THE SCHOOLBOY FARMERS!

A Grand Long Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.

The Magnet 1d. Library

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LORD MAULEVERER WAS STANDING DIRECTLY IN THE PATH OF THE MADDENED ANIMAL, THE BLANKET ON HIS ARM. "MAULY!" SHRIEKED WHARTON.

(A Thrilling Scene in the Magnificent Long Complete School Tale in this Issue.)

MY READERS' PAGE

The Editor is always pleased to hear from his chums, at home or abroad, and is only too willing to give his best advice to them if they are in difficulty or in trouble. . . . Whom to write to: Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.

For Next Monday:

"STICKING TO HIS GUNS!"

By Frank Richards.

Among the many characters who have played and are playing their parts on the stage of Greyfriars, few have been more popular with our readers generally than Herbert Vernon-Smith. His cynical coolness, when he first came to the school, and put himself into opposition to the acknowledged leaders of the Remove Form, the pluck he showed on many occasions, his dropping of his old pub-haunting, doggy ways, all served to awaken and keep alive interest in him. This is very clearly shown by the many letters which reach me asking for "another yarn about the Bounder." Next week's story is a yarn about the Bounder, and a very fine yarn, too. It tells how he came by accident upon the traces of a plot; how, disbelieved by most of his Form-fellows, and sneered at by some, he stuck doggedly to his own conviction; how he was punished and rebuked by those in authority for the too daring measures he took to cope with the danger that threatened Greyfriars; and how, in the long run, he proved that he was right, and the doubters wrong. The capture of a particularly wily and audacious scoundrel was brought about by the cool courage and real resource of one junior who was

"STICKING TO HIS GUNS!"

WHAT THE MEN AT THE FRONT THINK OF THE "MAGNET."

Here are a few extracts from letters, all received on one day, which bear eloquent testimony to the esteem in which our paper is held by the lads in khaki.

A private in the King's Royal Rifles writes: "All the boys in my team hang on at my bivouac for the papers, so you see they are as popular as ever."

The sister of a R.A.M.C. man in France says: "I send the 'Magnet' out to my brother every week, and he says all the boys look forward eagerly to the bright little paper."

To a reader in Brighton, a man of the Northamptonshire Regiment writes from Egypt: "The papers have been passed all round the camp, until the print on them is jolly nearly worn away! You can't imagine how ripping it is to have a supply of the 'Magnet' and the other Companion Papers in your tent, for, of course, we cannot buy them out here. I thank you, on behalf of the whole camp, for sending me the parcel: and I can tell you one thing for sure—there are lots of fellows, who never looked at the papers before this war, who are going to be staunch and regular readers when they come back."

A NOTICE IN THE "MAGNET."

One of my readers tells me that, in reply to a notice on the Chat page of this paper, asking readers in his neighbourhood to join him in forming a footer club for next season, he received over thirty replies. This speaks well for the support given to the "Magnet" in his district—which is Clapham. It also speaks well for the effectiveness of our notices.

I am not out to increase the number of these. Already we receive many more than we can possibly find room for. But I want to say a word or two on the subject, because I know of some cases in which there has been dissatisfaction on account of notices refused. One not too loyal reader wrote me an abusive letter because of a refusal, saying that the paper was utterly rotten, and that he meant to do all he knew how to damage it. Let him go ahead! We don't want his sort, and we can afford to smile at their puny efforts to do us harm. But the vast majority take the disappointment in a far different spirit; and to them I wish to explain clearly why I have to refuse notices of back numbers and other things which the owners want to sell or exchange.

It would never do to accept some of these and refuse others. That course would be obviously unfair. To print all, even all those sent now, while none is being inserted, and the senders of each is politely told why, would be quite impossible without shortening the stories. If once they began to be inserted, they would crowd upon us, for so many of you have things you would be glad to sell or exchange, and the prospect of a free advertisement of them is naturally alluring. But it cannot be done, my friends! We simply can't find room. Those who want to sell back numbers should watch for the notices of those who want to buy them, which I am inserting for the present, though if this kind of notice comes along in ever-increasing volume, as it has shown signs of doing lately, I may have to drop it.

GIRLS' AND BOYS' PAPERS.

In a recent number of a leading evening paper there were some very interesting remarks about the reading of boys' papers by girls. I have not space to say any more about them here than that I am dealing with the subject in this week's issue of our Companion Paper, the "Gem," and I advise everybody interested, as I feel sure all our thousands of girl-readers will be, to get a copy.

THE "BOYS' FRIEND" 3d. LIBRARY.

Two new issues of this series are now on sale. Both are adventure yarns of the most enthralling type. No. 399 is

"THE PEARL SEEKERS!"

and the writer is Cecil Hayter, a master of the craft. No. 340 is

"POLRUAN'S MILLIONS!"

by Maurice Everard, whose name is a household word among "Boys' Friend" readers. Don't miss them.

NOTICES.

For Correspondence, Etc.

E. W. Smallwood, 317, Rotherhithe New Road, S.E., would be glad to correspond with any lonely boy-readers of 15-16.

Miss Ethel Fitzmaurice, 45, Botanic Avenue, Belfast, would be glad to correspond in Pitman's shorthand, for practice, with other readers learning it. She would also like to hear from Miss Dorrie Robertson (New Zealand), with whom she corresponded a short time ago.

Isaac Goldring, of Belfast offers his sincere thanks to the reader who sent him a number of ½d. "Magnets."

Private E. R. Chapman, 1st Herts Regt., B.E.F., France, wishes to thank the many readers who have sent him back numbers.

Rifleman J. Jones, 41485, 5th R.B., Hut 13, Lines 14, Eastern Commaud Depot, Shoreham-by-Sea, Sussex, would be pleased to correspond with readers in the Colonies.

Alfred Hayes and Herbert Parratt are collaborating in the writing of articles of topical interest, and would be glad to hear from the editor of any amateur magazine who wants matter of that kind.—Address, 65, Heron Road, Herne Hill, S.E.

S. Symonds and John West are forming a "Gem" and "Magnet" League for readers not over 12. Stamped and addressed envelope to S. Symonds, 21, Glycena Road, Lavender Hill, Battersea, S.W., please.

J. Hetherington, 53, Kingswood Road, Chiswick, W., is starting a small amateur journal, and would be glad to hear from likely contributors. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

John Orritt, 92, Stamford Road, Birkdale, Southport, wishes to form a "Gem" and "Magnet" League for readers at home and abroad. Soldiers welcomed. No entrance-fee or subscription. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

Yours Editor

The Magnet 1d Library

THE SCHOOLBOY FARMERS!

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

By FRANK RICHARDS.

A sudden yell awakened his lordship. A herd of pigs came snorting and grunting down the lane, with an ancient yokel in charge of them. The horse started off, and the cart was quickly in the midst of the grunting, rolling pigs.
(*See Chapter* 8.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Hands Wanted!

"WHY not us?"

Bob Cherry of the Remove propounded that question quite suddenly.

Harry Wharton & Co. were talking cricket in the junior Common-room, and Bob was looking over the local paper, with a shade of unusual thoughtfulness on his brow. He looked up from the paper suddenly to ask that question.

"Why not us?" repeated Bob. "We could do it, couldn't we?"

"That depends on what it is," said Harry Wharton.

"What are you burbling about?" asked Johnny Bull.

"County Council School chaps are doing it in country parts," pursued Bob, unheeding. "We've got as much sense as they have, haven't we?"

"Some of us have," agreed Frank Nugent. "I don't know about you!"

"Why, you ass——"

"Suppose you explainfully explicate what you are talking about, my esteemed Bob?" suggested Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"There's an advertisement in this paper——"

"There are generally some advertisements in it."

"Fathead! This is an advertisement from a farmer. All his men have gone to the war, and he wants hands. He's asking for boys—schoolboys, you know—to keep things going a bit till things come round. Why shouldn't we lend a hand?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"It's up to us to do our bit!" argued Bob Cherry. "Mugging up Latin ain't so jolly necessary in war-time. Far as I'm concerned, I'd be quite willing to chuck lessons for three years, or the duration of the war."

"Hear, hear!"

"Besides, farm work is ripping," said Bob. "I've had a holiday on a farm, and I've helped with the hay and things. There are lots of things a chap can do—even a public school chap."

"Blessed if I see it!" said Nugent. "Not much good our working off Latin verses on the cows and sheep!"

"Or talking to the bullocks and things in Lower Fourth French," said Johnny Bull.

"Or trying to initiate the pigs into mathematics," said Harry Wharton.

"Rot! We can feed pigs, I suppose? We've often stood Bunter a feed, and that was practice—in a way!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry!" chimed in Billy Bunter.

"And we could milk the—the bulls—at least, the cows!" said Bob, rather vaguely. "I've never milked anything, but I've often opened tins of condensed milk, and I dare say it comes to much the same thing. It only wants practice."

"And we could make hay," said Johnny Bull sarcastically. "We've often made hay of the Highcliffe fellows!"

"Oh, don't be funny! My idea is that we should be jolly useful on a farm, and we should get out of lessons for a week or two—not that I'm thinking of that, of course—ahem!"

"Not at all," said Wharton gravely. "Of course, the Famous Five could do farming as easily as anything else. This Co. is equal to anything—from mopping up Coker of the Fifth to running the war better than Asquith!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Besides, it would be good training," said Bob. "Under the new Conscription law we shall all be soldiers when we're eighteen. Well, that means that we shall go out fighting the Germans. It would be useful to learn how to deal with pigs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think it's a jolly good idea!" said Wharton. "There's only one difficulty in the way. County Council School chaps can get off to do things—we can't. I don't quite see the Head letting us go farming. He hasn't such a ripping opinion of the powers of the Greyfriars Remove as we have."

"But the Head's patriotic," urged Bob Cherry. "Now they've mopped up all the farm labourers into the Army, what are we going to do for food? Not much good getting five million men into Flanders and having no grub for them. Everybody ought to turn to and lend a hand. Why not us?"

"The whynotfulness is terrific," said Hurree Singh. "Let us put it to the esteemed Head."

"Ahem!"

"Suppose we tackle Quelchy about it?" said Bob. "He's not quite so awful as the Head. Who's game?"

The Famous Five looked at one another.

Farm work instead of school work in these pleasant summer days was certainly a very attractive idea. And the juniors had no doubt that they would be of great use on a farm denuded of labour by the demands of the Army. But whether the Head and their Form-master would see matters in the same light was a question it was difficult to answer.

"Of course, Quelchy wouldn't let off slackers like Bunter ——"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Or Skinner or Fishy. They'd only be looking for a holiday. But he'd know that we'd be willing to work."

"Yaas, begad!" chimed in Lord Mauleverer, the dandy of the Remove. "It's a rippin' idea! I'll come to Quelchy with you."

"You!" yelled Nugent. "What could you do?"

"Work!" said Mauleverer firmly. "At least, I'd watch you fellows workin', and encourage you! It's simply rippin' lyin' in the hay on a summer afternoon! I've tried it!"

"Farm labourers don't lie in the hay on a summer afternoon," grinned Nugent. "You'd better not tell Quelchy that that's the programme!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I could work the pump," said Lord Mauleverer. "I've watched a man workin' a pump, and it's as easy as anythin'. And I could—could sow and—and reap, and things like that! It's quite easy. You shove seed into the ground, and then it comes up, and you—you reap it, you know, with a hook or somethin'! It's a jolly good deal easier than construin' Virgil. Fancy givin' old Virgil a rest for a week while we're raisin' crops to feed the country! It would make a chap feel that he was worth his keep, you know, sowin' the seed one day and watchin' the fields of golden grain wavin' in the sun the next! That sounds quite poetical, too, don't it?"

"Do you think golden grain comes up in a single night, like mushrooms?" asked Bob Cherry witheringly. "Not you know about farming! I believe it takes weeks."

"Months!" grinned Wharton.

"Well the longer the better, if they let us stay to see the job through!" said Bob. "Come on; let's go and see Quelchy!"

"Well, it won't do any harm!"

Bob Cherry led the way, with the "Friardale Gazette" in his hand. His chums followed him doubtfully, Lord Mauleverer bringing up the rear with Billy Bunter. Bob noticed that addition to the party when they reached the Form-master's study.

"You cut off, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Cherry; I'm going, too! I suppose I can do farm work," said Bunter. "If you're going to get out of lessons for a week, so am I!"

"It isn't for that. It will be jolly hard work."

"Well, I'm not afraid of hard work!" said Bunter. "I'm jolly well going to ask Quelchy!"

Bob Cherry grunted, and knocked at Mr. Quelch's door. The click of a typewriter was audible from the study, showing that the Remove master was busy with his literary work. The clicking ceased as Bob tapped.

"Come in!"

Bob opened the door, and the Removites marched into the study. Mr. Quelch turned round on his chair and stared at them.

"What is it?"

"If you please, sir, will you look at that advertisement?"

Mr. Quelch looked at it.

"Well?" he rapped out.

"Ahem! We'd like to go and help that farmer chap, sir," said Bob.

"What!"

"We're patriotic, sir," said Billy Bunter. "We want to go and hoe and mow and reap and sow and be a farmer's boy, sir!"

"Don't be absurd, Bunter!"

"Ahem!"

Mr. Quelch glanced at the advertisement again, and then at the juniors. To the relief of the applicants for work he did not frown.

"You really wish to have leave from school for a time, and lend your assistance upon a farm, my boys?" asked the Form-master.

"Yes, sir!" said the juniors, in chorus.

"I will speak to the Head on the subject."

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

"I do not disapprove of the idea," said Mr. Quelch graciously. "Something of the kind has been done at Eton. I am glad to see that you wish to make yourselves useful in this time of stress. Certainly, labour is very badly required on the land. But you must not regard anything of the kind as a holiday. The work would be very hard."

"We don't mind work, sir."

"And probably the food would hardly be what you are accustomed to."

"Oh!" murmured Billy Bunter.

"I have no doubt Mr. Higgins would be very glad of your assistance for a week or two. I will mention the matter to Dr. Locke to-day."

"Thank you, sir!"

And the Removites left the study in a state of considerable satisfaction. Mr. Quelch evidently approved.

In the passage Bob Cherry executed a double-shuffle in great glee.

"This will be one up for the Remove!" he chuckled. "Fancy us being useful in war-time, while the Sixth are slacking around doing nothing! Hurrah!"

"I—I say, you fellows, we shall have to make inquiries about the grub," said Billy Bunter anxiously. "Patriotism is all very well, but a chap wants plenty to eat. And the wages, too—I shall want two pounds a week!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lord Mauleverer was in sight, sauntering along after the juniors cheerily in a shining topper. After him came a procession of inhabitants of the village, carrying his luggage. *(See Chapter 4.)*

"You'd better not go," said Nugent. "Suppose you got mixed up with the other pigs, and the farmer wouldn't let you come away again?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

To which Billy Bunter replied with a snort. He was not afraid of that; but the question of "grub" was a very serious one, from William George Bunter's point of view.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
Nine in Luck!

"WHAT'S the giddy verdict?"

Harry Wharton came into No. 1 Study, where the Co. were anxiously awaiting him. The captain of the Remove had been called to the Head's study to hear his decision. He came back with a very cheerful face.

"All serene!" he said.

"We're to go?" exclaimed Bob eagerly.

"Yes; to-morrow morning!"

"Hurrah!"

"The Head thinks it's a good idea, and we're to go for a couple of days on trial," said Harry. "Dr. Locke has written to Farmer Higgins."

"Good egg!"

"And you've jolly well got to behave yourselves. The Head holds me responsible, as captain of the Remove."

"What about the grub?" asked Billy Bunter.

"Bless the grub!"

"Haven't you asked the Head to be very careful to make special arrangements about feeding us?" exclaimed Bunter, in alarm.

"Ha, ha! No!"

"Well, you must be a silly ass! Suppose we don't get enough to eat?"

"The awfulness would be terrific!" said Hurree Singh.

"Well, if I don't get enough, I know I shall jolly well help myself!" said Bunter warmly.

Wharton held up a warning hand.

"I'm responsible for you, Bunter. If I catch you raiding the hog-wash, you'll get into trouble."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you beast——"

"Well, are you going?" asked Skinner of the Remove, looking in at the door. "Did the Head lick you for your cheek?"

"No. We're going!"

Skinner whistled.

"Well, my hat! You've actually screwed a week's holiday out of the Head with this spoof about farm-work?"

Bob Cherry picked up a cushion.

"Where will you have it, Skinner?" he asked.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Skinner. "I'd have asked permission, too, if I'd thought such a game would work. I'd like a week off as well as you. Yaroooh!"

The cushion flew with deadly aim, and Skinner disappeared into the passage. There was a bump and a yell.

"Rotter!" growled Johnny Bull. "Just like Skinner! He thinks we're only after the holiday."

