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No. 866. Vol. XXVI.

Week Ending September 13th, 1924

The Magnet 2^d

Library EVERY MONDAY
of
Complete School Stories.



BILLY BUNTER GETS THE "HUMP"!

"THE CALL OF THE DESERT!"

(This week's amazing 25,000-word story of Harry Wharton & Co. in Africa—inside.)



Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his chums. Write to him when you are in trouble or need advice. A stamped and addressed envelope will ensure a speedy reply. Letters should be addressed "The Editor," THE MAGNET LIBRARY, The Amalgamated Press (1922), Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

"FOUR AGAINST THE WORLD!"

HERE'S the title of the new serial billed to start in next week's issue of your favourite paper. It tells of the adventures of four brothers who are "up against it." The narrative sweeps along on a tide of excitement that will hold your interest at a high pitch. You will get to like the Melton brothers from the moment of their introduction. The British boy and girl is ever on the side of grit and determination, and in this coming treat these qualities are exemplified. Get ready to welcome

"FOUR AGAINST THE WORLD!"

By Hedley Scott,

and persuade your pals to start with the opening chapters. That's item number one on the programme for next week. In addition there will, of course, be another ripping long complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., telling of their adventures in Northern Africa. The title alone,

"FOES OF THE SAHARA!"

suggests some stirring times in store for our cheery and plucky band of Removites. It is a far cry from Greyfriars to the Sahara, and the conditions are vastly different from those obtaining at the old school in Kent. But Harry Wharton & Co. are still the same characters we have grown to admire and respect—plucky, resourceful, and tenacious. They have set out to rescue both Major Cherry and Ali ben Yusuf from Mustapha ben Mohammed, the usurper sheik, a task that many a grown man would shrink from. That their path is beset by dangers goes without saying—even the wild animals of that limitless expanse of sand and rocks dog their footsteps. But the will to win is uppermost. Dangers and difficulties were made to be overcome, in the opinion of our Greyfriars chums, and they emerge from the test with honour. No Magnetite should miss this stirring story. To my mind it shows Mr. Frank Richards at the top of his form. "Nuff said."

WHILE GREYFRIARS SLEEPS

the Remove juniors light up their candles, bring forth the merry hamper, and tuck in. If, later, their sleep is troubled by indigestion, what matters? Schoolboys pay scant heed to such trivialities—at the time of the feed! In this coming supplement dealing with the dormitory—one might say the night-life of Greyfriars—there is plenty of sparkle and fun. Several of the tired mortals in the Remove air their views on "Do we Sleep Too Much?" So far as Billy Bunter and Lord Maulverer are concerned, twenty hours' rest out of the twenty-four is barely sufficient. But THE MAGNET LIBRARY, No. 866,

in any case, there's nothing to send my chums to sleep in our

DORMITORY SUPPLEMENT.

On the contrary, you will be very much awake. Don't miss it, chums.

WHO WANTS A BIKE?

I would remind all Magnetites that every week I am giving away free a handsome "Royal Enfield" bicycle, listed at £8. Think of it, for just three words you might be the possessor of one of these ripping cycles. Some of you will be saying that you already have a bike. Well, what's the matter with having another one in hand in case of accidents? Or, better still, why not win one of these bikes for your sister? Three words, chums—bear that well in mind—is all that is required to win one of these prizes. You'll find the result of the "Robert Cherry" Competition on page 22, and some of you, no doubt, will envy the good fortune of the prize-winner. Well, it might be your turn to come up "in print" as the prize-winner if you fill in the coupon on page 4 now. Get busy, boys!

"THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL!"

A reference must be made to this wonder book of the year, which is now on sale at all newsagents. The 1925 Edition of this world famous Annual is a triumph of journalistic art. It surpasses anything of its kind that has ever seen the light of day. There are glorious complete stories of your favourite characters—Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars, ditto Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood, and Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's. In addition there are stirring adventure stories, plays, poems, "How to Make" articles, gorgeous coloured plates, and splendid photographs, etc. That's not telling of its wonderful contents by half, but it should be a sufficient pointer to those of my chums who are keen to secure a copy of the "Holiday Annual." As a word of warning, let me inform all Magnetites that there's bound to be a rush for the "H.A.," and to avoid disappointment it is advisable to

ORDER YOUR COPY NOW!

Several of my reader chums look like developing into first rate authors, providing, of course, they stick to the job and shoulder its innumerable set backs with a brave heart and a determination to succeed. An uphill task appeals to many of us—the fruits of success are then doubly sweet. But the bill cannot be taken in a single stride, as several

keen Magnetites seem to think. I would advise these authors of the future to concentrate for the time being on amateur periodicals. If, after a few months of hard work, they find their liking for story writing still as firm as ever, and, what is more to the point, their knowledge of the technique of this fascinating art improved, then is the time for them to think about transforming an unpaid hobby into a remunerative one. But, as I have repeatedly said, it is a long, stony path that has to be followed, and only the "real stickers" get there.

HE WANTS TO KNOW!

A loyal Magnetite who signs himself D. H. Calvert, but who, alas, fails to write his address on his notepaper, has sent me in a string of questions that leave my head buzzing. Some of them, however, I can answer in this column; the others will have to stand over until my chum lets me know his address, for space will not permit of my printing them here. He wants to know whether Bunter Court really exists. It does—but only in the fertile imagination of William George Bunter. Is Dr. Locke married? Most certainly! Is Phyllis Howell Jimmy Silver's cousin? No! How many monocles has Arthur Augustus D'Arcy? 'Fraid you beat me there, my chum. Might just as well ask me how many pebbles there are on the beach at Brighton. We'll say that he has a fresh one for every day of the week, and an extra special one for Sundays, and we'll leave it at that.

COCKY!

This is not a paragraph about the swanking cockatoo. I wished to refer to a serious complaint which reaches me from a reader who had a pal. Past tense, you note! That chum has turned out a hopeless failure as a friend. He had a trip round the world and has come home unbearably conceited. He thinks he knows everything and a bit more.

How well one knows that sort of individual! He will learn better, of course, but the operation takes time. His hobby is to "best" everyone else, to assert his superior knowledge. Let him enjoy his paltry little triumphs. You can feel sorry for the silly ass. He is as mean as the personage who relies for amusement on picking holes in others.

PASSING IT ON.

A lengthy and very interesting letter has just reached me from a loyal chum in Chelmsford. He cannot find enough to say in favour of the Companion Papers. But there's one thing he has done, namely, introduced a new reader to our select band. He loaned some Companion Papers to a friend while he was on holiday, and now learns that his pal is so taken with the Harry Wharton & Co. yarns that he has placed a regular order with his newsagent since. That's the spirit. That's what I want every Magnetite to do. Make a campaign of it, chums. Take the MAGNET into every home you can. That will constitute your "little bit," and the rest you can safely leave to

Your Editor.

Major Cherry has carried out his intention of seeking Ali ben Yusef—once a Greyfriars schoolboy—in the desert fastnesses without being encumbered by the Greyfriars chums. But when Harry Wharton & Co. make up their minds to do a thing that thing is as good as done. Thus it is we see our cheery band of Removites setting forth on their own, scorning the innumerable perils of the journey, eager to answer—



A Magnificent New Long Complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., staged in the barren deserts of Northern Africa.

By popular
FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter Wants to Know!

"BOB!" Bob Cherry did not seem to hear Bunter's voice.

He was standing by the parapet on the flat roof of the African villa, looking away to the south.

There was a deep line in Bob Cherry's brow, and his eyes were fixed earnestly on the burning expanse of the desert.

The sun was sinking, a ball of fire in a cloudless sky. The day had been hot, and the heat was still great. Scarce a breath of air stirred over Biskra. White villas and dingy mudhouses baked in the African sun.

Bob Cherry did not seem to feel it. His gaze was fixed on the limitless expanse to the southward—the burning plain that stretched away to the heart of Africa, as if he were striving to penetrate beyond the range of vision, to read the secrets of the silent desert.

More than a week had passed since Major Cherry had ridden away into the Sahara, and no word from him had reached the Greyfriars chums at the villa in Biskra.

Well Bob knew the dangers into which his father had gone, in the savage territory ruled by the Sheik Mustapha ben Mohammed. He had not gone alone, and Bob tried to think that even the savage Arab sheik would not venture to raise his hand against the French soldiers who had ridden with the major. But he doubted. Who was to tell, who was to know what might have happened in the recesses of that vast wilderness of sand and burning sun?

"Bob!" Billy Bunter came up the stone steps to the roof of the villa, and blinked at Bob through his big spectacles. Perhaps the Owl of Greyfriars was too short-sighted to notice the troubled line in Bob's brow. Perhaps he did not think that it mattered, anyhow. Billy Bunter was not accustomed to giving much thought to anyone but his own fat self.

Down in the shady garden Harry Wharton & Co. were sipping lemonade under the trees with Marjorie and Clara. Bob had slipped away quietly, leaving his friends chatting cheerily about some excursion planned for the morrow.

He was thinking of his father. He could not help thinking of him and of the sheik—Mustapha. To Bob's anxious mind Mustapha ben Mohammed loomed like a dark, threatening shadow, like some devouring monster of the desert.

Billy Bunter rolled towards him and sat down on the low parapet with a grunt. Bunter felt the heat, and he did not like stairs. He plumped down on the stone parapet and grunted. Bob Cherry did not glance at him.

"I say, Bob." Bob made a movement of impatience. But he remembered that William George Bunter was, in a way, a guest at the villa in Biskra, and he controlled his impatience.

"Well, what is it?" he asked, withdrawing his anxious gaze at last from the glowing south.

Bunter blinked at him. He was not feeling anxious about the major. He was feeling concerned about a much more important person—William George Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove.

"Anything up?" he asked, observing at last that Bob's rugged face was clouded.

"Eh? Nothing special," grunted Bob. He had no intention of confiding his doubts and fears to Billy Bunter.

"You're looking glum," said Bunter.

"Am I?" muttered Bob.

"The chicken, I suppose?" said Bunter.

"The what?"

"It was tough," said the Owl of the Remove, shaking his head seriously. "I told you it was tough at lunch. These Arab shopkeepers are awful swindlers, and I shouldn't wonder if your cook's in league with them. Still feeling it?"

Bob Cherry grinned involuntarily. He had already forgotten his lunch and what he had eaten. But such matters lingered long in Bunter's memory.

"But that isn't what I came up to speak about," resumed Bunter. "The fact is, Cherry, I want to know."

"Eh?" "Your pater went away over a week ago," said Bunter, blinking at him. "We're left here. Mind, I'm not complaining. The fact is, I like it better without your pater's grim old chivvy knocking about. I suppose you do, too?"

Bob breathed hard. "Enough to put any fellow off his feed, isn't it—a chivvy like that?" said Bunter agreeably.

"You fat idiot!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"I suppose you don't want me to boot you over the parapet into the garden, do you?" asked Bob.

"Eh? No, I say—"

"Then shut up about my pater!"

"Nothing to get waxy about, old chap," said Bunter. "What are you getting your rag out for? Besides, I must speak about your pater, as that's what I'm worrying about."

"Oh!" said Bob, his rugged face softening a little. It was quite unexpected to hear that Bunter was worrying about Major Cherry and the perils that encompassed him in the Sahara.

"Suppose he's killed by this time—"

"What?"

"Well, you know what we've heard about the Arabs in the desert," argued Bunter. "Here in Biskra, and in all the towns we've seen, they're a set of thieves. But out in the desert, where they're not afraid of the French garrisons, they're murderers as well. And they tell horrid tales about that jolly old sheik—Mustapha ben Mohammed. They say that he murdered the last sheik of his tribe—a blessed old sheik named Yusef. They say that he's committed no end of murders, and I dare say it's true."

Bob grunted. He knew the reputation of Mustapha ben Mohammed well enough, and it had made him tremble for his father.

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"Now," pursued Bunter, "your pater's gone to hunt for Ali ben Yusef, who used to be at Greyfriars. Old Mustapha's got him a prisoner, and he knows the major is after him, and so it stands to reason that he will mop your pater up if he can, Bob. You see that?"

"Well?" muttered Bob restively.

"And your pater's got that giddy diamond amulet—the Eye of Ahmed, as they call it—that the old sheik wants so badly," went on Bunter. "Mustapha will be after that like my young brother Sammy after a jam-roll."

"What do you know about the Eye of Ahmed?" growled Bob Cherry. "You weren't told anything about it, that I know of."

Bunter grinned.

"Precious few things go on that I don't get wind of," he said complacently.

"You mean you've been eavesdropping?"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I may have heard you fellows speaking about it. I've often told you that you talk too much. You can't deny it."

Bob Cherry made a motion with his foot. But he restrained the desire to kick Bunter. The fat junior's unexpected concern for his father's safety disarmed him.

"So you see how it stands," went on

Bunter. "The major's huntin' for the giddy sheik's prisoner, and he's got that blessed amulet that Mustapha wants, and he's a savage brute, anyhow. Ten to one he's had his spies watching for the major, and has ambushed him in the desert and mopped him up. Don't you think it's likely?"

Bob breathed deep.

"It's possible," he said in a low voice.

"I didn't expect you to be worrying about it, Bunter."

Bunter blinked at him.

"Eh? I'm not worrying about it," he said in surprise.

"Oh! I thought—"

"What I mean is this—suppose the major's killed, he won't be coming back here," explained Bunter. "He can't if he's killed, you know. Well, then, what are we going to do?"

Bob stared speechlessly at the Owl of the Remove.

"Of course, I'm sorry, and all that. But we've got to think of ourselves. We've had a pretty good time since your pater left us here. But I suppose we're not staying in Biskra for good. Has your pater made arrangements for our journey home? Has he left the money to pay our fares, and the expenses, and all that? I can tell you,

I've been thinking a good bit about it."

Bob was still speechless.

"Of course, given time, I could telegraph to Bunter Court for any funds we require," continued Bunter. "But it was understood from the beginning that all my expenses on this trip would be paid by Major Cherry. I shouldn't have come otherwise. As it was, I had to turn down Lord Mauleverer, and a pressing invitation from my old pal D'Arcy at St. Jim's. I'm bound to say plainly, Cherry, that in the circumstances, I shall decline to find the money."

Bunter's manner was growing warm. Bob was still silent, and Bunter construed his silence to mean that there was ground for his misgivings. The Owl of the Remove felt that he had a grievance—indeed, that he was being imposed upon.

"I may as well be quite frank," he went on, with growing indignation. "I don't grumble at the way we're provided for here. It's not quite up to the style of Bunter Court; but a fellow can make allowances. But what's going to happen if the major doesn't come back? I want to know, and I want to know now. We can take it as practically certain that he's killed by this time—"

Billy Bunter stopped at that point. Bob Cherry, forgetting that the fat junior was in some sort a guest, reached out and grasped him by the collar.

Rap!

"Whoooop!" roared Bunter, as his head came into sharp contact with the stone parapet.

"You fat rotter!" gasped Bob.

"Yaroooh! Beast! Is this how you treat a guest?" yelled Bunter, in rage and indignation.

Bob Cherry was "slewing" the Owl of the Remove round to kick him. He paused.

"Leggo!" howled Bunter.

Bob let go. A coffee-coloured face looked across the flat roof, from the stone stair that led up from the garden.

Ibrahim the guide—Honest Ibrahim, as he called himself—stared at the scene.

Bob beckoned to him.

"Ibrahim! Come here."

"What can I do, my fine gentlemen?" asked Honest Ibrahim, coming across at once.

"Do you want twenty francs?" Ibrahim's eyes gleamed.

"Oh! Yes! Fine!"

"Take that fat villain away, and kick him, hard. I'll give you a franc for each kick, up to twenty."

Ibrahim grinned.

"You trust Ibrahim—he do your business," he said cheerfully. And a dusky hand grasped Billy Bunter.

"Ow! Help!" roared Bunter.

"Hands off, you nigger! Bob, you beast—Yarooooop! Oh, crumbs! Wharton—Nugent—Bull—Inky—I say, Marjorie—I say, Hazel—I say, Clara—Yarooooooop!"

"You come with Ibrahim," said the Arab in his soft voice, as he hooked the Owl of the Remove towards the stone stair.

"Yaroooh! Help!"

And Bunter went.

Bob Cherry strolled down to the garden, and joined the cheery party under the trees. From a distance came a sound of loud and fiendish yells. The juniors looked round.

"Is that Bunter?" asked Wharton.

"That's Bunter," assented Bob.

"Is he being hurt?" asked Marjorie Hazeldene.

"I hope so—I mean, I think so."

"Oh, my hat!" said Miss Clara.

"What's happening to Bunter?"

A MAGNIFICENT "ROYAL ENFIELD" BICYCLE GIVEN AWAY FREE EVERY WEEK!

MAGNET "Characters" Competition!



EASY AS FALLING OFF A LOG! RIDE YOUR OWN BIKE AND SEE THE COUNTRY IN COMFORT!

This is one of the simplest competitions ever put before MAGNET readers. All you have to do, chums, is to take the name,

WILLIAM GOSLING,

and, starting with any three letters in it, make up a three-word phrase about this world-famous character. For instance, the letters N, G, O, could make "Never Grows Old," or G, S, I, could make "Grouse Season Interminable."

Remember that the initial letters of each word of your effort must be contained in the words William Gosling, although you may use any other letters of the alphabet to follow, and also use the same letters more than once.

When you have thought out a good answer fill in the coupon below, taking care to write your effort and your name and address clearly, and post it to "William Gosling," "Characters" Competition, THE MAGNET LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C. 4, so as to reach that address not later than **September 23rd, 1924.**

To the sender of what the Editor considers is the best answer will be awarded a magnificent "Royal Enfield" Bicycle.

The excellence of your effort will consist in its apt relation to the character named. You may send in as many attempts as you like, but all efforts must be written on the proper entrance form.

The decision of the Editor of the MAGNET must be accepted as final in all matters, and entries are only accepted on this condition.

MAGNET "CHARACTERS" COMPETITION. (William Gosling.)

Write your effort here.....

I enter the MAGNET "Characters" Competition, and I agree to accept the Editor's decision as final.

Signed

Address.....

In the event of my winning, I prefer a Lady's—Gent's—Bicycle. Cross out the word not applicable.

Another "Royal Enfield" Bicycle offered next week!



A burly Arab rushed at Major Cherry with uplifted spear. Bou Saoud shouted in Arabic, and the man dropped his spear and sprang on the major, clutching him with sinewy hands. The clubbed revolver crashed on the Arab's head, and he groaned and fell. But another and another dusky ruffian grasped the old soldier, and he was dragged to the ground. (See Chapter 3.)

"Ibrahim's kicking him."

"What on earth is Ibrahim kicking him for?" demanded Johnny Bull, in astonishment.

"Twenty francs."

"Eh?"

"Bunter asked for it," explained Bob Cherry. "It's all right! Shove the lemonade this way."

And the puzzled party gave no further heed to the roars of William George Bunter, though for quite a long time they outdid the celebrated performances of the Bull of Bashan.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Ibrahim's Mission!

MARJORIE'S eyes rested on Bob Cherry's ruddy, rugged face several times, as they sat under the palm-trees in the garden.

Bob was trying to look cheery, and to take part in the talk; but his heart was heavy, and he was always a poor hand at playing a part. He did not want to be a wet blanket; but he felt rather dismally that that was what he was, just at present.

The chums of Greyfriars were discussing an excursion to Touggourt, and debating the method of transit whether by tramway, or a hired carriage from the Rue Berthe, or on camel-back or horseback. But Bob, in his present state of mind, had not the slightest keenness to visit Touggourt, or any other of the show-places of Biskra. He tried to take an interest in the matter, but without much success. In spite of himself, the troubled frown would return to his brow.

"What's up, old chap?" asked Harry Wharton, at last. "Don't you want to go to Touggourt to-morrow?"

"Eh? Oh, yes," said Bob.

"We ought to see the jolly old sights while we're here," said Johnny Bull. "We're not likely to have another vacation in Algeria."

"Not likely," agreed Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "And it will be the

new and jolly experience to travel camel-fully."

Bob grinned faintly.

"Let's go gamelfully, by all means," he said. "Bunter's bound to roll off his camel, and that's all to the good."

"My esteemed Bob!" murmured Hurree Singh.

"Bob is thinking about his father," said Marjorie quietly. "Isn't there any news yet, Bob?"

Bob Cherry started, and coloured a little.

