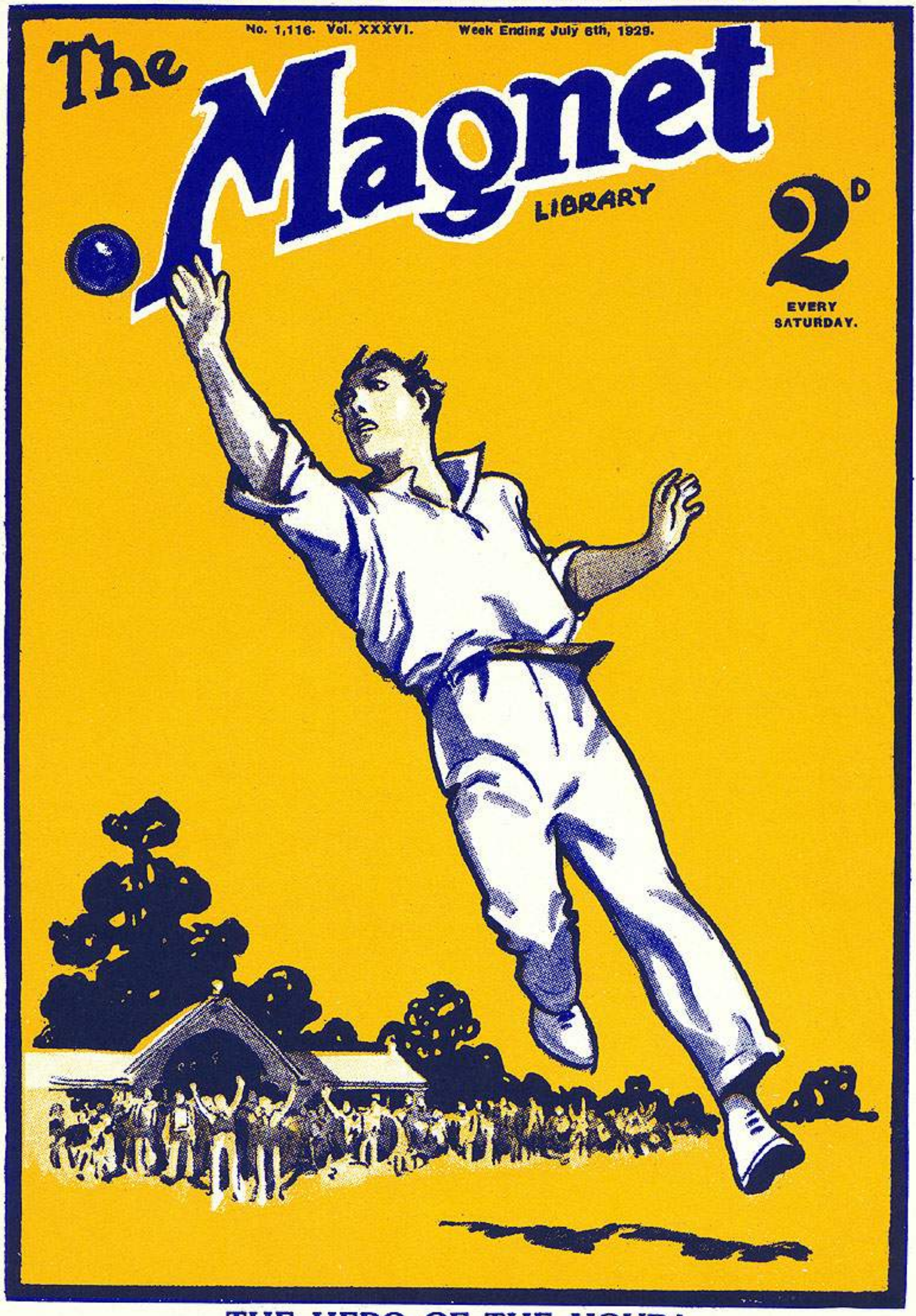
"THE MYSTERY OF MARK LINLEY!"

This week's BEST school and adventure story.



THE HERO OF THE HOUR!

The ideal story essentially demands a strong plot with a fair sprinkling of humorous and dramatic situations; and in "THE MYSTERY OF MARK LINLEY!" all these ingredients are yours to enjoy.

An Invitation to All Readers!

Come Into the Office, Boys!

Always glad to hear from you, chums, so drop me a line to the following address: The Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

NOTE.—All Jokes and Limericks should be sent to c/o "Magnet," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

HERE you are, you fellows—who wants a trip to the moon? It would be a bit of a change from the ordinary seaside or country holiday, wouldn't it? And from the way things are going it looks as though it will not be long before some of the enterprising travel bureaus are running cheap week-end tickets to the moon. A German scientist has just put forward a practical suggestion for taking people to the moon in a projectile similar to the one described by Jules Verne many years ago. Furthermore, the French Astronomical Society have awarded him a prize of 5,000 francs for his suggestion, which certainly looks as though there is something in it!

Now, chums, have a laugh at this joke which earns a pocket-knife for G. Murray, 19, High Street, Merton, S.W.19.

***Little Girl:* "Packet of pink dye, please."**

***Grocer:* "For woollen or cotton goods?"**

***Little Girl:* "It's for ma's stomach. The doctor said she'll have to diet, and pink's her favourite colour!"**

FREE GIFTS!

I suppose most of you are already looking forward to a summer holiday at the seaside; to pierrot parties, jolly bathing and a restful lounge in a comfy deck chair. Rather! Well, here's a little surprise for you. At all the popular seaside resorts the MAGNET's special Representatives will be on the look-out for MAGNET readers. When readers have been "spotted" these Representatives will be pleased to present them with a topping Free Gift, selected from the following: A Mystery Packet, Large Balloon, a Kite, Flags, etc. Now you're asking "What do we have to do in order to get spotted?" Very little indeed. When you're reading your copy of the MAGNET, in the comfort of a deck chair, make a point of displaying the cover prominently. Got the idea? Once our Representatives see the MAGNET cover they'll get ready to present you with a Free Gift.

NOW FOR A LIMERICK,

which wins a pocket wallet for S. Taylor, 55, Juxon Street, Oxford. Here it is:

Old Gosling, the Greyfriars porter
Is a champion "growser and snorter."
When chaps come in late,
He prompt locks the gate,
And says: "Which as 'ow I'll report yer!"

I wonder how many of you have wondered—as Dick Manfield, of Southport, is wondering—

WHAT DO FIREWORK MAKERS DO

all the year round? Surely, says Dick, the fireworks which are burned on the Fifth of November are not sufficient to keep the manufacturers going all through the year? Of course not, and even when you add the amount of fireworks made for regattas and fetes, that would not be sufficient to keep the manufacturers busy. The great bulk of fireworks go to ships at sea. Every ship carries a large stock of fireworks aboard, although they are rarely used. But they must be kept for cases of emergency, and that means that they deteriorate and have to be replaced with fresh ones every now and again. So, actually, the greatest number of fireworks made are never even used!

ALONE ON THE OCEAN!

At the time of writing there is a certain amount of interest being evoked over a man who set off in a small cutter to cross the Atlantic alone. He has already wandered almost around the whole world in this manner, lashing his tiller and letting his small craft drift when he sleeps. It must take a great deal of pluck to face the ocean in such a small vessel, and yet many men have chosen this particular life of adventure. Most of them, I am sorry to say, have disappeared sooner or later, and neither they nor their craft have ever been seen or heard of again.

And, talking about

SECRETS OF THE SEA

brings me to a query from Bert Kay, of South Shields, who asks me if the riddle of the "Marie Celeste" was ever solved. Bert refers to the case of a sailing ship, which, many years ago, was found drifting at sea. When she was boarded not a living being was in her, although the breakfast things were still on the cabin table. No boats were picked up, and the weather had not been stormy. The entire crew, together with the captain's wife and daughter had, seemingly, vanished into thin air—and to this day no one has ever been able to account for this! It is one of the strangest stories ever told about the sea.

By the way, young Dicky Nugent's just barged into my office to tell me that he fancies he can do my job a jolly sight better than I can do it myself—of course, Dicky was first in the field when cheek was served out—so, for once in a way, I'm going to give him his head. Get on with the giddy washing, Dicky!

WHAT DID NOAH SAY

when he herd the rane coming down? S. P. Lash, of Waterford, asks me that. It's an easy one. He sed "Listen!" (I think Dicky meant to have written "'Ark!" there.—Editor). Now we come to a kwery from annuther reeder. "Don't you think the moddern boy ort to pay more attenshun to riting?" he asks. "Please answer by post." I wood have done, only I can't maik out his naim and address!

I think we will now have one of those orther's eggsperiences which the editer promised you. This is an eggsperience which okkurred to that faimus orther Richard Nugent, who rites our wunnderful storys of St. Sam's Skool, and is tolled in his own words:

A GRATE JAPE!
By Richard Nugent.

Their was a sound of revvelry by night in the Forth-Form dormitory at Greyfriars Skool, for Harry Wharton & Co. were about to hold a midnite feest.

"Bring out the ise-pudding!" kommanded Harry Wharton. "It's topping, you fellers, and I ordered it speshally for you."

The ise-pudding was brort out. It certainly looked good, and the mouths of the Removites watered as they servayed it.

Bob Cherry was the first to sampel it.

"Groo!" he eggsclamed. "What the dickins is this?"

But all the others, being very greedy, had helped themselves to large porshuns, and the neckst minute they were all splutterring and gasping. It looked like ise-pudding—but the taiste! Then, from the dormitery door, kame a voice which they all knew well.

"Ha, ha, ha!" it laffed. "Ever been had?"

The voice was that of Richard Nugent, of the Second Form, who had karried out a grate jape. He had taken the ise-pudding which had been intended for the Forth-Formers, and had substichooted a konkokshun of his own, which was maid of cold mashed potaters, liberally besprinkled with red pepper, and dekoraited with chopped almonds! And the Second Form that night, et the ise-pudding which Harry Wharton had intended for his own chums.

This was not eggsactly a holliday eggsperience, but perhaps the editer will klass it as one, and award a prize for it. I suggest he does, anyway.

Dicky Nugent's suggestion will be carried out—perhaps! Anyway, Dicky has been carried out! He's already occupied far too much of my valuable time, and if I let him ramble on I will have no room to tell you of the rest of the features I have in store for you in our next issue. The long complete Greyfriars yarn is entitled:

"UNDER SUSPICION!"
By Frank Richards.

and it features Mark Linley, the hard-working scholarship boy. Mark is a sterling character, full of grit, and even though things look decidedly black against him, Mark sets his teeth and hangs on! You'll know what happens in the end when you have read this fine yarn next week.

Enjoying our new serial? Well, there's another trenchant instalment of "The Masked Death!" in store for you next week, so don't miss it, whatever you do. And when you have finished it and decide to have a little light relief, you can turn to "Bound for the Amazon!" which is the second of Dicky Nugent's "Trezzure" series. I can promise you some hearty laughs in Master Dicky's story next week!

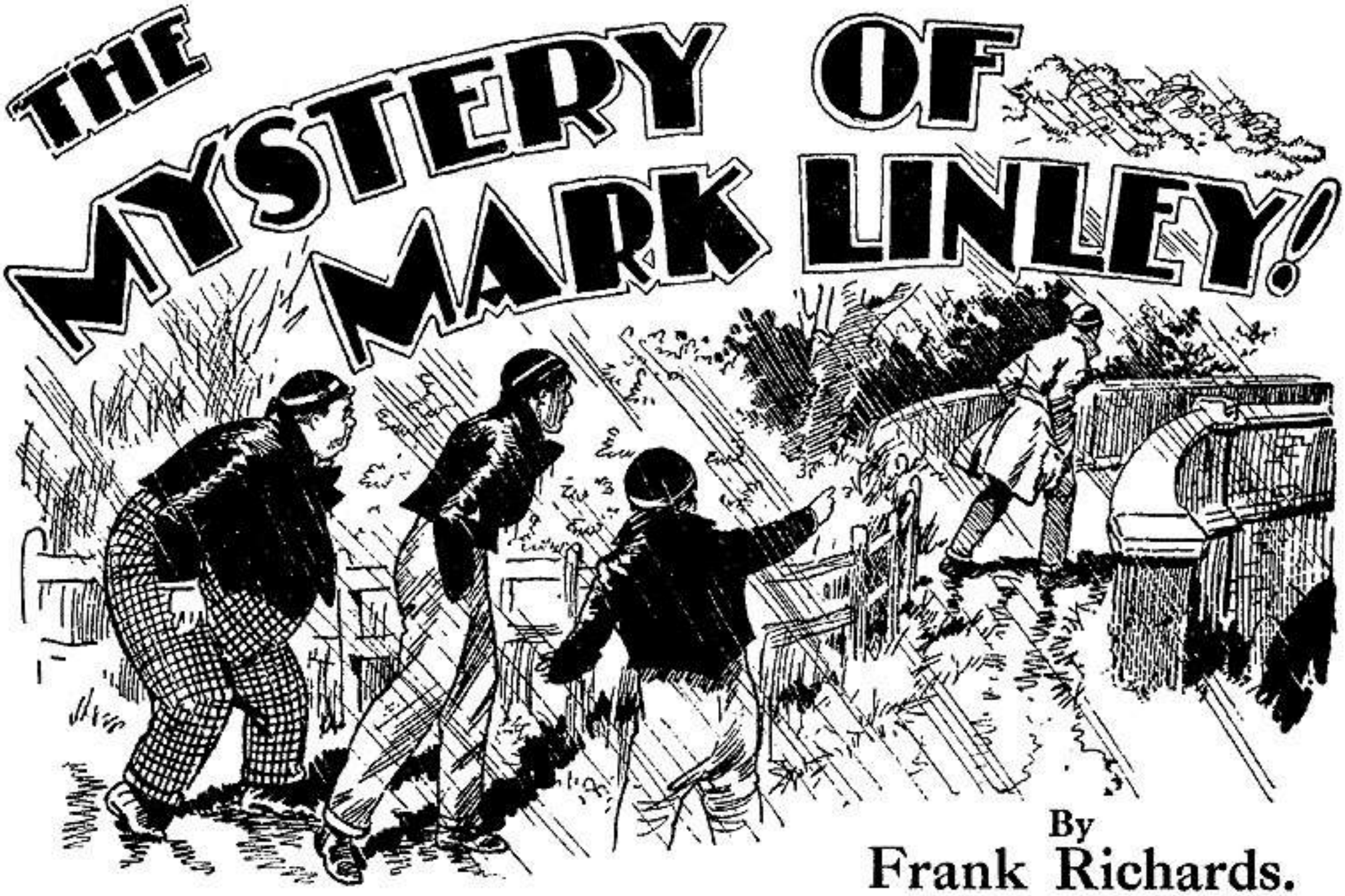
To finish up a rattling fine issue there will also be another article of our "Giants of Cricket" series. This time it will deal with Philip Mead, of Hampshire, and you will find it decidedly interesting and informative.

That's enough for this week, so cheerio, chums!

YOUR EDITOR.

LONG COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY OF THE CHUMS OF GREYFRIARS!

THE MYSTERY OF MARK LINLEY!



By
Frank Richards.

Here's a heart-stirring story, telling of a scholarship boy's plucky effort to help his impoverished parents, and of the evil construction certain "nosey parkers" in the Greyfriars Remove place upon it.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Play Up!

BANG!

A cricket bat lunged at the door of Study No. 13, in the Greyfriars Remove, and the door flew wide.

That was Bob Cherry's gentle way of announcing his arrival.

There was one fellow in Study No. 13—Mark Linley, of the Remove. He was standing at the window, looking down into the green, sunny quad, and he jumped at the sound of the crash, and turned round.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob.

Mark looked at him, smiling faintly. Bob Cherry was in his usual exuberant spirits. His ruddy face was bright; he seemed to breathe health and strength and cheerfulness. Bob generally found the world a jolly little place to live in. On that particular afternoon, Bob was completely satisfied with the universe. A half-holiday, a glorious summer's day, and a cricket match just going to begin—Bob did not want more than that to make him rejoice.

His look was rather a contrast to Mark Linley's. There was a thoughtful shade on Mark's face, tinged with anxiety. Bob did not observe it, for the moment.

"Out you come!" he roared. "Forgotten the match, what?"

"No. but——"

"You haven't changed yet."

"No. I——"

"Buck up!"

"But I——"

"The men are just going down to Little Side," said Bob. "We're going to mop up the Shell this afternoon—massacre them, in fact. That ass, Hobson, of the Shell, thinks he's going to beat the Remove. He's said so. He's got another guess coming, as Fishy would say. Come on, fathead. What are you hanging about for?"

"But I——"

"Rats!" Bob glanced at the study table, where a volume of Zenophon lay open, and by it several sheets scribbled in Greek. Bob shuddered. The sight of a Greek character was enough to make him shudder. Bob found Latin tough enough. Greek he regarded as something in the nature of racks and thumbscrews. "You ass! Swotting again?"

"Not exactly. I——"

"Well, you fathead!" said Bob. "Cricket match just going to begin, and here you are travelling along those giddy old parasangs with Zenophon. Bless him and his parasangs. What the dickens is a parasang, by the way?"

Mark smiled.

"I've been going over the thing again, a bit," he confessed. "You see, the result of the Popper Prize is out to-day——"

"You did your paper for that a fortnight ago."

"Yes; but I'm not satisfied with it," said Mark slowly. "The exam's open to Fourth and Shell, as well as Remove, and—and I fancy some Shell man will walk off the prize."

"Well, going over it again this afternoon won't help, will it?" asked Bob.

"No. I was just trying to make out if I could have done a better paper——"

"My dear chap, better put the whole thing out of your mind," said Bob. "No good worrying whether your paper's good or bad. Can't be altered now."

"I know. But——"

"It's not like you to get nervy," said Bob, staring at the Lancashire junior. "Don't let it grow on you, old bean. As soon as your paper was finished, and handed in, you should have chucked the whole thing out of your little mind. I should."

Mark nodded, without speaking.

"Awfully keen on the prize?" asked Bob, with a grin.

"Well, yes."

"That isn't like you, either. It's a cash prize, and I haven't noticed you were awfully keen after cash."

"I—I happen to need the tenner——"

"Well, you won't bring the tenner any nearer by mooching in the study, and sapping Greek. Come on!"

Mark hesitated.

"The—the fact is, I'd rather not play to-day," he said. "Ask Wharton to let me off. He can easily find another man."

"Rubbish!"

"Newland's a good man, and he's keen to play. I'd like to see Newland given a chance in the match——"

"Newland's all right; but you're going to play," answered Bob. "Get a move on, fathead!"

"The names will be on the board at four," said Mark. "I—I don't want to be out of the House then."

"My dear chap, whatever the names are, they'll be just the same at six as at four."

"I know—but——"

"But you're anxious about the result, and you're going to mooch about the House waiting for the names to be put up, and waste a lovely afternoon, and a cricket match?"

"Well, you see——"

"I don't!" said Bob Cherry cheerily. "What you want, to take your mind off a worry, is open air and exercise. Much better for you, old bean. If you hang about doing nothing till four o'clock, you'll get as nervous as a cat. You're going to play cricket. See?"

"I—I'd rather——"

"Rely on an old pal for good advice," said Bob. "Cricket's what you want, and what you're going to get. Mooching and worrying ain't good for a chap. Come on."

Mark shook his head.

"I'm not coming, Bob. I—I'm really anxious about that prize—it means a lot to me. I can't get my mind off it to-day. I should play a rotten game, and let down the side."

"No, you wouldn't, old scout. Once you get the willow in your paws, you'll play up. You're not the man to let anybody down. Come on."

But Mark did not come on. The shadow had deepened on his good-looking, intelligent face. His eyes had a harassed look. Bob's expression became more serious.

"Look here, old man," he said quietly, "I tell you I'm right. You're getting nervy, and that's bad. I can guess that the prize means a lot to you—I suppose it's your people at home?"

Linley nodded.

"I thought so. But worrying won't alter facts. You want to buck up, and keep a stiff upper lip. You're really wanted in the Remove team, if we're going to beat the Shell. Play up, old man! Put in that northern punch that the prince was speaking about the other day."

"But——"

"You fellows coming?" shouted the voice of Harry Wharton, from the Remove staircase.

"Coming!" bawled back Bob Cherry.

"Buck up, then!"

"Right! Come on, Marky—and give 'em the northern punch."

And as Mark still hesitated, Bob Cherry took his chum by the arm, and waltzed him out of the study.

"Hold on!" gasped Mark. "I——"

"This way!" chuckled Bob, and with a grip of iron on Linley's arm, he rushed him down the Remove passage.

"You ass! I——"

"Keep moving!"

Mark had no choice about keeping moving, unless he entered into a scrap with his loyal chum. And in a couple of minutes more, he was changing for cricket, and—as he had to admit—feeling all the better for it.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Nothing for Bunter!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Hook it, Bunter!"

"But I say——"

"Fathead! No time to waste now. Hook it!"

"I say, it's important!" howled Bunter.

"Hold on a tick, old chap!" said Mark Linley good-naturedly.

And Bob impatiently held on.

The other Remove cricketers were all on Little Side. Bob Cherry and Mark Linley were hurrying after them, when the Owl of the Remove interposed his plump person in their way. Billy Bunter was looking very serious. And what he had to say was evidently important—from Bunter's point of view, at least.

"Cut it short, fatty!" said Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"We're due at the cricket, Bunter,"

said Mark Linley. "If you've got anything to say, cough it up—quick!"

"How can a fellow cough it up, when a fathead keeps on interrupting him," said Bunter peevishly. "It's about the Popper Prize, Linley."

Mark started.

"What about that?" he asked. "The names are not out yet."

"Lots of fellows think that Stewart of the Shell will come out top," said Bunter, blinking at him through his big spectacles.

"Likely enough," said Mark quietly. "Stewart's clever at Greek."

"Well. I'd rather you got it, old fellow."

"Are you?" said Mark, in involuntary surprise.

Billy Bunter was not accustomed to displaying deep concern for others; but certainly the fat junior looked very earnest now.

