

HARRY WHARTON & Co. In another Thrilling Schoolboy-Adventure Yarn . . . in this grand **FREE GIFT ISSUE!**

The Magnet ^{2^o}



*The
Googlie
Bola!*

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The GREYFRIARS DIAMOND-DIGGERS!



By
**FRANK
RICHARDS**

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter Handles the Bola!

"WATCH me!" said Billy Bunter.

Bunter liked an audience. Besides, Bunter thought that his performance was going to be worth watching.

For once, Harry Wharton & Co. seemed to agree with the fat Owl of the Greyfriars Remove. They smiled, and watched.

"Go it!" said Bob Cherry encouragingly.

It was a sunny morning on the fazenda—the plantation on the banks of the Rio Rexo in Brazil.

On the green lawn, surrounded by orange-trees, in front of the planter's house, the chums of the Remove had been putting in some practice with a "bola."

Jim Valentine, the planter's nephew, had been giving his pals from his old school some instruction in the use of that curious South American weapon. One after another the juniors swung the long cord, with the iron balls at the end, generally missing the stump at which they aimed. It was not easy for a novice to handle a bola. It required practice.

Billy Bunter, from the shady veranda, watched them, with a sarcastic grin on his fat face. Now he rolled down the steps, to show those clumsy fellows that there was one chap in the party, at least, who could handle a bola.

Harry Wharton handed him the bola, and the Famous Five stood back to

watch. They stood back at a safe distance. It was rather a long cord, attached to the iron balls. And nobody wanted to be within its radius when Bunter got going.

"You hold it like this—" began Jim Valentine.

"That's all right," interrupted Bunter. "I know how to hold it."

"You swing it—"

"I know!"

"But—"

"I'm not a dud like those fellows," explained Bunter. "There isn't much you could teach me, I fancy."

"Oh!" said Jim. "All right! Go ahead, if you know all about it!" And the boy planter retreated out of reach.

Bunter grasped the cord, and swung the iron ball. It looked easy the way Jim Valentine did it; and Bunter was in no need of instruction. But it was not quite so easy as it looked.

"Ow!" ejaculated Bunter suddenly.

He did not know why the iron ball dropped on his foot; but he knew that it did drop there, for it gave his foot quite a painful clump.

"Wow!" howled Bunter.

"Bravo!" shouted Bob Cherry. "Go it!"

Bunter was hopping on one leg. This was not the performance Bunter had intended to put up. But the audience found it entertaining. They watched, as Bunter had bidden them—and they watched with great interest.

"Go it, Bunter!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Dance, little man—dance!" chuckled Frank Nugent.

"Ow!" roared Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's not the way a bola is usually

handled," remarked Jim Valentine. "But I suppose Bunter knows best."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Wow!" Bunter ceased to hop, and blinked round at a row of laughing faces. "I say, you fellows! What are you cackling at?"

"Get on with the fandango, old fat bean!" said Harry Wharton.

"You silly ass! I'm not showing you how to dance a fandango: I'm showing you how to handle a bola."

"Oh, my mistake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" snorted Bunter. "Shut up, and watch! I'm just going to begin."

The fat junior gathered up the bola again. This time he was a little more careful, and did not drop the iron ball on his feet.

Nevertheless, he seemed to find difficulties. The long cord seemed to want to twine itself round Bunter's fat arms, and round his podgy neck. Bunter's first performance had been a dance. Now it seemed as if he was bent on giving a knot-tying display.

"Blow it!" gasped Bunter. "It's easy enough—easy as pie. You fellows can't do it, because you're clumsy. Watch me!"

"The watchfulness is terrific!" grinned Hurreo Janset Ram Singh.

"The beastly thing seems to be getting into a tangle; but it will be all right in a minute."

"Shall I help you get clear?" asked Jim Valentine, stepping forward.

"No!" hooted Bunter. "Think I can't handle a bola?"

"Well—"

"You mind your own business!" snorted Bunter. "Get out of the way!"

See? How's a fellow to handle a bola, with a silly ass butting in all the time?"

Jim laughed, and backed away again. Harry Wharton & Co. gave the Owl of the Remove rather expressive looks.

Bunter, like the Famous Five, was a guest at the Valentine plantation. In the best circles guests did not talk to their host in that strain. But Billy Bunter had his own manners and customs.

Headless of expressive looks, the fat junior disentangled the bola. He was getting warm and irritable. In the hand of an expert the bola looked an easy proposition. Bunter had no doubt that he could do what any other fellow could do—a little better, in fact, than the other fellow. Still, it did not seem, somehow, to come as easily to him as it did to the boy planter.

However, he got the cord clear at last, and then Bunter did get going. He swung the bola round his head, taking aim at the tree-stump, which he was not going to miss as the other fellows had done.

Somehow he did miss it.

Bunter put plenty of force into that swing. The long cord stood out taut, the heavy iron ball at the end keeping it straight out. So far, so good; but it missed the tree-stump, and travelled on, right round Bunter.

What happened next startled Bunter, and convinced his audience that the performance was well worth watching.

The ball circled round Bunter at almost lightning speed. The cord in his hand wound round him, drawn by the circling ball.

To his great surprise the fat junior found himself encircled by the winding cord.

The iron ball, whizzing round and round from the force Bunter had put into it, wound that cord round Bunter so fast that he hardly knew what was happening before he was enclosed in circle after circle.

"Ooogh!" gasped Bunter.

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

Harry Wharton & Co. had not been expert. But, at least, they had not wrapped themselves up in the bola. That was what Bunter was doing.

In the twinkling of an eye, his fat arms were pinned to his sides, and the circling ball wound more and more and more cord round him, till there was more cord than Bunter to be seen. Arms and legs were circled again and again; and the iron ball itself finally came to rest, tapping on Billy Bunter's fat chin.

The audience shrieked.

Bunter, unable to move a limb, tottered. The iron ball slid to the ground. Bunter stood a helpless prisoner.

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fino!"

"Ripping!"

"Bravo!"

"Best thing I've seen in South America!" gasped Bob Cherry. "You never see a native handle a bola like that! Three cheers for the googlio 'bola'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Owl Beasts! I say—" Bunter struggled frantically in his bonds, but he struggled unavailingly.

It was necessary for somebody to take hold of the iron ball and unwind the long cord. Nobody seemed keen to do it. Bunter's audience seemed satisfied to stand round and laugh.

"Valentine, you beast, come and unwind me!" yelled Bunter.

"My dear chap, I'm not going to butt in!" said Jim. "I'm minding my own business."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"We're all minding our own business!" chortled Bob Cherry. "You don't want silly asses to butt in, old fat bean!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "I say—Yaroooooh!" Struggling with the binding coils of the bola, Bunter lost his footing, and rolled over on the grass.

"Ow! Whooo-hooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Come on, you men!" said Bob Cherry. "Bunter's done his funny turn! Good-bye, Bunter!"

"I say—" yelled Bunter. "Come

Knowing that Peter Valentine has found diamonds in the wild back-country of Brazil, O Lobo, the "Wolf," determines to capture one of his guests from Greyfriars and trade his life for the fortune!

and gemme out of this—lemme out of this beastly bola, you beasts! Don't you walk off and leave me tied up like this, you rotters—I say, you fellows—"

But the Greyfriars fellows did walk off. Billy Bunter had stated that he did not want silly asses to butt in. So the silly asses refrained from butting in—which ought to have pleased Bunter. He did not, however, seem pleased.

He roared, and rolled, and howled, and yelled, wriggling frantically in the coils of the bola. He was left to finish the performance without an audience.

It was about a quarter of an hour later that the fat Owl, by rolling over and over and over in the grass, succeeded in unwinding the bola. And it was a crimson and breathless and infuriated fat junior who crawled back into the veranda and plumped down exhausted in a chair—where, for quite a long time, he gasped and gasped and gasped, as if he would never leave off gasping.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Mountains of Montanha Fria!

"O LOBO," the Wolf of Brazil, clamped himself on the thick branch of the ceiba, stretching out from the bank over the Rio Rexo, and stared down at the water that flowed sluggishly beneath.

The dark, black-bearded face of the Brazilian bandit set in savage ferocity, as his jetty eyes fixed on a boat, tied up to a jutting root, in the shade of the mighty branches, and the murmur of voices came up to his ears. Silent as a creeping python on the massive branch, hidden by the heavy foliage, the bandit watched and listened.

The boat was a "montaria," belonging to the fazenda. In it sat the Famous Five, of the Greyfriars Remove, with Jim Valentine, and his uncle, Peter. They had been up the river, and had now made a halt in the shade of the ceiba, for tea. Jim unpacked a basket of sandwiches and cakes, and a black servant, brewed "mate," the native tea, at the forward end of the boat. After a trip in the brilliant South American sunshine, the Greyfriars fellows were glad to sit in the shade—and they never guessed that their voices had caught the keen ears of an enemy lurking in the forest that grew down to the water's edge; and never dreamed that O Lobo had crawled out on the ceiba branch to watch them from above.

Once Mr. Valentine glanced up at a faint stirring in the foliage. But the treeswarmed with monkeys and parrots, and he gave no further heed to the rustle that had reached him.

Peter's lean, brown face was serious in expression. The juniors, eating cakes and drinking mate, chatted cheerily; but they knew that the planter had something to say, though he was in no hurry to speak.

More than once they had wondered whether he would tell them anything of the discovery of diamonds he had made, on the barren slopes of the Montanha Fria—the "Cold Mountain," which was visible from the windows of Boa Vista, many miles away across the forests to the west.

Of that discovery they knew from O Lobo; but Mr. Valentine had said nothing on the subject so far.

They had been two or three weeks at Boa Vista now, enjoying every day of their holiday in the wonderful and fascinating land of Brazil. Naturally, they asked their host no questions; but they could not help feeling curious on the subject of "os diamantes," which had roused the savage greed of the bandit of the Rexo.

"I'm going on a trip in a few days!" Peter Valentine spoke abruptly. "If you boys would like a trip to the Montanha Fria—"

"What-ho!" said Bob Cherry, at once. The planter frowned thoughtfully.

"There may be some danger," he said slowly. "O Lobo, the bandit, has wind of my discovery, as you know. Here you are safe from him, while Chico, the Caraya hunter, is on the watch for the scoundrel. But away from the fazenda, it may be a different matter, and yet—" He smiled. "I think I would rather keep you under my eyes while O Lobo is still a free man."

"We'd like to come along, sir," said Harry Wharton; "we're not exactly afraid of danger."

"It will be a rough trip—but you won't mind that!" said Mr. Valentine. "I'm not so sure about Bunter, how-

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ever. Bunter does not like hardship, I think."

The juniors smiled. Billy Bunter did not like hardship—he disliked it very much indeed.

He had not come up the river that afternoon with the party—because the sun was hot! A hammock under a shady tree suited Bunter better.

On the other hand, if there was any suggestion of leaving him behind, it was certain that Billy Bunter would want to come.

"Bunter's hardly the man for it, Peter!" said Jim Valentine. "And he'll be quite safe at the fazenda with Joao Frulo there."

"Well, I will give him his choice," said Peter. "He may please himself. You boys are keen, I suppose?"

"Yes, rather!" said the Co. together, and Hurree Janset Ram Singh added that the ratherfulness was terrific, at which Peter grinned.

"We may be able to help you snaffle the diamonds, sir!" suggested Johnny Bull. "I rather like the idea of picking up Koh-i-Noors and things."

The planter laughed. "It is possible that we may find some big stones," he said. "And the fact is, I should be glad of your help, if you feel inclined to put in a little work at diamond-washing. It will be an experience for you, and it never does a boy harm to learn things."

"We're not slackers, Mr. Valentine!" said Harry, smiling. "Rely on us!"

"You see, I prefer not to take any of the plantation hands to help!" explained Peter. "In a wild quarter of the country like this, with the railroad a hundred miles away, and law and order still farther, the less that is talked about a discovery of diamonds the better. I can trust my manager, Joao Frulo, and Chico, the Indian hunter—but I have told no one else. Yet, with all my care, that scoundrel, O Lobo, has got wind of what I have found at Cold Mountain. But he is not likely to spread the news, to draw other thieves of his own kidney after the plunder."

"He doesn't know a lot, either," remarked Jim. "Only that diamonds have been spotted at the Montanha Fria!"

"I suppose they wouldn't be left there long if that rascal knew where to lay his hands on them!" said Harry.

"Hardly!" said the planter. "And we shall take as much care as possible, not to let it become known that we are going to the Cold Mountain. We shall start before daylight, in a boat, as if we were going on a hunting-trip—and even if the rascal should be on the watch, there is no reason why he should guess our destination."

A mocking grin wrinkled the dusky face peering from the foliage overhead. But O Lobo made no sound.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry suddenly, as the lianas on the bank parted, and a red-bronze face looked through. "Jolly old Chico!"

The Caraya Indian stepped out of the forest.

Knee-deep in the shallow mud of the river margin, he came out towards the boat. There was a grave, almost grim expression on his dark face.

Harry Wharton & Co. listened, while the planter spoke in Portuguese, and the Indian answered in the same tongue, his bronze hand resting on the gunwale of the montaria. They saw Peter knit his brows, and caught the name of "O Lobo" on the Indian's lips.

They knew that for a week or more Chico had been hunting for the bandit, known to be watching the fazenda. They

wondered whether he had brought news of the Wolf.

Mr. Valentine slipped his hand to his hip-pocket, where he carried an automatic. His eyes glinted under his knitted brows, as the Indian ceased to speak.

"News of that villain Lobo, sir?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Yes—Chico has picked up sign of him in the forest, and trailed him—here!" said the planter quietly. "He has lost the track, close at hand—it looks as if O Lobo has taken to the trees. As likely as not, he has spotted us here, and may have his eye on us at the present moment."

The Famous Five rose rather hastily to their feet.

They stared at the thick wall of greenery by the river-side. It gave them a thrill, not quite pleasant, to think of the black, fierce eyes of the Brazilian bandit peering at them from the foliage.

The Indian stared up at the leafy branches of the cabin, like a roof over the moored boat. Watching him, the juniors saw his look become fixed, intent. They stared up also; but could see nothing but foliage and creepers. But they guessed that the Caraya's keen eyes picked out something more.

With a sudden, swift movement, the Caraya fitted an arrow to his bow and sent it whizzing into the branches over the boat. There was a flutter of disturbed parrots—and a rustling sound, that was not made by bird or beast. O Lobo was crawling back along the thick branch, towards the parent trunk. As he moved, the juniors had a glimpse of a big grass-hat among the foliage.

"There he is!" shouted Bob. The Caraya, with gleaming eyes, splashed back through the mud to the bank. Peter Valentine flung up his arm, and the crack of the automatic woke the echoes of the tropical forest as a bullet crashed into the massive branches of the coiba.

A startled yell came back. Evidently O Lobo was there; they knew now that he had been close at hand, within sound of their voices. Whether he was hit or not they could not tell; he was not seen. But if he was hit, he was not disabled; for a hurried rustling showed that he was in rapid retreat.

Chico disappeared into the forest; the rustling died away, the juniors listening intently till no further sound could be heard.

"Gone!" said Bob at last. "Chico's on his track," said Jim Valentine. "I hope Chico will get him. He must have heard what we were saying, Peter; he knows now that we are making a trip to Montanha Fria—"

Peter Valentine nodded, but did not speak. The juniors, sitting in the montaria, finished their tea, listening the while for sounds from the forest, but no sound reached their ears from the bandit or the hunter who was on his trail; and when the montaria paddled home to Boa Vista they were still ignorant as to whether the Wolf had made his escape.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Bunter Gets the Bird!

"**B**LOW!" grunted Billy Bunter. Squatting in a hammock slung under a shady tree in the gardens at Boa Vista, Billy Bunter was disposing of Brazil nuts. There were lots of things in Brazil that Bunter did not like, but he liked the nuts. At home Brazil nuts cost money; at the plantation of Boa Vista they were to be had in unlimited

quantities for nothing—which suited Bunter.

But there is always a fly in the ointment somewhere. Billy Bunter had dropped some of his supply of nuts.

To any other fellow that would not have seemed an irreparable disaster; Bunter had only to jump out of the hammock and pick up his nuts. But Bunter was fat and lazy, and the afternoon was hot, and he was not disposed for the least exertion. Perhaps his exploits with the bola that morning had made him extra tired. Anyhow, instead of getting down to retrieve his fallen nuts, the Owl of the Remove remained squatting in the hammock and said "Blow!"

Besides, Bunter had other resources. He hooked a large chunk of rapidura out of his pocket. Deprived of his nuts, he could still find comfort in toffee.

Rapidura was a regular article of diet in the Brazilian back-country, Bunter had found, and the supply of rapidura was as unlimited as the supply of Brazil nuts. The Owl of the Remove found comfort in the native toffee and left the nuts where they had fallen.

But if Billy Bunter was indifferent to the nuts scattered in the grass under the tree, they attracted attention from another quarter. A bird slithered down from the branches and scuttled after them—a bright parrot.

It was a macaw, one of the innumerable parrots that haunted the forest in countless numbers. Even the fat Owl was rather struck by its beauty, for it was of the blue-and-gold variety and shone like a jewel.

Still, that macaw wasn't going to snaffle Bunter's nuts if he could help it; Bunter was going to pick them up when he got out of the hammock later. He waved a fat hand at the blue-and-gold macaw.

"Shoo!" hooted Bunter. "Shoo! Woooooh! Buzz off, you greedy brute! Shoo!"

The bird looked up, cocked an eye at him, and then went coolly on. It had found a nut and was getting busy with it.

"Beast!" grunted Bunter. He ceased to wave and "Shoo!" and devoted himself to toffee. After all, there were lots of Brazil nuts, and he could spare one for a hungry macaw; so Bunter gnawed toffee while the bird gnawed at the nut, and both were busy.

Billy Bunter had needed nutcrackers to deal with the hard rind of Brazil nuts, but the macaw had only Nature's weapons. The sharp, curved beak worked and worked at the nut till it got to the kernel, and the golden bird, heedless of the blinking, fat junior in the hammock above, parked the nut with great satisfaction and went for another.

Bunter, busy with toffee, ceased to watch its antics, but his attention was suddenly drawn to the macaw again.

It seemed to be in difficulties; it clawed at the earth and clawed at the nut, in which its beak was buried.

Bunter stared at it in surprise. The macaw was tottering about with the nut sticking on its beak.

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Bunter. "He, he, he!"

He chuckled at the strange sight. The macaw, in its eagerness to get at the luscious interior of the nut, had caught its curved beak inside the hard shell, and could not get it out again.

It seemed funny to Billy Bunter, and he chuckled.

But it did not seem funny to the distressed parrot, fluttering wildly, squawking unmusically, and scattering tail-feathers in its excitement.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter. Squawk, squawk, squawk! came from the macaw.

It squawked loudly in spite of that impediment in its speech; and its distress was so evident that even Bunter realised it at last and ceased to chuckle.

"Poor little beast!" muttered the fat junior.

Bunter was an unthinking fellow, but he was not unfeeling. He would have helped the macaw out of that scrape if it had not involved the trouble of getting out of the hammock.

It did not occur to his fat mind to make that effort; but after watching the hapless bird a few minutes longer it did occur to him. In its efforts to claw off the hard nut sticking on the curved beak the bird was almost tying itself up in knots.

"Oh dear!" said Bunter, and he made the effort.

Probably the macaw, in its relief at being rid of the encumbrance, was only snapping its beak to test whether it was still in working order. But Bunter, not doubting that he had had a narrow escape of losing a lump of his superabundant flesh, jumped back hurriedly into the hammock.

"Beast!" snorted Bunter.

It was an ungrateful world! Harry Wharton & Co. had gone up the Rexo that afternoon, not caring a rap about Bunter, after all he had done for them. True, Bunter had not wanted to go—had, in fact, refused to go. That did not alter the fact that the beasts had gone and left him on his own. And now, after he had taken the trouble to lift his uncommon weight out of his hammock to help that wretched bird, the wretched thing snapped at his fat finger. Bunter was disgusted.

