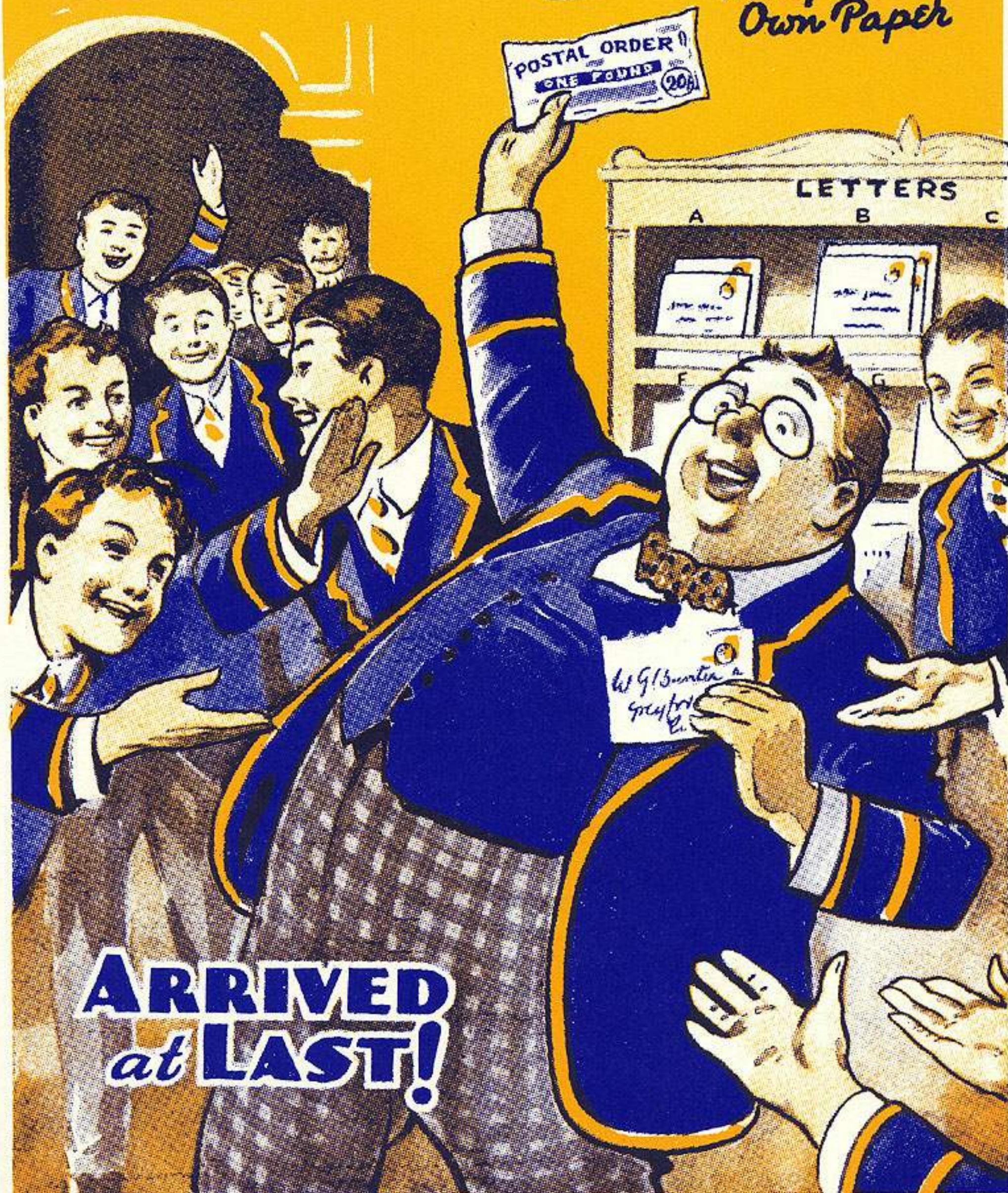


"THE SCHOOLBOY SLEUTH!" Exciting Yarn of HARRY WHARTON & CO.

The Magnet^{2D}

Billy Bunter's
Own Paper



ARRIVED
at **LAST!**

Once Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, takes a dislike to a fellow, there's no shifting him. His feud with Skip, the ex-pickpocket, is still going strong!

The SCHOOLBOY SLEUTH!

By FRANK RICHARDS



In the light of the flash-lamp, Vernon-Smith bent over Skip's box, and thoroughly searched its contents!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Too Good to be True!

BILLY BUNTER beamed. He was surprised. He was, in fact, astonished. But he was delighted. His fat face was irradiated by happy grins.

"I say, you fellows—look!" he gasped.

The Remove fellows looked—or, rather, they stared!

It was morning break at Greyfriars School. A good many fellows had gathered, as usual, to look for letters. Billy Bunter, the fat ornament of the Remove, was among them.

Bunter seldom missed looking for a letter in break—being in constant expectation of a postal order.

It was true that that postal order was a long time coming. Any fellow less hopeful than Bunter might have given up expecting it.

Perhaps the fat Remove's hope was a little faint. When Bob Cherry handed down a letter from the rack, addressed to him in his pater's hand, Billy Bunter blinked at it, and did not seem in a great hurry to open it. Only too well, the Owl of the Remove knew that Mr. Bunter was more likely to send him a lecture on economy than a postal order.

However, he jabbed a fat thumb into the envelope, and took out the letter. And then—

Really, Bunter could hardly believe his eyes, or his spectacles. From the folded letter he drew a slip of engraved paper—on which the figure "20s." leaped to the eye.

It was a postal order!

And it was not merely a postal order for 2s. 6d., 5s., or even 10s. It was a postal order for a pound!

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A whole, genuine quid!

"Oh crikey!" breathed Bunter. "I say, you fellows, look! I say, I told you fellows I was expecting a postal order, didn't I?"

"You did!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Great pip!" gasped Johnny Bull. "Is that a postal order, or the ghost of one?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gratters, old fat bean!" said Harry Wharton.

"The gratterfulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Wonders will never cease!" remarked Frank Nugent.

"Don't you cash that postal order, Bunter!" exclaimed Peter Todd.

"Eh? Why not?" demanded Bunter.

"We'll have it framed, old scout, and hang it up in the study!" said Peter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Toddy! I say, you fellows, I told you I was expecting a postal order! Well, here it is!" chuckled Billy Bunter. "A quid, too! Any of you fellows got a remittance for a quid?"

"No such luck!" said Bob Cherry. "But I'll tell you what, old fat man—we'll whack that one out with you, if you like!"

"Eh? You jolly well won't!" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter blinked at that postal order. He gazed at it. He gloated over it. Often and often had Billy Bunter mentioned that he was expecting a postal order. Equally often and often, it hadn't come.

And now—here it was! Billy Bunter's celebrated postal order had materialised at last. Here it was—clutched in Billy Bunter's fat, grubby fingers.

It seemed almost too good to be true.

Surprised fellows stared at Bunter's postal order—Bunter, most surprised of all, beamed at it. The sun at noonday had nothing on Bunter's fat face for brightness.

"I say, you fellows, I shall have to go to Courtfield to cash my postal order," he said. "It's got Courtfield Post Office on it. I say, which of you fellows is going to lend me a quid till I cash it?"

"Echo answers which!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "I'll give you all my change for it, if you like."

"Eh? How much change have you got?"

"Fourpence."

"You silly ass!" hooted Bunter. "I say, Smithy, you cash it for me, will you? You've got lots of money."

"And lots of sense to look after it!" remarked Vernon-Smith. "You might forget to settle when you'd cashed the postal order."

"Oh, really, Smithy—if you can't trust a fellow with a quid—"

"Right on the wicket!"

"Beast! I say, Toddy—"

"Take ninepence for it?" asked Peter Todd.

"No, you ass! I say, Hazel—"

"Stony!" said Hazeldene.

"I say, Skip—"

"Ain't got a quid!" said Skip.

"I say, Redwing—"

Tom Redwing laughed.

"Mrs. Mimble will take it at the tuckshop, if you fill it in," he said.

"Oh! Good!" gasped Bunter. He rolled doorward.

"Hold on, fatty!" called out Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Eh?" Billy Bunter blinked round through his big spectacles. "I'm not going to lend you anything, Wharton!"

"You howling ass!" roared the captain of the Remove.

"I'm jolly well not!" declared Bunter firmly. "Only yesterday, you refused to cash a postal order for me, though I told you I was expecting it by every post."

"You blithering bloater——"

"You can't expect it!" said Bunter.

"Will you let me speak, you howling chump? I was going to say——"

"Oh, I know what you were going to say," grinned Bunter, "and you can save your breath. You ain't having any of this!"

There was a chortle from the group of juniors. The expression on Harry Wharton's face, at the moment, was quite entertaining.

"You—you—you—you bloated, blithering bandersnatch!" gasped the captain of the Remove. "I was going to say that you'd better read your letter before you blow that postal order. Your pater may have sent it for something special."

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter.

He had not thought of that.

But it was, in fact, extremely probable.

It was so very unusual for a tip of a whole "quid" to arrive for Billy Bunter, that it was much more likely than not that it was sent to him to make some necessary purchase, or something of the kind. In which case, it certainly behoved Billy Bunter to peruse his father's letter before he "blew" that postal order.

"That's all, fathead!" snapped the captain of the Remove, and he went out into the quad with his friends.

Billy Bunter rolled out of the House rather more slowly. With a postal order for a pound in his fat hand, his fat little legs almost carried him to the tuckshop of their own accord.

But he realised that Wharton's advice, though unpalatable, was good. He stopped in the quad, unfolded Mr. Bunter's letter, and blinked at it through his big spectacles.

Then he ceased to beam.

He ceased to gloat.

He ceased to grin.

He almost groaned.

Mr. William Samuel Bunter's letter ran:

"Dear William,—Your Uncle George is coming to stay with us this week. I have written to your headmaster, and arranged leave from school for you, as I desire your uncle to see you while he is here. You will come home on Thursday morning, and I enclose a postal order for £1—One Pound—to pay for your return ticket on the railway.

"Your affectionate father,

"W. S. BUNTER."

Bunter blinked at that letter. His face, generally as broad as it was long, was now longer than it was broad. It looked, indeed, almost as long as a fiddle.

"Oh lor'!" groaned Bunter.

That postal order was not a "tip." It was booked for his railway ticket. Leave from school—getting out of work for days—was attractive—but it did not console Bunter at that awful moment.

The vision of a whole quid's worth of tuck had dazzled him. Now it was gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream.

"Oh lor'! Oh crikey! Oh crumbs!" groaned Bunter.

He did not head for the school shop, after all. It was useless to head for the school shop, when that postal order had to be retained for his railway fare on Thursday morning. He just groaned.

Nobody looking at Billy Bunter's fat face then would have guessed, from

its expression, that his celebrated postal order had arrived at last. He looked as if he found life a weary, dreary burden.

THE SECOND CHAPTER..

Pon Is Too Playful!

"WHEN are you fellows going?"

"When we start."

"Well, when are you starting, fathead?"

"When we go!"

"If you think that's funny," roared Billy Bunter, "I don't!"

The Famous Five of the Remove seemed to think it funny, for they chuckled. Billy Bunter evidently did not, for he frowned.

Harry Wharton & Co. were at the school gates after class. They were in coats and hats, and evidently going out. Billy Bunter joined them there, also in coat and hat—also, apparently, going out. The chums of the Remove were waiting for somebody to join them; but not, it seemed, for Bunter.

It was a fine afternoon for November. The weather was uncommonly good for the time of year, and looked like keeping so, which was very satisfactory, in view of the fact that the football match at Highcliffe was

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**Once a thief, always a thief  
... at least, so thinks  
Vernon-Smith. His firm belief  
is that Skip, the new Re-  
movite, is at heart the same  
dishonest young rascal that  
he was before he came to  
Greyfriars—and he means to  
prove it!**

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due on the morrow. Harry Wharton & Co. were discussing that fixture—an important event in the Remove—when Billy Bunter happened.

Billy Bunter was not interested in football matches at Highcliffe School, or anywhere else. He was interested in the fact that the Famous Five were going over to Cliff House to tea. He saw no valid reason why he should not be present at that function. The circumstance that he was not included in the invitation from Marjorie & Co. was a trifle light as air to Bunter.

"I say, you fellows, what are you waiting for?" he demanded.

"A few minutes," said Bob Cherry.

"Eh? Wharrer you mean?"

"I mean that we're waiting for a few minutes."

"You silly ass! I mean, who are you waiting for?"

"Then you shouldn't," said Bob, shaking his head. "Whom, my dear porpoise—whom? What would Quelch think of your grammar?"

"Will you stop being a funny ass?" hooted Bunter. "Look here, if we're going to walk over to Cliff House, the sooner we start the better. It's a jolly long walk. Who—I mean, whom are you waiting for?"

"Skip!" answered Harry Wharton.

"Oh, rot!" said Bunter. "You don't want him. You can't take a fellow who's been a pickpocket over to Cliff House. Smithy thinks he's a pincher now, just the same as he was before he came here."

"Smithy wants booting! Shut up!"

"Well, I'm not down on the chap, since he pulled my sister Bessie out of the river," said Bunter. "But I can't say I want him with me at Cliff House."

"That's all right," said Bob Cherry. "He won't be with you at Cliff House, old fat man!"

"Wharton says he's coming——"

"Yes; but you're not, so that's all right!"

"Beast!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here he comes!" exclaimed Bob, as an active figure came cutting across from the House.

It was Skip of the Remove, his chubby face bright and cheery.

Vernon-Smith, loafing in the quad with his hands in his pockets, gave him a scowl in passing; but Skip did not even see it.

The fellow who had once dwelt in Slummock's Alley, and who, as all the Remove knew, had been a pick-pocket before he came to Greyfriars, had plenty of friends in his Form now, and he gave little heed to the Bunder and his enmity.

"Ere I am!" said Skip cheerily, as he joined the juniors waiting at the gates.

"What did Quelch want?" asked Bob.

"Only going over a hexercise," said Skip, whose English was still rather that of Slummock's Alley than of Greyfriars School. "If you blokes are ready, off we go!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Good-bye, Bunter!"

"Beast!"

Good-byes were of no use to Bunter. As the Famous Five and Skip walked out of gates, the fat Owl of the Remove rolled after them.

There was only one objection that Bunter could see to his joining the party for Cliff House. That was that it was over a mile to walk.

But for the sake of the spread, Bunter was prepared to face even that tremendous exertion.

There being no other objection, that Bunter could see, he joined up. Six juniors walked away down Friardale Lane at a brisk pace, and the fat Owl rolled in their wake, putting his best foot foremost, so to speak. For about a hundred yards he kept pace; then a breathless squeak reached the ears of the juniors ahead.

"I say, you fellows, don't gallop! What's the good of hurrying like that, you silly asses. Look here, if you're going to race like that, I jolly well shan't come!"

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Put it on, you men!" he said.

And the juniors, grinning, put it on. They had been walking briskly, and Billy Bunter had had to go all out to keep pace. Now they broke into a trot, and the fat Owl was left almost standing.

"I say, you fellows!" he yelled.

"Good-bye, old blonter!"

"Beast! Wait for me!" howled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co. did not wait. They accelerated. When they looked back five minutes later, they spotted, in the far distance, a fat figure leaning on a fence, gasping for breath.

That was their last view of Bunter.

Not, apparently, fearfully depressed by the loss of the fat Owl's fascinating company, they walked cheerily on down Friardale Lane, to take the footpath through the wood to Cliff House.

They had nearly reached the stile,

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when a cyclist came in sight from the direction of the village ahead.

Fine as the weather was, there had been plenty of rain recently, and the country lane was muddy. A good deal of mud splattered from the wheels of the bike as it came whizzing on.

"That's Pon," said Bob Cherry. "Keep clear of his jigger. That Highcliffe cad would like to splash us."

It was Cecil Ponsonby, of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe School, who was coming along on the bike.

Skip gave him an inimical glare.

"I know that bloke," he said. "Him and two more was 'elping Smithy to rag me on Courtfield Common one 'arf-'oliday. They 'ad me in the mud, when Miss Bullivant come along and stopped them. I've a good mind to 'ave him off that bike, and give him some mud for hisself."

"Hold on!" said Harry Wharton hastily.

"He ain't a friend of yours?" asked Skip.

"No fear! But we're playing football at his school to-morrow, and you're coming over to see the game, so we don't want a row."

"Oh, alright!" said Skip.

But he eyed Ponsonby very grimly as the dandy of Highcliffe came along.

Ponsonby glanced at the group of Greyfriars juniors by the roadside, with the supercilious expression on his face that often made fellows want to punch his head. He slowed down a little, his eyes specially on Skip.

Pon had not forgotten that rag on Courtfield Common, any more than Skip had. True, the raggers had had the best of it, and Skip had been in a parlous state when Miss Bullivant, the games-mistress of Cliff House, had happened on the scene and rescued him. But in the tussle Skip's knuckles had damaged Pon's aristocratic nose rather severely. It had been sore for a week afterwards, and was still a little red.

The Greyfriars juniors had drawn to the side of the lane, giving the cyclist plenty of room to pass.

Pon, as he came abreast of the group, made a sudden and unlooked-for swerve towards them.

He released his left hand from the handlebar, and grabbed the cap from Skip's head as he passed.

The next instant he had shot onward, waving the cap in the air, and laughing. The bike was out of reach at once.

Skip gave a yell.

"Smoky 'addocks! Look 'ere! Gimme my cap, you silly idjit!"

He rushed in pursuit of the bike. The Famous Five stared after him. Skip had no chance whatever of overtaking a fellow on a bike. But he rushed in fierce pursuit.

Ponsonby, laughing, looked back at him, waving the cap.

"Gimme my cap!" yelled Skip.

"Come and fetch it!" chortled Pon.

This little jest on Skip seemed tremendously funny to Pon. But a moment later it ceased, all of a sudden, to be funny.

Looking back, while he rode holding with only one hand, was rather perilous on a muddy, greasy road. The bike suddenly skidded.

"Oh!" gasped Pon.

He dropped the cap and clutched at the handle-bars as he went wildly rocking. But he could not save the spill. The bike crashed over on the edge of the ditch, and Pon shot off it—into the ditch.

Splash!

"Oh, my 'at!" gasped Skip.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell from the

Famous Five, watching that little scene, from a distance, with great entertainment.

"Oooogh!" spluttered Pon.

There was plenty of water in the ditch beside Friardale Lane. There was plenty of mud under the water. Pon landed in the ditch.

Skip picked up his cap, jammed it on his head, and chortled. He walked back to rejoin his friends, and the Greyfriars party walked on to Cliff House, laughing as they went.

Pon was left wallowing in water and mud and no doubt wishing that he had not been quite so playful.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Bunter Bags For It!

"HE, he, he!"

Thus Billy Bunter.

William George Bunter, as he came rolling slowly and breathlessly along the lane, looked peeved.

The Famous Five and Skip had long been out of sight, and Bunter had little hope of overtaking them before they reached Cliff House School. He still hoped to be in at the death, as it were—that is, to arrive before the spread was over. But he was peeved, and his fat brow was frowning as he rolled—till suddenly, coming to a halt, he grinned in a state of great amusement.

It was the sight of a wet, muddy, dreary, draggled figure that caused that explosion of merriment on Bunter's part.

He blinked at Ponsonby of Highcliffe through his big spectacles and at the bike sprawling in the muddy lane.

Pon was scraping off mud.

He had crawled out of the ditch after the Greyfriars juniors had left him—and ever since he had been scraping.

Mud clothed him like a garment. His boots were full of it. It caked his trousers. It splashed the rest of him. He was of the mud, muddy!

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "I say, is that you, Pon? He, he, he! Been mud-collecting? He, he, he!"

Ponsonby glared round.

His face was crimson with fury and with exertion. The dandy of Highcliffe was very particular about his clothes. They were in a really awful state now. His temper was in a worse state still!

He was not in a mood to be chuckled at with impunity—especially by a Greyfriars fellow—and that Greyfriars fellow no fighting-man! His eyes gleamed from a mud-splashed face at Bunter with a deadly gleam.

"You fat, sniggering rotter!" he gasped.

"He, he, he!" chortled Bunter. "Had a spill? I say, Pon, you look muddy! I say, you look a sketch! He, he, he!"

Pon ceased to scrape mud, and made a step towards him.

Then Bunter, realising his danger, promptly backed away. Ponsonby would have been glad to punch anybody just then—especially any Greyfriars man. And the fat Owl of the Remove was almost as defenceless as a punch-ball.

"Here, you keep off, you beast!" gasped Bunter, in alarm; and as Pon came quickly towards him the fat junior took to his heels.

Pon rushed in pursuit.

Billy Bunter put on a spurt—rather wishing that he had not stopped to chortle at the muddy Highcliffian. For about a dozen yards Bunter went like a steam engine. Then wind failed him, and he had to slow down.

As he slowed, a hand gripped the collar of his overcoat from behind.

"Ow! Leggo, you Highcliffe cad!" yelled Bunter.

Pon did not let go. He tightened his grip. The fat Owl was dragged to a halt. He blinked through his big spectacles in great alarm at Ponsonby's red, furious face.

"I—I—I say, you leggo, you beast!" he gasped. "I—I'll ask Bob Cherry to lick you if you don't leggo!"

Smack!

Pon's right hand came with a terrific smack on Bunter's fat ear, and he staggered, with a fearful yell. Then Pon's left hand came with an equally terrific smack on his other ear and righted him again.

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter.

He tottered dizzily.

Had Pon left it at that Bunter would have scudded, and been glad to get away. But Pon did not leave it at that. He seemed to find solace in smacking Billy Bunter's fat head. He went on smacking it—hard.

Smack, smack!

"Ow! Keep off, you beast! Yaroooh! Rescue! Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as the dandy of Highcliffe smacked and smacked.

Then, in sheer desperation, the fat Owl of the Remove hit out.

Pon did not seem to be expecting that.

He was landing another terrific smack when a fat fist jolted on his chin, and, with Bunter's weight behind it, it was a hefty jolt.

Ponsonby staggered back and almost fell.

Bunter flew.

Pon, for a moment, staggered, his hand to his chin, which felt as if it had been pushed through his head. But only for a moment. Then he flew after Bunter. If Pon had been enraged before, he was doubly and trebly enraged now.

This time Bunter covered about twenty yards before he was grabbed again by the collar of his coat. But he was grabbed!

But this time Pon did not smack his head. He whirled the fat Owl towards the ditch by the roadside.

With a swing of his arm he sent Bunter stumbling and tumbling in.

Splash!

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter, as he landed, sitting down.

Pon had landed on his feet when he went in, and the water had washed over his knees. Bunter landed sitting down, and the water flowed round his fat neck.

"Urrrrrrgggh!" gurgled Bunter. "Wurrgh! Groooogh! Help me out, you beast! Woooooch! Urrgh!"

Ponsonby grinned at him for a moment, and then walked back to the spot where he had left his bike. Bunter was left squirming in the ditch.

He scrambled to his feet.

Spluttering and gasping and gurgling, the hapless fat Owl scrambled out of the ditch and landed, breathless, in the lane—streaming with water and oozy mud. Mud streamed from him.