"No. I thought the pater might send a message back by an Arab or somebody. But there's nothing, so far."

Harry Wharton's face became grave.

"What is it—ten days?" he said. "We can hardly expect news in that time, Bob. The major told us he might be a good time away. He's got rather a hefty job on hand, you know."

"I wish he'd let me go with him," muttered Bob.

"So do we all—but he wouldn't," remarked Nugent. "After all, we might have been in the way."

"Better off here," said Hazeldene, with a yawn. "I've had one trip into the desert, and I don't like it. Sand and dust and sun—groogh! I'd rather keep under a roof than under a tent."

"Cheer up," said Miss Clara encouragingly. "The major will come trotting home in a day or two, and he will bring Ali with him."

"I—I hope so," muttered Bob. His colour deepened as he noted the gravity that had fallen on his companions. "Look here—I don't want to be a dashed wet blanket. It's all right! I dare say I'm worrying over nothing. Now, what about that trip to Touggourt to-morrow? Let's fix it up and get off early, before it's too hot. We may as well take Ibrahim with us—he'll come, anyhow."

Bob's determined effort at cheerfulness made his comrades smile.

"I have been thinking about it," said Marjorie quietly.

"About going to Touggourt?"

"About your father, Bob. We all know that he has gone into danger, and

he may not be able to send a message. But there may be a way of getting news all the same."

"How's that, Marjorie?" asked Bob eagerly.

"Ibrahim might be useful," explained Marjorie. "He is a guide, and well acquainted with the desert, and he knows all the Arab tribes. Suppose you sent Ibrahim to see whether he could learn anything of Major Cherry? He can go where a white man could not go, being an Arab, and he could ask questions without being suspected, or getting into danger. And he would do that, or anything else, for a few francs."

"By Jove!" said Bob, and he gave Marjorie Hazeldene a very grateful look.

"Not a bad idea," said Harry, with a nod. "Trust Ibrahim to poke his old brown nose into anything anywhere. We know he's a sticker, from the way he's stuck to us."

"The stickfulness is terrific," agreed Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "I thinkfully consider the beautiful Marjorie's suggestion a good one."

"Jolly good!" said Frank Nugent.

"Ripping!" said Miss Clara.

"Good!" said Bob. "It's a topping idea. It will be doing something, anyhow. I'll ask Ibrahim." And Bob shouted: "Ibrahim!"

The Arab guide appeared at once. Since the Greyfriars party had been established in Biskra, Honest Ibrahim had attached himself to them, declining to take any denial. He made himself very useful in many ways, and the fact that he was a rogue was only to be expected, as he was an Arab guide. He was at least a very obliging, very polite, and very useful rogue. If he was informed that his services were not required, Honest Ibrahim only smiled and salaamed, and turned up again like a bad penny; and by sheer persistence he had made himself a fixture at the Biskra villa.

He came across the garden to the party under the palms, his gold-braided short jacket, and his voluminous

trousers of a brilliant blue giving him somewhat the look of a highly-coloured tropical beetle. He salaamed thrice.

"You call me, my fine gentlemen?" he asked. "What I can do? You trust Ibrahim—he do your business. Fine English and American gentlemen say Ibrahim the only honest guide in Algeria."

"I wonder what the others are like, then," granted Johnny Bull.

"All bad—all rascals—they cheat you," said Ibrahim. "Only I, Ibrahim, very honest Arab."

"I suppose you know the desert pretty well, Ibrahim?" said Bob.

Ibrahim waved dusky hands.

"Know him all, all the way from Tunis to Timbuctoo," he said. "Speak all Arab dialects—take you everywhere. You want to go to Timbuctoo? Ibrahim do your business very cheap."

"I want you to go into the desert and find out what has become of my father," said Bob abruptly.

"To hear is to obey, my fine gentleman."

"My father has gone to find Mustapha ben Mohammed, the sheik, in the desert," said Bob.

Ibrahim's bronze face became very grave.

"He go as friend or as enemy?" he asked.

"Hem! Not as a friend, certainly."

Ibrahim opened his lips, but closed them again without speaking. But it was easy to guess his thoughts, and Bob's ruddy face became a little pale.

"A party of French soldiers went with him," said Wharton. "The Arabs would not dare to harm them, I suppose?"

Ibrahim shrugged his shoulders.

"In the desert Mustapha is master," he said. "Will the eagles of the Sahara tell the French governor what has happened to his soldiers?"

Bob breathed hard.

"He has gone to rescue a prisoner who is in Mustapha's hands," he said. "It is Ali ben Yusef, the son of the former sheik of the tribe."

"It is said that Ali is dead," said Ibrahim, raising his eyebrows.

"Well, he isn't dead; he is Mustapha's prisoner, and my father has gone to rescue him."

Ibrahim shrugged his shoulders again. It was quite clear that Ibrahim's belief was that Major Cherry had gone to his death.

"I want news of him," said Bob, biting his lip hard. "Will you go into the desert, Ibrahim, and find out what has happened, if you can?"

"That is easy."

"Then lose no time," said Harry Wharton.

"A thousand francs," said Ibrahim coolly.

"You shall have a thousand francs if you bring me news of my father," said Bob.

"It is done!" said Ibrahim. "I go for my camel. To-morrow I shall be among the Arabs of the Tahar, and I shall know. Two day, and I bring my fine gentlemen's news."

And Ibrahim salaamed again, and backed away, and disappeared.

He left the Greyfriars party with clouded faces. Bob Cherry left his comrades, and walked away under the trees, his hands driven deep into his pockets, his brow dark and troubled. Ibrahim's belief was plain enough—and the guide knew the desert and its savage inhabitants. And Bob, with a heavy heart, realised how likely it was that the burning sands of the Sahara had already

closed over the brave man who had set out to rescue Ali ben Yusef from the desert sheik.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Tragedy of the Desert!

MAJOR CHERRY stirred in his sleep, and awoke.

The night was hot.

The tent, slight and well aired as it was, seemed stuffy and close. Round it was the stillness of the desert.

From the silence afar came the howl of a hyena.

It was not that that had awakened the major. The old campaigner had slept through the thunder of the guns in Flanders, through burning nights in India and Mesopotamia. Perhaps it was a sense of danger near at hand that had awakened him.

He rose, and his hand was on his revolver at once. He stepped to the open flap of the tent and looked out into the starry night.

Far from Biskra, far from Touggourt, from Wargla, from the farthest extremes known to the tourist, the major's quest had led him.

Mustapha ben Mohammed still eluded him.

The Arabs had been camped in the oases within a day's ride of Biskra before the arrival of the Greyfriars party. But the sheik had had news of their coming. Bou Saoud, the Spahi, had dogged them from England, he had spied on them all the way from the coast, and he had taken the warning to his father, the sheik. And the Arabs had struck their tents and vanished into the desert.

The trackless Sahara had swallowed them.

Here and there news of them had been picked up, from wandering Arabs and Mozabite traders.

But the search was long and weary.

The dozen French cavalymen who rode with the major were already tired of it. But Captain Ducloux had his orders, and the search was to go on till the elusive Arabs were run down in the desert.

Somewhere in that wilderness of sand and scrub Ali ben Yusef, once a school-boy at Greyfriars, was a prisoner in the hands of the sheik. But more than once, as he rode under the burning African sun, the major wondered whether he would succeed in wresting him from the grasp of the robber sheik.

He stood at the opening of the tent. The hyenas were howling round the camp, which was pitched beside a well in a low valley surrounded by sandhills.

Stars gleamed in the sky, but the night was dark. Through the gloom the major caught a glimpse of a French sentry, drowsily pacing, with his carbine under his arm.

The rest of the camp was sleeping. Faintly a pale glimmer came in the eastern sky. Dawn was at hand—the sudden dawn of the Sahara. But in the valley in the sandhills the darkness was still thick.

Sharper and more shrill came the howl of the hyenas lurking about the camp, as if the hungry brutes had been disturbed. The French sentry stopped in his drowsy pacing, and stood staring away into the darkness, as if brought to the alert by the clamour of the hyenas.

Major Cherry stepped from the tent, his revolver grasped in his hand. Crack!

A sudden sharp, ringing shot echoed among the sandhills.

There was a muffled cry from the

French sentry, and he pitched forward on his face in the sand. For a second he struggled, and then lay terribly still. The bullet, winging its way from the darkness, had struck him down, and he was dead.

The report was followed by a wild shout.

A minute before the camp had seemed buried, lost, in the deepest solitude. Now the darkness swarmed with moving forms, with wild faces and glancing spears, and the silence was torn by the incessant crackling of firearms.

Bullets rained on the suddenly awakened camp.

"The Arabs!" roared the major.

"Aux armes!" came a yell from the French captain's tent. Half-dressed, Captain Ducloux rushed out, sword in hand—to fall before his tent with three or four bullets in his body.

Dusky forms, in glimmering burnouses, swarmed in the camp.

The major, his teeth set, his eyes glinting under knitted brows, faced the yelling horde, his revolver spitting fire. On all sides the French soldiers were fighting against overwhelming odds. They were taken by surprise, and the odds were five or six to one. But they fought fiercely to the end, and went down one by one, still fighting. Wild trampling and yelling, shrieks and groans, turned the camp in the valley into pandemonium. A flare of flame danced against the velvety sky, from a tent that had been set on fire.

The major was in the thickest of it, fighting with the savage energy of despair. This was the end of his quest of the kidnapped Arab schoolboy—for he knew that the attack came from Mustapha and his men. Somewhere among that dusky swarm were Mustapha ben Mohammed and Bou Saoud, the Spahi, and the major only hoped that he might meet them before he fell.

"C'est toi!" It was the voice of Bou Saoud, shouting in French.

In the flare of the burning tent Major Cherry saw the Spahi rushing upon him. His revolver was empty, and he had no time to reload. He sprang at the Spahi with the weapon clubbed.

A burly Arab rushed at him with up-lifted spear. Bou Saoud shouted in Arabic, and the man dropped the spear and sprang on the major, clutching him with sinewy hands. The clubbed revolver crashed on the Arab's head, and he groaned and fell. But another and another dusky ruffian grasped the major, and he was dragged to the ground.

He struggled fiercely, but three or four pairs of hands held him, and he was overpowered.

Bou Saoud stood looking down at him, showing his white teeth in a grin as he panted in the grasp of the Arabs.

"Bind him!" he said in Arabic. And thick leather thongs were wound about the major's arms and legs, and knotted with cruel rigour.

"We have met in the desert, mon ami!" grinned the Spahi.

"You scoundrel!"

Bou Saoud laughed and turned away. The major, bound and helpless, dragged himself to a sitting posture and stared round him with haggard eyes.

The pale glimmer in the east had turned rosy red; from the glimmering horizon the sun appeared, and it was day. The sunlight gleamed on a fearful scene.

Like wild beasts the desert Arabs prowled round the camp, snatching up plunder, quarrelling savagely over the loot, and driving their spears a dozen

times into the bodies of any that showed a sign of life.

Of the party that had camped in the lonely valley in the sandhills only the major lived to see the dawn.

And he was a prisoner in the hands of Mustapha, the robber sheik. He groaned in bitterness of spirit. His quest of Ali ben Yusef had ended—thus! A couple of Arab spearmen came towards him and lifted him from the ground. They bore him away to a camel, and bound him on the animal's back. Bou Saoud, mounted upon an Arab horse, rode away down the valley, followed by three or four of the Arabs, leading the camel among them.

The sun rose higher over the desert, burning rays streamed down upon the man bound on the camel's back.

The riders turned out of the valley and struck across the desert to the southward.

Behind them the camp was left, still swarming with the greedy ruffians searching for plunder.

Half a mile glided under the feet of the camel; higher and higher the sun rose, burning upon the unprotected face of the prisoner.

Far to the south a low range of hills loomed dimly through the haze of the heat. The hills, apparently, were the destination of the major's captors.

They rode at last into a wide, open valley, where a clump of palm-trees showed that there was a spring. By the oasis was a group of Arab tents. Bou Saoud slackened speed and rode beside the major, regarding him with a mocking grin.

"You came to seek Ali ben Yusef?" he said.

The major did not answer. "You will find him now," grinned the Spahi. "He is here; you shall see him. But first you shall see my father—the sheik Mustapha. He will be glad to see you, mon Dieu! Do you know your life has been spared?"

Major Cherry was still silent. "It is because you hold the Eye of Ahmed—the amulet of the sheiks of the Tahar, without which a sheik cannot reign in safety," said Bou Saoud. "You know it! Dog of a Roumi, son of a thousand dogs, where is the Eye of Ahmed?"

The major closed his lips. "Mustapha ben Mohammed will make you speak!" grinned the Spahi.

He rode on into the Arab encampment with his followers. A crowd of dusky faces surrounded them, savage black eyes staring curiously at the prisoner.

They stopped before a large tent, and Bou Saoud dismounted. He disappeared into the tent.

A minute or two later the major was taken from the camel, and his feet were released, though his hands remained bound. With a burly Arab on either side of him, he was hustled into the tent—to face Mustapha ben Mohammed, the robber sheik of the Sahara.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Secret of the Sand!

"REGARDEZ, je vous prie—mais, monsieur—regardez—c'est une chose extraordinaire!"

"Oh, buzz off!" grunted Bob

Cherry. "Mais regardez donc—" "I say, you fellows, this is worth seeing," said Billy Bunter. "The chap really knows what he is talking about, you know." "Bosh!"

Harry Wharton & Co. had been sauntering through Biskra in the sunny afternoon, and they had stopped for coffee at a Cafe Maure. Under a high stone wall a canvas awning shut off the blazing sun, and they were glad of the shade.

Round them were dusky Arabs, sitting or lying on rugs stretched outside the cafe, sipping tiny cups of a thick coffee, or tea from glasses. Some of them were smoking, some slowly and lazily playing dominoes. A black Nubian flapped among them with bare feet, carrying a brass tray laden with coffee cups and small, sweet cakes.

Billy Bunter was giving great attention to those cakes. With the comfortable assurance that some other member of the party was going to foot the bill, Bunter saw no reason for stinting himself. More than a dozen cakes had already disappeared inside Bunter; but he was only beginning.

Guides, sellers of oranges, fruits, and souvenirs—souvenirs and relics of the desert and the Roman ruins, manufactured in France and imported into Algeria—stopped at the sight of the white faces among the dusky customers of the cafe. Half a dozen English tourists were a rich prey to the innumerable Arabs who lived on foreign visitors. But the juniors waved them off as well as they could, though they seemed to settle like flies.

Most of them spoke a little English, and more French, which they mingled

with Arabic in an almost incomprehensible jargon. The man who was now pestering the juniors was a fat Arab in a dirty burnous and a shabby turban, with a fat, sly face and shifty, watchful, cunning eyes. He held a goatskin bag in his hand, which he was offering for the juniors to look at, asserting in excited French that he had a "chose extraordinaire" to display.

"Regardez!" he repeated. "Only look! I am Suleiman—the seer. I tell you everything that does happen—"

"A giddy fortune-teller!" grinned Johnny Bull. "My hat! Is anybody ass enough to believe in such rot?"

"The rotfulness is terrific." "I say, you fellows, you try him," said Bunter. "He can tell you lots of things—I've tried. He can describe things he's never seen; tell you all about your place at home, if you like—"

"Rats!" said Nugent. "Well, he told me," said Bunter warmly. "I put him to the test. He described Bunter Court—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He sees it all in the sand, you know—genuine Sahara sand," said Bunter. "The Arabs believe in it."

"More fools they!" grunted Bob. "Well, the tourists go in for it, too," said Bunter. "I can tell you that chap knows something. He described Bunter Court all right—grand mansion, you know—vast colonnade—extensive grounds—and, of course, he's never seen it."



"I see him!" said the diviner in his droning voice. "He rides in the desert—he is mounted, and the soldiers ride with him." "My father!" said Bob Cherry eagerly. "Yes." "How the thump does he know that?" muttered Nugent. "I dare say he saw Major Cherry ride out from Biskra a fortnight ago," grunted Johnny Bull. "I think—" "Hush—he's speaking," said Bob. And the diviner's droning voice went on. (See Chapter 4.)

"Neither has anybody else," grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"
The juniors grinned. That the Arab fortune-teller was a charlatan they knew must be the case, since what he set out to do was not within the bounds of possibility. But no doubt he had found it easy enough to "draw" Bunter, and earn from him enough to pretend to read a description in the Sahara sand.

"Oh, cut off, my man," said Harry Wharton. "Buzz, you know."

But the fat Suleiman did not buzz. "I tell you everything—toute chose," he said. He waved the bag. "I read him in the sand—the sand of the desert! All things are told in the sand. You have one friend who is far away—you want to know what he do. Suleiman tell you in the sand."

Bob Cherry started a little. Ibrahim the guide had been three days absent, and had not yet returned. No word had come from Major Cherry.

They had been anxious days to Bob; though he had tried to keep cheerful in order not to spoil the holiday of his comrades and the Cliff House girls. He was resolved not to be a wet blanket. But he was aching for news of his father.

The seer noted at once the change in Bob's face, and bestowed all his attention upon him at once.

"You want to know, yes," he exclaimed. "Toute chose—toute chose. C'est moi qui vous dit cela. There is someone who is gone—yes. You would know?"

Bob reddened under the glances of his chums.

"Of course, I know it is all rot, you fellows," he said. "There are spoofers in our own country who pretend to read things from crystal balls, and table-rapping, and silly swindles like that. But let the fellow rip—it's a lark, anyhow."

Poor Bob did not look much in the humour for a "lark." He had heard a good deal of talk about the Arab seers, and justly regarded their claims as all moonshine. But he knew that some foolish people believed in them; and in his anxious frame of mind he would have been glad to believe in them himself, if they could have told him news of his absent father.

"Oh, go it, old chap, if you like," said Wharton. "He will tell you a few lies for a few francs."

"Well, it's amusing," said Bob. "Go ahead, Suleiman."

"I tell you the truth!" said the diviner. "Only truth comes from the mouth of Suleiman. Otherwise the spirit of Allah would depart from him, and he would be dumb, and could tell nothing."

"You can't tell anything, anyhow," growled Johnny Bull. "Get it over, and chuck it."

"I know it's all spoofer," said Bob Cherry unasily. "I know the game—they pump something out of a chap, and then make out that they've read it in the sand—as this fellow seems to have done with Bunter—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"
"Get on with it," said Bob. "How much do you want? Five francs?"

"Nothing," said the Arab diviner. "What?"

"If Suleiman tell you the truth, you give him twenty-five francs; if he do not tell you the truth, you give him nothing," said the fat Arab with an air of dignity.

"Well, that's a sporting offer," said Frank Nugent, laughing. "Looks like a losing game for Suleiman—he doesn't look as if he's got a very close acquaintance with the truth."

"Get on with it," repeated Bob, with a strange eagerness in his voice. His common-sense was against it; but he found himself hoping, somehow, that there was something in the fat, brown man's claim to powers of divination.

The Arab opened the goatskin bag. "You think of someone who is away?" he asked.

"Yes."
"A man or a woman?"

"You can tell me that, if you can read things in the sand," said Bob gruffly.

"C'est vrai! Nous verrons."
Suleiman the diviner opened the bag wider, revealing that it was stacked with glistening particles of sand. He stirred the sand gently with a dirty finger, making little furrows in it, and bent his fat face over it, his cunning eyes staring into the sand as if they would penetrate it.

The Greyfriars juniors watched him with curiosity, mingled with disgust. They had not been long in Africa, but long enough to have become well acquainted with the roguery and thievery of the Arab population. But a man who pretended to read the decrees of Fate in a bag of sand seemed to them a particularly impudent rogue. The Arabs sprawling outside the Cafe Maure gave the diviner their attention also, with grave and serious faces. What seemed to the Greyfriars fellows an impudent imposture was apparently serious to the natives.

The fat Arab's face grew set and severe; he rolled his eyes, and drew a hissing breath, and his gaze seemed to devour the furrowed, glistening sand in the goatskin bag. Bob Cherry watched him curiously, but with growing dislike and disgust. The man spoke suddenly:

"C'est le pere de monsieur!"
Bob Cherry started violently.

"I see him!" went on the diviner in a droning voice. "He rides in the desert—he is mounted, and the soldiers ride with him. It is the father of monsieur."

"My father!" Bob nodded. "Yes."

"How the thump does he know that?" muttered Nugent.

