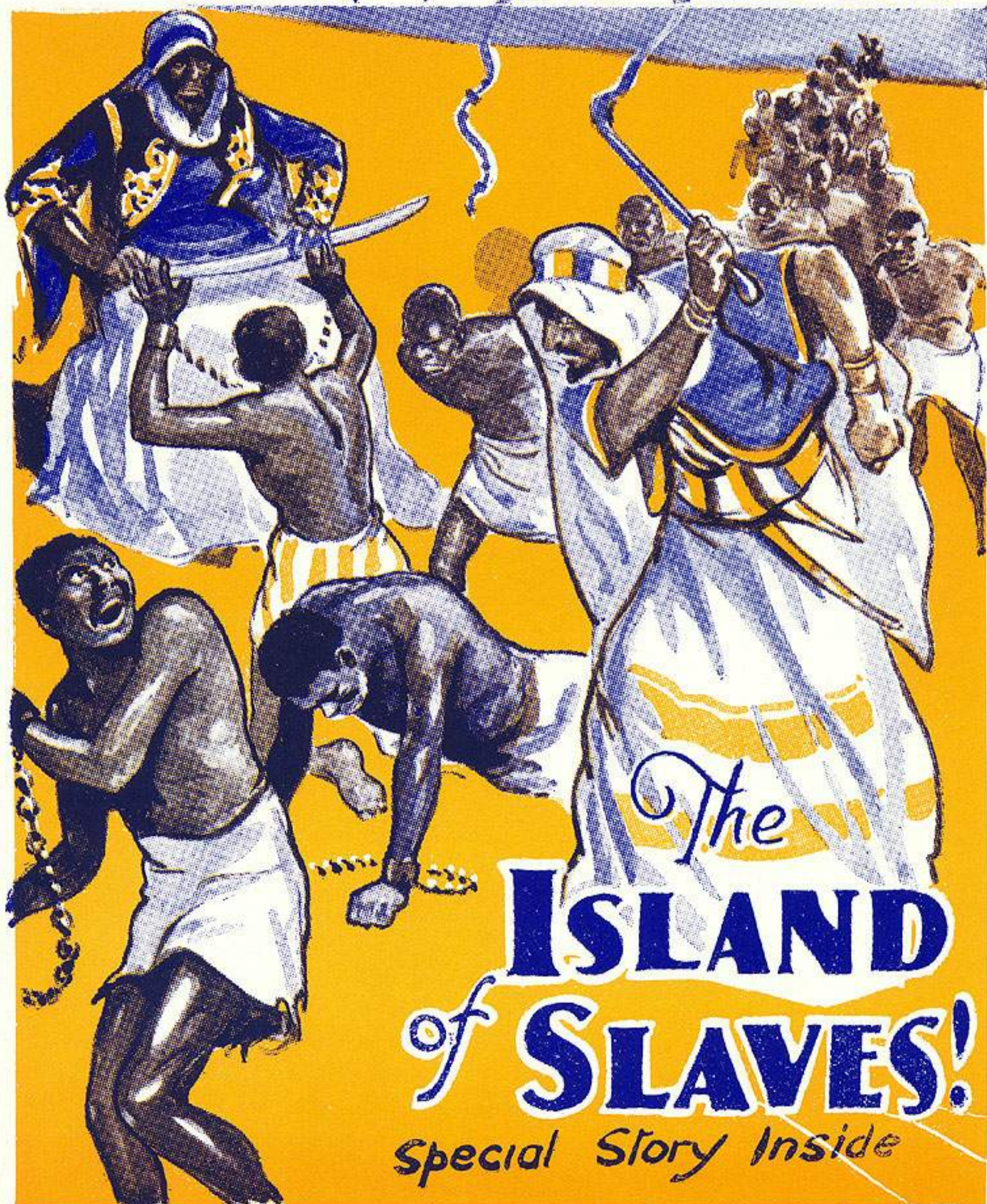


Dandy Long Complete Yarn of Harry Wharton & Co.—Within!

The MAGNET 2^D



The ISLAND of SLAVES! Special Story Inside

THE MYSTERY OF



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Not Bunter!

WHAT about me?" asked Billy Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter did not seem to have expected that question to set the table into a roar.

But that was the effect it produced.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Removites.

Prep was over; and most of the Remove were gathered in the Rag. Most of them were busy. They were engaged in tearing up paper into small fragments, to be stuffed into bags.

Harry Wharton, the captain of the Form, had ordained a cross-country run for the morrow. Old newspapers, old exercise books, anything in fact that was tearable, was being torn up to make "scent" for the paper-chase.

While they manufactured the scent, the chums of the Remove discussed who should be the hares. The whole Remove were going to be the pack; and two of the best had to be picked out to lay the scent.

It was quite a serious subject; and the Remove men discussed it seriously. But hilarity supervened, when William George Bunter butted in with his valuable suggestion.

Bunter blinked at the chuckling Removites through his big spectacles with a wrathful blink.

"Look here, Wharton——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you think I can't run——" roared Bunter.

"My dear man, I've seen you run," grinned Bob Cherry. "That time you had Coker's pie, and Coker of the Fifth got after you, you beat all records. But you couldn't stay the distance in a paper-chase."

"And that time you rowed with Tubb of the Third," chuckled Johnny Bull. "You put up a splendid sprint across the quad. But——"

"Beast!"

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"I was thinking of Tatters," said Harry Wharton. "I mean, Cholmondeley! Cholmondeley's jolly fit, and he's a good runner——"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Like the idea, Tatters?" asked Harry, turning to the new fellow in the Remove.

