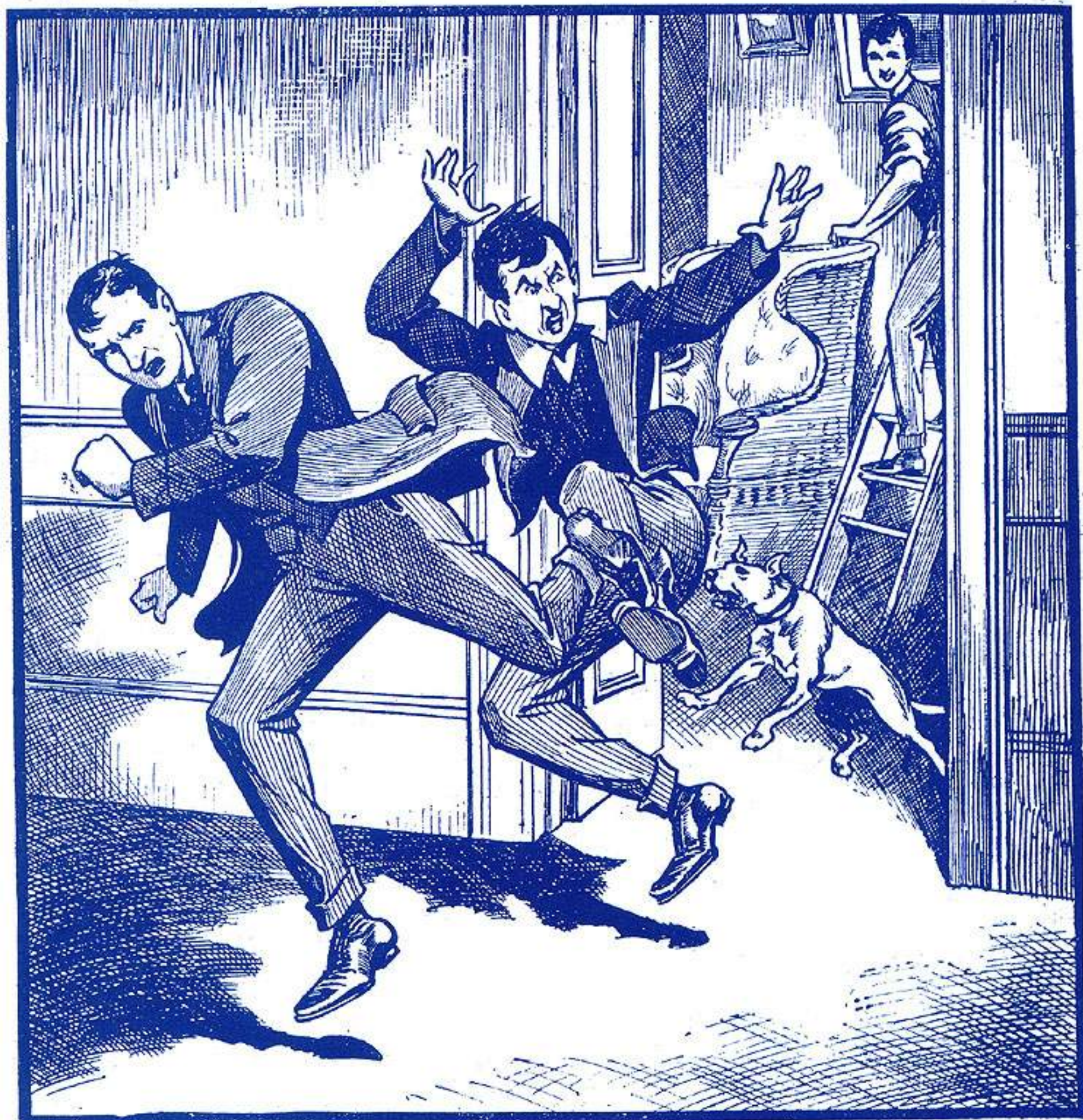


A GENTLEMAN RANKER!

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



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REX ROUTS THE ROTTERS!

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

A GENTLEMAN RANKER!

By
Frank
Richards.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Shock for the Remove!

"MY hat! I can't shift those beggars for toffee!" Bob Cherry pulled up, panting, on the football-field at Greyfriars, and mopped his perspiring brow. With him were half a dozen leading lights of the Remove Form, and they were all going through the same process as Bob.

The juniors were practising shots at goal, and it was the custom for two fellows to guard the citadel against the attacks of the others. When the defenders were beaten, another couple took their places, and so on.

Bulstrode and Johnny Bull were in goal at the present moment, and both were grinning broadly.

And they had good reason to grin. For half an hour they had kept the fort intact, and had tackled all sorts and conditions of shots, never allowing themselves to be beaten. Whether it travelled high or low, swift or stealthy, the ball was always checked in its career.

Bulstrode, who kept goal for the Remove, was in great form; and his partner, well-known for his rocklike qualities, had given a great exhibition.

"This sort of thing," granted Bob Cherry, "isn't going on for the duration of the war. Stop that one, you beauties!"

And Bob sent in a scorching shot, which curled in under the cross-bar, but which Bulstrode's nimble fingers just managed to intercept.

"Good for you, old man!" gasped Johnny Bull. "Stick it out!"

"That's just what I'm going to do," chuckled Bulstrode.

A curious crowd had collected close at hand. It was not often that the crack shots of the Remove failed to get their own way; and the spectators were interested to see who would be the first to crash the ball into the net.

Standing apart from the rest, smiling genially upon the scene, was a neatly-dressed youth of about fifteen, whose face was new to Greyfriars. In the general interest, however, he stood unnoticed.

But the stranger was worth looking at twice. He was slim and well set-up; with dark eyes and brown curly hair. His suit was of blue serge; and his voice, when he spoke—as he did presently—was clear and refined.

"Put some ginger into it, gentlemen!" Peter Todd, who had just sent in rather a tame shot, which Johnny Bull had headed out, spun round on the speaker.

"Who the dickens are you?" he growled. "A new kid has no right to be so critical! Well, it's easy enough to be a looker-on in Vienna. Come and do better yourself!"

"With pleasure," smiled the stranger. He ran lightly on to the field, and the way he trapped the ball when Peter Todd sent it across to him proved that he was every inch a footballer.

Pausing for a brief second only, to get

his direction, he drove the sphere hard and true for goal.

It came towards Johnny Bull's area, and the burly Removeite foresaw no great difficulty in stopping it. But, just before it reached him, the ball changed its course with a wicked swerve, and crashed past him into the net.

"Goal!" Johnny Bull rubbed his eyes. "Mum-mum-my hat!" he gasped. "Beaten—and by a raw, untamed new kid!"

"These flukes will happen, even in the best-regulated families," said Peter Todd.

The boy in the blue serge suit laughed good-humouredly.

"Not satisfied yet?" he said. "Better get in goal yourself, for an experiment."

"Thanks," said Peter grimly, "I will! Come on, Bob!"

Peter Todd and Bob Cherry took up their positions in front of the net, and the bombardment was resumed. The stranger got in one or two hot shots, and finally sent in a fast rising one. The ball cannoned into the net, taking Peter Todd's cap with it in the rush.

"Shades of Steve Bloomer!" gasped Peter. "I take back what I said about flukes after that. It was a clinking shot, kid!"

The unknown bowed. "Look here," said Harry Wharton, approaching him. "I rather like your style. What's your name?"

"Brown."

"Do you spell it with an 'e'?"

"No; just plain Brown—Jack Brown."

"Well, you're hot stuff, anyway. You're fond of footer, I s'pose?"

Brown's eyes sparkled.

"Fond of it? Oh, rather!" he exclaimed.

"You'll be quite an acquisition, then," said Harry.

"Good word, that. I'll back it both ways."

There was something so taking about Jack Brown that the juniors warmed to him at once.

"We shall look to you to back up the Remove all along the line," said Bob Cherry.

"Yes, rather!"

Jack Brown looked surprised.

"Oh, but really—" he began.

"You're coming into the Remove surely?" said Harry Wharton. "You're too big and too old for the Third."

Jack Brown smiled. He looked at his best when he smiled.

"I'm afraid," he said, "you don't understand. You seem to be under the impression that I'm coming to Greyfriars as—as a scholar."

"Of course!"

"Well, there's no such luck."

"You're not going to be a gentleman of leisure, by any chance?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"No," said Brown, a curious smile playing about his lips. "I'm the new boot-boy!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Skinner is Suspicious!

THE sudden explosion of a bomb-shell on Little Side could not have had a much more startling effect than Jack Brown's statement.

The boot-boy!

The duties of a boot-boy at Greyfriars were not all beer and skittles. He was a very downtrodden individual, very much put upon by the cook and others in the domestic regions, and his duties lasted from the rising up of the sun to the going down thereof. It wasn't the sort of life that the average lad with a good education would plump for.

"You—you must be pulling our legs, Brown!" said Harry Wharton at length.

"I'm not! What I say is perfectly true!"

"But—"

"I s'pose your estimate of me will go down with a bump now?" said Brown wistfully. "Strictly speaking, I ought to say 'sir' to any of you."

"Draw it mild, kid!" said Bob Cherry.

"We think no worse of you because you have to clean boots and knives and things. But it—it takes a lot of swallowing, all the same. What are your people about to put you at a job like this? They ought to be jolly well ashamed of themselves, I should think!"

For a moment Brown's eyes blazed, and his hands were so tightly clenched that the knuckles stood out hard and white. The juniors could see that he was a youth of spirit.

"Go easy!" he said. "My people are the best any fellow ever had, and I'm proud of them!"

"Sorry, old chap!" said Bob Cherry. "I oughtn't to have said that, I see."

The boot-boy's expression softened.

"That's all right," he said. "But I'd be glad if you wouldn't mention my people again, any of you."

The juniors were silent. Was it possible that the boy Brown had a past?

Perhaps he had run away from home. Perhaps he was a fugitive of some sort, or—a more sinister thought still—perhaps he had an ulterior motive in coming to Greyfriars. It seemed incredible that a fellow with his winning disposition was a boot-boy because he was unable to follow any other calling.

The reflections of the Removeites were rudely interrupted by an excited cry from Skinner, who was standing a few yards away scanning an evening paper. Skinner had got the paper for Loder of the Sixth, who had been specialising in dead certs and sure snips; but quite apart from the racing results, and the war's slow grind on the Western Front, there was other news of a most interesting nature.

Harry Wharton & Co. crossed over to Skinner, and glanced at the column which had caused him to exclaim.

"A STARTLING DISAPPEARANCE!"

was the headline, and the paper proceeded to state:

"The Hon. Roy Hastings, who is the only son of the Earl of Northerncourt, and heir to the Northerncourt estates, is missing from his home at Hurstbourne Priors, Hants.

"We understand that the young heir was home for a week from Grandcourt School. He had no worries, and was on the best of terms with the other members of his Form. Whether his sudden disappearance was intentional or accidental is quite unknown.

"The Hon. Roy Hastings is fifteen years of age, slim, well-built, and a fine athlete. He is of dark complexion, with curly brown hair and dark eyes, and when last seen was wearing a blue serge suit and a tie of the Grandcourt colours. Detectives and other agents are already at work to elucidate the mystery of his disappearance."

The news was certainly of an interesting nature, though why Skinner should be so excited about it the others couldn't see at first. Skinner himself supplied the solution.

He pointed dramatically to Jack Brown.

"Look!" said Skinner. "If he isn't the missing heir, I'll eat my hat!"

"What?" exclaimed the Removites in a startled chorus.

"Dark complexion, curly brown hair, dark eyes, blue serge suit!" jerked out Skinner. "It doesn't need a Sexton Blake or a Ferrers Locke to put two and two together. Look here, you fellow," pushing his way forward, "are you the Hon. Roy Hastings? Out with it!"

The boot-boy faced Skinner calmly, and without flinching.

"My name," he said, "is Jack Brown. I've said so once before, and I'm not going to repeat it every five minutes like a parrot. And it's not a habit of mine to trot round telling lies. Whenever I choose to give you any information about myself you can count on it as being genuine."

"Good man!" said Harry Wharton. "I think that fairly disposes of the Roy Hastings theory. You've woke up the wrong passenger, Skinney!"

"Have I, by Jove!" said Skinner. "I'm not so sure about it!"

And his suspicions on the subject of the boot-boy's identity were confirmed five minutes later when, diving to pick up a silk handkerchief which Brown had dropped, he espied in the corner thereof the initials "R. H."

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Loyal Pal!

"I DON'T believe it!" said Bolsover major emphatically.

"But—but he fits in to a T with the description given in the paper," protested Skinner.

"Pah! So would dozens of other chaps. There are at least a score of fellows at Greyfriars who have brown curly hair and dark eyes. If Brown was really the heir to those estates in Hampshire, is it likely that he'd come to a school as a giddy boot-boy? Of course not! He'd have everything to lose and nothing to gain."

"But the handkerchief," said Skinner. "The initials are 'R. H.' You'll find it difficult to explain that away."

Bolsover nodded. "I admit that's queer," he said. "Still, boot-boys aren't particular whose handkerchiefs they use, as a rule. I should think it was merely a coincidence."

Skinner's face fell. "P'r'aps you're right, old man," he said. "What a pity! I was hoping we might have made a good haul out of this

bizney. If Brown was playing a double game, as I thought, we could have made him pay out money hand-over-fist to keep us from splitting. But if he is Brown, and not Hastings, the little brat won't have a penny to bless himself with! My hat! We'll jolly well make him sit up!"

That was just like Skinner. He had no use for a fellow who was not well endowed with this world's goods. He was prepared to inflict the doubtful benefit of his friendship on the Hon. Roy Hastings, but not on plain Jack Brown.

"I hear the Head's rigged up a room for the little sweep," said Bolsover. "It's a bed-sitting-room in the servants' quarters. Wouldn't be a bad idea to go and have a rag, and play cocoanut shies with the furniture. It's a bit infra dig. to have any truck with boot-boys, but this specimen badly wants putting in his place."

Skinner nodded.

"Lead on, Macduff!" he said.

The cads of the Remove were particularly anxious to make the new boot-boy sing small. To begin with, Brown had been congratulated by Harry Wharton & Co. on his footballing abilities; and that in itself was sufficient to cause Skinner and Bolsover to dislike him.

Then, again, he had deceived Skinner—so Skinner held, at least—by the remarkable likeness he bore to the missing heir. And, lastly, what right had he to behave differently from other boot-boys—to sound his "h's" instead of dropping them, to dress in decent togs, and to act like a public school boy instead of a guttersnipe? It was monstrous!

By the time they reached their destination Bolsover and Skinner had worked themselves up into quite an angry state. They would make this presumptuous intruder take a back seat, like the menial he was, and not start interfering with the sons of gentlemen. They would teach him that they were not to be trifled with. In short, they would make the place too hot to hold him.

Jack Brown was discovered standing on the top of a pair of steps arranging pictures on the walls of his cosy little room. It was easy to see that Brown was an ardent worshipper at the shrine of sport, for W. G. Grace was perched in a prominent position, and C. B. Fry and Ranji were smiling at him from either side.

Just as Skinner and Bolsover entered, Brown was engaged in hoisting a capital portrait of a man in football garb—a fine, upstanding man, with big, broad shoulders and a cheery smile.

The picture seemed to affect Brown strongly, for Skinner and Bolsover, standing in the doorway, distinctly saw him gulp something down, after which he murmured:

"Heaven grant he may come back—some day!"

The rest of the articles in Brown's room were typical of an athletic youth. There were two pairs of dumb-bells, a fishing-rod, a punching-ball, and a set of boxing-gloves.

The most priceless possession of all, however, and one which caused the two watching juniors to feel a trifle uneasy, was a young terrier, whose ears were cocked in threatening fashion.

