

THE MIDNIGHT MARAUDERS !

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.



BILLY BUNTER BUMPS INTO THE ANGRY BARONET !

"G - g - good-afternoon, sir!" said Bunter, feebly, taking off his cap, and blinking nervously at the riding-whip. "Nun-nun-nice afternoon, sir!" "What are you doing here?" thundered Sir Hilton. (An exciting scene in the Grand, Complete Story of School Life contained in this number.)

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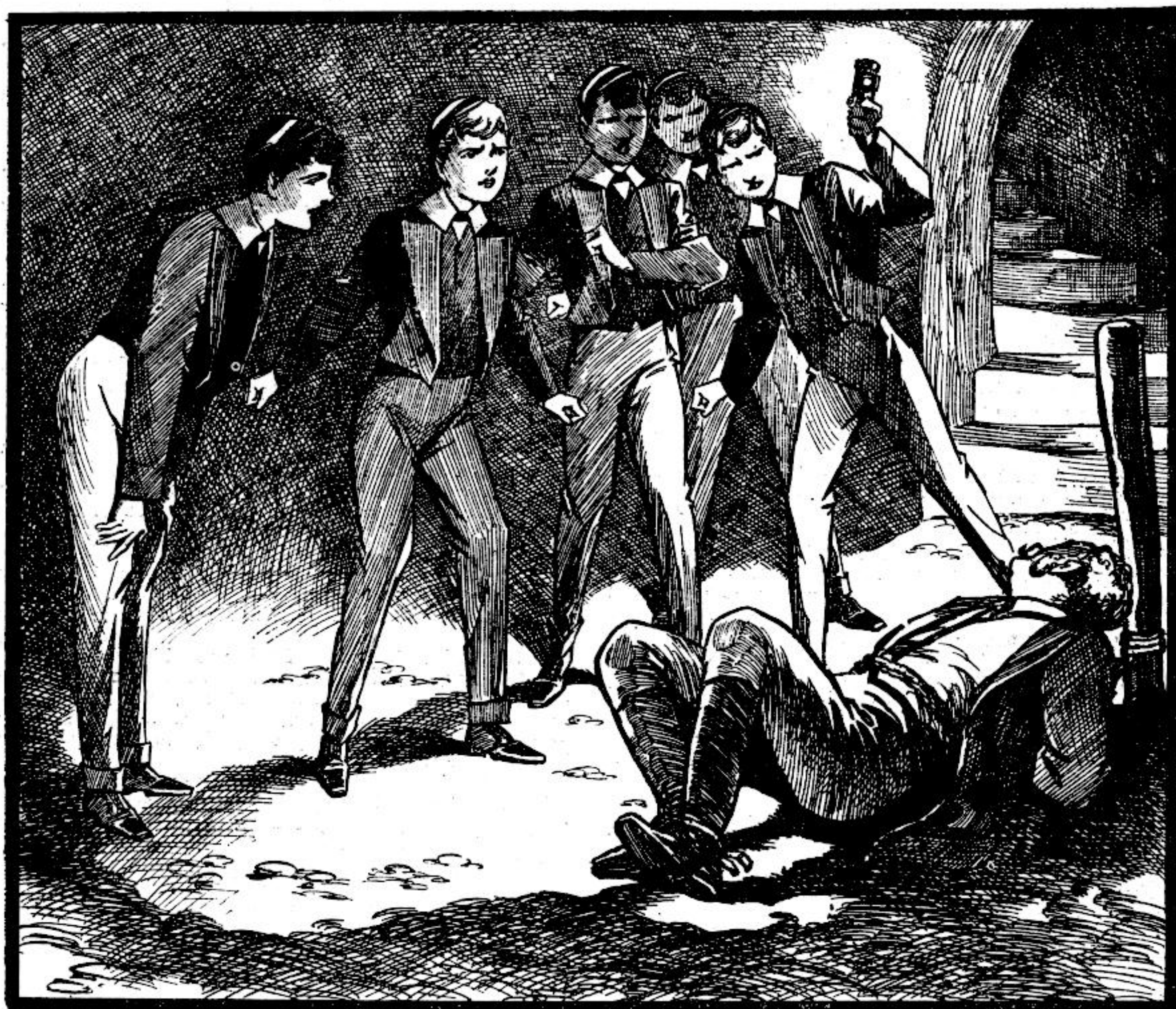


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THE MIDNIGHT MARAUDERS!

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

By FRANK RICHARDS.



On the earthen floor a lengthy form was extended, with hands bound an 1 feet shackled with strong rope. Another rope was passed round the waist, and secured to a stake driven in the ground. The light gleamed upon the purple complexion and white moustache of Sir Hilton Popper. (See Chapter 15.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Very Wrathful!

"LOOKS like trouble for somebody!"
Bob Cherry of the Remove made that observation.

Harry Wharton & Co., in a group near the steps of the School House, were discussing plans for the afternoon, the afternoon being a half-holiday at Grey-

friars. It was a fine and sunny afternoon, quite warm for the season of the year, and Johnny Bull had suggested a picnic. Johnny Bull had received a handsome remittance from his uncle in Australia, and it was burning a hole in his pocket.

The discussion was interrupted by the arrival of a tall, stiff gentleman, with a purple complexion, a white moustache, an eyeglass, and a fiery eye. The juniors

spotted him as he came in at the gates, and crossed towards the School House with long strides. The purple gentleman was Sir Hilton Popper, quite a "big gun" in the district, with whom the chums of the Remove had had trouble in their time.

Sir Hilton's arrival certainly meant "trouble for somebody," as Bob Cherry observed. The baronet was not on good terms with anybody at Greyfriars, and his visit was evidently not a friendly one, to judge by his expression.

"Look at his fiery eye!" continued Bob Cherry cheerfully. "He's got it on us already—innocent little us! And we haven't done anything this time."

"Not a thing," said Johnny Bull. "We haven't picnicked on his blessed island since the row last time—"

"We haven't cut down any of his trees for camp-fires—since last time," remarked Nugent.

"And it's a week since we cut his wire-fence on the right-of-way up the river," remarked Harry Wharton. "So it can't be that."

"Tain't us," said Bob. "My conscience is clear—unusually clear. What a nobby thing it is to have a clear conscience, especially when a fiery, untamed baronet is around."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors eyed the baronet as he came across the Close. He certainly had his eye on them, and his eye gleamed through his eyeglass. But their consciences were quite clear; they felt that it couldn't be them this time. Some other Greyfriars fellows had provoked the wrath of the baronet.

They capped him respectfully as he came up to the House. But Sir Hilton Popper did not acknowledge the salute. He halted, and stared at them grimly.

"You young rascals!"

"Good afternoon, sir!" said Bob Cherry, quite affably. "Fine weather for October, sir!"

Sir Hilton Popper snorted.

"Impertinent young scoundrel!"

"My hat!"

"I have a great mind to lay my cane about your shoulders, sir, instead of leaving you to your Headmaster."

"You don't say so!"

Bob Cherry's reply seemed to have an exasperating effect upon Sir Hilton Popper. A soft answer is said to turn away wrath, but it did not produce its proverbial effect upon Sir Hilton Popper. He gripped his cane hard, and made a stride towards Bob Cherry.

Bob did not retreat a step. The Co. lined up at once, looking very grim.

"You'd better keep that cane to yourself, sir," said Harry Wharton quietly.

"Impertinent young jackanapes—"

"Bow-wow!" said Bob.

"What?"

"Bow-wow!"

"Exactly!" chimed in Frank Nugent, "Bow-wow!"

"The bow-wowfulness is terrific, august sahib," purred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

There was a chuckle from some of the fellows in the quad. The expression on Sir Hilton Popper's face was quite entertaining. In spite of the clear consciences of the Famous Five, it was evidently towards them that Sir Hilton's wrath was directed, for some reason known only to himself. But the chums of the Remove did not see any reason why they should be "slanged" by Sir Hilton Popper, and they were not at all inclined to take it quietly.

From several quarters came that absurd ejaculation, "Bow-wow!" mingled with chuckles, as the Greyfriars fellows began to gather round.

Sir Hilton's purple face became a deeper purple, and his very eyeglass glittered with anger.

"Young rascals—impudent young rascals!" he gasped.

"Bow-wow!"

That was too much for Sir Hilton Popper. He had come there to lay a complaint before the Head, but he took the law into his own hands now. He made a rush at the Famous Five, with his cane lashing in the air.

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Probably he expected to see the juniors run, and to bring his cane down on their shoulders as they fled.

But the Famous Five did not run.

They faced the charge, and as the cane sang towards them, Harry Wharton dodged under it, caught the baronet's arm, and jerked it up. The next moment he had wrenched the cane from the hand of the astonished baronet, and with a swing of his arm, he sent it whizzing over the branches of the elms in the Close. Sir Hilton Popper simply gasped with wrath.

"Why, you—you—you—" he stuttered.

"Let not your angry passions rise, esteemed sahib!" said Hurree Singh gently. "Let dogs delight to bark bitefully, but—"

"By gad! I'll—"

"Bow-wow!"

"Back up!" gasped Bob Cherry, as the baronet charged again, this time with the intention of boxing their ears.

But the boxing did not come off.

Sir Hilton found himself grasped on all sides by strong hands, and his arms were held down, and he wriggled in vain in the grip of the juniors.

"By gad!" he shouted. "Let go! Unhand me, you young ruffians!"

"Make it pax, sir," suggested Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Sir Hilton Popper was not likely to make it "pax" with the young rascals of the Remove. He struggled furiously in their grasp.

"Bump him!" shouted Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five did not take Skinner's advice. Bumping the baronet was rather too dramatic a proceeding. But they held him fast.

"Boys!"

Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, shouted from his study window. He had seen the whole affair.

"Yes, sir," said Wharton.

"How dare you! Release Sir Hilton at once!"

"We're only defending ourselves, sir," said Wharton. "Sir Hilton Popper has no right to attack us!"

"I am aware of that, Wharton. Sir Hilton, pray calm yourself! Release him at once, do you hear?"

"Very well, sir."

The Famous Five released the infuriated Sir Hilton, who stood gasping with rage. He turned his angry glance upon the Form-master at the window.

"So this is how the boys here are allowed to act!" he shouted.

Mr. Quelch's steely eyes dwelt upon him coldly.

"You have no right to make an attack upon the boys in this school, Sir Hilton!" he said. "You could hardly expect them to allow you to strike them at your own will. If you have any complaint to make you may lay it before the Head."

"These boys have been trespassing on my land—"

"Dr. Locke will hear whatever you have to say on the subject. You cannot come here and administer punishment with your hands."

"Huh!"

Sir Hilton Popper snorted, and strode into the House. Mr. Quelch made a sign to the juniors to approach his window.

"Is Sir Hilton's statement correct, Wharton?" he asked sternly. "Is it possible that you have provoked him again, after the trouble that was caused before?"

"No, sir."

"Then Sir Hilton is mistaken?"

"I suppose so, sir. We certainly haven't been anywhere near the island in the river, or on his land at all."

"Very well."

Mr. Quelch turned back into his study, and the Famous Five looked at one another rather grimly. It was on their account, after all, that the baronet had come to Greyfriars.

"Nothing to be afraid of," said Nugent, after a pause. "The old sport is off-side this time."

"The Head will take our word," said Johnny Bull.

Trotter, the page, came out of the house a few minutes later.



A form emerged into view at last—the form of a fat man in Norfolks, with a pair of gold-rimmed glasses glimmering on his fat, round nose. (See Chapter 8.)

"You're wanted in the 'Ead's study, young gentlemen," said Trotter, with a commiserating look, and he added in a confidential tone: "Which Sir 'Ilton Popper's there, and a-carryin' on something chronic."

"Trotty," said Bob Cherry solemnly, "our consciences are clear—clear as the sun at noonday. We are innocence personified. Strong in the consciousness of unimpeachable virtue, we go fearlessly before the seat of judgment."

"Oh, Master Cherry!" grinned Trotter.

And the chums of the Remove proceeded to the seat of judgment.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Not Gully!

DR. LOCKE wore a worried look when the five juniors came into his study.

Sir Hilton Popper was standing; he had declined to take a seat. His eyes gleamed at the juniors as they came in.

Sir Hilton had a special "down" on Harry Wharton & Co.

The baronet had lately been a governor of Greyfriars, and had attempted to introduce all sorts of unwelcome

changes into the school, being one of those intolerable "cranks" who have imbibed Prussian ideas, and desire to inflict them upon their countrymen.

His project having been defeated, Sir Hilton had resigned from the governing board. Greyfriars had risen as one man against his Prussianising scheme—and chief among the rebels had been the chums of the Remove, as Sir Hilton knew very well.

The baronet had not forgotten. It was quite probable that he was glad of an opportunity of getting the Co. into trouble with their headmaster.

"These are the boys you complain of, Sir Hilton?" said Dr. Locke.

"They are the boys, sir!" rapped out Sir Hilton. "They have trespassed again on the island in the river, and they have assaulted me, within the last few minutes, within the walls of Greyfriars."

"What have you to say, Wharton?"

"That we have done neither the one nor the other, sir," said Harry. "Sir Hilton attacked us in the quad a few minutes ago. We held him."

"You—you held him?"

"Yes, sir, and took his cane away. Mr. Quelch saw it all, and he did not blame us. Sir Hilton has no right to come here to lick us, surely, sir?"

"Certainly not!" said the Head. "Sir Hilton, you gave me the impression that these boys assaulted you. It appears that you attacked them first."

"I was about to chastise them, sir!" rumbled Sir Hilton.

"I must remark that you had no right to do so, and that they could not be expected to allow you to assume any such right."

Sir Hilton twisted his moustache savagely.

"In my young days, sir, boys did not argue with their elders!" he snapped.

Dr. Locke made a gesture. He did not wish to enter upon an argument respecting the manners and customs of Sir Hilton Popper's young days.

"But concerning the other matter, Wharton," the Head continued. "Sir Hilton Popper complains that you have trespassed upon his island."

"We do not regard it as his island, sir," said Harry. "It is well known that the island is free to the public, and that Greyfriars School possesses fishing rights there."

Sir Hilton Popper seemed on the verge of an explosion.

"What you say may be quite correct, Wharton," said the Head; "but you are also aware that, in order to avoid useless disputes, the island has been placed out of bounds for the school."

"Yes, sir, we are aware of that; and we have not been there, sir, because you have forbidden it—not for any other reason."

"Sir Hilton Popper declares that you were there yesterday."

"He is mistaken, sir."

"I am not mistaken!" thundered the baronet. "Since I have returned home I have very carefully visited the island, in order to make sure that my orders have not been disregarded. I have found plain traces there of trespassers."

"What reason have you to suppose that the trespassers were these boys?" asked the Head, raising his eyebrows.

"Because I found them there on a previous occasion, when they treated me with unexampled insolence, and denied my right to close the island to the public, sir!" fumed the baronet.

"On that occasion, Sir Hilton, they were punished, as I remember very well. They deny having visited the island yesterday, and unless you can produce some proof—"

"My word, sir."

"Unless you saw them there, you can hardly make any statement on the subject."

"I did not see them—they were too careful for that."

"You have witnesses who saw them?"

"Certainly not."

"Then you have no grounds for your complaint save the merest suspicion," the Head exclaimed warmly.

The Famous Five stared at Sir Hilton Popper. They knew that he was a hot-tempered and unreasonable old gentleman, but they had hardly expected that he would come to Greyfriars to denounce them without a shadow of proof of any kind, and without any reasonable ground for even suspicion.

Sir Hilton was accustomed to endless "kow-towing" from his hapless dependents, and on his estate his word was law—he was monarch of all he surveyed—and cottagers, whose little homes were at his mercy, trembled at his frown. He never seemed quite to understand that his autocratic powers did not extend beyond the borders of his land.

Apparently he was under the impression that he had simply to walk into Greyfriars and announce his conviction that certain juniors had trespassed on his land in order to see those juniors promptly and severely punished.

That impression was about to be corrected.

The Famous Five waited cheerfully enough. They knew that they could depend upon justice and fair play from their headmaster.

Sir Hilton Popper was silent for some moments. He seemed to be a little taken aback.

"I have not the slightest doubt that these juniors were the trespassers," he said at length. "They were the guilty parties on the previous occasion. They openly and impudently denied my right to keep the public out of the island."

"We still deny it," said Wharton.

"Please be silent, Wharton. Sir Hilton Popper, you must give me some better grounds than a mere supposition before you ask me to believe that these boys are telling me falsehoods."

"I know they were there."

"On your own showing, you cannot know it," said the Head coldly. "Moreover, I may mention that yesterday was not a holiday at this school, and the boys are very unlikely to have gone so far away after lessons."

"I have reason to believe that their visit was paid at night, probably for the purpose of setting night-lines," said the baronet. "I have no doubt whatever that they are quite capable of breaking bounds at night."

"That is mere supposition. I think anything of the kind is extremely unlikely."

Sir Hilton made an angry gesture.

"Then you refuse to punish these boys for trespass?"

"Undoubtedly I refuse to punish boys who are, to my mind, quite innocent of what you accuse them of," said Dr. Locke sharply.

"Then they are to escape scot-free!" exclaimed the baronet angrily. "Very well, sir—very well, indeed! I will take the law into my own hands. Since you refuse to keep the young rascals in order—"

"Sir!"

"I will deal with them myself. I will keep very careful watch upon the island, and when I catch them in the act, sir, I will hand them over to the police!" thundered Sir Hilton.

Dr. Locke rose to his feet.

"If you find Greyfriars boys trespassing on your property, Sir Hilton, you will act as you think fit," he said icily. "The matter is now closed. I am not accustomed to raised voices in my study, sir."

"Huh!"

With that angry grunt, Sir Hilton strode out of the room.

Dr. Locke made a gesture of dismissal to the juniors, and the Famous Five left the study. Sir Hilton Popper was striding away furiously towards the gates. At the end of the passage a crowd of juniors gathered round Harry Wharton & Co., curious to hear the result of the interview.

"Licked?" asked Peter Todd.

"No fear!" said Bob. "The giddy baronet doesn't look as if he were pleased, does he?"

"But what was the row?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Somebody's been trespassing on his island—at night, it seems," said Wharton. "Was it you, Toddy?"

"Not guilty, my lord."

"You, Squiff?"

Sampson Quincy Iffley Field shook his head.

"You, then, Skinner?"

"No jolly fear," said Skinner promptly. "I dare say it wasn't a Greyfriars chap at all. The old sport jumped to conclusions, that's all."

Nobody in the Remove admitted having been on the island, and Temple Dabney & Co., of the Fourth, equally denied all knowledge of it. It really seemed as if the delinquents in this case had not belonged to Greyfriars at all.

"Suspicious old bounder!" Bob Cherry remarked, with a shake of the head. "After that, the least we can do is to go and picnic on his old island this afternoon."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Co. shouted with laughter at the idea. Since Sir Hilton had complained of them when they hadn't been on the island, it was only justice to give him something to complain about.

"Ripping good idea!" said Nugent. "But—"

"Suppose he catches us?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Oh, he couldn't catch us!" said Bob Cherry. "He can't sit on the bank all day watching the island, I suppose. Besides, he thinks we go at night, and it's at night the place will be watched. Anyway, let's get a boat out and pull up to the island, and act according to circumstances."

"Good egg!"

And, having paid a visit to the tuckshop, and provided a well-filled bag for the picnic, the Famous Five started for the river.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
The Signal on the Island!

ROW, brothers—row!" sang Bob Cherry sweetly. The chums of the Remove had run out their boat and embarked. The bag was dumped down, and Hurree Singh took the lines, and Wharton, Nugent, Bob, and Johnny Bull took an oar each. They pulled away cheerily up the shining Sark.

The deep brown of autumn was on the woods that clothed the banks of the river. A soft breeze from the sea brought the salt air to them. It was a most enjoyable pull up the river.

As the juniors pulled away a fat figure appeared on the bank, and waved wildly to them. The sun gleamed on a fat face and a large pair of spectacles.

"I say, you fellows!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! It's Bunter," said Bob, resting on his oar.

Billy Bunter waved both fat hands in his excitement.

"Pull in, you chaps!"

"What for?" demanded Wharton.

"It's important—awfully important!" shouted Bunter. Bob Cherry grunted.

"Old Popper again, I suppose," he said. "Fancy Tubby taking the trouble to give us a tip! Pull in a bit!"

The boat neared the bank, where the Owl of the Remove stood blinking at them through his big glasses. The juniors rested on their oars a dozen feet from the green rushes.

"Well, what is it, Tubby?" asked Wharton. "Old Popper on the track?"

"Popper! No," said Bunter. "You're going picnicking?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm coming with you."

"Eh?"

"Pull in a bit closer," said Bunter. "I can't jump that distance."

"Why, you fat bounder!" exclaimed Bob Cherry wrathfully. "Have you stopped us to tell us that?"

"Of course!"

"Go and eat coke! Pull away, you chaps!" said Harry Wharton, in deep disgust.

"Hold on!" shouted Bunter. "How am I to get in the boat, you fatheads?"

"Is that a conundrum?"

"Look here, Bob Cherry——"

"Because one rode a horse and the other rhododendron!" said Bob cheerily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!" roared Bunter. "I'm not asking you conundrums. I want to come to that picnic!"

"You may continue in the wantfulness, my esteemed Bunter!"

"I say, old fellows——"

"Good-bye!"