Arthur Cecil Cholmondeley, more commonly called Tatters by his friends, nodded.

"'Ear, 'ear!" he answered.

Sniff from Bunter!

"A fellow who drops his H's!" he jeered.

"Well, Tatter's H's won't be wanted in a paper-chase," said Bob. "He can drop them along with the scent and no harm done."

"I'm offering my services!" said Bunter, with dignity. "You fellows keep me out of the football. You make out I never do anything for the Form. Well, I'm willing to run in the paper-chase."

"You can run with the pack, old fat bean," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "You'll crock up after the first dozen yards; but that won't matter in the pack."

"The crockfulness will be terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But if you ran as an esteemed hare, there would be danger of terrific burstfulness."

Snort from Bunter.

It was one of Billy Bunter's little ways to fancy that he could do anything—till he came to do it. At that point, he generally discovered that, after all, he couldn't.

Bunter was not distinguished as a sprinter.

Certainly there had been occasions when he had covered the ground quickly—as on the occasion when Coker of the Fifth had been pursuing Bunter and a purloined pie. On occasions like that, Bunter had been known to resemble the hare in its flight. But there was no doubt that on most occasions his motions resembled those of the tortoise—and not a common or garden tortoise,

so to speak, but a very old and very tired tortoise.

So Bunter's services as hare in a paper-chase were not likely to be accepted.

"I say, you fellows, this is rather sickening," he said scornfully. "You bar me from footer! You know how I play soccer——"

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"But if I asked you for a place in the team against St. Jim's, for instance, you'd say no, Wharton. Don't deny it—you would!"

"My dear old barrel, I'm not going to deny it," answered the captain of the Remove. "I should say No, with a capital N."

"And you carry the same petty jealousy into such matters as paper-chases," said Bunter bitterly. "I must say it's rather sickening."

"Fathead!"

"If there's any man in the Remove who runs like me, I'd like to see him!" said Bunter.

"There isn't!" chuckled Frank Nugent.

"Not one!" said Squiff. "Not a man! Nobody else in the Remove rolls along like a jolly old barrel."

"I'd undertake to leave you all standing, and chance it!" declared Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" said Bunter. "I call it sickening! You fellows keep me out of everything. What do we come to a Public school for, I'd like to know? Games! We're not like common people who go to school to learn things——"

"You're not, anyhow!" grinned Bob. "Nothing common about you, old bean, when it comes to learning things."

"We come here for games," said Bunter. "Games are the thing! Well, I'm kept out of games! I call it rotten."

"You blithering ass!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Every time there's games practice you have to be rooted out of some corner and kicked down to Little Side."

"I'm not talking about games practice," said Bunter disdainfully. "I'm talking about games. I don't need the practice you fellows do."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Put me in the team against St. Jim's or Rookwood and I'll show you some

THE PAPER-CHASE!



football that will make you sit up and take notice."

"More likely make us fall down in a faint," said Johnny Bull.

"I've given up expecting that!" said Bunter scornfully. "You keep me out of games! Now I'm offering to run in a paper-chase I get the same sneaking, sneering, carping jealousy! I tell you, I'm sick of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter drew himself to his full height—which was not, however, impressive—and gazed at the hilarious Removites with scorn. His very spectacles glittered with wrath.

"Well, I can tell you I'm fed-up!" he said. "I'm making you this offer, Wharton, if you want a really good run across country to-morrow—"

"Thank you for nothing."

"If you refuse—"

"No 'if' about it," chuckled the captain of the Remove. "If the course were all downhill, it might suit you. You could turn on your side and roll along like a barrel—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But as the matter stands, declined with thanks! You can run with the pack, old fat bean; and if you're still in sight after the first quarter of a mile, I'll stand you a doughnut."

"Safe offer!" chuckled Peter Todd.

"Well, look out!" said Bunter darkly.

"Eh!"

"Look out!"

Harry Wharton & Co. stared at the Owl of the Remove. He was frowning darkly, and his manner was dramatic. He wagged a fat forefinger at the chums of the Remove as he warned them to look out.

"What are we to look out for?" asked Wharton in astonishment. "Are you going to lick us all round, or what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look out!" repeated Bunter mysteriously. "The worm will turn."

"Well, you're a worm, and a jolly fat one, old bean!" said Bob Cherry. "Are you going to turn? Or do you mean that you're doing a funny turn?"

"You'll see!" said Bunter, still more mysteriously. "You'll see what you will see! You can take my word for that!"

"Right on the wicket," chuckled Bob. "Your word isn't much use, as a rule, but we can take it for that. You men,

we're going to see what we shall see. Make a note of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If the run's mucked up," said Bunter, "don't say I didn't warn you."

"Wha-a-t?"

"You howling ass, what are you driving at?" demanded the captain of the Remove, staring at William George Bunter blankly.

"That's telling!" said Bunter.

"Fathead!"

"I know what I know," added Bunter with a mysteriousness that was really worthy of the films. "Look out—that's all. Just look out!"

And with that Billy Bunter rolled out of the Rag, leaving the juniors staring. Evidently, something was working in the fat but powerful intellect of William George Bunter.

Perhaps Bunter expected to leave the Removites in a state of perplexity and wonder, tinged with alarm. Perhaps he expected to be called back to explain his mysterious threat. If so, he was

One moment young Cholmondeley of the Remove is with the Greyfriars Hares and Hounds—the next he is gone; vanished as completely and as mysteriously as if the earth had opened and swallowed him!

disappointed. The juniors stared after Bunter, laughed, and forgot his fat existence the next minute as they went on tearing up scent and discussing the morrow's run. No doubt something was working in Bunter's powerful brain; but to the rest of the Remove Billy Bunter's unimportance was abysmal, and they did not even want to know what it was!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Paper-Chase!