Jack Brown broke into a cheery whistle. Then, turning suddenly, he beheld the intruders.

"Hallo!" he said, with perfect composure. "Come to take stock of my new digs?"

"We came," said Skinner, "to give you our opinion about you—straight from the shoulder!"

"Good! Get it off your chest!" "We consider you're a beastly upstart, and a rank outsider! You come here

currying favour with Wharton and the rest—"

"Here, steady!" ejaculated Brown, the steps shaking under him. "I'm not standing this sort of thing!"

Then he seemed to reflect for a moment.

"You both want a thundering good licking!" he said. "But I haven't the energy for that just now. It's been a tiring day."

"You lick us!" muttered Bolsover. "Why, you cheeky young cub—"

He took a stride towards the steps with the intention of bringing them down, Brown and all.

But the boot-boy had a loyal ally in that room in the shape of his dog Rex. Many a time, when he had been driven to the wall, he had found Rex a very present help in trouble. And on this occasion it was only necessary for him to say three words:

"Wire in, Rex!"

What followed was as swift as a pantomime transformation scene. Two juniors bounded through the doorway as if all the demons of the underworld were after them; and the next moment Rex stalked majestically into the room, bringing with him two large and frayed portions of trouser-cloth, which he deposited at his master's feet.

"Good boy!" said Brown pleasantly. "It looks as though I've got a lonely battle to fight here, one way and another; and I shall stand in need of a friend. You'll stick to me, won't you, old man?"

For answer, Rex solemnly rose on his hind legs, and proceeded to rub his shaggy head against his master's knees. He could not speak, except after the manner of his kind, but his affectionate little bark seemed to say:

"Rely on me. I'm with you through thick and thin!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Bad Luck for Bunter!

BROWN was not slow in shaking down to his new life.

The rest of the domestic staff at Greyfriars resented his presence among them. Had he been a typical boot-boy, with a familiar Cockney manner, he would have fitted in all right. But he never joined in the usual gossip and scandal of the kitchen; and when he did say anything it was not the kind of thing which pleased the kitchen.

"Too big for 'is boots!" sniffed one of the maids. "We shall 'ave to give 'im a gentle 'int that 'is sort isn't wanted 'ere!"

But Brown could never be caught tripping. He worked as no boot-boy at Greyfriars had ever worked before. The boots and shoes of the Head's household were polished so that one might have seen one's face in them.

He had other duties, too, and he got through them in a brisk, cheery way, making light of the drudgery.

And wherever Brown went Rex accompanied him. The boot-boy fed him at the tea-table at first, a proceeding which at once roused the wrath of the others, who insisted on rigid war-time economy. After that Brown gave the dog half his own allowance.

As for the Greyfriars fellows, they had ceased to take an active interest in Brown for the time being. They had other interests; and the story of the disappearance of the Hon. Roy Hastings was already beginning to lose its glamour.

A few still held to the theory that Brown was the missing heir; but he did not invite confidences, and they found it difficult to glean anything from

him. When circumstances brought him into contact with the fellows he was always polite and good-natured; but it was obvious that he wished to say as little about himself as possible.

It was Saturday, and, finding himself released from his duties, Brown summoned Rex to his side, and set out for a stroll into the village, glad to be free from the chattering tongues with which he had been surrounded all the week.

He had not proceeded very far when Billy Bunter rolled up to him.

The views of the fat junior on the subject of Jack Brown were that he was playing a deep game. He credited the new boot-boy with having a shady past, and also—a point which mattered most in Bunter's eyes—well-lined pockets.

"Hallo, old man!" he said, with an air of condescension. "Would you like to come for a stroll with me?"

Brown surveyed the fat junior with extreme disfavour.

"No, thanks!" he said. "My arms are pretty stiff already, and I don't want to add to the agony by rolling a barrel along the road!"

"Oh, really, you know——" Billy Bunter fell into a trot by Brown's side. "You needn't be so huffy with—with a fellow of your own class."

"My own class!" said Brown, flushing a little. "What d'you mean?"

"Well, I come of a noble family myself!" panted Bunter, in a sudden burst of confidence. "I know what it's like to live on vast estates, and have joy-rides in motors, and all that! I expect you miss all those things, don't you? What did you do to make the place too hot to hold you? Did you bust the Earl of Northerncourt's safe open? Whatever it was, you have my sympathy. I—I say, don't walk so beastly fast!"

Brown strode on, unheeding, while Rex emitted a low growl which ought to have proved more effective than any air-raid warning.

"I s'pose," Bunter went on, "you're simply rolling in filthy lucre? And that reminds me. I'm expecting a—a postal order for ten bob—my usual postal order, you know, for my pocket-money. Somehow or other there's been a delay in the post."

Brown grinned, but said nothing. Though young in years, he was old in experience. If Billy Bunter hoped to extract a loan from him he imagined a vain thing.

"It would greatly help matters," gasped Bunter, wearied out with much running, and perspiring in every pore of his fat face, "if you could advance——"

"Eh? What's that?" said Brown suddenly. "You want me to advance? All serene!"

He strode up to the fat junior, seized him in a grip of iron, and propelled him towards the nearest ditch.

Few would have guessed that Jack Brown was possessed of such strength. Slim in stature though he was, every inch of him was whipcord.

"Here, I say! Hold on—leggo!" yelled Bunter. "Don't be a beast, Hastings! It's bad form for fellows who move in high society to——"

Splish!

Billy Bunter finished his remarks in the ditch. It was a particularly muddy ditch, and the mud was of the kind whose fragrance lingers lovingly.

Billy Bunter wallowed and spluttered, and choked and gasped, and addressed Brown in terms which were by no means complimentary.

"You beastly brat of a boot-boy!" he gurgled, at length. "You'll hear more about this! I'll raise Cain about it when

I get back to Greyfriars! Yah! Beast! Outsider!"

Brown listened calmly to this wild outburst; but when Bunter launched into a volley of abuse concerning his parents, his lips set tightly together, and he rapped out a word to Rex.

Five minutes later Billy Bunter, looking a total wreck, was waddling away in the direction of Greyfriars.

And Billy Bunter's fat hands were behind him. Rex seemed to have a taste for trousering samples!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Fighting Spirit!

TEN young men—or, to be more correct, ten youths, not one of them being over the age of eighteen—stood in a disconsolate group on the village football-ground.

Not far away, improving the shining hour by shooting at goal, were a hefty, beefy collection of men, attired in jerseys the hue of which put Joseph's celebrated coat of many colours absolutely in the shade.

This was the scene which attracted Brown's attention as he tramped into the village. He was a keen footballer and a rare sportsman, and even a village match was not beneath his interest. He vaulted the railings, and strolled up to the dejected youths of Friardale.

"Footer match this afternoon—what?" he said pleasantly.

The freckled-faced youth who captained the side, and who, in the intervals from footer, conducted a milk-round, ground his heel savagely into the turf.

"We've been tricked!" he said, in tones of anger. "Those bounders"—he indicated the giants who were clustered round the goal-mouth a short distance away—"call themselves the Courtfield Crusaders. Matter of fact, they don't live at Courtfield at all. They've picked the best and biggest players from all the villages round, so as to reduce us to a pulp. And when we issued the challenge in the local rag we distinctly said that we were only prepared to meet teams of our own age and weight."

"I see," said Brown, his eyes gleaming. "They've taken a jolly mean advantage. Why, if you started playing against those brutes you'd be half a dozen goals down at the interval."

"I know," said the captain, known to his companions as "Freckles." "We shouldn't have an earthly. And Bob Lee, our star player, hasn't turned up, so we're a man short. I'd a jolly good mind to cry off!"

Brown reflected for a moment, stooping to pat Rex as he did so.

"I don't think I should do that," he said presently. "It would give 'em the impression that you're funky. Better be whacked to the wide than let 'em go away with that idea in their bullet heads."

"P'r'aps you're right," agreed Freckles slowly.

"Look here," said Brown. "You seem a sensible sort of merchant, so I'd like a word with you."

He drew the skipper of the local team aside, and made a few brief, convincing remarks, with the result that the clouds cleared from the captain's brow, and he turned to his followers with a grin.

"This gent's goin' to play for us," he said.

"Fat lot of difference that'll make!" observed a painfully outspoken youth.

"You shut up, Billings! I'm not goin' to have any of your old buck! Line up, everybody!"

And then Freckles approached the captain of the Courtfield Crusaders, and tossed for choice of ends. He won, and

electd to kick in the direction of the slight breeze which had sprung up.

The Crusaders were a powerful, bustling side, and when the match began it reminded the little knot of spectators of David's historic encounter with Goliath.

The Crusaders were not very particular in their methods of tackling, and Friardale's casualty list would have been considerable, even in the first few minutes, had not the referee kept a firm grip on the game.

The visiting captain, Barker, was indeed a terror. He ought to have lived in the days of the French Revolution. Science he had none, and his main idea seemed to be to play the man rather than the ball. If he had a chance of bringing his boot into contact with both, so much the better.

But the Friardale fellows, though undersized, were very plucky, and Brown worked wonders in the forward line. He was here, there, and everywhere, and always found time, even in the thickest of the fray, to sling out a cheery word to his comrades. The latter, spurred on by his enthusiasm, played a great game—a game well worth watching. They kept their burly opponents resolutely at bay, and, just before the interval, Brown swung the leather across to Freckles for him to score.

The interval was a lively one.

It was surprising, to say the least of it, that a team of hulking louts like Courtfield Crusaders should be a goal to the bad; but it only showed what a little enterprise and enthusiasm could do when rightly directed.

As for Jack Brown, he was flushed and smiling, and felt the joy of battle surging through his veins. Barker, playing at full-back for the visiting team, had been making himself very objectionable, and Brown's shins had been nicely hacked; but he heeded not these things. All he longed for was the complete rout of the Crusaders.

The second half opened at a gruelling pace, and the referee's whistle blew with great frequency, the visitors being seemingly ignorant of the offside rule.

The Crusaders, however, came on again and again, and the Friardale defence was sorely tried. After twenty minutes' Spartan play, with manifold thrills, the scores were made level.

The crisis had come now, and Brown knew it. Most of the men around him were already in the early stages of exhaustion. They had been kept on the go the whole time, and the defence could not be relied upon to hold out to the end.

Brown realised this, and he realised, too, that the only way to win would be to add to the score as rapidly as possible, giving the Crusaders insufficient time to make up the margin.

Brown came very much into the picture after this. He raced through on his own, successfully swept past the burly and bad-tempered Barker, and rounded off his efforts with a sparkling shot, which had the goalie fairly whacked.

"Well played!" panted Freckles, who had been rushing up behind. "Jingo, I'm jolly glad I didn't cry off!"

Brown smiled.

"There's more to come," he said. "I feel in topping form this afternoon."

"You'll sing another tune presently, you conceited young cub!" growled a voice in his ear.

Brown turned, and surveyed Barker grimly.

"If it's a scrap you're wanting," he said, "I shall be happy to oblige. The only condition I make is that you leave it till after the match."

Barker scowled, and from the way he walked back to his place it was obvious that there were breakers ahead.

Friardale continued the pressure, and Brown still ruled the play. For science and daring he put every other player on the field completely in the shade. He never once showed the white feather, though he might well have been excused for doing so, for the Crusaders were a positively brutal side.

True, they did not commit many open fouls; but there are many things worse than open fouls in football. There is the sly ankle-tapping, performed when the referee is looking elsewhere, the sudden jerk of the elbow in a shoulder-charge, and so on. The Crusaders were past masters at this sort of thing; and several of the Friardale players were already limping painfully.

But the fact that they were a goal to the good heartened them; and Brown's fearless display brought all that was best in them to the surface.

The Crusaders strove hard to equalise. Time was flying fast now, and a defeat at the hands of this youthful team would be very galling.

Jack Brown, on the other hand, was equally determined to drive home the advantage already gained. He pounced upon the ball as Freckles sent it across, and dashed off down the field.

Barker stood waiting for him, legs apart. There was an expression on Barker's face which was not nice to see.

Brown cleverly guided the ball past his opponent, and was in the act of following it up when a heavy boot thudded against his ankle, and, with a gasp of pain, he reeled and fell.

"Foul!"

An indignant chorus went up from the Friardale team.

The incident had taken place within the penalty area, and the referee awarded the kick without hesitation. Freckles took it, and scored.

Shortly afterwards the whistle rang out, with the home team winners by three goals to one.

But the Friardale fellows were not thinking of their victory just then. With one accord they made a rush for Barker.

"Leave him alone!" said Brown, struggling to his feet. "He's a cowardly cad, I know; but he's not worth touching—not even with a bargo-pole!"

Reluctantly the would-be avengers withdrew.

Brown hobbled away to the side of the field. He looked very pale and shaken.

A friendly little yelp at his feet caused him to smile, despite his pain.

"Hallo, Rex!" he murmured.

"They've made a pretty hopeless creak of me this time, I'm afraid. Still, we fairly floored the giants, didn't we?"

"You did!" exclaimed an admiring voice. "You put up a topping show, Brown!"

"And so say all of us!"

Brown turned, with a look of dazed wonder on his face, and encountered the friendly glances of the Famous Five. Then his knees seemed to give way under him, and he fell to the grass in a dead faint.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

For Light Duty Only!

"FEELING chirpier now, kid?"

Jack Brown opened his eyes, and saw the rugged countenance of Bob Cherry beaming over him.

"I—I'm quite all right," he said. "It's very good of you fellows to bother about me! I can get back to Greyfriars all sore!"

But he winced even as he spoke, and his cheeks were drawn with pain.

"You'll have to go into dock for repairs," said Harry Wharton. "That brute has made a mess of your ankle.



Brown on the casualty list! (See Chapter 6.)

We bound it up as best we could, and I'm afraid you'll have to travel back to the school on a hurdle."

"Is Rex all right?"

"The dog? Yes, rather! We had to hold him back by force, or he'd have made shavings of that fellow who fouled you."

Brown patted the loyal Rex, and then allowed himself to be carried away on the hurdle.

It was a queer procession which made its way to Greyfriars, and the sight of the boot-boy, who had so nobly championed the cause of Friardale, gave the juniors food for thought. Whether he was Brown or Hastings, boot-boy or earl's son, this fellow was certainly one of the very best.

They had held aloof from him of late—social etiquette had seemed to demand it—but they knew that, after this, social etiquette would go to the four winds of heaven.

The snobs would sneer, and the upstarts would point the finger of scorn at them, but they were resolved to let nothing interfere with their friendship with Brown in the future.

The boot-boy was badly hurt; and the doctor, when he arrived from the village, sentenced him to a week in bed, at the end of which time the ankle would be sound again.

Brown was very miserable at first. He hated being idle, and the prospect of a week's loneliness—except for the presence of the faithful Rex—was painful.

But he was not prepared for what was to follow.

During those long days of inaction the Famous Five treated him as a brother. They cut footer in order to pay visits to the little sitting-room; they came loaded up with books of adventure, and with as much tuck as was consistent with wartime regulations; and Brown had very few dull moments after all.

The tongues of Skinner & Co. wagged, of course. It was infra dig. to pay visits to low-down boot-boys, said the cads of the Remove; and when this had no effect they spread the story about the school that Brown was, beyond doubt, the missing heir, and that Harry Whar-

ton & Co. were hanging round him with a view to lining their pockets later on.

But the Famous Five were proof against such insults, and their friendship with Brown waxed rather than waned in consequence. They gave him the time of his life during his enforced captivity.

Presently Brown was able to hobble about the room with the aid of a stick; and whilst he was thus engaged one evening Billy Bunter drifted in.

The fat junior had not forgotten his ducking in the ditch, neither had he forgotten that Rex had a great partiality for trouser-cloth. He eyed the dog warily, and crept into the room on the instalment system, so to speak.

