. A wild shriek broke from Herbert Mauleverer, before he fell back in a dead faint.

view ; and probably he did not care to hear Brian's comments on the subject. It was odd enough, when the juniors came to think of it, that Brian had heard nothing during the night, as his quarters were so close at hand ; but if he was in ignorance of what had occurred, it was as well to leave him so.

Mauleverer did not join the skaters ; and while his comrades were gone out, Wharton looked for the schoolboy earl, and found him in his den. He was seated in a deep armchair, with his eyes fixed on the armoured figure of Sir Fulke, his face strangely pale and worn. He glanced up with a smile as Wharton entered, but the smile evidently was forced. And it came into Wharton's mind that the strange visitation had told upon Mauly more than he had guessed.

" You're coming out on the ice, old fellow ? " said Harry.

Lord Mauleverer shook his head.

" I think not. Lazy, you know."

" But——" said Harry.

" Besides, Drake's comin' to-day," said Mauleverer. " I think I'll go down in the car to meet him at the station. Like to come ? "

" Good ! " said Wharton. " When do you go ? "

" Twelve."

" Right-ho ! I'll be ready. Won't you come out for a run now ? "

" Dear boy, you go ahead with the strenuous life. I lost some sleep last night, an' I want a little extra nap."

Mauly closed his eyes. Harry Wharton joined the skaters ; but as soon as he was gone from the den, Mauly's eyes opened again. His glance turned almost haggardly on the figure of Sir Fulke.

Brian Mauleverer joined Harry Wharton as he was going down to the lake. The young man was smoking a cigarette, as usual, and he seemed in a cheery mood.

" 'Nothin' wrong with Herbert, is there ? " he asked suddenly.

" Mauly ? " said Wharton.

" Yes. He seemed a little off his feed this mornin'." Brian looked curiously at Wharton. " I hope the ghost story didn't give him a jolly old nightmare last night ; but from his looks I'm afraid it did."

" Very likely, I think," said Harry.

" Friend of yours comin' down to-day, I believe ? " said Brian, changing the subject.

" Yes, Jack Drake. He used to be at Greyfriars with us," said Harry.

" Oh, a schoolboy ? "

" Well, it's not long since he was a schoolboy," said Wharton, with a smile. " He's a jolly good sort."

Brian nodded, and strolled away into the park, while Wharton joined the skaters. The captain of the Remove left his comrades in time to join Mauleverer for the run to the station. Mauleverer looked a little more like his old lazy and cheerful self as the car ran down the drive in the frosty sunshine. But the signs of strain in his face were only too clear.

" Mauly, old man," said Wharton, as the car left the park gates behind, " I've been thinking——"

" About the giddy ghost ? " asked Mauleverer, with a faint smile.

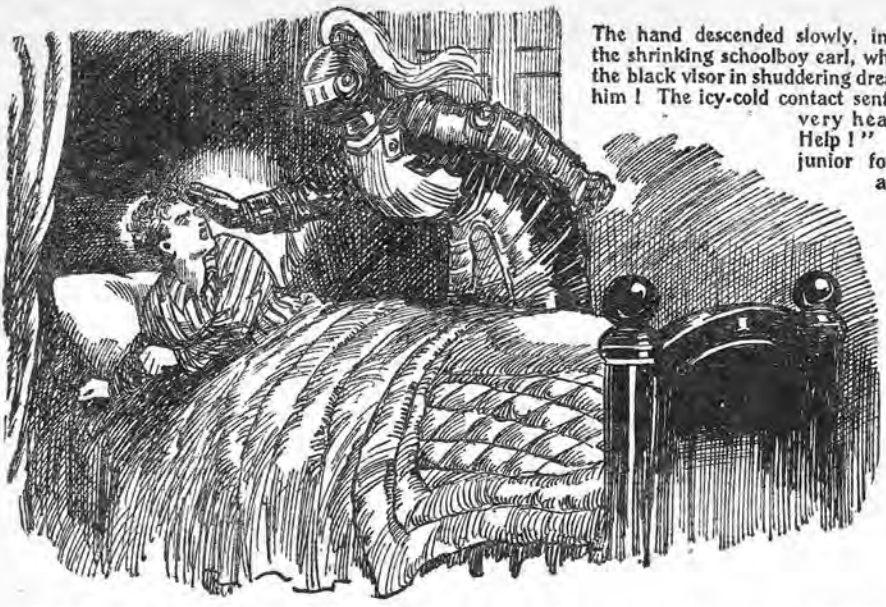
" Yes, old chap. I know it's not an agreeable subject to you," said the captain of the Remove, " but I want to ask you a question. Now it's all over—now it's daylight—do you feel sure that you saw—what you thought you saw last night ? "

Mauleverer was silent.

