

A CHRISTMAS PRESENT FOR YOU—SUPERB ART PLATE, INSIDE!

The

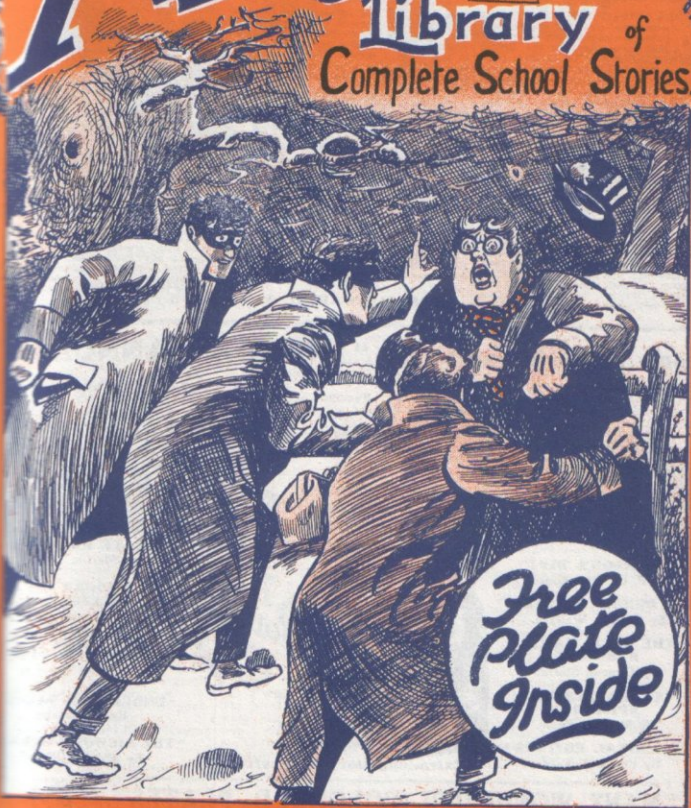
No. 881. Vol. XXVI.

Week Ending December 27th, 1924.

Magnet 2nd

EVERY MONDAY.

Library of Complete School Stories.



Free
plate
inside

“IS YOUR NAME WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER—?”

“An interesting” incident from this week’s magnificent story of Harry Wharton & Co.—the Greyfriars chums—inside!



H. M.S. VIVACIOUS is one of a numerous class of large and powerful torpedo-boat destroyers that were added to the British Navy during the War. All of them have names that begin with the letter "V," just as another class of destroyers have names that begin with the letter "W," another—names beginning with the letter "S," and so on. A series letter is adopted for naming destroyers with a practical object in view. Naval men in speaking of a destroyer say: "She is one of the 'V's,'" or "One of the 'W's,'" as the case may be. The initial letter of her name, at once recalls to mind a full description of the boat and also where she may be serving, as the different "classes" are generally kept together in flotillas.

Originally there were twenty-eight "V's," but three of them were lost on active service. The Vivacious and her twenty-four surviving "sisters"—except for five that are fitted as "leaders"—each displace 1,300 tons, are 300 feet long, and have engines of 27,000 horse-power. Of their four 4-inch guns two are mounted forward and two aft, thus leaving the deck space in the "waist" of the

boat clear for the operation of the quartette of 21-inch torpedo tubes placed there, and which are constructed on the "twin" principle—that is, they are joined together in pairs. On a little platform between the tubes stands a powerful searchlight that is used for finding "targets" during night fighting.

Like all modern destroyers, the "V's" use oil fuel only, and they carry a crew of 110, a much larger one than the old destroyers required. If you look at this week's picture you will see that the bows of the boat are very sharp. They are so shaped for two reasons, one being to ensure speed, the other for ramming purposes. Going at "full pelt," the Vivacious would be able to cut an enemy destroyer in half or to sink a hostile submarine by shearing clean through her hull. Destroyers are given a raised forecastle so that they can make their way through heavy seas. If they had the same freeboard—in other words, the same height all round the hull—they would bury their noses in the water so deeply that they could

not steam very fast, and they would be submerged in a seaway. In order to keep them dry their bows have a "flare" or a slight bend inward—which assists in throwing down the water that climbs toward their decks.

The upper structure on their foremast also "leans over" a bit in order to meet back incoming seas. But, despite all this, a destroyer in rough weather is no place for an indifferent sailor. She cuts through the waves, and there is always much water tumbling along her decks. A "life-line" has to be stretched from stern to stern so that the crew can hang on to this and prevent themselves from being swept overboard as they move from one part of the ship to another.

The older type of destroyer was so uncomfortable that compensation for the hardships endured, in the shape of a small sum per day for "hard living money," used to be paid to the crew. Destroyers now have good living accommodation in them that the special pay has ceased. All the same, "destroyer work" is a young man's job—particularly for officers, to whom it gives the better chances of showing what is in them than they get in a big ship.

Next Week:

H.M. SUBMARINE M 1.

Some of the Stories in the "HOLIDAY ANNUAL!"



Exciting Motor-racing Story.

Hundreds of Pictures—many useful "How-to-Make" articles, etc.



THRILLING PIRATE ROMANCE.
By Stuart Martin.

"JACKSON'S DIP!"
By P. G. Wodehouse.

"THE BORDER RAIDERS!"
By Gordon Wallace.

"THE WILD MAN OF BORNEO!"
By Duncan Storm.

"ST. KATIE'S BIG SPLASH!"
By Michael Poole.

"THE RIVAL EDITORS!"
By Frank Richards.



Extra-long story of Greyfriars.

"THE BEGGAR AT THE GATE!"
By Howard Pease and Knight Jesse.

"FORBIDDEN TO FIGHT!"
By Martin Clifford.

"UNDER THE FALLS!"
By M. Wynne.

"THE BISHOP'S MEDAL!"
By Martin Clifford.

MANY WONDERFUL COLOURED PLATES
THIS FAMOUS STORY-BOOK IS NOW ON SALE!

6/-

TOO LATE? Wharton realises rather late in the day that he has been a trifle hasty in separating from his chums. Now, in the light of calm reflection, he sees that the major portion of the blame lies at his door. An apology should set things right—so thinks Wharton—but Nugent, Bob Cherry, Inky, and Johnny Bull are not so ready to forgive as he imagines.



A Magnificent New
Long Complete Story
of Harry Wharton
& Co. of Greyfriars.
Told by
FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Butting-in of Bunter!

HALLO, hallo, hallo!"
"Anything up, Franky?"
"Is the upfulness terrific,
my esteemed Nugent?"
Frank Nugent made a grimace.

He stood in the hall with a letter in his hand, which he had just opened, and the contents of that letter seemed to have given Nugent food for thought.

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and Hurree Janset Ram Singh had just come in. Outside, the December dusk was thickening, and snowflakes fellattering in the winter gloom. The three juniors seemed in great spirits after a tramp in the snow; but Nugent, their host and entertainer for the Christmas holidays, wore a worried look.

From a half-open door Dicky Nugent, of the Second Form at Greyfriars, looked out into the hall.

"Tea, you Remove bounders!" he smiled out. "You're late. Slackers, as usual!"

Bob Cherry chuckled.
At Greyfriars the Second Form fag would probably have been bumped for his cheek in thus addressing the heroes of the Remove.

But at home it was a different matter. Master Dicky was free to be as cheeky as he liked—a freedom of which he availed himself quite extensively. He made it clear that his brother's guests were very small beer in his eyes.

"Right-ho, little one!" said Bob good-naturedly. "Just rolling in."

"Shut up, Dicky," said Frank Nugent frowning.

"Rats!" retorted Dicky.

And he grinned and disappeared.
Nugent glanced at his letter again, and the wrinkle in his brow deepened. The chums regarded him inquiringly.

"From Wharton?" asked Bob.

Nugent shook his head.

"No. Wharton isn't likely to write, I suppose, in the giddy circumstances."

"Oh, I don't know," said Bob

cheerily. "I'd be glad to hear from him. Wish he was here with us."

"The wishfulness is terrific," remarked the nabob of Bhanipur.

"This letter's from Bunter," said Frank.

"Bunter?"

"Yes."

"Well, nothing to worry about in a letter from Bunter, I suppose?" said Johnny Bull. "Does he mention that he's expecting a postal-order?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Nugent laughed.

"No, he's coming here."

"Oh, my hat! You didn't mention that you'd asked Bunter for Christmas."

"I haven't."

"But he's coming!" ejaculated Johnny Bull.

"So he says."

"Bunter doesn't worry about trifles like that," chuckled Bob Cherry. "Good old Bunter! The glories of Bunter Court have palled on him pretty soon, so he's giving you a turn."

"Look at the letter," said Frank.

The three juniors read the letter from William George Bunter together. It was scrawled in Billy Bunter's well-known fist, and in Billy Bunter's own original orthography. It was adorned with a considerable number of blots and smears, in Billy Bunter's well-known style. And it ran:

"Deer Nugent,—Just a line to tell you I shal be with you this evening. The pater hardly likes me leeving home while the festivities are on, but I toled him I couldn't lett down my old pals at Christmas-time. Wharton lett me down over Christmas, as you know, but that isn't my stile. My train gets in at Wold at six-thirty. Send the car to meet it, like a good chap. So no moar at present from your old pal,

"W. G. BUNTER."

"Well, of all the neck!" ejaculated Johnny Bull.

"The neckfulness is terrific."

"He doesn't give me time to answer, you see," said Frank Nugent. "I—I suppose he will have to come."

Grunt, from Johnny Bull.

"You're an ass, Nugent," he said.

"If you don't want the chap, don't have him. I wouldn't."

"Well, I don't want him, that's a cert," said Frank.

"Then shoo him off."

Nugent made a grimace again.

No doubt Johnny Bull, who was a plain speaker—painfully plain, sometimes—would have "shooed" off an uninvited guest without ceremony. But Frank Nugent was cast in softer mould than the sturdy and hefty Johnny. Certainly Bunter's butting in in this way was the last word in cheek. Nevertheless Nugent hesitated to deal with him as Johnny would have dealt. He was too kind-hearted—too soft-hearted. Johnny would have said—to think of turning a Greyfriars fellow from his door at Christmas-time.

"The kickfulness is the proper caper, my esteemed Nugent," suggested Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Hem!"

"Good egg!" said Bob Cherry heartily. "Let's see! He gets in at six-thirty. He'll get here about seven if he walks. Well, at seven we'll all be waiting at the gate, and we'll give him a kick each—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And dribble him back to the railway-station," said Bob. "How's that for a wheeze?"

Nugent smiled, but he shook his head.

"After all, he won't do any harm," he said. "If we stand Dicky's Second Form friends I suppose we can stand Bunter."

"You're soft, old man," said Johnny Bull. "Leave him to us, and we'll make him glad to buzz off."

"Oh, let him rip!" said Frank.

"Come in to tea now, old scouts."

"Right-ho!"

There was quite a merry party already

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 881.

at the well-spread tea-table. Mrs. Nugent presided, with a kind and smiling face, making much of the guests of her two sons, ably seconded by Amy and Cissy, Nugent's sisters. Dicky Nugent was talking nineteen to the dozen, if not twenty, and Gatty, of the Dozen, had plenty to say, while Myers, also of the Second Form, was in the throes of shyness, and did not dare to look at Amy or Cissy, and only gasped like a newly-landed fish if either of them addressed him.

"Pass the cake, Myers," said Nugent minor. "Amy, give Myers the cake. Don't be a dummy, Myers—Amy won't bite you."

Which remark reduced the unhappy Myers to the deepest depths of bashful anguish, and brought a colour to his face that was like unto the hue of a newly-boiled beetroot.

"Have you had a nice walk?" asked Mrs. Nugent with a smile to the Remove fellows.

"Oh, topping!" said Bob Cherry. "We came on some chaps we know—Rookwood chaps. You're not far from Jimmy Silver's place here, Frank."

Nugent nodded.

He was thinking about Bunter's letter and the imminent arrival of the Owl of the Remove.

"There's a chap coming along this evening, mater," he said. "A chap from Greyfriars."

"All your school friends are welcome, Frank," answered Mrs. Nugent. "Is it someone I know?"

"Chap named Bunter."

There was an emphatic exclamation from Dicky Nugent.

"Bunter? Major or minor?"

"Bunter major—Bunter of the Remove," answered Frank.

"What the thump is he coming for?" demanded Dicky Nugent warmly. "Is he staying about here somewhere, and giving you a look-in?"

"He's coming to stay."

"He jolly well isn't!" said Dicky indignantly. "Why, when he was trying to stick you for an invitation, last day of term, I heard him, and I told him I'd burst him if he came here!"

"Dicky!" said Mrs. Nugent reprovingly.

"So I did—and so I will!" said Nugent minor. "I can't stand Bunter! Nobody can stand him."

"You must not speak of Frank's friends like that, Dicky."

"But he isn't Frank's friend—he's just sticking Frank for Christmas because Frank's soft!" retorted Dicky.

"Dry up, you cheeky fag!" exclaimed Nugent, with a crimson face.

"Bow-wow!"

"Look here, Dicky—"

"Bosh!"

"Come, come!" said Mrs. Nugent, with a reproving but fond glance at the cheerful Dicky. Dick was the spoiled darling of the Nugent household; and he exploited that position to the full.

Frank Nugent gulped over his cake. He was annoyed with Bunter, and annoyed with Dicky, and he was not feeling very cheerful or bright, between those two annoyances. And it was for that reason that Bob Cherry conceived a little scheme for helping him out of his difficulty—which he hastened to communicate to Johnny Bull and Hurree Janiset Ram Singh, as soon as they were out of Frank Nugent's hearing.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Getting Ready for Bunter!

"I'VE got it!"

Thus Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull and Hurree Janiset Ram Singh regarded him inquiringly. Bob had led his chums into his room rather mysteriously. Frank Nugent was engaged just then in making arrangements for the reception of Bunter—though the arrangements did not include sending a car to the station for the Owl of the Remove. There was no reason, so far as Frank could see, why Bunter should not walk from the station. Bunter, no doubt, would have seen many reasons; but Bunter did not matter.

"We're going to get Franky out of this," went on Bob. "Bunter's too much of a good thing."

"Much too much," grunted Johnny Bull.

"The too-muchfulness is terrific," agreed Hurree Singh. "But the kickfulness is not the proper caper, as the esteemed and fatheaded Franky does not appreciably agree."

"More ways than one of killing a cat," said Bob cheerfully. "We're going to meet Bunter on the road—"

"Blessed if I'm going out in the snow to meet a fat owl!" growled Johnny Bull.

"And turn him back," explained Bob. "He won't turn back. Only Franky can turn him back, and Franky's too soft."

"Fathead! I tell you it's a wheeze," said Bob. "Look here, suppose Bunter ran into a gang of footpads—"

"There aren't any footpads in Wiltshire that I know of."

"Ys, there are—three of us."

"Us?" ejaculated Johnny Bull.

"Little innocent us!" grinned Bob. "We can make ourselves masks out of some old rags or something, and jump on Bunter on the road. He's a first-class funk, and he will bolt for it."

"What's the good of that? He'll come another way."

"You won't let a fellow finish. Suppose he thinks that the gang are looking for him specially—waiting for him to knock him on the head."

"He's not ass enough to think so."

"My belief is that he's ass enough for anything—and we know he's a first-class funk," said Bob, with conviction. "If

we're jolly careful, we can start him for the railway-station at top speed, and he'll take the first train and never come back again."

Hurree Janiset Ram Singh grinned a dusky grin, Johnny Bull looked doubtful.

"Anyhow, it will be a lark," urged Bob. "It's up to us to save Franky from Bunter if we can. We can't shoe him off; but if we make him want to go, that's a different matter. Franky doesn't pull any too well with his young brother at home; and Bunter will make a lot more trouble. It's partly Bunter's fault, too, that Wharton isn't with us—his silly tale started a lot of the trouble at Greyfriars."

"That's so," agreed Johnny Bull.

"We'll try it on,—and," said Bob. "It will be a lark."

"Right-ho!"

Having decided upon that rather extraordinary scheme, the three chums of the Remove lost no time in putting it into execution. An old black muffler was cut up into masks, with eye-holes complete; and the juniors tried them on before the glass, and grinned at their reflections. There was a tap at the door, and Frank Nugent looked in.

"Why—what—?"

Nugent jumped, as three black-masked faces were turned towards him.

"What the thump—?"

"Money or your life!" said Bob

Cherry, in a deep voice.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What on earth's this game?" asked Nugent, laughing.

"Oh, just a little Christmas lark, you know," said Bob, taking off his mask and slipping it into his pocket. "Anything up, Franky?"

"That young ass Dicky—"

"We'll bump him next term, at Greyfriars, old chap," said Johnny Bull.

"These young brothers are a worry."

"The young ass doesn't want Bunter," said Frank ruefully. "No business of his, of course. I haven't said anything about his bringing home a gang of Second Form fags—and I can't say I like the Greyfriars Second rooting about the house. They're talking now about meeting Bunter at the station and snow-balling him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, of course, I can't allow it," said Frank. "Fellow must be civil, though Dicky doesn't understand that. The mater wants me now; but I was thinking that you fellows might like to walk out and meet Bunter."

The trio exchanged a glance.

"Fact is, we were just thinking of it," said Bob Cherry affably.

"You don't mind?"

"Not at all."

"Pleasure!" said Johnny Bull.

"The pleasurefulness will be terrific, my esteemed Franky."

"Good!" said Nugent, relieved. "I'll leave Bunter to you fellows, then."

"Right-ho! Leave him to us," said Bob. "Get your coats, you chaps, and let's get going."

"Those dashed fags have gone already," said Frank. "You'd better hurry up a bit."

"We'll start this minute, old chap."

A few minutes later, the three juniors, muffled up in coats and scarves, were turning out of the gate into the dark, misty, snowy road. Wold was a good half-mile distant from the Oaks, Nugent's home; and after dark it was a lonely road. Bob Cherry & Co. tramped away cheerfully towards the country town; and in a few minutes they caught sight of three tramping figures ahead of them.

The Best Xmas Gift

Nothing could give more pleasure as a Xmas Gift than a copy of the topping HOLIDAY ANNUAL. Many of the stories in it are about the famous school-boy heroes—Harry Wharton, Billy Bunter, Tom Merry, Jimmy Silver, etc., etc. Make sure YOU get this book for Christmas.



"There's the giddy Second!" murmured Bob.

The Remove fellows slowed down. They did not want to overtake Dicky Nugent & Co.

They had told Frank that he could leave Bunter to them. They had not explained what was to happen when he was left. That was their own little secret.

The three fags vanished again in the mist ahead; and half-way to Wold the Remove fellows halted. They stopped at a spot where a clump of trees shaded the road with wide frosty branches.

"Here's a good place!" said Bob. "That the place a gang of footpads would choose."

"Jolly cold waiting here!" said Johnny Bull.

"Well, you can't expect it to be warm in December, old chap," said Bob Cherry. "Put on your giddy masks."

The three black masks were donned and fastened. With their coats turned up about their ears, their caps pulled on, and the black masks hiding their faces, there was no danger of Billy Bunter recognising the Remove fellows; and certainly their aspect was rather alarming, on a lonely road in the dark.

"Now, mind you play up, you know," said Bob Cherry impressively. "You'd better not let Bunter hear you speak, either."

"Why not, my esteemed Bob?"

"He might recognise your giddy way of the English language, you know," said Bob, with a chuckle.

"The silentfulness will be terrific, my esteemed and ludicrous Bob."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes somebody."

"Can't be Bunter yet—"

"Shush!"

There were footsteps on the dusky road, approaching the spot from the direction of Wold. The three masked men remained in cover in the shadow of the trees, silent and still. Dimly the form of a pedestrian came into view from the dusk. It was not the Owl of the Remove—it was a stout gentleman, unknown to the juniors. He came tramping on through the snow, and the juniors were very still in the shadows—unwilling that a stranger see them in their present respectable guise.

Unfortunately, the stranger halted at the foot of the clump of trees, to light his pipe.

A match scratched.

The sudden illumination showed three shadowy figures and masked faces to the startled eyes of the stout gentleman. "Oh!" came a sudden gasp.

The match dropped into the snow, and the stout gentleman rushed on up the road at a terrific pace.

"My hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Thud, thud, thud! Frantic footsteps chased on the snow."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The stout gentleman vanished in wild flight, and his footsteps died away in the distance.

"Now, if he comes back with a bobby," said Johnny Bull meditatively.

"The rats! Bunter won't be long."

The amateur footpads waited rather anxiously now. Once more footsteps were heard on the road, and Bob Cherry slipped out of cover through the eyeholes of his black mask. In the glimmer of the moonlight he caught the gleam of a large pair of spectacles.

"Ready!" he whispered.

Just as the amateur footpads prepared for



There was a tap at the door and Frank Nugent looked in. "What—what—" He jumped as three masked faces were turned towards him. "What the thump!" "Money or your life!" said Bob Cherry in a deep voice. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Inky and Johnny Bull. (See Chapter 2.)

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Sentenced to Death!

BILLY BUNTER stepped out of the train at Wold Station and blinked round him through his spectacles.

Perhaps he expected to find Frank Nugent on the platform waiting for him. If so, Bunter was disappointed. He grunted, and rolled out of the station, bag in hand.

There he looked for the car. But there was no car to be seen. Billy Bunter looked this way and that way, like Moses of old. But there was no car. "Beast!" murmured Bunter.

He had asked Nugent in his letter to send the car for him. There was no mistake about it—he remembered it distinctly. Yet there was no car. Billy Bunter felt very ill-used.