MR. QUELCH smiled, a kindly smile.

It was the following afternoon; a fine, clear, frosty winter's afternoon.

That afternoon, when Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, took his little walk abroad, he was muffled up against the cold, almost like an Arctic explorer. Mr. Quelch had reached an age when the central heating, as it were, had diminished a little. But the members

of his Form were at that happy age when a keen, frosty day, with a biting wind from the north, made them feel merry and bright. Every face in the Remove was cheerful when they gathered in the old quad for the start of the paper-chase. Even slackers like Skinner and his friends looked unusually cheery, and were ready to start with the

rest of the pack, though it was likely that they would tail off before much ground had been covered.

And Mr. Quelch smiled kindly as he looked at the bright faces of his Form. It was a half-holiday, and the Removites looked as if they were going to enjoy it. The crowd of cheery faces brought back to Henry Samuel Quelch some reminder of his own far-off youth. For Mr. Quelch had been a boy once—as his Form knew, though they found it hard to believe.

There was only one member of the Remove missing from the ranks. That was Billy Bunter.

Bunter, it seemed, was disdainful to run with the pack—his valuable services as a hare having been declined. Bunter had disappeared immediately after dinner—where, nobody knew. Not that anybody gave it a thought. Not only nobody knew, but nobody cared. Nobody in the Remove, indeed, just then remembered that there was such a person as William George Bunter in the universe at all.

Tatters, otherwise Cholmondeley, had been selected as one of the hares. Frank Nugent was the other. Nugent was an extremely fleet-footed fellow, very suitable for the task. And Tatters was a good man at running. Owing to the peculiar circumstances of

earlier days, he had never learned to play the games that were played at Greyfriars. Harry Wharton & Co. were initiating him into the mysteries of soccer, but Romé, of course, was not built in a day, and it was not likely that Tatters would be playing a good game of football for some time to come. So the captain of the Remove was glad to give him a chance of distinguishing himself in a way for which he was fitted.

Tatters was looking very merry and bright. He was a handsome fellow, and an athletic one, though slim in figure, and he looked very fit in his running kit.

Wingate of the Sixth had agreed to start the run. But the captain of Greyfriars was not yet on the spot when Mr. Quelch walked down.

The Remove master paused, smiling kindly as aforesaid, and took a benignant survey of the crowd of juniors.

He seemed pleased to see the new fellow there. Cholmondeley was such

an unusual new fellow for Greyfriars, that Mr. Quelch had rather feared that there might be some "set" against him in the Form. But this, certainly, did not look like it.

"Ah! You are—um—going for a run, Wharton?" asked the Remove master. "A—a paper-chase, I presume?"

"Yes, sir," said Harry.

Vernon-Smith winked at Tom Redwing, and Skinner murmured to Snoop, "What a brain!" As Frank Nugent and Arthur Cecil Cholmondeley were laden with bags of scent, in full view, Mr. Quelch was safe in "presuming" that it was a paper-chase.

"And which are the—the hares?" asked Mr. Quelch genially.

"Tatters—I mean Cholmondeley—and Nugent, sir," said Wharton.

Mr. Quelch turned his benevolent attention to Tatters.

"I hope you will have a good run, Cholmondeley," he said.

"Thank you, sir," said Tatters. "I 'ope so."

Mr. Quelch winced.

"You should say, I hope so, Cholmondeley," he murmured.

"Yes, sir, that's wot I said," answered Tatters. "I 'ope so, sir! This 'ere frosty weather is jest prime for a blooming good run, sir."

There was a suppressed chuckle in the ranks of the Removes.

Tatters' flow of English was as interesting, in its way, as that of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Indeed, to Greyfriars ears, the English that Hurree Singh had learned from Mook Mookerjee, the wise moonshee of Bhanipur, was hardly more remarkable than the language Tatters had learned as the companion of Tinker Wilson.

"My dear boy," said Mr. Quelch gently, "I have observed several times that you should not use such a word as blooming."

"Oh! Sorry, sir!" stammered Tatters. "I didn't mean to, sir! But it's 'ard for a bloke to keep on remembering."

"Neither should you use the word bloke, Cholmondeley."

"I—I mean cove, sir——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I mean——" stammered poor Tatters, quite put out by that involuntary chortle from the Remove.

"Never mind, my boy. I have no doubt you are doing your best," said the Remove master, kindly. "But you must try to forget all that you learned in company with that disreputable man, Wilson, before you were reclaimed by your grandfather, Sir George Cholmondeley."

"You bet, sir!" said Tatters.

Mr. Quelch coughed.

"I am very glad, Cholmondeley, to see you taking part in the games of your Form," he said. "Very glad, indeed, to see that you have made so many friends here."

"Yes, rather, sir," said Tatters. "It's prime! Course, I know that I ain't so posh as most of these 'ere blokes, sir; but bless your little 'eart, they treats a cove decent. I was blooming lucky to be sent to Greyfriars, sir, and you can lay to that."

Mr. Quelch coughed again.

He rather liked this new boy, and he certainly compassionated him on his early misfortunes. But he wished, very much wished, that Arthur Cecil Cholmondeley would pick up the King's English a little more rapidly.

"Well, well, I hope you will have an enjoyable run, my boys," said Mr.

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Quelch, rather hastily, and he walked on out of the gates with Mr. Prout.

"Decent old cove, ain't he?" said Tatters. "Looks a bit of a blinking terror, but his eart's in the right place."