"Yes, rather," said Bunter emphatically. "Being your pal, of course, I wish you luck."

"How long have you been Marky's pal?" grunted Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Come on, Marky!"

"I say, you fellows, I haven't finished yet," said Bunter. "Lots of fellows in the Remove think you will beat Stewart, Linley. I think so myself, and I'm rather a judge in such things, you know."

Mark laughed.

"Well, thanks for your good wishes, anyhow," he said. "Now, let's get on——"

"Hold on a tick! If your name's top, you get the prize in cash," said Bunter. "Now, what I'm coming to is this. I've been a good friend to you ever since you came to Greyfriars, as you know."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Of course, I don't mean to say that I'm blind to the social distinction between us," explained Bunter. "I belong to wealthy and highly-connected people, and you're a rank outsider, if you don't mind my mentioning it."

"Not at all."

"Well, facts are facts, ain't they?" said Bunter, blinking at him. "You were a factory bounder before you came here on a scholarship, and your people are poor—disgustingly poor, living in some hovel or other in Yorkshire."

"Lancashire," said Mark quietly. "And not exactly a hovel, Bunter."

Bob Cherry had taken an almost convulsive grip on the handle of his bat. Bunter, oblivious in peril, rattled on.

"I never approved of this scholarship stunt, letting in all sorts of scraggy outsiders into a school like Greyfriars," said Bunter. "If the governors took my advice, they'd abolish 'em. But they won't."

"They won't, certainly," agreed Mark.

"Still, you can't deny that I've been kind to you," pursued Bunter. "Your manners, for instance, have improved a lot since you came here. You've benefited by association with me—learning to act like a gentleman. Like me."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Are you going to kill him, Marky?" asked Bob Cherry, in a deep, sulphureous voice.

"No," said Mark, laughing.

"Then I'm going to."

"Oh, really, Cherry! I wish you wouldn't keep on interrupting when I'm having a friendly chat with a pal. Look here, Linley! What I'm getting at is this—one good turn deserves another. I've been kind to you, and treated you well. I'm no snob. I've been disappointed about a postal order."

"Oh!"

"From one of my titled relations," explained Bunter. "It's practically certain to come to-morrow. But if it doesn't——" He paused and blinked anxiously at Mark. "If it doesn't, old chap, would you mind lending me a fiver out of the Popper Prize, if you get it? That will tide me over till I get my remittance—see?"

"I see," accented Mark.

The cat was out of the bag now, and he saw why he had suddenly become Bunter's pal.

"Well, is it a go?" asked the Owl of the Remove. "A fiver will see me through. I'll settle on Saturday."

"No," said Mark. "If I win the Popper Prize—I'm in need of it—Bunter, and I'm not giving it away."

"Who's talking about giving it away?" demanded Bunter indignantly. "If you think I would accept a gift from a fellow in your social position, Linley, it only shows what a rank outsider you are. A loan is a very different thing."

"Not very different, in your case," said Mark.

"Oh, really, Linley——"

"Are we going to keep the cricket waiting, while that fat idiot wags his flabby chin?" snorted Bob Cherry.

"Shut up a minute, Cherry! You're all jaw, like a sheep's head. A fellow can't get in a word edge-wise when you're about. I say, Linley, I could do with a pound. Make it a pound."

"Nothing doing, Bunter," answered Mark, shaking his head.

"Well, after all I've done for you you——" said Bunter warmly.

"Come on, Marky."

"Right-ho!"

A fat hand caught at Linley's arm.

"Linley, old chap! Look here, make it ten bob! Look here, I'll ask you home to Bunter Court for the holidays, and give you a chance to meet some decent people for once in your life. There!"

"Fathead!"

Linley shook his arm loose.

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "Yah! My own fault, I suppose, for condescending to be friendly to the lower classes. What they mean by letting such shady blighters into Greyfriars, I don't understand. I can only say—yoooooop!"

Bunter made that final remark unintentionally, as the business end of Bob Cherry's bat thumped on his extensive waistcoat.

Bunter sat down suddenly in the quad.

"Whoooooo!" he gasped.

"Now, come on, Marky, you ass, and don't waste any more time," said Bob; and the two juniors ran on lightly towards the cricket ground, leaving William George Bunter struggling frantically for his second wind.

"Buck up, you men!" called out Harry Wharton. "The Shell are going to bat! Waiting for you!"

"The waitfulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the latefulness is better than the neverfulness."

And the Remove men went into the field.

Hobson and Stewart opened the innings for the Shell, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh went on to bowl the first over for the Remove. The game was soon going strong.

Bob Cherry glanced once or twice at Mark. The Lancashire lad was anxious about the outcome of the prize exam, into which he had put a great deal of hard work. And Bob could guess that he had reason to be anxious. But now that he was on the cricket field

"Well, 'ere's the paper," said Mr. Clegg. "You young gents look at it, and see if you can make 'ead or tail of it." The document was shown to the Removites and they looked at it with interest, wondering what on earth it could be. (*See Chapter* 5.)

Mark seemed to have dismissed the matter from his mind, as Bob had recommended. His face was bright, and his eyes keen, his manner alert, and he was evidently putting all his attention into the matter in hand. And Bob was satisfied.

And that Mark was a useful man, admitted of no doubt. The Shell, an older team than the Remove, had many advantages, and the heroes of the Lower Fourth had a hard fight before them. Hobson, the captain of Shell, was in great form, and he bade defiance even to Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's bowling, and the scarcely less keen bowling of Tom Brown, the New Zealand junior. Runs piled up for the Shell, till suddenly there was a roar from the Remove men round the field:

"Caught!"

"Oh, well caught!"

"Good man, Linley!"

Mark Linley held up the ball; and Hobson of the Shell, with a grunt, followed the example of the ploughman in the poem, and homeward plodded his weary way.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter's New Pal!

"ALL down for 40!" said Bob Cherry, when the last Shell wicket had fallen. "If we can't beat that, you men——"

"We can!" said Harry Wharton cheerfully.

"The beatfulness will be terrific, my esteemed Bob. The absurd Shell will not have a preposterous look-in."

"Feeling fit, Marky?" asked Bob.

Mark Linley was glancing in the direction of the House. He looked round again quickly as Bob Cherry spoke.

"Fit as a fiddle," he answered.

He coloured a little. In the pause following the Shell innings the Popper Prize had come into his mind again. But it was useless to go up to the House yet; the result was to be posted at four o'clock, and it was not yet half-past three. In such matters the Head was meticulously punctual, neither before nor after time.

"Give it a miss, old bean," murmured Bob. "You're down fourth to bat, you know."

"That's all right," said Mark brightly. "I'm feeling fit to give the Shell a run for their money."

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry opened the innings for the Remove. Hobson & Co. had not made the score they had hoped for, and they were resolved to take it out of the Remove in bowling. But they found the Lower Fourth batsmen hard to shift. Harry Wharton seemed impregnable at his wicket, and though Bob seemed to give the enemy more chances, the chances never seemed to materialise, and Bob's mighty swipes drove the leather far afield, and gave the Shell good hunting. Under the bright summer sunshine, Hobson & Co. ran and dodged and panted and perspired, and still the batsmen made good at the wickets, and the score jumped up at a rate that delighted the Remove.

Mark Linley, standing before the pavilion with the rest of the waiting batsmen, looked on with keen interest. There was nothing slow about the Remove innings; it was keen cricket from the start. But as the minutes passed, Mark's glance turned more than once towards the House that could be seen through the trees. It was approaching four o'clock; and at four the names would be on the notice-board. There was a chance, an excellent chance, that his own name would head the list; and the Popper Prize meant more to him than most of the Remove men would have easily understood.

That Linley's people were poor, that only his scholarship kept him at Greyfriars School, all the fellows knew. But Mark talked little about his affairs, even to his best friend, Bob; and nobody knew of the distress in his little home in the North, that might have been relieved by such a sum as ten pounds—a sum that was nothing to a fellow like Lord Mauleverer or Herbert Vernon-Smith, but that was a small fortune to a fellow who counted his money in shillings and sixpences. If only his name was at the top of the list!

While he was playing cricket Mark kept his thoughts steadily on the game; it was his way to concentrate on any work he had in hand and put his best into it. But he was idle now, waiting for his turn to bat, and his thoughts wandered. He joined in the cheering for the batsmen, losing nothing of what was going on, but his heart was elsewhere. And as four o'clock approached he considered whether he would be able to cut off to the House and ascertain the result before he was wanted to bat. Then came a roar from Hobson of the Shell.

"How's that?"

"Out!"

Bob Cherry was down at last. With

a ruddy face Bob carried out his bat, and Vernon-Smith took his place. Mark compressed his lips a little. It wanted five minutes to four by the clock in the tower, visible over the elms, and he was down to follow the next man out. He could not be off the field when his name was called.

Bob was out now, and might have been asked to cut off to the House and bring the news. But Bob's eyes were glued on the batsmen, and Mark did not think of asking him, or any other fellow. He was sensitive—perhaps more sensitive than most fellows in the Lower Fourth—and he disliked to make anything like a display of his anxiety; he was not a fellow to wear his heart on his sleeve.

The Bounder was generally a good man at the wickets, and it was likely enough that his innings would last plenty of time for Mark to run to the House and back. But Smithy, while a good man, was a little erratic, and now Mark noted that he was more erratic than ever. He brought off several magnificent knocks, but each time he was taking chances; the Bounder's style was always rather showy. Mark dismissed the thought from his mind; the Bounder might last an hour at the wickets, or he might last another half-minute—there was no telling. Four o'clock boomed out from the tower; and while all the other fellows were cheering the Bounder's swipes and Wharton's steady batting, Mark's thoughts were on the paper that the headmaster must even then be placing on the board—the paper that told whether his hard work had earned a ten-pound note for the people at home, or whether he had failed.

He set his lips a little and waited. His quiet face showed little or nothing of the disturbance within. Mark's way of life had been harder than that of most Greyfriars fellows, and he had learned self-control. The Bounder was still batting, and some of the fellows were saying that he was going to make his century. The Shell fellows, on the other hand, expected every over to be his last. But when the quarter chimed Vernon-Smith was still going strong.

"I say, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter rolled up to the group of waiting batsmen. Nobody heeded Bunter. All eyes were on the game—on the scoring batsmen and the panting field. Johnny Bull remarked that the Shell would want their second wind when their second innings came along; and Frank Nugent opined that they wouldn't have an innings left in them. Undoubtedly Hobson & Co. showed signs of being run off their legs.

"I say, you fellows," repeated Billy Bunter warmly. "Where's Stewart?"

"In the field, fathead!" answered Johnny Bull.

"Oh, rotten!"

As the Remove were batting Billy Bunter might really have guessed that Stewart of the Shell was in the field. But Bunter was thinking of matters more important than the details of cricket.

Bob glanced round at the fat junior for a moment.

"What the thump do you want a Shell man for?" he asked.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Stewart's my pal," he answered, with dignity. "I don't believe in keeping up these rows among Forms. I like Stewart! Most of the Shell are bounders, but Stewart's a specially nice chap——"

"Special Scotch?" grinned Bob.

"The Scotchfulness of the esteemed Stewart is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But where does the absurd specialfulness come in, my worthy fat Bunter?"

"You can run him down if you like," said Bunter aggressively. "But I admire the chap."

"Who's running him down, you fat idiot?" growled Bob.

"I admire him," said Bunter. "Splendid chap! Magnificent!"

This eulogy of Stewart of the Shell drew several glances on Bunter. It was true that Edward Stewart of the Shell was a rather agreeable youth, good at games and good in class, and with rather nice manners. But the Remove had little to do with the Shell, except when they met in games; and it was equally true that Stewart of the Shell would never have dreamed of having a pal in a lower Form, and that if he had dreamed of it he certainly never would have dreamed of William George Bunter, unless it was a case of nightmare. Bunter hardly knew Stewart, and never had anything to do with him. So his sudden and inexplicable admiration for the lad from the land of cakes was really surprising.

"What are you burbling about, you fat dummy?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Shut up, anyhow." And Bob turned his attention back to the game.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Dry up, Bunter."

"Look here, how long is this going on?" asked Bunter irritably. "I came down specially to speak to Stewart. It's important."

"Call him off the field!" suggested Johnny Bull sarcastically.

"Think he'd come?" asked Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The idea of a fellow who was just then racing after the ball, coming off the field to talk to Billy Bunter made the juniors chortle.

"How's it going?" asked Bunter, "Is the innings nearly over?"

"One down for forty-two!" said Bob.

"Oh, dear! That means it's going on a long time!"

"You fat chump! Do you want to see the Remove wickets go down?" roared Johnny Bull.

"Well, I want to see Stewart."

"You can see him from here," grinned Bob. "If you'd kept your silly eyes open, you'd have seen him just send in the ball too late."

"Rot!" said Bunter. "Stewart's the best cricketer in the Lower School. Nobody in the Remove is a patch on him."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Has Stewart suddenly come into a fortune, or had a remittance from home?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Nugent! I say, you fellows, it's rather rotten hanging about here waiting to speak to a pal, while that foozling is going on," said Bunter. "Besides, I know Stewart is keen to hear the news."

"What news, ass?" asked a Shell man who was among the crowd looking on.

"About the Popper Prize."

Mark Linley felt a sudden catch at his heart. He did not speak.

"Oh!" said the Shell man. "Is that up?"

"Of course it is," said Bunter. "I came down from the House specially to tell Stewart, being his pal. I want to congratulate him on getting the tenner."

"So that's it?" snorted Johnny Bull. "You silly, fat duffer, Stewart won't lend you any of the tenner."

"Oh, really, Bull——"

"Stewart at the top?" asked the Shell man.

"Yes, rather," said Bunter, "he bags the Popper tenner. That ass, Linley, thought he had a chance—but I could have told him he hadn't an earthly. Stewart was my man, I can tell you."

"You fat dummy, shut up!" snapped Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

Bob's glance fell on Mark's face. It was a little pale; but it was calm and cool, and Mark smiled faintly as he met his friend's glance.

"Hard cheese, old man," muttered Bob.

"All serene."

There was a roar from the Shell.

"How's that?"

The Bounder was out at last.

"Man in!"

Mark Linley took his bat. Bob's eyes followed him rather anxiously as he went out to the wickets.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Grit!

BILLY BUNTER grunted discontentedly.

Bunter was not an unpatriotic Removite; he wanted his Form to win matches, so far as his fat thoughts attended to the matter at all. But the prolongation of that innings was sheer torture to Bunter. He had seen the result of the Popper exam posted, and he had rolled down to Little Side with the news for Stewart that he was the winner. On the morrow Stewart, of the Shell, would be in possession of a ten-pound note, and any fellow who was in possession of a ten-pound note was a fellow whom Billy Bunter delighted to honour. Bunter was prepared to cultivate the most devoted friendship for Stewart, of the Shell—so long as the tenner lasted at all events. It was really rotten to be cut off from the object of his admiration in this way, by so trivial a thing as a game of cricket.

Bunter did not even have the satisfaction of imparting the news to the happy man. While the new batsman was going in, the Shell man who had heard the news, bawled it out to Stewart, and that youth waved his hand and grinned in acknowledgment. Bunter waited impatiently for the innings to be over, so that he could acquaint Edward Stewart with the sudden admiration and friendship he had for him. As a matter of fact, Bunter was not likely to prosper in that new friendship. The lucky man was likely enough to stand a tremendous spread for his friends, in celebration of his win; but it was extremely unlikely that Bunter, of the Remove, would be asked, or allowed to butt in unasked. But hope springs eternal in the human breast.

As for Mark Linley, Bunter was not wasting a thought on him now. Linley had had honourable mention on the Head's paper; but honourable mention would not buy a single jam-tart at the tuck-shop. Honourable mention might be gratifying to the recipient thereof, but it was of no use to William George Bunter. The fat junior dismissed Mark, contemptuously, from his podgy mind.

Mark went out to his wicket with a heavy heart. He had hoped for good luck, and he had done his best to deserve it, but a Lower Fourth man competing with the Shell had the balances weighed against him. He had hoped, but he had been doubtful, and now his chances were gone. His own disappointment mattered little to Mark; from very early years he had learned to face the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune with quiet fortitude. But what he had wanted to do, for others, with the money could not now be done. That was where the shoe pinched, and that made his heart like lead.

Stewart, of the Shell, had the ball now, and he sent down a fast one which Mark just stopped. It was not a dangerous ball, but it was a rather narrow escape, and Bob Cherry gave a grunt. The news that Bunter had so unfortunately brought along in the middle of the game had had its effect on his chum. Bob looked round for the fat junior, with the idea of kicking him, but Bunter had fortunately rolled out of reach.

"Linley won't last long," remarked the Bounder.

"Seems off his form," said Nugent.

"Well, we've done jolly well— we can afford a wicket!" observed Johnny Bull. "Where's my bat? I go in next."

But Johnny's bat was not needed just yet.

Mark pulled himself together. He had failed in the exam, but there was no need to fail in the cricket match. Mourning over spilt milk never did any fellow any good. Somehow, somehow, he would find another way of earning money, in the meantime he was playing cricket, and he must not let the side down. Bob Cherry's words came back to his mind—"the northern punch." Fortune had dealt him a hard knock, but the Lancashire lad was grit all through, and it did not take him long to rally. The next ball that Stewart sent down was knocked away for four, and the Removites cheered.

"Good man!" roared Bob Cherry. He knew what was on his chum's mind, and he knew that Mark had mastered his trouble.

The innings went on. Harry Wharton was out at last, and Johnny Bull took his place. Johnny had bad luck, being caught out for three, and Nugent went to the wickets. Mark Linley was still going strong. There was nothing flashy about his style—it was quite unlike the Bounder's. It was good, cool, steady cricket, and it was too much for the Shell. When the Remove innings

tailed off at last, Mark was not out, with an individual score of thirty-six, and the total score was one that made the Remove rejoice and the Shell men look glum.

"We shan't have to bat a second time!" remarked Harry Wharton, and Hobson, of the Shell, who overheard the remark, growled:

"Swank!"

But it was not swank. In their second innings the Shell captured sixty, leaving the Remove the winners by ten runs and an innings. The Remove roared over the result, even Billy Bunter added his fat squeak, and nothing was left for the heroes of the Shell, but to hide their diminished heads. Hoskins, of the Shell, remarked that if the Remove had beaten them at cricket, they had beaten the Remove at Greek, in allusion to Stewart's capture of the Popper Prize. But Claude Hoskins' remark evoked no enthusiasm, even from Stewart. The Shell would rather have won the cricket match than all the prizes in the long list at Greyfriars.

The match had ended unexpectedly early. Harry Wharton & Co. were thinking of tea; but for once Billy Bunter was not thinking of the same tea. Bunter passed over his old pals in the Remove like the idle wind which he regarded not. Bunter's fat mind, for the time, was completely obsessed by his new friendship for that admirable youth, Stewart, of the Shell. He followed the Shell fellows from the field—he kept his spectacles glued to Stewart—he rolled into the Shell passage when Stewart proceeded there with his friends. But, as the poet has remarked, the course of true love never did run smooth—and the same applied to the course of Billy Bunter's friendship.

It takes two to make a bargain, and, unfortunately for Bunter, Stewart did not play up. So, far from reciprocating Bunter's friendship, Stewart only asked him what the thump he was wedging into his study for; and, without waiting for an answer, kicked him out of that apartment. There was a bump and a roar in the Shell passage, and the sudden end of a sudden friendship.

Bunter rolled away disconsolate, and looked for the Famous Five. But the Famous Five had gone out of gates by that time. William George Bunter sought them, but found them not. With feelings that were growing too deep for words, Bunter went to Study No. 7 for tea with Peter Todd, but Toddy had had his tea and departed.

It was not Bunter's lucky afternoon.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Uncle Clegg in Trouble!

"FEEL like walking?"

Bob Cherry asked the question.

As a matter of fact, no member of the Famous Five felt very much like walking, just then. They had done enough running to last them for some time. The match with the Shell had been rather strenuous.

"The walkfulness does not seem the proper caper, my esteemed Bob," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The sit-downfulness would be more grateful and comforting."

"Oh, don't be slackers," said Bob. "Let's walk down to Friardale."

"What on earth for?" demanded Harry Wharton.

"Well, we can get tea at Uncle Clegg's."

"We can get tea at the tuck-shop here, or in the study, and save the walk," said Nugent, staring.

"But we want the walk," urged Bob.

"Rats!" said Johnny Bull.

Mark Linley was with the Famous Five. He was with them chiefly because Bob had hooked his arm, and declined to release it.

Mark liked the company of the cheery five, and they liked his, but just then the Lancashire lad would have liked to be alone. That, however, was exactly what Bob Cherry decided was not good for him. It was not Bob's way to butt into another fellow's affairs, but circumstances alter cases, and in the present circumstances, Bob considered that the less Mark was left alone the better. He had had a heavy blow, a bitter disappointment, and brooding over it would not do him any good.

"Lovely weather for a stroll along the lane," said Bob. "Lots of time to get back before call-over, as the Shell let us off so early. Nice little teas to be had at Uncle Clegg's in Friardale."

By that time, Bob's chums had caught on to the fact that he had his own reasons for wanting to walk down to the village. Why he couldn't state them was rather a puzzle, but the Famous Five were an accommodating Co.

There was a general nodding of heads.

"Come on, then," said Wharton.

"Let's!" said Nugent, cheerily.

Mark Linley jerked at his arm. Bob kept it secure. Mark gave another jerk, and again in vain.

"I think I'll go to my study, you chaps," said Mark. "I'm not keen on a walk, after the match."

"Deserting your old pals?" asked Bob, reproachfully. "If you're thinking of palling with Bunter, it's too late. Bunter's wrapped up in Stewart of the Shell at present."

Mark laughed—which was Bob's cheery object.

"Oh, come along, Linley," said the captain of the Remove. "A walk won't hurt you—come and have tea at Uncle Clegg's with us."

"I think I'd rather——."

