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A Splendid New, Long, Complete Tale, dealing with the Thrilling Adventures of the Famous Chums of Greyfriars School

—BY—

FRANK RICHARDS.

Harry Wharton & Co's Windfall!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Good!

"SEE him yet, Harry?"

"Not yet."

"Oh, rats!" growled Bob Cherry. "It's time he was here!"

"Patience, my son," said Frank Nugent. "Patience, and pass the sardines!"

"Oh, blow the sardines! I want that giddy telegram!"

Nugent philosophically helped himself to sardines. He was just as anxious about the arrival of the telegram as Bob Cherry, but he saw no reason why he should spoil his tea.

Harry Wharton was standing at the window of No. 1 Study in the Remove passage at Greyfriars, looking out into the old Close. Nugent, Bob Cherry, and Johnny Bull were sitting at the tea-table, finishing their tea. Every few minutes they looked up from the tea and toast and sardines to ask Wharton if he could see the telegraph-boy from Friardale coming.

Wharton had finished his tea hurriedly, and had been at the window ten minutes or more. He felt that it was high time that the telegram came, and he was anxious. A great deal depended upon that telegram.

But there was no sign of the youth in uniform in the Close. Wharton had a clear view of the Close as far as the school gates. He could see innumerable juniors chatting in groups, or strolling about the Close in the fine April evening. From the direction of the playing-fields came the sound of the click of bat and ball, where the first cricket practice of the season was beginning. But of the telegraph-boy there was no hint.

"Coming?" asked John Bull, as he poured out a new cup of tea.

Wharton shook his head.

"No."

"Sister Ann—Sister Ann, do you see anyone coming?" sang out Nugent.

Wharton laughed.

"I wish the kid would come!" he exclaimed. "I'm really anxious about that wire. I'm sure my uncle will telegraph. I asked him specially to."

"Does your uncle always do as he's asked specially?" said Nugent, grinning. "Mine doesn't. I asked mine specially to send me a pound last week, and he sent me a lecture on extravagance instead."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton looked out of the window again. Bob Cherry made an onslaught on the sardines.

The door of the study opened, and a fat face, ornamented with a pair of spectacles, projected itself into the study.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Telegram come, Bunter?" exclaimed Bob Cherry, thinking that the fat junior might be the bearer of news.

"Not that I know of, Cherry. I say, you fellows, I hear that you four are going to Italy for the vacation——"

"So we are, if we can fix it," said Nugent. "It all depends on Wharton's nunky. If he plays up, it will be all serene."

"I think he'll play up all right," said Wharton; "and I asked him specially to wire in reply to my letter, as we should be too anxious to wait for the post. I think it will work all right."

"I suppose you want me to come?" said Billy Bunter thoughtfully.

Harry Wharton turned round from the window, and Nugent and Bob Cherry and Bull all looked round together. Four separate and distinct glares were fastened upon William George Bunter, but they did not seem to affect him very much—perhaps because the Owl of the Remove was too short-sighted to see them.

"You suppose we want you to come?" repeated Bob Cherry. "There must be something awfully wrong with your supposer, then! I should advise you to have it seen to."

"Oh, really, Cherry——" Billy Bunter blinked indignantly at the chums of the Remove. "Oh, really, I was only thinking of you fellows! My knowledge of Italian would be very useful——"

"Your knowledge of Italian!" ejaculated Wharton.

"How much Italian do you know?"

"Well, I can say 'Bongo swah'——"

"Bonsoir!" roared Nugent. "That's French, you ass!"

"Well, I've heard that the two languages are very much alike," said Bunter. "I heard a chap say that if you put an 'o' on the end of a French word it becomes an Italian word, or so near that it makes no difference. So you would only have to say bongo swaho!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't think that would do," grinned Harry Wharton. "But even if it would, I don't really think we could travel round Italy on two words. I'm afraid you're no good as an interpreter."

"Well, there's my general experience, you know—my—my savoir faire," Bunter said. "I'm just the chap you want, if you only know it."

"We don't know it, do we, you fellows?"

"No fear!" said Bob Cherry.

"Not much!"

"Rather not!"

"I say, you fellows, you remember how well I did you in Switzerland one vac.?" urged Billy Bunter. "I really think I ought to come. And if you're going to climb Mount Vesuvius, you'll want a really strong, athletic chap to help you."

And Billy Bunter drew himself up to his full height of nearly five feet.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at," said the Owl of the Remove peevishly. "I say, you fellows——"

"Is Sister Ann—Sister Ann, do you see anyone coming?" sang out Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton looked out of the window again.

"I see a flock of sheep," he replied, like Sister Ann in the story of "Blue Beard." "But they're only the Fourth-Form chaps."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Telegraph-boy may have gone into the house while you were looking away from the window!" said Bob Cherry severely. "You're no good as Sister Ann. What the——"

"Hark!" said Johnny Bull. "I can hear fairy footsteps."

Heavy footsteps were coming up the stairs. They paused on the landing, and then there was a tap at the door of No. 1 Study in the Remove. A peaked cap peered round the door, and the juniors recognised the telegraph-boy from Friardale.

"Come in!" roared the four together.

The boy came in. He had the familiar buff-coloured envelope in his hand.

"For me?" shouted Wharton.

"Master Wharton—yes, sir," said the lad, handing it to Harry.

To the telegraph-boy's amazement, Bob Cherry clasped him to his Eton jacket and hugged him.

"Ow!" gasped the youth from Friardale. "My 'at! What the——"

"Bless you, my son!" said Bob Cherry solemnly.

Harry Wharton tore open the telegram.

The message was from his uncle, Colonel Wharton. It was brief, but it was welcome. It said all that the juniors wished to know.

"Certainly. Naples if you like for the vacation."

"Hurrah!" shouted Wharton.

"All right?" asked Nugent eagerly.

"Right as rain! Look!"

The four juniors read the telegram. They cheered together, and the study rang with it.

Harry Wharton fished a half-crown out of his waistcoat pocket, and presented it to the astounded telegraph-boy, who retired, wondering whether the Greyfriars boys were all potty, as he expressed it. The juniors cheered again, with a cheer that sounded the length of the Remove passage.

"Hurrah! Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"I say, you fellows——"

The four juniors joined hands, and danced round the study in an impromptu war-dance in the exuberant delight of the moment. Billy Bunter was collided with, and rolled over on the floor, and he sat gasping and blinking through his spectacles in amazement as the juniors danced round him.

"Hurrah!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Bravo! Hip-pip!"

And in the excitement of the moment the juniors began to dance on Bunter instead of round him, and the fat junior roared and wriggled out of the study and fled.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
Declined, Without Thanks.

THE Greyfriars fellows soon heard all the news. It was wonderful what an interest the whole school took in the matter.

The vacation was near at hand, and most of the fellows were making all sorts of plans for the holidays; but there were very few of them who could hope to get so far as the South of Italy, which was where Harry Wharton & Co. were going.

The morning after the arrival of the telegram Harry Wharton received a letter from his uncle, the contents of which gave him great satisfaction. Colonel Wharton was coming down to Greyfriars to see him, to make arrangements for the journey; and he added that he would be very pleased to take three or four of Harry's chums along with his nephew on the trip to Naples. Nothing could have suited the chums of the Remove better, and they executed another wardance in No. 1 Study when they read the letter.

"I wish we could take a crowd of the fellows," said Wharton regretfully. "Blessed if I wouldn't like to take the whole giddy Remove—even including Bunter. But I suppose it can't be done. I wish Inky would come, but he's got to spend the vacation with a giddy Indian prince. Never mind, we four will have a good time."

"What-ho!" said Frank Nugent. "Though if you wanted to make up a big party, I think about half Greyfriars would offer."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a tap at the door of the study, and Temple of the Fourth put his head in. There was a very genial smile upon the face of Temple of the Fourth. He seemed to have forgotten completely that he was usually on terms of warfare with the Remove, for he bestowed a most genial nod on the Removites. Dabney, who was behind him, grinned amiably.

"I hear you chaps are going to Naples for the vac.," Temple remarked.

"Oh, rather!" added Dabney.

"Looking for a giddy treasure or something, I hear," said Temple.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"I shouldn't mind coming," said Temple confidentially "You kids will need an Upper Form chap to take care of you."

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"We'll come!" said Temple. "Your uncle would be pleased, I've no doubt, Wharton."

Wharton grinned.

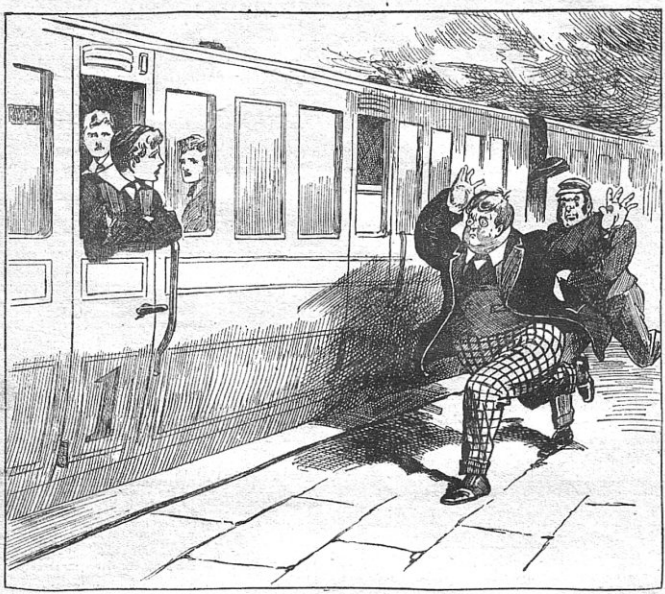
"My dear chap, we're not taking a collection of curiosities to show to the Italians," he replied; "otherwise, I should be delighted!"

"Why, you young ass——"

"You cheeky young beggar——" said Dabney.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo!" said a gruff voice in the passage, as Coker of the Fifth hove in sight. "You here, you kids? I've got something to say to you. Buzz off, you Fourth-Form fags. I want to speak to Wharton."



Cherry looked out of the window and gave a grunt. "My hat! here's Bunter!" The fat junior of Greyfriars was flying along the platform with a porter in hot pursuit. "I say, you fellows," he roared, "stop for me!" (See Chapter 5.)

And Coker, Potter, and Greene of the Fifth insinuated themselves into the study, and Temple and Dabney were pushed out. Harry Wharton & Co. grinned at one another. They knew what Coker & Co. had come for. Coker was all graciousness, and did not seem to be aware that he was on fighting terms with No. 1 Study.

"Hear that you kids have got a paper, or something, about some buried treasure, or something, somewhere, somehow," said Coker affably.

"Quite so!" said Nugent. "It's something about something somewhere that somebody somehow gave to somebody."

Coker grinned as the Removites chuckled.

"He, he, he!" said Coker. "Very good! I'll tell you what," he said, as if in a sudden burst of confidence. "We'll come with you."

"Not really!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, as if almost overcome by the munificence of the offer.

"Yes," said Coker, nodding genially; "we'll come and help. In fact, I'll take charge of the whole expedition, and see that you kids don't get into trouble."

"You're too kind, Coker!"

"Well, the fact is, I mean to be kind," said Coker, beaming. "We'll help make up the party with pleasure, won't we, Potty?"

"Certainly!" said Potter.

"Very pleased indeed!" said Greene.

"It's settled, then!" said Coker.

"Not quite settled," said Harry Wharton, blandly. "You see, we're not setting up in business as travelling showmen. If we were, we couldn't do better than take some specimens from the Fifth Form. But——"

"What!"

"But under the circs., it can't be done!"

Coker & Co. glared. They had descended from their lofty dignity as members of the Fifth Form in order to join the junior party, and to find that their great kindness was declined—declined even without thanks—was most exasperating.

"Look here!" roared Coker. "If you are going to be cheeky——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are we coming, or are we not?"

Four voices replied simultaneously:

"Not!"

"Well, of all the nerve!" said Coker. "It's no good being kind to these kids! I've always said that fags have to be kept down with a stern hand! Of course, we can't allow this cheek to pass! Go for 'em!"

"Here, hold on!" shouted Harry Wharton. "Chuck it——"

"Bump them for their cheek!" roared Coker.

"Hold on! Get out! Oh! Yar-o-o-o-oh!"

But Coker & Co. did not hold on. They rushed upon the Removites, and Temple and Dabney rushed in after them. In a moment there was a wild and whirling struggle raging in Study No. 1, and the furniture was flying right and left.

"Yow-ow!"

"Yah-ah!"

NEXT TUESDAY: **"A FORBIDDEN CHUM!"** By FRANK RICHARDS. Order Early.

"Go it!"

"Bump the cheeky cads!"

"Yar-o-o-op!"

Crash—crash—crash!

The table flew into the fender, and books and papers were distributed over the grate. Chairs crashed right and left, and the bookcase glass flew into a thousand fragments. A cushion hurtled through a pane in the window and dropped into the Close. The four Removites were soon on the floor, in the grasp of the Fourth and Fifth fellows.

"Bump them!" roared Coker. "Wreck the giddy study! We'll teach 'em to check the Fifth!"

"Rag 'em bald-headed!" gasped Temple.

"Oh, rather!"

Greene caught up a bottle of ink, and swept it round the study, streaming it over the struggling Removites. Dabney shovelled soot out of the chimney, and the unfortunate four sneezed and gasped under a cloud of it. The terrific din in the study brought a crowd along the passage. Wingate, of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, came striding along, with a frowning brow.

"Look out!" shouted Fry, of the Fourth, from the passage. "Here comes Wingate!"

Coker & Co. ceased operations at once.

"I—I think we've finished here!" gasped Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha! I think we have!"

"Bunk, you fellows!"

The raggers bolted from the study. The captain of Greyfriars arrived in the doorway a few seconds later, and stared in at the inky and sooty juniors, and the scene of wreck and disaster, in amazement.

"What on earth has been happening?" he exclaimed. "Earthquakes?"

"Oh!" gasped Wharton, sitting up with the rug round his neck, and a chair across his legs, and ink streaming down his face and making furrows in the soot. "Yow! The cads! We've been ragged!"

"Well, you look it!" grinned Wingate. "By the way, your uncle has just arrived, Wharton."

"What!" gasped Wharton.

"He's coming upstairs now," grinned the Sixth Former.

"Oh, my hat!"

There was a steady tread of a military old gentleman in the passage. A handsome, kind face, with a white moustache, looked into the study. Colonel Wharton had often been to Greyfriars, and he knew his way to his nephew's quarters.

The old soldier halted in the doorway, and stared in.

"Oh!" he ejaculated.

Harry staggered to his feet. Johnny Bull and Nugent scrambled up. Bob Cherry extricated himself from a heap of torn curtains, and turned a sooty face upon the visitor.

"The dickens!" ejaculated Colonel Wharton. "What does this mean, Harry?"

"Only a rag!" said Wharton, feebly. "Some chaps wanted to come to Naples with us, and—and they got rather emphatic when we declined."

The colonel burst into a laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groo!" groaned Nugent. "Ow!"

"You had better clean up while I call upon the Head," said the colonel, smiling. "I was going to have tea with you, but under the circumstances——"

Bob Cherry jumped up.

"It's all right, sir," he explained. "We'll be ready in a quarter of an hour—just time for you to have a little jaw with the Head——"

"Yes, do come, sir!"

"Very well," said the colonel, "I'll come! Ha, ha, ha!" And he laughed again as he walked down the passage. The Famous Four looked at one another with sickly smiles through the soot and ink.

"Well, this is rotten!" Nugent murmured.

"Better buck up!" said Bob Cherry. "We've got enough to do in a quarter of an hour!"

"By Jove, we have!"

And the unfortunate four bucked up.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
The Treasure Clue.

"ALL hands on deck!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

A crowd of Removites had come along to stare into the wretched study, and chuckle—which was, perhaps, their way of showing their sympathy. But they answered Bob Cherry's appeal cheerfully, and all hands were soon busy setting the study to rights. The Famous Four rushed off to a bath-room to clean up, and Linley, and Penfold, and Ogilvy, and Bulstrode, and Hazeldene, and half a dozen other fellows, set to work to tidy up the study.

Lord Mauleverer and Fisher T. Fish rushed off to the tuck-shop across the Close to purchase provisions, and Morgan, and Elliot, and Vane, and Leigh, borrowed crockery and other necessities up and down the passage, and transported them to Study No. 1.

By the time Harry Wharton & Co. returned, clean and fresh, and with their clothes changed, matters were nearly right again.

When Colonel Wharton—who had judiciously allowed nearly half an hour to elapse instead of a quarter—returned, he found Study No. 1 newly swept and garnished, so to speak, and a really inviting tea ready.

Poached eggs and ham, toast, and cake, and jam-tarts, adorned the festive board, and the array of crockery and cutlery was really imposing.

The colonel smiled as he looked in.

"All serene, uncle!" said Harry Wharton cheerfully. "Come in!"

The colonel came in.

He was given the safest chair, near the fire, and the four juniors busied themselves waiting on him. Billy Bunter's jam-tarts looked in at the door, and Bob Cherry brandished a toasting-fork behind the colonel's back, as a hint of what he would do if the Owl of the Remove did not vanish. The colonel chanced to glance round, and Bob Cherry, caught in the act, extended that he was stretching himself, turning very red. Billy Bunter rolled in, feeling that the chums of the Remove could not very well kick him out in the presence of the distinguished guest.

"So glad to see you, sir!" said Bunter affably, offering a fat and not very over-clean hand to the colonel. "You remember me, sir—I spent a vacation at your place with Harry!"

Wharton made a grimace. Bunter never called him Harry when circumstances permitted him the free use of his host. But the kind old colonel remembered the occasion Bunter spoke of, and he shook hands genially with the Owl of the Remove.

"It's so kind of you to give us a look-in in this way, sir," said Bunter agreeably. "I used to belong to this study, you know, sir. I've got a study to myself now—I'm a reading chap, you know, sir, and I like quiet when I'm swotting over Latin and—and Greek. But the chaps like me to come in just the same. We're exactly the same happy family that we used to be—ain't we, you fellows?"

Bob Cherry gave a grunt.

"Yes," said Colonel Wharton, with his kind smile. "I remember when I was a fag at school, we used to stick together in our study. It was our study, against all the world. And some exciting times we had. But I dare say you young fellows keep up the traditions of Greyfriars!"

"Yes, rather, sir!" said Bunter, taking a seat at the table. "Would you mind passing the eggs, Bob?"

Bob Cherry made some inarticulate sound.

He never allowed Bunter to call him Bob; but there was no help for it now.

"You've cooked these eggs jolly well, Franky!" said Bunter, blinking at Nugent, who writhed at the familiarity he was powerless to resent just then. "I was coming in to do it for you, but I was detained. I had promised to help Mark Linley with his Greek."

Bob Cherry nearly exploded. Bunter did not even know the letters of the Greek alphabet. But there was no limit to his impudence.

"I'll have my tea strong, please," said Bunter, as Wharton took up the teapot. "Nice jolly family circle, ain't it, sir?"

"Yes, indeed!" said the colonel, unsuspiciously.—Colonel Wharton had commanded in India, and he had dealt with Frontier chiefs and troublesome rajahs, but he was not quite

up to Billy Bunter's weight in some things. "Very jolly indeed! You told me in your letter that you had something to show me, Harry!"

"Yes; the document, sir," said Harry.

"Let us have it over tea," said the colonel, "and you shall spin the yarn, and tell me how you obtained the paper."

"Certainly! Was that somebody calling you in the passage, Bunter?"

Bunter cocked his ear.

"I didn't hear anybody," he said, very distinctly. "Did you, sir?"

"No; I heard nothing," said the colonel.

"What a pity you're up, Bunter!" suggested Nugent.

"Oh, lots of time for that!" said Bunter. "I want to be here just now to help you fellows with my advice about your journey, you know."

There was evidently no getting rid of the Owl of the Remove without a row in the presence of the colonel, which the juniors were naturally anxious to avoid. They had to resign themselves to their fate.

While the colonel did justice to the tea the Removites had hospitably prepared, Harry Wharton told him the story of the mysterious document.

"It was given us by a chap named Dorrian," he explained —or, rather, we found it, and the man let us keep it. An Italian chap from Naples, named Felice Cesare, was after it—and after him—and he was scared to death. But we're not afraid of all the giddy Neapolitans in Naples—are we, you chaps?"

"No fear!" said Bob Cherry.

"Cesare has bunked, too," said Wharton, anxious to impress upon the colonel that he really had no idea of running into dangers. "The police were after him, and he seems to have vanished. I don't suppose we shall ever hear of him again."

"Not at all likely," agreed Nugent.

"I've got the paper here," said Wharton. "It was written out by an Italian chap named Ciro. He was dying, and he wrote it in his blood, so Mr. Dorrian told us. That fellow Cesare was after him, and he wanted the paper badly. It's written in Italian, but the Head has translated it for us."

The colonel's eyes glistened. The old gentlemen had not forgotten his soldier days, and he was as keen upon an adventure as any junior in Greyfriars.

"Let me see the paper," he said.

Harry Wharton drew the precious document from an inner pocket, and laid it before the colonel. His uncle took it up and read it through with great interest, though the language was quite unknown to him.

"Ricercate nella Casa del Fauno in Pompei, abasso la sesta pietra presso la fontana, e voi la trovarete."

"By Jove!" said the colonel, twisting his white moustache. "I can see that's it's written in Italian, Harry, but I can't read a word of it."

"Here's the translation, sir. The Head did it for us."

Colonel Wharton read the translation:

"Search in the House of the Faun in Pompeii, underneath the sixth stone past the fountain, and you will find it."

"By Jove, that's interesting! And what is it you will find?" asked Colonel Wharton.

"According to what Mr. Dorrian said, there is a chart there, which shows where the gold pieces are buried on Mount Vesuvius."

"Gold pieces, by Jove!"