"Well, so we are, ain't we?" demanded Billy Bunter.

"You fat bounder! You may be."

"I know I'm jolly well not going to make work of it," said Bunter, with a sniff. "I shall be willing to superintend. I dare say I could give the farmer a lot of tips about farming. I'll show you fellows what to do, too!"

"If you come, you'll work," said Wharton. "I'll see to that!"

"If you're going to be a beast, Wharton, I sha'n't come!"

"Hurrah!"

Snoop of the Remove looked in.

"You fellows got permission?"

"Yes."

"Good! Then I'm going to ask!"

"Hard work, you know," said Bob Cherry.

Snoop sniggered.

"They won't get much work out of me. Blessed if I don't go to the Head with Skinner! What sort of whoppers did you tell the Head, Wharton? You might give me a tip before I go to him."

"I'll give you a tip, certainly!" said Wharton wrathfully. "The tip of my boot, you worm!"

"Here, leggo—yooop!"

Snoop was swung round in the powerful grip of the captain of the Remove, and he received the tip—hard! He roared as he went into the passage.

He shook a fist into the doorway of No. 1 Study, and then departed to join Skinner. The two slackers of the Remove proceeded to the Head's study in company; and they came away again very cheerily. They had received permission.

There was a buzz of talk on the subject in the junior Common-room that evening. The news that Skinner and Snoop had received permission encouraged a good many other fellows to visit the Head's study.

Squiff and Peter Todd and Tom Brown and Vernon-Smith went in company, but they did not look so cheerful when they came back.

"What luck?" Bob Cherry asked, when they returned to the Common-room.

Peter Todd shook his head.

"Nothing doing," he replied. "The Head doesn't want the whole school to go farming. He thinks enough permits have been given for the present. We can have our turns later, he says, if it's a success."

"Well, that's right enough," said Wharton. "He couldn't let the whole Remove clear off, you know. There are nine of us going already. Six of the best, and three rotten slackers!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"We'll think of you to-mororow, when we're snoozing in the hay, and you're grinding Latin in the Form-room," grinned Skinner.

"You won't be snoozing in the hay," said Wharton warningly. "You'll be working."

"Bow-wow!"

"You're not going to get Greyfriars a name for slacking. We're going to help Mr. Higgins, and take the places of the conscripts."

"Rats! What train are we catching?" asked Snoop.

"The ten-fifteen from Courtfield."

"Good! I shall have time to drop in for some cigarettes."

"If you bring any cigarettes into the train we'll make you eat them!" said Bob Cherry.

"Br-r-r-r!"

It was evident that Skinner and Snoop did not take the expedition quite seriously as war-work. They were looking forward to slacking and lazing generally. But Harry Wharton had his own ideas about that. The Head had impressed upon him that, as captain of the Remove, he was responsible for the party, and that he was expected to see that they were worth their keep at Higgins' farm, and a little over. And Harry intended to fulfil expectations on that point. There was no room for slackers in the party of schoolboy farmers.

The amateur farm-hands went to bed that night in great spirits. When the rising-bell clanged out in the morning, Bob Cherry was the first out of bed. He dragged Lord Mauleverer out by the shoulders, and bumped him on the floor, tangled in his bedclothes.

"Yow-ow! You silly ass!" roared his lordship.

"No slacking," said Bob. "You're a farmer's boy now, Mauly. When we get to the farm you'll have to get up at five."

"Oh, begad!"

"Bunter! Do you want me to help you?"

"I'm not getting up yet," growled Bunter. "There's no lessons for us this morning. We haven't got to start till after nine. Lemme alone!"

"Up you get!"

"Look here, Cherry, I'm going to do as I like. I'm not going to get up till half-past eight this morning!"

"Your mistake!" said Bob Cherry, grasping the Owl of the Remove by one of his fat ears. "Out you get!"

"Yarooooh! Leggo!"

"Your ear's coming out, anyway," said Bob. "You can please yourself about the rest!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter's ear came out of bed, and, needless to say, the rest of William George Bunter followed it. The fat junior sat on the floor and roared.

"Yah! Beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Cherry! If I'm coming with this party, it's got to be understood that I'm going to do as I like!" roared Bunter. "I'm not going to get up till ten in the morning. That's got to be understood. And if you interfere with me again I'll jolly well lick you!"

"Help!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Now I'm going back to bed," said Bunter. "Mind your own business, you beast! I don't want to have anything to say to you."

Billy Bunter plunged into bed again, and laid his fat face on the pillow. The next moment the pillow was whisked from under his head, and was descending on him in a shower of swipes. Bunter turned out of bed as suddenly as if the bed had become red-hot.

"Is that enough?" asked Bob cheerily.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Of course, you're going to do exactly as you like, Bunter—so long as you like to buck up. See?"

"Groo-hooh-hooh!"

Billy Bunter did not go back to bed again. He gave Bob Cherry a furious blink, and proceeded to dress himself. On second thoughts, he had decided not to lick Bob Cherry.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Mauleverer's Problem!

THERE were nine very cheerful faces at the Remove breakfast-table that morning. Harry Wharton & Co. were looking forward to a change, and to doing some useful work for their country. Billy Bunter was looking forward to a time of laziness. Skinner and Snoop were looking forward to a cessation of restraints, and slacking, smoking, and playing the "giddy ox" generally. Lord Mauleverer was contemplating a succession of pleasant naps in the hay. Some of these expectations were to be realised; others were not.

After breakfast the schoolboy farmers made their preparations for departure. It was very agreeable to be free that morning while the other fellows were going into the class-rooms as usual. Coker of the Fifth met Wharton in the passage, just before the bell rang for classes.

"Hold on a minute, kid," said Coker, with unusual graciousness.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" asked Wharton cheerily.

"I've been to the Head," said Coker. "He doesn't think any more permits ought to be given at present. That's a mistake on his part; he doesn't seem to understand that a Fifth Form chap would be more use on a farm than a gang of silly juniors. But I've got an idea."

"You have!" exclaimed Wharton, in astonishment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, I have," said Coker, frowning.

"Well, wonders will never cease," said Bob Cherry. "How on earth did you come to have an idea, Coker?"

"Don't you be a cheeky fag, Cherry, or you'll get a thick ear!" said Coker drily. "I don't stand cheek from the Lower Fourth."

"Well, we don't stand cheek from the Fifth," remarked Nugent. "Bump him, you chaps, and let's get on! No time to waste on Coker."

"Look here!" said Coker. "This is my idea. The Head won't give permission for a larger party. But it's occurred to me that if one of you young rascals stayed behind, I could go instead."

"Go hon!"

"My idea, Wharton, is that you should go to the Head and suggest it. I've no doubt he would decide to let me go instead."

"I've no doubt he would," grinned Wharton.

"You see, I should be really useful, and it would be patriotic on your part," Coker explained. "Now, buzz off, and see the Head—the bell goes in a minute!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, you cheeky young sweeps?"

"I'm cackling at a cheeky ass," said Bob Cherry. "What are you cackling at, Franky?"

"I'm cackling at a burbling jabberwok," said Nugent. "What are you cackling at, Johnny?"

"I'm cackling at a howling josser," said Johnny Bull. "What——"

"Look here!" roared Coker. "I'm fed-up with this! If you don't want to do the right thing, Wharton, I'll jolly well lick you! I can't say fairer than that."

"But I'm going to do the right thing," chuckled Wharton. "The right thing, under the circumstances, is to bump you for your cheek. Collar him!"

"Why, you cheeky young—— Yarooooh!"

Many hands were laid on Horace Coker, and he smote the floor with a mighty smite. The Removites passed on, laughing, leaving Coker gasping on the floor. He jumped up in a fury. But just then the bell rang for classes, and Horace Coker had to go into the Fifth Form-room—with vengeance unsatisfied.

Harry Wharton & Co. went up to the dormitory in great spirits to pack their bags. Each of the juniors had decided to take an old suit of clothes, rightly judging that natty Etons would be somewhat out of place on a farm, and would be liable to damage. Lord Mauleverer, however, was of a different opinion. The dandy of the Remove was willing to face hard work—in case of need—but he could not possibly face being ill-dressed. There was a roar from the rest of the party as he took a shining topper from a hatbox.

"Put that away, fathead!"

"Are you going farming in a topper, you ass?"

"My dear chaps——"

"Put it away!"

"Begad, you know, a fellow wants to look respectable, you know," said Lord Mauleverer. "I'm not goin' to work in this. I'm takin' my panama to work in."

"Why can't you take a straw like us, fathead?"

"I'm takin' a straw, too."

"Or a cap," said Nugent.

"I'm takin' a cap."

"Is there anything you're not taking?" asked Johnny Bull sarcastically.

"Well, I suppose I'd better take an extra topper."

"Fathead!"

"You see, we don't want to be a dingy crew," said Lord Mauleverer. "You fellows will look rather a scratch crowd, won't you? I'm goin' to stand up for the respectability of Greyfriars, you know."

"If you take that topper, it will come to a bad end," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, rats!" said his lordship.

The party made up their bags—not very large ones. Meanwhile, Lord Mauleverer had packed a bag, a dressing-case, and a trunk. When the party were ready to start, his lordship looked a little helplessly at his belongings.

"How are you gettin' to the station?" he asked.

"Walking."

"But how are the bags goin', then?"

"We're going to carry them."

"Oh, don't be funny!" urged his lordship. "How can I carry a bag?"

"With your hands," suggested Bob Cherry. "Of course, you might carry it with your feet, if you found it more convenient."

"I wish you'd be serious, Cherry. How can I carry a bag with my hands when I walk with my hands in my pockets?"

"Is that a conundrum?"

"Besides, I couldn't carry a bag, a dressin'-case, a hatbox, and a trunk," said Mauleverer. "Do be serious!"

"Perhaps you'd like us to shoulder them?" suggested Bob.

Lord Mauleverer brightened up.

"Jolly good idea!" he said heartily. "You and Bull can take the trunk—you're strong beasts. Nugent can take the hatbox, and Inky the dressin'-case, and Skinner the bag."

"Catch me!" said Skinner.

Bob Cherry winked at his comrades.

"We ought to oblige Mauly," he said. "Mauly can't be expected to overdo it. The aristocracy have bucked up awfully during the war, but they can't be expected to take their hands out of their pockets. There's a limit."

"Look here, Bob——"

"Oh, don't jaw—shoulder Mauly's luggage!"

"Yaas, don't be slackers, you know!" urged Mauleverer.

"Slackers!" roared Johnny Bull wrathfully.

"Yaas. This isn't a time for slackin'—war-time, you know."

"Why, you—you——"

"Come on—lend a hand with this trunk!" said Bob.

As it was evident that Bob Cherry had some humorous intention in view the juniors assented. In addition to their own bags, Lord Mauleverer's luggage was shouldered, and the juniors marched out of the dormitory heavily laden.

The rest of Greyfriars was in the class-rooms as they took their departure. They marched out into the quadrangle, his lordship following with his hands in his pockets.

Gosling, the porter, stared at them as they came down to the gates. Gosling had heard of the farming idea. He had not expected to see the schoolboy farmers starting with sufficient luggage for a voyage round the world, however.

"Well, my heye!" said Gosling.

The party marched out into the road. There, at a sign from Bob Cherry, Lord Mauleverer's luggage was dumped down by the roadside. His lordship blinked at it and blinked at the juniors.

"Good-bye, Mauly!" said Bob affably. "Come on, you chaps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Begad! What about my luggage?" ejaculated Mauleverer, in astonishment.

"Oh, you can sit on the trunk," said Bob. "You can try on the hats, you know, if you want something to do. You can rest your feet on the bag. You can use the dressing-case for a pillow. Good-bye!"

The juniors started for Courtfield, grinning. Lord Mauleverer gazed after them in dismay.

"Oh, begad!" he murmured. "What a rotten joke! Oh, crumbs!"

"Are you coming, Mauly?" called back Wharton.

"I can't carry my luggage, dear boy."

"Leave it there."

"Train goes at ten-fifteen, you know."

The juniors tramped away up the road. Lord Mauleverer sat down on the trunk, apparently to think it out. The juniors turned the bend in the road, and lost sight of him. They expected to hear feet pattering behind, but they did not hear them. They arrived at Courtfield Junction Station minus Lord Mauleverer.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Off to Fernford!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were in good time for the train. They had to wait at the station a quarter of an hour. Billy Bunter improved the shining hour by extracting chocolates from automatic machines and devouring them. Skinner and Snoop disappeared for some time—doubtless to lay in a supply of cigarettes for the glorious days of slacking they had arranged for.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's the train!" exclaimed Bob Cherry at last.

The train came in. Harry Wharton cast an anxious glance towards the station entrance.

"That ass Mauly hasn't come," he said.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here he is!"

Lord Mauleverer, looking as elegant and nonchalant as usual, sauntered on the platform. He was followed by a porter wheeling a trolley, upon which reposed a trunk, a huge dressing-case, a hatbox, and a bag. He nodded genially to the astonished juniors.

"Plenty of time—what!" he remarked.

"How did you get that rubbish here?" roared Bob.

"Eh? My luggage? Oh, that was all right! I had a brain-wave," explained Lord Mauleverer. "I went in and telephoned for a taxi."

"My hat!"

"Luckily there was a taxi to be had, and it got me here in time. I don't want to reproach you fellows, but you've led to my wastin' a quid in war-time," said Lord Mauleverer. "It's wrong to waste quids in war-time. Every quid counts in fightin' the Germans, you know. I won't rub it in, but I really advise you to be a bit more careful."

"What?"

"No good comes of slackin'," said his lordship. "Slackin's all right in peace-time, but just now I think it's rather bad form. I do, really! Here's the train. Label those things for Fernford, will you, porter?"

"Yessir."

Lord Mauleverer stepped into a first-class carriage.

"We're going third," yelled Johnny Bull.

"Begad, are you? All serene!"

"Have you got a first-class ticket, you ass?"

"Yaas. But they let you go third with a first-class ticket, you know. The railway company is awfully accommodatin',"

said Mauleverer, stepping out. "No difficulty at all about that. Come on!"

"I say, Mauly, you give me your ticket," said Bunter. "I'm accustomed to travelling first, you know. You can have mine."

"Certainly, dear boy."

"Well, give it to me, fathead!"

Lord Mauleverer sat down in a corner seat of the third-class carriage. The juniors had the carriage to themselves.

"Yes, give it to Bunter," said Johnny Bull. "It's worth the money to get rid of Bunter for the journey."

"Oh, really, Bull! Why don't you give me the ticket, Mauly, you fathead?"

"It's in my pocket."

"Well, get it out!"

"Can't you get it out?" said Mauleverer warmly. "Blessed if you're not all tarred with the same brush—slackers first and last!"

"You howling ass, which pocket is it in?"

"I forget."

Slam! The carriage door closed, and the guard waved his flag. The train started for Fernford. Billy Bunter gave Mauleverer a basilisk glare through his spectacles.

"Ass! It's too late now!"

"Begad! Is it?" yawned his lordship. "I hope you fellows are not going to jaw. I'd like to go to sleep."

"Make room for me," growled Bunter. "There's nine of us here, and only room for eight. Make room, Skinner."

"Go and eat coke!"

"Get up a bit further, Snoop."

"Bow-wow!"

"Mauly, you ass, make room for a chap!"

"Eh? Can't you stand?"

"Stand!" yelled Bunter.

"Yaas. Don't be a rotten slacker!"

"Why, you—you—you——" spluttered Bunter.

"Blessed if I ever saw such slackers! Perhaps Bob will stand and let you have his seat."

"Perhaps I won't!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Well, Wharton, then——"

"No jolly fear!"

"Well, of all the slackers!" said Mauleverer, in disgust. "Blessed if I'm not ashamed of the lot of you! I hope you won't start this rotten slackin' at the farm. What will Mr. Higgins think of you?"

"It's what he'll think of you that puzzles me," said Bob Cherry. "My idea is that he'll think Greyfriars is a private lunatic asylum. But there's one thing he's not going to think. He's not going to think Greyfriars chaps come to do farm work in silk hats. Here goes!"

"Hallo! Whatter you doin' with my topper?" yelled Lord Mauleverer, as Bob Cherry grabbed it from his head.

The topper sailed out of the open window. Lord Mauleverer gazed after it, petrified.

"I told you it would come to a bad end," said Bob Cherry.

"Begad! That topper cost thirty bob, and it's a clear waste in war-time," said Lord Mauleverer. "You know what the Cabinet Ministers say about national economy?"

"Yes; if the war lasts seventy-seven years, the result may depend on the last silk topper," grinned Johnny Bull.

"Still, it's more comfy to take a nap without a hat," said Lord Mauleverer. "I've got two more in the hatbox. Don't wake me up, you chaps."

