THE SUNDAY CRUSADERS!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.

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SKINNER'S SUPREME SACRIFICE!

(An impressive scene in the Grand, Complete Story of School Life, contained in this number.)

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A Complete School-Story Book, attractive to all readers.

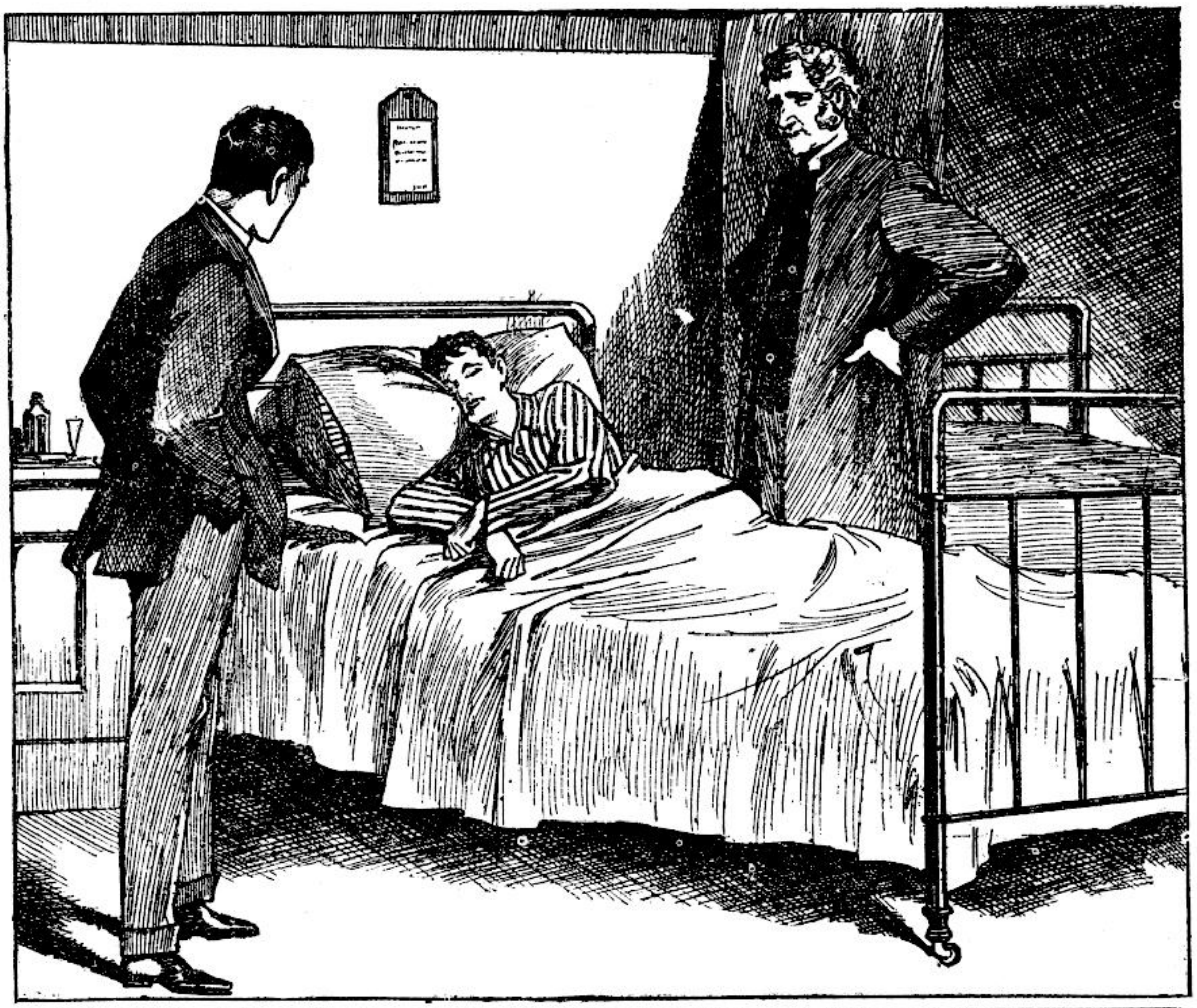
The Magnet Library

The Editor will be obliged if you will hand this book, when finished with, to a friend. . . .

THE SUNDAY CRUSADERS!

A New, Long, Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School.

By FRANK RICHARDS.



Bolsover could scarcely restrain his emotion as he stood by the bedside and gazed on the still form of his rescuer. The burly Removite was thinking strange and new thoughts. He realised now his utter folly. "Oh, sir," he muttered brokenly, "do you think he will be spared?" (*See Chapter* 15.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

To Be or Not To Be!

"IT'S the last straw!"

Harold Skinner, of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, uttered the words with an air of finality.

Bolsover major, who was with him, gave one of his expressive snorts.

"It's certainly the limit!" he growled. "Three times in one giddy day! Not once, mark you; not twice; but three times!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" boomed the cheerful voice of Bob Cherry. "Wherefore that worried brow, Bolsover? Been left out of the footer team?"

The juniors were standing before the notice-board in the Hall, hence Bob's surmise.

"Rats!" said Bolsover. "Look at that blessed notice! The Head's got a nerve I must say, to insult us by

sticking up such a thing as that. Confounded cheek, I call it!"

Bob Cherry glanced at the notice. At the same time, the rest of the Famous Five, looking very fit and ruddy after a hard game of footer, came on the scene.

"What's the rumpus?" asked Harry Wharton.

Bob Cherry read out the notice. It was certainly unusual, but where the Head's colossal cheek came in Bob could not quite ascertain.

"I have considered it desirable that all boys who have been confirmed shall attend Divine Service, Matins, and Evensong every Sunday, until further notice.

"(Signed) HERBERT H. LOCKE."

"What d'you think of it?" roared Skinner. "Isn't it enough to make any decent chap's blood boil? Ordering us to go to church, as if we were beastly slaves!"

"I don't see anything to go into hysterics about, Skinney," said Wharton. "A good course of church-going is just the thing you want."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But it's a free country," said Bolsover. "I don't see why we should be compelled to go to church at all, come to that. But three times! It's the absolute giddy limit!"

"They'll be forcing you to wash your neck next!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Eh! What's the matter with my neck?"

"Well, it could do with a sort of spring-cleaning," suggested Bob. "But p'r'aps you're patriotic, Bolsover, old man, and send all your soap to the Tommies in the trenches?"

"Look here!" roared Bolsover. "If you're looking for a thick ear, Cherry, I'll jolly soon give you one!"

"Bow-wow!" said Bob cheerfully. "I've got something better to do than scrap about like some fag. You'd better keep off the grass."

"But what about this church-going bizney?" asked Skinner. "You don't mean to say you're going to take it lying down, Wharton?"

"I don't see that we're hard done by in any way," answered Harry. "As it is, church is compulsory twice a day on Sunday, and a half-hour's service thrown in ought not to break our hearts. Anyway, it's nothing to raise Cain about."

"I don't know so much about that," said Skinner. "I call it a crying shame. If we submit to this, we shall be imposed upon still further, I expect. The day won't be far distant when we shall be forced to stay in church for hours on end. Whereas, if we nip this in the bud now, it'll be all right. But we ain't going to swallow the situation cheerfully. No fear! Down with tyranny!"

"But why kick up a fuss over one extra service?" asked Frank Nugent. "It isn't as though we've got something better to do. If we could play footer on Sunday, and all that sort of thing, perhaps three services would be coming it a bit too thick."

"Sunday footer ought to be allowed," said Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you duffer——"

"It's all very well to laugh, but when you come to think of it, what's to be said against playing games on Sunday?"

"Lots," said Johnny Bull promptly. "I was reading about it in the Chat Page of 'The Boys' Friend.' One of the readers wrote up to know if he could fix up footer matches for Sunday afternoons, and the Editor jolly well ticked him off about it. Serve the kid right!"

"But did the Editor give any reasons why the fellow shouldn't do it?" asked Skinner.

"He did; and they were jolly sound ones, too. Good enough for me, at any rate."

Skinner sneered.

"The fact is, he wants to make all his readers prigs and Good Little Georgies," he said. "I'll bet his Answers to Correspondents are chock-full of things like this: 'It is very naughty of you not to go to church on Sunday.' 'It was very wicked of you, my errant chum, to visit the picture palace.' 'You should suck an acid-tablet, Charles, when you want to smoke,' and all that sort of rot!"

Johnny Bull clenched his big fists, and advanced threateningly on Skinner.

"You'd run down the Editor of 'The Boys' Friend,' would you?" he roared.

Skinner backed away hastily.

"Well, I—I may be wrong," he admitted stutteringly.

"You jolly well are, and you know it! Fellows of your stamp would be improved by reading such a paper as the 'Friend.' But I suppose you prefer 'The Turf Tipster,' or something of that sort!"

"I agree with Skinney about Sunday games," said Bolsover. "They're getting more and more in fashion, and even old Prout has a game of golf some Sunday afternoons. I've seen him going off with his clubs."

"Prout knows his own business best," said Harry Wharton. "If he chooses to go and play golf, that's no concern of yours, or mine either. And golf's different to footer."

"I don't see it," said Skinner. "We're like a flock of sheep. Because a few goody-goodies go to church, and snivel in the pews, and behave as crass hypocrites generally, we all go to church. And it's rot, every bit of it! I'm going to strike out in a new line."

"You'll be asking for trouble if you stay away," said Bob Cherry grimly. "It'll mean the sack, or a pretty hefty flogging, at least."

"Let 'em all come!" said Skinner recklessly. "Why should we have religion rammed down our throats, I should like to know? Every man for himself. That's the way I look at it."

"Same here," said Bolsover.

"The madfulness of the esteemed rotten Skinney in absentfully staying away from church would be terrific!" purred Hurree Singh, in his weird and wonderful English.

"The Head's wrath would be terrific, too, if he tried it on," said Nugent. "Better toe the line with the rest of us, Skinney. You'll find it pays."

"Oh, come on, Bolsover!" said Skinner impatiently. "Don't let's stop jawing to these rotten prigs! Leave 'em to say their prayers like good little boys."

"You're on dangerous ground, let me tell you, Skinner," said Harry Wharton, his eyes flashing. "I can stand a lot, but I sha'n't be able to hold out much longer."

"Hark at him!" sneered Skinner. "Keeping his ickle temper under control, by gad! 'Now, children, you should never let your angry passions rise. Your little hands were never made to tear each other's eyes,' as the poet says. Don't let's ruffle the feelings of the poor little angel!"

Harry Wharton wasted no more time in words. He shot out his left, catching Skinner fairly and squarely on the point of the jaw. The cad of the Remove measured his length on the floor.

"Get up and have some more!" said Wharton, prancing over him with clenched fists.

"Ow! Yaroooh! Go for him, Bolsover, old man!" moaned the unhappy Skinner, clasping his injured jaw.

Bolsover hesitated a moment. He was a great fighting-man—far more so than the fallen Skinner—but he didn't like the expression on Harry Wharton's face at that moment.

"Back up!" shrilled Skinner. "Give him one like he gave me!"

The bully of the Remove saw that his reputation was at stake, for several more fellows had clustered round and were looking on. He swung round upon Harry Wharton.

"Why couldn't you leave Skinney alone?" he snarled.

"Oh! So you want some, too, do you?" asked Wharton. "Anything to oblige! Where will you have it?"

For answer Bolsover swung out his right viciously. It was a clumsy blow, and Wharton, stepping aside, easily dodged it; then he rushed in, and fairly peppered the burly Removite with blows.

Left and right, right and left! Bolsover was driven back several yards from the notice-board, and then his opponent, wading in, got home a smashing right-hander on the mark, which caused the bully of the Remove to measure his length on the floor as Skinner had done.

"If you want another dose you can have it, you cad!"

"Stop! Stop this game at once!" commanded Bob Cherry. The field stood spellbound at the interruption.
(*See Chapter* 9.)

panted Harry. "I've stood your brazen insults long enough!"

A groan from Bolsover was the only answer.

"Come on, old chap!" said Bob Cherry, taking hold of Wharton's arm. "Let me lead you away, or you'll be tempted to dribble that precious pair of cads round the Hall like a footer!"

And the Famous Five proceeded to No. 1 Study for tea, leaving Skinner and Bolsover to voice their groans and grunts before an unsympathetic crowd.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
Backing Up Linley!

"SHUT your eyes, Marky!"

"Eh?"

"Shut your eyes!"

Bob Cherry gave vent to that extraordinary injunction before breakfast next morning as he entered the study which he shared with Mark Linley, the Lancashire junior.

Bob was concealing something behind his back which his study-mate could not see.

"What is it," asked Mark—"a jape?"

"Never mind. Do as I tell you. Shut your eyes and open your mouth!"

Mark Linley obeyed. The next moment he fell back in his chair, gasping and spluttering, for something very hard and not at all savoury had been crammed into his mouth.

He opened his eyes quickly, and found himself biting one end of a long brown-paper roll. The expression on his face was comical to behold.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "You thought you were going to have something nice and tasty—what?"

"You ass, Bob! I might have known you were up to some monkey-trick or other! That's my certificate."

"Your what-er?"

"My certificate. It's from the——"

Mark Linley paused, and coloured.

"Well?" said Bob curiously. "From whom?"

"The S.P.C.K."

"What's that—the Society for Potting the Confounded Kaiser?"

"No, you chump! For the Promotion of Christian Knowledge!"

"Oh!"

"I've joined, you see," explained Linley. "I used to know a young chap who went in for missionary work among the mill-hands of Lancashire. He wrote and said it would be a good plan if I joined, and I've done so."

He untied the string, and drew forth the certificate of membership. Fortunately, it had been unharmed by

Bob Cherry's practical joke. Then he glanced wistfully at his chum.

"Have you any objection, Bob," he asked, "to my having this framed and stuck up on the wall?"

"Certainly not, old scout. Why should I?"

"Well, some chaps might—might be against a thing of that kind. They'd say I was a religious fanatic."

"Not in my hearing," said Bob Cherry. "I'd pulverise 'em!"

Mark Linley smiled.

"You're a good fellow, Bob!" he said.

"I'm true to my friends, if nothing else," said Bob Cherry. "Got a frame for this?"

"Yes."

Mark Linley drew out a neat black frame from the table drawer. Then he inserted the certificate, and hung it over the mantelpiece.

"I'd have stuck it up in the dormitory, only certain sneering cads might have smashed it up," said Mark. "The study seems to be the best place. Even now it may be spotted by fellows like Skinner, and I shall never hear the end of it."

"Skinner!" echoed Bob Cherry scornfully. "Who cares a tuppenny rap for Skinner! If he comes meddling into this study, he'll go out on his neck!"

Mark Linley laughed at this dire threat, and the two chums proceeded into Hall for breakfast.

The news of Linley's action was not long in leaking out. William George Bunter, the Peeping Tom of Greyfriars, first got to know about it. He made a tour of the Remove studies in order to beg, borrow, or steal a pot of marmalade, and in the course of his mission had observed the certificate in Linley's study.

Billy Bunter was full of it after breakfast. Old Linley had some religious tract or other prominently displayed in his study, he confided to Skinner.

"He's got which?" asked the cad of the Remove.

"A blessed certificate for saying his catechism over ten times running without a mistake, I suppose!" said Bunter.

Skinner grunted.

"The rotten prig!" he exclaimed. "It's up to us to smash the thing up, Bunty."

"Ye-e-es," agreed Bunter, not with much enthusiasm, however.

"The cad's gone to punt a footer about in the Close," pursued Skinner, "so the coast is clear. Kim on!"

With some misgivings, Billy Bunter followed the amiable Skinner on his mission of destruction.

Cautiously opening the door, the two juniors saw that Linley's study was deserted, and noiselessly entered.

Skinner surveyed the certificate on the mantelpiece with a sneer. Then he took a cricket-bat from a corner of the study.

"What's going on?" asked Bolsover major, looking in.

"Dunno! But this is coming off!" grinned Skinner.

He raised the cricket-bat in the air, and swung it down upon the framed certificate. There was a crashing of glass as the frame came clattering down, and Skinner surveyed his handiwork with a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes.

"Well bowled!" roared Bolsover. "Next man in! Anything I can do for you?"

"I don't think so," said Skinner. "Oh, yes, there is, though! You and Bunter can keep cave. I'm going to make this Bible-punching freak from Lancashire sit up!"

So saying, Skinner wrenched out the certificate from the wrecked frame, and deliberately tore it up into about fifty pieces. Then he took several sheets of impot paper from the table drawer.

"What's the little game?" asked Bolsover.

Skinner chuckled, and proceeded to write various inscriptions in blue lead, which he posted up on the walls of the study. Then he surveyed the work with a critical air.

"Not bad—what?" he exclaimed.

Bolsover read the inscriptions, and roared. Billy Bunter came in from the corridor, and he, too, glanced at them and smirked.

"'ANGEL 'ARRY; or, The Boy Who Followed the Straight Path'!" chuckled Bolsover. "Oh, my hat! 'MOSES, THE MALEFACTOR'! 'WITH JEHOSHOPHAT IN JUDEA'! Ha, ha, ha! They're the books he reads, I suppose?"

Skinner nodded.

"There's a lot more of 'em," he said, "and they ought to make mammy's darling sing small."

"I say, you fellows, let's get out of this," said Bunter. "It's nearly time for lessons, and those cads might come in at any minute. They're sure to come here to bring the footer in."

And the three young rascals quitted the study, and made tracks for the Remove Form-room.

They were only just in time, for Bob Cherry and Mark Linley came running down the passage, the bell for lessons sounding at that moment.

As the two chums rushed pell-mell into the study, Bob Cherry gave a roar of anguish, and tripped over something on the floor.

"What is it, Bob?" asked Linley.

"Some confounded glass thing stuck in the way!" roared Bob. "Some silly idiot—some imbecile! Why, my hat, it's your certificate, Marky!"

Mark Linley gazed at Skinner's handiwork, and his face went very white. Then his eyes roved round the room, and the insulting epithets of the cad of the Remove stared him in the face.

"Marky, old chap, what's the matter?" asked Bob Cherry. Then he, too, caught sight of the inscriptions, and he gave vent to a roar of rage.

"The cads!" he exclaimed hotly. "The cowardly cads to insult you like this!"

Bob Cherry was fairly dancing with rage.

"Calm down, Bob, old chap," said Mark Linley, taking him by the arm. It's only the ignorant work of some fool, or fools!"

"Skinner and his set are responsible, or I'm a Dutchman!" said Bob. "And your certificate, too! Oh, the rotten cads! This is the limit, and I'm jolly well not going to stand it! I'll put down their persecution, once and for all!"

And Bob Cherry whipped out of the study. He was almost blind with fury, and any insult to Linley always stung the good-natured Bob as much as the Lancashire lad himself.

Straight to the Form-room he went, for morning lessons had begun. Mark Linley called to him, but he did not heed. Throwing open the door, Bob dashed into the room, and Mr. Quelch, who was engaged in chalking something on the board, stood almost spellbound at the dramatic interruption.

"Cherry!" he roared, in tones which could only be likened to the rumble of thunder. "How dare you, sir? I demand a full explanation!"

But the Form-master's irate words were wasted on the desert air. Bob Cherry's eye singled out Skinner, and he noted that the cad of the Remove was grinning broadly.

That grin was like the proverbial red rag to a bull. It infuriated Bob Cherry beyond measure.

Indifferent to the fact that he was in the Form-room, in the presence of a master, he made towards Harold Skinner, and, to the amazement of the class, yanked the cad of the Remove out of his seat, and proceeded to hit out right and left with his big fists.

"Ow! Yow! Yaroooh!" shrieked Skinner. "Shurrup! Hands off! Help me, you fellows! Mr. Quelch! Wharton! Draggimoff! He's mad! Yoooop!"

Mad or not, Bob Cherry was certainly giving the hapless Skinner beans. He blacked one of his eyes, got in a telling blow on Skinner's somewhat prominent nose, and wound up with a smashing right-hander, which sent the junior sprawling across one of the desks, upsetting whole pots of ink, and sending books and papers all over the room.

Then he drew back, panting and breathless.

"If you want any more, you cad," he said, in clear, concentrated tones, "come on! I'm ready!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Way of the Transgressor!

MR. QUELCH stood petrified. For a moment he could neither move nor speak.

In the whole course of his career as a disciplinarian he seldom remembered having witnessed such an extraordinary scene. It was unparalleled, unprecedented.

When Mr. Quelch did speak his voice resembled the rumble of thunder more closely than ever.

"Cherry!" he roared. "Boy! Are you demented? How dare you set my authority at naught?"

"He's a cad, sir!" panted Bob. "A beastly, cowardly, insufferable cad! I've given it to him hot, and he shall have another dose when he gets up!"

"Most assuredly he shall not!" said Mr. Quelch, in a grinding voice. He stepped forward, and seized Bob Cherry by the collar.

"Now explain this—this unexampled scene of hooliganism!" he demanded.

Mark Linley stepped forward.

"Don't be too harsh with him, sir," he said appealingly. "It was for my sake that he got into this row."

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "Do you presume to intercede for this wretched boy, Linley?"

"He was feeling a bit wild, that's all, sir."

"Then he must curb his animal tendencies," said Mr. Quelch, tightening his grip on Bob Cherry's collar. "Which would you prefer that I should do, Cherry—take you before Dr. Locke, or flog you here with my own hand?"

Of two evils Bob Cherry chose the lesser. The reaction had set in now, and he realised to what a sorry pass his impetuosity had led him. It would have been far wiser, far more discreet, to have settled with Harold Skinner after lessons.

"I'd rather you flogged me, sir," he said meekly.

"That is the wisest decision you could come to," said Mr. Quelch grimly. "Dr. Locke would probably take a less lenient view of this affair than I have done."

So saying, Mr. Quelch proceeded to lay about him with the cane. He was not a believer in half measures. The unfortunate Bob received a thrashing which would have caused a less sturdy junior to howl with anguish.