"Hallo, skeleton!" said Brown cheerfully. "Come for a little chat—what? Well, make yourself at home. There's some ginger-pop in the cupboard, and some chocolates that Lord Mauleverer brought me. Jolly decent fellow, Lord Mauleverer."

Billy Bunter gave a grunt, but he did not decline the boot-boy's hospitality. In fact, he was half-way through the box of chocolates before he spoke.

"Look here," he said at length, "you might take me into your confidence, Hastings, old chap!"

"My name's not Hastings—or St. Leonards, either. It's Brown."

"Oh, come off!" said Bunter. "You've kept that game up long enough. Why not open your heart to me? I sha'n't split. Loyalty to chaps I like is one of the strongest points of my character."

Brown raised his eyebrows.

"I shouldn't have credited you with having a character," he said, "unless it was a rotten bad one."

Bunter ignored the thrust.

"The other day," he said, "I asked you to cash a postal-order for me in advance."

"You did!" grinned Brown.

"Well, you were in rather a huff at the time. Is it any use my asking you again?"

"Not the slightest!" said Brown cheerfully.

"Then I reckon you're a mean beast!"

grumbled Bunter, feverishly cramming a handful of chocolates into his mouth, lest Brown should think fit to deprive him of them. "You look at me as if I'm trying to sponge on you, and all the time you're sponging on Wharton & Co. as fast as you can go!"

It was a malicious remark, and many fellows, recognising the source from whence it came, would have ignored it. But it stabbed Brown like a knife.

Sponging on Wharton & Co.?

Yes; that was exactly what he was doing! He had eaten their tuck, borrowed their books, stolen from them the time they might have devoted to healthy sport.

Brown was too thunderstruck by the light that broke in upon him to kick Bunter out of the room. He simply stood and stared straight in front of him, full of remorse.

He had sneered at Bunter for attempting to cadge the amount of a postal-order; yet he himself had been guilty of a similar offence, on a larger scale. At least, that was how it looked to him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" boomed a cheery voice. And Bob Cherry, with the rest of the Famous Five at his heels, came into the room.

Billy Bunter lost no time in making himself scarce. He knew that Harry Wharton & Co. would not see eye to eye with him on the question of Brown's alleged cadging.

Bob was carrying a couple of bound volumes of "The Great War," and balanced thereon was a tray containing bread-and-butter, tea, and a goodly pile of sardines. He was proceeding to explain that it was Brown's benefit, when he suddenly stopped short, noting the expression on the boot-boy's face.

"Is anything the matter, old man?" he asked. "Ankle not given way again, surely?"

Brown did not reply. He tried to speak, but words failed him.

"Has that fat cad been saying anything to upset you?" growled Johnny Bull, clenching his big fists. "If he has, I'll jolly well slaughter him!"

Bob Cherry laid the volumes on the couch, and the tray on the table.

"Pile in!" he said. "I expect you're feeling peckish. I always get the blues myself when I'm hungry."

Brown waved the good things away from him.

"Don't!" he said. "This has gone far enough! I—I— You're all very kind to me, but it's time I drew the line!"

The Famous Five regarded the speaker in amazement.

"What on earth are you burbling about?" demanded Nugent.

"It's simply this," said Brown. He had pulled himself together once more, and spoke with calm deliberation. "I've been sponging on you fellows right and left. I've got no real claim to your friendship, and, even if I had, it wouldn't justify me in living on the fat of the land at your expense like this. I couldn't see it before. I was a thoughtless ass. But my eyes have been opened at last, and it's only right that I should speak out. I know you won't misunderstand me. And—and please don't think me ungrateful for all this kindness."

"But I don't see——" began Harry Wharton, in dismay.

"And I don't, either!" said Bob Cherry. "Brown, you silly old duffer, what's come over you? You seem to have the idea that we've been making martyrs of ourselves to please you. Nothing of the sort. It's been a sheer pleasure to us to help you kill time a bit. Don't be a chump!"

"Look here," said Brown firmly, "you

mustn't come to see me any more. Don't argue the point; you'll only make it harder for me if you do. Do you know, you fellows are beginning to get into bad odour through coming here?"

"Who says so?" demanded Frank Nugent fiercely.

"I won't mention names. But a fellow gave me a look in to-day, just before Bunter came in, and he told me that Mr. Quelch strongly disapproved of your taking all this interest in me. Mr. Quelch isn't a mob, but I rather think he draws the line at his scholars chumming up with boot-boys."

"Tell me the name of the cad who told you that," exclaimed Harry Wharton hotly, "and I'll make him eat his words!"

Brown smiled—for the first time during the interview.

"I'll tell you his name," he said, "provided you give me your word of honour you won't lay hands on him. I wish to settle with him myself afterwards. He spoke slightly of my people, and that's always a weak point with me. One or other of us will get a thundering good licking when I'm well!"

"Who was it?" said Wharton. "We won't take any action—honour bright!"

"It was Bolsover."

"I guessed as much. D'you think you'll be able to tackle him all right, though?" added Harry dubiously.

"I've entertained fellows of his weight before," said Brown, smiling grimly at past recollections, and I shall give him a good run for his money. Meanwhile, you fellows had better keep off the grass. I say it in your interests as well as my own. If Mr. Quelch makes a complaint to the Head about your being thick with me, and all that, it might mean trouble for all of us."

He moved towards the table.

"I'll have this tea, because I see you'd be hurt if I didn't. But it's the last time I shall let you play the Good Samaritan role."

The juniors saw that Brown's mind was made up, and they did not stay to reason with him. But before they left him they each shook hands with him in turn—shook hands with the grip of true comradeship, and bade him be of good cheer.

Had the Famous Five looked back five minutes later, they would have seen Jack Brown patting Rex, and would have noticed that his eyes were misty.

Not often had any seen those eyes dimmed with tears, and even now Brown brushed them hastily away, as if ashamed of his own weakness.

The loyal friendship of the Famous Five had touched his heart.

If only he had their chances—chances shared by a cad like Skinner, a bullying lout like Bolsover, a greedy fellow like Bunter!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Brown's Mysterious Behaviour!

"HE'S an awfully deep bounder!" said Stott.

"About as deep as they make 'em!" assented Sidney James Snoop.

"I'm beginning to think," said Bolsover, "that there's something in what Skinner says after all—about Brown being the heir to the Northern-court estates."

The black sheep of the Remove had been discussing the boot-boy at great length.

Brown was quite fit again, but he had not yet carried out his threat in regard to Bolsover. Instead, he had settled down to work with all his old enthusiasm for two or three days, and had then asked

the Head if he might go home for a week-end.

Dr. Locke had agreed, and Skinner and Bolsover, whose curiosity concerning the boy who called himself Brown had not abated one jot, had shadowed him to the railway-station. They had seen him take a ticket to Winchester, and he was wearing the neat blue serge suit in which he had first come to Greyfriars.

The suspicions of Skinner and Bolsover had been increased tenfold.

"Winchester!" said Skinner. "That's not a far cry from Hurstbourne Priors, where his pater's estates are. I wonder——"

Bolsover wondered, too; and the cads of the Remove had been half inclined to follow Brown to his destination.

But to absent themselves from the school on what might prove to be a wild-goose chase would be too risky. Their suspicions might turn out to be incorrect after all.

"If he is the Hon. Roy Hastings," said Stott, "he's not going to leave this place before he's forked out some of the good red gold which his ancestors—pirates and cut-throats, I dare say—handed down to him!"

Skinner, who appeared to have been thinking deeply, suddenly came out with a startling suggestion.

"It would be a ripping wheeze," he said, "to tackle the bounder in his den when he gets back. Tell him that we know for a fact that his name isn't Brown, and that he's here for some underhand purpose. Threaten to expose him to the Head, and then he'll stump up quick enough!"

"That would be blackmail," said Bolsover bluntly.

"That's an ugly word. Can't you call it something nicer?"

"Oh, hang what you call it! I'm game. Ain't that good enough?"

"But supposing," said Snoop, "the fellow refuses to cough up, even after we've threatened him?"

"We must carry out our threat, that's all. We'll tell the Head that he's up to some deep game or other, and then he'll be sent packing. But before we go as far as that we'll wreck his giddy room. That ought to bring him to his senses."

Brown was due to return to the school on Monday evening. In the afternoon Skinner was sent to get a paper for Loder, and his eye chanced to fall upon a brief paragraph, which sent a thrill of excitement through him.

"The Hon. Roy Hastings, who has been missing from his home for some time past," said the paper, "has been seen this week-end in Winchester. Detectives are still pursuing their quest with unceasing vigilance."

Seen in Winchester!

Skinner wanted nothing further than that. There wasn't a shadow of doubt now, in his mind, that the Hon. Roy Hastings and Jack Brown were one and the same fellow.

The cad of the Remove communicated the information to Bolsover, Stott, and Snoop, and they proceeded to Brown's sitting-room after tea to await his return.

"Don't forget," said Skinner. "We must get on to him like the very dickens if we want to gain anything by this affair. I don't believe in doing things by halves. We must bring him absolutely to his knees."

"But if he's the son of a bloated aristocrat, like the Earl of Northern-court, what on earth is he playing this comic game for?" asked Bolsover dazedly.

"I give it up. The only fellow who

can answer that question to our satisfaction is Brown—I mean Hastings—himself! Shush! I fancy he's coming!"

There was a sudden patter in the passage without, and Rex entered. Behind him, carrying a handbag, came Brown.

He was looking very pale and very tired. The mud of Hampshire was on his boots, and there were rings round his eyes which told of sleepless nights. Some fellows would have drawn the line at tormenting him just then, but not so Skinner and his cronies.

"Good-evening!" said Brown wearily, dropping into a chair. "What can I do for you?"

Skinner eyed the boot-boy calmly. "I'll trouble you to tell us," he said, "exactly who you are, and what your little game is!"

"I don't understand you."
"Then it's about time you did! You needn't keep up that shallow pretence any longer. We know too much about you already to be taken in!"

"You know nothing about me which I'm afraid to have told!" said Brown, his eyes flashing.

"You are the Hon. Roy Hastings!"
"Rats! I'm Brown!"
"Do you mean to stick to that silly tale?"

"I mean to stand by what I say, for the simple reason that it's true!"

"Very well!" said Skinner. "Our course is clear. The Head will be interested to hear that you are masquerading under another name. We'll go along and tell him presently."

Brown did not seem at all frightened. He merely indicated the door.

"I wish you'd sheer off," he said. "I want to get to bed."

"I dare say you do, my pippin," said Bolsover. "You seem to think we're joking, but we'll jolly soon show you that we're in sober earnest. Fire away, you fellows!"

A quaint old clock was ticking away merrily on the mantelpiece. Bolsover raised it in both hands above his head, and sent it crashing to the floor. The glass was shattered into a thousand atoms.

"You cad!" exclaimed Brown. "Oh, you cad!"

Then he dashed fiercely at Bolsover.

But Skinner and Snoop sprang behind him, grasped him by the collar, and bore him down. Meanwhile, Stott contrived to hustle Rex into the cupboard, and slammed the door. Brown was entirely at the mercy of his assailants.

The work of destruction proceeded apace. The Prussian Crown Prince could not have held a candle to Bolsover, who continued to hurl down pictures and ornaments, and trample them underfoot.

Brown, with the united weight of Skinner, Snoop, and Stott sprawling on him, was unable to move, but when Bolsover reached down the portrait over the mantelpiece—that of a fine-looking athlete in football garb—the boot-boy nearly choked.

"You dare!" he exclaimed passionately.

Bolsover did dare. The picture shared the same fate as the others. Then, having emptied the contents of the coal-scuttle about the room and smashed the bookcase with the poker, Bolsover turned to his companions.

"We'll go along and see the Head now," he said.

"One minute!"

Brown's voice rang out imperiously.

"Will you let that stand over till the morning?"

"Not likely!" said Bolsover. "You'd bolt in the night if we did!"

"I sha'n't budge from this room—honour bright!"

"But why——"

"The reason I ask," said Brown, "is that I want to fight you first. I can't manage it to-night. I've had a very trying week-end. But in the morning I shall be fit to take you on!"

Bolsover roared with laughter. "You—fight me!" he guffawed.

"Certainly!"

"You won't stand an earthly," said Skinner. "Bolsover will knock you into the middle of next week!"

"I'll chance that."

"Right-ho!" said Bolsover. "That's a bargain. We'll postpone our visit to the Head, and I'll meet you behind the chapel after brekker to-morrow morning."

"With gloves?" asked Brown.

"Yea. I should be had up for manslaughter if we went into it with bare fists. That's a deal, then? Come along, you fellows!"

Skinner & Co. trooped out of the room, and left Brown to himself. He extricated Rex from the cupboard, cast a despairing glance at the wreckage around him, and then threw himself on to his bed, so utterly wearied out that, despite his troubles, he was soon asleep.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Behind the Chapel!

FOR once in a way the clang of the rising-bell at Greyfriars was a welcome sound.

Bolsover had freely advertised the forthcoming fight; and when breakfast was over, all roads led to the familiar spot behind the chapel, where Greyfriars boys had fought for generations.

Brown was already there. His coat was off, and the faithful Rex was guarding it.

Opinions were divided as to the probable result of the fight. The fellows who knew little of Brown, and a great deal of Bolsover, considered the affair a dead cert for the latter. But Harry Wharton & Co., who had witnessed some of Brown's remarkable exhibitions of strength and endurance, knew that he would fight gamely to the finish, and had a shrewd idea that he would succeed in wearing down the sledge-hammer attack of the bully of the Remove.

The interval between breakfast and morning school was not a long one, and it was desirable to get to business right away. Harry Wharton set the ball rolling by stepping forward to act as referee, and simultaneously Bob Cherry offered to be Brown's second. Bolsover placed himself under the care of Skinner, who urged him to "knock the beastly little upstart into kingdom come."

Harry Wharton turned to the crowd. "There's no need to go into details of the why and wherefore of this scrap," said Harry, in ringing tones. "It's a personal matter between Brown and Bolsover, and they prefer to settle it in the good old-fashioned style. Are you ready, you two?"

Brown nodded; and Bolsover gave a grin, which seemed to say that it didn't matter if he were ready or not, as he could lick his opponent blindfold.

"Time!"
The crowd surged forward excitedly. Their expectations were high.

Brown seemed to be the representative of Right—Bolsover of Might.

"Go it, ye cripples!" sang out Peter Todd.

Brown opened quietly; but it did not need the eye of an expert to see that he was "all there." He was getting his opponent's measure; and Bolsover, as blow after blow on his part failed to get home, began to feel distinctly uncomfort-

able. Was it possible that he had walked into a hornet's nest?

He gritted his teeth savagely. The prospect of having his colours lowered before the Form was like gall to him.

Honours were easy at the end of the first round; but Skinner was decidedly uneasy.

"He's playing with you, old man," he said emphatically.

"Is he, by Jove!" said Bolsover grimly. "He'll soon get tired of it, if that's the case. He's been lucky, that's all, and he's as slippery as a confounded eel! Take that sponge away, Skinner, you idiot! He hasn't marked me yet!"

"Coming events," murmured Peter Todd, who was standing near, "cast their shadows before."

"Time!" rapped out Wharton.

The second round was fiercely contested. Brown dropped his defensive tactics, and hit out. He had a knack of getting every ounce of strength into his blows. It was not the force of the arm alone that gave power to his punch. Every muscle and fibre of his body seemed to play its part.

But Brown was not yet definitely on top. Bolsover fought furiously, and a few of his smashing straight lefts found their mark. They would have floored a good many fellows there and then; but Brown was no weakling. He seemed able to stand unlimited punishment.