And his lordship settled down to sleep. He settled down in profound content for the space of the tenth part of a second. Then he leaped to his feet with a sudden yell which would have done credit to a Hun.

"Yarooooh!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the matter?"

"Yow! Ow! Some beast ran a pin into me!"

"Great Scott! Who could have done that?" ejaculated Bob.

"Why, you've got a pin in your paw, you fathead!"

"Dear me! Then I must have done it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lord Mauleverer rubbed his leg and glared at the humorous Bob. Then he turned to sit down again. Billy Bunter was in the corner seat, and evidently a fixture there.

"That's my seat, Bunter."

"Mine now," said Bunter. "You can stand. Don't be a slacker, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, begad!"

Lord Mauleverer stood. But after five minutes the juniors crowded up and made room for his lordship to sit down. But there was no nap for the slacker of the Remove on that journey. Restful repose was not possible in the presence of the exuberant Bob.

The train ran into Fernford Station at last, and the juniors crowded out on the platform with their bags. An ancient farm labourer in a smock frock, with a face like very old mahogany, was waiting there. He chewed a straw while he waited. As his ancient eyes fell upon the Greyfriars party he removed the straw and touched his ancient hat.

"Be you the young gentlemen from t' school?" he inquired.

"We be," replied Bob Cherry gravely.

"Maister Higgins sent me to meet ye and take ye to t' farm."

"Thanks awfully!"

"This way!"

"Begad! What about my luggage?" exclaimed Lord Mauleverer, as the juniors picked up their bags to follow the countryman.

"Luggage, zur?"

"Yaas!"

"Maister sez nothin' about no luggage, zur!"

"Has Mr. Higgins sent a car for us?"

"Lorramussy! There ain't no car, zur!"

"Oh, begad! Is it a trap?"

"There ain't nothing, zur!"

"My hat! Are we goin' to walk?"

"Yes, zur!"

"How far is the farm?"

"Matter o' three mile, zur!"

"This is where you faint, Mauly!" said Bob Cherry sympathetically.

Lord Mauleverer did not faint. But really he looked very near it.

"What's goin' to be done?" he asked.

"You are!" grinned Bob. "Come on, you chaps! Mauly can sit on his luggage and think it out."

"Hold on a minute, William—is your name William?"

"Garge, zur!"

"Begad, what a queer name! I didn't know Garge was a name!" said Lord Mauleverer innocently. "How can I get my luggage to the farm, Mr. Garge?"

"Doan't know, zur!"

And Garge marched off, followed by the Greyfriars juniors. Lord Mauleverer eyed them, and eyed his luggage. Then he opened his hatbox and took out a hat. That was all he could think of at present.

But about a quarter of an hour later, as the juniors were following Garge along a deep, rutty lane, Bob Cherry looked back and uttered an exclamation.

Lord Mauleverer was in sight, sauntering along after them cheerily in a shining topper. After him came a procession. Two ancient yokels bore a trunk on their shoulders, a boy of ten carried the dressing-case, a little girl bore the hatbox, and an old gentleman, who looked a hundred, at least, was labouring along with the bag. All the young men of Fernfold had gone to the war—but what remained of the inhabitants had rallied round to help a nobleman in distress—probably induced by a sight of Lord Mauleverer's plentiful supply of cash.

"Well, my only hat!" ejaculated Bob.

"Good old Mauly, always in at the death!" grinned Skinner.

Garge blinked at the following procession with wide-open eyes. Garge had never seen a new hand arrive at the farm in this style before.

"Lorramussy!" said Garge.

The juniors waited for the procession to come up. Lord Mauleverer joined them cheerfully.

"All serene!" he said. "I don't want to rub it in, but I think I ought to point out to you slackers that you've made me spend five pounds in war-time."

"Five pounds!" said Wharton.

"Yaas!"

"What on earth for?"

"Quid each for this little lot," said Lord Mauleverer, nodding at the peculiar procession. "Prices have gone up—war-time, you know. I'm not a sweatin' employer, you know. I believe in high wages for people who work. Dash it all, if people didn't work, employers would have to work, you know!"

"Is there a duck-pond at the farm, Garge?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Yes, zur!"

"Good! We'll drown Mauly in it! Come on!"

And the war-workers marched on, with the procession of luggage-bearers bringing up the rear.

Farm-hands and juniors were quickly at work, filling buckets at the pond and rushing them to the burning stack. Mrs. Higgins and the maid came out to help, and there was a scene of wild hurry and excitement. (*See Chapter* 12.)

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
At the Farm!

A STOUT, red-faced gentleman in gaiters, with a gun under his arm, stood at the gate. The juniors guessed that this was Farmer Higgins, and they touched their caps to him very politely. The farmer ran his eye over them, and his glance dwelt in astonishment upon the procession of luggage-carriers.

"By gum!" said Mr. Higgins. "You're the party from the school—eh?"

"Yes, sir!" said Wharton. "We've come to work."

"To work hard, sir!" said Bob Cherry.

"Yaas, begad!"

"What's all that?" asked Mr. Higgins.

"That's my luggage, sir."

"Thunder! Have you come down 'ere for a holiday?"

"Not at all, dear boy!" said Lord Mauleverer warmly. "If you find a slacker in this party, it won't be me. I'm ready to work. I'll start milkin' the cows now, if you like."

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Fathead! The cows are milked early in the morning," said Skinner.

"Thank goodness—I mean, sorry," said Lord Mauleverer. "Perhaps you'd like me to start sowing the golden grain, sir?"

"Sowing the what?" said Mr. Higgins faintly.

"The golden grain, sir!" said Lord Mauleverer. "Or reapin' it. I don't care which I do, so long as I'm useful. That's what I really want. But I had an idea that the sowin' was done before the reapin'. But, of course, you know best, as a practical farmer, sir."

"Oh, my eye!" said Mr. Higgins. "Garge take these new 'ands in, and show them their quarters!"

"Yes, zur!"

Harry Wharton opened the gate, and the juniors passed on up the path to the farmhouse. The farmer looked after them almost dazedly. Since conscription had cleared his land of all hands, Mr. Higgins had been in parlous straits for labour. He had the choice of getting what labour he could, or of allowing his land to go out of cultivation. From motives both patriotic and personal, he did not wish to adopt the latter alternative. He had been very glad to avail himself of Dr. Locke's offer of nine schoolboys to help. Schoolboys from the village school were useful enough, but Mr. Higgins had his doubts about public school fellows. But he was glad to give them a trial. Lord Mauleverer had given him an impression that his new labourers would be a trial indeed!

"Look here, Mauly, you fathead!" said Bob Cherry. "You're not to talk. You're making people believe that we're a set of prize idiots at Greyfriars!"

"Oh, begad!"

"Yes; for goodness' sake keep your head shut, Mauly," said

Johnny Bull, "and don't talk about golden grain. It's never heard of in the country!"

"But I've read about golden grain in poetry," said Lord Mauleverer.

"There's no poetry on farms, fathead. A spade is called a spade, not an agricultural implement. I wonder what Mr. Higgins thought of a howling ass coming on a farm job in a topper!"

"Here you are, zur!" said Garge.

Garge stopped at a barn near the farmhouse.

"This our quarters?" asked Wharton.

"Yes, zur!"

"Well, it's airy, at all events!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"My hat! This is roughing it!" said Snoop.

"Well, we came here to rough it," said Wharton. "I suppose they'll put some sort of beds in here."

"Begad! Rather a lark—what?" said Lord Mauleverer. "I've never slept in a barn before. But where's the bath-room?"

Old George looked perplexed.

"The what, zur?" he asked.

"The bath-room, Mr. Garge. Where is it?"

Garge scratched his ancient head in a puzzled way.

"I suppose we shall have to go up to the house for a bath," said Lord Mauleverer, on second thoughts. "Well, that's all right. But—but I haven't brought a dressing-gown. What the dickens is to be done?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All your fault, you asses! If you hadn't bothered a chap about takin' too much luggage I should have packed another trunk," said Lord Mauleverer plaintively. "Now I shall have all the trouble of dressin' to go and get a bath in the mornin', and dressin' all over again after the bath. That will take it out of a chap, and I don't see how I shall get much work done after that! Hallo! What do you people want?"

"They want to be paid, you ass!" said Skinner, as the luggage-carriers, after depositing their burdens in the barn, surrounded his lordship.

"Oh, yaas, begad!"

Lord Mauleverer opened his pocket-book, and bestowed a pound-note on each of his train—a proceeding that made old Garge open his eyes till it really seemed as if they would never close again. Old Garge had never seen a new farm labourer supplied with an apparently unlimited number of currency-notes. The five natives departed in a state of great satisfaction; and there was probably a rush on the ale at the Fernford Arms that day.

"I suppose we're going to begin work at once," said Bob Cherry, as Garge left them to themselves in the barn. "We'd better change our clobber."

Lord Mauleverer sat down on a stool with a shake of the head.

"Too much fag," he said. "What's the good of changin' your clothes?"

"To save them, fathead!"

"We've all brought old clothes, ass!" said Wharton.

"Well, I haven't, so I'm not goin' to change! I don't feel as if I can begin work to-day, either, after that exhaustin' journey!"

"I say, you fellows, I'm hungry!" exclaimed Bunter.

"Go and eat coke!" suggested Bob Cherry.

"Look here, if that fellow Higgins thinks he's going to starve us——"

"Shurrup! Here he comes!"

Mr. Higgins looked genially into the barn.

"Like your quarters?" he asked.

"Yes, ripping, sir," said Bob Cherry. He was wondering inwardly whether there would be any beds, but he did not mention the matter.

"I see you've brought some workin' clothes with you."

"Yes, sir," said Wharton.

"Come along, and I'll show you over the farm. I've got a few minutes to spare jest now."

"Thank you, sir."

Lord Mauleverer suppressed a groan, and rose from the stool. The farmer looked at his lordship seriously.

"You young gentlemen will have to rough it a bit," he said. "But I don't want you to overdo it. You—what's your name?"

"Mauleverer, sir."

"You, Mauleverer, then, have you got all the things you want with you? I see you've brought hardly any luggage!"

The juniors stared for a moment, and then grinned. Mr. Higgins was evidently a gentleman with a sense of humour. But Lord Mauleverer did not grin. He took Mr. Higgins quite seriously.

"Yaas; it was the fault of these slackers," he said. "They wouldn't let me pack the other trunk."

"Well, if you need anything, all you have to do is to telephone for it."

"Oh, good! You've got a telephone laid on?"

"Not yet. I'm going to have one laid on this afternoon, in case you should want it."

"Thanks awfully, my dear man! That's very good of you!"

"Not at all," said Mr. Higgins. "What I want is to make you comfortable. My old hands never needed a telephone; but, bless you, I'm a believer in the rights of labour. The new car will be here to-morrow morning. I suppose you could manage to do without a car for to-day?"

"Oh, yaas! Don't mention it!"

"Do you prefer a Daimler or a Mercedes?"

"I leave it to you, sir," said Lord Mauleverer. "They're both good."

"Very well. Is there anything else I could get for you?"

"Nothin', sir. The only thing I'm anxious about is the bath."

Mr. Higgins looked thoughtful.

"There isn't a bath-room in the farmhouse," he said. "But I suppose it will do if I have one put in the barn?"

"Certainly. But won't that be a lot of trouble?"

"Not at all. The new bath-room will be here about the same time as the telephone and the new motor-car."

"Thanks awfully, sir!"

"Now come and have a look round."

The juniors followed Mr. Higgins.

"Awfully obligin' chap, isn't he?" said Lord Mauleverer confidentially. "Blessed if I thought farmers were like this. Seems to me an agricultural labourer must have a rippin' time if all farmers are like this."

"They must! Ha, ha!"

"What are you cacklin' at?"

But the juniors did not explain what they were cackling at. They left his lordship to discover that for himself.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Lord Mauleverer Begins to Learn!

MR. HIGGINS kindly showed the juniors over the farm. Fernford Farm was extensive, and the showing round included a very long walk, which made Bunter puff and gasp. Lord Mauleverer shuddered a little as the party stopped to view the pigs, whose name seemed to be legion. There was an aroma about the pigsties which did not seem to agree with his lordship. Mr. Higgins did not seem to notice that, however.

"Fond of animals—what?" he asked, addressing himself particularly to Lord Mauleverer, who seemed to have taken his fancy.

"Oh, yaas," said Mauleverer faintly.

"Good! You shall have the job of feeding the pigs."

"Oh, begad!"

"George will show you how to make the hogwash," said Mr. Higgins, beaming.

"Help!"

"You'll grow very fond of them in the long run," said Mr. Higgins—"that fond of 'em that you'll feel quite cut up when you have to stick 'em."

Lord Mauleverer turned pale.

"Stick 'em!" he said faintly.

Mr. Higgins nodded.

"Do you mean kill 'em, sir?"

"Yes. You see," explained Mr. Higgins, "a pig has to be killed before it can be turned into bacon. Otherwise, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals would raise objections."

"Oh, begad!" Lord Mauleverer pushed back his silk hat, and wiped his brow. "I—I suppose it's necessary to kill the poor little beasts, sir?"

"As necessary as killing Germans, my lad."

"I—I suppose people couldn't do without bacon?" murmured Lord Mauleverer. "I—I sha'n't ever touch a rasher again!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Mr. Higgins.

And he led the way onward. Lord Mauleverer gave his grinning chums an unhappy look.

"I'm beginnin' to understand the conscientious objectors now, you fellows," his lordship groaned. "I couldn't kill a pig. That's how they feel about killing Germans, I suppose. I could kill a German at a pinch, but I'd die before I'd kill an animal—I mean, a four-footed animal. I would, really! Why can't we all be vegetarians? I'm goin' to be a vegetarian after this, begad!"

"You thumping ass!" said Johnny Bull. "The chap's pulling your silly leg. He wouldn't trust you to kill a pig. It's a business that has to be learned."

Lord Mauleverer brightened up.

"Sure of that?" he asked.

"Yes, fathead!"

"Oh, good!" said his lordship, in great relief.

"These are sheep," said Mr. Higgins, pointing with his whip to a flock of sheep in a field.

The juniors smiled in a sickly way. They knew sheep by sight.

"Begad, are they, sir?" said Lord Mauleverer politely. He felt that Mr. Higgins expected somebody to say something.

"Yes. They are used for the production of mutton. Alive, they are called sheep. Dead, they are called mutton."

"Oh!" murmured the juniors.

"You live and learn," said Mr. Higgins. "Now, when you eat your mutton chops in the future, you'll know where they come from. I dare say you always thought they grew on trees like bananas. Haw, haw!"

"I wish they did," sighed Lord Mauleverer. "Do you really kill those poor little beasts, sir?"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Higgins. "The mutton chops are painlessly extracted, and the sheep feel all the better for it afterwards."

Even Mauleverer could see that the merry farmer was pulling his leg this time. But how anybody could kill a sheep was a mystery to Mauleverer. Never had vegetarianism presented so many beauties to his eyes.

Mr. Higgins opened the door of a shed.

"This is the black bull," he said. "He's kept roped up because he's dangerous. If he got loose, he would gore every man on the farm. I don't know whether the rope's got loose—it sometimes does."

Skinner and Snoop and Billy Bunter backed away hastily. But the other juniors followed Mr. Higgins into the shed. A magnificent bull was roped up there, and he gave a deep mumble, and turned a pair of wicked eyes on the visitors. There was no doubt that he was a dangerous animal to let loose.

"What a fearful-lookin' beast!" murmured Mauleverer.

"You like him?" asked Mr. Higgins jovially. "That's right. You're going to look after this bull, and take him down to the pond to drink."

"Oh, begad!"

"If he gores you——"

"Oh, I—I say——"

"If he gores you, I'll send you home in the new motor-car, and telephone the sad news to your relatives with the new telephone," said Mr. Higgins.

Lord Mauleverer grinned faintly, realising that Mr. Higgins was being humorous again.

"You may have the job of killing him," went on the farmer. "He has gored seven of my hands to death, and if he does it again I'm determined to turn him into pork chops. I suppose you know pork chops come from bullocks—what?"

"Do they really?"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

Mr. Higgins led the new labourers to the farmhouse, where they were presented to Mrs. Higgins, a buxom lady with a kindly face. The farm having been inspected, the juniors sat down to dinner in the farmhouse kitchen, with the farmer and his wife, and Garge and two or three old fellows, who were evidently long past military age.

Dinner consisted of bread and cheese and ale, but the juniors did not touch the ale. They preferred water. The diet was good and healthy, but Billy Bunter grumbled under his breath. If the diet at Fernford Farm was to consist of bread and cheese, Billy Bunter was likely to be fed-up very quickly with the merry life of a farm labourer.