But as he stood and blinked round discontentedly three familiar faces appeared in view. They were the faces of Nugent minor, Gatty, and Myers, of the Second Form at Greyfriars.

"There he is!" called out Dicky Nugent.

"I say, you fellows!" called out Bunter.

Whiz, whiz, whiz!

Three snowballs came whizzing at the Owl of the Remove with deadly aim.

"Oh!" roared Bunter. "Ow!"

One of the missiles relieved him of his hat. Another caught him under his fat chin. The third squashed in his neck.

"Ha, ha! Got him!"

"Give him some more!" yelled Dicky Nugent.

"Oh, my hat! Ow!"

Bump!

Billy Bunter sat down suddenly.

"Ow! You young villains! Ow!

Wow!"

Whiz, whiz, whir! Squash! Snowballs rained on Billy Bunter. The three fags fairly danced round him as he sat and gasped, a good deal like Red Indians round a hapless victim.

Squash! Smash! Crash! Squash!

"Ow! Oh! Wow! Groooogh!"

spluttered Bunter. "I—I—TUI—

Groogh—oogh—gug-gug-gug!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter scrambled to his feet. He grabbed up his hat with one hand and his bag with the other and fled.

"After him!" yelled Dicky Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter went down the street at great speed, spluttering and puffing and blowing. After him came the three cheerful heroes of the Second, pelting him as he ran.

Fortunately for Bunter, a figure in blue loomed up on the pavement.

"Hook it! It's a bobby!" said Gatty.

And the three fags vanished round the nearest corner.

Billy Bunter scudded on, and he was out of the street in the country road before he realised that he was no longer pursued.

He dropped into a wall, panting for breath.

"Beasts!" he gasped. "I shall jolly well speak plainly to Nugent about this! I'll jolly well tell him that I shan't stay if he's got a mob of cheeky fags."

He blinked back along the dusky road towards the lights of Wold. There was no sign of the festive fags, much to his relief, and he settled down to trudge to the Oaks. He knew the way well enough; it was not the first time that the Owl of the Remove had inflicted himself on Nugent.

He tramped on, and the lights of the town vanished behind him. He was on a lonely country road, dimly lighted by the glimmer of the stars.

Suddenly Bunter halted. From the dark shadow of a clump of trees a conted, muffled, masked figure stepped into view.

Bunter's heart thumped, as he blinked at the black-masked face. He stood still, rooted to the snow with terror.

"Halt!"

It was a deep, rasping voice.

"Oh dear!" gasped Bunter.

"Seize him!"

Two more masked footpads came out of the shadows. Billy Bunter longed to flee, but his legs refused to serve him. His fat knees knocked together as the footpads surrounded him.

"Bill!" said the deep voice again.

"Yes, captain!" said another deep voice.

"Have you got the knife?"

"Here it is!"

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, I—I'm not going to resist. I—I'll give you my watch—"

"Silence! We are not robbers!" said the deep voice. "We are the agents of the Brotherhood of the Crimson Hand."

"Oh crikey!"

"We seek the son of the stockbroker, Samuel Bunter," went on the masked ruffian. "The order has gone forth that he is to die!"

"Ow!"

"Is your name Bunter?"

"Nunno!"

"The truth, dog!" snarled the masked ruffian. "What is your name?"

"Jones!" gasped Bunter.

"The wrong bird, captain," said the other deep voice. "But—"

"Our information is sure, Bill. The son of Samuel Bunter is known to have travelled by the six-thirty. Our secret service is sure. If this is not Bunter he must be near at hand. But I suspect that this trembling villain is Bunter!"

"Ow! Not at all!" gasped the Owl of the Remove. "I—I've never heard the name before. I—I hope you can take my word."

"Have you seen Bunter?"

"Never!"

"Do you know where he is?"

"Nunno! I—I've never heard of him," gasped Bunter. "I think he went abroad with Wharton and Smithy for the year—"

"What?"

"I—I mean, he's staying with Lord Maulverer over the holidays," spluttered Bunter. "That's what I really meant to say. I don't know the chap, you see. I don't belong to Greyfriars myself, so I've never seen him. My—my name's Smith."

"Oh, my hat!"

"C-can I go now?" stammered Bunter.

"If you are not Bunter, what are you doing here?"

"I—I'm going to see my old pal Nugent!" groaned Bunter, trembling in the grasp of the masked ruffians.

"Who is Nugent?"

"A—chap in my form at Greyfriars!" gasped Bunter.

"You lie! You have said that you do not belong to Greyfriars. Are you seeking to deceive the Brotherhood of the Crimson Hand?" thundered the masked man.

"Ow! No, not at all. I—I mean, he isn't in my form at Greyfriars!" gasped Bunter. "That—that's what I meant to say."

"Brothers, I think that this is Bunter. We had better kill him to make sure."

"Ow! I'm not Bunter!" yelled the fat junior. "I—I swear, you know! My—my name's Robinson—I mean, Smith—that is to say, Jones. Ow! Wow! Mercy!"

"Get out the knife, Bill!"

"Yaroooh!"

"You have one minute to live!" said the deep voice ruthlessly.

"Ow! Help!"

The fat junior dropped on his knees. The masked ruffians released him. Up jumped Billy Bunter like a jack-in-the-box. He spun round in the road, and ran for his life.

"Ha! He escapes!" roared the deep voice. "After him—quick!"

"Ow!"

Billy Bunter tore down the road at frantic speed. His one thought was to escape from the Brothers of the Crimson Hand, to bolt into the railway-station at Wold, and to jump into the first train, regardless of its destination. Heavy footsteps thudded behind.

Had that programme been carried out, doubtless Bob Cherry's little scheme would have been a great success.

But, as the poet has observed, "the best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley."

There was a sudden crash on the misty road.

As Bunter tore madly towards Wold, three figures came running lightly from the direction of the town. Dicky Nugent & Co. were on the track of the Owl of the Remove again, and they were putting on speed, keen to give him some more snowballs before he arrived at the Oaks.

The two parties met suddenly and unexpectedly.

Crash!

Bump!

Yell!

Three fags went spinning right and left under Bunter's terrific weight, and Bunter rolled over in the snow, roaring.

"Ow! Help! Police! Fire! Help! Yarooooooh!"

And a second later three ruffians, unable to stop in time, were rolling over Billy Bunter and Dicky Nugent and Gatty and Myers.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Not a Success!

"Ow, my hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"Ow!"

"What the thump—"

"Gerroff!"

"Help!"

For a minute or two it was like pandemonium on the dusky, snowy road. Bob Cherry picked himself up dazedly, with his mask hanging from one ear. Somebody's elbow had crashed into his eye, and Bob was feeling hurt. There was something under him that wriggled as he sat up, and a howling, wrathful voice proclaimed that it was Dicky Nugent.

"Gerroff, you beast! What's this game? Ow!"

"Help!" yelled Bunter. "Robbers! Thieves! Murder! Yoooop!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Ow! Get off my esteemed neck!" groaned the nabob of Bhanipur. "My excellent Johnny, you are squashing me painfully."

"Oh dear!"

"Look here, what's this game?" yelled Dicky Nugent furiously. "What are you Remove cads up to?"

"They've got masks on!" gasped Gatty. "What are you silly Remove asses doing with masks on?"

"Think you can scare us?" hooted Myers.

Billy Bunter sat up. Even in a state of palpitating funk, the Owl of the Remove understood, and he could not help seeing that a black mask hung from Bob Cherry's ear, and that another was hanging over Johnny Bull's collar.

He comprehended.

"You!" he stammered. "You fellows! Oh, you beasts! I—I thought—"

Bob Cherry snorted. The unexpected intervention of Dicky Nugent & Co. had spoiled his scheme in the moment of success. Now that he recognised the Remove fellows, William George Bunter was not likely to believe that he was tracked by the mysterious Brotherhood of the Crimson Hand.

The fat junior picked himself up. He was breathless, but he was grinning now.

"So that was the game, was it?" he said. "Rotten! I dare say you fellows thought you took me in."

"We jolly well did take you in!" snorted Johnny Bull.

"He, he, he!"

"Oh, you were scaring Bunter, were you?" said Dicky Nugent. "Of course, you were bound to make a muck of it. Remove style."

"Oh, of course!" said Gatty. "If you silly fags hadn't butted in we—"

"The scarefulness was terrific!"

"Don't you believe it!" said Billy Bunter cheerfully. "I knew it was you fellows all the time, of course."

"What!" howled Bob Cherry. "I was just pulling your leg, you know—pretending to be frightened. He, he, he! I took you in!" chuckled Bunter.

"Why, you fat owl—"

"He, he, he! I say, you fellows, you can't think what a set of silly fools you look!" chortled Bunter. "Of course, I knew it was you. I should know you anywhere, Cherry, by the size of your feet."

"Why, you—you—you—" gasped Bob.

"Now I'll be getting on to the Oaks," said Bunter cheerily. "You fellows coming? He, he, he!"

And Billy Bunter, quite himself again, trotted along the road towards the Oaks, leaving Bob Cherry & Co. staring at one another, and the fags chuckling.

"Well, it's been rather a frost!" said Bob Cherry ruefully. "But for these silly fags, though—"

"Oh, you couldn't pull it off! You couldn't pull anything off!" said Dicky Nugent. "Come on, kids! Let's give that fat owl a nip before he gets in."

"Yes, rather!"

The three fags ran in pursuit of Bunter, gathering up snow. A snowball caught the Owl of the Remove on the back of the neck, and he gave a howl and broke into a run. After him went the three heroes of the Second, pelting him as they ran.

"Come on!" said Bob Cherry. "Those silly fags have spoiled the whole thing. Let's give them what they're giving Bunter."

"Good!"

"The goodness is terrific!"



"I say, you fellows!" called out Bunter. Whizz, whizz! Three snowballs came whizzing at the Owl of the Remove with deadly aim. "Oh!" roared Bunter. One of the missiles relieved him of his hat, another caught him under his fat chin. "Ha, ha! Got him!" roared Dicky Nugent. "Give him some more!" (See Chapter 3.)

The three Removites gathered up snow and started after the Second Form. Snowballs rained on Dicky Nugent from behind, much to their wrath and indignation.

There was a running fight till the gate of the Oaks was reached, and then hostilities ceased by common consent. A very breathless and snowy party marched up to the house. Frank Nugent came into the hall to meet them.

"Hallo, Bunter!" roared Bunter. "I've been snowballed!" roared Bunter.

"What!"

"If this is how you let your young brother treat a guest, Frank Nugent, I don't think much of your hospitality."

"Bunter—"

"This isn't how I receive visitors at Bunter Court, I can jolly well tell you!" roared Bunter. "I've a jolly good mind to take the next train home, so there."

"Good!" said Nugent.

"Eh!"

"I'll walk to the station with you."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Come on, Bunter!"

"I—I say, old chap—he, he, he!—I can't take a little joke, of course. He, he, he!" Bunter ejaculated feebly. "I'm jolly glad to see you, old chap. You're looking well, Nugent! Ripping for all us old pals to be together for Christmas, isn't it—and all the better because Wharton isn't here—what?"

"Look here, Bunter—"

"All serene, old chap. Don't apologise."

"I wasn't going to. I—"

"It's all right! Help me off with my coat, there's a good fellow—'at's right!"

Billy Bunter did not take the next train home. He stayed. Frank Nugent made the best of it. But if he had known what the result of the Owl's visit was to be, it is extremely probable that Billy Bunter would have taken his departure on the spot, even if Nugent had

had to adopt Bob's suggestion of dribbling him back to the railway-station like a football.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. Homeward Bound!

A BLAZE of sunshine on green hillsides and waving palms and bright blue sea.

Harry Wharton paused on the road, and stood with his back to the rocks, looking out over the Mediterranean.

Far off in England there was snow on the roads, and mist on the sky. Here in the French Riviera it might have been summer. Snow, indeed, glimmered on the summit of the Maritime Alps. But a balmy breeze played over the blue waters, that laved golden sands and rugged old rocks, and sunshine poured down on noisy town and white-walled villa, on dusty white road and clambering vines.

Harry Wharton stood long in silence, looking at the sea and the sunny shore. Boats with brown sails dotted the waters. Motor-cars roared by on the road, leaving a wake of white dust. Brown-faced children played and shouted in scented gardens. It was a scene of loveliness and idleness, strangely contrasting with his own land far away—his own land where, nevertheless, he longed to be that Christmastide. His whole heart was in the sea-girt isle where his friends were, where Christmas really was Christmas, where the snowflakes danced on the healthy north wind.

He resumed his way up the hill road. Above Nice, embosomed in verdure of tropical trees and shrubs, stood the Villa Fleurette, the Riviera home of Mr. Vernon-Smith, the millionaire. Wharton turned in at the gates, and followed the path up to the white-walled villa.

His face was set in expression. He had come to Nice with Herbert

Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, and the Bounder's father. Of Mr. Vernon Smith he had seen little—the millionaire was mostly at Monte Carlo with a party of Stock Exchange friends. From the little Wharton had seen of that wealthy, blatant crowd, he had no desire to see more. And of the Bounder he desired to see nothing at all, since they had quarrelled the night before in Nice, and parted bitterly.

To stay on as the Bounder's guest, for Christmas, after that, was impossible. Wharton had spent the night at an hotel in Nice; now he was on his way to the villa to take away his things. That last call was unavoidable. He hoped to get through, and to get away, without seeing the Bounder. Smithy was not likely to rise early after his night out.

But as he came up to the house the first person he beheld was Vernon-Smith, breakfasting on the terrace.

The Bounder looked rather pale, otherwise quite himself. He caught sight of Wharton, and nodded to him.

"Come up here!" he called out. Wharton came on the terrace.

"You've not had your brekker?"

"Yes."

"Where did you put up for the night?"

"Hotel de la Gare."

"Why didn't you come back here?" Wharton did not answer that question.

The Bounder cracked his second egg. His manner was, perhaps, a little apologetic.

"I meant to give you a good time here, Wharton," he said, after a long pause.

"I know you did, Smithy."

"It seems to have been rather a failure."

"It was rather a mistake," said Harry. "I'm not bearing malice, Smithy, though you've treated me pretty rottenly. But I ought to have remembered—we both

ought to have remembered—that our ways are rather different. We can part friends.”

“Part?” repeated Vernon-Smith. Wharton smiled slightly. It was difficult to imagine that the Bouncer supposed he would stay after what had happened the night before at the Casino Oriental.

“Yes,” he said. “I’ve come for my bags. I suppose I can use the telephone for a taxi?”

“You know you can use anything you like,” said the Bouncer gruffly.

“Yes, yes; that’s all right. I’ll pack up my things now.” Wharton made a step towards the french windows.

“Hold on!” said the Bouncer. “Yes?”

“I admit that I got rather past the limit last night,” said Vernon-Smith, colouring a little. “I had rotten bad luck at the casino, as you know, and I was rather excited, and then I was rather an ass. I was wild when you wouldn’t lend me money to play after I’d lost all I had about me. You were right, of course—it would have followed the rest. And, anyhow, I knew you were against the thing, and didn’t want to be at the casino at all. I ought never to have taken you there.”

“Never mind that now,” said Harry. “You did lend me five hundred francs,” smiled the Bouncer. “Had you forgotten that?”

“No; but—”

“Here’s the little bill.” The Bouncer carelessly flicked a five-hundred-franc note from his pocket-book. “You see, I’ve replenished the supply. Look here, Wharton, you’re not going.”

“You don’t want me to stay.”

“I do.” “You feel that it’s up to you, after asking me here,” said Wharton, with a faint smile. “But it’s all right, Smitty. We’re going to part friends—on my side, at least.”

The Bouncer eyed him curiously. “I’ve treated you rottenly, as you’ve said,” he remarked. “I should have punched you last night if you hadn’t caught my paw in time. I’m sorry, of course. But you’re in a wonderfully patient sort of temper—for you. You’ve quarrelled with your best friends for much less reason.”

Wharton coloured. “I know that,” he said. “I’ve thought that over a good deal. I know that I let my temper get the better of me, and I’m going to set it right if I can. And I don’t owe you any grudge, Smitty. But I shall have to go.”

“If you like to stay, I’ll give Ponsonby and his crew the go-by,” said the Bouncer. “I’m not keen on seein’ them again.”

Wharton shook his head. “I know you mean it, Smitty; but you’d soon be sorry if I said ‘Yes.’ We’re like oil and water—we don’t mix. I don’t want to lecture you. You’ve got your own ideas about running a holiday. My ideas aren’t the same. I was wrong to set foot in the casino, and I intend never to do so again. And you’ll probably spend half your time there. Besides, I’m going home.”

“Back to England?”

“Yes.” “But your uncle’s in Russia, and your aunt’s staying with friends at Bourne-mouth. You came away with me because your home is shut up,” said the Bouncer.

“I could have gone with Nugent,” said Harry. “He wanted me. But I was suspicious and touchy. I can see it

plainly enough now. I’m going to make it right with old Frank.”

“Best thing you could do,” said the Bouncer rather unexpectedly. “But you’re about the last fellow in the world I should have expected to see eating humble pie.”

“Frank won’t look on it in that light,” said Harry quietly, though the flush in his cheeks deepened. “If he does— But he won’t! I don’t think I was wholly to blame in the trouble we had before break-up at Greyfriars, but I think the fault was mostly mine, and I own it. I let Bunter’s silly tattle influence me, which was stupid enough. I’m going to send Nugent a wire to ask him if he would like me for Christmas—I’ve got time to get back for Christmas Day.”

“Quick work!” said the Bouncer. “Telegrams to England take a lot of time, going and coming.”

“No need for an answer,” said Harry. “I’m starting as soon as I’ve sent the wire, and shall go down to Wold, in Wiltshire, near his home. I shall tell him where to find me there, and if he wants me he will come.”

The Bouncer pushed back his plate and lighted a cigarette. He eyed the captain of the Remove very thoughtfully.

“You’re right,” he said. “Nugent’s a good sort—and he’s a better pal than a fellow with your hasty temper deserves to have!”

Wharton winced. “I dare say that’s about right, Smitty,” he said. The captain of the Remove was evidently in a chastened mood.

“Well, if you won’t stay you won’t!” said Vernon-Smith. “You needn’t telephone for a taxi. I’ll order out the car, and run you down to the station with your bags.”

“No need to trouble.”

“Oh, don’t be an ass!” said the Bouncer. “I know I’ve let you down over this vacation. Let’s part on good terms!”

“Right-ho, Smitty!”

Wharton went to his room and packed his bags. He was sorry for the trouble that had occurred between him and Vernon-Smith. He knew that the Bouncer had meant well by him, in his own way. But the ways of the two Removites were wide as the poles asunder. Wharton was glad to part friends with the Bouncer—but he was wisely determined to part. Smitty’s apologetic mood was sincere enough while it lasted; but the leopard could not change his spots, nor the Bouncer his ways.

In a short time Mr. Vernon-Smith’s French chauffeur was driving the two juniors down the hill road into Nice. Three fellows strolling on the road waved their hands to Smitty and scowled at Wharton. Smitty waved back to them. It was obvious that he was only waiting for Harry Wharton’s departure, before renewing his association with Ponsonby and Gadsby and Vavasour, of Highcliffe.

“Lois of time for the train!” said Vernon-Smith as the car swung into the Avenue de la Gare. “Stop at the telegraph-office, what?”

“Thanks!”

Harry Wharton pondered a little over his telegram to Frank Nugent. He had made up his mind; but the words Vernon-Smith had carelessly uttered were sharp and bitter in his memory. Would Nugent and the others regard him as “eating humble pie”? The thought made his cheeks burn. He was determined to leave Vernon-Smith and

to return to England—that was settled. Christmas Day was to find him in his own country. But need he, after all, wire to Nugent? Need he, after all, “eat humble pie,” and join the Greyfriars party at the Oaks? Was he, after all, wanted there, by the friends he had repulsed when the school broke up for the Christmas holidays?

But he set his lips. The Bouncer’s words made no difference to the matter, one way or the other. He realised that a doubting and suspicious temper was getting the better of him again. With a firm hand he wrote his message.

“Frank Nugent, The Oaks, Wiltshire, Angleterre.”

“Returning. Arrive Blue Lion, Wold, Saturday. Will you come there for me?—HARRY WHARTON.”

That was plain enough.

If Nugent wanted him he would be glad to receive that telegram—he would come to the inn at Wold. If he did not—well, in that case Wharton would wait at the inn, and he would not come. At all events, he would have done all that he could to heal the breach—more than any fellow who knew him would have expected him to do.

The telegram was duly despatched, and Harry Wharton rejoined the Bouncer. Vernon-Smith saw him into his train—they shook hands cordially enough at parting—and the Paris-Lyons-Mediterranean express rolled away with the captain of the Remove—on his long journey to England and home.

Sunlit hills and green valleys, ancient cities basking in sunshine—fast they glided by the whirling Rapide. Blue skies, growing greyer—greyer and more grey, dim with winter mists, till it seemed a new world into which the express rolled and hummed. But grim winter skies, and gleaming snow and keen wind, were not welcome to Wharton. They spoke to him of home—the home of a stronger and hardier race than the dwellers in the soft and sunny South.

The Channel at last—rolling and tossing under December winds—a steamer that rocked and plunged through chopping seas.

Then the white cliffs, seen through mist and spray—the buzzing throng at the landing-place. His feet trod English ground again. The keen North wind brought healthy colour to his cheeks—and he had no regret for the blue skies and sunny seas he had left behind him.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Only Way!