Both the combatants were breathing hard when they returned to the knees of their seconds. It had been a gruelling game of give-and-take in that second round, and it was obvious that, carried out at such a pace, the fight could not last a great deal longer.

Brown's name was in everybody's mouth. Even Harry Wharton & Co. had not expected to see him put up such a spirited fight as this. His pluck seemed to be without limit.

"Keep the home-fires burning!" said Bob Cherry. "Give him gip, Browney, old man!"

The Third round was as hard fought as the second, and Bolsover was very much the worse for wear when it was over. One of his eyes was closed, and he was breathing more heavily than before. The fickle Skinner had already begun to lose faith in his champion.

The fourth round was what Peter Todd described as the "star turn." Brown gained the mastery over his man, and trounced him all the time, knocking him all over the ring.

The crowd roared their applause.

"You've got him this time!" chuckled Bob Cherry, as he set a miniature gale blowing with his towel. "He's beaten all ends up. All that's now required is the finishing-touch."

Bolsover staggered rather than walked up for the next round. In a dazed sort of way he realised that he had met his Waterloo. All hope of defeating his slim, unruffled, unassuming opponent had faded from his breast.

But there was pluck in Bolsover. Many fellows, knowing that certain defeat stared them in the face, would have thrown up the sponge earlier; but not so the burly Removeite. With all his faults, Bolsover possessed those bulldog characteristics which have taught the Hun many a bitter lesson in Flanders. He meant to see the thing through; and, had he but known it, Brown himself was admiring his courage at that moment.

Bolsover made a last desperate effort to retrieve his position, but all his clumsy blows were swept aside like chaff. And then, in the middle of the round, his defence fell to pieces altogether, and he was entirely at Brown's mercy.

He dropped his guard, and Brown, with

that relentless lightning punch of his, could have knocked him senseless.

But in boxing, as in other sports, chivalry plays a large part, and Brown, instead of making the fullest use of his opportunities, contented himself with a sharp uppercut, which, without great force or any viciousness behind it, proved quite effective.

Harry Wharton counted Bolsover out amid an impressive and profound silence. Then, when the count was over, the crowd burst into a ringing cheer—a cheer of wonder and enthusiasm—a cheer which fell like music upon Brown's ears.

Even Rex shared in the general applause. He barked with tremendous vigour, and leapt to lick his master's hand.

Bolsover rose slowly to his feet, and, advancing towards Brown, held out his hand.

"I don't know if you'd care to shake," he said, "after the beastly way I've created you—wrecking your room, and all that. But I promise you'll find me on your side after this. You're a real sportsman, if ever there was one! You could have hammered me to a pulp, but you chose not to take advantage. I can't undo what I've done, but I can at least keep off the grass in future. Will you shake?"

"Of course!" said Brown, fighting to keep back the lump which rose to his throat. "I scarcely expected this, Bolsover. You're a brick!"

And the hands of the victor and vanquished met in the grip of friendship.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Skinner. "Carry me home to die, somebody! This is too painful for words!"

"Remind you of the last act in some rotten love play!" sneered Stott.

"Absolutely!" agreed Snoop.

But no one took any notice of Skinner and Snoop and Stott. They were left to their own devices, but, despite the loss of Bolsover, their feeling towards the boy who called himself Brown was darker and more vindictive than ever.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

When a Boy's Down!

AMID the excitement of the early morning hour, Jack Brown had lost sight of the dark clouds that had marred the sky of his existence. His one end and aim had been to defeat Bolsover, and now that his task was accomplished, and the applause had died away, Brown found himself face to face once more with the stern realities of life.

He returned thoughtfully to his room. On rising that morning he had made a pathetic attempt to tidy it up and to create order out of chaos.

But Bolsover had done his work too well. Everything had been ruthlessly scrapped.

The room, which had once been so cheery and comfortable—a den to delight in—now presented a very dismal appearance. Brown could have wept as his eye dwelt on that scene of destruction.

Rex, who had been trying conclusions with a gigantic bone, trotted over to his master's side. His whole bearing was one of profound sympathy.

"Good old Rex!" said Brown, his face lighting up a little. "They sha'n't touch you!" he added fiercely. "If they do, I shall lose my wool absolutely, and Bolsover's licking this morning will be a picnic compared with what they'll go through!"

Brown sat down rather wearily on the couch. For the first time since his arrival at Greyfriars he felt disinclined for

work. Cares had crowded in upon him just lately; he was passing through troubled waters, and was called upon to endure much.

The Winchester week-end had not been a gay time. Far from it! For three days and three nights Brown had sat by the bedside of his mother, whom worry and illness had brought very low.

Brown loved his mother dearly, and it had cut him to the heart to see her so helpless.

He was thinking of her now as he sat there, and so absorbed in thought was he that he did not hear a heavy tread outside, followed by the window being thrust open.

"Letter for you, sonny!" came the voice of Blogg, the ancient postman.

Brown came suddenly to himself. He reached out eagerly for the letter, and ripped open the envelope.

A look of consternation came over his face as he read the straggling lines.

His mother was worse.

"Do not worry, dear Jack, on my account," she wrote. "My pain is mental, rather than physical. If only I had news of your poor father, instead of being kept in this agony of suspense, I am certain I should rally. As it is, I feel that I am sinking from day to day. My vitality and fortitude are at a low ebb. But, please God, we may hear something



soon. I have not abandoned hope, even though twelve long and dreary months have dragged by since—"

Brown could read no further. A sob came into his throat which he could not repress. That brave, smiling woman, his mother, had broken down at last! She had never unburdened her anguish of spirit in this way before. Even when things were at their worst, she had always shown her son a smiling countenance. Her pluck had been magnificent, stamping her as a heroine among women. And now—the barriers of endurance were breaking down. There was despair in her letter—despair and tragedy!

"Oh, mother!" murmured Brown, over and over again. "Would to Heaven I could help you!"

He clenched and unclenched his hands in his emotion.

"It's a hard life, this," he went on. "A year ago I regarded the world as a sort of recreation-ground. I see things differently now, by Jove! A battlefield is nearer the mark!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came the cheery tones of Bob Cherry. "Who talks of battlefields? Are you having a sort of thanksgiving for your victory over Bolsover, Brown? Why—great Scott! What's the matter?"

The Famous Five, who had been in the act of entering the room, stopped short on the threshold. They were looking in blank amazement, not at the room,

which they knew to have been wrecked, but at Brown's white face and tear-stained eyes.

"My dear old fellow!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, at length. "This is the last thing we should have expected, to see you looking down in the dumps like this!"

Brown conquered himself on the instant. A moment later he was smiling.

"You took me by surprise," he said. "I often mope like this when I'm alone. It's idiotic of me, I know, but—"

The captain of the Remove laid his hand on the speaker's shoulder.

"Look here, Brown," he said, "you're in trouble of some sort—pretty badly, too, I should say. You're not the sort of chap to crack up at nothing. We don't wish to be inquisitive, and we'll clear out at once if you prefer it. But it's not good for a fellow to nurse his troubles alone like this!"

"Hear, hear!" said Johnny Bull. "Wouldn't it be wiser to tell your uncles all about it, old man?"

Brown pointed to his mother's letter, which had fallen from his hand on to the floor.

"Read that," he said. "We'd prefer that you told us yourself," said Nugent. "Better than prying into your private correspondence."

"Very well," said Brown. "The reason I was blubbing just now was because of my mater. She's been ill over the week-end—very ill indeed—and I can do nothing to help her."

"Hard cheese!" murmured Johnny Bull sympathetically.

"It's severe mental strain," Brown went on. "She's worried herself to death about the pater."

The juniors looked up inquiringly. This was the first time Brown had volunteered any information on the subject of his father.

"Before the war," said Brown, "my pater was a master and football coach at a public school. He used to play for the Corinthians."

"Brown of the Corinthians!" exclaimed Wharton. "I've heard all about him. He was one of the finest wingers in the country!"

"And a year ago," said Brown—"a year ago to-day, as a matter of fact—he was taken prisoner by the Huns. He'd joined the Hampshires, and had only been in France a fortnight when it happened. We heard from him occasionally, and he was being treated pretty decently at the Hun camp. But after a few months the letters dropped off, and we began to think that he—that ho—"

Brown could not finish.

"We understand," said Wharton quietly. "It's rotten! But I shouldn't give up hope yet, if I were you. A hundred things might have happened. He may have escaped!"

"No such luck!" said Brown, with a faint smile.

There was a long pause.

"Is there other trouble besides that?" asked Nugent, at length.

"Yes. Money affairs got into a bad way. It became necessary for me to put my shoulder to the wheel and earn a little to keep things going. I found myself right up against it. I discovered, with a mighty shock, that there was practically nothing I could put my hand to. Clerking, engineering, and all that sort of thing were no good for me—I'd cared too much for games, and let the work slide. So I had to content myself with becoming a hoot-boy. It was a sacrifice of pride, I can tell you, but it was the only way. I couldn't let my mater starve. But it's the uncertainty about the pater that's the real trouble. Oh, I hate war—I loathe it from my

oul! There are some who like it. They're living like fighting-cocks, and have never known such prosperity. They've got no longing for what they call the outbreak of peace. It's the poor families like our own, who are struggling tooth-and-nail for existence, who feel the draught. I reckon—"

There was a sudden rush of feet without, and Peter Todd dashed into the room with a morning paper.

"Congrats!" he said to Brown. "Your identity's proved now beyond all question. The missing heir has been found!"

"Good!" said Brown.

The juniors scanned the paragraph which Peter Todd pointed out. It was very brief, as if the man who wrote it felt reproachful that such a startling disappearance, which had in it all the makings of a fine romance, should have ended in smoke:

"The Hon. Roy Hastings, whose sudden disappearance caused so much anxiety, has been found. It appears that he paid a visit to his uncle, Major Cobb-Webb, at Winchester, without his parents' knowledge. Happiness is once more restored to the house of Northern-court."

"The scream of it all is," said Peter Todd, "that Skinner and Snoop and Stott have just gone marching in to the Head to tell him that you're the Hon. Roy Hastings, and that you're here with ulterior motives."

"What!" gasped Brown.

"It's a fact! They'll get it in the neck, and serve 'em jolly well right! They've led you a dog's life during the last day or two, and a thundering good licking is just the thing they want!"

"Yes, rather!" exclaimed the Famous Five, in chorus.

"They won't persecute you any more after this!" said Harry Wharton emphatically. "Oh, hang! There goes the bell for morning school! See you later, Brown, old man! Keep a stiff upper lip, and hope for the best!"

"All serene!" said Brown, with a smile.

But it was a brief smile, for it faded from his face when Harry Wharton & Co. had gone, and he plunged once more into gloomy thought.

Life had little to offer just then, and it seemed as if he was destined to fight on in an atmosphere of cloud and storm, with never a glimmer of sunshine.

"Keep a stiff upper lip!" Wharton had said.

That was all very well in theory, but extremely difficult in practice; and Brown felt that he would have need of all his courage, tenacity, and endurance to face the troubles which surged about his head like waves.

Verily, there were black times in store for him, unless a miracle happened at the eleventh hour!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Miracle Happens!

"I'll make it as hot for the beast as possible!" said Skinner.

"Leave the jaw to me."

Snoop and Stott nodded, and followed their leader along the passage towards the Head's study.

Skinner had tried to persuade Bolsover to take part in the cowardly conspiracy against Jack Brown. But Bolsover remained firm as a rock. He had promised Brown that he would be on his side in future. And he was as good as his word.

Skinner rapped on the door of the Head's study, and the deep voice of Dr. Locke bade him enter.

"Screw up your courage!" hissed Skinner to his companions. "And back

me up if I happen to make any bloomers!"

"Rely on us!" said Stott.

The Head seemed surprised to see the three juniors. He was not accustomed to early-morning calls.

"Well, Skinner," he said, rather impatiently, "do you wish to speak to me on an important matter? If not, you had better defer this interview until after morning lessons."

Skinner didn't like this reception. But he had steeled himself to go through with the business, and, clearing his throat, he began.

"It's about Brown, sir!"

"Brown?"

"Yes—the new boot-boy, sir. Of course, his name isn't Brown, really. It would interest you to know, sir, that—"

"Go on!"

"That Brown is only an assumed name, sir," said Skinner desperately. "This fellow is playing a low game of some sort. I believe he intends rifling your safe—"

he imagined to be the crowning statement of his sensational story.

"His name, sir," he said, "is Hastings—the Hon. Roy Hastings!"

"You are assured that this is a fact?"

"Oh, absolutely, sir!"

"Then I am afraid I must disillusion you."

The Head picked up the copy of the "Times" which lay on his desk, and indicated a paragraph—the paragraph which Peter Todd had taken to Brown's room a short time before.

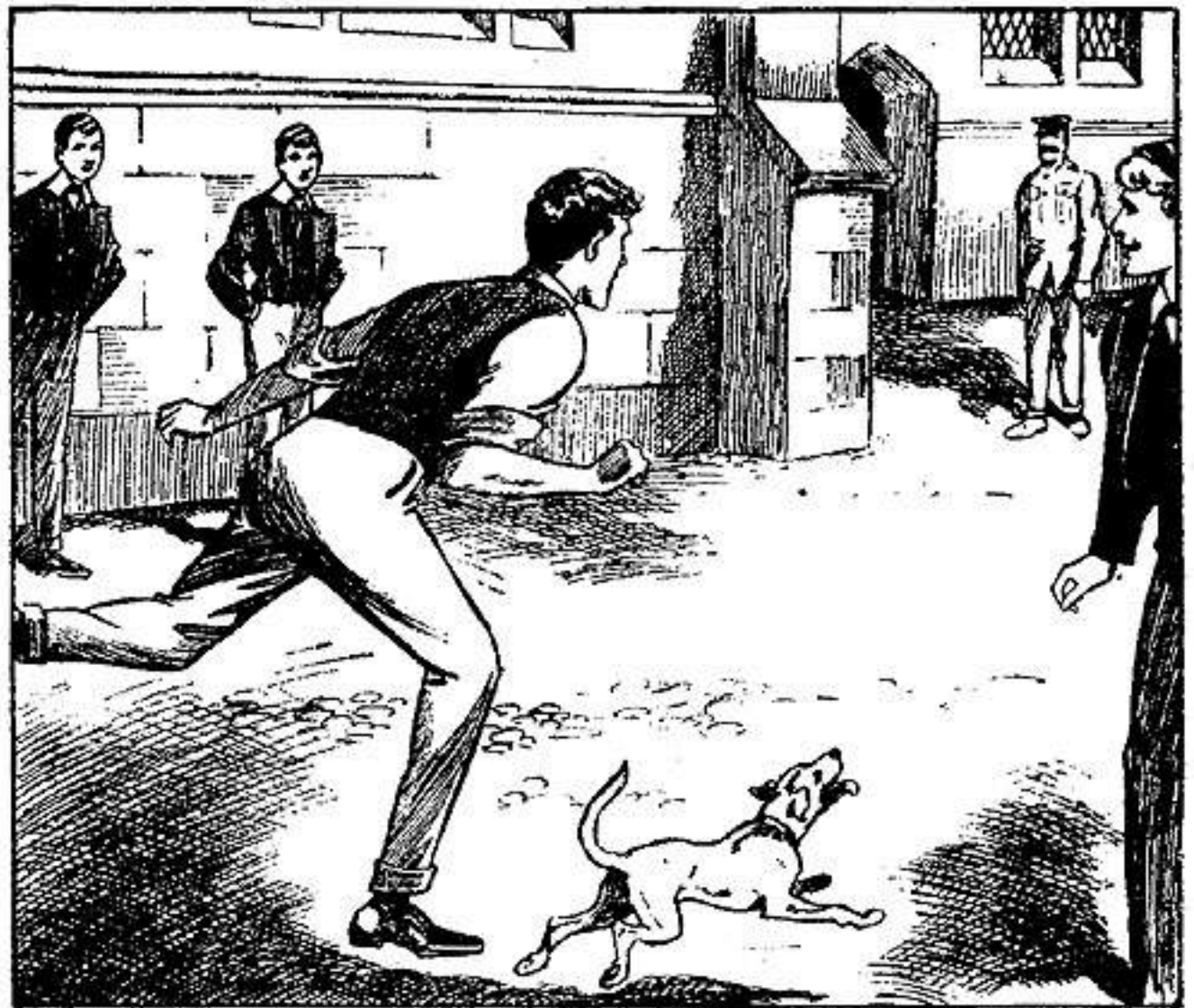
The cads of the Remove stared helplessly at the printed words.