Squawk, squawk!

with its round eyes, which had an odd resemblance to the fat Owl's spectacles, it fluttered out of the hammock and landed on the fat shoulder again.

Bunter jumped clear of the ground.

"Ooogh! Gorroff!" he roared.

He waved fat hands wildly. The parrot squawked in great excitement and flew off the fat shoulder. Probably it did not understand Bunter's antics. It fluttered along the ground, and then Bunter saw it coming again. Apparently that macaw had taken a fancy to the Owl of the Remove. Perhaps it comprehended what Bunter had done for it and was grateful; perhaps it was only playful. Anyhow, it sailed at Bunter again; and the fat junior, in terror of beak and claws, fairly turned tail and ran out of the trees.

"Ooogh! Keep off, you beast!" roared Bunter, as he ran.



The sudden tilting of Bunter's straw hat disturbed the parrot. It grabbed with its claws for a secure hold, and flapped its wings. Then the fat Owl became aware that there was something alive on his hat. "That—that—that beastly parrot!" he stuttered. "Oh crikey!"

Grunting, he slid down from the hammock and rolled over to the macaw.

It was half-tame, like most of the parrots that haunted the trees close by the house. Often the juniors threw nuts and fragments of farina to feed them, and they sometimes gathered in crowds for the food. The macaw did not seem alarmed by Bunter's approach; perhaps it even understood that the fat junior was coming to its aid.

Bunter bent over it, blinking at it rather uneasily. He did not like a macaw's sharp beak at close quarters; a nip would have been extremely uncomfortable.

Very gingerly he picked up the struggling bird; holding it with one fat hand, he jerked away the clinging nut from the curved beak with the other.

Snap!

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

He dropped the bird as if it had suddenly become red-hot, as the beak snapped an inch from his fingers.

There was a flash of blue-and-gold as the parrot rose in the air. But it did not fly away into the branches; it alighted on Billy Bunter's fat shoulder as he sat in the hammock.

There was a yell of alarm from Bunter.

It did not even occur to his fat mind that the macaw, half-tame, and often fed on the fazenda, had sat on shoulders before. He was in instant dread of feeling the sharp beak close on a fat ear or a fat cheek.

Squawk! came from the macaw.

"Yooop!" spluttered Bunter.

He bounded out of the hammock. His lump of rapidura fell from his fat hand and dropped among the scattered nuts. Bunter did not heed it; he was only anxious to get away from that macaw.

His sudden jump dislodged it and left it in the hammock. But it was not done with Bunter. Blinking at him

The macaw swooped on him, landing on top of the straw hat that Bunter wore. Its weight was light, and Bunter did not feel it on top of the hat. He blinked round and did not see the macaw—having no eyes in the top of his head, of course.

"Thank goodness the beastly thing's gone!" gasped Bunter.

He did not return to the hammock. Utterly unconscious of the fact that the affectionate macaw was perched on top of his straw hat, he supposed that it had gone back to the nuts. If it got into difficulties with another nut, Billy Bunter certainly was not going to its rescue again. He had had enough of that macaw!

It was getting towards time for the evening meal, anyhow; and Billy Bunter rolled off towards the house—in happy unconsciousness that he was carrying the macaw as a passenger on top of his fat head!

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THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Mystery of the Macaw!

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

Harry Wharton & Co. were coming up the path from the river. Mr. Valentine had left them at the landing-place to see his manager, Joao Frulo, about some business on the plantation. Jim came up the path with the Famous Five. All six of the fellows stared at Billy Bunter, as they sighted him heading for the house, at a little distance—and presenting a really remarkable spectacle as he went.

Bunter's face was red and excited. He was panting for breath. He was moving with unusual celerity. But these circumstances did not make the juniors stare. What they stared at, in amazement, was a handsome blue-and-gold bird perched on the crown of Bunter's straw hat.

It was not uncommon to see a parrot perched on somebody's shoulder at the Brazilian fazenda. But it was unusual, to say the least, for anybody to carry a macaw about on top of his head. And it was very surprising in Bunter, who had never petted the innumerable parrots at Boa Vista, having an uneasy dislike for curved beaks. But there was the fat Owl of the Remove, rolling towards Boa Vista with the macaw perched on his hat—and it made the chums of the Remove stare and chortle.

The fat junior blinked round, through his big spectacles, as he heard Bob Cherry's cheery roar. He waited on the path for the juniors to come up.

"I say, you fellows!" he gasped.

"Here we are again, old bean!" said Harry Wharton. "Had a good time eating and snoozing while we've been up the Rexo?"

"Yah!" was Bunter's reply.

"I didn't know you had a fancy for parrots, Bunter," said Jim Valentine, laughing.

"Eh? I haven't! Hato 'em!" grunted Bunter. "I've jolly nearly been pecked to pieces by a putrid parrot."

"Wha-a-t?"

The Owl of the Remove gave an unquiet blink round. He was at a good distance from the trees where the hammock swung; but he did not feel quite sure that that beastly macaw was not after him.

"I say, you fellows, can you see anything of a macaw?" he asked.

"Sus-sus-see anything of a macaw?" gasped Bob.

As the macaw was sitting in full view, on Bunter's hat, the Famous Five and Valentine naturally saw something of it. But it dawned on their minds that Bunter did not know that it was there.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the six. Really, it struck them as funny for Bunter to be inquiring if they could see anything of a bird that was squatting on top of his head!

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" snorted Bunter. "I say, that putrid macaw got its beak fixed in a nut, and I helped it out, you know. I was sorry for the brute. And what do you think? The beastly thing flew at me, and I was jolly nearly nipped."

"Perhaps it wasn't going to nip you!" gasped Jim Valentine. The cheerful bird sitting on Bunter's head did not seem to be thinking of "nipping." Sitting there, it blinked calmly and solemnly at the grinning juniors.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" growled Bunter. "It was after me. I nearly had a lump taken out of my finger—and then it nearly got my ear! Flew at me

like a tiger, you know! I had to get away from it!"

"You—you got away from it?" stammered Wharton.

"Yes. I jolly well hopped it!" said Bunter. "Might have got me by the nose, you know. It got on my shoulder, but I shifted the beast. The brute of a thing seemed to want to stick to me."

"No accounting for tastes!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter gave another uneasy blink round. He was relieved to see no sign of the pursuing parrot.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the juniors. The sight of Bunter blinking round for the bird that was perched on his straw hat, was too much for them. They yelled.

"You silly asses!" roared Bunter. "What are you sniggering at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!"

Bunter rolled on up to the house, Harry Wharton & Co., almost weeping with merriment, followed him.

The blue-and-gold creature was still sitting solemnly on Bunter's straw hat. Where Bunter went, the golden macaw went. Really, it was quite an extraordinary headgear for any fellow.

Domingo, the black steward of Boa Vista, was in the veranda as the juniors arrived. Glancing out as they came, he beheld Bunter, and jumped, his eyes rolling in astonishment in his black face.

Bunter glared at him as he came up the steps. It was bad enough to be followed by a mob of sniggering fat-heads. He did not want a black man staring at him with a grin that showed a set of white, gleaming teeth almost from one black ear to the other.

"You cheeky nigger!" hooted Bunter. "What are you hooting at? Eh?"

"A arara!" ejaculated Domingo.

Domingo spoke little English, and Bunter less Portuguese. The fat junior did not know that "arara" was the Brazilian name for the macaw, though he knew that "a" and "o" stood for "the."

"Don't gabble at me, you black idiot!" snorted Bunter. "I don't want any check from a nigger, see? Get out!"

Domingo turned away, still grinning. He did not "get out," as Bunter bade him, as he was directing the negro servants to lay supper in the veranda. The other blacks looked at Bunter, and there was a flash of white teeth in wide grins.

"I say, you fellows, what's the matter with these silly niggers?" exclaimed the exasperated Owl, as the juniors came up the broad wooden steps into the veranda. "What are they sniggering at?"

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

"And what are you sniggering at?" howled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter, with an angry snort, sat down in a deep cane chair. Leaning back in that chair to rest his fat limbs, the straw hat was on a level with the top of the chair-back. The macaw, undisturbed, still sat on the hat. Clearly it was going to stick to Bunter! There was, as Johnny Bull had remarked, no accounting for tastes. That macaw seemed to like Bunter.

Nobody enlightened the fat Owl—everybody was entertained by the unusual decoration on his straw hat, and wondered how long it would remain there undiscovered by Bunter.

The fat Owl, mystified and annoyed, frowned.

When Mr. Valentine came into the veranda from the gardens, with his manager, both of them noticed the

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macaw at once. Peter smiled, and Mr. Frulo stared.

"You find one very pretty arara, yes?" exclaimed Dom Joao. "You make one tame pet of one pretty arara, little senhor?"

Bunter blinked at him.

"What the dickens do you mean?" he demanded. "What's an arara?"

"They call a macaw an arara here!" said Peter.

"Oh!" Bunter jumped, and blinked round uneasily. "Has that putrid macaw followed me in? Where is it?"

"Where is it?" repeated Peter Valentine blankly, while the juniors yelled.

"Nossa, senhora!" ejaculated Joao Frulo. "You ask where is a macaw? You do not know where is an arara?"

"I can't see the beastly thing!" Bunter heaved his weight out of the chair. "I say, you fellows, if the brute's here, drive it out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can't see it!" howled Bunter. He turned completely round, staring in all directions for the troublesome macaw.

"Where is the beast?"

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

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a sudden squawking repetition of the laughter from the macaw perched on Bunter's hat. "I say, you fellows! Beast!"

Bunter jumped clear of the veranda floor in his astonishment. Everybody else was doubled up with mirth.

Evidently that macaw could talk, and was quick at picking things up. It had already picked up some of Bunter's remarks, and was cheerfully repeating them.

"I—I say, who—who spoke?" gasped Bunter. "I say, is this blessed place haunted? I—I say—What the thump—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows—" yelled Bunter.

"I say, you fellows!" squawked the parrot.

The Greyfriars fellows almost wept. The bewilderment in Billy Bunter's fat face might have made a stone imago chortle.

"Beasts!" roared Bunter.

"Beasts!" squawked the macaw.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It dawned on Bunter's fat brain that the squawking voice came from above his head. He tilted up his fat chin and blinked up at the slanting roof of the veranda through his big spectacles.

That sudden tilting of the straw hat disturbed the macaw. It grabbed with its claws for a secure hold and flapped its wings. Then the fat Owl became aware that there was something alive on his hat.

He gave a wild howl of alarm and grabbed the hat from his bullet head. Billy Bunter blinked at it like a fellow in a dream.

"That—that—that beastly parrot—" he stammered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was on my hat!" gasped Bunter. The mystery was solved at last.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cackle, you silly beasts!" roared Bunter.

"Cackle, you silly beasts!" squawked the macaw.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"Oh crikey!" said the macaw.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shoo!" hooted Bunter; and he hurled his hat at the macaw.

There was a flash of blue-and-gold as the bird whizzed off the chair-back, and flew to a perch high up in the veranda, out of reach.

Bunter shook a fat fist at it. Then he fielded his straw hat and hurled it

again, and missed by a couple of yards. After which, as the servants were bringing in supper, the fat junior left the macaw to its own devices.

But, for once, Billy Bunter did not devote his whole attention to a meal! Every now and then he cast a suspicious blink over a fat shoulder at the macaw on its perch. That parrot had evidently taken a fancy to Bunter—but it was a case of entirely unreciprocated affection!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter, Too!

"I'm coming!"
"But—"
"I'm coming!"
"You see—"

"I'm coming!" said Billy Bunter, for the third time. "I'm jolly well coming, see?"

And another voice added:

"I'm jolly well coming, see!"

That remark came from Bunter's macaw, perched on the rail of the veranda.

It was three or four days later.

The party at the coffee-fazenda had hoped to hear that O Lobo had been tracked down by Chico, but the Caraya had had no success to report. The Wolf was still at large.

TO READERS IN THE IRISH FREE STATE.

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That, however, made no change in their plans; they had made preparations for the journey to Cold Mountain, and on the morrow morning at daybreak they were starting.

Mr. Valentine had left it to Bunter to decide for himself whether he would join up for the trip or not. It was to last several days, and it would be rough going. Bunter, in point of fact, was far from keen on it. But one consideration made him determined. The Famous Five thought that Bunter had better stay behind. For that excellent reason Bunter was determined to go.

"You can jaw!" said the fat Owl calmly. "But I'm coming! It's like you fellows to try to leave a fellow out of things—"

"It's not that, you fat ass!" said Harry Wharton. "But it's a long way to the Montanha Fria, and a rough journey—"

"I can rough it better than you fellows, I think! You're a pretty soft lot!"

"You silly ass!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Go it!" said Bunter. "Call a fellow names. Just because I'm not going to be left out of a trip—"

"We may run into danger," said Frank Nugent. "You won't like that, Bunter."

Bunter blinked at him scornfully.

"I don't suppose there'll be any danger," he said. "You fellows wouldn't go, if there was—you haven't much pluck! But if there is danger, I shall be wanted to look after you."

"You funky fat ass—" began Johnny Bull.

"I'm the only fellow here with any pluck!" sneered Bunter. "Who was it attacked an alligator and saved Chico's life, when that beast O Lobo tied him up for the alligators to chew? I ask you!"

To which there was no reply. That Billy Bunter was a howling funk was a well-known fact in the Greyfriars Remove. Nevertheless, it was true that he had saved the Caraya from a terrible death, at the time when the hunted Wolf had turned on his hunter and taken him unawares.

How Bunter had screwed up his courage to do it, was a mystery. But he had! And Bunter was not the man to let anybody forget it.

"Chico's going," said Bunter. "He will be glad to have me along—a chap with some pluck to back him up, if there's any danger."

Again there was no reply; for again it was true! The Indian, whose life Bunter had saved, was deeply grateful, and he regarded the fat Owl with great admiration—not knowing him so well as the Greyfriars fellows knew him. Chico admired Bunter—the only inhabitant of Brazil who did!

"Suppose we run into some jaguars?" went on Bunter. "There's lots in the forests, at a distance from here. What about that?"

"Then you'll wish you hadn't come!" grinned Bob.

Snort from Bunter!

"You'll be jolly glad to have me about!" he sneered. "Has any chap here except me handled a jaguar? You saw me bring one down, at a single shot—dead as a doornail!"

Once more, it was true! By an amazing fluke, the fat Owl, blazing away at random, had hit a jaguar in the eye with a bullet that might have gone anywhere.

Bunter declined to admit that it was a miraculous fluke. It was, according to Bunter, one of those rare, deadly shots that only an expert with the rifle could hope to get away with.

By this time, indeed, Bunter had persuaded himself to believe his own assertions. He fancied, or fancied he fancied, that he was keen to meet another jaguar!

He was likely to change his mind, in a hurry, if he did meet one!

But there it was—Bunter had the advantage, in argument, at least. He was, so to speak, the goods! He had saved Chico from the vengeance of the Wolf! Nobody else had. He had shot a jaguar! Nobody else had. He was the man for such things—at all events, he declared, and almost believed, that he was!

"Well," said Harry Wharton, bringing forward his last argument, "we're starting at dawn, Bunter. You'll have to get up early!"

That really ought to have finished it! Bunter had to get up early at Greyfriars School; where there was a rising-bell that was not to be denied. On holiday, Bunter never got up early. He loathed getting up early—in fact, he hated getting up at all!

But the fat Owl's fat mind was made up! The more the other fellows wanted to leave him behind, the more firmly Bunter was resolved not to be left behind.

"Right-ho!" he said calmly. "I'll call you fellows!"

"You fat ass—"

"I'll root you out!" said Bunter. "If old Valentine's fixed it to start at

daybreak, none of your slacking, you know!"

The Famous Five breathed hard.

"Wouldn't you like to leave me out of it while you're picking up diamonds?" grinned Bunter. "Don't I know you?"

"You blithering ass!" said Harry. "We shan't be picking up diamonds! We're going to lend Mr. Valentine a hand at digging and washing, and it will be hard work, in a hot sun—and you know you're too dashed lazy to do anything of the kind!"

"Yah!" said Bunter.

"Yah!" said the macaw on the rail.

"If we find any diamonds, they belong to Mr. Valentine," went on the captain of the Remove. "Nobody here will get anything out of it!"

Bunter sniffed! Apparently the fat junior pictured himself picking up glittering gems on the Montanha Fria, and had rather forgotten that any diamonds found there belonged to their owner.

"Well, I'm coming," he said. "You can jaw till you're black in the face—but I'm coming! So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

"Smoke it!" said the macaw.

"Well, have your way, you fat ass!" said Harry. "You'll be sorry when you've started. It will be rough."

"Rats!" retorted Bunter.

"Rats!" said the macaw.

With its little head cocked on one side, its round, glittering eyes fixed on the juniors, the arara seemed to be listening to the talk, as if it understood.

Harry Wharton & Co., giving up the argument went into the house, to make some final preparations for the trip; and the macaw, flying off the rail, perched on Bunter's fat shoulder.

"Urrgh!" grunted Bunter. "Blow you!"

"Blow you!" answered the arara cheerfully.

But Bunter allowed the bird to remain. He was getting used to the macaw, though he was still rather uneasy when the sharp, curved beak was too near his fat ears.

At first, Bunter had only been anxious to get rid of that parrot; but when he realised that it was a case of personal attachment, he tolerated the macaw.

Parrots are sometimes very affectionate creatures, and that little arara seemed to have bestowed its affection on Bunter.

Possibly it was intelligent enough to be aware that Bunter had helped it in the hour of need. Possibly it had already belonged to somebody, and, having lost its master, was looking for another. Bob Cherry suggested that the arara mistook Bunter for a relation, from the resemblance of his round spectacles to the parrot's round eyes! More probably, the fact that Bunter was always provided with food had an attraction for the bird. Bunter was generally eating, and the arara fed on the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, as it were. Since it had belonged to Bunter that parrot certainly had fed on the fat of the land!

Anyhow, it was sticking to Bunter, and Bunter tolerated it, and, after a time, felt rather flattered, and grew rather attached to it, in his turn, though he was always a little doubtful and suspicious of the sharp beak.

He thought of teaching it to talk, but laziness supervened. But the arara did not need much teaching.

It picked up words with surprising quickness, and often startled the juniors

by repeating phrases of Bunter's—not always of a complimentary nature! Often the Greyfriars fellows would be startled by a sudden screech, followed by: "I say, you fellows! Rotters! Beasts! Yah!"

With the parrot on his shoulder, Billy Bunter sat and grinned. He was going to have his way, and that was that!

"Cheeky rotters!" said Bunter, when he was left alone.

"Cheeky rotters!" agreed the macaw.

"They can go and eat coke!"

"Coke!" assented the parrot.

"Oh, shut up!" said Bunter.

"Shut up!" said the macaw gleefully.

"They'd all like to leave me out,"

growled Bunter. "Even that old ass, Peter Valentine."

"That old ass, Peter Valentine!" said the macaw.

The planter came up the steps into the veranda and glanced at the fat junior in the chair.

"Daybreak to-morrow, Bunter, if you're coming along," he said.

"I'll be ready!" said Bunter.

Mr. Valentine regarded him rather dubiously. Bunter was certain to be a worry and a trouble on a rough journey, and it was equally certain that he would be sorry that he had started when he found what the journey was like.

"You'll be roughing it a bit," said the planter. "Montanha Fria isn't much like the fazenda, you know."

"I rather like roughing it," said Bunter calmly.

"Right! It's settled, then. Turn out at dawn."

Mr. Valentine passed on to the doorway at the back of the veranda, and Bunter grinned. There was a squawk from the macaw, and then a cackling voice:

"That old ass, Peter Valentine! Yah! Rotter! Beast! That old ass, Peter Valentine! Squawk! Squawk!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "Shut up, you silly brute!"

Peter Valentine gave a start, and looked round. He gave Bunter a very, very expressive look and passed on into the house.

"Oh lor!" breathed Bunter.

