HIS OWN FAULT!

A Magnificent New Long Complete School Tale of the Boys of Greyfriars.

The Magnet Library 1d.

No. 443. Vol. 10. AUGUST 5th, 1916.

THERE WAS A CROWD OF FELLOWS ON THE CRICKET GROUND, AND THEY STARED AT SQUIFF AND THE BISCUIT-TIN AND THE WRIGGLING OWL OF THE REMOVE. SQUIFF EXPLAINED WHAT THEY WERE AFTER, AND, AMID MUCH LAUGHTER, COINS RATTLED INTO THE BISCUIT-TIN, SWELLING BUNTER'S FUND BEYOND HIS WILDEST HOPES.

(An Exciting Incident in the Magnificent Long Complete School Tale in this Issue.)

MY READERS' PAGE

OUR COMPANION PAPERS: "THE BOYS' FRIEND," 1d., Every Monday. "THE GEM" LIBRARY, 1d., Every Wednesday. "THE BOYS' FRIEND" 3d. COMPLETE LIBRARY, "THE PENNY POPULAR," 1d., Every Friday. "CHUCKLES," Price ½d., Every Saturday.

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

For Next Monday:

"THE TRICKSTER TRICKED!"

By Frank Richards.

In the splendid long complete story which appears next week, Mark Linley, the staunch, loyal, good-tempered Lancashire lad, plays a very prominent part—a circumstance which will make it all the more welcome to the big section of our readers with whom Linley is a prime favourite. Some of these have been inclined to indulge in mild grumbling of late because so little has been heard of Mark. Everyone will delight in reading of how the scholarship boy's father paid a visit to Greyfriars, and of the consequences that followed. Harold Skinner is the "villain" of the piece, and Wibley also figures in an important part. To say more than this might be to give away too much in advance, for a great deal of the genuine charm of this really fine story depends upon the reader's not knowing all about it beforehand. So be sure to get next Monday's "Magnet," all of you, and read for yourselves of

"THE TRICKSTER TRICKED!"

OUR COMPANION PAPERS.

Most "Magnet" readers know the "Gem"—in fact, it might be hard to find a single one who does not. If such a one exists, he ought to remedy the mistake he has been making without delay. And probably most of you know the "Boys' Friend," even if you do not see it regularly. Take my tip, though—you ought to be regular readers. The Rookwood School stories would suit you down to the ground. Next week would be a capital time to start reading our green Companion Paper, for in next week's issue begins one of the most thrilling and fascinating serial stories ever written. The author is Maurice Everard, who has established himself as a tremendous favourite with the readers of the "Boys' Friend."

Then there is the "Penny Popular," with its three regular weekly features—the Sexton Blake detective yarn; the Tom Merry school story; and the tale of Jack, Sam, and Pete—S. Clarke Hook's immortal trio.

And there is also "Chuckles," far and away the best half-pennyworth of fun and fiction on the market. In that bright and breezy little paper a first-rate adventure serial is now running; while there are also each week stories dealing with Teddy Baxter, the Cockney schoolboy, and those very humorous characters, Captain Custard and his nephew the Nib.

THE TRAGEDY OF A YOUNG READER.

In these days of battle and sudden death it is no uncommon thing to find the tragic note struck in some of the letters I receive. But I have rarely felt more grieved by any sad story told me than by one which came to hand a few days ago.

The letter was from the mother of a boy who was a reader of "Chuckles," and a member of the very popular club run in connection with that paper. About six years ago this unfortunate little chap lost the sight of one eye through the carelessness of a boy who was throwing broken bottles about. Now he has lost the other eye through being struck in it by a cat—that is to say, the sharp-pointed piece of wood used in the game called "Cat." In the second case there is not much blame due to anyone; accidents will occur in all games, and, of course, one knows that many youngsters play these games in the streets simply because they have nowhere else to play them. But the boy responsible for the first accident was guilty of wanton carelessness. I don't go in for preaching, but I cannot let pass the opportunity to warn my readers against dangerous tricks of this sort.

But the chief reason why I am alluding to this sad mishap is this. I know that many of my readers are ready at any time to write to a lonely fellow-reader. Here is one who is lonely beyond all doubt. Think only for a moment what the complete loss of your sight would mean to you! There are few heavier afflictions.

I want some of you to write to him. Don't dwell too much on his misfortune. That is always with him. You can just say you have heard about it—that will be quite enough. Write cheery letters. Tell him about yourselves and the things that interest you; some of them are sure to interest him.

His mother sent me the last letter he wrote before the accident happened. It is very neatly and nicely written, and thanks us for sending him a Chuckles Club certificate, with which he was greatly pleased. He says that he is very keen on seeing every week the adventures of Breezy Ben and Dismal Dutchy; but he will never see them again, poor little fellow!

His name and address are: R. Jordan, 29, Truro Road, Bedminster.

FROM THE TRENCHES.

Extract from a letter sent by a reader who told me in it of the way in which the "Magnet" and its Companion Papers are appreciated in the trenches: "My friend said that he saw a chap shooting with one hand and reading a 'Magnet' with the other."

H'm! "Some" hand that—what? Wonder how long it took him to teach it to read?

"Of course, his shots were going wide." The other hand seems to have been less well trained. I almost feel that I owe an apology to some Germans who ought to have been killed, but weren't!

NOTICES.

Cricket and Football.

St. Andrew's C.C. (Bootle—average age 16) are open for matches, any date, home or away. Hon. Sec., J. E. Abraham, Canal House, Jersey Street, Bootle, Liverpool.

Grove Hill C.C. (average age 14) want matches within a four-mile radius of Middlesbro'.—Hon. Sec., W. H. Simpson, c.o. The Tyne & Tees S.S. Co., Ltd., North Street, Middlesbro'.

Southgate United F.C. (average age 14) want fixtures for the coming season.—Hon Sec., W. A. Tilley, 27, Balmes Road, Southgate Road, N.

J. E. Stout, 35, Radlix Road, Leyton, N.E., wants to arrange footer fixtures for the team (average age 16½) of which he is secretary.

Victoria C.C. want matches within seven-mile radius of Olton.—H. Gough (captain), Somerset Villas, Warwick Road, Olton, Birmingham.

West Kensington Park F.C. (average age 16-17) want home and away matches for coming season within easy distance of Hammersmith.—Hon. Sec., 13, Talgarth Road, West Kensington, W.

Harry Sharp, 44, Bowling Green Lane, Clerkenwell, E.C., wants matches for his team (average age 12) within reasonable distance.

Immanuel C.C. (average age 17) want home and away matches Saturday afternoons, within three miles of Birmingham.—Hon. Sec., A. Appleby, 105A, Broad Street, Birmingham.

Westbourne Park Juniors F.C. want home and away matches for coming season.—Hon. Sec., R. French, 9, Shirland Mews, Shirland Road, Paddington, W.

Your Editor

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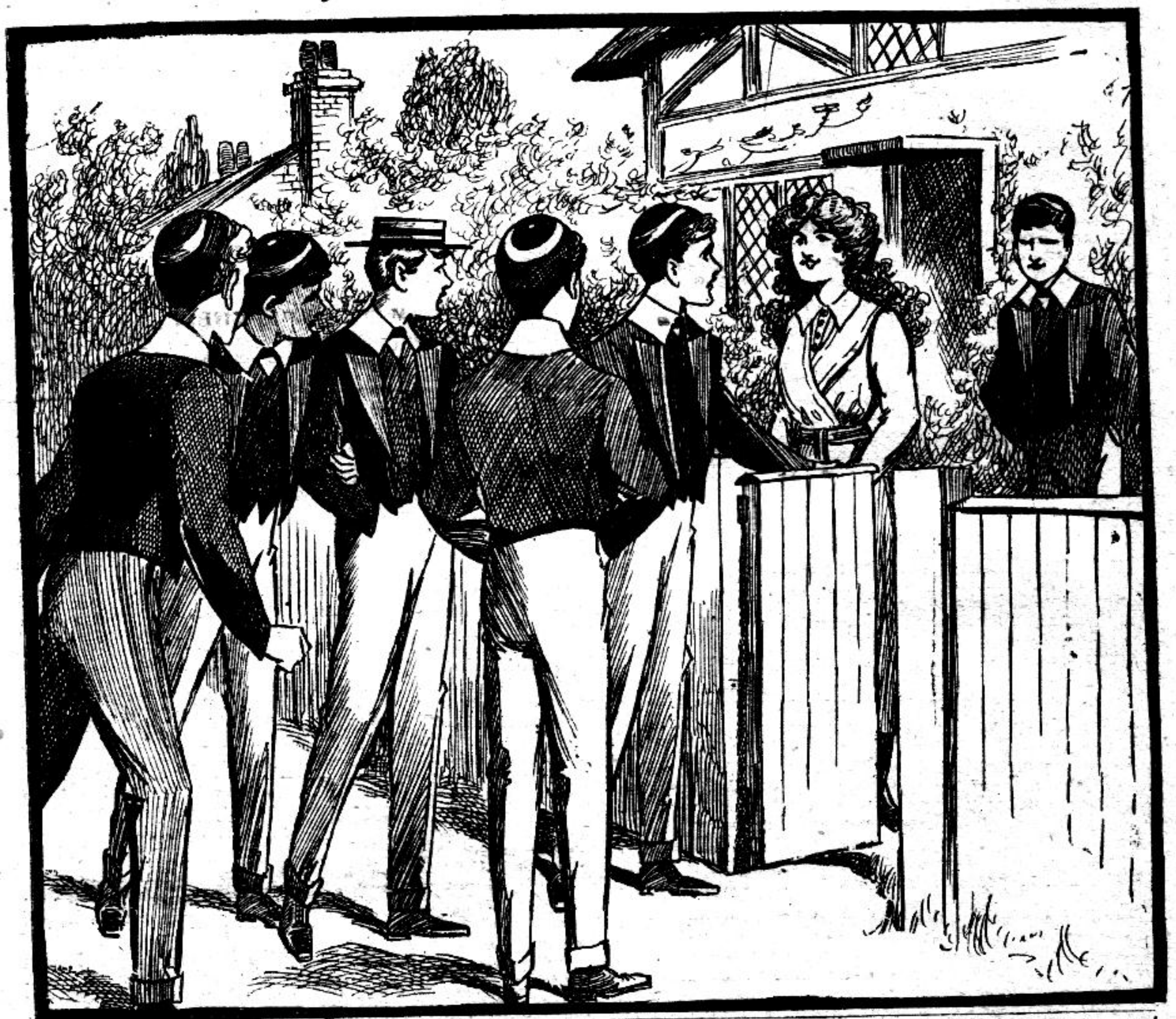
HIS OWN FAULT!

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

By FRANK RICHARDS.



Hazeldene came out of the garden and joined Marjorie, with a grim look at the Famous Five. "Ready to go home, Marjorie?" he asked. (*See Chapter* 13.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Under Suspicion!

"HAZEL! Come in, old chap!"

The Famous Five were at tea in No. 1 Study, when Hazeldene of the Remove looked in at the half-open door.

Harry Wharton called out the invitation most cordially.

"Just in time for tea!" said Frank Nugent.

"And the land's flowing with milk and honey!" said Bob Cherry impressively. "At least, there's condensed milk and treacle——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The gladfulness to see the esteemed Hazel is terrific!" declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Hazeldene hesitated at the door.

"The fact is, I haven't come to tea," he said. "I—I looked in to speak to you, Wharton. Another time will have to do."

"Oh, come in!" said Harry. "You can speak to me before the rest, I suppose? What is it—about the cricket?"

"N-no."

"You're going into the eleven for Redclyffe, if you choose," said Harry. "I've got your name down for Wednesday afternoon."

"Oh!" said Hazel.

"Your sister will be coming over to Redclyffe to see the match. She'll be glad to see you in the eleven."

"I—I—— The fact is——" Hazel stammered.

The chums of the Remove looked at him curiously. Hazel's face was red, and it reddened still more under the gaze of the Famous Five of the Remove.

"I—I didn't know you'd got me down for Wednesday, Wharton," he said. "I—I hardly think I'm in form."

"Oh, rot! You're all right!" said Harry.

"I—I—I've got an engagement for Wednesday——"

"Oh!"

"I'm sorry—I sha'n't be able to play," said Hazel, his flush deepening.

"Well, suit yourself, of course," said Wharton gruffly. The cricket captain of the Remove was not accustomed to having the offer of a place in the Form Eleven declined so lightly. "Rake will play instead. But there's no reason why you shouldn't play if you want to."

"I'm sorry; but—but it can't be done."

Wharton nodded shortly. Any other fellow in the Remove would have jumped at the offer; indeed, there was likely to be a considerable amount of grumbling on account of Hazeldene being selected. Wharton wondered, as he looked at Hazel's flushed and uneasy face, whether there was something behind this. The wayward junior had a perfect genius for getting into scrapes, and he was always easily led by any fellow with a stronger mind who chose to take the trouble.

"If your engagement on Wednesday is with Ponsonby of Highcliffe, you'd better chuck it, and play cricket," said Johnny Bull drily.

"It isn't," said Hazel.

"Look not upon the wine when it is red," said Bob Cherry solemnly. "Likewise, look not upon the wicked pasteboards when they are being dealt by Ponsonby of Highcliff."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Hazel irritably. "I'll look in and see you again, Wharton."

"Right-ho!"

"Blessed if I can see what the secret is about!" grunted Johnny Bull. "If you want us to clear out, Wharton, we'll go."

"I don't," said Harry. "Hazel's got no secrets with me that I know of."

Hazel's lip curled in a sneer.

"Oh, I'm not in a scrape!" he exclaimed. "I can see what you've got in your mind, Bull. I haven't been betting on horses, and I don't want Wharton to get me out of a fix."

"Well, it wouldn't be for the first time if you did," grunted Johnny Bull.

"Easy does it, Johnny!" murmured Bob Cherry. "What's past is past, you know."

"Oh, let him run on!" sneered Hazel. "I shall be hearing soon that I'm missing the match on Wednesday to meet a bookmaker, or to play cards with Ponsonby, or to go out smoking with Skinner. That's what you think of me."

"It's your own fault if we do," said Johnny Bull coolly. "I've timed you."

"Timed me!" repeated Hazel. "What the dickens do you mean?"

"Timed you when you've run straight, I mean. You generally run straight about three weeks after getting landed in a scrape. Then you go out looking for trouble, and you generally find it. Now, it's more than three weeks since you were in your last fix——"

"You silly ass——"

"So it's high time you found trouble again," said Johnny Bull calmly; "and if you've got something to say to Wharton that Wharton's friends can't hear, I conclude that you have found trouble, and you want that duffer to wriggle you out of it somehow."

"Oh, cheese it, Johnny, old chap!" said Wharton uneasily.

He could not help the same thought coming into his own mind. He knew Hazel too well. And his friendship for Hazel's sister, Marjorie, somehow gave him a feeling of responsibility for the wayward fellow, and many a time he had stood by him in a serious scrape.

And there was no doubt that Johnny Bull's statement was correct. Hazel's repentance generally lasted as long as the remembrance of trouble—which was only a week or two.

Hazel's flush had died away now. There was a glitter in his eyes.

"I suppose I might have expected this kind of thing here!" he said, with a sneer. "As you're so jolly curious about it, Bull, I'll say out what I came here to say to Wharton. I was going to ask him to lend me a sovereign."

The juniors were silent. Johnny Bull's face showed plainly enough that this confirmed the suspicion that was already in his mind.

"It isn't to pay a bookmaker!" sneered Hazeldene. "I dare say you think it is. Can you lend me a quid, Wharton?"

"I could," said Harry. "I've had one to-day from my uncle. If you really want it, Hazel, I could hand it over."

"Well, I do!"

"More duffer you, Wharton!" grunted Johnny Bull. "You must be an ass to chuck away your only quid without knowing where it's going!"

"Hazel will tell me where it's going," said Wharton quietly.

"I sha'n't!" said Hazel grimly. "You can please yourself about lending it to me."

Wharton frowned.

"I suppose that means that Johnny's right, and that you're in trouble again, Hazel?"

"You can think so if you like."

"Are you always as polite as that when you're borrowing a quid, Hazel?" inquired Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton drew a currency note from his pocket.

"There you are, Hazel," he said, tossing it across the table.

Hazel picked the note up slowly.

"I'll return this next Monday," he said. "I can do it."

"Suppose the gee-gee doesn't get home?" suggested Johnny Bull.

Hazel gave him a fierce look.

"So you think it's going on a gee-gee?" he asked.

"Looks like it to me."

"Well, think so, and be hanged! Do you think so, Wharton?"

"I haven't said so, Hazel."

"Do you think so? If you do, you can take your note back, and I'll manage without it somehow."

"I'll take your word about it," he said. "You've been in scrapes enough; and when you're in a scrape you're generally mysterious like this. But if you say you're not, I believe you."

"Well, I'm not!"

"All serene, then!"

Hazeldene put the pound note in his pocket, and left the study with a moody brow. The chums of the Remove went on with their tea.

There was a shade on Harry Wharton's brow now. He believed Hazel—or, at least, he tried hard to believe him. But what did Hazel want money for, without being able to state why he wanted it? What did his hesitation, his flushed face, his mysterious manner, mean? The captain of the Remove could not help thinking that the black sheep had broken out again, and that there was trouble in store for him—and through him, for Marjorie. But he had told Hazel that he would take his word, and he tried to dismiss the doubt from his mind.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

No Encouragement for Patriots!

"I SAY, you fellows——"

There was a chorus of "Buzz off, Bunter!"

But Billy Bunter did not buzz off. A determined expression sat on the fat face of William George Bunter.

Harry Wharton & Co. were in the Common-room. It was a couple of days after Hazel's mysterious behaviour in No. 1 Study. The Famous Five were chatting over the prospects of the Redclyffe match, which was coming off on Wednesday afternoon. The eleven had been made up without Hazeldene. Billy Bunter came up, with a decidedly serious look on his face, and a pencil and paper in his fat hands.

"You can leave off jawing cricket for a few minutes," said Bunter. "This is an important matter."

