

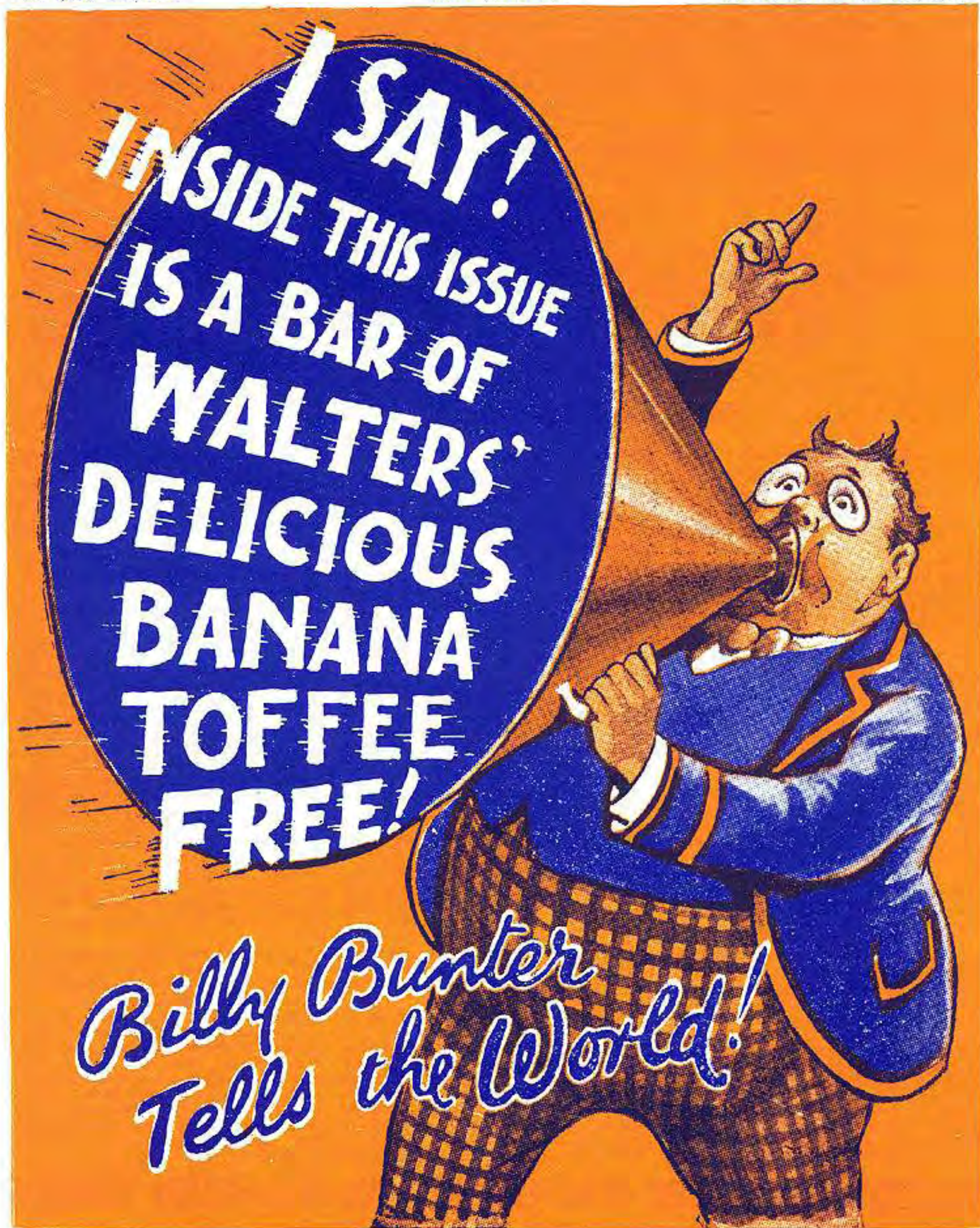
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THE VANISHED SCHOOLBOYS!



BY FRANK RICHARDS

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Bob Cherry.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry.

He bounded to his feet. A minute before Bob Cherry had been alone—so utterly alone, in such silence and solitude, that he might have fancied himself the only inhabitant of a deserted world.

Where he was the Greyfriars junior did not know.

He knew that he was in a vault, deep below the surface of the earth, shut in by walls of solid stone; but that was all he knew.

Two or three weeks—that seemed like years—had passed since he had fallen into the hands of the man who had kidnapped him. For what reason, Bob could not even begin to guess.

Once in twenty-four hours the man who called himself "Nemo" visited that hidden prison to bring him food. At first he had come by day; latterly he had come by night, though it was only by his watch that Bob could keep count of days and nights, for not a gleam of daylight ever penetrated to his prison.

But it was morning now, and Bob had no expectation of a visit. On the frosty earth's surface the wintry sun was shining. At Greyfriars School the fellows would be in the Form-rooms. Mr. Quelch would be taking the Remove—Bob's Form. Class with Quelch was not regarded by the Removites as enjoyable; but Bob would have given a great deal to be back in his old place in the Form-room, listening to the words of wisdom from Henry Samuel Quelch. Even "maths" would have been vastly preferable to the silence and

solitude of the hidden vault. Bob was thinking of that, while he tried to fix his attention on a book, when the whir of the moving block of stone, which formed the door of the vault, warned him that his kidnapper was coming. But what else was coming, Bob Cherry did not dream.

The stone rolled aside, disclosing the cavity in the wall by which his gaoler came and went. But the man did not enter. Bob, staring at the opening, had a glimpse of the man with the jutting nose, and another man whose face was masked. But what made him leap to his feet, with a yell of astonishment, was the sight of a Greyfriars junior, with his hands bound, between the two.

As he stared blankly the junior was thrust into the opening, and stumbled across the stone flags of the floor, and fell heavily.

The next moment the stone door closed with a thud.

Bob stood staring for a moment; then he jumped forward, to help the fallen junior to his feet.

"Smithy!" he gasped.

It was Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, who had been pitched headlong into his prison.

The vault was lighted by a single electric bulb suspended from the high, arched roof. The light gleamed on the white, savage face of the Bounder as Bob helped him to his feet.

"Smithy!" repeated Bob blankly.

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth. "Yes; they've got me, as well as you. Get my paws loose—quick! We may have a chance of getting that stone open."

"No such luck," said Bob. "I've tried a hundred times or more—"

"Get me loose, fathead!"

Bob grinned. The Bounder was not

a patient or good-tempered fellow, and he seemed in one of his worst tempers now. That was not surprising, in the circumstances. Bob began to grope at the knots on his wrists.

"Haven't you a knife?" snarled Smithy.

"No."

"There's a penknife in my pocket."

"Oh, all right!"

Bob found the penknife, opened it, and sawed through the cord. The moment the Bounder was free he sprang to the stone that closed the hidden doorway. He grabbed at it, pushed at it, thrust at it, panting with rage and eagerness, Bob watching him.

"Nothing doing, old chap!" said Bob. "I've tried—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Go it, then, as long as you like!"

But Vernon-Smith soon desisted. There was, as Bob said, nothing doing. He turned away from the solid stone, breathing hard.

"Oh, the rotter!" he muttered.

"How the thump did you get here, Smithy? I'm jolly glad to see you, on my own account. I haven't seen a face for weeks, except that brute, Nemo's. But I'm sorry you're in the soup, too. How—"

"Trapped!" said the Bounder bitterly. "Trapped like a rabbit! And nobody knows!" He ground his teeth. "Nobody will know!"

"But how—"

"I was after you!" grunted Vernon-Smith. "Looking for you, you see, when they got me! Now I'm as deep in the mud as you are in the mire."

"Well, my hat!" said Bob. "Then you know where this place is. Aren't you at the school now—I mean, weren't you? How did you get so far from Greyfriars?"

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THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Booting Bunter!

The Bounder gave a savage laugh. "How far from Greyfriars do you think you are?" he snapped.

"Haven't the foggiest," said Bob. "I was taken at least a couple of hundred miles in the plane when they kidnapped me; after that somewhere in a car. I was brought in here rolled up in a sack, and saw nothing. I suppose it's a long way from the school?"

"About thirty feet!" snapped Smithy. Bob Cherry jumped.

"Feet! Miles, do you mean?"

"I mean what I say—feet!"

"Is that a joke?"

"Do I look like joking?" snarled the Bounder. "Do you think I should be hunting for you, if you were miles from the school? You're about thirty feet from the Remove Form Room at the present moment; but it's thirty feet down!"

"Down!" repeated Bob.

"Can't you guess now? This vault is under Greyfriars School; but it's a secret vault—one that nobody knows of. I tell you that thirty feet above your silly head old Quelch is spouting to the Remove men at this dashed minute!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Bob Cherry stared up at the stone arch far above his head, lost in gloom. It seemed impossible to believe that he was so near his old school, so near his friends, within sound of a shout, but for the solid stone and solid earth that interposed. He stood overwhelmed with astonishment, while the Bounder prowled round the hidden vault like a wild animal in a cage.

"Under Greyfriars!" gasped Bob at last. "Great pip! That's what that brute meant when he told me that he had put me in the last place where anyone would think of looking for me! Under Greyfriars! Why, everybody must think that I am hundreds of miles away, as I was hooked off in an aeroplane!"

"That's the game! The cunning rascal—"

Bob stared at the stone arch again. It was amazing to think that his friends were so near. If they could but have guessed—

"But—if you were looking for me, Smithy—"

"That's why I'm here."

"Then, if you guessed, others—"

"I knew things that nobody else knew. I never guessed. How could I guess—or anybody? But I found something out, and so"—the Bounder gave a savage laugh—"and so I'm here a prisoner like yourself—to stay here as long as that scoundrel chooses!"

"You found something out?"

"Yes."

"You should have told—"

"Well, I didn't!"

"Why not?" demanded Bob warmly.

"Because I didn't jolly well choose!" snarled the Bounder.

"Look here, Smithy—"

"Oh, shut up!"

Bob Cherry's blue eyes glinted. He was glad—more than glad—to see a Greyfriars face again. But he came very near at that moment to planting a smack on the face he was so glad to see.

But Bob's temper was in rather better control than Smithy's; and he did not bestow that smack. He stood silent, while the Bounder, gritting his teeth with rage, roamed up and down and round about the hidden vault, searching every nook and corner like a wild beast seeking escape from a cage, and equally in vain.

BILLY BUNTER opened the door of Study No. 4 in the Remove passage at Greyfriars, and blinked into that apartment through his big spectacles. Then he rolled in.

The study was vacant till Bunter entered it. A bright fire burned in the grate, and the room looked very comfortable and cosy. That study belonged to the Bounder and Tom Redwing, his chum, and it was the best-furnished study in the Remove, excepting Lord Mauleverer's. Redwing cared little for expensive carpets and handsome curtains and deep leather armchairs—his tastes were simple enough. But the Bounder was rather lavish in his expenditure, as a millionaire's son could afford to be.

Billy Bunter, standing with his podgy back to the fire, his hands in his trousers pockets, surveyed that handsome study with satisfaction.

Everything that belonged to Smithy was still there, though Smithy was not, nor likely to be again. Smithy, caught out of bounds after lights out, had been "up for the sack," when he had suddenly vanished from Greyfriars—having, according to the general belief, taken him-

First Bob Cherry mysteriously disappears from school. Then, before the scare has died down, the Bounder vanishes, in equally mysterious fashion. No wonder Greyfriars is in a fever of excitement—for now comes the news that Tom Redwing has also fallen a victim to the sinister, unknown kidnapper!

self off, to save the Head the trouble of turfing him out, and himself the disagreeable ordeal of "turfing."

Where Smithy might be did not, however, worry Billy Bunter. That fat youth was not bothering about Smithy. Seldom or never did the fat Owl of the Remove bother about anybody but William George Bunter.

"Fine!" said Bunter, addressing space.

Looking round Study No. 4, Bunter was evidently satisfied with what he saw. As it was not his study, his satisfaction might have puzzled any Remove fellow who had witnessed it.

"That armchair will suit me to a T!" murmured Bunter. "That man Smithy believed in making himself comfy!"

And Bunter transferred his fat person to the armchair, which creaked as if in protest, as his extensive weight dropped into it.

Undoubtedly it was better than Peter Todd's armchair in Study No. 7. And in Study No. 7 Peter sometimes insisted on having the use of the armchair—on the trivial grounds that it was his own. In Study No. 4 there were two!

"Topping!" said Bunter.

He sprawled in Smithy's armchair and stretched out his fat little legs to the warmth of the fire.

There was a tap at the door, and Harry Wharton looked in. He glanced round the study, and then looked at Bunter.

"Isn't Redwing about?" he asked.

"Looks as if he isn't!" answered Bunter.

"What are you doing here, you fat image?" asked the captain of the Remove.

"Sitting in my armchair."

"Eh? Yours?"

"I'm going to share this study with Redwing, now Smithy's gone," explained Bunter. "I'm rather fed-up with Toddy in Study No. 7. He's mean!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Does Redwing know?" he inquired.

"I haven't mentioned it yet. I shall tell him when he comes up. You can come in if you like, Wharton," added Bunter condescendingly. "Always welcome in my study, old chap."

"Well, I'll come in, as Redwing asked me to come here for a jaw," said Harry. "Many thanks for giving me permission to come into another fellow's study."

"I've told you it's my study now," said Bunter. "Smithy's left all his things here! Of course, he couldn't take an armchair under his arm, and a book-case on his shoulder, when he bolted, just in time to stop the Head kicking him out! He, he, he! I fancy he's leaving the things here, Wharton. He was rather pally with Redwing, goodness knows why—and I fancy he will leave the things for Redwing, see? Smithy doesn't care twopence about what they cost—he's rolling in money."

Harry Wharton sat on the edge of the study table, smiling. Billy Bunter had ensconced himself in the study in the place of Herbert Vernon-Smith, now gone—probably for good! He seemed satisfied that he was going to stay there. To Wharton's mind it seemed more doubtful. However, it was no business of his, and he sat on the table to wait for Tom Redwing to come up.

"Redwing's been looking a bit down in the mouth since Smithy went," rattled on Bunter. "He seems to have liked the chap—not much to like about him, so far as I could see. Well, it will cheer him up to get somebody in the study in Smithy's place, what?"

"Depends a good deal on the somebody, I imagine," answered Harry.

"Well, I mean, a thoroughly decent, good-mannered, pleasant sort of chap," said Bunter. "A fellow like me—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I don't see why I shouldn't pal with him," said Bunter, in an argumentative sort of way. "Of course, he's not what you'd call a gentleman, like me—"

"Not like you, that's a cert!" agreed Wharton.

"But he's fairly decent," said Bunter, impervious to sarcasm, "and I'm no snob! I can be civil, if not exactly pally, with a social inferior. You know that, Wharton—I've always been civil enough to you, f'rinstance—"

"Eh?"

"And I shall manage all right with Redwing, though he's only a common seaman's son!" said Bunter confidently. "I've got tact!"

"Oh! You've got tact?" gasped the captain of the Remove.

"Lots! Fellows of really good family have, you know!" explained Bunter. "I shall keep Redwing at a proper distance, of course—but, at the same time, treat him in a friendly way. Tact's all that's needed in dealing with the lower classes. Take my word for it."

"You blithering idiot!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

The door opened again, and Frank Nugent came in.

"Reddy's talking to Quelch," he said. "He will be up soon. Waiting for him, Harry?"

"Oh, yes! Some sort of a pow-wow, I believe," said Harry. "May as well
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wait, the other fellows will be coming along in a minute."

Nugent stared at Bunter. He seemed rather surprised to see him in Study No. 4. Bunter waved a fat hand at him.

"Shut the door!" he said.

"Inky and Johnny will be along in a minute," said Frank.

"I said shut the door!"

"You can say it as often as you like," said Nugent, staring. "I'm leaving it open, all the same."

"If you can't shut a fellow's door when you come into a fellow's study, Nugent, you can jolly well get out of a fellow's study!" said Bunter warmly.

"What the dooce—"

"Bunter's planted himself here," explained Wharton, with a grin. "He's waiting for Reddy to come up and give him the glad hand and the joyful eye."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Nugent.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" snapped Bunter. "I suppose Redwing will be glad to have a decent chap here, after Smithy—"

"Oh crikey! Are you going to put it like that to Reddy?" gasped Nugent.

"Bunter's got tact, you see!" said Wharton. "He's just told me so."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the jolly old joke?" asked Johnny Bull, looking in. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh followed him into Study No. 4.

"Bunter!" said Nugent. "He's come to stay, and he's going to tell Redwing how nice it will be to have a decent chap here after Smithy."

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

"Guard with your left when you tell Reddy that, Bunter!" chuckled Johnny Bull.

"The guardfulness with the esteemed left will be a necessity and a sine qua non!" chortled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you fellows are going to cackle, you can go and cackle in some other fellow's study!" hooted Bunter. "I don't want you cackling here!"

"The fact is, you'd better clear, old fat man," said Johnny Bull. "Reddy asked us to come here to talk about something, and you're not wanted."

"You cheeky fathead!" roared Bunter. "Are you telling me to get out of my own study?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cackle!" sneered Bunter. "Cackle away! Who'd fancy that you'd lost a pal recently, to see you cackling! Bob Cherry—"

The four juniors became grave at once. Johnny Bull stepped towards the fat junior in the armchair, took hold of a fat ear with a finger and thumb that seemed like a steel vice, and hooked him out on the hearthrug, with a heavy bump.

There was a terrific roar from Billy Bunter.

"Yarooooh!"

"Now, all kick him together!" said Johnny.

"The kickfulness is the proper caper!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Burst the fat frog!" growled Frank Nugent.

"I say, you fellows— Yarooooh!" roared Bunter. "Whoop! Help! Rescue! I say, yooo-hooooop! Wharrer you kicking a fellow for? Whoooooop!"

The Owl of the Remove rolled over on Herbert Vernon-Smith's expensive carpet. He roared as he rolled.

A few moments ago the four juniors had been laughing. Now they seemed quite "shirty." Harry Wharton & Co. were very far from having forgotten their missing chum, Bob Cherry. The

kidnapped junior was only too constantly and painfully in their thoughts. And Bunter's tactful way of reminding them of him—when they did not need to be reminded—could only be justly rewarded with a kicking, in the opinion of the four. So they kicked him.

Quite unaware that he deserved to be kicked, and extremely unwilling to be kicked, whether he deserved it or not, Billy Bunter squirmed round the table, and scrambled for the door. In his anxiety to escape four lunging feet, he forgot that it was his own study.

Luckily for Bunter the latest comers had left the door wide open. Unluckily for him, Johnny Bull reached him as he jumped out.

Johnny let out his foot with a thud. Bunter was fairly caught as he jumped, and the drive of Johnny Bull's hefty foot added to the impetus of the jump. With a wild howl, Bunter shot right across the Remove passage. A bony youth who was coming down the passage was fairly carried away by Bunter's weight as he collided with him.

"Aw! Wake snakes!" yelled Fisher T. Fish.

Fisher T. Fish and Bunter mixed up on the farther side of the passage.

"Ow! Oh! Yooooop!" spluttered Bunter. "Beast! Wow! Ow!"

"Ow! My cabeza!" howled Fisher T. Fish, rubbing his bony head, which had banged on the wall. "Say, you guy, wharrer you mean? What? I guess I'll make potato scrapings of you."

"Ooooooh! Ow! I say—yaroooop!" roared Bunter, as the American junior jammed bony knuckles into his fat ribs. "Leave off! Ooooooh! I say—help—fire—yarooooooh!"

Billy Bunter scrambled up and fled. After him rushed Fisher T. Fish, red with wrath, with a pain in his bony head, and a still more severe pain in his temper. They vanished up the passage, both going strong. And Harry Wharton & Co., in the doorway of Study No. 4, were cackling once more as they went.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Wrathy!

MR. QUELCH, the master of the Remove, was frowning at the junior who stood before his study table. It was seldom that the Remove master had a frown for Tom Redwing, who was so quiet and modest and well-behaved a fellow, that the sharpest-tempered Form-master could hardly have helped liking him.

But Mr. Quelch was frowning now. He was annoyed, and, as a matter of fact, Quelch had not been in his best temper that term at all. He had caught a bad cold at Christmas, which had kept him away from his duties for several weeks. He had not quite recovered his usual health, and was aware that he ought to have been taking a rest instead of getting on with his job at Greyfriars—which, however, he was extremely unwilling to leave to other hands.

And as it never rains but it pours, it was turning out to be a term of trouble—unusual trouble. A boy in his Form had been kidnapped by some unknown rascal who had swooped down on the football field in an aeroplane, and Bob Cherry's fate was still unknown. Following that came the outbreak of Smithy, the scapegrace of the school, and, grimly satisfied as he was that expulsion was the proper sentence for Smithy, Quelch did not like a member of his Form being "bunked."