" Yaas," he said, at last.

" You feel sure it wasn't a dream ? "

" Yaas."



The hand descended slowly, inexorably upon the shrinking schoolboy earl, while he watched the black visor in shuddering dread. It touched him ! The icy-cold contact sent a chill to his very heart. "Help ! Help !" The terrified junior found his voice at last.

"Then what do you think ?"

The schoolboy earl did not speak.

"If you saw it, Mauly, it must surely have been some sort of a trick," said Wharton.

"I don't see how."

"Neither do I," said Harry, with a nod. "Nobody else was there—nobody but ourselves—even if anybody in the house could have thought of playing such a dastardly trick. But——"

"But what ?"

"Well, to put it plain, old chap, ghosts are all rot," said Harry. "Now, we're going to meet Drake, and I'm more glad than ever that he's coming. You know that when Drake left Greyfriars he entered the service of Ferrers Locke, the famous detective. He's a detective himself, now."

"Yaas."

"Well, my idea is, tell Drake all about it, and see what he thinks," said Harry. "Sort of professional opinion, you know."

Lord Mauleverer smiled.

"This isn't the kind of business a detective could deal with, Harry," he answered. "Either it's a potty fancy—and I want a doctor for that, begad—or—or the old legend's true, and that old villain Sir Fulke Mauleverer has come back to warn me that I'm near the end. And if it's that, a detective can't help—not Ferrers Locke himself."

"But if it was some sort of a deception——"

"How could it have been ? You searched my rooms, and there was no one there—and you know nobody could have got away before you arrived."

"That's true. But——"

"Nothin' doing, you know," said Lord Mauleverer.

"All the same, I'd like to tell Drake and get his opinion. He's no end of a keen chap. If there's anything to be found out, Drake's the fellow to find it out."

Mauleverer hesitated.

" Drake's a practical sort of chap," he said. " I'm afraid he'll think it's silly nerves. I don't want to be chipped."

" I understand that," said Harry. " But whichever way you look at it, Mauly, it's a serious matter. Drake will be glad to help, if he can help. If something of the kind happened again this Christmas, you'd feel the shock pretty seriously. Let Drake know, anyway."

" I'll do whatever you like," said Mauleverer, at last.

" Good man ! " said Wharton, relieved.

The car stopped at the station, and Mauleverer and Wharton went on the platform. The train came in, and a cheery, good-looking youth with very keen eyes jumped out and waved his hand to the two juniors. They rushed across the platform to greet him.

THE TENTH CHAPTER

JACK DRAKE TAKES A HAND !

JACK DRAKE looked very merry and bright.

He shook hands warmly with Wharton and Lord Mauleverer, evidently glad to see his old Greyfriars schoolfellows again.

" It's jolly to see you ! " he exclaimed. " Topping, in fact ! "

" You're looking just the same, Drake," said Wharton, smiling. " I don't think I should guess you were a giddy detective, to look at you."

" Begad, no," said Lord Mauleverer. " I suppose you've been runnin' in a jolly old cracksman before brekker every mornin'—what ? "

Jack Drake chuckled.

" I'm a schoolboy again, for the Christmas holidays, at least," he said. " I almost wish I were going back to Greyfriars again with you next term."

" But not quite ? "

" No ; not quite," said Drake, laughing. " I like my new life, and Ferrers Locke is a man anybody might be happy to work with."

The three schoolboys walked out of the station together. Drake's face was very bright as he sat in the car with the Greyfriars juniors.

He glanced round appreciatively as the car glided along a lane with all leafless trees, white with frost, on either side.

" This is a jolly change after Baker Street," he said.

" But not so excitin', dear boy."

" No, but rather more jolly," said Drake. " You fellows have already started late hours, I see."

" Oh, you see that ? " asked Harry.

" I fancy so," Drake grinned. " I'm a detective, you know, and a disciple of Ferrers Locke. Tell me what it is, Mauly."

" Eh ? What what is ? " ejaculated his lordship, with a start.

" What you've got on your mind."

" Eh ? How the thump do you know I've got anythin' on my mind ? " demanded Lord Mauleverer.

" I shouldn't be of much use to Ferrers Locke if I couldn't see that, old scout," said Drake. " Has anything happened since you came home for the holidays ? "

" By gad ! " said Mauleverer.

