

Harry Wharton & Co. IN ANOTHER EXCITING SCHOOL ADVENTURE . . . "PONSONBY PULLS THE STRINGS!"

The Magnet 2^D



Frank Courtenay, of Higheliffe, who has called at Greyfriars on a friendly visit, is accused of theft! Is there any truth in it, or is it only schoolboy slander?

PONSONBY PULLS *the* STRINGS!



By
**FRANK
RICHARDS**

Introducing Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, and Frank Courtenay & Co., of Higheliffe.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Very Sudden!

"**S**OMETHING," said Bob Cherry, "is up!"

Most of the Greyfriars Remove were already aware of that fact.

That something was up was a fact that leaped, so to speak, to the eye.

Harry Wharton & Co. of the Remove did not know what it was. They could not begin to guess. But they knew that it must be serious.

That Saturday afternoon, a half-holiday at Greyfriars, was fine and sunny, and the Famous Five were as merry and bright as the cheery spring weather.

They were going out to tea that afternoon; but it was not yet time to start, and in the meantime they were walking cheerily in the quad, discussing the coming Easter holidays. Then suddenly a window was flung open—the window of their Form-master's study. From that window Mr. Quelch leaned out and called to Harry Wharton—or, rather, barked at him.

"Wharton, you will see that no Remove boy goes out of gates!"

Having barked that brief instruction, Mr. Quelch popped back from the window, his head disappearing like that of a tortoise into its shell.

Harry Wharton & Co. were left gazing at the window.

A dozen other fellows had heard Quelch's brief bark. They stared at Mr. Quelch's window and looked at one another, wondering what was "up."

Harry Wharton, as captain of the Remove and head boy of that Form, had his Form-master's instructions to carry out—not an easy matter.

On a fine half-holiday, naturally, plenty of fellows were going out of gates, or had gone. Some of the Removees had gone on the river; others had gone out on their bicycles, or afoot.

However, if the captain of the Remove could not carry out his Form-master's instructions completely, owing to the circumstances, he could do his best—which he immediately proceeded to do.

Fellows who had gone out had gone out—and that was that. Fellows who hadn't could be stopped in time.

He cut down to the gates at once. In the gateway he could see the backs of two Remove heads—Smithy's and Redwing's. They were going out, and he shouted to them as he scudded.

"Smithy! Reddy! Hold on!"

The two juniors looked round and stopped. Harry Wharton arrived breathless at the gates.

"What's up?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Blessed if I know!" gasped Wharton. "Whole Form gated!"

"What?"

"Official from Quelch. Sorry, but you can't go out!"

"What utter rot!" exclaimed Smithy angrily. "What the dickens is Quelch playing the goat for?"

"Better ask him, old bean."

"Look here, I'm going up to Hawkscliff with Redwing this afternoon. I'm not sticking in gates for nothing!" snapped the Bounder.

"Can't be helped, old man. Beak's orders—"

"I'm jolly well going—"

"Don't be an ass, Smithy," said Tom Redwing quietly. "Quelch must have some reason—"

"Blow Quelch and his reasons!"

"Fathead! Come in!" Redwing slipped his arm through the Bounder's

and led him back into the quad, scowling.

Harry Wharton stood in the gateway. His friends joined him there—Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. All of them were surprised by Mr. Quelch's sudden and unexpected command, and none of them pleased.

Something, as Bob Cherry remarked, was "up," but fellows did not expect to be gated suddenly on a half-holiday. Moreover, it was getting near time for the Famous Five to push out their bikes and ride over to Higheliffe School.

But beak's orders were beak's orders, and fellows had to toe the line. Smithy was arguing angrily with Redwing, evidently inclined to clear off, regardless of beak's orders, but restrained by his more level-headed chum. The Famous Five did not think for one moment of disregarding beak's orders, but they could not help feeling rather disgruntled.

"What the dickens can be up?" growled Johnny Bull. "Quelch is going out himself; at least I heard that he was taking an amble down to Courtfield with Capper. What the thump—"

"It's something serious," said Nugent. "Quelch looked like a gorgon—"

"He generally does!" grunted Johnny.

"A bit more than usual, though," remarked Bob Cherry.

"The gorgonfulness was unusually terrific," observed Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "The esteemed Quelch looked preposterously infuriated."

"Blessed if I can make it out!" said Harry Wharton. "I believe half the Form are out of gates. Quelch was a bit late with his order. We should have been gone in another ten minutes."

"Pity we didn't start early," grunted Johnny Bull. "Too late now."

Three Remove fellows came down to the gates—Peter Todd, Tom Brown, and Squiff.

Wharton waved them back.

"Hold on, you men! Whole Form gated!"

"What for?" demanded Toddy.

"Goodness knows!" The captain of the Remove shrugged his shoulders. "Quelch's orders, that's all I know."

"Blow!" said Toddy.

"Bother!" said Squiff.

"Br-r-r-r!" grunted Tom Brown.

The three turned unwillingly back.

Bolsover major was the next to arrive. He gave the head boy of the Remove an aggressive glare.

"What's this rot about gates?" he demanded. "I'm going out!"

"Beak's orders——"

"Rubbish! I expect you're pulling our leg! I'm going!" snorted Bolsover major, and he swung on.

"You're not!" said the captain of the Remove. "Get back!"

"Shan't!" retorted Bolsover independently.

But he did, as the Famous Five grasped him and tipped him over. Bolsover major rolled back into the quad roaring.

Lord Mauleverer of the Remove came sauntering down from the House.

Harry Wharton waved to him as he arrived at the gateway.

"Can't go out. Mauly, old man."

"That's all right," answered his lordship placidly. "I'm not goin' out. I staggered along to speak to you, old bean. I say, has some ass been ragging Quelch?"

"I shouldn't wonder. Something's up!"

"He looks fearfully huffy! Message for you, old man. Just got it from Quelch. All Remove men to go into the Form-room. You're to shepherd them in," said Mauleverer. "What a life—what?"

"We're due at Highcliffe soon," growled Johnny Bull. "That chap Courtenay's expecting us to tea."

"Rough luck," said Lord Mauleverer sympathetically. "But I'd recommend givin' Quelch his head; beaks seem to expect it."

His lordship sauntered back to the House. The Famous Five exchanged rather uneasy looks. For some reason—evidently a very sudden reason—Mr. Quelch had gated his Form, and now they were to assemble in the Remove-room. Why? Only too clearly something of a serious nature was "up." A "row" was impending, that was plain. Somebody was "for" it!

"Blow!" said Harry Wharton.

And, leaving word with Gosling, the porter, to turn back any Remove fellow who wandered gateward, Harry Wharton proceeded to hunt up all available members of the Form and round them up into the Form-room.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter Bolts!

"I SAY, you fellows——"

"Come on, Bunter!"

"But, I say——" stammered Billy Bunter.

"In the Form-room—sharp!" said Harry Wharton. "Don't be a fat ass, Bunter! Quelch has ordered all the Form in."

"But——" gasped Bunter.

The fattest member of the Greyfriars Remove blinked at Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry through his big spectacles; with a startled—indeed, horrified—blink.

The news that the Remove were called in in the middle of a half-holiday sur-

prised most of the fellows, annoyed some, and perhaps alarmed some, but no fellow was so dismayed as Billy Bunter.

Bunter was easy to find. It was only necessary to walk over to the school shop. That was usually the cover to draw if Bunter was wanted.

If he had any money, he was likely to be found inside expending the same. If he hadn't, he was likely to be found outside, feasting his eyes, as he could not feast his capacious interior. On this occasion he was outside.

There he was when Harry Wharton came along with Bob and announced the assembly of the Remove.

Up to that moment Billy Bunter's fat thoughts had been concentrated on jam tarts and the shortage of cash. Both were driven from his mind, however, by Wharton's announcement.

Bunter did not seem merely startled. He did not seem merely dismayed. He seemed horrified, flabbergasted—indeed, flummoxed. His little round eyes almost popped through his big round spectacles at the captain of the Remove.

"But," he stuttered, "I say—but——"

"For goodness' sake, get a move on!" said Harry. "I've got to hunt up every man who's in gates! Roll him in, Bob!"

Harry Wharton went on his way to look for other fellows.

Bob Cherry tapped Bunter on a podgy shoulder.

"Shift!" he said.

Billy Bunter did not shift. He

Cecil Ponsonby's treachery knows no bounds! Given the chance of scoring over an enemy, there's no holding the ead of Highcliffe!

leaned back against the shop-front, and blinked at Bob like a scared owl.

"Did—did—did Wharton say all the Form?" he stuttered.

"The whole jolly lot! Come on!"

"In—in the Form-room?" gasped Bunter.

"Yes, ass! Are you coming?"

"But—but, look here, I—I say, a fellow might be out of gates!" gasped Bunter. "A fellow can go out, if he likes, on a half-holiday. I saw Russell and Ogilvy go out, and Fishy——"

"Well, if they're out, they'll have to be left out, fathead! But everybody in gates has got to turn up!"

"Well, suppose I was out!" said Bunter. "I might have been. In fact, I was going——"

"You're not! Come on!"

"The fact is, I've got an appointment this afternoon——"

"So have we all—with Quelch!" chuckled Bob. "Other appointments will have to wait till we're through with Quelch."

"I—I mean, it—it's important!"

"Quelch seems to think this important!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Come on, you fat duffer! Like me to roll you in like a barrel!"

"Beast! Look here, I don't see how Quelch will know whether a fellow was out of gates or not!" argued Bunter. "I'm jolly well going out—see?"

Bunter started for the gates.

"You fat duffer!" roared Bob. "Gosling will stop you!"

"Oh crikey!"

Billy Bunter came to a halt.

"Follow on, fathead!" called out Bob. And he walked away to the House.

Billy Bunter did not follow on.

Remove men, called from various directions, were going in, but Billy Bunter did not join them.

Nobody was keen on that assembly in the Form-room, but Billy Bunter seemed to have a rooted objection to it. That assembly looked as if some fellow was booked for a row, and, judging by Bunter's dismayed and alarmed face, he was probably the fellow!

"Oh lor!" breathed Bunter.

When he moved, he did not move towards the House. It was useless to go down to the gates, if Gosling was stopping fellows there. But there were other and less-conspicuous ways out.

The fat junior rolled away to the old Cloisters. In the Cloister wall, in a secluded quarter, was a spot where the old wall was negotiable, even to a climber of Billy Bunter's limited powers. Bunter headed for it as fast as his little fat legs could go, hoping that Quelch would suppose that that member of his Form had been already out of gates when the summons came.

"Bunter!" came an exasperated yell. "Stop!"

Harry Wharton's voice did not cause Billy Bunter to stop. It caused him to accelerate.

There was a patter of pursuing footsteps.

Bunter flew.

"You fat chump!" roared the captain of the Remove. "Stop! Do you hear? I'll burst you all over the shop! Stop, you fat frump! Stop, you frumptions chump!"

Bunter, unheeding, bolted into the Cloisters.

Harry Wharton cut after him.

He was intensely exasperated.

It was bad enough to be called on, on a half-holiday, to round up a lot of unwilling fellows and to stay in gates when he wanted to get off to Highcliffe. It was altogether too bad for fellows, after being told to go in, to cut off and give him unnecessary trouble. He cut after Bunter, with the intention of leading him to the House by a fat ear.

But the fat Owl of the Remove, whose movements generally seemed modelled on those of a tortoise, now seemed to be understudying the hare.

He had a good start, and he flew. He reached the old ivied wall in the secluded spot and clambered. He was on the wall, spluttering for breath, when Wharton came panting up. The captain of the Remove was just in time to grab a whisking fat ankle.

"Now, you fat bandersnatch——" he gasped.

"Ow!" roared Bunter. "Leggo!"

"Come down!" yelled Wharton.

"Beast!"

"You blithering idiot!" shrieked Wharton. "You've got to come into the Form-room! Ten to one Quelch spotted you in the quad, and he will know you cut. Will you come down?"

"Will you leggo?" howled Bunter.

Harry Wharton did not let go. He pulled. Bunter clung to the top of the wall. Wharton had possession of one foot. The other, luckily for Bunter—rather unluckily for Wharton—was free. Bunter kicked out with it.

"Whoo-hoop!" roared the captain of the Remove, as a boot clumped on his chin.

He released the fat ankle as he staggered back, claspings both hands to his chin, which felt rather damaged.

In a twinkling Bunter was over the wall. There was a bump and a squeal as he dropped into the lane on the other side.

"Ow!" gasped Wharton. "Oh! Yow! Wow!" He rubbed his chin. "I—I—"

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"I'll— Bunter, you frabjous owl, come back, and I'll slaughter you!"

Perhaps Billy Bunter did not think that an attractive offer. Rapid footsteps were heard in the lane, fading away to the Courtfield road. The Owl of the Remove was gone. Harry Wharton was left rubbing his chin and breathing wrath.

Further pursuit was impracticable. He had to turn up in the Form-room himself, and there was no time to trail Billy Bunter across the open spaces. Still rubbing his chin and breathing wrath, the captain of the Remove gave it up, and walked away to the House.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Letter from Greyfriars!

RUPERT DE COURCY of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe School stood in the gateway at Highcliffe, looking into the road.

Lounging there, with his hands in the pockets of his elegant trousers, the Caterpillar seemed to be watching for somebody to arrive. But every now and then he glanced round at a junior standing at a little distance within gates, and smiled.

That junior was Cecil Ponsonby of the Fourth.

Ponsonby seemed rather to amuse the Caterpillar.

There was a red swelling on Pon's handsome nose, a dark shade under one eye. These unusual adornments rather detracted from Ponsonby's good looks—and Pon was very particular about his good looks. But the Caterpillar was not interested in the red nose or the dark eye that Pon had collected in his scrap with Courtenay, the captain of the Fourth. He was wondering idly what Pon was up to.

He was not deeply interested; the Caterpillar was never very deeply interested in anything. But, with nothing else to occupy him while he waited for a fellow to come in, he occasionally turned an amused eye to Pon.

Ponsonby had come down to the gates at a brisk walk, evidently intending to go out. Then he stopped and turned back.

Then, after hesitating and loitering about for a time, he had come gateward again. Again he had stopped. Now he had taken a letter from his pocket, and was reading it, with a black and scowling brow.

Crumpling that letter in his hand, Ponsonby started towards the gates once more. But once more he stopped and stared at the letter, scowling more blackly than before.

Clearly, Ponsonby of the Fourth was in an undecided frame of mind. That letter worried him, and he did not seem to be able to make up his mind whether to go out or not.

At last, however, he appeared to decide. He shoved the letter into his pocket and tramped to the gates, and then became aware of the Caterpillar there and the amused grin on De Courcy's face.

He gave the Caterpillar an evil look. Its effect on that youth was to widen his smile.

"Hard life, ain't it, old thing?" murmured the Caterpillar amicably.

"What do you mean, you fool?" muttered Ponsonby, stopping.

"Frightfully uncertain, an' all that!" said De Courcy. "Now I'll bet that when you backed that gee-gee, you fancied he was going to romp home and

win you a hatful of money! Did he come in eleventh, old bean," added the Caterpillar sympathetically, "or twelfth?"

Ponsonby stared at him.

"You silly dummy!" he said politely. "Do you think—" He broke off.

"Sort of!" smiled the Caterpillar. "I was gatherin' from your speakin' countenance, old bean, that you had backed the wrong horse, and that old Lodgey wants to collect from you, when you banked on him payin' out."

"Fool!"

"You're gettin' frightfully polite in your old age, Pon! Isn't it that?" drawled the Caterpillar. "That's generally your little trouble, when you look like a demon in a pantomime. And goin' off like this, without your pals, to meet a man—"

"No bizney of yours!" snapped Ponsonby.

"None at all," agreed the Caterpillar. "That's why I'm interested. You're an interestin' study, Pon, and I keep on wonderin' how long it will be before you're sacked from Highcliffe. If dear old Mobbs didn't shut his eyes pretty tight where you're concerned, it would have happened before this—what?"

Ponsonby, scowling, tramped on; but he turned back, to speak again to the smiling Caterpillar.

"I'm goin' to see Lodgey," he said. "You needn't shout it out all over Highcliffe, though."

"Not a syllable, old bean," said the Caterpillar reassuringly. "Mum's the word, especially as it isn't true."

"What the dickens do you mean?" snarled Ponsonby.

The Caterpillar chuckled.

"I fancied you were goin' to see that jolly old racin' man, till you said so!" he explained. "Now, of course, I know you're not."

Ponsonby gave him a black look and turned away again.

"If you see Franky—" called out De Courcy.

Pon looked back again, blacker than ever. Since his scrap with Frank Courtenay, in which he had shown the white feather, that name was, to Pon, rather like a red rag to a bull.

"If you mean Courtenay, hang him!" he snarled.

"As high as he'll let you!" said the Caterpillar amiably. "But otherwise, if you see him, tell him to buck up. You see, he went out on his bike after class—you know what a strenuous ass he is, always exertin' himself in one way or another—and he seems to have forgotten that he's asked a crowd of distinguished guests from Greyfriars to tea. Tip him that I'm waitin' for him to blow in, if you spot him—there's a nice man!"

Ponsonby tramped away down the road towards Courtfield without answering. He was not likely to deliver that message, or any other, to the captain of the Highcliffe Fourth. His feelings towards Frank Courtenay were about as bitter as any fellow's feelings could possibly be.

The Caterpillar smiled after him.

"Now I wonder," murmured De Courcy. "What that rank outsider is up to? As he said he's goin' to see Lodgey, he's goin' to see somebody else. I don't like the look in his eye. What's his jolly old game? Can't be goin' to barge in on the Greyfriars fellows again. He'd like to, but he don't dare! I wonder—"

The Caterpillar shook his head thoughtfully. A few days ago Pon had contrived a shindy with Harry Wharton & Co. when they called on Courtenay at Highcliffe, with the result that Mr.

Mobbs, the master of the Fourth, had ordered them away. There is no doubt that he would have liked to play the same game over again, now they were revisiting Highcliffe. But Frank Courtenay had put "paid" to that little game by punching Pon—hard!

Pon did not like punching, and it was fairly certain that he would not ask for more. Indeed, the hopeless funk he had displayed in the scrap had made him an object of ridicule in the Fourth, even among his own nutty pals. Pon, certainly, would not go through that again, if he could help it.

De Courcy watched him curiously as he disappeared down the road. He knew his Pon, and knew that he would hit back, if he could, by any means that came to hand. Still, so far as the Caterpillar could see, there was nothing that Pon could do, and as he disappeared from sight, the Caterpillar dismissed him from his mind.

Ponsonby tramped away down the road, scowling.

At a distance from the school gates Gadsby and Monson of the Fourth were loitering, and they joined him.

"Goin' out?" asked Gadsby.

"Can't you see?" snapped Pon.

"We'll come!" said Monson.

"You won't!" answered Ponsonby, and he stalked on, leaving the two juniors staring after him.

"I'm gettin' fed up with Pon's rotten temper!" growled Gadsby.

Monson shrugged his shoulders.

"He can't get over that lickin' Courtenay gave him in the study. The silly ass asked for it, begged for it—and then funk'd the man! The fellows won't let him forget it in a hurry! What the dooce did he expect?"

Heedless of his friends and their comments, Ponsonby tramped on. He stopped at last, when the town of Courtfield was in sight, and drew from his pocket the letter the Caterpillar had seen him reading. He read it over again, with a scowling brow.

It was not a dunning letter from Lodgey, the racing man, as the Caterpillar had at first supposed. It was quite a different kind of letter. It was, in fact, a very remarkable letter. It ran:

"Dear Ponsonby,—I shall get into a pheeferful row if you don't let me have that gold ehane back. Quelch may miss it any minnit. You wood never have seen it if you hadn't been ragging me, you beest, and it dropped from my pokket. You know that you had no rite to take it, you beest. I told you it was Quelch's, and I took it from the drore in his studdy for a jape on him, and I was gowing to hide it, but what will he think if it can't be fownd? You kno he will think it has been pinched. There will be a pheeferful row here if it doesn't turn up. If you kepe it you are a beestly pincher.

"I kno I can't prove that you had it, you friteful beest. I don't kno what to doo if you don't lett me have it back. I feel pheeferfully phunky every time I see Quelch's eye on me. Look here, you beest, I will cum over on Saterdag and wate for you at Courtfield style. Doo bring that beestly wotch-ehane and let me have it, and I will put it back and never tutch it agane.

"W. G. BUNTER."

Ponsonby scowled blackly at that remarkable epistle from Billy Bunter. Having read it through once more, he tore it carefully into small pieces, and scattered them on the wind.

"The fat fool!" he muttered. "By Jove, I'll show him!"



He tramped on again, with knitted brows. He was going to keep the appointment with W. G. Bunter, at the stile near Courtfield; but, to judge by his expression, Billy Bunter was likely to be sorry that he had kept it.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Startling Announcement!

HENRY SAMUEL QUELCH, master of the Greyfriars Remove, stood in his study, with an expression on his face that the fabled Gorgon might have envied.

He stood by his writing-table, one drawer of which was open.

From that drawer Mr. Quelch had turned out every article it contained, in search of something that was no longer there.

But—as if he could not really believe that it was not there—the Remove master sorted through all the articles that he had taken from the drawer and laid on the table.

He shook papers and books, not because he supposed that a heavy, massive gold watch-chain could possibly be hidden therein, but to make assurance doubly sure.

On the table lay a short section of a gold watch-chain—a few links. The other section—most of the watch-chain—was gone.

Gone!

It was unmistakable, and yet unbelievable. How could that chain be gone, when Quelch had left it in that drawer, under the papers there?

Only a few days ago that ancient, massive gold watch-chain had snapped a link, after long, long service. Quelch had placed it in that drawer, intending to take it to the jeweller's for repair next time he walked down to Courtfield. Now, booked for an afternoon's walk with Mr. Capper, he had gone to the drawer for it, never doubting. It was gone!

His hurried order to his head boy from the study window had followed. Then the message by Mauleverer, to round up the Form. This matter, of course, had to be investigated at once. He had excused himself to Mr. Capper, who had gone off with Prout instead. Then Quelch had rooted, and rooted, in

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the faint, lingering hope that the chain might have slipped into something, and that he would find it yet. But it was not to be found.

Tap!

Mr. Quelch's eyes glittered at the opening door.

Harry Wharton looked meekly in.

He started a little at the expression on his Form-master's face. He knew already that something serious must have happened. One look at Quelch showed that it was something very serious indeed—something awfully serious.

"What is it, Wharton?" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"The Form are in, sir, as you directed."

"Oh, yes! Are all the Form in, Wharton?"

"No, sir. Some of the fellows were out of gates—"

Mr. Quelch uttered a sound resembling a snort—if Form-masters could be supposed to snort. Still, even an intensely irritated Form-master could find no fault with fellows going out on a half-holiday. It was unfortunate, in the circumstances, as he wanted to interview the whole Form at once. But there it was, and it could not be helped.

"Very well, Wharton!" he snapped.

Harry Wharton faded away. He re-

turned to the Remove-room, where about sixteen or seventeen fellows were gathered. They were all in a state of excitement by this time, and some of them extremely uneasy.

"Is he coming?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"I think so," answered Harry.

"Found out what's up?" asked Skinner.

Harold Skinner's conscience was not very clear, and he looked anxious—so did Snoop.

They were wondering uneasily whether Quelch had scented cigarettes in a certain study in the Remove.