But even that was not the worst, for Smithy, instead of taking his gruel as a fellow might have been expected to do, had cleared out of the school, leaving

the sentence of the sack, as it were, suspended in the air, with no head to fall upon. And even that was not the worst, for the Bounder, having cleared off, had not gone home, and what had become of him nobody knew, except that he was on his own somewhere. But everybody knew that his father, Mr. Vernon-Smith, was in constant communication with the Head on the subject—much to Dr. Locke's worry and irritation, and Mr. Quelch's also.

With such a troublous term going on, Mr. Quelch, though a just and on the whole a kind man, was unusually tart, not to say tartaric. Fellows in the Remove knew that they had to walk warily these days.

The frown on Mr. Quelch's face was dark and thunderous. Redwing stood before him, colouring a little, but very firm. He was a thoughtful fellow, and understood that his Form-master had plenty of trouble on hand, and was sorry to add thereto. But, much as he respected Mr. Quelch, all his thoughts were with his chum, Smithy, and the mere mention of Vernon-Smith to Mr. Quelch at the present time had the same effect as that of a red rag on a bull. And the exasperating scapegrace of Greyfriars was the topic now.

"Such nonsense—such absurd nonsense! I am surprised at it in a lad like you, Redwing—surprised and very much annoyed!" barked Mr. Quelch.

"I am sorry, sir; but—" stammered Tom.

"I can make every allowance for your attachment to this boy, Vernon-Smith, unworthy as he was of it. Indeed, I had hoped that your example and influence might have an improving effect upon his very bad character. But he was bad to the core," said the Remove master. "His latest act is one of insolent rebellion and defiance of authority—in keeping with his disreputable conduct for whole terms."

"But, sir—"

"Do not interrupt me, Redwing! Your folly has caused unnecessary trouble for your headmaster and myself. Last Friday Vernon-Smith was ordered to appear before his headmaster, to be expelled from the school for having broken bounds after lights out. Instead of doing so he left the school surreptitiously, and has remained at large since. His father is anxious—we are all anxious—but there is not the slightest doubt that the young rascal is keeping away of his own accord, and is laughing in his sleeve all the time."

Redwing was silent. What Mr. Quelch stated was so exactly in keeping with the Bounder's character, that Tom could not help wondering whether his Form-master was, after all, right. It was like Smithy, sacked by his headmaster, expecting an angry and stormy interview when he saw his father, to go off "on his own," giving all the trouble he could. Nevertheless, Tom did not think so, and he had reasons for not thinking so.

"And you," continued Mr. Quelch angrily, "you had the audacity to present yourself, when Mr. Vernon-Smith was with the Head, and tell some absurd story—"

"I thought I ought to tell you what I knew, sir!" faltered Tom.

"You knew nothing!"

"I knew what Smithy said that morning, sir."

"Nonsense! What did he say?"

"He said that he had a chance of finding Bob Cherry, and that if he found him the Head might let him off the sack—I mean, off expulsion."

"If Vernon-Smith really uttered such words, he was talking at random. How could he have the remotest chance of finding Cherry, who was taken away in

an aeroplane, and therefore is obviously at a very great distance?"

"I don't know, sir; but—Smithy meant what he said."

"Nonsense! Absurd! Ridiculous!" hooted the Remove master. "You should never have repeated such idle and foolish words, if Vernon-Smith really uttered them at all. Mr. Vernon-Smith knows as well as we do here that his son is a reckless and rebellious young rascal; that he is merely absenting himself in order to cause anxiety and trouble; but he chooses—deliberately chooses—to take the view, from what you told him, that the boy may have been kidnapped as Cherry was—"

Mr. Quelch paused. His anger and indignation were carrying him a little too far, and he realised it.

He was intensely exasperated with the missing Bounder, and scarcely less so with the Bounder's father. But a boy in

"Redwing, you have caused enough trouble by telling this ridiculous story. I forbid you to spread it over the school. I will not allow such nonsense to become the talk of Greyfriars. I am deeply displeased with you. Leave my study!"

Tom Redwing quietly left the study. Mr. Quelch's gimlet eyes gleamed and glinted after him, till he shut the door.

The junior's face was troubled and harassed as he went slowly up the stairs to the Remove passage. Displeasing a master whom he liked and respected was a trouble to Tom's honest mind, in which he did not in the least resemble his pal, the Bounder, who delighted in "baiting" the beaks. He knew, too, that Mr. Quelch's view was the view taken by most of the school, especially the Remove. He had to admit that but for the fact that Smithy was his chum he would most likely have thought as

least, given him lines. The boy's obstinate persistence, in his own opinion, so widely different from Mr. Quelch's, savoured of disrespect—and the statement he had made to Smithy's father, while that portly gentleman from the City was at the school, had certainly led to much worry—quite unnecessary, in Mr. Quelch's opinion.

The millionaire chose, as Mr. Quelch expressed it, to take the view that there might be something in what Redwing had said. Naturally, he was unwilling to take the view that his son was an utterly unfeeling young rascal! His views would not have mattered very much if he had kept them to himself! But he did not! Far enough from that!

Mr. Quelch, with an angry snort, turned to a pile of papers at last! Correcting papers for his Form was a thing



"Busy?" asked Bunter. "Yaas!" answered Lord Mauleverer, reclining comfortably on the study sofa. "Buzz off like a good grampus!" "You look it!" said Bunter, sarcastically. "What are you busy about?" "Well, I'm waiting for Vivian to come up and get the tea!" said his lazy lordship.

his Form was not the proper person to hear his exasperation.

"I feel sure, sir, that when Smithy left the school that morning he never meant to run away—"

"Nonsense!"

"I'm certain that he had some idea of being able to find Bob—"

"Rubbish!"

"And—and I'm afraid he's come to some harm, sir—"

"Absurd!"

Mr. Quelch rose to his feet. His face was dark with anger. He was certain, in his own mind, that Vernon-Smith was at large, that he was laughing in his sleeve at the worry and trouble he was causing, and that he would keep that game up so long as his ample supply of money lasted. So the mere suggestion that Smithy had fallen into danger, in seeking to help and rescue the kidnapped Removite, not only seemed nonsense to Mr. Quelch, but extremely exasperating and disrespectful nonsense.

everyone else did. He was clinging to his own belief, rather like a drowning man to a plank, because he would not part with the hope that Smithy might yet make his peace at the school, and resume his place in the Remove.

If Smithy had fallen into danger in attempting the rescue of the kidnapped Removite, could the Head carry on with the sentence of expulsion when the facts were known? Hardly! That consideration was sufficient to keep Tom firm in his belief. It was really a case of the wish being father to the thought. If Smithy was wandering at large, deriving cynical amusement from the trouble he was giving, there was assuredly no hope for him at Greyfriars again! Tom was not going to believe that unless he had to.

Mr. Quelch remained glaring at the study door after it had closed on Tom Redwing for two or three minutes. Seldom had the Remove master been so angry and annoyed. He almost regretted that he had not caned Redwing, or, at

that had to go on, even if a member of that Form had been kidnapped and another sacked!

But he was in too irritated a mood to deal with Latin papers, and he pushed the pile aside and rose from his table and paced the study with a wrinkled and knitted brow.

Buzzzzzzzz!

Mr. Quelch very nearly said "Confound it!" as the telephone bell buzzed. He was in no mood for that wonderful and useful but sometimes irritating instrument. Instead of taking off the receiver, he glared at it. No doubt it was Mr. Vernon-Smith again, making useless inquiries on an annoying and unnecessary topic! Or it might be the man who called himself Nemo—the rascally kidnapper, who had had the audacity to telephone to the school once when Major Cherry was there! Still, as it was probably neither, Mr. Quelch was constrained to lift the receiver and ascertain who it was. He jerked it off

with a jerk that made the instrument rock, and barked:

"What—"

"Inspector Grimes speaking!" came a plump voice over the wires.

Mr. Quelch grunted! He had almost given up hope that the police would ever have news of the missing member of his Form, Bob Cherry. However, the bare chance was something.

"Is it news?" he asked.

"Yes, sir!" said Mr. Grimes.

Mr. Quelch's face cleared! In the worst of tempers, he would have been made quite amiable by news of Bob Cherry—news that he was safe, that he had been found. He almost smiled now.

"I am delighted!" he exclaimed. "More than delighted! Has the boy been found then?"

"Not found yet, sir, but seen—"

"Where was he seen?"

"In Courtfield last Friday morning."

Mr. Quelch blinked! It was about three weeks or more since Bob Cherry had been carried off on the plane and vanished from school.

"You are sure?" he gasped.

"There is no doubt, sir," said Inspector Grimes. "I have been making inquiries, and there is no doubt that on Friday morning he called at the Courtfield Hotel."

"I hardly understand! If he called at an hotel in Courtfield he can hardly have been under restraint—"

"Not then, certainly! But a waiter at the hotel, who knows him perfectly well by sight, informs me that on Friday morning he called at the hotel to see a Mr. Kranz, who is staying there—a gentleman who is, I understand, an Old Boy of Greyfriars School—"

"Certainly, certainly! I am well-acquainted with Mr. Kranz," said the Remove master. "In fact, he gave me

a lift in his plane the day I returned to Greyfriars. He has called several times since to make inquiries concerning the missing boy. But—but I simply cannot understand why, if the boy called on him on Friday, Mr. Kranz has not informed us of the fact, knowing how terribly anxious we are about Cherry."

"Cherry!" repeated Mr. Grimes.

"Cherry—the kidnapped boy!"

"I am not speaking of Cherry, sir!"

Mr. Quelch jumped.

"You are not speaking of Cherry!" he exclaimed. "If you are not speaking of Robert Cherry, Inspector Grimes, of whom, in the name of goodness, are you speaking?"

"Vernon-Smith, sir!"

"Vernon-Smith!" roared Mr. Quelch.

If that communication had been televisual instead of telephonic Inspector Grimes would have been quite startled by the expression of Mr. Quelch's face. Fortunately, the plump inspector at Courtfield could not see it.

"Yes, sir!" went on the inspector cheerily. "As you are aware, sir, Mr. Vernon-Smith has some idea that his son may have fallen into lawless hands when he left the school!"

"Nonsense!"

"Hem! That is Mr. Vernon-Smith's view, sir, and, as he communicated with us and requested official assistance, it could scarcely be refused."

Snort! Only a snort could express Mr. Quelch's feelings at the moment! So he snorted.

"Inquiries have been made locally," pursued the plump voice. "Apparently the boy—Vernon-Smith—left the school surreptitiously, and perhaps has intentionally kept out of sight."

"I have no doubt of it, sir!" barked Mr. Quelch. "No doubt whatever! None!"

"However, inquiries have been made, and one of my men found that a waiter at the Courtfield Hotel had seen him on the morning he left the school. He called at the hotel and asked to see Mr. Kranz. Possibly, sir, you would prefer to ask Mr. Kranz whether he knows anything of the boy's further movements."

"I have no desire to do anything of the kind."

"Hem! I imagined, sir, that you would desire to make some movement in the matter, as the boy's master."

"Mr. Vernon-Smith has given you instructions," said the Remove master bitterly. "You had better communicate with him. Why the young rascal should have called on Mr. Kranz I cannot imagine; but it is a proof, at least, that he was at liberty and going where he pleased."

"It certainly seems so, sir. But he has not been seen, it seems, since Friday—possibly Mr. Kranz may let in some light on the matter. I will get into touch with him and—"

If Inspector Grimes made any further remarks, they were lost to Mr. Quelch! That gentleman snapped the receiver back on the hooks. It was not exactly polite; but Mr. Quelch was, on the subject of Smithy, in a state that any fellow in his Form would have described as fed-up to the back teeth! Having jammed the receiver back with a force that made the instrument rock, Mr. Quelch left the study—to call on the Head and pass on to that gentleman the news that Herbert Vernon-Smith had, from the testimony of a witness, been free as air on the morning he quitted Greyfriars School, and certainly not in lawless hands!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Council of War—and a Surprise!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were waiting in Study No. 4 when Tom Redwing arrived there.

They waited with cheerful patience, as they were aware that Tom had been called into his Form-master's study. He had asked them to come in for a "jaw," and they gathered that it was on the subject of his missing chum—that being, at present, the single subject that occupied his mind.

The Co. were a good deal more concerned about their own pal who was missing; neither did they suppose, any more than Mr. Quelch did, that there was any cause for anxiety on the Bounder's account. But they sympathised with Redwing, and liked him personally, and were quite willing to hear what he wanted to say on the subject, though they wondered what it could be. He came in at last, with a clouded brow.

"Sorry to keep you hanging on," he said. "Quelch—"

"That's all right," said Frank Nugent. "I saw Quelch bag you! You look as if you've enjoyed the interview to a terrific extent."

Redwing smiled faintly.

"Quelch is in rather a bait," he said. "I suppose it's natural—poor old Smithy has given him trouble enough."

"The enoughfulness is terrific," agreed Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"But—I've got to think of Smithy," said Tom. "That's what I want to speak to you fellows about. Quelch has forbidden me to talk of it in the Remove—but I've told you fellows already; and I'm not specially keen on talking about it to anybody else. I want to know what you fellows think of it—and whether you think anything can be done." He coloured a little. "You may not be very keen about



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Smithy—but if it's as I believe, Smithy got landed, hunting for your pal Cherry, and if they're found they'll be found together."

"Sort of council of war?" said Johnny Bull.

"Yes, that's it," said Tom.

The four juniors were silent. Wharton spoke at last.

"You've told us what Smithy said that morning, before he went, Reddy! But—he must have been talking out of his hat, old chap! If he had any idea that he could put his finger on old Bob he must have supposed him to be somewhere within reach of Greyfriars. We all know that he was taken away in a plane—and that means a great distance—"

"I know! But—Smithy left the school with a belief in his mind that he had a chance of finding Bob, bringing him back, and getting another chance from the Head in consequence."

"That means that he believed that the kidnapper has parked Bob somewhere near the school!" said Nugent.

"I suppose so! If he was far away, Smithy couldn't have known anything about where he was."

"Sounds jolly unlikely," said Johnny Bull.

"I know! But he meant what he said—he might have told me more, only Quelch barged in and sent him up to pack his box. I never saw him again." Tom's lip trembled a little. "I know what you think—what all the school thinks—that Smithy has just cleared off, playing the goat on his own, to give all the trouble he can—now he's done for here—"

"It's like him!" said Johnny Bull bluntly.

"I'm not saying it isn't! But I'm certain that it's not so, all the same. He knew something, and was following it up—and if he hasn't shown up since it's because he's been prevented."

"But, my dear chap," said Harry, "how could he have known anything? How could he have found out anything?"

"He was out of bounds all that night! He was shut out, and tried to get in by the vaults, and failed. He had to hammer on the door to be let out in the morning. Well, something must have happened that night to put the idea into his head."

"But what?"

"We know that the kidnapper is hanging about," said Tom. "You fellows spotted him in the school vaults that day you went down after that fat duffer Bunter."

"That's true. But—"

"Smithy may have barged into him or seen something—"

Harry Wharton smiled.

"He wouldn't be likely to be in the vaults again, after being spotted there. Old Grimes made a pretty thorough search of the place, after what we told him. Why should he come back there?"

"Why should he ever have been there at all?" said Tom.

"Blessed if I know, unless he was hiding."

"Smithy must have got in by the tunnel from the old priory in Friardale Wood. He may have seen the man there or—or something! I can't even guess what may have happened—but—something did, or Smithy wouldn't have believed that he could spot where Bob was. If he'd only told me—"

"If he found anything out, he ought to have told the Head at once," said Johnny Bull.

"The Head was going to sack him as soon as he saw him. He believed he had a chance of getting Bob back and making his peace. I'm convinced that

he tried—and failed! And that can only mean—"

"That the man Nemo caught him at it and bagged him?" said Nugent.

"Well, yes."

The juniors were silent again. It did not seem probable to them—it seemed highly improbable.

"He's not been home," said Tom. "You needn't tell me that he's a reckless ass, I know that! But I don't believe he'd play such a fool game to that extent. His father takes the thing seriously, at least, to the extent of getting in touch with the local police here and asking them to make inquiries

RHYMES OF THE REMOVE.

No. 3.



Once more our Greyfriars Rhymester bursts into verse, and this time he chooses as his subject Harold Skinner, the shady slacker of the Remove.

When I informed the Quelch bird
That Greece was in Japan,
He said my answer was absurd
And forthwith he began
My shrinking hide to tan;
He did! I give my solemn word!
(He is a brutal man.)

I thought the Danube was a town
(I didn't think so long);
"Proficilo" I called a noun
(It seems that this was wrong);
I got it hot and strong.
When Quelch brought his ashplant down
I sang a mournful song.

I said that Cromwell burnt the cakes,
And there I erred, no doubt,
But though I made a few mistakes,
What need had Quelch to shout
In grinding tones, "Come out" ?
Gee, how a fellow gasps and quakes
When Quelch begins to spout!

He said he'd give me special care
And told me to construe.
Now that's the one thing, I declare,
That I can never do,
And Quelch thinks so, too.
He told me with a baleful glare
That my opinion's true.

"Post brave tempus Hercules,"
I gasped, and feared the worst;
"The post went shortly, sir, but he's
In time to catch it first!"
I thought Quelch would have burst.
I groaned in fear, for scenes like these
Have often been rehearsed.

I saw a general grin had gone
Around the Form again,
But Quelch, when he heard my "con,"
Picked up his stoutest cane.
I wriggled, but in vain.
He grasped me and he laid it on
While I yelled out in pain.

Then Quelch frowned and went away
(A very good thing, too),
Lascelles came in, and I may say
He tanned me black and blue,
And then, to see it through,
I finished up the happy day
With lines from old Mossoo!

whether Smithy has been seen in the neighbourhood after he left! So far, he hasn't been seen by anybody, or they would have heard. He seems to have vanished completely after getting out of the school."

"Cleared right off!" said Johnny Bull. "He wouldn't hang about here to be nobbled if he was out to mystify and worry everybody."

"Even then, somebody would have seen him at the railway station, or if he had a car they'd know at the garage—" Tom paused. "He wouldn't leave me without a word like this! We've had rows enough—but we were good pals! He wouldn't give me all this anxiety for nothing!"

The juniors did not answer that. They were only too well aware of the Bounder's utter disregard for everyone else, when he was following his own wilful and headstrong way.

"Well," said Harry Wharton at last. "It comes to this—you think that old Bob must be parked somewhere near the school—that Smithy knew it, or suspected it, and went after him—and that he's now parked along with Bob!" He smiled a little. "I'd be jolly glad to believe it—it would give us a chance of hunting for old Bob. But—"

"The butfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Janset Ram Singh, with a shake of his dusky head.

"I know it sounds thick," said Redwing. "But—until I get some news of Smithy I shall go on thinking so. And—and if it's so, there's a chance of finding something out if we set to work on it—"

"How—and where?" asked Nugent.

"We may get news any minute that Smithy has been seen somewhere," said Harry.

"I don't believe so! I—"

Redwing broke off as there was a knock at the door of Study No. 4. It opened to reveal the tall and angular figure of Mr. Quelch. The juniors jumped to their feet at once.

"Redwing—" barked the Remove master.

"Yes, sir!"

"I have come here to speak to you—but these boys may as well hear what I have to say, as I have no doubt that you have told them the ridiculous story you told the Head and Mr. Vernon-Smith!" said Mr. Quelch in angry, bitter tones. "I have received a telephone call from Inspector Grimes at Courtfield, who informs me that Vernon-Smith was seen in Courtfield after leaving Greyfriars—"

"Oh!" gasped Tom.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Wharton.

"What now becomes of your absurd story, Redwing, which has caused so much trouble and annoyance?" snapped Mr. Quelch.

Tom's face was crimson. The news was good, in its way; but it came as an overwhelming blow to all his beliefs.

"Is—is—is it certain, sir?" he stammered.

"Are you suggesting that an experienced police officer like Mr. Grimes has made a foolish mistake?" barked Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! No! Of course not, sir! But—but—"

"But you do not wish to give up your own foolish and obstinate opinion!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "Is that it?"

"No, sir! But—may I ask where he was seen—and by whom?"

"He was seen by a waiter at the Courtfield Hotel, where apparently he called to see Mr. Kranz, who is staying there. Finding that the police were inquiring for him, this man, who knew
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him by sight, and doubtless was given his name when he called, informed Inspector Grimes of the fact."

"Oh!" gasped Tom.

"It appears, therefore, that after surreptitiously leaving the school, Vernon-Smith went to Courtfield and had the impudence to call on an Old Boy of Greyfriars at his hotel! Does this look as if, as you suggest, he was seeking Cherry and fell into bad hands in so doing?"