" I hope nobody has burgled the Mauleverer plate ? " said Drake. " But if so, hand over the case to me—the man on the spot, you know ! "

" Not so bad as that," said Wharton, laughing.

" But something's happened ? "

" Yes."

" Something in my line ? "

" I don't know yet," said the captain of the Remove, " but we were going to tell you and ask your opinion."

"Good!" said Drake. "I'd be no end pleased if I could help. Get on with the yarn at once."

Drake leaned back on the soft cushions, drinking in the keen, frosty air, while Wharton told the story, Lord Mauleverer putting in a few words here and there.

Mauly's foreboding that Drake might "chip" him on the subject was not realised.

The schoolboy detective listened with quiet gravity, and it was easy to see that he was taking the incident with great seriousness.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Harry, when the story was finished and the schoolboy detective was in possession of all the circumstances.

"I think it's jolly lucky that Mauly asked me down for Christmas," said Drake quietly. "There's somebody in Mauleverer Towers who will bear watching."

"Oh, gad!" murmured Mauleverer.

Drake lifted the slim junior in his arms and bore him into the outer room and placed him in the armchair before the fire. Mauleverer ceased to mutter; the pallor of death was in his face.

"I suppose it's known that I'm coming?" said Drake. "Has it been mentioned about my connection with Ferrers Locke?"

"The fellows know, of course," said Harry, "and Mauly's uncle may know. It's not been mentioned otherwise."

"Better not speak of it, then," said Drake. "I'm coming along just as your old schoolfellow from Greyfriars, that's all. No need to put anybody on his guard if we can avoid it."

"That's so," assented Wharton.

"But you can't think——" began Mauleverer, perplexed.

"It's a bit hard to know what to think, so far," said Drake. "But I'm going to look round, and then do some hard thinking."

And that was all Ferrers Locke's assistant had to say. The car glided up the drive at the Towers. Brian Mauleverer was strolling on the terrace with his inevitable cigarette, and he came to meet the juniors. Lord Mauleverer introduced Drake, who was referred to simply as a former Greyfriars fellow. Brian was genial enough to him, but took no special note of the newcomer, evidently not having the faintest idea that Jack Drake was

anything but what he looked—a cheery schoolboy.

Drake met the rest of the Greyfriars party at lunch. Wharton had already spoken a word to his chums, and no reference was made to Drake's profession. After lunch Lord Mauleverer sought out Harry Wharton, with a rather worried look on his face.

He found the captain of the Remove on the balcony, enjoying the view of the parklands.

"You remember what I told you fellows before we broke up at Greyfriars," he said.

"About your cousin?"

"Yaas. Drake's come here in the same way, and—and I suppose I ought to let him know. But I couldn't let him know before he came, and—and now it doesn't seem specially necessary to mention it, as he's landed, what? I hate referrin' to the subject, of course."

Wharton smiled.

"Drake's landed, as you say," he said. "No need to mention it now, I should say."

Lord Mauleverer looked relieved.

"I'm glad you think so. I was bound to let you fellows know—and Drake, too, if I'd seen him—but I didn't! Now it's too late, let it drop—what?"

"I should think so," assented Harry.

"Good!"

And nothing was said to Jack Drake on the subject of Brian Mauleverer's peculiar antecedents. But it is probable that Ferrers Locke's pupil needed telling very little on the subject; he had had more than experience enough to read the signs that were indelible in Brian's face, and he needed no prompting to make him decide, at the first meeting, that Brian Mauleverer had been a "bad hat," and had not changed since.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

THE GHOST WALKS AGAIN!

HARRY WHARTON had looked forward to the arrival of Jack Drake as the means of solving the strange mystery of the ghost of Mauleverer Towers. But in the course of the day he was conscious of some disappointment. True, it was Drake's object to appear nothing but a careless schoolboy on holiday, and to keep the "detective" quite out of sight. If he was playing that as a part, he was playing it remarkably well. For no one seeing Drake among the Greyfriars juniors at the Towers would have dreamed that he had any thought in his mind but to enjoy his Christmas holiday. He skated on the frozen lake, he rode one of Mauleverer's ponies, he wandered in the great picture gallery, he chatted to Jerningham, the stately old butler, and he played a game of billiards with Brian Mauleverer. He contrived to put a great deal into the afternoon; but nothing of it, so far as Wharton could see, had any connection with the mystery he had undertaken to solve.