"No," answered the captain of the Remove; "but it's something pretty serious, I think!"

"Smokes ain't fearfully serious," muttered Snoop.

"It's something more than that," said Harry, which was rather a relief to the smoky members of the Form.

"After Smithy, perhaps?" suggested Bolsover major. "Weren't you out of bounds in prep yesterday, Smithy?"

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. "Am I the fellow to do anything of that kind?" he asked. "Could Quelch possibly suspect a chap like me of goin' to see a man about a horse? Don't be an ass!"

"Might have got on to Fishy's moneylending stunts," said Peter Todd. "Is Fishy here?"

Fisher T. Fish was not there. No doubt the business man of the Remove would have been very, very uneasy if he had been. But he was out of gates.

"Quelch wouldn't call in the whole Form for that," said Bob Cherry. "It's something to do with the lot of us."

"Some jape on Quelch," said Nugent. "But it must be something a bit out of the usual for all this fuss."

"But what the dickens—" said Johnny Bull.

The Bouncer chuckled.

"Bunter's not here," he remarked. "I saw him in the quad, but he hasn't come in. Did you let him off on purpose, Wharton?"

"No, ass; he bolted!"

"Jolly good reason to bolt, I fancy," grinned Vernon-Smith. "It's been pretty plain for days that Bunter was up to something in Quelch's study last Wednesday. Quelch has just found it out."

"Oh!" exclaimed Skinner. "That's it!"

"The thatfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "It is the esteemed and fatheaded Bunter who has caused this spot of bother."

Harry Wharton nodded. He had forgotten—having much more important things than Billy Bunter to think of—but he remembered now.

Ever since Wednesday Billy Bunter had been in a state of uneasy apprehension. He had some weighty secret, which he was keeping to himself; but he was keeping it in his own remarkable way.

Every man in the Remove knew

that Bunter had been "up" to something in his Form-master's study. Nobody had been able to guess what it was. But the Removites had no doubt, now that Smithy mentioned it, that Quelch had found out, and that that was the cause of this unexpected assembly.

It was a general relief to the other fellows. Moreover, they were curious to know what the dickens it was that Bunter could have done. So they were rather keen for Quelch to come in.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here he comes!" murmured Bob.

There were footsteps in the corridor. Mr. Quelch entered the Form-room, and shut the door after him. The expression on his face caused the Remove fellows to exchange startled glances.

A pin might have been heard to drop as the Remove master stood and faced his Form. His manner was quiet and calm; but seldom or never had the Removites seen such intense anger in his face. They wondered what the dickens Bunter could have done.

"My boys"—Quelch's voice was quiet, but very penetrating—"something has occurred which must be inquired into without delay. It is very unfortunate that the whole Form is not present. However"—he paused a moment, and the juniors hung on his words breathlessly—"something has been removed—taken—from my study. There is every appearance of"—another long pause as if Quelch could hardly get the word out—"of theft!"

Sensation!

"An article has been taken from a drawer of the table in my study," resumed Mr. Quelch. "It was a watch-chain, placed there till I had an

opportunity of taking it to the jeweller's for repair, as it had been broken. One piece—a few links—remains. The chain is gone!"

The Removites hardly breathed. They knew now how serious the matter was—more terribly serious than they could have dreamed.

"I have made a careful—a meticulous search. There is no doubt that the chain is gone—a gold chain of very old-fashioned workmanship, and considerable value. Its precise value I do not know, but it is upwards of twenty pounds. That, however, is the most trifling part of this painful matter. A theft has been committed, and suspicion points to my Form."

The dead silence was broken by the quiet voice of Lord Mauleverer.

"May I speak, sir?"

All eyes shot round at Mauleverer.

Mr. Quelch's gimlet-eye fixed on him.

"You may speak, Mauleverer, if you know anything of the matter," said the Remove master.

"Nothin', sir," said Mauleverer urbanely.

"Then what do you mean, Mauleverer?"

"Might a fellow ask, sir, how suspicion points to this Form?" inquired his lordship placidly. "I think you said so, sir."

"I should have supposed that that was clear," snapped Mr. Quelch. "Only boys of this Form ever go to my study. It could scarcely fail to be noticed if a boy of another Form did so."

"Oh, quite, sir! I was in your study yesterday myself, takin' in lines. But I don't suspect myself of stealin' anythin', sir."

"Mauleverer!" rapped Mr. Quelch angrily.

There was a suppressed chuckle in the Remove. Mauleverer had broken the tension.

"I mean to say, sir—"

"That will do, Mauleverer. If you mean that suspicion may fall upon the servants, I have considered that. But—"

"But I don't, sir. I'd trust young Trotter with untold gold, and I don't mean anythin' of the kind."

"Then what do you mean?" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"I mean, that I don't see how suspicion can point to the Remove, sir," said Lord Mauleverer calmly. "There isn't a thief in the Form, so how can it?"

"Hear, hear!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Silence! I have said, Mauleverer, that the gold chain has been abstracted from my study. I last saw it on Wednesday afternoon, when I placed it in the drawer. It has been taken since, either on Wednesday, or a subsequent day this week. It can have been taken from only one motive—theft. If any boy present knows anything of this matter, I order him to stand forward."

No one stirred.

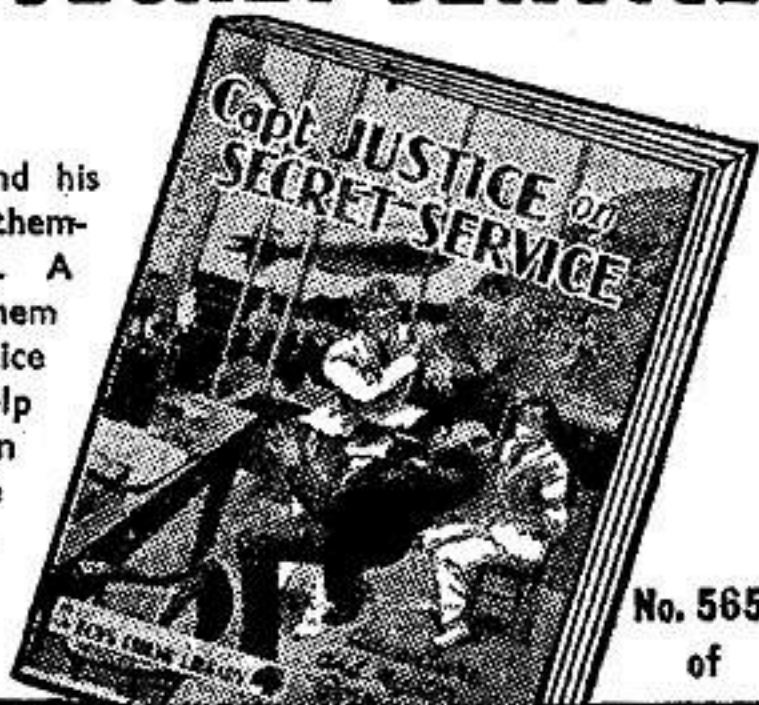
"If the article," said Mr. Quelch, "is returned to me, the boy concerned will, of course, be expelled from this school. He will leave immediately. If it is not returned to me the matter will go before the headmaster, and the thief will undoubtedly be detected. If that boy has any sense of self-respect, any regard for the school of which he is unworthy to be a member, he will desire to avoid making a sensation on the subject. I appeal to him, if he is present."

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The Bounder winked at Tom Redwing.

"No takers," he murmured.

But Redwing did not smile.

"Wharton!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir!"

"You will acquaint other members of the Form, not now present, with what I have said. Let it be known to all the Form that if the chain is returned to my study before preparation this evening, the matter may be ended with as little publicity as possible."

"Very well, sir."

"Otherwise," said Mr. Quelch, "an investigation must be conducted by the headmaster, and the result will be much worse for the culprit, who must infallibly be detected. That is all. Dismiss!"

And the Remove fellows marched out of the Form-room in a state of breathless excitement.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Awful for Billy Bunter!

"BEAST!"

That was Billy Bunter's greeting, as Ponsonby arrived at the stile by the side of the Highcliffe road.

Bunter was seated on the stile, resting his weary legs.

It was some miles from Greyfriars to Highcliffe, with the town of Courtfield between. Bunter had done most of the distance on a motor-bus; but he had had to put in some walking—not much, but a little went a long way with a fellow who had so much weight to carry.

Bunter was tired, and glad of a rest on the stile; but he was fearfully anxious to see Ponsonby, and he blinked incessantly up the road towards Pon's school, till he saw the Highcliffe junior approaching.

It was a relief to see him at last; he had not felt sure even that Pon would take the trouble to walk out in answer to that urgent letter.

Ever since Wednesday, when he had played his fatuous trick in Mr. Quelch's study, the fat junior had been in a state of terror. Even at meal-times he could not quite forget that worry on his fat mind.

Now he knew that Quelch had made the discovery that the gold chain was missing. That afternoon's happenings could mean nothing else. It was the climax!

He blinked at Ponsonby through his spectacles, in mingled fear and hope and dislike. Pon's expression did not look promising.

"Beast!" repeated Bunter.

The Highcliffe fellow glanced up and down the road. Then he stepped nearer to Bunter, his eyes gleaming.

"Better keep a civil tongue, you fat frog!" he muttered.

"I—I mean, I—I'm glad to see you, old chap!" stammered Bunter. "I say, you're going to give me that chain back, ain't you?"

"I know nothin' about any chain!" said Ponsonby, quietly and deliberately. "I've come here to ask you what you mean by writing to me at my school, and what you meant by that letter?"

"Oh, you beast!" groaned Bunter. "You know jolly well that that chain dropped out of my pocket when you and Gadsby were ragging me in the paddock—and you grabbed it up! You jolly well know—"

"Does that mean that you've been pinchin' a chain?"

"You jolly well know it doesn't!" panted the fat Owl. "I told you I took

it for a lark on Quelch. The beast whopped me, and I was going to hide it, to make him sit up. I told you and Gadsby. You know I did, and you wouldn't give me the chain back. If you keep it, it's stealing."

Ponsonby reddened.

He had his own plans laid with regard to that gold chain which had passed into his hands from Bunter's. But certainly he had no intention of keeping it.

Even Bunter realised that that could hardly be possible. It was like Pon to torment a fellow, and he supposed that Pon was deriving a cat-like amusement from tormenting him. That was quite in Pon's style.

"You fat fool!" said Ponsonby, between his teeth. "If you want me to yank you off that stile and smash you—"

"Well, give it me, then!" wailed Bunter. "It's come out now—"

"What's come out?" Ponsonby's eyes snapped.

"I mean, Quelch has missed it! He's called all the fellows in, and I had to dodge out!" groaned Bunter. "I know what it means! He thinks it's been pinched. He wouldn't think it was a lark—a stodgy old fossil like Quelch! I—I never thought of that at the time, but I can see it now, all right—you and Gadsby thought I'd pinched it at first. I say, Pon, do give it to me, and let me put it back! They'll be saying that there's a thief in my Form— Oh lor'!"

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that owing to the Easter
Holidays, next week's
MAGNET will be on sale
Thursday, March 25th.**

"Think I care?" sneered Ponsonby.

"Oh, you beast! You'd like to score over my school, by making out there was a thief there!" moaned Bunter. "Oh, you rotter! Is that your game, you awful beast?"

"Has Quelch spotted you?"

"Eh? No! How could he? He knows by this time that somebody took the chain away, that's all."

"Well, if you'd hidden it, as you say you meant to do, he would think just the same as he thinks now."

"I—I know! But I never thought of that!" mumbled Bunter. "I—I don't want to rag him—I just want to put the chain back. I could drop it somewhere to be picked up, if I couldn't get a chance at his study! If—if you'll give it back to me—"

Bunter blinked at Pon's hard face, with hope—but diminishing hope. He could see that Pon did not intend to part with the article.

"Now, listen to me, you fat fool!" said Ponsonby, in low, measured tones. "You say that I picked up that chain when you dropped it, and Gadsby was there. Well, Gadsby and I were miles away from here, on our bikes, that Wednesday afternoon."

"You know you weren't!" groaned Bunter. "You jolly well know you were ragging me in the paddock, and the chain fell out—"

"That's enough! I know nothin' of it, and Gadsby knows nothin'. If you spin a fool yarn like that, you'll be givin' yourself away as the fellow who pinched the chain—and that's all!"

"I—I shan't say anything if you don't

give me the chain, of course! But you've got to give it to me!" gasped Bunter. "I—I don't believe you want to pinch it yourself. Why can't you give it to me, then?"

"I'll give you a word of advice," said Ponsonby. "If you've taken something of value from your Form-master's study, the less you say about it the better, if you're not going to put it back. You can't drag me into it, and you know you can't! Such a silly yarn would simply be laughed at!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the rascally Ponsonby, his little round eyes dilated behind his big round spectacles.

"I'll give you another tip," went on Ponsonby. "That chain will get back where it belongs without your name being mentioned. If you keep your mouth shut, you're safe."

"But why can't you—"

"That's enough! Now, I don't want any more letters from you at Highcliffe," went on Ponsonby. "I don't want to hear from you at all. I'm fed up with you and your silly rot! If I hear another word from you, either by letter or by word of mouth, you can get ready to go up to your headmaster with Quelch!"

Bunter almost fell off the stile.

"You beast!" he gasped. "You—you wouldn't—"

"I'm warnin' you, that's all!" Ponsonby stepped back. "Now cut! I've seen more than I want of you. Don't come near Highcliffe again! Get off!"

Billy Bunter slipped from the stile.

He stood blinking at Ponsonby.

He was not going to get that wretched chain, that was clear. Whether Pon was playing with him, like a cat with a mouse, or whatever his object might be, the chain was not going to be handed over.

The fat junior breathed hard.

Bunter was no fighting-man. He was no hero! And he was no match for Pon. But he was desperate now.

He hardly dared go back to Greyfriars without that chain. He had no doubt that Pon had it in his pocket at the present moment. In sheer desperation, the hapless fat Owl made a rush at the Highcliffe fellow.

He rushed and hit, and Ponsonby jumped back. Bunter followed him up, slogging wildly. A fat fist caught Ponsonby on the chin, and another on the nose.

With a gasp of rage, he flung himself at Bunter.

In his fight with Frank Courtenay, Pon had shown the white feather; but even Pon had no hesitation in tackling a fat, clumsy, short-winded and short-sighted little fellow like Billy Bunter.

Only utter desperation could have induced Bunter to begin it. He had landed two knocks, but he landed no more. A terrific thump on his podgy chest sent him spinning.

"Ow!" roared Bunter. "Wow!"

He bumped down on the roadside, roaring.

Ponsonby glared at him, and kicked him savagely.

"Now get out, you fat fool!" he snarled. "Do you hear? I'll boot you till you get going! Get out of it!"

"Ow! Wow! Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as Ponsonby kicked, and kicked again.

Neither of them heard a bike on the road, or noticed a cyclist coming from the direction of Courtfield.

That cyclist, as he saw what was going on, drove at his pedals, and came up like a flash.

He jumped down, leaving the bike to spin into the hedge, and grasped

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,519.

Ponsonby by the arm. Pon was dragged back from the yelling Owl.

"Now, you cur—"

Ponsonby, panting with rage, twisted round, and stared into the angry, scornful face of Frank Courtenay, the captain of the Highcliffe Fourth.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Putting Paid to Pon!

FRANK COURTENAY gripped Ponsonby by his collar, shaking him a good deal, like a terrier shaking a rat.

Ponsonby sagged in his grip, gasping for breath.

Billy Bunter, sprawling in the grass by the road, roared and howled and yelled, hardly aware that he was rescued.

"Ow! Beast!" roared Bunter. "Keep off! Wow!"

Billy Bunter was hurt. Ponsonby had lost his temper, and he had kicked hard, and kicked often.

"You cur!" Courtenay's voice was bitter with scorn. "So that's how you treat a fellow who can't protect himself! You rotten cur!"

"Let me go, you cad!" breathed Ponsonby, choking with rage.

His clenched fist was raised, to dash into the scornful face of the captain of the Highcliffe Fourth.

Courtenay's eyes gleamed at him.

"You funk'd the other day, you cur, and I let you off! Try it again now, if you like! You're not touching that fat duffer again! Put up your hands, you rotter, if you dare to stand up to a man who can handle you!"

He swung the dandy of Highcliffe away, and Ponsonby went crashing into the hedge. He leaned there, gasping for breath.

"Yow-ow-ow-wow!" roared Bunter.

He sat up dizzily.

"Beast! Where's my specs! Mind you don't tread on my specs! Wow!" The fat Owl's spectacles had fallen off as he rolled under Pon's boot. With them, visibility was not good; without them, Bunter blinked like a helpless owl.

"Here they are, kid!" Courtenay said. He spotted the glasses, picked them up, and handed them to the fat Owl.

Bunter tottered to his feet, jamming on the spectacles. He blinked at Frank Courtenay, and recognised him.

"Oh! You!" he gasped. "Ow! The beast was kicking me! Wow! That's Highcliffe style—kicking a chap when he's down! Wow!"

It was not a gracious speech, as Courtenay was a Highcliffe man as well as Ponsonby. The captain of the Fourth frowned. Billy Bunter, no doubt, would have been grateful for the rescue if he had had time to think about it. But for the moment his fat thoughts were concentrated on the aches and pains he had collected from Ponsonby's boot.

"Cut!" said Courtenay briefly. "I'll see that that cur doesn't touch you again!"

Billy Bunter was only too glad to cut.

He rolled away down the road towards Courtfield, in a hurry to get clear, while Courtenay remained on the spot. It was only too probable that Ponsonby would hand out more boot-leather when the captain of the Fourth rode on to the school. Puffing and blowing, the fat junior vanished down the road.

Ponsonby dragged himself from the hedge. He panted for breath, his eyes burning at Courtenay.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,519.

"You—you rotter!" he breathed.

"You—you—"

"Cut it out!" snapped Courtenay contemptuously. "Get back to Highcliffe!"

"Do you think you can give me orders?" hissed Ponsonby.

"I'm giving you orders now! I don't know what that fat ass was doing over here, or why you were pitching into him—but I know I'm going to stop you. I've no time to waste hanging about here, and you're not going after Bunter when I'm gone. Get a move on at once!"

"I'll do as I please, you rotter!"

"You'll do as I please!" said Frank Courtenay grimly. "You kicked up a row with Wharton and his friends the other day—with Mobbs on the spot to save your skin. You wouldn't have dared otherwise. But you've got pluck enough to handle a fat duffer who could hardly stand up to a rabbit. It doesn't need much—about as much as you've got. You were booting Bunter—well, you'll walk straight back to Highcliffe this minute, or I'll boot you the same as you were doing to Bunter."

"I won't take a step! I—"

Ponsonby choked. He almost foamed. "You rotten bully, if you think—"

Courtenay laughed contemptuously.

"I like that word—from you, considering what you were doing when I stopped you! Are you going?"

"No!" hissed Ponsonby.

"That does it!"

Frank Courtenay strode straight at him, grasped him by the shoulders, and spun him round.

Forgetting funk in his rage, Ponsonby struck at him, and struck again. But he was spun round, and Courtenay's boot crashed on him.

Ponsonby staggered along the road under that hefty kick.

"Now get going, or—"

Another of the same was coming. But one was enough for Ponsonby. He ran.

The captain of the Fourth stared after him in contemptuous disgust. Then he pulled his machine from the hedge and wheeled it on towards the school after Ponsonby. Whether the dandy of Highcliffe would have seized an opportunity to get after Bunter again he did not know; but he was not giving him a chance.

Ponsonby dropped into a walk, and looked round, with a face white with rage. Courtenay made a gesture to him, and he tramped on—or, rather, stamped on. The captain of the Fourth was not far behind him, and he did not want the boot to get within reach again. Courtenay meant to see him in at the school gates, and Pon had no idea of arguing the matter further.

He reached the Highcliffe gates and went in.

A couple of minutes later Courtenay wheeled his machine in—and met the whimsical grin of the Caterpillar.

"Waitin' for you, Franky!" yawned De Courcy. "Forgotten that we've got some friends comin' to tea!"

"No; I collected a puncture over at Green Hedges, and it rather delayed me," answered Courtenay. "They haven't blown in yet?"

"Not yet!"

"That's all right, then!"

"Pon's just crawled in, lookin' as if he were goin' to bite!" murmured the Caterpillar. "He looked rather ruffled and rumpled. Have you been ruffin' and rumplin' Pon, Franky?"

Courtenay's brow darkened.

"I stopped him ragging that fat ass Bunter," he said.

"Bunter!" repeated the Caterpillar. "Was it that jolly old Greyfriars

porpoise that Pon was goin' out to see? By gad! Did the dear old fat man walk over specially for Pon to meet him an' rag him? Must be a fearfully obligin' chap."

"I don't know what he was doing over here, but Ponsonby was booting him, and I stopped the brute," growled Courtenay. "Let's get in and get tea ready for those Greyfriars chaps—they can't be long now."

They went in together—Courtenay frowning and the Caterpillar smiling. Neither of them, certainly, was likely to guess why Billy Bunter had come over that afternoon.

Bunter, in the Courtfield motor-bus, was rolling homeward to Greyfriars—still aching and paining from Pon's boot, but giving hardly a thought to his aches and pains in his dread of what he was going to hear when he got in.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Tea at Highcliffe!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. rode past Courtfield, heading for Highcliffe, that afternoon, looking—and feeling—in rather less than their usual cheery spirits.

They left the Remove fellows behind them at Greyfriars in a buzz of excitement.

The Remove knew now what was "up," and few, if any, doubted that Billy Bunter was the culprit. Least of all did Harry Wharton doubt, for the fat Owl's desperate flight over the Cloister wall had only one meaning—he knew what Quelch wanted the form for and dared not turn up.

The captain of the Remove had a clouded brow as he rode away with his friends for Highcliffe.

Bunter had done it!

The Famous Five hardly thought of doubting that.

"No need to mention anything at Highcliffe!" Harry Wharton remarked, as their destination came in sight.

"No fear!" said Bob Cherry. "Pon would like to get hold of it if he had any idea of what was on! It would amuse that cad no end to start a story of a theft at Greyfriars!"

"The esteemed mumfulness is the absurd word!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Speechfulness is silvery, but silence is the bird in the bush that saves a stitch in the side, as the English proverb remarks."