“I SAY, you fellows!”

No answer. Billy Bunter blinked round the breakfast-room at the Oaks.

It was untenanted. Certainly the hour was rather late for breakfast, even in holiday-time. It was half-past eleven.

But Bunter was never an early riser if he could help it. On vacation he could help it.

So he had come down to breakfast at half-past eleven—and the house seemed to be deserted.

“Well, my hat!” ejaculated Bunter. A bright fire was burning—a place was laid at the table, apparently for Bunter. He crossed over to the fire and warmed his fat hands, then he rolled to the windows and looked out. The gardens lay white under a cloak of snow, leafless branches swayed in the

wind. No one was to be seen in the gardens.

"My word!" said Bunter. He felt neglected and indignant. "They've gone off without me!" he exclaimed. "This is how they treat a guest! Well!"

Bunter remembered that an excursion had been arranged for that day. Frank Nugent's home was not far from the home of Jimmy Silver, of Rookwood School—and Jimmy Silver had several Rookwood fellows home with him for Christmas. The Greyfriars party were visiting the Priory that day—to spend the day there with Jimmy Silver & Co. Mrs. Nugent and Amy and Cissy, Dicky and his fellow-fags, and the four Removites were all going—and Bunter had been going too, but he had preferred bed. He remembered that Bob Cherry had called him once, and Nugent twice, that morning, but he had only grunted and turned over for another snooze.

"All they had gone without him!" "Of all the cheek!" murmured Bunter. "Leaving me behind! Nice sort of treatment for a guest!"

Apparently Bunter expected the whole party to put off their excursion until it pleased him to turn out of bed—towards midday. Such expectations were not uncommon with the Owl of the Remove, and generally they were disappointed.

He rang the bell at last, and a trim parlour-maid appeared. Bunter blinked at her through his big spectacles.

"Where's Nugent?" he asked.

"They are all gone out, sir."

"The whole lot?"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Nugent and all?"

"Yes."

"Where's Mr. Nugent?"

"The master's in London to-day."

"Nobody at all at home?" asked Bunter.

"Nobody, sir."

"Well, my hat!"

"Shall I have breakfast served, sir?" asked the maid, with a trace of a lurking smile.

"Oh, yes!"

Breakfast was served.

Bunter was still indignant and rather morose. But he felt better when he had negotiated breakfast. It was an ample breakfast—not to say enormous. Having had in what any other fellow would have regarded as provisions for three days at least, Bunter felt soled.

This important matter duly attended to, he questioned the parlour-maid as to whether any message had been left for him by Frank Nugent.

No message seemed to have been left.

Bunter consulted his watch.

"How far is it to Silver's place—the Priory?" he asked.

"About four miles, sir."

"Did they go in the car?"

"Yes."

"The car's come back, I suppose?"

"No, sir."

"Then how am I to follow them?" demanded Bunter.

Janet was silent; possibly she did not suppose that that was a problem which it was her duty to solve.

"If they think I'm going to walk four miles—" Bunter almost overcame with indignation.

But there seemed no help for it.

Billy Bunter did not want to spend the day by himself at the Oaks. He was persuaded, too, that Jimmy Silver & Co. would be very keen to see him at the Priory. He had heard, too, that Jimmy's Cousin Phyllis was there; and he had no doubt whatever that Phyllis would be seriously disappointed if she did not see the Owl of the Remove. It

would be unnecessary cruelty to inflict such a disappointment upon Phyllis.

"Well, I can get there in time for lunch!" Bunter reflected. "That's the important thing."

"You are going to the Priory, sir?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps you will mention to Master Frank that a telegram has come for him."

"I'll take it to him," said Bunter.

"Very good, sir."

Billy Bunter crammed himself into his coat, and wound a scarf round his pogy neck, and put on his hat. Janet produced the telegram, and Bunter slipped it carelessly into his pocket.

Then he started.

Four miles would not have seemed much of a walk on a keen and breezy morning to any other member of the Greyfriars party at the Oaks. But to William George Bunter it was like unto one of the labours of Hercules—or, rather, like all the labours of Hercules rolled into one task.

A quarter of a mile on the way Bunter sat down on a log by the roadside to rest.

He was feeling angry and deeply injured.

The very least Nugent could have done, in his opinion, was to send the car back for him, instead of keeping it waiting at the Priory for the return of the party.

Nugent did not seem to care whether he came on or not—perhaps, indeed, he did not want him to come on at all! It was barely possible!

Such a possibility made Billy Bunter all the more determined to follow the Christmas party. But it was clear that he had to make the journey by easy

stages. He spent twenty minutes resting on the log, and then restarted after the interval, so to speak.

Another quarter of a mile and Bunter sat down again, this time on a stile. By this time the effect of his ample breakfast was wearing off, and he was feeling that he could do with a snack. He rummaged through the pockets of his overcoat in the hope of discovering some overlooked fragment of toffee or a few stray bullseyes.

He did not find toffee or bullseyes; but he found the telegram, which he had quite forgotten. He pulled it out and blinked at it.

Curiosity was Bunter's besetting sin. Nugent's telegram was no concern of his in any way; its contents could not be supposed to interest anyone but Frank himself.

But Bunter wanted to know. He fumbled with the envelope till it came open in his fat fingers.

"My hat! It's come open!" murmured Bunter. "They ought to fasten those cards more safely. Just like those cards to make out that I opened it, on purpose—as if I'd open a fellow's telegram! I can't stick it shut again as the beastly envelope's got torn. I suppose I'd better see whether there's anything important in it."

A moment more and he was reading the telegram.

He blinked at it in astonishment.

"My hat! Wharton!"

The Owl of the Remove stared at the written message. It was idle and unscrupulous curiosity that had prompted him to open the telegram. He had had



Crash! The two parties met suddenly and unexpectedly. Bump! In a struggling heap the masked juniors of the Remove and the fags of the Second yelled and roared. (See Chapter 3.)

no idea of the contents. But he was very keenly interested now.

"Returning. Arrive Blue Lion, Wold, Saturday. Will you come there for me?"
HARRY WHARTON.

"Cheek!" said Bunter.

He shook his head.

"Nugent turned him down for the vac, and now he's butting in! Can't stand a fellow fishing for invitations and butting in where he's not wanted! Sickening, I call it!"

Bunter's fat lip curled contemptuously.

"I suppose he's had a row with Smyth—he was to stay with Smyth till the end of the vac. Just like Wharton—always rowing with somebody. He kicked me on the last day of term, I remember. Bad-tempered beast! I jolly well don't want him for Christmas, for one! Nugent ought to turn him down again; but he's soft—he's so jolly soft that he will let any butting bouncer stick him for a holiday!"

And Bunter sniffed.

"Waiting at the Blue Lion in Wold to-morrow, is he?" murmured Bunter. "Like a blinking parcel waiting to be called for! I wouldn't go, if I were Nugent. In fact, I'll jolly well advise him not to go, I'm jolly well fed-up with Wharton!"

Billy Bunter detached himself from the stile, and resumed his weary way. He kept the crumpled telegram in his hand.

Now that he had "done it," the fat junior was rather worried about the consequences—as was often the case with Bunter. Nugent was not likely to believe that the torn envelope had torn itself by accident. Was the beast likely to cut up rusty about his telegram being opened and read?

It was only too probable.

Bunter was very well aware that his "planting" himself at the Oaks for Christmas had stretched Nugent's kindness and patience to their extreme limit. Even the worm will turn; and "soft" as he deemed Nugent, he realised that there was a limit to his softness. If he found his unwelcome guest spying into his private correspondence, it was only too probable that such a discovery would mean the prompt departure of W. G. Bunter—perhaps with a boot behind him.

Indeed, it was likely enough, Bunter realised, that Nugent would be glad of a good excuse for booting him out.

Nugent's patience being already stretched to the limit, was not likely to stand any further strain.

It was clear to Bunter that he had acted injudiciously—from the point of view of a continuation of his stay at the Oaks.

There seemed to be only one way out of the difficulty. He would have to forget to give the telegram to Nugent.

That solution comforted Bunter for a time, and he brightened again. Then it occurred to him that perhaps Janet would mention the telegram when Nugent came home. Nugent would inquire after it.

And then he would know that it had been opened.

"Oh, dear!" murmured Bunter.

Really, he wished that he had left the telegram alone. It was all Wharton's fault, of course—butting in like this! Still, that was not the view Nugent was likely to take.

Already, in his mind's eye, Bunter saw Frank's indignant eyes fixed upon

him, and heard the ominous words—in his mind's ear—"Get out!"

"Suppose I lost the telegram!" murmured Bunter.

He brightened up.

That was a very easy solution. Wharton, it was true, would wait at the Blue Lion, in Wold, for Nugent's coming—and wait in vain! Serve him jolly well right! He had kicked Bunter on the last day of term, and he was a beast, anyhow. Losing the telegram was the only way of saving Bunter's bacon—and the telegram, therefore, had to be lost!

It did not take Bunter long to "lose" the telegram. Passing over a bridge, he dropped it into the stream below, and the torn envelope after it. Then, greatly cheered, the Owl of the Remove rolled on his way to the Priory.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Lost!

"BUNTER!"

Snore!

A cheery party returned to the Oaks at a rather late hour that evening. Immediately after supper Billy Bunter rolled off to bed.

He was tired. He had walked four miles that day—by easy stages, it is true—arriving at Jimmy Silver's home in time for tea.

Contrary to his expectations, there had been no exuberant delight on the part of the Silver household at beholding Bunter.

Jimmy Silver was civil enough. His friends, Lovell and Raby and Newcome of the Rookwood Fourth, were civil; but there was a striking absence of enthusiasm on their part.

Still, Bunter had had a good day.

The "prov," at least, was good and ample, and that, after all, was the most important consideration.

Bunter came back in the car, and slept most of the way. His uncommon exertions that day had fatigued him, and he stayed only long enough to dispose of enough supper for six, before he went to bed.

And now—Bunter's grievances really seemed never to cease—here was that beast Nugent waking him up, actually shaking him by the shoulder. Bunter did not mean to wake up. He snored resolutely.

"Bunter!"

Shake!

Snore!

"Bunter! Wake up!"

Bunter snored on.

Frank Nugent left the bedside, and returned a moment later with a wet sponge in his hand. The wet sponge was dabbed in Bunter's fat face.

The Owl of the Remove awoke then, quite suddenly.

"Yoooop!"

He sat up in bed suddenly.

"Oh, you're awake now, are you?" grunted Nugent. "Where's my telegram?"

"Beast!"

"Janet says a telegram came for me this morning—"

"Blow Janet!"

"You offered to bring it over to the Priory to give it to me, and she handed it to me," said Frank. "You never gave it to me."

"Blow your telegram!"

"Look here, Bunter, it may be important. You ought not to have taken it if you couldn't remember to hand it to me," said Nugent, frowning. "Give it to me at once."

"I'll find it in the morning! I'm sleepy!" howled Bunter.

"I want it now."

"What the thump does it matter?" snapped Bunter.

"It may matter a lot," said Frank. "I asked Squiff to send me a wire if he was able to come over for Christmas Day, and it may be from him. You needn't get up, fazybones. Tell me where it is."

"Look in my coat pocket," said Bunter.

"Where's your coat?"

"Downstairs on a peg."

"Oh, all right."

Frank Nugent quitted the bedroom, and Bunter grinned sleepily, and turned his head on the pillow and snored again. Shake, shake, shake!

"Ow! Groogh! Lemme alone!"

"Wake up, Bunter!"

"Beast!"

Bunter blinked furiously at Nugent, who was bending over him again. It was a case, evidently, of no rest for the wicked.

"Look here, you rotter, I'm going to sleep!" roared Bunter. "What the thump do you mean by keeping on waking me up?"

"I've looked in all your coat pockets, but the telegram isn't there," said Nugent.

"Then it's lost!"

"Lost!" howled Nugent.

"Well, it must be, if it isn't there," argued Bunter. "I put it in my coat pocket. Janet saw me. If it isn't in the pocket now, it must have dropped out. I suppose."

Nugent glared at him.

"You've lost my telegram!" he gasped.

"Oh, really, Nugent, I think you might thank a chap for taking the trouble to bring you a telegram," said Bunter. "It's not my fault if it's got lost. I suppose you don't think I lost on purpose, do you?"

"No, you silly ass, but you shouldn't have lost it."

"Now let a chap go to sleep."

"It may be in one of your other pockets."

"It isn't."

Frank Nugent stared at Bunter in great exasperation. It did not cross his mind for a moment that the telegram was from his estranged chum, Harry Wharton; but naturally he wanted it. Bunter closed his eyes again, but another shake wakened him once more.

"I want the telegram, Bunter," said Frank. "If it's lost, it's got to be found. Where do you think you lost it?"

"I can't think about it at all when I'm sleepy!" hooted Bunter.

"Do you want me to mop a jug of water over your silly head to wake you up, Bunter?"

"Beast! It's all right! I'm now sleepy."

"Turn out of bed, and go through all your pockets," said Frank angrily. "You may have put it in some other pocket and forgotten. Now, then, sharp!"

"If you call this hospitality, Nugent, I—"

"Do you want me to jerk you out by the ears?" Frank Nugent's patience seemed to be wearing very thin.

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Turn out, you fat rotter!"

"I—I say, I—I remember now!" gasped Bunter. A few more "whoppers" mattered little to Bunter; but turning out of his warm bed on a cold night mattered a great deal. "I—I lost it at Jimmy Silver's place. You—you'll find it there all right. I remember now it dropped from my pocket in—in the muslin-room."

"You weren't wearing your overcoat in the music-room!"

Once more it was borne in upon Bunter's fat mind that a certain class of persons should have good memories.

"I—I mean, I put it in my trousers' pocket for safety, when I took my coat off," he stammered. "Then—then I took something out, and the blessed telegram fell on the floor. I was going to pick it up, but I forgot."

"You fat idiot!"

"If you call that civil—"

"If it's there, it's all right," said Frank. "I can bike over to-morrow and get it. You're sure?"

"Quite sure," said Bunter. He would have said anything to be allowed to go to sleep.

"All right, then. Good-night," grunted Nugent.

"Coo'-night!"

Billy Bunter was asleep before Nugent had closed the door. The affair of the telegram worried Nugent a little; but it did not worry Bunter.

On the following morning there was a thaw on the river, which was frozen hard; but Billy Bunter did not join the others. He reposed in bed till nearly lunch-time, recovering from the terrific weariness of a four-mile walk on the day before.

He came down for lunch, however, bright and cheery, and thinking of anything but his missing telegram. After lunch he was reminded of it, as Nugent was going over to the Priory on his bicycle to recover it, and Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamsat and Sam Singh were going with him. The boys explained to Bunter, in the plain language of the Greyfriars Remove, what they thought of him for losing the telegram, and Bunter grinned. They were going after a telegram that was no longer in existence, but the Owl of the Remove kept his own counsel on that subject. His opinion was that it served the beasts right.

He chuckled as the four juniors wheeled out their bicycles. There was a thaw on the roads, and the spin was now likely to be a very enjoyable one. It was Saturday afternoon, and by that time probably Harry Wharton had reached the Blue Lion, in Wold, where, according to his telegram, he was to wait for Nugent. And Nugent, heading for the Priory, was riding away in exactly the opposite direction.

Bunter chuckled a fat chuckle.

His opinion was that it served Wharton right, and served Nugent right; and, in fact, served all the beasts right.

And while Frank Nugent was absent on a wild-goose chase, and Harry Wharton waited for the friend who did not come, Bill Bunter ensconced himself in a comfortable armchair before the open fire and enjoyed a long nap, in a state of fat and fatuous contentment. When he dreamed, it was of cake for tea and supper to follow.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Waiting!

HARRY WHARTON looked out of the window into the straggling High Street of the little Wiltshire town.

Dark was deepening into dark.

From a late fall of snow roofs and window-sills gleamed white through the December dusk. A cold wind swept down the street, and pedestrians turned up their coat-collars against



It did not take Bunter long to lose the telegram. Passing over a bridge he dropped it into the stream below. (See Chapter 6.)

It was a strange enough change from what he had lately seen in the sunny South, but it was a welcome change to his eyes.

He watched the street for Frank Nugent.

Only half a mile away was Nugent's home, where Frank and his other friends were gathered for Christmas.

Wharton had reached Wold about mid-day. He had lunched at the cosy, old-fashioned inn, and now he was waiting in the deserted coffee-room.

More than once he blamed himself for having decided upon that programme, and thought that he would have done better to make directly for the Oaks, taking Nugent's welcome for granted.

Yet, upon the whole, he was not sorry for his decision. Nugent knew that he was there, and if he wanted him he would come.

Howsoever long the telegram might have taken in delivery, Nugent must have had it the previous day. If he shared Wharton's conciliatory mood, he would come to the Blue Lion in Wold to welcome his reconciled chum.

As the afternoon grew dimmer towards evening Wharton's face grew more sombre, like the weather outside.

True, he had not told Nugent—he had not been able to tell him—at what precise time he would arrive. That had depended on somewhat uncertain trains.

But surely Nugent might have come down to the inn during the afternoon, even if Wharton might possibly not have

arrived till evening. It was only half a mile, and his time was his own.

He had not come yet.

Wharton was tired with his journey. He had lost no time on the long, long route from the South of France back to England. He was tired and in need of rest. But he could not rest now. He had come home with his heart full of kindness towards his old chums, eager for a reconciliation, willing to forget all offences—given and received. He had been very resolved that he would be on his guard against his own passionate temper. That he would not fancy offences, that he would not suspect neglect or indifference.

But now—

In spite of his resolutions the old black bitterness was returning. The thought that he had made himself too cheap—that he had "eaten humble pie," as the Bounder expressed it, and eaten it in vain, made his cheeks burn. He had made the most open and frank overtures towards a reconciliation. Had he been met half-way, had he been met at all, he would have been satisfied. But Nugent did not come.

Lights twinkled along the street in the dark.

Why did not Nugent come?

Darker and darker grew the brow of the captain of the Remove, blacker and more bitter his thoughts. He had humbled himself for nothing. He had

asked his old friend for renewed friendship, and he had been refused. Nugent did not mean to come.

Wharton started from the window at the twinkling lights. He remembered his good resolutions. The breach, this time, would be final. There would be no bridging the gulf, no attempt, on his side, to bridge it again. He would make sure—he could not make too sure.

Nugent must have had the telegram. Letters might go astray, especially at Christmas-time. Not so a telegram. He could not suppose for a moment that his message of peace and goodwill had not been delivered. It was futile to think of such an explanation as that.

But—it was barely possible—Nugent might have changed his plans for Christmas. He might not be, after all at home. It was not probable, but it was possible, and he would leave nothing to chance. If the old friendship was to be broken off for ever, it should not be by his fault—there should be no room for a mistake.

He left the coffee-room, and found the innkeeper, a fat, good-natured gentleman with a red face and a fruity voice. Very little questioning was needed. Mr. Nugent was well known in the locality. The innkeeper knew all about Master Frank's Christmas party at the Oaks. The Greyfriars juniors had been in Wold several times, two or three times at the inn. Certainly Master Frank was not away for Christmas. He was at home, and his young brother, too—a "young rip," as the innkeeper told Wharton with a cheery grin. That very morning, in fact, Mr. Bunce had been driving past the Oaks in his trap, and had seen Master Frank on the ice, skating with a merry party of his friends.

Wharton returned to the deserted coffee-room, his heart heavy and his brow sombre.

The merry party had been skating on the ice that morning. Nugent was at home. They had not cared to think of their chum who was returning to join them. Not one of them, it seemed, had given him a thought. Even Bob Cherry—frank and hearty old Bob, whom Wharton would never have dreamed capable of bearing a grudge—even he did not care to meet his former chum with a welcoming word.

Possibly Nugent had not shown the other fellows the telegram. Indeed, if he intended to repulse his old chum, it was quite likely that he had kept it to himself. That exonerated Bob, and Johnny Bull, and Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

But Nugent?
Why was he keeping up the grudge like this? There had been hot words in the last few days at Greyfriars. Wharton's anxiety for his uncle, absent in Russia, had undoubtedly had an effect on his temper. He admitted that he had been irritable, and in that mood peculiarly amenable to mischief-makers like Bunter and Skinner. He admitted that he had refused Nugent's invitation for Christmas rudely enough.

But surely his telegram atoned for that. He had held out the olive-branch. He could not do more.

Nugent did not want him.
Perhaps he regarded him as "butting in"—as if he were a fellow like Bunter. Wharton's cheeks crimsoned at the thought.

The evening was growing old.
A yawning waiter came to inquire if Wharton wanted supper, to ask him if he wished to engage a room. The solitary schoolboy hanging about the inn
THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 581.

By himself was rather a puzzle to the people of the Blue Lion.

Wharton sat down to a lonely supper, having engaged a room. He could not leave Wold that night. He was not going to Nugent's place, but he had to think out where he was going.

Almost at every footstep Wharton raised his head, thinking that it might be Nugent at last.

He would have been glad had his chum arrived even at the eleventh hour with some explanation of his tardiness. Many things might have happened to delay him, if only he came at last.

But he did not come.
Wharton waited, drearily enough, until the inn closed for the night, and then he went to his room.

It was long before he slept.
Mingled with his anger and indignation was shame—shame that he had offered friendship where it was not wanted. That he had laid himself open to this cruel and humiliating rebuff. Never again, at all events. That was his bitter thought.