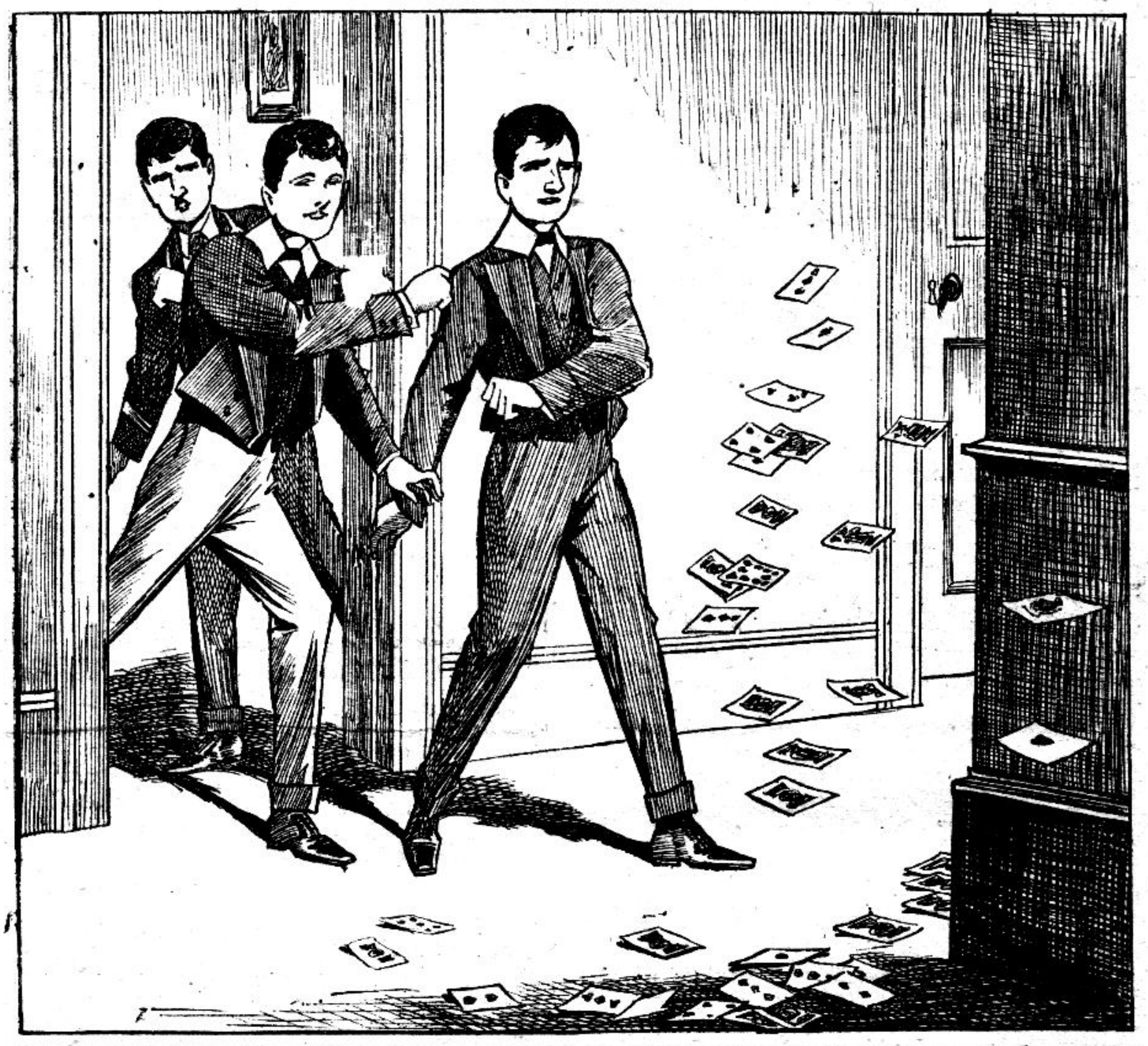
"Don't tell us you're expecting a postal-order!" groaned Bob Cherry.

"As a matter of fact, Cherry, I am expecting a postal-order."

"I knew it! And you want it cashed in advance? Kick him, Johnny! You've got the biggest feet."

"Your hoofs are jolly well bigger than mine——"

"I say, you fellows, do let a chap speak! I'm raising a subscription."



Bulstrode jerked the door open, and threw the cards into the passage. "You silly fool!" Hazeldene gave a howl of wrath. *(See Chapter 6.)*

"The Jam Tart Fund, for the benefit of W. G. Bunter?" asked Nugent.

"Nothing of the sort! It's a patriotic fund. Some fellows are patriotic," said Bunter. "I don't want to pass any remarks, but I do think a fellow might think of something besides cricket at a time like this. You may have heard," added Bunter, with crushing sarcasm, "that we are at war with Germany——"

"Yes; I saw it in the 'Evening News,'" said Bob. "Is it still going on?"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Blessed if it isn't like you, Bunter—it goes on for ever," said Bob, with a yawn. "What they really want is a Remove chap at the head of affairs. Then things would begin to move a bit."

"I say, you fellows, do be serious! You ought to remember that while the chaps out there are keeping the Germans off, you're able to slack about Greyfriars playing cricket. My idea is, that it's up to us to back them up."

"By providing you with a free feed?" said Wharton.

"By looking after their wives and children," said Bunter.

"Wha-a-at!"

"Well, my hat!" said Johnny Bull, in amazement.

"You know about old Chirpey?" said Bunter. "He used to be a plumber, or a gasfitter, or something. I remember he used to bring a bag of tools here when something or other went wrong with something. Now he's out there with the boys, and Mrs. Chirpey is living on the allowance. You know all about it. You remember Toddy chipping in when her landlord was putting the bailiffs in, or something, and stopping the beast. Well, Chirpey's kid is ill."

"Sorry to hear that," said Wharton.

The juniors knew all about Private Chirpey, once a plumber, now in khaki. He had left a wife and two children in Friardale, to live upon an allowance which was nearly half as much as Mr. Chirpey's wages had been before the war. Some of the juniors had sent parcels to Mr. Chirpey when they were in funds, to show "old Chirpey" that he was not forgotten.

"How do you know anything about it?" demanded Johnny Bull. "You can't have been at the keyhole there, I suppose?"

"Oh, really, Bull! I met Marjorie Hazeldene this afternoon. She was going to Mrs. Chirpey's house. She's been helping to nurse the kid."

"Good old Marjorie!" said Bob.

"Now, my idea is to raise a fund," said Bunter impressively. "Mrs. Chirpey isn't rolling in money. Illnesses come expensive. Suppose somebody walked in with a fiver for Mrs. Chirpey? That would very likely see her through it. I'm going to take all the trouble—all you fellows have got to do is to hand out the money. See?"

"Yes, I see," assented Wharton.

"Well, how much shall I put you down for, Wharton?" Bunter wetted the end of the pencil in a business-like way. "As Captain of the Remove, you ought to start the ball rolling with something decent, you know. Shall I say a quid?"

"You can say what you like, Bunter."

"You had a quid on Saturday from your uncle."

"How the dickens do you know?"

"I happened to see you take the postal-order out of the letter. If you haven't spent it you can start the fund with it."

"Nothing doing!"

"I'm surprised at you, Wharton! As your uncle is a soldier, you ought to be willing to back up the Army. Where would you be if the soldiers weren't looking after you? What?"

"In Queer Street, I expect, as most of us would be," said Harry. "But that's no reason for handing you quids to spend at the tuck-shop."

"If you can't trust my personal honour, Wharton——"

"Well, I can't!"

"I decline to discuss the matter further with you, Wharton! I'm disgusted at you! Bob, as your father is a soldier, you'll put up something handsome, I suppose?"

"Your supposer's out of gear, old chap! Nothing doing!"

"I'm disgusted with you, Bob Cherry! What I can't stand is selfishness in a fellow! What are you handing out, Nugent?"

"A thick ear, if you don't shut up!"

"I say, Bull——"

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

"Inky, old man, you'll set these disgusting, unpatriotic pro-Germans an example, I know. You've got lots of oof. Shall I put you down for a quid?"

"My esteemed oof is remaining in my esteemed pocket, my estimable Bunter!"

Billy Bunter snorted.

"Well, I can only say I'm disgusted! Lord Mauleverer's set you an example. He's stood half-a-sovereign already. I've got his name down."

"What have you done with the half-sovereign?"

"I decline to answer insulting questions, Cherry! I'm disgusted with you! Hazel—I say, Hazel!"

"Hallo! What do you want?" said Hazel, who had just come into the Common-room.

"Subscriptions."

"Go and eat coke!"

"I'm hungry—I—I mean——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Look here, Hazel, as your sister is helping to nurse young Chirpey, you might hand over something to the Chirpey Fund."

Hazel started.

"The what?" he exclaimed.

"I'm raising a fund for Mrs. Chirpey. Her kid is ill, and we're going to see her through. How much are you standing?"

"Go to Jericho!"

"Well, I'm disgusted with you, Hazel! I say, Bolsover——"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Bolsover major.

"I thought the Remove was a patriotic Form," said Bunter bitterly. "It seems that I was mistaken. Rake, old man——"

"Nothing doing!" grinned Rake.

"I say, Kipps——"

"Buzz off!"

"Squiff, old man, I suppose you're going to set these rotters an example? We look to Australia for a lead, you know," said Bunter encouragingly. "You hand out something, and it will—will knit closer the bonds of Empire, you know, and—and hands across the sea, and—and so on. How much?"

"You can look to Australia for a lead, if you like!" grinned Sampson Quincy Iffley Field. "But you needn't look to me for any cash to spend at the tuck-shop!"

"Oh, really, Squiff—— I say, Fishy!"

"Bow-wow!" said Fisher T. Fish.

"Now, look here, Fishy," said Billy Bunter persuasively, "it's up to you! You know jolly well the Huns will mop up you Yankees unless we lick them. Haven't you been swanking about your blessed Monroe Doctrine for fifty years, because you were safe behind the British Fleet? You're making money out of us while we're fighting your battles. Now, I put it to you—you ought to dub up. Something is expected even of Yankees. Did you say five bob, Fishy?"

"I guess not."

"Half-a-crown?"

"Nope!"

"Look here, Fishy——"

"Oh, vamoose, do!"

Billy Bunter blinked round at the grinning juniors.

"Well, I can only say that I'm disgusted!" he said. "I'm surprised—I am, really! Here's a chap fighting for his country, and his country squeezes out a tuppenny-ha'penny allowance for his wife, and you fellows won't back me up in raising a fund! I'm disgusted——" Billy Bunter broke off with a yell. "Yarooh! What beast chucked that cushion at me? Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, Mauly!" Lord Mauleverer lounged into the Common-room. "Mauly, old man, these rotters ain't backing up the fund! If you feel inclined to put a bit more on, I'm ready to put your name down. Would you like to make it a quid?"

"Oh, begad!" yawned Lord Mauleverer.

"Make it a quid, Mauly," said Bunter. "It will be an example to the unpatriotic pro-Huns."

Lord Mauleverer fumbled in his pockets.

"Don't be an ass, Mauly!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Bunter's fund won't get any further than the tuck-shop!"

"Mauly can trust me!" said Bunter loftily.

"Then Mauly's a howling ass!"

"Oh, I'll make it a quid!" yawned his lordship. "Give me that ten-bob note back, Bunter, and here's one for a quid!"

"Ahem! Haven't you ten shillings?"

"No. Can't you give me the ten-bobber?"

"I—I—— Ahem! You—you see——"

"Why can't you give me the ten-bob note?" demanded Lord Mauleverer. "It isn't half an hour since I handed it to you."

"You—you see, I—I——"

"Because it's gone!" roared Bob Cherry. "You ass! It's gone in grub already!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"You fat, swindling bounder!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, seizing Bunter by the collar. "Where's Mauly's ten bob?"

"Yarooh!"

"Where's the ten bob, you Prussian?"

"Groogh! Leggo! I—I had to have a snack!" gasped Bunter. "I—I was hungry, you know! But it's all right. I'm going to put in my postal-order instead. Yow! Ow!"

"Oh, begad!" Lord Mauleverer put the pound note back into his pocket. "You're a swindlin' cad, Bunter, dear boy!"

"Bump him!"

"I—I say, you fellows—— Yaroooh! Leggo! Help! Yah!"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Oh, crumbs! Yow! Ow, ow, ow!"

Billy Bunter rolled on the floor, roaring.

"Now, all together!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Kick him out!"

"Yah! Oh! Help!"

Billy Bunter rolled out into the passage with a dozen boots behind him. In the passage, he picked himself up and fled for his life.

There was no encouragement for patriotism in the Greyfriars Remove—not for patriotism, at least, of William George Bunter's variety.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
A Visit to Mrs. Chirpey!

"MARJORIE!"

Harry Wharton jumped off his bicycle as he caught sight of the graceful figure in the lane. Marjorie Hazeldene greeted him with a bright smile.

"You're going to the village?" asked Harry.

The captain of the Remove felt that he was in luck. He had run out after tea for a spin, without any expectation of meeting his girl chum of Cliff House School.

"Yes," said Marjorie. "I'm going to Mrs. Chirpey's."

"May I come?"

Marjorie smiled.

"Yes, if you like."

Wharton walked beside the girl, wheeling his bicycle. Marjorie's sweet face was graver than usual.

"I've heard about little Chirpey," said Wharton.

"I suppose Hazel told you?"

"No; I heard it from Bunter."

Wharton's brow clouded a little. He had not spoken to Hazel since that little talk in the study. Monday had come and gone, and Hazel had not returned the loan. Wharton had not asked him for it, though the loss of his remittance was not a light matter. A pound more or less made a very considerable difference to a junior in the Lower Fourth.

"Oh, Bunter!" said Marjorie.

"Yes. The young ass has been gassing about raising a subscription for Mrs. Chirpey. He raised half-a-quid from Mauly, and blued it in the tuckshop, and we jolly well bumped him for it. Only Mauly would be ass enough to trust him with money. I say, is Mrs. Chirpey really hard up, Marjorie?"

"I'm afraid so. Her little girl has been ill for two months, and it costs a good deal of money for a poor woman. Miss Primrose gave me permission to go and help to nurse," said Marjorie. "Mrs. Chirpey has plenty to do, with the little boy to look after and her old father."

Wharton's brow wrinkled.

"Bunter's idea wasn't a bad one, if the fat bounder could have been trusted," he said. "I—I suppose Mrs. Chirpey wouldn't be offended if something of the sort was done in a delicate way, Marjorie?"

Marjorie looked doubtful.

"I don't see why she should, Harry. It wouldn't be like charity; it would be like paying a debt."

"That's how I look at it," said Harry. "Whatever we did, we couldn't do as much for Chirpey as he is doing for us."

Marjorie nodded.

"Miss Skimp goes there from the vicarage," she said. "She has advised Mrs. Chirpey to give up her little house and go into two rooms. Mrs. Chirpey asked her if she would like to live in two rooms, with two children and an old man to look after, and Miss Skimp was very much offended. But I cannot see why a soldier's wife should give up her little house. She won't, anyway, and I think she is right."

They entered at the little garden gate.

"Here is Mrs. Chirpey," said Marjorie.

Mrs. Chirpey opened the door as they came up the path. Mrs. Chirpey's usually plump and rosy face was looking careworn now. Harry Wharton raised his cap. Mrs. Chirpey greeted Marjorie warmly and affectionately. It was easy to see that Marjorie's visits were more welcome than those of the estimable Miss Skimp from the vicarage.

"How is Lucy?" asked Marjorie.

"She's been asking for you, Miss Marjorie. Your brother's in the garden with Dick."

"Hazel here?" said Harry, somewhat surprised.

"Hazel often comes with me," said Marjorie. "Good-bye, Harry!"

"Good-bye, Marjorie!"

The girl disappeared into the house. Wharton walked back to the garden gate, where he had left his bicycle. There was a pattering of feet, and a chubby little fellow came racing round the house, and rushed into Wharton.

"Hallo, Dicky!"

It was Master Dicky Chirpey, aged seven.

The next moment Hazeldene of the Remove appeared. He had an old football at his feet, and he kicked it across the garden to Dicky.

"There you are, Dick! Hallo, Wharton!"

He stared at Wharton.

Wharton stared at him. It was rather a surprise to find Hazeldene of the Remove spending his leisure hours in amusing a child of seven.

Wharton's thought was probably visible in his face, for a clouded look came on Hazel's face, and his lip curled.

"Surprised to see me here—what?" he asked. "Did you miss me from the school, and think that I had gone down to the Cross Keys?"

"I didn't miss you, and I shouldn't have thought you'd gone to the Cross Keys, anyway," said Harry.

"Well, Bull would, anyway!" said Hazel, with a laugh. "I'm a dog with a bad name. But you can tell Bull that you didn't find me drunk and disorderly."

"Oh, don't be an ass, Hazel! Are you going back now?"

"No; I'm going to see Marjorie home to Cliff House. You needn't wait!"

Wharton flushed a little.

"By the way, I haven't settled that quid," said Hazel. "I promised it for Monday, and now it's Tuesday. But you never did expect me to keep a promise, did you?"

"It doesn't matter."

"But it hasn't gone on gee-gees," said Hazel, with a grin. "I know you believe it has, but it hasn't. You're welcome to your belief!"

"Are you trying to quarrel with me, Hazel?"

"I don't care twopence whether we quarrel or not!" said Hazel coolly. "I know what you think of me, you and your precious friends, that's all. As for the quid, I shall settle that to-morrow. I've asked my uncle for it."

"You needn't have troubled."

"Well, I did. Come on, Dicky! On the ball, you know!"

Dicky rushed off with the football with Hazel, and Wharton left the garden. He mounted his bicycle and rode away slowly towards Greyfriars.

He did not quite understand Hazel's mood.

Hazel had been in numberless scrapes, and when he was in a scrape he always seemed to expect somebody to get him out of it. But when he was on the reform tack, as Bob Cherry called it, he was touchy and sensitive, and bitterly offended by the slightest breath of suspicion. He seemed to exact the most implicit faith, in spite of the fact that he had never given grounds for faith to be placed in him.

It was more for Marjorie's sake than anything else that Wharton had made efforts to keep on good terms with Hazel. He was not an easy fellow to keep on good terms with.

He was evidently in a quarrelsome mood at present, but whether that was due to being regarded with doubt or to a consciousness that he was doing wrong Wharton could not guess. Either theory would have accounted for Hazel's touchy mood.

One thing was certain, and that was that if Hazel had slipped back into his old bad ways, there was trouble ahead. Somebody would have to rescue him from his scrape, and that somebody would be Marjorie, and for that reason it would be Harry Wharton & Co.'s concern.

Hazel was late for calling-over that evening. Mr. Quelch marked him down as absent, and it was nearly half an hour later that Hazel came in, looking tired. He had to report himself at the Form-master's study. Billy Bunter met him on his way thither.

"I say, Hazel, how are they getting on at the Cross Keys?" grinned Bunter.

Biff!

Billy Bunter sat down in the passage with a roar.

Hazel tapped at Mr. Quelch's door, and entered.

"You have missed calling-over, Hazeldene," said the Remove-master severely.

