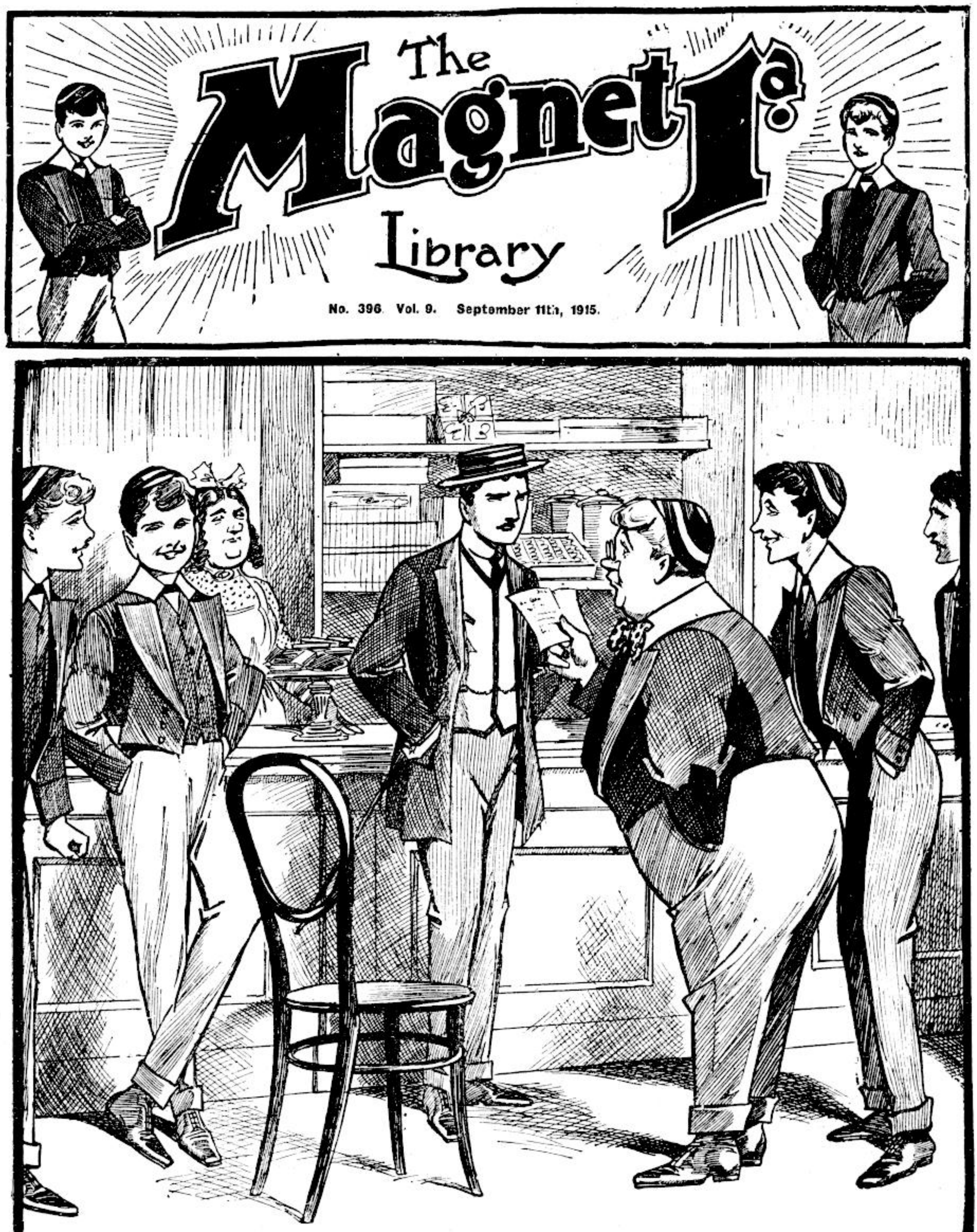
A SERGEANT'S SPLENDID LETTER!



THE TRAGEDY OF THE TUCK SHOP!

READ "BACKING UP BUNTER" INSIDE.

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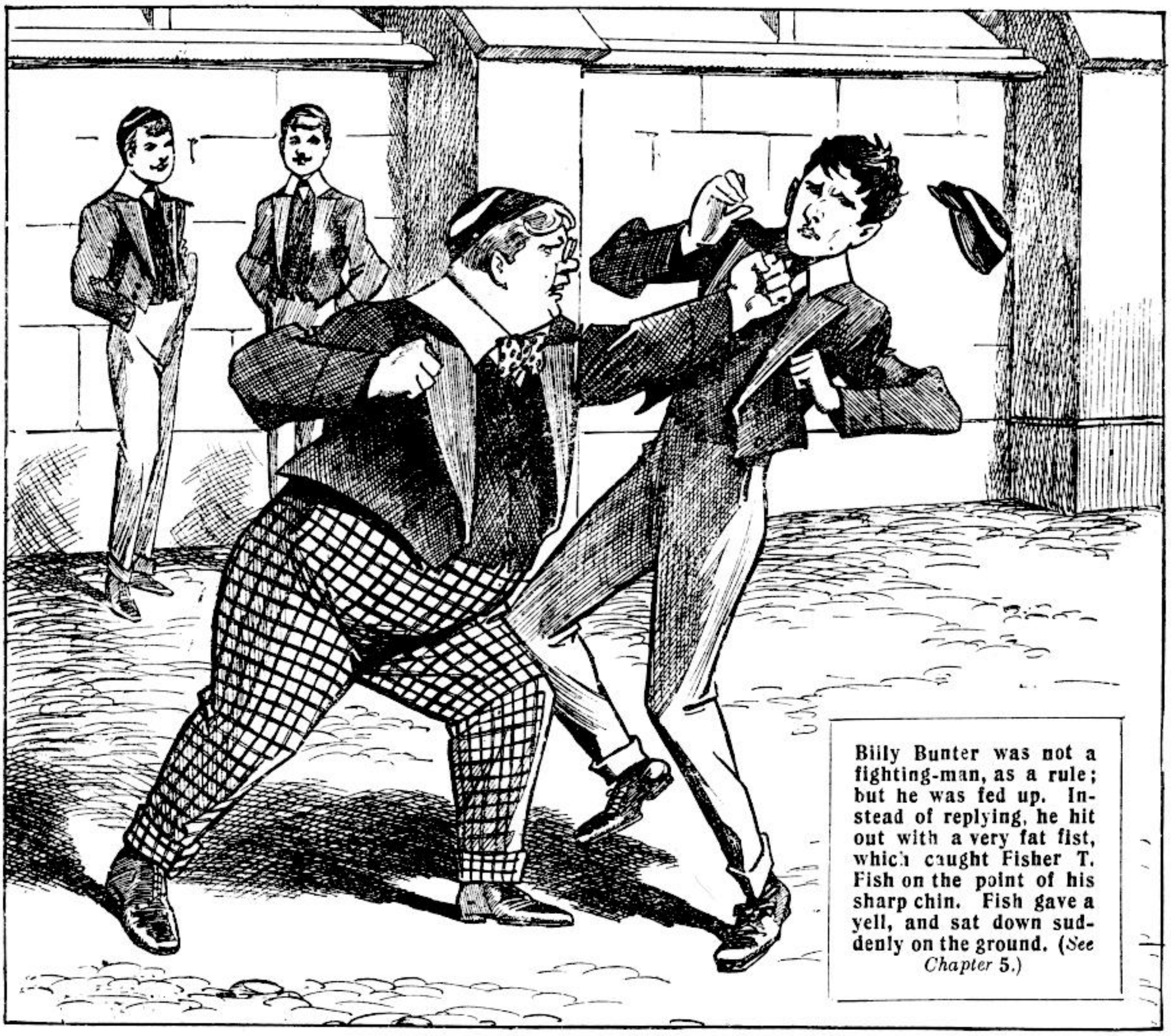
BACKING UP BUNTER!

A New, Long, Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School.

By FRANK RICHARDS.



Billy Bunter was not a fighting-man, as a rule; but he was fed up. Instead of replying, he hit out with a very fat fist, which caught Fisher T. Fish on the point of his sharp chin. Fish gave a yell, and sat down suddenly on the ground. (*See Chapter* 5.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Getting On With the Washing!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Bunter's up!"

The rising-bell was clanging out at Greyfriars, and the Remove fellows were sitting up and yawning, preparatory to turning out.

Bob Cherry was generally the first out of bed; but on this especial morning, as he hurled away the bedclothes in his usual energetic manner, and jumped out, Bob discovered that he was second.

Billy Bunter was already up.

No wonder Bob was surprised. Indeed, he rubbed his eyes, as if not quite assured that he was not still dreaming.

It was Bunter's custom to stay in bed till the last possible moment. Many a time and oft Bob Cherry had helped him out with a friendly boot, or squeezed a wet sponge down his fat neck to jerk him out of the land of dreams. But this morning William George Bunter did not require any of those friendly attentions. He was first up.

"Awake, Bunter?" asked Bob.

Billy Bunter jammed his big glasses on his little nose and blinked at him.

"Of course I'm awake, you ass!"

"Well, I thought you might be sleep-walking," Bob explained. "Wherefore this thusness?"

"Bunter up!" yawned Harry Wharton, as he turned out. "Wonders will never cease! He will be washing his neck next!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No jolly fear!" remarked Frank Nugent. "Miracles don't happen twice in the same morning."

Billy Bunter grunted disdainfully, and turned to his ablutions. His ablutions never kept Bunter very long. He generally indulged in what some of the fellows described as a "cat-lick." But this morning the "lick" would have disgraced the laziest cat. Bunter was in a hurry.

"Hallo, Bunter, you've forgotten something!" called out Johnny Bull, as Bunter began to towel.

Bunter ceased towelling for a moment.

"Eh? What have I forgotten, Bull?"

"The soap!"

"You silly ass!" roared Bunter, and he recommenced towelling, while the other Removites began ablutions on a rather more extensive scale.

Bunter dabbed his fat face dry, and ran a comb through his hair—once. Then he finished dressing. For once in his life Billy Bunter was to be the first out of the Remove dormitory.

"I'll tell you what!" exclaimed Squiff, the Australian junior. "Let's do Bunter a good turn. You chaps remember the time he had a bath. That was before I came to Greyfriars, but I've heard about it. Let's give him another."

"Oh, really, Squiff——"

"Jolly good idea!" exclaimed Bob Cherry heartily. "Just the time, when he's up early for once."

"Hear, hear!"

"I say, you fellows, don't play the giddy ox!" exclaimed Billy Bunter in alarm, as the merry Removites closed round him. "I'm in a hurry this morning."

"Too great a hurry to wash!" grinned Mark Linley. "Well, we'll all lend a hand. Many hands make light work."

"Look here, I've got to get down to get a letter," howled Bunter. "I'm expecting it by the early post, and it's jolly important."

"Expecting a postal-order, as usual?" grinned Bob.

"'Tain't a postal-order; it's a whacking remittance from my pater," said Bunter. "Twenty pounds, very likely."

"Bow-wow!"

"My pater's a bear," said Bunter loftily. Bunter had a little way of rattling off queer Stock Exchange terms that he had heard his father use at home. "He's been bearing the market, you know, and he's collared a regular fortune. And he's going to send me a whack out of it—he always does."

"Ripping pater Bunter's got," said Skinner. "I know he sent him a tenner once. I'd swop my pater for him any day."

"He's sent me lots of tenners, Skinner. This time it is going to be something extra good. Wharrer you up to, Bob Cherry, you idiot? Let my collar alone."

Bob Cherry shook his head.

"This is an important occasion," he remarked. "If you're going to be a giddy millionaire again to-day, Bunty, you ought to dress for the part. Millionaires always wash their necks—at least, I suppose they do. They can afford to, I should think. Now, you're expecting a whacking remittance?"

"Yes, I am—leggo!"

"And you're going to roll in filthy lucre, and put us common persons in the shade?"

"Yow-ow!"

"And lend quids right and left——"

"No fear! I'm not lending you anything, Bob Cherry."

"Nor little me?" asked Nugent.

"Certainly not! You refused to cash a postal-order for me the other day, Nugent. I sha'n't lend you a cent."

"Bunter's going to stick to his old pals, ain't you, Bunter?" asked Skinner. "You let him alone, Bob Cherry."

"Yes, let Bunter alone," said Snoop.

Bob Cherry snorted.

When Bunter was in funds he was the recipient of all sorts of friendly attentions from Skinner & Co, and the news that a whacking remittance was coming that day was more than sufficient to rally Skinner & Co. round the fat junior.

But they did not venture to chip in. Bob Cherry was a dreadfully hard hitter, and he could have wiped up the dormitory with Skinner & Co. "on his own."

Bob Cherry's opinion was that it was time that Bunter had another wash, and, owing to Bunter's unusually early rising, there was time for it this morning. So a wash Bunter was going to have. On a celebrated occasion some hilarious juniors had seized Bunter by force and bathed him; and it was often said that, on that occasion, Bunter had found a waistcoat that had mysteriously disappeared. Bob considered that it was time for Bunter to have another.

"Will you leggo?" roared Bunter, as the Famous Five yanked off the clothes he had just finished putting on. "Leggo my collar! Leave my shirt alone! Yow-ow-ow! Leggo my trousers! I tell you I've finished washing! I don't need so much washing as you bounders! Yarooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All hands to the mill!" chuckled Squiff. "You may find another waistcoat this time, Bunter, or a necktie!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow-ow-ow! Help!"

"Pile in! Got a scrubbing-brush, anybody?"

"A rake would do—or a spade!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Nearly all the Remove entered into the joke. Billy Bunter was surrounded by a crowd of hilarious fellows, half-dressed, and wholly determined to bath Bunter. His clothes were yanked off, and Bob Cherry started with a sponge. Billy Bunter roared and howled under the cold water.

"Hold him!" howled Bolsover major. "I've got a loofah here."

"Hurray! Go it!"

"Yaroooh!" yelled Bunter as Bolsover got to work with the loofah. "Yoop! You're skinning me, you beast! Yow! The skin's coming off!"

"I've not got to the skin yet!" said Bolsover, rubbing away. "There's another inch before I get to the skin!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all right, Bunter—'tain't skin that's coming off."

"Go it, Bolsover!"

"Yaroooh! Help! Murder! Fire! Yah!"

With yells of laughter, the Removites washed Bunter. It was such a wash as he had seldom or never experienced before. Bob Cherry was lathering soap into his hair, Johnny Bull was scrubbing his neck, Nugent and Hurree Singh took a foot each, while Bolsover "loofahed" him all over.

The Owl of the Remove wriggled and squirmed in the grasp of many hands like a very fat worm.

His yells died away into gurgles as soap got into his mouth, and he spluttered and spluttered frantically.

He was soon shining and foaming with soap from head to foot. Then he was doused with water. Then the Removites began towelling. They towelled Bunter till he hadn't an ounce of breath left in his plump body.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By Jove! He looks thinner, doesn't he?"

"We've reduced your weight, Bunty."

"A stone at least!"

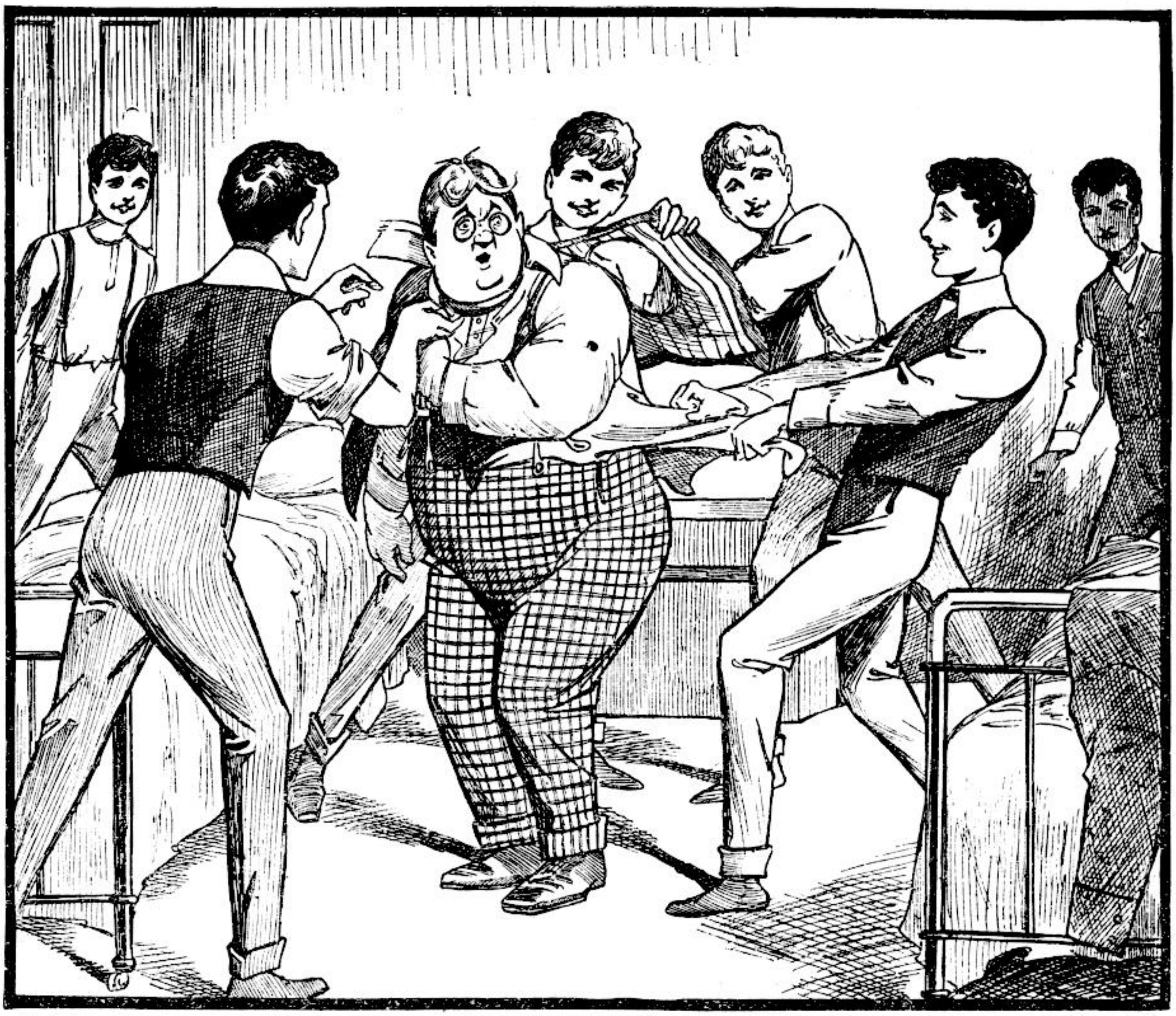
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Grooooh!" moaned Bunter. "Yow-ow-ow! Beasts! Yoooop! Oh! Ah!"

"That's all the thanks we get," said Bolsover major. "And I've got to go to the expense of getting my loofah disinfected, too!"

Billy Bunter found his glasses, and jammed them on his nose, and blinked furiously at the merry juniors.

"Yow! Ow! You rotters! I was going—grooh—to



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stand a feed out of my—yoop—remittance, and now I —yow-ow—won't! Groooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter bundled into his clothes. The juniors were hurrying through their own washing; they had spent a good deal of time on Bunter. The Owl of the Remove was first out of the dormitory after all. He took his jacket on his arm, and his collar in his hand, and bolted, fearful that his humorous Form-fellows might begin again. The dormitory door closed after him with a slam. A yell of laughter followed the fat junior as he rolled, half-dressed, down the passage.

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THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Great Expectations!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. were down soon after Bunter. They came down smiling, and found the Owl of the Remove blinking over the letter-rack. But the letters that had arrived by the early-morning post had not been put out yet.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Feel better?" asked Bob Cherry cheerily.

"Yow! You rotter! I haven't got my breath back yet!" growled Bunter. "And I can jolly well tell you you're not going to have anything out of my remittance!"

"Not after giving you a free wash?" said Bob reproachfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter snorted and rolled away. He certainly did look cleaner than usual. The bath had done him good.

Harry Wharton & Co. went out into the Close for their usual run before breakfast. Billy Bunter haunted the passage until Trotter came with the letters. He had risen specially early to capture his expected letter, and he waited very discontentedly. As soon as the page appeared, the Owl of the Remove bore down on him.

"My letter!" he exclaimed.

"There ain't one for you, Master Bunter."

"Lemme look!"

Billy Bunter blinked carefully over all the letters, but there certainly was not one for him. He grunted with dissatisfaction. He had had the trouble of rising early for nothing, to say nothing of the forcible wash.

"Got it?" asked Skinner, as he came down.

"'Tain't come yet."

"Next post, perhaps," said Skinner amicably.

"I suppose so."

"Sure it's coming?"

AN IMPORTANT CHANGE IN THE "MAGNET." (SEE PAGE 5.)

"Of course I am!" snapped Bunter. "A tenner at least—perhaps twenty. My pater's rolling in money since the war."

"Come and have a ginger-pop before brekker, Bunty, old chap," said Skinner affectionately.

And he linked arms with Bunter, and walked him away across the Close. Bob Cherry burst into a chuckle as he saw them.

"Looks as if Bunty is really getting a remittance," he remarked.

And his chums agreed that it did.

Billy Bunter was quite an important personage that morning. Skinner and Snoop and Stott and Fisher T. Fish vied with one another in friendly attentions. Billy Bunter liked the limelight, and he could swallow any amount of flattery. And he purred with pleasure.

At morning lessons he was thinking more about his remittance than the Form-work, with the result that Mr. Quelch was down on him several times.

But the Owl of the Remove hardly heeded Mr. Quelch. It was half-holiday that afternoon, and Bunter was thinking of the glorious time he was going to have with his handsome remittance—when it arrived.

Time had been when Billy Bunter had been the most impecunious fellow in the Remove. He had reduced borrowing to a fine art, and the postal-order he was always expecting, and upon which he sought to raise loans in advance, was well known to all the school. Only innocent new boys could be found to lend Bunter anything on the strength of his expected postal-order.