Grunt, from Johnny Bull.
"I dare say he saw Major Cherry ride out of Biskra a fortnight ago. It's likely enough."

"But how does he know he's my father?"

"Pooch—these Arabs know all our affairs—they tattle to one another like a lot of old women," grunted Johnny Bull. "I think—"

"Hush! He's speaking."
Johnny Bull grunted, and relapsed into silence, as the diviner's droning voice went on:

"He rides with the Roumi soldiers in the desert. It is night! They camp in the sand-hills. It is darker and darker. There is no moon; the hyenas gather round the camp, snuffing their prey. I read it in the sand. Suleiman tells you the truth! What is it that the father of monsieur seeks? He seeks a boy who is a prisoner. But he will never find him. There is death in the desert."

Suleiman raised his eyes from the bag of sand. The juniors, in spite of themselves, had become very grave. Bob's face was pale.

"I read no more," said Suleiman. "C'est terrible—"

"Tell me the rest," said Bob Cherry fiercely.

"If monsieur demands—"
"Yes—yes—"

Suleiman bent his glinting eyes on the sand again. Bob Cherry watched him breathlessly. If the man was a charlatan, how did he know so much? If there was something in his claim to divination, he could tell more.

The Arab's dark face grew darker, as if troubled. His droning voice went on:

"It is night in the desert. The stars shine on the camp. All are sleeping. Now I see them fighting—the French soldiers and the Arab spear-men. They are fighting till the Roumis are all slain."

"All?" breathed Bob.
"All but one; all but the bronzed-faced man—the Englishman. He is fighting. He is overwhelmed. He is taken prisoner. He is bound upon the back of a camel. He is taken into the desert. The sun burns upon his face as he rides."

"My father!" breathed Bob.
"He is taken into the tent of a sheik. And now—now—" The diviner paused again.

"Now?" breathed Bob.
"He is asked something that he will not answer, and the torturers are called in."

Bob uttered a cry.
"Stop it!" exclaimed Harry Wharton roughly. "Shut up, for goodness' sake! Here's your twenty-five francs. Take it and clear!"

Bob Cherry leaned back under the awning, his ruddy face deathly white. He seemed deprived of the power of movement or speech.

Suleiman grabbed the twenty-five francs, salaamed to the Greyfriars juniors, and disappeared, fastening up his goatskin bag as he went. Bob turned a haggard face on his comrades.

"He knows!" he muttered.
"It's all rot!" said Johnny Bull.

"How can he know?"
"He must know. He does know! He says that the sheik asked my father something that he would not answer," muttered Bob. "We know what that is—about the Eye of Ahmed. And—and they're putting him to the torture." Bob shuddered.

Wharton laid a hand on his arm.

"Pull yourself together, Bob, old chap! That man is a swindling thief. He's heard something or other, and patched up this tale from it. Don't be an ass, Bob! You've got too much sense to believe in magic, I hope."

"My esteemed Bob—" murmured Hurree Singh.

Bob nodded vaguely, and staggered to his feet. The words of the sand-diviner had shaken him to the very soul. How did the man know so much if he was lying?

"Bob!" exclaimed Nugent.

Bob Cherry strode away, seeming not to hear. Harry Wharton hastily called to the Nubian waiter to pay the bill.

"I say, you fellows, don't go!" exclaimed Billy Bunter. "I haven't finished yet."

"Go and eat coke!"
"Oh, really, Wharton—"

The chums of the Remove hurried after Bob Cherry, and Bunter, with an indignant grunt, rolled after them. The Owl of the Remove had devoured only enough for six or seven, so he had to leave his meal unfinished.

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THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bob Cherry's Resolve!

"MARJORIE!"

Bob Cherry tried to smile cheerily, but it was a painful failure.

It was the following day, and Bob was pacing aimlessly in the garden of the Villa Mimosa. He had been scarcely able to rest since the sand-diviner, at the Cafe Maure, in Biskra, had told him the story of his father's disaster.

It was in vain that his chums reasoned with him on the subject—that he reasoned with himself. Eastern magic, he knew very well, was all moonshine. Yet the tale of the sand-diviner left his heart as heavy as lead, with bitter anxiety for his father. There was in it, somehow, an accent of truth, and if Suleiman had not read it in the goat-skin bag of sand, he had other sources of information. It was maddening to Bob to be idling in the holiday town while his father was being, perhaps, done to death in the hands of the robber sheik of the desert.

And yet he felt helpless.

Danger and death would not have deterred him from following the major into the desert, and seeking to help him in his extremity. But Major Cherry's orders had been strict. His son and the others were to await his return to Biskra. To disobey his orders, to plunge into the trackless desert, because of a tale told by a rascally Arab, was scarcely to be thought of. Bob knew that he must wait—wait at least till he knew more for certain. But every minute that he waited passed on leaden wings.

Marjorie Hazeldene came through the trees and joined him. Her pretty face was clouded.

"Marjorie," said Bob, "I—I—" His pitiful attempt at a cheery smile faded away.

"I understand, Bob," said Marjorie softly.

"I know I'm rotten company just now," said poor Bob. "I—I can't help it, Marjorie. You'd better give me a miss for a bit. I—I'm not quite up to excursions and things, but I don't want to spoil the holiday for anybody else. I—I dare say it's all right."

The girl was silent, and Bob gave her an anxious look. He comprehended that Marjorie had come to tell him something.

"Is there news?" he breathed.

Marjorie nodded.

"Ibrahim—"

"He has returned," said Marjorie.

"And—and his news?"

"I have not spoken to him. I saw him ride in on his camel," said Marjorie. "But—but I think— Bob, you must keep up your courage, and do not give up hope while there is a chance."

"I—I understand," said Bob huskily.

Leaving Marjorie under the palms, he hurried away towards the villa. Honest Ibrahim's camel was snorting in the courtyard. Honest Ibrahim himself was sitting in the veranda, sipping sherbet. His gold-braided jacket and bright blue trousers glimmered in the sun. After his sojourn in the desert Ibrahim was as much of a dandy as ever. He rose and salaamed to Bob. The other juniors were with him in the veranda, and their faces were grim.

"Buck up, Bob, old man!" said Harry.

Bob Cherry nodded without speaking, and fixed his eyes on Ibrahim. There was commiseration in the Arab guide's dusky face.

"Tell him, and cut it short," said



"Drop that gun!" ordered Harry Wharton grimly. Achmet grinned, instead of obeying. Quite plainly he was only waiting for a signal from Ibrahim to fire on the juniors. Wharton threw up his rifle and fired at the Arab who held the gun. Crack! There was a fearful yell from Achmet and he rolled over on the sand, the long Arab gun clattering down with a jingle. (See Chapter 11.)

Harry. Bob understood that his comrades had heard Ibrahim's news already.

"My father is a prisoner?" asked Bob.

"It is so."

"In the hands of the Sheik Mustapha?"

"Yes."

"And the soldiers who went with him—"

Ibrahim made an expressive gesture.

"Dead?"

"The Sahara has devoured them," said Ibrahim. "I have talked with men of the Tahar. Ibrahim do your business."

"Where is my father now?"

"Mustapha's prisoner, in his camp in the desert. Far, far, far away to the south, where the French soldiers never ride."

"You could find the camp?"

"Yes."

"You can guide me there?"

Ibrahim raised his eyebrows.

"It is death!" he said.

Bob gave an impatient growl.

"That needn't worry you. You needn't run any risk. I'll pay you well to guide me to Mustapha ben Mohammed."

"To hear is to obey," said Ibrahim.

"Bob!" muttered Nugent.

"I'm going to my father," said Bob quietly. "Do you think I can go home and say that I left him to be murdered by those Arab scoundrels in the desert? They can kill me, too; I don't care much. Anyhow, I'm going!"

"If you go, we go," said Harry Wharton very quietly.

"No need for that. What's the good of all you fellows going into danger?" muttered Bob uneasily. "Those desert thieves would murder you for the clothes on your backs."

"We shall go, all the same."

"The gofulness will be terrific, my esteemed Bob."

Frank Nugent nodded assent.

"It's up to us," said Johnny Bull, in his slow and thoughtful way. "Can't leave a man in the lurch. It's up to us."

Ibrahim looked at the Greyfriars juniors, a strange glimmer in his black eyes. Bob Cherry sat down.

"Tell us all you know, from start to finish, Ibrahim," he said.

The Arab told the tale—of the night attack on the French encampment, the massacre of the soldiers, the capture of the major. It was almost as the sand diviner had told it. What Suleiman had read, or pretended to read, in the sand, Ibrahim had learned from his acquaintances among the robber Arabs of the desert.

"This ought to be reported," said Harry Wharton, when the guide had finished. "Ibrahim must go to the Mairic—"

The guide looked alarmed.

"No, no, no!" he ejaculated. "Ibrahim say nothing! Every knife in the Tahar tribe would be at his throat! One word in Biskra of the doings of Mustapha ben Mohammed, and it is death."

I tell my fine gentlemen. I tell no other."

"But—" said Harry.

Ibrahim shook his head vigorously.

"Let's march him along to the Mairie, and make him spin his yarn there," growled Johnny Bull.

Ibrahim grinned.

"No make," he said. "Make Ibrahim tell lies."

"You precious rogue!"

"Oh, what does it matter?" exclaimed Bob. "Let it drop. We've got to depend on ourselves now, and there's no time to lose. I'm leaving Biskra to-morrow."

"Then we're all leaving," said Harry.

"Except Bunter," said Johnny Bull.

"Of course. Bunter will have to stay here."

"I say, you fellows—" Billy Bunter blinked out of the french windows upon the veranda. "I say, I heard you! Leaving me out—what? I can jolly well tell you that I'm not going to be left out, see?"

"You don't want to come into the desert, Bunter."

"I jolly well do!"

"You fat ass!" exclaimed Harry Wharton impatiently. "It's not an excursion—it's a dangerous expedition."

Bunter winked.

"Pile it on," he said.

"Look here, Bunter—"

"Go it!" grinned Bunter. "You can't fool me, you know. I'm fly! You're jolly well not leaving me out."

"You fat duffer!"

"Yah!"

And Billy Bunter rolled away, quite convinced that there was some ripping excursion on, and quite determined that he was not going to be left out of it.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Greyfriars to the Rescue!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. lost no time.

They had resolved, with little discussion, what they were to do; and the resolution once taken, they proceeded at once to put it into effect.

Major Cherry, in seeking Ali ben Yusef among the savage Arabs, had fallen into the hands of the desert sheik. To save him, or to die in the attempt, was Bob's resolve, and his chums were prepared to back him to the very end. They realised very clearly the dangers they had to face, but there was no hesitation among the Famous Five.

The remainder of that day, and the evening, were spent in preparations for the expedition.

As a matter of fact, the juniors were fairly well prepared already. They had hoped to accompany the major into the desert in the first place, though that hope had been disappointed. And it had always been in Bob's mind that he should go in search of his father, if the major did not return in safety to Biskra.

Every day the juniors had put in some time at practice at the shooting gallery in the Rue Berthe. Almost every day they had taken camel rides, to become accustomed to that novel mode of transport. All that they needed for the expedition was in their possession already, with few exceptions. And in the final preparations Honest Ibrahim came in very useful.

That the honest one cheated them most outrageously in the purchases he made for them the juniors were well aware. But Ibrahim at least "delivered the goods," and they were satisfied. Ho

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engaged to have camels and attendants ready at dawn, and he kept his word. Major Cherry had left a good sum of money in Bob's hands, not knowing how long he might be absent; and the other juniors were well provided with holiday funds. So there was no shortage of cash.

On Ibrahim's suggestion, nothing was said of the object of the expedition. The servants at the villa, and at the Hazeldenes' villa, supposed that it was an ordinary travelling excursion into the desert, such as is often undertaken by the tourists at Biskra. Arms and ammunition had to be taken, but this only gave the impression that a little hunting would be thrown in. Certainly, without being told, no one was likely to suspect that the Greyfriars juniors were setting out to try conclusions with a robber sheik of the Sahara.

Honest Ibrahim pointed out that if the French authorities got wind of the expedition it would be stopped officially at once. The French governor, assuredly, would not have allowed a band of English tourists to undertake an armed conflict with the desert Arabs. Harry Wharton & Co. realised that it was necessary to be discreet.

But, silence being kept, there was nothing to fear.

Every day some excursion set out from Biskra, and those who went deep into the desert, beyond the confines of the French garrisons, generally went armed. There was nothing to call particular attention to the schoolboys.

It was only in Biskra that intervention was to be looked for. Once in the boundless desert every man was his own master, and could do what was right in his own eyes.

It was in a serious mood that the Greyfriars fellows packed their camping materials, their rifles and revolvers, and examined their cartridges. Even Bob Cherry realised that the expedition was a wild and reckless one—that the chances were a thousand to one against the juniors.

But Bob was quietly determined, and his comrades did not think for a moment of failing him in his hour of need.

Billy Bunter, certainly, would have backed out promptly enough had he understood the nature of the journey.

But Bunter was quite convinced that it was only an excursion on an unusually large scale, and that the other fellows wanted to leave him out. So he was resolved to go.

It was in vain that Harry Wharton told him the news Ibrahim had brought. Bunter described it as "gammon" with a fat wink. His view of the Arabs was that they were all thieves and liars and swindlers, but that some of them were ruthless and blood-thirsty robbers he declined to believe. Indeed, it was hard to believe that within a day's ride of the clanging tramway of Biskra the primitive passions of the desert raged uncontrolled and unchecked. Bunter declined to believe it. In fact, he complained loudly because the party were going to travel on camel-back, instead of taking the railway. He declined to believe that there was no railway.

In the evening Harry Wharton called at the Hazeldenes' villa, to tell his friends there what was to happen. Mr. and Mrs. Hazeldene were astonished, and they tried hard to dissuade the captain of the Greyfriars Remove. Hazel whistled with surprise, and seemed rather keen on coming—an idea that his parents "sat upon" very emphatically at once. Marjorie said nothing, but her

look showed Harry that she did not disapprove. As for Miss Clara, she declared that she wanted to come too, and that for two pins she would.

"Anyhow, we'll see you off," said Clara. "When do you start?"

"At dawn," said Harry with a smile.

"Then we'll see you off, old chap," said Miss Clara. "You'll see me waving a hanky at the gate."

"Good!" said Harry.

"My dear boy," said Mr. Hazeldene gravely, "I wish I could dissuade you. I am not sure that it is not my duty to intervene, and inform the authorities of your reckless intention."

"That wouldn't be playing the game," said Clara.

"Clara!" murmured Marjorie.

"Well, it wouldn't," said Clara. "I jolly well wish I could go, too. I'd like to make old Mustapha sit up."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I don't see why I can't go," said Hazel, rather sulkily.

His father shook his head.

"Impossible, my dear boy," added Mrs. Hazeldene.

Hazel grunted.

Harry Wharton took his leave, leaving very grave faces behind him. The other fellows came in during the evening to say good-bye. Their preparations finished, the Famous Five went early to bed, and slept soundly enough.

At the first glimpse of dawn they were out of bed. The tramping in the courtyard showed that Honest Ibrahim had arrived with the camels and the camelmens.

Billy Bunter's deep and resonant snore was still heard; and the juniors were careful not to awaken him.

Bunter was not likely to awaken so early on his own account; and by leaving him asleep the juniors settled the disputed point. The Owl of the Remove was not required on an expedition of danger.

After a hasty breakfast the juniors came out.

Honest Ibrahim grinned and salaamed.

"All ready!" he said. "Fine camels! Yes! You trust Ibrahim. He do your business! All ready, my fine gentlemen!"

Biskra was still sleeping. Faintly from afar came the call of the muezzin.

The juniors mounted their camels. Their baggage, as light as they could make it, was packed on those patient and powerful beasts. The gate was opened wide, and the party rode out into the dusty road that led to the desert.

All eyes turned back to the next gate on the road—and two white handkerchiefs fluttered there. Marjorie and Clara waved their hands, and the juniors waved back.

Then they started.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Too!

HARRY WHARTON'S face was thoughtful as he rode on the scarcely-marked track in the desert.

The sun was high, blazing down on the riders.

Biskra was left far behind. Here and there a clump of date palms broke the expanse; here and there a white villa gleamed, or a group of Arab mud houses loomed up.

A party of French railwaymen, workers on the Touggourt railway, passed the riders, and exchanged cheery greetings. A squad of Spahis trotted by, and glanced at the Greyfriars party—who felt a momentary uneasiness. Had the

French officer known of their intention, it was very probable that he would have turned them back. But to his eyes the party was only one of the many excursion parties from Biskra, and he gave them no special heed.

Honest Ibrahim seemed in cheery spirits. The juniors were quite well aware that the guide regarded the expedition as little short of insanity; they guessed very easily that he did not believe that a single member of the party would return alive from the quest. But those gloomy prognostications did not affect Ibrahim's spirits at all. He seemed quite satisfied with himself and things generally, and he sang an Arab song, incomprehensible to the juniors, as he trotted onward on his camel.

There were three other Arabs in the party, friends of Ibrahim whom he had engaged for the journey. They were to care for the camels and the baggage, to do the work of the camp, and make themselves generally useful. It was understood that when they reached the danger zone, Ibrahim & Co. were to take their leave, leaving the Greyfriars fellows to their own devices. Ibrahim had explained very coolly that he had no intention of risking his precious dusky skin in conflict with the desert Arabs, and the juniors certainly did not expect it of him. They were very well aware that they had only themselves to depend upon.

The song that Ibrahim was singing was taken up by the three camel-drivers, and Harry Wharton noticed that they grinned as they sang, and glanced at one another and at the travellers. He wondered whether the song had reference to them and to their expedition. He had already learned some of the Arab ways, and knew that the guides sometimes commented upon their employers in this way.

Each of the Famous Five rode a camel, and there were four baggage camels also. Ibrahim rode a handsome camel; but the drivers were on foot, running lithely, and beating the lumbering beasts with their sticks to urge them on. The cracking of the sticks on the camels' tough hides, and

the yelling of the drivers urging them on, made a kind of almost incessant chorus.

Higher rose the sun, blazing on the plain.

Towards noon a halt was made, at an Arab mud village. There was a French auberge, kept by a fat and weary-looking man, who welcomed the party eagerly. During lunch at the auberge, he told them how he pined for his "la belle France," while he served them with the best that his little inn could furnish. The camel-drivers camped in the courtyard, where they took their meal, while the juniors ate in the dusky little salle-a-manger, swarming with flies.

They had finished, but were still politely listening to their host, whose eloquence seemed inexhaustible, when there was a clatter of hoofs without. They heard an exclamation from Ibrahim, and then a well-known voice.

"Where are they, you blessed nigger?"
"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Bunter!" exclaimed Nugent.

A minute more, and William George Bunter's fat face, streaming with perspiration, crimson with heat, loomed into the salle-a-manger. His spectacles gleamed reproach at the Famous Five.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Bunter, you ass—"

"Bunter, you chump—"

"You terrific duffer!"

Bunter glared.

"Left me behind, did you?" he roared. "Well, I can jolly well tell you that I'm not going to be left behind. See?"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob.

"I've jolly well come after you!" hooted Bunter. "Leaving me out—after all I've done for you!"

"Look here, Bunter—"

"Oh, don't jaw, Wharton! I'm hungry! I'm tired! Let a fellow have some grub! Here, you—trot out some grub!"

"Oui, monsieur!" said the innkeeper. Billy Bunter sat down, puffing for

breath, and still glaring reproach at the chums of the Remove.

Evidently Bunter had had a hot and hurried ride. He seemed to be almost melting.

But that did not affect his appetite. He polished off roasted mutton, and an omelette aux fines herbes, and then settled down to dinner.

The eyes of the aubergiste opened wider and wider as he supplied Bunter's wants. He had seen all sorts of travellers in his time, but he had never seen his foodstuffs raided in this style before. With a few customers like Bunter every day, the good man would soon have made a sufficient fortune to enable him to shake the dust of the desert from his feet, and retire to la belle France.

"He was bound to turn up," remarked Johnny Bull, as the juniors watched Bunter's wonderful gastronomic performances. "I suppose we'd better leave him here."

Bunter blinked across the table.

"You jolly well won't!" he snapped.

"We're going into the desert, Bunter—into danger," said Harry Wharton patiently.

"Gammon!"

"If you go on further than this, it will be impossible to turn back," said Bob.

"I don't want to turn back."