"There," gasped Mr. Quelch at length; "let that be a lesson to you, Cherry! In future you will please remember that the Form-room is not a bear-garden!"

"I'm awfully sorry, sir," said Bob penitently. "I forgot myself."

"You behaved in a manner which is quite foreign to your usual conduct," said Mr. Quelch, more kindly. "Something must have been very much amiss. What was it?"

"I'd rather not say, sir."

"Had Skinner offended you in any way?"

"I've done nothing at all to him!" hooted Skinner.

"Silence, Skinner! I was not addressing you, and you will take a hundred lines for your rude interruption of my remarks. Remove yourself from that ridiculous attitude, and sit down in your place!"

With much difficulty—for Bob Cherry's doughty blows had caused him to ache all over—Skinner obeyed.

"What had that boy done to offend you, Cherry?" repeated Mr. Quelch.

"I'd rather you got it from Skinner himself, sir."

"Very well. What did you do, Skinner?"

"Nothing, sir," replied Skinner, with a furtive glance at Mark Linley.

"I am sorry to have to doubt any boy's words," said the Form-master, "but I really consider you are lying, Skinner. However, I will not press for information. Cherry and Linley, you will go to your places. Take fifty lines for being late for lessons, Linley!"

"Very well, sir."

And morning lessons proceeded. All would have been well but for the tactless muttering of Billy Bunter, who sat next to Skinner.

Bunter was an enormous chatterbox. In class and out of class, he had never learned how to bridle his tongue.

"Never mind, Skinney!" he whispered, almost audibly. "You smashed the rotter's certificate!"

"Shurrup, you fathead!" hissed Skinner.

"Oh, really, Skinney! I say, what a pity that brute Cherry lammed you! We'll smash him afterwards!"

Mr. Quelch's eyes, which were usually compared to gimlets, on account of their penetrating powers, turned sharply upon the Owl of the Remove.

"Bunter!"

"Ahem!"

"You were talking!"

"Me, sir?" quavered Bunter hastily and ungrammatically. "Not a bit of it, sir. You—you're imagining things, sir."

"Boy!"

"I—I haven't opened my mouth since I came into the class-room, sir!"

"But I distinctly heard you!" said Mr. Quelch, in a terrible voice. "You were speaking to Skinner. How dare you tell me such impertinent untruths?"

Billy Bunter sat and quaked, as well he might, for the wrath of Mr. Quelch was equal at that moment to the wrath of Jove of old.

"I—er—that is to say, I was whispering, sir!"

"Indeed! That is a habit which I strongly discountenance in class, Bunter. I believe you are in some way connected with this affair of Cherry and Skinner."

"Oh, no, sir! You're on the wrong track, sir, I assure you," said Bunter quickly. "I didn't see Skinner smash the certificate up, sir. How could I, when I wasn't standing in the doorway at the time?"

"Bunter!"

"Yes, sir?"

"You are an utterly stupid and ridiculous boy! So you saw Skinner smash up a certificate?"

"No, sir."

"What!"

"Certainly not, sir!"

"But you said just now that you did."

Bunter looked round wildly. He was a fabricator of the first water, but not a clever one. He lacked the art of making his untruths agree with one another.

"It was—well, n-not exactly a certificate, sir. It was a—— Yoooooop!"

That was not exactly what Bunter meant to say, but he said it, all the same.

"How dare you make such an absurd noise in class, Bunter?"

"Yow! Somebody kicked me, sir."

"Was it you, Skinner?"

"Perhaps my boot may have accidentally knocked against Bunter's leg, sir," said Skinner demurely.

"Stand out before the class, Skinner!"

The cad of the Remove came forward reluctantly.

"What is this story of a certificate which you are alleged to have smashed?"

"It only exists in Bunter's imagination, sir," said Skinner calmly. "He dreams these things, sir."

"Why, Skinney, you rotter," said Bunter indignantly, forgetting for the moment where he was and in whose presence he was speaking, "you know jolly well you bashed into Linley's certificate with a cricket-bat!"

"Is that so, Linley?" asked Quelch.

"Somebody destroyed a certificate of mine, sir," answered Mark; "but Skinner may not be guilty."

"I am convinced that he is," said Mr. Quelch, compressing his lips. "Bunter, tell me the truth, or I will waste no more time in words! Did you or did you not see Skinner doing the damage referred to?"

"I did, sir," said Bunter desperately. "Go on, Skinney! Own up! You can see he means to worm it out of us!"

Skinner never felt more inclined to kick the Owl of the Remove than he did at that moment. When Bunter chose to let his tongue run away with him, he was the most exasperating mortal on earth.

"If you do not speak up, Skinner, and tell me the plain, unvarnished truth, I shall flog you most soundly!"

"It—it was a certificate Linley had, sir," said Skinner, seeing that evasion would be useless while Billy Bunter was present. "All the chaps took exception to it, so I smashed it up."

"And why, pray, did they take exception to it? Who sent Linley the certificate?"

"The S.P.C.K., sir," said Skinner, with a curl of the lip.

"What! You mean to tell me that Linley received a certificate from a society with such sound and manly principles, and that you ruthlessly destroyed it?"

"Ahem! We don't think much of societies like that, sir."

"Who's 'we'?" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Myself, sir, and Bunter, and Bolsover, sir."

"Three of the most blackguardly boys in the Remove!" sniffed the Form-master. "I feel sure that all the decent boys in my class approve of such a society. Am I right, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir."

Somebody began to hiss. The sound seemed to rouse the Form-master to fury.

"Who made that objectionable noise?" he asked.

No reply.

"It emanated from the back row. Was it you, Nugent?"

"Certainly not, sir!" said Frank indignantly. "I'm with Wharton, heart and soul!"

"Was it you, Singh?"

"The reply, honoured sahib, is in the negative."

"Snoop?"

"Of course not, sir!"

"Oh, you rotten fibber, Snoopy!" came Bunter's voice.

"Did you hear Snoop hiss, Bunter?"

"Yes, sir," replied the Owl of the Remove. He was aware that he had shown up in a very sorry light over the certificate affair, and considered that if he helped to bring Snoop & Co. to judgment Mr. Quelch would let him down lightly.

"Snoop, stand forward!"

Giving Bunter the glare of a basilisk, Sidney James Snoop came out before the class.

"He wasn't the only one, sir," said Bunter piously. "There was Stott and Bolsover."

"Come out, the boys named!"

Stott and Bolsover joined Snoop in front of the class.

"Hold out your hands!" commanded Mr. Quelch sternly.

The culprits did so.

Swish, swish, swish!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Now go to your places, and let me have no recurrence of such a disgraceful exhibition."

Squeezing their hands tightly, and vowing dire threats of vengeance upon Bunter, the three juniors slunk back to their seats.

"I am glad to see, Wharton, that you and your chums take a reasonable and manly view of this matter. There was certainly no harm in Linley receiving a certificate from a religious organisation, provided he did not resort to unseemly bragging. For the wanton destruction of that certificate, Skinner, you will be reported to Dr. Locke for a public flogging!"

Mark Linley stood up in his place.

"Well, Linley?"

"I'd rather you weren't too hard on Skinner, sir. It was only thoughtlessness on his part. And I can easily get another certificate."

Mr. Quelch reflected.

"Very well," he said at length. "Bearing in mind your generous appeal, and the fact that Cherry has already—ahem!—punished Skinner, I will let a caning meet the case. Hold out your hand, Skinner!"

The cad of the Remove obeyed. Mr. Quelch gave him four stinging cuts on each hand, and Skinner, who was not of the stuff of which heroes are made, roared with unrestrained anguish.

"You will now apologise to Linley, Skinner, and go to your place."

Skinner mumbled out a few words of apology, and Mark Linley nodded his head by way of acceptance. Then the anti-Church crusader crawled to his place, feeling more dead than alive.

"As for you, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, "you are a wicked and untruthful boy, and I should be perfectly justified in administering severe chastisement!"

"Oh, sir!"

"As it is, however, I incline to the belief that you are more fool than rogue. You will write five hundred lines of Virgil."

"Thank you, sir!"

"And you, Cherry, will refrain from such objectionable antics in future; although I must express my admiration of the way you stood by Linley. I like a boy who never goes back on his friends."

Bob blushed, and went to his place; and morning lessons began in real earnest. And ever and anon came a dismal groan from Harold Skinner, who was beginning to realise the truth of the time-honoured saying that the way of the transgressor is hard.

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THE FOURTH CHAPTER
The Pagans!

"GENTLEMEN of the Remove——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Dry up!"

"We have met together on this suspicious occasion——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"To make a bold stand against tyranny and rank injustice!"

"Bravo!"

"Go and eat coke!"

Harold Skinner stood on a form in the Rag after tea, addressing a strangely-mixed audience. He was backed up by Bolsover, Snoop, and Stott, who stood in front of him, and shouted "Hear, hear!" to everything he said.

Harry Wharton & Co. had put in an appearance, too. They wanted to know what Skinner was up to, and were quite prepared to take a hand if necessary.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows! We've stood it long enough!" pursued Skinner. "This is a free country, is it not?"

"What-ho!"

"And yet we are compelled—compelled, mind you!—to attend church three times a day!"

And Bob Cherry commenced to sing, to a well-known refrain:

"I know a little school,
Not far away,
Where church-going is the rule
Three times a day!
Oh, how they tear their hair
When the old man doth declare
That they must worship there
Three times a day!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order, please!" roared Bolsover major.

"Must we take it lying down?" Skinner went on, waxing eloquent.

"Certainly!" grinned Frank Nugent.

And he gave Skinner's form a violent shove, causing the orator to topple over in an undignified heap on to the floor.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner picked himself up, his face crimson.

"You rotters!" he roared. "Ain't you going to listen to reason?"

"How can we while you're talking?" asked Bob Cherry innocently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bolsover and Snoop placed the form into position again, and effectually safeguarded it against further attack.

"Look here!" yelled Skinner. "This school's turning into a sort of prigs' convent! They're trying to make us devote all our time to searching the scriptures and digesting the Twelve Commandments!"

"That's something new, anyway," said Vernon-Smith. "I thought there were only ten. Who tacked on the other two?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"None of us seem to have any spirit," said Skinner, ignoring the interruption.

"I should think not!" exclaimed Squiff! "Strong drink ain't allowed on the premises, and——"

"Dry up!" roared Skinner. "I put it to the meeting at large: Is it playing the game to force us into going to church?"

"No!"
"Rather not!"
"Shame!"
Harry Wharton & Co. looked serious. Quite a lot of fellows seemed to be siding with Skinner all of a sudden. It was more than likely that the Head's decision would be extremely unpopular among the more turbulent members of the Remove.
"Who will join with me," demanded Skinner, warming to the subject, "in a colossal crusade against the Church? What benefit does a fellow derive from going? If he's a decent chap, he remains decent; if he's a cad, then on Monday morning he remains as much a cad as ever!"
"So I've noticed," said Bob Cherry pointedly.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Prigs and Puritans are barred!" Skinner went on. "Good Little George and Perfect Percy can get out! And as for the Head's notice, I solemnly set it at defiance! Now, then, who is on my side?"
"I am!" came in a tremendous roar from several Removites.
"Up with your hands, then!"
Nearly a dozen hands shot up, and the Famous Five looked considerably dismayed. Skinner seemed booked to secure quite a large following.
"One moment, gentlemen!" said Skinner. "Let me take your names. Bolsover, Snoop, Stott, Fish, Bunter, Hazeldene, Morgan, Trevor, Treluce, Wun Lung, and Todd."
"Todd!" gasped Harry Wharton.
He wondered if he saw aright, for there was Peter Todd, the leader of No. 7 Study, calmly putting up his hand with the rest!
"You—you're not serious, Toddy, old man?" gasped Wharton.
Peter nodded.
"I was never more serious in my life," he said.
"But—but you mean to say you're up against the Church?"
"Christianity has been proved a failure," said Peter Todd, with conviction. "Look at this war. You're not going to tell me that such awful carnage could obtain in a Christian world!"
"Then you're an Atheist?" asked Harry, aghast.
"Put it that way if you like."
The Famous Five almost fell down. They could hardly believe the evidence of their ears. Peter Todd, who had proved himself to be such a thoroughly sound and good-hearted fellow in the past, was an Atheist! At least, he didn't acknowledge the Christian Faith, which amounted to the same thing.
"Don't throw in your lot with Skinner, for Heaven's sake!" pleaded Wharton. "Think it over! It's madness to go against the Church!"
"When I want your opinion, Wharton, I'll ask for it," said Peter Todd.
And he turned his back abruptly upon the captain of the Remove.
"Good biz!" exclaimed Skinner, as he entered the last name with a flourish. "Any more recruits?"
No one else stirred.
"Then these'll be enough to lick the Germans with—I mean, to do the trick. We'll call ourselves the Pagans—what?"
"That's the idea," said Bolsover. "Twelve good men and true, banded together to put the kybosh on tyranny and to uphold the rights of Greyfriars scholars."
There was something decidedly humorous in announcing that Bunter and Fish and Wun Lung and Snoop were "good men and true." The only good thing and true about Bunter was his demolishment of a square meal; while the others were the last fellows in the world to merit such a recommendation.
Harry Wharton sprang upon a form.
"Gentlemen——"
"Yah!"
"Go home!"
Skinner's a rotten cad and a rank outsider!"
"Tell us something we don't know!" urged Bob Cherry.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"He's a fellow of no principle," pursued Harry, "and his latest scheme is as wild as they make 'em. I don't want to appear priggish, but what I say is this: Let no chap turn his back on the Faith which he has been brought up to observe!"
"Hear, hear!"

It was a tremendous demonstration of encouragement and approval from Wharton's chums. Whatever happened, Skinner was not destined to have things entirely his own way.
"These Pagans must be smashed," Wharton went on, "before they get dangerous. We can't sleep comfortably in our beds to-night with the knowledge that we've let a set of blasphemous schemers go unpunished. Rush 'em!"
At Wharton's signal, the rest of the fellows fairly threw themselves upon Skinner & Co., and the next moment a wild and whirling battle was in progress.
It did not last long. Bolsover and Peter Todd were the only fellows who put up anything approaching a desperate resistance. The others were driven back before the doughty blows of the Famous Five and their supporters, and speedily gave up the ghost.
"If you're a sensible chap, Skinney," said Bob Cherry, knocking Skinner down, and then sitting on him, "you'll drop this rot for good and all. It's madness—sheer, unadulterated lunacy—to go against the Church, and it's the action of a downright rotter!"
"Lemme gerrup!" gasped Skinner, who felt that he was on the verge of suffocation.
"Not this evening, my infant!" said Bob Cherry grimly. "Some other evening! You must give me your word first that you'll chuck up this Pagan bizney."
"Never!" panted Skinner.
Meanwhile, the other Pagans had been effectually conquered, save Peter Todd, who, with his back to the wall, was hitting out fiercely at Frank Nugent. The scene was an animated one, and one which Milton might have described as "confusion worse confounded."
The door of the Rag was thrown open, and Loder of the Sixth entered, with an ashplant in his hand. He wasted no time in vain questionings. Striding into the room, he gave Todd and Nugent a stinging cut each with the ashplant, causing them to howl with pain and rage.
"You young rascals!" snorted the enraged prefect. "Clear out of this, all the lot of you! Wharton, I presume you are the ringleader in this outrage? Remove yourself from Bolsover's chest, and take a hundred lines!"
Harry Wharton saw that Loder was not to be reasoned with, so he submitted quietly, and the Famous Five, with a final word of warning to the Pagans as to what would befall them if they got up to any tricks, proceeded to No. 1 Study for prep.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Skinner Astonishes the Natives!

"CHARLIE CHAPLIN!"
"Who?"
"What?"
"Which?"
"Charlie Chaplin!" said Skinner.
It was Sunday, and he was seated at tea in his study, with Snoop and Stott and Bolsover.
So far the Pagans had emulated the celebrated Brer Rabbit, and laid low. Like good little boys, as Bolsover expressed it, they had put in an appearance at Divine Service and Matins that morning. Most of the fellows imagined that Skinner had bitten off more than he could chew, and that he was not going to defy the authorities after all. But they did not know Harold Skinner.
Sunday teas at Greyfriars were usually on a lavish scale, and that which was set out in Skinner's study was no exception. Skinner's pals had been devoting their exclusive attention to one of Mrs. Mimble's finest ice-cakes, when their chief suddenly, and without ceremony, had dropped his knife, taken a sheet of printed paper from his pocket, and exclaimed:
"Charlie Chaplin!"
"That's the laughter-merchant, isn't it?" said Bolsover. "What about him?"
"He's on view to-night at the Courtfield Cinema."
"Well?"
"And I think I'll run over and see him," said

Skinner thoughtfully. "It's a jolly fine film, I've been told."

The other three stared at their leader in undisguised amazement.

"I suppose you forget," said Stott, with heavy sarcasm, "that it's Sunday?"

"Not a bit of it," replied Skinner. "The cinema's open, all the same. "Half the proceeds of Sunday nights go to the Red Cross Fund, so I shall be acting from the highest patriotic principles if I go over and give 'em my kind patronage."

"You'll be acting like a confounded fool!" snorted Bolsover. "Who d'you think's going to give you a pass-out of gates on Sunday night to visit a picture palace?"

"Nobody."

"Well, dry up, then!"

"I shall take French leave," said Skinner calmly.

"What!"

"Getting deaf in your old age? I shall go at my own risk, of course. Better than attending Evensong, and listening to dry sermons, any day of the week. Besides, this fellow Chaplin's a humorist, so I shall pick up a good many tips from him. Matter of fact, I'm going to persuade my pater to get me a job with a cinema company one of these days."

"But—but you realise what it means if you get collared?" asked Bolsover, in an awed voice.

"Of course I do, fathead! It means that I should jolly well go out of Greyfriars on my neck. But you trust your Uncle Harold. He's too downy a bird to fall foul of the authorities."

"Well, it's a risk I wouldn't take, for a pension," said Snoop.

"I can quite believe it, Snoopy. But, then, you're such a hopeless funk, you know!"

"Look here—"

"Oh, don't row, for goodness' sake!" said Bolsover.

He saw that it would be no use attempting to dissuade Skinner from his purpose. The cad of the Remove was as recklessly inclined as Vernon-Smith had been in the past. Indeed, the mantle of the Bounder seemed to have fallen upon Skinner.

"They're going to have calling-over just before church every Sunday now," said Skinner, "so that nobody dodges the services. But you'll answer for me, won't you, Stott?"

"Rely on me," said Stott. "But I really think you're mad, Skinney, old man! You might be recognised by somebody in Courtfield, and the chopper will come down then with a vengeance!"

"The chances are a hundred to one against. The masters, most of 'em, will be at church. And even if anybody known to the school happens to be in Courtfield, they won't spot me in the dark."

"It's a risk I wouldn't care to run, anyway," said Bolsover, "and I'm not a funk!"

"Well, I'm going, so there's an end of it!" said Skinner. "Pass the sardines!"

And the meal proceeded.

A few minutes later Peter Todd came into the study. He was looking rather grim.

"Hallo, Toddy! Take a seat, old man!" said Skinner amiably. "Which will you have—cigars or nuts?"

Todd helped himself liberally to the cake, and nibbled at it thoughtfully.

"It's about time we did something," he said. "I thought this Pagan idea was going to be something great, and flourish like the flowers in May."

"So it is, O King! We haven't got into our stride yet. Give a chap a giddy chance. We'll have a discussion during the week, and fix up a footer match for Sunday afternoon."

Peter Todd gasped.

"You're going to play footer on—on Sunday?" he stuttered.

"Certainly! It's all part of our crusade."

"But, my dear chump, if we're seen flaunting about on Little Side in our footer togs on a Sunday we shall be sacked on the spot!"

Skinner regarded the speaker pityingly.

"When I was a child," he said, "I thought as a child, I spake as a child, and I understood as a child. But after I had had my eye-teeth cut I became a different being. D'you imagine, Toddy, that I'd be such an ass as to play in public?"

"Where will you play, then?"

"In my younger days," said Skinner, with the reminiscent air of a man of eighty, "I used to know a secluded meadow in Friardale, admirably suited to our purpose. We will hie thither."

"Oh!" exclaimed Peter Todd. "I didn't think of that! It's quite a ripping wheeze!"

"I'm just the chap for ripping wheezes," said Skinner modestly. "They fall from my mighty brain as thick and as fast as leaves in Vallombrosa. F'rinstance, I was inspired to go and see the celebrated Charlie Chaplin to-night."

"What d'you mean?"

"He's actually got the nerve to buzz over to Courtfield Cinema while we're in church!" explained Bolsover.

Peter Todd almost fell out of his chair.

"You must be mad, Skinney!" he gasped. "Stark, staring mad!"

"I believe Bolsover has already said something to that effect," said Skinner. "You may both be right; but, anyway, there's method in my madness. I'm going to do something which no Greyfriars fellow, past or present, has ever done before. It'll be handed down to all the future generations."

"Especially if you get the sack!" said Todd drily.

"I'm prepared to chance that little emergency. Coming, Toddy?"

"I wouldn't be found dead inside a picture-show on a Sunday night!" said Peter Todd, with emphasis. I don't mind Sunday footer—in fact I'm rather taken with the idea, but I draw the line at going out of my way to meet trouble."

"All right, then; we won't come to blows over it," said Skinner. "As leader and founder of the Pagans, it's up to me to do something worth talking about. If I'm bowled out, I sha'n't whine. It's a decent adventure, anyway. And I'm anxious to see this Essanay mirth merchant."

"Oh, well," said Peter Todd, who, having finished the cake, was looking for fresh worlds to conquer, "if you're so jolly anxious to put a halter round your neck, go ahead. Don't mind me."

Skinner looked at his watch.

"Time I made a move," he observed. "I want to see every film right through. Good-bye, you fellows!"