"Ooogh!" gasped Bunter. "Oh! Ow! Beast! Wow! Groooogh!"

Ponsonby mounted his bike and rode away in the direction of Highcliffe. Billy Bunter stood like a pillar of mud, spluttering. Pon had been in an awfully muddy state—so muddy that Bunter could not help chortling. Bunter was in a muddier state—much muddier—but he was not feeling inclined to chortle. It was fearfully funny to see another fellow smothered with mud, but in a fellow's own case, of course, there was nothing funny in it—quite the reverse!

"Oooooooggh!" mumbled Bunter. "Grooogh! Oooogh!"

He tottered away—not in the direction of Cliff House. Even Bunter realised that he could not present himself at Cliff House School in this state.

Neither was he disposed to walk the remaining mile in an overcoat drenched and dripping with mud—even for the sake of a spread in the school-room, with, in all probability—a large cake! Bunter headed for Greyfriars. He wanted a change even more than he wanted a feed.

Bounder's thoughts had been a good deal occupied with his feud with Skip—but he forgot all about feuds and bitterness and rancour when he was on the football field.

That, at least, was so much to the good. His incessant enmity towards the waif of the Remove was irritating enough to the Famous Five, who had made friends with Skip. But in Soccer, at least, they could pull with the Bounder. And the captain of the Remove was anxious to avoid disagreement so far as he could, for Smithy was

he was as straight as a die now, and all the fellows knew it. Only the Bounder was determined not to acknowledge it—but, to his intense chagrin, he found that his feud with Skip did not prevent the new fellow from making friends—it had the unpleasant effect of making Smithy himself unpopular.

Fellows were fed-up with it, and they told the Bounder so in plain language, which only added to his bitterness and his determination to "show up" the pincher if a chance ever came his way.



"Oh!" gasped Pon. He dropped Skip's cap and clutched at the handle-bars as he went rocking. But he could not save the spill. The bike crashed over, on the edge of the ditch, and Pon shot over it. "Oh, my 'at!" gasped Skip.

Shedding mud at every step, he tottered in at the gates. Fellows in the quad stared at him and grinned.

"Been for a swim with your clobber on?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Urrgh! Beast!" groaned Bunter.

He tottered on dismally to the House, leaving the Bounder laughing.

At Cliff House School, Harry Wharton & Co. rather wondered whether Billy Bunter would blow in before they left. But he did not blow in. While Marjorie & Co. were entertaining their schoolboy friends Billy Bunter was scraping off mud—and tea at Cliff House was over long before the hapless fat Owl had finished scraping.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

No Soccer for Smithy!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH glanced round, in break the following morning, at a group of juniors in the quad with a bitter sneer on his face.

That morning most of the Remove fellows were thinking of the match at Highcliffe booked for the afternoon.

Smithy was thinking of it as much as any other fellow—he was a prominent member of the Remove eleven, and he was a keen footballer. That term the

a man who could not be spared from the team.

It was a cheery group on which Smithy's sneering glance fixed. The Famous Five were standing there, with Peter Todd, Squiff, Tom Brown, and one or two more of the footballers—and Skip!

Skip's face was bright and cheery.

His first days at his new school had been cloudy—the Remove, rather naturally, had not taken to a fellow who was known to have been a pickpocket before he came to Greyfriars.

The fact that he had saved Coker of the Fifth from having his "nut" cracked, and that Coker's aunt had taken him up, did not seem to the Remove a good reason for letting so very extraordinary a new fellow into their Form.

They had, in fact, ragged Horace Coker when it was learned that his Aunt Judy had persuaded the Head to give the boy from Slummock's Alley a chance at Greyfriars.

But that was all changed now.

Only the Bounder still "barred" Skip, and still believed, or affected to believe, that he was the dishonest young rascal he had formerly been.

New associations had washed out the effect of the training the waif had received at the hands of "Barney the Binger." Whatever Skip had once been,

At the present moment, the Bounder was lounging by himself, with his hands in his pockets, while Skip made a member of the cheery group. Certainly he was welcome to join that group, if he liked—but he did not choose to join in any conversation in which Skip took part. A bitter sneer came over his face, as he heard Harry Wharton speaking to Skip in cheery, friendly tones.

"Get over on your bike, old bean, and see the game! Lots of the fellows will be coming over."

"Wot to!" said Skip. "I got a Latin paper to do for Quelch, but I'll get over and see you play, you bet!"

Vernon-Smith walked across to the group. The sneer was more pronounced on his face, as he joined them.

"Better wash that out, Wharton!" he said coolly.

The captain of the Remove glanced round at him.

"Wash what out?" he asked.

"That fellow going over to Highcliffe. It's pretty thick, I think, to have a pickpocket here in our Form at Greyfriars—but showing him off at another school is the limit."

Skip's face crimsoned.

"Oh, shut up, Smithy, for goodness' sake!" exclaimed Bob Cherry angrily. "Can't you ever let that rest?"

"Don't be a fool, Smithy," said Harry

Wharton, "and don't butt into what doesn't concern you. I don't suppose any man at Highcliffe has ever heard anything about Skip, anyhow—"

"Wrong!" said the Bounder coolly. "I've got friends at Highcliffe, and I haven't kept it a secret."

"You might have kept your silly mouth shut," snapped Wharton. "Does that mean that you've spun the yarn to Pon and his gang?"

"Exactly."

"Then you ought to be jolly well booted!"

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not keeping the fellow's shady secrets for him," he said. "Lots of Highcliffe fellows know—Pon and his pals, at least. We don't want to be chipped, over there, about having a pickpocket in our school."

"Shut up, Smithy!" said several voices.

Skip's lip trembled.

"If you blokes think I better not come—" he said in a low voice.

"Rot!" said Harry Wharton. "Smithy ought to be booted for tattling about you to Highcliffe fellows; but it makes no difference. You're not likely to see Ponsonby there, anyhow—he has nothing to do with football. More likely to be pub-haunting on a half-holiday."

"You're jolly well coming over, fat-head," said Bob Cherry, "and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Smithy, you swab!"

"I'll come all right, if you blokes don't mind," said Skip.

"Of course you'll come!" said Harry Wharton.

"Look here—" began the Bounder.

"That's enough from you, Smithy!" interrupted the captain of the Remove curtly. "Shut up!"

"I tell you—"

"Shut up!" exclaimed five or six voices.

The Bounder crimsoned with anger and mortification. Every fellow there was against him—on the side of the boy from Slummock's Alley, who had once been barred by the whole Form.

"Well, I've got this to say!" shouted Vernon-Smith, quite losing control of his temper. "If that pickpocket goes over to Highcliffe, I don't—and you can find another man to play!"

The Bounder's angry voice was heard by a good many fellows in the quad, as well as by the group he was addressing. It reached, among others, the ears of a tall, angular gentleman who was walking under the elms. And Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, spun round, and fixed his gimlet-eyes on the group on the quad, with a glint in them.

"I mean that!" Vernon-Smith's voice was loud and furious. "I won't be seen at Highcliffe with that thieving rascal—that pickpocket—that pincher from a slum—"

"Vernon-Smith!"

That cold, cutting voice interrupted the Bounder's angry tirade. He gave a gasp, as he swung round and stared at Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob.

Sudden silence fell on the group of juniors. The Bounder, reckless as he was, had certainly not intended his angry words to reach his Form-master's ears. But clearly Mr. Quelch had heard every one of them.

His glinting eyes fixed on Herbert Vernon-Smith.

"Vernon-Smith! How dare you utter such unworthy taunts to a boy who, ever since he has been in this school, has been as upright and honourable as any other boy in my Form. You should be ashamed. Vernon-Smith you will re-

main in detention this afternoon until five o'clock. And if I hear another such word from you, I shall cane you."

With that, Mr. Quelch walked on—leaving the Bounder dumb with dismay.

The other fellows looked at one another in silence.

"Well," said Bob, at last, "that's torn it!"

"You fool, Smithy—"

"You silly ass!"

"You goat!"

The Bounder made no reply. He tramped away in silence, with a black and bitter brow. He had not meant his hasty words—nothing, if he could have helped it, would have kept him out of the Highcliffe match. But he had to be taken at his word now—and he had to take himself at his word. Smithy did not look as if he was enjoying life, when the bell rang, and the Remove went on for third school.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Man Wanted!

"I SAY, Harry, old chap—"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter!"

"You needn't bite a fellow's head off, Wharton—"

"Dry up!"

The captain of the Remove was, evidently, not in a good temper. He seemed to have no patience to waste on Billy Bunter.

He was, in fact, utterly dismayed—as well as the other footballers. Almost any other man in the team could have been better spared than Smithy.

The Highcliffe match was no easy proposition. Frank Courtenay, the junior captain of Highcliffe, was a good skipper, with as good a team as the Remove men ever faced. They needed their very best men for that match—and Smithy was one of the very best.

His threat to stand out of the game, if Skip went over to Highcliffe, was "gas"—merely that and nothing more; as all the fellows knew. But Quelch's sentence of detention was a much more serious matter. Smithy's "gas" would not have made much difference—but an order from the Remove master made all the difference in the world.

After dinner that day, the Remove team were getting ready to start—they had to be early at Highcliffe. And they had to go without the Bounder. The Bounder had to go into detention when the footballers started for Highcliffe. And every man in the team felt like kicking him before he started.

At such a time, the captain of the Remove was in no mood for Billy Bunter's entertaining conversation.

"Do listen to a fellow, Wharton!" he yapped. "You've got to leave Smithy out of the team, as he's got himself detained—"

"Yes, ass! Shut up!"

"You'll want another man, you fat-head!" hooted Bunter.

"I know that. Get off!"

"If you're thinking of playing Nugent I—"

"Yes—buzz away!"

"Well, I think it's rot!" said Bunter, with emphasis. "I know Nugent's your pal, and you're glad of a chance to play him—but leaving out a better man to play your own pal, ain't Soccer. See?"

"You fat, frumpious fathead—"

"You can call a fellow names!" retorted Bunter. "But Soccer's Soccer, all the same! You've got a better man than Nugent."

"Well, who?" snapped Harry irritably.

He did not expect much in the way of sense from the fat Owl, on the subject

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of Soccer. Bunter's Soccer consisted chiefly in dodging games practice whenever he could! Still, any fellow was entitled to offer an opinion—especially as the skipper was far from satisfied with his choice.

Wharton was keen enough to play his best pal, so far as that went. Nugent was a good man, too. But he was nowhere near the Bounder's form, as Harry knew only too well. He was as good a man as was available to take the Bounder's place, that was all.

"Who?" repeated Harry. "Hazel's off colour; Bolsover's no good, except at back, and not much good at that; Wibley can't play Soccer for toffee, though the fathead thinks he can; Newland's not bad, but—"

"What about me?"

"You!" yelled the captain of the Remove.

"Me!" said Bunter. "I'm willing to play for the Form! I'm going home on leave to-morrow, and the fact is, I'd be glad to mention to my uncle that I'd just played for the school. He's keen on games, and it might mean a good tip!"

"You—you—you—" gasped Wharton.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Bunter, "if Uncle George sprang a liver. Well, I'm willing to play. Jealousy apart, you know jolly well that you've got a good man in me."

"Will you shut up, you frabjous idiot, when a fellow's worried?"

"No, I won't!" said Bunter. "In a case like this, when I might get a really decent tip from my uncle—I mean, when you're hard up for a really good man—I think that personal jealousy ought to be put in the background. You don't like playing a man who can put you in the shade. I know that. But in the circumstances, I can jolly well say—yaroooooooooop!"

Bunter was interrupted by a grasp on his fat neck, and he finished his remarks with a wild roar as he sat down in the quad.

He seemed to have exhausted the patience of the captain of the Remove.

"Ow! Beast! Yahoooo!" roared Bunter.

Harry Wharton walked away and left him roaring. Evidently, he was not going to adopt Billy Bunter's brilliant suggestion for solving the difficulty.

Whether it was due to jealousy of Bunter's wonderful form at Soccer, or to some other reason, there was no room for the fat Owl in the Remove's football ranks.

Frank Nugent met his chum, as he went towards the House, with a ruffled brow. There was a rather whimsical expression on Nugent's face. He was keen and eager to play; but it was not exactly exhilarating to be regarded in the light of a more or less unsatisfactory makeshift!

"What about it, old chap?" he asked.

"That fool, Smithy—"

"Oh! Yes! But if you want me—"

"It can't be helped, I suppose."

"Thanks!"

Even the good-natured Nugent could not help a certain dryness of tone.

Wharton looked at him.

"Don't you be an ass, old chap," he said. "You know I'd rather play you than that sneering, snapping, disgruntled fathead, Smithy any day, if it were a matter of choice. But you know Smithy can play your head off at Soccer."

"I know," assented Nugent. "But I—"

"It can't be helped. Oh, that fool—that ass—last week he got detention, when we were playing the Shell, and

now he's asked for it again—the silly, cheeky, blithering—"

"Go it!" said a sarcastic voice.

Wharton stared round—at the Bounder.

"You're welcome to hear my opinion of you," he snapped. "All this term you've been making a fool of yourself, with your silly feud against a chap who only wants to keep you at arm's length. Now you've dished us. You know you're wanted in this game, and it's like you to swank on it."

The Bounder coloured a little.

"I never really meant—"

"I know you didn't. It was gas!" said Wharton contemptuously. "All right, if you hadn't yelled it out for Quelch to hear. You can gas as much as you like, and no harm done. Who the dickens cares a boiled bean for your hot air? But you've got yourself detained, and that tears it!"

"I'm ready to play, all the same."

"Oh, don't talk rot!" howled the exasperated football captain. "How can you play? Think you can walk out of detention, and that Quelch will let you?"

"I'll take the risk of cutting—"

"Oh, shut up! Would you like Quelch to come after you and yank you off the field under the eyes of all Highcliffe? He would do it like a shot! You're out of the game. Go and eat coke!"

"I'll come, and chance it—"

Wharton gave him a glare of concentrated wrath. It was like the Bounder, after recklessly landing in trouble, to fall back on defiance of authority as a resource. But the captain of the Remove had no use for the Bounder's wild and hot-headed escapades.

"If you show up at Highcliffe we'll boot you home again!" he said. "You've caused bother enough, Vernon-Smith, without playing the goat and causing more. Look out for the booting of your life if we see you at Highcliffe."

"Look here—"

"Go and eat coke!"

Wharton turned his back on the Bounder and walked away with Nugent.

Smithy cast a dark look after him. He was out of the game, and that was that—and, to do the Bounder justice, it came as hard to him to let the other fellows down as to cut the match himself. But there was no help for it—and the fact that he had only himself to thank for it was no comfort to him at all.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Good for Evil!

SKIP came along Masters' Passage to his Form-master's study—and stopped. He raised his hand to tap, lowered it, raised it again—and still stood hesitating. Finally, making up his mind, he tapped.

"Come in!"

Skip entered—to meet a grim frown on Mr. Quelch's brow.

But that frown cleared off immediately as the Remove master saw Skip. He had been expecting to see Vernon-Smith, who was due for detention.

A kind smile took the place of the frown.

"Come in, my boy!" said Mr. Quelch graciously. "What is it? You wish to ask me something about your exercise?"

All Mr. Quelch's doubts and misgivings, on the subject of that peculiar new member of the Form, had worn away during the weeks Skip had been at the school. He had doubted the Head's wisdom in acceding to Miss Judith Coker's urgent request to give

Skip a chance as a Greyfriars boy. But he doubted no longer.

He had had a very careful, and, at first, a very doubtful, eye on Skip. But everything he had observed had been to the boy's credit.

Twice Skip had fallen under suspicion of having reverted to his old ways—and each time it had proved to be a mistake. Mr. Quelch now had complete faith in him. And Skip was such a hard worker that he could not help feeling pleased with him. Already the boy was catching up with the Form work, and thus making things easier for his Form-master.

On this Wednesday afternoon, though it was a half-holiday, Skip was going to put in an hour at a Latin exercise—as he often did in his leisure time. The Bounder was pleased to sneer at it as "swotting," but Mr. Quelch had a good opinion of a boy who was not satisfied to lag behind the rest of his Form.

Skip had no exercise in his hand, at the moment; it was not that that had brought him to his Form-master's study. He stood rather confused, with the colour in his cheeks, and his eyes downcast.

Mr. Quelch gave him a look of rather perplexed inquiry. Apparently Skip had something to say, which he found it difficult to utter.

"If—if you'll excuse me, sir," blurted out Skip. "If you won't think it a cheek me asking you, sir—"

Mr. Quelch smiled encouragingly.

"What is it? You may speak out, Skip," he said kindly.

"It—it's about Smithy, sir—I mean Vernon-Smith!" stammered Skip.

The Remove master's brow darkened again. He was quite aware of Smithy's relentless "down" on the new junior, and was as irritated by it as many of the Remove fellows were.

"Has Vernon-Smith—" he began, and paused.

Skip was not the fellow to come to him with a complaint; neither would Mr. Quelch have been very willing to listen to one.

"I mean, about the football, sir!" stammered Skip. "I—I know it's a cheek to come 'ere to speak to you, sir, like this 'ere, but—but—it being 'cause of what Smith said to me that he's in detention, sir, I—I thought—"

His voice trailed away under his Form-master's surprised stare.

"Kindly be more explicit!" said Mr. Quelch, rather sharply.

"I mean, sir, it ain't only Smithy himself, but all the blokes want him in the football match at 'Ighcliffe," said Skip. "I know it's a cheek to ask you, sir; but if you could let 'im off—"

"Let him off!" repeated the Remove master. "I fail to understand you, Skip. Vernon-Smith has been punished, not severely, for a serious fault—"

"Yessir! But—"

"You were the victim of his unfeeling and unmannerly taunts!" said Mr. Quelch sharply. "Naturally, I can allow nothing of the kind!"

"Yessir!" mumbled Skip. "I know, sir! But—but I don't mind what he says, sir; and it being 'cause of me, I thought p'r'aps you might let him off, as they all want him over at 'Ighcliffe for the football match. I—I know it's a cheek to come 'ere and ask you, sir—"

Skip's voice trailed off again, and he stood with his eyes on the carpet and his cheeks burning.

Mr. Quelch looked at him across his writing-table, with a stern brow—which, however, gradually relaxed.

"You are asking me to pardon

Vernon-Smith for his offence?" he rapped.

"Ye-es, sir, if you'll excuse me!" stammered Skip. "Seeing as all the blokes want 'im over at 'ighcliffe this afternoon—"

"Has Vernon-Smith asked you to come here and make this request?"

Skip started, and stared.

"Oh, no, sir! He don't never speak to me; he don't like me! He wouldn't ask no-favour of me."

Mr. Quelch was silent, regarding the waif of the Remove curiously. He spoke at last.

"I will consider what you have said to me, Skip. You may leave my study."

"Yessir!" mumbled Skip.

And he went, leaving Mr. Quelch with a very thoughtful expression on his face.

A few minutes later there came another tap at the door, and Herbert Vernon-Smith entered.

He came in, with a sullen, sulky face. The footballers were already preparing to depart without him. Had Wharton been willing, the Bounder would have gone with them and chanced all that would have followed. As it was, he had come in for detention—in his blackest mood.

Mr. Quelch looked at him coldly. He did not like the Bounder's sulky expression or his manner of half-suppressed, resentful insolence. But he addressed him quietly:

"Vernon-Smith, please ask Wharton to come to my study!"

The Bounder gave him a quick look. He had expected to be walked off to the Form-room with a detention paper. This unexpected command gave him a glimpse of hope. His sulky face cleared a good deal.

"Yes, sir!"

He hurried away.

In two minutes or less the captain of the Remove presented himself in the study.

The Bounder lingered in the passage in a state of mingled hope and doubt—feelings that were shared by Harry Wharton.

"You are aware, Wharton, that Vernon-Smith is under detention this afternoon, and you know why," said Mr. Quelch. "Skip has asked me to overlook his offence."

"Skip has?" ejaculated Harry.

"I am disposed to accede to Skip's request," said Mr. Quelch. "If it is correct that Vernon-Smith is an essential member of your eleven—"

"Oh, yes, sir!" said Harry eagerly. "He's one of our very best men; we can hardly do without him."

"In that case, Wharton, you may tell Vernon-Smith that his detention this afternoon is cancelled."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove.

The relief in his face brought a smile to Mr. Quelch's.

Wharton's face was very bright as he left the study. He cut down the passage at a run.

Smithy was waiting at the corner.

"Well?" he asked.

"It's all right; you're let off. Get your things—and hurry up!"

"Good egg!"

The Bounder rushed away.

Harry Wharton went out of the House. The footballers were already in the quad, waiting for the coach that was to take them over to Highcliffe.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the jolly old news?" asked Bob Cherry, as the captain of the Remove joined them.

"Wherefore that beatific grin?"

Harry Wharton coughed.

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"Smithy's coming, after all!" he said.

"Oh, good!"

"Fine!" said Nugent.

"Oh! Sorry, old man, but you know—"

"I know!" said Nugent, with a grin.

"It's all serene, fathead! I'm jolly glad Smithy's got off! But what on earth made Quelch let him off?"

"Skip asked him."

"Skip?"

"Yes—just Skip."

"By gum, that was jolly decent of the kid!" said Johnny Bull. "Can't see Smithy doing it for him!"

"He's a decent chap!" said Harry. "I should think even Smithy would get that into his silly head after this! Anyhow, Smithy's coming, and we're jolly well going to beat Highcliffe!"

"Hear, hear!"

And when the coach rolled away, Herbert Vernon-Smith was in it with the rest of the eleven—much to his own and the general satisfaction.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Painful for Pon!

GOAL!

"Good old Smithy!"

"Urrah!" chirruped Skip.

The Highcliffe game was going strong. Courtenay and his merry men were at the top of their form, and immediately the game started Harry Wharton was deeply thankful that he had the Bounder in the ranks.

All through the first half the game was hard and fast, but neither side succeeded in getting through. But just after the interval the Bounder scored for his side, and there was a joyous roar from Greyfriars men round the field.

A good many Remove men had come over on bikes or by the motor-bus, and had dropped in during the first half. Among them was Skip, who had cut across on his bike immediately he had finished that Latin exercise.

The interval was just over when Skip arrived, and he was in time to see Smithy pot the pill—which delighted him as much as if the Bounder had been his best friend instead of his worst enemy.

Skip had no cause to like the Bounder; but he had plenty of cause to like Harry Wharton & Co., and he knew how keen they were to have Smithy in the side for the match at Highcliffe. He was glad, from the bottom of his heart, that he had screwed up his courage to speak to Quelch, and that he had succeeded in getting Smithy off detention. And as the Bounder put in the ball for Greyfriars, Skip shouted as loudly and enthusiastically as any other Remove man on the field.

"Goal! Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Ip-!p-!urrah!" chortled Skip.

"Old Smithy's brought his shooting boots!" remarked Bolsover major.

"Good old Bounder!"

"Bravo, Smithy!"

The Bounder's face was bright as he walked back to the centre of the field after the goal. Smithy loved the lime-light, and he was getting it.