He slept at last, with the winter wind howling round his window, snowflakes fluttering lightly against the panes. Nugent, in his room at the Oaks, so near, and yet so far, was sleeping soundly enough, little dreaming that his absent chum was so near at hand. Billy Bunter was sleeping still more soundly, the sleep of the well-fed and the well-satisfied; and if Bunter dreamed, it was of turkey and mince-pies, and certainly not of the harm he had done.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Cut Direct!

"WHARTON!"

"Jimmy Silver!"
Wharton rose from the breakfast-table, in the Blue Lion Inn, in surprise, his face lighting up a good deal.

The morning was bright and clear—a sharp winter's morning. Wharton, as he sat at breakfast, had heard a far stop outside the inn, and the sound of cheery, youthful voices, but had not heeded. Four fellows wrapped in coats and scarves came tramping in, and one of them, as he saw Harry Wharton at the table, greeted him cheerily.

It was Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Fourth Form at Rookwood—whom Harry had met on the football-field at Greyfriars only a few weeks before. Lovell and Raby and Newcome were with him.

"Fancy meeting you, old bean!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, as he shook hands with the Greyfriars junior.

"Jolly glad to see you," said Harry very cordially. Sore as he was feeling, solitary and discredited by his own friends, it was a real pleasure to see the cheery faces of the Rookwooders, and to hear their cheery greeting.

"Staying here?" asked Raby.
"Yes, till my train goes," said Harry.
"We saw some friends of yours yesterday," remarked Newcome.

Wharton coloured faintly.
He remembered that Jimmy Silver's home was only a few miles from Frank Nugent's place; and he guessed who

were the friends to whom Newcome alluded.

"On your own here?" asked Jimmy Silver cheerily.

"Yes."

"Bound to catch your train? We're going for a little bit of a joy-ride, and you'd care to come—"

"Good egg!" said Jimmy Silver's three chums cheerily.

"We dropped in here for some coffee," said Jimmy. "We're only a few miles from home, you know. Never dreamed of dropping on you here. I believe one of your friends mentioned that you were in France for the Christmas holidays."

"I was," said Harry. "I came back however. I'm going on to Bournemouth—to my aunt."

Perhaps the Rookwood fellows wondered a little why Harry was not going on to the Oaks to see his school chums—also, they must have been surprised that a fellow who had just returned from France, and was going to Bournemouth, was staying for a day at that little town in Wiltshire.

But that did not concern Jimmy Silver & Co., and they were the reverse of inquisitive.

"Bound to get there to-day?" asked Lovell.

"Oh, no!"
"Then come for a spin in the car with us. Lots of room."

Wharton smiled.
The cheery cordiality of the Rookwood fellows was like a tonic to him in his black and despondent mood.

"I'll be jolly glad," he said. "I'd had rather too much of my own company the last few days, and it's a real pleasure to see you chaps. Have your coffee at my table while I finish my brekker. Sha'n't be long."

"Right ho!"
Jimmy Silver & Co. sat down round the table, and there was a buzz of chatter as the coffee was disposed of, and the Greyfriars junior finished his breakfast.

As Wharton did not refer with a single word to his friends at the Oaks, the Rookwooders did not mention them further—perhaps surmising that there was a rift in the lute somewhere.

Harry Wharton went for his coat and hat and joined the Rookwood quartette in the car, which was waiting outside the inn. The chauffeur drove on through the High Street of Wold and out into the open country. Harry Wharton's face was bright now; the cheery company of the Rookwooders, indeed, was just what he needed then.

"Ever seen Stonehenge?" asked Jimmy Silver.

Wharton shook his head.

"Then you'll see the jolly old place to-day," said Jimmy. "We're going to stop at Amesbury for lunch, and see the giddy Druidical remnants in the afternoon, and home to tea. Nice little run—what?"

"Ripping!" said Harry.

"You'll come back with us to my place to tea, of course. You'll get a good train in the morning," said Jimmy.

"I'll look it out for you."

"Good! You can drop me at the inn coming back."

"Rats! If you're putting in another night at Wold, you're jolly well going to put it in at the Priory," said Jimmy Silver.

Wharton smiled.

"Can you land a fellow suddenly on your people like that?" he asked.

"Right as rain," said Jimmy Silver.

"The pater wouldn't mind if I brought

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY...PRICE 2!

home half the Fourth Form for Christmas. I'll telephone home from Amesbury, and tell them to send down to the man for your bags, see?"

"You're awfully good," said Wharton, hesitating. "But—"

"The pater will be jolly glad to see you, likewise the mater, likewise cousin Phyllis, said Jimmy Silver. "It's a go, isn't it?"

"If you're sure—"

"My dear chap, that's all right."

"Then it's a go, certainly," said Harry. "I should like it no end."

"Good man!" said Jimmy Silver.

"You've met all my people before, and they like you, and I can tell you they'll be glad to see you. Hallo, what are you waiting at, Lovell?"

"Greyfriars claps," said Lovell.

Harry Wharton glanced round quickly.

A group of fellows appeared in the road, sauntering along in the sunny morning—Frank Nugent, Bob Cherry, Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh, Johnny Bull, and Billy Bunter.

The car was approaching them at a good speed, and Arthur Edward Lovell waved his hand cheerily to the Greyfriars fellows.

The latter waved back; and then all of a sudden they stared in amazement at the sight of Harry Wharton in the car.

Billy Bunter felt an inward quiver.

He was the only fellow there who knew that Wharton had been at Wold.

All the Greyfriars stared Bob Cherry.

Bunter supposed that Harry Wharton was still with the Boulder in the South of France. They almost wondered whether they were dreaming for a moment.

The car came gliding past.

Frank Nugent made a step towards it, his eyes fixed on Wharton's face. For an instant Harry Wharton breathed sharply.

Then his face set hard.

In reply to Nugent's eager look, which he did not understand, he stared fixedly and stonily at his old chum without a sign of recognition.

His bitter thought was that, if Nugent had changed his mind, and thought of offering friendliness now, it was too late.

He stared icily at Nugent, without a sign.

Frank started back.

He could not understand that look—it was the cut direct! The colour flushed into Frank's cheeks.

He stopped, as if rooted to the ground. The car dashed on.

There was not a sign from Harry Wharton that he even knew the Greyfriars fellows by sight. They were left staring blankly after the car.

Jimmy Silver gave the junior beside him a rather queer look.

"Like to stop and speak to the chaps?" he asked.

"Oh, no!"

"Right-ho, then!"

The car rushed on. The Greyfriars party vanished behind. The die was cast now—Harry Wharton had cut his old friends in public; and he was not sorry that he had done so. And if he felt a pang he did not show it. Like Pharaoh he said, he hardened his heart.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The End of a Friendship!

"HE, he, he!"

Billy Bunter's unmusical exclamation passed unheeded.

Frank Nugent and his comrades stood in the road, staring after the vanished car.

Johnny Bull was frowning rather darkly. Bob Cherry looked puzzled, and Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh's dusky face was troubled. Frank was flushed and distressed. Wharton's unexpected appearance in Wiltshire, when they had supposed him nearly a thousand miles away, was amazing; and his conduct was more amazing still—and far from agreeable.

"Well, my hat!" said Bob at last.

"It was Wharton, right enough. But what the dickens is he doing here?"

"He must have parted with the Boulder pretty quick," said Johnny Bull. "Most likely they had some trouble. Wharton hasn't been very easy to get on with lately."

"The easyness is not terrific," murmured Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

"I can't understand it," said Nugent, his lip quivering. "He's cut us—before the Rookwood fellows, too! What the thump does he mean by it?"

Johnny Bull shrugged his shoulders.

"Who cares?" he grunted.

"Well, I do, for one," said Bob Cherry. "And so do you, Johnny, old man."

RESULT OF "MAGNET" "CHARACTERS" COMPETITION (Sidney James Snoop).

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

MISS MURIEL CRAGGS,
50, Ruskin Avenue,
Manor Park,
London, E.12,

for the following line:
"SO SELDOM SINCERE."

Another £8 Bike Given Away
Next Week, Chums!

"I'm fed-up, I know that!" growled Johnny Bull. "What does he mean by giving us the marble eye like that? We had some little trouble at Greyfriars—he refused to come with us for Christmas—but that's no reason."

"No. It's jolly queer!" said Bob ruminatingly. "Nothing's happened since the school broke up to put up his back to this extent, that I know of."

"He, he, he!"

"Stop cackling, Bunter, bother you!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"I can't understand it," said Frank.

"He's here—and with the Rookwood chaps, too. He can't have fixed up the vac with Jimmy Silver. We saw Silver yesterday, and he never mentioned Wharton. He would have been bound to mention it. And what has he got his back up like that for?"

"Oh, let him rip!" growled Johnny Bull. "I tell you I'm fed-up!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"But I say, if we're going to Stonehenge to-day, we've got to catch our train," urged Bunter. "I don't care much about Stonehenge, but we don't want to lose our train and be late for lunch at Amesbury!"

"Better get on, I suppose," said Bob. Nugent nodded silently, and the Greyfriars party walked on towards Wold.

Billy Bunter blinked rather curiously at his companions, and several times he grinned a fat grin, like a fellow who was in possession of a humorous secret. Bunter was quite well aware why Wharton's "back" was up to such an exasperating extent.

Bunter had, as a matter of fact, forgotten all about Wharton that morning, until the sight of him in the car recalled the captain of the Remove to his fatuous memory.

As Wharton was still in the vicinity, it was clear—to Bunter—that he had waited all the previous day for Nugent to come to the Blue Lion, and waited in vain.

Bunter could have enlightened his companions with a few words, but he was very careful not to utter those few words. The consequences of having read, and destroyed, Nugent's telegram, would have been rather too painful for the Owl of the Remove.

He kept his own counsel; but he grinned to himself as he heard the other fellows discussing the matter in puzzled and angry tones.

The party were in good time for the train at Wold, and it rolled away with them for Amesbury.

As it happened, Nugent had arranged an excursion that day to see the ruins of Stonehenge, quite unaware that Jimmy Silver & Co. had made the same arrangement. Where Wharton and the Rookwood fellows were going in the car Nugent had not the faintest idea; and he did not think of guessing that the destination of the two parties was the same.

Billy Bunter was comforted by arriving at Amesbury in excellent time for lunch at the George. After lunch the party walked out to Stonehenge, Bunter, however, electing to remain and rest at the inn. Druidical remains did not interest Bunter, and he was not disposed to stretch his fat legs, if he could help it. He preferred a doze over a good fire, with a couple of teas on his own before the party came back to tea—when he would be quite ready to join them in another.

Frank Nugent had started out cheerily enough with his friends that bright winter morning; but his cheeriness was gone now.

He tried to keep cheerful, not desiring to be a vet blanket on the party; but in spite of himself his face was clouded and his heart was heavy. And he was angry, too.

Wharton's conduct was, so far as he could see, quite indefensible. The old friendship was dead and gone, that was clear, and if Wharton wanted it so, let it be so; but he need not have insulted his old friends in the presence of fellows from another school; he need not have been anywhere near Nugent's home at all.

Why had he come there, knowing that in that neighbourhood he might meet his former friends at any moment on the highways or byways, if he intended to act like this when he met them?

It looked as if Wharton, in his bitterness and rancour, had gone out of his way to come into contact with his discarded friends, in order to insult and wound them.

At Stonehenge, while his friends were exploring among the ancient monoliths—strange relics of a forgotten time—Frank Nugent left them to it, and wandered away by himself.

(Continued on page 15.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 683

A KNIGHT OF THE ROAD

A Gallant Rescuer!

"HELP! Help!"

The cry rang through the frosty air, and the solitary horseman drew rein sharply.

The winter dusk was gathering, and Hampstead Heath was veiled in mist, through which the trees, with their mantles of glittering snow, loomed like ghosts.

The horseman hesitated for a second. He was not sure of the direction from which the cry had come. But even as he paused it was repeated, with agonised entreaty.

"Help!"

Down a steep slope the horseman dashed, risking an ugly fall over concealed branches or rocks, across a level patch of ground, and so to the brink of a deep quarry. Here he drew rein and dismounted.

"Hallo! Hallo! Where are you?"

"Over the brink. Where, for Heaven's sake! I can hold on no longer."

"Don't let go, my lad. I'll have you in safety within the moment!"

And the horseman carefully clambered over the edge of the quarry, where a



The horseman carefully clambered over the edge of the quarry, where a slender figure hung, clutching an outstanding root with fast-loosening fingers.

slender figure hung, clutching an outstanding root with fast-loosening fingers. The horseman's arm was round him just in time, and slowly, with no little difficulty, his rescuer drew him back to safety.

He lay panting on the snow for a few minutes, while the man chafed his frozen fingers back to life. Then he raised himself and turned grateful eyes to the face bent above him.

"You saved my life, sir. I missed my footing in the snow, and I should have been on those jagged stones at the bottom of the quarry by now had it not been for you. If I can show my gratitude—"

The horseman helped him to his feet.

He was a youth of some sixteen years, slender, and good to look upon. His well-cut coat and laced tricorn proclaimed him to be of quality, but there was no trace of the effeminacy of the town beau in his gallant bearing.

"If I can show my gratitude, sir—" he repeated.

The horseman laughed and clapped him on the back.

"Tush, lad! There's no question of gratitude. I only did what any other man would ha' done. 'Twere best you



hastened home ere you catch an ague."

"My name is Peter Meyrick," said the lad simply. "I live quite close to here. Won't you come back with me? Mother would be glad to welcome you."

"No, Sir Peter—you see, I know your name—I will not come back with you. I—I have urgent business to attend to."

Sir Peter gave a cry of dismay.

"And here have I been hindering you all this time. Your pardon, sir. Mayhap some day I shall be in the position to serve you."

He bowed to the stranger and turned his face towards home, walking sharply to restore the circulation to his cramped limbs, while his gallant rescuer remounted his horse, and, after watching the lad out of sight, trotted back to the road.

"You are very late, dear!" exclaimed Lady Meyrick, as Peter entered her boudoir, having thrown off his outdoor clothes and donned shoes in place of his high boots.

Sir Peter kissed his mother, and sat down by the blazing fire to roast chestnuts.

"I had an adventure, mother dear. Not a very pleasant one, either."

"Yes!"

"I came across the Heath by a short cut, and walked too near to Crag Quarry. The snow was slippery and I missed my footing."

A little cry of horror from Lady Meyrick.

"I clung to a root and called for help. It came just in time, for, egad! I couldn't have held on much longer. A gentleman heard me and climbed down to me, dragging me up just as my fingers were slipping from their hold."

"Peter, why did you not bring him here, that I might have thanked him? He saved your life!"

"He would not come, mother. Well, I hope I got a chance to repay him one day. I shouldn't have been here now had it not been for his courage."

There was a moment's silence, in which Sir Peter thought of the handsome face that had bent above him, and the strong hands that had drawn him back from certain death.

Then he roused himself and laughed.

"Gad, I'd forgotten! Aunt Clarice

hath arranged a carol-singing expedition to obtain money for our tenants' Christmas dinners this year. Cousin Jack is taking part and the squire's sons. She wants me to sing treble."

"To be sure, it will be great fun,

Peter! When do you hold your practices?"

Her ladyship always entered into anything her son proposed, and the two were far more like good friends than parent and child.

Sir Peter, the elder, had died when his son was but two years old, and the present baronet, was all-in-all to the widowed mother.

"They are coming here to-morrow night, mother, and I am going to Aunt Clarice's on Wednesday. Then to the squire's on Thursday, and back here on Friday."

"I will have a fire put in the picture gallery, Peter. You will be able to practise well there. I will play the spinet till you are used to singing without accompaniment."

So it was arranged. And the next night saw a merry gathering in the picture gallery. There were six in the company, all healthy English lads, used to the saddle in the daytime and music in the evening.

Lady Meyrick presided at the spinet, and the old gallery rang with youthful voices raised in song.

During a rest Sir Peter related his adventure of the previous night.

"That quarry ought to be fenced round," said the squire's eldest son gravely. "It's a death-trap!"

"They say that the highwaymen use it as a shelter," chimed in Jack Meyrick. "There is a path which runs down it, known only to the gentlemen of the road. They have oft disappeared over its edge when pursued, and none have ever discovered how they did it."

A sudden thought turned Sir Peter cold.

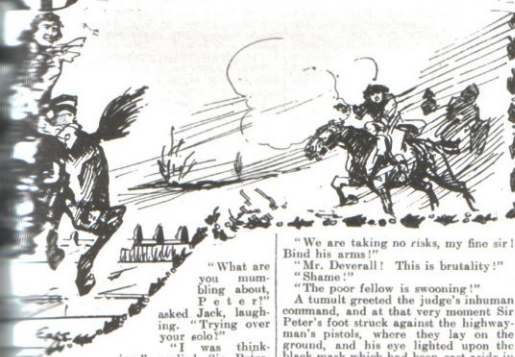
His rescuer had clambered so nimbly over the edge of the treacherous precipice. He would not accompany him home.

Was it possible that the man he owed his life to was a common footpad?

"He'd have robbed me there and then!" muttered the lad. "He was no thief. It was just a coincidence."



D. A GRAND STORY OF THE GOOD OLD DAYS!



"What are you numbering about, Peter?" asked Jack, laughing. "Trying over your solo?"

"I was thinking," replied Sir Peter. "Let's have another try at 'A Child this Day is Born,' and stab me, Rex, but if you don't keep in tune this time I'll duck you in the pond!"

With merry jests the practice went on, and by the end of the week the carol-singers were in excellent training. It was on the Saturday night, while returning from his aunt's house—carefully skirting the quarry this time—that Sir Peter heard a great to-do on the road.

Shots were fired, shouts rang through the frosty air, and then came a great yell of triumph.

"By gad, he's down! Don't let him escape!"

The Highwayman!

DRAWN by the excitement, Sir Peter ran towards the road.

A coach was standing there, and a great crowd of travellers surrounded someone who lay on the road.

"Truss him up, lads! He'll slip from us an we do not bind him well!" shouted a rough voice, which Sir Peter recognised as belonging to Mr. Justice Deverall, the most notorious bully in the whole county.

"Some poor wretch of a footpad," muttered the boy, disgusted at the evident cruelty of the judge's manner.

Then another voice spoke, weakly and with pathetic entreaty:

"For the love of heaven, do not bind my wounded arm; if you knew what I suffer! I swear not to attempt escape!"

The blood went singing to Sir Peter's head.

He knew that voice, altered though it was by pain; he would have known it among a thousand.

How could he save his rescuer? The judge's voice spoke again, with a horrible chuckle,

"We are taking no risks, my fine sir! Bind his arms!"

"Mr. Deverall! This is brutality!"

"Shame!"

"The poor fellow is swooning!"

A tumult greeted the judge's inhuman command, and at that very moment Sir Peter's foot struck against the highwayman's pistols, where they lay on the ground, and his eye lighted upon the black mask which had been cast aside in the struggle.

So it came about that a thunderous report caused the travellers to forget their captive and swing round to face a masked figure, who held two ugly-looking horse-pistols at an uncomfortably close range.

"Now then!" shouted Sir Peter, disguising his voice as well as he could. "Enter that thief's coach and away we go! Let one man lay a finger on you lad an' he's done his last act in this world! Enter the coach—sharp's the word! The other boys'll be up in no time!"

Like the guests in "Macbeth," the travellers "stood not upon the order of their going," but went at once.

The coach clattered away and disappeared in the distance, and when Sir Peter was quite sure they were alone, he loosened the highwayman's bonds and helped him to his feet.

"Lean on me, sir," he said quietly, pulling off his mask and pushing the pistols into his deep pockets.

Too faint to resist, the wounded man allowed him to support him to the Grange, where Lady Meyrick was ready to help any friendless thing that ever sought her aid.

She gave a cry of pity when Sir Peter led the half-swooning man into her boudoir.

"Sit down here, sir!" she cried, drawing a chair to the fire. "I will send for wine."

It was characteristic of her that she made no inquiries, but went straight about the task of mercy.

When the stranger had drunk a glass of wine and the ugly wound in his arm had been washed and bandaged, he looked curiously round the pretty room. His eyes lighting upon Sir Peter, who had drawn back a little, he gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Why, I had no thought that I owed my life to Sir Peter Meyrick!" he said,

holding out his injured hand. "Many thanks, young sir! But for you—" He broke off and looked across to Lady Meyrick, who was regarding him with no little astonishment. "Madam, I cannot accept your hospitality without revealing to you the fact that I—"

"That this gentleman saved my life at the quarry, mother," finished Sir Peter.

Lady Meyrick came forward impulsively.

"Ah, sir! I thank heaven that I have had the opportunity of repaying you some little of the great debt I owe you."

"The debt is on my side, madam. And I cannot allow you to remain in ignorance of my name for a moment longer. You will probably have heard it," he smiled wistfully. "Men call me Dick Turpin."

If he had expected the gentle face to change, the highwayman had misjudged Lady Meyrick.

She came to him and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"There is a proverb, sir, which tells us that 'one good turn deserves another.' You saved my son's life."

So Richard Turpin, gentleman of the road, remained at the Grange an honoured guest till his wound was healed, and then bade his host and hostess good-bye.

He grasped Sir Peter's hand as he prepared to leave the house.



A thunderous report caused the travellers to release their captive. They swung round to face a masked figure, who held two ugly-looking horse-pistols at uncomfortably short range.

"You played the highwayman to save my life, Sir Peter," he said. "Let that suffice. 'Tis a fool's game, after all."

"Can we not prevail upon you to turn from it, sir?" came the soft voice of Lady Meyrick.