"Yes; some Johnny in Naples buried them there for safety when there was some trouble going on," said Harry. "It seems that he's dead a long time ago, and there's nobody to claim the tin; and the man Ciro, who was a guide on Mount Vesuvius, found them by chance. He was hunted down by Cesare and some other chaps, and never had a chance of lifting the treasure, and he's dead now. The stuff belongs to whoever can find it, and I don't see why we shouldn't do it."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry.

"That's why we want to go to Naples for the vac., sir," said Wharton. "It will make the holiday jolly interesting."

Colonel Wharton nodded.

"Begad," he said, "I like the idea! Good! It's settled; we'll make it Naples for the vacation, if you boys can get the permission of your parents to go."

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

"Quite all right, sir!"

"Then it's settled. Indeed, I'll ask the Head to let you off a few days before the vacation, so as to lose no time."

"Hurrah!"

"Jolly good idea, sir!" said Billy Bunter. "I've written to my father already, sir, and he's replied that he will be delighted to let me go with you, sir."

"Very well; that is arranged, then," said the colonel.

The chums of the Remove looked speechlessly at Bunter. The nerve of the fat junior took their breath away.

NEXT TUESDAY: "A FORBIDDEN CHUM!"

Bunter gave a sudden howl, and the colonel looked up.

"Ow! Somebody stamped on my foot!" roared the fat junior. "Ow!"

"I—I'm sorry!" stammered Bob Cherry, turning very red. "It must have been—ahem!—my foot, Bunter!"

"Ow! I wish you'd be more careful with your blessed big feet, Bob!"

"Why, you young—ahem—ahem—all right!"

Bob Cherry mentally promised Bunter all sorts of things when Colonel Wharton was gone. The colonel stayed some time, discussing the plans for the journey, and advising the juniors as to what they would take with them. Then he retired to see the Head, and the Famous Four fixed their eyes upon Bunter as the colonel rose. But Billy Bunter was wise, and he rose at the same moment.

"I must be going now, you fellows," he said. "I'll walk down the passage with you, sir."

And he did.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Left Behind.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. looked at one another when the colonel and the fat junior were gone. Bob Cherry closed the door carefully before he trusted himself to make a remark.

"The awful young sweep!" said Bob, in measured tones. "Did you ever hear of such frightful cheek?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"He almost deserves to come for his impudence," he said. "But we're not having him!" said Nugent.

"No fear!"

"It's all right," said Johnny Bull. "We'll get rid of the awful bounder before it's time to start for Naples."

Harry Wharton nodded, but he did not feel quite so sure about that. Billy Bunter was not a fellow that it was easy to get rid of.

The juniors saw Colonel Wharton before he left. He told them that the Head had consented to their leaving school a few days before the vacation commenced, and so they might as well begin making their preparations at once. Which the Famous Four were only too glad to do. They walked with the colonel to the station in high spirits, and then returned to do their preparation. Billy Bunter looked into the study again later in the evening.

"All nicely arranged, you chaps?" he remarked.

"Come into the study, Bunter!" said Nugent sweetly.

The fat junior blinked at him suspiciously.

"Ahem! I haven't any time now, Franky—I've got my prep. to do—"

"You cheeky villain!" roared Nugent, starting up. "If you call me Franky again, I'll scalp you!"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"And you're not coming to Naples!" exclaimed Wharton.

"I never heard of such confounded cheek!"

Bunter blinked at him in surprise

"But it's all arranged," he said. "I've had a talk with the colonel. He's going to stand the whole expenses of the tour, so that's all right. I couldn't very well have asked my pater to hand out the money."

"Do you mean to say that you've been cadging from my uncle?" yelled Wharton.

Bunter backed away a little, ready to run.

"Oh, really, Wharton! Of course, as the colonel was taking us, it's understood that he pays the exes. Besides, as I'm really coming to be useful to you chaps, it's not fair that I should be put to expense. Of course, I shall take some cash with me. I'm expecting some postal-orders—"

Wharton made a spring towards the door, and Bunter vanished. A door slammed down the passage, and a key was heard to turn in the lock.

Wharton and Nugent, red with wrath, hammered on the outside of Billy Bunter's door.

"Open this door, you fat bounder!"

"Oh, really—"

"Let us in, you fat owl!"

"Sorry, you fellows, but I've got my prep. to do!"

"Will you open this door?" yelled Nugent.

"No, I won't!"

And the juniors retired baffled.

They did not see Billy Bunter again till bedtime. The fat junior blinked at them rather uneasily as they came into the Remove dormitory.

"I say, you fellows, you'd better make it pax, as we're going on a holiday together," he remarked. "No good starting a holiday on bad terms, you know."

"You fat bounder, you're not worth licking!" said Harry

Wharton. "But you're jolly well not going to inflict yourself on us for the vac."

"Oh, I say, that's a rotten way to put it, when a chap is only trying to be friendly!"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

"Faith, and I'll bet you that you don't get rid of Bunter!" chuckled Micky Desmond. "If you leave him behind, he'll swim after you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter grunted and rolled into bed. He knew perfectly well that the chums of the Remove would leave no stone unturned to get rid of him, but he thought that he would be able to take care of that. The Owl of the Remove had a wonderful gift for sticking to anything he wanted.

The next day the Famous Four were busy with their preparations for the journey. They did not confide to Billy Bunter just when they were leaving, and they sent off their boxes in advance. In the afternoon, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh evinced a new and strange desire to be chummy with Bunter. Hurree Singh was booked for the vacation, and could not go with his chums, and he was determined that they should not be bothered by Bunter if he could help it. After school he slipped his arm into Bunter's, and led him away to the tuckshop across the Close.

"I am sure that my esteemed friend Bunter is hungry," he remarked.

"Well, yes, I am a bit peckish, Inky, old man," Bunter confessed. "I'd stand a feed for both of us this minute, only I've been disappointed about a postal order I was expecting."

Hurree Singh nodded sympathetically.

"The cashfulness of my honourable self is abundant," he said. "If will pleasurefully stand the esteemed feed."

"Good egg!" said Bunter.

Inky did stand a feed—really a splendid one. He rolled Bunter up to the counter of the tuckshop and fed him till even the Owl of the Remove cried halt. Ham and eggs, steak-pies, and boiled beef and baked potatoes, cakes, and jam-tarts and cream-puffs and doughnuts, all went down the same way, washed down by copious draughts of ginger-beer and lemonade. It was seldom that William George Bunter had a chance of spreading himself in this manner, and he took full advantage of it.

"Another tart or two, my worthy chum?" asked the nabob, as Bunter stopped at last.

Billy Bunter shook his head.

"N-n-no, thanks!" he said. "I—I think I'm done! But I'll put some in my pockets, if you like, Inky, old man."

"Pray do, my esteemed Bunter!" said the nabob whitely.

And Billy Bunter packed his pockets almost as tightly as he had packed his skin.

He rolled out of the tuckshop feeling highly satisfied with himself, and with the world generally. His pace was slow; he moved like a heavily-freighted vessel, as indeed he was. He nodded genially to Bulstrode, whom he met on the steps of the School House. Bulstrode grinned, and several other Removites who were standing near chuckled, as if over some joke known only among themselves.

"Had a good feed?" asked Bulstrode.

"Yes, rather! Inky is a decent chap," said Bunter. "I don't care if he is a blessed nigger, I'm going to treat him as a friend in future."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By the way, where's Wharton?" said Bunter, noticing that the Famous Four were not in sight. "Where are my friends?"

"Oh, they're gone!" said Ogilvy.

"Eh?"

"They've been gone half an hour!" said Russell, chuckling. "They caught the six train from Friardale."

Bunter staggered.

"Gone!" he said faintly.

"Yes, rather!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

"Gone!" murmured Billy Bunter. "But—but they couldn't go without me, you know. I'm a member of the party."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They've given you the slip!" roared Bolsover. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really——"

"They caught the six train!" grinned Bulstrode. "But you've had a good feed, Bunter! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. "That villain Inky—he was keeping me out of the way on purpose——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I'll squash him! I—I—— How long have they been gone?"

"Half an hour! The train's been gone a quarter of an hour now—there goes the quarter-past six!" grinned Bulstrode, as the clock chimed out.

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Read the grand new story of Tom Merry & Co., entitled:

"IN HONOUR BOUND!"

"Ow! I—I—I've been had!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Removites.

"Beasts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was no doubt that William George Bunter had been "had," but he did not receive any sympathy from the Remove. They roared.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Just in Time.

COLONEL WHARTON was awaiting the Greyfriars juniors at an hotel in London, whence they were to start upon the journey. The colonel had decided that the journey should be made by the overland route—by the train to Paris, Milan, and Rome. The mere names of those famous cities were enough to excite the imagination of the juniors. They pictured themselves already in the fast express, dashing through strange countries with strange names, that sounded like poetry in the ears. Paris, Lyons, Milan, Florence, Rome, Naples! The boys were bubbling with excitement as they reached the hotel near Charing Cross where the colonel was waiting for them.

"Where is Bunter?" asked Colonel Wharton, as he shook hands with the juniors. "I understood that there were five of you, and I've taken the tickets."

"Oh!"

"Isn't he coming?"

"He's detained," said Wharton cautiously. "He was enjoying himself when we left. Upon the whole, I don't think Bunter is really quite suitable for this journey."

"He may come on," suggested the colonel.

"I hope not—I—I mean, I think not—but if he does, of course——"

"Well, if he does I've got the tickets," said the colonel.

"When do we leave, sir?" asked Bob Cherry.

"In the morning, by Charing Cross for Folkestone and Boulogne."

Bunter was not mentioned by the juniors again till they went to bed that night. The quartette shared a room, and when they were by themselves Bob Cherry remembered the existence of the Owl of the Remove.

The fat bounder wouldn't have the cheek to come on after we've dodged him like that, would he?" he asked.

Wharton laughed.

"He's got cheek enough for anything," he said.

"But he doesn't know where we are," Nugent remarked.

"He knows we're going from Charing Cross," Johnny Bull remarked thoughtfully, "but he doesn't know the train, or even the day. Colonel Wharton told the Head all about it, but nobody else at Greyfriars knows. And I suppose even Bunter won't have the nerve to tackle the Head for information."

"Well, let's hope not."

And the juniors went to bed.

They were up bright and early in the morning, and they breakfasted in the hotel, with the colonel in high spirits.

Their final preparations were made, and the last strap was fastened, the last buckle secured, and they drove to the station.

There was a goodly crowd on the big platform for the departure of the Continental express, and the juniors glanced round rather uneasily in search of a familiar form of Falstaffian dimensions. But Billy Bunter was not to be seen, and they were relieved. They had a reserved carriage to themselves, and they installed themselves in it. The colonel buried himself behind "The Times"—he was too old a traveller to feel the excitement that possessed the juniors. The boys crammed the window, and bought magazines and chocolates, and apples, and all sorts of things from the itinerant vendors on the platform. Doors were slamming down the line now; in three minutes the express was booked to depart.

"No Bunter!" murmured Bob Cherry.

And the juniors chuckled.

There was a sudden commotion visible and audible at the end of the platform, where a policeman was examining tickets as travellers came on. Someone bolted through the crowd, with a porter in hot pursuit.

Bob Cherry looked out of the window. Every door on the train was closed now, and the guard was about to give the signal to start.

Bob Cherry gave a grunt.

"My hat! Bunter!"

Billy Bunter was flying along the platform.

"I say, you fellows," he roared, "stop for me! Keep off, you porter idiot! My friends have got my ticket! They're here! I must go by this train—matter of life or death! Ow! Leggo! I say, you fellows——"

"You come hoff!" roared the angry porter, catching

The Juniors continued to watch the passing crowds from the balcony. Suddenly Harry Wharton gave a start. Among the loungers leaning on the stone wall of the esplanade, he caught sight of a dark face that seemed familiar to him. "My hat! That's Felice Cesare!" he muttered. *(See Chapter 8.)*

Bunter by the shoulder as he came abreast of the juniors' carriage. "You ain't got a ticket, and——"

Providentially for William George Bunter, he caught sight of Bob Cherry's face at the carriage window.

"Here's the carriage!" he shouted. "Here are my friends! They've got my ticket! Bob Cherry——"

"Oh, rats!" growled Bob Cherry.

"Stand clear there!"

But Bunter was clinging desperately to the handle of the carriage door.

"Colonel Wharton!" he shouted.

The colonel started up from his paper.

"Begad! Is that Bunter, after all?"

"Yes, sir," said Harry reluctantly. "He's come!"

"By Jove!"

"Stand back!"

"It's all right, porter," said the colonel, looking out. "This lad belongs to my party—I have his ticket here."

"Very well, sir," said the porter, touching his cap.

Billy Bunter scrambled into the carriage. He was hot and breathless, and streaming with perspiration. He sat down upon the nearest seat and gasped wildly.

"Ow—ow—ow! Nearly missed you! Oh!"

The train was already on the move. The porter slammed the door, and the Continental express glided out of the station. Billy Bunter sat gasping and puffing like a grampus.

"Here we are again, you fellows!" he gasped. "I'm sincerely sorry I couldn't leave with you last night—Inky simply wouldn't let me come—he couldn't bear to part with me. But I came off first thing in the morning."

"How did you know where to find us?" asked Bob Cherry,

restraining his feelings from respect for the presence of the colonel.

Bunter grinned.

"Well, I guessed that the Head would know about it," he explained, "so I told him how I had stayed behind to cheer old Inky up, and he told me where I could find you. He lent me the money for my ticket to London—I shall send him a postal-order for it—I'm expecting some postal-orders to be waiting for me at the poste restante in Naples. I didn't lose any time. I'd really have come on last night, only there wasn't a train. Jolly nearly missed you, didn't I, after all? Had a regular struggle to get on the platform without a ticket."

"Well, all's well that ends well," said the colonel.

"Yes, sir; quite so. I'm here, you see," said Bunter, grinning. "I determined to leave no stone unturned to rejoin you fellows—I knew how you'd miss me if I didn't come!"

Harry Wharton & Co. restrained their feelings. There was no doubt now that the fat junior was coming—unless, as Bob Cherry wildly whispered, they should pitch him overboard from the Channel boat.

The train glided on through the beautiful countryside of Kent. Billy Bunter got his wind back at last.

"You fellows brought a lunch-basket!" he asked.

"No!" growled Bob Cherry.

"Got any sandwiches?"

"No!"

"Then I'll have some of that chocolate!"

And Billy Bunter munched chocolates most of the way to Folkestone.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
On the Continent.

"F-K-S-TUN!"

"I wonder what that means?" said Billy Bunter, waking out of a nap as the train came to a sudden halt. The voices of porters were ringing unmusically out.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"That means Folkestone," he said; "and you'd better get out."

Colonel Wharton stepped from the carriage, and the juniors bundled out with their various belongings. Porters clamored them on all sides, and they went down the long platform and walked to the boat. Billy Bunter rubbed his eyes and set his spectacles straight, and rolled on after the party. He linked arms with Frank Nugent, much to Frank's disgust, but he did not like to shake him off under the eyes of the colonel. Billy Bunter knew that very well. The Owl of the Remove did not mean to run any risk of being left behind again.

"I didn't have time to bring anything from Greyfriars with me," Bunter explained. "You fellows will have to lend me a change or two, and perhaps I can do some shopping in Paris."

"You fat bounder!" said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really——"

"Here's the boat," said the colonel, marshalling the little flock of five over the wooden gangway. "This way, my lads!"

The steamer was crowded. Billy Bunter blinked round, and nudged Harry Wharton in the ribs.

"I suppose there's a buffet on this boat?" he said.

"You'd better leave the buffet alone," said Harry. "The sea looks a bit rough outside."

"Oh, I'm a splendid sailor, you know, and it's no good beginning a sea trip hungry," said Bunter confidently. "I think I'll go down to the buffet. The unfortunate thing is that I've left all my money at the school."

"Left your cheque-book on the grand piano in the study, I suppose?" Johnny Bull suggested sarcastically.

"I suppose the colonel wouldn't mind lending me a fiver——"

"Take this half-sov., you fat porpoise, and shut up!" said Wharton.

"Very well. I'll let you have this back out of my first postal-order at Naples, Wharton."

And Bunter's fat fist closed over the half-sovereign, and he rolled away down the stairs.

The boat was soon in motion, and the juniors stayed up on deck to see the animated scene. The decks were crowded with people. A bright April sun was shining on the sea, but the waves were curling outside the harbour. It was pretty clear that there would be some sick passengers before Boulogne was reached. Billy Bunter did not even notice that the steamer was in motion. He was seated below, with a large plate before him, and he was clearing the plate as fast as a dutiful steward replenished it. Billy Bunter's appetite ran to the full extent of the half-sovereign, and he had nothing left for a tip, but that was a trifle which did not trouble Bunter at all, though it seemed to worry the steward a little.

Bunter rose at last, and rolled to the stairs, followed by a very expressive glance from the tipless steward, whom he had kept very busy for a quarter of an hour. Bunter clutched at the rail as he put his foot on the stairs, for the first time realising that the vessel was moving.

"She—she's started!" he ejaculated.

The steward grinned. He saw his revenge in prospect.

"Yes, sir," he said cheerfully. "Likely to be a rough passage, sir."

"Ow!" said Bunter.

"Man on deck will give you a basin, sir."

"Basin!" gasped Bunter. "What for? I don't want a basin."

"You will soon, sir," said the steward consolingly.

"Ow!"

"Get as near the engines as you can, sir, that's best," said that wicked steward. And Billy Bunter groaned, and rolled up on deck.

He took the steward's advice, and rolled near the engines, and the smell of the oil, added to a roll on the sea, brought a most artistic shade of green to his countenance. Then he realised that the neighbourhood of the engines was the worst possible for a passenger with threatened trouble inside, and he rolled away in search of his friends. Colonel Wharton was seated in a deck chair, looking over his Baedeker's Guide, and the Famous Four were standing in the bows, with their hair blowing about, and the colour in their cheeks as they faced the sea-breeze.

"I—I say, you fellows!" groaned Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here he is!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Feel all right, Bunty?"

"Ye-e-e-es!"

"That's right! Had a good feed?"

"Groo! D-d-don't talk about that!"

"Why not?"

"Groo-ooo-h!"

"She's beginning to roll a bit," Nugent remarked.

"Well, it only takes an hour and a half to Boulogne—we can stand it."

"Hour and a half!" groaned Bunter.

"Yes, just about that."

"Ow!"

"What's the matter?"

"I—I suppose it was the fat ham," moaned Bunter. "I'm feeling rather queer."

"Basin, sir!"

"Ow! Take it away!"

"You'll want it, sir."

"Groo!"

Bunter did want it. In five minutes more he was suffering so terribly that the juniors' hearts melted towards him, and they hung round him, looking after him, and ministering to him, as if he were the dearest friend they had in the world. They held him, and they consoled him, they brought him water, they talked comfortably. But the boat was drawing out into rougher and rougher water, and verbal consolations were of little use. Billy Bunter's sufferings increased, and his groans were terrible to hear.

"Poor lad!" said the colonel. "Courage, Bunter—it will be over soon."

"I—I wish you'd drop me overboard," moaned Bunter.

"I—I'm tired of life. Ow! You rotter, Wharton, to get me into this!"

Wharton jumped.

"I!" he exclaimed.

"Groooh! Yes, you—you knew I should suffer like this, and that's why you persuaded me to come, you beast! Ow!"

"Persuaded you to come!" yelled Wharton.

"Ow! Ow! Ow!"

"Have some water, Bunty," said Nugent.

"You! Take it away! Groo! Go and eat coke! Oh!"

"Nice boy!" murmured Johnny Bull.

"You—you—ow! You rotters! You're jolly well pleased to see me like this."

"We're doing all we can for you," said Harry.

"You! You're not! Ow! Yah! Oh!"

If Bunter had been well, the juniors would have bumped him on the deck there and then, in spite of the colonel's presence. But they had mercy on him, under the circumstances. There was no doubt that his sufferings were, as Hurree Singh would have said, terrific. His greediness was the chief cause, and the fact that he was always out of condition. But it was no time to remember that it was all his own fault, and in spite of his ingratitude the chums did all they could for him. Bunter groaned, and complained, and reproached, until the steamer, after what seemed to him a lifetime of horror, rolled into the harbour at Boulogne.

Harry Wharton & Co. had been feeling a little queer themselves, but it passed off as soon as the steamer was at a standstill. But Billy Bunter had to be helped ashore, and he only gave a deep groan in reply to the Customs officer's question as to whether he had anything to declare. Wharton piloted him to the platform, where the train was to start for Paris, and there Billy Bunter showed some signs of life.

"I suppose there's a buffet on the station," he said.

"My hat! Are you going to feed again already?" demanded Wharton, in astonishment.

Bunter snorted.

"I haven't got much of my lunch left," he said angrily. "I suppose I'm not to starve till we get to Paris, am I? Where's the buffet?"

Harry Wharton led him into the buffet. Bunter ascertained that there was plenty of time to feed before the train started for Paris. Now that he was on dry land again, his strength was returning. With his strength his appetite came back. He made a lunch in the Buffet de la Gare that astounded the waiters, and took the best part of a louis to settle the addition. Then he announced that he felt better, and he rolled away to the train in a more contented frame of mind.

"Going straight on to Paris?" he asked.

"Yes," said Colonel Wharton.

The colonel was eyeing Billy Bunter rather doubtfully by this time, a little surprised at his nephew's selection of such an individual as a comrade on the Naples expedition. He did not know the facts yet.

"I hear there's a casino here in Boulogne," Billy Bunter remarked. "They play a game for money, you know."

"Yes, it is a swindle, carried on in most of these French coast towns," said Colonel Wharton.

"Wouldn't be a bad idea to try one's luck there, sir," hinted Billy Bunter.

The colonel's bow grew dark.