"Look here, you rotters——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites pulled away again, and Bunter glared after them in great wrath. He started along the bank to keep pace with the boat, his little fat legs going like machinery.

"Beasts!" gasped Bunter. "Fancy making me walk, the rotters! I say, you fellows, if you're going to the island I sha'n't be able to get across unless you come for me."

"Bow-wow!"

"Yah! Beasts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter's fat legs were not equal to keeping pace with the boat. He was soon left behind. But he did not halt. Whenever there was a feed of any description anywhere Billy Bunter seemed to regard it as his undoubted right to be present and to take the lion's share of the good things. The Famous Five were generally patient and long-suffering with Bunter, and the Owl of the Remove took full advantage of it. He continued tramping along the grassy bank in a very bad humour.

The boat disappeared round a bend in the river, leaving Bunter still tramping on. The juniors grinned as they rowed away. They fancied that Bunter would soon tire of his pursuit; and if he did not he would be stopped by the park fence when he came to the border of Popper Court. There was really a right-of-way along the river

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the whole length of Sir Hilton's estate, but the baronet had closed it, and nobody seemed inclined to undertake a law-suit against him.

"Here we are again!" said Bob Cherry, as the island came in sight.

It was a lonely spot. The island, a mass of thick woods and foliage, rose almost in the centre of the stream, dividing the shining waters. In the clear river the great trees were mirrored, so that there seemed to be another island upside-down in the water.

The boat slowed down as it drew nearer the island.

After the scene in the Head's study the adventurous juniors felt quite justified in paying that visit to the island, but they knew that it was necessary to be very careful.

If Sir Hilton Popper did indeed catch them there and report them to the Head, Dr. Locke would certainly be very "wrathy."

But there was no sign of a human being on the wooded island or on the thickly-wooded banks of the river.

"Safe as houses!" said Nugent.

"Some blessed gamekeeper may be lying low," said Harry Wharton. "We don't want to get into trouble with the Head. These rows with old Popper make him waxy. Let's row right round the island first."

"Good!"

The boat glided on past the island, and turned, following its shore. The juniors scanned it keenly, but the solitude was unbroken. But suddenly Harry Wharton uttered an exclamation, and his hand rose to point.

"Look!"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Bob.

From a high tree there was a flutter of white. It looked like a large handkerchief that was fluttering in the breeze from the tree-top.

"My only hat!" said Johnny Bull. "How the dickens did that get there?"

"Looks like a signal of some sort," said Wharton. "It can't have got there by accident. It's been tied there."

"Why the deuce should anybody climb that tree and tie a handkerchief there?"

"Goodness knows!"

The juniors rested on their oars, staring at the white rag. There was no doubt about it. It was tied to a high branch, and tied securely, or the breeze from the sea would have torn it away.

Evidently it had been tied there as a signal.

But by whom? And for what?"

It was a puzzle.

"Shows that there's somebody on the island," said Bob sagely—"one of Sir Hilton's keepers, perhaps—and he's signalled that we're coming to the island. Of course, he would spot us on the river."

Wharton nodded, with a frown.

It seemed unlikely that the baronet would waste a keeper's time by posting him on the island to keep watch—very unlikely, indeed. But it seemed to be the only explanation of the signal on the tree-top.

"Jolly lucky we've seen it," said Johnny Bull. "We can keep clear now. Even old Popper can't raise objections to our rowing round his blessed island."

"Better keep off it," said Nugent. "No good rushing into the lion's jaws, you know. We can pull further along and camp on the bank past Popper Court."

"I don't like giving up the idea," demurred Bob.

"Fathead, we don't want a ragging from the Head! It's no good asking for trouble," said Johnny Bull. "It's lucky we've spotted that there's somebody on the watch."

"Oh, all right!" said Bob.

The juniors pulled on up the river. Once or twice they glanced back, and they could see the white cloth still fluttering. But as the boat passed round a bend in the river Wharton obtained a last glimpse of the island through an opening in the trees ashore, and he noted that the white signal had disappeared.

"It's gone!" he said.

"Taken down as soon as we cleared off," said Bob. "Pretty plain proof that there's somebody on the watch there. I dare say we're well out of it."

"Of course we are, fathead!"

"What a disappointment for Popper if he's laying a

giddy little trap for us!" chuckled Bob. And that reflection comforted Bob for having to abandon that excellent wheeze of a picnic on the island.

The juniors pulled on for another half-mile, and landed on the bank under the trees and proceeded to camp for the picnic. There they were safe from Sir Hilton Popper and all his works, and they enjoyed the picnic thoroughly.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter Makes a Discovery!

"BEASTS!"

Billy Bunter was referring to the Famous Five.

The fat junior had arrived on the river-bank opposite the island. To reach that spot he had had to negotiate the fence of Sir Hilton Popper's estate, and Bunter was not a good hand at a fence. He was also considerably uneasy on the subject of the irascible baronet. He kept in cover of the trees and bushes as he tramped up the river, keeping his eyes well about him.

But he reached the bank opposite the island without misadventure. There he halted under the trees that grew thickly down to the water's edge, and blinked across the intervening space of water.

On the island, he was assured, the picnickers had landed, and there the picnic was in progress; and he was left out of it, like a very fat Peri at the gate of Paradise.

"Rotters!" murmured Bunter. "Leaving me like this—after all I've done for 'em! How the deuce am I going to get across to the island? They wouldn't hear me if I shouted—and they wouldn't come if they did hear. Beasts!"

It was indeed a deep problem.

Bunter blinked up and down the bank, in the hope of spotting some boat moored there, which he would have borrowed without the slightest hesitation. But there was no craft to be seen.

The Owl of the Remove almost gave it up. But it was a long walk back to Greyfriars; and he had set his mind on that feed. It would be so much easier to return in the boat—if he could only join the picnickers. So he lingered, blinking across the shining water at the island.

He could see no sign of the picnickers there. But he concluded they would be keeping out of sight—on Sir Hilton Popper's account.

A rustle in the underwood startled him as he stood blinking.

A shiver ran through Bunter's fat form.

He thought of Sir Hilton Popper at once. To be caught by the baronet, actually on his land—marched to Greyfriars by the scruff of his neck. Billy Bunter shuddered at the thought.

Picnic and picnickers vanished from his mind. He plunged into a thick clump of bushes, palpitating, as the rustle came nearer.

A man passed within six feet of him, and Bunter caught a glimpse of him through the foliage.

He was not a keeper; and he was not Sir Hilton Popper. He was dressed in brown Norfolks, and was a fat, somewhat unwieldy man, with a round, red nose. He was quite a stranger to Bunter. He wore a pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez perched on his fat little pug nose, and he was blinking round him in a very watchful way. But the bushes concealed Bunter, and he was passed unseen.

Billy Bunter scarcely breathed.

He concluded that the man in the gold-rimmed glasses was some guest at Popper Court. Possibly Sir Hilton was near at hand. Bunter lay very low.

He heard the stranger halt by the river, the rustling ceased. There were some minutes of deep silence.

Bunter's curiosity began to rise. The man, with his broad back turned towards the junior, was staring away across the river towards the island.

Bunter ventured to put his head through the foliage to watch him more closely. The man was looking up at the tree-tops on the island, as Bunter could tell from the angle of his head. Bunter blinked in the same direction, but he could see nothing but the tree-tops, in their autumn brown.

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After several minutes the man moved, and Bunter popped back instantly into cover. When he ventured to look again, the man had disappeared, but Bunter could hear him moving. There was a continuous rustling within a dozen feet of the fat junior, where a tiny backwater of the Sark flowed among the trees, completely covered by branches and over-growing bushes. The branches rustled, and there was a "clack" of wood meeting wood.

Bunter started as he heard it; he knew what was "on." The unseen stranger was dragging out a skiff concealed under the bushes in the little backwater.

There was a faint dash of an oar in the water. Bunter blinked out of cover again; keeping himself well concealed, however.

The fat man, in a tiny skiff that was none too large for him, was pulling directly across the current to the island.

He rowed hard and fast, and the boat fairly shot across the stream. It seemed to Bunter less than a minute before it bumped on the island shore.

There it vanished under the shadow of the overhanging trees.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Bunter.

There was something utterly amazing in the whole occurrence. The fat man in the gold-rimmed glasses had been indescribably stealthy in all his movements. Billy Bunter was not keen of observation, but he could not help observing that.

The stranger, whoever he was, was paying a secret visit to the island. For what purpose was an utter mystery. He could not be a poacher—there was nothing to poach on the island, excepting a few rabbits. And the fat man was too prosperous-looking to be a poacher.

"Blessed if I know what he's up to!" muttered Bunter. "But one thing's jolly certain—he'll run into the picnic!"

Bunter chuckled at the idea.

The picnickers had left him out, and now they were going to be spotted—and serve them jolly well right! That was Bunter's thought. As a matter of fact, Harry Wharton & Co. were not on the island at all, but Bunter was not aware of that.

The fat junior waited several minutes, but there was no sound and no sign of life from the island. It began to be clear that the fat stranger had not run into the picnic, after all.

"Beasts!" murmured Bunter. "They've not gone there at all. I heard 'em say the island. I suppose they've given it a miss in case I got there. Greedy rotters; after all I've done for 'em!" Bunter groaned. "Now I've got to walk back to Greyfriars! Oh, crikey!"

Disconsolately the fat junior turned away, and retraced his steps along the bank. It was a long, long way to Greyfriars, and Bunter did not like exertion.

But, as it happened, his walk back to school was destined to be interrupted.

He had nearly reached the border of Sir Hilton Popper's estate, when an awe-inspiring figure appeared from the trees.

Bunter halted.

His little round eyes grew larger and more saucer-like behind his big glasses. It was Sir Hilton Popper who stood before him, with a riding-whip in his hand, his white moustache bristling, and his eye gleaming through his eyeglass.

Billy Bunter was fairly caught.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Mysterious Disappearance!

"HUH!"

With that ejaculation Sir Hilton Popper strode towards the hapless Bunter.

His riding-whip whistled in the air as he came. He looked as if he meant business.

Bunter stood rooted to the grass.

It was not much use to attempt to run—the long legs of the baronet would have overtaken him in a very few minutes. Besides, it was clear that Sir Hilton had recognised him.

"Oh, dear!" mumbled Bunter. "What rotten luck!"

"Boy!"
"G-g-good afternoon, sir!" said Bunter feebly, taking off his cap, and blinking nervously at the riding-whip.

"Nun-nun-nice afternoon, sir!"

"What are you doing here?"

"W-w-w-walking, sir."

"You have climbed that fence?"

"Oh, dear!"

"You are a Greyfriars boy?" thundered Sir Hilton.

Bunter gasped.

"Oh, no, sir! I—I belong to Highcliffe School, sir. M-m-my name is Cecil Ponsonby, sir!"

"That is a Greyfriars cap!"

"Oh, crumbs!" Bunter had forgotten the badge on his cap. "I—I borrowed that cap, sir. Mum-my own cap blew off, sir."

"Don't tell me lies, boy! I have seen you at Greyfriars. Your name is Bunter."

"Oh, dear!"

"And I have caught you trespassing on my land!" exclaimed Sir Hilton. "Caught you in the act, you young rascal! Where are your companions?"

"I—I haven't any."

"You are alone here?" exclaimed Sir Hilton, evidently disappointed.

He hoped to catch the Famous Five, too.

"Yes, sir. The—the fact is, I'm not trespassing," stammered Bunter. Necessity is the parent of invention, and under the stress of danger Bunter's gifts as an Ananias came out very strongly. "I—I disapprove of anything of the sort, sir. I—I came here to—to—to—"

"Don't tell me falsehoods, boy!" Sir Hilton's grip tightened on his riding-whip. "I shall send a note to your headmaster; but I shall thrash you myself, on the spot. I shall see that justice is done, personally."

"Oh, dear! I—I say, I—I'm not really trespassing, sir," stuttered Bunter. "I—I came to—to stop a chap who was trespassing—to—to remonstrate with him, sir, and—and to tell him that it wasn't allowed to go on the island, sir—"

"The island!" exclaimed Sir Hilton.

"Yes, he's gone there," said Bunter. "I was too late to stop him."

"A Greyfriars boy?"

"Oh, no, sir! A man—a fat johnny in glasses."

"Nonsense!"

"It's true, sir—I watched him!" exclaimed Bunter. "He's gone on the island. He had a boat hidden here—"

"I do not believe a word of it," said Sir Hilton grimly. "You are telling me falsehoods to save your own skin. I am going to—"

"But he's on the island now, sir," howled Bunter. "I—I assure you—"

Sir Hilton stared away towards the distant island. Billy Bunter looked round wildly. The fence was between him and safety; there was no chance of flight. The baronet was deep in thought for some minutes.

"Very well," he said at last, "if some stranger is trespassing on my island I am obliged to you for the information, and I will excuse your own conduct. You will come with me and I will ascertain. If I find a man there you are excused; if I do not I will thrash you all the more severely for attempting to deceive me."

Bunter brightened up.

"That's a go!" he said. "I—I mean, very good, sir."

"Come with me!"

"Oh, certainly!"

Sir Hilton Popper strode along the bank, and Bunter had to trot to keep pace with him. They arrived opposite the island, and Sir Hilton scanned it from the shore. It looked lonely and deserted. He glanced suspiciously at the fat junior, but Bunter looked quite confident. He knew that the man could not have left the island, or he would have seen the skiff on the river.

"You still maintain that a trespasser is there?" snapped Sir Hilton.

"I know he's there sir."

"Describe the man to me."

Bunter did so. Sir Hilton listened with a puzzled and frowning brow. Finally he nodded.

"Very well, we shall see."

The baronet took a silver whistle from his pocket and blew it twice. Then he waited, standing stiff as a

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"STRAIGHT AS A DIE!"

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ONE
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ramrod. In a few minutes a gamekeeper came out of the wood. He touched his hat respectfully to the great man.

"Get a boat here, Joyce, as quickly as you can," said Sir Hilton curtly.

"Yes, Sir Hilton."

The keeper disappeared.

Ten minutes later there was a splash of oars and the keeper reappeared, pulling a boat down the river from the boat-house. He pulled in to the rushes, and Sir Hilton signed to Bunter to embark, and followed him in.

"The island!" he said briefly.

The keeper pulled away again.

In a few minutes the boat grated on the island shore under the thick trees.

"This is just where he landed," said Bunter.

"There is no boat here."

"It was just a little light skiff," explained Bunter. "He could carry it easily on his shoulder. I dare say he's shoved it out of sight."

"We shall see. Joyce, search the island thoroughly, and tell me whether you find either a man or a skiff."

The keeper landed and plunged into the bushes. Billy Bunter sat in the boat, waiting confidently. The island was so small that it would not take the keeper long to search it, and, of course, the man and his skiff could not have vanished into thin air, so Billy Bunter felt quite safe.

A quarter of an hour passed.

Sir Hilton tugged at his white moustache, his look growing grimmer and grimmer. Joyce came out of the trees at last.

"Well?" said the baronet.

"There's nobody on the island, Sir Hilton."

"Nor a boat?"

"No, sir."

Sir Hilton Popper turned grimly to Bunter.

"Well, you young rascal?"

"He—he must be here!" exclaimed Bunter. "I should have seen him if he'd cleared off. I know he's still here!"

"You need not tell me any more falsehoods, Bunter. I do not believe a single word of your story. You have wasted my time, doubtless hoping to escape. Joyce, take the boat back!"

The keeper pulled back to the shore, and they landed. Then Sir Hilton Popper laid a grip of iron on Bunter's collar. The Owl of the Remove yelled in anticipation.

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

"Yarooopp!"

"You young rascal!" (Swish!) "You lying young rascal!" (Swish!) "Take that—and that—and that—and that!" (Swish! Swish! Swish!) "And if I catch you again—!" (Swish! Swish!)

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow! Yah! Oooooop!"

"Joyce, see that young rascal off the estate!"

"Yes, Sir Hilton," grinned Joyce.

He took Bunter by the collar and led him away.

Billy Bunter groaned at every step. Sir Hilton had a heavy hand, and Bunter had felt the full weight of it.

"Now you clear off, you young rascal!" said the keeper, as he pushed Bunter through a gate, "and don't you come back agin!"

"Ow! Ow! Ow!"

Billy Bunter stumbled dolefully along the bank, in deep anguish. He sat down on the grassy slope by the river and groaned. For the next half-hour Billy Bunter was wholly occupied in making such remarks as "Wow! Yow! Ow!"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Fact or Fiction!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"Bunter again!"

The Remove boat was coming lazily down the current, when the returning picnickers sighted the fat figure of William George Bunter on the bank.

Billy Bunter was seated on the grass, rocking himself to and fro and groaning with such energy that his

groans could be heard at a considerable distance. Perhaps he had sighted the boat, and put on extra steam, so to speak, in order to appeal to the sympathies of the Remove chums.

"Looks as if he's been in the wars!" said Harry Wharton. "Pull in!"

Billy Bunter blinked dolefully at the Famous Five as the boat bumped into the rushes.

"What's the matter?" demanded Wharton

"Oh, dear! Ow!"

"Is the painfulness terrific?" asked Hurree Singh sympathetically.

"Yow-ow!"

"Somebody been going for you?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Yoooop!"

"Is that German or Esperanto?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Anybody know what he means?"

"Groo-hoo!"

"Must be German," said Bob. "Sprachen Sie nicht Englisch, dummkopf?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow-ow! I say, you fellows, I've had an awful time," moaned Bunter. "The old villain broke a stick on my back. Yow-ow!"

"What old villain?" asked Harry.

"You! That old villain Popper! Grooh!"

"You've been trespassing on Popper's property," said Bob Cherry sternly. "I'm surprised at you, Bunter. Why don't you follow the example of nice boys, like us, and avoid these misguided things?"

"Wow-wow! I was following you rotters—yow-ow! It was all your fault. My backbone is sprained in three places, and I can't move!"

"Horrible!" said Bob. "We were going to offer you a lift home in the boat, but, of course, if you can't move that's n. g. Good-bye, old chap! We'll see if we can send an ambulance presently."

Bob shoved his oar into the rushes to pull off. Billy Bunter jumped up, as if moved by a spring.

"You rotters! Lemme get in!" he roared. "You're jolly well not going to leave me here!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, my hat!" said Bob. "What wonderful vitality! A chap jumping up like that when his backbone's broken! Roll in, Bunter—if your backbone will let you!"

Billy Bunter rolled in, and plumped down in the stern with a plump that made the boat rock. The grinning Removites pulled off again, with Billy Bunter glowering at them.

As the boat glided down the stream Bunter's groans recommenced.

"How long is it since old Popper licked you?" asked Bob.

"Yow! About an hour. Wow!"

"Then the edge of it must have worn off by this time, and you needn't make such a thumping row."

"Wow! You unsympathetic beast! Grooh!"

Splash!

Billy Bunter yelled as a shower of drops came over him.

"Look out, you dummy! You're splashing me."

"I always splash fellows who groan," said Bob placidly. "I shall keep on splashing as long as you keep on groaning."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter's groans ceased. A blessed stillness descended upon the river.

"Anything left from the picnic?" asked Bunter, after a pause.

"You're too cut up to eat," said Bob, with a shake of the head.

"I'm simply famished. I think a feed would alleviate the pain," said Bunter pathetically. "Is there anything left?"

"Certainly."

"Well, can I have it?" demanded Bunter, blinking round.

"If you like."

"Thanks! What is it?"

"The spirit-stove."

"Eh?"

"And the kettle."

"You—you rotter!"

"And some matches and methylated spirit. Blessed if I know how you're going to eat them, but you can try if you like."

"Beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry chuckled, and drew a bundle out of the locker. Bunter's fat brow cleared at the sight of sandwiches and half a cake.

"There you are, fatty. Pile in and be happy!"

Bunter's jaws were soon munching away at a great speed. The sandwiches disappeared in record time, and the cake followed. Then Billy Bunter, somewhat restored, related at full length his thrilling adventures of the afternoon.

The juniors eyed him curiously as he told of the mysterious man in gold-rimmed glasses who had visited the island so stealthily, and vanished so mysteriously.

When he had finished, Bob Cherry groped in the locker again. He found a biscuit there, and solemnly presented it to Bunter.

"You've earned it," he remarked.

"Why, you—you rotter!" howled Bunter. "Don't you believe me?"

"Of course not," said Bob, in surprise. "You didn't expect us to swallow that yarn, surely?"

"It's true!"

"Tell us another," suggested Bob. "Make it a masked man this time; that's much more interesting, and it would be just as true."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter glared speechlessly at the doubting Thomases. Bunter's reputation was exactly the reverse of the well-known George Washington. As Bob Cherry had remarked, G. W. could never tell a lie, and Billy Bunter could never tell anything else.

It was hard lines that when Bunter was telling the truth his old reputation should rise up against him like this.

"You rotters!" he said at last. "Every word's true. The chap sneaked on to the island; he had a skiff hidden there."

"Go it!"

"He never went off the island, I know that; but when I got there with old Popper and the keeper he had disappeared."

"Into thin air?" suggested Nugent.

"Of course he couldn't do that, Nugent. I don't know where he had disappeared to. But he had disappeared."

"Picked up by a Zeppelin, perhaps," said Johnny Bull.

"Did you see a Zepp, Bunter?"

"No, I didn't, you fathead!"

"You didn't?" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Why not?"

"There wasn't one there, you dummy!"