The sides lined up again, and the game went on—hard and fast. It was a strenuous game between two good teams, with little to choose between them for quality. But Greyfriars were ahead, and they were keeping ahead. Again and again the Highcliffe men came down like wolves on the fold, but Squiff in goal was a tower of strength, and every time the attack had to peter out.

Skip stood watching, with a bright and cheery face. But the bright look faded off his chubby countenance as he heard a drawling voice behind him:

"Mind your pockets, you fellows!"

He stared round, his face darkening. It was Pon's voice.

Ponsonby, with his friends, Gadsby and Monson, had come down to the field to give the match a look-in. Their interest in Soccer was slight; but Pon had spotted Skip among the Greyfriars fellows who had come over to watch the game; and the good Pon was not likely to lose an opportunity of making himself unpleasant to a fellow he disliked.

Skip's eyes gleamed at the dandy of Highcliffe.

Ponsonby & Co. were grinning. According to what Smithy had told them, this fellow who was called Skip had been a pickpocket. They had backed up Smithy in ragging him, and had been rather damaged in the process, especially Pon. So they were quite pleased to see him on the Highcliffe ground, and to make themselves obnoxious.

"You talking to me, face?" growled Skip.

Pon gave him a supercilious glance.

"Not at all," he replied. "I was simply warnin' my friends to mind their pockets, as there are pickpockets about."

"Meanin' me?" snapped Skip, his face reddening.

"Look here, you Highcliffe cads, you shut up!" called out Bolsover major. Bolsover was always ready for a row, and Pon & Co. were asking for one.

"My dear chap," drawled Ponsonby, "if you bring pinchers and pickpockets over here—ooooogh!"

Pon got no further.

Skip made a sudden stride at him, grabbed at his nose, and gripped it with finger and thumb.

Pon gurgled as his nose was pulled.

"Ooooooogh! Goooooogh! Led do by dose!" he gurgled, "Ooooooogh!"

"Oh, gad!" gasped Monson. "You cheeky cad—"

Ponsonby struck furiously at Skip.

Skip, grinning, released his nose—leaving it crimson, with a pain in it—and stepped back.

"Now you 'old your row!" he said. "If you don't like a bloke, you can keep your blooming distance! 'Old your row!"

Ponsonby came at him like a tiger, his face flaming.

It had not been his intention to provoke a scrap—Skip was too hard a hitter for Pon to scrap with him, if he could help it. But having his aristocratic nose pulled, in sight of a crowd of fellows, was too much for Pon. He came at Skip with blazing eyes and clenched fists hitting out furiously.

Skip's hands went up at once. In a moment they were fighting.

Dozens of fellows, who were watching the game, turned their heads, to stare at the sudden outbreak of hostilities.

Gadsby and Monson made a move, to come to the assistance of their leader—but Bolsover major barged in at once, with his big fists clenched.

"Fair play, you Highcliffe cads!" snorted Bolsover.

And Gaddy and Monson backed away, promptly enough, from the burly, brawny Removite. Pon was left unassisted—and he was badly in need of assistance.

A jolt from Skip sent him staggering back, and he sat down, suddenly and hard, on the earth.

He scrambled up, red with rage—but he did not come on again. He stood panting, his eyes burning, but his brief courage had petered out.

"Come on, old covey!" said Skip.

"You ain't finished yet, are you? Smoky 'addocks! You started in a blooming 'urry, but blow me tight, if you ain't in a bigger 'urry to leave off!"

Pon made a step towards him—but stopped. With a burning face, he turned away, and walked off the field—Gadsby and Monson following him, exchanging a covert grin as they did so.

It was not the first time that Pon's insolence had landed him in trouble that he had not the courage to face when it came.

fellows were glancing at him, and whispering to one another.

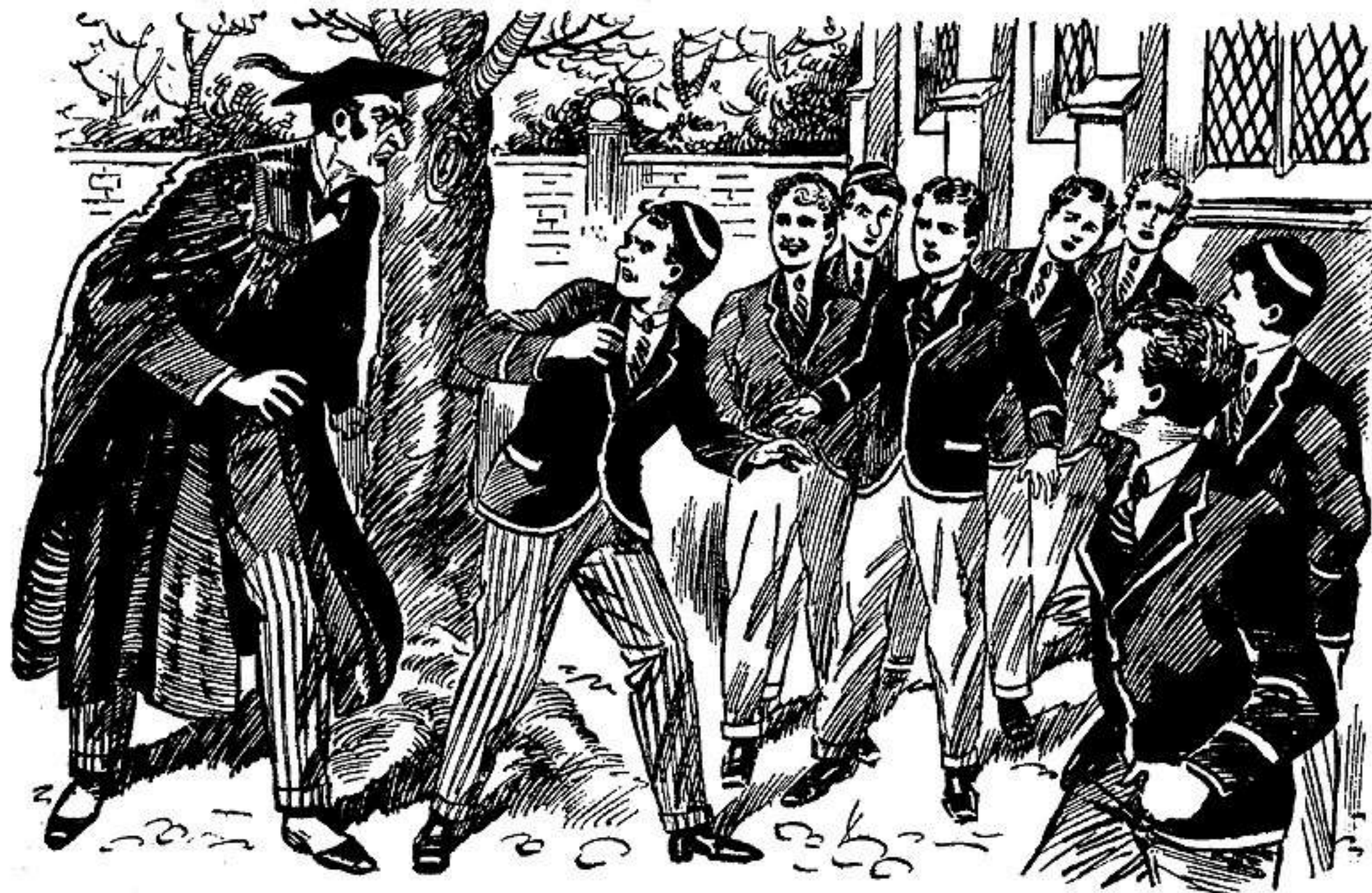
Vernon-Smith had the ball, and the Remove forwards were going down the field in great style. The Bounder centred to Harry Wharton, who shot for goal, and beat the Highcliffe custodian: and again there was a roar round the field.

"Goal!"

But Skip's voice did not join in it. He did not see the goal, and hardly heard the shout that followed.

Neither alternative was any use to Bunter. He was short of cash—with the exception of the postal order which was booked for his railway fare on the morrow, so he could not tip Trotter. And he was too lazy to brush the coat himself. So there it was—still caked with mud.

Bunter, however, was the fellow to think of other resources. It was Billy Bunter's way if he wanted a hat or a handkerchief, or a pair of socks, to annex the same from the fellow who was least likely to kick him.



"If Skip goes over to Highcliffe, I don't!" said Vernon-Smith, losing control of his temper. "You can find another man to play in my place! I won't be seen at Highcliffe with that thieving rascal—that pickpocket—that pincher from the slum!"

"Vernon-Smith!" The Bounder spun round and stared at Mr. Quelch.

Skip stared after them, as they went. "My eye!" he said. "What a blooming funk!"

The words reached Ponsonby's ears—but they did not make him turn back. Crimson with rage and humiliation, he tramped away, followed by his grinning friends.

Skip shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, as he turned back to watch the game. But the cheery look was gone from his face now.

A good many Highcliffe fellows were staring at him, curiously, and his cheeks burned as he noted it. Bolsover major who had chipped in to see fair play, moved off to a little distance—and Skip did not need telling why. His chubby face was clouded.

At that moment, his feelings towards the Bounder were bitter enough. With his strange past, he had a hard row to hoe in his own school—but it was the Bounder's enmity that had made his history known at Highcliffe—but for Smithy, Pon & Co. would have known nothing about him.

The game was going on, hard and fast—but Skip was no longer watching it. He was sorry that he had come over to Highcliffe at all, and he was thinking of getting away at once. Pulling Pon's nose was a satisfaction in its way—but it did not alter the fact that Highcliffe

He walked off the field, went back to his bicycle, and pedalled away. The Soccer match at Highcliffe went on, no longer watched by the waif of the Remove. Skip, with a clouded brow, was pedalling homeward to Greyfriars.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Borrows a Coat!

"BEAST!" murmured Billy Bunter.

He was looking at his coat—and thinking of Ponsonby. That coat was fearfully muddy.

It was dry—so far as that went. But it was muddy from the collar to the tail!

Billy Bunter was not awfully particular about his garments—he was, indeed, rather slovenly. His knees were generally baggy, and his elbows shiny, and his hat always wanted brushing. Still, even Bunter could not take his walks abroad in a muddy coat like that. That coat needed brushing—it needed quite a lot of vigorous brushing, before a fellow could wear it again.

Bunter had a choice of resources, in such a case. He could tip Trotter to brush the coat clean, or he could brush it clean himself.

There were other coats hanging up in the lobby, and it was merely a question of choice.

Bunter would have preferred Lord Mauleverer's for, besides being a very handsome coat, Mauleverer never kicked him. Unfortunately, Mauleverer had exerted himself, that afternoon, to the extent of going over on the motor-bus to see the game at Highcliffe, and as it was a cold November day, he had naturally gone in his coat.

Nugent's would have been Bunter's next choice—Nugent being a good tempered fellow. But Nugent had gone over with the team—in his overcoat.

There was, in fact, rather a shortage of overcoats, as most of the fellows were out, and most of them had gone in their coats. Some, however, who had gone on bikes, had not put on overcoats—and Skinner & Co. had not gone out at all—cold November weather and football matches having no attraction for the slackers of the Remove.

Bunter did not think of borrowing Skinner's coat, however. A kicking was an absolute certainty if he did. He hesitated between Hazel's and Skip's.

Both were quite good, warm overcoats: but Hazel's was rather the larger of the two, and therefore more useful.

to Bunter, who had a considerable circumference to button it round.

So, having decided on Hazel's coat, he proceeded to squeeze himself into it—and his fat arms were already in the sleeves, when Hazeldene came into the lobby—for his overcoat.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter, in dismay.

He wished he had started a little earlier. He had to get to Courtfield that afternoon, to cash the postal order at the post-office, and—still more important—to expend the sum of one-and-six at the bun shop. Careful calculation had revealed to Bunter that he could do the railway journey on eighteen-and-six!

He might really have started earlier—but he had been frowsting over the fire in the Rag—and Bunter had always found frowsting more attractive than walking.

"Where the dickens is my coat?" exclaimed Hazel, staring round. "Has some silly ass bagged my coat—why, you fat frog, that's my coat—"

"Is—is—is it?" stammered Bunter. "I—I—I thought it was mine, old chap—I wasn't going to borrow your coat because mine's all muddy. Look here, you beast, if you kick me again, I'll jolly well—yoo—hoooooop!"

Hazel jerked the overcoat away, planted his boot twice on Bunter's tight trousers, and walked out, putting on the coat as he went.

"Owl! Beast!" gasped Bunter.

The fat Owl wriggled painfully. Bunter had often been kicked—but somehow he had never grown to like it.

He decided on Skip's coat now. He crammed himself into the same, and rolled hastily out of the House.

After his experience with Hazel, he did not want to meet the coat's owner, while he was wearing the coat. Unaware that Skip had long since gone over to Highcliffe on his bike, the fat junior kept a wary eye open for him, as he rolled down to the gates.

Skip was not to be seen; and Bunter breathed more freely, when he was safe out of gates, and rolling up the road to Courtfield Common.

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Bunter, suddenly.

On the road over the common a cyclist appeared, coming directly towards him. It was Skip!

Billy Bunter gave him one blink, and promptly stepped off the road, into the cover of a clump of bushes.

It really was rotten luck, to run into the coat's owner like this.

Whether Skip, in passing, would recognise his property, Billy Bunter did not know—but he was not taking risks. It was quite probable, for that coat, which hardly met round Bunter's fat circumference, was obviously not his own—a fact that leapt to the eye.

Anyhow, it was safer to hunt cover till Skip had passed. Skip could hardly have spotted the coat from a distance, and Bunter sagely decided to dodge a closer view.

It was easy enough to park his fat person behind the bushes and wait till the cyclist had pedalled by.

Blinking through the interstices of the bush through his big spectacles, the fat junior watched the cyclist drawing nearer.

Skip was riding at a leisurely pace, and as he came closer, Bunter noticed that his face was clouded and thoughtful.

As he was coming from the direction of Courtfield, which was also the direction of Highcliffe, Bunter concluded that he had been over to see the football match. If so, he had evidently left early.

Bunter watched him impatiently, only anxious to see him pass, and to see the last of him.

But he was not destined to see the last of Skip so soon as he desired.

As he stood blinking impatiently at Skip, three more cyclists, at a distance behind the Greyfriars junior, came into his view.

They were not riding at a leisurely pace like Skip. They were going all out, and the jiggers fairly flew.

Skip, who did not look back, was unaware of them. But they were full in Bunter's view, and he recognised Ponsonby, Gadsby, and Monson, of the Highcliffe Fourth.

"Beast!" breathed Bunter, as he blinked at Ponsonby.

He was glad that he had got safely out of sight before the Highcliffians appeared on the road.

Pon & Co. looked as if they were pressed for time, but it was quite probable that they would have found a few minutes to spare for Bunter if they had met him on the road.

It did not occur to his fat mind for the moment that Pon & Co. were in pursuit of Skip, as he knew nothing of what had happened on the Highcliffe football ground that afternoon.

They were gaining fast on Skip, and looked like passing him before he passed Bunter.

Ponsonby was a little ahead of the other two. Even the short-sighted Owl of the Remove could see the bitter, vindictive expression on his face as he came nearer.

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Bunter, suddenly.

Almost abreast of the clump of bushes that hid the fat junior, Ponsonby overtook Skip.

But he did not, as Bunter expected, pass him.

He drew level with him, riding close, and then Skip, glancing round, saw him. At the same moment Ponsonby released his right hand from the handlebar and struck at the Greyfriars junior.

The lashing fist caught Skip on the ear and sent him spinning. Bike and rider went over together.

The bicycle crashed and clanged in the road, and Skip, flying helplessly from the saddle, bumped into the grass by the roadside.

He gave a yell as he landed.

Ponsonby jammed on his brakes and jumped down. Gadsby and Monson followed his example.

As Skip struggled up in the grass the three Highcliffians rushed on him, and Billy Bunter, behind the hawthorns, blinked at the startling scene with his eyes almost popping through his spectacles.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Not as per Programme!

"BAG the cad!" panted Ponsonby. "Got him!" grinned Monson. "We've got him all right!" chuckled Gadsby.

They had got him—there was no mistake about that. Skip, dazed by the crash in the grass, hardly knew what was happening to him for a moment.

Before he could get on his feet, Pon & Co. were on him.

As he struggled to rise they jammed him back in the grass, and Pon's knee was planted on his chest. Monson grasped one arm; Gadsby grasped the other.

Skip glared up at them, panting.

"Leggo!" he gasped. "Leggo a bloke!"

Ponsonby grinned down at him savagely. There was a pain in Pon's nose, and it was red and rather raw, but Pon had the upper hand now. Three to one, with nobody at hand to intervene on a lonely road, Pon & Co. were full of beans.

There was, it was true, someone at hand, though Pon & Co. were unaware of it—Billy Bunter, hardly a dozen feet away behind the bushes.

But Billy Bunter was not thinking of intervening.

With Pon & Co. in this warlike state, the fat Owl was only too glad to be out of sight. He sagely remained out of sight.

Not that his assistance would have been of much use to Skip.

Pon & Co. were not great fighting-men, but any one of them could have knocked Bunter out with a single punch. Perhaps Bunter realised that. Anyhow, he stayed where he was.

"Now, you hooligan!" said Pon, between his teeth.

"Leggo, will you!" panted Skip. "You rotten funk! I'll 'andle you fast enough if you'll let a bloke get up."

Ponsonby laughed. He was not likely to give up his advantage. It had seemed sheer luck to Pon, when he saw Skip ride away from Highcliffe on his own, leaving the rest of the Greyfriars crowd watching the finish of the football match. Pon & Co. had lost little time in getting out their bicycles and following.

On the football ground, where there were plenty of fellows to see fair play, Pon had not cared to carry the trouble further; but it was a different proposition if Skip was overtaken on the lonely road over Courtfield Common, with three fellows to handle him.

Now he was at Pon's mercy, and Pon was not feeling merciful. His lofty nose had been pulled in sight of fifty grinning fellows. What Pon wanted was vengeance, and now he was going to have what he wanted.

"Hold the brute!" said Pon, as Skip struggled and heaved.

"We've got him!" grinned Monson. "I say, what about yanking him along to the pond and pitching him in?"

"And his bike after him!" said Gadsby.

"All in good time!" said Pon. "You slum hooligan, you pulled my nose at Highcliffe!"

"I'll pull it again, too!" gasped Skip.

"Will you?" grinned Pon. "I fancy it's your own nose that's going to be pulled this time. Like that!"

He gripped Skip's nose between finger and thumb.

There was a muffled howl from Skip.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Gaddy and Monson.

"Oooogh!" gurgled Skip.

Pon, grinning, pulled his nose and tweaked it, and tweaked it again. Skip struggled frantically.

With Pon's knee grinding on his chest, and Gadsby and Monson gripping his arms, he had little chance.

Pon tweaked and tweaked. Pon was enjoying this. Skip struggled and yelled and gasped. He exerted all his strength; but, strong as he was, he could not throw off the Highcliffians.

Billy Bunter, behind the bush, blinked at the scene. He made a movement and stopped again. Bunter was no fighting-man and no hero, but it went against the grain to see a Greyfriars fellow handled like this by the young rascals of Highcliffe without lending him aid.

Almost did Bunter make up his fat mind to rush to the rescue, but not quite. Skip's nose was suffering severely. Bunter did not want his own

little fat nose to go through the same experience. He shivered at the thought.

Twice he moved, and twice he stopped. The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak.

Then, all of a sudden, there came a change in the scene. Skip, with a desperate wrench, dragged his right arm loose from Gadsby's grip.

Gadsby grabbed at it again instantly; but it was not the arm—it was the fist that he caught. He caught it with his chin, and went over backwards.

Look out!" yelled Monson.

Pon had no time to look out. Skip's fist lashed up at him, jolting on his jaw like a lump of iron. Pon rolled sideways and sprawled in the grass.

Monson let go and jumped away just in time.

Skip bounded to his feet like an india-rubber ball. He was hardly up when the three were springing on him.

But Skip, on his feet, was a different proposition from Skip down on his back with a knee on his chest. In the midst

of the three he was fighting like a wild-cat.

Ponsonby closed with him, clinging to him and punching. But at the same time Skip landed his right in Gadsby's eye, sending Gaddy sprawling in the road, where he stumbled over Skip's bike and crashed.

Gaddy was hors de combat!

Borne over by the other two, Skip went down in the grass again. But Pon and Monson went down with him, and

(Continued on next page.)

LEARN TO PLAY FOOTBALL!



THE REAL THING

THOSE of you who have been following these notes and doing as I have advised should be getting quite good at controlling and kicking a ball. Others of you, of course, will have been finding things a bit difficult. Don't worry if you have; some people do things quicker than others. It isn't always the quick ones, though, who are the best in the end, so keep on trying and practising.

However far you've got, I expect you are all anxious to start playing proper football. If you've been practising hard you should be ready to have a go at the real thing. But let me warn you, you are going to find it much harder to do the things I have been telling you to do in a game than when you are just practising. Don't worry about that, either. The more you play, the more easily you will be able to do the little dodges without thinking.

Most of you know that in football the eleven players in a team do not just wander about the field chasing the ball wherever it goes. They are given certain positions to fill. Each player, in his own position, has his job to do, and mostly he keeps to his own job.

Before you start playing proper games you will all have to decide in which position on the field you are going to play. One boy will be best for one position another for another. I only wish I could come and see you all play, and then tell you which position I think would be best for you. I am afraid I can't do that, though. The only thing I can do is to tell you about the positions, and what sort of players they require, and let you judge for yourselves from that.

Let's start from the beginning and take the goalkeeper first. I have an idea that not many boys like the goalkeeper's job, because there isn't enough work to do. Sometimes, of course, the goalkeeper, even in big football, has an easy time, and doesn't see much fun during a game, because he has to stay in his goal. Yet the goalkeeper's job is a very important one—and a very hard one, too. The boy who is going to be a goalkeeper ought to be tall—at any rate, tall enough to reach the cross-bar of the goal when he jumps up. He must be quick, and sometimes he will need to be brave to stop a ball which

Every man must be able to pull his weight if a football team is to be successful. One man in the wrong position may mean disaster. Has it occurred to you what position on the footer field you are best suited for? Our special contributor is ready to help you in this respect.

is kicked straight at him from close range. He must also be good at catching the ball.

DEFENDERS

PLAYING in front of the goalkeeper are two full-backs—a right full-back and a left full-back. I can't tell you this week how to play in every position on the field, as there are eleven of them, and it would take too much space. That can wait till later. Let's put it like this for the time being. The full-backs are there to keep the forwards of the other side away from the goal. If one of the opposing forwards has got the ball, the full-back must tackle him for it and kick it away out of danger. So the full-back must be a good tackler and a strong kicker. He doesn't always have to kick the ball as hard as he can, and nothing else, as I shall be able to explain later. But he must be able to kick hard sometimes. Altogether, the full-back's job is one for fellows who are pretty big and strong.

After the full-backs we have the half-backs. Funny name, isn't it? It means all that it says—and a bit more. The half-backs have two separate jobs to do—help the full-backs to stop the other forwards, and help their own forwards to score goals. In other words, they have to work hard.