For a moment he had thought that Mr. Valentine was going to box his fat ears—as no doubt Peter would have done, had not Bunter been a guest at the fazenda. Bunter was quite relieved to see him go.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Start!

"ROTTERS!"

That was Billy Bunter's remark at daybreak the next morning. The first beams of the sun were glimmering through the mosquito-netting at the windows. The Famous Five were up, and Jim Valentine had given Bunter a shake. And the fat Owl expressed his feelings in that remark as he turned out.

"Beasts!" he added.

Exactly why the fellows were, at the moment, rotters and beasts, it would have been rather difficult to say. Certainly, they were not responsible for Billy Bunter turning out in the dewy morn. They had, indeed, done their best to persuade him to give it a miss.

But Bunter was feeling sleepy, grumpy, and morose. He hated early rising. Only a keen desire to make himself unpleasant induced him to rise early. He attributed the discomfort to the other fellows, and he scowled at them with a devastating scowl, and told them, in a morose mumble, what he thought of them.

Which did not affect the cheery spirits of the Famous Five in the least. Unheeding the morose and gloomy Owl, they turned out cheerily to an early breakfast and packed their outfits and prepared to start.

The montaria was ready at the landing-stage, with the black paddlers on board. The first part of the journey was to be by water—an easy stage of the trip, to be followed by harder work on foot. Rifles and cartridges, provisions and other supplies, were taken down to the boat by the blacks. Mr. Frulo saw to the packing of the supplies on board and gave the Famous Five a cheery greeting when they appeared.

Billy Bunter was the last to arrive. The whole party were in the montaria, ready to start, and the fat Owl had not arrived, and they waited impatiently. Mr. Valentine sent a black servant back to the house, with a message that they were leaving in five minutes—which brought Billy Bunter, sulky and annoyed, to the boat as the fifth minute elapsed.

Bunter was not in a good temper. Apart from having risen early, he had had time to park only a couple of breakfasts. He was strongly inclined to throw up the whole thing, but he was not in a mood to confer happiness and satisfaction on the other fellows.

He plumped into the boat, with a plump that made it rock.

"Filthy morning!" he remarked.

Mist was rising from the river, vapour clouded the trees along the bank. That was quite usual in a tropical country, but it was the first time that Bunter had been up early to take note of it.

"It will be clear presently, old fat man!" said Bob. "You'll be grouching about the sunshine soon."

"Yah!"

"One good morning, little senhors!" said Mr. Frulo, waving dusky hands in farewell as the blacks prepared to push off. "Top of a beautiful morning to you, my young friends! Adeus!"

Squawk squawk, squawk!

There was a whiz of blue and gold in the air and a macaw whizzed into the montaria and settled on the stern.

Bunter had forgotten his parrot! Evidently, his parrot had not forgotten Bunter!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's jolly old Bonito!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. The parrot had been named Bonito, which meant "pretty." "Taking your fowl with you, Bunter?"

"No," grunted Bunter.

"Better hand it over to Mr. Frulo, then."

"Shan't!"

Bob Cherry laughed. Bunter, evidently, was not in a good temper, or in a reasonable mood.

The montaria pushed off, Joao Frulo waving dusky hands in farewell, and the blacks paddled up the REXO.

The macaw remained squatting on the stern. The juniors rather expected it to fly away into the forest, but it remained where it was preening its bright feathers, and cackling now and then. Billy Bunter sat and scowled for a good hour, not having yet recovered from his early rising.

During that hour, however, he packed away foodstuffs from a well-filled basket, and this process had a gradually ameliorating effect on his temper.

Having emptied the basket—and filled the interior Bunter—he stretched himself on mats in the stern and went to sleep.

His snort mingled with the rhythmic splash of the paddles. The macaw hopped down and settled near him, with its head cocked on one side, apparently listening to Bunter's snore, and somewhat puzzled by the continuous rumble.



"Urrgh! Keep it off! Take it away!" shrieked Bunter. "Ow! Gerroff! Beast! Urrgh!" Bob Cherry followed the fat junior up, dangling the long-legged horror above the terrified fat face. "You asked for it, you blithering owl!" he roared. "Now you can have it!"

The sun rose higher as the montaria followed the windings of the Rexo. Here and there, open "campo" was passed, vast plains that stretched away to the distant hills. But for the most part, the river was banked by deep forest, which grew down to the water's edge, and, where it was shallow, even in the water. Monkeys and parrots stared down at the voyagers as they passed below.

In some places branches extending over the river hung so low that the juniors had to duck their heads to pass beneath them. Sometimes great masses of lianas trailed in the boat.

"Oh crumbs!" ejaculated Bob suddenly. From a mass of creepers, brushed by the montaria in passing, a gigantic spider dropped, landing on the slumbering face of Billy Bunter.

It was such a spider as the juniors had never seen before. They had heard of the huge spiders of the Brazilian forests, that preyed on birds, catching birds even as large as sparrows, in their webs. Now they saw one—sprawling over the fat face of the Owl of the Remove.

"Urrrgh!" came in a mumble from Bunter.

Bob plunged forward to the rescue. Naturally he did not want to touch the horrible creature with his hand, but he hooked it off Bunter's fat face on the end of a stick. Whether it was going to bite, he did not know, but he gave it no time.

In his haste the end of the stick clumped on Bunter's nose. But the spider was lifted off—clinging to the end of the stick with its innumerable long legs.

"Yow-ow!" howled Bunter. That tap on the nose had awakened him, and he sat up, blinking wrath. "Beast! Rotter! Wharrer you up to? Can't a fellow go to sleep without a beast banging him on the nose?"

"You silly ass!" roared Bob. "There was a spider on your face—"

"Rot!"

"I just hooked it off—"

"Gammon!"

"You blithering ass—"

"Oh, don't tell whoppers, blow you!" snorted Bunter. "You just leave a fellow alone, you beast! You needn't make out that there was a spider, because I jolly well know there wasn't! And if there was, nobody asked you to butt in, you beast!"

"You blithering fat owl!" roared Bob. "I won't butt in next time—"

"Well, don't!" snorted Bunter.

"And if you want your spider, you can have it!" roared Bob.

He swung the stick round, the spider clinging to the end; and the hideous creature whisked just under Bunter's fat little nose as he sat.

The fat Owl uttered a yell of horror. "Urrgh! Keep it off! Take it away! Ow! Gerroff! Beast! Urrgh!"

Bunter rolled over to get away from the long-legged horror. Bob Cherry followed him up, with the stick held at armslength. The spider, probably in a state of great surprise and bewilderment, clung with endless legs to the tip of the stick. Bunter, in a state of horrified alarm, scrambled away.

"Keep it off!" he shrieked.

"You asked for it," said Bob, "now you can have it!"

"Yaroo!"

Bunter dodged the spider frantically. He fell over the black bare legs of one of the grinning paddlers and went down with a bump that made the montaria shake from end to end.

"Ow! Keep it off! Beast! Wurroogh!" spluttered Bunter, as he sprawled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob lifted the stick and brushed the spider off in a mass of passing creepers.

All the fellows were glad to see the last of it—especially Bunter!

Bunter did not go to sleep again. He sat and cast uneasy blinks at the branches overhead, as the montaria paddled on, mile after mile, up the winding Rexo. And the chums of the Remove exchanged smiles. They could see that Bunter was already thinking of chucking that trip. Which, in the opinion of the Famous Five, and probably of Peter and Jim, was a consummation devoutly to be wished!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Through the Tropical Forest!

"A IN'T it hot?" groaned Bunter.

It was!

At midday, the montaria paddled into a shady creek, many long miles from the fazenda. There, under the shade of mighty branches, the party lunched, and rested in the shade. At that point the land trip was to commence, through the untrodden forest to the mountain that loomed against the blue sky far off in the west.

Nobody in Brazil dreamed of moving during the fierce heat of noontide, and the Greyfriars fellows had found it necessary to adopt that custom, strenuous fellows as they were. When the cooler afternoon came it was still, from an English point of view, fearfully hot. The hottest midsummer day at home was chilly in comparison.

But the time came to start, and they started. Outfits for the trip were packed in rucksacks, which the juniors put on their backs. Every fellow was carrying his own supplies—except Bunter. Bunter absolutely refused to carry anything. He did not find it easy to carry his own

weight—without any additional weight added.

Peter Valentine gave him a look—but did not speak to him. If Peter was fed-up with the fat and troublesome Owl, he did not let the fact escape him. Bunter's outfit was handed to one of the negroes.

The juniors understood that Chico, the Indian hunter, had gone ahead of the party to the Montanha Fria, to make some preparations for their arrival. But no one else was to join in the trip; and they had supposed that the blacks were to be sent back in the boat.

Peter had apparently made some change in the arrangements on account of Bunter. The montaria, instead of being sent back to the fazenda, remained tied up in the creek; and one of the blacks, whose name was Pedro, was told to follow the party through the forest with Bunter's pack.

Peter led the way, and the juniors followed, Bunter trailing wearily behind. Almost immediately, the forest swallowed them, and river and sky were lost to sight.

"I say, you fellows, ain't there a road?" squeaked Bunter.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"You fat duffer! There isn't even a path!" he answered. "We're right out in the wilds now. I don't suppose a white man, except Peter, has ever trodden here before!"

"Oh, rotten!" groaned Bunter. "I say, is it far?"

"I believe about twenty miles," said Harry.

"Twenty what?" howled Bunter.

"Miles, old bean—not yards!"

"Oh crikey!" said Bunter.

Twenty yards would have been enough for Billy Bunter through the thick tropical forest. Twenty miles made him feel quite faint.

"I can't walk twenty miles!" he gasped.

"Like us to roll you along like a barrel?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Beast!" said Bunter.

"Beast!" said the macaw, who was travelling on Bunter's shoulder. Bonito's

weight was negligible, and did not bother even Bunter.

"I say, you fellows," went on the parrot. "Rotters! Beasts! That old ass Peter Valentine! Lot of rotters! Yah!"

"You'd better be careful what you teach that bird to say, you fat ass!" said Harry, laughing. "Peter might smack your silly head!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" groaned Bunter.

"Coke!" said Bonito. "Coke, coke, coke! Rotters! Ha, ha, ha!"

The macaw's screech echoed through the forest, answered by screeches from wild parrots. Bonito went on talking. Perhaps the laughter of the juniors encouraged him to talk.

"That silly ass Bull!" said Bonito. "That fathead Bull! Oh lor'!"

Johnny Bull gave an angry grunt, as his companions chuckled.

"Knows you, old chap!" said Bob.

"That beast Cherry!" went on the parrot. "That clumsy beast Cherry!"

Johnny Bull chortled.

"Seems to know you, too, old bean," he remarked.

"Ha, ha!" yelled Bonito. "That idiot Wharton—yah! Lot of rotters! I say, you fellows! Lot of beasts! Lot of rotters! Lot of rotters!"

Evidently, Bonito had picked up a lot of things from Bunter. He was reproducing some of the fat junior's soliloquies.

The juniors could not help laughing. But Bunter was not amused. Plugging through the hot forest, with the prospect of twenty miles of it, had lowered Billy Bunter's spirits to zero. Bunter was tired of that trip—indeed, he was feeling tired of life!

Perspiration streamed down his fat face, almost in rivers. Wearily he brushed away cudless flies.

How Peter found his way through the forest was rather a mystery to the juniors. But the planter never hesitated a moment.

To the eyes of the schoolboys, it was absolutely trackless. In many places, the vegetation was so thick and tangled that it had to be cut with a hatchet.

to allow a passage. Peter and Jim wielded the hatchets; and it was hard, hot work. But the Famous Five were not going to leave all the work to others, and they insisted on taking turns when there was chopping to be done.

"Oh crikey!" groaned Bunter.

Wiry lianas had to be pushed aside, in masses and bunches. They were rather deceptive things, for sometimes they seemed to give way, and then tautened round a fellow and dragged him back. Bunter did no cutting—the trail was blazed for him, as he rolled on in the rear. But his fat legs were soon aching, and his fat arms ached and ached from pushing back the clinging creepers.

There was an almost continuous groan from the fat junior. He had been warned, on all hands, that he would not like the trip. Now he repented him that he had disregarded the warnings.

He had never dreamed that it would be like this. Near the fazenda there were paths, if not roads—scattered native villages; a tincture of civilisation. Here all was primeval. The Rio Rexo was on the outer edge of the settlements; beyond, for hundreds of miles, nature ran riot, as in the old days before the white men came to Brazil.

Bunter had heard that in the interior of that vast country there were thousands of square miles, untrodden by a white man's foot—rarely trodden even by the wandering Indians. He had not realised that the Valentino fazenda was on the border of that unpeopled region.

Only the existence of the river enabled Peter Valentine to plant in that remote region. Without the waterway of the Rio Rexo, not a quintal of coffee could have been sent away from the plantation.

Now that outlying settlement on the Rexo was left long miles behind. The juniors were tramping through primeval forest, untrodden save by a rare wandering hunter.

The thick greenery round them hid jaguars, pumas, herds of savage peccaries, mighty pythons that undulated along the branches. Dangers lurked in every thicket.

But worst of all, to Billy Bunter, was the heat and fatigue of that weary tramp. Even hidden perils were not so bad as that—at least, so long as they remained hidden.

Bunter groaned—and groaned—and groaned. He perspired, and perspired, and perspired! He swatted flies—and swatted, and swatted, and swatted!

The party had covered about a mile when the fat junior came to a halt. Halting, he leaned on a tree and gasped for breath, and wiped an ocean of perspiration from his fat face.

The juniors looked round at him. "Come on, Bunter!" called out Harry Wharton.

"Shan't!" gasped Bunter.

"Shan't!" said Bonito.

"You'll get lost, fathead!" said Johnny Bull.

"Beast!" gasped Bunter.

"Beast!" chuckled the parrot. "Rotter! Lot of rotters! Ha, ha!"

The party came to a halt. The Famous Five were warm and tired, but they grinned at one another. They had expected Bunter to conk out. Now, evidently, he had conked out.

Peter Valentine turned back. "Tired?" he asked.

"I'm worn out!" snorted Bunter indignantly. "Why the thump couldn't you tell me it was like this?"

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"I warned you that it was rough going, my boy," answered the planter, with a smile.

"Beast!"

"Wha-at?"

"Beast!" said the macaw. "That old ass, Peter Valentine! Beast! Ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry.

But the planter did not seem to hear—or, at all events, to heed—the injudicious revelations of Bonito. Only a faint smile flickered on his lean, bronzed face.

"If you'd like to return to the fazenda, Bunter—" he said.

"I'm going to!" yapped Bunter. "I'm fed-up with this. I can jolly well tell you—fed-up to the back teeth! Ooogh!"

"Very well; Pedro will take you back to the boat," said Mr. Valentine. He spoke to the black in Portuguese, and Pedro nodded and grinned. The montaria is still where we left it," went on the planter. "You can return in it to the fazenda, Bunter."

"Oh, good!" gasped Bunter.

It was an immense relief to Bunter. So it was to the rest of the party. The juniors understood now why the planter had told the blacks to wait in the boat at the creek, and why Pedro had accompanied the party thus far. Peter had foreseen that Bunter would conk out, and had made arrangements accordingly. The possibility of getting back, of stretching his fat, weary limbs in a restful hammock, quite brightened Bunter.

"Sure you don't want to come on, old fat man?" asked Bob Cherry, with a grin. "Another twenty miles or so—"

"It's bringing down your fat!" remarked Johnny Bull. "You're melting visibly, old fat bean! You've lost about a ton already!"

"Beast!"

That was Bunter's good-bye. He turned back, guided by Pedro, and disappeared towards the river. And the Greyfriars party, no longer accompanied by a continuous groan, tramped on cheerfully through the tropical forest.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Night in the Forest!

"HALT!"

Never had a word sounded more gladly in the ears of the chums of the Remove.

The dusk of the tropical evening was closing in on the vast forest. The shades of night were falling fast—very fast—for the tropical twilight was brief. So long as Peter and Jim tramped on, the Famous Five tramped after them, determined not to give in. Their legs felt like dropping off. But they were not going to grouse; they would have gone on till their knees crumpled under them rather than have taken a leaf out of Bunter's book.

But they were glad, very glad, when Peter called "Halt!"

The lean, iron-limbed planter could have kept on, and finished the journey to Montanha Fria without a rest. But he did not expect the same hardihood from the schoolboys, and he was too considerate to wear them out. They had done nine or ten miles of terribly hard going; they were tired, and sweating, and bitten by flies, and it was time for repose.

"Ready for a rest?" asked Peter, with a smile.

"We could keep on, sir!" said Johnny Bull sturdily.

"No doubt; but we camp here for the night," said Peter. "You've done a

pretty good day's march; my boys. Jim's more used to it than you are, and Jim is ready for a rest."

"Quite!" said Jim Valentine. "More than ready, Peter."

"Well, I shan't be sorry to sit down for a bit," remarked Johnny Bull.

And he sat down on a fallen log, and the other fellows followed his example.

Peter had picked an open glade in the forest for the camp. There was no sign of water, but a supply of that useful fluid had been brought in water-bottles. Thick walls of greenery shut in the glade, and overhead the interlocking branches barred out the sky.

The blackness as night descended was like pitch. But Peter lighted a camp-fire, which was soon crackling and blazing, casting strange lights and shadows up and down the glade.

Hot as the day had been, with night came cold, as is usual in the tropics. The juniors were glad of the warmth of the fire.

Over the fire Jim Valentine brewed "mate," the native tea that was the universal beverage. Peter cooked the supper. Harry Wharton & Co. gathered firewood, of which there was abundance on all sides.

There was a thrill in camping out in the lonely forest. Rifles were carefully loaded before the campers slung their hammocks and turned in. The fire was banked up to burn through the night, to scare away wild animals and the sounds that came from the forest told that that precaution was very necessary. More than once a spotted head looked out from the tree-ferns and lianas, and constantly, when they looked round, the juniors saw the gleam of eyes reflecting the firelight. A possible visit from a jaguar or a puma was rather thrilling to think of.

But the juniors were too tired to think much about jaguars or pumas. They turned thankfully into their hammocks after supper. Sleeping in hammocks, they had learned, was customary when camping in the Brazilian forest—a custom borrowed from the native Indians.

"Keeping watch, sir?" asked Bob Cherry, blinking drowsily at Peter over the edge of his hammock. "We'll all take our turns—"

"Go to sleep, my boy!" smiled the planter. "I shall sleep with one eye open. Boas noites—good-night!"

"Goo'—nigh'—"

yawned Bob, asleep before he had quite finished. The fire blazed and crackled and glowed red. From the forest came the innumerable sounds of the night: rustling of stealthy beasts of prey, calling of animals and birds, strange bell-like notes from the frogs. But the chums of the Remove were deaf to the sounds of the tropical night, sleeping as soundly in their hammocks as they had ever slept in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars.

Harry Wharton awoke at a late hour, lifted his head, and glanced sleepily round before settling down again. The fire was burning brightly; in the other hammocks the other fellows were fast asleep. He could see nothing of Peter Valentine, and he sat up and looked round for him.

It seemed unlikely that the planter could have left the camp; but he was not in the hammock; and he was not to be seen near the fire. Harry Wharton felt a twinge of uneasiness.

The thought of O Lobo came back to his mind. It was fairly certain that the bandit knew of the intended expedition to the Cold Mountain, though he did not know when it was to take place. Likely enough he had spied on the party from a distance when they started; quite likely he had tracked them in their journey through the forest. They had fully expected to see something of him, and now it occurred to Wharton that they might see something of him soon.

He was sleepy, but he did not go to sleep again. Peering from the hammock, he wondered where Peter was. As the planter had told the schoolboys to sleep, and leave the watch to him, Wharton did not care to turn out; but he was feeling rather uneasy.

He was relieved, a little later, to see a dark figure detach itself from the wall of green by the glade. He had no doubt that it was Peter coming back from a scout.

But as he watched the approaching figure he felt a thrill of startled uneasiness. Surely Peter would not be returning to the camp with that stealthy, creeping tread?

Wharton's heart beat faster.

Was it Peter?

