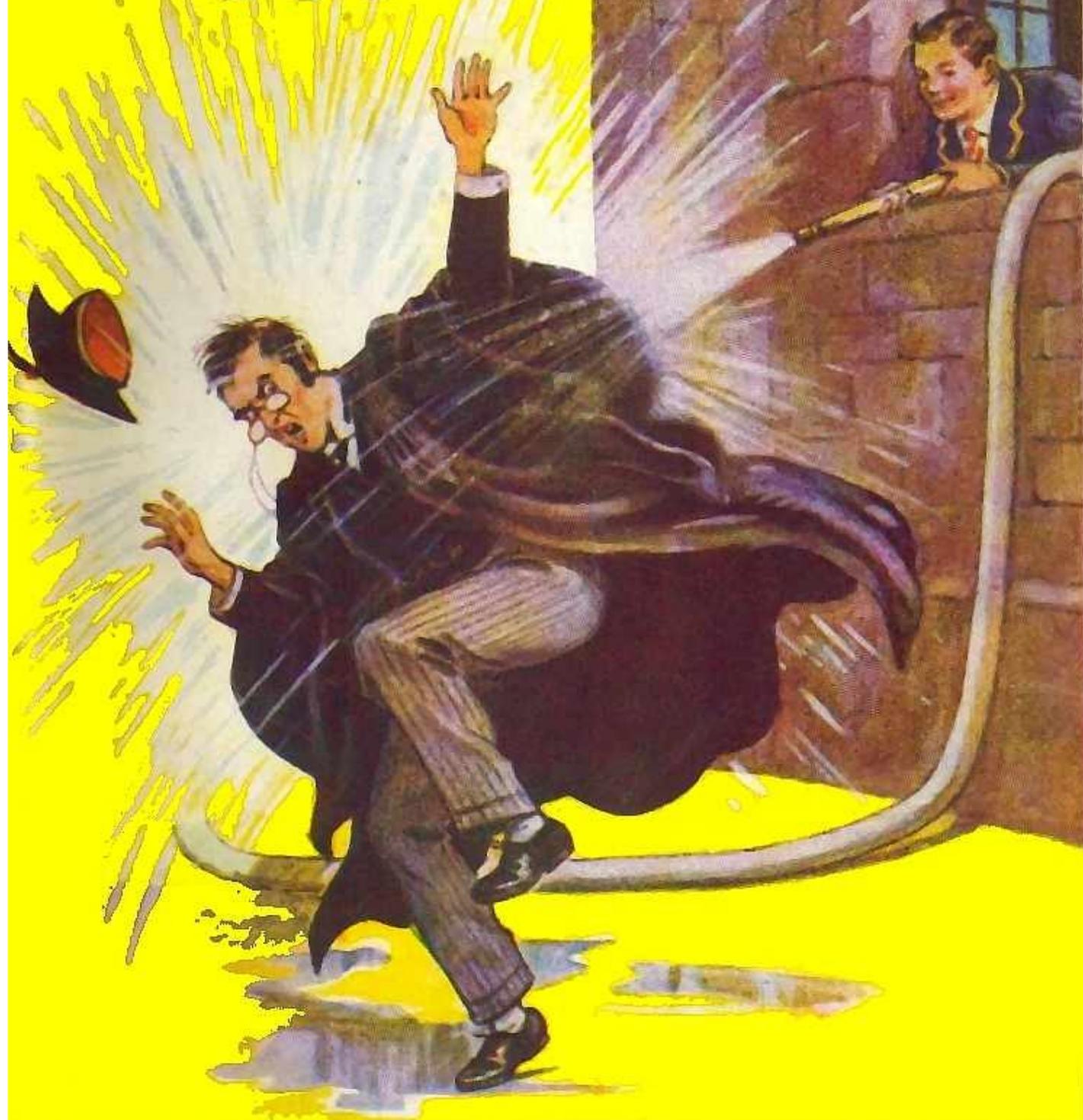


BILLY BUNTER'S BARRING- OUT



FRANK RICHARDS



HE BLINKED AT THE PLATE BOB WAS
HOLDING UNDER HIS LITTLE FAT NOSE

BILLY BUNTER'S BARRING-OUT

By
FRANK RICHARDS

Illustrated by
R.J. MACDONALD

CHARLES SKILTON LTD
LONDON
1948

BAD LUCK FOR BOB

"You will go on, Bunter!"

"Oh!" gasped Billy Bunter. It was just like Quelch!

They were doing Caesar in third school, in the Remove form-room. Harry Wharton was on "con", and Wharton's construe was so good that Mr. Quelch's crusty countenance had melted into a smile of approbation.

His attention was fixed on Wharton: and Billy Bunter had naturally supposed that he was safe from the gimlet-eye for a minute or two.

Bunter had been waiting for a safe moment, to transfer a sticky chunk of toffee from a sticky pocket to a sticky mouth.

He had to be cautious. It was risky to chew toffee in class. Billy Bunter was not the fellow to run risks if he could help it.

But on this occasion, Bunter really had no choice in the matter. He had found that toffee in Vernon-Smith's study only just before the bell rang for third school, so there had been no time to devour it before he had to roll into the form-room with the Remove. To keep it in his pocket till after class was scarcely possible—for Bunter. The inner Bunter yearned for the toffee that was growing warmer and stickier every moment in his trousers' pocket.

So Billy Bunter kept his eyes, and his spectacles, glued on Quelch, waiting for his form-master's attention to be concentrated elsewhere.

Now it seemed to be concentrated on Harry Wharton: and Bunter made the venture.

A fat sticky hand groped in a sticky pocket, and came out with a sticky chunk, which in another moment would have been parked in a capacious mouth. But at that moment the gimlet-eye shot round to Bunter, and Quelch rapped to him to "go on".

It was Quelch all over. Some beaks found it easier work to concentrate on apt pupils, and forget the backward ones. There were fellows in the Fourth Form who had browsed comfortably on the back benches in Mr. Capper's form-room for whole terms, their existence hardly noted by Capper. But Quelch was not like that. Quelch was a whale on duty. All the more because Wharton was a nerve-rest in comparison with Bunter, Quelch cut him short and whirled round on the Owl of the Remove.

Billy Bunter was not an apt pupil—far from it. His rooted objection to learning anything was only equalled by his remarkable gift for forgetting anything that he had to learn. At the moment, Bunter was even less interested than usual in the Gallic War. Having reached the period of Caesar's invasion of Britain, some of the juniors found a spot of interest in it. It was at no great distance from the site of Greyfriars School that Caesar had landed with his legions. But Billy Bunter couldn't have cared less. Bunter was deeply interested in toffee.

But the gimlet-eye was upon him: and he sat with the sticky chunk clutched in a fat hand, not daring to push it back into his trousers' pocket, still less to lift it to his mouth, under that gimlet-eye. If Quelch spotted that toffee, it meant trouble for Bunter.

"Did you hear me, Bunter?"

"Oh! Yes, sir! "

"Go on at once."

"Yes, sir! I—I think I—I've lost my place," stammered Bunter, to gain a moment.

That was not very useful with Quelch. Quelch expected members of his form to follow the lesson with attention.

"Bunter! If you have been so inattentive—!"

"Oh, no, sir! I mean, yes, sir! I mean I haven't lost my place—" stuttered Bunter.

"Go on from 'frigoribus' ," whispered Bob Cherry, to help the fat junior out. Bob was always good-natured. But it was not always safe to indulge good-nature under the eye of Henry Samuel Quelch.

"Did you speak to Bunter, Cherry?"

"Oh! Yes, sir."

"Take fifty lines! Bunter, go on immediately. If you have lost your place, it can be due only to idle inattention, and—."

"Oh, no, sir! I—I've got it all right!" gasped Bunter.

"Then go on at once!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

To stand up and construe, with that chunk of toffee in his fat hand, was to invite instant detection. Billy Bunter had to get rid of that chunk of toffee, priceless as it was. Bunter was not a bright fellow, but peril sharpens the wits. He rose, contrived to stumble as he did so, and rested a fat hand for a second on Bob Cherry's knee. The next second, he was perpendicular — leaving the chunk on Bob's knee, sticking to his trousers.

"Insula natura triquetra—" mumbled Bunter, going on from "frigoribus".

"Construe!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

Billy Bunter proceeded to construe. He was safe from discovery now — the toffee, even if discovered, was no longer in his possession. He hoped that Bob would not succumb to the temptation of eating it!

Really, there was no danger of that. A sticky chunk that had gathered dust and fluff in Bunter's trousers' pocket was not likely to tempt any other fellow in the Remove.

Bob Cherry stared down at that sticky lump on his knee, and drew a deep breath. Bob was not, perhaps, quite so careful with his clothes, as some fellows in the form, like Wharton, or Nugent, or Lord Mauleverer. But no fellow could be expected to like sticky toffee adhering to his trousers. Bob would gladly have kicked Bunter at that moment, had such a proceeding been feasible under Quelch's eye.

He took the chunk between finger and thumb, intending to drop it on the floor, with a reckless disregard of its priceless to Billy Bunter.

"Cherry!"

Well had Quelch's eyes been compared, by the Remove fellows, to gimlets!

Bob jumped.

"Yes, sir!" he stammered. "What is that, Cherry?"

"That, sir! Oh, n-n-nothing, sir."

"You have something in your hand, Cherry, which you have just taken from under your desk. Stand up at once and show me what it is."

"I—I haven't taken anything from under my desk, sir—."

"Have you anything in your hand or not?"

"Oh! I—I—."

"Stand up, and open your hand!" rapped Mr. Quelch. There was no help for it. With a crimson face, Bob rose to his feet, and all eyes in the Remove turned on him. His friends, Wharton and Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, stared, wondering what the matter was. Skinner, who had seen it all, winked at Snoop, who grinned. Billy Bunter blinked dolorously at Bob through his big spectacles. That chunk of toffee, only too clearly, was a goner now. Bunter had saved himself: but he had not saved the toffee. The fat Owl was so deeply concerned about the toffee, that he had no time to be concerned about the unfortunate Bob.

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch, as Bob Cherry, his face burning, revealed the sticky chunk in his hand. "Is—is—is that toffee! Toffee! Upon my word! Cherry, how dare you bring such comestibles into the form-room! Pah!"

"I—I—," mumbled Bob.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Vernon-Smith, "Cherry guzzling stickers in class, like that fat octopus Bunter!"

"Cherry! Stand out before the form!"

Bob gave Billy Bunter one look. Bunter did not even see it. His eyes and his spectacles were fastened on the toffee—now about to disappear for ever! Bob tramped out before the form: his face, always rather ruddy under his mop of flaxen hair, looking like a peony as he faced his frowning form-master.

"Drop that into the waste-paper basket at once," rapped Mr. Quelch, with a gesture of distaste towards the offending chunk.

Bob dropped it into the waste-paper basket.

"Cherry! I am surprised at this! I should not be so surprised in the case of a greedy, stupid boy like Bunter. In your case I am surprised—shocked—I may say disgusted! Your fingers are smeared—sticky—pah! Leave the form-room at once and wash your hands—and take care that they are quite clean when you return."

Bob gasped. It had happened to Billy Bunter, more than once, to be sent out of the form-room to wash his grubby fat paws. Bob Cherry had never dreamed that it would ever happen to him. Now it had!

"You will stay in the form-room after class, and write out the whole lesson," added Mr. Quelch. "Now, go—and I repeat, I shall expect to see your hands quite clean when you return."

The form-room door closed on Bob's burning ears.

Billy Bunter resumed his interrupted "con", handing out even worse howlers than usual, which was not surprising for Bunter was naturally worried about his toffee. Mr. Quelch rewarded him with a hundred lines, and called Peter Todd, who was going strong when Bob Cherry came back to the form-room—his fingers were no longer sticky, but his face was still crimson. He gave Bunter a glare as he dropped into his place.

Mr. Quelch's attention was fixed on Toddy, and the fat Owl ventured to whisper.

"You silly ass! What did you let him see the toffee for?"

"You fat villain!" hissed Bob. "Oh, really, Cherry—."

"After class, I'm going to kick you all round Greyfriars, and back again," breathed Bob.

"Beast!"

Most of the fellows were sorry for old Bob when they filed out of the form-room, and left him solitary there, with the Latin lesson to write out. But Billy Bunter, however, could not help thinking that it was all for the best

— he did not want to be kicked all round Greyfriars and back again. Other fellows gave Bob Cherry sympathetic glances as they went — Billy Bunter's parting glance lingered on the waste-paper basket, where the toffee reposed — gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream!

SHIRTY!

"SEEN Bunter?"

Bob Cherry snapped, rather than asked, that question. It was quite unusual for Bob to snap. He was easily the best-tempered fellow in the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars. Generally his face was sunny, his voice cheery. His friends looked at him in surprise, as he came tramping out of the House with a knitted brow.

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, were waiting for him. Wharton had an old footer under his arm, which the juniors were going to punt about before dinner. They did not expect Bob to look his bonniest, after his experience in third school, and after sitting in the form-room writing out Caesar. But neither did they expect him to look like Smith in one of his "tantrums".

"Bunter?" repeated Harry Wharton. "Yes — he's in the quad somewhere. You don't want Bunter."

"I jolly well do!" growled Bob.

"First time I've ever heard of anybody wanting Bunter," remarked Frank Nugent. "Never mind Bunter — come and help us punt this ball about — there's time before tiffin."

"I want to see Bunter first," grunted Bob. "I'm going to kick him all over the school. I'll punt Bunter, not the ball."

"But why the puntfulness of the esteemed and ridiculous Bunter?" asked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. Snort, from Bob.

"Didn't you see Quelch jump on me in class? Were you sitting in form with your eyes shut?"

"Hem!" murmured Harry Wharton. Bob Cherry, for once, was shirty — only too clearly he was shirty. It was unusual — but there it was.

"I don't see that you want to boot Bunter for that," said Johnny Bull, staring at Bob's flushed face. "You can't take it out of Bunter because the beak dropped on you for smuggling stickers into the form-room."

"You silly ass!" hooted Bob.

"Look here—!"

"I suppose you couldn't talk sense if you tried," snorted Bob. "Not that you've ever tried, so far as I know."

"Oh, pack it up," said Johnny. "I know it's pretty rotten to be sent out of the form-room to wash, but what the dickens do you expect, if you're as sticky as Bunter? No good slanging your pals because you got what you asked for."

"Do you think I took that toffee into the form-room?" shrieked Bob.

"Of course I do, as you had it in your hand when Quelch spotted you. What do you mean?"

"It was Bunter's," howled Bob.

"Was it?" said Johnny Bull. "Well, if it was Bunter's, why couldn't you leave it alone? If Bunter offered me toffee in class, I should leave it alone."

"You dithering chump, he didn't offer it to me—" raved Bob. "He was going to wolf it, when Quelch put him on con, and he jammed it on my knee to keep Quelch from spotting it, you yammering ass, and I was going to chuck it away, you blithering fathead, and that's how I got my fingers sticky, you benighted cuckoo, and that ass Quelch—."

"Easy does it, old man!" said Harry Wharton, hastily. "Quelch is in the quad, and if he heard you paying him compliments like that—."

"Blow Quelch!" snorted Bob.

"The blowfulness of an esteemed beak is not the proper caper, my worthy Bob," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Come and punt the ball—."

"Bother the ball!"

"——and let the frown of terrific infuriation be obliterated by the smile of restored equanimity," urged the nabob of Bhanipur.

"I'm going to kick Bunter! Think I'm going to be sent out of the form-room to wash, as if I were a sticky animal like Bunter? Why, I'll boot him all over the shop! I—I'll burst him! Where is he?"

"Make a noise like a jam-tart, and he'll come running!" suggested Nugent.

"Fathead!" roared Bob. Evidently he was not in the mood for little jokes. He stared, or rather glared, round, in search of the fattest figure at Greyfriars School.

A flash of big spectacles in the sunshine caught his eye.

A plump figure was rolling towards the group of juniors. Billy Bunter was blinking about him cautiously through those big spectacles, his little round eyes very watchful for Bob Cherry. He did not want to encounter Bob till that incensed youth had had plenty of time to cool down. Unluckily, his limited vision made all fellows, at a little distance, much of a muchness to Bunter, and he rolled directly towards Bob while watching out for him so warily.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There he is!" ejaculated Bob. "Hold on, old chap—!"

"B-r-r-r-r!"

Bob rushed to meet Bunter. The Owl of the Remove blinked at him as he came, and squeaked:

"I say, Bolsover, do you know whether Cherry's out yet? Oh, crikey!" added Bunter, in an alarmed howl, as he recognised Bob. "Oh, crumbs! I say, you keep off! Oh, scissors!"

Billy Bunter revolved on his axis, and flew. After him rushed Bob.

Bunter's little fat legs had slight chance against Bob's long ones in a foot-race. But he made frantic efforts, and those little fat legs fairly twinkled with speed. Dozens of fellows stared round at the chase. Bunter charged across the quad, crimson with exertion, puffing and blowing, his big spectacles slipping down his little fat nose: hardly seeing or caring whither he went, with that heavy tread thundering close behind him. There was a shout of laughter.

"Go it, Bunter!"

"Put it on, porpoise."

"He's just behind you, Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Harry Wharton. "There's Quelch!"

From a little distance, Mr. Quelch stared at the scene, with a frowning disapproving brow. Greyfriars fellows were not supposed to rush about the quad like young colts. Boys will be boys, and Quelch, who had once been a boy himself, in the dear, dead days beyond recall, admitted it. But there was a limit. Frowning, Mr. Quelch changed the direction of his majestic walk, and advanced to intervene.

Billy Bunter did not even see him. Bunter saw nothing as he charged on. He had no idea that Quelch was in the offing at all, till he crashed into him. Then it was too late.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Quelch, as he staggered from the shock. Bunter, spluttering, rolled over at his feet. The Remove master made a frantic effort to keep his balance—and failed. He sat down.

"Oh, scissors!" gasped Bob Cherry. He stopped just in time to save himself from crashing into the two on the ground—one sprawling, the other sitting.

"Upon my word!" gurgled Mr. Quelch.

"Ow! Keep him off!" roared Billy Bunter, as he rolled. "I say, you fellows, keep him off! I say—yaroooooh!"

Mr. Quelch picked himself up. His mortar-board was aslant, with a slightly intoxicated look. His face was thunderous. The glare of the fabled basilisk had nothing on that which the Remove master fixed on Bob Cherry. He did not even look at the sprawling, spluttering Owl. Bob had the whole benefit of that basilisk glare.

"Cherry!" gasped Mr. Quelch. He was almost winded.

"Oh! Sorry, sir!" stammered Bob. "I—I—."

"How dare you, Cherry! This accident is not Bunter's fault—it is yours—entirely yours! How dare you chase that stupid boy in such a-a-a ruffianly manner! Go to my study and wait for me there."

"I—I—."

"Not a word!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "Go!" Bob Cherry, with deep feelings, went into the House.

Billy Bunter, realising that it was his form-master into whom he had cannoned, sat up, and blinked at him in terror.

"I—I say, it—it wasn't me," spluttered Bunter. "I—I didn't—I—I never—I—I—I wasn't—oh, crumbs!"

Mr. Quelch did not heed him. He set his mortar-board straight, and moved away towards the House—slowly, and breathing a little stertorously as he went. A charge with Bunter's weight behind it would have told on a hefty footballer. It had told severely upon a middle-aged form-master. Mr. Quelch was in a painfully deflated state. And it was only too clear that his temper had a razor-like edge on it. Nobody envied Bob Cherry what was going to happen when Quelch arrived in his study.

"Well, that's torn it!" remarked Frank Nugent, when Quelch at length disappeared into the House.

"The tornfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, dismally.

"Poor old Bob!" said Harry. Bunter asked for it, but—."

"Fellow shouldn't lose his temper!" said Johnny Bull, judicially. "If a fellow loses his temper and charges about like a mad elephant—."

"I say you fellows," Bunter was perpendicular once more, still gasping for breath. "I say, think Cherry's going to get six?"

"Not much doubt about that," snapped Harry Wharton. "Quelch looked as if he would like to make it sixty."

"He, he, he! Serve him jolly well right—rushing after a fellow like a mad bull!" gasped Bunter. "I never did anything! First he goes and lets Quelch see my toffee, and it's a goner—then he makes out that it was my fault! I jolly well hope that Quelch will give him a dozen."

"You fat, footling, foozling frump—."

"Oh, really, Wharton—."

"Bob's for it," said Harry. "Only one thing we can do—let's kick Bunter."

"Good egg!"

"Beast!" gasped Bunter. And he departed in haste, without waiting to be kicked.

A few minutes later, fellows near Mr. Quelch's study window heard a sound from within—the rhythmic sound of a cane on trousers. There were six swipes, and each one sounded like a rifle-shot. When Bob Cherry emerged from the House, his ruddy face was a little pale, and he still looked "shirty"—more so than ever.

GOOD ADVICE NOT WANTED

"ROT"

"But, old chap—!"

"Rot! "

Herbert Vernon-Smith stopped at the door of No. 1 Study, in the Remove. He smiled, a sarcastic smile, as he heard Bob Cherry's voice from within, in emphatic tones. It sounded like an argument going on in that celebrated study.

"The rotfulness is not terrific, my esteemed Bob," came the soft tones of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I said rot, and I mean rot!" grunted Bob.

The Bounder looked in.

"Trouble in the happy family circle?" he inquired. The Famous Five were all there. It was a half-holiday that afternoon, and a half-holiday was generally a happy occasion. It did not seem so happy as usual now. Bob Cherry was still feeling the effects of that severe "six" in Quelch's study, and his ruddy face was clouded.

Harry Wharton looked round at Smithy, and frowned. "Nothing of the kind," he said, sharply.

"Oh, we're not rowing, Smithy," grunted Bob. "We're not so keen on rows as you are. Only these silly asses talking rot-as usual."

"Pass on, friend, and all's well!" said Johnny Bull. But the Bounder did not pass on. He came into the study, and stood leaning on the door-post, his hands in his trousers' pockets, surveying the chums of the Remove. That he was interrupting a discussion did not worry the Bounder. He was not wont to consider others very much.

"I've been looking for you, Cherry," he said.

"Well, here I am," said Bob. "What do you want?" He gave the Bounder rather a grim look. "If you're going to be funny about a fellow being sent out of the form-room to wash, you'd better chuck it before you begin. I've punched Skinner's head already for being funny about that."

"Not in the least," said the Bounder, amicably. "I hear that you had six from Quelch, and an impot over and above."

Bob gave an angry growl.

"Yes! Quelch would have liked to make it a dozen. He couldn't very well do that, so he chucked in an impot as a make-weight. I've got to write out the whole conjugation of amo, active and passive—blow it! And Quelch says I'm to take it to him at three, which means sticking in my study and mucking up the half." Bob's blue eyes glinted. "I'm fed up with Quelch!"

"Amo, amas, amat—ad libitum, and ad infinitum!" said Vernon-Smith. "Looks like a jolly half for you, old bean."

"Does it?" growled Bob. "Well, I'm going out all the same, and Quelch can whistle for his impot, see?"

"Oh!" said Smithy. He understood now what was the cause of the argument in No. 1 Study. Bob was in a mutinous mood, and his friends had been reasoning with him. It was their good advice that Bob had been calling "rot".

"Look here, Bob," said Harry Wharton.

"You can talk till you're black in the face, if you like," said Bob, "but I'm not sticking in my study on a glorious afternoon like this, because that fat ass Bunter smuggled stickers into the form-room, and Quelch got the wrong pig by the ear. We've fixed it to go over to Highcliffe on the bikes, and we're going."

"My esteemed Bob—!"

"Can it, Inky."

"You can't do it, Bob," urged Frank Nugent. "It's tough but it can't be helped. If you don't take that impot to Quelch, he will come up to your study for it—."

"Let him! I shan't be there."

"He will be wild," said Johnny Bull.

"He can be as wild as he likes. I tell you I'm not sticking in my study—we're riding over to Highcliffe."

Bob's face was set and stubborn. His friends were anxious and worried. Mr. Quelch was not a master to be disregarded with impunity. Bob was in no mood to think of consequences, but his friends thought of them for him.

"I wouldn't cut, old scout," said Vernon-Smith, shaking his head—rather to the surprise of the Co. They had given Bob good advice themselves, but they did not expect the same from the Bounder, who was a rebel by nature, and up against all authority on principle.

Bob gave his new adviser a glare. Good advice from the scapegrace of Greyfriars was unexpected, and he had no more use for it from the Bounder than from his pals.

"Oh, you wouldn't, wouldn't you?" he grunted. "Are you going to talk rot like these chaps? I like that from you—a fellow who's always kicking over the traces and hunting trouble."

"There are ways of doing these things," said the Bounder, with a grin. "If you cut without handing in that impot, you're just handing yourself over to Quelch—bound hand and foot. That's not sense. You can get back on Quelch, and I'll help you—that's why I was looking for you. But you can't defy a beak—they've got you if you do. There's such a thing as caution."

"Who wants to get back on Quelch?" snorted Bob.

"I should fancy you do, after getting six, and a real stinker of an impot."

"Rot!" growled Bob.

"I've got a jolly good idea for making the old bean sit up—."

"Take it away and boil it."

"Look here—."

"Oh, can it!" snapped Bob. "I'm going over to Highcliffe, but I'm not going to play any rotten tricks on Quelch. That's in your line—not in mine."

"Funky?" sneered the Bounder.

Bob's eyes gleamed.

"Mind if I chuck Smithy out of your study, Wharton?" he said.

"Not at all," answered Harry, laughing. "Go ahead."

The Bounder gave the Co. a black look, stamped out of the study and slammed the door after him, with a slam that rang the length of the Remove passage. Evidently Smithy had expected Bob, in the circumstances, to be ready to join up in a scheme of retaliation on his "beak". But Bob Cherry had no more use for schemes of vengeance than for good advice. He was angry and mutinous, and a little unreasonable, but there was not a spot of vengefulness in his nature. Smithy, who had meant well, according to his lights, departed in high dudgeon, leaving the study echoing with the slam of the door.

"Silly ass!" growled Bob. "Fat lot of good putting a drawing-pin in Quelch's armchair, or gum in his inkpot! Br-r-r-r! Look here, you men, it's time we pushed the bikes out, if we're going."

"We're not going," said Harry Wharton, quietly. "Courtenay and the Caterpillar will be just as pleased if we run across on Saturday—."

"We're going this afternoon."

"We're not," said the captain of the Remove.

"You'd be sorry you'd played the goat, old chap, by the time we got to Highcliffe. Cut off to your study and get that impot done—."

"Rats!"

"And then change and come down to Little Side."

"We'll fix up a pick-up for the afternoon, and round up all the fellows who haven't gone out of gates. A spot of soccer will do you good, old chap—after you've done that impot."

"I'm going over to Highcliffe," said Bob, stubbornly.

"Rot, old chap!" said Frank Nugent.

"Rot or not, I'm going."

"My esteemed Bob—!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I've said I'm going."

"Look here," hooted Johnny Bull, "we're not going, see? If you go over to Highcliffe, you'll jolly well go on your own."

"Suit yourself!" said Bob, gruffly. And he walked out of No. 1 Study, shutting the door after him with almost as much emphasis as the Bounder—leaving the other members of the Co. looking rather blank.

NO BIKE FOR BUNTER

"GOING out, Peter?"

"Sort of!" asserted Peter Todd. "I'm not taking this bike off the stand just for exercise, old fat bean."

"I mean, if you're going out on that bike, you won't be able to lend it to me for the afternoon," said Bunter.

"Exactly!" agreed Peter. "Not to mention that I should scalp you, slaughter you, and boil you in oil, if I found you on my jigger."

"Oh, really, Toddy! I've got to have a bike," said Bunter, peevishly. "I've got to get over to Cliff House this afternoon, to see my sister Bessie."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Peter.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Nothing funny in my going over to Cliff House to see Bessie, is there?" snorted Bunter.

"Bob Cherry still looking for you?" asked Peter.

"I'm not going over to Cliff House because of that, Peter. If you think I've been dodging Bob Cherry ever since third school, you're mistaken. Catch me dodging him! I'd knock him down as soon as look at him!" said Bunter, disdainfully. "Fat lot I care for him!"

Peter Todd chuckled. Ever since third school that morning, Billy Bunter had been leading rather a hunted life. He had had one narrow escape of establishing contact with the biggest foot in the Greyfriars Remove—since when, a glimpse of Bob Cherry in the offing had been sufficient to send the fat Owl scuttling for cover like a fat rabbit. Bob, by that time, had probably forgotten his intention of booting Bunter for his sins, but the guilty flee when no man pursueth.

"'Tain't that at all," went on Bunter. "I could knock Cherry spinning just as easily as I could you, Toddy."

"Just about!" agreed Peter.

"Still I don't want to row with the chap, said Bunter. "He will get over that six from Quelch if I steer clear of him for a bit. But I can't be looking over my shoulder every minute to see if he's coming—not that I'm dodging him, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh cackle!" said Bunter. "I'm going over to Cliff House because I haven't seen Bessie this term yet. I hope the beast will have got over his temper by the time I come in—I mean, I don't care two straws whether he gets over his temper or not. Like to come to Cliff House with me, Peter? I'll take you with pleasure, if you'll give me a lift behind on your bike, and the same back again."

"This is a bike—not a ten-ton lorry," answered Peter.

"Beast!"

"Why not ride your own jigger?" asked Peter.

"How can I when there's two punctures and the mudguard's twisted, and the chain broken? I've asked you to mend it a dozen times at least—and look at it! snapped Bunter. "I shall have to borrow a bike. Mauly's won't do."

"Mauly's about the only man in the Remove who wouldn't kick you for borrowing his jigger," remarked Peter.

"It won't go," grunted Bunter. "The front wheel jams somehow since I had it out on Saturday. I suppose I'd better take Cherry's. It's a rotten high machine—long-legged beast! Hold on a minute, Peter, and put the saddle down for me, will you, as low as it will go."

"You frabjous, frumptious chump," said Peter. "You'd better let Cherry's jigger alone. He isn't exactly pleased with you, already."

"Fat lot I care! But you see," explained Bunter, "he won't be wanting the jigger this afternoon. That gang were going over to Highcliffe, but Cherry won't be able to go, as he's got to stick in and do a paper for Quelch. Serve him jolly well right, too—chasing a fellow like a mad bull. He won't know I've had it—not that I care whether he does or not."

"He might guess, if you bring it back with the front wheel jammed somehow, or a couple of punctures and the chain broken," suggested Peter. "Take my tip and leave it alone, old fat frump."

"I want you to put the saddle down for me, Peter. I wish you wouldn't jaw so much—you're wasting my time."

"Not to mention my own!" grinned Peter. "Goodbye, old tulip." Peter wheeled his machine out of the bike-shed.

"Hold on," yelled Bunter. "You haven't lowered that saddle for me, Peter. I say, ain't you going to put that saddle down for me? "

"You've guessed it!" said Peter, over his shoulder, and he disappeared with his jigger.

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

The fat Owl blinked at Bob Cherry's bicycle with an exasperated blink. He lifted it from the stand, and blinked at it again. But no amount of blinking could alter that fact that that bike, as it stood, was too high for Billy Bunter's little fat legs: it was obvious that, hoisted into the saddle, his feet would not reach the pedals. The saddle had to be put down to the lowest possible extent to accommodate Bunter.

There was no special reason why Bunter, if he wanted a saddle lowered, should not handle the job himself. But it implied exertion, and Bunter disliked exertion. It was so much more agreeable to watch some other fellow do it. But Peter having declined, with the selfishness to which Bunter was sadly accustomed, there seemed no help for it, and he grunted and opened the tool-bag. Then there was a tramp of feet as two Remove fellows came in at the open doorway.

Bunter blinked round at Squiff and Tom Brown. His fat face brightened.

"I say, you fellows," he squeaked.

"What are you doing with Cherry's bike?" asked Squiff.

"Oh, he's lent it to me," explained Bunter. "I say, Field, will you shove the saddle down for me? I haven't got hop-pole legs like that ass Cherry."

"That ass Cherry?" repeated the Australian junior. "Well, if he's lent you his bike, he's an ass all right. But has he?"

"Haven't I just said so?" hooted Bunter.

"Oh, quite!" grinned Squiff. "But I'd rather hear Bob say so, before I mess about with his bike. Leave it alone, you fat Ananias."

"Beast! I say, Browney, will you put the saddle down for me? You're not a lazy slacker like Field, old chap."

"Why can't you put it down for yourself?"

"Oh! I—I—I've cut my finger! It—it's bleeding like anything—awful pain—."

"Too bad," said Tom Brown. "Let s see it—I'll tie it up for you."

"I—I mean, it isn't exactly bleeding—it—it's an internal pain—inside, you know. It won't take you a minute to put the saddle down for me."

"It won't!" agreed Tom Brown, laughing. "Come on, Squiff."

"I say, you fellows," howled Bunter.

But Squiff and Tom Brown wheeled out their machines, and were gone. Billy Bunter breathed hard and deep. He had almost made up his fat mind to undertake the necessary labour himself, when there was again a tramp of feet, and three Fifth-form men came in—Coker, Potter, and Greene.

Bunter blinked at them—not a hopeful blink. Fifth Form men were far from likely to be helpful to a fag in the Lower Fourth. Still, it cost nothing to prefer a request.

"I say, Coker, I've cut my finger—I mean I've sprained my wrist! I say, will you put this saddle lower for me, old fellow?"

Coker of the Fifth gazed at him.

"Did you call me old fellow?" he asked. Coker seemed to doubt whether he had heard aright. "Old fellow" from a Lower Fourth junior was the limit, in the opinion of Coker of the Fifth.

"Yes, old chap! You see, I've hurt my thumb, and I can't—yaroooooh!" roared Bunter. "Leggo! Ow! Wow! Leggo, you beast."

Bob Cherry's bike clanged on the concrete, and Billy Bunter sat beside it, with a bump and a roar. Having landed him there, Horace Coker gave him a glare of ineffable scorn and disdain, and took no further notice of him. Coker was frowning, and Potter and Greene grinning, as the three Fifth Form men wheeled their machines out.

"Oooooogh!" gurgled Bunter. "Beast! Ow" Oooh." It was borne in upon Billy Bunter's fat mind, that if that saddle was going to be shifted, his own fat hands had to do the shifting. So he propped up the bike and sorted out the tools, spluttering for breath as he did so. Really, it was not a tremendous task when Bunter came to do it, and in a few minutes, the saddle was down to the lowest notch. Bunter wearily secured it, and was putting the spanner back in the tool-bag when Skinner and Snoop came in.

"Hallo, that looks like Cherry's bike," remarked Skinner.

"He's lent it to me," said Bunter, hastily.

"Does he know?" asked Skinner, and Snoop chuckled.

"Yah!" was Billy Bunter's elegant reply to that question, and he started for the doorway with the bike.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Skinner. "If Cherry's lent you his bike, I wonder what he's coming down to the bike-shed for."

Bunter jumped.

"Oh, crikey! Is—is—is he coming here?" he gasped. "Look here, he can't be going out—he's got a paper to do for Quelch! If he's after me—."

"He's coming, anyhow!" chuckled Snoop. "He was just behind us."

"Oh, lor'!"

Bunter rushed the bike doorward.

As Bob Cherry had to stay in and write a Latin paper for Quelch, Bunter had naturally not expected him to turn up anywhere near the bike-shed. But evidently—to Bunter—he was after the fat Owl! If he was coming, it behoved Billy Bunter to get off the scene with the borrowed bike, in the shortest possible space of time. In hot haste, he careered through the doorway with the bike.

Crash!

Snoop had said that Bob was just behind, on his way to the bike-shed. Being only just behind, it was natural that he should arrive less than a minute after Skinner and Snoop. He arrived in time to meet the front wheel of the bike, as Bunter rushed it out. "Oh!" roared Bob, as the bike crashed on him.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Skinner and Snoop. They seemed amused.

"Why—what—who-how—," spluttered Bob, as he staggered and stumbled over. "What are you running that bike into me for, you mad porpoise? Why, it's my bike—what are you doing with my bike? By gum, I'll—." Bob Cherry scrambled up, red with wrath.

Billy Bunter made a bound to escape. It was a rapid bound—but it was not quite rapid enough. Bob Cherry shot after him, and his foot shot out.

"Whoop!" roared Bunter, as it landed.

"You fat villain—!"

"Yaroooh!"

Billy Bunter accelerated, hitting the open spaces on his highest gear. Bob glared after him.

"Come back and have another, you fat tick!" he roared.

Bunter was not likely to accept that invitation. He vanished into space, and Bob, breathing hard went back to pick up his bike. He found that he had a saddle-shifting job on hand before he could ride it, and rather regretted that he had let Bunter off with only one kick. Still, it had been a fairly hefty one, and perhaps it had been enough. That, at least, was Bunter's impression.

THE WORM TURNS

"Ow! Oooogh! Ow!"

"Bunter's signature-tune!" remarked Frank Nugent. Four juniors chuckled. Those breathless sounds of woe indicated that William George Bunter was in the offing.

Having decided to follow their erring comrade and reason with him, Harry Wharton and Co had come out of the House, to look for Bob. He was not to be seen in the quad, so they headed for the bike-shed, when what Nugent described as Bunter's signature-tune impinged upon their ears. A fat figure came rolling round the corner of the House—preceded by a series of breathless, woeful squeaks. Billy Bunter wriggled as he rolled, as if he had a pain somewhere. No doubt he had!

"Oh! Ow! Ooogh! I say you fellows—ow!" Billy Bunter blinked dolorously at four grinning faces. "I say—ooh! That beast—oh!"

"Which?" asked Johnny Bull. "Loder been licking you?"

"Ow! No! That beast Cherry!" gasped Bunter "He's kicked me."

"Was the kickfulness terrific?" asked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, sympathetically.

"Beast! Ow! He's jolly well kicked me!" roared Bunter. "Came after me—he's been hunting me ever since third school, as you fellows know—and I thought he was in his study doing his paper for Quelch, and he wasn't, and—wow!" Bunter wriggled and wriggled. "Hunting for me, instead of doing his paper for Quelch! Ow! I'm jolly glad I ran his bike into him—wow!"

"You've been bagging Bob's jigger?" asked Harry.

"Well, he won't want it, as he can't go out—ow! I say, you fellows, if Bob Cherry fancies he can kick a chap, he's jolly well mistaken, as he will jolly well find out—see? I'll show him! I'll jolly well show him! Wow!"

"Come on, you men," said Harry Wharton. It was clear, from Bunter's remarks, that Bob was at the bike-shed, so there was no time to be lost if he was yet to be reasoned with.

The four juniors hurried on their way. Billy Bunter blinked after them, as they went, with an angry snort.

Evidently, the chums of the Remove attached no importance whatever to the circumstance that Bunter had been kicked. To Bunter himself it was a matter of the first importance. Often and often had William George Bunter been kicked, for his sins, but he had never grown to like it.

"Beasts!" hissed Bunter. "I'll jolly well show that beast Cherry, anyhow! Wow!"

The fat Owl rolled into the House, and up to the Remove passage. He was not heading for his own study—he passed No. 7, and rolled on to No. 13.

That study belonged to Bob Cherry, Hurree Singh, Mark Linley, and Wun Lung, the Chinese junior. Bob and Hurree Singh, he knew, were not there, and it was not probable that the other fellows were in the study on a sunny half-holiday, a fine autumn afternoon that tempted every fellow out of doors. To make sure, Bunter tapped on the door. There was no reply from within, and he opened the door, and blinked into the room through his big spectacles.

It was, as he expected, vacant.

With a grunt of satisfaction, the fat Owl rolled in, and shut the door after him.

There was a vengeful gleam in the little round eyes behind the big round spectacles. Bunter was on the trail of vengeance.

Billy Bunter was not, as a rule, a vengeful fellow. He had his faults—indeed, their name was legion. But remembering grudges was not usually one of them. Bunter as a rule forgot offences almost as easily as he forgot his lessons, and the little sums he owed up and down the Remove. But he was feeling very sore now, and the worm will turn. Bunter had been kicked—hard. He would have liked to punch Bob Cherry's head—but how was a fellow to punch a head he couldn't reach? But there were other ways and means.

"Won't I jolly well show him!" breathed Bunter. .

Bob had to come up to his study, before long, to write that paper for Quelch. That Bob, in a mutinous mood, intended to go out of gates without writing that paper first, Bunter was not aware. He expected Bob, as a matter of course to come up to the study to work his weary way through the conjugation of "amo", active and passive. A surprise—not a pleasant one—was to greet the unsuspecting Bob when he arrived there. Bunter was going to enjoy that surprise—Bob, most decidedly, was not.

The fat Owl opened the door of the study cupboard.

Bunter knew his way about No. 13, as he did about all the other studies in the Remove. Few study cupboards had secrets from Billy Bunter.

From the cupboard he took a large flat tin, which was used for toffee-making in the study on the happy occasions when materials for the same were available.

Placing the tin on the table, he poured the inkpot into it.

Then from the cupboard he took, in succession, a bottle of gum, a bottle of pickles, a tin of liquid shoe-polish, and a bottle of lemonade, and streamed their contents into the flat tin. He added a shovelful of cinders and ashes from the grate, and stirred up the horrid mixture with the shovel, grinning as he did so.

