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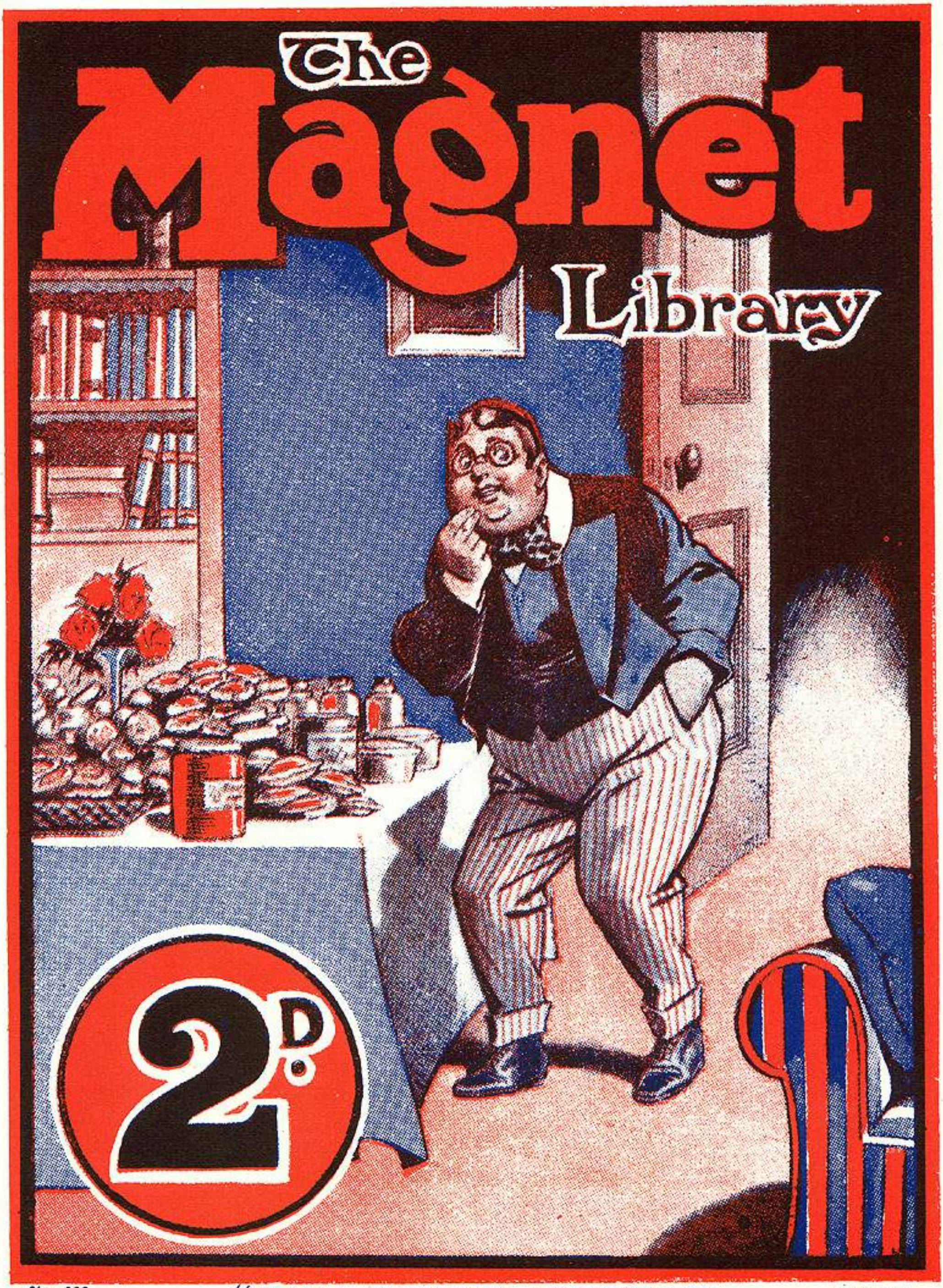

No. 409.
Vol. 9.

"THE STUDY RAIDER!"

(From the Original Painting by C. H. Chapman.)

Dec. 11th
1915.

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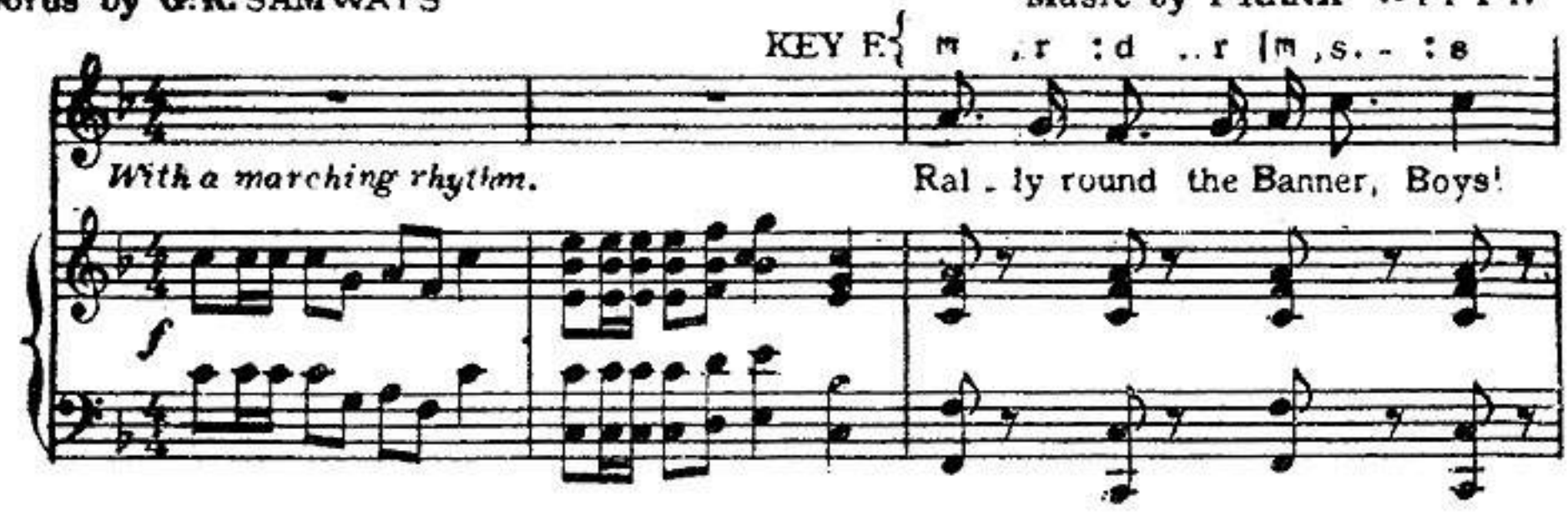
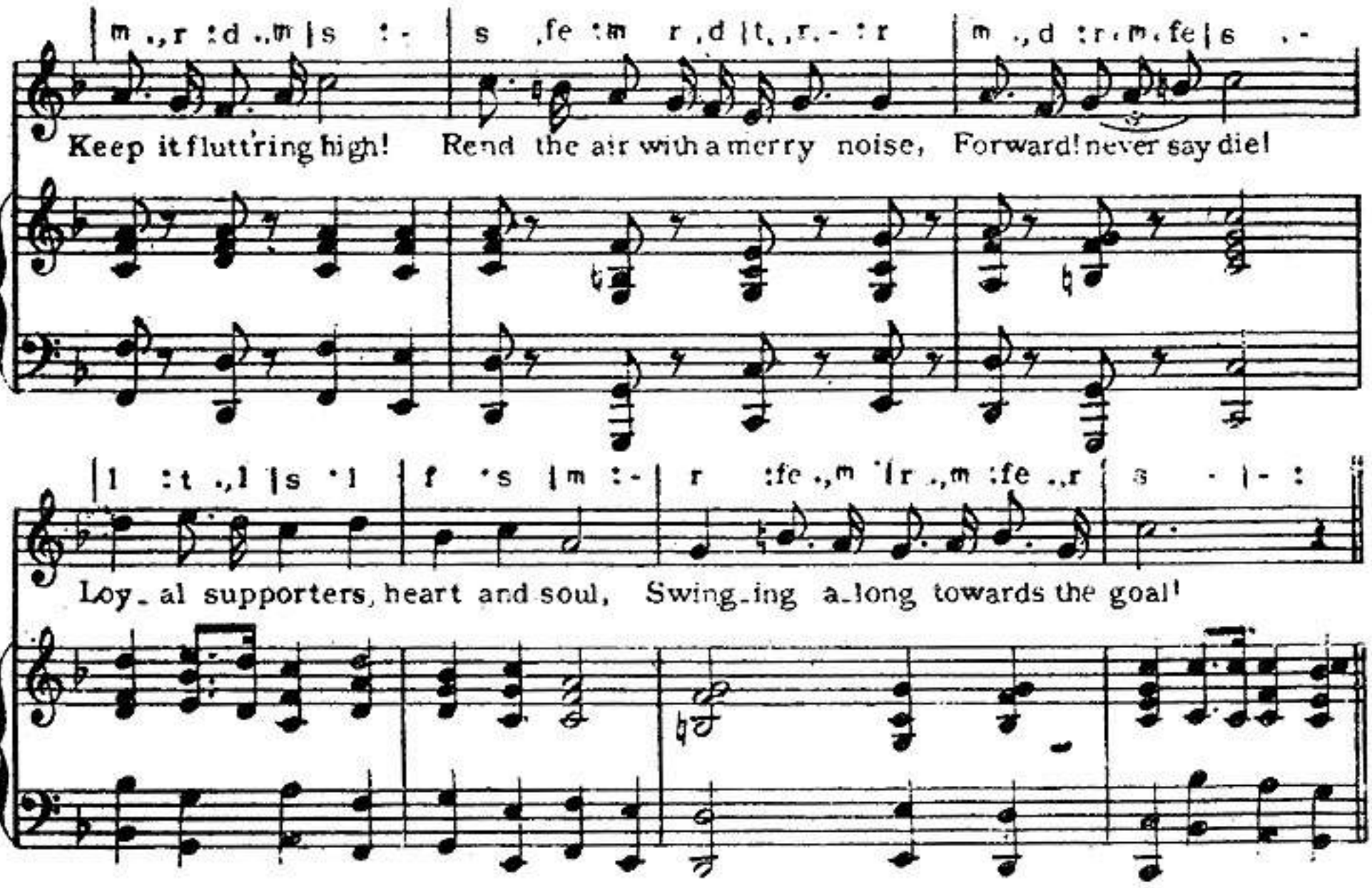
Words by G. R. SAMWAYS **Music by FRANK WITTY.**





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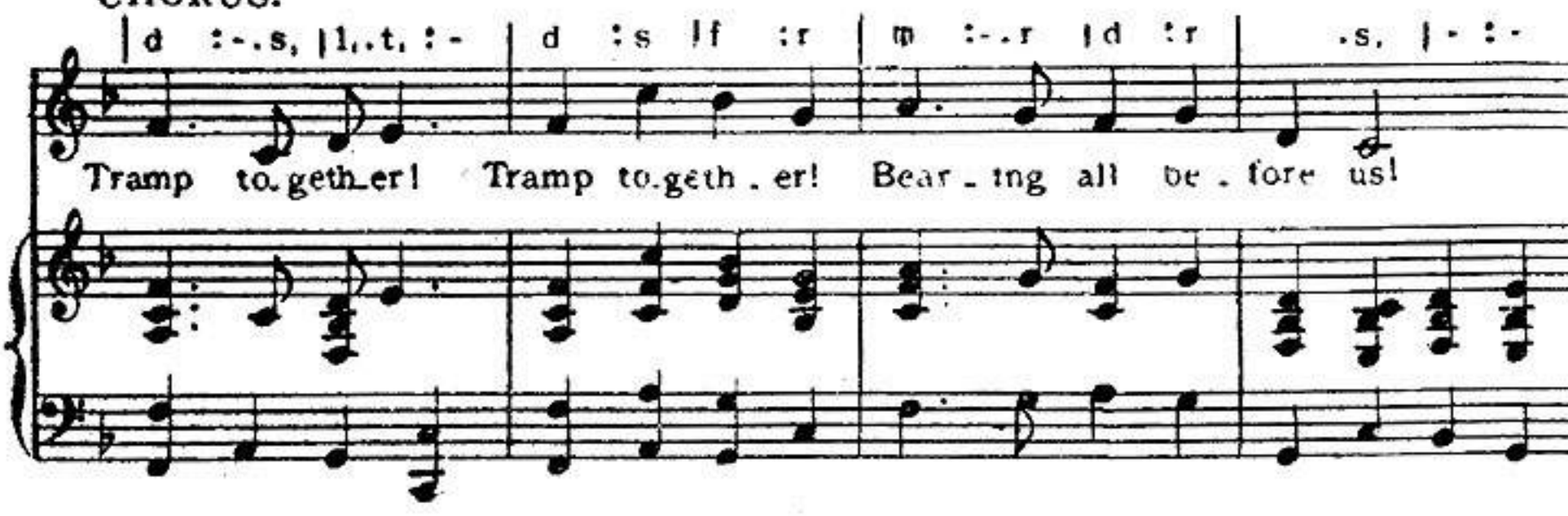

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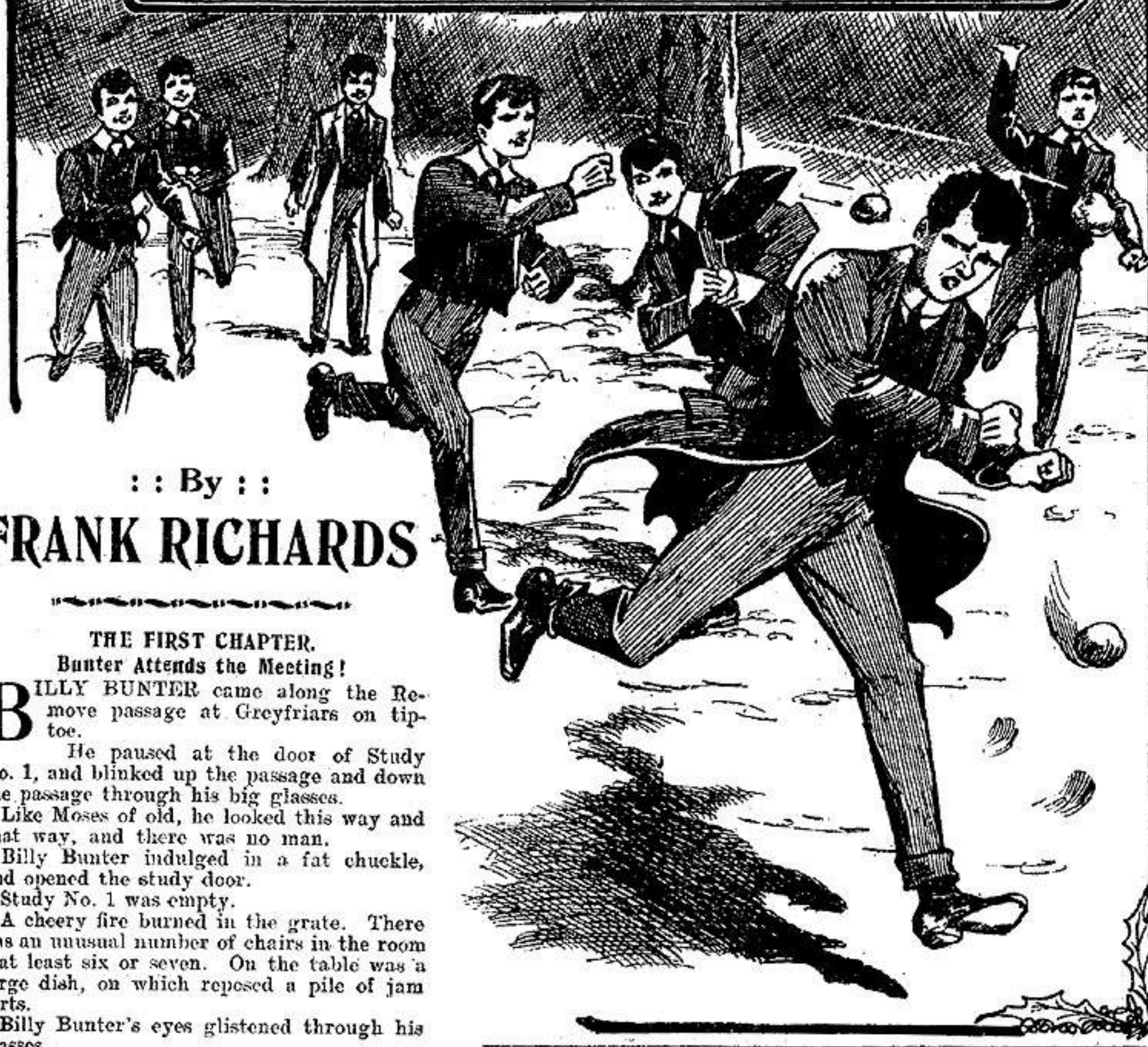


: : By : :

FRANK RICHARDS

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Bunter Attends the Meeting!

BILLY BUNTER came along the Remove passage at Greyfriars on tiptoe.

He paused at the door of Study No. 1, and blinked up the passage and down the passage through his big glasses.

Like Moses of old, he looked this way and that way, and there was no man.

Billy Bunter indulged in a fat chuckle, and opened the study door.

Study No. 1 was empty.

A cheery fire burned in the grate. There was an unusual number of chairs in the room—at least six or seven. On the table was a large dish, on which reposed a pile of jam tarts.

Billy Bunter's eyes glistened through his glasses.

"Beasts!" he murmured. "Not a word to me about it! Special meeting concerning the Christmas holidays, and keeping me in the dark! Beasts! Jam tarts, too! They know I like jam tarts. If I hadn't hap-

Coker of the Fifth was fleeing for his life, and after him were a crowd of merry juniors, pelting him with snowballs. "Yarooh!" Coker was roaring. "You cheeky young villains! Gerrogh!" "Pile in!" roared Bob Cherry. "This is Coker's farewell benefit! Go it!" *(See Chapter 1.)*

pened to hear Bob Cherry speaking to Linley, I shouldn't have known a word about it. Beasts!"

Billy Bunter tiptoed into the study and closed the door softly behind him.

The study was evidently prepared for the special meeting, but the special meeting had not yet arrived. Outside, in the old quadrangle, the snow was falling, and the walls and roofs of Greyfriars were gleaming white. From the dusky old quad came merry shouts. A snowball battle was raging there. Harry Wharton & Co. of the Remove had cornered Coker of the Fifth, and the great Coker was having the time of his life.

But Billy Bunter wasn't interested in snowball battles. Exertion of that kind was not in his line at all.

He was interested in that special meeting which was to take place in Study No. 1, and which was to concern the Christmas holidays. He was still more interested in the jam tarts. As he stood by the table he was listening carefully for footsteps in the passage. Meanwhile, he was busy with the tarts. The big pile on the dish diminished with astonishing rapidity.

"My hat! These are simply prime!" murmured Bunter, pausing a moment to take breath after the fourth tart. "Beasts, to leave me out of it, after all I've done for 'em! Making arrangements for the Christmas holidays, too—without considering me! They know jolly well that I ain't booked up for Christmas yet. That silly ass Mauleverer won't give me a chance of speaking to him on the subject—not that I want to go home with him! Toddy says he wouldn't be found dead with me at Christmas, or any other time, if he could help it. Toddy's a beast! They're all beasts—but these are jolly good tarts! Prime! And we'll jolly well see whether I'm going to be left out of the meeting."

Billy Bunter's jaws worked rapidly while he looked round the study for a place of concealment. Harry Wharton & Co. had committed the unpardonable omission of leaving Bunter out of the special meeting.

Not that the meeting was any business of Bunter's, but he made it his business.

Greyfriars was breaking up on the following day for the Christmas holidays, and Bunter's holiday had to be considered.

Considering Bunter's many accounts of the palatial splendours of his home, it was a little remarkable that he did not wish to spend his vacation there. But he didn't.

There were loud shouts from the quadrangle, and Bunter flattened his fat little nose against the frosty window-pane, and blinked out. Coker of the Fifth was fleeing for his life—the great Coker was running as if on the cinder-path—and after him were a crowd of merry juniors, pelting him with snowballs.

"Yarcoh!" Coker was roaring. "You cheeky young villains! Gerrogh!"

"Pile in!" roared Bob Cherry. "This is Coker's farewell benefit. Go it!"

"Give him socks!"

"There's one for his nob!"

"Hooray! Right on his wicket!"

"Yaroooh!" roared Coker.

He disappeared into the porch of the School House. Bunter chuckled at the study window. The sight of the great Coker in disorderly flight was exhilarating.

"Now the beasts will be coming in!" murmured Bunter. "Where the dickens——"

There was a screen in the corner of the study, but Bunter was wider than the screen. It was not much use hiding there. The cupboard was too small for his ample proportions. There was only one resource—he dived under the table. It was high time, for loud footsteps and cheery voices could be heard in the Remove passage.

The tablecloth was fortunately—for Bunter—on the table, and it descended within a foot of the floor. Billy Bunter crouched under the middle of the table, screened from view, unless any of the fellows should happen to stoop down. In that case his feet would certainly have been revealed.

But Bunter had to chance that. It was necessary for him to know what plans were going to be laid at that special meeting concerning the Christmas holidays—at least, Bunter regarded it as necessary. And he was not troubled with any scruples about getting his information in this way. It was not at all a new departure for the Peeping Tom of Greyfriars.

The study door came open with a bang.

A cheery party of juniors poured into the study. Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove, and Frank Nugent, the two Removites who shared the study, came in. They were followed by Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Here we are again!" said Bob Cherry. "We're late for the giddy meeting!"

"Nobody else here yet," said Wharton.

"Late for the tarts, too!" exclaimed Nugent. "Who's been scoffing the tarts? I put two dozen there. Now there's only eleven—twelve—fourteen."

"That fat bounder Bunter's been here."

"The cheeky porpoise!" exclaimed Wharton. "Those tarts were a little light refreshment for the meeting."

"Thank goodness he hasn't taken the lot, then!" said Bob Cherry. "I expect he heard us coming, and bolted. I'll try one myself. It makes me hungry snowballing Coker."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here comes Marky!"

Mark Linley came into the study.

"Sorry I'm late," said the Lancashire lad, with a smile. "Only a few minutes, I think."

"All serene. Where are those other bounders?"

"Here's one of them!" said a cheery voice at the door, and Sampson Quincy Iffley Field, otherwise known as Squiff, came in. The Australian junior was rubbing snow out of his hair.

"Grooh!" he remarked. "It's cold. Not much like our Christmases down under, this! All the merry meeting here now?"

"No, there's two more to come," said Harry Wharton—Toddy and Dutton. Here they come!"

Peter Todd and Tom Dutton arrived. The meeting was now complete, and Harry Wharton shut the door. Most of the fellows were looking curious. The meeting had been called, and they had come, but they were not yet aware of its object, excepting that it concerned the Christmas holidays.

"Well, here we are!" said Peter Todd. What's the meeting for? To scoff these tarts? I don't mind. Have a tart, Dutton?"

"Certainly!" said Tom Dutton, looking round. Dutton was deaf. "Where is it?"

"Here they are, fathead!"

"They are tarts," said Tom. "I don't see any mutton."

"Oh, dear!" said Squiff. "Put a tart in his mouth and keep him quiet. Now, what's the meeting about? Is it a giddy secret?"

"Well, not exactly a secret," said Wharton, "but we're keeping it rather dark, because—because we don't want it jawed up and down Greyfriars. Might look like—like swank, perhaps."

"This is getting interesting," remarked Todd. "I'll have another tart. Get on with the washing."

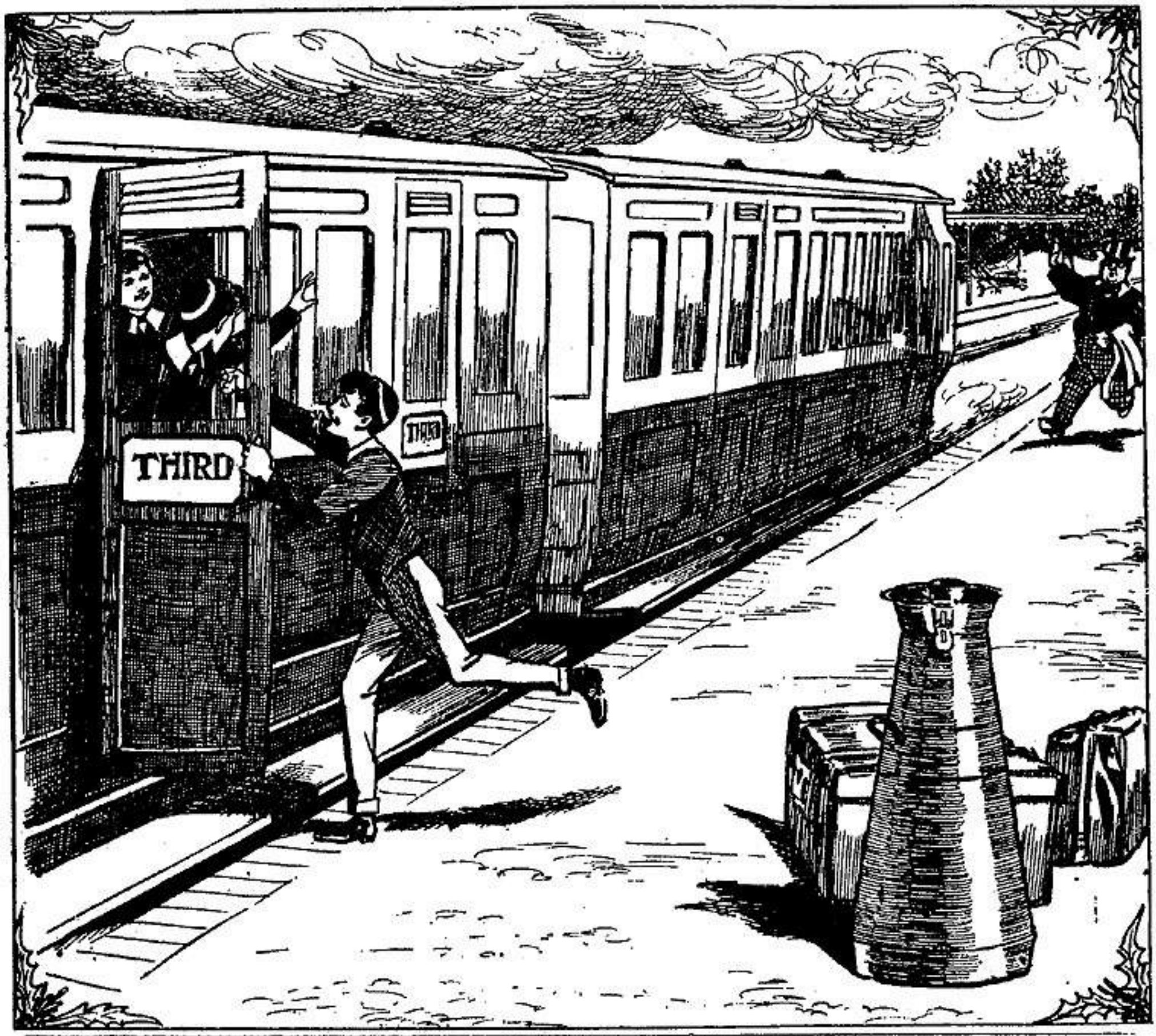
"The fact is, I've got an idea——"

"Glad to hear it," said Peter affably. "I've wondered sometimes, whether you'd ever have one."

"Don't be funny, Toddy. This is quite serious. And if you fellows don't catch on to the idea, don't talk it up and down the passage. I don't want it jawed about—and, especially, don't let that chattering ass Bunter get hold of it!"

"Right-ho!"

Under the table Billy Bunter grinned. The "chattering ass Bunter" was nearer than the captain of the Remove imagined. But Billy Bunter did not make a sound. Like the celebrated Brer Fox, he lay low and said "nuffin." The meeting were busy with the tarts, the snowballing of Coker in the quad having given them sharpened appetites. But they were generously prepared to hear the captain of the Remove expound his idea while they disposed of the light refreshment.



"You've left your luggage!" shrieked Bunter. "And left you, my pippin!" chuckled Bob Cherry, as the train began to move. "Fare thee well, and if for ever, all the better! Fare thee well!" "Ha, ha ha!" *(See Chapter 8.)*

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
A Great Sch me!

"GENTLEMEN——" began Wharton.

"Hear, hear!" said the meeting cordially. And Peter Todd added "Adsum!" Peter Todd was always a little humorous, even on the most serious occasions.

"Gentlemen, I've got a ripping idea!"

"Good!" ejaculated Squiff.

"Why, you haven't heard what it is yet!"

"I was alluding to the tarts. Go on!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen, the Christmas holidays are upon us. To-morrow Greyfriars breaks up, and for a time we say farewell to these distant spires, these antique towers!"

"Bravo!"

"Wharton ought to be in the House of Commons," said Bob Cherry, with conviction. "He could jaw their heads off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do shut up and listen! Gentlemen, this Christmas will be rather different from ordinary Christmases."

"Not at all like a common or garden Christmas," said Johnny Bull.

"Not at all," said Wharton, who—as his chums suspected, at least—had prepared a little address for the meeting in advance. "War is raging on land and sea. In France and Flanders, in the Dardanelles and Serbia, in Africa and Mesopotamia, the British Empire is at grips with a barbarous foe."

"Hear, hear!"

"Ergo——"

"That's Latin," interjected Bob Cherry.

"Ergo," shouted Wharton—"therefore——"

"Translations while you wait!" murmured Nugent.

"Therefore, my idea is that we should not pass the Christmas holidays in the usual way. We can't, as a matter of fact. Look at me, f'rinstance——"

"Put a mask on first!" murmured Peter Todd.

"Will you shut up, Toddy? Look at me! My uncle's at the Front, killing Germans, and my aunt's superintending a hospital at the base. Look at Bob Cherry! His father's out with French, killing Germans. Look at Johnny! His father's in Egypt——"

"Killing mosquitoes!" said Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then look at Nugent! His father's in the War Office——"

"Killing time!" said Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the meeting.

"I've been thinking it over," continued Wharton. "Of course, even in war-time it's everyone's duty to have a merry Christmas if he can. No good pulling a long face. The Tommies are keeping the Huns out for us, and they expect us to keep merry and bright!"

"Hear, hear!"

"All the same, this Christmas will be a bit out of the common, and I've got an idea, and that is that, instead of enjoying ourselves as usual, we should think of looking for some work—some kind of war work——"

"Great Scott!"

"Spending our holiday, or part of it, in work that will help," said Wharton steadily. "I think it's the least we can do. What the dickens! The baker and the milkman and the plumber have gone to the war, fighting our battles! They won't let us go; the War Office don't want schoolboys like us."

"They don't want 'em," remarked Nugent, "but they need 'em."

"We can't go to the Front, but we can do something at home, and that's my idea"

"Jolly good idea," said Squiff, "if there's anything to do! Blessed if I know how to knit woollen comforters, though!"

"Marjorie showed me how to knit socks once," said Bob Cherry thoughtfully, "but she said I spoiled the sock."

"I don't mind sending my spare cigarettes to the Tommies," suggested Peter Todd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or we might apply for jobs as advisers to the War Office," suggested Johnny Bull. "I'm not at all satisfied with the War Office."

"Good egg!" said Nugent heartily. "There's quite a lot of things I should like to mention to Kitchener!"

"We could stump the country on conscription," said Mark Linley thoughtfully. "My idea is to raise the military age, so as to bag all the old johnnies of fifty and sixty who are so keen to send the young johnnies to the war."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry. "I shall certainly mention that to Kitchener—if I get that job as adviser."

Harry Wharton rapped on the table with a ruler. His splendid scheme for the Christmas holidays was not receiving the attention and respect it merited.

"Order!" he rapped out. "Listen to me!"

"Pile in, old scout!"

"Hear, hear!"

The tarts were finished, and the meeting prepared to give the captain of the Remove their undivided attention.

"I've called you chaps together because we're all more or less stranded," said Wharton. "My home is shut up, so is Bob's. Squiff's people are in Australia; Toddy's father is on some legal business somewhere in France; Johnny's mater has gone with his pater. I don't know about Dutton."

"Dutton's coming with me wherever I go," said Peter Todd.

"And where are you going?"

"Well, Cousin Alonzo is going to Uncle Benjamin's," said Peter. "I was thinking of the same. But I think I rather like your idea best."

"And you, Marky?"

"I'm with you," said Mark Linley. "My father's on munitions at a place fifty miles from home, and the mater's with him in lodgings. Rake asked me to go home with him, along with Tom Brown and Vernon-Smith, but I'll join your party with pleasure if there's work to be done. Rake won't mind a bit."

"We couldn't possibly spare you, Marky," said Bob Cherry at once. "If we're going to work, you'll have to show us how to. You're the only chap here who's ever done any honest work."

The scholarship junior laughed.

"The only work I know is factory work, and I don't think you'd pick that up in a day or two," he said. "I don't think we should have much chance at munitions."

"I suppose we shouldn't," agreed Wharton. "I'd like to lend a hand at making shells; it would be next best thing to slogging the Huns ourselves. But I'm afraid that's N.G. But there are other things."

"Well, what's the wheeze?"

"We can earn money."

"Filthy lucre!" said Peter Todd.

"Not for ourselves, ass!" said Wharton. "Money for war funds; money to help the soldiers. F'rinstance, look at the prisoners in Germany! They don't get enough to eat. The Huns put 'em on short commons; the rotters themselves don't have too much to eat in these days, as a matter of fact. Well, suppose we earned a lot of money, and sent big Christmas hampers to the prisoners in Germany?"

"Hooray!"

"That's a thing that's worth working for, anyway."

"I should jolly well say so!" said Bob Cherry heartily. "I'd work my little finger off for that! But how——"

"'Tain't so jolly easy to get jobs," said Johnny Bull.

"And we couldn't take other people's jobs away," said Nugent. "That wouldn't be playing the game."

"That's the question," said Wharton. "But we've got to decide first whether we're going to do it, and then we'll decide what we're going to do. Now, then, hands up for spending the Christmas holiday on war work!"

Every hand went up at once. Wharton looked over the enthusiastic assembly with an expression of great satisfaction.

"Carried unanimously!" said Squiff.

"Hear, hear!"

"Done!" said Wharton. "Now, that's settled. Now, all we've got to do is to decide on the kind of work we're going to do, and set about it."

"All!" murmured Johnny Bull.

"It is a wheezy good idea!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "I suggestfully recommend a vote of thankfulness to the esteemed Wharton for the nobby wheeze!"

"We haven't got our jobs yet!" grinned Bob.

"Only keep it a bit dark," said Harry. "I think it's a ripping idea myself, but some fellows might think it rather swanking, you know—might think we were after the limelight. A good many people are nowadays."

"Not a giddy syllable," said Johnny Bull. "Not a word outside the study. Besides, we should look duffers if it didn't come off."

"Not a word to Bunter especially. He's in your study, Toddy."