The fire cast a bright ruddy light over the camp. But the hammocks, slung to a big ceiba, were in deep shadow of the branches overhead. They were almost invisible to the approaching man.

Closer came the stealthy figure, creeping softly and silently. And suddenly in the glow of the fire Wharton glimpsed the face—dark, beaky, black-bearded under the grass-hat. It was O Lobo.

But other eyes were on the bandit. Even as Wharton prepared to jump from his hammock, and seize his rifle, the sudden report of a firearm rolled like thunder through the forest.

Bang!

O Lobo gave a sudden bound.

Whence the shot came he could not see, and Wharton could not see. It was clear that the bandit had supposed that he was stealing upon a sleeping camp. He bounded clear of the ground as the sudden shot came. And Wharton saw his face, for a second, convulsed with rage, with a streak of red running down the dark, bearded cheek, where the bullet had gashed away a strip of skin.

But it was only for a second—the next, the bandit was bounding away into the trees, where he vanished from sight almost in the twinkling of an eye.

"Oh!" gasped Wharton.

There was a swaying and rustling of the hammocks as the whole party awoke, and stirred, at the roar of the shot.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"What—"

"What's up?"

Peter Valentine, with a smoking rifle in his hand, stepped from a thick clump of tree-ferns near the fire. There was a grim look on his lean face.

"All right, my boys!" he called out.

(Continued on next page.)

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"It was O Lobo!" panted Wharton. "Oh, I saw him? He is gone," said the planter, "and he has taken a mark of my bullet with him. I think. You can sleep, my boys."

Wharton realised that the planter had been on the watch all the time—in cover of the clump of tall ferns, watching with ready rifle for the enemy. He settled down to sleep, and did not open his eyes again till the golden dawn was glimmering through the branches.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Lost!

"WHAT a beauty!" said Bob Cherry.

He stopped to look at the butterfly.

The party were on the march again in the cool of the morning. Camp had been broken soon after daybreak, and a quick breakfast washed down with mate. Peter Valentine was in the lead, as usual, and the Greyfriars fellows strung out in single file behind him. Bob Cherry was bringing up the rear when the butterfly caught his eyes.

It was a beauty, as Bob declared. More than a foot in expanse across the spread wings, it had almost all the colours of the rainbow, and fluttered in the shafts of sunlight among the trees like a living jewel.

Harry Wharton glanced back.

"Come on, old bean!" he called out.

"Coming!" called out Bob.

He was about to follow on, when he stopped again, his eyes on the big butterfly. He had no desire to catch it, beautiful as it was; Bob was much too good-natured to think of destroying life idly. But the lovely insect was in danger of an almost invisible net spread between two tall tree-ferns.

It was a huge spider-web, spread horizontally. The butterfly, after resting a moment on the ground, rose, and hit the web above.

It beat frantically against the strange and unexpected impediment to its flight. Like the humming-birds and other small creatures on which the bird-killing spider feeds, it lacked the intelligence to fly downwards and escape on one side. Upward it could not go—and it was only upward that it strove to go. And the spider in its hidden lair, well aware of it, came crawling out—dark and hideous and hairy over the top of the web.

Bob turned quickly aside from the way the party were following, and hurried to the spot. The impending tragedy was only a dozen feet away from him, and he ran across at once to intervene.

Left alone, the bird-killer would have reached the spot, over the struggling butterfly; reached down and bitten the victim with its poisonous fangs, and dragged the hapless body away to its lair. Under the web, in the herbage, was a little heap of the tiny bones of small birds, slain by the hideous killer of the forest. But the butterfly was not going to be added to the list of the spider's victims.

Bob ran up quickly, reached out with his stick, and gave the huge spider a prompt poke. He did not want to hurt even such an ugly and savage brute, but he had to drive it away—and at that poke the spider scuttled back into his foul lair in a great hurry. Its long hairy legs whisked and vanished.

Then the stick demolished the fatal web. As it was knocked to pieces the

butterfly freed itself and soared away, flashing up to the trees like a gleaming jewel.

Bob's eyes followed it till it disappeared.

Then he turned back, to hurry after his friends. In the thick forest it was only necessary to halt a minute, for the fellows ahead to get out of sight. And Bob had spent several minutes.

He hurried, breaking into a run, dashing lianas and ferns out of his path. It was not easy to run in the tangled forest, but he was anxious to come up with the others. As they were going at a steady walk he should have overtaken them in a few minutes.

But he did not overtake them.

Five minutes—ten passed, and his run dropped into a walk. Then he halted, staring round him in surprise and dismay.

He had had no doubt that he was following the party. But it was borne in on his mind now that he was not.

He stared round blankly at endless trees, interlaced with creepers. Here and there were openings that looked like paths. It was clear that, in his haste, he had taken the wrong direction, and his hurry had only had the effect of taking him farther and farther from the right path.

"Oh crumbs!" ejaculated Bob.

He was not lost; he could not be lost, so near his friends. But for the thick trees he knew that they would be in sight. But in the Brazilian forest the visibility did not extend beyond a few yards. Surely, at least, they would be within sound of his voice.

But he was loath to shout, thus admitting that he was lost. Although the juniors had made a good many trips from the fazenda on the Rexo, this was Bob's first experience of the real primeval forest, untrodden by human foot. It was difficult for him to realise that a fellow might be hopelessly lost within a dozen yards of other fellows looking for him.

"I'm not lost—that's silly rot!" growled Bob, as the idea forced itself into his mind. "I shall come on them in a jiffy!"

He knew that the route lay westward. But it was useless to look up at the sun as a guide. The vast branches, interlocking overhead, screened the sun and the sky, only golden shafts coming through.

He tramped on uncertainly for a few more minutes, hoping every moment to sight the party. But only great trunks, decaying logs, tangled creepers and tall tree-ferns met his eyes. He stopped again. It was clear that if he kept on he might, for all he knew, be going farther away from his friends, instead of drawing near to them.

"Blow that beastly spider!" grunted Bob.

He had to call—and before the party got out of hearing. Very likely they had not missed him yet. Wharton, the last of the file, had passed out of sight before Bob left the path to go to the rescue of the butterfly. They were tramping on, nothing doubting that he was tramping in the rear. Bob's heart beat rather uncomfortably at the thought of being left behind—lost in the endless intricacies of an untrodden tropical forest. He shouted:

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

Putting all his beef into the shout, he roared again and again, and his voice rolled in innumerable echoes among the trees. Breathless, he stopped to listen for an answering shout.

He heard no voice. The thick walls of greenery blotted sound. And even if his friends were not yet far away, it was probable that they could not hear him. But as he stood listening there came a sound of crackling and rustling in the wood.

"Oh, good!" gasped Bob, in great relief, at that sound of someone approaching. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! This way!"

He had been thinking of unslinging his rifle, and firing a signal shot if his shout was not heard. But that approaching trampling in the thickets told him that he had been heard. He did not doubt that someone was coming back for him—most likely Peter. He was not lost, after all.

Greatly relieved, he waited and watched the swaying of the creepers as the trampling came closer. It sounded as if more than one was coming, and he wondered that his friends did not call back to him.

"Here I am—this way!" he shouted.

A mass of lianas parted, under a pushing hand, and two figures appeared among the creepers.

Bob caught his breath.

His eyes almost started from his head at the sight of a dark, black-bearded face—the face of O Lobo! Close by the bandit was another swarthy ruffian—a dusky half-breed, with a face scarred by the slash of a knife—a face so brutal and ferocious that it seemed like that of a wild animal.

Bob's heart almost died in his breast.

His shouts had not reached the ears of his friends. They had reached the ears of the savage enemy who was tracking the party through the forest. O Lobo and his follower were almost upon him, and the black, gleaming eyes of the Wolf of Brazil glittered as he saw the junior. He called to his companion and leaped towards Bob Cherry, a dusky hand outstretched to clutch.

For one spellbound moment Bob stared at the two savage faces. Then he turned and ran desperately into the forest, crashing through lianas, trampling down tree-ferns, stumbling, falling, picking himself up in breathless haste—running for his life. After him, in savage pursuit, came the two bandits, closer and closer at his heels.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Attacked by Peccaries!

"H!" panted Bob.

Something squirmed and squealed under his legs, and he tottered, and grasped at a branch, to save himself from falling.

In blind flight from the two bandits, the Greyfriars junior had no time to look where he was going—or to care! He was thinking only, if he could, of getting away from the savage outcasts of the sertao, hoping wildly that in his flight he might come across his lost friends.

Had a spotted jaguar, a puma, or a rattlesnake been in his way, he would hardly have slackened pace, with the two desperate outcasts at his heels. He did not, in fact, see the creature into which he dashed till it squirmed and squealed, and he staggered back from the shock.

Then, as he held on, gasping, to a branch, he became aware that the thickets round him were alive with moving forms.

Startled squeals, grunts, snorting howls filled the air with excited and angry sound. "Pigs!" was the first thought in Bob's mind as he heard the



Heedless of the knife that slashed at them, the peccaries swarmed over the struggling man, tearing and rending. Bob Cherry, white with horror, unslung his rifle and, following O Lobo's example, fired in quick succession at the swarming pigs below!

sudden angry din—a herd of wild pigs. And it was, in fact, a herd of peccaries into which he had stumbled.

The peccary is not a large animal, but in ferocity and sheer savagery of temper, the biggest wild boar has nothing on its small brother of the South American forests. And it is an absolutely fearless brute. The peccary over which Bob had stumbled in the thick grass and ferns had been rooting after fallen nuts, but immediately it turned on Bob, with gnashing fangs, and rushed directly at him.

He had no time to think; he acted on instinct, as it came. Leaping aside, he barely dodged that savage rush.

The idea of running away from a pig at home would have made Bob smile. But he had heard a good deal about the South American peccary since he had been in Brazil, and knew that it was no smiling matter. Even more dangerous than the bandits behind were the fierce little brutes that now swarmed after the breathless schoolboy.

Jim Valentino had told him about peccaries, and warned him that in case of trouble with them there was only one resource—to clamber into a tree. Even one was dangerous, and a whole herd would drag down, and tear in pieces, the strongest man, heedless of his firearms.

Whether Bob could have escaped by running, from O Lobo and the half-breed was doubtful, but it was certain, and he knew it, that he could not escape on foot from the peccaries, who ran like the wind. He plunged away through the underbrush, with a swarm of wild pigs at his heels, leaped at a branch of a ceiba-tree, and dragged himself up.

He was barely in time.

A sharp tusk tore his boot as he hung, before he could get out of reach. It slit the leather like a knife.

But the next moment he was out of

reach, clamboring desperately on the branch, and the peccaries ran to and fro under him, squealing with rage at his escape.

"Oh!" gasped Bob again. "Oh, crumbs!"

He sat astride the branch, only six or seven feet from the ground, panting for breath. He was too exhausted by his effort to climb higher into the tree, for the moment.

Under the branches of the ceiba there was a space, clear of thickets, but cluttered with rank grass and tree-ferns. Grass and ferns were crushed down by the peccaries as they ran and squealed—fifty of them, at least, every one a packet of unreasoning ferocity.

Trample, trample, came the bandits through the underwood, closer and closer; and Bob wondered breathlessly whether they knew of the danger ahead. It was likely enough that they had not heard the squealing of the peccaries in the loud crackling and crashing made by their own hurried progress through the tropical growths. And in less than a minute after Bob had swung himself up, a grass-hat came into sight below.

O Lobo ran in among the peccaries before he saw them. But he was swift to realize his peril—swifter than Bob had been. Without pausing in his stride he sprang into the ceiba, swinging himself on to a long, low branch, hardly a dozen feet away from the panting schoolboy.

He did not see Bob, for the moment, forgetting him in the sudden new peril he had barely escaped. Hanging on to the tree, with his chest over the branch, he shouted to his companion, who had dropped a little behind him in the chase. He was shouting a warning.

"Jose! Jose! Tome cuidado!"

The half-breed came crashing through the underwoods. He burst, panting, into the open space under the great tree.

Instantly the whole herd of peccaries turned on him. Before he even saw them they were rushing him down.

Had he leaped instantly upward he might have escaped the charge; but his foot caught in a trailing creeper, and he stumbled. He recovered from the stumble in a moment; but a moment was too much.

Bob Cherry, staring in horror from above, saw the sudden terror that disfigured the fierce, swarthy face as the half-breed went over. He heard the fearful scream that came the next second.

The half-breed scrambled up, only to be knocked over again by the swarm. Sharp tusks, keen as ground razors, were tearing at him on all sides, and under Bob's horrified eyes he staggered and rolled, streaming with blood.

Bob saw him flash the knife from his belt and strike madly, desperately, on all sides.

The stabbing blade sank deep into a squealing throat—into another, and another; peccaries, dead or dying, sprawled round him, but the rest of the pack showed no sign of fear.

Heedless of the knife that slashed at them, they swarmed over the struggling man, tearing and rending.

"Jose!" panted O Lobo, and there was a thrill of horror, even in the harsh voice of the hardened bandit.

Bob expected to see him drop back to the earth to leap to his associate's aid. But O Lobo was not thinking of leaping to his death.

Instead of that, he scrambled higher into the tree, and, sitting astride a branch, safe out of reach of the peccaries, unslung the rifle from his back. It was, in truth, all that he could do to help his comrade, unless he chose to share his terrible fate.

Crack, crack, crack!

(Continued on page 16.)

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GREYFRIARS DIAMOND DIGGERS!



(Continued from page 13.)

The rifle rang, and at each shot a peccary rolled on the earth.

Crack, crack, crack!

But the rest of the herd did not heed; they did not give a single look at the man above, who was picking them off, one after another. Their savage attention was concentrated on the wretch struggling madly in their midst.

Jose was still struggling, but feebly. The razor-like tusks of the peccaries ripped his flesh in strips. He sank down to death under the rending fangs of the fierce brutes.

Bob Cherry, white with horror, unslung his rifle. The half-breed was his enemy hunting him with murder in his heart; but Bob forgot that as he saw his vain struggle to escape his fearful doom. He followed O Lobo's example, firing in quick succession at the swarming pigs below.

But it did not deter the pack.

Jose's cries died away, his struggles ceased. With unabated ferocity the peccaries tore, and rent, and gashed, and Bob turned his face away, sick at heart. Only a tatter of bones and torn clothing remained of Jose, the half-breed, and Bob shuddered to think that that fate had nearly been his own.

A rustling in the branches of the ceiba reminded him of O Lobo.

The bandit was crawling along the branch to the parent trunk, and he reached it as Bob's eyes turned on him and clambered on the branch to which the boy clung.

The fate of his associate seemed already to be dismissed from O Lobo's thoughts. With the peccaries still raging below, he turned his attention to his quarry. Life was cheap in the forests of Brazil, and the bandit had looked on too many terrible scenes to be affected by them. While the wild pigs were still rending what remained of his comrade the Wolf of Brazil clambered through the tree to reach the hunted schoolboy.

Bob pulled himself together. It was impossible to attempt further flight, for it was sudden death to descend from the tree while the peccaries remained on the spot. Sitting astride the branch, his back to the drooping end of it, he faced the bandit crawling out from the trunk, and lifted his rifle to a level.

"Stop!" His heart was beating almost to suffocation, but his voice was steady. "Stop, you scoundrel, or I'll shoot!"

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

For Life or Death!

O LOBO grinned, with a flash of white teeth through his black beard. But he stopped a dozen feet from the Greyfriars junior, watching him like a cat.

At that short range Bob could have sent a bullet crashing through the burly body, and sent O Lobo whirling

down to the tusks of the peccaries. But the bandit well knew that only in the last resource, to save his life, would the schoolboy fire on him.

"Put down your rifle, little senhor!" said the bandit. "You are in my hands, and there is no escape! Jose is gone, but I have other comrades in the forest, and they are not far away."

"My friends aren't far away either!" retorted Bob. "They must have heard the shots. Keep your distance!"

The bandit made a movement forward. Bob's eyes gleamed over the rifle.

"I've warned you!" he panted.

He would have pulled the trigger the next moment, but the bandit stopped again.

Squatting on the branch, the ruffian bent his head to listen. He, as well as Bob, had no doubt that the planter and his party must have heard the firing. If they had missed the lost junior, the sound would draw them in the right direction to look for him.

O Lobo had no time to lose. But every passing minute was a gain to Bob; and he listened as intently as the Wolf for a sound from the forest. Distant, but sharp and clear, sounded the crack of a rifle.

Bob breathed quickly.

"That's a signal!" he muttered. "They've heard!"

O Lobo's jetty eyes glittered at him.

But for the peccaries, he would have run down the fleeing junior by that time, and Bob would have been in his hands. But he could read the desperation in the set face of the junior, and he hesitated to advance along the branch in face of the levelled rifle.

Bob had fired several shots at the peccaries, but he had still three remaining, and the range was too close to miss. And, in spite of the excitement that made his heart leap and thump, he held the weapon steadily enough.

"Give me ear, little senhor!" snarled the bandit. "If I had desired to take your life, I could have shot you down as you fled. You are my prisoner—and you know why; the boy Wharton has told you why I seized him that day at the fazenda—"

"I know," said Bob. "You're after Mr. Valentine's diamonds, you rascally thief, and you fancy you can make terms with him if you lay hands on one of his guests! You won't lay hands on me in a hurry!"

"The Senhor Inglez will come to my terms when I have you in a safe place!" said O Lobo, between his teeth. "You or another—e tudo o mesmo! It is all the same! Venha! You come with me, or I hurl you to death on the tusks of the peccaries! They wait—look!"

He made a gesture to the herd below, still tearing at the fragments of the wretched half-breed.

But Bob did not glance down. The sight sickened him, and he guessed that it was the cunning bravo's aim to divert his attention. His eyes remained fixed on the beaky, bearded face, with the gash of a bullet across the dusky cheek.

"You hear me!" snarled O Lobo.

"I hear you, you rotter!" answered Bob. "Keep your distance! There goes another shot—they're coming!"

Another rifle-shot rang in the distance. How far it was Bob could hardly surmise, for the thick trees deadened sound; but, at all events, he knew that his friends had missed him and were firing signal-shots.

He shifted his aim a little, so that the ball would not strike the bandit, and pulled trigger. The bullet whistled past O Lobo, and crashed into the trunk of the ceiba. Loud and clear, the

report of the rifle rang through the forest.

It was an answer to the signals of his friends, and it was heard, for another shot came echoing from the distance.

Immediately, Bob aimed at the bandit again, and his muzzle looked the enraged Wolf in the face.

There was mingled fury and indecision in the swarthy face of O Lobo.

That the planter and his companions were approaching as fast as the thick and tangled forest allowed, he had no doubt. The peccaries, savage as they were, would be driven off, or shot down under the rifles of so numerous a party. The bandit's own fate trembled in the balance.

But he was savagely reluctant to abandon his prey. He glared at the undaunted schoolboy, showing his teeth in a snarl.

Bob watched him over the rifle.

For a minute longer the bandit hesitated. He had slung his own rifle over his shoulder to scramble through the tree. Now, with a sudden, swift movement, he unslung it.

Bob caught his breath.

He could read the savage mind of the bandit like an open book. The murderous thought was written in the evil face. O Lobo had planned to make him a prisoner, and, failing in that, he was ready to shoot him down as ruthlessly as he would have shot a peccary.

It was life or death now—and Bob did not pause! As the bandit grasped the rifle to shoot, Bob pulled trigger.

Crack!

He was barely in time, for O Lobo's movements were sudden and swift, and in another moment the shot would have come. But it did not come, for Bob's bullet ploughed along the sinewy brown arm in the cotton shirt, and O Lobo, with a scream of pain, lurched wildly on the branch. The rifle crashed on the earth below as the bandit grasped at the branch to save himself.

For a long moment Bob watched him, his heart pulsating. He feared to see the bandit go crashing down to his death.

But the clutch of the cutcast held, and O Lobo did not fall. He squatted on the branch again, panting, the blood running down from the gash in his brown arm, and dripping from his fingers.

Panting, spitting out oaths, O Lobo clung to the branch with his sinewy legs, and his swarthy hand went to the knife in his belt. Faintly, from the distance, came the echo of a calling voice.