And in one respect Drake seemed to have changed since he left Greyfriars—as Wharton discovered when he strolled into the billiards-room and found the schoolboy detective at play with Brian Mauleverer. The captain of the Remove learned that there was a fiver on the game. He made no comment; it was no business of his. But he was surprised, and he was not pleased. The "bad hat" was evidently at his old tricks again, in spite of his supposed reform; and Drake had been led into it. After leaving the billiards-room, Drake walked on the terrace in the dusk, and Harry Wharton joined him there.

"We're going to have tea up in

Mauly's den," he said. " You've seen Mauly's quarters already."

" Oh, yes ; and looked at Sir Fulke ! " said Drake. " He looks a bit too solid to take midnight saunters, doesn't he ? "

" He does," agreed Wharton. " You seem to get on fairly well with Mr. Brian ? "

Drake looked at him.

" You don't like the chap," he said.

" 'Hem ! "

" I'd never heard of Mauly's cousin before," said Drake. " Good reasons for keeping him dark, I dare say. It would be a bad day for the Mauleverer family if Mauly took a header through the thin ice when he's skating, Wharton. Mr. Brian isn't exactly the johnny to make a reputable head of a noble family."

" You think he's a bad hat ? "

" I don't think, I know ! It's amazing that Mauly should have a relation like that. Son of a younger son—brought up expensively and left with hardly a brown," said Drake thoughtfully. " It's not uncommon for fellows of that kind to go to the dogs. Unless I'm mistaken, the worthy Brian went to the dogs at top speed, and landed there up to the neck."

" I see you've worked it out," said Harry. A sudden thought struck him. " Of course, you've been drawing him."

" I've been getting posted," said Drake coolly, " and I know what to think of a man who eggs a schoolboy to play for money."

" Oh ! " said Wharton.

" Hallo, hallo, hallo ! " It was Bob Cherry's stentorian voice. " You fellows coming in to tea ? "

" Right-ho ! "

Tea in Mauly's den was a good deal like a spread in the study at Greyfriars. Sir Reginald Brooke joined the merry circle for a while, and Brian Mauleverer came in, to smoke cigarettes and chat.

Once or twice Brian made allusion to the ghost story, but the juniors, realising how distasteful the topic was to Mauleverer, headed him off, as it were.

There was besides a topic of great interest to the juniors—a dance that they were to attend at a neighbouring mansion in the evening. Lord Mauleverer was to take his whole flock, and he asked Brian whether he was coming.

The young man shook his head.

" I'm readin' up farmin', you know," he said. " I'm goin' to put in an evenin' of steady readin'. You young fellows go off and enjoy yourselves."

And after dinner the party rolled away cheerily in the big car. Harry, who eyed Mauleverer anxiously at times, could see that the fall of darkness brought a sombre shade to the face of the schoolboy earl, and guessed that Mauly was looking forward to the coming night with uneasiness. He was glad that Mauly's mind was to be occupied till bedtime.

It was at a late hour that the party returned to Mauleverer Towers. Sir Reginald Brooke had gone to bed, but Brian was found in the smoking-room, in a haze of cigarette smoke.

" Had a good time ? " he asked.

" Top-hole ! " said Bob Cherry heartily.

" The top-holefulness was terrific ! " said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Brian grinned.

" That's good ! " he said. " Good-night ! "

And the juniors went up to their rooms.

They gathered in Lord Mauleverer's den to say good-night to his lordship. Mauly was smiling cheerily. Whatever

he felt inwardly, he was not likely to show any outward sign of disquiet if he could help it. Bob Cherry and Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh went to their rooms sleepy and contented. Wharton and Drake lingered for a few minutes.

" Mauly, old man, let one of us camp with you to-night," said Harry in a low voice.

" Rot, old fellow!" answered Mauleverer.

" But if there was anything——"

Mauleverer shook his head.

" I'm not draggin' anybody else into it," he said. " If there's anythin', it's for me to stand."

Wharton looked at Drake.

" There won't be anything if there's somebody with Mauly," said the schoolboy detective. " Mauly, old man, keep your pecker up—and if something happens to-night, all the better. It will help us to clear up the mystery."

Mauleverer smiled faintly.

" Well, good-night, old infants!" he said.

Wharton took a last glance at the mail-clad figure of Sir Fulke as he went. The door closed.

Drake went to Wharton's door with him. The face of the schoolboy detective was very grave.

" I sha'n't sleep to-night," he said in a low voice. " You'd better not, either, Harry. But keep in your room unless you hear an alarm."