He took his school-cap from the door-peg, and thrust it into his breast pocket for the time being. Then he made tracks for the Head's garden.

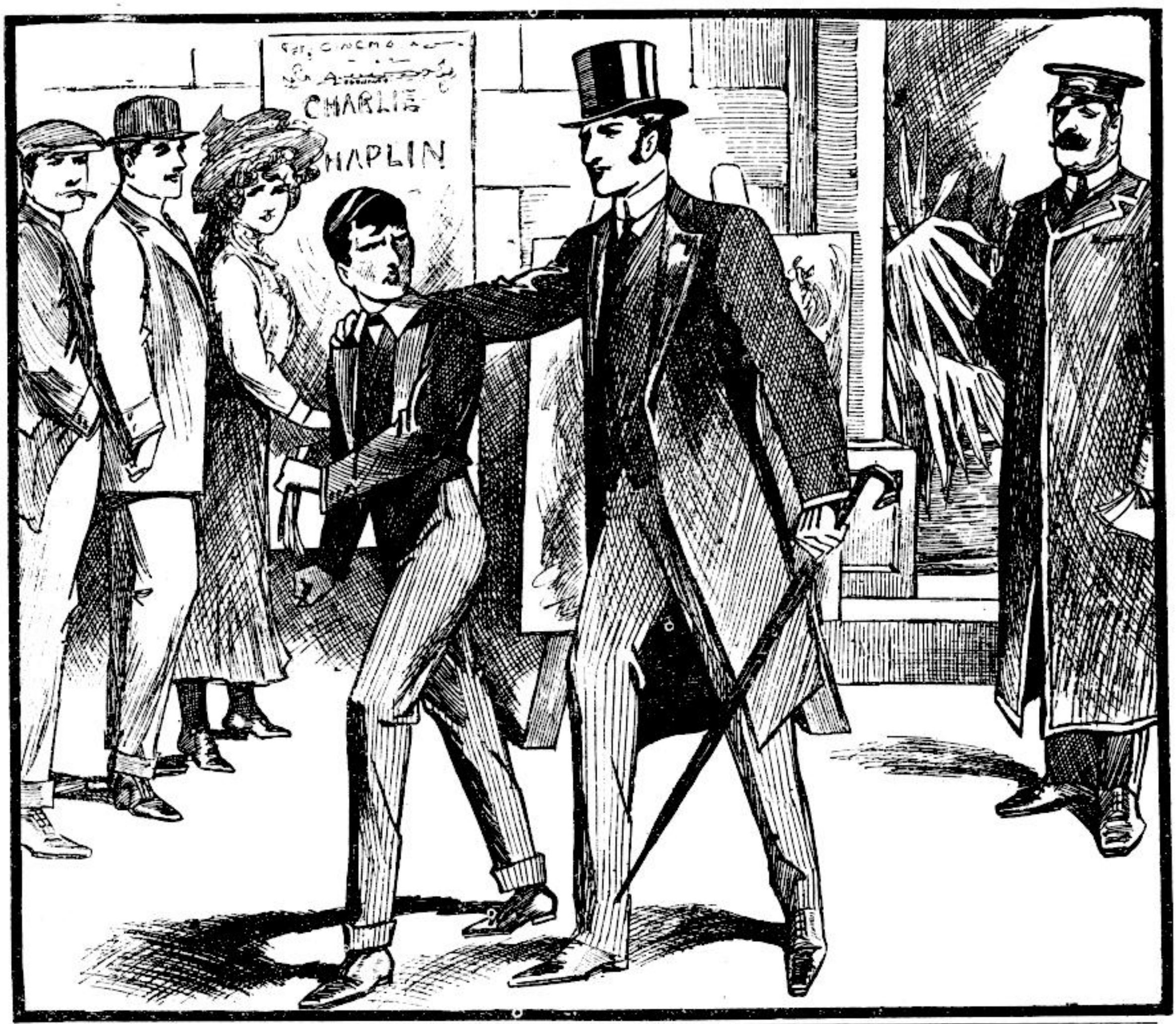
The evening shadows had set in, and it was not difficult work to shake the dust of Greyfriars from his feet undetected. In another moment the cad of the Remove breathed freely. One of the worst parts of his mission was over.

It was necessary for Skinner to walk into Courtfield, the local trains from Friardale being few and far between on Sundays. To pursue the main road, too, would have been a most risky proceeding, so the junior set off across the fields.

Like Sam Weller's knowledge of London, Skinner's knowledge of the intricate side-walks and footpaths was "extensive and peculiar." In spite of the pervading gloom, his footsteps did not once falter, and in less than an hour he was confronted with the lights of the little country town.

The cinema had just been opened to the public, and quite a crowd of small youths rushed frantically past the attendants and into the dimly-lit hall. Apart from the Charlie Chaplin film, a long and powerful drama was to be shown, as evidenced by the loud-mouthed announcements of one of the attendants.

"Now showing! No waiting! We're always on the move! The world in motion! The world on pictures! Great new drama, 'The Reformation of Reggie,' complete in three parts! Thrilling pictures at popular prices! Profits for the Red Cross Fund! Walk up there!"



A hand was suddenly clapped on to Skinner's shoulder, and a voice, which rang like a death-knell in the ears of the adventurous junior, exclaimed: "Skinner! What are you doing here?" The intruder was Mr. Quelch!
(*See Chapter* 5.)

Skinner "walked up." He paid for a sixpenny seat, and was glad to get into the semi-gloom of the picture palace.

Once in his seat, he breathed more freely. The chance of detection was at a minimum now.

Skinner extracted a cheap-and-nasty packet of cigarettes from his pocket, and prepared to thoroughly enjoy himself.

"The Reformation of Reggie" was a domestic drama, and not quite in Skinner's line. Nevertheless, he chuckled intermittently at the various comicalities, and felt sorry when the first part came to an abrupt ending.

Then the lights were turned up, and Skinner's eye roved furtively round the crowded seats.

The Courtfield Cinema boasted two boxes, and the Greyfriars fellow gave a start as he recognised in one of them the portly figure of Mr. Bunn, who owned the teashop and confectioner's establishment in Friardale.

What if Mr. Bunn should see and identify him! The thought caused a cold sweat to break out on Skinner's brow. Reckless though he was, he could picture the Head's wrath if Mr. Bunn reported him. It would be terrible in its intensity.

From that time onward the pictures had no fascination for Skinner. He was fearful lest the stout tradesman should see him, and possibly expose him in public.

"What rotten luck!" he muttered to himself. "Fancy old Bunn shoving his nose in here! I should have thought he'd have gone to church."

There was only one thing for it. Every minute added to his chances of detection, and the sooner he got out of the picture palace the better.

The Charlie Chaplin film was next, and a stir of anticipation ran round the audience. Charlie was a hot favourite with the Courtfielders.

But Skinner, dearly as he would have loved to remain, felt that he had better glide swiftly out. It was almost a miracle that Mr. Bunn had not observed him up to the present.

He rose to his feet and passed out. Pausing just outside the entrance, he blinked in the unaccustomed glare of lights.

"Thank goodness!" he breathed. "I was in agony that old Bunn would spot me! However, I'm out of the wood now."

But even as he spoke a hand was suddenly clapped on to his shoulder, and a voice, which rang like a death-knell in the ears of the adventurous junior, exclaimed:

"Skinner! What are you doing here?"

The intruder was no less terrible a personage than Mr. Quelch!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Fate of a Fool!

HAROLD SKINNER was conscious of one all-pervading wish at that moment, namely, that the earth would open and swallow him up. He was caught red-handed by the very last person he would have expected to meet in Courtfield at such a time—his Form-master.

Fervently Skinner wished that he had followed out the excellent advice of Bolsover, Todd & Co. and remained behind. But it was too late to think of that now. He cowered in the grasp of Mr. Quelch, and a shiver ran through his frame as the awful seriousness of his present plight was borne in upon his mind.

"Answer me, boy!" commanded Mr. Quelch, giving the terrified Skinner a vigorous shake. "I demand an explanation at once of your presence here, in Courtfield, or things will go hard with you!"

"I—I——" stammered Skinner. Then he stopped short. What could he say? What sort of explanation could he give? He had avoided the dreaded Mr. Bunn, only to run into the arms of a far more formidable individual. With all his cunning, with all his fabricating abilities, Skinner was cornered, and he knew it.

"I am waiting!" said Mr. Quelch grimly.

Quite a little crowd of sightseers and busybodies had gathered round, and were gazing at the extraordinary scene with undisguised interest.

"Can we get away from this—this crowd, sir?" quavered Skinner.

Mr. Quelch coloured a little as he noted the lookers-on.

"Very well," he said acidly. "We will walk back to Greyfriars. Now, Skinner, why have you not been to church with the rest of the boys?"

"I can't stick it, sir," said Skinner, with frank defiance.

The cad of the Remove was reckless now. He had fallen into the hands of the Amalekites with a vengeance.

"You—you cannot what?" asked Mr. Quelch, in a rasping voice.

"Stick it—ahem!—tolerate it, sir."

"In short, you prefer picture palaces?"

"That's it, sir."

Mr. Quelch could hardly believe his ears. Quite a number of boys in his Form were Tartars; but few indeed had ever gone to such lengths as this.

"Do you mean to tell me, Skinner," he exclaimed, "that you deliberately absented yourself from the evening service to come over here and witness the actions of a few revolting men from the West?"

"They're not revolting, sir," said Skinner stoutly. "Charlie Chaplin's fine, sir!"

"Do not presume to bandy words with me, Skinner!" roared Mr. Quelch. "You are depraved, unworthy of the name of boy! But I find consolation in the fact that this will doubtless be your last night at Greyfriars."

However much consolation Mr. Quelch may have derived from such a circumstance, Harold Skinner found none. His heart was very black and bitter just then against Fate, and against things in general. Never could he have been the victim of more cruel luck. What was Quelchy doing in Courtfield on a Sunday night?

The Form-master's next words explained matters.

"By a fortunate chance—unfortunate from your standpoint," said Mr. Quelch, compressing his lips—"I came over this evening to deputise for the organist at Courtfield Parish Church, as he is ill. But for that, your rascality might have passed undetected. I am very glad indeed that I have been able to lay you by the heels."

Skinner said nothing. He tramped moodily along by Mr. Quelch's side, feeling as if the whole affair were part of some strange dream.

At last the gates of Greyfriars came in sight, and Gosling, the porter, almost fell down as he saw Skinner come in with Mr. Quelch.

"Which I never saw Master Skinner go out with you, sir!" he exclaimed.

"I suppose not," said Mr. Quelch drily. "There are doubtless ways and means of quitting the school of which you are in ignorance. Which way did you come out, Skinner?"

"Through the Head's garden, sir."

"Ah, I thought so! In future, I will ask the prefects to be more vigilant."

Master and boy entered the Close, and Gosling clanged the gates to behind them.

"You will proceed to your dormitory, Skinner," said Mr. Quelch, "and I will inform Dr. Locke of your conduct first thing in the morning. He will not wish to be disturbed to-night."

"Very well, sir!"

Skinner started to walk away, and the Remove-master called him back.

"Did I understand you to say that you were antagonistic towards the Church, Skinner?" he asked.

"Yes, sir!"

Mr. Quelch looked very grave.

"That is a most unparalleled attitude for a lad of your age to adopt," he said, his voice becoming more kindly. "Although you will probably be expelled from Greyfriars to-morrow for your conduct, I should be sorry to see you leave the school with such a wicked prejudice rooted in your mind. Do you mean to say you are an Atheist?"

"More or less, sir!"

"You do not believe in the existence of a Deity?"

"No, sir."

"That is an awful statement for a boy to make, Skinner! Supposing you were brought to death's door to-night? Supposing now, at this moment, some terrible illness seized upon you? Would you not seek Divine aid?"

"I can't say that I would, sir!"

"Then I feel sorry for you, my boy! I should never have thought any pupil of mine could have held to such misguided principles! You must not imagine, Skinner, that a Form-master is a person who is always trying to catch a boy out in some misdemeanour. Far from it. He always strives to be a friend, as well as a disciplinarian; and, although I have seldom spoken to my boys on the subject of religion, I honestly thought that every one of them was, in his heart, a devout Christian. It pains me more than I can say to think otherwise!"

And Mr. Quelch looked so genuinely distressed that even Skinner felt certain compunctions at that moment. As a matter of fact, he believed in Providence as much as any other boy, and only maintained that he didn't out of sheer bravado.

He was tempted to make the admission to Mr. Quelch, but he hesitated. And he who hesitates is lost.

"I can only presume that you are incorrigible," said the Remove-master, "and I hope, for your own sake, that you will pull yourself together in future."

And Mr. Quelch went on his way.

The Remove dormitory was in a buzz when Harold Skinner entered. Everyone had heard by now of his daring excursion into Courtfield, and everyone was on tenterhooks to know how he had fared.

"Well," inquired Bolsover major, "did you work the giddy oracle?"

Skinner sat down heavily on his bed.

"I've been bowled out," he said.

"Phew!"

"Who the dickens spotted you, Skinney?" asked Snoop fearfully.

"Quelchy."

"My hat!"

"Told you so!" said Peter Todd. "Why couldn't you take your uncle's advice, Skinney, and stay behind?"

"It's easy to be wise after the event!" growled Skinner. "How the deuce was I to know Quelchy would be prowling about in Courtfield? It was vile luck!"

"Are you sure he recognised you?" asked Stott.

"Recognised me? Well, he ought to have done, considering I ran right into his arms on coming out of the giddy cinema!"

"Great Scott!"

"What an inglorious start for the Pagans!" chuckled Nugent. "They begin by letting their leader go out of Greyfriars on his neck!"

"I haven't gone yet," said Skinner.

"Well, I shouldn't think the Head would be bubbling

over with the quality of mercy, after that," said Bob Cherry. "You've put your foot in it this time, Skinney, and no error!"

"Oh, dry up!" muttered Skinner. "Is that one of the things church-going teaches you—to pile on a chap when he's down?"

Bob Cherry flushed.

"It's your own fault, every bit," he said. "Why couldn't you behave with common decency? But dash it all! It's no use talking of decency to a cad like you! I'm going to sleep."

A good many fellows bombarded Skinner with questions, but received very unsatisfactory answers from the cad of the Remove; and after a few minutes silence reigned throughout the dormitory.

That night was one of the most painful nights within Harold Skinner's range of recollection. He was awake for hours, a prey to bitter thoughts; and it was not until the first grey gleams of dawn arose that he sank into a troubled and uneasy slumber.

Shortly after rising-bell Wingate of the Sixth looked into the dormitory, with the intimation that there was to be an assembly in Big Hall as soon as everybody was dressed. Harold Skinner regarded the announcement as if it were his own death-warrant.

Mr. Quelch had reported the affair to the Head. But what alternative had he? The offence was far too serious for the Form-master's own jurisdiction. A boy had deliberately "cut" church in order to visit the local cinema—and on Sunday night!

The rest of the Pagans congratulated themselves that they were well out of a nasty hole. For it was quite on the cards that Skinner would receive the order of the boot.

Dr. Locke, when he rustled into Big Hall, looked very grave.

"Boys," he said quietly, "I have called you together this morning that I might make an exhibition of a boy who is nothing more or less than a viper to this school."

"Hear, hear!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Last night," said the Head, "the boy in question had the extraordinary effrontery to disregard the notice I placed on the board, and to visit a vulgar cinematograph show in Courtfield!"

A murmur of astonishment ran round the crowded Hall. There were many who had not yet heard of Skinner's nocturnal escapade.

"By a fortunate chance, one of the masters encountered the culprit when the latter came out of the place," Dr. Locke went on. "Such an offence merits instant expulsion. Skinner of the Remove, stand forward!"

The cad of the Remove obeyed, flinching under the Head's stern glance.

"What have you to say for yourself?"

"Nothing, sir."

"You admit that you are the boy in question?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Then I should be quite justified in sending you home by the next train. However, I have reason to believe that your father has fallen upon bad times, and I have no desire to overburden him still further with news of your expulsion. On this occasion a public flogging shall be made to meet the case. But listen to me, Skinner. If you ever transgress again, in a similar way, I shall have no recourse but to send you home at once. Gosling, come forward, and take this boy upon your shoulders!"

The school-porter, who had been loitering just inside the doorway, shuffled up to the dais. He took Skinner up, and then the Head produced the heavy birch, and proceeded to flog the hapless junior as he had never been flogged before.

"Oh! Yah! Yow! Help! Yarooop!" shrieked the wretched victim. "Ow-ow-ow!"

"Beastly funk!" muttered Frank Nugent, with a curl of the lip.

"Reminds you of a slaughter-house, don't it?" grinned Bob Cherry.

Unlike Vernon-Smith in the olden days, Skinner failed to take his deserts with stoical fortitude. The Bounder had been hard as nails, and would have borne the most gigantic public flogging without so much as a murmur; but with Skinner it was different.

The scene was over at last, and when the Head desisted

Skinner was howling for mercy. His fellow-Pagans could not have felt particularly proud of their chief at that moment.

"Let the flogging I have just administered be a lesson to you, you wretched boy!" said Dr. Locke sternly. "You are an utter reprobate, and may account yourself extremely fortunate that I have not expelled you in disgrace! A recurrence of this affair, and I shall do so! In future you will perhaps deem it more expedient to follow the straight path!"

But the Head did not know Harold Skinner.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Death of Skinner!

ONE would naturally have thought that, after the scene in Big Hall, Skinner would have written "Finis" to his list of nocturnal escapades and turned over a new leaf, but such was not the case.

The terrific flogging he had received at the Head's hands only tended to make the cad of the Remove more reckless than ever.

"What about Sunday footer?" he asked, meeting Peter Todd in the Close after morning lessons.

"Still going strong?" asked Peter, in amazement. "I thought you'd have chucked this Pagan bizney after what happened this morning."

"Not I!" answered Skinner. "I'm going on with the little game until the Head gives us our rights! When he chooses to make church-going voluntary, and not compulsory, I'll ring off!"

"Well, I don't mind joining in Sunday footer," said Peter Todd. "How are you going to wangle it, though? There's only a dozen of us, so we shouldn't be able to have a match."

"Oh, yes, we should! What price Highcliffe?"

"Highcliffe!" gasped Peter.

"Certainly! Old Ponsonby and his set spend a pretty wild sort of Sunday as it is, and they wouldn't be averse to a little game in the afternoon."

"But I'm not on speaking terms with Ponsonby. He's a cad and a waster!"

"Oh, bury the hatchet, for goodness' sake, Toddy! No good sticking to that silly feud which Wharton started. Ponsonby's got his faults, I admit, but he ain't a prig. He'll be able to raise an eleven just about up to our weight."

"Nearly all our chaps'll be passengers!" said Peter. "There's Bunter and Fish, and Wun Lung and Snoop—all ornaments. To put it candidly, you're not a Steve Bloomer, Skinney!"

"I've never swanked I was," said Skinner. "Still, there's such a thing as rising to the occasion, you know."

"Hazel's a good goalie," reflected Peter Todd, "and I can put up a pretty decent show at centre-half. Morgan and Trevor and Treluce are all right, and Bolsover ought to be a reliable full-back."

"The team's not at all dusty," said Skinner, his face lighting up. "It's quite good enough for Ponsonby & Co., anyway, and we ought to give 'em a good game."

"When will you fix things up?"

"To-night. I've already arranged to meet Pon after lights out. We can discuss which meadow will suit our purpose, and arrange to rig up the goalposts, and all that sort of thing."

"But do you seriously mean to say you're going to break bounds after what's happened?"

"Of course!"

"You mad duffer! It'll mean the sack instanter if you're spotted."

"Yes; but the last three words make all the difference!" chuckled Skinner. "I sha'n't be spotted. Quelchy and the prefects would never dream that I'd go the pace after being collared last night."

"Well, you've got a jolly sight more nerve than I'd ever have given you credit for. What time are you meeting Pon?"

"Ten o'clock."

"That means that you'll be absent from the dorm when Wingate turns the lights out?"

"I suppose so."

"Why, you frabjous dummy, you'll be nabbed as sure as fate."

Skinner regarded his companion more in sorrow than in anger.

"Ever heard of a bed being made up to represent a guileless schoolboy in repose?" he asked.

"Oh, I twig! You'll make up a dummy? That's all very well; but supposing Wingate asks for you?"

"Look here," began Skinner wrathfully, "if you're going to chuck cold water over everything I say or do I shall get fed up."

"I'm merely advising you for your own good," said Peter Todd. "Real sporting adventures are all right, but I don't hold with a chap taking silly risks, and fairly asking for trouble. Sunday footer's different. We can have a high old time in some secluded meadow, and you blades can enjoy a quiet smoke during the interval, and probably no one'll be the wiser. But to break bounds the first night after being bowled out is sheer idiocy!"

"I'm going, all the same," said Skinner determinedly.

Peter Todd saw that argument would be useless. Skinner was bent on keeping the appointment with Ponsonby, and wild horses would not have turned him from his purpose.

He went into the Remove dormitory half an hour before bedtime that evening in order to make up the dummy.

Alonzo Todd, the benevolent Duffer of the Remove, followed him into the dormitory, and shook a bony forefinger reprovingly at him.

"My dear Skinner," he began, "it is with a feeling of deep and sincere regret that I observe you have taken to the broad road that leads to destruction."

"Get out!" said Skinner curtly.

"I further understand," Alonzo went on, unheeding, "that you are endeavouring to scatter the seeds of Atheism broadcast throughout the school. That, my dear Skinner, is a most wicked and wanton proceeding. I have here some religious tracts——"

"Will you get out?" roared Skinner.

"A perusal of which will be highly beneficial to you. The sentiments they contain will appeal to your better nature, the possession of which, however, is a matter for doubt. Pause, my dear fellow, on the verge of your folly and degradation. Think! Renounce the works of the devil, and become a convert to the salvation of souls!"