Below, there was a scuttling and rustling in the underwoods. The peccaries, having glutted their fury on the body of the half-breed, were leaving the spot. Six or seven of them lay dead in the trampled ferns, unheeded by the rest.

Grunting and snorting, the herd trampled among the trees, resuming the rooting after fallen nuts, that the incident had interrupted.

Bob heard them going, but he did not glance down. His eyes were fixed on the bandit. He had one remaining cartridge in his rifle, and his life depended on it—unless his friends arrived.

O Lobo, knife in hand, murderous fury in his face, stared at him with glittering jetty eyes, along the branch. Every savage instinct in his ferocious nature urged him to come to close quarters, but the steady rifle daunted him.

"Another time, little senhor!" he muttered at last. "Another time!"

He swung round on the branch, and clambered back to the trunk. The peccaries were still at hand, and he dared not descend for his rifle. It was easy for him to go, by clambering from

tree to tree, and Bob supposed that was his intention.

Watchful as he was, he was not prepared for the swift cunning of the desperado. Suddenly, with a lightning-like swiftness, O Lobo half turned and flung the knife.

More by luck than design, Bob caught it on the barrel of his rifle and dashed it aside. The sudden movement overbalanced him on his precarious perch, and he toppled over.

For one dreadful instant he hung to the swaying branch by his legs, the earth swimming beneath him.

His rifle dropped from his hands, and he clutched wildly at the twigs and foliage to save himself.

He hardly knew how he regained the branch. But he got hold of it with his hands, and struggled to draw himself up.

Hanging on the drooping, swaying branch with hands and legs, his brain swimming, he heard a panting yell of triumph from the bravo.

Like a jaguar creeping on its prey, O Lobo came clambering along the branch above. The Greyfriars junior was at his mercy now.

Had the ruffian still been armed nothing could have saved Bob. It seemed that nothing could save him now, for the handit, on the branch above him, beat and tore at his clinging hands and forced him to unloose his hold.

The hapless schoolboy's brain was spinning. Above him was the dark, evil face of the bandit; below he could hear the grunting of the peccaries—going, but not gone. The fate of the half-breed was in his horrified mind, and he clung on wildly and desperately, till the bandit at last forced his grasp loose, and he fell.

He gave a gasping cry as he fell; he landed on the crumpled grass and ferns with a shock that drove every ounce of breath from his body.

A lead squealing rang in his dizzy ears.

Two or three of the peccaries had sighted him and squealed alarm to the pack; the whole herd came trampling and squealing back through the underwoods.

Bob heard the squealing, grunting, trampling as he lay exhausted, and the fierce brutes swarmed round him; he gave himself up for lost.

He hardly heard the shout that rang suddenly through the trees; it was followed by the ringing of volleying rifles.

It was not the tusks of the peccaries that reached him. A hand grasped him and dragged him up, and he leaned—panting, almost sobbing for breath—on the shoulder of Harry Wharton.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

In Ambush!

"SHOOT!" roared Peter Valentine. "Shoot!"

His rifle was pumping out bullets.

"Bob, old man!" panted Harry.

He supported his chum with his left arm; in his right hand he wielded the hatchet with which he had been clearing a way through the underwoods. A charging peccary dropped at his feet with its skull split; another rolled over, disabled by a second slash.

But Wharton would have been down the next moment with the chum he had dragged from death had not help been at hand. Jim Valentine reached him, slashing at the savage brutes with an axe in his right hand, the automatic in his left spitting bullets.

All the party were on the spot now, and every rifle was ringing. The peccaries rolled over on all sides under the

rapid fire at close quarters; but they were as fearless as they were fierce, and still attacking.

More than half the savage herd were stretched in the crumpled ferns and creepers before the rest at last were driven off.

In those wild and whirling minutes no eye was turned on the dark, evil face looking down from the ceiba—and O Lobo did not linger

He knew what to expect as soon as the planter had a moment to spare for him, and he clambered away swiftly through the branches and lost no time in making his escape. It was easy for the lithe, active bandit to clamber from one tree to another by the interlocking branches, and in a few moments he was gone.

The firing ceased; what remained of the peccary pack scattered in the forest,

leaving the space under the ceiba like a shambles.

Bob Cherry pulled himself together.

"Thank goodness you came!" he panted. "Look for O Lobo; he was in the tree. Look for the brute—"

"O Lobo!" repeated Peter Valentine.

He stared up, but there was no sign of the bandit now.

Bob mopped his perspiring face.

"Don't look at that," he breathed, as Harry's glance turned on something that lay in the creepers among the dead peccaries. "That—that was one of O Lobo's gang, and the peccaries got him."

Wharton shuddered and did not look. "They'd have got me if you hadn't come up!" Bob shivered. "Let's get out of this."

(Continued on next page.)

GREYFRIARS INTERVIEWS

By Our Long-Haired Poet.

(1)

With odes and sonnets by the score,
With rhymes and limericks galore,
Each week we're deluged more and more,
They're multiplying tenfold!
And never does that tireless brain,
Evince the slightest sign of strain;
They still arrive in endless train,
Straight from the pen of Penfold!

This week:

DICK PENFOLD

(The Poet Laureate of the Remove.)

Who is the Greyfriars Rhymester? Readers have suggested that his real name is Dick Penfold. Well, this interview doesn't throw much light on the matter, so you must use your own judgment. We, ourselves, like Brer Fox, are "sayin' nuffin'."

(2)

Sometimes they're tedious, or worse;
Sometimes they're humorous and terse,
All kinds of poetry and verse
He still produces daily.
Across the world his fancies roam,
With ships upon the rolling foam,
And men who never more come home,
Like Nelson and Bill Bailey.

(3)

If you desire to weep and wail,
Just read his Sonnet to a Snail,
His Ballad to the Nightingale
Is also rather doleful;
But when romantically inclined,
His Ode to Onions you will find
Creates a wistful frame of mind,
And makes you gently soulful.



(4)

In sterner mood, his Cavalcade
Will make you bold and unafraid;
You'll shout like Colonels on parade,
"H'rump! H'rah! Attention!"
While sentimentally, no doubt,
His Serenade to Mr. Prout
Beats all the poems he's turned out,
Too numerous to mention.



(5)

His prowess on the footer field
Has well and often been revealed;
At cricket he is known to wield
A willow clean and forceful.
Photography is his delight,
His photographs are clear and bright,
At timing an uncertain light
He's specially resourceful.

(6)

"Now what's your little game?" you say.
"And why this flattering display?
Why write in such a fulsome way
Of Penfold's many talents?"
Well, list! I will a tale unfold!
The deadly secret soon is told,
He's given me no bag of gold
To swell my banking balance!

(7)

No, this is why I praise his skill,
And why I'll go on praising still:
If I don't praise him no one will!
And he might be forgotten!
My sympathy is with a lad
Who, like myself, is labelled "mad";
Alas, a poet's life is sad!
It's really rather rotten.

(8)

I interviewed him after class,
And at the time the silly ass
Was standing by a looking-glass,
And gravely staring in it.
A stupid and foolhardy act.
For what occurred? In point of fact,
The beastly looking-glass was crack'd
In under half a minute.



(9)

Now what had caused that sad result?
'Twas either Penfold's beauty cult,
Or Skinner with a catapult,
I cannot say for certain.
At all events, the mirror flew
In pieces, and 'twixt me and you,
That stopped my merry interview,
So let me draw the curtain!



"Come," said Peter Valentine quietly

Harry Wharton gave Bob a helping hand as they left the spot, but Bob Cherry was soon himself again.

"Sorry I've given you all this trouble, old beans," he said. "I suppose you missed me—"

"Not for some time," said Harry. "I thought you were following on; but when I called you, and you didn't answer, we stopped and turned back."

"What did you stop behind for?" asked Johnny Bull.

Bob explained. The juniors smiled as they listened. It was like Bob to go to the rescue of the butterfly in the spider's web.

"Of course, I hadn't any idea I should get lost," said Bob ruefully. "But I'd have fired a signal shot, you see, only that brute O Lobo turned up when I shouted and I had to hook it. There was another man with him—the man the peccaries got—but, according to what he said, there are more of them about—"

"Very likely," said Mr. Valentine quietly. "That villain is in touch with all the worst characters on the Rexo—and there are plenty of them. You must be careful to keep together after this, my boys."

"You won't lose me again, sir," said Bob; "I'll stick to you like Bunter to a chunk of toffee"

And the juniors were very careful not to lose sight of one another as they followed the winding ways of the forest, with Peter's tall figure striding ahead.

They had no doubt that O Lobo was following them, at a safe distance, probably with several of his ruffianly associates.

The trail they left was easy enough to pick up, for at almost every step branches had to be broken away, tree-ferns trampled down, lianas hacked and torn, and in some places it was necessary to cut a way through solid bush.

In a few days the swift tropical growth would hide every trace, and no sign would remain to tell that human feet had trodden here, but for the time it was a trail that a blind man could almost have followed.

Jim Valentine had dropped to the rear, and he kept a keen watch, with constant backward glances; but the thick forest, closing behind the party as they went, revealed nothing.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob, as a sudden gleam came through the trees ahead. "What's that?"

"Water," said Harry. They came on it in a few minutes more; it was a little stream flowing down from the still-distant Montanha Fria, a tiny tributary of the Rexo winding away through the forest to join the river.

There was little more than a trickle of water flowing between banks of mud, but in the heat of the tropical forest the Greyfriars fellows were glad to see it. They tramped through cracking mud and stooped in the shallow water to bathe their burning faces.

The whole party halted in the stream, ankle-deep. Down the bank their footprints were deep in the dried mud. If O Lobo was on the trail he could have no doubt of it when he reached the forest stream.

Peter gave the signal to resume the march, and they tramped out of the shallow water, up the gentle slope of the opposite bank. Immediately the forest swallowed them again.

It was not yet nearly noon, and they did not expect to halt for a rest till midday so there was surprise when

Peter gave the word to halt at a distance of a hundred yards or so from the stream they had left behind.

"We're not tired yet, sir," hinted Johnny Bull. As a matter of fact, the juniors would not have been sorry to rest, but they did not want the planter to fancy that they could not hold out for a morning's march.

Peter smiled. "A rest will do you no harm," he remarked.

"The restfulness will be terrifically welcome," remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "But it will give those esteemed and ridiculous bandits a chance to come up with us."

"Quite!" assented Mr. Valentine. "You think they're following us, sir?" asked Harry.

"I am sure of it. Peter's smile was grim. "O Lobo will not lose this chance of guidance to the spot where I found diamonds on the Cold Mountain; neither will he lose a chance of picking up a straggler from the party."

"He won't have another chance of that, Mr. Valentine," said Bob, colouring a little.

"One can never tell in the forest," answered Peter; "and when we strike more open country a bullet from behind a tree may do some damage. Wait here."

With his rifle under his arm, the planter turned back and disappeared through the forest in the direction of the stream that had been crossed ten minutes before.

The juniors exchanged rather uneasy glances.

"What's up, Jim?" asked Frank Nugent.

Jim Valentine smiled. "I think Peter's got an idea of discouraging O Lobo from sticking to our heels," he answered. "You needn't worry about Peter, though; he's picked a good spot for it."

"I wish he'd let us take a hand," said Harry. "There may be a gang of the brutes—perhaps five or six of them—"

"Peter's all right," answered Jim. The juniors could only wait. The thick forest hid the stream from sight, and the planter had vanished in the trees. They sat down, leaning against tree-trunks to rest—but it was an uneasy repose.

They knew that Peter was watching by the forest stream to ascertain beyond doubt whether the bandits were on the trail and to deal with them if they appeared. If the clash had to come, it was better for Peter to pick time and place for it than to leave the choice to O Lobo and his crew. But the juniors were uneasy, and they listened anxiously for sounds from the direction of the hidden stream.

It was hardly more than fifteen minutes before the sound came, but they seemed long minutes to the listening juniors. When it came, it came with startling suddenness.

Crack, crack, crack!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Lesson for O Lobo!

PETER VALENTINE lay at full length on a massive branch of a ceiba-tree, close by the bank of the forest stream. His rifle was held before him, and from the thick foliage he watched the stream below—and the farther bank, from which the pursuers would appear—if they came. And the planter had no doubt that they would come. His lean, brown face was set hard and

grim. He did not need the help of the Greyfriars fellows in what was coming, neither would he have cared to let the schoolboys witness the scene, if it could be helped. Warfare in the South American forests was grim and merciless.

He waited and watched. From the forest on the other side of the shallow stream, big grass-hats bobbed into view, over swarthy, savage faces. Making no sound, the planter watched, his eye gleaming over his rifle, and counted the ruffians as they emerged from the trees and came down the mud bank to the water.

O Lobo came first, and, following him, came three others, dark and desperate ruffians of his own kidney. The watching man saw O Lobo pause and point to the deep footprints in the mud, and his companions nodded and grinned. It would have been impossible for the Greyfriars party to blanket their trail, and at no point had the Wolf been left in doubt, at all events, for more than a few minutes. But on the muddy bank of the stream it leaped to the eye. The four bandits tramped on into the stream, where they stopped to plunge their faces in the cooling water, as the juniors had done. But O Lobo, standing in midstream, was looking about him with suspicious eyes.

The planter knew what was in his mind.

By following the stream in either direction, and walking in the shallow water, the party could have broken the trail, and given the pursuers a long and difficult task, to find the spot where they took to the forest again.

Evidently O Lobo suspected that they might have done so.

That idea had occurred to Peter, but he had not acted on it, because he was assured that, sooner or later, O Lobo would have struck the trail again, and the device would only have postponed what was inevitable.

As the struggle had to come, Peter chose to pick his own time and place—and he had picked a spot where he had all the advantage.

In the stream, the bandits were under his rifle, without cover, and he had only to pull trigger, to pick them off like rabbits.

Grimly he watched the four ruffians splashing in the shallow water. O Lobo, as he stared suspiciously round him, sighted the trail of footprints, deep in the mud, that led up from the stream, the way the Greyfriars party had gone.

"Bom!" the planter heard him exclaim. "Vamo-nos!"

He tramped swiftly forward, unconscious that that sudden movement saved his life. For it was at that moment that the planter pulled trigger, and the bullet missed the black-bearded ruffian by hardly an inch as he moved.

The report following the bullet echoed like thunder across the stream. O Lobo gave a convulsive leap, in his startled surprise, as he felt the wind of the bullet, caught his foot in one of the numerous potholes in the stream-bed, and splashed over headlong into the water.

Crack, crack! rang the rifle from the ceiba, as O Lobo splashed over; and a wild yell came from the three swarthy braves in midstream, as the bullets crashed among them.

One of them, struck in the leg, pitched over; another staggered with a shattered shoulder.

The third man staring wildly, grasped his rifle, and fired almost at random. The shot crashed into the ceiba, but yards from the planter stretched on the bough. Another shot

would doubtless have come closer, but the bandit had no time for another shot.

Peter Valentine fired again, with a steady hand and a deadly aim, and the swarthy bravo dropped his rifle and fell backwards in the shallow water that closed over him as he sprawled.

He did not stir again. But the man with the shattered shoulder was running back screaming into the forest, and the ruffian with the bullet in his leg was crawling out of the water.

Peter gave them no further heed. His eyes were turned on O Lobo.

The Wolf had barely escaped the first shot, but he had not been hit. He was plunging and floundering madly down the stream, to get out of the line of fire, as his companions fell.

Crack, crack! rang the rifle, as Peter fired twice, swiftly, after the black bearded bandit as he went.

But the bandit had plunged into a slimy thicket that grew out into the stream, and was lost to sight.

Peter slithered down the ceiba, ran to the water's edge, and watched for him to reappear, over his lifted rifle.

To the other three bandits he paid no heed. One lay like a log in the rippling water, and the two who were wounded were crawling into cover. He watched for O Lobo, ready to fire.

He pulled trigger at a stirring in the muddy thicket down the stream. The bullet spattered mud, but there was no cry from the bandit. O Lobo, under cover of the thicket, was crawling up the bank on the farther side of the stream. Peter did not see him again.

The planter shrugged his shoulders. He had effectually stopped the pursuit, and that was enough for him.

Leaving the stream, he retraced his steps to the spot where the Greyfriars party had halted.

In a few minutes he rejoined them.

Harry Wharton & Co. were deeply relieved to see him return. They looked at him in silence.

Peter smiled faintly. "March!" he said.

"You've stopped them?" asked Bob. "Quite!"

That was all Peter said, and the juniors asked no further questions. The march was resumed, and though Peter said nothing of what had happened by the forest stream, the juniors could guess enough to feel assured that the Rexo bandits were no longer on their trail.

They tramped on through the hot forest, till Peter gave the word to halt for the noontide rest.

There was a lunch of dried meat and mandioca bread, with mate tea, without which no meal was complete, and bananas, which grew wild in golden clusters, within reach on all sides.

Hammocks were slung to branches, and the juniors rested till the heat of the tropical day passed. Then once

more they tramped on through the interminable forest.

But the forest, interminable as it seemed, was thinning out, as they marched on during the afternoon. The earth under their feet was no longer thick with rotting vegetation, and here and there stones cropped up in the soil.

Since leaving the Rexo, the juniors had hardly seen the sky, so closely woven was the roof of interlaced branches overhead. Now patches of brilliant blue began to appear, growing more and more extensive, as the trees fell away.

"There's the jolly old mountain!" exclaimed Bob Cherry at last.

Dark against the blue sky the Montanha Fria rose to view. It had been in sight all through the long march, but for the intervening vegetation. But the juniors had seen nothing of it till now, and now it was quite close at hand.

It was not a high mountain—not more than six hundred feet. It lay, a great mass, before them, broken by innumerable arroyos and gullies and chasms. In places it was thickly clothed with forest or jungle; in others, the stony soil was almost bare.

Behind it, the setting sun glowed crimson. Peter led the way up a rugged arroyo, or water-course, down which a stream trickled, rippling round their boots as they advanced. It was the source of the forest stream they had crossed many miles back.

For a mile or more the Greyfriars fellows tramped up the rugged arroyo, into the very heart of the Montanha Fria. "Cold Mountain," as it was named, it seemed hot enough to the juniors; even the water that flowed round their feet was warm.

All the Greyfriars fellows were strong and sturdy, and determined not to show a sign of giving in; but they began to wonder whether that tramp would ever end. But it was near the end now.

Peter turned aside from the water-course, and tramped out on the bank. Here there was a level, though rugged, space, backed on all sides by what looked like impenetrable cliffs.

"Are we there?" gasped Nugent. Jim Valentine grinned.

"We're there!" he said. "And, look! There's Chico ready for us! And I hope he's got supper ready!"

Close by the high cliffs, back from the arroyo, stood a hut—or, rather, an open shed, for it had no walls, only corner posts and a roof. Near the hut a fire burned with a dull red glow, an iron pot slung over it on three sticks. And the scent of cooking that greeted the tired juniors, as they came up, was grateful and comforting.

Chico, the Caraya, stepped forward to greet the party, as they arrived, with a grave salute.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob

Cherry cheerily. "Glad to see you again, old coffee-bean! Looking for somebody?" he added, as the Indian's dark eyes scanned the party, and then his glance passed them as if in search.

"O Mocho bravo!" said Chico. "Amigo meu!"

He spoke in Portuguese, which was not so mysterious to the juniors now as it had been when they first arrived in Brazil.

They could not help grinning. Billy Bunter was nicknamed "the Owl," from his resemblance to that bird with his big spectacles. Chico possibly had heard that nickname from Jim Valentine—or perhaps the resemblance had struck him also. At all events, he alluded to the fat Owl of the Remove.

But he added an adjective to the name that no fellow at Greyfriars had ever thought of adding!

"O Mocho Bravo—the Brave Owl!" translated Harry Wharton. "Oh, my only summer hat! That's Bunter!"

"Amigo meu—that means 'my friend'!" said Bob. "Good old Chico!"

The Indian gazed at them, evidently puzzled by the smiling faces. Evidently, too, he had expected to see Bunter and missed him from the party.