But there had been a great change.

Bunter senior had had phenomenally good fortune on the Stock Exchange. The war, which had brought trouble to so many, seemed to have brought fortune to Mr. Bunter. Billy Bunter often related proudly how his pater had been a bull, or a bear, and gave weird hints of inside knowledge concerning contango, and carry-over, and backwardation, and so forth. Mr. Bunter was apparently piling up gains in his speculations, and, though there were many "lame ducks," Bunter senior was evidently not one of them.

And Bunter senior had shelled out handsomely to his two sons at Greyfriars. Billy Bunter of the Remove, and Sammy Bunter of the Second Form, had basked in the paternal prosperity.

When Bunter had first announced that he was expecting a tenner from his pater, his announcement had been received with howls of laughter.

But more than one tenner had come, and a good many fivers, and the impecunious Owl was frequently rolling in more money than was good for him.

Besides tremendous feeds at the tuckshop, he expended his superfluous cash in being what he called a "blade." He took up smoking and playing nap, and sometimes had a "high old time" with Ponsonby & Co., the "nuts" of Highcliffe School. Indeed, Ponsonby of Highcliffe, whose knowledge of card-games was much more extensive than Bunter's knowledge of human nature, made an excellent thing out of Bunter, and was remarkably civil to him.

And as Ponsonby & Co. were a very exclusive set of young gentlemen, Bunter "swanked" without limit about his friendship with them. He had to pay pretty dearly for it, it is true.

It was now some time since Billy Bunter had had one of those whacking remittances from home, which had become famous in the Remove.

He had written home urgent letters, and now he was expecting the horn of plenty to flow again.

When the Remove came out after morning lessons, Billy Bunter's little fat nose was held high in the air. Skinner and Stott and Snoop and Fisher T. Fish gathered round him in the passage in the friendliest way. Bunter gave the Famous Five a very lofty look of disdain as he passed them in the passage.

"Rolling in tin—what?" asked Bob Cherry cheerily.

"I've no doubt my letter's come," said Bunter loftily. "But it's no good your being civil now, Bob Cherry. It's a bit too late."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I've got my own friends, and I don't care to talk to you!"

"You fat duffer!" said Bob. "Do you think I want any of your silly remittance? I sha'n't even ask you for the seven-and-six you owe me!"

"I guess you can leave Bunter alone," said Fisher T. Fish. "Bunter's got his own pals. Haven't you, Bunter?"

"As for the paltry seven-and-six, Bob Cherry, I'll settle that up immediately!" said Bunter. "I've no doubt Fishy will lend it to me!"

"Ahem!"

"Go it, Fishy!" said Harry Wharton. "A sprat to catch a whale, you know. Bunter's going to get a whacking remittance. You must be sure of it, or you wouldn't be wasting your time on him."

"I guess I'm pally with Bunter because I—I admire him," said Fish. "And I'd lend him seven-and-six like a shot, only—only I happen to be stony."

"Well, Skinner will do it," said Bunter. "Lend me seven-and-six, Skinner, and I'll get out of this person's debt."

"This what?" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Person!" said Bunter contemptuously. "Did you hear me, Skinner?"

"Awfully sorry," said Skinner. "I've only got a—ahem—a bob."

"Stott, old man—where's Stott?" Stott had gone. "I say, Snoopy——" Sidney James Snoop seemed to have vanished. "Really, Cherry, you are making a lot of fuss about a miserable seven-and-sixpence. I'll settle up out of my remittance, and then I hope you will not trouble me with your acquaintance any further!"

And Bunter walked on, with his nose higher than ever, leaving Bob Cherry gasping. Bunter in funds was a remarkable Bunter, and Bob did not know whether to laugh, or to go after him and bump him in the passage. Fortunately for Bunter, his good humour had the upper hand, and he decided to laugh.

Bunter & Co. scanned the letter-rack with keen eagerness. But there was no letter for Bunter yet.

"'Tain't come," said Skinner.

"Afternoon's post, I suppose," growled Bunter. "Let's get to the tuckshop. I must have a snack before dinner. You can lend me a bob, Skinner."

"I—I—the fact is——"

"Will you lend me a bob, or won't you?" snapped Bunter.

Skinner suppressed a groan, and handed over the bob. He did not like parting with money, and Bunter's remittance that afternoon was not absolutely a certainty. But Skinner felt that it was certain enough to risk a shilling on it.

After dinner Billy Bunter and his dear friends kept a watch for the postman. But the early afternoon post came in, and there was no letter for Bunter. Bunter's friends were as disappointed as William George himself. It was a half-holiday, and they had been planning quite a number of nice things for that half-holiday, on the strength of Bunter's expected tenner.

"It's this blessed war, you know," said Bunter; "the letter's delayed. It'll come by the afternoon's post all right. But I'm getting peckish. Skinner——"

"Stony, old man," said Skinner.

"I say, Fishy——"

"I guess——" began Fisher T. Fish, in alarm.

"When my tenner comes there's going to be a feed," said Bunter. "All my friends will be asked. I shall leave out any cad who won't lend me a bob when I want one. Have you a bob about you, Fishy?"

Fisher T. Fish made a grimace, and parted with the bob, as Skinner had done, and Billy Bunter promptly expended it in refreshment while he waited for the postman.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
At Last!

"HIGHCLIFFE cad!" growled Bob Cherry.

An elegantly-dressed junior strolled in at the gates of Greyfriars.

It was Cecil Ponsonby of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe School. Harry Wharton & Co. glanced at him, but did not speak. Ponsonby glanced at them, and assumed the most supercilious expression his features were capable of.

He extracted an eyeglass from his pocket, jammed it into his eye, and gazed at the Famous Five as he might have gazed at a collection of strange animals in the Zoo. Bob Cherry's fists doubled up.

"Let's bump him!" he suggested.

Wharton shook his head.

"What does he want here?" growled Johnny Bull.

"Well, he hasn't come to see us," said Harry, laughing. "I suppose he's dropped in for Bunter."

"Like his cheek!"

"The cheekfulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Singh. "The bumpfulness would be the proper caper!"

But Wharton shook his head.

"Hands off!" he said. "If we go over to Highcliffe to see Courtenay, we can't object to Ponsonby coming here to see Bunter. It's like his cheek to wedge in here, but it can't be helped."

"You know what he wants that fat fool for," said Johnny Bull.

"Yes, but it isn't our business."

"Oh, rats!"

However, Wharton's pacific reasoning was acceded to, and the Famous Five allowed Ponsonby of Highcliffe to pass unbumped. The cad of Highcliffe sauntered on, looking quite as if the Close of Greyfriars belonged to him. He was looking for Bunter.

When Bunter was in funds Cecil Ponsonby was his dear friend. Since Harry Wharton & Co. had chummed up with Frank Courtenay of the Fourth Form of Highcliffe, they had often visited him there, and so peace was established. But for that circumstance their old enemy would not have been allowed to saunter through the Close with a supercilious smile on his face.

Billy Bunter was outside the school shop, in the corner of the Close, and he gave Ponsonby a nod and a grin. The dandy of Highcliffe strolled up elegantly, and shook hands with Bunter in a very cordial manner.

"I thought I'd call for you, old chap," he remarked. "We're expecting you this afternoon, you know. Gaddy and the rest are quite lookin' forward to it."

"Oh, I'm coming!" said Bunter. "I'm waiting for the postman. I'm expecting a big remittance this afternoon."

"Pater still rolling in it?" smiled Ponsonby.

"What-ho! I'm expecting a tenner.

"Lucky bargee," said Ponsonby. "Tenners don't often come my way. You won't have long to wait. I spotted old Boggs in the lane as I came in."

"Oh, good! It can't be later than this post. I'm jolly well going to clean you chaps out this afternoon!" said Bunter confidentially.

Ponsonby nodded.

"I've no doubt you will. You nearly did last time, I remember."

"You had my fiver last time," said Bunter, frowning a little.

"Did we?" said Ponsonby carelessly. "Then you'll get your revenge this time. You play bridge marvellously for a fellow who hasn't played much."

"I'm a dab at most games," said Bunter. "Besides, I've got nerve, you know, and that's what you need more than anything else. I'm a sportsman, you know."

"You are!" agreed Ponsonby affably.

He was inwardly thinking that Bunter's tenner would replenish the exchequer in his study in a very handsome way. Ponsonby & Co. were short of funds, or the dandy of Highcliffe would not have taken the trouble to call for Bunter.

"Mind those rotters don't hear you!" added Bunter hastily, as Harry Wharton & Co. came towards the tuckshop.

"Why?" said Ponsonby, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Well, they might chip in, you know, the cheeky beasts! As if a chap can't do as he likes with his own money!" said Bunter. "Like their cheek, I think. I'd jolly well lick 'em all round if I could. Come in and have a ginger-pop while you're waiting."

"Right-ho!"

The Famous Five had ordered ginger-beer when Bunter and Ponsonby came in. Billy Bunter gave his orders in a lofty manner. Mrs. Mimble gave him the "marble eye." She never served Bunter without seeing the "colour of his money"; she knew him too well. All his generous remittances did not enable Bunter, somehow, to settle his little bill, and he still owed the tuckshop an account that was very, very old.

"You settle for this, Pon," said Bunter, understanding Mrs. Mimble's stony look. "I'll square out of my remittance."

"Certainly, dear boy!"

Ponsonby carelessly threw a coin on the counter. Billy Bunter blinked at the Famous Five triumphantly. He enjoyed showing off his elegant friend before the eyes of the chums of the Remove. Harry Wharton & Co. imbibed

AN IMPORTANT CHANGE IN THE "MAGNET." (SEE PAGE 5.)

ginger-beer, and talked cricket, supremely indifferent to Billy Bunter and to the cad of Highcliffe.

Wharton, however, was frowning a little. He knew very well that Ponsonby was very little better than a card-sharper, and that the fat Owl's remittance was what he was after. Duffer and ass as Bunter was, Wharton felt a certain compassion for him as he thought of what the Owl of the Remove would feel like when his expected tenner had come—and gone!

There was a buzz of voices outside, and old Boggs, the postman, appeared, propelled into the tuckshop by Skinner, Snoop, Stott, and Fisher T. Fish. The four had captured the postman in the Close, and brought him along with them to Bunter.

"Here he is, Billy!" chortled Skinner. "We've captured him for you, old chap."

"Really, young gentleman——" gasped Boggs.

"He's got a letter for you, Billy," said Snoop.

Bunter set down his glass.

"Hand it over, Boggs!"

Old Boggs wiped his perspiring brow, and fumbled in his bag. He produced a letter, and it was handed to Bunter. Then old Boggs was allowed to shoulder his bag and depart.

Bunter's eyes glistened behind his spectacles as he looked at the letter. It was not registered, as he had expected. But it was addressed in his father's hand, and he had no doubt that it contained what he expected.

"I guess that's it, Bunty," remarked Fisher T. Fish anxiously.

"Oh, yes!" said Bunter carelessly.

"Some bounders have all the luck," said Snoop enviously. "Let's have a squint at the tenner, Billy.

Bunter was guzzling ginger-beer again. He seemed to take a pleasure in keeping his dear friends on tenter-hooks.

"May as well be gettin' along, as you've got the letter you were expectin'," said Ponsonby. "Nothin' else to wait for, is there?"

"No; I'm coming."

Wharton made a movement towards Bunter. He felt that it was up to him to speak a word at least to the fatuous Owl.

"Look here, Bunter," he said quietly, "you'd better not go over to Highcliffe this afternoon."

Bunter snorted.

"I suppose I can please myself," he said.

"Well, yes; but you know very well what they want you for there," said Wharton. "You know what would happen to you if it came out about your playing cards."

"Are you going to sneak?" sneered Bunter.

Wharton snapped his teeth.

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Perhaps Bunter will ask you for your advice when he needs it, Wharton," suggested Ponsonby, in his silkiest tone.

Wharton did not look at the cad of Highcliffe.

"Yes, so I will," said Bunter. "The fact is, Wharton, I don't want to have anything to do with you. You're not my sort. And I tell you plainly that it's no good your starting being civil to me just when I get a whacking remittance from my pater. It ain't good enough!"

"Oh, squash him!" growled Bob Cherry.

Wharton crimsoned with anger.

"Come on, Billy, old scout!" said Ponsonby.

"I'm coming, Pon."

Wharton stepped back. He was greatly inclined to kick Ponsonby out of the tuckshop, and to give Bunter the licking of his life. But he restrained himself.

"Let's see the tenner, Bunty, old man," urged Skinner, with a somewhat hostile glance at Ponsonby.

Skinner & Co. did not like the idea of their rich pal being walked off under their noses in this manner by the dandy of Highcliffe. They could guess that there would not be much of the tenner left by the time the Owl came home from his visit.

Bunter slit the envelope with a fat thumb.

He took out the letter and unfolded it. Then his expression changed. The expressions of his friends changed also. For it was clear at a glance that there was, after all, no remittance in the letter.

The fat junior blinked at the brief epistle, and his jaw dropped, and his gaze seemed to become transfixed.

"Oh!" he gasped. "Oh! Ah! Oh, dear!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
The Blow Falls!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. had been about to leave the tuckshop, having finished their ginger-beer. But the dismayed exclamation of Billy Bunter made them pause. The utter dismay and trouble in Bunter's fat face showed that he had had bad news. The Owl seemed to be completely overcome.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry, not unkindly. "Anything wrong, Bunter?"

Bunter groaned.

"Bad news?" asked Wharton.

"Oh, dear! Yes!"

The letter fluttered from Bunter's fat fingers, and he leaned against the counter limply.

Never had the Owl of the Remove looked so thoroughly "knocked out."

"Oh, dear! Oh, my hat! Oh! Oh! Ah!"

Fisher T. Fish stooped and picked up the letter.

"I guess we can see the news, Bunty—what?"

Bunter nodded without speaking. Perhaps he felt in need of sympathy, and expected sympathy from his dear friends when they learned of the crushing blow that had fallen upon him.

Fisher T. Fish read out the letter, and his long face became longer as he read. For the Yankee junior realised that there was to be no return for the "soft sawder" he had wasted upon Bunter, and that the bob he had lent the Owl had vanished for ever!

For the letter ran:

"Dear William,—I have received all your letters asking for money, and request you to send me no more. Owing to the unfortunate result of an operation in the City I find myself in very changed circumstances. So far from being able to accede to your requests for money, I shall not be able to send you your usual allowance until things come round a little. As I have been very generous with you lately, I trust you have sufficient money put by to meet all your wants till the end of the present term. Your affectionate father,

"W. B. BUNTER."

"Waal, I swow!" finished Fisher T. Fish.

"By gum!" said Skinner. "That looks like the kybosh!"

"He, he, he!" came from Snoop.

"I always said that old Bunter would be found out in the long run," said Skinner, with great coolness. "It's a bit thick, getting money by speculation in war time! Unpatriotic, I call it! I can't say I'm sorry!"

"Why, you—you rotter!" stuttered Bunter. "You were jolly glad to have a whack in it, anyway!"

Skinner whistled, and strolled out of the tuckshop to spread the news. He told the news with many smiles, and it was received with chuckles. Bunter senior was one of those sharp City gentlemen who thrive in troublous times by fishing in troubled waters, and nobody was sorry to hear that he had "come a mucker" at last.

"I—I say, you fellows, this is simply awful!" groaned Bunter. "Of course I haven't got anything put by! Fancy docking a chap's allowance for the rest of the term? Isn't it rotten?"

"I guess it is rather thick," said Fisher T. Fish. "Here's your letter, Bunter. I guess I'd keep that dark if I were you."

And Fisher T. Fish sauntered away. Snoop and Stott followed him. They were done with Bunter, and were not interested in his lamentations.

"I—I say, Pon"—Ponsonby was going out—"I—I'm coming over, all the same, Pon."

The dandy of Highcliffe did not seem to hear. He walked out of the tuckshop.

"I say Pon!" shouted Bunter.

Ponsonby was afflicted with sudden deafness.

He walked away from the tuckshop without looking back, and Bunter blinked after him from the doorway in dismay and surprise.

"Pon!" he roared.

Ponsonby disappeared through the school gateway.

"Blessed if he doesn't seem to be deaf," growled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, Bob Cherry?"

"Poor old porpoise!" grinned Bob. "The noble Pon doesn't want a stony-broke visitor to play bridge."

"Rats! Pon's my pal," said Bunter. "He isn't like you chaps. He doesn't make up to a chap for his money."

"Why, you fat idiot——"

"I suppose he's gone off because he can't stand you fellows," went on Bunter. "My pal Pon is aristocratic. He's very particular about the kind of company he keeps."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I—I say, you fellows, isn't this rotten?" groaned Bunter, with a change of tone. "Fancy the pater getting himself into a fix like that! No more remittances and no more allowance this term. Isn't it awful?"

"The awfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Singh. "But it is not easy to sympathise with an esteemed worm like our Bunterful chum!"

"Look here, you fellows," said Bunter eagerly. "I'll tell you what. You know I'm going to play bridge with Pon this afternoon?"

"We know you were going to," said Wharton. "I don't fancy you're going to now."

"I'm a dab at bridge," went on Bunter, unheeding. "They had a fiver out of me the other day at nap. But I'm going to skin them at bridge. Look here! You make up a few quids among you——"

"What?"

"And lend me the money——"

"By Jove!"

"And I'll settle up when I've cleaned them out at bridge. I say, you fellows, where are you going? Don't walk away while I'm talking to you. Beasts!"

The Famous Five were gone.

Billy Bunter grunted discontentedly. The expected tenner was gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream. He was not only stony, but he was faced with the dreadful prospect of remaining stony until the end of the term. The horn of plenty had suddenly run dry.

Bunter did not waste any time thinking about his father's unpleasant state. The elder Bunter's position could not have been pleasant. But William George was fully occupied in thinking about himself.

What was he going to do? Whom was he going to do was, perhaps, a more correct way of putting the question. He decided to make a round of his personal friends, who had benefited by his prosperity in happier times, and borrow a small sum from each of them. With that much capital in hand he would carry out the projected visit to Highcliffe, and the "skinning" of Ponsonby & Co. He had great faith in his powers as a bridge-player. A game like bridge, for high stakes, required nerve, pluck, acuteness, and judgment, and Bunter was fully satisfied that he possessed all those requirements. A certain amount of rascality was also required for a boy of Bunter's age to play cards for money, but that requirement, at least, Billy Bunter undoubtedly possessed.

Having drained his glass, feeling that it might be a long time before he had any more ginger-beer, Bunter rolled out of the tuckshop. Harry Wharton & Co. had gone down to the cricket, and a crowd of fellows were watching the game. Billy Bunter spotted Skinner among them, and he bore down on Skinner.

Skinner did not seem glad to see him. Bunter with a tenner in his pocket and Bunter bent on borrowing were two quite different persons.

"I say, Skinney, old man," said Bunter, jabbing Skinner in the ribs with his knuckle. "Can you lend me a quid?"

"Make it a fiver," said Skinner humorously.

"I've stood you a lot of smokes, and feeds, too," said Bunter. "Now that I happen to be short of money it's up to you to shell out."

"So I will, when my pater becomes a successful swindler on the Stock Exchange," said Skinner. "I'll tell you when the time comes."

"'Tain't swindling," said Bunter, with a snort. "It would be called swindling in private life, perhaps, but on the Stock Exchange it's called speculation. You don't understand those things, Skinner. Can you lend me ten bob?"

"You owe me a bob now."

"Look here, Skinner——"

"When are you going to settle up my bob?"

"Hang your bob, and hang you!" growled Bunter. And he rolled away in search of another victim, leaving Skinner chuckling.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Down on His Luck!

"FISHY, old man——"

"Just looking for you, Bunter."

"Well, here I am."

Fisher T. Fish was looking for Bunter, while Bunter was looking for him, and they had found one another. Billy Bunter looked more hopeful now. Fishy, at any rate, was not going to turn out a fair-weather friend like Skinner. The Yankee junior was actually looking for him—to lend him money, of course. At least, Bunter hoped so.

"I'm hard up, Fishy," said Bunter pathetically. "The pater has left me in the lurch, you know. But I know you'll stand by me."

"I guess——"

"I want to raise a few quids," said Bunter. "Now, you——"

"I reckon——"

"You've done pretty well out of me when I was in funds, Fishy, and you——"

"I calculate——"

"How much can you lend me?"

Fisher T. Fish sniffed.

"Look hyer, Bunter, I've been looking for you. I want my bob."

"Your—your what?"

"Bob!" said Fish. "I lent you a bob to-day, on the clear understanding that you settled up this afternoon! Now, shell out!"

Bunter glared at him. So that was why the Yankee junior had been looking for him.

"Why, you—you——" gasped Bunter.

"I guess I can't afford to give bobs away in these hard times!" said Fish. "I'll trouble you for that bob, Bunter."

"You skinny Yankee——"

"I guess I want my bob. I regard you as having squeezed that bob out of me on false pretences," said Fish indignantly. "You said quite plainly your popper was sending you a tenner. Otherwise I shouldn't have parted with my money. I calculate I know you too jolly well. Now, shell out!"

"Go and eat coke!"

Bunter tramped away, but Fisher T. Fish was not so easily disposed of. He started after Bunter, and caught him by the shoulder.

"Look hyer, where's that bob?" he demanded.

Billy Bunter was not a fighting-man, as a rule; but he was fed up, and his temper was rising. Instead of replying, he hit out with a very fat fist. That drive had all Bunter's heavy weight behind it, and it caught Fisher T. Fish on the point of his sharp chin.

Fish gave a yell, and sat down suddenly on the ground.

"Yooop! Ow!"

"There, you rotter!" panted Bunter. "Now, get up, and I'll give you some more!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Fisher T. Fish did not get up. He sat and nursed his chin with both hands, blinking at Bunter.

"Oh, Jerusalem crickets!" he gasped. "Ow! Oh, my word! Yow!"

Bunter rolled away, and this time he was not pursued. Fisher T. Fish was too busy nursing his chin.