"I saw my sister home to Cliff House, sir. She was delayed in the village."

"Oh! Well, don't let it occur again!"

Hazel left the study.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Smokes for Sale!

"SMITHY, old man——"

"Rats!"

Billy Bunter sidled into Vernon-Smith's study with a very mysterious air. The Bounder of Greyfriars was alone, Skinner, his study-mate, being downstairs. The Bounder pointed to the door.

"Don't try it on me, Bunter. I'm not subscribing to the Jam-tart and Ginger-beer Fund, thanks!"

"'Tain't that," said Bunter. "I'm letting the fund stand over for a bit, owing to the selfishness of the fellows. Even Mauly has been cutting up rusty, owing to my borrowing that half-quid—temporarily, of course. I am going to replace it with my postal-order, and then the fellows may do me justice."

"Sorry for you, if you ever get justice!" grinned the Bounder.

"Oh, really, Smithy! But look here, I didn't come here to ask you to subscribe to my Chirpey fund. 'Tain't that. I've got something for you."

"Go hon!"

"How'd you like a smoke?"

"A what?" exclaimed the Bounder.

"A jolly good cigarette—what?"

"My hat!" The Bounder stared at Bunter. "Are you treating fellows to cigarettes now, you fat rascal?"

"Not exactly treating them," said Bunter cautiously. "I'm willing to treat you to one, to show you what they're like. Really good, you know—I've had one. I can let you have several packets cheap."

"You're selling cigarettes!" exclaimed the Bounder, in amazement.

"That's it—a cheap line, but really good stuff."

"And you've come to sell them to me?" asked Vernon-Smith, a glint coming into his eyes.

Bunter nodded.

"That's it. Of course, Wharton and those duffers believe that you've chucked smoking and playing the giddy ox. I'm not going to give you away, Smithy, so long as you like to keep it up."

"You're sure there's something to give away?" queried the Bounder sarcastically.

Bunter chuckled a fat chuckle.

"You can't pull the wool over my eyes," he explained. "I'm rather a keen chap, you know. You spoof Wharton so as to get into the cricket team, but a fellow would have to get up very early in the morning to spoof me. You can't take me in, you know," said Bunter, wagging his head knowingly at Vernon-Smith.

"I mayn't be able to take you in, but I can chuck you out!" remarked the Bounder, rising from his chair.

"I say, Smithy! I've come here to do you a favour, you know. Now you're keeping up appearances, it must be rather awkward for you to dodge into the tobacconist's for your smokes and all that. You'd better have these," urged Bunter. "Look here!"

Billy Bunter produced a large cardboard box from under his jacket. He laid it on the table with a flourish. Vernon-Smith had picked up a bat, but he put it down again. The cardboard box was full of cigarettes; there were two hundred of them, closely packed, of a well-known brand. It was a ten-and-sixpenny box.

"Cost ten-and-six," said Bunter. "You know the brand—you used to smoke that sort. Well, I'll let you have them for seven bob cash, Smithy. I can't say fairer than that!"

"You've bought a ten-and-sixpenny box of cigarettes to sell me for seven shillings?" said the Bounder, in astonishment.

"Ye-e-s, exactly."

"Well, as it happens, I don't smoke."

"Oh, draw it mild, Smithy! No good keeping that up with me—a keen chap like me. I won't give you away, you know."

"But if I did," went on Vernon-Smith, "I should want to know where that box came from before I bought it."

"It's mine."

"Where did you get it?"

"I—I—I bought it, you know."

"On purpose to sell it again at three-and-six loss?" grinned Vernon-Smith.

"Ye-e-es. Just so!"

"Not quite good enough! Where did you steal those cigarettes?"

Billy Bunter picked up the box hastily.

"Look here, Smithy, if you don't want them, I'll try Skinner. The beast offered me two bob for the lot, and they're worth ten. But I'd rather have two bob than nothing. Or Loder of the Sixth might take them—they're good, ain't they?"

"Where did you get them?"

"Mind your own business!" snapped Bunter. "If you don't want them you can go and eat coke!"

And Billy Bunter rolled discontentedly out of the study, with the box under his jacket.

"You'd better take those cigarettes back to their owner, Bunter," said the Bounder, as he rolled away. "You'll get into trouble when they're missed."

A snort was the only reply from Bunter.

"Beast!" murmured Bunter, pausing irresolute in the passage. "Silly ass, thinking he can take me in like the rest! If Skinner would go to half-a-crown I'd let him have them. I wonder if Snoop—— I say, Snoopey!"

"Hallo!" said Sidney James Snoop, looking out of his study.

"Look here! How much will you give me for these splendid cigarettes, old chap?"

"My hat! Where did you get them?"

"I—I found them."

"Bob the lot," said Snoop.

"Look here, they cost ten-and-six."

"They didn't cost you that," grinned Snoop. "I'll give you a bob, and chance the owner getting on the track."

"Rats!" growled Bunter, and he rolled on in search of a more promising purchaser. He found Stott of the Remove on the stairs, and offered his cigarettes for sale; but Stott's financial resources were limited to a French penny, so there was nothing doing with Stott.

"Try Hazeldene," suggested Stott. "I hear that he's going on the giddy ran-dan again—missing call-over, and so on."

"Hazel? Oh, no!"

"It's a fact," said Stott. "I saw him dodging into the tobacconist's in Friardale this afternoon. Try him!"

Bunter shook his head, and went on his way. For some reason he did not wish to try Hazeldene as a purchaser for the cigarettes.

He found Lord Mauleverer in the lower hall, and stopped him. Mauleverer was a good deal of a slacker, but he had no vices, and did not seem a very promising subject; but Bunter was getting desperate. He wanted to dispose of his cigarettes before the school shop closed.

"I say, Mauly," began Bunter, in a mysterious whisper, "would you like to try a cigarette—a really good brand?"

Lord Mauleverer stared at him blankly.

"Begad! A cigarette!" he ejaculated.

"Don't shout, you ass! There's Wingate at the end of the passage!" growled Bunter. "Look here, I've got some ripping cigarettes to sell. I'll let you have 'em specially cheap, because we're pals, you know."

"Begad, that's a mistake of yours, Bunter. We're not pals!"

"Look here——"

"You're a dashed young blackguard, Bunter! Take your smokes away and bury 'em! Don't come blaggin' to me!"

"You silly ass——"

"If you come blaggin' to me I'll pull your silly nose—like that!" said Lord Mauleverer.

"Yow-ow-ow! Led go by dose!" spluttered Bunter.

He jerked his fat nose away with a howl. Lord Mauleverer grinned and walked away. Billy Bunter did not follow him. His lordship evidently did not mean to encourage him in "blagging."

"Beast!" mumbled Bunter. "Rotter! Jolly good mind to give him a jolly good licking! I—I suppose I shall have to try Loder."

And after some hesitation Bunter rolled away to the Sixth Form passage, and tapped at Loder's door.

Gerald Loder of the Sixth was a prefect; and a prefect was really the last person who should have been supposed to be a likely purchaser for cigarettes. It was Loder's duty to put down that kind of thing with a firm hand. But Billy Bunter knew a good deal about Loder, and he knew that Loder smoked. It did not occur to his obtuse mind that, even if Loder smoked like a furnace, he would be too cautious to give himself away to a junior on the subject.

Loder stared at him as he came in, looking very mysterious, with the box of cigarettes concealed under his jacket.

"What do you want, Fatty?"

Billy Bunter closed the door, somewhat to Loder's astonishment.

"I've got something for you, Loder."

"I've got something for you, too," said the astonished prefect, taking up a cane.

"I—I say, Loder, honest Injun, you know! I've got some cigarettes."

"Wha-at!"

"Look at that!"

Bunter held up the box. The prefect blinked at it, too astounded to speak. "Ten-and-sixpenny box," said Bunter impressively. "I'm going to let you have them for seven bob, Loder."

"Mum-my hat!" gasped Loder.

"That's jolly cheap, ain't it?" said Bunter. "But I mean it. I don't know whether they're your favourite brand, Loder; but they're good."

Loder rose in his wrath, towering over the Owl of the Remove.

"You—you dare to come with cigarettes to sell to me!" he gasped. "You dare to hint that I smoke!"

"Oh, really, Loder!" said Bunter, in dismay. "Don't be funny, you know. Look here, you save three-and-six by buying that box—— Yaroooh! Leggo!"

Loder's grasp descended upon the fat junior's collar, and Billy Bunter was shaken till his glasses slid down his nose, and every tooth seemed loose in his head.

"You young scoundrel!" said Loder. "You abandoned young rascal! Come with me! Come to Mr. Quelch!"

"Yarroogggh!"

"Come along, you depraved young villain!"

"Grooohooooh!"

With Loder's iron grip on his collar, Billy Bunter was marched out of the room straight to the Remove-master's study.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Brought Before the Beak!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! What's the row?"

"What's the matter, Loder?"

"What's Bunter been doing?"

A crowd of fellows gathered round, as the unfortunate Owl was marched along with Loder's grip on his collar.

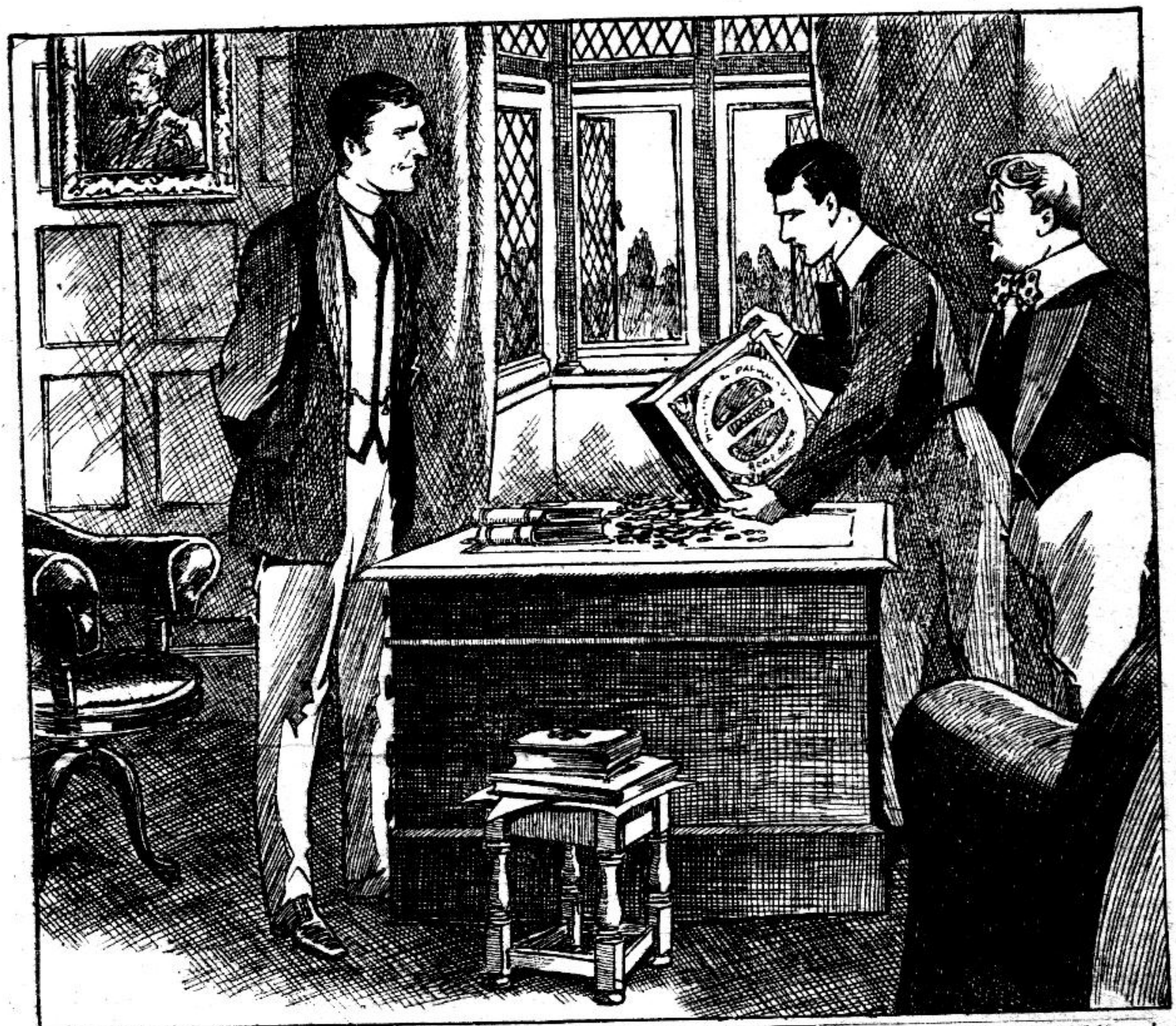
The box of cigarettes, grasped in his podgy hand, was a sufficient explanation, however.

"Smokes!" said Skinner. "Oh, Bunter! Naughty!"

"Grooogh! Leggo, Loder! I say, you fellows—groogh!"

"You young ass!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"I—I say, you fellows, I haven't been smoking!" yelled Bunter. "Leggo, Loder, you beast! I was going to do you



Squiff removed the lid of the biscuit-tin, and poured out the contents on Mr. Quelch's table. Billy Bunter eyed it almost ravenously. (*See Chapter* 11.)

a favour, you rotter, and save you money. I ain't going to Mr. Quelch! Yow-ow-ow!"

Loder knocked at the Form-master's door, and marched Bunter in. Skinner burst into a howl of laughter.

"Oh, my only hat!" he gasped. "The fat idiot went to sell them to Loder! He wouldn't take my two bob! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sell them to Loder!" exclaimed Squiff.

"Yes—ha, ha! The silly ass, as if Loder would admit that he smokes. He knew jolly well Bunter would jaw it all over the house if he did. Ha, ha!"

"But where did the fat duffer get the smokes?" said Wharton. "That's an expensive box. He couldn't have bought them."

"Stole them, I expect."

"And you offered him two bob for stolen cigarettes!" exclaimed Bulstrode.

"Oh, he told me he found them!"

"Found them in a shop when the tobacconist wasn't looking, I expect," remarked Tom Brown. "And he tried to sell them to Loder. Oh, the fathead!"

"Well, of all the crass idiots!" said Bob Cherry. "Bunter really does take the bun!"

"Well, he's going through it now!" grinned Bolsover major. "The duffer, to think Loder would own up to smoking!"

"The dufferfulness was terrific," remarked Hurree Singh. "But the whackfulness will also be great."

The juniors listened with interest for the sound of howls from Mr. Quelch's study. They had no doubt that Mr. Quelch would come down heavy.

Billy Bunter's fat knees were knocking together as Loder marched him in. Loder was really taking the only possible course open to him, if he was to keep up appearances. Bunter realised that a little too late.

"Bless my soul! What does this mean?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, rising from his chair.

"Put the cigarettes on the table, Bunter!" snapped Loder.

"Cigarettes!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir. Bunter has in his possession a large box of cigarettes, and he had the astounding impudence to bring them to me—to offer them to me!" said Loder, with virtuous indignation. "I considered it best to bring him to you at once, sir."

"Quite right, Loder! You may release him."

Loder let Bunter go. The fat junior stood gasping and quaking under the stern eyes of the Form-master.

Never had Mr. Quelch's piercing eyes appeared so much like gimlets. They seemed to bore into the unhappy Owl.

"Bunter! You bought these cigarettes?"

"Nunno, sir!"

"You offered them to Loder, a prefect?"

"I—I—I—I thought I ought to give them up to a prefect, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"They do not belong to you?"

"Nunno!"

"You took them to Loder to give them up?"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"He tried to sell them to me, sir!" said Loder indignantly. "He actually hinted that he suspected me of being a smoker, and asked me to give him seven shillings for them!"

"Bunter! Have you the audacity to accuse Loder, a prefect of the Sixth, of smoking?"

"Ye-es, sir—I—I mean no, sir!"

Billy Bunter knew perfectly well that Loder smoked. But he knew, too, that he could not prove it—and that it would not help him if he could.

"Yes or no, Bunter?"

"No, sir; certainly not! Loder is—is mistaken. I—I thought that those—those wicked things ought to be given up at 'once," stammered Bunter. "I have never smoked a cigarette, sir. They make me sick."

"How do you know they make you sick, Bunter, if you have never smoked?"

"I—I mean, they don't make me sick, sir. I can stand them quite well!"

"What!"

"I—I mean, I can't stand them at all!" groaned Bunter, realising that he was putting his clumsy foot in it again. "That's what I meant to say, sir."

"It is perfectly clear to me, Bunter, that you have smoked."

"Oh, no, sir! Not at all, sir. I should be ashamed to do so, sir. I—I have remonstrated with fellows for smoking, sir, pointing out that our kind masters would not approve——"

"Don't be ridiculous, Bunter! You have smoked, and you apparently fancied that your foolish vice was shared by Loder."

"Oh, no, sir! Loder is quite mistaken."

"Did you ask him for seven shillings?"

"I—I may have mentioned seven shillings," burbled Bunter. "I—I was speaking in quite a general way, sir."

"Did you attempt to sell Loder these cigarettes?"

"Not at all, sir! I—I was going to let him have them cheap—I—I mean, I suggested that he should lend me seven shillings. I'm expecting a postal-order, sir——"

"What!"

"A postal-order for ten shillings, sir, from a—a titled relation of mine. I really wanted Loder to lend me seven shillings till my postal-order came. Loder rather misunderstood, sir. I—I was going to make him a present of the cigarettes, sir, as he's a smoker—I mean he isn't a smoker, of course."

"Do not tell any more falsehoods, Bunter!"

"No, sir; certainly not! May I—I go now, sir?"

"You may not, Bunter! This matter is not settled yet."

"I—I'd prefer to let it drop, sir, if you don't mind," stammered Bunter, with a longing glance at the door.

"Why did you take these cigarettes to Loder?"

"Because Smithy wouldn't buy them, sir—I mean——"

"You offered them to Vernon-Smith?"

"Oh, no, sir! I wouldn't think of such a thing!"

"You are an incorrigible liar, Bunter! How did these cigarettes come into your possession?"

"I—I found them, sir."

"If you found them and kept them, Bunter, you stole them. Where did you find them?"

"In—in the lane, sir. They—they were lying in the mud, sir, so I—I picked them up," groaned Bunter. "I—I thought they oughtn't to be wasted in—in war-time, sir."

"The box is perfectly new and clean," said Mr. Quelch, examining it. "You did not pick this box out of the mud, Bunter. Have you actually stolen these cigarettes?"