"This way," said Bob, and he led the way, taking Linley's arm along with him, and Mark, naturally had to accompany his arm. The six juniors walked down the shady lane to the village together.

The chums of the Remove chatted cheerily on the way, and Bob took care that Mark should be drawn into the talk. In spite of the trouble at the back of his mind, Mark found himself cheery enough, and in fact, having realised Bob's amiable intentions, he played up, and did his best to be merry and bright. Indeed, in friendly and cheerful company, his trouble did not seem so heavy as it would have seemed had he been brooding over it in solitude. And when a trouble is inevitable, and has to be borne it is always best to take it as cheerfully as possible. Neither worrying nor grousing will make a trouble lighter.

The juniors reached Friardale, and turned into Uncle Clegg's little tuck-shop in the old, irregular High Street. Uncle Clegg's establishment in the village was not, in point of fact, quite so well provided as the school tuck-shop, and the accommodation was much less comfortable. But quite a good tea could be got there, and Bob's object, chiefly, was to keep Mark occupied till calling-over, and his friends having guessed his object now, they all played up. All of them realised that the loss of the Popper Prize was a blow to the scholarship junior, though only Bob knew how heavy a blow it was.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" bawled Bob, in his stentorian tones, as the juniors tramped down the step into the dusky little shop.

Uncle Clegg was there.

The gnarled old gentleman was leaning on his counter with a printed paper before him, a pair of spectacles on his nose, blinking. He seemed intensely puzzled by the printed paper, and so deeply immersed in his task of elucidating it, that he did not heed the entrance of his customers. But at Bob's cheery bellow, he blinked up.

He gave the juniors a dispirited blink. Uncle Clegg seemed to be in low spirits that golden summer's afternoon.

"Here we are again, old bean," said Bob.

"Yes, Master Cherry," mumbled Mr. Clegg.

He stood at his counter and blinked.

"Anything up, Mr Clegg?" asked Harry. Uncle Clegg was an established character at Friardale, a portion of the local scenery. He was an old gentleman—quite old—indeed, there were little boys in the village who believed that he was hundreds of years old. But he was very hale and hearty, as a rule, though a trifle crusty, as an old gentleman has a right to be, when the rheumatism will not cease from troubling and the lumbago is not at rest. It was quite unusual to see Uncle Clegg so downcast as this.

He nodded dolorously.

"Yes, sir!" he said, "you're right! Yes."

"Rheumatism bad?" asked Bob, sympathetically.

"Taint the rheumaticks this time. Worse!" said Uncle Clegg, darkly.

"Lumbago?" asked Nugent.

"Worse!" said Mr. Clegg.

"My hat! Give it a name," said Bob. "Here's a whole bunch of your bright young friends all ready to sympathise, Mr. Clegg."

Mr. Clegg smiled faintly.

"It's that there paper," he said, laying a gnarled finger on the mysterious document before him.

"Cross-word puzzle?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Worse!"

"The worsefulness appears to be terrific, my esteemed Uncle Clegg," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Uncle Clegg grinned. The nabob's beautiful flow of English seemed to have the effect of cheering him up for a moment.

"Anything we can do to help, Mr. Clegg?" asked Mark Linley, in his quiet way. Mark had a practical mind, which turned rather to help than to sympathy, though he was sympathetic enough.

But Mr. Clegg shook his head.

WHAT NAME?

The following letters have been jumbled together purposely. Put in their proper order, they spell the name of a well-known junior at Greyfriars.

KILLRAMENY

Who is it? The answer will appear in next week's MAGNET.

Last week's solution was—

Patrick Gwynne.

"You boys wouldn't understand it," he said. "Why, I don't understand the blinking thing myself."

At which the juniors grinned. They flattered themselves that their understanding might possibly be of a rather higher order than Mr. Clegg's, though he certainly had the advantage of age. However, it was Mr. Clegg's business, not theirs, so they let it pass, and devoted themselves to tea; Mr. Clegg providing the fare, with a solemn and troubled countenance. It was quite a rush of custom for the little village shop, and as a rule, Mr. Clegg was very keen on custom, being quite a keen business man in his slow, old way. Now, however, he appeared to have lost interest in business, and when the time came to settle, he made several mistakes, and Mark had to point out to him that he was losing two shillings on the transaction. Mr. Clegg corrected the mistake, in the same dolorous and disconsolate manner. Generally a matter of twopence would have given him lively concern, now he did not seem to care about two shillings.

The juniors could not help wondering what was the matter, and how that mysterious paper had affected Mr. Clegg's spirits to this remarkable extent. They really would have liked to help the old gentleman in his curious trouble, had it been possible.

"You'll lose all your profits at this rate, old bean," said Bob Cherry, when the mistake in the charge had been duly adjusted.

"I don't know as I want to make any profits," answered Mr. Clegg, shaking his head slowly.

This was so astonishing that the chums of the Remove simply blinked at Mr. Clegg.

"Profits may be more trouble than they're worth," said Mr. Clegg darkly.

"How's that?" asked Wharton, quite perplexed. "You can't make a living without making profits, can you?"

"What's the good of making profits if a covey comes and gets them off you?" asked Mr. Clegg.

"My only hat! A man held up the bank at Courtfield once," said Bob. "Has some jolly old bandit been holding up your shop, uncle?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Worse!" said Mr. Clegg.

"You haven't a burglary?"

"Worse!"

"The worsefulness really seems to be terrific and preposterous," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Perhapsfully if you show us that absurd paper, we may be able to render some ridiculous assistance."

"If it's a matter of figures, we really could help, Mr. Clegg," said Mark Linley. "And we'd be glad to."

"Marky's the man for that," said Bob. "You've kept accounts in your time, haven't you, Marky?"

"I helped a shopkeeper with accounts at home," answered Mark. "Of course, it was a simple matter."

For the first time Mr. Clegg cheered up a little.

"You know how to do accounts, sir?" he asked.

"Well, to some extent," said Mark, with a smile. "It's not really very difficult, you know if you're good at figures."

"I never was," said Mr. Clegg sadly. "Course, I know that two times two is four, and twelve times twelve is a hundred and ninety."

The juniors did not smile, but they thought that if Uncle Clegg knew that he must be very remarkable at figures.

"Well, 'ere's the paper," said Mr. Clegg. "You young gents look at it, and see if you can make 'ead or tail of it."

The document was placed before the Removites. They looked at it with interest, wondering what on earth it could be. Then there was a general grin.

The mysterious document that had caused Mr. Clegg so much worry and trouble was an ordinary form for income tax return.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Help Required!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. grinned. They really could not help it. Personally, of course, the chums of Greyfriars had little knowledge of such matters, being as yet of that happy age when the Inland Revenue Department does not trouble the mind and disturb the serenity. But they had seen and heard of such troublesome documents at home. Indeed, Bob had heard his father, Major Cherry, make remarks on the subject that were reminiscent of the Army in Flanders.

The "covey" to whom Uncle Clegg had darkly alluded was, evidently, neither a burglar nor a bandit, but a harmless and necessary tax collector. The document that had plunged Mr. Clegg into the lowest spirits, and dismayed him more than the revolver of a hold-up man, was simply a paper requesting information as to his income from all sources, couched in language

"Hand it over!" roared Lord Mauleverer. "I'm jolly well not going to hand you a private letter from my Uncle Christopher," began Bunter. "Yaroooooh!" Lord Mauleverer had lost patience, and he grasped Billy Bunter by the collar and banged his head on the trunk of the tree. (*See Chapter* 7.)

which was probably clear to the brilliant intellect of a revenue official but which might as well have been Greek or Sanskrit so far as Mr. Clegg was concerned.

"My belief is," said Mr. Clegg, "that it means something. Would the Government go to the expense of printing them papers and sending them to folks if they didn't mean anything? 'Course they wouldn't! But what do it mean? That's what gets me!"

"It's not really very complicated, Mr. Clegg," said Mark. "It looks worse than it really is."

"The barkfulness is worse than the esteemed bitefulness," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I don't get on to it," said Mr. Clegg. "Far as I make out they give you something for every child, and you puts in the number of children. Makes a man think he might have done better to get spliced, after all. There's Barstow, the wheelwright—he's got twelve. I s'pose he gets a lot out of the Government—or would, if he knew. As a friend, I think I ought to put him on to this—might make his fortune."

"They don't give you anything," said Mark hastily. "They make an allowance off the tax."

"Oh!" said Mr. Clegg, disappointed, but apparently consoled for not having become "spliced" in his far-off youth. "That's it, is it? I thought there was a catch somewhere."

"You can always depend on one thing, old bean," said Bob—"they don't give anybody anything. They take! They think it is more blessed to receive than to give!"

"I wish I'd never 'eard of the thing," said Mr. Clegg, unconsciously voicing the sentiments of some millions of taxpayers. "I was a fool to go in for it—that I know. Let sleeping dogs lie—that's a good saying. If I'd 'ad any sense I'd have let it alone."

"But you can't do that," said Wharton, with a smile. "The income tax is like the rain and the thunder and the hail—it happens whether you like it or not."

"Well, they never worritted me before," said Mr. Clegg, shaking his head. "I fair asked for this, I did. You see, this is 'ow it come about: When the War was on I put my savings in War Loan. Put up your money for your country, they says, and I put it up. The interest is good and safe, they says. Then I found they was sneaking some of it."

"Wha-aaa-a-t?"

The juniors jumped. They had not, perhaps, a very high opinion of the political gentlemen who manage, or mismanage, the affairs of the Empire on which the sun never sets. But really they could not imagine even a professional politician "sneaking" any of Mr. Clegg's little savings.

"Sneaking it!" said Mr Clegg firmly. "Four and a 'arf per cent they makes out they're giving a covey. I took their word on it, but it never seemed to come right. I thinks over it for years. I ask the coveys at the Red Cow and they all agrees it don't come right. Then I asks the parson, and he says, says he, that's all right, says he, what they're keeping back is the inkum tax, he says. Well, I says, I don't rightly know what the inkum tax is, I says, but I ain't never paid it, and I ain't going to."

Mr. Clegg paused for an indignant snort.

"Long and the short of it is," he resumed, "I goes to the office in Courtfield, and has it out with the coveys there. I tells them plainly they're keeping back my money. They was very polite—I'll say that for them—polite as you'd like, but they don't 'and out the money they was keeping back, and that was what I was after. I tells 'em I never 'card of the inkum tax, and a young gent with curly hair he grins and he says, says he, that's all right, says he—you'll 'ear of it now, says he."

The juniors regarded Mr. Clegg compassionately. His visit to the office of the tax inspector at Courtfield rather reminded them of Daniel in the lion's den. Mr. Clegg had dared to be a Daniel, with unhappy results for himself.

"They talks to me very patient and polite," admitted Mr. Clegg. "But I don't ketch on to 'arf of it. Covey asks me if I want to claim a prepayment——"

"A repayment?" asked Mark.

"Might 'ave been," said Mr. Clegg. "Offers me a paper. 'Fill it in 'ere,' he says, 'and 'ere, and 'ere'—very patient and polite. If I got to read all that small print, I says, I'd rather let the money go." And I takes my 'ook, thinkin', of course, that it was all over and I'd never 'ear any more about it. Then some time arter I gets this 'ere paper. It ain't the same paper the young covey showed me in the office, I'm sure of that much. They seem to 'ave lots and lots of papers of different kinds. I s'pose they get them printed cheap, being the Government."

Mr. Clegg jabbed the document on the table with a gnarled knuckle.

"I never wanted that there paper," he said pathetically. "I'd rather never 'ave 'eard of the thing. They been sneaking my money for years, and I let it go to save trouble. Now I got the trouble all the same."

"It's easy enough when you understand it, Mr. Clegg," said Mark soothingly. "The tax is deducted at source, which means that they keep it back out of the interest. But if you're not liable to income tax, it will be returned to you,and you claim it and get it."

"I ain't got any back so fur," said Mr. Clegg doubtfully.

"You have to claim it on an official form. If you're liable to tax, of course, you have to pay like anybody else. You get your whack in the Army and Navy, you know," said Mark, with a smile.

"And they're building a new Naval base at Singapore, to defend the coast of Kent in the next war," said Bob Cherry solemnly.

Mr. Clegg scratched his nose.

"The best thing you can do is to fill in this paper," said Mark. "You have to show the profits of your business—that's easy enough from your books——"

"But I ain't never kept any books."

"Oh! But you have some idea of your profits?"

"Two 'apennies for a penny, or thereabouts," said Mr. Clegg.

"They're really quite reasonable people," said Mark. "If the profits of your business don't amount to one hundred and thirty-five pounds a year——"

"Course they don't."

"Well, in that case, you're not liable to tax, and you get back all that's been deducted from the interest on your War Loan. You simply have to fill in the form, and they send you a cheque for the whole amount deducted for six years past."

"Straight?" ejaculated Mr. Clegg, brightening up considerably.

"Quite!" said Mark, smiling. "I helped a man at home with a paper like this, and it's simple enough, really. Only, if you haven't kept any books, there may be a difficulty, as, of course, they want to know the facts. There are people who make incorrect statements to get out of paying the tax."

"Oh!" said Mr. Clegg thoughtfully. "It wouldn't do to put in any gammon, eh?"

"Certainly not. It would be dishonest, and it would be found out—two jolly good reasons!"

"Mean to say they 'aven't been sneaking my money all this time, sir?"

"No, no, nothing of the kind. It's merely kept back for taxes; and if you're not liable you get it all returned to you. Of course, you have to claim it first. You'll have to go through all your accounts, and make up your books, and show how you stand in your business."

Uncle Clegg gave a deep groan. The prospect seemed to terrify him. His accounts, so far as he kept any, were generally on odd fragments of wrapping-paper, often indecipherable afterwards to Mr. Clegg himself.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! We shall be late for call-over!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Time to move!"

"Look here, Mr. Clegg, I can help you," said Mark. "I've got to get back to the school now, but if you like I'll run down here to-morrow and go through the paper with you, and help. I've done it before for a shopkeeper at home, in the North, and it's easy."

"Put your money on Marky, Mr. Clegg," said Bob. "Marky can do these things on his head."

"I'm sure I take it very kindly, sir," said Mr. Clegg gratefully. "You're a gentleman, Mr. Linley. That's what you are. If it ain't taking up too much of your time——"

"That's all right," said Mark.

And the juniors left the village shop, leaving Uncle Clegg very greatly comforted. They made their best speed back to Greyfriars, and squeezed in just before Gosling had time to shut the gates.

Billy Bunter met them as they came into the House.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! I hope you haven't had your tea, Bunter."

"Going to stand a feed after call-over?" asked Bunter eagerly.

"Oh, no! I mean, if you've missed your tea, it will bring down your fat a little," explained Bob Cherry genially.

"Beast! I say, you chaps——"

"How's your pal, Stewart?" grinned Nugent. "Did you tea with him?"

Snort from Bunter.

"Stewart's a beast——"

"Eh! He was no end of a splendid chap this afternoon!"

"He's a rotter!"

"Why this sudden change?" asked Bob, with a chuckle.

"An absolute rank outsider—a measly worm—a stingy beast—a sneaking, rotten, mean blighter!" said Bunter. "I've dropped his acquaintance, and intend to cut him!"

"Looks as if Stewart doesn't intend to lend Bunter anything out of that tenner," remarked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, if you're going to have a supper in the study——"

"We're not."

"Oh, go and eat coke, the lot of you!" said Bunter, suddenly losing all interest in the Famous Five.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Remove went cheerily into Hall.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Lord Mauleverer Chips In!

LORD Mauleverer, taking a little stroll under the elms in the quad, came to a halt. Leaning against a tree a little distance ahead of him was a rotund form, which could only have belonged to a porpoise or to William George Bunter of the Remove. As no porpoises were known to be loose around the school, Lord Mauleverer guessed that it was Bunter—and accordingly halted.

The Owl of the Remove was not looking towards him, and his astute lordship had time to retreat before he was nat'ed. Lord Mauleverer was a good deal of a slacker; but there were other things that caused him to display great activity—and one of these things was Billy Bunter.

To keep out of Bunter's way, to avoid the fascinations of his conversation, above all to elude being poked in the ribs by his fat knuckle, Mauly was prepared for any amount of exertion. But although Lord Mauleverer halted, and prepared to beat a strategic retreat unseen, he did not after all depart from the spot.

Bunter, as he leaned against the elm, was reading a letter—holding it up close to his fat face. Bunter's vision, like his stature and his cash, being short. And Lord Mauleverer, glancing at Bunter, unavoidably saw the letter he was holding up, and the opening words of it struck his eye—"Dear Mark."

There might, for all Mauly knew, be a dozen fellows at Greyfriars named Mark; but it was certain that William George Bunter was not one of them. There was, so far as Mauly knew, only one Mark in the Remove, whose surname was Linley—a fellow for whom Mauly had a very deep respect and liking.

Lord Mauleverer's aristocratic brain was not particularly quick on the uptake; but he knew Bunter and Bunter's ways, and he had not the slightest doubt that the Peeping Tom of Greyfriars had bagged a letter belonging to Mark Linley, and was reading it—that being one of Bunter's pleasant little ways. Anything that did not concern him was always of deep interest to Bunter.

So, instead of retreating, Lord Mauleverer advanced. He walked on towards Bunter, who, blinking round through his big spectacles and seeing him, promptly put the letter in his pocket. Then he bestowed an affable blink on the indignant and incensed Mauly.

"You, old chap," said Bunter. "Just the man I want to see. Coming along to the tuckshop?"

"No, you fat fraud!"

"Oh, really, Mauly! I say, old chap, Mrs. Mimble's got some new tarts to-day—some of those scrumptious four-penny ones——"

"Look here, Bunter——"

"My treat!" added Bunter, with dignity. "I'm not asking you to stand me tarts, Mauly. I'm offering to stand you tarts. As many as you like, old chap. I can tell you they're spiffing. Only you'll have to lend me a bob or two till to-morrow—my postal-order will be here in the morning, and——"

"I saw you reading a letter, Bunter."

"Did you?" said Bunter. "Yes—that's a letter from one of my titled relations, old chap. He mentions that my postal-order will be here by the first post in the morning. So come along——"

"Is your name Mark?"

Bunter started.

"I saw that letter in your paw, you fat rotter!" said Mauly. "You've got hold of a letter belongin' to Linley."

"Oh, really, Mauly! It's rather mean to look at a letter when a fellow's reading it. A thing I'm incapable of myself," said Bunter, with a shake of the head.

"You fat villain, I saw the name by accident, and knew it couldn't be your letter. Shell it out!"

"Well, it ain't yours!" said Bunter.

"I'll take it to Linley."

"I'm taking it to him myself," explained Bunter. "If I pick up a letter a fellow's dropped in the quad I naturally take it to him."

"And naturally you read it first!" snapped Mauleverer.

"Nothing of the sort. If there's a thing I despise it's inquisitiveness," said Bunter. "I was reading a letter from my uncle, Sir Herbert Bunter. He——"

"He calls you 'Mark,' does he?" grunted Mauleverer.

"Of course not! I mean yes. Sort of nickname he has for me—he's awfully fond of me, you know," explained Bunter. "You see, his own name being Mark, he wanted me named after him, but I was named after Lord William and Sir George. So that's why he calls me Mark. See?"

"His own name being Mark!" gasped

(*Continued on page* 12.)

Giants of Cricket

Here's the first of an interesting series of articles describing the early struggles, failures, and triumphs of men who to-day occupy the foremost positions in the world of cricket.

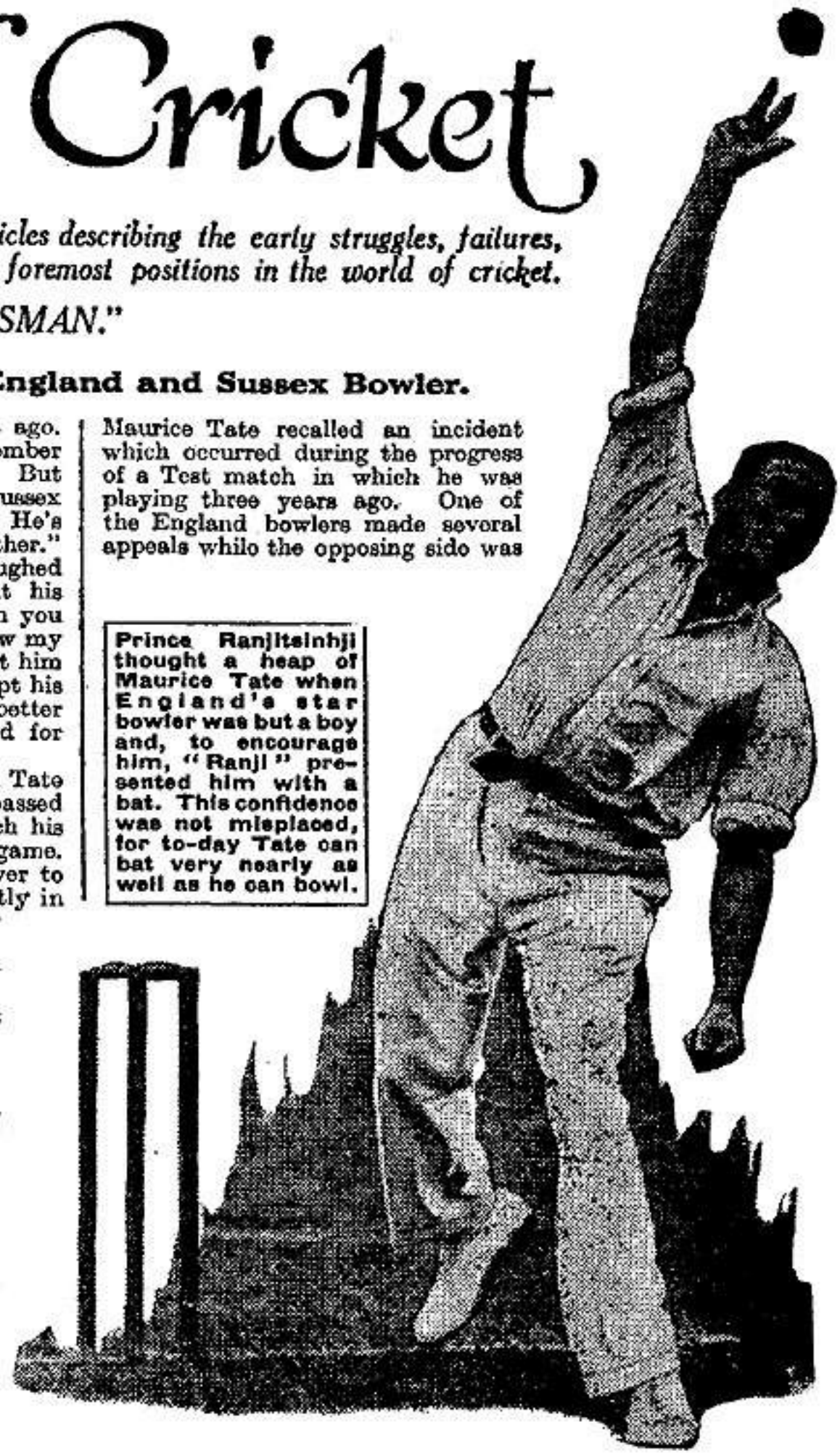
By "SPORTSMAN."