But he was not satisfied yet.

He stepped to the door, opened it a few inches, and blinked cautiously into the passage. Nobody was in sight. Bob was not coming yet. Not for a moment did it occur to Bunter that he was not coming at all.

Assured that he had time, the fat junior picked up the shovel again, and proceeded to rake down soot from the study chimney.

There seemed to be plenty of soot in the chimney, judging by the cloud that descended into the fireplace. Blacks floated all over the study, settling on books and papers, chairs and carpet. That did not worry Bunter. It was not his study.

"He, he, he!" gurgled Bunter, as he shovelled soot into the fiat tin on the table, and stirred it up.

All was ready now.

Bunter placed the door ajar. Standing on a chair, he lifted the large flat tin, and lodged it securely, one side resting on the top of the door, the other on the lintel over the doorway.

It was quite safe there, till the door was pushed open from without. Then the tin, lacking visible means of support, would fall, obeying the well-known Law of Gravitation so ably demonstrated by Sir Isaac Newton. It would come down—cosh!—on the head of the unlucky person pushing open the door! Bob Cherry, probably, would like a mixture of soot, ashes, cinders, gum, ink, pickles, shoe-polish, plus the tin, no more than Billy Bunter liked a boot on his tight trousers. This was tit for tat—a Roland for an Oliver.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter.

Having arranged his booby-trap to his satisfaction, the fat Owl stepped down, chuckling. All was ready now.

With the booby-trap in position, it was impossible for Bunter to leave the study. But he did not want to leave it. Bunter had thought all this out—he had it cut and dried.

In a corner of the study, opposite the door, stood a Chinese screen that belonged to little Wun Lung. That screen showed many signs of wear and tear, inevitable in a junior study, and there were several rents in it. Billy Bunter moved the screen, packed himself into the corner, and drew the screen in place again. It hid him completely from view. But while completely hidden himself, Bunter had full view of the study, by applying his eyes to one of the rents in the screen.

From that coign of vantage, Bunter was going to watch the crash when Bob Cherry pushed open his study door. He was going to see the flat tin pan come down—cosh— on Bob's devoted head, smothering him from head to foot with a horrible mixture of soot, ashes, cinders, pickles, and the rest. He was going to enjoy the sight! Bob was not—but Bunter was! Afterwards, it would be easy enough to escape—for Bob, in that ghastly state, would be chiefly in want of a wash; and the astute fat Owl had only to remain concealed in his hide-out till the coast was clear.

It was a masterly and absolutely water-tight scheme—at all events, Billy Bunter had no doubt that it was.

With a grinning face Bunter waited.

He did not expect Bob to be long—he had to hand in his impot before he could go out; and in fact was leaving it rather late already. Every moment now Billy Bunter expected to hear a heavy tread coming up the Remove passage.

But it did not come.

Bunter had not expected a long wait. But it seemed that he was booked for one. Minute followed minute, and the fat Owl grew more and more impatient. Tired of standing he sat down in the corner, and rested his fat shoulders in the angle of the wall. Still there was no sound of a heavy tread coming along to No. 13 Study. Why the beast was hanging it out like this, Bunter could not guess. It was very annoying, to Bunter. Still, sitting in a corner, resting fat shoulders and a fat head against a wall, was not really hard work, and Bunter sat it out.

He was rewarded at last. There was a sound of footsteps in the Remove passage, and they stopped at the study door.

Bunter, on his feet again, peered through a slit in the screen, grinning from one fat ear to the other, almost breathless with joyful anticipation. There was a sharp tap on the door, and it was pushed open, and then—**COSH!**

WHAT BUNTER SAW!

MR. QUELCH glanced up from a pile of Form papers on his table, to the clock in his study and frowned.

From afar came the chime of three, from the old Greyfriars clock-tower. That caused the Remove master to glance up at the clock on his mantelpiece.

It was three o'clock.

It was time—exactly time—for Robert Cherry, of the Remove, to hand in his imposition: the complete conjugation of the verb "amo" active and passive. Three o'clock was the appointed time: and three had chimed from the clock-tower, three was indicated by the clock on Mr. Quelch's mantelpiece—and so there should have been, at that moment, a tap at Quelch's door.

But there was no tap!

Henry Samuel Quelch frowned, and compressed his lips.

After this Combined Operation he turned to the Form papers.

The junior was, perhaps, entitled to a few minutes' grace.

Mr. Quelch was not in the best of tempers that afternoon. He had had a severe and painful shock in the morning. He had been charged over headlong by Billy Bunter, bumped and winded. A Remove junior no doubt would have forgotten it by this time—but the Remove master had not. Between fifteen and fifty there was a great gulf fixed. Aches and pains lingered in Mr. Quelch's bones, detracting considerably from his comfort. Every twinge reminded him of the incident, and of Bob Cherry—the cause of it. True, it was Bunter who had charged him over—but Bunter had done that in flight from Bob—the blame was on the pursuer, not the pursued. Mr. Quelch was deeply annoyed with that member of his form "Six" and an impot seemed to him a light punishment for the offender.

But annoyed as he was, Mr. Quelch was a just man. Aristides himself had nothing on Quelch on that line.

Robert Cherry should have delivered that impot in his form-master's study promptly at three. Quelch himself was the soul of punctuality, and had little patience with procrastination in others. Nevertheless, he could make allowances for human nature. If Robert Cherry was really late with that impot, the vials of wrath were ready to pour. But a few minutes could be excused in a schoolboy—especially a rather thoughtless schoolboy like Bob—that was only just. So Mr. Quelch started on another Form paper, having no doubt that before he was through it, he would hear the expected tap on his door.

It happened to be Mark Linley's paper, and Mr. Quelch's frowning brow relaxed as he examined it. Mark was the best scholar in the Remove, and his Latin papers always had a pleasing effect on Mr. Quelch.

He was looking quite genial by the time he was through.

Had Bob entered the study at that moment, with his impot, he would have found Quelch quite amiable, in spite of twinges: and any little errors due to haste would probably have been overlooked. Unluckily, Bob did not arrive.

Mr. Quelch glanced at the clock again. The genial expression faded from his face. Robert Cherry was five minutes late.

Quelch's lips compressed in a tight line. His jaw looked like a vice, and he resumed correcting papers. Five minutes' grace was the limit. Unless Robert Cherry, when he came, could give a very good explanation of the delay, he was booked for another spot of trouble with his form-master.

But he did not come!

Papers rustled under Mr. Quelch's fingers, as the minutes passed. The quarter chimed from the clock-tower.

Then Mr. Quelch rose to his feet. His face was set.

This was not mere procrastination. It was not mere thoughtlessness. It was disregard of authority. It was practically defiance. Mr. Quelch was the man to deal with that kind of thing with a drastic hand.

The Remove master left his study, thoughtfully placing a cane under his arm as he did so. On his way to the staircase, he passed Wingate and Gwynne, of the Sixth Form; and after he had passed, the two prefects glanced at one another with a faint grin. The expression of Quelch's speaking countenance, and the cane under his arm, indicated that some luckless fellow in the Remove was "for it".

Mr. Quelch mounted the stairs. .

Nobody was about, as he crossed the study landing, to the couple of steps that led up from it to the Remove landing. He crossed the Remove landing, and rustled into the passage. With a grim brow, he walked—or rather stalked—up the Remove passage to No. 13 Study.

He was angry: and, like the prophet of old, he felt that he did well to be angry. Nevertheless, he was still prepared to temper justice with mercy, if he found Robert Cherry in his study slogging hard at that impot. But if he did not find him so occupied—!

He arrived at No. 13 Study, tapped sharply on the door which stood ajar, pushed it open, and entered. And then—!

What happened next, Mr. Quelch hardly knew. Something descended upon him—he did not know what. For a horrid moment it seemed as if the ceilings were collapsing on his head. Something, whatever it was, banged on his mortar-board, knocking it sideways. Something—something wet, and sticky, and smelly, and clammy—streamed all over him. It soaked his scanty hair, it oozed into his ears, it trickled down his neck. From beneath that sticky clammy mixture that clothed him like a garment, Mr. Quelch spluttered a frantic splutter.

What was it? What had happened? He was choked, blinded, drenched, smothered, asphyxiated. He staggered to and fro, helplessly, spluttering, gasping, gurgling. His cane dropped to the floor. His mortar-board followed. He swayed, and staggered, and reeled.

"Urrrrgggh! Ooooch! Wurrnggh! Oh! Wooooch!" In the opposite corner of the study, peering through big spectacles and a slit in the screen, Billy Bunter stood turned to stone.

He did not make a sound. He couldn't leave, if he had wanted to—and most assuredly he did not want to.

What Bunter saw petrified the fat junior. The stony stare of the fabled Medusa could not have petrified him more utterly and thoroughly.

It was Quelch!

He had expected Bob Cherry. He had not dreamed of expecting Quelch. But it was the unexpected that had happened.

It was Quelch—and Quelch had walked into the booby-trap so carefully prepared for Bob Cherry! It was Quelch, his form-master, upon whose majestic nut that booby-trap had descended. It was Quelch—Henry Samuel Quelch—who was staggering, spluttering, gurgling, swamped and smothered by a horrible mixture of soot, and ashes, and ink, and gum, and pickles, and shoe-polish. It was too awful for belief, but there it was—it was Quelch! Billy Bunter had been prepared to view the scene with a joyful grinning face, but what Bunter saw did not make him feel like grinning—far from it. His fat jaw dropped—his eyes almost popped through his spectacles—and he stood petrified with horror.

"Wurrnggh! Gurrnggh!" Quelch was making strange, inarticulate sounds. "Oooooogh! Wooooogh!

Mmmmmmm!"

The Remove master clawed at the sticky stuff on his face. He rubbed his sooty eyes, and stared and glared round him.

It dawned on him what had happened. It was soot that smothered and scented him. There were other ingredients, equally unpleasant—but soot predominated. As he realised what had happened—that he had walked into a booby-trap—towering rage boiled up within Mr. Quelch.

"Urrnggh! Cherry!" he gasped.

He gave a sort of inky glare round the study. Bob Cherry was not there—but after what had happened, Mr. Quelch hardly expected to see him there. He was not likely to linger on the scene—after what he had done! Quelch had no doubt who had done it. That a fat terrified Owl was hidden behind the screen in the corner of the study was not likely to occur to him. Cherry had done this—how could he doubt it? That was why he had not brought his imposition to his form-master's study—knowing that if he did not, his form-master would come up to inquire the reason why—and he had prepared this ghastly trick for him when he came. Mr. Quelch breathed fury—and soot—as he thought of it.

"Ooooh! The young rascal! Wooooogh!" Quelch coughed, and gasped, and gurgled. He picked up the cane, and whirled round in the doorway. In a cooler moment Mr. Quelch would have realised that, important and urgent as it was to get within a cane's length of the young rascal who had done this, he was in no state for making a public appearance, and that his best guess was to head for the nearest bathroom, and hot water and soap. But Mr. Quelch was not cool. Generally rather icy, he resembled rather a volcano in full eruption. Like the alpine climber in the poem, his brow was set, his eye beneath flashed like a falchion from its sheath, as he whirled out of No. 13 Study into the passage, scattering a cloud of soot.

Soot dropped from him, in flakes, as he careered down the passage. He left a trail of soot and trickling ink and pickles behind him. And when he was gone a frightened fat face peered from behind the screen in No. 13 Study, and Billy Bunter moaned feebly.

"Oh, crikey!"

BLACK MAN!

"WHO—?"

"What—?"

Wingate and Gwynne ejaculated together, as they stared blankly at a strange, weird figure on the staircase. Who it was, what it was, the two Sixth Form men did not know, for the moment: they could only stare in wonder. Mr. Quelch was hardly recognisable just then. Not one of his colleagues on the Greyfriars staff would have known him. He was blackened with soot: like Phoebus Apollo, he was made like unto the night!

"Wingate!" Mr. Quelch's voice was hoarse, partly from excitement, partly because some of the soot had got into his mouth. "Urrrrggh! Wingate! Have you seen Cherry—urrrrrggh!—of my Form?"

"Is—is—is that Mr. Quelch?" stuttered the captain of Greyfriars.

"Eh? What? Yes, of course it is I," snapped Mr. Quelch. "What do you mean, Wingate?" It did not occur to Mr. Quelch, for the moment, that he was unrecognisable.

"I—I—I—" babbled Wingate. "I—I—has something happened, sir?"

It was rather a superfluous question. Only too clearly something had happened. Only a few minutes ago, Mr. Quelch had passed the two prefects, looking grim, but his usual neat and spotless self. And now—! Obviously something had happened!

"Is—is—is that soot?" gasped Gwynne. It was another quite superfluous question: the black cloud that floated round Quelch as he moved was plainly soot.

"Oh, gum! What's that?"

"Who's that bargee?"

"Who's that nigger?"

Five or six fellows came up from various directions. Temple, Dabney, and Fry, of the Fourth—Hobson and Hoskins of the Shell—Tubb of the Third—Sammy Bunter of the Second—all converged upon the spot, staring at Mr. Quelch, and ejaculating in chorus. Not one of them recognised him. He was a strange and uncanny object to their eyes, exciting startled interest.

"Who is it—what is it?" exclaimed Cecil Reginald Temple. "Oh, gum! What the jolly old dooce—!"

"It's a nigger!" squeaked Sammy Bunter.

"It's a chimney-sweep!" exclaimed Tubb. "What's a chimney-sweep doing here? He's spilling soot all over the shop."

"Shut up, you young asses!" rapped out Wingate, hastily, while Mr. Quelch gave the juniors a sooty and deadly glare. "It's Mr. Quelch—there's been an accident—"

"Quelch!" gasped Temple. "Oh, gad!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are those boys laughing?" Mr. Quelch almost roared. "At what are those boys laughing?" Even at that moment, Mr. Quelch was incapable of saying "What are those boys laughing at?" "Upon my word! I—I—"

"Now, then, clear off, you!" exclaimed Gwynne, hustling the juniors away. They crowded back, staring at Mr. Quelch, and still laughing—they could not help it. A Greyfriars form-master disguised in soot seemed too much for them.

To Mr. Quelch himself, there was nothing of a comic nature in this shocking episode. Like the good old queen, he was "not amused". But the beholders seemed very much amused indeed. Grinning faces looked at Mr. Quelch from all directions, and there was a ripple of merriment.

"Wingate! I asked you whether you had seen Cherry of my Form!" hooted the Remove master.

"I—I don't think I've seen him since dinner, sir! Is—is he wanted?"

"He has done this!" panted Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, my hat. I—I—I mean, what—what has happened, sir?"

"That is a foolish question, Wingate!" Mr. Quelch's manners were generally irreproachable: a little icy, perhaps, but always polite. But under the present stress they deteriorated. "Cannot you see what has happened? Cannot you see that I am smothered in soot?"

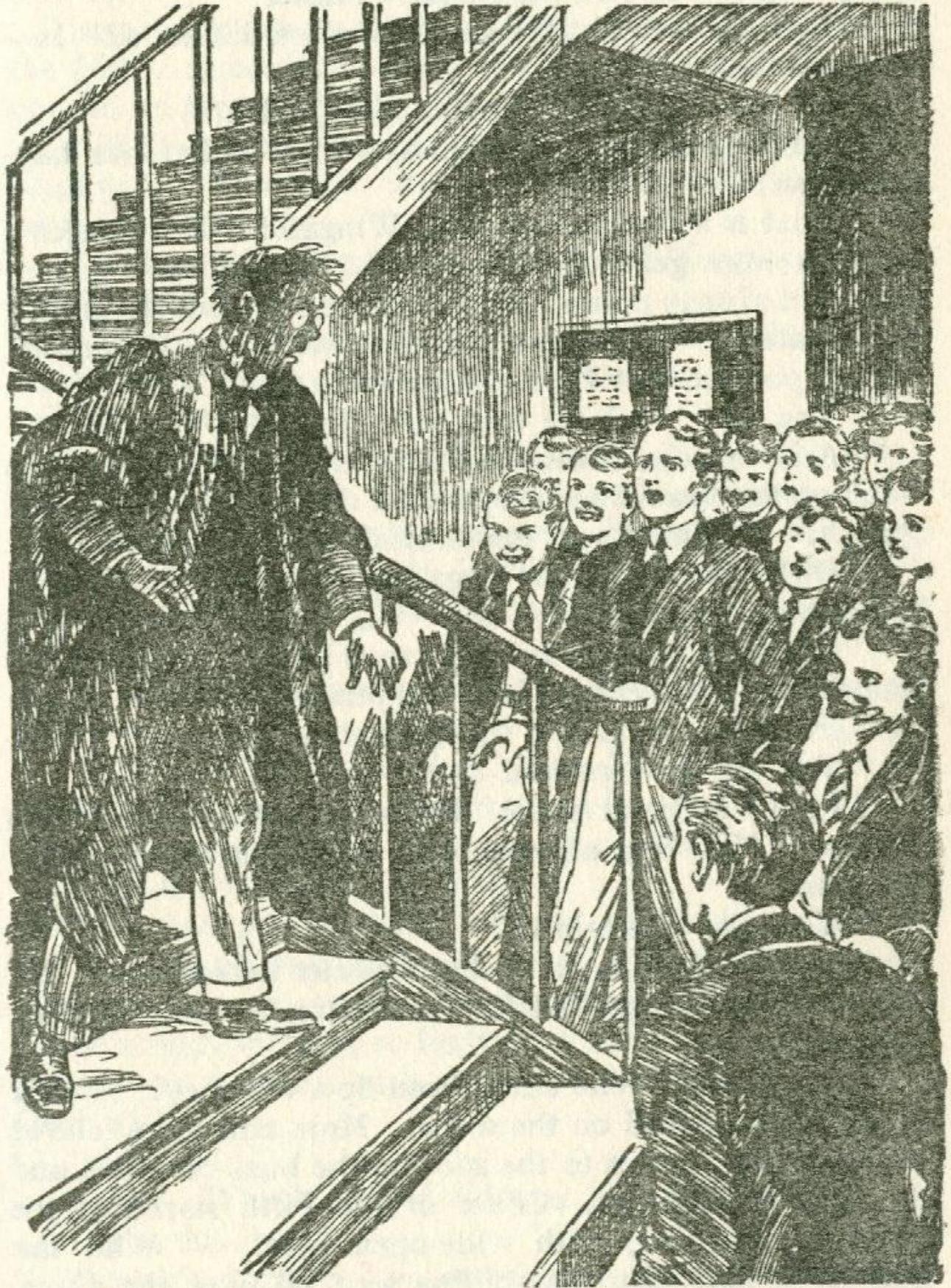
"Yes, sir! I—I see that, sir! But—"

"A receptacle, containing soot, and—and other things—fell on my head when I opened a door!" spluttered Mr. Quelch. "Cannot you understand that, Wingate?"

"Oh! Ah! Yes, sir!" gasped Wingate. "A—a—a booby-trap, do you mean, sir?"

"I think it is called by some such name," snapped Mr. Quelch. "I was caught in it—smothered with soot as you see—grooogh! I am in a shocking state."

"Yes, sir, I—I noticed that—"



MR. QUELCH GAVE THE JUNIORS A SOOTY AND DEADLY GLARE

"Find Cherry at once! He is the perpetrator of this outrage! Find him at once, and send him to my study Wingate."

"Yes, sir! Certainly."

"I shall take him to his head-master immediately. He will certainly be expelled for this outrage. Lose no time, Wingate."

"Great pip! Who's that been up a chimney?" Coker of the Fifth arrived on the scene. More and more fellows were arriving, drawn to the spot by the buzz of voices and the trills of laughter. Coker of the Fifth stared at the sooty form-master, with wide-open eyes. "Who the dickens is that silly ass spilling soot all over the place, Wingate?"

"Coker!" roared Mr. Quelch. "How dare you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell from two or three dozen fellows.

There was a heavy tread, and Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, came along from Common-Room. His eyes popped at Mr. Quelch.

"Who—who—what is that?" exclaimed Mr. Prout, blankly. "Wingate! Who is that black man? What is he doing here?"

"It's not a black man, sir!" stuttered Wingate. "It's Mr. Quelch."

"What? What? What do you mean, Wingate? I am referring to that black man—that negro—."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's soot, sir!" gasped Wingate. "It—it's not a black man, sir, it's Mr. Quelch, and—and—and soot—!"

"Soot!" repeated Mr. Prout. He sniffed the scent of soot. "Bless my soul! Yes, I perceive now that it is soot. Is—is—is that Quelch? Can it be possible that that is Quelch?"

"Cannot you see who I am, Mr. Prout?" shrieked the Remove master.

"That is Quelch's voice," said Prout. "Upon my word! You are quite unrecognisable, Quelch! In the name of goodness, why have you done this?"

"What?" howled Mr. Quelch.

"I asked you, Quelch, why you have done this? In the name of all that is absurd, why?" gasped Mr. Prout. "A man of your years—a form-master—a member of Dr. Locke's staff—playing so fantastic a trick as to make yourself up as a black man—are you out of your senses, Quelch?"

"Idiot!"

"Eh? What? What did you say, Quelch?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Quelch's manners were deteriorating further. Never in all his career as a schoolmaster had he used such an expression before. Never had he dreamed of telling his portly colleague, Prout, what he really thought of him! Now, in the stress and excitement of the moment, it had popped out.

But Prout's absurd misapprehension was really too much for Mr. Quelch. It put the lid on, so to speak.

"Cannot you see," almost roared Quelch, "that I have been the victim of an outrage—a disrespectful—a dastardly outrage—."

"Really, Quelch—!"

"Cannot you see that I have been smothered with soot, by a miserable trick—a wretched trick—or are you blind?"

"Upon my word, Quelch—I-I—," Prout spluttered.

"Pah!" Mr. Quelch turned an angry back on Prout.

"Wingate! Find Cherry, of my Form, at once—immediately—without a moment's delay—and send him to my study—."

"Oh! Yes, sir."

Mr. Quelch whisked away to his study. A ripple of laughter followed him as he went. Prout, very much offended, stared after him indignantly. Everyone else was in the throes of mirth. Even the prefects were grinning, as soon as Mr. Quelch's back was turned.

That ripple of merriment behind him added, if possible, to the Remove master's wrath. His ears burned under their sooty covering. Quelch could see no occasion for merriment in all this. The Greyfriars fellows evidently could!

Quelch's study door closed with a bang.

He was going to wait in that study—impatiently—till Wingate marched the delinquent in. Then he was going to march that delinquent straight to his head-master, for dire judgment. He was going to demand that delinquent's immediate expulsion from the school.

That, indeed, did not seem a heavy punishment, in Mr. Quelch's present mood. He could almost have envisaged something lingering, with boiling oil in it! Anyhow, the iniquitous young rascal was going to be taken, without a moment's unnecessary delay, to his head-master, to take the consequences of what he had done.

But inside the study, Mr. Quelch gave a sudden jump, or rather a bound, at the sight of a black face looking at him from the looking-glass.

He stared at that black face, hardly able to believe that it was his own.

"Goodness gracious!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

He gazed at his reflection in horror. He had not realised that he was as black as a native of Central Africa, and quite a startling apparition.

"Oh!" breathed Mr. Quelch.

It was borne in upon his mind that he was in no state for interviewing a head-master. Urgent as it was to deliver the delinquent to immediate stern justice, Quelch realised that it was still more urgent to make himself a little more presentable, before he entered the majestic presence of Dr. Locke.

Breathing hard, he whisked out of the study again, and headed in haste for the nearest bathroom.

There in a cloud of steam, with soap and hot water, rubbing and scrubbing, and scrubbing and rubbing, Mr. Quelch was busy for quite a long time—during which his wrath did not diminish. Rather it seemed, like wine, to improve with keeping!

SAFE AS HOUSES

"OH, crikey!" breathed Billy Bunter.

Bunter's fat face was quite pale.

He put his fat head out from behind the screen in the corner of No. 13 Study, and listened.

Quelch was gone. His hurried footsteps had died away down the Remove passage. The coast was clear, and it was safe for the fat Owl to emerge from his hide-out.

He emerged, trembling in every fat limb.

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Bunter. "If he finds out that it was me—oh, crikey!" He shuddered at the thought.

There was only one idea in Bunter's fat mind now—to get away before anyone came up to the study, and to keep his part in this transaction dark—very dark indeed. He hardly dared contemplate the consequences if he were found out. True, he had intended that booby-trap for Bob Cherry, and had never dreamed that a beak would put his head in it. Not for worlds, not for the whole universe, would Billy Bunter knowingly have caught his form-master in a booby-trap. But he had done it! That was the awful and terrifying fact! Whatever he had or hadn't intended, he had caught Mr. Quelch in a booby-trap, and smothered and soaked and drenched him with a horrible mixture of soot and ashes and ink and gum and pickles. It meant a Head's flogging, at least, if he were discovered—it might very likely mean the "sack"—it might mean both. Obviously Bunter's cue was to keep this dark—to keep it a dead secret that he had been in No. 13, or up in the studies at all that afternoon—like Brer Fox to "lie low and say nuffin'." Billy Bunter was not very bright, but he was bright enough to realise that.

He tiptoed across the study to the door, carefully avoiding the swamp of mixture on the floor, and peered cautiously into the passage.

It was vacant. He could hear sounds from a distance—downstairs. But Quelch was gone—all was clear.

The fat junior rolled out into the passage. There he paused.

He wanted to get away as quickly as possible—to put the greatest possible distance, in the shortest possible time, between himself and the scene of that awful disaster. Nobody was to know that he had come up to the Studies at all. But it was certain that eyes would fall upon him if he went down the staircase—and the game would be up.

"Oh lor'!" mumbled Bunter.

His fat brain did not often work quickly. But it worked quickly now. He turned and scuttled up the passage, to the little stair at the upper end which led to the Remove box-room. He almost whizzed up that stair, and rolled panting into the box-room—safe out of sight now if anyone came up to the Remove studies, as was sure to happen before long.

"Oh, crikey!" moaned Bunter. .

He paused a minute or two to pump in breath. Then he rolled across to the box-room window, and opened it. Descent from that window, at the back of the House, was easy for most Remove fellows, by way of the leads outside, and a massive old rain-pipe. It was not easy for Bunter: still, he had done it before, and he could do it again. He stood at the window, surveying the kitchen gardens and the school allotments with anxious eyes through his big spectacles.

Far in the distance, he glimpsed Mr. Mible, the gardener, at work with a hoe. No one else was in sight: and Mr. Mible's back, luckily, was turned towards him. Bunter clambered through the window, and dropped on the leads. Grunting and gasping, he swung himself down the rain-pipe in the corner, and landed on the solid earth at last, breathless and grubby, but safe.

He was out of the House now. All he had to do was to walk round the school buildings, and mingle in the crowd in the quad, unsuspected. The fat Owl gasped with relief as he rolled away.

Nobody would know! Nobody could possibly know. How could anyone know? There was no evidence to connect Bunter with what had happened in No. 13 Study—not the remotest clue to connect him. Certainly, without a clue, no one was likely to think of Billy Bunter as the man who had booby-trapped his beak. The Bounder might be questioned—he was the fellow for such deeds, if there was such a fellow in the Remove at all. But nobody would even dream of Bunter. He had only to keep his mouth shut, and he was safe as houses. Keeping his mouth shut was not easy work for Billy Bunter, but in these dire circumstances he was capable of it. The affair would make a sensation of course—there would be an inquiry, investigation, no end of a row in fact: but it would remain a mystery—an insoluble mystery. That certainty comforted. the Owl of the Remove, and he was feeling more like his old satisfied self, as he rolled into the quad.

There he passed Coker and Co. of the Fifth. They were grinning, as if they had lately witnessed something very amusing.

"Fancy old Quelch!" chuckled Coker. "Black as the ace of spades—ha, ha, ha! Jevver see a beak like that before, you men? "

"Never!" grinned Potter. "Hardly ever!" chuckled Greene.

They did not even glance at Bunter as he rolled by: certainly never dreaming that the fellow who had made Quelch black as the ace of spades was passing them.

A group of fags of the Third and Second were grinning near the door of the House. Sammy Bunter squeaked at his major as he saw him coming.

"I say, Billy! Heard?"

"Heard what?" asked Bunter.

"He, he, he!" Sammy had a squeaky cachinnation very like Billy's. "I say, your beak—old Quelch! He, he, he."

Bunter breathed hard.

"Anything happened to Quelch?" he asked, as casually as he could.

"What-ho!" chortled Tubb of the Third. "You should have seen him—you've missed something, Bunter."

"Best thing this term," said Paget of the Third.

"Somebody's swamped the old bean with soot."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

He rolled on into the House, and went into the Rag. In that apartment he found a good many fellows, laughing and chuckling. Billy Bunter blinked at them rather anxiously. But nobody glanced at him. They were discussing the sooting of Quelch, but evidently without the remotest idea of connecting William George Bunter with the episode. The fat Owl felt more and more comforted.

"Say, you guys, was it a sight for sore eyes?" chortled Fisher T. Fish. "I'll say it was, and then some."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Quelch!" said Temple of the Fourth.

"Was he wild?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Black but not comely!" chuckled Wibley.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What a nerve, though!" said Stott. "Quelch was bound to know who did it."

Bunter's fat heart missed a beat as he heard that!

"Fairly asking for it, and no mistake," remarked Morgan. "He couldn't expect Quelch not to tumble."

Bunter trembled.

"Wingate's looking for him now," said Wibley. "May march him in any minute. Must have been an ass."

Bunter felt like fainting!

"I—I—I say, you fellows," he stuttered. "Is—is—is Wingate looking for—for anybody? Who's he looking for? "

"Bob Cherry, of course," answered Wibley.

Bunter jumped.

"Bob Cherry!" he repeated. "What's he looking for Bob Cherry for?"

"Quelch wants him, of course."

"B-b-b-but what does Quelch want him for?"

"Haven't you heard! The awful ass got Quelch in a booby-trap—swamped him with soot and all sorts of stuff. Quelch was a picture. Quelch is going to take him to the Head."

"He—he—he's going to take Bob Cherry to the—the Head?" stuttered Bunter.

"Yes, as soon as Wingate walks him in."

"Oh, crikey!"

Billy Bunter almost collapsed into an armchair. He was, as he had astutely calculated, safe—safer than ever, in fact, now that Quelch appeared to have pounced on the wrong man. Why Quelch supposed that it was Bob Cherry, Bunter did not know—but evidently, Quelch did! And he was going to take Bob to the Head! Billy Bunter was safe—safer than ever—but it was not a happy Owl who sat in the armchair, blinking dismally through his big spectacles at the crowd of juniors, as they continued to discuss the sooting of Quelch, regardless of him.

STARTLING NEWS!

"WHARTON!"

Harry Wharton glanced round, a little impatiently. It was Wingate of the Sixth who called, and the voice of the captain of Greyfriars was not to be passed unheeded—unwelcome as any interruption was while football was going on. But the whistle had just gone, with the ball in touch: Wingate had considerably waited for a pause in the game before he called to the captain of the Remove.

It was only a pick-up game, seven-a-side. Many fellows had gone out of gates before Wharton started to pick up sides. But the Remove were accustomed to play soccer with the accent on the "play"; and they "urged the flying ball" with their accustomed keenness and vigour. Four members of the famous Co. were in one of the Sides: where the other member was, they did not know.

Their disgruntled chum having—in spite of good advice and sweet reasonableness—gone off on his bike, the Co. had been left rather at a loss. They had arrived at the bike-shed, only in time to see Bob disappear out of the gate on his machine, and he had not even turned his head when they called.

Perhaps he had expected them to follow on. But they had agreed unanimously to "chuck" the ride to Highcliffe for that day: moreover, it seemed quite probable that Bob, when he found that they did not follow, would think better of it and "chuck" it also. They hoped that good sense would prevail, and that he would come in before it was too late, realising that even writing out the whole conjugation of a Latin verb, active and passive, was better than trouble with Quelch. So the captain of the Remove proceeded to pick up sides for a game, and Bob for the present was left to his own devices.

It was quite a good game, and the chums of the Remove forgot other matters once it had started. One side numbered Wharton, Nugent, Johnny Bull, Hurree Singh, Ogilvy and Russell, with Hazeldene in goal; the other, Vernon-Smith, Redwing, Bolsover major, Micky Desmond, Smith minor, Kipps, with Elliott in goal.

The second half was near its end when Wingate came striding down to Little Side, with a frown on his brow. Wingate, as requested by Mr. Quelch, had been looking for Cherry of the Remove, but he had not found him, so far, and he was not feeling pleased. His time—though he had not cared to mention that circumstance to Mr. Quelch—was of value, and he did not want to expend it rooting over the school for an elusive Lower boy.

"What the dickens does he want?" muttered Wharton, as he looked round at Wingate's calling voice.

"Better go and see," suggested Nugent.

Wharton gave a grunt, and walked across to where Wingate was standing. The captain of a junior form was small beer, in comparison with the captain of the school: and the Remove game had to wait.

"You called me, Wingate?" said Harry.

"Yes! Where's Cherry?"

"Bob Cherry?" repeated Harry.

"Yes: he's wanted. Where is he? I suppose you know—you're always in a gang together," grunted Wingate. "I can see he's not here playing. Where is he?"

"Oh!" said Harry. He realised that this meant trouble for Bob. "Is it Quelch who wants him?"

"Yes! I've been looking all over the place for him," said Wingate. "Quelch wants him—badly."

"I suppose that means that he hasn't done his impot."

"I don't know whether he had an impot or not. I know Quelch wants him, to take to the Head! I've wasted enough time already—where is he?"

"Quelch is going to take him to the Head!" exclaimed Harry, in dismay.

"So he said! Where is he?"

"He went out of gates, a good time ago," answered Harry. "Before we started this game. I—I thought very likely he'd come in, and got on with that rotten impot. I—I suppose he hasn't! But look here, Wingate, Quelch wouldn't take him to the Head just for not writing his Latin paper on time."

"I tell you I don't know anything about a Latin paper. Cherry is wanted for swamping his beak with soot."

"Soot!" repeated Harry, blankly. There were exclamations among the footballers, most of whom caught what Wingate said.

"The young ass seems to have landed his beak in a booby-trap," said Wingate. "I don't know the particulars, or just where it happened, but Quelch looked horrid. Are you sure Cherry's out of gates? "

"I know he went," said Harry. "If he came in, I haven't seen him."

Wingate glanced over the footballers.

"Any of you seen Cherry?" he called out.

There was a general shaking of heads. Nobody on the soccer field had any information to give.

"Not since we started this game, Wingate," said Nugent, "and that was nearly an hour and a half ago."

Wingate gave a grunt of annoyance.

"The young ass!" he said. "I suppose he's keeping clear—after what he's done. It won't do him any good."

The Greyfriars captain stalked away, leaving the footballers in a buzz. A few minutes ago they had been keen on the game, thinking of nothing but soccer. But Wingate's startling and dismaying news had put paid to the pick-up.

"We'll chuck this, Smithy," said Harry Wharton, abruptly.

"O.K. We've missed something!" said the Bounder, with a grin. "I'd like to have seen Quelch with his New Look!"

"It's rot," said Harry, with a deep breath. "A booby-trap—and soot—Bob wouldn't be such an ass."

"Bob's out of gates," said Johnny Bull. "He couldn't have—." Then Johnny broke off, in dismay.

"Oh! Could he have fixed it for Quelch before he went out? He jolly well knew that Quelch would go up to the studies for him, if he didn't take in his paper. If it happened in his study—."

"It's not like Bob," said Tom Redwing. "There's some mistake."

The Bounder gave a scoffing laugh.

"Quelch seems to think that it was Cherry, as he sent Wingate hunting for him," he said. "By gum! That's the chap who said that he didn't want to get back on Quelch, and snapped a fellow's head off—and all the while he had it fixed for the old bean."

"I don't believe it," snapped Wharton.

"Quelch does!" sneered the Bounder.

Wharton made no answer to that. The Remove footballers hurried across to the changing-room, anxious to join the crowd in the House, and hear the latest news. Four faces were very clouded. The Co. had expected Bob to land into trouble with Quelch, if that wretched impot was not handed in. But what had happened was utterly unexpected and dismaying.

"It's rot," muttered Wharton, as he kicked off his boots. "Bob wouldn't do it. It's some rotten mistake."

"If it happened in his study—!" said Johnny Bull, dubiously.

"I don't suppose it did."

"We shall soon find out that much," said Frank Nugent. "But even if it did, I don't see that that puts it on Bob. There are other fellows in that study. Inky was with us, but—."

"If Linley's over at Lantham this afternoon," said Harry. "I should have called on him for the pick-up, if he'd been in gates. And Wun Lung—I can't see that little Chinese laying booby-traps for a beak. But—Bob wouldn't."

"He was jolly shirty with Quelch!" said Johnny Bull. "I know he was—but he wouldn't, all the same. And we don't know that it happened in his study at all. If it didn't, I don't see—."

"You fellows heard?" William Wibley, of the Remove, put a grinning face into the changing-room.

"Heard about Quelch? Smothered with soot and sticky stuff—black as a nigger—I can tell you, Solomon in all his glory hadn't a thing on Quelch," Wibley chuckled. "You should have seen him."

"Where did it happen, Wib?" called out Harry Wharton.

"In Bob Cherry's study—."

"Oh!"

"That's that, then!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Sure of that, Wibley?" asked Nugent.

Wibley chortled.

"What do you think? I've been up to see—lots of fellows have. There's a jolly old ocean of soot, and ink, and all sorts of stuff, in the doorway, where Quelch got it. Bob wasn't mean with the stuff—he let Quelch have lots."

"How do you know it was Bob?" snapped Wharton.

"Eh! Quelch said so."

"Well, how does Quelch know?"

"Haven't asked him," answered Wibley, with a grin. "But I suppose he knows, as he said so. Perhaps he remembers that he gave Bob six this morning. He's going to take Bob to the Head, so I suppose he knows."

The Co. left the changing-room in glum silence.

TROUBLE AHEAD!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry's voice had its old cheery ring.

He jumped off his machine, at the gate near the bike-shed, and nodded to the four juniors who were standing there. They watched him in silence as he wheeled his bicycle in. There were no signs of "shirtiness" now about Bob's rugged good-tempered face. Evidently the clouds had rolled by, so far as Bob was concerned; and judging by his looks, he did not know how they had been gathering at Greyfriars during his absence.

"So you've come back," said Johnny Bull.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" Bob stopped and looked at the four glum faces, and coloured a little. "Look here, you fellows, no need to look at a fellow like a family of gargoyles or griffins. I know I've been rather an ass—and you needn't rub it in, see? "

"Did you go to Highcliffe?"

"No, I didn't," grunted Bob. "I was going, but—as you fellows didn't come, how was I to explain why? I just went for a ride. And—and thinking it over, I thought it was all a bit fatheaded, and came back. And here I am—and I'm glad you all look so jolly pleased to see me," said Bob, sarcastically.

He wheeled his bike into the shed, leaving the Co. exchanging glances. They could guess easily enough how it had been—that a ride in the fresh air had banished bad temper and resentment, and restored Bob's accustomed cheery equanimity. He had come back his old sunny self—little guessing what was awaiting him at the school.

That seemed clear enough to his friends, and evidence that Bob was not responsible for what had happened in No. 13 Study.

Bob came tramping out after putting up his machine.

He glanced from face to face, puzzled and a little restive. "Quelch been inquiring for me? " he asked.

"Yes," said Harry.

"He would, I suppose! I daresay he went up to my study for me, as I didn't turn up with the impot."

"He did,"

"Well, I suppose there will be a spot of bother," said Bob. "I can stand it! No need to look like a set of moulting owls, that I can see. Fellows have cut an impot before now and no bones broken. I'm going to tell Quelch I'm sorry I didn't take in my impot on time. That's good enough, I suppose. He will double it, I expect—well, I can write out two rotten conjugations instead of one—I daresay it serves me right."

"You don't know what's happened?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Has anything?"

"Yes."

"Well, not being a giddy magician, I don't know what may have happened here while I was miles away on a bike. What is it? Bunter burst at last?"

"It's Quelch," said Harry.

"Is he specially ratty? I don't see why he should be," grunted Bob. "Half the fellows are late with impots, if you come to that. If I'd stayed out till roll, he might get his hair off—but I've come in in plenty of time to hand in that putrid impot before roll. I'm going in to speak to Quelch, and then up to the study to slog at it. If Quelch feels like giving me another six, he can get on with it, and be blowed to him."

"It isn't that, Bob, Quelch went up to your study—after that impot, I suppose—and put his head into a booby-trap."

"Oh, my hat!"

"We were in a pick-up, and didn't see him—but from all accounts, he was smothered from head to foot with soot, and ink, and gum, and all sorts of stuff."

"Phew!" Bob Cherry chuckled. "Poor old Quelch! Must have been a surprise for him! By gum, I shan't find him in a good temper after that! Who did it?"

"Didn't you?" asked Johnny Bull.

Bob stared at him.

"Didn't I?" he repeated. "Mad? How could I catch Quelch in a booby-trap when I was riding round Redclyffe on a bike?" Bob's face flushed. "And do you think I would, either? That kind of thing might be a lark among the fellows, but it's a dirty trick on an old johnny like Quelch! Look here."