Roy Hastings—the real Roy Hastings—had returned to the bosom of his family! Then Brown was not an impostor, after all!

"Oh, my aunt!" murmured Skinner.

His knees were knocking together with fear. He had said too much; and now he must pay the penalty.

"I can only regard your absurd story as a deliberate attempt to injure Brown's character," said the Head sternly. "I shall not probe this affair too deeply."



From a German prison! (See Chapter 11.)

"Or sneaking some valuable manuscripts!" suggested Stott.

"He may be a spy!" threw in Snoop.

The Head grew alarmed. He looked hard at the three juniors.

"If I find that you have concocted this story for a joke, and that it has no foundation of truth, things will go hard with you!" he said.

"It's quite true, sir, I assure you!" declared Skinner. "We had our suspicions from the start, but we meant to make perfectly sure before we laid the facts before you."

"You say this boy's name is not Brown?" demanded the Head.

"It certainly isn't, sir."

"Then who is he?"

"He's an earl's son, sir," said Skinner. "Kicked out of the family, by the look of things. He's thoroughly dishonest, I should say."

The Head looked rather grim.

"You have not yet told me the boy's name," he said.

Skinner paused before delivering what

There is no need. I have a very shrewd idea, Skinner, that you and your wretched accomplices have been constantly persecuting Brown, and you have come here with the sole object of doing him an injury. You hoped that I should credit your cock-and-bull story, and make things unpleasant for Brown. On the contrary—the Head reached for his cane—the unpleasantness will be for you. Stand forward, Skinner!"

With a groan, the cad of the Remove obeyed.

"Hold out your hand!"

"Please, sir, I—I should like to point out—"

"Nothing you say now will lessen the severity of your punishment," said the Head. "You have behaved in a most despicable manner throughout."

Skinner gingerly extended his hand. Swish, swish, swish!

"Ow-ow-ow!"

"Now the other!" panted the Head.

Skinner had to go through the mill. He had been licked before, many a time.

and off; but this was no common or garden licking. His hands seemed to be on fire by the time the Head had finished.

"Now, Stott!"

The young rascal addressed came forward in fear and trembling. Nothing would have suited him better than if the floor had suddenly opened and swallowed him up.

But the floor remained firm, and so did the Head. Stott went through the same ordeal as Skinner, and yelled more loudly. It seemed to certain juniors who were hovering in the Close that pig-killing was in progress.

As for Sidney James Snoop, he fervently hoped that the Head's arm would grow weary by the time he had dealt with Stott; but, on the contrary, the Head had got fairly set, and the quality of mercy was lacking quite as much during Snoop's caning as in the case of the other two.

"There!" panted the Head. "I trust that will be a lesson to you, and a warning never again to slander a boy who, despite his lowly position, is worth the whole of you lumped together! Come back, Skinner! How dare you leave my study until I have finished speaking? I shall expect you to apologise to Brown, in my presence."

The Head rang his bell, and sent for Brown.

"Ah, come in, Brown!" he said, a few moments later. "These boys have so far forgotten themselves as to trump up an absurd charge against you. They insinuated that you had come to Greyfriars with dishonourable motives, and I am happy to state that I do not believe their story. Now, Skinner, you will apologise, in the name of all three, for your shameful conduct."

Skinner loathed the idea of eating humble pie thus; but he had no desire to renew his acquaintance with the Head's cane. He turned to Brown.

"We're sorry," he said briefly.

Brown nodded.

"I bear no malice," he replied.

"That will do," said the Head. "Now you may go."

Out in the passage, Skinner spun round upon the boot-boy, more in amazement than in anger.

"So you're not Hastings, after all!" he exclaimed. "You really are plain Brown. Blessed if this doesn't prance off with the whole giddy biscuit factory! I made sure we were on a good thing, and when I saw in the paper that the real heir had been found, you could have knocked me down with a feather!"

"You should have taken my word at the start," said Brown. "It would have saved you something."

"What beats me," said Skinner, "is this. You remember the first day you were here, when you astonished the natives on the footer ground? Well, you happened to drop a handkerchief, and I picked it up. The initials on it were 'R. H.'"

Brown laughed.

"I remember," he said. "It was one sent me by mistake from a laundry."

"Well, I'm jiggered! And I would have sworn it belonged to Roy Hastings! If only——"

"Come on!" growled Stott. "We shall be late for lessons as it is, and Quelchy will be flying at our throats."

"Who on earth's that?" exclaimed Snoop suddenly.

A man could be seen coming in at the school gates—a man in a tattered khaki uniform. He looked extremely muddy

and war-weary, and his left arm hung limply at his side.

The Removites glanced at him with nothing more than idle curiosity; but Jack Brown was like one transfixed.

For full ten seconds he stood thus, as if in a trance. Then, with an uncontrollable cry of delight, he darted forward.

"Father!"

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Good-bye to Greyfriars!

JACK BROWN had never covered a hundred yards so quickly in his life as he did then. He fairly flashed over the intervening space, and Rex, who had sprung suddenly from nowhere, barked joyously in his wake.

"Oh, dad!" exclaimed Brown jubilantly. "Is it really you? I—I can't believe my own eyes!"

"It's me, right enough," said the warrior, with a smile. "Back from the jaws of death, my boy."

"But how——"

"It's a long story, Jack. Words could not sufficiently picture the hardships and horrors I've been through over there. Twelve months in a German camp! The first few were smooth enough, but the rest—— Well, there are some things a man simply daren't talk about."

"And you escaped?"

"I did. It was my third attempt, and Providence saw me through."

"Come along to my room," said Jack.

TO THE BOYS AT THE FRONT!

If you are unable to obtain this publication regularly, please tell any news-vendor to get it from

Messageries HACHETTE et Cie.,
111, Rue Reaumur,
PARIS.

"We can jaw without fear of interruption there."

Father and son passed into the building.

"I say!" exclaimed Brown. "You look fearfully fagged out. Would you like some grub?"

"The mere mention of the word makes me feel like a cannibal. I've been living on scratch meals for the past year, and, as you will see, it hasn't improved my appearance. I could have got something to eat at Folkestone, but I should have missed my train, and I was dead keen on seeing you, Jack."

Brown made his father comfortable on the couch in his sitting-room, and then sped off to the kitchen.

The cook regarded him sternly.

"Which you 'aven't done a stroke of work all the mornin'——" she began.

"And I don't intend to!" said Brown cheerfully. "Look here, cook. My pater's home from France—or from Germany, rather! He's had as ghastly a time as you can imagine, and it's marvellous how he's come through alive. He's here now—hungry as a hunter. Will you bustle around and get him some grub?"

This was an appeal which went right to cook's heart. There were few things she would not have done for a British Tommy.

"All right," she said. "I'll do some rashers and tomatoes, and send them along by one of the maids."

"That's the style!" said Brown.

He returned to his father's side, regarding him with affection and concern.

"Your arm, dad!" he burst out sud-

denly, noting how limp the limb was hanging. "Have you been hit?"

The soldier shook his head.

"It's paralysed," he said simply. "I get my final discharge from the Service now. Don't look so scared, Jack! It's a good thing, really. I shall be able to get into harness again, and set things straight at home. I've had my fill of soldiering. It's a great life for those who have no ties, but I'm too much of a home-bird to want to be away long. And that reminds me. How thoughtless of me not to have asked before! How is your mother?"

"She was pretty low when I was home last week-end," said Jack. "Does she know that you're safe in England?"

"Yes; I wired her from Folkestone."

"Splendid! The news will do her more good than all the doctors and tonics in the world!"

"I'm glad of that, Jack. And now—why, bless my soul!"

A maid entered at that moment bearing a tray, on which were rashers of bacon and tomatoes, bread-and-butter and cake, and a steaming pot of coffee.

"Bless my soul!" said Brown's father again. He had lived for many months on the shortest of rations, and the sight of a good feed seemed to fairly take his breath away.

"Pile in!" said Brown. "And don't talk yet! I want to see you enjoy yourself."

And Brown of the Corinthians, back from semi-starvation, certainly did enjoy himself. Every mouthful was a luxury.

When the meal was over, he turned to his son.

"We'll be getting home now, I think, Jack," he said. "Your days as a blacker of boots are over. It's been a rough time for you, I guess."

"Oh, I don't know," said Brown. "I've had some fun. Played footer for the village, knocked out one of the best boxers in the Remove, and was suspected for some time of being an earl's son in disguise! Not a bad record—what?"

"It's not been all sunshine, I'm sure," returned his father. "But, of course, you'd be sure to hide the seamy side. That was always your way."

When Harry Wharton & Co. trooped out from morning lessons they were in time to catch Jack Brown and his father departing for the railway-station.

"My innings is up," said Brown, with a smile. "This is my dad, you fellows—broke in the wars, but merry and bright for all that. He escaped from a prisoners' camp in Germany."

"Hurrah!"

There was no mistaking the way in which the juniors viewed the situation. Cheer upon cheer rang out on the morning air, and the loudest voice of all was Bolsover's!

"This'll put things right at home, won't it, Brown?" said Bob Cherry. "I hope you'll live happy ever after, old chap!"

"I hope so," smiled Brown. "Good-bye, you fellows—and good luck! I sha'n't forget your kindness to me in a hurry!"

The juniors watched father and son pass through the old gateway and disappear down the road; and the Famous Five, in particular, felt very sorry to lose Brown. Despite his humble position, he had been like one of themselves, and he had come through a very trying ordeal with flying colours!

They would not soon forget the Gentleman Ranker!

(Don't miss "AN OLD BOY AT GREYFRIARS!"—next Monday's grand story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)

THE GREYFRIARS GALLERY.

No. 44.—POLICE-CONSTABLE TOZER:

TOZER is not a really important figure in the Greyfriars stories. Yet he comes into them pretty often, and generally in an amusing manner. Not that Tozer intends to be amusing. Nothing of the sort! He takes himself very seriously indeed. In Friardale he represents the law. He calls it "the lor"; but no matter!

There is no reader of these pages but can remember, one thinks, the days when the word "policeman" was to him a word of terror.

The writer, at least, remembers well the awe with which that word filled his childish mind. One's mother or one's nurse told naughtiness that the policeman would be fetched to quell it; and the very sight of the man in blue after that was a matter for trembling, however good one's conscience might chance to be for the moment!

But one got over it. Shall he who writes confess to the unlawful slide made along the paved pathway that ran between walls to the churchyard of his native village, made in flagrant defiance of him whom we had come to call "the bobby"? The awe had gone when one talked of him thus. And then, too, one had fought with and thrashed his boys. And how could he be so great and mighty a man if they were to be conquered? Surely, had he been all we thought him, his boys had been fellows invincible, rare blades, heroes! But they were nothing of the sort—just boys a bit below the average, in truth, who admitted defeat before they were really hurt. And there was another representative of "the lor"—as Tozer has it—who had daughters, quite pretty girls— But that's another story!

The Greyfriars boys generally have no awe where P.-c. Tozer is concerned. They have outgrown that phase. The policemen of their childhood days might be great and dreadful figures, but Tozer is nothing of the kind. They jape Tozer. He is merely a fat and rather silly man in blue uniform, with a rooted suspicion that whenever he sees a cap of white and blue on the head of a boy under sixteen or so mischief is afoot.

Tozer reported Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent to the Head for "imperence," and they had to apologise—for the Head must uphold authority, of course. That rankled a bit. But they took it out of Tozer afterwards. He got a fall when he pulled up Billy Bunter for the crime of having cigarettes in his possession, and could not prove it. Bunter had gone to fetch cigarettes all right. Skinner had sent him, passing on an errand of Loder's. But the tobacconist had seen Tozer lurking—Tozer is not a first-class sleuthhound—and had substituted chocolate! Then Loder sent the guileless Alonzo to the tobacconist's for chocolate; but the tradesman had been put up to what it meant, and Tozer caught Lonzy—a real capture this time—and haled that suffering innocent before the Head. Whereupon Lonzy, without any intention of telling tales, gave Loder away most completely!

Then there was the time when Harry Wharton spoofed Tozer about a football. Tozer chased him under the absurd belief that he had stolen the ball, and Harry ran as long as it suited him to run, and then let the stout constable come up and showed him the receipt.

Tozer took Bulstrode minor in charge, and marched him to the school when that erring youth was playing the blade. Tozer could not be bribed to let him go—as Johnny Bull said, Tozer could not be bribed in public. He was quite inflexible on that occasion, anyway.

Greatly down on smoking is Tozer, but he has an unfortunate way of suspecting the wrong people, and he was done brown when he took Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent before Dr. Locke, and it turned out that there was only moss in the pipe, and that the cigarette was made of brown paper. But the policeman stuck to his guns. He had known youngsters smoke brown paper before then. (So have I. But I don't recommend it as a nice smoke, any more than I do cane, which many aspiring smokers have used for a first essay!) Bob and Frank got a hundred lines of Virgil each for that trick, so Tozer scored slightly.

The man in blue was fetched to deal with Bob and Inky when they were holding the

fort ("Bob Cherry's Barring-Out"—perhaps the best story which has ever appeared in the MAGNET). But a red-hot poker proved too much for his courage. Quite lately we have seen him brought in by Mr. Jeffreys to quell revolt, but getting the worst of the deal.

It was with Tozer that Mauly, in his bath-chair, collided on that wild rush downhill caused by the carelessness of the fags. And it was Tozer who was not pleased with Peter Todd when that engaging youth said that he had heard a bad boy say that Tozer was an old donkey. It had quite shocked Peter, of course; and, as he told Tozer, he had chidden the bad boy at once. But the malefactor had gone from bad to worse by saying that Tozer's face was enough to make a cat laugh. And Peter's reported answer—which was to the effect that a man could not help his face—failed to mollify the constable in the least. He even went so far as to suspect Peter of pulling his leg!

Tozer shared in the craze when all Greyfriars and Friardale went treasure-hunting. He was caught digging in the lane with Frank Nugent's trowel. He said he was digging for worms; but the Famous Five asked awkward questions as to how he had come by the trowel. And Vernon-Smith put marking-ink in Tozer's helmet, and the unconscious policeman presented a rather queer spectacle



when he went to report the boys to the Head for interfering with him.

Then there was the time when Coker had rigged himself up as "Convict 99" in the great drama, and Tozer, hunting for a real escaped prisoner, tried to arrest the great Horace. Tozer was bitter that time. He went so far as to say that if he had his way all boys should be drowned at birth!

But the Remove did Tozer a real good turn when they helped him to capture Slippery Jim, the scoundrel who had had Mr. Hiram K. Fish, Fishy's "popper," in tow. Unaided, Tozer would certainly not have brought off that coup.

He never found out who were the three Suffragettes—Miss Bunkhurst, Miss Puncher, and Miss Jorkins—by whom he was so roughly handled. But they answered at roll-call to the names of Wharton, Cherry, and Bolsover major.