"Turn from it, madam? Ay, to the Three Legged Mare! A highwayman I have lived, and a highwayman I shall die. There's Black Bess waiting for me at a little inn we both know of, and she shall never wait for me in vain. Farewell, my friends! Forget me."

Once more, months later, Sir Peter saw his rescuer.

He had ridden up to London and had been stopped by crowds in Tyburn Lane.

A cart came slowly down the road, bearing a tall, slender figure, whose head was very upright and whose eyes were proud.

A stifled gasp broke from Sir Peter's lips, and, wheeking his horse, he set it at a gallop back the way he had come.

Turpin's words had come true; he had turned from the road only to make his last journey to the "Three Legged Mare"—the gibbet. And so he died. But to two people, at least, his name would always hold kindly memories,

THE END.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 861.





(Continued from page 13.)

He was thinking of that meeting with Wharton, and the more he thought of it the deeper his anger grew.

What had he done to deserve to be so treated?

His conscience told him, nothing.

During those past weeks at Greyfriars he had been patient, kind, under the growing irritation of Wharton's temper. He had borne with his chum then, as he had borne with him many a time before. The breach had not come by his wish, and he had hoped that it would heal; that after the parting, during the vacation, they would meet as friends again at Greyfriars, with all disagreement forgotten, and nothing like a grudge on either side. That now was impossible.

They would have to meet; and if not as friends, as enemies then, if Wharton chose it so. There was a limit to patience—an end to forbearance. The die was cast, and it was no fault of his. His cheeks burned with anger and resentment at the memory of that cold, cutting, steely glance from the captain of the Remove in Jimmy Silver's car.

"Hallo, Nugent!"

Frank started from a deep reverie, and looked up at the sound of Jimmy Silver's voice.

The Rookwood fellows had left the car at the Amesbury inn, and walked out to Stonehenge. And so they came on Nugent, at a distance from his companions.

"Oh, you here, Silver!" stammered Frank.

He spoke to Jimmy; but his eyes were upon a cold, averted face—the face of Harry Wharton.

"Yes, we came over to see the giddy fair of the Druids, and you seem to have done the same!" said Jimmy cheerily.

"Yes, the other chaps are there. I—I was just walking round," said Frank, rather confusedly.

He pulled himself together.

"I see that Wharton's with you. I want to speak to him. We'll come on after you chaps."

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged a glance, and walked on. Harry Wharton would have walked on with them, but Nugent planted himself directly in his path.

"Stop!" he said.

Wharton stopped.

The Rookwood fellows, not looking back, passed on out of sight, towards the monoliths looming up over the plain. The two Greyfriars fellows—once the closest of chums, the firmest of friends, stood face to face, regarding one another with knit brows and gleaming eyes.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Fight!

"WELL?" said Nugent, at last.

"Well?" repeated Wharton, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"What have you got to say?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" said Nugent.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 381.

"Nothing at all!" said Wharton, with a carelessness he was far from feeling. "What is there to say? Will you let me pass?"

"Not yet."

"My friends are out of sight already," said Harry. "Let me pass, Frank Nugent!"

"Not till you've explained!"

"There's nothing to explain. I'm done with you and you're done with me. You've made it clear enough, and I want to make it equally clear. Now stand aside!"

"And you think that's good enough?" said Nugent, with a ring of menace in his voice. "You think I'm going to be satisfied with that?"

"I think you will have to be."

"You've insulted me—gone out of your way to do it—before fellows belonging to another school, too—"

"You asked for it! I want to have nothing to do with you and nothing to say to you, or your friends, either!" said Wharton. "Isn't that plain enough? How can I make it plainer?"

Nugent's cheeks burned.

"It's quite plain enough," he said. "Go your own way, and be banged to you! I've stood enough from you—more than any other fellow would have stood. I'm done now!"

"That's all I want," said Wharton icily. "Now let me pass. Do you want me to walk round you?"

"I'm done with you!" repeated Nugent. "You know, if you care to own the truth, that it's your own rotten temper that's to blame. You neglected your uncle, and treated him disrespectfully just before he went to Russia to risk his life; and it weighed on your conscience, and you took it out of every fellow that would stand it—me most of all."

Wharton crimsoned.

"That's enough! Let me pass!"

"Not till you've apologised."

The captain of the Remove burst into an angry laugh.

"That's likely. You've been a false friend, and you want me to say I'm sorry. It's not really likely, is it?"

"You'll apologise for insulting me before the Rookwood fellows this morning, or you'll put up your hands!" said Nugent doggedly.

"I've stood more than enough, but even the worm will turn. Take your choice!"

His cheeks flamed as he saw the slightly derisive smile on the face of the captain of the Remove.

The slim and graceful Nugent was no match for the captain of the Remove—the best fighting man, with the exception of Bob Cherry, in a fighting form.

Nugent clenched his hands convulsively.

"You rotter!" he breathed

"That's enough, Nugent!"

Nugent trembled with rage.

"You think you can treat me how you like because you're a better man with the gloves! We'll see. Put up your hands!"

He advanced on Wharton, his face crimson, his eyes blazing, his hands up, and put his hands behind him.

"Will you put up your hands?" shouted Nugent furiously.

"No," said Wharton quietly.

"Coward!"

Wharton shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"At Greyfriars we always considered it bad form to scrap on a Sunday," he said.

"You should have thought of that before. You're going to fight now or take a licking. That's your choice."

"I tell you—"

Nugent rushed at him, hitting out, beside himself with anger and exasperation.

"Hands off!" roared Wharton.

"You rotter, you cad, take that!" Nugent's fist crashed in the face of the captain of the Remove.

The next moment they were fighting.

No one, seeing the two juniors foot to foot, hand to hand, with faces flaming with anger and enmity, would have deemed that the two had been the closest of chums throughout their school-days. Both of them had forgotten it now; both of them remembered only injuries, real or fancied.

They fought furiously, foot to foot. A trap drove by with a party of sightseers bound for Stonehenge, and the occupants stared at the two fighting schoolboys. Neither Wharton nor Nugent noticed or heeded them.

Nugent was no match for the captain of the Remove, but his passionate anger and resentment seemed to lend him strength, and for some minutes he had the upper hand. Wharton retreated before his furious onslaught, with marks of fierce blows on his face.

Then he recovered and began to attack fiercely in his turn. There was a crash as Nugent went to the frosty ground.

He was up again in a twinkling, however, and rushing on.

The fight was resumed furiously, and some minutes passed of trampling and deep, hurried breathing and close, fierce fighting. Then Frank was down again.

He was not so soon on his feet this time.

But he clambered up unaidedly. Weight and strength were telling against him. He was outclassed, and he knew it. He knew that he was beaten, but he would not admit it. He savagely refused to resign it. He struggled on desperately to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

But there was no chance for him. He went down again heavily, and lay panting.

Harry Wharton stepped back.

"That's enough!" he said curtly.

"It's not enough! I'm going on. I—"

"You can't go on!" snapped the captain of the Remove. "Don't be a fool, Nugent."

"You rotter! You'll see."

Nugent scrambled up. His handsome face, almost girlish in its delicacy of feature, was sadly marked now. His strength was almost gone, but his courage was indomitable. He would have died a hundred deaths sooner than have yielded while he had the force left in him to raise his hand for a blow.

Wharton backed away.

"I tell you—chuck it, you fool!"

Nugent's answer was a fierce blow.

The captain of the Remove struck it aside. Again and again Nugent struck, and again and again his blows were warding easily, coolly, till he stopped, panting with rage and shame. Wharton was not returning a single blow now. He contented himself with defence, and his defence was child's play. It was the crowning humiliation to poor Nugent.

He stood and panted.

"You've licked me!" he choked.

"You rotter, you've licked me! I can't touch you—"

He broke off and sank on a stone by the roadside, shaking from head to foot. Wharton looked at him.

There was compunction in his look.

"Nugent, you forced me to it. You struck the first blow. You made me

fight. Goodness knows I never wanted to."

"Leave me alone!" muttered Nugent, with a bitter look. "You've insulted me and humiliated me. I'm licked, and I know it! Get out of my sight, at least."

"Nugent—" Wharton made a step towards him.

"Don't touch me!" exclaimed Nugent shrilly. "Get away, I tell you! You make me sick!"

Wharton stopped, breathing hard.

He did not answer. He gave Nugent only one look, and then walked on towards Stonehenge. Five minutes later he passed Bob Cherry & Co. on the road, coming to look for Nugent. They looked at him, and with averted face he passed them.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Bitter Blood!

BOB CHERRY turned his head to look after the captain of the Remove. His brows knitted in a dark line and his eyes gleamed.

Good-tempered and placable as Bob Cherry was, there was something in the averted look of his former friend, in the scornful disregard of his existence, that raised his deepest ire. He was tempted to turn and follow Wharton, and call him to account there and then.

But he restrained his resentment. He remembered, too, that it was Sunday. He swallowed his wrath and walked on with his companions.

Among the other sightseers amid the monoliths of Stonehenge the Greyfriars

juniors had met Jimmy Silver & Co., and exchanged cheery greetings with them. They had been about to leave when the Rookwooders arrived, and they were aware that Nugent had walked away in the direction of Amesbury, which was on their way back. So they sauntered along, looking for him, wondering if he had met with Wharton, who had apparently lingered on the road behind Jimmy Silver & Co.

They came on Nugent quite suddenly. He was seated on a stone by the road, with a rather dazed expression on his face, dabbing at his nose with his handkerchief, which was reddened as he dabbed.

Bob hurried up to him with a startled exclamation.

"Franky, old man—"

"My esteemed Franky—" exclaimed Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

Nugent coloured as he looked up at his friends. He tried to pull himself together, to assume an air of unconcern. But it was difficult, for he had exerted himself beyond his strength in the unequal fight, and he was feeling utterly spent and worn.

"You've been scrapping?" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

Nugent nodded.

"Old chap, you look a bit knocked about," said Bob Cherry anxiously. "I wish you hadn't left us. Who was it—some blessed hooligan?"

"Where is he?" growled Johnny Bull, with a warlike look round.

"It was Wharton."

Bob jumped.

"Wharton?"

"Yes."

"Nugent!"

Frank's face was crimson.

"Yes, Wharton," he said. "I-I started it, if you want to know. I told him he'd got to apologise."

"So he jolly well ought!" grunted Johnny Bull. "So he would, if he had any decency left."

"And he wouldn't!" said Bob.

"No."

"But, Frank—"

"Oh, I know I'm a fool!" said Frank bitterly. "I'm no match for him. I've got what I asked for, if it comes to that. But I'll try again, next term at Greyfriars. It doesn't rest here."

Bob Cherry whistled softly.

He could understand Nugent's resentment, his humiliation and impotent anger. But this bitterness was quite a new thing in Frank. Wharton had indeed worn out the patience of the most patient of his chums. Henceforth it was Nugent who was unforgiving.

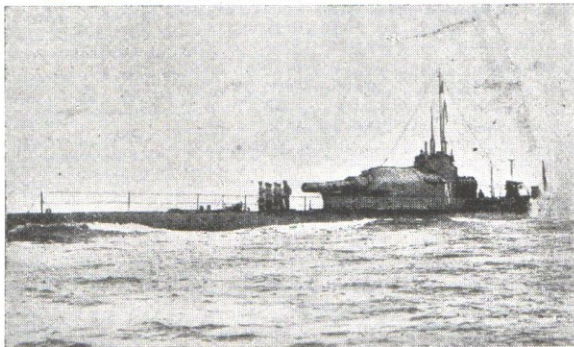
"Wharton oughtn't to have handled you, even if you rowed with him," said Johnny Bull, in his quiet, stolid way. "You're no match for him, and it was rotten. It's not like him—not like we believed him to be. I wish I'd been here, I'd have given him somebody a bit tougher to handle. By Jove, I've a jolly good mind to go after him now!"

Johnny Bull sent a wrathful glare in the direction of the ancient British monoliths that loomed over the frosty plain.

"You needn't blame him, as far as that goes," said Nugent. "I made him put

GORGEOUS FREE ART PLATE

OF THE LATEST BRITISH SUBMARINE AFLOAT.



Well Worth Framing, Chums! Our Fighting Fleet—Plate No. 10,

GIVEN AWAY WITH NEXT WEEK'S

"MAGNET."

DON'T MISS THIS FREE GIFT, BOYS—ORDER YOUR COPY AT ONCE!

up his hands; he was unwilling. And he let me off lightly. I couldn't touch him, and he knew it, and he—no spared me." Nugent's face was flooded with crimson. "Next time—next time—" "Let's get back, Franky, old man," said Bob Cherry gently.

Nugent rose from the stone, and walked back to Amesbury with his comrades. They went in a rather moody silence.

It was only too clear that the old friendship, unbroken for so long, was broken at last, and it was not pleasant to think of it. Next term at Greyfriars the Famous Five would be the Famous Five no longer—one member of the Co., and its leader, would be wanting. It would be a change—a change very much for the worse. There had been trouble in the Co. before, more than once; but it had always been set right, sooner or later. It did not look as if this would ever be set right. It was not now a question of Wharton "coming round," as his chums had hoped that he would after the Christmas holidays. Nugent was as bitter—more bitter perhaps—than the captain of the Remove; he could not forgive his humiliation. And if Wharton should be willing to let bygones be bygones, it was fairly certain that Nugent would be unwilling.

Many fellows in the Greyfriars Remove considered Nugent "soft"; and undoubtedly he was the best-tempered and most placable fellow in the Form, slow to take offence, quick to forgive it. But under his softness there was plenty of strength of character; and once his mind was made up he could be firm enough.

At the George in Amesbury Nugent did what he could to remove the traces of the fight, with some success; but there remained plenty of evidence of a hard scrap, certain to be observed at once when he reached home. He warned his comrades to say nothing about the quarrel with Wharton; and it was agreed that the captain of the Remove should not be mentioned; discussion on that topic could serve no useful purpose. That Nugent had been "in a scrap" was a true and sufficient explanation of the damaged condition of his face.

Billy Bunter had had two ample teas at the George during the absence of the party, and was now ready for a third. He blinked inquisitively at Nugent's swollen face over the tea-table.

"You've been scrapping, Franky," he said.

Nugent made no answer. He was not in the least disposed to gratify the curiosity of the Owl of the Remove. Fortunately, Bunter knew nothing of the encounter at Stonehenge, and could not tattle on the subject at the Oaks.

"I say, you fellows, the Rookwood chaps came along here while you were gone," said Bunter.

"Did they?" grunted Bob.

"They put up a car here," said Bunter. "I saw them from the window. I say, Wharton was with them."

"Was he?"

"Yes, I saw him, you know. I didn't speak to the fellow—I wouldn't, you know. I despise him!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Look here, Bob Cherry—"

"Shut up!" growled Johnny Bull.

"I'm going to make a suggestion!" hooted Bunter. "Silver's left a car here and gone off somewhere with his friends. Well, suppose we wait till they come back, and get a lift in the car home? Better than going by train—"

what? We can stick on to them somehow. Leave it to me."

"Cheese it!" snorted Bob. "We're going home by train. And if the Rookwood chaps are coming back here with Wharton, you fellows, we may as well clear before they get back."

"The clearfulness is the proper caper," assented Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Ring off!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Shut up, and finish your tea, Bunter! You've got only a few minutes more, and you've only eaten enough for five or so far!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

Nugent had already risen from the table. Another meeting with the Rookwooders, in company with Wharton, would have been too awkward for all concerned.

"I'm jolly well not going to hurry!" growled Bunter.

"There's only one train back to-day," said Nugent. "If you miss that, Bunter, you'll be landed. We're not going to wait."

"There's lots of time for the train, and you know it, Nugent. I'm not finished yet."

"Then you'll stay on alone."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Cheese it!"

The bill at the inn was settled, and the Greyfriars four walked out of the George, Bunter calling after them that he would follow them to the station when he had finished his tea. Bob Cherry & Co. did not heed him. They did not care in the slightest whether Bunter followed them or not. If he chose to lose the train home it was his own business. They had far more weighty matters on their minds than Bunter, weighty as he undoubtedly was in his own way.

Billy Bunter went on with his tea. But he slackened down his gastronomic activities a little. Nugent had paid the bill up to date, as it were, and any subsequent liabilities incurred by Bunter had to be settled out of his own pocket. So the Owl of the Remove considerably moderated his transports. Having finished a large cake, and reluctantly paid for the same, Bunter resisted the temptation to order another, and walked out into the inn yard to look at the car in which Jimmy Silver & Co. had arrived, and which was still waiting for them.

"Catch me buzzing after them to catch a rotten train!" grunted Bunter. "I'm jolly well getting a lift in this car. They can make room somehow. They simply can't refuse, especially if I explain that I lost the train. The car for me!"

And while Frank Nugent and his friends took the train home to Wold, minus Bunter, the Owl of the Remove waited at the George for Jimmy Silver & Co. and Harry Wharton to return from Stonehenge, quite determined to get a lift back in the car, and not to take no for an answer.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Light at Last!

"I SAY, YOU FELLOWS!" "Hallo! It's Bunter!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, without enthusiasm.

"This your car—what?"

"Yes."

"Room to give a fellow a lift?"

"Oh!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. had walked back from Stonehenge cheerily in the frosty

afternoon. They were rather surprised to see William George Bunter sitting in their car, evidently waiting for them. Harry Wharton frowned slightly; but the Rookwood fellows took Bunter good-humouredly. But Jimmy Silver looked thoughtful over his request for a lift. As a matter of fact, the car was well filled with five fellows in it, and certainly there was no room for Bunter. A slim fellow might have been squeezed in without great difficulty, but a fellow of Bunter's extensive diameter and circumference was quite another proposition.

"Lost my train—the last train back, too," said Bunter sorrowfully. "Hard cheese, what? They'll be no end anxious about me at Nugent's place."

"Oh, in that case—" said Jimmy.

"Oh, we'll make room somehow," said Lovell. "If you're stranded—"

"Just that," said Bunter. "I say, you fellows, I'm no end sorry to bother you. Quite an accident losing my train, of course. You see, I hadn't finished my cake when the other fellows went."

"Oh, my hat!"

"So if you really can make room—" said Bunter cheerily.

As the fat Greyfriars junior was already ensconced in the car and showed no sign whatever of intending to move, it was pretty clear that the Rookwooders had to make room for him somehow, or else sling him out by his collar.

"All right, we'll manage somehow," said Jimmy Silver, with a smile.

The Rookwooders and Harry Wharton and Bunter crammed into the car, and the chauffeur took his place and drove the car out of the old streets of Amesbury. Wharton sat as far as he could from Bunter; he was not anxious for the society or the conversation of the Owl of the Remove.

"I say, you fellows, did you see Nugent and the other chaps at Stonehenge?" asked Bunter, blinking at the Rookwooders, as the car ran on.

"We saw them," said Jimmy Silver.

"Why didn't you come and see the giddy ruins?"

"Too much fog. Lot of rot, if you ask me!" said Bunter. "Besides, I was hungry. I say, was it one of you chaps that punched Nugent?"

"Eh?"

"He came back to the George fairly knocked out!" grinned Bunter. "He'd been scrapping with somebody. One of you chaps?"

"Certainly not!" said Jimmy rather sharply.

The Rookwooders could not help exchanging glances. After the meeting they had seen of Wharton and Nugent they did not need telling who had done the "punching."

Wharton's face was crimson.

"Well, he looked fairly sick," said Bunter. "Somebody above his weight had pitched into him and knocked him about. Poor old Franky! If I'd been there I'd have handled the chap for him and given him a jolly good hiding! Nugent ain't much of a scrapper; he's got plenty of pluck, you know, but he isn't a hefty fellow. Rotten trick for a fellow to pitch into him, wasn't it?"

Wharton's cheeks burned.

"I fancy his mater will jump when she sees his face," rattled on Bunter, "and his sisters, too. Amy and Cissy think a lot of Frank. I wonder who he was scrapping with? Do you know, Wharton?"

The captain of the Remove did not seem to hear.

"Looks like more snow," remarked

Baby, by way of changing the painful

topic. "You should have seen his nose—"
went on Bunter.

"By the way, I've been wanting to see you, Nugent," said Jimmy Silver. "You told Nugent you had lost his telegram at my place. He came over yesterday on his bike to ask me about it, as I suppose you know. You never dropped it at the Priory."

Bunter squirmed uncomfortably. Had he been a little less obtuse he might have foreseen that Jimmy Silver would mention the telegram when he saw him again. Certainly Bunter did not want it mentioned in the presence of Harry Wharton.

"Oh, that's all right, Silver!" said the Owl of the Remove hurriedly. "It wasn't important—it doesn't matter."

Nugent seemed to think that it mattered, said Jimmy rather sharply. "You told him you dropped it in the music-room at the Priory, and when the chaps came over yesterday for it we had no end of a hunt—asking everybody in the house about it. It wasn't found, and you certainly never did drop it there. Can't you remember what you did with it?"

"It's really a bit thick, Bunter!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "Telegrams are usually rather important, and Nugent's note in the dark about whom it came from. You ought to try to remember where you lost it."

Harry Wharton sat very still in his corner. It seemed to him as if an icy hand had gripped his heart.

A lost telegram! Was it possible—was it barely possible— Had he made a terrible mistake, after all?

His eyes fixed on Bunter, who avoided his glance. The uneasiness of the Owl of the Remove was manifest. Bunter was wishing from the bottom of his fat heart that he had not "stuck" the Blackwooders for a lift home in their car.