Tom did not answer. He could not! He stood crimson and dumb. Mr. Quelch gave him a grim, frowning look.

"Let there be no more of this nonsense, Redwing!" he said. "You have tried my patience very severely; and I am very angry with you. If you have been, without cause, anxious for Vernon-Smith, you know now that there was, and is, no cause for anxiety. Let there be no more of it."

And Mr. Quelch, still frowning, rustled away.

There was a deep silence in Study No. 4 when he was gone. Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another, but did not speak. Redwing's earnestness had impressed them, and they had begun to wonder whether there was "something in it." But news that Smithy had been seen, safe and sound, after leaving Greyfriars knocked the whole thing on the head. Redwing, with a crimson face, stood silent, overwhelmed. Had his anxiety been wholly without foundation—was it true that his chum was recklessly disregarding his feelings, and everybody else's, with the cynical indifference for which the Bounder was only too well known? It certainly seemed so.

"Well, that's that!" said Johnny Bull at last.

"The thatfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The juniors looked at Redwing. He had nothing to say. Quietly they left the study, leaving poor Tom to hide his own painful and harassing thoughts.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bad Luck for Bunter.

"MAULY, old chap! I say—"

"Don't!"

"Eh? Don't what?" demanded Billy Bunter.

"Don't say! Just shut up, old fat bean!"

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

"And buzz off, like a good grampus!" added Lord Mauleverer.

"Busy?" asked Bunter sarcastically.

Lord Mauleverer did not look busy. He was stretched on the expensive sofa in his elegantly furnished study, with his knees drawn up, and his head resting on his hands, which were clasped behind his noble head. But he answered in the affirmative.

"Yaas!"

"You look it!" said Bunter, still sarcastic. "What are you busy about?"

"Well, I'm waitin' for Vivian to come up and get the tea," said Lord Mauleverer.

"Well, look here, Mauly—"

"Can't!"

"Why not?" roared Bunter.

"Don't like your features!"

"You silly ass!" hooted Bunter.

"I've heard that one before!" yawned Lord Mauleverer.

"Look here, old chap, it's rather important," said Bunter. "Poor old Redwing—"

Lord Mauleverer sat up and took notice.

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"Eh! What about Redwing?" he asked.

Bunter sniffed Mauleverer, for reasons utterly unknown to Bunter, liked Tom Redwing, who was the son of a sailor; nobody and nothing, in Bunter's valuable opinion!

On the other hand, he did not seem to like Bunter, who was not only a gentleman, but an uncommonly attractive and fascinating one!

It was really irritating for Mauly, who, a moment ago, had been only too obviously anxious to get rid of Bunter, to sit up and take notice like this, as soon as that common fellow, Redwing, was mentioned.

Still, as it happened, it suited Bunter's book; so he contented himself with a sniff, and did not tell the Earl of Mauleverer what he thought of him.

"The fact is, Mauly, I'm rather worried about Redwing," said Bunter, playing on the chord that was apparently the right one. "He's fearfully out up about his pal being sacked."

"Poor old chap!" said Mauly. "But what—"

"The silly ass thinks that Smithy has dropped into some trouble or other, you know," said Bunter. "Of course, we all know that he's gone off on his own, and is laughing in his sleeve. But Redwing's been jawing some rot about his going to look for Bob Cherry—I've heard him—"

"You hear too many things, Bunter."

"The fact is, Reddy confided the whole thing to me," said Bunter. "I'm the sort of chap a fellow naturally comes to in trouble, you know—"

"Oh gad!"

"I've comforted him as much as I can," continued Bunter. "I laid my hand on his shoulder and said 'Cheer up, old chap! Smithy's all right! Only one of his usual rotten tricks!'"

"Did Redwing kick you?"

"Eh! No."

"Then you never said that to him!" said Mauly.

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

"Shut the door after you!"

"But to come to the point," said Bunter, unheeding. "Poor old Redwing is fearfully down in the mouth, Mauly. He can hardly miss Smithy—the fellow was a beast, as we all know—but he's left alone in the study, and a fellow doesn't like that. I'm taking pity on him, Mauly."

"Take pity on me instead!" suggested Mauleverer.

"Eh! How?"

"By goin' out and shuttin' the door after you!"

"Beast! I mean, look here, Mauly, I'm taking pity on Reddy, as I've said. I'm going to change into his study and keep him company."

"Poor chap!"

"You silly rotter!" roared Bunter.

Lord Mauleverer chuckled.

"I say, Mauly, don't be a howling ass!" urged Bunter. "I can feel compassion for a fellow down on his luck, if you can't! I'm changing into Redwing's study—that's settled. Well, my idea is to give a sort of house-warming in my study. I'm going to ask all my friends—you among the others, Mauly. That's the sort of thing to cheer the fellow up. It will do Redwing good, Mauly. I'm not thinking of myself at all—"

"No!" ejaculated Mauly.

"No!" roared Bunter. "Do I ever?"

"Oh crumbs!"

"I've thought this out," went on Bunter, "and decided to blow the

whole of my postal order on it. I told you I was expecting a postal order—"

"Yaas!"

"Only there's a difficulty in the way," added Bunter. "My postal order hasn't come. What are you cackling at, Mauly? Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. Well, my idea is this—will you lend me a pound, and take the postal order when it comes tomorrow? It will come to the same thing, won't it?"

"Not quite!" chuckled Lord Mauleverer.

"I hope you're not going to be mean, old chap. There's nothing like a good spread to cheer a fellow up when he's glum. I've always found it so. I wish you wouldn't keep on cackling when a fellow speaks! It's nearly tea-time now, old chap, so there's no time to lose. You'd like to cheer old Redwing up, wouldn't you?"

"Yaas."

"Well, then, lend me—"

Jimmy Vivian, of the Remove, came into Study No. 12. He gave William George Bunter a rather inimical stare, and then looked at Mauleverer.

"Did you ask Bunter here, Mauly?"

"No."

"Want him here?"

"No."

"Shall I barge him out, then?"

"Yaas."

"I say, Mauly— Keep off, you beast—I say—yaroooop!" roared Billy Bunter, as Jimmy Vivian, grinning, barged him out.

It was quite an emphatic barge, and it sent Bunter staggering across the Remove passage.

Vivian slammed the door after him.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. "Oh, lor'!

Beast! Wow!"

The fat Owl of the Remove shook a podgy fist at the door of Study No. 12, and rolled away. He stopped at the doorway of Study No. 4.

Redwing was there now; and Bunter, though well aware how condescending it was of him to offer to share a study with a common person, was not, in his fat heart of hearts, absolutely sure that Tom would jump at the generous offer. Bunter was sadly accustomed to thanklessness and ingratitude.

And Bunter was in his usual stony state. Even Billy Bunter realised that, on his very first day in his new study, it was a little "thick" to put it up to his new study-mate to stand the study tea! Even Bunter would have preferred to stand his whack on the first occasion.

But there seemed to be no help for it! Lord Mauleverer had failed him, and his celebrated postal order had not arrived. Peter Todd, in his own study, had refused to lend him even a measly half-crown. He had offered to give him one—if he changed out of the study! But Peter wanted to be sure of the fact before he parted!

Bunter opened the door of Study No. 4 at last! It was neck or nothing—and Bunter had, at least, plenty of "neck."

But for those beasts Harry Wharton & Co., he would have been ensconced in the study before Redwing came up. He would have preferred to greet Redwing, when he came up, as a man already in possession. And if Mauly had only played up, he might have come in laden with good things for tea, which, in Bunter's opinion, was the sort of thing that would have assured any fellow of a hearty welcome. Now



As Vernon-Smith struck with his cudgel, the man with the jutting nose warded off the blow with his arm. The next moment he struck out with his right, and the Bounder went spinning. A split second later and Bob Cherry was rushing to the attack!

he had nothing to rely on but his "neck."

Redwing, with a dark cloud on his face, was staring from the study window into the misty quad. He was thinking over what Mr. Quelch had said, dismally enough. The news that Smithy was, apparently, safe and sound, was a relief; but the idea that his chum was playing the fool in a particularly reckless and unfeeling way, was far from pleasant.

Deep in gloomy thought, he did not even hear Bunter enter.

The Owl of the Remove blinked at the back of his head. Then he gave a fat cough, and Redwing started, and glanced round.

He frowned as he glanced. Even Bunter could not imagine that the fellow was pleased to see him. It was like the fellow's cheek, of course, but there it was!

"Don't bother now, Bunter," said Redwing quietly. "Cut off, old chap."

"Oh, really, Redwing—"

Tom turned back to the window.

"The fact is—" said Bunter.

"Well, what?" Redwing looked round again impatiently.

"You're looking pretty down in the mouth, old chap!"

Redwing coloured.

"No bizney of yours!" he snapped.

"Well, I'm sorry, old fellow!" said Bunter amicably. "Awfully sorry, and all that, you know. You're a bit of an ass to bother about a rank outsider like Smithy, of course—"

"What?"

"Still, I know how I should feel, if a pal of mine was sacked, even if he thoroughly deserved it, as Smithy did and—"

"For goodness' sake cut off, Bunter."

"The fact is, Redwing—"

"Don't worry!"

"I've come here—"

"I can see that! Now go."

"To stay—"

"What?"

"You'll be a bit lonely in this study, old chap, now that Smithy is turfed out! I've decided to change out of Study No. 7, into here," explained Bunter, while Redwing stared at him blankly. "As far as I can make out, Smithy is leaving his things here. He left in too big a hurry to have a leaving sale—he, he, he! I bag Smithy's armchair—"

"You—you—what—"

"You'll have the one you've always had," said Bunter. "That's all right! I bag Smithy's. And about tea in the study, we whack that out, of course. But look here—"

"You fat duffer—"

"Look here, my idea is this—you stand the tea one day, and I stand it the next," said Bunter, blinking at him. "As I'm new to the study, I'll let you begin to-day—"

"Look here, Bunter—"

"All right, old chap—it's settled," said Bunter briskly. "I was going to have a sort of house-warming, only that beast Mauleverer—I mean, I've been disappointed about a postal order. We can see about that to-morrow, when my postal order comes! To-day—"

Tom Redwing came across the study. He took hold of a fat shoulder, and spun Billy Bunter into the passage as if he had been a humming-top. Then he shut the door.

Bunter stood blinking at that door for a few moments through his big spectacles. Then he opened it again.

"Look here, Redwing—"

"Get out!"

"If that means that you don't want me in the study—"

"It means that exactly!"

"If you think you're going to bag Smithy's things—"

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"Think I don't know your game?" said Bunter, with a scornful blink.

"You're jolly well not bagging that armchair, fr'instance—and if you think you are, I can jolly well say—yarrooooooop!"

Bunter roared as he sat down suddenly in the passage. The door of Study No. 4 closed again, this time with a slam.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter.

He picked himself up, and glared at the door. This time he did not open it again. He stooped to the keyhole, and yelled:

"Yah! Rotter! Low cad! I'm jolly glad Smithy's sacked, and I jolly well wish you were sacked along with him! Yah!"

And having delivered that defiance, Billy Bunter scudded along the passage, before the door could re-open. He bolted rather breathlessly into Study No. 7, where Peter Todd and Tom Dutton were rising from the table after tea.

"Hallo! Why aren't you in your new study?" asked Toddy.

"He, he, he! Only a little joke of mine, old chap—I'm not changing out," said Bunter. "Think I'd dig with a low-class rotter like Redwing? No fear! I'm not the man to desert an old pal like you Toddy."

"I fancied it was too good to be true!" agreed Toddy.

"Oh, really, Peter! I say, what's for tea?"

"Poached eggs and toasted cheese and a cake."

"Oh, good! Where is it?" Bunter blinked round.

Peter tapped his waistcoat.

"Eh!" gasped Bunter. "What—"

"Just finished!" said Peter cheerfully.

"Oh, crikey!"

Toddy and Dutton strolled out of the study, grinning. Billy Bunter was left gazing at a bare table. And his feelings, as he gazed, were too deep for words.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Desperate Attempt!

"I'm not standing this!" said Herbert Vernon-Smith, between his teeth. Bob Cherry made a grimace. "If there is any way out of—" he said.

"We've got to find one, you ass!"

Bob smiled.

He had been weeks imprisoned; the Bounder, only a few days. But he was bearing it with much the greater patience of the two. If a thing could not be helped, it was useless to repine, and Bob had never been a fellow for grousing.

The Bounder was like a wild animal now. His temper was so savage, that it was difficult for Bob to avoid a quarrel, every hour of the day. Even solitude had its charms, compared with such company; and Bob was not wholly gratified by the change. The sight of a human face, the sound of a human voice, had come as an immense relief—but that feeling wore off, when the face wore an incessant scowl, and the voice was raised in incessant grousing, grumbling, and growling.

"How can you stand it—" muttered the Bounder.

"I've got to, same as you!" said Bob. "We shall get out of it some time. The brute can't keep us here for ever. My father—"

"Fat lot he's done so far!"

"I've no doubt that he's done everything possible, Smithy," said Bob quietly. "But there's no clue for him, or for anybody. And nobody's likely to guess that a Greyfriars fellow is stacked away just under Greyfriars—it's a cunning move that would beat Ferrers Locke himself."

"Your father could get us out if he liked! That villain phoned him at the school and told him his terms. Some rotten gadget your pater's invented for flying stunts, that the silly ass thinks is of value—he's willing to trade you for the secret—that's why he's nobbled you. If Major Cherry let him have it—"

"Oh, don't talk rot," said Bob gruffly. "If my father gave way to his threats, and did what he knew was against his duty, I should be ashamed of him. And I shall never be that."

The Bounder snarled.

"All very well!" he sneered. "I don't suppose the gadget is worth anythin'—your father never struck me as an inventive genius."

"Mr. Nemo seems to think so, if he's taken all this trouble and risk to get hold of it."

Another snarl from Smithy!

"Hang him! If I could get one drive at him, I'd smash that long nose of his through the back of his head!"

"Hear, hear!" grinned Bob. "And I'd knock it back again! Only give us half a chance—!"

The Bounder roared savagely about the vault. Again and again, a hundred times at least, he had examined every cranny. There was no way out but by the moving stone, and that was impassable. And since there had been two prisoners in the hidden vault, Nemo had not come alone when he came—the other man was with him when he visited the prisoners. There was no chance of fighting a way out.

Smithy stared up at the vaulted roof, where the electric bulb hung.

"They must have tapped the electric wires somehow, to get that here," he said. "If it was spotted—"

"Let's hope it may be!" said Bob. "Look here, Smithy, keep a stiff upper lip! They're feeding us decently—they've left us books and clothes and a

stove to keep us warm—we might be worse off—"

"Oh, chuck it!"

"I've been putting in some work at the school books," said Bob. "You might do the same—"

"Rubbish! Nice place for swotting!"

"Well, swotting passes the time, and it hangs pretty heavy here," said Bob.

"I've been here longer than you, Smithy, and I can tell you I'm jolly well fed up! Fed right up to the chin."

"Anybody might think you enjoyed it, the way you take it!" snarled Smithy.

"Oh, rot! What's the good of squaling like a cat on hot bricks?" demanded Bob. "We've got to stand it! May as well stand it quietly."

"Fool!"

Bob made no answer to that. He proceeded to go through some physical jerks—which was a way he spent a good deal of the time in his weary imprisonment. The Bounder roved about the vault, kicked over a box, and pitched a stool out of his way. He spoke again at last.

"They must have got these things here secretly, by way of the tunnel from the priory," he said; "one at a time, I suppose, at night. They had it all cut and dried long in advance. And then getting you away in a plane, to give the

to it. He must have come along after those two blighters collared me, if he kept his word."

"Perhaps he didn't," said Bob. "Might have been pulling your leg, or forgot all about it."

"I don't believe he's been called away. He's been staying in Courtfield for weeks, doing flying stunts with the Aero Club. He has his own plane there. And he knew there was something in it; I told him I saw that long-nosed villain in the vaults the night I was out of bounds, and he agreed that it was possible that the brute was keeping you hidden here, and promised to help."

"I wish he'd get on with it, then!" said Bob, with a sigh.

"I can't understand it. He must have come, as he agreed; and if he didn't find me in the tunnel—as, of course, he didn't—he ought to have tried to find out what had become of me. He might have guessed that I'd fallen foul of the kidnapper—"

"Well, he couldn't," said Bob. "You never dreamed the man was there. How could Kranz?"

"It's queer that he was there, too," muttered the Bounder. "He and his pal—the two of them, trapping me like a rabbit! I'd said not a word to a soul, excepting Kranz. So how did they know?"

Bob shook his head.

"I suppose Kranz came, found that I wasn't on the spot, and went," said Vernon-Smith. "But surely if he hears that I'm missing—and he seems always bargin' in at the school—he's bound to hear. May have forgotten all about me—confound him! Yet he seemed frightfully keen when I suggested to him that the kidnapper might have parked you somewhere in these old vaults. Keen as mustard on that! But if he told them, and they searched, they'd never find this vault. It may not even be the one that Kranz used to use for his smoking-parties when he was a schoolboy. But he ought to do something."

Bob Cherry nodded. He had little hope of any help coming from Mr. Franz Kranz. If that old boy of Greyfriars had been able to do anything, it would have been done before this. To Bob it seemed probable that Mr. Kranz, who was a man with plenty of business on his hands, had forgotten all about Smithy. Anyhow, Bob could not see what he could do, unless he knew of the existence of that hidden vault. Endless searching might have gone on without revealing it to the searchers. Obviously it was a well-hidden secret, or the kidnapper would not have selected it for concealing his prisoner.

The hour was growing late. Only by their watches the two hapless juniors knew that it was night at all.

But Bob, who was keeping his usual regular hours even in such strange circumstances, was sleepy. The Bounder, on the other hand, rose at any hour, and turned in at any hour; and often, while his fellow-prisoner slept, paced and paced the vault with scowling brow and muttering growls. Smithy was not the sort of fellow to bear such restraint with anything like patience, and every hour added to his savage irritation.

Bob Cherry sat on the edge of his little camp-bed at last to take off his boots. Vernon-Smith glared at him.

"Turnin' in?" he snarled.

"Well, it's pretty late."

"What difference does that make here?"

"Well, I'm getting sleepy."

"Oh, go to sleep—if you can!" sneered Vernon-Smith. "I can tell you what—I'm going to wait for those scoundrels

A DERBY READER WINS A POCKET WALLET

for sending in the following GREYFRIARS LIMERICK:

A fellow at Greyfriars named Skinner
Did once chance to remark while at dinner:
"What a shame it would be
If our fat W. G. B.
Ever started to waste and get thinner?"

Sent in by Charles Swain, 69, Stanton Street, Derby.

NOTE: All limericks and jokes to be sent to: "Limericks and Jokes" Editor, c/o MAGNET, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

impression that you were a long way off. The cunning scoundrels! Cherry, I can't stand much more of this!"

"After all, there's a chance that that man Kranz—"

"The rotten fool!" muttered the Bounder.

"According to what you've told me, he knew you came here—"

"Yes, he knew. I can't understand it. He's a fool—a dolt!"

"Well, I saw him at Greyfriars the day he came back with Quelch," said Bob. "I didn't like his look much, but he impressed me as being anything but a fool. Sharp as a razor, I thought him."

"Same here. But he must be a dolt not to guess that something's happened to me!" snarled Vernon-Smith. "I believe he knows of the existence of this actual vault. I heard the Head tell Quelch that he used to play the goat, smoking and card-playing, down in the vaults with his friends when he was a Greyfriars man, donkeys' years ago. He was searched for once, and hid out of sight, and the Head gathered that he had found out some of the secrets of this filthy old burrow. I tell you I heard him say so to Quelch, and that was what made me go to him."

"He can't know—"

"I believe he does. He actually said he knew of a secret vault, and arranged to meet me in the tunnel and guide me

to butt in, and have a go at them. You can back me up or not, as you choose."

Bob looked very grave.

"If you have a go at them I'll back you up fast enough," he said. "But there's nothing in it, Smithy. Either of them is a match for both of us—and they always come together since you've been here."

"I'm going to try it on," said the Bounder obstinately. "I'd rather be knocked on the head than stand this any longer."

"A knock on the head won't improve matters—"

"Oh, if you're funky—"

Bob Cherry's blue eyes glinted.

"You'll see whether I'm funky if you try it on," he said quietly. "I'll back you up fast enough, but—"

"Leave it at that, then."

"They won't be here till after midnight," said Bob, stretching himself on the bed. "From what you've told me, Mr. Nemo got alarmed when the fellows spotted him in the vaults in the daytime. If anybody spotted him here at night they might guess, as you did. But nobody's likely to. If you're going to sit up, give me a call when you see the blighters."