Lord Mauleverer, however, was very well satisfied. He had almost trembled at the prospect of eating beef or mutton or bacon. True, he partook of all those articles of diet at Greyfriars and at home. But after seeing the pigs and the sheep and the bullocks, it seemed different. Lord Mauleverer would have felt like a cannibal at that moment if he had eaten beef or mutton or bacon. As a matter of fact, the other fellows, though less fastidious than his lordship, shared his feelings to a great extent. Farm life wanted getting used to.

"By gad, this is very comfy, dear boys!" Lord Mauleverer remarked. "What rippin' cheese! What toppin' bread! Now, all I want is a nap in the hay."

Mr. Higgins rose

"Now to work!" he remarked.

"Work!" said Mauleverer.

"This way!"

And the schoolboy farmers went out to work.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
Sticking To It!

CRASH, crash, crash!

Bob Cherry, Harry Wharton, and Johnny Bull were hard at work splitting logs. Mr. Higgins had set them to that task. Frank Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh were sawing wood. Hurree Singh declared that the hardfulness of the work was terrific, but he stuck to it gamely. It certainly was harder than Form-room work at Greyfriars.

Lord Mauleverer sat on a fence and watched them. Skinner and Snoop had been set to raking hay, rather rebelliously. Billy Bunter was assigned to gathering fruit in the orchard. Mr. Higgins had jovially assured him that he was simply built for that, and he had declined to give him a ladder. Bunter was designed by Nature for an active climber, according to Mr. Higgins. The Owl of the Remove had gone to his work with suppressed fury in his breast.

"Buck up, Mauly!" called out Bob Cherry.

"I'm just goin' to begin, dear boy!"

"That blessed farmer thinks we're all like Mauly, and a set of burbling slackers!" growled Bob. "He's pulling our leg all the time. He doesn't expect us to make any impression on this pile of logs."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"We'll surprise him," he said. "We'll work through the whole lot before dark."

"That's a big order!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Well, we've got to show that we're worth our salt."

"My esteemed arms are aching terrifically," murmured Hurree Singh. "How do you feel, my esteemed Nugent?"

"Nearly dead!" groaned Frank. "But I'm sticking to it."

"The stickfulness is terrific!"

"Buck up, Mauly, you ass! You've come here to work!"

Lord Mauleverer groaned, and rose.

"I'll take one end of that saw, and give you a rest, Franky," he said.

"You're welcome!" gasped Frank.

Lord Mauleverer took one end of the double-handed saw, Hurree Singh having the other end. He drew it towards him at a snail's pace.

"That is not the way to use the esteemed saw," remarked Inky. "The motion must be quickful, or it will not penetrate the esteemed wood."

Lord Mauleverer gave the saw a disheartened push. Then he let go, and sat on the fence again.

"Finished?" howled Nugent.

"Yaas; I'm tired!"

"Is that what you call working?"

"Look here, even a farmhand can't keep slavin' at it all the time!" said Lord Mauleverer indignantly. "After handlin' a big, heavy saw like that a chap wants a bit of a rest."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This fence ain't really comfy," murmured Mauleverer. "I think I'll go and take a snooze in the hay yonder. After I've had a rest, I'll come back and do some more work."

"More!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Yaas!"

His lordship drifted away to the hayfield, and lay down in the hay. He put his silk hat over his eyes, and went to sleep. The juniors grinned, and went on with their work.

It was a hot summer's afternoon. They worked in their shirt-sleeves, with the perspiration running down their faces, and their straw hats on the backs of their heads. Harry Wharton & Co. were not at all slackers; but they made the discovery that farm work was a little more tiring than school work, and that even a slogging cricket-match was nothing to it.

But they were determined not to give in. They intended Mr. Higgins to understand that they had come there to work, and that they meant to do it.

It was towards sundown when Mr. Higgins, who had been busy elsewhere, paid them a visit. A huge pile of logs had been sawn and split, and the farmer stared at them in astonishment.

"Who did that?" he asked.

"We did," said Bob Cherry, mopping his manly brow, and gasping.

"Oh, my word!" said Mr. Higgins. "Didn't Garge come and help you?"

"Alone we did it," said Bob.

"Well, my eye! You can work!"

"That's what we've come here for," said Wharton.

Mr. Higgins grinned.

"Do you know what you've done?" he said. "You've

Bob Cherry followed Skinner and Snoop fast, flourishing the whip. The two slackers ran the race of their lives down to the gate. They did not stop to open it, but hurled their bags over, and bundled after them. *(See Chapter* **12.)**

sawn up twice as many logs as my men would have done in the time."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"You'll do," said Mr. Higgins. "Don't overdo it. Where's Mauleverer?"

"Ahem! I—I think he's taking a rest."

"Well, he's earned one, if he's done his share of that," said Mr. Higgins cordially. "You'd better go in to your tea now."

"Hadn't we better finish the pile, sir?"

"No, no! You'll be laid up to-morrow," said Mr. Higgins good-humouredly. "Find the others, and take them in to tea."

"Right, sir!"

The juniors were glad enough to knock off. They were aching in every limb from their unaccustomed labour. The discovery that they had overdone it, however, was very agreeable to them. Mr. Higgins had had to admit that they could work. Their performance was, indeed, more creditable than the farmer supposed, as he believed that Lord Mauleverer had done his share—a point upon which the juniors did not care to undeceive him.

They proceeded to look for their comrades. A sound of deep and anguished groaning fell upon their ears as they entered the shady orchard.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the matter with you, Bunter?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter was seated at the foot of an apple-tree, with his fat hands pressed upon his ample waistcoat. There was an expression of deep anguish on his face.

"Ow-ow-ow-yow!" he groaned.

"Are you ill?" exclaimed Wharton.

"Yow-ow-ow-wow!"

"What on earth are you up to? What have you been doing?" exclaimed Nugent.

"Yow-ow-ow-woop!"

"You've been scoffing the apples!" said Harry.

"Yow-ow-ow! They're awful!" groaned Bunter. "I suppose it's the apples. I only ate about twelve—well, fifteen at the most. They looked all right."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob. "These apples ain't eating apples. They're intended for cooking. And they ain't ripe, either."

"I thought they were rather sharp!" moaned Bunter. "But I was jolly hungry. Ow-ow-ow! I'm dying!"

"Well, don't make that row about it!" said Johnny Bull unfeelingly. "Die quietly, and have a little dignity about it. Remember you're a Greyfriars chap!"

"Yow-ow-ow-wow!"

"Where would you like to be buried?" asked Bob Cherry sympathetically. "I say, we must get Bunter away when he's dead. I shouldn't wonder if Higgins would want to turn him into rashers, instead of killing a pig specially!"

"Yow-ow-ow! Send for a doctor!" moaned Bunter. "I've got awful pains—like red-hot daggers and things. I feel as if a thousand bayonets had been run into me all at once, and—and red-hot carving-knives! Yow!"

"Keep your hands from picking and stealing," grinned Nugent. "We came to call you to tea, but I suppose you won't want any tea now."

Billy Bunter staggered to his feet.

"I—I think a meal might revive me a little," he stammered.

Bob Cherry shook his head.

"Better not have any tea!" he said decidedly. "I put it to you, Bunter, as a patriotic chap. You're dying, and the meal would be a sheer waste. You can't waste good food like that in war-time!"

"Yow-ow-ow! Beast!" mumbled Bunter. "I—I think I might recover if I could have a really good square meal."

"All the more reason why you shouldn't have one. Don't be an unreasonable beast, Bunter!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

Billy Bunter was still yow-ow-owing as he toddled away towards the farmhouse. The juniors grinned, and looked for Lord Mauleverer. They found him asleep in the hay, with his silk hat over his eyes. Bob Cherry took a running kick at the hat, and it flew away, and Lord Mauleverer started up.

"Begad! What's that? 'Tain't rising-bell, is it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tea-time!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Oh, begad!"

Lord Mauleverer sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"Where's my hat?"

"I'll take your hat for you," said Bob; and he pounced on the topper, and started it with a running kick.

The silk hat rose in the air like a football, and Bob Cherry dribbled it away to the farmhouse. Lord Mauleverer rushed after him.

"You silly ass! Gimme my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The silk hat and Bob Cherry and Lord Mauleverer disappeared in the direction of the farmhouse, followed by a roar of laughter from the Co.

"Now, where are Skinner and Snoop?" said Harry. "They were at work in this field!"

"Slacking somewhere!" growled Johnny Bull.

Skinner and Snoop were discovered on the lee side of a haystack. They were smoking cigarettes, and taking it very easily.

"Tea-time!" said Wharton grimly. "We're sent to call you!"

Skinner yawned.

"Oh, all right! I'm hungry!"

"Been working hard?" asked Johnny Bull sarcastically.

"Oh, awfully! I raked hay for about ten minutes!"

"So did I," said Snoop. "Garge stared when we went off work. I told him to go and eat coke!"

"That won't do!" said Harry, frowning.

"Won't it?" said Skinner affably. "Thanks for your opinion! It will do well enough for us—eh, Snoopey?"

"What-ho!" grinned Snoop.

And the two slackers sauntered away towards the farmhouse, throwing away the stumps of their cigarettes. Harry Wharton & Co. followed them.

Bunter came up in the shallow pond, gasping. Bob Cherry hooked him with his rake, and dragged him out of the pond. "Groogh! Hooogh!" gasped the Owl of the Remove.
(See Chapter **11.)**

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
Caught Napping!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. slept soundly enough that night.

Two of the party slept in the farmhouse, three in cottages, and the rest in the barn. The quarters were not exactly palatial, but only Bunter and Skinner and Snoop were inclined to grumble.

Wharton and Bob Cherry were in the farmhouse. When the earliest rays of the sun were stealing in at a tiny window, they were called by the booming voice of Mr. Higgins.

Bob Cherry sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is it rising-bell already?"

Wharton yawned portentously.

"Early rising here!" he remarked.

Bob Cherry looked at his watch.

"Great Scott! It's only five!"

"Never mind: turn out!"

The two juniors turned out as cheerfully as possible. There was a couple of hours' work to be done in the early sunshine before breakfast.

Nugent and Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh turned up cheerfully. Skinner and Snoop and Bunter were rubbing their eyes and grumbling audibly. Lord Mauleverer was yawning as if he would yawn his head off.

"Begad! This is rather overdoin' it—what!" said his lordship, looking at the captain of the Remove with a lack-lustre eye.

"Underdoing it, I think!" grinned Johnny Bull. "I could have done with another two hours' snooze!"

"Blessed if I'm going to stand this!" growled Skinner.

"Skinner!" bawled Mr. Higgins.

"Hallo!"

"Fill that bucket, and get on with sousing out the yard!"

"Oh, rats!" said Skinner, under his breath.

"Eh? What?"

"Oh, nothin'! Where's the blessed bucket?"

"Use your eyes, my boy!"

Harold Skinner used his eyes, and found the bucket, and filled it at the pump.

He proceeded to "souse" out a cobbled yard at a snail's pace. Snoop helped him—with the celerity of a very old and unfit snail.

Lord Mauleverer approached the farmer respectfully.

"You looking for a job?" said Mr. Higgins jovially. "Right-! You can help George make the hogwash. You've got to feed the pigs presently!"

"Oh, by gad! I was just thinkin' of my bath!"

"Your what?"

"Bath," said Lord Mauleverer. "Of course, I'm expectin' to rough it, but I suppose I'm goin' to have my mornin' tub?"

"The marble bath hasn't arrived," said Mr. Higgins regretfully. "It's going to be laid on at the same time as the telephone and the new motor-car. Until it comes, you'll have to wash under the pump!"

"Under the—the pump!"

"Yes. We are shortly going to have a new pump laid on, gilt-edged and studded with diamonds," said Mr. Higgins gravely. "But until it comes, would you mind using the old pump?"

"Oh, begad!"

"Come on, Mauly, you silly ass!" chortled Bob Cherry. "If you wait for the diamond-studded pump, you won't get a wash till you get back to Greyfriars!"

"Oh, begad! I—I suppose there's soap?"

"Soap!" said Mr. Higgins. "You'll find the soap in the inlaid mahogany box on the grand piano in the droring-room!"

And Mr. Higgins walked away chuckling.

"Is he jokin'?" asked Lord Mauleverer, appealing helplessly to the juniors.

"I rather think he must be!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Didn't you think of packing a cake of soap among the silk hats and dressing-gowns and fancy waistcoats?"

"Yaas; there's some soap in my dressin'-case, but it's in the barn," said Lord Mauleverer. "Go and fetch it, dear boy!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Well, you slackin' ass!"

Lord Mauleverer fetched the soap himself, and the juniors washed under the pump.

Skinner and Snoop and Bunter did not trouble the pump, however. They decided to make their last wash at Greyfriars do. Washing under a pump at five in the morning did not appeal to them.

Billy Bunter, indeed, had already disappeared. He had not had enough sleep yet. A quarter of an hour later there was a roar from the barn, and Billy Bunter was seen again. Garge was driving him out at the point of a pitchfork.

At breakfast Lord Mauleverer was looking somewhat unhappy. He confided to Bob Cherry that washin' under a pump was all very well, but he hadn't been able to wash all over.

That, however, did not seem to trouble Bunter and Snoop and Skinner.

Breakfast was plentiful, and Billy Bunter travelled into bacon and eggs at a great rate, and decided that he could stand farm life, after all, if he found plenty of opportunities for little naps, and wasn't expected to work.

"Any of you know how to drive?" Mr. Higgins asked at breakfast.

"I'm a dab at it, sir!" said Bunter.

"Yes, you look it," said Mr. Higgins. "Can you drive, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir."

"Begad, I can drive!" said Lord Mauleverer. "I've often driven my car at home!"

"I don't mean a car—I mean a horse!"

"Oh, I see! Yaas, I can drive a horse!"

"Well, I want two of you to take a cart down to Fernford this morning. You're not much use on the farm, so if you can drive——"

"Count on me, sir!" said Lord Mauleverer brightly.

He was already looking forward to a nap in the cart.

"Better let me go and take care of him, sir," said Bunter.

After breakfast the juniors loaded the cart. It contained three large boxes of eggs, and two large cans of milk, and several other items. Garge harnessed the horse, a somewhat restive-looking animal.

"Sure you can manage horses, Mauleverer?" asked Mr. Higgins, a little anxiously. "I don't want to run any risks with them eggs, but I haven't a man I can send."

"Rely on me, sir! I've often driven four-in-hand!"

"Well, if you can drive four-in-hand, you can drive old Tom," said Mr. Higgins. "You can get in to help unload, Bunter!"

"Certainly, sir! Perhaps I'd better drive, though!"

Mr. Higgins did not seem to hear.

The two amateur carters clambered in, and Wharton opened the gate. Lord Mauleverer gathered up the reins, and the cart rolled out. His lordship listened patiently to the farmer's instructions as to the delivery of the eggs and milk and several sides of bacon; but the chances were that he forgot the instructions within two minutes.

"Mind you don't go to sleep and let the horse bolt, Mauly," said Wharton, by way of farewell.

"That's all right, dear boy!"

The cart lumbered away down the lane.

Harry Wharton & Co. were soon at work in the fields. Mr. Higgins had sagely picked out the least useful of his labour recruits to take the cart down to the village. If he had known Lord Mauleverer a little better, probably he would not have done so.

The cart lumbered down the rutty lane, in the cheery morning sunlight. Billy Bunter laid down in the cart and went to sleep, and his deep snore mingled with the bumping of the heavy cart. Lord Mauleverer nodded over the reins.

"By gad, I'm sleepy!" murmured his lordship. "Are you sleepy, Bunter?"

Snore!

"Gone to sleep, begad! Well, I suppose I've got to keep wide awake!" murmured his lordship, with a sigh.

Lord Mauleverer's method of keeping wide awake was to lean back on one of the boxes and close his eyes.

The cart jogged on peacefully for some time, his lordship sleeping the sleep of the just.

Old Tom soon realised that there was not a master hand on the reins, and he ceased to jog on, and took to cropping the grass by the wayside.

The cart came to a halt. Lord Mauleverer and Billy Bunter slumbered on peacefully, while the sun mounted higher in the sky.

A sudden yell awakened his lordship, and he started and opened his eyes and blinked. A herd of pigs came snorting and grunting down the lane, with an ancient yokel in charge of them. Old Tom did not like pigs, and he grew restive at once. He started off on his own accord, and the cart was quickly in the midst of the grunting, rolling pigs. The drover yelled to Lord Mauleverer, who made a clutch at the reins. But the reins were dangling about the horse's neck.

"Oh, begad!" ejaculated his lordship.

"Look arter that horse!" roared the drover.

There was a terrific grunting and squealing as the horse and cart ploughed its way through the pigs. The drover shook a brawny, knuckly fist at the startled Mauleverer. His fat charges were bolting on all sides, and he was yelling and brandishing his stick to get them together again. The shouting and yelling and squealing excited old Tom, who broke into a gallop.