" You think——"

" I think that the scoundrel will try to repeat his villainy, if he finds the coast clear," said Drake.

" But—I can't understand! Why should anybody try to hurt Mauly? Who could want to?" muttered Wharton. " He hasn't an enemy in the world. Some lunatic, perhaps."

" If it's a lunatic, there's method in his madness," said Drake dryly. " Poor old Mauly keeps it under, but he's fairly shaken up by this. A little more of it, and Mauly's condition will be pretty serious. Fellows have died under shocks like that."

Wharton started.

" But—but you can't suspect——"

" We shall know better what to suspect when the ghost has walked again," said Drake, and he nodded good-night and left Wharton to himself.

The captain of the Remove was not likely to sleep. He turned out the light and waited. His anxiety for Mauleverer drove away the thought of slumber. And Jack Drake, in his room across the corridor, was not thinking of sleep. After turning out the light, he lifted a chair close to the door, sat down, and listened—and for a very long time Drake did not stir, though his eyes did not close.

The light still glimmered under Lord Mauleverer's door till a late hour. The schoolboy earl was tired, but he was disinclined for sleep. But when the hour of one tolled out, Mauleverer rose at last from his chair by the log fire and turned wearily to his bedroom.

He left the electric light burning in his den.

He switched on the light in the adjoining bedroom, and the hurried glance he gave round him showed how the strange visitation of the previous night had told on his nerves.

He undressed and got into bed, leaving the electric light at full force.

If the ghost of Mauleverer Towers walked that night, it would not walk in darkness.

Mauleverer did not sleep; but at last, after long listening to the December wind wailing without, he dozed.

He came out of the doze with a start.

A thrill ran through him, and a groan came to his lips.

Tramp ! Tramp ! Tramp !

The tramping of iron feet was not loud—but it was clear, distinct. Lord Mauleverer sat up, pressing his hand to his heart. His face was chalky white and dewed with sweat.

His eyes were fixed on the open doorway between the rooms.

He knew what was to appear.

His starting eyes fell on the armour-clad figure advancing from the outer room, the visor closed ; advancing with steady iron tread.

Closer and closer !

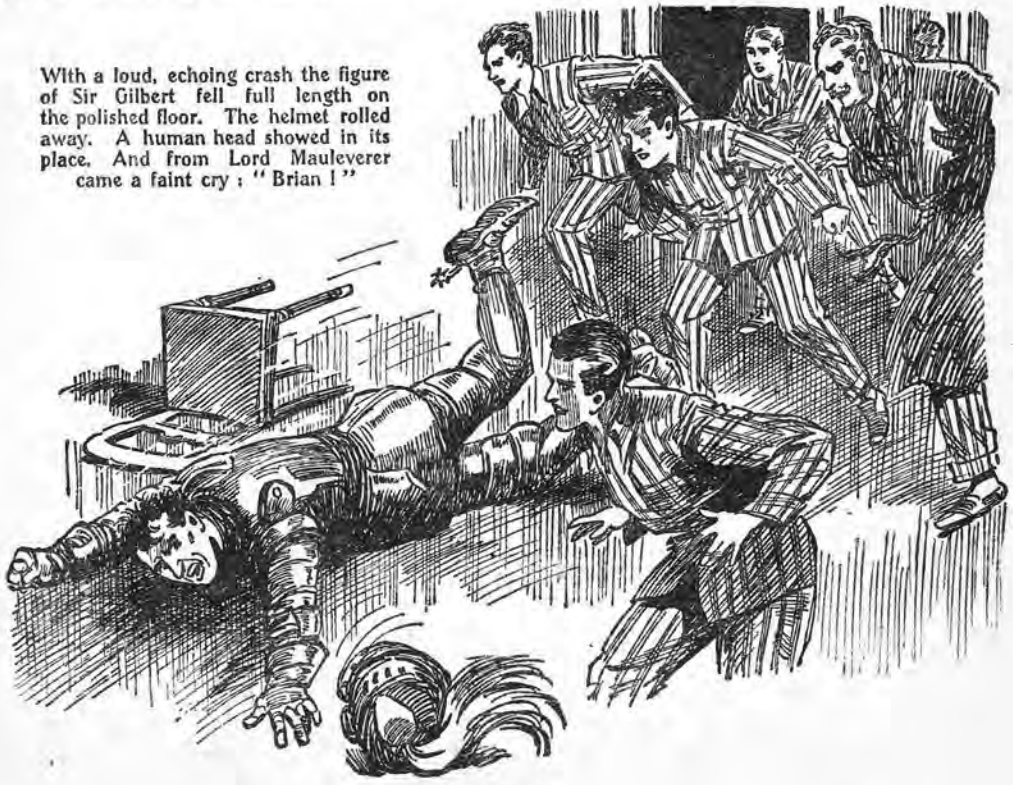
It was no dream of the night, no fancy born of darkness and shadow. In the full glare of the electric light Sir Fulke Mauleverer towered over his unhappy descendant—and a gauntleted hand rose over Mauleverer as he cowered on the bed.