No. 1. MAURICE TATE, the All England and Sussex Bowler.

I FIRST met Maurice Tate some twenty-seven years ago. He was a very small boy at that time and I remember chaffing his father on the difference in their sizes. But Fred Tate, who was then the mainstay of the Sussex attack, said, with a smile: "I don't care about his size. He's going to be a cricketer; and a better one than his father." Prince Ranjitsinhji and C. B. Fry, who were with me, laughed heartily, and the former said: "I don't know about his becoming a better cricketer than you are, Fred, but with you to guide him he should certainly be first class, and to show my faith in you both I am going to give him a bat, for I want him to be able to bat as well as bowl." The Indian prince kept his word and so did Fred Tate, for he has made his son a better cricketer than ever he himself was, although he played for England.

I lived near Brighton and was constantly meeting Fred Tate both on and off the cricket field, and scarcely a week passed without the proud father telling me of the interest which his little boy was showing in all things appertaining to the game. I remember giving the child a ball and advising him never to be without it, for I knew that if a boy has a ball constantly in his possession he would be ever manipulating it, twisting and turning it, and eventually being able to juggle with it. Perhaps that is the reason for Maurice Tate's ability to do almost what he likes with a cricket ball to-day.

But his manipulation of the ball kept him out of his school eleven when he became old enough to play in the team. His breaks and swerves were not considered to be so valuable as pace, and on one occasion his schoolmaster said: "Yes, Tate. We know your father is a great cricketer, but you will never be one. Take my advice and stick to football!"



Prince Ranjitsinhji thought a heap of Maurice Tate when England's star bowler was but a boy and, to encourage him, "Ranji" presented him with a bat. This confidence was not misplaced, for to-day Tate can bat very nearly as well as he can bowl.

AT last the time came when his father had to make up his mind in what direction the boy's future lay, and in order that the youth should have two strings to his bow, Maurice was apprenticed to a firm of engineers in Essex. Then he began to play on better grounds and against strong opponents so that his finger spin was appreciated, and he commenced to look like a "class" cricketer.

I shall always remember the season of 1910. It opened with many days of wet weather and I went along to the Sussex ground to see how the young colts were shaping at the nets. One youth of fifteen bowled exceedingly well and, when he went in to bat, seemed to want to hit the cover off the ball. I spoke to him and then, to my delight, I found he was Maurice Tate who had been asked to attend for a fortnight's trial. He was retained in the Nursery and received much valuable coaching from players who had already made cricket history. Two of these were Albert Relf and Joe Vine, both England players.

For two years I watched this youngster doing everything that was possible to improve his bowling and batting until I felt sure he was good enough to play for his county. But he was still very young. At the age of seventeen a youth hasn't much reserve strength, and that was probably the reason why he was not tried out very much. However, one day when both he and I were playing in a quite important country game at Newick, Sussex, he received a telegram telling him that he had been chosen to play for Sussex against Northamptonshire on the next day.

Of course, I ought to be able to record the fact that he took several wickets for few runs, but he didn't. He was not by any means successful, and I put this down to nervousness. I travelled those many miles to be present at his debut, and although he only took one wicket for 30 runs, it required no expert knowledge of the game to foretell his wonderful future.

THEN young Maurice was in and out of the Sussex team for two or three seasons, gradually improving in all departments of the game, until he was good enough for a world's eleven as a bowler, and for any county side as a batsman.

Maurice Tate has always been known throughout the country as a bowler who never takes the slightest advantage of an opponent. If a ball hits a batsman's leg, Tate does not appeal unless he really thinks that the man is leg before wicket.

Some bowlers appeal when they shouldn't, although not in a spirit of unfairness. They cannot get out of the habit of shouting "How's that!" when a ball strikes a batsman's leg. Maurice Tate recalled an incident which occurred during the progress of a Test match in which he was playing three years ago. One of the England bowlers made several appeals while the opposing side was batting and the umpire, Reeves, who is noted for his wit, remonstrated with him in the pavilion after stumps had been drawn for the day. "I never knew such a chap as you are for appealing!" he remarked to the player. "Do you know, there's only one man in the whole world who appeals more than you do!" "Oh!" ejaculated the bowler. "And who's that?" "Dr. Barnardo!" replied Reeves.

A few days ago I met Maurice Tate as he was leaving the field after taking a lot of wickets. He was beaming! Since then I met him after he had had an unsuccessful day's bowling. But he was beaming just the same.

"Still happy?" I queried. He grinned more than ever as he replied: "Why not? I cannot expect to be top dog every day. And, after all, I'm just sufficiently a batsman to enjoy another man's good knock, even if he's an opponent. It was a pleasure to be hit by such a cricketer."

That remark came straight from the heart, for Maurice Tate is essentially a cricketer to the backbone. His store of patience in the face of most trying conditions never gives out. His energy is unlimited, his cheerfulness unbounded; and he possesses sufficient confidence in his own powers to play the waiting game when the batsman appears to be set for the day. Sussex have reason to be proud of Maurice Tate, for he has kept his place in the front ranks of first class bowlers for many seasons, and is likely to do so for many more seasons to come.

Hats off, then, to Maurice Tate!

(Next week "Sportsman" will tell you some interesting facts in the brilliant career of Philip Mead, the England and Hampshire batsman.)

THE MYSTERY OF MARK LINLEY!

(*Continued from page* 10.)

Lord Mauleverer. "You've just said he was your Uncle Herbert!"

"Did I? I mean my uncle Mark. That is, Herbert Mark," said Bunter. "We all have two names in our family. His name's Herbert Mark Bunter."

"You fat, prevaricating, benighted villain——"

"Oh, really, old chap——"

"You've admitted that you picked up a letter belonging to Linley——" hooted Lord Mauleverer.

"Not at all, old fellow! I said if.' I said distinctly 'if.' Don't put words into a chap's mouth, old fellow. Besides, I'm going to take him the letter when I've finished reading it."

"Do you want me to bang your silly head against that tree?" inquired his lordship.

"Eh? No. I say, don't get waxy about nothing, old fellow," said Bunter. "I say, it's rather a jest. They're frightfully hard up."

"What?"

"The old bounder's unemployed," said Bunter. "Fairly up against it, you know. Can't get a job. My opinion is that they won't work. I've heard my pater say so. I remember, last evening of the holidays, seeing my pater sitting in his armchair, sipping his port, and saying that it was all due to slacking and drink."

Lord Mauleverer grinned for a moment.

"Nice sort of chap to let into Greyfriars, what?" asked Bunter disdainfully. "Look here, Mauly, can't we do something about this? You and me, you know. We're both concerned in the matter, as two fellows of the best families in the kingdom; we can't be expected to take it patiently when low rotters like this are let into the school. Think it would be any good speaking to the Head? I'll come with you."

"You'll come with me to the Head if you don't hand over that letter instantly, you pernicious porpoise!"

"Oh, really, Mauly——"

"Hand it over!" roared Lord Mauleverer.

"I'm jolly well not going to hand you a private letter from my Uncle Christopher—— Yarooooh!"

Lord Mauleverer had lost patience. He grasped Billy Bunter by the collar and banged his bullet head on the trunk of the tree. The elm did not suffer. But apparently the bullet head did, for Billy Bunter let out a yell that woke the echoes of the quadrangle.

"Now hand over that letter!" hooted Lord Mauleverer.

"Yooop! Beast! I'm just going to!" wailed Bunter. "Can't you give a fellow time to get a beastly letter out of his beastly pocket? Wow!"

"I'm waiting. If you want another bang——"

"Beast!"

Bunter extracted the letter from his pocket and handed it over. Mauleverer promptly transferred it to his own pocket and turned away. Billy Bunter rubbed his head dolorously. But as the schoolboy earl walked away the fat junior squeaked after him.

"I say, Mauly, old chap! Let's read it together. 'Tain't fair to take it away and read it all by yourself."

Lord Mauleverer paused. William George Bunter had a narrow escape, at that moment, of receiving something more severe than a bang on the elm. Evidently his opinion was that Mauly was taking the letter away to read it.

But his lordship refrained from giving Bunter what he deserved, and walked away with the letter in his pocket.

"Beast!" gasped Bunter.

Mauleverer crossed the quad towards the House, and came on the Famous Five. He paused to address those cheery youths.

"Seen Linley?" he asked.

"Not since class," said Bob Cherry. "I think he went out."

"Bother! I want to see him, but I can't go chasing him," said Lord Mauleverer. "I dare say it will keep till he comes in."

And his lordship ambled into the House.

"I say, you fellows——"

Billy Bunter hailed the chums of the Remove a few minutes later.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Did Mauly show you the letter?"

"Eh? What letter?" asked Harry Wharton.

"He, he, he! He's got hold of a letter of Linley's," grinned Bunter. "Rather mean, I think, reading a man's letter and showing it about. Not a thing I'd do myself."

The Famous Five fixed their eyes on Bunter.

"Mean to say Mauly's reading another fellow's letter?" asked Nugent.

"Well, what else do you think he's got it for?" asked Bunter.

"I don't suppose he's got a letter that doesn't belong to him," said Harry. "If he has, he has some reason. You fat freak——"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"You flabby, frabjous fathead, what you want is a bumping——"

"Hear, hear!"

"I say, you fellows!" Bunter jumped back. "I say, hands off, you know! Look here, I'll let you into it. I'll tell you what was in the letter. Old Linley's out of work—he, he, he!—and on the rocks—he, he, he!—and all I can say about it is—— Whooop!"

In the grasp of five pairs of hands, Billy Bunter smote the quadrangle with a mighty smite.

"Whoooop!" roared Bunter.

And Harry Wharton & Co. strolled away and left him whooping.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Missing Letter!

MARK LINLEY came in, just in time to follow the fellows into Hall, and answer "adsum" to his name when Quelch called the roll.

Some of the fellows looked at him rather curiously. Mark was a little breathless, and had evidently hurried back to the school.

It had been noticed in the Remove that Mark was a good deal out of gates of late. Ever since the day of the match with the Shell, and the announcement of the result of the Popper Prize exam, in fact, there had been a change in Linley's habits.

Fellows like Skinner and Snoop sneered at him as a "swot," a "sap," and a prize-hunter. And even his friends thought he was rather too much given to grinding Latin and Greek in his study. But of late there had been no swotting and sapping in No. 13, in the Remove. Mark did the usual prep there, and that was all. Neither was he giving unusual attention to games. He attended the compulsory practice, and did not turn up on other occasions.

Some fellows wondered what it was that drew him out of gates on every occasion when it was possible for a fellow to be out of gates. Skinner wondered whether the quiet, well-conducted scholarship junior had made questionable acquaintance outside the school, but even Skinner dismissed that suspicion. Even Skinner could not suspect Mark of sneaking in at the back door of the Cross Keys, or snatching a surreptitious game of billiards at the Three Fishers.

Whatever might be his new occupation, Mark said nothing of it. But that was not unusual, for he was always a fellow of a few words.

"Just in time, old bean!" grinned Bob Cherry, as Mark came in with the last of the Remove.

Mark nodded and smiled.

He answered cheerfully to his name when the Remove master called it. So far as Bob Cherry had observed, he had recovered from the disappointment of the Popper Prize result. His manner was quiet, but it was as calm and cheerful as of old.

But the cheerfulness faded out of his face when the fellows left Hall and Skinner made a remark.

"Sorry about your pater, Linley."

Skinner's face did not express sorrow. There was a malicious glimmer in his narrow eyes.

Mark turned on him quickly.

"What do you mean, Skinner?"

"What I say," answered Skinner. "Awfully rough to be up against it like that, isn't it?"

"I don't see how you know anything about my father or his affairs, Skinner," said Mark, breathing hard.

"What about the dole?" asked Snoop.

"The dole?" repeated Mark.

"Yes. Don't they get on the dole in such circumstances? You've heard the favourite song of the unemployed?" said Skinner. "It runs: 'You great big beautiful dole'!"

Mark set his 'ips.

"I don't see why my affairs should be cackled up and down the Remove," he said. "It looks to me as if you've been prying into private letters, Skinner." His hand went to his pocket as he spoke, and went out again empty, and his face hardened. "I seem to have lost a letter. Have you picked it up and been cur enough to read it?"

"Not guilty, my lord," answered Skinner airily. "I only mentioned the matter to express my sympathy. You know my sympathetic nature. As for how I know about it, it's the talk of the Form."

"I'd like to know how it became the talk of the Form."

"Sorry I can't enlighten you," yawned Skinner. "I got it from Bunter. Perhaps Bunter can tell you."

"I'll ask him," said Mark quietly.

And he went in search of Bunter.

That fat and fatuous youth was discovered in Study No. 7, adorning Peter Todd's armchair with his portly person. Peter was in the study, and he gave Mark a friendly nod as he entered. Bunter, however, fixed his big spectacles on Mark with an inimical stare.

"What the thump do you want here?" he asked.

"You!" answered Mark.

"Like your cheek, I think!" said Bunter warmly. "I'm rather particular who I speak to——"

"Whom, dear man—whom!" chided Peter Todd. "Be grammatical, if you can't be civilised."

"Oh, really, Toddy——"

"You can kick him, if you like, Linley," said Peter generously. "As a rule, I object to fellows coming here and kicking Bunter. I think they ought to do it in the passage. But I make an exception in your favour."

"What I mean is, I can't help knowin' somethin' that doesn't concern me," said Lord Mauleverer. "A fellow can't help having ears, can he?" "Hardly," assented Mark Linley. "Well, then, you won't think me cheeky for buttin' into your bizney?" asked Mauleverer anxiously. "Of course not! What is it?" *(See Chapter 9.)*

Mark smiled.

"I've come to ask Bunter a question," he said.

"Well, you needn't," said Bunter. "I want to have nothing to do with you—nothing whatever. A fellow has to draw a line somewhere. I draw it at you. Got that?"

"Perhaps Linley's going to bag a prize," suggested Peter. "He nearly got the Popper. He may get the next."

"Oh!" said Bunter, with a sudden change in his manner. "Of course, I don't mean to say that I'm down on you, Linley. I'm no snob, I hope. I've always believed, in fact, in being kind to the lower classes. A real gentleman always is. What improvement you can get by association with me you're welcome to."

"It wouldn't be a lot, would it?" remarked Peter. "Not what you'd call a really enormous amount."

"Shut up, Peter, while I'm talking to a pal," said Bunter. "I say, old chap, what prize are you going in for now? A cash prize, of course?"

"I'm not going in for any prize."

"Eh?" Again there was a change in Billy Bunter. "Look here, Linley, I don't mind being kind to you, as I've said, but there's a limit. I don't want you here. That's flat!"

"You fat idiot——"

"Oh, really, Linley——"

"Somebody's bagged a letter belonging to me, and read it, and spread it about the Form," said Mark.

"That's Bunter," said Toddy, with a nod. "Quite in his line. Are you going to kick him, or shall I lend you a fives bat?"

"I know nothing about your letter, of course, Linley," said the Owl of the Remove, with dignity. "I never knew you had a letter; and as for picking it up, I never even saw it. If Mauleverer takes your letters and reads them, no good blaming me."

"Mauleverer!" ejaculated Mark.

"I'm not going to say anything about Mauly. He's a pal of mine, though I told him plainly that it was rather mean to read a fellow's letter." Bunter shook his head sorrowfully. "I'm rather more particular in such matters than most fellows, I suppose."

"Mauly would never do anything of the kind!" exclaimed Mark.

"That's all you know," sneered Bunter. "What's he doing with your letter, then? If you want the thing, ask him for it. Pitch into Mauly, if you want to pitch into somebody. I decline to enter into a vulgar shindy with you."

"Where's my letter?" demanded Mark.

"Mauly's got it."

"I'll bother you for that fives bat, Toddy, if you don't mind," said Mark, breathing hard.

"No bother at all," answered Peter. "Delighted, in fact."

He sorted out the fives bat and handed it to Linley.

Bunter jumped up and backed round the study table.

"I—I say, Linley, old chap——"

"Hand over that letter, you fat rascal."

"Mauly's got it!" shrieked Bunter. "I tell you the beast has got it. Showing it all over the place—that's how the fellows got to know what's in it——"

Whack!

"Yaroooooh!"

Mark had Bunter by the collar this time. The fives bat came into rapid action. The yells of William George Bunter were like unto the roaring of the celebrated Bull of Bashan.

Whack, whack!

"You cheeky beast!" yelled Bunter. "I'll jolly well lick you! I say, Toddy, old chap, you lick him. Yarooogh! I tell you Mauly's got the—yoop!—letter. He took it away from me—whoooop!"

"Oh!" said Mark. "Why couldn't you say so at first, you fat dummy? Go and eat coke! Thanks for the bat, Toddy."

"Not at all, old bean."

Mark left the study. Three or four fellows gathered round the door, drawn to the spot by Bunter's yells.

"Killing a pig in this room?" asked Skinner.

"Not killing one," answered Toddy; "only batting one."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, Harry, old chap!" gasped Bunter, as he caught sight of the captain of the Remove. "I say old fellow, that cad Linley makes out that I had his letter. I say, if you like to give the rotter a licking, I'll hold your jacket!"

"I'd give you one, you fat bounder, if Linley hadn't," answered Wharton.

(Continued on page 16.)

(*Continued from page* 13.)

"Why can't you let fellows' letters alone?"

"Oh, really, Wharton! I never had the letter. Besides, Mauly took it away from me before I read it. I wasn't going to read it, either. I hadn't got to the end of it when that beast Mauly butted in. I told Linley that Mauly had it—told him plain! And instead of going and pitching into Mauly, the beast pitched into me!" gasped Bunter. "Me, you know! A fellow who's been kindness itself to him, and overlooked his lowness as much as a fellow of good family possibly could. Are you going to lick him?"

"Anybody want to borrow a fives bat?" asked Peter Todd. "Here's the bat, and here's Bunter—and all the Remove are welcome to a go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! I'd jolly well lick him myself, only he's rather beneath a fellow's notice. I thought he would go and row with Mauly," groaned Bunter. "You would have, Wharton."

"What?"

"You'd have gone off in a temper and rowed with Mauly! But that North country beast never flies off the handle like you do. I wish it had been your letter."

"Why, you image——" ejaculated Wharton, while the other fellows roared.

The captain of the Remove, with a rather red face, tramped away down the passage.

Bunter was left groaning. Peter Todd politely asked him to stop, and Bunter groaned the more. Then Peter picked up the fives bat, with a businesslike look, and inquired where Bunter would have it. Bunter, apparently, did not want it anywhere, and there were no more groans in Study No. 4. The Owl of the Remove suffered in indignant silence.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Declined with Thanks!

"TRICKLE in, old bean!"

Lord Mauleverer gave the Lancashire lad a genial grin as he looked in at Study No. 12 in the Remove.

Mark stepped into the study.

"I've got somethin' that belongs to you," said his lordship, fumbling in his pockets.

"You took my letter away from Bunter?"

"Well, I took it away from a chap who had no right to it," said Mauleverer cautiously.

Mark smiled.

"Bunter's let out that you took it from him, Mauly. It's all right."

"Oh! I thought I heard some yellin' along the passage. I'm afraid Bunter is rather a little beast, but very likely he doesn't know any better," said Mauleverer tolerantly. "Now, I don't want to give you lessons, Linley; but I'm a very careful chap myself——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And you shouldn't drop letters about in the quad for fellows to pick up, old bean."

"I don't think I did," answered Mark. "I think Bunter must have taken that letter from my study. I remember now that I left it in my desk there. A fellow's desk is supposed to be safe."

"Not from Bunter!" grinned Mauleverer. "I suppose he thought there might be toffee in the desk, and came on the letter. Here it is."

"Thanks, old chap!" Mark put the letter in his pocket. "And thanks for taking it away from that fat ass!"

"Not at all, old bean! Hold on a minute!" said Mauleverer, as Mark was about to leave the study. "Sit on somethin' and let's have a chat. I've got somethin' to say."

Mark sat on a corner of the study table.

"Go ahead!" he said.

"I—I—I'm afraid there's been some jaw about what's in that letter, Linley," said Mauleverer hesitatingly.

"I'm afraid so," said Mark, his brows contracting. "It can't be helped, though."

"What I mean is I can't help knowin' somethin' that doesn't concern me," said Lord Mauleverer. "A fellow can't help havin' ears, can he?"

"Hardly," assented Mark.

"Well, then, you won't think me cheeky for buttin' into your bizney?" asked Mauleverer anxiously.

"Of course not! What is it?"

Lord Mauleverer hesitated again. He seemed extremely uncomfortable; and Mark eyed him in wonder. Generally Lord Mauleverer was the most self-possessed youth in Greyfriars School. Now he coloured and hesitated and coughed uncomfortably.

"Well, to come to the point——" he said, and paused.

"Go it!" said Mark.

"If you don't mind my mentionin' it——"

"Not at all."