Alonzo Todd was waxing so eloquent that he did not observe the dangerous gleam in Skinner's eyes.

"My Uncle Benjamin would be shocked—nay, disgusted—at your perjurous slander of the Christian faith. Oh, pause, my dear friend! Pause and reflect! Let my words move you!"

They did. Skinner sprang forward, causing Alonzo to drop his precious tracts—doubtless originally intended for the inhabitants of darkest Africa—and bolt for the door.

Skinner implanted a lusty kick in the rear of the retreating Duffer; then he picked up the wordy tracts and hurled them through the doorway after their owner.

"Hang that religious maniac!" he muttered. "I shall be late for my appointment with Pon!"

He proceeded to arrange the bolster and some clothes so as to represent a dummy figure; then, his task accomplished, the leader of the Pagans descended the stairs, and crossed the Close to the old wall, which he noiselessly scaled in the gloom.

Though baffled in his endeavours to reform Skinner, Alonzo Todd was not beaten. About five minutes after his unceremonious exit from the Remove dormitory he entered it again, blinking in the gloom.

"Skinner, my dear fellow!"

There was no response. Alonzo tiptoed towards the bed, and discerned the outlined form of a sleeper.

"If you are asleep, my dear Skinner, I will not seek to disturb you. But why have you retired to rest so early? I wish to point out to you the error of your ways. I entreat you to place full confidence in one who is fully conversant with the curse of Atheism."

Still silence.

"He must be asleep!" exclaimed the innocent Alonzo. "How he can obtain slumber, with such a weight of wickedness on his mind, passes my comprehension. I should have thought he would have laid in anguish, his soul racked with excruciating torture. I fear I must rouse him, and bring him to a sense of his folly."

Alonzo put his hand upon the shoulder of the sleeper, or what would have been a shoulder if the sleeper had been there. He shook the dummy gently.

If the dummy had been Harold Skinner the action would most assuredly have roused him.

"Skinner, dear boy, you should not cover your head with the sheet in that way. It is most unhealthy to sleep beneath the bedclothes. My Uncle Benjamin always impressed upon me that such an action was detrimental to a sound constitution. Can you hear me?"

Alonzo paused for a reply, but it did not come. He began to look rather startled.

"Really, Skinner, I know you must be awake, and your failure to answer is nothing but a feeble attempt at a practical joke. Do you realise the enormity of your conduct? Even my Cousin Peter has, I regret to say, fallen under the ban of your wickedness."

The sleeper did not move.

"He who lifts up his hand against the Church shall surely fall," continued Alonzo, in solemn tones. "Nothing can uphold the frauds of Antichrist. Attacks upon the Church and upon the Bible will inevitably recoil upon your own pate. It may even happen, my dear Skinner, that in the height of your persecution of the Established Faith you may be struck dead. Oh, pause, my dear, dear Skinner, and consider your folly! Do not let repentance come too late."

There were tears in the eyes of the guileless Alonzo, for he was deeply and genuinely moved. Sneered at and disdained though he was by many, the good-natured Duffer of the Remove had a heart of gold.

"Skinner, will you speak?" he almost wailed.

Silence.

"Oh, dear! There must be something the matter!" murmured Alonzo. "Perhaps he has fainted, or he has been taken suddenly ill!"

He bent over the bed, but no sound of breathing came to his ears. The figure lay still, inanimate. Was it possible that Skinner was dead?

Alonzo's face went very white. He passed a trembling hand over the sleeper, but could feel no pulsation.

The Duffer of Greyfriars sprang back in alarm. He was shaking from head to foot.

"Skinner's dud-dud-dead!" he muttered, in an awed voice.

Alonzo would have pulled back the bedclothes to make assurance doubly sure, but his nerves were in rags. Dashing out of the dormitory, he flew down the stairs and into the Rag, where Harry Wharton & Co. were playing chess. The look of frozen horror on his face caused Bob Cherry to upset the chess-board with a crash. Bishops and pawns went hurtling to the floor.

"What the dickens is the matter?" asked Harry Wharton, springing to his feet.

"Skinner!" panted Alonzo.

"What about him?"

The bearer of ill tidings controlled himself with a great effort.

"Let his untimely end be a lesson to all who renounce the works of righteousness!" he said, raising a solemn hand into the air. "My poor fellows, brace yourselves up for a terrible shock. Skinner has gone to that bourn from whence no traveller returns. In short, he is dead!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Resurrection!

"DEAD!" echoed the Famous Five, with one breath.

"Most assuredly, my dear fellows," said Alonzo, with almost a sob. "In the midst of his iniquity he has been taken from us."

Harry Wharton grasped the Duffer by the arm and shook him.

"Explain yourself, you silly clown!" he said. "How do you know Skinner's dead? And how did it happen, and where?"

"He breathed his last in the Remove dormitory just

now," explained Alonzo. "Doubtless the heavy load of guilt under which he was labouring was responsible for crushing his spirit. Would that he had been warned in time!"

The Famous Five looked startled. Was it possible that Harold Skinner had suddenly been called to his account?

Cases were on record of fellows who had dropped dead from failure of the heart's action. Was this sorry fate Skinner's?

With one accord the juniors dashed up to the Remove dormitory. Nugent lit the gas, and Harry Wharton threw back the coverlet of Skinner's bed. Then he drew back, shrieking with laughter.

"Hush!" murmured the gentle Alonzo, who had followed the others into the dormitory. "Ribaldry in the presence of the departed is unseemly and unjustified!"

"Departed coke!" sobbed Wharton. "Skinner's no more dead than I am! It's a dummy!"

"What!" yelled the juniors.

"A blessed dummy! Skinner's gone pub-haunting, or something, and he's made the bed up so as Wingate won't twig. Oh, Lonzy, Lonzy! You'll be the death of me!"

"I knew the chap couldn't have shuffled off this mortal coil," said Nugent. "Whom the gods love die young, and they don't love Skinner!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors could afford to laugh now. Their minds were greatly relieved to find that there had been no tragedy. They bore no superfluous love for Skinner, yet they would not have cared to see him ill, let alone dead.

"My dear fellows——" began Alonzo feebly; and the Famous Five roared afresh. They could not help it, for the Duffer's face was a study.

"We'd better leave this cheap imitation of Skinner here," said Bob Cherry at length. "We don't want the chap to be bowled out, though he deserves it, after going the pace like this."

He rearranged the bed in its original state, and then the Famous Five went down to resume their interrupted game of chess, laughing heartily.

Meanwhile, Skinner was very much alive. He had met Ponsonby of Highcliffe according to contract, and the two young rascals repaired to the Cross Keys in Friardale, where they discussed the situation uppermost in their minds.

Cecil Ponsonby was just the sort of fellow to see eye to eye with Skinner in anything. He was a blackguard to the finger-tips, and received plenty of scope owing to the somewhat slack rule which prevailed at Highcliffe. Blade, dog, and goer combined was Pon; and premature dissipation had marked him for its own.

"I think we've got the little scheme nicely cut and dried," he confided to Skinner. "I jawed it over with the rest of the chaps, and they're quite in agreement. Matter of fact, we'd have fixed up Sunday footer long before this, but there were no teams we could play. So we've had to spend our Sabbaths in loafin' about."

"But you go to church, surely?" exclaimed Skinner.

"Matins, compulsory; all other services optional," grinned Pon. "Only the hopeless prigs like Courtenay and De Courcy attend when they're not obliged to. We don't."

By "we" Ponsonby referred to the notorious "nuts" of Highcliffe.

"Lucky bounder!" said Skinner enviously. "Fancy only having to attend Matins!"

"We don't always do that," chuckled Ponsonby. "When Mobby's on duty, we don't trouble about turnin' up at all. We can twist Mobby round our little fingers, you know."

Skinner could quite believe it. He was well acquainted with Mr. Mobbs, the reprehensible toady who ruled junior Highcliffe. Happily, masters like Mr. Mobbs were very few and far between. They would not be tolerated at Greyfriars.

"What place have you got in view for the match?" proceeded Pon.

"Harrison's meadow. It's very secluded—miles away from the main road, in fact—and there's absolutely no risk of our being spotted. Will that suit you?"

"Admirably!" said Ponsonby. "Have a fag?"

"No, thanks!"

"What! You don't smoke?"

"I'm off it just now," explained Skinner. "You see,

it's our intention to wipe up the ground with your lot, and a chap can't afford to ruin his wind, you know."

Ponsonby grinned.

"What sort of a team have you raked together?"

"A pretty passable lot," said Skinner. "There's myself——"

"Oh, you're passable enough, especially if you play goal!" said Ponsonby, unable to resist the sarcasm.

Skinner flushed.

"Don't be so beastly unpleasant," he urged. "Lemme see. There's Treluce in the sanny with a chill, but we've got just eleven without him. Snoop, Stott, Trevor, Morgan, Bunter——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Ponsonby.

"Where's the joke, you ass?"

"Bunter!" gasped Pon. "Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha! Got any more freaks like him?"

"There's Fisher T. Fish and Wun Lung," said Skinner.

"Ye gods! Then I won't trouble to get together an eleven. Half a dozen of us will do for such a freak collection as that!"

"Don't be too premature," warned Skinner. "There's Hazel in goal, and Bolsover——"

"That bargee fellow, d'ye mean?"

Skinner nodded.

"And Peter Todd," he said.

"Oh, that puts a different complexion on it. Todd's hot stuff. My hat! Fancy him being up against church-going! I suppose he is?"

"Yes. He doesn't hold with creeds and dogmas and all the rest of it. I regard him as my right-hand man."

"Useful sort of follower to have, too, I should say," remarked Pon.

"Rather," said Skinner. "Look here, what time are we going to play?"

"Three o'clock do?"

"Nicely."

"Right-ho, then! You'd better let me provide the ball. I can get it out of the school without being spotted. In your case it might be different."

"That's so," said Skinner "It's awfully good of you, old chap."

"Don't mench," said Pon. "Oh, I say! What about togs?"

"We shall smuggle ours in the old barn the day before," said Skinner.

"Good wheeze! I'll get our chaps to do likewise. And now we'll set to and have a game at cards. Any objection?"

"No fear," said Skinner, with a grin.

And the two young rascals joined the landlord in a little "flutter," as they called it.

Far into the night the juniors played, and when at last Skinner rose to go he was cleaned out of every penny he had possessed. It had been a case of diamond cutting diamond, for all three of the gamblers had played unscrupulously, with no regard whatever for honest dealing. And of three cheats the order of skill was as follows: 1. The landlord; 2. Ponsonby; 3. Skinner. Hence the latter's downfall.

Nevertheless, the cad of the Remove was in no way perturbed. He hoped to get his revenge on some future occasion. Bidding his companions good-night, he made his way back to Greyfriars in the pitchy blackness of the late October evening.

Fortune favoured him, as he had anticipated it would. He did not encounter a soul on his journey back; and the somewhat risky manœuvre of getting through the box-room window and into the Remove dormitory was successfully accomplished.

"All serene?" inquired the sleepy voice of Peter Todd.

"What-ho!" answered Skinner, in the darkness.

"Pon fixed things up all right?"

"Yes. We're booked to turn up at three on Sunday afternoon, in Harrison's meadow."

"I shall be there," said Peter Todd, with emphasis. "We'll whack those Highcliffe bounders by unlimited goals!" But Peter Todd was yet to learn that man proposes and Providence disposes.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.
Bob Cherry Chips In!

SUNDAY arrived at length. As one grows older, one finds it comes round pretty regularly. To the Pagans the week had seemed to drag out its slow length in a most monotonous manner. They had been chipped mercilessly by the other fellows because, so far, they had done nothing, and they were burning to show the Remove in general what demons they could be when they chose.

Sunday walks were the recognised thing in the afternoon, when each select circle of chums sauntered forth together in their shining silk toppers. Shortly after dinner the Pagan eleven left the gates, looking meek, mild, and demure, and quite in harmony with the character of the day. They, too, wore spotless Etons and nicely-polished toppers, and little did anyone who saw them imagine that within the short space of an hour they would be rushing about in footer togs.

A motley collection they were, with Billy Bunter and Wun Lung and Fish. Neither of the three named were footballers, but their inclusion in the team was necessary, since there were only eleven Pagans available.

Why Bunter and his fellow-freaks had joined the ranks of the anti-church brigade was not difficult to understand. Billy Bunter had a rooted objection to church services. He invariably fell asleep during the sermon, and had been taken to task on numerous occasions for snoring when he should have been gleaning Divine knowledge.

Fisher Tarleton Fish, of the great United States, naturally viewed with disfavour the form of religion in vogue in what he was pleased to term "this sleepy old island," while Wun Lung was a heathen by birth.

"Now, look here," said Peter Todd, who was to captain the team. "This is not going to be a joke. We've got a hard game in front of us, and those Highcliffe chaps have got to be given the kybosh. I hope you all understand that?"

"Really, Toddy! We shall play like Trojans!" said Bunter.

"I'd feel more easy in my mind about the result if you were far away on a desert island!" growled Bolsover. "Where d'you think you're going to play?"

"In goal, of course!"

"Why, you burbling great bladder of lard!" interposed Hazeldene. "I'm goalie, and you jolly well know it!"

"Right-back, then!" said Bunter.

There was a roar from Bolsover.

"Not while I'm on the spot!" he said ominously.

"Oh, really! I'll be left-back, then!"

"You're not going to bag my position, look you!" said Morgan warmly.

"Where am I to play, then, Tood?" asked Bunter, with dignity.

"Blessed if I know! We shall have to put you behind the goal, as a sort of long-stop, I suppose."

"Anyway, we've got to win," said Skinner. "It'll be a gorgeous feather in our cap if we can rout Highcliffe. We shall have something to crow about in the dorm to-night, and Wharton & Co. will have to sing small. They'll realise that Pagans can play footer as well as prigs!"

"Hear, hear!"

The juniors tramped on through the leafy lanes, then they struck off across the fields, until the old barn came in sight.

There were signs of activity in the vicinity. Ponsonby & Co. were already there, changing into their footer garb.

"Ready for the fray—what?" asked Pon, as Skinner came up to him.

"We is—we are!"

"Buck up and change, then. We've marked out the pitch all right, and stuck up the goalposts. Gaddy and I came here last night."

"And there's no danger of being spotted?"

"None at all, sire."

Skinner nodded, and went into the barn to change.

A few minutes later the rival teams took the field. There was no referee, which was rather unfortunate, since Ponsonby & Co. had never, in the history of Highcliffe, been known to play the game.

Peter Todd felt some compunctions at first. After all, he reflected, it was coming it a bit too thick to indulge in Sunday footer. True, games were played on Sundays throughout the country by certain people whose professions gave them no time for sport during the week; and Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, frequently spent Sunday afternoons on the golf-links; but, somehow, two wrongs did not seem to make a right.

However, it was too late to retract now. Peter had taken upon himself the responsibility of captaining the side, and to back out now would be to hold himself up to ridicule for ever and a day. He would never hear the end of it.

He tossed with Pon for choice of ends, and then the fellows began to line up for the start.

"Which position am I to occupy?" asked Bunter, who was almost bursting beneath a gorgeous jersey, which resembled the coat of many colours worn by Joseph of old.

"Go anywhere, so long as you keep out of the way!" snorted Peter Todd. "But if you start charging your own men off the ball there'll be trouble!"

And Billy Bunter took up his position in the forward line.

"Where me playee?" inquired little Wun Lung, running up.

"Oh, go and pick flowers!" growled Peter.

He began to realise that in undertaking to captain such an extraordinary team he had bitten off more than he could chew.

"No comee here to pickee flowers," said Wun Lung. "Me wantee to kickee football."

A curious lump rose in Peter Todd's throat. Through a sort of mist, he extended his hand to Bob Cherry. "Forgive me," he said simply. "I've been an utter fool!" (*See Chapter* 10.)

"Kick it, then, you Chinese image! But if you dribble it towards your own goal I'll slaughter you!"

"You chaps ready?" asked Pon impatiently.

"Quite."

And Ponsonby kicked off.

There was little to choose between the two sides at first. The Highcliffe nuts were hopelessly out of condition, but, on the other hand, Bunter, Fish, and Wun Lung were mere passengers, and Snoop and Stott little better. Had not Bolsover and Morgan been there to defend the Greyfriars citadel, Ponsonby & Co., poor players though they were, would have overwhelmed the opposition.

After twenty minutes' play, Ponsonby met a somewhat fluky pass from Merton, and banged the leather past Hazeldene into the net.

"Hurrah!"

"First blood to Highcliffe!" chortled Gadsby.

Peter Todd frowned as the ball was placed in position.

"This won't do!" he said determinedly. "We might just as well go to church as put up a putrid show like this!"

The Pagans woke up. The forward line—such as it was—contrived to take the leather up to the Highcliffe goal, and Skinner was presented with a gilt-edged opportunity of opening the score for Greyfriars. As he was about to shoot, however, Billy Bunter stampeded up, and charged him off the ball. The Highcliffe right-back, rushing in, easily cleared.

"You—you champion dummy!" hooted Skinner, glaring at Bunter as if he would eat him. "You robbed me of a certain goal, you unspeakable porpoise!"

"Oh, really, Skinney! It was the other way round. I should have scored easily if you hadn't deliberately cannoned into me!"

"Why, you—you——" spluttered the infuriated Skinner.

Then he resumed his place, quite at a loss for words.

Just before the interval Ponsonby scored again. The goal was obviously off-side, but there was no referee to rule it so, and it was allowed, much to the disgust of Bolsover major, who felt like smashing the conceited Pon.

"This is too thick!" exclaimed Peter Todd, as the players came off at half-time. "Real football's impossible with freaks like Bunter on the field. We'd have been at least five goals to the good by now if they hadn't chipped in just as everything in the garden was lovely. It makes a chap feel like chucking up the sponge."

"Oh, stick it out!" said Skinner. "A game's not lost till it's won, you know. We'll make up the leeway in the second half."

"I hope so, anyway," growled Peter. "If not, there'll be a dead Bunter lying about the field afterwards!"

When the game was set in motion once more, the Pagans warmed to their work, and pressed hotly. Peter Todd sent a well-judged pass to Trevor, the outside-right, who sped goalwards with the ball, and shot from a very difficult angle, beating the Highcliffe goalie to the wide.

"Told you so, Toddy!" said Skinner cheerfully. "Played, Trevor, old man!"

The prospects of the Pagans brightened up perceptibly. Highcliffe's defence had weakened, and after a time Peter Todd risked a long shot. The ball bounced over the custodian's head and into the net.

"Level, by gad!" exclaimed Skinner. "This is great! Go it, ye cripples!"

From end to end the ball travelled fast, but the shooting on both sides was erratic. Bunter and Fish and Wun Lung were three separate and distinct thorns in the Greyfriars combination. They were a far greater asset to Ponsonby & Co. than they were to the Pagans.

The ding-dong struggle went on, until it was seen that there were only ten minutes to go.

"Come on!" roared Peter Todd. "Put your beef into it!"

Bolsover cleared a very feeble Highcliffe attack by booting the ball half the length of the field. Trevor gained possession, and raced towards the goal. He was just about to shoot, when there came a dramatic interruption.

"Stop! Stop this game at once, you cads!"

The field stood spellbound. Skinner's face went very white, but he laughed harshly when he saw who the speaker was. It was Bob Cherry, who suddenly came upon the scene with Mark Linley. The two chums were taking their usual Sunday walk, and Fate had led them to the very spot where the match was in progress. In the ordinary way they would not have traversed Harrison's meadow once in a blue moon.

The sight of the game had almost stupefied Bob Cherry at first. Then he had been filled with sudden revulsion at the whole scene, and gave vent to his feelings in his usual outspoken way.

"Chuck it, you cads!" he repeated; and the next moment the enraged Bob strode upon the playing-pitch, with the faithful Lancashire lad at his heels.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Breaking the Sabbath!

"SHEER off!" yelled Skinner, who was the first to regain his composure. "Go and mind your own bizney, Cherry!"

"This is my bizney!" replied Bob. "I'm not a prig, and neither is Marky; but playing footer in secret on Sunday is about the limit! If you don't stop the game, somebody's going to get hurt. I don't care if I have to tackle the lot of you single-handed!"

"Bravo, Bob!" murmured Mark Linley admiringly.

"Fat lot you care about Sunday, Cherry!" sneered Skinner. "You're not above fighting on such a day, anyhow!"

"It's an unsavoury job," was the reply; "but there's such a thing as fighting in a good cause. I wouldn't go into it for the mere sake of the thing, much as I should like to give you a black eye, Skinney! I shall be doing it out of a sense of what's decent."

"Stick it!" murmured Ponsonby encouragingly. "Brought your cassock and surplice along with you?"

"Oh, it's our old friend Pon, is it? I might have expected you to be mixed up in shady work of this kind. It's just about your mark!"

"Hadn't you better take Skinner's advice, and sheer off?" said Peter Todd. "We're desperately keen on finishing the game, you see. An exciting tussle, isn't it, Pon? Enough to stir the sportin' instincts of a bishop! The score's two all, and there's every prospect of a good finish. Have a game shots at goal with us afterwards, Cherry, old man?"

Bob Cherry looked hard at the speaker.

"Well, you're about the limit, I must say!" he remarked. "I'd always regarded you as a decent chap, and this is an eye-opener to Marky and myself. A month ago you'd have knocked anybody down who suggested that you'd ever play footer on a Sunday in some poky meadow."

"And a year ago I knocked down a fellow named Cherry," said Peter Todd, reminiscently. "You remember the scrap we had in the gym?"

Bob Cherry did. It was always a sore point with Bob that he had been beaten in fistic encounter by such a person as Peter Todd. That licking had never been avenged, and it rankled.

"You needn't harp on that old chord!" he said wrathfully. "No doubt the result would be reversed if I had a go with you again."

And Bob Cherry meant it. In his present state of righteous indignation, he could have beaten anything on two legs.

"Let's get on with the game, look you," said Morgan impatiently.