"No, sir. I found them. I—I didn't mean to say the mud exactly. What I really meant to say was, that I found them in a desk."

"A desk!" exclaimed the Remove-master. "If you do not tell me the truth at once, Bunter, you will regret it! Those cigarettes belong to someone at Greyfriars?"

"Yes, sir," mumbled Bunter.

"Do they belong to a master?" asked Mr. Quelch.

"That's it, sir," said Bunter, greatly relieved by the suggestion. "They belong to—to Mr. Prout, sir."

"You have stolen cigarettes from Mr. Prout?"

Bunter gasped. He realised that this would not do.

"Oh, no, sir! Now I come to think of it, they belong to a Remove chap. That's what I really meant to say."

"Very well. They belong to a Remove boy, and you have taken them?"

"That's it, sir. I—I felt I ought to prevent him from smoking the beastly things, sir. From—from a sense of duty entirely."

"What is the name of the owner?"

"I—I don't want to give Hazeldene away, sir——"

"Hazeldene! Do you state that you found these cigarettes—two hundred cigarettes—in Hazeldene's desk, Bunter?"

"I—I'd rather not say, sir!"

"Yes or no! Answer me at once!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"Loder, will you kindly fetch Hazeldene here?" Loder of the Sixth left the study. "Bunter, I shall punish you severely. Hazeldene had no right to have tobacco of any description in his possession, but you were guilty of dishonesty in taking it and attempting to dispose of it. I do not believe for one moment that you took the cigarettes from a good motive. You have acted, Bunter, like an unscrupulous young scoundrel. I shall endeavour to impress upon your mind, Bunter, that honesty is wiser as well as more honouable. Hold out your hand!"

Swish, swish, swish, swish, swish, swish!

Billy Bunter's yells could be heard at the end of the passage. Mr. Quelch pointed to the door with his cane, and the fat junior staggered out of the study.

"Got it bad?" asked Bolsover major, as Bunter came limping down the passage.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Serve you jolly well right!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Yow-wow-wow-wow!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes Hazel!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as Loder appeared with the Removite. "You're not in this, Hazel?"

Hazeldene made no reply. With a clouded and moody brow he followed the prefect into Mr. Quelch's study, and the door closed.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
Chucked Out!

HARRY WHARTON tapped at the door of No. 2 Study, and entered. Hazeldene was alone there. He smiled satirically as he met Wharton's glance. Wharton had waited for him to come up after his interview with Mr. Quelch. He had expected to find him looking sore and savage from a licking. But there were no signs of a recent licking about Hazeldene. Apparently Mr. Quelch had tempered justice with mercy, and the captain of the Remove could not help feeling astonished.

"Not licked?" he exclaimed.

"Sorry—no!" said Hazel ironically. "I can feel for your disappointment. But I'm not licked."

"Don't be an ass, Hazel!" said Wharton warmly. "You know I don't want you licked. Only I can't understand Quelchy letting you off. Bunter's had it bad."

"Bunter's a dishonest young scoundrel," said Hazel coolly. "He stole the cigarettes from my desk. I had just missed them when Loder called me down."

"Then—then they were there?" ejaculated Wharton. "They belonged to you?"

"I shouldn't be likely to have another fellow's property in my desk, should I?" said Hazel. "Perhaps you think I should, though!"

"I can't understand Quelchy letting you off, if it came out that the smokes belonged to you," said Harry. "It's extraordinary!"

"Yes, isn't it?"

"Well, I'm glad, so far as that goes."

"Thank you!"

"Not that you didn't deserve a licking!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove, irritated by Hazel's sneering tone. "It's not like Quelchy to lick Bunter and let you off, when you brought the things into the place. But, hang it, I didn't come here to jaw you!"

"Did you come for your quid?" said Hazel. "My hat! I shall never hear the end of that quid, I think."

Wharton flushed angrily.

"Have I asked you for it, even once?" he exclaimed.

"It seems to me that you think of nothing else. Well, I can't pay you!"

"I don't care twopence whether you can pay me or not. As a matter of fact, I never more than half expected you to."

"Now we're getting at your real opinion," said Hazel. "Well, I'm going to pay you. I had the money on Monday, as a matter of fact. I bought those cigarettes and some other things with it, instead of squaring up. Shocking, ain't it?"

"Well, it was dashed blackguardly, if you want my opinion!"

"I don't, to be quite candid."

Wharton controlled his temper with an effort. It had not been so trifling a matter as Hazel seemed to suppose, to hand over the whole of the remittance from his uncle. But Wharton would never have asked the reckless junior for the money. It was a little too bad to have the words put into his mouth, as if he had been dunning his debtor. And it was not pleasant to hear that the money had been expended on "smokes."

"It seems to me that you're trying to quarrel with me, Hazel," said Harry, after quite a long pause.

Hazeldene shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't care a rap either way," he said. "A fellow doesn't like being watched and suspected. I told you once I was going straight. You don't choose to think so. Well, you can please yourself, and go to Jericho!"

"I haven't watched or suspected you. But when you tell me that you've brought two hundred cigarettes, and keep them in your desk, I suppose I can't help knowing it, can I?"

"Perhaps you'd like to know how the rest of the money went," said Hazel. "I've got some more of my purchases here. Look!"

He opened his desk, and took out a pack of cards.

Wharton stared at them.

"You'd better not let a prefect find them here," he said.

"You can go and tell a prefect if you like!"

Wharton drew a deep breath.

"I won't quarrel with you, Hazel, though you seem to want me to. I'd rather speak to you as a pal."

"Go it! Here beginneth the first lesson," grinned Hazel. "Dear friends and brethren, beware of the first step upon the road to ruin! Go it!"

"I'm not going to preach to you, Hazel."

"My mistake! I thought you were."

"If you're taking up that kind of thing again," said Harry, with a gesture towards the cards, "I think you're an ass!"

"And a blackguard, too?" suggested Hazel.

"Yes, and a blackguard, too, if you want plain English!" said Harry hotly. "You gave your word that you had finished with that kind of foolery. You might think of Marjorie, and what she would think about it."

"Has my sister asked you to act as her defender and protector?" demanded Hazel, with satirical politeness. "She hasn't mentioned it to me."

"And that's why you don't want to play in the Redclyffe match to-morrow!" said Harry angrily. "Cards and smokes, and Ponsonby of Highcliff, I suppose?"

"You can suppose what you like," yawned Hazel. "I'm not responsible for what you suppose."

"Well, I think—— But I won't tell you what I think. You know well enough." Wharton turned abruptly to the door. He was beginning to feel that he could not keep his hands off Marjorie's brother much longer.

"Thanks awfully!" said Hazel. "I thought I was fairly in for it. But you can sermonise me if you like, you know. You've got a right to. I still owe you a pound. You can take it out in jaw!"

Wharton strode out of the study. Bulstrode came in as he went, and glanced curiously at Wharton's clouded brow. Then he looked at Hazel, as the captain of the Remove closed the door.

"Been rowing with Wharton?" he asked.

"Not at all. He's been rowing with me."

"How the dickens did you get off with Quelchy?" asked Bulstrode curiously. "I thought you'd come out of his study doubled up, like Bunter. I'm glad you got off, of course, but how on earth did you work it?"

"I explained to Quelchy."

"You spun him a yarn?"

"Exactly," said Hazel, with a sneering smile. "I told him I had bought the cigarettes to send to a man at the Front."

"Well, my hat! I should never have thought of that. But you don't mean to say Quelchy swallowed it?" said Bulstrode.

"He swallowed it whole," said Hazel calmly. "He was a bit suspicious at first——"

"Ha, ha! I should say so!"

"But I convinced him, so it was all right."

"You wouldn't have convinced me so easily," grinned Bulstrode. "Well, you are a deep rotter, Hazel, and no mistake. After that, I suppose he handed the fags back to you?"

"No, he didn't do that. He made me give him the soldier's name, and he's going to see the fags posted himself."

"You had a Tommy's name all ready, in case of accidents?"

"Exactly."

"Blessed if I thought you were so deep! That cock won't fight twice, though," said Bulstrode, with a shake of the head. "I see you've got some cards there. You'd better keep them out of sight. No good telling Quelchy they're to send to a soldier, if he sees them. Ha, ha!"

Tom Brown, the New Zealander, who shared No. 2 with Bulstrode and Hazel, came in. He looked at Hazel in surprise.

"Not licked?" he asked.

Bulstrode, with a chuckle, explained. The New Zealand junior did not seem to share his amusement. He looked disgusted.

"Well, that was a rotten trick!" he commented. "I'd rather take a licking than use a soldier's name like that. Still, the chap will get the smokes. Serve you jolly well right, Hazel!"

Hazel sneered.

"Thank you for your opinion. But you can keep it to yourself."

"If I'd seen those smokes here, they'd have gone into the fire," said Tom Brown coolly, "and those cards would have followed them. And they'll go now, unless you take them out of the study."

"I'm going to put them in my desk."

"And tell another lie when they're found there!" said Tom Brown contemptuously. "And suppose we're suspected of using them as well as you? We couldn't deny that we knew they were in the study."

Hazel gave a shrug.

"Well, it's not good enough," said Tom Brown decidedly. "I daro say Snoop will let you keep them in his study; he's that sort. But you can't keep them here!"

"I suppose this is my study as well as yours?"

"And mine as well as yours," said the New Zealand junior. "You can take those cards out of it!"

"Well, I won't!"

"You will!" said Tom Brown.

"Dash it all, be sensible, Hazel!" said Bulstrode, pushing between the two. "Now that Quelchy knows about the cigarettes, he may look in here any time. He's a suspicious old bird. It isn't safe to have the cards here. We might all get into a row. The same yarn won't go down twice; you know that."

"I can keep what I like in my desk."

"You can't!" said Tom Brown. "Not things of that kind—not in my study! I'm not going to be hauled up before the beaks to please you. Take them out!"

"Well, I won't!"

"I agree with Brown," said Bulstrode. "Take them out, Hazel!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Then we'll jolly well take them out for you!"

"Let my cards alone!" shouted Hazel.

But the two juniors were in earnest. Hazel's blackguardism was his own affair, but they had a very natural disinclination to be dragged into it if it was brought to light.

Tom Brown grasped him by the shoulders, and Bulstrode jerked the cards away. Hazel struggled savagely, but the sturdy New Zealander held him as if he were an infant.

"Now, will you keep them somewhere else?" asked Bulstrode angrily.

"No, I won't!" yelled Hazel.

"Then here goes!"

Bulstrode jerked the door open, and threw the cards into the passage. The whole pack scattered along the passage. Hazel gave a howl of wrath.

"You silly fool!"

"And if you don't keep a civil tongue, you'll go after them!" growled Bulstrode.

"You rotter! You meddling hound——"

"Out you go, then!"

Bulstrode grasped him, and whirled him to the door Hazel's fist crashed into his face, and Bulstrode roared. Then he hit out, and Hazel reeled into the passage. Bulstrode slammed the door after him.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Peter Todd Earns Bunter's Gratitude!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"Cards, by Jove!"

The row in No. 2 Study had brought a dozen juniors out of their rooms and from their prep. They stared at the cards scattered along the Remove passage, and at Hazel, reeling against the wall, panting for breath.

With a scowling face, Hazel began to gather up the cards.

"You howling ass!" said Bob Cherry, in measured tones. "Get those things out of sight! Suppose a prefect came along?"

"Mind your own business!"

"You thumping idiot!" said Vernon-Smith. "You might have sense enough to keep it dark, at any rate!"

"The same as you do?" sneered Hazel.

Harry Wharton looked out of his study, but he did not speak. He went back to resume his work. Nugent, always good-natured, lent Hazel a hand in collecting the cards. Hazel put them into his pocket, and with a glare of defiance at the juniors, went downstairs. He did not venture to take the cards back into No. 2 Study.

"Well, this is a go!" said Nugent, as he sat down at

An orange caught Billy Bunter on his fat chin, and he sat down in the road. He was still sitting there, gasping, when the brake disappeared. (*See Chapter* 8.)

the table again in No. 1. "Hazel is going the whole giddy unicorn, and no mistake!"

"The silly ass!" said Wharton, frowning. "He seems to be asking for trouble. He used to be more cautious. It's just as if he wants to be sacked."

"Not much loss if he were!"

"It would hurt Marjorie. Blessed if I know how Marjorie came to have a brother like that!" growled Wharton. "That's the end of his blessed reformation. Johnny Bull was right, after all. I'm fed up with him!"

"It's queer, though," said Nugent thoughtfully. "He seems to glory in being a giddy blackguard, and at the same time he's awfully touchy about being suspected of anything of the kind."

"Yes; that's Hazel all over."

"I suppose this means that he's on with Ponsonby again, and Banks the bookie, and all the rest of it. He'll be up to his ears in trouble before the week's out. Who's going to yank him out of the scrape?" said Nugent, with a grin.

"Blessed if I feel inclined to do anything of the sort. A chap gets fed up in the long run!" grunted Wharton. "We shall hear soon that Banks is dunning him for money, or that he's borrowed Marjorie's watch and pawned it, or something of the sort. And then he will be looking for somebody to help him out. Br-r-r-r-r!"

Wharton went on with his work, with a frowning brow. It had really seemed that at last Hazel had made an end of his folly, and it was exasperating to find that he was beginning again. And when the time of trouble came, Wharton knew, angry as he was, that he would stand by the foolish lad, for Marjorie's sake.

The chums of the Remove had finished their preparation, when Billy Bunter came into the study. The fat junior had apparently recovered from his licking. He blinked at Wharton and Nugent, heedless of their frowns.

"I say, Wharton, old chap——"

"Oh, get out!"

"It's rather important," said Bunter, unmoved. "You sometimes send things out to the soldiers, Wharton. Will you be sending another parcel soon?"

"Do you want to put something in it?" asked Wharton sarcastically.

"Yes, exactly. F'rinstance, a soldier chap out there would like a new pipe," said Bunter. "If a chap smokes, it's much healthier to smoke a pipe than cigarettes, you know. Would you like to send out a ripping new pipe?"

"I've sent out pipes **sometimes**," said Harry. "What are you getting at? You're not likely to buy a pipe for a Tommy."

"Oh, really, Wharton! The fact is, I was going to send one, but I'm rather short of tin, and, if you like it, I'll let you have it cheap. And—and a tin of tobacco with it—real shag."

The two juniors fixed their eyes on Bunter.

"Here they are! Billy Bunter drew a briar-pipe from one pocket and a tin of tobacco from another. "That pipe must have cost four bob at least, and tobacco is eight or nine shillings a pound now, you know. You can have the lot for two bob. What do you say?"

"Where did you steal them?" asked Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

Wharton rose to his feet.

"Is that some more of Hazel's property you've been stealing?" he asked. "Has that howling idiot gone in for a pipe, too?"

"Ahem! I—I found them, as a matter of fact," said Bunter. "I thought you'd like them to send to the soldiers. Of course, a junior here couldn't have such things. It would really be a good deed to take them out of his desk, so as to keep him from getting into a scrape. Don't you think so?"

"Well, my hat!" said Nugent. "I wonder if all burglars are as honest as Bunter?"

"Here, leggo my collar!" yelped Bunter. "Wharrer you up to, Wharton?"

"I've a jolly good mind to take you to Mr. Quelch!" said Harry angrily. "But I'll take you to Hazel instead. I suppose that rubbish belongs to him?"

"I—I say, you know, you can have them for ninepence!" gasped Bunter. "Don't you want a really good bargain, you fathead? Yow-ow! Leggo! I'm not going to Hazel. The beast will be waxy, you know, and I only took them to save him from getting a licking—— Yarooooh!"

Wharton jerked the fat junior out of the study, and yanked him along to No. 2, heedless of his expostulations. He kicked open the door, and bundled Bunter in. Tom Brown and Bulstrode had finished their preparation, and gone down, and Hazel was alone in the study, with a sullen brow.

"What the thunder do you want?" he exclaimed angrily. "Do those things in Bunter's paws belong to you?"

"You fat rotter!" shouted Hazel, springing to his feet. "You've been at my desk again!"

"I—I say! I—I was only trying to keep you from getting

into a row, Hazel! I—I meant it all in kindness. Yarooh! Keep off!"

Billy Bunter struggled furiously to escape. He wrenched himself away from Wharton, only to fall into Hazel's clutches.

Pommel, pommel, pommel! The pipe and tobacco went to the floor, and Bunter roared and wriggled as Hazel hammered him.

"Yow-ow! Help! Murder! Lend me a hand, Wharton, you beast! Yarooh!"

Harry Wharton walked out of the study.

Billy Bunter followed him in a few minutes, head first. He collapsed in the passage, groaning, and the study door was slammed on him. But there was a helping hand ready; it was Peter Todd's. Peter Todd grasped the Owl by the collar, and whirled him along to No. 7 Study.

"You've been picking and stealing again, Bunty!" said Todd. "I don't know whether you're a bigger fool than rogue, Bunty, or whether you're a bigger rogue than fool. But I know I'm going to cure you, or break a cricket-stump in the attempt! You're not going to disgrace this study, my fat tulip!"

"Yarooh!" roared Bunter, in apprehension. "I—I say, Toddy, I—I took them to save Hazel from getting into another row—I did really—— Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

The cricket-stump rose and fell rhythmically, and the dust rose from Billy Bunter's tight garments. Whack, whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Help! Murder! Fire! Oh, Toddy, you beast! Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"There, I think that will do," said Peter Todd. "You can always rely on me to look after you, Bunty, when you're going astray."

"Yow! Beast! Yow-ow!"

"I expect you to be properly grateful, Bunter."

"Yow-ow-ow! Beast!"

"Are you grateful?" roared Peter, flourishing the stump.

"Yow-ow! Yes! All right; I'm grateful!" shrieked Bunter.

"Good! That's a proper state of mind. You give me a lot of trouble, Bunter, and I'm sure I shall break that stump some day," said Peter. "But, bless you, I don't mind; so long as you're my study-mate I'm going to look after you! Rely on me!"

Billy Bunter did not reply. There was no language that could have expressed his feelings at that moment.

Loder rose in his wrath, towering over the Owl of the Remove. "You—you dare to come to me with cigarettes to sell to me!" he gasped. "You dare to hint that I smoke!" *(See Chapter 4.)*

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
The Match at Redclyffe!

HAZELDENE of the Remove came in for a considerable amount of attention from his Form-fellows the next day.

His case was quite out of the common.