"But that's no reason why you shouldn't say you saw one, is it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do you mean to say you don't believe in the man at all, like old Popper?" howled Bunter indignantly.

"Of course not. Tell us an easier one."

"Hold on!" said Harry Wharton quietly. "What time was it you saw that chap go on the island, Bunter?"

"About two hours ago, or a bit more."

"It's six now," said Harry. "That would be about four o'clock. We passed the island just before four o'clock, you chaps, and saw the signal on the tree. We thought that was jolly queer."

"We thought it was one of Popper's keepers there," said Bob. "But according to Bunter's yarn old Popper hadn't anybody there."

"It's jolly odd. According to Bunter, this fat johnny in barnacles went to the island soon after we passed. Looks as if somebody was on the island, and signalled that a boat was on the river, and the fat johnny waited till the signal was down before he went to the island. Tell us the yarn over again, Bunter."

"What for?" snapped Bunter.

"Because when you're telling whoppers you always contradict yourself on some points," explained Wharton. "Liars ought to have good memories, but you've a bad one. Let's have it over again."



The Removites pulled away again, and Bunter glared after them in great wrath. He started along the bank to keep pace with the boat, his little fat legs going like machinery. "Beasts!" gasped Bunter. "Fancy making me walk, the rotters!" (See Chapter 3.)

Bunter snorted angrily, but he told the yarn over again, and the juniors listened to it carefully. To their surprise the second edition was the same as the first, without a single variation, such as Bunter habitually indulged in when he was drawing upon his imagination.

"Blessed if it doesn't sound as if he's telling the truth!" said Bob Cherry, in wonder.

"If you don't believe me, you can go and eat coke!" growled Bunter.

"The queerfulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "There is something that is mysterious going on on the island, and the esteemed Popper does not know it."

"And that's why he thought we'd been trespassing there!" exclaimed Nugent, struck by a sudden thought. "He's found traces of somebody being there, you know, and put it down to us. Must have been this fat johnny Bunter saw."

Harry Wharton wrinkled his brows in thought.

"But what the dickens can it mean?" he demanded. "There's no reason why anybody should go to the island secretly. Such a man as Bunter described couldn't go there to poach a few wild rabbits. And keeping a skiff hidden in that backwater, it's jolly strange. Then that signal on the tree—shows that there are two of them, at least. It beats me hollow."

"P'r'aps it's a gang of coiners," suggested Bunter brilliantly.

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"STRAIGHT AS A DIE!"

"Bow-wow!"

"And how did they—or he—disappear when old Popper's keeper searched the island?" said Johnny Bull. "There's no place there to hide in, unless it's a hollow tree. And they couldn't shove a boat into a hollow tree."

"I give it up," said Bob.

The strange affair occupied the thoughts of the juniors as they pulled home to Greyfriars. The affair was so strange, indeed, that they were almost driven to the conclusion that Bunter had, after all, been drawing the long bow, after his well-known custom. Yet the fat junior's story was so connected and clear that they could hardly help believing him.

It was a puzzle, and they had to give it up, but they thought a good deal about it. And, though they did not know it then, they were destined to have a good deal more to do with the mystery of the island.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Scouting!

"PENNY for 'em!" said Frank Nugent.

Harry Wharton started out of a brown study. He had been thinking deeply for some time, after finishing his prep in the study that evening, and Nugent had been watching him with an amused smile.

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

Wharton smiled, too, as he met Nugent's glance.

"I've been thinking of that queer bizney this afternoon," said Harry. "The more I think about it, the less I can make head or tail of it."

"Same here," said Frank. "But it needn't worry us."

"No; I know it isn't our affair. But it's interesting, all the same. I've thought it out, and I'm sure that Bunter was telling us the facts. He's told the yarn to Toddy and half a dozen fellows since, and he sticks to the same story."

"Looks like it. It's queer about that fat johnny he describes. But what does it matter to this study?"

"Nothing," said Harry, laughing. "Only secret business is generally underhand business, and it looks to me as if something's going on that won't bear the light. There's some little game on, and I think very likely it ought to be looked into."

Nugent whistled.

"I don't see what shady bizney could be going on there," he said.

"I don't either; but if it isn't shady, why all that secrecy? That signal on the tree-top; it must have been to warn Bunter's johnny that there was a boat on the river. Whoever was on the island was on the watch, and spotted us. The fat johnny had to get there unseen. Keeping a boat hidden in the backwater is jolly curious, too—boats cost money, you know—and why should a man keep a boat there simply to visit the island? He could always hire a boatman to row him up from Friardale for a couple of bob, if it was all above aboard."

"It's fishy," said Nugent. "Decidedly fishy. But I haven't the faintest idea of what can be going on there. There was a gang of forgers unearthed hereabouts once, but those things don't happen twice."

Wharton shook his head.

"Not likely. But how did the man disappear from the island, Frank? He couldn't have got off unseen, Bunter thinks. He must have hidden somewhere."

"Easy enough to hide in the trees, I should say."

"Well, the leaves are growing thin at this time of the year, and a tree wouldn't be a very safe hiding-place. Besides, there was the skiff. They couldn't hide that in a tree," said Harry. "It looks to me as if they—whoever they are—have got some hiding-place on the island."

"Phew!" Nugent whistled again. "You'll be suggesting German spies next, Harry."

"Why not?" said Wharton quietly. "It's perfectly well known that there are German spies on this coast, and they have to lie awfully low now that the police are so keen after them. There are hundreds of the scoundrels still free in England."

"But German aliens have to be registered, you know; the police know where they are when they want them."

"Not naturalised Germans," said Harry. "Lots of cads got naturalised so as to be able to spy more safely, and they can go where they like and do what they like; they're British subjects in name and law. Of course, I know it sounds rather thick; but it's plain enough that there's something fishy going on, and there's a chance, at least, that it's some German treachery."

"I suppose there's a chance," assented Nugent, "but—but the fellows would cackle if we suggested that in the common-room, Harry."

"We're not going to suggest it in the common-room. My idea is that we might look into it ourselves."

Nugent grinned.

"Old Coker started as a spy-hunter once," he remarked. "Are we going to follow in the footsteps of Coker of the Fifth?"

"Oh, blow Coker! Look here, Frank, it's up to us," said Harry earnestly. "I admit there's only a chance that it is some German dirty work, but the bare chance is enough. Anyway, it's something fishy."

"I'm game," said Nugent at once. "But it means trespassing on old Popper's land, and if the Head gets to know—"

"We can work it," said Harry. "We know just where Bunter's johnny had his boat hidden. He keeps it there, and he doesn't know Bunter spotted him. What about a run up the river to-morrow, and a look for that boat? That would settle the matter if we could find it."

"I'm on," said Nugent.

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There was a somewhat humorous expression on Frank Nugent's face, but Wharton was in deep earnest. Whatever was the explanation of the mystery of the island, the captain of the Remove felt that it was something "shady." And it was certain that the Kentish coast was the happy hunting-ground of foreign spies.

As Wharton said, it was but a bare chance that the island hid foreign plotters, but that chance was more than enough to justify an investigation.

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh were taken into consultation, and they agreed at once to the expedition. Squiff, the Australian junior, and Tom Brown, the New Zealander, were also called in. They seemed a little sceptical, but they were quite keen to join in the investigation. It was arranged that after lessons on the following day the seven juniors should leave the school separately, and meet at a spot on the river and go ahead.

The expedition was kept a secret among themselves. It was risky enough, for any encounter with Sir Hilton Popper or a report from him to Dr. Locke would have meant condign punishment for the parties concerned.

When afternoon lessons were over on Thursday the Co. started.

They sauntered out of the school gates one at a time, apparently bound in different directions, and met together a quarter of an hour later on the bank of the river.

"Now full steam ahead!" said Bob Cherry, with a twinkle in his eyes. "And remember that I claim first whack at the German spy."

There was a chuckle from the party, and Wharton frowned a little. The whole party seemed inclined to take the expedition somewhat humorously, and Wharton wondered whether he had allowed his imagination rather too loose a rein. Yet it was certain that the island held some secret.

"Second whack to me!" said Squiff. "I'll give you his right eye if you'll leave me his left!"

"Leave his nose to me!" said Johnny Bull.

"Mine's his scalp!" said Tom Brown.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Wharton, a little gruffly. "I haven't said there's any German spy. I only said there was a bare chance if it."

"The barefulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

And the party grinned and marched on.

Sir Hilton Popper's fence on the river-path did not stop them. In the sunset they reached the place opposite the island, where Bunter, according to his story, had watched the fat gentleman in gold-rimmed glasses. They kept their eyes well about them now. Sir Hilton's keepers were very keen after trespassers, by orders of their irascible employer, and the expedition would have been a rank failure if it had ended in capture and a return to the school in charge of a surly man in velveteens.

But the heroes of the Remove had had plenty of experience as Boy Scouts, and they knew how to make the best use of cover. They made their way cautiously through the thickets to the little backwater that bubbled and sang out of sight under the thick branches and gnarled roots.

"My only hat!" murmured Sampson Quincy Iffey Field suddenly.

"What is it, Squiff?"

"A boat, by gum!"

"Phew!"

The juniors gathered quickly round the Australian. Hidden under the overgrowing brambles, the little skiff rocked on the unseen water; but Squiff had dragged its nose to light. It was so well hidden that the keenest of Sir Hilton's keepers would certainly never have discovered it unless he had been told it was there. The juniors fixed their eye upon it, and their eyes gleamed.

It was a confirmation of Bunter's story that removed all doubt. Evidently the stealthy gentleman in gold-rimmed glasses had a real existence. This was the little light skiff that Bunter had described.

"That's a clincher," said Tom Brown, with a soft whistle. "Somebody keeps this craft here for secret visits to the island. What the dickens for, I wonder?"

"German spies, of course," said Bob, with exaggerated solemnity. "They're spying on the island, and sending off to Berlin a full description of old Popper's rabbits."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Harry. "Look here, we've found the boat. Let's leave it as we've found it. No need to let the johnny know we've bowled him out."

"Ain't we going to the island to catch the spies?"

"We can swim it."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I'm going to, anyway," said Wharton. "We can leave our clobber in the trees here. Look here, if there's somebody on the watch on the island we don't want to go there in a boat. He would spot us at once. We don't want to be spotted; we want to spot him."

"Active, and not passive," murmured Nugent.

"No need for all of us to go, either," said Harry. "You fellows stay here in cover, and keep your eyes open for that fat johnny if he should turn up. Bob can come with me. Two of us can search the island, or I'll go alone if that grinning ass doesn't want a swim!"

"Keep your wool on, old scout!" said Bob, chuckling. "I'll come. Haven't I claimed first whack at the Hun—if we find him?"

"Oh, rats! Come on, then!"

Leaving five of the party in cover by the backwater, Wharton and Bob stripped off their outer garments. Bob was heading for the river, when Harry stopped him.

"Hold on! If there's a man watching we don't want him to see our heads on the river."

"Can't leave them here, can we?" murmured Bob.

"Fathead, we've got to keep in cover! Haven't you learned scouting?" demanded Wharton. "Get a dead branch, and slip your head under it and float."

"Ripping!"

There were plenty of dead branches sagging in the backwater. The two juniors plunged into the little tributary, and arranged the loose branches over their heads, and floated out into the river and started swimming for the island. From the shore nothing could be seen of them save what appeared to be two floating fragments of driftwood. It was a scout's "dodge," and a good one. If a watch was being kept from the island the watcher would need very keen eyesight to discern that two human heads were hidden under the dead branches that drifted with the current down to the island in the river.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Secret of the Oak!

"HERE we are again!" murmured Bob Cherry.

The two swimmers had started from a point on the bank a little above the island, so that the current drifted them down slantingly. They came in among the thick green rushes under the trees on the isle, and cautiously lifted their heads through the dead branches they had used for cover.

There was no sign of life upon the island save the twittering of birds in the trees and the occasional scuttling of a rabbit.

If there was a secret watcher there he was well hidden. The two juniors drew themselves quietly from the water among the bushes.

"Whither now, O king?" asked Bob.

"We're going to search the island," said Harry.

Bob Cherry glanced down at the dripping costume that encased his limbs.

"Well, there's nobody here," he remarked. "We're not exactly in the proper rig to run into a picnic party, especially if there were ladies——"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Bob! Come on!"

"Right-ho!"

The juniors made their way into the trees. The island was so thickly wooded that there were few open spaces, but the extent was not large, and it was easy enough for a pretty thorough search to be made.

The two juniors separated, Wharton taking the upper end and Bob the lower end of the little island. They agreed to meet at a big tree in the centre of the isle, a gigantic oak whose branches spread far and wide.

In about twenty minutes they met under the branches of the oak, and each glanced at the other inquiringly and shook his head.

"Nobody here now, at all events," said Bob.

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ONE
PENNY.

"It seems not," assented Wharton. "But somebody has been here. I've found traces of footprints and broken twigs, and so on."

"So have I; but Popper and Bunter and the keeper were here yesterday," said Bob. "Joyce searched the island, Bunter says. That would account for all the signs we've seen."

"Quite so. All the same, there was somebody here when we rowed past yesterday, as we know by the signal on the tree. What we've got to find out is where that fat johnny vanished to, and where he hid his skiff."

Bob gave a slight shrug of the shoulders. So far as he could see, there was no hiding-place on the island.

"Perhaps he got off without Bunter seeing him," he suggested. "You know what a blinking owl Bunter is."

Wharton nodded, knitting his brows a little. He wondered whether he had come there on a wild-goose chase, after all.

He was standing in deep thought, under the spreading branches of the big oak, when a slight sound caught his keen ears.

He started and glanced round him.

He put his fingers to his lips as Bob Cherry was about to speak. Bob was silent, looking round him curiously.

The sound was repeated. It was a faint scraping sound, evidently made by somebody moving somewhere, but where the juniors could not guess. The thick under-woods round them were still and lifeless.

Whence had come that faint sound?

Their eyes met expressively. It was clear enough now that they were not alone upon the island in the river.

"That wasn't a rabbit!" Bob whispered.

Wharton shook his head.

"Listen!" he breathed.

They listened intently.

There was a rustle in the big tree over their heads. They looked up, startled. Then Wharton dragged his companion into cover.

His heart was thumping.

"Somebody in the tree!" he breathed, scarcely audibly.

Bob's eyes were gleaming.

"But—but—has he seen us? How did he get there?"

"Don't you see?" Wharton's face was flushed with excitement. "He was in the tree—it's hollow!"

"Hollow? By Jove!"

"And he's just climbed out of the trunk into the branches."

"My hat!"

"Shush!"

With beating hearts the two juniors lay low and listened. The rustling in the branches of the oak was plain enough. Someone was climbing in the branches, and, as the juniors had not seen him, it was certain that he had come from within the hollow trunk.

The huge old trunk seemed solid enough. The juniors had noticed no trace of an opening in it.

But they could not doubt the evidence of their senses. The oak was hollow, and it concealed the unknown watcher of the island.

They were on the track at last of the mystery of the island. Who was the man that had been hidden in the hollow oak? Why was he there? What nefarious business was being carried on in such deep secrecy?

The rustling in the branches ceased, and there was silence again. But they knew that the unseen man was still in the tree.

They lay quiet, without a movement, under the thick bushes. The Unknown had emerged from his hiding-place into the branches, and they felt that something was to happen. Wharton placed his lips close to Bob's ear and whispered:

"The other man's coming, perhaps, and this chap's watching the river. If there's a boat, he's going to signal that the coast isn't clear, same as he did yesterday."

Bob nodded.

"Listen!"

A faint splash of an oar was heard on the river.

"He's coming!" murmured Bob.

A few minutes later they heard the bumping of a boat in the rushes. Then there was a rustle in the under-

wood as an unseen figure came towards the big oak from the river.

Through the interstices in the thicket where they had taken cover they watched, in tense silence.

A form emerged into view at last—the form of a fat man in Norfolks, with a pair of gold-rimmed glasses glimmering on his fat, round nose.

The hidden juniors exchanged a quick glance.

It was the man Bunter had seen—the "fat johnny" whom the Owl of the Remove had described to them the previous day.

They scanned his face closely through the bushes. Evidently he had not the slightest suspicion that anyone was on the island excepting himself and his associate.

They noted the fat, florid face, the light-blue eyes that glimmered coldly behind the glasses, the gross features and heavy lips. If ever there was a face of a Teutonic cast it was that of the man in glasses before them. The man was a German, by origin at least—they had not the slightest doubt about that. True, he might be English so far as a "scrap of paper" could make him English, but he was a German from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet.

What was he doing there?

The fat man stood under the wide-spreading branches, looking up. A rope came dangling down.

It was a thick, double rope, with wooden bars lashed across—in fact, a rope ladder.

The juniors watched breathlessly.

The fat man grasped the rope-ladder as it dangled down before him, and began to climb. With surprising activity, considering his bulk, he ascended, and vanished into the branches of the oak.

There was a mutter of voices above for a few moments, and then silence.

Then a slight scraping sound again, and the juniors knew now that it proceeded from the interior of the trunk.

Then silence again—unbroken.

For ten minutes longer the juniors lay silent; but there was no sound, and they rose out of their cover at last.

Wharton made a sign, and without speaking they trod away silently through the thick underwoods, and plunged into the river. In a few minutes more they were dragging themselves from the water on to the river bank, where they had left their chums.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Hand to Hand!

"HERE they are!"

It was Johnny Bull's voice.

Dripping with water, Wharton and Bob Cherry joined their chums, who came cautiously out of their cover to meet them. All the juniors were looking excited.

"Did you see him?" whispered Squiff. "He came to the island. We were afraid he would spot you there."

"He didn't spot us," said Wharton. "But you——"

The Australian junior chuckled.

"He didn't spot us here—no fear! We heard him coming, and we thought it might be old Popper, so we took cover."

"Good!"

"We watched him get the skiff out, and he pulled for the island," said Frank Nugent. "He hadn't any idea we were here, but we thought he would spot you."

"Is he still there," asked Tom Brown.

"Yes; he and the other."

"And he didn't see you?" asked Squiff.

"No fear!"

Wharton explained hurriedly what they had seen on the island. The rest of the party listened in amazement.

"A hollow oak, by gum!" said Squiff. "I didn't think of that."

"What the merry dickens is their little game?" said Johnny Bull. "It can't be pleasant quarters, in a hollow tree."

"They don't stay in the tree," said Wharton. "I fancy there's a hollow underneath it—a sort of cave. They couldn't stay in the tree. That's only the way they get into their den."

"But what are they doing there?"

"Goodness knows!" said Bob.

"Can't be simply hiding," said Squiff. "If that were it, this fat johnny would stay there with the other chap. But he comes and goes, you see. One of them stays there, and the other goes about. 'Tain't a case of hiding."

"He looked like a German," said Bob.

"He was a German!" said Wharton quietly. "There's no doubt about that. I suppose you fellows can see now that there's some shady game going on, and that Germans are mixed up in it?"

"Looks like it, by gum!"

"But I don't see it, all the same," said Nugent. "Spies wouldn't want to hide themselves in a corner of the earth like that. Their business would be to get information and send it to Germany."

Wharton nodded.

"I can't quite get on to it," he confessed. "But it's clear enough that there's something fishy going on, and we're going to find out what it is."

"Hear, hear!"

"We don't want to jaw about it, in case it turns out to be a mare's-nest," said Harry. "There might be some simple explanation, which would make us look duffers if we talked about German spies. But it looks to me shady, and we're going to get to the bottom of it somehow. We've got to think it over. Better clear off now, or we shall be late for call-over."

Wharton and Bob had been rubbing themselves dry while they talked. Their wet costumes were rolled up into a bundle, and they donned their clothes. Then the party returned the way they had come, keeping a careful look-out for the enemy—the enemy being Sir Hilton Popper and his keepers.

"Oh, what rotten luck!" ejaculated Bob Cherry suddenly.

They had almost reached the park fence, on the other side of which was safety, when a purple face and a white moustache came into view through the trees. Sir Hilton Popper strode out of the wood, directly in their path.

The juniors halted.

They were fairly caught. It was not even a case of being caught on the disputed territory of the island in the river. They were on Sir Hilton Popper's own land; and they were caught!

"So I have caught you at last!" he said.

"Looks like it, sir," said Bob Cherry, who was the first to recover his coolness. "How do you do, sir?"

Sir Hilton's eye began to gleam behind his eyeglass.

"Impertinent, as usual!" he snapped.

"Business as usual in war-time, sir," said Bob affably. And the juniors grinned.

Sir Hilton Popper did not grin; he scowled.

"You have been to my island?" he exclaimed.

"Your island, sir?"

"Yes, you young rascal!"

"Not at all," said Bob. "We've been to our island!"

"You admit that you have been on the island?" exclaimed Sir Hilton.

"Anything to oblige, sir."

"I shall report this at once to Dr. Locke. This time you will hardly venture to deny your trespass."

"We should not deny anything that was true!" said Harry Wharton disdainfully.

"You denied it before."

"Because you made a false accusation."

"What!" shouted Sir Hilton.

"But when you tell Dr. Locke the truth, we shall certainly not deny it," said Wharton calmly.

Sir Hilton gripped his riding-whip convulsively.

"You insolent young scoundrel!"

"Better language, please!" said Wharton sharply.

"Wha-a-at?"

"You would not like us to call you an insolent old scoundrel, I suppose?"