Sidney James Snoop and Stott were in their study when Bunter looked in on them. Bunter's hopes were failing, but he had determined to give Snoop and Stott a trial. They grinned at the sight of him.

"Hallo!" said Snoop. "Expecting a postal-order?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Stott.

"The fact is, I am expecting a postal-order from one of my titled relations," said Bunter confidentially.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. I say, you fellows, if you could manage to whack up a quid——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You rotters!" roared Bunter. "After all the feeds I've stood you!"

"Well, you had the lion's share of the feeds!" said Snoop. "There wasn't generally very much for anybody else!"

"Precious little!" agreed Stott. "And you needn't come to this study to sponge, Bunter! We're not taking any!"

"You—you rotters! I've just given Fishy a licking!" howled Bunter. "I've a jolly good mind to give you the same!"

"Ha, ha! Pile in!"

Bunter decided, on second thoughts, not to administer that licking. He rolled away disconsolately, followed by a shout of laughter.

He looked in at his own study—No. 7—and found Alonzo Todd there. The gentle Alonzo was writing home a letter of a dozen pages to his celebrated Uncle Benjamin, but he kindly suspended his labours as Bunter came in.

"My dear Bunter," said Alonzo affectionately, "I have heard of your bad news, and I am exceedingly sorry. I do not see any reason why Skinner should regard it as amusing. It must be a great disappointment to you."

"It's rotten!" growled Bunter. "I suppose, under the circumstances, Lonzy, you wouldn't mind lending me ten bob?"

"I should be very pleased, Bunter——"

"Or a quid?" said Bunter, his hopes rising.

"Certainly, my dear Bunter! But——"

"Well, make it a quid," said Bunter.

"With pleasure, only——"

"Well, hand it over!"

"I should be exceedingly pleased to do so, my dear Bunter, but I happen to have no money at the present moment."

"You silly ass!" roared Bunter.

Bunter rolled out, and slammed the door, leaving the gentle Alonzo in a state of considerable surprise.

The Owl of the Remove proceeded to look for his other study-mates, Tom Dutton and Peter Todd. He found them on the cricket-field. Peter was batting against the Fourth, but Tom Dutton, the deaf junior, was waiting for his turn, with his bat under his arm. He looked round as Bunter dug him in the ribs.

"I suppose you've heard?" asked Bunter.

Tom Dutton looked up and down and round about.

"I can't see any bird," he replied.

"Oh, crumbs! Have you heard the news—about my pater, I mean? I'm stony, and I was expecting a tenner."

"Eh?"

"Can you lend me ten bob?" howled Bunter.

"Who's a snob?"

"Oh, dear! Can you lend me ten bob? I'm going over to see Ponsonby——"

"Oh, Ponsonby! Yes; he's a snob," agreed Dutton. "I'm surprised at your having anything to do with him, Bunter!"

"Oh, you deaf idiot!" gasped Bunter. "I tell you I'm hard up, and I want to raise the wind."

"You have sinned, have you?" said Dutton. "You shouldn't use such high-flown language, Bunter. Why can't you say you've played the giddy ox, like any other chap? I suppose you've been gambling with Ponsonby."

"You silly fathead!"

"Eh?"

"I want a loan. Do you hear? A loan."

"Good!" said Dutton. "I'm glad to hear it, Bunter. Let him alone. He won't do you any good."

Bunter gave it up. Peter Todd's wicket fell, and Tom Dutton went in. Bunter waylaid Peter as he came off. He assumed a most pathetic expression.

"Peter, old man, of course you know about it?" he murmured.

"Yes; I know all about it," said Peter. "It's just in time to save you from apoplexy from over-eating, Bunter! You should regard it as a stroke of luck."

"Don't be a beast, Toddy! I want some cash this afternoon badly."

"Yes; I know about Ponsonby calling for you," said Todd unsympathetically, "and I'm not lending you anything to gamble with. But if you ask me again I'll lend you——"

"What?"

"The end of my bat! Clear off!"

"I say, Toddy, just five bob. Ow! Yowp!"

Peter Todd kept his word, and the end of his bat was hard and heavy. The Owl of the Remove fled without making any further requests.

"Beasts!" groaned Bunter, as he rolled away. "Rotters! They're jolly civil when I'm in funds, blow 'em! Yah! I'm jolly well going over to see Ponsonby all the same. They've had a lot of money out of me, and they'll have to play for I O U's for once."

He rolled away out of gates, but it was with very dubious feelings that he started for Highcliffe.

Ponsonby & Co. certainly were remarkably civil to Bunter when he was rolling in money. On other occasions their incivility was striking. More than once they had ragged the fat junior when he visited Highcliffe, but it was always easy for them to placate him when it was worth their while. Bunter might be kicked one day, but he was willing to make friends again the next, for the sake of being admitted to Ponsonby's aristocratic circle.

But now that Pon knew the financial state he was in, what sort of a reception was he likely to meet with?

Ponsonby not only knew that he was stony, but that he was never likely to emerge from that unhappy state.

"The rotters!" murmured Bunter. "It's my money they want, the beasts! I shouldn't wonder if they cheated me, too. Smithy says they cheat at cards. Beasts! I'll jolly well let 'em think that I've had the tenner after all!"

Bunter brightened up at that cunning thought; and with renewed hope in his breast, he rolled away on the road to Highcliffe, bent upon spoiling the Egyptians.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Welcome Guest!

"BY gad, it's Bunter!"

Ponsonby was looking out of his study window at Highcliffe, when he spotted the fat junior from Greyfriars coming in.

There was a haze of smoke in Ponsonby's study. Gadsby and Monson and Vavasour were there, indulging in cigarettes, one of their pleasant little tastes. They were chuckling over what Ponsonby had told them of his visit to Greyfriars. The terrible misfortune which had fallen upon the Owl of the Remove seemed only to amuse the nuts of Highcliffe. They regarded it as funny.

"I never could stand that fat bounder, anyway," Gadsby had remarked. "Even when he was gilt-edged he was quite impossible, dear boys. Thank goodness we're done with him!"

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

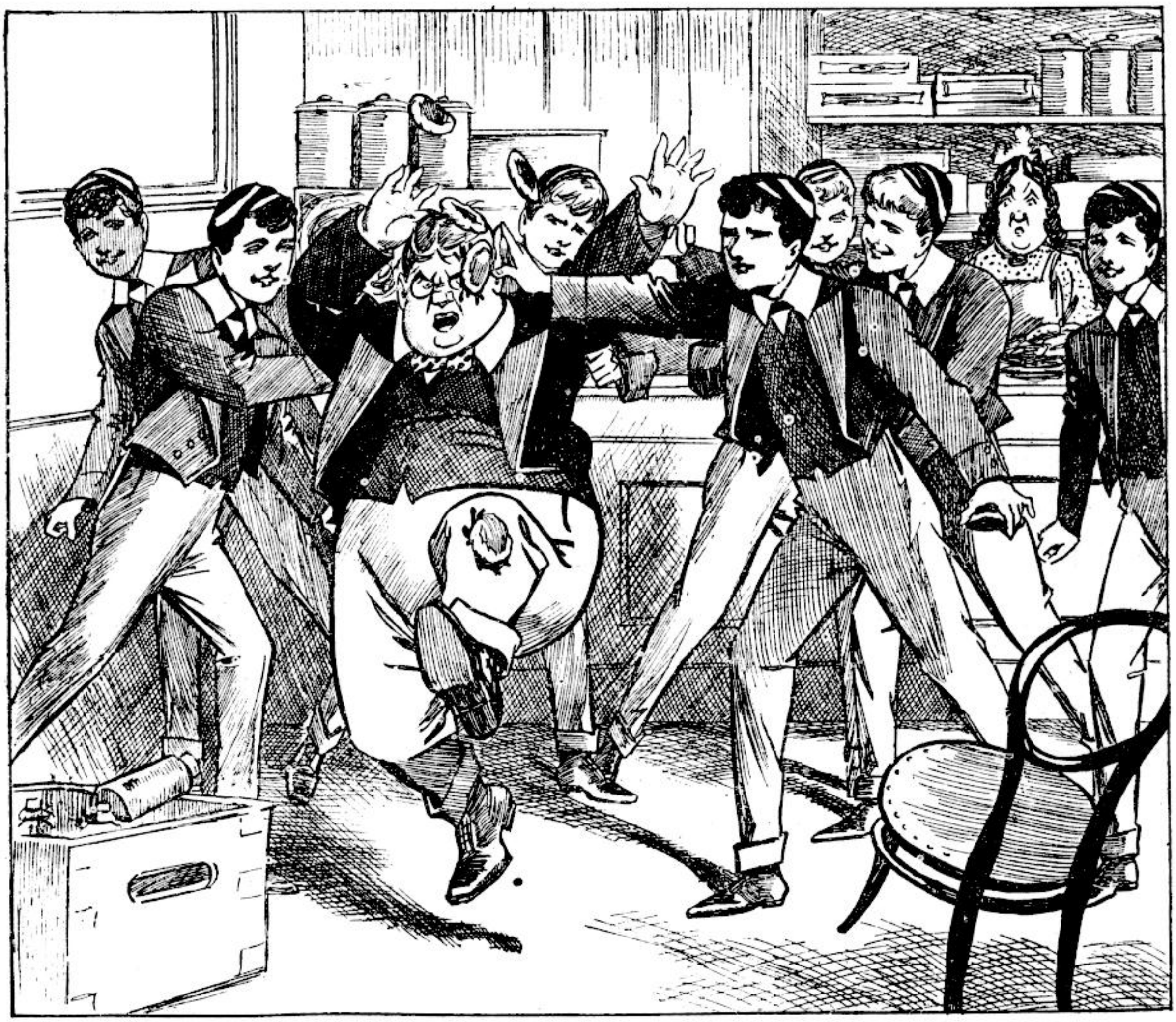
Then came Ponsonby's remark from the window.

"By Jove!" said Gadsby, starting up. "You don't mean to say he's got the cheek to come here, after all!"

"Looks like it," grinned Ponsonby.

"By gad, what a nerve!" said Monson.

"Comin' to play bridge on tick, absolutely," said Vavasour. "What offers for Bunter's I O U's?"



Johnny Bull grabbed up the jam-tarts with both hands, and plastered Bunter's face, his hair, and his fat neck with them. Billy Bunter yelled with wrath and indignation. "Yaroooh! Ugh! Huh! Stoppit! Help!"
(*See Chapter* 12.)

"Penny a hundred!" grinned Gadsby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The four elegant youths gathered in the window—keeping their cigarettes out of sight from the quad, however—and watched Bunter. The fat Removite looked very red and warm after his walk. He rolled puffing into the porch, and disappeared from view.

"He's really comin' here," said Ponsonby. "Goin' to offer us a little game for waste-paper, I suppose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall be sorry to hurt Bunter's feelings," drawled Ponsonby. "But we must really make it quite clear to him that his acquaintance is not desirable in this study."

"You bet!" said Gadsby. "We're not likely to be bothered by the fat brute, unless it's jolly well worth our while."

"Absolutely!"

Tap!

The door opened, and Bunter's fat face and big glasses glimmered into the study. The nuts of Highcliffe stared at him. Bunter wriggled into the room with an ingratiating grin. It was not at all the manner he would have assumed if he had had a crisp and rustling tenner in his pocket. But circumstances alter cases.

"How do you do, dear boys?" said Bunter feebly. "You didn't wait for me at Greyfriars, Pon."

"No, I didn't," assented Ponsonby icily.

"You—you see, if you'd waited, I could have told you about that letter," said Bunter, blinking at him.

"We know all about the letter," chuckled Gadsby. "Pon's told us It appears that your respected pater has bitten off more than he can chew. Is he going to be sent to prison?"

"He hasn't done anything to be sent to prison, you ass!"

"You mean he's not been found out?" asked Monson.

"Look here, Monson——"

"Awfully good of you to come, dear boy," said Ponsonby. "We were gettin' bored. You will amuse us, Bunter. Can you dance?"

"Dance!" said Bunter, with a stare.

"Yes, a step-dance, you know."

"No, I can't."

"Then we'll teach you. Put the poker on the spirit-stove, Gaddy. Get it nice and hot. We'll teach Bunter to dance."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The nuts of Highcliffe hailed the suggestion with enthusiasm. They were tired of bridge, especially as

AN IMPORTANT CHANCE IN THE "MAGNET." (SEE PAGE 5.)

funds were short. They did not feel inclined to join Courtenay and his team at cricket. But they were quite ready to amuse themselves by tormenting Bunter. Bunter was not a fighting-man, and he could be ragged to any extent without danger to the raggers. That just suited Ponsonby & Co.

Billy Bunter blinked at them in alarm. He had walked into the lion's den, as it were. He had only too painful a remembrance of previous raggings administered by Ponsonby & Co., and he knew their cruel proclivities. The nuts were not always good-natured in their little rags.

"I—I say, you fellows," stammered Bunter. "I—I know you're joking, of course."

"Of course we are," assented Ponsonby; "and the joke's up against you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I wanted to tell you about that letter——"

"Oh, never mind the letter now."

"It—it was only spoof, you know."

This was a "whopper," even more whopping than Billy Bunter's usual whoppers. But it had the desired effect. The manners of Ponsonby & Co. changed with startling suddenness. Gaddy, who was about to light the spirit-stove to heat the poker, blew the match out.

"Spoof!" repeated Ponsonby.

"Oh, yes, you know; just a joke on me!" explained Bunter, inventing with the facility that comes of long practice. "My—my brother at home, you know——"

"By gad!"

"You don't mean to say you've got your tenner, after all?" said Monson curiously.

Bunter slapped his pocket.

"What do you think!" he said boastfully.

The "blades" of Highcliffe exchanged glances. Ponsonby wished sincerely that he had not made that proposition about Bunter's dancing, and the hot poker. He felt that it would require a considerable amount of explaining away.

"Ahem!" said Ponsonby. "You—you'll excuse our little joke, Bunter. Of course, we—we were simply joking. I'd rather hot-poker Gaddy than you."

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"Let me catch anybody hot-pokering Bunter!" said Monson. "I'd jolly well dot him in the eye!"

"The fact is, we were rather annoyed at your being so late, Bunter," said Ponsonby. "We've put off all our other engagements this afternoon on your account, and we've been waiting for you. When you know that fellows are looking forward to enjoying your society, it's rather hard cheese to keep them waiting."

Bunter was all smiles again now. Flattery could never be laid on too thick for the Owl of the Remove.

"That's all right," he said. "Sorry to keep you waiting, but—but I had to get another letter, you know."

"With that ripping tenner in it—what?"

"Exactly!"

"Trot out the cards, Pon," said Monson. "We're going to have a really good time this afternoon. A chap like Bunter makes everything so jolly."

Tap!

"Hallo! Keep those cards out of sight for a minute!" muttered Ponsonby hastily, as a knock came at the door.

Monson shoved the cards into the table drawer as the door opened. But it was only De Courcy of the Fourth.

"Hallo, Caterpillar!"

The Caterpillar nodded affably.

"Hallo, dear boys! May I come in?"

"Trot in, old scout! Where's your father confessor?"

The Caterpillar grinned. It was curious that, although he had chummed up with Frank Courtenay, and given the nuts the "go by" in consequence, Ponsonby & Co. were always keen for a chance of getting him back into their select fold. The fact that De Courcy did not care a rap for them or their opinion probably had something to do with it.

"Franky is faggin' at cricket," explained the Caterpillar. "I've been watchin' them. I'm rather good at watchin' cricket, but a fellow gets tired in the long run. Frank is knockin' up runs, and staggerin' humanity at a terrific rate. So I've sneaked away."

"Join us in a little game, old chap?"

The Caterpillar shook his head.

"No, but I'd enjoy watchin' you," he said. "I've given up bridge, since Franky took me in hand, and snatched me like a brand from the burnin', you know. I simply dare not; it would shock Franky too much, with that tremendous morality of his that he learned among the workin' classes. But I'll sit and watch, if I may. The fact is, I spotted our friend Bunter comin' in." The Caterpillar made a graceful bow to Bunter. "Knowin' Bunter to be a bold, plungin' blade, I thought I'd like to see him rookin' you. So if I'm not in the way——"

"Squat down," said Ponsonby. "Lock the door, Gaddy! We don't want Mobby droppin' in on us."

The Caterpillar stretched his elegant limbs in a comfortable armchair. Ponsonby cherished a secret hope that when he saw the cards and the money, the old desire for play would stir in the Caterpillar's breast, and he would join in. Anyway, Courtenay would be annoyed when he knew that his chum had been present at gambling in Ponsonby's study, and that was something.

De Courcy watched them with an amused and ironic smile as they sat down to play. The Caterpillar had a peculiar sense of humour, and the sight of the Owl of the Remove in the character of a bold and plunging blade afforded him great enjoyment. He could have watched Bunter for hours, when that egregious youth was on the "razzle."

Billy Bunter felt flattered by the interest De Courcy took in him—not suspecting its exact nature. He knew all about De Courcy's tremendous connections and his swarm of titled relations, and he was prepared to be very chummy with the Caterpillar. He blinked at him encouragingly.

"Take a hand, old chap," said Bunter.

"No; I'm watchin'," he said. "It's a pleasure to watch a bold sportsman like you, Bunter. Go ahead!"

And the "sportsman" went ahead.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
The Little Game!

CECIL PONSONBY'S knowledge of the game of bridge, like Sam Weller's knowledge of London, was very extensive and peculiar.

Bunter's knowledge was decidedly limited.

Gadsby and Monson were their opponents, while Vavasour smoked and looked on. He was equally interested with the rest in the game, it being an understood thing that the four were to take equal "whacks" in the plunder.

If Billy Bunter's obtuseness had not excelled even his rascality, he could hardly have hoped to get the better of the three young sharpers, all keener than himself, and better versed in the game they had chosen.

But the Owl of the Remove was quite confident.

He had a great opinion of himself as a blade and a sportsman, and he flattered himself that he knew bridge inside out. His instruction had mostly been picked up from the Highcliffe fellows, who had assured him solemnly that his mastery of the game was wonderful—an assurance Bunter was quite prepared to believe.

Moreover, Bunter had the comfortable consciousness this time that he couldn't lose anything.

His pockets were quite empty, as a matter of fact, so far as money was concerned. Ponsonby & Co., who were "out" to take Bunter in, never dreamed that the fat junior was, in fact, taking them in. They fully believed that a tenner reposed in his pocket, and that when the rubber was over, that tenner would pass into their hands.

Had they known the state of the Bunter exchequer, they would hardly have wasted an hour in "dishing" him at bridge. Bunter was prepared to sign I O U's for any amount—which would be worth exactly the value of the paper they were written upon, and no more.

Billy Bunter had readily agreed to a guinea a hundred on the game—in fact, he would have agreed to a fiver a hundred, if the Highcliffians had asked him. He was there to clean them out, or to give them I O U's. The size of the stakes did not worry him at all.

The Caterpillar's smile grew more ironic as he noted that Bunter's partner, Ponsonby, was playing very badly indeed.

Ponsonby, though not great either in classes or in outdoor games, was very great at bridge, and certainly could have played a better game if he had liked.

Apparently he did not like.

De Courcy glanced very curiously at Bunter. The Owl of the Remove did not seem to have the slightest suspicion that he was being done. That Ponsonby was deliberately putting in bad play did not seem to occur to him.

"By gad!" the Caterpillar murmured to himself. "The silly duffer! They're going to rook him for five quid at least on the rubber. By gad, it will be amusin' to see his face afterwards!"

But De Courcy made no remark aloud. It was not his business, and he could scarcely invite himself into Ponsonby's study for the purpose of criticising Ponsonby's methods of rooking his visitor.

He waited for the denouement.

Owing to Ponsonby's methods, the rubber was finished in a remarkably short time, and Gadsby and Monson were easy winners.

"And a hundred for the rubber," grinned Gadsby.

Billy Bunter blinked at the cards, and at the score. Ponsonby gave a shrug of the shoulders.

"Shall we stay partners, Bunter?" he asked. "We'll double the stakes, and make 'em sit up in the next rubber."

"Certainly," said Bunter.

"By gad!" remarked the Caterpillar. "You are a howling sport, Bunter, old scout! You are a sticker!"

"What-ho!" blinked Bunter.

"There you are," said Gadsby, "we've done you by just five hundred. Five guineas, please! You can settle with me, Pon, and Bunter with Monson."

"Right-ho!" said Ponsonby.

As a matter of fact, Ponsonby had nothing like five guineas about him, any more than Billy Bunter had. But as the Highcliffe nuts were acting in concert, that was a matter of no importance. Ponsonby's half of the loss was not to be paid at all, that was understood, and Bunter's losses were to be divided after he was gone. But Ponsonby clinked several coppers together in his pocket, and then clinked them into Gaddy's hand, without letting them be seen, so that Bunter had the impression that Ponsonby had paid up in the customary manner.

"Well, Bunter?" said Monson pleasantly. "I'm waiting for my little bit."

"Settle up after the next rubber," suggested Bunter, his heart beginning to beat uncomfortably.

"Oh, no; a rubber at a time!" said Monson. "Stick to the rules of the game."

"Hardly worth while changing my tenner for a little bit like that."

"Oh, we'll change it for you!" said Ponsonby. "I'll cut down to the tuckshop with it, if you like. We want some giddy refreshments, and I'll bring them in."

"Well, the fact is——"

"Buck up, Bunter, old man; you're keeping the table waiting!"

"Ahem!"

The Caterpillar's smile broadened into a grin. Bunter's manner was a sufficient indication of the true state of affairs.

Ponsonby & Co. exchanged quick glances. All the honeyed pleasantness departed from their manner, and their looks were very grim.

"You'll pay up, please," said Monson quietly. "I'm waiting for you, Bunter."

"The—the fact is——"

"We can change your tenner."

"I—I—— For a small amount like that, I'd rather give you an I O U," stammered Bunter.

"We're not collecting impot-paper," said Monson. "Now, pay up. This is a serious matter, not a joke!"

"I—I——"

"I'm waiting."

"The—the fact is, I—I can't."