And Bob laid his head on the pillow and closed his eyes.

The Bounder continued to roam the vault restlessly, every now and then giving the sleeping junior a dark and bitter look.

He could not sleep himself. He could not take what was inevitable calmly and coolly, as Bob did. Hopeless imprisonment seemed to stretch before him. Major Cherry was never likely to yield to the kidnapper's demands. The Bounder knew that, if Nemo did not, Bob would remain a prisoner; the Bounder a prisoner also, because he knew too much. How was it to end?

Considering the Bounder's character, it could only end in some act of desperation. His mind was savagely made up now. At all risks he was going to make an attempt to fight his way out as soon as the stone was opened.

Long, long minutes passed, while Bob Cherry slept, and the Bounder roamed the vault like a caged wolf. Above their heads, within sound of a shout if a shout could only have been heard, Greyfriars School was sleeping. Bob Cherry had been a prisoner as many weeks as the Bounder days. But he slept, while Smithy was a bundle of jumping nerves and savage temper. When his watch told him that it was one o'clock he shook Bob's shoulder.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob sat up and rubbed his eyes. "What—"

"They can't be long now," said Smithy.

"Oh, all right!"

Bob rolled off the bed. Vernon-Smith had snapped the leg from a stool to use as a weapon. Bob, though in a very dubious mood, did the same. He did not believe that there was a chance—the ghost of a chance. But if Smithy put up a fight, Bob was not going to leave him unsupported. It was yet another half-hour before they heard the low whir of the moving stone.

"Now!" breathed the Bounder. His eyes glittered.

The moving stone rolled aside.

In the aperture stood the man with the beard and the jutting nose, his glasses glimmering under the peak of his cap.

Behind him stood a man in a dark coat, with a mask on his face and a raised revolver in his hand.

The man who called himself Nemo stepped into the vault, crouching his head at the low entrance. There was a

well-filled bag in his hand—the usual supply of food for the prisoners.

The second man did not enter; he stood half-crouched in the opening in the stone wall, covering the prisoners with his revolver.

If he was prepared to shoot, the position was hopeless; and there could be little doubt that the desperate crooks would stick at nothing to prevent an escape.

But the Bounder had made up his mind.

As the man with the jutting nose stepped in, the Bounder made a desperate spring and struck. The cudgel in his hand came crashing at the kidnapper's head.

The man was on his guard, wary and watchful as a wolf. He leaped back even as the blow descended, and threw up his arm. The blow caught him on the left arm instead of the head, and brought a gasp of pain to his lips. Before the Bounder could recover his weapon, he struck out with his right, and Herbert Vernon-Smith went spinning, heels-over-head, across the vault, to fall with a crash. A split second later the man with the jutting nose dodged the swipe that Bob Cherry aimed at him, and knocked him backwards with a blow that was like the tap of a sledgehammer.

"Oh!" gasped Bob, as he crashed.

The man with the jutting nose stared grimly at the two sprawling, gasping juniors. He picked up the bag, which had dropped as the Bounder attacked him, and tossed it on the table.

Bob Cherry staggered to his feet, dazed and dizzy. The Bounder raised himself on his elbow, unable to rise farther, his senses spinning. The masked man at the aperture still had his revolver levelled.

The man with the jutting nose gave a harsh laugh.

"You will not have a chance of trying that game again!" he said. "I shall leave you to yourselves for some time after this! Make the food last; you will not see me again for some days!"

He stepped back to the opening.

"And take warning!" he went on harshly. "If you had passed me, my man would have shot you down before you left the vault! You may be thankful that you did not put him to the test!"

He disappeared through the opening, and the stone rolled back into its place and thudded shut. Bob Cherry picked himself up slowly, his head aching and singing. More slowly, the Bounder gained his feet. He leaned on a buttress of the vault, panting for breath.

"Rotten luck!" said Bob at last.

The Bounder did not speak. The disappointment and rage in his breast were too intense for speech.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter, Too!

LORD MAULEVERER rubbed his noble chin thoughtfully, and wrinkled his aristocratic brow a little. His eyes were fixed on Tom Redwing of the Remove in the Greyfriars quad.

After class some of the Removites were punting a footer about, and Mauly was giving them a wide berth, a gentle walk under the leafless elms being exertion enough for his lazy lordship. But

another fellow also was giving the punt about a wide berth—a fellow generally keen and full of energy. And Mauly's eyes followed Tom Redwing, very thoughtfully, as he tramped across the quad, with his hands deep in his pockets and a cloud on his brow.

Finally, Mauly moved, so as to intercept Redwing as he tramped along. Tom stopped, finding the elegant figure of the schoolboy earl in his path.

"Pip?" inquired Mauleverer.

Mauly never wasted words.

Redwing smiled faintly.

"Was I looking glum?" he asked.

"Yaas."

"I didn't mean to. But—"

"I've been thinkin', old beanlet," said Lord Mauleverer. "Fat ass—dear old Bunter—was gabblin' somethin' in my study the other day. Sort of sticks in my mind. Smithy's not been heard of yet. Everybody thinks he's gone off on his own to worry the world generally. But you don't—what?"

"I don't know what to think," said Tom. "But—"

"Don't think I'm bargin' in," said Mauleverer hastily. "Hate bargin' in. Never was such a chap for mindin' his own bizney! Can't understand how Bunter finds the time for mindin' other people's as he does! But what the fat chump said rather sticks in my mind. You see, I'm a bit bothered about old Bob—sort of friend of mine, you know. Bunter was gabblin' about somethin'; he seems to have heard you talkin' to some fellows—the dear boy hears everythin', you know. May I, without bargin', ask you whether it's a fact that you've got an idea that Smithy went huntin' for Bob Cherry the day he flitted?"

"So that fat owl's got hold of that? Quelch is waxy about it, and has told me not to speak about it in the Remove," said Tom. "I had already told Wharton and his friends. I suppose that fat ass was eavesdroppin'! Yes, it's a fact, Mauly. I did think so. But since it's turned out that Smithy was seen in Courtfield after he left here, I don't know what to think."

"Like to tell me about it?" asked Mauly. "Might be able to give you an opinion."

Mauleverer had to suppress a yawn as he spoke. Tom Redwing laughed. So far from being a fellow to "barge" in, Mauly had to make an effort to do so, having a constitutional dislike for exertion, physical or mental.

"Don't bother your old napper about it, old fellow," said Tom.

"My dear chap, that's all right. If you don't mind tellin' me, I'll listen to every word, and give you my jolly old opinion. Two heads are thicker than one, you know!"

"I'll tell you like a shot. I'd be jolly glad to know what you think," said Tom. "You're a slacking ass, old chap, but you've got a lot of horse-sense when you take the trouble to use it!"

"My long suit!" said Mauleverer.

Redwing told him what he had already told Harry Wharton & Co. Lord Mauleverer listened attentively.

"From what Smithy said, I was convinced that he had some clue to Bob

(Continued on next page.)



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and was after him," Redwing concluded. "But when Quelch told me that he had been seen in Courtfield, calling on Mr. Kranz there—"

"Sort of flummoxed you?"

"Yes," said Tom.

"Feel like losin' faith in your pal?"

"Well, I hope not. But—"

"I wouldn't do that," said Mauleverer gravely. "Give a man a chance up to the last shot in the locker—what?"

Redwing's face brightened.

"It's rather weird," said Lord Mauleverer thoughtfully. "I don't see how Smithy can have known anything about Bob, or why he supposed that the old chap was anywhere near at hand. But Smithy isn't the man to talk out of the back of his neck. He was out of bounds all that night, and he may have dropped on somethin'. But it's rather a facer, his bein' seen walkin' about Courtfield. That rather puts the lid on the idea that he butted into trouble and got snaffled."

"It does!"

"Have you asked Kranz about it?"

"I haven't seen him, of course. I suppose Inspector Grimes will have asked him if he knew anything."

"Yaas! But why not ask him yourself?"

"Well, it would be rather a cheek, buttin' in to see him. And what would be the use?" asked Tom. "He must have told Mr. Grimes anything he knew about Smithy's intentions if he knew anything."

"Yaas. But when a detective's on the job, he always interviews the last johnny who saw the happy victim alive," said Lord Mauleverer. "Know why Smithy went to see this man Kranz?"

"I haven't the least idea. Smithy's keen on flyin', and Kranz is a flying man; you remember he gave Quelch a lift here in his plane when the railway was blocked. Unless it was something of that sort—"

"If Smithy was thinkin' of gettin' after old Bob that mornin', he wouldn't have bothered about jawin' with a flyin' man about flyin'. Takin' it that Smithy was after Bob as he said, why did he go to see Kranz?"

"Goodness only knows!"

"Must have had a reason. Could he have fancied that Kranz could give him any sort of help?"

Redwing stared.

"How could he?" he asked.

"Don't ask me—I don't know! But unless he fancied somethin' of the sort, I don't see why he called on Kranz."

Redwing was silent, thoughtful.

"This man Kranz, foreign name and all, was a Greyfriars chap once," said Mauleverer ruminatingly. "So he knows this country well, I should say. Also, I hear that he's doin' some flyin' with the local aero club. Flyin' men see a lot of things. Smithy must have supposed that Bob was fairly near at hand if he started lookin' for him. Parked in the neighbourhood somewhere. May have fancied that Kranz might have spotted somethin'."

"I—I suppose it's possible," Mauly's suggestion brought new thoughts into Redwing's mind. "He must have had some reason for calling on the man."

"And it must have been in connection with lookin' for Bob, unless he was pullin' your leg—see?"

"Ye-e-es."

"It's a nice, cold, frosty afternoon, and a walk will do us good," said Lord Mauleverer. "Let's go and call on jolly old Kranz and ask him to tell us what Smithy was after, and whether he let anythin' drop."

Redwing hesitated. But Lord Mauleverer, having made up his noble mind, had no use for hesitation. He slipped his arm in Redwing's, and drew him away towards the school gates.

"But Mr. Grimes must have asked him!" demurred Redwing.

"Let's ask him ourselves!" drawled Mauleverer. "Grimes most likely believes, like dear old Quelch, that Smithy is simply playin' the giddy ox, and will turn up in his own good time. See? Well, we don't. We take the thing up from a different what-do-you-call-it—"

"A different angle?" said Tom, with a smile.

"That's it. Come on!"

Redwing gave way, and walked out of the gates with Mauleverer. He had little hope—or, rather, none—that Mr. Franz Kranz, the Old Boy of Greyfriars, would be able to let in any light on the Bounder's strange proceedings. But he was willing to put the slightest chance to the test.

"I say, you fellows!" A fat figure rolled out of the gates after the two juniors as they started for Courtfield.

"I say, Mauly—"

"Oh gad! Is that Bunter?" groaned Lord Mauleverer.

Bunter put on a spurt, and came up, puffing and blowing.

"I say, old fellow, don't walk so fast," he said. "Going to Courtfield?"

"Yaas."

"I'm going there, old chap."

"Oh dear!"

OVERSEAS READERS PLEASE NOTE!

Readers living overseas and in the Irish Free State will appreciate the difficulties of supplying them with gifts of toffee. But in this issue an alternative gift scheme has been arranged for their benefit.

"What about taking the bus, though?" said Bunter. "The motor-bus will be along in a few minutes."

"Good egg!" said Lord Mauleverer heartily. "You take the bus, Bunter, and we'll walk—what?"

Billy Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles.

"The fare's fourpence," he said. "I've left all my money in my study. Still, you can lend me fourpence, Mauly."

"Can't!"

"Why not?" demanded Bunter.

"Haven't got it."

"You haven't got fourpence?" roared Bunter.

"No."

"Gammon!"

"Honest Injun!" said Lord Mauleverer. "I never carry coppers!"

"You—you—you silly ass!" gasped Bunter. "Lend me sixpence, then, you chump!"

"Oh, all right!"

Lord Mauleverer fished out a sixpence. The motor-bus was in view, rolling on behind, and heading for Courtfield. Bunter grabbed the sixpence and waved a fat hand to the bus-driver.

"Wait for you at the bunshop, Mauly!" he squeaked.

And he ran for the bus, hopped on, and was borne on towards the town. Lord Mauleverer gazed after the disappearing motor-bus with an expression of great astonishment on his face. Redwing was grinning.

"Did Bunter say he would wait for us at the bunshop, Reddy?" asked his lordship, at last.

"Yes," said Tom, laughing.

"What is he goin' to do that for? We're not goin' anywhere near the bunshop!" said Lord Mauleverer.

"I fancy Bunter thinks we are."

"Oh gad! Does he, really?"

Lord Mauleverer chuckled. Evidently Billy Bunter had taken it for granted that, with tea-time nearly due, the two juniors were going to the bunshop, at Courtfield, to tea, as Mauly frequently did. Bunter probably could imagine no other reason why a fellow should walk to Courtfield, especially at tea-time! In this instance the fat Owl of the Remove had taken a little too much for granted.

The two juniors walked on.

Billy Bunter reached Courtfield, on the motor-bus, a long way ahead of them. He hopped off at the bunshop in the High Street. There he waited for the walkers to arrive.

Bunter waited a long time. Then he stepped into the bunshop and expended the twopence change out of Mauly's sixpence. Then he came out and waited again. Still the walkers did not arrive.

It was not till the shades of night were falling fast, as a poet has expressed it, that the Owl of the Remove gave it up. Then, as he rolled on his weary way back to Greyfriars, Billy Bunter would have given anything—except a feed—to punch Lord Mauleverer on his noble nose, with all his extensive weight behind the punch!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Kranz Knows Nothing!

"PLEASE wait here, gentlemen!" said Bane.

"Thank you," said Lord Mauleverer.

"I will inform Mr. Kranz."

"Yaas!"

Mr. Kranz's "man" left the two juniors, and Lord Mauleverer sat down in a deep leather chair, while Tom Redwing stood looking from the french windows into the garden behind the Courtfield Hotel.

Mr. Kranz's man had informed them that Mr. Kranz was, at present, in the billiards-room, with some friends; but he showed them very politely into Mr. Kranz's sitting-room and went to inform his master that the two young gentlemen from Greyfriars School had called.

Lord Mauleverer half-closed his eyes as he leaned back in the comfortable chair. But his half-closed eyes, sleepy as they looked, did not fail to observe his surroundings. It was evident, from these surroundings, that Mr. Kranz "did" himself very well, and was a man who could afford to spend money. His man, Bane, was a smooth, sleek-looking manservant, with perfect manners, but with a searching keenness in his eyes that Mauleverer had noted. He had an impression that the man was, for some reason of his own, keenly interested in the circumstance that two Greyfriars boys had called to see his master.

It was ten minutes or more before Mr. Kranz entered—a short, stocky man, of very strong build, with sharp, light-blue eyes. Lord Mauleverer rose from the chair. Mr. Kranz had a cigar in his mouth when he came in, which he removed and held in his fingers as he addressed the juniors.

"Lord Mauleverer and Mr. Redwing, my man tells me—"

"Yaas," said Lord Mauleverer. "Please excuse us for bargin' in like this, sir—"

"Not at all," said Franz Kranz, with a smile. "I am always pleased to see



As Bunter pulled a chair to the table and sat down, Peter Todd picked up a jam tart with one hand and grasped the fat junior's jacket with the other. Squash! "Gurrrrghh!" spluttered Bunter, as the jam tart was plastered over his fat features. "Wurrrgh! Urrrghh!"

any boy belonging to my old school. But what—"

"If you can spare us a few minutes, sir—" said Redwing.

"Certainly! Please sit down!"

The schoolboys sat down and Mr. Kranz seated himself and resumed smoking his cigar. Tom Redwing felt a little uncomfortable, feeling that it was rather a "cheek" to butt in on Mr. Kranz like this. But Lord Mauleverer was his accustomed placid self.

"It's about Vernon-Smith, sir," said Mauleverer.

Kranz wrinkled his brow a little, as if in an effort to recall the name.

"Yaas. Pal of ours. Greyfriars man."

"Oh yes; I remember the name. The boy who has been expelled from the school. I think I remember hearing from Mr. Quelch, when I was at the school something about it—"

"Yaas. Not exactly expelled. He was goin' to be, but he wandered off on his own. Not turned up since," said Mauleverer.

"The young rascal! His conduct must be causing his relatives a good deal of anxiety," said Mr. Kranz.

"Yaas. We're afraid that somethin' happened to him."

"Indeed! I hope not."

"And knowin' that he called on you, sir the mornin' he left the school, we rather wondered whether you might know anythin' about him," said Lord Mauleverer.

"Oh, I see. Nothing, I am sorry to say," answered Mr. Kranz. "He certainly called here, and we had a short conversation, and then he left. I am given to understand that a waiter here, who brought in his name when he called, mentioned the circumstance to the police-inspector, when the inquiries were made. He appears to have informed Mr. Grimes that Master Vernon-Smith called here that Friday

morning, and left about half an hour later; and I am afraid that I can add nothing to that."

"Would you mind tellin' us why he called, sir?"

Mr. Kranz raised his eyebrows.

"I've a reason for askin', sir," said Mauleverer. "Accordin' to what he said to this chap, Redwing, before he bunked—I mean, left—he had some idea in his noddle of lookin' for Bob Cherry, the chap who was kidnapped weeks ago. You've heard of that, of course?"

"Yes, I have heard of it," said Mr. Kranz, with a very curious look at Lord Mauleverer.

"If he said anythin' about that to you, sir—"

Mr. Kranz laughed.

"As a matter of fact, that was why he called," he said. "He told me that he had an idea—which seemed to me very extraordinary—of looking for the kidnapped boy, and making his peace with his headmaster by taking him back to the school."

"Exactly what he said to me!" exclaimed Redwing eagerly.

"Ah, he told you that?" said Mr. Kranz, his light blue eyes fixing on Tom Redwing's face. "Did he not tell you more than that?"

"No; nothing more. Just that," said Tom.

"But surely you thought such a statement very extraordinary?"

"Yes, of course. But I am sure that he had something to go on," said Tom.

"If he let out anything in speaking to you, sir, it might help."

"In what way?" asked Mr. Kranz.

"I understand that this boy, Vernon-Smith, has gone off of his own accord."

"Well, yes, sir; but I don't believe so myself," Redwing coloured. "I—I think it's possible, at least, that he got into some trouble looking for Bob."

"That had certainly not occurred to

me," said Mr. Kranz, with a smile. "Are you not letting your imagination run away with you a little, Master Redwing?"

Redwing's colour deepened.

"Perhaps, sir; but—" His half rose.

"Hold on, old bean!" said Lord Mauleverer gently. "Mr. Kranz is goin' to tell us what Smithy said. We want to know."

"Certainly!" said Mr. Kranz. "So far as I can remember, I will certainly tell you."

"I am sure, sir," said Tom, "that he believed Bob to be somewhere within reach—somewhere near. Did he tell you so, sir?"

"I believe he said something of that kind," said Mr. Kranz. "To me the idea seemed rather absurd, but I was, of course, sympathetic. As I told him, I am acquainted with Major Cherry, and feel very much concerned about the mysterious fate of his son. I am afraid I cannot recollect precisely what Master Vernon-Smith said. To tell you the truth my mind was rather occupied with other matters; but as he seemed in distress, I treated him sympathetically."

"So far as I remember, he had an idea that I, as an old boy of Greyfriars, and well acquainted with this part of the country, might have some idea where the kidnapped boy might be hidden, if he was not, as is generally supposed, taken to a great distance. I had, of course, no such idea; but in the circumstances, I spoke to him in a soothing way, and promised to give him any help that might be in my power."

"Oh!" said Tom, disappointed.

"That promise, of course, I should be glad to keep," said Mr. Kranz. "I rather expected to see him again, in

(Continued on page 16.)



(Continued from page 13.)

fact, but he never turned up. Probably he realised afterwards that the whole idea was harebrained, and dismissed it from his mind."

"Oh!" said Tom again.

He was deeply disappointed, but he had, in point of fact, expected little or nothing. He rose.

"I am sorry that I can tell you no more," said Mr. Kranz, rising also. "I quite understand your anxiety for your friend. But I have no doubt that you will hear from him sooner or later. He cannot keep up this extraordinary escapade for ever."

"If it is an escapade," muttered Tom. "But I don't believe—" He broke off. "Well, I won't bother you with that, Mr. Kranz. Come on, Mauly!"

"But you are not bothering me," said Kranz quickly. "Please do not be in haste. I have every sympathy with you. Do you still believe, Master Redwing, that your friend, Vernon-Smith, has fallen into trouble in searching for the kidnapped boy?"

"I do!" said Tom firmly.

"In that case, you must mean that he fell foul of the kidnapper?"

"I—I suppose so."

"And that the man has forcibly detained him to secure his silence?"

"It comes to that," said Tom.