"Oh, you ass!"

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter went on with his extensive meal. He was hot, and he was tired. But his jaws were not tired; they were too well exercised to tire easily.

"I say, you fellows, where's Marjorie?" he asked, blinking round.

"Marjorie!" repeated Wharton.

"Yes. Haven't the girls come with you?"

"No, you duffer! Don't I keep on telling you that this isn't an excursion?"

"Pile it on," said Bunter.

"Oh, kick him!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows, I'll take a nap after dinner, while you're seeing the



"I say, you fellows, what—what—" babbled Bunter, staring out at the scene in amazement and terror. The juniors did not heed Bunter; there was no time to waste on the Owl of the Remove. Four of them walked across to the camel drivers. "Drop your weapons!" commanded Wharton. "Take their stickers from them, Franky," he added. "If they resist we'll shoot." (See Chapter 11.)

Roman ruins, or the mosque, or whatever it is. I'm tired. I don't care about Roman ruins and mosques."

"We are not here to see the sights, Bunter. We're keeping right on to the south."

"All right—I'll come. Only don't leave it too late about turning back, you know—we don't want to be late home."

"We're not going back to Biskra."

"Gammon!"

William George Bunter was not to be convinced. The Greyfriars juniors strolled out of the auberge, leaving Bunter to finish his lunch—which was finished at last. Then the Owl of the Remove took a nap on the shabby sofa in the "fumoir." Harry Wharton & Co. hoped that he would be still asleep when they started.

But Bunter was on his guard now. When the camels were being prepared to resume the journey, Bunter rolled out of the auberge.

"I say, you fellows, I'm ready."

"Go and eat coke!"

"Yah!"

Harry Wharton & Co. settled their bill and mounted their camels. Billy Bunter remounted the horse that had brought him from Biskra. Bunter, by this time, was able to keep on a horse, though his style of riding drew broad grins from the Arabs.

"Look here, Bunter," exclaimed Wharton. "You'd better ride back to Biskra at once."

"Rot!"

"You'll be all right at the villa while we're away, and Mr. Hazeldene will see you safe back to England if—if anything happens to us."

"Pile it on!" said Bunter.

"Mind, if you keep on, you're booked," said Harry. "We shall be right in the desert by sunset, and then it will not be safe for you to ride back alone, even if you could find the way."

"I'm not going back," grinned Bunter. "Not till you fellows do. If you're really camping out to-night, I can camp out, I suppose. Of course, I shall expect to be made comfortable."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

Harry Wharton gave it up, and the party trotted on by the desert path. Billy Bunter trotted with them, grinning gleefully. He had not been left behind after all; and he felt that he had scored.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Choice!

"I'M tired!"

Billy Bunter had made that announcement a dozen times at least. Now he made it again.

Nobody heeded Bunter.

The sun was sinking over the desert. The halt was not to be made till night-fall, at an Arab village that Ibrahim knew. Through baking heat the Greyfriars juniors rode on, to an accompaniment of cracking sticks and objurgations from the camel-drivers.

"I say, you fellows, I'm tired!" bawled Bunter.

"Shurrup!"

"Didn't you hear me say I'm tired?" demanded the Owl of the Remove indignantly. "When are we stopping, you beasts?"

"At dark," said Harry.

"Why can't we camp now?"

"Fathead!"

"Look here, I think this camping out is a rotten idea," said Bunter peevishly.

"I like a roof over my head."

"Ride back to Biskra, then, if you can find the way."

THE MACNET LIBRARY.—No. 855.

"You know I can't, you beast!"

"Then dry up!"

The brief dusk of the desert fell at last. Lights twinkled from an oasis far ahead.

A crowd of ragged children and men and women, black and brown, turned out to stare at the travellers as they arrived.

There was no auberge in the mud village—no white man at all. The Greyfriars party camped by the date palms, and the tents were unpacked from the baggage-camels and erected. Billy Bunter grumbled considerably; but an ample supper restored his spirits.

"What is there to see in this place?" he asked, after supper.

"Nothing," said Harry.

"Then what have we come here for?"

"To rest before we go on to-morrow."

"Are we going on farther?"

"Yes, ass."

"But what's the game?" asked Bunter. "Are we getting to another town, or what?"

Wharton made an impatient movement.

"Fathead! I've told you that we're going into the desert, to find Major Cherry if we can."

"I wish you'd tell the truth, Wharton!" said Billy Bunter severely.

"What?"

"Why can't you fellows follow my example, and be straightforward and truthful, and all that?" demanded Bunter. "What's the good of keeping on telling whoppers?"

"Oh, dry up, you duffer!"

"Yah!"

Bunter snored contentedly in a tent. The party were to start at dawn; and at dawn Bunter was still snoring placidly. Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry looked at him as he snored.

"We could spare one of the camel-drivers," said Harry. "He could guide Bunter back to Biskra. We'll leave him here—"

Bunter's eyes opened.

"You jolly well won't!" he mumbled.

"Do you want to keep on, Bunter?"

"I'm jolly well going to keep on!"

"Well, we're starting."

"Look here, I'm not getting up for two hours at least!" roared Bunter indignantly.

"Please yourself; we're going."

"Beast!"

In a very indignant frame of mind, Bunter breakfasted, and was ready when the start was made. Honest Ibrahim eyed him very curiously.

"Fine fat gentleman better go back," he said. "I send Achmet to guide fine fat gentleman to Biskra. Yes?"

"Mind your own business, you dashed nigger!" grunted Bunter.

Ibrahim's eyes gleamed.

"To hear is to obey, my fine gentleman," he said.

"Well, shut up, then!" said Bunter.

And Honest Ibrahim shut up.

To the cracking of the sticks, and the howls of the camel-drivers, that day, was added an accompaniment of groning from William George Bunter. The day was hot, and the journey was tiring, and many a long mile glided beneath the plodding feet of the camels. Bunter was tired of the saddle, and he was accommodated with a seat on one of the baggage-camels. There he sat more at ease, and grumbled unheeded. The horse, which he had hired in Biskra, trotted along with the party, but after the noon-day halt it had disappeared. The juniors wondered whether one of the camelmen had sold it to some of the Arabs who gathered round the camp—they could not help suspecting Honest Ibrahim. But

Ibrahim smilingly disclaimed any knowledge of what had become of the horse.

"I say, you fellows, that horse will have to be paid for, if it isn't taken back to Biskra," said Bunter. "I wash my hands of it! If you travel with a lot of thieves, you'll have to take the consequences, Wharton. I shall expect you to pay for that horse."

"You can settle that with the man it belongs to when you get back to Biskra!" growled Johnny Bull. "That is if you ever get back."

"What do you mean, you ass? I suppose we're going back to Biskra after this excursion?"

"It isn't an excursion, fathead."

"Gammon."

Bunter was not to be convinced. But towards nightfall that day he began to feel uneasy. He had not much sense of direction, but even Bunter could watch the sun, and could guess north from south. And he realised that the party were going deeper and deeper into the desert, and he saw that the white villas had long since disappeared, and that the Arab mud villages were growing fewer and fewer, and the inhabitants of them more savage-looking and surly. He still clung to the belief that the party were heading for some town where sight-seeing was to be done. But his belief was shaken now.

"We're camping out again to-night?" he asked Wharton.

"Of course!"

"When do we turn back, then?"

"We don't turn back."

"I fancy it's getting rather risky now," said Bunter uneasily. "I could hear those beastly hyenas yelling last night. Suppose we run across a lion?"

"Very likely we shall."

"Oh, shall we?" exclaimed Bunter warmly. "Well, then, I want to turn back. I don't like lions, I can tell you."

"It's too late for you to turn back now, Bunter. We can't spare one of the camels to carry you, and your horse has been stolen. And you could not make the journey in any case."

"I don't want to turn back alone, fathead! It's time we all turned back!" exclaimed Bunter.

Wharton made no reply to that.

Again the party camped for the night at an Arab mud village, in a nook of the desert, where there was a spring and a clump of scrubby palms. Again in the glimmering dawn they rode on, and the way was ever southward. Billy Bunter was growing alarmed now.

At noon the party halted in a range of low hills, and camped where a high rock shut off the severest heat of the sun. Billy Bunter was silent over the lunch—an unusual circumstance with him. After lunch, instead of going to sleep as usual, he unburdened his mind.

"I'm fed-up with this, you fellows," he said determinedly. "I tell you plainly I'm fed-up!"

"Well?" said Wharton curtly.

"It's time we stopped this jaunt. Let's get back to Biskra," said Bunter.

"What I say is, chuck it!"

"Fathead!"

"Look here!" said Bunter, the dread truth penetrating into his fat mind at last. "Is it really straight that you're going right into the desert to look for Major Cherry?"

"I've told you so."

"But is it straight?" howled Bunter.

"Yes, ass."

"Then why didn't you let me know?" demanded Bunter indignantly.

There really was no reply to make to that, and the Famous Five did not trouble to make any. Billy Bunter,

(Continued on page 17.)



GAY GOSSIP!

By Bob Cherry.

BILLY BUNTER proudly claims to have no less than four millionaire uncles. One is supposed to have made a fortune in gold prospecting at Klondyke, another is at the head of the Bunter Bath Bun Corporation, a third managed to "get rich quick" on the Stock Exchange, and the other is what Bunter calls "a big shipping magnet." It is surprising that, with four millionaire uncles, Bunter can't squeeze even a sixpenny postal-order out of them!

ALONZO TODD declares that his devoted Uncle Benjamin is a second King Solomon in the matter of wisdom. But I venture to suggest that the Wise King had more "savvy" in his little finger than Uncle Ben has in the whole of his cranium.

GOSLING, the porter, is of the opinion that all relations "oughter be drowned at birth." But if this drastic step were taken there wouldn't be any births.

TOM BROWN has received invitations to spend the summer vac with no less than ten uncles. He is in a quandary, and doesn't know which to choose. If he takes my advice, Brownway will select the uncle with the biggest bank balance, the best-stocked larder, the finest orchard, the most up-to-date wireless installation, and the most wonderful mansion for miles around. Then he can bank on getting a good time.

COKER of the Fifth deplors the fact that he doesn't possess a pretty sister. Perhaps it's as well that he doesn't, for when they were together his own ugliness would stand out in painful contrast.

DICKY NUGENT of the Second informs us that he hopes to spend the summer holidays with his favourite "ant." Hope he doesn't get bitten.

IT is the proud boast of Harold Skinner that he has an uncle who is a big director in the City. Probably a director of envelopes.

A RATHER cruel rumour has gone the rounds that Vernon-Smith's millionaire father was once a dustman. This is ridiculous on the face of it, though we all know that Smith's pater has collected plenty of "dust."
[Supplement i.]

MY SISTER!

By Billy Bunter.



WHO turns the scale at half a ton,
And samples many a currant-bun,
Doughnut, and tart, and "Sally Lunn"?

My Sister!

Who has a honnie, beaming face,
The prettiest girl in all the place,
The queen of all the British race?

My Sister!

Who calls at Greyfriars twice a week
(She's self-invited, so to speak),
And makes old Toddy say, "What check!"

My Sister!

Whose ways are wonderful and winning?
Who never growls, is always grinning,
And is more sinned against than sinning?

My Sister!

Who wears the daintiest of dresses,
And has the most divine of tresses?
No need to make a dozen guesses.

My Sister!

Who always eats enough for nine,
Doesn't know where to draw the line,
And has an appetite like mine?

My Sister!

Who thinks that I'm a splendid chap,
A gallant hero in a scrap,
The mightiest man on all the map?

My Sister!

We grew in beauty, side by side,
A fact which cannot be denied,
But who's her mother's joy and pride?

My Sister!

Who, when she reads these rhymes,
Will smack
Her brilliant brother on the back,
And treat him to a stunning snack?

My Sister!

EDITORIAL!

By Harry Wharton.

IN "H.M.S. Pinafore," perhaps the most popular of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, the First Lord of the Admiralty sings a song about "his sisters and his cousins, whom he reckons up by dozens, and his aunts." He appears to have had a whole heap of relations, who haunted him wherever he went. That was the penalty of his high position. Had he been a humble Jack Tar, without a penny to bless himself with, his relations would not have been in evidence. It is a well-known fact that, when a man rises to fame and fortune, plenty of relations bob up to share the honour and glory—and the loot.

Of course, there are relations of all sorts—rich relations, poor relations, generous relations, mean relations, cheery and charming relations, and sour and surly relations. You will meet all types in this issue. Our contributors have set out to tell us about their pater and maters, their uncles and aunts, their brothers and sisters, and their fifth cousins twice removed. Some of these relations are popular, others are very much the reverse.

As at most public schools, the great day for relations at Greyfriars is Speech Day. They roll up in their thousands, so to speak. Big brothers from the "Varsities, pretty sisters and charming girl cousins; bronzed warriors like my uncle Colonel Wharton, and Major Cherry; dignified old dames, and small brothers who have hardly left the nursery. This great gathering of the clans is a very happy event, and it is with natural pride that the Greyfriars fellows pilot their people round the historic building.

Some fellows, however, prefer their relations at a distance. Possibly they believe in that very doubtful maxim that "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." Billy Bunter is always pleased to receive tuck-hampers and parcels and postal-orders from his swell relations—if any. But he doesn't like them to pay personal visits to Greyfriars. They are pretty certain to interview Mr. Quelch as to Bunter's scholastic progress. They are informed that Bunter is the biggest dunce and dullard in the Remove; and they depart in high dudgeon, without bestowing a handsome "tip" upon the unfortunate Owl.

I feel sure that this number will serve to strengthen the happy "relations" which already exist between ourselves and our readers.

HARRY WHARTON.
THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 865.



My Favourite Relation!

Some Candid & Comical Confessions of our Contributors.

HAROLD SKINNER:

I suppose you will think me very selfish when I say that my favourite relation is my pater's brother's nephew—namely, myself! Of course, it's rather ridiculous for a fellow to be a relation of himself: but you see what I mean. "Number One" comes first, in my estimation, and all the sisters and cousins and aunts and uncles are "also rans"!

ALONZO TODD:

Need you ask who is my favourite relative? My dear, devoted Uncle Benjamin has pride of place. He has proved himself a father, mother, and big brother rolled into one. He is ever ready to advise and counsel me in all my undertakings. It was Uncle Ben who told me that marbles was a dangerous game to play, for the constant stooping caused one to become round-shouldered, and probably hunchbacked. I therefore gave up marbles. It was Uncle Ben who counselled me to wear three warm woollen undervests, lest I should contract a chill. Again, it was Uncle Ben who cautioned me never to go swimming in more than two inches of water. When bathing, therefore, I always see that the water comes up to my ankles, and no higher. My cousin Peter declares that Uncle Ben is a crank and a faddist; but I prefer to regard him as a very sane and sensible man, whose precepts I shall always carry out to the letter.

BILLY BUNTER:

My faverrit relation is my Aunt Providence. You haven't heard very much about her, as she seldom figgers in the Greyfriars stories. She is an egg-streemly wealthy lady; I know that for a fact, bekwase when I stayed with her once I venchered to take a peep at her Post Offis Savings Bank book. It showed a credit balance of fifteen-and-sixpence. That, of course, means that she is independent. She toils not, neither does she spin; and yet they call her a spinster! Whenever I visit her at her Mansion de Lucks, she always gives me a jolly good time, and studies my comfort and convenience in every way. She knows that my appytite is a bit above the average. She also knows that I have a frail and delliket constitution. She therefore instructs her butler to give me a duzen solid meals per day, in order to keep my strength up. Moreover, she takes me out in her Rolls-Rice car, and interjuices me to all her titled friends in the locality. Can you wonder that I love the dear old sole? Anybody who keeps me well supplied with grubb is certain of a high plaice in my affekshuns; and I have no hezzitation what-ever in saying that Aunt Providence—bless her hart!—is my faverrit relation.

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DICKY NUGENT:

i can't say off-hand which relation i like best. you see, i'm always chopping and changing in my likes and dislikes. my uncle bob used to be my favorite relation, but he no longer sends me fat remittances, like he used to, so he has gone down with a bump in my affek-shuns. my mater was a warm favorite at one time; but i quarrelled with her during the last summer hollidays. i went birds'-nesting, and tumbled out of a tree into a pond, and went home with my clothes ringing wet. my mater was awfully annoyed. she called me a careless young sweep for spoiling my new soot. then she reported me to my pater, who gave me six hard ones with the soul of a slipper. he laid them on, too; so you can guess that he's not my favorite relation! Sometimes i like my big brother frank, and sometimes i don't. at the prezant moment he happens to be my favorite, bekwase he treated me to a lime-joooc and soda in the tuckshopp the other day, thus winning my "cordial" affekshun!

DICK PENFOLD:

I'm rather fond of Uncle Fred, I've great respect for Uncle Ted. I've high regard for Uncle Michael—he sent me once a ripping cycle. I'm somewhāt sweet on cousin Phyllis, and also cousin Amaryllis. You'll never find upon this planet, a kinder soul than my Aunt Janet. I simply love my dear old mater—

the same remark applies to pater. No single favourite have I got, because, you see, I love the lot!

HORACE COKER:

No need to ask who my favourite relation is. My Aunt Judy, of course! She keeps me well supplied with crisp and rustling "fivers," and she sends me no end of prezants. I've had a wireless set from her, and a grammar-phone, and a cricket-bat, and a book on Spelling. I have wedged the latter under the door of my study, in order to keep the draft out! Aunt Judy is a dear old sole; though, to be quite kandid, I prefer her at a distance. When she comes to Greyfriars she fusses over me to such an eggstent that all the fellows lart at me. Besides, she wears such quaint, old-fashioned dresses. They used to be fashionable in the rain of Queen Ann, but they're hopelessly out of date now. Why duzzent Aunt Judy pop over to Parris and get some modern gowns?

SAMMY BUNTER:

I haven't got a favorite relation at all. Nobody loves me. Boo-hoo! I've got heaps of wealthy Aunts and Uncles; but it's Billy and Bessie who get all the plums, while I am left out in the cold. You see, Billy and Bessie are always hanging round the nex of our rich relations, and cadging for favers; but I'm not a sponger. However, one of these days, I shall make a fortune myself. And when my brother and sister ask me to go halves, I shall shake my head skornfully, and say "Neigh!" And then there will be weeping and nashing of teeth on the part of Brother Bill and Sister Bess!

WILLIAM GOSLING:

"Which I don't 'old with these ere relations. They're nothin' more or less than a noosance! I've got a brother wot plays a barrel-organ up an' down the country, an' when 'e 'appens to be in this part of the world, 'e always gives me a look-in. 'E's such a down-at-'eel tramp that I feels ashamed to own 'im. 'E leaves 'is barrel-organ an' 'is monkey outside the school gates, an' pops into my lodge, an' embraces me with brotherly affection. 'Times is crool bad, William, ses 'e. 'Will you lend me five bob?' I shakes my 'ead viggerusly, an' says, 'Op it, or I'll 'ave the perlice on yer!' Instead of 'opping it, 'owever, my brother brings 'is barrel-organ into the Close, an' starts churnin' it, an' collects coppers from all the young gents. I feels downright ashamed of 'im, an' 'ides meself in my parlour until 'e sees fit to make 'isself scarce. I've got other relations, too, wot comes an' pesters me from time to time; an' wot I says is this 'ere—an' I says it most emphatic—all relations oughter be drowned at birth!"

[Supplement ii.

Read about the
"NIGHT LIFE"
of our
GREYFRIARS CHUMS



in Next Monday's
SPECIAL
"DORMITORY"
SUPPLEMENT!
DON'T MISS IT, BOYS!



Too Many Relations!

By TOM BROWN

PEOPLE are always ready to sympathise with orphan boys, who have no parents, and very often no aunts or uncles, or brothers or sisters, or relations of any sort. But nobody has any pity to waste on a poor fellow who, like myself, is overburdened with relations.

If I were to tabulate a list of all my relatives, it would fill a whole issue of the "Greyfriars Herald." I've got cousins by the dozens; scores of aunts; and uncles by the gross. And woe-betide me if I dare to forget any of their birthdays! I am expected to send them a present of some sort, or at least a greeting-card. And this, I might mention, makes a big hole in my pocket-money.

I will take the reader into my confidence, and let him have a peep at some of the entries in my birthday-book. We will take the month of July.