"You can't!" exclaimed all the nuts together, and De Courcy chuckled. He was finding the sporting scene in Ponsonby's study even more amusing than he had anticipated. That a fat duffer like Bunter should be

rooking the rooks struck the Caterpillar as decidedly funny.

"I'll give Monson my I O U!" mumbled Bunter, with an attempt at dignity. "I—I suppose you can trust me?"

"Do you mean to say," began Ponsonby, breathing hard, "that you've been telling us lies?"

"Oh, really, Pon——"

"Don't call me Pon, you fat swindler!"

"Swindler!" murmured the Caterpillar. "That's good—distinctly good!"

"You haven't a tenner, after all?"

"I've been disappointed," stammered Bunter.

"Then that letter from your pater was genuine, after all?" exclaimed Ponsonby, as he understood at last. "It wasn't spoof?"

"Well, you—you see——"

"You've come here without any money in your pockets to play with us?" said Ponsonby, scarcely able to believe such amazing "cheek."

He had never suspected Bunter of possessing so much cool nerve; and his ears burned at the idea that he, Cecil Ponsonby, had been taken in by a duffer like the Owl of Greyfriars.

"What's the matter with my I O U?" demanded Bunter. "Among gentlemen——"

"You fat rascal!"

"Oh, really——"

"Spoofed, by thunder!" exclaimed Monson, rising to his feet. "We've wasted three-quarters of an hour on that fat fool for nothing."

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled the Caterpillar.

"Shut up, De Courcy!" yelled the enraged Ponsonby. "The fat cad has taken us in, and he's going to pay for it. Collar him!"

"Oh! I—I say, you fellows——"

"Nail the cad!"

Billy Bunter made a movement towards the door, but Monson promptly put his back to it. The Owl blinked round him wildly. There was no escape for him. He was fairly caught.

Deeply, at that moment, Billy Bunter repented him that he had had that ripping idea of "spoofing" the nuts of Highcliffe. If he had won he would have pocketed his winnings, with his "stony" state undiscovered. He had not understood that he had about as much chance of winning as of flying.

As a matter of fact, he had acted like an unscrupulous young rascal, though, for that matter, he was in excellent company. It was a case of sharpers catching a sharper.

The Caterpillar was simply wriggling with mirth in the armchair. The scene appealed keenly to his peculiar sense of humour.

But the nuts were not humorous about it. They had fagged at bridge to clean out Bunter, and Bunter could not pay. He had led them to believe that he had a tenner, and he had nothing, and was never likely to have anything.

They were furious.

"Now, you fat rotter, you're going through it!" said Ponsonby. "You won't want to try to swindle us again in a hurry. Light that spirit-stove, after all, Gaddy, We'll make him dance!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Oh, dear! I say, you fellows——"

"Give him a stump to begin with," said Vavasour.

"Yank him over the table."

"Ow! Yow! Help!"

Bump! Billy Bunter, grasped by three pairs of hands, flopped heavily on the table, face downwards. Ponsonby flourished a cricket-stump.

Swish! Whack!

"Yarooooh!"

"Sock it to him!" shouted Monson. "Give him fifty!"

"Give the rotter a hundred!"

"Yow-wow-wow! Help!"

The stump went up again, but, as it was about to descend, Ponsonby's arm was caught in a grip of iron. He swung round savagely, and looked into the calm and smiling face of the Caterpillar.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
The Caterpillar Chips In!

"CHUCK it!"

The Caterpillar spoke quietly and calmly. He had lounged lazily out of the armchair, like the slacker he was. But there was nothing slack in the grasp he had fastened upon Cecil Ponsonby's arm. It was a grasp like a vice.

Ponsonby's face was passionate with rage.

"Let go, you fool!" he said, between his teeth.

The Caterpillar smiled.

"What language!" he murmured. "Pon, old scout, your manners are deplorable. Are you going to put that stump down?"

"No!" yelled Ponsonby.

"Then I must take it away, dear boy."

"You slackin' cad——"

"Shush!"

The stump was wrenched from Ponsonby's hand. The slacker of Highcliffe, the elegant and laughing Caterpillar, had great strength when he chose to exert it.

"I'm sorry to spoil the fun," said the Caterpillar apologetically, "but I can't see Bunter ragged like this, for nothin', you know. It's up to me to chip in, and I'm chippin' in. Awful fag, but I must do it."

"You know he's been rookin' us!" howled Monson.

"Well, what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, you know," purred the Caterpillar. "You did play badly, didn't you, Pon?"

"Mind your own business!"

"Certainly! Too much fag to mind anybody else's. But call it off, Pon. Let the fat bounder wriggle away——"

"I'm going to thrash him within an inch of his life!" shouted Ponsonby. "Do you think I'm going to let a fat fool like that spoof me?"

"Yow! Leggo! Help!"

"He ain't worth lickin', dear boy," urged the Caterpillar. "Now, be a good chap, and let him wriggle off."

"I won't!"

"Then I shall have to take him under my protection," said the Caterpillar. "Bunter, my giddy sport, you're under my wing."

Ponsonby clenched his hands furiously.

"Get out of my study, De Courcy!"

"Certainly! With Bunter. Come on, Bunter, my tulip!"

"Bunter's not goin' yet!" said Gadsby savagely.

"Bunter's goin' to have his lesson first!" snarled Monson.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Collar that cad and chuck him out!" shouted Ponsonby. And the four nuts advanced threateningly upon De Courcy.

The Caterpillar did not budge. His grasp tightened upon the stump he had wrenched away from Ponsonby.

"Think it over, dear boys," he urged. "If you put me to the trouble of lickin' you, somebody will get hurt. There, I told you so——"

"Yooop!" shrieked Gadsby, as the stump caught him on the head.

"Keep your distance, old scout. I don't want to brain you, but I can't fight four at once. Too much fag," yawned the Caterpillar urbanely, as the infuriated nuts crowded back from the stump.

Bunter had already rolled off the table and scuttled behind the Caterpillar. Ponsonby & Co. gave him and his champion deadly looks.

But the stump, flourished in De Courcy's hand, kept them back. They would have rushed the Caterpillar, unarmed, but the stump looked a little too dangerous.

"Open the door, Bunter," pursued De Courcy, with unmoved tranquillity. "I'm going to cover the giddy retreat."

"You rotter!" howled Monson.

"Shush, dear boy!"

Bunter dragged the door open, and scuttled into the passage. De Courcy made a graceful bow to the infuriated nuts, and stepped out after him. Twirling the stump like a walking-cane, De Courcy sauntered down the passage after the scuttling Owl of the Remove. Ponsonby & Co. did not follow.

De Courcy tossed the stump into a corner, and strolled downstairs after Bunter. He overtook the Owl of Greyfriars in the quadrangle.

"You'd better cut off, young 'un," he drawled. "Your giddy scalp won't be safe if Pon gets hold of you after this."

"The rotter!" mumbled Bunter. "He was jolly friendly while I had any money."

"It's the way of the world, my plump friend," remarked the Caterpillar. "It's a wicked world, dear boy. I'll see you to the gates."

"Hallo, Caterpillar!" Frank Courtenay, in flannels, joined them in the quad. "Where have you been, you slacker?"

"Watchin' Bunter spoilin' the Egyptians. I've rescued him from the ferocious clutches of Ponsonby & Co.," explained the Caterpillar. "Awful fag, but I did it. They thought Bunter had a tenner, and it turned out that he hadn't. Result—shockin' breakage of an old friendship."

Courtenay laughed.

"I'm seein' our sportin' friend to the gates," added the Caterpillar. "How many runs have you made, Franky?"

"Seventy."

"By gad! What energy! Well, here we are. I advise you to cut off, Bunter. Good-bye!"

Billy Bunter paused outside the gates.

"Hold on!" he said. "I say, De Courcy——"

"Well?"

"What do you say to a little game?" asked Bunter, blinking at him. "I'm fairly in the mood, you know. Right in the vein. I'll take you on at nap or bridge——"

"You'd better get off!" growled Courtenay, frowning.

"Oh, be a sport!" urged Bunter, with quite a sporting air.

"My plump young friend," said the Caterpillar, "in the presence of Franky I dare not quit the straight and narrow path of moral rectitude——"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Courtenay.

"Otherwise," said the Caterpillar, "I might be inclined to take on a desperate and roarin' blade like you, Bunter, for the sake of the thrillin' excitement. But it can't be did. Good-bye!"

"But, I say——"

Courtenay and De Courcy walked back into the gateway. Bunter hesitated. Then, catching sight of Ponsonby in the quad, his hesitation vanished, and he started for Greyfriars at a run.

And all the gratitude Billy Bunter felt towards the Caterpillar for his kindly protection was expressed in one word:

"Beast!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER.
Hard Up!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. had just come off the cricket-field when Billy Bunter came in. The Owl of the Remove crossed the Close, with a clouded and moody brow. Bob Cherry hailed him cheerfully.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

Bunter blinked at him dolefully.

"Had any luck?" grinned Bob. "Have you come home loaded up to the neck with the spoil of the giddy Egyptians?"

"Ponsonby's an awful rotter!" grumbled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They're all beasts! They only want me to visit them when I've got plenty of tin!"

"Go hon!"

"I'm done with those cads!" said Bunter. "I shall refuse to recognise Ponsonby after this! I shall cut him!"

"Most likely he'll save you the trouble, so long as you're stony," remarked Johnny Bull.

"The cads actually refused my I O U," said Bunter. "It's an insult, you know. Of course, I should have settled up in the long run."

"The longfulness of the run would have been terrific!" remarked Hurree Singh, with a chuckle.

"Oh, really, Inky! Of course, my pater's affairs will come round in time. Under the circumstances, I think you chaps might lend me a quid or two——"

"Good-bye!" said the Famous Five together. And they walked away, and Bunter went on to the School House, frowning.

Tea was over in No. 7 Study. Peter Todd was on the cricket-ground again, and Tom Dutton was doing lines, and Alonzo Todd reading a missionary report. Bunter grunted as he blinked in at the study door.

"I want my tea," he remarked.

"My dear Bunter, it was finished an hour ago," said Alonzo. "I am afraid there is nothing left. Have you not had tea with your friends at Highcliffe?"

Bunter snorted.

"You remember you told us your friends there were going to stand a very handsome tea," remarked Alonzo. "I understood that you always have a really high time when you go there, Bunter, because they are so fond of you. Otherwise I should certainly have left you some of the sardines."

Bunter snorted again. His "swank" had cost him his tea. He blinked into the study cupboard, but it was bare.

"Well, I want my tea," he said. "Ponsonby is a low cad, and I declined to have tea with him. Lend me a bob, Lonzy."

"I am so sorry that I am in a state of financial embarrassment."

"Dutton, old man, lend me a bob!" shouted Bunter, ruthlessly interrupting Alonzo's long-winded explanation of his stony state.

"Eh?" said Dutton.

"I haven't had my tea."

"What rot!" said Dutton. "You're too young to go to sea. Besides, your pater may pull round again, you know. Never say die!"

"Oh, you deaf ass! I'm not talking about going to sea!" howled Bunter. "I'm simply famished, and I want a feed. See?"

"You'd better ask the Head," grinned Dutton.

"Eh—why?"

"Tell him you want to go to sea, and see what he says."

"Oh, rats!"

Bunter gave Dutton up, and retired from the study, slamming the door. Alonzo opened it and peered after him.

"My dear Bunter——"

The Owl looked round hopefully.

"Found a bob?" he asked.

"No; but I suggest that you should ask some of your friends in this emergency," said Alonzo. "Skinner, I am sure, would be glad to make you a small loan, as you have been so very friendly with him——"

"Oh, bother!" growled Bunter. And he rolled away.

Alonzo's advice was well meant, but it was quite useless to Bunter. He had already learned how much reliance was to be placed upon the friendship of Skinner & Co.

But a scent of cooking attracted him to No. 14 Study. He blinked in, and discovered Fisher T. Fish frying rashers.

"I say, Fishy," mumbled Bunter, "I haven't had my tea, and it's too late in Hall, old chap."

"Too late for tea here, too, unless you can pay up the bob you owe me!" said Fisher T. Fish. "I guess I'm not a charitable institution!"

"Oh, really, Fishy——"

"Oh, vamoose the ranch, do!"

"Look here, do you want another licking?" asked Bunter, remembering how easily he had disposed of the Yankee junior on a previous occasion.

Fisher T. Fish did not reply. He picked up a pair of tongs and charged at Bunter. The Owl dodged out of the study just in time and fled.

"You come back, you fat mugwump, and I calculate I'll make potato-scrapings of you!" yelled Fisher T. Fish.

Bunter did not come back. He was looking for tea, not for a chance to be made into potato-scrapings.

His fat face brightened up at the sight of Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent coming up to No. 1 Study with packages in their hands. He joined them at once.

"I say, you fellows, I haven't had tea," he said pathetically.

"Too bad!" said Nugent. "We haven't either. Good-bye!"

"I'll have tea with you chaps, if you like."

Wharton shook his head.

"You can't have tea with fellows you don't know," he replied. "You dropped our acquaintance, you know."

"I—I—I was only joking," mumbled the wretched Owl. "I—I say, everybody's giving me the go-by now I haven't any money."

"Serve you right!" said Wharton cheerfully. "You swanked too much when you had any, Bunty."

"And—and the fact is, I'm expecting a postal-order——"

"You and your postal-order!" grinned the captain of the Remove. "Have you brought that postal-order to life again?"

"It—it's a fact, you know. One of my titled relations——"

"Bow-wow!"

"Well, I—I'm not expecting a postal-order," said Bunter desperately, "but you might ask a chap to tea when he's down on his luck."

Harry Wharton was not proof against this appeal. He took Bunter by a fat ear, and led him into the study.

"You can do the cooking," he said.

Bunter brightened up wonderfully. All his troubles were forgotten at the prospect of a feed.

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and Inky and Squiff arrived, to find the Owl of the Remove in his shirt-sleeves busily engaged in cooking. The chums of the Remove were in funds, and the tea was ample—which was fortunate, as it happened, for Billy Bunter was in his most wolfish mood.

All the unpleasant remarks he had made to the Co. seemed to have passed from Bunter's mind. He was quite willing to be pally.

Neither did the Co. seem to remember them. They could not help feeling a certain amount of compassion for the miserable Owl, whose short-lived prosperity had vanished for good. Bunter's swank was a matter rather for amusement than for resentment. In his present deplorable state they were good-naturedly willing to feed him up to his fat chin, and help him to forgot his troubles.

Billy Bunter did forget his troubles—for the present, at least. His fat face beamed over the well-spread board.

"I say, you fellows, this is something like!" he remarked. "Do you mind if I open the other pot of jam?"

"Go ahead!"

"Thanks! I must say you fellows are rather decent!" said Bunter. "You never had any of my money when I had any. That rotter Skinner won't lend me a bob!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at in that! And that worm Fishy is dunning me for a bob he lent me this morning. Why, I've stood him no end of feeds!"

"Such is life!" sighed Bob Cherry.

And Hurree Singh declared that the suchfulness was terrific.

"It's an ungrateful world," said Squiff solemnly, "and you were such a nice, sweet, agreeable chap when you were in funds, Bunty!"

"Yes; wasn't I?" said Bunter. "I'm sorry now that I wasted money playing nap with that cad Ponsonby. And then the tin I've blued on smokes! What a fat-headed thing to do, you know, when I might have saved it up to buy tuck with!"

"Experience boughtfully is better than taughtfully!" remarked Hurree Singh.

"Pass the tarts, Bob, old chap. Do you mind if I finish the tarts?"

"Not at all."

"Well, that was a jolly good feed!" said Bunter at last, when he was finished—which was not till the table was quite bare. "Now, I'll tell you what, you chaps."

"Well?"

"We'll have a game of nap to wind up with. I—— Hallo! Yoop! Wharrer you at?" roared Bunter.

He really did not need to ask that question. He found himself suddenly in the passage on his back, and the door slammed after him.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.
Friends in Need!

BILLY BUNTER'S fat face wore a lugubrious expression during the following days.

He was stony.

And he was not only stony, but he had the dreadful prospect of remaining in that state for the rest of the term, and perhaps longer.

For a while, while his father's prosperity had lasted, William George Bunter had basked in the sunshine of fortune.

He had soon grown accustomed to getting whacking remittances, and to having golden quids in his pockets.

It is easier to get accustomed to wealth after poverty than to poverty after wealth. So Bunter discovered.

And the consequence which his wealth had given him was a thing of the past now. He was a nobody again.

Instead of saying "when I get a tenner," he could only remark, "When I used to get tenners," and he found that there was a tremendous difference between the two.

Even his allowance was stopped; his pater naturally considering that, having had so much cash of late, he had been able to put by a little for a rainy day. It was in vain that Bunter wrote him pathetic letters, pointing out that the contrary was the case. His pater would not or could not help him. Indeed, Bunter, senior, was soon tired of hearing of William's troubles, and he wrote to tell him that he was lucky to be able to stay at Greyfriars at all, and that unless matters improved in his business he might have to take him away from Greyfriars at the end of the term.

There was no help to be had from home. Billy Bunter was plunged into the depths of the blues.

It was in vain that he strove to raise little loans on the strength of a postal-order he was expecting. The fellows knew that postal-order too well.

Good-natured fellows parted with a shilling or a half-crown occasionally, without any expectation of seeing it again. Lord Mauleverer "stood" him a whole quid. But money never lasted Bunter long. It all went the same way—to the tuckshop.

And he was not only stony—he was in debt.

Fisher T. Fish was his most persistent creditor. It seemed to give the Yankee schoolboy a physical pain to think of losing his "bob." He dunned Bunter for that unhappy shilling, up hill and down dale.

Then there were several tradespeople in Friardale and Courtfield to whom Bunter owed little accounts — tradespeople who had seen him changing banknotes, and had thus been led into giving him credit.

When the bills came in Billy Bunter showed them pathetically to Peter Todd, in No. 7 Study, and Peter kindly advised him to go bankrupt. Alonzo offered to pay all the amounts for him, at some future time when his financial resources should enable him to do so. Tom Dutton was not only deaf, but stone deaf, when Bunter tried to make him understand that it was up to him to see his study-mate through his difficulties.

So Bunter's fat, round face grew longer and longer every day.

Till at last, in the Remove Form-room one morning, Mr. Quelch called him out before the class. The Remove master had a paper in his hand.

"Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, in a thunderous voice, "I have received this account from Mr. Clegg, of Friardale."

"Oh, lor'!" groaned Bunter.

"It appears that Mr. Clegg has supplied you with eatables to the value of thirty-two shillings and threepence-halfpenny."

"Oh!"

"Mr. Clegg has written me a note, explaining that he did this because you had a banknote at the time, which he could not change. Otherwise he would not have given you credit. He tells me that he has asked you several times for the money, and that you refuse to pay."

"I—I haven't refused, sir!"

"Then why have you not paid this account?"

"I—I'm expecting a postal-order shortly, sir. Then I'm going to settle up in full with old Clegg."

"You had better do so at the first opportunity, Bunter. If this matter is brought to my notice again, you may expect the account to be sent on to your father, as well as severe punishment for yourself!"

"Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated Bunter, shuddering at the idea of accounts being sent on to Mr. Bunter in his present mood.

"Don't utter ridiculous ejaculations, Bunter. Go back to your place!"

He sat a picture of dismay for the rest of the morning. His reckless improvidence was coming home to roost.

When the Remove were dismissed, Bunter rolled out of the Form-room with a face of misery. Bob Cherry clapped him on the shoulder in the passage.

"Buck up, tubby!" said Bob kindly. "'Tain't the end of the world yet, you know."

"I'm done in!" groaned Bunter. "If that bill goes to my pater there'll be an awful row. He won't pay it."

Bob whistled.

"There'll be an awful row if he doesn't," he said.

"I know there will. Old Clegg will come to the Head. I shall have to leave Greyfriars!" mumbled Bunter. "And that isn't all—there's a quid due to the bunshop in Courtfield, and they're dunning me. Then there's thirty bob at the grocer's. They've no right to give schoolboys credit, you know, and it'll serve 'em right if they're not paid. But——"

"Well, there's ten-and-six at the hatter's, and about ten bob at the hosier's, and a pound at the confectioner's, and—and some more things I forget just now."

"My hat!"

"He owes me a bob, the swindler!" said Fisher T. Fish.

The Caterpillar wrenched the stump from Ponsonby's hand. "I'm sorry to spoil the fun," he said, apologetically; "but I can't see Bunter ragged like this, for nothin', you know. It's up to me to chip in, and I'm chippin' in. Awful fag, but I must do it." *(See Chapter 8.)*

"And me another!" said Skinner.

"He used to go into the shops when he had a banknote, and get credit by showing it about," remarked Snoop. "It was a dirty trick, in my opinion."

"You were jolly willing to have a whack in the grub, anyway!" hooted Bunter. "You ought to help me out of this!"

"I guess I want that bob, Bunter!"

"Come along with me, you fat chump!" said Bob, taking Bunter by the ear. "We'll go into this."

Bob Cherry's chums joined in the consultation that followed. They were all willing to help if they could. Not that they had any responsibility for Bunter, but it was pretty clear that if they did not help him nobody would.

And if Bunter's debts were not paid it was certain that serious trouble would fall upon him.

The Famous Five and Squiff and Peter Todd consulted solemnly. If the amount had been small they would have paid it among themselves. But it was not small. It was large.

They made Bunter bring all his various bills to No. 1 Study, and they went over them. Peter Todd figured out the total amount on a sheet of impot-paper. It came to seven pounds.

"You see, I could give 'em a bit each, and keep 'em quiet," said Bunter. "Something may turn up, you know."

"They've got to be paid," said Harry Wharton, frowning. "How much money have you got?"

"Oh, really, Wharton, of course I haven't any money!"

"Where the deuce is seven quid to come from?" said Bob Cherry blankly. "If they're not paid, Bunter may get kicked out of Greyfriars. It would be a good thing for Greyfriars, of course, but rather rough on Bunty."

"I'm expecting a postal-order——" began Bunter.

"Shut up!" shouted the whole meeting, in great

'exasperation. They were fed up with Bunter's postal-order.