"Quelch thinks you did."

"What rot!"

"Well, he does," said Nugent, "and your being out makes no difference—the rotten thing was got ready for Quelch when he came up, and if you did it, you did it before you went out. You had the place to yourself—Inky

was with us, and Mark Linley over at Lantham, and we've found out that Wun Lung went to Courtfield for the pictures after dinner. But if you say you didn't—."

"Well, I do say I didn't!" snapped Bob.

"That's that, then," said Harry. "You didn't! But who the dickens did?"

"The who-fulness is terrific."

"I don't see why Quelch should put it down to me," said Bob. "Plenty of fellows more likely—it's more in Smithy's line, or Skinner's."

"It must have been a fellow who knew that Quelch would come up to your study," said Harry quietly. "You knew he would if you didn't take that dashed impot to him at three. I remember Nugent mentioned it, in our study—."

"Um! I suppose that's what Quelch is going on," said Bob. "Well, I never did it, and never dreamed of it and they can't make out that I did when I didn't. I—I suppose there's a pretty row on?"

"The rowfulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, dismally. "The esteemed Quelch is preposterously infuriated."

"Well, I suppose it would make him a bit shirty," said Bob. "Blow! I wish I'd done that putrid impot—I've been rather a fool. Still, Quelch was piling it on too thick—six on the bags, and a stinker like that over and above. But—but I wish—." He broke off. "I'd better go in—I've got to face the music, and it's no good hanging it out."

The Famous Five walked away to the House, with troubled faces. Bob Cherry's chums took his word on the subject, as a matter of course—if Bob said that he had not done it he had not done it. But they could hardly hope that Mr. Quelch would take the same view. He had declared his intention of taking Bob to the head-master, which meant that the belief was fixed in his mind that Bob Cherry was the culprit.

The Bounder met them in the quad, and gave Bob a sarcastic grin.

"So you've turned up to take your gruel?" he said. "I suppose these fellows have told you that Quelch knows—."

"They've told me that Quelch thinks he knows, if that's what you mean," growled Bob. "I'd never heard anything about a booby-trap in my study till they told me five minutes ago."

Vernon-Smith whistled.

"Is that what you're going to tell Quelch?" he asked.

"Of course it is, as it happens to be true."

"Hem!"

"Don't you believe me, Smithy?" asked Bob, his eyes beginning to gleam.

The Bounder laughed.

"Keep your wool on," he said. "If that's what you're going to tell Quelch, I hope you'll get by with it. Best of luck!"

"It's true!" roared Bob.

"They say that truth is stranger than fiction," smiled Smithy. "But if you didn't soot Quelch, who did? Got an answer to that one?"

"How should I know?" snapped Bob. "You, as likely not."

"I!" ejaculated Smithy, with a jump.

"It's more in your line than mine—a rotten trick like that on a beak. I had nothing to do with it, at any rate."

"Not in my line to get nailed for it, as you've done," sneered the Bounder. "I'd have helped you to get back on Quelch—I offered to—without gettin' hauled up to the Head. If you'd listened to me—."

"Well, I wouldn't—and I won't now," said Bob gruffly. "Go and eat coke, Smithy."

Bob tramped on, followed by his chums, leaving Herbert Vernon-Smith knitting his brows.

But a moment later, Smithy cut after them, and caught Bob by the arm. The Bounder had his good impulses, and he was really concerned about Bob.

"Hold on a minute, Cherry—."

"Oh, rats! Leave go my arm," snapped Bob.

"Do listen to a chap—I'm speaking as a friend," said Vernon-Smith. His manner was unusually earnest. For goodness' sake, don't go and land yourself in awful trouble by spinning a yarn that Bunter would have too much sense to spin. Can't you see it's as clear as daylight?"

"What?" roared Bob.

"Look at it!" urged Smithy. "Have a little sense, old chap! Where's the sense in denying what's as plain as the sun at noonday?"

Bob jerked his arm away, and faced round on the Bounder, clenching his fists, with a blaze in his eyes. But the earnest expression on Smithy's face disarmed him. It was not like the Bounder to concern himself much about other fellows, and as a rule he had little sympathy for lame ducks: but his look showed now that he was really anxious for Bob.

"You silly ass," said Bob, with a deep breath. "I suppose you can't understand that some fellows wouldn't tell lies to a beak like you do, but I tell you I never knew—."

"Never mind that," said Vernon-Smith. "Just listen. If you spin that yarn to Quelch, you can't expect him to believe it—how could he? Look at it, old chap. See how it looks! You had to go to your study to write an impot. You knew that Quelch was shirty, and that he'd come up to your study if you didn't hand in the rotten thing on time. You deliberately went out of gates, and Quelch came up—and put his head into a booby-trap at your study door, got all ready for him when he came. What is Quelch, or anybody else, to believe?"

Bob Cherry stood silent. His friends exchanged uncomfortable glances. The way Smithy put it, it looked—as he said—as clear as the sun at noonday. And that evidently was how Quelch looked at it—how could he do otherwise? The Co. believed Bob—but they could not help realising that it was because he was their pal that they took his word against all probability.

"You see, old fellow, it won't do," said Vernon-Smith. "I'm not preachin' at you—I know that a fellow up against it can't be too particular. But it won't wash—that's the point. You must think of somethin' better."

"Something better than the truth?" asked Bob.

"Never mind that! Somethin' better than tellin' Quelch you never did it, when he knows you did. I can help you there—."

"You can invent a lot of lies for me to tell Quelch, do you mean?"

The Bounder breathed hard.

"You're not an easy fellow to help," he said. "But I'd hate to see you sacked, all the same."

"I'd rather be sacked than tell lies, if it comes to that."

"Oh, cut that out," snapped Smithy. "My advice to you is to tell the truth—as it's the only thing that can do you any good. Stuffing a beak is all very well, if a man can get by with it. But you can't! Can't you see that you can't? Look here, Cherry, have a little sense. Quelch is as mad as a hatter over getting sooted, and you can't wonder at it. He will be madder if you tell him a string of lies that he couldn't begin to believe. That will be the last straw, and you'll be properly dished. Can't you see that?"

"Who's going to tell him a string of lies?" bawled Bob.

"You are, if you deny what everybody knows is true. For goodness' sake, think first. There's one chance—just one chance of pulling through," urged Smithy. "Go to Quelch, own up to what you did, tell him you're sorry, tell him you know you acted like a fool, beg his pardon—and you may get off with a flogging. Quelch isn't really a hard man, if you tackle him the right way. He doesn't want a man in his Form sacked, if there's a way out. Give him a chance, can't you?"

Bob gave the Bounder a long look. Then, without another word, he turned his back on him, and walked on to the House, his friends following. The Bounder stared after them, and then shrugged his shoulders and walked away.

Wingate was at the door, and he called to Bob as the juniors came up.

"Cherry! Where have you been all this time, you young sweep? Your form-master wants you in his study."

"I know," answered Bob.

"Well, cut in at once."

Bob went into the House. His friends accompanied him to the corner of Masters' Studies, and with glum faces watched him go up the corridor and tap at Mr. Quelch's door. He went into the study, and the Co. waited, in a worried mood.

They had not long to wait. Hardly more than a minute later, the study door opened again, and Mr. Quelch came out with Bob. There was no sign of soot about Mr. Quelch now! He was his usual spotless self once more. His face was calm—but set in a hard, grim expression that boded ill for the hapless junior who followed him.

Mr. Quelch did not even glance at the waiting juniors, but Bob gave them a rueful glance as he passed. Then they went on to the head-master's study, and the door of that dreaded apartment closed after them. The Co. looked at one another in silence, and drifted away to the Rag, to wait there for Bob, wondering dismally what was going to happen to their chum before they saw him again.

SACKED!

"I SAY, you fellows."

Harry Wharton and Co. did not heed the squeak of Billy Bunter. Had they taken note of him, they might have observed that the fat Owl was looking unusually worried and troubled. Billy Bunter was sprawling in an armchair in the Rag, with a cloud on his podgy brow, and a dismal blink behind his big spectacles. He was listening to the talk of a crowd of fellows, without taking part in it—which was very unusual for Bunter. Generally Bunter had plenty to say, often too much. Now he was silent—till the Co. came in, when he called to them. But the chums of the Remove had neither time nor inclination for Billy Bunter, and they passed him by like the idle wind which they regarded not.

There was a buzz of voices in the Rag—and only one topic. There was, indeed, only one topic at Greyfriars School by that time—the sooting of the Remove Master. From the beaks in Common-Room, down to the smallest and inkiest fag in the passages, the whole school discussed it.

It was an unprecedented happening—it was, as Mr. Prout declared in Common-Room, unparalleled. It was, as Wingate remarked to the other great men of the Sixth in the Prefects' Room, the limit. It was, as Horace Coker told the Fifth Form men in the games-study, a bit thick even for a cheeky Remove fag. It was, as Hobson said in the Shell, altogether too rich. It was, as Cecil Reginald Temple confided to Dabney and Fry of the Fourth, the outside edge—in fact the very rim! That the perpetrator of such an act would be "sacked" went without saying. Even if Quelch was disposed to go easy—which was highly improbable—the Head was bound to come down like a ton of bricks. The man who had sooted Quelch was booked for the long jump. And the man was known—it was Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter, as he listened, was only too thankful that the name was not known to be William George Bunter! But he was deeply worried.

Few fellows would have suspected Bunter of indulging in the luxury of a conscience. But even Bunter had a conscience—of sorts!

All the worried fat Owl wanted was to keep his own part in the affair a deep dead secret. He did not want the blame to fall on another fellow. It had so fallen—and Bunter's fat conscience, such as it was, was troubled.

Certainly it did not occur to him to own up, and take the unpleasant medicine himself. That idea did not even enter his mind at all. More than ever, now that he knew it was a matter of expulsion, it was necessary for him to keep his secret—that was how Bunter looked at it. All the King's horses and all the King's men could not have dragged a confession from him. But it was awful for poor old Bob—Bunter felt that, and he was deeply dismayed and uneasy. He would have done anything—except the only thing that would have been of any use—to help Bob out of this scrape.

Quite unaware of the worry on the fat Owl's mind, and in fact not even remembering his existence at all, the crowd in the Rag discussed that exciting happening. Quelch in his sooty state had evoked merriment—but now that it was known that a man was to be "bunked", all the fellows realised that it was serious. More and more fellows, coming in from excursions out of gates, heard the news, and joined in the buzz of talk. All or nearly all the Remove were in the Rag, when the Co. came in. Harry Wharton and Co. could not help noting that not a fellow expressed any doubt that Bob had "done it". That was taken for granted—as indeed they themselves would have taken it for granted, but for Bob's denial. Smithy was not the only one who thought it as "plain as noonday". Certainly, there was plenty of sympathy with Bob, but nobody doubted that he had asked for what he was going to get.

Mark Linley came over to the Co. with a clouded face. The Lancashire junior was very friendly with Bob, in No. 13 Study, and the news had been a shock to him when he came in from Lantham.

"You fellows know, of course—!" he said.

"Yes," said Harry.

"Know where Bob is now?"

"Quelch has just taken him to the Head!"

"Poor old Bob! What on earth can have made him do it?" said Mark. "I know he was wild with Quelch—but—but it wasn't like him to do such a thing. If I'd known what he had in mind, I wouldn't have gone out this afternoon—but how could a fellow think—."

"Bob says he never did it," said Harry.

"Oh! He's said so?"

"Yes."

"Then who on earth did? " exclaimed Mark, blankly. "Who would want to soot Quelch—and who could have known he would be coming up to our study—Bob knew, because he went out instead of taking in his impot—but who else—? "

"You believe Bob?"

"Yes, of course. If he says he didn't do it, he didn't! I know old Bob well enough to believe that. But—well, it beats me."

"Hallo," called out Skinner, "what's that? Is Cherry making out that he didn't soot Quelch?"

"Yes!" growled Johnny Bull.

"My hat! He's got a nerve to take that line! Why, Quelch knows he did, just as if he saw him fixing it up!" exclaimed Skinner, in astonishment.

"What on earth's the good of spinning that yam?" asked Snoop, staring. "Does he think Quelch is an idiot?"

"Is Bob going to tell the Head that?" asked Peter Todd.

"Yes! It's true."

"Um!" said Peter.

"Let's hope the Head will think it's true," said Skinner, with a grin.

"The truthfulness is terrific, my esteemed and disgusting Skinner," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. Skinner laughed.

"Mind shuttin' up, Skinner " came a drawl from a deep armchair, in which Lord Mauleverer was reposing his aristocratic limbs. "You rather get on a fellow's nerves, if you don't mind my mentioning it."

Skinner stared round at him.

"Do you believe that, Mauly, you ass?"

"Yaas."

"Who sooted Quelch, if Cherry didn't?" asked Hazeldene.

"Ask me another," said Lord Mauleverer. "It's up to the prefects to find that out. Bob didn't."

"How do you know he didn't, fathead?" demanded Bolsover major.

"Haven't you just heard Wharton say that Bob says he didn't? Isn't that good enough for you?"

"Think it will be good enough for the Head?" asked Skinner. "I suppose you don't know what a silly ass you are, Mauly. A fellow will say anything, when he's up for the sack, of course. I wonder how many fellows here will believe Cherry's yarn."

"Well, I do, for one," said Squiff.

"And I, for another," said Tom Brown.

"Same here," said Ogilvy and Russell, together.

"I say, you fellows, so do I," squeaked Billy Bunter. "It's jolly rotten for Quelch to make out that Bob did it, when he jolly well didn't."

"Know who did?" sneered Skinner.

"Eh! No! How should I know? I—I don't know anything about it, of course," said Bunter, in great haste. "I wasn't up in the studies this afternoon. But—but it's jolly rotten to pick on old Bob like that!"

Harry Wharton and Co. glanced at the fat Owl curiously. Billy Bunter's contribution to the discussion surprised them: Bunter really was not the fellow they would have expected to back up a man who was down.

Bunter blinked at them.

"I say, you fellows, is Bob with the Beak now?"

"Yes," said Harry.

"I—I say, think he'll be bunked?"

"Goodness knows."

"Oh, lor'!" said Bunter, dismally. "I say, it's rotten."

"The rottenfulness is terrific, my esteemed Bunter," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Quelch ought to take a fellow's word," mumbled Bunter. "But that's Quelch all over! He's refused to take my word, before now. You fellows know he has."

"Fathead!"

"Oh, really, Bull! But look here, you chaps, they can't sack Bob for it when he never did it."

"You see, they happen to know he did," said Skinner.

"Beast! "

Lord Mauleverer sat up.

"One of you fellows might kick Skinner," he said "I don't want to have to get out of this armchair,"

Skinner moved away rather hurriedly.

There was a step in the doorway, and all the fellows looked round. But it was not Bob. The Bounder came in with Tom Redwing.

"Cherry gone up to the Head, Wharton?" he asked

"Yes."

"Is he sticking to what he said in the quad?"

"I suppose so."

"More fool he!" said Vernon-Smith, with a shrug. "What's the good of it? Blessed if I can make the chap out."

"Whatever Bob tells the Head will be true, Smithy," said Tom Redwing, quietly.

The Bounder laughed.

"Look here, Smithy—!" began Johnny Bull, in a deep growl.

The Bounder glanced over the crowd in the Rag, from face to face, and turned back to the Co., with a sneering grin.

"We're all here," he said, "every man in the Remove, excepting Cherry. It was a Remove man who sooted Quelch. Well, if it wasn't Cherry, the man's here. Pick him out."

"Oh!" said Harry Wharton, slowly.

"Some man here did it, and is leaving it on Bob Cherry—pretty sort of a worm, what?" sneered the Bounder. "Well, who's the worm?"

The Remove fellows looked at one another, rather blankly. There was a long silence. It was broken by a squeak from Billy Bunter.

"I say, you fellows! Here's Bob."

All eyes swept round to the door again. Bob Cherry came into the Rag. He came in quietly, his ruddy face a little pale.

"Bob, old man—."

"What's happened?"

"What's the verdict."

"My esteemed Bob—."

"For goodness' sake, old chap, what—?"

Bob Cherry drew a deep, deep breath. His voice was quiet and steady as he answered.

"I'm sacked."

CHAPTER XII

BUNTER IS WORRIED

"TODDY, old chap—!"

"Park it!" said Peter, briefly.

"Oh, really, Toddy—."

"Give us a rest, fathead."

Peter Todd was generally more or less patient with his fat study-mate in No. 7. But he was worried and bothered now, and had no use for conversation from Billy Bunter.

It was "prep" in the Remove studies—or should have been. But few fellows in the Form were giving much attention to prep that evening. A man in the Remove had been "sacked": Bob Cherry, under sentence of expulsion, was spending his last evening at Greyfriars. It was a thrill of excitement to all, and a matter of deep concern to many. In No. 7, as in most studies, there were serious faces. Peter Todd looked worried, Tom Dutton solemn, but Billy Bunter, strange to relate, was the most lugubrious. Bunter sat in the study armchair, not even thinking of prep, blinking dismally through his big spectacles. The sacking of Bob Cherry was a shock to all the Remove, especially to his chums: but Billy Bunter was quite unexpectedly taking it to heart. It really was not Bunter's usual way to concern himself unduly about the misfortunes or disasters of other fellows: as a rule he could bear such things with remarkable equanimity. But for once the fat Owl was thinking of a fellow whose name was not William George Bunter. Still, Toddy couldn't be expected to guess that one. It was such a novelty.

"But look here, Toddy—!" mumbled Bunter.

Tom Dutton was at work, in a desultory way. Peter had started, but ended by shying his books into a corner, and now he was moving about the study restlessly. He stopped, to give Billy Bunter a glare.

"For goodness' sake, ring off, fatty," he said. "Look here I'm worried about old Bob. You wouldn't understand that, but I am, see? So dry up."

"I'm worried too, Peter."

"Yes—I can see you worrying about anything but a cake or a jam-tart," said Peter, sarcastically. "You fat villain, it's all more your fault than anybody's—you landed Bob in a row with Quelch in the first place—and that's why he did it—if he did."

"He—he—he didn't, Peter."

"Oh! You think he didn't?" asked Peter, rather more amicably. "Well, he says he didn't, and his pals believe him. Not that that matters a lot—it's what Quelch and the Head believe that matters. It looks as clear as daylight, and I'm blessed if I can guess who did it if Bob didn't. If Bob didn't do it, he seems to have done his best to make it look as if he did. What do you think, Dutton?"

"Eh!" The deaf junior looked up. "Not till supper, Peter."

"Not till supper!" repeated Peter, blankly.

"No. I don't want to drink anything over prep. Still if you're going to make cocoa, I'll have some."

"I didn't say drink—I said think!" howled Peter. "What do you think about Cherry?"

"That's rot," answered Dutton. "Quelch wouldn't let us have sherry. You don't mean to say you've got sherry in the study?"

"Do you think Bob Cherry sooted Quelch?" roared Peter.

"Oh! No! He says he didn't, and that's good enough for me," answered Tom Dutton, shaking his head. "And you needn't shout."

"Well, if it's good enough for you, I suppose it's good enough for me," said Peter. "But if it wasn't Bob, who the dickens was the fellow?"

"No need to bellow—I can hear you all right."

"Br-r-r-r-r!" grunted Peter. And he resumed his perambulation of the study. "If it wasn't Bob, and we could spot the fellow, we'd jolly well make him own up. You ought to know, Bunter, you fat ass."

"Eh! How could I know?" gasped Bunter in alarm.

"Don't you know everything?" yapped Peter. "Aren't you always nosing into things, poking your fat boko into everything that goes on? Is there a keyhole in the school you haven't had an eye or an ear at?"

"Beast!"

"Why couldn't you have been nosing about the studies this afternoon—as per usual?" growled Peter. "Then you might have spotted who did it—if it wasn't Bob. Your nosing might have come in useful for once."

Br-r-r-r-r!"

Billy Bunter was silent. The conversation was taking an alarming turn for him. He was anxious about Bob—indeed his plump conscience was troubling him quite severely. But he was still more anxious about his more important self.

"It's tough," said Peter, after another perambulation of No. 7 Study. "Still, what else could the Head do? You can't soot a beak and nothing said. But—if Bob didn't do it—poor old Bob!"

"I—I say, Peter, can't we do anything?" mumbled Bunter. "I—I think something ought to be done, Peter."

"Well, what?" asked Peter.

"I—I don't know! But—but it ain't fair, and—and it can't go on, can it?"

"Like to drop into the Head's study, and advise the old bean to think again?"

"Eh! Oh! No."

Peter grunted, and sat down, at last, to do a little work. After all there was Quelch in the morning!

But Billy Bunter was not thinking of doing any work. He sat dismally in the armchair for a time, but heaved himself up at last, and rolled to the door.

"Going out in prep?" grunted Peter.

"Blow prep."

Bunter rolled out.

He rolled along to No. 13 Study, pushed open the door, and blinked in. Three Remove fellows were there—Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, Mark Linley, and little Wun Lung. They seemed to be thinking of anything but prep. Hurree Singh's dusky face was deeply clouded, Mark Linley was troubled, and the little Chinese, curled up in an armchair, looked the picture of woe.

"I say, you fellows, where's Bob?" asked Bunter.

"In the Head's house," answered Mark.

"Oh! Ain't we seeing him again?"

"I hope they'll let us say good-bye, at least. I don't know."

"He—he—he's really going?" gasped Bunter.

"Of course. He's sacked,"

"Oh, lor'!"

"The go-fulness is the deadly cert, my esteemed fat-headed Bunter," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "and the missfulness will be worse than the milefulness."

"But—but they can't boot him, when he never did it," mumbled Bunter.

Mark set his lips.

"He never did it," he said. "If we only knew the fellow who did—and who's keeping it dark all this while—"

Billy Bunter rolled away without waiting for Mark to finish. His next visit was to No. 1 Study, where he blinked in at Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent. Neither of them was at prep, or thinking of prep.

Wharton cast an impatient glance at the fat face looking in at the door.

"Cut off, Bunter," he snapped.

"Oh, really Wharton—."

"Roll away," exclaimed Frank Nugent. "Don't bother now."

"Oh, really, Nugent—."

Bunter did not roll away. He rolled into the study, and shut the door after him. Harry Wharton reached for a cushion—but dropped it again, as he read the woebegone expression on the fat visage. Bob's hard fate was a heavy blow to his chums, but why it should come as a blow to Bunter was rather a puzzle. But evidently it did.

"You—you fellows are sure that he's got to go?" asked Bunter. It seemed as if the worried fat Owl could not believe it, even yet.

"Yes, yes."

"When is he going?"

"Early train in the morning. He's in the Head's house for tonight. You'd better go back to your study."

"C-c-can't we do anything?" mumbled the unhappy Owl.

"What can we do?"

"I—I say, you fellows, we—we ought to do something. If—if they weren't in such a beastly hurry, Quelch might get over his temper, and—and—."

"Don't be an ass," growled the captain of the Remove. "Quelch won't get over his temper, as you call it, unless they find the right man. They'd rather sack the right man—but they think they've got him. It looks like it, of course."

"We—we can't let it go on, I tell you. Bob's rather a beast, I know—."

"What?"

"I mean, kicking a chap, and all that," said Bunter, "but—."

"You fat ass, get out."

"But it's too thick," said Bunter. "I—I jolly well know Bob never did it—."

"Most of us know that. But the Head doesn't," said Frank Nugent, "and Quelch doesn't."

"His pals ought to stand by him," said Bunter.

"You fat chump, what can we do?" snapped Wharton."

"Suppose—suppose we hide him somewhere?" suggested Bunter.

"Hide him!" repeated Harry, blankly.

"Yes, and if they can't find him, they can't hoof him out, see?" said Bunter, eagerly.

"You howling ass!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! You needn't call a fellow names because he's trying to help poor old Bob out of a scrape," said Bunter, warmly. "I can jolly well tell you that I'm sticking to him, if you fellows ain't."

"Why, you—you—!" gasped Wharton.

"I'm backing him up," said Bunter, firmly. "He kicked me today—jolly hard, too! I don't care! I'm standing by him, see? Kindest friend and noblest foe—that's me."

"You benighted chump!"

"We can jolly well hide him somewhere," urged Bunter, "and keep it dark, you know, and that will give Quelch time to get over his temper. Then he may let Bob off with a whopping. Bob can stand a whopping.

"Ass!"

"I mean, so long as he ain't sacked, it's all right. We could hide him in the studies—,"

"Fathead!"

"Or in the Rag! What about the chimney—?"

"Up the chimney!" stuttered Wharton.

"Yes! They'd never find him there—!"

"You blithering owl, get out and give us a rest."

"Beast!"

Bunter rolled out again. There seemed no encouragement in No. 1 Study for his brilliant idea of hiding Bob Cherry up a chimney!

He blinked round, in the passage, wary of prefects, and jumped as he saw Loder of the Sixth staring at him from the landing.

"What are you doing out in prep, Bunter?" rapped Loder.

"Oh! I—I ain't out of my study, Loder—I—I mean I'm just going back—I—I just went to borrow a Latin dick off Wharton—I—I—." The Owl of the Remove broke off, as Loder made a motion towards him, and bolted into No. 7 Study like a fat rabbit into a burrow.

BACK UP!

"WHARTON!"

"Yes, sir."

It was after breakfast in the morning. The autumn morning was bright and sunny, but its brightness was not reflected in the faces of a good many fellows at Greyfriars School. To Harry Wharton and Co. it seemed almost impossible that they were to lose their chum that sunny morning—that the gates of Greyfriars were to close behind Bob Cherry, for the last time. Yet it was true—all the school knew that when the Remove went into their form-room, Bob would be rolling off to Courtfield station, to take the train home, with a Sixth Form prefect in charge to see him safely off.

Wharton felt a momentary gleam of hope, as Mr. Quelch stopped to speak to him. But it faded out as he glanced at his form-master's face. Mr. Quelch's manner was by no means unkindly, but his face was grim, and there was not a vestige of hope to be read in it. Quelch was not a hard man, and no doubt he had some realisation of what Bob's friends were feeling like, but towards the hapless culprit there was no relenting.

"Cherry leaves in half-an-hour, Wharton," said the Remove Master. "If you desire to speak to him before he leaves—."

"Oh! Yes, sir."

"The head-master has given him leave to say good-bye to his friends here. He is now in the junior day-room, if you desire to speak to him."

"Thank you, sir," said Harry, in a low voice.

It was something, if not much, to see old Bob before he went. The captain of the Remove called to his friends, and they hurried to the Rag, where the expelled junior was waiting.

Bob Cherry was standing by the window there, staring out into the quad, and the crowd of fellows whom he was seeing for the last time. His face was deeply clouded, but it was calm. What had happened had fallen on him like a bolt out of the blue, but Bob could "take it".

"Bob, old man!"

Bob turned from the window, as the Co. ran in. He tried to summon up a smile. "Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Bob, old chap—!" muttered Harry.

"My esteemed and ridiculous Bob!" mumbled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"It's too rotten, old fellow," said Nugent, with a quiver in his voice. "Oh, it's too rotten."

"It's a rotten shame," growled Johnny Bull.

"It's tough," said Bob. His voice was low, but steady. "It will hit the pater hard. I suppose he's got the Head's letter by this time. Can't be helped."

"Quelch seems as hard as a rock," said Harry.

"I'm not blaming Quelch," said Bob, quietly. "What was he to think? I was an ass—as you fellows told me, I ought to have gone up to my study and written that putrid impot. If I had, all this couldn't have happened."

"But you never sooted Quelch—."

"No! Goodness knows who did. I can't make that out. But you see, it looks all of a piece, to the beaks. Chap marches out against orders, knowing jolly well that his beak will come up and look for him—and the beak puts his head into a booby-trap in that chap's study—and there's no reason why anyone else should have done it, so far as anybody knows. Can't blame Quelch, or the Head—the thing couldn't be clearer, the way they look at it. It was my own fault in the first place—and I've got to stand for the rest." Bob paused, and smiled faintly. "You see, I've been thinking it over, and I'm not blaming anybody. But—it's tough!"

"The toughness is terrific," groaned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Jolly glad to see you fellows, anyhow, before I clear off," said Bob. "I've got leave, till the bell rings for class." He winced. "You'll be going into the jolly old form-room, and I—." He broke off.

"I say, you fellows—."

"Oh, buzz off, Bunter."

"Shan't! I say, Bob, old fellow—."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, old fat man," said Bob, with a touch of his old cheery manner. "So you had an egg for brekker?"

"Eh! How do you know?" asked Bunter, in surprise. Bob chuckled.

"Elementary, my dear Watson, as Sherlock Holmes used to say. Lots of clues!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—!"

There was a trampling of feet, and Peter Todd came in, with Squiff, and Tom Brown, and Vernon-Smith, and Redwing, and Lord Mauleverer. A crowd followed them in.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Quite a party!" ejaculated Bob. "I say, you fellows, don't you push a chap!" squeaked Bunter. "Stop shoving me, Smithy—you're treading on my toes, Penfold—gerrout, Wibley—look here, Hazel—."

The juniors crowded round Bob, and Bunter squeaked unheeded. Every fellow wanted a last word with him. Every man in the Remove had turned up—even Skinner, and Snoop, and Stott, came to say good-bye. Even Fisher T. Fish came to say that is was sure tough on a guy. Lord Mauleverer, for once, seemed to have lost his aristocratic poise, and his noble face was as long as a fiddle. Bolsover major clapped Bob on the back—little Wun Lung hung on to his arm—Kipps dug him in the ribs—every fellow talked at once.

Bob looked over the crowd—and he could not help a lump coming into his throat. The whole form—every man in the Remove—crowded round him—fellows he had liked, and fellows he hadn't liked—fellows he had chummed with and fellows whose heads he had punched. All his friends had come to say good-bye, and his friends were the whole form—every man sorry that he was going.

"Hard luck, old man—."

"It's jolly rotten—."

"We shall miss you, old chap—."

"I say, you fellows—."

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Beast!"

"We shall see you in the hols, old boy—."

"I say, you fellows," yelled Bunter, "will you listen to a chap? The bell will be going in a minute. Look here, Bob ain't going."

Harry Wharton and Co. stared at the fat Owl. Bunter spluttered with excitement.

"I tell you he ain't going! We can jolly well keep him here—."

"You silly ass—."

Clang! clang! clang!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, there's the jolly old bell," said Bob. "You fellows will have to go—Wingate will be coming for me—."

It was the bell for class, and time was up. It was a fateful sound, to Bob and his friends. But not, apparently, to Billy Bunter! He grabbed Bob by the arm.

"I say, old chap! Hold on! Don't go!" gasped Bunter. "We'll jolly well hide you—I told these fellows last night, but they wouldn't listen—suppose you hide up the chimney, old chap—."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob.

"Dry up, Bunter, you fat ass—."

"You shut up, Toddy! You ain't going, Bob—you—you never did it, and you ain't going to be sacked! I tell you—."

"Wingate's coming!" called out Skinner.

"Blow, Wingate!" howled Bunter. "Look here, you fellows, ain't you standing by a pal? They can't hoof him out, if we all stick to him!"

Harry Wharton and Co. stared. Why Bunter was taking it like this, they could not guess. But his excited words found an echo in their own hearts.

"By gum!" said Johnny Bull, with a deep breath. "We could—!"

"Shut that door," gasped Bunter. "Keep Wingate out."

"You ass," said Peter Todd. "Quelch will come for him then."

"Keep Quelch out."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Bar them out!" gasped Bunter. "Bar them all out! Keep Bob here! I say, you fellows, stick to Bob and keep him here."

"My only hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, staring blankly at the Owl of the Remove. "What's the matter with Bunter? Has that egg for brekker gone to your head, old fat man?"

"Oh, really, Cherry!"

Harry Wharton gave his comrades a look. The same thought was in all their minds. Billy Bunter had put it there—but there it was! They did not speak—there was not time for words. Each read the thought in the faces of the others. And as Wingate's tread was heard in the passage, Harry Wharton cut across to the door.

Slam!

"Harry, old man—!" exclaimed Bob.

The captain of the Remove did not heed him. He turned the key in the lock, just as Wingate reached the door from outside and turned the handle and pushed. The door-handle rattled.

"Here, open this door!" came the voice of the captain of Greyfriars.

"Have you come for Bob Cherry?" called out Harry Wharton.

"Yes."

"We're not letting him go."

"What?" roared Wingate.

"Bob's staying here."

"You young ass! Open this door at once."

"Bob's not going."

"Will you open this door?"

"No!" said Harry Wharton.

"I shall have to call Quelch."

"Call him, if you like."

There was a pause, and then Wingate was heard departing. Harry Wharton turned from the locked door, and looked over the crowd of breathless faces. All were excited, a few uneasy, some alarmed. It was rebellion, and it had come swiftly and suddenly, taking the crowd in the Rag by surprise. Bob Cherry stood as if dumbfounded.

There was a chuckle of glee from the Bounder. Smithy, at least, rejoiced in the prospect of a row. "We're all in this!" said Harry.

"You bet" chuckled Vernon-Smith.

"We jolly well are!" said Johnny Bull, emphatically.

"The jolliwelldness is terrific."

"But—" stuttered Bob.

"O.K., old man," said Frank Nugent. "We're all standing by you."

"But—"

"A jolly old barring-out," said Vernon-Smith, his eyes gleaming. "By gum! Who'd rather go into form and do con with Quelch?"

"But—" said Bob again. "But—but you can't! You'll get into a fearful row! I can't let you do it."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"You can't stop us!" he said. "You're not going Bob—we're keeping you here. That fat ass Bunter has talked sense for once in his life."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Look here, that's all very well," exclaimed Skinner, "but I don't want to get bunked, for one. I'm getting out of this."

"Shut up, Skinner!" bawled Johnny Bull.

"I tell you—"

"Kick Skinner, somebody."

"Yarooooop!" roared Skinner, as somebody obliged.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're all in this together," said the Bounder. "They can't sack a whole form. Shoulder to shoulder, and down with the beaks."

"Hear, hear!"

"Here comes Quelch!" murmured Nugent, as a well-known tread was heard in the passage. The door-handle turned. The door remained fast.

Knock!

Sudden silence fell in the Rag.

REBELLION!

Mr. Quelch's knuckles rapped sharply on the old oak panels.

Outside the door, the Remove master stood, quite an extraordinary expression on his face.

Wingate's report that the Remove were locked in the Rag, that they had the expelled junior there and wouldn't let him go, had startled and amazed Quelch. It had also roused his deep ire. Henry Samuel Quelch had no use for rebellion in his form.

By that time, the bell had ceased to ring. The Remove should have been going into their form-room: the expelled junior should have been on his way to the railway station. Instead of which, he was still at the school, and the boys of Quelch's form apparently fancied that they could keep him there! The fabled basilisk's look had nothing on Quelch's, as he rustled away to the junior day-room to deal with this extraordinary outbreak, with promptness and despatch.

Knock!

"Kindly open this door!" Mr. Quelch's tones were quiet—dangerously quiet.

There was no reply from within.

The juniors looked at one another, in silence. They were accustomed to obey that commanding voice. In the Greyfriars Remove, Henry Samuel Quelch spoke as one having authority, saying "Do this", and he doeth it! For once the Remove master's voice passed unheeded.

"Are you there, Wharton?" came Mr. Quelch's voice again.

"Yes, sir."

"Open this door at once, Wharton."

"Sorry, sir! We can't."

"What do you mean, Wharton?"

"We can't let Cherry go, sir."

"No fear!" breathed Nugent.

"The no-fearfulness is terrific."

"Wharton!" Mr. Quelch's voice was still quiet but it had a sharp edge on it. "You are aware that Cherry has been expelled by his head-master. A prefect is ready to take him to the station. He must leave at once."

"Cherry never did what you think, sir—"

"That matter has been settled, Wharton, and cannot be re-opened. Are you venturing to question a decision of your head-master?" rumbled Mr. Quelch.

"We're not letting Cherry go, sir!"

"Not in your lifetime, old bean," called out the Bounder, and there was a breathless and rather uneasy laugh from some of the juniors.

"Shut up, Smithy, you ass," muttered Redwing.

"Upon my word! Vernon-Smith, I know your voice—I shall cane you severely for your insolence," exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Cherry! You are there, Cherry?"

"I'm here, sir," answered Bob.

"Come out at once, Cherry! You must be well aware that you cannot remain here, since you have been expelled. I command you to come out."

"It wasn't I that sooted you, sir—"

"That will do, Cherry! Will you leave that room this instant?"

"No, sir, I won't!" retorted Bob. "My friends are standing by me, and I'm sticking on. I'm not going to be sacked for nothing, if I can help it."

"Hear, hear!" chuckled the Bounder. "We're all standing by you, Cherry, old scout. Even Bunter's bursting with pluck. Aren't you, old fat porpoise?"

"Oh, crikey!" mumbled Bunter. It was Bunter, amazing to relate, who had started the ball of rebellion rolling. If it came to a barring-out, it was Bunter's barring-out. Nevertheless, the rapping voice of his form-master struck terror to Billy Bunter's fat soul.

"We're all standing by Bob, sir!" called out Squiff.

"Nobody here believes that it was Bob—"

"Is that Field speaking?"

"Yes, sir!" answered the junior from New South Wales.

"I shall cane you, Field."

"Thank you, sir," said Squiff, politely.

"Unless this door is opened immediately, every boy here will be caned, and given detention for six half-holidays!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Look here," muttered Skinner. "It's not good enough—Ow! Keep your hoofs away from me, Bull, you hooligan. "

"You talk too much, Skinner, old man," said Johnny Bull. "Better shut up."

"Look here—!" hissed Skinner.

"The shut-upfulness is the proper caper, my esteemed funky Skinner," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Speechfulness is silvery, but silence is the cracked pitcher that saves a bird in hand from going to the well, as the English proverb remarks."

"It's rot," muttered Skinner. "We can't stand up against the beaks—."

"We're going to try, at any rate," said Harry Wharton, "and any fellow who doesn't back up the form will be jolly well booted."

Knock! knock! Quelch's knuckles rapped on the oak again. He seemed to be getting impatient.

"For the last time, will you open this door?" came his voice, in rising tones.

"We can't let Bob Cherry go, sir!" answered the captain of the Remove.

"If you continue this rebellious conduct, Wharton, you also may be expelled from Greyfriars!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"I'll risk that," said Harry quietly. "We don't intend disrespect to you, sir—."

"Don't we?" chuckled the Bounder.

"Shut up, Smithy."

"—but we're standing by Bob Cherry," went on Wharton. "We don't believe that he did what the Head has sacked him for."

"We know he didn't, sir," said Lord Mauleverer. "He's said so."

"Silence!" roared Mr. Quelch.

"Please listen, sir," said Harry. "It was someone else, and we all know it, and it will come out in time—."

"Oh, crikey!" breathed Billy Bunter.

"We all hope so, at any rate, sir. We're keeping Bob here till it comes out—."

"I will hear no more of this impertinence, Wharton. Unless this door is opened immediately, it will be forced. Will you open it at once?"

"No, sir!"

The juniors heard Mr. Quelch rustle away. They could guess his mood as he went. Most faces in the Rag were serious—only the Bounder was grinning. Skinner and Snoop were alarmed, and Fisher T. Fish very uneasy. But almost all the form were backing up the form-captain. The Famous Five were the accustomed leaders of the Remove, and where they led, others were ready to follow.

"That's one for Quelch's nob," chuckled the Bounder. "I'll bet he's gone for Gosling, to bring his tools and get the door open. He won't do it in a hurry."

"Look here—!" muttered Skinner.

"I'll say you guys have bitten off more'n you can chew," remarked Fisher T. Fish. "You sure want to guess again."

"It's too jolly risky," mumbled Snoop.

"Look here, you men," said Bob Cherry. "If you choose to stand by me, I'm sticking it out. But any man who funks it had better clear. Skinner has a right to get out while the going's good, if he chooses."

"Rot!" snapped the Bounder. "Stick together."

"It's a free country," said Bob. "Any fellow who doesn't want to see it through can drop from the window, before the trouble starts. Once we've barred out the beaks, we shall all be in it together. Now's the time."

Skinner looked at Snoop and Stott. Stott gave a grunt. "I'm standing by the form," he said. "Dash it all, Skinner, even Bunter's standing up to it! Let's all stick together."

"Buck up, Skinner," squeaked Billy Bunter. "Be a man, you know! Like me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, they can't bunk the lot of us, if we stick together," said Skinner: and Snoop nodded. "What about it, Fishy?"

Fisher T. Fish rubbed his long thin nose thoughtfully.

"Staying or going?" asked Harry Wharton. "There's the window, if you want to drop out. No time to waste."

"I guess—."

"Make up your mind, you ass. Quelch will be back in a minute or two."

"I guess—."

"This isn't a guessing competition," remarked Bob Cherry.

"I guess I'm seeing it through," said Fisher T. Fish, making up his mind. "I'm telling you guys that you're a bunch of boneheads, but I guess I'm taking pot-luck with you. I sure don't want Quelch all to myself—I'll tell a man, he will be horn mad, and a guy wouldn't have a good time with him on his own."

"Any chap want to get out before the row begins?" asked Harry Wharton, looking round over the crowd of faces. But all heads were shaken in reply. Nobody wanted to get out.