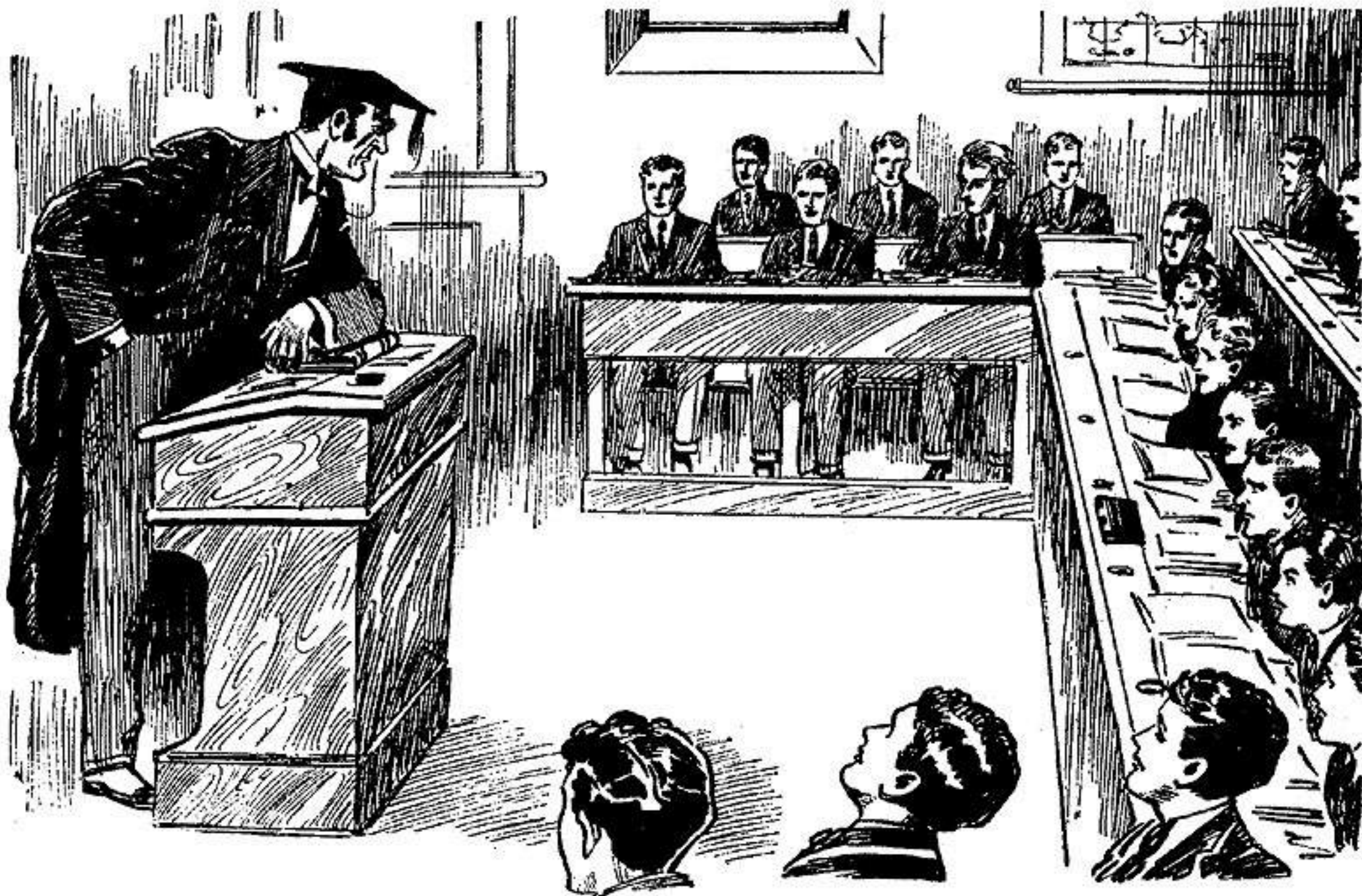
Which English proverb caused the Co. to chortle as they rode up to the gates of Highcliffe School.

They wheeled in their machines to leave with the porter—with a rather wary eye open for Pon & Co.

After the row on their last visit they had decided to keep clear of Highcliffe for the rest of that term. But Frank Courtenay had come over to see them the same day to set the matter right. He had assured them that Pon would steer clear next time, and they had no doubt that his method of persuasion would prove successful. With a thrashing in hand, so to speak, and another to come if he caused more trouble, Pon was likely to behave himself. The Famous Five were naturally very unwilling to let their old enemy decide whether they should visit their friends or not. So here they were again, hoping that it would be all right this time.

And it was!

Pon's lesson, it was clear, had done him good. He was walking in the Highcliffe quad when the Famous Five crossed from the porter's lodge to the



"My boys!" Mr. Quelch's voice was quiet, but very penetrating. "Something has occurred which must be inquired into without delay. A theft has been committed in my study—and suspicion points to my Form! If any boy present knows anything of this matter, I order him to stand forward!" No one stirred.

House, and he glanced at them. Apart from that glance of dislike, however, he took no notice of the visitors.

They elaborately affected not to see him at all.

Ponsonby, after that glance, walked away; and they went on to the House, where they found Gadsby and Monson and Vavasour lounging in the doorway.

Neither from them was there any sign of hostility. The three nuts looked the other way.

At the door, the Caterpillar met the visitors, and walked them off to Study No. 3 in the Fourth.

The Greyfriars fellows smiled a little as they went with De Courcy. Pon & Co., it was clear, had learned their lesson. They seemed to have lost all desire to butt in between the captain of the Fourth and his friends from Greyfriars.

Frank Courtenay greeted the visitors cheerily, as they arrived in his study with the Caterpillar.

"Sorry we're a bit late," said Harry Wharton. "We were rather delayed in getting out."

The Famous Five were a good half-hour late. That, of course, was not their fault, as Mr. Quelch could hardly have been disregarded.

"Better late than never!" said Courtenay, with a smile. "I'm jolly glad to see you fellows here again. No trouble this time, I hope?"

"Not the least little bit in the world," grinned Bob Cherry. "I think you must have been talking to Pon, and pointing out to him the error of his ways."

"There was a bit of a scrap," said Courtenay.

"Only a small bit!" explained the Caterpillar. "Pon doesn't like scraps in large doses. Pon's got his faults; but there's one thing about that chap—

he always knows at once when he's had enough. And he's not backward in sayin' so, either. Squat down, you men—are there enough pews to go round?"

There was enough "pews" to go round, chairs having been borrowed from other studies for the festive occasion.

Seven cheery fellows sat round the study table to tea, and Ponsonby was very soon forgotten.

The talk over the tea-table ran chiefly on games, that being a subject in which Frank Courtenay was as keenly interested as the chums of Greyfriars. If it bored the Caterpillar, as it probably did, he showed no sign of it.

But Ponsonby, though forgotten by the happy party, reminded them of his existence before tea was over.

Tap!
"Trot in!" called out Courtenay, glancing round.

The door opened; and a silence fell on the tea-party as Cecil Ponsonby appeared in the doorway.

Courtenay's brow darkened; and there came a glint into the Caterpillar's eyes. Harry Wharton & Co. were silent and uncomfortable. The general impression was that Pon's lesson had, after all, been lost on him, and that he had looked into Study No. 3 in search of trouble.

But there was no trace of hostility in Ponsonby's manner.

In the quad he had given the Greyfriars fellows a look of bitter dislike. Now he bestowed a nod on them, with a smile on his face.

"Sorry to butt in," drawled Pon, "but I noticed these chaps comin' in, a little while ago, and I've been wantin' to speak to them."

"No charge!" remarked Bob Cherry. The other fellows sat silent. They

could not make out what Pon wanted, but they knew him too well to think of trusting to friendly appearances.

From his looks, Pon might have forgotten that he had been on terms of warfare with Harry Wharton & Co. ever since he had known them. But that was rather too improbable to be easily credited.

"Look here, Ponsonby, what do you mean?" asked Courtenay, restively; while the Caterpillar watched the fellow in the doorway curiously.

"I'm rather sorry for what happened the other day," said Ponsonby. "My Form-master, Mobbs, barged in and ordered you fellows off, when you called here for Courtenay. You had to get off without him. I hear that he liked off to Greyfriars afterwards, to see you about it, and had to wait a long time for you fellows to come in. It was all my fault, and I thought I'd say that I'm sorry it happened. That's all."

With that, and another cheery nod, Ponsonby walked away, without waiting for an answer.

The Greyfriars fellows were rather too astonished to answer, as a matter of fact. They could only stare.

Then Ponsonby was gone.
"Well, my hat!" murmured Harry Wharton.

"That's rather decent of Pon!" said Bob. "I suppose he's thought it over, and feels that what he did was rather thick."

"The thickfulness was terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But—" He left it at that.

Courtenay was looking surprised. But he was looking relieved and pleased. It was his way to think the best he could of any fellow. As it was only an hour since he had booted Pon on the Highcliffe road, this graceful apology from
THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,519.

him was all the more unexpected. But it was welcome.

"Well, that's that," he said, with a smile. "Ponsonby's not quite so black as he paints himself, what?"

"Dear man!" murmured the Caterpillar.

"Well, that clears the air, anyhow," said Harry Wharton. "So long as there's no more trouble, that's what everybody wants."

In point of fact, the Famous Five were puzzled and doubtful. Still, it seemed only fair to give Pon the benefit of the doubt. Even a "rotter" like Pon might have realised that there was a limit; and it was difficult to imagine any ulterior motive he might have had for coming there.

But after the Famous Five were gone, the Caterpillar cocked his eye whimsically at his study-mate.

"Frankly, old man, what was Pon up to?" he asked.

"Eh? Was he up to anything?" asked Courtenay.

"Was he?" murmured the Caterpillar. "The lickin' did him good, of course—that stopped his jolly old knavish tricks! But why this development?"

"Oh, rot!" said Courtenay. "Even a fellow like Ponsonby might do the decent thing occasionally!"

"Might!" agreed the Caterpillar. "But as that inky chap would say, the mightfulness is terrific. Is he simply establishin' peace, because he doesn't want a dose of his own medicine, when he hikes over to Greyfriars to see Skinner—he's rather pally with that man Skinner in the Remove."

"Oh!" said Courtenay. He had not thought of that. De Courcy had! "Well, I shouldn't wonder! If he's thinking of paying Skinner a visit, he wouldn't like to be treated as he treated the Greyfriars chaps here on Wednesday."

"Might be that!" mused the Caterpillar. "But—"

"But what?"

"N.G.!" said the Caterpillar. "Pon's too deep for me! Deep as a jolly old well! Those chaps didn't need tellin' that you went over to Greyfriars last Wednesday, and had to wait a long time for them there. They knew that. Why did Pon come here to remind them of that unimportant circumstance?"

"He didn't, you ass; why should he?" said Courtenay, staring.

"He did!" said the Caterpillar calmly. "But why? So far as I know, it doesn't matter a blue bean to anybody, whether you hung about at Greyfriars last Wednesday or not."

"Of course it doesn't!"

"It does—to Pon!" said the Caterpillar.

"Fathead!"

The Caterpillar laughed, and dropped the subject.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Knows Nothing!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter rolled into the Rag.

A good many Remove fellows were there, after tea. Fellows who had been out of gates earlier in the afternoon, and had since come in, had been told of the announcement in the Form-room. It was the one topic among the Removes at present. And everybody was anxious to see Bunter. Not a man doubted that the fat Owl was the fellow Quelch wanted.

So there was a buzz as the fat junior

rolled in, and he was surrounded at once.

"Here he is!"

"Here's Bunter!"

"Packed your box, old fat man?"

"What have you done with the loot, you bloated burglar?"

"You're for it this time, you frabjous ass!"

Billy Bunter blinked round at the crowd of faces, with startled eyes behind his big spectacles.

"I—I say, you fellows—has—has anything happened?" he gasped. "I—I've been out of gates, you know. I didn't clear off because the Form were ordered in—I never knew—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I say, has there been a row, or—or anything? What did Quelch want?"

"He wants his jolly old watch-chain!" chortled Skinner. "And he won't be happy till he gets it!"

"And the sooner you hand it out, the better!" chuckled Snoop.

"You frightful idiot!" said Peter Todd. "What on earth made you do it? Have you gone right off your rocker?"

"Got it about you?" asked Bolsover major.

"Popped it?" asked Skinner. "If you have, you'd better take Quelch the ticket!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, this isn't a laughing matter!" said Squiff. "That fat ass has landed himself this time! It's the sack!"

"The long jump for Bunter!" agreed Skinner. "You should have kept to grub-raiding, old fat man. You only get booted for that! But when it comes to pinching loot—"

"You—you—you beast!" gasped Bunter. "Who's pinched anything?"

"Haven't you?" chortled Skinner.

"No!" yelled Bunter.

"Better tell Quelch that when he trails you down!" said Hazeldene laughing. "You fat ass, every fellow here knows it was you!"

"It wasn't!" shrieked Bunter. "If Quelch has missed a gold watch-chain, I know nothing about it. I wasn't in his study last Wednesday, and I never saw him put it in his drawer while I was there. As for touching it afterwards, I never thought of such a thing, of course!"

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

"I never knew he had a gold watch-chain, if you come to that," said Bunter warmly. "I've never noticed it once when I've seen him wearing it—"

"Oh crikey!"

"I never knew it was broken, either," went on Bunter. "He hadn't got the pieces in his hand when I went to his study about my lines. If he had, I never saw them. Besides, a broken watch-chain might be lost anywhere. I dare say Quelch dropped it out of gates."

"Go it!" gasped Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Besides, it might have been taken any time since last Wednesday," went on Bunter. "I haven't been in his study since Wednesday—I've been jolly careful to keep away, I can tell you. I expect it was taken on Thursday or Friday. Lots of fellows were in the study yesterday or the day before. Might have been any chap in the Remove, see?"

"Ain't he a cough-drop?" gasped Skinner.

"Might have been one of the servants," said Bunter, "or—or a burglar! How does Quelch know it wasn't burgled, I'd like to know?"

"He does know!" chortled Skinner.

"It was a daylight raid, old man—and you were the jolly old raider."

"Beast!"

"It was Bunter, of course," said Tom Brown. "We all knew he had been up to something in Quelch's study. And if we hadn't known before, we should know now he's told us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I haven't told you!" howled Bunter. "Don't you fellows get making out that I know anything about it. I don't know anything at all. I—I—I say, you fellows, Quelch didn't mention me, did he?"

"No, you ass," said Peter Todd. "But if there's an inquiry, it's bound to come out. For goodness' sake, take it back to Quelch at once. You've still got it, I suppose?"

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"Of course he's not still got it," said Skinner. "Bunter's an ass, but he's hardly ass enough to take a beak's watch-chain to wear. It's gone in jam tarts before this."

"You rotter!" howled Bunter. "It hasn't! Think I'm a thief?"

"I don't think—I know!" answered Skinner, staring at the fat Remove. "What do you mean, you fat chump? We all know you took Quelch's gold chain."

"Beast!"

"The sooner that fat rascal's kicked out of the school, the better!" growled Bolsover major. "Pinching a fellow's tuck is bad enough, but when it comes to this sort of thing—"

"I say, you fellows, I didn't—I never—I—I wasn't!" wailed Bunter. "I keep on telling you that it might have been anybody. Might have been Bolsover—"

"What?" roared Bolsover.

"Well, you're making out that it was me, so why shouldn't I make out that it was you?" howled Bunter.

"Why, you fat scoundrel, I'll—"

"Hold on, dear men!" Lord Mauleverer detached himself from his armchair, and interposed. "Chuck it, Bolsover!"

"I'll smash him—" roared Bolsover major.

"You won't, old bean! Leave Bunter alone," said Mauleverer. "If he's done this, he's got enough comin' without any smashin' in the Remove."

"Well, that's true enough!" admitted Bolsover. "But if he begins making out that it was some other chap—"

"So it was!" howled Bunter. "I don't believe the rotten thing is missing at all, and I'm certain that some other fellow took it—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bunter, old man," said Lord Mauleverer gently, "I don't know why you bagged that watch-chain, but for goodness' sake take it back at once. I'll come with you, if you like."

"Mauly doesn't know why he bagged it!" chortled Skinner. "That's the kind of brain he's going to take with him into the House of Lords!"

"Quite!" assented Lord Mauleverer amiably. "I simply can't imagine why Bunter shifted that watch-chain! It looks as if he did—but why he did, beats me."

"He pinched it, you silly fathead!" said Hazel.

"Don't be an ass, Hazel!"

"Why, you silly chump—"

"I—I didn't!" gasped Bunter. "Mauly knows, don't you, Mauly? You know I wouldn't, old chap."

"Quite!" said Lord Mauleverer. "You pinch cakes and buns, old fat man—because you haven't sense enough to know better—"

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

"But idiot as you are, you know as

well as any other fellow that stealin' is stealin'. If Quelch had missed a cake or a bag of doughnuts, it would be different. Don't you fellows make a silly mistake—Bunter's a born idiot, and a howling ass, and a blitherin' chuckle-head—but he's not a thief!"

"But he's taken it!" yelled Bolsover major.

"Yaas, it looks as if he has! What did you take it for, Bunter?"

"I tell you I didn't take it!" said Bunter. "If you can't take a fellow's word—"

"I say you did, you fat pilferer!" said Bolsover.

"I didn't!"

"Up-end him, and shake it out of his pockets!" said Hazel.

"Beast!"

"Bunter, old man," said Lord Mauleverer earnestly. "Every fellow's known, since last Wednesday, that you did something in Quelch's study that afternoon. Now this comes out. I know you wouldn't pinch the thing, old chap—but what did you do with it?"

"Nothing. I never saw it when I was in the study, and I never went to the study at all that afternoon. If Quelch put it in the drawer of his table, I knew nothing whatever about it. My belief is that Quelch must have popped it, and lost the ticket—"

"Oh gad!"

"That would account for the whole thing," said Bunter. "But so far as I'm

concerned, I know absolutely nothing whatever about it. Nothing at all."

Lord Mauleverer gazed at him.

"Bunter, old bean," he said quietly, "if you don't give it up, what does it look like? Can't you understand that?"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter blinked round indignantly through his big spectacles. That he had taken the chain, not a fellow doubted—and only Mauleverer seemed to doubt that he had "pinched" it.

"This is pretty thick, I think," said Bunter warmly. "Making out that a fellow would pinch a rotten old watch-chain. Jumping on a fellow who knows nothing at all about it. I've never seen the rotten thing. It wasn't in that drawer in Quelch's table at all, and I never took it out while I was in the study. Not that I was there, you know. I never went to Quelch's study at all that day. Besides, I had to go there to take my lines! My belief is that Quelch lost that watch-chain out of gates. And I shouldn't wonder if it's in the drawer all the time, and he's overlooked it—he's that sort of an old ass! I know it was safe in that drawer when I left his study. I didn't look in the drawer, of course—not the sort of thing I would do! I've never seen the beastly thing in my life—and I don't feel at all sure that Quelch had a gold watch-chain at all, if you come to that!"

With which, the fat Owl turned and rolled indignantly out of the Rag, leaving the fellows there in a roar.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Not Nice!

HORACE COKER of the Fifth Form barred the way of five juniors coming along from the bike-shed just before call-over.

Coker held up a magisterial hand, and the Famous Five, in sheer surprise, stopped.

"What's this I hear?" demanded Coker of the Fifth.

"Is that a conundrum?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"Don't be cheeky! Pretty state of affairs at Greyfriars!" said Coker sternly. "Pinching going on in the Remove, so I hear."

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

The Famous Five exchanged a quick glance. It was a dismayed glance.

Clearly, the news was spreading of what Quelch had announced in the Form-room that day: It was unpleasant, but, of course, inevitable. With all the Remove breathlessly discussing the matter, it was not likely to be long in reaching other Forms. Half Greyfriars, probably, had heard of it by the time Harry Wharton & Co. came back from Highlife.

"I've always said," resumed Horace Coker, "that your beak doesn't whop you fags enough! This proves it! Pinching at Greyfriars—my hat! I'd

(Continued on next page)

SCIENCE DISCOVERED THE AEROSPHERE

The Aerosphere is the body of air surrounding the earth. The air we breathe, composed of nitrogen and oxygen and small quantities of other gases, is called the troposphere: above that is the stratosphere, which may be used for very high-speed flying in the future. Above the stratosphere is a region of warm air, in which meteors, etc., become luminous.



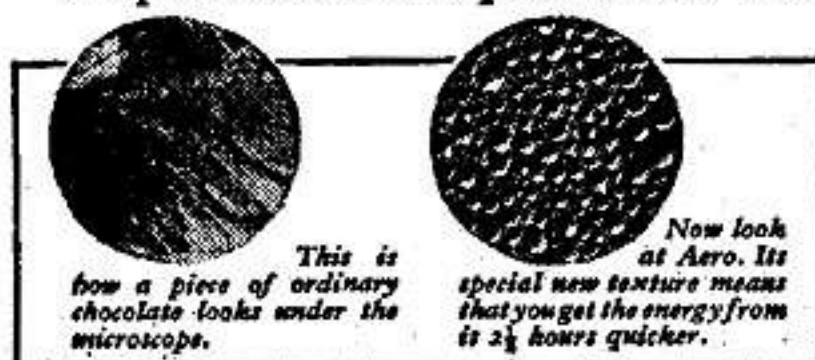
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whole mob of young scoundrels out of the school, if I were Head!"

"You silly, burbling chump—" began Jolenny Bull.

"You gabbling gander—" said Bob Cherry.

"You Fifth Form fathead!" said Frank Nugent.

"Barge him!" said Harry Wharton tersely.

"Good egg!"

"A mob of young rotters!" Coker was going on. "Disgracing the school—my school! I jolly well think—"

Coker finished at that.

Five juniors charged at the same moment, and Horace Coker landed on his back on the cold, unsympathetic earth.

It was not a happy landing. He roared as he landed, and went on roaring.

He had reason to continue roaring, for all the Famous Five walked over him as they went on their way. Five pairs of boots were wiped on Coker, and as one pair was wiped on his waistcoat it left him rather breathless.

Winded to the wide, Coker of the Fifth sprawled and gasped, and the chums of the Remove left him to it.

They were frowning as they went on to the House.

"This is going to be pleasant!" said Bob, with a wry grimace. "That idiot Coker's the first—we shall get a lot of this!"

"Hallo, you fellows!" Hobson of the Shell came up with a grin on his face. "I say, I hear that your beak's sending for a hobby to run the lot of you in! Anything in it?"

This evidently was an outbreak of humour on the part of Hobby of the Shell. But the chums were in no mood for this brand of humour.

Without answering Hobby, they grasped him, rolled him over, and sent him sprawling in the quad.

Hobby was left in the same winded state as Coker of the Fifth, probably wishing he hadn't been so humorous.

Harry Wharton & Co. walked on with pink faces, which grew pinker as they came on Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Fourth near the door.

Evidently Temple & Co. had heard. They grinned at one another as the Remove fellows came up.

Cecil Reginald Temple winked at Dabney and Fry.

"Watches were made to go, you chaps," he remarked. "Funny thing is that in the Remove watch-chains do the same thing."

"Ha, ha!" chortled Dabney and Fry.

"The best thing you can do with a watch-chain," went on Temple, who seemed to be quite brilliant this afternoon, "is to keep a watch on it."

"Oh, rather!" chuckled Dabney.

"Or it might be Removed!" explained Temple—which appeared to be a pun on the name of Quelch's Form.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five came to a halt. The Fourth Formers had heard of "pinching" in the Remove; but they could hardly have imagined that the Famous Five did anything in that line. This was only badinage—or, as Temple would have called it, "roddin'."

But the Removites were not to be "cotted" with impunity.

Bob Cherry grasped Temple, Johnny Bull grasped Fry, and Harry Wharton grasped Dabney. It was done swiftly and efficiently before the playful Fourth Formers could dodge.

Three heads came together with a sounding crack.

Three fearful howls were blended into one.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,519.

Then Temple, Dabney, and Fry were strewn on the earth, and Harry Wharton & Co. walked into the House.

Vernon-Smith met them as they came in. The Bouncer had a grim look on his face.

"Nice, isn't it?" he grunted.

"The niceness is not terrific, my esteemed Smithy."

"It's all over the shop now," growled the Bouncer. "We shall never hear the end of it, this term, at least. That young scoundrel, Tubb of the Third, pretended to button up his pockets as he passed me."