It was a knotty problem, and the juniors tried to think it out. It was Hurree Jamset Ram Singh who made a suggestion.

"There is solefully one thing to be done," he remarked.

"Well?"

"The cash must be raised whipfully round. It is what you call in English an esteemed benefit. Suppose the Remove Dramatic Society gives a beneficial performance——"

"Bunter's benefit!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "What a ripping idea!"

"Good egg!"

"Good old Inky!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "That's the idea. A performance for Bunter's benefit, all the takings to go to Bunter!"

"Oh, good!" said Bunter.

"To settle his debts!"

"Oh!" said Bunter, his face falling again.

"We'll put our heads together, and make up a ripping variety show—something the fellows will like," said Wharton. "We'll charge a bob a head for admission, and reserved seats at half-a-crown. Lots of the fellows will turn up to help that fat idiot out of his fix, and to see the show."

"And if there's more than seven quid raised it can go to the cricket club," said Peter Todd.

"Good!"

"Oh, really, you fellows," exclaimed Bunter warmly, "you're jolly well not going to hand over my money to the cricket club!"

"Your money!" howled Bob Cherry.

"Yes, my money!" said Bunter firmly. "It's my money, I suppose, if it's raised for my benefit!"

"Oh, suffocate him, somebody!" said Squiff.

"The money will be handed over to me," said Bunter. "That's always done in a benefit. I can do as I like with my own money, I suppose!"

The Removite glared at him. But Billy Bunter was impervious to glares. Billy Bunter was standing up for his rights!

"In fact, the whole thing had better be left in my hands," said Bunter. "It's my benefit, and I warn you that I'm not going to have any interference."

"Oh, my hat!"

"A fellow can always manage his own business best, and I insist upon managing mine," said Bunter.

"Manage it then, you fat ass!" exclaimed Wharton angrily. "We've wasted enough time on you. Let's get down to the cricket, you chaps."

"Right-ho! Come on!"

"Here, I say, you fellows, you're going to back me up, I suppose?" exclaimed the Owl of the Remove, in dismay.

"No! We're leaving you to manage your business," said Bob cheerfully. "Manage away, old chap. We're not going to interfere."

And the Co. quitted the study, leaving Billy Bunter on his own.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bunter.

He jumped up, and pursued the meeting down the passage.

"I—I say, you fellows! I—I was only joking, you know. Of course I'm quite willing to leave it in your hands, you know."

"Too late!" said Peter Todd.

"Oh, really, Toddy, you're going to stand by an old pal when he's down on his luck?" said Bunter pathetically. "I shall get the sack, you know."

"Jolly good thing, too!"

"Oh, dear! I say, Bob, old man——"

"Rats!"

"Harry, old chap——"

"If you call me 'Harry, old chap,' I'll knock your head on the wall!" exclaimed Wharton. "Look here! We'll try to see you through this, you fat lunatic, if you promise to keep your silly head shut, and not to meddle."

"I—I'll agree to anything you like if you'll only shut up that beast Clegg, and all the other beasts!" mumbled Bunter. "It's a go!"

And the Co. returned to the study to consult upon ways and means for making Bunter's benefit a success, Bunter himself being excluded from the conference. The Co. had had enough of Bunter.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.
Getting Up the Programme!

BUNTER'S benefit!

There was a general chuckle in the Remove at the idea, when it became known.

Why anybody should exert himself for the benefit of Bunter, who certainly never exerted himself for the benefit of anybody else, was a mystery. But it is a curious circumstance that when a fellow expects to get things done for him, he generally does get things done for him. There are many persons in the world who have a cheery habit of laying their troubles on other people's shoulders.

The Famous Five and other leading members of the Form having undertaken the task of seeing Billy Bunter through his difficulties, most of the Removites were prepared to "do their bit."

The next day there appeared on the notice-board a prominent notice, in the handwriting of Harry Wharton, which was read with considerable interest by all the Lower School. It ran:

BUNTER'S BENEFIT!

On Saturday afternoon the Remove Players will give a Benefit Performance—a Variety Matinee—at 3 p.m. in the Form-room.

First-class Performance by the best Talent in the Remove. All your Old Favourites will appear. Merry and Bright!

Greyfriars Fellows are requested to back up the Benefit as One Man. Admission at the doors, One Shilling. Special Reserve Seats, which can be booked in advance. 2s. 6d. Apply at No. 1 Study for Tickets.

ROLL UP! BY ORDER!

"What the dooce does anybody want to benefit Bunter for?" Temple of the Fourth wanted to know.

"Bunter can generally look after himself," remarked Hobson of the Shell. "And I'm going to leave him to do it, for one!"

"I guess I'm keeping my cash in my trousers pocket," said Fisher T. Fish emphatically. "Bunter owes me a bob now."

But a good many of the fellows decided to go. After all, a bob wasn't much, and it would help a schoolfellow out of a fix, and there would be a pretty good entertainment, anyway. The Remove Players were always entertaining. Not like the somewhat dreary classical plays given by the Sixth, or the Shakespearian performances of the Fourth Form Dramatic Society.

Bunter's difficulties were pretty well known all over the school by this time, and schoolboys are proverbially good-natured. If anybody didn't deserve backing up, it was Bunter, but most of the fellows decided to back him up all the same.

Fellows who were not prepared to spend money were, however, prepared to do their bit by generously contributing to the performance. Indeed, if the manager of the Remove players accepted all the kind offers made him, it was likely that the performers would outnumber the audience, and that there would be a glut of talent at Bunter's benefit.

When it came out that the committee were in No. 1 Study, planning the programme for the matinee, kind helpers dropped in on them to offer their services. Billy Bunter himself was the first. Bunter considered it a good idea for him, personally, to take up half the programme with a ventriloquial entertainment.

He learned from the committee that ventriloquial entertainments were off, and, as Bunter persisted warmly, Bunter was soon off, too, with Bob Cherry's boot to help him off.

The next caller was Fisher T Fish. Fish, however, was not erring on the side of generosity. Fish did not regard it as business to do anything for nothing.

"I guess you galoots are making up the programme—what?" asked Fishy, as he inserted his long, thin nose into the study.

"We are," said Harry Wharton. "Good-bye!"

"I guess I can make a suggestion. What you want, to make this entertainment go, is some real, live American humour," explained Fish. "Well, I'm willing to give you a turn—say, half an hour—of the best and latest American jokes. I guarantee to send the audience into a roar. What do you say?"

"Rats!" was the reply of the committee.

"Now, you can't afford to miss this," said Fish persuasively. "And I guess I'll let you have good terms—generous terms."

"Terms?" said Wharton.

"Yep! I'll put in my bit for a small percentage on the takings; say, twenty per cent."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess I fail to see where the cackle comes in! Real American humour is the very thing you want. I guess I could accept ten per cent. of the takings.

"My dear chap, there wouldn't be any takings if the fellows found out there was going to be American humour at the matinee. Good-bye!"

"You drive a hard bargain," sighed Fishy. "I guess I'll be satisfied with five per cent."

"There's the door."

"Look hyer! If you reckon I'm going to give a turn for nothing you're off your guess!" said Fishy warmly.

"You're not going to give a turn at all," grinned Bob Cherry. "But we might be able to meet you on business terms. Suppose you give ten minutes of American humour——"

"Yep?"

"And you pay a quid into the fund——"

"What?"

"On those terms you can consider your services accepted," said Harry Wharton, with a nod. "And you're getting a good bargain. 'Tain't everybody who'd listen to American humour for ten minutes for one quid. But we'd stand it for the sake of backing up the fund."

"You silly jay!" shrieked Fisher T. Fish. "I guess you can go and chop chips!"

And the Yankee junior retired and slammed the door, leaving the entertainment committee chuckling. But the door reopened in a minute or so, and the long, thin nose of Fisher T. Fish reappeared.

"I guess I'm coming to the show, anyway."

"All are welcome," said Harry Wharton cheerfully. "Can I supply you with a reserved ticket? Half-a-crown, please."

Fisher T. Fish snorted.

"I guess you can keep your half-crown tickets, and I'll keep my half-crowns. You can give me a ticket for a bob."

"Pay at the doors."

"Yep. But this is the bob Bunter owes me," explained Fish. "I guess there's no screwing it out of him, so I'm going to take it out this way. You give me a ticket for a bob—that bob."

"No Yankees admitted on the nod. You pay cash, or you don't come in."

"Look hyer! There's a bob due to me——"

"Bow-wow!"

"I guess I'm not going to be done," said Fish indignantly. "If this hyer is Bunter's benefit, I guess I can come in for the bob Bunter owes me——"

"You can settle that with Bunter. Go and eat coke! Vamoose the ranch! Clear off! Buzz!"

"I guess——"

What Fishy guessed was never known, for Bob Cherry charged at him with a cricket-bat just then, and the Yankee slammed the door and fled.

"Now, about the programme," said Harry Wharton. "We've got Wibley down, in his impersonations, that's good. He's going to do Mr. Mobbs of Highcliffe, and the Caterpillar, and Bunter, and Coker of the Fifth—lightning changes, and so on. That ought to go down."

"The downfulness will be terrific!" remarked Hurree Singh.

"Then I give a recitation," said Wharton; "and there's a scene from Julius Cæsar by the players generally. Clog-dance by Mark Linley. That always goes down, and Linley does it a treat. Pathetic ballad by Nugent.

Franky can always do the pathetic bits. Comic song by Bob Cherry."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob.

"What's the song going to be, though?"

"That's all right; I'm making it up."

"Eh!"

"You see, we want a really good song for the comic turn," said Bob, who was chewing a stump of pencil thoughtfully. "When you want a thing well done, there's nothing like doing it yourself, is there?"

"Ahem!"

"I'm writing a war comic song," explained Bob. "Although I say it myself, it is a ripper!"

"The ripfulness is sure to be terrific!"

"It's an imitation of Gilbert and Sullivan," said Bob. "I suppose you know their old song about the policeman—'A Policeman's Life is not a Happy One.' Well, I think I'm rather improving on it."

"Ahem!"

"What are you all ahemming for?" demanded Bob. "Do you think I can't write a comic song?"

"Ahem!"

The ahemming was, as Inky would have said, terrific. Apparently the committee had some lingering doubts as to Bob Cherry's ability in the song-writing line. But before the question could be pursued further, the study door opened, and Skinner came in, with a genial grin.

"I've heard what's on," he remarked. "I'm going to help."

"Half-crown, please——"

"I don't mean that I want a ticket," said Skinner hastily. "But I'm willing to do a turn. I'm rather good at conjuring——"

"Kipps is going to give us a conjuring turn. Thanks all the same! Good-evening!"

"Look here, I'll make it a comic song if you like——"

"That's Bob's little bit. Shut the door after you."

"My hat! I suppose you don't want any casualties in the audience!" jeered Skinner. "Now, I ask you fair and square, is it the right thing to get an audience into a Form-room, where they can't get out in a hurry, and start Bob Cherry singing to them? Is it kind?"

Having propounded that query, Skinner had no time to wait for an answer, as Bob Cherry introduced his boot into the discussion, and Skinner departed from the study with a yell.

"I'm fed up with silly idiots coming here offering their silly services," said Bob; "and I don't see what you duffers are grinning at, either. The next silly idiot who comes in here will get this cushion on his neck!"

The grinning committee settled down to work again, and Bob resumed his labours upon the comic song that was to outdo Gilbert and Sullivan. A little later the door reopened, and Lord Mauleverer stepped in. Bob Cherry rose to his feet and grabbed the cushion.

"I hear——" began the dandy of the Remove.

He had no time to get any further.

Swipe!

"Oh, gad!" yelled Lord Mauleverer, as he sat down on the study carpet.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.
Tuck for Bunter!

BOB CHERRY flourished the cushion.

"Travel!" he roared.

"Begad! Oh, dear! Wow!"

"We don't want any comic turns, any conjuring tricks, and comic songs, or serious ballads, or skirt-dancers!" howled Bob. "You can travel along! Now, I give you one second and a half."

"But, I say, I've come to—— Yooop!"

Swipe!

"Hold on, fathead!" exclaimed Wharton, jumping up and jerking the cushion away from Bob Cherry. "Perhaps Mauly hasn't come to offer his services."

"Oh!" said Bob.

"Begad!" gasped Lord Mauleverer. "Is this a private lunatic asylum? If this is the way you treat fellows who come to buy tickets, you won't have a thumpin' big sale, I can tell you that."

"Oh, you've come to buy tickets!" stuttered Bob. "Sorry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors kindly picked up Lord Mauleverer. The slacker of the Remove seemed incapable of that exertion on his own.

"Awfully sorry!" said Bob. "You can consider the whole thing a mistake. I withdraw that cushion."

"You silly ass!" groaned his lordship. "I've a jolly good mind not to buy any more tickets now."

"Any more!" said Wharton. "You haven't bought any yet."

"Yaas, I have—eight! I've decided to take another eight, and I'll give the lot to fellows who can't afford 'em," said his lordship. "It will buck up the sale a bit, and I happen to have lots of tin just now. There's a quid, and you can give me the sixteen now."

"But you haven't bought eight tickets!" exclaimed Wharton, in perplexity. "What the deuce do you mean? You haven't been here before?"

"I bought 'em of Bunter," explained his lordship.

"Bunter!" yelled the committee, with one voice.

"Yaas!"

"Bunter! Oh, my hat!"

"Well, I paid him for them, but he told me to call here for the tickets," said Lord Mauleverer. "He said that was all right."

"All right! Oh, the fat rotter!"

"Begad! What's the matter?"

"There's your tickets," said Wharton. "You'd better have them, as you've paid for them. It means a loss of a quid to the fund. Come on, you fellows, and we'll look for Bunter. We may be able to save the quid."

"Begad! Hasn't Bunter paid in the money?" ejaculated his lordship.

"Fathead! Did you think he would?" hooted Johnny Bull.

"Well, as it's his benefit, you know——"

"Bow-wow!"

The committee broke up suddenly. Lord Mauleverer was left standing in the study, with a strip of tickets in his hand. The committee rushed away in search of the cheerful youth whom they were benefiting.

They would guess where to find him. They made a direct line for the school shop.

Billy Bunter was there, in all his glory. He was seated on a high stool at the counter, and Mrs. Mimble was being kept pretty busy in serving him. The shiny and satisfied look on Bunter's face indicated that Lord Mauleverer's sovereign had already passed over the counter.

"Bunter, you spoofing rotter!"

Billy Bunter blinked round at the angry Removites.

"I say, you fellows, you can sample these tarts, if you like," he said generously. "It's my treat!"

"Your treat, you—you Prussian! What have you done with Mauly's quid?" roared Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

Bob caught the Owl of the Remove by the collar, and jerked him off the stool. Billy Bunter came to the floor with a bump and a yell. His mouth was full, and he began to splutter wildly.

"Groooooogh!"

"Where's that quid, you spoofer?"

"Gerrrroogh! It was my quid, wasn't it?" spluttered Bunter. "Leggo, Bob Cherry, you beast! Groogh!"

"Hand over the quid!"

"I've spent it!" yelled Bunter. "I suppose I can do as I like with my own money, can't I? Ain't it my benefit?"

"You—you—you——"

The committee glared almost speechlessly at Bunter. The sale of eight reserved seats for the benefit was a leg-up for the fund; and Bunter had coolly appropriated the quid, and was expending it in tuck!

"You fat rotter!" gasped Wharton at last. "The money is being raised to pay your debts, not for you to guzzle!"

"That's all very well," said Bunter. "But I choose to use my own judgment about that. Very likely there will be plenty of money for all that, and some left over, and that's mine, of course. Have you fellows taken any money yet?"

"A quid so far, from Mauly."

Bunter held out a fat hand.

"Hand it over, then!"

"What!"

"Of course, I don't exactly distrust you, Wharton——"

"Distrust me!" said Wharton, almost dazedly.

"But I prefer to have my own money in my own hands. It's always safer for a fellow to look after his own money himself. Give me my quid, please."

"You—you—you fat idiot! We're going to pay your debts with the money we raise on the benefit."

"I can pay my debts with it myself. I'm afraid I must insist upon having the money in my own hands, Wharton."

"Insist!" stuttered Wharton.

"Certainly. I daresay you mean well—I'm willing to give you credit for that. But you're too jolly interfering. I simply can't stand fellows meddling in my personal affairs."

"Meddling!"

"What do you call it, then, when you want to keep my money in your hands?" demanded Bunter. "If I were a suspicious chap, I should think you were on the make. And, look here, I want strict account kept of all the takings. I don't say that I mistrust you, exactly—I wouldn't say that—but I don't want any mistakes made. I want you to keep careful account, and to hand me all the money as fast as it is taken. That's the most satisfactory way."

"So that you can blue it on guzzling, and leave us to find the money again to pay your debts!" howled Bob Cherry.

"That's my personal affair, Cherry, and I'm old enough, I suppose, to be able to manage my own affairs my own way!"

"It's no good talking to him," said Johnny Bull. "Has Bunter paid for all that tuck on the counter, Mrs. Mimble?"

"Yes, Master Bull—a sovereign's worth."

"Then he can have it!"

Johnny Bull gathered up fat jam-tarts with both hands, and started on Bunter. He plastered his face, his hair, and his fat neck. Billy Bunter yelled with wrath and indignation.

"Yaroooh! Ugh! Huh! Stoppit! Help!"

"Pile in!" said Bob Cherry.

The committee seized on the tuck, and bestowed it on Bunter. They gave it all to him—but not exactly in an eatable condition. The cool cheek of the Owl had exasperated them beyond all bounds. Tarts were squeezed down Bunter's back, ginger-pop was poured on his head, cream-puffs were squashed into his hair. The fat junior puffed and gurgled and wriggled wildly under the infliction, but there was no escape for him.

It was time that William George Bunter had a lesson—and he had it.

When the enraged committee had used up all the tuck, they quitted the shop, leaving Bunter sitting on the floor in a state that was, as Hurree Singh truly declared, terrific. Mrs. Mimble gazed at him in horror. Bunter crawled to his feet, and blinked at her through jam and cream and ginger-beer.

"Ow! Beasts! Wow! Beasts! They've done this because I won't let them keep my money! Groogh! They want to swindle me, I know that! Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

A little later there was a footnote to the notice on the board.

"N.B.—Tickets are to be obtained only in No. 1 Study. Any tickets sold by Bunter are valueless, and will not admit the purchasers to the matinee.—By Order."

That footnote simply made Bunter snort with indignation when he saw it. It confirmed him in his suspicion that the Famous Five were on the make, and that he would need to keep a very sharp eye on his money.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.
The Caterpillar Astonishes the Natives!

"HERE come the giddy guests!"

Courtenay and De Courcy, of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe, came along the Remove passage at Greyfriars. They were warmly greeted in No. 1 Study. It was Friday, and lessons were over, and the chums of Highcliffe had come to tea.

The Famous Five and Squiff were in the study, and Wibley of the Remove was there also. Wibley had his own reasons for being there. It was not the tea that attracted him, but the fact that the Caterpillar was coming. In the great benefit matinee on the morrow Wibley was to give his famous imitations, and the Caterpillar was to be one of the characters imitated.

Naturally, Wibley wanted to perfect himself in his part, by watching the manners and customs of the slacker of Highcliffe. He did not confide that to the Famous Five, however. They might have had doubts as to whether it was quite fair on a guest.

Considering that item in the programme, the chums of the Remove had some doubts about mentioning the matinee to their visitors; neither did they wish to appear in the unfavourable light of "sticking" their visitors to take tickets. Bunter's difficulties were no concern of the Highcliffe fellows, of course, and they could not be expected to support the matinee.

But as they sat down to tea, they discovered that the Caterpillar knew all about it. They had forgotten Bunter.

"Rippin' idea this of yours, this giddy benefit," remarked the Caterpillar. "I shouldn't have thought Bunter was so popular here. Some fellows have a wonderful gift of hidin' their attractions."

"Oh! You've heard?" said Wharton.

"Yaas. We're comin'."

"Yes, do come," said Wibley. "You'll find it awfully amusing."

Wharton gave the humorous Wib a warning glance.

"You're welcome, of course," he said. "As distinguished visitors, we'll give you free passes for the show."

"Not at all," said Courtenay. "We'll take tickets like the rest—in fact, we've taken them."

"Taken them?"

"Yes."

"From Bunter, I suppose?" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Yes; he met us coming, and told us all about the benefit," said Courtenay.

"Oh, the rotter!"

"Eh! I don't quite understand."

"Let's see the tickets," said Wharton.

Courtenay showed the tickets. They were scraps of impot paper, bearing the words in pencil, "ADMIT ONE TO THE BENNEFIT MATTINAY ON SATTERDAY." The writing was Billy Bunter's—and so was the spelling, for that matter.

"Aren't they all right?" asked Courtenay, with a curious look at the Removites. "As it's Bunter's benefit, we took it that he was entitled to sell tickets."

"Ahem! Yes, it's all right," said Wharton hastily. "I suppose you've paid for these—ahem!—tickets?"

"Yes."

"I'll change them for numbered tickets," said Harry. "Here you are—these are good seats, right at the front. Thanks for taking them."

The chums of the Remove realised that the lesson in the tuckshop had not been enough for Bunter. Like Oliver Twist, he wanted more. They inwardly resolved to give him some more when the Highcliffe visitors were gone.

"Bunter explained that this was bein' got up owin' to his wonderful popularity," remarked the Caterpillar. "It seems that the school will do anythin' for Bunter. Nice to be popular like that. They don't do these things for me at Highcliffe."

"Has Bunter sold any more tickets at Highcliffe?" asked Wharton, breathing hard through his nose.

The Caterpillar chuckled.

"I fancy not! He won't call on Pon again in a hurry. Pon's spreadin' a tale that Bunter's pater is stony broke, and goin' to be prosecuted for swindling on the Stock Exchange, or somethin'."

The Removites grinned.

"He's stony, I believe," said Wharton. "That part of

the yarn is true. That's why we're getting up the benefit for Bunter. The silly duffer got into debt when he was in funds, and now he can't pay, and he's being dunned right and left. It was too bad to stick you for these tickets, though."