Poor old Tozer! He will never feel really friendly to Greyfriars, one fears. But there is no real malice on the part of the boys; and perhaps Tozer does not hate them as much as he thinks he does. For the pompous old chap is not really bad-hearted. No doubt he has his good points, though they don't come out in the evidence. If he has not, he is very unlike the ordinary run of policemen, for in all seriousness I declare that I have met very few men indeed of that calling who were not good fellows; and I have known more than one man in blue whom I was glad to call a friend.

Extracts from "THE GREYFRIARS HERALD" and "TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY."

TRIMBLE'S NIGHT OUT!

By DICK JULIAN.

I.

"BUZZ out!"

Clive and Cardew and Levison all said that together as Baggy Trimble came into Study No. 9.

As a matter of fact, fellows generally say that when Trimble puts his fat face into a study, or else they buzz something at him as a hint to clear.

Naturally, Levison & Co. supposed that Trimble had come to borrow a bob or two, or to propose some dodge for getting out of the food regulations. Trimble is that sort.

But Trimble didn't buzz out. He rolled in, and closed the door after him.

"I've come here to speak to you, Levison," he said. "You others may as well clear off—it's rather private."

"Cheeky ass!" said Cardew.

"Fathead!" remarked Clive.

"Never mind these fellows," said Levison, grinning. "You can ask me before them to lend you a half-crown, and I can refuse before them."

"Tain't that!" said Baggy loftily. "Do you think I've come here to borrow money?"

"Of course."

"Well, I haven't!" roared Trimble. "I can get all the money I want by dropping a line to my pater at Trimble Hall."

"Then you might trouble Trimble Hall a little more, and us a little less," said Clive.

"The fact is, I've had a big tip from my uncle," said Baggy.

"Bow-wow!"

"Two quid!" said Trimble.

"Rats!"

"And here they are!" roared Trimble indignantly. And he flourished two pound notes under the noses of Study No. 9.

"By gad!" said Cardew. "It's true! And you've come here at once to settle up your little debts, Trimble? That's very straightforward of you."

"Ahem! I—I haven't exactly come for that," said Trimble, taken aback. "I—I'm going to settle, of course—in a—a day or two! The fact is, I expect to have plenty of money soon. That's what I want to speak to Levison about, if you fellows will clear off."

"You're not going to get plenty of money out of me, if that's what you mean," grinned Levison.

"Tain't that! I want a little talk with you—in private," said Trimble mysteriously.

"Stay where you are, you fellows. You can get on, or get out, Trimble. I give you two minutes," said Levison, laying down his pen. Study No. 9 were at prep, and Trimble ought to have been.

Baggy Trimble hesitated.

"Well, I suppose you fellows will keep it dark," he said, at last. "I don't want it jawed about, for the Housemaster to hear. The fact is, Levison, I want you to give me an introduction."

"A which?"

"An introduction—to a certain place."

"Eh? Where?"

"The Green Man," said Trimble, lowering his voice.

The three juniors stared blankly at Baggy Trimble.

"The—the Green Man?" said Levison, almost faintly, at last.

Trimble nodded and grinned.

"That's it! Of course, I know you're pally with those sporting chaps at the Green Man. You spoof the chaps that you've reformed, and all that, but I know better, you see. You can't take me in, like you do Tom Merry and the rest," said Baggy, wagging his head very sagaciously at Levison.

"You silly fat duffer!" shouted Levison; while Clive and Cardew chortled.

"Oh, come off it!" said Baggy. "Now, you know I'm a keen fellow—"

"My hat!"

"Sharp as a razor, and got all my wits about me, and all that," continued Baggy.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 509.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you know, there's nothing to cackle at," said Trimble. "You know I'm about the keenest blade at St. Jim's, if you come to that. Well, I'm going to use my brains, and make some tin, now that I've got capital. I'm a regular corker at nap and banker, and, in fact, I'm cut out for a regular sport—daring and coolness and nerve and—and all that, you know. That's me!"

"Oh, gad!" said Cardew.

"I'm going out of bounds to-night," said Trimble, with a very doggish air. "Same as you do, Levison—or used to—like Cutts of the Fifth, you know. Well, I want you to come with me. Mind, I'm going, anyway. I dare say they'll be pleased to see a sporting fellow, even if I have to introduce myself. But I'd rather you came with me. And I expect to make a good thing of it. See?"

Levison gasped.

Trimble of the Fourth sometimes smoked cigarettes with Racke and Crooke, and fellows of their sort, and was a dingy young rascal in his way. But this was the first time he had proposed to break bounds at night to go pub-haunting. Now that he had a couple of pounds all at once, Trimble was ambitious to start as a regular sport—as he called it. And he seemed to think it quite likely that he would win money in a game of cards with the sharpers at the Green Man. He had confidence in his own cleverness.

Cardew and Clive simply stared at Trimble, undecided whether to laugh, or to bundle him neck and crop out of the study.

Levison looked thoughtful.

"You're going, anyway?" he asked.

"Yes, rather!"

"You'll get flogged if you're found out."

Trimble sniffed.

"I sha'n't get found out! I'm too jolly keen for that. You never get found out, Levison."

"I don't do that kind of thing, you fat idiot!"

Trimble winked.

"See any green in my eye?" he inquired. "That yarn's good enough for Tom Merry or D'Arcy, you know. It won't wash with me."

Levison's eyes gleamed for a moment. But he went on calmly:

"You want me to help you out of bounds to-night?"

"That's it."

"And take you to the Green Man, and introduce you to the low blackguards there?"

"The sporting chaps—yes."

"And if I don't help you you'll go alone?"

"You bet!"

"You specially want to leave your two pounds at the Green Man to-night?"

"Rats! I'm a regular corker at any card game," said Trimble. "I haven't the slightest doubt that I shall skin them—skin 'em clean!"

"Well, it's a pity to stop a regular corker when he wants to go on the randan," said Levison thoughtfully. "What time do you want to go?"

"Say ten o'clock—all safe by then."

"I'll stay awake," said Levison. "Now let me get on with my prep."

"Right-bo!" said Trimble. And he left the study looking very satisfied.

Levison's study-mates stared at him.

"You're not going to help that fat idiot to go out blagging, Levison?" exclaimed Clive.

"Isn't it a pity to disappoint him?" asked Levison. "If he wants a night out, let him have a night out."

"Why, you ass—"

"Look here, what's the game?" asked Cardew. "You're not going to help him to go blagging at the Green Man?"

"Well, I don't suppose he'll get so far as the Green Man," grinned Levison. "My idea is to make him learn that the roads aren't

safe for a kid at night, and he may chuck up blagging after lights-out. Suppose a couple of footpads set on him—"

"What?"

"I fancy after that Baggy will be glad to keep in the dormitory after lights-out—what?"

"Yes. But—"

"Well, that's going to happen, if you two fellows will lend me a hand," said Levison. "It's a good deed, you know—saving a howling idiot from going on the downward path."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Study No. 9 chortled in chorus over the good deed. Before bed-time Levison went along to Tom Merry's study to borrow some of the props of the Junior Dramatic Society. That evening Baggy Trimble was brimming with glee, and he told about a dozen fellows in confidence what he was going to do after lights-out. Levison told them in confidence what he was going to do, too, so quite a number of fellows were looking forward to Trimble's night out with great anticipations.

II.

"WAKE up!"

Baggy Trimble had intended to be wide awake at ten o'clock.

As a matter of fact, he fell asleep about a minute after Kildare had seen lights out at half-past nine, and at ten he was snoring. But a shake woke him up, and he blinked round in the darkness.

"Groogh! Wharrer marrer? What's that?" he mumbled.

"Ten o'clock!" said Levison's voice in the dark.

"Oh, all right!"

Trimble turned out and dressed. Levison was dressed already. It was very dark in the dormitory. Levison led the way, and they tiptoed out and along the passage to the lower box-room.

Levison opened the window, and so Trimble did not notice that it was already unfastened.

"Come on, Baggy!"

"I'm coming!" gasped Baggy.

It wasn't easy for Baggy to climb out of a window; he had so much weight to carry.

But he did get out, and dropped on the leads, and Levison very kindly helped him to the ground.

They scuttled away in the dark.

Baggy Trimble was feeling quite important, and full of beans. He felt that he was like Racke and Cutts of the Fifth—a regular goey sport. He was looking forward to that little game at the Green Man with tremendous excitement.

"Bunk me up, Levison!" he whispered, as they reached the wall. "I'll go first, or I can't get up!"

Levison chuckled.

He bunked Baggy Trimble up, and Baggy gasped, and sprawled over the wall. He rolled over, and held on, and then dropped into the road and sat down.

"Ow!" he gasped.

"All serene?" asked Levison, looking down from the wall.

"Yow-ow!"

"Broken anything?" chortled Levison.

"Nunno!" gasped Baggy. "I'm all right!"

He scrambled up, panting for breath. Levison was still looking down from the wall.

"Come on!" said Baggy.

"What's that dark shadow on the road behind you?" asked Levison. "Is somebody there?"

"Oh, crumbs!"

Baggy Trimble spun round like a humming-top. There were trees on the other side of the road, and it was very dark under them.

Baggy Trimble wasn't a hero. He blinked into the deep shadows with his heart thumping, and his heart nearly went down into his boots as two moving shadows appeared under the trees.

"Oh, dear!" gasped Baggy.

Two dark forms came out into the road.

They were wearing long black cloaks, and had masks on their faces.

"Your money or your life!" said a deep voice.

"Stand and deliver!"

Baggy Trimble collapsed against the school wall, his fat knees knocking together. He hadn't expected anything like this. At that moment he would have given his food allowance for a year to be safe back in the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Oh, dear! I say, Levison— Yow-ow!"

"Hands up!" thundered one of the masked men. "Ere, Jim, knock 'im on the 'ead with your life-preserver!"

Trimble made a jump away from the wall as they rushed on him.

He couldn't climb the wall and get back to the school. He had to run, and he bolted up the road.

Behind him sounded a steady patter of feet.

The masked men were pursuing him!

Trimble put on speed. He was so scared that he hardly knew what he was doing. He tumbled into the ditch once, and dragged himself out again, squelching with mud. He shed mud on all sides as he rolled on, running his hardest.

But the footsteps were gaining on him.

"Shoot!" he heard a deep voice say behind him.

Baggy Trimble gasped, and collapsed on the road. He hadn't another yard left in his fat legs if he was going to be shot the next moment.

He lay there in the dust, snorting like a grampus, and the two masked footpads ran on past him, apparently not seeing him in the dark.

Their footsteps died away up the road.

Baggy Trimble sat up, gasping like old bellows. He could scarcely believe in his good luck at first. But the ruffians were gone, and the way was clear back to the school.

Baggy was not thinking of the Green Man now. He had no desire to walk a mile in the dark for a little game with the sporting gents. He was only thinking of getting safe within the walls of St. Jim's before those two murderous ruffians could get hold of him.

He shook in every limb as he dragged himself up. Only fear of the footpads enabled

him to put one fat leg before the other. He gasped and panted and gurgled all the way back to the school. And suddenly, just as he had nearly reached the wall, he heard a sound of footsteps on the lonely road.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Baggy.

He put on a desperate spurt, and got to the wall.

He hoped that Levison would still be there. Without help he couldn't climb the wall from outside. And the footsteps were drawing nearer. He stopped to see if Levison was there, intending to run on if he wasn't. But Levison was there!

"That you, Baggy?" came a whisper from above.

"Groogh! Yes! Help me in!"

"Any hurry?"

"They're after me!" shrieked Trimble.

"Help me in!"

Levison didn't seem to be in a hurry, however.

"Who are after you?" he asked calmly.

"Yow-ow! Help me in! They're going to rob and murder me! Yow-ow-ow!"

"You'll wake the school at that rate, Baggy."

"Yow-ow! Help me in, or I'll go and ring up the gate!" spluttered Trimble.

"Give us your paw!"

Baggy reached up, and Levison helped him from above. Baggy wasn't a light-weight, and Levison had all his work cut out to drag him up the wall. Luckily, Trimble got a grip on the top, and dragged himself up. He lay across the wall on his waistcoat, gasping for breath.

He couldn't stir another inch—till he heard a deep voice on the road:

"Here he is! Seize his ankles and drag him down! I've got my knife ready!"

When he heard that Baggy Trimble moved as if he had suddenly been electrified. He fairly rolled over the wall, and found himself sitting on the grass-plot inside.

He felt safe there, and he lay and pumped in breath for a good five minutes. Levison waited for him. Thrilling as it all was, Levison did not seem to be alarmed or excited.

"Come on, Trimble!" he said at last. "I dare say they've cleared off, and we can get along to the Green Man."

"You—you—you dangerous idiot!" spluttered Trimble. "Do you think I'm going out

again to-night, you silly chump? I'm going straight back to the dormitory, you raving maniac!"

"But what about the little game?"

"Yah!"

That was all Trimble's answer as he puffed his way to the School House.

Levison followed him. It seemed an age to Baggy Trimble before he got into the Fourth Form dormitory again, and he could have wept with relief when he plumped into his bed.

"Hallo! What's all that?" came Blake's voice from his bed. "Anybody up?"

"Only Trimble!" said Levison. "He's been out on the tiles, but he decided to come home before the milk in the morning."

"I've been nearly murdered!" gasped Trimble. "There were two awful footpads on the road—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to cackle at! I've been nearly murdered! Luckily, I knocked them down before they could use their knives—"

"Knocked them down!" ejaculated Cardew's voice.

Cardew and Clive had just come into the dormitory very quietly, but Trimble naturally couldn't see them in the dark. He hadn't the least suspicion that Levison's pals had been out of doors at all.

"Knocked them down, Trimble?" exclaimed Clive.

"Yes, rather!" Baggy was recovering himself now. "I faced them—you know what a plucky chap I am—"

"Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I gave one my left, and the other my right!" said Trimble. "They fell like—like felled oxen. Then I came in again—quite calmly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I don't see anything to cackle at!" said Trimble crossly.

But the other fellows did; and the whole dormitory was in a cackle from end to end.

And Baggy Trimble never could understand afterwards how it was that whenever he told the story of his thrilling night out his hearers only cackled. But it is likely to be Trimble's last night out, as well as his first, I think.

THE END.

KEEPING IT DARK!

By FRANK NUGENT.

"BUT, above all, we mustn't let Bunter know!"

We—the Famous Five—were gathered together in Study No. 1, engaged in earnest discussion, when Harry Wharton uttered that admonishment.

It was Wednesday afternoon, a half-holiday, but the drizzling weather kept us indoors.

The subject of our conversation was Chumgum's Circus—not Bunter. The former had recently pitched itself on Courtfield Common, as was its annual custom.

The villagers wouldn't have debarred themselves of at least one night at the show for worlds, and we ourselves were awfully keen on going.

But the Head's views and ours did not tally in that respect. Dr. Locke was no loyal advocate of circuses, and had put Chumgum's jolly little show—perhaps "circus" is a misnomer, as horses had ceased to perform—strictly out of bounds.

Nevertheless, we meant to go, even though we should be compelled to break bounds in order to do so. To-night was the last night—it was now or never!

"Keep it dark from Bunter, whatever you do," he said anxiously. "You remember the last time the circus came? He was so fascinated with the star turn—the gorging one, you know—that the fat young ass ran away from school and joined the circus. But for old Prout we might never have had him back—not that that would have been any great loss! But it would never do for that to occur again, and perhaps get the young idiot sacked, would it?"

We agreed that it wouldn't.

"If he knows we are going he's bound to follow us," said Bob Cherry sagely. "As you say, the thing is to keep him in the dark. We don't want our prize porker to desert us and become a professional grub-eater in a circus."

The circus was a great success this year. The wonderful grub-eater, billed as the "Human Boa-constrictor," was going great guns, we had heard. He could eat chops and tarts and joints of meat at such a rate and in such quantities that the stupefied audience could only gasp open-mouthed and wonder whether they were watching a man or a mammoth. His nightly performance was a great attraction, and the cause of a mighty increase in the takings of Chumgum's Circus.