"The cheeky little tick!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Why didn't you boot him?"

"Oh, that's all right; Tubb's holding his nose over a basin now, to catch the gore. I believe he's shed about a gallon."

"Good man!" grinned Bob.

"But that won't stop it," growled Vernon-Smith. "By gum! I'll boot Bunter all over Greyfriars if he isn't sacked to-night!"

"It must have been Bunter!" said Harry.

"Of course it was! We all know he did something in Quelch's study last Wednesday—now we know what he did."

Nugent minor of the Second Form came up to the Removites.

Frank Nugent turned to him—to be greeted by a cheeky grin.

"I've been waiting for you to come in, Frank," said Dicky Nugent. "Look here, what have you been up to in the Remove?"

"What do you mean, you young ass?"

"Well, from what I hear, there's been wholesale burglaries in your beak's study, and half the Remove are in it!" said Nugent minor. "I hope you're not mixed up in it."

Nugent major gazed at his minor. His friends did more than gaze. As if moved by the same spring, they grasped Nugent minor, and there was a loud howl as he came down on ancient oak planks.

Bang!

"Whoo-hooo—hooo!"

For once Frank Nugent left his minor to his fate. Generally he was ready—his friends thought too ready—to stand by Dicky. Now he left him to enjoy that for which he had asked.

Bump, bump, bump!

The Famous Five passed on, leaving Dicky Nugent yelling. Herbert Vernon-Smith kicked him, kicked him again, and yet again; and would doubtless have continued so to do had not the fog bolted, yelling as he went.

It was clear that the Remove were going to be considerably "chipped" on that painful subject. They, on their part, were making it clear that the chipping was going to be a painful process to the chippers.

The bell rang for call-over, and the Greyfriars fellows went into Hall, where Mr. Prout was taking the roll.

Billy Bunter rolled in, last of the Remove.

In that Form all eyes fixed on Bunter—inimically! Every fellow knew, or, at least was sure, that Bunter was the guilty party. It was Bunter who had brought this disgrace on the Form.

The worst of it was, from the point of view of many fellows, that what they knew was not known to the school authorities, and, for the present at least, the delinquent was going scot-free.

Nobody, of course, could give him away; moreover, though it was a moral certainly that Bunter was the man, it could not be said that there was actual proof.

Quelch was a downy bird, and likely to spot the facts, no doubt; but he had not spotted them yet. Bunter had not been sent for to his Form-master's study.

The sooner he was sacked the better, was the opinion of most of the Remove. They wondered that he had the nerve to turn up at roll with the Form, when every fellow there knew what he had done.

Some of the Removites ostentatiously gave Bunter plenty of room. They did not want to be near him.

Lord Mauleverer, however, drew up to the fat Owl's side and gave him an agreeable grin. Mauly, generally considered an ass in his Form, seemed bent on proving what an utter ass he was. Apparently he believed in Bunter.

"I say, you fellows!" mumbled Bunter.

"Shut up, you podgy pincher!" growled Bolsover major.

"Beast! I say, Wharton, old chap, you—you d-don't believe I tut-tut-touched Quelch's rotten chain, do you?" pleaded the dismal Owl.

"I know you did, fathead!" answered the captain of the Remove.

"You don't, do you, Mauly?" groaned Bunter. "You know I wouldn't pinch anything, don't you, Mauly?"

"Yaas, old fat bean!"

"You're a fool, Mauly!" snapped the Bouncer.

"Thanks, old thing!"

"Mauly knows!" said Bunter. "I know he's a bit of a fool, but he knows I never pinched that rotten chain."

"Oh gad!" gasped Lord Mauleverer.

"Silence!" called out the prefects, as Mr. Prout started on the roll.

Mr. Quelch was in Hall, his gimlet-eyes on his Form. Some of the fellows expected him to call Bunter back when roll was over. But the Remove master, it seemed, had not yet turned any special suspicion on Bunter, and the fat Owl rolled out with the rest.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Keeping it Dark!

BILLY BUNTER sat in the arm-chair in Study No. 7 in prep.

He was not thinking of prep.

Bunter was seldom keen on prep, or work in any shape or form. In the present dismaying state of affairs, he could not bring his fat mind down to it, and made no attempt to do so.

As it was Saturday evening, the prep was "Sunday prep." A volume of Milton was propped open on the study table.

Peter Todd and Tom Dutton were scanning the blank verse of that great poet, and Bunter left them to it.

Every now and then Peter glanced at him, but did not speak.

Neither did Bunter.

Generally talkative, the fat Owl was now dismally silent. It was not like Bunter to think instead of talking. But he was doing it now.

But the more he thought over the dismal circumstances, the more dismal they seemed.

Gladly—how gladly—the fat Owl would have returned that wretched chain to Quelch's study. But that was impossible now.

Ponsonby had it, and refused to part with it. He had said that the chain would go back where it belonged, and Bunter believed that much. So far as he could see, the cad of Highcliffe was only bent on worrying and tormenting him.

But that was no present help.



"Ow! Wow! Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as Ponsonby kicked. Next moment, Courtenay had leaped from his bicycle and grasped the cad of Highlife by the arm. Pon was dragged back from the yelling Owl. "You cur!" Courtenay's voice was bitter with scorn. "So that's how you treat a fellow who can't protect himself! You rotten cur!"

Bunter, when he had taken that broken watch-chain from the drawer in Quelch's table, had not foreseen—had not even dreamed—that it would be supposed to have been stolen when it was missed.

It was a jape. He was going to give Quelch a hunt for it. That was all—merely that, and nothing more.

But since he had lost the chain, it had dawned on his fat brain what it would look like.

Now there was no doubt.

Evidently it had not even crossed Quelch's mind that the act was that of a particularly idiotic practical joker.

An article of value had been taken from his study, and he had adjudged the action a theft—as, Bunter realised now, he could not help doing.

Even had he carried out his fatuous intention of hiding the chain in Quelch's Sunday hat, for him to find, he realised that it would not have altered the matter.

Quelch would not have taken it as a practical joke; he would only have supposed that the thief had got frightened, and allowed the loot to be found.

That, of course, was what it would have looked like. Too late, this was clear to the hapless Owl.

But even that could not be done, as he no longer had the chain. It would not have helped much; but, anyhow, it was impossible.

Even if Pon returned the chain, it would still be believed that a theft had taken place. Even if Bunter told that Pon had taken it from him, and was believed, it would not help; for a confession that the chain had been in his hands was tantamount to a confession of theft.

Not that he was likely to be believed, as Ponsonby was prepared to deny it, and Gadsby would back him up. But it would not help, anyhow.

Pon, for some mysterious reason of his own, was willing—indeed, anxious—to keep it dark that he had found that chain on Bunter. That was something to be thankful for. Had he walked into Greyfriars and handed it over to Mr. Quelch, Bunter's number would have been up.

Billy Bunter dared not have it known that the chain had ever been in his hands at all—now that it was taken for granted on all sides that it had been "pinched" by a thief.

That had to be kept dark at all costs.

And somehow—Bunter did not know how—all the Remove seemed to know that he had done it. If Quelch heard the talk of the Form, the Remove master would send for him, and then—

Bunter shuddered at the thought.

"Oh lor!" he groaned.

Peter Todd glanced over from Milton. "Feeling the draught, old fat man?" he asked.

"Oh, no!" gasped Bunter. "I—I'm feeling fine! I—I haven't got anything on my mind, Peter."

"You mean you haven't got a mind to have anything on?" asked Peter.

"Beast!"

Prep went on in silence after that. Bunter did not even look at it. He sat in the armchair, a picture of dismal dole.

"Coming down, old fat ass?" asked Peter, when prep was over, and he rose from the table.

"Nunno! The—the fellows seem to think I know something about old Quelch's watch-chain, Peter. D-d-do you know why?"

Peter looked at him attentively.

"Why did you do it?" he asked.

"I—I—I didn't!"

"I can't make you out," said Peter. "You snaffle a fellow's tuck; no man's cake is safe in the same hemisphere with you. But I'd never have believed

that you'd do a thing like this—even you!"

"I never did, Peter, old chap! Can't you take my word for it that I haven't been in Quelch's study at all?" pleaded Bunter.

"You took in your lines there on Wednesday afternoon."

"Well, I had to, hadn't I? I didn't want to do the lines, you ass! Think I like doing lines?"

"If you took lines in, you were in the study."

"Oh! I—I mean—"

"Well, what?"

"I—I mean, I—I didn't take the lines in, old chap! That's what I really meant to say. Besides, Quelch was in the study when I took them in; he hadn't gone to the Head, Peter. He was there all right, and I couldn't have touched the chain while he was there, could I? I think you might take a pal's word, Toddy!"

"Oh crumbs!" said Toddy.

"Besides, I never ought to have had those lines. Quelch is always picking on me for some reason. And he whopped me, Peter. Six swipes! That's what made me think of it."

"Of what?"

"Oh, nothing! Besides, it never happened on Wednesday at all, and I haven't been in the study since. Suppose it happened on Thursday or Friday, then I couldn't have done it when I was in the study on Wednesday, could I, especially as I wasn't in the study on Wednesday at all?"

"Great pip!" said Peter.

And he left the study and went down with Tom Dutton, leaving Billy Bunter on his dismal own.

But Bunter was not left long alone. There came a tramp of feet in the

(Continued on page 16.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,519.

PONSONBY PULLS the STRINGS!



(Continued from page 13.)

Remove passage, and the Famous Five walked in.

Bob Cherry threw the door shut. Billy Bunter blinked at them. All five faces were very serious, though not so awfully, fearfully serious as Bunter's own.

"I say, you fellows," mumbled Bunter—"I—I say, you're standing by me, ain't you, after all I've done for you?"

"Where is it?" asked Harry Wharton quietly.

"Eh—where's what?"

"Quelch's chain."

"Beast!"

"Now, look here, Bunter," said the captain of the Remove, "you're an absolutely unscrupulous young rascal in a good many ways, but I can't believe you would steal! I know Quelch whopped you last Wednesday, and you may have felt sore about it—"

"I jolly well did!" groaned Bunter. "I could hardly sit down to do my lines afterwards!"

"You blithering owl—I mean, you felt savage—vengeful, perhaps! Did you throw Quelch's chain away, or anything of that kind, for a reason like that?"

"No!" howled Bunter.

The Famous Five watched his fat face. They had discussed the matter, and agreed that there could be no reasonable doubt that it was Bunter who had bagged that chain. But they jibbed at the belief that Bunter was guilty of theft.

It was too awful a thing to believe of any fellow, if it could possibly be helped. And it seemed to the captain of the Remove that he had hit upon a possible explanation.

A fellow who was whopped might feel sore, and think of getting back on the beak who had whopped him. Skinner once, in such circumstances, had thrown away some of Quelch's manuscripts. It was barely possible that Bunter had been fool enough to do the same with a watch-chain. He was, after all, fool enough for almost anything.

"If that's it," said Harry, "it may be possible to get it back. There's a chance of Quelch letting you off the sack if he could be made to believe that it was anything but a theft. Don't you see?"

"Beast!"

"If it was that, old man, tell us," said Bob Cherry, quite gently. "We want to help you if we can."

Bunter blinked at them.

"If Quelch thought that I'd thrown it away to pay him out for whopping me, what do you think he would do?" he asked.

"Well, you might get off with a flogging in that case. There's a chance, at least."

"You—you—you beast!" gasped Bunter. "Think I want to be flogged?"

"Do you want to be bunked?" hooted Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

"Look here, Bunter—" urged Frank Nugent.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,519.

"Rotter!"

"My esteemed, idiotic Bunter—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" yapped Bunter. "It's like you fellows to make out I did it—after all I've done for you, too! You'd be jolly shirty if I didn't take your word! Well, take mine!"

"You blithering bandersnatch—"

"Yah!"

"Look here, Bunter," said Wharton, "every man in the Form knows you did it. It's bound to get to Quelch sooner or later. It looks like a theft, and if it was anybody but a blithering idiot like you we shouldn't have a doubt about it. But you're fool enough—"

"Beast!"

"If you've chucked Quelch's chain away in a dustbin or something—like Skinner did once with his papers—"

"I haven't!" yelled Bunter.

"Then what have you done with it?"

"Nothing! I've never seen it in my life."

"You've seen it on Quelch a hundred times, you fathead, before it busted and he left it off!" howled Johnny Bull.

"Oh yes! I—I mean, except for that, I've never seen it in my life. That—that's what I—I mean."

"Oh crikey!"

"We're trying to help you, Bunter," said Harry patiently.

"Nice way to help a chap!" said Bunter bitterly. "Making him out to be a thief! You'll make out that I had the bag of doughnuts out of your study cupboard if you miss it at supper-time. You're capable of it!"

"You've bagged those doughnuts!" exclaimed Nugent.

"No, I haven't!" yelled Bunter. "I never knew you had any—if you had! What should I know about your mouldy doughnuts?"

"Well, my hat!" said Bob.

Harry Wharton & Co. left Study No. 7. They felt that William George Bunter was rather too much for them.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Quelch Wants to Know!

"BUNTER!"

"Yee-es, sir?"

"You will remain!"

"Oh crikey!"

It was Monday morning in the Remove room. The Remove were dismissed for break after second lesson, when Mr. Quelch bade Bunter remain.

The fat Owl blinked at him dismally. The other fellows exchanged glances as they went out.

"Quelch's spotted him!" whispered the Bounder; and the Removites had little doubt that Quelch had.

Sunday had passed without any further mention of the matter that was on every mind—that is, without any official mention. It was discussed at endless length among the juniors themselves.

On Monday Billy Bunter was feeling better. It was his happy way to dismiss troubles from his fat mind as soon as he could, and as he had not been called to account he hoped that he was going to hear no more of the matter.

He was sorry, of course, that Quelch had to lose that mouldy old chain, but that was not his fault; it was Pon's fault. Besides, Pon had said that it would be returned, so that was all right. All Bunter wanted was to hear no more about Quelch's beastly watch-chain.

But if Bunter ventured to hope that the affair was done with he was the only fellow in the Remove who fancied so. All the Form knew that the matter could not possibly rest till the culprit had been discovered.

It was only a question of how long it would be before Quelch spotted Bunter. Now it looked as if Bunter was spotted.

The fat Owl stood before his Form-master's desk, inwardly quaking. Mr. Quelch scanned him keenly, but not unkindly.

"I have some questions to put to you, Bunter," he said. "I desire you to answer me frankly."

"Oh, certainly, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"On Wednesday last week," said Mr. Quelch, "you came to my study with an untruthful excuse about your lines, and I caned you. At the moment, Bunter, I recall that I had the missing watch-chain in my hands."

"Did—did—did you, sir?"

"You must have noticed it, Bunter."

"I—I'm rather short-sighted, sir—"

"I placed the chain in a drawer of my table, Bunter, when I took up my cane. You must have observed it."

Mr. Quelch paused; and Bunter suppressed a groan.

Evidently the Remove master had been giving the affair deep thought and had recalled certain circumstances which Bunter would have preferred forgotten.

"You, Bunter, were, therefore, aware that the broken watch-chain was in that drawer of my table," said Mr. Quelch quietly. "I cannot find that any other boy in the Remove was aware of it."

Bunter quaked.

He had not thought of that at the time. Thinking was not much in his line. But Quelch, of course, had thought of it; it was just like him.

"Later," resumed Mr. Quelch, "you returned to my study that afternoon, Bunter—"

"Oh, no, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"You returned to my study during my absence, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch sharply. "You must have done so, as I found your lines on my table when I came back after seeing Dr. Locke."

"I—I had to take in my lines, sir," mumbled Bunter. "You—you remember you told me I couldn't go out that afternoon till I'd done them."

"Quite so, Bunter! I remember perfectly. And the fact that you took in your lines and left them on my table demonstrates that you entered the study during my absence," said Mr. Quelch.

"D-d-does it, sir? I—I mean, I—I—I just popped in and—and popped out; I wasn't in the study a minute, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I—I don't see why I should be picked on, sir. Lots of fellows have been in your study since, sir—Mauly and Wharton and Smithy and lots of fellows."

"That is quite true, Bunter, but there is no reason to suppose that any of these boys knew anything about the watch-chain," said Mr. Quelch. "But you undoubtedly must have known where it was. You certainly saw me place it in that drawer last Wednesday."

"I—I'd forgotten, sir! Besides, I never saw you put it there! I never saw the watch-chain at all, sir, and I forgot it the minute I left the study."

"Bunter!"

"Yee-es, sir? C-c-can I go now?"

"You may not!"

"Oh lor'!"

Mr. Quelch scanned the hapless, fat Owl. The fact that Bunter knew exactly where the gold chain was, and it did not appear that any other fellow knew, pointed to Bunter. But Mr. Quelch was a just gentleman, if a severe one.

Bunter was plainly frightened, and equally plainly he was ready to tell any untruth that came into his obtuse head. But Quelch did not take these circumstances as signs of guilt.

Any fellow questioned on so terribly

serious a subject might have been uneasy and nervous. And Bunter was so habitually untruthful that his Form-master hardly expected anything else from him at any time.

Scared by the bare possibility of being suspected, Bunter, innocent or guilty, would undoubtedly have rolled out fib after fib.

And little as Bunter supposed so—Mr. Quelch desired to be very patient and considerate towards him on account of his obtuseness. Bunter was exactly the fellow to make himself look guilty if he was innocent, from sheer funk and habitual prevarication.

"I must ask you a direct question, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch at last. "Did you or did you not pilfer the gold chain from my study?"

"No, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I'm not a thief!"

That answer was unusually truthful for Bunter.

He was not a thief, and he had not pilfered the watch chain. He had taken it from sheer fatheadedness, to play an idiotic practical joke. That was quite a different matter. There was genuine indignation as well as terror in Bunter's fat face as he repudiated the suggestion of pilfering.

"As if I'd steal anything!" mumbled Bunter. "I wouldn't, sir! I hope I'm not that sort of chap!"

"I hope not, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch dubiously. "I certainly hope not, my boy. Far be it from me to judge any boy guilty without the most convincing proof. But the fact remains that the watch-chain was taken."

"Mightn't it have been a burglar, sir?" asked Bunter hopefully.

"Do not be absurd, Bunter!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"But—but it might, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"A burglar, Bunter, would not content himself with taking a single article," said Mr. Quelch, as patiently as he could. "Neither is there any trace of the House having been entered at night."

"One of these daylight burglars, sir?"

"Do not talk nonsense, Bunter!"

"Oh! Yes, sir! I—I mean, no, sir!"

"You have nothing to tell me, Bunter?"

"Oh, no, sir! N-n-not at all!"

"Very well," said Mr. Quelch. "The inquiry will proceed until the truth has been elucidated! You may go, Bunter!"

Bunter went—gladly!

Mr. Quelch was left, pursing his lips, worried and thoughtful.

Billy Bunter rolled out into the quad, immensely relieved to get away, gasping as if he had come up from a dive, after that terrifying interview.

In the quad he was immediately surrounded by Remove fellows.

"Spotted?" asked Skinner.

"Copped?" asked the Bounder.

"Going up to be sacked?" inquired Peter Todd.

"Have you given it back to Quelch?" asked Hazel.

"Yah!" hooted Bunter. "Making out it was me—yah! Quelch doesn't think it was me, anyhow! You should have heard what he said."

"What did he say, then?" asked Bob Cherry. "What did he want you for?"

"He—he—he said that—that if there were one fellow in the Form that he could absolutely trust it was me!" said Bunter. "He said 'Bunter, I know that you, at least, can never have done this.' His very words!"

"Oh crikey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He said those very words!" declared the fat Owl. "That shows you fellows, doesn't it?"

"Not quite!" chuckled Bob.

"The quiteness is not terrific."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quelch hasn't spotted him yet?" remarked the Bounder. "He's not such a downy bird as we thought. But he will spot him all right."

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter, at all events, was not spotted yet. It was, in the opinion of the Remove, only a matter of time. They little dreamed of the strange and unexpected turn that the affair was to take.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Dropping a Hint!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Jolly old Pon!"

"Ponsonby!" said Harry Wharton, knitting his brows.

The Famous Five were in the quad, after class that day, when an elegant youth wheeled a bike in, left it at Gosling's lodge, and strolled towards the House.

The chums of the Remove eyed him rather grimly from a distance.

After what had happened at Highcliffe less than a week ago they considered that it was a nerve, on Pon's part, to butt in at Greyfriars.

He had friends there—as they had at Highcliffe. He had forced a row on them when they called on their Highcliffe friends. Really, he might have expected a dose of his own medicine when he came over to Greyfriars. But he sauntered across the quad like a fellow quite at his ease.

"What about—?" began Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"No rags," he said. "Pon's clucked up ragging at the other end, and we don't want to start it again this end. After all, he came to Courtenay's study while we were there on Saturday and said he was sorry."

"Fat lot he meant it!" granted Johnny Bull. "I dare say he was making it square because he was coming over here to see some chap."

"I shouldn't wonder. Let him rip, all the same. We don't want to pick up his manners and customs."

And the Famous Five let Cecil Ponsonby rip!

He did not seem to observe them. Catching sight of the Bounder, he went to speak to him.

"Skinner about?" he asked.

Smithy grinned.

"Tip straight from the horse's mouth?" he asked. "Where did you pick up that nose, old bean?"

Ponsonby's eyes glinted for a second.

"Does it show much? I had a bit of a scrap the other day," he said carelessly. "I say, I want to see Skinner."

"He went up to the studies."

"All right."

Ponsonby walked into the House as if it belonged to him. He knew his way about, having called a good many times on Skinner and the Bounder, and sometimes on Hazel.

Skinner was in his study doorway, talking to some fellows in the Remove passage, when Ponsonby came lounging up. He gave the dandy of Highcliffe a welcoming nod.

The talk in the Remove passage was on the subject of the missing chain—almost the one topic in the Remove now. Ponsonby caught a few words as he came up, and smiled. Little as any Greyfriars fellow was likely to guess it,

it was that very matter that had brought him over to Greyfriars. So far as any fellow but Bunter knew, Pon had never heard of that chain, still less of the fact that it was missing.

"Hallo, old bean!" said Skinner.

"Trot in! Just going to have tea!"

Ponsonby went into Study No. 11 with him. Snoop was in the study, and he gave Pon an agreeable nod. Both the black sheep of the Remove were rather bucked by their acquaintance with the superb Pon.

"Tea-ing with us?" asked Snoop.

"If you'll ask me!" answered Pon, with a pleasant smile. "I've run across to have a jaw with you chaps—we've got somethin' on I'd like you to join in next half-hol. Motorin' party."

"Good man!" said Skinner.

The three sat down to tea very amicably. If Pon & Co. were getting up one of their expensive motoring excursions for a half-holiday, Skinner and Snoop were glad enough to be asked for the same.

Naturally, they had no suspicion that Pon had invented that motor trip as a pretext for a visit. Skinner and Snoop were a pair of young rascals, but had they known what was in the mind of the dandy of Highcliffe they would have shrunk from him as from an adder.

Pon was far too wary to come at once to the subject about which he had to speak.

The talk over tea ran on that motor trip, which was to extend miles out of school bounds, with a spread at a certain inn that Pon knew, and a game of billiards afterwards with cigarettes galore—just the sort of trip that appealed to Skinner and Snoop.

After tea, Skinner—with a wary "squint" into the passage—produced smokes. Pon had been rather hoping that the subject he had in mind would come up of its own accord. As it did not, he came to it himself.