"Oh, never mind!" gasped Bunter. "The fact is, now I come to think of it, it blew away."

"Blew away!" ejaculated Lovell. "Yes—these winds, you know—"
"But if it blew away, why the thump did you tell Nugent you dropped it at Jimmy's place?" exclaimed Raby.

"I—I didn't—"
"Eh?"

"I—I mean he was asking me about it and waking me up, and I had to shut him up somehow, you know; he wouldn't let me go to sleep—"

"Well, my only hat!"
"I say, you fellows, it—it looks like snow—I mean snow!" stammered Bunter, anxious to get away from the subject.

Wharton found his voice. "What's this about a lost telegram?"
The voice was husky. "It may have been mine. I telegraphed to Nugent—"

"Oh, it wasn't yours!" exclaimed Bunter hastily.

"How do you know?"
"Franky was expecting a wire from Squiff—it was from Squiff—"

"How the thump do you know whom it was from?" asked Jimmy Silver. "It was lost unopened—or so I understood."

"Yes, exactly—of course—"
"Do you fellows know when the telegram came?" asked Harry.

"It came on Friday," said Jimmy Silver. "Nugent and his friends were spending the day at my place, and it came after they'd left home. Bunter was up late, and he came on after them and brought it for Nugent—and lost it before Nugent saw it."



"I'm sorry, Nugent," said Wharton contritely. "You wanted me to apologise yesterday—well, I apologise now." Frank Nugent's face did not soften. "Yes, I dare say—words don't cost very much," he said bitterly. "Frank—"
"We've said enough, I think," continued Nugent, unheeding. "And he turned his back on Harry Wharton and strode away. (See Chapter 14.)"

"Oh!" muttered Wharton. "Of course, it mayn't have been important—but it may have been," said Jimmy. "Bunter oughtn't to have lost it; and I really think he might try to remember when and how he did it. It might be found yet."

Wharton sat still, his face very pale. Nugent had not seen his telegram—Nugent had not known that he was in Wood that Saturday.

That fact leaped to his mind. He understood now.

He understood Frank's anger and indignation, which had puzzled and angered him; he did not know that Wharton had wired from Nice at all.

It was a crushing discovery. "Oh, don't worry!" said Bunter. "It's all right, I tell you! Nugent will get it all right. He's told his father about it, and Mr. Nugent is going to apply to the Post Office on Monday for a copy of it. So there's nothing to worry about."

"Oh, I dare say it's all right, then!" said Jimmy. "Of course, he can always get a new copy from the Post Office by paying a fee. All the same—"

Jimmy checked himself, remembering that it would be far from polite to tell Bunter what he thought of him.

The car ran on through the growing dusk.

Bunter blinked several times uneasily at Wharton; but the captain of the Remove did not speak to him, or look at him again—much to his relief.

Wharton did not utter a word more during the journey; he was almost dazed by the discovery he had made, and plunged into deep and miserable

thought. He had come back from France determined that any further trouble with his friends should not be by his fault—determined that his passionate temper should not betray him again; that he would not be suspicious or prompt to take offence. And this was the outcome.

Certainly he had been right in his conviction that the telegram must have been delivered at Nugent's house; certainly not later than Friday morning. That much was certain. But he could not possibly have surmised what had happened to it afterwards.

But he knew—he knew—that he ought to have trusted his friend more.

He knew it, with a bitter, self-accusing conviction. He ought to have surmised anything, believed anything, rather than that his old chum had deliberately insulted and ignored him and his offer of reconciliation.

No wonder Frank had been indignant; no wonder his long-tried patience had failed at last.

The car stopped.

Billy Bunter alighted at the gate of the Oaks. Wharton glanced from the car at the lighted windows of the house beyond the frosty trees. There were his friends—there was Nugent, his face marked by angry blows. Wharton shivered at that thought. There were his estranged friends—estranged now beyond hope.

"Now for home!" said Jimmy Silver. The car ran on towards the Priory. The lights of Nugent's home vanished behind in the December darkness.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 881.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Frank Nugent's Last Word!

"FROM—from Wharton!"

Frank Nugent muttered the words.

It was the following day. Frank stood with a slip of paper in his hands—the official copy of the lost telegram.

"Returning. Arrive Blue Lion, Wold, Saturday. Will you come there for me?"

"HARRY WHARTON."

That was the telegram, which Frank should have received on Friday morning—which he would have received on Friday afternoon but for Billy Bunter's meddling inquisitiveness.

Bob Cherry whistled softly.

"So that accounts!" he said.

"The accountfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed and ludicrous Wharton offered the excellent olive branch, but the receiving was a boot on the other leg. The misapprehensiveness was great."

Johnny Bull gave a grunt.

"It's pretty clear now," he said. "That's how the Rookwood chaps happened to meet Wharton yesterday—he was hanging about in Wold. Why couldn't he come on here?"

"Why?" said Frank bitterly.

"Well, we left Greystriars on rather rusty terms," said Bob Cherry tolerantly. "He mightn't have felt sure about his reception here, you know."

"And why were we on rusty terms?" said Nugent. "Whose fault was that?"

"Wharton's, I suppose. But—"

Nugent compressed his lips.

"This makes it clear; but it makes no difference," he said. "You fellows can do as you like, of course, but I'm fed up, for one. Lots of fellows have told me I was a fool to put up with Wharton's temper. The very first day he came to Greystriars I had a fight with him in the railway train. Now I've had another fight with him—and it's going to be the last trouble between us, if I can help it. When we go back to Greystriars I shall change my study and keep my distance."

"Franky, old man!" murmured Bob.

"I mean that," said Nugent quietly. "I don't bear any grudge—I hope I don't, at least—but I'm fed up, and I don't want any more. You fellows can do as you like."

"It's nearing Christmas," said Bob hesitatingly. "On—on Christmas, you know—"

He paused.

Nugent made no answer. He thrust the crumpled slip of paper into his pocket, and walked away by himself. Billy Bunter came out of the house, blinked at the grave-faced juniors, and rolled away after Nugent.

"Don't worry!" snapped Frank.

"If that's what you call being polite to a guest, Nugent, I can only say that your ideas of politeness ain't the same as mine," said Billy Bunter, with a great deal of dignity.

Nugent breathed hard. He was in no mood for Bunter just then. But he constrained himself to be as civil as possible to his unwelcome guest.

"What is it? What do you want?" he asked.

"That young roiter, Dicky— began Bunter.

"Do you mean my brother?" growled Frank. "Don't call him names, Bunter."

"Well, I can tell you I'm getting fed up with him," said Bunter warmly, "and his friends, too. I really think, Nugent, you needn't have had a gang of Second Form fags here when I was coming. You might have known that I shouldn't care for it."

"Is that all?" snapped Nugent.

"Making out that I was reading a letter," said Bunter. "I picked it up to see if it was for me, and the flap came open, and—"

"So you've been prying into the letters!"

"Oh, really, Nugent!"

"Perhaps that's how you came to lose my telegram," exclaimed Nugent, a sudden suspicion coming into his mind. "Did you open that, too, you fat rascal?"

"Oh, blow your telegram!" said Bunter peevishly. "I've heard enough about that telegram, I can tell you—you and the other chaps, and your blessed pater, and Jimmy Silver—as if a telegram had never been lost before. What the thump did it matter, too? You didn't want to see Wharton!"

"Wharton!" repeated Nugent.

"You saw him yesterday," said Bunter. "My belief is that it was Wharton you were scrapping with."

"How did you know the telegram was from Wharton if you didn't open it?" said Nugent between his teeth.

"I—I didn't—"

"You've just said so."

"I—I meant—"

"So you opened the telegram, and read it," said Frank, his face growing hard and dark. "I might have guessed as much; and you never lost it—you didn't dare let me know you'd opened it."

Nugent comprehended at last what had happened to the telegram.

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"You don't know the harm you've done," said Frank, breathing hard.

"No harm that I can see, old chap. You didn't want Wharton here, I suppose. Did you want to scrap with him here instead of at Amesbury?" said Bunter, with fat sarcasm. "Swanking cad—do him good to kick his heels at the Blue Lion, in my opinion."

"So you knew—"

"I didn't—I mean—that is to say—"

"You needn't say any more, Bunter," said Frank Nugent, pale with anger. "I'm going out now for an hour—"

"I'll come with you, old fellow."

"When I come back," said Nugent, unheeding, "I shall expect to find you gone."

"Eh?"

"If you're still here," said Nugent deliberately, "I shall kick you out of the house, and, if necessary, all the way to the railway-station. I wish I'd taken Bob's advice and done it the first day. I mean it, Bunter—if you know what's good for you, you'll clear, quick."

"I—I say—" stuttered Bunter.

Nugent turned his back on him, and walked away. Billy Bunter was left rooted to the ground, staring after him through his big spectacles, in a state of great dismay. That Frank was "soft," and could be imposed upon to almost any extent, was Bunter's fixed belief; but he realised now that there was a limit—it was borne in upon his fat mind that Nugent meant every word he had said.

"Oh dear!" murmured Bunter. "Oh, my hat! Beast! Oh dear!"

Nugent walked on with a moody brow. He was still feeling the effects of the hapless fight of the previous day, and he was not in a cheery mood. He wanted to be alone just then; and he tramped along the snowy road, heedless of where he was going.

"Nugent!"

Frank started suddenly, and looked up. His fat face flushed at the sight of Harry Wharton.

"You!" he muttered.

Wharton came eagerly towards him. "Frank, old man! I—I've found out about the telegram. I—I know now that you never had it—"

Nugent's face set.

"I've had a copy of it from the post-office this morning," he said coldly.

"Then—then you know—"

"Well!"

Nugent's voice was cold and hard. Harry Wharton breathed quickly.

"I'm at the Priory now," he said. "Jimmy Silver has asked me to stay over Christmas. I—I came out this way in the hope of coming across you, Frank—I couldn't come to your house."

"I should think not," said Frank bitterly.

"It was a mistake," said Harry. "I—I thought you'd had my telegram, and—"

"It was like you to think so," said Nugent.

"What?"

"It was like you. You thought I'd your telegram, and turned you down in a rotten, caddish way. Do you think I'd have thought the same, in your place?"

"I'm sorry," said Wharton, in a low voice. "You wanted me to apologise yesterday, Frank—well, I apologise now."

"Yes, I dare say—words don't cost very much," he said. He passed his hand over his bruised face. "Can you take that back—or do you think a few words will set it right, as soon as it occurs to you that you've been a hasty, hot-tempered fool?"

"Frank!"

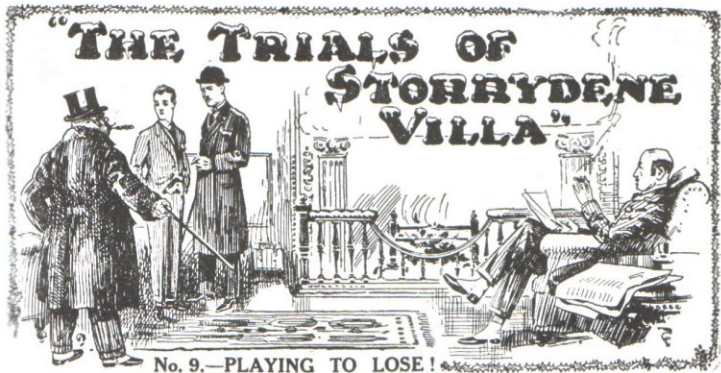
"We've said enough, I think," said Nugent icily, and he turned his back on Wharton, and walked away towards his home.

Harry Wharton looked after him for some moments, his own face hardening. Then he, too, turned away.

Billy Bunter was gone when Frank Nugent reached home. Like the gentleman in Macbeth, the Owl of the Remorse had stood not upon the order of his going, but gone at once. And the fat junior's departure certainly did not detract from the cheeriness of Frank Nugent's Christmas party.



£25,000 A SIDE! On the result of a footer match hangs a small fortune. Sir Aubrey Ailen reckons that the money is his already. Harry P. Wanniker is not such a "simp" of a millionaire, however, to walk blindly into the trap prepared for him. Who pays?



The Captives!

THE yellow light of the guttering candles peopled the musty apartment with eerie, flickering shadows that darted hither and thither, distorted and grotesque. Yet flickering shadows made uninspiring company for the twelve men who, bound and gagged, were lying upon the cobbled floor of the cellar beneath the Marquis of Gandy, a low-down, disreputable-looking public house in Little Smith Street, Storrydene.

A stained deal table ran the length of the cellar, and ranged along either side of it were upturned barrels that served as chairs. The crumbling walls of the same place were damp and festooned with cobwebs, and the clammy air was heavy with the reek of cheap tobacco smoke and the fumes of stale alcohol.

The cobbled floor was thick with dirt, and the question of ventilation seemed to have escaped the builder of the unseemly, unhealthy hole.

The twelve bound men were young, well-limbed, and well-dressed, and five of their number wore horn-rimmed glasses, and there was something about the cut of their clothes and the shape of their faces that suggested New York City.

And every hat was a broad-brimmed Western.

The captives were the Chicago Stiffs, the American tourists who claimed to have put the "sock" in Soccer.

They had been in captivity for nearly twenty-four hours.

And they knew not why.

Having beaten Manchester Town on Wednesday afternoon, they had stopped at Storrydene in the evening, and had celebrated their first Christmas in England on the following day. It was during dinner on Christmas Day that an affable stranger had introduced himself, and congratulated them upon their victory over Manchester.

The affable stranger asked if he might see the company.

A clever conversationalist, he quickly won the hearts of his hosts by touching upon American cities and American customs, and it was not long before he

was voted a "real guy"—which was high praise indeed.

Questioned, the footballers said they were booked to play against Storrydene Villa on the morrow—Boxing Day. The game was to take place on the Chelsea United ground. The Stiffs were to catch the midnight train to London.

It was then about ten o'clock, so the Americans were at a loose end.

"Why not come along to my club for an hour?" suggested the affable stranger.

"We can have a drink and a hand of cards. I know you fellows like poker."

The mention of poker was the bait to which the team from Chicago rose at once, and a little later the party set out for the Marquis of Gandy, the disreputable-looking public-house in Little Smith Street.

The affable stranger chuckled as he escorted the Americans to the "club."

"We call it the 'Thieves' Kitchen,'" he explained, "for our club-room is really a wine-cellar. It's a freak kind of club, but thoroughly Bohemian. We use candles instead of electric light, and sit on barrels instead of chairs. The Thieves' Kitchen is the most exclusive club in the Midlands, gentlemen."

The adventure made an immediate appeal to the footballers, and they were smiling like a crowd of schoolboys as they followed the affable stranger across the bar-parlour of the Marquis, through a small, curtained door, and down a flight of narrow stairs.

Halting before a baize-covered door, their guide had rapped in mysterious fashion, and slowly and noiselessly the door had opened.

A dozen masked figures were seated round the stained table, and no sooner did the Americans enter, blinking in the flickering candlelight, than they found themselves covered by a number of gleaming revolvers.

The affable stranger's affability dropped like a cloak as he rapped out the command:

"Put 'em up!"

He also warned his guests against the futility of putting up a fight. He mentioned that it was a habit of the Star-

light Boys to shoot first and apologise afterwards.

Bewildered by the dramatic turn of events, the footballers had permitted themselves to be bound and gagged, and at the back of their minds they believed that the whole thing was a "rag," the stranger's idea of a joke. The masked figures had slipped from their barrels and vanished without a sound, leaving only a squat, gnome-like creature in charge, a broad-shouldered, bow-legged brute, who appeared at regular intervals and attended to the prisoners' wants. And nearly twenty-four hours had passed, and the footballers were still bound and gagged.

It had already dawned upon them that this was a queer kind of rag.

Nine tinny chimes floated into the cellar from the upper regions, and then the door opened noiselessly, and the affable stranger walked into the place, his swarthy features twisted into a broad grin.

Behind him came the gnome-like figure, its gnarled fists dangling almost to its knees, its massive head on one side, leaning and horrible.

"Remove the gags, Gumper!" ordered the affable stranger, seating himself at the head of the table.

He looked perfectly at ease, even though he had held twelve Americans in captivity for nearly twenty-four hours.

The gags having been untied, the captives moved their cramped jaws and glared across at the young man who had betrayed them, and twelve angry men began to talk at once, their nasal voices echoing through the cellar. The Americans had the gift of pungent and picturesque expression, and the things they said to their host, were personal and to the point.

But there was a good deal of the salamander about the affable stranger, for he merely smiled blandly as he listened to the white-hot bombardment of hissing threats and abuse.

"I suppose you fellows will have to pause for breath within the next hour or so?" he remarked. "Meanwhile, do you mind if I smoke?"

Taking a cigar from his case he lit up, and smiled through the blue haze of smoke, and little by little the dim died down.

"Say, you," drawled a big-limbed fair man with a close-cropped head, "d'you mind puttin' us wise about this circus? I suppose you know that you've kidnapped twelve American citizens, and that there'll be a whole heap of trouble about it? You're soon goin' to learn that it doesn't do to monkey with the Stars and Stripes!"

The young man with the cigar smiled round at his glovering guests. He appeared to be very amused about the whole thing.

"Aren't you somewhat hasty in forming your judgment, my dear Schmidt?" he asked. "You seem to take it for granted that I am at the bottom of this—er—practical joke."

"What?"

Twelve furious men shouted the word. "You've been the victims of a practical joke," smiled their host, dropping his cigar ash into a pewter tankard.

Schmidt, the Chicago skipper, nodded his cropped head.

"Sure," he agreed bitingly, "we've been victims all right! I reckon this practical joke is about as funny as tooth-ache! Who's the joker, anyway?"

"A gentleman who is not unknown to you," came the quiet reply. "Harry P. Wanniker!"

This was the second shock for the captives, for Wanniker was the American millionaire who had raised the Chicago Stiffs and financed the tour.

"Aw, come off it, you cheap stiff!" growled Clancy, the centre-forward. "Is it likely that he'd have kept us locked up here when we should have been playing Storrydene Villa at Chelsea?"

"Quite likely," smiled the young man with the cigar. "It's a long story!"

"Then I guess you'd better spill it!" put in Schmidt. "And what about cutting these blamed cords?"

The other man hesitated for perhaps two seconds, that was all.

"Gumper," he said, turning upon the dwarf, "release these gentlemen! It was the circumstances it was a courageous thing to do, for the footballers had vowed to take a terrible vengeance once they were free; but, having rubbed their numbed limbs and restored their circulation, they seated themselves round the stained table and waited for the host to speak.

"Shoot, old-timer!" growled the burly Schmidt. "Let's hear the yarn."

"In the first place," said Nugent Ailen, for he it was, of course, "do you think that Wanniker is running you fellows for the good of his health?"

The sudden question took the footballers completely by surprise, for there was a wealth of meaning in the words.

The heavy jaw of Patsy Clancy jutted forward as the centre-forward leaned across the table and looked straight into Nugent's shifty little eyes.

"Say, you," drawled Patsy, "what are you drivin' at? Harry P. Wanniker is one of the whitest men I know, and you've only got to say half a word against him and—"

"I'm not saying anything against him," put in Nugent hurriedly. "I was merely preparing you for a surprise."

"Say a word against Harry P. and you can prepare yourself for a surprise!" growled Schmidt, gazing reflectively at one mighty fist. "But go ahead!"

Nugent Beasley Ailen looked anything but happy as he ran on.

"It's like this," he said, glancing round at the hard faces. "Wanniker and Sir Aubrey Ailen—the chairman of

Storrydene Villa, you know—had a big bet about the charity match between the Villa and the Chicago Stiffs—"

"The game we were supposed to play this afternoon?" put in Schmidt.

"Exactly," said Nugent. "Both men stood to win or lose a small fortune, and it was Wanniker who decided to make sure of the dollars. Well, he wired me last night, and—strictly according to his instructions—did you know—I took the liberty of kidnapping you gentlemen!"

The Americans exchanged glances—incredulous, angry glances.

"Go on!" growled Schmidt.

"Wanniker, meanwhile, raked up seven men to take your place," continued Nugent, increasing the utter amazement of his hearers, "and it was those substitutes who turned out against the Villa this afternoon and got beaten by eight goals to nil!"

"But—" broke in half a dozen excited voices; and Nugent Ailen waved the interruption aside.

"His big bet with Sir Aubrey Ailen, the Storrydene chairman, was all part of a money-making scheme, for his agents—both here and in America—were backing Storrydene Villa to defeat the unbeaten Chicago Stiffs; and it is safe to say that never has so much money been at stake on the result of a Soccer match. It was absolutely imperative that the Stiffs should lose, so Wanniker decided upon a bold stroke, and played substitutes. He took a great risk, of course, but a gambler's life is a series of risks. He knew it was useless to appeal to you fellows, and ask you to stand in with him, for you are above selling a match; but I am authorised to hand each of you two hundred pounds in notes on condition that you say nothing about what has happened!"

Twelve hard-faced Americans exchanged glances.

"The dirty skunk!" growled Schmidt.

"And he thinks he can bribe us with hush-money!" drawled Clancy, looking vicious. "The poor mutt!"

"But that isn't all," put in Nugent Ailen, producing his last card. "You fellows are due to play on the Chelsea United ground at half-past two tomorrow, and you are to play to win!"

"This was an evening of surprises, and the footballers were ready for anything. "Go on, spill it!" growled Kelly, the goalkeeper.

"I don't know full particulars," said Nugent; "but another game has been arranged between you and the Villa, and again there is a lot of money at stake. And Wanniker has backed you to win him £25,000, against a similar stake put up by Sir Aubrey Ailen."