"Rely on me."

"Have you finished?" asked Tom Dutton, speaking for the first time.

"Well, I think we've about finished," said Harry.

"Then what's it all about?"

"Eh?"

"You fellows speak in such mumbling voices that a chap can't hear a word!" said Dutton. "Have you been discussing something?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"You put up your hand with the rest!" roared Wharton.

"I! I never pointed my hand to the west that I know of. If you mean putting up my hand, I did that because Toddy did. Toddy said I was to follow his lead."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle at!" said Tom crossly. "I believe you've been mumbling on purpose, just to make out that I'm deaf!"

"Not at all."

"Rot! You needn't bawl! Just speak in an ordinary voice, and I hear you all right. I'm not deaf—slightly hard of hearing, that's all."

"Take him away, and roar at him, Toddy!" gasped Wharton. "Or write it down for him. It's all right, Dutton—Toddy's going to write it!"

"Sha'n't!" said Dutton firmly.

"What!"

"I'm not going to fight Toddy. What's Toddy done?"

"Oh, crumbs! I didn't say anything of the sort!" yelled Wharton.

"I don't see why you think I ought."

"I tell you I didn't say——"

"Go away? What did you ask me for, then?"

"Help!" cried Wharton.

"Why, you cheeky fathead, I'll teach you to call me a

whelp!" exclaimed Dutton; and he made a rush at the captain of the Remove.

"Here—keep off!—hold him!" yelled Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The meeting was in convulsions, and no one held Tom Dutton. He grasped the captain of the Remove, and they waltzed round the table and bumped into it. There was a crash as the dish slid off, and was shattered on the fender. Then another crash as the table went flying.

Then there was a yell.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Bunter!" shrieked Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter was revealed.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
The Secret Out!

BILLY BUNTER squatted on the carpet and blinked.

The overturning of the study-table had revealed the Owl of the Remove to the startled eyes of the juniors. Bunter had lain very low; he had not made a sound; and no one had dreamed of his presence at the special meeting. But he was revealed now with a vengeance.

"Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Eavesdropping as usual!" shouted Peter Todd. "Gimme the poker!"

"Jump on him!"

"Squash him!"

"He's heard the whole bizney! Brain him!"

Billy Bunter leaped to his feet with a yell of alarm. He dodged round Wharton and Dutton, who were still clasping one another like long-lost brothers.

"Here, you keep off!" roared Bunter. "I—I haven't heard a word—not a single syllable! I don't know anything about Wharton's idea—I haven't the faintest suspicion of what you're planning! Keep off!"

"Drag this idiot off, Toddy, or I shall scalp him!" yelled Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peter Todd and Squiff grasped Dutton and dragged him off. He was still breathing wrath.

"Shut up!" Toddy roared in his ear. "It's all a mistake!"

"Rubbish! My eye's all right—I don't need a steak! Lemme go! I'll teach that cheeky idiot to call me a whelp!"

"He didn't!" shrieked Peter Todd.

"Oh, didn't he?" said Dutton. "Well, I heard him! Hallo! How did Bunter get here? Oh, I see—it was Bunter that he was calling a whelp, was it?"

"No!"

"Know? How should I know, when I didn't see Bunter? I beg your pardon, Wharton! I thought you were alluding to me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not that I approve of the expression at all," said Dutton. "Bunter's an eavesdropping cad, but whelp's a rather stiff expression. Still, if you were alluding to Bunter, all right!"

"For goodness' sake don't explain!" gasped Peter Todd. "Let it go at that! Now let's slaughter Bunter for spying!"

"Oh, really, Toddy, I wasn't spying—you know I'd scorn to do anything of the sort!"

"What were you doing under the table, then?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"I—I had just stooped down to—to tie my bootlace."

"And that's where the tarts went!" exclaimed Nugent. "The fat bounder's scoffed the tarts, and heard all we've said! Now it will be all over the school!"

"I sha'n't say a word, of course, Nugent! In fact, I haven't heard anything. Besides, I think Wharton's idea is rotten! I shall certainly refuse to join your party for Christmas if you're going to work! Never heard of such a fatheaded idea!"

"You won't join the party right enough!" growled Wharton. "I wonder if it's any good making the fat beast promise to keep it dark!"

"I should be willing to give my word—the word of a Bunter!" said the Owl of the Remove loftily. "By the way, Harry, old chap——"

"Chuck it, you fat worm!"

"Harry, old chap," repeated Bunter, feeling that the possession of the little secret made him master of the situation—"Harry, dear boy, I really came here to see you to mention that I'm expecting a postal-order——"

"My hat!"

"It will be for a pound—a titled relation of mine, you know! He always whacks out handsomely at Christmas-time! There's been some delay in the post—these women postmen they employ now, I suppose—anyway, it hasn't come yet. I suppose you fellows could let me have the quid. Of course, I'll hand you the postal-order immediately it comes."

The chums of the Remove simply glared at Bunter. That he should work off his famous postal-order story on them who knew him so well was really the limit!

"Kick him out!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—if you fellows can't oblige a chap like that, I don't see that I'm called upon to keep your blessed secrets!"

"Price of silence, one pound!" grinned Bob Cherry. "As Bunter would chatter, anyway, we'll save the quid and wallop Bunter!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I—I could do with five shillings!"

"Hand me that cushion!"

"Half-a-crown!"

"Plank him over the armchair!"

"A bob!" yelled Bunter.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Yow-ow-ow-oooop! I say, you fellows, I won't say a word! Yaroooh! I'll jolly well tell all the Remove! Leggo! Yoooop! Yawwwp!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Yaroooh! Help! Fire!"

"There!" gasped Bob Cherry, throwing down the cushion. "Next time you tie up your bootlace, Bunter, don't do it under this study-table, or you'll get some more. Now kick him out!"

"I say, you fellows—oh, crumbs! Yah!"

Bump! Billy Bunter rolled into the passage.

"Now all jump on him together!" said Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha! One—two——"

Bunter did not wait for "three." He picked himself up and fled along the Remove passage.

"Now all the fat's in the fire," said Harry Wharton ruefully. "All the Remove will know about it in ten minutes, and we shall be chipped to death!"

"Well, it's a jolly good idea, anyway," said Mark Linley. "Let 'em chip!"

"They will, whether we let 'em or not!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Never mind! It's all in the day's work! We're all backing you up, Wharton. All you've got to do is to find the job, and we'll pile in."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The pilefulness will be terrific! But where is the esteemed job?"

"Echo answers where!" grinned Squiff.

"Pardon me, my esteemed Squiff, but echo would answer 'job' to my loquacious remark," said Hurree Singh gently. "That is, unless the acoustical properties of this esteemed study are terrifically extraordinary!"

"Got it!" shouted Squiff.

"Eh? Got what, fathead?"

"The idea—a job for Inky to begin with. Teaching English," said Squiff.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the special meeting broke up—fully agreed upon backing up the captain of the Remove in his excellent "wheeze"; and also agreed upon leaving it to Harry Wharton to find the "job." And, as it wanted only one day to breaking-up, the allowance of time for finding that "job" was not extensive.

Meanwhile, Billy Bunter was retailing his discoveries up and down the Remove passage; and, considering what an excellent idea it was, it was received with merriment that was decidedly disrespectful. Somehow or other, the Removites could not quite picture the Famous Five in the role of war-workers.

When the chums of the Remove came into the common-

room a little later, they found a crowd of juniors admiring a pen-and-ink sketch that was pinned on the wall—the work of the humorous Skinner. It depicted a munition factory being blown sky-high, and underneath was written:

"No. 1 Study lends a hand."

And when Bob Cherry came into his study he found a ball of wool and a pair of knitting-needles on the table all ready for him. Whereat Bob Cherry snorted. Ripping as Harry Wharton's great wheeze was, the Remove appeared determined to take it in a humorous spirit.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
A Call for Aid!

"MASTER WHARTON!"

Trotter, the page, looked into the Remove dormitory, where several of the juniors were busy packing their boxes—Wharton among the rest.

"Hallo, Trotty!"

"You're wanted, Master Wharton."

"Hallo! War work already?" exclaimed Bolsover major. And there was a laugh.

"It's a telephone call, Master Wharton," said Trotter. "Mr. Quelch sent me to call you. The man's holding the line."

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Wharton, jumping up and slipping on his jacket.

"Is it a call from the Dardanelles, Trotty?" asked Rake. "Is Wharton wanted out there to superintend?"

"Or has French resigned, and asked them to send for him?" chuckled Snoop.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He, he, he!" echoed Billy Bunter. "Perhaps he's wanted at the War Office. It may have got out that he's willing to take on Kitchener's job. He, he, he!"

Wharton's handsome face was a little red as he hurried from the dormitory. He was quite satisfied that his scheme for the holidays was a good one, and the general hilarity of the Remove on the subject was a little disconcerting. He had been well advised in keeping it dark, but in that he reckoned without his host, in the person of William George Bunter. All Greyfriars knew about it now.

Mr. Quelch was in his study. The receiver was off the telephone.

"Someone has asked for you on the telephone, Wharton," said the Remove-master. "As he says the matter is important, I have sent for you. You are at liberty to use the telephone."

"Thank you, sir!"

The captain of the Remove took up the receiver.

"Hallo! Are you there?"

"Yes. Is that Wharton—Harry Wharton?"

"Yes."

"I understand that some of the Greyfriars boys, including yourself, have undertaken to do war work?"

Wharton started.

"That is so," he replied. "I do not see how you can know it, though. Who are you?"

"Sergeant Flapp. I have heard it from a young gentleman belonging to your school, who came along and saw us in a fix here. We are snowed in, on the road to Wapshot Camp. We can't get help in the village, and we want a digging party to help us out; the waggon, laden with ammunition, is in a snowdrift. If this is true about you boys being willing to help generally, you can't do better than come along with spades and pile in. We may be here all night if we don't get help."

"Where are you now?"

"Post-office, Friardale. The waggon's stuck half-way up Wapshot Lane."

"Hold on a tick!"

Wharton turned to his form-master. The evening was drawing in, and it was late for Greyfriars fellows to go out. But Wharton was a fellow of his word. Digging a waggon out of a snowdrift in the middle of a snowstorm was not exactly pleasant work. But it was war work, anyway. Wharton was not a slacker.

"Mr. Quelch, can some of us go out?"

"For what reason, Wharton? It is late, and the weather is very bad," said Mr. Quelch. "What business can you have out of doors at this hour?"

Wharton explained quickly.

The Form-master pursed his lips.

"The weather is shocking," he said. "Wapshot Lane must be inches deep in mud, as well as the snow. My dear boy——"

"The fact is, sir, we've been planning to do war work during the holidays, and this sergeant chap has heard of it from one of our fellows," said Harry. "If we don't turn up, it looks like bragging, and then slacking. And we don't mind the cold or the snow, sir. We're not soft."

"Very well, Wharton; you may go. Gosling will provide you with implements."

"Thank you, sir!"

Wharton hurried out of the study. He returned in hot haste to the dormitory.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Was it a call from the Dardanelles, after all?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's work," said Harry. "Come on! Military waggon stuck in the snow in Wapshot Lane, and we're going to help dig it out."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"There's a chance for you!" grinned Bolsover major. "Rally round, you giddy war-workers! Roll up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Remove looked out of the window at the fast-falling snow in the December dusk. Wharton was already changing into a pair of thick old boots, and evidently he expected the members of that "special meeting" in No. 1 Study to back him up. Bob Cherry put on his coat. Squiff and Mark Linley quickly followed his example. Then the rest of the special meeting followed suit.

"You're really going?" exclaimed Hazeldene.

"The gofulness will be terrific!" said Hurree Singh. "You may come alsofully, my esteemed Hazel."

"Not in this weather!" grinned Hazel.

"If you're buried alive we'll come along to-morrow and dig you out!" said Bolsover major. "Who'll take a bet? Three to one they don't go any further than the tuckshop in Friardale!"

"He, he, he!"

Harry Wharton & Co. hurried away, unheeding. A strong blast of wind came in at the door, laden with snowflakes, as they left the School House. Three or four fellows had to pile on the big door to get it shut again. The wind from the sea was shaking the old elms in the Close, and even at that distance they could hear the roar of the surf. The weather was wild on the North Sea.

"Oh, crumbs," said Peter Todd, "this looks ripping!"

"The soldiers are out in it," said Wharton. "Why not us as well?"

"Oh, quite so! Groooh!"

"Butt in!" said Bob Cherry cheerily.

Gosling, the porter, dealt with them from his window; he did not care to open his door. He stared at their request for spades, and informed them that they would find all the agricultural implements there were in the woodshed. To the woodshed they proceeded—without Gosling. That gentleman preferred his warm fireside and his glass of gin-and-water.

Only four spades were to be had, and there were nine juniors in the party. But a couple of garden-forks, a rake, and a trowel completed their equipment. Thus accoutred, they marched down to the gates through the whirling snow and the howling wind. Gosling snorted as he came out to open the gates, and snorted still more loudly as he clanged them behind the juniors.

"Groooh!" said Nugent. "It's c-c-cold!"

"The Tommies are facing this kind of thing at the Front," said Harry.

"Not to mention Huns," said Bob. "We're lucky; we're let off the Huns, anyway. Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's another silly ass going out collecting colds in the nose!"

A junior, muffled in coat and scarf, was coming from the village. He stopped as he met the Greyfriars party.

"Hallo! Where are you off to?" he exclaimed.

"Skinner, by Jove!" said Johnny Bull. "What on earth are you doing out in this weather, Skinner?"

"I suppose we owe this to you?" grunted Todd. "I suppose it was you told the sergeant about our keenness after war work—what?"

"You don't mean to say you're really going?" ejaculated Skinner.

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is—groogh—terrific!"

"My hat!" said Skinner.

"You come, too!" said Wharton.

Skinner chuckled.

"Thanks! I'm going to squat over the fire till bed-time."

"Slacker!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, I don't suppose I should be much use!" said Skinner. "Ta-ta! Best of luck!"

Skinner went on his way towards the school, grinning. Harry Wharton & Co. faced the lashing wind and tramped on. They reached Friardale, half buried in snow, and tramped through the village to Wapshot Lane. A mile up that steep lane was Wapshot Camp, and somewhere en route they expected to find Sergeant Flapp and his upset ammunition waggon.

Snow, beaten by the wind, was piled in great drifts along the hedges. Underfoot it was many inches deep. The nine juniors were white as ghosts themselves with clinging flakes.

War work, under these circumstances, was not enticing, but no consideration on earth would have induced the heroes of the Remove to give in, and to return to face the merriment of their Form-fellows. Besides, the men in khaki needed their help. They tramped on grimly.

Wharton halted at last, peering round him in the gloom.

"We're more than half-way to the camp!" he exclaimed. "The sergeant said it was half-way. I don't see any sign of them."

"May have got the blessed thing out and gone," said Bob.

"Better keep on and see."

The juniors tramped up the steep lane grimly. They kept their eyes well about them. There was no sign of men in khaki; no sign of an ammunition waggon upset in the snow-drifts. Wapshot Camp came in sight at last. The amateur war-workers were feeling a little discouraged. Certainly, if the men in khaki had got out of their difficulty it was all to the good. But it was disappointing to arrive too late to be of any service. The spades were growing very heavy, too; the juniors shifted them from one arm to the other as they marched on.

"Well, here we are!" said Johnny Bull, as they arrived at the gate of the camp.

The gate was closed.

Just inside, a sentry in a huge coat occupied a sort of upright box. Harry Wharton called to him.

"Have they got in?"

"Hey?" said the man in the khaki coat, peering at them over the gate. "What's that?"

"The ammunition waggon that was upset; we've come to help dig it out," explained Wharton. "We were told it was half-way up to Wapshot."

"Fust I've heard of it."

Wharton jumped.

"Hasn't there been an accident to an ammunition waggon in the lane?" he exclaimed.

"Not that I know of." The sentry peered at him. "Is this a lark, young 'un? This isn't the place for your larks, and don't you forget it."

"It isn't a lark!" said Wharton indignantly, while his comrades stood round in dismay. "We were telephoned about it. A Sergeant Flapp. Do you know the name?"

"Never heard it."

"Were you expecting a waggon up here this evening?"

"If we was I haven't been told about it. I fancy somebody's been pulling your leg, young 'un."

"Oh, my hat!"

The sentry grinned over the gate. The Greyfriars crowd, in their coats and mufflers thick with snow, laden with spades and forks and a rake, looked rather a forlorn company.

"You're sure they haven't come in?" stammered Wharton.

"Quite sure."

"Then we've been spoofed!"

"Looks like it," grinned the sentry. "Very good of you to come and lend a 'and, all the same, young gentlemen."

"Oh, crumbs! Good-night."

"Good-night!" chuckled the sentry.

Harry Wharton & Co. turned away from the gate with feelings too deep for words.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
A Good Turn!

"SPOOFED!" howled Peter Todd.

"Diddled!"

"Dished!"

"The dishfulness is terrific!"

Johnny Bull clenched his big fists.

"I'd like to be close to the funny idiot who telephoned!" he growled.

"Skinner!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Skinner! My hat!"

"What did he go down to the village for in this weather?" demanded Bob. "Wasn't he grinning like a hyena when he passed us on the road? It's one of Skinner's blessed jokes—the beast!"

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

"Oh, the rotter!" groaned Wharton.

"Sergeant Flapp!" snorted Squiff. "Sergeant rats! You ought to have recognised his voice on the telephone, Wharton, you ass!"

"Well, I—I didn't. I suppose he disguised it." Wharton's eyes gleamed. "If it was Skinner, we'll make him sit up when we get back!"

"When!" groaned Nugent. "Two miles, and more—through this! I'm fed up with war-work—this sort, anyway!"

The amateur war-workers tramped down the lane with almost homicidal feelings towards the humorous Skinner. They had no doubt now that it was Skinner who had called Wharton up on Mr. Quelch's telephone. It was exactly one of his humorous efforts. Probably he had not expected the amateur war-workers to go out in such terrific weather; his scheme had been to make them look ridiculous, as they certainly would have looked, if they had refused the first offer of war-work.

Probably at that very moment Skinner & Co. were chuckling over their march through the snow. The juniors felt very anxious to get to close quarters with the humorist of the Remove.

They tramped and stumbled down the lane to the village, and then wearily along the road to Greyfriars. Progress was slow in the wind and the snow, and the spades and forks and rakes seemed enormously heavy. There was only one consolation for the discomfited war-workers—the prospect of what they would do to Skinner when they reached him.

But they were not destined to reach the humorous Skinner just yet. Half-way from the village to the school a light gleamed through the snow and the dusk in the middle of the road.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Somebody's had a breakdown, anyway! Looks like a motor-smash."

"Oh, blow it!" mumbled Peter Todd. "We haven't come out to help blessed civilians."

"Halt!" said Wharton.

"Look here——"

"Rats—halt!"

The Greyfriars party came to a halt as they reached the light in the road. It was a large motor-lamp, and it was stuck in the middle of the road, evidently as a warning to traffic that the road was not clear. As they came up a wrathful voice came to their ears:

"Good gad! Am I going to be stuck here all night? William, you idiot, what's going to be done?"

"'Ave to get 'elp, sir," said a husky voice.

"Good gad! Where's help to be got in this howling wilderness—what?"

"Dunno, sir."

"Do you know where you are, William?"

"Somewhere in Kent, sir."

"Somewhere in Kent, you dummy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is this the Lantham road, or is this not the Lantham road, William?"

"Dunno, sir."

"How far are we from Lantham now?"

"Dunno, sir."

"You don't know! Do you know that I've got to get to Lantham by nine o'clock—that I'm expected at the Theatre Royal at nine precisely?"

"Dunno, sir."

"What are we going to do, William? You ass! You duffer! You dummy!"

"Dunno, sir."

The juniors could not help grinning as they came up into the radius of light from the big motor-lamp. Someone was evidently in serious difficulties, and it was having an unfortunate effect upon his temper.

A handsome car was tilted a little sideways in the snow. Two wheels were deep in a rut, unseen and unsuspected by the driver under its covering of thick snow. One side of the car was plunged deep in a heavy snowdrift. A fat gentleman, with a very red face, in a big overcoat with a fur collar, was standing beside the car, gesticulating wildly. The big fur-lined coat was open, and the juniors could see that he was in evening clothes, with an expansive shirt-front and a big diamond.

The chauffeur was standing with a somewhat nonchalant look. Evidently he considered it his duty to drive the car, not to extricate it from mysterious ruts and snowdrifts. It was plain at a glance that without help the car could not be extracted from its bed of snow. The chauffeur, having recognised the impossibility of the task, had given it up. He was taking it quite calmly. Apparently he recognised, also, the uselessness of excitement under the circumstances. Any amount of excitement could not possibly extract the car from the snowdrift.

But the fat gentleman did not see eye to eye with the chauffeur. He was almost raving. But the chauffeur was undoubtedly right. The fat gentleman's raving had no perceptible effect upon the embedded motor-car.

"Was there ever such an idiot?" the fat gentleman ejaculated, apparently appealing to space. "Was there ever such an exasperating blockhead? Good gad!"

"Perhaps we can help you, sir!"

The fat gentleman spun round at Wharton's voice. He groped for an eyeglass, stuck it in his eye, and stared at the juniors.

In his present predicament, the sight of nine sturdy lads, armed with spades, forks, and a rake, must have appeared an astonishing godsend.

"Good gad!" he ejaculated. "Thank goodness somebody appears to live in this awful wilderness! Young gentlemen, if you will help me I will reward you handsomely—handsomely!"

"Thanks, we don't want any reward," said Harry, laughing. "But we will certainly help you if we can!"

The fat gentleman seized his hand and wrung it in a transport of gratitude.

"A thousand thanks! Look at me—stuck here, all night apparently, with an upset car and an imbecile chauffeur!"

The chauffeur grinned slightly.

"Well, I don't quite see what the chauffeur could do, unless he could lift the car;" said Wharton, "and it would need five or six men to do that."

"Am I on the Lantham road?"

"No fear! You must have taken the wrong turn in the village. You should have followed the Redclyffe road. This leads to Courtfield."

"What did I tell you, William?" roared the fat gentleman.

"Dunno, sir."

"You took the wrong turning, you blockhead!"

"'Ow could a man help it in this 'ere darkness, and without a sign of a finger-post for miles an' miles, sir?" said William indignantly. "It's a blooming miracle that we've got this fur from Luxford without being buried alive. This 'ere ain't a night for goin' 'cross country in a car, Mr. Whiffles!"

"Am I, or am I not, bound to reach the Theatre Royal at Lantham by nine o'clock?" shouted Mr. Whiffles. "Am I, or am I not, up to my neck in work for the Christmas pantomime at Lantham? Have I, or have I not, wasted an evening at Luxford, looking for talent, and being disappointed? Have I, or have I not, to complete the company of 'Puss-in-Boots' before Boxing Day, or take the consequences?"

To this tirade, which the fat gentleman delivered in a voice that rang across the snowy fields, William answered stolidly:

"Dunno, sir."

The juniors chuckled. The excitement of Mr. Whiffles, contrasted with the stolid calm of the chauffeur, struck them as funny.

"Look at me!" exclaimed the exasperated Mr. Whiffles, appealing to the juniors. "Was there ever a manager so worried by a blockheaded chauffeur? Here am I, faced by Boxing Day, and the pantomime company not half completed—not half, mind—to say nothing of rehearsals. Here am I, after wasting half a day for nothing at Luxford, going back to see what can be done at Lantham, and my chauffeur chooses this precise moment for upsetting my car in the middle of a howling wilderness, an uninhabited waste, ten thousand miles from everywhere!"

"Not quite so bad as that, sir," said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "We came out to dig up a waggon that wasn't upset, and we'll dig up one that is upset, if you like. We'll have that car out in a quarter of an hour."

"Do so, and Montague Whiffles is your friend for life!" exclaimed the fat gentleman. "Come to the Theatre Royal, and ask me anything you like, and it is yours!"

Bob Cherry grinned. It occurred to him to ask the expansive gentleman for his fur-lined overcoat; but he refrained.

"Is the car damaged?" asked Wharton.

"No. William has kindly refrained from wrecking the car," said Mr. Whiffles, with a deep sarcasm that was wholly lost on the chauffeur. "Instead of running into a stone wall or a tree, as he might have done if he had been in the humour, he has simply upset the car in a snow-drift."

"'Ow you do talk, sir!" said William. "If these young gents will 'elp, we'll 'ave the caw hout in a jiffy. The wheels are sunk in a deep rut, young gents, and it's pitched into the drift, and Mr. Whiffles ought to be thankful as it ain't smashed, and 'im, too!"

The fat gentleman snorted. He was not in a thankful mood.

"Pile in, you fellows!" said Harry.

The Removites piled in willingly.

They had come out to help imaginary men in khaki, owing to the humorous proclivities of Harold Skinner; but here was someone in distress, and they were quite willing to help him out of it, though he was, as Toddy remarked, merely a civilian.

It was hard work, especially in the bitter wind, and with the snow falling on them in heavy flakes. But they were tough.

They started digging away the drift into which the car was plunged, the chauffeur taking one of the spades and helping, while Mr. Whiffles stood by, and surveyed the progress of the work through his eyeglass.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
Not So Funny

HARRY WHARTON & Co. worked away with a will. Spades and forks, and the rake and the trowel, speedily made a clearance of the snow. In about a quarter of an hour the car stood clear, save for the falling flakes.

The sentry grinned over the gate. The Greyfriars crowd, in their coats and mufflers thick wi h snow, laden with spades and forks and a rake, looked rather a forlorn company. "You're sure they haven't come in ?" stammered Wharton. "Quite sure." "Then we've been spoofed !" *(See Chapter 4.)*

Then it was a question of lifting the side that was sunken in the deep rut. The juniors and the chauffeur lined up to the task.

Many hands make light work; but the task was not easy, even with so many willing hands and strong arms bent to it.

"It's coming!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Good gad! It's coming!" ejaculated Mr. Whiffles. "One more shove, young gentlemen! Thank goodness you came along!"

With a final deadlift effort the car was got out of the rut Then William began a minute examination of it, and nodded his head with satisfaction. There was no damage of a serious kind.

"Is it a going concern?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Right as rain, sir!" said William. "Now, if you'll tell me which is the right bally road——"

"Back to the village, and the first on the right. There's a finger-post to Redclyffe."

"And how far to Lantham?"

"About fifteen miles, if you keep to the turnpike road."

Mr. Whiffles extracted a huge gold watch from under his huge fur coat, and consulted it with the aid of a motor-lamp."

"We shall do it before nine," he exclaimed joyfully, "if William will kindly condescend to keep from overturning the car again!"

"Dunno, sir," said William.

"My dear boys, I am unspeakably obliged to you. Know that I have several young persons waiting to see me at the theatre—I have to look over them to-night, and tell them that they're no good for the pantomime—at least, I expect so. Even the panto has been knocked sky-high by the war. I sincerely, devoutly, and whole-

heartedly hope that they will hang the Kaiser, when caught. Young gentlemen, you have rendered me an immense service."

"That's all right, sir."

"Ready, sir?" said William.

Mr. Whiffles stepped into the car. Certainly he could not be considered ungrateful for a little help. He was overflowing with gratitude and cordiality. He insisted upon shaking hands with the whole Greyfriars party, all round.

"Sure there is no recompense I can make?" he asked anxiously.

Harry Wharton smiled.

"Thank you, Mr. Whiffles. Nothing."

"If you should find yourselves near Lantham on Boxing Day, don't forget to come to the Theatre Royal. We open on Boxing Day with 'Puss-in-Boots'—panto with new war effects—Kaiser as the Ogre, you know, and Puss in khaki boots and putties—what? You trot in on Boxing Day, and ask for me—Montague Montmorency Whiffles—and you're safe for the best seats in the house, even if we are drawing millions."

"Thank you, sir!"

"I may have mentioned that I am the manager and part-owner. Remember the name—Montague Montmorency Whiffles."

"Not likely to forget it, sir," said Squiff. Indeed, a name like that was not easily to be forgotten.

Mr. Whiffles fumbled under the big fur coat again, and produced a handsome card-case, from which he extracted a card. He placed the card in Wharton's hand.

"Keep it!" he said. "My name—my address. Remember that I shall be glad to see you at any time at the Theatre Royal, and that I shall always be under a tremendous obligation to you. Good-bye, dear boys!"

"Good-bye, sir!" chorused the juniors.

The engine was throbbing, and Mr. Whiffles having finished, the chauffeur set the car in motion. The juniors stood and watched while he backed and turned in the road—a difficult feat, but safely accomplished by the stolid William. Mr. Whiffles waved exuberantly a fat hand from the window of the car, and Bob Cherry waved his cap in return, and the motor-car buzzed away into the winter night.

"Well, that's rather a go!" remarked Mark Linley. "I'm jolly glad we were able to get the old chap out of his fix."

"The gladfulness is terrific! The gratefulness of the esteemed old johnny is also great!" remarked Hurree Singh.

"Well, we haven't come out for nothing, after all," said Wharton, as the juniors resumed their tramp to Greyfriars.

"No fear! We've made a friend for life!" grinned Peter Todd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All the same, we're going to give Skinner jip for sending us on a wild-goose chase up Wapshot Lane!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Yes, rather!"

The hour was getting late, and the snow falling more thickly. The Removites tramped on to the school, and they were pretty well tired out, as well as snowy and muddy, when they arrived at last at the gates of Greyfriars.

Bob Cherry rang a tremendous peal on the bell, and Gosling came grunting down to the gates, and opened them.

"Nice hower to come hin!" he snorted. "I'll report yer!"

"Report away, old chap!" said Bob. "Come along with us to Quelchy. A sight of your cheery old chivvy will give him a merry Christmas feeling!"

"If it doesn't give him a fit!" remarked Squiff.

Gosling grunted back to his lodge. The juniors deposited the agricultural implements in the woodshed, and hurried to the School House. In the Hall they shook themselves like Newfoundland dogs, and little piles of snow collected round them. Coats and scarfs and mufflers were peeled off. There was a yell from the direction of the common-room.

"Here they are!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here come the giddy war-workers!"

Harry Wharton & Co. marched grimly into the common-room. They were greeted by a roar of laughter. Skinner had evidently told the story of that spoof telephone-call.

"I say, you fellows, did you rescue the ammunition waggon?" squeaked Billy Bunter.

"Did you carry it home?" roared Bolsover major.

"Did the Colonel thank you nicely?" yelled Hazeldene.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here, keep off!" roared Skinner, as Johnny Bull made a rush at him "Only a joke! Don't be an ass! Here, stop him, somebody!"

Skinner dodged wildly round the table, and collided with Billy Bunter, who sat down on the floor with a bump and a yell. Then Squiff collared him, and the next moment Johnny Bull had his head in chancery.

"Yaroooh! Help!" roared Skinner.

Bolsover major rushed to the rescue, and was promptly collared and bumped by the Co. There was no rescue for Skinner.

Up to that moment Harold Skinner had regarded the whole affair as funny. The humour of it, however, was quite lost upon him now. The funny aspect of the matter had departed.

"Yarooh! Help!" roared Skinner. "Lend me a hand, Smithy, you beast!"

Vernon-Smith grinned.

"This is only the wind-up to the joke, Skinney, old chap. It's funny, I assure you! You look awfully comic with your legs flying like that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow-ow-ow! Draggimoff! I—I didn't mean to send you up to the camp," wailed Skinner. "I was only going to show you up. Yow-ow-ow!"

"You spoofing worm!" said Johnny Bull, hammering away. "You thought we didn't mean bizney, and you were going to show us up as slackers—what? And you gave us a tramp in the snow instead, you tricky beast!"

"Yow-ow! Only a joke——"

"So is this!" said Johnny Bull. "I'm as funny as you are, when I get started. This is one of my little jokes. Why don't you laugh, you beggar?"

The unfortunate Skinner, held in an iron grip while Johnny Bull was pounding his nose, did not feel like laughing. But the other fellows yelled. Skinner's contortions were, as the Bounder said, comic, and were regarded generally as an extremely funny wind-up to a good joke.

"Cave!" shouted Penfold.

"Quelchy!" called out Russell. "Chuck it!"

Johnny Bull released Skinner, who collapsed into a chair, clasping his nose with both hands. A minute later Mr. Quelch looked into the common-room. If he had noticed the uproar, the Form-master made no comment upon it. Rules were a little relaxed the night before breaking-up.

"I see you have returned," said the Remove-master kindly. "I hope you were able to be of service."

Wharton coloured a little.

"The fact is, sir, we—we were spoofed!"

"You were—what?"

"I—I mean taken in, sir! It was a rotten practical joker on the telephone."

"What a very foolish and unfeeling joke!" said Mr. Quelch frowning.

"But as it happened, sir, there was a motor-car stuck in the snow on the Friardale road, and we were able to dig it out, so we didn't go out for nothing. I'm glad we went, or the motorist would be stuck there now."

"I am glad to hear it, Wharton. It is always so much to the good to be able to render assistance to anyone in distress. As for the practical joker you speak of, his conduct was most unfeeling, and he certainly should be sought out and punished."

"I—I think he's been punished, sir!" murmured Harry.

Mr. Quelch glanced at Skinner, who was nursing his nose. Perhaps he understood for he did not pursue the matter. With a kindly good-night, he quitted the common-room. Wingate looked in, while Johnny Bull was debating whether Skinner had better have any more.

"Bed!" said the Greyfriars captain.

And the Remove marched off to their dormitory, Skinner still nursing his nose. Upon the whole, Harry Wharton & Co. were very well satisfied with the evening's work. They had done a good turn, at least, though it hardly came under the heading of war-work, and they were glad that they had extracted Mr. Montague Montmorency Whiffles from his scrape. As they were but little likely to be anywhere near Lantham on Boxing Day, they never expected to see that fat and exuberant gentleman again, little dreaming just then how much they were to have to do with Mr. Whiffles in the near future.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Decides to Join!

"GROOOH! It's cold!"

Bob Cherry made that remark as he turned out at the clang of the rising-bell on the following morning.

"Groo-hoh-hooh!" came from Billy Bunter. "I say, you fellows, I'm not getting up yet. Tell Quelchy I'm ill, Wharton, will you?"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob. "Why can't you turn out, fatty?"

"Too jolly c-c-cold!"

"And too jolly lazy—what?"

Snore!

"Do you want Wharton to tell Quelchy you're ill, and can't come down, Bunter?" bawled Bob Cherry.

Bunter's eyes opened again.

"Yes! Shut up!"

"Good enough! Of course, Wharton can't tell Quelchy a whopper, but I'll make that all right!" said Bob, dipping a sponge into icy water. "I'll soon make you ill!"

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as icy drops trickled on his plump neck. "Oh, you beast! Gerroff!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm going to make you ill, so that Wharton can report to Quelchy. If the water doesn't do it, I'll try some soap. I know it would make you ill to get any soap on your neck!"

Billy Bunter rolled out of bed and bumped the floor. Getting up was better than icy water down his neck.

"Yow-ow-ow! Beast!"