A lot of people think that half-backs have to work harder than anybody else on the field. We won't argue about that; but to be a half-back you must be fast, so that you can be both a full-back and a forward almost at the same time. You must be extra good at controlling the ball and at passing it. You see, the half-backs help the forwards by passing the ball to them as much as they can. If the passes go in the wrong place, or too high, or too hard,

the forwards won't be helped very much, will they?

ATTACKERS

NOW we come to the place which, I suppose, is the most popular among boys—the forward line. Don't think I blame you for all wanting to be forwards. Goals are the things which count in football, and everybody wants to be the one to score them. That's quite natural, although later on I hope to be able to show you that the people who don't score many goals—the half-backs and full-backs—do just as much towards goal scoring as the forwards who actually get the goals. But that's a bit complicated for the moment.

I think I had better take the forward positions separately. The outside-right and the outside-left are the ones who play near the touchlines. Most good wing men, as they are called, are very fast runners. I think of Joe Hulme, of Arsenal, who is, perhaps, one of the fastest men who ever played football. But speed alone doesn't make a wing man. You must have ball control as well, good shooting, and a strong kick to get the ball into the middle.

The inside forwards—these are the inside-right and the inside-left—are the players who, along with the half-backs, are sometimes called the hard workers of football. Their job is rather like the half-back's job. A lot of players in big football to-day have started as half-backs, and changed to inside forwards, or the other way round. The only thing that can help you to decide whether to be an inside forward or a half-back is your shooting. If you can shoot extra hard you may be a better inside forward than a half-back.

The only position I haven't touched on is centre-forward, the favourite of all. Surprising that it should be, as in big football, at any rate, the centre-forward has a hard time—knocks and bruises. He must be strong, fast, a good shot, and he certainly must be able to use both feet.

So there you have the lot. Now sit down, think which position you might fit best, and try that one. But I shouldn't stick to one place if I were you. Move about a bit and make sure you find your best position.

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the three rolled over, struggling breathlessly.

"Oh crikey!" breathed Bunter, as he watched with popping eyes.

Skip did not need help now!

A jolt in the ribs, that felt like the kick of a mule, laid Monson gasping in the grass.

Pon was left alone to handle the waif of Greyfriars.

Skip struggled to his feet, with Pon's head under his arm. Pon, with his head in chancery, yelled frantically, as Skip punched at his features.

He tore himself loose at last, and jumped away.

Skip stood panting.

"Come on!" he gasped. "Come on, the lot of you!"

But Pon & Co. did not come on again. Gadsby was already getting on his bike. Monson staggered up, and tottered towards his machine. Ponsonby yelled to them.

"Back up! Come on, I tell you!"

Gadsby shot away on his bike. He had had enough, if Pon had not. Monson was hardly a moment after him. He also had had enough.

And Pon, the next moment, realised that he, too, had had enough, as Skip advanced on him, and he made a rush into the road for his machine.

Skip rushed after him.

Pon reached the bike—as Skip reached Pon! Skip's foot shot out, and landed on Pon's elegant trousers.

The dandy of Highcliffe yelled, and pitched forward, nose-diving over his bike.

Skip gave a breathless chuckle.

"Ave some more!" he gasped.

Pon, clearly, did not want any more. He scrambled up, dragged up the jigger, and threw himself upon it in hot haste. He shot away after his friends, leaving Skip grinning.

Skip rubbed his painful nose. But he grinned as he rubbed it. Three to one, Pon & Co. had had no doubt of being able to handle the waif of Greyfriars. But the boy from Slummock's Alley had proved too tough for them. He remained victorious—grinning after the heroes of Highcliffe as they flew.

"Blooming funks!" gasped Skip.

And he picked up his bike, mounted, and rode away for Greyfriars.

Not till he had disappeared up the road did Billy Bunter emerge from cover—grinning from one fat ear to the other.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Just Like Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER chuckled.

Pon & Co., going as fast as they could drive their bikes, had vanished in the direction of Courtfield. Skip had disappeared in the opposite direction—without spotting Bunter in his coat. So it was all right for Bunter.

The fat Owl chuckled gleefully.

His own part in the episode had not been fearfully creditable. Even Bunter realised that. Still, as it had turned out, Skip had not needed help.

He had beaten the Highcliffians, one against three, and put them to flight. And Pon & Co.'s defeat was a great satisfaction to Bunter.

After what Pon had done the previous day, Bunter would have been very glad to get Pon's head into chancery. Skip had had it in chancery, which was really just as good; and every thump on Pon's features had been a happy satisfaction to Bunter.

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"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter. "Hallo, whose is that?"

In the trampled grass by the roadside, where the struggle had taken place, a handkerchief lay—which had evidently dropped from the pocket of one of the combatants.

Bunter stooped to pick it up.

If it was Skip's, he would return it to him; if it belonged to one of the Highcliffians, it could remain where it was.

The initials, "R. G.," in a corner of it, showed that it was Gadsby's, and Bunter let it fall into the grass again.

As he did so, a gleam from the trampled grass caught his eye—a gleam of gold.

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Bunter.

He stooped again, and picked up the gleaming object. It was a gold wrist-watch. The strap had broken—and the watch had fallen in the grass, unnoticed in the struggle.

Bunter blinked at it.

He knew that gold wrist-watch—a rather uncommonly valuable article for a schoolboy to wear. He had seen it, often enough, on Pon's wrist.

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Bunter. "The silly ass! Leaving a gold watch here for anybody to pick up!"

Really, Pon was not to blame for that. The strap had snapped in his frantic struggle with Skip, and Pon had been too busily occupied with Skip's punches on his features to notice his loss. And his departure had been very hurried.

Bunter blinked at the watch—and blinked up the road, the way the Highcliffians had gone.

Pon & Co. were long out of sight.

The fat Owl stood with the watch in his hand, perplexed to know what to do with it.

Gaddy's handkerchief he could leave where it was—but he could hardly leave a gold watch lying by the roadside, to be picked up by the first tramp who came along.

Finally, he slipped it into his overcoat pocket, and rolled on his way to Courtfield.

On a half-holiday, he was quite likely to see some Highcliffe fellow in Courtfield, to whom he could hand the watch to be returned to Pon. Otherwise, he could hand it over to Smithy, who was on pally terms with those Highcliffe cads, and who could take it back.

Leaving it at that, the fat Owl rolled on to Courtfield, where he entered the post office in the High Street, and duly cashed his pater's postal order.

With a pound note in his possession, he made his cheerful way along to the bun-shop.

It was Billy Bunter's fixed intention, when he sat down in the bun-shop, to expend the limited sum of one-and-sixpence, reserving the balance of that pound for his journey-money on the morrow.

Such was Bunter's intention—but between intention, and the carrying-out thereof, there was a great gulf fixed.

Bunter was hungry. That was his usual state; and a walk across the common in cold November weather had made him hungrier.

Tuck to the value of eighteenpence vanished in a matter of seconds.

Almost before he knew what he was doing, the fat Owl had exceeded the limit. He had hardly taken the edge off his appetite, when a hasty calculation brought home to his fat mind the fact that he was indebted to the bun-shop to the extent of four-and-six.

He paused.

But his pause was brief.

In the midst of foodstuffs, and with

cash in his pocket, it was not easy for Bunter to stop. Perhaps, too, he remembered the ancient proverb, that one might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. Anyhow, he carried on.

After all, he did not need the money till the morrow morning. Lots of things might turn up by then. Bunter had a hopeful nature.

A postal order might turn up by the first post—perhaps. He might borrow something up and down the Remove. As a last resource, he might explain to Mr. Quelch that he had lost his journey-money; in which case Mr. Quelch could not do less than provide the same.

That was a very last resource, as, of course, Mr. Bunter would be required to reimburse the Remove master—which meant trouble for Bunter on the home front.

Anyhow, there was Bunter, surrounded by enticing eatables, with a whole pound—and somehow—Bunter hardly knew how—his bill came to the exact amount of twenty shillings before he left off.

He was feeling much better in one way, but rather worried in another, when he rolled out of the bun-shop, with a pound's worth of tuck parked in his capacious interior.

It had been a happy feed—a glorious spread. But Bunter could not help feeling rather worried about his railway-fare for the morrow.

Naturally, with that worry on his fat mind, he forgot all about Ponsonby's wrist-watch in his overcoat pocket.

But he was reminded of it by the sight of a couple of Highcliffe juniors in the High Street. They were Vavasour and Drury—two pals of Pon's—of the Highcliffe Fourth.

Bunter blinked at them, and remembered the watch. He rolled up to them, with his hand in the overcoat pocket.

"I say, you fellows—" began Bunter.

He got no further.

Vavasour and Drury, of course, had not the faintest idea that Bunter had picked up a watch belonging to their pal and wanted to hand it over.

They had already spotted Bunter, and were considering whether to knock his cap off, when he rolled up to them—fairly asking for it, as it were.

Drury promptly knocked his cap off. Vavasour, grinning, gave him a shove, and he sat down on the cap.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. "Ow! Beasts! I say—ow!"

Vavasour and Drury, chuckling, walked on.

Billy Bunter scrambled to his feet, fielded his cap, and glared after them, with a glare that might have cracked his spectacles.

Then he resumed his homeward way—without bothering to look for any more Highcliffe fellows. He had had enough of Highcliffe fellows. Pon could wait for his watch, and be blowed to him!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Smithy Is Late!

"COMING, Smithy?"

"No!"

Harry Wharton compressed his lips a little, and the Bounder smiled sarcastically.

It was a cheery party that packed into the coach for the return to Greyfriars. Almost on the stroke of time the Caterpillar had put in the ball for Highcliffe; but the score stood at two to one, and it was a victory for the



Skip grabbed Ponsonby's nose and gripped it between finger and thumb. "Oooooooooogh! Gooooooooogh!" gurgled the Highcliffe junior. "Led do by dose! Oooooooooogh!" "If you don't like a bloke," said Skip, "you can keep your blooming distance! 'Old your row!"

visitors—which was extremely satisfactory to the Remove footballers.

Harry Wharton just then was feeling unusually cordial towards the Bounder. The game had been a tussle from beginning to end, Courtenay's men fighting hard all the time, and the Bounder had been worth his weight in gold. Smithy had taken one goal for Greyfriars, Wharton had taken the other from a pass of Smithy's, and without the Bounder in the ranks, all the fellows knew that the result would probably have been very different.

So Smithy at the moment was a popular man. He had played the game of his life and done splendidly for his side. Even after the gruelling match he looked as fresh as paint. He had had quite an ovation from the fellows when they changed after the game; but when they got into the coach Vernon-Smith stood back, apparently not intending to return to Greyfriars with the team.

"Look here, Smithy, you'd better come!" said Harry Wharton.

"Think so?" smiled Smithy.

"Lock-up's early now, you know," urged Harry.

He did not need telling why Smithy was staying behind at Highcliffe—cards and smokes in the study of his precious pal, Pon.

"Oh, I'll be back for lock-up, all right!" said the Bounder. "Some chap here will lend me a bike."

"I wish you'd come," said Harry.

After that splendid game, in which the Bounder had shown first-class form and done better than any other man for his side, he hated to think of him in Pon's study, at cigarettes and banker. It was difficult for a healthy fellow like Wharton to understand that blackguardly kink in Smithy.

"You're awfully good," said the Bounder. "But the fact is I've promised

to see a fellow here after the match. Sorry and all that!"

"Oh, all right!" said Wharton curtly, and he left it at that.

Smithy strolled into the House as the coach rolled away with the Greyfriars team.

"Silly ass!" commented Bob Cherry.

"Rotten blackguard, you mean!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"I hope he won't be late for lock-up, and get into a row with Quelch," said Harry. "He played a ripping game to-day!"

"The ripfulness was terrific."

"His Soccer's all right!" said Johnny.

"But—" He completed the sentence with an emphatic grunt.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob suddenly, as three cyclists came past the coach. "If Smithy's stayed to see Pon, he hasn't found him at home. There's Pon!"

"Looks as if he's been in the wars!" remarked Nugent, with a grin.

Pon & Co. glanced at the Greyfriars coach as they passed, and Pon favoured the footballers with a scowl. The three knuts of Highcliffe certainly looked as if they had been in the wars.

Monson had come off best; but Gaddy had a blue bruise on his chin, and Pon's face was a study in damages. Now, in a tired and dismal and utterly disgruntled state, they were plugging wearily home on their bikes, when they passed the crowd of cheery footballers.

"Dear old Pon!" grinned Bob. "Always hunting trouble—and always finding it!"

He waved a cheery hand to Pon in acknowledgment of his scowl.

The coach rolled on to Greyfriars. Fellows who had biked over to see the match followed on their jiggers; but among them Skip was not to be seen, and the Famous Five rather wondered what had become of him.

"Skip came over, I suppose," remarked Bob Cherry. "He wouldn't be ass enough to let Smithy's rot keep him away."

Four members of the Famous Five had been too busy with Soccer to notice anything of the row on the football ground at Highcliffe, but Frank Nugent had seen it from a distance.

"He was there," said Nugent. "He got into a row with Ponsonby and his pals. I think he pulled Pon's nose."

"More power to his elbow!" grinned Bob. "But where is he now? Can't have stayed behind with Smithy for a game of banker with Pon."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think he cleared off after the row," said Nugent. "I didn't see him afterwards, anyhow."

Harry Wharton frowned.

"If there was a row, it was Pon's fault," he said. "Skip's peaceable enough if he's left alone. I suppose we shall find him at Greyfriars."

And they did. Skip was waiting for them when they came into the House. He gave them a rather sheepish grin as their eyes fixed on his damaged countenance. He looked almost as damaged as Pon.

"Ow did it go?" asked Skip.

"Two to one in our favour," answered Harry. "Why didn't you stay for the finish?"

Skip coloured uncomfortably.

"There was a row," he mumbled. "That bloke Ponsonby—I thought I'd clear off."

"You didn't collect that nose and that eye on the football ground at Highcliffe, surely!" exclaimed Harry.

"Oh, no! They come arter me when I left," said Skip. "Three of them—and they caught me up on the common, and there was a bit of a scrap."

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(Continued from page 13.)

"More than a bit, to judge by their looks when they passed our coach!" grinned Bob Cherry. "You don't mean to say that you handled the three of them?"

"Oh, they was blooming funks!" said Skip. "They was full of beans so long's they'd got a bloke down, but when a bloke got up you couldn't see their 'eels for dust! Pon got more'n I did, and chance it, and the other two got as much as they wanted." He rubbed his nose. "I say, I got tea ready in the study, if you blokes are ready for it."

"Ain't we just!" grinned Bob.

Over tea in the study Skip gave a fuller account of the scrap with Pon & Co.

Tea was hardly over when the bell rang for calling-over, and the juniors went down to Hall.

Two places were vacant in the ranks of the Remove when they went in. Vernon-Smith was not there, neither was Billy Bunter.

But at the last moment, before the doors were shut, Bunter rolled in.

Walking back from Courtfield—even with taking short cuts across the common—had been a long and laborious journey for the fat Owl. He had arrived just as Gosling was about to shut the gates. However, he got in, rolled breathlessly across to the House, left Skip's overcoat in the lobby, and bundled into Hall—just in time. He arrived panting.

But the Bounder did not arrive.

The doors were shut after Bunter had squeezed in, and if the Bounder came now he was too late for roll.

"Where's Smithy, you fellows?" whispered Tom Redwing. Redwing had been up to his home at Hawkscliff that afternoon. "Didn't he come back with you?"

"No; he stayed on at Highcliffe," answered Harry. "He said he would be back for lock-up, though."

"I say, you fellows—" whispered Bunter breathlessly.

"You seen Smithy, Bunter?"

"Oh, no! But, I say, can you lend me a pound?"

"You fat ass!"

"Eighteen-and-six would do."

"Fathead!"

"But, I say—"

"Silence!" called out Wingate of the Sixth.

Mr. Quelch was about to take the roll, and Billy Bunter shut up.

The Remove master called the names. When he came to that of Vernon-Smith there was no answer. The gimlet-eyes turned on the Remove sharply, and Mr. Quelch repeated the name. But there came no answering "Adsum!" The Bounder was not there.

Quelch was seen to compress his lips as he marked Vernon-Smith absent.

When roll was over, and the doors were opened again, Smithy was not to be seen. He was late—and it looked as if he was going to be later.

"The howling ass!" said Bob Cherry.

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"Too deep in banker, I suppose, to remember call-over here."

"Asking for it, as usual!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows." Billy Bunter rolled after the Famous Five. "I say, about that pound—"

But the chums of the Remove did not stay to hear about the pound. They accelerated, and left the fat Owl to waste his sweetness on the desert air.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Watch that Went!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH looked far from pleasant, as the door of Pon's study at Highcliffe opened, and Pon came in.

He had been waiting some little time—and he had expected to find Pon & Co. in the study waiting for him.

Pon & Co. apparently had forgotten that arrangement; anyhow, they were not there, and Smithy had to wait.

He waited with growing annoyance, but the study door opened at last, and the dandy of Highcliffe came in.

Smithy gave him an angry stare—which changed to a grin, as he saw Pon's face.

"Been scrappin'?" he asked. "I've been waitin' here."

Ponsonby gave him a glance, and crossed to the looking-glass, to gaze at his reflection therein. He had forgotten the Bounder, as a matter of fact, and his appointment with him, when he followed on Skip's track—and since the scrap on Courtfield Common, his mind had been too fully occupied with his damages for him to remember Smithy.

Neither did he care a straw if the scapegrace of Greyfriars had had to wait for him. He was, from a similarity of blackguardly tastes, friendly with Smithy—but that friendship, though often renewed, never lasted long. Pon's real feeling for Smithy was contempt for a "bounder" who was capable of that most unforgivable of sins, talking about money; while Smithy despised Pon still more heartily as a weak-kneed rotter and funk.

The Bounder did not conceal his amusement at Pon's damaged countenance. Pon scowled at it in the glass.

Pon was very particular about his looks—and his looks, now, were sadly marred. He scowled into the glass, and then scowled round at the Bounder. Smithy was, more or less, a friend of his—but he was in no mood to be civil to any fellow who belonged to Greyfriars.

"Did you forget fixing it up for me to see you here after the match?" asked the Bounder sarcastically.

"Yes, I did!" grunted Pon.

"Well, I'll clear, then!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "Sorry I stayed. Not much time left before lock-up at Greyfriars anyhow, now. Glad you seem to have been enjoying life," he added with a grin.

"I'll make that slum hooligan pay for this, somehow!" muttered Ponsonby, with another glance at the battered reflection in the glass. "You can grin, you cheeky fool; but I've heard from Skinner that he knocked you out, and you didn't want a second round."

"You've been scrapping with Skip?" exclaimed the Bounder. "By gad! That was askin' for it! He's a tough brute—that time we ragged him on the common, there were four of us, but we had our hands full."

"There were three of us this time!" snarled Pon. "But the brute seems as strong as a horse."

"You let him lick three of you!"

grinned Smithy. "Good old Highcliffe!"

"Oh, shut up!" snarled Ponsonby. Gadsby and Monson came into the study—Gaddy with his hand to his chin. They nodded to Smithy.

"Sorry, Smithy," said Gadsby. He was not quite so indifferent to good manners as Pon. "Not much time now for a little game. We've been in a scrap with that hooligan of yours—my chin feels as if a horse had kicked it."

"My ribs are nearly fractured, I think," said Monson. "No wonder the brute knocked you out, Smithy—I believe he could stand up to Tommy Farr." He glanced at Pon. "No time left for banker, Pon, what?"

"Hardly!" grunted Pon. He glanced at his wrist-watch—or rather, at his wrist, where the watch should have been. "Hallo! Where the dickens is my watch?"

"Your watch! Lost it?"

"Must have dropped it in that scrap, I suppose—I never noticed it," said Ponsonby. "I suppose the strap must have burst—" He broke off. "By gad! Did I drop it, though?" A sudden glitter came into his eyes. "Didn't you fellows see anythin' of it, if I dropped it?"

"We left in rather a hurry!" said Gadsby, with a faint grin. "I know I dropped my hanky, as I've missed it—but I never noticed it at the time, and I shouldn't have stayed to look for it if I had."

"Bother your hanky! That watch cost my pater fifteen guineas," snapped Ponsonby. "I'm not goin' to lose it. I—I wonder if that pickpocket had it?"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Monson.

"How could he?" said Gadsby uneasily. "We kept him pretty busy—"

"It's gone!" said Ponsonby viciously. "When a fellow's been in a pickpocket's clutches, and finds that he's lost a gold watch—"

"By gum!" said Vernon-Smith. "I wonder!"

His eyes gleamed.

"Sure it's gone?" he asked.

"Look, ass!" Pon held up his wrist.

"I mean, sure you had it on—"

"Of course I am."

"Pon had it on," said Monson. "I know that. If it's gone—"

"The fellow's a pickpocket!" said Vernon-Smith. "He's got everybody fooled at my school—excepting me. But—"

"He had it!" said Pon. "I'm jolly certain of that. He had it while I was struggling with the brute—he had my head in chancery, and he could have got it off me easily enough, if he's anythin' like what you've told us about him."

Vernon-Smith breathed hard.

He believed—he was determined to believe—that Skip was the same young rascal that he had been in his early days with Barney the Binger, and his later days with Jimmy the Rat.

A leopard could not change its spots, nor an Ethiopian his skin; that was how Smithy looked at it—and he did not realise that it was his bitter dislike of Skip that made him so determined to take that view.

His belief was that he was the only fellow who had too much sense to be taken in by an unscrupulous young rascal's humbug.

But he hesitated. Twice, in the belief that the boy from Slummock's Alley had pinched, he had accused him—and twice he had proved to be in the wrong.

Another reckless accusation, which might prove unfounded, was rather too serious a matter. Mr. Quelch had given him a very grim and stern warning on that subject.

"Do you think so, Smithy?" asked Gaddy.

"I think it's jolly likely!" said Vernon-Smith slowly. "I know he would pinch a gold watch, or anything else, if he had half a chance. But—"

"Well—but—" snapped Ponsonby.

"But we'd better go slow, and make sure!" said the Bounder. "I'm with you in this—I'd give a term's pocket-money to see that young scoundrel turfed out of my school. But—we've got to make sure. Look here, a few weeks ago, I missed my wallet, and, of course, took it for granted that he had it—but it turned out that that idiot Bunter had hidden it in a jar in my study. Another time, a banknote was picked out of my pocket—and then I hadn't the faintest doubt—but it was only that young ass, Wun Lung, playing one of his potty tricks. I had the rough edge of Quelch's tongue, I can tell you."

"My watch is gone!" said Ponsonby sullenly. "I can tell you that I'm jolly well not lettin' him keep it!"

"Make sure first!" said the Bounder. "You'd look a pretty fool, if you accused him, and it turned out to be all moonshine. It's quite likely that he had it—most likely, I believe—but it's quite likely, too, that the strap broke in the tussle, and it dropped. Look for it first, anyhow."

"Might have been picked up long ago, if it dropped!" said Gadsby.

"I don't see that!" said Ponsonby, at once. "We were in the grass, off the road—between the road and that clump of hawthorns. If it dropped, it dropped in the grass. Nobody going along the road would see it there—only somebody coming across the common and passing that clump of bushes close to the spot. If it dropped, it's still there."