Schmidt nodded his bullet head.

"Has he, the skunk!" he growled. "I tell you straight, boys, I'm through with him. But I shall turn out to-morrow. What's more, I'll see that Storrydene Villa win again, and by a score of goals this time. Harry P. Wanniker's going to learn a lesson!"

A cunning smile flitted across Nugent Ailen's fleshy features as the other players nodded.

The Chicago Stiffs were going to play to lose!

The Mystery!

TWELVE hard-faced Americans—the Chicago Stiffs and their trainer—arrived at the Chelsea

United ground on the stroke of two o'clock, and they lost no time in getting to their dressing-room and locking the door, and scarcely had the key turned than somebody rattled the handle.

"Say, open up, boys!" cried Harry P. Wanniker. "I shall be tickled to death to see you again!"

Silence.

"Say, you Stiffs, I'm Harry P.!"

Silence.

"What's got you, boys?" demanded the lean-limbed American, his long, horse-like face flushed.

Silence.

Harry P. Wanniker was the most surprised man in London at that moment, and he did not take kindly to this extraordinary treatment. What had bitten the boys? he asked himself. Perhaps this was a joke.

He grunted.

"I'll see 'em later," he growled, his brow puckered. "Can't think what's got 'em, the wops!"

Harry P. did not see his men until a few minutes to the half-hour, and then they swept past him as though he were a complete stranger.

He gasped.

"Say—" he cried, following the footballers down the passage.

"Go chase yourself!" growled Schmidt; and Wanniker pushed his broad-brimmed hat to the back of his head and fumed.

Storrydene Villa had already taken the field—the same team that had played the Americans before with the exception of Hoppy Hawkins. The Villa's redoubtable goal had been unfortunate enough to contract a bad chill. The doctor had placed him on the sick list, despite Hoppy's continued avowals that he was as fit as a fiddle. Gordon, the reserve goalie, was therefore called upon to fill the gap. The looks of surprise when the Villa team set eyes upon the Americans were comical to behold. The Stiffs certainly bore some resemblance to the eleven who had been so severely trounced, but the resemblance was very slight.

"I suppose they played their reserves yesterday," said Peter Voyce, addressing Noyle.

The other man nodded, a puzzled light in his eyes.

"That's about it, old man!" he agreed. "It's dashed rummy, though! Wish we had old Hoppy with us!"

And so thought all the other Villa players.

The team was given no further time for speculation, for the referee—a fussy-looking individual in baggy cycling knickers—held a hurried consultation with his linesmen and whistled the skippers to the centre.

"Did you play a reserve team yesterday, lad?" asked Hefty Hebble, gripping Schmidt's outstretched hand.

"Sure!" drawled the American. And Hebble did not understand the meaning of the little smile that flitted across the fellow's clean-shaven features.

The choice of ends fell to Hefty, and he decided to play with his back to the sun; and within one minute from the kick-off Peter Voyce, the Storrydene centre-forward, had carved his way

through the Chicago defence and tested Kelly with a tricky rising shot. Making a too wild spring across the goalmouth, the custodian just failed to accomplish a brilliant save, the ball crashing against the top of the upright and glancing into the net. And thus did the Americans know the mortification of being one goal down in the first few seconds of the game.

Neither Kelly nor his team-mates seemed to be worried by the early reverse, for the forwards were smiling somewhat grimly as they sauntered up the field and looked across to the clubhouse.

Harry P. Wanniker, standing on the balcony, did not miss those grim smiles, and he pulled jerkily at his long black cigar and muttered.

"What's bitten 'em?" he asked himself again and again; and he turned sharply as a throaty, unpleasant laugh came to his ears.

He found Sir Aubrey Ailen, the chairman of the Storrydene club, at his elbow.

"Hallo, Bad Man, you here?" he drawled.

"Oh, yes, I'm here!" grinned the baronet. "And I'm likely to stay here as well! I'm going to be right on the spot after the game, Wanniker! I'm taking no chances about that cheque!"

He shot a cunning side glance at Lord Landsdale as he made the remark.

"Don't worry your pretty head about that cheque, Bad Man," drawled the man from New York, his clear eyes narrowing. "His lordship's looking after that!"

"Yes—and who's looking after his lordship?" sneered Ailen.

Sir Aubrey never missed an opportunity of insulting the fine old sportsman, for he, a plebeian, could not forgive Landsdale for having been born a gentleman. And on the present occasion he made the mistake of going a shade too far.

Captain Denny, Harvey Graine, and other members of the Imperial Sporting Club were with Landsdale, and it was the former who advanced swiftly upon Ailen, gripped the fellow bodily, and swung him over the rail of the balcony with a show of strength that made the onlookers gasp.

Ailen was no light-weight, yet Denny, leaning over the rail, proceeded to hold his kicking burden at arm's length.

"Let go, you maniac!" shouted the terrified baronet, struggling madly. "Help! Leggo, you idiot!"

Sir Aubrey made an unhappy choice of words, for it was not his wish that Denny should let go—a nasty drop awaiting him should the gallant officer obey the command—but Denny, ever ready to oblige, opened his muscular fingers and allowed his burden to shoot towards Mother Earth with the speed of a human comet.

Ailen did not come to earth, however, for it so happened that a flat-topped barrow was standing directly beneath the spot from which the baronet started upon his non-stop flight through space. On the barrow were many stacks of bills and a big iron pail containing about a dozen quarts of freshly-made paste. It was into the warm, glutinous mess that Sir Aubrey Ailen, Bart., made a spectacular dive. His head disappeared beneath the slopping surface, and the weight of his portly body brought the barrow, the bills, and the whole concern down with a resounding crash.

It was an angry bill-poster—a gentleman with a mottled complexion and a walrus moustache—who suddenly appeared on the scene and took a running kick at the portion of Sir Aubrey that was protruding through the tails of the tight-fitting morning-coat.

"Come on! Outa that!" roared the indignant bill-poster, his walrus moustache bristling like an excited scrubbing-brush. "Out of it! What d'yer mean by poking your nose into somethin' that don't concern yer? Nosey! That's what you are! Ain't you ever seen a pail o' paste before!"

"Thud! Thud! Thud!"
Three kicks, landing in quick succession, found a billet between the baronet's coat-tails.
"Come on! Out of it, I tell yer!"

roared the bill-poster, still kicking with neatness and precision. "It's a fine thing when you can't leave a bit o' paste lying about! It didn't do you no 'arm, did it? The paste was quiet enough! It wasn't interfering with no one! Docile—that's what that paste was! Never mess about with another bloke's paste! That's my motter! That's the motter that's carried me through life—"

It was at this moment that Sir Aubrey Ailen, Bart., scrambled to his feet and wrenched the pail off his head, a sticky mess streaming down his face and smothering his fancy waistcoat.

The "fans," who should have been sympathetic, let out a yell of callous laughter that must have been heard all round the ground.

Sir Aubrey, incredible though it may seem, did not swell the volume of merriment with a gladsome "Ha, ha, ha!" Instead, he pranced around and shook his podgy fists at the moist-eyed town-folk who were enjoying his antics.

He of the walrus moustache again took a hand in the proceedings, and it was obvious that he failed to recognise Sir Aubrey Ailen, Bart.

"Oh, ho!" said the bill-poster unpleasantly, glaring down at the paste-splattered gentleman who was his employer. "Oh, ho! Tryin' to 'ide yourself in my pail, was you? Thought I wouldn't spot yer, perhaps? We can't 'ave that, y' know! We can't 'ave that!"

"Can't you, you bottle-nosed idiot!" roared Sir Aubrey—and the next moment he swung the bucket aloft and "crowned" Walrus, after which he turned sharply and tore towards the



Sir Aubrey's spectacular dive into the pail of paste brought the barrow, the bills, and the whole concern tumbling down with a resounding crash. "Hi! Outa that!" roared an indignant bill-poster, and he took a running kick at the portion of Sir Aubrey's anatomy that was protruding through the tails of his morning coat. (See this page.)

steps of the club-house, leaving a sticky trail of paste in his wake.

Harry P. is Suspicious!

HARRY P. WANNIKER, of New York City, looked about as cheerful as a dyspeptic owl, as he chewed savagely at his long black cigar and glared towards the field of play.

Sir Aubrey Ailen's neat dive into the bucket of paste had certainly had its amusing side, but the interlude had already been forgotten by the lean-limbed American.

Harry P. was worried; and not only was he worried—he was angry.

His team of stalwarts, the giants who had carried everything before them since they landed in England, were three goals down to Storrydene Villa; and the game had scarcely started.

It was extraordinary, unbelievable, catastrophic, but it was not the early reverse that was troubling Harry P. Wanniker; and neither did the twenty-five thousand pounds he had at stake enter into the matter.

He was angry and worried over the strange behaviour of his players—Schmidt, Clancy, Gluckeheimer, and the rest of them. They seemed to regard the match as a joke, and they even went so far as to carry Peter Voyce up the field after the youngster had scored his second goal.

Harry P. was a hundred per cent sportsman, but—hang it all!—that was going a bit too far.

"Those guys have gone plumb loco!" muttered Wanniker, his strong fingers closing round the rail of the balcony with a power that threatened to crush the wood. "They've sure gone dippy! Ants in the attic; that's what's the matter with them! They're decaying from the eyes upwards!"

Harry P. found small comfort in this reflection, however, for there was something coldly sane about the Chicago Stiffs, as they played their leisurely, unhurried game, never making the least effort to get on even terms with the Villa; and Harry P. lost all patience when Peter Voyce was allowed to break away, to walk round Grebb and Berry, and bring off the hat trick.

That was bad enough, of course, but when the Americans closed in upon the youngster and shouldered him in triumph, it looked as though Wanniker would leap over the balcony and dash on to the field.

"Say, you dear old ladies!" he yelled, cupping his hands round his mouth. "Why don't you kiss him? You're sure givin' him the willies!"

Wanniker's metallic voice reached to every corner of the ground, and the Stiffs were grinning as they turned with studied deliberation and looked towards the clubhouse.

"I guess we are givin' him the willies," said Schmidt, glancing towards Patsy Clancy.

His remark floated back to the burning ears of Harry P. Wanniker, and sent that gentleman on the verge of apoplexy.

The famous American sportsman was at an utter loss to understand what had come over his eleven, and every moment added to his rage and discomfiture; but he brightened up somewhat when Gluckeheimer, taking a pass from Maddenburg, beat Coyne with almost childish ease, and set off across Storrydene territory.

Gluckeheimer looked dangerous, and the crowd roared for the best.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 321.

"Up, the States!" roared thousands of eager-eyed "fans," as the inside left darted between Denning and Thirbyro and reached the penalty area. The encouraging yell changed to a hollow groan of disappointment as the American took a wild slam at goal and sent the leather flying fully five feet above the crossbar.

Gluckeheimer may have done his best, of course, but Wanniker, his eyes snapping fire, had his own opinion upon the delicate point.

"They're sellin' me, the low-downers!" he mused, a trifle bitterly; for he had spared no expense in the matter of the tour. "That cur Ailen has got at 'em!"

Scarce had the thought flashed into his mind than he swung round and strode across the balcony to the smoke-room of the clubhouse. The first person he encountered was Ailen, who, washed and brushed, and wearing a borrowed overcoat over his damaged suit, was looking little the worse for his unpleasant experience.

The baronet's unlovely face was creased into an oily grin, and a cigar jutted from the corner of his thick-lipped mouth. And he had something to feel pleased about, of course, for nothing less than a miracle could give the game to the team from Chicago. Sir Aubrey's twenty-five thousand pounds were safe; Wanniker it was who would have to hand a similar amount to the City of London Hospital. For that was where the stake money Nugent Ailen had glibly talked about would go.

"Not a bad game, old man," remarked Ailen affably. "What I mean to say, it whiles away an afternoon very pleasantly—what? Still, a lot depends upon one's point of view, I suppose. I think my team ought to win by a narrow margin—a dozen goals or so! I should think your fellows would positively shine at shove-'a'-penny! They're just the right build for the game!"

Ailen's badinage was of a poor order, and Harry P. Wanniker grunted.

"Sure," he agreed, his eyes narrowing, as he studied the other man's fleshy countenance. "I don't want you to think me suspicious, old-timer, but I suppose you ain't trying any tricks today?"

Sir Ailen's grin vanished, and gave place to an expression of pained surprise.

"Could you believe me guilty—" he began.

"Sure," grated Harry P. "I'd believe you guilty of anythin'. You'd rob a kid of his candy or a dead man of his bootlaces! Take your face away, Bad Man; it gives me a headache!"

Turning on his heel, the American strode across the carpet and passed out of the room, and Sir Aubrey looked anything but happy as he watched the lean-limbed figure disappear.

"Where's he off to, I wonder?" he mused uneasily; and he wondered how he could prevent Wanniker holding even a brief conversation with the Stiffs.

Only one more goal was scored before half-time, Coyne finding the net with a long, low drive; and the footballers from Chicago came in for a certain amount of "harracking" as they clustered round Schmidt and moved across the turf in a body.

"Take up, Stiffs! You're like a lot of old women!"

"They weren't trying!"

"Brighten up your ideas, Chicago!"

The "harracking" was mild and good-natured, and Schmidt and his warriors were grinning, as they passed through the narrow passage beneath the grand stand and disappeared from view.

Sir Aubrey Ailen was engaging Wanniker in earnest conversation, as the Americans passed into their dressing-room, and the former smiled as he heard the door slam and the key turn in the lock.

Thrusting the baronet aside, Harry P. dashed down the corridor and banged upon the door with his hard fists.

"Say, let me in, Schmidt!" he shouted, a tinge of angry colour in his cadaverous cheeks, his lean jaw jutting. "Go, chase yourself!" came a voice from within the room.

Muttering, Wanniker whipped a revolver from his hip-pocket and clapped the muzzle against the keyhole.

"Open up, you boob!" he shouted, his eyes blazing. "Open up, or I'll blow the lock and the lot of you to Harlem! I give you five seconds! One—two—three—" The lean trigger-finger twitched. "Four—"

The key turned in the lock and the door swung open.

Out to Win!

STROLLING into the dressing-room, Harry P. Wanniker thrust his Stetson off his forehead and looked round at the eleven mutinous faces.

There was a tense silence for fully five seconds, and then Wanniker spoke.

"I ain't pleased with you guys," came the mild announcement, and the remark brought a queer smile into Schmidt's blue eyes.

"Hear that, boys?" he asked, glancing at his men. "He ain't pleased with us! No, Mr Wanniker, I don't suppose you are. It's like this: We're going to see that you don't make a pile of dollars out of us this afternoon!"

Harry P.'s long black cigar dropped from his thin-lipped mouth and rolled across the floor.

"Say," he breathed, looking very fierce, "I don't get you! I know that something's got you, so I suggest that you come across with the whole story, quick! I tell you, boys, by the natty chin whiskers of George P. Washington, that I don't understand this business. There's somethin' a'goin' somewehere. Hear that, Ailen got anythin' to do with it?"

Harry P. Wanniker was very earnest as he put the question, and it dawned upon Schmidt and the others that they may have been hasty in swallowing the story that had been put up to them in the cellar in Storrydene.

"Come on! said Wanniker, showing signs of impatience. "Spill it! And let us have it without trimmings. There ain't much time, y'know."

Quite convinced that he and his men had been bluffed, Schmidt plunged into their story, touching upon the main points in crisp, snappy sentences, and the lean, horse-like features of Harry P. Wanniker became as hard as granite as he listened to the tale of Sir Aubrey Ailen's perfidy, and the harsh things Wanniker said about the portly baronet threatened to blister the paintwork and rip the paper off the walls.

Harry P. was a very angry man at that moment.

"And now listen to my end of the yarn," he said, glancing at his watch, and quickly, briefly, he told his hearers the facts of the case, starting from the Wednesday evening, when he had met Sir Aubrey Ailen in the smoke-room of the Imperial Sporting Club in Northumberland Avenue.

He mentioned how he and Ailen had backed their respective clubs for twenty-five thousand pounds aside, and touched upon the telegram that had taken him



The portly figure of Sir Aubrey Allen was tearing across the turf. The baronet was brandishing an umbrella, and the light of fury glowed in his little eyes. "You're not trying, you hound!" he shouted, rushing at Peter Voyce with the obvious intention of impaling him. "You're a traitor!" (See page 27.)

post-haste to Paris on the morning of the game. He told how the wire had proved to be a ruse to get him out of the country, and how he had hired an aeroplane, reached the Chelsea United ground on the stroke of time, and discovered that the so-called Chicago Stiffs were all complete strangers to him.

It was not until later that he learnt that it was the notorious Starlight Boys who had captured the Stiffs and impermanently them in the game against Storydene Villa.

Sublimely oblivious of the fact that Wanniker had discovered the plot, Sir Aubrey had turned up at the Imperial Sporting Club after the match, and had demanded the American's cheque for twenty-five thousand pounds, and he had received the shock of his life when Harry P. had strolled into the crowded smoke-room and denounced him.

Wanniker, of course, could have made a criminal case of it, but he preferred to hit the baronet where it would hurt him most—in the pocket.

It was agreed that the real Stiffs, having been released by Allen's orders, should meet Storydene Villa on the following day—Saturday—and the result of the game was going to make a difference of twenty-five thousand pounds to either Wanniker or the baronet.

Wanniker, in forcing the bet, had felt confident of victory, yet half-time found the Stiffs losing by five goals to nil!

Allen, it seemed, would have the last laugh, after all.

"It looks to me, boys," drawled Harry P. quietly, "as though your durned, uncharitable nature is going to cost your Uncle Wanniker something like a hundred thousand dollars. But it ain't the cash that's troubling me a heap. Rather is it the thought that you'd think of your Uncle Wanniker."

Schmidt and his men looked doleful and down-in-the-mouth as they gazed up at the tall American, and they wanted

to punch themselves for having doubted him for one moment. They thought longingly, too, of what they would do to the affable stranger when next they came across him.

"I dunno what to say or how to say it, old-timer," said Schmidt, almost tearfully, "but if you feel you'd like to kick me into the next State, I tell you to go right ahead. We've been a bunch of boneheads!"

"Now then, you fellows!" came the petulant voice of the referee. "Show a leg!"

Harry P. Wanniker was smiling. "No, I don't wanta boot you fellows, 'cause I like you too much," he said. "But there's somethin' you can do for me."

An eager chorus broke from the footballers.

"Say it!"

"Name it, bo'!"

"I suggest," drawled Harry P. Wanniker, "that you ginks win this match for me."

"And we sure will!" cried Schmidt and Clancy. And the team from Chicago raced out of the dressing-room and took the field.

The Last Laugh!

SIR AUBREY ALLEN was standing upon the balcony of the clubhouse when the Chicago Stiffs filed across the cinder-track and took the field, and a puzzled light dawned in the baronet's dark eyes as he noticed that something very like a metamorphosis had taken place during the short interval. There was a subtle difference in the demeanour of Wanniker's eleven. Gone was their easy-going, don't-care attitude, and in its place was an air of grim determination that Allen found strangely disquietening.

The other people on the balcony also noticed the peculiar transformation, and

nobody seemed the least bit surprised when the Americans broke away immediately after the resumption of play and swept down the field like a human avalanche.

This spirited movement was greatly to the liking of the "fans," and the spacious enclosure was soon a scene of riotous, leathern-lunged pandemonium.

"Go on, the States!"

"That's the ticket!"

"You're all over 'em, Chicago!"

Even such old stagers as Denning and Thirlby seemed to lose their heads in that moment, but Hefty Hebble looked as stolid as usual as he ambled forward to meet the attack.

Gluckenheimer, Clancy, and Schmidt speedily proved that they knew the short-passing game from A to Z, as Hefty was soon to learn to his cost, for they bluffed the big fellow with the utmost coolness, and made an opening for their centre-forward, who drove a terrific shot and almost smashed an upright. Striking the bottom of the post, the leather tore into the net, and the wild yell of "Goal!" broke simultaneously from thousands of throats.

Grace, Hebble's burly partner, was largely responsible for that goal, for he skipped in front of Gordon and gave the reserve custodian not the ghost of a chance.

Gordon grinned ruefully as he fished the ball out of the net.

The crowd, of course, was almost delirious with delight, for there was likely to be some excitement if the famous Stiffs regained the form that had enabled them to beat Manchester Town and the other crack teams.

"Up, the States!"

"Attaboy!"

"Set 'em alight!"

"Nah then! What abart it?"

The Americans saw that no time was wasted, and scarcely was play resumed

than Gluckenheimer robbed Coyne of the ball and sent Doss away down the line; and Grace, remembering his previous blunder, became suddenly nervous and tackled with all the refined subtlety of a baby elephant. Doss, a wizard-winger, had not the slightest difficulty in waltzing round the hairy back, and the centre he dropped into the goalmouth was as near perfection as a centre could be.

The Chicago backs and half-backs were there in a body, and the robust manner in which they swept the ball and the Storyrdene defenders over the goal-line was a new departure in goal-getting tactics.

"Pheep!"
The fussy little referee was pointing a dramatic finger towards the centre; he took not the slightest notice of Sir Aubrey Ailen, who was gesticulating wildly from the balcony of the clubhouse.

"That was a foul, ref!" shouted the baronet. "Don't you know rough play when you see it? Caution those hooligans, sir!"

The air was throbbing with sound, of course, so Sir Aubrey's remarks were lost in the din; and those fans who heard his throaty voice merely turned their heads and grinned up at him.