"And it would be nearer the facts, too," said Bob Cherry.

"I shall chastise you with my own hands!" shouted Sir Hilton, and he whirled up the riding-whip and strode at the juniors.

Perhaps if Sir Hilton Popper had been a little calmer he would not have attempted to chastise seven sturdy juniors with his own hands. He very soon discovered that he had taken on too large an order.

The riding-whip fell once—across Wharton's shoulders. The next instant Harry Wharton hit out, and the baronet caught a very hard set of knuckles on the point of his chin.

That anybody, especially a schoolboy, would venture to hit him had apparently never even occurred to the autocrat baronet. The surprise, rather than the force of the blow, knocked him over. He sat down heavily in the grass with a loud gasp.

"By gad!" he stuttered. "By gad!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Squiff.

Sir Hilton sprang up in a towering fury. The riding-whip lashed round him, but only for a moment. Then he was seized by seven pairs of hands, and he sat down in the grass again with a heavy bump.

Squiff caught up the whip and tossed it into the river. Johnny Bull squashed Sir Hilton's hat on his head.

Then the juniors scrambled over the fence, and departed, leaving Sir Hilton Popper struggling wildly with his hat.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bob Cherry, as they started for Greyfriars. "There will be a row about this! Knocking baronets down isn't allowed."

"Serve him right!" said Wharton, his eyes flaming. "Does the old duffer think we're Germans to be whipped like dogs?"

"Hear, hear!" grinned Squiff. "But there will be a fearful row."

"The rowfulness will be terrific!" said Hurree Singh. "But we shall all stand together shoulderfully, and face the esteemed music."

"That is what comes of going after German spies," groaned Bob. "There's no encouragement for patriots in these days."

In a somewhat glum humour the juniors returned to school, just in time to answer to their names at roll-call. There was no doubt whatever that the row would be "terrific." Sir Hilton Popper had been knocked down, probably for the first time in his life—though perhaps it was not the first time he had deserved it. That he would come to Greyfriars raging, and that they would be called before the Head and flogged, the juniors did not doubt in the slightest. It was a disastrous ending to the expedition.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Startling News!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. did not feel cheerful that evening.

They waited for the blow to fall.

While they were doing their preparation they expected every moment to receive a summons into the Head's study, there to find Sir Hilton Popper like a lion in his wrath.

But, as it happened, the summons did not come.

After prep was over the Co. gathered in the common-room. It was close upon bed-time then, and it was unlikely that the baronet would call so late.

"Blessed if I can understand it," said Tom Brown. "He must be leaving it till the morning."

"I thought he would come raging in a few minutes after us," said Bob. "Jolly queer that he should let it stand over like this. Making it lingering punishment, the beast!"

"Well, he can't be coming now," said Nugent, as Wingate of the Sixth looked in to shepherd the Remove off to their dormitory. "I shall dream to-night about birches and swishings—ugh!"

"I'd rather have had it over," said Harry. "But it can't be helped. We shall get it in the morning, right enough."

With that happy anticipation the chums of the Remove went to bed.

Their glum forebodings respecting the probable happenings of the morning did not interfere with their

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sleep, however, and they slept soundly enough till the rising-bell clanged out.

"Must be before lessons," said Bob Cherry, as they went down. "Old Popper won't leave it later than that."

But Bob was not a true prophet.

When the bell rang for first lesson, Sir Hilton Popper had not appeared, and there had been no summons to the Head's study.

In a state of great amazement, the Co. went to their Form-room.

The conduct of the baronet was simply inexplicable. That he would allow the matter to drop was impossible. He would exact the severest possible punishment for the way the Removeites had handled him on the river-bank.

That was as certain as anything could be. But why was he delaying? Why had he not arrived at Greyfriars with his complaint?

During morning lessons the heroes of the Remove were on tenterhooks. Surely the baronet must call during the morning and lay his grievous wrongs before the Head. In that case they would be called out of the Form-room, undoubtedly, to answer to the charge.

They were thinking more of Sir Hilton Popper than their lessons, as a matter of fact, and two or three of the Co. received lines from Mr. Quelch for inattention in consequence. The Remove-master was quite unaware of the worry that was on the minds of his hopeful pupils.

Morning lessons ended, and the Remove came out into the quadrangle. The Co. gathered in an astonished group to discuss the situation.

"It beats me hollow," said Bob. "Old Popper must be letting the matter drop. I can't catch on to it at all."

"Perhapsfully what he really needed was a knock-downfulness," suggested Hurree Singh. "It has perhapsfully done him good."

The juniors grinned. Perhaps a knocking-down was what Sir Hilton needed; but he was not likely to see it in that light himself.

"Or perhapsfully the esteemed rotter is deliberately keeping us on the tenderhooks," said Hurree Singh.

"Tenderhooks, fathead!" said Bob.

"My esteemed master in India taught me to say tenderhooks, my beloved chum," replied Hurree Singh gently. "He was a very learned moonshee."

"Must have been a regular corker, by the way, he taught you English," said Squiff. "But about old Popper—what on earth's his little game?"

"Give it up," said Bob.

"What are you fellows worrying about?" asked Peter Todd, joining them. "I can see there's something on your little brains."

"We're expecting Popper," said Bob. "Wharton knocked him down yesterday."

"Great Christopher Columbus!" ejaculated Peter.

"Keep it dark, of course," said Harry. "If old Popper doesn't complain, there's no need for us to give ourselves away."

"No fear!" said Peter. "Fancy knocking old Popper down! What a nerve! I've never knocked down a baronet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But why hasn't he come to see you scalped?"

"That's what we can't make out," said Johnny Bull. "He can't intend to let us off. That wouldn't be like him."

"No jolly fear!" said Peter. "I suppose he's lingering out the agony. What a nice man!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's somebody," said Bob Cherry, as he spotted a portly figure entering at the school gates. "Grimey, by gum!"

It was Inspector Grimes, from Courtfield. He crossed towards the School House with his ponderous stride. Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another, dumbly. They remembered a threat the baronet had uttered—that he would place the next case of trespass in the hands of the police. Was Inspector Grimes's visit to Greyfriars in connection with their unfortunate selves?

"Oh, my sainted aunt!" murmured Squiff, after a frozen silence. "This is where we get it right in the neck!"

"The Head will simply ramp!" groaned Bob Cherry.

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"He'll think Greyfriars will get into the papers—and all through us."

"Be nice to the inspector," whispered Nugent.

The juniors took that excellent advice. They "capped" the portly gentleman very respectfully as he came up. They could not help noting that Mr. Grimes looked at them very curiously.

"Good-morning, sir!" said Bob.

"Morning!" said the inspector.

"Quite a pleasure to see you here, Mr. Grimes," said Nugent.

"I hope it will turn out pleasant for you, young gentlemen," said the inspector.

And with that somewhat alarming remark, he passed into the house, and was shown into the Head's presence.

"He's after us!" grunted Johnny Bull. "That utter waster, old Popper, has complained to the police instead of to the Head. What a rotten trick!"

"I don't see how the bobbies can go for us," said Wharton. "There's really a right-of-way along the river, and everybody knows it. Old Popper has closed it, but he can't legally call it trespass. We weren't in his woods, only on the path, when he caught us. As for knocking him down, he struck first with his confounded whip. Haven't we got a good case, Toddy? You're a blessed lawyer, and you ought to know."

"You've got a first-rate case in law," said Peter; "but not with the Head. The Head will be waxy."

"There's the rub," growled Tom Brown. "Blow Sir Hilton, and blow his old island, and blow everybody!"

The juniors waited. They fully expected now to be called into the Head's study, to face Inspector Grimes instead of the baronet. In a few minutes Trotter came out, looking for them.

"Little us wanted?" asked Bob.

Trotter grinned.

"Yes, Master Cherry—you, and Masters Wharton, and Nugent, and Bull."

"What about the rest of us?" asked Squiff.

Trotter shook his head.

"Them's all the 'Ead mentioned," he said; "and you're to go at once, young gentlemen."

"We'll all go," said Tom Brown. "We'll see it through together."

"No need for liekings all round," said Wharton.

"Rats! Shoulder to shoulder," said the New Zealand junior, and he led the way into the House.

The rest of the party followed him, leaving Peter Todd looking very sympathetic.

Wharton tapped at the Head's door, and the seven delinquents entered. They found the Head looking very grave. Inspector Grimes was standing with a stolid face.

"You sent for us, sir?" said Wharton.

"I sent for four boys," said the Head. "What do you others want?"

"We're all in it, sir," said Squiff.

"Only four boys were recognised by Joyce, sir," said

Inspector Grimes. "But if these others were present, they had better remain."

"Certainly," said the Head.

The inspector's remark astounded the juniors. What had Joyce, the gamekeeper, to do with it? Had not Sir Hilton Popper complained, after all?

"My boys," said the Head, gravely and not unkindly, "a most serious thing has occurred. Yesterday, early in the evening, it appears that you met Sir Hilton Popper on the path by the river."

"Yes, sir," said Wharton.

"The meeting was seen, from a distance, by a gamekeeper named Joyce," said the Head. "He is prepared to identify four boys—Wharton, Nugent, Bull, and Cherry."

"We do not deny it, sir. We were all there."

"You were upon Sir Hilton Popper's estate?"

"We were on the river-path, sir. There is a right-of-way the whole length of the Sark. It is not our fault if Sir Hilton has chosen to fence it in."

The Head made a gesture.

"We will not go into that, Wharton. The present matter is not one of trespass, or anything of the kind. Joyce, the gamekeeper, has informed Mr. Grimes that he saw a crowd of schoolboys using violence towards Sir Hilton Popper."

"We defended ourselves, sir. He went for us—I—I mean, he attacked us with his riding-whip."

"Joyce's statement is that he hurried towards the spot, but as he had to pass through a thick plantation to reach the river, he lost sight of you for ten minutes or so. When he arrived on the path you were all gone."

"We cleared off at once, sir."

"And Sir Hilton?"

"Sir Hilton!" repeated Wharton, puzzled.

"Did you leave him there?"

"Of—of course," said Wharton, in astonishment.

"How did you leave him?"

"He was sitting in the grass, sir," said Harry; and his face broke involuntarily into a smile as he remembered the baronet's last appearance, struggling with the hat that had been jammed down over his head.

"Had you hurt him?"

"Only—only a thump, sir. He hit me with his whip, and I knocked him over."

"Ahem! Was that all?"

"We—we sat him down, sir, so that we could get away. He was slashing at us with his whip."

"Ahem! And when you saw him last—"

"He was sitting in the grass, sir," said Harry. "We looked back—at least, I did—after we got over the fence."

"You did not see him after that?"

"No, sir."

"You have not seen him since?"

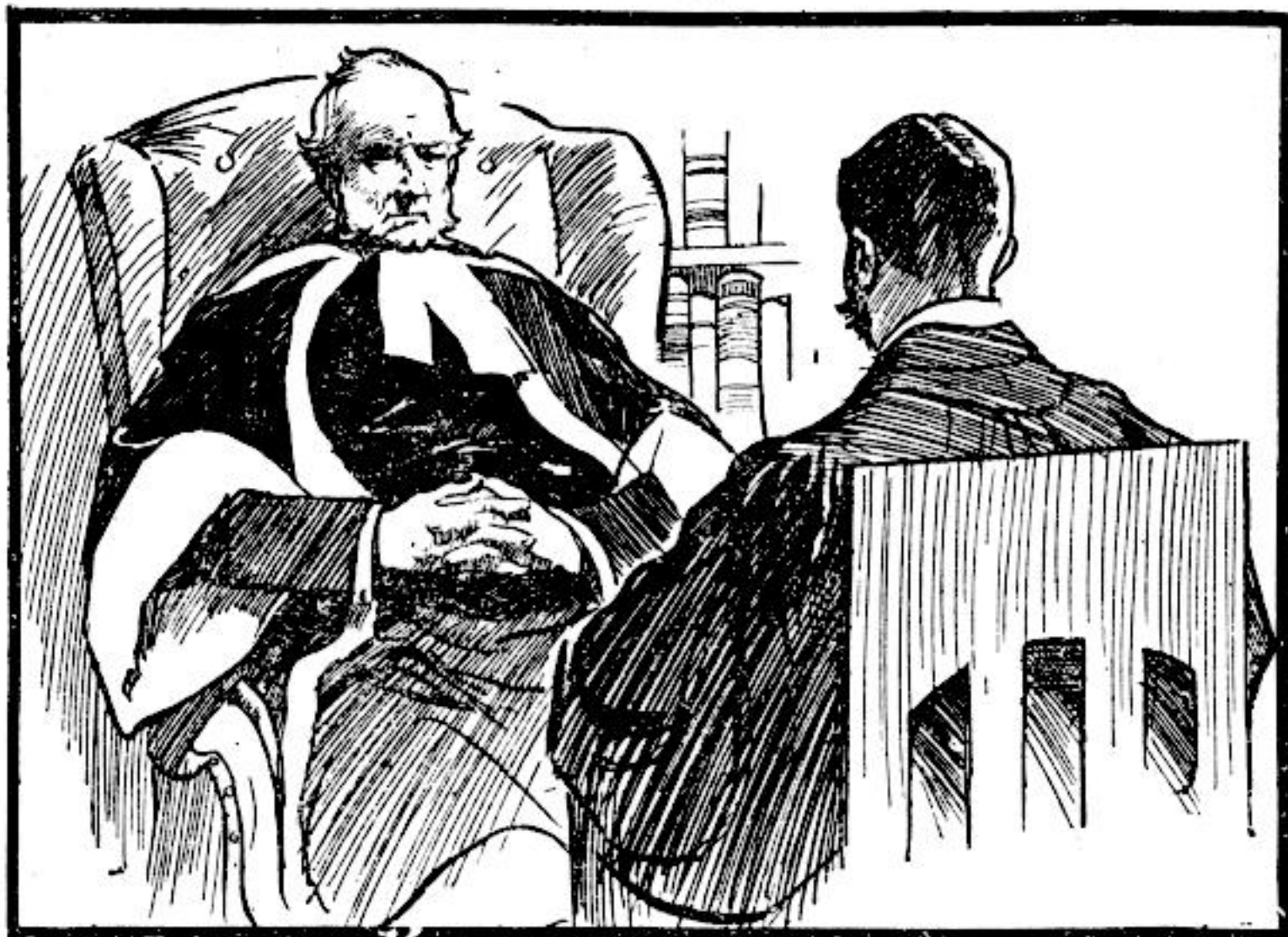
"No."

Inspector Grimes, much to the astonishment of the juniors, was making notes in his pocket-book of Wharton's replies. A strangely uneasy feeling was settling upon the Removites. They realised that there

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Wharton dragged his companion into cover, his heart thumping. There was a rustle in the big tree over their heads. "Somebody in the tree!" breathed Wharton, scarcely audibly. (See Chapter 8.)

was something behind all this—something grave and serious that they did not know.

"Is that all you have to say, Wharton?" asked Dr. Locke.

"That is all, sir. If Sir Hilton has complained to the police——"

"He has done nothing of the kind, Wharton. Sir Hilton Popper has not been seen since Joyce saw him in your hands, and you left him on the river-bank."

"N-n-not been seen, sir!" Wharton stammered.

"No. He has disappeared."

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Under Suspicion!

"DISAPPEARED!"

All the juniors repeated the word together in amazement and dismay.

Inspector Grimes was watching their faces with a keen, quiet glance. He could not doubt the genuineness of their astonishment.

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"Disappeared!" said Bob Cherry. "Sir Hilton Popper has disappeared! But—but—but how—why?"

"That is not known," said the Head. "But assuredly he has disappeared, so I learn from Inspector Grimes. Since the time you encountered him by the river he has not been seen. The gamekeeper Joyce arrived on the spot to find you gone, and Sir Hilton gone also. It was then, as he stated to Mr. Grimes, ten minutes after the struggle, as he had been making his way through the wood. You will see, therefore, that you boys were the last persons to see Sir Hilton Popper before his disappearance."

"My word!" murmured Bob Cherry, in dismay.

They realised the seriousness of the matter now thoroughly enough. This was why the baronet had not come to Greyfriars, after all—he had not been able to come.

"But—but perhaps he's gone away, sir," stammered Nugent. "Sir Hilton is often away from home, I've heard."

Inspector Grimes interposed.

"He has not gone away of his own accord, Master Nugent," he said. "I want you young gentlemen to tell me everything you can that may throw any light upon the matter. It is more serious than you may suppose. Sir Hilton has not been found, but his hat has been found floating in the river."

"In the river!" ejaculated Wharton.

"Yes; found and identified. Sir Hilton did not return to Popper Court last night, and he was searched for. This morning his hat was found, caught in the rushes, and soaked with water. It was within a hundred yards of the spot where the keeper saw you boys struggling with his master. Of course, the current may have carried it any distance; Sir Hilton may have gone up the river after you left him. His movements are quite unknown. But—I am about to put a very serious question to you." The inspector paused to give his words due effect. "You appear to have handled Sir Hilton very roughly."

"Not till he had slashed us with his whip," said Tom Brown.

"Quite so—quite so. But you were in an excited frame of mind, I presume, and reckless. Tell me this—did you attempt to duck him?"

"Duck him!"

"In plain words, did you throw him into the water?"

Wharton started.

"Certainly not. We have told you how we left him. He was sitting in the grass. His hat was on his head then; we had jammed it on, and he was trying to get it off."

"You are sure of that?"

"Quite sure."

"You are sure, then, that the hat did not fall into the water during your struggle with him?"

"Quite. It was jammed on his head."

"The jamfulness was terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh

Dr. Locke regarded the inspector anxiously. Mr.

Grimes's face was still stolid. Wharton uttered a sudden exclamation as a dark thought flashed into his mind. His face grew quite pale.

"Mr. Grimes! Surely—surely it is impossible that you suspect—that—that we have done anything with Sir Hilton Popper? You couldn't think so!"

Mr. Grimes gave him an odd look.

"I am questioning you as the last persons who saw the gentleman before his disappearance," he said; "that is all. The fact that you had a violent scene with him has a bearing on the subject. If you had ducked him, and he was unable to get out of the water——"

"Do you think we should have left him to drown?" exclaimed Bob Cherry hotly.

The inspector made a gesture.

"It is not my business to think anything, but only to investigate the facts," he said. "If you had done so, in self-defence you would probably deny it."

"We should not deny the truth."

"Ahem! I trust not. However, since you can tell me no more, I must pursue my inquiries elsewhere," said Mr. Grimes. "Dr. Locke, you will be responsible for these boys, when they may be required."

"Undoubtedly," said the Head.

"Thank you!"

The inspector took his leave. Dr. Locke gave the juniors a very troubled look.

"You see now what has come of your disregard for my orders," he said. "You have been out of bounds, and it has led to this. I shall not punish you. The matter is too serious for ordinary measures. Until the cause of Sir Hilton's disappearance is discovered you will be under suspicion."

"Under suspicion!" said Nugent faintly.

"Certainly, as the last persons who saw Sir Hilton Popper alive, and who were acting violently towards him."

"Oh!"

"But—but—but he can't be dead, sir," said Johnny Bull, in a scared voice.

"His hat was found in the river," said Dr. Locke. "Why it should be there, unless Sir Hilton had also been in the water, cannot be said. The police are dragging the river in places now. It is feared that Sir Hilton has been drowned. My boys, I am sure that you have told the facts, as far as you know them, but others may believe that you threw Sir Hilton into the river, intending to duck him, and that he never emerged. I fear that such an idea is in Mr. Grimes's mind."

"Oh, sir!"

"Good heavens!" muttered Wharton, aghast.

"I am responsible for you," said the Head. "You will keep within gates. If you should attempt to leave the school you will be taken into custody."

"Arrested!" gasped Squiff.

"I fear so. So you will see the necessity of being circumspect," said the Head. "You may go, my boys. I trust that Sir Hilton Popper will be found alive and well. It think that will be sufficient lesson to you, without any punishment from me."

"We're sorry we broke bounds, sir," said Bob Cherry miserably.

"I am sure of that, my boy. You may go."

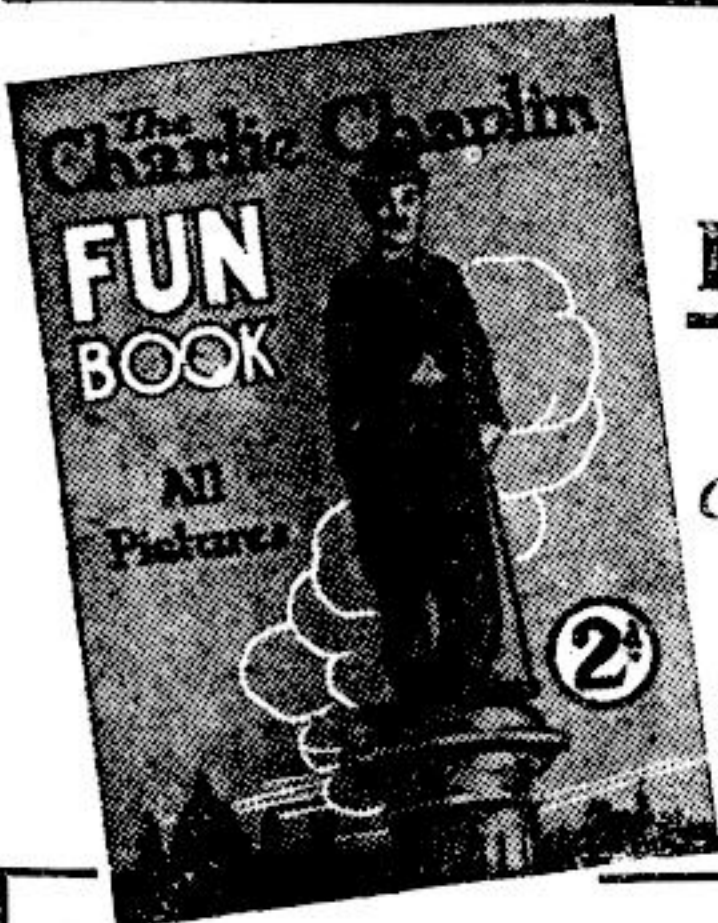
The juniors left the study. As Harry Wharton opened the door to leave there was a gasp outside, and a fat junior nearly fell into the room. The captain of the Remove reached out with his boot, and Billy Bunter rolled along the floor with a yell. Harry closed the door.