"Cut out and see!" said Smithy. "I'll come—it's time I got back, anyhow. You'll have to lend me a bike!"

"Come on!"

The four of them left the study immediately. They hurried down to the bike-shed, and wheeled out their machines—the Bounder being accommodated with Drury's. They rode away from Highcliffe at a good speed.

Pon's face was dark and bitter as he rode.

Certainly, he would have been glad to get his lost watch back; but he would have been almost as glad to find that the pincher had pinched it, if it was possible to bring the theft home to him.

The Bounder had little doubt on the subject; but this time he was going to make assurance doubly sure—before he committed himself to another accusation against Skip. Gadsby and Monson both inclined to the opinion that the watch had dropped in the grass, and would most likely be found there.

They covered the ground fast, and arrived at the spot on the road over the common where the scrap had taken place.

It was easy enough to identify the spot by the clump of hawthorn-bushes that stood back a little from the road. And when they dismounted there were ample signs of the tussle to meet their eyes—boot-marks in the soil and trampled grass.

"This is the place," said Ponsonby.

The early November dusk was falling, but there was still plenty of light for a search. A glimmer of white in the grass caught all their eyes almost at once. Gadsby pounced on it.

"That's my hanky!" he said, holding it up.

Vernon-Smith's eyes gleamed.

"That's pretty plain proof that nobody's been along here and picked up the watch," he said. "If some tramp

was rooting about and found the watch, he would have picked up that hanky, too. Why shouldn't he?"

"Of course he would," said Ponsonby. "If we don't find the watch—now we've found Gaddy's hanky—"

"Let's look!"

With bent heads and watchful eyes the four of them searched, up and down and round about. All over the spot where the scrap had taken place, and for a considerable radius round it, they searched, but there was no sign of Pon's watch. In the deepening dusk they gave it up at last.

But that the watch was not there was a certainty. The only question was—what had become of it? And they had little doubt about that.

"He had it," said Ponsonby.

"Looks like it," agreed Gadsby.

"He had it all right," said Monson.

"A tramp would have pinched it if he'd spotted it, but he would have pinched the hanky, too. There's been no tramp here."

"By gad!" said Ponsonby. "I'll—I'll—"

"Hold on!" said the Bounder quietly. "I think the same as you fellows—I'm sure of it. But go slow. That watch hasn't been pinched by any tramp—the hanky being still here proves that. But somebody may have passed along and seen it, and taken it to the police station. Anybody who saw it would—and he wouldn't bother about a hanky."

"Oh!" said Ponsonby.

He realised that that was a very possible contingency, which he had overlooked in his haste to believe that Skip had robbed him.

"You don't want to make any mistake," said Vernon-Smith, in the same quiet tone. "Mind, I think the same as you do, but you've got to be sure. If that watch has been picked up and taken to the police station, you can find out by inquiring there. Better do that before saying anything."

Ponsonby nodded.

"I'm sure enough—still, we'd better be careful," he agreed. "We've got to get back now. We're late for lock-up as it is. I can phone the police station from Highcliffe. I know jolly well that they won't know anything about it there, all the same."

"If they haven't heard of it there

by to-morrow morn-

ing, that settles it,"

said Vernon-Smith.

"Better cut now.

We're all late."

They parted, Pon & Co. pedalling back to Highcliffe, and the Bounder keeping on to Greyfriars.

He had forgotten calling - over, or rather, disregarded it; but he cared little. He had a good excuse to give for being late—one, too, that his Form-master would not be pleased to hear, which was rather a satisfaction to Smithy.

He was, in fact, in a very satisfied mood as he rode on to Greyfriars. He knew—at least, he was certain that he knew—that Pon's gold wrist-watch

was, at that moment, in the keeping of a dishonest young rascal who, at long last, was going to be shown up and booted out of Smithy's school. And it was a satisfaction to the Bounder to have it proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that he was right, and everybody else wrong.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Quelch Is not Pleased!

WINGATE of the Sixth called to the Bounder as he came into the House—an hour late for roll, but cool as usual, and with a smile on his face.

"Vernon-Smith!"

"Yes, Wingate," said Smithy cheerfully.

"Go to your Form-master's study!"

"Just goin'," smiled the Bounder.

And he went.

Some of the Remove fellows who saw him go were surprised by Smithy's cheery and equable look. Fellows who came in an hour late for roll did not generally report themselves to their beak in such good spirits.

Mr Quelch's expression, when the Bounder arrived in his study, was not calculated to make him feel bucked. It was exceedingly grim.

"So you have returned, Vernon-Smith?"

"Yes, sir," said the Bounder meekly.

"You are an hour late," said Mr. Quelch. "I require an explanation of this, Vernon-Smith."

"Sorry, sir," said Smithy, in the same meek tone. "I've been delayed, helping a fellow look for a watch he'd lost."

"A Greyfriars boy, do you mean?" asked Mr. Quelch sharply.

"No, sir; a Highcliffe man."

Mr. Quelch's lips closed in a tight line. In such a matter as this the Bounder's word was worth nothing. He had no scruple whatever in "telling the tale" to a beak. Mr. Quelch, of course, was quite aware of that. And this excuse seemed to him one of the flimsiest he had ever heard.

"Indeed!" he said, very dryly. "And who was the Highcliffe boy, Vernon-Smith?"

"Ponsonby of the Fourth Form, sir."

(Continued on next page.)

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"If Ponsonby of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe, has lost his watch, Vernon-Smith, you are perfectly well aware that you have no right to disregard calling-over at your own school, to assist him in looking for it."

"Not in ordinary circumstances, sir," said the Bounder, still very meek. "But, in the circumstances, as it happened—"

"What circumstances?" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Ponsonby lost the watch when he was scrapping with a Greyfriars fellow, sir," explained the Bounder. "I thought that it might look rather rotten for my school if the watch wasn't found."

Mr. Quelch almost jumped.

"Vernon-Smith—what do you mean? I know the boy Ponsonby—a boy of whom I have the lowest opinion. Is it possible—is it even barely possible—that he would have the audacity, the impudence, to hint, for one moment, that a Greyfriars boy was capable of—"

Mr. Quelch gasped with wrath.

"Not any ordinary Greyfriars fellow, of course, sir," said Vernon-Smith.

"What do you mean? Who was the Greyfriars boy you refer to?"

"Skip, sir."

"Skip," repeated Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir. They seem to have heard about him at Highcliffe, and, as the watch was missing—"

Mr. Quelch breathed hard.

"You say that you helped Ponsonby search for his watch, Vernon-Smith?"

"Yes, sir; for a whole hour."

"Did you find it?"

"No, sir."

"Do you mean that the watch is still missing?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Quelch sat silent for a long moment looking at the Bounder. Vernon-Smith met his gaze with cool hardihood. The Remove master's face grew grimmer and grimmer.

"Tell me exactly what has occurred?" he said at last.

"From what Pon says, sir, he and a couple of friends of his came on Skip on Courtfield Common this afternoon, and there was a bit of a rag. It ended in a fight, and Pon had a struggle with Skip."

"You were not concerned in this, Vernon-Smith?"

"I was playing football at Highcliffe at the time, sir. Ponsonby told me after the match what had happened, and, in the circumstances, I thought that the sooner the watch was found the better."

"Do you mean that Ponsonby suspects Skip of—of having purloined his watch?" Mr. Quelch seemed hardly able to utter the words.

"I'm afraid so, sir, as he has heard that the fellow was a pickpocket before he came here," said the Bounder. "I went with him and his friends to the place where the watch had been lost, and we hunted for it for a long time. I thought that the strap might have broken in the tussle, and the watch had dropped."

"Very possible, indeed," said Mr. Quelch. "But you did not find it?"

"No, sir. We found a handkerchief one of the other fellows had dropped, but the watch was not there. I thought you would excuse me for being late, sir, in such circumstances," said Smithy, with great meekness.

"Certainly!" said Mr. Quelch. "But I have not forgotten, Vernon-Smith, that you have twice brought accusations against this unfortunate boy, both of

which proved to be absolutely unfounded."

"I'm not accusing him, sir," said the Bounder. "I advised Ponsonby to say nothing about the matter until he had inquired at the police station, in case someone might have picked up the watch and taken it there."

"That, at least, was very good advice," said Mr. Quelch, rather less grimly. "It is very probable that that will prove to be what has actually happened. I shall excuse you, in these circumstances, Vernon-Smith; but I warn you to say nothing on this subject, connecting the name of your Form-fellow with such a suspicion. If Ponsonby should have the impudence to bring an accusation, in which I do not believe for one moment, I shall know how to deal with him. But I will not allow you, Vernon-Smith, to spread such a story in this school."

"Oh, certainly, sir!" said the Bounder, biting his lip.

"I am well aware, Vernon-Smith, of your enmity towards this boy!" said the Remove master sternly. "You have shown it by twice accusing him—mistakenly, if not maliciously. I am assured that he knows nothing of Ponsonby's watch—neither do I feel at all sure that the Highcliffe boy suspects such a thing. If I find that there is any talk in my Form, connecting Skip's name with a supposed theft from a Highcliffe boy, I shall call you to a very strict account, Vernon-Smith!"

"I shall say nothing, sir," muttered the Bounder sullenly. "It's nothing to do with me—I'm not accusing him—"

"Take care that you do not," said Mr. Quelch. "I shall be observant in this matter, Vernon-Smith, and I warn you to be careful."

He made a gesture of dismissal, and the Bounder left the study, leaving his Form-master with a troubled frown on his brow.

Vernon-Smith smiled sarcastically as he went down the passage.

He was quite aware of what Quelch was thinking—that he was catching at straws to score over a fellow he disliked. The Remove master would have to change his tune when an accusation came from Ponsonby.

"I say, Smithy"—Billy Bunter met him as he came out of Masters' Passage—"I say, did you win?"

The Bounder stared at him.

"Haven't you heard, you fat ass? Two goals to one," he answered.

"Eh? I don't mean the football!" said Bunter irritably. "I mean, I heard that you stayed behind at Highcliffe. Did you win at banker?"

"Banker?" repeated Smithy blankly.

"Yes, with Pon—"

"You blithering, blethering bloater, I'll—"

"Oh, really, Smithy! I say, if you won off Pon at banker could you spare a quid for a pal? I—I've lost my postal order—and—and I say, Smithy—Yaroooooh! Beast!"

The Bounder grasped Bunter by the collar, twirled him round, planted his boot on the tightest trousers at Greyfriars, and walked on.

Bunter was left wriggling—and without a hope of raising that indispensable "quid" from Smithy whether he had won off Pon at banker or not.

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THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter in Quest of a Quid!

"I SAY, you fellows—"
"Good-bye, Bunter!"
"I'm not starting yet—"
"Sorry! Good-bye, all the same!"

"Beast!" hooted Bunter.

Whereat, the Famous Five smiled. Bunter, that cold November morning, was not smiling.

A fellow with leave off from school was entitled to smile. But Bunter was too worried even to reflect how gorgeous it was to get out of lessons for the remainder of the week.

The previous evening Bunter had gone up and down the Remove, like a lion seeking what he might devour, in search of that urgent, necessary, indispensable quid. He had found it not.

No fellow seemed to see any reason why he should part with a quid—in the rare case when he had one—because Bunter had "blowed" his journey-money at the bun-shop. Not even for the pleasure of losing sight of Bunter did any Remove man care to spring a quid.

Bunter's natural resource, in the distressing circumstances, was to apply to his Form-master. But that meant a row at home when it came to his pater's knowledge. As Bunter had asked for that row at home it did not seem to anybody else worth a pound to keep him out of it.

To Bunter it seemed worth a pound of anybody's money, and more. In vain, however, he strove to make the Remove fellows see this. They simply would not see it.

"I can't go without my railway fare, you fellows!" pleaded the fat Owl, with a pathetic blink at the Famous Five. "I can't bilk the railway company, you know! I mean, I might get spotted."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I say, I may get a really good tip from my Uncle George, and I'll square—"

"Good-bye!"

"I wish you wouldn't keep on saying good-bye, when I'm not starting yet. It's all your fault, Wharton, if I don't get a good tip from my Uncle George. It would have been a cert if he knew I'd played for Greyfriars—he's fearfully keen on games. Well, I offered to play, as you know. Besides, if I'd played yesterday I shouldn't have spent that quid at the bunshop."

"You shouldn't have, anyway, you fat fraud!"

"Of course, I was relying on my old pals to see me through, you know, and—"

"Well, perhaps they will!" suggested Bob Cherry. "Go and look for them, and ask them, anyhow."

"Beast!" hissed Bunter. Apparently the Famous Five were the old pals to whom Bunter alluded. "Look here—"

"Isn't your train going yet?"

"No; not till nine-thirty."

"Couldn't you catch an earlier one?"

"Beast! I say, you fellows, do be sports!" urged Bunter. "I've got to have a quid for my fare, and if I ask Quelch there will be a row at home. I owe Trotter a bob, too—"

"You fat villain, have you been borrowing from Trotter?"

"No!" roared Bunter. "Think he'd lend me anything—I mean, I hope I'm above borrowing from servants—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up cackling, blow you! I promised Trotter a bob for brushing the mud off my coat—you know that beast Pon smothered it with mud the other day. He's reminded me three



"If the missing watch is in one of the pockets of this coat, Vernon-Smith, as you state," said Mr. Quelch, in a grinding voice, "Skip will be sent away from Greyfriars as an unreformed thief!" Next moment he gave a gasp as he withdrew from a pocket the gold wrist-watch, with its broken strap.

times—just as if he thinks I may go off without tipping him his bob. It isn't half an hour since he cleaned the coat, and he's reminded me three times already—"

"Well, you shan't diddle poor old Trotter!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "We'll find a bob for Trotter."

"And what about the pound?"

"Nothing about the pound!"

"The fact is, I'd rather you lent me a pound for my journey-money than a bob for Trotter—"

"Not really!" gasped Bob.

"Yes, really, old chap! I say, you fellows, don't walk away while a chap's talking to you!" roared Bunter.

But the Famous Five did walk away.

Billy Bunter blinked round him in search of other victims. It was getting near time for him to start for Courtfield to catch his train, but he could not start with that problem unsolved. It was all right about the bob for Trotter, if that was any comfort to him. It did not seem much. It was the pound for Bunter that he was chiefly concerned about.

"I say, Toddy—hold on a minute, Toddy—just a minute—"

"Two if you like!" answered Peter Todd liberally.

"If you could lend me a quid, Toddy—"

"Certainly—"

"Oh, good!"

"If you can take it out of half-a-crown—"

"Eh?"

"And let me have two-and-six change!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

Peter walked on, grinning. The bell rang for first school, and Billy Bunter watched the Form go in. It was satisfactory, so far as that went, not to be going in to lessons with the rest. But

when every possible lender had disappeared into the Form-room the hapless fat Owl felt more forlorn than ever.

Evidently there was nothing for it but Quelch. Bunter had to fall back on that last, desperate resource.

As Mr. Quelch had gone to the Form-room with his Form, Bunter was too late to catch him in his study. He had to follow on to the Remove-room.

Mr. Quelch glanced at him in surprise as he presented himself there.

"Are you not gone, Bunter?" he inquired—a rather superfluous question, as Bunter evidently wasn't gone.

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Indeed! Well, if you are not going, you may take your place in the Form, Bunter!"

"Eh? Oh! I—I mean—"

"Take your place, Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch impatiently. "Please do not waste my time and the time of the Form."

"I—I—I mean, I'm going, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I—I haven't come in to Form, sir! I—I'm going, but—but I've lost my money, sir—"

"What?"

"I—I can't find my money anywhere, sir!" gasped the fat Owl. "I—I've looked all over the place for it, sir—and—and I can't find it! C-e-e-an you let me have my railway fare, sir? A pound—"

Mr. Quelch fixed him with a gimlet eye.

"Have you spent your journey-money, Bunter?"

"Oh, no, sir! I—I wouldn't, of course. I never went into the bun-shop in Courtfield yesterday, sir! I passed it without going in—"

"You spent your journey-money in the bun-shop in Courtfield?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, in a formidable voice.

"Oh, no! Not at all, sir! I—I wasn't in Courtfield yesterday! I went the other way—to Friardale! I mean, I never went out of gates at all!" gasped Bunter.

There was a chuckle from the Remove.

But Mr. Quelch did not even smile. He glared.

"Bunter, I shall advance the amount necessary for your fare, and acquaint your father with the fact! I am sorry to have to cane you before you start."

"Eh?"

"But I have no choice in the matter," said Mr. Quelch, taking up his cane. "Bend over that chair, Bunter!"

"But—but I never spent the money in the bun-shop, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I never went into the bun-shop at all! You can ask them at the bun-shop, sir—the waiter who served me will remember—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Bend over that chair, Bunter."

"Oh lor'!"

Whack, whack!

"Yow-ow!"

Billy Bunter rolled, wriggling, out of the Form-room.

He had his pound—the problem of transport was solved. That was satisfactory. But the fact that Mr. Bunter would stop that sum, later, out of his allowance, was not so satisfactory. He had two whacks from Quelch's cane, over and above—in which there was no satisfaction at all.

Still, as he strolled away to Courtfield he took comfort in the reflection that he was getting out of classes. That, at least, was so much to the good.

Moreover, as eighteen-and-six covered his travelling expenses, he was able to
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expend eighteenpence on toffee and chocolates to guzzle in the train.

So, as he sat in the train, homeward bound, the fat Owl of the Remove felt that life, after all, was worth the trouble of living.

He was half-way home when a sudden recollection, coming into his mind, made him ejaculate:

"Oh crikey!"

In his distressful stress of mind, ever since the expenditure of that pound, he had completely forgotten about Pon's watch. Now he remembered it.

"Oh crikey!" repeated Bunter.

That watch was still where he had left it—in the pocket of Skip's overcoat, hanging up in the lobby.

Bunter grinned.

If Skip wore that overcoat during his absence, and found the watch in his pocket, he would be astonished.

Bunter chuckled at the idea.

"He, he, he!"

After which, he continued his operations on the toffee, and dismissed the matter from his fat mind again.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Smithy the Detective!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH stood on the Remove landing after class that day, leaning on the banisters, with a knitted brow.

The Bouncer was thinking—hard!

Three or four fellows, passing him, called to him as they went down. But the Bouncer did not heed.

There was something "on" in the Rag, but Smithy was not interested in it. Wibley, the dramatic genius of the Remove, was giving one of his theatrical entertainments after tea, and all the Remove were gathering to give him an audience. But quite other matters occupied the mind of the Bouncer.

The Famous Five, and Skip, came across the landing together.

Smithy glanced at Skip as he passed.

"Come on, Smithy!" called out Bob Cherry. "Forgotten Wib's show?"

"I'll look in later!" answered the Bouncer carelessly.

The chums of the Remove went down—and Smithy's eyes followed Skip as he went with them.

He was wondering, sardonically, whether the pincher of Slummock's Alley had Pon's watch about him at that moment.

If not, where had he hidden it?

That he had taken advantage of that struggle with Ponsonby to pinch the wrist-watch, Vernon-Smith had no doubt whatever now.

He had seen Pon that day, and learned from him that inquiry at the police station had drawn blank. Nothing was known there of the lost watch.

Either it had been snatched in the struggle on Courtfield Common, or else it had dropped, and had been picked up by some passer-by.

The former was Smithy's fixed belief—and Pon's also.

But there was no proof.

Pon's idea was to come over to Greyfriars, openly accuse Skip of having pinched the watch, and demand a search of him and his belongings—which, he had no doubt, would reveal the missing article.

But Smithy doubted very much whether the headmaster of Greyfriars would order such a search.

More than an hour had elapsed

between the loss of the watch and the hunt for it by Pon & Co. and the Bouncer.

In that interval, if it had been left lying in the grass, anything might have happened to it.

Smithy was convinced that Skip had it—but he was no fool, and he realised quite clearly that it would not look anything like so certain to other eyes.

Smithy had said nothing on the subject, so far; but he knew that if he had done so, Harry Wharton & Co., and most of the other fellows, would have told him that he was a suspicious fool, and warned him to shut up.

The headmaster was likely to be quite as emphatic, if a Highcliffe fellow brought a charge of theft against a Greyfriars boy—even Skip!—without an atom of evidence to offer in support of it.

And yet—Smithy was assured—Skip had that watch.

The question was, to find proof—to have something definite to "go on," so that the accusation could be made on safe ground.

That was what the Bouncer was thinking out now.

It was in his power to find proof—if proof was to be found. Ponsonby, over at Highcliffe, could do nothing; but his ally, at Greyfriars, could do a great deal.

Unless it could be proved that Skip had the watch, it was useless, and might be perilous, to accuse him. The Bouncer was going to prove it.

He waited, on the landing, till all the Remove were gone down. If one or two fellows lingered in the studies; he had to take the risk of that. He knew; at any rate, that Study No. 1—Skip's study—was vacant, as he had seen Skip go down with the Famous Five.

Smithy had made up his mind—but he hesitated a little, before he left the landing, and went into the Remove passage.

He was satisfied with his own plan of action—detectives, he told himself, did such things, and nobody thought the worse of them. But he knew what any Remove man would think of a fellow who went rooting through another fellow's belongings, from whatever motive.

But his mind was made up; and he went along to Study No. 1 at last—glanced up the passage to make sure that no eye was on him, and then slipped into the study.

He shut the door, and turned on the light.

Assured as he was that he was justified in this—that he was only taking measures to show up a rascal—his heart beat rather uncomfortably.

Instinct—often a safer guide than reason—warned him that he was doing a rotten thing. But he refused to listen to the still, small voice.

But he knew very well what he would feel like, if Wharton or Nugent happened to come back to the study, and find him spying there; and he lost no time.

He was going to search Skip's belongings in that study—that was why he was there, and he made haste about it.

It did not take him long. Nothing belonging to Skip was locked—rather to his surprise. The search was swift, but thorough—and it ended in the certainty that, if Skip had the watch, he had not hidden it in his study.

Smithy was glad to get out of the study again—justified as he felt in searching it. Whether detectives did such things or not, Smithy could not feel comfortable doing them.

But he was going on, now that he had started. Skip's box in the dormitory was his next objective.

No fellow was allowed to go up to the dormitories until bed-time, without special leave—but the Bouncer disregarded that strict rule, without a second thought.

In the Remove dormitory, however, he did not venture to turn on the light. He turned on a flash-lamp, and bent over Skip's box. Had it been locked, he would have felt quite certain that Pon's watch was inside, and would have tried his bunch of keys on it. But again—rather to his surprise—it was not locked.

The box was searched, swiftly and thoroughly, with the same result as in the study—the watch was not there.

Smithy closed the box, shut off the flash-lamp, and went down the dormitory stairs—pondering his next step.

It began to look as if the fellow was keeping the purloined watch on his person—risky as that was. In that case, the amateur detective's only resource was to wait for night, and search the pockets of Skip's clothes after lights out, while he was asleep.

But there was another cover to draw first. Most of the Remove fellows kept their overcoats downstairs in the lobby. Skip's would be there, with the rest.