"Hold on, Bunty! You ain't ill yet——"

"Keep off, you rotter! Yah! Oh, keep that sponge away, you ruffian! I'm getting up, ain't I?" yelled Bunter.

Bob Cherry was in great spirits that morning. Having kindly helped Bunter to face the December cold, he proceeded to Lord Mauleverer's bed. His lordship was taking an extra snooze, regardless of rising-bell. But he seemed to be taking it with one eye open. He knew Bob Cherry.

"You clear off, begad!" ejaculated his lordship. "I'm tired. Besides, there ain't lessons to-day. We break up!"

"We wake up before we break up, Mauly! Feel awfully fagged?"

"Yaas!"

"Feel as if you couldn't possibly turn out for another hour or so?" asked Bob sympathetically.

"Yaas!"

"Like me to shove on another blanket, and leave you quiet?"

"Yaas! Oh, yaas!"

"All right. I'll give you something to cure all that!" said Bob cheerfully.

And he laid violent hands upon Lord Mauleverer's bedclothes and yanked them off.

"Oh, begad! Yow-ow! Yaw-aw! If it wasn't such a fag, I'd wipe up the dorm with you!" groaned the slacker of the Remove.

It was cold that morning, and it was really not surprising that the slackers wanted an extra snooze in their warm beds. The snow had ceased to fall, but it lay piled white and thick in the Close, on every wall and roof and window-sill. Bob Cherry simply steamed as he splashed in cold water

"Glorious weather!" said Bob, with great cheerfulness.

"Grooh!" said the other fellows.

"Buck up, Bunter! There's lots of cold water for your bath!"

"Grooogh!" said Bunter.

"Now, you know you ought to have a bath every Christmas, Bunter. Pile in, old chap, and you may find another waistcoat, same as you did when you bathed last year."

Billy Bunter snorted, and proceeded to indulge in his usual modified ablutions, which some of the fellows described as a "cat-lick." Bunter saw no reason for departing from his usual customs at Christmas-time.

The juniors came down with keen appetites for breakfast. All Greyfriars was in high spirits that morning. There were no lessons, and there was breaking-up—always a happy event. True, life at the old school was cheery enough, especially for the fellows who knew how to make the best of it; but change and home and holidays were very welcome.

Most of the fellows had their plans for the holidays cut and dried, but, as it happened, that was not the case with Harry Wharton & Co. The amateur war-workers had not yet decided what they were going to do.

The idea of war-work had been in Wharton's mind for some time, as an excellent way of spending the winter vacation. If nothing came of it, he was going home to Wharton Lodge with his friends; but, as his uncle and aunt were away, he was not very keen on that. The circumstances were unusual for most of his friends, and in any case the Christmas could not be like any ordinary Christmas. But Wharton was quite determined that the idea of some kind of war-work should become a reality.

After breakfast, the Co. gathered to discuss plans. Wherever they should go, it was certain that they had to go somewhere. That day they were expected to leave Greyfriars with the rest.

"We've left it a bit late," grinned Bob Cherry. "You should have sprung this great wheeze on us a bit sooner, Harry. All I can suggest is, going in a body to the War Office, and bucking up Nugent's pater!"

"I say, you fellows——"

The nine juniors had met in consultation in No. 1 Study. Inevitably, Billy Bunter joined them there. Wharton pointed to the door.

"Travel!" he said laconically.

"Oh, really, Wharton—don't chuck that cushion, Bob Cherry—I've simply looked in to wish you a merry Christmas before I go!"

"Oh!" said Bob, dropping the cushion, a little remorsefully. "Merry Christmas, Bunter! May your circumference never grow less!"

"Remember us when you're tucking into Christmas pudding and mince-pies in the historic halls of Bunter de Bunter," said Squiff.

"And remember us to your uncle, the marquis," said Peter Todd.

"And your grandfather, the duke," said Nugent.

"And your second cousin, the earl," said Johnny Bull. "Not to mention the odd princes and emperors in your family circle."

Billy Bunter grinned feebly. Generally the Removites declined to believe in his titled relations. Now they were asking to be remembered to them; but Bunter suspected that it was only in a humorous spirit.

"Oh, really, you fellows, the fact is, I'm not going home for the holidays."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Whom have you fastened on?" asked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mauly's begged me to come with him."

"He's changed his mind since yesterday, then," remarked Johnny Bull. "I heard him tell you that if you got into his car he would drop you in the first ditch!"

"Ahem! I have declined Mauly's invitation. Things are bound to be rather slow at his place, you know. Smithy pressed me to come."

"So you're going home with the Bounder?"

"Nunno; I declined."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was sorry to have to tell Smithy that it couldn't be done. Same with Wibley and Bulstrode, and—and Russell and Ogilvy. Ogilvy was very keen about it, but

I told him I didn't care for Scotland in the winter—couldn't stand it, in fact."

"Still harder for Scotland to stand you, I expect," remarked Johnny Bull. "Scotland has all the luck!"

"The fact is, you fellows, I've made up my mind," said Bunter. "I'm a patriotic chap. I've always thought a lot about the soldiers; you know I once started raising a fund to send them chocolates——"

"And spent all you raised in the tuckshop," said Wharton, "and I know we jolly soon stopped you."

"Ahem! As I was saying, I'm patriotic—the most patriotic chap here, I should say. I've made up my mind. I'm going to help you chaps do war work."

"Wha-a-t!"

"I'm not going to desert you, Toddy at Christmas-time."

"You jolly well are!" said Peter Todd emphatically.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He, he, he!" echoed Bunter.

"Hallo! What are you 'he, he, heing' about?" demanded Todd.

"Your little joke! He, he, he!"

"But it wasn't a little joke," said Peter, "and you might go and 'he, he, he' in the passage! We're busy!"

"I'm willing to do any kind of war work," said Bunter, unheeding—"anything you like, so long as the work is light, and there's plenty of grub and some tin. I could be of a lot of help, you know. A brainy chap, good French linguist, clever ventriloquist——"

"No demand for linguists and clever ventriloquists," said Bob Cherry. "Shut the door after you!"

Bunter did not move.

"The fact is, Wharton, I'm depending on you now. Don't think I bear any malice for your little jokes yesterday. I don't. I can take a joke."

"Can you take your hook?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"I've declined numerous invitations, especially from the fellows at St. Jim's. That chap D'Arcy asked me for Christmas—we're very pally, you know—but, on reflection, I decided not to desert my old pals. I'm sticking to them."

"Well, go and tell your old pals you are sticking to them," suggested Squiff.

"Oh, really, Field——"

"Buzz off!" roared all the juniors together.

"I say, you fellows——"

Peter Todd took the Owl of the Remove gently by the ear, led him from the study, and sat him down in the passage. Then he closed the door and locked it.

"Now for the giddy council of war!" he remarked.

Through the keyhole came a wrathful voice:

"Yah! Beasts! I won't come now! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the volunteer war-worker having been disposed of, Harry Wharton & Co. proceeded to discuss their plans.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
A Stunning Scheme!

"WHAT are the marching orders, O king?" Bob Cherry made that humorous query. "Behold your faithful followers ready for the fray! Is it the Dardanelles, the trenches, or the War Office? To hear is to obey!"

"Shut up, Bob, and be serious!"

"Sober as a judge," said Bob cheerily. "I only want to point out to the honourable meeting that we are expected to clear out of Greyfriars to-day, bag and baggage. It is customary to decide upon some destination before starting on a journey. Still, I'm willing to go down to Friardale and take the first train to anywhere."

"I've got an idea."

"Hear, hear!"

"The hear-hearfulness is terrific! Let us hear the ridiculous idea!"

Harry Wharton opened his pocket-book and took out a card. He held it up to general view. The juniors looked at it. Upon the card was inscribed:

"MR. MONTAGUE WHIFFLES.

"Theatre Royal,
"Lantham."

"It's the old sport's card," said Nugent. "But what the merry dickens is there interesting about that just now?"

"That's the idea," said Wharton.

"Er—which?"

"We're going to look for war work," explained Wharton. "Well, we can't go to the Front, and we can't make shells. Marky is the only chap here who's worth his salt when it comes to doing real work."

"Unfortunate, but true," sighed Bob Cherry. "They didn't foresee this war when they founded public schools. It was an oversight."

"But there's an old saying," resumed Wharton, "that it's money that talks."

"Money makes the esteemed mare go," said Hurree Singh, with a nod.

"So if we can earn money, and devote it to the war, it comes to the same thing," explained Wharton. "Suppose we could work and raise twenty or thirty or forty pounds. Well, we could do a lot of good with that. There's chocolate and socks for the fellows at the Front, grub for the prisoners in Germany; lots of things you can do with a little money. That's the way rich people are helping in the war. They can't do anything useful themselves owing to their training—or want of training, whichever way you look at it—but they can hand out cash, and enable chaps who can do useful things to do 'em. See? It's rather a queer thought that one factory-hand in Lancashire is worth more than all the professors at Oxford, or all the politicians in London. But there you are! That's how it is. If all the nobility died to-morrow the war would go on just the same; but if anything happened to the working classes the country would be in a pretty deep hole."

"Strange, but true," grinned Mark Linley.

Bob Cherry rubbed his nose.

"I—I suppose that's so," he admitted. "Dashed if you don't make us feel like lazy drones in a busy hive! But don't rub in it. We'd work if we could."

"And we're going to work," said Harry. "It's up to us, and we're going to do it. But, as I said, we're no good at munitions."

"And they wouldn't take us as nurses in a hospital," remarked Bob.

"Don't be an ass, Bob! There's one thing we can do: we can earn money, and give it to the good cause."

"Something in that, if we can earn the money," said Johnny Bull. "But how in thunder are we going to earn any money? And what has old Whiffles got to do with it?"

"Lots, I hope. I've been thinking," said Wharton. "You remember what the old chap said—he'd been to Luxford getting recruits for his pantomime troupe, and he didn't get any. He said his company wasn't complete, and he's got to start 'Puss-in-Boots' on Boxing Day."

"Well?"

"Well, that's where we come in, I hope."

"Blessed if I see how."

"You've seen plenty of pantomimes. Kids act in them—sometimes little nippers of eight and nine; kids of all ages and sizes. Now, I haven't the least doubt that Mr. Whiffles would look on us as kids."

"Us!"

"Kids!"

"Cheese it!"

It was a chorus of indignation. That anyone could regard the heroes of the Remove as "kids" was not to be admitted for a moment.

"Anyway, we're young. There's no denying that," said Harry.

"Well, rather young!" admitted Bob Cherry

grudgingly. "But not exactly what a fellow would call kids—unless he wanted a thick ear!"

"Young enough to act in a pantomime——"

"What?"

"Which?"

"That's the idea," said Wharton. "Mr. Whiffles is looking for talent. Well, it can't be denied that we've got lots of talent."

"Hear, hear!"

"We've done no end of amateur theatricals—lots and lots! We've even got up a panto of our own once. We really know the ropes. So we've had lots of experience. We can dance and sing—after a fashion—and Marky at least can do ripping clog-dances——"

"Panto!" said Bob Cherry. "Oh, ye gods and little fishes!"

"Panto! My hat!"

"What a lark!"

"What a really ripping wheeze!" exclaimed Peter Todd. "Why, it'll be the catch of the season—if we can persuade Whiffley to take us on."

"What we don't know, we can pick up in the rehearsals," said Harry. "I don't see why we shouldn't have a good chance. They're not so jolly particular about the kids they shove into panto. Anybody with a little brains can do the work. We've got a little brains, and plenty of nerve!"

"Lots and lots!" agreed Bob heartily. "Nobody's ever said that the Remove was short of cheek."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, what do you think of the idea?" demanded Wharton. "Shall we see the Whiffles-bird, and put it to him?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Passed unanimously."

Wharton jumped up.

"Then the sooner the quicker!" he exclaimed. "We shall have to buzz over to Lantham to see Whiffles. There won't be time to get there and back before we have to get out of here. We'll take our baggage to the station and leave it there till we've settled."

"And suppose Whiffley don't take us on?" grinned Squiff. "Then we shall be understudying a real panto kid—out in the snow, homeless, on our lonely own!"

"We'll settle that afterwards, if this fails. We can always go to Wharton Lodge if we get hung up," said Harry. "We could have a pretty good time there, though my people are away. But we're not looking for a good thing; we're looking for work."

"Hang your charity, we want work!" chuckled Bob.

"Besides, if we could wedge into a panto, it would be a ripping holiday for us," said Harry. "Plenty of change and excitement!"

"Beats everything else hollow," said Squiff, "if we have any luck."

"We can try, anyway, so come on!"

The council of war broke up; the plan of campaign was decided upon.

It was in a somewhat excited mood that the juniors prepared for the venture.

The prospect of playing in a panto was sufficiently exciting. If they had the luck to be taken on by Mr. Whiffles, they would certainly have a busy and exciting time, and they would ask no better way of spending the Christmas vacation. And all that they earned would go to the war funds, so it was practically war work that they were undertaking.

But outside their own select circle not a word was said.

Wharton's "wheeze" had caused enough hilarity already in the Remove. The patriotic nine were not looking for any more chipping. If Mr. Whiffles declined their services with thanks—as was indeed probable—it was wisest to keep the whole matter entirely to themselves.

They packed their baggage, in cheery spirits. Billy Bunter hovered round them as they did so. Bunter was evidently still keen to be enrolled among the war-workers.

"What train are you catching, Harry, old chap?" he asked.

"The one that goes when we start!" Bob Cherry hastened to reply.

"But when do you go?"

"When the train starts!"

"But when does the train start, fathead?"

"When we go!"

Billy Bunter snorted.

Greyfriars fellows were departing now in great numbers. Bob Cherry found time, busy as he was, to give Coker of the Fifth a parting snowball as he went off with Potter and Greene. They yelled "Merry Christmas!" after Wingate, as the captain of Greyfriars departed with Courtney. Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Fourth came to say good-bye, and to promise the Famous Five tremendous lickings at footer next term.

Brakes rolled away laden to the brim with Greyfriars fellows and their bags and baggages. Wharton had consulted a time-table and found a train for Lantham, from Courtfield Junction. He arranged with Gosling for a trap. Gruff Gosling was quite sweet and amiable that morning. Breaking-up meant a harvest of tips for Gosling, and a prospect of almost unlimited gin-and-water during the vacation.

"Remember us to Kitchener when you get to the War Office, you giddy war-workers," yelled Rake, as a crowded brake of Removites departed.

"Merry Christmas to the Kaiser, if you meet him at the Front intirely!" howled Micky Desmond.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Our esteemed pals are humorous," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But, as the English proverb says, he who laughs last goes longest to the well!"

And the Co. grinned joyfully at the English proverb.

"I say, you fellows!" Billy Bunter rolled up, bag in hand, as Gosling was placing the baggage of the Co. in the trap. "Give me a lift to the station. The brake's gone."

"Only room for another ton!" said Bob. "Can't stand your weight, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Bob——"

"Don't Bob me, you fat bounder. Roll in!"

Bunter panted and got into the trap. Gosling took the ribbons, and the trap bowled away down the road to Courtfield. A big motor-car, from the direction of Highcliffe, passed it on the road, with two juniors in it, and the Greyfriars fellows waved their caps and shouted as they recognised Courtenay and the Caterpillar:

"Merry Christmas!"

The express was gone when they reached Courtfield. Billy Bunter looked puzzled as he rolled out of the trap.

"Blessed if I know what train you're taking," he said. "The next train is only to Lantham."

"Is that all?" said Bob seriously.

"Yes, that's all. Look here, how are you going?"

"There's an aeroplane calling for us shortly," explained Bob. "We're going direct to Potsdam, to give the Kaiser a surprise."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

Gosling, handsomely tipped, and overflowing with joviality and gin, departed with the trap, and the baggage was taken into the station Billy Bunter's little round eyes almost bulged through his big glasses when he saw the baggage placed in the left-luggage department.

"Ain't you taking your luggage with you?" he demanded. "Look here, I know jolly well you're trying to dodge me. You can't go without your luggage, anyway, and I tell you what, I'm going to squat outside this office till you go."

"Squat away!" said Bob Cherry cheerily.

"The next express is two hours," said Bunter. "Mind, I'm going to wait. Any of you fellows got any toffee?"

The juniors strolled down the platform grinning. Billy Bunter had evidently made up his mind to be a member of the war-working party, whether they liked it or not. But they had no objection to Bunter sitting outside the left-luggage office while they made the journey to Lantham.

The Lantham train came in, and the juniors boarded it. There was a yell from Billy Bunter in the distance:

"Get out, you duffers! You're in the wrong train!"

"Good-bye, Little Yellow Bird!" sang Bob Cherry.

"I say, you fellows, that's the Lantham train."

"Go hon!"

"You've left your luggage!" shrieked Bunter.

"And left you, my pippin!" chuckled Bob Cherry, as the train began to move. "Fare thee well, and if for ever, all the better! Fare thee well!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The train rolled out of the station, leaving William George Bunter rooted to the platform. Bunter shook a fat fist after the grinning faces at the carriage window, and rolled back to the left-luggage office. There he mounted guard. William George was not easily shaken off. Sooner or later, he sagely reasoned it out, the beasts would have to come back for their luggage, and then he would be on the track again. So William George waited, with all the patience he could muster.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.
At the Theatre Royal!

"LANTHAM!"

"Here we are again!" murmured Bob Cherry.

The nine seekers of jobs stepped from the train. They left the station and looked round for the Theatre Royal. Some of the party were feeling very doubtful, but they all looked and felt quite cheery. As Nugent sapiently remarked, Mr. Montague Whiffles could not eat them.

An obliging porter gave them directions to the Theatre Royal, and they started down the High Street of Lantham.

"I say! Where are you going?" asked Tom Dutton, grabbing Peter Todd's arm.

"Theatre Royal."

"I'm not wearing a hat—I've got my cap on."

"What?"

"Didn't you say my hat would spoil? Besides, it's not snowing now."

"Oh, crumbs! Don't let Tommy start on Mr. Whiffles," said Squiff. "If Whiffy tries to talk with him we shall get the order of the boot at once."

"You follow your leader, and don't jaw, Tommy!" shouted Peter.

Dutton looked round.

"Four what?" he asked.

Peter Todd did not reply to that puzzling question.

"Look here," he said. "We'd better not spring ourselves all on Mr. Whiffles at once. I suggest a deputation of three going in to see him. I'm willing to take the lead."

"Bow-wow!"

"Now you know," said Peter argumentatively, "that we have all the brains in No. 7 Study."

"It's a good idea," said Wharton. "I'll go in, with Bob and Nugent——"

"What price me?" demanded Peter.

"Tuppence, and dear at that!" said Bob Cherry politely. "You chain Dutton up somewhere, and watch him."

After a little discussion—and a warning from Peter Todd that they were bent on mucking up the whole show—Wharton and Nugent and Bob Cherry kept on to the theatre, leaving the rest of the party at the corner of the street.

"Well, here's the Theatre Royal," said Bob, as they stopped before the edifice.

The theatre was not so imposing a building as its name might have implied. Probably it was the biggest theatre in Lantham, however. It was closed, and a crusty-looking old caretaker was sweeping snow from the steps. Boards outside announced that a magnificent new pantomime was coming on Boxing Day, with illustrations of Mr. Whiffles' new rendering of "Puss-in-Boots." There was a picture of the Kaiser as the Ogre—the imperial features really lending themselves to the character. There was a striking picture of Conchita, the Fairy Queen, which Bob Cherry pronounced stunning. There was a handsome Marquis of Carabas, every inch a prince; and a gigantic picture of Puss-in-Boots himself. All the pictures were highly coloured; and gave the good folk of Lantham a great impression of the treat they were to enjoy on Boxing Day.

"Looks as if they've got the principal parts filled, anyway," said Nugent. "I was thinking of Puss-in-Boots for my little bit."

"And the Marquis of Carabas would have suited Harry," grinned Bob Cherry; "and I could have done the Kaiser-Ogre."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"If we get in the chorus, we shall be lucky," he said. "How the dickens do we get at Mr. Whiffles, though? I'll tackle this old johnny."

Wharton ascended the steps, and the gentleman with the broom gave him a howl.

"Whatcher at—trampin' on them steps which I 'ave jest swep'!"

This was not encouraging to begin with.

"Sorry," said Wharton politely. "I want to see Mr. Whiffles."

"Well, Mr. Whiffles ain't in my weskit pocket," said the caretaker.

"Can you tell me where he is?"

"'Ow should I know?"

"Is he about here in the daytime?"

"Dunno."

Wharton descended the steps again.

"Drawn blank," said Bob Cherry. "I suppose there must be a stage-door somewhere—there's always a stage-door, you know. Let's look for it. I'll give that old johnny a snowball first, to teach him to be civil at Christmas-time."

"Fathead!" exclaimed Wharton, catching Bob's arm as he stooped. "You don't get a man to give you a job by snowballing his employees."

"Well, I suppose not," agreed Bob. "But, I say, I could catch him bending beautifully!"

"Come on, you ass!"

Bob Cherry was dragged away from that tempting target. The three juniors circumnavigated the building, so to speak. The stage-door was detected at last, in a side street. They marched up to it. The door was half open, and Wharton looked in. A man in his shirt-sleeves stared at him.

"Get outer that!" he said.

"I've called to see Mr. Whiffles," explained Wharton.

The doorkeeper grunted.

"Well, you can't see Mr. Whiffles. Mr. Whiffles is busy!"

"He asked us to call."

"Special app'intment, I s'pose," grinned the doorkeeper—"I know the gime. Well, Mr. Whiffles 'as gone on a 'oliday to Horstralia."

The doorkeeper took hold of the door to close it. The callers were considerably discouraged, but they had the presence of mind to insert a boot each in the doorway.

"Take them feet away!" said the doorkeeper.

"We've called to see Mr. Whiffles."

"Don't I keep on telling you as Mr. Whiffles 'as gone to Rooshia for his summer 'oliday?" said the doorkeeper, who was evidently of a humorous turn.

"We'll wait till he comes back from Russia, then," said Bob. "Anything we can sit down on?"

"Will you clear off?"

"Not till we've seen Mr. Whiffles."

The doorkeeper appeared to be about to indulge in some emphatic remarks—perhaps more emphatic than were suitable for such youthful ears to hear. But he checked himself, and stared at them scrutinisingly instead.

"Look 'ere, what's the gime?" he asked. "If you're kids arter panto, you'll 'ave to see the stage-manager, and he ain't here now."

"We want to see Mr. Whiffles."

"He's busy."

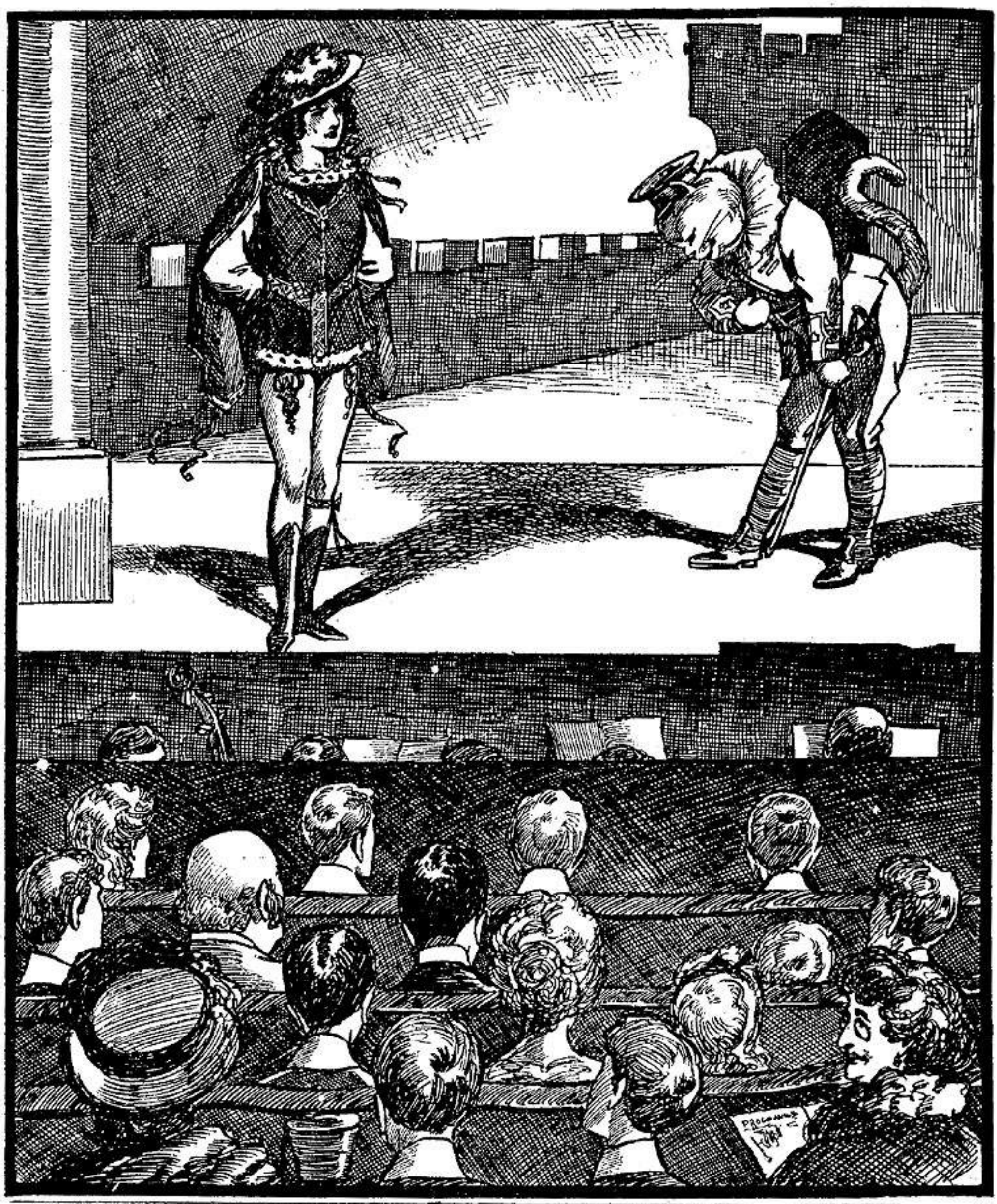
"We'll wait till his business is finished."

The doorkeeper hesitated. His first impression had evidently been that the schoolboys had come to the theatre actuated only by curiosity.

"Well, wot's the names?" he asked at last ungraciously. "I might send your names up, if you really know Mr. Whiffles."

"He doesn't know our names," said Harry. "But I have his card here——"

"That's his card right enough," admitted the doorkeeper. "But——"



Wharton advanced from the wings. There was a murmur from the audience as he appeared. He heard it, without understanding that it implied admiration and approval, for he cut a very handsome figure as the Marquis of Ca-abas. (*See Chapter* 20

"I'll write a message on it, and you can send it to him."

"Ho!"

Wharton stepped in cheerfully, rested the card on the doorkeeper's table, and wrote on it in pencil:

"The Greyfriars boy to whom you gave this card last night would like to speak to you for a few minutes, if possible."

He handed the card to the doorkeeper, who blinked curiously at the writing. He appeared to understand.

"Oh! I 'eard about the breakdown," he said. "I 'eard as some schoolboys dug the blooming car out. You —wot?"

"Little us!" said Bob.

"You can wait inside," said the doorkeeper grudgingly.

"Thanks!"

The three juniors stepped into the passage, and the door was closed.

The doorkeeper shouted up the passage:

"Ted!"

A lean and lanky lad appeared from somewhere in the shadows.

"Yes, Mr. Hacker."

"Take this 'ere to Mr. Whiffles in his office!"

"Which he's going it!" murmured Ted, for the doorkeeper's benefit. "Going it 'ot and strong! Charley's really gone."

"I knew that afore you was born!" said Mr. Hacker. "You cut off!"

"Blessed if I 'arf like going in," said Ted. "He's been slanging Badger."

"If Mr. Badger 'eard you a-calling him Badger, my boy, it'd be the boot for you, short and suddin!" said Mr. Hacker. "You cut off!"

"Keep your whiskers on," said Ted cheerily. And he cut off.

The juniors waited, looking about them a little curiously. The doorkeeper had retired into a little den, where there was a table and a chair and a telephone. He seemed to become oblivious of their existence. The bare walls, the dingy floor, did not match the brilliant posters on the boards at the theatre entrance. Evidently all that glittered was not gold. Behind the scenes, the surroundings of the pantomime fairies were far from fairy-like.

Ted returned in about ten minutes, looking surprised.

"They're to go up," he said.

"Good egg!" said Bob. "Lead on, Macduff! Come on, you chaps! We've passed Cerberus, anyway."

The doorkeeper looked round sharply, probably suspecting that Cerberus was some uncomplimentary title. The juniors followed the lanky Ted. They stopped at a door marked "PRIVATE," and Ted put his finger to his lips.

"Arter jobs?" he murmured.

"Yes," said Harry.

"'Tain't a good time to catch 'im. He's got 'em."

"Eh? Got what?"

"His tantrums."

"Never mind; we'll chance the tantrums. Anything gone wrong?" asked Nugent.

"Yes; Charley's bunked."

"Who on earth's Charley?"

"Charley!" repeated Ted, as if the repetition of the name was sufficient explanation. It did not appear to dawn upon Ted that there existed in the wide world anyone who had not heard of Charley—evidently a celebrated personage.

"And Charley's gone, is he?" grinned Bob.

"Bunked this morning," said Ted. "All along of the Ogre. I told Hacker a week ago it was coming. I knowed it! They never could pull together, and then the Ogre got a bigger line in caps than Charley, and that did it! He's bunked! My idea is that he's had the offer of another shop, a West End shop, too! You bet!"

This was so much Greek to the Greyfriars juniors, and they did not attempt to understand it. Ted knocked at the door, and opened it, and the juniors were ushered in. With a final pitying glance at the juniors, whom he evidently regarded as hapless victims, Ted closed the door and withdrew.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.
Mr. Whiffles is Worried!

"GOOD gad!"

The juniors knew at once the rich, rolling voice of Mr. Montague Montmorency Whiffles. They had received a hint already that that excitable gentleman was in a disturbed state of mind. They had the evidence of their own eyes now.

Mr. Whiffles' office was a very comfortable room, with a Turkey carpet, mahogany chairs, a roll-top desk, a telephone, and green-shaded electric lights. Mr. Whiffles was striding to and fro on the Turkey carpet, very nearly tearing his hair. His tantrums on the occasion of the motor-car spill were as nothing to his present tantrums. The "bunking" of the mysterious Charley seemed to have completely upset his equanimity.

He did not observe the three juniors for some moments, as he strode to and fro, occasionally kicking a chair. The trio stood just inside the door, feeling somewhat awkward, and waiting till Mr. Whiffles should become aware of their existence.

"Good gad! The last straw—the very last—the outside edge!" ejaculated Mr. Whiffles, continuing his monologue. "The very last drop in the bucket! Hooked under my very nose! Stolen away—kidnapped—contract or no contract! Scoundrel! Rascal! Traitor! Hun!"

The vials of Mr. Whiffles' wrath were being poured out on the head of the absent and iniquitous Charley.

The manager of the Theatre Royal spun round suddenly, as his eyes fell on the bashful youths from Greyfriars.

"Ah! Excuse me! Come in!" he ejaculated. "How do you do? Let me see, I think your name is Robinson——"

"Wharton, sir."

"Yes, yes; exactly! You are the young fellows who got me out of a fix yesterday. Can't get me out of this one, though, by gad! Glad to see you. But this isn't Boxing Day. The panto isn't on yet. Call on Boxing Day, and——"

"We haven't called about that, sir," said Harry. "We—we wanted to speak to you. A rather important matter for us, but if you're busy now——"

"Yes, yes—I mean, no—exactly!" said Mr. Whiffles, who was so worried as to be hardly aware of what he was saying. "Oh, you scoundrel! You traitor! You Hun!"

Wharton jumped.

For a moment he thought that these excessively opprobrious remarks were being addressed to himself. But he noted that Mr. Whiffles was shaking a fat fist at a full-length portrait that adorned the wall. It was a picture of the Marquis of Carabas, which the juniors had seen outside the theatre.

"Excuse me!" said Mr. Whiffles again. "When I think of that ungrateful villain, I grow excited. The scoundrel! A week to Boxing Day—only a week mind—and he's bolted, and left me in the lurch! Where I am to get a Marquis of Carabas from at this time of day goodness only knows! Snapped away by a London house, that's it—and blow his contract! But I'll have damages out of him—heavy damages—you mark my words! You hear me? I'll bleed him with damages!"

"Oh!"

"But the shareholders will shove it all down to me!" said Mr. Whiffles. "Oh, those shareholders! Oughtn't to have engaged a Marquis of Carabas who would break his contract at the last moment—as if I knew he was a rascal, a Hun, a traitor! The whole panto may be knocked on the head! Good gad!" Mr. Whiffles waved his fat hands in the air. Then, coming back to earth again, as it were, he jammed his monocle into his eye, and blinked at the juniors. "Excuse me! What did you say I could do for you, young gentlemen? I haven't forgotten the good turn you did me! Far from it! Montague Whiffles isn't ungrateful! He's too dashed good-natured—that's his fault—too much dashed good-nature, and he gets left in consequence! What was it you asked me, Master Robinson?"

The juniors had asked nothing so far, but Wharton, seeing an opening, proceeded to do so now.

"I understood that you were short of—of chaps in the pantomime, sir."

"Short of them?" said Mr. Whiffles. "Good gad! Short isn't the word! Left on the beach! Stranded! Squelched! That's nearer the mark!"

The juniors were sorry for Mr. Whiffles' evident trouble, but this was rather good news to them, all the same.

"Then you've got some openings, perhaps, for fellows who are looking for pantomime work, sir?" asked Wharton.

"Oh, the places will fill up easily enough!" said Mr. Whiffles. "All but Charley Chawker's place. There

I'm left! Diddled! Dished! Done! I can leave the rest to Badger. But why——"

"If there are some vacancies just now, sir, we—we know some chaps who would like to be given a trial, if you'd be so kind!"

Mr. Whiffles smiled.

"Certainly! Send 'em along! What sort of kids?"

"Well, they're really schoolboys, sir—public schoolboys——"

"Oh! Not much good for the panto," said Mr. Whiffles. "They don't earn princely salaries in panto, and there's no room for swank."

Wharton coloured a little. He did not see why public schools and swank should be so closely associated in Mr. Whiffles' mind.

"The—the fact is, sir, we belong to a public school ourselves," he said.

"Ah! Your pardon!" said Mr. Whiffles.

"And—and we're looking for the jobs."

Mr. Whiffles stood quite still for a moment, his eyeglass fixed on the juniors in great astonishment. For the moment he even forgot the iniquitous conduct of Charley. He noted the well-cut Etons, the natty boots, the handsome coats of these applicants for a job in the panto. It was no wonder that he was surprised.

"Are you joking?" he said at last.

"Not at all, sir. If you would give us a chance in the panto, we'd do our very best, and certainly you wouldn't have to find fault with us for swank."

"But—but what's your little game?"