"I say, you fellows, here they come!" squeaked Bunter.

There was a sound of footsteps in the passage outside.

Mr. Quelch was returning, no doubt with assistance to deal with the door. There was a sharp knock on an upper panel.

"Wharton!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Will you open this door?"

"No, sir!"

"Gosling!"

"Yessir! "

"Kindly force the lock of this door, without delay."

"It won't be easy, sir," came Gosling's crusty tones.

"It must be done, Gosling, and at once."

"Wot I says is this 'ere, sir—."

"Lose no time, Gosling," rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Wot I says is this 'ere, sir—that there door is a door, and that there lock is a lock. They made doors, when that there door was made. And—."

"You are wasting time, Gosling."

Grunt, from Gosling. He was heard to set down a bag of tools. Then, with another grunt, he commenced operations. Bang! bang! bang! clang! bang! It was true, as Gosling declared that the door was a door, and the lock was a lock, made when people really made doors and locks, long before the time of the modern builder. It was no easy task that Mr. Quelch had set the ancient Greyfriars porter. But Gosling put his beef into it, as it had to be done. Bang! bang! bang! Then there was a sudden yell.

"Yooo-hoo-hooooooop! Ow! Oooooh!"

"Gosling! What—?"

"Ow! I've 'ammered my thumb!" came an anguished wail from Gosling. "Ow! Oooogh! I've 'ammered it—'ammered it 'ard! Wooooooh!"

"Please be more careful, Gosling—."

"Ooooooooh!"

"And do not waste time—."

"Wot I says is this 'ere, sir, I've 'ammered my blinking thumb—."

"Kindly refrain from using such expressions, Gosling! And lose no more time," rapped Mr. Quelch, impatiently.

Gosling was heard to snort. Then he resumed operations.

Bang! bang! bang! Clang!

THE FIRST ROUND!

BANG! bang!

The din was heard all over Greyfriars.

In all the form-rooms—excepting one—fellows started, and looked round, and looked at one another—unaware, till the banging began, that anything unusual was going on at Greyfriars. Now all the school knew that something very unusual was going on.

In the Sixth Form room, the Head started, and listened, in amazement. The Sixth Form men looked at one another: only Wingate guessing what was toward. In the Fifth Form room, Mr. Prout gave his form a welcome rest from Livy, and went to the form-room door, and stared out. In the Shell, Mr. Hacker also went to the door to stare out in astonishment, and the Shell fellows whispered and wondered. In the Fourth, Mr. Capper left Temple, Dabney and Co. to their own devices, while he fared forth to discover what on earth was happening. In the Third and the Second Mr. Wiggins and Mr. Twigg could hardly repress the buzz of excitement among the fags. It was an historic morning at Greyfriars School.

Bang! bang! bang!

Mr. Quelch's lips were compressed in a tight line, as he watched Gosling at work, almost deafened by the banging and clanging of hammer and chisel. Quelch was only too well aware of the excitement that would be caused, throughout the school, by this unprecedented commotion, breaking into the scholastic calm of morning lessons. It was gall and wormwood to Quelch. There was nothing else to be done—if the rebellious Removites refused to open that door, it had to be forced, and it could not be forced without a terrific din. But every bang of the heavy hammer was a blow to Quelch, as he visualised the excitement, the wondering, the whispering, in every form-room: and still worse, the comments of the other masters, later, when they met in Common-Room—the sarcastic remarks, the shrugging of shoulders. Mr. Quelch's feelings were deep—and at that moment he would willingly have given every member of his form not merely six, but sixty, if not six hundred, well laid on.

Bang! bang! bang!

While Gosling banged and clanged, the garrison of the Rag were not idle. Mr. Quelch could hear excited voices from within, and the rumbling and rolling of furniture hastily removed.

"Stick the table against the door!"

"Get those armchairs over here."

"Buck up!"

"Get out of that armchair, Bunter, you fat ass."

"Beast!"

"Shove that table along."

There was a long heavy table in the Rag, not easily moved. A dozen juniors had seized it, and were trundling it to the door. There was a loud crash as it arrived there.

Bang! bang! bang! Grunting for breath, Gosling banged on. There was a loud crack from the lock. Gosling's efforts were telling at last.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! It's going!"

"Look out!"

"Brace up against that table."

"They won't get in!"

"I say, shove Bunter against the door! Nothing would shift it then."

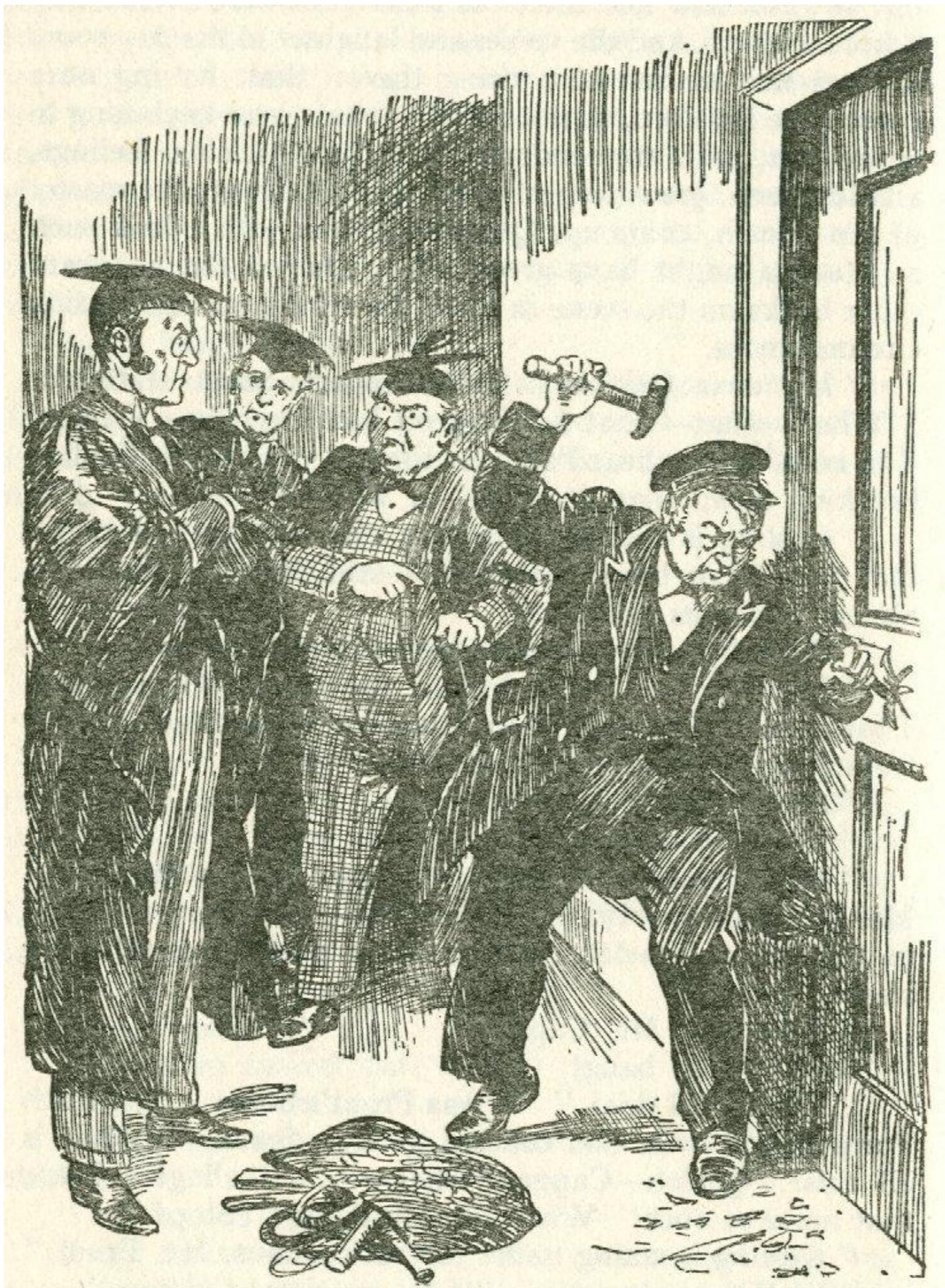
"Ha ha, ha!"

Bang! bang! crack! crack! The massive old lock was yielding. Bang! crack! Gosling laboured on, Mr. Quelch watching him with knitted brows. He had supposed, at first, that once the lock was forced, the door would open—but he knew now that the rebel Removites were barricading it from within. And the voices and laughter in the day-room showed that spirits were rising there: that, having once passed the Rubicon, as it were, the rebels were beginning to enjoy this, as a tremendous "rag". Quelch's feelings, already deep, grew deeper! And as Mr. Capper, the master of the Fourth, came up, Quelch met him with a look such as Medusa might have given him. Quelch did not want other beaks on the scene in these disturbing and distressing circumstances.

"My dear Quelch!" Mr. Capper almost stuttered. "What-what-what is going on here, my dear Quelch! The noise can be heard all over the school. Is—is Gosling breaking down that door, or—or what? "

"Gosling is forcing that door, Mr. Capper! I regret that you have been disturbed," said Mr. Quelch, with almost ferocious politeness.

"But why—why—?" gasped Mr. Capper.



“LOSE NO TIME, GOSLING,” SAID THE REMOVE MASTER

"Some juniors have locked the door, Mr. Capper. That is all. Probably your attention is required in your form-room," suggested Mr. Quelch.

"Really, Quelch—."

"Really, Capper—."

"It is not easy to carry on class in such a din, said Mr. Capper, warmly. "If it is really necessary to break in that door, Quelch, cannot it be postponed till after class?"

"It cannot, Mr. Capper." Bang! bang! bang!

"What is all this?" It was Prout's boom. The Fifth Form master was also coming to investigate. "What is all this? Quelch—Capper—what—. Gosling! Cease that noise at once! What are you doing? Stop!"

"Gosling is acting under my instructions, Mr. Prout," said the Remove master. "Lose no time, Gosling."

"I fail to understand you, Quelch," boomed Prout. This din is disturbing and distracting the whole school. The whole school, sir, is being disturbed and distracted." Prout often repeated his remarks, apparently under the impression that they were worth hearing a second time.

"The whole school, sir—."

"Is anything the matter here?" It was Mr. Hacker's thin, acid voice. "Prout—Capper—Quelch—what is this riotous disturbance?"

"That's the Acid Drop!" came a voice from within the Rag. "Quelch is getting all the beaks round."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Vernon-Smith!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "I shall punish you severely—."

"First catch your hare!" came a chuckle from the Bounder. Smithy, evidently, was warming to his work!

"Are those Remove boys in that room?" exclaimed Mr. Hacker. "Are not your boys in your form-room, Mr. Quelch?"

Quelch breathed very hard.

"They are not, at the moment, Mr. Hacker! I shall conduct them there, as soon as this door is opened—."

"Guess again!" called out the Bounder. Mr. Quelch seemed to choke.

"I fail to understand this," boomed Prout. "Quelch, I quite fail to understand this. I repeat, I fail to understand—."

"I am not responsible, sir, for your lack of understanding," retorted Mr. Quelch, now in a goaded state.

"What? What? Upon my word!" gasped Prout.

"Are we to understand, Mr. Quelch, that these boys of your form are in a state of rebellion, and that they have locked you out?" asked Mr. Hacker.

"You are to understand what you please, Mr. Hacker—but I desire you not to intervene in matters pertaining to my form."

Hacker, Prout, and Capper exchanged glances. Hacker shrugged his bony shoulders, turned, and walked back to his form-room. Prout and Capper lingered a moment or two, and then followed him. Their voices floated back as they went.

"Extraordinary!"

"Amazing, sir! Unprecedented! Unparalleled!"

"Gosling, you are wasting time. Proceed, Gosling!" said Mr. Quelch, in a choking voice.

Bang! bang! clang!

Two astonished faces appeared at the end of the passage—Mr. Wiggins's and Mr. Twigg's. They also had to inquire. But after a glance at Mr. Quelch's pale set face and glinting eyes, the masters of the Third and Second retired without asking questions. Quelch was beginning to look dangerous!

Bang! bang! crack! creak! bang!

"Is—is anything wrong, sir?" Trotter, the page, arrived, from the regions below. He stared at Gosling with eyes like saucers. "If you please, sir—."

"Go away, Trotter!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"But cook asked me, sir—."

"Go away at once!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! Yessir!" gasped Trotter, and he vanished.

Bang! bang! crack! The lock went at last, and the door moved.

"Push the door open, Gosling," exclaimed Mr. Quelch, in great relief. Gosling shoved, and the door opened a few inches, and then jammed against the tackle within.

"They're a-'olding of it, sir," gasped Gosling. "Push harder!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, my eye!" gasped Gosling: and he put in all his beef. The door yielded another inch.

Quelch watched him anxiously: then he lent his aid, pushing hard at the door. He dreaded every moment to see his Chief arrive on the scene. The Sixth Form room was at a good distance, but there was no doubt that the din at the door of the Rag carried that distance. Very much indeed did Mr. Quelch desire to have his form under

control again, before Dr. Locke was apprised of this unheard-of state of affairs. Prout and Capper and Hacker were bad enough—but the Head would be the last straw.

Quelch was bony and angular, but he was strong. He exerted all his strength on the door, and again it yielded an inch or so. Gosling, panting and perspiring, did his best. There was a buzz of voices within.

"Brace up, you men."

"Jam the table on it—."

"Stick your feet against it—."

"Shove! Shove, you fatheads!"

"Shove terrifically, my esteemed chums."

"Get it shut! Shove away."

The yielding door ceased to yield. It moved back under the pressure from within. Gosling jammed his foot into the opening, to keep it from closing.

"They can't shut it, sir," gasped Gosling. "I got my foot in it, sir."

"Very good, Gosling! Push harder."

"Take your hoof away, Gosling, you old donkey!" shouted the Bounder. "Here, give a fellow room."

"Keep your foot there, Gosling—!" panted Mr. Quelch.

"Yaroooh!" roared Gosling.

He jerked his foot back, as if door and door-post had suddenly become red-hot. To Mr. Quelch's astonishment he pranced on one leg, clasping the other, and entirely ceasing to push at the door.

"Gosling!" shrieked Mr. Quelch.

"Yooo-hooop!" roared Gosling, still prancing.

"Whooooop! Somebody's stuck a pin in my blinking leg —wooooh-oooh-ohh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Push on this door at once, Gosling," shrieked Mr. Quelch, unable to resist the pressure from within.

"Gosling! This instant—."

"Yoooh-oooh-oooh! Wot I says is this 'ere, I got a pin stuck in me leg!" bawled Gosling. "I got a pain! Ooooh! I got a norful pain! Ooooh!"

The door banged shut. Quelch, panting, ceased his efforts. He gave Gosling a look that might have withered the ancient porter. But Gosling did not even see it. His whole attention was concentrated on the calf into which the Bounder had jabbed a pin. Heedless of withering looks Gosling tottered away, apparently washing his hands of further proceedings.

Mr. Quelch stood for some moments, recovering his breath. Then he rapped on the door. "Wharton! "

"Yes, sir!"

"Unless this riot ceases at once, the Sixth Form prefects will be called to deal with you. For the last time—!"

"Pack it up, old boy!" called the Bounder.

"Goodness gracious!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

He rustled away. There was no help for it: this unprecedented outbreak on the part of his Form had to be reported to the head-master, and the aid of the prefects called in to quell it. It was a bitter pill for Mr. Quelch to swallow, but he had to get it down, and he departed for the Sixth Form, leaving the rebels of the Remove winners of the first round.

ATTACK IN FORCE!

"I SAY, you fellows!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Enjoying life, old fat bean?" roared Bob Cherry. Bob seemed in very cheery spirits.

He was still at Greyfriars—on a somewhat precarious tenure, no doubt, but there, at all events, he was: and a row in the Rag was infinitely preferable to the journey home in the morning train.

"I say, we're keeping them out, ain't we?" said Bunter.

"We are—we is!" agreed Bob.

"You've done a fat lot to help so far, you fat snail!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, really, Smithy—."

"Bunter's done his bit," said Bob, with a chuckle. "Wasn't it Bunter's idea? Blessed if I thought I should be still here now."

"You're here to stay," said Harry Wharton.

"Um! Yes! Let's hope so, old scout."

"The stayfulness will be terrific, my esteemed Bob.

"We are all sticking to you gluefully."

"Shoulder to shoulder, and down with the beaks," said the Bounder. "It's no end of a rag, anyhow."

"Not exactly a rag, Smithy," said the captain of the Remove. "We're going to keep Bob here, that's fixed. Quelch himself will be glad we did, if it comes out who sooted him in Bob's study. He doesn't want to turf out the wrong man, if he knew."

"Hem!" the Bounder grinned.

Bob Cherry gave him a grim look. Smithy, evidently, still believed that it was the right man who had been "turfed".

"If you can't take my word about that, Smithy, what the thump are you backing me up for?" demanded Bob, hotly. "You'd better chuck it, and get out!"

"I'll watch it," said Vernon-Smith. "My dear man, I wouldn't miss a rag like this for worlds. Of course it was you sooted Quelch—."

"I tell you I did not!" roared Bob.

"O.K. Have it your own way," said the Bounder, carelessly. "It doesn't matter a pin, so long as we give the beaks and pre's a good run for their money."

"It matters a lot, Smithy," said Tom Redwing, quietly. "The fellow who smothered Quelch with soot ought to be sacked. And he will be sacked, if they find him—only it isn't Bob."

"And it will come out," said Frank Nugent.

"I—I—I say, you fellows, I—I don't think it will come out who sooted Quelch," gasped Billy Bunter.

"You're a fat ass," said Johnny Bull. "Things always come out in the long run. The fellow will be nailed sooner or later. If we can keep Bob here till that happens, it's all right."

"Is it?" gasped Bunter. He seemed to doubt it!

"Of course it is, you ass! Once they get the right man, they'll let up on Bob. The fellow might have the decency to own up, too."

"Mmmm—might he?" stuttered Bunter.

"Can't bank on that," said Mark Linley. "Whoever he was, he's kept it pretty dark so far. But it may come out."

"Anyhow, we're sticking to Bob, and keeping him here," said Peter Todd. He gave his deaf chum a thump on the back. "Aren't we Dutton, old chap?"

"What rot!" said Dutton.

"Eh! What?"

"Rot!" said Dutton. "What should I be doing with mutton in my cap? What do you mean, Toddy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, my idea was that if we kept Bob here, it would give Quelch time to get over his temper. What do you fellows think?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Removites. If Billy Bunter fancied that Quelch, in the present circumstances, was likely to "get over his temper", Billy Bunter had that idea entirely to himself.

"D-d-don't you think so, you chaps?" asked Bunter, anxiously.

"Not quite!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "He didn't sound like it, at any rate."

"Quelch will be feeling like biting somebody, just now," grinned the Bounder. "I rather think that he'd like to sack all the Remove in a bunch."

"Oh, lor'!" said Bunter.

"Jolly glad not to be in class with him this morning!" chuckled Squiff.

"The gladfulness is preposterous."

"Yes, there's that!" said Billy Bunter, brightening. "I say, you fellows, we get out of class, you know. And there's maths with Lascelles in third school, too."

It was quite a happy reflection to Billy Bunter. Bunter was not really of the stuff of which heroes are made, and a "row" with the beaks filled him with deep trepidation. He was very far from sharing the Bounder's enjoyment of a shindy. But getting out of lessons was a thing that Bunter could appreciate—no "con" with Quelch, no maths with Lascelles—that really made life worth living! There was a lot to be said for a barring-out, if it enabled a fat lazy Owl to sit in an armchair in the Rag, instead of on a form in the Remove room under a gimlet eye!

"Quelch has gone for the pre's now," said Squiff. "Well, we can bar the pre's out all right. They won't get that door open in a hurry."

"No fear!" said Bob.

There was a loud crack, as Bob detached a leg from a chair—it was no time to stand on ceremony. With his pocket-knife, he whittled it into a wedge, and jammed it under the thick oak door. After which, it looked as if nothing short of a battering-ram would push that door open. Certainly the Sixth Form prefects were not likely to be able to do it.

There was a sound of footsteps and voices outside. The enemy had arrived.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here they come!" called out Bob.

Mr. Quelch's voice was heard.

"Please force the door open, Wingate! The lock no longer holds. I think there is furniture piled inside, but—"

"We'll soon deal with that, sir!" came Wingate's voice. "Line up here, you men—all of you put your shoulders to it."

There was a trampling of feet, as half-a-dozen stalwart Sixth Form men put their shoulders to the door and shoved. The barricade within, even with a crowd of juniors adding their weight, might not have resisted that mighty shove. But the wedge jammed under the door did it. Six hefty seniors exerted all their strength, but the door did not budge a fraction of an inch.

"It's jammed somehow," gasped Loder.

"Seems to be stuck fast," said Walker.

"Push harder!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

There was another mighty heave at the door. But it remained fast, and the prefects were heard gasping and panting.

"It's no good, sir," said Gwynne. "They've got it fixed somehow."

"Nonsense!"

"Kindly get that door open at once."

"Does Quelch sound as if he's getting over his temper, you men?" asked the Bounder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was only too clear that Quelch's wrath, far from fading out, was intensifying. Probably he had had a very unenjoyable few minutes with the head-master. The juniors could imagine the rising of Dr. Locke's eyebrows, at the news that Quelch's form was out of hand, and that he required the aid of the prefects to re-establish control. Quelch's temper, obviously, was bad—and likely to get worse and worse so long as the rebellion lasted.

"It's no good, sir." Wingate's voice was a breathless gasp. "We can't shift it an inch. I—I fancy it's wedged or something."

"What a brain!" said Bob Cherry. "He's guessed it."

"You cheeky young sweep!" roared Wingate.

"You cheeky old sweep!" retorted Bob.

"By gum! I—I—I'll—!"

"If you cannot get the door open, you must enter by the window," snapped Mr. Quelch. "Proceed to do so at once—we are wasting time."

The Sixth Form men looked at Mr. Quelch, and looked at one another. Then they tramped out of the House, to come round to the window of the Rag. Mr. Quelch followed them, breathing hard through his nose.

"All hands repel boarders!" chuckled Bob Cherry. There was a rush of the Removites to the big bay window of the Rag, which looked out on the quadrangle. The window was a good height from the ground, but easy enough for a senior man to clamber into—if he was not stopped. There was a broad stone sill outside to give lodgment. The glass was not likely to stop an attack.

From the window, the rebels watched the prefects, rather breathlessly. They intended to keep them out—that was settled. The Famous Five were grimly determined, even if they had no backing in the form. But

all the Removites were ready to follow their leaders. Nevertheless, there was a breathless thrill, in the bare idea of a tussle with the mighty men of the Sixth.

"Does Quelch look shirty?" asked the Bounder, as the Remove master came in sight with Wingate and Company.

"Sort of!" chuckled Bob.

"The sortfulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Our venerable beak is preposterously infuriated."

Mr. Quelch, if not exactly "infuriated", certainly had an expression of concentrated anger on his expressive face. There was thunder on his brow, as he glanced at the sea of faces packing the bay window. Wingate and Co. arrived under the broad stone sill, and looked up. Harry Wharton opened the middle casement, as Wingate put his hands on the sill to swing himself thereon.

"Keep back, Wingate," he said. "If you get on that sill, we shall tip you off."

"You young ass!" answered Wingate.

"We mean it," said Nugent.

"The meanfulness is—!"

"Terrific!" chuckled Bob. "Terrific and preposterous! Take a tip, Wingate, and steer clear! We don't want to hurt you, old bean—we like you too much."

"Let Loder come first!" said the Bounder. "We'd all like to have a cut at Loder."

The Greyfriars captain paid no heed to that. With a swing, he landed on the wide sill, on his knees. A moment more, and he would have leaped through the open window into the Rag. But in that moment, six or seven hefty punches landed on him from within, and he rolled backwards off the sill.

Bump!

"Oh!"

There was a loud bump, and a louder roar, as the Greyfriars captain landed on the hard, unsympathetic earth under the window. He sprawled there, spluttering.

"Man down!" shouted Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on!" yelled the Bounder. He brandished a chair-leg. "Like your nut cracked, Loder? Put it this way!"

The Sixth Form men stared at the packed window, and at Wingate sprawling and spluttering beneath it. They had not, perhaps, so far considered it a very difficult task to deal with a mob of excited juniors. But it dawned on them now that the task ahead of them was no easy one. The garrison of the Rag could keep them out, if they stood up to it. And they looked like doing so. George Wingate picked himself up, panting for breath, and rubbing places that had sustained damage.

"Follow me, you fellows!" he breathed.

HOLDING THE FORT

"BACK up!"

"Look out!"

"Stand up to them!"

There was a roar of excitement in the Rag. Wingate was half in the window. Gwynne and Sykes were clambering on either side of him—Loder and Walker and Carne pushing on behind. Mr. Quelch, from the quad, looked on like a man petrified. Quelch could hardly believe his gimlet-eyes. Never had they surveyed such a scene as this.

"Upon my word!" gasped Quelch.

But nobody heeded Quelch. The prefects had their hands full: so, literally, had the defenders of the Rag. Six or seven pairs of hands grasped Wingate, as he plunged forward, and shoved him back. Gwynne, pushing in beside him, yelled frantically as he received the end of the Bounder's cudgel, jamming in his waistcoat. Sykes, dodging a wild reckless slash, rolled off the sill and disappeared.

"Let go, you young villains!" panted Wingate, struggling desperately.

"Get out, old bean!"

"You're not wanted here."

"Shove him out."

Wingate was big and strong, more than a match for any three of the Remove. But numbers told. All the Famous Five had a grasp of him, and Peter Todd and Squiff and Tom Brown lent vigorous hands. In spite of all his efforts the captain of Greyfriars went rolling, and joined Sykes under the window.

The next moment, a whizzing cushion from within caught Gwynne under the chin, and he went down, landing on Wingate and Sykes below. There were loud and frantic howls from those two unfortunate seniors as he landed. Patrick Gwynne was not a light-weight, and he landed hard and heavy.

"Go it!" roared the Bounder, his eyes ablaze. Smithy was enjoying life. "Give 'em jip!"

Three of the assailants were, for the moment, *hors de combat*. But Loder and Walker and Carne were crowding in, and hitting out. Mr. Quelch would hardly have approved of big Sixth Form men punching juniors: but really, Loder and Co. had little choice in the matter, if they were not to be bundled off the sill in a heap. They hit out recklessly, and there were loud yells as hefty punches landed, and for a moment the enemy looked like getting in. Loder sprawled half in, head and shoulders inside the Rag, landing out on all sides with clenched fists. But Peter Todd and Squiff captured his arms, and held on to them, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh grasped his collar with dusky fingers like a vice. Loder was an unpopular prefect, much too much given to a too-liberal use of the ashplant, and the juniors were not disposed to stand on ceremony with him. Held by the enemy, Loder struggled and panted and wriggled and kicked. But he could not get loose—the Removites had him, and they held on to him.

Crack! Smithy's cudgel caught Walker of the Sixth as he plunged after Loder. Walker's roar could be heard in every form-room at Greyfriars. He backed from another crack, and slid off the sill.

"Look out, Smithy, you ass!" gasped Wharton.

"Don't brain them."

"Rats!" retorted the Bounder. And he aimed a cut at Carne. Carne of the Sixth saw it coming, and jumped back, landing in the quad on his feet.

Only Loder remained—and he remained because he could not go. Loder was in the hands of the Amalekites.

Outside in the quad, five prefects were gasping and panting, in a damaged and breathless state. Loder, sprawling half through the window, kicked and struggled and yelled.

"Let go! Let go, you young demons! I'll go!" spluttered Loder.

"You were in a hurry to come in just now," grinned the Bounder. "Hold on to him, you men, while I get the inkpot."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Boys!" shrieked Mr. Quelch. With utter amazement, the Remove master had seen Wingate and Co., the chosen men of the Sixth, hurled back from the attack on the window. "Boys! How dare you! Cease this at once! Cease!"

"Go home, Henry!" shouted the Bounder.

"What? What?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Vernon-Smith! How dare you? I—I—I—I will—." Words and breath seemed to fail Mr. Quelch.

"Put a sock in it, Henry."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you leggo?" roared Loder. He struggled frantically in the window. But he struggled in vain. A dozen fellows had hold of him now. Peter and Tom Brown had his arms—Hurree Singh his collar—Nugent and Johnny Bull had an ear each, Squiff had his nose between finger and thumb—Bolsover major's hand was twined in his hair. Many other hands grasped, and there was hardly enough of Gerald Loder to go round. Loder was unwilling to wait while Smithy got the inkpot—but he had to wait. "Leggo! I tell you I'll go-yooooooch!"

An up-ended inkpot streamed ink over Loder's head.

As he twisted his head wildly to dodge it, a jet of ink went into his open mouth. There was a sound of wild spluttering and gurgling.

"Urrrrggh! Oooooogh! Oooooch! Ooo-er! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chuck him out!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, laughing breathlessly.

"Out you go, Loder!"

Loder, streaming ink, his collar torn out, his hair a wild inky mop pitched headlong from the window.

"Come back and have some more, Loder!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Urrrrrrggh!"

"Nobody seems to want any more," chuckled the Bounder. "We've beaten the pre's, my beloved 'earers! Does Quelch look pleased?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Quelch did not look pleased. The expression on his speaking countenance was very expressive: but it did not express pleasure. The glare he gave the grinning faces at the window was like that of a gorgon. Then he looked at the Sixth Form men who had been called in to his aid. Untidy, breathless, dishevelled, sadly damaged and dilapidated, they stood, rubbing bumps and bruises—Loder, his face streaming with ink, looking a good deal like a zebra. Quelch, as he surveyed them, did not need telling that they were disinclined to try their luck again at the window. They were beaten, and they were aware of the fact.

"Wingate!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "This—this cannot continue! The prefects have been called in to restore order! Kindly proceed to do so."

Wingate breathed hard. He looked at his comrades.

Loder, with a savage snort, walked away. Quelch stared after him.

"Loder! Where are you going, Loder? "

Gerald Loder did not take the trouble to answer. He just went. Loder had had enough—perhaps a little too much! Walker and Came exchanged glances, and walked away after Loder. They seemed to have had enough also. Gwynne and Sykes, apparently thinking this too good an example not to be followed, followed it. Mr. Quelch was left with only Wingate to keep him company.

"We can't get in at that window, sir," said the Greyfriars captain.

"But—but—"

"It can't be done, sir, unless those young rascals choose."

"Nonsense!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

Wingate gave the Remove master an expressive look, and walked away after the other prefects. Mr. Quelch was left standing alone, with a rather blank expression on his face. He stared after the departing prefects, and he stared at the crammed window of the Rag. There was a shout from within.

"Go home, Henry!"

Mr. Quelch, with burning ears, walked away in his turn. Smithy chuckled and slammed the window shut.

"Our win!" he said.

"Hurray!"

The rebels of Greyfriars had won the second round.

NO SURRENDER!

"I SAY, you fellows—."

"Lend a hand, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—."

"All hands to the mill, you fat slacker!"

Grunt, from Bunter.

Every fellow in the Rag was busy—excepting Bunter. Bunter was seated, or rather sprawled, in an armchair, and seemed disinclined to stir. He did not feel, like Diogenes of old, that he was bound to roll his tub when everyone else was busy. Bunter preferred to sit it out.

But there was a shade of deep thoughtfulness on his fat brow. Thinking was not Billy Bunter's long suit. But he was thinking now. A consideration which seemed to have escaped the general attention had occurred to Bunter. Bunter was, in fact, the man to think of it. It was food!

Nobody else seemed to be thinking about it. Everybody was busy about other things—less important things, in Bunter's opinion. The garrison of the Rag were strengthening their defences.

Precisely what move to expect next from the "enemy" they did not know. But no fellow expected that they would be left in peaceable possession of their stronghold. There was more trouble to come, and the Famous Five set the example of getting ready for it, and all the other fellows followed suit.

They were not going to give up Bob Cherry to be "sacked". That was settled. They were going to bar out the beaks till that point was conceded. That was settled too. They were on a strong position, in the Rag—and they were making it stronger. Bob Cherry had sorted his tool-box out of a locker, and had a hammer in one hand, a fistful of nails in the other.

"We shall have to do a spot of damage," he remarked.

"That can't be helped."

"The more the merrier!" grinned the Bounder.

"I say, you fellows—! " squeaked Bunter again.

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"I say, it's important," urged Bunter. "I've been thinking, you chaps—."

"Great pip! What have you been doing that with? " exclaimed Peter Todd, in astonishment.

"Oh, really, Toddy—."

"We'll have the door off that cupboard," said Bob.

"It will make topping bars to nail across the window."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Good egg!" chortled Smithy.

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

"You still talking, Bunter? Tip him out of that chair, somebody."

"I say—stoppit—look here—oh, crikey!"

Bump!

"Yaroooh!"

Billy Bunter sat on the floor, and spluttered for breath—for a space forgetful even of the urgent and important question of food.

"Now we'll have that door down, and hook out the shelves," said Bob. "Go it! Can't stand on ceremony when there's a war on!"

It was the only timber available, and it had to go. It went—amid a terrific banging and clanging, wrenching and rending. Bob had said that they would have to do a spot of damage—and it looked like being rather a large spot. But in the exciting circumstances that could not be helped.

It had just happened that the rebels of the Remove had selected the junior day-room to stage the barring-out. But it was as good a spot for the purpose as could have been found within the walls of Greyfriars.

At the end of the long room, opposite the bay window that looked on the quadrangle, was the washing lobby, where there were wash-basins, and running water. It had a window overlooking a bricked passage between the two buildings, and a door on the Rag. That door was hooked off its hinges, carried to the window, and nailed over it—Bob Cherry driving in his longest nails with mighty swipes of the hammer. There were several other smaller windows, each of which was nailed securely to its frame. That made the lobby safe from attack.

Then split shelves and sections of the cupboard door were nailed and screwed across the big window looking on the quad. Bob Cherry's hammer beat an unceasing tattoo, while Johnny Bull laboured with a screw-driver.

Other fellows whittled more wedges, to jam under the door of the Rag, banging them into place.

In every form-room at Greyfriars, every fellow heard the din, and knew that something extremely unusual was going on. Prout and Hacker, Capper and Wiggins and Twigg, found it hard to keep the excitement in check, while Monsieur Charpentier, who had a French set in hand, gave it up in despair, and merely wrung his hands. Gosling stared across the quad, rubbed a thumb in which there was a lingering twinge, shook his ancient head, and asked Mr. Mible, the gardener, what he thought Greyfriars was a-coming to, with these 'ere goings-on. Mr. Mible could only shake his head in turn.

Heedless of the outside world, the rebels of the Remove carried on, till suddenly Penfold, looking from the window, called out:

"The Head!"

The uproar in the Rag ceased all at once. "The Head's coming! " breathed Skinner.

"His jolly old nibs himself! " exclaimed the Bounder.

"The esteemed and ridiculous Head!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The juniors crowded to the window. Between the wooden slats nailed across, there was plenty of space to look out. The majestic figure of Dr. Locke had issued from the House, and was approaching—slow and stately and dignified. Mr. Quelch, apparently at a loss how to deal with his rebellious form, had called in that majestic aid. It was what the rebels might have expected—but it gave many of them an uneasy thrill, as they watched the head-master approach. Faces were grave now. In all the crowd in the Rag, only the Bounder looked unconcerned.

The outbreak had happened suddenly, without much thought, if any. The rebels had carried on in a whirl of excitement. But the sight of the head-master had a sobering effect, especially on Bunter and Skinner and Snoop.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Billy Bunter. "I—I—I say, you fellows, the Head will be waxy!"

"Go hon!" said Smithy, sarcastically.

"The waxfulness will probably be terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Singh. "But the carry-on-fulness is the sine qua non."

"We're sticking it," said Squiff.

"Leave him to me," said Vernon-Smith. "I don't mind telling the Old Man where he gets off."

"Chuck it, Smithy," exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Nobody here is going to cheek the Head."

"Why not?" yawned the Bounder.

"Shut up, Smithy!"

"Yaas, pack it up, old bean," said Lord Mauleverer. "Rotten bad form to cheek the Head! We're not givin' in, but there's such a thing as good form."

"We're not giving in, that's a cert," said the captain of the Remove. "But let's hear what the Old Man has to say, and mind—no cheek!"

Tap!

Dr. Locke had arrived. He stood at the window sill off which the prefects had rolled an hour ago, head and shoulders visible to the crowd in the Rag. His usually kind and benign countenance was set and stern—sterner than the juniors had ever seen it before, as his slim fore-finger tapped on the glass. Harry Wharton quietly opened a casement, and faced his head-master.

Dr. Locke looked at him, at his comrades grouped round him and the crowd of juniors behind. For a moment or two there was deep silence. Then the Head spoke, in a cold, cutting voice quite unlike his accustomed kindly tones.

"What does this riot mean?"

"Hem! It's not exactly a riot, sir," said the captain of the Remove, very respectfully. "It's a barring-out!"

"What? What?"

"You see, sir—."

"I understand from Mr. Quelch," said Dr. Locke, "that this form is in a state of insubordination. It appears that you have disregarded and defied the authority of your form-master, and retained here a boy who has been expelled from Greyfriars. That boy will leave the school immediately, in charge of a prefect, and the rest of the form will return at once to their duty. Every boy who has taken part in this outbreak will be severely caned by his form-master. Are all the form here, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir, every man in the Remove."

"Very good! Leave the day-room at once, and proceed to your form-room. Cherry!"

"Here, sir!" said Bob.

"You will go to my study, and wait there till you are sent to the station."

Bob made no answer.

"That is all!" said the Head.

"Is it?" murmured the Bounder. "Not quite, I think."

Dr. Locke bestowed a stern stare on the crowd at the window, and made a move as if to depart. Evidently he had no doubt that his commands would be obeyed. The Bounder glanced round with a grin.

"Anybody here keen to let Quelch begin with the cane?" he asked. "Look here, Wharton, are you going to tell the old scout to guess again, or shall I do the talking?"

"Shut up, Smithy."

"Go it, Wharton!"

"Will you listen to me, sir?" asked the captain of the Remove, with his most respectful manner.

"I will listen if you have anything to say," answered the Head, icily. "But be brief."

"We're standing by Bob Cherry, sir—."

"That will do, Wharton," interrupted the Head, frowning.

"We all take his word that he had nothing to do with what happened to Mr. Quelch yesterday, sir," said Frank Nugent.

"We're not letting him be sacked," said Johnny Bull.

"No disrespect to you, sir," said Peter Todd. "But we're not letting him go."

"The respectfulness to your venerable and ridiculous self is terrific, esteemed head-master," said Hurree Janset Ram Singh, earnestly. "But the sackfulness of our absurd chum is not the proper caper."

"We're going to keep him here, sir, and hold on, till it's settled that he's allowed to stay!" said the captain of the Remove.

"Bless my soul!" said the Head, blankly.

"I assure you, sir, on my word, I had nothing to do with sooting Mr. Quelch," said Bob. "I told you in your study yesterday, sir, and I tell you again now—."

"You need not speak, Cherry."

"But, sir—."

"You are no longer a Greyfriars boy, Cherry! Be silent."

Bob's blue eyes glinted.

"Very well, sir," he answered. "But I'm not going. I'm sticking here, and my friends are sticking to me."

"We jolly well won't let him go," growled Johnny Bull, "and we're jolly well sticking to him like glue."

Dr. Locke gazed into the crowded Rag, his face hardening. It was dawning upon his mind that his commands were not going to be obeyed so promptly as he had supposed.

"Listen to me, all of you," he said, very distinctly. "This riot must cease at once. Every participant will be caned severely. If it continues, the ring-leaders will be expelled from the school, and will leave with Cherry."

"Oh, crikey!" came a gasp from behind the crowd of Removites.

"We're not giving in, sir!" said Harry quietly.

"We're sticking to our pal, sir!" said Nugent.

"The stickfulness will be preposterous."

"And that's that!" said the Bounder.

Dr. Locke compressed his lips hard. He turned away without another word. The Greyfriars rebels watched the stately figure depart.

"That's that!" repeated Herbert Vernon-Smith. He put his hand to the window. "Any man here want to hop out, and sample Quelch's cane?"

Nobody, evidently, wanted to hop out and sample Quelch's cane. The Bounder laughed, and shut the window. Bob Cherry looked round over the crowd of faces. "Look here, you men," he said. "We're up against the Head now, and goodness knows how it may end. If you'd rather I went—."

"Shut up, you ass!"

"Forget it!"

"Put a sock in it!"

"Fathead!"

Bob laughed.

"O.K." he said. "We're sticking it out. Shove those boards this way—I've still got some nails left."

The din of preparation was resumed in the Rag. Mr. Quelch, listening from afar, frowned his grimmest frown.

Those sounds told him that the head-master's intervention had failed. The rebellion in the Remove was going on. The expelled junior was still at the school—his comrades still determined to keep him there. It could not last long—Quelch was sure that it could not last long. But exactly how he was going to deal with it, the Remove master did not at the moment know.

INEDIBLE DATES!

"WHAT about elevenses?"