It was unlikely—even the suspicious Bouncer had to admit that it did not seem likely—that the pincher would leave a stolen watch in an overcoat pocket hanging up in the lobby.

But he was going to make sure. Having started in business as an amateur detective, he was going to leave no stone unturned.

With a casual air, the Bouncer strolled down to the lobby on the ground floor. All the Remove were in the Rag—where Wibley was going strong. But in the lobby he found Coker, Potter, and Greene, of the Fifth Form.

Coker & Co. had leave out of gates, and had come for their overcoats. Smithy went across to his own coat, and affected to be looking for something in one of the pockets of it, while he waited for the seniors to clear.

Coker & Co. paid him no heed.

They were gone in a few minutes; and then Smithy made a swift step to Skip's coat, anxious to get through, before anybody else came in.

He did not think a discovery likely. He was only going to make sure, by feeling in all the pockets. He gave a sudden start, catching his breath, as his hand, in the first pocket into which he thrust it, came in contact with a small, hard object.

Even before he saw it, he knew what it was. His eyes blazed, as he drew it out and looked at it.

It was a gold wrist-watch—with the snapped strap still attached. It was Ponsonby's watch—he knew it as well as Pon did. It was Pon's missing watch—and he had found it in Skip's overcoat pocket!

For a long moment, the Bouncer of Greyfriars stood with the watch in his hand, looking at it. Then he dropped it back into the pocket in which he had found it. With a bitter, sardonic smile on his face, he left the lobby. There was no doubt now!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

In the Hollow of His Hand!

HA, ha, ha!"

"Good old Wib!"

There was a hilarious audience in the Rag. Wibley was giving Shakespearean recitations—

(Continued on page 22.)

Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, the Boys Are Marching! At the Head of the Column is—

The GREYFRIARS GUIDE

A TOUR OF THE SCHOOL.

Big Hall.

(1)

Here, in Big Hall, the roll they call
At seven-fifteen the whole year round;
Name after name you hear exclaim
The same old oft-familiar sound:
"Adsum!" And it's very pleasant
When you happen to be present,
For lickings wait when you are late,
And find old Gosling's shut the gate.

(2)

Here, in Big Hall, upon the wall
Are trophies, banners, many a name
Of Old Boys who, though lost to view,
Are still on Greyfriars roll of fame;
Some are also carved upon a
Big white marble roll of honour,
And some are cut with penknives, but
These aren't "official," so—tut-tut!

(3)

Here, in Big Hall, the scholars all
Flock in on prize days full of state,
With fathers, mothers, aunts, and others,
To hear the speeches of the great.
But sometimes, too, the school
assembles
While a wretched victim trembles
And shakes with dread to see the Head
Pick up the birch and—well, 'nuff said!

THE GREYFRIARS ALPHABET FISHER T. FISH,

The Transatlantic Shylock of the
Remove

F is for Fisher T. FISH—a guy
Who's from the States, and sure is spry.
I kinder guess that he's a friend
To anyone with cash to spend!
He plots and plans and thinks and
dreams,
And spends his days devising schemes
To do his trusting schoolmates down
And strip them of their last half-crown,



Then lends them money of his own
Upon their note of hand alone!
The interest which they must pay
Is twenty-five per cent per day!
All kinds of things he has for sale
At prices which would turn you pale.
In fact, his "fishy" business stunts
Would make old Shylock faint at once!

ANSWER TO PUZZLE

The name is RUSSELL.



A WEEKLY BUDGET OF FACT AND FUN

By
THE GREYFRIARS
RHYMESTER

GREYFRIARS GRINS

The reason why Skinner's smoking party in the top box-room to-night has been cancelled is that one of the invitations accidentally reached Wingate of the Sixth.

STRIKE NEWS.—Bolsover major organised a sit-down strike against lessons yesterday. This has now been called off, as, owing to negotiations with Mr. Quelch, Bolsover has announced that he will not be sitting down for about a week!

Repairs to the roof of Big Hall have now begun. It was damaged when Angel of the Fourth raised it at a public flogging last week.

PUZZLE PAR

Here are some three-letter words, reading downwards. If you insert the name of a Greyfriars character in the blank space, it will change them all to four-letter words.

T F R L P H C
O O O O O O O

N R E T M D T

Answer at foot of column 2.

THIS WEEK'S WISDOM.—"There is so much doubt and ignorance among even the most learned men that I'm perfectly certain only a fool would say he was perfectly certain of anything."—ALGERNON CAPPER, M.A.

"The Greyfriars Herald" talks of publishing a weekly list of those who have been punished, and for what offences. Of course, they'll call it the Agony Column.

Mr. Quelch has been having trouble with his liver. His dearest wish is to make his liver bend over and take six!

AFTER SCHOOL HOURS The Form-Match Mystery

(1)

Tell me why this human tide,
Surging in from far and wide,
Gathers all round Little Side;
Tell me why they grin with glee,
Staring so expectantly—
What is it they hope to see?

(2)

There's a Form match, I can tell,
For the Fifth will play the Shell,
And they both play pretty well;
But no Form match could attract
Such a crowd, and that's a fact—
Look, the ground is simply packed!

(3)

And, moreover, in this case,
There's a grin on every face.
What on earth is taking place?
Sixth Form prefects push their way
Through the fags to watch the play—
Something special's on to-day!

(4)

Now it seems the Shell have scored,
How the massed spectators roared!
Tears of laughter simply poured
Down each giggling idiot's nose—
Something funny, I suppose.
Why they're laughing, goodness knows!

(5)

Half a tick! What's that you say?
COKER'S IN THE MATCH TO-DAY!
What? Here, let me see him play!
That explains why fellows yell;
I'll be laughing soon as well—
Ten to one, lads, on the Shell!

There Will Be Another Jaunt with the Greyfriars Guide Next Week!

edited and amended by William Wibley in such a way that William Shakespeare would hardly have known his own handiwork.

Shakespeare, Wib thought, was a bit heavy, in his unedited state. Under Wib's skilful hand, however, the immortal bard became quite light and entertaining.

Wib had thought of the bright idea of selecting verses from Shakespeare and putting them in different order, thus producing a comic instead of a tragic effect. And the juniors chortled.

Wibley was getting a laugh, when the door opened, and the Bounder came in. Tom Redwing looked round, and beckoned him to a chair he had been keeping for him.

"Here you are, Smithy!" he called.

The Bounder did not sit down, however. He stood looking at the crowd in the Rag, with an expression on his face that drew many glances—and caused Redwing's cheery face to cloud.

Harry Wharton gave him a sharp look.

"Anything up, Smithy?" he asked.

"Yes!"

"Well, what?"

"I fancy there's going to be a fellow up for the sack!" drawled the Bounder.

That statement was more than sufficient to draw the general attention. Wibley, who had come to the end of an item, did not begin on the next. He had lost his audience—moreover, he was as startled as the other fellows by the Bounder's words.

"Who?" asked a dozen voices.

"Loder of the Sixth caught out at last?" asked Hazeldene, with a grin.

"Oh, no! Not a Sixth Form man!"

"Hilton or Price of the Fifth?" asked Peter Todd.

"Not at all!"

"Angel of the Fourth?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Oh, no!" drawled the Bounder. "A Remove man!"

If the Remove fellows had been interested before, they were excited now. A crowd gathered round the Bounder.

Skip was among them. Smithy's eyes were on his face; but he had to admit that that chubby face showed no sign whatever of alarm. He did not guess that he had been spotted, or else he had a nerve of iron. But the Bounder sarcastically reflected that a fellow who had been trained among crooks would naturally have plenty of nerve.

Harry Wharton's face was rather grim, as he eyed the Bounder. He could think of nobody in the Remove who was likely to be up for the sack, unless it was Herbert Vernon-Smith himself. But, catching the Bounder's eyes on Skip, he had a hint of what was in Smithy's mind. And his brow darkened. Like most of the Form, he was fed-up with the Bounder's feud, and he did not want to hear any more wild and reckless accusations.

"If you're not talking out of your hat, Smithy—" said the captain of the Remove sharply.

"Not in the least!"

"Well, what do you mean?" demanded Wharton gruffly. "What bee have you got in your bonnet now?"

"You heard what I said," answered Vernon-Smith coolly. "I believe that a Remove man is up for the sack! In fact, I know it! A fellow has to be sacked for pinching!"

"Pinching!" repeated Bob Cherry.

The word, as was inevitable, drew attention upon Skip. Other fellows guessed now what Wharton had guessed at once.

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Skip's face became crimson.

"You at it again?" he exclaimed, his eyes gleaming at the Bounder. "You can't let a bloke alone! If you mean me, you rotter, say it plain!"

"You seem to jump to it pretty fast that I mean you!" sneered the Bounder. "They say that a guilty conscience needs no accuser."

"Everybody here knows that you mean nobody else, Vernon-Smith!" said Harry scornfully. "And if you fancy that any man here is going to take any notice of your rot, you're mistaken. This makes the third time that you've accused Skip—and it's another silly mistake!"

"It's about time Smithy stopped making those mistakes!" said Frank Nugent quietly. "And I think it's up to us to stop him."

"The upfulness is terrific!" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The ragfulness is the proper caper."

"Oh, let's hear what it is this time," said Harry Wharton, with a contempt that brought the red into Vernon-Smith's cheeks. "First it was his wallet that Bunter hid in his study—then it was a banknote that Wun Lung played tricks with. What do you fancy you have lost this time, you silly fathead?"

"Nothing!"

"Then what—?"

"I've lost nothing! Somebody else has! Sorry I can't give you the particulars!" said the Bounder, with a sneer. "But Quelch has forbidden me to say a word about it in the Form."

"You've told Quelch?" exclaimed Bob.

"I told him last night, when I had to explain why I came in late. He did not believe a word of it—"

"Did you expect him to?" snapped Wharton.

"Not without proof!" agreed the Bounder. "The dear old bean fancied that I was jumping at a chance to score over a fellow I'm down on—he fancied that the wish was father to the thought, as jolly old Shakespeare puts it—"

"And he was right!" said Harry.

"Right on the wicket!" said Bob Cherry.

"I could read it in his face!" sneered Smithy. "Not that I care a boiled bean—he will have to listen to proof."

"Oh! You've got proof?" grinned Peter Todd. "You had last time, I remember—and the time before! I fancy Quelch will go over your proofs pretty carefully!"

"But wot 'ave I done, you silly hass?" asked Skip. "Wot 'ave you got it into your silly 'ead that I've done, you fool you?"

"Yes, tell us that, Smithy!" said Bolsover major.

"Can't—Quelch's orders are to say nothing, and you know how I delight to obey the slightest wish of my kind teachers. Skip can tell you if he likes—you'll get it straight from the horse's mouth."

"Do you know what that fathead's talking about, Skip?" asked Harry.

"Ain't got an idea!" answered Skip. "Beats me 'oller."

"He's got a nerve on him," commented the Bounder. "Well, if he's not telling you, you'll have to stay in the dark, for the present."

"Do you think you can leave it at that?" exclaimed Harry Wharton angrily. "By gum! You've accused Skip again, or practically accused him—and you'll make your words good, here and now, or you'll get the ragging of your life!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Cough it up, Smithy, or you're for it!"

"Keep cool!" drawled the Bounder.

"You'll hear it all soon enough—Quelch can hardly keep it dark! I'm going to him now—and I'm taking Skip with me. We're going to Quelch together."

"I ain't going to Quelch!" said Skip, staring at him.

"You are, my pippin," said the Bounder grimly, "and if you refuse to come, I'll call a prefect here, to make you."

"And why do you want Skip to go with you to Quelch?" demanded Harry Wharton.

"I don't mind telling you that!" said the Bounder, coolly and deliberately. "I'm not giving him a chance to get rid of the evidence, I'm not taking my eyes off him till we're both standing before Quelch in his study."

There was a rather breathless hush in the Rag.

Harry Wharton broke the silence.

"Are you saying—do you dare to say—that Skip has something on him now, that doesn't belong to him?"

"No! but there's something that he could lay his hands on fast enough,—and I'm not giving him the chance! That's why I've come here instead of going straight to Quelch," said the Bounder, with bitter distinctness.

"The proof might have disappeared by the time it was looked for, if he got wind that he was spotted. I'm not going to lose sight of him for a second—now I know. Will you come with me to Quelch, Skip?"

"No, I won't!"

"That does it!"

The Bounder had closed the door when he came in. Now he opened it wide again, and looked into the passage. Evidently, it was his intention to carry out his threat, and call a prefect.

"Hold on, Smithy!" said Harry Wharton, quietly. "Don't make a bigger fool of yourself than you have done already! Skip, old man, I'd advise you to go to Quelch, after what Smithy's said. This can't be left where it is!"

"I'll go, if you think so!" said Skip. "I don't mind! Smithy nearly got a flogging last time—and this time he will get it all right! And if he don't, I'll jolly well 'ammer him for jumping on a bloke like this!"

"It's all rot, of course!" said Bob. "But you'd better go, kid! Quelch will make that silly ass sit up for spinning another idiotic yarn!"

"I'm risking that!" drawled the Bounder. "Are you coming, my light-fingered young friend, or do you want me to call Wingate?"

"I'll come, as Wharton says so!" answered Skip, disdainfully. "I wouldn't come for you, and don't you think it!"

The Bounder laughed.

"Never mind your reason—so long as you come!" he answered.

"I shall come with you, Skip!" said Harry Wharton. "You may as well have a friend with you." He laughed. "I'm taking it for granted, of course, that you don't mind anyone hearing what Smithy has to say to Quelch."

"Course I don't mind!" said Skip. "Why should I? I don't mind the 'ole school 'earing every word."

"Come on, then."

Wharton left the Rag with Skip—the Bounder standing back to let them go first. Clearly, obviously, Vernon-Smith suspected that Skip might attempt to dodge away in the passages, and was going to follow behind him, to make sure that he did not. The Rag was left in a buzz of excitement.

Few of the fellows believed that there was anything in the Bounder's new accusation—any more than there had been in the earlier ones. Smithy had, in fact, unintentionally, by his repeated



"This letter from Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, "proves beyond doubt that Skip's statement was correct. I am deeply sorry that I was misled. I express my regret, Skip. You will take your place in the Form. Every boy here, I am assured, will be glad to know that not a vestige of suspicion attaches to you."

unfounded suspicions, proved to the Remove that the one-time pincher's reform was genuine.

But the Bounder had made an impression—it was so plain that he believed that he had his enemy in the hollow of his hand, that the juniors could not help wondering, a little, whether there was something in it this time.

Wibley's theatrical stunts were forgotten, even by Wibley himself—and in a buzz of excitement, the juniors waited to hear the outcome of that interview in Mr. Quelch's study.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Proof Positive!

MR. QUELCH raised his eyebrows, as he surveyed three members of his Form, across his writing-table.

He was busy with Latin papers, when they arrived—and he sat with his pen poised in his hand. His inquiring glance fixed on his head boy.

"What is it, Wharton?" he asked.

"Vernon-Smith has something to say to you, sir."

"Indeed! You may proceed, Vernon-Smith." The gimlet-eyes turned on the Bounder, sharply and not pleasantly. Mr. Quelch had not forgotten what Smithy had told him the previous evening; and the more he thought of it, the more it annoyed him. "Kindly be brief."

"Yes, sir!" said the Bounder. "It's about Ponsonby's watch, sir—"

Mr. Quelch raised his hand.

Harry Wharton and Skip both stared at Smithy, blankly. Neither had had the faintest idea of what Smithy was going to say: and what he did say, surprised both of them. This was their first hint that a Highcliffe man was concerned in the matter: and the

reference to Ponsonby's watch simply mystified them.

"Stop!" said Mr. Quelch, sternly. "I have directed you, Vernon-Smith, to say nothing on that topic."

"I've said nothing, sir."

"You are now doing so, in the presence of two of your Form-fellows," exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Not another word!"

"Very well, sir, if you say so!" said the Bounder, with bitter meekness. "I thought I ought to tell you that there is now no doubt in the matter."

"If you mean that the Highcliffe boy's watch has been found—"

"Oh, no, sir."

"Then you will be silent!"

"Certainly, sir, if you tell me so. But may I let Ponsonby know that his watch is here?"

"Wh-a-t!" Mr. Quelch fairly stuttered, at that.

"I mean, sir, that he naturally will want his watch back!" explained the Bounder with cool impertinence. "It's a very valuable watch, sir—I believe it cost Pon's father a lot of money—"

"Are you stating, Vernon-Smith, that a Highcliffe boy's missing watch is in this school?"

"Yes, sir."

There was a moment's silence in the study. Wharton was simply amazed, and wondering whether Vernon-Smith had gone out of his senses. Skip blinked at him. The expression on Mr. Quelch's face was growing terrifying.

"I will hear you, Vernon-Smith!" said Mr. Quelch, at last, and his voice had an edge like a razor. "I am compelled to investigate such a definite statement. But I warn you, that if this should prove to be another reckless, unfounded accusation against this boy Skip, I shall report you to your head-master for a flogging. Twice you have made such mistakes—and I will allow no

excuse whatever for a third mistake of the same kind. I cannot help thinking, Vernon-Smith, that you are actuated by malice against this boy."

"I hope not, sir," said Vernon-Smith. "I admit that I'm keen to show him up for what he is, and to get rid of a thief—"

"I will allow no such names to be applied to Skip!" interrupted Mr. Quelch, angrily. "His unfortunate past is well known here: but every boy in my Form knows that he has been above suspicion since he has been a Greyfriars boy. It is ungenerous for anyone to remember his past against him, when he deserves the greatest credit for having thrown off the influence of bad training in bad hands. His conduct in this school, Vernon-Smith, compares very favourably with your own."

"Oh!" ejaculated the Bounder.

"I say so deliberately," said Mr. Quelch. "This boy was once dishonest—He was trained to be so, by a bad-hearted man. Given an opportunity, he turned to better things. Here, he has been dutiful, painstaking and well-behaved. I have never had occasion to suspect him of breaking any rules of the school—such as smoking, associating with doubtful characters outside Greyfriars, or anything else of the kind—and I cannot say the same of you, Vernon-Smith. You have been in danger of expulsion: and I am far from certain that you have amended your ways."

The Bounder bit his lip, hard.

Harry Wharton smiled faintly. It was all perfectly true; for, unless Skip was still a pincher, as Smithy believed, there was no doubt that his record, as a Greyfriars fellow, was a good deal better than Smithy's!

"Now I will hear you," added Mr. Quelch, "and I warn you to be careful what you say."

"I'll be careful, sir!" said the Bounder, between his teeth. "I've told you already that Ponsonby missed his watch, after a fight with Skip on Courtfield Common yesterday—and that we hunted for it and never found it. I've told you that Pon believes that he snatched it—"

"Oh, smoky 'addocks!" breathed Skip.

"The rotter!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Silence, please!" said Mr. Quelch. "You have told me this, Vernon-Smith, and I am far from convinced that the Highcliffe boy suspects anything of the kind. I will not take your word, without absolute proof, in any matter affecting Skip."

"Ponsonby told me to-day, sir, that he intended to come over here, and demand a search—"

"If Ponsonby did any such impudent thing, he would be ejected from the gates!" said Mr. Quelch grimly. "No such charge would be listened to, on no better grounds than a wild suspicion."

"So I told him, sir," said Vernon-Smith. "I advised him to hold off, till proof could be got."

"If you are speaking the truth, Vernon-Smith, it was good advice you gave him. But you have stated that the watch is here. What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that it is here, as I said, sir. I've seen it."

"You have seen a watch belonging to a Highcliffe boy, here?"

"Yes, sir."

"In Skip's possession, do you mean?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's a blooming lie!" yelled Skip.

"Silence! Vernon-Smith will either prove his statement, beyond the shadow of a doubt, or he will be taken to his headmaster for a flogging!" said Mr. Quelch. "Proceed, Vernon-Smith!"

"Certainly, sir!" The Bounder was cool as ice, and Wharton, as he saw it, felt a sinking of the heart. Obviously, Smithy could not have made that positive statement unless it was true. "I must explain, sir," the Bounder went on. "As I told Pon, the fellow couldn't be accused without something to go on. Knowing that he had the watch, I felt justified in looking for proof—"

"In what way?" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"I searched his things, sir."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, taken utterly aback. "You have the impudence to tell me that you searched the belongings of another boy in the Remove?"

"I did," said the Bounder, "and I found the watch in one of his pockets."

"You—you found the watch in—in one of his pockets?" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir."

"Look 'ere—" gasped Skip.

"Please say nothing, Skip! Let this boy complete his statement. You tell me, Vernon-Smith, that Skip has the Highcliffe boy's watch on his person at the present moment?" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"No, sir. The watch is in his coat pocket in the lobby," said the Bounder. "I couldn't search the fellow himself—though I'd have found a way if it hadn't turned up elsewhere. But it did. Ponsonby's watch was in the pocket of his coat when I searched."

"Where is it now?"

"I left it where I found it."

"In Skip's coat pocket?"

"Yes, sir."

"Mad!" said Skip, staring at the Bounder, too astonished now to be angry. "Mad as a blooming 'atter!"

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Mr. Quelch's eyes almost bored into the Bounder.

"You say definitely, Vernon-Smith, that you found the Highcliffe boy's missing watch in Skip's overcoat pocket, and that it is there at the present moment?" he rasped.

"Yes, sir!"

"Wharton, go to the lobby at once and bring the overcoat here! Lose no time!"

Harry Wharton, dumb with amazement and dismay, left the study. He was back under the minute, with Skip's overcoat in his hands.

In silence, he handed it to Mr. Quelch.

"I shall examine this coat!" said Mr. Quelch in a grinding voice. "If the watch is here, Vernon-Smith, as you state, Skip will be sent away from Greyfriars as an unreformed thief who has deceived us all! If it is not here, you will be expelled from Greyfriars!"

"Oh, quite, sir!" said the Bounder coolly.

Mr. Quelch slid his hand into the coat pockets. He gave a gasp—or, rather, a gurgle. His hand came out, and in it gleamed the gold wrist-watch, with its broken strap!

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

GUILTY!

"PON'S watch!" said Vernon-Smith quietly.

Mr. Quelch gazed at the watch like a man in a dream. Harry Wharton stared at it in utter dismay and horror. Skip seemed like a fellow in a trance.

Skip was the most surprised of all by the discovery of the missing watch in his overcoat pocket.

The silence in the study could have been felt. Mr. Quelch broke it at last with a husky voice.

"Whose is this watch?"

"Ponsonby's, sir!" said the Bounder.

"Have you seen this watch before, Wharton?"

"I—I think so, sir. I—I think it's Ponsonby's—at least, I've seen him wearing one just like it."

"So 'ave I, sir," said Skip, staring at the watch. "He had it on when I was a-pulling of his nose yesterday at 'ighcliffe."

Mr. Quelch sank back in his chair. He was absolutely overcome.

He had faith in the reformed pincher of Slummock's Alley. He had little faith in the Bounder. Right up to the last moment he had hardly doubted that this was another reckless accusation, founded on a mistake born of malice. But the gold watch in his hand was proof positive.

"Skip," he gasped at last, "this—this watch is not yours?"

"No, sir!"