"So are his H's," remarked Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're a funny cove, ain't you?" said Tatters, with a glare at Harold Skinner. "Can't let a covey's blooming aitches alone, can you?"

"My dear man, I'd let your aitches alone if you had any," said Skinner, "but you haven't—you've dropped them all."

"He, he, he!" came from Sidney James Snoop.

"Oh, shut up, Skinner," said Bob Cherry.

"Yes, you close your tater-trap," said Tatters resentfully. "If you open it too wide you might get a bung on the beezee."

"My only hat! What's a beezee?" asked Skinner.

"Ho, you don't know what a blooming beezee is?" asked Tatters.

"No!" said Skinner regretfully. "I never had the advantage of being taught by the estimable Tinker Wilson. Never, in fact, been on speaking terms with a tinker at all! My misfortune."

"Well, if you don't know what a beezee is I'll blinking well show you!" said Tatters.

And with a sudden swing of his arm he swung round his bag of scent, and it crashed on Skinner's sharp nose.

"Yaroooh!"

There was a yell from Skinner, and he staggered back and sat down in the quad.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Know what a beezee is now?" asked Tatters. "Like another cosh on it?"

"Oh! Oh! Wow!" gasped Skinner, clutching his nose, as he staggered to his feet. "Ow, you ruffian! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky rotter!" yelled Skinner. "I'll jolly well——"

"Here, chuck it!" interposed Harry Wharton, pushing the enraged Skinner back. "You asked for that, you know."

"Look here!" howled Skinner.

"Shut up; here comes Wingate!"

The Greyfriars captain was arriving on the spot. Harold Skinner gave the new junior an inimical glare, and fell back to his place in the ranks. He rubbed his nose rather painfully. He knew what a "beezee" was now, if he had not known before; in fact, it's hue had been enriched by the crash of the bag of scent on it, and it was now deserving of Tatters' description of it as a "blooming" beezee! Certainly it looked blooming, if not blossoming.

"You kids ready?" asked Wingate.

"Yes, Wingate."

And Wingate started the hares, and Frank Nugent and Arthur Cecil Cholmondeley disappeared out of the gates at a trot. The hares were to be given ten minutes' start; and Wingate kept his eye on the clock-tower.

Nugent and Tatters were far ahead, and out of sight, when Wingate gave the signal at last, and the whole pack streamed out of the gates and down the road.

The scent lay down the road towards Friardale; but it turned off at the footpath through Friardale Wood, and the hounds went along the footpath on the trail.

By that time Skinner & Co. had bellows to mend, and they dropped out quietly.

The rest of the pack followed the towpath along the Sark; but by the

time the bridge was reached some more had tailed off.

As they came out on the bridge Bob Cherry's bugle blew a loud note. The hares, far in the distance across the river, had been sighted, though they vanished the next moment.

Ta-ra-ra-ra!

"Tally-ho!"

"Put it on, you men!"

And the pack ran on following the trail of torn paper, by road and lane and fieldpath, more and more tailing off as the miles accumulated under their feet, till at last there was only a bunch of the best men in the Remove keeping up the steady pace, close on the track of the hares.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter Means Business I

"BEASTS!"

Billy Bunter made that remark.

Had any of the hares or hounds given a thought to Billy Bunter that frosty afternoon—which they did not—they would have supposed that the fat Owl of the Remove was indoors, frowsting over a study fire.

But Bunter, for once, was not "frowsting."

Bunter was out and about. Bunter was in a determined and vengeful mood. As he had told the Removes, the worm will turn. Bunter did not exactly realise that he was a worm. But he had turned.

The sun had gone down on Bunter's wrath, and risen on it again. Bunter meant business!

He had left Greyfriars immediately after dinner. The paper-chase did not start till some time later, so Bunter had plenty of time. And Bunter plugged away across country long before the hares left the school gates.

The course to be taken on that run was more or less mapped out. The details were left to the hares, but it was understood that the run would cross the Sark by the bridge, wind round the foot of Redclyffe Hill, cross the Seven Elms meadows, and so round by Courtfield Common and back to the school. It was a long run, and a roundabout run, and it was likely to test the powers of the Remove pack. It was probable that only a handful of the Form would be in at the death.

Nugent and Tatters were good men for the part they had to play, and it was likely enough that they would beat the pack. Had Bunter been one of the hares there would have been no doubt about it—in Bunter's mind. For the self-esteem of William George Bunter was on a par with his circumference. It was almost unlimited.

Bunter was far from realising that he would have crooked up in the first hundred yards. His view was that he was left out—as usual—owing to petty jealousy—also as usual! And this time the worm was going to turn—Bunter was going to put his foot down.

The hares were going to be caught before the run was half over! Bunter was going to contrive that. And, taking short cuts direct across country, Billy Bunter arrived in the Seven Elms meadows.

Once they were on the go there was no doubt that the Removes would cover the ground quickly. Still, Bunter had ample time.

He was puffing and blowing by the time he arrived at Seven Elms. It was a long walk from the school; and though

Bunter had taken it at a leisurely pace it had winded him. He slowed down more and more as he came into the wide, green meadows of Seven Elms—a rich pasture-land, watered by a little stream that flowed down to the Sark.

That stream was small, but it was deep and swift. In summer it could be waded in many places; in winter, fed by the rains, it was full to the banks, and often spread beyond them over the meadows, flooding the low-lying pasture land. Where a footpath crossed the wide meadows there was a plank bridge across the stream.

In the winter the place was almost a solitude.