"We want work for the Christmas vacation, sir."

"Ah! Hard up! War-time! I savvy!" said Mr. Whiffles. "Well, this is really my stage-manager's department, but I would put in a word for you with Mr. Badger. Had any experience?"

"Lots of experience in amateur theatricals. We got up a panto at Greyfriars once, too."

"Hum! Hum! Can you dance?"

"Yes."

"I don't exactly mean ball-room dancing. Still, if you can do that, it's only a step. Sing?"

"Well, yes. Nugent sings in the choir.

"Hum! Panto chorus isn't much like choir singing. However——"

"And Linley—one of our friends—can sing Handel by the yard," said Bob Cherry. "He comes from Lancashire."

"Well, I sha'n't want him to sing Handel in 'Puss-in-Boots,'" grinned Mr. Whiffles. "However, we shall see. I'll speak to Mr. Badger at once——"

"There's some more of us, sir," said Wharton. "Nine in all. Would there be a chance for the lot?"

"Oh!" said Mr. Whiffles. "I don't see why not. A few rehearsals would knock you into shape, and there's nothing in it—only wearing a costume, and going on and off the stage. You're not asking me for leading parts—what?"

"No, sir," said Harry, smiling.

Mr. Whiffles paused again, and looked at the captain of the Remove. He appeared struck by a sudden thought.

"Good gad!" he ejaculated.

He lighted a big cigar, and blew out a pungent cloud of smoke. Then he glanced at the full-length picture of Charley Chawkins, and then at Wharton again. A deep thought was evidently working in Mr. Whiffles' mind.

"What did you say your name was?" he asked.

"Wharton, sir—Harry Wharton."

"And you've acted?"

"In private theatricals, a lot."

"What kind of parts?"

"Hamlet, Mark Antony——"

Mr. Whiffles groaned. Evidently it was not a Shakespearian actor he was looking for.

"Tony Lumpkin, and Sir Lucius O'Trigger, too," said Harry.

"That's better!"

"And I was Dick Whittington in our school panto."

"Good, good! I wonder"—Mr. Whiffles rubbed his plump chin—"I wonder—by gad! I must speak to Badger I must see you act. Good gad! I wonder—ha, ha!"

These mysterious ejaculations conveyed no meaning whatever to the juniors, and they were further surprised

to see Mr. Whiffles snap his fingers contemptuously at the picture of Charley Chawkins.

Whatever was working in Mr. Whiffles' mind, however, he did not explain.

"You say you've got some friends waiting?" he said. "Fetch them along! I'll get Mr. Badger to look you over. By gad! If I've found my Marquis of Carabas—ha, ha!"

Mr. Whiffles opened the door and strode away. The three juniors looked at one another.

"We seem to be getting on," remarked Bob Cherry. "Blessed if I understand half he says, but he seems a jolly good sort. He's been left in the lurch by the chap who was to play the Marquis of Carabas—that johnny in the picture. I suppose it puts him out a bit. What are we going to do? He seems to have forgotten that we're here."

"Fetch along the other chaps," said Nugent. "You cut off and get them here while we keep guard, and remind Whiffles now and then that we still exist."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry, accordingly, cut off. Hacker, the doorkeeper, looked round as he came down the passage to the stage-door.

"All serene, cocky!" said Bob Cherry cheerily. "I'm coming back with a whole gang of leading gentlemen—a galaxy of stars. Mind you don't keep us waiting at the door. It's more than your job's worth."

And, leaving the doorkeeper staring and rubbing his nose, Bob Cherry let himself out, and hurried down the street for the rest of the party.

Meanwhile, Wharton and Nugent waited in the manager's office, not knowing anything better to do. Mr. Whiffles had struck them as a somewhat erratic gentleman, and they would not have been surprised if he had totally forgotten them. Ten minutes passed, and then there was a step in the passage. But it was not Mr. Whiffles. A young lady, in gorgeous raiment, partially concealed by a cloak, tripped into the office. From her likeness to the picture outside the two juniors recognised Conchita, the Fairy Queen.

Miss Conchita glanced at them, and glanced round the office.

"Isn't Mr. Whiffles here?" she asked.

"I think he has gone to speak to Mr. Badger, miss," said Harry.

Frank Nugent was staring fixedly at Conchita. To the schoolboy's eyes, the pantomime queen was a vision of loveliness. In her stage attire, and with her face "arranged" for the footlights, she looked about seventeen. And certainly she was a very beautiful young lady.

Conchita made a pettish gesture. The star of the pantomime was evidently accustomed to concessions on all sides, and the absence of the manager when she wished to speak to him did not please her. Even the great Montague Whiffles was not very great in the eyes of the Fairy Queen.

"Oh, thunder!" said Conchita.

Wharton started a little. He thought that "Oh, thunder!" was a very emphatic expression for such pretty lips.

He certainly did not mean to express his thought in his face, but probably Miss Conchita's eyes were very keen. She burst into a hearty laugh.

"What are you little boys doing here?" she asked.

The two juniors coloured deeply. Certainly, Miss Conchita was a year or two older than they were, but she had no right whatever to regard them as little boys.

"We're waiting for Mr. Whiffles," said Wharton.

"We—we're looking for jobs, miss," stammered Nugent.

"My word," said the Fairy Queen, laughing again, "you don't look much like panto kids!"

"We are, all the same," said Harry, "and we're not exactly little boys, either."

"Jolly nearly as old as you are, Miss Conchita, if you come to that," said Nugent.

Miss Conchita laughed again.

"How old are you, kid?" she asked, addressing Frank.

"Fifteen."

"And how old do you think I am?"

"Seventeen."

To Frank Nugent's great astonishment, the Fairy Queen pinched his ear in quite an affectionate manner, and tripped out of the room, laughing. Nugent rubbed his ear.

"Well, my hat!" he said.

"A very cheery young lady!" remarked Wharton.

"Isn't she stunning?" said Nugent, with a deep breath. "What a ripping girl, Harry! Did you notice her eyelashes?"

"Not particularly."

"And her ears?"

"Her ears? No."

"Like little pink shells," said Nugent.

"Were they?"

"Yes; like beautiful little pink shells!" said Nugent enthusiastically. "I—I say, Harry, we've simply got to get this job. We needn't bother much about the screw. After all, that don't matter much to us. We've simply got——"

The arrival of Bob Cherry and the rest of the party interrupted Nugent.

"Well?" said Squiff.

"Looks promising," said Harry. "We're waiting—— Hallo!"

Ted put his shock head in at the door.

"This way!" he said.

Nine anticipative juniors followed the lanky Ted.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.
The Pantomime Rehearsal!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. arrived, after traversing several gloomy passages, upon the stage. The theatre was empty and dark—dead and lifeless to the view. Strains of music came from the orchestra, however, where a fat little conductor, with a shock of black hair, was brandishing his baton. The juniors halted in the wings and looked on. A rehearsal was in progress, and the stage swarmed with fairies and cats, grouping and breaking up and regrouping with bewildering swiftness.

Mr. Whiffles was in the wings, and he gave the juniors a short nod, but did not speak. He was watching the groupings and the regroupings of the pantomime crowd. A short, stubby gentleman, with a very red face, was in charge of the proceedings, and the juniors guessed that this was Mr. Badger, the stage-manager. He rapped out words of direction in a rasping voice, and seemed to be in a bad temper. Stage-managers during rehearsals frequently are afflicted by bad temper.

He called out something to the conductor, and the latter gentleman brandished his baton more energetically than before, and, indeed, his whole body seemed to be brandishing itself. The orchestra struck up quick dance music. The movements of the fairies and cats and courtiers on the stage were bewildering. They formed up with what seemed to the juniors wonderful celerity and precision, though the remarks of Mr. Badger indicated that he was far from satisfied.

"This is the Great Cat Dance," Mr. Whiffles condescended to tell the juniors.

Harry Wharton & Co. watched the Great Cat Dance with great interest. There were about thirty boys and girls of various ages in cat costumes, and an equal number of fairies. Miss Conchita appeared from the O.P. side, led in by Puss-in-Boots himself, and joined in the dance. The Marquis of Carabas was unavoidably absent, owing to the "bolting" of the unspeakable Charley.

Frank Nugent's eyes were glued upon the Fairy Queen.

Conchita looked very pretty and graceful, and she danced extremely well. The climax of the scene was reached when the Ogre rushed in—a huge figure, with a huge face, a mask designed to resemble the Kaiser, with gigantic spiked moustaches that rose above the top of his head. The Ogre evidently had felonious designs upon the Fairy Queen, which were promptly baffled by Puss-in-Boots. The Ogre was driven victoriously from the stage, with a crash from the orchestra.

Then the whole proceedings came to a sudden termination.

It was the end of the rehearsal for the day. The juniors had arrived in time to see the finish.

"Ten to-morrow morning!" shouted Mr. Badger.

A gentleman in a cat mask, adorned with huge, streaky whiskers, came strolling across the stage to Mr. Badger.

"Don't blame me," he said, in a sepulchral voice.

"What's the matter with you, Billy Scrooge?" snapped Mr. Badger.

"It's what's the matter with the author" said Mr. Scrooge wearily. "Is there a funny line in my part? I ask you, Mr. Badger, is there a funny line? If you want me to send the audience home crying on Boxing Night, all right! I don't mind."

Mr. Badger made a gesture that might have meant anything.

"It's a dirge," said Mr. Scrooge—"a dirge! But if you want to plant a dirge on the people in front on Boxing Night, a dirge it is! All serene!"

And Mr. Scrooge drifted away.

Evidently Mr. Scrooge was the comedian, and he was not satisfied with the allowance of "fat" in his part.

The stage-manager—a long-suffering gentleman—did not argue with Mr. Scrooge. Probably everybody in the pantomime who had a "part" at all was more or less dissatisfied with it. The happy possessors of leading parts could complain; the lesser lights, who could be easily replaced, had to endure in silence. That was all the difference.

Mr. Scrooge having gone, a plump little lady, in spangles and bangles, rushed from somewhere, and caught Mr. Badger excitedly by the shoulder. She was evidently a foreign lady. Her dusky face was wildly excited.

"So you shall cut my song!" she exclaimed. "Is it not so? Ah-h-h! N'est-ce-pas? Is it zat my song, he shall be cut?"

"Can't be helped, Madame Felicita," said Mr. Badger. "All things considered——"

"Ah-h-h! All zings considered, excepting ze audience, isn't it? And me—I—Madame Felicita? You shall cut my song Vat zen?"

Madame Felicita broke into a stream of rapid French. She was still volleying French at a terrific rate as she retreated, accompanied by incessant gesticulations. But she disappeared at last.

Mr. Badger passed his hand across his brow with a dramatic gesture. He was no doubt as glad that the rehearsal was over as the rehearsers themselves were.

The crowd had vanished down the stone corridor leading to the dressing-rooms. Mr. Whiffles made a sign to the juniors, and they went on the big, empty stage. The manager conversed in low tones with the stage-manager for some minutes, both of them casting glances towards the juniors, and especially at Harry Wharton. Every now and then the juniors heard a few words.

"Figure's all right, and looks, but no experience." That came from Mr. Badger.

"Yes, looks intelligent enough," he went on, in reply to some remark from Mr. Whiffles. "But what a risk—what a thundering risk!"

"I don't say jump at it," said Mr. Whiffles. "I say try it. Give him a trial. We're in a hole. That confounded Charley! A week before Boxing Day too!"

"I know we're in a hole. But have you 'phoned——"

"I've been 'phoning all the morning."

"Oh!"

"And telegraphing."

"And——"

"N. G."

Mr. Badger shrugged his shoulders

"Charley's understudy?"

"Still down with the flu. I've seen him," said Mr. Whiffles. "Besides, he was poor stuff. Charley knew how he was leaving me stranded. I'll settle his hash, though! I'll give him law!"

"That won't get you out of this pickle."

"Exactly. But we've got to get out of it, if the panto

Frank Nugent was staring fixedly at Conchita. To he schoolboy's eyes, the pantomime queen was a vision of loveliness, and in her stage attire and with her face "arranged" for the footlights, she looked about seventeen. And certainly she was a very beautiful young lady. (*See Chapter* 10.)

isn't to be dished. What about seeing what the kid can do?"

"He's young."

"All the better, if he can fill the bill."

"If!" said Mr. Badger.

"Well, see.

"Oh, I'll put him through it, sir. If he's any good, it's a stroke of luck."

"My luck's always been good," said Mr. Whiffles, rubbing his fat hands.

Mr. Badger nodded, and scrutinised Harry Wharton again. The juniors waited in silence, very much perplexed. Nothing was still said to them. Mr. Badger rapped out:

"Higgins!"

The long-legged Ted appeared from nowhere.

"Take this young gentleman to Mr. Chawkins' room and find him a dresser. He's to rehearse Carabas."

"Yes, sir."

"Wharton—is your name Wharton?"

"Yes, sir," said Harry.

"Follow Higgins."

Harry Wharton followed Higgins down a stone passage. Then Mr. Badger turned his attention to the other juniors. He put questions to them, and put them generally through their paces, shrugged his shoulders, made gestures, murmured to Mr. Whiffles, and finally told them to turn up for the rehearsal at ten o'clock the following morning.

Evidently the Co. were very small fry in the eyes of Mr. Badger, but Harry Wharton had been selected for something special. When Mr. Badger had finished with them, the juniors waited about in the wings for Wharton to return, both the manager and the stage-manager bestowing not the slightest further attention upon them.

"Looks as if we're going to be given a chance, anyway," murmured Squiff. "But what's Wharton up to, I wonder?"

"Goodness knows!" said Nugent.

"We'd better wait for him," said Bob Cherry. "Looks to me as if he's been picked for something good. Our humble selves will have to be satisfied in the chorus. I hope Harry's going to have luck."

And the juniors waited, with best wishes for Wharton.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.
Wharton's Chance!

HARRY WHARTON followed Ted Higgins down the corridor, his mind somewhat in a whirl. He hardly understood what was wanted of him, but he was feeling hopeful and elated.

"This 'ere is Mr. Chawkins' dressing-room," said Ted,

as he showed the junior in. "Charley, what's bolted, you know! You're to put on his clobber. I'll 'elp you, if you like. The dresser's gorn."

"Thank you!" said Harry. "But what am I to put on this clobber for?"

Ted closed one eye.

"You're in luck," he said. "They're going to give you a trial in Charley's place."

"Marquis of Carabas?" asked Harry, with a deep breath.

"You bet."

"My hat!"

"Buck up! Mr. Badger don't like bein' kep' waitin'."

Ted lent a willing hand, and Wharton was soon clad in the handsome garb of the Marquis of Carabas. It was a little loose for him, but Ted appeared to be a perfect genius with safety-pins. The costume suited the well-set-up figure and handsome face of the Greyfriars junior. In the courtly dress, with a velvet cloak and a plumed hat and sword, Harry looked every inch a young prince, as Ted admiringly informed him.

"Now, kim on, sir!" said Ted.

Wharton smiled as he noted the "sir." He had acquired, along with the Marquis of Carabas' costume, immensely greater importance in the eyes of the call-boy. If he should fail to secure the part, and should be relegated to the chorus, doubtless Ted would revert to his former familiar and patronising manner. But, for the present moment, Ted was deeply respectful.

Mr. Whiffles and Mr. Badger looked keenly at Wharton as he reappeared. Harry was feeling a little nervous as he came back on the empty stage, but the approving nod of Mr. Whiffles reassured him. The Greyfriars juniors looked at him in surprise and admiration.

"Ripping, old chap!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

Mr. Badger gave Bob a freezing glance, and Bob backed into the wings blushing. Evidently it was no place for Bob to make remarks.

"He looks the part—what?" Mr. Whiffles murmured to the stage-manager.

Mr. Badger nodded.

"I suppose you can dance, Wharton?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"And make graceful bows—what?"

"I hope so, sir. I'll try."

"And speak?"

"I—I think I can speak, sir."

"Give me those lines, then."

Wharton took a ragged sheet of "scrip" the manager handed to him. He glanced over the lines; they were in rhyme, and evidently to be spoken by the Marquis of Carabas in the pantomime. Wharton read them through twice—he had a good memory, and that was enough for him—and he declaimed the verses without looking at the paper again. It was so much like the theatricals at Greyfriars that he was not troubled in the least by "nerves."

A nobleman am I, though poor, alas!
Mine are the fair broad lands of Carabas.
Now closed upon me is my castle-gate,
Within, a guilty Ogre holds his state,
A giant grim, of horrid Hunnish race,
Whose spiked moustaches almost hide his face.

The lines were feeble enough, but Wharton delivered them very well. Bob Cherry very nearly shouted "Hear, hear!" but he remembered Mr. Badger's steely eye, and checked himself in time.

"Now cross the stage, and kneel to me as if I were the Fairy Queen," said Mr. Badger.

Wharton almost grinned at the idea of the tubby little gentleman as a fairy queen, but he carried out the directions quite gracefully. Mr. Badger and Mr. Whiffles consulted again. Then Ted was sent to request Miss Conchita to come. The orchestra were showing signs of restiveness, evidently anxious to get off after the rehearsal. But there was no release for the instrumental gentlemen yet.

Ted came back in a few minutes.

"Well," rapped out Mr. Whiffles, "where is Conchita?"

"Please Madame Conchita says she will come when she's finished her smoke," said Higgins.

Mr. Whiffles muttered something, and Mr. Badger muttered something, and the juniors stared. Frank Nugent's jaw dropped. He could not imagine that sweet and dainty Fairy Queen with a cigarette between her pretty lips.

It was a full five minutes before Conchita arrived, and she was looking a little cross.

"I was just going," she said. "What is it?"

"Sorry—sorry!" said Mr. Badger quite deferentially. "We sha'n't trouble you more than a few minutes. We are trying this young gentleman in Charley's place——"

"My word!" said Conchita.

"Will you try him in the cat waltz."

Miss Conchita yawned.

"I suppose so. What's the use of a schoolboy for Charley's part? Anything for a quiet life. Come here, little boy."

Wharton flushed scarlet, and approached Miss Conchita.

"Don't be nervous, kid!" said that young lady.

"I—I'm not nervous!" stammered Wharton.

"Don't tread on my feet, mind!"

"I won't!"

"Mind you don't, that's all!"

Mr. Badger was speaking to the conductor. The strains of the cat waltz proceeded from the orchestra. Wharton, in spite of his assurance that he was not nervous, felt a little uneasy as he began to dance with Conchita. Conchita was plainly bored by the whole proceeding, and she lounged through the dance, but Wharton did his best. He was really a graceful dancer, and he did very well. When the music ceased, Miss Conchita left his arm abruptly, and lighted a cigarette, the juniors watching her in wonder.

"The kid can dance," said Conchita, blowing out little rings of smoke. "Better give him a trial. Charley danced like a horse."

Conchita sauntered away through the wings, pausing a moment to pinch Frank Nugent's ear as she passed. Nugent was left with a crimson face.

Mr. Whiffles clapped Wharton on the shoulder.

"He'll do, Badger?" he said.

"So far, so good," said Mr. Badger. "I'll give him his part, and he can come and see me before the rehearsal to-morrow morning. Half-past nine, Wharton; ten o'clock, you others."

Mr. Badger walked away. There was a rustle in the orchestra, as the musical gentlemen made their delayed departure. Mr. Whiffles nodded kindly to the juniors and went back to his office. Harry Wharton & Co. were left to their own devices.

Wharton removed the costume of the Marquis of Carabas in the dressing-room, and replaced his own clothes, and rejoined his chums. The juniors left the theatre.

"Well, we're taken on, anyway," said Bob Cherry. "Congratulations, Harry, old chap! You're going to be the giddy marquis."

"It's not settled yet," said Harry.

"Bet you it's going to be! Conchita is a corker, isn't she?"

"She's a stunning girl!" said Nugent.

"Simply stunning!" agreed Bob. "I say, I'm hungry! We'd better get a feed, and then buzz off for our luggage. We shall have to find some quarters in Lantham. I say, I wonder if Bunter's minding our luggage all this time?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In great spirits, the Greyfriars juniors proceeded in search of a "feed."

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.
Bunter Sticks to His Old Pals!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. found a restaurant in Lantham, where they enjoyed a late, but very substantial, lunch. The happy result of their visit to the Theatre Royal filled them with satisfaction. Pantomime acting was not exactly war-work, it is true; but it came to the same thing. All the salaries they received, however much the amount came

to, should be devoted to the good cause—and they were already planning "whacking" hampers for the prisoners in Germany.

If Wharton secured the part of the Marquis of Carabas, certainly there would be a decent salary attached to it; and the fellows in the chorus would get something. Altogether, it was sure to make up a handsome little sum. It gave them a keen satisfaction to feel that they were doing their "bit."

"It will be a simply ripping vacation!" said Mark Linley.

"And now you won't be ashamed of us, Marky," grinned Bob Cherry. "Up to now, you've been the only chap worth his salt in all the esteemed company—the only chap who could earn his oats. Now we're up to your giddy level."

Mark laughed.

"Jolly pleasant work, too—for a change, anyway," said Harry Wharton. "Whiffles is an old sport. We ought to pass a vote of thanks to Skinner. If Skinner hadn't been such a funny ass, we shouldn't have made Whiffles' acquaintance."

"I'll take back those punches on the nose, next term," chuckled Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now about our luggage," said Harry Wharton, when lunch was over. "No good all of us going back to Courtfield—waste of money. One chap had better go for the bags. The rest of us can look for diggings. We shall have to dig in Lantham, of course."

"I'll go, if you like," said Peter Todd.

"We'll meet the Lantham train at the station, and have the diggings ready for you," said Harry.

"Good egg!"

The party walked to the station with Todd, and saw him off for Courtfield, and then proceeded to search for "digs." It was a new experience to the Greyfriars juniors, and they found it exciting, and quite agreeable.

Peter Todd arrived at Courtfield, and the first person that met his eyes on the platform was William George Bunter. Billy Bunter was a slacker in many ways; but he was evidently a sticker. He rolled up as Peter stepped from the train, blinking at him with deep reproach.

"You've kept me here five hours," he said.

"I didn't keep you here," said Peter. "What the deuce have you stayed in this blessed station for?"

"I've been looking after your luggage."

"Bow-wow!"

"I say, Peter, old chap——"

"Rats!"

Todd extracted the baggage from the office, and had it booked for Lantham. Then he strolled on the platform, waiting for the next train. Billy Bunter kept at his heels, a good deal like a fat poodle.

The train came in, and Peter stepped into it. Bunter rolled into the carriage after him.

"Look here," said Todd, perplexed. "This isn't your train, Bunter."

"Yes, it is."

"Have you taken your ticket?"

"No, I haven't."

"Then you'll get into trouble at Lantham."

"Not if I've got an old pal with me to see me through," said Bunter cheerfully.

"You fat duffer!" roared Peter. "Why don't you go home?"

"I'm sticking to my old pals, old chap. After minding your luggage the best part of a day, you might be a bit grateful."

Peter grunted. Billy Bunter had made up his mind to stick to his old pals. There was no doubt about that. The train buzzed away through the December dusk to Lantham.

"Blessed if I know what to do with you, Fatty," said the puzzled Peter. "The fellows will scalp me if I bring you with me."

"Rats! I suppose I can come to Lantham if I like!" snorted Bunter. "Are you fellows putting up there?"

"Oh, bow-wow!"

"I'll put up where you do, Peter, old chap. You can pay the bill."

"Can I?" growled Peter Todd.

"Of course, I shall settle out of my postal-order——"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"If you're going to be a rude beast, Peter Todd——"

"Well, I am!" said Peter grimly.

"All serene! I don't mind it from an old pal," said Bunter affectionately.

Peter gave a snort.

"You fellows have got a job in Lantham?" asked Bunter inquisitively.

"Yes, fathead!"

"Well, my hat! Of course, I'm not going to do any work. But I'm sticking to you. Wharton's going to spend the wind-up of the vacation with Tom Merry at St. Jim's. Well, I'm going with him then."

"So you don't want to lose sight of him—what?"

"Oh, really, Toddy——"

"Look here," said Peter, after some thought. "We've got a job—plenty of hard work, and probably not much money. You can come along if you like, and house-keep for us in our diggings—cook, and all that."

Bunter brightened up.

"Good egg! I'd do more than that for an old pal like you, Peter."

"Not so much of your old pal!" growled Todd.

"I say, have you got any toffee about you?"

"No, tubby!"

"I'm jolly hungry."

"Serve you right!"

Bunter grunted, and relapsed into dignified silence. He closed his eyes, and dozed till the train stopped in Lantham. There Peter Todd shook him, and woke him, and paid his fare, and marched him out of the station.

Harry Wharton & Co. were waiting in the station entrance. There was a general howl at the sight of William George.

"Bunter!"

"The Bunterfulness is terrific!"

Billy Bunter grinned agreeably at the juniors.

"You didn't think I was going to desert you, did you?" he asked affectionately.

"Well, we didn't think so," said Squiff—"we only hoped so."

"Oh, really, Field——"

"The fat bounder would come," said Peter. "He's agreed to be maid-of-all-work in our digs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Instead of going home to the festive halls of Bunter de Bunter!" grinned Squiff. "How he must love us!"

"Found the diggings?"

"Yes; come on!

Peter Todd claimed his baggage, and it was piled on a four-wheeler, but the juniors walked. There wasn't room for them in the "growler," but Billy Bunter found room for himself. He was not fond of walking.

Bunter blinked out of the cab, with a very disparaging expression, as the vehicle threaded its way into a cheap part of the town.

"I say, you fellows, ain't you putting up at an hotel?" he called out.

"Ha, ha! No jolly fear!"

"Look here, I'm jolly well not going to live in a slum!" said Bunter. "Like your cheek, if you want to know my opinion!"

"Thanks, we don't!"

The four-wheeler stopped outside a house in a clean but decidedly cheap street. It was within ten minutes' walk of the back of the Theatre Royal. Wharton and his companions had found those diggings and engaged them while Peter was gone to Courtfield.

The door was opened by a buxom lady, with a kindly face. The baggage was taken up to the rooms Wharton had engaged—three rooms on an upper floor. There was also a small room with a sink and a gas-cooking stove. The surroundings were not palatial. The wallpaper was old and faded, the furniture cheap and chipped, and the carpet and linoleum worn into holes in places. The lighting was by gas, and the light was not brilliant.

Billy Bunter surveyed the place with ineffable disgust. Wharton settled with the cabman, and the juniors proceeded to unpack their belongings. In the three rooms there were a total of six beds, some larger and some smaller, affording altogether plenty of accommodation for the party. The juniors had not expected palatial surroundings, and, so long as the place was clean, they were not exacting. And it was clean enough. But Billy

Bunter apparently expected more. He sat on a bed and sniffed; and as the juniors did not appear to notice his sniffs, they grew more and more emphatic till they resembled snorts.

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THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.
Bunter Is Not Satisfied!

SNIFF!

Snort!

Bob Cherry glanced round at last.

"Got a cold, Bunter?" he asked.

"No!" growled Bunter.

"What are you snorting like a horse for, then?"

"I'm disgusted!"

"The disgustfulness of the esteemed Bunter is great," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But what is the matter with the disgusting and ridiculous Bunter?"

"I say, Wharton?"

"Hallo!"

"Are you going to spend the Christmas vac in this place?"

"Yes."

"This hole!" roared Bunter.

"Any port in a storm, you know," said Bob Cherry. "We're going to pay thirty shillings a week for these rooms and attendance. Attendance means making the beds. We do our own cooking."

"Jolly good idea!" said Peter Todd. "We shall have lots of time for shopping. No more meals at restaurants; it won't run to it."

"But—but you can't live here!" gasped Bunter. "Look from that window! There's a view of back-yards and washing!"

"Did you expect to see the Mediterranean?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look at the carpet—in holes!" howled Bunter. "Look at the walls! The paper's peeling off! My hat! Why, this is the kind of house where plumbers live!"

"Well, what's the matter with plumbers?" asked Squiff. "Plumbers earn more money than we do."

"Oh, don't be an ass, Field! When I'm on a holiday I want some comfort," said Bunter. "I thought you'd be staying in the best hotel in the place, of course."

"You'd rather stay in the best hotel?" asked Nugent.

"Yes, of course."

"Well, trot along and stay there!"

"Who's going to pay?"

"Is that a conundrum?"

"I say, you fellows, you must be spoofing me!" growled Bunter. "You can't really mean to stay in this hole? Where have you got jobs?"

"Theatre Royal, in the panto."

"In the panto!" shrieked Bunter. "But they don't pay panto kids more than a few bob a week."

"That means short commons."

"Oh, you—you—you——"

Bunter could find no words to express his feelings.

The juniors grinned, and went on with their unpacking. They were in Lantham to work, and their quarters did not matter much to them so long as they were cheap. Bunter was after a holiday. He remembered the time he had planted himself upon the Co. for a summer holiday at Shoremouth, and he had fancied it was to be something of the kind over again. The discovery of the grim reality almost overcame him. This was what he had waited five hours in Courtfield for—this! He glanced round at his dingy surroundings with feelings almost too deep for words.

"You'll be all right, Bunty," said Peter Todd comfortingly. "You haven't got to work in the panto. That's only for us common persons. You're going to keep house, and do the cooking. You can have a smell of cooking all day long if you like. There!"

"What are you going to live on?" demanded Bunter. "Of course, if you place plenty of money in my hands to keep house, I might think of it. You understand that I want something pretty decent?"

"Kippers for breakfast," said Squiff. "One kipper each."

"And a cheap kind of stew for lunch," said Bob Cherry. "Bunter can go round the butcher-shops making bargains for odd bits!"

"I jolly well won't!" roared Bunter.

"Bread and cheese for supper," said Wharton. "Not too much bread, as it's dear; and only a little cheese, as it's expensive."

"Oh, my hat! Look here, if you earn any money——"

(Continued on page 23.)

Nugent dropped into the chair, rather than sat. He was in a reckless and utterly miserable mood. "Now," said Conchita, "tell me, what is the matter?" "I—I can't!" stammered Nugent, crimsoning again. (See chap. 21.)

"All the money we earn is going to war funds, fathead!"

"What utter rot! What are you going to live on, then?"

"Private resources!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "We've got some tin of our own—enough to live on, with strict economy. Of course, the economy will have to be very strict. That's all right in war-time."

"Oh, you chump!"

"We shall expect you to make a whole stew for ten for a couple of bob at the most," said Mark.

"You might be able to do it, as you were brought up in a factory!" snorted Bunter.

"Exactly! And I could do it, and will, if necessary."

"Well, I can't, and won't!"

"Please yourself," said Bob Cherry cheerily. "But, remember, he that will not work, neither shall he eat!"

"Toddy, you beast! You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself, landing me in this! After the way you urged me to come——"

"Oh, crumbs! Did I urge you?"

"Yes, you did; and left me minding your baggage all day! Look here, if you fellows don't make up your minds to treat me decently I shall go!"

Billy Bunter delivered this remark in the tone of an ultimatum. He blinked at the juniors majestically through his big glasses.

"Oh, Bunty," exclaimed Bob Cherry, in great alarm, "unsay those cruel words!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean what I say, so you'd better think it out!"

Bob Cherry closed one eye at his comrades.

"What terms will you stay on, Bunter?" he asked

"Well, I'd be willing to stay if you move at once into a more decent show," said Bunter considerately. "I'm accustomed to better surroundings than this. There isn't even a servant kept in this house. Get into respectable quarters, and allow me, say, five pounds a day for keeping house——"

"No more than that?"

"Well, six would be better. And you'll have to engage a servant for me."

"Anything else?"

"I'll mention anything else I think of later on, but that's the minimum."

"The giddy, irreducible minimum?" asked Bob.

"Yes; the very least I could accept."

"And if we don't agree, you're going?"

"Yes."

"Well, there's the door!" said Bob Cherry cheerily.

"Eh?"

"Deaf, old chap? The door! There it is! Mind the step! There's no light on the stairs! Remember us to Lord Bunter de Bunter when you get home!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter blinked furiously as he realised that the humorous Bob had been pulling his leg. The unpacking being finished, Peter Todd and Squiff went out shopping, while the rest of the party cleaned and prepared cooking utensils. Billy Bunter was generally keen on cooking, but he did not seem keen now. He was in a state of disappointment and fury hardly to be described in words. This was the holiday he was going to get—this!

The shoppers returned with succulent kippers in paper. There was soon a scent of cooking in the tiny kitchen. Those rooms had been used by generations of employees at the Theatre Royal, and a lingering smell of kippers hung about them. The table was laid in the largest room, and the juniors sat down to their supper with keen appetites. Bunter joined them, glowering. There was one kipper for Bunter, and plenty of bread-and-margarine. It did not run to butter. But, as Bob Cherry pointed out, that was all right, as most butter was imported from abroad, and it was unpatriotic to spend money abroad in war-time. Bunter did not seem to see it.

"I—I suppose this is a joke?" he gasped at last.

"Deadly earnest," said Bob. "What are you grousing about? You're getting a kipper for nothing, to say nothing of this lovely margarine! And there's treacle to wind up with—real British treacle!"

"Treacle! Oh, my hat! Haven't you any jam?"

"Nix."

"I'm not going to stand it!" roared Bunter.

"Don't say you're going to leave us!" implored Bob Cherry. "Anything—anything but that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter snorted furiously. Supper over, the juniors carefully washed up. Mrs. Jones had provided them with the necessaries for doing so—on a limited scale—the "attendance" in those diggings being very strictly limited. Billy Bunter did not lend a hand. He glowered.

Washing up being finished, Harry Wharton & Co. prepared to turn in. Bunter insisted upon having a bed to himself, and as he was blessed with a terrific snore his desire was willingly acceded to, though it made close quarters for the rest. But they were prepared to rough it.

Nugent turned in with Bob Cherry; and Bob's eyes closed almost as soon as his head was on the pillow. He started out of a doze as Frank spoke to him.

"Bob, old man!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" murmured Bob sleepily. "Taking too much room—what?"

"No, no."

"Wharrer marrer then?"

"Do you remember Miss Conchita?"

Bob started, broad awake.

"The girl at the panto? Yes. What about her?"

"N-n-nothing."

"She smacked your chivvy, didn't she?"

"No, she didn't; just pinched my ear," said Nugent indignantly. "Those beautiful little hands couldn't smack!"

"Those which?" gasped Bob.

"I—I was just thinking of her," said Nugent.

"Better think of sleep."

"We shall see her again to-morrow."

"I suppose so. Good-night!"

Bob closed his eyes again. A couple of minutes later he was awakened out of his doze

"I say, Bob!"

"Grooh!" murmured Bob. "Wharrer marrer now? Want some more of the blanket?"

"Nunno. Did you notice——"

"Eh?"

"How her eyelashes seemed to sweep her cheek——"

"Oh, blow her eyelashes!" mumbled Bob. "Go to sleep, for goodness' sake, and let a fellow get a snooze!"