"I hope you are joking," he said. "You will certainly not do anything of the sort while you are under my charge. We shall pass through many towns on the Continent, where similar disgraceful practices are allowed, but you boys will see nothing of them. That is to be understood from the start."

"Of course, sir," said Bob Cherry, glaring at Bunter. "Don't take any notice of Bunter, sir; he's a little bit potty, that's all."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Oh, go to sleep, you fat bounder, and shut up!" growled Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter took his advice. He curled up in his corner, and went to sleep, and slept for hours. Once or twice he woke up to ask if it was Paris yet, and finding that it was not, he grunted, and went to sleep again. He was finally awakened by a rough shake.

"Groo!" he grunted. "Wharrer marrer! Lemme alone!"

"Certainly!" said Johnny Bull blandly. "If you'd like to be shunted off to a siding, you can stay here."

Bunter started up.

"Where are we?"

"Gare du Nord, Paris, fathead!"

And Billy Bunter rolled out of the carriage after the juniors.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
A Little Run.

PARIS, the next morning, looked very cheerful and gay under the April skies; but the juniors saw little of the great city—only what was to be seen from the windows of the taxicabs as they rolled to their station for departure. They were off again early in the morning, and the Southern express rolled away with them on a route they had traversed once before, when they had spent a vacation in Switzerland.

But this time they did not keep on to the eastward, but swept southward to Lyons; and all day long the train ran buzzing on through the French countryside, till it seemed to the juniors that it was the most natural thing in the world to live upon a rocking, buzzing train, with trees and houses, villages and towns, and great cities flying past them.

They dined in the restaurant car of the train, and made a good dinner, in spite of the strangeness of their surroundings. They used up a great deal of Greyfriars French upon the waiters, to the astonishment of the waiters, who apparently did not know that they were being spoken to in their own language.

Billy Bunter, with his usual modesty, assumed the role of interpreter to the party, and he appeared to be fully satisfied with the French so long as it was sufficiently provided with ongs and bongs—whereas, as Bob Cherry pointed out, the French of France seemed to be chiefly composed of wahs and swahs.

The long April day wore away, and night descended upon southern France, through which the express was now restlessly humming.

The juniors were tired, and their heads were heavy with "railway ache"; but no one grumbled, excepting Billy Bunter. Bunter, however, grumbled sufficiently to make up for any deficiencies on the part of the others.

Colonel Wharton had booked sleeping-cars for the party, and early in the evening, even earlier than the usual Greyfriars bedtime, the juniors turned in.

The berths were arranged two in a car, and Bob Cherry had the pleasure of sharing a car with Billy Bunter.

"I want the underneath berth," said Bunter, blinking at the berths through his big spectacles, after the train attendant had made up the beds.

"Rats!" said Bob Cherry, who was kicking off his boots.

"Now, look here, Cherry, I'm not going to climb up to the top one; besides, if there should be an accident, and a fellow were pitched out, he could be hurt."

"You're likely enough to get hurt, anyway, if you don't shut up," said Bob.

"Look here, I'm going to have the lower berth——"

"You can have it if you like, you silly fathead!"

"Oh, all right, then!" grunted Bunter.

And he undressed, and rolled into the berth.

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"Put out that light!" he said.

"I'm not finished undressing yet, ass."

"Look here, Bob Cherry, you're jolly well not going to keep that light on while I'm trying to go to sleep!" bellowed Bunter. "Put it out!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"I tell you I'm not going to stand it. Look here——"

Bob Cherry took the pillow from his bed, and smote the Owl of the Remove, and Bunter dragged the bedclothes over his head in defence.

"Ow! Ow! Stop it! I was only j-j-joking! Yow!"

"There!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Don't let's have any more of your jokes, then."

"Groo! Put that light out, you beast!"

Bob Cherry turned out the light and climbed into his bunk. One of his feet alighted upon Bunter as he did so, and the fat junior gave a howl.

"Yow! Gerroff!"

"Well, you would have the lower berth," said Bob Cherry. "These things will happen, you know."

"Ow! Beast!"

Bob Cherry chuckled, and turned in. The Owl of the Remove composed himself to sleep, and his musical snore was soon booming through the sleeping-car.

The express rushed on through the starry night, southward and ever southward. The train rocked and bumped, but it did not keep the juniors awake.

But Billy Bunter was not destined to sleep in peace. Bob Cherry was fed up, as he would have called it, with the Owl of the Remove. It was about ten o'clock when the fat junior suddenly started into wakefulness.

The bedclothes had been suddenly jerked from him. He started up, and bumped his head, and gave a terrific howl. The engine whistle was screaming, as it passed some station where the express did not stop; but the sudden scream of the whistle in the dead of night had a sound of terror to the startled ears of Billy Bunter.

"Ow! Ow! What's happened?"

A voice bellowed out above him.

"Run for it!"

"Ow! Is it an accident? Yow! We shall all be killed! Oh, you cads, to get me into a thing like this! Yow! I wish I was at Greyfrairs! Oh!"

"Run!"

"Yarooh!"

Billy Bunter rolled out of the bunk, and bumped on the floor. It was too dark to find his clothes, and he had no time to grope for the switch of the electric light. The train was rushing on at top speed—what is considered top speed on Continental railways, that is to say—and it seemed very fast to Bunter. The express rocked and swayed, and the fat junior was too terrified for it to occur to him that there could not have been an accident if the train was still rushing on.

He groped wildly for the door, and roared for help.

"Run!" yelled Bob Cherry, from the upper berth.

"Ow! I can't find the handle—yow! Oh! Help! Fire! Murder! Rescue! Oh!"

Bunter tore the door open, and bolted into the train corridor in his pyjamas. The conductor came dashing along the train. The train conductor was a Frenchman, and Frenchmen as a rule are not extraordinarily modest. But this Frenchman was shocked at Bunter. He gazed at the fat junior, encased in highly-coloured pyjamas, and held up a pair of somewhat soiled hands in horror.

"Monsieur!" he shrieked. "Go back! Au lit, m'sieur, au lit! Zat is not propair."

"Ow! Help!"

"Vat has happen zen?"

"It's an accident, you French idiot!" bawled Billy Bunter. "We're all going to be dashed to pieces! Stop the train! Ow!"

Harry Wharton looked out of the next compartment.

"Is that you, Bunter?"

"Ow! Yes! Ow!"

"What's the matter, you fat bounder?"

"It's an accident——"

"It isn't, you fathead. Get back into your car! How dare you come out into the corridor in your pyjamas!" roared Wharton. "Suppose any ladies come along!"

"Pas de danger, m'sieur!" shrieked the conductor. "Il faut retirer! Supposez que les femmes—monsieur! Suppose you zat ze ladies they come along—monsieur!"

"Look here——"

"Go back—allez-vous-en!" yelled the conductor.

"Isn't there an accident?" demanded Billy Bunter, beginning to realise that he had been rather hasty, but not quite reassured yet.

"Non!" shouted the Frenchman. "Go back viz you, or dress yourself, monsieur!"

"Oh, all right—don't shout at me, you foreigner!"

"Serve you right if he gave you a thick ear," growled Bob Cherry, as Bunter rolled back into the car. "You're a foreigner here, not that chap, you ass!"

"Look here, Cherry, you told me that there was an accident," bawled Bunter.

"I didn't! I told you to run!"

"Well, then——"

"That's all!" said Bob Cherry, with a chuckle. "Now you've had a little run, you can get back to bed and be quiet!"

"What did you tell me to run for, then?" yelled Bunter. "Why did you tell me to run, if there was nothing to run for?"

"Oh, just to see if you would do it, that's all!" said Bob Cherry.

"You—you—you——"

"Shut up and go to bed!" said Bob Cherry. "I shouldn't wonder if you get a process or something served on you to-morrow, for shocking that French chap!"

"Oh, really——"

"Good-night!"

"Beast!"

Snore!

"Rotter!"

Snore!

"Pig!"

Snore!

And Billy Bunter gave it up, and grunted and turned in again. He did not wake again till the sun was shining in at the windows of the train. Bob Cherry was already up and gone, and Billy Bunter rolled out of bed and dressed himself—his washing occupying him about three seconds—and rolled away in search of breakfast. And he mentally resolved that he would not have any of those blessed French breakfasts—coffee and a roll—the mere thought of which made him feel hungrier than ever; but a square meal, if the resources of the dining-car were equal to it—and he found that they were.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
In Italy.

GREAT cities, with names that they knew of from history and the newspapers, flitted past the juniors as their journey ran on southward. Milan, the centre of the great new manufactures which are bringing prosperity and the smoke of chimneys to the North of Italy, was passed. Gladly enough the juniors would have explored that famous city; but they needed to keep on for their destination. For only a few days in each city of world-wide fame and historic interest would have used up more time than whole terms at Greyfriars. And Naples, the most beautiful city of the world, awaited them at their journey's end, and they were content. Milan, and then Florence—and again they would have been glad to stop—and then Rome. Rome, the ancient capital of the world—Rome, the Eternal City—the city of wonderful traditions, fallen so low in latter days—the relic of a wonderful past—where ruins, crumbling with the age of two thousand years, jostle shoulder to shoulder with the ugliest efforts of the modern jerry-builder—Rome, the city of priests, and ruins, and beggars, and endless noise. But Rome, too, vanished behind the juniors, as they sped on southward, under a burning sun, to the south of the Italian peninsula—towards the Queen of Cities—beautiful Naples—the "dolce Napoli" of the boatman's songs.

There were many tourists southward-bound, as well as the Greyfriars juniors—the express from Rome was crowded.

In the train corridor was heard the delightful accent of New York, mingled with the deep German, and the crisp French, and the musical Italian. To the juniors, the sound of the Italian language alone, now that they heard it spoken daily about them, was a delight. The very names of the stations, as the porters called them out, seemed a succession of poems. And some of the railway-porters would call out the names, when they were of more than two syllables, in a kind of chant, as if the impulse to sing were too strong for them to resist.

Beautiful scenery, beautiful voices, and beautiful language, and beautiful manners for the most part, even in the humblest folk—and beggars, beggars, beggars, and more beggars—that was Harry Wharton's first impression of "dolce Napoli."

The juniors were brimming with excitement.

"Really in Italy now," Bob Cherry said, as the train was running into the central station of Naples—the Stazione Centrale. "Somebody says that Italy finishes at Rome, and past Rome is the wilderness—but this place seems to be more Italian than any other part we've seen. How dark their chivvies are!"

"Yes, rather—and they have a jolly thick accent, too!" said Wharton, who had picked up a little Italian en route. "But what ripping people! Nearly everybody seems to be a beggar; but they're satisfied with a halfpenny a time—and a beggar in England would punch your head if you gave him a ha'penny!"

"I don't approve of begging," said Billy Bunter, in his loftiest tone. "I'm jolly well not going to give them anything! I haven't given a penny away since we crossed the Frontier!"

"I quite believe you!" said Johnny Bull drily.

"Tell 'em to go and eat coke, and they'll soon get to know there's nothing for 'em!" said Bunter, with an air of wisdom.

"There's such a thing as shelling out to poor folk, if you've got some tin to spare," suggested Bob Cherry.

"Oh, rats!" said Bunter.

"Here we are!" said the colonel cheerfully. He had travelled in Naples before, and the scene that greeted the juniors was not new to him.

They quitted the train, and facchini crowded up to take the baggage. The juniors had already learned that the porter of the English railway, the porteur of the French line, became a "facchino" on the Italian lines—plural facchini. Facchini, with dark faces and rolling eyes, handsome features and melodious voices, all of them dirty, and all of them evidently poor, and yet wonderfully good-tempered, crowded up, and the colonel allowed twice as many men as were needed to take the baggage. Even then, more facchini crowded up, and wanted to help, in search of the few soldi they needed badly enough.

Outside the station were endless ramshackle cabs waiting. Most of the Neapolitan cabbies speak a little English—they can offer their vehicle in a kind of English, and all of them know the French word "pourboire," and the English word "present." A chorus from the cabbies hailed the passengers outside the Stazione Centrale.

"Wanter carriage?"

And an army of hotel touts came up, hat in hand, bowing to the ground, each one recommending most eloquently, in queer mixtures of Italian, English, and French, the wonderful merits of his own particular hotel or pension.

Colonel Wharton intended to stay only one night in Naples, before moving on to Pompeii, and he had already selected his hotel. Without even replying, save by a bland smile to the eager gentlemen who crowded round him, he saw the juniors and the baggage crammed into an hotel omnibus, and they rolled away from the Stazione Centrale, leaving the horde of cabbies, touts, guides, and beggars to attack the other passengers, who had been less expeditious in getting away.

It was a brilliant day—the sun blazed in a sky of burning blue. Naples, roaring with noise as the clumsy old-fashioned cabs and coaches, and the clanging trams rolled over its rough paving, lay round the juniors—deafening to the ears, but delightful to the eyes.

The hotel selected by the colonel lay upon the sea-front, at the end of the Via Caracciolo, which faces the glorious Bay of Naples—the most beautiful bay in the world. As the blue sea burst upon the view of the Greyfriars juniors, they could not restrain a cry of delight.

"Oh, ripping!" said Bob Cherry, his eyes dancing. "This was worth coming this distance for. Where's Mount Vesuvius, sir?"

Colonel Wharton smiled, and pointed to the double-coned mountain that rose into view across the noble bay.

There was a slight curl of blue smoke rising from the active summit of the volcano, and mingling with the fleecy clouds.

"Is that Vesuvius?" asked Nugent.

"That is it, my lad!"

"It doesn't look dangerous."

Colonel Wharton laughed.

"No; and I hope it will not prove dangerous, during our visit, at all events. That is the mountain whose eruption covered and buried the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum eighteen centuries ago. And now, you see, the vineyards cover its slopes, and houses are built upon its sides, out of the very lava masses that covered up and destroyed former buildings. The Italians are a cheerful race, and they take things easily."

"By Jove, they do!" said Harry. "I have read that there was an eruption only five years ago, which destroyed half a village."

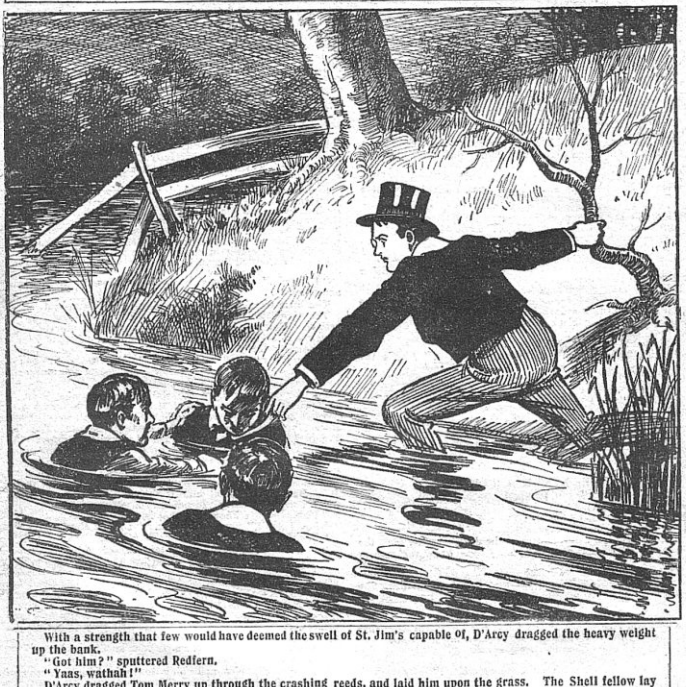
"And they are rebuilding it with the lava," said the colonel, smiling.

"My hat!"

"And here is our hotel!"

They alighted.

Facchini started up like demons in a pantomime, to carry in the baggage.



With a strength that few would have deemed the swell of St. Jim's capable of, D'Arcy dragged the heavy weight up the bank.

"Got him?" sputtered Redfern.

"Yaas, wathah!"

D'Arcy dragged Tom Merry up through the crashing reeds, and laid him upon the grass. The Shell fellow lay like a log. *(An incident in "IN HONOUR BOUND!" the splendid long, complete tale of the famous chums of St. Jim's, which is contained in this week's issue of our popular Companion Paper, the "Gem" Library. Price One Penny.) Order a copy to-day.*

The juniors, having enjoyed a good wash and change, after their railway journey, came down fully prepared to do justice to the meal that was ready. Billy Bunter was in high spirits. He had heard about the macaroni that is one of the greatest products of Naples; indeed, in the drive from the station, they caught glimpses of it here and there, hanging up outside houses to dry in the sun. Bunter had heard that it was an extremely tasty article of diet, and he was anxious to sample it.

Macaroni, delicately cooked with tomato sauce and powdered cheese, is a dish for the gods, and so the Greyfriars juniors decided. Billy Bunter astounded the cameriere by the frequency of his demands for fresh helpings.

Billy Bunter was still at the table, busily engaged, when the juniors finished, and strolled away to the wide windows to look out upon the sea.

Colonel Wharton, taking a kind pleasure in the delight of the boys, pointed out to them the objects of interest visible from the hotel windows.

The glorious bay, rolling blue in the sun—Mount Vesuvius on the left—the Island of Capri straight ahead—and the open sea away to the right—all lighted up by a burning sun.

On the Via Carracciolo, the great promenade of Naples, innumerable carriages and pedestrians passed to and fro.

The juniors found endless pleasure in a scene so new and strange, in the costumes, and the dark Italian faces—darker in Naples than in the north of Italy—and in the fragments of a musical language that floated to their ears.

Opposite the hotel, beggars lounged against the stone wall of the promenade, and basked in the sun—the "lazzaroni," for whom the city is famous. And the lazzaroni were innumerable. It was not surprising that they were poor, when everyone seemed determined to live in the sun without troubling himself to work. But they took their poverty and rags with cheerful tolerance, and begged of all passers with a persistance that was insensible to rebuffs. For the ruling idea of the Neapolitan vagabonds is that all English people are rolling in money—as, indeed, they are, in comparison to the Neapolitans—and that it is only necessary to ask, in order to have. And they did not lack in asking. Every passer-by, who looked in the least prosperous, would have brown, dirty hands held out to him, and pitiful voices would ask for "maccheroni," or "signa," or "buona mano," which all signify a tip in the language of the beggars.

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Bob Cherry glanced round at Billy Bunter. The fat junior was still busy at the table, and his fat face was growing red and shiny with his efforts.

"Look out, Bunter!" shouted Bob Cherry abruptly.

Bunter blinked up.

"Eh! What's the matter?"

"The volcano!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Eh—what?"

"It's smoking, and——"

Bunter waited for no more. He knew that in case of an earthquake, or an eruption in that delightful ecline, it was the custom to rush at once into the streets, to be safe, at least, from falling roofs.

With his fork still in his hand, the fat junior bolted from the room, and rolled down the stairs, and tore into the street.

To his surprise, the scene was quite calm without—nobody seemed to be alarmed. He blinked up at the balcony where the juniors grinned down upon him.

"There isn't any eruption, Bob Cherry!" he bawled.

"I didn't say there was," said Bob blandly. "I said the mountain was smoking—and so it is! Look at it!"

"You—you ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter rolled in to finish his interrupted meal.

Harry Wharton & Co. continued to watch the passing crowds, and the white sails that glanced upon the bay.

Suddenly Harry gave a start.

Among the loungers leaning upon the stone wall of the esplanade, he caught a dark face that seemed familiar to him. A pair of glittering black eyes were watching the group on the hotel balcony.

"My hat!" muttered Wharton.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "What's the row?"

"Look!"

"Look at what?"

"That chap there—the fellow with the red neckerchief."

"Phew!"

"Who is it?" said Colonel Wharton, in surprise. "Someone you have seen before?"

"Yes, sir—it is Felice Cesare!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER.
Pompeii.

FELICE CESARE!

It was the Neapolitan.

There was no doubt about it.

The juniors, as they scanned the dark, swarthy face, the curly black hair, the glittering, jetty eyes, knew the man at once.

It was the Italian who had come to Greyfriars—the one-time guide of Mount Vesuvius who had tracked down the man who held the mysterious document—their rival in the quest for the jewel hoard in the dead city of Pompeii.

Colonel Wharton's face grew very grave. His keen eyes scanned the face of the Italian; and Cesare, discovering that he was seen, moved away and disappeared in the crowd.

"That is Cesare?" said the colonel slowly.

"Yes, uncle."

"The man who was after the treasure clue?"

"Yes."

"He looks a resolute rascal," said the colonel thoughtfully. "So he knows that we are in Naples, and he will easily guess what we are here for."

"Looks like it, sir," said Bob Cherry. "Not that we're afraid of him."

"No fear!"

The colonel knitted his brows.

"I have no doubt he returned to Italy at once, when the police were looking for him in England," he remarked. "And the station has probably been watched for us. He expected that we should come—and he would have any number of helpers among the crowd of beggars and thieves at the station—it was easy for him to have us watched for. But he cannot do us any harm; the days of brigandage in the south of Italy are over."

"I suppose he will hang about watching us, on the chance of spoofing us out of the paper," Nugent remarked.

"I have that safe enough," said the colonel. The precious document had been given to the colonel for safe keeping.

But the juniors could not help thinking a great deal about the dark, threatening face of the Neapolitan.

The discovery that Felice Cesare was in Naples watching for them, gave an added spice of danger to the adventure they were engaged upon.

They did not see the man again that day.

Later in the afternoon they had a drive through the city,

to see all of it that they could see in one day, and they returned to their hotel tired but delighted.

The next day they were to leave for Pompeii.

Their hearts were beating at the thought of visiting that celebrated place. A city that was overwhelmed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in the first century of the Christian era—and only lately excavated and revealed to the eyes of modern generations—a city of the dead past, but remaining as the inhabitants had left it—it was a scene of inexhaustible interest to the explorer.

The colonel, who had visited the place before, told them much about it as the train ran by the delightful shores of Napoli.