The hand descended slowly, inexorably upon the shrinking schoolboy earl, while he watched the black visor in shuddering dread. It touched him ! The icy-cold contact sent a chill to his very heart.

" Help ! Help ! "

The terrified junior found his voice at last. His cry rang through the room as he tore himself away from that phantom touch and rolled from the bed, on the other side, with a crash. And then, as he lay, wild incoherent mutterings came from his lips ; and for the moment, at least, Lord Mauleverer's senses failed him.

Mauly had received a terrible shock.



With a loud, echoing crash the figure of Sir Gilbert fell full length on the polished floor. The helmet rolled away. A human head showed in its place. And from Lord Mauleverer came a faint cry : " Brian ! "

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER

THE AMAZING DISCOVERY!

JACK DRAKE tore open his door and switched on the electric light in the corridor. At the same moment Wharton's door opened, and his face, white as death, stared out.

"Drake, it's Mauly——"

"Come on!"

They raced to Mauleverer's room. The whole corridor, bright in the electric light, was before them. They hauled open Mauleverer's door, and the room before them was bright with light. The room beyond was lighted, too, and from that room cries came faintly, incoherently.

"See that no one gets out, Wharton!"

"But——"

"I'll see to Mauly."

Drake ran across into the bedroom. Wharton remained in the doorway of the outer room.

If some foe was there—some ruthless scoundrel—as Drake evidently suspected, he had no chance of passing Wharton and escaping. Bob Cherry, Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Singh hurried out of their rooms and joined the captain of the Remove.

"Better call Mr. Brian!" said Wharton hurriedly. "Drake thinks someone is here! We may want help!"

"Right!" muttered Bob, and he ran down the passage to hammer at Brian Mauleverer's door.

Meanwhile, Jack Drake had reached Mauleverer. The schoolboy earl, stretched on the floor, was alone in the bedroom. He was conscious; but there was no light of consciousness in his eyes; his glance was wild and strange, and the words from his lips came in a wild, meaningless babble. It was clear that the unhappy boy had received a terrible shock.

Drake lifted the slim junior in his arms and bore him into the outer room and placed him in the armchair before the fire. Mauleverer ceased to mutter, but his face was still distorted, his eyes strange in their look. The pallor of death was in his face.

Drake set his teeth.

"Another shock like that and there will be a new earl of Mauleverer, I think," he said in a low voice to his comrades.

"But what has happened?"

"We shall soon know."

Bob Cherry came back along the corridor.

"I can't make Brian hear," he said. "He must be in a jolly deep sleep."

Wharton's lip curled. He had little doubt that the scapegrace had been drinking heavily before going to bed, and for that reason could not be awakened.

"Shut the door!" said Drake. "Lock it!"

Wharton obeyed.

The juniors gathered round Lord Mauleverer. For some minutes the schoolboy earl looked at them dazedly, not knowing them. A terrible fear was in their hearts that Mauleverer was losing his grip upon his sanity.

But the wild look faded from his face at last, and he grew calmer. He was shuddering from head to foot.

"It's the warning," he said, in a voice so low that the juniors could barely hear it. "I'm not afraid! I'm ready."

"Mauly, old man——" muttered Wharton.

A faint, tremulous smile glided over Mauleverer's white face.

"It's rotten to bother you fellows like this! But there was no doubt this time. I saw him. He touched me——"

" Touched you ? " said Bob.

" Touched me ! I felt the chill of the gauntlet."

" Impossible, old fellow," breathed Nugent.

Mauleverer's face worked.

" I never believed in the legend," he said—" never quite, at any rate. Now I've had proof. He touched me—I was broad awake—in the night."

" Who—what touched you ? " asked Johnny Bull in a scared voice.

Mauleverer made a gesture towards the two armoured figures between the windows.

" Sir Fulke ? " breathed Nugent.

" Yes."

" Old fellow——"

" Dear old chap," said Johnny Bull, " the armour couldn't move unless there was somebody inside it. And we can see there isn't."