And Bob closed his eyes once more, and refused to open them again.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.
At Rehearsal!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. turned up at the Theatre Royal the next morning in great spirits. To the schoolboys this novel mode of passing a Christmas vacation was full of interest and excitement. To have the free entry of the theatre by the stage-door was elating. The only dissatisfied member of the party—William George Bunter—remained at the "diggings" in Slocum Street, in a decidedly bad humour. One "shop" egg for breakfast made Billy Bunter furious. His suggestion that he should have new-laid eggs, while the other fellows had "shop" eggs, if they liked them, was somehow not adopted. Bunter asked what was the good of one egg to him, but he was left to find an answer to that conundrum for himself. Bunter blinked after the chums of the Remove as they departed, with a blink that was almost Hunnish. This was not the sort of Christmas holiday he had been looking for—not at all!

There had been a fresh fall of snow, and the juniors tramped through it cheerily. Hacker, the door-keeper, let them in without question this time—indeed, his manner to Wharton was quite respectful. Panto kids were nothing, or less than nothing, in Mr. Hacker's eyes; but a "leading" gentleman was decidedly something. Wharton was not a leading gentleman yet, but it was a possibility, at least.

Wharton was in time, and the others were early, as the general rehearsal did not begin till ten. Wharton was taken at once into the private office, where he found Mr. Montague Whiffles in much better spirits than on his previous visit. The manager of the Theatre Royal shook him warmly by the hand, and hurried him away to Badger, who was smoking a big cigar on the empty stage, and talking to Billy Scrooge. Mr. Scrooge was lugubriously comparing his comic part in the panto to a funeral service, and almost tearfully declaring that he wouldn't get a single cackle from the people in front. Miss Conchita was also there, smoking a cigarette. She gave Wharton a friendly nod.

A little dusky gentleman was introduced to Wharton as Signor Goloppi, dancing-master and professor of deportment. The junior was placed in his hands, and the signor pronounced him a good pupil, and arranged with him for practice for five hours a day, exclusive of rehearsals. This looked rather like hard work, but the captain of the Remove was prepared for hard work. He was to visit the signor at his lodgings for instruction every day till Boxing Day. Mr. Whiffles was paying the signor, probably indemnifying himself from the Marquis of Carabas' salary; for it was pretty certain that Wharton would not receive anything like the same figure as the truant.

At ten o'clock the pantomime company turned up in force for the general rehearsal. Some, of course, were late, which led to lurid remarks from Mr. Badger, and a short and sudden "sack" for one unfortunate individual. Klack, the musical conductor, waved his baton, his arms, his head and hair, and occasionally his legs. Mr. Klack conducted in the "grand manner."

"Madame Felicita! Madame Felicita! Madame Felicita!" screamed Mr. Klack.

"Madame Felicita!" the chorus took up the cry.

"Madame Felicita!" bawled Ted.

"Madame Felicita!" shouted Mr. Badger.

The whole theatre seemed to echo to "Madame Felicita!" That lady appeared, with a sulky expression, at last. Evidently it still rankled with Madame Felicita that her song had been "cut."

The rehearsal was a trial to the juniors.

They were ready-witted enough, and they had some experience of theatricals in an amateur way, which helped them now. But the work was very new to them, and there seemed neither time nor inclination for patient explanation or instruction. Tom Dutton, being deaf, was the object of many emphatic objurgations from Mr. Badger and Signor Goloppi, but his deafness did not dawn upon them, as they did not expect him to answer. And as Tom heard hardly a word they addressed

to him, their remarks did not discourage him. He kept his eyes on Peter Todd and did as Peter did, and his faithful chum was always ready to help him out. As their task was simply to bear the long royal train of the King of the Cats, it was not a heavy one. They had nothing to say—only to move their lips and appear to be singing when there was a general chorus.

In the Great Cat Dance Harry Wharton was Conchita's partner, and he acquitted himself very well. He was a little troubled by the fact that Conchita—evidently monarch of all she surveyed—persisted in smoking a cigarette during the dance, and the smoke worried his eyes and his nose. The charming young lady saw his difficulty, and it seemed to amuse her, for she took a mischievous delight in blowing smoke into his face on several occasions.

"You don't smoke, kid?" asked Conchita, after the dance, as she stood in the wings.

Wharton stared a little.

"Certainly not," he said—"not at my age!"

Miss Conchita nodded approvingly.

"That's a sensible kid!" she said.

Wharton winced. Certainly it was sensible not to smoke at his age; but he did not exactly like being called a "sensible kid."

"I shouldn't have thought it was allowed at a rehearsal," he said.

"It isn't."

"Oh!"

Conchita laughed.

"What is the name of your young friend—the little fellow with the blue eyes and pink face?" she asked.

"Do you mean Nugent? He isn't such a little fellow!" said Wharton, nettled. "He's nearly my age!"

"Then he is almost venerable!" said Conchita gravely. "He is a nice little boy; and he is looking so shocked to see me smoking! It amuses me. Come here, Nugent!"

Nugent was looking on at a repetition of some act that Mr. Badger was not satisfied with, and in which he was not included. He was watching Conchita more than

the act, however. He came quickly towards the Fairy Queen as she beckoned to him.

"What is your name, my dear?" she asked him.

"Frank."

"Why are you shocked to see me smoke?"

Nugent crimsoned.

"I—I'm not," he stammered. "I—I think—I mean—you see, we don't smoke at Greyfriars; but this is different, of course! But—but——"

"Well?"

"Nothing," said Nugent.

"Go on," said Conchita. "Tell me what you were going to say."

"All right, if you won't think it cheeky."

"I won't. Please go on!"

"Well, I should think it would be bad for your dancing," said Nugent. "We find that a fellow can't play footer if he smokes. And—and my father says it's bad for anybody still growing—it spoils the growth."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Miss Conchita had a very musical laugh. "Your father is very wise, Frank, and he has given you good advice. But it won't stop my growth, at my age, I suppose?"

"Better not smoke till you're turned twenty-one, if you smoke at all," said Nugent sagely.

"Twenty-one!" said Conchita thoughtfully.

"Yes; it's as bad at seventeen as at fifteen."

To Nugent's astonishment, Conchita pinched his ear again. But the touch of the slim little fingers pleased him.

"Are you busy to-day after the rehearsal?" she asked.

"Not a bit," said Frank.

"I am going out shopping. Would you like to come with me, and carry my parcels?"

Nugent's eyes danced. The look upon his face showed how much he would like it. Miss Conchita smiled quite affectionately.

"Wait for me at the stage door," she said.

"Oh, rather!" said Nugent. "You're awfully kind, Miss Conchita!"

Conchita nodded, and tripped away. Nugent gave Wharton a blissful look, and Harry regarded him curiously.

"Isn't she simply stunning?" said Frank, with a deep breath.

"She seems a very nice girl," said Harry. "I wish she wouldn't smoke when we're dancing, though. Luckily, she won't be able to in the real performance."

"I don't see why women shouldn't smoke as well as men, if they want to," said Nugent. "If it's a bad habit, it's as bad for one as the other."

"I suppose so; only it's a bother getting it in my eyes."

"It seems to me that you've got all the luck."

"Yes, they seem to have settled on me for Marquis of Carabas," said Harry. "It's a whacking good thing for our fund."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that! I mean dancing with Conchita."

"Yes, she is a wonderful dancer."

"I wish——" Nugent paused, and did not say what he wished. "Jolly good of her to let me go shopping with her, Harry."

Wharton laughed.

"I suppose she is older than she looks," he said. "Stage ladies generally are. I suppose she's really over twenty-one. That's why she laughed."

"What utter rot!"

"Eh?"

"Where are your eyes?" said Nugent warmly. "Seventeen at the most, I should say. Perhaps only sixteen and a half. I—I wish I were older."

"What on earth for?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"Ten in the morning!" came Mr. Badger's strident voice. "I will thank you, Madame Felicita, to be on time to-morrow morning. I cannot have the ballet delayed in rehearsal."

The morning's work was over. Fairies and cats and courtiers vanished. Harry Wharton & Co. left together.

after Harry had received warm congratulations from Mr. Whiffles, which encouraged him considerably.

"By Jove, I'm ready for lunch!" said Bob Cherry, as they came out into the keen winter air, in the slushy side street. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! What are you waiting for, Franky?"

"I'm coming later," said Nugent, colouring.

"Anything on?"

"Yes."

"Well, what is it?" asked Johnny Bull, puzzled by Nugent's colour. "The manager want to speak to you?"

"Oh, no!"

"It's all right; come on!" said Wharton. "Nugent's going out shopping with Miss Conchita."

"My only hat!"

The Co. walked cheerily off, leaving Nugent waiting by the stage door with a crimson face.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.
Bunter Deserts His Old Pals!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Where's the oyster?"

Bob Cherry asked that question when the chums of Greyfriars reached their diggings.

Bunter had been left with instructions to have a feed ready when the Co. returned. He had been provided with sufficient provisions for the whole party to fulfil his duties as cook and housekeeper.

But there was no sign of a meal in readiness, and no sign of Bunter. On the table was a large amount of dirty crockery, showing that the Owl of the Remove had been feeding on his own.

"Snoozing, perhaps," said Harry.

But Bunter was not snoozing. The juniors searched through the rooms for him. But William George had vanished. So had all the provisions. There was not an egg or a kipper to be discovered.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's this?" exclaimed Bob suddenly.

"This" was a note pinned on the table, which they had not noticed at first. The juniors gathered round to read it. It was in Billy Bunter's well-known sprawling hand, and it ran:

"Rotters!—

"I'm off. If you think I'm gowing to stand this anny longer, you're mistaken. I'm not. You left me just enouf grub for one, and I've eaten it, as I rekwired a snack before my jurney. I'm still hungrey. I regard you all as rotters. I ment to ask you home to my plaice, but now I won't. I've borrowed the tin Wharton left in his bag to pay my fair home; but, of course, I shall return it next term, out of my postal-order. I

decline to be under anny monnetary obligation to a fellow I despize. You can all go and eat coak!

"W. G. BUNTER."

Such was the farewell of William George Bunter.

"Well, my hat!" said Squiff. "That's where our dinner's gone—inside Bunter. And Bunter's gone. How much tin did you leave in your bag, Wharton?"

"Thirty bob," said Wharton ruefully. "I didn't know that fat bounder saw me put it there, though."

"Well, getting rid of Bunter is cheap at thirty bob," said Johnny Bull. "I'd have stood him another quid to go."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And now we've got our shopping to do over again," said Peter Todd. "Come on!"

The departure of the indignant William George did not cause any tears to be shed. The chums of the Remove renewed their supplies, cooked their dinner, and ate it with good appetites.

Then Wharton had to hurry off to keep his appointment with Signor Goloppi, and to grind. The rest of the party proceeded to practise "on their own," the few who had "lines" mugging them up very carefully, and all of them assiduously practising over again the stage business that fell to their share.

Harry Wharton looked a little tired when he came in, long after the winter evening had fallen.

"Been swotting?" asked Bob Cherry sympathetically.

"Yes, a bit," said Harry, with a smile. "But it's all right. Goloppi made me grind. But he says that Mr. Whiffles has finally decided on me for Marquis of Carabas. It means good business for our fund."

"No talk about cash so far, though," said Squiff.

"They don't pay for rehearsals."

"Oh!" said Johnny Bull.

"Our screw begins when the panto begins, on Boxing Night. I'm afraid you chaps will get only about ten bob a week."

"Great pip!"

"Still, it will run for weeks; we're going to stick it for the whole vac. Of course, I shall get something a bit decent. The signor says that Charley Chawkins had twenty pounds a week."

"Phew!"

"Of course, I sha'n't get that. But I might get half."

"Ten quid a week!" said Bob Cherry, rubbing his hands. "Why, that's a giddy fortune! It will buck up the fund no end. You'd better chuck up Greyfriars and stick to panto for good."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hasn't Nugent come in yet?" asked Wharton, as he sipped the hot, cheering cocoa Bob had kindly prepared for him when he came in.

"Not yet. Marky's seen him, though," grinned Bob.

Mark Linley laughed.

"I was shopping in the High Street when he passed me in a car," he said.

"In a car!" ejaculated Wharton.

"Yes. Miss Conchita's car, I suppose. She was with him. Nugent looked as if he were enjoying himself."

"King of Hearts!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "Miss Conchita seems to have taken a fancy to Franky. Well, any girl might. But we mustn't let Franky play the giddy ox, like old Mauly when he was mashed on the girl at the bunshop. He was mumbling something last night about her nose."

"Her nose?"

"I think it was her nose. No, I remember now—her eyelashes. I was jolly sleepy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was some time before Frank Nugent came in. He came in looking as if he were walking on air. Evidently he had had a good time.

"Your kipper's ready," said Bob.

"Thanks; I've had supper."

"Extravagant youth!" said Bob reprovingly. "Didn't we knock restaurant feeds on the head?"

"I've had supper with Miss Conchita. She asked me," said Nugent, colouring. "Old Badger was there. Blessed if I see why Conchita wanted old Badger, but he was there. He was grinning all the time, and he called Conchita a little minx once, and she didn't seem to mind. Fancy a kid in the panto chorus having supper with the stage-manager! It was an honour, of course, but I didn't

like old Badger being there, all the same. I don't like his manner towards Conchita."

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

"What are you cackling at now?"

"Well, I'm thinking of her eyelashes," grinned Bob. "Have you noticed how they sweep her cheek?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you silly asses——" Nugent glared at his hilarious chums. "For goodness' sake stop cackling like a barnyard full of hens!"

"But what have you been doing all the time, besides swanking about in a motor?" asked Squiff.

"Shopping, mostly. You don't know what a ripping girl she is," said Nugent enthusiastically. "What do you think she has been buying?"

"Powder-puffs?" asked Bob.

"No, fathead!"

"Complexion-improvers?"

"You silly idiot——"

"Eyebrow-pencils?"

"Look here——"

"Well, what, then?"

"Presents for the soldiers," said Nugent. "Chocolates, and cigarettes, and Christmas hampers, and so on. She's spent an awful lot of money, and it was all on presents for the chaps at the Front. Chaps she doesn't know, you know—just Tommies. She sends them to the regiment. I helped to make up parcels, and post 'em, and so on. Isn't that ripping?"

"She's a good sort," agreed Bob. "A ripping good sort!"

"And she does look lovely in furs," said Nugent dreamily.

To that remark his chums replied only with chuckles. Nugent hardly spoke for the rest of the evening, but he was thinking the more. He did not even notice the absence of Billy Bunter, till Bob Cherry showed him the scornful epistle left behind by the departed Owl. Nugent grinned for a moment, as he read it, but he was soon dreamy again. It was evident that Frank Nugent's thoughts were far away from the dingy diggings in Slocum Street, dwelling upon a pretty face framed in furs.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.
Nugent's Little Weakness!

THE next day, when the juniors arrived at the theatre, there was good news. They found Conchita in conversation with Mr. Badger in the wings, and the stage-manager appeared a little irascible.

"What rot!" he was remarking.

Conchita closed his lips with a pretty finger.

Then Mr. Badger shrugged his shoulders, and nodded his head.

"Oh, all right!" he said resignedly.

Conchita laughed, and moved away, and Mr. Badger beckoned to Nugent. Frank came up wonderingly.

"I'm going to try you in a new part," said Mr. Badger gruffly. "Signor Goloppi will instruct you after the rehearsal."

"Thank you, sir!"

"You needn't thank me!" snapped Mr. Badger.

The rehearsal seemed to afford Mr. Badger more satisfaction than on previous occasions. The company was pulling together better now, and there was no doubt that the new Marquis of Carabas filled his part very satisfactorily. Mr. Whiffles rubbed his hands as he watched him from the stalls. There were several songs for Wharton to render, as well as a good deal of patter, and under Signor Goloppi's instructions he had made good progress with both. And there was certainly no fault to be found with his dancing.

Nugent's new part proved to be that of a Cat Courtier. It was not a leading part, but it was a big step from the chorus, and he was very glad of it. He knew that he owed it to the kindly intervention of Conchita. In that part he had to act with Conchita in several scenes.

which was pure bliss to him. By this time all Frank's thoughts were centred upon the Fairy Queen.

His devotion was quite evident to the Fairy Queen herself, and she was very kind to Nugent. As a rule, Miss Conchita appeared loftily oblivious of the existence of the pantomime crowd. Even Streaky-Whiskers, otherwise Mr. Billy Scrooge, hardly ever had a word from her, and Puss-in-Boots himself—Mr. Montgomery Tadger—never received a smile in return for his many "glad-eyes." As for the common-or-garden members of the chorus, they were miles beneath the notice of the Fairy Queen. The juniors did not catch a glance from her. But to Nugent she was kindness itself. There was, perhaps, something in Frank's kind, innocent face, his clear and loyal blue eyes, which appealed to her; and his frank and worshipping admiration, perhaps, had its effect, even in the atmosphere of flattery and admiration in which she lived. Bob Cherry remarked—in an unfortunate moment—that she was quite motherly towards Franky, a remark which drew upon him a perfect glare from Franky.

Nugent's comrades were inclined to chip him at first. But Squiff having proposed, as an evening's amusement, the conjugation of the verb "to mash," Nugent abruptly retired from his room, and closed the door after him with unnecessary force.

Squiff whistled.

"Quite like old Mauly when he was mashed," he remarked. "You remember how he went for Skinner that time? Blessed if I thought Nugent was such an ass!"

"It's one of the weakfulnesses of youth," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh sagely. "The esteemed Franky will forget all about the Fairy Queen when we are backfully at Greyfriars next term."

"Well, we'll keep an eye on him," said Squiff. "There's not going to be any giddy elopements during this vac."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But after that the juniors forbore to "chip" Nugent on the subject. They "gave him his head," as Bob expressed it.

Besides, there were more important matters to claim their attention. They had to work hard at rehearsals, and at practice in their rooms; and, moreover, there was the Christmas pudding. Christmas without a Christmas pudding was not to be thought of, and they had decided to make one themselves.

Billy Bunter would have been useful here, if he could have been restrained from bolting all the ingredients. But Billy Bunter was far away. Bob Cherry constituted himself cook.

He borrowed a large pan from Mrs. Jones, and the ingredients were purchased, and Bob Cherry set all hands to work on them. When the pudding was composed, the juniors regarded it rather dubiously. But Bob had no doubts, and he fastened it up cheerfully, and carried it down to be boiled in Mrs. Jones' copper.

"That pudding will be ripping!" said Bob. "We'll send a bit to all our friends, to let 'em know we're getting a real Christmas. Might send a bit to old Quelch, too."

"You don't want to see him again next term?" asked Todd.

"Yes. Why, you ass?"

"Then don't!"

"Look here! If you think that's not a jolly good pudding——" began Bob warmly. "Why, I've been awfully careful with it. I put in more of the things than were given in the recipe, to make sure of having a good one. You wait till that pudding comes up, and then you'll see!"

Meanwhile, the juniors were assiduously attending rehearsals with the rest of the company. Wharton and Nugent found their work hard with Signor Goloppi, but they took it cheerfully, and made good progress. Each day that passed found them more expert and fitted for their parts, and both Mr. Badger and Mr. Whiffles expressed their satisfaction.

Indeed, Mr. Montague Whiffles congratulated himself upon the motor accident which had been the means of bringing him his new Marquis of Carabas.

On Christmas Eve, after rehearsal, he called Wharton into his office.

"I don't mind telling you," said Mr. Whiffles, "that I'm jolly glad you called on me, Wharton. You're every bit as good as Charley."

"Thank you, sir!"

"Excepting, of course, the name," said Mr. Whiffles hastily. "Of course Charley was known to the public. You're not."

"Yes."

"We haven't mentioned salary so far."

"No, sir."

"I'm going to deal fairly by you," said Mr. Whiffles. "Charley's understudy isn't well yet, by long chalks, and you're welcome to the part for the run of the pantomime. You've told me you're on vacation. Well, I'm keeping you till the end of your vacation, if you like."

"That's ripping, sir!"

"And I'm going to pay you," said Mr. Whiffles generously, "four pounds a week. There!"

Wharton's face fell a little. He did not care about the money himself; it was the fund he was thinking of. Charley Chawkins had had twenty pounds a week in the same part, and Wharton had thought that he might receive half as much. Of course, as Mr. Whiffles said, Charley's name was well known to the public, and Wharton's was quite unknown.

"That's half what Charley had," said Mr. Whiffles. "I don't mind telling you that I'm dealing with you handsomely."

"Half?" murmured Wharton.

"Yes. Charley had twenty in the papers, and eight in the theatre," explained Mr. Whiffles.

"Oh! I—I see!"

Wharton understood then. Charley's "twenty a week" had been one of those fanciful salaries which artistes love. His real "screw," in cash, had been eight pounds.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Whiffles," said Harry.

"You can tell Nugent that he will get a pound. The others will have ten shillings. Satisfied—what?"

"Oh, yes, sir, quite!"

And Wharton thanked the great man, and withdrew.

"Jolly good," said Bob Cherry, when he heard. "Lemme see—four, and one, and seven at ten bob each—we shall bag eight ten a week among us. Why, it will be a giddy fortune by the end of the vac—and all for the war. Long live war-work!"

"I owe my bit to Conchita," said Nugent. "She's awfully good. And she spoke a word for Dutton, too, when Badger found out that he was deaf. I know it was Conchita that prevented Badger from sacking him."

"She is a good sort," agreed Bob Cherry. "She seems to have a lot of influence over Badger."

"Well, she's the leading lady, you know. Besides, I should think that anybody would be glad to do anything that Conchita wanted."

"Go hon!"

"Oh, don't cackle, you ass!"

The juniors walked home in cheery spirits. It was the queerest Christmastide they had ever spent; but they were enjoying it tremendously.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.
The Christmas Pudding!

"MERRY Christmas!" sang out Bob Cherry, as he bounded out of bed the next morning. "Grooh! It's cold! M-m-merry Christmas!"

It was certainly cold. The window-panes were crusted with frost; outside, in the street, the slush was hidden by a fresh fall of snow. But the spirits of the Greyfriars pantomimers were high. After a wash in cold water, they turned out in the street, where ten minutes of merry snowballing gave them a ravenous appetite for the breakfast kipper.

They were quite pleased with their Christmas Day, unusual as it was. Bob Cherry was anticipating the pudding. So were the other fellows—in a somewhat dubious state of mind.

When dinner came round, there was a goose, specially

cooked by Mrs. Jones—the whole Co. having firmly—politely but firmly—declined to entrust it to Bob Cherry. The goose was pronounced ripping, and so were several other items; and then came the pudding.

Bob Cherry turned it out with a flourish.

The juniors looked at it.

"Is it done?" asked Nugent.

"Done to a turn!" said Bob confidently.

"But—but oughtn't a Christmas pudding be rather—rather more solid than treacle?" asked Squiff.

"Oh, draw it mild—it's not like treacle!" said Bob uneasily. "Of course, a Christmas pudding is more digestible if—if it's a bit soft. I don't believe in having 'em like cannon-balls, you know."

"Well, we can eat it with spoons, I suppose," said Johnny Bull thoughtfully.

"Rats! Why can't you eat with a fork?" said Bob warmly.

"Let's see you do it, then."

"Well, look!"

Bob Cherry started with a fork, to show that it could be done. He looked a little queer as the pudding streaked through the prongs of the fork.

"Of course, this makes it easier to get at the fruit," he remarked casually. "Look what ripping raisins there are in it."

"Groooh!" said Peter Todd suddenly.

"What's the matter, fathead?"

"Yow! These raisins ain't stoned!"

"I—I forgot about stoning the raisins," said Bob, after a pause. "But—but it doesn't really make any difference."

"Oh, no, not a bit!" said Wharton cheerily. "Pile in!"

In spite of Bob's example, and his heroic struggles with the fork, the juniors decided to take spoons to that pudding. Wharton negotiated a spoonful, and made a somewhat wry face.

"You haven't been putting any vinegar in it?" he asked.

"Vinegar! Of course not!"

"H'm!"

"Or any furniture-polish?" asked Todd.

"Furniture-polish, you ass? Of course not!"

"H'm!"

"You're not eating your pudding, Squiff."

"The—the fact is, I'm going to send this to Bunter," said Sampson Quincy Iffley Field. "Bunter oughtn't to be left out."

"But there's lots more."

"Still, I'm not going to be greedy. 'Tain't quite the thing, to be stuffing Christmas pudding in war-time."

"Don't you like that pudding, Dutton?" asked Bob.

"Eh?"

"Don't you think it's all right?"

"Nothing to fight about," said Dutton, shaking his head. "I'm surprised at you, Cherry—on Christmas Day, too. Like your cheek to ask us to eat this muck; but there's nothing to fight about!"

"Aren't you going to eat it?" shrieked Bob.

"I should think I could beat it—rather! If I couldn't make a pudding better than that, I'd leave it alone, I can tell you!"

"Why, you silly chump——"

"No, thanks! This lump is enough for me—too much, in fact. I don't want another lump."

"Look here, Dutton——"

"No thanks! I've had enough goose and beef. Besides, there isn't any mutton, so far as I can see."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you going to do with that pudding, Wharton?" asked Bob Cherry, giving Tom Dutton up as a hopeless case.

"I—I was thinking of sending it to—to Skinner."

Bob snorted.

"You're not eating yours, Johnny."

"I'm going to send this to Bolsover major, Bob."

"What rot! You don't like Bolsover."

"No; that's why!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry glared round at the grinning company. The Christmas pudding could not be called a howling success.

"Well, if you fellows turn up your noses at good grub, in war-time, too, I can only say it's unpatriotic!" grunted the maker of the Christmas pudding. "I'm jolly well going to have some. I like that pudding. I think that pudding's ripping!"

"Go it!" said Mark Linley encouragingly. "We'll watch you!"

Bob grunted, and piled in. The first forkful disappeared quickly—the second more slowly—the third more slowly still. A strange expression was coming over Bob Cherry's face. The juniors watched him with great interest. Bob loaded his fork again with the stringy mess, and raised it—and put it down again!

"The—the fact is, I've had enough," he remarked. "Nuff's as good as a feast, you know!"

"The nuff-fulness is terrific, my esteemed Bob!"

"I went rather heavy on the beef, you know," explained Bob. "No good stuffing, even at Christmas-time. Besides, Christmas pudding is really nicer when it's cold. I'm very fond of cold Christmas pudding."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I don't see anything to cackle at!" roared Bob.

But his comrades evidently did, for they persisted in cackling. Bob Cherry put the pudding away very carefully—perhaps hoping that in growing cold it would improve a little in flavour and consistency.

The early evening the juniors spent in Lantham Church, and they came home early to supper and bed. On the following morning was to take place the final dress rehearsal of "Puss-in-Boots"; and on the evening the Theatre Royal was to open with that great panto-

mime, and they would make their bow to the public of the good town of Lantham. They were anticipating the morrow with considerable excitement.

Bob Cherry placed the cold Christmas pudding on the supper-table, with a somewhat grim look at his chums. He helped himself generously, and began operations with a fork.

"You don't want any of this pudding, I suppose?" he said sarcastically.

"Rather indigestible just before going to bed, you know," said Wharton diplomatically

"We want to be fit to-morrow," remarked Nugent.

"Well, I'm jolly well going to tuck in, anyway!"

"Go it, old scout!"

Bob Cherry was determined to go it. But he did not get further than the second forkful. Then he laid down his fork.

"Come to think of it, Christmas pudding is indigestible just before going to bed," he remarked. "No good being a glutton, like Bunter."

"Not a bit of good," grinned Nugent.

"Besides, it's rather rotten to be scoffing Christmas pudding when the fellows in the trenches haven't any," said Bob. "I didn't think of that before. On the whole, we won't eat the Christmas pudding at all."

"Hear, hear!"

"I'll pack it up to-morrow, and send it to the chaps at the Front."

"My hat!"

"If you send it to the Front, you jolly well send it to the Germans, then!" said Squiff warmly. "What have our fellows done?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly good idea!" said Peter Todd heartily. "Send it to the Germans, and swell their casualty list!"

"You—you—you silly ass!" stuttered Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry picked up the dish, and carried away the famous Christmas pudding. What became of it the juniors did not know; but Bob returned without it, and it was not seen again. And Bob declared categorically that he would never, under any circumstances, cook a Christmas pudding again for such a set of grinning asses—for which statement the company immediately passed a hearty vote of thanks.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.
Boxing Night!

BOXING DAY!

It had come at last—the great day!

With much suppressed excitement, the heroes of Greyfriars attended the full-dress rehearsal at the Theatre Royal. Mr. Badger was in a temper, a little more so than usual. Mr. Whiffles was excited, and ejaculated "Good gad!" incessantly. Mr. Klack brandished his baton and himself more energetically than ever in the orchestra.

But the dress rehearsal went excellently.

All was in order.

After the rehearsal Miss Conchita stood chatting for a few moments in the wings with Mr. Badger. The stage-manager appeared to be very ruffled, and he glanced towards Frank Nugent several times as he spoke to the Fairy Queen. Conchita laughed, and pinched his ear as she had pinched Nugent's. Frank saw the action, and he turned quite pale.

"Come on, Franky!" said Wharton. "Time we were off!"

"Eh—what?"

"Come on, kid!"

"I'll follow you."

Wharton looked at him in surprise. Nugent's eyes were fastened upon Conchita. The girl had placed one of her dainty little cigarettes between Mr. Badger's lips, and was making him light it from her own. Mr. Badger was wriggling and grinning uncomfortably, probably feeling ridiculous, but evidently quite under the sway of the Fairy Queen.

"You old goose!" said the Fairy Queen, when the cigarette was lighted.

Mr. Badger grunted.

Conchita laughed, and ran away, and Mr. Badger went on smoking the cigarette. Nugent gripped Wharton's arm almost convulsively.

"Let's go!" he muttered.

"Right-ho!"

Wharton and Nugent hurried after the others, who were waiting in the street outside the stage-door. They started for Slocum Street, and Wharton dropped behind a little with Nugent. He was a little anxious about his chum.

"For goodness' sake, buck up, Franky!" he said, in a low voice. "You're looking like a giddy ghost!"

"I—I—I——" Nugent choked. "Harry, old man. I—I'm an idiot, I know——"

"I know!"

"But—but—— Look here Harry! Just tell me! It's impossible, isn't it?"

"What is?"

"That—that Conchita could see anything in that tubby old bounder? Of—of course, she—she has to be civil to him, as he's her manager."

"Of course," agreed Wharton.

"But she can't like him, can she?"

"Well, he isn't a bad sort, and he seems to let her have her way in everything," said Harry.

"I suppose he's in love with her!" said Nugent fiercely.

"I've thought so, certainly. Why shouldn't he be, Frank? Don't be an ass, old chap!"

"I suppose I'm an ass," said Nugent miserably. "But—but, of course, you wouldn't understand. Don't laugh at me, Wharton, or—or I shall quarrel with you!"

"I'm not going to laugh at you, Frank," said Harry, perplexed and worried. "But, really, you know, how can you be a thumping ass like that—you, a kid of fifteen?"

"Well, she's only seventeen."

"My dear old chap, she's older than she looks," urged Wharton. "Besides—— Blessed if I know what to say! You're such an ass! You ought not to be thinking about her at all! You know that as well as I do!"

"Why not?" growled Nugent. "Why shouldn't I? Isn't she a ripping girl? What does it matter to me if she smokes? Most stage people do."

"Of course, that doesn't matter. But—but——" Wharton hardly knew what to say. "But—— Dash it all, Frank, you're not going to tell me that you've fallen in love with the Fairy Queen?"

"Yes, I have!" muttered Nugent. "Don't laugh, or——" He broke off. "I suppose it seems idiotic to you?"

"Yes; it jolly well does."

"I'm not such a kid, and she's only a bit older; nothing to speak of. I—I'm not a fool. I don't expect her to take any notice of me; only—only to see her chummy with that ugly old man, old enough to be her father—— She—she pinched his ear, Harry."

"Well, she's pinched yours, too."

"Oh, you don't understand! I—I wouldn't care; only if—if she didn't care for anybody else. I—I only want just to see her, you know, every day, and—and talk to her sometimes—just a word or two now and then; only—only when I see her being nice to anybody else it makes me——"

He choked again

It was jealousy that was tormenting the poor lad—all the more bitter because he knew how unreasonable and ridiculous it was. He had known Conchita only a week; he had no claim upon her of any kind. Indeed, he was a nobody, and she was the leading lady in the pantomime company. It was absurd, but it was none the less real for all that.

Nugent relapsed into silence, and walked on, his hands driven deep into his pockets, his eyes on the ground.

He scarcely spoke a word during the afternoon.

When the juniors, full of excitement, started for the theatre for the performance Nugent went with them, quiet and depressed. All the pleasure of the pantomime was gone out, for him.

The dressing-room accommodation at the Lantham theatre was not extensive. There was a crowd and a crush. Wharton, as the Marquis of Carabas, had the assistance of a dresser, but the other fellows had to look

after themselves. They were quite in the way of it now, however, and they were soon attired for their parts.

When Wharton's dressing was finished he looked for Nugent. He was anxious about him. The theatre was filling. Mr. Whiffles was in happy anticipation of a full house for Boxing Night.

Nugent had to appear in the first scene, which represented the Fairy Court, as a special emissary from the King of the Cats. Wharton found him in a shadowy corner of the dressing-room, sitting, with a moody brow, and not having made a movement towards preparing for his part.

He shook the gloomy junior by the shoulder.

"Frank," he exclaimed, "get changed, for goodness' sake! They'll be calling for you in ten minutes! The curtain goes up then."

"Eh? Oh, all right!"

"I'll help you," said Harry anxiously. "Frank, don't be an ass! If you let down the first scene there'll be a fearful row!"

Nugent rose moodily, and allowed Wharton to help him into his costume as a Cat Courtier. With a cat-mask and a furry coat, and a long, furry tail whisking behind him, he was dressed for the part.

"Buck up, old chap!" said Harry. "Got your lines?"

"My lines?" muttered Nugent.

"Yes; you have to answer the Fairy Queen."

"I—I'd forgotten. What do I say?" muttered Nugent confusedly.

Wharton looked at him in dismay. The voice of the call-boy could be heard in the passages.

"Beginners, please!"

"Where's your scrip?" muttered Wharton hurriedly. "Look it up—quick! You haven't much to say. When Conchita asks you whence you come, you know, you say—— Look!

"'From Tomcatland I came at break of day,
Where King Grimalkin holds his regal sway.
My royal lord and King is on his way.'"

"Yes, yes; I'll remember."

Wharton led him out of the dressing-room. Ted Higgins bowled along the passage.

"'Ere you are! Why ain't you in the wings, young 'un? 'Ook it!"

Nugent hesitated.

"Buck up, Frank!"

"I—I can't go on!"

"You must!" said Harry. "Pull yourself together! Here comes Badger!"

The stage-manager came down on the unfortunate Frank like a lion in his wrath.

"Is that you? What are you doing here? Get into your place! Do you know the curtain's just on the rise? Do you want the sack? Get a move on, you young fool!"

And Mr. Badger fairly dragged Nugent along by his shoulder. Wharton followed him to the wings anxiously. There, Nugent shook himself fiercely free from Mr. Badger's grasp.