"You spying beast!" he muttered savagely.

"Ow!" howled Bunter. "Yow-ow! I—I wasn't listening. I—I was only stooping to tie up my bootlace. Yow-ow! Keep off, Bob Cherry, you beast, or I'll tell all the fellows that you've murdered old Popper! Yoooop!"

Billy Bunter fled wildly, helped along by Bob Cherry's boot. The chums of the Remove went out into the quadrangle together, a very gloomy party.

"Well," said Squiff, with a whistle, "this takes the biscuit, and no mistake! It's about the last thing I should have expected to happen. That fatheaded inspector suspects us of having made away with old Popper! What next?"



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"What next?" was a question the juniors could not answer, but they realised clearly that it was a very serious question for them.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER

Under a Cloud!

MARK LINLEY hurried up to the Co. as they came in to afternoon lessons. Mark was looking startled and distressed.

"What on earth's this jaw about you fellows?" he exclaimed.

"What jaw?" demanded Wharton.

"About you and old Popper. Bunter's spreading a yarn that you're suspected of having drowned him in the river."

Wharton set his lips.

"The chattering ass!" he said. "I suppose you don't believe we've done anything of the kind, do you, Linley?"

Mark smiled.

"Not exactly," he said. "But something has happened, I suppose. I hope you fellows aren't in trouble."

"We are," grunted Bob.

"The troublefulness is terrific!" said Hurree Singh glumly. "But the esteemed Bunter is a blinkful ass!"

"Bunter declares that old Grimes was going to arrest you, and that the Head had to fairly go down on his knees to him to get you off," said Mark.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Serious as the matter was, the juniors could not help laughing at Bunter's version. The chatterbox of the Remove was in possession of exciting information now, and he was not likely to allow the matter to rest.

Vernon-Smith joined them at the door of the Form-room. The Bunder was looking very curious.

"What's this about you fellows being handcuffed in the Head's study?" he asked.

"Handcuffed!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Yes. Bunter says——"

"Oh, Bunter! We shall be hanged, drawn, and quartered next, according to Bunter," said Bob Cherry. "Hallo, hallo, hallo, Pen! Wherefore that solemn chivvy?"

Penfold did not smile.

"I suppose it's not true," he said.

"That depends. What is it?"

"Bunter says——"

"Great Scott! Bunter again! What has he been saying now?"

"He heard Inspector Grimes reading out a warrant for your arrest, for the murder of Sir Hilton Popper."

"Oh, my hat! Bunter's improving!"

"I'll squash the fat beast if he keeps this up!" growled Harry Wharton.

Fisher T. Fish came eagerly along the passage. The Yankee junior's eyes were gleaming with excitement.

"Waal, I calculate this prances off with the whole biscuit!" he exclaimed. "Twenty pounds each, by gum! That's a hundred and forty quid for the crowd of you—seven!"

"What on earth are you driving at?" shrieked Tom Brown.

"Ain't it true? Hasn't the Head bailed you out at twenty quid each?" asked Fisher T. Fish.

"Bailed us out!" yelled Johnny Bull.

"Yep! On the charge of manslaughter, Bunter says!"

"I—I—I'll pulverise him!" yelled Johnny Bull. "Where is he? Lemme get at him! I'll manslaughter him!"

All the Remove were coming to the Form-room now, and Bunter was among them. The wrathful Johnny headed for him, with his big fists clenched. Billy Bunter dodged behind the burly form of Bolsover major.

"Keep him off!" he roared. "He ain't safe! He wants to manslaughter me same as he did old Popper!"

"I'll smash him!" roared Johnny Bull.

Billy Bunter dodged right round the astonished Bolsover, and fled along the passage, with the incensed Johnny raging after him. He ran fairly into the arms of Mr. Quelch, who was coming to the Form-room for afternoon lessons. The Remove master staggered, and clutched at the Owl.

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"Bunter," he gasped, "how dare you! How——"

"Save me!" yelled Bunter.

"What! What! Are you insane, boy? Save you from what?"

"That—that manslaughterer, sir!"

"What! Who?"

"Bull, sir!" shrieked Bunter. "There's murder in his eye!"

Mr. Quelch grasped Bunter by the shoulder, and shook him forcibly.

"Bunter, how dare you say ridiculous things! Are you out of your senses?" he thundered.

"He's settled old Popper, and now he wants to settle me because I know about it," stuttered Bunter. "He ain't safe! Old Grimes ought to have arrested him!"

"Be silent, you stupid boy!"

Mr. Quelch led Bunter into the Form-room by his fat ear, and the Owl of the Remove went to his place, blinking nervously at the Famous Five. Evidently he was in a state of trepidation.

That afternoon Harry Wharton & Co. were the cynosure of all the eyes in the Remove. Billy Bunter's yarns, though they all varied one from another, naturally made the juniors very curious; it was evident that there was some foundation in fact. The fellows knew that Sir Hilton Popper had disappeared—that the Co. had been the last persons to see him, and that they had been "handling" him on that occasion. And the grim and glum looks of the Co. showed, too, that they felt the position to be serious.

As a matter of fact, Harry Wharton & Co. were thinking chiefly about that very serious position all the afternoon.

Mr. Quelch, however, treated them with a very light hand, and passed over random answers without comment.

He knew of the dark suspicion that rested upon the juniors, and understood the troubled frame of mind they were in.

After lessons a crowd of the Remove and the Fourth gathered round the Co. in the Close to ask questions. Thanks to Bunter, all sorts of wild rumours were current.

"It was a silly thing to do, chucking him into the river," said Bulstrode. "Of course, he asked for it—but it was risky—a man of his age."

"You silly ass!" shouted Wharton wrathfully. "We didn't chuck him in the river!"

"Bunter heard Grimes say——"

"Besides, his hat was found in the river," said Russell. "Depend upon it, they'll find him there, too! Sure you didn't duck him?"

"Of course we didn't!"

"Bunter says the Head has gated you, and he's undertaken to produce you when the police want you!" grinned Skinner.

"Well, that's a fact, for once!"

"Like being under arrest," chuckled Snoop. "How does it feel? But don't be scared; they don't hang kids of your age."

"Why, you silly duffer——"

"Ten years in a reformatory, I guess," said Fisher T. Fish. "Rather a come-down for Greyfriars chaps—goin' to a reformatory—just a few."

"Do you want a thick ear?" bawled Johnny Bull.

"Nope. I guess I'm sorry for you—real sorry. The best thing you can do is to vamoose the ranch before the bobbies come for you," said Fish. "Absquatulate while you've got the time. Of course, we all know that you did duck him, and—— Yaroooh! Leggo!"

The exasperated chums collared Fisher T. Fish and bumped him on the ground. Then they stalked away in great wrath, leaving the crowd in a buzz of excitement. Billy Bunter spotted them in the Close, and scudded off at once, as if in fear of his life. Two or three fags of the Second Form followed his example. Harry Wharton set his lips with anger.

"The kids are beginning to look on us as dangerous," said Bob Cherry. "That idiot Bunter! Blessed if I don't begin to feel like Eugene Aram."

"It's too rotten!" growled Tom Brown. "This is what

comes of going after giddy German spies on dashed islands."

"I suppose that was my fault," said Wharton, knitting his brows. "I'm sorry I dragged you fellows into it."

"Oh, rot!" said the New Zealand junior at once. "We're not grousing, are we? Besides, I believe that there really are German spies on the island, and we ought to look into it after this has blown over."

"It won't blow over unless Sir Hilton Popper turns up!" growled Johnny Bull. "That dummy Grimes has got it into his wooden head that we ducked him, and that he never came out of the water. Come to think of it, it was jolly odd that he should disappear immediately after we'd finished with him."

"The oddfulness was terrific."

Wharton made a restless gesture.

"What's going to be done?" he said. "We can't let this go on. If they don't find old Popper, that ass Grimes may arrest us next."

"My hat!"

"I hope he'll turn up," said Bob. "I dare say he will. Anyway, I don't see anything that we can do."

The seven juniors were feeling in far from cheerful spirits. When they went to tea, a cardboard pinned on the door of No. 1 Study caught their eyes at once. It bore an inscription in large letters:

"MURDERERS' ROW!"

The juniors stared at it furiously. Evidently it was a joke of some fellow in the Fourth, who had chosen to nickname the Remove passage "Murderers' Row." Wharton tore the card into quarters, and scattered them, and the chums of the Remove went in to a glum and gloomy tea.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Danger Ahead!

HARRY WHARTON was thinking hard that evening.

No news had been heard of the missing baronet. It was evident that Sir Hilton Popper had not "turned up."

Neither had Inspector Grimes visited the school again. Mr. Grimes was engaged upon the search for the missing man. If he failed to discover him, alive or dead, there was no telling what step he would take next. That he could suspect the Greyfriars juniors of having caused serious harm to the baronet seemed incredible. Yet there was the undeniable fact that they were the last persons who had seen him alive, and that they had been in conflict with him.

Wharton was usually very careful with his preparation, but this evening he almost entirely neglected "prep." Nugent got through his work somehow. Then he rose, and moved restlessly about the study, occasionally glancing at Wharton, who was sitting with knitted brows, and his hands plunged deep in his pockets.

"We're not in luck's way, Harry," he remarked at last, ruefully.

"Something's got to be done," said Wharton.

Frank shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't see what we can do. We can't hunt for Sir Hilton Popper, I suppose. If we did, we shouldn't find him."

"I'm not sure of that!"

"I mean, we haven't the faintest idea where to look for him," said Nugent. "He must have been made away with, I should think, as he's disappeared. His hat being found in the river looks as if he's been there, too. I'm sorry for the old boy; he was a Tarter, but it's rotten if he's been murdered!"

"I hardly think so."

"He's been awfully rough on poachers and other people," said Frank. "I think he was about the best-hated man in the county. After we left him, he may have found some chap poaching rabbits in the wood, and he would be as hard as nails on him, of course. There are some rough characters hereabouts who might knock him on the head rather than go to prison."

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"It's possible, of course. But if there's a body in the river, it ought to have been found by this time."

Nugent looked at his chum curiously.

"I can see you've got some idea," he said. "You can't guess where to look for old Popper, I suppose?"

"It's just an idea," said Harry. "I want to put it to all the chaps, and see what they think. Fetch 'em along, Franky. I think there's something to be done."

"Oh, all right!"

Nugent called the juniors into the study—Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh and Squiff and Tom Brown. They were not a cheerful party. Inspector Grimes's visit and its possible outcome weighed on their minds.

"Well, what's the game?" asked Squiff.

"I've got an idea where Popper may possibly be," said Harry, closing the door when the party were in the study. "I'm thinking of looking for him. You fellows can help or not just as you think fit."

"We'll help, of course," said Tom Brown.

"The helpfulness will be great. But what is to be done?" asked Hurree Singh doubtfully.

"You remember what we found out on the island?" said Wharton. "That fat johnny is a German, and he has a confederate there. They're up to some dirty business. Well, suppose they had spotted Bob and me there yesterday? What do you think they would have done?"

"If they're German spies, they're working with ropes round their necks," said Johnny Bull. "They'd have knocked you on the head most likely, or kidnapped you, to keep you quiet."

"Exactly!"

"But what's that got to do with old Popper?" asked Bob Cherry.

"It may have a great deal to do with him," said Harry. "Suppose Sir Hilton went to the island after leaving us, or after we left him? He guessed that we had been there; he said so. He may have gone to see whether we'd done any damage picnicking. You remember Toddy used his notice-board for a camp-fire once. Well, as he was going to complain to the Head, it's most likely that he would go to the island first to see whether any damage had been done."

"Likely enough," agreed Squiff.

"Well, we know that the two Germans were there; we'd left them there. Suppose Popper ran into them?"

"Phew!"

"But they were in hiding," said Squiff.

"They may have come out of that; the fat johnny may have been going to leave the island just as Popper got there. Well, if they found themselves discovered they wouldn't hesitate at much to keep him quiet. Spies in England get pretty rough measure when they're spotted. They'd hardly venture to make away with him if they could avoid it, I suppose; but they'd certainly shut him up somewhere, so that he couldn't betray them."

"By Jove," said Nugent, "you've hit it!"

"Hold on," said Squiff. "Old Popper couldn't get to the island without a boat. If he'd taken a boat out it would be known. Grimey said nothing about a boat."

Wharton paused. That was a point that had escaped him. Certainly if Sir Hilton Popper had taken out a skiff from his boathouse his boatkeeper would know, and would have reported the circumstance to Inspector Grimes.

"Besides, he wouldn't row himself to the island," added Squiff. "He would make his man row him there."

Wharton nodded.

"I suppose that's so," he admitted. "If he'd been rowed to the island after he left us somebody would have seen him after us. We shouldn't be the last persons who'd seen him alive."

"Rather knocks the idea on the head, doesn't it?" said Tom Brown.

ANSWERS

"So far as the island is concerned—yes," said Harry. "But Popper may have met the German coming off—may have run into him on shore."

"Of course, it's possible."

"But it's like this," said Harry. "Old Popper left us—went up the river to look across the island—he could easily see from the bank whether we'd been camping there—or he may have intended to call a keeper to row him across. Just then he runs into the fat johnny, and bowls out the fact that the island's being used by somebody without his knowledge. The German wouldn't hesitate at much, with his neck at stake. But if Sir Hilton had been killed his body would have turned up as well as his hat. But that hiding-place under the hollow oak would hide him just as long as the spies choose to stay on the island. Inspector Grimes certainly wouldn't think of looking for him there."

There was a general nodding of heads.

Wharton's theory was plausible, at least—all the more so because there seemed to be no other way of accounting for the baronet's disappearance.

"We can put this to Grimes, anyway," said Nugent.

Wharton shook his head.

"Grimes would think it a yarn," he said. "He knows we know he suspects. He would think we were trying to put him off with a tall story about German spies. He wouldn't admit that German spies were at work under his nose, too."

"But he would have to search the island," said Bob.

"And they'd see him coming, with half a dozen bobbies, and clear off, and all he would find would be a hollow tree, without anything suspicious about it. As for Popper, if he's in their hands, they'd take him with them, or perhaps—" Wharton paused. "If he's still living, they might make an end of him, and bury him in a safe spot, to save their own skins."

"Oh!"

"German spies are capable of any villainy. We know that. Grimes would go to the island because he'd be bound to, but he'd go believing it was a cock-and-bull story, without taking proper care—at least, it seems so to me. I can fancy the grin on his fat chivvy when he heard us pitching a yarn about German spies," said Harry. "Besides, we can't even say the fat johnny was a German—only that he looked like one."

"But, dash it all, we've got to get those rotters collared, if they're really spies!" exclaimed Tom Brown.

"It's up to us," said Harry.

"Us!"

"Little us!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Yes; I suppose we can handle a couple of rascally Huns," said Harry. "I'd be glad to have a go at any Hun, for one!"

"Same here!" said Bob heartily. "But—but we're gated, you know."

"We shall have to chance that. It's pretty clear, from what we saw, that one of the rascals stays on the island, and the other goes about. Exactly what game they're playing I don't know, but I've an idea. Their business is to get information and send it to Berlin. They could rig up a wireless apparatus on the island quite easily."

"Wireless!" ejaculated Bob.

"Yes; it's just the place for it. It's well known that there are spies working with wireless in a good many places, only the police can't spot them. I can't think of anything else they can be doing there. That would account for one of them staying on the island, and the other going to and fro."

"My hat!" said Johnny Bull. "If that's the truth we've dropped on a pretty nest of villainy."

"We're going to find out," said Harry. "It looks to me as if Sir Hilton has dropped on them, too, and they're keeping his mouth shut. Anyway, it's possible. I'm going to the island to see to-night."

"To-night?"

"Yes."

"Breaking bounds!" said Squiff. "After the way the Head's jawed to us! It would mean terrific trouble if—"

"Can't be helped. It's a special case. We can get out of the dorm quietly when the rest of the fellows are asleep, and I have a key to the boathouse. A pull up the river won't hurt us. I suppose you're game?"

"Game as pie!"

"The gamefulness is terrific!"

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NEXT
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"Then it's settled," said Harry.

But the juniors were very grave when they went to their dormitory. They could not help thinking with some misgivings of the plans for that night. But they were game.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER. In the Deal of Night!

MIDNIGHT!

Greyfriars School was sleeping.

In the Remove dormitory seven beds were empty of sleepers, however, though a careful arrangement of pillows and bolsters gave them the appearance of containing their usual occupants.

Seven juniors were outside the walls of the old school, and as midnight struck they were pushing a boat cautiously out into the river.

The night was dark but fine, and a few stars glimmered in the sky.

The Removites were excited; they could not help that. The midnight expedition made their hearts beat a little faster. While Greyfriars slept the expedition was to be carried out, and it was more than likely that danger was before them.

The boat glided out into the river, and the juniors had muffled the oars. Silently they pulled away up the Sark.

Bob Cherry was steering, and he kept a keen look-out for the island. The black mass of trees rising from the dark waters caught his eyes at last.

"Here we are!" he murmured. "Go easy now!"

Deep silence brooded upon the woods and the river.

The boat floated softly under the overhanging trees of the island, and crushed gently into the rushes.

Wharton made the painter fast to a branch, and the juniors stepped ashore, one by one. There was a faint rustle as they landed, but hardly more than was made by the breeze that stirred the foliage.

Without a word, in dead silence, they picked their way towards the centre of the island, where the old oak rose gigantic above the other trees.

A faint glimmer from the stars penetrated the branches of the oak, which the autumn winds had thinned of leaves.

There was no sound—no sign of life.

Yet from what Wharton and Bob Cherry had witnessed the previous day they knew that they were standing above the secret hiding-place of the denizens of the island.

"What next?" murmured Bob.

"They get into the tree from above," whispered Harry. "We've seen that. We've got to climb—easy enough."

"Right-ho!"

"I'll go first and see if all's clear. I'll drop my handkerchief as a signal if it's all serene."

"Go ahead!"

Wharton grasped the gnarled old trunk, and began to climb.

In a couple of minutes he was among the lower branches, and he groped about him and peered, looking for the opening by which the German had descended into the hollow trunk.

But there was no opening.

Where the giant branches sloped off from the massive trunk there was a broad space in which half a dozen juniors could have sat comfortably, but it was solid to the touch. Had not Wharton known that there must be an opening, he would have been deceived. It was evident that the denizens of that strange hiding-place had fitted up a secret trapdoor there, closely resembling the wood of the oak itself.

For several minutes Harry Wharton groped and felt over the apparently solid wood. Then he made the signal to his comrades.

One by one they climbed into the tree and joined him.

"Well?" whispered Bob.

"There's an opening, a trapdoor of some kind, and we've got to find it," whispered Harry. "It must be here, because we know they went down into the tree."

"I've got an electric torch," said Nugent. "Would it be safe—"

"Chance it!"

Nugent turned on the light of the little torch, and by its gleam the juniors carefully examined the surface. It was some time before they discovered the edges of the trapdoor, so carefully had the work been done. But they discovered the trap at last, and followed its edge with their fingers. Nugent shut off the light.

"How about getting it open?" murmured Squiff.

"That's a poser."

Wharton felt over the trapdoor again. There was no means of raising it from above, so far as he could discover. He jammed his pocket-knife under the edge and tried to prize it up. But the blade snapped.

"N.G.," said Johnny Bull.

Wharton gritted his teeth.

"It's fastened underneath," he said. "If they've got wireless here, they're not working it now. We've got to get in!"

"How, my lord?" murmured Bob.

"Somehow. Better knock."

"Knock?" ejaculated Bob.

"It's the only way. If there's only one of them there he will think it's the other come back, and open the trap—"

"But suppose they're both at home?"

"Chance it! Anyway they can't get away. There can't be any other way out of a den like that, under a hollow tree."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Nugent. "And—and suppose we get the trap opened, and find a Johnny there with a revolver—"

"Get ready to knock him on the head, then. We can't back out now."

"Nunno! All right."

Each of the juniors had brought a weapon of some kind—a stick or a thick ruler. They gathered round the trap, their hearts beating. Unless the expedition was to be abandoned, there was no resource but Wharton's suggestion. They resolved to put it to the test.

Wharton slipped a thick, round, ebony ruler from his pocket. He lifted it, and struck sharply upon the trapdoor.

Knock!

The sound rang with faint echoes through the branches of the oak.

Silence followed.

Knock again!

The juniors listened, with thumping hearts. From beneath them, in the thickness of the tree, came a sound.