Billy Bunter, as he came in sight of the stream, glistening in the winter sunshine, grinned a breathless grin. He was heading for the plank bridge.

That plank was the only method of

of that run, Bunter was going to muck it up. It did not even occur to Bunter's fat brain that there was anything mean or revengeful in this. His idea was that the beasts had asked for it and were going to get it. They had said that he would crock up—as if he wasn't the best runner in the Remove! Perhaps the beasts would crock up themselves, with a few extra miles added to an already long run. Bunter hoped they would enjoy those miles.

Standing by the plank bridge, Billy Bunter blinked across the stream through his big spectacles.

He could see nothing of either hares

and intense irritation, he tugged and shoved in vain.

He had laid his plans quite cunningly, but it proved easier to lay plans than to carry them out. The plank was a huge, heavy plank. It was heavier than—in Miltonic phrase—the tallest pine hewn on Norwegian hills. It was well sunk in mud on the bank; and the stream, full to the margin, lapped it as it flowed.

Bunter tugged and shoved and puffed and blew; and the well-planted plank remained immovable.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

Exertion did not appeal to Bunter.

"I'll soon show you what a beezer is!" said Tatters. With a sudden swing of his arm he swung round his bag of "scent," and it crashed in Skinner's face. "Yaroooh!"



crossing the stream—unless fellows liked to plunge into icy water and try swimming.

Bunter was going to shift the plank. Then, when the hares arrived at the spot, they would find that there was "no thoroughfare."

The hares would have to turn aside, follow the stream, and go miles round. Good men as they were, they would probably be feeling the strain by the time they reached that spot. A few extra miles would knock them out—and serve them jolly well right! Bunter had no doubt that it would serve them right! Fellows who did not give Bunter his due deserved anything short of boiling in oil. Having been left out

or hounds, so far. Still, they might not have been very far away. The fat Owl's range of vision was limited.

"Beasts!" remarked Bunter, addressing space, and referring to the whole Lower Fourth, hares and hounds and all.

He was tired from his walk. Now that he was standing still he was also cold. He resolved to get on with it without losing time. The beasts might come into sight at any minute.

He stooped to the plank and grasped the end.

He grasped and tugged and shoved, with beads of perspiration starting out on his fat forehead. To his surprise,

It was one of the things he disliked intensely. But he exerted himself now. Cold as the weather was, Billy Bunter grew quite warm; he perspired, he puffed, he blew, he gasped, and he spluttered, and a button flew from his waistcoat.

And still the plank remained where it was, absolutely regardless of Bunter and his herculean efforts.

"Hi!"

Bunter started and looked up.

In that lonely place he had not expected to meet anyone till the Remove runners came along.

But as he was hailed from the farther bank he realised that, solitary as the place was, the footpath and the plank bridge might be used by a pedestrian at any time; and any labourer or shepherd who caught him trying to shift that plank was likely to get wrathful.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"You young limb! Let that plank THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,197.

alone!" bawled a harsh voice across the stream. "You 'ear me?"

Bunter blinked at the man.

He was a burly, roughly dressed fellow, with a stubbly face and heavy brows, under a battered bowler hat. He was wheeling a hand-cart, on which was a tinker's outfit, among other things.

He scowled savagely at Bunter across the water. His annoyance was justified, for the removal of the plank meant a long tramp round for him by rough field-paths. Bunter, in planning that little scheme for the benefit of the Remove runners, had not given a single thought to the public who used that plank bridge. A fellow could not think of everything, of course. Bunter had carelessly forgotten the population of that part of Kent.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "I—I wasn't moving the plank, you know."

"You lying young 'ound!" answered the tinker.

Bunter, in point of fact, had told the truth; he wasn't moving the plank. He was intending to, and trying to, but he actually wasn't!

"You leave that plank alone, you limb!" said the tinker. "You think a cove's going miles round 'cos you want to lark with that plank?"

"Oh, no!" gasped Bunter. "It—it's all right! It won't move—I mean, I wasn't trying to move it!"

The tinker grunted, and wheeled his little cart on the plank. Bunter stood away from it as the man came across. He had to wait till this beast was gone before he renewed his efforts on the plank.

"I say, buck up!" he called out.

The tinker was negotiating the plank slowly and carefully.

"What's the blooming 'urry?"

Bunter did not answer that question.

He waited till the tinker was across. An idea had come into his fat mind. His unaided efforts were futile, and here was aid. He would not have dared to ask the aid of any farmer's man or shepherd in playing such a trick, which was certain to cause great inconvenience to the local inhabitants.

But this travelling tinker was not a local inhabitant; and he looked a rough, boozy, unscrupulous fellow enough; indeed, he did not look at all the kind of man a fellow liked to meet in a lonely place.

Bunter did not think of that consideration for the moment; he had room in his fat brain for only one idea at a time.

A small tip would be enough for the tinker; and his sinewy arms would soon carry out the task which had proved too much for Bunter's fat and flabby muscles.

"I—I say——" gasped Bunter.

The tinker, having reached the bank, had stopped and dropped the handles of his cart. He was looking at Bunter in a meditative way.

It did not even occur to Bunter at the moment that the ruffian was considering whether it was worth the risk to knock him down and go through his pockets. As a matter of fact, it was not worth it. Bunter's wealth being limited to a shilling, a sixpence, a French penny, and a rolled-gold watch. But the tinker was not aware of that; and he was thinking it over when Bunter addressed him.

"Well, wot you got to say?" he grunted.

"Did you see a lot of fellows coming this way—a pack of schoolboys?" asked Bunter.

"Ain't seen nobody."