"Let me alone!" he muttered savagely.

The stage-manager gasped. Certainly he had never been spoken to in that tone before, in the Theatre Royal or any other theatre.

"What—what!" he stuttered. "Here, out you go! We'll cut the lines! Higgins, kick this young fool out of the theatre!"

"Don't!" said a soft voice, as Conchita glided up.

"Conchita, I tell you——" raved Mr. Badger.

"Leave him to me, Fred. The poor kid is nervous, that's all," said Conchita quietly. "Go and bully someone else, Freddy, there's a good boy!"

Mr. Badger seemed on the point of a Vesuvian explosion, but he controlled himself, and turned away muttering, and said something very emphatic to the unlucky Ted, who was the nearest object upon which his wrath could be poured.

"Pull yourself together, Frank!" said Conchita kindly.

Nugent looked at her with gleaming eyes. She had called Mr. Badger "Fred." The girl looked puzzled for a moment.

"Is it nerves?" she whispered.

"No!" said Nugent sullenly.

"What is the matter, my dear boy?"

"Nothing!" The kindness in her voice melted Nugent's sullenness at once. "I—I'm sorry. I'll do my best!"

"I'm sure you won't spoil my scene," whispered Conchita softly. "Come, show me your lines. Let me see if you remember them."

"How good you are!" muttered Frank.

Conchita smiled, and pinched his ear, which would have been a full consolation for his many troubles if he had not remembered that she had bestowed the same honour upon Mr. Badger's fat ear.

However, Conchita went over his opening lines with him, and it was impossible to resist the influence of her kindness. Conchita's manner was, indeed, motherly towards him at that moment, though Nugent did not realise it. What comforted him was the thought that Conchita, after all, liked him better than she liked the obnoxious and unspeakable Badger.

"Are you going on, Conchita?" It was Mr. Badger's voice again. "How long are you going to fool with that silly young idiot?"

"I'm going on!" said Conchita brightly. "Now, you are word-perfect, Frank; and mind, I rely upon you for the success of my scene."

Conchita glided on the stage without waiting for Frank's reply. The poor lad's heart was in his eyes. Mr. Badger glanced at him curiously for a moment, and then burst into a gruff but not ill-natured laugh, and turned away.

The stage represented the Fairy Court, with dazzling swarms of fairies ranged round the golden throne of the Queen. Upon that dazzling scene the curtain rose, to sweet strains of music from the orchestra, and wild gesticulations from Mr. Klack.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.
The Pantomime!

THE house was full.

Boxes and stalls, pit and gallery, were crowded.

From the wings, Nugent caught a glimpse of the house—a sea of white faces and watching eyes. A dance was beginning in the Fairy Court. Wharton kept by the side of his chum. He was pretty certain that Nugent was not listening for his cue; his eyes were fastened on the Fairy Queen—who, indeed, looked a vision of loveliness at that moment.

The dance ended, and a voice piped:

"Lo! The messenger from King Grimalkin!"

It was Nugent's cue, but he did not move. Wharton pressed his arm.

"Go it, Franky!"

Nugent started, and hurried forward. He came out into public view on the stage far from gracefully, very nearly tripping over the long tail that whisked behind him, and which he had forgotten. In utter confusion, he stumbled, and fell on one knee. Mr. Badger, in the wings, ground his teeth with rage. But the Fairy Queen "gagged" gracefully, without an instant's hesitation:

"Who is the knight that swiftly comes to me,
And to our Royal Highness bends the knee?"

The lines were "gagged." They were not in the Fairy Queen's part, but invented on the spur of the moment, to give the audience the impression that Nugent's involuntary stumble was in his part.

Nugent understood. The voice of the Fairy Queen, and the warning look she gave him, pulled him together. He rose and delivered his lines, his voice faint at first, but growing clearer as he regained his courage:

"From Tomcatland I came at break of day,
Where King Grimalkin holds his regal sway!"

From that moment Nugent was quite himself. He forgot the sea of faces in front, he forgot the obnoxious

Mr. Badger, and remembered only that Conchita had asked him to help her scene. He did very well, but he was glad when he found himself in the wings again. Streaky-whiskers—otherwise Billy Scrooge—was holding the audience now, and, in spite of Mr. Scrooge's fault-finding with his part, he was sending the good folk of Lantham into screams of laughter.

"Good old Franky!" whispered Wharton, as Nugent joined him, panting for breath. "It was all serene—right as a trivet!"

"I couldn't have got through without her!" muttered Nugent. "Isn't she an angel."

"Yes, rather!"

"Don't hang about there," grumbled Mr. Badger. "You won't be wanted again for an hour yet, thank goodness!

Nugent moved away angrily, but he did not go far; he wanted to watch the Fairy Queen. The pantomime was proceeding in great style, and Conchita was producing her usual effect upon the audience. Wharton waited with a beating heart for his cue. His thoughts were not, like Nugent's, bent upon the Fairy Queen. He was thinking of his part, and his intention of making a success of it if he could. He was word-perfect, he knew that, and Mr. Whiffles had told him that he looked the part down to the ground, and he had reason to have confidence in himself.

But his heart thumped as the time drew near for his cue.

Amateur acting at Greyfriars, before an audience of his schoolfellows, was very different from this. And his part was not a small one, like Frank's; it was a principal part—next to that of Puss-in-Boots himself. A theatre crammed with strangers was his audience now, and the thought of it gave him a thrill. He tried not to think of it; he knew it would be wiser not to do so. He did not feel "stage-fright"—only a fear that stage-fright might seize upon him.

Mr. Montgomery Tadger clapped him kindly on the shoulder. Puss-in-Boots was a good-natured gentleman of forty.

"Cheero, young 'un!" said Mr. Tadger. "Feeling fit—what?"

"Yes!" gasped Wharton.

"You look first-rate!" said Mr. Tadger. "Got your cue all right?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Don't think about the people in front. Think of the fiftieth or sixtieth time that you'll be playing the part, when it will be everyday bizney to you!"

Wharton smiled; it was good advice. He realised that when he had played the part a dozen times it would have become commonplace to him, and no thought of stage-fright would enter his mind.

"That's a good tip," he said. "Many thanks!"

Mr. Tadger's cue came at that moment, and the easy way in which he made his entrance was reassuring to Wharton. What Mr. Tadger could do, he could do.

Mr. Tadger's name was well known, and a murmur of applause greeted the entry of Puss-in-Boots.

Wharton watched with all his eyes. He made sure that his plumed hat was right, and his velvet cloak correctly adjusted. He took a hasty glance into a little mirror. His face, made up for the stage, was highly coloured, and looked very handsome. It was all serene. His cue came at last.

Mr. Tadger's voice was heard.

"But lo! My master comes, right on the nail!
Hail to the Lord of Carabas! All hail!"

Wharton advanced from the wings.

There was a murmur from the audience as he appeared. He heard it, without understanding that it implied admiration and approval. The junior cut a very handsome figure as the Marquis of Carabas.

His lines came instinctively to his lips, with no effort of memory:

"A nobleman am I, though poor, alas!
Mine are the fair broad lands of Carabas!"

And so on and so forth. Every moment Wharton felt more at home in his part. A dance with the Fairy Queen was included in the act, and this time, fortunately, the Fairy Queen was not smoking a cigarette, as she had persistently done in the rehearsals.

Frank Nugent was watching.

He had pushed aside the cat-mask from his face; he felt suffocated. What luck it was for Wharton to be dancing with the Fairy Queen! Nugent did not envy his chum his good luck so far as the part went; he rejoiced in Wharton's success. But to see him dancing with Conchita——

Nugent set his teeth hard.

Was he growing jealous of his own chum? He drove the miserable thought from his mind.

But his face was very gloomy when the scene ended, and Wharton came off the stage. Wharton's face was bright. There had been a ripple of applause and hand-clapping, and he knew that he had been successful.

Mr. Montague Whiffles was in the wings, expansive in evening clothes, with a big shirt-front and a big diamond. He clapped Wharton enthusiastically on the shoulder.

"Saved!" he ejaculated dramatically.

"Eh?" said Harry

Mr. Whiffles rubbed his hands.

"Thank goodness Charley bunked, after all!" he said. "You're better than Charley—better, I tell you, to say nothing of your looks! Charley wasn't a bewt! Good gad! I made a discovery when I discovered you, kid! Don't get swelled-headed about it, but you're a find—one of Montague Whiffles' finds!"

Wharton grinned. He had an impression that he had found Mr. Whiffles, not that Mr. Whiffles had found him. But Mr. Whiffles was evidently regarding that acquisition as a proof of his own managerial genius.

"Congratulate me, Franky!" said Wharton, pinching Nugent's arm.

Nugent started.

"I'm jolly glad, Harry," he said. "You did well—rippingly! I'm jolly glad!"

But he spoke absently. His eyes were on Conchita, who had come off, and was speaking to Mr. Badger. The Fairy Queen was in great spirits, pleased with her own success, and the success of the pantomime. Mr. Badger's crusty face had considerably relaxed, too. The "people in front" were giving the pantomime a great reception, and its success was now assured.

Wharton followed Nugent's glance. Conchita's manner towards the stage-manager was decidedly affectionate, and Mr. Badger beamed upon her. They moved away together, speaking in low tones.

"I—I'm going!" muttered Nugent.

"Franky——"

Nugent hurried away.

Wharton could not follow him. In the next scene he was wanted for a single combat with the Ogre, and he had to await his cue. Nugent disappeared.

Wharton's cue came, and he rushed on, sword in hand; and the combat was loudly cheered by the crowded house. When he was off the scene again, Wharton looked round for his chum, but Nugent was not to be seen. A little later Ted Higgins was scouring the passages for the Cat Courtier, but he had to report to Mr. Badger that Nugent could not be found. Mr. Badger, grinding his teeth, sent a hurried message into the orchestra; and Mr. Billy Scrooge "gagged" heroically, and Nugent's brief part was "cut" without the audience knowing anything about it. Wharton, concerned as he was for his chum, was too busily occupied to think about it; he had plenty to do. Luckily, Nugent was not wanted again, excepting to take part in the general chorus at the climax; and in that swarm he was not missed.

It was over at last—the last scene had been played out—and there were loud calls for Conchita, for Puss-in-Boots, for Billy Scrooge, and the Marquis of Carabas. With a beating heart, Wharton appeared before the curtain, led by the hand by Conchita, and retired again amid loud applause.

Mr. Montague Whiffles was in the seventh heaven; his venture was a pronounced success, and Mr. Badger predicted a good run for the panto. The whole company

THE SOLDIERS' SANTA-CLAUS SHIP!

This picture shows a liner containing thousands of Christmas presents for our brave Tommies in the trenches being escorted on its journey across the Channel, to ensure its safety from enemy submarines.

shared the satisfaction of the manager, with one insignificant exception. There was no room for satisfaction in Frank Nugent's heart.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.
A Little Surprise!

"FRANK!"

Conchita's voice was low and clear.

Nugent started.

In a remote spot behind the scenes he had been long alone—alone with his bitter misery and jealousy. He crimsoned as he met Conchita's kind and puzzled glance.

"Why did you miss your call, Frank?"

"Did I?" muttered Nugent.

"Don't you know you did? Mr. Badger was furious."

"I—I suppose I did. Hang Badger!"

"What!"

"I suppose he'll sack me," said Nugent bitterly. "All the better. I should have to go, anyway."

"Are you ill, Frank?"

"No."

Conchita looked at him curiously.

"Come with me," she said.

Frank hesitated a moment, and then followed the Fairy Queen to her dressing-room. Conchita was still in her fairy garb, and looked a picture of loveliness. Conchita's dressing-room was very different from that of the lesser lights; it was a very elegant apartment, with shaded lights and luxurious appointments. Her dresser stared at the junior as he came in. At a gesture from Conchita, she retired to the adjoining room. Conchita sat down, and motioned Frank to a seat.

Nugent dropped into the chair, rather than sat. He was in a reckless and utterly miserable mood.

"Now," said Conchita, "tell me, what is the matter?"

"I—I can't," stammered Nugent, crimsoning again.

"Why not?"

"You'd laugh at me."

"I won't laugh at you, my dear boy."

"I—I don't know why you're so kind to me!" muttered Frank miserably. "I'm nobody, and you——"

Conchita laughed.

"Tell me what is the matter. Why don't you like Mr. Badger?"

"I hate him!"

"But—but why?"

"Because—because——"

"Well, because?"

"Because I think you like him," said Frank.

"Why shouldn't I like him?"

Nugent was silent. Conchita's eyes scanned the crimson, handsome face of the junior curiously. Then she burst into a sudden, soft laugh.

"Oh, Frank, you ridiculous boy!"

"I suppose I'm ridiculous!" muttered Frank. "I—I suppose you'd think so. You don't think that a chap of my age could—could——"

"Fall in love?" smiled Conchita.

"Yes," said Nugent desperately. "I'm not ashamed of it, either. You—you don't know what I think of you, Conchita; you can't guess. And I'm not a little boy, as you keep on saying; you're not much older than I am. You're only two years older at the most, and that ain't so very much. There's not such a tremendous difference between fifteen and seventeen, though you seem to think there is."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I knew you'd laugh at me," said Nugent moodily. "I—I'd better go. I know you think I'm a fool."

"I won't laugh, Frank. I—I must say that I think you are a little foolish," said Conchita softly. "But you have paid me a great compliment. My dear boy, I liked you from the first moment I saw you, because—because ——"

Frank's eyes sparkled.

"You liked me, Conchita?"

"Yes, my dear, because—— Dear Frank, you must prepare for a shock."

"I don't understand."

"Because you were so good and kind and simple and unsuspecting, that you reminded me of my own youth, and brought back to me many feelings and thoughts that had been long forgotten," said Conchita quietly.

Frank sat petrified.

"Your—your—your youth!" he murmured dazedly.

"My youth," said Conchita. "My dear little friend, I am not old enough to have lost all my vanity, and I was pleased and amused when you supposed that I was a girl of seventeen. My dear, on the stage we do not grow old. But it is twenty years since I was seventeen."

"Twenty years! Then you are—are——"

"Thirty-seven," said Conchita.

"Impossible!"

"But true."

Frank Nugent looked at the sweet, smiling face, where the ravages of the years were so carefully hidden. Was it possible? He knew that his chums supposed that Conchita was twenty-five, and he had laughed the idea to scorn. But thirty-seven! His face flooded with scarlet. What an utter, utter fool Conchita must think him! Thirty-seven! And he was fifteen!

"Now you will see what a silly boy you are," said Conchita softly. "Don't repeat what I have told you, Frank. Ladies do not like to have their exact age known—especially in my profession. Professionally, I am supposed to be twenty-five. And"—her charming face dimpled in a mischievous smile—"I did not smoke till after I was twenty-one."

Nugent gasped.

"Now you are going to forget all that nonsense, and we are going to be very good friends," said Conchita "And you will not hate Mr. Badger any more."

"I—I—no—I——"

"I want you to like Mr. Badger."

"Why?" muttered Frank.

"Because I am engaged to him."

"Oh!"

That was the climax.

Nugent staggered to his feet. His brain was in a whirl. He would have given whole worlds for the floor to open and swallow him up. Conchita pinched his ear affectionately.

"You are not cross, Frank?" she said.

"No—oh, no! Only—only what a fool you must think me! What a fool I am!" said Nugent. "I—I beg your pardon!"

Conchita laugned.

"And you will be very civil to Mr. Badger—yes? Ah, here he is!"

There was a tap at the door, and Mr. Badger stepped in.

"Conchita, old girl, it's ripping! I've just been to the box-office, and—— Hallo!" Mr. Badger broke off as he caught sight of Nugent. "What's that kid doing here?"

"I have been lecturing him," said Conchita calmly. "He is going to beg your pardon, Fred, for his failure this evening, and promise amendment, and you are going to give him another chance."

Mr. Badger grunted.

Nugent pulled himself together.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said. "I—I've been a fool, and I'm sorry. If you'll excuse me, I'll be more careful."

"All right; cut off," said Mr. Badger good-humouredly. Where was that attack of "calf-love" that had caused him so much bitterness and trouble? Gone? Quite gone, without leaving a trace behind. He laughed as he went down the passage. What a fool Conchita must think him! But he determined that he would repay her kindness somehow; she would see that he wasn't such a fool, after all, and that he knew how to be grateful.

THE TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

Conclusion.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Here he is!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were waiting for Nugent at the stage-door.

Wharton regarded his chum a little anxiously as he came up. But Nugent's expression relieved him.

"Where on earth have you been?" asked Squiff.

"I've been speaking to Conchita."

"Popping the question!" chuckled Bob.

"Don't be an ass, Bob!"

"Well, I thought——"

"Oh, rats! I don't think I've ever known such a really splendid, kind-hearted lady as Conchita," said Frank. "By the way, I don't know whether it's generally known, so you needn't jaw about it, but I may as well tell you—she's engaged to Badger."

"Engaged to Badger!"

"My hat!"

"Yes; he isn't a bad sort, either," said Frank. "He's going to give me another chance, after the muck I made of it this evening. I rather like Badger."

"You—you rather like him!" murmured Wharton.

"Yes. He's a bit short-tempered, but, of course, a stage-manager has lots of worries. He's good-hearted."

"And—and you don't mind——" ejaculated Johnny Bull.

"Don't mind what?"

"The engagement."

"Why should I mind?"

"Franky, old chap," said Wharton, "you're not such a silly idiot as you supposed you were. You've dug up some common-sense from somewhere."

"Thanks!"

"Not at all. Let's go and scout for some supper; we ought to stand a little extra to-night, after a whacking success all round."

"Righto!" said Nugent cheerily. "I'm jolly hungry—almost hungry enough to eat some of Bob's Christmas pudding."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Greyfriars pantomimers marched off in the greatest of spirits.

"Puss-in-Boots" at the Theatre Royal in Lantham had a good run. And every night the Greyfriars juniors played their parts till the end of the vacation. After Boxing Night Frank Nugent gave complete satisfaction, and Mr. Badger was even pleased to give him a word of commendation.

The end of the vacation came all too soon, and places had to be filled in the pantomime cast at the Theatre Royal. Mr. Montague Whiffles did not disguise his regret at parting with his schoolboy recruits. But the parting had to be, and the iniquitous Charley's understudy was quite prepared to take Wharton's part, and the minor places were very easily filled. The juniors took quite an affectionate leave of the kind Mr. Whiffles and of the beautiful Conchita.

It had been a merry Christmastide—one of the best. But best of all was the sum they had raised, by their own exertions, for the good cause—a sum of nearly forty pounds, which was duly expended in "tuck," and sent on to the prisoners in Germany. And Bob Cherry remarked that if that wasn't war-work, he would like to know what was. And many a brave fellow in the German prison camps was glad of the result of Harry Wharton & Co.'s Pantomime.

THE END.

(Do not miss "Bunter the Masher!" next week's grand story of the chums of Greyfriars by Frank Richards.)

CHRISTMAS MAGIC!

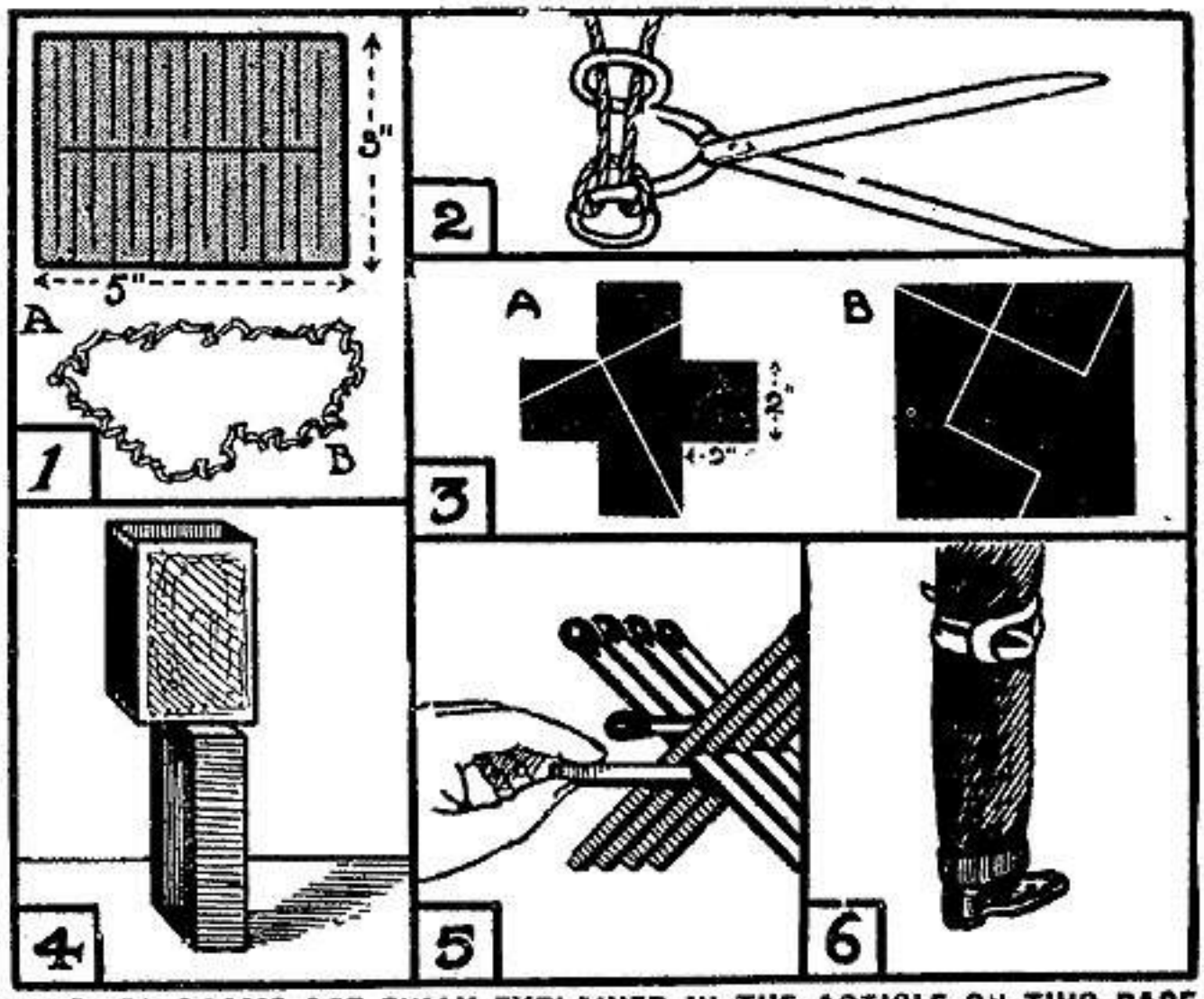
EASILY ACCOMPLISHED AND ENTERTAINING TRICKS FOR THE FESTIVE SEASON - -

THE NOTEPAPER SURPRISE.

Take a piece of fairly stout notepaper about five inches wide and three inches deep. Show this to your friends, and inform them that you will cut it in such a way that it will be possible for you to pass your whole body through it. The paper will still be kept in one piece, and you will not join it in any way after cutting.

"Impossible!" they will exclaim.

You then pick up a pair of scissors, and cut the paper as marked in Sketch 1 (A). Give it a little shake, and it will come out as in Sketch 1 (B). The cuts can best be made by folding the paper in halves, first one way and then the other.



THESE DIAGRAMS ARE FULLY EXPLAINED IN THE ARTICLE ON THIS PAGE.

THE NEWSPAPER RINGS MYSTERY

This is a splendid little trick, which will cause much surprise and amusement.

Cut three strips, about one and a half inches in width, along the entire length of a double sheet of newspaper which has been opened out. With a little gum or paste join the ends, thereby making three large paper rings. The first ring you paste up in a straightforward manner, but the second you must twist once before joining, and the third you must twist twice. If carried out deftly, this twisting will not be noticed by the audience.

Now ask the audience what would happen if the three rings were cut down the centre lengthwise.

"You will then have six rings!" they will naturally reply.

You then proceed to cut them.

The first ring comes out in two, as the audience expected; but, to their astonishment, the second comes out in one large ring, and the third comes out in two small rings linked together.

THE BANDAGE THAT PASSES THROUGH YOUR LEG.

An ordinary large-sized pocket-handkerchief is all that is needed for this trick.

Inform your audience that you will bind it twice tightly round your leg, and will tie it in a knot. By one quick jerk you will then free yourself of the bandage, leaving the knot intact.

This is how it is done:

When putting the handkerchief round your leg, make a loop behind, and twist it round this loop. The two ends of the handkerchief will thus be taken only half-way round the leg, and then brought to the front again and tied. You will better understand this trick by carefully studying Sketch 6. It needs practising a little to be performed effectively, and care must be taken to keep your audience in front of you.

THE SCISSORS TRICK.

Thread a piece of string, about a yard long, through the handles of a pair of scissors, as shown in Sketch 2. Take hold of the loose ends of the string, and then ask members of your audience to release the scissors without forcing you to let go of the string. Unless they are acquainted with the trick, they will give up in despair.

You then ask one of them to take the loose ends of the string from you, and proceed to release the scissors in this way.

Take hold of the loop between the eyes of the scissors, thread it through the top eye, bring it back over the lower eye, and then over the points; pull the scissors away from the string, and—hey, presto!—they are free.

THE MAGIC MATCHBOX.

Place the cover of a matchbox on the drawer, as shown in Sketch 4, and ask your friends what would happen if you brought your fist down as hard as possible on the construction.

"You will smash the box!" is their likely answer.

You then strike the blow, but, instead of breaking the box, you will find that it simply flies off the table on to the floor, much to the surprise of your audience. Ask them to try it, and they will fail to smash the box, as you did.

AN INGENIOUS TRICK WITH MATCHES.

Count out ten matches, lay nine of them on the table, and inform your friends that you will balance them all on the remaining match.

Invite some of them to try to do it, and much amusement will be caused by their vain efforts.

Then show them how easily it can be done by arranging the matches thus:

Lay one match on the table, put eight others across it on alternate sides, with the heads inwards, and then place the last match on the top. You will then be able to pick them all up on the bottom one, as shown in Sketch 5.

THE PAPER CROSS PUZZLE.

Cut out a number of paper crosses, with all the points of the same dimensions shown in Sketch 3 (A). Hand them round to the audience, and ask them to cut them, with two straight cuts, so that the pieces will form a complete square. Keep one aside for yourself, so that you can show them how it is done.

After you have had some fun out of their futile efforts, cut

the cross you have placed aside, as shown by the white lines in Sketch 3 (A), and the pieces will form a complete square, as shown in Sketch 3 (B).

THE MYSTERY OF THE BROKEN MATCH.

Have ready a hemstitched handkerchief, with a match concealed beneath the hem. Let your audience witness you place a second match in the handkerchief, carefully wrap it up, and then present it to several of them to break. They will feel the match inside the handkerchief, and will think they are breaking the one you have placed there, but you will be careful to present to them the one that is concealed in the hem. Great will be their surprise, therefore, when you open the handkerchief, and show them the match again quite intact.

A COIN SURPRISE.

Place a threepenny-piece a short distance from a penny, and ask your friends to carefully survey both coins. After they have done so, ask them how many threepenny-pieces, laid flat upon the table, could be completely covered by a penny.

To this they will probably answer "Four or five." You can now point out to them that the diameter of a threepenny-piece is just over half that of a penny, and, therefore, it is only possible to completely cover one. Their bad guessing, of course, is simply due to an optical illusion.

SHADOWS—AN AMUSING GAME.

The game of "Shadows" is a splendid way in which to pass a pleasant half-hour. Stretch a large white sheet tightly across a three-fold clothes-horse. One person sits in front of this while the others pass in turn across it at the other side. A light should be arranged so that the shadow of the persons passing across the sheet falls directly upon it. The player sitting in front has to guess the identity of each person whose shadow falls on the sheet; failing this, he or she must pay a forfeit. If, however, the guess is a correct one, the player named takes the place of the one in front of the sheet.

ANOTHER SURPRISE.

Tell your friends that you will bring to their notice something that both sinks and floats in the same liquid.

Of course, they will be curious to know what the object is.

Now, you are sure to have raisins at Christmas, so take a pip from one of them, and place it in a glass of soda-water.

The pip will immediately sink to the bottom, but in a short time the gas bubbles will gather around it and bring it to the surface. The bubbles will burst, and the pip again sinks to the bottom. It will keep rising and sinking alternately whilst the soda-water is in a gaseous condition.

THE DISAPPEARING SIXPENCE.

In the first place we must have two sixpences, as nearly alike as possible in appearance, and one of these you take an early opportunity to drop under the table at which you propose to perform the trick. Have ready also a small piece of beeswax that has been kneaded between the fingers until it is fairly soft.

Now spread an ordinary pocket-handkerchief out on the table, place the remaining sixpence in the middle of it, and then fold over the corners of the handkerchief so as to hide the coin from view. The beeswax should be secretly stuck to the first corner folded over, and pressed over the sixpence so that it adheres to it.

Ask your audience to make quite sure that the coin is in the handkerchief. This they can do by pressing the fingers on it and feeling the coin beneath the folds, but at the same time they will be causing the coin to stick more tightly to the handkerchief.

Now comes the exciting moment.

"Ladies and gentlemen," you say, "I am going to make the sixpence pass right through the table, and it will be found upon the floor. If you will all be very quiet, perhaps you will hear it fall." They won't, of course, but if you make a slight noise with your feet, they will imagine they did.

Make a few mysterious motions with your hands above the handkerchief, and say, "Presto! Go!" Then pick up the handkerchief so that the corner containing the coin is near the top, and shake it out vigorously to prove that the coin has disappeared. Now secretly dispose of the coin sticking to it. "Look under the table, and you will find the sixpence there!" you can tell your audience, and while they are thus engaged you will have ample opportunity of getting rid of the other coin unobserved.

AN AMUSING COTTON TRICK.

Place a reel of white cotton in your pocket, leaving one end—about two inches long—of the cotton just visible on your coat. Some member of the party is sure to notice this, and, thinking that the piece showing is merely a piece of "fluff," will attempt to pick it off. What a surprise he will have on finding that instead of being one small piece there are yards of it.

A GOOD "CATCH."

Announce to your audience that you will place a glass of water on the table, cover it completely with a hat, and then drink the water without removing the hat. This will sound an impossible task, and they will all be anxious to see how it is done.

It is done in this way. Place the glass of water in the centre of the table, borrow a bowler-hat, and place it over the glass.

Now go under the table, and make a pretence of drinking the water through it. Everyone will, of course, be sceptical, but on coming from under the table you ask one of the audience to remove the hat to see if the water has been drunk or not. As soon as this is done, you can seize the glass and drink the water. Now announce to your surprised audience that you have done exactly as you said you would do—namely, drink the water without removing the hat, as someone else has removed the hat for you.

A TRICK WITH DOMINOES.

Form seven dominoes into a double arch, thus: Two on either side standing on their narrow edges, two more laid flat across the top of these, two on either side of the latter two, standing on their narrow edges, and one placed across the top. Now you have a double arch.

Place a domino standing on its wide edge just in front of the construction, place your forefinger through the lower arch, and then sharply tilt the domino which you have placed in front so that it strikes against the two dominoes in the middle of your arch, and you will find that the middle dominoes will fall out, leaving the rest of the construction in the form of one high arch.

Care must be taken, of course, to get the two sides of the top arch directly above those at the bottom.

ANOTHER LITTLE "CATCH."

Produce an ordinary blacklead pencil and a sheet of writing paper, and then ask your audience to examine them closely.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," you remark, "you notice, no doubt, that this is rather a peculiar-looking pencil. In point of fact, it is an electric pencil. At present you see it writes plain black like any other pencil." Here make a few marks with the pencil on the paper, and then proceed: "But if I electrify it a little, it will write red, blue, or yellow—in fact, any colour, just as I please. What colour will you have? Choose for yourselves."

"Red," we will suppose is the reply.

Now breathe upon the point of the pencil, rub it on your coat-sleeve, and write the word "RED" in bold letters, and nobody can deny that you have fulfilled your promise.

SIMPLE THOUGHT-READING.

To wind up your entertainment, surprise your friends with a little thought-reading. This is how it is done:

Invite your audience to write questions on several pieces of paper, and fold them up so that you cannot possibly see the writing. You then collect the papers, and place them into a hat. Place the hat on your head, and in a thoughtful and serious way exclaim, "Someone has asked me——"

This first question must be an invention of your own, but you proceed to answer it. Next you take a slip of paper from the hat, carefully note the question it contains, but read out your own invented question, as if verifying your previous remarks. You now have the information for the next question.

Thus you continue till all the slips of paper are exhausted, including one with your own question on, which you must previously conceal under the band of the hat, and which you should be careful to take out last.

Another method of thought-reading is to hand round slips of paper, and tell each of your friends to write any message they wish thereon, and you will write exactly the same on a separate piece, without seeing what they have written.

All you have to do is to write the words, "Exactly the same" on your piece of paper, and as you collect the messages from your friends, show this to them. Although the trick is obviously "a catch," they cannot deny that you have fulfilled your promise.

The Rubies of Sheba.

By EDWIN WOOTON.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS OF A GREAT NEW SERIAL STORY OF MYSTERY AND ADVENTURE.

The managers of the BYZANTINE GEM SYNDICATE call upon SIR WILLIAM CRANSTON, manager of the GREAT SOUTHERN BANK, to demand the return of the SHEBA RUBIES, which they have previously placed in the bank's keeping.

The interview is interrupted by a detective and another person, who request Sir William to hand the rubies over to them, as they hold a royal warrant to take possession of the gems to prevent them being conveyed to Germany.

MR. DELAVILLE, the chief cashier at the bank, is sent for the gems, and on returning surprises the manager by informing him that the safe is empty.

This brings him under suspicion, and TOM HEREWARD, a junior clerk at the bank—to whom, with his sister, Dora, Delaville is acting as guardian—determines to sift the matter out to save his guardian from disgrace.

MARSELLA, a detective, discovers that Tom's sister, Dora, is wearing a ring containing one of the missing rubies, which Mr. Delaville has given her.

Tom discovers that his guardian bought this ring from a MR. BROCKLEY, and informs Sir William Cranston.

Sir William rings up Brockley, who admits that he sold the ring to Delaville for three hundred pounds.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Trap.

"Where did you get it?" demanded Sir William.

"It was handed to me in the ordinary course as commission goods by Swaritz, of Hatton Garden."

"And how did it get into his hands? Did he tell you who had sold him the stone?"

"No. He is on the 'phone. Why not ring him up?"

"Get me the number, Hereward," said the manager.

Within a space of twenty seconds it had been furnished. Tom carried out even the smallest order with the almost reflex promptness that makes for success.

Then Sir William sent his inquiry, and there came an answer—one so lengthy and so gripping that as he listened to it the manager put up one hand as if to command silence.

There came the dull click of the receivers being replaced. The face of the bank's managing director had taken on an expression colder than that of anger, and more merciless.

"You have the record," he said to Tom. "Read it aloud."

"I—I cannot, sir. The—the speaker got ahead of me," returned Tom huskily.