"There's going to be no more football here to-day," said Bob Cherry, his jaw setting obstinately.

"Oh, really, Cherry! I fail to see how you can stop it," said Bunter. "Do get out of it, there's a good chap. I want to put on the winning goal."

"A fat lot of good you are to a side!" growled Bolsover. "We'd have romped home by now if you hadn't been chucking your weight about!"

"I guess you can vamoose the ranch, Cherry," said Fisher T. Fish. "We've got the bulge on you in this act. What can one chap do against twenty-two?"

"Two chaps," interposed Mark Linley. "I'm backing up Bob, and some of you ought to know by this time that I can hit straight from the shoulder!"

"Let's get on with the game," said Gadsby, in tones of impatience. "No good arguing with these angelic hypocrites!"

"If you call me a hypocrite again, Gadsby," said Bob Cherry, "I'll knock you down!"

Gadsby noted the expression on the speaker's face, and remained silent. He considered that discretion was, in this case, the better part of valour.

"Look here," said Skinner, coming forward, "I've got a wheeze. Perhaps we're not such unsportsmanlike chaps as you seem to think, Cherry! Will you agree to this? You can fight the best man among us, and if you knock him out we won't proceed with the game. If, on the other hand, he gives you a licking, then we go ahead."

Bob Cherry considered for a moment. The arrangement seemed fair enough, and he felt fairly confident that he could account for the best boxer in the community. Besides, such a proceeding was decidedly better than entering into the fray practically single-handed. What could he and his chum hope to do against twenty-two fellows?

"Very well!" he said at length. "I'm game! Who's your man?"

The footballers held a brief discussion, and after a time Peter Todd was selected to do battle on their behalf. Peter was a very hefty warrior, and as he had beaten Bob Cherry before there seemed to be no reason why he should not repeat the performance.

"Go in and win, old man!" said Skinner. "I'll be your second."

Peter Todd nodded, and stepped forward. Bob Cherry proceeded to peel off his coat.

The rest of the players formed a ring round the two

combatants, and Ponsonby, who was to officiate as referee, took out his watch.

"Time!"

The spectators realised that this was to be a battle royal. There were no nicely-padded gloves, no artificial preventers of pain. This was a scrap under the old and approved conditions of schoolboy warfare—a fight to a finish with bare fists.

It was one of the few fights Bob Cherry had ever entered into on a Sunday; but, under the circumstances, he felt it was justifiable. It was the only way in which the game could be successfully frustrated.

Peter Todd rushed furiously to the attack, and Bob Cherry met his hurricane blows with a defence like a barn-door. Not one of them was allowed to get home.

Bob himself acted mainly upon the defensive. He knew that he was "up against" a skilful opponent, with whom a knowledge of ringcraft was a sort of second nature. He also knew—and the knowledge gave him great satisfaction—that Peter Todd's fighting would be scrupulously fair. Fellows like Ponsonby and Bolsover would not have scrupled to hit below the belt.

The first round ended very tamely. Todd's attacks had been successfully nullified, while Bob Cherry had not made a single pressing movement.

"Stick to him, old chap!" said Mark Linley encouragingly, as he sat Bob on his knee. "You'll win through, as sure as fate! Right always does."

Bob Cherry nodded, and went up for Round 2 with a stout heart and plenty of courage. He put in some good work on this occasion, and Peter Todd was driven round and round the ring. When the allotted three minutes had expired he was puffing like a very old bellows.

"This is like Britain and Germany," Bob confided to his second. "It's going to be a war of exhaustion. When he weakens, I'm going to wade in and supply the finishing touches."

Mark Linley laughed. His faith in Bob Cherry was founded as upon a rock.

Peter Todd, meanwhile, had been receiving the doubtful benefit of advice from Skinner. The latter had urged him to "go for the brute hot and strong"—a thing easier said than done. Bob Cherry was a very impregnable sort of brute.

Todd was a wreck at the end of the third round. Bob Cherry's big fists had been going like battering-rams, and they had found their mark, too. The claret was streaming from Peter Todd's nose, and one of his eyes had temporarily shut up shop. But Peter possessed that admirable quality of endurance. He never knew when he was beaten, and was prepared to go on until he dropped.

In Round 4 he made a spirited stand, and Skinner & Co. looked on eagerly, anxiously. But their hopes were dashed to zero at the end of the round, when Bob Cherry fairly lifted his opponent off his feet. Only the prompt—perhaps too prompt—call of time prevented an early knock-out.

The fifth round was productive of some fierce fighting, but with Todd it was the energy of despair that forced him to keep on keeping on. He had not fully recovered from the effects of that smashing blow of the round before, and his attack soon lost its sting. Bob Cherry kept on, cool as a cucumber, and with determination writ largely on every feature of his countenance. A feeling of joy surged up in Bob's breast. He was winning, winning!

His opponent dropped his guard for an instant, and the movement was fatal. Bob Cherry sailed in, and got home a smashing blow on the mark. As Todd swayed uncertainly, Bob shot out his left in a delightful uppercut. And this time his antagonist went down and stayed down.

In vain Ponsonby strove to count Peter Todd back to action; in vain, Skinner raved and coaxed and entreated. The Pagan's bolt was shot, and, in accordance with the terms of the contract, the football match was to be abandoned.

"Hang him!" muttered Ponsonby savagely.

And that was all the thanks Peter Todd received for his game fight against a far superior adversary.

It was some time before the fallen warrior could rise. When he ultimately staggered to his feet, he held out his hand to Bob Cherry.

Bob looked him straight in the eyes.

"I'll shake hands with you, Todd," he said quietly, "when you've chucked this tommy-rot and taken your stand for the Church—not before."

Peter Todd hesitated.

"Be a man, Toddy," urged Mark Linley. "Bob's quite in the right, you know!"

Something in the grave, earnest expression of the Lancashire lad caused a curious lump to rise in Peter Todd's throat. Through a sort of mist, he extended his hand again to Bob Cherry.

"Forgive me," he said simply. "I've been an utter fool. There's a lot to be said for going to church, after all. It makes a fellow true blue."

Bob Cherry grasped the proffered hand, and shook it warmly.

"You're a white man, Toddy," he said. "I knew it all along. I couldn't for the life of me understand why you had this lapse. But we can wipe that off the slate now. I say! I'm beastly sorry I lammed you!"

"It was a lesson I badly needed," answered Peter grimly. "I sha'n't be such an ass again, in a hurry!"

Skinner, who had been listening in surprise and amazement to Todd's remarks, gave him an infuriated glare.

"You're going to back out of our little circle?" he asked.

"That's it!" said Peter cheerfully. "I should advise you to do the same, Skinney. It's never too late to mend, you know."

"You cad!" exclaimed Skinner hotly.

"Better moderate your transports, please! I'm not good enough for Cherry, but I could lick you with one hand!"

And Skinner, almost weeping with rage, subsided. The Pagans had lost their most valued member.

"We'll get on with the game, and let Todd go to Jericho!" said Ponsonby.

"No, you won't, my beauty!" said Bolsover. "Fair play's a jewel. Todd was fairly whacked, and we're going to abide by the result."

And they did. Bob Cherry, by his magnificent defeat of Peter Todd, had dealt a decided death-blow to Sunday footer among that ill-assorted band known as the Pagans.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Tuckshop Raiders!

"JAM-TARTS!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Ginger-pop!"

"What-ho!"

"Doughnuts!"

"Rather!"

Skinner of the Remove enumerated these tempting delicacies in a manner which instinctively made his listeners' mouths water.

The Pagans were homeward-bound from the abandoned football match. Ponsonby & Co. had, with much grumbling and growling, changed their clothes and gone empty away to Highcliffe, while Bob Cherry and Mark Linley had waited for Peter Todd, that they might walk back to Greyfriars with him.

"Fruit-tart," said Skinner, "and best Devonshire cream!"

"Don't!" implored Bunter feebly. "I feel faint at the very thought of it. Is that what you're standing us for tea?"

Skinner shook his head.

"Like the seed in the parable, I've fallen on stony places," he said. "We shall have to content our little selves with bread-and-butter and the inhabitants of Sardius to-night."

"What the dickens are they?"

"Sardines, of course!"

"Groo! Beastly sort of hospitality to offer a chap!" grumbled Bunter.

"There's something better to follow," said Skinner. "All the good things I've mentioned."

"But where are they coming from?" asked Bunter incredibly.

"The tuckshop, my fat friend."

"But Mrs. Mimble doesn't open on Sunday," said Snoop. "It's against orders."

"I know that, Snoopy. "But what's to prevent us from carrying out a terrific raid on the tuckshop?"

"What?"

"We can cut church," exclaimed Skinner, "and while everyone's at Evensong we can do the dreadful deed. I've got a knack of opening the shop window, so the grub's easily get-at-able. We'll take some cricket-bags along, and cram 'em with tuck."

"My hat!" said Bolsover. The "wheeze" almost took his breath away. It really seemed as if, in point of daring and unscrupulousness, Skinner out-Boundered the Bounder of old.

"But how do you imagine we're going to dodge calling-over?" asked Bolsover sarcastically.

"We sha'n't attempt to dodge it," said Skinner. "My idea is this. We'll turn up at the assembly for church, like good little boys, and while we're marching up to the service with the other fellows we'll fall out of our places and hide in the shrubbery. Then, after everyone's gone in, we'll slope back to the school and raid the tuckshop. Then we can take the loot up to the Remove dormitory, and have a high old time."

"Sounds easy," sniffed Bolsover. "These things are all right in theory, but they come a cropper in practice."

"Nice sort of optimist, aren't you?" said Skinner. "Is that the sort of spirit which is going to enable our chaps to lick the Germans?"

"Have your own way, then," said Bolsover. "After all, it's not a bad wheeze, though I've heard better."

"But—but what a risk!" said Snoop fearfully.

"If any chap thinks the game's not worth the candle, he can quit!" said Skinner grimly. "There's going to be no half-heartedness in this affair. Those who think the thing'll fall through, and don't care to stand or fall with the rest, had better say so now. Then we shall know where we are."

"Guess I'm on!" said Fisher T. Fish.

"Same here," said the rest of the fellows together.

"That's all right, then. We'll go ahead with the wheeze."

"I hope you chaps don't think I'm staying away from church for the sake of the tuck," said Bunter loftily. "I object to the Greyfriars form of religion on principle. I'm a Buddhist."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle at, you fellows," said Bunter peevishly.

"Funny you never discovered you were a Buddhist till we mooted this tuckshop idea," said Skinner. "Why didn't you air your peculiar views when you first came to Greyfriars?"

"I only made up my mind last week. You see, it's taken me a long time to consider the pros and cons of the matter. A chap doesn't become a Buddhist at a moment's notice."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you'll have the feed of your life to-night, anyway," said Skinner. "There'll be none to say you nay. We shall have unlimited tuck, and the whole thing'll be jolly fine. It's a tremendous score for the Pagans."

"But we shall be thieving, look you," said Morgan bluntly.

"That's an ugly word, Morgan!"

"It'll be true, though. What else can you call it?"

"It's a—a joke," said Skinner. "It's no worse than raiding another chap's study."

"Except that we're doing it on a Sunday," said Trevor.

"Look here!" roared Skinner. "You can come in or stay out, just as you choose. You don't care a straw for religion, so what's it matter if we are thieving? Anyway, there's no compulsion in the matter. If you prefer to wash your hands of it, you can do so."

"Oh, I'm not going to back out," said Trevor. "I was only thinking how rotten it looked, though."

"No more so than Sunday footer. You didn't scruple to break the Sabbath by barging about in footer togs, so you needn't have any compunctions about this."

The gates of Greyfriars came in sight at that moment, and the juniors entered. Most of the fellows were at tea, either in Hall or in their studies.

The Pagans proceeded to Skinner's study, and disposed of a very sparse meal. They were preparing themselves for the great feast to come.

Skinner & Co. were regarded with curious eyes by most of the Removites at calling-over. Some of the fellows had expected Skinner, at least, to be conspicuous by his absence, and others had heard of the interrupted football match, and wanted to see if the participants showed signs of wear and tear.

Mr. Quelch called the roll, and his gimlet eyes scrutinised every Removite keenly. He had not forgotten the picture palace episode of the previous Sunday.

But everyone was present, save Treluce, who was in the sanatorium; and the fellows trooped up the canopied path which led to the church.

The task of the Pagans was comparatively easy, for masters and prefects had gone on in advance. At Skinner's signal, his followers detached themselves from the ranks and plunged into the shrubbery.

The rest of the fellows were staggered at the sudden wholesale desertion, but none of them were sneaks, otherwise there might have been an uproar.

The Pagans lay concealed until the last line of fags had passed into the church; then they came out of their hiding-places and grinned at each other in the gloom.

"This way!" said Skinner cautiously. "Don't make a row!"

As the first notes of the organ pealed out on the evening air the Pagans returned to the school buildings, and made their way noiselessly to the tuckshop.

Mrs. Mimble had gone to the service, and the coast was clear. In quite a short space of time Skinner unfastened the window of the shop, bidding Bolsover and Morgan go into the deserted building for a couple of cricket-bags.

"They'll think the Huns have been here on a looting expedition," chuckled Skinner.

"You don't think we shall be bowled out?" asked Trevor.

"No giddy fear! No one will have a single suspish."

The absentees soon returned, bringing with them the cricket-bags. Then Skinner and Stott clambered through the window, and the rest followed, barring Bunter, whose rotundity was such that the feat could only have been accomplished with great difficulty, and at the risk of certain garments splitting.

"Mind how you come!" called Skinner, from the darkness. "Strike a match, somebody!"

Bolsover lit the gas, and the raiders "piled in" with their nefarious work.

Bags of jam-tarts and puffs, jars of jam and marmalade, bottles of jelly and preserved fruits, were rapidly packed in the capacious depths of the cricket-bags.

The task occupied about a quarter of an hour, and far in the distance came the sound of Psalms being chanted as the juniors made their way, heavily laden, to the Remove dormitory.

Some of them felt serious compunctions at that moment. With all their professed hatred of existing creeds, with all their dogged antagonism towards the faith of their forefathers, they felt somehow that raiding the tuckshop on a Sunday night was a little too thick. Perhaps Skinner and Bunter were the only exceptions. In the case of the others the stolen food was pretty certain to leave a bad taste in their mouths.

"We must buck up and get rid of the stuff," said Skinner, in some alarm. "Service'll be over in three-quarters of an hour."

"If we can't demolish the lot in that time," said Bolsover, "I'm a Dutchman! We've got Bunter on the job, you know."

The feed commenced at once. Most of the juniors were hungry, and the fare was most appetising.

"Pass the cake, somebody!"

"Buck up with the buttered scones, there!"

"Ginger-pop for me, please!"

But the feasters were destined to receive quite a rude interruption even at this early stage of their orgy. Foot-

steps were heard ascending the stairs, and Skinner & Co. turned almost green with fright.

"It's a—a master!" murmured Stott, with chattering teeth.

"Can't be; they're all at church!" said Bolsover. But there was a tremor in his voice, all the same.

The door of the dormitory was thrown open, and the mysterious prowler, whoever he was, entered. There had been no time to clear away the good things. Indeed, so numerous were they that there would have been no place to stow them.

Ten guilty juniors looked up with a start. Then the feasters recovered themselves, and relief was written on every countenance.

The intruder was Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.
No Rest for the Wicked!

"SMITHY!"

"What a start you gave us, old man!"

"I dare say I did," said Vernon-Smith grimly. "So this is the little game, is it?"

The Bounder's keen eye took in every detail of the scene. He noted the tremendous array of tuck, the crate of ginger-pop, and the flushed faces of the assembled juniors.

"Going to join in, Smithy?" asked Bolsover. "Make room for the stranger within the gates, you fellows! Pass the cream-buns this way, Bunter, you greedy ox!"

"Nothing for me, thanks!" said Vernon-Smith. "I wouldn't touch stolen food with a barge-pole!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Getting deaf?" asked the Bounder pleasantly. "I'm not going to be a party to this cads' festival! I'd cut off my right hand first."

"It was a different tale a few months ago!" sneered Skinner.

Vernon-Smith flushed. He called to mind the occasion when he himself had organised a raid on the school tuckshop. True, it had not taken place on a Sunday; but the grim fact remained, all the same.

"You needn't remind me of the past," he said. "That's dead and done with now. I know I used to be a downright rotter and a rank outsider; but I've had the sense to realise my folly, and to go straight. And you'd be well advised to do the same."

"Here endeth the first lesson!" said Skinner. "The Rev. Herbert Vernon-Smith will now give us——"

Smack!

The Bounder's open hand came right across Skinner's cheek, knocking him sideways over one of the beds.

"No more talk of that kind, you cad," he said, "or I'll thrash you within an inch of your life!"

And Harold Skinner knew that when the Bounder said a thing he meant it.

"What are you doing out of church yourself?" asked Hazeldene. "You'll find it pretty hard to explain away if it comes out."

"I'll tell you why I came away," said Vernon-Smith. "When I saw you all sneak into the shrubbery, it struck me that there was something of a shady nature going on. So I came out of church on the plea that I was feeling faint, and hurried along here. It strikes me that I've just come in time to rescue the greater part of the grub. You'll oblige me by leaving that cake alone, Bunter. What's that? You won't? Then I must make you!"

Vernon-Smith stepped forward, and dragged Bunter along to his bed.

"You'll undress and tumble in," he said, "and leave that stuff alone!"

"Oh, really, Smithy, you rotter! What right have you to act in this high-handed manner? Are you going to take this lying down, you chaps?"

"No fear!" said Bolsover, with a lion-like roar. "Rush the cad!"

And there was a combined movement of the Pagans towards Vernon-Smith.

The Bounder stood ready, his hands tightly clenched.

"If anyone so much as lays a finger on me," he said, "he'll be sorry for it!"

"What will you do?" sneered Bolsover.

"For want of a better word, and to put it bluntly, I shall sneak!"

"You utter cad!"

"That's quite enough. You know as well as I do that I'm not a chap to resort to sneaking. But in some cases it's justified."

Bolsover put down his hands, and the others followed suit. They were in the Bounder's power, and they knew it. A word to the authorities, and the Pagans would have to pay a terrible price for their act of robbery. It would most certainly mean the "sack" for the ringleaders, for no headmaster would dream of tolerating such a grave misdemeanour.

"I'm going to state terms," said Vernon-Smith, "and you can take them or leave them, as you choose. In half an hour's time, or less, the fellows will be back from church, and Mrs. Mimble, too. I'll give you an opportunity of taking back the stolen grub, and of leaving money in the shop for what you have already consumed. In this way, your looting expedition won't come to light. It'll be kept from the masters, at any rate. But it's only right that the other fellows should know about it, and if they give you a warm time, you've only got yourselves to thank. That's all."

"And supposing we don't agree to those terms?" said Skinner sulkily.

"Then things will go hard with you. The grub will be here when the chaps come in from church, and the prefect who sees lights out will spot it. Then the chopper will come down, and I don't see how you can keep the affair from getting to the Head's ears."

"Oh, crumbs!"

The Pagans were cornered. Vernon-Smith had them in a cleft stick, and there was no way out. To commit assault and battery upon the Bounder would be worse than useless. They were baffled at every turn.

"Better make your choice—quick!" said Vernon-Smith, looking at his watch.

"Very well. We give in, hang you!" growled Skinner.

It was a sorry and humiliating ending to the feast. Most of the good things still lay untouched, and the whole affair had fallen as flat as a pancake. Once more the Pagans had come "up against it." They could make no headway against the decent fellows in their Form. Bob Cherry had stopped the football match, and now Vernon-Smith had effectually prevented the continuation of the feed. Right always seemed to conquer, in the long run.

Reluctantly the feasters took up the cricket-bags, and went to restore the contents to their original place. The little that had been eaten was paid for by means of a whip-round, and by the time the fellows returned from Evensong and came up to their dormitory there was no trace of the interrupted banquet to be seen.

The rest of the Removites were angry and amazed when Vernon-Smith described what had taken place. There would obviously be short shrift for Skinner & Co.

"Raiding the tuckshop on a Sunday night!" gasped Bob Cherry. "If that isn't the limit, I should like to know what is! You'll end up in prison, Skinney, as sure as fate!"

"That's what they preach from the pulpit, I suppose!" growled Skinner. "The sorry fate of a sinner! I've heard it all before. You go and sing Psalms, Cherry!"

"Why, you—you——" spluttered Bob.

He advanced towards Harold Skinner's bed, but Wharton pulled him back.

"Not to-night, Bob," he said. "We'll put the beauties through it in the morning. They won't worship Paganism so much after we've finished with them, I fancy!"

"What shall we do with them?" asked Johnny Bull. "Flaying 'em alive would be too merciful. Can't you suggest something lingering, you fellows, with boiling oil in it?"

Wharton laughed.

"I think if we get up half an hour before rising-bell, and make them run the gauntlet, it will answer our purpose," he said. "Every chap will take a hand, and see that the job's done thoroughly. After all, they're

getting off lightly, for if the Head knew about this some of them would have to say good-bye to Greyfriars."

"If I hadn't gone out of church," said Vernon-Smith, "they'd probably have made merry, and got through the whole of the tuck. Lucky I thought of coming to see what was afoot."

"Jolly lucky!" said Wharton. "It would have been too foul for poor old Mother Mimble to have stood the loss of all that tuck. You're quite a Sexton Blake, Smithy!"

The Removites turned in at length, leaving Skinner and his followers to spend a night of painful anticipation. Early in the morning the fellows turned out in force, and the Pagans were dragged from their respective beds, and compelled to run the gauntlet, not once, not twice, but three times. And when it was over, and the groaning and wailing had subsided, the feasters devoutly wished that they had turned up at Evensong on the previous night, instead of raiding the tuckshop. The words of the poet were peculiarly appropriate at that moment:

"So comes a reckoning when the banquet's o'er:
A dreadful reckoning, and men smile no more."