"O Mocho bravo!" he repeated. "Onda esta o Mocho bravo!"

The Famous Five understood, but their Portuguese was not equal to a reply to Chico's question. But Jim Valentine explained in that language that Bunter had preferred to stay at the fazenda.

A shade of disappointment crossed the Indian's dark face. Clearly, he was disappointed not to see the fat youth who had saved him from the alligator, and who was, in consequence, a hero in his eyes. The Caraya missed Bunter! But he was certainly the only member of the party at Montanha Fria who did!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Digging Diamonds!

"**W**HERE are the jolly old diamonds?" asked Bob Cherry, next morning.

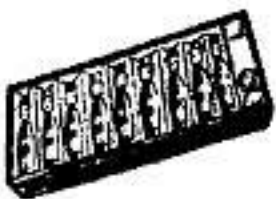
Jim Valentine chuckled.

Bob, apparently, had had some idea of seeing big, precious stones glittering in the sun, reflecting back its rays. As the juniors had never been at a diamond diggings before they did not quite know what to expect. Certainly, there were no flashing gems to be seen when they turned out in the sunny morning.

They had slept like tops, in hammocks slung under the roof of the hut. And they had found that they needed

(Continued on next page.)

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their blankets, and would have been glad of a few more! Cold Mountain merited its name, by night if not by day!

The sun was high overhead when they turned out; the cold of the night was gone as if by magic, and hard to recall in the gathering tropical heat! The forest had been hot, but the rocks of the Montanha Fria were baking, and the arroyo was rather like an oven.

Here and there were deep pools in the rocky river-bed—but for the most part the stream was not more than a few inches deep. Rocks closed it in on all sides, save for the rugged ravine where it descended to the forest, the way the party had come up.

All round, rugged cliffs barred the blue sky, and overhead was a vault of cloudless blue, across which, from time to time sailed great black vultures—never missing from a Brazilian landscape.

"The diamonds are not on view, old chap!" said Jim, laughing. "They're like most other things—only to be got by hard work!"

"That sportsman Lobo didn't strike me as a chap looking for a job of work," remarked Bob. "But I suppose even Bunter would put in a spot—for a bagful of diamonds. If they're deep down in the mine, where's the mine?"

"This way!" said Jim.

He led the juniors along the rugged, rocky bank of the arroyo. Here and there, among the other rocks, were ridges of lava which showed that at some distant date the montanha had been subject to volcanic action.

At a little distance from the hut they found Peter Valentine. He had turned out earlier than the juniors, and was already at work.

Clad only in a cotton shirt, and cotton trousers rolled up to the knee, the planter was wielding a spade.

At this point the rocks receded from the bank of the stream, and a kind of gravel formed the soil. It lay fairly loose, and flew under the planter's rapid spade.

Rather to the surprise of the juniors, Peter was shovelling the gravel into a rough truck, built of wood from the forest, though, no doubt the wheel had been brought from as far off as Rio de Janeiro.

"Healthy exercise!" remarked Bob. "But a bit hot for it!"

"O cascalho!" explained Jim, pointing to the pile of gravel that was growing in the truck.

"O which?" asked Bob.

"The gravel—that's what the diamonds are found in. It's called cascalho here. When that truck-load is washed-out, the diamonds in it will be found—if any!"

"Easy money!" said Bob.

"This was a lucky strike, of course," said Jim Valentine. "Peter struck it by sheer chance while hunting jaguar. He followed one up the arroyo, and shot it near the spot where the hut stands now. And you can bet that as soon as he saw this patch of cascalho, he was on it like a bird! You see, Peter's been at the diamond-mines in Minas Geraes, and he knows pay-gravel when he sees it."

"Useful thing to know!" said Harry. "I fancy I should have walked across this patch without guessing that there were diamonds in it."

"Very likely!" smiled Jim. "And I might have done the same! But Peter spotted it, and he scratched out a few diamonds the first day—and then he knew he had made a trike."

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"I suppose all diamond mines don't hit you in the eye like this?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Hardly! Generally, there's a thickness of at least twenty feet of sandy stuff, and clay under it," answered Jim. "Then, as likely as not, more sand. Then you come to the pay gravel. But, you see, there's been volcanic action here—and, umpteen centuries ago, the rocks were shifted, and that patch of cascalho was left exposed."

"I see."

"Nobody was likely to happen on it in this remote corner of an uninhabited region. If a wandering Indian came this way, he would know nothing about the fortune he was walking over. Peter would never have chanced on it if he hadn't been determined to get that jaguar."

"And O Lobo?" asked Johnny Bull.

"He knows nothing of it—all he knows is that Peter has struck diamonds, from spying at the fazenda."

"He would have spotted the place, if he had followed us here, though," remarked Bob.

"That was his game, of course; and he has another game on hand, which we've got to be careful to beat. If he gets hold of one of Peter's guests, he will trade his life for the secret!" said Jim. "He's twice come near to getting away with that."

"But you don't mean that Peter would—"

"Fathead!" said Jim. "Like a shot—and O Lobo knows it! But we're safe as houses here—O Lobo was stopped in the forest, and he will never scent us out in this hidden corner of the earth, unless he borrows a nose from a bloodhound."

That seemed to the juniors likely enough. The rugged recesses of the mountain had swallowed them from sight, and no trace had been left behind of their ascent of the arroyo.

But unlikely as it was that the Wolf would succeed in getting on their track again, they soon learned that Peter was taking no chances. While he worked in the cascalho, the Indian hunter kept watch lower down the ravine, lurking in cover with his bow ready. Had the bandit picked up the lost trail, a whizzing arrow would have transfixed him as he came up the stream, between the walls of rock.

Peter, resting on his shovel when the barrow was filled, glanced across at the group of schoolboys and smiled.

"Looking for work?" he asked.

"Ready and willing!" answered Bob.

"Heave that barrow away then."

Peter began spade-work again, loosening the cascalho for another load. Bob Cherry stepped to the barrow and grasped the handles. It was a heavy load, and Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh joined up to push. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent took spades to help with the digging.

"This way!" said Jim Valentine.

He guided the barrow to the water's edge. Here a section of the stream had been dammed with heavy rocks, forming shallow pool.

In the water lay a "cradle" for washing. Into the cradle the barrow-load of cascalho was tipped.

Bob trundled the barrow away for another load. Johnny and the nabob remained to help Jim with the washing.

With large gourds, water was dashed on the gravel again and again, washing away earth and stones.

"Oh, my esteemed hat!" ejaculated Hurree Janset Ram Singh suddenly.

His dusky hand plunged in, and he held up a stone between finger and

thumb. Though in the rough state, and lacking the brilliance that would follow cutting and polishing, it was easily recognised as a diamond.

"That the goods?" asked Johnny.

"That's the goods!" answered Jim. "A decent stone, too—worth about a hundred pounds in Rio!"

Johnny whistled. The nabob tossed the stone to Jim, who slipped it into a bag at his belt. Then the washing was resumed.

No more diamonds were found, but the process was not complete yet. Only the larger diamonds were likely to be found in the first washing.

From the cradle the remnant of the washed cascalho was trowelled out into a pan, where another and more meticulous washing took place. Half a dozen small diamonds, which Jim told the juniors were worth two or three pounds each, were the reward of the second washing.

It was interesting work to the Greyfriars fellows. There was a thrill in the idea of digging for diamonds. But as the day wore on they found it hard work, digging, shovelling, barrow-pushing, washing. The hot sun blazed down on them, and they soon discarded most of their garments and worked with bare arms, that blistered in the sun.

It was not such "easy money" as it had looked!

But they stuck to it manfully, and it was clear that that patch of cascalho was rich in stones, for quite a number of diamonds had been washed out before they stopped to rest at noon. In that remote recess of an uninhabited wilderness, Peter Valentine had found a fortune. The juniors did not wonder at the eagerness of the Wolf to get on the track of it.

Peter did not allow them to resume work in the afternoon. They were willing, but they were stiff with the heavy labour, and had a good many sun-blister to take care of. They were glad enough to lie in the shade and rest; but the hardy planter worked on, almost without a pause, till the sun set behind the Montanha Fria, when the Indian cooked a supper of armadillo steaks, and the diamond-diggers gathered round the camp-fire—cold again, after the burning heat of the day.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Saved by a Squawk!

SQUAWK!

Billy Bunter grunted.

Squawk!

"Oh, shut up!" growled

Bunter.

Squawk, squawk!

"Beast!" hissed Bunter.

"Beast!" retorted Bonito.

"Will you be quiet, you beastly, squawking brute?" snapped the fat Owl.

"Can't you shut up, and let a fellow sleep?"

"Sleep!" echoed the arara. "Sleep! Ha, ha! Let a fellow sleep! Lot of rotters! I say, you fellows! Ha, ha!"

Squawk, squawk!

Billy Bunter sat up, his eyes gleaming behind his spectacles. He was fed up with the conversation of the inncew.

It was a hot day. It was always hot at the fazenda. Bunter considered it rather unfair to be baked by the sun in March—which, as he was on the south side of the equator, could not be helped, seasons being reversed in that hemisphere. He would have been glad to fee, the March wind blowing across the quadrangle at Greyfriars. Still, he would not have been glad to roll into the Romove Form Room and receive

instruction from Mr. Quelch! Even the tropical heat was better than that. And at the fazenda, at least, he could laze without limit.

Harry Wharton & Co. had been absent some days now—and Bunter did not miss them a fearful lot. There was plenty to eat, and nothing to do in the way of work—a life that suited Bunter admirably.

Sometimes he talked to Mr. Frulo,

but as most of his remarks were extremely uncomplimentary to Mr. Frulo's native land Dom Joao did not yearn for his company. To the Italians and negroes who worked in the coffee fields Bunter had nothing to say—he knew no Italian or Portuguese. Domingo, the house-steward, was sometimes favoured with his conversation, but he did not seem to long for it. Bunter suspected Domingo of knowing more

English than he admitted. He was tired of Domingo's almost invariable reply, "nao entendo," which meant, "I don't understand!" He suspected that Domingo could have understood had he put Bunter's conversation at a proper value.

Still, he had no lack of talk, for Bonito talked incessantly. Bunter was too lazy to teach the parrot anything, (Continued on next page.)



COME INTO the OFFICE, BOYS - AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the "Magnet," The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped, addressed envelope will ensure a reply.

THERE are two more marvellous pictures for your magic spectacles free with this issue—making a grand total of twelve pictures.

And what a wonderful collection, too! Once again, the good old MAGNET has proved beyond doubt that it is the finest value-for-money paper on the market!

I am frequently receiving letters from readers asking for back numbers of the MAGNET. Such a request this week comes from G. Wilkins, of Belfast. To obtain them he must write to our Back Number Dept., Bear Alley, Farringdon Street, E.C.4, enclosing the cost of copies required, plus the postage. I am always sorry to hear that a regular reader has missed one or two copies. It proves only too clearly that my oft-repeated advice should not be ignored. Bear it in mind now and always: "Order your copy in advance!"

"A Constant Reader," of Tonbridge, Kent, asks

WHEN WERE PLAYING-CARDS FIRST USED?

The earliest mention of their use occurs in the household accounts for 1392 of Charles VI of France. Exactly who invented playing-cards and when they were first used is uncertain. Some writers claim that they were first introduced from Arabia. Others say they came from the far West. The generally-accepted opinion is that they were invented and first used, in Venice, Italy. The earliest cards used in this country were hand painted, but early in the fifteenth century the manufacture of cards had become established in Germany. In 1463 cards were being manufactured in this country, and a law was passed to prevent foreign cards being imported. In 1615 a duty was first levied on cards, which rose from 5s. a gross of packs to 2s. 6d. per pack. This high duty led to much smuggling of cards, and the duty was subsequently reduced to 3d. per pack, which is the duty payable at the present time.

Designs of playing cards have varied greatly, and if my reader is interested in them, he should pay a visit to the British Museum, where a marvellous collection of playing cards can be seen.

FROM a Hartlepool reader comes the following query: "Who was the only monarch to lose his throne last year?" Quite a number of monarchs have lost their

thrones recently, but the only one to do so last year was

THE KING OF SIAM.

Siam has always been a rather peculiar country so far as its monarchs have been concerned. In olden days there was a Siamese king who would never allow anyone to approach him, except on their hands and knees. He kept a large body of retainers who were never allowed to stand upright. Many of these, owing to the terrible conditions under which they existed, died with their knees permanently bent, and their backs broken! So much for the "good old times" in Siam. When his particular king's son came to the throne, however, he abolished the order, and commanded his subjects to stand in his presence.

Thank goodness we don't live in

THE DAYS OF THE TYRANTS!

There was a black ruler of Hayti, for instance, who had a remarkable manner of proving how stern was his discipline over his bodyguards. He used to exercise them on a parade ground overlooking a terrific precipice. He would face them up opposite the brink of the precipice, and then order them to march. Sometimes he would halt them on the very brink of the precipice, but sometimes he would refuse to give the order to halt, and the whole band had to march unflinchingly over the precipice to a terrible death beneath. To disobey the order would have meant death by the most appalling tortures.

A similar "death march" happened in Russia in the reign of Czar Paul I. When reviewing his bodyguard, he got annoyed about a button on one soldier's coat. He gave the order: "About turn. March!" When asked where they were to march, he answered "To Siberia." There were four hundred men in the march, and the distance to Siberia was over 2,000 miles. The country to be traversed was roadless wastes, and the men had no food or proper clothing. They were never heard of again!

In my chat a little while ago I mentioned revolvers and automatic pistols. This has caused a Yorkshire reader to write and ask me for a few

POINTS ABOUT PISTOLS.

Pistols were invented in the town of Pistoja, in Italy. The first people to use

them, however, were the English cavalry in the year 1544. Many people think that revolvers are a comparatively recent improvement on the earlier pistols, but actually pistols with revolving cylindrical breeches were in use a long time ago. There is one in the United Services Museum, in London, which is supposed to date from the time of Charles I. An eight-chambered matchlock revolver, which dates from the 16th century, is in the Royal Artillery Museum. So, you see, revolvers are not new ideas. Many people think that Colonel Colt, the American, invented revolvers. He certainly invented the Colt revolver, and also the method of manufacturing them by machinery. This method was not introduced to England until 1853, and induced the British Government to establish the Enfield armoury two years later.

WE'VE been having a lot of rain in this country recently, and this lends added interest to a query which comes from a reader in Birmingham. Which, he asks, was

THE WETTEST YEAR

this country ever experienced? Last year's figures are not available yet, but the record total rainfall for a year was in 1923, when over 247 inches of rain fell in Cumberland. There have been some very spectacular falls of rain in this country. For instance, in one day at Ilkley over £100,000 worth of damage was done by rain! A rain of "blood" was experienced in Cornwall in 1902, and over the whole of the South of England the following year. This red rain was found to consist of red dust mixed with ordinary rain, and the dust was traced to the Sahara desert. The dust had been picked up there, had travelled to this country, and then fallen with the rain—causing quite a lot of terror to superstitious people! Red rain has fallen frequently in other parts of the world, due to the same cause. One fall of "blood rain," however, which occurred in Hamburg, Germany, was found to be caused by the presence of millions of tiny insects in the rain!

As my space is running short, I must leave over a number of other queries, and say a word about next week's programme.

"THE PRISONER OF MACAW ISLAND!"

By Frank Richards

is the title of the grand long complete yarn of Harry Wharton & Co. With one of Peter Valentine's guests from Greyfriars in his hands, O Lobo, the ruthless Brazilian bandit, plans to trade his prisoner's life for the diamonds on the Montanha Fria. Whether or no he succeeds you will discover when you read this exciting yarn next Saturday. Geo. E. Rochester gives us more stirring chapters of his brilliant adventure yarn, while the "Greyfriars Herald" and our clever rhymester's "Interview" are well up to standard. Don't miss this tip-top issue, boys.

YOUR EDITOR.

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but Bonito repeated what he heard, and was gradually getting quite a remarkable collection of phrases.

Bunter was quite used now to finding the parrot on his shoulder when he took his walks abroad.

When he napped in a hammock under a shady tree, Bonito would perch on the rope, or an adjacent bough, and watch him with solemn eyes.

Really, he was a very intelligent bird, for his cackling and squawking and whistling were always checked when Bunter was napping, as if he understood how important it was that the fat Owl should not be awakened.

Which made his uproar all the more annoying on the present occasion. Having lunched, on his usual substantial scale, Billy Bunter had sat in the hammock and parked Brazil nuts and rapadura and bananas and oranges till not an available inch remained unfilled within his extensive circumference. After that, Bunter naturally needed a rest.

And Bonito, instead of keeping respectfully silent, as usual, while he watched his master's slumbers, hopped on to the hammock, squawking away at a terrific rate.

It was no wonder that Bunter was annoyed, and that his little round eyes gleamed wrath through his big, round spectacles.

He set those spectacles straight on his fat little nose and glared at the macaw, shaking a fat fist at it.

"Shut up!" he bawled
"Shut up!" said the macaw. "Lot of rotters! Hi, hi! Ha, ha! Shut up! I say, you fellows, shut up!"

Squawk, squawk, squawk, squawk!
The parrot was just out of Bunter's reach, or something might have happened to it then. The fat and sleepy Owl boiled with wrath.

"What's the matter with you, you beast?" he howled. "Can't you keep quiet? What are you squawking about, blow you?"

Squawk squawk! Scream!
The macaw, wildly excited, hopped, and squawked and screamed, and almost yelled. Billy Bunter was not quick on the uptake, but even Bunter's dense brain realised that there must be some cause for the parrot's unusual excitement. Something was alarming Bonito, and the thought of a wild animal or a snake flashed into Bunter's mind.

Forgetting, for a moment, his wrath, he stared round from the hammock, to spot the cause of the alarm.

Wild animals had long been cleared off from the vicinity of the coffee plantation, but it was always possible that a snake might creep from the surrounding forest; and a snake, certainly, would have alarmed Bonito. But it was not a snake that Bunter saw as he blinked down from the hammock.

His eyes almost bulged through his spectacles as he glimpsed a dark, evil, black-bearded face among the trees.

He sat petrified

The hammock was swung on a tree, in the grove at the side of the lawn. It was in sight of the house windows. All round were coffee-fields, with a hundred men at work there, under the supervision of Joao Frulo. From the landing-stage on the river Bunter could hear the calling of native boatmen. Danger from O Lobo had not entered his mind in so secure a spot.

But it was the bandit he saw, creeping, with the stealth of a jaguar, among the trees. He almost fell out of the hammock with horror and fright.

Squawk squawk squawk! came wildly from the macaw. The horrified

fat Owl knew why now. Evidently, the stealthy, creeping movements of the bandit had made the macaw suspicious, and alarmed it.

"Oooogh!" gasped Bunter.
The bandit, as he crept towards the hammock had one eye on the house. He was taking great risks in venturing into the gardens of Boa Vista. From the black servants he had little to fear, but Mr. Frulo carried a rifle slung on his shoulder, and it was certain that he would have pumped out bullets at sight of the Wolf. And the alarm would have been given at once if any eye had fallen on O Lobo.

But his luck was in, for no eye fell on him, except the sharp, glittering eyes of the macaw. But for the macaw Bunter would have been fast asleep in the hammock, and, in a few minutes more, in the grasp of the bandit. Bonito had given the alarm in time. A good deed is never wasted, but Billy Bunter had certainly never dreamed of the result when he had helped the macaw out of its scrape.

He blinked in horror at the black-bearded bandit, and O Lobo, seeing that he was discovered, ceased to creep stealthily and made a swift bound towards the hammock.

Bunter, with a howl of terror, rolled out on the other side.

He bumped on the ground, leaping up again like an india-rubber ball. Activity was not in Billy Bunter's line, but he displayed as much activity now as the nimblest kangaroo.

He was on his feet in a split second, bolting across the lawn towards the house, and yelling at the top of his voice.

"Help! Help! Help!"
Squawk, squawk, squawk! came from the macaw. The parrot whizzed after Bunter, and clutched at his usual seat on a fat shoulder.