"Oh, you are Mr. Delaville's ward, aren't you?"

"Yes, Sir William!"

"Leave the room, and attend to your duties elsewhere."

As the door closed, Sir William Cranston, turning upon those assembled, said slowly:

"The dealer of Hatton Garden declares that the stones—for there were others, it would seem—were purchased by him of a man named John Grey; and he further says that this John Grey told him that he had bought the stones of a man whom he met by chance in a restaurant, and with whom he got into chat. He was a lame man, tall, dark, and well dressed. He was especially struck by the fact that the man was wearing a scarf-pin to which was attached an old Persian gold coin of small size."

Every man present knew the force of the words, for Charles Delaville was tall, and dark, and lame, and well-dressed. Moreover, his most cherished possession was a gold daric that had circulated when the Roman Empire was in its infancy. With the superstition common to all men he had made it into a mascot, and always either wore it in his necktie or carried it on his person.

As the words passed the manager's lips the door was opened, and Peter Sullowby, the bank porter, entered, some trifling perfunctory labour obviating any explanation. Sir William, glancing up irritably at the intrusion, saw his gaze fastened on Delaville; a gaze at the moment so inscrutable, while eloquent of something surging storm-like through the man's soul, that the financier almost yielded to the impulse to demand aloud:

"What has Mr. Delaville to do with you?"

Charles Delaville was making his way homewards, when he came face to face with Peter Sullowby, the bank-porter.

"Beg pardon, sir," said Peter, coming hurriedly forward. "I was wanting to see you privately, like. The fact is, I ran against one of those Syndicate chaps half an hour ago." Then, sinking his voice, he added: "It was the German, Mr. Schofield. He told me as he's found out something about the box of gems, but that it wants delicate handling—far more delicate handling that it is likely to get from the police. His idea was to see you without anybody else knowing of it. But he's got precious little time, for he's expecting to be interned."

"Well, you know my address. You may give it to him, if you see him soon," returned Delaville, accentuating the final word in allusion to his coming change of residence.

Sullowby shook his head.

"Don't think he has time to run about, sir," he remarked. "The gentleman said he would be at—let me see—where was it? Oh, one hundred and twenty-three, Monmouth Street, Lorne Square, to-night at nine; and if you could get there, he would be able to put you up to something."

Charles Delaville's face grew dubious.

"It seems strange he should have confided the fact of his

knowing anything to you, instead of addressing the bank authorities," he commented.

"Excuse me, sir, but I don't see it. The poor gentleman is up to his eyes in trouble over the war, and he is nervous of the police!"

Delaville laughed shortly.

"I suppose the position of an alien is not very roseate just now," he remarked. "Well, I will think over it, and possibly I may go. The address is 123, Monmouth Street, I think you said."

"Yes, sir; and to-night at nine."

"Very well," said Delaville.

And, seeing Tom Hereward in the near distance, he nodded a good-bye, and strode off.

"You'll be thrown, my fine fellow, before you're much older!" muttered Peter, looking after Delaville. "You'll be thrown, and kicked, and trampled in the mud; and men will spit when they hear your name! Schofield wants to meet you, does he? Sucked it in like orange-juice, you did! I've only to see that German, and pitch him a similar yarn about you, and the business'll be all but done."

Delaville was one who had accustomed himself to seize on any proposition, and accept or reject it after keen, if momentary, scrutiny.

As he walked to meet Tom he debated this suggestion of an interview with Schofield.

"I don't like it," his thoughts ran. Then came the decision: "I shall not go!"

With this he had come to Tom's side. The boy was looking anxious, far more than Delaville himself. The latter smiled, and, running one arm through his ward's, rallied him upon his facial expression.

"It is a come-down from a Daimler to a 'bus, but we must try to survive the fall," he said solemnly. "I am glad to see you are not weeping. It is extravagant to weep; it adds to the laundry bill!"

The men seemed to have exchanged ages, for Tom turned upon the other with the reproving gravity of middle life.

"You appear not to grasp the fact, sir, that you have been almost directly accused of selling the stones," he said. "I was not in the room when the message from Swaritz was told to the directors, but I know that it was told, and what they thought of it."

"Why, what a clever boy you are!" returned Delaville banteringly. "Now I haven't the remotest idea what they thought, and I haven't the slightest wish to know. Seriously, Tom, aren't you something of an ass? If I had appropriated the rubies, do you think I should go peddling them? And is it reasonable to suppose that if I had some five million pounds' worth of gems in my possession, and did peddle them, I should buy back one of the smaller stones, and have it flaunted before all and sundry? Yes; I am sorry to say it, but you are a very unimproved kind of ass!"

"I heard them discuss all that, sir," said Tom sturdily. "And Marsella said you had done it because everyone would think the course so absurd as to be impossible. He said you were a keen judge of how men think, and that this judgment would guide your actions."

"Let me see. You have been my ward for nine years, Tom. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you ever known me commit any gross, obvious, inexcusable blunder?"

"Never once, sir."

"Then why suppose me capable of one?"

"I don't, sir; but you seem to miss the point, which is that Marsella urges that you would reason as you are reasoning now, and that you would expect other people to reason in the same way. I heard him tell Sir Samuel Abram, a director, that there was no hurry; the big fish was in the net, and couldn't possibly escape, but he was quite determined not to lose the chance of catching other fish by landing his prize too quickly. That is simply the truth, sir."

Delaville's face flushed.

"Excuse me, sir," went on Tom. "I mean no rudeness in asking whether the late Mrs. Delaville was German?"

"My wife was not German, either by birth or blood. Her mother, when a widow, married General von Hartzen. I studied, like many other young Britishers, at Heidelberg for a year or two."

"I see," replied Tom thoughtfully.

"Why the query, Tom?"

"Marsella said that half your interests were Teutonic. He implied that it was just possible you had been working with the Syndicate."

Delaville's eyes became luminous with anger.

"Very well," he said; "since you have chosen to listen to the mad vapourings of an out-of-work police-officer anxious for a job, and to give credence to them, knowing that they are designed to make me out a scoundrel, I throw up my guardianship. You are at liberty to reside where you choose, so long as it is not beneath my roof. I will say no further word to you until you humbly crave my pardon. Before Heaven, I will compel my slanderers to apologise publicly! Go to my house, and take your things away! If you have not gone by the time I return, I shall have you put out!"

"I shall have you put out!"

The words uttered by Delaville struck home to the heart of Tom Hereward like a dagger-point. As Delaville, after uttering them, swung away, his limp almost imperceptible, Tom's impulse was to run after him and reason, or plead—to do anything which might force his guardian to believe the honest truth that he, Tom, had absolute faith in him; but pride pulled him back.

His growing manhood asserted itself. He would not seek peace until his elder acknowledged himself to be in the wrong.

In a near street Charles Delaville came to a halt. His blood was surging hotly through his brain.

"Why," he said to himself, "the opportunity was at hand for proving one of the slanders false!"

He would go to Monmouth Street and meet Schofield, and ask him to bear witness that he, Delaville, had never written or spoken a word to any member of the Syndicate, save in the common course of his duties.

His mind fully made up, Charles Delaville hired a taxi, and was driven to the house in Monmouth Street.

It was a very unpretentious building. The street itself was one that had fallen from fashion. Delaville stepped within a lobby, for he saw no bell, and the outer door was wide open. It seemed absurd to knock at the inner door with his knuckles or stick, so he turned its handle. Very evidently the place was some kind of club, for on the wall were the words, "Smoking-room," accompanied by a painted hand with outstretched forefinger.

Better for the man had he seen the finger extended in the opposite direction! Better for him had he turned on his heel, and sped into the night!

Delaville went on. What had he to fear? If his heart beat more strongly than at other moments it was because he felt himself on the eve of victory. He was about to prove his enemies slanderers.

The Power of Evil.

With a manner that revealed nothing whatever of his brainstorm, Charles Delaville, following the instructions upon the wall, found himself within a spacious apartment. Its furnishing was of the "had been" kind. The chairs were numerous and good, the carpet had once been worthy of a mansion. There were comfortable-looking corners. Here and there a screen stood. But all wore an air of shabbiness.

Four men were present—two of them engaged in a game of chess, one reading a newspaper, and the fourth standing with his back to the fire.

Delaville seated himself. At the moment there came upon him a strange sensation. It was one of those states of mind that will not yield to reasoning. He could only liken it to being in an atmosphere that stifled. But the air itself was pure enough. He felt the mysterious influence paralysing his will. Two impulses were at war within him—to flee the place; to remain, and abandon himself to whatever might eventuate.

A club waiter came through the doorway and up to the table where the man with the newspaper sat. Some words in a low tone were exchanged. As he passed back he stopped opposite Delaville, and with a foreign accent asked:

"Are you waiting for anyone, sir?"

Delaville nodded.

"Yes," he answered, "I have an appointment with a Mr. Schofield."

"Very good, sir! Some refreshment?"

More for the sake of appearance than from a desire to drink, Delaville ordered some liquid. He did not touch it when brought, but waited impatiently, consulting his watch now and again.

At the end of fifteen minutes he muttered a curse upon the German, gulped down the refreshment, drew out his cigarette-case preparatory to going, and———

Then something happened. He felt as if a piece of machinery had got loose in his brain and was whirling round with increasing speed.

And with this came a madly-joyous, care-free wave that surged upon him and, as it were, bore him high over the rocks of world worry.

Schofield! Good old Schofield himself was here! He was gripping the man's hand and swearing he was the best fellow on earth. He heard questions—absurd questions—about the rubies, and he was answering that Sir Samuel and Sir

William, Marsella, and the rest of them could do their worst, and he would laugh at them. Schofield and himself knew; they didn't care.

What right had the Government to grab the property of inoffensive citizens? The Germans were jolly good fellows!

All this and a great deal more he was saying; and then he was being helped in quite a friendly manner to the doorway and down the stairs and out into the street, where a tall, black-coated, bowler-hatted man was putting him into a taxi, and the wheels of the taxi and the machinery in his brain were whirling him up to bed.

And they continued whirling while he slept, and they left behind them the ghost of their whirling when he awoke in the reproachful, healthful, fresh morning.

The memory records were all blurred. He had an after-flavour of drink and excitement and much talk. Where had he been? How his head ached! Had he become intoxicated?

Dora regarded him from eyes whose lids were reddened when they met at breakfast.

"Hallo! Where's Tom?" Delaville asked, his voice coming weakly.

"He has gone!"

For two seconds the man thought his ward referred to the daily bank journey, and he was about to say, "How absurdly early!" when recollection rushed upon him, and he stammered:

"I forgot! Gone! Tch! He must be mad!"

"He said you had ordered him to leave."

The man pressed one palm to his forehead.

"There were words," he said. "Oh, it will all come right!"

A light sprang into Dora's face. Of course it would all come right. Her guardian would bring Tom home from the bank, and they would be better friends than ever. She would go to meet them.

The housekeeper, coming in at this moment, regarded her employer from beneath two chronically uplifted brows. She asked whether Mr. Delaville would like anything else for breakfast, and, to his imagination, imported into the question the declared opinion that he deserved to get nothing at all.

Presently he forced himself to sit at the table and eat.

As the meal went on he became moody, resentful over the mystery of what had happened the previous evening, and puzzled at something else. It had come to his memory that Sullowby had told him something about Schofield. Why, of course, he had gone to interview the German. Had the interview taken place? He did not know.

Delaville felt that it was a morning on which he must violate his new rule of economy. He could not possibly ride in a 'bus, faced by the critical eyes of strangers. He would go to the office in a taxi.

When he had arrived at the bank everyone and everything seemed to have changed in some subtle manner. The fierce old commissionaire at the entrance looked past him as if not seeing him. The office atmosphere itself pained. Delaville was being acted upon by that strange element which acts as messenger from brain to brain wherever men's minds are stirred.

As Delaville began to arrange his papers in the office reserved to his use there entered a messenger bearing an official envelope. The cashier took it into his hands without interest, and opened it leisurely, thinking it only one of his customary departmental orders. But in place of what he had expected, there confronted him the words:

"Sir,—I am instructed by the Directors of the Great Southern Bank to acquaint you that your services will not be required after and inclusive of the date of this communication. As your late duties will be taken over by your successor forthwith, the directors will be glad if you will vacate the office at the earliest possible moment."

The communication was signed "William Cranston," and was accompanied by a cheque for salary due at the end of the current quarter.

Charles Delaville immediately made his way to an adjoining office, where sat the great manager of the tottering house of finance.

Sir William was talking on some official matter with young Tom Hereward. At sight of his guardian the boy turned his back, and quitted the room, never meeting his eyes once, never giving him smile or word; seeming to ignore him as a something negligible.

Delaville stood silent, waiting the moment to speak. Clerks went by. Not one spoke. The chief began writing.

"Sir William——" began Delaville.

The chief took no notice. More clerks passed to and fro, one or two paler than usual. The chief, a little whitened, perhaps, wrote rapidly.

"Sir William," said Delaville huskily, "may I speak?"

The manager's answer was to leap across to where a girl stenographer was at work, and give some instructions.

Then, without looking at Delaville, he rose, and quitted the office.

The girl gathered a sheaf of papers and followed.

Delaville stood alone. The seconds passed. A senior clerk came in hurriedly, saw the room's other occupant, and muttered something. Another said on passing him:

"Go home!"

It was a suggestion. In Delaville's present state of mind a suggestion was something to obey. Delaville went out into the corridor. Messengers and clerks, passing to and fro, gazed away from him. Everyone was care-free and secure in his employment. He alone had been singled out for dismissal.

What was the word the man in Cranston's office had muttered? "Traitor!" Delaville had not understood it then. One of the boys had just mouthed it. Nonsense! Only fancy, of course.

His head was aching. He would go home. When he had rested he would be able to see into the thing; he would be able to demand effectively an answer to the question: "Why am I treated as a leper?"

He went to his own room, took up his hat, placed in a handbag some odds and ends belonging to him, and passed out into the open.

The commissionaire who had avoided his gaze looked past him again; but he, too, sent after him the word, "Traitor!"

The blare and rumble of the streets seemed to take up and repeat the word. Did it refer to him? Why, the word was being repeated. That man said it, and that man, and that man!

"Traitor!"

He heard it from every mouth that passed, from the motor-drivers, from men calling to each other. It was woven into countless phrases, it was interpolated in chance-heard phrases, it was aimed at him, and now it was hooted and shouted at him by myriad voices.

The man passed on to the house where he had lived so happily. The servant was speaking about him as he came in. The housekeeper had his name on her tongue. The milkman was uttering some snarl of contempt. The world held one being in loathing and horror—himself.

At last, unable to stand it any longer, Delaville decided to seek aid. He would have the truth of it all from those who knew. He had little acquaintance with law or lawyers; but there was a solicitor's plate on the door of a house he passed daily.

Into this office he strode, wild-eyed, erect of form, and strident of voice, demanding to see the man. Almost violently Delaville broke into a history of his recent experience.

The lawyer, a young man, looked at his visitor keenly, arrived at a decision, and nodded his head.

"Now, see here, Mr. Delaville, the best thing for you to do," he said, "before taking any further step, is to see a doctor. Just now your nerves are out of order. Go round and chat with my brother. He is in practice almost within a stone's throw—No. 17, Bryan Square. He'll put you right in no time; and then you'll be better able to judge as to your future course of action."

Delaville left, a card in his hand.

"Go straight there!" said the lawyer, as he saw his client out.

Immediately after the ex-cashier had quitted the office the solicitor seized his telephone.

"Is that you, Dick?" he asked. "Right! I've just had a queer sort of crank in. Says he is Charles Delaville, of the Great Southern Bank, and has been dismissed summarily for some not very obvious reason. He declares that everyone in the street is calling him a traitor. Evidently something has gone wrong with his brain. Am sending him to you. What is that? No! I had not heard. Great Scott! Seen at Vahr's, and overheard talking to Germans about getting gems out of the country. The scoundrel! I should think you would kick him out. Sorry I sent him. Schofield got away—has he? Hope he may be drowned. So long!"

Five minutes after the lawyer had replaced the receiver, his brother was looking into Delaville's eyes. The visitor might be a very Judas, but he was something to study—something quite as interesting as a frog under experiment.

"Oh! So everyone is saying it? I understand. And you seem to hear it from the skies like a roaring voice, do you? I see. Oh, I don't know anything about that. People may be saying it, or they may be talking about the weather. I'm a doctor, you see, not a police-officer. I'll ask you something. What does 'Vahr's' mean? Don't know, and don't want to. Take that prescription to Marshall, at number twelve in this street."

Immediately Delaville left, the doctor rang up his brother.

"He has been in," he said. "Should say he is a chronic drinker and drug-taker. One of Vahr's catches! What a traitor!"

Vahr!

One man had said the word, or the name. Now everyone said it. There was no other word speakable by the human tongue that mattered. It came to Delaville from every inarticulate sound.

Vahr! Vahr. Vahr! What did it mean?

And then from some back-stored memory came scattered trifles of things heard and half believed, or ridiculed and discredited as absurd.

Vahr! Why, Vahr was the name of some sort of institution to which sellers of their country's honour were lured!

And these mouthing, snarling men implied that he had been at Vahr's! He! Why, he was as loyal to Britain as the King himself! He had tried his hardest to get into a fighting corps.

Then came light. Vahr's must be another name for the Monmouth Street club.

What did it all mean? The man who limped, and wore a coin at his neck, and who was said to have sold some of the rubies—who was he? There was a plot against him—a plot to rob him of fortune, and good name, and sanity itself. How would it all end?

Changes of Fortune.

When Tom Hereward parted from his guardian, his blood was swiftly rising to boiling heat. Within thirty minutes he had cabbed to the house where he lived, had thrust a suit or two and some sundries into a bag, had taken an abrupt leave of his sister, and was being driven to where he knew a welcome awaited him—the home of his humbler friend, Will Sullowby. His knock at the house-door brought Will himself.

"Hallo!" said the latter genially. "What's up, old fellow?"

"Will," said Tom, "I've had a beastly row with my guardian, and he has told me to clear. Do you know where I can get a room?"

Will whistled softly.

"Where's your kit?" he asked.

"On the taxi."

"Then tell the driver to haul it in, for this is where you can get a room."

"But your father?"

"The guv'nor's out. If he was at home he wouldn't stand arguing, but would bring that bag in."

A husky laugh came from Tom. He paid the driver, and himself took the kit-bag in hand.

"And now what's the row, Tom?" asked Will, when they were alone.

"Oh, about that beastly robbery. But let us drop the subject. I'm sick of it!"

"Come and have a look at my gym," said Will, by way of diverting the other's thoughts.

He led the way to a back yard. Here, in an old shed, made weather-proof by Will's industry, parallel and horizontal bars and punching-bag had been made out of odds and ends. Upon the walls were single-sticks, gloves, foils, dumb-bells, and clubs—things picked up for next to nothing in a more or less damaged condition, and made sound and useful by Will's clever hands.

"Can't box till this old wrist gets strong again," he remarked, "but I'll take you on with the foils."

They chalked the buttons, and engaged in some really good fencing, which left each scathless.

"There's the guv'nor," said Will, after a while. "Now I'll go and settle things. Come on! You'll see and hear for yourself whether you're welcome."

Peter was in the sitting-room when the two entered the house.

"Hallo, Mr. Hereward!" he said, the while his eyes seemed burrowing into the boy strangely. "I'm glad to see you! Is that your bag in the passage?"

Will spoke up:

"Tom has had some slight disagreement with his guardian," he explained, "and called to ask if I knew where he could get a room, so——"

"Of course, having common-sense, you told him not to go further and get a colder welcome." He turned to Tom. "Here's your home, young man," he said, "so long as you care to make it one."

"You are very good," returned Tom simply.

"That doesn't need trumpeting," commented Peter. "So you had some words with Mr. Delaville, had you? Between you and me, he deserves what he'll get one of these days. They say that pride comes before a fall. He's had a bit of a stumble already. Let him look out for another."

Tom resented the man's words. He and his guardian might quarrel, but no one should say a word against him.

"We won't talk about that, please," he remarked. "There's no better man in all England than my guardian, although he does flash out like lightning, and I'll prove it before I'm much older."

Peter looked at the speaker from beneath lowered brows.

"They tell me," he said, "that you have been ferreting out a lot in this case."

"I have been doing my best," returned Tom simply.

"And got your reward by being kicked out of the man's house. Take my advice, Mr. Hereward, don't put yourself to any more trouble. The less you have to say to Mr. Delaville in the future the better for you. But we won't have a debate. Now, Will, show Mr. Hereward to his room. It's a humble household, young man, and a bachelor's one at that. An old lady comes in to do the cooking and look after the cleaning a bit. You see, we don't handle millions here, like some people who never worked for 'em."

Again had come the snarl. Did Peter hate Delaville? And, if so, why? The questions flashed upon Tom as he followed Will, but he made no comment.

Tom went to his bed early that night. He little guessed as he placed his head on the pillow that Delaville, the man who had been to him as a father, was at that moment being enclosed in a net of conspiracy, a net drawn by merciless hands.

Although rumours were afloat as to the bank being about to close its doors, the officials had been told nothing definite. Tom went off to his usual duties on the morning following.

To Tom's surprise, Sir William looked at him with almost undisguised pity, and set him to work where he would not be in contact with any of the staff.

It was not until close on midday that Tom gathered any knowledge of what had transpired, and then it came about by Will Sullowby, white of face, coming swiftly and noiselessly into the room.

"Have you heard?" he asked huskily.

"What?"

"You haven't heard anything?"

"What are you driving at, Will?"

"It's about Mr. Delaville," said Will; "he's a traitor!"

"A what?"

Tom had risen, his lips had become a thin line, his eyes blazed.

"A traitor! Oh, Tom, they say they've trapped him plotting with the German spies here!"

"Who says so?"

"It's not I who am saying it," went on Will. "Sir William and everyone else here believes it. Mr. Delaville has been sent off! The bank's closing at one sharp, and won't reopen!"

"If he is a traitor," said Tom, "why is he not arrested?"

"Because it has something to do with the gems, and they think they will find out more by allowing him to be at liberty. He was seen at Vahr's."

"Vahr! Who or what is Vahr?"

"It's a sort of club. One of the police told me about it just now. It used to be a foreign club, and the authorities bought it up on the quiet, and then when they had it in their hands they put detectives in it, and when these foreign chaps got together they were watched, and so on. It's the sort of place where they trap anyone who would like to sell knowledge to the enemy. See?"

"And I suppose the scoundrels who run it expect us to believe their evidence!" broke out Tom scornfully. "Show me one of them, and I'll let him feel the power of my fists!"

With that Tom seized his hat, and began putting on an outdoor coat.

"I'm not going to wait till the office closes," he said. "Tell them anything you like, if I'm asked after."

With that, he hurried into a near corridor, and quitted the building.

A traitor! Why the supposition was monstrous!

And even as the boy hurled away the idea with scorn someone in passing said to a companion:

"Oh, it's true enough! I had it from a man who knows. And they say he has had something to do with the big gem robbery. Awful scoundrel!"

The words scorched Tom's brain. As if walking a race, he strode through the streets, until, hot and giddy, he found himself on the steps of his old home.

Mr. Delaville himself opened the door.

"Guardian!"

Tom's eyes were on the other's. The man lowered his head. He moved aside, and Tom entered.

"These lies—these black lies! What do they mean?" panted the boy.

"Tom, I know almost as little as yourself!"

"Traitor!" He heard it from every mouth that passed—from the motor-drivers, from men calling to each other. The word seemed to be hooted and shouted at him by myriad voices. **(See page 39.)**

"Tell me all, sir! How ever little it may be, it may help me to see light."

Then Charles Delaville told his story.

"Have you spoken to Sullowby on the matter, sir?"

"Spoken to him! I very nearly took him by the throat, and he justified himself by saying that he had merely given me a message."

"Then we must find Schofield, sir!"

"Too late, Tom! Schofield, they tell me, got away on the Dutch boat at daybreak!"

Tom's eyes were fixed on vacancy, but were alight with concentrated thought.

"I see it all," he said tensely. "Someone planned to lure you into that place. The authorities assume you knew its character as a meeting-house for spies and traitors, and were ignorant that the police now use it as a trap. Your plotter drugged you, and made you talk. The authorities do not know you were drugged. They believe just what they are told."

"Where are you staying, Tom?"

"At Sullowby's, sir."

"I see. You would like to leave at once?"

"I think not, sir. To tell you the truth, I am rather glad that I am at Sullowby's. You will learn why later. Only trust me, sir."

"I can do that, Tom."

Tom rose, and held out his hand. He looked at his guardian as if hesitating to say something.

"What is it, laddie?" asked Delaville.

"We had some theatrical things, sir, last winter. Could you let me have them?"

"Certainly, my boy! You mean the wig and whiskers, and so on? They're in a box in one of the garrets. Take the lot if you want them. What are you going in for—acting? A precarious profession Tom."

The boy laughed off the question. In one sense he was indeed about to act, for he had resolved to take a part in the twin tragedies that had stirred all England.

Half an hour later as he strode along the streets, swinging a parcel carelessly, his face had aged by years in its expression of honest strength and purpose. He was about to face the league of liars.

Tom as a Detective.

In the solitude of his little room, Tom Hereward sat himself down, and began to arrange his facts. The case of the gem robbery would alone occupy him for the present. Some facts seemed beyond disputing; Delaville had bought one of the stolen gems. Contradictory as it appeared, this stolen gem had been sold originally by a man so closely resembling Delaville that Marsella, the detective, felt sure of their identity. He—Tom—had now to prove that this original seller was or was not Delaville. On that everything depended.

Who was John Grey? What was he like? Where was the restaurant in which he had met the possessor of the ruby? One man alone could answer these questions—the gem-dealer of Hatton Garden. He would seek him at once, and without getting into disguise.

"So you are Mr. Delaville's ward, are you?" said the gem-merchant, good-humouredly. "And you've turned detective, it seems. Well, my boy, I need only give you the answer I've given Marsella as to what I know about John Grey. I told him that Grey had recently lost his life on a torpedoed boat while on his way to Flushing. He wouldn't believe it, so I didn't trouble to tell him anything more; but I'll tell you, because I appreciate civility. Grey told me that he had been living near the Commercial Road. He let out that he had given up his office, and had his letters addressed to a shop. That is all I know, but it may afford you a hint as to your hunting-ground."

During the ensuing week, for one or two hours daily, Tom, disguised with false beard and moustache, haunted the district, talking here and there, and getting isolated facts, which at length led him to the doorway of a tobacconist's shop.

"Genuine Egyptian cigs—are they!"

Tom, looking like a commercial traveller who had finished a good day's business, picked a cigarette from the box extended him, while with his free hand he caressed a flowing moustache.

"I dunno. That's what they call 'em. Will one be enough?" said the girl behind the counter.

"Quite enough—more than enough! It was not the cigarette that made me wander in here."

The girl grinned.

"Lived here long?" asked Tom.

"Goin' on for two years."

"Strange I shouldn't have seen you!"

"'Tain't strange at all!" retorted the girl. "I don't serve in the shop much."

Tom smiled.

"Now I think of it," he replied, "I met you once at number thirty—Jennings' place, you know—when old Porson had the shop?"

"Not me, you didn't! Ain't never been there. P'r'aps it was Mrs. Scudamore."

"Scudamore? Scudamore? Surely I know the name."

"'Tain't 'er fault if yer don't. She's jawin' all over the place mornin', noon, an' night. Blessed if she ain't!"

"Used to be frequently at number thirty?" inquired Tom.

"Of course she did."

"Where does she live?"

"How should I know! But what d'yer want 'er for?"

"To see if she's the aunt of a friend of mine who has just come back from Australia with a pile of money. He asked me to make a few inquiries, but I lost the address."

"I believe you're kiddin' me. But, if you want the old lady, you'll find her at number fourteen Wigton Street, fust turnin' to the right."

With this Tom quitted the shop.

For one or two hours daily during the past week Tom, disguised with false beard and moustache, and so looking not merely unlike himself, but older, had haunted the district, gossiping here and there, and getting isolated facts, which, carefully strung together, had at length led him to the last but one of his hunting-grounds.

As he quitted the shop he threw his imitation Egyptian cigarette into the gutter, and strode away in the direction of Wigton Street. At No. 14 he saw a lady on the top step, grasping a broom, leaning over the railings, and communicating with another lady, who also carried a broom, and stood on the top step of the house adjoining.

"Are you Mrs. Scudamore?" asked Tom, raising his hat.

"Gracious! 'Ow you did fright me!" said the lady addressed. Then, with suspicion, she added: "What is it—insurance?"

"No, I don't want any money. I was recommended to you as a lady of discretion, who could supply me with some information. I can make it worth your while."

The lady of the adjoining house stood with mouth agape, and eyes dilated, inspecting Tom's wearing apparel, and unsurpassable moustache.

Mrs. Scudamore, after the manner of her kind, herself made such inspection. Then, almost visibly swelling with importance, and with lips compressed, she stepped inside her house, held the door wide, and in the manner of one conveying secret instruction, motioned her visitor to enter.

"Come into the parlour," said Mrs. Scudamore, when the door had been closed.

"You know the neighbourhood well, I believe?" hazarded Tom, when seated.

"Egscuse me a moment!" Mrs. Scudamore propped the broom against the wall of the room. "But who set you on to come 'ere?"

Tom had recourse to his imagination.

"A friend. Let me see. What is the name of the landlord?"

"Old Jagg, the grocer, owns the 'ouse, an' mighty little 'e does for it. Why, if you was to come down to the back-kitching in the middle of the night an' see the beedles all comin' up from cracks in the skirtin', I give you my word you couldn't put a pin's point between 'em! But what was I sayin'? Oh, yes! Who sent you 'ere?"

"The Reverend James McDullop—a great friend of Mr. Jagg, I believe. 'My dear fellow,' he said to me, 'if anyone can be relied on to help you, it is that pattern of her neighbours—Mrs. Scudamore!'"

The lady drew herself up.

"I ain't in a position to give no 'elp," she returned. "An' you told me on the doorstep as you didn't want no money."

"Of course, ma'am—of course! The help I want is your opinion, and so on. You know the neighbourhood, I believe?"

"As well"—and Mrs. Scudamore waved her hand—"as I know this 'ere room. When I come twenty-eight year ago the bottom end of Wigton Street was a churchyard. Mr. Jaggs' brother, as was on the Vestry, offered to lay it out if they would allow a right-o'-way. Me an' my 'usband come 'ere just as number fifteen was bein' built."

Tom inwardly groaned.

"Very interesting indeed," he commented; "and some other day we may have a chat over the old times. But just now I wish you to tell me whether you knew a Mr. Porson, of number thirty, round the corner?"

(Another long instalment of this grand serial next Monday, when the "MAGNET LIBRARY" resumes its usual size and price—1d. Order your copy early.)

MY READERS' PAGE

The Editor is always pleased to hear from his chums, at home or abroad, and is only too willing to give his best advice to them if they are in difficulty or in trouble. . . . Whom to write to: Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C

Christmas Greetings To All!

To every boy and girl, father and mother, soldier and sailor who reads and enjoys the MAGNET Library I extend my heartfelt wishes for a Merry Christmas and a highly prosperous New Year.

The term "Merry Christmas" will, I expect, ring very harshly in the ears of all who have suffered bereavements during the present war, but these should endeavour, hard though it may seem, to look on the bright and noble side of it all, while all my reader chums who have relatives at the Front should not allow that fact to interfere with their fun and frivolity this coming Christmastide.

For my part, I have tried hard to keep alive the spirit of Christmas by bringing out what I honestly consider to be our best number. Day and night the ceaseless clicking of typewriters has resounded through the corridors of the Fleetway House, and my sadly depleted but unwaveringly loyal staff has backed me up with might and main in this colossal undertaking, the result of which lies in this issue. I have little doubt but that "Harry Wharton & Co.'s Pantomime" will make a tremendous hit, and the same remark applies to the serial, the supplement, and the song. It is my particular wish that the latter shall become a universal favourite, for my chums are having a great honour conferred upon them in having a special song of their own.

And now I will cast off the editorial mantle, and speak as friend to friend. I really am most delighted and gratified with the splendid support accorded me since last Christmas. The circulation of the MAGNET Library has been gloriously rising; wars, troubles, and Zeppelin raids have not hampered it, and the future is distinctly bright. I am fully aware, however, that without the aid of my vast army of friends this splendid state of affairs cannot continue. Let me thank you all, therefore, for the good work you have done in the past, and when "Peace on earth" is genuinely assured once again I trust the MAGNET Library will emerge greater and grander than ever.

For Next Monday:

"BUNTER THE MASHER!"

By Frank Richards.

Next Monday's issue, which will return to its customary size and price, contains one of the finest stories of school life famous Frank Richards has ever penned. Billy Bunter—not for the first time in his career at Greyfriars—blossoms forth as a lady-killer. But on this occasion, much to the surprise and dismay of his Form-fellows, he receives letters from, and arranges secret meetings with, no less a person than Marjorie Hazeldene, of Cliff House. This state of affairs hits Bob Cherry very hard, for he quite fails to understand what Marjorie can admire in the clumsy, ungainly Owl of the Remove. However, Peter Todd, the schoolboy lawyer, gets to work on the mystery, with dire results for

"BUNTER THE MASHER!"

LIEUTENANT LASCELLES' DOUBLE.

Leg-Pulling That Didn't Come Off.

A few weeks ago, my chums will remember, I published a letter purporting to come from a Lieutenant Larry Lascelles, who claimed that the company he helped to control was composed to a large extent of men bearing the names of MAGNET characters. I have now received the following letter from this amazing practical joker:

"Royal Garrison Artillery.

"Dear Editor,—Since I wrote to you last I have been wounded by shell-fire in three places. Sergeant Vernon-Smith was wounded at the same time. I have been at the Front since December, 1914, and have not been hit before, so I think I am rather lucky. Last July Courtney and I were both buried alive, but the boys dug us out. It was really awful. Every second seemed an hour, and when we were freed from our living grave I was never more thankful in my life. I won the D.C.M. last March. Has my namesake got one yet?

"Lieutenant Eric Courtney was married last week, and I was best man. Your new venture, the 'Greyfriars Herald,' is mighty popular in the trenches, I guess. Thank you for publishing my last letter. I didn't expect you to. Wishing you every success.—Yours loyally, LAWRENCE LASCELLES.

"(Second-Lieutenant.)"

The writer of this extraordinary epistle possesses a very broad sense of humour, which, if rightly directed, should gain for him a position on the halls or in Pentonville Gaol. Perhaps my amiable friend thought I should cheerfully swallow his flighty remarks, and laud him up to the skies for having won the D.C.M.; instead of which, I warn him not to be a bigger fool than he can help, and not to practise leg-pulling on the editor of a boys' paper. It doesn't pay!

"RALLY ROUND!"

Stirring Song of the Season.

I would draw the attention of all my chums to the magnificent song given away with this issue, and specially written for readers of the MAGNET Library. If you detach the covers of this number you will find that the song is fully displayed, and it will only be necessary for you to play it over, or, failing your ability as a musician, to persuade your pretty sister to do it for you. You will at once be enraptured by the delightfully catchy tune, which should spread like wildfire among the boys and girls of Britain.