It was a faint scraping sound, and they knew it was caused by someone climbing up some kind of a ladder in the hollow trunk.

"Now for it!" whispered Bob.

Wharton grasped his ruler grimly. He knew that the spy would be armed, and it was no time for half-measures.

Creak!

In the darkness the juniors could not see the trapdoor rise, but they knew that it had risen. A faint glimmer appeared—it was a face that was looking out into the gloom.

"Gottfried!" whispered a guttural voice.

The cautious whisper, the German name, would have told the juniors enough if they had not been sure already. It was the watcher of the island who was before them, and he was speaking, as he supposed, to the fat "Johnny," whose name was evidently Gottfried.

Wharton made a sudden clutch at the glimmering face, and seized a collar. With a sudden drag he jerked the German half-way out of the open trap.

The astounded man sprawled on his face among the juniors, his legs dangling down in the hollow of the tree below.

"Mein Gott!" he gasped.

"Nail him!"

The seven juniors all piled on the rascal together. His right hand was in his pocket in a twinkling, but it was pinned and held there. The rascal had no chance to draw the weapon he had grasped.

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The man was muttering and cursing furiously in German. He was strong and deperate, but the odds were too much for him, and he was at a disadvantage. He sprawled, face downwards, and Johnny Bull's heavy knee was planted in the small of his back. Hands grasped him on all sides.

That the German was alone in the hidden den was clear from the fact that he did not call for aid. For a moment the Greyfriars juniors had only one foe to deal with.

In a few minutes the German lay helplessly gasping under the weight of the juniors, his resistance at an end.

"Got him!" murmured Bob.

"Number One!" grinned Squiff. "Let's make sure of the beast. I've got a whipcord here. What's he saying, Wharton, you know his lingo?"

"I don't know those words," said Harry, laughing breathlessly. "I fancy he's swearing."

"Oh, we'll soon stop that."

"Groooh!" came in a gurgle from the German, as Squiff stuffed a handkerchief into his mouth. Then the whipcord was bound round his wrists, and knotted tightly. The rascal's eyes gleamed like a wild cat's.

"A win for us!" chuckled Bob. "Now full steam ahead!"

Nugent turned the light of the electric torch into the hollow trunk. A rope-ladder, fastened to iron staples, dangled there. Bob Cherry led the way, and disappeared into the hollow oak.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bagged!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

Bob's voice called up from the black depths below to his waiting comrades.

"Hallo!" replied Wharton.

"Are you there?" came Bob's voice, with a chuckle. "Like 'phoning, ain't it? It's all right. About fifty steps to the ladder. Dark as pitch here. Better bring that Hun down, in case he gets loose."

"Right-ho!"

"You will get down into the tree," said Wharton, in the German's ear.

"Ich will nicht," said the man sullenly, as Wharton removed his gag.

"I'll loosen one of your hands, now we've searched you," said Harry. "You can go down the ladder, or you can be pitched down. Take your choice."

The rascal decided to go down the ladder. One of his hands was released, the juniors would not trust him too far. Wharton and Johnny Bull went first, and Nugent and Squiff descended with him, and Tom Brown and Hurree Singh followed.

There was not much chance for the German to give trouble.

In a few minutes they reached the solid earth below, some distance under the giant roots of the oak. Nugent flashed the light round, and revealed a bare, earthen cellar. The juniors promptly tied up the German again, and bound his ankles in addition, and stuffed the handkerchief into his mouth. They did not mean to run any risks with their prisoner.

Then they made an examination of the curious hiding-place, leaving the sullen spy lying on the ground.

"Must have taken them a lot of trouble to get this place fitted out," Squiff remarked.

"I suppose it was worth their while," said Harry. "By Jove! Here's an electric light."

He had found a switch, and he touched it.

The earthen cellar was illuminated at once from a powerful lamp.

The juniors blinked in the sudden light.

The cellar was furnished with two or three benches and tables, made of rough wood nailed together, evidently brought to the place in sections. There were tins of food, cooking utensils, an electric cooking-stove, and several large accumulators. Money had evidently been spent freely by the Germans.

"What on earth's this?" asked Nugent, as he stopped

before a curious-looking apparatus, from which insulated wires ran into the hollow of the tree.

"What I suspected," said Harry quietly. "I don't know how to work it, but I know what it's for. If it had been going we should have heard it buzzing."

"Wireless?" ejaculated Bob.

"Yes."

"Rotten that we haven't nailed the other rotter!" said Johnny Bull. "This beast is the one who sends the messages, I suppose, and the fat johnny is the spy who collects information for him to send."

"That's it."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob suddenly. "Listen!"

"What the——"

"Listen! I can hear somebody breathing."

The juniors listened.

From a cavity in the banked-up earthen wall there came a faint sound, the sound of a sleeper's steady breathing.

With cautious steps the juniors advanced to the cavity. They could guess whom they would find there—not an enemy.

Nugent flashed his lamp into the opening.

On the earthen floor a lengthy form was extended, with hands bound and feet shackled with strong rope. Another rope was passed round the waist and secured to a stake driven in the ground.

The light gleamed upon the purple complexion and white moustache of Sir Hilton Popper.

Harry Wharton & Co. had found the missing baronet. "Old Popper, by jingo!" murmured Bob, as he gazed at the sleeper. "I wonder what he will say now if he finds us trespassing on his blessed island."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The burst of laughter that greeted Bob's remark awakened the baronet.

He started up into a sitting posture.

"By gad!" he ejaculated. "What—where— Oh! Why, who are you? Impertinent young rascals, by Jove! What are you doing here?"

"Trespassing on the island, Sir Hilton!" said Bob cheerfully.

Harry Wharton knelt and opened his pocket-knife, and sawed through the ropes that bound the baronet's long limbs.

Sir Hilton Popper watched him dazedly.

He seemed unable to realise at first that he was free, and that the Greyfriars juniors whom he had persecuted were his rescuers.

"Feel a bit stiff—what?" asked Bob.

"By gad, yes!" groaned Sir Hilton, dragging himself to his feet with Wharton's help. "Cramped, by gad! How long have I been here—weeks, what? Bread and water, by Jove! Bread and water for me! By gad, the German scoundrels! Hanging is too good for them! By gad!"

"How did they get you, sir?" asked Wharton.

Sir Hilton rubbed his cramped limbs, and murmured a strong expression under his white moustache. Bob Cherry stopped his ears, and the baronet flushed.

"By gad, I found a fat scoundrel coming off the island!" said Sir Hilton. "Ran into him, by Jove, last week, if I've been here a week!"

"It was yesterday that you were missed," said Wharton.

"Yesterday, by gad! It seems like a week! Well, I found the scoundrel rowing off my island, and stopped him when he got into the backwater, by Jove—collared him, sir! And, by thunder, he knocked me down—me—with a life-preserver, by gad—nearly stunned me—and dragged me into the boat and brought me here. Me!" repeated Sir Hilton, evidently still in a state of great astonishment that even a Hunnish ruffian should have had the nerve to lay hands upon his august person. "By Jove! Ow! This cramp— Ow-ow! Yah! Oh!"

And Sir Hilton rubbed his stiffened limbs more furiously than ever, panting for breath.

"Blessed if you didn't work it out right, Harry!" said Bob Cherry admiringly. "Right on the wicket, by Jove!"

"How did you young rascals get here?" demanded Sir Hilton gruffly, perhaps a little less gruffly than was his wont, however. "Trespassing on my island again—picnicking—what?"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 402.

NEXT
MONDAY—

"STRAIGHT AS A DIE!"

EVERY
MONDAY

The "Magnet"
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ONE
PENNY.

The juniors grinned.

"We don't usually picnic at one o'clock in the morning," said Nugent.

"One o'clock in the morning! By gad! What are you doing out of your school at such an hour?" exclaimed the baronet.

"We came to get you out of this," said Wharton quietly.

"By gad! How—how did you know?"

"We're scouts, you know, sir," said Bob Cherry gravely. "A Boy Scout's bizney is to be up to everything. That's how it was. A little job like this is nothing to the Greyfriars Scouts—nothing at all. We think nothing of bagging a German spy before brekker in the morning."

Sir Hilton grunted, and Bob's companions chuckled.

"Well, I'm much obliged to you," said the baronet at last. "Heaven knows how long I should have been kept here. There's spying going on—transmitting by wireless, too—I've seen that. They might have kept me a prisoner for weeks or months, or murdered me, and left me buried here, for all I know. Have you seen them? Where are they?"

"We've got one of them," said Harry. "We've tied him up. There was only one of the rascals here when we came."

Sir Hilton set his teeth.

"The other's coming back to-night—Gottfried, he's called—I've heard them talking. I heard them chattering in German; the other man has gone out to discover what is being done about me—searching, and so forth. He's coming back to-night. I heard them saying so. You say it's night now; no difference down here between day and night."

Wharton's eyes gleamed.

"My hat! Let's put out the light, you fellows, and if the villain comes we can bag him, too."

"Good egg!"

"Hear, hear!"

The electric light was extinguished at once. Sir Hilton Popper sat down in the dark, chafing his stiffened limbs. He was as keen as the juniors to catch the chief of the two scoundrels who had used him so roughly.

In the darkness of the excavation under the hollow oak the juniors waited.

In their excitement they did not feel sleepy. Late as the hour was, they were very wide awake.

But it was a weary vigil. The juniors waited and watched silently; the silence only broken by an occasional grunt from Sir Hilton Popper. The baronet was still suffering from his bonds.

Suddenly Wharton grasped Bob Cherry's arm in the darkness.

"Hark!" he whispered.

There was a sound overhead—a scraping sound. Then a voice.

"Fritz!"

Fritz, evidently, was the name of the man in the cellar under the tree. But Fritz did not answer, for the best of reasons; he was gagged, and Johnny Bull's hand, too, was over his mouth.

"Wo bist Du, Fritz?" went on the voice. "Die Türe ist nicht geschlossen."

The German was evidently surprised at having found the trapdoor in the tree open. The juniors waited breathlessly.

They heard a rustling of the rope-ladder, showing that the man was descending through the tree.

Closer and closer came the sounds, till they heard him land on the solid earth close by them, and heard his hurried breathing in the darkness.

"Fritz! Wo bist Du?"

There was alarm in his voice now. A sudden gleam of light came through the dark from an electric lamp in the German's hand. As it flashed out the juniors rushed upon him from all sides.

"Ach!"

Crash!

It was the fat man in gold-rimmed glasses, as the juniors saw in the momentary light. They were in

darkness the next moment, struggling with the German.

Bang!

A pistol-shot rang out, with a deafening report in the confined space. Nugent flashed on his light.

"All safe!" said Bob Cherry, with a deep breath of relief. "The murderous hound! Lucky you got in that cosh—he might have had more luck with another shot."

The German groaned, and stirred.

"Fasten the brute up!" said Harry.

That task did not take the juniors long. In a few minutes the German was bound hand and foot.

"By gad, you've got him!" said Sir Hilton Popper. "You should have left him to me, cheeky young rascals! Got him, by thunder! Got the pair of them!"

"A pair of beauties," grinned Bob Cherry. "Please, Sir Hilton, will you excuse us for trespassing on the island this time?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Sir Hilton Popper grunted.

The early dawn was creeping from the east when the Head of Greyfriars had the surprise of his life.

Thunderous knocking at the door of the School House awakened all Greyfriars; and the Head came out, in his dressing-gown, and in a state of great astonishment. He almost fell down at the sight of Sir Hilton Popper and seven sleepy juniors.

"Bless my soul!" said the Head, gazing at the group as he opened the door. "What—what—"

"Good-morning, sir!" said Bob Cherry demurely.

"Bless my soul! Sir Hilton, I am delighted to see you safe and sound, but—but what—" gasped the Head.

"I have come with these boys to ask you to excuse them, sir, for breaking school bounds at night," said the baronet.

Dr. Locke felt inclined to faint. Many requests had been made to him by Sir Hilton Popper—general requests for exemplary punishment of certain juniors. But a request of this sort was a surprise.

"Do I—do I hear aright?" ejaculated the Head. "I—I presume I am not dreaming. Boys, is it possible that you have broken bounds—at night—"

"They have done so, sir, to rescue me from the hands of a gang of ruffians, and they have succeeded," growled Sir Hilton. "You will be pleased to hear, too, that they are responsible for the arrest of two dangerous German spies. Under the circumstances, I hope you will excuse them for having acted like reckless young rascals."

"Bless my soul!" said the Head dazedly.

"Reckless young rascals!" repeated Sir Hilton. "But doocid plucky young rascals, too! Plenty of real British pluck in this school, sir. Greyfriars, sir, should be proud of these boys!"

"Dear me!" The Head recovered himself a little. "Boys, go to bed at once. You need not rise at rising-bell."

"Thank you, sir!"

Gladly enough the Remove heroes went to bed. They were fagged out.

They did not come down till ten o'clock in the morning, and they missed morning lessons. By that time all Greyfriars knew the story. Needless to say, the Head had acceded to Sir Hilton's request, and the "young rascals" were not punished for their escapade. Indeed, they received a good many compliments on all sides.

And as that afternoon was a half-holiday, Bob Cherry proposed to celebrate the big score by a picnic on the island! His proposal was received with enthusiasm, and half of the Remove, and a crowd of other fellows, rowed down to the island, but they found it in the hands of the police, and had to row back.

Harry Wharton & Co. bore their blushing honours thick upon them with becoming modesty; indeed, the only fellow who "swanked" on the subject was Billy Bunter. The Owl of the Remove was convinced that to him, and to him alone, was due the solving of the mystery of the island.

THE END.

(Next Monday's magnificent story is entitled "STRAIGHT AS A DIE!" Order now!)

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OUR COMPANION THE BOYS' FRIEND, "THE GEM" LIBRARY, Every Monday. Every Wednesday.

FAVOURITE FRIENDS IN FICTION.

No. II.



In any place where ringcraft reigns
What boxer could be bolder
Than Tommy, who has skill and brains,
And hits straight from the shoulder?
His exhibitions with the gloves
Are never tame or tardy;
And every boy of Britain loves
The tales by A. S. Hardy.

So far as first impressions go,
Young Tom is frail of figure;
Yet all his forceful punches show
Much stamina and vigour.
And many a giant in his prime,
Who through the ropes has swaggered,
Has found himself knocked out of time
And absolutely staggered!

Ben Adams and his merry crew—
A mass of manly muscle—
Have travelled all the country through
And shone in many a tussle.
If Tom is tackled in the ring
By any swanking boxer,
Then Ben is heard to softly sing:
"You'll get a nasty shock, sir!"

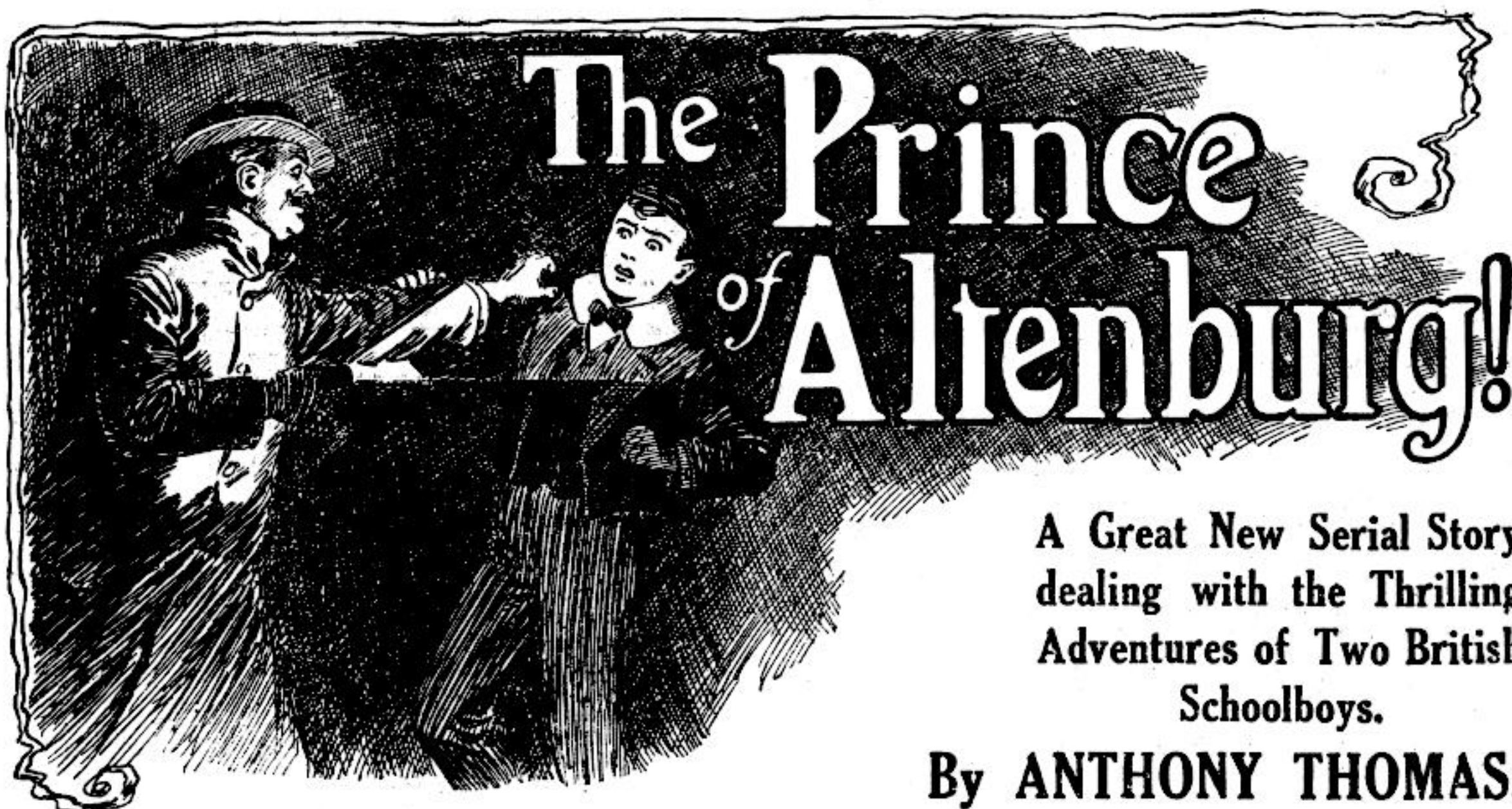
The crafty Powell, nicknamed Posh,
And seething with sedition,
Determines that his booth shall squash
All kinds of opposition.
His "stars," however, catch it hot,
And often come a cropper;
They get it where the chicken got
The celebrated chopper!

Tom Belcher's energy and zest,
And his superior science,
Have prompted scores to give him best
Who set him at defiance.
Though barely five-foot-four in height,
He will not budge a fraction,
But gamely goes for men of might,
And knocks them out of action!

Long may the youthful marvel shine,
So valiant and victorious!
His upper-cuts are just divine,
His style is grand and glorious
The noble art of self-defence
Will never wane to zero
While Tommy proves, in every sense,
A sportsman and a hero!

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A Great New Serial Story
dealing with the Thrilling
Adventures of Two British
Schoolboys.

By ANTHONY THOMAS.

THE FIRST INSTALMENTS.

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 Kielberg, a German cruiser, under the care of BARON ZELLING.

DERWENT HOOD, chief of the British Counter-Espionage Department, goes in search of the Kielberg on H.M.S. Chatswood. The German cruiser, being hard pressed, seeks refuge up the River Kunene, on the West Coast of Africa, where she runs aground.

Accompanied by two members of the Chatswood's crew named Dexter and Walters, Hood proceeds up the river in a motor-launch. They succeed in rescuing the two boys; but, owing to the vigilance of their German pursuers, are forced to go into hiding.

Discovering the hiding-place of the fugitives, the baron sends a strong party to attack them. His final instructions are that the Prince of Altenburg must not be harmed, but the others can be shot at sight.

(Now go on with the story.)

Aboard the Moonbeam.

Dr. Margards, headmaster of St. Dunstan's, was seated in the study at the town house of his friend, Lord Bassington. On the table before them were huge maps, and Bassington had a curious little instrument in his hand with which he was measuring the distance.

"You see," Dr. Margards was saying, "from what I understand, the Chatswood will make no move until they have everything required for this expedition up the river. I gather that this may take a good many days—if not weeks—though some of the stuff has already gone out. Meantime, it appears these two boys will remain prisoners on this German boat."

"And may be blown to bits when the expedition does go up the river?" suggested Lord Bassington.

"Exactly! After all, the Admiralty cannot be expected to risk hundreds of lives for the sake of two schoolboys," Dr. Margards answered.

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"STRAIGHT AS A DIE!"

Margards answered. "I feel very diffident about coming to you, and even now I sincerely hope you will not act contrary to your own wishes. But if you can—"

"My dear fellow," Bassington cried, "I've been round to the Admiralty, and even tried the War Office—offered to do anything and go anywhere! And all I get is the job of going about the country speech-making—when I'm just dying to be on the sea, and having some of the real thing. But I'm too old! Pooh!"

"Then you are inclined to try and arrange this trip?" Dr. Margards asked, with an unusual amount of excitement in his voice.

"I think we can do it," Bassington answered. "The yacht is all ready; there'll probably be some difficulty in getting a crew together, but I think I know a few veterans who would jump at the chance. Let's see! To-day's Wednesday—I think everything could be fixed up, with a rush, by next Tuesday morning. How would that suit you?"