Thrusting his hands into the armholes of his waistcoat, Harry P. Wanniker

pulled joyously at his black cigar, and strolled across the balcony.

"Say, Ailen, this ain't a bad game, after all, is it?" drawled the American. "It whies away an afternoon—what?" He grinned down into Sir Aubrey's blazing eyes. "A lot depends upon one's point of view, I suppose. Didn't you mention something about it a little while back? I guess your fellers had better chuck football and take to collecting stamps—stamps being about the only thing they could lick!"

Wanniker was paying Ailen back in the latter's own coin; and a savage word broke from Ailen.

"You've got nothing to crow about, you—you lean fish!" snarled the baronet, his little eyes popping out of his head. "You seem to forget that we've got a three-goal lead!"

The American's long black cigar rolled leisurely from one corner of the thin-lipped mouth to the other.

"Sure," nodded Harry P., "but my boys have got plenty of time in which to wipe the earth with your bunch of half-witted paralytics! Have a cigar, bad man!"

Sir Aubrey Ailen was very angry with Wanniker; but he made it a rule never to refuse anything—even from his worst enemy.

"I don't mind if I do!" he growled, taking the weed that Harry P. produced from his waistcoat pocket.

Lighting up, Sir Aubrey pulled at the cigar for some seconds; then he turned a wry face up to Wanniker, who was watching the play with marked intentness.

"I don't think much of this!" growled the baronet, waving his gift under his nose and sniffing. "What is it?"

Harry P. Wanniker shook his head; but he did not glance down at his questioner.

"Couldn't say, bad man!" he drawled; and the quiet statement brought a sort of indignation from Ailen.

"Couldn't say!" cried Sir Aubrey, his face turning an art shade of purple.

"Couldn't say! You know where you got it? I suppose? You didn't pick it off a rose-bush, did you?"

"No, bad man," answered Wanniker quietly. "As a matter of fact, I picked it out of the gutter as I was coming to the ground. I saw a dustman throw it away."

"Oh, you kid! What a beaut! Attaboy!"

"Goal!"

The scoring of the Stiffs' third goal

probably saved Harry P. Wanniker from physical violence, for the baronet was clenching his joddy fists even as an exploding vocal explosion announced the fact that Patsy Clancy had beaten the unhappy Gordon with a rasping daisy-outer.

"One—two—three!"

"Only two more, you Stiffs!"

"Attaboy!"

"Oh, you babes! Set 'em alight, Chicago!"

Sir Aubrey Ailen appeared to be the only person on the ground who was not shouting himself hoarse; but certain it is that he would have raised his throaty voice had he not been past coherent speech. He could do no more than splutter, his little eyes goggling, his head whirling.

"One—two—three!" roared the fans. And it seemed to Sir Aubrey that they were mocking him.

The score stood at five to three; Wanniker's team needed only two more goals to equalise!

And three to win!

And there was his cheque for twenty-five thousand pounds at stake!

The mere thought seemed to go straight to Ailen's brain and madden him; for he looked anything but sane as he swung round and shook a fleshy fist under the American's aquiline nose.

"I—I—You—you—" spluttered Ailen; and Harry P. Wanniker nodded in complete understanding.

"Sure!" he drawled. "It's not a bad game, is it, old-timer? You were going to say that it's a pleasant way of passing an afternoon—"

"You won't win, you long streak!" shouted the baronet, quivering like a human jelly. "My boys are letting you down lightly, leading you up the garden! Just you wait a minute, you gum-chewing slab!"

Nodding genially, Harry P. Wanniker did wait for a minute, and it was sixty seconds—to a tick—when Gluckenheimer sent Grace reeling, and scored the fourth goal for the Chicago Stiffs.

This was almost the last straw, so far as the baronet was concerned, for he was positively gibbering as he rushed to the edge of the balcony and shook his fist at the Storyrdene players.

"You idiots! You incompetent monkeys!" he shouted. "What do I pay you for! You're not trying! You're letting me down! Hebble! Voce! Thrillboy! Pull yourselves together, you blundering fools!"

Thousands of eyes turned towards the raving figure on the balcony, but the baronet was blind and deaf to everything other than the knowledge that Wanniker's team might win the game, after all.

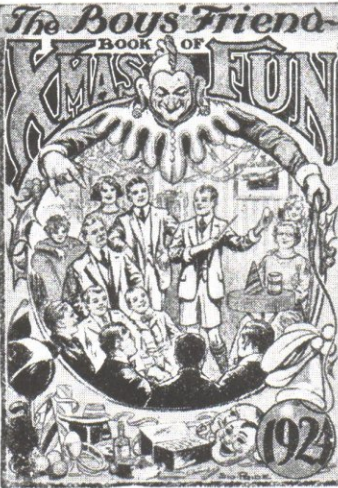
Two goals would do the trick, and the Stiffs had twelve minutes in which to get them!

Sir Aubrey was a bundle of nerves, and he was muttering savagely as he turned and made his way from the balcony, leaving a lean-limbed, horse-faced American to chuckle at his discomfort.

Peter Voce and the other players looked a very determined side as they lined up once more, for they were acutely conscious of the fact that they were being outplayed and run off their legs. Never had Gordon, the reserve goalie, put up such a poor show between the sticks.

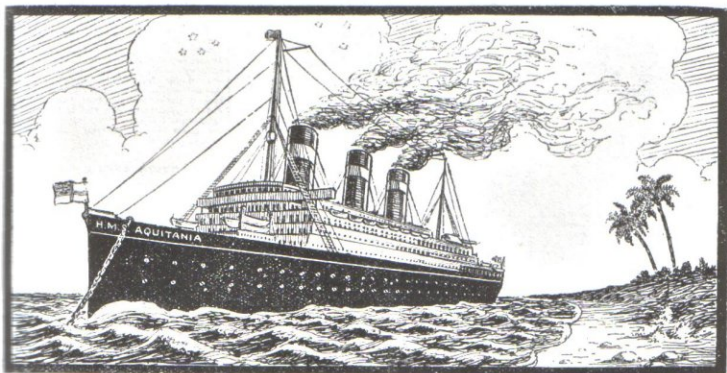
A sudden silence settled upon the vast crowd as the whistle shrilled, and Peter Voce touched the leather to Coyne; but a yell burst forth when the inside

A Sure Guide to a Jolly Christmas!
This Wonderful 20-page Book Given
FREE in—



the Grand Bumper Christmas Number
of the "Boys' Friend" Out To-day.
Don't be without it whatever you do!

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?



£25 IN PRIZES! See the Great "ERRORS" Competition in this week's issue of "THE GEM LIBRARY."

man returned the ball, and his centre-forward started on one of those characteristic runs that had made his name famous throughout the country. Adopting that curious gliding action, the brown-haired youngster carved a way through the Chicago defence and roused excitement to fever heat, and the whole universe seemed to hold its breath as the young figure beat Grebb and swung its

boomph!
The sound of contact echoed upon the ball air, and then came the hollow groan, dug-down-out and sepulchral, for the ball had grazed the crossbar by a fraction of an inch.

"Oh, hard luck, sir!"
"Bad luck, lad!"

His shouts of sympathy changed to a roar of laughter, and Peter, turning quickly, almost gasped as he saw the scrawny figure of Sir Aubrey Ailen tearing across the turf. The baronet was brandishing an umbrella, and the light of homicide glowed in the depths of his little eyes.

"You're not trying, you young rascal!" shouted Ailen throatily, rushing at the amazed youngster with the murderous intention of impaling him. "You're a fool! You're a traitor!"

Slipping nimbly aside, Peter snatched the umbrella and wrenched it from the baronet's hands. The swift blow he landed upon Sir Aubrey's coat-tails had any amount of sting behind it.

Swinging round, Ailen found himself confronted by the fussy referee, and a moment later two burly figures in blue had taken him gently by the arms.

"May we escort you, sir?" asked one of the constables, a good-natured grin upon his broad features. "You're—er—where in the way, you know?"

"Unhand me, you low fellow!" shouted the baronet. "Don't you know who I am? My name is Ailen—Sir Aubrey Ailen—and I'm a—"

"Quite so, sir," put in the constable respectfully. "I know exactly what you are! Shall we stroll?"

The enclosure was in a state of pandemonium as the fuming baronet allowed himself to be led across the turf, and Ailen was comparatively sane when he again took up his position beside Harry P. Wanniker on the balcony.

And then came the fifth goal!
The team from Chicago had equalised!

The face of Sir Aubrey Ailen was distorted with rage as he gripped the rail of the balcony and poured abuse upon the heads of Hefty Hebble and his men, but he reached the stage of apoplexy when Clancy, in the last half-minute of the game, broke away on his own and gave the Stiffs the lead with a shot that Gordon did not even see.

That was the last goal of the match. Harry P. Wanniker had saved his twenty-five thousand pounds!

It was the Monday following the great game the Chicago Stiffs and Storeylene Villa, and Lord Derrington, secretary to the City of London Hospital, was frowning angrily as he snatched the telephone-receiver from its hook and asked for a number.

A short pause followed, then:
"Is that the Imperial Sporting Club? What? Yes. Is Lord Lansdale there? Lansdale, idiot! Eh? What? Oh, Derrington—Lord Derrington! And, I say, you might rub the sleep out of your eyes, young man!"

It was obvious that his lordship was in anything but a sweet temper, and his frown gave place to a frown as he glared

down at the slip of pale pink paper on his desk.

He stabbed at the cheque with the point of an ivory paper-knife.

"Even schoolboys wouldn't be guilty of such a thing," he muttered; "yet Lansdale and—Hullo! What? He gave his attention to the phone. "Is that you, Lansdale? Yes, I thought I'd ring you up and congratulate you upon your joke. It is dashed funny! I didn't know you were a humorist!"

"Really, my dear fellow," came the protesting voice of Lord Lansdale, "I don't understand you! Did you get the cheque?"

"Oh, yes, I got it all right!" returned Derrington. "As a matter of fact, it has just come back from the bank!"

A sibilant gasp floated over the wire.
"Do I understand that the cheque has been returned 'R.D.'?" asked Lansdale, incredulity in his mellow voice. "Is that what you mean?"

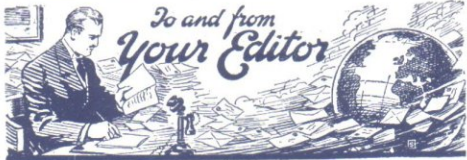
"That is precisely the meaning that I wish to convey," said the other man bitingly. "And I received a short note with the cheque, a note to the effect that the total sum to Sir Aubrey Ailen's credit at the Capital and Midland Bank is fourteen shillings and sevenpence-halfpenny! I thought I'd mention this trifling and unimportant point, Lansdale, for the bank declines to meet your friend's cheque for a paltry twenty-five thousand pounds! Good-morning to you!"

Sir Aubrey Ailen had had the last laugh!

THE END.

(Be sure and read the concluding story in this grand series, boys, entitled "Dorland's Trump Card!" Take the tip and order next Monday's MAGNET issue!)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY—No. 881.



A GRAND SURPRISE!

FOR many weeks past Magnetites have been clamouring for another detective serial featuring young Jack Drake—Ferrers Locke's capable boy assistant. Now, as I'm always out to please my loyal chums, I lost no time in calling upon Mr. Hedley Scott—the author of those popular serials, "A Marked Man," "The Yellow Claw," and "Four Against the World!"—to turn in a suggestion. It came in due course, and it at once took my fancy, as I'm sure it will take yours. We need not go into the theme of the story too much, but this much can be said right now: Jack Drake stars throughout the piece. The ex-Greyfriars junior is given HIS FIRST CASE to solve. Don't run away with the idea that Ferrers-Locke will be at his back to put him wise. Not a bit of it. Drake tackles a pretty deep problem absolutely off his own bat. That he makes mistakes goes without saying—he is but human. That he shows splendid grit and determination is nothing more than we have been led to expect from this plucky youth. His path is anything but a rosy one; danger peeps out at him at every turn of the wheel, but he means to "get there." As is fitting in this going treat, it is entitled:

"THE DEPUTY DETECTIVE!"

For Ferrers Locke hands over the reins entirely to his assistant and fades away into the background. There are some remarkable pieces of crime detection and clever deduction in this powerful story, chums, which shows you that even a boy can do the things usually undertaken by a full-grown man. I have read the opening chapters of this grand story two or three times, and without hesitation I pronounce

"THE DEPUTY DETECTIVE!"

By Hedley Scott,

to be the finest work this brilliant author has ever turned out. Get ready to welcome young Jack Drake in his gigantic task; get ready to welcome the return of Hedley Scott

to these pages. The date? Well, here's a bit of a surprise for you, boys; this grand yarn is billed to start

THE WEEK AFTER NEXT!

Another piece of news worth bringing to your attention concerns next Monday's Grand Free Art Plate. This time Magnetites will be able to add to their wonderful collection of warships a magnificent photo of H.M. ST. IMARINE III. The vessel depicted is the latest thing in submarines, and it carries a 12-inch gun. One begins to wonder, when gazing at this huge gun, what would happen to the submarine if it were fired. A really interesting picture, this, chums, and one that should on no account be missed. Make sure you get yours!

"THE DOWNWARD PATH!"

Harry Wharton's luck seems to be dead out. Bit by bit he is losing the esteem of his Form master—he has already lost that of his intimate chums—and all the work in his complex nature is coming to the surface. Far from being a model youth, Harry looks like running the career of the one-time Boulder of Greyfriars to a short head. He fairly aches for trouble, and, as a natural sequence, gets it. Having found it, Wharton unreasonably thinks that he is being victimised. Such a state of affairs cannot continue for long; there's bound to be a severe break sooner or later. Whether that possibility worries Wharton you will gather from reading next week's yarn. Don't miss it, chums, or you will regret it.

"NEW YEAR" SUPPLEMENT!

As befits the occasion, Harry Wharton & Co. have turned in a breezy New Year Supplement. In it we read of resolutions from such notorious characters as Gerald Loder, Horace Coker, etc. Even Billy Bunter resolves to cut down his gormandising!

I rather fancy that Billy's resolution will have been broken by breakfast-time on New Year's morning! In fact, I know it will. Magnetites can look forward to a bright and pleasing Supplement well up to its usual standard.

"DORLAND'S TRUMP CARD!"

This powerful yarn concludes the Stormy-dene series that has been so popular amongst my footballing chums. Detective Inspector Dorland certainly has a trump-card up his sleeve, and it takes all the wind out of Sir Aubrey's sails and leaves him floundering like a big fish out of water, when this brilliant police officer plays it. How Peter Joyce fares you will learn next week. Look out for this story, chums, and take the precaution of ordering your "Magnet" well in advance.

A QUESTION ABOUT GREYFRIARS.

An old reader asks for complete information about Greyfriars. I will do my best to oblige my correspondent. Greyfriars is situated on the River Sark, near the coast of Kent. There are between three and four hundred boys in the school. Firiardale is the nearest village. The headmaster is the Rev. Herbert Joyce Locke, D.D.

The Masters.

Fifth Form: Paul Pontifex Prout.
Shest: Horace Manfred Backer.
Upper Fourth Form: Algernon Capper.
Remove: Horace Henry Samuel Queich.
Third Form: Eusebius Twigg.
Second Form: Bernard Morrison Twigg.
French: Henri Charpentier.
German: Herr Otto Gans.
Maths: Lawrence Lascelles.

SIXTH FORM.

Form master: Dr. Locke.

FIFTH FORM.

Captain: George Bismell.

SHELL.

Captain: James Hobson.

UPPER FOURTH FORM.

Captain: Cecil Reginald Temple.

REMOVE, or LOWER FOURTH:

Captain: Harry Wharton.

School Routine.

Rising-bell: 7.30 winter; 6.30 summer.
Chapel: Breakfast. Morning school, 9-12.
Dinner: 1. Afternoon school (with the exception of Wednesday and Saturday), 2-4.
Recreation, 4-6-30. Tea. Evening prep is from 7.30 to 8. Lights out: Juniors, 9; seniors, 10.

JOIN THE ROYAL NAVY
AND SEE THE WORLD.

THE FINEST CAREER FOR BRITISH BOYS.

Boys are wanted for the Seaman Class (from which selections are made for the Wireless Telegraphy and Signalling Branches). Ages 15 to 17 years.

Men also are required for

STOKERS Age 15 to 23
ROYAL MARINE FORCES 17 to 25
GOOD PAY ALL FOUND.
EXCELLENT CHANCES FOR PROMOTION.

Apply by letter to the Recruiting Staff Officers, R.N. & R.M., Birmingham: 254, Coventry Road; Bristol: 311, Victoria Street; London, S.W.1: 55, Whitehall; Manchester: 239, Deansgate; Newcastle-on-Tyne: 116, Ryedale Hill; Southampton: 6, Washington Terrace, Queen's Park.

MAGIC TRICKS, etc.—Parcels, 2/6, 5/6. Ventriloquist's Instrument, Invisible, Imitate Birds. Price 6d. each, 1 for 1/—, T. W. Harrison, 239, Pentonville Rd., London, N.1.

100 DIFFERENT UNUSED STAMPS AND ALUMINIUM WATERMARK DETECTOR FREE!
LISBURN & TOWNSEND, London Road, Liverpool.

When Answering Advertisements
Please Mention This Paper.

FOUNTAIN PENS. Beautiful all gilt metal Self-Filler attached only 1/6, post free. Best lever action self-filler. Every reader of this paper should make sure of having one by sending 1/- P.O. to-day to—
WALTER & WILLIAMS, 4, Chandos Avenue, Moseley, Birmingham.



HEIGHT COUNTS

In winning success. Let the Girvan System increase your height. Wonderful results. Send P.C. for particulars and our £100 guarantee. Enquiry Dept., A.M.P., 17, Strand Green Road, London, N.4.

FILMS

from 6/6 1,000 ft. 100-ft. Sample, 1/6; post 3d. Lists Free. MAYFLOR, 71, STANLEY ROAD, STRATFORD, E. 15.



DON'T BE BULLIED

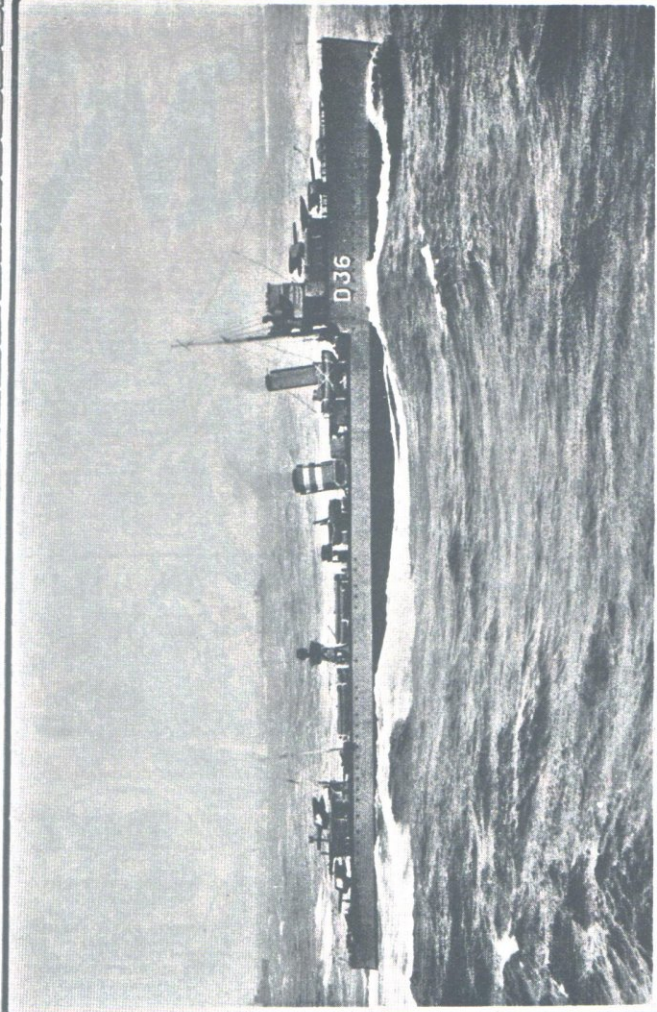
Special offer. TWO ILLUS. SAMPLE LESSONS from my Complete Course on JUIJITSU for four penny stamps, or a Large Illus. Portion of Course for 5/6. Jujitsu is the best and simplest science of self-defence and attack ever invented. Learn to take care of yourself under ALL circumstances. SEND N.W. (Est. 20 years.)
"YAWARA" (Dept. A.F.S.), 18, Queensway, Harworth, Feltham, Middlesex

CUT THIS OUT

"The Magnet." PEN COUPON. Value 2d.

Send 2 of these coupons with only 2/6 direct to the Fleet Pen Co., 119, Fleet Street, E.C.4. You will receive by return a splendid British-made 14ct. Gold-Nibbed Fleet Fountain Pen, value 10/6 (fine medium, or broad nib). If only one coupon is sent the price is 3/6, 2d., being allowed for each extra coupon up to 6. (Pocket size, 4d.) Satisfaction guaranteed or cash returned. Special New Offer—Your own name in gilt letters on either pen or 1/- extra.
Lever Self-Filling Model with Safety Cap, 2/- extra.

27-12-24



OUR FIGHTING FLEET—No. 9, H.M.S. VIVACIOUS, (Torpedo Boat Destroyer)
1,300 tons, 27,000 horse-power. Guns: 4 4-in., 1 3-in. anti-aircraft. 5 torpedo tubes.