Whole streets were excavated, and whole streets remained yet to be dug out from their encrustation. Houses, all roofless, but otherwise wonderfully preserved, stood as they had been left when the inhabitants fled from the eruption—in the first century!

Eighteen hundred years had passed since then, and the paintings upon the walls remained, in many cases almost as fresh as ever—and the bread that was baking in the ovens in that far-off day had been found and was preserved. And grimmer relics of the dead past were to be seen—skeletons that had been dug out of the solidified ashes—and skeletons of unhappy prisoners in chains at the time of the eruption, wretches suffocated in their manacles without a chance of escape.

"Pompeii!" said the colonel abruptly, as the train made another stop.

The little wayside station was glowing with sun-heat.

The party from Greyfriars party alighted, and facchini came up in crowds. Colonel Wharton good-humouredly allowed the baggage to be taken by twice the necessary number of hands. The hotel porter of the Suisse came up, hat in hand. Colonel Wharton had engaged rooms at the Hotel Suisse, the principal hotel in the place, a stone's throw from one of the entrances to the dead city.

Further on away from the station was the new town of Pompeii—a village of narrow streets and dark hovels and poverty and rags—like most Italian villages, with weird smells thickening and sickening in the heat of the sun. But the Pompeii hotels are mostly well out of the village, close to the station. A couple of hundred yards from the Stazione the windows of the handsome Hotel Suisse blazed and glittered in the sun-rays pouring upon them. A portly, imposing gentleman came out to greet the party, with graceful bows. Billy Bunter blinked at him as the party walked up to the hotel, and Bob Cherry whispered in his ear.

"I suppose you know who that is, Billy?"

"No, I don't," growled Bunter. "I know I'm hungry."

"It's the Duke of Pompeii."

"Is it really?" exclaimed Bunter, with great interest.

"My dear chap, can't you guess that by looking at him?"

"I suppose I ought to call him your Grace," said Bunter, who had a "strong weakness" for titles, and had no dukes so far on his visiting-list. Dukes, indeed, are not uncommon in the Neapolitan land—titles grow there almost as thickly as blackberries in England, and dukes, counts, barons, and even princes, crop up in the most unexpected places, and do not all seem to be able to afford the luxury of clean linen.

"Yes; you have to go down on your knees, you know."

"Do I really?"

"I suppose you're not going to begin with a breach of etiquette, Bunter," said Bob Cherry severely. "You don't want to show these Italian chaps that you've never met a duke before."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

The duke was very civil, at all events. He greeted the colonel just like a hotel manager, but his manners were certainly ducal. He ushered the party into the hotel with great empressment. Billy Bunter was looking for an opportunity of falling upon his knees, but fortunately Harry Wharton stopped him in time.

"I've got a lot of titled friends in England," Bunter remarked to Harry. "But I don't know any other dukes, really. This one——"

"This what?"

"This duke——"

"You ass, that's the hotel manager!"

"The—the what?"

"The hotel manager," said Harry. "You ass!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

Bob Cherry grunted.

"You ass, Harry! I wanted to see Bunty go through his tricks. Now you've spoiled it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I say, you fellows——"

"Here are our rooms," said the colonel, as the ducal manager indicated, with a noble wave of the hand, a suite of rooms with southern windows, with green fields before them,

and a mountain in the distance, with the sea laving its base.

"I think we shall be very comfortable here."

"Yes, rather, sir!"

"Better wait till we've sampled the grub before we feel too jolly sure about that," remarked Billy Bunter.

Billy Bunter had an opportunity of "sampling the grub" shortly afterwards, when dinner was served; and it came fully up to even the exacting requirements of the Falstaff of Greyfriars.

The juniors were eager to begin their explorations; but the ruins were closed to the public at five o'clock, and they were perforce compelled to wait until the morrow morning.

They slept soundly enough that night, and they were awakened in the morning by the bright sun streaming in at the windows.

Bob Cherry was the first out of bed.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he roared. "Up with you, you chaps! Let's go out and have a look at the place before brekker."

"Right-ho!" said Wharton and Nugent and Johnny Bull at once.

Billy Bunter grunted.

"What's the time?" he demanded.

"Seven o'clock!"

"Well, I'm jolly well not going to get up till nine!"

"All the better," said Bob Cherry cheerfully.

"Br-r-r-r!"

And Bunter rolled over and went to sleep again.

Wharton rang, and hot water was brought up, and the four chums of the Greyfriars Remove duly bathed and dressed themselves, and sallied forth in quest of adventure.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.
Carriages for Hire.

THE sun was blazing down, early as the hour was. On the shady side of the hotel it was cold, but in the sun it was, as Bob Cherry remarked, very like being in an oven. But they enjoyed it. It was pleasant to feel the sun of Italy blazing upon their faces. Outside the hotel old-fashioned, queer-looking carriages were standing, with sleepy horses and drowsy drivers. But all trace of drowsiness vanished from the swarthy faces of the drivers at the sight of the "Inglesi."

"Wanter carriage?"

It was the warcry of the Neapolitan cabby.

The juniors grinned good-humouredly. They were already growing used to that greeting. In the sun-blaze, swarthy drivers gathered round them, each offering his own particular "carrozza," and endeavouring to capture the new arrivals.

"Wanter carriage?"

"Drive to Amalfi, sar."

"Drive to Sorrento, signor."

"Good drive to Napoli, sar."

"I give you cheap price."

"Good carrozza, sah—buona—buonissima—good carrozza! You go."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"We don't want to drive; we're going to look round," he explained.

"Wanter carriage?"

"Me drive you!"

"I give you cheap price. What you pay?"

"You give me ten franes."

"Diece lire, sar."

"Wanter carriage?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Doesn't anybody ever walk in this country?" roared Bob Cherry.

"Buona carrozza, sar."

"I give you cheap price."

As a matter of fact, Italians never walk if they can help it, and the drivers were naturally amazed that anybody should prefer to walk when there was a carrozza to be had. They could not understand it, unless it was one more example of the peculiar customs of those mad people, the English.

They could only conclude that it was a question of price, and they bid against one another with great vociferation.

"What you give me drive to Amalfi?" roared a tall, dark individual, who looked like a brigand who had sold off his gun and dagger to invest in a cab, to meet more modern requirements. "Me Julio, sar. What you give me drive to Amalfi?"

"We don't want to go to Amalfi," said Wharton.

"Ah! You go to Sorrento?"

"No; we don't want to go to Sorrento."

"Where you go, then?"

"We're going to do a walk round."

"No walk—carrozza—carrossa, qui," explained Julio, indicating his cab with a very dirty forefinger. "You drive. Me drive you to Amalfi for trenta lire—thirty franc."

"No, thanks!"

"Venti-cinque," said Julio, elbowing the smaller drivers away, and perfectly convinced that it was only a matter of

price. "Venti-cinque!" Then, in a sudden burst of English: "Twenty-five, sar—twenty-five franc!"

"No, thanks!"

"Twenty franc!" said Julio, coming down to the real price. "Me drive you to Amalfi for twenty franc."

"No!"

"What you give me, den?"

"Nothing."

"No drive to Amalfi for noting," said Julio, in amazement.

"But we don't want to drive to Amalfi."

"Me drive you to Sorrento for cinque lire—five franc."

"We don't want to go to Sorrento."

"You give me four franc?"

"No, I tell you."

"Three franc," said Julio despairingly. "I give you cheap price. You drive to Sorrento for three franc."

"No, no, no!" roared Wharton.

And the famous Four walked away, still followed by a roar of vociferation from the anxious drivers, who evidently did not understand that they didn't want to drive anywhere, and were quite convinced that it was only a question of the price.

"Sorrento, sar——"

"Five franc!"

"Four franc!"

"Good carrozza!"

"Three franc and buona mano!"

"Two franc and pourboire!"

"What you give me?"

"My hat!" said Wharton, as the chorus died away behind. "I'm glad we've got rid of those chaps. I——"

"We haven't got rid of them!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Here they come!"

Three of the drivers had leaped into their little carrozzas, and were dashing in pursuit of the juniors. The horses' hoofs clattered wildly over the stony road, the drivers showing the most utter recklessness in driving, as Italians generally do. It seemed that only by a series of miracles the carrozzas remained upon their wheels instead of turning somersaults.

"Drive to Sorrento, sar!"

"Drive to Napoli, sar!"

"Where you drive, sar?"

"Nowhere!" roared Bob Cherry. "Be off!"

"You give us maccheroni, sar!"

"That means a tip in this country," grinned Nugent. "Non e maccheroni."

"Oh, signor!"

"Buona mano, sar!"

"I drive you to Sorrento for three franc."

The juniors walked on, and two of the cabbies gave it up, and rattled back to the hotel in their shaky carrozzas. When they were in motion, they seemed to be under the impression that they were driving in chariot races, and as soon as they stopped they seemed to fall half-asleep. The juniors were already learning that that was the southern temperament—long spells of idleness, with occasional bursts of wild energy.

But Julio was not to be shaken off. He slackened down his horse, and kept pace with the juniors, grinning at them cheerfully the while.

Whenever they happened to glance towards the road, they met the eye of Julio, and he hailed them.

"Wanter carriage?"

"Queer beggars, these people," said Nugent. "Jolly good tempered, too. London cabbies wouldn't be so jolly polite."

"Wanter carriage, signorini?"

The juniors strolled on. They came upon the wall which enclosed the ruins of Pompeii, and over the wall they caught glimpses of the dead city within. They took a footpath across a field, where the enterprising Julio could not follow in his carriage, but he was not to be shaken off so easily as that. The carrozza rattled away in a cloud of dust; but Julio was only going round to head them off from a fresh direction.

"Dropped that bounder, at all events!" grinned Bob Cherry.

They came out upon a road again. There was a clatter of hoofs and a rattle of wheels, and Julio dashed round a corner at top speed, and drew up so suddenly that his horse almost tumbled over.

"Wanter carriage, sar."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You drive to Sorrento, sar?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Up and down, and round about, the Greyfriars juniors strolled in the glorious sunshine, and after about an hour they returned to the hotel with a good appetite for breakfast.

Julio had hung upon their traces all the time.

As they reached the Hotel Suisse, the unfortunate man

looked very disappointed. He halted his carrozza, and jumped down.

"You no drive?" he said.

"Not this morning," said Harry Wharton good-humouredly.

"Domani," suggested Julio.

"What does domani mean?" said Harry. "Anybody know?"

"To-morrow," said Julio, eagerly, understanding the question. "Domani, signor—to-morrow, sir. You drive to Sorrento to-morrow?"

"Perhaps!"

"Me here—sempre," said Julio. "Me drive. Me give you cheap price. Wanter carriage, you ask for Julio. Me Julio."

"Glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Julio," said Nugent solemnly.

Julio looked puzzled.

"You drive—dopo colazione," he said.

"We're not going to drive."

"No want carriage!" said Julio, understanding at last.

"No."

"You give me maccheroni."

"Maccheroni! What on earth for!" demanded Wharton.

"Me drive about—till me—ver'," said Julio pathetically. "Me follow you a hour."

The juniors burst into a roar. It was quite in keeping with the Neapolitan character to demand a tip for having bothered them for an hour.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of all the cheek——"

Julio grinned. Having succeeded in making the signori laugh, he was pretty certain of his tip.

"Buona mano," he said persuasively. "A little tip for me. Maccheroni, signori."

"Give him a franc for his cheek," said Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton tossed a franc—or lira, as it is called in Italy—into the brown, extended hand of the cabby. Julio looked at it. The Neapolitan lazzaroni are masters of the art of facial expression, and they have a custom of looking artistically surprised and disappointed on receiving a tip, which gives the unwary stranger the impression that he has broken some unwritten law in giving so little. And if they receive ten times as much as they expect, the pathetic look of disappointment comes all the same.

"Una lira!" said Julio.

"Yes, it's for you!" said Wharton.

"You give me two lire."

"Well, you cheeky bounder," said Wharton warmly. "You're getting that bob for nothing. Here, hand it over, if you don't like it."

Julio handed back the lira, under the impression apparently that he was to receive a two lire piece. Wharton returned the coin to his pocket, and turned away. Julio gave a yell of horror.

"Signor! Signorino! Maccheroni!"

"But you don't like it," said Wharton coolly. "If you don't like one franc, I don't want to give it to you. It's all right."

"You no give me two franc!"

"No fear!"

"You give me one franc."

"But you've refused it."

"No refuse. You give me one franc," said Julio anxiously.

Wharton handed the franc over again, and Julio pocketed it very quickly, evidently nervous that it might disappear again.

"Now you give me one more franc, signorino," he said.

"Oh, go and eat coke," said Wharton.

The juniors went into the hotel. Julio was not in the least disconcerted by his rebuff. He put his swarthy face and brigandish hair into the doorway after them.

"You drive, signor—you take Julio! Good carrozza! Me drive you to Sorrento."

The juniors walked into the dining-room. From afar the mournful tones of Julio followed them, dying away in a melodious cadence:

"Good carrozza, sar! Me give you cheap price!"

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The City of the Dead.

COLONEL WHARTON was down, and Billy Bunter appeared soon afterwards, and the juniors sat down to breakfast. The eggs and bacon of England were not to be had—eggs came up in the form of omelettes, and bacon was impossible to obtain. But good fish from the bay supplied its place, and there were fresh rolls, and delicious butter, and excellent coffee. From the window, as they breakfasted, they could see the entrance to the ruins, and all but Billy Bunter were anxious to get out of doors. Billy Bunter was left still breakfasting when the party rose. The fat junior blinked up at them.

"I haven't quite finished yet," he remarked. "These omelettes are good, and I think I shall have a few more. The fish are good, and I'm going to have some. You fellows needn't wait for me."

"We sha'n't!" said Bob Cherry politely.

And Colonel Wharton and the Famous Four walked out of the hotel, between rows of waiters bowing with Italian politeness, and crossed the road to the entrance to the ruined city of Pompeii.

There was an instant rattle of wheels on the roads, and carrozzas came up in a bunch, with hoofs rattling, and wheels crashing, and drivers cracking their whips, and yelling wildly.

"Wanter carriage?"

Colonel Wharton made a gesture towards the entrance to the excavations, and the drivers understood. Some of them drove off, but several of them drew up their carriages, to remain outside the gate, and wait for the visitors to emerge, like cats watching round a hole into which a rat has disappeared.

The juniors passed the gate, and Colonel Wharton took the tickets of entry—two francs, fifty centimes, for each person.

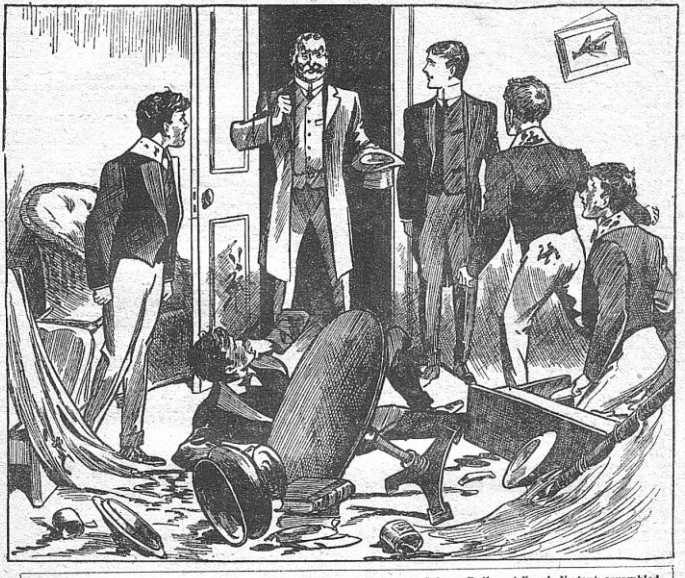
"Guide, sir?"

"Require a guide, sir?"

Half a dozen uniformed guides stood round offering their services. The colonel shook his head. Under the circumstances, a guide was not what they wanted. Colonel Wharton had visited the ruins before, and he knew his way well enough to the Casa del Fauno—the House of the Faun.

The party walked up the inclined path into the ruined city, through the ancient gateway, which stands just as it stood in those ancient days when the wealthy Romans came down to Pompeii for change of air at the seaside.

The ground was paved with huge stones, just as the streets



The old soldier halted in the doorway and stared in. Harry Wharton, Johnny Bull, and Frank Nugent scrambled up, while Bob Cherry turned a sooty face towards the visitor. "The dickens," ejaculated Colonel Wharton, "what does this mean, Harry?" *(See chapter 2.)*

of Naples are paved at the present day. The streets are narrow, and must, in the old days when they were inhabited, have smelled as strongly as Italian streets smell in modern times.

"I guide you, sir!" came a pleading voice. "House of the Faun, sir—House of Arbaces, and House of Glaucus, mentioned by Milford Lytton Bulwer, in his celebrated work, 'Last Days of Pompeii,' sir!"

"Thank you, I know the place," said the colonel.

"House of the Boar-Hunt, sir—House of the Veteii——"

"Thanks, don't trouble."

And the guides being a little less importunate than the cab-drivers, the visitors succeeded in getting away by themselves.

There were a good many people in the old city—visitors, with guides and without. The juniors looked round them with breathless interest.

Their steps woke the echoes of the old stones, as they had been wakened two thousand years before by the feet of the old Romans.

There, before their eyes, was the arch erected in honour of Nero—there were the wine-shops, with marble counters, and sunken vases in them for holding the wine—there were the grooves where the sliding doors had moved to and fro.

Streets upon streets, houses, palaces, temples, theatres—all as they had been left in those strange old days. And there, close on the horizon, rose Mount Vesuvius—the terrible volcano whose streams of lava and ashes had wrought all this destruction, and preserved a Roman city unaltered for the curious eyes of modern times. Peaceful enough looked the terrible mountain now, with blue smoke rising faintly from its summit, and vines climbing its steep slopes, and houses built half-way to the crater. And yet the monster only sleeps. Any day he may wake again to fury, and send down streams of molten lava to engulf the newly-excavated city, and the villages round about it.

Breathless with wonder and interest, the juniors trod the echoing streets of that city of the dead.

Skeletons—the bones of men who had been alive eighteen centuries before—were to be seen in some of the houses—wall-paintings, in colours wonderfully fresh—columns shattered but still noble.

"My hat!" said Harry Wharton at last. "It's wonderful—wonderful!"

They walked through the principal street, and across by another, and then another, and another opened before them. It was a city that lay about them, with houses on houses—a city where no living being dwelt now save the green lizards that scuttled to and fro in the crumbling corners of the old Roman brickwork.

"Guide, signori?"

"No, thank you," said Colonel Wharton.

"Good guide, signori—buono."

It was a short, thick-set man, with a heavy black beard and moustaches, who had followed the party in from the Porta Marina where they had entered.

He did not accept the colonel's rebuff, but followed them at a distance.

Colonel Wharton turned round sharply. The man was not

in uniform, and was, therefore, not one of the accredited guides of the place.

"Via!" exclaimed the colonel sharply. "You are not a guide—no?"

"Pardon, signor——"

"Get away!"

They halted at the Casa del Fauno—the House of the Faun. It was one of the finest buildings in Pompeii. Across the entrance was an iron gate, and the colonel called to a man in uniform to unlock it.

The attendant unlocked the gate, and stood by it key in hand, waiting for the party to emerge in order to turn the key again. In the dead city all the best houses are kept locked in this manner.

They entered the atrium, or outer hall of the hall, and passed through, the juniors gazing about them at the shattered columns.

Further on was the impluvium, or shallow water tank, which exists in all these ancient houses, in old times filled by the rain, which came through an opening of exactly the same size in the roof overhead.

The roof was gone, and the burning sun of Naples shone down upon the mosaic flooring.

The impluvium was dry enough now. In the centre of it rose a stone pedestal. The juniors were looking eagerly for a fountain, remembering the words on the mysterious document—the sixth stone past the fountain.

But there was no fountain to be seen.

Further on was the peristyle, a garden surrounded by columns, still in a good state of preservation.

Harry Wharton glanced back towards the gate of the atrium.

The uniformed custodian was standing there with the key in his hand, not in the least interested in the movements of the visitors to the old house.

But the black-bearded Italian who had followed them into Pompeii was watching them from the atrium.

Colonel Wharton frowned as he saw him again.

"That fellow seems to be very much interested in our movements," he remarked.

Wharton started a little.

"Is it one of Felice Cesare's friends watching us, uncle?"

The colonel grasped his cane.

"I will soon see about that!" he exclaimed.

"My hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, "look at him! I'll swear I've seen that nose before, and those eyes, and the fellow hadn't a beard then!"

"It's Cesare!" shouted Nugent.

"Himself, by Jove!"

Colonel Wharton strode towards the black-bearded man.

The Italian met him with a sullen scowl, and did not recede a step. Colonel Wharton grasped the heavy black beard, and the man started back—too late! The backward jerk of his head lent additional force to the pull, and the heavy black beard came off in the hand of the Englishman.

"Cesare!" shouted Johnny Bull.

The custodian with the key came forward. Cesare backed away, his hand going inside his jacket.

"Maledetto!" he muttered, showing his teeth in a savage snarl.

The colonel pointed to him.

"That man is following us," he said to the attendant. "Will you have him sent away? You can see that he was disguised."

He slipped a ten-franc note into the attendant's hand.

Money will work wonders everywhere, but more in Italy than anywhere else. The attendant bowed, and laid a heavy hand upon Cesare's shoulder, and addressing to him remarks more forcible than polite in Italian, hustled him away. Cesare had no choice about going; but he cast a savage glance back at the English party. The sound of his cursing died away in the distance.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Secret of the Sixth Stone.

COLONEL WHARTON re-entered the House of the Faun. There was a grim smile upon the bronzed face of the colonel.

"He is gone," he said. "I think he had a knife about him, but he would not dare to draw it here. There are too many attendants about. And he has not served us an ill turn. The attendant will not be back for some minutes, I think, and, meanwhile——"

"Meanwhile, we'll look for the sixth stone past the fountain, uncle."