"It—it is Ponsonby's watch," breathed Mr. Quelch. "It has been found in your pocket, Skip. Unhappy boy, what have you to say?"

"I ain't touched it, sir."

"Wha-at?"

"I ain't seen it, sir, since I see it on that Highcliffe bloke's wrist yesterday on the football ground at 'ighcliffe."

Mr. Quelch gazed at him. Such a statement, in the circumstances, was not likely to find credence.

"Boy," gasped Mr. Quelch, "this watch belongs to Ponsonby. You admit it yourself. Did you take advantage of your struggle with him yesterday to snatch it from his wrist?"

"No, nor I didn't!" exclaimed Skip.

"I ain't never pinched nothing since I

been 'ere, sir, like I promised the 'Ead I wouldn't. Nor it ain't only because I promised the 'Ead, neither. I wouldn't pinch now, sir, not at any price—not if I was right on my uppers!"

"This watch has been found in your possession. If you did not steal it, how can you account for it?"

"Those who 'ide can find!" said Skip, with a black and bitter glare at the Bounder.

Vernon-Smith started, and his face whitened with rage.

It was, perhaps, a natural suspicion to come into Skip's mind, in view of the Bounder's bitter enmity and his utter ignorance of how the watch had come into his possession.

That he had never touched it, he knew; some other hand must have placed it where it was found. Whose but his enemy's?

But such a suspicion was not likely to enter any other mind.

"What?" gasped Mr. Quelch. "What?"

"You—you villain!" panted the Bounder, almost beside him. "You'd like to make out—you'd like— Oh, you rascal and rotter! Mr. Quelch, you can send for Ponsonby. Pon will tell you that he missed the watch after his scrap with that thief, while I was playing football at Highcliffe. You can send for Gadsby and Monson; they were present when Pon missed the watch, and said that that rascal must have taken it! You can ask them."

"You need say no more, Vernon-Smith," said Mr. Quelch. "You are under no suspicion of any such act."

"I can prove that the watch was missing before I saw Ponsonby after the football match. I was playing football, and the watch was on Pon's wrist when he went out, and missing before he came back!" panted the Bounder.

"I have no doubt whatever of it," said Mr. Quelch quietly. "You should not have undertaken to search this boy's pockets, Vernon-Smith; you acted foolishly and recklessly in doing so. But there is no doubt that you found the watch there. Have you anything more to say, Skip?"

"Only that I ain't touched it, sir!" said Skip in a scared voice. "On my davy, I ain't, sir!"

"Can you expect me to believe that, wretched boy?"

"It's true, sir. If Smith found it in my coat pocket, like he says, it was put there! I've knowed such things 'appen in my alley, too."

"Possibly," said Mr. Quelch, very dryly. "But such things do not happen at Greyfriars School. I shall certainly inquire and ascertain beyond the shadow of a doubt that this watch never could have been in Vernon-Smith's possession. But I have not the slightest doubt on that point. This watch, Skip, was found in your pocket. You cannot tell me that you picked it up, intending to return it to the owner; you have stated that you have never touched it."

"Nor I ain't!" mumbled Skip.

The Remove master laid the watch on the table. His face was set and hard.

Skip's eyes turned on Harry Wharton. "You don't believe I pinched it?" he asked pleadingly.

Wharton could not speak. He had come there as Skip's friend to see him through—to stand by him when he was accused. But what could he say now? The discovery of the missing watch overwhelmed him.

"Ain't you got a word to say to a bloke—you, neither?" muttered the wretched waif.

"What can I say?" Wharton's voice faltered. "I—I've always believed in you, Skip, ever since I said I would."

But—but that's Pon's watch; you know it is."

"I know."

"Well, then——"

"It was put in my pocket!" said Skip. "I tell you, I ain't 'ad that overcoat on—not since Toosday. Any bloke could 'ave got at it."

"Don't suggest such things, for goodness' sake! Nobody would. You're making matters worse," said the captain of the Remove hastily.

"I am sorry, Wharton, that your faith in this boy has been misplaced, and mine also," said Mr. Quelch. "Do not blame yourself, my boy. It is better to trust and be deceived than to be distrustful and suspicious. It is no credit to Vernon-Smith that he persistently distrusted this boy—though it proves, unfortunately, that his distrust was well founded."

"I knew——" began the Bounder.

Mr. Quelch interrupted him sharply.

"You could not have known, Vernon-Smith. You could only have distrusted and suspected. Be silent! You may both leave my study. Skip, you will remain."

Wharton and Vernon-Smith left the study, and the door closed, leaving the waif of Greyfriars with his Form-master.

In the passage Smithy gave the captain of the Remove a mocking look.

"What do you think now?" he sneered.

"I think you're a rotten spy, going through a fellow's pockets!" retorted Wharton. "I'd cut my hand off sooner."

"I've shown up that thief."

"Poor little beast! I suppose you have, and he will have to go. He never had a decent chance, and you know it as well as I do. He's tried to keep straight—I know that; but I suppose his awful training turned out too strong for him. But I know he tried to keep straight, at least—I'm sure of that much."

"Gammon!"

"Oh, shut up!"

Harry Wharton left the Bounder, almost as disgusted with him as with Skip. Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders and walked into the Rag. In a few minutes more all the Remove knew.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

A Mystery to Mauly!

"MAULY all over!" said Bob Cherry, with a faint grin. It was!

In the morning, before the bell went, most of the fellows were in the quad, and most of their eyes turned upon two figures, walking together.

One of them was Skip—pale, harassed, miserable; the other was Lord Mauleverer, whose arm was linked in Skip's.

Seldom or never was Mauly demonstrative. He never linked arms with a fellow. Now he did!

It was, as Bob remarked, Mauly all over.

Herbert Vernon-Smith glanced at him with a bitter sneer. Harry Wharton & Co. smiled. Other fellows exchanged glances, some of them grinning. Skip and his noble friend were the cynosure of all eyes.

Skip had been an outcast in his early days in the Remove. That had passed away. He had become, as Bob Cherry expressed it, "one of us." Now, however, he was more utterly an outcast than he had ever been.

He was going—everybody knew that he was going. But he had not gone

yet, and until he went no Greyfriars fellow wanted to have anything to do with him, except, it appeared, his noble lordship, the Earl of Mauleverer.

Mauly was displaying, to all whom it might or might not concern, that he was standing by Skip, sticking to the fellow who was down.

Which meant, of course, that he still believed that Skip was true blue. He was not the fellow to stick to a thief. Which, again, meant that Mauly's intellectual processes ran on uncommon lines—the kind of brain, as Skinner remarked, that they had in the House of Lords. For how Mauly could possibly believe that a fellow, once a known pincher, had not pinched a gold watch that was discovered in his pocket, was a mystery to other fellows.

It was a shock to Harry Wharton & Co.—a bitter shock. It was a shock to Mr. Quelch, and a severe one. But what were they to believe?

How were they to believe that a Greyfriars fellow did not know how a Highcliffe fellow's watch had got into his pocket?

Had Skip been an ordinary Greyfriars fellow, with the best of reputations, it would have put faith to a breaking strain. But he was not. He was a reformed pincher, and this only meant that his reform had been merely skin-deep, or humbug from beginning to end. So every fellow could not help thinking—except, it seemed, Mauly. Rome was not built in a day, and reform was not a matter of a few weeks. That was how it looked, even to charitable fellows who believed that Skip had tried to keep straight.

Mauleverer came towards the Famous Five, Skip dragging back. But as Mauly had his arm linked, he had to accompany him or jerk his arm away.

Mauly gave the chums of the Remove a nod.

"This is a queer bizney," he remarked. "I've been talkin' to Skip, and neither of us can make it out."

"Oh!" said Harry Wharton, hardly knowing what to say.

"It's a dashed mystery!" explained Mauleverer. "Who the merry dickens put that watch in Skip's pocket—and why?"

"Don't be an ass, Mauly!" growled Johnny Bull. "Smithy's a bit of a corker in some ways, but if you think he'd do a rascally thing like that you're a fool!"

"I don't," said Mauly. "Smithy found it there! What I'm wonderin' is how it got there for him to find?"

"Walked, perhaps," suggested Johnny sarcastically.

Skip gave the Famous Five a haggard look.

"You blokes think I pinched that there watch!" he said. "I ain't blaming you. I know 'ow it looks, but Mauly don't."

"Not at all, old chap!" said Mauly.

"Though I'm blessed if I know why he don't!" added Skip frankly.

"The whyfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurrec Jamset Ram Singh.

"Well, I've got a little sense, I hope," said Lord Mauleverer. "Look at it, you fellows. In the first place we took Skip's word that pinchin' was a thing of the past. He was twice had up on suspicion, and each time he came off with flyin' colours. Each time, if he'd liked, he could have snaffled somethin' more valuable than Pon's watch; but it was proved he hadn't. Why didn't he?"

"'Cause I wouldn't!" said Skip.

"Exactly! You fellows see that?" asked Lord Mauleverer.

"Oh, yes; but——"

"Smithy's wallet, when it was missed,

was stacked with notes, and then there was a tenner. Skip could have had both, but he never had either. Apart from believin' in a chap, there's such a thing as common sense," said Lord Mauleverer. "He never had Pon's watch. But how did it get into his pocket?"

"Flew!" said Johnny Bull, still sarcastic.

"Skip had an idea that Smithy might have planted it there, to down him," went on Mauly, unheeding. "I've talked him out of that. Naturally it looks like it to Skip; but, of course, it's utter rot!"

"Thanks!" came the Bounder's sneering voice, as he joined the group.

"Not at all, Smithy!" said Mauleverer amiably. "You're a bad hat, but not so bad as that. Got any idea who did it, and why?"

"You silly ass!" snapped the Bounder. "You know as well as I do."

"Quite! Neither of us knows anythin'. But you're no fool, Smithy, though you're a bit of a rotter. Can't you exert your jolly old intellect, and spot how that beastly watch got to Greyfriars?"

"Oh, don't be a chump!"

"Can't you fellows think of anythin'?" asked Mauleverer. "I've been cudgellin' the old nut, with no result. And there's no time to lose."

"There ain't, old covey!" mumbled Skip. "Quelch jawed me last night, but 'ow could I confess what I 'adn't done? Now it's left over till he can see that bloke Ponsonby. The bloke's to come over for his blooming watch, and Quelch is going to ask him questions. But he don't believe that Smith 'ad it, and shoved it in that pocket."

The Bounder gritted his teeth.

"Nor I don't, neither," went on Skip unexpectedly. "I thought so at first, for what did it look like, me not knowin' 'ow the blooming thing got there? But I don't reely believe Smith is such a rotter as that."

"Thank you for nothing!" sneered Smithy.

"I got to go," said Skip. "Mr. Quelch is going to see Ponsonby first, but it don't make no difference. I got to go, leavin' you blokes thinkin' me a pincher—all except Mauly."

"You're not gone yet," said Lord Mauleverer. "Quelch won't be seeing Ponsonby till after third school, at least. So far, he's only phoned that the watch is here to be called for. There's time yet, if a fellow could think of anythin'. It's clear enough to me, of course. If Skip had pinched that putrid watch, would he have been fool enough to put it in an overcoat pocket hanging up in a lobby where fellows go a dozen times a day? Is that sense?"

"He left it where he put it when he pinched it," said the Bounder, staring. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that he did nothin' of the kind, Smithy, even if he pinched the watch, as he wasn't wearin' the overcoat at Highcliffe that day."

"He's told you so?" sneered Smithy.

"Yaas."

"He went over to watch a football match on a cold November afternoon, without his overcoat."

"So did other fellows who went on bikes, dear boy. I saw Russell and Wibley there without their coats," said Lord Mauleverer cheerfully. "And Bolsover major saw Skip, when he was pulling Pon's nose, and he hadn't his overcoat on."

"Oh!" said the Bounder, a little taken aback. He had not doubted that

the Greyfriars waif had slipped the stolen watch into a pocket of the coat he was wearing when he pinched it.

"Oh!" repeated Harry Wharton, also surprised.

"A fellow with a pinched watch might leave it in the pocket where he dropped it; but if he was looking for a place to park it, he would find a safer place than an overcoat pocket in a lobby!" said Lord Mauleverer. "You fellows see that?"

"Oh, yes," said Harry slowly. "But I—"

"But what?"

"But it was there, Mauly."

"Yaas! But who put it there, and why?" said Lord Mauleverer, rubbing his noble nose in perplexity. "That's what I'm tryin' to dig up. It's a dashed mystery, ain't it?"

There was no reply to that. If it was a "mystery" to Mauly, it did not seem so to other fellows.

But at that point there was an interruption, as Trotter came out of the House with a message for Skip, calling him in to his Form-master's study.

The waif of the Remove drew a deep, hard breath.

He glanced round at the juniors, from face to face.

"I s'pose this 'ere is the finish!" he said in a low voice. "I s'pose I ain't going to be allowed to come into Form no more—and mebbe I shan't see you blokes agin. I got to mizzle, I 'ave. But, believe me, or believe me not, I ain't going back to Barney the Binger—and I ain't going back to the pinchin'. S'elp me, I ain't! But—I jest 'ate to think of you blokes thinking I pinched when I was 'ere—and Coker, too, when he 'ears about it. That does come 'ard! Mauly don't believe it—"

"Never!" said Mauly. "Never, old bean!"

"I s'pose you wouldn't, being a nobleman, and above thinking things like that bloke Smith!" said Skip. "I don't care much what Smith thinks, but it does come hard for you other blokes to think me a pincher, when I ain't! P'r'aps, arter I'm gone, you'll try as much as

you can to believe that I was telling the truth, jest as Mauly believes, and that I never touched that watch!" Skip's voice almost broke. "It's true, s'elp me, and I 'ope you may try to believe it, arter I'm gone!"

"We—we'll try!" stammered Harry, at a loss for words. "Goodness knows we're sorry—"

Skip nodded, and walked into the House.

The juniors, in silence, watched him go. Even the Bounder's face was grave. Skip's last faltering words had gone to all hearts—even Smithy felt a twinge. As he disappeared into the House they little doubted that they had looked for the last time on the hapless waif from Slummock's Alley.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Outcast!

"COME in!" said Mr. Quelch coldly.

Skip entered his Form-master's study.

It was close on time for morning classes. Skip could guess that this summons meant that he was not to go into Form with the rest of the Remove. He expected it—but it was a blow to him.

His face was pale, troubled, harassed, as he stood before the Remove master. But his manner was firm as he waited for Mr. Quelch to speak.

The Remove master, when he entered, was glancing over a pile of letters. It was one of his many duties to supervise the correspondence of his Form, before the letters were handed out.

One letter he had taken from the rest. Skip's eyes fell on it, and he noted that it was addressed to himself.

That was a little surprising, for, since he had been at the school, he had had no letters from anyone at all, neither had he expected to receive any.

But he noticed, to his further surprise, that the letter was addressed to him in the scrawling, smeary hand of Billy Bunter.

Why Bunter, who had gone home on

leave, should have written to him, was a mystery to Skip, and would have puzzled him, if he had thought about it; but his mind was too fully and sorely occupied with his disaster for him to give it any thought.

He simply glanced at the letter as he noted his name on it, and that was all, without taking any interest in it whatever.

Mr. Quelch laid down the letter in his hand and fixed his eyes on Skip. There was more sadness than anger in his look. If Skip had been feeling resentment it would have faded away at that look from his Form-master.

But he was not, in point of fact, feeling resentment. He did not feel like a victim of injustice. He was the victim of a strange and mysterious happening that he could not understand.

What Mr. Quelch believed he had no choice but to believe, in the circumstances; and Skip was sensible enough to realise it. What was the Remove master to believe, when Skip himself could not begin to guess how that wretched watch had got where Vernon-Smith had found it?

"I have only a few words to say, Skip," Mr. Quelch's voice was almost kind. "This has been a terrible shock to me, for I had come to have complete faith in you. It will be a very painful shock to your headmaster when he is acquainted with it. To him, I trust, you will tell the truth—"

"I've told you the truth, sir!" muttered Skip.

Mr. Quelch made a gesture.

"Say no more!" he said. "No definite step will be taken until I have seen the Highcliffe boy, Ponsonby, and questioned him. I shall see him after third school this morning. He is coming here for his property to be handed over to him. After that—"

"I got to go!" mumbled Skip. "I know, sir!"

"Until then," said Mr. Quelch, "no further step will be taken. I shall not report the matter to Dr. Locke until I have seen the Highcliffe boy. But then you must be prepared to face your headmaster, and to leave the school. In the meantime, you will remain, but I cannot allow you to mingle with the other boys, and you will not come into Form."

"Very well, sir!" said Skip drearily.

"Perhaps you had better occupy the time," said Mr. Quelch, "in packing your box. Where you will go, when you leave, is a matter that requires consideration. Dr. Locke will doubtless discuss it with Miss Coker, who is responsible for your presence here. But you cannot, of course, remain at Greyfriars, after what has happened."

Skip's lips quivered.

"I know, sir. I know what you can't 'elp thinking—the fellers in my Form think the same. They been good friends to me, better'n I ever deserved. Since I been 'ere, I've found out 'ow a decent bloke looks on a thief—and that's what I was, afore I come 'ere. And—and that's what they think I am still. Wharton and Cherry, and the rest, what has stood by me like the good-hearted blokes they are. All except Mauly—bless him for it—"

Mr. Quelch started.

"What do you mean, Skip? Mauleverer—"

"Mauly don't believe it, sir!" said Skip. "I dunno why, because it's plain enough, on what it looks like; but Mauly don't believe it. All the other blokes does, and I s'pose Coker will, when he 'ears. I can't expect nothing

Calling all Boys!

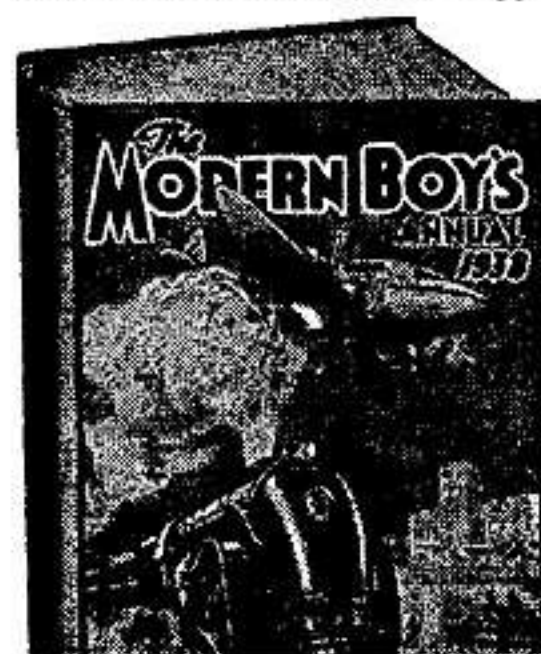
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else. But I've said, sir, and I say agin, I never touched that watch, and 'ow it got into the school at all jest beats me 'oller."

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips. "We need not discuss that, I think," he said dryly. "I have sent for you, Skip, to tell you not to come into class, and to hand you this letter. It appears, from the handwriting, to be from Bunter, who is now at home on leave from school. I see no reason why you should not receive it. Take it, and leave my study."

"Yessir!" Skip picked up the letter and dropped it carelessly into his pocket.

In the usual way, it would have been placed in the rack, where the juniors were accustomed to look for letters in break. But Skip was not to be with the other fellows in break.

In silence, with downcast eyes and drooping head, the unhappy waif of the Remove left his Form-master's study.

Mr. Quelch's glance followed him, with a mingling of sadness and anger. He had come to trust the boy, and he had had hopes of him; his trust and his hopes had been destroyed together. It was a blow to him; and yet, in view of the hapless boy's early history, it was what might have been expected.

The bell was ringing now, and Mr. Quelch left his study, to go to the Form-room. Skip had gone out into the quad.

Only one fellow spoke to him there—Mauly, of course. Mauly, in his sublime disregard of such a trifle as overwhelming proof, was going on his serene way, undisturbed by the fact that he was alone in his belief.

"What did Quelch have to say, old chap?" he asked.

"Only that I ain't to go into Form," muttered Skip. "I ain't fit to be with the other blokes. He give me a letter—that hass Bunter has wrote me a letter, goodness knows why. I got it in my pocket. I couldn't come and take it in break—might pinch the other blokes hankies, if I did!"

"Come on, Mauly!" called out Bob Cherry.

"Comin'! I'll see you again in break, Skip."

"Better not!" mumbled Skip. "Quelch won't like it, Mauly! I don't want to get you into a row, Mauly."

"Rot!" said his lordship. "Look out for me in break."

And with that, Lord Mauleverer followed the Remove in.

Skip was left alone. He wandered dismally in the quad, his hands in his pockets. Bunter's letter crumpled under his hand, in one pocket, and he was thus reminded of it. With little interest in what it might contain, he took it out to read it, and have done with it.

Meanwhile, the Remove gathered in their Form-room.

Mr. Quelch was looking very grave, and many faces in the Form were grave also. Vernon-Smith showed no sign of enjoying his triumph.

He had triumphed; he had—as appeared, at least—proved that he had been in the right all along—that the Greyfriars waif was the unscrupulous pincher he had always been. Now he was to go, and that was what the Bounder wanted. But the misery he had seen in his face had touched even the Bounder's heart, and he felt a twinge of compassion for the wretched fellow.

The lesson began in the Remove Form Room in a rather dismal atmosphere. It was suddenly interrupted.

There was a sudden patter of feet in the passage outside that stopped at the

Form-room door. That door was hurled open.

All eyes turned on it in astonishment as Skip bolted in. The Remove fellows stared at him blankly. Mr. Quelch glared at him.

"Leave this Form-room at once!" he thundered. "You were told not to come here! How dare you come here!"

Skip panted breathlessly.

"I got to come, sir!" he gasped. "I got to show you this 'ere letter—this 'ere letter from Bunter, sir!"

"What! Nonsense! What—"

"You read it, sir!" panted Skip. He fairly thrust the letter into his Form-master's hand. "You got to read it! You got to, sir!"

Mr. Quelch gazed at him, thunder-

struck, as he mechanically took the letter. The Removees simply blinked.

"Read it!" panted Skip. "Jest read it!"

"What on earth—" murmured Bob Cherry. "Is the chap potty? A letter from that fat ass Bunter—"

"Skip, I fail to understand you! What—"

"Read it!" yelled Skip, in wild excitement. "Read it!"

And Mr. Quelch, angry, amazed, perplexed, raised the letter and read it—with starting eyes.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Light at Last!

Skip stood panting.

All eyes were on him. All—in amazement—could see that his face was bright and his eyes dancing. Something, evidently, had happened to change despair into hope, but what it was no fellow there could guess. How a letter from Billy Bunter could have wrought this change was a deep mystery to all the Remove.