He knew, from Bunter, that Mr. Quelch had missed the chain. He had no doubt that there was a row going on at Greyfriars on the subject. The few words he had caught in the Remove passage apprised him that such was the case. But he wanted to know exactly how the matter stood.

"Some excitement goin' on here—what?" he asked. "Somebody up for the sack, or what?"

"That fat ass Bunter?" answered Skinner.

"Bunter!" repeated Ponsonby, with a start.

If Bunter had been spotted it knocked skyhigh all the plans that the cad of Highcliffe had been forming. If that fat fool had not had sense enough to hold his tongue—

"Yes, that blinking owl!" said Snoop, with a laugh. "He's fairly asked for it this time!"

"What's he done?" asked Ponsonby as casually as he could.

"Pinched a mouldy old watch-chain out of Quelch's study," answered Skinner. "At least, everybody believes it was Bunter."

Ponsonby breathed hard.

"He's owned up?" he asked.

"Catch him owning up!" said Skinner. "Quelch hasn't got on to it yet. Bunter won't own up when he does. He will go on pouring out whoppers and whoppers—he keeps them on tap! You know Bunter!"

"Yes, I know him," said Ponsonby, laughing. "But if he hasn't owned up how do you know he did it?"

"Well, everybody knew that the fat idiot was up to something in Quelch's study last Wednesday. Now it's come THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,519.

out that the chain is missing, and we had only to put two and two together."

"Last Wednesday!" repeated Ponsonby thoughtfully. "Do you mean the day that Courtenay was over here?"

"Eh? Oh! Yes," said Skinner. "That was the day. I remember Courtenay had to wait for Wharton's mob to come in, and Smithy lent him his 'Holiday Annual.' That was the day."

"Oh gad!" said Ponsonby. "It's rather lucky that the man's been spotted, if there was anything missing that day. I shouldn't like a Highcliffe man to get mixed up in anything of that kind."

"Eh, what?" said Snoop, staring.

"I dare say Courtenay was only here for a few minutes, anyhow," remarked Ponsonby carelessly.

"No fear!" said Skinner. A rather peculiar expression had come over Skinner's face. "I'd forgotten about him—but, now I come to think of it, Courtenay was here for more than an hour that afternoon. You see, Wharton's crew didn't know he had come over, and they stayed out till close on calling-over, and Courtenay waited all the time."

"Smithy lent him his 'Holiday Annual' to pass the time, I remember," remarked Snoop. "I know he was squatting in the visitors' room more than an hour."

"Is that anywhere near Quelch's study?" asked Ponsonby.

"Don't you remember? It's just at the end of Masters' Passage. Only a step to Quelch's study."

Ponsonby laughed.

"Well, a Highcliffe chap is above suspicion, of course," he said. "But I can't help thinking it's just as well that you know who did it. There might be fellows here who'd be glad to drag a Highcliffe man in, if they could."

Skinner and Snoop exchanged a quick glance.

"By gum," said Skinner, "nobody's thought of Courtenay! I don't suppose anybody remembers he happened to be here that day. Of course, it's rot to fancy for a moment that a fellow like Courtenay would go mooching along studies to pinch."

"Of course," said Snoop.

"Besides, I dare say Quelch was in the study," remarked Pon.

"He couldn't have been when the chain was pinched. Somebody pinched it, whether it was Bunter or not. Quelch couldn't have been there," said Skinner slowly. "Of course, it might have been taken any time up to Saturday, when Quelch missed it. We put it down for Wednesday, because we all knew that Bunter had been up to something that day. It's known that he took lines in, while Quelch was with the Head."

"That was before Courtenay came," said Snoop. "Bunter was out most of the afternoon, and came in late for roll."

"Getting rid of the loot, very likely," assented Skinner. "It was Bunter all right. Still, he won't own up."

"Any trouble here while Courtenay was here?" asked Ponsonby.

"Not that I know of. He just sat in the visitors' room, reading Smithy's book till Wharton and his gang came in, so far as I know."

"I mean, he seemed rather upset when he came back to Highcliffe," said Ponsonby. "I couldn't help noticing it, because he picked a row with me, and we had a bit of a scrap." He

rubbed his nose. "I wondered what was the matter with him. He's generally so quiet and cool."

Skinner and Snoop exchanged another glance.

"Bit upset, was he?" said Skinner. "I don't see why he should be. Nothing happened here to upset him, unless—" Skinner broke off.

"Oh, rot!" said Snoop uneasily. "A fellow like Courtenay couldn't have done—"

"Rather not," said Ponsonby. "I can't imagine a Highcliffe man pinching. Hardly Highcliffe style, you fellows."

"It's not Greyfriars style, if you put it like that," said Skinner tartly.

"Oh, I don't mean that, of course; but it's happened here," said Ponsonby, laughing. "These things don't happen at Highcliffe—that's all I mean."

"They seem to happen when a Highcliffe man is on the spot, though," said Skinner, with a sneer. "I never thought of it before, but I'm dashed if I feel so jolly certain that it was Bunter, after all. He's denied it, anyhow, and sticks to it. Look here, Ponsonby—"

"Well, don't let's rag about it," said Ponsonby amicably. "And, for goodness' sake, don't start anything of that kind. You'll hear from Wharton if you do. He's very pally with Courtenay, and he would be fearfully ratty."

"What the dickens do I care if he's ratty?" snapped Skinner. "I'm not afraid to say what I think, because of Wharton, I can tell you that!"

"Well, about that motor trip?" said Ponsonby. Having sown the seed, as it were, Ponsonby considered it judicious to drop the subject. "I shall have to be getting off. Walk down to the gates with me, and let's fix it up."

"Right-ho!"

Skinner's momentary unpleasantness vanished at the mention of the motor trip. The three left the study together, and went out of the House.

They chatted at the gates for a few minutes, and then Ponsonby wheeled out his bike and departed. There was a bitter, malicious grin on his face as he rode away.

In the Highcliffe Fourth they were calling him a funk, and even his own friends sneered at him; but, if all went well, they would be calling Frank Courtenay something worse before long.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

A New Topic!

HARRY WHARTON glanced round the Rag.

He strolled into that apartment after tea, and heard a buzz of voices as he came in.

That buzz died away at once.

A moment before, a dozen fellows had been going strong. Sudden silence followed the entrance of the captain of the Remove.

Something of an exciting nature had been under discussion. It was not, it seemed, anything that the fellows wanted Wharton to hear—which was rather curious.

"Anything on?" asked Harry, puzzled.

"Oh," said Skinner, "nothing!"

"If you were talking about me, you can carry on," said the captain of the Remove sarcastically. "I don't mind, in the least."

"Nobody was talking about you," said Hazeldene.

"Then why the sudden silence?"

Harry Wharton, perplexed, and perhaps a little annoyed, glanced from one face to another.

Bolsover major gave a grunt.

"If you want to know—" he began.

"Oh, I don't, particularly! Sorry to interrupt, that's all," said Wharton, still more sarcastically.

"Well," said Bolsover, "the chap's a friend of yours, that's all."

"You were saying something nice about a friend of mine? Must have been something very nice, to make you all shut up like oysters when I stepped in. I'll step out again, and you can get on with it," said the captain of the Remove contemptuously.

"Oh, don't give us your swank!" snorted Bolsover. "I suppose we can talk in this room if we like. And I don't believe there's anything in it, either."

Harry Wharton, who was turning to the door, turned back.

"In what?" he asked.

Nobody replied. Skinner had told Ponsonby in his study that he did not care if Wharton was ratty or not. Still, he did not speak.

"Look here! Cough it up!" snapped Harry Wharton. "What the dickens do you mean? Have you got something up against Bob, or Nugent, or Johnny Bull, or Inky?"

"We weren't talking about a Greyfriars man."

"Who, then?"

"Courtenay, if you want to know."

"That Highcliffe man!" Wharton stared. "Yes, he's a friend of mine. But what the dickens are you cackling about him for? I don't suppose you've even seen him this term at all."

"I have," said Bolsover. "I saw him last Wednesday."

"So did I," said Hazel.

"Lots of fellows saw him," said Skinner. "He was hanging about the place long enough for people to know he was here."

Harry Wharton looked at them. He had forgotten that incident of last Wednesday; and now that he remembered it, he could not see how it could possibly interest anybody. Yet it was plain that Frank Courtenay, and his visit to Greyfriars, had been under excited discussion a few minutes ago. It was puzzling, and not pleasing.

"You remember he was here, Wharton?" said Hazel.

"Of course I do," said Harry. "We missed him at Highcliffe that afternoon, owing to that cad Ponsonby. And he biked over here to see us when we came in. What about it?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"Look here! What's the cackle about?" demanded the captain of the Remove angrily. "What the dickens are you saying about that man Courtenay that I'm not to hear?"

"Well, as he's a friend of yours—" said Wibley.

"Oh, rot!" broke in Bolsover major, in his most aggressive manner. "Wharton's bound to hear it before long. Let him hear it now. Mind, I don't believe there can be anything in it."

"Same here!" said Russell. "All rot! It was Bunter all right. We all know that it was Bunter."

"Courtenay was in the visitors' room all the time," said Ogilvy.

"So far as we know," said Skinner.

"Nobody was keeping an eye on him," said Snoop.

"Why should anybody, fathhead?" said Ogilvy.

"Well, nobody did."



"Somethin' was stolen from a Form-master's study last Wednesday, while you were over at Greyfriars," said Ponsonby. "It's the talk of the place that you did it!" "That's a lie!" exclaimed Courtenay quietly. "Well, you've only got to ask the first Greyfriars man you see!" said Ponsonby contemptuously.

Harry Wharton listened to this with angry amazement growing in his face. What he heard implied one thing, and one thing only; but it was so amazing, so unexpected, so unthinkable, that he could not believe it.

"Will you tell me what you mean?" he almost shouted. "Is any fellow here fool enough, and rotter enough, to think—" He broke off. He would not put it into words.

"Nobody's said so," answered Wibley, "and nobody thinks so, so far as I know. But it is a fact that Courtenay was here for a long time last Wednesday afternoon."

"Sitting in the visitors' room, reading a book Smithy lent him, while he waited for us to come in!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Yes, I know."

"May as well put it plain," said Ogilvy. "The fact of the matter is, Wharton, that somebody seems to have remembered, all of a sudden, that that Highcliffe man was here that afternoon, hanging about by himself. He's supposed to have sat in the visitors' room, while he waited for you to come in, and I've not the slightest doubt that he did. To think of a chap like Courtenay scouting along the studies and pinching anything is just silly rot."

"Utter rot!" agreed Russell.

Wharton's face blazed.

"Has anybody dared to suggest—" he gasped.

"Oh, don't come the high horse!" roared Bolsover major. "The chap was here, and nobody knows what he might have done. If fellows are going to be suspected of pinching, I don't see taking it for granted that it was a Greyfriars man, when there was a Highcliffe man right on the spot, only a step from Quelch's study, for an hour or more."

"You utter fool!" exclaimed Harry

Wharton. "We all know that it was Bunter—"

"Well, Bunter says it wasn't."

"I believe in a chap standing up for his own school!" said Skinner. "I'd rather believe it of a Highcliffe man than a Greyfriars man."

"Hear, hear!" said several voices. Skinner had touched the right chord.

"We all know—" roared Wharton.

"I don't see that we do!" said Skinner. "So long as it was only among Greyfriars men, all right—but when it comes out that there was a chap from another school on the spot, it makes a difference."

"It does—a lot!" said Bolsover major. "They're a pretty shady lot at Highcliffe, I know that. Look at that fellow Ponsonby, for instance."

"Courtenay's as different from Ponsonby as chalk from cheese, you silly fathead!"

"Well, I've heard that they're related," said Bolsover, "and I jolly well know that if Ponsonby belonged to this school he'd have been sacked long ago."

"And a lot more with him, too," said Wibley. "Highcliffe's a rotten show, and stacked with rotters!"

"Courtenay's one of the best fellows breathing," said Harry Wharton.

"I'm not saying he isn't!" grunted Bolsover. "I rather like the chap, from the little I've seen of him. But if he was right on the spot here when Quelch's chain was pinched, I don't see jumping to it that it was a Greyfriars man did it. Stick up for your own school!"

"Who started this rotten foolery?" asked Harry Wharton, looking round the Rag with gleaming eyes.

Skinner and Snoop did not speak. Wharton, clearly, was "ratty," and Skinner had changed his mind about not caring for the same. But Bolsover major answered promptly enough.

"Somebody seems to have remembered that the chap was here that day, that's all. And so he was!"

"So he jolly well was!" said Hazel coolly. "Nobody believes that he pinched Quelch's chain—but he was here, and that is that!"

"I'm not going to believe it was a Greyfriars man, when a Highcliffe man was around, not without jolly good proof!" snorted Bolsover major. "If you ask me, I'll tell you it's a jolly queer coincidence, Quelch's chain going at the time he happened to be here. He was here only that once, and while he was here, Quelch's chain went."

"By gum, that's a coincidence!" said Hazel.

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath, and walked out of the Rag. It was not easy to repress his anger, but he realised that an angry outbreak would make matters worse instead of better. He went, with his eyes glinting under knitted brows, and Skinner winked at Snoop as he went.

"His Magnificence is annoyed!" drawled Skinner. "He's cross with us! Anybody care two hoots?"

Snoop giggled. The discussion, interrupted by Wharton's entrance, was resumed in full force when he was gone. It was not likely to be long before the name of Frank Courtenay was bandied all over Greyfriars in connection with the pilfering in Quelch's study.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Own Up!

"BUNTER!" "Yes, old chap!" said Billy Bunter eagerly.

Billy Bunter was blinking in at the window of the school shop THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,519.

through his big spectacles. He was deeply interested in what he saw therein, but he turned at once as his name was called by the captain of the Remove.

Harry Wharton came striding towards him with a dark and knitted brow. The other members of the Co. came with him—looking troubled and worried.

Billy Bunter did not notice their looks. He was short-sighted—and his thoughts were concentrated on other things. It was tea-time, and he had been disappointed about a postal order. So far, Bunter had only had tea in Hall, and tea in Study No. 7. If there was tea going in any other study, Bunter was ready.

"I say, you fellows, Mrs. Mumble's got those new cakes in to-day!" said the fat Owl. "I say, I was going to stand you fellows one, only—only my postal order hasn't come! It's rather rum, as I was expecting it from one of my titled relations, but there it is—it hasn't! If you fellows are going to do any shopping now, I advise having one of those cakes—"

"Look here, Bunter—"

"I do, really!" declared the fat Owl. "I strongly advise it, you fellows! I know they're five bob each, but if you can run to five bob, you can't do better! They're good—and big, too—enough to go round, and—"

"You fat cuckoo—"

"Oh, really, Wharton! Look here, is it a feed?"

"No, you podgy cormorant!"

"Then what are you bothering a chap for?" asked Bunter peevishly. "I—I say, 'tain't Quelch again, is it, like it was on Saturday? I—I'm going out—"

"It's not Quelch, fathead!"

"Oh, all right, then! I say, if you fellows have ten bob you don't want, you can lend it to me, and take the postal order when it comes!" suggested Bunter. "It will be for exactly ten bob! Then I'll stand one of those cakes, and we'll whack it out all round. Nothing mean about me, I hope."

Harry Wharton breathed hard—and the Co. looked curiously at Bunter.

Judging by appearances, Bunter had forgotten the troublesome affair of the missing chain. Quelch having failed to "cop" him, perhaps he was hoping, once more, that he was done with that spot of bother.

"Look here, Bunter, shut up, and listen to me," said the captain of the Remove. "You're certain to be bowled out before long, and you ought to own up. Some silly fools have remembered that Courtenay of Highcliffe was over here last Wednesday, and everybody thinks that the chain was pinched on Wednesday, and so there's a putrid yarn starting that Courtenay might know something about it. Got that into your fat head?"

"Eh? Was he over here that day?" asked Bunter. "Oh, yes, I remember he was—you fellows stayed out and kept him waiting, so I heard. I wasn't here myself, but I heard Skinner saying that it wasn't the way he'd treat a friend—"

"Never mind Skinner now. That Highcliffe man waited in the visitors' room over an hour—only a step from Quelch's study. Cads like Skinner think they can make a rotten yarn out of it," said Harry. "Now, as you did it—"

"I didn't!"

"You howling ass, every man in the Remove, and plenty out of it, knows that you pinched that chain last Wednesday. Now that another fellow's name is getting mixed up in it, you ought to tell the truth."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,519.

"I always do, old chap," said Bunter. "Nothing untruthful about me. I'm a bit more particular in such things than some fellows I could name. You fellows, frinstance—"

"I suppose there can't be any doubt that Bunter did it!" said Bob Cherry, slowly.

"How can there be, fathead? He's admitted a dozen times over that he did something in Quelch's study last Wednesday. What else could it have been?"

"I haven't admitted anything of the kind," exclaimed Bunter in alarm. "I've said all along that I never went to the study at all, and I only went to take my lines, and—"

"You did something there, Bunter!" said Nugent. "We've all known that since Wednesday. What was it?"

"Nothing, old chap!"

"He snaffled that rotten chain!" growled Wharton. "If it was anything else, he would say so. It's plain enough, and everybody knows it."

"Well, it looks like it, all right," said Bob. "I can't quite get it into my head that Bunter would steal, but he might have chucked it away, to pay Quelch out for whopping him. He's too big a fool to understand that it comes to the same thing."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"I think it must be that," said Harry. "I don't see how the fat chump could sell it or pawn it; besides, he's as hard up as ever! If it was that, Bunter—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"You've got to do the decent thing, you fat idiot! Think what this means to Courtenay, if the facts don't come out."

"Eh? I suppose Courtenay doesn't matter so much as I do?" ejaculated Bunter. "Wharrer you mean?"

"You did it, fathead! You're the man, dummy! You'll get howled out, anyhow, chucklehead! Go to Quelch—"

"I'll watch it!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, you fellows, I—I don't think that chap Courtenay did it! I—I hardly think he would! I rather like that chap—he stopped that cad Pon ragging me the other day. Still, if the fellows think that he did it, that's all right."

"What?" roared Wharton

"What I mean is, if it gets to Quelch, it will bottle him up!" explained Bunter. "He won't want to start an awful row between the two schools—that stands to reason! Look what a fearful kick-up there would be if a Greyfriars beak accused a Highcliffe chap of pinching! He couldn't! If Quelch thought it was Courtenay, ten to one he'd let the whole matter drop, see?"

"You pernicious idiot—"

"Well, that's how I look at it!" said Bunter. "I can tell you I'm fed up with fellows making out that I pinched that rotten chain! It's insulting! I'd much rather they thought a Highcliffe chap did it!"

"You—you—you—" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Oh, give a chap a rest!" said Billy Bunter. "I can see myself going to Quelch—I don't think! If you're so jolly keen on somebody going to Quelch and owning up, go and do it yourself!"

"Wha-at?" stuttered Wharton.

"Well, you seem keen on it, and I'm not stopping you!" said Bunter. "You were in his study on Thursday, and it might have happened on Thursday, just as much as on Wednesday—see? You go and own up!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bob Cherry, while the captain of the Remove gazed speechlessly at Billy Bunter.

"Anyhow, you can leave me out of it," said the fat Owl. "I can jolly well tell you that I'm tired of the subject. Oh, there's Mauly—"

Lord Mauleverer passed, going into the tuckshop.

"Look here, Bunter, you born idiot!"

"Sorry I can't stop—I've got to speak to Mauly! It's important!" And Billy Bunter rolled into the shop after his lordship.

The Famous Five looked at one another. The turn that the affair had taken was utterly dismaying to all of them. What Frank Courtenay would feel like if he heard the faintest hint of it, they could hardly imagine. And if it continued to be the talk of the Remove, it was quite possible that he might hear.

Harry Wharton clenched his hands.

"If Ponsonby got hold of this—" he muttered.

"By gum, it would be just pie to that cad!" said Johnny Bull. "He loathes Courtenay—he would be glad to shout it out all over Highcliffe, and make out that fellows believed it here, too!"

"Bunter's got to own up!" breathed Wharton.

"We can't make him!" said Bob. "It's up to Quelch! Quelch is bound to find it out before long—if Bunter did it!"

"What do you mean? You know he did it!"

"I don't, old chap, and you don't, either," said Bob quietly. "It looks like it—that's all we know. Mauly said from the first—"

"Mauly's an ass—"

"Perhaps; but he said Bunter never stole the chain, and I think the same. And if he took it to chuck away, he would know where he chucked it, and go and get it back, after all this fuss, I should think."

Harry Wharton looked at him. He opened his lips—and shut them again.

The Famous Five walked away in silence, with clouded faces. They passed Skinner in the quad, talking to a group of Remove fellows—and Skinner, as he saw them with the corner of his eye, raised his voice a little.

"I believe in being fair!" said Skinner virtuously. "Fair play's a jewel! I've nothing against that Highcliffe man—I hardly know him. But look at it! Quelch's chain went one day last week. If it went on Thursday or Friday, that lets Bunter out; it was on Wednesday he was in the study. If it went on Wednesday, it may have been Bunter, and it may not—but it's a jolly odd coincidence that it went just when a Highcliffe man was on the spot! I don't see why Bunter shouldn't have fair play!"

Harry Wharton paused, clenching his hands.

Frank Nugent hastily put his arm through his chum's, and drew him on.

"Ragging won't do any good, old chap!" he said.

Wharton nodded, and walked on with his friends. Skinner cared about as much for fair play as Billy Bunter cared for the frozen truth; but he did care a good deal for getting Wharton's "rag" out. Still, it was obvious that punching Skinner would not mend matters. The fact was, that the way Skinner put it impressed the Remove fellows, and even made Skinner himself think that there might be something in it.

Anyhow, it was clear that this was not going to die away till the truth came to light. And if that "downy" bird, Henry Samuel Quelch, was going to get at the truth, he seemed to be taking his time about it.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Row at Highcliffe!

"MOBBS ought to know!" said Cecil Ponsonby.
 "Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"I don't like Courtenay!" said Ponsonby, glancing round at the circle of fellows by the House steps at Highcliffe. "There's no secret about that! We've never been friends, and I, for one, don't want to be. But this isn't a matter for a fellow to consider personal feelings. We're all Highcliffe men, and what disgraces one of us, disgraces the lot. That's how I look at it."

"That's right enough," said Monson.
 "But it's all rot!" said Drury. "They can't be saying anythin' of the kind over at Greyfriars, Pon! Skinner's pullin' your leg!"

"If I'd heard it only from Skinner, I shouldn't take any notice of it," answered Ponsonby. "I saw Skinner yesterday at his school, and there was a hint of it, that was all. They seemed to pounce on it that Courtenay was at their school at the time it happened—"

"Any fellow might have been," said Merton.

"I know that! I might have been myself, if I'd gone over to see Skinner last Wednesday, instead of yesterday. That makes it all the more rotten!" said Ponsonby. "They seem keen to fix it on a Highcliffe man, and they've had to make it Courtenay, simply because he was there at the time."

"But if it's only Skinner's rot—"

"I've heard it from others since, as well as Skinner!" explained Ponsonby. "I met some of them outside their school when I was out on my bike to-day. I may as well say that I wanted to know whether anybody beside Skinner had that rotten idea in his head. Well, I talked to three or four fellows, and they told me that it's the talk of the Remove, and that it may get to their beak any minute."