Billy Bunter started up, awake at last. He jammed his glasses straight on his fat little nose, and blinked round him in alarm.

"I—I say, Mauly——"

"Begad! Hold on, Bunter!"

"Yarooh! Wharrer marrer? Stop that horse!"

"Can't!"

"You silly ass!" shrieked Bunter. "Stop him! He's running away!"

"Yaas!"

"Are you going to stick there like a wooden image, you silly ass, while we get our necks broken?" roared Bunter.

"Yaas!"

The egg-boxes and the milk-cans were rocking as the cart bumped and crashed over the deep, sun-dried ruts in the lane. Old Tom had the bit fairly between his teeth now, and the reins were far out of Lord Mauleverer's reach. He could only sit tight and wait for the catastrophe.

"Stop him!" screamed Bunter.

"My dear chap," said Lord Mauleverer patiently, "I can't stop him by pullin' his tail, can I?"

"We shall be killed!"
"Yaas, it looks like it."
"Oh, you howling idiot! Help! Rescue! Fire!"
Crash!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.
Lord Mauleverer is Equal to the Occasion!

CRASH!

The cart had come to grief at last.

Old Tom's forelegs were tangled in the hanging reins, and he had come a terrific cropper. The cart pitched forward, and one wheel slid into the ditch, and then it went sideways. Billy Bunter landed bodily in a bed of nettles, and the voice of Bunter was like unto that of a bull of Bashan.

Lord Mauleverer went into the hedge, and rolled over into the field. Old Tom floundered in the ditch, in a foot of water.

Egg-cases and milk-cans rolled out, crashing. Milk poured from the cans, and Billy Bunter had the chief benefit of it. Eggs smashed all over the Owl of the Remove.

Lord Mauleverer sat in the grass and gasped.

"Begad! That looks like a smash-up! Oh, crumbs, what did I take up farmin' for? I'd rather be grindin' Latin, begad!"

"Yow-ow! Help! I'm killed!"

"Begad! Are you killed, Bunter? You're makin' a jolly row, then!"

"Fire! Murder! Help!"

Lord Mauleverer staggered to his feet. Old Tom was floundering wildly in the ditch, splashing mud and water on all sides.

Bunter was roaring in the bed of nettles. He had almost disappeared under thick layers of broken eggs mixed with milk.

Mauleverer attended to the horse first. As the simplest way of attending to him, he took out his pocket-knife and cut the traces. Then old Tom scrambled out of the ditch and bolted.

The amateur farmer blinked after him in dismay as he disappeared down the road in a cloud of dust.

"Oh, begad!"

The tattoo of Old Tom's hoofs died away in the distance.

"Yow-ow-ow! Help! Help me up, you silly ass! I've broken my backbone. I'm sprained in six places. My spinal column's broken!"

"Begad, you must be in a bad way!" said Lord Mauleverer sympathetically. "I wonder if there's a hospital in the village."

"Yow-ow! Help!"

Lord Mauleverer grasped Bunter and dragged him out into the road. The fat junior was a pitiable-looking object. His lordship could not help grinning as he looked at him.

"Oh, you idiot!" gasped Bunter. "Look at me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you cackling dummy——"

"Any bones broken, dear boy?"

"Yow-ow! Yes—a dozen at least! My leg's broken——"

"You're standin' on it all right."

"I—I mean my arm! And I'm smothered! How am I going to get clean?" roared Bunter.

"Blessed if I know! That ditch doesn't look clean enough to wash in. You might try."

"Groooooogh!"

"This is awfully unlucky," said Mauleverer. "Mr. Higgins will think I'm not good as a farmhand. Where are you going Bunter?"

"I'm going back, you silly ass!"

"Look here, you stay and help me out of this fix!" said Lord Mauleverer indignantly. "Nearly all those eggs are broken. I—I suppose that milk can't be scraped up again, can it?"

Billy Bunter did not reply to the question. He tramped away furiously towards the farm. Lord Mauleverer was left to deal with the difficulty alone.

He surveyed the scene of havoc in dismay.

Mauleverer had a sincere desire to make himself useful to the farmer, but he could not help feeling that Mr. Higgins would be far from satisfied with the way he was doing it.

Old Tom had disappeared, and the rate at which he had vanished suggested that he would soon be in the next county. The cart could not be moved without the horse, and, moreover, one of the wheels was broken. The milk was gone—and only a few eggs remained intact. Several sides of bacon reposed in the ditch. Exactly how to deal with the situation, his lordship did not know.

"Hallo! Had an accident?"

Lord Mauleverer looked round. A farmer was leaning over a gate at a short distance, regarding him with a grin.

"Yaas," said Lord Mauleverer dismally. "My gee-gee has bolted. Can you tell me where I could buy a horse?"

"Eh?"

"I want to buy a horse, and some new traces, and eggs and milk, and things," said Lord Mauleverer innocently. "Is there a shop about here where I could get them?"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"My dear fellow, it's rather bad taste to laugh at a chap in misfortune!" said Lord Mauleverer reproachfully. "I've got to deliver all that stuff in Fernford—somewhere—I forget the man's name. Perhaps you could sell me a horse?"

"Haw, haw haw!"

"Oh, begad! What a life!" groaned Lord Mauleverer.

The farmer looked at him curiously.

"You want to buy a horse?" he asked.

"Yaas."

"Cash?"

"Yaas."

"Then I'm your man!" said the red-faced gentleman cordially. "I've got a splendid animal I'm willing to sell at a sacrifice. You won't find a chance to pick up a horse like that at twenty pounds in a lifetime."

"Thanks awfully, dear boy!" said his lordship gratefully. "You're a friend in need, by gad!"

"Come and look at the horse," said his new friend.

"What-ho!"

Lord Mauleverer passed the gate, and followed his new acquaintance across a field to a farmhouse and stable. The red-faced gentleman led him into the stable.

"Look!" he said impressively.

But for the farmer's enthusiastic manner Lord Mauleverer would not really have thought that that horse was a particularly fine specimen. He looked very bony, and had evidently seen his best days. But the farmer so evidently expected Lord Mauleverer to admire the horse, that his lordship could not possibly hurt his feelings by failing to do so.

"Fine 'orse—wot?" said the red-faced gentleman.

"Yaas, toppin'!"

"I'm givin' him away at twenty-five pounds," said the farmer regretfully; "but that was always like Josh 'Ooker—that's me. Always losing on a bargain!"

"Begad! I thought you said twenty!"

Mr. Hooker had said twenty; but Lord Mauleverer had received the price so indifferently that it had already advanced.

"Twenty-five pun is the price of that 'orse," said the red-faced gentleman firmly; "and if you don't think that 'orse is worth double the money, it shows as you don't know nothin' about 'orseflesh, young gentleman."

"All serene, dear boy!"

"And I'll tell you what I'll do," said Mr. Hooker generously. "I'll throw in the harness for another five pounds."

"Will you really?"

"Yes, I will. It's a bargain."

"Perhaps you'll help me harness him?" asked Lord Mauleverer. "I haven't harnessed a horse yet. I believe you have to fasten somethin' to somethin', or else to somethin' else, or somethin' of the sort. I believe it's quite simple when you know how to do it."

Mr. Hooker appeared to be troubled with inward convulsions for a moment. But he nodded.

"Josh 'Ooker is your man," he said. "Josh 'Ooker only wants to see the colour of your money first."

"Oh, yaas; I forgot!"

Lord Mauleverer opened his pocket-book, and extracted three ten-pound notes.

Mr. Hooker simply blinked at them, and at the wedge that remained in the purse. His manner became intensely respectful.

"You're a gentleman, sir," he said, "that's wot you are! As for the milk and things you've upset, I can supply the lot cheap. Five pounds will cover it."

"Begad, isn't that lucky! You're a friend in need, Mr. Hooker!"

"New line of business for you—what?" asked Mr. Hooker curiously. "You ain't been long at farming?"

"I'm a schoolboy, really," explained Lord Mauleverer. "I've come down to help Mr. Higgins. They've conscripted all his labourers. I'm makin' myself useful, you know."

"Oh, by gosh!" said Mr. Hooker.

The red-faced gentleman led the horse out, and he was harnessed to the cart, which Mr. Hooker and a labourer dragged out of the ditch. Lord Mauleverer watched them with his hands in his pockets. The damage to the wheel was soon repaired. It turned out that this was worth another two pounds, which Lord Mauleverer cheerfully paid. He was only too glad to get out of his scrape by parting with some of his banknotes, fortunately being remarkably well supplied with those useful articles.

Mr. Hooker and his labourer were, for reasons best known to themselves, grinning all the time. Lord Mauleverer did not quite see what there was to grin at, but he smiled politely.

When all was finished, and the cart was loaded, Lord Mauleverer gathered up his reins, thanked his new friend warmly, and drove on to Fernford. This time he did not go to sleep. He left Mr. Hooker leaning on the gate chuckling, and chuckling as if he would never cease. Mr. Hooker had done a remarkably good stroke of business that morning; but so had Lord Mauleverer, from his own point of view, so both parties were quite satisfied.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.
All Serene!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Bunter!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Billy Bunter had arrived.

The schoolboy farmers suspended their work as the fat junior came rolling up. They burst into a yell at the sight of him. It was a little difficult to tell, at first glance, which was Bunter, which was milk, and which was broken eggs.

"What on earth's happened?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Hallo!" roared Mr. Higgins, coming on the scene. "What's the matter? Has anything happened to my cart?"

"Yow-ow-ow! Upset!" gasped Bunter.

"Oh, thunder!"

"All the milk and eggs gone——"

"Great Scott!"

"And the horse bolted——"

"My word!"

"And the cart busted——"

"Thunderation!"

"And look at me!"

The farmer snorted.

"Go and get under the pump, drat you!"

Billy Bunter rolled away savagely. He had expected sympathy for his uncommon sufferings. But he was not likely to get any from Mr. Higgins. The farmer was thinking of his milk and eggs and horse.

The juniors looked at one another in dismay.

"Oh, that ass Mauly!" groaned Bob.

"The assfulness is terrific. The esteemed Higgins appears to be in an august wax," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"No wonder," said Wharton. "Somebody will have to make the loss good. Luckily Mauly has plenty of money."

"Money instead of brains," grinned Nugent. "That's often the way in this world. Jolly lucky for Mauly he was born rich as well as an idiot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Higgins had gone away in a state of great excitement. The juniors hurried after Bunter, who was cleaning himself under the pump. They extracted from him information as to how and where the accident had happened.

"Was Mauly hurt?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"I don't know. I hope he was!"

"Why hasn't he come back?"

"Don't know, and don't care!"

And that was all that could be extracted from Bunter. He continued to clean himself, cheered by remarks from Snoop and Skinner.

"We'd better go and look for Mauly," said Harry. "The ass may have broken a leg if he was pitched out of the cart. It would be just like Bunter to leave him in the lurch."

The juniors agreed, and they hurried down the lane in the direction Mr. Higgins had taken. They soon overtook the farmer. Mr. Higgins turned and frowned at them, his cheery good-humour quite gone.

"Ain't you working?" he demanded.

"Ahem! We thought Mauly might have been hurt, sir, so——"

"Pity if he ain't broken his neck, the hass!" said Mr. Higgins. "Goodness knows where old Tom is by this time!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "Here comes Mauly!"

"Mauly, by Jove!"

Mr. Higgins stared.

Lord Mauleverer came driving up cheerfully from the direction of the village, with a new horse in the cart, and a smiling face. He stopped beside the group.

"Sorry I'm rather late, sir!" he said, touching his cap. "I have had rather a hunt for the man in the village. I'd forgotten his name. But it's all right. I've delivered the goods."

"D-d-delivered them!" gasped Mr. Higgins.

"Yaas."

"But they were smashed up, according to Bunter!" howled Bob Cherry.

"Yaas. I replaced them with a fresh lot, and the man was quite satisfied."

"Oh, gosh!" murmured Mr. Higgins. "Where's my 'orse?"

"I'm sorry to say he got away, sir; but I've replaced him."

"Replaced him!" stuttered the farmer.

"Yaas. I bought this one for you instead."

"Bless my bones!" said Mr. Higgins. "'Ow much did you give for that knacker? If you gave more than three quid, the man ought to be prosecuted for selling him!"

"Oh, begad! Mr. Hooker said he was cheap at twenty-five pounds!" said Lord Mauleverer in dismay.

"Twenty-five what?" shrieked Mr. Higgins.

"Pounds, sir."

"Oh, Mauly!" gasped Bob Cherry.

Mr. Higgins seemed overcome.

"Take the horse in," he said—"take it in! My eye! My sainted Sam! Old Tom will be caught in an hour or two, so it's all right. You're sure the goods you delivered were satisfactory?"

"Quite, sir. Mr. Walker was very pleased."

"Oh, all right!"

Lord Mauleverer drove on cheerfully. The juniors jumped into the empty cart for a lift back to the farm. Lord Mauleverer smiled at them serenely.

"I'm making rather a success of this farmin' job," he said complacently.

"A—a—a success!" said Wharton.

"Yaas. Of course, bein' inexperienced, a chap is bound to get into a scrape or two. But you live and learn, you know. I've got out of that scrape. If old Tom is brought back, Mr. Higgins will be a horse to the good, even if it's only worth three pounds. Chap I bought it of said it was cheap at twenty-five. Opinions differ about horses, you know. It's quite remarkable. Depends a lot on whether you're buyin' or sellin', I believe. After this I suppose Mr. Higgins will always give me the job of drivin' to the village."

"Yes—I don't think!" grinned Bob. "A few more drives like that, and you'll find yourself in the workhouse."

"Oh, begad!"

When Mr. Higgins came in to dinner he eyed Lord Mauleverer very oddly. He was quite in good humour again, and announced that old Tom had been caught and brought home.

Mr. Higgins detailed Lord Mauleverer's adventure at the dinner-table, and Mr. Higgins roared, and the farmer's wife almost went into hysterics, and old Garge chuckled till he had to be thumped on the back, and the juniors shrieked, and Lord Mauleverer regarded them in mild surprise. However, bowing to the majority, his lordship decided that there must be something humorous in the matter after all, so he laughed, too.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.
Bunter Looks for Honey!

"A FELLOW'S entitled to help himself!" said Billy Bunter, in an argumentative tone.

It was the following day, and the juniors were at work again. They were making hay in the meadow, and they found it warm work. Lord Mauleverer was wearing his Panama. His last silk hat was being reserved for emergencies. His lordship had resisted shirt-sleeves for some time, but he had come down to shirt-sleeves at last.

Billy Bunter was tired. He had raked hay for about three minutes, which was quite sufficient to make him excessively fatigued. Skinner and Snoop were waiting for an opportunity of sneaking away to enjoy—more or less—a quiet smoke.

Billy Bunter had evidently been thinking.

"The labourer is worthy of his hire," said Bunter, blinking at the industrious juniors, "and it's wrong to muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn, you know! And I'm fond of honey!"

"Honey?" repeated Bob Cherry.

"Yes, honey. I've been looking at the hives."

"You'd better let the hives alone, you fat boa-constrictor," said Harry Wharton warningly. "Mr. Higgins will scalp you if you meddle with his hives!"

"The labourer is worthy——"

"Well, you're not labouring," said Bob. "Get on with the hay; we've got a lot of raking to do. And then there's pigs to feed, and the sheep to look after, and the cows to drive home. I suppose you feel rather fagged?"

"Yes, awfully!"

"Feel as if you'd like to guzzle honey, and then go to sleep?"

"Yes, you beast!"

"Well, I'll give you something to cure all that. Every time you slack down I'll liven you up with a dig of my rake—like that!"

"Yarooh!"

"Or like that!"

"Yoooooop!"

"And you'll soon forget all about the honey," said Bob. "Buck up!"

"Yah! Beast! I'm going—— Yarooob! Keep that rake away!" yelled Bunter. "I'm working, ain't I?"

"That's right; keep it up! Do you feel rather tired, Mauly?"

"Nunno!" gasped his lordship hastily.

Bob Cherry's cure for that tired feeling was a little too painful for Mauly.

"You feeling at all fagged, Skinner?" asked Bob, flourishing his rake.

"No, you rotter!"

"What about you, Snoopey?"

"Lemme alone, you beast! I'm working!"

"What a happy, industrious family!" said Bob cheerily. "We sha'n't get tired till this hay is finished—anyway, any chap who gets tired gets this rake at the same time! How do you feel now, Bunter?"

"I—I—I'm enjoying it!"

"Bravo!"

Billy Bunter blinked at Bob with a blink of ferocity. But he kept on working till Bob was at a little distance. Then he made a sudden bolt, dropping the rake and fleeing for his life.

"Come back!" roared Bob.

Bunter disappeared round a haystack.

"Skinner! Where are you going?"