"Yes, Harry."

"La sesta pietra passato la fonata," Johnny Bull re-

marked, repeating the words of the document. "But there isn't any fountain here, sir."

"Blessed if I can see one," said Harry.

"Perhaps there's been one, and it's gone," Nugent remarked.

"That wouldn't help us much."

The colonel smiled.

His keen, grey eyes were scanning the interior of the House of the Faun.

"There is a stone pedestal in the impluvium," he said.

"Doubtless at one time it was a part of a fountain, and it is undoubtedly what the paper refers to, I think."

"Very likely, uncle."

"But the sixth stone past the fountain," said Johnny Bull. "Taking this stone thing as the fountain, what about the sixth stone? The floor here is mosaic, not paved at all, as we expected from the paper."

The colonel nodded.

"What we seek is certainly not buried in the floor, as one might have expected from the document," he agreed.

"Then where is it, sir?"

"Patience, my boy."

Colonel Wharton pointed.

At the side of the atrium was a row of blocks of stone, evidently laid there after being removed from the ruin when the house was excavated.

There were nine of them, and they were laid in a row, beginning at a point which was just level with the impluvium, though some yards to the side of it.

The juniors' eyes glistened.

They had wondered how the dead holder of the mysterious document could have been able to bury his secret clue under a stone in the flooring, when the ruins were so evidently well watched by attendants.

It was now clear that he had done nothing of the sort.

He had simply thrust it under one of these huge blocks of stone, which stood by the side of the atrium as they had stood for years.

They were never moved; there was no occasion to move them. They stood there, and would probably stand in the same row in the same position for a thousand years to come.

The hiding-place was simple and easy, and utterly unlikely to be suspected. A paper slipped under one of those stones would, in all probability, remain hidden till doomsday unless the owner returned for it, when it would be easy to recover.

If the custodian's attention was removed for a few moments.

The juniors counted along the row of great blocks to the sixth past the fountain.

"Here it is, sir!" said Harry Wharton, in an excited whisper.

"Jolly heavy!" Johnny Bull remarked.

"Yes; it won't be easy to shift."

"Look under it while I shift it," said the colonel.

"Ready, sir."

Colonel Wharton laid his strong hands upon the great block of stone. He exerted his strength, and the stone tilted over a little.

Harry Wharton looked underneath it eagerly.

There, half-embedded in the dust, where it had been crushed down by the weight of the stone, lay a fragment of flat wood.

Wharton caught it up.

"Got it?"

"Yes."

"Good."

The colonel allowed the stone to slip back into its place. All was as it had been before. Wharton slid the flat piece of wood into his pocket. He had noticed that there were lines drawn upon it, but he had not stopped for more than a hurried glance. It was necessary to keep it out of view. If the attendant had seen it, he would probably have imagined that the explorers were pocketing some relic of Pompeii, and explanations would have been very awkward.

"Don't look at it now," said the colonel quietly. "Keep it in your pocket till we are back at the hotel, Harry."

"Yes, rather, uncle."

The custodian came strolling in, and explained to the colonel in voluble Italian that the disguised intruder had been ejected from the ruins.

Colonel Wharton thanked him; and the party continued to look about the House of the Faun, though, as a matter of fact, the ruins had ceased to interest them. They were all keen to get back to the hotel and examine their find.

But it was safest to keep up appearances. And indeed the place was well worth examining. The House of the Faun—so called from the statue of the Dancing Faun found there—was full of interest.

They left it at last, and strolled through the ruins towards the Porta Marina.

It was time to return to the hotel for lunch, and they strolled out quietly enough, nothing in their manner

indicating that they had visited the City of the Dead for any unusual reasons.

Outside the gates the carriage drivers were waiting.

"Wanter carriage?"

"I give you cheap price."

"Drive you to Sorrento, sar."

"What you give me?"

They laughed and nodded, and crossed the road to the hotel. By the verandah of the Hotel Suisse a man was waiting—it was Felice Cesare. His black beard was gone, and his dark face was livid with rage and anxiety. He came up to the party, his hands clenched and quivering.

"You have found it!" he hissed.

The colonel looked at him calmly.

"You had better be off, my man!" he said. "You are wanted in England for crime, and there are extradition laws in this country!"

The Italian ground his teeth.

"Have you found it?"

"I have nothing to say to you!"

"Listen, signor! I know that Ciro drew up a chart of the treasure on Mount Vesuvius, and that he hid it in the ruins of Pompeii. I know that when he was dying he wrote down where it was to be found."

"He wrote it in his blood, which you had shed!" said the colonel sternly. "Scoundrel! Do you dare to show your face in the light of day?"

"You have found the clue?"

"Begone," said the colonel. "You tried to rob Ciro! and you murdered him without being able to rob him! But I am upon my guard! Go!"

"Will you give me the clue?"

"I will give you a thrashing if you do not begone instantly!" exclaimed the old soldier angrily. "I do not bandy words with an assassin!"

The Italian's dark face reddened with rage.

His hand went suddenly behind his sash, and came out again with something in it that gleamed and glittered in the sun.

"Look out, uncle!" shrieked Wharton.

The ruffian was leaping upon the colonel like a tiger. But the veteran was on his guard. His cane swished up instantly, and it caught on the swarthy wrist, and Felice Cesare gave a howl of pain. The knife clattered upon the pavement.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.
The Chart.

"ECCO!"

It was a yell from the crowd of drivers, guides, loungers, and lazzaroni outside the hotel.

"Ecco!"

"Il coltello!"

The colonel's heavy cane crashed upon the ruffian's head, and he reeled back. Colonel Wharton put his foot upon the knife.

"You scoundrel!"

"Arrest him!" shouted the hotel porter.

There was a rush of indignant men at the attempted assassin. Cesare glared at them like a wild animal, and suddenly springing into the road, he fled.

"After him!" shouted the colonel. "A thousand francs to the man who seizes him! The man is a murderer!"

There was a yell, and all the drivers, as if moved by a common instinct, set their carrozzas in motion, and dashed after the flying Italian.

With a thunder of hoofs and a clatter of wheels, they vanished down the road in wild pursuit, amid clouds of dust.

If they could catch him, it was likely to go hard with Felice Cesare. It was not that he had attempted to use a knife—that was not at all uncommon in the South of Italy. But he had tried to kill a rich British signor—the source of wealth to all sorts of natives while he lived at Pompeii. And all the drivers who hoped to drive him to Sorrento, to Amalfi, or the Napoli or Salerno were mutually indignant.

"The awful rascal!" said Harry Wharton, with a deep breath. "He would have killed you, uncle!"

The colonel laughed grimly.

"An old soldier is not so easily killed," he said. "I fancy he will be scared away now, even if they do not catch him."

They passed into the hotel.

A bowing waiter met them with the announcement that dejeuner was serving.

But they were too anxious to examine their prize to think of lunch yet, though the clear air had given them a good appetite.

They ascended to the colonel's room, and Harry Wharton laid the fragment of wood upon the table, the colonel locking the door.

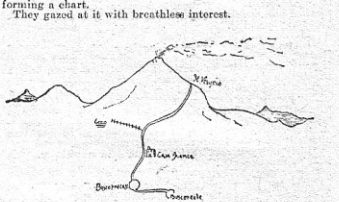
The explorers gathered eagerly round.

"There it is!" said Harry.

He wiped the wood with his pocket-handkerchief. It was but a fragment, polished on one side, and about six inches square.

Upon the surface lines had been traced with a knife, forming a chart.

They gazed at it with breathless interest.



A sloping line clearly indicated the side of Mount Vesuvius; and there were several words scratched in with the knife—"Casa Bianca, Boscotrecase"—and then the word "Ecco."

"Boscotrecase is a village on the slopes of Vesuvius," said the colonel quietly. "Casa Bianca is the spot where travellers take horse to make the ascent of Vesuvius on horseback. These lines indicate the direction to be taken after leaving Casa Bianca."

"But 'Ecco,'" said Wharton. "What does that mean?"

The colonel smiled.

"It is the same word as the French 'voila,'" he replied. "It means 'Look here' or 'Behold,' as the case may be."

"Then in this case——"

"In this case it certainly means that that is the spot where the treasure is to be looked for. There is no other indication of it."

"Quite so."

"Then," said Frank Nugent, with a deep breath, "we've only to ascend Mount Vesuvius, and dig up the giddy treasure."

"We have to find the place. It is not so simple as it looks upon the chart," said the colonel; "and we must keep it a dead secret. At a hint that we are seeking treasure, every beggar and lounger in Pompeii would be following us."

"If Cesare should set them on——"

"They would rob him sooner than us," said the colonel, laughing. "He will keep quiet, I think, for his own sake, hoping to rob us of the treasure himself. But he may take some gang of ruffians into the secret, so we shall have to be on our guard."

"When shall we begin?" asked Wharton eagerly.

"To-morrow."

"Not to-day?"

The colonel shook his head.

"No, my boy. Some of Cesare's friends are undoubtedly watching the hotel at this very moment, and we must take every step with caution."

"Y-e-es, I suppose so," said Harry, a little disappointed.

He would have been glad to rush off in quest of the hidden treasure without a moment's delay.

"If the man is caught, that will simplify matters a good deal," the colonel remarked. "If he is not, we shall have to be upon our guard when we climb the slopes of Mount Vesuvius. There must not be a suspicion of our real errand. We shall leave the hotel to make the ascent of Mount Vesuvius in the ordinary way, like ordinary tourists, and we shall ascend as far as the crater as people usually do. Then we shall get rid of our guide upon some pretext, and strike off on the path indicated upon this chart by ourselves.

"By taking our bearings very carefully, I think we shall find it. By comparing various points marked on the map, I can calculate the distances, although no scale is given. The distance between the Casa Bianca and the spot where the treasure is buried, is roughly the same as between Casa Bianca and Boscotrecase, which is easy to calculate by any local map. Our chief difficulty will not be to locate the cache, but to keep it when located. We must watch for Felice Cesare."

There was a tap at the door.

"I say, you fellows——"

"It's Bunter!" said Harry Wharton. "No need for him to see the map. He would only jaw about it."

"I will take charge of it," said the colonel.

He slipped the flat square of wood into his pocket.

The door was opened, and Billy Bunter blinked in somewhat indignantly.

"Lunch has been ready a jolly long time!" he exclaimed. "I've tried to make the waiters understand that I wanted to begin first, but they seem to have an impression that I meant I was waiting for you to come down, so they haven't given me anything."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!" growled Bunter. "I'm famishing! I'd really be very much obliged if you'd come down to lunch. Not that it matters, only I can't get my lunch till you come."

"Then we'll simply rush!" said Bob Cherry.

The juniors were hungry, and they did full justice to the excellent lunch. Billy Bunter, of course, distinguished himself, as usual. When his hunger was partially satisfied—it never seemed to be quite satisfied—he asked questions about their success in the ruins of Pompeii.

"Shut up, you ass!" said Wharton, in a whisper. "It isn't public property!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"We are going up Vesuvius to-morrow," said Colonel Wharton. "I suppose you will be all coming?"

"What-ho, sir!"

"Yes, I think I shall come," said Bunter. "I'll do Pompeii this afternoon, between lunch and tea. How do we get up Vesuvius, sir?"

"There are two ways—railway train and horseback; but the train goes only up to a certain point. The best ascent is by horseback on the southern side from Boscotrecase and Casa Bianca."

"I'm rather a dab at riding horses," Billy Bunter remarked thoughtfully.

"Never seen you do it!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry! Don't you remember the time the circus was at Greyfriars, and we had some riding lessons?"

"Rolling lessons, you mean, so far as you were concerned!" said Nugent. "I remember you rolled off as fast as you got on!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The horses here will be quiet enough," said the colonel. "But, of course, there will be some risk for a bad rider. The path up the mountain is steep in places, and in some places very narrow, with a steep cliff along the side."

"Ow!" said Billy Bunter.

"If any of you prefer, you can go up by the railway, with a Cook's party of excursionists," said the colonel.

"No fear, sir!"

"I don't know," said Billy Bunter. "It's not a bad idea. What's the good of exerting yourself for nothing?"

"Quite so," said Bob Cherry, only too glad of the chance of being untroubled by the fat Removite for a day. "Good egg, Bunter!"

"You think it's a good idea to go by train, Cherry?"

"Jolly good!"

"Then you'll come with me?"

"Eh?"

"I don't want to go training about in a foreign country by myself," said Bunter. "But as you'd like to come with me, Cherry, the others can go on horseback——"

"No fear!" said Bob Cherry emphatically.

"But you said it was a good idea to go by train!" exclaimed Bunter.

"Yes; for you—not for me!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"You could get a nice comfy seat in the train, and a nice talkative guide, and a nice party of Cooky tourists, and a good lunch, Bunter," said Frank Nugent persuasively. "You could take some grub in your pockets, too, to eat all the way."

"I'm jolly well not going alone by railway!"

"But just think——"

"Oh, rats! Besides, if we're going looking for treasure——"

"Shut up!"

"They can't understand English," said Bunter, blinking round at the numerous guests at the other tables in the large salle-a-manger. "I'm going to be on the scene if we look for the giddy treasure. I want my whack."

"Your what?" demanded Wharton.

"My whack," said Bunter. "I suppose we go equal whacks, don't we?"

"Well, of all the nerve!" howled Bob Cherry. "Colonel Wharton, do you mind if I kick Bunter out of the room? I feel that I can't stand him any longer."

Colonel Wharton smiled.

"Yes, I think I should mind," he said; "and I am sure Bunter would."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 218.

The Greyfriars juniors' patience was worn out at last. They had stood Bunter as long as they could. But after fastening himself upon the party in spite of every effort they made to get rid of him, to demand an equal share in the treasure which he certainly would not stir a finger in finding was a little too much. They were fed up, as Bob Cherry expressed it, and there were squalls ahead for the Owl of the Remove if he was not very careful indeed.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Expedition.

WHEN Colonel Wharton went into the glass-walled vestibule to smoke his cigar after lunch, the half-dozen doors were open, and each doorway was packed with swarthy faces. Cabbies, guides, loungers, beggars, lazzaroni of all description greeted the English signor with loud and vociferous explanations of what they had done. They had chased the ladrone who had attempted to use his knife upon the nobilissimo signor—they had almost captured him—but he had escaped. But the carabinieri would search for him, and he would be found and arrested. And they one and all, with wonderful unanimity, demanded rewards for their services in chasing the villain.

The great probability was that the greater part of them had never joined in the chase at all, but had heard what was going on, and had come to lend a hand in plundering the rich English signor. But all were equally eloquent and vociferous. They asked for tips in various ways, but the burden of the song was the same.

"Pourboire, signor!" said Julio the cabby.

"Buona mano, signor!"

"Maccheroni!"

"Sigari!"

"If you please, a little present."

"Un piccolo regalo, signor!"

"You give me someting."

"You give me five franc—one!"

Colonel Wharton smiled grimly. He knew that it was impossible for a traveller to move a step in Naples without endless demands for money following. He was prepared for this.

"Give all these men a franc each," he said to the hotel porter.

"Oui m'sieur."

The porter began to hand out lire. There was a groan of disappointment. The ruffians had expected a few coppers, but they had the usual Neapolitan reproach in their faces at a franc each. They knew that it was possible to make it two francs each if they groaned sufficiently.

"Oh, signor!"

"Un franc!"

"Vat is dat?"

"You give me two franc—tree franc."

"Give them a franc each and kick them out!" said the colonel. And he walked away to the salon to finish his cigar in peace.

The hotel porter grinned and obeyed. The lazzaroni, finding that there was no more than a franc apiece to be had, contented themselves with it, and went away with smiling faces.

Twenty or thirty persons, probably, had joined in the pursuit of Felice Cesare after his attempt upon the colonel's life. A hundred or more offered up to claim the franc each. But that was merely a little Neapolitan way.

In the afternoon the juniors paid another visit to the ruins of Pompeii, and wandered over the dead city, taking an official guide with them this time.

If they discovered the treasure upon the slopes of Mount Vesuvius, they did not want to linger in the vicinity; and they wanted, of course, to explore the old Roman seaside resort thoroughly before they left, so they made the most of their time.

With great curiosity they scanned Oscan inscriptions cut upon the stone—dating from a period before the existence of the Roman Empire—or of the Roman Republic, for that matter—before the city of Rome had had a local habitation and a name. The endless past seemed to look upon them mutely from the old thick walls of the dead city.

In many places, indeed, the colonel hurried the boys through the houses, where there remained relics of the bestiality universal in the ancient world before the light of Christianity was shed upon mankind.

Up and down the old streets, where the footprints of thousands of years ago are still as legible as in the days before the great eruption, the juniors went, till all too soon came the time for closing the ruins, and they returned to the Porta Marina.

The Porta Marina—the Sea Gate of Pompeii—had been

near the sea in the old days, but the convulsions of Nature had driven the sea further off, and where a sea-beach once had been lay fields and a railway-line and the Hotel Suisse.

Tired but delighted, the juniors returned to the hotel, the familiar yell ringing out at once from a group of drivers in the road:

"Wanter carriage?"

"I give you cheap price."

Colonel Wharton made arrangements at once with the manager for the expedition on the morrow. Although the majority of tourists on Mount Vesuvius use the funicular railway, the more adventurous ascend by horseback, and this was necessary for the colonel's purpose. The arrangements were soon made.

Two carriages were to take the party as far as Casa Bianca, halfway up the mountain, and there horses were to be in waiting. The party would then mount, and follow their guide to the summit. There was not a hint of the fact that the party had any object save to look into the crater of the famous volcano.

"I have arranged to leave early in the morning," said the colonel, as he rejoined the boys. "Early for this village, I mean—nine o'clock."

"That's jolly early," said Bunter. "Suppose I'm not up?"

The colonel looked at him.

"If you are not up, you will remain behind," he said.

"Oh, really——"

"We'll be ready, sir," said Bob Cherry.

And the juniors were ready at nine in the morning, after a hearty breakfast. And Billy Bunter contrived to be ready with the rest. As they came out of the breakfast-room, a little dark man took off his black felt hat and bowed and grinned, and the manager introduced him with a wave of a plump hand.

"Guide, sir, for to-day."

"You speak English?" asked the colonel.

The guide grinned.

"Me speak him good," he replied.

"Very well. What is your name?"

"Pietro Cagni, signor."

"Is all ready?"

"Si, signor."

"Come on, my lads."

Two large three-horse carriages were in waiting. The party piled into them, and the drivers cracked their whips like pistol-shots in the Neapolitan fashion, and the explorers moved off from the hotel, watched by an interested crowd of lazzaroni and beggars and drivers, one of whom sent a sort of despairing cry after them:

"Wanter carriage?"

Away down the heavy road—ill-paved, like all the roads in Italy—lumbering, with whip cracking, and ragged children shrieking from dusky hovels for "maccheroni," or "a little tip, signor."

"Don't give 'em anything!" grunted Billy Bunter, as the tender-hearted Bob Cherry put his hand into his pocket in search of loose change. "Let 'em work!"

"Fat lot of work you'd do if you could help it, wouldn't you?" growled Bob.

"Oh, rats! I don't believe in begging," said Bunter loftily. "Let 'em work!"

"How are kids of three and four to work?" demanded Nugent.

"Well, let their fathers work!"

"Suppose they won't?"

"Well, let 'em starve, then!" said Bunter.

"But it's a little bit thick to let children starve because their fathers won't work, isn't it?" suggested Nugent.

"Oh, rot!" said Bunter. "Where's the lunch-basket?"

"Hungry already?"

"Yes, rather. This air gives a chap an appetite."

"Well, you fat brute," said Nugent, in disgust, "you might think a bit about those poor kids. They get the same air and the same appetite, and don't seem to have anything to eat excepting scraps of bread."

"Oh, rats! I hope the waiter didn't forget to put that chicken in. I told him specially to put in a whole chicken for me, apart from the rest!"

There was a yell of "Grazie, signor!" as Bob Cherry scattered a handful of ten-centime pieces among the crowd round the carriage.

But, indeed, there was little use in giving, for the news that a foreigner was giving away money spread like wildfire, and people came from all quarters to participate. The lame, the halt, and the blind, the well and the hearty, the crippled and the weak, came in droves. Ragged children of all ages and sizes and colours—some with dreadful sores upon their poor little faces—crowded and crammed round the carriages.

Bob Cherry, Nugent, and Bunter were in the second carriage, and it was surrounded. It was going at a slow pace up the rough, ill-paved street, and the beggars were fleeter than the horses. They easily kept pace with the slow

vehicle, and filthy hands were stretched out on all sides, and wild, dark faces glared into the carriage, and loud voices howled for money.

Bob Cherry looked a little scared at what he had done.

He had never dreamed of anything like this, and he began to think that in Italy it is not exactly safe to yield to one's charitable instincts.

"Give 'em all the change you've got," said Bob. "Perhaps they'll go."

"I'm jolly well not going to give 'em anything," said Bunter. "Let 'em work!"

Nugent turned out his pockets, and when coppers were all gone threw out silver, in the vain hope of satisfying the growing mob. It was the worst thing he could have done. To give away silver in Italy is to prove, beyond the possibility of dispute, that you are a millionaire, simply rolling in money. The whole town turned out to the work as soon as the news flew that an Englishman was giving whole francs away.

"My hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "They're stopping the horses! They'll have the blessed carriage over in a minute!"

"We shall be robbed!" yelled Bunter.

"Oh, shut up! They haven't shown a sign of that," said Nugent.

And, indeed, it was quite true. In all that ragged, starving, unwashed swarm of human beings there did not seem to be a single thief.

The driver cracked his whip more energetically, and drove on faster, but the crowd poured after the carriages till they were out of the town. Bob Cherry held up his empty hands, and shouted "Niente!" to signify that he had no money left, and gradually the pursuers dropped off.