"Splendidly!" Dr. Margards cried. "You're a good sort, Bassington!"

"Rot!" the peer answered cheerfully. "This is going to be a real holiday for me. I shall have to find out exactly how far we can go; I mean, we don't want to get into trouble with the Admiralty people, for butting in on their business. Still, you can leave that side of the question to me. You get back and fix up your end, and I'll wire you when and where we are going to start."

Dr. Margards went back to St. Dunstan's, and had no difficulty in arranging matters so that he could get away almost at once.

On the Monday came a wire from Lord Bassington.

"Everything fixed up. Only waiting for you. Come direct here.—Bassington, Royal Hotel, Benford."

That same afternoon the Head joined his friend. Lord Bassington was dressed for the part—the commander of the Moonbeam, a yacht that had already made a name for itself all over the world.

"Everything's aboard," Bassington said, "and I'll have your belongings sent on at once. We've got a first-rate crew—youngsters of fifty and sixty, who are delighted at the idea of a real voyage."

"I only hope it's not a wild-goose chase I'm taking you on," the Head answered. "I've been thinking a lot about it, and it's quite possible we may get there just in time to learn that everything has been done."

"Never mind!" Bassington retorted. "We'll go out with the idea of doing something, at all events. The same thought struck me; the others have had a very good start, but we may manage to turn up in time for something useful."

"Did you ask any advice from your friends at the Admiralty?" asked the doctor.

"I did," Bassington answered. "And they were all quite convinced that we should get there about a fortnight too late."

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

In any case, they were quite certain that we could do no good in any way. Still— Here we are! And I'm hoping we shall have some fun before we come back. Probably we'll get torpedoed in the Channel!"

He laughed, as though the prospects were delightful to him. But Dr. Margards was troubled when he went on board the Moonbeam.

She was a beautifully-fitted yacht of just over 900 tons, designed rather for comfort than for speed, though on occasions her owner had shown that her engines were capable of special efforts. She had sailed on every ocean in the world, and Lord Bassington himself knew every nut and bolt in her.

"Quick work, you know," he told Dr. Margards, when at last they cast off. "We're fitted out and provisioned for anything, bar fighting. We daren't carry too much in the way of firearms, or there might be trouble. And I've got a lot of useful information about this extraordinary river we're making for."

"Have you?" Dr. Margards asked. "I thought nothing whatever was really known about it."

"Well, it is!" retorted Bassington. "And the very man who's taken this German boat up the river is one of the two men who found out practically everything that is known. He prepared a book on the subject which was not intended to be public property; but we've got a copy of it! I've had a look at it, and know quite a lot now. I spent one whole night and morning in preparing rough charts, and I guess we shall need them!"

"It is dangerous?" queried the doctor.

"Just a little," answered Bassington. "This German boat can't have gone very far. And if they can go—we can! I shall have a chance to show my skill at the helm when eventually we do get there."

They talked over the whole subject many times on the voyage, but as the days passed, Dr. Margards became more and more anxious.

He could not explain it, but ever since the day when he had talked with the Assistant-Commissioner at Scotland Yard a curious instinct had impelled him. However hopeless and foolhardy the task which he had set himself, he could never have rested content had he not made the attempt.

It was fortunate for him that Lord Bassington had naturally an adventurous nature, and was only too glad of the excuse to undertake the cruise.

Even Dr. Margards did not quite understand how they were going to accomplish their mission. There was simply this deep-rooted instinct in his mind—the boys were in a perilous position, and none but he realised how important it was that their lives should be put first and foremost.

The days grew into weeks, and still the Moonbeam held her course, and drew nearer and nearer the West African coast.

At last came a day when on the horizon they sighted a warship. It was the Chatswood, and late in the afternoon the yacht came within speaking distance.

Lord Bassington himself signalled to the ship, and, as a result, received an invitation from the commander to come aboard.

The sea at the time was almost as smooth and unruffled as a millpond. On Bassington's suggestion, Dr. Margards decided to make the trip over to the battleship with his friend.

The commander of the Chatswood knew Lord Bassington slightly, and when the breezy sailor peer stepped aboard he met with a cheerful welcome.

"But what on earth are you doing in this part of the world?" Captain Brewis asked. "It's not quite the place to come to for a pleasure cruise."

"We're not here for pleasure," Bassington laughed. "We're trying to cut in on your job, to be quite truthful. Dr. Margards is the Head of St. Dunstons, and two boys from his school are playing truant up this river you seem to be watching. We've come out here to take them back to school again."

"You've what?" asked Brewis in amazement. "Surely you're not hunting those youngsters?"

"Certain!" Bassington answered. "Any information regarding their precise whereabouts will be gratefully received."

"But—" Brewis looked at the yacht lying a couple of hundred yards away, then at Dr. Margards and Lord Bassington, both most scrupulously and carefully dressed in the lightest possible yachting clothes. "This is a problem! Is everybody going to come holiday-making here? I've sent our only motor-boat up the river weeks ago, and it's not returned yet. I am getting rather anxious, I can tell you. The Admiralty doesn't pay me to wander about here in this fashion."

"But I understood you were sending an expedition up the river?" Dr. Margards said. "Has anything been done?"

"Not yet," answered Brewis. "We're all ready and wait-

ing, but we've been hoping every day to hear from our first scouting party. They may have had difficulties with the boat, or a thousand and one things may have held them up. I'd practically decided that if they didn't turn up to-morrow I'd send another scouting party out. Only if the first little lot failed, there's a prospect of the second meeting the same fate."

"You don't think that any harm has come to them?" asked Dr. Margards quickly.

Brewis shrugged his shoulders.

"I hope not," he said sincerely. "But they ought to have been back a fortnight ago. It's an unpleasant problem."

"We're going up that river," Lord Bassington said definitely, "right now!"

"I don't think you'll get far," Brewis answered. "We've had men up a little way, and it's a difficult bit to negotiate."

"I know," Bassington agreed. "All the same, we shall do our best. I've got the little pinnacle we came over in, which may come in handy. It's not much more than a toy, but it won't run into sandbanks."

"Right-ho!" Brewis said. "It's your own affair, and I shall be quite pleased to know someone is going to risk it. If you can manage to find anything out, I shall be glad to know."

They went to the Moonbeam shortly after that, and from the bridge Brewis watched the yacht steam slowly towards the mouth of the river.

It wound in and out, and Brewis wondered.

"Someone aboard seems to know the shoals," he said. "I wonder what luck they'll have?"

His second in command shook his head.

"I wonder, too," he answered slowly. "I'm sorry about young Dexter. It seems to me we can count him out now, unless they took him prisoner. Otherwise, he is not the youngster to waste time, and he'd have been back here long ago. It's time we thought of the next step."

Test for Nerves!

After Grenville Dexter had decided that nothing could be done that night, and the only thing was to make themselves as comfortable as possible, he was quiet for about five minutes.

Darrell and Burke had made themselves fairly comfortable in the bow of the launch, and were talking of their different experiences. It was still broad daylight, but Hood had protected himself from the insects as far as possible, and was putting in a real rest.

Walters, the ever-busy, was carrying out some odd repairs and cleaning up the launch. The sailor did rest occasionally, but he didn't let it grow into a habit.

Presently Dexter, possibly because of Walters's example, began to wander round, peering through the trees and generally examining their position.

At the end of about ten minutes he came back to where Hood lay blissfully unconscious of everything. Dexter touched him on the shoulder, and in an instant the Secret Service man was sitting upright.

"Anything happening?" he asked before Dexter had time to speak.

"Sorry to disturb you," Dexter said, "but I should like you to come and have a look over here."

Dexter led him through the trees and almost to the water's edge.

"Can you see anything?" the midshipman asked, and Hood watched carefully.

He turned to Dexter in a short time and made a quick movement with his hands, while his face indicated a half-hopeless, half-cynical outlook.

"Well?" he asked, keeping his voice low. "And what do you think of that?"

"They've spotted us," Dexter said briefly.

"Agreed!"

Hood nodded, and they both walked back to the launch.

Not until they were sitting on the side of the boat did either of them speak. Then Derwent Hood looked quizzically at Dexter.

"Begin to wish you hadn't returned to pick us up, I guess?" he asked.

Dexter shook his head.

"No. But this is a tight corner. They're on the watch. Are they going to keep it up for long, or what?"

For through the trees Dexter had seen one of the Kielberg's boats lying idly near the bank. There were half a dozen men and an officer on board, and while Dexter watched he had seen the officer peering through his glasses as though to break through the screen of trees and leaves which hid the launch.

Obviously he was there with only one purpose, and it was equally obvious that he knew what lay behind the trees.

"Hope for the best, and prepare for the worst," is my



Walters stood on the bank of the stream, so near the boat that the flames almost touched him. Dexter also rose and followed him. In the drifting smoke clouds they could see the two making desperate efforts to reach the burning branches with other branches they had picked up. (See page 27.)

motto for a case of this kind," Dexter went on. "They've marked us down. What will Zelling's idea be on the subject?"

"Wait till he thinks we're all peacefully asleep, and then come and shoot the whole bunch of us—except, perhaps, young Darrell," Derwent Hood answered.

"Then that's our worst, and we'd better prepare for it," Dexter said. "And we haven't much time before the daylight will be gone."

He looked around him quickly, examining the details of their position afresh.

"Come to the water's edge again," he asked Hood, "and let's consider the situation once more."

They went together, leaving the other three wondering what fresh development had caused the sudden seriousness to come to their leaders.

"Now, is Zelling likely to attack us in the dark, or wait until daylight?" asked Dexter.

"If he meant to do it by daylight, he would have been here by now," Hood argued. "Probably he's waiting until we try to start the launch off again."

"Yes," Dexter nodded. "But we're not going to start to-night. He might change his mind, and come for us, in which case—"

He broke off as he weighed up all the possibilities in his mind. Then he turned to Hood quite sharply.

"We'll get back and start on the defensive work right now," he said quickly.

Back at the launch, he and Hood speedily decided on their defensive methods, for that night at all events.

"If they don't come, and nothing at all happens, we can

go ahead to-morrow on some brighter scheme," Dexter said. "Meantime, how far do you think we can get the boat back, Walters?"

"Not very far, sir," the sailor answered. "We're nearly on the bottom now."

"Well, we'll get her as far as we can," Dexter ordered. "Lend a hand, Hood. Come along you two!"

The five of them persuaded the launch to move about twenty yards up the little waterway.

Here the trees and the undergrowth were denser than ever, and it was almost dark.

Dexter surveyed the new position, then began to give orders to all of them.

"Cut down some of the branches, Walters. We'll hide the boat as much as possible. Give him a hand, Burke. You help to ornament the launch, Darrell."

He himself set to work, and Hood assisted valiantly. Not only was the launch almost completely screened, but they laid big branches across the waterway itself.

The five laboured strenuously, not caring greatly about the noise they made.

"We won't go aboard the launch," Dexter decided. "It will cramp us too much. Let's see! I guess they'll come from this side—if they do come."

He indicated the right side of the waterway as he stood facing the main river.

"Now, if we can get some sort of protection behind the boat, and on the left side, we should have a fair chance. I don't think they can work round us—if we're on the watch. What about a bit of entrenching work? Do you think we can manage it?"

"We'll try," Hood agreed, and with the axe and odd tools they began to work a clear space among the trees, piling the debris in front, and gradually scooping out the soft, moist soil.

"A bit damp," Dexter remarked, "but it will make quite a comfortable shake-down, so we shall be able to rest, even if they don't come."

The shelter they had constructed was not exactly a finished affair. Its chief advantage lay in the fact that if anyone came in the early morning those who were in the shallow trench would be completely hidden from view.

A mass of tangled creepers and ferns in the front simply made the place look like a more dense part of the wood.

Not that they were very well able to judge, since by the time they had done the work it was completely dark, and they had to move cautiously in order to find their way about.

"Is there anything else?" Dexter asked. "You'd better take my revolver, Hood, as you haven't got one. Walters and I will use the rifles. Come along, Walters! We'll get everything we need off the boat."

The two struggled back eventually, bearing various things they thought might be useful, and planted them down in their new resting-place.

"I don't believe they'll dream of coming to-night," Dexter remarked. "I'm hanged if I can see any of you. It's too dark for anything!"

"And I can't make out where my observation window is," Hood retorted. "I think we can have our little supper, and go to sleep. Can someone pass me a biscuit?"

Walters had been posted at one end, and Dexter at the other. Derwent Hood was in the centre, with Darrell on one side and Burke on the other. Neither of the boys had any weapon at all, and their instructions were simply to keep down if anything did happen.

"But I don't think anything will," Dexter said. "I'll keep my eyes open for anything for an hour or two, then I'll waken you, Hood. You may all just as well try and get what rest you can. We shall have a fairly strenuous day to-morrow, I expect."

"You're right," Hood agreed. "I'm going to tumble off right now, and you youngsters had better do the same. But don't let me have too long, Dexter. You haven't had very peaceful nights yourself just lately. Good-night!"

From long experience and training, Derwent Hood was asleep within five minutes, yet a touch would have wakened him. Walters was almost as good, and Darrell, lying between the two, heard their regular breathing, which suggested that, despite the discomforts of their bed, they were both as happy as on a luxurious couch.

But Jack Darrell himself could not sleep, though he was thoroughly tired and weary. Almost he wished that he had been put by Teddy Burke that he might inquire from time to time how his chum progressed.

He drew the thin mackintosh sheet closer about him, and tried to banish every thought from his mind. But never in all the strange experiences of the last few weeks had he felt the eerie sense of mystery so strongly as he did now.

The silence was overpowering, exaggerated by the occasional break which came when some strange bird or creature gave voice. And the darkness was tangible, something you could feel and touch.

He put up his hand, but it was as though he had plunged it into a warm, black mist, and it was completely hidden from view.

Nor could he see even the faint outline of the form lying next him. Now and again he put forth his hand cautiously, and felt very gently to make certain that Derwent Hood was still near him.

Darrell had never been afraid in his life; certainly he had never known until to-night what the fear of darkness meant. But now the faintest rustle of the leaves or movement of the branches and creepers piled in front of their resting place set his heart throbbing, and made him hold every muscle in his body tense and taut, ready for the blow which in some vague way he expected to fall.

But nothing happened. He began to wonder if Dexter had also fallen asleep, or whether he would ever awaken Hood. Jack wished for the time when he would give the signal, if only to reassure him that the two men were there and knew of the dangers about them.

Almost he felt inclined to waken Hood himself. The feeling grew on him as curious sounds, very soft and gentle, yet distinct from anything he had heard before, came to him.

He put out his hand towards Hood, then felt it gripped firmly and reassuringly.

"All right, sonny?" Hood whispered softly. "Getting a bit jumpy?"

"No," Jack answered, rather doubtfully. "But I thought I heard something."

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OUR COMPANION THE BOYS' FRIEND, "THE CEM" LIBRARY, Every Monday. Every Wednesday.

"Don't worry," Hood whispered back. "Even Zelling wouldn't be so mad— By Jove!"

Even while he spoke the sound of breaking branches reached them.

Dexter's voice called out softly but clearly:

"All right, Hood? Tell Walters!"

It was to Jack Darrell an agonising moment, and had he but known it, Teddy Burke, lying still and quiet not four feet from him, was going through exactly the same sensations.

He wanted to shout out or to get up: anything to break the tension of this silent waiting.

Suddenly the darkness was broken. A light burst through the trees, illuminating for a few brief moments even their hiding-place. Just for a second or so Jack Darrell could see the pale outline of Derwent Hood's face, and could distinguish the fact that his neighbour had turned over and was now lying so that he could raise himself on his hands and look forward.

Then the light disappeared and the sound of breaking branches grew louder and more frequent.

Only one command came from Midshipman Dexter.

"Don't move!" he said, quite clearly and distinctly, and there was no note of fear or nervousness in his voice.

Midshipman Dexter Suffers.

Immediately following Dexter's command the light came again. This time it seemed to last longer, and, if anything, was more powerful.

"Fireworks free!" Derwent Hood whispered, and it relieved Jack wonderfully to feel that Hood could still joke.

He tried to make out from where the light came, but the trees around and overhead, while letting some of the illumination through, prevented any clear vision.

The second light was followed by several cries and the sound of firing. But the noise was some distance away, and it was impossible to distinguish what the shouting was about.

For a space the darkness was supreme again. The shouting, however, grew more general and came nearer. It seemed as though the wood was filled with men, struggling to work their way through.

A splash and a cry told of one unfortunate who had made a false step. Jack felt Derwent Hood come near him again, and heard his whisper.

"Bathing strictly prohibited!" he said, then turned and gave the joke to Teddy Burke.

Whether he did it with a purpose or not, it had one good effect. It steadied the youngsters' nerves. They felt that, after all, this was real adventure, and the cold, clammy terror which had been hovering round never gained its chance with them again.

Once more the light came. And this time they heard a sound—a curious, hissing noise, followed by a crackling and gentle roar. The brightness increased, and right ahead of them they saw a sheet of flame.

For a moment even Dexter and Hood were startled. The effect was extraordinary, and at first they could not even guess what the cause was.

"Keep down!" Dexter issued a quick warning, not knowing whether it was necessary or not.

They peered through the observation-holes they had made in the screen and watched in wonder the strange display before them.

On the other side of the narrow waterway it seemed as though a huge bonfire had been lighted, and its flames leapt upward, greedily devouring the undergrowth and struggling to eat into the big trees.

In the light of the fire curious, distorted figures leapt before them, darting in and out among the black trunks of the trees. There were wild cries of alarm, and, mingled with the human voices, the weird shrieks and calls of the birds and other creatures who were alarmed and terrified by this invasion of their territory.

Utter confusion reigned, and the five watchers for a time neither thought of nor considered their own safety. They could see the black forms of men leaping and struggling. Some of them almost reached the boat, but, stepping on to the branches which had been put across the stream, were plunged into the water.

They could hear them struggling and shouting among the tangled mass. And all the time the flames grew bigger and wider, now darting along the ground, then spurting upward in a mighty effort to reach the topmost branches.

The fire came nearer the five, so that Dexter at last called out to Hood.

"What are we to do?" he asked. "Had we better get out of this?"

"Presently," Derwent Hood answered. "There's no

immediate danger. The stream is our protection. But the boat's getting scorched."

He was right. The flames were now running all along the right side of the waterway, and the branches covering the boat were ablaze. The roar was unpleasant, and the heat and acrid smoke became almost unbearable.

The black figures had gone—where, no one could say. Probably they had made for the river and escaped, though some of them were certain to have received injuries.

It was Walters who made the first move. He stood upright and surveyed the flames that now seemed intent on consuming the boat upon which the sailor had spent so much time only a few hours ago.

Very cautiously he stepped forward, and Dexter did not call him back. When Walters stood on the bank of the stream, so near the boat that the flames almost touched him, Dexter also rose and followed him.

In the drifting smoke-clouds they could see the two making desperate efforts to reach the burning branches with other branches they had picked up.

At last, with a groan, it seemed, the burning mass fell into the stream, where for a time it burned less fiercely, but still quite sufficiently violently to be dangerous.

Walters dropped into the water and began to push the mass down. Seeing this, Hood now came from his place, and he and Dexter took a hand.

The fire in the wood on the other side seemed to have run its course. Here and there a flame kept shooting up as the smouldering fire crept along and discovered some dry undergrowth still unconsumed. But it had apparently not covered a really great area, and must have encountered other waterways, which, if not sufficient to kill it altogether, were enough to check it and keep the flames within the narrow area where it first began.

In the water the three men struggled for a quarter of an hour or so pushing the burning branches further from the boat and deeper into the water.

Success attended their efforts at last. Nothing remained but the acrid smoke, which half-blinded them, and filled their mouths and nostrils so that they could scarcely breathe.

Jack Darrell and Teddy Burke had not remained behind in their temporary bed very long. They had even assisted in the business of keeping the flames down by putting out any little fire that started on their side of the stream.

Now they all stood together again. Here and there could be seen a tongue of fire leaping up in the blackness of the wood, a remnant of the great sheets that had held sway for a time.

"And now," Derwent Hood was the first to speak, "what damage have we suffered? No personal injuries, I hope?"

They had not been unfortunate in that. Dexter had a foot slightly scorched when he had been too energetic in repressing the flames. It began to trouble him a little now that he was out of the water.

Walters was also burnt a little. But there was nothing very serious.

"It's the boat I'm thinking of," Walters said. "Have you got that little lamp of yours, Mr. Dexter?"

The midshipman found his pocket flash-lamp, and he and Walters clambered over to the launch.

It did not take them long to discover that the damage here was considerable. The centre of the boat where the engines was had been practically burnt out.

Strangely enough, it was the ironwork which at first appeared to have suffered most. The woodwork was badly scorched in places, but the boat was still water-tight so far as they could judge.

"It's the petrol," Walters said. "The engine's done in, sir. I don't think we'll ever repair that."

His judgment was unfortunately too true. It was a nasty blow to Dexter, but he said very little.

"How on earth did they start the fire?" he asked. "It wasn't done purposely."

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ONE
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"I think it's fairly obvious," Hood said slowly. "They must have made a kind of firework sort of roman-candle affair, you know, with the idea of showing their party where we lay. Probably they expected it would terrify us, too."

"But how would they use it?" Dexter asked. "Not in the woods, surely?"