We had no doubt—indeed, we knew from experience—that Bunter would fairly fall over himself for the chance of filling a post like this—and filling himself as part of the work!

"There's Bunter, yonder!" I said, pointing out of the window at the obese Owl of the Remove as he came rolling across the Close.

"Great Scott! He's passed Mrs. Mimble's without going in!" exclaimed Bob. "Who says the age of miracles is past?"

"I guessfully suppose that he has given the esteemed dame upfully so far as the cashing of ludicrous and imaginary postal-orders in advance is concerned," grinned the nabob.

"But one would think he'd have looked in just to satisfy his beastly inquisitiveness," grunted Bob. "He needs curing of that complaint, and, by Jove, I've got the very wheeze for doing it! Listen to this, you chaps! If it doesn't act as a first-rate curiosity-curer, I'll eat my hat! We'll spring it on him every time he pokes his nose into our affairs. Listen!"

The next few minutes were occupied in hurried whispering, which ended in all scampering out of the study except Bob and me.

"Here he is! I can hear his fairy footsteps coming along the passage," whispered Bob. Then, in a louder voice, he said: "We mustn't let Bunter know anything about this, Franky!"

The footsteps stopped. Bunter had heard!

A moment later a pair of large spectacles peered round the door.

"I say, you fellows, is it a feed?" said Bunter, entering the study. "Where is it?"

"Bah! 'Tis no feed, Bunter!" said Bob Cherry, in deep, sepulchral tones. "'Tis a dark and deadly secret which will remain locked in our bosoms for the rest of our lives!"

"I say, out with it!" urged Bunter, all alive with curiosity. "You can rely on me to keep mum."

With an air of elaborate circumspection Bob went to the door, looked out, closed it carefully, and then tiptoed to the window to see that it was shut properly. Then he approached Bunter, and, in low tones, hissed:

"Mr. Quelch and Mr. Prout went to the circus last night—"

"Eh?"

"And Mr. Quelch tried to get Mr. Prout in at half price—"

"What?"

"But the doorkeeper wasn't having any. However, he agreed to let them in at two for fivepence."

"Look here—" began Bunter.

"And when they got inside," went on Bob imperturbably, "they heard one man say to another, 'D'yer know, pard, Mr. Quelch and Mr. Prout went to the circus last night—'"

"What the dickens—"

"And Mr. Quelch tried to get Mr. Prout in at half price? But the doorkeeper wasn't having any. However, he agreed—"

Bunter glared at him wrathfully. "Look here, Bob Cherry, if this is your idea of a joke—"

"I say, he agreed to let them in at two for fivepence. And when they got inside they heard one man say to another—"

"Shut up!" roared Bunter.

"Not at all!" said Bob cheerfully. "Ho

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said, 'D'yer know, pard, Mr. Quelch and Mr. Prout—'

"What's that secret you were going to confide in me?" shrieked Bunter.

"This is it, of course. You're too impatient—you won't let me finish. He said, 'D'yer know, pard, Mr. Quelch and Mr. Prout went to the circus last night—'

Bunter gave a snort of disgust, and stamped out of the study, slamming the door behind him very rudely, and leaving us almost in hysterics.

In the passage he came across Johnny Bull. The latter was searching all the little nooks and crannies and crevices of the passage in a most mysterious manner. Bunter approached him inquisitively.

"I say, Bull—"

"Ah, you're the chap I'm looking for!" said Johnny impressively.

"Well, you didn't expect to find me in a mouse-hole, did you?" grunted Bunter, his voice queerly modulated between huffiness and eagerness. "What's the game?"

"Bunter, you are the only fellow in the whole of England to whom I would unburden my tortured soul!" Johnny's voice sank to a hoarse whisper, but we could hear it plainly. "I have a skeleton in the cupboard! You are the only one I can trust with it."

"Yes, yes!" said Bunter quickly, his round eyes glimmering.

"I know something—something terrible!" Johnny shuddered. "It is this. Mr. Quelch and Mr. Prout went to the circus last night—"

Bunter spluttered, and seemed on the verge of apoplexy. We had our study door a little ajar, and saw and heard all that took place. Johnny went on:

"And Mr. Quelch tried to get Mr. Prout in at half price. But the doorkeeper wasn't having any."

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"However, he agreed to let them in at two for fivepence; mark that—two for fivepence! It is of the utmost importance that you should take heed of that fact, for when they got inside they heard one man say to—"

But Bunter was fleeing down the passage as fast as his fat little legs could carry him. At the end of the passage he almost ran into Squiff.

Squiff was looking deeply troubled, and was glancing about him nervously. He appeared somewhat relieved at the sight of Bunter.

"Bunter, have you heard what has happened?" He wrung his hands, and a despairing groan escaped his lips. "Oh, Bunter, have you heard what happened last night?"

"Well, what happened?" grunted Bunter. His curiosity had lost some of its edge now.

"Mr. Quelch and Mr. Prout went to the circus—"

"You blithering idiot!" roared Bunter.

"And Mr. Quelch tried to get Mr. Prout in at half price. But the doorkeeper wasn't having any. However—"

Bunter gave Squiff a glare like that of a basilisk. But the humorist was thoroughly wound up.

"However, he agreed to let them in at two for fivepence. When they were inside they heard—"

"You chuckle-headed dummy!"

"They heard one man say to another—"

"Br-r-r!"

Bunter pushed his tormentor roughly aside, and passed on in an indignant mood.

"Bunter!" called Squiff after him. "I haven't told you yet what one man said—"

But Billy Bunter was gone. Several more times Bunter was stopped and informed, in strict confidence, that Mr. Quelch and Mr. Prout had visited the circus together the previous evening, etc., until at last the poor Owl didn't know whether he was rolling upon his head or his heels.

We gathered together a little later in Study No. 1, grinning over Bunter's discomfiture like a lot of Cheshire cats.

"Now, what do you think of my great curiosity-curer?" demanded Bob triumphantly. "Isn't it a success—what?"

We all voted it a tremendous success.

"A little more of this, and Bunter will drop his old habit of tying bootlaces outside people's study doors—I don't think!" laughed Harry.

"Let's nip along to the Common-room until tea-time," suggested Johnny. "There may be something going on there."

By now practically the whole Form was

aware of the little joke against Bunter, who was, as usual, meandering about the Common-room, talking about titled relations and expected postal-orders.

We had scarcely been in five minutes when in walked Skinner, grinning all over his unhealthy face. It was easy to see that he had caught on to the curiosity-curer, but you could always count on Skinner for mixing spite with his humour.

"I say, I've something to tell you, Bunter," he grinned, beckoning to the Owl.

"Well?" growled Bunter.

"Mr. Quelch and— Ha, ha, ha!"

Just then a figure in cap and gown paused in the doorway on hearing his name mentioned. It was Mr. Quelch.

"Mr. Quelch and Mr. Prout went to the circus last night—"

The Form-master looked astonished. We all grinned—Bunter included. Skinner evidently attributed this to the success of his plagiarised joke, and went on gleefully:

"And Mr. Quelch tried to get Mr. Prout in at half price. But the doorkeeper wasn't having any—"

Mr. Quelch's face was a study. It looked like the sky before a thunderstorm.

"However, he agreed to let them in at two for fivepence," went on Skinner, enjoying the joke hugely. "When they were inside they heard—"

"Boy!" rumbled Mr. Quelch.

The storm had burst at last, and Skinner spun round as if he had been shot.

"How dare you make such gross misstatements, Skinner?" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"How dare you declare that I visited the circus last night in the company of Mr. Prout! How dare you assert that I—goodness gracious!—attempted to gain Mr. Prout admittance at half the stipulated price!"

Skinner turned quite green.

"I—I—"

"And so we entered at two for fivepence, indeed!" said Mr. Quelch. "From whence did you obtain this absurd information, Skinner?"

"It—it was only a—a little joke, sir, on Bunter!" muttered Skinner, licking his dry lips.

"Indeed! Then I will proceed to play a little joke upon you," said Mr. Quelch grimly. "Follow me to my study!"

And, from the yells which emanated from the precincts of Mr. Quelch's study during the next five minutes we conjectured that Skinner was not enjoying Mr. Quelch's little joke.

II.

THERE was quite a little party assembled in Study No. 1 for tea that day. There were Harry Wharton, Johnny Bull, Hurree Singh, Bob Cherry, and myself—otherwise, the Famous Five. Squiff was also there, as were the occupants of Study No. 7—Peter Todd, his Cousin Alonzo, Dutton, and Bunter. Poor Peter had been taken with something in the nature of a mental collapse during the writing of one of his recent Herlock Sholmes adventures, so we invited him to tea in the hope of cheering him up a little.

No one outside the Famous Five, however, was aware of our unlawfully projected visit to the circus after lights-out that night.

During tea Bunter was looking very thoughtful. His brow was puckered up, and he gazed moodily into vacancy.

We looked at him a little uneasily more than once. The usually obtuse Bunter had an uncanny way of putting two and two together when he liked. If the Owl got wind of our escapade for the night all would be U.P.

"Wire in, Bunter!" urged Bob Cherry. "You're eating nothing."

"I don't want anything to eat," said Bunter.

Nine knives and nine forks clattered down with one accord upon their respective plates, and nine pairs of startled eyes were riveted upon the Owl.

"You don't want anything to eat?" we repeated, in faint tones.

"I'm thinking," said Bunter, with a blink round at us.

"Oh!"

"There's nothing to 'Oh!' about," said Bunter peevishly. "I want to know what it is you're keeping dark from me. I heard Cherry say this afternoon, 'Don't let Bunter

know anything, Franky!' or something to that effect. What is it?"

"Why, I thought you'd heard, Bunter?" said Bob Cherry, in surprise. "I'm sure we meant to tell him, chaps, didn't we? It's like this: Mr. Quelch and Mr. Prout went to the circus last night—"

"Rats!"

"And Mr. Quelch tried to get Mr. Prout in at half price."

"Br-r-r-r!" growled Bunter.

"You've heard it, then?" asked Bob.

"Go and eat coke! But I know it's something about the circus," said Bunter suspiciously. "You wouldn't keep harping on it if it wasn't. Look here, you chaps, are you—"

The Famous Five, myself included, gazed at him anxiously. But he stopped, and lapsed once more into thoughtful silence.

That night, after Wingate had packed us off to bed, we waited for about a quarter of an hour, so that the other fellows might doze off. Then we rose, and dressed quickly.

"Put your best foot foremost!" said Harry, when he had clambered through the box-room window and alighted on the ground beneath. "We ought to just get there in time to see the second half of the show."

Trotting and walking alternately, we arrived at the circus, and reached our seats. Row after row of good-natured rustic faces were turned towards the ring in eager expectancy of another couple of hours' enjoyment.

The first turn after the interval was Excalibur, the phenomenal sword-swallower. It was a sight to see all those country faces gazing breathlessly at this marvel, and looking wonderingly at each other as sword after sword disappeared.

We enjoyed the spectacle as much as anybody, but became a little bored as the twentieth sword disappeared—or, rather, as the same sword disappeared for the twentieth time—down his sleeve instead of his throat.

Then came Daring Daniel, the lion-tamer, who showed remarkable bravery by dashing into the den of a fat, over-fed lion, which had no possible motive for wanting to eat anybody, and then dashing out again. He did this a fair number of times, and the wondering audience sagely remarked that he would meet his death one of these days.

After a bit came the star turn—the last on the programme. It was Ham-Jam, the Human Boa-constrictor.

"If Bunter could but see this!" grinned Bob. "Wouldn't it give him an appetite?"

A large, iron-barred cage was wheeled into the ring. Inside the cage was a table piled up with viands, and seated beside the table was—

"Bunter!" yelled Wharton.

"Great pip! It is!"

It was Bunter, sure enough! He was bare to the waist, and painted blacker than a chimney-sweep. A thick ring of white was daubed round his mouth, and made it look twice the size. But the being was plainly Bunter.

Moreover, he was wearing his spectacles! Without these he would have been helpless. The people in the auditorium evidently assumed that these adornments were purposely added to give the gourmand a comic effect. But we, of course, knew better.

He was greeted with rounds of applause, and we stared at him, hardly believing our own eyes.

"The deep young bounder!" murmured Harry, at length. "He's been taking us in. And to think that we were keeping our visit here so dreadfully dark just because of him! The young spoofer!"

"So this explains why he passed Mrs. Mimble's shop to-day!" said Johnny Bull grimly. "This explains why he went easy with the tea! Just to keep up an appetite—eh? We'll show him!"

"But suppose he bolts with this show?" muttered Bob Cherry. "It leaves Courtfield to-morrow. What—"

"We'll settle that," said Harry determinedly. "I'll see Chumgum after the circus."

Meanwhile, to the enjoyment and amazement of the audience, the Human Boa-constrictor was going it! He finished the heap of dainties in record time, and sat with folded arms waiting for more.

"Good old Bunter!" chuckled Bob.

It must have been an expensive performance for Chumgum, for more edibles came,

and went as quickly as they had come. War-time prices, too!

Again more came, and again everything disappeared. The audience cheered and clapped and stamped their feet in a transport of glee. In our cases the exhibition lacked novelty, as we had seen it done over and over again, but we clapped hard and laughed with the rest. We had the satisfaction of knowing, however, that Chungum was paying for the grub—it was not our treat this time!

At length the show was over, and we trooped out. We made straight for Chungum's tent.

"It's Bunter we want, Mr. Chungum," said Harry bluntly, when in the presence of the great man.

"Well, he's taking a bath now," said Mr. Chungum, not overjoyed to see us. "You can't see him for at least an hour yet. I part with him for good to-night."

"Do you?" said Harry suspiciously. "I'll be sorry to lose him," said Mr. Chungum. "He brings us in plenty of the ready, though his show does cost a little."

"Look here, Mr. Chungum," said Harry. "If you'll give us your word of honour that Bunter leaves your show for good and all to-night, and if you'll tell us where you are pitching your tents to-morrow—excuse me!—we'll go. We can't wait here an hour for Bunter. You know, a year ago Bunter bolted with a circus—"

Chungum laughed. "My dear kid, I willingly promise you that Master Bunter leaves us for good to-night,"

he said. "And as you doubt my word, I will tell you that we go to Fairbury to-morrow. Good-night!"

Accepting the hint, we left him, and made our way to school. We soon undressed, and slipped into bed. Bunter's bed, of course, was empty.

"I'll see Fatty about this to-morrow," said Harry dully.

The next morning we ran Bunter down outside Mrs. Mimble's tuckshop, which he was on the point of entering.

"Now, Bunter, about last night?" said Bob grimly.

Bunter blinked at us nervously. It was patent that Mr. Chungum had informed him of our confab the preceding night.

"Out with it!" said Bob sharply. "You fat spoofer, who was it went to the circus last night?"

Bunter grinned feebly. "Mr. Quech and Mr. Prout went to the circus last night—"

"What!" we roared. "And Mr. Quech tried to get Mr. Prout in at half price—"

"This joke's gone on long enough," growled Bob. "Bump him till he explains!"

Although Bob was the proud originator of that extraordinary joke, he did not seem to appreciate it now. Neither did we, for the matter of that. We seized Bunter, and he descended to earth with a mighty bump.

"Yaroo! I'll explain, you beasts!"

"Look sharp about it!" said Bob.

"It's this way, you idiots," grunted Bunter, attempting to straighten his

dishevelled attire. "You know what a success I was as the grub-eating savage in the show that came last year? Well, it made such an impression on Chungum when he heard of it that he wrote and asked me to take the savage's part for just this one week in Courtfield, in place of the original, who is a dud. I have performed every night this week—"

"Have you, by gum?" "But don't let the fellows get wind of it," said Bunter hastily. "You had better not, for your own good, you know, for you have broken bounds as well as I. If the Head got to know we should all be flogged for a cert, and maybe sacked—"

"And Chungum would get it pretty hot, too," said Harry, frowning. "He had no right to engage you without the Head's permission."