Billy Bunter propounded that query with a thoughtful and worried fat brow. Bunter's powerful brain had been concentrated on that important subject for quite a long time, while the other fellows hammered, and banged, and clattered, at the work of fortification. But the hammering, and banging, and clattering, were over now. Bob Cherry, with a final bang, had driven in his last nail. The Owl of the Remove was able to get a hearing, at last.

"Elevenses?" repeated Harry Wharton.

"It's just on break," said Bunter. "The fellows will be coming out soon. They'll clear out the tuck-shop as usual. We can't cut across to the tuck-shop, can we?"

"Hardly," said Harry, laughing,

"Well, then, what about elevenses?" asked Bunter, anxiously.

"Nothing about elevenses—or twelveses, or even thirteenses," chuckled Bob Cherry. "Tighten your belt, old fat man."

"A fellow has to have a snack in break," said Bunter.

"The snackfulness will not be terrific on this ridiculous occasion, my esteemed fat Bunter."

"We can't stick here without grub!" exclaimed Bunter, in alarm. "I'm hungry now."

"Not really?" asked Bob.

"Yes, really," asserted Bunter.

"Oyez! oyez! oyez!" roared Bob. "Take notice, all citizens and loyal subjects—Bunter is hungry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at," howled Bunter. Look here, I might be able to stick it out till dinner. What about dinner, though?"

"No dinnerses, and teases," said Bob, shaking his head. Not even supperses."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Talk sense!" yapped Bunter. "We've got to eat haven't we? I'm backing you up, old chap—it was my idea in the first place to keep you here, wasn't it, whether the beaks liked it or not! Didn't I say the first word?"

"You did!" agreed Bob. "Much obliged, old fat porpoise. Blessed if I should have expected you to care a boiled bean one way or the other, but you did! Brightest idea you ever had, Bunty."

"But we've got to eat," argued Bunter. "We can't expect them to send our dinner in here to us, can we?"

"Oh, my hat! Not quite."

"Well, what are we going to do?"

"Without!" said Frank Nugent.

"Without dinner?" said Bunter, blankly. "Mad?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, do be serious," urged Bunter. "I say, got a spot of toffee about you Bob?"

"Sorry—no!" chuckled Bob.

"You had a box of chocs yesterday, Smithy. Still got some?"

"Lots!" answered the Bounder.

"Oh, good!" gasped Bunter.

"They're in my study," added Smithy.

"You silly ass!" howled Bunter. Chocolates in a Remove study were not of much use to a fellow locked and barred in the Rag.

"Poor old Bunter!" said Peter Todd. "Like some butterscotch, fatty?"

"Oh! Yes! Rather."

"Then I'm awfully sorry that I haven't got any."

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "I say, you fellows, I suppose you never thought about grub when you started this?"

"Not a word," confessed Harry Wharton. "We hadn't much time for thinking about anything, old fat man. Why, even you didn't think about grub."

"First time in your life that you didn't, fatty, but you didn't!" chuckled Bob. "Now it's too jolly late."

Billy Bunter blinked dolorously at grinning faces through his big spectacles. It was true that Bunter—even Bunter!—hadn't been thinking about "grub" in those exciting moments when the trouble began. Even Bunter's thoughts were not really concentrated on food just after breakfast! But he was thinking about it now. The approach of "break", when Bunter was accustomed to pack into his capacious inside all the edible things on which he could lay his fat hands, reminded him painfully of the inner Bunter. And not only were there not going to be any "elevenses", but apparently no dinner and no tea! It was an awful prospect!

"Oh, lor'!" moaned Bunter. "I say, you fellows, this is just rot! We can't keep this game up without grub."
"We've got to stick it, old barrel."

"We can't!" howled Bunter. "I can't, anyhow. I—I say, you fellows, n-n-now I come to think of it, it's pretty rotten to back up against the Head! A fellow's bound to respect his head-master. Suppose we chuck it—?"

"You can chuck it, if you like," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "We'll open the window and roll you out, if you want to quit. Quelch will be glad to get hold of one of us, to make an example of."

"Oh, crikey!"

"Quelch is in the quad now," said Vernon-Smith. "He looks as if he would like to bite somebody. Let's make him a present of Bunter."

"Beast!" moaned Bunter.

"It's the sack for Bunter, if they get him!" chuckled the Bounder. "The Old Man said he would sack the ring-leaders. It was Bunter started this going. Bunter's the man they want."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Better stick it out, old fat bean," said Peter Todd. "If you quit, Quelch will wear out his thickest cane on you, and the Head will sack what's left."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I wouldn't let you fellows down, of course," gasped Bunter. "I—I—I'm sticking to you! I—I'm not a quitter, you know. I—I—I'm jolly well going to see this through."

"You'd better," grinned Smithy.

"But what about grub?" moaned Bunter. "We can't stick here without grub. You see, it ain't possible."

"True, O King!" agreed Bob Cherry. "We shall have to scout for grub, when we get a chance. Not till dark, though."

"No fear," said Vernon-Smith. "They can't get at us here, but they'd collar any fellow getting out, fast enough. After dark a fellow might have a chance."

Billy Bunter groaned.

"Cheer up, old fat man," said Bob. "We'll scrounge something, somehow, later on."

Groan!

"Until then, you can live on your fat, like a polar bear," suggested Peter Todd. "You've got lots."

Groan!

The prospect of scrounging something somehow later on did not seem to comfort Billy Bunter very much. Neither did he seem to think it feasible to subsist on his own fat like a polar bear. He just groaned.

"Poor old Bunter," said Bob. "If he feels like that now, what will he feel like by tea-time?"

Groan!

"If anybody's got a stick of toffee, or a chunk of chocolate, or a giddy bullseye, cough it up," said Bob. "We don't want Bunter to perish on our hands."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What about some dates?" asked the Bounder. "I can get him some dates if he'd like them."

Billy Bunter sat up and took notice. His fat face brightened like the sun coming through a gloomy cloud.

"Fine!" he gasped. "You're a good chap, Smithy."

"None better," agreed Smithy.

"Hand them over, old chap! I—I say, you don't mean that they're up in your study?" added Bunter, with a dismayed misgiving.

"Not at all—here in the Rag," answered the Bounder. "If you think you'd like them, Bunter—."

"Yes, rather! I say, I'm jolly fond of dates. They're good prov. Why, Arabs live on dates. Of course, they ain't really food, but they're something to go on with. Where are they, Smithy?"

"I'll get them, if you really think you'd like them."

"Yes, yes, yes!" gasped Bunter.

"O.K.," said Smithy, and he went across the Rag, and groped in the cupboard from which the door and shelves had been removed.

Bunter watched him with breathless eagerness. Some of the other fellows watched him, too, curiously. Dates seemed to them a very unlikely form of provender to be found in the Rag. A fellow might have had a chunk of toffee or a slab of chocolate, but dates seemed improbable. The Bounder appeared to be in earnest, however. He groped in the cupboard, and came back with a crumpled newspaper in his hand. It was an old copy of the *Friardale Gazette*, which had been used to layout over one of the dislodged shelves.

Bunter blinked at it.

"Here you are, old fat man," said Vernon-Smith, cheerily. "They're in this paper. Have the lot if you want them."

"Good," gasped Bunter.

He took the crumpled newspaper in eager fat hands, and uncrumpled it, in the happy expectation of beholding sticky, succulent dates within. Nothing, however, met his eyes, or his spectacles, but the local news of happenings in Friardale and Woodend. He blinked at the paper. Then he glared at Vernon-Smith.

"Where's the dates?" he bawled.

"Can't you see them?" asked Smithy.

"Eh! There ain't any here!" howled Bunter.

"Wharrer you mean?"

"Well, my hat! You want some new specs," said the Bounder. "Mean to say that you can't see the dates? "

"Of course I can't, when there ain't any!" shrieked Bunter.

"Well, that's the limit, even for that owl!" said the Bounder. "He can't see those dates, you fellows, when they're fairly staring him in the face—one in the top corner of every page."

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

"In the tut—tut—top kik—kik—corner of every pip—pip—page!" stuttered Bunter. "Why you beast—what's the good of those dates? I thought you meant dates, you beast, not dates!"

"Ha, ha, ha! "

Billy Bunter glared at the playful Bounder, with a glare that might have cracked his spectacles. It was true that there was a date at the top corner of every page of the *Friardale Gazette*, but it was not the sort of date that Billy Bunter wanted. Bunter could eat almost anything, but even Bunter could not eat those dates!

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The exasperated Owl crumpled the newspaper in a fat hand, and hurled it at Smithy's grinning face. It missed the Bounder by about a foot, and caught Lord Mauleverer under a noble ear.

"Oh, gad!" ejaculated his lordship. "What the dooce—!"

"Ha ha, ha!"

"Well some fellows are never satisfied," said Smithy. "Bunter says he's hungry, and I give him a whole lot of dates, and that's how he thanks a chap."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" hissed Bunter.

There was a clang of a bell, a trampling of feet, and a shout in the quad. The Greyfriars fellows were coming out in morning break. The tuck-shop across the quad would be open now—crowded with fellows of all forms—excepting the Remove. Billy Bunter, in normal circumstances would have been the foremost. And now—! Bunter' could only groan. Of all utterly rotten ideas, a barring-out seemed to Bunter, just then, the very rottenest!

TOUGH!

COKER of the Fifth stared.

"Bob Cherry!" he ejaculated.

Horace Coker seemed astonished. He stood in the quad, staring at the window of the Rag, from which a good many of the Removites were looking. Other fellows, as well as Coker, were gathered round, staring. Every man at Greyfriars knew that something extraordinary had been going on in the school during morning class, but until they came out in break they did not know what it was. But the news spread like wildfire that the Lower Fourth were in the Rag, and had barred out the beaks. And Greyfriars fellows swarmed round the big bay window, latticed now with nailed wooden slats. The sight of Bob Cherry's ruddy face, grinning cheerfully from the window, was a surprise. Most of the fellows had supposed that he was far from Greyfriars by that time.

"You still here!" exclaimed Coker.

"Sort of!" assented Bob.

"But you're sacked!" Coker was puzzled. "Didn't I hear that you were sacked for sooting your beak, and Wingate was taking you to the station? I understood that the Head had sacked you."

"You did!" ejaculated Bob. "That's jolly queer."

"Isn't it so?" demanded Coker.

"Oh, yes! It's so," admitted Bob. "But it's queer your understanding it. I wouldn't expect you to understand anything."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't want any cheek!" roared Coker. "Look here, what are you doing here when you're sacked?"

"Talking to a prize ass!"

"Why, you cheeky little tick!" gasped Coker. "I'd jolly well smack your head if I could get at you. What are you grinning at, Greene? What are you sniggering at, Potter? Is there anything to snigger at in a fag cheeking a senior man?"

"But weren't you going this morning, Cherry?" asked Hobson of the Shell.

"I was," agreed Bob.

"Has the Head changed his mind, then?"

"No: I've changed mine."

"Oh, gum!" said Hobson, blankly.

"You're really sticking on at Greyfriars after you're bunked?" exclaimed Temple of the Fourth.

"Sticking like jolly old glue."

"Well, you've got a nerve!" said Cecil Reginald Temple, with a whistle.

"Oh, rather," said Dabney.

"And you're barring out your beak?" asked Fry. "I say, you'll have the Head down on you."

"Ancient history, old bean! We've had him."

"Cheeky young sweeps!" said Coker. "Look here, Wharton! Are you all in this—backing up a cheeky young tick who sooted his beak?"

"Bob didn't soot our beak," explained the captain of the Remove. "We're backing him up because he didn't."

"Rot!" said Coker. "Why, the Head sacked him for it! And a jolly good thing too. A fag who soots his beak ought to be turfed out. Quelch must be a silly ass to let you carry on like this."

"Shut up, old man," whispered Potter of the Fifth, hurriedly. A tall and angular form was coming towards the spot with long strides. Mr. Quelch had sighted the crowd under the window of the Rag from a distance, and was hastening to the scene. But Horace Coker had his back to the approaching Remove master, and did not see him. Neither was he the fellow to shut up.

"Rot!" said Coker. "Fags barring-out their beak, by gum! I tell you Quelch must be a silly ass to let them carry on—a blithering ass—an absolute fathead—!"

"COKER!"

"Oh!" gasped Coker. He spun round, at a voice that sounded like the filing of a saw, and stared at Henry Samuel Quelch. "Oh!"

"Coker! I heard what you said!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Oh!" stuttered Coker. "I—I—"

"I shall report your words to your form-master, Coker! If you were in my form I should cane you! I shall report you to Mr. Prout! Go! Leave this spot at once." The gimlet-eyes glinted round at the crowd of Greyfriars fellows. "Go, all of you! You are not allowed to hold any communication with these rebellious boys. Disperse immediately!"

"Keep your wool on, Henry!" came a voice from the Rag.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd dispersed, most of them laughing. Mr. Quelch turned an embittered eye on the grinning faces at the window.

"Wharton!" he rapped out.

"Yes, sir," said Harry.

"If this rebellion continues," said Mr. Quelch, with a quiver of anger in his voice, "measures will be taken to put an end to it, you can have no doubt of that. In the meantime, it has perhaps occurred to you that no food will reach you so long as you remain locked in the day-room."

"We didn't think about that at first, sir. But we've thought of it since," answered the captain of the Remove. "It makes no difference! We've got to stand by a man in our form who's been sacked for nothing."

"For nothing?" repeated Mr. Quelch. "For an act of the most outrageous disrespect and reckless ruffianism! That is what you call nothing, Wharton?"

"Oh, no, sir! But it wasn't Bob—"

"Nonsense!"

"We wouldn't stand by the fellow who did it, sir! Every man here would be down on him," said Harry, earnestly. "It was a rotten thing to do, and Bob Cherry would be as much down on it as anybody else—"

"That's true, sir," said Bob.

"I desire to hear nothing from you, Cherry! You are no longer a Greyfriars boy, and should not now be in the school at all. I am speaking to you, Wharton, and to the others. If your rebellious conduct is due to a mistaken sense of loyalty, I would gladly deal with you as leniently as possible. Let this rebellion end at once, and I will do all in my power to mitigate your punishment."

"Thanks for nothing!" murmured the Bounder.

"Shut up, Smithy."

"We can't let Bob go, sir," said Harry.

"Are you so foolish, Wharton, as to suppose that you can keep an expelled boy here, against the authority of your form-master and head-master?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"We hope so, sir, until it comes out who did what Bob was sacked for. Then it will be washed out, of course. Nobody will stand by the fellow who did it, and that's the man the Head really wants to turf out—I—I mean, expel. We don't care how soon he's sacked."

"I—I say, you fellows—!"

"Shut up, Bunter."

"And we think, sir," went on Harry, "that you'll be glad yourself, sir, that Bob never went, when the right man is found—"

"It's bound to come out," said Johnny Bull. "Things always come out in the long run. It's up to you to find him out, sir."

"Wha-a-at? "

"The upfulness to your esteemed self is terrific, honoured sahib," said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, with a nod of his dusky head. "You have the wrongful pig by his ridiculous ear, sir."

"I don't think it was a Remove man at all," said Frank Nugent. "I can't think of a single fellow in the form that could have done it. Anyway, it wasn't Bob."

Mr. Quelch's lips set hard.

"I have tried to reason with you to end this folly," he said. "Matters must now take their course. Every boy here will be severely punished, and the ring-leaders will be expelled. That is all."

And Mr. Quelch, with a grim brow, stalked away.

"Henry's feeling this," remarked the Bounder, with a grin. "All the beaks will be cackling it over in the Common-Room. And the old bean can't do a thing. We're all right."

"Right as rain!" said Squiff.

"The rightfulness is terrific."

"I say, you fellows, that's all very well, but what about grub?" squeaked Billy Bunter. "I tell you I'm hungry."

"Like some more dates?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter was deeply concerned about "grub". But as the morning wore on, other fellows as well as Bunter grew more than a little concerned about it. Schoolboys have healthy appetites, and beyond a few odd spots of toffee or chocolate, there was nothing to eat in the Rag.

Break over, other forms went back to the form-room. Third school ended, and they came out again. The dinner bell rang, and Greyfriars gathered for provender—with the exception of the Remove. For the rebels in the Rag there was no provender. After dinner, fellows were seen at a distance, in groups, staring towards the window of the Rag, but none came near—two or three prefects were keeping a watchful eye open, to prevent

communication with the rebels. There was no chance of friends in other forms smuggling sustenance to the Remove. Then the school bell rang again, and once more the quad was deserted.

Faces in the Rag grew serious. Some of them grew long. But nobody suggested surrender.

The Famous Five were determined to hold out at all costs. Squiff and Tom Brown, Smithy and Redwing, Ogilvy and Mark Linley, Peter Todd and Lord Mauleverer, were equally determined. If some of the others were feeling dubious, the resolute spirit of the leaders kept up the general morale. And nobody, certainly, wanted to be the first to sample Quelch's cane!

"It's going to be tough!" Tom Brown remarked.

"You don't want to give in, Brownie?" asked Bob.

The New Zealand junior shook his head.

"No fear! If they think they can starve us out, they've got to think again. But it's going to be tough, all the same."

"I'm as empty as a drum!" sighed Peter Todd.

"The drumfulness of my ridiculous inside is also terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"The fellow who sooted Quelch ought to own up!" growled Johnny Bull. "That would clear up the whole thing. I could eat a horse."

"I say, you fellows." Billy Bunter half-rose from an armchair, and blinked dolorously at the Famous Five.

"I—I say, what do you think they'd do to the chap if—if he owned up?"

"Sack him like a shot, of course," answered Harry.

"Oh!"

"And serve him jolly well right!" said Bob.

"Oh!"

Billy Bunter collapsed into the armchair again.

"What about rag football, you men?" asked Bob Cherry. "Better than standing round thinking how jolly hungry we are, what?"

And Bob sorted an old soccer ball out of a locker.

It was something, at least, to take the thoughts of the beleaguered Remove off the dinner they had missed, and the tea they were going to miss. They played "rag" football, with plenty of energy and plenty of noise, and more or less forgot the drum-like state of the inner man.

But Billy Bunter did not join up. The fat Owl sat in the armchair, blinking dismally at the game through his big spectacles, and wondering whether even the "sack" was worse than the dolorous pangs of the inner Bunter.

IN THE NIGHT!

"QUELCH is still up!"

"Bless him!"

"Bother him!"

The hour was late!

Five or six fellows peered from the window of the Rag, where the stars glimmered down on the quad from fleecy clouds.

The last door had closed, the last light—but one—extinguished. The great pile of Greyfriars School was buried in silence and slumber. It was midnight—and all but the Remove had long been asleep—all masters, excepting the Remove master. But looking out into the dim quad, the rebels could see one glimmering window, at a distance—and they knew that it was the window of Quelch's study. It was long past the Remove master's usual bedtime—but evidently, he had not gone to bed.

The light had been turned off in the Rag. It was judicious to give the "enemy" the impression, if possible, that the rebels had gone to sleep like the rest of the school. Some of them had—sitting in the chairs, or lying with heads pillowed on arms. From the gloom came the intermittent snore of Billy Bunter, telling that the fat Owl had forgotten his woes in slumber. But the Famous Five, and half a dozen other fellows, were still wide awake—waiting and watching for a chance to carry out their plan of foraging for provender.

That was now the most urgent item on the programme.

More and more, as hour followed hour, the rebels realised the truth of the old maxim, that "an army marches on its stomach". Even the Famous Five, resolute as they were, had to admit that the barring-out could hardly carry on without provender. The only chance was a foray under cover of night—when Quelch, they hoped, would be sleeping soundly at a safe distance, the prefects all in bed in the Sixth Form quarters and bound in slumber's chain. Now, at midnight, they were ready to make the venture. But still that light glimmered from Quelch's study window into the dim quad.

"He can't be going to sit up all night, surely!" muttered Frank Nugent.

"Bother the man!" grunted Johnny Bull. "He's as regular as clockwork as a rule—off to bed at the tick of eleven. Now it's twelve."

"I—I wonder whether he suspects—!" murmured Harry Wharton.

The Bounder gave a scoffing laugh.

"Of course he does," he snapped. "He's on watch! Quelch knows as well as we do that we can't carry on on empty tummies. He knows our game just as if we'd told him."

"Um!" said Bob.

"No good watching for that light to go out," growled Smithy. "Quelch has got us in the hollow of his hand, if we can't get grub. Think he'll give us a chance if he can help it?"

The juniors looked at one another in the dim glimmer of starlight at the window. They could not help feeling that Smithy was right. Certainly that steady gleam at Quelch's window looked like it. But if Quelch was sitting up on watch, the prospects of a raid on the larder did not seem very bright.

"We've got to chance it," said Vernon-Smith.

"If Quelch spots us—!" said Redwing, dubiously.

"He will spot us! Think he's sitting up with his eyes closed and his ears plugged? He's just waiting for us to do what he jolly well knows we're going to do, and he will spot us all right."

"That rather washes it out," said Nugent.

"Rot! A dozen of us will go," said Vernon-Smith. "Quelch will butt in—you can take that as a cert. Well, we up-end him —."

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Up-end Quelch?"

"Why not? We've done enough already to be bunked, if we don't make them come to terms. We up-end him, and tie him up with the tail of his own gown—."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Who's game?" asked Smithy.

"Draw it mild, old man," murmured Bob. "There's a limit."

"The gamefulness is terrific, my esteemed Smithy! But the up-endfulness of the estimable Quelch is not the proper caper. "

Smithy looked round at the dim faces, with a sarcastic sneer on his own. The Bounder was prepared for any desperate measures. But the other fellows were by no means ready for such an enterprise as "up-ending" Quelch and tying him up in the tail of his own gown. There was, as Bob said, a limit.

Harry Wharton looked from the window again. The distant light was still glimmering from the study into the quad.

"I—I suppose Quelch couldn't have gone to bed, and forgotten to turn his light off?" suggested Nugent. Snort, from the Bounder.

"Does Quelch ever forget anything?"

"Um! No."

"Hark!" whispered Squiff. There was a sound of a footstep in the silence of the night, and the juniors all spun round towards the door of the Rag. That footstep was coming up the passage.

They listened, tensely. The footsteps paused at the door: there was a moment's silence, and then they were heard to recede again. They died away.

"Quelch!" whispered Bob.

"Doing sentry-go," grunted the Bounder. "Think he's gone to bed and left his light on now, Nugent?"

"No, fathead! That was Quelch, of course."

"Keeping an eye on us," said Bob. "Quelch is a downy bird."

"The downiness of the ridiculous Quelch is preposterous!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"We could have rushed him, while he was sniffing at the door," growled Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, chuck it, Smithy."

"Well, what are we going to do, then?"

"Wait!" said Harry.

The rebels waited. Their hope was that Quelch would get tired of his vigil and go to bed. There could be no doubt that a man accustomed to early and regular hours would get frightfully sleepy in the middle of the night, and he might conclude that the rebels were asleep at such an hour, too—even if he suspected, he could not be certain of their plans. The older the night grew, the more attractive bed would seem to the tired and sleepy form-master. With that hope, they waited, till the stroke of one boomed dully through the night from the clock-tower. But a glance from the window showed that the light in Quelch's study was still burning steadily.

"He's making a night of it, I suppose," mumbled Peter Todd. "I suppose he jolly well knows our game, as Smithy says."

"He's sitting this one out, that's a cert," said Bob.

"Sitting up with jolly old Euripides or blithering old Sophocles to keep him company!" growled Vernon-Smith. "Look here, we've got to chance it, and sit on Quelch and keep him quiet if he butts in."

"Pack that up, Smithy."

The Bounder growled angrily, but he was in a minority of one. Nobody else was disposed to lay disrespectful hands on the majestic person of Quelch. There was the sound of a yawn in the gloom, followed by a voice.

"Look here, you chaps—. I've got an idea."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! I thought you were asleep, Mauly."

"Not at all, dear boy. I've been thinkin'."

"Has it given you a pain?" asked the Bounder, sarcastically.

"Shut up, Smithy! What's the jolly old idea, Mauly?" asked Harry Wharton. The Bounder gave a sniff, evidently having but little faith in any ideas that might germinate in the aristocratic intellect of Lord Mauleverer. But the other fellows gave attention.

"Dear old Quelch is sittin' up in his study," murmured his lordship. "What about a fellow whippin' along, grabbin' his key, jammin' it in outside, and lockin' him in?"

"Oh!"

"Of course, he will hammer and thump to be let out. But that will take time, with everybody asleep in bed. What?"

"By gum!" said Bob Cherry. "Mauly, old man, you're a giddy genius. Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows, Mauly's solved the jolly old problem."

"It's a chance, anyhow," said Squiff. "Ten to one Quelch will have his nose in a book. If a fellow's quick—!"

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath.

"It's the big idea," he said. "Thanks, Mauly, old man! I'll go. We'll give Quelch another half-an-hour and if he doesn't go to bed—."

"He won't!" grunted Smithy.

"Then I'll try it on."

The juniors waited again. The minutes passed slowly, without a sound from the silent house. The half-hour chimed at last. The light was still glimmering from Quelch's window: he had not gone to bed.

"Get the door open," said Harry.

Quietly, or as quietly as possible, the wedges that jammed the door of the Rag were withdrawn. Bob opened the door a few inches, and peered out, and listened. All was dark and silent.

The old bean's not on sentry-go again," he whispered.

"He's in his study—and if you have any luck—."

Harry Wharton removed his shoes. Silent, in his socks, he crept out of the Rag. His friends remained at the door, watching him as he disappeared into darkness.

The passage was as black as a hat. But the captain of the Remove knew every inch of the way, and he lost no time. In a few minutes he was standing at the corner of Masters' Studies, looking along the corridor towards the door of Quelch's study. He caught his breath as he looked. Light from Quelch's study streamed out into the corridor. The Remove master's door was standing wide open—evidently so that he would not fail to hear any sound that might stir in the silent house.

Wharton set his lips. The open study door made his task more doubtful of success. Ten to one Quelch would be sitting facing the doorway, and would see him the instant he appeared there. He had planned to open the door suddenly and snatch the key from the inside. Now he had to take the chance, but it was a very doubtful one—and he paused, his heart beating.

As he stood, a faint sound came to his ears, and he started. It was the sound of a rumbling snore.

For a moment, he fancied that an echo of Billy Bunter's snore was in his ears. But he was too far from the Rag for that. Then he understood, and suppressed a chuckle.

Snore!

It was a faint and distant rumble. But it was unmistakable. It proceeded from the open doorway of Quelch's study. It told its own tale! Silently, he crept up the corridor, and looked in at the open door.

SUCCESSFUL OPERATION!

MR. QUELCH sat in his armchair at the fireside in his study. It had been turned so as to face the open doorway, and Quelch sat facing Harry Wharton as the junior looked in. Had his eyes been open, no doubt they would have opened wider, at the unexpected sight of the captain of the Remove. But they were not open—they were shut! At half-past one a.m. Mr. Quelch had no longer been able to resist the blandishments of the sleepy god, and Morpheus had him fast.

His book lay open on his knee. His head leaned back on old soft leather. He slept—and at intervals, with a faint rumble, he snored!

Quelch, of course, had not intended to take a nap. He had sat up on the watch, and he had fully intended to remain alert. To while away the weary vigil he had enlisted the services of Euripides. Perhaps that, added to the fatigue of a long day, and unaccustomed late hours, had done it. Quelch, unconsciously, had nodded: and from nodding, had sunk into slumber—and there he sat, facing Wharton, fast asleep. Euripides rested unheeded on his knee. It was a matter of regretful concern to Mr. Quelch that, of the seventy-five known works of that great Greek, hardly a score had survived for the delectation of later ages. But a single spot seemed to have been enough for him on the present occasion. Anyhow, whether it was fatigue, or late hours, or Euripides, Quelch was deep in slumber.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Wharton.

For a long moment, he stared across the study at his sleeping form-master. Quelch did not stir. He slept on—and another faint whirring rumble testified to the soundness of his slumber.

Then, on tiptoe, Harry Wharton stepped into the study.

With extreme caution, without a sound, he drew the key from the inner side of the lock.

Quelch was asleep—but he might wake. It was easy to carry out the bright idea of Lord Mauleverer—and only prudent to do so. If Quelch woke up, it was obviously better to have a locked door between him and the rebels of the Remove.

Softly, silently, Wharton drew the door shut. He turned the handle carefully, latching it without a sound. Slowly and cautiously he slipped the key into the outside of the lock, and there was not the faintest sound as he turned it, and drew it out again. Then he tiptoed away down the corridor, a low rumbling snore from the study following him as he went.

He groped his way through the darkness back to the Rag. A breathless whisper came as he approached the door where a dozen juniors waited anxiously in the dark.

"That you, old chap?" whispered Nugent.

"Little me," answered Harry, cheerfully.

"We've not heard anything," muttered Bob Cherry.

"I thought we should hear Quelch's door bang, from here."

"So we should have," growled the Bounder. "Wharton hasn't done it. Have you funk'd it, or what?"

"My esteemed idiotic Smithy—!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Look here, I'd better go," snapped the Bounder.

"Shut up a minute, Smithy," grunted Johnny Bull.

"What's happened, Wharton?"

"I've locked Quelch's door on him."

"Oh!" ejaculated Smithy. "Look here, mean to say Quelch let you take your time about it?"

"Exactly."

"Wasn't he in the study?" asked the Bounder, puzzled.

"Oh, yes, sitting facing the door. It was wide open. I had lots of time to take the key and close the door without banging it."

"Quelch let you do it?" exclaimed Vernon-Smith.

"Yes. He never said a word."

"Well, I can't understand it, then."

"Lots of things you can't understand, Smithy. I haven't mentioned yet that he was fast asleep in his chair."

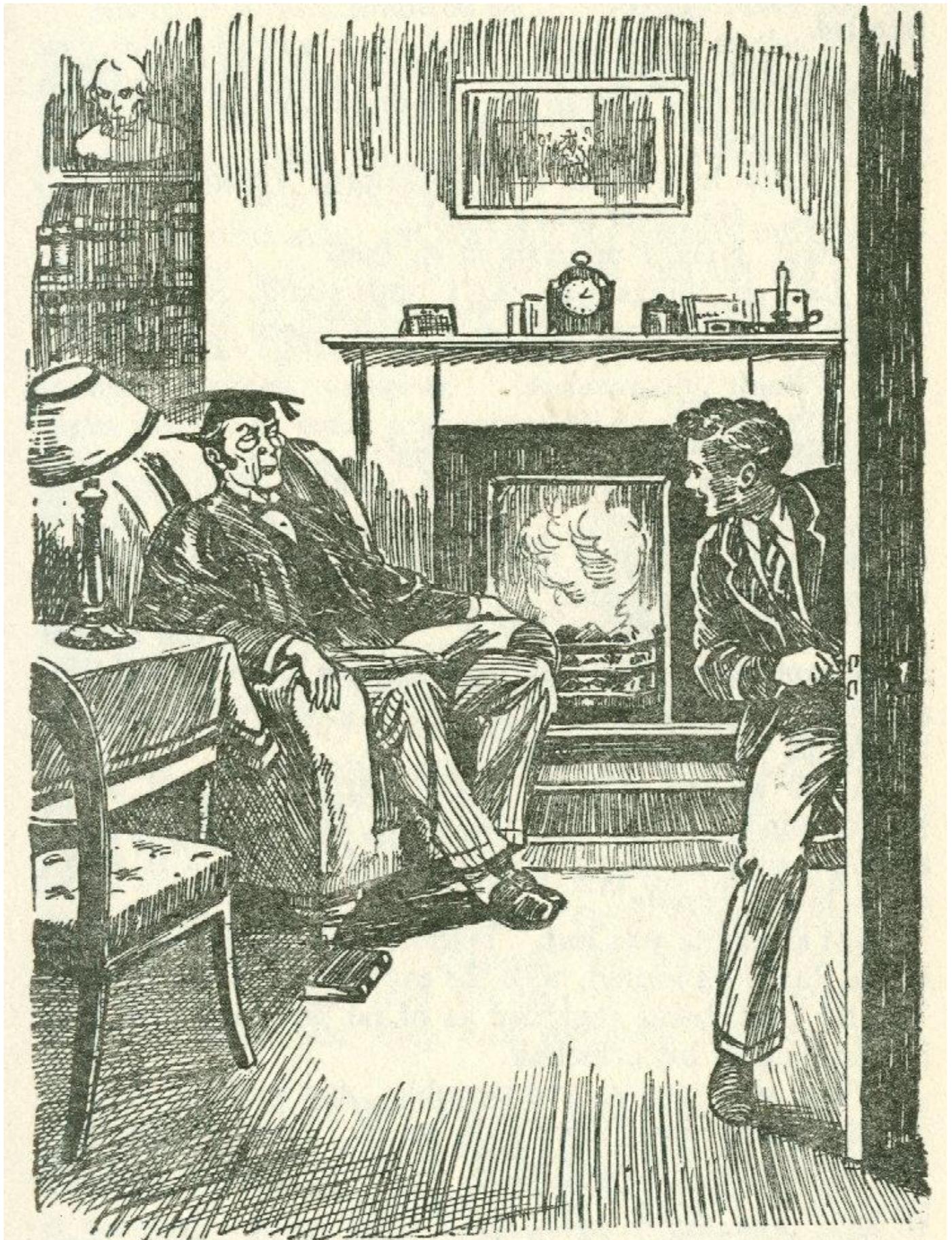
"Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a chuckle in the Rag.

"And now we'd better get going," continued the captain of the Remove. "Quelch looked as if he was set for the night, but you never know. The sooner we get the grub here, the better."

"You bet!" chuckled Bob. "Every jolly old minute is precious now. We shan't get another chance after this: and we've got to raid every spot of grub we can lay our hands on, and stand a siege."



QUELCH WAS ASLEEP—BUT HE MIGHT WAKE

"Call all the fellows," said Harry. "And not a sound, mind. We've got a lot to do, and we've got to get through without giving the alarm, if we can. It won't do to lose a minute."

Not a minute was lost. Fellows who had fallen asleep in the Rag were roused, with the exception of Billy Bunter. The fat Owl, being regarded as of no particular use, was left snoring in his armchair.

There were yawns, and mumbles, and rubbing of eyes, but the whole crowd were soon ready. Even Skinner and Co. were keen. Every fellow woke up hungry, and the prospect of "grub" was inspiring.

The Removites, all of them very wide awake, now crowded out of the Rag into the passage, in a state of breathless excitement. Every fellow had removed his shoes, and was silent in his socks.

Harry Wharton, followed by a tiptoeing crowd, led the way to the service door, which gave access to the kitchen regions: the quarter where provisions were to be found. That item was the most important on the programme. Blankets and other things were wanted, if time allowed, but "grub" was indispensable.

For the next hour, any wakeful eye peering through the gloom might have had the impression that the old school was haunted by innumerable gliding, whispering ghosts.

Dim forms glided in the shadows. Low voices exchanged hurried whispers. Occasionally there was a slight sound, as some fellow stumbled, or dropped something. But the rebels were very cautious. All depended on caution.

To and fro forms flitted, and armfuls and bagfuls of assorted supplies were dumped, one after another, in the Rag, where Billy Bunter snored in happy unconsciousness that anything was going on.

In a school like Greyfriars, with more than two hundred fellows to cater for, the supplies on hand were naturally extensive. Vegetables, grown on the school allotments, were ample. All was grist that came to the mill. Fellows about to stand a siege could not stand on ceremony. Other forms at Greyfriars were likely to feel the pinch the next day. That could not be helped. Other forms could wait till fresh supplies were obtained: the Remove couldn't. This was, as Bob had said, the only chance the rebels were likely to have, and they had to make the very most of it.

For a long hour they worked, flitting to and fro: and at the end of that time, almost every spot of food to be found within the walls of Greyfriars was piled and stacked in the Rag. There were whole sacks of potatoes, piles of other things, stacks of assorted provender. Many of the hungry juniors sampled the supplies, as they worked, in which line Billy Bunter would have rendered yeoman service, had he been awake. But the fat Owl snored on: and if he dreamed, little dreamed that pots of jam were within reach of his fat fingers.

All the while, the rebels were alert for any sound of alarm. But there was no alarm. Mr. Quelch, in his study, slept as soundly as William George Bunter in the Rag, and no-one else was likely to awake. Quelch's inadvertent nap was sheer luck for the rebels. Had he been locked awake, in his study, it would certainly have taken him some time to get released—perhaps a quarter of an hour. That would have been useful—but not so useful as his prolonged nap! They had had a whole hour now, and still there was no sound from Quelch's study.

The work was finished at last: the Rag provisioned for a siege, the rest of Greyfriars left in the state of Mother Hubbard's cupboard.

"O.K.," said Bob Cherry, his voice a little muffled by a mouthful of biscuits. "We've got enough—even for Bunter!"

"The okayfulness is terrific," chuckled the nabob of Bhanipur.

"Dear old Quelch!" murmured Peter Todd. "Let's hope he's enjoying his nap."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now for the dorm," said Harry Wharton. "We're in luck—we've got time to bag the blankets and things. A dozen fellows will be enough—the rest stop here and keep guard."

Silent figures flitted away to the stairs. Fellows in other forms, fast asleep in their dormitories, heard nothing. The door of the Remove dormitory was opened softly and they tiptoed in. The Bounder turned on a flash-lamp: and they gathered blankets and pillows from the beds.

There was still no sound of alarm, as the raiders crept down the staircase again, heavily laden.

But as they reached the foot of the staircase, the Bounder uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Hark!"

From the distance came a sound through the silence of the night. It was the sound of a thump on a door. It was distant, but plainly heard, echoing through the silence.

"Quelch!" breathed Harry Wharton. "He's woke up!"

Thump! thump!

"Sounds as if he's woke up!" chuckled the Bounder. "But he won't wake up the other beaks in a hurry. Dear old Quelch has got to wait a bit. Hark! He's going it!" Thump! thump!

"Putting his beef into it, and no mistake," murmured Peter Todd. "Come on—somebody will hear that before long."

"Too late!" chuckled the Bounder.

"The too-latefulness is terrific."

"Come on—quick!" exclaimed Harry.

They ran for the Rag. Louder and louder, through the silent house, came the echoing sound of thumping on a door, from the direction of Masters' Studies. Only too clearly, Mr. Quelch was awake—and had discovered that he was locked in his study! Thump! thump! thump!

How long it would take for that loud and angry thumping to rouse sleeping ears, the juniors did not know, but they lost no time. They ran for the Rag, and crowded in. The door was slammed, the light turned on, and the wedges pushed under the big door again, Bob Cherry banging them home with his hammer. Bang, bang, bang, from the Rag, answered thump, thump, thump, from Masters' Studies: and in the hitherto sleeping house there was a sound of stirring.

TOO LATE!

THUMP! thump! thump!

"Ow! Oh! Ooooh!"

Mr. Quelch, in a state of considerable excitement in his study, was thumping on the door for release—and he thumped not wisely but too well! Quelch's knuckles were tough—but hard old oak was tougher. Having delivered a particularly energetic thump, Mr. Quelch suddenly ceased thumping, and clasped his right hand with his left, spluttering.

"Oh! Ah! Ooooooh! Whoooooh! Oh!"

But the noise had been heard. If Quelch's thumping had failed to rouse out sleepers, the banging of the hammer in the Rag would have done so. Lights were flashing on in the house, and there were footsteps and voices. From a distance the boom of Mr. Prout reached Quelch.

"What is it? Do you know what it is, Wingate? Or you, Loder? What is this extraordinary, this unprecedented, this unparalleled disturbance in the middle of the night? "

Thump! thump! thump! Quelch restarted after the interval, using his left hand this time, and with more circumspection. There were footsteps, and the rustle of a voluminous dressing-gown, in the corridor.

"Quelch! Is that you, Quelch? What is the matter? Is your study on fire. Is it burglars? Bless my soul!" The door-handle rattled, as Prout grasped it. "Quelch! If you are there, open the door."

"The door is locked!" shrieked Mr. Quelch.

"Locked!" repeated Mr. Prout. "Then for goodness' sake unlock it, Quelch. Why have you locked yourself in your study, Quelch?"

"I have not locked myself in my study!" raved the Remove master.

"What? What? You said the door was locked—and I certainly cannot open it—what do you mean, Quelch?"

"I should think that that was plain to the most limited intelligence, Mr. Prout! I have been locked in from outside," roared Mr. Quelch. "Will you have the kindness to unlock the door instead of wasting further time?"

"Really, Quelch—!"

"Will you unlock the door, Mr. Prout? I tell you I have been locked in. I must have fallen asleep in my chair for a moment, and someone must have locked the door while my eyes were closed—will you unlock it at once?"

"I should be very glad to do so, Quelch—."

"Then do so at once."

"—if the key were here—"

"What?"

"As there is no key, I cannot unlock the door," said Mr. Prout. "I cannot unlock a door without a key, Quelch. That, I think, should be plain to the most limited intelligence," added Mr. Prout, in sarcastic parody of his colleague.

Mr. Quelch's jaw closed like a vice. Evidently the unknown who had locked him in had taken the key away. Seldom, or never, had Mr. Quelch been so deeply and intensely exasperated. He would probably have ground his teeth, had they been his first or second set. But his third set were too expensive to be so dealt with. He closed them very hard instead.