There were several fellows in the Remove who amused their leisure moments by "blagging," as the juniors called it—fellows like Skinner and Snoop. And at one time Vernon-Smith and Hazeldene had been conspicuous among the "merry blades." That was past, so far as the Bounder was concerned. As for Hazel, he was not exactly vicious, but he fell into incessant scrapes from sheer irresolution and inability to resist temptation. But whenever a black sheep went "blagging," he was at least cautious about it; and Hazel seemed to have thrown caution to the winds on this occasion. That made his case unique.

Nobody was surprised to find that he kept a store of cigarettes; but that he kept them two hundred at a time, in a place where they might be seen, was a surprise. That he kept cards in his study was not a surprise, either; but his letting them come to light was very reckless. The pipe and the tobacco put the lid on, as the Bounder put it. A foolish fellow might smoke a cigarette or two; but for a junior in the Remove to start a pipe was almost tragically comic. The fellows laughed, or shrugged their shoulders, or sneered, as the humour moved them. Hazel's relapse had been widely advertised, as it were. He had been chucked out of his own study for keeping cards there; his Form-master had taken the cigarettes from him; and Hazel was openly on bad terms with most of his friends. He had been offered a place in the eleven for that afternoon's match, and he had refused it; and that alone was enough to make him conspicuous.

The juniors did not need telling why he had refused it. The cards and the cigarettes gave the clue to his refusal. Hazel had other occupations for his half-holiday; and they were occupations that would not bear the light. So the Remove fellows naturally concluded.

Skinner & Co., quite pleased to discover that Hazel was, after all, one of themselves, adopted a very friendly manner towards him. To their surprise, Hazel was far from meeting

them half-way. Skinner's invitation to a smoke in the box-room was curtly refused; Snoop's suggestion of a game of nap for penny points in the study was declined without ceremony. It seemed that if Hazel was taking up blackguardism again he had the grace to keep it outside the school at all events.

After dinner, when the cricketers were preparing to start for Redclyffe, Wharton spoke to Hazeldene again. He did so with an effort, but he was thinking of Marjorie, and of her pain and disappointment if she learned of Hazel's new outbreak. Hazel was mooching about in the quadrangle by himself, having just driven off Skinner & Co. in the gruffest possible manner, much to the annoyance of those sporting young gentlemen.

He looked at Wharton grimly as the captain of the Remove came up. There was no compromise in his sullen face.

"We're just starting, Hazel," said Harry, affecting not to notice his look. "I've asked Rake to play, but he's willing to stand out if you want the place."

"I've told you I've got an engagement this afternoon," said Hazel.

"You couldn't cut it off, then, to play Redclyffe?"

"I could, but it would disappoint somebody."

"Do you really think, Hazel, that you ought to put Ponsonby before your own friends in your own school?"

"Who said it was Ponsonby?"

"Well, nobody; but I suppose——"

"You are pretty quick to suppose harm of a fellow, aren't you?" sneered Hazel. "I could explain if I liked. But if you choose to think as you do, I don't care. Suppose it's Banks, the bookmaker? I dare say you think so!"

"We shall start rowing, at this rate," said Harry. "Marjorie will be disappointed if you don't turn up at Redclyffe. And it isn't a custom of mine to go round begging fellows to play in the Form eleven."

"Marjorie won't be there," said Hazel grimly. "She gave me a message for you yesterday. Sorry she can't come to Redclyffe this afternoon with Phyllis and Clara."

"Well, you might have given me the message," said Harry warmly.

"I was going to when you started rowing me. I haven't seen you since."

Wharton's lips closed.

"But I haven't kept Marjorie away," sneered Hazel. "I can see that you're thinking so. It's because she's nursing that Chirpy kid. The kid's worse, and Marjorie is going to be there all the afternoon."

"Oh, I see!" Wharton's brow cleared. "That's just like Marjorie. I only hope she won't hear anything about your playing the giddy ox while she's worried about that."

Hazel burst into a laugh.

"It isn't exactly a laughing matter, Hazel!"

"Quite a mistake; it is," said Hazel coolly. "You don't know how much you amuse me when you mount the high horse, Wharton. You ought to do it on the stage in the Rag, and charge for admission."

Harry Wharton walked away without replying. Hazel's mocking laugh followed him. Wharton's face was quite pale when he arrived at the brake. He had never come nearer to knocking Marjorie's brother heels over head. Bob Cherry gave him a curious glance.

"His Highness coming?" he asked.

Wharton shook his head.

"Then you'll want me?" said Rake.

"Yes."

"Good egg! I dare say I shall knock up as many runs as Hazel," said Rake. "Just a few more, perhaps."

"I say, you fellows," called out Billy Bunter, as the brake started, "make room for a chap! I'm coming over to Redclyffe with you!"

"Run behind, old son," said Bob Cherry. "There isn't room for a porpoise. But if you run all the way to Redclyffe without falling down dead of apoplexy I'll stand you a penny bun!"

"Beast!"

As the brake was crowded already, and Bunter required room for two at least, his request was a little unreasonable. The cricketers were not disposed to sit on one another's knees to accommodate Bunter.

"Stop, you rotters!" howled Bunter, rushing after the brake. "I'm going to look after Marjorie, you know, while you're playing. Marjorie will be awfully disappointed if I'm not there. I say—— Yaroooh!"

An orange caught Billy Bunter on his fat chin, and he sat down in the road. He was still sitting there, gasping, when the brake disappeared.

Harry Wharton & Co. arrived at Redclyffe in great spirits. Wharton dismissed Hazel from his mind. So far as the eleven went, it did not suffer by the exclusion of Hazel. When he was at the top of his form he was only as good as Rake. Wharton had been willing to give him a chance; but he had not taken it, and Rake was a better man for the team.

Miss Clara and Phyllis Howell arrived on their bicycles soon after the cricketers. They had come to see the match.

"Isn't Hazel with you?" asked Miss Phyllis, noting the absence of Marjorie's brother.

"No; he couldn't come," said Harry. "Something else on."

"Marjorie sent him a message," said Phyllis. "She wanted him to call at Mrs. Chirpey's on his way home. Perhaps he is going there, though, anyway. He generally comes home with Marjorie."

"Yes, he may be there," assented Harry. He did not think it likely, but there was no reason to say so.

The stumps were already pitched, and the two teams lost no time in getting to business. Redclyffe were not in great form, and the Remove cricketers had matters very much their own way.

The Remove batted first, and Wharton declared the innings closed, with six wickets down for a hundred runs. Redclyffe made 30 in their first and 68 in their second innings—a result that was very satisfactory to the Greyfriars team.

"Hazel was an ass to miss this," grinned Bob Cherry, when the team came off at the finish. "He could have covered himself with glory this time. Anyone could!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Where did you spring from, Bunter?"

"I came over on a bike!" said Bunter. "I couldn't let Marjorie be disappointed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" growled Bunter. "It's rather a fag biking over here, but I really promised Marjorie I'd come! Where's Marjorie?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob. "Marjorie hasn't come!"

"Oh! Hasn't come?" Billy Bunter's face fell. "That's jolly curious. She knew I should be here!"

"Perhaps that's why she hasn't come!" suggested Rake.

"Oh, really, Rake! I say, you fellows, I suppose you're having tea here. Is there anything decent?"

"Another miss in baulk!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "We're not having tea here—we're going home to tea!"

"Oh, really, you know, I'm hungry!" said Bunter, in alarm. "I say, you fellows, who's going to ride my bike home? I'm coming in the brake."

"No room for porpoises in the brake!" said Nugent. "You can ride home. Besides, we couldn't take the bike in the brake!"

"Well, it doesn't really matter about the bike. I'll leave it here!"

"And how will you get it back?" asked Wharton.

"I don't care about that!"

"You don't care whether you get your bike back, you ass?" exclaimed Bob.

"No; it doesn't matter. I'm coming in the brake," said Bunter, and he climbed into the brake to settle the matter. "You'd better ride that bike home, Bob!"

"Catch me!"

"Well, please yourself, of course; but it's hardly safe to leave your bike lying about here, is it?"

"My bike?" roared Bob.

"Yes; I borrowed your bike——"

"Why, you—you—you——" stuttered Bob.

"Mine was out of order, you know," said Bunter calmly. "It was your fault. I've asked you to mend my punctures half a dozen times, and you've never done it. But I don't mind if the bike's left here. Please yourself!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry made a step towards the brake. But the presence of Phyllis and Clara had a restraining influence. Otherwise Billy Bunter would have departed from the brake "on his neck" in a very short time.

But Bob's face cleared.

"All serene!" he said. "I'll ride home to Cliff House with Phyllis and Clara. Much obliged to you for bringing my bike over, Bunter!"

Phyllis and Clara wheeled out their machines. They looked surprised when Bob wheeled out one also.

"Bunter brought it over for me," said Bob. "Kind of him, wasn't it?"

"Very kind, indeed!" said Phyllis, in surprise.

"Now I can see you home, if you'll let me," said Bob brightly. "I—I suppose perhaps Marjorie will be home by the time we get to Cliff House?"

Phyllis and Clara looked at one another, and laughed. Bob Cherry was not diplomatic. It was never left in doubt as to which direction his preference lay in. But the two girls liked Bob all the better for his frankness.

"We'll call in the village for Marjorie," said Phyllis. "She has her bicycle with her."

"Oh, ripping!" said Bob.

And the cricketers in the brake envied the cheery Bob as he rode away in great spirits with the two girls. Bunter jumped up.

"I say, Bob, I'll ride that bike home, after all!" he shouted.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Bob Cherry turned a deaf ear to Bunter's kind offer. Billy Bunter went home in the brake.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.
A Case of Doubt!

BOB CHERRY arrived at Greyfriars some time after the returning cricketers. He came into Study No. 1, where the Co. were finishing a late tea.

"Couldn't wait for you," said Johnny Bull. "Here you are!"

"I've had tea," said Bob. "I had it at Cliff House. I say, I saw Hazel!"

"Been to the Cross Keys?" asked Johnny Bull.

"No, ass! I called at Mrs. Chirpey's with Phyllis and Clara to take Marjorie home."

"Hazel there!" exclaimed Wharton.

"I was surprised to see him," said Bob. "I thought he had gone out on the razzle, you know. But he'd been there all the afternoon!"

"My hat!"

"Marjorie told me so," said Bob. "And what do you think he's been up to?"

"Give it up!"

"Gardening!" said Bob.

"Gardening?"

"Yes! Looking after Mrs. Chirpey's garden for her. She grows vegetables in the garden, you know, to save money. Hazel's been hoeing and digging, and getting up potatoes and things."

"Well, that takes the cake!" said Johnny Bull.

"The cakefulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Singh. "Then the esteemed Hazel did not go out razzlefully!"

"Why the dickens couldn't he say so, then?" said Johnny Bull. "I don't see why he wanted to keep so dark about it."

"Hiding his light under a bushel, I suppose," said Nugent. "It was a jolly decent thing to do. Marjorie's influence, I suppose?"

Harry Wharton looked rather troubled.

"It's jolly odd," he said. "So that's the engagement Hazel had for this afternoon. I suppose he'd promised Mrs. Chirpey."

"Marjorie said it was arranged last week," said Bob.

"Well, he might have said so! He led us to suppose that it was something shady, in his old style."

"I—I've been thinking," said Bob awkwardly. "Hazel is a touchy beast, but—but perhaps we've been a bit hasty. Perhaps he isn't really playing the giddy ox at all, but he's chosen to let us think so, out of—of sheer obstinacy, you know. He is that kind of mule."

"Well, he's only got himself to thank, then," said Johnny Bull. "I don't like sulky fellows myself!"

"Of course, if he's going straight, it's a bit irritating to be supposed to be playing the fool!" said Wharton. "And Hazel is proud, in his way. But—but there's the cards and the cigarettes and the rest of it!"

"I suppose he didn't get those for Mrs. Chirpey?" said Johnny Bull sarcastically. "He isn't teaching young Dick Chirpey to play nap, I suppose?"

"No, he isn't!" said a voice at the door, as Hazel looked in. He gave Johnny Bull a bitter look. "So that's your opinion of me?"

"Listeners never hear any good of themselves," said Johnny Bull, unmoved.

"If you heard what we were saying, Hazel, you know it was nothing against you," said Harry Wharton quietly.

"I heard what Bull said. That's enough for me," said Hazel, with a sneer.

"You can hear some more, if you like," said Johnny Bull. "I said you're sulky, and so you are! And if you've got an explanation to give, you ought to give it. If you deliberately lead fellows to think badly of you, you've only got yourself to blame!"

"Well, I sha'n't give you any explanation," said Hazel, shrugging his shoulders. "I didn't come here to talk, either. I came to pay Wharton the pound I owe him."

He laid a currency note on the table.

"There's your quid, Wharton. I sha'n't trouble you again, I promise you!"

"I haven't asked you for it," said Harry.

"Well, there it is, all the same!"

"Hazel, old man——"

Hazeldene walked out of the study.

"Sulky beast!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Don't look down in the mouth, Wharton, you ass! What does it matter? Are we going to fawn round Hazel on our hands and knees, to beg him to smile on us?"

"Fathead!" said Wharton, laughing.

"Besides, the fellow's a blackguard! If he isn't, what was he doing with cards and cigarettes? He wasn't going to play cards for nuts, I suppose, as we do at Christmas. Perhaps he intended to have that box of cigarettes framed, and hung on the wall of the study instead of a picture?" said Johnny Bull, who seemed to be in a sarcastic humour. "And the pipe was intended as an ornament for the mantelpiece, of course. I only hope he'll smoke some of that shag, that's all! That'll cure him of playing the silly idiot!"

"There might be some misunderstanding," said Bob dubiously.

Johnny Bull grunted.

"Tom Brown didn't think so when he chucked him out of

the study," he said, "and Browney's the best-tempered chap in the Form!"

"It would be just like Hazel to let fellows think badly of him, and hug his grievance all the time, when there was nothing the matter."

"Well, that kind of a silly ass wants sitting on!" said Johnny Bull.

But Harry Wharton could not help wondering. It would, indeed, be very like Hazel to nurse an injury, and hug a grievance, when a few words could have set the matter right. And yet, how could the facts of the case be explained away? Even if Hazel were duffer enough deliberately to make matters look as black against himself as possible, there was no doubt about the facts. They seemed to speak for themselves.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.
Backing Up Bunter!

"I'M going to make an appeal to you, Squiff."

Sampson Quincy Iffley Field grinned. Billy Bunter spoke in a very impressive manner. He had cornered the Australian junior in the passage after lessons, the day after the Redclyffe match.

"You've had a remittance to-day," went on Bunter. "I happened to see it. You've had two quid from Australia."

"And you want them in advance on a postal-order you're expecting for two pounds?" grinned Squiff. "Well, I don't mind. You can go on wanting!"

"I'm thinking about my fund."

"Oh, you want to pay Mauly his half-sovereign?"

"Ahem! I'm going to square that out of my postal-order. I suppose you don't think I'm the kind of chap to stick to money subscribed for a noble purpose?" exclaimed Bunter indignantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! If you doubt my personal honour, Field, this discussion had better cease!"

"Much better!" agreed Squiff. "Good-bye!"

"The fact is, Squiff, I'm very keen on that fund. Now, as it happens, there's been a delay in the post——"

"Same old delay in the post!"

"I've been disappointed about my postal-order——"

"Same old postal-order!"

"It's owing to this conscription, you know!" explained Bunter. "It's led to my postal-order being delayed. I've been disappointed——"

"Same old disappointment!"

"Oh, really, Field! Look here! You say yourself that I ought to square up Mauly's half-quid. Owing to my disappointment about a postal-order I can't do so immediately. I want you to lend me half-a-quid to pay Mauly!"

"Well, that's a new one!" said Squiff.

"Eh? A new what?"

"Whopper!"

"If you can't take my word, Squiff——"

"I'd as soon take the Kaiser's word, dear boy! What beats me is how you came to be born out of Prussia!" said Squiff, with a perplexed look. "You've got a gift of lying that would make the Kaiser green with envy!"

"Look here! Are you going to lend me that half-quid for my fund, Field?"

"No fear!"

"And you call yourself a Briton!" said Bunter, in disgust. "Now, you know that Colonials are expected to set an example of patriotism. Now's your chance. You've got two quids. They'd start a fund rippingly——"

"By Jove, so they would!" said Squiff, as if struck by a sudden idea. "One of them would, anyway. I want the other badly. Blessed if I don't start the fund with a quid, and help look after old Chirpey's little home!"

Billy Bunter brightened up.

"Right-ho! Now you're talking, Squiff! Hand it over!"

Squiff laughed.

"It's my fund, you know!" exclaimed Bunter. "You're not going to start a rival fund. Play the game, you know!"

"Right as rain!" said Squiff. "It's your fund, Bunter—the Bunter Fund! You shall raise the money——"

"Good!"

"And take it down to Mrs. Chirpey's——"

"Ripping!"

"And present it to her, with the compliments of the Remove, in a neat little speech!" said Squiff.

Billy Bunter beamed.

"That's exactly my idea!" he said. "I'm jolly glad to see you backing me up in this patriotic way, Squiff! You're a real Briton, and no mistake! We want some more chaps like you from New North Victoria——"

"New South Wales, you silly ass!" said Squiff witheringly.

"Ye-es, I mean New South Wales! Hand over the quid!"

"You'll want a collecting-box," said Squiff, unheeding. "I'll go round with you and persuade the fellows to put in their money!"

"Oh, good! They'll believe you — I—I mean, they'll believe me, of course, knowing what an honourable chap I am!"

"Exactly! I shall give them my word that every penny entrusted to you for Mrs. Chirpey will be safely delivered to Mrs. Chirpey, into her own hands!"

Bunter's eyes glistened behind his spectacles. Any fellow in the Remove would have trusted Squiff with untold gold. The Australian junior's support was certain to make the fund a success. Visions of unlimited feeds floated before Bunter's dazzled eyes. Not that Bunter intended to be dishonest, by any means. He fully intended to make up every shilling—when his postal-orders arrived!

"Come on, Squiff; let's start!" he exclaimed eagerly. "I'm ready! I'll get a tin!"

Squiff went to his study for a tin, with Billy Bunter at his heels. Johnny Bull and Fisher T. Fish were in the study. Squiff sorted a biscuit-tin out of the cupboard, and held it up before his astonished study-mates.

"Subs, please!" said Squiff.

"What's it for?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"The Bunter-Chirpey Fund. You hold the tin, Bunter, as it's your fund!"

Billy Bunter took the tin. His eyes were gleaming.

"Catch me!" said Johnny Bull. "I'd stand my last bob for Mrs. Chirpey if she wanted it, but I'm not standing tarts for that fat bounder!"

"This fund has the guarantee of New South Wales—official," said Squiff. "I'm starting it myself with a quid. Here goes!"

A pound note fluttered into the tin.