"Mind your own business!" snapped Skinner.

"Kim here!"

"Yow! Ow! You dangerous beast!" yelled Skinner, as the humorous Bob hooked him back with the rake.

"Smoking's barred! Stick to your work!" said Bob severely. "I'm here to rake hay, not to rake slackers! But I shall rake you every time you try to clear off!"

Skinner murmured something, and went on working. Bob had not really been appointed overseer, but he appointed himself. He was determined that Mr. Higgins should not suppose that Greyfriars fellows were slackers.

In the blaze of sunshine, with their hats on the backs of their heads, the juniors worked away. But a sudden anguished yell from the distance interrupted the labour. It was a voice—even the voice of William George Bunter—and it said:

"Yow! Ow, ow, ow, ow, ow! Help! Fire! I'm stung! Yoooop!"

Then there was a roar—in the voice of Mr. Higgins.

"My bees! You young idiot! Oh, gum!"

"Yow! Ow, ow! Help!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Bunter's in trouble!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Remove to the rescue!"

"Yow! Ow, ow! Help!"

The juniors rushed to the rescue. Skinner and Snoop took the opportunity of slipping quietly away. They had done more work than they wanted, and they did not care what was happening to Bunter. In a few minutes they were hidden behind the haystack, smoking.

"Yarooh! I'm stung! Help!" shrieked Billy Bunter.

Harry Wharton & Co. arrived panting on the scene. Mr. Higgins came up, crimson with excitement and rage.

Billy Bunter had been seeking honey. Perhaps Bunter did not know that there were bees in the hives as well as honey. Perhaps he had supposed that he could "shoo" the bees off. He hadn't found the honey. But he had found the bees, and the bees had found him.

One of the hives was overturned, and a cloud of bees were buzzing angrily about Bunter. Dozens of them had settled on him, and he had been stung in a dozen places. He was waving his fat hands to beat off the angry swarm, without much success.

He came rushing and staggering towards the juniors with the buzzing swarm still round his head.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Nugent. "I don't want to go near that!"

"The silly ass! Make for the pond, Bunter!" shouted Wharton. "Jump in!"

"Yow! Ow, ow! Help!"

Wharton ran forward and dragged him by the sleeve. Bees buzzed round him, but angry as he was with the fat marauder, he would not leave him to the mercy of the angry honey-makers. He rushed Bunter to the duckpond and plunged him in.

Splash!

"Groooogh!"

Billy Bunter disappeared under the water. Wharton dodged the bees, fortunately without getting a sting.

Bunter came up in the shallow pond, gasping. The bees had let him alone at last. But he had over a dozen stings, and they were painful.

"Groogh! Hooogh! Help! You rotter, you want to drown me! Yow! Ow, ow! Help!"

Bob Cherry hooked the fat junior with his rake, and dragged him out of the pond. Bunter came out squelching mud and water.

He sank down in the grass, gasping and yelling. He was suffering real pain this time, and his yells might have been heard from one end of Fernford Farm to the other.

"You silly young idjit!" howled Mr. Higgins. "It serves you jolly well right!"

"Yow! Ow, ow, ow! I'm stung! Yow! I'm swelling! Yooop! I'm dying! Yow!"

"Get him to the farmhouse!" said Mr. Higgins. "The missus'll look arter him. He'll be ill, anyway!"

"Yow! Ow, ow, ow!"

Billy Bunter was rushed away to the farmhouse, and left in the care of Mrs. Higgins. Frank Nugent was sent to the village for a doctor. When the juniors saw Bunter again, a couple of hours later at tea, his fat face was swollen and bandaged, and he blinked at them in anguish.

"I say, you fellows, I've had enough of this!" he gasped. "I'm going back!"

"The sooner the quicker!" said Bob. "You've put Mr. Higgins to a serious loss, mucking up his hives like that!"

"Blow Mr. Higgins! Blow his hives!"

And Bunter went early and groaning to bed. The next morning the Owl of the Remove was a pitiable object. Mr. Higgins was not sorry that he had decided to go; Bunter was not a valuable farm labourer. And the juniors saw him off at Fernford Station with considerable pleasure.

There had been a slight disagreement between the farmer and Bunter on the score of remuneration for his very valuable services. Bunter was of opinion that he had earned three pounds. Mr. Higgins thought three shillings too much. Billy Bunter departed with half-a-crown, and a fixed determination never to do any more work as long as he lived, if he could possibly help it.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Sack for the Slackers!

"WHERE are those slacking rotters?"

Bob Cherry asked the question. It was a day or two later, and the Greyfriars farmers were digging. They were turning up hard soil, and the work was not easy; but, as Bob Cherry remarked, it was good training for digging trenches some day.

Skinner and Snoop had disappeared, as they generally did at every opportunity. Mr. Higgins had made no remark about their slacking. The little they did might not be worth their keep, but he was so eminently satisfied with Harry Wharton & Co. that he was tolerant with the two slackers, taking the bad with the good.

Even Lord Mauleverer had fallen into the way of working hard. Certainly, Bob Cherry's way with slackers was short and sharp, and exceedingly drastic. His lordship found it less trouble to work while Bob was keeping a friendly eye on him. But Skinner and Snoop dodged Bob with great success.

"Oh, never mind them!" said Wharton. "They won't work. The rotters were born tired. Smoking somewhere, of course!"

Bob grunted, and rested from his labours to look round over the sunny fields. Naturally, having the honour of the school at heart, he did not wish the farm folk to have an impression that Greyfriars turned out vicious slackers.

From the nearest haystack a thin column of smoke rising to the sky caught Bob Cherry's eye. He started.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Look at that!"

Wharton uttered a startled exclamation.

"Great Scott! Fire!"

"The stack's on fire!" exclaimed Nugent. "How the dickens——"

"Look!" said Bob grimly.

From the other side of the stack Skinner and Snoop came into view, running, and with pale faces.

The juniors did not need telling what had happened then. The two black sheep had been smoking in the shelter of the stack, and a carelessly-tossed match had done the mischief. The dry hay had caught, and the two young rascals were only thinking of putting a safe distance between themselves and the mischief they had wrought.

"The rotters!" said Johnny Bull, catching his breath. "They've set the stack on fire! Why, that may mean ever so many pounds' damage!"

"Buck up!" called out Harry.

The juniors dropped forks and spades, and started at a run for the hayfield. Mr. Higgins was already approaching from another direction, and Garge was dashing up from the stables. The farmer caught Skinner and Snoop by their collars.

"You young varmints!" he roared. "You done that!"

"I—I say, we—we didn't!" stammered Skinner. "I—I don't know how it happened!"

"You've been smoking, and dropped a match!" roared Mr. Higgins. "I know!"

Crack!

Skinner's head and Snoop's came in contact with a resounding concussion. There was a simultaneous yell from the rascals of the Remove. Mr. Higgins hurled them away from him, and they went spinning. Never had the juniors seen the easy-going farmer so angry and excited.

"Buckets!" yelled Mr. Higgins.

"All hands on deck!" howled Bob Cherry.

"Begad! Why don't they turn on the hose?" exclaimed Lord Mauleverer.

"Because there isn't a hose, fathead!"

"Oh, begad!"

"Lend a hand with the buckets, and don't jaw, Mauly!"

"Yaas, dear boy!"

Farmhands and juniors were quickly at work, filling buckets at the pond, and rushing them to the burning stack. Mrs. Higgins and the farm maid came out to help, and there was a scene of wild hurry and excitement.

Fortunately, the fire had been seen before it had had time to obtain a strong hold on the hay. Swamped with water, and raked out hurriedly, it was quenched before the stack had fairly caught.

But for a good hour all hands were labouring with frenzied energy in the hot sun, streaming with perspiration, before the danger was over. And even then the stack had sustained considerable damage from the burning and the swamping.

"Well, the stack ain't gone!" said Mr. Higgins at last breathlessly. "If it had, I'd have laid a cartwhip round them two young villains! I'm fed up with them. They're goin'!"

"Time they did!" growled Bob Cherry. "Better give them the cartwhip, all the same, sir. By Jove, I will, if you don't!"

Skinner and Snoop received their sentence sullenly. They were glad enough that their misconduct was not to be reported to the Head of Greyfriars. As for the damage they had done, that did not worry them, as they had not to pay for it. Mr. Higgins told them curtly to go, and left them. But Bob Cherry was more emphatic. He helped them to go.

When Skinner and Snoop came out of the farmhouse with their bags, Bob was waiting for them with a tremendous cartwhip.

"Just off?" asked Bob affably.

"Yes," growled Skinner, eyeing the whip uneasily. "None of your larks, you rotter!"

"My dear chap, I'm going to see you off!"

"Look here——"

"Let's see how quickly you can get to the gate," said Bob. "I'm going to help you all the way—like that!"

"Yaroooh!"

The long lash curled round Skinner's legs, and then round Snoop's, and the two slackers made a wild break for the gate. Bob Cherry followed them fast, flourishing the whip.

Skinner and Snoop did not look much like slackers at that moment. They ran the race of their lives down to the gate.

They did not stop to open it. The cartwhip was curling round their legs. They hurled their bags over the gate, and bundled after them. They rolled in the dust, gasping.

Skinner sat up, crimson with pain and fury.

"Yow-ow! You rotter! Yow!"

"Oh, you beast!" howled Snoop.

Bob Cherry flourished the whip.

"Are you going?" he inquired.

"Yow-ow! Rotter! Yow-ow! Cad! Yah!"

"Then I'll come out to you!" said Bob.

He vaulted over the gate. Skinner and Snoop snatched up their bags and fled for their lives. They went down the lane to Fernford as if they were on the cinder-path, and Bob returned, chuckling, to his work.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.
Skinner's Revenge!

"LOOK here, we'd better catch the train, Skinner!" Skinner grunted.

The two slackers had stopped to rest half a mile from the farm, in the thick grass under the trees.

They were in savage tempers. Each of them had a bump where the farmer had knocked their heads together, and the cartwhip had left its marks on their limbs. They had deserved it all, and more; but that reflection was no comfort to them.

"I'm not going yet!" growled Skinner.

"It's getting dark, fathead!"

"We can catch the late train. The Head won't know what time we left the farm," said Skinner.

"But what is there to hang about for?" said Snoop.

Skinner gritted his teeth.

"I'm going to make those rotters sit up! We've been turned out in disgrace, and we've got to go back to school."

"Can't be helped," said Snoop. "We couldn't help setting the stack on fire, but it was rather thick, you know."

Skinner rubbed his head.

"I'll make old Higgins sorry for it!"

"Look here, what have you got in your noddle?" said Snoop uneasily. "We can't do anything."

"Wait till it's dark," said Skinner.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going back when it's dark. There'll be a moon to-night early, and light enough. I'm going to let the bull loose!" said Skinner viciously.

Snoop started, and changed colour.

"You silly ass! He will do no end of damage!"

"That's what I want," said Skinner coolly.

"He's dangerous."

"All the better! Bob Cherry says I funked going near the shed now the beast isn't roped up, in case it should get out."

"So you did," grinned Snoop.

"Well, perhaps Bob Cherry will funk it when he's loose," said Skinner. "It's easy enough. The bull's loose in the shed now, and I've only got to get the door open and bolt."

"I—I say, he'll trample the crops and break fences, and—and do no end of damage. If he gets fairly away there'll be the dickens to pay!"

"Let old Higgins pay it, then!" said Skinner coolly. "That's my game. I'm not going to have my head banged against your wooden napper for nothing!"

"I'm jolly well not going to have a hand in it!" said Snoop decidedly.

"You needn't! A funk like you would be in the way," said Skinner. "You can wait for me here, and look after my bag."

"Well, I'll do that," agreed Snoop. "I'd let it alone, though, if I were you."

"Rats!"

The late summer evening was descending on the fields. Farm labourers passed the two juniors, tramping their homeward way. It was not till darkness had quite fallen that Skinner left the spot.

Snoop remained where he was, in an uneasy frame of mind. He was willing enough to make all Fernford Farm sit up in return for the order of the boot so unceremoniously bestowed by Mr. Higgins. But he was more than willing to leave the danger of the rascally adventure to Skinner.

Skinner was feeling a little uneasy, too, as he made his way through the darkening fields and reached the farm buildings.

But he did not falter in his purpose. His heart was full of malice and all uncharitableness.

The moon was glimmering from the clouds as Skinner picked his way towards the strongly-built shed where the black bull was kept. He paused outside, and could hear the breathing of the savage animal within. The bull was loose in the shed, but the door was secured by a wooden bar dropped into solid sockets, and there was no danger of its escape, unless the door was deliberately opened. Skinner glanced hastily round, and then pulled the bar from its place.

The ill-fitting door swung open a few inches as the fastening was removed. There was a sound of a movement within, which made Skinner's heart leap into his mouth. Two fiery eyes gleamed in the darkness.

With wildly-beating heart the junior turned and fled.

Skinner had intended simply to leave the door unfastened, certain that the restless animal would sooner or later discover that it was free, and take advantage of its freedom. Unfortunately for Skinner, the noise he had made at the door had attracted the bull's attention, and, the door being a few inches open, and admitting the moonlight, the black bull was not left in doubt on the subject for a single moment. Skinner had scarcely left the shed when a heavy head was thrust against the door and it swung wide open.

Skinner looked back over his shoulder.

What he saw nearly froze him with terror. Scarcely a dozen yards behind him the huge head and shoulders of the bull emerged from the shed, and the wicked eyes rolled and gleamed in the moonlight. There was a deep, muffled roar.

Skinner broke into a frantic run.

Thud, thud, thud!

He knew that the bull had seen him, and was thudding after him. In his terror his knees almost gave way; but he knew that to falter was death, and he pulled himself together and raced on.

A deep roar behind him spurred him on

Thud, thud, thud!

To his excited fancy it seemed that the hot breath of the bull was already fanning him. With a shriek of terror, he clambered head first over the gate and rolled into the road.

The bull crashed at the gate a few seconds later. Skinner turned almost sick as he realised how narrow his escape had been. But the gate was strong, and it baffled the ferocious animal.

Skinner scrambled weakly to his feet, and tottered down the lane. Again the bull crashed against the gate, and it rocked and creaked; and then the animal turned off, and Skinner heard him crashing against a hedge. He ran for his life. Sooner or later the black bull would get into the road, he knew. His heart was beating almost to bursting as he ran and panted up the lane.

In his anger and malice he had intended that the bull should do damage to crops and fences; it had not come into his mind that lives would be in danger from the savage beast—or, rather, he had not troubled to think about it at all. But he realised it now, and he realised what he might have to answer for.

"Skinner! What's the row?" It was Snoop's voice, as he started up from the shadows and caught Skinner by the arm. "Did they see you?"

"Run!" panted Skinner.

"But what——"

"The bull! Run!" shrieked Skinner.

Snoop cast a terrified glance down the lane. The moon was shining more clearly now, and the lane was growing as light as by day. In the distance a huge black form could be seen careering along the road. Snoop's knees gave way under him.

"The—the bull!" he stammered. "He—he's after us!"

Thud, thud, thud! Bellow!

"Run!" gasped Skinner.

The bags lay on the ground; the terrified juniors did not heed them then. They ran for their lives. Behind them came the thudding of heavy hoofs. Closer and closer—closer and closer!

"The hedge!" panted Skinner.

He bounded from the road and plunged through the hedge, the terrified Snoop after him. They clambered madly up the trunk of a tree, tearing their clothes and hands, careless of everything if they could but escape the fearful danger below.

They were only just in time.

The bull went careering past the spot they had left, while they clung, palpitating, to the highest branches they could reach.

"He's gone!" groaned Snoop.

"He's coming back!" said Skinner through his chattering teeth.

"Oh, good heavens!"

The bull came thundering back along the lane, evidently in search of his victims. He clattered into the abandoned bags, then stopped, and gored them savagely. The two juniors watched him in the clear moonlight with sick hearts. The black bull was wreaking upon the bags the fury they had escaped. The bags and their contents were in shreds when the bull left them at last, and thundered back towards the farm, bellowing.

"Gone at last!" Snoop almost sobbed, as the thundering hoofs died away in the night. "Oh, you fool Skinner! He may kill somebody! Let's get away!"

They slipped down from the tree and ran for Fernford.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Mauly the Hero!

"THE bull's loose!"

Garge brought the startling news as the schoolboy farmers were preparing for bed. There was uproar and excitement at once.

"How the thunder did he get loose?" roared Mr. Higgins. "I saw him safe enough!"

"The door's wide open, zur, and the bull's gone!" said Garge, with chattering teeth. "And 'Enery says he's in the hay-field, zur!"

Mr. Higgins jumped up, threw down his pipe, jammed his hat on, and rushed out.

The juniors looked at one another.

"My hat! Here's a go!" said Bob Cherry.