" Search the room," said Drake.

" We did that last night," said Nugent. " There was nobody."

" Search, all the same."

" We may as well," said Bob. And the juniors proceeded to search. They examined every corner of the bedroom, and tried the door that led to the farther corridor. But it was bolted on the bedroom side, as it had been the previous night. Then they came back to Lord Mauleverer's den, and searched once more. But they gathered round Lord Mauleverer again, with clouded faces.

The schoolboy earl smiled — a ghastly smile.

" You see, Drake," he said, " nobody's here—and nobody could have got away."

" That's certain," said Wharton.

" Old fellow, you dreamed it," said Johnny Bull uneasily.

Lord Mauleverer made no reply to that. He knew that he had not dreamed the terrible sight and the freezing touch of the gauntlet.

All eyes turned upon Jack Drake. His face was grave and grim.

" Drake," said Wharton huskily, " can't you help ? Can't you give us some light ? This is killing Mauleverer."

" I know that ! " said Drake quietly. " That is the game."

" What ? "

" You called Mr. Brian, Bob ? "

" Yes. He couldn't hear."

" Did you go in ? "

" His door was locked."

" Call Sir Reginald Brooke," said Drake.

Lord Mauleverer made a gesture.

" No, no ! I——"

" You've put the matter in my hands, Mauly, and you must give me my head," said Drake gently. " I've got a reason. I'm going to save you from the scoundrel who has nearly driven you out of your senses and endangered your life."

" Drake ! " exclaimed Wharton.

" Call Sir Reginald ! "

Without further demur the captain of the Remove quitted the room. It was in less than five minutes that he came back with the old baronet, in dressing-gown and slippers, with pale and startled face. Sir Reginald hurried to his nephew.

" Herbert ! " he said huskily.

" I didn't want them to tell you, uncle," said Lord Mauleverer. " It's rather a shame. But I've seen it ! "

" Tell me all ! " said the baronet, his voice quivering.

He listened, his pale face growing paler and more worn. The juniors stood in silence. Drake had quietly locked the door again after the baronet had entered. His face was hard and grim, and there was a glint in his eyes.

" My poor boy ! " whispered the old baronet. " I——"

" I have something to tell you, sir," said Drake quietly. " Mauly, old man, you have been tricked. A scoundrel has played on your fears, old fellow. It's a dastardly trick from beginning to end."

" But how—how ? " exclaimed the old baronet. " There is no one here ! "

" We've searched, Drake," said Bob. " You know we've searched ! "

Drake nodded.

" Mauly did not fancy what he saw ! " he said quietly. " He saw the armour of Sir Fulke Mauleverer in motion. That means that somebody was inside it. It was not the phantom of the old knight. It was a cunning trickster who will gain by Mauleverer's death."

" Drake ! "

" Look in the armour," said Drake.

" It's empty now."

" Look in it ! "

Wharton obeyed. He shook his head.

" And now," said Drake, with a grim smile, " take off the helmet of Sir Gilbert."

" What ? "

" The other suit of armour ! " said Drake.

" Drake ! "

All eyes turned upon the figure of Sir Gilbert Mauleverer. It stood motionless in its place.

" It was Sir Fulke I saw," breathed Mauleverer. " The black armour——"

" Take off Sir Gilbert's helmet ! "

" But——"

Wharton was interrupted. There was a sudden amazing movement, and the shining armour of Sir Gilbert Mauleverer was in motion. With clanking footsteps, the armour-clad figure left its place, rushing towards the door. For a moment the juniors stood transfixed, amazed, horror-stricken, unbelieving what they saw. But Jack Drake made a spring at the striding figure of the knight, and grasped at the armour, seemingly tenanted now by a living body.

" Back up ! " shouted Drake.

He dodged a savage blow from a steel gauntlet, and clung to the figure in armour. Wharton and Bob Cherry, dimly understanding at last, rushed to his aid.

Crash !

With a loud, echoing crash the figure of Sir Gilbert fell full length on the polished floor.

The helmet rolled away.

A human head showed in its place—a human face, distorted with rage and fury and despair. And from Lord Mauleverer came a faint cry :

" Brian ! "

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER

UNMASKED AT LAST !

" BRIAN MAULEVERER ! "

It was Brian Mauleverer—the scapegrace, the adventurer, the scheming plotter—exposed, and unmasked at last !

Lord Mauleverer started to his feet, with staring eyes. Sir Reginald Brooke gazed at the sprawling, armour-clad figure dazedly.

Jack Drake smiled grimly.