Bunter did not even know it was there. He raced on, yelling for help. O Lobo, with gritting teeth, rushed out of the trees in pursuit.

The startled black face of Domingo looked from the veranda. At sight of the bandit the steward let out a yell that awoke almost every echo of the fazenda. Shouts of alarm from all directions followed it.

Loudest of all rang the wild yells of Billy Bunter as he headed for the shelter of the house at amazing speed.

"Que ha?" came a shout, in the voice of Mr. Frulo. "O que!" The manager came running up the path from the Rexo, rifle in hand.

"O Lobo!" was the answering yell of the terrified blacks.

"Help!" yelled Bunter.

"Help! Squawk, squawk!" yelled Bonito.

Bang!

O Lobo stopped. The fleeing fat junior, half-way to the veranda steps, was almost within his grasp.

But as the bullet whistled by his head, the bandit realised that the game was up; and he stopped, turned, and darted back into the orange-trees.

"Nossa senhora!" gasped Mr. Frulo. "E elle—O Lobo!" He fired twice as the bandit ran, and again as O Lobo disappeared into the orange-trees.

"Ow! Help! Wow! Help!" spluttered Billy Bunter. "Oh crikey! Keep him off! Yaroooh!"

Mr. Frulo passed him, running for the orange grove with smoking rifle. He shouted to the blacks, and, with the manager in the lead, a crowd of the negroes joined up and followed him.

But the fact that the Wolf was in full flight, with Dom Joao and the blacks in pursuit, made no difference to Billy Bunter. He charged on, and

charged up the steps into the veranda. And a black boy, who was watching from the steps, rolled over under his charge, and went bundling down to the ground, with a series of terrific yells.

Bunter did not heed him.
He charged across the veranda into the house; bolted into his room, and banged the door after him and locked it. He dragged his bed to the door for further security, and then plumped down on the bed, gasping for breath.

"Urrrrggh!" gurgled Bunter.
"Urrrrggh!" repeated Bonito.
"Ow! Oh crikey! Wow!"
"Oh crikey!" chuckled the macaw.

"I say, you fellows— Oh crikey!"
"Thank goodness you woke me up, you noisy beast!" gasped Bunter. "That awful villain would have had me!"

"Noisy beast!" screamed Bonito. "Noisy beast! Ha, ha!"

Bunter, quaking on the bed, listened. He gave a squeak of alarm at the sound of a footstep outside his door.

"Ow! Go away, you beast! Oh crikey!"

"All is safe as one house," came the reassuring voice of Dom Joao Frulo. "O Lobo he run with himself at one very great speed, and there is one complete disappearance of that very bad person."

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "Oh lor'!"

"Oh lor'!" chuckled Bonito. "I say, you fellows— Oh lor'!"

"It is all safe to come out of a room," said Mr. Frulo, through the door. "It is safe as one house, as you say in English. If O Lobo show one nose any more time, I shoot him with complete deadness."

"Sure he's gone?" gasped Bunter.

"By this time, little senior, he is far away in one forest, and he will not dare to show one more nose," assured Mr. Frulo. "On a word of Joao Frulo, you need not be afraid."

"Who's afraid?" snorted Bunter. Inside the house, and with the Wolf of Brazil far away in the forest, Billy Bunter recovered his courage. And he was not standing any cheek from a copper-coloured Brazilian coffee manager. Not Bunter. "Who's afraid, I'd like to know?"

"Que diz vossa merce?" gasped Mr. Frulo. "What do you say?" He seemed surprised.

"I'm jolly well not afraid!" snorted Bunter. "Too much pluck to be scared by a coffee-faced Brazilian, I hope. Yah!" He snorted again at the sound of a chuckle through the door. "What are you sniggering at, blow you?"

Mr. Frulo did not explain what he was sniggering at; but he was still sniggering as he went away.

"Cheeky cad!" growled Bunter. "Rotten cheeky foreigner!"

"Fat idiot!" said the macaw unexpectedly. "Silly fat ass! Ha, ha!"

Those remarks had evidently been picked up from Harry Wharton & Co.

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Bunter.

"Shut up!" cackled Bonito. "Silly fat ass! You talk too much, old fat man! Shut up! Ha, ha!"

Whereupon Billy Bunter grabbed a pillow from the bed, and shied it at Bonito, missing by about a yard.

"Beast!" squawked Bonito. "Yah! Beast! Ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter glared at the macaw. But he remembered that Bonito had saved him from the bandit. And, after all, the happy macaw did not know what he was saying. He was quite unconscious of the fact that he



"Oh, look!" cried Bob Cherry, nudging Wharton's arm. "Look!" O Lobo grinned, until a stirring in the grass behind caused him to glance round. The next moment a yell of terror burst from the bandit, as he saw the anaconda about to swoop on him.

was handing out painful truths. So Bunter relinquished the bolster, which had been about to follow the pillow.

"All right," said Bunter. "You're a noisy beast, but you've done me a jolly good turn, and I'll jolly well get you some nuts."

"Nuts!" said Bonito, nodding at Bunter from his perch on the bed head. That, at least, was a familiar and agreeable word to Bonito, which he did understand. "Nuts—nuts! Ha, ha! I say you fellows, nuts!"

"You're not a bad old bird," said Bunter.

"Bad old bird!" yelled the parrot. "Bad old bird! Nuts—nuts! I say, you fellows, you're a bad old bird! Nuts!"

Billy Bunter grinned, rolled the bedstead aside, and opened the door. Bunter and Bonito were soon busy together on nuts, both in a state of happy satisfaction.

But, in spite of Mr. Frulo's assurance, Billy Bunter did not go out of the house again. He sagely resolved that, until the other fellows came back from Montanha Fria, he would confine his walks to the veranda, with an eye open for bandits, ready to dodge into the house at a sign of a black-bearded face. It was not much of a hardship to Bunter, who always preferred to take his exercise sitting down.

To that sage resolve the fat junior kept carefully. And if O Lobo watched for him again, he watched in vain. But the fat Owl waited impatiently for the return of the party from the Cold Mountain, little dreaming of the strange and terrible adventures that were to fall to his lot before he saw Harry Wharton & Co. again.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Anaconda!

"DON'T go too far!" said Peter. Bob Cherry grinned. "Right—ho! You're not going to lose me again," he answered.

"No danger of that, so long as you keep to the arroyo," said Peter Valentine. "But keep out of sight from the plain. There may be eyes on the watch at the foot of the montanha."

"Rely on us!" cried Harry Wharton. The Greyfriars party had been a week on the Montanha Fria. Every day the juniors put in a spell of work at the digging, trundling, and washing of the cascatho. But the labour was hard and wearing, and Peter would not allow them to keep at it as he did himself.

But there were other things to be done, and no lack of occupation. Chico knew paths over the cliffs that seemed impenetrable, and nearly every day he went to hunt, and sometimes one or two of the juniors went with him. The unending farina—the staple food in Brazil—had to be varied as an article of diet; and iguana cutlets and armadillo steaks figured on the bill of fare, and other things that were strange and new to the juniors.

All down the course of the rocky arroyo there were deep pools here and there in which fish were to be found and netted. On this particular afternoon Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry were going to look for fish.

Peter's warning was not unnecessary, for though nothing had been seen or heard of O Lobo, it was likely enough that the desperado was not far away. There was nothing to guide him up the rocky ravine—similar to a hundred

others that split the barren rocky slopes of the Cold Mountain. But a sight of one of the party would have been enough for him if he had been lurking in the forest at the foot of the mountain.

Wharton and Bob clambered down the ravine, treading in the trickling water that flowed round their feet. In a few minutes the winding arroyo hid them from the camp.

But it was a good mile down to the plain, and they were able to cover at least half that distance without danger of being spotted by watchful eyes that might be looking from the forest below.

"This looks a good spot," remarked Bob.

He came to a halt where the rocky bank of the arroyo levelled out a little, and a patch of thick jungle grew on less stony soil. Here the stream widened, spreading in shallows, with here and there a deep pool in the shadow of jutting branches.

"Looks like it," agreed Wharton. Below them the arroyo wound on downwards, but the high cliffs on either side shut off the view at a short distance.

The sun came down in a stream of heat, and they were glad to pick a spot under shady boughs on the edge of the patch of jungle. Fish could be seen in the clear water, and they had only to winkle their nets.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is that a jolly old peccary?" exclaimed Bob suddenly, as a grunting noise came from the thickets above where they sat.

Wharton listened. "No peccaries up here," he said. "I believe they stick to the forests, and they never go about alone, either."

"Sounds a bit like Bunter!" remarked Bob, with a grin.

Harry Wharton laughed.

It was an odd sound that the juniors had not heard before. It was rather like a grunt, with a strange hissing sound to it. It did not sound alarming to the two juniors. They knew that it did not come from a jaguar or a puma. They concluded that there was some small animal in the thickets, and were about to settle down to their fishing when the jungle, a dozen yards above the spot where they sat, began to stir.

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Bob, jumping to his feet, as a sliding head appeared suddenly from the thicket.

Something that looked like a hose-pipe of immense thickness undulated behind it.

"A snake!" gasped Wharton.

The juniors had seen plenty of snakes in Brazil. In the "sertao," or back-country, everyone had to walk warily on account of serpents of all sorts and sizes. Snake-bite was one of the most frequent fatalities among the barefooted Indians and negroes.

But this was their first anaconda, and the sight of the terrible creature held them spellbound for a moment. Then they bounded away into the middle of the watercourse, forgetting their nets.

Evidently, that patch of jungle was the den of the anaconda, and they had disturbed it. If it had fed, no doubt it would have remained still; the fact that it was stirring showed that it had not fed, but wanted to feed. The vast coils undulated at a rate of speed that was amazing in so huge a creature; for, as its length coiled from the jungle, they could see that it was not less than twenty-six feet long.

"Hook it!" panted Bob.

The juniors had not brought firearms with them—not that firearms would have been of much use against a serpent. Bob had a hatchet slung to his belt, but it was the only weapon they had excepting their knives.

"Hold on!" Wharton caught his companion's arm. "Get back! We can't pass the brute!"

The anaconda coiled from the thicket above them, cutting off their retreat to the diamond camp, half a mile away up the ravine. Bob's first impulse was to rush past it, but Wharton dragged him back in time. He could see at a glance that there was no chance of getting through.

"Get back!" he panted.

They retreated down the arroyo, with beating hearts, hoping that the giant serpent would coil back into its lair and give them a chance of passing it. But after them, in heavy coils, the anaconda undulated, heedless of the shallow water splashing round it. It was in pursuit of them, and, once enclosed within those mighty coils, they knew that their bones would crack like pipe-stems.

They retreated, with their faces towards that terrible enemy at first, but its swiftness forced them to turn and run. Leaping from rock to rock, with panting breath, they fled down the arroyo, with the monster undulating in deadly pursuit.

Peter's warning was not forgotten. But they had no choice in the matter now. There was fearful death at their heels, and it was a race for life. Once or twice, behind them, came that strange noise of mingled hissing and grunting; but for the most part the huge brute rolled in silence. But it never paused for a second.

Breathless and panting, the running juniors reached the foot of the arroyo where it led into the plain towards the forest. They dashed breathlessly out of the ravine. There were trees within

reach, but it was useless to climb them; the anaconda was a swifter climber than any human being. But in the open it was possible to dodge the brute, and they had gained in the chase.

Looking back into the narrow ravine, they could not see it, though it was certain that it was still following.

Bob mopped the perspiration from his brow.

"Get out of sight!" he panted. "The brute may pass on if it doesn't spot us. Get into cover and watch."

"This way," answered Harry.

Between the Montanha Fria and the forest was a thinly wooded tract. Harry Wharton stopped where a bunch of feathery canes grew, mingled with gigantic yellow trumpet-flowers, blossoms as large as hats. The panting juniors placed it between them and their pursuer.

Through the openings of the clump they watched, with thumping hearts, hoping to see the anaconda glide away to the forest, but ready to take to instant flight again if it turned in the direction of their hiding-place.

Hardly breathing, they watched, little guessing that, in their flight from that terrible enemy, they had passed almost within the grasp of another enemy, almost as dangerous

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Saving an Enemy!

O LOBO showed his white teeth in a snarling grin through his black beard.

The bandit of the Rexo could scarcely believe in his good luck as he stood under a giant fig-tree and stared at the figures that ran past. His black eyes glittered at the running schoolboys hardly a bola's cast away.

The Wolf was alone, and his tattered look showed that he had had rough and hard days in the forest. Savagely determined as he was, O Lobo almost despaired of success by this time.

After Peter had stopped his pursuit at the forest stream, more than a week ago, the bandit had trailed back to the Rexo. His desperate attempt at the fazenda had followed. Defeated again, O Lobo traversed the forest once more, heading for the Montanha Fria, and for days and nights he had been lurking, watching, hunting, searching, in the desperate hope of picking up the trail of the diamond-seekers.

Somewhere in the rugged, pathless recesses of the Cold Mountain he knew that they were to be found. But there was no clue, and he was almost at the point of giving up the vain search.

It was a sudden and startling surprise to him to sight two of the party. He could hardly believe his eyes as Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry ran past the fig-tree, within a few yards of him, without seeing him, and ran on.

Whence they had so suddenly appeared he did not know, and could not guess. He cared little.

His black, glittering eyes followed the juniors as they ran on, and he grinned a wolfish grin as he saw them dodge into cover behind the clump of feathery canes and trumpet-flowers.

If they had seen him they had taken cover too late! Neither of them was armed, and O Lobo had a rifle under his arm. They were at his mercy—and it was success, sudden and unexpected, after his weary days of vain searching.

Grinning, the bandit left the shade of the fig-tree, and followed the way the juniors had gone, towards the clump behind which they were hidden.

As he came out into the open the two

juniors, watching through the openings of the clump, saw the dark, threatening figure, the black-bearded face in the burning sunlight.

Wharton caught his breath.

"O Lobo!" he breathed.

"Peter was right!" muttered Bob. "He was on the watch. Has he seen us?"

"I hope not; but—"

Wharton broke off. O Lobo, with a grinning face, was coming directly towards the clump, and it was hardly possible to doubt that he knew that the schoolboys were there. From his position they knew that they must have passed him, as they ran.

"Oh, look!" breathed Bob, catching Wharton's arm. "Look!"

Behind the grinning bandit, as he came, undulating coils stirred in the herbage. Whether the anaconda would have found them, in their cover, the juniors could not know. But the bandit was full in sight of the terrible brute—his back to it.

The juniors hardly breathed.

Unconscious of the danger behind him, O Lobo came on directly towards the clump. His dusky hand parted the feathery canes, and he looked through at the juniors, grinning.

The juniors, breathless, silent, stood as if rooted to the ground. The bandit grasped his rifle, half raising it. The muzzle pushed through the canes.

"Do not try to run!" he said. "You are in my hands—run, and a bullet will stop you very quickly!"

He chuckled aloud, his dark, evil face triumphant. It was a stirring in the grass behind him that caused him to glance round.

The next moment a yell of terror burst from the bandit, as he saw the coiling anaconda swooping on him.

The rifle, which a moment before had threatened the schoolboys, swung round, and O Lobo fired desperately at the anaconda. The bullet splattered on a leathery coil, but before the report had died away, in a thousand echoes, the coils were round the yelling bandit.

White as chalk, the juniors stared through the canes. The rifle dropped from O Lobo's hands as he struggled madly.

He tore at the knife in his belt, and slashed and slashed; but in a few seconds, his arms were pinned by his sides, by coil and coil that wound about him, and the knife dropped from nerveless fingers.

Undulating, thickening as they undulated, the coils of the anaconda wound round and round the bandit; and scream after scream of mad terror came from his ashen lips.

Spellbound with horror, the juniors gazed at the fearful scene.

In a few minutes more, in a few moments, the wretch's bones would be cracking, and the hideous brute would be swallowing its prey. Bob Cherry grasped the hatchet from his belt. Wharton dragged out his hunting-knife.

Neither spoke. Both knew that they could not leave even that desperate wretch to so fearful a fate, without an effort to save him.

He had forgotten them—forgotten everything but the mighty coils that were crushing him to death. In the madness of fear and despair he screamed, filling the forest with echoes.

Bob Cherry leaped forward, trampling through the canes. With all his strength he slashed at the coils with the axe, holding it in both hands, and putting every ounce of energy into that mighty stroke.

Under that desperate slash from the keen edge of the axe, a winding coil

(Continued on page 28.)

THE LOST SQUADRON!

By Geo. E. ROCHESTER.

New Companions!

CAST away on a desert stretch of land, which has risen up from the bed of the English Channel as the result of a huge tidal wave, Squadron Leader Akers, together with Flight-Lieutenant Ferris and a stoker named Sam, make the terrible discovery that England and Western Europe are submerged beneath the sea.

Reconnoitring, they come upon the age-old ruins of Camelot, where, together with two more castaways, named Baines and Crawley, they decide to establish their headquarters. Baines and Crawley, however, prove more of a hindrance than a help.

"Look here, you men!" said Akers tolerantly. "There's no good adopting that sort of attitude. Situated as we are, we've all got to pull together and each do our bit. You get some driftwood, Mr. Ferris and I will unpack the grub, and Sam'll cook it."

"I'm not budging from here!" retorted Baines stubbornly. "And it seems to me, mister, that the sooner we come to an understanding the better. Neither Crawley nor me minds lending a hand, but there's no call for us to take orders from you, and we're not going to do it, see?"

"Then you and your friend Crawley had better push off," said Akers, unbuttoning his leather flying jacket. "But before you go, it may interest you to know that it is my intention to give you a good thrashing."

Baines stared at him with mouth agape.

"What—what did you say?" he gasped, suddenly finding the power of speech of which he had been momentarily bereft.

"I said," repeated Akers, neatly folding his jacket and placing it on the sand, "that I intend to give you a good thrashing."

"Oh, you do, do you?" sneered Baines. "My, now, isn't that interestin'? And what do you intend to give me a good hiding for, if I may make so bold as to ask?"

"For giving my friends and me a thoroughly unpleasant and uncomfortable morning" replied Akers. "Will you please stand up?"

"Will I?" roared Baines, suddenly losing all self-control. "I'll show you whether I'll stand up or not, you tuppence-a-penny, trumped-up, swanking toff!"

Lumbering to his feet, his face crimson with passion he made a rush at Akers, clenching fists flailing.

"Shall I handle the big lout, sir?" demanded Sam eagerly of Ferris.

"No," grinned Ferris. "It won't be necessary, Sam."

Neither was it, for Baines' bull-like rush was abruptly checked by a straight and hard-as-iron left from Akers. It took Baines full on the mouth, sending him backwards to the sand, minus at least two of his front teeth.

He was up in an instant. Then, with head down, he tore in again at Akers. But Akers side-stepped, and, as the fellow floundered past, he drove a hard right to the head which put Baines down again, sprawling, bemused and bewildered.



Snatching up heavy pieces of timber, Akers and his companions rushed to the rescue of the screaming Baines!

"Get up, you fool!" ordered Crawley, with an oath.

Baines got up, shaking his head as though to clear his befuddled senses. It would have been easy for Akers to have stepped in then and finished him off. But Akers preferred to wait, and, recovering himself somewhat, Baines rushed in at him again.

But it was a much more circumspect Baines this time. He had received two clouts, which had been an astounding revelation to him, and he didn't want another. But, in spite of his caution, he did get another, and then another, both of which rocked him on his feet.

He was not to know, as Ferris did, that during the past winter Akers had been well in the running for the middle-weight championship of the Royal Air Force.

But what Baines did learn during those painful and bewildering moments was that Akers had an extraordinary knack of blocking each and every punch and was himself the possessor of a punch like the kick of a mule.

Having learned this much, Baines lost all heart for the fight and, receiving a well-timed smash on the

jaw, he went down and remained down, sprawling inelegantly on his back, with arms outflung, and bruised and battered face upturned to the midday sun.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" exclaimed Crawley, in disgust, surveying the prone and inert form of his companion. "Knocked cold as mutton—and by him!"