He could guess, of course, what had happened. He had sat up to watch, feeling certain that the rebels in the Rag would emerge at some time during the night in search of provender. Then all Quelch had to do was to weigh in, cane in hand, while the door of the Rag was open. Unluckily he had fallen asleep in his chair—only for a few moments, he supposed. But the young rascals had taken full advantage of those few moments. Unaware that an hour and a half had elapsed since his eyes had closed over Euripides, it seemed to Quelch that every moment was precious—and here he was, still locked in his study!

"Wingate! Are you there, Wingate?"

"I am here, sir," came back the voice of the captain of Greyfriars. "If there's anything I can do, sir—."

"Go to the junior day-room at once. If the door is still open, take care that the boys do not close it."

"Oh! Yes, sir."

Wingate hurried away. Mr. Quelch was left in his study rather like a tiger in a cage. To comfort him, he heard several voices in chorus with Prout's in the corridor outside. Other masters had come down—Hacker, Capper, Wiggins, and Monsieur Charpentier. Quelch glared at the locked door. He wanted to be released—but he did not want a large and increasing audience.

"What is this disturbance—?"

"What is the matter?"

"Mon dieu! Mais qu'est-que-c'est? C'est affreuse! Vat is it zen?"

"Quelch is locked in his study!" boomed Prout.

"Some boy of his form—."

"Quelch's boys!" came Hacker's acid sarcastic voice.

"Oh! The Remove!" said Mr. Capper.

"Ce pauvre Quelch! La porte est fermée, n'est-ce-pas! Hélas! Ce pauvre Quelch!"

"Such a disturbance at this hour—!"

"Really, one expects to be allowed to sleep at night!"

"Je crois—I zink zat it is a house on fire—it is a commotion of ze most grand—."

Mr. Quelch almost foamed, as he listened. Then he heard Wingate's voice again.

"Please let me pass." The captain of Greyfriars had returned, and had apparently to push his way through a barrage of beaks.

Quelch rapped on the door.

"Wingate! Did you find the day-room open—?"

"No sir! The door was closed and fastened. But one of the juniors pushed a key under the door—he said it was the key to your study—."

"Oh! Unlock it at once, Wingate."

It was a relief to Mr. Quelch to hear the key scrape into the lock. The door opened. Quelch almost shot into the corridor.

Prout and Hacker, Capper and Mossoo and Wiggins backed hastily to give him room to pass. Quelch did not waste a word or look on them. He whirled past like a thunderstorm.

"Mon pauvre ami—!" began Monsieur Charpentier, full of sympathy. But Quelch had no use for the French master's sympathy. He whirled away.

The gathering of beaks exchanged eloquent and expressive glances, and departed. Wingate grinned faintly as he followed their example. Quelch, heedless of them all, arrived at the door of the Rag, almost breathless. But that door, as Wingate had told him, was closed and fastened. A resounding bang of Bob Cherry's hammer had driven the last wedge safely home.

Mr. Quelch rapped on the panels.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is that you again, Wingate? Go and boil your head, old bean."

"It is I, Cherry!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! Sorry, sir! I don't want you to go and boil your head, of course, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have been locked in my study!" Mr. Quelch's voice trembled with wrath. "I am well aware that it was some boy here—."

"He's guessed it!" came the Bounder's voice. "Some brain, what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You will find that this is not a matter for merriment, gasped Mr. Quelch. "No doubt I may have closed my eyes, for a moment, over my book. But I am well aware of what was your intention—to obtain a supply of food to enable you to carry on this rebellion. Is not that the case, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir."

"Fortunately, you have had no time to carry out any such intention, as my eyes were closed only for a few moments. And I repeat the warning I gave you before—that no food will reach you till you have submitted to authority. Understand that clearly."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Evidently, to the Greyfriars rebels, Mr. Quelch was as yet unaware that they had carried out a successful military operation whilst his eyes were closed over the entrancing pages of Euripides.

"Don't you worry, sir," chuckled the Bounder. "We've not been losing time. It isn't us that will have empty plates in the morning."

"We're all right, sir,"

"The rightfulness is terrific!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Bounder. "Come round to the window in the morning, sir, and we'll chuck you a biscuit. It's all the brekker you'll get,"

Mr. Quelch gave quite a convulsive start. It dawned upon his mind that he had, perhaps, nodded over Euripides for more than a moment or two!

"D-do—do you mean to say—?" he stuttered.

"We jolly well mean to say that we've snaffled all the jolly old grub there is in the jolly old house!" chortled the Bounder. "Perhaps the Head will ask you to brekker in his house, sir. If not, come round for that biscuit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What—what—what is the time, Wharton?"

"Five minutes past three, sir."

"Oh!"

Mr. Quelch turned away without another word. His feelings were too deep for words. A sound of chuckling, mingled with munching, followed him from the Rag. The rebels were enjoying a late supper. Mr. Quelch, realising that there was no purpose to be served by keeping further watch went to bed—and as he went, his brows were wrinkled in a more frightful, fearful, frantic frown than that of the Lord High Executioner.

COKER ASKS FOR IT!

CLANG! clang! clang!

"Urrrggh! Lemme alone!"

"Wake up, Bunter."

"Beast!"

Clang! clang!

The rising-bell was ringing at Greyfriars in the sunny morning. In junior dormitories and Sixth Form studies, Greyfriars fellows were turning out to a new day. In the Rag, the Remove were up—with the exception of Billy Bunter. All through the night, Billy Bunter had slept soundly, his snore intermittent but unceasing.

Nobody had troubled to awaken him during the excitement of the night; and the fat Owl was not likely to awaken on his own account. How a fellow could sleep through the buzzing of voices that had followed the night's operations, the banging of Bob's hammer wedging the door, was rather a mystery; but Billy Bunter was a good sleeper—it was one of the things he could do really well. Rip van Winkle had nothing on W. G. Bunter in that line.

Having snored on through the buzzing and trampling, and banging, and various other noises, Bunter was not likely to awaken at the clang of the rising-bell. In bed in the dormitory he was accustomed to pass it by like the idle wind which he regarded not, till some fellow awakened him with a shove, or a Jerk, or by pulling the bedclothes off—and he passed it by unregarded now. So Bob Cherry kindly gave him a call.

Bob's stentorian voice, bawling in his fat ear, caused Bunter's sleepy eyes to open a little—not much. They remained open long enough for him to ejaculate "Beast", and then closed again.

"Rouse out, fatty!" roared Bob, administering a shake.

"Beast! Shut up! 'Tain't rising-bell."

"Can't you hear it, fathead?"

"Eh! Oh!" Bunter blinked. "Well, you idiot, what does rising-bell matter now? We ain't in the dorm now, fathead! There's nothing to get up for, chump! Leave a fellow alone. Yah!"

"What about brekker?" asked Bob.

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "You jolly well know that there ain't any brekker, and I'm jolly well going to sleep as long as I jolly well can, so yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell of merriment. Bunter having slumbered through the night, was as yet unaware that provender was now ample in the Rag, and that there was going to be breakfast. Had Bunter been aware of that important circumstance, he would have been out of the armchair with a bound, sleepy as he was. But the fat Owl was ignorant of it, and it was a case where ignorance was not bliss.

Bunter snored, pillowed a fat head on a fat arm again, curling up in the armchair, and went to sleep once more. Bob Cherry chuckled, and left him to it. If Bunter preferred to sleep, there was no reason why he shouldn't. Leaving him to snore, Bob rushed off into the lobby to join in the scrum for an early wash.

The rising-bell ceased to clang, and Billy Bunter continued to snore. Everybody else was active and merry and bright. The Removites were in great spirits that morning.

"O what a beautiful morning!" sang Bob Cherry, as he splashed cold water right and left. "Everything's going our way!"

"By gum, I'm ready for brekker," said Bolsover major. "I could do with two or three—after yesterday! We can jolly well spread ourselves for once, with all the grub in the school here."

"What about rations?" asked Peter Todd.

"Blow rations! I'm jolly well going to have two or three eggs, and a couple of rashers, and a whole pot of jam, and—."

"That won't do," said Harry Wharton, decidedly. "We've got grub, but we've got to make it last. They'll take jolly good care not to let us have such a chance again, and goodness knows how long this shindy may go on."

"True, O King!" agreed Bob Cherry.

"Look here," bawled Bolsover, indignantly. "We're barring out the beaks, ain't we, and we can jolly well do as we like, see?"

"Not at all," said the captain of the Remove. "We're not going to scoff more than usual—we're going to scoff less, to make it last. We're going on strict rations, and any fellow who doesn't agree—."

"Well, I don't for one!" roared Bolsover major.

"O.K. Collar him, you fellows, and stick his head in that wash-basin! We'll keep it there till he agrees."

"Hear, hear!"

"Bag him!"

"Hold on," exclaimed Bolsover major hastily, as the Famous Five gathered round him. "Hands off, blow you. I—I daresay you're right, come to think of it. Stick to rations and be blowed."

"Sure you agree?" asked Bob. "We don't mind upending you and sticking your head in the water, if you're keen on it."

"Is the keenfulness terrific, my esteemed Bolsover?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" yapped Bolsover major. After which he held his peace, and some other thoughtless fellows, who had been disposed to back up his suggestion, held their peace also.

The big cupboard in the Rag, now in use as a temporary larder, was stacked from top to bottom, with all sorts of varied supplies. Certainly they looked ample, but the wiser heads among the rebels realised that rationing was essential, for there could be no doubt that every precaution would be taken by the "enemy" to prevent any renewal of supplies. When the big table in the Rag was spread for breakfast it was a sufficient but frugal meal—and fellows who were dissatisfied took it out in grumbling.

Breakfast proceeded to an accompaniment of snores from the armchair in which the fattest figure at Greyfriars School was curled up in slumber. Grinning faces turned towards Billy Bunter as he snored. Bunter wanted his sleep out, and they let him have it; but what Bunter would say when he did wake up, and found that grub had been available for hours, was quite interesting to contemplate.

The clatter of crocks and the buzz of voices did not awaken Bunter. He slumbered on—Epimenides himself could not have done better.

Breakfast over, the rebels cleared the table, and crocks were washed in the lobby and packed away. After which, Bob Cherry was sorting out his soccer ball, when he became aware of a red wrathful face staring in at the window.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's jolly old Coker!" exclaimed Bob.

Rap! rap! came Coker's knuckles on a pane, so emphatically that it cracked. Coker of the Fifth had a heavy hand.

Harry Wharton opened the casement. A crowd of smiling faces looked out at Horace Coker. Coker did not smile.

"Look here, you cheeky fags!" roared Coker. "Do you know that there's nothing for brekker in the school?"

"We'd guessed that one!" admitted Bob.

"I hear that you've walked off the whole lot, and you've got it here!" roared Coker. "Think you can make a Fifth Form man go without his brekker?"

"The thankfulness is terrific, my esteemed Coker."

"You cheeky little scrubby villains! Look here, you jolly well hand out something for me, see!" bawled Coker.

Apparently Coker of the Fifth regarded his own breakfast as being more important than anyone else's.

"Sorry," said Bob, politely. "Ask next door!"

"What we have, we hold!" chuckled Johnny Bull.

"Hold on, though," said the Bounder. "Let's hand Coker something, as he's asking for it."

"Can't spare a thing, Smithy," said Peter Todd shaking his head.

"We've got lots of spuds," said Smithy.

"Spuds?"

"Yes—let Coker have one."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Whiz!

Coker had demanded that something should be handed out to him. Perhaps he had not expected a potato. But that was what he received—and he received it fairly on his prominent nose.

Bang!

"Oh!" roared Coker, as he received it.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good shot!"

"Let Coker have another spud!"

"Oh! Ow! Woooogh!" spluttered Coker. He did not wait for another spud. With his hand clasped to his suffering nose, Coker of the Fifth departed—in haste.

GRUB!

"OH, lor'!" moaned Billy Bunter.

The fat Owl of the Remove sat up and took notice at last.

Bunter had had his sleep out. Even Bunter, good as he was in that line, could not keep it up so long as Rip van Winkle. He sat up at last, set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose, and blinked dismally and dolorously round the Rag, and moaned.

Bunter was in the lowest of spirits.

Everybody else in the Rag seemed quite cheerful. Some of the juniors were punting a soccer ball, with plenty of vim. Others were playing darts, with a dart-board slung up on the door. In one corner an eight-handed mill was going on; four fellows with the gloves on all at once. A group stood by the window, looking out into the sunny quadrangle with cheery faces. Lord Mauleverer, elegantly reclining in an armchair, looked as placid and content as usual. Fisher T. Fish, in a corner, was counting his money, and seemed to be enjoying himself. Wibley was reading Shakespeare—Mark Linley was reading Greek—the Bounder was scanning a pink paper, and calculating the chances of Pulled Peter in the Welsher's Plate. Everybody but Bunter, in fact, seemed to regard life as a cheerful proposition, and well worth living. To Billy Bunter it seemed a dreary desert. Never, in all his fat career had existence on this planet seemed to Billy Bunter so weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable.

Bunter was hungry! He was awfully hungry. He was fearfully hungry. He knew now what it was like to be adrift in an open boat at sea. It was like this!

He moaned.

"I say, you fellows."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Waking up already?" asked Bob Cherry. "It's only ten o'clock, Bunter."

"I'm too hungry to sleep!" moaned Bunter. "I say, you fellows, this can't go on. I—I—I don't want you to be sacked, Bob, but—but you can see it won't do, can't you, old chap?"

"Not quite!" said Bob, shaking his head. "Looks to me as if it will do all right."

"Ain't you fellows hungry?" asked Bunter.

"Not particularly."

"I'm dying of hunger!" groaned Bunter.

"Well, look here," said Johnny Bull. "Go to sleep again, and die quietly."

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter dragged his fat limbs from the armchair. He blinked round at grinning faces, with lack-lustre eyes behind his big spectacles. How the other fellows could look so merry and bright, in the circumstances, was a mystery to Bunter. His fat face was the picture of woe.

"I say, you fellows, we can't keep this up!" he mumbled. "Not without grub, you know. It ain't much I eat, as you fellows know—."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"But a fellow must have something. I say, couldn't one of you fellows cut out, while the beaks ain't looking and bag something from the tuck-shop? I'll pay for it if you like," added Bunter, generously. "Nothing mean about me, I hope. I'll stand a quid—Maully will lend me a quid till my postal-order comes, won't you, Maully?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" howled Bunter. "I keep on telling you I'm hungry! Famished! Look here, we've got to chuck this, see!"

"The chuckfulness is not the proper caper!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "We are sticking it outfully, my esteemed fat Bunter."

"We can't!" yelled Bunter. "Not without grub! You can't expect it, Bob Cherry! Why, you beasts, you wouldn't be barring out the beaks at all if I hadn't suggested it. It was my idea from the start."

"And the best you ever had!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Keep on with the good work, old porpoise."

"My idea was to hide Bob somewhere, till Quelch got over his temper," hooted Bunter.

"Quelch won't get over his temper till he's got the man who sooted him," said Frank Nugent. "Quelch's temper isn't getting better. It's getting worse."

"The worsefulness is terrific."

"I tell you we could hide Bob up the chimney—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, we can't keep this up without grub!" roared Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a howl of laughter up and down the Rag.

The big cupboard, stacked with provender, was not a dozen feet away, wide open to the view. Bunter, now that he was awake, had only to blink round in that direction, to learn that the pressing problem of "grub" had been solved. But the fat Owl was not blinking in that direction—he was blinking at the Famous Five with an infuriated blink.

"Cackle!" he snorted. "Fat lot you fellows care if I fade away before your eyes, after all I've done for you."

"Oh, gum!" said Bob. "It will take you some time to fade away, old fat man. If you lose a hundredweight a day, you'll last for weeks—."

"Months," said Johnny Bull.

"Beasts!" groaned Bunter. "I—I say, you fellows, of course I don't want Bob to be hoofed out, but after all, it—it won't matter a lot, you know. You—you won't miss him as you would me!"

"Oh, great pip!"

"Will—will you go and tell Quelch you'll go, Bob?"

"Not this morning," chuckled Bob.

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter collapsed into the armchair again. The expression on his fat face might have moved a heart of stone.

Bunter had a conscience, little as most of his acquaintances would have suspected him of such a possession. Bunter had sooted Quelch, and Bob Cherry had been sacked for it, and it had been too much for his fat conscience. He had astonished the natives, as it were, by his championship of the expelled junior.

But all was changed now.

Bunter hadn't been hungry then! Now he was! He was awfully, fearfully hungry! That made a tremendous difference.

Conscience, in such harrowing circumstances, had to take a back seat. It faded right out! It was not merely an "also ran". It was simply nowhere.

Indeed, at the present moment, Billy Bunter would willingly have seen half Greyfriars sacked, in exchange for one square meal!

"Cheer up, old fat man," said Peter Todd. "You're getting out of lessons, you know."

"Blow lessons," moaned Bunter.

"You don't have to turn out at rising-bell—" grinned Skinner.

"Blow rising-bell!"

"You don't have to wash!" said Vernon-Smith.

Even that failed to comfort Bunter. He only gave a dismal groan. Then he closed his eyes behind his spectacles. The juniors watched him with grinning faces. Like the gentleman in Dickens who breakfasted lightly off a cigar, and took it out in sleep, the Fat Owl had apparently decided on slumber as a resource.

"My only hat! He's going to sleep again!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, shut up that row! You might let a fellow sleep, when there's nothing to eat," squeaked Bunter.

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

Bob Cherry walked across to the store cupboard. He selected a large plate, and placed on it half a cold veal pie, flanked with cold potatoes, a slice of ham, and a couple of hard-boiled eggs. It was considerably more than a fellow's rations, but Bob felt that this was a special case. With that well-laden plate in his hands, he came back to Bunter.

"Wake up, old porpoise," he said, cheerily. Bunter's eyes did not open.

"Beast!" he mumbled. "Gerraway!"

"But look here—."

"Will you let a fellow sleep, you beast?"

"But—."

"Gerraway!" hissed Bunter. "I'm going to sleep, I tell you. Gerraway and shut up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's grub!" roared Bob.

"Eh? "

Bunter's eyes opened. He blinked at the plate Bob was holding under his fat little nose. His little round eyes almost popped through his big round spectacles at that plate. For a moment, Billy Bunter seemed to be unable to believe either his eyes or his spectacles. Then he grabbed.

"Oh, crikey!" he gasped.

He wasted no more time in words. Words were superfluous. Bunter's plump jaws were much too busy for speech. For a good ten minutes, the fat Owl put in solid concentrated work on the foodstuffs.

Then, evidently, he felt better. He blinked round at Harry Wharton and Co.

"I say, you fellows! This is prime! I say, where did you get it?"

"We raided the larder last night, you fat ass, while you were snoring," answered Bob, "and you could have had it hours ago, if you hadn't been too jolly lazy to turn out when I called you."

"Oh, really, Cherry! I say, have you got lots?"

"The lotfulness is terrific," grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh good!" said Bunter. He filled a large mouth again, and his voice came muffled through veal and ham. "I say, you fellows, keep your pecker up. We're not giving in, you know. Blow the beaks! We're jolly well sticking this out! "

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stick it out," said Bunter. "If you feel funky just keep an eye on me! I'll see you through. Bob ain't going to be sacked while he's got a pal like me to stand by him! Blow the beaks! Blow the pre's! Blow the Head, if you come to that! We're sticking this out! I say, this pie is prime!"

And Bunter, full of beans, finished the pie. He leaned back in the armchair to rest after his exertions. There was a happy smile on his face, mingled with fragments of veal and ham and egg. Life was once more worth living!—and Billy Bunter was valiantly prepared to "stick it out"—at any rate so long as the "grub" lasted!

HOT WORK!

CRASH!

"Oh!"

"What—!"

"Look out!"

It was a sudden alarm. Fellows in the Rag jumped, and exclaimed, and stared round towards the door.

Third school was going on at Greyfriars. All forms but the Remove were in class. Perhaps some of them rather envied the Lower Fourth, who were enjoying a "sing-song" in the Rag, oblivious of conjugations and declensions, geometry and algebra, and French irregular verbs.

The rebels of Greyfriars undoubtedly seemed to be enjoying life, at the moment. Cheery voices were raised in a merry chorus: when suddenly, that terrific crash came at the door of the Rag. The "sing-song" ceased abruptly.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, the jolly old enemy!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Crash!

The door of the Rag was of solid oak, thick and strong. But it shook and trembled under the shock. A dozen wedges hammered in under it held it fast, and it seemed secure against anything but a battering-ram. But that terrific shock really sounded as if a battering-ram had arrived on the scene.

Crash! crash! crack!

An oaken panel split. Splinters flew into the room.

There was a rush towards the door, and an alarmed squeak from Billy Bunter.

"I say, you fellows, they're busting in the door! Oh, crikey!"

Crash again! The split panel burst, and the end of a heavy oaken form appeared in view for a moment. It was withdrawn, and through the gap, the Removites had a glimpse of the passage without.

"By gum!" breathed the Bounder. "Quelch means business this time!"

Outside the Rag, four prefects of the Sixth Form could be seen—Wingate, Gwynne, Loder, and Sykes. They were holding the long, heavy form, which they had rushed against the door. A little breathless, they backed across the passage for another rush.

Mr. Quelch was standing there—a grim expression on his face. Quelch, evidently, had made up his mind that the time had come for heroic measures! Since the raid on the larder the previous night, it was clear that the rebellion would not peter out for want of provender. But it could not go on—in Mr. Quelch's opinion, at least. It had to end. The expelled junior had to be despatched on his homeward journey, and the rest of the form brought back to order and discipline.

The position was, in fact, growing quite intolerable to the Remove Master. His Chief expected him as master of the rebellious form, to restore order, and was undoubtedly a little grim on the subject. Still more unpleasant were the smiles and shrugs of other members of the Staff. Quelch had hardly ventured to show his face in Common-Room for the last day.

He was reluctant—very reluctant—to cause this terrific uproar, which rang and echoed in every corner of the school. But there was no help for it, if the barring-out in the Rag was to end—and it had to end! So there was Quelch, looking on with a grim frowning brow, as the Sixth Form men battered at the door of the rebels' stronghold.

"Come on!" rapped Wingate.

The four big seniors rushed again, and again the oaken form crashed on the broken upper panel. It was a terrific crash, and the panel flew in fragments in the Rag, leaving a huge gap in the door.

Through that great gap stared startled faces. A pair of gimlet-eyes fastened on them, as the Sixth Form men backed for another charge.

"Wharton!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

Harry Wharton looked at him.

"Wharton! Open that door, before further damage is done! You can see that it will be down in a few minutes. Cease this mutiny, and—"

The captain of the Remove set his lips.

"Back up, you fellows," he said. "We're keeping them out."

"Yes, rather."

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"Stick it out!" exclaimed the Bounder. "Here, give a fellow room! We can get at them now, anyhow." The Bounder had a chunk of coal in either hand, and the gleam of battle in his eyes.

"Good egg!"

"Go it!"

"Give them all you've got!" roared Cherry.

Whiz!

"Oh," roared Wingate. The seniors were about to charge again, when a lump of coal landed under Wingate's chin. It landed with a crash, and the Greyfriars captain let go the form, and staggered against the wall.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Gwynne. "Look out—holy smoke!" he added, in a yell, as a second chunk caught him under the ear.

"Good shot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Missiles came whizzing fast through the gap in the door—chunks of coal, potatoes, tomatoes—anything that came to hand.

"Play up, you fellows."

"Give them jip!"

"Give them terrific jip!"

"Wingate!" Mr. Quelch almost bawled. The prefects, instead of charging again, had let go the oaken form and were ducking and dodging. "Wingate! Proceed! Break in the door!"

"Oh, yes, sir!" stuttered Wingate. "Come on you men."

"Look here—!" spluttered Loder.

"Get on with it, I tell you."

The Sixth Form men grasped the oaken form again and charged at the door of the Rag. But the rebels were in action now, and the great gap in the door gave them plenty of chance at the enemy. An inkpot caught Wingate on the chin: a hassock flattened on Gwynne's features: a chunk of coal crashed into Sykes' ear, and Loder gave a yell, and let go the form, as a potato, from the Bounder's accurate hand, landed in his eye.

There was a crash—but this time it was made by the oaken form thudding to the floor, as Wingate and Co., quite dizzied and bewildered by the missiles raining on them, let it drop.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

A whizzing potato narrowly missed Mr. Quelch's own majestic nose, and he involuntarily backed away a pace or two. The four prefects backed across the wide passage, leaving the oaken form where it lay. The fire from the Rag seemed rather too hot for them.

Mr. Quelch's face was a study. Apparently he hadn't expected this. Really, he might have—but he hadn't.

"Wingate! Take up that form! Proceed to break in the door!" gasped the Remove master "You are wasting time. This din can be heard all over Greyfriars. Proceed at once."

"Oh! Yes, sir! Come on, you men."

"It's too jolly thick—!" spluttered Loder.

"Oh, you come! All together."

"Yes, come on!" yelled the Bounder, grinning from the gap in the door. "Back up, you fellows! Let them have it."

Wingate and Co. grasped the oaken form, and rushed it on, reckless of whizzing missiles. It crashed on the door, splintering another panel. The Bounder reached out through the gap with a chair-leg in his hand. There was a loud crack as it landed on Loder's head, and a fearful yell from Gerald Loder.

"Yarooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Loder let go the form again, and bounded away. The other three dragged the oaken form back, ducking and dodging.

"I say, this is getting too jolly thick!" gasped Gwynn. "Oh, crumbs!" he added, as a tomato squashed in his ear. "You young demons—ooch!"

"Oh, get on with it," exclaimed Wingate. "We're not going to be beaten off by a mob of fags! We're going to—groooooogh!" A jet of inky water from Peter Todd's squirt filled Wingate's mouth suddenly and he spluttered in quite a frantic manner.

"Upon my word!" breathed Mr. Quelch. "Wingate! Proceed—."

"Come on, Wingate!" yelled Peter. "I've got some more ink."

"Come on, Gwynne!" howled Johnny Bull. "I've got another tomato ready."

"Here's a spud for you, Loder."

"Stop this one, Sykes!"

Whiz! whiz! whiz!

"Get on with it!" roared Wingate, red with wrath.

In quite a desperate frame of mind: the Sixth Form men charged at the door again with the improvised battering-ram. Breathless and panting and crimson, they rushed. But they did not reach the door. From the

gap, a chair-leg whizzed from the Bounder's reckless hand, and crashed on Loder's knee. Loder gave a wild howl and stumbled over, dragging the oaken form down with him.

"Oh!" spluttered Wingate, as he sprawled over it.

"Man down!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Sykes and Gwynne jumped back, followed up by whizzing missiles. Wingate staggered to his feet catching a jet from Peter's squirt in one ear, and a potato from Squiff in the other, as he did so, what time a ripe tomato from Bolsover major spread itself over his features. Loder sprawled, yelling, and clasping an anguished knee.

"Oh! Ow! Oh!" yelled Loder. "My knee! Ow! Oh!" He scrambled up, still hugging that knee.

"Have another, Loder!" shouted the Bounder. "Here it comes!"

Loder did not wait for it. He made a bound along the passage to get out of range. And he did not come back.

"Wingate!" articulated Mr. Quelch. He stared at the shattered door, and at three panting battered prefects.

Mr. Quelch had hesitated before adopting these drastic measures with the rebels: but he had had no doubt that, once adopted, they would be successful. But success did not seem to be smiling on them! Loder was gone, and the remaining three did not seem in a hurry to recommence.

"I say, you fellows," came an excited squeak from the Rag. "I say, give a fellow room! I've got a packet of pepper to chuck at them!"

That did it!

Wingate, Gwynne, and Sykes, as if moved by the same spring, shot away down the passage. They had faced inkpots, squirts, potatoes, tomatoes, chunks of coal—but a packet of pepper seemed more than they wanted.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell from the Rag. "Go it Bunter."

"Go it, you fierce old porpoise!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Hold on—they're gone!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Let Henry have it!" shouted the Bounder.

"Shut up, Smithy!"

"Rot! Hand it to me, Bunter and I'll—."

Mr. Quelch walked away rather hastily.

UP TO COKER!

"THIS is pretty thick!" said Horace Coker.

Coker made that remark to Potter and Greene, in their study in the Fifth. He sat with a frowning brow, rubbing his nose, where twinges lingered. Coker's nose had not quite recovered from the effects of the potato that had landed on it early that morning: it had a lingering pain in it and like Marian's in the ballad it was red and raw.

"Eh?" said Potter, glancing round.

"What?" mumbled Greene, through a mouthful of ripe red apple.

Potter and Greene were Horace Coker's loyal chums: but they did not always seek his society immediately after class. Coker rather prided himself on being one of those strong, silent characters—and his conversation was practically endless. Often—too often—it was instructive. Potter and Greene frequently felt that it was possible to have too much of a good thing.

On the present occasion, however, they had come up to the study with Coker in very friendly and cheerful mood. Coker had had a hamper of apples and pears from his affectionate Aunt Judy. Coker was an open-handed fellow—what he had was always at the disposal of his friends. So there was Potter, eating pears, and Greene, eating apples: while Coker sat and reflected on much more serious things—to wit, the barring-out in the Remove, while he rubbed his twingeing nose.

"I say, it's pretty thick!" snapped Coker.

"Oh!" said Greene. "Well, it does look a bit weird, old man."

Unaware that Coker was thinking about the parlous state of affairs at Greyfriars School, and seeing him rubbing his damaged nose, Greene naturally supposed that Coker's remark referred to the nose.

"A bit thick, perhaps," agreed Potter, falling into the same error as Greene. "But it will get better, you know."

"It doesn't look like getting any better," said Coker, still pursuing his own topic. "Looks to me like getting worse. It's a disgrace to the school."

"Oh, no! Not so bad as that, old chap," remonstrated Potter. "It looks pretty bad, I know, but—."

"A bit startling, perhaps," said Greene, "but—."

"I say it's a disgrace to Greyfriars," said Coker, in his most dictatorial manner. "If you fellows can't see it—."

"Oh, we can see it all right!" said Potter, staring.

Really, it was impossible not to see Coker's nose. It leaped to the eye.

"You fellows don't seem to feel it as I do," grunted Coker.

Potter and Greene made no rejoinder to that. They considered that they could hardly be expected to feel the damage to a nose so much as the owner thereof.

"I feel it a good deal," said Coker.

"I—I suppose you would, old fellow," said Potter. "I suppose it's a bit painful."

"It's more than that," snapped Coker. "You see, I happen to have the good of the school at heart."

Potter and Greene wondered dizzily what the good of the school had to do with Coker's nose.

"And I can tell you," pursued Coker, "that it's too jolly thick, and that it won't do. Quelch can't do anything about it, that's pretty plain."

"Quelch!" stuttered Potter and Greene. They almost forgot the apples and pears in their bewilderment. A form-master at Greyfriars had many duties on his hands, but doctoring a Fifth Form man's damaged nose certainly was not one of them. "Did you say Quelch?"

"It's up to him," yapped Coker, impatiently.

"Is it?" stammered Potter, blankly.

"Of course it is. The prefects can't do anything, either. It looks to me as if nobody can do anything about it—unless I do."

"Well, after all, it's your nose, old chap," pointed out Greene.

"My what?" ejaculated Coker.

"Nose."

"Who's talking about my nose?" roared Coker.

"Eh! Weren't you? "

"You silly, blithering, footling fathead, wharrer you mean? I'm talking about that row that's going on in the Rag!" bawled Coker.

"Oh!" gasped Potter and Greene. It dawned upon them that there was a misunderstanding.

"I'm not talking about my nose, you howling ass. Blow my nose," snorted Coker."

"Dash it all, you can do that for yourself, Coker," said Greene.

"I'll lend you a hanky, If you like," said Potter.

"You—you—you—" Words and breath seemed to fail Horace Coker, and he glared at Potter and Greene as if he could have bitten them.

Potter winked at Greene, with the eye furthest from Coker, and they resumed operations on the apples and pears. How the row in the Rag concerned Coker of the Fifth in any way, was quite a mystery to them. But they were willing to let old Horace run on if he liked. Coker was standing the apples and pears, and they were standing Coker—that was only fair.

"You silly, blithering, footling, fozzling, dithering dunderheads—!" Coker found his voice again. "If you can't talk sense, shut up. I tell you it's too thick, and it's a disgrace to the school: and if you can't see it, take my word for it. Quelch can't do anything, and the prefects can't and I think it's up to me, see?"

"You're not a prefect, old bean," remarked Potter.

"It's not my fault that the Head hasn't sense enough to pick prefects from our form," snapped Coker. "I don't mean that you fellows would be any good, of course. But I should make a rather better pre than Wingate or Gwynne or Sykes, I fancy. "

"What a fertile fancy!" murmured Potter.

"Eh? What did you say, Potter? "

"I said carry on, old chap."

"Well, I've got the good of the school at heart" said Coker. "I'm not letting this go on. We're going to put a stop to it. I will show the Sixth that they're not the big panjandrums they fancy they are, when Fifth Form men do what they jolly well can't do, see? I'm not letting a bunch of fags keep up this kind of cheek. I've got a short way with fags, as they'll find. I'm handling this affair, as nobody else can."

"More Power to your giddy elbow, old man," said Potter, selecting an attractive ripe pear.

"How are you going to do it?"

"By strategy," explained Coker. "You fellows are going to help."

"Oh! Are we?" asked Potter and Greene. They seemed to doubt it.

"Yes. I've got it all cut and dried. I've been thinking it out while you fellows have been scoffing those apples. What this needs is strategy—well, I've got a head for strategy. There's a mob of fags bunged in the Rag, with the windows boarded, and the door wedged. Those Sixth Form duds tried to burst in the door to-day, while we were in class—you heard the row they made. What luck did they have? They smashed a big hole in the door and that let the fags get at them, chucking things—and they were driven off. Pah!" Coker gave a snort of contempt.

"Well, I've had a look at it—there's a huge gap in the door. Big enough for a fellow to push through see?"

"Oh!"

"That's the way in," said Coker.

"Oh!"

Potter and Greene exchanged an expressive look. If Coker of the Fifth had a fancy for putting his head through a gap in a door, into a lion's den, Potter and Greene did not share that fancy in the very least.

"Look here, it ain't our business," said Potter.

"That will do, Potter."

"But look here—!" urged Greene.

"Don't jaw, Greene."

Potter, with a regretful glance at the hamper, turned to the door.

"Come on, Greeney," he said. "We've got to see old Blundell in the games-study, you know."

"Oh! Yes! Quite!" said Greene.

"Don't go!" roared Coker. "If you fellows want me to bang your heads together, you've only got to walk off while I'm talking to you."

"We've got to see Blundell about the football—."

"Shut up and listen to me. You fellows will go round to the window of the Rag, and draw off their attention, said Coker. "I push in through that gap in the door while their backs are turned, see?"

"Oh!" said Potter and Greene.

They realised that Coker did not require them to follow his heroic lead through the gap in the door into the lion's den. Neither Potter nor Greene dared to be a Daniel, to that extent. But if Coker on his own chose to understudy Daniel, they had no particular objection to urge.

"Got it?" asked Coker. "That's strategy—see? You draw them off to the window—I push in through that gap, and once I'm inside, I'll have the door open in a brace of shakes. Quelch will simply have to walk in. And that will be that."

Potter and Greene had strong doubts whether that would be that. But they did not argue with Coker. Argument rolled off Coker like water off a duck. Horace proceeded to expound his masterly strategy further.

"You two go up to the window. You make an attack on that side—not that you'll be able to handle them of course," said Coker, with a disdainful sniff. "I don't expect that! You'll just keep them busy while I do the job. Chuck things at them, see, and they'll chuck things back—I suppose you ain't afraid of being pelted with spuds and inkpots and things."

"Not exactly afraid," said Potter, thoughtfully. "But as a matter of choice, I'd rather not be pelted with spuds, and inkpots and things, if you don't mind,"

"I do mind," said Coker.

"But I say, Loder of the Sixth is still limping from a cosh they gave him on the knee," expostulated Greene.

"I've asked you not to jaw, Greene," said Coker testily. "You fellows are like a sheep's head—all jaw. Shut up a minute. You pelt them, and they pelt you, and that will keep the whole gang busy at the window, giving me a chance to carry out my strategy. If you get a few hard knocks, never mind. Don't make a fuss about trifles."

"Oh!"

Horace Coker gave his nose a final rub and rose from his chair.

"Now you've got it clear, come on!" he said. "I've told you what to do—and all you've got to do is, do it! Come on, and don't jaw."

Coker led the way from the study. Potter and Greene, having exchanged a private wink behind Coker's burly back, followed.

They did not "jaw" as they went. There was really no need, as Coker did enough for three. Coker was still giving them instructions, when they arrived at the door-way of the House.

"Now, cut out," said Coker. "Cut round to the window of the Rag, and begin. And don't be funky of a few spuds and inkpots," added Coker, sarcastically. "You're not made of putty, I suppose? I'll be ready at the door, by the time you get round to the window. Cut on."

Potter and Greene obediently cut on, as directed. But out in the quadrangle, out of Horace Coker's view, they stopped, and looked at one another. Potter smiled. Greene grinned.

"Like a game knee like Loder's, Greeney?" asked Potter.

"Not a whole lot," answered Greene.

"Or a murphy in your eye, or an inkpot in your ear?"

"I don't think!"

"I'm not exactly yearning for anything of that kind, myself," remarked Potter. "Lovely afternoon for a walk! What about it?"

"Let's!" chuckled Greene.

It was a nice autumn afternoon, and Potter and Greene quite enjoyed their walk. And while they strolled by field and meadow, they wondered idly how Horace Coker was getting on with the Remove.

STUCK!

HORACE COKER trod on tiptoe.

He realised that it was necessary to be cautious as he approached the door of the Rag.

It irked Coker, as a senior man, to exercise caution in dealing with a mob of juniors. Coker was a heavy-handed fellow, and he had, as he often said, a short way with fags. Still, it was clear that if a swarm of Removites manned that gap in the door before Coker could push in, it was likely to prove a case of "no admission". Caution was indicated: and Coker was as cautious as it was in his nature to be, which was about as cautious as a rhinoceros. On tiptoe Coker made as much noise as any ordinary fellow tramping on flat feet. But circumstances favoured Coker—for there was a din going on in the Rag, which quite drowned any noise made by Coker's extensive feet.

There was nobody in the passage. Strict orders had been issued that no Greyfriars fellow was to enter that passage, in order to cut off communication between the rebels and the rest of the school. Any intruder therein was liable to be whopped by a prefect if spotted. Coker was aware of the edict, but Coker was going to be the means of bringing a rebellious form back to obedience: which no doubt justified a spot of disobedience on his own account.

On tiptoe, Horace Coker drew near the door, in which the great gap yawned wide. On his rugged face dawned a grin. There was a trampling of feet, and a buzzing of voices, in the Rag. Coker had no doubt that Potter and Greene, at the window, were drawing off the attention of the defenders, in accordance with his deep strategical plan—never dreaming that his loyal pals had gone for a walk out of gates and left him to dare to be a Daniel on his own.

In point of fact, the din in the Rag had quite another cause. Boxing was going on. The Famous Five had the gloves on opposed to Smithy, Squiff, Tom Brown, Robert Donald Ogilvy, and Mark Linley: Other fellows surrounded the doughty champions in a ring, encouraging them with advice, cheers, and yells. Only one fellow in the Rag was in a state of repose. That was a very fat fellow, sprawled in an armchair.

Coker reached the door.

More closely inspected, the gap in the big oak door did not look inviting. It was large—large enough for even a burly fellow like Coker to push through. But its edges were fearfully jagged, likely to be quite unpleasant to a fellow's ribs as he pushed in. Coker did not wholly like the look of it.

But he had not come there to retreat. He did not hesitate. Coker was not the man to hesitate. He drew one deep breath and plunged.

Head and shoulders went Coker through the gap.

His manly chest scraped on jagged splintery edges, painfully. He plunged on heedless of pangs. Almost in the twinkling of an eye, half Coker was through. .

But the other half did not follow so quickly. It did not follow at all. A jagged point of broken wood impaled his waistcoat. It almost impaled Coker. It held him like a hooked fish.

"Ooooh!" gasped Coker, wriggling frantically.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came a sudden roar in the Rag.

"Coker—!" yelled Skinner.

"That Fifth Form fathead—!" roared Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows—."

"Bag him!" yelled the Bounder.

The boxing match stopped on the instant. Only half of Coker—the upper half—was visible inside the Rag. Coker's burly form filled the gap in the door, and his lower half was still outside, invisible. But there was plenty of Coker to be seen, and all eyes in the Rag turned on him.

Boxing-gloves were tossed aside, and the whole crowd of Removites rushed to the door.

Coker made a frantic effort.

There was a tearing, rending sound. But his waistcoat still held. He was hooked, and he stayed hooked.

But for that unforeseen mishap, no doubt Coker would have plunged right into the rebels' stronghold: though what would have happened then would not perhaps have gone according to his strategical plans.

As it was, Coker was held. "Collar him!"

"Punch him!"

"Wallop him!"

"Cheeky ass—give him beans!"

"Oh! Ow! Oooogh!" spluttered Coker. His face was crimson, and he gurgled for breath. "Ow! Hands off, you young scoundrels! Leggo! Leave go my ears, will you? Ow! wow! You're pulling out my hair! Yarooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shove him out!"