"The rotten cads!" said Merton.

"Greyfriars cads all over!" said Monson, with a sneer. "They've got thieves there, and they'd like to make out we're no better."

"Well, the worst of it is, that some of them seem to believe it," said Ponsonby. "Of course, they jump at the idea of sticking it on a fellow outside their own school. I don't know much about it—only that something was pinched from the Remove beak's study; whether it was money or a gold watch, I don't quite know, but it was something valuable. They thought at first it was that fat freak Bunter; then somebody suggested that Courtenay had been on the spot at the very time that it happened—and that started it, as far as I can make out. I think Mobbs ought to know."

Gadsby, who was in the little crowd of Highcliffe fellows round Pon, said nothing. He was looking at Pon rather uneasily, but he was silent.

Only Gadsby knew that Pon had taken that gold chain, missing from a Greyfriars study, from Billy Bunter. The others were taking Pon's words at face value, as it were.

In fact, Ponsonby, who had been rather "under the weather" of late, was rising a little in the estimation of the Highcliffe Fourth.

He had been sneered at, jeered at, covered with humiliation as with a garment, for having provoked Courtenay into a fight, which he dared not carry on, and having shown the white feather before half the Form.

In spite of that, he was, apparently, standing up for Courtenay, as a fellow—
 (Continued on next page.)

The STATELY HOMES of GREYFRIARS

A TIPPERARY TALE

By

The Greyfriars Rhymester



(1)

I've never been to Tipperary,
 It's a long, long way to go!
 That is why I'm rather chary
 When describing it, you know!
 I'd go, and hang the consequences,
 If the Ed. would help a bit
 (Merely paying all expenses),
 But he doesn't fancy it!

(2)

Micky Desmond is the Friar
 Who was born on Ireland's soil;
 He is cheerful, and a trier,
 And will end in boiling oil!
 For he is a fearful joker,
 Always looking out for fun;
 He would make the saddest croaker
 Feel much sadder when he'd done!

(4)

"Sure, my house is just a hovel
 Built of peat and lumps of clay!
 There, bedad, we grope and grovel
 On the muddy earth all day.
 We're all very fond of growing
 'Taters on the bed-room floor.
 Sometimes when the wind is blowing
 Houses shift a mile or more!

(6)

"What's my pater like? Begorrah,
 He's the broth of all the bhys!
 His ould hat's a perfect horror,
 So's his shirt and corduroys!
 Faith, he always fights the neighbours
 When he sees 'em round about,
 Gets his club, and then belabours
 All their heads and knocks 'em out!

(8)

"Pigs have rather ugly features,
 Something like ye're own, ould chap!
 We cut rashers off the creatures
 While they take their daily nap!
 Sure, that isn't a disaster,
 They don't seem to feel the pain,
 And we stick the wounds with plaster
 Which soon heals 'em up again!"

Our clever Greyfriars
 Rhymester seems to have gone
 off the rails entirely this week.
 Reading his verses written
 around Micky Desmond, the
 Irish junior, one would
 imagine that he'd been asked
 to write about the Unstately
 Homes of Greyfriars.

(3)

As I thought the job too tricky,
 (Writing of an unknown land),
 I went forth to look for Micky,
 And I found him near at hand.
 "Sure, bedad, I'm intherested
 In the good ould Emerald Isle,
 Please describe it," I requested.
 Micky did so with a smile!

(5)

"Faith, 'tis welcome ye're receiving
 If ye're calling at the hut;
 Please don't shut the door on leaving,
 'Cos there ain't no door to shut!
 Mind the pigs! They're always sleepin'
 Just wherever it is dark!
 Irishmen are fond of keepin'
 Houses like a Noah's Ark!

(7)

"And my mater's always smokin'
 Her ould pipe, a broken clay!
 Faith, the fumes of it are chokin',
 But they keep the wolves away!
 No, bedad, I'm not mistaken,
 And it cures the pigs, what's more:
 Turns 'em slowly into bacon
 As they sleep upon the floor!

(9)

This was more than I could swallow
 "No," I cried, "it isn't right!
 You beat Ananias hollow,
 Beat him simply out of sight!"
 Micky said with calm effrontery,
 That his story was quite true,
 And, as I don't know the country,
 What is left for me to do?

Next Week: CHERRY PLACE.

Highcliffian, forgetful of offences and grudges.

"A thing like this," went on Ponsonby, "can't be knocked on the head too soon. By gad, it's not safe for a Highcliffe man to step inside Greyfriars at all, if this sort of thing is goin' to happen. Suppose the pinching had been done when I was there yesterday! I might have got the benefit of it, instead of Courtenay. Mobbs ought to take it up, and see that it's knocked on the head at once!"

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"Shut up, Pon!" muttered Gadsby, speaking for the first time. "Here they come!"

Frank Courtenay and the Caterpillar came across the quad together, heading for the doorway by which Pon & Co. were grouped.

Courtenay paid them no special heed; but the Caterpillar's eyes were on the group rather curiously. De Courcy had spotted at once that something unusual was on.

Ponsonby gave Gadsby a look. He had no intention whatever of shutting up.

"Don't be an ass, Gaddy!" he said. "Courtenay has a right to hear what those Greyfriars cads are sayin' about him, and I've no doubt that he will put it up to Mobby! I know I would. They wouldn't call me a thief, and get away with it."

"Mobby ought to go over and see their headmaster about it," said Monson. "He would, if he knew!"

Frank Courtenay came to a sudden stop. He had heard what Ponsonby and Monson said, and he came directly towards the group. His face was quiet and calm, but there was a dangerous glint in his eyes.

"What's that, Ponsonby?" he asked. "I heard what you said! If you're not mad, what do you mean by it?"

The Caterpillar said nothing. He watched Ponsonby with intent and curious eyes.

"I meant you to hear, Courtenay!" said Pon. "You've a right to hear. Don't think I'm raggin' now—"

"Never mind that! Tell me what you mean!"

"I mean what you heard me say! Somethin' was stolen from a Form-master's study last Wednesday, while you were over at Greyfriars. It's the talk of the place that you did it."

"That's a lie!" said Courtenay quietly.

Ponsonby set his lips.

"If you choose to take it like that I can't help it," he said. "If you think so, you've only got to ask the first Greyfriars man you see. It happened—by a coincidence, of course—while you were there, and the long and the short of it is that they'd rather suspect a Highcliffe man than one of their own crowd."

"I don't believe a single word of it," said Courtenay, in the same quiet, contemptuous tone. "I don't believe that there has been any theft at Greyfriars, and I don't believe that any Greyfriars man would connect my name with it, if there was. This is another of your rotten tricks to make trouble between the two schools."

"I tell you, if you ask any—"

"You need tell me nothing, you lying rascal!" said the captain of the Fourth. "I shouldn't be likely to ask any Greyfriars man such a thing, as you know. This is one of your rotten tricks, and as clumsy as it is rotten; but I've warned you what to expect if you begin that game again."

"Franky, old man," murmured the Caterpillar, touching his friend's arm.

For once Courtenay did not heed his chum. The Caterpillar, keen as a razor, could see that there must be something in this. Pon was not talking idly out of his hat! But Courtenay did not, as he said, believe a single word of it, and saw in it only one more of Pon's endless cunning trickeries to cause trouble with his Greyfriars friends.

He shook off De Courcy's hand and stepped nearer to Ponsonby, his eyes in a blaze of anger.

"You cur!" he said, in a low, but very distinct voice. "You'll admit now, before all these fellows, that you were

lying—and I'll shake you like a rat till you do."

"Hands off!" panted Ponsonby, as the captain of the Fourth closed in on him and grasped him by the collar. "I tell you—"

"Look here, Courtenay—" exclaimed Monson.

"Hands off, you cad!" exclaimed Drury. "Pon was stickin' up for you, and—"

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

Courtenay did not heed. His grasp closed like iron on Ponsonby's collar.

The cad of Highcliffe sagged in his grip, struggling.

"Now, you cur, admit that it's all lies—and let all these fellows hear you!" said Courtenay, between his teeth; and as Pon did not speak, he shook him, with all the strength of his arm, shaking him till his teeth clicked, and he gasped and panted for breath.

"Ware beaks!" breathed the Caterpillar, as a skinny figure in cap and gown appeared in the doorway.

Courtenay, in his anger, had given no heed to the fact that this scene was being enacted in front of the open door, in sight of a score of study windows. He shook Ponsonby like a rat.

Mr. Mobbs, the master of the Fourth, bustled out, pink with anger. He seemed scarcely able to credit his shocked and horrified eyes, as he saw his favourite, Cecil Ponsonby, sagging and gasping in the muscular grip of the captain of the Fourth.

"Courtenay!" almost shrieked Mr. Mobbs. "How dare you? Release Ponsonby at once! Do you hear me? At once!"

Frank Courtenay heard, but for a moment it seemed that he was not going to heed, even the voice of his Form-master. Then, as Mr. Mobbs stretched out a bony hand to grasp at him, he released Ponsonby, and the dandy of Highcliffe rolled on the ground at Mr. Mobbs' feet, spluttering for breath.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Shock for Mr. Mobbs!

"COURTENAY!" gasped Mr. Mobbs. "Stand back!" The Caterpillar caught his chum's sleeve and pulled him back.

A crowd of fellows had gathered round from all sides, staring at the startling scene. Mr. Mobbs, crimson with anger, stooped, to give Ponsonby a helping hand.

With his Form-master's assistance, Pon staggered up, panting spasmodically.

His eyes burned at the captain of the Fourth. With a shaking hand he put his collar straight.

Mr. Mobbs turned to Courtenay again. "How dare you?" His squeaky voice was shrill with intense anger. "You ruffianly young rascal—"

Courtenay's eyes were flashing. He looked quite unlike his usual calm, controlled self. The Caterpillar pressed his arm, in anxious warning. Courtenay did not heed it.

"How dare you lay hands on your Form-fellow, and in such a ruffianly manner, Courtenay? I repeat, how dare you?"

"Let the cur hold his lying tongue, then!" exclaimed Courtenay.

"Old bean—" breathed the Caterpillar helplessly. The keen, cool-headed Caterpillar was feeling quite at a loss.

"What—what?" gasped Mr. Mobbs. "Is that how you answer your Form-

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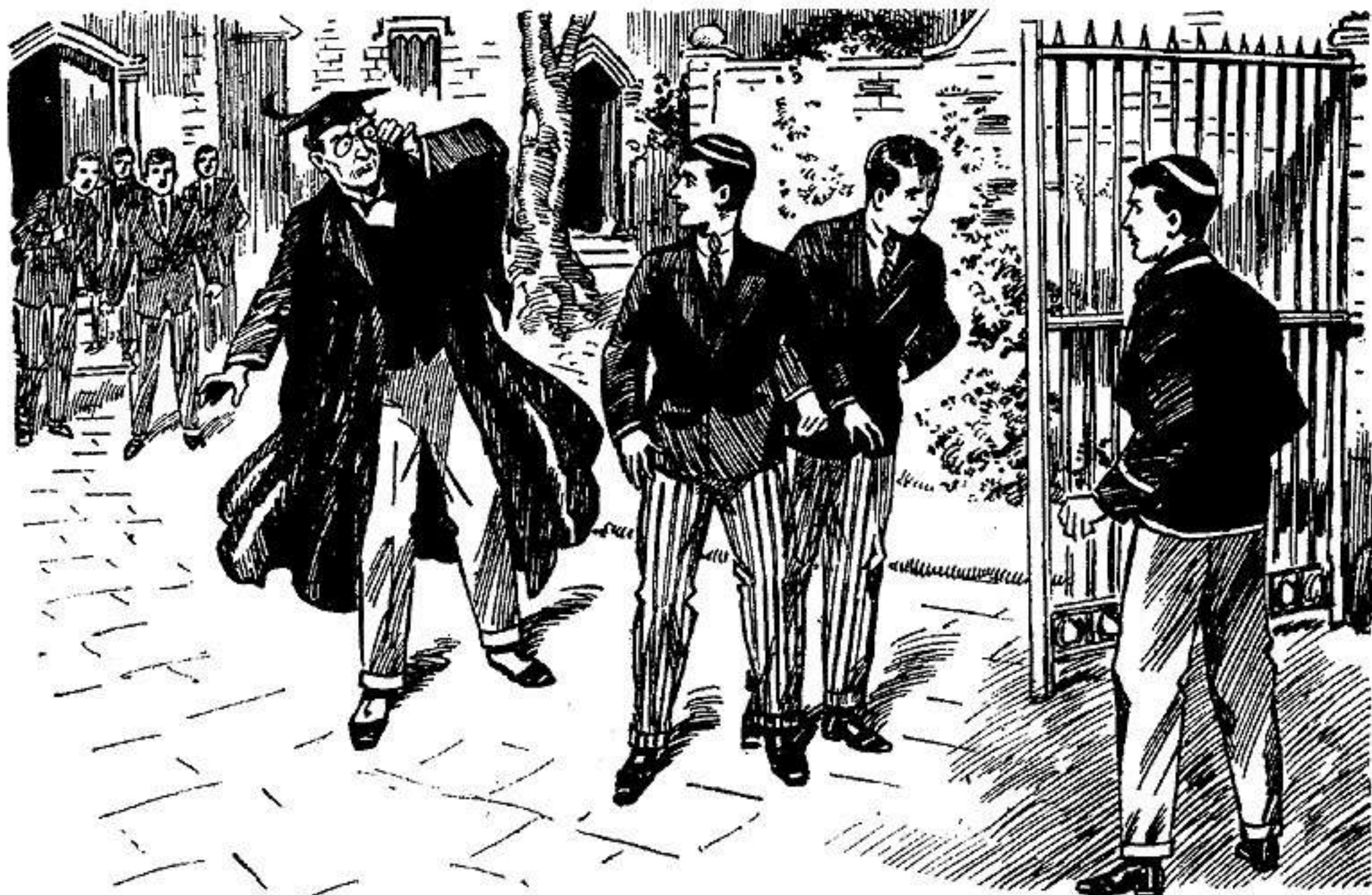


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"Wharton came to tell me, sir—" began Courtenay. "Silence!" roared Mr. Mobbs. "I am astonished at you, Courtenay. You have been accused at Greyfriars of a disgraceful action, yet I find you maintaining terms of friendship with a Greyfriars boy! I forbid you to hold any communication whatever with a boy belonging to Greyfriars School!"

master? Take care, Courtenay, take care! I demand to know the cause of this disturbance."

"Ponsonby can tell you, if he likes, and if he dare repeat to you what he was saying to me!" answered the captain of the Fourth.

The Caterpillar pressed his arm again, in dismay. He could see, though his chum could not, that Pon had something to "go upon"—that it was not all malicious "gas"—and that, indeed, Pon was eager to repeat it to Mr. Mobbs.

Mr. Mobbs stared at Courtenay in angry amazement, and then looked at Pon.

"Ponsonby, what does this mean? Tell me at once!"

"I'm quite willin' to do so, sir!" answered Ponsonby, still gasping. "I was speakin' to Courtenay in a perfectly friendly way, but he misunderstood, and lost his temper—"

"That is false!" said Courtenay.

"Silence! Silence, Courtenay! Do you desire me to report you to Dr. Voysey for a flogging? I have not the slightest doubt that Ponsonby is stating the exact facts! Please proceed, Ponsonby; and you will interrupt again at your peril, Courtenay."

"I've seen some Greyfriars fellows to-day, sir," said Ponsonby, "and heard some news from them, and I was saying that you ought to be told, sir, as they're making up a disgraceful story about a Highcliffe man."

Courtenay made a movement. He could see that Pon was going to bring it all out before the master of the Fourth, and it amazed him; and, at the same time, it dawned on him that this was not, as he had taken for granted, one of Pon's reckless and malicious falsehoods. There was more to it than that.

"Keep cool, old chap!" the Caterpillar breathed in his ear.

But the captain of the Fourth was keeping cool now.

"Please explain yourself, Ponsonby," said Mr. Mobbs. "I scarcely understand—"

"It's rather a rotten thing, sir. From what I hear, there has been a theft at Greyfriars—somethin' is missin' from a Form-master's study—"

"Shocking! But how does that concern Highcliffe in any way, Ponsonby?"

"It happened, so they say, last Wednesday, sir, when a Highcliffe fellow happened to be in their school, calling to see some fellows there, and they suspect that he did the pinchin', sir."

Mr. Mobbs fairly jumped.

"Impossible, Ponsonby!" he gasped. "Impossible!"

"I know it's impossible, sir, but that's what they're saying over at Greyfriars, an' I was goin' to advise Courtenay to let you know, sir; it seems to me a matter for a fellow's Form-master to deal with."

"Courtenay! Was it Courtenay—?"

"Yes, sir."

"Goodness gracious!"

"Ponsonby was standin' up for Courtenay, sir," said Monson. "The silly ass misunderstood, and grabbed him—"

"I quite understand. Courtenay!" Mr. Mobbs fixed his eyes on the captain of the Fourth. "Were you aware of this?"

"I was not; and I do not believe it now," answered Courtenay.

But he spoke slowly. He believed now, at least, that something had happened over at Greyfriars. Pon could hardly dare to tell an utterly unfounded falsehood to his Form-master, who, obviously, was bound to inquire into the matter, now that it had been brought to his notice.

"Were you at Greyfriars School last Wednesday, Courtenay?"

"Yes, sir."

"For what reason?"

"I went over to see Wharton and his friends—"

"Indeed!" snapped Mr. Mobbs. "I remember that they came here, and were ordered away, because of a disturbance at the gates. You should not have gone to see them after that, Courtenay. However, never mind that for the moment. Were you aware of a theft in that school?"

"No; and I don't take Ponsonby's word that there has been one, either."

"That is nonsense, Courtenay," snapped Mr. Mobbs. "A single question asked at Greyfriars will settle that point. I shall certainly make the inquiry. You adhere to your statement, Ponsonby?"

"Certainly, sir!"

"What do you say now, Courtenay?" snapped Mr. Mobbs harshly.

Courtenay made no answer. He could not help acknowledging that, in this detail, at least, Pon was stating the facts. There had been a theft at Greyfriars. Pon, so far, was on solid ground.

"You are sure, Ponsonby, that Courtenay's name has been mentioned at Greyfriars in connection with the matter?"

"It is the talk of the school, sir! They make out that Courtenay pinched the thing, whatever it was—some article of jewellery, I believe—while he was there," answered Ponsonby. "I've heard it from half a dozen fellows."

"Scandalous!" exclaimed Mr. Mobbs. "Outrageous! Courtenay, what possible grounds could you have given for so dreadful a suspicion?"

"None whatever, sir, if Ponsonby is telling the truth. I do not, and cannot, believe that my name is connected with such a thing at Greyfriars!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,519.

"You have heard Ponsonby's statement?"

"I don't believe him, sir!"

"I'm sorry Courtenay takes it like this, sir," said Ponsonby smoothly. "We're not friends, and he doesn't seem able to understand that, whether we're friends or not, I'd stand up for any Highcliffe man accused of such a rotten thing at another school."

There was a murmur of approval from the Highcliffe fellows, listening with intense interest.

"Quite so, Ponsonby," said Mr. Mobbs. "I am quite assured of that. Your own view is that it is merely a Greyfriars slander, and that Courtenay is perfectly innocent of the charge?"

"Of course, sir! I'd as soon believe myself a thief as Courtenay."

Another murmur of approval.

"You hear that, Courtenay?" said Mr. Mobbs sternly. "You hear Ponsonby's faith in your honour after you have treated him so disgracefully? You should be ashamed of yourself!"

Courtenay was crimson and silent.

He saw now what his chum had seen at a glance, that his name really was coupled with what had happened at Greyfriars. It was horrible and incredible, but clearly Ponsonby could not be making a statement that would be disproved as soon as Mr. Mobbs made an inquiry, which he was obviously going to do.

"I am glad," said Mr. Mobbs, "that this shocking matter has been brought to my notice. It must be dealt with immediately—without an hour's delay. I shall deal with it. I shall make it very clearly understood, at Greyfriars, that such a disgraceful charge cannot be made against a Highcliffe boy."

"That is what I thought, sir," said Ponsonby.

"You were right, Ponsonby; and the advice you intended to give Courtenay was good!" said Mr. Mobbs. "I have no doubt that this is merely tattle among the boys at Greyfriars—no such charge could be officially made. Such tattle must be put a stop to instantly, and I shall place the matter before the headmaster and demand the most drastic action. Courtenay!"

"Yes, sir!" muttered the captain of the Fourth.

"I trust that you will express your regret to Ponsonby for your outbreak of savage temper now that you understand that he was actuated by friendly concern for you as a Highcliffe boy!" said Mr. Mobbs severely.

With that Mr. Mobbs rustled back into the House, bristling with angry indignation and determined to lose no time in getting over to Greyfriars and dealing with this matter.

Courtenay gave Pon a look, but did not speak. In silence he walked away with the Caterpillar—also silent.

The crowd before the House broke up—in a buzz of excited discussion.

Pon went up to his study—he needed to change his collar after Courtenay's energetic handling. He smiled when he was in the study.

He was standing before the glass, arranging his tie to his satisfaction, when Gadsby came in.

Gadsby closed the door carefully.

"Look here, Pon, what's this game?" he muttered, in deep uneasiness.

Pon glanced round at him.

"What game?" he asked airily.

"Oh, don't be a fool!" said Gadsby gruffly. "It's that chain that's been missed at Greyfriars—that rotten watch-chain you snaffled from that fat fool Bunter. I believe he was only larking with it, as he said, but I suppose his beak would think it was pinched when

he missed it. Do they really think over there that Courtenay snooped it?"

"They're sayin' so, at any rate."

"Mobbs will kick up a fearful row about it."

"Naturally; the little man's frightfully indignant."

"What have you kept the chain all this time for, Pon? Bunter would have put it back if you'd let him have it."

"I hardly know what you're talkin' about, Gaddy! What chain do you mean?"

Gadsby stared.

"That chain you bagged from Bunter the day we ragged him in the paddock!" he snapped. "You've not forgotten it, I suppose?"

"I have," answered Ponsonby deliberately—"and you'd better forget it, too, Gaddy! All you've got to remember is, that somethin's missin' at Greyfriars, and they've landed it on Courtenay."

"If Bunter lets it out—"

Ponsonby laughed.

"Can you see him doin' it with the sack to follow for stealin'?"

"Well, no! He will keep it dark, I suppose. But we know—"

"We don't know a thing," said Ponsonby calmly. "It looks to me as if there's goin' to be bad trouble between the two schools, and a sad end to the happy friendship between that cad Courtenay and the other cads he's so fond of at Greyfriars! The matter can never be cleared up unless the chain is found—and I hardly think that will happen."

"Pon!" muttered Gadsby.

"Well, you fool?"

"It's a foul trick, Pon! It's not good enough! I don't like Courtenay any more than you do, or his Greyfriars pals, either—but there's a limit! You can't sow trouble between them by a dirty trick like this!"

"Can't I?" smiled Pon. "Nothin' to do with me, is it? I never asked a Greyfriars man to pinch, did I—and did I ask them to suspect a Highcliffe man? Let them get on with it!"

"That's like their dashed cheek, of course. But look here, it's pretty disgraceful for our own school. If it's not cleared up this will stick to Courtenay—which means that it will stick to Highcliffe."

"Dear me!" said Pon.