"I should hate to seem buttin' in——"

"My dear chap, nobody would ever suspect you of butting in," said Mark, with a smile. "I can't imagine what you're driving at. Cough it up!"

"Well, I—I gather that your pater is rather up against it," said Lord Mauleverer slowly.

"That's so," assented Mark. "It's rather rotten to have it talked about in the Form; but I don't mind you knowing, Mauly. The dad's having rather a hard time of it at present."

"That's why you were so keen on the Popper Prize?"

Mark nodded.

"Don't let Bunter's cackle give you a wrong impression, Mauly," he said quietly. "Father hasn't written to me for money, as the fellows may think, from what Bunter's tattled. He's written to tell me not to worry about home affairs and to stick to my work here. I shouldn't even know that he had lost his job, only I found it was so in the hols. He wouldn't have told me."

"I quite understand," said Lord Mauleverer. "Now, what I'm comin' to is this——"

"Go it!"

"Well," said Mauleverer, "you know I'm rollin' in oof——"

Mark's face became crimson. He comprehended at last the drift of the schoolboy earl.

"Chuck it at that, Mauly, old fellow!" he said quietly. "I know you've the best intentions in the world; but——"

"Give a man a chance," murmured Lord Mauleverer. "We're friends—and you know a tenner's nothin' to me. A loan——"

"Which I couldn't repay," said Mark. "Thanks, old man—but I'm not exactly Bunter!"

"Oh gad!" ejaculated Lord Mauleverer, in dismay. "You don't imagine I'd class you with Bunter, do you?"

"No; but if I took your money, I should class myself with him." Mark slipped from the table. "Let it drop!"

"I—I say, have you got your back up?" inquired Mauleverer dismally. "I never meant to put your back up, old bean. Honest Injun!"

Mark laughed.

"My dear old chap, I know you're the kindest fellow in the world, and I'm ever so grateful for your offer," he said. "Only the thing happens to be impossible. No harm done."

"You ain't waxy?" asked Mauleverer anxiously.

"Not in the least."

"A fellow would like to do somethin' to help, you know," murmured his lordship.

Mark shook his head.

"Fellows have to help themselves," he said. "The fact is, Mauly, I've found something like a job, and I think it will see me through. I'm telling you because I know you feel friendly towards me."

"Begad! I'm glad of that!" said Mauleverer. "Goin' in for another prize? Best of luck!"

"No; it's something outside the school," said Mark. "It's work—harder work than I expected—and it takes all my spare time and keeps me from thinking of prize-hunting."

"Actually earnin' money by work?" asked Lord Mauleverer, in great admiration. "I know lots of fellows do. I never could get on to it myself. Sort of Herculean job, what? Do you know, I've often thought it lucky that I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth. If I had to work, I'm afraid I should fade away and perish. I suppose these things really are whacked out fairly, you know. Fellow who can work, works; fellow who can't, doesn't! Eh?"

"I'm jolly glad you were born rich, anyhow, old chap," said Mark, with a smile. "I'm afraid you'd have rather a rough time in the labour market."

And, with a nod to the schoolboy earl, Mark left the study.

Lord Mauleverer was left with a very thoughtful expression on his face. His lordship had never known what it was to be short of that necessary article—cash. And he generally had more bank-notes than other fellows had half-crowns. Perhaps that was why Mauly never gave a thought to money, regarding it simply as a useful article that could be drawn from the bank when required, almost as one might draw water from a tap. It was quite a painful reflection to him that there were lots of fellows who couldn't go to the bank and renew their supply of cash at necessary times.

Mark Linley went along to Study No. 13. It was time for prep, and Mark's other occupations did not cause him to neglect his school work.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was in the study; but he had not yet started prep.

"I have been waiting for you, my esteemed and ridiculous Marky," he observed.

"Well, here I am," said Mark.

"Will the excusefulness be preposterous if your ridiculous friend ventures to

make remarks on a private and absurd subject?" asked the nabob.

Mark started. That cryptic remark might have puzzled him but for his interview with Lord Mauleverer. Now he understood at once.

"Do not get your ludicrous back up, my esteemed Marky," went on Hurree Singh. "In the present deplorable state of scarcefulness of cash a ridiculous loan might be grateful and comforting. The stitch in time, as the English proverb remarks, saves a bird in hand from becoming a bird in the bush."

Mark chuckled.

"Nothing doing, Inky—thanks all the same."

"The regretfulness is great!" said Hurree Singh; and the subject dropped, as Bob Cherry and little Wun Lung came in.

Mark rather wondered whether Bob was going to join in the chorus, as it were. Probably he would have done so; but Bob's financial resources being limited to ninepence made the offer of a loan rather impracticable.

Study No. 13 settled down to prep.

After prep, Bob and Hurree Singh went down to the Rag.

Mark was taking a little more time over his work than his study-mates. Little Wun Lung settled down in the study armchair, watching him quietly with his slanting eyes in silence. When Linley rose at last and put his books away, the little Chinee spoke.

"Fliend Markee plenty tlouble?" he said.

Mark glanced round at him.

"You've heard, too?" he said, rather grimly.

"Plenty talkee, me heal," said Wun Lung. "Me likee nicee ole Mark. Lookee, you takee!"

He pressed something into Linley's hand. Mark stared at it. It was a banknote.

"Fliendly loan!" explained Wun Lung. "Likee nicee ole Mark, velly good fliend to little Chinee."

"My dear chap," said Mark, "much obliged; but I don't want a loan, really. Shove this in your pocket, you young ass!"

Wun Lung looked deeply disappointed.

"No takee?" he asked.

"No."

"No likee li'le Chinee?"

"Yes, yes; but I can't take your money!" said Mark, half-laughing and half-vexed. "Put it in your pocket. It's all right."

Wun Lung reluctantly accepted the banknote. Mark left the study to go down to the Rag. There was trouble in his mind, and trouble on his heart, but the kindness of his friends, though it was impossible to accept it, had a cheering effect on him.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Riches Take Unto Themselves Wings!

"GOT it?"

"Got it!"

"Hurrah!"

Stewart of the Shell grinned cheerily. His friends in the Shell grinned as cheerily as Edward Stewart.

It was a wild and windy day at Greyfriars. In the old school quad the roar of the sea could be heard, dashing against the chalk cliffs. The wind roared round the old red chimney-pots, and howled through the elms. But wind and weather did not affect the spirits of Stewart and his friends. Stewart had got it!

"It" was the tenner!

Stewart of the Shell, having won the Popper Prize, he had rather expected, and his friends had rather expected, that it would be handed over to him on the spot by the headmaster.

Had it been a medal or a pot, Stewart would have been immediately gratified.

But hard cash, he found, was quite a different matter. Stewart had won a cash prize of ten pounds, and was entitled thereto. But the sum of ten pounds was, in the headmaster's estimation, much too large a sum to be entrusted to a junior in the Shell. Before that sum was handed over, therefore, Stewart learned that his father was to be communicated with, and his wishes known. Stewart's opinion of this was that it was all rot. But he did not venture to tell the Head so.

Unfortunately for Edward Stewart, his father was absent from home, and quite a long interval elapsed before the Head received his reply, requesting him to hand the cash to Edward.

Mr. Stewart's wishes being now known, the cash had been duly handed over. It was handed over in the form

(*Continued on next page.*)

of a crisp banknote for ten pounds—seldom seen in the Shell.

Stewart came away from the Head with a beaming face. As day had followed day, and the tenner did not materialise, Stewart had begun to feel that he had rather wasted his efforts on the exam. Now he was comforted.

"Going to change it?" asked Hoskins.

Stewart grinned.

"What do you think?" was his counter-question.

"Good man!" said Hobson.

"Mrs. Mimble will be able to change it for me," said Stewart. "I think a spread in the tuckshop rather a good idea."

This was carried nem. con. There was not a fellow in the Shell who did not think that idea uncommonly good.

Quite an army marched across the windy quad with Stewart.

"Let's see it, old bean," said Chowne of the Shell. "We don't see a thumping lot of tenners."

"Yes; let's see the jolly old tenner," agreed Hobson.

"Here it is."

Stewart took out the banknote. It was bright and new and crisp and rustling—altogether a very delightful article.

It passed from hand to hand.

The Shell fellows gathered round it in great admiration. On the edge of the happy group hovered Billy Bunter of the Remove. Bunter had caught a glimpse of the tenner, and it caused a sudden revival of his friendship for Stewart of the Shell.

"I say, you fellows, let's see it!" gasped Bunter.

Lower Fourth fags were not allowed to butt into the lordly society of the Shell. Somebody kicked Bunter, and he departed, roaring.

"Well, here you are, Teddy!" said Hobson, tossing the banknote back to Stewart. "Catch!"

In the circumstances, with the wind howling from the sea, it was rather a reckless proceeding to toss so flimsy an article as a banknote back to its owner. But Hobby's best friends admitted that Hobby was not much given to thinking.

A gust of wind swept across the quad as the banknote was tossed. It caught the flimsy paper, and Stewart, grabbing at it, missed it by a foot.

"Look out!"

"Catch it!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The slim strip of paper fluttered away on the wind. There was a wild rush in pursuit of it.

"There it is!"

"Jump on it!"

"Catch, catch!"

The banknote fluttered to the ground. Five or six Shell fellows pounced on it, but just before they could catch it, another gust sent it sailing again. This time it blew high into the air, and sailed away among fluttering leaves torn from the elms by the fierce wind.

"Oh, crikey!" ejaculated Stewart.

"You ass, Hobby!"

"Oh, I say, I told Stewart to catch, but——"

"It's gone!"

"There it is—coming down! After it!"

The Shell fellows raced after the fluttering banknote. After them panted Billy Bunter, with eager eyes behind his big spectacles. It was not like Bunter to exert himself very much for others; but certainly he was very keen on capturing that banknote. Perhaps he thought that he would be entitled to join in the spread at the tuckshop if he was the lucky captor.

But Bunter had no chance. A heavy Shell fellow crashed into him, and sent him sprawling. Bunter collapsed and roared.

With shouts and yells, the Shell fellows pursued the elusive banknote. The high wind seemed to be playing a game with it. Several times they nearly had it. But every time it was blown high out of reach again. They panted and puffed and blew, in hopeless but determined pursuit.

Coker of the Fifth, walking stately across the quad, was mixed up in a wild rush of the Shell, and left on the ground, spluttering.

By that time, the frantic pursuit of the banknote had attracted general attention. Hacker, the master of the Shell, came out of the House with a frowning brow, to inquire what the uproar was about. When he learned, he joined in the chase, his gown fluttering wildly in the wind. Fifth Form men joined in, and even some of the stately Sixth. While a whole mob of juniors lent their aid—Remove and Fourth and Third and Second Form fags. The old quadrangle of Greyfriars presented a scene of the wildest excitement. Some of the fellows shouted "Tally-ho!" some of them "On the ball!"—most regarding the affair as a game. But it was no game to Stewart. It was his tenner.

But pursuing an elusive slip of flimsy paper in a high wind was like hunting a will-o'-the-wisp. It vanished from sight at last, and some fellows declared they had seen it blown over the gym, others were certain it was in a tree, others argued that it was on the roof of the School House, while still others averred that it had blown into an open window. In the multitude of counsels there was no wisdom. Only one fact was absolutely certain, and that was that the banknote had been lost to sight, though to memory dear.

"It's gone," said Hobson, at last.

"Oh, crikey!" said Stewart dismally.

"It'll be found, old chap—it's bound to be found," said Hobson comfortingly. "Why didn't you catch it when I chucked it to you?" he added.

"You ass!"

"Look here, Stewart——"

"You silly fathead!"

"Well, if you're going to be stuffy about it——" said Hobson.

Perhaps it was excusable for Stewart to be a little "stuffy" about it. His riches had taken unto themselves wings and flown away. His banknote was gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream.

Fellows still rooted about in odd corners, looking for that banknote. Billy Bunter sought for it with an earnestness that was really surprising in a youth so disinclined for exertion. But the banknote was gone, and all that remained for Stewart to do was to put a notice on the board, requesting that the banknote, if found, might be returned to its owner. But the day passed, and the next day, and the next, and the elusive banknote had not been returned to its owner. And Stewart's only solace was to tell Hobson of the Shell what he thought of him, which he did with emphasis, eloquence, and high frequency.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

On the Track!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Br-r-r-r-r-r!" said Skinner.

"Don't you think it's rather queer——"

"Your face?" asked Skinner. "Yes, rather!"

"As Inky would say, the queerfulness is terrific!" remarked Snoop. "Take it away, will you? Too queer for me."

Billy Bunter blinked at Skinner and Snoop. He had not been alluding, of course, to his face which he did not regard as queer in the very least, whatever might be the opinion of others.

"Look here, you fellows, don't rot!" he said. "I mean it's queer——"

"So do I," said Skinner. "I've thought sometimes that you came to Greyfriars wearing a Guy Fawkes' mask, and that you've never taken it off."

"I mean about Linley, you silly ass!" hooted Bunter.

"Oh!" Harold Skinner condescended to be interested. "What about Linley, fatty?"

"Any more news in his letters from home?" asked Stott, with deep sarcasm.

"Oh, really, Stott——"

"I'd have skinned you if I'd been Linley," said Stott. "You've made the whole Form tattle about him. I'd have given you more than a few licks with a fives bat."

"Oh, shut up, Stott!" said Skinner. "What is it now, Bunter? It's rather a lark to rag Linley. I'd like to see him really go off at the deep end some time. He's too jolly quiet for me."

"It's queer," said Bunter. "I've got my suspicions of Linley. Of course, I'm not the fellow to think uncharitably of any chap. You fellows know how good-natured I am."

"We do," agreed Skinner. "You could put all your good-nature into a thimble, and there would be lots of room left for a finger. But get it off your chest. What's Linley been up to? Is his jolly old pater still on the dole, or has he written to Linley to pawn the study armchair, and send him something to pay the bailiffs out?"

Snoop chuckled, and Stott grunted.

"Look here, that's beastly, Skinner!" said Stott. "Why can't you let the chap alone? He never does anybody any harm."

"He swots," said Skinner. "He saps. He keeps up an air of being better than other fellows. I don't like humbugs. I don't like prize-hunters. If you admire him so much, Stott, you can go and pal with him. I shouldn't miss you."

Stott grunted again, and was silent. Stott was a rather slow-witted fellow, much under Skinner's influence. But he often irritated his chief by expressing opinions quite contrary to Skinner's. He was, though he seemed unaware of it, rather too good for the company he kept.

"Oh, don't rag—you two!" said Snoop. "Give it a name, Bunter. What have you found out now?"

"I haven't exactly found out anything," said the Owl of the Remove. "But I've been thinking a lot."

"What with?" asked Skinner, with interest.

"Oh, really, Skinner! Doesn't it seem queer to you fellows about Linley?" asked Bunter. "Every day, almost, he clears off immediately after class, and never comes back till just on call-over. Half-holidays it's just the same. Wharton fairly has to drag him down to games practice, when he goes at all, and that's not often. I hear that he's asked to be left out of the Redclyffe match. And you know he used to be awfully keen on cricket. What does he do out of gates?"

"I've often wondered," said Skinner.

"He's up to something," averred Snoop. "But I'm dashed if I've been able to guess what!"

"What does it matter?" asked Stott.

"Oh, do shut up!" said Skinner irritably. "He may be up to something—perhaps something shady."

"Well, you wouldn't mind that," said Stott. "You'd like him all the better if he was a bit shady, wouldn't you?"

"You silly owl!" said Skinner.

"It may be pub-haunting," said Bunter. "Some fellows go in for that. You know Loder of the Sixth had it up against Wharton and his lot, and they explained it away, but"—Bunter shook his head seriously—"I never was quite satisfied about that, you now."

"Stick to Linley," said Skinner. "He doesn't go pub-haunting, because that costs money, and he hasn't any money."

"All the Remove knows that, since Bunter pinched a letter from his study desk," grunted Stott.

"I did nothing of the kind," said Bunter warmly. "A fellow might be looking in a desk, and might see a letter by accident, and——"

"And he might get a batting for it," said Stott. "And a jolly good thing, too."

"Beast! Look here, you fellows, Linley's up to something, out of gates. All the Form knows that, by this time. It's jolly mysterious. My idea is that it's a fellow's duty to look into it."

"You mean you're bursting with curiosity?" asked Stott.

"I don't mean anything of the sort!" roared Bunter. "Some fellows have a sense of duty. I never did approve of syrupstitiousness."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I've spoken to Wharton about this," said Bunter. "I felt bound to, from a sense of duty, as he's captain of the Form."

"And what did Wharton say?" asked Snoop.

Bunter snorted.

"He didn't say anything. The beast kicked me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you may think it funny," said Bunter hotly. "I didn't! Wharton's got a low mind. Having no sense of duty himself, he can't see that other fellows are high-minded and dutiful and—and noble. Instead of giving me credit for a sense of duty, he just kicked me—in a rather brutal way. It hurt."

"Good!" said Stott heartily. "Let's all do the same, you men."

"Oh, dry up!" said Skinner. "The fact is that Linley's goings-on are jolly queer, and I've rather wondered that Quelchy doesn't look into it. Linley's always out of gates, comes in late, and looks tired, as if he'd been swotting Greek. Only he can't go out of gates to swot. It's a jolly mysterious thing!"

"Fellows ought to look into it," said Bunter. "That's what I was going to say. Us, for instance."

"Spying, as usual," said Stott.

"I decline to answer an insulting remark, Stott," said Bunter, with dignity. "I hope I'm incapable of spying on anybody. Linley's going out again now. I just heard him tell Bob Cherry he couldn't stop. Well, suppose we follow him?"

"There he is," said Snoop, with a nod in the direction of the gates.

Mark Linley was going down to the gates. He did not glance at the little group of Removites under the elms, but they looked at him with considerable interest. Quite a number of fellows in the Remove had noticed Linley's peculiar "goings-on," as Skinner called them, and there was some surmise on the subject. Most of the fellows, however, had the happy gift of minding their own business—a thing that William George Bunter could not have done had he tried—not that it was on record that he had ever tried.

"It's queer, as Bunter says," remarked Skinner. "After all, I don't see why we shouldn't take a stroll in this delightful summer weather."

"Just what I was thinking of, in fact," observed Sidney James Snoop.

"I say, you fellows, come on!" said Bunter eagerly. "If the beast sees us and cuts up rusty, you can handle him all right." Apparently Bunter had felt a little uneasy about shadowing Linley "on his own."

"Come on," said Skinner.

Snoop followed Skinner at once. Frederick Stott hesitated, but he finally went. Bunter trotted off gleefully. All of them were curious; though Bunter, to do him justice, had no malice in him. He only wanted to find things out, and tattle them up and down the Form; inquisitiveness being his besetting sin.

Mark Linley turned down the shady lane that led to Friardale. Skinner & Co. strolled after him.

"Shadowing" Linley was easy work. It never seemed to occur to him that any fellow might watch him, and he did not turn his head once as he walked down to the village.

Neither did Skinner & Co. turn their heads; they kept their eyes on the sturdy, active figure in advance of them. Had they turned their heads they might have learned that they were not the only shadowers at Greyfriars that sunny afternoon.

With shouts and yells, the Shell fellows pursued the elusive banknote. Several times they nearly had it, but every time it was blown high out of reach again. Mr. Hacker, the master of the Shell, who had inquired what the uproar was about, joined in the chase. "On the ball!" shouted someone, regarding the affair as a game. (*See Chapter* 10.)

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Shadowers!

"GENTLEMEN, chaps, and fellows!" said Bob Cherry. "Have another ginger-pop!"

"No time for riotous living now," said Bob. "We've got something better to do than guzzling ginger-pop here."

The Co. looked at him in surprise. They had gathered at the school shop for light refreshment, and, so far as they knew, there was nothing on hand till they went down to cricket practice.

"What's the game?" asked Nugent.

"Skinner!"

"Oh, blow Skinner!" said Johnny Bull. "I don't want to have anything to do with Skinner."

"He's gone for a walk," said Bob.

"Let him!"

"You don't feel inclined to follow him?"

"No fear."

"Well, I do," said Bob. "So pull up your socks and come on."

"Look here, what are you driving

at?" demanded Harry Wharton. "We were going to put in some cricket before tea——"

"Cricket, like everything else, can be overdone," said Bob cheerily. "At present our game is Skinner. To make it clear, even to Johnny's limited intellect, Marky's gone off on one of his mysterious jaunts, and Skinner's gone after him."

"Oh!" said Harry. "Spying, I suppose."

"Your supposer is working as per schedule," said Bob. "Right on the wicket. I can't make out what Marky goes mouching out of gates for, always on his lonely own; but it's his own bizney, not anybody else's, and he's not going to be watched. If you fellows don't want to come, I'll go. I hope I can handle that gang."

"Oh, we'll come!" said Wharton.

"The comefulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The spyfulness of the esteemed Skinner is a bird in hand that must be stitched in time, as the English proverb says."

The juniors chuckled over the English proverb as they sauntered down to the gates. Bob Cherry, glancing after his chum as he went out, had observed Skinner & Co. take the trail, and he had promptly resolved to intervene. Bob was considerably puzzled himself by Mark's unknown occupation out of school, but he had never thought of asking him a question about it; and whatever it was, if Linley did not choose other fellows to know, other fellows were not going to find out by prying. Bob had made up his mind on that subject.

The Famous Five walked down the lane at a good speed, and soon came in sight of Skinner & Co. They had a glimpse of Mark Linley farther ahead, walking on rapidly, like a fellow who had no time to lose, and making his shadowers exert themselves rather more than was their custom. Billy Bunter was already puffing and blowing.

Obviously Mark Linley was walking down to Friardale, which was quite a harmless proceeding after class. The village was within bounds, and any fellow was free to go there if he liked, so long as he kept clear of certain places that were under taboo—such as the Cross Keys. It was difficult for even Skinner to suspect the quiet, well-conducted North-country junior of "pub-haunting," but it was a puzzle to guess what else could take him so constantly away from the school. Skinner was prepared to see Linley turn in at the side-lane that led to the back door of the Cross Keys—a little lane that Skinner himself knew well. But when Mark reached that spot he walked on. That was not his destination.