SMASHING

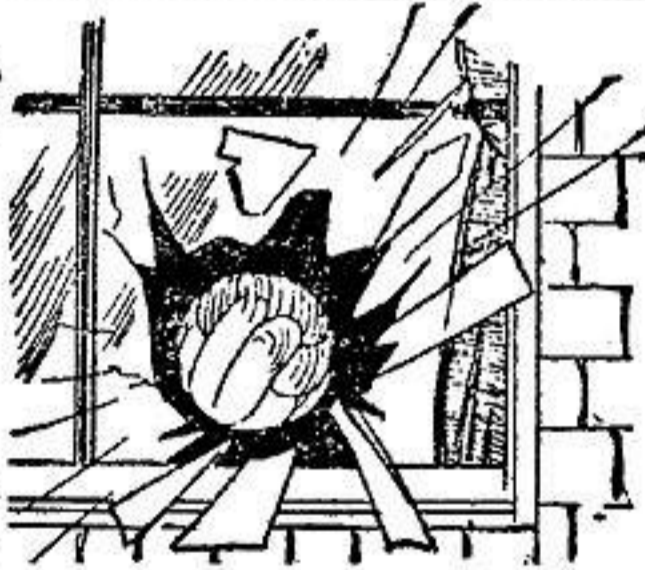
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"Well, they'll be here soon—they can't be long now," said Bunter. "It's a paper-chase, you know."

"Ho!" grunted the tinker. If there was a paper-chase on, and a crowd of schoolboys might come into sight at any moment, it was evidently not worth while to knock this fat fellow down and rob him.

Incidents of that kind were not uncommon in Tinker Wilson's career; but he preferred them to take place without witnesses.

"Help me to shift that plank before they come!" said Bunter. "Look here, I'll give you a shilling!"

The tinker looked at him surlily.

"What you want to shift that plank for, you young limb?" he growled.

"Only a lark on the fellows, you know," explained Bunter. "Of course, I shall put the plank back again—h'm. I'll give you a bob to help me shift it."

"It's a do!" said the tinker.

Tinker Wilson's regard for the public was about on a par with William George Bunter's. A shilling meant a deep drink at the next inn he passed; and a single drink weighed more with Mr. Wilson than all the inhabitants of Great Britain bunched together.

Bunter grinned cheerfully.

"Lend a hand, then," he said. "They'll be along soon. They can't really run, but they've had time to get here by now."

The tinker nodded, and stooped by the end of the plank. Bunter had asked him to lend a hand; but on second thoughts—proverbially the best—Bunter did not lend a hand himself. If he was going to tip this rough-looking brute a shilling, the brute could do the work!

So Bunter looked on, while the tinker grasped the heavy plank and tugged. He blinked across the stream, and in the far distance, among the hedges, he had a glimpse of moving figures.

"I say, they're coming!" he exclaimed.

Grunt, from the tinker. Sinewy as he was, Tinker Wilson had to exert himself to shift the plank.

"Buck up!" said Bunter, blinking anxiously at the distant figures.

"Shut it!" grunted the tinker.

"Look here, my man——"

"I says, shut it!" growled the tinker, in a tone that made Bunter decide to say no more.

The fellow was cheeky; but, in the circumstances, Bunter decided to allow his cheek to pass unrebuked.

From the hedges two lithe figures came running, cutting across the wide meadows towards the stream.

But the plank was shifted now. With the end of it in his powerful hands the tinker lifted it, dragged the other end loose from the opposite bank, and pitched it into the stream. The swift current whisked it away in a moment, and it disappeared.

"You ass!" exclaimed Bunter. "You ought to have pulled it ashore. It may stick in the rushes, and they——"

"Shut it!" said the tinker. "Gimme that bob, an shut up your ugly mouth!"

Bunter blinked at him. This was worse than cheek; but again Bunter decided to let it pass unrebuked. He fumbled in his pocket for the shilling, and the tinker glanced across the stream at the two distant running figures.

Then he gave a violent start, and seemed to forget Bunter's existence.

"Burn my body and boots!" he gasped.

"Eh?" ejaculated Bunter.

The tinker was staring blankly. His eyes fairly burned as they were fixed

on the distant schoolboys. Suddenly he turned on Bunter.

"Get out of sight!" he snarled.

Without waiting for the astonished Owl of the Remove to answer, he grasped him by a fat arm, and twirled him into a thicket of brambles and hawthorns that grew close at hand.

Bunter sat down there with a bump and gasped.

A second more and the tinker had pushed his hand-cart out of sight in the thicket, and was crouching there, watching the oncoming runners from cover.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter.

"Shut it!"

"I say—"

"You say a word and I'll brain yer!"

"Oh dear!"

Bunter blinked at the man in dismay and dread.

What was the cause of the man's strange actions he could not begin to understand. But he knew that the ferocious scowl on the ruffian's face scared him to the very marrow of his bones.

Across the wide field the two runners came into nearer view. From his hiding-place the tinker's eyes gleamed at them.

"It's Tatters!" he muttered. "Burn my body and boots, it's Tatters all right! I'll swear it's Tatters!"

Bunter gasped.

The tinker turned to him savagely.

"'Ere you! Don't make a row—don't let them blokes 'ear that there's anybody 'ere, or I'll out yer! You know them coveys?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"Yes!"

"You belong to their school, perhaps?"

"Oh dear! Yes."

"Greyfriars?" asked the tinker.

Bunter stared. How this tinker knew anything about Greyfriars, or the fellows there, was a mystery to him.

"Yes," he gasped.

"What's their names?" asked the tinker, with a jerk of his stubby thumb in the direction of the distant hares.