It was likely to be a long, long time before the Pagans sought to violate the Sabbath by putting into effect another raid on the school tuckshop.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.
In Direst Peril!

PLONK, plonk, plonk!

Clank, clankety-clank!

"What the merry deuce——"

Those weird sounds proceeded from the interior of Skinner's study, and Bolsover major, who was passing, stopped short in amazement.

Clankety-clank, clank, clank! Plonk, plonkety-plonk!

"Great Scott!"

Bolsover entered the study. He wondered what in the world could be causing such an extraordinary commotion.

Skinner stood at the table, with a grin on his face. In his hand he held a very rusty tin can, with a handle, and inside was a large pebble, which, when the can was shaken, knocked against the sides, and produced a most unearthly din.

"Little things please little minds!" said Bolsover. "Can't you find something better to do than rattle an old tin can about, Skinney? Or are you trying to imagine what you were like fifteen years ago?"

"My son," said Skinner, turning his eyes upon the intruder, "this can is going to play no small part in a gigantic jape!"

"This is where I make myself scarce, then," said Bolsover. "I haven't got over the drubbing those cads gave us the other night yet."

"Don't get excited, fair youth!" said Skinner. "This wheeze is guaranteed harmless."

"But what——"

"You are wondering what use an old tin can is? Well, it's going to do yeoman service. As Shakespeare remarks, there's sermons in stones, and good in everything. This knockabout can's coming in jolly useful."

"Blessed if I quite see how!"

"Listen, my friend! I'm just going to wend my way up to the church belfry. Arrived there, I shall detach the bell which summons the good little boys to the services, and substitute this novel arrangement. Twig?"

Bolsover burst into an unrestrained guffaw.

"Ha, ha, ha! What a wheeze!"

"And when Gossy rings the bell for church the din will be something like this."

And Skinner rattled the tin can vigorously.

"Don't!" said Bolsover, holding his ears. "I take your word for it. My hat! You're a giddy genius, Skinney!"

"Flattery, thy name is Bolsover! Still, it ain't a bad stunt. I'm off now to fix it up."

"Shall I toddle along?"

"If you like."

And the two Pagans left the study to carry out their nefarious designs.

Most of the fellows were at tea, and they reached the church without detection. Then they proceeded to scale the long ladder which ascended to the musty little belfry.

To unhinge the bell was not a very difficult manœuvre, and in a few moments the task was accomplished. Then the juniors proceeded to fix up the tin can, chuckling to themselves the while.

Presently footsteps were heard far below, in the porch.

"Quiet!" hissed Skinner warningly. "We don't know who the johnny is, but for goodness' sake don't make a row!"

"Keep that confounded can still, then!"

There was a heavy, dragging sound close at hand, and the conspirators looked startled.

The sound continued, and the grunting of a man could be heard down below.

Skinner turned quite pale.

"They're taking the ladder away!" he gasped.

"Oh, crumbs! Shall we yell out?"

"Don't be an idiot! We shall be caught like rats in a trap!"

The dragging noise ceased at length, and on looking down the juniors were just in time to see a burly workman disappearing through the doorway of the porch. Someone outside had helped him to bring out the ladder.

"Hang it all!" muttered Bolsover. "Here's a pretty go, and no mistake! The confounded workmen are here, of course. I forgot the place was under repair."

"Same here," said Skinner.

Had the juniors reflected beforehand they might have known that extensive repairs were being made to the old building. The roof had weathered the storms of years, and withstood many a fierce buffeting of wind and tempest, but it had shown sad signs of wear and tear of late, and the Head had arranged for a firm of experienced building contractors to do what was necessary.

Why two of the workmen, who had apparently finished for the day, should return and walk off with the belfry-ladder was beyond the juniors' powers of divination. But the cold, hard fact stared them in the face. They were cut off from the outer world—prisoners in the cobwebbed belfry!

"I—I say," said Skinner, with a shiver, "this is awful! They'll miss us at calling-over, and I shall be sacked from the school!"

"We must get down, that's all."

"But how?" asked Skinner helplessly. "The ladder's gone, and they're not likely to bring it back to-night. What foul luck!"

The juniors stared at each other dismally. Darkness was falling rapidly, and the old belfry had an eerie, almost uncanny appearance. It made their flesh creep.

For a time they remained silent, trying to think of a way out of their unpleasant situation. But inspiration refused to come.

The time passed slowly, but none the less surely. It would be calling-over soon, and the two absentees would be searched for. The thought almost made Skinner's knees knock together.

After a time, the leader of the Pagans moved over to the little window and looked out. Bolsover caught him by the arm.

"Are you thinking of shinning down the ivy?" he asked. "Don't be a fool! You'd break your neck, as sure as fate!"

"We must do something!" said Skinner, between his teeth.

"Is it too big a risk," said Bolsover suddenly, "to fix up the bell again, and ring it, in the hope that someone'll come along who doesn't happen to be a beak or a prefect?"

"Don't, for goodness' sake!" implored Skinner. "There would be a row about it, that's certain, and it would all come out."

Then a wild gleam of hope came to him. There was a chance, after all, of getting away, and Skinner clutched at it as a drowning man clutches at a straw. It was worth trying, anyway.

"Supposing we got out of the window," he said, "and

drew ourselves up on to the roof? That seems easy enough."

Bolsover poked his head out and looked up.

"True," he said, "we can clamber along the scaffolding on the church roof. But what good will that do, fathead? I'd rather spend the night here than flounder about there, at the mercy of the elements."

"But, don't you see," said Skinner excitedly, "there may be a ladder at the other end of the roof; and if so, we can shin down to safety?"

"Something in that. Anyway, we'll put it to the test."

Better put the bell back first," said Skinner. "I'm not in the humour for this tin-can joke, somehow."

"Nor I," said his companion grimly.

Bolsover wrenched off the can which had indirectly been the cause of the whole trouble, and the bell was fastened on again. The work had to be done carefully, to prevent undue noise.

"Now for it!" said Skinner.

He clambered out of the little window, and drew himself up on to the roof of the church. Above him towered the ivy-clad steeple—a grim and silent sentinel of the night.

Bolsover followed, and he, too, managed to get on to the roof without mishap. It was not a very difficult proceeding.

"All right?" asked Skinner.

"Quite. Lead on, Macduff!"

Skinner led the way across the roof, where the workmen had been engaged nearly all day. Bolsover followed immediately behind him, and at last, to his great joy, Skinner discerned, at the far end of the roof, the top of a ladder, which had been reared up from the ground below.

"Come on!" he exclaimed, in a frenzy of delight. "Oh, what luck!"

But even as Skinner spoke his foot crashed upon a frail piece of scaffolding, which gave beneath the impact. The next instant several of the planks on which he and Bolsover stood gave way, and the two juniors went crashing through into the depths below!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Skinner's Supreme Sacrifice!

THE age of miracles is said to belong to the past, but many strange things frequently happen in this world of ours which must be termed miracles for want of a better definition.

One of them happened now. Instead of dropping straight down to the floor of the church, both Skinner and Bolsover pitched on to a wide beam which ran across the chancel, on either side of which was a niche. With remarkable presence of mind Bolsover gripped the beam with both hands, and clung on to the woodwork, his body being suspended in mid-air.

It was a terrible predicament; but Skinner was less fortunate still. He, too, attempted to clutch the beam and hang on to it, hoping to pull himself up and make his way along it to safety; but his hand slipped, and he slid off, managing to clutch hold of Bolsover's legs as he did so.

The effect of this action was terrible, and the weight of his companion almost caused Bolsover to lose his grip entirely. As it was, with such a burden hanging on to him, he could not hope, strong as he was, to maintain his hold much longer.

It was a dreadful moment for the juniors who had been so closely allied in their crusade against the Established Faith, and it seemed that a tragedy was certain. Was it to be their fate that they should meet with a terrible death in the very church which they had attacked and slighted for weeks past?

Yet even at that dreadful moment the good that was in Harold Skinner came to the surface. His brain felt dizzy, and he knew that to shout for aid would be worse than useless. The church was far away from the main building, and no one would hear the cries, or, if they did, would not reach the scene in time to be able to render satisfactory assistance.

The situation was grim and ghastly in its intensity.

Suddenly Skinner spoke. His voice was clear and strange, and not at all like the voice of the leader of the Pagans.

"Bolsover, old man!"

"Yes?" came in a sobbing whisper from the bully of the Remove.

"Do you think if I were to let go you could work your way along the beam to safety?"

"But, you—you'll be killed!"

"Better one life than two, old chum!"

Bolsover saw the truth of this statement, and at that moment his heart went out to Harold Skinner in a wave of almost indescribable gratitude and relief.

The burly Removite's voice nearly broke as he said:

"God bless you, Skinney! If—if you'll do this for my sake, then you're the best and noblest fellow in Greyfriars, ay, and in the whole world, too!"

Skinner tried to frame a word of farewell, but he could not. His lips twitched, and that was all. But in that moment of dire anguish he did not forget to call upon One who had said, "Greater love hath no man than this: that a man lay down his life for a friend."

Pagan no longer, but a devout believer in the soul's resurrection and forgiveness of sins, Harold Skinner released his hold of Bolsover's legs and fell.

A shriek of terror arose—an awful shriek, penetrating far into the night—but it was not from Skinner. Percy Bolsover heard the hard, relentless thud of his comrade's body as it struck the tiled floor beneath, and the sound unnerved him completely. Skinner—Skinner, of all persons!—had gone to his death for the sake of a chum.

Bolsover's grip was weakening fast. Had he kept his head he could have raised himself on to the beam with comparative ease, and wended his way along until he reached one of the niches, where he would be safe. But the poor fellow's nerves were completely unhinged, and although he still clung on, it was only with the sheer frenzy of despair.

Then, just as he was about to give up the seemingly hopeless struggle for life, a voice exclaimed:

"Hang on, there! Hang on, and I'll help you!"

Bolsover knew who had spoken. It was Mark Linley.

A feeling of hope surged in his breast, and he almost shouted with delirious joy when he felt a ladder being raised against the rafter.

"Stay where you are! I'm coming!" came the calm yet imperious tones of the Lancashire lad.

Mark Linley mounted the ladder with swift steps. He reached the top just in time, for Bolsover, overcome by the tense anxiety of the last few moments, had fainted away.

The situation was most precarious, and had Mark Linley lost control of himself for an instant both juniors would have shared the fate of Harold Skinner.

But the lad from Lancashire never faltered. He stood erect on one of the highest rungs of the ladder, and succeeded in placing the burly Removite over his shoulder. The ladder rocked and swayed ominously, but fortune favours the brave, and, after a brief but terrible period of suspense, Linley accomplished his perilous task, and successfully descended the ladder.

Lucky it was for Bolsover that Linley should have entered the church at the time he did. A war intercession was to be held on the morrow, and Mark had suddenly remembered that he had not put up the numbers of the hymns. He had, therefore, hastened to the church with all speed, and had entered just as Bolsover's shriek rang out.

He laid some hassocks in the aisle of the church, and laid Bolsover gently upon them. Then he struck a match in the gloom, and peered down with grave anxiety at Skinner.

Mark feared the worst at once. The face of the fallen junior was pallid, and he was inanimate. No pulsation could be felt, and a lump rose in Linley's throat as he turned away and wended his steps with all speed to the school buildings.

Help soon arrived. Wingate and several more Sixth-Formers, hearing what had happened, hastened to the spot, and Harold Skinner was taken up tenderly and conveyed at once to the sanatorium. Shortly afterwards Bolsover came to his senses.

"Where am I?" he murmured, endeavouring to rise.

"In the church, safe and sound," said Courtney, who had remained with Mark Linley. "Brace up, kid!"

"But Skinner?" gasped Bolsover hoarsely.

"He is terribly hurt, poor fellow; perhaps killed!" said the senior gravely.

"Killed!" echoed Bolsover, with a choking sob. "Oh, Courtney, Courtney! Killed! And he gave his life for me!"

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.
The Last of the Pagans!

HAROLD SKINNER lay still and silent in the school sanatorium. The local doctor had been summoned, out of a faint hope that the boy might yet be living, and great was the joy of Dr. Locke and the rest of the community to know that breath still remained in the plucky junior's body.

"He may rally," said the doctor seriously; "but it is a matter for doubt. The poor fellow is terribly injured. One of his legs is broken, and there is internal trouble. He must be operated upon without delay."

"Send for the best surgeon in the kingdom, if necessary," said the Head. "I care not what his fee is. That boy's life must be saved at all hazards."

Late that evening a Harley Street surgeon arrived. He was a cheerful individual, with none of the morbid peculiarities attached to many men of his profession.

The operation was a lengthy affair, and it was well that it had been placed in the hands of a skilful man.

"He will pull through," said the surgeon. "I entertain the highest hopes of his recovery. There are no bones broken, apart from the leg, and unless he has a relapse all will be well. The operation was attended with much difficulty, but I do not think the labour has been in vain."

The Head was profuse in his expression of thanks, and remained by the bedside of the patient after the surgeon had taken his departure.

Skinner did not open his eyes until nearly midnight. When he did so he was able to speak, and to speak coherently.

He had much to say to the Head, but it boots not to repeat it in these pages. Suffice it to say that the prostrate junior made a full and frank confession of all his misdemeanours, not sparing himself in the least.

But his offences were amply atoned for now. Bolsover major had craved an audience with the Head, outside the sanatorium, and had described, with simple eloquence, Skinner's glorious act of heroism. Such a story would have melted a heart of stone.

"You are forgiven, my poor lad," said Dr. Locke, in moved accents. "I thank Providence that you have been spared, and that you have been brought to a sense of your misdoing. You erred grievously; but it is not for me to judge you. We are none of us fit to cast a stone. I sincerely hope you will speedily be restored to health and strength."

"Thank you, sir," said Skinner, and a curious smile hovered around his lips. "The Pagans will shut up shop after this. And I'm going to try and atone for all I've done; that is to say, if I'm to be allowed to remain at Greyfriars."

"Heaven help you!" murmured Dr. Locke. "I should certainly not dream of sending you away after the noble sacrifice you made for the sake of another."

"I hope to be fit again soon, sir," said Skinner. And then his eyes closed once more.

But in the silent watches of the night that followed a change for the worse drew rapidly on. The breathing became a series of short, quick gasps, the lungs seemed choked, and the lamp of life seemed to be nearing its final flicker.

It was one of the most anxious vigils the good-hearted doctor had ever spent. He was driven between alternate hopes and fears, and from his heart he uttered a fervent prayer that Providence would spare the stricken junior, who had redeemed the past in such a courageous, heroic manner.

For a long time it seemed impossible that the boy would live, and the Head could not decide whether to wire for Skinner's parents, or wait for the doctor's morning visit. At last he decided upon the latter course.

Bolsover major was admitted to the sanatorium in the morning, after Greyfriars had risen. There had been no rising-bell, and everyone, from Wingate down to the youngest fag, was deeply concerned for the sick junior.

Bolsover could scarcely restrain his emotion as he stood by the bedside and gazed on the still form of his rescuer. The burly Removite was thinking strange and new thoughts. He realised now the utter folly of his attack upon the Christian Faith.

"Oh, sir," he muttered brokenly, "do you think he will be spared?"

"Yes, yes! Do not distress yourself, my boy," said the Head kindly.

For hope lives long and dies hard.

. . . . . .

Harold Skinner still hung between life and death when Dr. Locke preached a brief but impressive sermon at the early service. The Head took for his text that grand passage from the 142nd Psalm:

"I cried unto Thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge, and my portion in the land of the living. Attend unto my cry, for I am brought very low."

It was a sermon which lingered long in the memories of those who heard it. The doctor spoke eloquently of Skinner's gallantry, and made light of those things which had led up to the stirring event. He had lived long enough to know that saints do not abide in our midst nowadays. We are all spotted, and some have more spots than others. A man should make large allowance for his fellows, and set much store by what is good in them.

When the sermon was over few eyes were dry in that great throng of warm-hearted schoolboys; and before returning to take up the routine of the day, every fellow prayed silently to One to Whom belongs mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him; and the prevailing hope present in every heart was that Harold Skinner would win through in that stern struggle against the reaper whose name is Death.

. . . . . .

The doctor's verdict was favourable. It had been touch-and-go, he said, but the danger was over now. Skinner was safe, and the dark shadow which had hung over the school was lifted at last.

During the days that followed there were few signs of outdoor activity in the Close. The familiar thud of the football was not heard, and voices were hushed, though none were sad now. And when Skinner was deemed well enough to see people, his schoolfellows poured into the sanatorium, and were profuse in their expressions of admiration for the ex-leader of the Pagans.

Mark Linley, too, was not forgotten. He was honoured with a tremendous banquet in No. 1 Study; and Bolsover major ever had reason to be grateful to the boy who had rescued him from the worst predicament he had been placed in during his young but adventurous life.

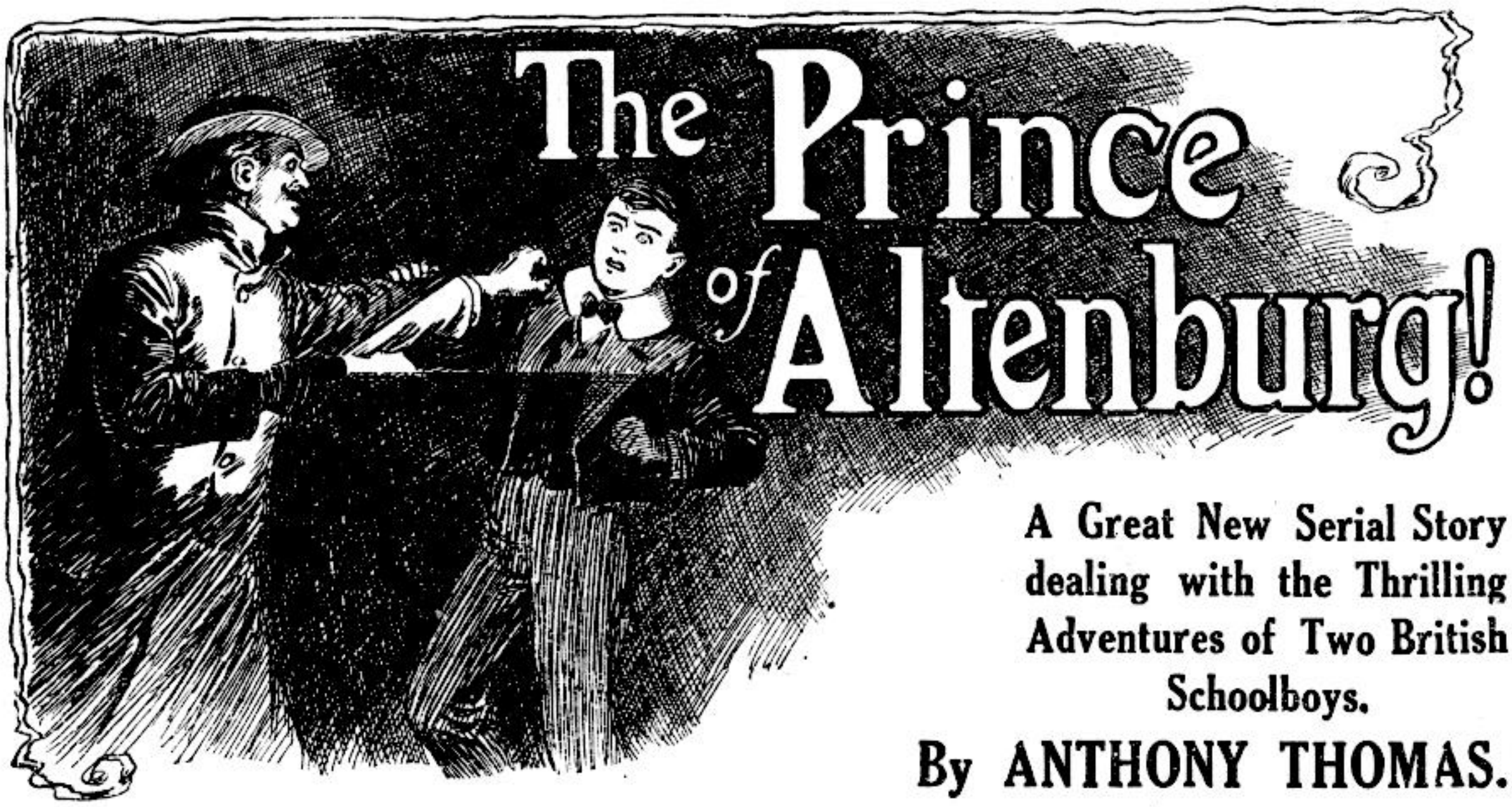
And thus the clouds rolled by, and Skinner sped rapidly on the high road to recovery. That he would reform was certain; but those who knew Skinner possessed grave doubts. They felt that the reform would be a "flash in the pan," rather than a permanent change for the better, for the evil in Harold Skinner's nature greatly outweighed the good.

But one thing was certain. The Pagans would be Pagans no longer. In future the attendances at the Sunday services would be eminently satisfactory, and none would seek to absent themselves. As Bob Cherry remarked, one could sing hymns and chant Psalms without necessarily being a prig and a Puritan. And due respect to the Sabbath was not merely the attitude of a Good Little Georgie. It was the right and manly course to be adopted by every fellow who played the game.

And for weeks afterwards the main topic of conversation among the Greyfriars juniors was the brief but exciting reign of The Sunday Crusaders!

THE END.

(If you have enjoyed this story, recommend to your chums next week's grand, long, amusing tale of Greyfriars School, entitled "BUNTER'S ANTI-TUCK CAMPAIGN!" By Frank Richards.)



A Great New Serial Story dealing with the Thrilling Adventures of Two British Schoolboys.

By ANTHONY THOMAS.

THE FIRST INSTALMENTS.

Two boys of St. Dunstan's School, JACK DARRELL and TEDDY BURKE, are discovered trespassing by an irate farmer, Mr. Stone.