"No; someone on the boat which they came over in would fire it—probably, though I don't know, in the same way as they'd send up a rocket. Only this would give a brilliant light for quite a minute if they sent it up properly and made it in the right way. I've seen them used before."

"But what madness to use them in a place like this!" Dexter said.

"Not if they did everything properly. The thing would burn itself out before it fell. Evidently it was a rush job, and one of them came down before its time. Result—they had a bonfire as well as the fireworks."

"And did us more damage than if everything had gone well for them!" Dexter said bitterly. "I wouldn't have minded a fight in the least, but to see our own boat practically burnt out without being able to do a thing to save it, is pretty rough luck. I'll get the poor wreck back to the Chatswood somehow or other."

To Dexter the injury to the boat was the worst blow he had suffered so far, and it altogether overshadowed in his mind the fact that the attack on them had failed utterly.

Derwent Hood scarcely shared the despondency. Zelling had failed, and it would probably be some time before he made another attempt. It was possible even that they would be altogether free from him now.

"No use crying over burnt boats, Dexter," he said presently. "Our next move, I think, ought to be to get to the top of the hill. It isn't much use staying down here to watch over the boat now, and we can think about it much more comfortably up there."

"Yes," Dexter agreed regretfully. "It isn't exactly a pleasant atmosphere down here. Everybody take what he can carry, and we'll trek."

He and Walters explored the boat again, and brought out various half-burnt packages. The others also climbed across the boat to the other side of the stream. Then, each one laden with anything worth carrying, they began their slow climb.

The first signs of dawn were beginning to show when at last the five reached the top and stood clear of the woods. For a time they simply lay there, all of them feeling the reaction from the experiences of the past night.

Dexter stood up presently and looked about him.

"We're in a bright position now," he said gloomily. "What's your opinion of the situation, Hood?"

"I haven't got one yet," Hood answered quite cheerfully. "Zelling and his crowd seem to be tied up on that side of the river, and we're in the same position here. How on earth we're ever going to get out of it I don't quite see just yet. But we're still alive, and that's a lot in our favour. Cheer up, Dexter! You've pulled through worse troubles than this, I'll be bound!"

Dexter laughed. Occasionally he struck a bad patch, and for five minutes, but rarely any longer, he viewed everything from a pessimist's point of view. But after that his natural courage and fighting spirit reasserted itself.

"You're right, Hood," he answered. "We are in a mess, but I guess we're not going to sit down and cry about it. The Chatswood will be waiting for us presently, and with a bit of luck I'm going to take my poor old launch back to her, with you lot all aboard. We'll have a confab on the subject here and now!"

(Look out for next Monday's instalment of this exciting yarn. Order your "MAGNET" early!)

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NEXT
MONDAY.

"STRAIGHT AS A DIE!"

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry
Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.



MY READERS' PAGE

OUR COMPANION

PAPERS: "THE BOYS' FRIEND," 1d., Every Monday. "THE GEM" LIBRARY, 1d., Every Wednesday. "THE BOYS' FRIEND" 3d. COMPLETE LIBRARY "THE PENNY POPULAR," 1d., Every Friday. "CHUCKLES," Price 1d., Every Saturday.

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:

"STRAIGHT AS A DIE!"

By Frank Richards.

In next Monday's magnificent, long, complete story of the chums of Greyfriars we are introduced to Paul Sydney, a good-looking new boy, who is a ward of Ferrers Locke, the famous detective. There is some consternation when it becomes known that he is to disturb the harmony of No. 1 Study; but Harry Wharton & Co. become very chummy with the new arrival, despite the fact that the latter seems to have a secret of some sort weighing on his mind. What that secret is, Snaith of the Shell makes it his duty to discover. He weaves a net whereby he hopes to bring about the downfall of Sydney, and things look very black indeed against the new junior, especially when his past—a very shady one—is brought to light. Ferrers Locke, however, brings his magnificent skill and powers of deduction to bear upon the case, and there is short shrift for the unworthy Snaith; while Sydney himself is proved, beyond all possible doubt, to be

"STRAIGHT AS A DIE!"

HARRY WHARTON IN "THE PENNY POPULAR." What Do YOU Think of the Idea?

The following letter from a Manchester reader of the "Magnet" Library touches upon a very important subject:

"Dear Editor,—You always express yourself as being willing to receive and consider any suggestions your chums may have to bring forward, so I am making bold to write to you in connection with a subject very dear to the hearts of most of us—the Harry Wharton stories.

"Now, it is an unfortunate fact, but none the less true, that the only paper in which we can read of our favourites is the 'Magnet' Library. Once upon a time you had short stories of Greyfriars in 'Chuckles'; then you had them in the 'Dreadnought'; but since that lamented journal shut up shop there have been no fresh developments. Could you not contrive, Mr. Editor, to introduce Harry Wharton and his famous chums into 'The Penny Popular'? I think it would be a splendid idea, and am sure it will be approved of if you put it to the vote. It is scarcely fair that Tom Merry & Co. should get all the limelight, and our own heroes be put in the shade.

"My chums are with me, heart and soul, in this request.—Yours respectfully,

HOWARD V. TRACEY."

Many thanks, Master Tracey! I have many times meditated on the same subject, but have said nothing, since I considered my chums wished for nothing more than the long, complete school tale in the "Magnet." However, if they will let me know their views on this very important question, I shall be happy to move in the matter.

In any case, it would be impossible for me to take out the Tom Merry story from "The Penny Popular"; but why not have an amalgamation, and make the story deal every week with both Tom Merry and Harry Wharton? Thus, instead of having tales of the early schooldays of the St. Jim's characters, we should be having entirely new stories, written in vigorous, up-to-date fashion, and dealing with the great rivalry which exists between the two schools.

Every keen Magnetite and lover of Harry Wharton should let me have his opinion now.

PLAYING THE GAME.

I have received a long letter from "Eleven Loyal New Cross Readers," who, in an honest, straightforward way, speak their minds on certain subjects in connection with the

"Magnet" Library and its companion paper, the "Gem" Library.

I am sure my New Cross chums will pardon me for not being able to publish their letter on this page, but I will condense a few of their criticisms in tabulated form, thus:

1. The Editor's Chat Page should contain useful articles instead of advice to readers.

2. Two weeks after "The Jew of St. Jim's" appeared in the "Gem" Library a South African reader was replied to in connection with the story. This leads us to believe that the "Replies in Brief" are not genuine.

3. A week or so ago we saw that two fathers of Magnetites wrote complaining to you, and you "told them off." Was this right?

I will endeavour to give my eleven chums straight replies to their straight questions. First of all, let me observe that I left off publishing articles solely at the request of my readers. If the latter prefer that I should shorten my weekly Chat, and reintroduce articles, I will willingly do so.

With regard to the second subject, I should like to point out that our "Replies in Brief" are never "faked." The inference is an odious one. Whatever system may be in vogue so far as other journals are concerned, I can honestly claim that the "Magnet" and "Gem" are clean and above-board. There are so many hundreds of enthusiastic letters waiting to be replied to in this office that I should have no need to put in falsified replies, even if I were despicable enough to contemplate doing so. As a matter of fact, the letter in question from a South African reader was sent to me some weeks before "The Jew of St. Jim's" appeared, and my remark in the "Replies in Brief" meant, in a nutshell, "How did you like the story?" It did not, of course, mean that my South African chum had already read the tale, for he hadn't.

As for the third question, I have had ample proof that the offensive letter referred to was written jointly by a couple of hare-brained boys, and not by fathers of Magnetites at all. That was why my reply was short and cutting.

My New Cross friends ask me several minor questions, but I have no space to record them all. If, however, they will send a representative up to see me, I shall be pleased to satisfy him that the lines on which these papers are run are straight, manly, and honourable. Honesty and fair dealing are considered old-fashioned and out of date in many circles, but your Editor has found them pay, and will never have cause to deviate from his unswerving course of playing the game.

STILL IN SUSPENSE.

"The Great Secret" is still a secret—until next week. Purchase next Monday's "Magnet," and share in the general rejoicing!

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

Walter G. (Melbourne).—I have no copy available of "The Race to the Tuckshop." Sorry!

Stanley Taylor (Bath).—Eat plenty of good and nourishing food, and keep off cigarettes. You might also take up a course of physical exercises.

William R. R. (Chatham).—I was much impressed by your letter. It is certainly strange that there are so few replies to Chatham readers, but it cannot be due to lack of enthusiasm. Thanks for your promise to back up the two coming additions to the companion papers.

W. M. (Norseman, Western Australia).—Tom Brown and Hazeldene are each fifteen years of age.

(Continued on page III of cover.)

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS TO "MAGNET" READERS.

The Editor of THE "MAGNET" LIBRARY wishes to thank the following loyal readers for their extremely useful letters and valuable suggestions. At the same time he sincerely regrets his inability to reply to them in full.

- "A True Balham Supporter."
 A. L. R.
 "A Loyal Peckhamite."
 A. W. N. Andrews.
 "A 'Magnet' and 'Gem' Reader" (Sydney).
 "A Loyal Reader" (Goodwick).
 "Automatic" (Scarborough).
 "A True Magnetite" (Catford).
 A. F. (Bolton).
 "A Constant Reader" (Luton).
 "A Staunch Reader" (East Dulwich).
 "A Boy Reader" (Southport).
 A. G. L. (Southsea).
 "A Constant Reader" (Seven Kings).
 "A Staunch Girl Reader (Northumberland).
 "A Loyal Girl Chum" (Wandsworth).
 "A Loyal Reader" (Cheltenham).
 "A New but Zealous Reader" (Northampton).
 "A Weekly Reader" (Portsmouth).
 "A Sturdy Magnetite" (Hanwell).
 "A Loyal and True Girl Reader" (Manchester).
 "A Constant Reader" (Chesterton).
 "A Nottingham Reader."
 "A Newcastle-under-Lyme Chum."
 A. G. (Birmingham).
 Andrews, Mabel, (Queensland).
 "A Regular Magnetite" (Newport).
 "A New Magnetite" (London, N.).
 Adcock, D., (Weymouth).
 "A Glasgow Reader."
 "An Old Supporter" (Birmingham).
 "An East Ham Reader."
 "A Liverpool Reader."
 "A Loyal Girl Reader" (Nelson).
 "A New Reader in Ireland" (Ballymena).
 "A Girl Reader" (Bournemouth).
 "A Faithful Reader" (London, W.C.).
 "A Boxer."
 "Anxious" (Bristol).
 "A Faithful Reader" (Wanstead).
 "A Pit Lad" (North Shields).
 "A Maoriland" (New Zealand).
 "A Very Ardent Reader."
 "A Fourth-Former."
 "A Magnet Supporter" (Aberdeen).
 "A Fulhamite."
 "A Thoroughly Satisfied Reader" (Westcliff).
 "A Girl Reader" (Ayrshire).
 A. G. M. (Hanley).
 A. T. (Tufnell Park).
 "An Every-week Reader" (Stepney).
 "A New Reader" (Liverpool).
 "A True Reader" (Spalding).
 "A True Magnetite" (Wilmslow).
 "A Loyal Reader" (Ashford).
 "A Girl Reader" (Cricklewood).
 "Ardent Reader" (Doncaster).
 Britton, D.
 Bright, H. E., (Blackfriars).
 Bourke, J. F., (New South Wales).
 Brogden, J. H., (Queensland).
 Beaumont, F., (Wakefield).
 B. M. (Rotherham).
 Bridge, C., (Blackpool).
 "Bunny" and "Dodger" (Strood).
 "Brum" (Birmingham).
 Bown, William (Peckham).
 B. S. and J. B. (West Worthing).
 Batten, W. H., (Feltham).
 Boucher, R., (Guernsey).
 Batten, H., (Highgate).
 Baker, W., (Earl's Court).
 "Beaver" (Bradford).
 Channon, Frank, (West Ham).
 Cleve, R. S.
 Curtis, E. H., (East Ham).
 Craig, William, (Bow).
 Campbell, H., (Glasgow).
 Campion, Pte. H. W., (British Expeditionary Force).
 Cherry, Robert A., (West Bromwich).
 Cowin, H. (Douglas).
 Cherwell, Lee-Cpl., (Sittingbourne).
 "Caledonian."
 Cohen, Magnus, (Clapton Common).
 "Chorley Reader."
 Carlton, Mrs. Lillian, (Glasgow).
 Crozier, John.
 Cazaly, George, (Sunderland).
 Dyer, George, (Chelsea).
 "Dot and Dash" (Birmingham).
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 Day, G., (Devonport).
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 Dixon, Clifford, (Manchester).
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 D. G. (Dunfermline).
 "Dolly Dimple" (Bristol).
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 "Eileen" (Worcestershire).
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 "Enthusiast" (Halifax).
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 F. J. T. O. P. (Liverpool).
 Fotherby, R., (Leeds).
 Fuller, Norman, (Croydon).
 F. R. (Derby).
 Furnell, F., (East Croydon).
 F. J. (Forest Hill).
 F. F. (Paignton).
 Graham, Ada, (Hyde).
 "Gussy" (Southfields).
 Gray, Walter, (Earl's Court).
 Gray, W., (Chiswick).
 Gasson, S.
 Gradwell, H. S.
 Garmonsway, F., (Co. Durham).
 Gordon, F. J., (Swansea).
 G. A. S. (Walsall).
 Gray, Laurence, (Manchester).
 Hynd, Robert, (Fifeshire).
 Hood, J., (Rochdale).
 Haddrell, T., (Birchington).
 H. B. R. W. (Carshalton).
 "Hughie" (London).
 Hughes, Edwin, (Manchester).
 Haines, W. C., (London).
 Hargreaves, H., (Blackpool).
 Helliwell, W., (Halifax).
 H. K. and Chums (Coventry).
 Hodson, J. A., (Bow).
 Hardwick, S. W., (Tredegar).
 Harold, J. W., (Brentwood).
 Hayes, Pte. T., (Thetford Camp).
 Hodgetts, H., (Birmingham).
 Hayes, Pte. L., (Sheffield).
 Haywood, M., (Chichester).
 Hart, L., (Brighton).
 Harvey, Stanley, (Camberwell).
 Hare, B., (Leeds).
 "Hurree Singh" (Sunderland).
 Hunter, J., (Blackburn).
 Harrison, Harold, (Manchester).
 H. T. (Leicester).
 H. K. and J. B. (Barnsbury).
 Harry D. (Staffs).
 Hargreaves, C. E., (Manchester).
 H. and E. R. (Teddington).
 Irving, Laurence, (Hornsey).
 Isaacs, G., (Maida Vale).
 "It" (Portsmouth).
 "Impatient" (Acton Green).
 Ingram, Alfred, (Blackpool).
 Insley, H.
 J. E. H.
 J. C. (Chingford).
 Joy, E. H., (Brighton).
 Jones, Tom, (Manchester).
 Jack H. (Manchester).
 J. B. P. (Liverpool).
 J. B. (Blackburn).
 Johnston, Allan H., (New Zealand).
 J. K. (Bournemouth).
 J. M. and W. M. (Glasgow).
 Jones, Effie, (Liverpool).
 Jordan, Cyril E., (East Croydon).
 J. J. (Kingston).
 J. M. (Wood Green).
 Johnstone, W., (Dublin).
 Jackson, A., (Halifax).
 Jonas, Sophia, (Victoria Park).
 Jarrett, Eileen, (Upper Tooting).
 Kyle, Robert, (Glasgow).
 Kelly, T. H. V., (Staffs).
 Kirby, W., (Norbury).
 Kingsley, J., and Chums (Dalston).
 Kennedy, Roland, (High Wycombe).
 Kirkby, Harry (South Devon).
 Kennedy, Walter (Joppa).
 Knott, M. W., and Chums (Natal).
 K. S. S. G.
 Lynn, William, (Manchester).
 Langton, S., (Alfreton).
 L. W. (South Tottenham).
 Lawrence, H., (Stroud).
 Lydon, J.
 Longden, Fred, (Manchester).
 Liles, Drummer Norman, (British Expeditionary Force).
 L. M. (Hounslow).
 Lee, J. Maxwell, (Gosport).
 Lawler, J., and Chums (Halifax).
 Lowe, Frank, (Brixton).
 L. S. (Surrey).
 L. E. S. (South Norwood).
 Lewis, J., (Glasgow).
 Little, R. V., (London, N.).
 Lea, E., (Birmingham).
 L. and C. (Johannesburg).
 Lewis, Harold, (Melbourne).
 Massen, A., (Norfolk).
 Macdonald, William, (Blackburn).
 M. P. and E. W. (Pentre).
 Muggeridge, Harry.
 Moorby, H.
 "Magnetite" (Leeds).
 Mathews, Harold F., (Balham).
 McKenna, F., (St Helens).
 "Magnetite" (Willesden).
 Macarthur, H. Duncan, (Manchester).
 Munro, Keith, (Victoria).
 McGivern, James, (Co. Antrim).
 Martyn, H., (London, E.C.).
 Myatt, Herbert, (Birmingham).
 Merrett, Donald.
 Matthews, S. H., (Chiswick).
 "Maurice."
 McGimpsey, Adelaide.
 Mark, Pte. H., (Dundee).
 "Non-stop Reader" (Torquay).
 Norman L. (Staffs).
 "Navy" (Manchester).
 Norman, H. C. H., (Peckham).
 Naylor, A., (near Leeds).
 Nicholls, E., (Dover).
 Newman, A., (Putney).
 N. H. S. (Stepney).
 "New Zealander" (Invercargill).
 (Continued on next page.)

Okell, John P., (Manchester).
O'Connor, Tom, (Wimbledon Park).

Pearce, W.
Peate, G. H., (Manchester).
Pearson, F., (Victoria).
Potter, Montague A., (Oxford).
Perkin, R., (Whitley Bay).
Pyke, Vera, L., (near Crewkerne).

Rosa and Ernest (London).
Roth, H., (W. Croydon).
Richards, Dylis, (Guernsey).
Rowland, Cecil, (Millom).
Ruger, Midshipman J., (Shiplay).
R. H. (Southwark).
Russell, B., and Chums (Hford).
Richmond, N., (Wavertree).
"Ruff and Reddy."
R. W. and G. T. (Walworth).
R. A. F. B.
Rostron, Eric A., (Rochdale).
Rawlings, R., and Chum (Montreal).
R. R. C. K.

Robertson, F., (Melbourne).
Ramsey, C., (Manchester).
R. E. (Great Dunmow).
Rosén, M., (Johannesburg).
Rippin, John L., (Knowle).
Robinson, John C., (Newcastle-on-Tyne).

Soloman, Annie, (Stepney).
Stembridge, C., (Feltham).
Skeet, W. E., (East Greenwich).
Scott, Private J. E., (Egham).
"Seven Loyal Readers from Morley."
Smith, E. A., (Darlaston).
S. C. (Ponders End).
Summerfield, H., (Lambeth).
"Sincere" (South Wales).
"Smithy" (Clydebank).
"Sunderland Lad."
Stephenson, W. A., (Carlisle).

S. R. (London).
S. P. (London).
Sixsmith, Eric.
Stringfellow, Frank, (Aigleth).
Smith, Leo, (Radford).
Spencer, A. E., (South Africa).
Siggins, Rifleman R. W., (Queen-boro).
Stephenson, G., (Portstewart).
Saul, Pauline, (East Ham).

"Two British Sparks" (Southstrand).
Teasdel, A., (Grimsby).
"The Drummer."
Thorpe, C. R., (Middlesex Hospital).
"Two Oxford Chums."
"Two Loyal Readers" (Southport).
"The 'Magnet' Bookworm"
(Brondesbury).
Toman, John, (St. Helens).
T. P.

"Two War-Office Messengers"
(Battersea).
"Two Canadian Magnetites."
"Tom Boy."
Thackral, Ernest.
"Two Parkstonians."
"Two Arms" (East Greenwich).
"Tim" (Salford).
"Two Readers" (Stoke-on-Trent).
Tood, J., (Belfast).
"Two Readers of the 'Magnet'"
(Port Glasgow).
"Trumpeter, R.F.A."
"The Crescents."
"Two Magnetites." (Belfast).
"Two Loyal Chums" (Halifax).

"Union Jack" (Vancouver).
"Un Lecteur Fidele" (Thornton Heath).
"Une Nouvelle Amie" (Chester).

Van Gastel, E. L., (London).
"Vernon-Smith."
Vincent, Reginald, (Leytonstone).
V. M. C. H. (Leyton).

Wilkinson, W. E., (Castleford).
Welsh, Ernest, (Hull).
Watkins, L. A., (Peckham).
Webbe and Winter (London).
Waterhouse, Louis, (Shertou).
Wrigley, Frank, (St. Helens).
Williams, Trevor, (Cardiff).
Wolt, Percy, (Leeds).
W. P. B. (Fakenham).
Wallace, H., (Douglas).
Warick, Daniel, (Dalston).
W. A. (Wilmslow).
Wright, Albert, (Weedon).
W. F. C. W.
Willis, Harold, (Horfield).
W. S. (Chesterton).
W. M. (Crewe).
W. F. C. S. (Hammersmith).
Whittingham, T. W.
Webster, A. E. J., (Now reported missing).
Wilcock, S., (E. Dulwich).
Walters, R. A.
Williams, A. S.

X. Y. Z. (Newcastle-on-Tyne).
Yarley, H., (Norwich).
Yarnall, L. E., (Streatham).
Zeegen, L., (Battersea).

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