"Surely that is rather a wild idea."

"I suppose it sounds so," said Tom. "But I'm sticking to it. I can't, and won't believe, that Smithy is causing us all this anxiety for nothing! I can't! I believe he's got landed somehow, and somewhere, and can't let us know. I—I'm sure of it!"

Kranz watched his face very intently.

"That is your fixed belief?" he asked.

"Yes," said Tom.

"And you hope to do something in the matter?"

"Everything I can," said Redwing. "I know this country like a book. I was born up at Hawkscliff, and I'll root over every foot of it, so long as we don't hear from Smithy that he's safe. But we're taking up your time, sir. Thank you for seeing us! It was rather a check to call—"

"Not at all," said Mr. Kranz politely.

"It was awfully good of you, sir!" said Lord Mauleverer.

And the two juniors took their leave.

After they were gone Franz Kranz crossed to an inner door, and opened it. Bane stood there with an intent expression on his smooth, sleek face.

"What do you think, Bane?" asked Franz Kranz softly.

"Danger!" said Bane briefly.

"From the boy Redwing?"

"Yes. The other"—Bane gave a shrug of contempt—"the other is a yawning noodle. But that boy Redwing—"

"Precisely my idea," said Franz Kranz. "Precisely. One thing leads to another, Bane. It is not so simple as it looked at first. But in case of danger it is always safest to grasp the nettle. Forewarned is forearmed, Bane."

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And I do not think that the boy Redwing will make any discoveries. I do not think he will be given a chance." And Mr. Franz Kranz smiled—a cold, cat-like smile.

And a discussion in low tones followed, which would have enlightened Lord Mauleverer and Tom Redwing very considerably could they have heard it.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

First in the Field!

"O H!" gasped Billy Bunter.

He shut the door of the study cupboard in Study No. 7 in the Remove hurriedly, as there was a footstep at the door.

Hurriedly he wiped a smear of jam from his extensive mouth with a shiny sleeve.

There was a rather red and guilty look on Billy Bunter's fat face as Toddy came in. He blinked at Peter rather uneasily.

Peter was looking very cheery.

There had been a remittance from Peter's uncle, Mr. Benjamin Todd, and the recipient thereof had nobly expended it on a spread, to which he had asked many friends.

Quite a handsome supply of tuck was stacked in the study cupboard—or had been. Judging by Billy Bunter's guilty and sticky look, it was now stacked in a safer place.

"Now, then, lend a hand, fatty," said Peter briskly. "You might have got the cloth on the table. The fellows will be along in ten minutes."

"The—the fellows—" stammered Bunter.

"I've asked six chaps to the spread."

"The—the spread—"

"You might have made up the fire, lazybones. Aren't you going to lend a hand?" demanded Peter warmly.

"Oh, yes; rather! But I—I say, Peter—" Billy Bunter edged towards the door. "I—I say, I've got to speak to Mauleverer!"

"Mauly's coming."

"Oh, I—I mean Wharton—"

"Wharton's coming."

"I mean to say Inky—"

"Inky's coming."

"I—I—I mean, I—I've got lines for Quelch, and—and—and—"

Peter Todd looked very fixedly at his fat study-mate. He stood in Bunter's way, and did not stir. Bunter's haste to depart when a feast was toward was remarkable. And there were jammy smears on Bunter.

"You fat scoundrel!" said Peter, in measured tones. "If you've been wolfing the tuck—"

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

Peter Todd took Bunter by a fat ear, and led him across to the cupboard. He did not mean Bunter to depart until he had looked into that cupboard.

"I—I say, Peter, leggo!" gasped Bunter. "I say, I—I've got to see the Head—"

With his free hand Peter opened the cupboard door. He gazed into the interior. And the expression that came over his face was positively terrific.

"Where's the tuck?" he gasped.

"The—the tuck—"

"A cake, a bag of jam tarts, a box of eclairs, a bag of biscuits, and the rest—ham patties, and—Where are they?"

"Are—are—are't they there, Peter?"

"They're not there!"

"Did—did you put them there, old chap?"

"You—you—you've wolfed the lot!"

gurgled Peter. "You—you've scoffed the whole shoot! You—you—you—"

"I—I haven't touched them!" gasped Bunter. "It was the cat—"

"The cat!" yelled Peter.

"Mrs. Kebble's cat! It—it's always nosing into the studies, old chap! The fact is, I—I saw that cat in the study! Yaroooh! Leave off pulling my ear, you beast! I—I looked into the cupboard to—to see if—if the cat had— Yaroooh!"

Still holding Bunter's fat ear, Peter Todd led him round the study, looking for a fives bat.

"I—I say, Peter—" gasped Bunter.

"I—I say, I—I suppose you can take a pal's word! It—it was the cat—"

Peter picked up a fives bat.

Billy Bunter, with a jerk on his suffering ear, was laid across the armchair. Then the bat rose and fell.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Ow! Wow! Yaroooh!" roared Bunter frantically. "I say, Toddy, I never touched the stuff! I say, old chap— Yaroooh!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "Look here, you rotter—"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Whooooop!"

Peter threw down the fives bat.

"Now, you fat brigand—"

"Yow-ow-woop!" roared Bunter.

"Get out!" said Peter. "Keep out! I'm going to kick you every time you barge into this study! That's a start!"

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as Peter's foot landed. "You silly idiot, do you think I'm going to be turned out of my own study?"

"I know I'm going to kick you every time you butt in here! There's another, and there's—"

Bunter made a bound for the door. He barely escaped the third lunge of Peter's boot. A yell floated back as the Owl of the Remove vanished up the passage.

Peter Todd looked into the study cupboard again. Some papers and cartons were left, and some sticky crumbs! He breathed hard and deep. Half a dozen fellows were coming to that spread—and the spread had departed, safely parked inside the extensive circumference of William George Bunter! Peter went through his pockets. Of the remittance from his Uncle Benjamin, fourpence remained. Evidently that spread was off. He stood staring into the cupboard.

"Too early, old bean?"

Lord Mauleverer drifted in.

"Nunno!" Peter Todd looked round.

"Not at all! Glad to see you, old fellow! Take a pew!"

His lordship took a pew.

Peter gave another look into the cupboard! But the closest scrutiny failed to reveal anything of an edible nature. Five more fellows were due in a few minutes. And when they got there, the cupboard, like that of the famous Mrs. Hubbard, would be bare!

"Rather a coincidence, old bean!" remarked Lord Mauleverer, as he gracefully crossed one elegantly trousered leg over the other.

"Eh, what?" asked the worried Peter.

"I was going to ask you and some fellows to a spread, when you asked me, old pippin!" explained Mauly. "Quite a coincidence, what?"

"Oh! Yes!"

"What about poolin' supplies, old tulip? The stuff's in my study."

"Oh!" said Peter.

"We'll toss up which of us fetches it, what?" asked Mauly. "Heads I win, tails you lose!"

"Not a bad idea!" Peter Todd gave the dandy of the Remove a searching

look, but read nothing in Lord Mauleverer's cheerful, good-natured face. Mauly was supposed, in the Remove, never to observe anything; and certainly his expression did not indicate that he had observed the depleted state of the cupboard in Study No. 7.

"Rather a good idea, I think," said Mauly. "Let's!"

"The fact is," confessed Peter, "that fat scoundrel, Bunter, has scoffed every dashed thing in the study—and it's a wash-out!"

"I thought I saw him movin' in rather a hurry, as I came along," assented Lord Mauleverer. "Lots of stuff in my

study, old chap! Look here! I'll tell you what—I'll help you carry it!"

And Lord Mauleverer, with an effort, hooked himself out of the armchair.

"But—I say—" stammered Peter.

"That's all right. Come on!"

"You're a sportsman, Mauly!"

"Yaas—come on!"

And Peter came on!

When the guests arrived in Study No. 7, a well-spread table greeted their eyes. They sat down to it, and were going strong, when a fat face and a large pair of spectacles blinked into the study.

"I say, you fellows—" began Bunter. "Bunter's late!" grinned Frank

Nugent. "Fancy Bunter being late for a spread!"

Bunter rolled in.

He eyed Peter Todd rather uneasily as he rolled.

But Peter did not stir.

It was hardly half an hour since Bunter had finished one feed. But he was ready for another! Bunter was always ready for a spread! In such matters his stowage capacity seemed unlimited. And he was quite regardless of the Plimsoll line in loading cargo.

"Make room for a chap!" said Bunter, still with an uneasy eye on Peter.

The juniors made room for a chap!
(Continued on next page.)



"Linesman's" store of Soccer knowledge is at the disposal of all "Magnetites." Address your queries to him, c/o The MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and then watch for his reply in this weekly feature.

TRANSFER FEES!

AT fairly regular intervals I get questions concerning the amount of the transfer fee paid for certain players. The figures on the cheque handed over for the services of a first-class player seem a matter of all-round interest. Readers of the MAGNET evidently share in the general curiosity.

I am asked by a Marlborough reader, for instance, to name a few players for whom really big transfer fees have been paid. While I am happy to oblige as far as possible, I want it to be quite clearly understood that any figures I give cannot be verified, and that there is no certainty that they are right to a pound.

You see, there is a definite agreement between the officials of the various clubs not to divulge the amount which is paid as transfer fee for any player. Indeed, there is a rule on the Football League books which says that such information must be kept secret.

Making use of such knowledge as I possess, however, I think it can safely and truthfully be said that David Jack, the Arsenal player, is the man concerned in the highest transfer fee ever paid. The amount was between ten thousand and eleven thousand pounds, and I know that I am very near the actual figure when I put it down as £10,350. Yet some of us remember the sensation which was caused when the first transfer fee of £1,000 was paid.

Perhaps some of my readers may not know that the David Jack transfer from Bolton Wanderers to Arsenal started as a sort of joke. The late Mr. Herbert Chapman, who was manager of Arsenal, asked one of the Bolton directors how much they would take for David Jack. "Oh, ten thousand guineas or so," said the Bolton director, laughing, and naming a figure which he thought would stop all the talk. But even at that figure Mr. Chapman insisted on talking business, and eventually the deal was put through.

It is said that Chelsea paid nearly £10,000 for Hughie Gallacher when they secured him from Newcastle, but I have reason to believe that such a figure was not reached in this case. Nine thousand

pounds was paid by Arsenal for Alex James, and about the next most expensive player was James Gibson, the Scottish International half-back for whom Aston Villa paid £7,500.

Somebody has told a reader friend that "Dixie" Dean cost Everton £6,000 when they got him from Tranmere Rovers, but this is not so. I believe the transfer fee for Dean was just about half that amount.

What is certain is that if at any time during the last few years Everton had been willing to transfer Dean they could have had even more than £10,000 for him.

But there is no reason for Everton to "raise the wind" in this way, and there would be no point in Dean moving from Everton to another club, as he could not get any higher wages, and the share of the transfer fee does not go up in proportion to the amount of that fee.

WHO WILL WIN THE CUP?

WILL you please give me your opinion as to the team which will win the Cup this season?

That is another query which I have received, and one which I am going to dodge. I could make a rough guess or two if I liked, but probably the teams I named would go out at the next round, and you wouldn't like me to look foolish, would you?

What does seem a fairly reliable thing to say is that the Cup will be won by a First Division side.

Only once since the War has a Second Division team come through successfully, West Bromwich doing the trick in 1931, the year they also gained promotion from the Second to the First Division, so they were nearly a First Division team then.

To answer another correspondent I may add that only once since League football was started has a team not in membership of either the First or Second Division won the trophy. The exception was Tottenham Hotspur. They were in the Southern League when, in 1901, they beat Sheffield United in a replayed final

tie at Bolton. No Third Division team as such, has ever won the Cup.

The letters to me come from many places, and I have one from Toronto enclosing a cutting from a Canadian newspaper concerning a footballer named William McManus who has returned to that country after having had a trial with Manchester United. The newspaper cutting suggests that McManus was not given a fair trial with the English club.

I cannot believe that all the facts are properly given by this newspaper, for it is a certainty that Manchester United would not have allowed a player whom they thought good enough for them to return to Canada without being offered suitable wages.

There are not so many good players to be found that any club can afford to let a possible go without a good trial. Consider how, in the frantic search for players, clubs in England are paying the fares of fellows to come all the way from South Africa for trials—and agreeing to pay their fares back if they don't make good in this country.

ONE of my readers who is obviously a student of the game, who goes to watch quite a lot of first-class matches, puts to me an interesting question. "I have been struck," he says, "by the small number of goals which are scored immediately following corner-kicks. Can you tell me why this is so? I always expect a goal when my team has a corner, but they never seem to fulfil my expectations."

It is a fact that hopes of spectators run high each time their favourites are awarded a corner-kick, and it is also a fact that these hopes are not often realised. I once knew a goalkeeper who, right through a football season, kept a tally of the number of corner-kicks both for and against his team, and what happened.

As the result of that "census" he found, at the end of the season, that the average of goals immediately following corner-kicks, was only one in thirty-three.

I doubt whether it would work out quite so small as that in all matches, but certainly corner-kicks do not produce many goals.

One reason for this is that the odds are on the defenders every time. They have only to get the ball away somewhere, anywhere. The attackers have to guide it through the comparatively small goal-space in order to score. Another reason is that players do not give sufficient attention to corner-kick tactics. The ball is just swung over, and there do not seem to be any deep-laid schemes for converting them. When space permits I will give one or two ideas which might be tried to bring up the average of goals from corner-kicks.

"LINESMAN."

Bunter pulled a chair to the table! He sat down! Then Peter Todd moved! He picked up a large juicy and sticky jam tart with one hand and grasped Bunter's jacket with the other.

"Squash!" "Gurrgh!" spluttered Bunter, as the juicy jam tart was plastered over his fat features. "Wurrgh! Urrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Yurrrrggggh!" Bunter's chair flew backwards, with a crash! He jumped away from the table, gurgling and spluttering.

"Ow! Urrgh! Beast! Gurrgh! Groogh! Hooogh! Ooogh!"

"Have another?" asked Peter, picking up another tart. "Hold on, Bunter! Here's another jam tart for you!"

Bunter did not hold on! He did not seem to want another tart! He made one bound out of Study No. 7, and the spread went on minus the fascinating company of William George Bunter.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Exit Bunter!

"ROTTER!" Billy Bunter made that remark a couple of days later. Bunter was wrathful.

He had every reason to be wrathful. At the moment he was seated in Smithy's leather armchair in Study No. 4 in the Remove.

It was the sound of footsteps approaching the door that caused Bunter to make the remark.

Since the little affair of the spread, Billy Bunter had found life in Study No. 7 hardly worth living. Peter Todd had undertaken to kick him every time he came into that study—and, so far, Peter was keeping his word! How many kicks Bunter had collected in a couple of days he hardly knew—but he knew they were numerous and very unpleasant.

Worse than that, if possible, was the shortage of grub. Peter and Tom Dutton had taken to "teasing" in Hall, and there was nothing in the study for Bunter. Only the arrival of his celebrated postal order could save Bunter from tea in Hall also—and that postal order, so long expected, did not reach

Greyfriars School. "Doorsteps and dishwater" was Bunter's description of tea in Hall. It did not suit him in the least!

In these disagreeable circumstances, Billy Bunter cast his eyes, and his spectacles, on Study No. 4 again. The Bounder was still absent—and Tom Redwing had the study to himself. Certainly Redwing had not made Bunter welcome there—but Bunter did not really require a warm welcome—so long as he was not kicked out he would be satisfied. So here he was, once more in possession, "trying it on" again.

But as he heard Redwing coming, doubts smote the fat Owl of the Remove. He rose from the armchair.

"Rotter!" murmured Bunter. "Beast! Low cad! I've a jolly good mind to punch his cheeky head, and jolly well show him that I won't stand any of his dashed impudence! But—"

But Billy Bunter decided, for reasons that were doubtless good, not to punch Redwing's cheeky head! Instead of that, he backed behind the armchair as a hand touched the door-handle outside, and ducked out of sight. The next moment Tom Redwing came in.

Harry Wharton followed him in. They were talking as they entered, and Bunter heard the voice of the captain of the Remove.

"We can't scratch matches, Redwing! We're playing the Fourth to-morrow, and we've lost two men—Smithy and poor old Bob! There's a place for you in the Remove team."

"I'd like to play, of course," said Tom. "But—"

"Look here, Reddy," said Harry Wharton directly. "I know how you feel about Smithy, though you're the only fellow who fancies that he's landed in any harm. Do you think we don't feel the same about Bob? But it's no use hanging about moping—that won't do anybody any good. If there was anything a fellow could do, it would be different—"

"I think there is something I can do," said Tom. "At least, I can try. It was Mauleverer's idea to go and see that man Kranz—and though he wasn't able to tell us anything new, it was clear from what he said that Smithy believed he had a chance of finding Bob when he left here. I'm more convinced than ever that he has fallen into some harm—"

"Well, what can you do, even if you think so?"

"What I told Kranz I should do—keep on hunting for him," said Tom. "If it's as I believe, Smithy can't be far away—they've got him, and Bob, hidden in this part of the country. There's lots of lonely places about here—up on the Pike, for instance. Nobody ever goes there in the winter. I know it's rather like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay—but it's better than doing nothing."

"If there was anything in it—"

said Harry. "Well, I believe there is—"

"You mean, you hope there is!" said the captain of the Remove.

"Well, I dare say it comes to that! But I believe so, too, and I think I've got something to go on," said Tom. "I've spent all the time I could get out of gates since I saw Kranz, in rooting about the country. Well, once or twice it's seemed to me that I've been followed."

Harry Wharton stared. "Followed!" he repeated.

"I'm not sure of it," said Tom. "Two or three times I've sighted somebody that seemed to be following me—keeping me under watch! Of course, it may be fancy—"

"I should jolly well say it was! Even if the kidnapper is about these parts still, how could he know anything about you? He can't even know that you were Smithy's pal, and certainly he couldn't guess that you had any idea of hunting for the chap."

"I—I suppose not! Still—"

"It's just fancy! You're letting this get on your nerves, Reddy! You'd better play football to-morrow," said the captain of the Remove. "Look here, shall I put your name down?"

Redwing shook his head. "No—I'm going up the Pike to-morrow afternoon—it's the loneliest place hereabouts, and I'm going to search there."

"Well, I think you're rather an ass!" said Harry, with a touch of impatience. "But just as you like."

And the captain of the Remove left the study.

Redwing threw himself into the armchair. He had been for a long tramp since class, and he was tired. As he dropped into the chair, it slid back on its castors a little, and there was a sudden squeak from behind it.

"Ow!" "What the thump—" exclaimed Redwing, jumping up.

"You silly ass!" gasped Billy Bunter. "Banging the back of a chair on a fellow's nose—wow!"

Redwing stared at the Owl of the Remove as he rose into view, rubbing his fat little nose.

"You silly ass!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here? Get out!"

"Oh, really, Redwing—"

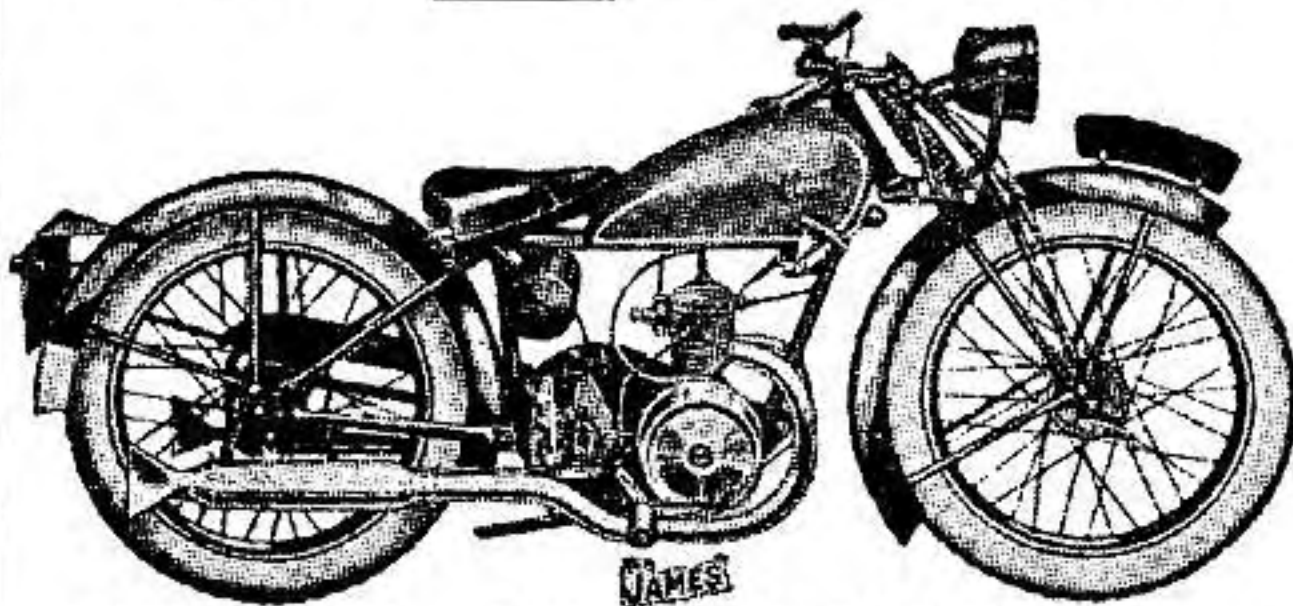
"Travel!" snapped Tom. He was in no mood for the antics of the fat Owl. "Look here, old chap," said Bunter persuasively. "You're frightfully bad-tempered lately. You're nery! You oughtn't to be alone in this study! What you want is company—"

"For goodness' sake, get out!"