"Not the pub!" said Snoop.

"I knew it wasn't!" grunted Stott.

"You know such a jolly lot, don't you?" said Skinner unpleasantly. "Perhaps you know what he's up to in the village?"

"I know that it's not our business."

"Right on the wicket!" said a cheery voice; and Skinner & Co. fairly jumped round. The Famous Five, running lightly on the grass beside the lane, had overtaken the shadowers.

"Oh, I—I say, you fellows——" gasped Bunter.

"Taken up detective work, Skinner, old bean?" asked Bob affably.

"I don't know what you mean," said Skinner. "I suppose I can walk down to the village after class if I like."

"Wrong!" said Bob. "You can't!"

"You cheeky ass——"

"You weren't following Linley?" asked Nugent.

"Linley? Has he gone out of gates?" asked Skinner carelessly.

"I say, you fellows, we weren't following Linley," said Bunter. "I never suggested anything of the kind to these chaps, and they'll tell you so. They were all present when I spoke to them about it."

"Shut up, you benighted idiot!" hissed Snoop.

"Oh, really, Snoop——"

"Cheese it!"

"I'm only explaining to these chaps that they're barking up the wrong tree. You see, you fellows, we're simply taking a walk," said Bunter, blinking at the Famous Five. "We're not keeping an eye on anybody. We don't care a rap where Linley goes; in fact, we don't know that he's going to the village at all. Personally, I haven't seen him since class. I believe he's in his study at the present moment, swotting. In fact, I saw him there."

If Bunter hoped to convince the Famous Five by this wealth of details, Bunter was disappointed.

"Mine's Bunter," said Bob Cherry. "What's yours, Johnny?"

"Snoop," said Johnny. "I don't like touching Skinner. Not without gloves on, anyhow. He's not nice to touch."

"I'll touch Skinner," said Wharton. "I can manage with my boot, I think."

"Look here——" roared Skinner.

"Look here——" hooted Snoop.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Go it," said Bob. "You can stand out if you like, Stott, or you can pick your man—just as you please. Pile in!"

"Yaroooooh!"

"Oh, my hat! Hands off, you rotters!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Billy Bunter found himself rolling in the dust of the lane in Bob Cherry's powerful grasp. Johnny Bull grasped Snoop, and proceeded to hammer his head against a wayside oak, taking no notice whatever of Snoop's frantic objections. Harry Wharton proceeded to deal with Skinner, as he had stated, with his boot. Skinner looked as if he were playing a wild and whirling game of hop-scotch, as he strove frantically to dodge that boot. Stott looked on for some moments, but loyalty to a bad cause led him to intervene—upon which he was collared by Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, floored, and sat upon.

The next five minutes were crammed with excitement for the shadowers. When that space of time had elapsed Skinner & Co. had elapsed also. They fled wildly in various directions, dusty, dismayed, and dishevelled, and vanished over the horizon.

"That's all right!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Now we've given them socks, we'll have that other ginger-pop we missed at the tuckshop. Come on; we'll look in on Uncle Clegg and give him our esteemed custom. We can ask him how he's getting on with the jolly old tax-inspector. You fellows remember that tale of woe he pitched us."

The juniors were near to Friardale now, so they walked into the old village High Street and headed for Uncle Clegg's shop. They had, as a matter of fact, forgotten the tale of woe Mr. Clegg had related to them on the day of the Shell match, but they remembered it now.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob suddenly.

"What——"

"There's old Marky!"

Mark Linley came in sight for a moment, just disappearing in at the doorway of Uncle Clegg's.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob. "We've run him down instead of Skinner. If

they'd kept on the trail, they'd have tracked him to the village tuckshop and spotted him mopping up ginger-pop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five chuckled as they walked on to Uncle Clegg's. Quite inadvertently they had seen the scholarship junior arrive at his destination. There was something rather comic in the idea of Skinner & Co. setting out to trail Linley and running him down in a tuckshop.

But when they entered the dusky little establishment the juniors stared.

Linley was not there.

They had seen him enter the shop, and certainly he had not come out again. But the shop was empty.

"My hat!" said Bob, in perplexity. "Where's Marky?"

"Echo answers where?"

"The wherefulness is terrific!"

"Must have gone through the house," said Harry Wharton. "Can't imagine why."

"Unless he knew that those cads were after him, and wanted to throw them off the track," said Nugent.

"Why should he take the trouble?"

"Goodness knows!"

Bob Cherry rapped on the counter. Uncle Clegg usually appeared promptly from his dark little parlour when the shop bell rang On this occasion he was not in a hurry to put in an appearance.

Thump, thump, thump!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" bawled Bob. "Tumble up, Uncle Clegg! Show a leg, there! All hands on deck! Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Drat 'em!" a voice was heard to utter from the parlour behind the shop.

And the juniors grinned.

Uncle Clegg opened the door, and put his gnarled head out and blinked at the juniors. He had a pen in his hand and a spot of ink on his nose, and seemed very perturbed and cross. Apparently he had been busy in his little parlour.

"Oh, it's you young gents!" said Mr. Clegg.

"Little us!" said Bob. "Ginger-pop, old bean! Pour out the Rhine wine! Let it flow like a free and bounding river! We're frightfully thirsty! We've been kicking fellows along a lane, and it made no end of a dust! We're as dry as Euclid!"

"The dryfulness is terrific!"

"Where's Linley?" asked Bob, as Uncle Clegg set out ginger-beer and glasses. "He came in here ahead of us, and he's done a vanishing trick."

"Hallo, you fellows!"

Mark Linley looked out from the half-open door of the parlour behind the shop, a slight flush in his face.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There you are! Come and help us with this ginger-pop, Marky!"

"Thanks, not just now! I'm rather busy!"

"Taking up the tuckshop business," asked Bob, "or tea-ing with Uncle Clegg? What's the game?"

But Mark had gone back into the little parlour, and Uncle Clegg, having served the Removites, followed him there. The Famous Five looked at one another.

"What the thump——" said Bob, perplexed.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh grinned a dusky grin.

"The esteemed mystery is explicatefully clear!" he remarked. "The absurd Marky is helping the ridiculous Mr. Clegg with his complicated and ludicrous accounts!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Bob.

The juniors chuckled. They chuckled again as they left the shop and started back to Greyfriars. Quite accidentally they had dropped on the solution of the mystery that had puzzled the Remove and had caused William George Bunter such deep perturbation in his fat mind. Skinner & Co., had they tracked Mark to his destination, would not, after all, have made a very alarming discovery.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Linley Explains!

MARK LINLEY came into Hall in time for call-over as usual. Several fellows in the Remove eyed him, Skinner and Snoop scowling as they did so. Billy Bunter gave him a scornful blink through his big spectacles. Mark, however, did not seem much affected thereby; indeed, he did not seem to notice the existence of Skinner and Snoop and William George Bunter. His face was thoughtful and showed signs of fatigue; he looked like a fellow who had been hard at work. Harry Wharton & Co., at least, could guess the reason now. A fellow who was trying to make head or tail of Mr. Clegg's weird accounts was likely to bag a headache or two in the process. They understood, but they were a little surprised.

Mark was one of the kindest and best-natured fellows at Greyfriars, and never hesitated to do anybody a good turn, and he very often did a good deal of some other fellow's work as well as his own. But there were, after all, limits in that direction. Even a kind and good-natured fellow was not expected to give up the whole of his leisure for weeks and to engage in a worrying and troublesome task for the sake of an old gentleman in the village, howsoever deserving. To give Uncle Clegg help for a few hours was an act of kindness, but to take on a task like this, more suitable for a solicitor, and quite beyond the powers of most boys of Mark's age, was surely carrying good nature to a very extraordinary length.

Mark, who was known now to be badly in need of money, could certainly have earned some by much less exertion than he was undertaking on Mr. Clegg's account. More than once Mark had obtained copying and translating jobs from a firm in Courtfield, for which the pay was not high, but was at least something. Now he seemed to be going "all out" on a hefty task for nothing.

The Famous Five reflected that it was no business of theirs, and did not think of speaking about it; but after prep, when the chums of the Remove gathered in Study No. 1 before going down, Mark came in. He looked a little uncomfortable, and there was a slight flush in his cheeks, but he came straight to the point.

"You fellows came on me at Uncle Clegg's to-day," he said. "I suppose it rather surprised you to see me there?"

"Yes, a little," admitted Wharton. "But we tumbled at once, of course."

"The tumblefulness was terrific, my absurd Marky!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I'd rather it wasn't talked about, of course," said Mark. "No need for the Remove to cackle about that as well as the rest of my business."

"We're not the fellows to jaw about what doesn't concern us," said the captain of the Remove, rather dryly.

"I don't mean that," said Mark hastily. "There's no harm in it, and no reason why everybody at Greyfriars shouldn't know, so far as that goes. Quelch knows already."

"Quelch does?" ejaculated Nugent.

"Naturally. I asked his permission before I took it on."

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"That would be news for Skinner!" he remarked.

"But I'd rather not have it jawed about," said Mark. "I never intended to speak about it; but, of course, I don't mind you fellows knowing. Since Bunter read my letter from home and tattled about it, it's no secret that I'm hard up. I'm earning money now—that is, I shall be earning some when I get through. Mr. Clegg is quite unable to get his business affairs in order without help, and I have taken on the job for an agreed figure."

"Oh!" ejaculated the juniors.

"I'd like to do it for nothing," added Mark, his cheeks flushing deeper. "But I can't afford that; my time's not my own when I'm at school—a school like Greyfriars—and my people are up against it at home. I've got to help—or leave school. I mean, I should feel bound to leave and help at home unless I could earn money here. I should have left already, and given up the scholarship, only it would be a blow to my people if I lost a chance of making good here. I couldn't bring off the Popper Prize, and this is going to take its place. I'm putting in some hard work—harder work than I've ever done for an examination, and what I'm doing for Mr. Clegg would cost him more if he employed a solicitor. And I'm to get payment by results. No results, no pay."

"How do you work that out?" asked Bob.

Mark smiled faintly.

"Mr. Clegg is one of the thousands of people who are entitled to a return of the income tax deducted at source, and who have never thought about it or troubled about it," he explained. "So far as I can make out at present he will get back about sixty pounds when the job's done. Of course, they have to be satisfied about his standing, and they're a bit suspicious of shop-keepers who don't keep books. The whole thing has to be worked out—and poor old Clegg could no more work it out than he could work out the toughest proposition in Euclid. He could get expert help, of course—but he would have to pay for it. I'm doing the job for him—cheap."

"I see," said Bob.

"And you're able to do the work?" asked Johnny Bull.

Mark nodded.

"I can do it—and I think the inspector will be satisfied when I'm done with it. But it's hard work, and it takes up all my time, and won't be finished

just yet. Clegg's accounts are enough to make an angel weep. He hasn't the faintest idea how he stands financially, and hasn't had for years. All he knows is that he has made a living out of his shop, and in hard times he's lived on the little income from his investment in War Loan. He's entitled to the return of the whole of the tax deducted at source, and over six years that comes to a good sum. But he's got to make the thing clear and satisfy the authorities, of course. That's my job.

"I'm to have ten pounds when it's done. Of course, he could not get it done by the usual people for that. But I don't get anything till he gets his repayment. If it doesn't come off I get nothing. But it will come off all right, of course, if the thing is put properly. It's only a question of getting his poor old accounts in order, and showing that he is not a tax-dodger."

"My hat!" said Bob. "I think I'll get you another job with my pater. He tears his hair over his income tax paper."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So that's how it stands," said Mark, smiling. "I don't mind you fellows knowing—but, of course, I don't want to make it the talk of the Remove, and to have Skinner gibing about it."

"Not a giddy syllable," said Bob. "But how you do it beats me! What a brain!"

"The brainfulness is truly terrific."

"And you told Quelch?" said Harry.

"Yes I couldn't take on such a job without asking him, and he gave his permission, so long as it doesn't interfere with school work, of course," said Mark. "I'm taking care of that—but I've had to let all other things go."

"Including the cricket?" grunted Bob.

"That can't be helped."

"Well, look here—suppose I come along and lend a hand?" asked Bob.

"Wha-a-at?"

"For goodness' sake, old chap, don't!" ejaculated Wharton. "Marky's got enough on hand without that."

"Perhaps I shouldn't be much use at figures," admitted Bob, after a moment's thought.

"The perhapsfulness is terrific."

"No perhaps about it," grinned Nugent. "We'd better not help, or Linley will be feeling like the man who prayed to be saved from his friends."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Roll away, barrel!"

Instead of rolling away Billy Bunter rolled into the study. He blinked at the juniors very seriously through his big spectacles. For the moment the short-sighted Owl of the Remove did not observe that Mark Linley was in the study.

"I say, you fellows, I've got something to say, and it's rather serious," said Bunter.

"Can't you go and say it to somebody else?" asked Nugent.

"No!" roared Bunter.

"Can't you go to your own study and say it to yourself?" inquired the captain of the Remove.

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Why say it at all?" asked Johnny Bull. "Why not shut up for once, just to show that your jaw can keep still?"

"This is a serious matter!" hooted Bunter. "It's about that fellow Linley."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Famous Five—and Mark grinned. He was standing within a few feet of Bunter, who was still unaware that he was there.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at," growled Bunter. "You fellows butted in when I was keeping an eye on him to-day. Well, it was like your cheek! Mind, I don't want you to tell him that I was keeping an eye on him."

"I don't think we shall need to mention it to him," chuckled Bob. "He may guess—now."

"Well, I don't see how he can guess," said Bunter. "He's not a suspicious sort of chap—I'll say that for him. But he's up to something out of gates, and I'm jolly well going to find out what it is. Not that I'm curious about it, you know—I don't mean that. I hope I'm not inquisitive."

"What a hopeful nature," remarked Bob.

"But some fellows have a sense of duty," explained Bunter. "I hardly expect you chaps to understand that. But that's how it is. That fellow Linley is up to something. I don't think it's pub.-haunting, but it's something shady—that stands to reason!"

"What about holding up a bank?" asked Bob. "A bank was held up in Lantham a few weeks ago. Think Linley did it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! It's something," said Bunter. "I've asked him, and he's never told me what it is. Now why hasn't he?"

"Perhaps he doesn't care to confide his private affairs to a fat, flabby, frabjous, chattering, tattling idiot," suggested Bob. "Think that may be it, Bunter?"

"You can call a fellow names," said Bunter. "but I can jolly well tell you that I'm not satisfied about this. I'm going to keep an eye on that fellow, Linley, and I'll thank you not to butt in again when I'm doing it. See? And don't tell him! If he's put on his guard it may give me a lot of trouble. No bizney of yours, and don't butt in. See? That fellow Linley's no good—I'm prepared to tell him so."

"Go ahead!" said a quiet voice.

Billy Bunter spun round.

He became suddenly aware that the fellow he was discussing was in the study.

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter.

His fat jaw dropped, and his little round eyes almost bulged through his spectacles.

"I—I—I didn't see you, old chap!" gasped Bunter. "I say, I wasn't speaking about you, you know."

"What?"

"I mean, I was only joking!" gasped Bunter. "One of my little jests, old chap! He, he, he!"

"Are you going to kick him, Marky?" asked Bob Cherry.

Mark laughed and shook his head.

"Then I jolly well am!" said Bob emphatically.

And he did.

"Whoooooop!"

William George Bunter travelled out of Study No. 1 at express speed. There was a bump and a roar in the Remove passage.

The way of the transgressor is said to be hard, but it really seemed as if the way of a fellow with a sense of duty was harder.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.
A Rag in the Rain!

"NICE!"

"Oh, very!"

"The nicefulness is terrific."

Those remarks were uttered in tones of the deepest sarcasm. Really, it was not nice!

It was a half-holiday. That, of course, was all right. Half-holidays were always welcome; their only drawback being that there were not enough of them. Most Greyfriars fellows could have got on very comfortably with a half-holiday every day, and, indeed, a whole holiday. But on this particular half-holiday the uncertainty of the glorious British climate had played a scurvy trick. Why it couldn't rain and fog while fellows were in class, and shine on half-holidays was an irritating problem. It had chosen to rain and fog on a half-holiday, and a little group of Remove men, looking out into a quad that wept with rain and mist, made remarks about the weather that were frequent and painful and free.

"This," said Bob Cherry, "is summer!"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh shivered.

"The summerfulness does not seem to be preposterously terrific!" he groaned.

"Looks like cricket!" groaned Wharton.

"More like swimming!" mumbled Nugent.

"Never mind! What's the odds so long as you're 'appy?" said Bob, whose exuberant spirits could not be damped even by rain and fog in the summer. "We get this mist from the sea, you know, and it's jolly as a rule to be by the sea. What about ragging Coker of the Fifth? Coker's a good thing to save for a rainy day."

"Oh, blow Coker!"

"We haven't had a row with the Shell for a long time!" remarked Bob. "Hobson will be getting his ears up."

"Blow Hobson!"

"Might work up a rag on Loder of the Sixth?" suggested Bob.

"Blow Loder!"

"What about putting on our macs and walking over the cliffs?" said Bob. "Healthy exercise anyhow."

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

Nobody but Bob was disposed for a tramp over slippery chalk cliffs in the rain.

"Well, dash it all, a man must do something," argued Bob. "I suppose you don't want to join Skinner and smoke cigarettes in the study?"

"Blow Skinner!"

"What about the 'Greyfriars Herald'?" asked Nugent. "We haven't turned out a number of the rag for dog's ages."

"Sticking indoors?" grunted Bob. Indoors was always an infliction for Bob, even on a rainy, misty day.

"We can't go out in this," said Nugent.

"The stickfulness inside the esteemed doors is the proper caper," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Bob grunted.

"You fellows stick indoors, and I'll get my mac and tramp a bit," he said. "Hallo, hallo, hallo, you going out, Marky?"

Mark Linley came along in an overcoat, with the collar turned up. He gave the juniors a cheery nod.

"Yes, old fellow," he answered; and he plunged into the rain. The Co. knew where he was going; Mark was still on the "job" as an amateur income-tax expert.

The Co. dispersed, four of them going up to the study, to fill in that dismal afternoon with editorial labours on the "Greyfriars Herald." Bob Cherry lingered, looking out into the rain, undecided. Three fellows came along and went out, and Bob stared after them. Skinner and Snoop and Billy Bunter were the very last fellows, as a rule, to venture forth in such weather.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! You fellows going out for a wash?" bawled Bob.

Skinner glanced round.

"Going to the pictures," he explained.

"He, he, he!" came from Bunter.

The Famous Five were at tea in Study No. 1 when Skinner & Co. crawled by the open doorway. The wet and dreary figures were greeted by a roar of laughter. "Ha, ha, ha!" "Tired?" "Enjoying life?" Skinner snarled, and Snoop and Bunter groaned. (*See Chapter* 16.)

Bob looked after them. He was not a suspicious fellow, but he could put two and two together. Skinner and Snoop were quite unlikely to walk two miles in the rain to see the most attractive picture ever shown on the screen, and still more unlikely to take Bunter with them—as any fellow who took Bunter was booked to pay for his ticket as a matter of course. And Mark had just started! Bob Cherry hardly needed telling that Skinner & Co. were on the track again.

He frowned for a moment, and then he grinned.

He was badly in want of some occupation that rainy afternoon, and he wanted it out of doors. It flashed into his mind that Skinner & Co. might furnish him with that necessary occupation.

In a few moments Bob was in his cap and mac, and speeding down to the gates.

He passed Skinner & Co. and shot out into the road.

There he ran in the direction of Friardale. In a few minutes he overtook Mark Linley, though Mark was hurrying.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

Mark looked round and smiled.

"Walking down to the village with me?" he asked cheerily. "Glad if you will, though it's not a nice day to be out."

"Couldn't be nicer," answered Bob.

"What?"

"For my little game, I mean." Bob glanced back. If Skinner & Co. were near the mist as yet hid them from sight. "Step into these trees, kid."

"What on earth for?"

"Because I want you to, old bean."

Mark, much puzzled, stepped out of the lane into the weeping trees by the roadside. Bob was grinning gleefully, and Mark guessed that there was some jape on, though he could not imagine what it was.

"We're much of a size," said Bob, "and our caps are just alike. Lend me your coat and take my mac."

"But what——" stuttered Mark.

"No time to jaw—just change! It's a little joke on some fellows who are taking a lot of interest in what doesn't concern them."

"Oh!" said Mark, and he laughed. "All right."

In a few moments Bob was inside Mark's thick, grey overcoat, with the collar turned up about his ears, and Mark was wearing Bob's macintosh.

"Keep doggo till the coast's clear!" said Bob.

"Right-ho!"

Bob Cherry stepped out into the lane again. Three figures loomed up in the rainy mist from the direction of the school. Bob set his face towards Friardale and walked on. Skinner and Snoop and Bunter followed the figure in the grey overcoat.

The fellow they were following did not look round. That made the shadowers' task easy, as on the previous occasion. But Bob had the best of reasons for not looking round. Had Skinner & Co. seen his face they certainly would not have taken him for Mark Linley. It was necessary for the enterprising shadowers to have only a back view.

Bob tramped on cheerfully. He had found his occupation for the afternoon—and he was pleased. When he turned into the footpath through the weeping wood, and the spies of the Remove followed him there, they were pleased also. They considered that they were going to find out something at last—whatever might be Linley's secret destination on his mysterious rambles out of gates, they were going to discover it now. They splashed onward by a wet, muddy path, feeling all the thrill of the chase.

Mark Linley, when the coast was clear, walked on with a smiling face to Friardale, where he was soon deep in accounts with Uncle Clegg in the dusky parlour behind the tuckshop. Mark worked hard that afternoon, heedless of rain and mist; and Skinner & Co. were destined to work hard also—and certainly not needless of rain and mist.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Across Country!

"I SAY, you fellows——"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Skinner crossly.

"I'm tired."

"Clear off, then."

"Yah!"