July 1.—My Mater's Birthday. She will expect me to write her a letter of not less than twelve closely-packed pages, and to send her a birthday gift into the bargain. Have decided to send her a gold locket, with a photograph of her hopeful son inset.

July 2.—My Cousin Jack's Birthday. Cousin Jack is only seven years of age, and he's crazy on kite-flying. I must pop over to Courtfield and buy him a box-kite. It will be a jolly nice present for him; in fact, there's a chance that he will be fairly "carried away" by it!

July 3.—My Cousin Ted's Birthday. Cousin Ted is fourteen—too much of a veteran to indulge in kite-flying. What he needs is a wireless set, and he hinted as much in a letter I had from him a few days ago. A wireless set will make a big hole in my resources; still, I mustn't forget that Cousin Ted sent me a handsome camera for my birthday. When I'm over at Courtfield, I'll call at Chunkley's Stores and inspect their wireless sets. It's fortunate that I happen to be in funds just now, because there are more birthdays coming along!

July 4.—My Cousin Bob's Birthday. I heard from Cousin Bob this morning to the effect that while playing cricket yesterday he smashed his cricket-bat to splinters. This is a pretty plain hint that he wants a new one! Whilst I am over at Chunkley's, I must remember to ask to see their selection of cricket-bats.

July 5.—My Aunt Maud's Birthday. I'm not in love with Aunt Maud. Spent a holiday with her once, and had a ghastly time. She wouldn't let me play cricket, because she said it was too dangerous. She hanned swimming for the same reason. And, being a vegetarian, she fed me on potato-pie and cabbage. Ugh! No present for Aunt Maud! A birthday-card will have to fill the bill.

July 6.—My Uncle Peter's Birthday. I must get the old buffer a pipe, I suppose. But it will be hard lines if Loder of the Sixth catches me in the act of coming out of the tobacconist's!

July 7.—My Cousin Connie's Birthday. Seems to be no end to these blessed birthdays! Cousin Connie wants a pearl necklace, but I'm afraid she will be unlucky. My funds won't run to a real pearl necklace. Still, I can get a jolly good imitation, and she'll never detect the difference. Next, please!

July 8.—My Grandfather's Birthday. A tin of tobacco will meet this case, I think.

July 9.—My Uncle Phil's Birthday. Uncle

Phil never sent me anything for my birthday, so I think I'll return the compliment!

July 10.—Nobody's Birthday. Oh, what a blessed relief! I've nothing to worry about to-day. No dashing over to Courtfield on a shopping expedition; no tying up parcels, and despatching them at the post-office. Not a single relation of Tom Brown's was born on this date. "For this relief, much thanks," as Shakespeare has it.

July 11.—My Pater's Birthday. It's a puzzle to know what to send him. Perhaps a box of cigars will prove acceptable. But real cigars cost a jolly sight more than chocolate ones; that's the tragedy of it!

July 12.—Aunt Matilda's Birthday. A bottle of perfume seems the correct thing to buy; but I expect she will complain that all her nephews and nieces sent scent!

July 13.—Cousin George's Birthday. Cousin George will be unlucky, for my funds have run out. It's his own fault, for having a birthday on the 13th!

July 14.—Nobody's Birthday, thank goodness! Received a handsome remittance this morning from my pater. Never was money more badly needed, for there's a whole crop of birthdays coming along!

July 15.—Aunt Jane's Birthday. Would send her a pair of silk stockings, but don't know what size she takes. A birthday-card must suffice.

July 16.—Aunt Flora's Birthday. (See remarks about Aunt Jane.)

July 17.—Aunt Bertha's Birthday. (See remarks about Aunt Jane and Aunt Flora.)

July 18.—Cousin Billy's Birthday. Cousin Billy has a Bunterian appetite, so I suppose

I'd better send the little brat a big birthday-cake!

July 19.—My Great-Grandfather's Birthday. It's about time the old buffer stopped having birthdays. He's had ninety-eight already. I suppose he's bent on reaching his century. I'd like to send him a bath-chair, but I can't afford it. So I'll send a bath-bun instead!

July 19 to July 25.—Blissful respite from birthdays!

July 26.—Cousin Molly's Birthday. Cousin Molly's a rattling good sort—my favourite cousin, in fact. I'll send her a dainty wrist-watch.

July 27.—Four Birthdays at once! Uncle John, Aunt Mabel, Sister Madge, and Cousin Flo. I shall spend a busy afternoon over at Courtfield, and I shall be lucky if I have any funds left! A tobacco-pouch for Uncle John, a pair of gloves for Aunt Mabel, a vanity-bag for Sister Madge, and a powder-puff for Cousin Flo. These birthdays will be the death of me!

July 28.—Cousin Tim's Birthday. Cousin Tim is a tiny totter of four. I should like to invest in a rocking-horse, but I'm nearly broke. Tiny Tim will have to be content with a top.

July 29.—Uncle Henry's Birthday. Uncle Henry is no favourite of mine, so I'll just send him my kind regards.

July 30.—Aunt Ermyntude's Birthday. She doesn't deserve a present, for having a name like that! Besides, I've only got fourpence left. And where can you buy a decent present for fourpence? I'll blue the money on a birthday-card.

July 31.—My Own Birthday! And, being utterly broke, I can't afford to buy myself a present.

Now that you have read these entries in my Birthday Book, I think you will agree with me, dear readers, that a fellow with no relations is to be envied, not pitied. Half my life seems to be spent in buying birthday gifts and despatching parcels! There is something to be said in favour of being an orphan, after all.

BLOWING UP A FOOTBALL!

By Dick Penfold.

Take it up tenderly,
Lift it with care;
Fashioned not slenderly,
Hissing with air!
Pump it up merrily,
Whistling the while;
Soon we shall verily
Kick it in style!

Sec, it lies flabbily
—All in a lump;
Shapelessly, shabbily—
Hand me that pump!
Vim and vitality
Conquer, no doubt;
But, sad reality,
Wind rushes out!

"Blow it up forcefully!"
Inky then said;
But I'm remorsefully
Shaking my head.
Still there's no life in it,
Lumpily it lies,
Who stuck a knife in it?
"See, it won't rise!"

"Pump away furiously!"
Somebody yells.
Soon I smile curiously,
See how it swells!
Round as the universe
It grows at first;
Here ends my puny voice—
Bang!!! The ball's burst!

THE LAST RESOURCE.

The fat gentleman, like many other misguided members of the portly brigade, decided to try golf as a weight-reducer. Armed with four sticks, a ball, and a caddy, he marched off to the links.

The caddy placed the ball upon the tee. Then, with a terrific swing, the fat man whirled his club through the air.

But the little white ball still stayed smiling on its tee, while the club, meeting Mother Earth, broke into splinters.

"Give me another club, boy!" said the fat man.

Alas! club No. 2 shared the fate of club No. 1, club No. 3 emulated the evolutions of club No. 2, and club No. 4 flew into a hedge.

And still the little white ball smiled on. "What would you do now?" asked the sadder and wiser golfer, wiping his forehead, as he turned in desperation to the caddy.

Holding out the empty bag, the urchin replied:

"Don't give in, guv'nor! Give it a swipec with this!"

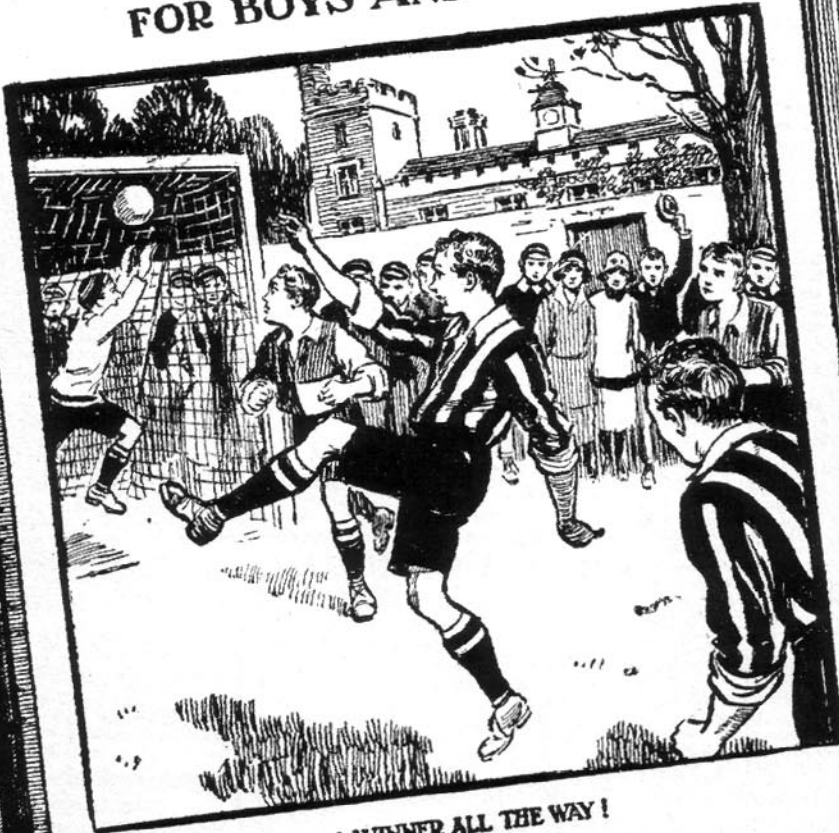
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DON'T LEAVE IT TOO LATE!



(Continued from page 12.)

in great alarm, blinked at them through his big spectacles.

"I'm jolly well not going into the desert!" he roared. "You can take that from me. I'm not going to be eaten up by lions and stung by poisonous snakes, and murdered by filthy Arabs! See?"

Wharton reflected.

"We might manage to get you back to Biskra, Bunter," he said quietly. "I'll ask Ibrahim whether it would be possible to buy a camel from some of the Arabs. We can get to one of the villages yet. We may be able to hire a guide to take you back."

Bunter shuddered.

"You silly ass! Do you think I'd trust myself alone, for three days and nights, with a murdering desert Arab?" he howled.

"It would be risky," said Johnny Bull slowly. "The fellow might murder Bunter for his camel, or his watch-and-chain. We're too jolly far now from the French garrisons to trust the Arabs. I don't believe Bunter would get back to Biskra alive."

"Ow!" gasped Bunter.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"It would be risky," he said. "But less dangerous for Bunter, I think, than keeping on with us."

"That's so," said Bob Cherry.

"Let the esteemed and funky Bunter make his own choicefulness," suggested Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"It's up to you, Bunter," said Harry. "You can choose which way you like—keep on with us or trust an Arab guide to take you back."

"I shall keep with you fellows, of course!" gasped Bunter. "But I want you all to turn back."

"Fathead!"

"After you've taken me safe back to Biskra you can go where you jolly well like, and be blowed to you!" snorted Bunter.

"We cannot turn back, Bunter," said the captain of the Remove quietly.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

Bob Cherry glared at the fat junior.

"You sickening dummy!" he growled. "We're three days out, and that would mean nearly a week lost if we made the journey over again. Do you think we're going to waste a week when my father's life is at stake, you fat idiot?"

"Oh, rot!" said Bunter.

"Shut up!" roared Bob.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Are you going back alone, or keeping on with us, Bunter?" demanded Harry Wharton impatiently. "That's the only choice, and you've brought it on yourself."

Bunter blinked across the burning desert. He blinked at the camel-drivers and at the cool, smiling Ibrahim. He blinked at a rough, dirty Arab who had ridden up, and was chattering to Ibrahim in Arabic. The thought of trusting himself alone in the solitary desert with one of them made him shiver.

"I'm keeping on with you fellows," he said faintly.

"Then make the best of it, and leave off grousing!" grunted Bob.

"Beast!"

And when the party started again, ever and ever southward, Bunter rode on the baggage camel with an expression of deep injury on his fat face, and haunting apprehensions in his podgy breast. Bunter had asked for it, there was no doubt about that. But now that he had got what he had asked for he was not pleased.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Danger of the Desert!

"HARRY!"

Bob Cherry drew closer to Harry Wharton's side in the dusky tent, and spoke in a whisper.

It was night, the deep, still night of the desert. Far in the solitude rang faintly a hyena's howl. Nearer at hand was the grunting of the camels. Save for those slight sounds, silence, heavy and still, lay like a blanket on the desert and the camp.

It was more than a week since the Greyfriars juniors had quitted Biskra. Day by day they had travelled on, farther and farther into the limitless desert. Already it seemed ages to them since they had seen a white man's face, or slept with a roof over their heads.

The object of their journey never left their minds; neither did they forget the danger of it. Yet, in a way, they enjoyed it. There was something in the boundless spaces of the desert that appealed to a primitive something deep down in their hearts. It seemed to them sometimes that their range of vision grew longer, that they breathed deeper and more freely in that vast expanse that stretched to the sky on every hand. The call of the desert had made itself heard to them.

The camp was now pitched by a rocky ravine, at the bottom of which was a trickle of water. Drifting sand had half-choked the ravine, the thin stream percolated through shining sand-grains. The water was acrid, but it was very welcome to the travellers. In the burning Sahara water is the great problem. Great spaces, irrigated by the genius and industry of the French engineers, have been turned into fruitful fields. Yet the great desert stretches still illimitable, were only scratched as yet by the hand of man.

The six juniors of Greyfriars were sleeping in one tent. It was hot, and it was stuffy; but as they drew further into the desert, the juniors realised that it was only prudent to keep together, especially at night. Ibrahim had assured them that he would warn them at once as soon as there was danger. But they did not wholly trust Ibrahim from the beginning, and as their journey progressed, their distrust of the smiling Arab grew.

Harry Wharton had been lying awake, thinking, when Bob's soft whisper reached his ear. He had supposed that all his comrades were asleep. It was past midnight now.

"Harry, old chap."

"Yes, Bob! Can't sleep?" asked Harry. "It's jolly hot."

"It's not that." Bob's voice was still a whisper. "I've been thinking, old chap."

"Same here," said Harry.

"About Ibrahim?"

"Yes."

"Then—you suspect him, too, Harry?"

Wharton was silent for a minute or two, his brow knitted in thought as he lay in the dusky tent. Through the

slit in an opening he could see the brilliant stars of Africa glimmering on the desert sands.

Wharton was not a suspicious fellow by any means; and in the first place he had taken it for granted that Ibrahim would guide them to the neighbourhood of Mustapha ben Mohammed's encampment, and leave them there to their own devices.

The guide was to be well-paid for his services, and he would depart with his reward in safety. There was no reason to be seen why he should play the juniors false.

But Wharton's distrust had grown.

The song of the camel-drivers on the first day out recurred often to his mind. He had been almost certain then that the gang of Arabs were exchanging mockeries of their masters. And since then, many a little incident, trivial in itself, had given Wharton the thought that there was a secret understanding among the Arabs.

Indeed, now that they were far, terribly far, from all help, the manners of the three camel-drivers had changed a good deal; on many occasions they were deaf to orders, and had assumed an insolence of manner much in contrast with their former servility.

Honest Ibrahim was as polished and polite as ever; his salaam was as effusively respectful as of old. But even in Ibrahim, guarded as he was, Wharton thought that he sometimes detected an under-current of mockery. Once, too, a packet of ammunition had disappeared—and was only found when Wharton refused to proceed without it. And the juniors had found, too, that the camel-drivers were armed. That was natural enough, in the perilous desert; but it was only in the later days that the men had no longer concealed their weapons. It was almost as if they had been keeping up a pretence, which every day grew less and less necessary to keep up.

Wharton did not show his suspicions. He was not sure that he was not doing Ibrahim an injustice; and, in any case, it was useless to let the man see that he was suspected and distrusted. But at night the juniors all occupied the same tent, and they allowed their drivers to see that they kept their revolvers handy. One night one of the men had stumbled, as if by accident—perhaps truly by accident—into the tent. He had found himself jamming his chest against the muzzle of Bob's revolver, and had backed out with great haste—and such an accident did not occur again.

All this was thronging through Wharton's mind, as Bob whispered, and he realised that his chum shared his uneasiness.

"What do you think, Harry?" asked Bob, as the captain of the Remove was silent.

"I—I can hardly tell, Bob. We know that Ibrahim is a liar and a cheat, and a good deal of a thief; but I suppose all the Arab guides are all that, more or less. We've been jolly decent to him, and I think he's a good-natured kind of rascal. I hardly think he would wantonly harm us."

"But if he thinks we're at his mercy now," muttered Bob. "If they turned on us, they might think a party of school-boys quite at their mercy. Ibrahim's to have five thousand francs for guiding us, but if he thinks he could take all we have—and the camels, too—it would be a big temptation. I don't believe he would have much scruple about cutting a throat for less."

"I—I think so, too. But—he has his reputation as a guide to consider, to some extent—"

"Not in this case—as our journey was a secret one. Who's to know that we went into the desert with him at all? Only the Hazeldenes, and they will be going back to England soon."

"That's so."

"Ibrahim was three or four days gone getting news of my father. Now we've been over a week on the road, and we're not near Mustapha's encampment yet," muttered Bob.

"Ibrahim went on a swift camel; we're loaded with our baggage, Bob. That may account for that."

"I—I know! Each special thing may be accounted for, but—but I don't like the look of things, Harry. I've been going to speak to you about it—but it won't do to let those Arabs see us confabbing. I don't like the look of things."

There was a short silence in the tent, broken by the steady breathing of the sleeping juniors, and the deep snore of Billy Bunter.

"What do you think, then, Bob?" asked Harry, at last.

"What about sending the Arabs back? If they object, and it comes to a scrap, better now than later, when we may be taken off our guard."

"That's so. But—"

"But we want a guide," said Bob. "That's right, but we can keep Ibrahim alone. Alone, he would never dare to try on treachery, if that's what he's thinking of."

"I think you're right, Bob," said Wharton after another long pause. "I can't help feeling that there is something up among that gang of shady blighters. We'll decide before we begin the march to-morrow."

"Right—ho!"

Bob Cherry returned to his rug, and in a few minutes was asleep.

But Wharton did not sleep.

That Bob shared his uneasy suspicions confirmed them, and his anxiety was keen. That they had taken their lives in their hands, in venturing into the Sahara, the juniors well knew; but they had not looked for treachery in their own camp. It was a closer and more pressing danger than that from the robber Arabs who followed the Sheik Mustapha, and Wharton thought it over and over, with sleepless eyes, as he lay in the dusky tent.

A sharper, louder howl of an hyena grated on his ears; it was nearer the

camp. It was answered by another still closer at hand.

Wharton rose to his feet.

His thought was that one of the savage, prowling animals had penetrated into the camp, among the sleeping Arabs, and he grasped his revolver and stepped to the opening of the tent.

At a short distance, the three camel-drivers were lying fast asleep by their sleeping beasts. But Wharton, as he looked out of the tent, caught a moving shadow—the glimmer of a turban. He realised, with a sudden start, that Ibrahim was not sleeping, and that the guide was leaving the camp. There was a faint click of a stone, as Ibrahim disappeared into the ravine.

Wharton stood still, his heart beating. Why was Ibrahim leaving the camp at that hour?

It came into his mind, like a flash of discovery, that that prolonged hyena-howl had come from no animal's throat; it was a signal from the ravine, answered by a similar call from the camp. Ibrahim was going forth alone, secretly, silently, to meet the unknown who had given the signal.

Wharton's eyes gleamed.

If that was so, the guide's treachery was manifest, and he would know how to act. He gave one searching glance at the camel-drivers—they were snoring under the stars. Then, his revolver gripped in his hand, Harry Wharton quitted the tent, and followed the way Ibrahim had gone, as stealthily and silently as the treacherous Arab himself.

THE TENTH CHAPTER. Treachery!

WHARTON stopped suddenly. From the silence of the desert a faint murmur of voices reached his ears.

He could distinguish no words; he knew that the speakers were talking in Arabic—the mongrel Arabic of the desert. It was proof that Ibrahim had gone forth to keep an appointment. The camel-drivers were sleeping in camp, and with whom was Ibrahim talking?

Wharton had descended a short distance into the rocky ravine, the way the guide had gone. The murmur of the voices came from beyond a high, rugged rock.

He halted and listened; and then

crept on silently and peered round the rugged edges of the rock.

The brilliant starlight fell clearly into the ravine; it was almost as light as by moonlight.

At a short distance from the rock Ibrahim was standing, easily recognisable in his gold-braided jacket and blue trousers. His profile was turned to Wharton, and the junior could see that he was grinning, with a glimmer of white teeth, as he talked.