"But we'll be pleased to come," said the Caterpillar. "Bunter's told us about the programme, and we know it will be good."

"Jolly good!" said Wibley.

Wharton glared with one eye at Wibley, the other eye being towards De Courcy. The captain of the Remove mentally resolved that some of Wib's imitations should be cut. In the presence of the Highcliffe chums, he could not be allowed to give his imitation of the Caterpillar, funny as it was.

But Wibley had no idea of making any change. He was watching the Caterpillar like a cat, noting every detail of him, spotting every turn of expression, to be used up later in his impersonation.

The Caterpillar, observant as he generally was, did not seem to know that he was the subject of Wibley's scrutiny. He hardly seemed to observe Wibley at all.

De Courcy was something of a curiosity to the Greyfriars fellows. He was a constitutional slacker, and yet at times he dislplayed the most remarkable energy, which showed what he was capable of if he ever chose to exert himself. But, curious as the Caterpillar had often seemed to the Remove fellows, he succeeded in simply astounding them during this little tea party in No. 1 Study.

After a while, he took up an egg-spoon in an absent-minded sort of way, wiped it carefully upon the table-cloth, and adjusted it behind his ear, as clerks sometimes adjust pens. All the politeness of Harry Wharton & Co. could not prevent them from gazing at him in blank astonishment. Courtenay stared at him, and turned a little red. There was a smear of egg-yolk upon the cloth, where the Caterpillar had wiped the spoon—and Courtenay had never known his chum to be dirty or slovenly before. It was utterly unlike the Caterpillar.

But De Courcy seemed quite unconscious of the amazement he had caused. He went calmly on with his tea. But that egg-spoon, glistening behind his ear, attracted their glances in spite of themselves. Unless De Courcy was "off his rocker" they did not know what to make of it.

Presently, the Caterpillar rose, in his calm, deliberate way, and turned round on his chair with its back to the table, and sat astride of it, and went on with his tea in that extraordinary position.

"My hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry involuntarily.

The Caterpillar glanced at him inquiringly, and Bob coloured.

"You remarked——" said the Caterpillar politely.

"Ahem! N-n-nothing," stammered Bob.

"Caterpillar, you ass!" murmured Courtenay, who was as astonished as the Removites.

De Courcy did not seem to hear.

Wibley's eyes were dancing with delight. He had known that the Caterpillar was a character, but he had never suspected him of these extraordinary peculiarities. His "imitation" would be simply a scream, when it came off!

But the Caterpillar was not finished yet. Having finished his tea, he tossed his cup and saucer into the sugar-basin in a careless sort of way. There was a general start.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Wibley, in delight.

Then the Caterpillar proceeded to pick out the lumps of sugar and drop them into the milk-jug, watching each lump as it dropped into the milk with a thoughtful and serious expression.

The Removites were silent, and almost horrified. They could only conclude that De Courcy was insane, and that it had broken out suddenly. Courtenay's face was very red.

"About time we were off, I think," said Courtenay, rising rather hastily. "We'll see you again to-morrow, you chaps."

"Three o'clock, the matinee," said Wharton.

"Right-ho! Come on, Caterpillar."

AN IMPORTANT CHANGE IN THE "MAGNET." (SEE PAGE 5.)

"Wait a minute or two, Franky," said the Caterpillar calmly. "There are a few lumps of sugar left."

"Caterpillar!"

"There!" said the slacker of Highcliffe, as the last lump splashed into the jug. "That's done! I can't think of anythin' else. Thanks so much, you fellows. I've enjoyed myself immensely—immensely!"

He detached the egg-spoon from behind his ear and laid it on the table, and, with the utmost calmness, collected all the other spoons and piled them into a heap on it.

The juniors watched him speechlessly. They wondered what on earth he was going to do next.

"Come on, Caterpillar!" urged Courtenay.

"Yaas, dear boy. Is that all right, Wibley?"

Wibley started.

"Eh?"

"I can't think of anythin' else," said the Caterpillar regretfully. "I'm not a fellow with much imagination, you know; I can't do imitations, or impersonations, or anythin' in that line. But I can give a really clever chap somethin' funny to imitate—that's the least I can do. You'll make 'em scream to-morrow, Wibby, with that egg-spoon bizney!"

And, with a genial nod, the Caterpillar lounged out of the study, linked his arm in Courtenay's, and walked off.

The chums of the Remove stared at one another. It dawned upon them suddenly that the Caterpillar had been pulling their leg.

"My hat!" gasped Wibley.

"Bunter must have told him!" stuttered Bob Cherry. "They said Bunter had told them about the programme. Wibley, you silly idiot——"

"He knew Wib was going to imitate him, and he was playing the giddy ox on purpose!" gasped Wharton. "He knew Wib was watchin' him—he's as keen as a razor. Wibley, you crass idiot!"

The juniors were crimson.

Wharton dashed out of the study, and overtook the Highcliffe chums in the quad. Courtenay was grinning now, and the Caterpillar smiling serenely.

"I say, you chaps," exclaimed Wharton, "I'm sorry——"

"So am I," said the Caterpillar affably; "I've just thought of a new wheeze. I'll stand on my head on the table, by gad! That will be rippin' when Wibley brings it off to-morrow. It will bring down the house, you know!"

"I'm sorry," stuttered Wharton. "I suppose Bunter told you?"

"Yaas, he mentioned what the programme would be like. That's why I decided to come. It's so hard to see oneself as others do, you know. That's where Wibby and his imitations come in so rippingly. I'm goin' to enjoy myself to-morrow," said the Caterpillar. "It will be simply a shriekin' turn! Let me go back and stand on my head; that will be a regular climax for Wibby."

"We're going to cut that part," said Harry.

"Oh, don't! I'm lookin' forward to enjoyin' it," implored the Caterpillar. "Give Wibby his head, I beg."

"It's going to be cut," said Wharton, "and I'm sorry——"

"Oh, don't mench, dear boy. Franky, I've been exertin' myself to amuse Wibby for nothin'," said the Caterpillar, with a sigh; "and I find any kind of exertion so tryin', too!"

Wharton returned to the study when the Highcliffians were gone with a grim expression on his face. Wibley was receiving all sorts of remarks from the other members of the tea-party.

"I don't know whether De Courcy is offended or not," said Wharton, "but I know that Wibley is going to have a jolly good bumping. Collar him!"

"Look here!" shouted Wibley. "Leggo, you silly asses! I——"

Bump!

"You're too funny, Wibby," said Bob Cherry. (Bump!) "You forget the laws of hospitality" (Bump!) "and politeness to a guest." (Bump!) "Your blessed imitations are going to be cut."

(Bump!) "And if you want to imitate something" (Bump!) "you can imitate a silly ass who's been ragged for being too jolly funny!"

And Wibley did, and the imitation was very lifelike.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.
The Benefit!

"WALK up, gentlemen! Bunter's benefit! Walk up!"

It was three o'clock on Saturday afternoon.

The Remove Form-room—used for the entertainment by the kind permission of Horace Quelch, M.A.—was growing crowded.

Quite a number of half-crown reserve seats had been filled. Wingate of the Sixth had kindly consented to come, and Courtenay had taken a ticket, and Coker of the Fifth had brought Potter and Greene, standing three tickets himself. It was very kind of Coker—who could be good-natured—and the juniors admitted that Horace Coker had his uses. The great Coker had told them that he was pleased to give their fag-show a leg up, and, as he paid seven-and-six for the privilege, they allowed him to call it a fag-show without bumping him on the floor.

Other purchasers of the half-crown seats were difficult to find, had not Lord Mauleverer come to the rescue. His lordship had generously purchased twenty-four seats at half a crown each and bestowed them on fellows who were willing to applaud the show if they could do it for nothing. It had cost his lordship three pounds, of which two went into the fund, the other having been expended in tuck by Bunter—tuck which Bunter had not really enjoyed.

The shilling seats were pretty well filled, too, and at the back of the Form-room a crowd of fags were standing, the committee having resolved to admit fags at half price to stand.

Bob Cherry and Bolsover major were the doorkeepers, burly fellows being required for that post, to argue with enterprising youths who wanted to come in on the nod. Every fellow who wanted to see that variety entertainment was required to "part."

Courtenay and the Caterpillar arrived in good time, the Caterpillar being in a smiling humour. As he explained to Bob Cherry at the door, he was "lookin' forward to seein' those rippin' imitations."

Nugent showed them to their reserved seats. Three o'clock had tolled out from the tower, and it was time for the performance to begin. Late comers bustled into the Form-room. In the passage Fisher T. Fish was glowering at the inexorable doorkeepers.

"I guess I'm not going to be left!" howled Fish wrathfully. "Don't I keep on telling you that Bunter owes me a bob. And this is Bunter's benefit, ain't it?"

"Shilling, please!"

"I'm not paying. That bob——"

"Scat!"

"Look hyer, I'm coming in!" roared Fish.

"Do," said Bolsover major grimly. "You'll go out again so sharp it will take your breath away."

"I guess——"

"Oh, buzz off, and make room for the nobility and gentry!" said Bob Cherry. "This way, gentlemen! This way for the great benefit performance! All your old favourites! Every item ripping, and every one a gem. Walk up!"

The last comer was admitted, and Bob Cherry closed the door. It was shoved open from outside, and Fisher T. Fish's long nose was introduced. That long nose had a narrow escape of being considerably shortened as Bob slammed the door again. Fishy jumped back just in time.

"Lock the door!" said Bolsover.

Bob Cherry turned the key. There was a kick on the door outside, and Fisher T. Fish's voice came through the keyhole.

"You mugwumps! You slab-sided galoots! I calculate I'm coming in. Bunter owes me a bob!"

But Fisher T. Fish was left to waste his sweetness on

the desert air. Bob Cherry and Nugent joined the Remove players behind the scenes. The matinee started with a piano solo by Harry Wharton, which the audience took quite good-humouredly, and when the solo was over a voice was heard from the keyhole:

"I guess I want this hyer door opened!"

Then the entertainment started. It was quite a good entertainment. Billy Bunter confided to all who would listen to him that it was not so good as it might have been, his ventriloquial turn having been excluded out of sheer jealousy and envy.

But nobody else seemed to mind the missing of the ventriloquial turn.

Wharton's recitation, and Nugent's pathetic ballad, and Kipps's conjuring tricks, were well received. Then Wibley came on with his impersonations. They were really very clever, and Wib changed at lightning speed between the representation of one character and another. He did Fisher T. Fish, and Mr. Mobbs of Highcliffe, and Billy Bunter, and several other characters in turn, and the Caterpillar waited for the impersonation of himself.

But it did not come. Instead of that there came the sound of a heavy bump behind the scenes. Apparently Wibley was being argued with. Wib's voice was heard proceeding excitedly from behind the screen.

"I tell you it's the best of the lot! I tell you——Yarooooh!"

Bump!

The audience chuckled, and nothing more was heard or seen of Wibley. Apparently the Remove players had succeeded in convincing him.

Bob Cherry came on next with his comic song, accompanied on the piano by Harry Wharton. The audience showed considerable interest in that song. It was announced as Bob's own composition, and it was written on the lines of Gilbert's most amusing song, "A Policeman's Life is not a Happy One."

There was a buzz of encouragement as Wharton struck up the opening bars, and Bob Cherry, looking very red, cleared his throat to begin. Bob was a general favourite.

"Go it!" sang Vernon-Smith. "On the ball!"

And Bob Cherry went it, in the following style:

"When the enterprising burglar isn't burgling, isn't burgling,
When the cutthroat isn't occupied in crime,
He likes to hear the little brook a-gurgling, brook—a-gurgling——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A yell of laughter interrupted the singer. Bob Cherry, in some slight confusion under the gaze of so many eyes, was singing the original song, instead of his new rendering thereof.

"I've heard that before!" said Coker of the Fifth to Potter. "That ain't original. I know I've heard that before!"

Bob Cherry stopped.

"Try again!" sang out Peter Todd. "False start! No ball!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton restarted on the piano, and Bob Cherry, looking very crimson, restarted, too, this time going on to his own up-to-date version:

"When the enterprising Zeppelin isn't zepping—
Isn't zepping,
When the Kaiser isn't occupied in crime,
He likes to see his surly Huns goose-stepping—
Huns goose-stepping!
And watch his Pickelhauben marking time;
In vain he seeks his enemies to smother,
In vain he seeks a nice place in the sun,
Taking one consideration with another—
With another,
A Kaiser Bill is not a happy Hun!"

CHORUS—with nearly all the Remove joining in with the full force of their lungs:

"When he sees his rotten Prussians on the run—
On the run,
A Kaiser Bill is not a happy Hun!"

There was a shout of applause. The fags stamped their approval on the floor, and the Removites clapped their hands and cheered. Bob Cherry had succeeded in making a hit.

It was some minutes before silence could be restored for the second verse, which Bob Cherry then delivered, to be cheered again to the echo. Bob Cherry retired with his blushing honours thick upon him.

Then, as the applause died away, a disdainful voice was heard from the open window:

"I guess I could beat that, slick!"

Fisher T. Fish, not to be denied, was sitting on the window-sill, and looking in. Bolsover major jumped up and made a bound for the window.

Fish did not wait for him to arrive. He rolled off the sill and disappeared, and a fiendish yell from the quad hinted that he had not fallen upon his feet.

The matinee proceeded without any further assistance from Fisher T. Fish.

From one item to another the benefit matinee ran its course, with great success, though Temple, Dabney, & Co. made disparaging comparisons between blessed variety show and their own splendid Shakespearian performances. But the audience appeared to be satisfied, and that was the great point.

When the performance was over Courtenay and the Caterpillar congratulated the Remove players on their success, but the Caterpillar reproached them gently with leavin' out the rippin' imitations he had been lookin' forward to. As he complained, he had exerted himself in No. 1 Study the previous day all for nothin'.

Billy Bunter ran down the committee in the green-room. Bunter was chiefly anxious about the takings.

"How much?" was his first question.

Harry Wharton was counting the money handed in by the doorkeepers, and adding it to the sum already taken for reserved seats.

"Six pounds three shillings!"

"Seventeen bob short," said Peter Todd. "We can make that up by a whip-round among ourselves."

"I say, you fellows——"

The seventeen shillings was accordingly whipped up. Peter Todd slid the money into his pocket, where Bunter's bills already reposed. The task of settling the accounts had been entrusted to Todd. It could hardly be entrusted to Bunter.

"I say, Toddy," said the Owl of the Remove, in dismay, "that's my money, you know!"

"You can come with me and pay the bills if you like," said Todd.

"I—I on second thoughts, you fellows, I—I think I'll let those bills stand over for a bit. I'll pay 'em something on account, you know."

"Will you?" grinned Peter Todd.

Peter started for the door.

"Gimme my money, Toddy, you beast!" roared Bunter. "I believe you're on the make, you rotter!"

"Nice youth!" murmured the Caterpillar, gazing at Bunter in great admiration. "It must be very encouragin' to help Bunter out of a fix—very!"

"On the make!" said Peter grimly, digging his knuckles into Bunter's collar. "You can come and see the bills paid, you fat villain! We've got about five miles to cover in all, and we're going to walk."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I'll leave it to you!"

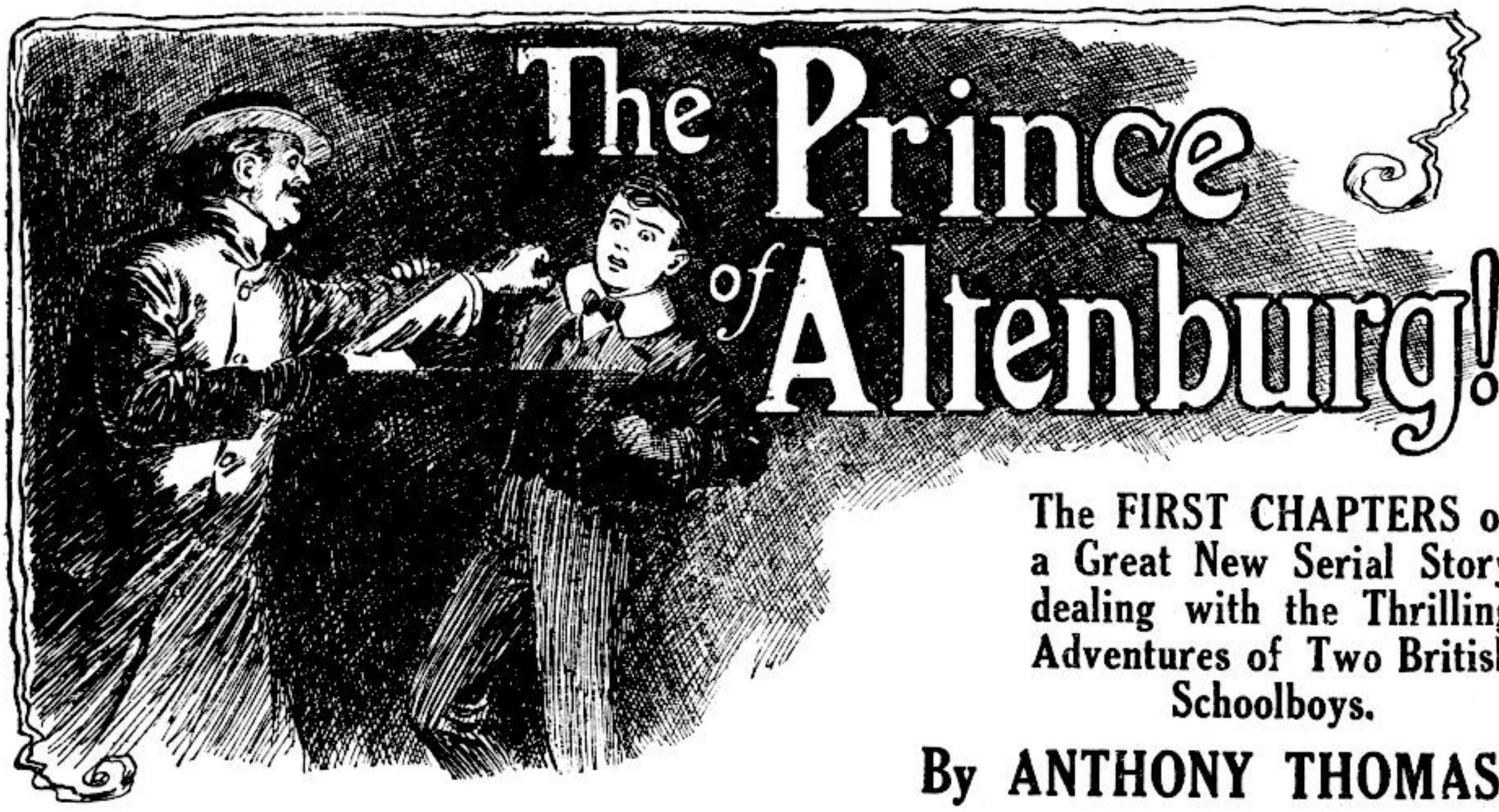
"No, you won't!" said Peter Todd cheerfully. "You'll come!"

And Bunter went; he had no choice about it. When Peter Todd returned from that long walk he looked fresh enough; he was a good walker. But Billy Bunter collapsed into the armchair in No. 7 Study, and did not move for a good two hours, breathing like a grampus all the time.

The benefit had been a great success. The Owl of the Remove had been rescued from his difficulties. Whether Bunter would be thankful or not, the rescuers hardly knew. But they soon discovered. For a long time after that famous matinee Billy Bunter was in the habit of giving out dark hints about selfish and designing fellows who had made profits out of a certain performance, and who wouldn't hand over to a fellow his own money, which was the total amount of gratitude the Remove players received for Backing up Bunter!

THE END.

START IT TO-DAY!



The Prince of Altenburg!

The FIRST CHAPTERS of a Great New Serial Story dealing with the Thrilling Adventures of Two British Schoolboys.

By ANTHONY THOMAS.

THE FIRST INSTALMENT.

Two boys of St. Dunstan's School, JACK DARRELL and TEDDY BURKE, are discovered trespassing by an irate farmer, Mr. Stone.

In order to appease the farmer's wrath, Teddy Burke shows him a copy of a newspaper containing a portrait of THE PRINCE OF ALTENBURG, and leads him to believe that Jack Darrell, who bears a strong resemblance to the portrait, is really the prince, and that they were coming to ask his permission to be shown over the farm.

Mr. Stone is unable to keep the knowledge that a prince is a scholar at the local college to himself, and eventually the news reaches the ears of a person named Lewis Mackay, who is staying in the neighbourhood.

Mackay, under the impression that Jack Darrell is really the Prince of Altenburg, kidnaps both him and his chum, Teddy Burke.

The chums eventually find themselves on board the German submarine V2 and under the care of a person named BARON ZELLING.

Suddenly the submarine is attacked and sunk. The crew and their captives jump from the sinking vessel into the water, and, with the aid of their lifebuoys, are floating about on the surface of the sea.

(Now go on with the story.)

Derwent Hood Gets to Work!

Even while Darrell and Burke were still floating about in the North Sea many things, apparently wholly unconnected with them, were being discussed in England.

At St. Dunstan's, of course, their disappearance overshadowed all other news. No one could throw the faintest light on the mystery. The Head could not believe that either of them had deliberately run away, yet that was the easiest solution of all. What else could have happened? The idea that two ordinary healthy schoolboys should or could be kidnapped was too preposterous to consider for a moment. He sent wires to their parents, asking if they could give him any news.

"I should not be surprised if it were another of Burke's foolish jokes," the Head told Mr. Stannard, their Form-master. "I expect we shall see them back here in a day or two—and I shall have something to say then."

"Oh, they'll return here quickly enough!" Mr. Stannard agreed. Neither he nor the Head for one moment conceived the possibility that months would pass before this apparently trifling mystery would be fully solved.

Nor did they for one instant connect the special news in their papers on the following morning with the two boys. It was good news, and the papers made much of it, though the official announcement was bald enough.

Briefly, it was reported that H.M.S. Castrian, of the Home Fleet, had on the previous afternoon sunk a German submarine of the latest type. The circumstances were such that it was a proof of the fact that British gunnery practically never failed, even under the most trying conditions. Although the submarine was running at full speed and not submerged, the second shot had hit her, and the commander of the Castrian had no doubt whatever that she had been sunk.