"Want us to carry you?" jeered Snoop.

"Beast!"

Tempers were growing short. Really, it was not a nice day for a walk. The rain was thin, but it came down with a steady persistence. The mist was clammy and unpleasant. Visibility was

not good; but the three shadowers easily kept the sturdy figure in the grey overcoat in sight

That figure tramped on through the wet wood by several winding paths one after another, and came out at last on the towpath by the Sark. The three followed on.

By that time Billy Bunter was puffing and blowing, and Skinner and Snoop growing irritated and tired. It was a wet and muddy tramp, and anything but enjoyable. Bunter was intensely inquisitive, Snoop was curious, and Skinner had a malicious hope to find out something of a discreditable nature.

But they realised that they had set themselves a hefty task. They had not expected Mark Linley to go so far afield as this. After two miles of it, they were tired and angry; but having done two miles, it seemed worth while to keep on. The fellow couldn't be going right across the country, Skinner savagely remarked; he must have some destination, and he was bound to reach it soon. So the three kept on, Skinner scowling, Snoop breathing in gasps, and Bunter moaning. None of the three was in good condition for a long tramp.

When they reached the towpath Skinner brightened up. He thought the goal was at hand now.

"The brute's going up to the Three Fishers," he said. "Can't be going anywhere else this way."

"Must be pub-haunting, then," said Snoop.

"I suppose so."

But instead of turning up the river the figure ahead in the grey overcoat turned down the river, and walked towards the bridge.

After him went the perplexed three.

"Is he going over to Cliff House, I wonder?" mumbled Snoop.

"Rot! He doesn't go there every time he sneaks out of gates!" growled Skinner. "Stands to reason he's going to the usual place."

"Well, where's that?"

"How should I know, fathead!"

"I say, you fellows——" gasped Bunter.

"Shut up, you fat frog!"

"Let's have a rest! Ow! My legs will be falling off soon!" gasped the hapless Owl of the Remove. "We've done miles and miles. I say, I'm not so jolly keen on following that beast after all. Ow!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"If he's going into Pegg, we could get tea there," remarked Snoop.

"Looks as if he is!" growled Skinner.

Bunter, who was about to halt, started afresh. If there was going to be tea in Pegg, Bunter had a fresh incentive for exertion. He tagged on wearily behind Skinner and Snoop.

Bob Cherry—still Mark Linley to the eyes of the fellows who were following—strode cheerily across the bridge, with a grin on the face he was careful not to turn back. Bob was good for many miles yet; but he could guess that there were six legs behind that were beginning to ache.

It looked to the shadowers as if their quarry was heading for the seaside village of Pegg; but in the lane that led thither, the figure in the grey overcoat crossed a stile, and proceeded by a field-path.

The three panted up to the stile, and stood leaning on it, glaring across a weeping field at the grey overcoat.

"Where on earth is he going?" muttered Sidney James Snoop hopelessly. He blinked through misty rain at the back of the grey overcoat a dozen yards away.

"Goodness knows!" muttered Skinner between his teeth. "If he knew we were after him I should think he was leading us a dance across country."

"He hasn't looked back once."

"No; besides, he must be going about his usual business. I can't make it out. Hallo, he's looking at the time!"

Although the back of the junior in the grey coat was towards them, they could see that he was taking out his watch and looking at it. His motions made that plain—intentionally. Skinner and Snoop exchanged a quick look.

"That means he's keeping some appointment!" breathed Skinner. "He's meeting somebody."

"Looks like it," assented Snoop.

The grey coat went onward again, and Skinner and Snoop clambered over the stile and squelched across the wet grass. Billy Bunter followed them—as far as the top bar of the stile. There he sat down. Flesh and blood could stand no more. Bunter had covered three miles—and by the shortest cuts it was two miles back to the school.

Bunter sat on the stile and groaned. Shadowers and shadowed disappeared across the misty field, and the Owl of the Remove still remained on the stile, groaning. He sat and rested his weary fat limbs, with the rain swishing down on him. Often and often had William George Bunter had reason to repent him of his inquisitiveness; but never had he repented him so deeply as now.

He detached himself from the stile at last, and rolled away—but not on the track. He rolled for home.

By wet and weary paths, Billy Bunter plugged back to Greyfriars. With aching, fat limbs he wearily rolled. It was a wet, weary, and woeful Bunter that crawled along by rainy lane and misty footpath.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Weary Walkers!

BOB CHERRY swung on his way through the rain, merry and bright.

He was enjoying his afternoon's ramble.

The other fellows, editing the "Greyfriars Herald" in Study No. 1, were out of the rain; but they were also out of the fun. The more it rained, the better Bob liked it. It made matters more interesting for the Paul Prys who imagined that they were shadowing Mark.

Skinner and Snoop were more and more perplexed. If Mark Linley always went as far afield as this on his mysterious excursions out of gates, it was no wonder that he generally looked tired when he came in for call-over. Skinner and Snoop were more than tired now; and when they thought of the journey back, after the chase, they almost shuddered.

From the wet field the figure in the grey overcoat followed a muddy lane—it almost seemed as if the brute were picking out the wettest and muddiest ways he could find!

The two spies squelched wearily after him. He followed at last the path to the cliffs, and after him to the cliffs went Skinner and Snoop. Snoop was limping now; and Skinner's temper was at the point of ferocity. He could have kicked himself for having started out on this terrible tramp across country -but having gone so far he would not give it up. He savagely resolved that he would run the rotter down if it wore him out, and find out his secret, and spread it all over the Remove, whatever it was.

Dimly seen through the mist, which was thicker near the sea, the figure in the grey overcoat swung on by the path over the chalk cliffs, tireless and springy. At a safe distance behind, but never losing sight of him, the two spies tramped on.

"Look here, he must be leading us a dance!" breathed Snoop at last. "If he keeps on this way it will take him to the Friardale road—that's the way back to Greyfriars."

"He can't know we're after him; he hasn't looked back once!" muttered Skinner. "He's got no eyes in the back of his head."

"He may guess——"

"How could he guess, idiot?"

"Well, it looks as if he's pulling our leg."

"Rot!"

Skinner was determined not to believe that he had been made a fool of. But even Skinner entertained some doubts when the figure in the grey coat turned from the cliffs and followed a lane that led into the Friardale Road. That, unmistakably, was the way back to the school, by passing through the village. And if the fellow was heading for the village why had he come five miles round?

But Bob did not come into Friardale. He did not intend to lead the shadowers so near to their real quarry as that. He turned from the road into a footpath. Wearily the shadowers turned after him. It was, at least, a comfort that they were nearer Greyfriars.

Not a single time had Bob turned his head. But several times he had stopped to adjust a shoelace, or to pick up a stone to toss carelessly at a tree, or for some other reason, and each time he had taken a surreptitious peep behind, to make sure that the shadowers were still on the track. He was rather surprised that such slackers as Skinner and Snoop had been able to stick it out so long. So long as they were able to stand it, Bob was prepared to give them exercise.

He came out of the footpath, on the Greyfriars side of the village. Bob was feeling inclined, himself, to get in to tea, by that time. But he did not intend to stop so long as Skinner and Snoop were willing to follow.

Not for a moment had it crossed their minds that he was not Mark Linley. They had seen Mark start out in that grey overcoat; and all they could see of Bob, from behind, was the grey overcoat, with the collar turned up, a Greyfriars cap, and his boots. But unless Mark had given up his usual mysterious occupation that afternoon, in order to lead them a dance, Skinner and Snoop could not begin to imagine what might be his reason for taking this weary, endless tramp round a weeping countryside.

As he reached the opening of the footpath through Friardale Wood, Bob turned towards it. It would be going

(*Continued on page 28.*)

THERE ARE THRILLS GALORE IN THIS GREAT 'TEC STORY, CHUMS!

THE MASKED DEATH

by JOHN SYLVESTER

Murder or Suicide? Many a clever detective has set out to prove that in certain circumstances the one is simply a cunning attempt on the part of a master criminal to represent the other. But theory without evidence is about as much use as a lock without a key!

The Mystery of Half-Moon Street!

FERRERS LOCKE closed his eyes and reviewed the facts again. If he made this single assumption, that Morecambe had known the whereabouts of the bullion that vanished seven years ago, he could see a motive for the crime—and any number of possible crimes.

All the crooks involved in that train robbery, so far as the police believed, had been rounded up and imprisoned. All except the brain behind it.

They had belonged to a gang headed by Peter the Pedlar; a notorious character in the underworld. But Peter the Pedlar had never been more than a gunman; he might have carried out the train robbery, but he couldn't have planned it. None of those men who had gone to prison could have planned it.

But it was known that various coups that particular gang had carried out had been planned and financed by Morecambe. Therefore, it was probable that this was no exception.

"His associates did the actual job and went to gaol," murmured Locke to himself. "While they were in gaol Morecombe paid a long visit to America, returning a couple of years ago without anyone knowing it. He alone knew where the bullion was hidden, and he came back unobserved, with the intention of quietly disposing of it. He was content to do this very gradually, since it would make him a wealthy man for the rest of his life.

"But things didn't work out according to plan. His return was discovered by someone who knew of the existence of his secret. That "someone" tried to scare him into sharing the loot, and, failing that, murdered him. The ghost business was probably for the benefit of the villagers. It was necessary, in any case, to keep prying eyes from watching too closely a house in which a half a million pounds was stowed away. One way of doing that was to revive a local superstition.

"Now, by this time the original gang, including Peter the Pedlar, must be out of prison. So we can assume they have been tracking Morecombe. But we must also assume someone else was after him as well. The man who actually murdered him was an artist in crime.

"It's a tangled trail. A gang of gunmen and a mysterious unknown, all out to find the same treasure—desperate men who will stop at nothing.

"And this is only the first round. Perhaps none of them at present knows Morecombe's secret. He may have taken it with him to the grave. But where can the money be hidden, and if Peter the Pedlar didn't kill him, who did?"

Locke was satisfied by the time the train reached Paddington that he had found an answer to one of those questions. When he opened his eyes Jack Drake was staring at him with eager curiosity.

"I know you haven't been asleep——" he began.

"No questions at present, Jack. Until we have more facts, we must keep our judgment in suspense. And, unless I am very much mistaken, we shall learn something of considerable interest very soon."

"But where are we going?"

"I'm going to Scotland Yard, but you must return to Baker Street. We shall re-meet at lunch to-morrow."

"Aren't you taking me with you to-night?" Jack pleaded.

"No, I'm sorry." He noticed the boy's disappointment, and hastily added: "I want you to get some sleep, Jack. I may have a job for you in the morning."

Ferrers Locke got no sleep himself that night. From the station he took a taxi straight to the Yard, where, to his relief, he found an inspector on duty with whom he had worked before.

Inspector Lambton was a much abler man than Webster. He was a finger-print expert, and it was he who had sent Locke the telegram identifying Morecombe, from his finger-prints, as Oscar Lomax. He was a short, stoutish man with spectacles; more like a stock-broker than a detective in appearance.

"Hallo, Locke!" he exclaimed, without showing any surprise. "I had an idea my wire would bring you to London."

"It wasn't your wire," replied Locke, as he shook hands. "I've come for permission to look into this Half-Moon Street affair."

"The suicide case? But I thought you were working on that Bridgeworthy murder?"

"No need to," said Locke, with a faint trace of a smile. "Webster's about to arrest the guilty person. He's managed it without any assistance from me."

"Sounds as though he's being a bit hasty, doesn't it? Come now, Locke, you aren't going to persuade me you've washed your hands of the case. I'm waiting to hear where Oscar Lomax comes in. Do you think he's the murderer?"

"I think, on the contrary, that he was the victim."

"Lomax—the same man as Morecombe?" The inspector stared in genuine astonishment. "But, hang it all, he came to us for protection."

"You would have recognised him, although Webster didn't. Anyhow, it's no crime to ask for police protection, even though you have been in gaol. He came to the Yard because I refused to help him. He was desperate. The fact that, in spite of his precautions, he was murdered shows how real the danger was."

Lambton rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"This is a surprising development. Of course, you've told Webster?"

"As a matter of fact, I haven't. He wasn't in the mood for enlightenment when I last saw him."

"That's his trouble," nodded the other understandingly. "He hates anyone else butting in. I suppose it's natural enough; although I can never bring myself to look upon you as an outsider. But to get back to Lomax. For what reason was he living in the wilds of Dartmoor? I thought he was still in America."

"I've got a theory, but I'd rather not go into it just now. My present need is to pay a visit to No. 6b, Half-Moon Street."

"I'll come with you, of course. But surely you don't think there's any connection between this and the Bridgeworthy mystery?"

"Frankly, I don't know. But if there is I may follow my own methods for the present. I think you know me enough,

however, to realise that what information I do pick up will be placed at the disposal of the police."

"I know you can be as tight as an oyster when you choose," said Lambton, with a rueful recollection of a case in which they had worked together. "However, I'll fetch my hat. We'll go to the mortuary first and view the body. No one has identified it yet."

There was no taxi in sight, so they decided to walk. On the way, Lambton outlined all the information—meagre as it was—that the police possessed.

A week ago, a man giving the name of Morrish rented a furnished flat in Half-Moon Street through a well-known firm of estate agents. He said he had recently arrived from abroad, and knew no one in England from whom he could obtain a reference. However, he offered to deposit a substantial sum and to pay the whole of the rent in advance, and no further questions were asked.

Yesterday a plumbing job had to be done. Thinking that the new tenant had not yet started to occupy the flat, the caretaker admitted the workmen with his master key. They were horrified to find a man lying on the floor, shot through the right temple. Medical evidence showed that he had been dead for two days.

The odd thing was that none of his personal belongings had yet been moved to the flat. Except for the original furniture, it was quite bare. Nor were there any papers in his pockets, nor markings on his clothes, that afforded the slightest clue to his identity. But there was a note beside him, saying that he was sick of life and resolved to end it.

"I must say it seemed to me a simple case of suicide," Lambton finally wound up.

"I've never forgotten," murmured Locke, "the maxim the old professor who taught us science used to impress upon us at Cambridge: 'Seek simplicity, and mistrust it.'"

"But in this case, surely——"

"Here we are at the mortuary. Have you got your credentials?"

"They know me," Lambton grinned.

What the Flat Revealed!

HALF an hour later Ferrers Locke emerged from that grim house of death. This time they hailed a taxi and gave the Half Moon address. Despite the inspector's judicious pumping, he got nothing out of Locke beyond what he already knew.

"Certainly," was Locke's verdict, "it could have been suicide. The wound in the temple is just where one would expect to find it in that case. I should like to examine the clothes more minutely; but meanwhile there's a clue staring us in the face that hardly needs a microscope."

"You mean the tattoo marks on the chest? But I don't see how it's going to help if nobody in the country has met the man before."

"Has he been identified by the clerk at the estate agent's?"

Lambton hesitated, and then struck his knee.

"I don't believe he has. It was taken for granted it was the same man. I couldn't swear to it, of course—you see, it isn't my case. In fact, it's nobody's case. It's just an ordinary police job, in which no suspicion of foul play has arisen."

"That's what was intended. But you might verify that point in the morning."

"By Jupiter, I will!" exclaimed Lambton vehemently, as the taxi drew to a standstill.

The night porter admitted them to the flat.

"But I'm dashed if I can think what you expect to find," Lambton declared as they entered. "It's been turned upside down, so if you are looking for finger-prints you've come too late. As I said, there was never any suspicion——"

"If I were to commit a murder I should take care there wouldn't be!" broke in Locke.

"Then thank Heaven you are on the right side!" chuckled the other. "You'd give us the deuce of a time if ever you decided to take to crime."

It was a small, bachelor apartment, consisting of two rooms, a bath-room, and a kitchen. There was no longer any sign of the tragedy that had been enacted. The bloodstains had been removed from the carpet, and every cupboard and drawer and wardrobe ransacked.

On a davenport in the sitting-room was a large, oval mirror, cracked across the centre.

"Someone's been tempting providence. Do you know how that happened, inspector?"

"I believe it was found broken. The nail must have come out of the wall."

"But nails don't come out of walls in a properly-built house. You haven't got it, I suppose?"

"I expect it's been swept away. But that's where the mirror hung; above the fireplace facing the door."

"And you say the body was found also with its head towards the fireplace?"

"Yes, I believe so."

Without another word, Locke strode across the room, and, drawing a powerful lens from his pocket, he examined the hole from which the nail had fallen. It was as he foresaw.

"That nail didn't give way. It was extracted as clean as a new tooth."

Lambton's eyebrows shot up. For a minute both men stared at one another without speaking. The tremendous importance of this detail was dawning on the inspector.

"I follow you. The mirror was taken down and deliberately cracked, so as to look like an accident."

"It was dropped on the ground right enough; you can see where the gilt frame is chipped."

"But what a devilishly ingenious idea. No one but yourself would have spotted it. Unless I had suspected foul play in the first place, I don't believe I should have looked."

"It was ingenious," admitted Locke; "but the execution was careless. With very little trouble it could have been made to look as though the nail had genuinely given way."

He gave a twitching movement with his shoulders.

"It's a platitude to say that every murderer makes a mistake," he continued. "But let us try to reconstruct what happened. We will call the murderer 'Mr. X'; and his victim's name can remain 'Morrish.' I think we are now agreed that it was not suicide. If Morrish had wanted to kill himself would he have taken such elaborate pains to rent a flat? Would he have divested himself of everything that could point to his identity—tearing the labels from his clothes and removing even the laundry marks?"

"It's unlikely, of course, but he might have wanted to spare his friends the disgrace."

"But he had no friends. Or even if that were his motive, what about the anxiety he would be causing by vanishing? Finally, that objection is ruled out by the fact that he left a note, signed in his own name, giving his reasons for committing suicide."

"True enough," nodded Lambton. "Confound it, you are making me wonder now how anyone came to believe he had taken his own life."

"Provisionally," resumed Locke, "I am going to suggest that something like this happened. Mr. X. wanted to remove Morrish; he wanted to blot him out completely, annihilate every trace of the man. To do this Mr. X took this flat in Morrish's name. He didn't live here, but merely came here one night, having made an appointment here with Morrish. His plan was carefully laid. Before Morrish arrived he took down that mirror and smashed it, to look like an accident.

"His object in doing that is obvious. He had probably rehearsed the scene. He meant to call Morrish's attention to something, step up from behind, and shoot him through the temple. If the mirror had been there, he would have been restricted to a particular angle of approach at the critical moment. There would have been the risk of being seen, and, of course, a struggle would have destroyed his whole scheme. Morrish not only had to be shot, but shot in a certain way and without fuss, so as to make it look like suicide."

"If your theory is true," said Lambton, after a moment's reflection, "we ought to get a description of Mr. X from the estate office."

Locke nodded, and at the same time

INTRODUCTION.

Ferrers Locke, the world-famous detective, and his assistant, Jack Drake, receive a visit from Mr. Silas Morecombe, of Bridgeworthy, South Devon, who tells Locke of the mystery surrounding his old and lonely house and of the shadow that looms over him. Morecombe had received two notes threatening his life, each with a crude drawing of a cowl as signature, and his terror had driven him to ask the detective's help. Locke divines that the man is concealing something, but, though he refuses his aid, the interests of justice take him and Drake to the West Country. The next night the two watch the lonely house on the edge of Dartmoor until suddenly their vigil is broken by an alarm from the black pile. Silas Morecombe is discovered dead in his room, the murderer having entered and escaped through a panel in the ceiling. The unknown vanishes without a trace, but the next morning Inspector Webster, of Scotland Yard, who is in charge of the case, announces that he is about to arrest Soames, the dead man's butler, for the crime. Locke has a very different theory, for he knows that Morecombe—whose real name was Lomax—was a member of a criminal gang that, years before, had been responsible for the disappearance of half a million pounds' worth of bullion. The gold was never recovered, and Locke is convinced that somewhere at the Grange are concealed the stolen ingots that were the cause of Morecombe's death. Inspector Webster fully believes that he has brought the case to a successful conclusion, however, and Locke and Drake depart for Plymouth. There, in an evening paper, Locke reads: "Unknown Man's Suicide. Shooting Tragedy in Half Moon Street!" "I expected as much," mutters the detective. "We must return to London at once!" In the train, Locke goes over all the facts of the case and comes to the conclusion that it is not suicide, but murder!

(Now read on.)

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his eyes rested on the grate. He stepped forward swiftly and knelt down.

"Letters have been burnt here. Probably taken from Morrish's pocket. But there's only a heap of ash at present. It looks," he added almost angrily, "as though some idiot of a policeman has broken up the ashes in looking for fragments."

"You're right," declared Lambton, with a gesture of indignation, as he leaned over the other's shoulder. "Some clumsy fool put his hand into the grate. I suppose the mischief can't be undone?"

"I'm afraid not. But I'll do my best. If you'll give strict orders for the grate to be untouched, I'll come back in the morning with some chemicals and see if anything can be deciphered."

"It won't be touched," said Lambton warmly. "You can rely on that. By jupiter, this has been some night's work! I suppose I'd better keep it out of the papers for the present?"

"Certainly," said Locke quickly. "Mr. X must think he has succeeded. You must get the inquest adjourned on some pretext. I'll meet you here again in the morning."

Lambton straightened and as Locke also rose, he offered him a cigarette.

"I suppose it's too early to ask if you've formed any idea of what Mr. X was after?"

Locke took a cigarette lighted it, and blew a thin stream of smoke at the ceiling.

"Half a million pounds!" he replied.

Covered by the Unknown!

THE descent of night was imperceptible owing to the fog that had been lying most of the day over the City. It was especially thick in the East End, where it spread along the river—a damp, sooty, choking contagion.

"You want a bloomin' gas-mask to come down here," Jack Drake complained to himself, as he turned into a narrow street off Limehouse Causeway.

He thought, with a sigh, of the clear, champagne air of the moors, the glorious panorama from Bridgeworthy Tor, the excitement of that night when a cowled figure had materialised out of the darkness, and Silas Morecombe had been found strangled in that house of mystery.