The other man was an Arab—a fat Arab, about whom there seemed something familiar to Wharton's eyes. He knew that he must have seen the man before; and suddenly he recognised him. It was Suleiman, the sand-diviner—the charlatan who had read, or pretended to read, the fate of Major Cherry in the goatskin bag of sand.

Wharton breathed hard.

What was Suleiman doing there—in secret converse with the guide? He, too, was grinning, and among the unintelligible words that poured from him Wharton caught the word "Roumi." Evidently the two Arabs were speaking of the English schoolboys. And a minute later Wharton heard him utter the name "Mustapha."

Wharton drew back into the cover of the rock, his heart beating.

Hitherto he had only suspected that the guide intended treachery, for the sake of the plunder of his employers. Now a deeper and darker suspicion entered his mind. Was the dusky scoundrel leading them into the heart of the desert, in collusion with Mustapha ben Mohammed? Was Suleiman an emissary from the desert sheik, arranging with Ibrahim the details of handing over the Greyfriars juniors to the enemy?

Wharton had picked up a few words and phrases of Arabic, but not enough to follow what the two dusky rascals were saying. But his suspicion was deep.

It was borne into his mind that Suleiman, the sand-diviner, was in league with the robber Arabs of the desert. Probably he was a spy of Mustapha's in Biskra. For he had known what had happened to Major Cherry—and Wharton contemptuously scouted the idea that he had divined it in the sand.

More and more it appeared certain to Wharton now that Honest Ibrahim had planned to sell the party to the robber sheik, and that Suleiman was there to arrange the details. Perhaps Ibrahim was sticking for a price—Wharton realised that it would only be a question of price with the scoundrel.

The talk of the two Arabs would have enlightened him had he been able to understand it. But he could not; the babble of words passed him by as meaningless as the babble of the water below in the sands and rocks.

His hand closed more tightly on his revolver. He was in the desert now, and in the desert life was cheap. But the fierce thought passed, and Wharton moved back silently to the camp.

The camel-drivers were still sleeping, and in the tent the Greyfriars juniors slept. Bunter's snore still resounded; the Owl of the Remove probably dreaming of the tuckshop at Greyfriars—certainly not dreaming that his fat life hung on a thread.

Wharton sat down at the opening of the tent, to wait. There was still a chance, a faint chance, that his grim suspicions were unfounded, and he intended to put the matter to the test.

He waited.

It was nearly half an hour later that Ibrahim came gliding back silently into the camp. He gave a sudden start as he saw Harry Wharton sitting wakeful

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before the tent. But his surprise was only for a moment. He salaamed and smiled.

"My fine gentleman does not sleep!" he murmured.

"It is hot to-night," said Harry carelessly.

Ibrahim sighed sympathetically. "Did you go after the byenas, Ibrahim?"

"Ibrahim think he hear one lion," said the guide softly. "Ibrahim he go looking for a lion."

"You did not find one?"

Ibrahim shook his head.

"There is no lion," he said.

"It was risky going alone," said Harry.

Ibrahim made an expressive gesture. "It is the duty of Ibrahim to die for his fine gentlemen," he said. "Danger shall not come near the tent of the noble English gentlemen while Ibrahim live."

"That's good," said Harry. He yawned. "I fancy I'll turn in now. But, by Jove, it's hot."

He stepped back into the tent.

Ibrahim smiled softly, and went to his own sleeping-place. Harry Wharton sank down on his rug—but not to sleep.

He was certain now.

Ibrahim had lied—as he had expected him to lie. Not a word had he said of meeting the Arab in the ravine; not a word of Suleiman, the sand-diviner. He had told the first lie that came into his fertile brain to account for his absence from the camp. Where was Suleiman now? Speeding across the desert, it was likely, to carry the news to Mustapha ben Mohammed that Ibrahim was prepared to betray the Greyfriars party into his hands—to lead them to the selected spot where they could be seized, or massacred, at the order of the desert sheik. It was only too likely.

But the guide was mistaken in believing that the Famous Five of Greyfriars could be led like lambs to the slaughter.

A little later Wharton looked out of the tent.

Ibrahim, rolled in his burnous, was sleeping under the stars, his handsome brown face placid and calm—as calm and peaceful as if no thought of treachery had ever entered his cunning brain. Wharton looked at him in bitter scorn and disgust, and turned back into the tent again.

Quietly, in whispers, he awakened his comrades. Billy Bunter snored on, untroubled, while in the dusk of the tent the Famous Five of Greyfriars held council in low whispers, and laid their plans for the morrow.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Facing the Music!

HONEST IBRAHIM salaamed to the Greyfriars juniors as they came out of the tent in the rosy light of the morning. Ibrahim was cheery and smiling and effusively respectful as ever. Billy Bunter was still snoring in the tent; he was likely to snore until he was awakened. For the present he was not awakened. Bunter was not wanted in the incident that was now to come.

The Famous Five had their rifles under their arms, and the firearms had been carefully loaded. Probably Ibrahim noted something a little unusual in their looks, for a suspicious gleam came into his cunning black eyes; but his dusky face smiled as effusively as ever, and he salaamed as if he had a steel spring in his back.



"You scoundrel," said Wharton hotly. "You are still at your tricks." Ibrahim's dusky face assumed an expression of sorrowful astonishment. "What's the trouble now, Harry?" asked Bob Cherry. "The rotter has been leaving signs in the sand. Look!" replied Wharton. On the sand were a number of loose stones. Ibrahim had dropped them in a regular line, believing that no watching eye was upon him. (See Chapter 12.)

The three camel-drivers had turned out, and were seated by the camels chewing dates. They glanced across at the Famous Five, grinned at one another, and muttered words in Arabic. Honest Ibrahim was still playing his part; but his less sophisticated followers scarcely troubled to keep up pretences.

"Fine morning, my fine gentlemen, yes," said Ibrahim in his soft voice.

"Oh, jolly fine!" grunted Johnny Bull.

Wharton fixed his eyes steadily on the guide. He intended to come straight to business, now that the chums of Greyfriars had decided upon their line of action.

"I am sending the drivers back to Biskra, Ibrahim," he said.

The honest one stared.

"My fine gentleman—"

"You will keep on with us, to guide us. But your three men will clear off at once."

Ibrahim had a sorrowful look.

"Is it that my fine gentlemen do not trust my men?" he asked. "They are good men—honest men—almost as honest as Ibrahim."

"That's as it may be," said Wharton dryly. "I want no trouble with them. I'm ready to pay them for their services, and they can go. You understand?" Ibrahim's black eyes gleamed.

"But how to keep on without drivers for camels?" he exclaimed. "That is not to be possible, my fine gentlemen."

"You'll have to make it possible."

"How can it be that they return, and leave us in the desert?" argued Ibrahim.

"Why so? You tell me."

"We don't trust them," grunted Bob Cherry. "Nor you, either. Put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

"You do not trust Honest Ibrahim?"

"No fear!" snapped Johnny Bull.

Ibrahim made a step back, his eyes gleaming at the juniors. The three camel-drivers were too far off to hear what was said; but they could see that something was amiss, and they had risen to their feet, still chewing dates, and watching the scene intently.

Honest Ibrahim's dusky face showed what was in his thoughts. The juniors could read there quite easily that the cunning Arab was debating in his mind whether to call on the camel-drivers for aid, and use force. The Arabs were four against five—but they were powerful men against boys, and they were armed, and accustomed to the savage life of the desert—very probably used to bloodshed. Harry Wharton & Co. realised very clearly that the next few minutes might see a deadly struggle raging under the rising sun—a struggle that could only end in death for one side, and from which neither side could emerge unscathed. But they did not falter. If the struggle was to come, it was better to come now, with only four antagonists, than later when a mob of desert Arabs would have to be faced in addition.

But Ibrahim, if he was thinking of violence, was in no hurry.

Perhaps he realized that the first bullet would be planted in his own honest carcass—for which even a victory of his followers would not have consoled him.

The juniors were ready to shoot, and they would have fired without the slightest hesitation at a hostile movement. It was borne in upon Ibrahim's mind that this was not a helpless party of school-boys he had to deal with—the Famous Five were anything but helpless.

Quite steadily they looked at the treacherous guide, and their rifles were ready. Achmet, one of the camel-drivers, stooped and lifted an Arab gun from the ground. Wharton's voice rang out:

"Drop that gun!"

Achmet grinned, instead of obeying. Quite plainly he was only waiting for a signal from Ibrahim to fire on the juniors.

Harry Wharton did not stand on ceremony—life was at stake now. The other two drivers were scowling threateningly, and Honest Ibrahim was evidently divided in his mind, whether to yield or to draw his knife and spring at the juniors.

Wharton threw up his rifle, and fired at the Arab who held the gun.

Crack!

There was a fearful yell from Achmet, and he rolled over on the sand, the long Arab gun clattering down with a jingle.

Loud shouts broke from the camel-drivers, and they came savagely forward, grasping their weapons.

Ibrahim gritted his teeth, in a snarl like a hyena. Bob Cherry's rifle looked fairly into his dusky face.

"Take care!" said Bob grimly. "I'll blow out your sneaking brains if you lift a finger, you cur!"

"My fine gentlemen—" gasped Ibrahim.

"Put up your hands!" snapped Bob.

"What—what you say?"

"Put your hands over your head, or I'll drive a bullet through you—sharp!"

Bob's eye gleamed along the rifle. Honest Ibrahim's dusky hands went up swiftly, and were clasped on his turban.

"Keep them there!" snapped Bob.

"To hear is to obey, my fine gentlemen!" murmured Ibrahim.

"Keep that scoundrel safe, Bob," said Harry. "We'll deal with the others."

"Leave him to me," said Bob. "I'd rather blow out his brains than not, and I think he knows it."

Honest Ibrahim did know it; and his honest knees were knocking together, as he clasped his hands over his turban. The savage malice had gone out of his face now, and only fear could be read there. Bob watched him grimly, ready to pull trigger in an instant.

A fat, startled face looked out of the tent. The crack of Wharton's rifle had awakened Billy Bunter.

"I say, you fellows, what—what—" babbled Bunter, blinking at the scene in amazement and terror.

The juniors did not heed Bunter; there was no time to waste on the Owl of the Remove.

Four of them walked across to the camel-drivers. Achmet lay groaning on the sand, his dusky face white. The bullet was in his shoulder, and he was quite disabled.

"Drop your weapons!" rapped out Wharton.

The two camel-drivers glared at him, and hesitated. Each of them was grasping a long Arab knife, and seemed only too willing to use it.

Ibrahim panted.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 866.

The Drudge of The Team

HE LONGED TO BE A FOOT-BALLED, BUT HE WAS ONLY A KID; AND THEY TREATED HIM LIKE DIRT, AND MADE HIM THE DRUDGE OF THE TEAM.

You mustn't miss this great human drama of First Division Football. The long opening chapters appear in this week's "BOYS REALM" (on sale Wed., September 10th), and in addition there is a wonderful FREE offer of Silver Cups and Match Footballs.

BOYS REALM

On sale every Wednesday.

"They no speak English, fine gentleman! I speak to them! Malek-Hamza—" He ran on in Arabic. The camel-drivers put down their knives.

Honest Ibrahim evidently realised that a fight was "not good enough." Bob Cherry stood ready to blow out his honest brains, and that was more than enough for Ibrahim.

"Take their stickers, Frank," said Harry. "Search them for weapons, too—tell them, Ibrahim, that if they resist we shall shoot."

Ibrahim rattled out Arabic again. The two camel-drivers scowled fiendishly, but they did not resist. Wharton and Johnny Bull kept them covered, while Frank Nugent and Hurree Singh searched them for weapons. Their arms were taken away and thrown into the tent.

"Now serve Ibrahim the same," said Harry.

"My fine gentlemen—" pleaded Ibrahim.

"Hold your tongue!"

Johnny Bull "went through" Ibrahim very carefully. He found a knife, and a handsome revolver of American make, probably stolen from some American tourist by the honest guide.

The Arabs having been disarmed, Harry Wharton bent over Achmet, to examine his wound and bind it up. The wounded man's eyes blazed at him, and he made a sudden snatch at Wharton's hand with his teeth, like a savage dog.

"Look out!" gasped Nugent.

Wharton jerked his hand back in time. He stepped away from the wounded Arab; Achmet had no more concern to expect from him. Indeed, Wharton was strongly tempted to bring down his rifle-butt on the savage brute's head.

Harry raised his hand, and pointed to the desert.

"Get out, and take that man with you," he said to the two camel-drivers.

They glared at him without replying, and looked at Ibrahim. It was very probable that they understood enough English to know what the captain of the Remove had said; at all events, they understood his gesture. But they did not stir.

"I tell them, my fine gentleman!" exclaimed Ibrahim, and he was beginning in Arabic, when Wharton cut him short. "Hold your tongue, Ibrahim."

"But I tell them, my noble gentleman—"

"You will tell them nothing," said Harry curtly. "You will not give them any message to take to Mustapha ben Mohammed, you scoundrel."

Ibrahim started violently. "If they can't understand my words, they will understand my boot!" said Wharton grimly. "You hear me, you scoundrels? Pick up that man and clear off, or I'll kick you out of the camp!"

The sullen drivers obeyed at that. They helped the wounded Achmet to his feet, and one of them bound his wound in a strip of dirty linen. Then the three of them moved off towards the ravine.

"Not that way!" snapped Wharton. He had no mind for the rascals to linger near the camp, in the cover of the rocks, watching for a chance of revenge.

They did not heed; but a bullet singing past their ears brought them to a sudden stop.

They glared round at Wharton. He pointed to the open desert, and, after a brief hesitation, they obeyed, and tramped off sullenly in the direction indicated.

Ibrahim made a move as if to follow. "Stand where you are!" snapped Bob Cherry.

"My fine gentlemen," murmured Ibrahim feebly, "you do not trust Ibrahim, the only honest guide in Algeria! You do not trust Ibrahim to do your business. Ibrahim, he go!"

"Ibrahim, he stay!" answered Bob grimly. "Take a single step and you're a dead scoundrel!"

Ibrahim's black eyes glinted, but he did not take a step. He stood with his hands clasped over his turban, while the three Arabs—the wounded man limping between the other two—tramped farther and farther into the desert, and at last disappeared over a ridge of sand.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

A Lesson for Ibrahim!

"I SAY, you fellows—" said

"It's all right, Bunter," said

Harry Wharton reassuringly.

Billy Bunter had watched the scene in a state of helpless funk. He was still shivering when it was ended, and the camel-drivers had disappeared into the distance of the desert.

"I—I say," stammered the Owl of the Remove, "what—what—what's the row, you fellows?"

"Those rotters were going to hand us over to the Arabs," said Harry. "We've stopped them, though."

"Ow!" gasped Bunter.

"My fine gentleman, I swear—" gasped Ibrahim.

"That's enough! I saw you meet Suleiman last night," snapped Wharton scornfully.

Ibrahim's jaw dropped. For the moment even the cunning Arab had nothing to say.

"We've got to clear out of here pretty quick, you fellows," said Harry. "Those scoundrels we've got rid of may take the news to their friends in the desert. Get the camels ready!"

"What—ho!"

"I—I say, you fellows, what about brekker?" Billy Bunter seemed to be recovering.

"Blow brekker, you fat duffer!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Take a handful of dates and shut up!"

"That's all very well, but—"

"Shut up!" roared Bob Cherry ferociously. And the Owl of the Remove jumped, and shut up at last.

The juniors broke camp without delay. Honest Ibrahim cast a longing glance towards the open desert. It was clear that he would have been glad to follow his associates. But keen eyes were upon him, and fast as Ibrahim could have run, a bullet would have gone faster. The treacherous Arab realised very clearly that he had to deal with fellows very different from the unsuspecting school-boys he had taken them for.

But Ibrahim was a philosopher in his way. As he was at the mercy of the party he had sought to betray, he made the best of it, and his effusive ingratiating manner came back, and he proceeded to make himself as useful as possible.

He helped in loading the camels, and did the work of two or three with a smiling cheerfulness that rather astonished the juniors in the circumstances. They knew very well that deep down in his treacherous heart he was longing for a chance to turn the tables on them, and betray them into the hands of their enemies. But he gave no sign of it, and was plainly seeking to ingratiate himself again.

Probably he hoped to disarm suspicion by smiling cheerfulness and submission. Undoubtedly he was still hoping to earn Mustapha ben Mohammed's bribe by placing the Greyfriars party in the hands of the desert sheik.

"I go with my fine gentlemen," said Ibrahim brightly. "It is honour and pleasure to serve noble English gentlemen. You trust Ibrahim. He do your business."

"Yes, we're likely to trust you, I don't think!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Ibrahim guide his fine gentlemen to—"

"We don't want a guide just at present," said Harry Wharton curtly. "We're getting out of this to throw your friends off the track. Later on you're going to guide us to Mustapha's encampment."

Ibrahim's eyes opened wide. "You still go find Mustapha?" he ejaculated.

"Yes; but we're not going to run into his hands to please you, Ibrahim. You fellows ready?"

"The readyfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Singh.

Ibrahim made a movement towards his camel. Wharton raised a hand and stopped him.

"You're going on foot, Ibrahim."

"But my fine gentleman—" protested Ibrahim.

"We're not giving you a chance of giving us the slip."

"Ibrahim never want to desert noble English gentlemen," said the guide sorrowfully.

"We'll jolly well see that you don't! Bunter, you take this camel, instead of a baggage camel."

"That's all right," said Bunter. "But, I say, you fellows—"

"No time to waste. Get on!"

"I've got a suggestion to make!" howled Bunter.

"Well, what is it—sharp?" exclaimed Harry impatiently.

"We've done enough of this," said Bunter. "We've had a jolly narrow escape already. The best thing we can do is to get back to Biskra as quick as we jolly well can."

"That's enough. Get on!"

"Look here!" bawled Bunter. "I'm jolly well not going to be murdered by filthy Arabs to please you!"

"You shouldn't have come!" said Wharton curtly. "You were warned. Now you've got to go through with it. Get on that camel at once, or you'll be left behind!"

Billy Bunter, in a state of great wrath and indignation, climbed on Ibrahim's camel. The juniors mounted their beasts, leading the baggage camels with long cords. Ibrahim, in great dismay, was left on foot like a camel-driver.

"Get a move on, Ibrahim!" said Harry Wharton. "Mind, I'm not going to waste words on you! You've tried to sell us to our enemies, and if we were Arabs like yourself your life would be worth nothing, and you know it. I tell you plainly that if you make the slightest attempt to get away, you will be shot down like a rabbit. Keep that in mind!"

Ibrahim salaamed and smiled. "Never desert my noble English gentlemen!" he declared.

"Oh, get on!" grunted Johnny Bull, in disgust.

"To hear is to obey, noble gentleman!" said Ibrahim cheerfully.

The party started.

The water-bottles and the water-skins on the baggage camels had been filled in the ravine. Well the juniors knew that it was a desperate undertaking to plunge into the desert without a guide, or, worse still, with a treacherous guide. It was exceedingly doubtful whether they could have found their way back to Biskra, even had they thought of adopting Billy Bunter's suggestion. Had they trusted Ibrahim to lead them back, they had little doubt that he would have led them into the farther recesses of the

Sahara, watching for a chance to betray them.

Guideless, they plunged into the desert, but circumstances had left them no choice in the matter. The first necessity was to throw the enemy off the track, and to be far away over the trackless sand if the savage sheik should arrive at the camp by the ravine, led by Suleiman or the dismissed camel-drivers.

The camels proceeded at a trot under the rising sun. Billy Bunter sat on Ibrahim's camel and chewed dates and grumbled. But the other fellows were mostly silent. Many a time, as the hot sands glided under the padding hoofs of the camels, they glanced back, but there was no sign of the pursuers on the blazing horizon.

Once they were at a good distance from their late camp they had little fear of being tracked by the desert Arab. The sand left little sign, and the burning wind of the desert, furling the particles of sand into endless shifting ridges, soon obliterated what little sign they left.

Harry Wharton's eyes rested a good many times on Ibrahim suspiciously. The Arab guide seemed to have accepted his fate with cheerful, smiling submission.

He had taken one of the camel-drivers' sticks, and he whacked and cursed the baggage-camels dutifully, urging them on when they slowed. His only desire seemed to ingratiate himself with the party by making himself useful.