"Bright and cheerful company!" continued Bunter. "Pleasant and agreeable company, you know! Mine, for instance."

Redwing pointed to the door. "The fact is, I'm done with Toddy, and I'm coming in here," said Bunter. "I'm fed-up with that beast Toddy! Look here, old chap, I'll tell you what—I'll come with you to-morrow to look for Smithy. If there's any danger, you know, I'll be there to protect you."

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Billy Bunter, peering over the edge of the bank, gazed with amazement and terror at Redwing struggling wildly in the grasp of two pairs of sinewy hands. After gagging Redwing and tying his hands together, one of the men produced a sack which he slipped over the schoolboy's head. "Oh, lor'!" breathed Bunter.

Tom crossed to the door and threw it wide open.

"Hop it!" he said.

"Look here——"

"Are you waiting for me to kick you?" demanded Redwing impatiently.

"Beast!"

Tom Redwing lifted his foot. But he dropped it again. He was worried and troubled, and not so patient as usual, but he tried to control his impatience with the fat and fatuous Owl. Any other Remove man would have booted out the intruder without ceremony; but Redwing preferred, if he could, to get rid of him without the application of boot-leather.

"Look here, Bunter, buzz off!" he said. "I'm rather bothered at present."

"I shouldn't bother about Smithy," said Bunter cheerfully. "Smithy's all right—having a jolly old time, I expect! If he knew you were bothering about him he'd laugh."

Redwing's eyes glinted. There was a bare possibility of truth in Bunter's cheery suggestion that was far from pleasing.

"Blessed if I know why you miss the chap," went on Bunter. "He was rather a beast! Look how he kicked me that time he fancied I was after his tarts!"

"You fat chump!"

"Oh, really, Redwing! The fact is, if you miss Smithy it's because you've got nobody in the study. You won't miss him if I'm here, old fellow! Dash it all, it will be rather an improvement, won't it?" demanded Bunter warmly. "I suppose I'm rather better company than Smithy!"

"Hook it, for goodness' sake."

"If that's how you thank a chap for taking pity on you, Redwing——"

"Look here, Bunter, do go!" urged Redwing.

"Shan't!" said Bunter.

A soft answer is said to turn away wrath. But it did not answer with Billy

Bunter. Bunter understood a boot! But if a fellow tried to persuade him instead, that, to Bunter's mind, was a sign of irresolution. Which, of course, had the effect of making the fat Owl obstinate.

"Shan't!" he repeated defiantly. Having the impression that Tom Redwing was undecided about kicking him out, Bunter was the fellow to pursue his supposed advantage. "If you think you're going to keep this study to yourself, Redwing, you're jolly well mistaken, see? I've said I'm coming in here, and I mean it! If you don't like it you can lump it, so there!"

"You silly ass——"

"That's enough," said Bunter, with a wave of a fat hand. "Just shut up! I can see it's no good being civil to a fellow of your class! Well, shut up, or I'll punch your head."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Redwing.

"I mean that, too!" said Bunter. "I don't want any of your cheek. If you want me to knock you across the study, I'm the man to do it. So yah!"

Billy Bunter had already considered the advisability of punching Redwing's cheeky head. He had given up the idea. Now he revived it. Really it was the method he preferred, if only he could get away with it! It seemed to his fat and obtuse mind now that he could! So he made a step towards Tom Redwing, and brandished a fat fist under his nose.

Redwing started back.

That was enough for Bunter—more than enough! Bunter only needed to see an adversary in retreat to inspire him with boundless courage.

He followed Redwing up, brandishing both fat fists at him.

"No more of it!" he said scornfully. "I'd whop you as soon as look at you, Redwing! Sooner, in fact! If you want a quiet life in this study you'd better mind your p's and q's, see? The

sooner you get that into your head, the better."

"Are you going?" gasped Redwing.

"No!" roared Bunter. "I'm not!"

"I fancy you are!" said Tom. And he made a jump at the Owl of the Remove, his patience was exhausted.

Billy Bunter hit out, with both fat fists. He intended them to land together on Redwing and knock him spinning across the study! That, in Bunter's opinion, was what the fellow wanted, to teach him manners.

But neither fat fist, as it happened, somehow, hit Redwing at all! They seemed to be brushed away like flies.

Then there was a grip on Bunter's collar and he was swung round to the door! His fat brain swam as he spun.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Ow! Leggo, you beast! I mean, leggo, old chap! I—I was only jug-jug-jug-joking—yaroooooh!"

Redwing's foot landed with a thud on Bunter's tight trousers. Bunter landed with another thud on the hard, unsympathetic floor of the Remove passage.

The door of Study No. 4 slammed.

Bunter sat up.

"Ooooooogh!" he gasped.

"My esteemed Bunter!" Hurree Janset Ram Singh came along the passage. "Are you taking an absurd rest on the ridiculous floor?"

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. He scrambled up. "I—I say, Inky, I—I've had a row with that cad Redwing! He—he called you a black nigger, old chap!"

"Oh, my esteemed hat!" ejaculated the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"I say, old chap. I'd jolly well kick a chap for calling me a black nigger, if I were you!" gasped Bunter.

"I shall immediately proceed to do so, my esteemed and idiotic Bunter!" answered Hurree Janset Ram Singh cheerfully.

His foot shot out.
 "Yarooooop!" roared Bunter.
 The dusky junior walked on, grinning, and Billy Bunter was left to roar.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Has a Bird's-eye View!

HARRY WHARTON & CO., the following afternoon, were devoting their attention to football with the Fourth.

It was a fine, frosty day, bright and clear on the Greyfriars football field. On the summit of the Pike, two or three miles from the school, the mist from the sea hung in clouds, and in the rugged slopes, and in the ravines and fissures, the snow remained thick and unmelted.

In winter-time few feet trod the solitary path up the misty Peak, and any fellow at Greyfriars would have said that Billy Bunter was the last fellow in the world to undertake such a trip! But, strange to relate, while the Removites were urging the flying ball, and Redwing was staying to watch the kick-off before he started out, a fat figure was labouring up a steep path on the Pike, with many grunts and gasps.

The path was steep and grew steeper. It was lonely, and grew lonelier. A dozen times, at least, Billy Bunter was tempted to turn back. But with unaccustomed resolution, Bunter plugged on.

Bunter was on the war-path! The worm will turn! When Redwing came up that path, after Bunter, he was going to meet with a surprise.

The fat Owl had been over the Pike before, in the summer, and knew his way about. He did not intend to climb to the summit, which was an ascent far beyond the powers of his fat little legs. At a certain spot, half-way up the steep Pike, a rocky bank overhung the path.

On that bank the fat junior halted and gasped for breath. He puffed and

blew for a good five minutes. Billy Bunter was rather short of wind at the best of times. That steep climb had exhausted what he had. He sat on a boulder and gasped and gasped.

But he pulled himself together at last. He had started long before Redwing—but the sailorman's son was certain to cover the ground much more quickly. He might appear on the path below any minute. Having renewed his supply of wind, Billy Bunter proceeded to make his preparations for the arrival of Tom Redwing.

There was thick snow on the bank, and the fat Owl kneaded snowball after snowball, till he had quite a large heap.

Then, keeping in cover of a jutting boulder, he watched the path below through his big spectacles, waiting for Redwing to appear.

Redwing was sure to come that way, as there was no choice in the matter; and when he came the vengeful Owl was going to give him what, in Bunter's opinion, he had been asking for!

Certainly, Bunter would have preferred to thrash the fellow, as he so richly deserved. But there were difficulties in the way of that. It was improbable that Redwing would have got the thrashing.

But this was a sure thing! Bunter grinned at the idea of pelting the cheeky rotter with snowballs, on the steep path and sending him rolling down. Redwing would not even see him at it—which was a rather important consideration, in view of the possibility of a kicking later. Now that he was safely landed in his coign of vantage, the fat Owl was glad that he had made the exertion.

With a grinning face, he watched the path that wound at the bottom of the steep, overhanging bank.

There was a sound of footsteps at last.

"Beast!" murmured Bunter, and he grasped a snowball in either fat hand in readiness.

A Greyfriars cap appeared below.

Redwing was coming—tramping steadily up the steep path. Billy Bunter watched him through his big spectacles, waiting for him to draw within easy range. He barely suppressed a fat chuckle at the idea of Redwing rolling headlong down, when he got the first snowball in his face.

Suddenly Tom Redwing stopped.

Bunter gave an impatient grunt.

Tom was standing out of effective snowball range, looking back down the winding, steep path by which he had come.

Bunter waited for him to advance again, but he remained standing still, and the fat junior wondered what he was looking back for.

Then a sound of clambering footsteps came to his fat ears, and he realised that Redwing was not alone on the path. Someone else was following him up, and was drawing nearer.

Bunter gave a snort.

He felt that this was just his luck! Not once in a blue moon did anyone come up the Pike in winter. Redwing would not have been there, but for his idea of searching for Smithy. Bunter would not have been there, had not Redwing been there. Yet, evidently, there was someone else on that lonely path—in fact, more than one, for two figures came suddenly into sight round a bulging rock. Bunter guessed now that Redwing had heard the footsteps, and waited to see who was coming. As he did not stir, apparently he intended to wait where he was till they had passed him on the way up.

Bunter, watching from the high bank twenty feet over the path, saw them slow down at the sight of the waiting junior.

He blinked at them rather curiously.

He could see little more than two slouched hats, but he discerned that both men were heavily bearded and muffled up against the cold.

They reached the spot where Redwing stood.

He stepped to the side of the narrow path to give them room to pass, his back to the wall of rock, on the top of which Bunter was ensconced.

But the two men did not pass.

Redwing stood facing them, his heart beating a little faster. Yet he told himself that these men could have no concern with him—two strangers who, on their looks, he had never seen before.

But it was sharply in his mind that several times of late, when he had left the school, he had had an impression of being followed. And it was unusual, at least, for anyone to be tramping the lonely path over the Pike in winter. It led only to the summit, whence there was a glorious view in summer, but only clinging mists to be seen in February.

They had slowed down, more and more, as they came—and as Redwing did not stir, they stopped and turned and faced him.

"Going farther up, sir?" asked one of them, a short, thick-set man, whose face was almost hidden between his slouched hat and his beard.

"Not at the moment!" answered Redwing.

The next moment he gave a sharp cry, as the two men leaped on him together. His half-formed suspicion had put him on his guard, and he struck out, his knuckles landing hard on the bearded chin of the thick-set man. The next moment he was down



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on the rocks, struggling wildly in the grasp of two pairs of sinewy hands.

Billy Bunter, on the bank above, wondered whether he was dreaming.

Obviously, the two rascals did not suspect his presence there, any more than Tom Redwing did. He leaned over the edge of the bank, gazing down in amazement and terror.

What it all meant was a mystery to Bunter.

The struggle on the path below was brief. Tom Redwing was strong and sturdy and plucky, but he had not the ghost of a chance against two grown men.

He was down on his back, a handkerchief was stuffed into his mouth, and hands were dragged together and tied. Then, from under his overcoat, one of the men produced a folded sack, which he rapidly unrolled, and slipped over the schoolboy's head.

"Oh lor'!" breathed Bunter.

He watched from above, with his eyes almost starting through his spectacles. It did not even cross his fat mind to attempt to help. Certainly, the fat Owl would have been of little use in such a struggle. Neither could he have reached the spot without going a good distance round to get back to the path. Below, where he crouched, the wall of rock dropped almost sheer for twenty feet. Bunter could not have helped had he thought of it. And he did not think of it! He could only watch, petrified with amazement and terror.

Neither of the kidnappers uttered a word. One of them held the schoolboy, who was still attempting to struggle, while the other ran his hands through his pockets.

But it did not seem that robbery was his object. Money was taken from one pocket, but it was put back again. A couple of old letters were taken from another, and the man scrutinised them both carefully, gave a grunt of dissatisfaction, and replaced them.

Then he uttered an exclamation as a small pocket volume of Keats came to light. He seemed fairly to pounce on it, much to the wonder of the watching Owl.

Bunter watched him open it at the title-page, where Tom Redwing's name was written in it. Then he spoke in tones of satisfaction.

"This will do—his name's written here."

He slipped the little volume into his pocket. Unless what he wanted was a specimen of Tom Redwing's handwriting, Bunter could not imagine what his object was. But if that was what he wanted, it was deeply mysterious to Billy Bunter.

"All serene, then!" muttered the other.

"Yes; get him away! You'll have to wait till dark. But get him off the path. I'll see to the rest."

"Right!"

The thick-set man, with Tom Redwing's little volume in his pocket, hurried away down the path and disappeared. The other dragged the kidnapped junior to his feet, and half-led, half-dragged, him away among the wild rocks of the Pike. They disappeared from Bunter's eyes above.

"Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter.

They were gone. There was silence on the lonely slopes of the Pike. But the fat Owl knew that the man in charge of Redwing was probably not far away. He was to wait "till dark." Wherever it was that he intended to take the kidnapped schoolboy, it could not be done till the fall of night cloaked his movements.

"Oh lor'!" groaned Bunter again.

His scheme of vengeance on Redwing was quite forgotten now. He would have helped him if he could. Evidently he could not. Gladly enough, the fat Owl would have scuttled down the Pike as fast as his little fat legs would have carried him. He dared not—not until the kidnapper was gone, and he was not going till dark. Unless he was going to risk falling into the hands of the rascal himself, Bunter had to stay where he was—till dark.

"Oh lor'!" he groaned.

He was sorry for Redwing. He was still sorrier for himself. Early as night-fall was in February, it was a long, long time to dark. And Billy Bunter had to wait till the coast was clear before he could venture to descend the path. When tea-time came the fat Owl almost resolved to chance it, but not quite.

He waited.

The longest summer afternoon had never seemed so long, so endless, to Billy Bunter as that short February afternoon. It seemed to drag its weary length along.

But darkness fell at last, and through the darkness Bunter heard a sound of footsteps on the lonely slopes of the Pike. Evidently the kidnapper and his prisoner were not far away. But they were going now, and Bunter, hungry and half-frozen, gasped with relief when they were gone. Not till long after every sound had died away did he venture to stir, and then, with many a grunt and groan, the fat Owl picked his way down the steep path, wishing from the bottom of his podgy heart that he had never ascended it.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Startling News!

"THIS 'ere Greyfriars?"

Harry Wharton smiled.

"This is Greyfriars," he answered.

The captain of the Remove was looking out of the school gates as the winter dusk fell. The football match was over, Cecil Reginald Temple & Co. of the Fourth comfortably beaten by a margin of four goals to one, in spite of the absence of such mighty men as Bob Cherry and the Boulder from the Remove ranks.

Wharton, remembering Redwing's expedition of the afternoon, had gone down to the gates to meet him as he came in. It was close on time for call-over now, but there was no sign of Tom Redwing on the road. But a rather tattered youth came along from the direction of Friardale, looking about him inquiringly, and stopped at the gates.

"Bloke 'ere of the name of Squelch?" he further inquired.

"Quelch!" said Harry.

"Might be Quelch," admitted the tattered youth. "Quelch or Squelch, one or t'other, the bloke says, what give me this 'ere note!"

"My Form-master's name is Quelch," said Harry. "If you have a note for him, I'll take you in."

"Orright!" said the youth.

And he followed the captain of the Remove in at the gates and across the quad to the House.

There was an envelope clutched in the lad's grubby hand. That, apparently, was the note that someone had entrusted to him for Mr. Quelch. Wharton tapped at the door of the Remove master's study.

"Come in!"

Wharton opened the door, and Mr. Quelch's gimlet eyes fixed in surprise on his grubby companion.

"Who—!" ejaculated the Remove master.

"This lad says that he has a note for you, sir," said Harry hastily.

"Oh, very well! You may come in, my boy," said Mr. Quelch kindly.

And the tattered lad came in.

"You Mr. Squelch?" he demanded.

"I am Mr. Quelch!" said the Remove master mildly.

"Bloke give me this 'ere note for you, sir! Give me 'arf-a-crown to bring it 'ere, sir! And 'ere it is!"

Mr. Quelch took the envelope, which was rather grubby from contact with the fingers of the messenger. The latter backed towards the door.

"One moment, my boy!" said Mr. Quelch. "There may be an answer."

"No, there ain't!" returned the cheerful youth. "Bloke says there won't be no answer, he says. Ow'd I see him again, if you come to that, when I met him on the road, and ain't never seed 'im before, and wouldn't know him ag'in except for his whiskers?"

And with that the messenger touched his cap and departed, leaving Mr. Quelch slitting open the letter. Harry Wharton was closing the study door after the lad had gone, when a sudden exclamation from Mr. Quelch startled him.

"Wharton, fetch that boy back at once!"

Harry glanced into the study again. Mr. Quelch was staring at the note he had taken from the grubby envelope, his face almost white with anger—more bitterly angry than Wharton had ever seen it, or dreamed of seeing it. It was clear that there was something very startling in that letter. Wharton ran down the passage at once, and caught the grubby messenger at the corner.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "Mr. Quelch wishes to speak to you!"

And he led the tattered one back to the Remove master's study. The lad looked a little uneasy at the sight of the thunder in the Form-master's brow. He could see that the letter had angered Mr. Quelch deeply, and he seemed rather inclined to bolt. But Wharton stepped behind him to cut off his retreat, with a faint grin on his face, and the lad blinked at him, and then blinked at Mr. Quelch again uneasily.

"Who gave you this note, boy?" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Bloke with whiskers, sir."

"His name?"

"Dunno, sir! Never seed him afore."

"It was not a boy of about the age of this boy?"

Mr. Quelch indicated Wharton with a gesture.

"Oh, no, sir! Bloke nearly as old as you, sir—fearful old!" said the youth.

"Lots of whiskers, sir."

"Did he tell you who gave him the note for delivery?"

"Schoolboy give it to 'im, he said, to take to this 'ere school for Mr. Squelch, sir. But he had to get back to his barge, he says; so he gave me the letter and the 'arf-a-crown to bring it here, sir. Where's the 'arm?"

"You did not see the boy who gave the bargeman this letter?"

"No, sir."

"Then you do not know where he went?"

"Dunno nothing about 'im, sir."

"Very well; you may go!"

And the grubby messenger went, rather glad to get away. Wharton once more was about to close the door and go when Mr. Quelch rapped at him.

"Wharton, have you seen Redwing?"

"Not for some hours, sir. He came

down to Little Side to see the football match start, and then went out."

Wharton was careful not to add particulars. He was aware of the Remove master's annoyance on the subject of Redwing's theory regarding the disappearance of the Bounder.

"He has not returned?"

"I—I think not, sir. I was at the gates waiting for him when that kid—that lad brought in the letter."

"Were you aware of his intentions when he left the school this afternoon?"

Mr. Quelch glared at his head boy as he snapped that question. Really, it almost seemed as if Mr. Quelch was prepared to turn his wrath upon the nearest person, so difficult was it to keep in a state of suppression.

Wharton coloured awkwardly.

"You may speak frankly!" snapped the Remove master. "The matter is serious, as Redwing appears to have run away from school!"

Wharton gave a jump.

"Run away from school—Redwing!"

"If you were aware——"

"Certainly not!" exclaimed Wharton warmly. "And I can't believe that he meant to do anything of the kind! He's not a reckless ass like Smithy! He's the last fellow in the world——"

"You know Redwing's handwriting, Wharton?"

"As well as I know my own, sir."

"Read that note!"

Mr. Quelch passed the note to his head boy. Harry Wharton's eyes fairly bulged as he read it. As he had said, he knew Tom Redwing's hand perfectly well, and this letter was written in that hand. It read:

"Mr. Quelch. Sir,—I am sorry, very sorry indeed, to cause you trouble, so I am letting you know at once that I am going away. I have heard from Vernon-Smith, and I have agreed to join him. I hope you will forgive me, sir, and the Head also. I should have asked leave to go, but I knew it would be refused. I had no choice.