Bob Cherry drew a deep breath as the carriages rolled away on the road up the lower slopes of the volcano.

"Well, that's an experience," he said.

Bunter grunted.

"You shouldn't have given 'em anything," he said.

"Oh, shut up!"

"I told you so!"

"Shut up!" roared Bob Cherry. "If you say another word, I'll give your lunch-basket to the next beggar."

Bunter did not say another word.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.
Climbing Vesuvius.

COLONEL WHARTON kept his eyes about him as the carriages toiled up the lower slopes of the volcano. Right ahead of them, in the gloriously clear blue of the sky, Vesuvius was sending up a faint column of smoke. On the hillsides were great masses of lava left by the last eruption.

The colonel half expected to catch sight of Felice Cesare. He knew well enough that the Neapolitan or some associate must have watched the departure from the Hotel Suisse.

But there was no sign to be seen of the Neapolitan. If he was watching the carriages he was keeping in cover—which was certainly easy enough on the rugged hillsides, encumbered with lava fragments and planted with vines.

The juniors watched the scene with endless interest. They had had Mount Vesuvius, as Johnny Bull remarked to Wharton, in their geography books; but it was very different from the real thing.

Here they were upon the slopes of the mountain which had done such fearful damage, and which might do still more fearful damage in future days. The light-hearted carelessness of the Vesuvian villagers was almost incredible. There were houses, outside which the lava lay piled as high as the lower windows, where it had been left at the last eruption. New paths were being made through the incrustation in places, and blocks of lava were used for building up walls by the road. Houses were built of it—lava and tufa formed the common building materials of the district.

It was not uncommon to see a field or garden partly under cultivation, and partly buried out of sight beneath masses of lava which had flowed down from the mountain and cooled and hardened there.

In the midst of those reminders of the terrible nature of their towering neighbour, the peasants lived their light-hearted life, knowing that any week, any day, the monster might wake to life again and overwhelm them and their frail dwellings—yet content to bask in the sun and take their chances.

The carriages rolled through Boscotrecase, and beggars crowded round again; but this time Bob Cherry was wiser, and also he had no money left. So the unfortunate beggars were left unaided, only Bob tossing a handful of rolls from

Bunter's lunch-basket to the ragged children—a proceeding which elicited a howl of indignation from William George Bunter.

The road was steeper now—to call it a road! It was a badly cut track which answered the purpose of a road, and the carriages creaked and rumbled upon it over the dust of old lava.

Higher they went up the winding road on the slope till the white walls of the Casa Bianca came closer and closer to view. Higher up on the hill was another white house, but this was where the horses were to be left—for the journey to the crater could not be completed even on horseback. The remaining couple of hundred yards would be merely crumbling dust, upon which it was difficult to find a footing at all.

"Casa Bianca!" called out the guide.

The carriages halted.

Here they were to remain; and the party turned out, to mount their horses. The horses had been brought along after the carriages, and they looked very decent animals, much better than one would have expected in a poor district. The saddles and trappings generally were of the roughest—but the juniors expected to rough things on the slopes of Vesuvius.

Colonel Wharton and the juniors mounted, and Billy Bunter stood for some time beside the big white horse selected for him, blinking at it doubtfully through his big spectacles.

"Get on, signorino, if you do please," said the guide.

Bunter grunted.

"All right, you foreign ass, there's no hurry!"

"The party do wait for the signorino."

"Oh, rats!"

The guide's eyes gleamed. He had the soft, sweet manners of the Neapolitans; but Billy Bunter's manners would have annoyed anybody.

"Can't you help me, instead of jawing?" demanded Bunter.

"Si, signorino."

"Give me a leg up, then."

"Si, signorino."

"Put some other idiot on the other side of the horse in case I fall," said Bunter. "This isn't the kind of horse I—I'm used to. But I forgot—you don't talk English, you ass!"

The guide signed to a driver to stand on the other side of the horse to catch Bunter if he toppled over. As a matter of fact, the guide fully intended that Billy Bunter should topple over.

He hoisted the fat junior up.

"Careful!" yelled Bunter.

Up he went—up and over, and floated into the arms of the driver on the other side, and was rolled gently on the ground. The Greyfriars juniors burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! I'm hurt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Waroch!"

"I help you again, si?" suggested the guide politely.

"No, you idiot; I'll manage without you now!"

And Bunter climbed upon the horse's back as if he were climbing the wall of a barn.

"All right!" asked the colonel, with a smile.

"Yow! Yes! Groo! I'm all right!"

"Start, then."

They started.

There was a roar from Bunter. He had given his horse a flick, by way of showing what an accomplished rider he was, and the animal started rather suddenly. Billy Bunter fell forward upon its neck and clasped the mane lovingly.

"Ow! Ow! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared, and the guide chuckled, and the by-standers grinned. There was a crowd round the party outside the Casa Bianca—nothing ever happens in Italy without a crowd collecting.

"Please look after him," said the colonel to the guide.

And Pietro assented, and took Bunter under his special charge as the party cantered up the hillside.

The juniors enjoyed the ride thoroughly.

It was not wholly without risk. The path was very narrow in places, and great gaps yawned beside it, and the edges were of crumbling lava. If the horses had been too fresh there would have been considerable danger; but the steeds were quiet enough, and they knew the way by themselves.

Higher and higher the juniors mounted, loud grunts proceeding at intervals from Billy Bunter as he clung awkwardly to his steed.

As they neared the chalet on the mountain-side where the horses were to be left Colonel Wharton glanced back.

He was not surprised to see a man on foot following the party at a distance, and he did not need telling that it was Felice Cesare.

The man disappeared after a time among the lumps of lava, but there was no doubt that he was still upon the track of the explorers.

The horses toiled up the path, the pace becoming slower and slower, till the chalet was reached. There the riders dismounted.

The man in charge of the chalet took the horses, and offered the wine of Lacrima Cristi, which grows upon the slopes of Vesuvius; but the juniors did not take it, leaving it to the guide and his companions.

They rested at the chalet, and ate a light lunch—Bunter, of course, making a very heavy one. Then came the last stage of the journey, which was to be done on foot.

Billy Bunter blinked at the steep slope, composed of crumbling dust, into which the foot sank six inches at every step, and grunted.

"I don't think I want to look into the crater, after all," he remarked. "I'll stay here while you fellows go up."

And the fat junior returned into the chalet and recommenced an attack upon the lunch.

The rest of the party pressed on.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Treasure Trove!

"What!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, as he scrambled up the dusty slope. "This is something like work!"

"What-ho!" said Nugent feelingly.

The ground crumbled under their feet at every step. Guides, stationed at this point of the journey, offered them assistance. They took off their belts, for the travellers to hold on to, and tramped up the dusty slope, with the juniors holding on behind—charging five francs for each traveller for that aid.

Colonel Wharton tramped up alone, but he advised the juniors to accept the assistance of the Resina guides; and even with that assistance the climb was not easy.

Through powdering dust they tramped on and upward. And Bob Cherry gasped out "Excelsior!" with his mouth and eyes full of dust.

But the last stage was passed, and they came out upon the summit of the mountain, on the very edge of the crater, and looked down into the great hollow and saw the lava there, which some day will overflow again and cover the sides of the mountain with ruin.

They rested upon the summit for some time before descending. They had looked into the crater of the volcano; but they were thinking of the spot marked on the chart with the word "Ecco."

Colonel Wharton rose to his feet.

"Descend!" he said.

And the descent began.

Going down the dusty slope was easier than going up. The juniors ran down at such a speed that they found it difficult to stop themselves at the bottom.

The colonel paid the assistants, with a liberal pourboire in addition that made them open their eyes.

"Now the horses, sar!" said the guide.

"I am going to explore the mountain a little," said the colonel. "Pray remain at the chalet, and wait for me."

The guide stared. Why anybody should want to explore the mountain was a mystery to him, just as much as it was why they should want to look into the crater.

"Me come?" he said.

The colonel shook his head.

"No; remain at the chalet."

"But me guide——"

"Remain at the chalet."

"Si, signor."

The guide was willing enough to remain at the chalet, instead of scrambling over the dusty hillside with those mad Englishmen.

He returned to where the horses were waiting, and ate an extra lunch and drank Lacrima Cristi, leaving Colonel Wharton and his companions to themselves.

The colonel took out the map.

He had made careful calculations in ascending, and he was quite sure of the spot indicated by the dotted line on the chart, breaking off from the regular path up the mountain.

"Are you tired, my boys?" he asked.

"No fear, sir!" said Harry Wharton promptly.

"You have your sticks—in case we need them?"

"Here they are, sir."

"Very good! Come on!"

The colonel led the way.

The juniors followed him, greatly excited now.

Colonel Wharton stopped again and again to renew his calculations, and in some places paced the distance with great care.

They were well out of sight of both the chalet and the Casa Bianca by this time, hidden from view by the ruggedness of the mountain and the huge blocks of lava that encumbered the hillside.

Once away from the path, the mountain was solitary; only in the distance they caught glimpses of the white walls of houses dotting the lower slopes.

Colonel Wharton halted at last.

The party were now in a deep, narrow gully on the hillside, blocked up at one end with lava, and deep in shadow.

"Is this the place, sir?"

Four voices asked the question eagerly.

Colonel Wharton smiled.

"I think so," he said, "and I fancy we shall find some indication hereabouts. No one ever enters this place; it leads to nowhere, and it is half a mile from the regular track up the mountain. Look round!"

The juniors scrambled about the gully eagerly.

Johnny Bull gave a sudden shout.

"Look!"

They rushed up to where he stood.

In the deepest, darkest corner of gully, scratched with a knife on the lava mass, was the Italian word:

"ECCO!"

It was the spot.

Colonel Wharton's eyes gleamed with satisfaction. His calculations had been correct. Here was the final clue; and here, if there was anything in the story of the treasure of Vesuvius, the treasure was to be found!

"But I say!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, in dismay. "How are we going to dig here? We can't get this lava up with our fingers."

"My hat! No!"

Colonel Wharton smiled, and opened his wallet. He took out the pieces and fitted together a small pick. He had come prepared for that emergency.

"Good *egg*!" said Nugent.

Clink, clink, clink!

The iron head of the pick rang upon the lava.

Fragments flew in all directions.

Clink, clink!

"I think we can move that lump now," said the colonel.

The juniors gathered round, and laid their hands upon the huge masses of lava which had been loosened by the blows of the pick.

"All together!" said the colonel cheerily.

"Heave ahead, my hearties!" grinned Bob Cherry.

A final heave and the mass rolled aside.

Underneath it was a hollow scraped out in the stony ground, and in the hollow reposed a large leather bag.

The leather was rotten with age, and through slits in it there came a dull gleam of metal.

One cry burst from the Greyfriars juniors.

"The treasure!"

In a moment they were down by the hollow, and dragging the bag out into view.

It burst as they handled it, and a torrent of gold pieces rolled out.

The money was French—golden louis of the time of the last Bourbon kings. And there were a thousand pieces at least.

"Gold!"

"Giddy gold!" roared Bob Cherry. "Hurrah!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

There was no doubt about it now. The treasure of Vesuvius existed, and they had found it!

"Got it!" said Johnny Bull.

The colonel looked at the shining heap with grave satisfaction.

"There will be a thousand louis there at least," he said. "Probably the value of eight hundred pounds."

"Oh!" said Johnny Bull.

He had been thinking in millions. The colonel smiled.

"That must have seemed an untold treasure to a poor guide of Vesuvius," he said. "The gold belongs to you boys, but if it were known that it had been discovered there would be claims made upon it. In England the Government claims a share of all treasure trove, as is only just. Here, I am afraid, the officials would take the whole, if they got upon the scent of it."

"They jolly well won't have this!" said Harry Wharton warmly.

Colonel Wharton nodded.

"No; it would not be fair," he said. "But I should suggest that, as the treasure was originally located by a Vesuvian guide, you should devote a portion of it to charity in this region—there are many poor here."

The juniors agreed at once.

"That would be only cricket," said Bob Cherry.

"Hear, hear!"

"Half of it, sir," said Harry Wharton generously enough. "Let's distribute half of it among the poor bounders round about here, and keep half for ourselves. That would be fair play."

"My dear boy, it is what I was going to suggest! And now let us get it out of sight as soon as possible, in case——"

"Too late, signor!" exclaimed a mocking voice.

The juniors swung round.

Felice Cesare stood in the opening of the gully, with a knife in his swarthy hand, and behind him appeared five or six dusky villainous faces.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.
In Peril of Life.

"LINE up!"

Harry Wharton uttered the words, and the Greyfriars juniors lined up promptly, ready to defend their treasure at any cost.

They had found it, and it was theirs, and they would have fought to a finish in defence of it, rather than yield it to Cesare and his gang of thievish rascals.

The juniors grasped their sticks in firm fingers, and the colonel, with a grim expression upon his bronzed face, drew a revolver from his breast.

At the sight of the revolver, and the grim face behind it, Felice Cesare and his comrades came to a sudden halt.

"The man who advances a step will get my first shot!" said the colonel, in a cool and unmoved voice.

"Signor——"

"Stand back!"

The revolver clicked, and the Neapolitans crowded back. Felice Cesare's face was as the face of a demon, with mingled terror and rage.

"Signor, I will have the gold!" he muttered.

"You will have lead, if you advance a step!"

The colonel so evidently meant what he said, and the hand that held the revolver was so steady, that the ruffians recoiled in spite of their greed.

"Pack up that money in my wallet, Harry!" said Colonel Wharton. "Pack it up while I keep these rascals under cover."

"Yes, uncle."

The half-dozen swarthy rascals made a restless movement as Harry Wharton began to pile the gold pieces into the colonel's leather wallet.

But the levelled revolver held them in check.

Harry Wharton was quick enough. In a few minutes the treasure of Mount Vesuvius was packed in the leather wallet, and it was buckled up.

"Now," said Colonel Wharton, "you rascals will stand out of the way!"

There was a howl.

"The gold!"

"Signor——"

"Give us half!"

"Half the gold, signor, and you live."

Colonel Wharton's lip curled.

"Listen to me," he said. "I will give you ten gold pieces each, and I will not give you a franc more than that."

"Non o abbastanzza!"

"It is not enough!"

"The gold—or your life!" yelled Cesare.

"There are six of them!" said the colonel unmoved. "Count out sixty pieces, Harry, and leave them on the lava there, to take if they like!"

"Yes, sir."

Wharton counted sixty pieces of gold upon the lava.

The glimmer of the precious metal seemed to dazzle the ruffians. They came crowding forward like a pack of wolves.

"Stand back!"

Felice Cesare's face worked with fury.

"The treasure, or your life!" he shouted.

"Il tesoro, o la vita!" yelled the ruffians in chorus.

"Back, I say!"

"Will you yield up the gold?" demanded Cesare hoarsely.

"Never!"

"Then die!"

Cesare came springing forward, with his gang in full cry at his heels. If they had reached the party there would have been a deadly conflict, and if Cesare could have helped it, not one of the Englishmen would have lived to tell the tale.

But in that terrible moment the old soldier's nerve was like iron.

Crack!

The revolver rang out, awakening a thousand echoes among the lava hollows of Mount Vesuvius.

Felice Cesare uttered a fearful cry and fell.

His fall seemed to stun his companions.

They halted.

"Next man in!" muttered Bob Cherry, with white lips.

But there was no next man in. The ruffians had stopped, and they did not come on. They looked at the bravo writhing on the lava, and they looked at the smoking revolver and the grim face of bronze behind the levelled barrel, and they paused, irresolute.

Cesare groaned heavily.

"Kill them—kill them!" he muttered.

And then he fainted.

"Listen to me," said the colonel quietly. "I will shoot every man of you if you attack us! There is a share of the treasure for you if you choose. Take it or not. But if you come near, look out!"

The Italians understood enough to know what he meant. Their eyes were upon the sixty pieces that glittered upon the lava.

"Signor——"

"Stand aside!"

They stood aside from the levelled revolver.

Colonel Wharton and the juniors passed them, and passed out of the gully. Bob Cherry shivered as he looked at the fallen man.

"He is not dead, sir?" he whispered.

The colonel shook his head.

"He is not dead, my lad—or dangerously wounded. I have disabled him, that is all. He is not badly hurt. But he will not trouble anybody again for a week or more."

"Good egg!"

As the party passed out of the gully, the ruffians made a movement, as if to rush upon them from behind.

But the colonel swung round, with raised revolver, and they crowded back again.

As the explorers tramped down the hillside, they heard the loud exclamations of the Italians as they crowded round the sixty pieces d'or—that had been left in the gully—and quarrelled and scrambled in the division of the spoil.

"Quick, now!" said the colonel.

Away from the gully, he returned the pistol to his pocket. Nothing more was seen of the Italians. They had enough pieces of gold to make them rich among their fellows, and they were not likely to talk of what had happened. For they were the aggressors, and they feared the law—what law there was in that wild region—and they knew well enough that there were hundreds to rob them if they had been known to be in possession of golden pieces. And Felice Cesare was hors de combat, and was no longer to be feared.

The party reached the chalet.

Billy Bunter was still lunching, though even his efforts in that direction were slackening down by this time.

"To horse!" said the colonel briefly.

And the party remounted and rode down the mountain.

Of Felice Cesare and his gang nothing more was seen. The party rode down to Casa Bianca, and there they found the carriages ready. Billy Bunter went to sleep in a corner, and the carriages rolled home to the Hotel Suisse.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.
Homeward Bound.

THE explorers did not linger at Pompeii.

Their task was done, and they left it at once. And in Naples Colonel Wharton made arrangements for the distribution of five hundred louis in charity among the Neapolitan poor, who needed it badly enough.

Billy Bunter strongly disapproved. But the rest were quite in harmony about it; and William George Bunter and his opinion were cheerfully disregarded.

Naples was left behind by the party, and with their share of the treasure of Mount Vesuvius safely disposed of, they rolled northward on the railway.

"Good egg!" said Bob Cherry, as he sat in the carriage and looked out of the train window, with the beautiful shores of Naples in the distance. "We've had a jolly good trip, and we've done the enemy! And won't we have a ripping time at Greyfriars now we're rolling in filthy lucre!"

"What-ho!" said Johnny Bull.

"A feed to the whole giddy Remove," said Frank Nugent, "and an extra jam-tart for Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Greyfriars will give us a giddy welcome when we go back with giddy gold pieces rolling out of our pockets!" said Johnny Bull, with a chuckle.

"I say, you fellows, I'll tell you what! You'd better place all the money in my hands, and I'll——"

"Stick to it!" suggested Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you fellows——"

"I'll tell you what!" said Bob Cherry. "I feel so joyful, and bucked up, that I feel we must do something to express our feelings. We haven't done Bunter justice. I think we ought to give him some attention now."

"Quite right!" said Bunter. "Look here——"

"So we'll bump Bunter," said Bob Cherry. "I believe in doing every fellow justice, and I'm sure Bunter is entitled to a bumping."

"Hear, hear!" roared the juniors.

"Ow! I say, you fellows! Oh—oh—oh!"

Bump!

"Yar-o-oh!"

So they bumped Bunter on the floor of the railway-carriage, and buns, and cakes, and nuts, and apples rolled out of all his pockets. And so they commenced the homeward journey in great spirits, looking forward joyfully to their reception at Greyfriars.

THE END.

CHING-LUNG IN THE FORBIDDEN LAND.

A Wonderful Story of Ferrers Lord, Millionaire, Rupert Thurston, and Gan-Waga.

OUR GRAND SERIAL STORY!

THROUGH TRACKLESS TIBET!

BY SIDNEY DREW.

(READ THIS FIRST.)

Wishing to explore the practically unknown land of Tibet, Ferrers Lord, millionaire, makes up a party, including Prince Ching-Lung, Rupert Thurston, Gan Waga, the Eskimo, and a number of the crew of the Lord of the Deep, to travel with him across Tibet to Kwai-Hal, the capital of Ching-Lung's province in China.

The party, conducted by an Afghan guide named Argal-Dunjat, have just crossed the Himalayas into the Forbidden Land, when, on reaching a Tibetan village ruled by an Irishman named Barry O'Rooney, they are attacked by the notorious pirate and outlaw, Storland Sahib, and a band of his ruffianly followers. Things are looking serious for the party when they are rescued by Ferrers Lord's wonderful aeronef, the Lord of the Skies. They are flying over the crater of an extinct volcano, when the engines suddenly stop working, and they are sent hurtling down through the crater into an underground lake. The damage caused is so great that Ferrers Lord gives up hope of ever getting the aeronef out of the cavern. Hal Honour, the engineer, however, makes a strange promise, and says that within two months he will rescue the whole crew. Punctually to the hour Honour fulfils his promise, and the miniature aeronef he has constructed rises from the black crater into the sunshine above with the first load of passengers, consisting of Ching-Lung, Gan Waga, and O'Rooney. The aeronaut rescues the remaining members of the crew, and goes back once more for Ferrers Lord and the stores. He fails to return, and Ching-Lung is just making up a search party, when he receives a message saying that the aeronef is delayed, but all is well.

While the party are marching along a river-bank, Joe, the carpenter, Prout, and Maddock, suddenly start jumping about, clutching at their faces as though in pain.

(Now go on with the story.)

O'Rooney's Punishment.

Ching-Lung rushed forward and caught Gan-Waga by the ear.

"What are you up to, you fat little wretch!"

"Up to, Chingy?" murmured Gan-Waga, in accents of utter innocence. "Not up at all. Me down here."

"What have you got behind you?"

"Me back, Chingy, and some trees."

"Oh, is that all? Do you call this a tree? Give me that."

It was a hollow reed, and Gan-Waga's pocket was full of wild peas, which grew abundantly near the river. Gan-Waga had been shooting these peas. Vengeance would have been taken when the truth became known, except for Tom Prout.

"Hold on, boys," he said, "and don't touch him. By hokey, he's given me an idea! Say, blubberbiter, where did you get that reed?"