"Oh, scissors!" gasped Coker. All round him the Removites swarmed, clutching at him, pulling his ears, smacking his head, grabbing his hair. "Ow! Keep off! I'll spiflicate you—groooh! I'll pulverise you—woooogh! Oh, great pip! Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leggo!" shrieked Coker. "There's a splinter sticking in my tummy—."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, crikey! Ow! Wow!"

Coker struggled and wriggled frantically. Coker was not the man, if he could help it, to retreat. But it dawned on Coker's powerful brain that this was not good enough: and that even if he succeeded in wriggling into the Rag, in the midst of that shouting swarm of juniors his last state was likely to be worse than his first. Matters had not gone according to plan—and retreat was indicated. Coker, in a wildly confused and bewildered state, his collar and tie torn out, his hair a tangled mop, his rugged face like a freshly boiled beetroot, retreated—wriggling back instead of forward.

But it booted not. The sharp point of jagged wood that impaled his waistcoat had prevented advance—and now it prevented retreat. He wriggled and wrenched, and wrenched and wriggled, in vain. He could not get out any more than he could get in. He was a fixture in the gap in the door.

"Oh! Ow!" roared Coker. "Will you leave off smacking my head, you young demons? Yaroooh! Will you leave off pulling my ears. Whooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Haven't you had enough, Coker?" asked Harry Wharton, laughing. "We're keeping this up till you go, you know."

"Get out, you Fifth Form fathead!" said Bob Cherry.

"I'm pulling your ears so long as they're in reach.

"I can't get out!" yelled Coker. "I'm stuck!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of merriment in the Rag. The juniors realised that their latest assailant was trying to retreat, but couldn't. Mercifully, they ceased to smack Coker's head and pull his ears. They crowded round watching Coker's struggles, with yells of laughter.

Coker struggled wildly. Outside the door, his long legs thrashed the air. He strove to jerk himself loose, in vain. And every wriggle and every Jerk scraped him on the jagged edges of the gap in the door, and he began to understand what it must feel like to be skinned.

"Oh! Ow! Oh! Ow!" bellowed Coker.

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

"Oh, crumbs! Oh, scissors! Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker was stuck—and he could not come unstuck. He could not get in, and he could not get out. He had to remain where he was, his burly form plugging the gap in the door, filling it like a picture in a frame. Like the farmer of Hythe who sat down on a scythe, he did nothing but wriggle and writhe. And the crowd in the Rag, greatly entertained by Horace Coker's wild wriggings and writhings, rocked with merriment.



"I CAN'T GET OUT!" YELLED COKER. "I'M STUCK!"

PROUT IS NOT PLEASED!

"SCANDALOUS!" said Mr. Prout.

"Shocking!" agreed Mr. Capper.

"Quelch's boys!" said Mr. Hacker, bitterly.

The three masters were standing near the corner of the passage, from which a terrific uproar echoed. It was heard far and wide, and it had drawn the three beaks from the Common-Room. It had also drawn Mr. Quelch from his study. Perhaps Prout and Capper and Hacker did not see the Remove master approaching, as they made their remarks. Or perhaps they did!

"This din—this uproar—this—this hullabaloo!" continued Prout. "In all my experience as a schoolmaster, I have never—Oh! Is that you, Quelch? I do not desire, Quelch, to add to your difficulties in the present unprecedented state of affairs—a state of affairs which I think may justly be described as unparalleled—but this din—this uproar—"

Mr. Quelch did not speak, but he gave Prout a look. Hacker and Capper, observing that look, tactfully faded away. The state of affairs was most unpleasant for Quelch, and no doubt his colleagues found a little relish in "rubbing it in". But Quelch was looking positively dangerous now.

Prout, however, was made of sterner stuff. He stood his ground. Quelch appeared to be understudying Roderick Dhu, on the occasion when dark lightnings flashed from Roderick's eye. But Prout, like Ajax, defied the lightning.

"I think I may say, unparalleled, Quelch! I think I may say—"

"You may say what you please, Mr. Prout!" snapped the Remove master. "But I have no time or inclination to listen."

"Really, Quelch!—"

"Pah!"

"What? What? Did you say 'pah', Quelch? Upon my word!" boomed Prout, pink with indignation. "Quelch! If your boys refuse to listen to you, as apparently they do, I shall speak to them myself, and try what the authority of a senior master may effect—"

"Pah!" repeated Mr. Quelch, more emphatically than before. And he swept past Mr. Prout, and turned the corner into the passage.

Prout rolled after him. Quelch had brushed him aside, as it were, like an intrusive bluebottle. The master of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars was no bluebottle to be brushed aside.

"I repeat, Quelch—!" trumpeted Prout, as he rolled up the passage after his exasperated colleague. "I repeat—Bless my soul!"

Prout stared. Quelch was staring. What was going on in the Rag to cause that outbreak of uproar, Quelch did not know—he had come to ascertain. Whatever he might have expected, and whatever Prout might have expected, neither of them had had the remotest expectation of seeing two long legs sticking out of the door of the Rag, thrashing the air.

They stopped—and stared. They had a view of an extensive pair of trousers and two large feet. It was unexpected—almost unnerving!

"Goodness gracious!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

"Bless my soul!" repeated Prout, blankly. "Who—what—who is that? What can it mean? What—"

"Oh, crikey!" came a gasping voice from the other end of Coker. "Ooogh! It's sticking in my ribs—wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a roar from the Rag.

"Is that someone trying to get in, or someone trying to get out?" ejaculated Prout, staring.

"One of your boys trying to get out backwards, I think, Quelch. That must be it."

"Nothing of the kind!" snapped Mr. Quelch. Quelch, if not Prout, observed at once that the trousers were too extensive for the Lower Fourth. "It is a boy of another form."

"I hardly think so, Quelch. The head-master has given strict orders that no boy of another form shall enter this passage during the continuance of the present unprecedented state of affairs—"

"Those orders have been disregarded!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "That is certainly not a boy of my form."

"In that case, Quelch, it appears that the example of rebellion in your form is spreading to other forms in the school—"

"To yours, no doubt!" said Mr. Quelch, acidly.

"What?" Prout jumped. "Did you say to my form, Quelch?"

"I did! That is a senior boy—no doubt of the Fifth Form!"

"I repudiate the suggestion." Prout did not merely boom. He thundered, in his indignation. "No boy in my form would join in these disgraceful proceedings. No boy in my form would come here, in defiance of the

Head-master's commands, to communicate with junior boys in a state of insubordination. I am thankful to say, Quelch, that no such disregard of authority, no such dereliction of duty, is possible in my form! I repeat—."

"Oh, gum! Wow! I'm being punctured!" howled the occupant of the gap in the door, wriggling like an eel. "I've got splinters sticking in me. Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Coker!"

"Coker's a sticker, you fellows."

"The stickfulness of the esteemed Coker is terrific."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Prout gasped. Quelch smiled, sourly.

"Coker, I think, is the name of a boy in your form, Mr. Prout," he said, in his most acid tone. "Obviously that is a senior boy. It appears that it is Coker, of your form, Mr. Prout."

Mr. Prout's portly face was a picture.

"As it is a boy of your form, Prout, who is the cause of this uproar, I will leave you to deal with the matter," added Mr. Quelch, grimly.

"Oh! Ah! I—I—I—" stammered Mr. Prout.

Mr. Quelch walked away. For the first time since the Remove rebellion had started, Quelch looked almost pleased, considerably comforted by the expression on Prout's speaking countenance. He went back to his study, leaving Prout to deal with that boy of his form who was the cause of the uproar!

Prout stared after him, and then stared at the trousers that plugged the gap in the old oak door of the Rag. His plump face, from red, grew purple. Obviously now, the hapless youth crammed in that gap was a Fifth Form boy—a boy of Prout's form. He could not be recognised from Prout's side of the door, but it was Coker—Coker of Prout's form—Coker of the Fifth!

In towering wrath, Prout rolled nearer. He roared: "Coker! Is that you, Coker?"

"Oh, crumbs!" spluttered Coker. He could not look round: his manly form filled the gap. But he knew the voice that thundered behind him. "Oh! Yes, sir! Oh, scissors!"

"What are you doing here, Coker?"

"I—I—I'm stuck in the door, sir!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came another roar.

"Coker! Come with me! Come away at once! I shall punish you severely, Coker, for coming here in defiance of your head-master's orders. Come!" boomed Prout.

"I—I—I can't!" gasped the unhappy Coker. "I'm stuck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I order you, Coker, to withdraw immediately from that orifice, and follow me to my study! Immediately!" thundered Prout.

Coker made a desperate effort. He wrenched, he wriggled, and his long legs flailed the air. There was a sudden spluttering gasp from Mr. Prout, as one of Coker's whirling feet came into contact with the widest section of his form-master's circumference. Prout was standing a little too near for safety, with Coker's long legs in such a state of commotion.

Thud!

"Ooooooooooh!" spluttered Mr. Prout. He staggered back, gurgling.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Coker. He had felt the contact though not so painfully as Mr. Prout. "Did—did I kick something? Was—was it you, sir?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Removites in the Rag.

"Ooooooooooh!" Mr. Prout was almost winded "Woooooh! Coker, you—oooogh!—Coker, I shall—urrrrrggh! I shall certainly—wurrnggh! I shall cane you for this, Coker! I shall take you to my study and—gurrnggh!"

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Coker.

"Poor old Coker!" said Bob Cherry, almost weeping.

"Sorry you butted in, old bean?"

"Prout sounds waxy!" chuckled the Bounder.

"The waxfulness is terrific."

"Coker!" Mr. Prout's gasping boom came from the passage. "If you do not immediately emerge from that orifice, Coker—,"

"I can't get out!" howled Coker.

"Like me to get a hammer, and knock you out like a nail, Coker?" asked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Unless you immediately emerge, Coker, I shall fetch my cane—" boomed Prout.

Coker made another tremendous effort. This time, the hooked waistcoat parted, with a rending sound, and Coker slid out backwards, through the gap in the door.

Mr. Prout gazed at him, as he stood crimson, panting, dishevelled, torn, rumped and crumpled. Never had Prout's majestic eyes beheld a member of his form in such a state before. He gazed—and he glared.

"Coker! Follow me to my study! Much as I regret to cane a boy in my form—a senior boy—you have left me no alternative. Follow me!"

"But sir—!" spluttered Coker.

"That will do!"

"I—I came here to get that door open, sir!" gasped Coker. "I should have done it if—if—if I hadn't got stuck—."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Try again, Coker!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Follow me!" boomed Prout.

He stalked away and Coker, breathless, tottered after him. A yell of laughter from the Rag followed them as they went.

Coker of the Fifth had had a painful experience. Another awaited him in his form-master's study.

Mr. Prout, as he said, regretted the necessity of caning a boy in his form—a senior boy. But he did not regret it so much as Coker did. Coker was still regretting it long after Prout had dismissed the matter from his mind.

QUELCH'S TRUMP CARD!

"OH!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"What—?"

"The pater!"

"Phew!"

It was Saturday afternoon. Matters were still unchanged at Greyfriars. The Remove rebellion showed no sign of coming to an end. The rest of Greyfriars pursued the even tenor of its way—but the Lower Fourth were still "barring-out the beaks", and seemed more determined than ever to carry on. Billy Bunter, in fact, was not the only member of the form who found it more agreeable to loaf about the Rag than to construe Latin with Mr. Quelch, wrestle with mathematics with Mr. Lascelles, or chase irregular verbs with Monsieur Charpentier.

On this particular afternoon, Harry Wharton and Co., and other fellows keen on games, would have been glad to get out. They were booked to play soccer with the Shell that afternoon.

But football matches, like lessons, had to go. There was no soccer for the Remove so long as the barring—out lasted. "Rag" football was rather a poor substitute: but they made the best of it. Anyhow, they were not going to give in—not till Bob Cherry's sentence of expulsion was washed out. That seemed as far off as ever.

Even Billy Bunter had given up the hope that Quelch might "get over his temper". Whenever the juniors had a glimpse of their form-master, his expressive countenance indicated that he was very, very far from that. Harry Wharton and Co. had not given up the hope that the real culprit might be found out. But there had been no such revelation. And irksome as the state of affairs must have been to Mr. Quelch, he seemed to have found no means of dealing with it. The rebels were still holding the fort.

But they were very wary. Quelch, as they knew only too well, was a "downy" bird. Sooner or later, as the Bounder remarked, he would produce some card from up his sleeve.

And now, as Bob stared from the window of the Rag, he guessed what that card was. And Bob's ruddy face grew serious.

At a distance, dozens of fellows, in the quad, were staring towards the Rag window. And they were staring, too, at two figures that were approaching that window. Bob's eyes fixed on those two figures in dismay.

One of them was his form-master. The other was a stocky gentleman with ruddy cheeks, grizzled hair, and a military stride. It was, in fact, Major Cherry. Bob was a dutiful son, always pleased to see his father: but just then, he could have wished that the old military gentleman had stayed at home in Dorsetshire.

A crowd of fellows joined Bob at the window. The Co. looked as serious as Bob. They realised at once that this was Quelch's trump card. Bob had not gone home, as scheduled. So his father had called for him. Quelch had summoned him from Dorset to Kent to take his son away. Quelch, like Alexander of old, failing to unravel the Gordian knot, had cut it.

"Oh, scissors!" groaned Bob. "That does it! I—I say, the pater looks pretty shirty, doesn't he?"

"The shirtfulness looks terrific," agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, sadly. "The esteemed major is infuriated."

"Rotten!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"I—I suppose you can't stick out against your pater, Bob?" said Frank Nugent.

Bob shook his head.

"Rot!" said the Bounder. "Quelch thinks this is a trump card—you can see that in his eye. Tell your pater you won't go, Bob, and trump Quelch's trump, see?"

"Bob can't do that," said Harry Wharton, quietly. "Don't be an ass, Smithy."

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"It's rotten," muttered Bob. "If the pater's come for me, I've got to go. A fellow can't cheek his pater. Quelch has done us."

Major Cherry arrived at the window. Harry Wharton quietly opened the casement. The old major glared in at a crowd of serious faces. There was no doubt that he was "shirty". His brows were knitted, and his eyes glinted. Never before had Bob seen his honoured parent looking so stern and grim. The major's eyes fixed on his flushed face.

The Remove master stood looking on, without speaking. He had done his part in bringing Major Cherry on the scene. The rest was up to the major.

"So, you're here!" rapped the major.

"Yes, dad," answered Bob meekly.

"I've seen your head-master. He confirms his letter to me. You've been expelled for a disrespectful trick on your form-master. What?"

"Bob never did it, sir," said Harry.

"My son can speak for himself!" grunted Major Cherry. "Dr. Locke tells me that you do not admit your action, Bob, but that the evidence is conclusive."

"I don't admit what I never did," answered Bob "I'm sticking here because I've done nothing to be sacked for, and my friends are standing by me because they take my word about that."

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"There is no doubt on the subject—!" he began. Major Cherry transferred his glare to Quelch.

"You have already told me so, sir," he barked. "I am now here to listen to what my son has to say."

"You are here to take the boy away from this school, sir."

"That depends!" said Major Cherry, grimly.

"What?"

"I have said that that depends. Do I not speak plainly, Mr. Quelch? Or do you, a schoolmaster, fail to understand the English language?"

"Really, Major Cherry—."

"Kindly allow me to speak. You deny the action that has been attributed to you, Bob?"

"Yes, father."

"And your friends take your word on the subject?" asked the major, with a glance round at the faces of the Co.

"Of course we do, sir," said Harry Wharton.

"Yes, rather."

"The ratherfulness is terrific, esteemed sahib," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, earnestly. "Our respectable chum is incapable of departing from the strait and narrow path of ridiculous veracity."

The Bounder did not speak. But a dozen other voices chimed in. Billy Bunter's squeak was heard with the rest.

"All this is beside the point, Major Cherry," said Mr. Quelch, icily. "Cherry of my form has been expelled, and you are here to take him away. Will you kindly direct him to leave that apartment immediately?"

The major did not heed. His brow, as grim as ever, was very thoughtful, as he gazed at the crowd of faces at the window.

"You believe me, father?" asked Bob, hopefully.

"Certainly I do."

"You are welcome to your opinion, sir," said Mr. Quelch, tartly, "but the decision that Cherry shall leave the school rests with his head-master—who has decided the matter. Will you kindly remove him without further waste of time?"

"No, sir," barked Major Cherry. "I will not remove him without further waste of time. I will not remove him at all."

"Sir! I insist—."

"You may insist, Mr. Quelch, as much as you please. I came here to ascertain the facts. I have now ascertained them. I recommend you, sir, to do the same."

"You will take Cherry away with you—."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. Bob!"

"Yes, father!" gasped Bob.

"Remain where you are!" barked the major.

"Oh! Yes! Rather."

"I applaud your friends for standing by you. I advise them to continue to do so."

"Major Cherry!" almost shrieked Mr. Quelch.

"That is all I have to say! Carry on, Bob!"

"What-ho!" chuckled Bob, his eyes dancing.

"Hear, hear!"

Major Cherry shook hands with his son through the window, turned, and strode away to his waiting taxi. Mr. Quelch stared blankly after him!

"Major Cherry!" he almost roared.

The major did not even turn his head. He stepped into his taxi, and it buzzed away to the gates. Mr. Quelch stared after it like a man in a dream. He had played his trump card—and this was the result!

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a roar from the Rag. The varying expressions on Quelch's expressive face seemed to entertain the rebels.

Mr. Quelch stared after the taxi till it disappeared.

Then he stared at the crowd of laughing faces in the Rag.

"Nothing doing, Henry!" chortled the Bounder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go home, Henry!"

Mr. Quelch said no word. His feelings, as he departed, could have been expressed in no known language. His trump card had failed him, and the rebels, encouraged—if they needed encouragement—by the major's visit, were carrying on. And how it was going to end, now, Henry Samuel Quelch had to acknowledge that he had not the remotest idea.

WET!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Enjoying life, Bunter?"

"Yes, rather! " chuckled Bunter.

The bell was ringing for third school on Monday morning. Greyfriars fellows, of all forms but the Lower Fourth, were going to the form-rooms. Many of them, as they went, cast glances towards the big bay window of the Rag—and envy could be read in many of the glances. To a good many of the fellows it seemed that the rebellious Remove were having a high old time, much to be preferred to swotting in form. True, they were risking dire penalties: but no penalties seemed to have accrued so far.

Billy Bunter blinked from the window through his big spectacles, and grinned almost from one fat ear to the other. To be able to laze about while other fellows were at work seemed, to Bunter, a consummation devoutly to be wished. School life had its drawbacks, in the shape of lessons, and beaks and prefects, and prep, and rising-bell. In a barring-out, all these spots of bother were eliminated. Life was worth living at Greyfriars, at last. With great satisfaction, the fat Owl watched fellows going in, happily glad that he was not one of them.

"I say, you fellows, this is all right!" said Bunter. "Look at Quelch over there, talking to Gosling. Looks shirty, doesn't he? He, he, he! He can't do a thing." Bunter chuckled. "Who cares for Quelch? What?"

The Famous Five chuckled. Bunter, evidently, was full of beans: a happy state likely to last so long as the "grub" lasted.

"Quelch is looking this way," said the Bounder.

"What is he confabbing with Gosling about, I wonder. Are they up to something?"

"Who cares?" said Bunter, valiantly. "I'd tell Quelch where he gets off, as soon as look at him. Chuck a spud at him, Bob."

"Fathead!" said Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry! I say, you fellows, we're keeping this up," said Bunter. "No surrender, you know! Latin prose and maths, if we were in class this morning. Who wants Latin prose and maths?"

"You fat slacker," said Harry Wharton. "We're keeping it up—but not to get out of Latin prose and maths. We've got to keep it up till they find out who sooted Quelch."

"Oh!" Billy Bunter's expansive grin diminished perceptibly. "I—wouldn't bother about that, old chap. They—they'll never find that out."

"We've got to carry on till they do, ass." The captain of the Remove knitted his brows. "Who the dickens could it have been? There was nobody in the studies that afternoon, and any fellow might have sneaked up and fixed up the booby-trap for Quelch—"

"Any fellow who had a down on him, and jolly well knew that he would be coming up to the study after an impot!" grinned the Bounder.

Bob Cherry gave him a glare.

"Oh, chuck it, Smithy," said Tom Redwing. "We all know that it wasn't Bob. Every man here takes his word about that."

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. It was like Smithy to be heart and soul in the rebellion, while he still believed that Bob had done the act for which he had been expelled.

But Smithy was absolutely alone in that belief. Many fellows had doubted at first—but all had been convinced. Even Skinner and Co. no longer doubted that a mistake had been made. Even Fisher T. Fish, who was almost too cute to believe in anything at all, believed in Bob. The Bounder kept to his own opinion—all the more, perhaps, because it had an irritating effect on the other fellows.

"Must have been a smaller chap than Bob, to squeeze out of the study after fixing a booby-trap over the door," said Peter Todd. "Well, what are you grinning at, Bunter? Anything funny in that?"

"Oh! No! Of course, the chap wouldn't stick in the study all the time, would he?" said Bunter, hastily.

"Not with Quelch coming up," said Nugent. "But he might have fixed it up from outside, standing on a chair."

"Or he might have been the tallest chap in the Remove, able to reach up without standin' on anythin'," suggested the Bounder, blandly.

"Look here, Smithy," bawled Bob. "If you want your silly face pushed through the back of your silly head—"

There was a shout from Squiff, at the window. "Here comes Quelch!"

All eyes turned on the quad again. Mr. Quelch had left Gosling, and was coming towards the window. The look on his face was the grimmest ever. All the juniors could read, in that look, that Quelch was about to make a new move—though what, they could not guess.

"I say, you fellows, don't let Quelch scare you," squeaked Billy Bunter. "He can't scare me, I can jolly well tell you. Who's old Quelch?"

"Shut up, you fat ass!"

Harry Wharton opened the casement, as his form-master tapped. Form-master and form looked at one another. Billy Bunter, wont to quail under the gimlet-eye, stared at Quelch through his big spectacles without turning a hair. Quelch, so far as the fat Owl could see, couldn't do a thing. So long as the enemy couldn't do a thing, Billy Bunter feared no foe.

"Good morning, sir!" ventured Bob Cherry.

"Top of the delightful morning, esteemed sahib!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Mr. Quelch did not deign to acknowledge those polite greetings. His voice was as grim as his countenance as he spoke.

"I am here to give you a last warning," he rapped. "If you do not all leave the day-room within ten minutes, I shall give Gosling instructions to proceed. I have hesitated to use such measures: but there is no alternative, unless you submit to authority. Gosling is now preparing the fire-hose for use—."

"Oh!"

"It will be turned upon you, if you persist in this mutiny," said Mr. Quelch, coldly. "Cherry! Go to Dr. Locke's study—the rest to the form-room, where I shall deal with you. You have ten minutes."

Without waiting for a reply, the Remove master turned and walked away. He left a startled crowd behind him. The Bounder whistled.

"Oh, crikey!" breathed Billy Bunter.

"So that's what the old bean had up his sleeve," said Vernon-Smith. "He's thought that one out over the week-end. We're goin' to get wet, my beloved 'earers."

"I—I say, you fellows—."

"Bunter's going to get a wash," remarked Johnny Bull. "It will do you good, old fat man—the first you've had since this show started."

Skinner and Snoop exchanged a glance and strolled away towards the lobby at the other end of the Rag.

"Say, big boys, I guess this is where we come out at the little end of the horn," remarked Fisher T. Fish.

"Guess again!" suggested Squiff.

"There's Gosling with the hose!" said Nugent. Gosling, at a distance, could be seen with the fire-hose, uncoiling it as he approached. The juniors knew that hose, and the powerful jet of water that would shoot therefrom. They had seen it used a good many times in fire-drill, and did not need telling what it was like. Gosling could sweep the Rag from end to end with a whizzing stream of water. "Wet outlook!" said Bob Cherry, with a grin. Harry Wharton shut the casement.

"We're standing up to it," he said, quietly. "We are—we is!" said Tom Brown.

"What-ho!" said the Bounder, emphatically. "Quelch won't knock us out with a spot of H-two-O."

"No fear!"

"I—I—I say, you fellows." Billy Bunter did not seem so full of beans. "I—I say, we—we shall get awfully wet. Suppose-suppose we c-c-c-catch kik-kik-cold? "

"If we kik-kik-catch kik-kik-cold, we shall probably snis-snis-sneeze, and bib-bib-blow our n-n-n-noses!" said Peter Todd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at," hooted Bunter.

"Look here, I don't jolly well want to get soaked."

"Nobody wants it, I imagine," said Harry. "But that's what we're going to get. We've got no cover against that. "

"Suppose we all stand behind Bunter," suggested Tom Brown. "Bunter will keep it off the lot of us. He's wide enough."

Billy Bunter gave the New Zealand junior a glare that almost cracked his spectacles.

"You silly ass!" he bawled.

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

"Jolly good idea," exclaimed Bob Cherry, heartily. "You were bursting with pluck a minute ago, Bunter. Now's your chance. Stand up to it, and we'll all stand behind you—."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!" snorted Bunter.

"Roll off into the lobby, old fat man," said Bob, laughing. "You can get round a corner there. But we've got to stand up to it, you fellows. If we don't guard the window, we're done. Look there."

He pointed to the quad. From the House, half-a-dozen Sixth Form prefects issued, with their ashplants under their arms. They joined Mr. Quelch in the quad.

"Quelch is downy, and no mistake," grinned the Bounder. "Gosling's got to wash us away from the window, and then Wingate and Co. clamber in—and the game's up. Quelch isn't thinking just of giving us a wash."

It was all clear to the rebels now. But the Famous Five did not falter, and most of the other fellows stood with them. Billy Bunter, whose valour seemed to have completely evaporated, rolled away to the lobby at the other end of the Rag. The communicating doorway was wide open, the door having been used in fortification: but it was possible to get out of range of the hose there, and the fat Owl promptly got out of range. Fisher T. Fish followed him, and then two or three other fellows. But almost all the Remove remained with their leaders. It was clear to all that if the window were left undefended, the game was up. Somehow they had to stand up to this new and unexpected form of assault.

Mr. Quelch was looking up at the clock-tower. He had given the rebels ten minutes to evacuate their quarters. Gosling, with a crusty grin on his crusty face, trundled the hose nearer and nearer. The Bounder selected a large potato, and watched, waiting for the ancient porter of Greyfriars to come within range.

The Remove master looked round towards the Rag.

Time was up! Perhaps he hoped to see an empty window. If so, he was disappointed. The window was crammed with faces looking out. His brows knitted.

He made a sign to Gosling. "Proceed!" he rapped.

"Yessir."

Whiz!

Gosling was within range now, and the Bounder's aim was accurate. There was a sudden fiendish yell from William Gosling, as a whizzing potato crashed on his ancient nose.

"Yooo-hooooop!"

Gosling staggered, letting go the hose, and sat down suddenly. He sat clasping his nose with both horny hands, roaring.

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

"Good shot!"

"Man down!"

"Oh, lor'!" roared Gosling. "Oh! My nose! Oh! Ooogh!"

Mr. Quelch uttered an exclamation of angry impatience.

"Get up, Gosling! Get up at once."

"Wow! My nose! I believe it's drove through the back of my 'ead! Wow!"

"Proceed! " almost roared Mr. Quelch.

Gosling staggered up, and grasped the hose again.

Another potato caught him under the chin, and another in an ancient ear. But he turned on the water, and a powerful stream shot from the nozzle, directed at the window of the Rag.

Crash! It came.

"Look out!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

The juniors jumped back from the window, as panes of glass cracked and smashed right and left under the torrent. Water came whizzing into the Rag, splashing and dashing, streaming and pouring, drenching the juniors, and sending them staggering under its force. The hose was in full play and there was no doubt, as the Bounder had remarked, the rebels of Greyfriars were going to get wet!

TURNING THE TABLES!

MR. QUELCH looked on, grimly.

There were no faces at the window now. The most determined fellows in the Rag had been driven back by the torrent of water.

Gosling, realising that no more whizzing missiles were to be feared, plodded onward with the hose, playing it on the gaping window. Behind him the prefects marched—the infantry following up the artillery, as it were. They were grinning—but Mr. Quelch's face was very serious. The measures he had adopted were drastic—very drastic. But it was clear that only very drastic measures could end the rebellion, which had already lasted almost a week, and looked like lasting indefinitely, unless very drastic measures were taken. Still, Quelch could not feel very happy about it. His consolation was that success was certain.

He had no doubt on that point.

Nearer and nearer plodded Gosling, with the full force of the hose, dashing and splashing in at the window. Nearer and nearer marched the Sixth Form prefects, behind him, ready to clamber in at the window when it was left undefended. Mr. Quelch followed them, nothing doubting that it would be all over in a few minutes now.

From the Rag, gasps and howls and yells could be heard.

Except for the few fellows who had dodged into the lobby, every man in the garrison was drenched from head to foot. The stream of water was incessant, shooting in at one casement after another, Gosling playing it like a fireman, to search out every corner. Water crashed on the ceiling, and fell like rain—it dashed on the walls—it flooded the floor, and every now and then the force of the jet caught some fellow and sent him spinning.

But the rebels were not giving in.

Neither was the window so undefended as it looked from outside. Bob Cherry had dropped to the floor, under the middle casement. He was splashed and soaked from top to toe, but the jet passed over him there, and could not reach him till Gosling reached the window and played it at close quarters. And the Co. were quick to follow Bob's example. The Bounder, and Squiff, and six or seven other fellows, joined them, crouching just below the level of the window. Other fellows were dodging wildly about, or retreating into the lobby at the far end of the room. But Harry Wharton and Co. were ready for the enemy when they started clambering in. There was a tussle to come.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Anybody feel damp?"

"The dampfulness is terrific!" gurgled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "but the surrenderfulness is a boot on the other leg."

"No surrender!" growled Johnny Bull. Johnny had an expression on his face reminiscent of the "tyke" of his native county, warranted to bite alive or dead. "We're not going to be beaten."

"Quelch is coming out!" grinned the Bounder.

"What a jolly old strategist! But I've got a chair leg ready for the first head that pokes in—even if it's Quelch's."

"By gum, the place is swimming!" said Nugent. "Hallo! Listen to Quelch! They're getting close."

Quelch's voice was heard from the quad, near at hand; "See that no one remains near the window, Gosling. You will turn the water upon any boy remaining near the window."

"Yessir!"

"You are ready, Wingate, as soon as the way is clear?"

"Quite ready, sir."

The voices were close. Gosling, with the hose, was just outside the window. Gosling's nose was red, and a little raw: but the crusty grin had returned to his crusty countenance.

Peering in, he could see a dozen fellows at the further end of the long room, in a drenched and wildly spluttering state. Grinning, Gosling played the hose full on them, and drove them, spluttering still more wildly, into the lobby.

Then he leaned in to see whether any were nearer at hand. The grin widened on his face as he saw Bob Cherry crouching just below, and the other juniors with heads ducked under the window level.

"Ho!" ejaculated Gosling. "Outer that, you young rips! Wot I says is this 'ere, you 'ook it!"

He swung the nozzle of the hose in at the window, leaned over, and turned it downwards on Bob.

"Ooooooch!" spluttered Bob, as the full force of the torrent dashed down on him. "Oh, crumbs! Woooch!"

Gosling gave a crusty chuckle, and swept the nozzle to and fro within, along the row of ducking heads under the window, raking them fore and aft, as it were. There was a chorus of wild splutters, and Gosling chuckled again.

But he chuckled too soon.

Bob, streaming with water, made a sudden swift spring, and snatched at the nozzle of the hose. He grasped it and wrenched.

He got the full force of the jet again, as he did so: but he held on, wrenching with all the strength of his arm.

"Good man!" yelled the Bounder. He leaped up, and his cudgel came with a loud crack across Gosling's horny hand.

"Oh!" roared Gosling.

He let go the hose under that swipe. Bob dragged the nozzle free, and turned it, to bear on Gosling. The next second, a torrent of water in the crusty visage hurled the Greyfriars porter backward.

"Gosling!" rapped Mr. Quelch, angrily.

For a moment, the Remove master did not realise what had happened. But the next moment he knew, as the torrent came bursting from the window.

Gosling sat down, spluttering and sputtering. Over him swept the torrent from the nozzle in Bob Cherry's hand, aimed at the prefects behind him. Bob, standing at the window with a grinning wet face, played the full force of the hose on Wingate and Co.

"Oh!" gasped the captain of Greyfriars, as the stream caught him in the face, and he tottered.

"Go it," yelled the Bounder.

"Oh, good man," gasped Harry Wharton. "Go it, Bob."

Bob Cherry was going it—hot and strong. For the moment, the enemy's artillery was captured, and it was turned on the enemy with dire effect. Bob swayed the nozzle to and fro, sending the splashing torrent into face after face, the Sixth Form men staggering right and left under it. In a moment they were scattering, jumping away in any direction to escape the whizzing flood.

Wingate made a spring to grasp at the hose to drag it away. But Bob was prompt; and the torrent, crashing in Wingate's ear, bowled him over sideways, and he sprawled headlong in flooding water.

On him, as he sprawled, played the stream. It was too much for any fellow to stand, and Wingate scrambled, spluttering, away. The other prefects were already scattering out of reach.

Mr. Quelch stood as if petrified. He stared at Bob, nozzle in hand, grinning at the window. He stared after the scattering prefects.

"Give Quelch a wash!" yelled the Bounder.

"Shut up, Smithy!"

"Give him some, I tell you! Get cracking, you dummy! "

Bob chuckled, but shook his head. He played the hose on the retreating Sixth Form men, drenching them from top to toe as they went.

"Wingate!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "Gwynne! Sykes! Seize the hose, and drag it away. Upon my word! Come back! Where are you going? Come back, I say!"

The drenched and dizzy Sixth Form men did not heed.

Like the guests in *Macbeth*, they stood not upon the order of their going, but went at once: and did not stop till they were out of range of the whizzing water. Gosling, crawling dizzily after them, was helped on from behind by a torrent that caught him in the rear. Mr. Quelch, pale with wrath, grasped at the hose with his own majestic hand, to drag it from Bob's hold. At the same moment the Bounder, giving Bob a push that sent him staggering, tore the nozzle from his grasp. The next instant he had turned it on the Remove master.

"Ooooooooooogh!" gurgled Mr. Quelch, as the flood caught him.

"Smithy, you ass—!"

"Chuck it!"

"Collar him!"

Harry Wharton caught at the Bounder. Smithy fended him off with his left, while with his right, he kept the nozzle on its target. The torrent fairly bowled over the Remove master, and he sat squelching in a flood.

There was a sputter from the nozzle, and the water suddenly ceased to stream. Wingate, with more presence of mind than the others, had dashed away to turn off the water at the other end. The water-supply suddenly failed, and the Bounder was left with a dripping nozzle in his hand.

But he had done enough—perhaps a little too much! Mr. Quelch tottered to his feet. He did not even look at the rebels. Gasping for breath, he tottered away, and disappeared into the House. Quelch was in want of a towelling and a change, more than anything else: and, heedless of anything else, he went in search of them. Wingate and Co. evidently felt the same need, and considered Quelch's example a good one to follow: they disappeared into the House after the Remove master.

"We win!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"The winfulness is terrific! The wetfulness is also considerable" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Who cares?" chuckled the Bounder. "We've put paid to them! Did you fellows think Quelch looked a trifle damp?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The rebels had won. As they stood, drenched and dripping, and looked round the Rag, swimming in water, they could not help feeling that it was rather in the nature of a Pyrrhic victory. Still, Pyrrhic or not, it was victory: and that was that!

UNEXPECTED!

"OH, crikey! " said Billy Bunter.

He blinked dolorously round the Rag through his big spectacles.

Seldom had the fat Owl looked so lugubrious.

Only that morning, Billy Bunter had been full of beans.

He had rejoiced in exemption from lessons, and beaks, and pre's, and prep, and rising-bell. He had been prepared to snort with scorn at the word "surrender". But in the afternoon a change, as the poet puts it, had come o'er the spirit of his dream! It was now a dolorous and dismal fat Owl.

Other fellows were looking rather grim. They were still determined: but they were not exactly enjoying life. Quelch's latest move had failed, it was true—the rebels, by luck and pluck, had defeated the enemy. But the blow had told, all the same—and told severely.

Almost every fellow had been drenched to the skin.

Even those who had dodged into the lobby to escape, had been splashed. They had had the satisfaction of drenching the enemy also. But the "enemy" only had to go into the House, towel themselves down, and change their clothes. There was no change of clothes for the rebels. They banked up a fire in the big fireplace in the Rag to dry out their clothes: they rubbed themselves dry. But a general dampness lingered. And their stronghold fairly swam with water.

There was nothing "soft" about the Remove. They could rough it. Night after night they had camped out cheerfully enough on the floor of the Rag, in the blankets annexed from the dormitory. But now every blanket, every pillow, and everything else, was wringing wet. After the clothes were dried, a vast array of blankets surrounded the fire, steaming. But it was obvious that they were not going to dry out in a hurry. And the floor reeked with wet. The ceiling and the walls dripped. Every article of furniture was in a soaking state. Even Lord Mauleverer was disinclined to stretch his lazy limbs in any of the armchairs. Even Billy Bunter preferred to stand, and lean on the table. And Bunter was not the only fellow who doubted whether the barring-out could carry on, in these damp and dire circumstances.

"I say, you fellows, this is awful, you know!" groaned Bunter. "I say, I shall be catching a cold."

"Awful!" agreed Bob Cherry, solemnly. "What's to be done, you fellows, if Bunter catches a cold? Never mind if any other fellow catches a cold—that won't matter at all. Will it, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—."

"Shut up, you fat frump!" growled the Bounder.

Smithy was not in the best of tempers, in the general state of discomfort.

"Beast!" moaned Bunter.

"I'm feeling pretty rotten, I know that!" grunted Skinner.

"Well, you're a bit of a rotter, old scout!" remarked Squiff, "so why not?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No good grousing," said Harry Wharton. "We've got to stand it. We've beaten them this time, anyhow."

"What about next time?" mumbled Snoop.

"Sure!" said Fisher T. Fish. "I'm telling you guys they'll be popping up again, surest thing you know. What's to stop them from washing us out again, as soon as they want?"

No one replied to that question. All the juniors knew that the "enemy" could not be prevented from administering the "mixture as before", if the spirit moved them so to do.

"They've got that doggoned fire-hose," argued Fishy. "They've cut it because you guys held on to the nozzle. I guess they don't need a nozzle on the pesky thing to give us another big wash."

"We all know that, fathead," growled Johnny Bull. "We're standing up to it, all the same."

"I say, you fellows, this is worse than Latin con with Quelch!" groaned Billy Bunter. "It's worse than French with Froggy. Why, it's worse than maths with Lascelles."

"Hadn't one of you fellows better kick Bunter?" inquired Lord Mauleverer.

"Oh, really, Mauly—."

"Good egg!" said Tom Brown. "Turn round, Bunter."

"Beast!"

"I jolly well wish we could spot that blighter who sooted Quelch," sighed Peter Todd. "That would let us all out."

Bob Cherry rubbed his nose, thoughtfully.

"It's pretty plain that the fellow, whoever it was, won't own up of his own accord," he said, slowly. "And I don't see how the beaks are to spot him, when they're not even looking for him."

"They sort of fancy they've got the right man!" grinned the Bounder.

"Oh, shut up, Smithy!" roared Bob. "If you weren't such a fibber yourself, you'd know how to take a fellow's word. That's your trouble."

"One for your nob, Smithy," said Frank Nugent, laughing.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"But look here, you men," went on Bob. "This is getting pretty thick. We've got ourselves dry, more or less, but they can wash us out again, as Fishy said, as soon as they jolly well choose. If you fellows would rather chuck it up, I can take what's coming to me."

"Punch his head, somebody!" said Lord Mauleverer. "You're talkin' rot, Bob."

"The rotfulness of your idiotic remarks is terrific, my absurd Bob," remarked the nabob of Bhanipur. "A still tongue is a cracked pitcher that goes longest to a bird in the bush."

"Don't be an ass, Bob."

It was a general chorus. The Removites were damp, and they were feeling neither merry nor bright. But they were nowhere near surrender.

Bob Cherry laughed.

"O.K.," he said. "I thought I'd mention it—."

"Well, don't mention it again, ass," said the captain of the Remove. "We're in this to the finish. It's up to the beaks to find out who sooted Quelch—and unless and until they do, we keep on—wet or dry."

"Hear, hear!"

"I say, you fellows—."

"Shut up, Bunter. Time for you to get on with the cooking."

"Blow the cooking!" yapped Bunter.

Cooking was the one form of exertion to which Billy Bunter had no objection. A cook was able to help himself to a series of substantial snacks while the cooking was going on. Bunter, so far, had found it quite attractive.

But he seemed to have lost his interest even in cooking now. There was still plenty of food in the Rag; but food for once, was not filling Billy Bunter's thoughts, or the whole extent of his horizon.

Camping on a wet floor, in a damp blanket, with the autumn wind blowing in at broken windows, was a horrid prospect. It worried Bunter.