But, clearly, it had. Mr. Quelch's eyes seemed to be almost bulging from his head as he read that letter. He gasped as he read it. It was enough to make him gasp, for the letter ran:

"Dear Skip,—I thort I'd better let you know about the watch, in case you fownd it in your pokket. I pikked it up where that Highcliffe cad Ponsonby dropped it on Wensday, and as I was waring your cote, that was how it was. I borrode your cote on Wenesday to go to Courtfield, because that cad Ponsonby had smuthered mine with mudd, and I saw you skrapping with the beest and the uther beests, and I was gowing to help you, only you likked them all rite. I was going to give the watch to Vavasour when I saw him in Courtfield, to take back to that cad Ponsonby, but Drury nocked my hat off, and Vavasour pushed me over, and then they kleered off. I forgot all about it afterwards, as I was worrid about my railway fair, but I remembered it in the trane. I suppose you must have been pheerfully surprised if you fownd Ponsonby's watch in your cote pokket, but that is how it was, and I was gowing to give it to Smithy to take over to him, as he is palley with those Highcliffe cads, but as I've said, I forgot all about it being worrid about my fair. You give it to Smithy to take to Ponsonby, and tell him to tell Pon, from me, that he's a cad and a wurm and a rotten sneek!—Yours, W. G. BUNTER."

Mr. Quelch read that remarkable epistle through with some little difficulty, for not only was it couched in Billy Bunter's own original spelling, but it was plentifully adorned with snuars and blots.

Having read it through, he read it through again.

Skip watched him breathlessly. The whole Remove watched him, spotting the starting changes in Quelch's speaking countenance as he read, and wondering what on earth could be in a letter from the fat Owl of the Remove to cause Mr. Quelch to experience such varying emotions.

"Bless iny soul!" said the Remove master at last.

He looked at Skip. He looked at the letter again. Then he looked at Skip again. The Remove, breathless, were on tenterhooks.

"Skip!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Yessir!"

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COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS and GIRLS!

WELL, chums, here we are again, and I was going to say: "All merry and bright!" But I have my doubts about that. After a fine week-end the weather has changed, and instead of bright sunshine, fog—thick and heavy—has descended upon us. And to make matters worse—as far as I am concerned—it has taken me twice as long by bus as it does in normal times to get to the office. And I've had a "stand-up" seat in the bargain!

I wouldn't have minded so much if I'd been able to read my morning paper, but I was deprived of this privilege. I made several attempts, but with the incessant stopping and starting of the bus, I was forced to continue my journey strap hanging. There was, however, one person in the bus who I envied very much. He was a lad of about thirteen, and he had a comfortable corner seat. In his hands was a current copy of the MAGNET, and by the radiant smile on his face, it was obvious to all that he was thoroughly enjoying its contents. Maybe the weather will have changed by to-morrow, and all will be merry and bright.

Talking of changes, here's one that I feel sure will please many thousands of loyal readers—the MAGNET is reverting once again to its original

ORANGE-COLOURED COVER.

Some years back, my staff and I decided, by way of a change, to have a two-coloured cover for the MAGNET, and the idea undoubtedly met with great success. Since then, however, almost every boy's book on the market has followed suit, with the result that readers have been continuously writing in and saying that the MAGNET, with its two-coloured cover, is not so conspicuous as it used to be when it appeared in the orange-coloured jacket. Well, after careful consideration, I've decided to revert to the original cover—orange-coloured—in our next issue. Don't forget, then, chums, look out for the orange-coloured cover of the MAGNET next Saturday.

Having put you wise in that direction, now for next week's tiptop programme. Frank Richards can always be depended upon to produce the finest of all boys' stories, and next Saturday's long complete yarn of Harry Wharton & Co. is no exception. It is entitled:

"THE RUNAWAY SCHOOLBOY!"

And an author capable of packing more exciting situations in any one tale is yet to be born. Once again, Skip, the hapless waif of the Remove, is under suspicion in his Form. But this time the accusation comes from Monsieur Charpentier, the French master, and not from his bitter enemy, Vernon-Smith. The evidence is so black against Skip that the one-time pickpocket decides to leave Greyfriars once and for all, with what results you will learn next Saturday.

It's a great yarn this, chums, and it is well backed up by our other splendid features. The best thing I can do is to repeat my oft-given advice—"Order your copy in advance, and don't run the risk of the MAGNET being sold out!"

THE EDITOR.

"Were you aware that Bunter had borrowed your overcoat on Wednesday?"

"Oh, no, sir! I went over to 'Highcliffe' on my bike to see the football match, and I never wanted the coat. I left it in the lobby, and I ain't wanted it since, so I never knowed."

Mr. Quelch turned to his staring Form.

"My boys," he said, "this is a letter from Bunter, who is now at home. It appears, from this letter, that Bunter borrowed Skip's overcoat on Wednesday, and that he picked up Ponsonby's watch where he had dropped it."

"Oh!" gasped all the Remove.

Vernon-Smith caught his breath.

"Naturally, as he was wearing Skip's coat, he slipped the watch into a pocket of that coat," said Mr. Quelch. "With his usual insensate stupidity, Bunter forgot about it afterwards—"

"Oh!"

"But I will read out Bunter's letter to the whole Form," said Mr. Quelch. "Bunter appears to have written this letter under the impression that Skip might have found the watch in his overcoat pocket, as no doubt he would have done the next time he wore the coat had not a meddling, suspicious, distrustful boy in this Form taken it upon himself to search the pockets."

The Bounder's face grew crimson.

"This letter," continued Mr. Quelch, holding it up in his left hand and tapping it with his right, "proves beyond doubt that Skip's statement was correct—that he did not know that the watch was in his coat pocket, and had no knowledge how it came to be there."

"Good egg!" grinned Lord Mauleverer. "Did I mention somethin' of the sort to you fellows? Did I?"

"You did!" gasped Harry Wharton. "But who'd have thought—"

"That ass Bunter—"

"That idiot Bunter—"

"That potty porpoise Bunter—"

"Silence, please!" rapped Mr. Quelch. "I desire every boy in the Form to give me his closest attention while I read Bunter's letter aloud."

There was deep silence at once. Every fellow in the Remove gave Quelch his very closest attention. Nobody wanted to miss a word of that letter—not a single syllable. Billy Bunter would have been surprised and flattered had he been aware of the breathless interest felt by the whole Form in his letter to Skip.

Slowly, clearly, Mr. Quelch read Bunter's letter aloud. Every ear was on the strain. Not a word was lost.

In almost every face came relief and satisfaction.

This explanation of the mystery was utterly unexpected, yet it was quite simple. It was not the first time that Bunter had bagged another fellow's

coat—not by some scores of times, at least.

As he had been going to Courtfield on that half-holiday it was not surprising that he had happened to see the Highcliffe rag on the Courtfield road, nor that he had spotted a gold watch gleaming from the grass when he passed the spot. Naturally, he would have picked it up to return it to the owner; naturally, he would have dropped it into the pocket of the coat he was wearing at the time; and—being Bunter—naturally, he had forgotten all about it in the stress of his own urgent personal affairs.

Really there was nothing to be surprised at in the whole occurrence; and even had not Bunter written that letter the facts would have come to light as soon as he returned to Greyfriars.

But the Bounder's face was a study.

This simple explanation, welcome to the whole Form and its Form-master, was a stunning blow to the Bounder.

What became now of his suspicion, his certainty, his proof positive—what indeed?

"Skip," said Mr. Quelch in a very gentle voice, "I need hardly say that you are absolutely cleared by this statement from Bunter."

"Thank you, sir!" gasped Skip.

"I am sorry—deeply sorry—that I was misled by what seemed to be irrefutable evidence," said Mr. Quelch. "I express my regret, Skip. You will take your place in the Form. Every boy here, I am assured, will be glad to know that not a vestige of suspicion attaches to you."

"Yes, rather!" bawled Bob Cherry.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Skip!"

"Hurrah!"

"Sorry, old chap—"

"The sorrowfulness is terrific—"

"All right now, old man! Forget all about it!"

Skip's face was radiant as he took his place in the Form. Fellows smacked his shoulders, smacked his back. They quite forgot for a minute or two that they were in the Form-room, under their Form-master's eye. But Mr. Quelch was unusually mild. Not for several minutes was his voice heard calling for silence.

Silence was restored at last.

The Bounder drew a deep, deep breath as the gimlet-eye turned on him.

"Vernon-Smith," said Mr. Quelch in a deep voice.

"Yes, sir?" said the Bounder sullenly.

"I do not blame you, Vernon-Smith, for having been convinced by evidence that seemed conclusive to myself. But that supposed evidence should never have transpired, and never would have transpired, had you not taken it upon

yourself to search another boy's pockets—an utterly unjustifiable and surreptitious act."

Smithy was silent.

"You are aware now, Vernon-Smith, of how that watch came to be in Skip's overcoat pocket. The explanation is quite simple—though, unfortunately, no one was aware of it. Had you not meddled in the matter the watch would have been found by Skip himself; and even had he not found it the facts would have become known when Bunter returned here. The whole of this disagreeable and distressing episode is, therefore, due to your unworthy suspicion of your Form-fellow and your utterly unjustifiable conduct in searching his pockets. For that act, Vernon-Smith, and for the distress it has caused, you must expect to be severely punished."

The Bounder set his lips.

He was for it, and he knew it, but he was not the fellow to flinch.

"I warned you," said Mr. Quelch, "that if it proved that this accusation, like the others, was unfounded you would be flogged, Vernon-Smith. The accusation has proved unfounded. It would never have been thought of had you not meddled in what did not concern you. Leave this Form-room, Vernon-Smith, and go to your headmaster's study. I shall follow you there. Wharton, I shall leave you in charge of the Form for a short time."

The Bounder, without a word, and with a set face, walked out of the Form-room. He was "for it"—but he was game.

When Ponsonby arrived at Greyfriars after third school he fully expected to hear of a detected theft; instead of which, he was informed that Billy Bunter, now absent from the school, had found his watch, and written to ask a Remove fellow to hand it to Vernon-Smith to be returned to him. Which was a surprise for Pon—and not quite an agreeable one. However, he was glad, at all events, to get the watch back, though he quite forgot to leave any message of thanks for Bunter for having found it.

Skip had a bright and happy face that day.

It was rather a contrast to the Bounder's.

Smithy had had his flogging, which every fellow in the Remove agreed that he richly deserved—and which, indeed, even Smithy could not quite think was undeserved. Perhaps, even, a doubt crept into his mind at last as to whether he was, after all, right about Skip, and everybody else wrong. Right or wrong, it was certain, at least, that Smithy would never play the detective again.

THE END.

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THE HEAD SCORES AGAIN!

Doctor Birchmall, the funniest headmaster in fiction, is in tip-top form in this week's instalment of Dicky Nugent's great serial: "THE ST. SAM'S AMBULANCE!"

A SERPRIZE FOR BURLEIGH!
"Bust it!" eggsclaimed Tubby Barrell.

The fat Fourth Former fairly gasped with dismay. Tubby had just rolled into Burleigh's study in search of a cake which Burleigh had ordered for tea.

Not many juniors would have ventured into a Sixth Form study on a tuck-raiding expedition. But where tuck was concerned, Tubby Barrell took the biscuit; and he had come to Burleigh's study to take the cake! Before he had time to open the cupboard, however, footprints which Tubby reeked as Burleigh's became ordible in the passage outside. And Tubby said "Bust it!" and made a dive for the nearest hiding-place—under the table.

A moment later Burleigh walked in with his pal Tallboy.

Tubby Barrell's fat carcass fairly wobbled with fear, as the two mitey men of the Sixth sat down at the table.

"I hoap they'll soon go!" he muttered to himself.

But Burleigh and Tallboy showed no signs of an early departure. On the contrary, they sounded as if they had sat down for a long conference.

"Two heads are better than one, old chap," Tubby heard Burleigh say. "Let's see if we can't put our heads together and invent a wheeze for stopping the Head's little caper of profiteering out of the Ambulance Corps."

"It's high time somebody stopped it, old fellow," Tallboy's deep base voice replied. "The old fogey is properly fleeing the people who are unforeshunt enuff to need the ambulance."

"He charged me a ginny, if you ever heard of such nerve!" snorted Burleigh. "I can tell you, Tallboy, when I parted with that munny I found it difficult to keep my wool on."

Tallboy nitted his brows.

"What I can't understand is the eggstraordinary number of accidents that seem to be happening all of a sudden. Morning, noon and nite, fellows seem to be slipping up on banana-skins and falling down the stairs and stepping into open cole-holes!"

"It's amazing!" nodded Burleigh.

The two seniors rinkled their brows and sat back in their chairs to ponder over the problem.

The next moment they received a severe shock. As they stretched out their long legs under the table, their feet cannoned into Tubby Barrell; and Tubby promptly let out a howl of anguish.

"Yarooooo!"

That aggermised yell gave Burleigh and Tallboy the fright of their lives. Their legs flew up and their heads flew back and they both tipped over and landed on their necks with a crash.

Crash! Bang! Wallop!

"Yow-ow!"

"Woocooop!"

The two Sixth Formers sat up, yelling with pane. Then their yells of pane changed to yells of rage.

"It's Barrell!"

"That fat yung frog! Slawter him!"

They jumped to their feet and made a rush at Tubby.

It looked very much at that moment as if the fat Fourth Former was in for a pretty ruff time.

And then, just as the chopper was about to fall, Tubby had a wonderful branewave.

"Half-a-minnit, you fellows!" he cried despritley.

"If you'll let me off I'll let you in—to the grate secret about the Head's ambulance stunt!"

Burleigh and Tallboy pawed.

"What grate secret are you talking about?" growled Burleigh.

"Why, the secret of all these accidents!" replied Tubby, shaking like a jelly with fear.

"It's something I found out by myself and I'm the only chap in the skool who knows it! If you treat me decently, I'll tell you all about it!"

The Sixth-Formers' eyes gleamed with interest. Tubby could not have mentioned a subject more likely to turn their thoughts away from his tuck-raiding habits!

"Is it possibul," asked Tallboy, "that this fat yung idjut can throw some light on the mistery?"

"Barrell knows more about other fellows' bizzness than most of them know themselves, so it's more than likely!" said Burleigh, with a larf.

"Spill the beans, Barrell! If it's worth it, we'll let you off!"

"Thanks awfully, Burleigh!" gasped Tubby, and he then proceeded to tell the Sixth Formers the dark secret he held about Doctor Birchmall's activities in improving bizzness for the St. Sam's Ambulance.

Burleigh and Tallboy listened in sheer amazement, as they heard that the Head had walked round the Skool House, removing cole-hole covers here, dropping banana skins there, and greasing the stairs somewhere else. At the end of Tubby's amazing story they both gave a long-drawn-out wissle.

"Few! So that's the eggsplication!" cried Burleigh. "No wonder there have been so many accidents lately! You can scat, Barrell!"

"Thanks! I suppose you can't spare me a cake for tea? I'm feeling awfully peckish after telling



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EXTEND THE "L" IDEA

Says HARRY WHARTON

Novice-drivers are compelled by law to put a big "L" on their cars. Other road-users can't complain after that, that they have not been warned.

This is a jolly good idea which ought to be extended to other spheres than motoring.

Just think how useful it would be if learners in other matters had to adopt the same system!

If Coker, for instance, had to wear "L" on his jersey at footer, the opposing side might co-operate with him from the start, instead of learning by slow degrees that his chief aim was to put the ball in his own goal!

If Snoop or Stott carried the same mark when they turned up for a compulsory session at boxing in the gym, Wingate might be merciful and match them against Second Form babes instead of chaps of their own weight!

The more I think about it, the more uses I can see for it.

Bolsover might tie "L" round his neck when he tries one of Skinner's cigarettes; and word could be sent up

at once to reserve a bed for him in the sanatorium.

Seniors promoted to the rank of fagmasters could wear the letter when exercising their new privilege. This would give fags the chance of explaining exactly what they were allowed to do—and, still more important, what they were NOT allowed to do!

Follows unused to entertaining could don it when giving a study tea. If they failed to pass the cakes round frequently enough, their guests could then pass them round themselves and excuse the hosts' ignorance.

And what a lot of ripe tomatoes and pea-shooter ammunition would be saved if amateurs at Form sing-songs flourished the magic sign when they reached a breakdown!

Finally, it really should be compulsory to put "L" on the novice efforts at pastry-making often found in hamper sent from home. Here I can speak with feeling. I've just finished a cake made by Nugent's sister!

Taking it all round, that letter "L" ought to be extended in all directions. In fact, it's a "capital" idea!



you all about that, and—ow-ow! Leggo, you beasts!"

And Tubby Barrell fled without waiting for cake!

When he had gone the two stately seniors gave vent to their feelings by performing a Highland fling round the room.

"Hip, hip, hip, hooray! Now we can have our day!" chortled Tallboy.

"What are we going to do about it, Burleigh?"

Burleigh pondered deeply for a minnit. Then his rugged face creased up into a broad grin.

"I know! Sir Frederick Funguss, the chairman of the St. Sam's guvvernors, is visiting the skool to-day. We'll see if we can't

curtsey and picked up a pile of doennutts.

Soon the ginger-beet corks were popping merrily and glasses were bubbling over with the foaming licker.

Doctor Birchmall, whose good yewmour soon conquered the setback Jolly had given him, lifted his glass on high.

"Let's drink, boys," he sized, "to the long life and prosperity of the St. Sam's Ambulance! And may bizzness continue as brisk as it is at present!"

The chums of the Fourth artfully clinked their glasses to the Head's toast. But they looked rather thoughtful as they did so.

"That's all right as far as it goes, sir," remarked Frank Fearless, taking a big bite out of his doennutt.

"The worst of it is, all these accidents mean nothing but hard work for us. Meanwhile, you seem to be taking all the profits!"

The head looked quite pained.

"Really, Fearless, I'm surprised at you entertaining such suspicions! As a matter of fact the paltry little amount I am drawing in fees from our customers is nothing compared with the vast sum I have spent in buying equipment for the corps!"

"Grate pip!"

"Do you know any more funny stories like that, sir?"

"Apart from the guessting of munny, sir," said Jack Jolly, "what puzzles me is the amazing number of accidents that are happening lately. What can be causing them?"

Doctor Birchmall, whose good yewmour was in actual fakt caused by the circumstances that he had just finished laying another batch of accident traps, larfed lightly.

"The only eggsplication I can give, my dear Jolly, is that people are getting more careless than they used to be. In my opinion, it's a very lucky thing for St. Sam's that our ambulance corps is on the spot ready for—"

"Another accident, sir!" came a cry from the doorway at that moment.

Burleigh and Tallboy burst into the tuckshop. The Head put down his glass and eyed them with eager, gleaming eyes.

"Where is it, boys?" he cried. "Who is the unlucky viktin this time?"

"It's over by the Skool House steps, sir!" grinned Burleigh. "A banana-skin did it, and the viktin is Sir Frederick Funguss!"

And the kaptin of St. Sam's chuckled grimly.

He fully expected that that unexpected announcement would cause Doctor Birchmall to crumple up completely. Sir Frederick Funguss, the chairman of the Guvvernors of St. Sam's, was an

awfully big pot, and the Head mite have been excused for feeling uneeasy over tripping up such an important personage.

But the Head did nothing of the kind. Instead, he rubbed his bony hands in glee.

"Sir Frederick Funguss!" he muttered, gloatingly. "Why, he's simply rolling in oof—or, as the vulgar mite put it, he has every pecuniary advantage! I shall be able to charge him a wacking grate fee with every chance of getting it! First-aid squad! Attenshun!"

Jack Jolly & Co. jumped down from their stools and lined up for orders.

"All present and correct, sir!" snapped Jolly.

"Very good, Jolly! You will run over to the garage and get the ambulance and drive it to the steps."

"I, I, sir!" said the kaptin of the Fourth, and he saluted smartly and went off at the dubble.

"Follow me, the rest of you!" grinned the Head; and he lifted up his neeze and set off for the Skool House steps at a spanking pace.

Fearless and Merry and Bright followed him, while Burleigh and Tallboy brought up in the rear at a more leisurely pace. The two seniors were frowning.

"I thought we should properly take the wind out of his sails," growled Burleigh. "But he seems as pleased as Punch about it!"

"I bet he won't be so pleased when Sir Frederick starts ticking him off!" said Tallboy. "We'll follow and see what happens."

And they hurried along to the steps, full of hoap that they would see the downfall of the wily old accident profiteer.

Alas! Their fond hoaps were doomed to disappointment!

When they reached the seen of the accident, the ambulance had already arrived and Sir Frederick was being lifted in by the first-aid squad. Far from being annoyed with the Head, however, the chairman of the Guvvernors was brimming over with innersent gratitude.

"My deah Birchmall, your ambulance is simply marvellous!" he said, in his refined way. "Duz-zent it prove a rathah hevvy drain on the skool funds?"

"Oh, no, Sir Frederick!" almost purred the Head. "You see, we make a small charge to each customer. It dozzent make the thing self-supporting, of course, but I make up the balance out of my own pocket in my usual kind-hearted way."

"Gad! A frightfully good ideah, what, what!" cried the old baronet. "How much will the charge be in my case, my deah fellow?"

"A meer trifle, Sir Frederick!" leered Doctor Birchmall. "Inclusive of medical attenshun in the skool sannytorium, it will not amount to more than ten ginnies—or say ten pounds for spot cash!"

"Bai Jove! In that case I had better pay on the nail!"

And the next moment the njured chairman of the Guvvernors was handing over a crisp, russling ten-pound note! The Head grabbed the tenner and pocketed it with a litening-like movement.

"Ta, Sir Frederick! I'll give you the receipt in the sanny!" he grinned. "All aboard, boys—and drive like the dickens, Jolly!"

A moment later, with the bell jangling and the Head hanging on to the tailboard, the ambulance was roaring across the quad. And Burleigh and Tallboy were left staring after it with feelings that were too deep for words!

(More larks in next week's instalment! Don't miss it!)

A NICE CUP OF TEA IN THE MORNING!

Fag's Money-Making Brainwave

Tubb of the Third had a bright idea. Fagging for Wingate lately, he has had to get up early in the morning and take a cup of tea to the old sport in bed. Why not make a dozen cups at the same time and retail the rest to fellows not

entitled to fags?—he thought. The profit would make a very acceptable addition to his somewhat limited income.



Tubb's Early Morning Teas really got into their stride on the second morning. Fifth Formers started booking up for the rest of the term. Inquiries came from the Shell as to what reduction was offered in price for ordering quantities. The Upper Fourth asked if Tubb would take half-

price for a term's order from the entire Form.

Tubb began to feel that his rosy visions of the future had drawn appreciably nearer!

Alas! The silly young idiot's avarice put "paid" to them all on the third day!

It was obvious that he couldn't possibly carry out all the orders himself. But he was too keen on preserving all the profits intact for himself to let in any of his pals and he thought he'd try it.

Something had to go. What did go eventually was a loaded tray of well-filled teacups.

Unfortunately, it went when Tubb was at the top of the stairs—and when Mr. Prout, having just returned from a secret early-morning slimming bout in the gym, was at the foot!

The whole trayload descended on Prout's napper with a crash that made most fellows in the School House think that a bombing raid had started. And with that crash, Tubb's money-making brainwave also finished.

Next time Tubb happens to be short of cash, he intends to "raise the wind" without "putting the breeze up" Prouty!

TOO TRUE!

The school doctor has told Snoop that he doesn't spend enough time in the sunshine.

We could have told the doc. ourselves that Snoop has always been a "shady" character!