"Mr. Higgins hasn't told us to come," said Wharton doubtfully. "I suppose it's dangerous. But we'd better go."

"I—I suppose so," said Nugent.

"Begad!"

"Come on!" said Wharton resolutely. "The bull's got to be caught. Better get pitchforks or something. He's a dangerous beast!"

"Hold on, dear boys——"

"Don't be an ass, Mauly! You're not going to funk!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Not at all, dear boy! But I can't find my hat!"

"Oh, you ass!"

Bob grasped his lordship by the collar, and Mauleverer found that he could go out without his hat.

"Where is the esteemed bull?" exclaimed Hurree Singh, when the juniors had armed themselves with pitchforks or rakes.

"Listen!"

A loud bellow announced where the bull was. Mr. Higgins, Garge, and Henry had cornered him in a field; but the bull was not easily captured. He charged at the hunters, and scattered them, and broke through, and dashed away towards the farmyard. There was a terrific quacking of ducks and geese.

"Here he comes!" shouted Nugent.

"I—I say, can we stop him?" muttered Johnny Bull.

"Line up!" said Wharton.

"Fuf-fuf-farm people have to stop bulls!" stuttered Bob. "We can, too, I suppose! But—but I—I wish he'd turn another way!"

The black bull did not turn another way. He came thundering directly down on the group of Greyfriars juniors. Their hearts beat fast.

"Look out, there!" roared Mr. Higgins from the distance.

Thud, thud, thud! Bellow!

Involuntarily the juniors scattered. The bull charged on. He reached the farmhouse, and swerved, and stood bellowing and pawing. Mr. Higgins and his followers came up, panting. The farmer had a looped rope in his hand.

"Drat the beast!" gasped Mr. Higgins. "You younkers keep clear; I can't have you hurt! Drat him!"

"Excuse me, sir," said Lord Mauleverer politely, "if somethin' was thrown over the bull's head—a blanket or somethin'—couldn't we catch him?"

"If the sky falls there will be catching of larks!" snorted Mr. Higgins.

Lord Mauleverer looked puzzled.

"I've heard of catching bulls that way, sir. Isn't it a good idea?"

"Oh, nobby!" said Mr. Higgins, with furious sarcasm. "You go and get the blanket and put it over his head—do!"

"Certainly, sir!" said Mauleverer innocently.

He ran into the barn.

"Close up round him!" said Mr. Higgins. "Mind he don't get at you with his horns. But close up, and we may drive him into the shed. If I could get this rope on him he'd go quiet enough."

Lord Mauleverer came out of the barn with a blanket over his arm. The bull, pawing the ground and bellowing, eyed the hunters furiously as they approached him with great caution. There was a louder bellow, and the great brute charged, and Mr. Higgins hopped out of the way with great activity.

"Look out!"

The bull thudded past the dodging hunters.

"Mauly!" shrieked Wharton.

There was a gasp of horror from the juniors.

Lord Mauleverer was standing directly in the path of the maddened animal, the blanket on his arm.

He did not move.

"Run, you young idiot!" screamed Mr. Higgins.

"Manly, hop it!"

Lord Mauleverer did not move. Either he did not realise his danger—which was hardly possible—or he was as cool as a cucumber, and quite resolved upon his course of action. The juniors watched him, frozen with horror. The black bull lowered his head and swept on straight at the junior.

Harry Wharton rushed after the animal desperately. But he knew that he could not get near in time to help Mauleverer.

The lowered head was within three feet of the motionless Mauleverer when his lordship woke to sudden life.

He made a quick leap aside, at the same moment tossing the blanket upon the lowered horns of the bull.

The great animal went thundering blindly by, tossing up his head, with the blanket impaled on the horns and dangling over his eyes.

"Bogad!" gasped Mauleverer.

Wharton reached him and gripped him by the arm.

"Mauly! You ass!"

"Oh, begad! Don't dislocate my arm, fathead!"

"My only sainted Sam!" gasped Mr. Higgins. "My only aunt! After him! We'll collar him now!"

The bull was blinded by the clinging blanket. He roared and pawed in the farmyard, striving to clear himself of the encumbrance. But he was not given a chance. The hunters closed round him, the rope was slipped over his neck and tautened, and he was dragged and driven back into the shed.

Mr. Higgins gave a gasp of relief as the door closed on him, and the bar was dropped into its place. He mopped his perspiring forehead and gasped.

"Loramussy!" he exclaimed. "That fairly gave me a turn! That bull might 'ave killed someone! And you—you—you, Mauleverer, you caught him! You young idjit, my heart was in my mouth! You oughter been knocked over and killed, by rights!"

Lord Mauleverer grinned.

"Begad, I'm jolly glad I wasn't!" he remarked.

"And you—you caught him!" gasped Mr. Higgins, still in great astonishment.

"But you told me to, sir!" said Mauleverer, in surprise.

"Eh?"

"You told me to throw the blanket on him and catch him," said his lordship innocently. "I ain't first-class at farmin', but I can obey orders."

"Oh, my eye!" said Mr. Higgins. "I never meant—— But I'm glad you did it, all the same! Bust my buttons, you're the best man I've got on the farm!"

"Oh, begad!" said Lord Mauleverer.

Bob Cherry clapped his lordship enthusiastically on the back.

"Good old Mauly!"

"Yow-ow!"

"Shoulder high, you chaps!"

"Hurrah!"

"Oh, crumbs! What's the little game? Mind my collar!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lord Mauleverer was borne back to the farmhouse shoulder-high by the juniors. The slacker of the Remove was the hero of the hour.

. . . . . .

Skinner's part in the escape of the black bull did not come to light, which was fortunate for Harold Skinner. The incident had made Lord Mauleverer the hero of Fernford Farm, and he was made much of while the stay of the juniors lasted. And when the spell of farm work came to an end, and the Greyfriars party departed, Mr. Higgins wrung his lordship's hand warmly, and assured him that if ever he needed a job in the farming line he had only to apply at Fernford Farm. And Lord Mauleverer grinned and assured him that he would—if ever he needed a job. And so, with great satisfaction on both sides, closed the career of the Schoolboy Farmers!

THE END.

(Do not miss "STICKING TO HIS GUNS!"—next Monday's Grand Story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)

BRIEF NOTICES
To Readers of THE "MAGNET" LIBRARY.

Fixtures Wanted.

W. S., 117, Campbell Road, Eastleigh, wants to arrange for his club home and away footer matches for next season. Average age 11½. Radius, seven miles.

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C. Simmons, 66, Napier Street, Shepherdess Walk, Hoxton, N., is the secretary of a North London footer club (average age 15½-16) which wants matches for next season within a reasonable distance of Hoxton.

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Brighton Juniors A.F.C. (average age 14-15) want home and away footer matches for next season.—Hon. Sec., Fred Newton, 137, Brighton Road, Gateshead-on-Tyne.

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For Back Numbers, etc.

(In all cases where the request comes from a reader in the Services, the Editor hopes that fellow-readers will supply the requirements free of charge.)

By Private F. Pike, 18969, G Coy. R.M.L.I., E Hut, Browndon Camp, Gosport—Back numbers of any of the Companion Papers.

By J. E. Jones, 9, Stapley Road, Belvedere, Kent—"Bob Cherry's Barring-Out" and "School and Sport."

By Gunner F. Cox, 46336, B Battery, 103rd Brigade, 23rd Division, B.E.F., France—Back numbers of the Companion Papers.

By D. McMillan, Messy Bank, Egremont, Cheshire—Christmas numbers "Gem" and "Magnet" for 1909, 1910, and 1911. Offers 1d. each.

By H. Garnham, 18, Fairholme Road, West Croydon—A pair of Sandown developers.

By D. Moss, 27, Price Street, Birkenhead—Numbers of "Gem" and "Magnet" between 350 and 400.

By S. Foley, Burton Street, Kilrush, Co. Clare—"Magnets" containing "Bunter the Boxer," "The School on Strike," "Billy Bunter's Love Affair," "Fought For and Won," "Hurree Singh's Peril," "The Race to the Tuckshop," and "Coker's Engagement."

By C. Mahony, Burton Street, Kilrush, co. Clare—"Billy Bunter's Postal Order," "The Schoolboy Auctioneer," "The Slackers' Eleven," and "The Hero of Greyfriars."

By Jack F. Smith, 1, Gloucester Row, Weymouth—Number 171 of "Gem," and 172 of "Magnet."

By H. Wreeden, 7, Lysander Grove, N.—"The Boy Without a Name."

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By three privates in the West Yorkshires—Back and current numbers of the "Gem," "Magnet," and "Penny Popular." Address, Private J. H. Watford, 27536, C Coy., 1st Garrison Batt., West Yorkshire Regt., M.E.F., Malta.

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By Private H. S. Harris, 4378, 3th Platoon, B Coy., 4th Northants Regt., Egyptian Exp. Force, Egypt—A mouth-organ or two for himself and chums.

Re Leagues.

Alec Burden, 213, Maxey Road, Plumstead, S.E., wants members for his "Gem" and "Magnet" (local) League.

G. Mitchell, 3, Neely Street, Belfast, wants more members for his "Gem" and "Magnet" League, and appeals especially to Belfast readers to join.

Sidney Kingston, 11, Valley Bride Parade, Scarborough, wishes to form a "Gem" and "Magnet" League, open to all British boys and girls. Stamped and addressed envelopes, please.

E. L. Boucher, 5, Green Hill Road, Moseley, Birmingham, wishes to form a Companion Papers' Foreign Stamp Exchange Club, and will be glad to hear from readers under sixteen interested.

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C. H. Noyce, 18, Corunna Road, New Road, Battersea, S.W., is starting a "Gem" and "Magnet" League, open to boys and girls anywhere in the British Isles. He appeals especially to Battersea readers to join.

L. C. Paganelli, 3, St. Martin's Place, Camden Town, N.W., is starting a "Gem" and "Magnet" Philatelic Club, and would be glad to hear from anyone interested. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

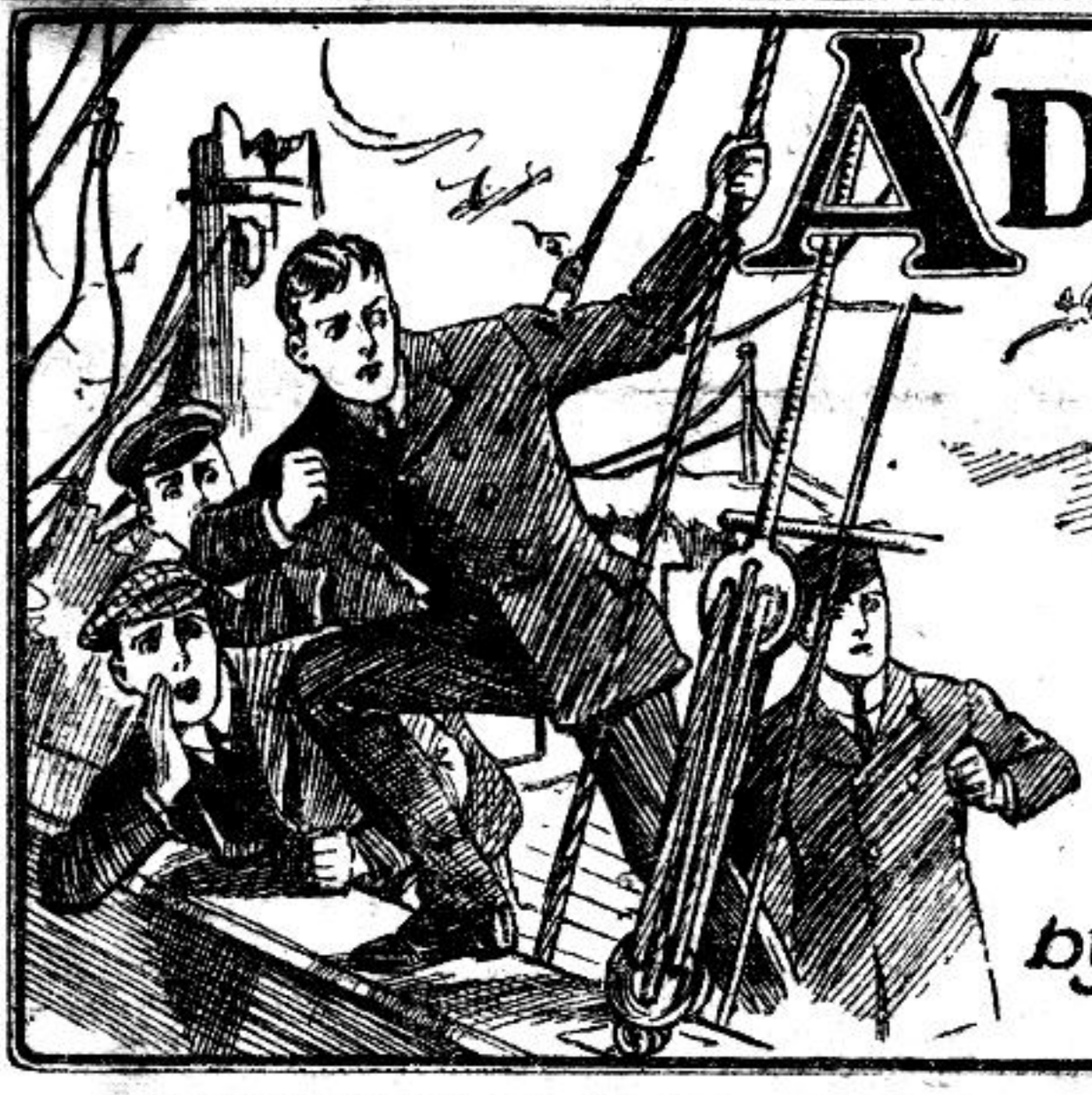
W. R. Hudson, 32, Oakwood Avenue, Mitcham, is authorised to raise a troop of Boy Scouts, and would be glad to hear of recruits. Age 11-15.

David Smith, 684, Govan Road, Govan, Glasgow, would be glad to get new members for his "Magnet" and "Gem" Social League. Small magazine published monthly.

Cyril Lowe, 344, City Road, Park, Sheffield, wishes to form a "Gem" and "Magnet" Social Club, open to readers of 12-18 anywhere in the United Kingdom. Will intending members please state age, and enclose stamped and addressed envelope?

(Readers will find a further List of Notices on cover, page ii.)

One Magnificent Adventure Serial Story. START TO-DAY!



ADVENTURERS FOUR!

A Story of Strange and Thrilling Adventures in an Amazing Quest

by ALEC G. PEARSON.

PREVIOUS INSTALMENTS BRIEFLY TOLD.

Hal Mackenzie receives a mysterious message urging him to come out to the Southern Andes and learn the secret of the Tower of the Golden Star. He sets out upon the voyage accompanied by his chums, Jim Holdsworth, Bob Sigsbee, and Pat O'Hara.

After exciting experiences in the hands of a treacherous captain, they arrive at Buenos Ayres.

They proceed upon their journey into the mountains, where they experience a sharp encounter with a band of brigands, from whom they rescue Aymara, the daughter of a native chief.

Later they arrive at the Cave of the Kings, where they shelter from a terrific storm; after which Aymara again appears upon the scene. She warns them of the perils besetting their undertaking, finally agreeing to show them a shorter route to their destination.

She pilots them through the Cave of the Kings, which penetrates for miles through the mountains, eventually leading them out on to a broad plateau on the mountain-side, where she leaves them. A short distance before them stands a mysterious-looking building, which Aymara had stated to be an Inca temple.

The chums decide to pitch their camp on the plateau; and are each busily engaged for some time on various tasks, when it is discovered that Hal is missing. Hearing the clang of a bell from the temple, they force the doors, and are about to enter, the leader carrying a torch.

(Now read on.)

The Snake-Worshippers.

It was a lofty edifice, with a flat roof supported by a number of elaborately carved stone pillars. At the far end was an altar, over which there was a representation of the sun in some burnished metal which looked like gold. All this they took in in a few swift glances, but no sign was there of any living person.

Yet there were two objects which held their attention at once. They were lying near the middle of the floor—one a dead snake, the other a scrap of paper.

"I dunno that a dead snake is goin' to be any use," said Sigsbee, "except it may serve as a clue to give us some idea of what's happened. And that scrap of paper——"

Jim had already picked it up and opened it out.

"It's from Hal!" he exclaimed. And he read out the few words that were scrawled on it in pencil.

"'Trapped. Chamber underneath. Movable stone.

"'HAL.'"

That was all.

"Trapped, is it?" cried O'Hara, clenching his huge fists and staring about him. "How the blazes——"

"It don't matter a red cent how it happened," interrupted Sigsbee. "We've got to get him out of the fix."

"I suppose he hadn't a chance to write more," said Jim. "But this note don't tell us much."