"You don't care a bean about the school so long as you get at the fellow you bar!" snapped Gadsby.

"You've got it!" assented Ponsonby coolly. "If you're so fearfully particular about the good name of Highcliffe, Gaddy, set me a good example, old bean—give up smokin' and backin' gee-gees with Lodgey and breakin' bounds after lights-out and droppin' in at the Three Fishers—what? I'll undertake to follow your good example, Gaddy, if you get on with it!"

Gadsby looked at him in silence and left the study.

Ponsonby finished arranging his necktie with the leisurely care that so important a matter required.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Very Unwelcome Visitor!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Scat, you fat rotter!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Buzz off!" growled Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter evidently was not "persona grata" with the Famous Five. They were worried and troubled, and it was Bunter who was the cause.

Another day had passed without any light having been shed on the mystery of that missing chain.

Quelch, no doubt, was keen on the investigation; but, apart from a vague doubt of Bunter, he had nothing to go on. Nothing, at all events, had transpired so far.

Neither was Billy Bunter now the sole object of suspicion in the Remove. A few days ago Lord Mauleverer had been the only fellow to stand by the suspected Owl. He had been regarded as a silly ass for his pains. Now a good many fellows considered that Mauly wasn't such an ass, after all.

A good many shared his belief now.

True, Mauly supposed that Bunter had taken the chain, for some idiotic reason of his own, without intending to steal it. That, in point of fact, was precisely the case. Harry Wharton & Co. also inclined to that view. But these fellows had that view to themselves.

Quelch regarded the matter as a theft. Most of the Remove regarded it in the same light. What else could it be?

So, if Mauly was right in maintaining that the fat Owl was no thief, there was another "pincher" to be looked for. And it was natural that fellows should prefer to think, if possible, that the pincher came from outside the school.

Skinner, chiefly with a desire to rag the Famous Five, made the most of the coincidence that Frank Courtenay had been on the scene at the very time when, it was generally agreed, the affair had happened.

Much better fellows than Skinner would have preferred to believe the thief a Highcliffe man rather than a Greyfriars man.

They were a shady lot at Highcliffe—plenty of fellows pointed that out. Ponsonby and his friends would have been sacked long ago if they had been at Greyfriars instead of Highcliffe. True, Courtenay had been supposed to be a rather different sort of chap—still, you never could tell! Highcliffe was a slack school, packed with all sorts of rotters; and there was a proverb that evil communications corrupt good manners!

Bolsover major declared that he wasn't going to believe that it was a Greyfriars man, unless it was jolly well proved that it wasn't the Highcliffe man. And for once the loud-voiced bully of the Remove found plenty to agree with him.

What worried the Famous Five, chiefly, was the dread that what was now the talk of the Remove, would reach Highcliffe.

What Courtenay would feel, and think, was very disagreeable to contemplate, if it came to his ears.

They had a real friendship for the captain of the Highcliffe Fourth—which Ponsonby, with all his tricks, had been unable to disturb.

Now it looked like being shattered, by the fatuous folly of the fat Owl of the Remove. They did not even suspect Pon's hand in this affair. So far as they knew, their old enemy had nothing whatever to do with it. Only they knew that if he got hold of the story, he would lose no time in spreading it all over Highcliffe. So far, however, they had no suspicion that it was Ponsonby pulling the strings.

"I say, you fellows—" repeated Billy Bunter. "I was going to tell you—"

"About pinching Quelch's chain, you fat frog?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"No, you beast! I was going to tell you—"

"Gerrout!"

"Oh, all right!" said Bunter. "I thought you'd like to know that old Mobbs has come over here—"

"What?" exclaimed the Famous Five, with one voice.

"That Highcliffe beak!" said Bunter, blinking at them. "I've just seen him. I say, you fellows, what do you think Mobbs wants over here? Have you fellows been ragging at Highcliffe?"

Harry Wharton & Co. did not answer that. They looked at one another in utter dismay.

It did not occur to Billy Bunter's obtuse brain why Mr. Mobbs had come over from Highcliffe. But the Famous Five guessed at once. Mr. Mobbs was a rare caller at Greyfriars. He never came except to make some complaint. They could guess easily why he came now.

"It's got to Highcliffe, then!" muttered Harry.

"Looks like it!" said Bob.

"Oh crumbs!" said Nugent. "What will Courtenay think? He can't think that we believe anything of the kind, anyhow."

"He can't!" said Harry. "But—oh, it's rotten!"

"The rottenfulness is terrific!"

"I say, you fellows," Billy Bunter blinked inquisitively at the Famous Five through his big spectacles. "I say, do you know why Mobbs's come over?"

"Fathead!"

The chums of the Remove hurried away towards the House. Then they glimpsed a meagre, skinny figure, stepping from a taxi. It was Mr. Mobbs, the master of the Highcliffe Fourth.

That Mr. Mobbs had come over on an unpleasant errand, they knew already; but had they been unaware of it, they could have read it in his frowning face, glinting eyes, and compressed lips.

Mr. Quelch was in the doorway talking to Mr. Prout: and both masters glanced at the visitor in surprise.

They saluted him very formally, as he came up the steps. Mr. Quelch's face grew a trifle grim. He had no doubt that this meant some fresh complaint about some trifling shindy between the two schools.

"Pray come in, Mr. Mobbs," he said, with frigid politeness. "If you have called to see me, I—"

"I have not called to see you, Mr. Quelch," answered the Highcliffe master, with equal frigidity. "I have called to see Dr. Locke. The matter chiefly concerns Remove boys, it is true—"

"Dr. Locke leaves all matters pertaining to my Form in my hands, Mr. Mobbs," he said. "If you will step into my study—"

"I must see the headmaster, sir! Only the headmaster can deal with a case of malicious slander such as this!" said Mr. Mobbs, bitterly.

The Remove master started, and looked at him.

"Slander, sir!" he repeated.

"I can call it by no other name, sir!" said Mr. Mobbs. "I understand that a theft has been committed in this school—"

Quelch gave another start. His face reddened with annoyance.

"Whether that is the case or not, Mr. Mobbs, it cannot possibly concern a member of Dr. Voysey's staff at Highcliffe!" he rapped.

"It concerns me very closely, sir, as the name of a boy in my Form at Highcliffe is bandied about here, as that of a suspected person!" yapped Mr. Mobbs.

"Nonsense, sir!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "Nothing of the kind has reached my ears."

"Perhaps not, sir, perhaps not! Nevertheless, I am given to understand that it is the talk of this school, and especially of your Form, sir! I am here to see Dr. Locke on the subject."

"There is evidently some extraordinary mistake!" said Mr. Quelch. "No Highcliffe boy can possibly be concerned in the matter. There has, so far as I am aware, been no such suggestion."

"Then I can only say that you are unaware of what passes under your eyes, sir!" said Mr. Mobbs. "I demand to see Dr. Locke!"

"Trotter! Kindly show Mr. Mobbs to Dr. Locke's study!" said Mr. Quelch, through compressed lips.

Mr. Mobbs jerked away after the House page, and a score of Greyfriars fellows, who had heard every word uttered by the Highcliffe master, exchanged glances.

"The fat's in the fire now!" muttered Bob Cherry dismally. "This means that it's all over Highcliffe."

"I say, you fellows—"

"It's all that fat frump's fault! Boot him!"

"Yaroooooh!"

Billy Bunter fled.

Ten minutes later Trotter came out of the House, and looked round.

"Master Wharton—"

"Here!" said Harry.

"You're wanted in the 'Ead's study, sir!"

Harry Wharton, with deep and unenviable feelings, went into the House, and proceeded to his headmaster's study.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER. From Bad to Worse!

THERE were three in the Head's study when the captain of the Remove entered.

Dr. Locke sat at his writing-table, with a glimmer of spring sunshine on his silver hair, and a troubled frown on his kind old face. Mr. Quelch

sat by the window. Mr. Mobbs stood—he had declined to take a seat.

All three glanced at Harry. Mr. Mobbs' look was bitter. Wharton took no notice of him. He liked Mr. Mobbs no more than Mr. Mobbs liked him. It was the Head who spoke.

"Wharton! I have sent for you, as the head boy of Mr. Quelch's Form. I have heard a most extraordinary statement from this gentleman—Mr. Mobbs, a master at Highcliffe School. He appears to think that the name of a Highcliffe boy has been coupled with the—the happening of last week in your Form-master's study. There must, I am sure, be some mistake. Do you know anything of this?"

"I know that Courtenay was here that day, sir," answered Harry; "and that he knew nothing whatever of what happened, if it happened that day at all. No fellow who knows Courtenay could suppose anything of the kind, for one moment."

Mr. Mobbs stared.

This apparently surprised him. He seemed to have lumped all Greyfriars together as concerned in this "slander."

"You, then, are not a party to this?" he exclaimed.

"Courtenay is a friend of mine, sir!" answered Harry. "He has a good many friends here."

"You mention his name, Wharton!" said Dr. Locke. "Does that mean that there has been such talk as Mr. Mobbs believes?"

Wharton reddened with discomfort.

"A few fellows, sir, have talked about it, because Courtenay happened to be here last Wednesday," he answered. "They thought it a coincidence."

"They have thought, or at least said, much more than that!" snapped Mr. Mobbs. "I have Ponsonby's positive statement that four or five Remove boys told him that it was common talk here, that a boy of my Form was the thief."

"Ponsonby would say anything, sir!" answered Harry coolly.

"What—what? What do you mean? Do you deny, to your headmaster, that any such statement has been made?"

Wharton was silent.

"Please answer, Wharton!" said Mr. Quelch quietly.

"Has any suggestion been made, Wharton?" asked Dr. Locke, with a stern note in his voice.

"I—I'm afraid so, sir!" stammered Wharton. "No fellow with a grain of sense would fancy anything of the kind; but—"

"Is it the talk of your Form, as Mr. Mobbs thinks?"

"I—I suppose so, more or less, sir!" answered Harry Wharton.

"You hear, Dr. Locke?" said Mr. Mobbs bitterly. "A Highcliffe boy,

(Continued on next page.)

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calling at this school on a friendly visit, is accused—"

"He is not accused," said Wharton, at once. "It's simply talk, because fellows happened to remember that he was here one day last week."

"You hear, sir?" repeated Mr. Mobbs in the same bitter tone. "I have a right, sir, to demand the most exemplary punishment of every Greyfriars boy who has joined in this iniquitous slander—this—"

"One moment, sir!" Mr. Quelch cut in icily. "If any boys of my Form have uttered reckless slanders their headmaster will know how to deal with them, but we must first ascertain the facts." He turned to the Head. "Dr. Locke, it is incredible to me that a Highcliffe boy's name can have been mentioned in such a connection merely because he called at this school. There must be some grounds, or supposed grounds—"

"Sir!" exclaimed Mr. Mobbs.

"Sir!" retorted Mr. Quelch.

Harry Wharton could have groaned. Quelch's back was up, Mr. Mobbs was more than enough to put any man's back up. Quelch was the man to stand by his Form, and that was right enough. He was not going to have Remove fellows adjudged reckless slanderers undefended. But this was going to make the matter worse than ever.

"You mean, Mr. Quelch—" said Dr. Locke slowly.

"I mean, sir, that there must be some circumstances which have caused this suspicion to arise—unfounded, doubtless," said Mr. Quelch. "The theft in my study last week remains an absolute mystery. There is no clue whatever to the perpetrator. I was quite unaware until this moment that a boy from another school was in the House at the time—"

"You insinuate, sir—" flamed Mr. Mobbs.

"I insinuate nothing, sir!" hooted Mr. Quelch. "I state the facts as they are. In your presence, sir, I will question my head boy in reference to the Highcliffe junior's visit."

"Please proceed, Mr. Quelch," said Dr. Locke.

"Wharton, this boy Courtenay came to see you or your friends, I presume?"

"Yes, sir. But—"

"Was he in your company, or that of other Greyfriars boys, all the time he was in this building? If so, any suggestion against him is, as Mr. Mobbs says, mere slander. But answer my question carefully."

Wharton breathed hard; he had to answer.

"We weren't in gates at the time, sir; we'd gone on a bike spin, and Courtenay had to wait for us."

"Ah!" Mr. Quelch put a great deal of expression into that "Ah!" and Mr. Mobbs bit his under lip. "How long did he wait, Wharton?"

"Something over an hour, sir."

"And where?"

"In the visitors' room, sir. I believe Trotter showed him in, but some Remove fellows saw him. Vernon-Smith lent him a book to read while he waited for us."

"Did anyone remain with him?"

"No, sir. He came to see fellows who were out; he didn't come to see anybody else."

"No doubt. It appears, then, that after Vernon-Smith lent him a book to read he remained alone in the visitors' room for more than an hour on Wednesday afternoon?"

"That is so, sir."

"You found him there when you returned?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have no means of knowing whether he left that apartment during the space of more than an hour?"

"No, sir. But I am sure he did not."

"Possibly—possibly! Was it early or late in the afternoon?"

"After tea-time, sir."

"In that case, there was no one in my study," said Mr. Quelch. "Quite so! This boy Courtenay has visited you many times, Wharton, I think?"

"A good many times, sir; we've always been friends."

"He is fairly well acquainted with the building? He could find his way about if he wished?"

"He wouldn't wish, sir—"

"Answer my question!"

"I—I suppose he could, sir."

"Quite so!" said Mr. Quelch grimly. He turned to Dr. Locke. "Sir, I have seen this lad Courtenay more than once, and he has impressed me favourably—very differently from most of the Highcliffe boys I have seen. Nevertheless, sir, it transpires that a Highcliffe boy was in this building, left alone within a few steps of my study door, last Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday. Suspicion, sir, has, so far, fallen on no one—which means that until a discovery is made it rests upon all alike. I see no reason whatever, sir, to exclude a Highcliffe boy from suspicion that falls upon Greyfriars boys."

"Sir!" hooted Mr. Mobbs.

"I do not regard this, sir, as a reckless slander," said Mr. Quelch, with intensifying grimness. "Until the actual delinquent is found suspicion must rest on all who had access to my study, and I cannot condemn the boys of my Form for thinking so."

Mr. Mobbs gurgled with wrath.

"No such suspicion can fall upon a Highcliffe boy!" he exclaimed. "Thefts may occur here, sir; they do not—and cannot—occur at Highcliffe."

"That may be your view, sir; it is not mine," said Mr. Quelch. "I find it extremely difficult to believe that there is a dishonest boy at Greyfriars; I find no such difficulty with regard to Highcliffe."

"You dare—" gasped Mr. Mobbs.

He had asked for it, and he got it. Tactless offensiveness had roused Quelch's resentment, and he did not mince his words.

Harry Wharton stood dumb with utter dismay. The affair was taking the most unfortunate turn possible.

"I dare state the facts, sir!" said Mr. Quelch. "There are boys at Highcliffe who would be expelled from any other school in the kingdom. This is well known to me and to other persons in this neighbourhood."

"Mr. Quelch—" murmured the Head.

"I am bound, sir, to speak in defence of my Form," said the Remove master. "I have myself seen Highcliffe boys—boys of Mr. Mobbs' Form—entering low resorts almost openly. Had I been aware that a Highcliffe boy was in this building in such circumstances at that particular time I should certainly not have concluded that the theft was the act of a Greyfriars boy. I should at least have kept an open mind on the subject."

"I will not tolerate this, sir!" bawled Mr. Mobbs. "I will tolerate no such suggestion, no such accusation—"

"Wharton, you may leave my study," said the Head hastily.

Harry Wharton was glad enough to go.

His friends met him as he came out into the quad, their own faces growing very grave as they saw his dismayed look.

"Row on?" asked Bob.

"It's the limit!" groaned the captain of the Remove. "That little beast Mobbs has got Quelch's rag out, and he's got on the high horse. Goodness knows what the end of it will be now!"

Very soon afterwards Mr. Mobbs emerged. He whisked down the steps, his face red with anger, and whisked into his taxi, and drove away. It was clear from his look that he had derived no satisfaction from his visit to Greyfriars.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Mobbs Puts His Foot Down!

"GREYFRIARS cad!"

"Cheek to come here!"

"Boot him out!"

Frank Courtenay started and looked round quickly. He was pacing under the old trees, his hands driven deep into his pockets, a wrinkle of troubled thought in his brow. The Caterpillar stood leaning on one of the old Highcliffe beeches, his eyes on his chum, silent.

Half an hour ago Mr. Mobbs had returned from Greyfriars in a state of fuming wrath and resentment. His first action after returning had been to see the headmaster; his next to put up a notice, signed by Dr. Voysey, placing Greyfriars School out of bounds for Highcliffe fellows.

Ponsonby had read that notice with a smiling face; Courtenay with dismay. It was quite a natural step for Mr. Mobbs to take, in the circumstances, but it was a blow for the captain of the Fourth. Exactly how matters stood at Greyfriars he did not know, but he had little doubt that overbearing bluster from Mr. Mobbs had made them worse.

That his friends there believed anything against him he was sure was not the case, but he would have been very glad of a word with Harry Wharton.

Loud exclamations from the direction of the gates drew his attention. The Caterpillar detached himself lazily from the beech.

"Better hike along, Franky," he remarked.

Courtenay was already going; the Caterpillar followed him. In the gateway stood Harry Wharton, and a dozen Highcliffe fellows were gathering round him with unpleasant looks.

"Cheeky cad, buttin' in here after what they've said about a Highcliffe man!" said Monson. "Barge him out!"

"Kick him into the road!" exclaimed Drury.

"Hold on, you fellows!" said Harry Wharton quietly. "I've come over here to speak to Courtenay; I must see him. I want to tell him that nobody believes a word against him—nobody who knows him."

He did not budge a step as the Highcliffians came round him with threatening looks. The Famous Five had consulted in the matter, and agreed that the captain of the Remove had better see Courtenay with as little delay as possible. But it was rather a delicate matter, calling at Highcliffe in the present circumstances, and

Harry was scarcely surprised by a hostile reception.

Not only Pon's knutty pals, but some of Courtenay's friends were in the crowd that gathered at the sight of him, and they looked equally angry and hostile.

Courtenay came up quickly. He pushed in between the Greyfriars junior and the Highcliffe window.

"Mobby won't like Greyfriars cads buttin' in here," said Monson. "Accusin' Highcliffe men of stealin'—"

"Don't talk rot!" snapped Courtenay. "Keep back, I tell you! Can't you let a fellow speak?"

"I won't stay a minute, Courtenay," said Harry Wharton. "But I had to come and speak to you. I'm sorry—more sorry than I can say—that some silly asses at my school have been talking rot, and mixing your name up in it. I want to make it quite clear that no fellow who knows you takes the slightest notice of it."

"I'm sure of that," said Courtenay.

"I don't quite know how it started," went on Wharton; "but some fellow seems to have remembered that you were there last week, and some fellows said it was a coincidence, and then one thing led to another. It's simply tattle—idle tattle—and nobody believes it—least of all your friends. It will be knocked right on the head when the facts come out—and that can't be very long, for most of us have a pretty clear idea who the right man is."

Courtenay nodded.

"I'm glad you've come to tell me," he said. "I was pretty certain that Ponsonby was making a mountain out of a molehill."

"A storm in a teacup—what?" said the Caterpillar.

"That's it," said Harry. "A few silly asses have been talking silly rot—just that, and nothing more. Any hour now the right man may be spotted, and that will be an end of it. But I'm awfully sorry—"

"That's all right, old man."

"Here comes Mobby," said Monson maliciously. "Mobby doesn't look as if he likes Greyfriars cads about."

Mr. Mobbs came whisking up.

Harry Wharton capped him politely, receiving a glare in return.

"How dare you come here, Wharton?" exclaimed Mr. Mobbs.

"I came to speak to Courtenay, sir, and assure him that—"

"It is impudent audacity for any Greyfriars boy to come here. I am surprised at you, though, I suppose, I should be surprised at nothing in a Greyfriars boy!" snapped Mr. Mobbs. "Such effrontery—"

"Wharton came to tell me, sir—" began Courtenay.

"Silence! I am astonished at you, Courtenay! You have been accused at Greyfriars of a disgraceful action, yet I find you maintaining terms of friendship with a Greyfriars boy. I forbid you to hold any communication whatever with any boy belonging to Greyfriars School."

"Will you let me speak, sir?"

"I will not, Courtenay! Go into the House at once, and remain there! I repeat that I will allow no communication whatever!" hooted Mr. Mobbs.

"Very well, sir! Good-bye, Wharton!"

"Good-bye, old bean!" said the Caterpillar. "Thanks for comin' over!"

"Silence!" roared Mr. Mobbs. "Do you hear me! Silence! Go—both of you! Go at once! Langley, please see those two juniors into the House!"

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 Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped, addressed envelope will ensure a reply.

THE first question comes from a Richmond reader, who asks me:

WHERE DOES THE THAMES RISE?

This question actually led to a little bit of bother in Parliament, because different people had different ideas as to which was really the source of the Thames. Actually, there are four head streams which combine together at Lechlade, and form the Thames. One of these streams rises at Seven Springs, Coverley, and many people claim that this is the actual source of the River Thames. Other people claim that Seven Springs is the source of the River Churn, which is a tributary of the Thames, and they say that a place called Thames Head, near Coates, is the real source. The Ministry of Agriculture, which is responsible for the issuing of the Ordnance Survey maps, has decided to settle the matter once and for all by putting Thames Head on the maps as the real source of the world's busiest river. But, even so, there are still people who stick to it that Seven Springs is the source.

Here is a paragraph which might interest London readers, or other readers who pay visits to the Metropolis. John Sandies, of Sunderland, is coming for a visit to London shortly. He has heard that, in London, there are a number of

FREE CINEMAS,

and he asks me if this is so. Yes, there are several free cinemas in London. Most of the big Colonial buildings have a cinema on the premises—notably Australia House, in the Strand, and South Africa House in Trafalgar Square. These cinemas present travel films of the various Dominions and Colonies, and they are extremely interesting. At the Science Museum, in South Kensington, there is another free cinema where splendid films are shown. The Post Office also presents free cinema shows sometimes. So, you see, you can find quite a lot of amusement in London—and all for nothing!

I've not left much room to tell you about:

"KEEPING QUELCH QUIET!"

By Frank Richards

next week's splendid long yarn of Greyfriars. But you can take it from me it's a real good 'un! As the title suggests, Mr. Quelch is very worried about the mysterious disappearance of his gold watch-chain, and Bunter, the cause of all the trouble, is forced to do something to keep his Form-master quiet. What the fat Removeite does is surprising, to say the least. Anyway, you'll read all about it in next Thursday's issue of the MAGNET. Our other features, of course, will be well up to standard, as usual.

YOUR EDITOR.

Langley of the Sixth marched Courtenay and Do Courcy off the scene.

Mr. Mobbs turned to Harry Wharton, and lifted a bony hand.

"Go!" he said. "Do not presume to darken these gates again. If you have the audacity to do so, I have no doubt that Highcliffe boys will make you understand very clearly what they think of your impudence."

With that Mr. Mobbs walked after Langley.

Mr. Mobbs did not, perhaps, intend his remarks to be an encouragement to the Highcliffians to get on with a rag. But he very carefully did not look round, as there was a scuffling behind him after he had turned his back. Certainly he could not have failed to hear; but if he heard, he heeded not.

"Barge the cad!"

"Boot him!"

"Boot that Greyfriars cad out!"

Harry Wharton stepped back quickly. He had left his bicycle by the paddock fence at a little distance.