" There's your ghost, Mauly ! " he said quietly.

" Brian ! " repeated Lord Mauleverer.

The young man stared at the startled faces, his features working with fury. A savage curse dropped from his lips.

" A trick ! " exclaimed Harry Wharton, panting with relief. " He was hidden in the armour ! Why, last night——"

" Last night he was hidden in the same place, I should say," said Jack Drake. " He had no time to get clear, according to what you told me, before you got on the scene. After playing his trick, he got out of Sir Fulke's armour and replaced it; then he heard you coming, and I imagine that at that moment he was fairly scared out of his rascally wits. He dodged into the other suit of armour as a desperate resource——"

" I—I see—now you——"

" I fancy he was palpitating there while you searched the room last night," said Drake. " But you did not guess—and he escaped——"

" I remember hearing a sound—after going to bed in Mauly's room. Of course——"

" And as he found it safe once, he felt safe enough to-night in hiding in the same way," said Drake. " Don't blame yourself—you didn't guess that there was a cunning villain—not hidden, but standing out in full view under your eyes—inside a suit of armour. But——"

" You guessed ? " exclaimed Bob.

Drake smiled.

" Get out, you cur ! " exclaimed Bob Cherry. And with a black scowl on his face, and a curse on his lips, Brian Mauleverer went, quitting Mauleverer Towers for ever !

" That's my business," he said. " My business is to look as deep into a thing as possible, and where there's no explanation, to find one. I expected the ghost trick to be played again to-night. I listened at my door, but the rascal trod by too softly even for me to hear. I never knew that anything was on till Mauly cried out. But after that there was no chance of the rascal getting away, and as we saw nothing of him I knew

that he would be found inside the other suit of armour——"

"A thousand curses!" muttered Brian Mauleverer.

Drake gave him a scornful look.

"The less you say the better, you scoundrel!" he exclaimed.

"But why?" exclaimed the old baronet hoarsely. "Why—why did this man, befriended by my nephew, play so dastardly a trick——"

"Look at Mauleverer!" said Drake. "You can see the effect it has produced upon him. A little more and Mauleverer would not have lived. Even now the shock might have——" He paused. "You need not ask that scoundrel his reason, Sir Reginald. He is heir to the earldom of Mauleverer, and his object was Mauly's death."

"Good heavens!"

"The awful villain!" gasped Bob Cherry.

Lord Mauleverer breathed hard. The look on his face showed that he had already guessed, before Drake spoke. He knew the reason of Brian's dastardly plot.

There was no anger in his face as he looked at the baffled rascal. There was pain, and contempt, and grief. Even the hardy adventurer shrank from his cousin's steady look.

"It's clear enough now," said Wharton slowly. "That is why he told the ghost story—that's why the gauntlet fell—he had fixed that, of course, to work on Mauly's mind. That was his game from the beginning. Mauly, that rascal must go from here to prison. You can't run a risk like this again."

Mauleverer did not speak.

Brian clambered unsteadily to his feet in the clanking armour of the old Crusader. His face was white, his look bitter.

"What can you prove?" he said contemptuously, savagely.

"You will not be harmed, Brian," said Lord Mauleverer quietly. "You have acted like a villain. I received you here in friendship, trying to forget what you had been—a rascal, a sharper—a gaol-bird! This is how you have repaid me—by seeking my life! You would have succeeded; you knew how to play upon my belief in the Mauleverer legend; you would have caused my death. Jack Drake has saved me, and you will have no chance in the future; you can go unpunished. But go!"

"But——" began Bob Cherry.

"Let him go!" said Mauleverer.

"This very hour, then!" exclaimed the old baronet.

Five minutes later Brian Mauleverer stood at the open door below, with the Famous Five. Outside, the night wind howled, drifting snowflakes against the old windows of Mauleverer Towers. The adventurer looked into the snowy winter's night—he looked at the juniors. There was no relenting in their faces. As he hesitated on the threshold, Bob Cherry raised his hand.

"Get out, you cur!" he said.

And with a black scowl on his face, and a curse on his lips, Brian Mauleverer went, quitting Mauleverer Towers for ever!

. . . . .

Harry Wharton & Co. enjoyed their Christmas holiday — and Lord Mauleverer, quite his old cheery self again now, was as merry and bright as any fellow in the party. And the chums of Greyfriars did not seem able to make enough of Jack Drake. They were well aware that that Christmas might have been a tragic one had not Drake come to their aid and laid so effectively the ghost of Mauleverer Towers.