"T. REDWING."

Harry Wharton read that letter once, twice, thrice. He understood now the bitter anger in his Form-master's face. His own feeling was one of utter amazement. Tom Redwing was, in his view, the last fellow at Greyfriars to act in a reckless and irresponsible manner; it was utterly unlike his chum, the Bounder, in almost every respect. With blank astonishment in his face, the captain of the Remove handed the letter back to Mr. Quelch, who was watching him very closely. Obviously the Remove master suspected that Redwing's friends in the Form might have known something of this scheme. But Wharton's look satisfied him that Wharton, at least, had known nothing of it.

"You were unaware of this, Wharton?"

"Quite, sir! I—I can hardly believe it now," said the amazed junior. "It's not like Redwing—not in the least. I—I suppose Smithy——" He broke off.

But the same thought was in Mr. Quelch's mind.

"This is due to Vernon-Smith's bad influence over the boy!" he exclaimed. "Of his own accord, Redwing would never have done this."

Wharton did not answer, but he could not help agreeing. He seemed to discern the hand of the Bounder in this reckless and unthinking act of a fellow generally thoughtful and steady as a rock.

"Redwing states that he has heard from Vernon-Smith!" pursued Mr. Quelch. "You knew nothing of that?"

"Nothing, sir! I knew he fancied

that Smithy had been kidnapped in looking for Bob——"

"That must have been a deception! How can he have fancied so when he clearly states that he has heard from him, and has joined him?"

"I—I can't understand it, sir! Redwing's not the fellow to tell lies—it's just impossible," said Wharton earnestly. "I—I suppose he means that he heard from Smithy this afternoon—perhaps he met him, sir, while he was out of gates. I'm absolutely certain that he went out hunting for him, thinking that he was kept shut up somewhere——"

"It is possible——"

"I'm sure of it, sir! I may as well tell you that he had an idea that Smithy was parked somewhere on the Pike, as that's the loneliest place in this part of the country, and there are caves on the summit. I know for a fact that he started for the Pike this afternoon, to hunt for Smithy."

"Then he must have met Vernon-Smith, and the young rascal persuaded him to share his own reckless fortunes by running away from school."

"That's what it looks like, sir."

"I must consult the Head at once."

Mr. Quelch rose. "The boy must be found and brought back to the school, though I have no doubt that he will be expelled for such an act. But as his father is away at sea——" Mr. Quelch broke off. "Wharton, you will make some inquiries among the Remove boys and ascertain whether any boy knows anything of Redwing's intentions or present whereabouts."

"Yes, sir!"

Harry Wharton left the study, still amazed. Mr. Quelch rustled away to consult Dr. Locke. It was one more trouble in that troubled term, and the Remove master was more bitterly angry with Redwing than even with the Bounder.

Mr. Prout took the roll in Hall at calling-over a little later. There was no answer when he called Redwing's name. Neither was there any answer to the name of Bunter. Nobody, however, bothered about the absence of the Owl of the Remove—but the name of Redwing was on every lip in the Remove. Wharton's inquiries in the Form did not elicit any information, but had the effect of spreading the news that Tom Redwing had run away from school, and joined the Bounder in some wild escapade. With an excitement like that on hand, the Remove fellows were not likely to bestow much thought on the circumstance that Billy Bunter had cut call-over, little dreaming what an unexpected light the fat Owl could have thrown on the matter.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Three in the Trap!

TOM REDWING stumbled along blindly, guided by an iron grip on his arm. His hands were tightly bound behind him, the gag was fastened in his mouth, and the sack over his head completely blindfolded him. He was cold, bitterly cold, but he gave hardly a thought to that.

For long hours he had remained in a cleft on the rugged slopes of the Pike with his unknown captor, waiting, as he knew, for darkness. Now he was in motion, and he knew that night must have fallen. But in what direction he was led he had not the faintest idea, once he had descended the side of the Pike.

Several times boughs rustled against him, and he knew that he was among trees. He had no doubt that the kidnapper, even under the cloak of the

winter night, was leading him by the most deserted and secluded ways. Even on a lonely countryside, and at night, it was no easy matter to get him away unseen, and the man was evidently neglecting no precaution.

Again and again they stopped in some thicket, or clump of trees, and waited. Then they went on again. Blind to his surroundings, the kidnapped junior could not guess the direction. All he knew was that they were no longer on the slopes of the Pike.

His thoughts were black and bitter. Somehow—he could not begin to guess how—the kidnappers had learned that he was in search of his missing chum, and had determined to put him out of harm's way. That much was clear. How they could have made the discovery he could not imagine; he had told no one outside Greyfriars excepting Mr. Kranz, and no Greyfriars fellow would have been likely to talk on the subject outside the school. But it was clear that they knew; that he had been watched and followed, as he had half-suspected, on his excursions out of gates, and that they had taken this opportunity, on the lonely Pike, of securing him. Now he was being taken—where?

He felt stone flags under his feet. He heard the sound of a heavy stone rolled aside. He wondered whether he had been led to the ruined priory in Friar-dale Wood. He was forced into an opening, and he counted the stone steps as he descended. Ten steps—the same number under the old priory! He guessed now where he was!

The stone thudded into place overhead, and he was led along. The man was taking him through the vaults under the priory, in the direction of the underground tunnel that led to Greyfriars School.

He was sure of it, but it bewildered him. Surely it was impossible that he was to be imprisoned in the vaults under the school itself! It was true that the vaults were seldom or never visited, but surely——

Anyhow, that was his destination, and he knew it now. With the hard grip still on his arm, he tramped along the narrow subterranean passage—silent, helpless, but his thoughts racing.

It was in the school vaults that Harry Wharton & Co. had glimpsed the kidnapper the day they went down after Bunter. Evidently the rascals knew their way about the place. All over the kingdom, the police were on the alert for the kidnapped son of Major Cherry. Nobody had dreamed for a moment of looking in Greyfriars School itself. Except—it flashed into Redwing's mind now—except the Bounder! That was what had been in the Bounder's mind—he guessed it now.

But too late—too late! The unknown scoundrels were wary; Smithy had fallen into their hands in seeking Bob Cherry, and now he had fallen into their clutches, seeking Smithy! In his hunt for his lost chum, sooner or later, it was likely enough he would have thought of the truth—and they had foreseen it, and given him no chance. Now——

There was a whir of a moving stone. A sudden shove sent him spinning forward, and there was a thud of a closing stone behind him.

He heard a shout of astonishment. There was a glimmering of light through the sack over his face.

Hands touched him, the sack was dragged away. Blinking in the sudden light, Redwing staggered to his feet.

Two startled faces were staring at him—faces he knew! Over his head



As Redwing was sent spinning forward, he heard a shout of astonishment. Then hands touched him, and the sack was dragged from off his head. Blinking in the sudden light, Redwing staggered to his feet to see two startled faces staring at him—faces he knew! "Reddy!" panted the Bounder. "Redwing, old chap!" gasped Bob Cherry.

was the arched roof of a vault; round him the solid stone walls.

"Reddy!" panted the Bounder.

"Redwing, old chap!" gasped Bob Cherry.

Smithy dragged the gag away; Bob groped at the knots on Redwing's wrists. In a few moments he was free.

"Smithy!" he gasped. "Smithy, old man, I—I've found you!"

"Were you looking for me?" asked the Bounder grimly.

"Yes!" gasped Redwing.

"And I was looking for Cherry, and I found him—here!" said Vernon-Smith, shrugging his shoulders. "You've had the same rotten luck, old bean."

Tom rubbed his numbed wrists.

"Rough luck, old chap!" said Bob. "Three of us in the soup now, and no chance for any of us."

"I—I'm glad I've found you, Smithy!"

"Thanks!" said the Bounder. "I'd rather I'd found you, old bean! Still, I'm glad to see your old chivvy." He laughed. "What do they think has become of me, at Greyfriars?"

"They think you've cleared off, old fellow."

"They would!" said the Bounder, with a curl of the lip. "If they look for me, it will be anywhere except where I'm to be found. But how did you know—"

"I didn't! I was hunting for you on the Pike, and they got me there!" said Tom. "Do you fellows know where you are? Under Greyfriars itself—"

"Oh, we knew that! Only about thirty feet from dear old Quelch!" said the Bounder. "My hat! I'd like to see even Quelch's face again."

"I'd like to see even Bunter!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Under Greyfriars!" repeated Tom. "The cunning rascals! Who could ever suspect—"

"Nobody!" said Bob. "Blessed if I know how they knew anything about

this secret vault, either! Nobody at Greyfriars knows anything about it that I've ever heard of. We're here till they choose to let us out. Awfully sorry that you've dropped into it, too, Reddy."

Redwing smiled.

"That's all right—I'm glad I did," he answered. "There's three of us now! Two heads are better than one—and three are better than two! We shall get out of this!"

Bob Cherry shook his head. Weeks of imprisonment in the hidden vault had washed out his hope of escape. But the Bounder's eyes gleamed.

"We tried tackling them once, and got knocked out," he said. "But there's three of us now—and we're going to try again. Next time the rotters barge in we'll—"

"I'm game!" said Bob.

"Same here!" said Redwing.

He glanced at the little trestle table, which was set for tea. Bob gave him a cheery grin.

"They're feeding us," he said, "though the grub's been a bit shorter since we tackled them—they don't come so often. But we're jolly glad to have a visitor to tea, ain't we, Smithy?"

"What-ho!"

And the three juniors sat down to the meal, in the silent, hidden vault, thirty feet below the crowded school, from which not a sound could reach them in their deep imprisonment.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

What Bunter Knew!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Bunter!"

"Rotten luck!" remarked Skinner. "We were just beginning to think that you were lost for good, old fat porpoise."

"Beast!" groaned Bunter.

The fat Owl of the Remove tottered in. It was after prep; Bunter had cut

prep as well as call-over. By that time, a good many fellows had begun to wonder what had become of him. Redwing, and the fact that he had run away from school to join Smithy, was the great topic, but Billy Bunter's prolonged absence was very unusual. Here he was at last, tired and muddy, and looking as if he was at the end of his tether—as, indeed, he was.

"You're for it, old fat man," said Peter Todd. "Quelch wants you in his study! What the dickens have you played the goat for?"

"Is—is—is he waxy?" gasped Bunter.

"Just a few, and then some!" grinned Fisher T. Fish.

"The waxfulness is preposterously terrific, my esteemed Bunter," remarked Hurrer Janset Ram Singh.

"Oh lor'! I say, Peter, is there any supper in the study?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm frightfully hungry! I haven't had any tea!" groaned Bunter. "I say, you fellows, I'm perishing of hunger! I lost my way a dozen times coming down the Pike—oh dear!"

"You've been up the Pike?" exclaimed half a dozen voices.

"Oh dear! Yes! I wish I hadn't! Ow! I'm tired! I say, you fellows, I feel as if my legs were dropping off! Oh lor'!"

"What on earth have you been up the Pike for?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Oh dear! I was going to ambush that beast Redwing, and snowball him—oh, lor'—I wish I hadn't! It's all his fault for making a fuss about the study! I shall jolly well bag the study if he doesn't come back, anyhow," added Bunter.

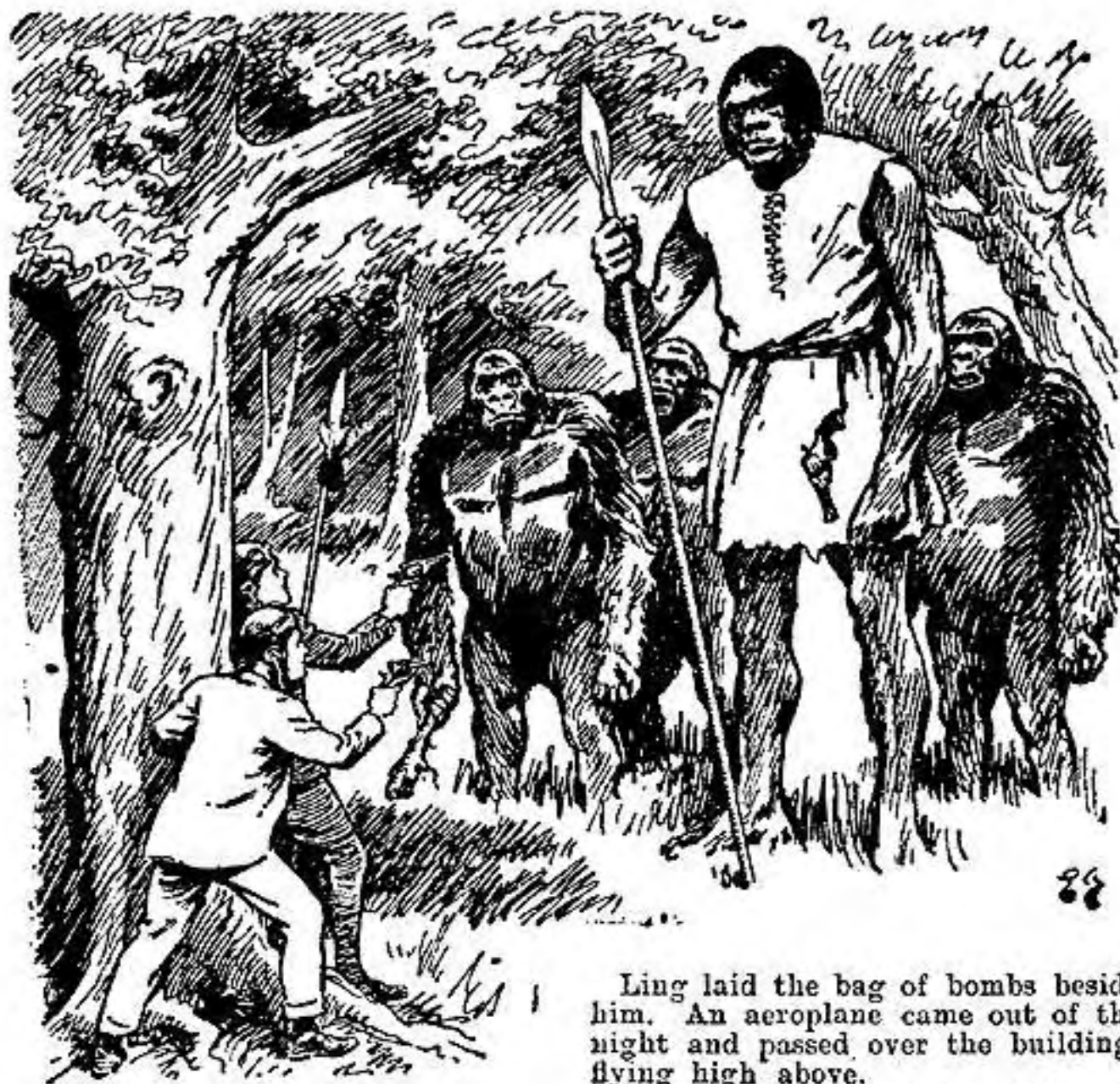
"He won't be back in a hurry, if he's started out to see the jolly old world with Smithy!" grinned Skinner.

"I don't believe he's gone off anywhere with Smithy!" remarked Lord Mauleverer. "He's no such ass."

(Continued on page 28.)

WHEN the GREAT APES CAME!

BY STUART MARTIN



HOW THE STORY STARTED.

GERRY LAMBERT and BILLY MURCHIE, two young airmen, are brought down in the African jungle by an army of apes—led by Big Ling, a giant ape-man—reared to crush civilisation by a renegade called Stein. Gerry escapes, but Billy is forced to lead an expedition to England, which spreads devastation in all directions. Gerry and Billy, in company with Commander Walsh of the R.A.F., prove of great assistance to the British forces, who bomb the enemy with gas shells. Stein retaliates by trying to destroy the civilian population, only to be burnt to death by his own chemicals. Big Ling then selects a gorilla known as the Watcher to accompany him to the top of St. Paul's, with a view to bombing the city.

(Now read on.)

A Battle of Giants!

UP the pillars climbed Big Ling and the Watcher, like monkeys going up a palm-tree. They reached the coping-stone above the pillars and hauled themselves higher still. The pigeons roosting in the stonework flew away in clouds at their approach.

Barely had they hauled themselves above the massive entrance when from Ludgate Hill came the sound of approaching cavalry and a battalion of troops.

The building was surrounded.

Ling continued to climb, however, exultingly calling on the Watcher to follow. They reached the parapet that surrounds the whispering gallery and dropped over. There was plenty of room to stand there, but Ling was not content. He tied his cable to the turret securely and left it there.

Higher he climbed. They reached the base of the dome, and there they rested.

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Ling laid the bag of bombs beside him. An aeroplane came out of the night and passed over the building, flying high above.

"What now, Ling?" asked the Watcher.

"We'll have our talk here," said Ling. "But, first, let me deliver these."

He stood up, and, swinging a powerful arm, flung the bombs far and wide. One landed on the Mansion House, another on the Bank of England, while a third exploded in the Strand opposite the Law Courts. The other bomb he dropped on the troops below.

The bombs were filled with gas, and did great execution, but Ling did not pay much attention to the fact. He seemed to have something else on his mind. When he had thrown his last bomb, he turned and ordered the Watcher to jump.

The Watcher sat still, however, watching the monster beside him, his eyes narrowed, his brows lowered.

"I am giving you a spectacular death, Watcher," said Ling. "Are you not a prince?"

Still the Watcher did not answer.

"You are the traitor, Watcher!" taunted Ling. "It was your hand that stole the tube from me while I fought the gorilla. It was you who spoke words of mutiny to Tree Climber. It was you who have called me by the name of Ling this night, instead of by the name of King."

"That is true," said the Watcher.

"You admit it?"

"Why not? My name is Watcher. I have watched."

"And what have you seen?"

"Listen to me," said the Watcher gravely. "I have seen much. The Master was but a man mad with the lust for power and killing. He

promised us an easy victory over the world. But has the victory been easy? Ling, I have a better plan than all this killing which must end in our death."

"What is your plan?"

"It is this. Let us go back to the jungle where we belong. We know the jungle. We are strangers here. We cannot win this fight. These people are filled with magic. Their guns are greater than ours. They will conquer, even if it takes them time to do it."

"And if we go back to the jungle?"

"We can live our lives there in peace. We can have our own territories."

"You are afraid, Watcher; afraid of fighting."

"Ling, you know that is not true."

"Are you afraid of death, then?"

"Again that is not true."

"Then jump to your death. I am your king. I tell you to jump."

"Will you jump with me, Ling?"

"I am king. I have stolen the world from men—"

"You have stolen the lives of thousands."

Ling rose to his feet, balancing himself on the edge of the stonework, and seized the Watcher in a terrible grip.

"I will throw you down!" he said savagely.

"Not even a king could do that and live," said the Watcher, as he grappled.

The troops down below saw the two mighty figures rise to view. A searchlight from far up the Strand had been playing on the base of the cathedral and now rose until it showed the two on the edge of the parapet.

It was a fight of giants.

Ling was twenty-five feet high, and the Watcher fifteen; but the difference did not mean so much in that engagement. Both knew it was a fight to the death, and all the savagery of the jungle was let loose in the combat.

Not a shot came from the troops, for although a shell could have ended the struggle, it was the intentions of the authorities to do no damage to the building. They knew that only two ape-men had climbed that stonework, and as the combatants swayed, they did not present themselves as easy targets.

Only when they reached the edge of the parapet did their great bodies appear, and then they swayed back to the dimness again.

Used to dizzy heights—used to the forest and the trees—these two had the footing of gorillas as well as the brains of men. Their feet held where a human hand would not have gripped.

Ling had thought that he would have an easy victory, but he found that the Watcher knew as many tricks as he himself knew, and there

was the additional fact that the Watcher was fighting for his life. They snarled and bit and tore, forcing each other towards the brink of the precipice, and then staggering back to safety.

Ling, however, was the stronger animal. His great arms threatened to squeeze the life out of the Watcher; but always the Watcher was able to escape the grip and hit back.

The end came at last. Ling had the Watcher on his back, forcing his head downward over the stone ledge. He was seeking to break the Watcher's neck. He put all his strength into the strain. The Watcher's head fell suddenly against the ledge. Ling heaved his body over. The Watcher slid downward; but, as he slid, his right foot went up, his toes curled round Ling's wrist. It was the gorilla grip.

It forced Ling to his knees; it forced him half over the ledge. And then the Watcher's other foot came up in a mighty swing and struck Ling full in the face. The blow knocked Ling's head backward with a knock-out force. He was dazed, but his hand smashed at the ankle of the Watcher's right foot. The bone snapped under that stroke.

The Watcher slid over the parapet, and his body struck the stonework and bounded into the air. Like a stone from a sling, it shot forward towards the turret above the clock-tower. It landed on the tower; and there it hung.