"One's Nugent—"

"Blow 'im! The other?"

"Tatters—I mean, Cholmondeley! His name's Cholmondeley!" gasped Bunter.

"But he's been called Tatters, wot?"

"Yes," gasped Bunter. "He was called Tatters, you know—he was with a tinker once—a beast named Wilson—" Bunter broke off suddenly. Bunter was not quick on the uptake; but even Bunter's brain worked. It came into his fat mind, like a flash, who this tinker was. A tinker who knew Arthur Cecil Cholmondeley by sight, and called him by his old name of Tatters—even Bunter could guess that the man crouching by his side in the thicket was the "beast" named Wilson.

"I knowed him!" muttered Wilson, with savage satisfaction. "I knowed him soon as I set eyes on him—I was sure it was Tatters! Burn my body and boots, I got him now!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunter.

The tinker gave him a glare.

"You keep mum!" he said. "You say jest one word, you give jest one squeak, you fat mug, and I'll smash you up so's your relations won't never know you agin! You can lay to that!"

And with glittering eyes, he resumed watching the two juniors, as they came swiftly on; Bunter, at his side, soundless, save for the chattering of his teeth.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

In Ruthless Hands!

FRANK NUGENT slacked down, and looked back. Tatters dropped into a halt by his side.

"All serene!" said Frank.

For a mile the open meadows stretched behind them. And on that open expanse there was no sign yet of the pack. Here and there were hedges, and hollows thick with bracken; but the country was too open to hide the pursuit. The hares were a good mile ahead of the hounds. The trail of torn paper lay across the green fields, fragments of it fluttering in the wind.

"We're orlright, old covey," said Tatters.

Nugent chuckled. Like the rest of the Famous Five, he was on friendly terms with the new junior; but he was not yet used to being addressed as "old covey."

"We can take it a bit easier from here," said Frank, as they resumed trotting on towards the stream. "We've got a fairly stiff run before us after we cross the water there, to get round by Courtfield Bridge and the common. Take it easy, Tatters, old bean!"

"Orlright!" assented Tatters.

At an easy trot, scattering handfuls of scent as they trotted, the two juniors approached the stream in the meadow.

It was not till they were quite close to the water that Nugent observed that

"Like a blooming fish!" he answered.

"Like to chance it?"

"You bet, if you would!"

"It's frightfully cold," said Frank.

"But—look here, it's miles round. There's no bridge nearer than Seven Elms. Come on."

"I'm with you," said Tatters cheerfully.

It had not even occurred to Billy Bunter's fat brain that the hares, finding the bridge gone, would plunge into the water. No earthly consideration would have induced Billy Bunter to plunge into icy water, especially with a swift current running. Bunter had made his usual mistake of judging other fellows by his own fat self.

Splash! splash!

The two juniors plunged into the stream, both swimming strongly.

The current drove them downstream, and they crossed diagonally, but they made swift progress, even encumbered as they were by the bags of scent.

In the thicket on the opposite bank, Tinker Wilson rose to his feet, and stared through the frosty brambles at the swimmers.

There was a grin of satisfaction on his stubby face.

Had he been aware, in time, that Tatters was coming, certainly the tinker would never have interfered with the plank bridge. He would have been only too glad to leave the way open for Tatters to walk into his hands.

But he had not, of course, had the slightest suspicion that his former victim was anywhere near, when he had shifted the plank. That knowledge had come too late.

He had waited and watched till the hares reached the stream. Had they turned along the bank, instead of taking to the water, Tinker Wilson would have plunged in and crossed the stream himself. The hares had saved him that unpleasant task.

self. The hares

His eyes gleamed through the brambles at the two dark heads that dotted the shining water.

"Burn my body and boots!" he muttered. "This 'ere is luck! Oh, bust me if this 'ere ain't luck."

He turned to Bunter. The fat junior squirmed away in terror from his savage glare.

"You keep mum!" said Tinker Wilson. "You stay 'ere, and don't you shift! You shift, my fat pippin, and I'll jest come back and wring your neck like you was a blooming chicken! You 'ear me!"

And leaving Bunter with that dire threat ringing in his ears, the tinker tramped out of the thicket, and disappeared from Bunter's sight.

"Oh lor'!" groaned Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove was trembling in every limb, from cold and fright. He had heard the splashes in the stream, and knew that Nugent and Tatters were coming across. The fat Owl had hoped that the removal of the bridge would keep them back, safe out of the hands of the ruffian—so far as he had thought of them at all. Now they were swimming across—right into the hands of Tinker Wilson.

Bunter groaned.

He would have liked to shout out a warning; but Tinker Wilson's knucky fists were too near for that. What the

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the plank bridge was no longer in its place.

"My hat!" he ejaculated.

"Wot's the row?" asked Tatters.

"The bridge is gone."

"Oh, bust my buttons!"

They trotted down to the bank of the stream. They had to halt there. Deep and swift the stream ran before them, fed by the winter rains in the downs. Nugent stared up and down the stream. The plank was missing from its place; and it was not in sight.

"Washed away, p'r'aps!" suggested Tatters. "This 'ere water is runnin' 'ard."

Nugent nodded.

"I suppose so," he said. "I suppose no silly ass can have moved it. You can't see it, can you? It might have jammed in the reeds."

"I'll squint along the bank," said Tatters.

But the "squint" along the bank discovered nothing. The plank had drifted half a mile by that time, and was well on its way to the Sark.

"Bother!" grunted Frank.

He stood and looked at the flowing water. It was icy cold, and there were fragments of ice in it from late freezing. It did not look inviting for a swim.