Of course, the chief knew his business best. But he needn't have been quite so reserved. If only he had said why he had sent him on this singular and, so far, fruitless errand, Jack would have been satisfied.

All day Jack had been visiting what seemed to him almost the queerest shops in London; grubby little establishments where people went to have pictures of snakes and anchors and women's faces pricked on their skin.

"Why don't they do the thing properly and have their noses ringed at the same time—the darned savages!"

Those were his own sentiments about tattooing; and it frankly amazed him that so many people could gain a living by catering for such a barbaric taste.

"For a crook to go and brand himself like this is rank lunacy," he concluded. "Surely the man we are after wouldn't be such a half-wit—not the man who planned that show the other night!"

Ferrers Locke had not told him why he wanted this information, and after a wasted day Jack was feeling rather disgruntled. He had a list of tattooist establishments, and if this one he was about to visit failed him, the others would have to wait until to-morrow.

He approached the shop, noting the dingy window, with its patterns displayed. He was only just in time, as the hunchback inside was just about to close the door for the night.

He was a villainous-looking man with a soapy manner.

"Come inside, sir," he fawned. "What can I do for you?"

Ferrers Locke didn't hesitate. He flung a book straight at the electric bulb, smashing it to pieces. (*See page* 28.)

Business couldn't be very brisk, reflected Jack. However, he made it clear that he hadn't come to be tattooed—not yet. He wanted to see some designs first.

A book was instantly produced. The patterns were most alarming. As Jack turned over the pages, the hunchback glibly quoted the prices. He had nearly reached the end of the book when suddenly he stopped.

He had found the picture he wanted. He was conscious of a rush of excitement. Two interlocked snakes, with huge, puffed heads and hissing tongues.

"You would like the cobras?" urged that oily voice. "For ten shillings I can do them. It is a beautiful design. A gentleman asked me only two days ago for that very pattern."

"He recommended me to come here," said Jack off-handedly. "Your client was called Taylor, wasn't he?"

"No; the name was Collins. At least, I think so."

The hunchback looked puzzled.

"A very tall man?"

"Yes, that's him. A giant of a man. Black hair, and muscles—why, they were like a prize-fighter's! But the name was Collins, I'm sure."

"He has several names," grinned Jack. "However, those cobras will do me nicely. I'll be looking in again."

A queer look crossed the hunchback's face. He suddenly shut the book with a slam and peered suspiciously at Jack. He seemed about to say something, but abruptly changed his mind.

"Good-night to you," he mumbled, dry-washing his hands.

"Good-night!" said Jack cheerily.

Jack's discontent had now completely gone. He made off for the Underground station in high spirits. It was like looking for a needle in a haystack and suddenly finding it stuck to your finger.

"A very tall man," he repeated to himself, "with black hair and the muscles of a pugilist. Name of Collins—and bearing a cobra pattern tattooed on his chest. The governor will cheer up when I tell him all this."

He was aching to know what it signified. The train journey to Baker Street seemed to take an appalling time.

At last he reached his destination. The fog was not so bad this side of the river; but it was dismal enough.

He entered the house, fairly bursting with his discovery. Ferrers Locke, he learnt from the housekeeper, had only preceded him by a few minutes.

Opening the door, he saw Locke sitting by the fire, with a leather attache-case on his knee.

"I found out what you wanted to know!" Drake began eagerly. "The man——"

"You've got that specimen, have you?" broke in the detective, suddenly looking up with interest. "I've just been having a chat with Professor Cannister. He's writing a monograph on the habits of the monarch butterfly—anosia archippus, to give it its regal title. It's most interesting how the species has begun to spread."

For a moment Jack stared at him as though wondering if he had gone mad.

"It's been known for a long time that the monarch leaves the United States for Canada every summer," continued Locke, drumming his fingers musingly on the attache-case. "It's possible it feels happier in non-republican surroundings. But how does it reach the Pacific Islands? How does it get so far as England? You've never given a thought to the problem, I suppose?"

Jack's eyes glistened as he caught the cue. He had recovered from his astonishment. He realised that some very good reason existed for this extraordinary reception.

"There seems no doubt," the detective went on, "that the introduction of its food-plant to the Sandwich Islands in 1850 enabled it to breed in the Pacific. And Cannister had a theory that——"

THE MYSTERY OF MARK LINLEY.

(Continued from page 24.)

over the same ground again from the beginning, if he followed that path; but he was prepared to do so if Skinner and Snoop were prepared to follow on.

But just as he was about to turn into the wood a weary, fat figure came plodding out into the road.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob involuntarily.

Billy Bunter blinked at him with lack-lustre eyes. Bunter had reached that point on his homeward trek, proceeding at the pace of a very old and very infirm tortoise.

Bunter, stopped, leaned on a tree, heedless of rain, and groaned.

"Ow! Oh, dear! I'm tired!"

"Had a good walk?" inquired Bob genially.

"Ow! Grooogh! That beast——" groaned Bunter.

"What beast?" grinned Bob.

"That beast, Linley—I believe he was leading us on!" groaned Bunter. "I say, what—what—— You've got his coat on!" Bunter blinked suspiciously at Bob's grinning face. "What are you doing in Linley's coat?"

"Taking a little walk in it," chuckled Bob.

"Oh, crikey!"

Skinner and Snoop, seeing the figure in the grey overcoat halt on meeting Bunter, were hanging back. Bob Cherry turned round towards them. His game was up now. But it was, after all, time to get in to tea.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" bawled Bob Cherry. "You fellows can come on—come and tell me how you've enjoyed your walk."

Skinner and Snoop stared at him, almost in stupefaction.

At the distance, in the rain and mist, it was not easy to recognise faces, but Bob Cherry's voice was unmistakable.

"It—it—it's Cherry!" babbled Snoop.

"Chooch—chooch—Cherry!" stuttered Skinner dazedly.

They gazed blankly. If this was not black magic they did not know what it was. For miles—weary miles and miles—the thought of which made them shudder, they had tracked Mark Linley, never losing sight of him for a second—and now he had suddenly turned into another fellow! Skinner and Snoop wondered whether they were dreaming.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob. "Surprised, what?"

They almost staggered on towards him.

"It—it's you?" gasped Skinner.

"Little me!" assented Bob cheerily.

"It was you all the time!" shrieked Snoop. "You jolly well knew we were after you!"

"I jolly well did!" chortled Bob.

"You've got Linley's coat on!" yelled Skinner. "Linley left the school in that coat. He—he—we—I——" He choked with rage. "You had a mac on when we saw you scooting by in the quad. What——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You rotter, what's this game?" shrieked Skinner.

"You see, I cut after Linley, and changed coats with him," chortled Bob. "Then I let you see me, and keep me in sight. Have you enjoyed your walk? Good exercise! Better than smoking cigarettes in the study."

"You silly ass, Skinner!" groaned Snoop.

"You silly chump, Snoop!"

"I say, you fellows, we've been taken in. You pair of silly idiots——"

"Like another walk?" asked Bob genially. "I'm good for the same jolly old tramp over again, if you fellows are."

Skinner & Co. made no reply. If looks could have slain Bob Cherry's exuberant career would have come to a sudden termination then and there. Fortunately, looks couldn't.

Leaving the three wretched spies scowling and slanging one another, Bob swung off cheerily to the school. After him, but no longer keeping him in sight, and not at all interested in tracking, Skinner and Snoop crawled wearily, and behind them tagged Billy Bunter, groaning. They were not in sight of the school when Bob swung in cheerily at the gates and trotted across to the House.

* * * *

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The door of Study No. 1 was wide open, and five cheery juniors were at tea there, with an eye on the Remove passage, when Skinner & Co. crawled by. Three wet and dreary figures came in sight of the study doorway, and were greeted by a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tired?"

"Enjoying life?"

"The enjoyfulness does not seem terrific."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner snarled, and Snoop groaned, and they crawled wearily on and disappeared. Billy Bunter halted.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I can take a j-j-joke," said Bunter feebly. "He, he, he! I—I knew it was a lark, all the time, you know, Bob, old chap! He, he, he! I—I just played up, you know. He, he, he! I'll come in to tea with you fellows——"

Half a loaf, hurled by an unerring hand, smote Billy Bunter on his ample waistcoat. Half a loaf is said to be better than no bread, but in the present instance Bunter certainly would have preferred none. He yelled and disappeared.

THE END.

(Now look out for the next story in this splendid new series, entitled: "UNDER SUSPICION!" which will appear in next week's bumper issue of the MAGNET. *You can only make sure of it, chums, by ordering your copy WELL IN ADVANCE!)*

THE MASKED DEATH.

(Continued from previous page.)

In a flash Jack understood. As the detective was speaking, the drumming of his fingers became more pronounced.

Dot-dot—dash! Dot—dash! Morse code! The butterfly talk was bluff. He was signalling a message.

To follow it while that voice droned on was not so easy. But Locke was evidently helping him all he could. The tapping became deliberate, although it was faint.

"There is a man behind the curtains," the message ran; "I think he has got me covered. Telephone for the police, in the next room, and come back with a revolver."

"Do you follow Cannister's theory?" Locke drawled.

"I understand it, but that's about all."

"You might fetch me that German book on the subject from the next room."

"Right-ho!"

Jack rose, and he could not help throwing a glance at the recess in the corner, over which a crimson curtain was drawn. His heart was beating quickly. He was about to turn and go towards the door when—crash! There was a loud explosion.

He heeled sharply, in time to see Locke spring to his feet, while a bullet that had missed his head by a fraction of an inch buried itself in the wall.

Locke didn't hesitate. He flung a book straight at the electric light, smashing it to atoms.

The room was plunged in darkness. There was a moment of profound silence as the echoes of the shot died down. No one moved.

They were waiting. Jack clenched his hands, ready to spring, and the sweat was trickling down his forehead.

There was a faint, stealthy rustling. The man in the recess had drawn the curtain.

Jack could picture him creeping forward in the darkness, his finger on the trigger of a revolver. Then the truth dawned on him.

They were helpless and unarmed in this room—and crouching somewhere in the blackness was the man who had murdered Silas Morecombe; the criminal who had masqueraded as the ghost of Bridgeworthy Moor, the master-mind they had been searching for.

Suddenly there was a spit of flame and a roar. Something red-hot stung Jack's arm, and he was blinded by a sudden dazzle of light.

(How would you like to be in Jack Drake's shoes, boys? But don't get anxious, he's worth a dozen dead 'uns yet. You'll see how he and Locke get out of this tight corner in next week's thrilling instalment.)

The TREZZURE-SEEKERS of ST. SAM'S

By Dicky Nugent

"... my uncle spent sevveral years up the Amazon, trading with the Indians. He used to supply them with chewing gum, commic papers, et settera, and they used to give him chunks of gold, and bags of preshus stones in eggschange."

I.

"BERRIED trezzure? Impossibul!"

Jack Jolly, the kaptin of the Fourth at St. Sam's, barfed skeptically as he spoke.

"But it's troo!" said Frank Fearless ernestly.

"Oh, ratts! It's too steep!" Merry remarked, shaking his head.

"You must be dreeming, old chap!" said Bright.

Frank Fearless' handsum face flushed slitely.

"I tell you I've been given a chart showing where the giddy trezzure has been blinking well berried!" he said, with dignitty. "My uncle, Fred Fearless, sent it to me by registered post just before he dyed, fighting a tribe of savvidge Indians in Peru."

"My hat!"

"He sent it to my home address, and the pater took the libberty of opening the letter before sending it on to me. Here it is!"

And, with a flurrish, Frank Fearless produced a peace of paper, yellow with age, containing a ruff plan drawn in ink. The juniors started as they saw the words "Peruvian Times," printed in one corner of it. Evvidently it had been torn from a newspaper in the far-off land of Peru, which seemed to confirm what Fearless had said.

"Perhaps you'll beleeve me now!" yelled Frank Fearless, with a quiet note of triumf in his voice. "If you'll cast your optix over that scrap of paper, you chaps, you'll see that it marks a spot thousands of miles up the mitey River Amazon. In that spot is berried the trezzure that my uncle intended to bring back to England with him."

"But—but what sort of a trezzure was he going to bring back from the Amazon?" asked Jack Jolly, still dewbious.

"Gold and preshus stones!" answered Frank Fearless, sinking his voice to a thrilling whisper. "You see, my uncle spent sevveral years up the Amazon trading with the Indians. He used to supply them with chewing-gum, commic papers, et settera, and they used to give him chunks of gold and bags of preshus stones in eggschange. See?"

"Grate pip!"

Jack Jolly & Co. were no longer increddulous. They were lissening with eggspressions of keen interest on their youthful fizzogs.

"Well, this is the giddy limmit!" said Jack Jolly. "What are you going to do about it, then, Fearless?"

"The pater has alreddy arranjed what to do," replied Frank. "He is fitting out his privit yot for a voyage to the Amazon immejately, and I'm going out with him. What I came to see you chaps for was to ask if you'd like to come with me?"

"My hat, I should jolly well think we would like to come with you!" said Jack Jolly. "What say, you chaps?"

"Yes, rather!" grinned Merry and Bright.

Fearless smiled.

"Thought you'd like to join in," he said. "Of corse, it won't be eggsactly a picnic for us, you know. Deth will stare us in the face at every step we take——"

"Oh, good!" cried Jack Jolly & Co., feeling awfully pleased at such a thrilling prospect.

"Ennemies will surround us on all hands——"

"So much the worse for them!" remarked Merry grimly.

"Yes, rather!"

"And blud will flow like water!" said Frank Fearless. "Alreddy my late uncle's sworn ennemy, One-eyed Pedro, is on the trak of the trezzure. He and his murderous gang will stop at nothing to get it, so I've no doubt we shall have plenty of fighting to do. That's why I want you fellows to come."

"Well, you can rely on us, old scout," said Jack Jolly cordially. "We'll fight all comers with the gratest of plezzure, won't we, chaps?"

"Yes, rather!" shouted Merry and Bright, without hezzitation.

"Spoken like heroes!" cried Frank Fearless. "Then, as you want to come, I sujjest we strike while the iron's hot, and go and get the Head's permission at once."

So saying, Frank Fearless pocketed his preshus chart and led the way out of the study. Jack Jolly & Co. followed, in a very eager frame of mind.

The Head, for once, was in a cheery mood. A copy of the "Holiday Annual" reposed on the desk before him, and its contents evvidently gave Dr. Birchemall considderable sattisfaction, for he was grinning from ear to ear when they entered.

"Well, boys, what can I do for you?" he asked. "If you've come to borrow a cupple of bob——"

"We haven't, sir," grinned Jack Jolly.

"That's just as well, Jolly; for, as a matter of fact, I haven't got it to lend you! What is it, then?"

"We've come to ask if we can have special leave to go trezzure-hunting on the Amazon, sir?" eggsplained Jack, getting down to brass tax at once.

"Trezzure-hunting—eh?" grinned Dr. Birchemall. "Dubloons and peaces of 8, et settera, I suppose? Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a real trezzure, sir," said Frank Fearless seriously.

"Ha, ha! No doubt, Fearless! Well, boys will be boys, I suppose!" said Dr. Birchemall induljently. "I have no objection to your going trezzure-hunting on the Amazon. But I shall eggspect you to be back in time for locking-up, of corse!"

Jack Jolly & Co. looked at each other and grinned. Apparently the Head imajined that the Amazon was a meer bus-ride from the skool. Joggrafly never had been Dr. Birchemall's strong point.

"'Hem! I'm afraid you don't quite understand, sir," said Jack Jolly. "As a matter of fact, it will take us rather longer than that. You see, the River Amazon happens to be thowsands of miles across the sea."

"Great pip! I never imajined it was so far away as that!" eggsclaimed the Head, with a start. "That means you want leave of absence for two or three days at least, then?"

"Two or three months will be nearer the mark, sir," venchured Fearless.

"My hat! That's rather a lot to ask," mermured the Head reflectively. "Still, the summer holidays will be along in a few weeks, so perhaps it is not so terribul, after all. Do you happen to know wether your skool fees are paid up to the end of the term?"

"Yes, sir!" corussed the juniors.

"Very well, then. That being the case," said Dr. Birchemall, breaking into verse, "you may hunt for the trezzure with very grate plezzure!"

"You're willing to let us go?" asked Jack Jolly.

"I am—I is!"

"Hooray!" yelled Jack Jolly & Co., crowding out of the Head's study.

II.

"SENOR BIRCHEMALL, I beleeve?"

Dr. Birchemall started from his chair in surprise, as the Spannish axxents fell on his ears, later on in the day. Looking up, he beheld a villanous-looking scoundrell wearing a black shade over one eye.

"What the thump——" gasped the Head.

"You are surprise, hay?" leered the evil newcomer, closing the door behind him and slinking stelthily up to the Head's desk. "You no have seen One-eyed Pedro before?"

"One-eyed Pedro? Oh, grate pip! Is that your name?" asked Dr. Birchemall.

The introoder nodded as he calmly rolled a cigarette.

"Si, senor! I am One-eyed Pedro, known in the Underworld as the Spannish Terror!"

Dr. Birchemall frowned.

"In that case, my dear sir," he said sternly, "the sooner you buzz off, the better. There is no place in this skollastick eddifiss for Spannish Terrors, Spannish onions, or anything else Spannish, if it comes to that!"

One-eyed Pedro's sollitary eye flashed.

"Ha! You insult! You make a larf of One-eyed Pedro! I kill you!" he shouted. So saying, he drew a fearsum-looking dagger from his belt, and made a lunge at the Head.

Needless to say, Dr. Birchemall didn't wait to see weather the dagger was sharp or not. With a yell of fear, he leaped out of harm's way.

"Ha, ha! One-eyed Pedro no cares for a life!" hissed the Spanniard. "But on second thoughts I let you off. I have bizziness with you."

"Bizziness with me?" echoed the Head wonderingly.

"Si! I will tell you. Squatty-voo, senor!"

One-eyed Pedro sat on the edge of the Head's desk and leaned forward with a sinnical smile on his villanous dile.

"You know the mucharcho, Frank Fearless?" he asked.

"'Mucharcho'—Spannish for 'boy,'" mermered the Head, translating the word with skollerly ease. "Yes, I know Fearless. He was in this very room only a short time ago, asking me for leave to go trezzure-hunting on the Amazon!"

"Carambo! He no shall get that trezzure!" hissed the Spanniard. "Listen, senor! You would like gold, hay? You are, as you say, hard up, is it not so?"

"It jolly well is so," admitted the Head regretfully. "To tell you the trooth, One-eyed Pedro, I haven't a bean!"

"You shall have gold, then—plenty gold, much wealth, senor!"

"When can I have it—now?" asked Dr. Birchemall eagerly.

"You help me, and I give you gold when I get the trezzure!"

"But surely you don't beleeve the yarn about berried trezzure?" asked Dr. Birchemall, with a stare.

"Si, senor! The mucharcho Fearless has a chart of the trezzure. That chart, senor, tells where the grate wealth is berried!"

"Bust me!" said the Head. "Then it's troo, after all! But what do you want me to do?"

The scoundrell sank his voice to a whisper.

"You pincha that chart from the mucharcho Fearless, and give to me, hay?"

The Head recoiled, as from a blow.

"No, no; I can't do it! It would be stealing!" he muttered horsely. "Forjery or blackmail I don't mind, but stealing—never!"

"Ha! But you think of the gold—much gold, plenty money!" hissed the tempter. "You like to be rich beyond the dreems of avariss, yes?"

The Head hezzitated.

"Well, of corse, if you put it like that——"

"You give in—you agree, is it not?" remarked the Spanniard, baring his glittering teeth in a villanous smile.

"I could certainly do with the money!" mewsed the Head, "and, after all, I don't see why a cheeky fagg like Fearless should have it all when his own headmaster's coughers are like Mother Hubbard's sellybrated cubbard. All right, then; on considderation, I agree to help you."

"Bueno!" grunted One-eyed Pedro. "Now I tell you what you must do. You must pinch——"

"Say 'konfiscate'—it sounds better," said the Head, with a frown.

"Carambo! What matter? You must konfiscate the chart from the mucharcho, and hand it over to me."

"But suppose I don't get a chance to do it before he leaves the skool for the Amazon?"

"In that case, you must go with him. I shall follow in my pirate ship——"

"Oh, my giddy aunt!" ejackulated the Head.

"And when the moment arrives, senor, I shall be there to take the chart from you. Savvy?"

"But—but Fearless won't allow me to go with him," objected the Head.

"Carambo! We will see about that!" hissed One-eyed Pedro, with a leer. "One-eyed Pedro will find a way, senor. Leave it to me."

"Dashed if I know how you're going to mannidge it," said Dr. Birchemall, rubbing his bald pate in perplecksity. "However, if you think it can be done, I'll do my best."

"Bueno! Or, as you say, good egg!" cried the Spanniard. "You will reap rich reward, Senor Birchemall."

"I hope I shall," said the Head, a look of greed flashing across his classical featchers. "What about something on account before you go, Mr. Pedro?"

"Eggscuse! I am a little deff!" said the scoundrell, with a sinnical grin. "Now I go. I call again to-morrow and see if you get the chart. Then I make my plans. Serve me well, and I make you rich. Let me down, and I kill you quick, see?"

"Look here, I wish you wouldn't flash that dagger about so much!" grunted the Head uneezily. "But don't worry your fat, Mr. Pedro. I'll get that chart by hook or crook. And now you'd better buzz off!"

"Adios, senor!" said the Spanniard, with a mocking bough.

An instant later he was gone.

Dr. Birchemall watched him crossing the quad, through the study window. Then he sat down and spent the neckst hour day-dreeming of the sumptuous feeds and wonderful outings he was going to have—when he had earned One-eyed Pedro's filthy loocre!

And meanwhile Frank Fearless and Jack Jolly & Co. were engerly making plans for their grate eggspedition to the Amazon, all unconshus of the fact that their own headmaster was watching for a chance of betraying them!

THE END.

(The second yarn in this amusing "Amazon" series is entitled: "BOUND FOR THE AMAZON!" Look out for it in next week's MAGNET, chums!)