A dozen Highcliffe fellows rushed at him, and barged him into the road. With a flash in his eyes he hit out, with left and right, and Monson spun in one direction, Drury in another.

Then he jumped for his bicycle.

"After him!" shouted Monson, staggering up.

"Scrag the cad!"

"Boot him back to Greyfriars!"

Wharton put a leg over his machine and shot away as the Highcliffe crowd came after him with a rush. He was glad that he had chanced it, and called to see Courtenay; but he was glad to get clear. He shot away at top speed, leaving the Highcliffians booing.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

The Hidden Loot!

THAT ass—"That dummy—" "That terrific fathead—" "That chuckle-headed chump—" "That footling freak—" The Famous Five were discussing Bunter.

Harry Wharton of the Remove had returned from Highcliffe. And it was a relief to his chums to learn that Frank Courtenay was not "getting his back up" over the disagreeable turn affairs had taken.

But the situation was awkward, uncomfortable and intolerable. It was worse since Mr. Mobbs' visit. The breach between Greyfriars and Highcliffe was now so wide and deep that it seemed doubtful whether it would ever be bridged. The only hope lay in the discovery of the culprit at Greyfriars, and that discovery seemed as far off as ever.

The Famous Five had little doubt of his identity; but that did not help much. Now as they walked under the elms, discussing the troublesome affair, Billy Bunter hove in sight, at a little distance, and they glared at him.

The Owl of the Remove did not observe them, though he seemed to be in an unusually watchful and wary mood.

He was blinking round him through his big spectacles with such exceeding and excessive caution that he was likely to attract a second glance from any fellow who sighted him. Billy Bunter had his own inimitable way of being cautious.

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"The footling, frabjous, fatheaded Crump!" said Harry Wharton. "It must have been Bunter—simply must have been! It looks to me as if he played some pretty trick with that putrid chain, and is afraid to own up, now Quelch thinks it was pinched. But what did he do with it?"

"The whatfulness is terrific!" sighed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"If it could be found—"

"Not likely!" said Johnny Bull.

"What the dickens is the fat idiot up to now?" asked Bob Cherry, staring at Bunter as, with a last cautious but short-sighted blink round him, the fat junior sidled into the old Cloisters and disappeared.

"Oh, bother the fat ass!" said Harry.

"But look here, he's up to something!" said Bob. "He's not sneaking into the Cloisters for nothing, or to smoke a fag like Skinner. Let's go and see what he's after."

"Oh!" Wharton started a little. "It's possible—"

"Come on!" said Nugent.

The Famous Five cut after Bunter. The same idea was in all their minds now—that perhaps the missing chain was hidden in some recess of the old Cloisters.

Bunter, certainly, had some object in creeping into that secluded spot in that cautious and surreptitious manner. It was a chance, at least, and they followed on, hoping for the best.

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Bob, as they sighted Bunter again. "Look!"

The fat junior had stopped at a wall at the end of the Cloisters, where the ancient ivy hung thick. He was pushing a fat paw through the ivy, evidently into some recess in the old stone wall behind.

That something was hidden there was obvious. The juniors could hardly doubt what it was, in the circumstances.

They came up with a rush, and Bunter, with a startled squeak, spun round. He withdrew his fat hand from the ivy, and placed his podgy back against it.

"You fat villain!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Shift!"

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

"What have you got hidden there, you podgy pincher?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"Eh? Nothing!" gasped Bunter. "I say, you keep off! 'Tain't yours, anyhow. And there's nothing there—nothing at all. So far as I know, there ain't any hole in that wall behind the ivy; and I never hid anything in it, if there is. Besides, it's mine."

"Shift, you blithering idiot!" said the captain of the Remove.

Billy Bunter did not shift. He planted his podgy back against the ivy that covered the hidden cavity in the wall.

"I say, you fellows, lemme alone!" he squeaked. "I tell you there is nothing there, and it ain't yours, you beasts!"

"Quite!" agreed Harry Wharton. "Nor yours, either, you fat fooler! Get out of the way, you blitherer! Do you think we're going to leave it there, now you've guided us to it, you footling, footling fathead!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"We're going to take it to Quelch, you blithering ass—"

Bunter gave a howl of alarm.

"Beast! I should get into a fearful row! If Quelch knew I'd hidden it here, he would think I'd pinched it! You know how jolly suspicious he is!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Isn't he a corker? You howling ass, we shan't mention you, though you ought to be flogged, and sacked, and sent to Borstal! We're not going to give you away, you pernicious porpoise! But we're going to take it to Quelch at once."

"You ain't!" yelled Bunter. "It's not there, I tell you, and I never put it there, and there's only half of it left, too, and besides, it's mine! Look here—"

"Only half of it!" exclaimed Harry

They had not the slightest doubt now that the missing chain was hidden there. That something was, there was no doubt at all.

Harry Wharton thrust his hand into the dark, deep cavity.

Then he uttered a startled ejaculation.

"What the thump—"

His hand came out again—his fingers wet. They were wet with gravy!

He stared at them blankly and groped in the cavity. There was a general gasp as he dragged the hidden object to light.

It was a piedish containing half—the smaller half—of a steak-and-kidney pie! Wharton's hand, at the first grope, had gone into the pie.

"A—a—a pip-pip-pie!" stuttered Bob Cherry.

"What the dickens—"

"A pip-pip-pie!"

Billy Bunter staggered to his feet. He glared at the Famous Five, with a glare that almost cracked his spectacles. They glared at him.

"Gimme my pie, you beasts!" roared Bunter. "It's mine! 'Tain't yours, anyhow! I keep on telling you it's mine! I never went down to the larder, and never snooped it while the cook wasn't looking! It came from Bunter Court this morning, you beasts!"

"You—you—you—" gasped Harry Wharton.

Evidently, it was not the missing chain that Bunter had hidden in the old Cloister. It was a pie, raided from the larder, of which he had disposed of half—and now intended to dispose of the other half.

"I say, you fellows, gimme that pie!" gasped Bunter. "I say, if you take it to Quelch, he will fancy that I had it, you know, if he knows I had—"

The Famous Five had certainly no intention of taking a purloined steak-and-kidney pie to Mr. Quelch!

"You—you—you— Here's your pie!" gasped the captain of the Remove.

And he gave it to Bunter.

He gave it to him upside-down, on top of his bullet head.

There was a fearful splutter from Bunter. Steak-and-kidney showered round him, and rich brown gravy ran down his fat neck as the piedish bonneted him.

"Urrrrgh!" spluttered Bunter.

"Wurrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter wanted that pie! He had it now! But he did not seem to be enjoying it, now he had it! He grabbed at fragments of steak-and-kidney in his hair and his neck, dabbed at steaming gravy, and spluttered. And the Famous Five, chuckling, walked away and left him to splutter.

THE END

(Billy Bunter gets himself into a worse pickle than ever in next week's grand long yarn entitled: "KEEPING QUELCH QUIET!" Be sure and get your copy of the MAGNET on Thursday!)

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Wharton. "What have you done with the rest, then?"

"Nothing! You see, there isn't anything there—"

"Have you sold part of it, or what?"

"Sold it! How could I sell it, you silly ass?"

"Thank goodness you haven't, anyhow! It would mean chokey, if you had! What have you done with it, if it's not all there?"

"Nothing! There isn't anything there at all—"

"Shift the fat idiot!"

"Ow! Leggo!" roared Bunter, as the juniors grasped him and whirled him aside. "Beasts! Leggo! You're not going to pinch it! Oh, you rotters! It's mine, I tell you! I never snooped it, and never hid it there, and I say— Yooop!"

Bump!

Billy Bunter sat down on the old stone flags with a heavy concussion. He sat and roared.

Hurriedly the juniors dragged the thick old ivy aside. The cavity in the old wall was uncovered.

TALL

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A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING!

Another Ripping Instalment of Dicky Nugent's
Rollicking Serial:

"THE ST. SAM'S TREZZURE HUNT!"

FOUND OUT!
"Help! Yarooooo!"
"Help! Yarooooo!"
Jack Jolly & Co. pawed.
It was a couple of days after Tubby Barrell had produced a live mouse like magic and thus won another point in Sir Gouty Greybeard's grato trezzure hunt. The chums of the St. Sam's Fourth were taking a stroll along the towpath of the River Ripple. As they walked, they discussed the mystery of Tubby's amazing success over Serownger.
Considering that Doctor Birchmell, the Head, now known as "Mr. Smith," and occupying the post of Sir Gouty's secretary, was supplying Serownger with advance information about each round of the trezzure hunt, it seemed impossible for Serownger to have lost. But he had—and Tubby had won! Jack Jolly & Co. simply could not understand it. They were still trying to puzzle it out, when the yells from under some trees near the river brought them to a stop.
"Help! Yaroooo! Help!"
"My hat! I know that voice somewhere," remarked Jolly, nitting his brows in an effort to remember the name of the owner.
"There's something familiar about it, certainly," agreed Frank Fearless.
"Yet it sounds rather like pig-sticking going on!"
"I know!" yelled Bright.
"It's Barrell!"
"Oh, crums! So it is!" grinned Jolly. "Talk of the angels!"
"Help! Murder! Perlee! Ow-ow-ow!"
"Tubby's going through it, by the sound of it!" remarked Fearless, with a frown. "I vote we clip in!"
"Here, here!" cried Jolly. "This way!"
Usually Jack Jolly & Co. stuck together. But now they broke—into a run! They raced across to the trees. As they drew nearer, they heard another voice besides Tubby's.
"Gimme that letter, you fat frowl, or I'll neck you into a jolly!"
"Ow-ow-ow! Shan't!"
"You jolly well will!"
"Yarooooo! I jolly well won't!"
"Wait till you've had a little more Chinese tortcher and see what you say then!" said the voice of Tubby Barrell's captor.
"Why, it's Serownger!" grinned Fearless, recognising the voice.
"Now I begin to see daylight!" panted Jack Jolly, as he put on a spurt.

"Tubby must have pinched a letter belonging to Serownger—the letter containing the secrets of the trezzure hunt! No wonder he won the last round!"
"Oh, crums! That's it!"
Jack Jolly & Co. put on speed. A couple of jiffies later, they spotted Serownger and Tubby amongst the trees. Serownger had the fat junior down on the ground and was twisting his arms behind his back, scowling frowns as he did so.
"Gimme that letter!" he roared.
"Yarooooo! Help! Leggo my arms! Wo-o-oop!" shrieked Tubby. Then Serownger gave him an extra twist and Tubby gave in at last. "All right—you can have the blessed letter!" he howled.
"That's better!" leered Serownger.
A moment later, he was howling himself, as an old boot, aimed with deadly accuracy by Jack Jolly, smote him on the seat of his trousers.
"Wo-o-oop! What the thump!"
"Collar him!" sang out Frank Fearless.
"Duck him in the river!" grinned Merry.
Serownger struggled fiercely and yelled feendishly. But his struggles and yells made no difference to Jack Jolly & Co. The chums of the Fourth grabbed him, rushed him back to the river and flung him in like a sack of potatoes.
"Plonk! Splash!"
"Yoooooop!"
"Wo-o-oop!"
"Gug-gug-gug-grooooo!"
"Now don't be a booby again, Serownger!" said Jack Jolly, severely. And the Co. left Serownger to crawl out of the river the best way he could and then returned to Tubby.
"Feel all right now, Tubby?" asked Fearless.
"Ow! No! That beast has broken every bone in my body! Er—do you chaps happen to see a letter about?" asked Tubby, beginning to crawl round in the long grass with surprising agility for a chap with all his bones broken.
Jack Jolly bent down and picked up a letter. It was evidently the letter Serownger had been trying

to get. The kaptin of the Fourth frowned, as his eye axidentally fell on it. He caught site of the opening of it, which read as follows:—
"Dear Serownger,—Just to give you the promised details of the trezzure hunt—"
"Sure it's your letter?" asked Jolly, as he held up the sheet of notepaper.
"Yes, rather! Thanks, awfully, old chap—"
"Sorry, but I shall have to keep it myself, I'm afraid," grinned the kaptin of the Fourth, as he transferred the precious letter to his pocket.
Then he led the way back to St. Sam's.
Tubby Barrell rolled along beside him every inch of the way, farly begging for it back—and begging in vain!

BIRCHY'S RESOLVE!
Ba-a-a-a-ah!
"What the dickens!"
Ba-a-a-a-ah! Ma-a-a-ah!
"What the thump!"
Serownger of the Fourth looked serprized. He had returned to St. Sam's and dried himself and changed his clothes. After that, he had gone out of the Skool House again to go to the tuckshop for something for tea.
Crossing the quad, he had noticed a large, awkward-looking sheep, nibbling at a patch of grass. That alone was serprizing. What was more serprizing, however, was that the sheep seemed to be following him, bleating loudly, as though it wanted



to attract Serownger's attention.
Serownger stopped and looked round to see what the sheep would do. He farly blinked when it galloped up to him. But a still more staggering serprize was in store for the plotter of the Fourth. When the sheep reached him, it lifted up its front paw and pulled back a mask over its face. And Serownger, to his amazement, saw a face that he recognised instantly.

"The Head!" he gasped.
"Quiet, you yung idjut!" hissed the extraordinary "sheep."
"If anyone hears you, the game's up! Pretend you're patting my head, Serownger. While you do the patting, I'll do the talking!"
"But—but what—"
"I had to disguise myself as a sheep," explained Doctor Birchmell. "As I told you over the fence, Serownger, it's far too dangerous now for us to meet—overdisguised in the ordinary way. But I had to see you—so I donned this disguise, hoping that our enemies will not have the brains to pennytrate it!"
"Grate pip!"
"What I want to know in the first place is why you failed to win the last round of the trezzure hunt," growled the Head. "When I sent you the full programme, Serownger, I quite antissipated that it was a certainty for you. Instead of that, you let that fat frump Barrell walk away with it!"
"It wasn't my fault, sir—honner bright!" gasped Serownger, patting away fearfully at the false sheep's head that covered Doctor Birchmell's top-not.
"Tubby Barrell pinched the letter!"
"The dickens he did!"
"I've just been trying to get it away from him—and all I got for my trouble was a ducking in the River Ripple!" said Serownger, bitterly.
"Now Jolly and his pals have taken it!"
Doctor Birchmell looked very sheepish under his woolly disguise.
"A nice state of affairs, yung Serownger, I must say!"

he remarked. "What do you think you were a-doing-of, letting all these outsiders into our little game? And what do you think is going to happen now?"
"Ask me another, sir!" said Serownger. "I never was much good at answering riddles!"
"Things have got to a pretty pass!" snorted the Head. "Jolly and his friends already know who 'Mr. Smith' really is. Now they know all the fourth-

coming problems in the trezzure hunt. What's more, that fat yung idjut Barrell is in it, too—one of the biggest tittle-tattles in the skool! Serownger! There is only one thing for it, if we're to win Sir Gouty's fifty pounds—and I'm resolved to do it!"
"And what's that, sir, mite I ask?" queried Serownger.
The Head's reply made Serownger fairly jump.
"We must kidnap Jolly and his friends and Barrell as well, and keep them out of the way till the trezzure hunt is over!" he said.
Then more fellows started crossing the quad; and the wolf in sheep's clothing hurriedly fricked away.

PRISONERS OF THE PLOTTER!
That nite, a motor-car which mite have been reck-raised by anyone; the know as one of Sir Gouty Greybeard's Rolls-Rices, drove up on the grass under the wall of St. Sam's. The driver eggstingwished the lights, then stepped out. He had some old sacks and some balls of cord strapped to his back.
"Ha, ha!" he muttered.
"The time has come to do my desprited deed!"
With these words, he tucked his beard into his weskit, pulled his cap well over his eyes, and started painfully scaling the wall.
Doctor Birchmell—for, of course, the visitor was he—landed safely on the other side. Keeping well in the shadows, he made his way to the Skool House. He carefully avoided the main entrance and went round to one of the side doors. Here he pawed for a minute or so, to make sure that the coast was clear; then he started suddenly in and ran un-notissed up some stairs leading to the servants' quarters.
In a matter of minutes, he succeeded in reaching the Fourth Form passidge, where most of the Fourth were bizzzy with their prep. On the way, he had a few narrow squeaks; at he kept his eyes wide open and always mannigged to dodge out of the way when anyone came along.
"Now for it!" he leered, when he arrived in the passidge.
He crept along to Tubby Barrell's study, hopped in-side, and closed the door swiftly behind him.

So silently did he perform the move that Tubby Barrell, who was sitting at the table doing sums, did not even hear him.
The first Tubby knew of his arrival was when a scarf was suddenly whipped round his head and noddid at the back, stopping him from calling out.
Tubby jumped to his feet, gergling wildly. But before he could resist, he was bound hand and foot. His attacker then selected one of the sacks he had brought with him, bundled Tubby into it, and tied it up. Then he calmly concluded by lowering the sack out of the window to the ground below!
"Nice work, by Jove!" was Doctor Birchmell's comment, as he quitted the study. "Jolly and his friends won't be quite so easy to mannidge, I'm afraid—but it will have to be done, all the same!"
He tip-toed along to Jack Jolly's study. Outside, he bent down and put his lips to the keyhole. He screwed up his face and tried to imitate the squeaky voice of Binding, the page.
"Master Jolly, Master Merry and Master Bright wanted at once in Mr. Lickham's study!" he squeaked through the key-hole.
Then he dodged back and flattened himself against the wall.
A moment later, Jack Jolly & Co. came hurrying out of the study and made for the stairs without even glancing at the wall where Doctor Birchmell was lurking.
The moment they had gone, the Head skipped into the empty study.
He carefully prepared three sacks and some lengths of cord and, after switching off the light, waited eagerly for the return of the heroes of the Fourth.
After a brief interval, he heard their footsteps approaching. He grinned to himself, as he heard Jolly remark: "I'd like to catch the silly ass that sent us on that errand!"
The next moment, the door opened.
Jolly took a step forward. Inamogately, with a lightning like movement, the Head slipped a sack over his head

and noddid it round his neeze.
Bright peered into the darkness, wondering what had happened to his leader. But before he could investigate, a sack enveloped him, and he found himself down on the floor, roaring.
Merry, at the back, pawed.
"What's the matter with you chaps—yow-ow-ow-ow! Crooo!"
Merry's remarks tailed off.

one fellow he needed to complete his "bag"! The Head pounced on him with tigerish gloo; and before Fearless knew what was happening, he, too, was bound and gagged and tied up inside the Head's last sack.
It was ticklish work, getting his captives across the quad and out of a side gate to the car without attracting attention; but the Head managed it at last.
Then the lights of the car beamed out again and Doctor Birchmell drove off, farling like anything. The five fellows who knew his secret were now his prisoners—and he meant to see that none of them got free again till his fowl desires were achieved!

(Look out for next week's "eggsting" instalment.)

as he, too, went into a sack. Grinning all over his dial, the Head pushed Merry into the study, then closed the door and got bizzzy with the cord. In five minutes, Jack Jolly and his pals were lowered out of the window and dumped beside Tubby Barrell in the bushes below the Skool House, bound hand and foot and bundled up in sacks like carcasses of beef!
As the Head finished his fowl work, the study door opened.
The luck was with Doctor Birchmell with a vengeance. It was Frank Fearless—the



Struggling wildly in the hands of six burly police-officers, Horace James Coker, Fifth Form, was charged before the Remove Potty Sessions with dangerous driving and chickenslaughter.
"What's the plea, prisoner?" asked Mr. H. Wharton, the Chairman of the Magistrates. "Guilty" or "not guilty?"
Prisoner: "I'll smash you! I'll spifficate you! I'll—"
Magistrate: "Muzzle him, someone, while we hear the evidence."
Court ushers assisted the policemen in fixing the muzzle over prisoner's mouth. Mr. R. Cherry, K.C., then outlined the case for the police, stating that Coker had been observed approaching Friardale Village at a speed estimated by experts at anything from twenty to a hundred miles an hour.
Magistrate: "My hat! Nothing like accuracy, is there?" (Laughter.)

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Continuing, Mr. Cherry explained that after Coker had passed Uncle Clegg's tuckshop, two chickens belonging to Uncle Clegg were seen to be lying in the road—killed, undoubtedly, by Coker's infernal machine! He asked that the prisoner should be found guilty on both counts and given a long term of imprisonment.
As prisoner refused to plead, Mr. P. Todd was asked by the Court to defend him. In an ingenious speech, Mr. Todd put forward the view that there was a good deal of doubt as to whether Coker really had killed the chickens. It was quite possible that they had died of old age. (Sensation.) Well, anyway, he had evidence to show that the bodies were cold when examined, which was only two minutes after they were supposed to have expired.
Mr. Cherry: "That's easily explained, your Honour. When these ill-fated animals saw

Bunter rolled into the study one day last week and said: "I think we ought to do something about Easter eggs for the poor blighters who can't afford 'em. What about collecting a few round the Form?"
"Good wheeze! Who's going to do the collecting?" I asked.
Bunter offered to do the collecting himself, and raked in about two dozen eggs.
But he didn't bring them back to the study. He took them up to a box-room instead and, with the kindly intention of testing them to see that they were fit to be eaten, he sampled a few.
In fact, he finished up by sampling the lot, one at a time. But not quite in the usual Bunter way. Bunter's usual method of sampling a thing is to scoff it completely. This time, however, he only took one bite at each egg.
The fact was that the flavours didn't agree with him. The first one, for instance, tasted of cayenne pepper; the second, of mustard; the third, of ink; the fourth, of mud; and the fifth, of soot!

Bunter has a pretty accommodating palate. But these Easter eggs beat it! He just took one bite at each egg and then took what was left to the nearest dustbin.
Now he's accusing ME of fixing it all up with the chaps! Suspicious blighter!
Whether there's any foundation in his suspicions or not, there's good news in all this for the unfortunate chap who has to put up with Bunter for Easter.
HE HAS CERTAINLY GONE RIGHT OFF EASTER EGGS!

Coker racing towards them, their blood froze in their veins!"
At this stage, prisoner began to take an interest in the proceedings. Having been unmuzzled, he stated that anyone who said he was a chicken-killer was an idiot. He was far too good and careful a driver to knock down any chicken and, just to show the Court what a lot of young idiots they all were, he was willing to undergo any test to prove it.
Magistrate: "Done! The Court will adjourn to Friardale Lane for the test!"
Before an interested crowd in Friardale Lane, prisoner later went through his test. Bundles of paper representing chickens were placed in the road at intervals and Coker was asked to drive through them without touching one.
The result, which was greeted with great hilarity, established the case for the police very firmly. Coker hit every "chicken" and sent it flying!
Coker was promptly rearrested and rushed back to Court, where he received a sentence of two hours' hard labour and a fine of five shillings, to be remitted to Uncle Clegg as compensation.



BUNTER HAS GONE OFF EASTER EGGS!

Announces PETER TODD

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COURT TESTS MOTOR-CYCLIST'S SKILL!

Trial With Dummy Chickens!

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OVERHEARD IN THE RAG
BATTLING BOLSOVER: I've fought a thousand fights since I came to Greyfriars.
SKINNER: Got any scars?
B.B. (absently): No; but I've some cigarettes, if they'll do.
TUCKSHOP TALE
They say that Bunter asked the tuckshop dame to cut him a sandwich and to make it lean.
And Mrs. Mimble cut it fat and made it lean—against the sandwich-stand!