"Well, you see, I told him the Head had given me leave to appear for the one week only," said Bunter uncomfortably. "He isn't to blame in any way. But, look here, you chaps," said the Owl, brightening up. "He has given me a fiver in payment for my services. Just call in at Study No. 7 after lessons, and have a jolly good tea at my expense!"

And Bunter rolled into Mrs. Mimble's tuckshop to make his huge purchases.

Billy Bunter stood higher in our estimation for the rest of that day, and at tea we all congratulated him, not only on his performance as the Human Boa-constrictor of Chungum's Circus, but also on his marvellous success in Keeping it Dark!

CAUGHT BY THE CONJURER!

By DONALD OGILVY.

KIPPS, the conjurer, was showing Bob Cherry some sleight-of-hand tricks in the junior Common-room when Skinner came in.

Skinner wasn't looking agreeable. His nose was very red, owing to Bob Cherry having punched it an hour before. Skinner had been pulling a fag's ear; so Bob had punched his nose to make matters even.

Skinner interrupted Kipps' demonstration. He pranced up to Bob Cherry, with his bony fists waving in the air, and a very war-like expression on his face.

"Take that!" he said. And he fairly hurled himself on Bob, and Bob was so surprised that he went over, with Skinner clinging to him like a cat.

"My hat!" ejaculated Bob. "Yah! Take that!" howled Skinner. "Hallo! Here's Skinner on the war-path!" roared Bolsover major. "Go it, Skinner! Give him jip!"

Bob Cherry recovered himself in a moment or two.

He rolled over on the floor with Skinner, and then threw Skinner off, and jumped up, leaving Skinner sprawling.

"You silly ass!" shouted Bob, pushing back his cuffs. "Now come on, and I'll dust up the floor with you!"

"Yow!" gasped Skinner. "Get up, you silly ass!"

"Skinner's had enough," said Kipps, with a chuckle.

Kipps had been watching the scramble with a rather curious expression on his face, and he seemed very much tickled.

"Eh? But he hasn't started!" exclaimed Bob.

"Ow!" roared Skinner. "Are you going to come on?" roared Bob.

"Ow! No! I—I'm hurt!" gasped Skinner. "I—I've knocked my funny-bone! I'll lick you another time, Bob Cherry!"

"Lick your merry grandmother!" granted Bob Cherry. "I'll let you off this time, but if you jump on me like a lion again I'll scalp you!"

Skinner crawled away, and collapsed on the sofa, and the fellows in the Common-room simply howled. Kipps dusted down Bob's jacket for him.

They had the impression that Skinner had showed up his courage to the sticking-point, and rushed at Bob to tackle him; and then his courage had petered out, and he didn't want to go on.

Snoop, who was looking on and grinning, lighted a cigarette, and attention was at once transferred from Skinner to Snoop.

Fellows like Skinner and Snoop sometimes smoked cigarettes on the sly, but they had never ventured to do so in the Common-

room before, and all the fellows stared at Sidney James Snoop.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What are you up to?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Only having a smoke," said Snoop carelessly.

"You silly ass!" "Stop it!" growled Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove. "You can play the fool in your own study, Snoop, not here!"

Snoop grinned defiantly, and went on blowing out puffs of smoke.

Kipps strode over to the sofa and sat down beside Skinner. Skinner scowled at him. He didn't like Kipps. But Kipps was very affable.

"How's your funny-bone?" he asked. "Oh, rats!" said Skinner.

"Shall I dust your jacket?" asked Kipps. And, without waiting for Skinner to say yes, he whipped out his handkerchief, and began to dust Skinner's jacket.

Skinner jerked himself away. "Let me alone, confound you!" he snapped. "Oh, all right!"

The obliging Kipps let him alone. Meanwhile, Harry Wharton was displaying a set of knuckles under Sidney James Snoop's nose.

"Put that smoke away, you silly ass!" he said. "Rats!" said Snoop.

Snoop was smoking like a regular furnace. His object seemed to be to produce as much smoke as possible in the shortest space of time. The smoke was floating about the Common-room, and it made some of the fellows cough.

"You'd better chuck it," said Nugent. "Wingate will be along soon to march us off to the dorm, and if he smells smoke—"

"Oh, f-o-b!" "Chuck it away!" said Wharton. "Bow-wow!"

Harry Wharton took Snoop by the back of his collar and shook him. It wasn't much use for Snoop to resist. He wriggled, and that was all, and he gave a fearful yell as the cigarette slid into his mouth.

"Yow-ow! Yooop! I'm burnt! Yooop!" "He, ha, ha!"

He wrenched himself away, and scowled at Wharton, and huddled out of the Common-room, taking the fag-end of his cigarette with him.

"Well, if that doesn't take the cake!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Smoking here when a prefect may step in any minute!"

"The cakefulness is terrific!" remarked Huirce Jamset Ram Singh. "Better wave a paper aboutfully, or the smellfulness will make the esteemed Wingate suspicious!"

"Good wheeze!" said Bob. "It would mean

a licking for Snoop—not that he doesn't deserve it, the smoky ass!"

Bob Cherry got hold of an old newspaper, and began waving it about to clear off the smoke. He was still doing it when Wingate of the Sixth came into the Common-room.

"Bed-time!" said Wingate. "Hallo! Is that a new sort of gymnastics, Cherry?"

"Not exactly, Wingate," stammered Bob.

Wingate sniffed. "Somebody's been smoking here," he said. There was dead silence. Wingate had detected the smell of tobacco at once, and he was naturally wrathful. It was bad enough for silly asses to smoke in the lav-rooms, or behind the wood-shed; but to smoke openly in the Common-room was the limit.

"Who's been smoking here?" demanded Wingate.

No answer. Wingate knitted his brows.

Snoop had disappeared; and nobody felt inclined to tell Wingate that he had been there smoking a cigarette.

"Come, now," said Wingate. "Who was it? I'm going to take the fellow, whoever he was, to Mr. Quech. Own up!"

Silence.

"If the fellow doesn't own up I'll call in Mr. Quech!" snapped Wingate.

And as nobody owned up, Wingate stepped out of the Common-room, after telling all the fellows to remain where they were.

In a couple of minutes he returned with the Remove-master.

Mr. Quech was looking very stern; and he had thoughtfully brought a cane with him. He anticipated that it would be wanted.

He sniffed at the scent of Snoop's cigarette, and the fellows wondered what was going to happen. It was against all the traditions of the school for anybody to give Snoop away, worm as he was. And Snoop, not being there, couldn't own up.

"Someone has been smoking here," said Mr. Quech, in his deep voice. "I give the culprit an opportunity to speak up."

No reply. "Very well. I insist upon knowing who has broken the rules of the school in this flagrant manner!"

"If you please, sir—" began Skinner. Mr. Quech's eyes turned on him like a pair of gimlets.

"Was it you, Skinner?" "Nunno, sir!" stammered Skinner, very hastily.

"What have you to say, then?" "If—if the fellows turn out their pockets,

(Continued on page 16.)

CAUGHT BY THE CONJURER!

(Continued from page 15.)

“sir, you—you’ll see whether the chap is here, sir,” said Skinner.

Mr. Quelch nodded.

Some of the fellows grinned. As Snoop had gone, and taken his cigarettes with him, there was no danger in the fellows turning out their pockets. At least, that was what the fellows thought; and they considered it was rather keen of Skinner to suggest it, so as to clear all the fellows in the room.

“Quite so!” said Mr. Quelch. “I was about to order it, Skinner. Every boy present will immediately turn out his pockets, and anyone who is found in possession of tobacco or smoking materials—”

Mr. Quelch didn’t finish; he left the rest to our imagination.

The fellows turned out their pockets cheerfully enough.

Skinner watched Bob Cherry like a hawk as Bob turned his pockets out. His jaw dropped.

He seemed scarcely able to believe his eyes when Bob turned out nothing but a pocket-knife, a stump of pencil, a ball of string, a bit of toffee, and a chunk of cobbler’s wax with a farthing sticking to it.

Certainly Bob had nothing in the way of cigarettes or tobacco about him, as Skinner, by his look, seemed to expect.

“You have not turned out your pockets, Skinner,” said Mr. Quelch.

Skinner started.

He began turning out his own pockets.

Suddenly he stopped, his face getting an extraordinary expression. His hand remained in his jacket-pocket as if stuck there.

“Well, Skinner?” Mr. Quelch’s voice was grim now. “Take your hand out of your pocket!”

Skinner’s hand came out—empty. But Mr. Quelch was not quite so easily deceived as all that.

“There is something in your pocket!” he snapped.

“N-n-no, sir!”

“Come here, Skinner!”

“I—I—”

“Come here at once!”

All eyes were on Skinner as he reluctantly approached the Form-master.

It really looked as if Skinner had smokes about him; and, in that case, it was certainly extraordinary that he had suggested the search.

Mr. Quelch thrust a hand into his jacket-pocket and drew out a packet.

There was a buzz from the Remove fellows.

It was a packet of cigarettes!

“Skinner!” thundered Mr. Quelch.

“I—I—” Skinner’s voice died away.

“So it was you, Skinner!” thundered the Remove-master. “And you hoped to deceive me, doubtless, by proposing the search of pockets yourself, guessing that I intended to order it. You are a cunning boy, Skinner. Hold out your hand!”

“I—I wasn’t—I didn’t—”

Swish, swish, swish, swish!

“Yaroooh! Yoop! Yah! Oh!” roared Skinner.

“Silence, Skinner! I shall confiscate these cigarettes, and if any are found in your possession again, you will be reported to the Head!” said Mr. Quelch sternly.

He marched off with the fags, leaving Skinner wriggling and rubbing his hands. Wingate shepherded the Remove off to their dormitory, Skinner groaning all the way.

Snoop was there, and he looked at Bob Cherry and grinned as the Remove crowded in. But he left off grinning, and stared, as he saw Skinner rubbing his hands and groaning dismally.

Wingate left the Remove to turn in, and Skinner, instead of undressing, sat on his bed and squeezed his hands and yelped. He was hurt.

“Better be more careful with your smokes next time, Skinnery,” said Vernon-Smith, laughing. “What did you propose turning-out pockets for, you ass? Quelch mightn’t have thought of it.”

“Ow!”

“Did you forget you had the smokes about you, Skinner?” chortled Billy Bunter.

“Ow! It’s a rotten trick!” gasped Skinner. “Somebody put those fags in my pocket. I hadn’t any on me!”

“Oh, draw it mild!” said Wharton.

“I tell you it’s true! They were planted on me!” howled Skinner.

“Rats!”

“Gentlemen,” said Kipps, “allow me to remark that Skinner’s statement is perfectly correct.”

The whole Remove stared at Kipps, the conjurer.

“What?” exclaimed Wharton. “What do you know about it?”

“That packet of fags was planted on Skinner,” said Kipps coolly.

“How do you know?”

“Because I planted them.”

“Wha-a-at?”

“One of my merry conjuring tricks, you know,” said Kipps calmly.

“Dash it all, that was a rotten trick, Kipps!” exclaimed Bob Cherry warmly. “A joke’s all very well; but you’ve got Skinner licked—”

“Instead of you!” said Kipps.

“I? What do you mean?”

“I mean that that packet of smokes was jolly nearly found on you,” said Kipps, as he kicked off his boots.

“You silly ass! How could they be found on me?” roared Bob Cherry. “Do you think I ever have smokes about me?”

“You did this evening.”

“Why, you—you—”

“Allow me to explain,” said Kipps. “Didn’t it surprise you rather when Skinner rushed at you and bowled you over?”

“What’s that got to do with the matter, ass?”

“Lots!” said Kipps cheerfully. “You see, being a merry conjurer, I’ve got an eye for sleight-of-hand tricks. Skinner shoved that packet of cigarettes into your jacket-pocket when he rolled you over.”

“Into my pocket?” gasped Bob.

“Exactly!”

“They were found in Skinner’s pocket, father!”

“Quite so. You may remember that I dusted your jacket, and then dusted dear old Skinner’s jacket,” grinned Kipps. “During the first operation I picked your pocket of the cigarettes; during the second, I slipped them into their owner’s pocket—Skinner’s. You see, when I saw dear Snoop lighting up a cigarette in the Common-room, just before a prefect was due there, I knew he did it for some reason; and the reason was that Skinner had planted a packet of fags in your pocket.”

“Oh!”

“Wingate came in and smelt the smoke, as planned by Skinner and Snoop!” yawned Kipps. “Quelch and the turning-out of pockets followed! I think Skinner must have been a little surprised when the cigarettes came to light in his own pocket instead of yours. Were you, Skinner?”

Skinner didn’t answer. His face was like a demon’s in a pantomime. Sidney James Snoop had turned quite pale.

“So, you see, you’d have got a bad name and a good licking if I hadn’t played that rotten trick!” smiled Kipps. “You said it was a rotten trick, didn’t you?”

Bob Cherry didn’t answer. He took the pillow from his bed and started for Snoop. Snoop dodged round his bed.

“It was only a joke!” he yelled. “Skinner asked me to help him— Yaroooh! Yah! Yawp! Yoop! Groogh! Ooh! Ah! Oh! Whoop!”

Bob Cherry was swiping with the pillow, and the rest of Snoop’s remarks, though loud and emphatic, were inarticulate.

Bob left him strewn along the floor, gasping, and started for Skinner. The Remove fellows gathered round to look on, grinning. Skinner didn’t try any denials. He was clean bowled out by the Greyfriars conjurer, and it was no use. He grabbed up a boot to defend himself. The boot was knocked out of his paw at once, and then Bob Cherry got to work with the pillow. Swipe, swipe, swipe!

“Help!” yelled Skinner. “Yoop! Yah!”

Skinner fled along the dormitory, with Bob after him, still swiping with the pillow. He jumped over the beds, and dodged round them, yelling all the time, with Bob close behind, swiping, and all the fellows roaring with laughter. He collapsed at last on the floor, and then the pillow came down hot and heavy, and Skinner wriggled and roared and shrieked, till Bob Cherry’s arms were tired.

Skinner did not get to sleep very early that night. He lay groaning for a long time, till Bolsover major threw a boot and shut him up. It was likely to be a long time before Skinner forgot how he had been Caught by the Conjurer.

THE HUN IMAGINATION.

By Monty Lowther.

There’s a hefty little village—
Some eight million souls or so—
Quite a splendid place for pillage,
Said old Blucher, long ago!
And the Huns bring hate, and bombs to drop
On all that there they see,
Plus their Hun imagination,
Which is worst of all the three!

It destroys St. Paul’s Cathedral—
Blown up every blessed raid!—
Picks big holes in Piccadilly,
Strafes the Burlington Arcade,
Makes the City one great smoking waste—
That we fail to see it’s strange!—
From the obelisk at Ludgate
To the vane of the Exchange.

Such a hash it makes of Whitehall!—
Mourn for Cuthbert gone before!—
And the anti-aircraft guns it stills,
For the gunners are no more!
It blows up Windsor Castle—
Just to give our King a hump!—
And, through bombs upon the famous Zoo,
Every beast has got the hump!

But the turnip-headed Englishman,
Who knows not truth from lies,
Somehow doesn’t trust the German
Somehow will believe his eyes!
His insular pig-headedness
Explains the way that he
Casts doubt on what Hun Kultur says,
Which surely true must be!

Before one little task the Hun
Imagination quails.
However hard he tries, he quite
Invariably fails
In the simple task of smashing
What really bears the brunt—
The Franco-British battle-line
Along the German front!

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