"I guess you're off your rocker!" said Fisher T. Fish. "That quid will go straight to Mrs. Mimble's shop!"

"I rather think not!" said Squiff coolly. "I'm keeping an eye on this fund!"

Johnny Bull grinned.

"Oh, I see! Well, there's my bit, in that case!"

Three half-crowns clinked into the tin. Every clink awoke a joyful echo in William George Bunter's breast.

"Now, Fishy! Your turn!"

"I guess I'm keeping my greenbacks in my trousers-pocket!"

"Squeeze out a bob!" said Squiff encouragingly. "It will give you a pain, I know, but it's for a good cause. After all, we stand you in the study, you know!"

"Shell out!" roared Johnny Bull. "You're being protected by the Army, ain't you, you worm?"

"I guess——"

"If the voluntary system fails, compulsion will be adopted," said Squiff. "I rather like the idea of the conscription of wealth. If they conscript a chap's body and bones, why shouldn't they conscript another chap's cash? I think we'll give the idea a trial in this study. Bunter, hand me that bat!"

"I—I—I guess I could stand a shilling!" said Fisher T. Fish.

And he did.

"Sorry to cause you such fearful anguish, Fishy!" said Squiff politely. "I know what a Yankee of your brand feels like when he has to part with any money. It's like going to the dentist's, isn't it? But, you see, you belong to our study, and we can't let you disgrace the study. 'Tain't pleasant to have to stand a rotten neutral, anyway! You feel that, don't you?"

"Oh, vamoose the ranch!" growled Fisher T. Fish.

And Squiff marched off with Billy Bunter and the biscuit-tin, to make a round of the Remove and raise subscriptions for the Chirpey Fund.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.
The Chirpey Fund Goes Strong!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! What's the little game?"

Harry Wharton & Co. were going down to the cricket-ground when Squiff and Bunter intercepted them in the quadrangle with the biscuit-tin.

"Chirpey Fund!" said Bunter importantly.

"Oh, buzz off, you fat goat!" growled Bob Cherry. "If you shove that tin here I'll bust it on your napper!"

"There is nothing doing, my esteemed Bunter! Mauly is the only estimable ass whom you can spoof swindlefully!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Squiff's backing up my fund," said Bunter hotly. "Squiff's

started it with a quid. Johnny Bull's stood seven-and-six, and even Fishy has shelled out!"

"And I'm lending Bunter a half-quid to make up Mauly's contribution," said Squiff. "Here it is!"

"Well, you must be an ass!" said Wharton. "It won't get any further than the tuckshop! Don't you know Bunter by this time?"

"Oh, yes, it will!" said Squiff coolly. "I'm keeping an eye on this fund. Contributors can bet their boots that all contributions will reach Mrs. Chirpey safe and sound! You can rely on Bunter this time!"

Squiff closed one eye significantly as he spoke, and there was a chuckle. The Co. understood. Billy Bunter had the impression that the cash was to be left in his hands. Squiff had the impression that it wasn't. And Squiff's impression was undoubtedly the right one.

"Oh, that alters the case!" said Bob Cherry. "Here's my bob! I'd like to put in five quid, but it can't be done out of one-and-twopence!"

"Small contributions thankfully received; larger ones in proportion," said Squiff, holding out the tin. "Pile in!"

Clink, clink, clink, clink!

Billy Bunter's eyes danced as the coins rattled into the biscuit-tin. Some of the Co. happened to be in funds, and they contributed liberally. Then they went on to the cricket-ground, and Squiff and Bunter departed in quest of fresh fields and pastures new.

"Hallo! Here's Hazeldene! How much for the Chirpey Fund, Hazel?"

"Oh, rot!" said Hazel.

"Under the official patronage of New South Wales," said Squiff persuasively. "Banknotes preferred, but coppers accepted!"

Hazel laughed, and dropped a small coin into the tin. Bulstrode and Tom Brown were waylaid, and contributions extracted from them. Peter Todd, with a broad grin, dropped in half-a-crown. Bunter's expression tickled Peter greatly. Evidently Bunter did not guess yet what an exceedingly keen eye Squiff meant to keep on that biscuit-tin.

Rake and Wibley and Micky Desmond were found in their study, and they paid up cheerfully. The fund was growing.

"We'll take it down to the cricket-field," said Squiff. "We'll catch a lot of 'em there; and in public they can't refuse—what!"

"Jolly good idea!" said Bunter. "You go with the tin, and I'll look after what's been collected already!"

"Oh, we'll leave it in the tin till the finish!" said Squiff.

"No; upon the whole, I think I'd better lock it up," said Bunter. "We—we might lose the tin, you know!"

"I'm keeping an eye on it!"

"Really, Squiff, I'm much obliged to you, but I'm going to manage my own fund my own way!" said Bunter warmly, as Squiff took his arm and marched him away.

"This way!" said Squiff calmly.

"Leggo my arm!"

"Buck up, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter made a tremendous effort to jerk himself loose, but Squiff's grip on his fat arm was like iron.

The Owl of the Remove, wriggling and grunting, was marched out into the quad again. There he halted, eyeing Squiff as if he could eat him.

"Will you let go my arm, you beast?"

"My dear chap, I'm too attached to you to let you go! Don't you want me to back up your fund?"

"On second thoughts, I'll do without you," said Bunter. "In fact, I think we've raised enough money for the present. I'm going to get it out and count it!"

"Hallo, Bolsover! How much are you shelling out?" asked Squiff.

"Nothing," said Bolsover major coolly. "Bunter can get a feed without my help!"

"I'm looking after the fund. I'm sticking to Bunter like glue," said Squiff. "He's tired of my company already, but I'm not leaving him. I'm too fond of him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bolsover major. "Here's my bob, then!"

"I say, Bolsover, make him leggo!" howled Bunter. "I say, give the beast a licking, Bolsover! I'll hold your jacket!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I'll stand you some tarts, Bolsover, and—and ginger-pop!"

"Out of the fund?" grinned Bolsover.

"Ahem! I—I mean——"

"Never mind what you mean," said Squiff. "It's what I mean that matters. I mean that cash to reach Mrs. Chirpey, my pippin. Kim on!"

Squiff marched the unhappy Owl off, leaving Bolsover major roaring. Billy Bunter's fat face was a study now. He realised that the Chirpey Fund was not to be disposed of at his own sweet will.

"Look here, you horrid rotter!" he gasped. "Do you

mean to say you're going to watch me, as if I couldn't be trusted with the money?"

"Just as if!" assented Squiff.

"Well, I'm not going to stand it!"

"I don't really see that you've got any choice in the matter!" grinned Squiff. "This way to the cricket-field! Get a move on!"

"I won't!" yelled Bunter.

"Do you want me to help you with my boot?" asked Squiff pleasantly.

"Ow! You rotter! Yaroooh! Leave off kicking me, you beast! I'm coming, ain't I?" yelled Bunter.

And he went. There was a crowd of fellows on the cricket-ground, and they stared at Squiff and the biscuit-tin and the wriggling Owl. Squiff explained cheerily what they were after.

He did not need to explain why he was keeping a vice-like grip on Bunter's fat arm. The juniors could guess that much for themselves.

Amid much laughter, coins rattled into the biscuit-tin, swelling Bunter's fund beyond his wildest hopes.

But, as he discontentedly reflected, it was not much use for the fund to be swelled if he could not get his fat fingers on it.

Little Side having been thoroughly "combed," Squiff proceeded to Big Side, where he interviewed a crowd of the seniors.

Wingate and Courtney and some others dropped cash into the biscuit-tin. Loder promised him a thick ear if he didn't clear off. Coker of the Fifth put in a ten-shilling note; the great Coker could always be depended on to flourish. Potter and Greene dropped something into the tin; Squiff knew what it was later, when a couple of old buttons were found in the collection.

"What about the masters?" said Squiff musingly, as they left Big Side. "Would you like to try your persuasive eloquence on the Head, Bunter?"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Bunter peevishly. "Let's take the money in and count it!"

"Right-ho!"

"By the way, you haven't done any cricket practice this afternoon, Squiff."

"No; I'm missing it to help you, Bunter."

"I'd cut off to the nets if I were you. I can manage the rest, you know!"

"Go hon!"

"I'll take the cash down to Mrs. Chirpey at once," said Bunter. "I dare say she's in need of it. Good-bye, Squiff!"

"No need to say good-bye to me; we're not parting yet. This way!"

"Ow! You rotter!"

Squiff tapped at Mr. Quelch's door. The Remove-master's voice bade him enter. Mr. Quelch looked surprised at the sight of the biscuit-tin.

"If you please, sir—if you can spare a few minutes——"

"You may go on, Field!"

"We're raising a little fund for Mrs. Chirpey, sir. Her kid—I mean, her little girl is ill, and the father's at the Front," said Squiff. "It was Bunter's idea, and I'm helping him carry it out. We've raised a good deal!"

"That is a very kind action, Field."

"Ahem! Would you mind counting the money for us, sir, and letting us have some currency notes for it? Mrs. Chirpey wouldn't know what to do with a heap of tanners—I mean, sixpences—and coppers!"

"Certainly, my dear boy!"

Squiff had bored a hole in the lid of the biscuit-tin for cash to be dropped in. He now removed the lid, and poured out the contents on Mr. Quelch's table.

Billy Bunter eyed it almost ravenously. All that cash was his—if he could get his fat hands on it! At present he couldn't.

"Dear me, what a very considerable sum!" said Mr. Quelch, in surprise.

"Yes, sir; most of the fellows shelled out," said Squiff complacently. "Mrs. Chirpey will be no end bucked——"

"Eh?"

"I—I mean, she will be cheered up, sir!"

"Yes, that is very probable. Dear me, three pounds—four pounds—five pounds fifteen shillings—six pound five shillings! That is a very handsome little sum, Field, and I have no doubt will be useful to Mrs. Chirpey. I am sure you will present it to her in a very delicate way!"

"As a present from the Remove, sir, in remembrance of old Chirpey, and what he's doing for us!" said Squiff.

"Yes, I am sure that will please Mrs. Chirpey. Six pounds five shillings and sevenpence," said Mr. Quelch.

"You must let me add a small amount, and I will hand you seven pound notes, which will go very nicely in an envelope!"

"Oh, thank you, sir! That will be ripping!"

Squiff had rather expected a small contribution from his Form-master, but not so much as fifteen shillings. Mr. Quelch, with a very benevolent smile, unlocked his desk, and took out seven pound notes. He placed them in an envelope, and handed it to the Australian junior.

"Thank you, sir!" said Squiff. "It's very kind of you to let me trouble you like this!"

"Not at all, Field! I am very glad to see that my boys are thoughtful for others, and not forgetful of the gallant fellows who are fighting for us all. I am glad to see, Bunter, that you are concerned in this!"

"It was my idea, sir," said Bunter. "I first thought of it. Squiff is only helping me. If you please, sir, I'd like to manage it by myself now. Would you mind telling Field to leave the money in my hands?"

Mr. Quelch gave Bunter a sharp look. He did not know the Owl so well as the juniors knew him, but he knew something.

"Why do you want the money left in your hands, Bunter?" he asked.

"Well, it's my fund, sir."

"I rather think that Field had better continue to manage the matter," said Mr. Quelch drily. "You may go!"

"Oh, really, sir——"

"You may go, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter went, and Squiff followed him with the precious envelope in his hands. In the passage the Owl of the Remove stopped, and fixed a glare like that of a basilisk on the cheerful Australian junior.

"Will you hand me over my money, you beast?" he demanded, in a sulphurous voice.

"Your money?" said Squiff, in surprise.

"That money, you rotter!"

"This isn't your money, dear boy. You're dreaming! This is Mrs. Chirpey's money."

"I—I'm going to take it to her."

Squiff nodded.

"So you shall. I'm coming with you to see that you do."

"Look here, I don't want your company!" roared Bunter. "Is that plain enough for you?"

"Quite."

"Then hand me my money——"

"Bow-wow!"

Billy Bunter's eyes glittered. He was in such a state of exasperation that he would have made a frontal attack, only the results to himself would have been so exceedingly painful. Squiff walked down the passage, and Bunter followed him out of the School House. And Bunter's expression by this time was like unto that of a demon in a pantomime.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.
No Luck for Bunter!

"WHAT luck?"

Harry Wharton & Co. had come off the cricket-ground, and they met the Australian junior in the quad. Squiff held up the envelope proudly.

"Seven quid! Quelchy's turned it into notes for us. You fellows coming along to Friardale? Bunter wants some company en route."

"I don't!" roared Bunter.

"He thinks he doesn't, but he does," said Squiff calmly. "Come along, you chaps—Marjorie is at Mrs. Chirpey's!"

"We'll come," said Bob Cherry at once.

"Gimme that envelope, you rotter!"

"Certainly; here you are," said Squiff relinquishing the envelope to Bunter, and at the same time fastening a grip on his arm. "This way! It will be quite a pleasure to see Bunter make the presentation in that graceful way of his."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, it would be rather more—more delicate not to have a crowd," said Bunter. "I'm sure Mrs. Chirpey would prefer it. Don't you think I'd better go alone?"

"Sure you wouldn't drop into Uncle Clegg's, and lose the money there?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry! Of course, I should be very careful."

"So are we going to be," said Squiff. "March!"

"Leggo, my arm, you beast!"

"Bow-wow!"

"I say, Wharton! You could lick him——"

"I could lick you," said Wharton, "and I'll do it, too, if you don't shut up!"

"Ahem! Bob, old man, I'll hold your jacket if you'd like to give that beast a licking."

"I'll give you a thick ear instead," said Bob.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five, and Squiff and Bunter, walked out at the gates. Billy Bunter's expression was growing more and more Hunnish. The money was all in his fat hand now, but it might as well have been in the Bank of England for all the use it was to him. It was tantalising and exasperating to have so much wealth—so near and yet so far.

Billy Bunter quite realised Squiff's humorous scheme by this time. Bunter was to raise the fund; but he was not to be permitted to squander it—it was an act of kindness to Mrs. Chirpey, and a joke on Bunter at the same time. The juniors grinned at Bunter's expression as they walked down the lane. He was evidently turning over in his fat mind schemes for bolting with the cash before they reached Mrs. Chirpey's. But Squiff's grip did not relax.

"I—I say, you fellows," said Bunter, as they neared the village. "On second thoughts, perhaps we'd better not hand over all this money at once. Mrs. Chirpey might waste it—she might go and pay the rent or rates or something with it. I think I'll give her half now, and half next week."

"I don't think you will," remarked Squiff.

"You rotter!" howled Bunter. "Can't a chap do as he likes with his own fund? It's a free country, I suppose."

"Not now," said Bob Cherry. "We've got compulsion now, and you're going to be compulsed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I say, you know, I—I'm going to put my postal-order to this, when—when it comes. It will be all right if I borrow a quid out of this, and put in a postal-order for two quid next—next week, won't it?"

"You can keep your postal-order for the next fund," said Squiff. "You can hand it to Chirpey when he comes home from the war. If the war last twenty years or so, I dare say your postal-order may have come by then."

"Oh, you rotter! Beast!"

"Are you always as polite as that when a chap's given up cricket practice to help you?" asked Squiff.

"Yah! Rotter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They were near Mrs. Chirpey's little house now. Billy Bunter was getting desperate. As they came in sight of the garden gate the Owl of the Remove made a sudden effort, and wrenched his arm away from Squiff. The next second he was fleeing as if for his life.

"Look out!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"After him!"

The chums of the Remove broke into hot pursuit.

"Stop him!" shouted Bob, as he caught sight of Hazeldene of the Remove ahead on the road.

Hazel looked round.

Billy Bunter paused, and dodged, and rushed past. But the fat and unwieldly Owl had no chance in the race. A couple of minutes later Squiff's hand was on his shoulder.

"Yow-ow! Leggo!"

Bump! Billy Bunter descended on the earth, roaring Squiff jerked the envelope from his fat hand.

"You fat burglar!" he said severely. "You won't get your paws on that again in a hurry! Bump him!"

"I—I say, you fellows, I—I was only joking, you know. I—I—— Yaroooh! Help! Fire! Murder!" roared Bunter.

Bump, bump, bump!

Harry Wharton & Co. walked away to Mrs. Chirpey's, Squiff carrying the precious envelope. Billy Bunter was left sitting on the ground, considerably dusty, and quite breathless. He shook a fat fist after the juniors. The fund had been raised, but it was gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream. And Billy Bunter felt like Rachael of old, who mourned and would not be comforted.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.
The Clouds Roll By!

HAZELDENE was in Mrs. Chirpey's garden when the juniors entered. A sullen look came over his face, and he did not speak. Harry Wharton & Co. went on to the house, leaving Hazel staring after them.

Through the open window they could see Marjorie in the little parlour with Mrs. Chirpey. The girl was putting on her hat, and was evidently about to leave. Harry Wharton knocked at the door.

Mrs. Chirpey opened it, and welcomed the juniors into the little parlour. She supposed that they had called for Marjorie.

"Go it, Squiff!" said Bob Cherry.

"Ahem!" Squiff coughed. "We—we've called to see you, Mrs. Chirpey."

"I'm sure you're very welcome, Master Field!" said Mrs. Chirpey, in some wonder.

"The—the fact is—ahem!—how is old Chirpey getting on, ma'am?"

Mrs. Chirpey smiled.

"I had a letter to-day," she said. "He is getting on well, Master Field. I haven't told him about Nelly being ill—no good worriting him in the trenches."

"Does he get plenty of smokes and things, ma'am?"

"I—I've had to stop the parcels since Nelly has been ill," said Mrs. Chirpey. "But Master Hazeldene has been very kind."

"Hazeldene!" exclaimed Harry.

"Yes; very kind indeed, like his dear sister," said Mrs. Chirpey, with an affectionate glance at Marjorie. "My man would miss his smokes if he did not get them, and Master Hazeldene guessed, somehow, that I hadn't sent anything lately, the dear boy!"

Harry Wharton gave a start.

A sudden and illuminating idea had come into his mind as Mrs. Chirpey spoke.

"Mrs. Chirpey, excuse me, did Hazel send your husband two hundred cigarettes?" he asked.

Mrs. Chirpey nodded.

"Yes; at least, his master at the school sent them. Master Hazeldene told me. His master did not think a boy ought to have cigarettes about him."

"But—but Hazel bought them to send to Mr. Chirpey?"

"Yes, indeed, and a pack of cards to amuse him off duty, and a nice new pipe, and a lot of things," said Mrs. Chirpey.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Johnny Bull.

"He sent the second parcel off yesterday," said Mrs. Chirpy; and I can't say how much obliged I am to him!"