In order to appease the farmer's wrath, Teddy Burke shows him a copy of a newspaper containing a portrait of THE PRINCE OF ALTENBURG, and leads him to believe that Jack Darrell, who bears a strong resemblance to the portrait, is really the prince, and that they were coming to ask his permission to be shown over the farm.

Mr. Stone is unable to keep the knowledge that a prince is a scholar at the local college to himself, and eventually the news reaches the ears of a person named Lewis Mackay, who is staying in the neighbourhood.

Mackay, under the impression that Jack Darrell is really the Prince of Altenburg, kidnaps both him and his chum, Teddy Burke.

The chums eventually find themselves on board the Kielberg, a German cruiser, under the care of BARON ZELLING.

Meanwhile, DERWENT HOOD, chief of the British Counter-Espionage Department, hearing that the baron and the two boys are on board the Kielberg, goes in chase of that vessel in H.M.S. Chatswood.

The Kielberg seeks refuge about sixty miles up the River Kunene, on the west coast of Africa, where she runs aground.

The Chatswood discovers the Kielberg's hiding-place, and Derwent Hood, accompanied by Dexter and Walters—two members of the Chatswood's crew—goes up the river in a motor-launch. They encounter a superior number of Germans, however, and are all made prisoners.

During a quarrel on the Kielberg between Baron Zelling and the captain, Darrell, Walters, and Dexter succeed in escaping. They seek refuge in the shelter of the foliage on the banks of the river, and at night the Germans appear in a launch, from which they are flashing a small searchlight.

(Now go on with the Story.)

Avoiding the Mousetrap!

Baron Zelling had, in the course of his career, often found himself in awkward positions. It was at such times that he abandoned all the arts of diplomacy in which he was skilled, and fell back on the thing which appealed most strongly to his Prussian mind—force!

When he realised that it was impossible to bend Captain Diemster to his own point of view, Zelling determined to get rid of him.

It took him some time to win to his side the officers he wanted. But he succeeded at last.

Then it was that the British motor-launch appeared on the scene, and caused a diversion. Zelling saw that the only thing to do was to act promptly. And there was to be neither sentiment nor mercy in his methods.

When the fight in the captain's cabin had subsided, Zelling thought for a moment that complete victory was his. The captain and his chief officer lay dead; any other supporters of the captain were not only outnumbered but were only too anxious to join the winning side.

Derwent Hood, an old enemy of Zelling's, lay trussed up and bound on the floor. The youngster, who had continually annoyed Zelling by his interference, was incapable of doing anything. The Prince of Altenburg, for whom Zelling had risked so much, had doubtless run to his cabin, or, at best, he could only make an attempt to escape. The baron was quite confident that the motor-launch had been put out of action.

He did not worry then when he learned that Midshipman Dexter and Darrell (as it pleased the prince to call himself) had made for their boat. He merely smiled, and waited for the two to be brought back as prisoners to him.

But when the man came back to the cabin, and reported that the launch with the three men on board had got safely away, Zelling lost control of himself.

"You fools!" he said. Then, in guttural German, he called them every name he could think of. Then he called to Von Bohn.

"Get out the launch, and take half a dozen men with you!" he ordered. "That British launch must be back here before morning. You understand? If they get to the mouth of the river, our plans are ruined. Quick! Get after them at once!"

Von Bohn went without a word. He had helped Zelling all he could, but he was beginning to fear him now.

From the floor where he lay bound Derwent Hood laughed at Zelling's anger.

"Ah, baron, I believe I shall outwit you even yet," he called. "Did you think we should be so foolish as to leave all the petrol for you to steal? We shall see, baron, whether, after all, I don't hold the winning card!"

Zelling kicked him where he lay. But Hood showed no sign of the pain he felt, and continued to smile. Whatever the cost, he meant to show no trace of disappointment or fear to Zelling. All his hopes now were centred on Midshipman Dexter, and the knowledge that he had at least succeeded in getting away safely brought joy to Derwent Hood, bound though he was.

The baron had quickly assumed command. He rapped out orders, and no one dared dispute his right.

"Take these two to their cabin, and lock them in! Have two men put on guard over them!" he commanded.

Immediately Derwent Hood was lifted up and carried to the lower deck. In the cabin he was put in one of the chairs, and left there helpless.

A few moments later they carried in Teddy Burke. The latter appeared to be slowly coming back to consciousness, for he tried to move his limbs.

His guards, however, did not apparently regard him as a dangerous prisoner, for they simply laid him down in the lower berth, then left the room.

The sound of the key turning in the lock, when the man had gone out, seemed to rouse Burke from his stupor. He raised himself from the berth, and stared round the cabin in a dull, hopeless way.

"Well, my lad," Derwent Hood called to him cheerfully, "and how are you feeling now?"

"Rotten!" Burke said slowly. "My head—— What's happened exactly? Where's Darrell and the other chap?"

"On their way to the sea, I hope," Hood answered. "As for us, we're prisoners here, and your friend, Baron Zelling, is, for the time being, in command."

"But Captain Diemster?" asked Burke. "Do you think they really killed him?"

"I'm afraid there's no doubt on that point," Hood replied. "And his chief officer has gone, too. The rest of the officers are inclined to support Zelling now; afraid of their own skins, I expect."

"But why?" Burke's head was aching furiously, yet he almost forgot it in his anxiety to understand the present situation. "What good will it do Zelling? I can't understand the man at all. What is he trying to do?"

"Principally to get his own way," laughed Hood. "I guessed he was making a bid for the complete control of the shipwrecked crowd, and that sooner or later he would put the captain out of the way. Unfortunately, Zelling seems to have the knack of keeping just about a day in front of me. He got out of England an hour or so before I had his place raided. He escaped to the Kielberg only a short time before I came on board the Tronjeim."

"This evening I fancied I saw the whole of his plan, and was quite prepared to outwit him. I never expected Zelling would force the row with the captain so quickly. But he was ahead of my calculations once more—and here I am in about the tightest corner I've ever struck. It's no use hiding the truth from you, Burke; we're in a really serious fix this time."

"What do you think will happen?" asked Burke.

"I think Zelling is just clearing the way now for his own plans. He doesn't want any opponents, and as soon as he can, he'll put both of us out of the way. Why shouldn't he? This is war-time, and we are prisoners. We attempt to escape, and Zelling is justified in shooting us."

"He can't shoot us now, though," Burke suggested.

"Can't he! He has put you in with me, and eventually you will unfasten all these ropes which are inconveniencing me at present. In fact, if you're feeling fit, you might begin on the job now. They're quite unpleasant."

Burke slipped out, and began to tackle the job, while Hood went on with his explanation.

"I fancy I heard the lock unfastened a short time ago. That's why I think I see Zelling's plan now. If you care to look outside, you'll find the guard has gone, and all we have to do is to walk out. Obviously, it has struck Zelling that it will be much better to finish us off when we are taking advantage of the opportunity he is giving us to escape than to put us out in cold blood."

"I don't understand it at all," Burke said, as he tugged at the ropes round Hood's ankles. "What can Zelling hope to get out of it, anyway?"

"He hopes to keep the Kielberg safe from the enemy, and to get the crew into South-West Africa, as a useful help to the governor there, if trouble comes his way—and it will! Then he himself, accompanied perhaps by one of the officers, and with young Darrell, of course, will take the motor-boat, and get up to some port, from where they will eventually succeed in taking a passage to some neutral country, and then on to Germany.

"Imagine what a story he will have to tell his chief! Of how, single-handed, he has accomplished all this! Honours and Iron Crosses will be showered upon him, especially if it happens, as it may do, that the few hundred officers and men he proposes to send to German South-West Africa turn the tide at the critical moment. I'm quite anxious to stop that little game at all costs."

"But supposing Midshipman Dexter and Walters get away with Darrell all right?" Burke asked

"There comes the one flaw at present in Zelling's plans, and I reminded him of it to-night. I hope they get through all right, but the Kielberg's boat has gone in chase of them, and, unfortunately, it is a faster boat than Dexter's. It's just open to doubt. Dexter's a smart chap, but he's up against a stiff proposition. Still, we'd better go on the idea that he will get through, and that the Chatswood will send a reconnoitring-party up the river, if it's only to search for us."

"And we'll probably be shot in the meantime?" suggested Burke. He scarcely saw the fun of the thing, even if Zelling's plans were completely spoiled, if he, Teddy Burke, was not there to rejoice over the fact.

"I hope not," Hood answered thoughtfully. "We've got to get off this boat, because it isn't safe to stay on board, and I don't like the idea of trusting myself two minutes to Zelling's mercy. Only we mustn't fall into the trap I fancy he's set for us. Good man!"

Burke had succeeded at last in unfastening Hood's bonds. The Secret Service man stood up, now and stretched himself.

"Keep that rope," he suggested. "It may be useful presently. Now, what are we going to do?"

He sat down at the table, and covered his eyes with his hand. For five minutes he sat there, thinking hard of the different sides to the problem which faced him.

"It's complicated, Burke," he said, at last. "If I could only rely on everyone doing just what they are expected to do, all would be well. But throughout the whole course of the present business the luck has played into Zelling's hands. We've got to risk it, that's all."

He went to the porthole, and began to unscrew the fastening. When it was open, he turned to Burke.

"You couldn't squeeze through that, could you?" he asked, then answered the question himself. "No; you're as bad a fit as I am. We must try the other way. Hand me that rope."

Burke watched him in wonder as Hood made one end of the rope fast to the bar at the end of the top berth. The other end was dropped through the porthole.

"Keep very quiet and follow me," Hood whispered to Burke.

Turning out the light, he went to the door and opened it cautiously. He looked down the passage outside the door, but there was no sign of anyone on guard.

"Good! Follow me into the next cabin."

As Burke stepped out Hood very quietly fastened the cabin door behind him. The two then went into the cabin where Dexter and Hood had been put originally.

Having closed and bolted the door of this cabin, Hood turned on the light. He looked round the place, and eventually laid hands on a small but fairly heavy mirror, which he ripped from its fastening.

What the object of it all was Burke could not guess yet. He watched Hood go to the porthole and open it. Then he peered through and out over the river.

Coming back for a moment, he turned to Burke.

"Turn the light out now!" he called out softly. "And don't utter a sound after that."

The cabin was in complete darkness, and Burke could see nothing of Hood. But suddenly he heard him yelling and calling like a madman.

It seemed to Burke that the sound came from outside the cabin, and he was right. Hood had put his head as far through the porthole as he could, then began to cry out as though in agony.

For five or six seconds it lasted. It ceased almost as abruptly as it began, and the next thing Burke heard was a splash in the water.

It was not very loud, and Hood himself wondered whether those on deck who had heard the cries would also catch the faint splash made by the mirror, which he had flung as hard as he could on to the surface of the water.

He worked back towards Burke, and gripped his arm. Together they stood listening in the darkness.

Sounds came to them. Men were running about the deck, and others were passing the door of the cabin they were in.

They could hear them in the cabin which they had only just left. Guttural cries and shouts of surprise mingled with commands.

In a few moments all the sounds came from the deck, and the noise in the passage and in the cabin next door ceased.

A shot rang out, followed by another. Through the open porthole came the sound of a boat being hastily pulled out into the middle of the stream.

"I believe it's come off all right," whispered Hood. "But I fancy Zelling himself didn't come down. He's got more brains than to be taken in so easily—if he's seen the cabin. Only a fool of a German could be ass enough to think a man could squeeze himself through that porthole."

"What are we going to do now?" Burke asked, for as yet he could not quite grasp the object of the manœuvre.

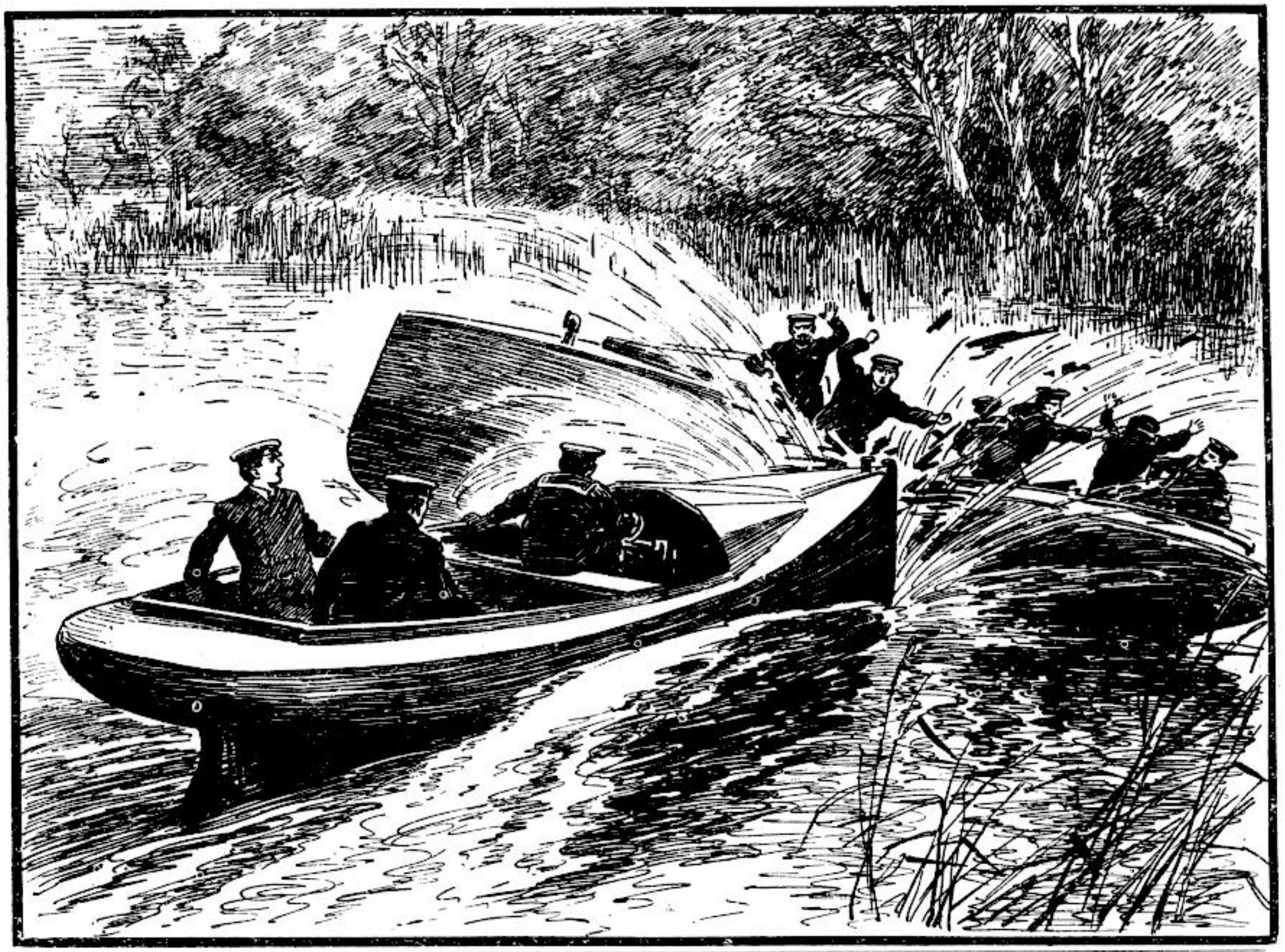
"Stay here for a little while," Hood answered. "We're a long way from being out of the wood yet."

———

News at Home!

Meantime in England the complete and utter disappearance of Darrell and Burke had not been without its effect.

At St. Dunstan's the Head waited patiently for the replies he expected from the parents. But Darrell's father, who occupied an important post in the Civil Service, had left home on some important mission, the object of which was a secret.



Walters backed his boat as far as he dared, then ran full speed ahead straight for the unfortunate boat before them. Again he got in the centre, and this time the sound of tearing and rending was unmistakable. "We've done 'em in!" said Dexter. (*See page* 27.)

Darrell's two elder brothers had both joined the Army, and were away in camp. Only his mother was at home, and she could do no more than send back word that Jack had certainly not come home.

Burke's father was a major in a well-known Irish regiment. His wife had died some years ago, and the housekeeper in charge of the house which Major Burke had taken near his regimental depot simply sent the letter on with others.

It followed the major, and reached him eventually just as he had arrived at the base in France. He could do no more than wire back to the Head of St. Dunstan's to do all he could, and, if necessary, engage detectives to investigate the matter.

In due time Mr. Darrell also sent word to the same effect. He could not imagine for one moment that Jack and his friend had run away. It was simply inconceivable.

He would not be able to give any personal attention to the matter for some weeks to come, as important Government work needed every moment of his time. But he would be glad to hear every detail, and all letters would be forwarded to him promptly.

Dr. Margards realised then that the whole responsibility for whatever action was taken rested with him. He set to work at once.

When several days had passed the Head succeeded in getting a friend of his who had influence at Scotland Yard to gain for him an interview with the assistant-commissioner.

It was in this manner that Dr. Margards eventually learned the earlier part of the story.

The Scotland Yard man quickly discovered that their own Secret Service staff were interested in the case, as one of the Counter Espionage Staff, Mr. Derwent Hood, had been working in conjunction with them over Baron Zelling's capture.

"It's an extraordinary case," the assistant-commissioner told Dr. Margards on the latter's fourth visit. "These two boys were picked up in the North Sea by a Norwegian tramp. From the latest report we've received, the Norwegian boat was overtaken by the German raider, the Kielberg, and Baron Zelling and the two boys were taken off by the Germans."

"Then they will be taken to Germany eventually!" gasped the Head of St. Dunstan's.

"Never!" laughed the assistant-commissioner. "Our boat, the Chatswood, is apparently after the Kielberg now. The only danger is if the German insists on a fight, and gets sunk, as she would do without a doubt, the boys would go down with her."

"I hope not!" breathed Dr. Margards fervently.

He suddenly realised that, despite the trouble the two boys had been to him on more than one occasion, they were fine specimens of boyhood, and would doubtless do both the school and himself much credit one day.

"We have a man on board," the Scotland Yard expert went on, "who has often worked for one of our departments, or in conjunction with it. I should trust him to see that he gets his own quarry, this Baron Zelling, who is a dangerous spy, and the two boys quite safely back to England again."

The assistant-commissioner was quiet for a moment as he thought of the cases in which Derwent Hood had been concerned, and of the stories told of his daring and brilliant strategy.

"Yes," he said more slowly. "I don't think you need worry at all, Dr. Margards. The matter is in the hands of the finest man I know for the job. I'd like to bet you we see them all back in England—Zelling as well—safe and sound within a fortnight or so."

"I'm very glad." Dr. Margards rose. "But you'll let me know, or send for me, if you do hear anything more important?"

"I'll let you know exactly what happens," the assistant-commissioner answered. "It must be treated as private in-

formation, of course, but it will enable you to reassure the boys' parents, I hope."

Dr. Margards left him then; and for a fortnight he waited, hoping that the Scotland Yard prophecy would be fulfilled speedily.

But nothing happened until, on the fifteenth day after his last interview, he received a brief wire from Captain Cobbold, the assistant-commissioner.

"Give me a call as soon as you can," the message said.

And Dr. Margards looked up the first train to London, and, leaving his work, was in the metropolis late that afternoon.

At the big offices on the Embankment he was shown almost immediately into the room of Captain Cobbold.

"Good news?" Dr. Margards asked anxiously, as he shook hands.

"Yes—and no," answered the assistant-commissioner. "Nothing definite; but I thought you would be getting anxious, so I asked you to call and hear the latest."

He paused for a moment, and took a writing-pad from his drawer.

"I have really only just had the information," he went on, "and, of course, as I mentioned before, it is for you only."

Dr. Margards nodded.

"The Admiralty have received a report from the commander of the Chatswood himself," Captain Cobbold went on. "It appears that the Kielberg has run up some river, almost unknown, called the Kunene, in West Africa, which is practically only navigable by the very lightest boats.

"The commander has sent a small expedition up the river to find out where the Kielberg is, and he suggests that on receiving confirmation of his views he should send several boats, fully armed, to take possession of the Kielberg and those aboard her.

"A ship has left to-day with various light guns and ammunition for the Chatswood; so that you can take it for granted that the German pirates' days are numbered. That will be about the last of them, I fancy."

"But the boys?" questioned Dr. Margards. "They—they will not be in any danger?"

The assistant-commissioner shrugged his shoulders.

"There is bound to be a certain amount of danger," he answered. "But the man I told you about—Hood, of the Counter-Espionage—is probably keener than you are to get them back safe and sound. And the commander of the Chatswood will do all in his power, you can be sure."

"I—my interest, you see, is entirely in the boys," Dr. Margards spoke hesitantly. "They were in my charge, and if anything happened to them I should feel responsible. I—I wish I could do something. Almost I feel inclined to go out myself."

"What?" The assistant-commissioner laughed as Dr. Margards stood up. Then for the first time he realised that the schoolmaster was a finely-built man, and was not nearly so old as his careful, precise manner gave one the impression at first.

In truth, as the boys at St. Dunstan's knew, the Head was a splendid athlete. More, he was not the man to make wild or rash suggestions.

"I was only thinking," Dr. Margards answered slowly, "that it will take some time for the battleship to make its plans and equip its expedition. Meantime, it might be possible for a private expedition to accomplish the rescue of the boys quite apart from them. And it would ensure the boys' safety."

"Pooh! You mustn't dream of such a thing!" Captain Cobbold felt almost annoyed by the doctor's calmness.

"I should be very careful not to do anything likely to interfere with the real business of the Chatswood," the Head went on, still speaking very thoughtfully. "Only it does seem to me that this expedition would not put the boys' lives first—quite right, too. To me their welfare is of paramount importance. We begin holidays in a few days. I think I'll go and consult my friend Bassington."

"Who's that?" asked Captain Cobbold quickly.