Really, and truly, the fat Owl did not want Bob Cherry to be sacked for what he, William George Bunter, had done. He was quite earnest about that. On the other hand, it was obvious—to Bunter—that his own comfort was the chief consideration.

"I say, my feet are wet!" said the fat Owl, pathetically.

"And nobody else's?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, really, Smithy." Bunter was not thinking of anybody else's feet! "I say, I—I can feel pneumonia coming on in my legs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cackle!" howled Bunter. "You'd like to see a fellow laid up with pneumonia in both legs, I daresay."

"Well, it's not the sort of thing you see every day!" chuckled Bob.

"We've got to stand it, old fat man," said Peter Todd.

"Even if you get pneumonia in your legs, and housemaid's knee in the back of your neck."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, suppose they turn the water on us again?" yelled Bunter.

"No supposing about it," said Vernon-Smith. "They will—if we don't give in. We've got it coming."

"Then what are we going to do?" demanded the Owl.

"That's an easy one. We are going to get wet."

"And wet or dry, we're sticking it out, till they spot who sooted Quelch, and sack the right man," said Wharton.

"Oh, lor'!" said Bunter, dismally.

The spotting, and sacking, of the right man was not a prospect to which Billy Bunter could look forward with much happy anticipation!

He did not want Bob sacked. Still more, he did not want to be sacked himself. He was fed up with the barring-out, in the present damp and dismal circumstances. Yet if it ended, Bob had to go—unless Bunter owned up. It was rotten all round—from whichever angle Billy Bunter viewed the position, it was just rotten!

He sat with a gloomy, puckered fat brow, while the other fellows talked. He couldn't own up—that meant the sack! If there had only been some way of owning up, and yet dodging the consequences—!

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter, suddenly.

He gave quite a jump! His little round eyes gleamed behind his big round spectacles. Something had come into his fat mind—something startling—something that made him catch his breath.

"Oh, crikey!" breathed Bunter. "If—if—if it would work—! If—if—!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, what are you iffing about, old fat man?" asked Bob Cherry, staring at him.

"Oh! Nothing! I—I wasn't thinking—."

"I could have guessed that one!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—!"

"Look out! Here comes Wingate!" called out Tom Brown, as the tall head of the captain of Greyfriars appeared from the quad.

There was a rush to the window. The Removites were ready to stand up to attack. But it was not an attack. Wingate was alone, and his face was very serious. Bob Cherry gave him a cheery grin.

"Did you get wet, Wingate?"

"Was Quelch a trifle damp?" asked the Bounder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You young asses," said Wingate, gruffly. "This has got to end. Quelch is worried about you—so is the Head. You've all been drenched, and the whole place is reeking with damp—you can't carry on this potty game any longer."

"We're all right, old scout," said Harry Wharton.

"We're carrying on, anyhow. Bob's not going to be sacked for what somebody else did."

"Honest Injun, I wasn't the man, Wingate," said Bob.

Wingate gave a grunt.

"Who was it, then?" he snapped. "It was a Remove man. Who sooted Quelch, if you didn't? Quelch would be glad enough to find out his mistake, if he's made one. You know that. Who's the man?"

"Haven't the foggiest," confessed Bob.

"Well, this is going to end," said the Greyfriars captain. "I'm here to warn you that the water will be turned on again—and you won't get hold of the hose next time—I'll take care of that. You'll march out of that room, or you'll be washed out."

"I—I say, you fellows—" squeaked Bunter.

"Turn it on as soon as you like, Wingate," said Harry Wharton. "You'll find that we can stand up to it."

"The standupfulness will be terrific."

"We're ready!" roared Johnny Bull. "Come on as soon as you like."

"I say, you fellows," yelled Billy Bunter. "I say give a fellow room! I say, I want to speak to Wingate. I say, Wingate—." The Greyfriars captain stared at the fat, excited face in the window. "I—I say, I know who it was!"

"What?" exclaimed Wingate.

"I—I—I jolly well know who it was," gasped Bunter, "and—and I'm jolly well going to the Head to tell him!"

BUNTER KNOWS!

WINGATE stared at Billy Bunter.

So did every fellow in the Rag. They stared blankly.

Billy Bunter did not, as a rule, fill a very prominent place in his form. His unimportance, really, was unlimited. Fellows even forgot his fat existence at times. And if they forgot it, they were never interested in being reminded of it. But, for once at least, Billy Bunter was right in the middle of the picture. He was the centre of attraction—the cynosure of all eyes.

Bunter, as it were, had the house!

His sudden and unexpected announcement that he knew who it was that had sooted Quelch, took all by surprise. Nobody knew who it was—and nobody had dreamed that Bunter knew.

"You fat villain!" gasped Bob, staring at him blankly.

"Oh, really, Cherry—."

"If you know, why haven't you let on before?" roared Bob. "You've let this row go on for a week, nearly, and you knew all the time—."

"You—you see—I—I—" Bunter stammered.

"If you really know, Bunter—!" said Harry Wharton, doubtfully.

"Haven't I just said so?" hooted Bunter.

"That's evidence against!" remarked Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, really, Smithy—."

"Well, if you know, how do you jolly well know?" demanded Peter Todd. "Mean to say that you saw what happened that Wednesday afternoon?"

"Oh! Yes!" gasped Bunter.

"You were up in the studies that afternoon?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Oh! Yes!"

"And why have you been keeping it dark all this while, if you know who the fellow was?" roared Johnny Bull.

"I—I—I."

"Gammon," said the Bounder. "If Bunter knew, he would have burred it out long ago. Can he keep his mouth shut?"

"Beast!"

"Look here," Wingate broke in, "if you really know anything about it, Bunter—."

"Oh! Yes!" gasped Bunter. "I know all about it! That's why I was backing up Bob Cherry, you know—because I knew he never did it."

"Oh!" said Harry Wharton. "If that's so, that accounts—But why didn't you tell us who it was, you benighted bandersnatch? You couldn't give a man away to the beaks, but you could have told us."

"And we'd jolly well have made him own up!" growled Johnny Bull. "We'd have scragged him till he coughed it up, after he'd got Bob landed for it."

"Yes, rather."

"The scragfulness would have been terrific, until the esteemed rotter coughed it up fully," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "That would have been a deadly cert."

"That's why—I—I—I mean, I—Look here, you fellows, I jolly well know who it was, and I'm going to tell the Head."

"You can't do that," said Harry Wharton. "You can't give a man away—we don't sneak in the Remove. But you can tell us, and we'll put it to the fellow to own up."

"And we'll put it pretty strong!" growled Johnny Bull.

"I'm going to tell the Head," persisted Bunter. "'Tain't sneaking—I'm no sneak, I hope! Did you fellows ever know me do a rotten thing? I ask you!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Look here, if you know the fellow's name, give it!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "No need to go to the Head—we'll jolly well see that the man does that—if it isn't Bob Cherry."

"'Tain't Bob Cherry."

"Then who is it?" demanded the Bounder, angrily.

"I ain't going to tell you. I ain't going to tell Wingate. I ain't going to tell Quelch! I'm going to tell the Head."

"You burbling owl," said Skinner. "If you want to tell the Head, why couldn't you tell him before this?"

"Because I've only just thought—I—I mean—." Bunter stammered. "Look here, you fellows, I'm going to the Head, now I've thought of a dodge—I—I mean—I—I'm going to the Head! Give me a bunk out of this window, will you."

"Do you mean that you're afraid to give the fellow's name here?" asked Harry Wharton. "Is that it?"

"Oh! Yes!"

"You silly ass," said Bob. "Do you think we'd let him touch you?"

"Oh! No! But—."

"Then he's here?" said Nugent. "It was a Remove man, was it?"

"Eh! Oh! Yes."

"Blessed if I can guess who it was," said Harry Wharton, quite perplexed. He looked round over the crowd of faces. "If the man's here, he may as well own up—it's all coming out now."

"Better for him to own up, than to wait for Bunter to give him away," said Squiff. "Might get off easier if he did."

"Who's the man?" asked Bob. But there was no reply to that.

"I say, Wingate—!" squeaked Bunter.

"Well?" grunted Wingate.

"I say, will you take me to the Head, if I come out? Not to Quelch, mind—I want to go to the Head, not Quelch."

"I'll certainly take you to the Head, Bunter. Hop out."

Billy Bunter clambered on to the window. There was a board nailed across the casement, but room for the fat Owl to squeeze out under it. He squeezed out, gasping and squeaking. The Removites watched him. Nobody approved of any fellow going to the Head to give a man away—still, it was agreed that if a man ever deserved to be given away, it was the man who had sooted Quelch and left another fellow to take his "gruel". In silence, they watched Bunter wriggle out, and Wingate give him a hand from the window-sill to the ground.

"Ooooh!" gasped Bunter, as he landed. He blinked back at the crowd of faces at the window. "I say, you fellows—."

"Come on!" said Wingate. He dropped a hand on a fat shoulder, and marched Bunter away.

A crowd of fellows in the quad stared at them as they went. From the window of the Rag, the Remove stared, till they disappeared into the doorway of the House.

"Well!" Bob Cherry drew a deep breath. "That's that!"

"The thatfulness is preposterous," agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Does Bunter really know—?" said Peter Todd, dubiously. "Jolly queer that he's kept his mouth shut all this while, if he does. Not like Bunter."

"Not like him at all," said Harry. "But—I think he knows! He's gone to the Head, anyhow. He will have to give the fellow's name, now."

"But who—?" said Nugent, blankly.

"Goodness knows."

"Not you, Smithy?" asked Bob with a grin.

"Don't be an ass!" growled the Bounder.

"Or you, Skinner?" asked Nugent.

"Thanks-no!"

It was a puzzle to the Remove, and there was a buzz of excited discussion. The Bounder did not take part in it—he stood silent, with a dark frown on his face. Smithy had been in the forefront of the schoolboy rebellion—as keen as any fellow on the barring-out, because he was a rebel by nature, and loved the excitement of a tremendous row—but he had not doubted that Bob Cherry had sooted Quelch. Now he had to doubt, which was irritating to a fellow who did not like admitting a mistake. The evidence had been good enough for the beaks, and good enough for the Bounder. And if the guilty man was not Bob, who was it? Bunter, it seemed, knew—and how did Bunter know? Then suddenly, in a flash, it came into his keen mind, and he guessed how Bunter knew.

"Bunter!" he ejaculated.

He came over to Bob Cherry, and tapped him on the arm.

"Sorry!" he said.

"Eh?" Bob looked round at him. "Got it into your silly head now that I wasn't the man, Smithy? "

"Yes—now I know who it was."

"Oh! You know who it was? You're the only man here who does, then. Who was it?" asked Bob.

"Bunter!"

"WHAT!" There was a general howl of astonishment.

"Bunter," said the Bounder. "That's why he's gone to the Head. He's thought up some dodge for wriggling out of it, I suppose—he's not the man to own up and take his gruel. But—it was Bunter! That's how he knows."

"Oh!" gasped Bob.

The Bounder had no doubt. The other fellows had—but they would not have doubted, if they could have heard what was going on in the Head's study in those very moments.

BUNTER TRIES IT ON!

TAP!

Dr. Locke glanced up, with a faint expression of annoyance. Mr. Quelch frowned. That tap at the door interrupted a consultation in the head-master's study.

Both head-master and form-master looked extremely serious. Both of them were troubled in mind. Both, of course, were agreed that the rebellion of the Remove had to be put down, and that all measures, however drastic, had to be used, to that desirable and necessary end. Nevertheless, they were concerned for the young rascals, much more than the young rascals were for themselves. As Wingate had said, Quelch was worried, and so was the Head.

"Come in," said Dr. Locke, a little less urbanely than was his wont.

Wingate opened the door. "Bunter, sir!" he said.

"Bunter?" repeated the Head, questioningly. Dr. Locke was, no doubt, aware that there was a boy in the Lower Fourth named Bunter. But he did not recall him at the moment. Lower boys did not come very much within the Head's majestic orbit.

"Bunter!" repeated Mr. Quelch, much more alertly.

Quelch was not likely to forget that fat ornament of his form.

"Oh, lor'!" came a squeak from outside the study. The voice of his form-master struck dismay to the fat Owl. He had come to see the Head—not Quelch! It had not occurred to him that Quelch might be with the Head. Evidently, Quelch was!

"Bunter of the Remove, sir," said Wingate. "He says that he has something to tell you, so I thought—."

"Quite so, Wingate! Let him enter," said Dr. Locke. The Greyfriars captain turned round.

"Get in, Bunter," he said.

Billy Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles.

Now that he knew that Quelch was there, he seemed disinclined to carry on.

"I—I say, Wingate—!" he stuttered.

"Go in at once, Bunter."

"I—I don't want to see Quelch! I—I'll wait a bit, and—and—wow! Leggo my collar, will you?"

Wingate twirled the fat junior into the doorway, before he let go his collar. Under two pairs of grim eyes in the study, there was no retreat for Billy Bunter. He had to make up his fat mind to it. Wingate gave him a push in his fat back, to help him further in, closed the door behind him, and departed.

"Oh, crikey!" mumbled Bunter.

The Head gave him an inquiring, not unkindly, gaze.

Mr. Quelch fixed gimlet-eyes on him that seemed almost to penetrate him.

Bunter avoided meeting those gimlet-eyes. He blinked at the Head. He would have liked to forget that Quelch was there.

"This is one of your boys, Mr. Quelch?"

"Yes: Bunter of my form, sir," said Mr. Quelch. His clouded face cleared a little. This looked to him like the first sign of surrender. "Tell your head-master why you are here, Bunter."

"I—I—I—" stammered Bunter. "I—I've got something to tell the Old Man, sir—."

"What?"

"I—I—I mean the Head, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"Bless my soul!" said Dr. Locke. Possibly he was aware that he was the "Old Man" to Lower boys at Greyfriars, but he had not expected to hear that term used in his presence.

"If you mean the Head, you had better say the Head, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, in his grimmest tone.

"Oh! Yes, sir! I—I didn't mean to say the Old Man, sir—I—I meant to say the Beak—I—I mean the Head—."

"Come to the point, Bunter," rapped the Head. "If you have something to say to me, you may say it—but be brief."

"It—it—it's about the soot, sir!" articulated Bunter.

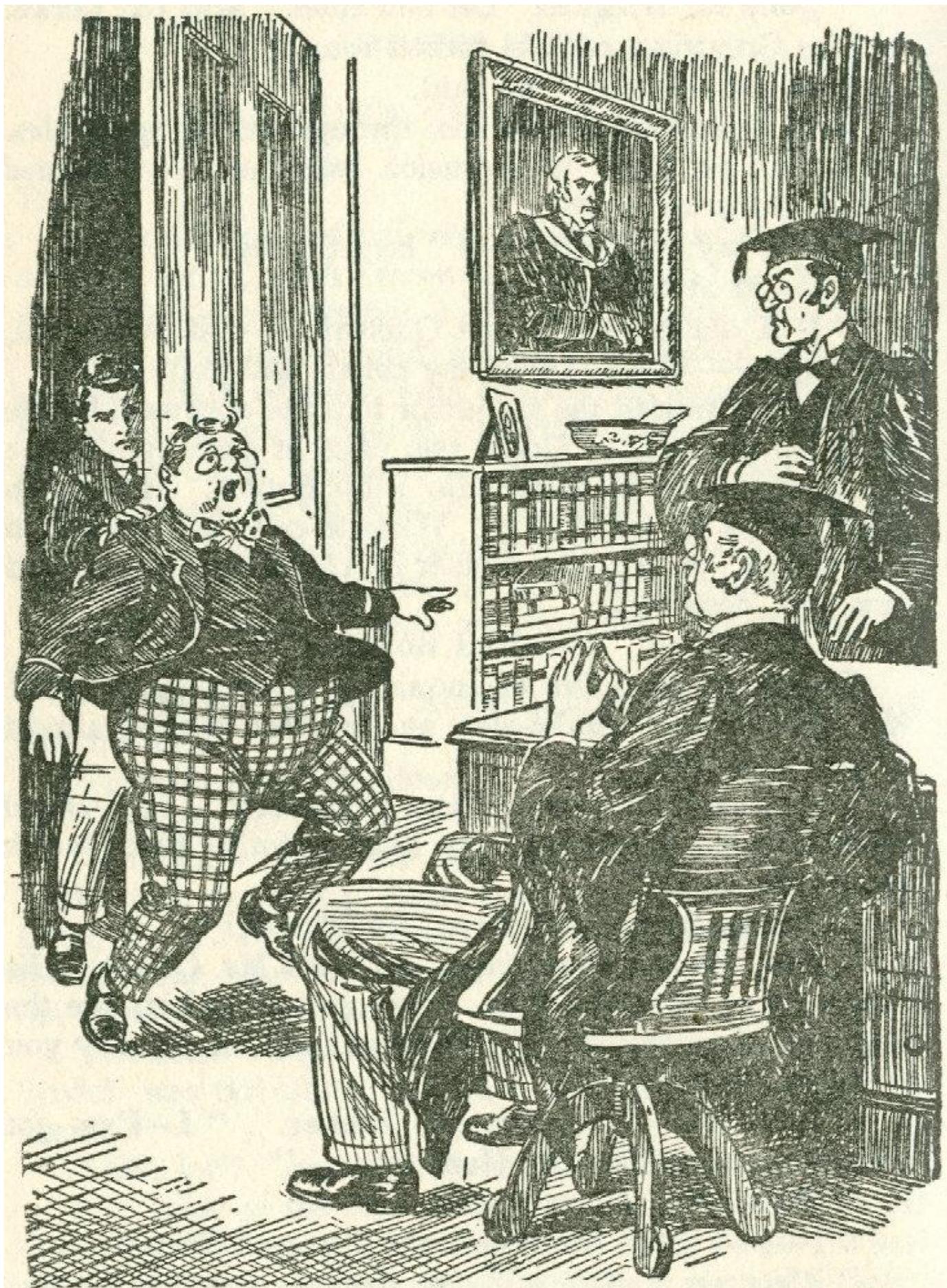
"The soot?" repeated Dr. Locke, blankly.

"Yes, sir. The—the soot—."

"Is this boy wandering in his mind, Mr. Quelch?" asked the Head. "If not, what can he possibly mean by speaking to me about—about soot?"

"Possibly he is alluding to the incident of last week, sir, for which Cherry of my form was expelled," said Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! Yes! Quite! I recall that there was soot involved in that episode. You were, I think, covered with—with soot, by means of a disrespectful trick played in Cherry's study. Quite!"



THERE WAS NO RETREAT FOR BILLY BUNTER

"I—I know who did it, sir!" gasped Bunter. Dr. Locke raised his eyebrows.

"I fail to understand you, Bunter. The guilty person is already known, and has been sentenced to expulsion. What do you mean?"

"It—it—it wasn't Bob, sir—."

"Bob?" repeated the Head. "What do you mean by bob, Bunter?"

"Bib-bib-Bob Cherry, sir—"

"Oh! Robert Cherry! I understand." Dr. Locke frowned. "If you have come here to be impertinent, Bunter—."

"Oh, no, sir! But—but I know it wasn't Bob, sir, because—because I—I know who it was, sir!" gabbled Bunter. "I knew who it was all the time, sir."

Dr. Locke's face became very grave. Mr. Quelch's grew grimmer. Head-master glanced at form-master.

"There is no doubt on the subject in your mind. Mr. Quelch?"

"None, sir."

"Nor in mine," said the Head. "The facts were clear, and spoke for themselves. Yet if this boy is acquainted with something that did not come to our knowledge—."

"I fail to see how that can be the case, sir."

"I agree! Nevertheless, we will hear what he has to say. You assert, Bunter, that the boy in question was not Cherry, and that you know the name of some other boy who was responsible for the incident?"

"Yes, sir," gurgled Bunter.

"You realise, Bunter, that if you make some wild unfounded statement, you will be severely punished for seeking to mislead your head-master?"

"Oh! Yes, sir."

"Can you prove what you say?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Do you mean that you actually witnessed the occurrence?"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I—I saw it all sir! I—I—I saw the whole thing, sir."

"Are you sure that the boy concerned was not Cherry?"

"Oh, yes, sir! N-n-nothing like him, sir."

"Bless my soul!" said Dr. Locke. He glanced again at Mr. Quelch. "This is very important if true—very important. If this is the truth, it will prevent an act of unintentional injustice which we should both have deeply regretted."

"Undoubtedly, sir," said Mr. Quelch, drily. "But I am bound to mention that this boy, Bunter, is the most untruthful boy in my form—."

"Oh, really, sir—."

"So much so, sir, that I almost doubt whether he has sufficient intelligence to distinguish the difference between truth and untruth. His word, sir, is worth absolutely nothing," said Mr. Quelch.

"He speaks of proof," said Dr. Locke. "The most indubitable proof will certainly be required. You tell me, Bunter, that you knew, all this while, that the guilty person was not Cherry?"

"I—I knew all along, sir—."

"Have you told anyone?"

"N-n-no, sir."

"And why not? I can understand that you would hesitate to give the boy's name to a master. But in your own form, there was no reason why you should not do so. Yet you tell me that you have kept it a secret all this time."

"Yes, sir."

"And why?" demanded the Head.

"I—I—I was afraid, sir—!" stammered Bunter.

"Oh!" said the Head. Again he glanced at the Remove master. The gimlet-eyes were fixed on Bunter, as if they would read right through the layers of fat. Mr. Quelch gave a slow nod. Even the most untruthful boy in the Remove could be believed when he stated that he was afraid! Quelch knew Bunter well enough to know that that was very probable!

"You were afraid, Bunter?" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir! " groaned the fat Owl.

"You have no reason to be afraid any longer, Bunter." Mr. Quelch's s tone was almost kind. If this wretched boy had been frightened by some hefty bully in his form Quelch was the man to see him through. "Your headmaster will see that you are protected."

"Most assuredly," said the Head, with emphasis.

"Moreover, the boy concerned will be immediately expelled from the school, if your statement is proved," added Mr. Quelch.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"Speak freely, Bunter," said Dr. Locke, benignly. "If an act of injustice has been done, if Cherry is really innocent in this matter, both your form-master and I have no wish but to learn the truth, in order that justice may be done. You have acted quite rightly in coming to me. You may give the boy's name, relying on my protection, Bunter."

Billy Bunter blinked at him.

The Bunder had told the fellows in the Rag that Bunter must have thought up some "dodge" for wriggling out of it. In that surmise, Smithy had shown his usual perspicacity. Bunter had!

His fat brain, working at unusually high pressure, under the awful prospect of unlimited and unending discomfort if the barring-out went on, had evolved a bright—indeed a brilliant—scheme. Bunter was obtuse—indeed his obtuseness was quite phenomenal. But, like many obtuse persons, he had in him a vein of cunning. It was this estimable quality in Bunter that had come to the rescue.

Thinking it out, in the Rag, it had seemed to him a sure winner. But in the presence of his head-master, and under Quelch's gimlet-eyes, he could not feel quite so sure. He blinked dismally at Dr. Locke—he did not dare even to blink at Mr. Quelch. But he realised that it was too late to back out. He had to "try it on"—and hope for the best!

"Come, Bunter." The Head's tone was kind and encouraging, as he scanned the frightened fat face. "I can see that you have something to tell me that I shall be glad to hear. You need have no fear whatever. You may rely absolutely on my protection, and your form-master's."

"Certainly," said Mr. Quelch. "Speak out, Bunter."

"I—I—I—!" gurgled Bunter.

"Well?"

"I—I—I'm afraid, sir. I—I daren't," gasped Bunter. "I—I'm afraid of what would happen to me afterwards—."

"You foolish boy, nothing whatever shall happen to you," said Dr. Locke. "Surely you can rely on your headmaster's assurance on that point?"

"Oh, yes, sir," mumbled Bunter. "If you tell me that I shan't be worse off for giving you the fellow's name, sir—."

"I do tell you so, Bunter. You have your headmaster's word for that," said Dr. Locke, encouragingly. "Now give me the name, without further waste of time."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Bunter. "The—the name—."

"Well?"

"It—it—it—it's—."

"It is what?"

"It—it's mine, sir!"

O.K.

BILLY BUNTER got it out—with a gasp.

After that gasp, there was dead silence in the Head-master's study.

Dr. Locke, hardly believing his ears, gazed at Bunter.

Mr. Quelch, with a most extraordinary expression on his face, gazed at him. For a long moment they seemed unable to speak: they just gazed.

"Bless my soul!" said the Head, at last.

"Upon my word!" breathed Mr. Quelch.

"Bunter! Do I hear you aright? Did you say that the name is your own?"

"Ye-e-es, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"It was you!" exclaimed Dr. Locke.

"Oh, crikey! Yes, sir!"

"You!" The grating of a wooden nutmeg was musical, compared with Quelch's grinding voice at that moment. "You! You confess, Bunter, that it was you who fixed up the soot over the doorway of Cherry's study, which fell on my head?"

"Yes, sir!" groaned Bunter.

"And you kept silent, and allowed another boy to meet your just punishment—to be expelled for what you had done—."

"Oh! No, sir! It was me that started the barring-out to keep Bob here, sir—I—I wouldn't let him be sacked if I could help it, sir—I—I—."

"If that statement is correct, it adds to your offence, Bunter."

"Oh, lor'!"

"Bunter!" said the Head, in a deep voice. "If your conscience has driven you to confess the truth, after all the harm you have done, and the trouble you have caused, I am glad of it—but it can make no difference to your punishment. The boy who was guilty of what amounts to an assault upon a member of my Staff must inevitably be expelled from the school. I am glad, and deeply relieved, that Cherry, who is innocent, is exonerated. You, who are guilty, will go—."

"I—I say, sir—!"

"Undoubtedly!" said Mr. Quelch, grimly.

"But—!" gasped Bunter.

"You need say no more, Bunter," said Dr Locke with a wave of the hand. "Cherry is exonerated by your confession. I shall personally express my regret to him. But you, Bunter, you who played this reckless and disrespectful trick on your form-master—you who have caused so much turmoil and uproar in the school—you, Bunter, will be expelled in his place—."

Yell from Bunter!

"I—I say! Oh, crikey! I say, sir, you promised—."

"What?"

"You promised!" yelled Bunter. "I wouldn't have told you if you hadn't! You said I shouldn't be any worse off if I gave you the name—."

"Wha-a-at?"

"You—you did, sir! Mr. Quelch heard you. Didn't you, sir? Didn't the Old Man—I—I mean the Head—didn't he say I could rely on his protection sir and—and I shouldn't be any worse off?"

"Goodness gracious!" stuttered Dr. Locke. "I—I certainly gave you that assurance, Bunter, but it was in the belief that you were afraid of some boy in your form—."

"I wasn't, sir! I—I—I was afraid of you, sir!"

"Bless my soul!"

"And—and Quelchy—I—I mean Mr. Quelch, sir—that was what I was afraid of. And you promised, and—and of course I—I—I knew I could trust my Head-master's word, sir or—or I shouldn't have told you."

Dr. Locke opened his lips—and closed them again.

Mr. Quelch opened his, and he also closed them again, contenting himself with gazing at William George Bunter like a Gorgon.

There was another silence in the study.

Head-master and form-master exchanged glances.

Billy Bunter waited, quaking, his fat knees knocking together. He had tried it on, and he believed that it would work. But the suspense was awful.

"Hem!" Dr. Locke, at last, coughed. "Mr. Quelch, what do you think—?"

Quelch echoed his cough. "Hem! I—I think—hem—."

"I gave the boy the assurance he speaks of," said the Head. "It was given under a misapprehension—but it was given."

"It—it was, sir—."

"I must keep my word to this boy, Mr. Quelch." The Head breathed hard, and he breathed deep. "There is no alternative to that."

There was no help for it. The Head knew it, and Mr. Quelch knew it. Billy Bunter, the most obtuse fellow at Greyfriars School or anywhere else, had been too deep for them both! The word of a head-master, of a Doctor of Divinity, once given, was fixed and immutable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. Not for any consideration whatever could it be broken. The Head knew it—Quelch knew it—and Billy Bunter knew it. That was that!

Billy Bunter knew that he had won. He would have grinned, if he had dared to grin.

"Bunter!" The Head's voice was deep. "You will not be punished. Your confession has, at all events, enabled me to rectify an error—to set right an act of injustice, of which you were the cause. But why, wretched boy, did you play that reckless and disrespectful trick on your form-master? "

"I—I didn't, sir—."

"What? You have just stated that you did!"

"I—I mean, I—I never meant—."

"Did you place the soot over the door of Cherry's study in the Remove, or did you not?"

"Oh! Yes, sir! But I meant—I mean I never meant—I mean, it was because the beast kicked me—."

"What? How dare you apply such an expression to your form-master, Bunter! How dare you state that Mr. Quelch kicked you?" thundered the Head.

"I—I—I don't mean Quelch, sir—I—I mean Bob Cherry, sir—He kicked me, jolly hard, too—."

"Is this boy in his senses?" exclaimed the Head. "What connection can there possibly be between Cherry kicking you, if he did so, and a disrespectful trick on your form-master? Explain yourself."

"I—I—I mean—."

Mr. Quelch grasped it. He was a little quicker on the uptake than his majestic Chief.

"I think the foolish boy means that he placed the booby-trap over Cherry's study door, intending it for Cherry, sir," he said.

"Oh! Is that your meaning, Bunter?"

"Yes, sir!" gurgled the fat Owl. "I—I meant it for Cherry, sir, because the beast—I mean because he kicked me, over the toffee, sir—."

"The toffee!" repeated the Head, like a man in a dream.

"Yes, sir! Mr. Quelch thought it was Bob's toffee, and sent him out to wash his hands because they were sticky, and Bob was fearfully shirty about it, and—and—."

"Can you understand this boy, Mr. Quelch?"

"I—I think so, sir! I—I think he is alluding to an incident in the form-room one day last week—a trifling incident—Bunter!" The gimlet-eyes bored into the fat Owl. "Was it your toffee, which I believed at the time Cherry had brought into the form-room?"

"Oh! No, sir! I—I mean, yes, sir," spluttered Bunter. "I—I stuck it on Bob's knee when you put me on con, and you thought—."

"Why did you not tell me the truth at the time!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Eh!" Bunter blinked at him. "You—you might have whopped me, sir."

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Quelch.

"I think we need not pursue this—this side-issue," said Dr. Locke. "It appears, from this stupid boy's confused and rambling statements, that what he did was not intended for you, Mr. Quelch, but for another boy in the Remove. That makes the matter much less serious."

"Very much indeed, sir," said Mr. Quelch. "You did not mean the—the booby-trap to fall on me, Bunter?"

"Oh, no, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I—I never dreamed that you would poke your nose in, sir—."

"What?"

"I—I mean, I never knew you'd come up to the study, sir. I knew Bob had to come up, because of his impot, and I—I fixed it up for him, because the beast—I mean because he kicked me, over the toffee, and—and hid behind the screen in the corner to watch him get it, and—and when you got it, sir, I—I—I—oh, lor'! "

"You utterly obtuse boy, cannot you understand that I should have taken a much less serious view of the matter, if you had confessed, and explained that it was an accident—."

"Oh! W-w-would you, sir?"

"Certainly I should! Pah!" snapped Mr. Quelch "Then Cherry knew nothing about the matter at all, Bunter?"

"Oh, no, sir. It was me—."

"You should not say 'it was me', Bunter," snapped Mr. Quelch. He could not let that pass, even at such a moment.

"I—I didn't say it was you, sir," stammered Bunter. "I—I said it was me, sir."

"I mean, you should say 'It was I!' " almost roared Mr. Quelch.

"But it wasn't you, sir," stuttered Bunter, in bewilderment. "It was me, sir—."

Dr. Locke passed his hand over his mouth, possibly a smile was dawning there.

"I think we may dismiss this boy, Mr. Quelch," he said. "Bunter! You may go!"

And Bunter went—gladly.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL!

"CHERRY!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

A sharp rap sounded at the door of the Rag. Every eye turned in that direction. Through the gap in the upper panels, the Remove fellows glimpsed an angular form. Harry Wharton and Co. looked out—their form-master looked in. The gimlet-eye pin-pointed Bob Cherry, and Mr. Quelch rapped out his name like a bullet. He was frowning, and in the imperative mood: but all the juniors could see that there was a change.

"Cherry! I have to express to you my regret, and that of your head-master," rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Oh!"

"It has transpired, Cherry, that you were not guilty of the act laid to your charge."

"Oh!"

"The culprit is now known. He has confessed. Your sentence of expulsion is, therefore, rescinded. Your father will be immediately informed that you are not to leave Greyfriars."

"Hurray!" roared Johnny Bull.

"The hurrayfulness is terrific!"

"Bravo!"

"Kindly be silent!" rapped Mr. Quelch. "Cherry! I regret the error that was made. Your head-master regrets it. You must, however, blame yourself. Your own reckless disobedience was the cause. Had you obeyed my instructions to write out your imposition that afternoon, the foolish boy Bunter could not have done what he did in your study, and nothing would have occurred."

"Oh! Yes, sir! I'm sorry!" stammered Bob. "I know I was rather an ass, sir—I—I mean—."

"Let this be a warning to you, Cherry!"

"Oh! Yes, sir! Certainly."

"However," added Mr. Quelch, more graciously, "I have now learned the facts regarding the incident of the—the toffee, and, in the circumstances, you will be excused the imposition."

"Oh! Thank you, sir."

"Wharton!"

"Yes, sir."

"In view of the fact that Cherry is now exonerated, and that the late unseemly disorder was wholly on his account, your head-master is disposed to take a lenient view of what has happened here. He has authorised me to tell you that all will be forgiven if the Remove return immediately to their duty. Immediately!" added Mr. Quelch, in a very deep voice.

"Oh! Yes, sir."

"The immediatefulness will be terrific, honoured sahib!"

"We'll be very glad, sir," added Mark Linley.

"Will we?" murmured the Bounder.

"If you return immediately to discipline and order, no one will be punished," said Mr. Quelch. His eye glinted for a moment at Vernon-Smith. Perhaps he was tempted to make one exception. If so, he resisted that temptation. "No one!" he repeated. "I leave the rest to your good sense, Wharton."

"Thank you, sir," said Harry. "We'll come out of this as soon as we can get the door open, sir. We're all glad it's over."

"Very good!" said Mr. Quelch.

He departed: leaving the Rag in a buzz. Faces were bright—Bob Cherry's like the sun at noonday. Only Smithy did not seem wholly pleased. It was the end of the "row", and Smithy thrived on rows.

"What jolly luck!" chuckled Bob.

"Terrific luck, my esteemed and idiotic chum," trilled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "We are not to lose the light of your absurd countenance, and the sackfulness is a boot on the other leg."

"And it was Bunter after all!" said Nugent. "What did that fat ass soot Quelch for? And where did he get the nerve to own up?"

The Bounder gave a scoffing laugh.

"I told you he had some dodge up his sleeve. Well, it was fun while it lasted, but I suppose it's over now."

"And a jolly good thing, too," said Bob.

"Anyhow, we beat them," Smithy chuckled. "And I shall always remember giving Quelch a wash!"

"Quelch may remember it, too," remarked Skinner.

"Rot!" said Harry Wharton. "Quelch plays the game. It's all over—and the sooner we're out of this, the better."

"Hear, hear!"

Bob Cherry's hammer was heard once more, knocking out the wedges at the door. It was not long before the rebels of Greyfriars—no longer rebels—were crowding out of the Rag, the fort they had held so long. Most of them were anxious to see Bunter, and to learn what had happened—or was to happen—to the fatuous fat Owl who had caused both the beginning and the end of the Greyfriars barring-out. That Bunter had had the nerve to own up was amazing—yet by what "dodge" he could have eluded the consequences, if the Bounder's surmise was correct, was still more puzzling. It was but seldom that Billy Bunter was a much-sought-after personage: but now everyone wanted to see Bunter.

"Hullo!" Coker of the Fifth met them as they streamed down the passage, and gave them a glare. "So you're out?"

"Sort of!" admitted Bob.

"Now you're all going to be whopped, I suppose?"

"Something wrong with your supposer, then! We're not going to be whopped."

"My hat!" ejaculated Coker. "Mean to say that after the way you've been carrying on, nothing's going to happen."

"Oh, yes, something's going to happen," said Bob. "But it's going to happen to you, Coker! Up-end him, you fellows."

"Why you cheeky young sweeps! I—I—I'll—Whoop!" Coker of the Fifth roared, as he was up-ended: and the Removites, leaving Horace Coker strewn in the passage, went on their cheery way.

They looked in the Remove studies for Bunter. They found him in No. 4—Smithy's study. A sound of vigorous munching from that study was a guide. In such matters as lessons, or dates, Billy Bunter had a very bad memory: but in some matters he had quite a good one: and he had not forgotten that Smithy had mentioned that there were chocolates in his study. He was discovered standing at Smithy's study table, with an open box before him, his fat fingers busy and sticky, and Smithy's chocolates going down like oysters.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here he is!" roared Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter gave a startled blink through his big spectacles, at the crowd of faces in the doorway.

"Oh! I say, you fellows, don't tell Smithy I've been here—he might think I'd scoffed his chocs—you know what a suspicious beast he is—Oh! I—I didn't see you, Smithy, old chap—. I say, I'm going to pay for this box of chocs—I was just going down to see whether my postal-order's come—."

"Have they sacked you, you fat ass?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Eh! Oh! No."

"Not?" exclaimed Peter Todd. "Why not? "

"Oh, really, Toddy—."

"Does he look sacked?" grinned the Bounder. Certainly Billy Bunter did not look "sacked". He looked sticky, he looked shiny, he looked, as usual, in want of a wash: but he did not look "sacked".

"But you've owned up to sooting Quelch," exclaimed Frank Nugent. "They sacked Bob for it—so why not you?"

"Well, the Old Man's a man of his word, you know," said Bunter.

"What on earth has that got to do with it?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Oh! Nothing! I didn't pull the Head's leg, you know—nothing of the kind," said Bunter, hastily. "I just went to him and owned up, in a—a frank and manly way! Think I'd leave it on another chap? Not my style, I hope."

"You left it on me long enough, you fat fraud!" said Bob.

"Oh! Well, I hadn't thought of the dodge then—."

"What dodge?"

"Oh! Nothing! I say, Smithy, I'll finish these chocs, if you don't mind. I'll settle for them out of my postal-order—."

"How did you wangle it with the Head?" demanded the Bounder.

"I'm not the fellow to wangle, I hope! The Head may have thought that I was afraid of the fellow who did it, when he promised that I should be all right if I gave the fellow's name—I don't know what he may have thought, of course. How could I? "

"Oh, my hat! Was that how?" gasped Smithy.

"Of course, he couldn't break his word—a head-master, you know. I wasn't so jolly sure of Quelch, as he had the soot!"

"So you've wriggled out of it, you fat worm?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry! I like that!" hooted Bunter, indignantly. "Here I go to the Head, owning up in a frank and manly way, just to get you out of a scrape, and all you can do is to call me names! I can jolly well tell you

that it was pretty grim, with Quelchy's eye boring into a fellow all the time. Still, Quelch said that it wasn't so serious, after he knew the soot was meant for you—."

"For me!" yelled Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Eh! Oh! No! I never fixed up the booby-trap for you, old chap. Besides, I only did it because you kicked me. You jolly well know you did, and if you think you can kick a fellow with impunity—."

"You fat chump, do you mean impunity?"

"No, I don't! Don't you try to teach me, old chap—you only show your ignorance. I went to the Head and owned up that I did it. That's me all over. I never pulled his leg, of course. Still, he had to stand by it after a promise. I wasn't funky about it, like some fellows I could name would have been. Quelch was there—but did I care? I never hung back, and Wingate didn't push me in—."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. I walked into the Head's study as cool as a cucumber—I mean a coolcumber—I mean as cow as a coolcumber—I—I mean—well, you know what I mean, and said, 'I did it!' Just like that!" Bunter gobbled chocolates. "And the Head said—groooooogh! oooooogh!" A chunk of chocolate went down rather too quickly, and Bunter gurgled. "Woogh! The Head said—gurrnggh! Wurrnggh!" The fat Owl cleared his fat neck, and got going again. "The Head said, 'Bunter! This is manly of you!' His very words. And you can jolly well cackle if you jolly well like, so yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen, chaps, and sportsmen," said Bob Cherry. "It was Bunter all the time, and he seems to have pulled the Head's leg and got off. I'm glad he isn't bunked, but he's going to be jolly well bumped—."

"Oh, really, Cherry—!"

"Collar him!"

"Here, I say, you fellows—Leggo—Beasts—yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as he was collared.

Bump!

"Oh, crikey! I say—."

Bump!

"Will you leggo?"

Bump!

"Whoooooop!"

Billy Bunter sat on Smithy's carpet, and roared.

* * *

THE next day, the Greyfriars Remove had resumed the accustomed tenor of their way, and they were on their very best behaviour in the form-room. There was a glint in a gimlet-eye that warned them to be circumspect: and they were circumspection itself. Everyone was glad, on the whole, that the spot of bother was over: though the fattest member of the form, now that all the drawbacks of school life had returned, could not help looking back with a regretful eye to the happy time when there had been no lessons or prep or rising-bell, during the exciting week of Billy Bunter's Barring-Out.