"Then—then Hazel got those things to send to Chirpey?" murmured Frank Nugent.

"Silly ass! Why couldn't he say so?" growled Johnny Bull.

"Shush!" murmured Bob.

"Get on with the washing, Squiff! Never mind Hazel now."

Squiff laid the envelope on the table. Mrs. Chirpey glanced at it in surprise. She did not guess at once what it contained.

"If you please, ma'am—ahem!—we—we've brought you a little present, with the compliments of the Greyfriars Remove," said Squiff. "We're much obliged to old Chirpey——"

"Dear me! What has Chirpey done for you, Master Field?"

"Kept the Germans out, you know."

"Oh!"

"We're much obliged to him," continued Squiff. "He's a jolly good fellow, and they're all jolly good fellows, and—and so say all of us!"

"Hear, hear!" said the juniors.

"And we want you to accept that little present, ma'am, as—as an acknowledgment of what old Chirpey's been doing for us," said Squiff. "That's all! Good-afternoon, ma'am!"

And Squiff hurriedly took his leave. The juniors followed him, and Marjorie shook hands with Mrs. Chirpey, and followed them out. The good lady was left with the envelope in her hands. She opened it, and her eyes grew very wide at the sight of seven one-pound notes. Poor Mrs. Chirpey had never possessed such a sum at one time before. And as she thought of what it meant to her—of the overdue rent to be paid; of the comforts required by the sick little girl, which she had not been able to provide; of the doctor's bill looming in the distance—Mrs. Chirpey fairly sat down and cried. But they were nappy tears. The Greyfriars juniors had known that Mrs. Chirpey must be hard up, but they did not realise quite how much such a sum of money meant in the frugal household.

"That job's jobbed," said Squiff, with a breath of relief, as they hurried down the path to the gate. "I—I wish it had been a hundred quid instead of seven. But, I say, you chaps, about old Hazel——"

He broke off as Marjorie joined them at the gate. The girl's face was very grave.

Hazeldene came out of the garden, and joined her, with a grim look at the Famous Five and Squiff.

"Ready to go home, Marjorie?" he asked.

"Yes, Hazel."

"Come on, then!"

Marjorie looked from one to another, and her face became graver. It was easy for her to see that something was amiss.

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath.

"I've heard something from Mrs. Chirpey, Hazel," he said.

"Have you?" Hazel yawned.

"I—I hope you have not been quarrelling," said Marjorie anxiously. "What is the matter, Hazel?"

Hazel shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing! Wharton doesn't care to speak to a blackguard like me, that's all, and I don't want to speak to a plaster saint like Wharton! So we'll get off, if you're ready."

Marjorie coloured.

"Hazel!" she said reproachfully.

"I'd better explain," said Harry, flushing. "We've rather misjudged Hazel. No harm in telling you now, Marjorie, as it all turns out to be a mistake."

"Oh, you've found that out, have you?" sneered Hazel.

"Yes, we've found it out—by chance," said Harry. "But I don't see that you can blame us. You had cigarettes and cards, a pipe and tobacco, in your study, and you never said a word about their being bought to send to Chirpey. You as good as told Bulstrode that you lied to Quelchy; I've heard it from him——"

"I told him the truth," said Hazel. "He chose to think it was a lie, and I let him think so!"

"You are mistaken there," said Harry quietly. "Anyway, as it was a mistake, I'm sorry, and I don't mind saying so."

"Same here," said Bob Cherry. "But what the merry thunder was a fellow to think, Hazel?"

Marjorie smiled a little.

"So you have been misjudging Hazel?" she said. "You did not know how kind he has been to Mrs. Chirpey—doing her garden, and running errands, and sending parcels to her husband. And——"

"You put me up to it, Marjorie; you know you did," said Hazel. "I suppose I ought to have shouted it all out in the quad at Greyfriars, and put an advertisement of it in the local paper. Then I should have got patted on the back, instead of being suspected and watched!"

"Perhaps we were a bit hasty," said Johnny Bull, after great deliberation. "But you're a secretive sort of beast, Hazel, you know, and jolly sulky. Now I put it to you, as a candid chap!"

Marjorie laughed, and Hazel, after frowning a moment, grinned. As a matter of fact, he had nursed his grievance with a kind of sulky satisfaction, but he was not sorry to have the truth discovered, and to be set right in the eyes of the Remove fellows.

"Anyhow, it's all over now, and we're sorry!" said Wharton frankly. "Now, we can't say more than that, Hazel."

"All serene," said Hazel. "I know I ought to have explained." This was a great concession from Hazel. "But—but it was pretty rotten to be supposed to be going to the Cross Keys, when I was playing games with little Chirpey. Nobody would have known anything about the cigarettes and things if that fat beast Bunter hadn't pinched them. And the quid you lent me went on smokes and socks for old Chirpey, Wharton, not on gee-gees!"

"I know," said Harry.

"My esteemed chums," purred the Nabob of Bhanipur, "the cloudy skyfulness has rolled away, and everything in the esteemed garden is merry and bright. The esteemed Hazeldene is discharged without an august stain upon his disgusting character, and he is restored equal to new to the noble friendship of his ludicrous and ridiculous chums!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's way of putting it quite restored all parties to good humour.

"I was going to ask you to come over to tea at Cliff House," said Marjorie, "now that you are all good friends again——"

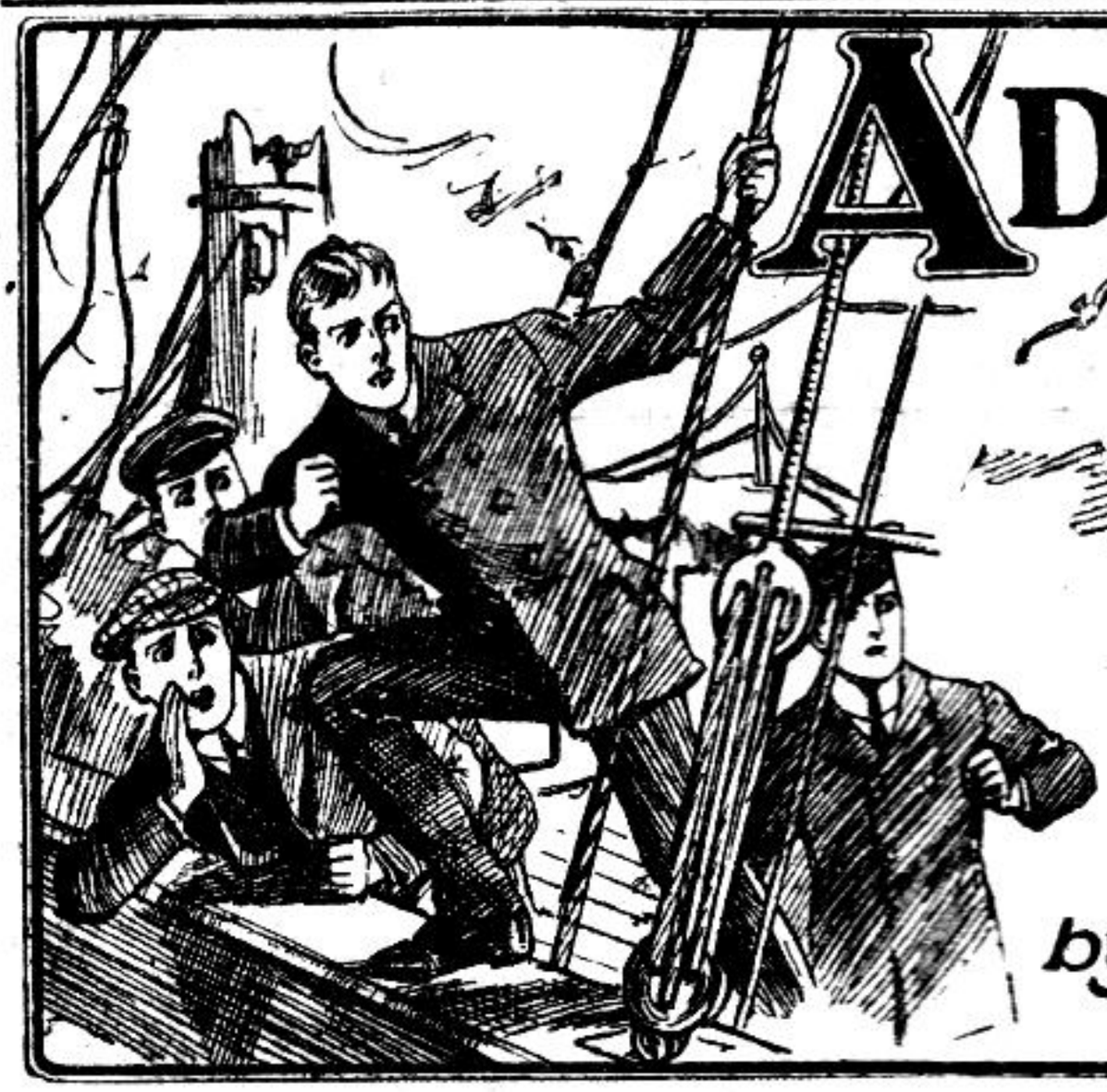
"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry emphatically.

And it was a merry party that marched off to Cliff House. Hazeldene, his sulks quite gone, was one of the most cheerful. Indeed, Hazel had fallen into such a reasonable mood by this time that he was almost willing to admit that the misunderstanding had been His Own Fault!

THE END.

Do not miss "THE TRICKSTER TRICKED!" — Next Monday's Grand Story of Harry Wharton & Co., by Frank Richards.

Our 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, and eventually arrive at the Black Sentinel—a rock cut in the figure of a huge man—where they encamp for the night. Aymara, the daughter of a native chief, had warned them of great dangers beyond this point.

Before morning they are attacked by scores of giant apes. They take cover behind a parapet of rocks surrounding their camp, and prepare for a terrific fight, assisted by the chief of some snake-worshippers, whom they had rescued from a heathen temple.

"Blaze away!" urges Hal, as their horrible foes advance. "We must kill as many as we can! If they force a way over the parapet, they'll tear us to pieces!"

Victors Again.

Nothing was more certain than that. For if any great number of their ferocious enemies got over the rock ramparts into the camp, the gallant little band of defenders would be doomed. And the horrible fate that would befall them in such a contingency was unnerving to think about.

But their nerves had been toughened, as their bodies were, by many wild and perilous adventures. They kept up a ceaseless fusillade, and many dead and wounded apes were lying on the ground.

But the huge leader was still alive. After he had been wounded by Sigsbee he had escaped the bullets; and now, chattering and screaming, he seemed to be gathering his followers together for a final attack. He was grotesquely human in all his gestures. They had drawn back after the last repulse, and now they made a combined rush in a close-packed mass.

But that rush never got home.

A volley was poured into the midst of them. Then another. The leader was in front. Suddenly he sprang high into the air, and when he crashed down on to the ground he didn't move again. He must have been shot through the heart.

Then a strange thing happened. The whole crowd of apes stopped in their headlong charge. They would not pass their dead leader. With weird cries, that sounded like lamentations, they surrounded the body.

Two of them picked it up, and then the whole of them turned tail and hurried away, those of the wounded who were able to crawl following them. They entered the wood, and in a few minutes all the living apes had disappeared. Only the dead were left.

"Thank goodness that's over!" exclaimed Jim, with a gasp of relief. "I don't think I could have stuck it much longer. I'm pretty well used up. I don't suppose they'll come back again."

"I hope not," said Hal fervently. "I've had enough. Those brutes that have just cleared off give me the cold shivers to think of—now that it's all over. They're unnatural foes, to say the least."

"What's the matter with the snake man?" asked O'Hara. "Is it that he wants more foighting, or will he be singing to us?"

"Looks as if he's going to give us a recitation," replied Jim.

Day had by this time dawned, and the glow of the rising sun was showing in the eastern sky. The chief had leaped on to the highest boulder of rock, and, raising his spear above his head, he began a wild chant, which was probably a hymn of victory.

He had a deep and sonorous voice, and as the morning was still, the savage, war-like chant rang out clear and far over the mountain-ridge. He was probably extolling the valour of his white companions, for occasionally he extended his arm toward them. Then he shook his spear with a menacing gesture at the grim Black Sentinel, and finally he *raised the weapon in a sort of salute to the newly-risen sun.*

Then he leaped down from the rock, and O'Hara, clapping him on the back, exclaimed:

"'Twas a great song, me bhoy, though sorra a worrd av it did I understand, more's the pity! Wan av these days I'll learn something loike it meself, for it does you good to aise your chist now an' again."

The chief understood that he was being praised, and he grinned with delight. Moreover, he had a respect for O'Hara almost amounting to awe, for he had witnessed some of the red Irishman's feats of strength. And nothing so appeals to a savage as great physical strength.

"I don't quite know," said Hal, "whether the chief wants to attach himself to our party, but I rather hope he doesn't. He has done us some good service, and seems to be a different sort of breed to the other snake-worshippers; but I'm not likely to forget that he is, or was, their chief."

"He's all right," replied Jim; "he's proved it. And he's capable of feeling gratitude; though at first you wouldn't believe he was. But, all the same, we want to carry through this adventure our four selves, without any permanent addition to our party."

"Exactly my idea," returned Hal. "There are many reasons why his presence would be awkward. Still, what are we to do? After the way he's stuck by us in this fight we couldn't turn him down."

However, the chief solved that difficulty himself, for after they had despatched their breakfast he intimated to them by signs that he must leave them. So far as they could gather, he meant to return to the temple, which appeared to be the headquarters of the snake-worshippers.

Before going he made them understand that it would be

better for them to avoid the forest into which the apes had disappeared, and to follow a path which he pointed out.

Hal presented him with an old pattern Colt's revolver, which had been taken from the outlaws, and to which he seemed to have taken a fancy, but as there were no cartridges to fit it, it was more ornamental than useful.

"I think he wants to wear it just for show," said Hal.

Then he took his leave, grasping the hand of each of them and placing it against his forehead, which was probably meant as a token of allegiance to them, should they ever require his services again.

"There's worse chaps than him knocking about," declared Sigsbee, "although he worships snakes. Blame funny idea, anyhow, that reptile worship!"

"I failed to see the humour of it," said Hal, "when I was tied to that stake in the vault of the temple!"

Jim Makes a Discovery!

They saw no more of the giant apes, nor did they find traces of any others of the tribe, from which they inferred that those unpleasant brutes—far more ferocious than is usual with the species—only inhabited a small tract of the mountain country.

Indeed, as they climbed higher and higher among the bleak and rugged mountain-passes, animals of all description became rarer, until at last the question of being able to shoot enough for their daily rations became a serious problem.

For they had now to "live on the country," as the stock of provisions which they had brought away with them, loaded on the pack mule, was nearly exhausted. There was a little flour left, a fair quantity of tea, and very little coffee; that was all.

"We must be over ten thousand feet up now," said Hal, as they pitched camp on the fifth evening after quitting the hill of the Black Sentinel; "and we shall have to climb higher yet before we begin our descent, which will mark the last stage of our journey. And during the past two days the only animal we've seen has been a puma—a white-coated one."

"Must dwell above the snow-line," replied Sigsbee, "having the white fur. It ain't the natural colour of the animal. But I guess I don't want to eat puma, if I can help it."

"Ever try a bit of one?" asked Jim.

"Once," replied Sigsbee, "when I was hunting way up in the Peruvian Mountains. Gee! It was strong meat! The flavour was in my mouth for a week afterwards! It most made me turn vegetarian!"

O'Hara threw another log on the fire, and stirred it up to a big blaze.

"'Tis not only mate we'll be short av soon," he said, "but foire as well to cook it. Trees are getting scarce, an' a bit higher there'll be no more than bushes. And thim same bushes are small use for making a dacint foire wid. Haven't I tried 'em? They either burn away before you can wink your two eyes, or they won't burn at all. An' here's the last av the mate, which we'll be havin' for supper to-night. 'Twill be toime enough to-morrow to start on short rations."

He held up a guanaco-steak which probably weighed two pounds; then, cutting it up into portions, he started cooking operations.

"We ought really to go on half rations to-night," said Hal.

"An' me as impty as a whisky-jar afther a wake!" exclaimed the Irishman. "'Twould be cruelty—no less!"

"All right, then," laughed Hal, "tuck in to the last bite. But don't blame me if you find yourself emptier than ever this time to-morrow!"

"Say, cap'n," interposed Sigsbee; "how'd it be if we remained here, just where we're camped, for a day, and all four of us spread ourselves around and do a bit of hunting? It would be middlin' poor sort of luck if between us we couldn't bag enough game to last a week!"

"Good idea!" said Hal. "That's what we'll do!"

"Then I can ate my supper wid a continted moind now," said O'Hara, "feelin' I haven't brought me comrades face to face wid starvation."

"No one standing opposite you could truthfully say he was facing starvation," retorted Jim, grinning. "Serve out the guanaco—it's about done. The steaks should be fairly tender after the way the pack-mule stamped on them this morning when they were lying on the ground while we were loading up."

So as not to be bothered with carrying a whole lot of odds and ends that could be done without, they used anything that came handy for plates, the bark of trees, leaves when they could get them big enough, or thin slips of wood. This evening tree-bark served for their purpose.

Away in the distance the giant peak of Aconcagua, the monarch of the Andes, reared its snow-clad crest to the sky. It was their beacon, which guided them on their way, for it showed them the direction in which they had to travel.

It was clearly visible to-night, but very often it was hidden in the clouds. And in some nighty cleft of the mountain-side, difficult of access, was the object of their quest, the Tower of the Golden Star.

They would have to descend into a valley before they reached it—the Valley of the Shadows, as it had been named by Aymara, and according to her account, a weird and mysterious place. And somewhere near that valley was the home of the half-breeds, the most cruel and treacherous of all the foes that they had or were likely to encounter.

Their night's rest was disturbed by one of the sharp and violent storms common to mountain regions, but beyond the fact that the camp-fire was scattered all over the place, no damage was done. It lasted only two hours, during Jim's turn for keeping watch, and he pleasantly remarked that it "served to keep things lively" during what would otherwise have been a monotonous vigil. But his comrades, who had their sleep disturbed, didn't view it in the same light; O'Hara, who had the next turn, being particularly disgusted.

He urged that Jim ought to keep another hour, but Jim pointed out that he wasn't responsible for the storm; and as he rolled himself in his blanket and composed himself to sleep as soon as the fire was rekindled it was useless to continue the argument.

The next morning, after a very frugal breakfast, the hunting programme was sketched out, it being decided that O'Hara should remain in charge of the camp, as he was the worst shot, while the other three went in different directions in search of game.