"Just dere, Tom. Millions of 'em dere, and lots of peases."

Prout whipped out his knife and hurried back to the reed bed. He cut nearly thirty of the hollow stalks, and filled his handkerchief with pods.

"Here's a shooter each, my sons," he grinned, "and you can help yourselves to the peas. The next time Mr. Poet O'Rooney starts spoutin' we'll give him beans—I mean peas—enough to last a twelvemonth."

The tubes were distributed amid delighted chuckles, and the party followed in the poet's wake. When they caught sight of him he was coming towards them with the rifles on his shoulder. He had also recovered his clothes.

"Gintlemen," he said, "in the name of decency, kape back. The clothes Oi now wear don't set off me beauty, and, the other garments bein' rescued, Oi will beg lave to change behoind the swate shilter of this bush. Swate is the shade of the perfoomed glade, whin the sun is hot and hoigh."

"He's at it again," said Joe.

Prout gritted his teeth as O'Rooney disappeared behind a bush. All the others grinned.

"Did you speak to the hornets, Barry?" called out Ching-Lung.

"Oi did not, sor. Me ould grandmother always towld me whin a choild to avoid the company of sharrpers. Hornets and wopses is sharrpers, as yez'll soon foined out av yez argues wid wan. They was aslape, and Oi walked on tip-toe. Has any gintleman a pair of whisker-curlers wid him, for, bedad, me moustache has warped in the damp?"

The men sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree. And from his shelter Barry burst into song:

"Oh, to be a sailor bould,
  Wid throusers loose and woide,
To sail in a gale on the back of a whale,
  Across the rushin' toide!
To sing yo-ho! whin the breezes blow,
  Wid a pound of salt junk insoide."

Barry had put on his shirt and socks, and had one leg in his trousers. To pull on his nether garments he was obliged to stand up. His head and shoulders appeared over the bushes, and Prout let go a pea with all the strength of a splendid pair of lungs behind it.

"Murther!"

Barry had been balancing himself on one leg. The pea struck him on the very tip of his nose, and as he clutched madly at the tingling spot he trod on the loose leg of his garment, overbalanced, and plunged headlong into the bush. It was a thorny bush, and Barry's shirt was not as good a protection as a suit of armour might have been.

"Horrnets!" he howled. "There's wan sthuck a sting into me as long as a bowie-knoife. And the thorrns is scrattin' me to rags. Ow, fetch a blue-bag, av yez loves me, and take me up tinderly, for the luv of hiven!"

Joe and a couple of the men went to the rescue. They parted the thorns, and released O'Rooney.

"Great ham and eggs," gasped Joe, "what's happened to your nose, Barry?"

"That's where he sat down," sighed Barry; "that's where the varmint settled wid his red-hot fate. Break the news gintly. Is ut swelled?"

"It's as big as a gin-bottle, and as crimson as a termarter."

"Troth, ut fales as big as the dome of St. Paul's, and ut's moighty tinder!"

Barry's nose was slightly flushed, and nothing more; but Barry could not see it, and imagination is a wonderful thing. It felt swollen, and he wondered how he could see at all, for it seemed to have bulged out all over his face.

"There's wan consolation," he sighed, "a big nose shows a big charcther. The Dook of Wellin'ton was famous for his boko, and whin he hollered down ut: 'Up, Guarrds, and ate 'em! England this day expicts iv'ry man to do his dooty!' there wasn't a mutton-pie left in the shop!"

Barry pulled on his trousers, and rapidly recovered from the shock.

"Ut's a sthrange thing," he said, "but Oi always fale poetic boie moonloight. Me foirst poem was wrote whin Oi was a curly-haired bhoy, and ut was wrote to the moon. Lit me warble ut."

"By hokey," murmured Prout, filling his mouth with peas, "warble on!"

"Oi got a medal for ut," continued O'Rooney. "Ut goes thus:

"Whin the moon shoines o'er the pigstoie,
  And the porrkers gintly snore,
And pussy sings her carols on the toiles,
  Thin the twins both sthart a-yellin', and Oi
    have to walk the flure,
  Till Oi foind a spiky tin tack——"

"Let him have it!" said Maddock. "Paste 'em at him!"

Barry received the charges of about five-and-twenty pea-shooters. The peas rattled round his face and head like hail-stones. Volley after volley was poured in. Barry yelled

and howled, but he could not face the merciless fire. Snatching up the rest of his garments, and bellowing out threats, he ran for it.

But they did not intend him to get off lightly. Shouting and laughing, they followed him to the wood, still firing at him. Puff, puff, puff! Barry ran with his hands guarding the back of his neck, and the attitude hampered his speed. Several of the men raced ahead, and a pitiless crossfire was opened on him. They chased him almost into the village, and then, utterly winded, Barry flopped down.

"Quarther, quarther! Oi surrendher!"

"Paste him!" roared Maddock. "No quarter!"

"Chuck ut! The whoite flag is up. Be all the laws of war, Oi axes for quarther."

"Have a quarter of a peck of peas instead!" grinned Prout.

"Isn't ut pace Oi'm wantin'!" roared the Irishman. "For the luv of marcy, sthop foirin'! Oi'll be good, Oi'll be good! Call an ambulance to remove the fragmints of what was wance a manly form. Pace to yer ashes, Barry. Why live when two-pound-foive will bury yez decently?"

"Quarter, quarter!" laughed Ching-Lung. "Cease firing, lads!"

Joe imitated a bugle-call, and the pea-shooters were lowered.

"Beggin' yer honour's pardon," said Prout, "I makes bold to remark that this man deserves no mercy. He's not a prisoner-of-war, but a thraitor. He has tortured his own comrades 'orrible."

"'Ear, 'ear!"

"In what way?"

"In a way, sir," said Prout, warming to the subject, "that would turn the blood of a brass monkey cold, and make a marble stater tremble. He is a poet. He quotes poetry to us."

"The horrid ruffian," said Ching-Lung. "This is certainly a terrible accusation. Proceed."

"Not bein' 'ard-'earted, me and my mates don't want to kill him or cut his tongue out; but we must be pertected. We 'umbly axes yer honour to bind him over to keep the peace."

"Prisoner at the bar——"

"Don't Oi wish Oi was at the bar," said O'Rooney. "Oi could dhrink a point of beer wid the best."

"Prisoner on the ground," continued Ching-Lung, "I bind you over to keep the peace. As this is your first appearance before me, and your poor, suffering comrades do not wish to press the case against you, I will be merciful. If you are brought here again for a repetition of this offence, all the horrors of the law will be fired at you, including skilly, plank-beds, treadmills, racks, thumbscrews, and, more terrible than all—WORK!"

"Not wurrk!" shrieked O'Rooney. "All the rist Oi can bear, but wurrk would kill me."

"You shall work!"

Uttering a hollow groan, O'Rooney fell back and lay still.

"He has fainted!" said Rupert, laughing. "The thought of work was too much. By Jove, where are the rifles?"

The exciting chase had made everyone forget the chief object of the journey. The rifles had been left with the four guns behind the bush.

"Well, we are a lot of crazy idiots!" said Ching-Lung. "We needn't drag the boys back there. We'll stroll off together, Ru. Now, lads, home with you. You had better toss up for sentry-go. Look after them, Prout."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

Two more fiery globes came sailing over the village. Both dropped their messages, upset, and burst into flame. Ching-Lung waited until the envelopes were secured. Both messages were practically the same as the one they had already seen.

"I'm awfully keen to know what Lord intends to do, Ching," said Rupert, as they entered the wood.

"I'm just as keen, old chap. I told you what O'Rooney said. If we can't get horses, what then?"

"Certainly we can't foot it to Kwai-hal."

"And it's equally certain Lord won't turn back; he's not the man to do it, Ru. And, another thing," Ching-Lung added, his voice unusually serious, "I must get back to my princedom. Just because I have British ideas, and want my people to be free and happy, the Court hates me. Do you know what was sent to me in London just before I left?"

"How can I know, my boy? A few bills, perhaps?"

"Oh, plenty of bills, but they are paid! The object in question was a dagger, and it was unpleasantly sharp. It arrived from the Chinese Court."

"Was it a present?"

Ching-Lung laughed lightly as he rolled a cigarette.

"You're a simpleton, my dear old chap," he answered, "and you don't know much about our pleasant Chinese customs. For the matter of that, it was equally a Japanese custom; but Japan is a fine, wide-awake little country, and she flies ahead like a runaway motor-car. Have you ever heard of harikari?"

"Great Scott!" gasped Thurston.

He stopped dead, and looked fixedly at his friend in the moonlight. He had heard of the atrocious custom. Harikari is self-murder. When a person is in disgrace with the Chinese Court, he receives a present of a bow-string or a knife. The present indicates that he is requested to kill himself and avoid the disgrace of a public execution.

"The brutes," said Rupert. "Then, as you have not committed suicide, I suppose you are a rebel?"

"Hardly just yet, my boy. The time has not expired. Through Lord's great influence, I am a bit of a favourite with the British Government, and my province is a nasty thorn in the side of Russia. Besides, I have big interests, and it is the usual thing when harikari is decided on to let the victim have a few months to put his affairs in order. But unless I reach Kwai-hal speedily, there will be a reward out for my head."

"Cheerful," said Thurston dismally.

"It is, rather. My throat tickles when I think about it. And another thing, Rupert, I know that Ferrers Lord is very uneasy."

"I don't wonder at that, Ching. So am I."

"Well, I could make sure of the safety of my worthless head, by not going back; but I don't mean to run away. The chief, though he kept everything quiet as usual, was going to make the Empress be good. The airship would have made her change her mind. She would have suddenly discovered that Prince Ching-Lung was a paragon of virtue, and that her liver must have been wrong when she told him to commit suicide. But now the ship is a total wreck."

"Still," said Rupert hopefully, "we may get horses. Once in Kwai-hal, the people will stick to you, and you have a little army, with Mike Kennedy at the head of it."

Ching-Lung was silent for a moment.

"You are a little ignorant, Ru. We must reach Kwai-hal first. In India, China, and Tibet news spreads swiftly and mysteriously. It is known now, perhaps even at Pekin, that a party of white men are endeavouring to cross the plateau. It is known, too, that there is a young Chinese with them. This Chinaman is not a servant, but has much authority. What will the Chinese Court argue from this? Ching-Lung's dearest friends are white men. The party is moving east, and, therefore, in the direction of Kwai-hal. Who can this Chinese chief be except Ching-Lung? That's the argument."

"I fail to see how this matters. What if they do know that we are crossing Tibet?"

"They will spend gold like water, old chap. They are afraid of me, and they will strain every nerve to kill us before we can cross the frontier. But Ferrers Lord will not turn back. Rest assured of that."

Here was food for thought. Rupert had expected that the expedition would encounter perils and difficulties of every kind in endeavouring to cross the mysterious land. But he had not dreamed of this. If Ching-Lung's suspicions had not over-reached the limit of fact, the whole power of the Chinese Court would be exerted to check their advance. Over and above that they had to face the relentless hate of Storland Sahib.

"Here are the rifles," said Ching-Lung quietly.

Rupert started.

"Was that a crocodile, Ching, that splashing sound?"

"Crouch down," answered Ching-Lung hoarsely. "It's a boat."

He pulled Rupert down into the shadow of the undergrowth.

What the Spy told Storland Sahib, and What the Watchers Heard.

The craft swept into sight round a rocky islet. It was a sampan, built in the square, Chinese style, and carried ribbed sail. In the moonlight sweeps glistened as they rose and fell in the water, and the boat moved slowly against the strong current. A Mongol imagines that no vessel can see without eyes, and several of these were painted on the bows.

"I don't like her looks," whispered Ching-Lung. "She's no trader. There are too many men aboard. Stick to the rifles."

"Packed like sardines," muttered Rupert, "and all armed. We'd better clear out of this circus."

Battling with the current, the ugly sampan drew abreast of them. A man was leaning lazily against her helm.

"Storland Sahib!" said Ching-Lung, in a soft hiss.

"I see him, Ching."

The moonlight was too brilliant for any mistake to be possible. Storland Sahib himself was guiding the clumsy vessel. There were four men toiling and labouring at each

of the heavy sweeps. A couple of smaller boats were being towed behind. The broad deck was packed with squatting figures.

Down came the brown sail with a clatter, and fore and aft anchors dropped overboard. The boat swung broadside on, and then several of the men began to fish with bamboo rods.

"After mahseer,"* muttered Ching-Lung.

But, innocent as the fishermen appeared, there was an ominous look about the rifles piled against the bulwarks. There was something threatening, too, in the silence. The yellow pirates spoke in careful whispers. Even when one of them hooked a big mahseer there was no noise made. These men were too strong to fear any attack from the terrified natives.

"Hala-hala-hal-al-ah!"

The soft cry came from the depth of the wood behind Ching-Lung and Rupert.

"Lie close, old chap."

Storland Sahib, who was leaning idly against the mast, whistled. A bent figure forced its way through the undergrowth, and stood on the bank with bowed head and crossed arms. It was the villager Ching-Lung had interviewed with O'Rooney. A plank was run out from the deck to the shore, and the renegade strode across it.

Ching-Lung strained his ears to listen. He had been talking the dialect as much as possible with O'Rooney.

"So Shalz-el-Phar, thou hast come?" said the deep voice of Storland Sahib. "What news, dog?"

"Strange news, immortal chief. Thy dog has watched and listened. The flying dragon that went a moon ago into the darkness——"

"It has not returned?" asked the renegade, starting.

"No, immortal excellency; but it hath sent its little one."

In the moonlight the watchers could see the look of utter bewilderment that settled on the fearless face of Storland Sahib.

"A little one, Shelz-el-Phar? What meanest thou, hoary-headed dog?"

"By Buddha I speak truth," answered the old spy. "The dragon was large when he entered, but the one that came out is small. Ay, immortal chief, smaller even than your sampan. Five times it flew back and forth, bringing its accursed imps from the hollow of the peak. And perhaps it was tired, for it came no more; but it blew out moons of fire from its mouth."

The "moons of fire" were the balloons sent off by Hal Honour and the millionaire. The renegade gnawed his lip. He could understand the meaning of the old man's picturesque language.

"And where are these accursed foreigners?"

"In the house of the Khan. He is with them."

"How strong are they?"

The old man spread out the knotted fingers of both hands three times. He had slightly overrated the number of the crew. Storland Sahib sat down on the plank. Then he said suddenly:

"Do they keep a watch?"

"Yes, immortal chief; but one could creep into the wall and stab him without a sound. My son is strong, brave, and cunning. And he loves gold, chief."

Ching-Lung felt creepy as he listened. Hampered for want of weapons, and greatly outnumbered, they could not withstand an attack if Storland Sahib determined on making one. He swiftly endeavoured to count the Mongols on the sampan. There were over seventy of them. He listened eagerly.

"I have men cleverer and more cunning than your son, dog!" snarled Storland Sahib; "but I will pay you for your news. Tell me more."

"They came to-night to my house, sahib, asking for ropes. They obtained them from the fisherman, and dragged out Nizdar, the smith, to fix sharp points of iron to staves."

"Ah!" The renegade's face brightened. "Is the tall man with the pale face with them?"

"The accursed sahib with the eyes that burn when he looks at you?"

"The same. He is their chief."

"I saw him not, immortal one," said the spy. "Nizdar had his forge alight, and was hammering the iron, and I was watching. The fiery moon came then, and the white dogs pursued it. It burnt in the air, and then, after a time, the Khan came to Nizdar, cursing him, and telling him to work no more."

Storland Sahib muttered something to himself. He was putting two and two together, and he did not blunder. His hated foes had built a smaller aeronef. On one of its journeys it had broken down, leaving Ferrers Lord and some of his men still imprisoned. The iron-shod staves and the ropes clearly indicated that the others were going to attempt to scale the peak, and endeavour to reach their comrades.

Then the fire-balloon had arrived with some message. This

message had caused them to abandon their plan, for they had told the smith that the iron-shod sticks would not be needed. Therefore the message could only have been a cheerful one.

He ground his teeth.

"You shall have your gold, dog," he said, "and your son shall stab the sentinel. Wait until the moon goes down, and it is darkest. I will bring my men to the edge of the wood. When the sentinel is dead, hoot like an owl, and we will surround the house and kill all. You understand?"

"Ay, sahib!" croaked the Mongol.

"Then go."

The bent figure hobbled away on its black errand, and Storland Sahib strode across the plank.

"Come, Rupert!" gasped Ching-Lung, in a voice that was unlike his own. "Creep back, and for your life make no sound!"

Ching-Lung Takes a Prisoner—Flight—Prout's Amazing Idea—Boarders to the Front—In Clover.

Rupert Thurston only understood a few words of the language, but his eyes had convinced him that danger threatened. Ching-Lung, with his usual quickness, had fathomed the renegade's whole scheme. If they succeeded in murdering the sentry without raising an alarm, the fight would be short. The Mongols would pounce upon the unsuspecting and unarmed crew, and slaughter them like sheep. A few might fight their way out into the open, only to fall, riddled with bullets.

And what then?

The hill pirate's wolves would hide the slain, and lurk in the house. At dawn, if Hal Honour could complete the repairs, the aeronef would leave her prison. She would descend, and every loophole in O'Rooney's house would bristle with rifles. One volley would be enough.

Before they were ten yards from their hiding-place, Ching-Lung had foreseen all this. He breathed more freely as he rose to his feet, and peered through the branches. He had plenty of time to frustrate the diabolical plan. They must fly to the mountain, and find some stronghold. He looked at the moon. They had two hours before them, but not a moment of that time must be wasted.

"What were they saying, Ching?"

"Keep on, and I'll tell you, old chap," answered Ching-Lung. "Look out for dead sticks, for they make as much row as a pistol if you tread on them. That old chap was a spy. He's going to kill the sentry, and then the sahib is going to rush the house, and cut our throats nicely."

"How sweet of him!" said Rupert. "It's a bit of luck we were on the spot."

"Wonderful luck! The old pig spun the whole yarn. We've got to clear out of the village sharp. It's a silly trick to hang about when someone is after you with a carving-knife. And we've got to stop that old johnnie. Go steady when you get to the edge of the wood. Give me your handkerchief, will you?"

"I've got a silk scarf as well."

"All the better," answered Ching-Lung. "Take it off your neck. It would only be in the way of the throat-cutters. Steady, steady! What are you doing?"

A dead stick cracked under Thurston's feet; but Ching-Lung deadened the sound by imitating the howl of a wolf. Then he pitched his voice so cleverly that an answering snarl seemed to come from the very heart of the wood.

"Keep where you are, my boy."

"There he is!" said Rupert, pointing forward.

The spy was limping towards the village not far ahead. The bright moonlight showed up every outline of his stooping figure. He stopped, and held his skinny arms towards the sky.

"What is he doing, Ching?"

"Praying—the murderous old hypocrite!" said the prince in disgust. "He's asking Buddha, or some other of his sweet gods, to help him to knock the accursed foreigners into the middle of nowhere. I'll knock him if I can get near enough. Wait until I can get my boots off. Don't you shift. If he gets out one yell, we may have the whole pack of them on us like a ton of slates!"

"Are you going to stalk him?"

"That's the word, Ru," answered Ching-Lung, as he unlaced his boots. "You might cut me a nice stout stick to use as a persuader in case he turns up nasty. I don't absolutely love the idea of hurting an old man, but that beast deserves it. I'll be as gentle as I can."

All the travellers carried useful knives of a large size. Rupert chose a branch, and began to saw through it. The

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* Mahseer, a fish of the carp tribe, found in many Indian rivers. They run to a very great weight.

Mongol was still engaged in his devotions, waving his arms, and dancing in a grotesque fashion.

"I'm off," said Ching-Lung. "Have you got that bit of tree?"

"Here it is. Will it suit?"

"Finely. Now for the warpath."

He began to crawl forward through the thin grass, his eyes watching every movement of the Mongol. The man turned his back. Rising, and bending almost double, Ching-Lung sped forward for a dozen yards, and then fell prone. Again the Mongol turned, and again Ching-Lung took advantage of the movement. Wildly excited, Rupert clutched at a branch and watched.

A figure sprang into sight and vanished again. The old man reeled and fell. Ching-Lung lifted his body, and staggered towards the wood. Thurston ran to his aid.

"I think I made no mistake about that," said Ching-Lung, with a grim chuckle. "This owl won't hoot to-night."

"What owl?"

"Oh, that was to be the signal, Ru, to let Storland Sahib know that they had murdered the sentry. I don't think I've hurt him very much, though I hit pretty hard. Just rope up his feet while I gag him. There's your scarf again. Pull up the knots as tight as you like. These brutes are like human eels."

Thurston followed the prince's advice to the letter. His advice, when given seriously, was always excellent. He knew the crafty Mongols better than anyone else. The man was gagged and securely bound, and then, without much ceremony, Ching-Lung caught him by the heels and dragged him under a bush.

"That's done," he said; "so we'll sprint back to tea."

Neither of the young men felt in any way anxious. Forewarned is forearmed. They agreed to retreat to the mountain. Ambushed among the rocks at the head of some precipice or gorge, they could defy any attack, and attract the attention of the aeronef. Storland Sahib would not wait for the vessel. He could not fight it, and he must be beaten.

But still there was cause for anxiety. They had very little food. Perhaps the breakdown would take longer to repair than either Ferrers Lord or the engineer had anticipated. Her coming would be delayed, and on the chilly slopes of the hill the men would need more food to keep up their strength than they would require in the warm valley. Still, the aeronef might be afloat at dawn, and there was a chance of shooting a yak or wild-goat.

"Who goes there?"

A rifle-barrel gleamed over the wall of O'Rooney's yard.

"Right, my Joseph," said Ching-Lung. "Keep that popgun down. Monkeys, as I have often remarked, should not be allowed to carry firearms. Keep it down, my Joseph."