In the same paper was an account of a police raid on the house of a Baron Zelling, a German who had lived in England for many years, but had long been suspected of being in the pay of the German Government. His house, which was situated right on the South Coast, had been carefully watched, and late on the Thursday night the police had forcibly entered it, and discovered that their suspicions were more than justified. Baron Zelling was not there, but a number of his servants, alleged to be Germans, had been made prisoners.

Now, there was one man that morning to whom the last item of news gave no satisfaction, although he had been mainly responsible for the raid. Derwent Hood, a man of about eight-and-twenty years, sat kicking his heels and watching the clock in a certain office in Whitehall. He looked annoyed, and every time his eye fell on that paragraph headed "Important Police Raid: German Spies Discovered at Rushingford!" he grew more annoyed.

For Derwent Hood was one of the youngest members of the British Counter-Espionage Service, whose duty it is to outwit the Secret Service of any other country who may wish to know too much about Britain's defences. And already Hood was marked down for a high place in the Service. His latest task had not been a difficult one, but he had made sure of every detail, and had waited until the right moment.

On Tuesday night he had personally superintended every detail of the raid on the house of Baron Zelling. He had known of every movement of the baron's and of his chief assistant, Stradwell, known in England as Mackay. He had known of the latter's kidnapping exploit, though the reason for it was not quite clear at the time. Every proof that was needed to bring Zelling within reach of the law was in Hood's hands.

And his prey had escaped after all. He had merely cap-

tured the jackal while the master-spy had disappeared, and with him had gone the two boys.

As he sat waiting in the Whitehall office Hood thought over the whole matter again. He began to understand certain things which had not been clear to him before.

Suddenly the electric-bell above his head rang insistently, and Derwent Hood sprang to his feet. A moment later he was entering the office marked "Private" at the far end of the room.

It was a plainly furnished office in which he now stood. In the centre was a big, broad writing-table, piled high with books and papers. At the desk sat a man of five-and-fifty years, dressed in the uniform of a major-general. Derwent Hood saluted him as he entered the room, then stood at attention in front of the desk.

"Well?" General Brodmin looked at Hood sharply. "I have read your report. It's all right to a point. But where is Zelling? Have you got him yet?"

"No, sir," Derwent Hood answered. "Every precaution was taken, but Zelling got away—with the two boys."

"Two boys! What two boys?" the chief of the Counter-Espionage Staff was noted for his bluntness.

"The two boys referred to in my report. Stradwell or Mackay was shadowed, of course, and with the help of another of Zelling's men he kidnapped two schoolboys. I begin to suspect why."

"Then say so!" retorted the chief.

"Because for some reason they believe one of them is Altenburg. I believe, too, sir, that Zelling and the boys get away in a submarine."

"What?" the general shouted. "And you let him go? And—I think I see the game now. Do you know if this boy bears any resemblance to Altenburg?"

"I believe he does, sir."

"Um!" The chief almost forgot to be angry for a time in considering the new problem which had arisen. "So Zelling has escaped you, and taken away a dummy prince? Whether he believes it or not, he'll swear it's the genuine article."

He sat for a few moments in silence, then suddenly looked up again.

"Hood!"

"Yes, sir?" Derwent Hood was at full attention.

"This may be much more serious than it seemed at first," the chief said slowly. It was a most unfortunate error to let Zelling slip through your fingers, and if what you imagine is true—and I can quite believe it—that he has been picked up by a submarine, and the two boys are also with him, it may be a tragedy—for you! You understand?"

"Yes, sir," Hood answered quietly.

"Good! Then you know what is before you now. I cannot hope that we shall ever see Zelling again, but at all costs he must be prevented from using those boys. If they give out the statement that Altenburg has joined them, it will be more serious than Zelling's escape. You can go now. I don't care when you return, but when you do, it must be to report that the dummy prince is safely back in England. If you can also report that Zelling is back, too, it will go to your credit. Any development may be reported briefly. You understand?"

He nodded curtly, and Hood brought his hand to the salute again as he answered, "Yes, sir." Then he turned sharply and left the room.

In the outer office he stayed only long enough to pick up his hat and stick. No one meeting him as he passed down Whitehall would have guessed that the smart, well-dressed young man who sauntered aimlessly along was until this morning one of the most important men in the British Secret Service. Nor did his manner suggest that he had just faced the hardest blow of his career, and was now confronted with an almost impossible task.

He went into St. James's Park, and sat there for a time, planning and puzzling over the next steps he must take.

There was only one way, and the sooner he got to work the better. He went back to his rooms and prepared for a journey.

It was six o'clock that evening when Derwent Hood came out again. But he was no longer the well-dressed, smart young man. He was wearing ill-fitting clothes, and carried a very ancient Gladstone bag, which contained, among a few articles of personal use, certain odd tickets, which proved that Gustav Benzman had been interned in England as an alien enemy. There were also one or two rough sketches of the work the interned man had done. They were of no earthly use to anyone, but they might prove that Gustav had tried to serve his Fatherland even while he was a prisoner.

The first call that Hood made was in the same building where he had spent so much time this morning. But he went now to a different office, where two or three men sat at desks, working as though for dear life.

A sign, and one of the men got up and held out his hand to Hood.

"Hallo! Off again?" he asked. "If you get very far in that rig-out it doesn't say much for our men."

"I hope to get to Berlin, anyhow," Hood answered cheerfully, "but thought I'd just drop in here to let you know my identity in case I get into trouble over there—Gustav Benzman, late of London and Fairfield Concentration Camp. You'll note it?"

"Right!" The other man nodded, but did not smile. Then, as a messenger entered the room, he turned to take the package from him.

"I don't suppose there's anything to interest you here," he said, as he unfastened the envelope. "Principally shipping stuff. Um! Not much excitement, here, Zelling. Let's see—weren't you on that job? You'd better have a glance at this. Though I suppose I'd better send it to the chief?"

He handed a flimsy sheet over to Hood, who read the brief message it contained.

"Great Scott! Yes. Send it to the chief. He ought to see it." And Hood dropped into a chair. "That knocks my little trip to Berlin on the head. But what on earth can I do now?"

"I should think the best thing you can do is to go hime and dress yourself respectably," retorted his friend, but Hood failed to see any joke in the remark. He rose slowly from the chair.

"Yes, yes. I think you're right," he said absently. "I'll get home again."

As he went out the man in the office turned to another, and smiled.

"He's a good fellow, Hood!" he said. "But I never saw a man take work so seriously. If he's after this chap Zelling—well, it's bad luck for Zelling, I say! Derwent Hood has never failed on a job yet, and he's had some stiff ones!"

Bound for Rio!

How long Jack Darrell lay tossing about upon the waters he had no idea. A numbness gradually overcame him; it was not unpleasant, but he had no thought or feeling for anything. He was just content to lie there, rising and falling with the waves.

He seemed to waken from a dream to hear someone talking near at hand. Even then he was too tired, too sleepy, to trouble much. Only when he felt himself being lifted from the water did he realise that help had come at last.

"English—an English boy!" he heard someone say, but the voice was that of a man who could speak very little English.

Then a gruff, yet cheerful, voice broke in:

"Another of 'em! I'm blowed! If there ain't been some dirty work round here my name's not Davy Faggott! Hand him over!"

As he was moved again Jack opened his eyes, and found himself looking up into the face of a big, burly man, whose short, straggly beard had never been trimmed in his life. He put Jack comfortably enough in the bottom of the boat, and covered him over with a thick coat.

"Don't you worry, me lad," he said, as he stood up again. "You're safe enough now. Just you shut your eyes, and think you're back at home again, and I'm your nursemaid looking after you."

Jack smiled a little, but he needed no advice to shut his eyes; it was impossible to keep them open

When, after much banging and bumping, lifting and carrying, he found himself being laid down once again, he made another attempt to look around him. The big sailor was still standing near him, but there was no longer the sky above him. He was in the centre of a boat now.

"Feelin' a bit better, are you?" asked the sailor. "It's lucky for you, my lad, that I've got a good pair of eyes in my head, else where'd you and your pals be now, I'm askin'?"

"My pals?" asked Jack. "Did you find any of the others, then?"

"Two more," the sailor answered cheerfully. "Another young fellow about your own age. He's pretty bad, I can tell you, and they've got him in the captain's cabin. An' then there's a funny-lookin' Johnny, who says he's a baron, or somethin' o' that."

"Then Teddy Burke—my chum is safe, after all?" Darrell gasped. "And we're on a British ship?"

"Don't you run away with no notions of that sort?" Davy Faggott answered. "This boat's a neutral, and there's precious few Britishers aboard her—me an' Sam Lease, that's all."

"What is it, then? Where are we going? Where are we now?"

Jack sat up suddenly as his mind began to recall all that had happened.

Davy Faggott did not answer for a moment, but went to the door of the cabin. Jack could not see what happened, but when Davy returned he brought a big can of hot tea.

"You just drink this," he commanded, and poured half a pint or more of the steaming liquid into a smaller can that stood on the little table. "Then I'll tell you all about it."

The tea seemed wonderfully good to Jack, and it sent the blood coursing through his veins again. A curious sense of satisfaction began to steal over him; he was safe and free from harm, and his chum, Teddy Burke, was also safe. He wanted to hear more about Teddy, and to know when he would be able to see him.

"He'll be along here in a short time," Davy Faggott told him. "They're just patching him up a bit in the captain's cabin, and the other chap's there, too. Nothin' wrong with him except funk. He's goin' to be a nuisance, I can see."

"Why?" asked Jack.

"Wants the captain to make for Rotterdam—started just as soon as ever he got on board and found where he was bound for. But it ain't likely!"

"Where are you bound for? And what boat is this?" Darrell was full of questions.

"You're in the Tronjeim now, and it's a Norwegian boat," Faggott said. "Me an' Sam Lease, who's another Yarmouth man, are the only Britishers aboard. But the captain and the mate know English right enough. And if you want to know where we're going to—well, it's a place called Rio, though they call it Rio de Janeiro on the map."

"That's in South America, isn't it?" Jack asked, and Faggott nodded. "But where's the first place you call at?"

"First stop Rio," Davy Faggott said cheerfully. "And a nice little sea-trip you'll have before you get there."

The cabin-door was opened again, and a tall, well-built man came in. Instinctively Jack guessed this was the captain of the Tronjeim; and behind him came two other figures, both of them looking almost equally ludicrous.

It was Baron Zelling who followed the captain in, and he was dressed now in an old, ill-fitting suit that made him look a much less important person than when Jack first met him. His usually fine military moustache was as bedraggled and untidy as his hair, and his whole appearance certainly suggested shipwreck.

The figure behind him was if anything more comical. For a moment Darrell scarcely recognised his chum in this new get-up. An old and over-large suit of pyjamas was partly covered with a blanket, while his head was bound tightly in bandages.

"Hallo, Teddy!" Darrell was still in his own wet clothes, and the captain was quick to notice it. He spoke sharply to Davy Faggott, who left the cabin at once.

Burke half stumbled, half ran across the cabin.

"Jack, you're all right, then?" he asked. "Thank goodness!"

Zelling also seemed pleased to see Jack quite fit and well.

"Ah, my little foresight was wise was it not, prince?" the baron asked. "I am telling our good captain here of our adventures. He is going to turn his ship, and to-morrow we shall be in Germany quite safely."

"I did not say so," said the captain, without looking at Zelling. "I said I did not know. Are you the Prince of Altenburg?"

He put the question to Jack, who by now had managed to get himself into a fairly comfortable position on the locker, and was still engaged in drinking the tea which Davy Faggott had given him.

Jack met the captain's gaze squarely as he answered.

"I am not," he said, very definitely, "and never was. This man who calls himself Baron Zelling kidnapped me—why, I don't know."

"I see," said the captain. "And you don't want to go to Rotterdam?"

"Not a bit," Jack answered. "All I want is to get back to England as quickly as possible."

The captain shook his head.

"I cannot land you in England. It is too dangerous. I have my orders."

"But you can go to Rotterdam," Zelling said quickly. "There is no danger in that. This boy does not speak the truth. He is the Prince of Altenburg, and it is his duty to go back. I undertake to make it worth your while. You shall be paid in Rotterdam."

For a moment the position seemed doubtful. The captain looked at Zelling, then turned to Burke.

"Do you wish to go to Rotterdam?"" he asked.

"I don't," Teddy answered quickly.

"Very well." The captain looked at all three in turn, then pulled himself up stiffly. "We are going to Rio. I cannot tell you how long we shall take. If you two boys are willing to make yourselves useful, I shall be glad, as we are short-handed."

"Of course we will," Jack answered quickly. "It was jolly good of you to take all the trouble you did in rescuing me. I know Burke and I feel very grateful!"

The captain bowed. He seemed a very decent sort, but was obviously very much on his dignity to-day.

"I was bound to do it," he said, even more stiffly. "You two boys can use this cabin. It is fortunate we are carrying no passengers on this voyage. I will find some place for you, Baron Zelling, at once."

He turned to go, and Zelling went with him. It was obvious that he had by no means abandoned hope of persuading or bribing the captain to put back to Rotterdam.

All that night, as a matter of fact, he clung to the captain, urging and imploring, sometimes even threatening him, but all to no purpose. The captain of the Tronjeim had made up his mind quite definitely.

"My orders are to go to Rio," was his invariable answer to Zelling. "I cannot take any risks."

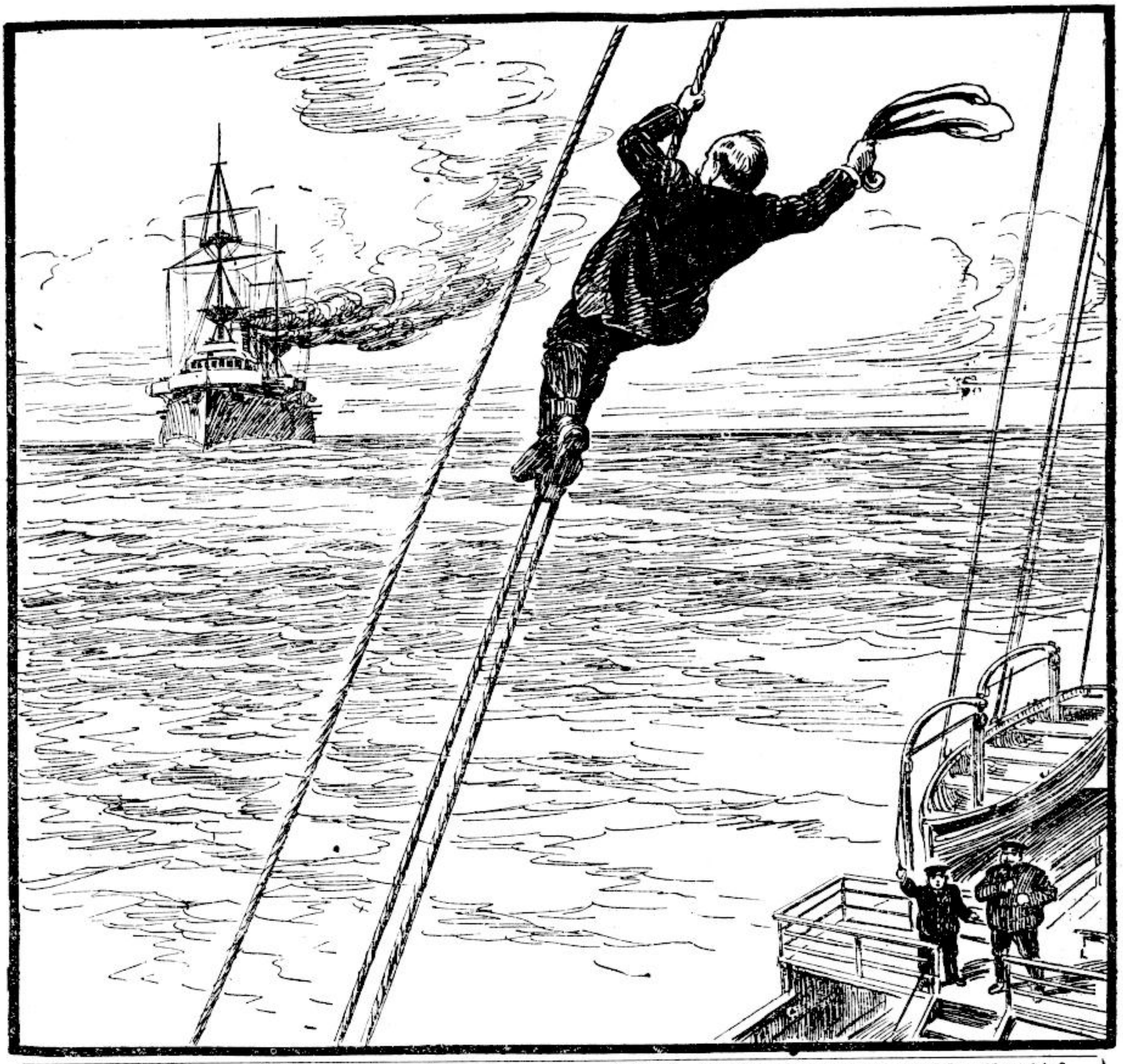
When eventually Davy Faggott came back to the cabin which Darrell and Burke were to occupy, he had quite a wonderful assortment of clothes for them. Getting into them, they both decided to go on deck, although Faggott warned Teddy Burke that he would have to take care. In the wreck of the submarine something sharp had struck the top of his head, and made a deep wound.

The Tronjeim was a fair-sized vessel, loaded with a miscellaneous cargo from Norway and from Leith, at which port she had called. Most of the crew, however, were Norwegians, and neither spoke nor understood English.

When Darrell and Burke eventually reached the deck darkness was setting in. Above them on the bridge-head they could just see Zelling still talking to the captain.

For a time the two men stood together, Zelling apparently getting more and more excited. His arms were being used very freely; but neither his words nor his gesticulations had the least effect on the captain, who more than once seemed to point for him to go away.

Suddenly the baron turned on the captain, and in an instant



Clinging to the ropes that ran up the mainmast was Baron Zelling. He was waving a great red handkerchief, not frantically or without system, but steadily and definitely, as a signaller waves a flag. (*See page* 26.)

was attacking him like a wild cat. He was a smaller man than the Norwegian, but his action took the skipper completely by surprise. He stepped back, slipped, and before the onslaught of blows fell to the deck. Zelling was on top of him, and had his hand on his throat.

In his madness the baron forgot that others were on the ship, nor did he hear the two boys, who at the first sign of the struggle had dashed to the stairway leading to the bridge.

As they got to the top Zelling had his knees in the captain's chest, and both his hands gripping his throat, though the captain was struggling furiously to release himself.

"Quick! Give me your answer!" Zelling was gasping. "Rotterdam, or I'll kill you!"

Whether Burke was the first to reach him, or whether it was Darrell, is impossible to say. Both simply flung themselves on Zelling.

A moment later a whistle blew, and the mate was helping the skipper to tie up Zelling's wrists. The two boys stood and watched while the baron, held firmly by the mate on one side and by Davy Faggott on the other, was hurried down to the hold.

"A German's gratitude," said the captain, as he resumed his post again. "I will come and see you boys presently!"

He motioned to them, and they understood. Leaving the bridge-deck, they went below. It was Davy Faggott who told them that Zelling was safely locked up.

"I guess that's the last we'll see of Mr. Baron Zelling for a few weeks," Darrell said. "Serve the beast right, too! I guess they won't pamper him!"

About an hour later the captain came to their cabin. He was anxious to hear their full story, and they told him.

"Very good," said the captain. "I am sorry I cannot put into port, but I will do the best I can for you. I will signal to the first British boat we sight and tell them!"

He kept his word. But the boat was also outward bound, though it had one advantage which the Tronjeim did not possess. It was fitted with wireless, and it agreed to send the message on.

And so it came about that the wireless station in Cornwall sent on to their headquarters in London the news that "German Zelling and two boys, Darrell and Burke, picked up ss. Tronjeim, bound for Rio."

Out of the Frying-Pan!

It was this message which, in the nick of time, came into the hands of Derwent Hood. Leaving the office, he first changed into his ordinary clothes, and then spent an hour in making inquiries concerning the Tronjeim; then, having

AN IMPORTANT CHANGE IN THE "MAGNET." (SEE PAGE 5.)

learned all that he could, he went to his rooms again, there to think over the problem afresh.

The following morning he was at Whitehall again, but not at his own office. Instead, he succeeded eventually in gaining admission to an important official at the Admiralty, with whom he had a long conversation.

"You could go on the Chatswood," the official said at last. "She's in dock now, but leaves again in four days. That won't be too late?"

"No, I think not," Hood answered. "The Tronjeim is a pretty slow boat. If you can fix it up for me, I should be very glad."

"It shall be done," the official assured him; and Hood went away.

Four days later he sat down with the officers on board H.M.S. Chatswood as she sailed out of harbour for patrol work in the Atlantic.

The commander of the vessel knew of Hood's mission, and had promised to do all in his power.

"Though, of course, you'll understand that if we spot the Kielberg, or any other of those pirates, we shall attend to them first," the commander explained. "The latest news is she's dodging down towards the South American coast. Still, I hope we'll fix up your little job first."

The Chatswood had to some extent a roving commission. She was one of a number of boats that were out in different seas after two or three of the fast armoured cruisers with which Germany was still interfering in a very mild degree with Britain's supremacy of the oceans of the world. Derwent Wood had been given permission to go out on her, and he had every hope of overtaking the Tronjeim, chatting pleasantly with the captain, and finally taking off Zelling and the two boys.

Then, when the Chatswood returned to port again, Hood would land with his captures, report to his chief, and stand once again in the same high place in the Service as he did before Zelling outwitted him.

It was on the morning of the fourth day out when he received a mesage from the commander to come up to him on the bridge.

"See that?" The commander pointed to a black dot on the skyline. "Have a look at it through these glasses!"

Hood looked, but could make little or nothing of it beyond the fact that it was a boat, and, further, that it was a merchantman.