Bob Cherry took the camel-driver's stick. "You're going to be flogged, Ibrahim," he said savagely. "Bend over!" The guide gave a howl. "You no beat honest Ibrahim, my fine gentleman." "Bend him over," said Bob curtly. The juniors grasped the stammering guide and bent him over on the sand. Then Bob laid on the camel-driver's stick with a heavy hand. (See Chapter 12.)

But suddenly Wharton halted his camel, and called to his comrades to stop. The camels, never reluctant to stop, halted in a snorting group.

"You camp now, my fine gentlemen?" asked Ibrahim.

"No!" Wharton made his camel stoop, and dismounted. "You scoundrel! You are still at your tricks!" Ibrahim's dusky face assumed an expression of sorrowful astonishment.

"My fine gentleman do not trust Ibrahim," he exclaimed.

"What's the game now, Harry?" asked Bob Cherry.

"The rotter has been leaving a sign in the sand. Look!"

Ibrahim gritted his teeth. He had not supposed that the schoolboy was watching him so sharply.

He had picked up a number of loose stones, and when he believed that no watching eye was upon him he had dropped them, in a regular line, indicating the way the party were riding.

Five or six white stones gleamed in the sun against the dull yellow of the Sahara sand.

Bob Cherry knitted his brows. "So that's the game," he said. "They couldn't pick up tracks, but that's a sign, I suppose, known to these scoundrels."

"It is nothing!" protested Ibrahim. "Rien de rien! C'est pour m'amuser—it is nothing at all."

The juniors were not likely to believe that explanation. Harry Wharton quietly picked up the white stones and re-arranged them, so that the line indicated a track at right angles with the course the juniors were following. Ibrahim watched him with burning eyes. If the robber Arabs came upon his "sign" now, it was certain that they would be led on a false scent.

"That's good!" said Johnny Bull. "But my idea is that that scoundrel ought to learn not to play dirty tricks on us. Give him six!"

"I mean to," said Harry grimly.

The Famous Five all dismounted and surrounded the treacherous guide. Honest Ibrahim eyed them with alarm. He knew the ways of the desert, and he more than half-expected to be stretched on the sand with a bullet in his brain. But the Greyfriars fellows had not yet, at all events, so far learned the lessons of the desert.

Bob Cherry took the camel-driver's stick.

"Bend over!" he said.

"You say—" stammered Ibrahim, staring at Bob.

That expression, common parlance at Greyfriars School in far-off England, was quite new to the Arab guide of Biskra.

"You're going to be flogged!" said Bob savagely. "Bend over, or you'll be put, sharp!"

The guide gave a howl.

"You no beat Ibrahim, my fine gentleman!"

"You'll jolly well see. Bend him over!"

Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh grasped the stammering guide and bent him over on the sand. Then Bob Cherry laid on the camel-driver's stick with a heavy hand. The lashes of the stick awoke strange echoes across the desert.

The yells of Honest Ibrahim awoke louder echoes. He yelled and wriggled and squirmed under the castigation. Bob Cherry did not spare the rod. All the juniors felt that it was time that the treacherous rascal had a lesson, and he had it—hard!

Bob Cherry did not cease till his arm was tired. Then he threw away the stick, panting a little.

"Is that enough, Harry?"

"That will do, I think," said Wharton. "Now get on, Ibrahim, and play no more tricks, you rascal! When we've done with you you can go, and be hanged to you; but until we've done with you you'll toe the line, or it will be the worse for you."

The juniors remounted, and the camels moved on again. Ibrahim

urged them over the glowing sand, no longer cheerful and smiling, but squirming with pain, and with a face like a demon.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Camp at the Oasis!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. pushed on all through the burning day. Even in the blaze of noon they did not halt.

Only too well were they aware how the rescue expedition must end if a swarm of Mustapha ben Mohammed's spearmen came to close quarters with them, and until many a long mile of sand lay between them and their late camp they did not feel secure from pursuit.

Burning sand and burning sun, scrubby bushes straggling here and there, ridge after ridge of sand-dunes, such was the scene that surrounded the Greyfriars juniors, as they plunged deeper and deeper into the heart of the Sahara.

England and home, even the white villas of Biskra and the mud houses of the Arab villagers, seemed like a dream behind them now. It seemed to them, sometimes, that they had always been living in that boundless expanse, that rich green grass and shady trees were figments of the fancy. And yet, wild and desolate as was the desert, they felt a keenness that did not slacken. The hard life was already making them feel more fit and keen. Even Billy Bunter looked less fat and flabby than usual. They were burned by the hot sun almost as brown as berries. The ever-present sense of danger did not shake their nerve—it made them alert and keen.

It seemed hard to believe that they were the same fellows who had sat on the old oaken forms in the Form-room at Greyfriars, and lounged under the elms in the quadrangle. Greyfriars seemed as far from them now as if it had been in a different planet.

It was a hard day's ride, and the party were glad when they halted, at last, under the sinking sun that turned the desert to flame. Ibrahim pointed out a patch in the red distance, which he told them was a clump of date-palms. By that time Ibrahim had recovered his cunning, and was as smiling and good-tempered as he ever had been. With placid hypocrisy he still sought to ingratiate himself with his masters.

After some hesitation the juniors headed for the date-palms. They had natural misgivings that perhaps Ibrahim had friends there, and that it was a trap. Bob Cherry gruffly told the guide that at the first sign of an enemy a bullet would be driven through his head. And Ibrahim smiled and salaamed.

The tiny oasis was found deserted. A dozen palm-trees stood in a cluster, and through the sand a clear spring bubbled up from some unknown source. By shifting the loose sand particles aside the juniors were able to form a little pool from which the water could be dipped.

The camels were fed and watered and secured, as the sun dipped below the far horizon, and darkness overspread the desert. One by one the brilliant stars of Africa came out in a sky of dark velvet.

Ibrahim made himself useful in the camp, obliging as ever. The tent was put up under the tall palms, and Billy Bunter, after a hurried supper, plunged into it to sleep. Careful watch was to be kept that night, but Bunter was not

(Continued on page 23.)

A "LEG-UP" FOR BIRMINGHAM!

Result of "Robert Cherry" Characters Competition!

In this competition the prize of a Gent's "Royal Enfield" Bicycle has been awarded to:

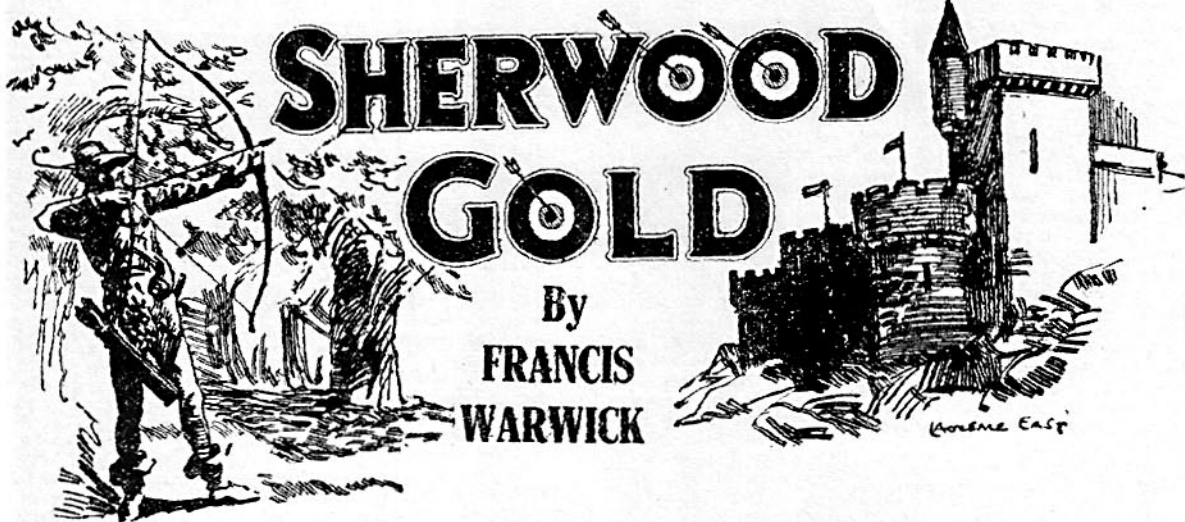
J. COSNETT,
190, Highgate Road,
Sparkbrook,
BIRMINGHAM,

who sent in the following line:

"Breed Empire Requires!"

Nothing very difficult about that, is there, chums? And J. Cosnett, of Birmingham, is the richer by an £8 Bicycle. Plenty more bikes waiting to be won—there's one offered this week. Fill in the coupon on page 4 NOW.

The Secret of Sherwood Gold is now before you, revealing a wondrous treasure, the like of which has never been dreamed of before.



By
**FRANCIS
WARWICK**

INTRODUCTION.

Story is staged in the time of the Crusades. News has just reached England that Richard Lion-Heart, the king, has been captured by the Austrians.

TOM HADLEIGH—a youth of sixteen, who suddenly finds himself the rightful heir to the demesne of Charmilene over which flies the unweary flag of

HUGO—known to the people of Nottingham as the Black Wolf.

ROBIN HOOD—chief of a band of outlaws, among whom are Little John, Friar Tuck, Lon, Alan-a-Dale, Ranulf, and Will Scarlet.

LANTERN—once Sir Lancelot Ashdown, now an outlaw. Bosom friend of Tom Hadleigh.

Tom possesses a broken talisman upon which is the inscription "The cave betwixt—a split oak—follow the water—Gold." The complete talisman is said to contain the secret of the whereabouts of a wondrous treasure. The other half of the talisman, however, has been in Earl Hugo's hands for many years. After countless stirring adventures in search of Earl Hugo's half of the talisman, Tom and his outlaw friends earn their reward, for a vassal of Earl Hugo—**GILBERT de VAUX**—delivers up the half of the talisman for which they are seeking. In great excitement Tom and the outlaws fit the two broken pieces together, eager to learn the secret of Sherwood Gold.

(Now read on.)

The Cave of Treasure!

THESE were the words writ upon the broken talisman:

"In the cave betwixt the black rock 'neath a split oak, and the goose's wing, follow the water. In the darkness lieth the Gold!"

A breathless silence fell when I had read aloud those precious words. Then Alan-a-Dale muttered:

"Right well do I recall a black rock 'neath a split oak! 'Tis not far from the glade where we found you, lad, with Gilbert de Vaux. But the goose's wing—what is the goose's wing?"

"The pool!" I cried, breathless. "It can mean naught other than the pool where Lantern and I, long ago, held tryst with Lon! The pool shaped like a goose's wing! That, also, is hard by the blind man's glade! What if this cave where the gold lies is none other than the cave of the Blind Man of Tarn?"

"By St. Christopher, I believe that you have guessed aright!" cried Alan-a-Dale. "I know the pool of which you speak, and the blind man's cave is indeed about midway betwixt the pool and this black rock 'neath the split oak!"

"And another thing," I said eagerly, "the talisman says: Follow the water." I remember well, when lying sick within the blind man's cave, hearing a trickle of water in the darkness of the far recesses!"

"Oho!" cried Friar Tuck. "Assuredly, my sons, are we soon to clap eyes upon this Sherwood gold! Rare—rare! The night groweth mighty dark, and 'tis high time we broke our fast once more, methinks. But tomorrow shall we seek this yellow dross with all dispatch, and learn whether this talisman indeed speaks truth or no! Oho, but we have beaten the Black Wolf—a plague on him! Glorious!"

And on the next day we did indeed clap eyes at last upon the treasure we had sought so long!

In the deepest recesses of the cave where the blind man had made his home, little dreaming of the wealth almost within his reach, we found a little stream trickling through the blackness. It vanished in a hole in the rock, scarce four feet in height, and we could hear it trickling far into the dark. We followed the water, crawling for many a yard ere we came to the hidden cave beyond—a great cave, larger far than the outer one. And here, what a wondrous sight lay before us!

In the wavering torchlight, a glittering, gleaming mass of treasure flashed to our eyes—such dazzling wealth as even we had ne'er thought to find! Great chests of golden coins there were, and golden goblets, pile on pile, with golden brooches and necklaces and trinkets heaped like leaves in a forest! A suit of armour from the East, fashioned of solid gold, stood nigh my right hand, and all along one wall of the cave were ranged a row of great golden shields, with strange devices of the East moulded upon them, and every shield was agleam with gems! Jewelled swords and knives and battle-axes, mouldering robes embroidered thick with rubies, and great bars of solid gold! Surely, save in the treasure-chambers of kings, had such wealth ne'er been gathered together in one spot before!

In dazed wonder I stared around! When this vast wealth were divided 'twixt us all—

And then Lantern gripped my arm with his left hand.

"The King!" he whispered joyously. For a moment I knew not what my comrade meant by that. Then his meaning dawned upon me,

"The King!" I echoed. "Ay, with such riches can the Lion-Heart at last be ransomed! 'Tis in our power to bring the King back to England—to defeat the evil schemes of Prince John and the rebel barons, to restore peace and justice to this sore-stricken land of ours!"

The glory of that thought! My voice was but an avestruck whisper as I gave words to it, but then I laughed for joy, and sprang with wild delight towards a huge iron chest of golden pieces, dipping my hands deep amidst the yellow gold, tossing it to hear it fall, letting it trickle 'twixt my fingers like sand!

"The King!" I cried again. "Ay, this treasure of ours shall bring the Lion-Heart back!"

Swiftly the weeks passed. Little by little, very secretly, was the treasure taken from the cave where it had lain hidden all those years—ever since my father had placed it there when he knew that his enemies were plotting to seize his demesne. Lantern and I had journeyed to Winchester, and there seen Longchamp. With the same wary secrecy, lest any hint of it might come to the ears of Hugo or Prince John, the Chancellor transferred the treasure to somewhere in the South.

The months passed, and autumn came, and eagerly we waited for news from Longchamp. But, meanwhile, upon other affairs we had been mighty busy!

The outlaws had made for me a banner—a white banner, with a leopard's head, golden, upon it, such as had once streamed from the towers of Charmdene. I set up my standard in a glade of Sherwood Forest not far from the outlaws' camp, and we fortified it strongly

with a great ditch and palisade. Secretly word was sent out through all the countryside; and mighty proud was I to see men flocking to my banner from every town and hamlet upon my demesne!

Ill-armed they were, ill-clothed, gaunt, savage men, who for years had groaned 'neath the iron heel of the usurper. But we armed them as best we might, and their terrible hatred for the Black Wolf far out-weighted all else! These men would fight to the death for me, I knew, 'gainst Hugo and his evil brood!

As the weeks passed slowly my army grew, there in the hidden depths of Sherwood. But yet were we not strong enough to strike, till the winter had passed and spring came. And then at last Robin Hood said to me one day, as he gazed around my camp, with those who had flocked to my banner fashioning spears and bows and other weapons all about us, and the banner of the leopard's head itself flowing bravely to the wind above all:

"My lord, the time is ripe!"

Lantern, who stood with us, nodded.

"Ay, the time is ripe. Strike now, ere Hugo learns that you have so much as raised your standard! Four hundred yeomen are impatient to march at your back, lad—and another hundred, clad in Lincoln green, await the signal, too!"

He had scarce spoken ere Little John came to tell me that a strange knight waited without who desired to speak with Richard, Earl of Charndene.

"He would give no name," said Little John, "and upon his shield there is no device. Beware of treachery, my lord."

I nodded, puzzled. Who could this unknown knight be?

A minute later through the gateway of the great palisade there came riding a knight in full armour, mounted upon a charger black as the Pit. He dismounted before us, and we saw that he was a man of truly wondrous stature—tall and broad and, doubtless, wondrous strong. When he raised his visor I heard a startled gasp from Lantern; but the strange knight's eyes were fixed upon me.

A splendid face he had—strong and aquiline, with crisp hair curling from 'neath his casque. His eyes were flashing and dauntless—the eyes, so they seemed to me, of one accustomed to be obeyed. When he smiled his strong white teeth gleamed in the sunlight.

"You seek me, Sir Knight?" I asked, my eyes upon his. "But first I would ask how you knew that Richard Athelstane was to be found in Sherwood!"

"One told me who has your confidence, my Lord Richard," he replied in a deep and pleasant voice. "Longchamp, Chancellor of England! And I have come to ask that I may fight 'neath your banner 'gainst Hugo, called falsely Earl of Charndene, when you strike 'gainst that arch-enemy of the King!"

Though I knew naught of this man, I did not pause a moment ere I cried eagerly:

"Nothing better could I ask than that! Brave men are needed sore to fight 'gainst the King's enemies to-day in England—"

He laughed, and I wondered why. Then all suddenly he strode forward and clapped me on the shoulder, looking down into my eyes, with a smile that thrilled my very blood, as he said softly:

"The King shall ne'er want for brave men in England while such as you are ready to strike a blow for him, young golden-head! I knew your father, boy—proud he must be can he see you now; and who knows that he cannot?"

And something in his tone, something

in his eyes, something in the face of Lantern as I glanced at my comrade, told me the glorious truth. But I stammered.

"Sir Knight, tell me who you are!" "I am the King, lad!" came the answer.

We March Upon Hugo!

"THE King!" I murmured. Ah, that wondrous moment when I knew that I was face to face with Richard of England—that 'twas the hand of the Lion-Heart that rested upon my shoulder, that those steady, smiling eyes were those of the King himself!

I stood motionless before him, my heart throbbing wildly. Struck dumb I was! And then I fell upon one knee and grasped his hand.

"Nay," said he; "arise, young lord. Staunch hearts and true are not so plentiful this day in England that I would have them kneel, when perchance ere long they shall lie prone for my sake—slain by rebel steel!"

There was a great bitterness in his voice, and his strong, splendid face hardened. Then he turned to Lantern, a strange look in his eyes.

"Lancelot Ashdown, of all men!" quoth he.

"Ay," answered Lantern quietly, "Though outlawed, and of knightly rank no more, I trust, highness, that you forbid me not to strike a blow for you 'neath the banner of Lord Richard."

The King stared at the little swordsmen curiously.

"You would wish to strike a blow for me?" cried he, with something like wonder in his voice. "Surely 'tis for this lad's sake, not for mine own, that you would wish to help in the downfall of this false Earl of Charndene whom they call the Black Wolf!"

Lantern shook his head. There was something in his face that I could not read.

"Nay, but for your sake also, highness," he answered. "For the sake of the days when I fought at your side in the Holy Land. Days not forgotten."



A second fellow aimed a sweeping blow at me with a brown-bill, and the spike opened my cheek and all but put out my eye. But in another moment I had sprung up on to the battlements and driven my great sword through the ruffian's heart. (See page 25.)

"'Tis three years ago that we last hewed our way, side by side, through the swarms of infidels, our swords dripping with the blood of the unbelievers," muttered the King. "Days not forgotten, you say? I, too, have not forgotten! Ay, much has happened since then. My own brother has turned 'gainst me, and a swarm of my barons are ready to fight 'neath his banner. None of these men have I ever wronged—'tis but greed and ambition that steers their course. For that alone are they ready to draw sword 'gainst their King. And yet you, whom I have wronged so terribly, do I find still willing to strike a blow for me!"

Lantern did not speak, but in his eyes was a sudden light of hope.

"A man of hot temper is Richard of England," went on the King, and again his voice was bitter. "I remember that I would scarce hear your defence, into such a passion had I been thrown by the lying information brought to me by Sir Hubert le Noir, the Knight-Templar. For lies I know it now to be! The Templar died of plague shortly ere I fell into the hands of my foes and I was cast into the dungeons of Dierstein Castle; and on his death-bed he told me of the vile plot to bring about your fall. Fool, hot-headed fool that I was to have listened to them, to have believed for an instant that you of all men could have sold my plans to our foes! But as soon as I knew the truth I vowed to seek you out so soon as English soil was 'neath my feet."

"You knew that I was here in Sherwood?" cried Lantern in amazement.

"Ay. For Longchamp has told me all concerning those who gave the gold that ransomed me. And you he recognised as soon as he clapped eyes upon you, though you guessed it not. And now Richard of England craves forgiveness for his black folly!"

The King held out his hand, and Lantern grasped it as man to man. Then the Lion-Heart drew his sword and motioned Lantern upon one knee. Lightly the King touched my comrade's shoulder with the blade.

"Sir Lancelot, no more are you outlaw! When I have—so please Heaven—smashed my foes and am again acclaimed as King of England, shall your lands and manor be returned to you. And if you bear yourself as bravely, as gallantly as in those days when aforesaid you wore the golden spurs, then shall Sir Lancelot Ashdown be indeed an ornament of English chivalry!"