"Oh, it's you, sir, is it?" said the carpenter. "Beggin' yer honour's pardon, I object to be called a monkey!"

"Well, you should change your face, Joe, and get one that doesn't make people want to strike matches on. Get a face, not a nutmeg-grater. Where are the boys?"

"Yarnin', sir."

"I think I can tell them a yarn that will raise their hair," muttered Ching-Lung. "You'll be off duty in a few minutes, Joe."

The men were again seated round the fire. They listened quietly as Ching-Lung told them the story.

None of them evinced the slightest trace of surprise or alarm.

"Bedad," said O'Rooney, "Oi knowed ut!"

"Did you, by hokey?" remarked Prout. "'Ow did you know it, wooden-'ead?"

"Bekase me big toe tickled," said the Irishman, "and it's a sartin soign. Ut tickled the day me father smashed his wooden leg thryin' to play football, and ut kept me awake wid ticklin' the noight me Uncle Dinnis got up in the darrk to take some pills, and swallered noine bone collar-studs in mistake. Oi tells yez, gentlemen, that whin that toe tickles somethin' painful is goin' to happen."

"Does it tickle now, hunk?" asked Gan-Waga.

"Ut does, flabby-face, and Oi say somethin' painful must come!"

"And it's comed," said Gan-Waga, as he trod heavily on the Irishman's foot.

Barry hopped round, holding his foot in his hand, as the warning was fulfilled. His face was fiery-red, and he did not like the way the men laughed. Something very painful had happened—very painful indeed!

"Got tickle in other toe, hunk? I soon stop him."

"No, you big-booted blackguard, I ain't!" roared O'Rooney. "You've bust me best corn!"

"Gan ought to have been a miller," said Maddock. "He knows all about grinding wheat."

"That'll do, lads. Never mind your corns, Barry. Get every scrap of food together, lads. We can't make any show against those brutes if we stay here. They're seventy strong, and better armed than we are. Now, look here, boys! I'm the youngest here, and we've been in some hot corners together. You're all old fighters, and, though I'm your officer, I'm not one of the eyeglass and cigarette kind, and I'm not too proud to ask your advice. My idea is to get up to the peak, and find a strong place. Let's have your idea first, Ru."

"I think that's a good plan, Ching."

"Now, Tom."

"I'm thinkin', sir," said the steersman. "Leave me a bit, sir, and ax Maddock."

Maddock wrinkled his forehead. He agreed with Ching-Lung that a retreat to the mountain was the best scheme. The others were of the same opinion. Then Prout solemnly took the pipe out of his mouth, scratched his head, and looked very thoughtful.

"Have you anything better to suggest, Tom?" asked Ching-Lung.

"Anythin' betther?" grinned O'Rooney. "Fancy axin' that! Take ut away and bury ut afore uts face sthops me Waterbury goold watch!"

"Feel the Irish boy's pulse, somebody," said Prout. "I think he's goin' to 'ave a fit!"

"Shut up, Barry!" put in Thurston. "What is it, Tom?"

"Was the boat opposite where we left the rifles, sir?"

"Yes, Tom."

Prout puffed pensively at his pipe.

"And there's about seventy of the hounds?"

"About seventy."

"Well," said Prout, "they'll make up their dirty minds to wipe us out. Storland Sahib has had a tussle or two wi' us, and he knows we don't wipe out as easy as writin' off a slate. I says, knowin' we're a tough crowd in a corner, he'll bring pretty well the whole pack against us."

"That's pretty certain," answered Thurston.

"What's more," went on the sturdy steersman, "I seed an island in the middle of the river."

"Wonderful!" said Barry O'Rooney. "A blind man wid pink whiskers could have seed ut!"

Prout scowled at the interrupter, and twenty threatening voices told Barry to "chuck it."

"Oi think Oi'd betther," murmured the irrepressible one.

The steersman pondered for a moment, and then took a blackened stick out of the fire.

"Here's the village," he said, drawing a mark on the floor, "here's the wood, the sampan, and the island. They won't leave many men to look arter the boat. I don't like the mountain plan. I says, ambush in the wood, and let 'em get ashore. Then, when they've gone, board the boat, and run her out behind the island. There'll be food on the boat, and very likely spare guns and 'nition. If they can get across that current in twelve months with us blazin' at 'em, call me—well, call me a howlin' Hottentot!"

There was a short silence. They were all wondering why they had not thought of such a simple and brilliant scheme before. Then O'Rooney fell on the steersman's neck, murmuring hoarsely:

"Kiss me, Thomas—kiss me! Oi loves yez!"

"Go away! You've been eatin' inyuns!"

"Niver! They were shallots, and smelt loike violets. Me love, yer brain and fate are about a match for soize!"

"Wait a minute, lads!" said Ching-Lung. "I like the idea, and I'm proud of you, Tom. But there's one big risk, or perhaps two. The boat may anchor in midstream after the others have landed, or we may not effect a surprise. That would bring them on us. The first shot would bring them back."

"But we could put up a nate foight in that wood, sir," remarked Barry. "And, howld on. There's a deuce of a big cave in ut, wid a narrow mouth. Oi know the way out at the other ind; and, bedad! we'd be up in the mountain all the same afore they knowed ut!"

"Then we'll try it. Hurry, my lads!"

All the available provisions were collected.

"There's still another risk," said Barry, who was beginning to show his mettle. "All these blackguards in the village are spoies, and that dirthy rogue Storland Sahib pays thim. Av we go out together he'll very loike get the news. We'll go wan by wan, and wait at the big rock. Oi'll do a sprint round the village, and av Oi foind a man awake, bedad, I'll make his head rattle loike a kettledrum full of marbles! Then Oi'll foind yez, and take yez round boi the cave."

"Hear, hear, Barry!"

The big rock mentioned by the Irishman was about half a mile from the half-ruined house. Man after man slipped away. Barry took his cudgel, and hurried down the village

street. All the houses were in absolute darkness. This fact made Barry feel more suspicious. He listened at the doors, if skins stretched on branches could be called doors, and at last he heard the vile strains of a native fiddle, and saw a few streaks of light.

Barry burst through the skin. It was breaking the law for a villager to be awake at such an hour, so Barry mended the law by breaking the fiddle over the head of the astonished musician, and came out very pleased with himself. His suspicions began to leave him. He paid a visit to the spy's house. As he neared it he drew back. The moonlight was brilliant on the other side of the dirty street.

A round black object appeared at the door of the old man's hut—a human head.

"The young angel that was to murther the sintry," thought Barry, "wondherin' whoy 'Father, father won't come home,' as the song goeth. Father won't come home for a bit, me bhoy."

He coughed.

"Is that you?" asked a voice.

"It is," said Barry in the vernacular.

"And what says the sahib?"

"That there's goin' to be a hot toime for somewun!" roared Barry, in his richest brogue. "What d'yez mane, yez scallywag? Breakin' the law, are yez? Bedad, this is where the earthquakes starrt off wid a glorious gallop!"

Barry rushed across the narrow road. Shutting the door was no protection, and the youthful Mongol knew it. He fled like the wind. Barry could run, but, like everyone else, he could run better when he was chased.

He knew that pursuit was vain, but he hurled his cudgel after the young man, and constant practice had given him a trained eye. He hit the runner, who yelled and redoubled his speed. Barry watched him out of sight, and chuckled as he picked up the weapon.

"Oi don't think he'll come back," he muttered, with a grin.

"Neither do I, Barry," said Ching-Lung.

"Bedad, yez made me jump, sor! Oi thought yez had gone."

"No; all the rest have. I was thinking about the signal—that owl's hoot, you know. It doesn't matter at all. We want them to leave the boat, and then we'll do the rest. Do you think these people are watching us?"

"Oi did at first, sor, but Oi don't now. We've got an hour good. Are yez sure the ould man can't get loose?"

"Not much. I took good care to chain him tight. I know what eels they are."

"Then, in the words of the poet——"

"Stop! Let the poet rest."

"Sartinly! Oi wouldn't disthurb him for goold—av the goold was in a picture," he added thoughtfully.

They turned back together.

"Talkin' about goold," said O'Rooney, "me ould Uncle Dinnis——"

"Oh, let him rest with the poet!"

"Whisht! Yez'll sthare whin i tell yez about him, sor. He was a most wasteful man, especially wid his teeth. They was all holler, and he had 'em stopped—stopped with real goold!"

"I've heard of people having that done often," said Ching-Lung mildly.

"But listen, sir! I ain't finished. About a wake afther he'd had his two-and-thirty teeth filled wid goold, bedad, he couldn't pay the rint! Bein' a wise man, he cleared out his furniture at dead of noight. In the mornin' along comes the bailiffs. Their jaws dhropped whin they seed niver a stick to take away for rint.

"'Hallo, Misther Dinnis!' they sez. 'This is a bit warrm, this is!'

"'Ut is a thrifle warrm agin the foire,' sez my uncle, 'and ut's warmer in the oven.' And then he grinned, and showed all his goold teeth. 'Come in,' he says, 'and sthay a month!'

"In they went, but niver a bit of stuff was there to take to pay the rint; and me uncle, he grinned and grinned, and showed the goold.

"And then wan of thim gets an idea. He whips out a pair o' pincers, and afore me Uncle Dinnis could shout 'Rats!' he was on the flure, wid three o' thim sittin' on his chest. In two minutes all his goold teeth was pulled out; and, afther the bailiffs sold them, there was fifteen shillin's over, which they sint back. Afther that me uncle niver smoiled agin. His last wurrds were, 'Be gum, I'm sthumped!'"

Ching-Lung laughed at the whimsical story. The moon was beginning to pale. He kept a sharp eye on the dark wood, but there was no sign of the foe. In the natural course of things, in order to effect a surprise, Storland would delay the attack until he thought the men were sound asleep.

They reached the rock at last. O'Rooney, who knew the ground, was appointed guide.

"Wance in the wood," he said, "Oi know we can laugh at thim!"

"The ticklish part is getting there," answered Thurston. "It's very bright."

"Too bright, old chap. That's what we're bound to risk. We must cross the open ground if we want to reach the wood. If they happen to see us and open fire——"

"Yez'll see me makin' a bee-loine for the Equator," put in O'Rooney. "They say 'don't halloa till yez are out o' the wood,' but don't yez spake a wurrd till yez are in it. Pick up yer fate and march!"

They neared the dark, silent line of trees. They were hardened veterans, but it was enough to unnerve any man. What if the flame from three score rifles suddenly burst from that shadowy mass? What if the foes knelt there pressing the triggers and only waiting for them to come closer?

They pressed on, opening out at a signal from Ching-Lung. The suspense was over. The tall trees towered above them, and they had entered the wood unmolested. There was a hurried consultation.

"It's quite evident," said Ching-Lung, "that seven hundred men could not get us out of here, much less seventy. The trees are too thick; and if we got them attacking, we could just knock them over like ninepins. What do you think, Barry?"

"Oi think me toe doesn't tickle, sor."

"And that means that nothing painful is coming along, I suppose?" said Thurston.

"Not to us, sor. Av yez loike, Oi'll sthay here and watch the beggars whin they come out."

They had entered the wood about half a mile above the village, and about six hundred yards higher up than the anchored sampan. The attackers would therefore leave the wood closer to the village, and there was no danger of the two forces coming in contact.

"I'm off to scout," said Ching-Lung. "I'll keep down——"

"Whisht! There they are!"

Dark forms were stealing out of the wood into the waning moonlight. They could only be the wolves of Storland Sahib.

"Can you count them?" asked Thurston.

"Fifty-eight, at least," said the keen-eyed Ching-Lung. "There can't be more than a dozen left behind."

There was still one chance against surprising the sampan. Had she anchored out in midstream? But why should she do that? Storland Sahib could hardly have bargained for swift, prior attack like this. A few moments would reveal the truth.

Like spectres they glided from tree to tree and from bush to bush. The roar of the river deadened any sound. Hearts beat quickly. There is a thrill of excitement about an attempt at a surprise that even a rousing fight cannot give.

Had the boat put out from the shore?

A moment more, and the whole scene was revealed in the fading moonlight. Her prow almost touched the bank. A stout cable fastened her to a tree. Her sweeps, tied with leathern thongs, floated in the current on either side. Below the yard the sail hung in clumsy folds.

Still the wood did not reveal its secret. Certainly the men on the sampan never dreamed of any danger. They were playing fan-tan by the light of a couple of lanterns. The attackers had only to charge across the few yards of bank. A single volley would have killed every Mongol. They never thought of firing, however, on an unsuspecting foe.

Then through the wood rang the low hoot of an owl.

"Have at yez! Hurroo! Paste 'em, me bhoys, and lather 'em joyfully! Charrge, me gay gossoons! Ould Oireland for iver, and punch yer harrdest! Hurroo!"

Barry's wild war-cry was answered by lusty hurrahs. Man after man leapt over the bulwark, brandishing his clubbed rifle.

"No quarther exsipt cowld wather!" bellowed the Irishman. "Wash the dirthy rebels!"

There was a burst of laughter. One shot from a revolver knocked the rifle out of Maddock's hand, and the fight was over. Like so many rats the terrified Mongols dived over the stern and swam for it.

"Cut her loose, lads!" said Rupert.

"Hold on!" cried Ching-Lung. "You needn't spoil a good hawser. We've years of time. We'll christen this vessel after you, Tom, and make you captain. Get up your anchors!"

"Right, sir!" grinned the steersman. "I appoint Ben first mate, Joe second mate, and Gan the stoker!"

"And where do Oi come in?"

"You can be the powder-monkey!"

"Or the bilge-water!" remarked Joe.

"Thank yez!" said O'Rooney huffily. "Niver moind, Oi love a sailor's life. As the bard sings:

"'Oi'm afloat, Oi'm afloat
On the swift-rollin' toide,
And we'll all be saysick in the mornin'!'"

And as the captain sprang ashore to see his orders carried out, Barry put an empty bottle to his eye, and scanned the horizon, his legs very wide apart.

"Shiver me timbers," he roared, "av there isn't a sail on the weather bow-and-arrer, and ut's a sale where things is goin' dirrt-chape! Avast there, yez lubbers! Oi don't know what 'avast' manes, but ut sounds proime. Go into the cockpit and let the chickens out; for, bedad, Oi think they want to lay-to, or p'r'aps three! Av we can spring a leak, whoy shouldn't we jump an onion? Now, Nelson, what are yez starin' at?"

He gazed fiercely at Gan-Waga.

"At a hidiot," said Gan-Waga gently. "My name not Smellsome, neither."

The boat swung away into the current.

"Sweeps out!" cried Prout.

They splashed down as the willing men seized them. The boat looked more clumsy than it really was. Through the wood voices were ringing:

"Hala-hala-hal-halala!"

"Some of the brutes have landed!" laughed Ching-Lung. "But Storland Sahib will soon find out that we're weasels, and take some catching asleep! What do you think, Ru?"

"I think we've got him on toast this trip!"

"Toast-and-water, so to speak. Yell away, my yellow beauties! By Jove, that was finely worked, and neater than ninepence! Just look here! See, they've left their money, even!"

The deck was strewn with coins left behind by the interrupted gamblers. Ching-Lung examined the dark island they intended to make their refuge. It was about seven hundred yards from either shore, and well wooded. From it they could not fail to see the little aeronef when she left the cavern. Sound travelled so wonderfully on the crisp, dry air that the report of a rifle could be heard for miles. A few shots would bring the vessel to them.

"I wonder if the sahib will give it up?" asked Thurston.

"Not at once. He's sure to be as wild as a cat with toothache, and he'll have a try at us. It's a nice shooting distance from the shore, and the cover is good. We've got his small boats, but he may find more. I don't think he dare try to cross at daylight, but he might in the dark."

"He can't get boats to-night, and the aeronef will be here in the morning."

"Hope so, sonny," said Ching-Lung thoughtfully. "I should like to see the sahib's pretty face when he rushes the house. I can imagine a smile of joy on it that would stop a steam-tram. Well, Joseph, what have you found?"

Joe had returned from below, where he had been exploring.

"Plenty of everything, sir," he answered. "There's grub and rifles, and a lot of bales and trunks I couldn't open. And there's as neat a little cabin as ever I seed wi' my two peepers, and whisky, and sparklets for makin' sody-water, and cigars, and cold beef, and pickles, and——"

"And a billiard-table and shower-bath and ping-pong—oh?" put in Thurston. "Draw it mild, Joe!"

"It's right, sir," said Joe. "I'm not spinnin' yarns, sir."

"Then I'll have a look at the palace. Do you want me here, Ching?"

"No. Trot away. I'll see things safe."

Rupert, still rather doubtful, followed Joe and his lantern. Joe had not exaggerated. There was a neat little cabin aft, and the moonbeams struggled through the grating. Pictures, roughly framed, but painted by a clever artist, decorated the walls. They were the work of Storland Sahib himself.

On the table lay the remains of a meal, a tantalus spirit-stand, and soda-water. Two comfortable deck-chairs, a neat carpet, and an ottoman formed the rest of the furniture.

"Could you, Joe?" inquired Thurston.

"I could, sor!" said Joe, with a grin.

"Then help yourself, and tell me what it's like!"

Joe helped himself to whisky-and-soda, and said it was like jam. Then he hacked off a slice of cold meat, placed a hunk of bread beneath it, smeared it with mustard, buried it in pickles, took a huge bite, and said it was honey. After that he went away with a cigar in his mouth, remarking that you couldn't buy a better one anywhere for less than twopence.

(Another long instalment in next Tuesday's issue of "The Magnet" Library. Please order your copy in advance. Price 1d.)

My Readers' Column

"A FORBIDDEN CHUM."

Under the above title, Frank Richards has written an exceptionally powerful and holding tale of school life for next Tuesday's MAGNET Library. The juniors of Greyfriars are, of course, the characters principally concerned in the splendid story, and the interest centres specially round little Bolsover minor, the unselfish fag, whose burly brother is the bully of the Remove Form. Despite the strictest orders to the contrary, Bolsover minor refuses to desert an old friend of his former days, with what result my readers will learn for themselves next week when they read

"A FORBIDDEN CHUM."

DO YOU WANT BACK NUMBERS?

I should like to draw my readers' special attention to a column which appears regularly on "The Gem" Library "Chat" page headed "Back Numbers Offered and Wanted." This column was started for the convenience of readers who wished to exchange the numbers of "The Gem" and THE MAGNET which they had read for some of the earlier dates which they had not had the opportunity of reading, and has grown into a very popular feature of our widely-read companion paper.

As back numbers cannot be obtained, as a rule, from these offices direct, those of my readers who may be in need of any particular issues of their favourite paper, that they have for some reason or other missed, will find that an advertisement in "The Gem" "Back Numbers" column—which will be inserted free to readers of that paper—will provide the best, if not the only means, of obtaining what they require.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

W. F. F. (Clapham Junction) and others.—You can obtain all particulars about joining any branch of the Army at the nearest police-station or recruiting-office.

S. P. (Liverpool).—Thanks for your interesting letter. With regard to your query, I do not think wrapper-addressing a very profitable spare-time employment. It is a very laborious task, and the fee that is paid is not by any means great. Some readers add to their pocket-money by constructing little fretwork articles, which find a ready sale amongst friends and others. Why not try this, or turn some other hobby into a means of increasing your money?

T. P.—Thanks for your letter. The words "Ancient Lights" which you see every morning on your way to business, and which are so often seen on old buildings, mean that when windows have been constructed twenty years, and the light has been suffered to pass to them without interruption during that period, the law implies, from the non-obstruction of light for that length of time, that the holder of the adjoining land has assented, and hence he has no legal right to build or erect a screen, or any other object, so as to stop up or obstruct such windows, or to diminish their light.

"Observant."—I must thank you for your letter, and in answer to your query, I have to tell you that the reason for a large body of soldiers crossing the suspension bridge without troubling to keep step, is a very good one. Suspension bridges are very delicate pieces of engineering, and whilst they are strong enough to withstand any ordinary strain, they are likely to be weakened considerably by a heavy concussion such as would be given by a hundred or so of marching men keeping time and step. You can now understand why you saw the soldiers crossing the bridge in so unmilitary a fashion.

George H. (Knightsbridge).—In answer to your query, I have to tell you that a ship's cable is usually 120 fathoms, or 720 feet. In marine charts, a cable is taken as 607.56 feet, or one-tenth of a sea mile.

THE EDITOR.

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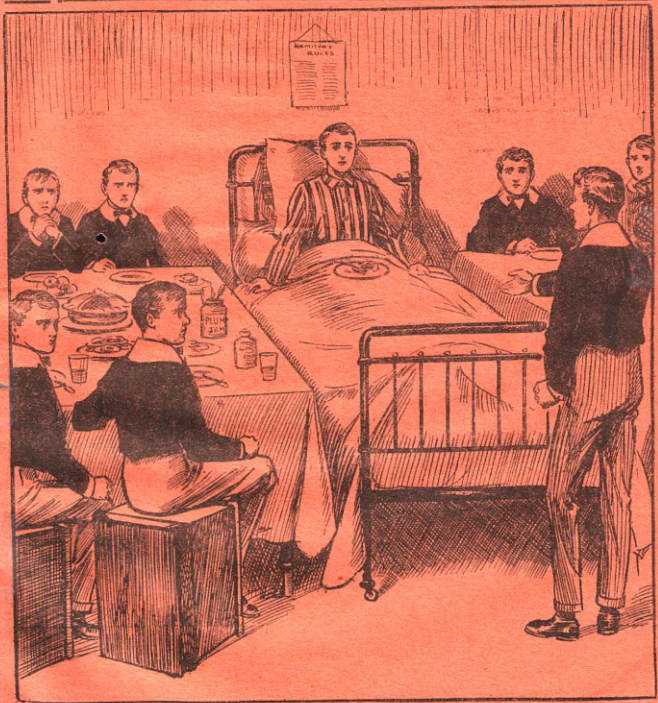

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