"And she's a Norwegian boat, or I'm a Dutchman!" said the commander. "That's your friend the Tronjeim, I guess. We shall be near enough to let them know we want a chat in a couple of hours. So cheer up, Hood! Your worry will be off your chest in a very short time now!"

"I hope so," said Hood, as he took the glasses again.

But some curious sense of fear suddenly came over him. Supposing—supposing he failed?

. . . . . .

Meantime, on board the Tronjeim life was by no means dull for Jack Darrell and Teddy Burke. The captain had suggested that they might make themselves useful, and they did.

Then the stories Davy Faggott and his shipmate, Sam Lease, had to tell! They forgot everything in the joy of a great adventure, better than all the jokes they had ever played before.

For the first five days, too, they were free from Zelling. Then, for some reason which they could not understand, he was released, and allowed to roam about the ship at will.

Faggott explained to the boys that the reason must be that the captain was afraid that Zelling might make trouble when they got to Rio; and, above all things, Captain Maldsen was a cautious, peace-loving man, who put the successful accomplishment of his business before everything.

But Zelling was carefully watched wherever he went. Neither the captain nor the crew bore him any good feeling, while the two boys, even though they understood not a word of the language, were as welcome in the fo'c's'le as they were when they sat down to dinner with the captain or his mate. Zelling's meals were served in the little cabin he had been given before his mad attack on Captain Maldsen.

There was little of the cocksure swagger left in him now. He went about morosely, as though pondering over horrible problems. He still persisted in his friendliness towards Darrell, but for Burke it was obvious that he had the strongest dislike, and did not fail to show it whenever they met.

The route Captain Maldsen had taken was apparently not much frequented by other vessels. Even Davy Faggott, who had sailed to every port, admitted it was a lonely voyage.

"I expect he's keeping out o' the way o' these warships and pirates they say are knocking round," he explained to Darrell. "Them Germans don't care much whether you're neutral or not. As long as they can sink somebody's ship, it's all the same to them. That there Kielberg, now, is a terror. A pal o' mine who was in the Lucy Wolf, from Liverpool——"

And forthwith came another of Davy's yarns, which went to prove that the Kielberg was the kind of boat no decent sailor wanted to meet.

It was late one afternoon, and the day had been scorching hot, when Davy came running to Darrell and Burke, who were having a general clear-up in their cabin.

"Come on deck!" he told them. "It's come! It's the Kielberg right enough, and we'll all go to the bottom in about five minutes!"

The two followed him out as quickly as they could, and almost knocked over Zelling, who was running hastily to his own cabin.

When they reached the deck Davy pointed out to them the vessel which he claimed to be the Kielberg. Even at the distance she then was, it was possible to tell she was no ordinary vessel, a man-o'-war of some kind, but of what nationality even Davy Faggott could not have told. The worst that it was the Kielberg had come from the captain himself, who was even now watching it carefully through his glasses.

An hour passed, and the grey smudge grew larger and larger until it seemed but a quarter of a mile or so away. It was then that Jack Darrell, looking up, saw something that made him wonder, then rush to the captain and point out to him what he had seen.

Clinging to a block on one of the ropes that ran up to the main mast was Zelling. How he had climbed up and stayed there without being observed before was probably due to the fact that all eyes had been fixed on the approaching ship. His position was not a particularly safe one either, for while one arm was clutched round the rope, with the other arm he was waving a great red handkerchief. He was not waving it frantically or without system, but steadily and definitely, as a signaller waves a flag.

The moment the captain saw him he ran from the bridge to the main deck until he was in front of Zelling. In his hand he held a revolver, and he turned this towards the baron.

"Come down," he ordered—"come down, or I'll shoot at once!"

Zelling stopped immediately, and climbed down the ropes in a way that suggested he was not unaccustomed to that kind of performance.

Both Darrell and Burke had run behind the captain, hoping to see some fun. To their surprise, when Zelling dropped on the deck and faced the captain, he was smiling more cheerfully than he had done since he had been on the boat.

"Pardon, captain!" he said, and bowed, and there was an unpleasant sneer on his face. "I was merely sending greetings to my friends, who will possibly come to call on me here."

The captain said many things, but in his anger he went back to his native language. Zelling still smiled.

A gun spoke, and the dull boom over the waters sent a little thrill of wonder, even of fear, perhaps, through everyone on board. As the shot passed high above them the captain ran back to his bridge again.

The watchers on the Tronjeim saw little flags going up on the great grey ship, then heard the captain giving out orders. In a short time the throb, throb of their engines had ceased, and the Tronjeim lay almost motionless.

Jack looked for Zelling, but he was nowhere to be seen now. The big ship had gradually come almost within hailing distance. Then a boat was lowered, men clambered into it, and headed for the Tronjeim. Captain Maldsen gave orders for arrangements to be made for them to come aboard.

In a short time two officers and two men were climbing on board. Captain Maldsen came forward to meet them, and they saluted him gravely.

They said something in German to which the captain shook his head. Then, from nowhere in particular, Zelling suddenly appeared. He said something quickly and sharply to the two officers, and at once their hands went up in salute, which Zelling returned. To Darrell and Burke the whole thing seemed like a comic play, Zelling, in his ridiculous dress—for his own clothes were hopelessly ruined—imitating, it seemed, the smartly uniformed naval men.

A brief conversation took place, then the elder of the officers spoke again to Captain Maldsen, but this time in English.

From where he stood Darrell could not quite catch all that was said. He gathered, however, that the captain was not over-pleased, and there followed some little argument. Then Zelling turned and pointed to where Darrell stood with Burke.

At once the two sailors, who stood behind the officers, stepped forward and laid hands on the boys. Instinctively they both shook them off, and stood ready to contest the matter. But before they could do anything further Captain Maldsen himself came to them.

"I am sorry," he said. "I would willingly have done my best for you, but I cannot. They say I must give you up, and the force is on their side. You will go? I cannot risk my ship."

Darrell nodded.

"We'll go, captain. You've been jolly decent to us, and I wish—— But good-bye! I hope we'll meet again one day."

He held out his hand, and the captain gripped it firmly, then turned to Burke and bade him good-bye.

Just then Davy Faggott rushed forward, and insisted on shaking hands with both of them. The naval officers smiled, but pushed Davy away, and a minute later all of them—the officers and their attendants, Zelling, Darrell, and Burke—were in the little launch.

As they moved slowly away from the Tronjeim, Davy Faggott waved them farewell once more.

"Good-bye! Good-bye! And good luck to ye!" he bawled; and then, in a lower tone, which only Sam Lease and Captain Maldsen understood, he added: "And Heaven help ye both!"

The journey to the Kielberg was made very quickly, and the party climbed on board. A different ship was this from the Tronjeim—cleaner, brighter, and more wonderful. But there was no joy in Darrell's heart as he stepped on the deck.

Baron Zelling became suddenly a person of importance again. There were salutes and counter-salutes, and at last they stood on a small deck before an imposing-looking officer, who was evidently the commander of the vessel.

Zelling was rattling away to the officer as hard as he could, but it was in German, and they had little idea of what he said. The officer said nothing; a nod and a glance at the two boys now and again was all the sign he gave. Then Zelling turned to Darrell, and spoke partly to him and partly to the officer, and now he spoke in English.

"And now—— Ah, well, we shall soon be back in Germany again!" he said. "A month—two months, perhaps—and we shall all be in the Fatherland once more."

A curious look came into the officer's eyes, and he gazed at Zelling almost contemptuously.

"Germany?" he asked, with a certain touch of bitterness. "I did not understand that it was your desire to return, or I would have warned you. It is too late now; but were you not mistaken in bringing these boys here, even if you desired to come yourself? But Germany! I fear you will never see Germany again, baron. There is only one end for every man of us on board the Kielberg."

"Where is that? Where are you going?" asked Zelling, and there was again the note of fear in his voice.

"Going?" The commander repeated the word. "Sooner or later we are all going with this boat to the bottom of the sea! There is no escape for us now!"

(There will be another splendid long instalment of this great serial story in next Monday's issue of the "MAGNET" Library. Readers are advised to order their copy in advance. There is such a popular demand for the "MAGNET" Library every week now that many readers are unable to get their copy, even on the day of publication.)

FAVOURITE FRIENDS IN FICTION.

No. 5.

Take heed, my bonny boys, and when
You're feeling sore and touchy,
Devour the deeds of Breezy Ben
And dear old Dismal Dutchy!
No finer tonic for the blues
Could ever be commended:
And even long-faced lads enthuse
And cry: "My hat! How splendid!"

Ben's famous "smile that won't come off"
With fun will make you wriggle;
And even dad will have to cough
And thus suppress a giggle.
While Dismal Dutchy's face appears
So desolate and doleful,
That one is almost moved to tears—
In fact, could shed a bowlful!

The weird adventures of the pair
Ten thousands hanker after;
And soon the Demon of Despair
Gives place to roars of laughter.
For who can fail to be impressed
With two such freak productions,
Who each intends to come off best
And give the other ructions!

The precious partners often plot
A "wheeze" for fake collections,
And, as a rule, they catch it hot
And strong in all directions.
Full many a zealous man of law
Has felt inclined to choke 'em;
And Dutchy, caring not a straw,
Joins Ben in picking oakum.

"Why, hoist me mainsail reef," says Ben,
"And slack me starboard rudder!
Pet Duchy, you're the best of men,
I loves yer like a brudder!
In rain or fine, in storm or shine,
Or any blessed weather,
By all the millions that is mine,
I vow we'll stick together!"

May Ben and Dutchy always thrive,
And spread their charms before us!
So long as they are kept alive,
Then naught shall ever bore us.
Here's health to every British boy,
Who swift his belt unbuckles
That he may laugh at all the chaff
Contained in cheery "CHUCKLES!"

Next Monday:

SEXTON BLAKE.

No. 6 of this grand new series.

AN IMPORTANT CHANCE IN THE "MAGNET." (SEE PAGE 5.)

MY READERS' PAGE

The Editor is always pleased to hear from his chums, at home or abroad, and is only too willing to give his best advice to them if they are in difficulty or in trouble. . . . Whom to write to: Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.

For Next Monday:

"COKER'S CANADIAN COUSIN!"

By Frank Richards.

Quite up to its usual high standard is the great story of school life which Frank Richards puts before my chums on Monday next. Coker of the Fifth is expecting a visit from his soldier cousin, who has come over to England with a Canadian contingent. Accordingly, Skinner, the humorist of the Remove, sees tremendous possibilities for a gilt-edged jape, and succeeds in persuading Mr. Montgomery Snooks, a broken-down actor, to impersonate Coker's cousin. The amiable Mr. Snooks gets on the warpath without delay, and the fur begins to fly; and when the genuine article,

"COKER'S CANADIAN COUSIN,"

arrives at Greyfriars to find an impostor on the scene, the fun is fast and furious.

Every Magnetite should place an order for next Monday's issue in the hands of his newsagent NOW.

A SERGEANT'S SPLENDID LETTER.

How many readers of the "Magnet" Library have walked round the world? None, you will say. But you would be wrong, for the extraordinary feat has been accomplished by Sergeant Leslie E. Wilson, of the Manchester Regiment.

The gallant sergeant, whose photograph I reproduce, has been good enough to send me the following excellent letter, which every boy, and every boy's parents, should make a special point of reading:

"'B' Company,
"19th Battalion, Manchester Regiment,
"Belton Camp.

"Dear Sir,—During the five and a half years previous to the outbreak of war, I was travelling the world on foot—collecting book material and black-and-white sketches.

"Whenever I was able during that period to get your little paper, the 'Magnet,' I did so, though naturally there were many occasions when I was unable to secure it.

"I read your paper, in the first place, out of curiosity; and later I made the habit of taking it for the benefit of studying the admirable pen-and-ink sketches with which the 'Magnet' is illustrated.

"I am getting an 'old boy' now, but I still take a great interest in the 'Magnet,' which I consider the very best paper for boys on the market. The school stories are really clever and wholesome, and it seems to me a pity that your paper is not better known to the public at large.

"I read the criticisms and your replies concerning the question of your non-enlistment, and think your place is undoubtedly where you are. I honestly believe that to many a healthy and full-blooded young man it takes more real courage to remain at home at a time like this than it needs for many others to go.

"That your decision to remain at home where you are needed has been criticised by some of your readers is only to be expected, for criticism is a cheap commodity, and worthless when it comes from narrow-minded persons.

"I am glad that some Tommies have written to you from the trenches to speak their appreciation of your paper, and I hope that Harry Wharton & Co. will live long to gladden the hearts of your numerous readers.

"I am an Australian myself, and would have returned to Australia last Christmas, after an absence from home of six years, but for the outbreak of war. I landed in Wales, from Ireland, two weeks before hostilities commenced, and on September 7th I joined the Army to try and do my bit for the Motherland.

"This is perhaps a long epistle for the purpose of expressing a confidence in your position and an appreciation of your paper; but, believe me, the sentiment contained in this letter is sincere.—I am, yours faithfully,

"LESLIE E. WILSON (Sergeant).

"P.S.—I enclose a testimonial touching on my walk round the world, not as a testimonial, but as some proof of my position, etc. Please use this letter as you see fit."

I really think the above letter is one of the finest I have ever received. What calls for most admiration is the fact that the famous pedestrian, on the outbreak of war, did not hesitate, did not stop to weigh the possible consequences, but joined the Army straight away. There is something typically Australian about this action, and I hope Sergeant Wilson's patriotism may be amply rewarded.

I have written a personal letter to my friend the sergeant, thanking him for the fine testimonial he has given to the "Magnet" Library, and for so staunchly backing me up in my position with regard to the Army. When actual fighting men realise the true facts of the case and express their sympathy that I am unable to exchange the pen for the sword, I think it is high time the cavilling critics hid their diminished heads.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

W. Gellert (Southampton).—Bob Cherry is slightly older than Harry Wharton. Sorry I cannot oblige you with a photograph of the Famous Five.

"A Loyal Manx Reader" (Douglas).—Many thanks for pointing out error.

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

STOP PRESS NEWS.

AN UNPRECEDENTED STEP TAKEN BY THE EDITOR OF THE "MAGNET."

LONDON, September 1st.

We have taken the unprecedented step this week of stopping the printing machines to insert the following notice:

There has been a very poor response to the Editor's appeal for postcards backing up the proposal to publish "The Greyfriars Herald" as a separate halfpenny monthly or weekly paper.

Magnetites! Do not let this thing fall through! Immediately you read this, write out your approval on a postcard, and despatch it to your Editor without delay.

Do it now!

EDITOR.

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REPLIES IN BRIEF (*continued*).

C. V. H. (Victoria).—I am much obliged to you for your good wishes, which I cordially reciprocate.

Henry Howard (Highgate).—I am sorry I cannot agree to publish a double number at such frequent intervals as you suggest.

Fred Barnes (Liverpool).—Wun Lung's brother, Hop-hi, is still at Greyfriars. I cannot publish replies to my chums' queries until at least three weeks have elapsed, for press reasons.

Nita Northam (Australia).—Loder is seventeen years of age, and Harry Wharton and Hurree Singh fifteen. Best wishes.

Private A. Nash (Havre).—Very many thanks for your loyal letter.

G. C. F. (Redcar).—The strongest cricket eleven the Remove could field is as follows: Wharton, Nugent, Cherry, Vernon-Smith, Field, Linley, Hurree Singh, Bull, Peter Todd, Brown, and Bulstrode, or Penfold. There are no Yorkshire boys at Greyfriars.

F. E. R. (North Fitzroy).—The cure for the vices you name is solely a question of will-power. Your chum should say "No," and stick to it most emphatically.

H. Turner (Battersea).—Take plenty of open-air exercise, and don't smoke.

"Edmontonian."—Many thanks for pointing out error.

G. Turner (Wanstead).—Write to Messrs. A. W. Gamage, Holborn, London, E.C.

F. R. T.—"The Dreadnought" is now defunct.

G. D. (West Ham).—I am surprised that you do not know what "lines" are. When a boy is ordered by an irate master or prefect to "take fifty lines," it means that he has to copy out fifty phrases from Virgil or some other ancient Johnny. No: the startling schemes of Fisher T. Fish are not "played out" yet.

"A Cyclist" (Flamborough).—I am unaware of the existence of the places you mention. Of course the companion papers are sold at Flamborough Head! If not, there's lack of enterprise somewhere.

W. Morris (Poole).—There are fifteen masters at Greyfriars. Bunter's father lives in one of the London suburbs.

R. D. V. (Stoke Newington).—Bob Cherry is a better boxer than Squiff.

Charles S. Kirby (Northants).—There is no "Magnet" club under my personal control. I am sorry I cannot put you into touch with the reader you mention.

"Dear Old Dublin."—So you had the honour of shaking hands with Sergeant O'Leary, did you? Well, you're a lucky chap. Mike is a real white man.

E. Mottlee (Hurstville).—Wingate was twelve when he came to Greyfriars. The Famous Five are each fifteen years of age.

Hilda Russell (Sydney).—Most of our back numbers do get forwarded to the wounded soldiers. A short time ago I made a special appeal to my readers on the subject.

"Kangaroo" (Australia).—I note your remark, and will see what can be done.

D. H. (Manchester).—Glad to hear your eyesight is all right again, and that you will be able to read and enjoy the companion papers as of yore.

H. H. S. (Middlesbrough).—Send your back numbers to one of the hospitals for wounded soldiers.

"Jack Sheppard" (Australia).—Johnny Bull returned to Greyfriars months ago. Skinner has always been a "blade" of a sort. To become a dental mechanic, you will have to be apprenticed to a high-class dentist who makes teeth for his customers. The prospects in this profession are excellent. I cannot give the definite date on which the next threepenny book story by Frank Richards will appear. Thanks for good wishes.

F. H. S. (Bow).—I was very interested to hear how you became a reader. The headquarters of the military units you mention are at Whitehall, London.

H. Craig (Aberdeen).—The "Magnet" Library commenced its prosperous course early in 1908. Horace Coker is seventeen years of age. Greyfriars was established as a public school well over a hundred years ago.

L. Scofield (Wigan).—The reason why Sunday is so seldom mentioned in our stories is, of course, that the usual schoolboy frolics do not prevail on that day. If you want to read a "Sunday" story, I can thoroughly recommend one which is now being written by Frank Richards. Be on the look-out for it!

Sid Hale (Catford).—There is no Correspondence Exchange in connection with this paper.

W. J. Stevens, of the Manchester Hotel, West Cliff, Bournemouth, is anxious to form a "Magnet" League in his town.

"A Huddersfield Chum."—Thanks for the splendid way you backed me up and helped to put "paid" to the machinations of "J. S. S. K."

"Automatic" (Scarborough).—Sorry I cannot oblige you in the direction named.

Private W. Rackstraw (1st Cheshire Regiment, British Expeditionary Force).—Very many thanks for your interesting and exciting letter. You've been through stirring times—what?

B. D. C. (Chester).—Your previous letter to me must have been overlooked. Send your back numbers to the Tommies.

Private G. Goldsmith (Chatham).—I have made a note of your request, and a parcel of back numbers has been despatched to you. Hope you got 'em all right.

"Monday Looker-out" (Devon).—Colonel Wharton is fighting in France with the British Army, and Captain Koumar P. Singh is at the Dardanelles.

"Annoyed and Faithful Chum" (Yorks).—You will see that J. S. S. K. has been successfully "choked off."

P. Robinson (Netherfield).—For goodness' sake don't write a boxing serial on the paper, a sample of which you send me! The editor you submit it to will have a fit! Use ordinary foolscap, and write on one side of the paper. Thanks for all your cheering comments.

Herbert Johnson (Bolton).—Thank you for your loyalty. I am afraid I cannot see my way to do as you suggest.

"A Regular Reader."—Whatever Peter Todd may have done on exceptional occasions, the fact remains that Bob Cherry is the Remove's best boxer.

A. F. W. (Ramsgate).—The Greyfriars coat-of-arms will appear on the cover of the "Gem" Library shortly. You will have seen by this time that the fixture with Highcliffe has been revived.

Master William Shepherd (Southannan, Fairlie, Scotland) will be glad to hear from fellow-Magnetites interested in poetry.

James D. (Manchester).—Bob Cherry and Tom Merry are the best boxers among the juniors of Greyfriars and St. Jim's respectively.

Sydney Jessop, 81, Huddersfield Road, Macclesfield, Cheshire, who is the English representative of the Stirling Club for "Magnet" readers, Canada, will be glad to hear from intending members.

"A Nut."—Did you not know that even before the war the French and Germans were more or less at loggerheads?

"A Loyal Friend" (Blackburn).—Three weeks at least must elapse before a query can be answered on this page. I don't see any reason why Squiff should disturb the present harmony of the Famous Five. If we make it a Famous Six, and keep on introducing characters like Squiff, it will soon become the Famous Fifty!

SERGEANT LESLIE E. WILSON, the man who walked round the world. The gallant sergeant is also a keen reader of The "Magnet" Library.

Ronald Wilson (Leytonstone).—If you are satisfied that your age and home ties militate against your joining the Army, the wiles of the recruiting-sergeant need have no terrors for you.

"Driver" (Leicester).—Doubtless you have seen the explanation of the motor-car incident in "The Old Boys' Challenge." Thanks for your good wishes.

"Never-miss-once" (Liverpool).—I will see what I can do in the direction you name later on.

R. P. G. (Manchester).—You're a good chap, R. P. G. I expect there are few boys of twelve years old who are supporting the family, and I am certain that few lads of that age are expert typists!

Horace B. Haynes (Birmingham).—Space precludes me from publishing your loyal letter. Nevertheless, I am greatly obliged to you.

X. Y. Z. (Sutton-in-Ash).—I am sorry I cannot do as you suggest, for various reasons. Thanks for your cheery letter.

Charles Richards (Bradford).—The idea is good, and will receive my careful consideration.

Sally Palmer (Southport).—The first volume of the "Magnet" is unobtainable. Those readers who have them are hanging on tight, and one cannot blame them.

Evelyn Bushill (Coatbridge).—Very many thanks for your letter and good wishes.

Ole Editor