"If you feel hungry during our absence, you'd best chew a bit of leather, Pat," advised Sigsbee. "Don't start in to make doughnuts against our return, and then come over kind of absent-minded, and eat them yourself."

"If I get hungry!" exclaimed O'Hara ruefully. "Faith, I'm that already. A breakfast av tay, an' a spoonful av flour an' wather fried in a greasy pan, is only thrifling wid your stummick!"

It will be necessary to follow Jim's fortunes in this hunting expedition, not because of his success in bagging game, for in truth he made no bag at all that day, but on account of a startling discovery that he made which brought about an alteration in some of their plans.

After quitting camp, Jim headed for some thin timber about three miles away, which he thought might serve as cover for game of some sort, either "fur or feathers," and when he reached the trees he found reason for congratulating himself that he had struck out in that direction.

For there he came upon the tracks of a guanaco, quite fresh, and easy to follow.

"This is a bit of luck," he said to himself. "One of those chaps will provide us with enough meat for a week, and it will keep easily at these altitudes, where the thermometer is nearly down to freezing-point. But I mustn't count my chickens before they're hatched; or, at least, I mustn't reckon on my guanaco before I've shot it."

And not always after it was shot, as he was to find out, to his discomfiture, later.

Well, for a matter of four miles he followed the tracks, and then he caught sight of the animal standing on a broad ledge of the mountain-side, nibbling at the scanty herbage.

But it was too far off for him to venture a shot at it, so he would have to stalk it until he got within sure killing range. He had expected that, and enjoyed the sport, for Jim was a good hand at stalking game. Luckily the animal was "down wind," so he would be able to get close up without being scented.

That is, provided the guanaco didn't take it into its head to move off, and Jim fervently hoped it wouldn't.

Luck seemed to be with him. He crept up to within two hundred yards of the animal, which only moved a few paces one way or another as it continued its feeding.

But it would be impossible to get any closer, as it was all open ground now between them, with scarcely enough cover to shelter a cat. So Jim laid down on the ground, well screened by a low bush, took careful aim, and fired.

He scored a hit in a vital part. The guanaco made a tremendous leap in the air, ran forward a few paces, bounded in the air again—and then vanished!

Jim stared at the place where the animal had been, with an expression of comical dismay.

"That takes the biscuit!" he exclaimed. "Done the vanishing trick down a crack, and the chances are a hundred to one against my being able to get at it. The beast did it to spite me. There were a dozen ways it might have jumped, and it chose the only one that could have dished me."

Shouldering his rifle, he made his way to the ledge, and looked down into what he had called a "crack." It was a fissure about ten feet in width and several hundred feet in

depth. The sides were perpendicular, and it would be impossible to climb down them. He could only dimly make out the dead guanaco at the bottom, which was shrouded in perpetual gloom.

"Well, there it is, and there it'll have to remain!" muttered Jim. "All our lariats knotted together wouldn't reach the bottom, and we haven't any other ropes strong enough to bear a man's weight. A week's meat rations gone to——"

He never stated where the "meat rations" had gone to, for as he was uttering the words he turned away from the edge of the fissure and his eyes fell on an object which gave him something of a start.

It was a skeleton—the skeleton of a human being, which was seated in a niche of the rock that rose up for twenty or thirty feet at the inner side of the ledge. The arms hung down straight, and the head leaned back against the wall of rock behind it. It was as though the man, who may have been dying of starvation when he reached this sheltered crevice, had sank down on to the rough, natural seat, and, leaning back, had fallen into a sleep from which he had never awakened.

And how long ago had that been? It was next to impossible to tell, but it must have been a long time, for the bones were bleached white, and only a few shreds of clothing were left.

Around the neck of this poor remnant of humanity, there was something hanging by a thin chain.

Jim lifted it gingerly. It was a silver crucifix, but the metal was now quite black.

"Not a native," he murmured. "Probably a Spaniard of the old days, when it was not an uncommon thing for a man to wear a crucifix. They were more devout then than they are now—and more cruel. Hallo! What's this?"

Jammed into a tiny crevice of the rock was a wallet, made of the skin of some animal. It had lain protected there from wind, rain, and snow, but when Jim pulled it out it fell to pieces in his hand; it was rotten with age.

A few coins fell out, but they were as black as the crucifix, and also a small roll of parchment, which was in a fairly good state of preservation.

Jim unrolled it, and saw that it was covered with writing, very much faded, but still decipherable. The writing was in the Spanish language. He decided that Hal should have the job of translating it. But the date was in figures—1752!

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Jim. "A hundred and fifty years ago! And all that time this skeleton has been seated here, keeping a sort of everlasting watch. Well, I won't disturb the remains of the old Don Spaniard."

He slowly made his way back to camp, and when he reached it he found Pat O'Hara in a state of jubilation. He had killed a small antelope, and already had it cut up. Sigsbee and Hal had not yet returned.

"It came close up, wantin' company, mayhap, poor baste!" explained O'Hara. "At first I hadn't the heart to shoot it, but whin it gave a lep, and turned to go, I bethought me none of ye might come back wid anything, so I let droive. An' there it is."

"Well, that's a comfort," replied Jim. "Now that the grub department is all right for a few days, my mind's at ease."

"What's that you've brought back wid ye?" asked the Irishman.

"I'll tell you all about it when the others come in," said Jim. "It will save having to spin the yarn twice over."

It was late in the afternoon when Hal returned to camp, and Sigsbee came in about half an hour afterwards. They had had no luck. Neither of them had so much as seen an animal or bird that would have been suitable for food if killed.

"'Tis foine hunters ye are!" exclaimed O'Hara sarcastically. "Here's meself, who was just lift to moind the camp, has done all the huntin'——"

"You're doing the crowing now," interrupted Jim. "Cut it out for a bit, Pat; I want to tell you all of my little adventure, and what I found."

"Eh? What did you find?" asked Hal curiously.

"This, among other things," replied Jim, handing the roll of yellow parchment to his chum. "The writing is in Spanish, which you'll be able to translate. Most of it seems to be quite legible."

Then he told them of the strange discovery he had made, after he had shot and lost the guanaco.

The Valley of the Shadows.

"My aunt! This is queer!" exclaimed Hal, as he perused the ancient manuscript. "Written a hundred and fifty years ago, presumably by that poor chap whose skeleton you found, Jim."

"But he couldn't have written it up there on that lonely ridge," said Jim. "A traveller in these regions would never carry a pen and ink about with him—at least, he wouldn't in those days."

"It was evidently written," replied Hal, "before he started on his quest——"

"His quest?"

"Yes. It's a strange coincidence, and if I was inclined to be superstitious—but then I'm not. The quest that Don Guzman Cavallo—that is the name of the writer—set out upon is the same that has brought us here into the heart of the Andes. He was in search of the Golden Star!"

Astonishment held the others silent for a full minute. That a century and a half ago a man should have set out on so perilous a journey, with the same object in view as themselves, seemed little short of marvellous. For somehow it had never occurred to them that the Golden Star might be as old as the mountains themselves; while at different periods throughout the ages daring adventurers may have sought to learn its secret.

"Read what is written," said Jim. "I'm more eager than ever now to know the contents of the parchment. Did he reach the Tower of the Star, or was he——"

"Keep your hair on," interrupted Hal, "and you shall hear. A few of the words I shall have to make a guess at as they are too indistinct to read, but otherwise I shall get along all right. Of course, the language is a bit quaint, just as old English sounds quaint to our ears now."

Seating himself on a rock, Hal read out to his comrades that which was written on the strip of yellow parchment. This is it:

"'I, Guzman Cavallo, of Santiago, in old Spain, but for my sins an exile in this country of strange men and strange beasts and strange happenings, am about to set forth on a journey from which it may well be I shall never return. But that matters little, for I have no relatives to mourn me, and but few friends. I go in quest of the Golden Star, to penetrate its mystery, to learn its secret. It is known to the Incas, but even torture will not wring from them what they know. All that they will state is that the star is guarded by wizards, and that may well be, for this is a country of wizards. But I have learnt that to reach it I must cross the Valley of the Shadows, a dread and mysterious place. There may be a fortune awaiting me, there may be death. I take the risk. It is, after all, but a game of chance, with life staked against a fortune. An Indian hunter will accompany me some part of the way. I have written this on the first day of the year 1752; then, if I fail in my quest, and my body is found, it will be known on what adventure I set out.

"'GUZMAN CAVALLO.'"

Hal folded up the parchment when he had finished reading.

"That is a fairly correct translation of the original," he said. "I had to fit in a word here and there, that's all."

"That old Spanish Don was a sportsman," said Jim. "I suppose the Indian hunter deserted—no food left, and no game to be killed, perhaps—and Don Guzman died of cold and starvation."

"I guess he had grit," put in Sigsbee. "But he seems to have got the notion that the secret of the Golden Star had something to do with hidden treasure. He was on the wrong track."

"'Tis ourselves may finish up the same way as he did," said O'Hara—"sittin' on a mountain in our bones—no more!"

"You must be suffering from indigestion, Pat," Jim exclaimed, laughing, "or you wouldn't hint at anything so unpleasant. You'd better give up eating meat for a few days."

"Indigestion!" echoed O'Hara indignantly. "It'll be, then, because I don't get enough nourishment. An' what would I be eating if I gave up mate? Would it be grass an' dirt an' stones, like me ould grandmother's goat? Barrin' he once ate the best part av her Sunday boots!"

"Say, you best stick to a meat diet, Pat," grinned Sigsbee, "though an old lady's Sunday boots might be tender eating compared to some of those guanaco steaks we've been sharpening our teeth on!"

They had plenty to talk about round the camp-fire that evening, speculating as to whether the old Spanish Don had actually reached the Tower of the Golden Star—though he made no reference to a tower—and was on his way back when death overtook him, or whether he died before he had even got so far as the Valley of the Shadows.

"Seems to me," observed Sigsbee, "that valley is where we're going to butt up against something real nasty. Aymara warned us about it, and that old Spanish adventurer reckoned it up as 'dread and mysterious.' Sort of place you wouldn't want to spend a holiday in."

(Continued on page iv of cover.)

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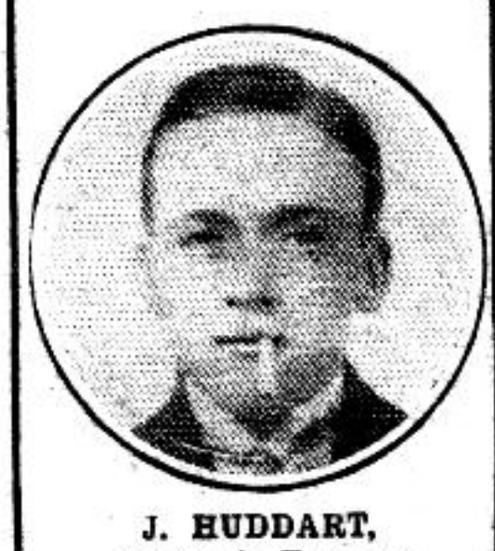

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CYRIL BATES,
Walsall.

ADVENTURERS FOUR.

(Continued from page 20.)

"Three more days will bring us to it," said Hal. "Less than that, perhaps, if we can hit on any decent paths on the downward track."

The whole of the next day they were climbing up to and crossing a ridge, where they reached their highest altitude, well over twelve thousand feet. Then began the descent into the valley.

It occupied a day and a half, because there was nothing in the shape of a pathway, and they had to pick their way down the rough slopes of the mountain side. It was the middle of the afternoon when they at length came to the edge of the valley, and for several reasons they decided to go no further that day, the principal reason being that they were all about tired out.

That valley was well named. What a place it was! Treeless and boulder-strewn for the most part, though in the distance they could make out a black patch several miles in extent. It was surrounded by lofty mountains and many frowning precipices, and although it still wanted two hours of sunset, there was a twilight gloom over the whole of it.

Vague, moving shadows drifted here and there across the great expanse of cheerless earth and rock; the shadows may have been caused by passing clouds, or by some strange effects of the atmosphere, but they were none the less weird and uncanny on that account. "Dread and mysterious," the old Spanish adventurer had named it, and he had not exaggerated. The wind moaned over the waste in fitful gusts, or rose to a shriek as it tore through a ravine high up among the jagged spurs and bleak crags of the mountains. Then it would suddenly drop, and a brooding silence would fall over the valley like an invisible pall.

It was during one of these pauses of deathlike stillness that Pat O'Hara let out a yell that could have been heard a mile off. It startled his comrades, who thought he must either have been bitten by a snake, or some other unpleasant thing have happened to him.

"What in thunder has got hold of you, Pat?" exclaimed Sigsbee, looking about on the ground. "Is it a scorpion, trying to wag its tail inside your boot, or some other kind of critter? There ain't nothing in sight that's got a move in it."

"'Tis nothing," replied O'Hara, "except I felt that I must shout, or I'd explode. 'Twas the dead silence that got a hould av me."

"I felt rather like that myself," admitted Jim. "I've never known such absolute stillness each time the wind drops, at least not out in the open, and I wanted noise. That's how it took me. But give us warning another time, Pat, if you're going to let loose one of those wild Irish yells. Consider our nerves. They're all on edge as it is."

There was a laugh, and the laughter acted like a tonic. They all busied themselves in unsaddling the mules, gathering wood, and kindling a fire, and the dozen other things which required doing when pitching camp for the night.

A Night of Terror.

Darkness fell with startling abruptness as soon as ever the sun disappeared, and as it was impossible to see further than a hundred yards in any direction, there would be no more of those strange, moving shadows until the moon rose.

"We sha'n't get a glimpse of the moon until it's high up in the heavens," said Hal; "and that will be close on midnight. So we've got to keep our eyes skinned. There's no sign of life in the valley, so far, but we don't know what's in hiding."

"We sure don't," assented Sigsbee. "I don't cotton to this dead silence, nohow. It kind of makes me suspicious."

So it was decided to take extra precautions, and instead of only one being on watch at a time, there should be two. Each spell was to be for three hours. Hal and O'Hara had from eight to eleven, and nothing happened during their first turn. At eleven o'clock Jim and Sigsbee were roused up for their three hours' watch.

They took their positions at opposite sides of the camp, well clear of the radius of light from the fire, which had been allowed to burn down very low.

Half an hour passed, and beyond the dismal moaning of the wind at intervals, and the occasional cry of a night-bird, which could not be seen, there was nothing to disturb the monotony of the watch.

Jim was staring through the gloom, trying to make out objects not more than a hundred yards away from him, when all at once he found Sigsbee by his side.

"You've got keen eyes," whispered the American. "I want you to come around and look at something that I'm not quite certain about."

Jim followed him noiselessly to the opposite side of the camp.

"Lie down," whispered Sigsbee. "Now—away over yonder, where I'm pointing—can you make out anything?"

Jim stared hard for a couple of minutes. Yes, he was able to discern some shadowy objects, which appeared to be moving slowly and stealthily towards them. What they were he could not make out, for in the darkness they seemed to have no particular shape. He told this to Sigsbee.

"Then I wasn't mistaken!" muttered Sigsbee. "Rouse the others!"

He brought his rifle to his shoulder.

"What are you going to do?" asked Jim.

"I'm going to plug the nearest one," was the reply. "We take no chances in this blamed valley. Things what come creeping and crawling towards you in the dead of night mean mischief. I'm going to shoot; and I shoot to kill!"

His finger tightened on the trigger of his rifle. There was a flash and a report, followed by an unearthly yell. A figure leaped several feet in the air, and then fell backwards.

Hal Mackenzie and Pat O'Hara had thrown off their blankets and leaped to their feet at the sound of the shot, just as Jim had darted across to wake them up.

"What's up?" asked Hal sharply.

"Don't quite know," replied Jim, "except that some queer-looking, shadowy creatures were creeping towards the camp, evidently with the idea of attacking us."

"Shadowy creatures! What do you mean?"

"Well, we couldn't make them out distinctly. They looked something like men, but after our experience with the big apes I wouldn't like to bet on what they are. Sigsbee shot one of them."

Hal and O'Hara had snatched up their rifles, and they all hurried over to where Sigsbee was lying flat on the ground, behind the cover of a low ridge of earth.

But there was no living creature, either man or animal, now to be seen. The shadowy figures had vanished as though they had melted into thin air. Even the one that had fallen, hit by the American's bullet, was not visible. But that may have been accounted for by the fact that there was some reedy grass where he went down high enough to conceal a prone body.

"Where are these shadowy things?" asked Hal. "I don't see any of them. Sure you haven't made a mistake, and that——"

"There was no mistake about the yell the galoot let out," interrupted Sigsbee, "when I plugged him. He was sure a man, of sorts, whatever the others may be. Best take cover, instead of standing up there and exposing yourself. I don't half like this sudden quietness."

His advice was taken, and not a moment too soon. For they had hardly laid down behind the ridge when a flight of missiles came humming through the air, passing over them, and striking the ground fifty yards behind. Had they been standing up some of them must have been hit.

"What the blazes are those things?" growled O'Hara.

They had come noiselessly out of the darkness, the only sound they had made being a faint sort of humming as they passed overhead, such as any missiles would be sure to make when going fast through the air.

Jim crawled back, picked one up, and returned with it. On examination it proved to be a metal barb, pointed like an arrow, and between four and five inches in length. It weighed about half a pound.

"Well, it's a sure thing our enemies are men," Hal said. "These barbs must have been fired from crossbows, or some such weapon. They'd make a nasty hole in a fellow."

"They couldn't be used at a very long range," replied Sigsbee, "unless there was a charge of powder behind them. They're too heavy. And powder can't be used in a crossbow, I guess—at least, not the specimens I've seen in museums."

"In this bit of country we've got into," returned Hal, "and among the strange people that seem to inhabit it, it's hard to say what's possible or what isn't possible. I wish the moon would rise. It's about time——"

He was interrupted by another flight of metal barbs, which came from a different direction to the last. They fell harmlessly twenty or thirty yards in rear of them. Pat O'Hara fired a shot in the direction whence they had come, but apparently without result.

"They're sure wasting their ammunition," growled Sigsbee, "but that's no kind of reason why we should waste ours. 'Tain't any use shooting unless you can see something to shoot at."

"We shall see less presently than we do now," said Jim.

"Then that'll be less than nothing," declared Sigsbee. "Why do you say that, anyway?"

"Look across the valley," replied Jim. "That's more than the darkness of the night over there. It's a heavy bank of fog, and it's spreading. The moon won't be much use to us when it does rise."

(There will be another grand instalment of this exciting story in next Monday's issue of THE "MAGNET" LIBRARY. Order your copy in advance.)