CORRESPONDENTS, PLEASE NOTE!

AFTER TO-DAY I SHALL REPLY TO NO MORE QUESTIONS DEALING WITH THE CHRISTIAN NAMES AND AGES OF "MAGNET" CHARACTERS. ALL SUCH INFORMATION IS CONTAINED IN THE SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT PRESENTED WITH THIS ISSUE. READERS ARE STRONGLY ADVISED TO DETACH THIS SUPPLEMENT, AND TO KEEP IT BY THEM FOR REFERENCE. THEY WILL FIND IT WELL WORTH THEIR WHILE.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

A. E. Farringdon (Walthamstow).—Your parody on "The Village Blacksmith" is as old as the hills. Apart from this, Longfellow's poem is sacred in parts, and I do not approve of religious subjects being parodied.

"Elise" (Burnley).—There is no Correspondence Exchange in connection with the MAGNET Library. Mr. Richards occasionally does quote French phrases in his stories.

(Continued on next page.)

REPLIES IN BRIEF (*continued*).

"North Londoner" (Hornsey Rise).—The name and positions of the Remove football team are as follows:—Goal, Bulstrode; Backs, Bull and Brown; Half-backs, Cherry, Peter Todd, and Linley; Forwards, Hurree Singh, Penfold, Wharton, Nugent, and Vernon-Smith. I wish you every success with your story. You will have to weigh the envelope, of course, to determine the amount of the postage.

"A Pit Lad" (North Shields).—I am sorry, but it would be impossible for me to revive the "Dreadnought," as you suggest. It didn't receive sufficient support, so the only thing for it was to close the paper down.

W. Evans (Vauxhall).—I should say that the cleverest junior at St. Jim's is Tom Merry. Levison is clever, after a fashion, but his is a cunning cleverness. Talbot is the taller of the those you name. Your letter should have been addressed to the "Gem" Library, as it deals with St. Jim's.

W. W. G. (Glastonbury).—The answer to your question is in the negative, as a politician would say.

P. C. H. (Plumstead).—You must excuse my replying to your letter through this medium, as I am daily finding it more difficult to answer readers' letters by post. I note all your criticisms, which do not strike me as being really valuable. Of course, a boy could spend £5 in a day! He could spend it in five minutes, if it came to that. A great barring-out story appears in this Wednesday's issue of the "Gem" Library. Best wishes, and a Happy Christmas!

Percy C. V. (Montreal).—Mr. Richards will shortly write another story introducing Bunter's ventriloquism.

"Ten Loyal Chums" (Manchester).—I am very much obliged to you for your kind letter. Merry Christmas!

Harold B. (Sale).—Thank you for your loyal promise of support in connection with the "Greyfriars Herald."

"Apprentice."—You should make application to the Admiralty, London, S.W.

R. V. (Pontypool).—The information you require was contained in the special four-page supplement given away with the Christmas Double Number of the "Gem" Library.

Verney Dean (Southport).—The character you mention arrived at Greyfriars in the ordinary way, and his jocular, good-humoured ways speedily endeared him to Harry Wharton & Co.

"Automatic" (Scarborough).—You will find the required information in our special supplement.

Bugler F. R. L. (Gosport).—Many thanks for your cheery letter. Hope you'll enjoy a rattling good Christmas!

38459 Private T. Tinsley, A Section, 58th Field Ambulance, R.A.M.C., 19th Division, British Expeditionary Force, France, would be delighted to receive a mouth-organ if any Magnetite has one to spare.

"Barrister."—I do not think the feature you suggest would appeal to the majority of my readers. Glad to hear you liked "The Remove Eleven on Tour."

"A Loyal Reader" (Kingston-on-Thames).—The persons and places you mention are fictitious.

"An Old Reader" (London, S.E.).—I notice you say that recent Double Number stories have not impressed you so favourably as the old ones. What price this issue? I have read it through three times myself, and am convinced that Mr. Richards has excelled himself. Merry Christmas to you and to all other "Old Readers"!

"Loyal and True" (Manchester).—A huge reprint order has been executed in connection with "School and Sport," by Frank Richards, and copies are still obtainable, at threepence each, from most newsagents.

Charles R. (Walthamstow).—I have often thought how ripping it would be to get a film of Harry Wharton & Co. on the cinematograph, but there are serious difficulties in the way. However, something of the sort may come about one of these days.

T. O. Hughes (Liverpool).—Thank you for your letter and portrait of Bunter. With regard to your complaint, you should consult a physician.

Vivian Walter (London, N.).—Many thanks for your letter and loyalty.

J. Fraser (Edinburgh).—A very good idea indeed! I will discuss it with Mr. Frank Richards when he is next in town.

W. R. Hughes (North Wales).—Many thanks for your letter and for enlisting a new reader of the companion papers.

Joseph E. (West Hampstead).—I will bear your suggestion in mind.

S. V. X.—Your criticisms are feeble and ill-founded. It is not at all surprising that Skinner & Co. are poor footballers. Fellows who smoke on the sly find themselves very short of wind when it comes to a ninety-minute tussle.

Harry C. (Bradford).—The answer is in the negative.

A. B. C. (Cardiff).—In my own opinion, the "Magnet" and "Gem" are about on a par. Sometimes, however, I feel a natural inclination towards the "Magnet," as the characters are so well-drawn, particularly Bob Cherry.

Colin M. (Southampton).—I am at all times delighted to hear from my married readers, as they wield a tremendous amount of influence in connection with the companion papers. Best regards to your wife and two children.

H. Mills (Redditch).—Glad to hear you enjoyed "The Remove Eleven on Tour." It is not advisable to introduce too many football tales, however, as they appeal only to a certain section of boys. The swot and the stamp-collector can't always tolerate them.

J. McA. (Glasgow).—Finish your story at leisure, and send it in. It will receive prompt consideration at this office.

Walter F. Day (Kennington).—Verses not quite up to standard. Try again! How did you like "School and Sport"?

"A. and B."—Thank you very much for your letter. With regard to the illustrations in the "Magnet," I find it impossible to do as you suggest. Some more ventriloquism stories will appear shortly.

J. C. H., R. P. J., and N. F. S. (New Zealand).—Have you no better way of occupying your spare time than by writing offensive letters to the editor of a boys' paper? Your remarks are idiotic, and I have consigned them to the Hound of the (Wastepaper) Basketvilles.

S. R. Kitson (Leytonstone).—More will be heard of the characters you mention in due course.

R. H. B. (Birmingham).—Many thanks for the splendid work you are doing on behalf of the companion papers!

"Anxious" (Brentwood).—Of course, it is not too late to send in contributions to the "Greyfriars Herald." Start right away!

Alfred Taylor (Birmingham).—Acting upon your suggestion, I had a story specially written about Wibley—i.e., "The Conjurer's Capture." Hope you enjoyed it. Thank you for your latest suggestion, which is already under consideration.

Mark Cohen (Bow).—The replies to your questions are, as follows: (1) Competitions appear both in the "Gem" and the "Greyfriars Herald." (2) There is a Jewish junior at Greyfriars; his name is Monty Newland. (3) Most of my readers prefer a page or two of Chat to long-winded articles on how to rear silkworms, and all that sort of thing.

E. L. C. W. (Leytonstone).—Hope the "Greyfriars Herald" exceeded your highest expectations.

J. B. H. (Bristol).—Thank you for your kind message. I hope to carry out the suggestion in the near future.

Kenneth D. Cameron (Cape Town).—There are numerous drawbacks to a competition for Colonial readers, especially in war-time, when mails are considerably delayed. It is a pity, but cannot be helped.

"A Loyal 'Magnet' and 'Gem' Reader" (Glasgow).—Take your time over the story, and send it in to me when complete. Don't forget to put your very best into the work.

W. S. (Inverness).—Thank you for your letter and loyal promise of support in connection with the "Greyfriars Herald."

Jimmy R. (Repton).—Glad to hear from you again. When are you going to submit some more of your amazing poetry, old chap? Your effusions are most entertaining.

Edward Ross and Chums (Dundee).—Sorry I have no photographs of Harry Wharton & Co. available for distribution.

Robert F. (London, E.C.).—Sorry I cannot help you in the direction you name.

Drummer W. P. (Ipswich).—No Correspondence Exchange is now being run in connection with the companion papers.

Rifleman A. E. Carter, 822, "A" Company, 11th Battalion, King's Royal Rifles, British Expeditionary Force, France, in writing to condemn the slanderous epithets of S. Huntley, of Monmouth, asks that any readers who have spare copies of the companion papers should send them out to him. Rifleman Carter and his comrades will highly appreciate such a kindness.

Louis K. Lavinge (Exeter).—I could hardly see my way clear to offer a prize of £20 to the reader who sends me in the best sketch of Harry Wharton & Co.. A 30,000-word story, if well written, is certainly worth £15, but not so a sketch.

Yours Editor

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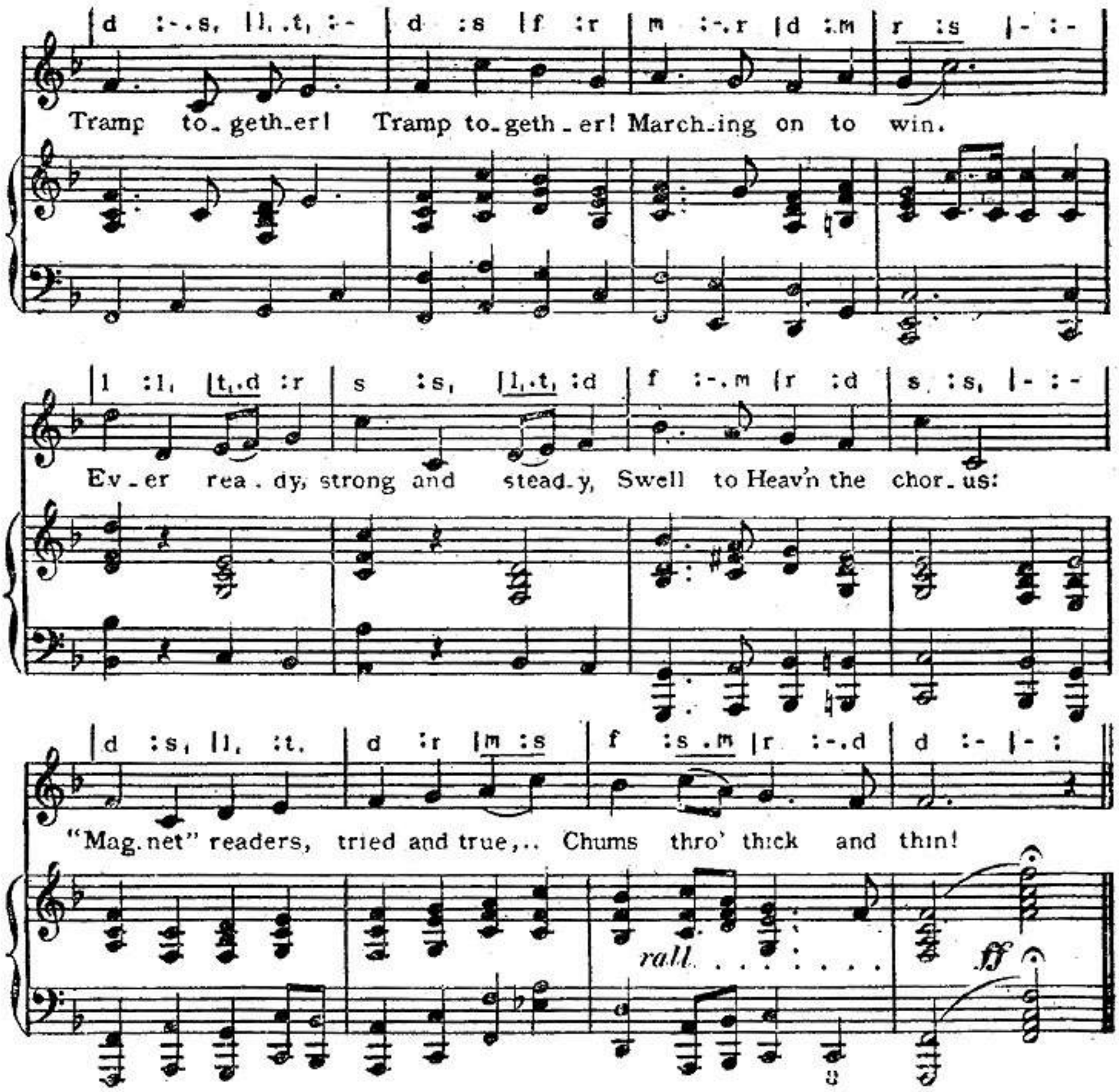


1

Rally round the Banner, Boys!
Keep it fluttering high!
Rend the air with a merry noise,
Forward! Never say die!
Loyal supporters, heart and soul,
Swinging along towards the goal!

CHORUS.

Tramp together! Tramp together!
Bearing all before us!
Tramp together! Tramp together!
Marching on to win:
Ever ready, strong and steady,
Swell to Heaven the chorus:
"Magnet" readers, tried and true,
Chums through thick and thin!

2.

Fellows who box and shoot and swim,
Warriors at the wicket;
Champions in the field and gym,
Loving all that's "cricket."
Ready to counsel or console,
Swinging along towards the goal!
Tramp together! &c.

3.

Marching along in mustered might,
This shall be our aim,
Ever to dare to do the right,
Ever to play the game!
Part of a great and glorious whole,
Swinging along towards the goal!
Tramp together! &c.

A Special Supplement given away with the "Magnet" Library. Readers are recommended to detach these four pages, then to fold them up and keep for future reference.

GREYFRIARS SCHOOL

FRIARDALE, KENT, ENGLAND

A USEFUL BUDGET OF INFORMATION CONCERNING THE FAMOUS SCHOOL, ITS STAFF, AND ITS SCHOLARS, ETC. ETC.

COMPILED BY THE EDITOR OF THE "MAGNET" LIBRARY, IN CONJUNCTION WITH Mr. FRANK RICHARDS.

GREYFRIARS SCHOOL

Friardale, Kent, England.

Telephone: 125 Friardale. **Telegrams: "Friars, Courtfield."**

THE STAFF.

Headmaster.—Herbert H. Locke, M.A.

Assistant Masters—
Paul Prout, M.A.
E. Mordaunt Price, M.A.
A. J. Capper, B.A.
Henry Quelch, M.A.
Ernest Blaine, M.A.
Bernard M. Twigg, B.A.
Lawrence Lascelles, B.Sc.

Gardener.—Joseph Mimble.
Porter.—William Gosling.
Head Cook.—Mrs. Kebble.
Page-boy.—Fred Trotter.
School Tuckshop.—Jessie Mimble (Proprietress).

GREYFRIARS SCHOOL.

(Founded by the Ancient Order of Grey Friars, A.D. 1472.)

Pleasantly situated near the coast of Kent, Greyfriars is one of the best-known of our great public schools. It has accommodation for 250 scholars, the fees being £80 per annum (exclusive of special tuition). Admission may also be gained by scholarship.

The school is divided into Forms in the usual way, under the captaincy of George Wingate, who is assisted by a staff of competent prefects. Each Form has its cricket and football elevens, matches taking place during the season with other public schools of the country. There are two large Museums, one for Natural History and one for Art. The school is amply furnished with racquets courts (hard and soft ball), fives courts, gymnasium, sanatorium, and other buildings.

The River Sark, which flows through Friardale, is greatly used by the Greyfriars boys for boating and bathing purposes.

The management of the school affairs is vested in a Committee of Governors, who meet at the Carlton Hotel on the first Wednesday in each month. The present members of the Board include Colonel James Wharton, Sir Bevan Snooke, the Honourable Archie Chalmers, Peter Purkiss, Esq., J.P., the Reverend B. Lamb, D.D., and the Headmaster.

SCHOOL ROUTINE.

(Subject to Alterations.)

Rising-bell, 7 a.m.
Chapel, 7.45 a.m.
Breakfast, 8.15 a.m.
Morning School, 9 a.m. to 12 noon.
Dinner, 1 p.m
Afternoon School (with the exception of Wednesdays and Saturdays), 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.
Recreation, 4 p.m. to 5.30 p.m.
Tea (either in studies or Big Hall), 5.30 p.m.
Calling Over, 6.30 p.m.
Preparation, 6.45 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Recreation (juniors), 8 p.m. to 9 p.m.
Recreation (seniors), 8 p.m. to 9.30 p.m.

Passes out of gates are given on application to, and at the discretion of, any master or prefect.

Failure to observe the times and regulations stipulated above will be reported to the Form-master of the delinquent, or, in exceptional cases, to the Headmaster.

OFFICIAL ORGANS OF GREYFRIARS SCHOOL.

The "Magnet" Library and the "Greyfriars Herald."

The former paper edited by H. A. Hinton, while the latter journal is under the control of Harry Wharton, of

the Remove Form, and published weekly by The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., through the kind sanction of the Headmaster.

NOTES ON THE LEADING CHARACTERS.

BLAND, BERTRAM.—A Fifth Form fellow, and a great friend of Blundell. Age 16½.

BLUNDELL, GEORGE.—Captain of the Fifth. A fellow of sound principles, and a first-class footballer. Often falls foul of Coker. Age 16½.

BOLSOVER, PERCY.—A bully of the worst type. Believes in winning his way in the school by sheer brute force. An associate of Skinner, and a rank outsider. Age 15.

BOLSOVER, HERBERT.—The younger brother of the bully of the Remove, found under dramatic circumstances selling newspapers in London. Has seen many vicissitudes in his young life, but is now comfortably settled at Greyfriars. Age 13.

BROWN, TOM.—A worthy son of New Zealand, with sound principles, and one who always plays the game. Age 15.

BULL, JOHNNY.—The latest junior to join the ranks of the Famous Five. Sturdy and straight-spoken, he always hits straight from the shoulder. Age 15, and a great favourite with thousands of boys and girls. Age 15.

BULSTRODE, GEORGE.—Captain of the Remove prior to the election of Harry Wharton. Like Vernon-Smith, has undergone a complete reform, having once been a thorough bully and scapegrace. A good goalkeeper, and a sound, level-headed fellow. Age 15.

BUNTER, WILLIAM GEORGE.—An insufferable gormandiser, sneak, spy, prig, toady, and eavesdropper, with hardly a good trait in his character. Motto—"Eat not to live, but live to eat." His "postal-order which never turns up" is a by-word at Greyfriars. Formerly an occupant of No. 1 Study, he could not be tolerated by Harry Wharton & Co., and is now relegated to Study No. 7 with the Freaks. Can beat Ananias at his own game. Has a wholesome hatred of cold water, and cadges industriously from every new boy. Borrows without the remotest intention of paying back the loan, though he affects to have sound principles. A ventriloquist of no mean order. Age 15.

BUNTER, SAMMY.—The youthful counterpart of his brother, the Owl of the Remove. A gluttonous little sneak, who is prepared to sink all his principles for a good feed. Age 12.

CARNE, JAMES.—Bully, cad, and rank outsider. A bosom friend of Gerald Loder. Age 17.

CHERRY, BOB.—Probably hero-worshipped to a greater extent than any other "Magnet" character. Light-hearted, and sunny as the day, he is always full of cheer when things look black, and is one of the Famous Five's most trusty warriors. He is greatly renowned for his powers as a fighting-man, and holds the honour of being the Remove Form's champion in this respect. A long-limbed, sturdy youngster of 15, brave as a lion, and exceedingly popular.

COKER, HORACE.—An overgrown, burly, and illiterate member of the Fifth Form, whose colossal conceit renders him a fitting target for "japes" of every description. Boasts of many things, but good at none. Plays football in a way to excite angels to tears. Always kept well supplied with funds by a doting aunt. Age 17.

COKER, REGGIE.—An undersized and studious member of the Sixth Form, and Horace Coker's younger brother. Often maltreated by bullies, but stoutly championed by the mighty Horace. Age 14.

COURTNEY, ARTHUR.—Wingate's best friend. One of the stalwarts of the Sixth, and loyal to the backbone. Age 17½.

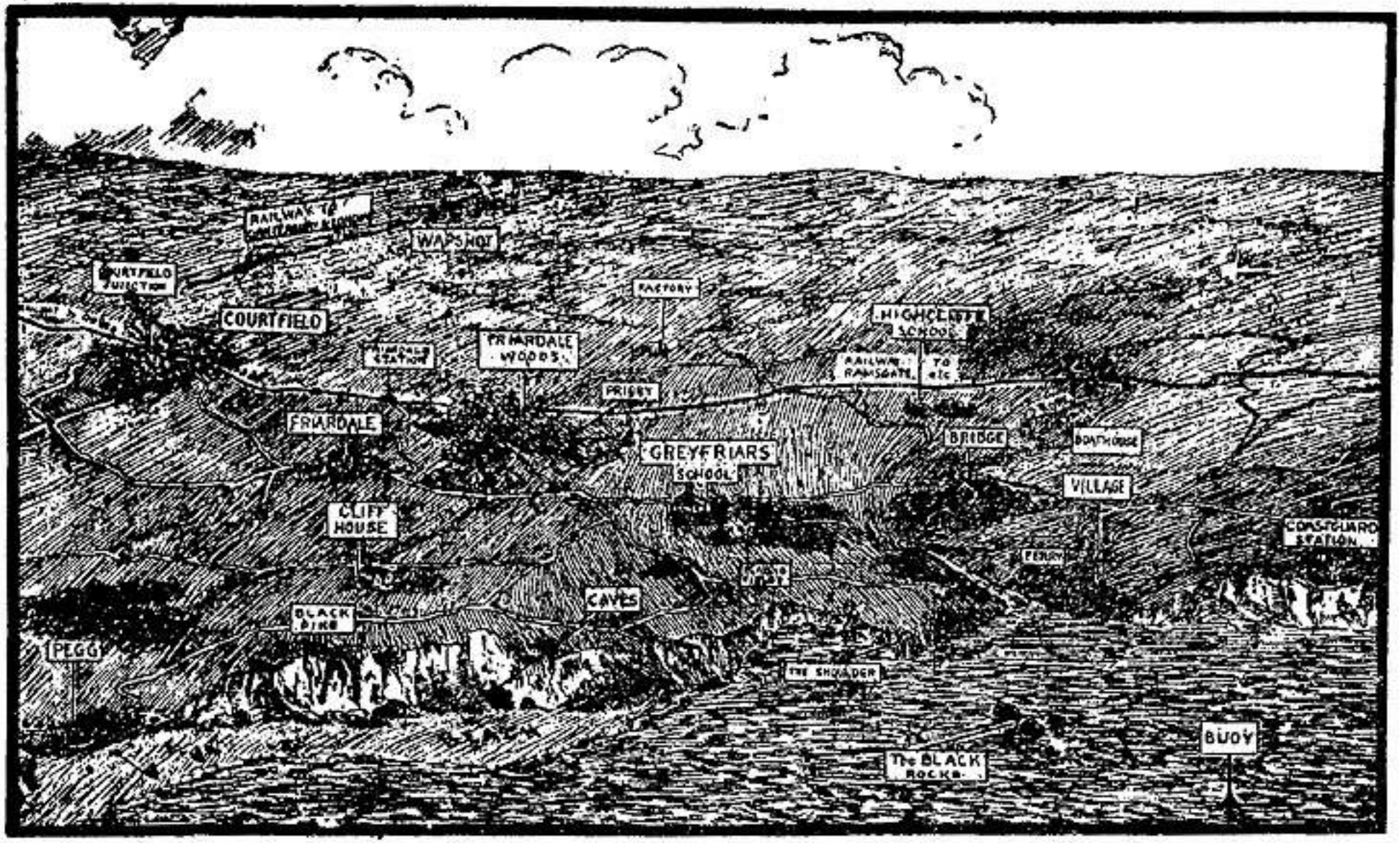
DABNEY, ERNEST.—Temple's right-hand man. Age 16.

DESMOND, MICKY.—A good-natured, genial son of the Emerald Isle. A splendid sportsman, with a smile for everybody. Age 15.

DUTTON, TOM.—One of the "Four Freaks"—the name given to the inmates of Study No. 7. Afflicted with the exasperating malady of deafness, but otherwise a good sportsman and a typical Removite. Age 15.

FIELD, SAMPSON QUINCY IFFLEY.—The "new chum" from Australia, who celebrated his arrival at Greyfriars by working off a gigantic

(Continued on page 6.)



Map showing the Principal Places of Interest in the District around Greyfriars.

jape on Ponsonby & Co., of Highcliffe. A bright cheery youth, noted for his staggering "wheezes." Held a temporary position with the Famous Five while Johnny Bull paid a visit to Australia. Age 15.

FISH, FISHER TARLETON.—Hails from the great "Yew-nited States." An astute swindler, always "on the make." His schemes for relieving his schoolfellows of their superfluous cash are the last word in cunning, but success seldom crowns his efforts. A boastful, blustering Yankee, and a mere passenger so far as sports are concerned. Age 15.

FITZGERALD, PATRICK.—A Fourth-Former with a beautiful Hibernian accent. Age 16.

FRY, WILLIAM.—A staunch supporter of Temple of the Fourth. Age 16.

GATTY, GEORGE ALFRED.—A staunch yeoman of Dicky. Nugent. Age 12.

GREENE, WILLIAM.—One of the chief toadies and hangers-on of Horace Coker. Age 16½.

HAZELDENE, PETER.—The weak-willed, easily-led brother of Marjorie Hazeldene, of Cliff House. Once an ardent follower of Vernon-Smith, and an unmitigated sneak. Has fallen into debt and disgrace on numerous occasions, only to be rescued, for his sister's sake, by the chums of the Remove. Has taken a turn for the better recently. Age 15.

HOBSON, JAMES.—Skipper of the Shell, and a good-natured rival of Harry Wharton. Age 16.

HOP HI.—The younger brother of Wun Lung, and equally Oriental in temperament.

HOSKINS, CLAUDE.—The musician of Greyfriars, and a bosom chum of Hobson, the captain of the Shell. Age 16.

IONIDES, MARCUS.—A Greek senior with a fiery disposition. One who never forgets a wrong, and whose revengeful spirit is always uppermost. Age 17½.

KIPPS. PERCY.—A conjurer of extraordinary ability, who has amazed Greyfriars from time to time by his feats of skill. Age 15.

LINLEY, MARK.—A loyal lad of Lancashire. Entered Greyfriars on a scholarship. Persecuted by cads on account of his poverty, but staunchly backed up by every decent fellow in the Remove. A patient; industrious worker, and Bob Cherry's best chum. Sincere in all he says and does, a perfect sportsman, and one who is, in every sense of the word, true blue. Age 15.

LODER, GERALD.—Probably the biggest blackguard within the four walls of Greyfriars. An unscrupulous bully and adventurer, who lives up to the Eleventh Commandment—"Thou shalt not be found out." A hard task-master to his fags, and a thorough waster. Age 17½.

MAULEVERER, THE HON. HERBERT.—A languid, sleep-loving fellow who has reduced slacking to a fine art. Extravagantly supplied with pocket-money, and almost criminally careless. Good-natured and generous to a degree, and, withal, a decent chap. Age 15.

MORGAN, DAVID.—A sturdy Welsh junior, and an indirect champion of Harry Wharton. Age 15.

MYERS, TEDDY.—One of Dicky Nugent's right-hand men. Always game for a lark. Age 12.

NUGENT, FRANK.—Wharton's most faithful chum, and a prominent member of the select circle known as "The Famous Five." Slimly built, with an almost girlish face, his fighting abilities are often underestimated by opponents. He is, nevertheless, a hard hitter, and, moreover, a keen sportsman. Age 15.

NUGENT, DICKY.—The daring young scapegrace of the Second. Leader of his Form in all larks, and is an irrepressible little rascal. Age 12.

OGILVY, ROBERT.—A Scottish junior, and an average youth, with no outstanding distinctions. Age 15.

PAGET, PERCIVAL SPENCER.—The aristocratic little dandy of the Third. A loyal supporter of Tubb, and close chums with Bolsover minor. Age 12½.

PENFOLD, DICK.—A local scholarship boy, and, like Mark Linley, has undergone much persecution, but came out with flying colours. A great sportsman and a good-hearted fellow. Age 15.

POTTER, GEORGE.—Shares with Greene the doubtful distinction of

being the chief satellite of Coker. Age 16½.

RAKE, DICK.—A study-mate of Johnny Bull, and a light-hearted, happy-go-lucky fellow. Signalised his arrival at Greyfriars by working a stupendous jape. Age 15.

RUSSELL, DICK.—A splendid all-rounder, who won the light-weight championship at the Public Schools Boxing Tournament at Aldershot, 1915. Age 15.

SINGH, HURREE JAMSET RAM.—Nabob of the Indian State of Bhanipur, and known to his intimate chums as "Inky," Remarkable for his quaint manner of speaking. Though constantly in danger of his life, he is well guarded by the rest of the Famous Five, to which circle he belongs. Fifteen years of age, and a sportsman to the finger-tips.

SKINNER, HAROLD.—The cad of the Remove. A dog, a blade, and a goer. Is a humorist of the callous type, and plays many practical jokes, which invariably recoil on his own head. Age 15.

SNOOP, SIDNEY JAMES.—An oily, reprehensible sneak, with probably less backbone than any scholar at Greyfriars. A notorious funk, and a miserable toady of Skinner's. Age 15.

SCOTT, GERALD.—Allied to Temple of the Fourth. Age 16.

STOTT, WILLIAM.—A hanger-on of Skinner's, caddish in the extreme, and a fellow without principle. Age 15.

TEMPLE, CECIL REGINALD.—The authorised captain of the Upper Fourth, and a great rival of Harry Wharton. Though exasperating, his feuds with the Removites are always characterised by fair play, and he has often proved himself to be, not only a rival, but a friend. Age 16.

TODD, ALONZO.—The reverse in almost every respect to his cousin Peter. Meek and mild, and afflicted with an uncontrollable desire to do "good turns," he is the laughing-stock of the Form. Full of the wise saws of his respected Uncle Benjamin. A student of the most hair-raising volumes on impossible subjects. Age 15.

TODD, PETER.—An enterprising go-ahead sort of fellow, whose motto is, "Never be backward in coming forward." Head of No. 7 Study, and leader of repeated campaigns against Harry Wharton and the chums of Study No. 1. Inherits some of his father's aptitude for the law. A good boxer and a reliable half-back. Age 15.

TUBB, GEORGE.—The recognised leader of the fag kingdom. An enterprising youngster, with a mania for cooking herrings on pen-holders. Age 12½.

VALENCE, RUPERT.—One of the desperadoes of the Sixth Form, closely associated with Gerald Loder in his nocturnal revels. Narrowly escaped expulsion on one occasion, when Courtney took the blame of his misdemeanour on his own shoulders for the sake of Valence's sister. Age 17½.

VERNON-SMITH, HERBERT.—Nicknamed "The Bounder." A fellow with a past. Originally the most wild and reckless junior within the walls of Greyfriars, he has, in spite of occasional relapses, completely reformed, and now stands as one of the best fellows in the Remove. His former feuds against Harry Wharton are well known; but these have been wiped off the slate now, and he and Wharton are the best of friends. As a sportsman the Bounder has few equals. His cricket and football are excellent, and he has proved his worth in many a thrilling tussle. His greatest qualities are courage and endurance. Age 15.

WALKER, JAMES.—An associate of Loder, but one who can play the game on occasion. His nature contains a curious admixture of good and bad, but when at his best he is a very decent fellow. Age 17½.

WHARTON, HARRY.—A fine, fearless fellow, who by his repeated gallantry has endeared himself for ever to all Greyfriars. Originally a hot-tempered, passionate lad, he reformed under the genial influence of Bob Cherry, and replaced Bulstrode as captain of the Remove. He puts down bullying with a firm hand, is a magnificent athlete, and a very fair scholar. Guardian—Colonel James Wharton, of the 21st Lancers. In addition to his duties as head boy of the Remove, Wharton captains the cricket and football elevens, and rules the Remove Amateur Dramatic Society. He is fifteen years of age, with a future holding high promise.

WIBLEY, ERNEST.—A marvellous actor and impersonator, and the shining light of the Remove Amateur Dramatic Society. Age 15.

WINGATE, GEORGE.—Captain of Greyfriars, and one of its most popular seniors. Strong, resolute, and good-natured, and a Trojan on the playing-fields. Came largely into the limelight in the never-to-be-forgotten story, "Schoolboys Never Shall Be Slaves." The very ideal of a public school captain. Age 17½.

WINGATE, JACK. — Younger brother of the Greyfriars skipper. Was formerly a passionate, self-willed youngster, but has now been tamed by the members of his Form. Age 12.

WUN LUNG.—A pigtailed youth from the East, with no notions as to honesty and truthfulness. By his clever sleight-of-hand tricks, however, he has thwarted many a dastardly plot formed by the cads of the Remove. Age 15.

RULES.

1. Boys shall be respectful to the masters and prefects appointed in authority over them.

2. They shall refrain from smoking and from using doubtful language.

3. The school boundaries are clearly defined, and no boy must go beyond them, unless he has the necessary pass signed by a master or prefect.

4. The Greyfriars cap, bearing the school colours—blue-and-white—must be worn by all scholars when outside the school premises. Straw hats, also bearing the school colours, are permitted in summer; but those wishing to wear silk hats—exclusive of Sundays—must apply for permission to the captain of the school.

5. The games of cricket and football are compulsory, and must be attended by everybody at least two afternoons in the week.

6. Complaints concerning the school food must be made direct to the headmaster, and not voiced at large by those who are dissatisfied.

7. The only boys' papers permitted to be read are the companion papers—viz., the "Magnet" Library, the "Gem" Library, the "Penny Popular," the "Boys' Friend," "Chuckles," the "Boys' Friend 3d. Library," and the "Greyfriars Herald."

8. Every boy must attend chapel at least once during Sunday.

9. Places of amusement are not to be visited without the previous consent of a master or prefect.

10. Bicycles are allowed, but application for the use of motor-cycles and other vehicles must be made beforehand to the headmaster.

11. No boy is to leave his dormitory before 6 a.m., except in the case of illness or other emergency.

12. Midnight revels are strongly discountenanced and forbidden.

13. No boy may absent himself from lessons without the headmaster's special permission.

14. Wilful damage to school property and the carving or writing of names on any part of the building whatsoever, or upon the trees on the playing-fields, is prohibited.

15. Boys who are unable to swim are not allowed to enter the river unless under the charge of a competent instructor.

16. Waste material of any sort is not to be strewn round the school buildings.

17. No boy must entertain strangers of a doubtful character.

18. No boy is permitted, under any pretext whatever, to carry firearms, catapults, or other weapons likely to inflict hurt or damage.

19. Tradesmen's bills should in all cases be paid promptly.

20. Each boy should make it an unswerving rule to do nothing likely to bring discredit or disgrace on the fair name of the school to which he belongs.

(Signed) HERBERT H. LOCKE,
Headmaster.