"Perhaps you'd like to have a go?" suggested Sam.

Crawley ignored this invitation. "Or perhaps you'd like to start in on me?" pressed Sam, edging closer.

"I ain't in a fit state for fightin'," said Crawley, with dignity. "Otherwise I might accommodate you!"

"I'll fight you with one hand," said Sam longingly.

But even this magnanimous offer failed to tempt Crawley, and, turning away, he bent down and assisted the battered Baines to rise.

"Well, get going!" said Akers, as the pair made no effort to move.

"No," responded Crawley sullenly. "We don't want to go. We wouldn't know where to make for or what to do. We're sick of being on our own."

"Well, if you stay with us, you'll have to behave yourselves," said Akers curtly. "It's not so much a question of obeying orders, as of pulling your weight and doing your fair share of any job which comes along. If you're not prepared to do that, then you'd better clear off."

"I'll do it!" muttered Crawley.

"And you, Baines?" demanded Akers.

"Yes," said Baines sullenly, through bruised and swollen lips.

"Then get some driftwood for the fire," said Akers. "But first you'd better bathe that face of yours at one of the pools."

Baines did so, then he and Crawley moved off in search of wood, and within the hour the party had had a meal and were ready to take up the trek again.

Throughout the remainder of the day they moved steadily southwards, making camp with the dusk. But that night, as they sat round a cheery fire of blazing driftwood, neither Akers, Ferris, nor Sam felt as comfortable as they had done on previous nights when they had been alone together.

Always there had been a deep understanding and friendship between Akers and Ferris, and Sam had fitted in splendidly with them. Not once throughout the long days and the watchful nights, when nerves might have been expected to be on edge, had the trio found themselves at cross-purposes.

But to-night they felt very conscious of the presence of Baines and Crawley, and inwardly each heartily wished they were rid of them. For Baines, seated hunched over the fire, was sulkily silent, and an effective stopper on conversation.

Crawley was not silent, but perhaps it would have been better if he had been, for his conversation consisted for the most part of pessimistic queries as to the chances of rescue.

Akers and Ferris turned in earlier than usual that night, leaving Sam to take the first watch. Baines and Crawley, following the example of Akers and Ferris, also stretched themselves out on the sand, and, as the fire died down to red embers, the camp drifted off into slumber.

It was midnight when Sam awakened Baines to take the second watch.

"Everything is quiet," he said, "but keep a good look-out. There's plenty of wood left for the fire. Good-night!"

With that, he thankfully lay down on the sand, leaving the watch to the sullen Baines.

An Alarm in the Night!

RISING to his feet, Baines stood for a moment staring about him in the darkness, then, slouching to the pile of driftwood which they had collected, he picked some up and threw it on the fire.

That done, he sat down again, and, producing his tin tobacco-box and knife, cut thoughtfully at a short length of black twist.

Rubbing the strong tobacco between his palms, he stuffed it into the bowl of his pipe, and, lighting it with a piece of wood from the fire, sat puffing in moody contemplation.

What was the point, anyway, of having to keep watch like this, he

reflected. There was nobody about, and nothing stirring. And why had he been picked to stand watch? Why didn't Ferris take this middle watch, or Akers himself?

The sullen eyes of Baines looked across the fire towards where Akers was lying, in sound slumber.

"Cursed toff!" he muttered savagely.

He was still sore and aching from the scrap of the morning, and in his heart was a bitter and vindictive resentment against Akers.

Baines hated all toffs on principle, but never had he hated one as he hated Akers.

"I'll get my own back!" he muttered menacingly.

He smoked on, turning over in his mind various schemes for settling his grudge against Akers. Then the tobacco in his pipe burned out. Left without the comfort of a smoke, Baines again began to ask himself angrily why the keeping of a watch was necessary, and why he was such a fool as to do it.

It did not take him long to decide that guard duty was wholly unnecessary, and also because it pleased him immensely to thus defy Akers, he abandoned the watch, and, stretching himself out on the sand, drifted off into slumber.

In this respect Baines proved himself a fool.

The fire died down to dull red embers, and nothing stirred to break the deathly hush of the night-enshrouded land. But through the darkness, moving weakly and painfully across the sand towards the camp, crept death, in dreadful and fantastic form.

From a pool it had emerged—a great, bulbous head, and round, staring eyes following long, snaky tentacles, which were so sapped of strength that they could only slither forward inch by inch along the sand.

For days now this giant octopus had lain slowly dying in the pool in which it had found itself stranded, following the upheaval. Yet day by day, and night by night, it had emerged, dragging itself pitifully about in desperate search of food.

But there had been no food to be found. No food until to-night. Was it instinct, or was it reason which caused the octopus now to move so remorselessly forward towards the camp, its cruel, unwinking eyes fixed with hungry intent upon its goal?

Instinct or reason, what does it matter? It was coming to kill, and to devour. That much was very evident in the awful, fixed stare of those cold, cruel eyes, and in the slow, but continuous slither of the tentacles across the sand.

The distance narrowed between the creature and the camp. But, all unconscious of the creeping menace, the five men slept on.

By the irony of fate, Baines was the nearest, and as he moved in restless slumber a tentacle groped forward, touched him, then slithered across his chest. It was followed by another, and another, which curled round him and began to drag him slowly along.

It was then that Baines awoke, momentarily bemused with sleep and bewildered by the crushing grip about his chest and arms.

Next moment, horribly illumined in the glow from the dying embers of the fire, he saw, within inches of his own, the dreadful and nightmarish face of the octopus, with its great, horny beak and cruel, staring eyes.

For one fleeting instant of time

Baines was paralysed with horror, then from his lips there burst such a wild and unearthly scream that Akers and his companions started up in alarm.

In the dull glow of the fire, all they could at first distinguish of the octopus and its prey was a vast, misshapen bulk. Then, as realisation came to Akers as to what the thing actually was, he gave an involuntary shout of alarm, and, springing to where they had heaped the driftwood for the fire, he snatched up a heavy piece of timber and rushed to the rescue of the screaming Baines.

Ferris and the others were not slow to follow his example, Sam drawing a bowie knife from his belt and hacking furiously at the clinging tentacles, the while his companions belaboured the creature with heavy pieces of wood.

In its weak and dying condition the octopus was unable to put up any sort of effective defence.

Releasing its hold on Baines, who lay incapable of movement, it groped weakly and uncertainly with its tentacles in an endeavour to come to grips with his assailants. But weaker and weaker became its efforts as the makeshift cudgels belaboured it unmercifully.

Already, staining the sand and drenching Baines, it had got rid of the inky fluid which, in water, would have proved such an effective shield against attack. There was something pitifully helpless about the wretched creature, but Akers knew that although it had released Baines, it would be cruelty to let it live. So he was heartily glad when suddenly its bruised and mangled tentacles slowly relaxed and it lay still and lifeless on the sand.

Baines was in a bad way through fright and terror, but a nip from Akers' flask of brandy served to revive him somewhat.

"How did the creature get hold of you?" asked Akers. "Didn't you see it approaching?"

"No," mumbled Baines.

"You weren't asleep, by any chance?" interposed Sam bluntly.

"No, I wasn't," lied Baines sullenly.

Akers made no comment. He strongly suspected that Baines had been asleep; but if such was the case, the fellow had certainly paid for his lapse from duty.

Roused from slumber as they had been, none of the party felt like turning in again, for within an hour or so it would be dawn. Building up the fire, they produced their pipes and sat discussing the attack made on the camp by the octopus.

With the dawn they breakfasted; then, shouldering their packs, took up the backward trek to Camelot.

Throughout the day they plodded steadily southwards, making an occasional halt to examine some derelict or explore some wreck. Not a sign of human life did they see, however, and with the dusk they again made camp.

After the alarm of the previous night there was no danger of either Baines or Crawley shirking duty by going to sleep on watch. The night passed uneventfully enough, and with the morning they continued the trek.

They were following the coast, and, although time and again they felt tempted to turn inland in order to explore some big stranded hull in the distance, there were so many of these battered derelicts that it would have been impossible to have examined them all.

They kept steadily to their course,

contenting themselves with sending a hail echoing far across the silent land whenever they sighted a stranded vessel aboard which they thought there might still be life.

As on the previous day, however, they saw no signs of life at all until, as afternoon was merging into evening, they topped a long boulder-strewn rise and saw in a rocky valley below them a camp-fire glowing ruddily through the gathering dusk.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Ferris. "There's somebody, anyway!"

"Yes. Come on," said Akers, leading the way down towards the fire, clustered around which could be seen the vague and indistinct forms of a group of men.

They were nearing the fire, when, without warning, a man stepped directly in front of them from behind a big boulder. He was jerseyed and sea-booted, and carried a rifle in the crook of his arm.

"Just stop right where you are, strangers," he said. "Don't come another step!"

Gold!

THERE was a curt imperativeness in the words, which brought Akers and his companions to an abrupt halt.

"What exactly is the idea?" demanded Akers, his surprised gaze moving from the bronzed and unshaven face of the man to the rifle held in such suggestive readiness.

"The idea is," replied the man, "that you don't come no farther until we know just who you are and what you're doing here!"

"I shouldn't think that requires much explanation," retorted Akers. "We are castaways, as you yourselves must be."

"Yes. But what brings you this way?"

"We are making southwards to a place where we intend to establish a base," replied Akers. "But why all these questions?"

"There's a reason," grunted the other.

What that reason was he did not say, however; but turned, instead, to the men who were hastening towards them from the camp-fire.

"Five castaways making southwards," he reported tersely to the foremost of the newcomers—a tall man with a fair, pointed beard, deeply bronzed features, and neatly attired in reefer jacket, blue serge trousers, and knee-high sea-boots.

"All right, Joe!" nodded the latter, his level, blue eyes taking quick stock of Akers and his companions. "I am sorry," he went on, addressing Akers, "to have had you stopped in this manner. But we would like to know who you are."

"That's soon done," replied Akers, introducing Ferris and the rest of the party. "But why this interrogation?" he concluded. "What are you afraid of?"

"That does not matter for the moment," replied the other. "I will explain later. In the meantime, I had better introduce myself. I am Captain Anstruther, of the freighter Tynemouth, which was cast away the night of the great storm. These seven men"—he indicated his companions—"are the sole survivors of my crew. And now, would you care to join us at supper and make your camp here for the night?"

"Thanks!" responded Akers. "We would!"

And over supper which was eaten round the blazing camp-fire, he and Ferris found Captain Anstruther and his men extremely likeable fellows.

During the meal Akers told of the

attempts he, and Ferris had made to find land; and when he had concluded Captain Anstruther nodded and said:

"Yes, from the bearings which we ourselves took we realised that the ocean bed had risen up. But we never dreamt that the catastrophe was as terrible as you say. If we had done, we probably would not have stopped you as you approached to-night."

"No?" said Akers. "I will explain that," said Anstruther. "Come with me."

Rising to his feet, he lighted a hurricane lamp; then, followed by Akers and Ferris, he set off through the darkness, threading his way between rocks and boulders until he came to where a great escarpment of rock reared itself a hundred feet or more up into the night.

"Look!" he said, holding the lantern close to the base of the rock so that its sickly illumination fell on a yellowish and uneven line which was about three inches wide and appeared to run the whole length of the face of the escarpment.

"Gold!" ejaculated Ferris.

"Yes, a seam of almost virgin gold," assented Anstruther. "We discovered it about a week ago, and, expecting early rescue, we made camp near by and mounted guard over it."

"You intend to claim it?" questioned Akers.

"Yes. Why not?" replied Anstruther. "We found it, and as this land is new territory no one has a better claim to it than we ourselves."

"I agree with you there," said Akers. "I don't see how anyone can possibly dispute your claim."

"And until rescue comes," put in Anstruther, "we're taking care that no one else gets hold of it. That's why we always keep a guard posted, and why you were stopped to-night. One's got to be on the look-out for rough customers in a land like this."

"Quite right," agreed Akers. "I

should imagine there's a fortune in that seam."

"There's enough gold to make me and my seven men wealthy for life," affirmed Anstruther. "But after what you've told us to-night, goodness knows if we're ever going to need it!"

"Cheer up, man!" said Akers hearteningly. "Rescue is bound to come. It's only a matter of time. The whole world can't have been submerged—"

He broke off and turned, as a sudden step sounded behind him in the darkness.

"Oh, hullo, Baines!" he said sharply, as that individual moved forward into the illumination of the hurricane lantern. "What do you want?"

"I was just seeing what's doing," growled Baines. "Having a look round, like. There ain't no harm in that, is there?"

"You get back to the camp!" snapped Akers.

Without a word Baines turned, and with hands in pockets, slouched away into the darkness.

"And you crashed your machine picking that fellow and his pal up," observed Anstruther dryly.

"Yes," said Akers. "But please don't rub it in!"

Anstruther laughed, and, after showing Akers and Ferris that the seam ran the whole length of the escarpment face, he led the way back to the camp-fire to which Baines had already returned, and round which the men were seated, smoking and chatting.

It was late before any of them turned in that night, for there were many experiences to relate, and much to discuss.

"I think your idea of making for Camelot and establishing a base there an excellent one," said Anstruther. "How far do you reckon the place is from here?"

"About thirty miles, working on our flying speed until we crashed, and our rate of progress on the return journey," replied Akers. "If we get off from here at dawn, and the going isn't too bad, we ought to reach it by nightfall to-morrow."

"Well, it means that we are near enough to keep more or less in touch," said Anstruther. "And, anyway, it's fine to know that we're not entirely alone in this dead land."

They talked for some time, then, when a guard had been posted, they turned in, and soon the whole camp was deep in slumber around the dying embers of the fire.

Up with the dawn, Akers and Anstruther said au revoir after arranging to keep in contact with each other, and the southward trek to Camelot was resumed.

Akers, however, was soon forced to abandon any hopes he might have had of reaching Camelot by nightfall. For shortly after leaving the Anstruther camp the going became so bad that progress was reduced to a minimum, the five men having to wind their way round great outcroppings of rock, clamber over smooth and massive boulders, and follow the tortuous, course of many a narrow and rock-strewn gulch.

To add to their discomfort, the sky which had been overcast since early morning, began towards midday to bank up with heavy rainclouds.

"It's going to be a proper downpour when it does come," observed Ferris, casting an eye up at the lowering sky.

"Yes; but it's not coming just yet," said Akers. "We'll push on as long as possible, then make camp under cover

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somewhere. There's plenty of rock outcroppings which will serve our purpose."

They were more fortunate than to have to trust to the dubious cover afforded by an outcropping of rock, however, for as they picked their way along the bottom of a wide and rocky valley they came to a cave which seemed to promise ideal shelter.

"I don't think we can do better than this," said Akers, after they had explored the interior. "I don't know how you fellows are feeling, but I've just about had enough walking for one day."

His companions agreed, and, without further discussion it was decided to make camp there and then. Packs were unshouldered; a search of driftwood embarked on, and soon a fire was crackling and blazing at the mouth of the cave.

They were none too soon, either, for scarcely had they got the fire going than there came heavy drops of rain which soon developed into a drenching downpour.

"It's set in for the rest of the day, all right," said Ferris glumly, sitting staring out across the rain-enshrouded valley.

"One ought to be thankful for small mercies," laughed Akers. "We might have been out in it."

"Seeing the sort of luck we have," responded Ferris, "I'm surprised we're not."

There was not the slightest doubt that the rain had set in for the remainder of the day, and as afternoon merged drearily into dusk which slowly deepened into night, there came the incessant spatter of the downpour on the sand and rocks outside the cave.

"I don't suppose it's necessary to keep a watch to-night, is it?" said Ferris, at length, when out of sheer boredom Sam, Baines and Crawley had knocked out their pipes and stretched themselves out on the sandy floor of the cave in an endeavour to pass the weary hours in sleep.

"I think we'd better," said Akers. "For one thing the fire ought to be kept going as a signal, in case anyone does happen to be moving about out there. You take first spell, and I'll take the second."

"Right-ho!" granted Ferris, and, throwing some fresh wood on the fire, he settled down to keep his vigil.

He soon got tired, not only of inactivity, but of his thoughts which, in spite of his efforts, persisted in dwelling on the England which had gone, and on those near and dear to him who had been swept into oblivion.

"Confound it! I can't stand this!"

he muttered, at length; and, rising to his feet, he stood looking about him with the hopeless air of one who is thoroughly and completely at a loss for something to do.

It wouldn't be so bad, he reflected, if he could go outside and walk up and down. That, at least, would be better than sitting about with nothing to do except think. But out there in the downpour he would be soaked to the skin within a very few moments.

Still, he had to do something if morbid and depressing thought was to be kept at bay, so he decided to explore the cave again. After all, their brief exploration of it during the afternoon had been but a cursory one.

Stepping quietly to one of the packs, therefore, Ferris took from it one of the candles which they had brought with them from the tanker, and, lighting the wick at the fire, he set off on his tour of exploration.

It was a big cave, wide and high of roof, and running back a full hundred feet or more. At the rear, where the roof seemed to curve down to the sandy floor, was a shallow pool stretching almost the whole width of the cave. And it was on reaching this pool that Ferris made his first interesting discovery.

The rocky roof of the cave did not curve down to the sandy floor, but terminated abruptly about six feet above it. The reason why he and Akers had not noticed that fact when they had examined the place during the afternoon, was that they had been content to make their inspection by means of the daylight which had filtered into the cave.

Keeping close to the rocky wall, Ferris stepped past the pool, and, with candle held aloft, stood peering into the inky darkness which lay beyond.

As he stood thus there came to his nostrils a faint smell which he diagnosed as that of decaying fish.

He took another step forward and then another. The unpleasant fish-like smell was stronger now. Halting, Ferris decided that he would go no farther. Then he called himself a coward, and visualised a thoroughly unsatisfactory return to the fire at the mouth of the cave.

He decided that he would go on just a little farther, and, tensed for instant flight, he began his cautious advance again.

(Is Ferris acting wisely? Does the cave house some such creature as a giant crab, or even worse? There's a startling surprise for you in next week's thrill-packed chapters. Don't miss 'em, chums!)

THE GREYFRIARS DIAMOND-DIGGERS I

(Continued from page 24.)

parted like a rope. It had cut half through the anaconda, breaking the spine. Again he struck, inflicting another gaping gash. Then he had to leap back from the thrashing coils.

Wharton's knife was not needed—not that it would have been of much use. The anaconda's coils loosened their grip on the bandit—rolling away from him, winding and undulating, as the terrible creature writhed and twisted in the pangs of death.

O Lobo fell like a log. Harry Wharton grasped him by the shoulders and dragged him away from the thrashing coils.

Canes and trumpet-flowers, grass and creepers, crumpled, as the coils thrashed and thrashed; but the juniors, dragging the half senseless bandit, were out of reach. From a distance, with starting eyes, they watching the writhing of the anaconda, till the mighty coils at last lay still.

For long minutes, O Lobo lay where the juniors had dropped him, white as death, breathing with difficulty. When he staggered at last to his feet, he stood swaying. As if by instinct, his hand went to his belt, where his knife had been. But his knife lay under the coils of a dead anaconda, and his rifle was in Harry Wharton's hands.

"Go," said Harry quietly; and the bandit, without a word, went, and disappeared into the forest.

Not till his limping, swaying figure was out of sight did the juniors return to the arroyo.

"No catch?" asked Frank Nugent, when Wharton and Bob came back into the camp.

"Only an anaconda!" answered Bob, with a faint grin.

"Wha-at?"

"No more trips out of sight of camp for you!" said Peter tersely, when he heard—and that was that!

For a week longer the Greyfriars party remained at the camp in the Montanha Fria, digging and washing diamonds. O Lobo was gone, and they saw and heard nothing of him, and almost forgot his existence. But they were soon to learn that the bandit of the Rexo had not been idle during the days that passed so busily for the diamond-seekers.

THE END.

(The next yarn in this exciting series, "THE PRISONER OF MACAW ISLAND!" is better than ever. Make sure of reading it, chums, by ordering next Saturday's MAGNET well in advance!)



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