"Bassington—Lord Bassington, you know," Dr. Margards explained. "We were at Oxford together, and I generally go for a cruise with him each year. This year it was cancelled because it appeared too doubtful in view of the war. But the adventure may appeal to him. He is a fine sailor, as you probably know."

"I should think he was!" The assistant-commissioner whistled softly after he had spoken. "Well, of course, you must decide it between yourselves; but any help I can give is at your service at all times, Dr. Margards."

"I know; and I'm more than grateful for all you've done for me," the doctor answered. "If I may, I will call in and see you again to-morrow."

"Certainly!" And Captain Cobbold shook hands.

When the doctor had gone the Scotland Yard man sat lost in thought for a time.

Another man entered presently, and Cobbold looked up with a start.

"Hallo! What's the problem now?" the new-comer asked. "Spies again?"

"Not exactly," answered Cobbold. "I'm just marvelling over the Zelling case. No one worries particularly about him, though he'd be better out of the way. It's the two boys who seem to have caused the fun, and they'd be enjoying themselves immensely if they knew the fuss they were causing."

"Oh! Why?" asked the other.

"The German Emperor and his staff are patiently waiting to give 'em a big reception. Our Counter-Espionage staff has its best man after them; there's one of our first-class cruisers on the job, and the Admiralty are as much interested in the youngsters as in the Kielberg. Scotland Yard is getting a trifle excited about them. And now there's a first-class private expedition likely to be arranged to go out and recover them without anybody's help. All for two kids who haven't left school yet!"

"I'd like to meet those youngsters!" retorted the visitor.

"So should I," agreed Cobbold. "From what we are now learning, they must be a fine pair of bluffers. And I can't quite tell yet whether they've done the country a bad turn—or a really excellent bit of work for us. But they're not clear of their troubles yet by a long chalk. I should think it was about even chances on their ever seeing their happy homes again."

Darrell Makes the Decision.

The Navy breeds coolness, and Midshipman Dexter would have shamed the proverbial cucumber.

He came of a fighting stock, and, like Teddy Burke, he could not keep out of a fight. But, unlike Burke, he was under no delusions about it. He did not flatter himself that he loved peacefulness; a good scrap in a worthy cause was a tonic to him, and a thing to be sought after.

So that when the Kielberg's boat came nearer he did not hope some wonderful chance would come and divert the little searchlight from his own boat. He did not wish anything at all, but simply sat and watched and waited—waited for the fight which now seemed inevitable.

The signal came at last. A bright circle of light shone on his boat and showed up every detail. For a moment it blinded him, but he was prepared for that.

Harsh shouts and cries came as the Germans realised they had tracked down the object of their search.

Then for a moment all was quiet. Dexter had taken his time and aimed carefully as the boat drew almost alongside.

And his aim had gone true. The lens of the searchlight was smashed into tiny fragments, and the light itself disappeared with astounding suddenness.

There were more weird cries and yells, and on board the enemy's launch Dexter could hear the sound of men moving and trying to grasp where they were and what orders they were to obey. Dexter himself gave only one order.

"Try and ram her, Walters!" he said quietly. "Keep down, both of you! We don't want any casualties this journey."

The opposing boat had drawn back into the river a little way. Walters swung their own boat round as quickly as he dared, and presently she was gliding out into the river.

It was fairly dark, and difficult to tell exactly where their opponents lay. But Walters was following the short, whispered instructions from the midshipman, and got up a good speed, and made as though to run away.

The other boat instantly put on pressure, and for a few moments both of them went at their highest speed. Then Walters slowed down and almost described a complete circle.

So quick had been the manœuvre that the boat behind did not seem to realise what had happened, nor did they slacken speed. And, quick as lightning, Walters had put his indicator over to full.

Then, judging as carefully as he could, and listening to every whisper from Dexter, he went right ahead.

Had it been broad daylight and every condition favourable, the manœuvre could not have been executed more exactly. The Chatswood's launch struck the other almost dead in the centre, and the impact was terrific. Jack Darrell, crouching low as he had been told, was flung into the bottom of the boat.

The noise and the shouting now was more weird and wild than ever. At first Darrell could not make out what had happened, but Dexter's whisper to Walters told him.

"We're all right, Walters," he said quietly. "I think

they're badly hit. Her engine's stopped. Give her another reminder."

Someone on board the German boat began to shoot, but the shots passed harmlessly by. Walters backed his boat as far as he dared, then ran full speed ahead straight for the unfortunate boat before them.

Again he got in the centre, and this time the sound of tearing and rending was unmistakable.

"We've done 'em in!" Dexter said. "There won't be a real fight after all. I guess the crew will be able to swim ashore all right, so we won't try and win any life-saving medals to-night. Look! Can you see the beggars?"

They peered into the darkness, and could dimly discern half a dozen heads bobbing about in the water.

"We'll stand by for a short time," Dexter said. "Keep your eyes on them, Walters."

They watched carefully, and gradually the six or seven heads appeared to reach the shore in safety. The motor-launch gave a little gurgle of despair and sank.

"Now we can run upstream a little, Walters," the midshipman said.

"Upstream, sir?" asked the sailor.

"I think so. There's no danger of another chase to-night, and I'd like to have a last look at those beggars in the morning. They'll have a nice walk back to the Kielberg, won't they?"

Walters laughed heartily at the joke. In imagination he could see the men struggling through all the tangled mass of undergrowth they would have to overcome on their long tramp back to their ship.

"Take some of the fat off a few of them, sir," he remarked pleasantly. "And we've paid 'em back for trying their monkey tricks on this little craft."

"We have," Dexter agreed. "From the little Hood told me I imagine old Zelling was relying on that tub we've sent to the bottom to take him right away from this pleasant neighbourhood. Pull in here, Walters!"

Walters obeyed and steered the boat into the bank again, but on the opposite side from their last anchorage, and about three-quarters of a mile above it.

"I think we've all earned some of that excellent coffee you make, Walters," the midshipman said. "Then we'd better just run over this craft and see whether we've suffered much damage."

But an examination revealed very little injury beyond badly scratched paintwork, and the shock had certainly not affected the engine in any way.

They drank their coffee in silence. Jack Darrell had spoken very little since the attack on their pursuers. His mind was filled with one thought and one problem. How was Teddy Burke faring now that he was helpless in Zelling's hands?

"I don't know!" Dexter exclaimed suddenly, and both Jack Darrell and Walters stared at him in surprise, for the outburst was sharp and unexpected.

"What's gone wrong now?" asked Darrell.

"Nothing. But I can't decide what course to take. What do you think, Walters? Shall we leave the other two for the time being, and get back to the ship again? Or shall we take all the risks over again and go back? If we go back we might manage to get them aboard this craft, and then there would be no heartaches. I don't like leaving a pal in the lurch."

"I'm in favour of doing just whatever you think best, Mr. Dexter," Walters answered quietly. "Though we haven't really had much scrapping yet—not to speak of, really," he added thoughtfully.

"No," Dexter nodded. "It's been running away most of the time. What do you think, young Darrell? Would you prefer to be safe and snug on board the Chatswood, which is a very nice ship for anyone to be on, or would you care to take the chance of meeting your old pal Zelling again?"

"I'd rather go back to the Kielberg and try and get the others off," answered Darrell quickly. "I'd hate the idea of getting away safely and leaving old Burke in Zelling's hands. I promised him I'd stick to him right through."

"My sentiments exactly," said Dexter. "And we've heaps of time to have a shot at the thing. It's the Kielberg for us, Walters. I'll take her now. We'll just try and sneak up right under her nose and hide there. And if we can't get old Hood and Burke off the beastly boat, my name's not Dexter. Then we'll try to blow the whole thing to smithereens. How's that for an idea, Walters? There'll be heaps of powder and stuff aboard her, and I guess you know how to manage the thing. Wouldn't you like to blow up a German battleship?"

"I should, sir," Walters answered grimly, as the engine began to work.

"Well, we're going the right way for it now," and Dexter laughed joyously. "Here's luck to our second attempt on the Kielberg! May we have a good run for our money, and land back on the Chatsworth safe and sound!

(Look out for next Monday's instalment of this exciting yarn. Order your "MAGNET" early!)

FAVOURITE FRIENDS IN FICTION.

No. 9.

Of all the chumps at Greyfriars School,
The most amazing joker
Who ever sought to reign and rule
Is Master Horace Coker.
Who, like a giant in his prime,
And filled with airs and graces,
Devotes his valuable time
To teaching fags their places.

Young Wharton and his gallant train
Are Coker's pet aversion;
And oftentimes to their domain
He makes a brief incursion.
A thrilling fight is on the board,
And when the tumult ceases,
The mighty Horace, sadly floored,
Feels smashed in fifty pieces!

A storm of wrath and direful groans
Awaits him who alludeth
In harsh or disrespectful tones
To Coker's Auntie Judith.
And when she sends substantial tips,
Her nephew's cheeks are ruddy;
For visions rise of motor trips
And banquets in the study.

Great Horace has two friends in need—
One Greene, the other Potter—
Who worship Coker at a feed,
And vow he's not a rotter.
But when the firm is "stony-broke,"
And other chaps revile 'em,
They tell their chief to nibble coke,
Or flee to an asylum!

When Coker with the bat doth smite
Against his captain's wishes,
The chaps regard it as a sight
For gods and little fishes.
While friends and foes alike declare,
And stake their oath upon it,
The greatest ill that flesh can bear
Is Coker's ode or sonnet.

Come, bow before the mighty one,
Who thinks no youth is wiser,
And seeks a place within the sun,
Like Bill, the hated Kaiser!
He fondly thinks he holds the field,
Defies all contradiction,
And evermore will stand revealed—
The funniest freak in fiction!

Next Monday:

FIGGINS & CO.

No. 10 of this grand new series.

MY READERS' PAGE

The Editor is always pleased to hear from his chums, at home or abroad, and is only too willing to give his best advice to them if they are in difficulty or in trouble. . . . Whom to write to: Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.

For Next Monday:

"BUNTER'S ANTI-TUCK CAMPAIGN!"

By Frank Richards.

The central figure in our next grand, long, complete story of Greyfriars School is Billy Bunter, who has provided such illimitable scope for the harmless humour of Mr. Frank Richards in the past. Fired, apparently, with patriotic principles, Bunter avows that it is the bounden duty of every British boy to economise in war-time. "Eat less tuck" is his unwavering motto; and great is the astonishment when the fat junior himself sets a glowing example to his schoolfellows by denying himself the luxury of a square meal. Unfortunately, most of the Removites agreed that they would stand by Bunter in his great scheme, little dreaming that he would carry it out, and as a result there are a good many empty stomachs in the ranks of the Remove. It eventually transpires, however, that Billy Bunter has been obtaining substantial supplies from a certain quarter, and when the true facts of the case come to light,

"BUNTER'S ANTI-TUCK CAMPAIGN"

comes to an untimely conclusion.

Those who read next Monday's story are assured of several hours of uproarious mirth.

"What dem velly bad English boys read!" An inspection in the desert.

(See "Still Smiling" on page iii of cover.)

Waiting for the wily Turk on the banks of the Suez Canal!

(See "Still Smiling" on page iii of cover.)

A SUNDAY-SCHOOL SECRETARY'S OPINION.

It is peculiarly appropriate that at the time of going to press with "The Sunday Crusaders," a story which demonstrates to British boys the value of church-going, I should receive the following interesting letter from an official in one of our big Sunday-schools:

"120, Battersea Park Road,
"London, S.W.

"Dear Editor,—This is the first time I have ever had the pleasure of writing to you, and I must congratulate you upon the excellent reading matter which you are supplying at the modest charge of one penny.

"Personally, I think the 'Magnet' and 'Gem' the finest literature on the market for people of both sexes and all ages. I feel, moreover, that I am in a position to make these remarks, being one of your oldest readers. I have read every copy of both the 'Magnet' and 'Gem.' This may not be a record, but, at the same time, it is very good, as you will admit.

"I am honorary secretary of one of the largest Sunday-schools in South London, and between 900 and 1,000 children, whose ages range from seven to fourteen years, pass through my hands every year. I think this allows me to state that I am, or at least ought to be, a good judge of what is fit literature for the young. I honestly contend that with the exception of 'The Book,' the 'Magnet' and 'Gem' are the finest periodicals on earth for young people to read. They teach in a practical manner the lessons of good and evil, also how young people who have not yet reached the age when their individual actions make much difference to life in general can still live good and useful lives and fit themselves to become useful men and women.

"I assure you that I never miss a chance of advising these young people to become members of your select circle of chums. Very often, if it is necessary for me to teach a class of children, I tell them in a shortened form one of the stories from either the 'Magnet' or the 'Gem,' and I have never yet been unsuccessful in finding some point which is of vital importance to good living.

"Wishing you every success,
"I am, yours sincerely,
"ARTHUR F. WATTS,
"Hon. Secretary, St. Saviour's Sunday-school, Battersea Park, S.W."

The above letter speaks eloquently for itself, and I am much indebted to Mr. Watts for letting me have his opinion of the papers—an opinion which is certainly not without weight.

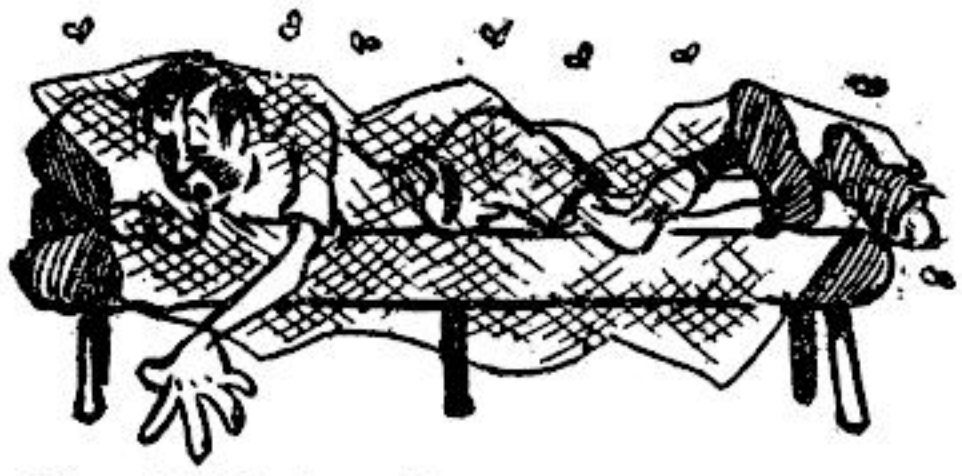
In a cheery, good humoured way, Mr. Richards and Mr. Clifford have always upheld, through the medium of their stories, the highest principles of the Christian Church. We leave it to the religious papers to deal freely and fully with such a vital subject, but the teaching of the "Magnet" Library and its kindred journals may be summarised thus:

1. Always play the game.
2. Be true to your church.
3. Be true to yourself.

Those who observe these simple rules will have the supreme satisfaction of living a good and useful life.

"Oh, I wish I was back at the Fleetway House!" says Mr. S. K. Perkins. "Here I am marching into action with the temperature about a thousand degrees over boiling-point!!"

(See "Still Smiling" on page iii of cover.)



The end of the day The mosquito is as big a pest as the Turk.

(See "Still Smiling" on page iii of cover.)

CAN YOU GUESS, BOYS AND GIRLS?

I wonder how many of my chums have fathomed the nature of the secret mentioned in my last Chat?

Mr. Frank Richards, who plays a prominent part in it, is such an obstinate gentleman that I must continue to "keep it dark," though I am burning with impatience to let the cat out of the bag, since the glad tidings will bring such tremendous joy

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

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to the hearts of my reader-chums. The latter, however, must possess their souls in patience, and continue to watch this page for further startling developments.

At the risk of being hurled from the Editorial chair by Mr. Richards, I will throw out this hint—that the great secret is in no way connected with "The Greyfriars Herald" or "Tom Merry's Weekly."

Now then, cute ones, put on your thinking caps, and see if you can solve this amazing mystery!

STILL SMILING!

I have just received a long letter from an artist member of my staff, Mr. S. K. Perkins, who has successfully survived a recent thrilling charge in the Dardanelles.

Our absent colleague trusts that the papers are still going merrily ahead, and in writing to him, enclosing such comforts as will meet his soldierly needs, I have assured him that such is the case, and that the wishes of myself and all "Magnet" readers go out to him for a safe return.

Mr. Perkins was ever a humorist, and though, at the time he wrote, he was facing death and danger in a thousand forms, he yet contrived to send me a few sketches, in which he has caught the local colour admirably. I am reproducing the drawings in this number of the "Magnet," as I feel sure they will be of interest to my numerous chums.

A keen Cornish reader of the "Magnet." My friend says: "There can never be a better paper published for boys and girls!"

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

"Office Boy" (Edinburgh). — If you will send me your name and full address, I shall be pleased to forward you a small booklet entitled, "How to Join the Navy."

H. B. (Margate).—Vernon-Smith's reform is lasting and complete. I do not think he will tread "the primrose path of dalliance" again. Good luck to your brothers on active service.

"Faithful" (Wimbledon).—Tom Dutton is not so hopelessly deaf that he cannot hear his Form-master address him at lessons. Hurree Singh is fifteen years of age.

"Jacques" (Portsmouth).—Sorry I cannot oblige you with the address of the Parisian photographers you mention. Many thanks for your loyal comments.

Jim Kendall (North Kensington).—Glad to welcome you as a new reader, Jimmy.

"An Anxious Reader" (Manchester).—The Greyfriars football season is already in full swing.

L. Bedford (Leeds).—The highest individual score in junior cricket at Greyfriars is 156, scored by Harry Wharton. The fellow who has scored the greatest number of goals in one match is Vernon-Smith, who once found the net seven times against a weak Highcliffe team.

Leonard B. Dickins (Sheffield).—Wun Lung will be in the limelight again shortly.

"An Ardent Reader" (near Preston).—You will have seen by this time the result of the "Chuckles" Miniature Competition.

"A New Reader" (Plaistow).—I am very sorry, but I do not know of any reader who, having a complete set of "Magnets" in his possession, desires to part with them. It is unfortunate, but the popularity of our little journal is responsible. Save your copies in future, and see that you get them bound. That's the best way.

Fred Burns (Plymouth).—Thank you for your letter and acrostic, Fred. I fear the latter is not quite up to publication standard. Billy Bunter's height is 4ft. 10in., his weight fourteen stone, and his chest measurement 39in.

E. F. Taylor (Wimbledon Common).—I would willingly extend the school tale in the "Magnet," but what about my serial-loving readers? Do you think they would be pleased? I don't.

Ernest R. (Leeds).—Were this Germany, I should most assuredly present you with the Iron Cross, for you hold the doubtful honour of having asked me the most questions—sixty-three. The previous record was fifty-eight. My dear chap, how do you suppose I can possibly do it? I am neither a walking encyclopædia nor a machine.

L. A. Maynier, Sinda Duncombe, and C. A. Isaacs (Jamaica).—Your loyal letter touched me very deeply. The "Magnet" Library will never shut up shop while there are such splendid supporters as yourselves to keep its flag flying. Here's health to you!

F. B. (Liverpool).—Smoking, in a young boy, is a curse. If you let it get a grip on you, you will find great difficulty in shaking it off. I do not wish to moralise, but you *must* eschew the weed. Try sucking an acid tablet occasionally when the craving to smoke makes itself felt.

F. C. J. (Sheffield).—Plans of Greyfriars and St. Jim's have already appeared, and are now unobtainable.

Ernest H. (Hungerford).—I much admire your patriotism in sending all your spare copies of the companion papers to a lonely soldier. You will have your reward in the long run.

"Industrious" (Deptford).—If you will write to Messrs. W. and G. Foyle, Charing Cross Road, London, W.C., enclosing a stamped addressed envelope, they may be able to get you the book you mention.

Douglas J. White (Handley).—There is little to choose between Bob Cherry and Harry Wharton in the sports of swimming and running.

W. S. (Peckham).—Watch the announcement on my Chat page. Things are going to move soon.

"An Irish Reader" (Co. Antrim).—I am surprised that you do not know the meaning of "prep." It is short for preparation, and refers to lessons which are studied at night in readiness for the following morning.

Florrie M. (Armagh).—I much appreciate your kind suggestion, but we mustn't bring out too many papers all at once. It will flood the market!

J. O'Connell (Co. Dublin).—The title of the first "Magnet" story published was "The Making of Harry Wharton." It is long since out of print.

B. G. Louden (Co. Down).—Glad you like our new serial. Good luck to you when you join the Merchant Service!

J. R. H. (Thornaby-on-Tees).—I always hesitate to advise young fellows on questions pertaining to the Army, but with so many bereavements in your family, I consider you are quite justified in sitting tight at home. You might, however, join the local Volunteer Force, if there is such an organisation in your district.

MASTER ARTHUR BROWN, Tollcross, Glasgow, who states in an interesting letter that he is a staunch reader of ALL the companion papers.

"A Satisfied Reader."—I know of no such place as that you name. With regard to the argument you have had, you are quite correct, and your chum must give you best.

J. L. J. (Enfield).—Your question as to who is the best swimmer in the Remove is difficult to answer. Vernon-Smith probably holds the honour for short distances, and Harry Wharton for long. The christian name of Mr. Quelch is Horace. Colonel James Wharton is attached to the 21st Lancers.

T. C. B. L. (Leicester).—I am always pleased to receive good-natured criticism, and have made special note of your remarks. Write to me again, will you?

Alex. McMillan (Paisley) and many others.—Bob Cherry is a better boxer than Dick Russell. The latter won the light-weight championship at Aldershot solely through Bob's indisposition at the time.

H. A. H. (Holloway).—Greyfriars is situated in Kent. Thanks for your good wishes, which I cordially reciprocate.

"Two Chums" (Northampton).—Your letter afforded me much interest. I would that all my readers were as enthusiastic as yourselves. Greyfriars and St. Jim's each contain about two hundred and fifty scholars.

Your Editor