Robin Hood had drawn apart when the King's identity had been revealed. But now the Lion-Heart turned to the captain of the outlaws.

"Greetings, Robin Hood!" said he. "Thine is a name that has passed from mouth to mouth even unto the Holy Land! 'Tis a mighty pleasant thing to set eyes upon so famous and brave a man." He laughed. "Fear not from me! Though you and your gallant yeomen have preyed for many a day upon the Royal deer, 'tis not for me to begrudge venison to those who are ever ready to fight for truth and right, to those who give shelter to my down-trodden people, the wretched and the crippled and the blind! Robin Hood, I know only too well that your band of outlaws is formed of men who have had to flee to the forest to save their limbs or the light of their eyes, or life itself, from the cruel oppression of the lawless barons. But I, Richard of England, declare that you and all your band are outlawed from this moment!"

And then the King called for a cup of wine. Raising it, he looked towards me.

"Wassail!" cried he. "Wassail to Richard Athelstane, Earl of Charndene! 'Tis an honour indeed to fight 'neath the banner of thy sires, lad. May Heaven be on our side when we march upon that ruffian Hugo. You are our captain. 'Neath your leadership I believe truly that we shall strike a mighty blow for freedom and justice, a blow that shall echo throughout all England, and the sound of it strike terror into the hearts of the traitors! Ere long, I trust, you shall be acclaimed as earl, to rule as your father ruled over the fair demesne of Charndene—wisely and justly, strongly where strength is needed, merciful where mercy is called for. Wassail, I say—wassail to Richard Athelstane, the earl!"

He drained the wine. Then, in simple words, he thanked us for all that we had done for him. He told us, too, that he wished for the present to remain incognito; only Lantern and Robin Hood and I, Little John, Alan-a-Dale, Tuck, and the other leaders of the outlaws knew that the strange knight who had come to fight for me was in reality the King.

That evening, as we sat round a great fire eating and drinking, the Lion-Heart asked me how I had discovered my true identity, and I showed him the parchment that I had found in the castle of Charndene, and the scar upon my chest where, so I had been told, the birthmark of which the parchment spoke had once been. The King nodded.

"'Tis proof enough for me," said he—"if proof were wanted. But your face tells me that you are of the House of Athelstane, for I remember your father well. Indeed, you are my namesake, lad, for I remember that your father asked mine own if he might name his son as the King's son was named. So he called you Richard, after Richard of England."

On the morrow we held a great council. All was ready for the assault upon the castle of Charndene; it remained but to decide upon the place and method of attack. 'Twas decided, after many an hour of discourse, that the great gate was too strong to be attacked, and that the best point was upon the northern side of the castle, where the ground around being higher, best use could be made of the deadly shafts of the bowmen.

During the long weeks of preparation we had made engines of war—great catapults and battering-rams swung upon frames, and some curious weighted frameworks of the depth of the castle moat—which our scouts had ascertained for us—to be cast into the water for the scaling-ladders to be raised upon. The men were divided into troops, each troop commanded by one of the men in Lincoln green. Of the four hundred wretches who had flocked to my banner, not one there was ill-armed or weakly now. 'Twas indeed a dangerous army that waited for my word to march upon the castle!

And on the morrow, that word was given!

'Twas upon a sunny, merry morning that those grim-faced men turned at long last towards the castle for the last great struggle. Ay, my own face was grim, too! For I was resolved that unless I won back my earldom I would die in the combat.

The squirrels frisked from bough to bough, the blossoms of spring splashed their colour in the greenwood glades as we passed on our way towards Charndene. I rode at the head of them, with the King upon my right hand, and Lantern on my left. Robin Hood rode beside the Lion-Heart, Lantern and I and the King were all clad in our light



THE SECRET OF THE CAVE!

In the wavering torch-light, a glittering, gleaming mass of treasure flashed to our eyes—such dazzling wealth as even we had ne'er thought to find. Surely, save in the treasure chambers of kings had such wealth ne'er been gathered together in one spot before. (See page 23.)

chain-mail, and hanging at my saddle-bow was a shield painted for me by the outlaws with the device of the leopard's head upon a white field; while Lantern's black shield bore the handsome device that had once been so dreaded by the infidel—a stag's head of silver.

All that night we marched, but so soon as dawn came we rested 'neath the trees. 'Twas at sunset that our scouts came with tidings of a great excitement and commotion at the castle; all the women had left its walls, all the old men, leaving but the fighting-men, and prisoners who rotted in the dungeons.

'Twas clear that our moving army had been discovered by some means, and that Hugo was preparing to defend his stronghold 'gainst our assault.

We pressed on swiftly, and two dawns later we came upon the castle!

The drawbridge was raised, and a sudden glitter of steel flashed out from one of the embattled walls. High above all, the crimson banner of the black wolf's head streamed 'gainst the rose-flushed sky.

Swiftly our engines of war were pieced together. So well had we laid our plans that there was no delay. Each man knew his post, and in a very short while all was ready.

All was very still. And then I gave the signal, and all suddenly the quiet of dawn was shattered with a mighty clamour! The great catapults were rushed forward to the walls, the picked bowmen burst from the trees and sent the cloth-yard shafts singing from the six-foot bows. Shrieks and cries rose high above all other sounds, but we could hear the arrow-heads rattle on the armour of our foes, could hear the great stones hurled from the catapults crash upon the battlements with deadly effect! Loud rang the war-cry of the outlaws: "Sherwood! Sherwood!"

'Neath a dreadful torrent of arrows and crossbow-bolts, the weighted frameworks were dragged to the moat and cast in. The scaling-ladders rose 'gainst the northern wall, and up them surged the brave yeomen, despite the great stones and the unslaked lime and the scalding water hurled down upon them.

I saw the towering form of Richard Lion-Heart leap for one of the ladders, Little John upon his heels. The next moment I, too, was swarming up 'towards the villainous faces that peered down upon us from the battlements above!

The Death of the Black Wolf!

THE ladder beside me went hurtling sideways, away from me, and I caught a glimpse of struggling figures in the moat, and of a fellow with a crushed skull who lay dead. Up I clambered, and a bearded ruffian with a broken nose struck down at me with an axe. But he missed, and I drove up at him, clinging to the ladder with my left hand. The blade caught him in the throat, and the next moment he had overbalanced with a horrid scream, and gone hurtling downwards to the moat.

A second fellow aimed a sweeping blow at me with a brown-bill, and the spike opened my cheek and all but put out my eye. But in another moment I had sprung up on to the battlements, and driven my great sword through the ruffian's heart.

Ay, we had gained the battlements! Not far away I could see the figure of the King, doing deadly work with mighty, smashing blows of his great mace. Lantern and Alan-a-Dale were scrambling up beside me, and Little John and Will Scarlet were already upon the walls. Then there came a fierce bellow

above all the clamour, and the next moment Friar Tuck had risen into view.

Standing upon the topmost rung of the ladder, he dealt a staggering blow to the pikeman who sprang at him. Then he had hauled himself, puffing breathlessly, upon the wall, and a moment later the ladder upon which he had been standing was sent crashing outwards, and I heard the cries from the men upon it as they fell.

The fight was waxing hotter and hotter. Now that we had gained the walls, those in charge of the catapults had left their engines, and came surging after us. So thick was the press around me that there was scarce room to swing my sword. So I made my way slowly to a point where one could indeed fight, and there engaged with a man-at-arms, who swung a huge mace from his wrist by its loop of leather.

He gripped his weapon tightly as I leaped upon him, and brought it whistling downwards. If that blow had fallen, 'twould have smashed both my cap of steel and my skull, but I leapt aside in the nick of time. The next moment he caught me a glancing blow upon the left shoulder which sent me staggering to the flagstones, and with a fierce shout of triumph he stood above me and whirled his mace on high.

I still grasped my sword, but his foot was upon it, and I could never wrench it free in time. It seemed as though death were very near!

I lay motionless, for somehow I could not stir as I gazed up, fascinated, at the mace that was even now whirling down to dash out my brains. And then the mace flew from his hand, and he staggered where he stood. Forth from his chest I saw the head of an arrow protruding, and near by, a bow still raised, stood Alan-a-Dale, his bowstring humming!

The gleeman had saved my life!

The dawn-light was half obscured by great, heavy clouds that had rolled up across the sky. A threat of rain was in the air. Ere long the rain came down in torrents, and on the wet, slippery flagstones we struggled on in a mist of rain 'gainst the villains who fought beneath Hugo's banner.

Back to back, Lantern and I strove with the ruffians, who pressed hard upon us. I had lost sight of the King, but I fancied that he was with those who were storming one of the towers that flanked the wall on which we had gained a footing.

Lantern was in fine mettle, and his nimble blade was dealing death to many of our foes, as it danced lightly hither and thither. So far, my men had held their own. But suddenly there appeared from one of the towers a huge figure in armour, swinging a mighty treble-chained flail, snarling fiercely as he whirled it about him. 'Twas the Black Wolf himself!

He slew two of the outlaws with one sweep of his deadly weapon. And at sight of him his men seemed to gain fresh courage and energy. Shouting and howling like a pack of wild beasts, Hugo's ruffians redoubled their efforts. And ere long the tide of battle turned, and they began to force my followers back to the edge of that mighty wall.

"Sherwood! Sherwood!" I shouted desperately, striving to rally them. But though they struggled gallantly, they were yet being driven back, when all suddenly a towering form in chain-mail burst into view.

'Twas the King. His hand went to his visor, and swiftly he raised it, showing his face to them all. In a moment the clamour had quietened almost to silence, and I heard a choking cry from the

Black Wolf, and he staggered back against the wall of the tower.

"I am Richard Lion-Heart—the King!"

His fierce shout rang out in the strange hush. And then from my followers there burst such a cheer as I had never heard before!

The King fighting on their side! No wonder that fresh life entered their weary hearts—no wonder they drove their foes back till all that battlement was won! Hugo and his evil brood retreated to the towers and walls beyond, and we pressed upon them all the while!

I saw the King engaged with Hugo himself, and I all but forgot to defend myself, so eager was I to watch two such fighters! But then the swirling tide of battle swept them apart, and Hugo was lost to my sight.

Roger of Avon and Ranulf of the Plough I saw, doing splendid work with their short swords. The Miller was not far away, with a short-handled, broad-bladed spear, with which I saw him strike down a burly axeman. The rain was ceasing now, but so wet were the flagstones that 'twas mighty hard to keep a footing as one fought.

The northern tower was already won, and a grim fight was now raging in the eastern. And 'twas in a gallery of the east tower that at last I came face to face with the Black Wolf!

His armour was stained with blood, his surcoat ripped to shreds, and he had taken a cut across the mouth that made his evil face horrible. When he saw me, a right devilish hatred sprang into his eyes.

"You dog!" snarled he. "At last we meet once more! When I have slain you, and your followers are broken and terror-stricken, then shall I go through Chardene and burn each hamlet that has risen 'gainst me, and slay every rebel!" I laughed harshly.

"'Tis you that shall die!" I cried. "And when your accursed banner has been dragged down, then shall the years of wretchedness and terror, cruelty and bloodshed be ended!"

And I rushed upon him! Mad with rage he must have been, for he flung his flail at me as I leaped forward. I sprang aside, and the weapon went flying past me to crash 'gainst the wall. He was defenceless now!

A crowd of fighting men were all about us, and Hugo's squires were near their muster. He sprang backward with a stream of curses.

"A spear—give me a spear!" One of the squires swift gave him such a weapon. And then Hugo and I were again striving in desperate combat.

For many a minute he kept me upon the defensive, so rapidly did he drive in his thrusts, so cunning was his spear-play.

Round and round we circled, and I realised that all around the fighters, as if by common consent, watched our combat in a silence very tense. 'Twas as though Hugo and I, their leaders, were to decide the issue of that grim day by single combat.

Hugo drove for my face, and as I leaped back I knew that the steel had been within an inch of my eyes. With a shout of fury he came after me. And then I thought I saw my chance.

My great sword whirled on high. Hugo tried to spring aside in time, but with a crash the steel descended on his cap. The blade bit through the metal as though it were but leather, and with a horrid scream the Black Wolf staggered

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In the great hall of the castle the King made me kneel before him, and touching me upon the shoulder with his blood-stained sword, told me that this night had I won my golden spurs. (See this page.)

back. Upon his knees he fell, and his spear clattered to the stones.
In another moment he was stretched lifeless at my feet.

Victory!

AND so were the tyrannies of Hugo ended!

I stared down as in a dream at the sprawled shape of my enemy, scarce able to believe my senses. Then someone came leaping to my side. 'Twas Lantern.

His sword flickered, and one of Hugo's squires fell across the body of his master. In the daze that had seized upon me, I had not noticed the man as he came leaping to avenge his master with sword upraised. Lantern had struck not a breath too soon!

A wild rapture filled me as I raised my sword to fight on. But panic had seized those of Hugo's ruffians who had seen the Black Wolf fall, and they turned and ran before us.

The panic spread among their comrades as the grim tidings were passed from lip to lip. And by eventide the castle was in our hands!

By the light of a wondrous sunset, the crimson banner of the black wolf's head was dragged down, and torn into a thousand fragments by the exultant men who had groaned 'neath that emblem of cruelty and oppression for so long. And in its stead there rose slowly through the clear air the white banner of the leopard's head—as in the bygone days ere the usurper came to Charndene.

Mighty heavy losses had we suffered; but all was forgotten in the wondrous joy that filled the hearts of all. The men in Lincoln green swarmed down into the dungeons, and released a score of baggard creatures, who joined in the wild revelry that filled the castle that night.

Ah, the rapture of it! I had won back the great demesne of Charndene for the House of Athelstane! A joyous place should it now become, I vowed. And afterward, in the great hall, the King bade me kneel before him, and, touching me upon the shoulder with his blood-stained sword, told me that this night had I won my golden spurs!

The Lion-Heart stayed in my castle for a day only, but by that time the news of his return seemed to have spread as if by magic throughout the countryside. And, as Lantern had once prophesied, the King's return caused Prince John's followers to fall from his standard like autumn leaves! And the tidings of our great victory, and the death of the Black Wolf, helped not a little to strike fear into the heart of the treacherous prince.

Those barons who had remained faithful to the Lion-Heart gathered their retainers ready for the struggle that 'twas thought must come. But it never came! And without further opposition from his terror-stricken brother, the King was crowned again, this time at Winchester. He forgot no one in rewarding those who had been true and faithful—even Lon, the jester, he remembered. The hunchback became the King's fool—a recompense well worth all that he had suffered.

Sir Lancelot Ashdown—or Lantern, as I still liked to call him—had his lands and manor returned to him, as the King had promised. These were in Derbyshire, so that no great distance lay betwixt our demesnes.

Ay, often did we go adventuring together in after times, the little swordman and I! And oftentimes did Lantern and I don jerkins of Lincoln green, and, mounted upon Hereward and Starlight, roam through Sherwood, and there visit Robin Hood and his merry men—all—Alan-a-Dale, Friar Tuck, Little John, and the Miller, and Will Scarlet.

And there, in the depths of the green-wood, would we sit around a leaping fire among the brown-faced men of Sherwood, and roar out in chorus the song of Alan-a-Dale:

"Heigho!
He bends his bow!
Flies the shaft of Robin Hood—
A streak of ash through the free green-wood!
Flying straight, flying true,
From the humming string of his six-foot yew!

"Heigho!"
And that is all my tale.

THE END.

The Only Difficulty!

The sixty-horse-power motor refused to do sixty-horse-power.

Fortunately, however, there was a repairing-shed near by, and the gentleman driver called the mechanic to his aid.

"Repair it?" said the mechanic. "You bet! Two two's, and Bill Blogg's done yer job!"

"You're a capable man, then?" queried the gentleman driver anxiously.

"What I don't know about motys," boasted the mechanic, setting to work with a screw-driver, "ain't worth knowing! I've been over 'em and under 'em and all around 'em. I know 'em like I know me A B C. There's on'y one thing," he continued, as he removed the bonnet and started hammering inside—"on'y one thing about these 'ere motys wot floors me."

"And that is?" inquired the owner.
"Well, sir," replied the mechanic, wiping his brow, "I can't get it into my head 'ow the dickens they make 'em go without 'itching a 'orse to 'em!"

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"THE CALL OF THE DESERT!"

(Continued from page 22.)

to be one of the watchmen. He cheerfully left that task to be "whacked out" among the Famous Five.

Bunter's deep snore was soon audible. Even danger, which he realised now was real enough and near enough, did not keep the Owl of the Remove from slumber.

Harry Wharton & Co. sat resting under the palms, talking in low tones, their eyes on the starry desert. They were fairly sure now that they were safe from any pursuit of the desert spearmen. That peril had been eluded, but on the morrow they were to seek fresh peril. For the end of their quest lay in the encampment of Mustapha ben Mohamed, where Major Cherry lay a prisoner—if still he lived. Somehow, they hoped to effect his rescue by strategy, and it was desperately necessary to keep their proximity unknown to the sheik.

Ibrahim lingered about them, offering small services, and in spite of their disgust at his treachery, and their utter lack of faith in him now, the juniors fell somewhat into their old way of treating him with kindness. But they were none the less on their guard.

"Time to turn in, you fellows," said Harry Wharton, at last.

"What about Ibrahim?" said Frank Nugent doubtfully. "He's jolly likely to cut and run if he gets a chance."

"Never desert noble English gentlemen."

"Oh, cheese it!"

Honest Ibrahim assumed a look of patient sorrow, and obediently "cheesed" it.

"We shall take him into the tent with us," said Harry. "We can't trust him to keep to the camp, of course."

"That's all right," said Bob Cherry with a nod.

"Too much honour for poor Ibrahim," murmured the guide. "Honest Ibrahim sleep at the door of his noble masters."

"I don't think!" granted Bob.

Woowoo!

A faint, distant, rumbling sound came from the silence of the desert.

"What's that?" muttered Bob.

"Him lion."

The juniors jumped up at once, grasping their rifles.

Woowoo!

The sound was fainter, more distant. They listened intently, but it was not heard again.

"Jolly glad he's gone," muttered Johnny Bull. "Blessed if I like the idea of a lion prowling round the tent."

"The camels seem uneasy," said Nugent.

"Him gone!" said Ibrahim. "Him go after gazelle, p'raps. Perhaps him come to camp when noble masters sleep. You trust Ibrahim keep guard over his fine gentlemen."

"Chuck it!" granted Bob.

The juniors listened for some time, but nothing more was heard from the prowling lion. The camels settled down into repose again. Harry Wharton & Co. entered the tent, and Honest Ibrahim was forced to enter it first. And any hope that the cunning Arab might have nursed of stealing away quietly in the night was soon frustrated. Harry Wharton knotted the end of a rope to his dusky wrists, behind his back, fastening the knot with all the skill he had learned as a Boy Scout, and the rope was knotted to a tent-peg.

"Ibrahim no sleep!" said the guide sorrowfully. "Him very discomfort, you see, fine gentlemen."

"Take your chance of that," said Wharton. "You asked for it. It's your own look-out, and you're lucky not to be knocked on the head."

Honest Ibrahim sighed, and said no more. In spite of his protest he managed to sleep soundly enough with his hands bound. As soon as he realised that there was no chance of escape he settled down to sleep, and was soon deep in slumber. The juniors were slower in following his example, but Wharton, Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurrec Janset Ram Singh slumbered at last. Bob Cherry was taking the first turn to watch, and he stood outside the tent with his rifle under his arm.

Deeper fell the night—silent, dusky—and Bob, as he paced slowly to and fro before the tent, felt himself in the centre of an immense silence and solitude.

Bob was thinking of his father as he kept watch and ward—of his father, a prisoner in the hands of the sheik of the Sahara, doomed, perhaps, to the torture. Was he still living; or had the desert sands closed over that kind face? And if he lived still, could the rescuers save him from the savage grasp of the Sahara sheik, or were they riding only to share his doom?

They were questions to which Bob could find no answer—doubts that tormented him through the long, silent night. He paced and watched, and longed for dawn.

THE END.

(Get ready to welcome next week's grand story of Harry Wharton & Co. "Fats of the Sahara!" is a yarn you will remember for many a long day. Our Greyfriars chums are nearing the end of their perilous quest, and from now on especially not a line of their adventures should be missed.)

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