"It tells us enough," replied Sigsbee. "There's a chamber underneath us, which he must have been taken into; and there's a movable stone which opens the way into it. Well, we've got to spread ourselves out to find that movable stone, first thing." He kicked the dead snake to the other side of the temple. "I don't know what that reptile has to do with this racket—it ain't been long dead—but it's best out of the way."

"Keep still a minute!" said Jim. "Hold your row, Pat!" The Irishman was muttering to himself. "I want to listen!"

He had laid himself flat down, with an ear against the stone floor. The other two did not speak nor move until he raised his head.

"Hear anything?" asked Sigsbee.

"Yes," replied Jim. "There's somebody underneath. The sound I heard was something like a murmur of voices, but nothing very distinct. And look here! I believe this is the movable stone. Hold the torch closer, Pat! That's the ticket! See? There's no dust round the edges of this slab where it joins the others."

That was the case, as a close examination showed; otherwise, every stone slab composing the floor of the temple was exactly like its neighbour.

But, try as they would, they were unable to move it. They pressed round the edges, in the centre, across and across, but it wouldn't budge. Then all at once Pat O'Hara was seized with a brilliant idea.

"Howld on!" he cried, in a hoarse whisper. "Whoy didn't I think av it before? 'Tis meself knows something av haythin timples, for wasn't I shut up for nigh on two years in the Timple av the Sun, in the land of Shoa, me being taken for a koind av magician or saint—I'm not sure which?"

"We know all about that," interrupted Sigsbee. "What is this idea of yours? Put us wise to it."

"I'm tellin' ye," said O'Hara. "These thrapdoors an' saycrit intrances in these timples are mostly worked by a lever in the wall, or maybe fixed in an idol, though they're not always easy to foind."

Jim darted to the side of the temple nearest to him.

"There's no idol here," he exclaimed, "so we must try the wall!"

It was covered to the height of a man with grotesque carvings, and a short search revealed a projection which was worn smooth and somewhat discoloured. Jim pressed down on it, heard a soft whirring sound, and then exclamations from his companions.

The slab of stone had dropped a few inches, and then slid noiselessly back in grooves. Through the square opening thus left a shaft of light streamed up. They went to the

edge and looked down. A flight of stone steps led to the chamber, or vault, below, but there was no one visible. Nor did any sound of human voices reach them; only a queer sort of hissing sound, soft and continuous.

A startled look came on to Sigsbee's face as he listened, and he muttered something under his breath. Aloud he said:

"Get a grip on your guns. We'll need 'em!"

They had armed themselves only with their revolvers, as rifles would have handicapped them.

Jim meant to take the lead, and, if necessary, most of the risk, in the rescue of his chum. It seemed to him that was his right. He had jumped on to the broad top step when the bell, which they had heard before, clanged three times.

Then from the far end of the vault, which must have been of considerable size, there came to their ears a sonorous chant in many voices. But the words were in a language which they did not understand.

"'Tis something like the death-chant av the Shoan priests," muttered O'Hara. "Bad cess to all haythins!"

Suddenly another voice joined in the chant, clearer, fresher, but keeping exact time with the deeper and harsher ones. And this voice chanted words in English!

"Be cautious! Ten—men—against you. All armed. Rifles—knives. Most—rifles—stacked."

"It's Hal!" whispered Jim excitedly. "He must have twigged that the stone slab was open, but those howling sinners can't have noticed it. What a dodge to join in with 'em, so as to give us the tip! It's great!"

"He's got his head screwed on the right way," declared Sigsbee. "Go slow! We must take these galoots by surprise if we can."

Noiselessly Jim descended the steps, his comrades following him with equal caution. When they gained the bottom the sight which met their eyes held them for a few moments spellbound. What they expected to see they could hardly have told each other, but they had never pictured what they did see.

The vault was fully three hundred feet in height, and probably about fifty in breadth. The walls were stained red, with a number of torches ranged around them, so that the place seemed to be filled with crimson light.

At the far end, with their backs towards them, were ten men, dark-skinned, and with long black hair which fell over their shoulders. They were stripped to the waist, but from their hips hung a sort of kilt, made of snake-skins!

With arms upraised, and still singing their dirgelike chant, they were facing a stone dais which stretched from wall to wall. At the centre of this dais, and bound upright to a pillar, was Hal Mackenzie.

He was to be sacrificed. But the manner of the death which he was to suffer set his comrades' eyes blazing with fierce anger, while at the same time they shuddered with horror.

For behind him, at present confined in a cage as wide as the dais, were a number of yellow-and-black snakes, the most venomous of their species, which writhed and twisted and crawled over each other, while their forked tongues shot out, and they kept up a constant hissing, as though gloating over their victim.

When the time came to let them loose the whole front of the cage could be raised by ropes, which ran through pulleys overhead.

"Snake-worshippers!" muttered Sigsbee. "Wherever you find them, no matter what part of the world, you can reckon them as cruel and treacherous and cold-blooded as the reptiles they worship."

He had his finger on the trigger of his revolver, but it was not yet time to use it. A rash act might seal their comrade's fate and their own. Hal had seen them, and shot one grateful look in their direction, and then glanced to the left-hand side of the vault, evidently meaning to draw their attention there.

They saw and understood. For just behind the row of half-naked snake-worshippers, up against the wall, several rifles were stacked. They were of an old pattern, and not magazine rifles, but at such close range they would be effective enough. The snake-men had long-bladed knives stuck in their girdles.

But if the rifles were secured the three rescuers would gain an advantage, even though they were outnumbered by three to one and an odd man over.

"Best thing is to make a rush and grab 'em," Jim whispered, "while the owners are busy with their hymn."

Sigsbee nodded.

"All ready?" he said.

At that moment the chant abruptly ceased, and all except one of the snake-worshippers stepped back. The rifles could not now be reached without breaking through the crowd.

The one man who still remained near the dais held the rope which drew up the front of the cage to set the snakes free.

A "Free" Fight.

There was a pause of breathless expectancy on the part of the snake-worshippers, while for a few moments Jim, Sigsbee and O'Hara stood motionless, like figures turned to stone. Their plan of action would need alteration, and they only had the fraction of a minute in which to decide what to do.

The sudden silence was broken only by the soft hissing of the reptiles.

It was O'Hara who solved the difficulty, whether for good or ill had yet to be told. He was a creature of impulse, who acted on the spur of the moment, with the result that he often created troubles for himself when there were more than enough provided in the ordinary course of their adventures.

His eyes were fixed on the man who held the rope, ready to pull up the movable front of the cage and set the snakes at liberty.

"Ye murtherin' spalpeen!" he muttered.

Then he raised his revolver and fired.

The bullet struck the native on the right shoulder-blade, and he stumbled forward with a loud cry of pain. But he still clung to the rope as he fell, with the result that his weight on it jerked up the cage door. In an instant the snakes were writhing through the opening.

"Thunder! You've done it now, Pat!" exclaimed Sigsbee.

There followed a scene of excitement and confusion which baffles description. The shot, the release of the snakes before the worshippers were quite ready for that event, the unexpected appearance of the captives' comrades, filled the natives with amazement and fury.

Jim was swift to realise Hal's peril, and equally swift to act. Charging straight through the crowd of Indians, and snatching a knife from one of them as he passed, he leaped on to the platform, and slashed away with feverish haste at the ropes of rawhide which bound his chum to the pillar. Some of the reptiles were close up to their feet. Once he had to stop to kill a snake which had raised its head to strike.

At length all the thongs were cut through, and Hal was free.

"Thanks, old chap!" he said. "It's better to die fighting than tied up as I was to face those horrors."

He stretched his numbed arms, then he and Jim leaped down from the platform and plunged into the fray.

"Take this knife!" said Jim, passing the weapon to his chum. "We're not going to die yet! We're going to lick these snake-men to a whisper!"

During this time Sigsbee and O'Hara had been "creating a diversion" by rushing in among the snake-worshippers and using their revolvers with effect. Their foes made no attempt to get their rifles—which, indeed, would not have been of much use in that melee—but fought with their long-bladed knives.

"We've got to rush this through jest as quick as greased lightning!" cried Sigsbee. "Those blamed snakes are hustlin' to join in, and they're going to win!"

Yes, the reptiles were joining in, sure enough, for several had already dropped from the platform, and others were following. They were the sort of foes that were better left in possession of the field of battle. Under the present conditions it would be impossible to beat them off.

But the Irishman grabbed one by the tail, and, swinging it round, hurled it among their adversaries.

The snake wrapped round the neck of a worshipper like a comforter.

"That should be good for a sore throat!" exclaimed Jim cheerfully.

But the fellow evidently held a different opinion, for he rushed away, yelling in terror. Venomous snakes are better worshipped at a distance.

At this juncture there occurred a curious interruption. An Indian, who must have been watching the scene through the opening in the floor of the temple, and apparently overbalanced himself, pitched headlong down the flight of steps and rolled along the floor of the vault.

O'Hara paused in the act of trying to ram the butt of his revolver down a snake-worshipper's throat, and stared at the new arrival in surprise.

"More av ye!" he cried. "Well, this foight's free to all! Come on!"

But the man who had arrived head-first was not in a condition to join in the fray, even though it was free to all-comers. He was stunned. But his advent had an unlooked-for effect on the snake-men. Presumably he was one of them—their chief, to judge by his costume, which was more elaborate than theirs, for in addition to the kilt of snake-skins he wore a robe over his shoulders, and a silver snake encircling his head.

(Continued on page iv of cover.)

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ADVENTURERS FOUR.

(Continued from page 20.)

Cries of dismay broke from the snake-worshippers. Apparently they regarded his sudden appearance in so extraordinary a fashion as a bad omen. They ceased fighting, and with one accord rushed for the steps leading up into the temple.

"Look out!" shouted Hal. "They may close the opening and imprison us down here!"

Sigsbee was up after them like a shot. The sharp crack of his revolver was heard once, then he called down to his comrades:

"It's all right! The galoots have cleared as though they were being chased by a pack of wolves!"

Three of their number, not counting the chief, they had left lying on the floor of the vault, dead or wounded. But even if they were only wounded, there was no hope for them. The snakes were already swarming over their bodies. They were sacrificed to their own lust of cruelty.

Hal and his companions turned from the horrible sight, and hastened to quit that dreadful chamber of death.

The chief was recovering consciousness, but seemed unable to help himself.

"We can't leave him here—to the snakes," said Hal.

"No," replied Jim. "I dare say he's as bad as the rest of 'em—worse, perhaps—but we must get him out of this."

"Put him on me back," said O'Hara. "'Twill be aisier an' quicker that way. An' 'tis quick we must be, for thim bastes av riptiles are hurrying along to get a bite at us!"

So the chief was lifted up on to Pat's shoulders, and the Irishman marched up the steps with his load, afterwards dumping him down on the floor of the temple as though he had been a sack of potatoes.

Hal was the last to leave the vault, and he closed the opening with the movable slab of stone.

"I've had more than enough of that place," he said, with a slight shudder. "And if there's one building in the world that I never want to enter again, it's this blessed temple!"

"I shouldn't call it blessed!" observed Jim.

"Well, no," admitted Hal; "that certainly isn't the right word."

As they were quitting the great hall of the building the chief of the snake-worshippers—who had now fully recovered his senses—rose slowly to his feet, and, extending his hands towards them, spoke some words in a language which they did not understand.

"I reckon he's thanking you for saving him from an unpleasant death," said the American. "Kind of grateful——"

"He can keep his gratitude," interrupted Hal. "We're not in need of it."

It was natural, after what he had undergone, that he didn't believe a snake-worshipper could nourish such a feeling. But in that he was mistaken, as events were to prove.

The Black Sentinel.

When they had got back to their camp, re-kindled the fire, and made some hot coffee—for the nights were cold so high up in the mountains—Hal gave them an account of how he had been trapped.

"After my late experience, I sha'n't be so eager to go prowling around ancient temples," he began, with a laugh—"at least, not alone. But I always had a fancy that way. Well, I walked over to this particular one to see if there was any possible way of getting inside. To my surprise I found an opening at the base of the minaret, which none of us had noticed when we examined the outside of the building in the first instance. It was about four feet in height by three in width. I crawled through, but the interior was so pitch-dark that I couldn't see my hand in front of me. As it was no use groping about in that darkness, I turned to go out again, when at that moment the aperture was closed."

"That must have given you an unpleasant jolt," exclaimed Jim, "especially as you hadn't your revolver with you!"

"I shouldn't have had a chance to use it," continued Hal, "for before I could make another move I was gripped by unseen hands, and a heavy robe of skins flung round my head and body, so that I could neither call out nor use my arms. I did a bit of kicking, but that was soon stopped by a rope round my ankles."

"We heard a bell clanging," said Jim, "and thought we heard someone shout. Sounded like your voice."

"It was me," replied Hal. "When they were carrying me through the temple the robe fell away from my head, and I let out a yell, hoping that you might hear it. But the snake-men quickly covered my face up again, and I was carried down into the vault. There I was bound hand and foot to the pillar. The rest you know. It was a narrow squeak, but, thanks to you all, I got out of it without much damage. As a matter of fact, you have suffered more than I have, as you all have some wounds to show, whereas I haven't a scratch."

You may be sure that the four adventurers kept well on the alert for the remainder of that night, two of them always being on guard at the same time, instead of only one, as was usual. For although the snake-worshippers had beat a very hasty retreat from the temple, there was no knowing but what they might attempt a treacherous attack if they thought they could take them by surprise.

But nothing more was seen of that weird and abominable band, who belonged to no tribe that Hal had ever heard of in that part of the country. So when the sun was well up they struck camp, and continued their journey along a very well made mountain road.

They were surprised to find such a road in that wild mountain region, so far from the beaten track through the passes used by travellers going from Argentina to Chili, or vice versa, but concluded that it was an old road made by the Incas centuries ago, when the temple was perhaps a notable place of worship.

But the route was evidently seldom used now, even by Indians, and of the presence of white men in the solitudes they were traversing there was not the faintest trace.

For three days they pushed on along that wonderful road, which dipped down into ravines, climbed over ridges, and circled round mountain-sides, with a sheer wall of rock rising on one hand and a yawning abyss on the other.

Progress was tolerably easy, though they often had to lead the mules when the road ran along the edge of a precipice and was not too wide. On an average they made about twenty miles a day.

Game was fairly plentiful, particularly a small kind of antelope, which was very good eating. Sigsbee did all the hunting that was necessary.

At sunset of the third day the easy travelling came to an end, for the road finished abruptly right on the edge of a precipice, beyond which was a great valley which stretched away for miles a thousand feet below them.

The valley was in itself an extraordinary sight, for there were hillocks and boulders of rock in it, tossed and tumbled about as though some terrific earthquake had hurled a great tract of land into the air, and that was how it had fallen back again.

Parts of it were forest-clad, other parts bare, while the glimmer of water could be seen here and there—small lakes and rivulets.

"Well, here we are," said Jim, as he and his comrades surveyed the scene, "butt up against nothing! It's a precious good job we weren't coming along here on a pitch-dark night, or we might have stepped off into space!"

"And a mighty long step down—a thousand feet!" commented Hal. "However, we're safe on top, so we can shake hands with ourselves on that score. The trouble is that we have to get to the other side of that valley, and I don't see any path down into it from here."

"'Tis flying-machines we're wantin' now," declared O'Hara.

Sigsbee had flung himself flat down on the ground, and was peering over the edge of the precipice.

"I've a notion," he said, "there's a path of sorts about a mile away to the left; but it's getting too dark to make anything out clearly at that distance. We've got to wait for daylight, anyhow, so it ain't any use trying to break our necks until then. What we have to do now is to find a place to camp middlin' handy. We don't want to go back on our tracks more'n we can help."

After a short look around they hit on a suitable spot about a hundred yards back, on a stretch of fairly level ground fifty or sixty feet above the road. There was wood and water handy, so they soon had a fire going, and some antelope-steaks grilling on the prongs of long wire forks which they carried among their cooking utensils.

Close to their camp there was a fairly high, flat-topped rock, which was easy of ascent, and after supper, when the full moon rose in a cloudless sky, they climbed up to have another look at the valley.

It was a wonderful sight which greeted their eyes under the silver-white radiance. But it was not on the valley that their attention was concentrated. It was on an object which rose from the crest of a mountain on the far side. It may have been part of the mountain itself, shaped into its present form by some freak of Nature.

The form was that of a man of gigantic height, and perfect in outline. It appeared to be staring out across the valley. It was as black as ebony, but in the brilliant moonlight it glistened with a curious effect. In the hazy sunset it had been indistinct, and they had taken it for a mere pillar of rock.

"The Black Sentinel!" exclaimed Hal.

(There will be another grand instalment of this exciting story in next Monday's issue of THE "MAGNET" LIBRARY. Order your copy in advance.)