But only for a moment. Gradually, the Watcher began to move. His arms, used to gripping trees, had automatically gripped the curving masonry. He slid down towards the clock as Ling launched one of his bombs at him.

The bomb struck the stone and sent up a cloud of gas. The Watcher's body remained still and inert.

Ling's battle cry rang out triumphantly. For a second he stood erect yelling defiance to the city and the world. And then he disappeared.

Where had he gone? Had he sunk down in death?

No. He was seen again crawling round to the dark side of the dome. A moment later, and he leapt out into space.

Down he came in a wide swing, his hands holding to the severed telephone cable. Before the troops were aware of his intention, Ling was on the upward grade. He had prepared the cable for this use to swing himself across the street, as lianas are used in the jungle.

He landed on the roofs on the south side and was lost to view.

The ship had been captured as Ling had ordered. The method had been followed according to orders. The vessel had not been disturbed when she was loading, but after the workers had gone, and all was in readiness, she was swung round by her officers preparatory to moving downstream.

She had already gathered way when a barge was propelled from the side of the river. It was followed by others. The first barge was beside the ship's bows, and ape-men were leaping to the rail before the skipper

realised that his vessel was being boarded.

A tall figure covered him with a gun and commanded him to remain on the bridge. The companionways were closed by others. The engineers below never knew of what was happening on deck.

The ship continued to move down the river, and soon her deck was crowded by apes who had come from the other barges. Other craft floated behind in a long string.

A River Police boat, chugging upstream, was brought alongside by her officers, attracted by the unusual sight.

"Ahoy, there!" cried one of the officers.

The next moment a dozen gorillas

OTHERS ARE WINNING USEFUL PRIZES—WHY NOT YOU?

The following laughable story was sent in by V. Baxendale, of 1, Vincent Street, Openshaw, Manchester, who has been awarded a useful pocket knife.



A NICE WAY OF PUTTING IT!

Tommy: "I say, Johnny, is it easy to skate?"
Johnny: "Oh, you soon tumble to it!"

leaped into the boat, headed by an ape-man. One by one the officers were seized and hurled overboard. Then the vessel continued on her way.

After passing the Tower, where the gaunt ruins lifted high above the river, the ape-man who stood beside the skipper turned his head. A boat was coming downstream, propelled by oars. The ape-man saw it moving amid the corkscrews of lights on the river.

Gradually the boat overhauled the steamer, and a voice shouted. It was the voice of Big Ling.

A rope was thrown, and Big Ling clambered aboard and walked up to the bridge. The skipper was alarmed at the sight of the huge monster, but he was forced to remain at his post.

"You have done well," said Ling to the ape-man.

"Where is the Watcher, King?"

"There is no Watcher."

"Dead?" queried the ape-man.

Ling did not answer. He was gazing fore and aft. He had arranged his escape well, and it had worked; and now he would begin the next step in his campaign from another angle.

A dark shadow crossed the racing clouds.

Ling looked up, and discerned an aeroplane circling above the vessel.

Immediately he gave orders to the skipper to put on speed. The man altered the telegraph to full speed, and the ship throbbed with the new force. She sent up a wash that dashed against the banks of the river. But always that aeroplane kept hovering above them.

Down to the wider stretch of the river the ship raced. The houses became fainter in the night; there was more freshness in the air. The sky became touched with dawn.

Gravesend was passed, then Thames-haven. Canvey Island showed up on the left. The estuary was facing them. The dawn broke, and out of the sky swooped the aeroplane.

It came down in a long dive, skimmed over the masts, and then zoomed upward again.

Ling watched it rise, but his face was set and grim.

The skipper turned to him.

"I have finished," he said. "I will navigate no more."

The man's face was white and drawn. He knew he was facing death.

Ling caught him by the neck, and without saying a word threw him overboard.

The ape-man took the wheel.

Down came the plane again, this time settling on the water. The skipper was hauled aboard, and the plane rose and swept up into the sky again.

Once more it dived, and this time a parcel was dropped on the deck of the steamer as the plane passed overhead. The parcel was handed to Ling, who opened it. Inside was a message written on a sheet of paper:

"To Big Ling, the gorilla.

"Surrender, or you will be sunk.—Your pursuers, Billy and Gerry."

The ultimatum seemed to infuriate Ling beyond measure. He raised his club and howled defiance at the plane. That howl and attitude were the rage of the jungle. The next message to Ling was more definite, however.

Down came the plane again. It dived to the level of the ship's deck. A machine-gun rattled, and a stream of lead tore through the crowded decks.

Down went the steersman, and down went scores of gorillas. Ling caught the wheel as the ship lost her course; but the plane had zoomed upward for another dive. It came down again, and once more the machine-gun rattled.

There was no zooming this time. Right in front of the ship the plane flew, turned, and came back. It

seemed as if it would crash into the bows. But it cleared them, and Ling saw Billy Murchie in the cockpit pointing the gun straight at him. The stuttering bark of the gun broke out. Bullets swept the bridge.

Ling was struck again and again. He was thrown to the deck, his right arm hanging limp.

The ship fell away and began to drift. Another ape-man jumped to the wheel; but again the plane attacked, again the gun roared, and again the steersman went down. Nothing could live on that deck before the hail of bullets.

The gorillas huddled together, howling. Ling rose to his feet, bleeding, terrible to behold. The plane attacked again and again, and every time it flew past the ship it left more victims.

The ape-men did their best to gain the wheel, but as soon as one stepped forward he was killed or maimed by the gun that shot from every angle.

The ship drifted quickly, caught by the tide. It struck a mudbank, heeled over, and lay rail deep, with the tide washing fore and aft. The gorillas clung to whatever they could lay their paws on—rails, masts, deck-houses. Others slid into the sea.

"King," shouted an ape-man, "we are lost! Look!"

He pointed ahead. Some naval pinnaces were pounding up the estuary, while a warship lay beyond. A gun boomed, and a shell fell in front of the stranded ship, sending up a column of water.

"I am King!" roared Ling; but none paid any attention to him now.

His ape-men could no longer control the gorillas. The ape-men them-

selves were trying to launch a boat; the barges they had been towing were fouling the rudder.

Up the companionway came the crew of the ship in a rush. They saw the decks filled with gorillas, over whom towered Ling. The sight of the crew seemed to madden him. He rushed at them, raising his club in his sound hand; but the rattle of the machine-gun rose above the din. The club was whirled from his grasp, while he himself was thrown down in the rush that took place to escape the stream of death.

The crew gained the boat which hung by a broken rope from the davits. One man cut the rope, and the boat fell with a splash into the sea.

The crew tumbled over the side and pushed off.

Down came the plane, taxiing towards the boat, and Gerry looked out of the cockpit, hailing them.

"Are you all there?" he cried.

"Yes, everybody here," came the reply.

"Pull away from the ship as quickly as you can, then," ordered Gerry.

The seamen needed no second bidding. They got the boat clear, while the machine-gun kept the ape-men off from attacking it.

Other guns began to bark. The naval pinnaces had arrived. An officer cupped his hands and roared to Ling, asking if he intended to surrender. The answer was a howl of rage, and the throwing of bombs both by ape-men and by Ling.

"Up she goes, Gerry!" called Billy; and up went the plane again,

while the pinnaces pulled clear and stood off at some distance.

The plane rose high until it was a speck. Ling was yelling to his ape-men to be ready with bombs. It was his intention to hit the plane when it came within reach. His voice kept up a constant riot of orders.

And then the plane began to descend. It came down from ten thousand feet high like an arrow.

From the time it started to dive to the time it reached the required position was a matter of seconds. It was moving at a speed of three hundred miles per hour. No human aim could hit such a moving object.

A bomb was dropped sure and true, hurtled from the plane.

The ape-men and Ling were still in the attitude of beginning their throw when the explosion engulfed them.

The heavens seemed to split with that roar.

Up went the deck of the ship, up went the masts. The sides of the ship seemed to rise from the water.

For a few seconds it seemed as if the air was filled with smoke and noise, and then a plume of smoke rose from the sea.

When it eventually drifted away there was no sign of the ship; nothing but a tossing sea of timber and a rain of debris that showered on the water.

There was no sign of gorillas, no sign of Ling, the monster who had claimed to have stolen the world.

The plane was far away, racing towards the warship. It landed on the sea beside the vessel, and willing hands helped Billy and Gerry up to where the commander was waiting for them.

"That was the bomb that saved England," he said, as he shook hands with both boys. "I've just got a message through from the Admiralty for you two. The war with the gorillas has ended in all sections. They have been cleaned up. There's only one left alive."

"Only one?" asked Billy. "I wonder—"

"He is a big chap called the Watcher. He was found on the roof of St. Paul's. He has been asking for you two boys. At present he is being patched up in some hospital. It rests with you whether he will be put into the Zoo or returned to Africa."

"I think he'd better be returned to Africa," said Billy. "He deserves to go there."

The commander took a slip from an officer who appeared just then at his elbow and read it.

"The War Office and the Admiralty want you two right away," he said. "You are to receive their thanks and something more substantial in the form of recognition. Turn in and have a sleep before the triumphal reception that awaits you."

In due course Gerry Lambert and Billy Murchie received their rewards. And never will these two chums forget their thrilling experiences or Big Ling, the giant ape-man, who had set out to become king of the world!

THE END.



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HOW did you like Walters' tasty toffee which was given with this week's issue, chums? I expect you made short work of it. Well, wasn't it just another example of what I am always telling you—that the MAGNET is always chockful of good things? This week's bar of toffee is the last of our present series of free gifts, but take my tip—keep your eye on the MAGNET! 'Nuff said for the time being!

My readers will probably remember my remarks concerning the mysterious snake stones of Singapore. This week I have received a letter from a reader who lives in Kuala Lumpur, in the Malay States, and he passes on some most interesting information for you.

This reader's name is Chua Toh Lwee, and he knows someone who possesses one of these marvellous stones, which, he tells me, are very rare indeed. In fact, this chum does not think there are more than three or four genuine ones in existence. Here is what he says concerning these

STONES THAT CURE SNAKE-BITES!

These stones are occasionally extracted from live snakes, and before one can be used it should be washed with pure water. When it is placed on a snake bite it absorbs the poison from the wound. When placed in water after use, foam is formed on the water. This foam is caused by the poison that has been absorbed. So the more foam there is, the more poisonous was the wound. When the stone ceases to give out foam, it is then immersed in milk, and it absorbs some of this and is then ready for use again.

Chua Toh Lwee tells me that the friend of his who possesses one of these precious stones has helped a great number of people who have been bitten by poisonous snakes or dogs. So if any of my readers are going to snake-infested countries, they ought to try to get a snake stone. Should the snake stone, however, come in contact with oil it loses its power of absorbing poison, and becomes useless.

Many thanks for your letter, Chua Toh Lwee. I am sure my readers will be as interested in your information as I was. Incidentally, I am very pleased to know that I have a reader in Kuala Lumpur. I am always glad to receive letters from my readers abroad.

THE second letter this week comes from A. Jackson, of London, who asks me

HOW TO BECOME AN ACTOR!

He would like me to publish the names of some London theatrical managers who will interview an inexperienced youngster and give him a chance. I am afraid this is asking too much. Theatrical managers are constantly receiving requests for interviews, but they very rarely accede to such requests. Some sort of experience is absolutely necessary for anyone who wishes to become an actor—either experience with a very good amateur company, or else a period of training at an academy for the stage. The best thing I can advise this reader to do is to write to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, 62, Gower Street, London, W.C.1, for

particulars. Most of the foremost young actors of to-day have studied there. Some of the smaller repertory companies in the suburbs and the provinces will occasionally give novices a chance to "walk on" in stage productions, but West End theatres and first-class touring companies insist upon experienced men only.

A South London reader writes to ask me if I can tell him something about

THE GREAT FROST FAIR,

which took place when the River Thames was frozen over in 1683. That was certainly the biggest "freeze" that has ever been known in the history of London, for the river was frozen to a depth of eleven inches! Streets of shops and booths were erected from the Temple to Southwark, while coaches and sledges turned the river into a new thoroughfare. A fox was hunted on the ice, an ox was roasted whole, and bull-baiting was indulged in. The king paid a special visit to his new "city" on the Thames, and a printing shop was set up to commemorate it.

If any London readers want to know exactly what it looked like, they should pay a visit to the London Museum, at Lancaster House, St. James. There they will see a magnificent model of this "frost fair." They'll see some other most interesting things, too. For instance, have you ever seen

JACK SHEPPARD'S CELL?

Well, if you go to the London Museum you'll see it—or one of the cells from which Jack escaped, for this famous gaol-breaker "did his stuff" in most of the London prisons of that time. You'll also be able to see one of the cells from an ancient debtor's prison. The model room has the finest collection of models dealing with old London that I have ever seen. You will see London as it appeared at various dates in its history, including a special model—with effects—of the famous Fire of London. There are some model theatres of the old "penny plain, twopence coloured" variety, and hosts of other interesting things.

If you haven't visited the London Museum, chums, you've missed something good—and there's no charge for admission!

Harry D., of Doncaster, puts up a "careers query" to me this week. He wants

TO BECOME A RAILWAY ENGINEER,

and asks how to go about it. All the big railway companies run their own engineering departments, and my chum should apply direct to the company which he wishes to join. If he can afford to pay a premium, he can become a pupil for the professional engineering staff, where he will have an opportunity of qualifying for the higher paid posts in the locomotive engineering or the civil engineering departments.

As the premium is fairly high, he may prefer to work his way up from the bottom, in which case the best thing to do is to apply for a vacancy at one of the

big railway workshops at Crewe, Swindon, Derby, or elsewhere. A certain number of apprentices are taken each year, and they train to become fitters, turners, and other skilled artisans at the recognised rates of pay. By sticking in, and studying in his spare time, it is possible for an apprentice to work up his way to a staff appointment where good salaries are the rule. Applications for apprenticeship should be made direct to the company concerned.

HERE is another little paragraph to add to your collection of "Things You'd Hardly Believe."

A FISH AS THIN AS A LATH

—and yet twenty feet in length! It is found only in the deepest ocean abysses, and is known as the oar fish. It is so thin that it is like a ribbon of a silvery colour. Because of the great depth at which it lives, it is rarely encountered, and when specimens are brought up from the ocean depths, or happen to get into shallower waters, they die. So you are not likely to come across an oar fish next time you visit the seaside.

And what about this:

A SIXTY-YEAR-OLD "BOY"!

Every boy remains a boy in Korea until he gets married! He may be fifty, sixty, or even older, but he is always referred to as a "boy." But the most curious thing is that the Korean boy must wear his hair in long plaits like a girl! And when he becomes a man—that is, when he gets married—he has to do his hair up in a "bun," like women did in this country some time ago.

What's more, I don't suppose he has the opportunity of reading such a fine boy's paper as the MAGNET which, incidentally, still numbers many "old boys" of sixty years of age amongst its readers. And they'll be just as bucked about next week's Greyfriars yarn as my young readers will be. It's called:

"THE SLACKER'S AWAKENING!"

By Frank Richards,

and I'm not going to say much about it, because you all know that Frank Richards' yarns are easily the best boy's stories appearing in any periodical. But I'll just advise you not to miss it, or you'll be missing something extra good.

The rest of next week's programme is as good as ever—which means that it can't be beat!

I suppose you've taken it for granted that our new serial is going to be a good 'un? Well, chums, it's all that and more—a real live detective and adventure yarn, featuring those grand old favourites, Ferrers Locke, the celebrated Baker Street detective, and his clever boy assistant, Jack Drake. So many letters have reached me asking for a serial of this description that I've had no hesitation in getting a story written round these old favourites. Watch out, then, for:

"THE MAN BEHIND THE SCENES!"

By Hedley Scott,

the opening chapters of which will appear in next week's issue of the MAGNET.

Of course, there will be another full-of-fun issue of the "Greyfriars Herald," "Lincsman's" footer talk, a poem by the Greyfriars Rhymester, to say nothing of my weekly chat with you.

Meet you again next week, then, chums.

YOUR EDITOR.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,357.

THE VANISHED SCHOOLBOYS!

(Continued from page 23.)

"He said so in his letter, Maudy!" said the captain of the Remove.

"Yaas! That's odd! But—" Maudyverer shook his head. "Redwing's no such ass, I tell you! He went out to root after Smithy—and if he met him, he'd bring him back."

"Must have met him, if he's gone off with him," said Nugent. "And he wouldn't write to Quelch and say he had, if he hadn't."

"I say, you fellows—" "You'd better get off to Quelch, Bunter," said Harry Wharton. "The sooner you do it the better for you."

"I say, you fellows, I couldn't help being late!" said Bunter pathetically. "I couldn't start for home till that beast was gone. He was waiting for dark, and I had to wait for dark, too, see? I shall tell Quelch so. I suppose he didn't want me kidnapped, too! That villain going about till dark—"

"What villain, you ass?" demanded Wharton.

"That villain who kidnapped Redwing this afternoon—"

"WHAT!" yelled the captain of the Remove.

"I say, don't yell at a chap! You make me jump!" said Bunter peevishly. "I say, I think I'd better bag some supper before I see Quelch! I think I'll—"

"What's that about Redwing?" shouted three or four voices.

"What do you mean, you fat ass? Quelch has had a note from Redwing, saying that he's gone off to join Smithy somewhere!" rapped Wharton.

"Eh! Has he?" Bunter's eyes seemed about to pop through his spectacles. "Well, Redwing never wrote if then."

"It was in his fist!" said Harry.

"Oh erikay! That's what that villain wanted that book for. That's why he spotted Redwing's name on it! Oh, my hat!"

"What do you mean, Bunter?" exclaimed Wharton, shaking the fat junior by the shoulder. "If you know anything of Redwing, cough it up! Out with it!"

"Groooooogh!" "You fat, flabby, frabjous frog—" "Urrrgh!"

"Here comes the old bird!" murmured Skinner, not loud enough for Mr. Quelch to hear, as he came rustling up.

The juniors stood back, leaving the Owl of the Remove facing his Form-master.

"Where have you been, Bunter?" snapped the Remove-master at last.

"On the Pike, sir. I—I went there to—to see if I could help poor old Redwing look for—for Smithy."

"Utterly absurd!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch angrily. "Do you mean to say that you remained there after dark and lost your way, Bunter?"

"I—I had to, sir," gasped Bunter.

"Why?" hooted Mr. Quelch.

"Because that villain was there—"

"What—who—"

"There were two of them, sir!" stammered Bunter. "I was waiting for Redwing, to snowball him as he came up the Pike—I mean, to help him look for Smithy, and—and then they collared him, sir! One of them went away, but he told the other beast to wait till dark, with Redwing. They had him tied up, with a sack over his head."

"Is this boy wandering in his mind?" said Mr. Quelch blankly.

"Oh, really, sir—"

"Tell me the truth at once, Bunter! Have you seen anything of Redwing since he went out of gates?"

"I—I've just told you, sir. They kidnapped him. I saw them! If they'd seen me they'd have had me, too."

"Bunter!" gasped Mr. Quelch at last. "Tell me at once what has happened. Calm yourself and explain."

And Billy Bunter told the strange story, listened to in utter amazement. The changes of expression in Mr. Quelch's face were extraordinary.

When the gasping Owl had finished, at last, the Remove-master took the letter from his pocket and scanned it again. If it was not in Redwing's hand, it was in an exceedingly clever imitation of that hand. But, from what Bunter had related, the kidnappers had found a specimen of his handwriting on him, and there could be no doubt that the hand had been imitated and a forgery sent to Greyfriars in his name.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Quelch, at last. "This is very surprising news—amazing! This letter must be a trick—a cunning device to prevent poor Redwing from being searched for. It must be placed in the hands of the police at once. Bunter, you will come with me to the Head."

And Bunter, suppressing a groan, followed his Form-master to Dr. Locke's study. He left a buzzing crowd behind him, discussing the amazing news.

Kidnapped!

There was no doubt about it!

After seeing the Head, Billy Bunter, much to his satisfaction, found himself the most sought-after person at Greyfriars School. Nobody, as a rule, wanted to hear what Bunter had to say. Generally, his conversation was at a heavy discount! Now everybody wanted to hear!

Only through Bunter was it known that Tom Redwing had been kidnapped, and even Mr. Quelch, in spite of his doubts, now admitted the possibility—or, rather, the probability—that Smithy had been kidnapped, also.

But whose hands? That was as deep a mystery as ever, though it was a mystery upon which light was soon to be thrown—from a quarter unexpected by any fellow at Greyfriars.

THE END.

("THE SLACKER'S AWAKENING!" is the title of next week's yarn of the chums of Greyfriars. And it's a real corker, chums! Don't miss it, whatever you do!)

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