Nugent looked back. Far across the expanse of pasture-land, there were moving dots in the distance.

"That's them!" said Tatters.

"Can you swim, old bean?" asked Frank.

Tatters grinned.

tinker intended, Bunter did not know; his mind was a blank on that point. That the tinker had recaptured Tatters, on a previous occasion when the boy had fled from him, Bunter was aware. But since then, Tatters had been found by his grandfather; and recapturing the boy was now kidnapping; an offence for which the rascal could be sent to prison for a long term; and there was not the faintest doubt that Sir George Cholmondeley would pursue him with the utmost rigour of the law. The tinker, so far as Bunter could see, could have no motive for running such a risk. He concluded that Wilson's intention was to bestow a thrashing on the boy he disliked, now that he had an opportunity. Indeed, it was difficult to think of any other intention that the man could possibly have.

Bunter did not care very much whether Tatters was thrashed or not. In fact, he was willing to admit the possibility that a thrashing might do Tatters good! As for Nugent, the ruffian was not likely to interfere with him—not that Bunter was deeply concerned about Nugent either.

The fellow Bunter was deeply concerned about was William George Bunter. And what Bunter wanted was to get to the farthest possible distance from the tinker, in the shortest possible space of time.

He rose to his feet, and blinked round him cautiously through his big spectacles.

Through the openings of the brambles he saw the lower stream, and the two swimmers in it, approaching the bank, fighting their way against the current, and widely separated.

Tinker Wilson, crouching low to keep out of their sight—though they were little likely to observe him—was stealing down the stream, keeping pace with the swimmers as they were carried lower and lower by the current. Evidently his object was to be on the spot when Tatters scrambled ashore.

Tatters was the more powerful of the two swimmers, and he was now much nearer the bank. The current had swept Frank Nugent a dozen yards farther down the stream than his comrade.

The tinker's back was to Bunter, and he was giving the fat junior no further heed—though it was pretty certain that he would have given him immediate heed, and something else of very drastic nature, had Bunter ventured on a shout to warn the swimmers.

But Bunter was not thinking of that. He did not want his fat features knocked through the back of his bullet head by the tinker's hefty fist. Other fellows could take care of themselves. Bunter's attention was wholly occupied in taking care of W. G. Bunter.

Had the fat Owl been aware of the ruffian's real intentions, the matter might have been different. But he was not likely to draw a thrashing upon himself to save Tatters from one.

Bunter trod softly and cautiously out of the thicket, keeping it between him and the tinker.

Once in the open, he took to his heels. The tinker, he hoped, was too busily engaged to pursue him. He could not do so without giving Tatters the chance to get clear; and it was Tatters he wanted.

As a matter of fact, Tinker Wilson did not even look round. All his attention was fixed on Arthur Cecil Cholmondeley, as the lad breasted the icy water and drew closer and closer to the bank.

Bunter ran as he had seldom run before—even with Coker, of the Fifth,

after him. Had the Famous Five seen him crossing the meadow just then, they might have been convinced that Bunter could run—sometimes.

He panted and puffed and blew and ran and ran, his fat little legs going like clockwork.

Not till he reached a hedge and plunged through it into another field, did Billy Bunter venture to slacken speed. Then, at a reduced pace, but still as fast as his fat legs would go, he kept on in the direction of distant Greyfriars.

Meanwhile, Tatters had reached the bank, grasped the branch of a drooping willow, and dragged himself out of the water.

Standing on the bank he looked back for Frank Nugent.

Nugent was more than a dozen yards lower down the stream, and still well out from the bank. He was swimming strongly, but he was not so sinewy as the hardy tinker's boy.

"Go it, old covey!" shouted Tatters. "I'll come along and lend you a 'and out of the blooming water!"

"All serene!" gasped Nugent, as Tatters' voice reached his ears.

Tatters started to hurry down the bank of the stream to reach the point where Nugent would land. As he turned, a sudden grasp was laid on him from behind, and he went with a crash to the earth.

Taken utterly by surprise, Tatters opened his mouth for a gasp, and a hard hand was clapped over it instantly.

"Shut it!" breathed a hissing voice. "You keep quiet, Tatters, or I'll limb yer! Shut it!"

Tatters' eyes almost bulged from his head. A shudder ran through him. He knew that he was in the hands of his old tyrant.

In spite of the tinker's threat, the boy struggled violently. But the powerful ruffian handled him easily enough. Tatters was dragged bodily along the rough ground, and into the thicket where the tinker had left his hand-cart and Bunter. Tatters made a desperate effort, and tore his mouth free from the tinker's grasping hand. A second more, and he would have shouted for help.

Crash!

A clenched fist struck the boy on the temple, and Tatters' voice died away in a gasping moan. He lay half-stunned in the grasp of the tinker.

"I warned yer!" muttered Wilson, between his teeth.

He dragged the boy to the hand-cart that stood among the brambles. From the cart he jerked an old frowsy coat which he wrapped round the junior. Then, with swift hands, he knotted a rope round him, fastening ankles and arms. A dingy rag was stuffed into Tatters' mouth, and a cord knotted round his head to keep it there.

Dizzy from the savage blow he had received, Tatters could only blink dazedly at his enemy.

The tinker's strong arms lifted him into the cart. The tattered tent, which Wilson used for camping out, was folded there, and the tinker drew the ragged canvas over his prisoner.

Then, taking the handles of the cart, Tinker Wilson trundled it rapidly away.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Vanished!

"O crumbs!" gasped Nugent.

He dragged himself from the water, fifty yards down the stream from the spot where the plank bridge had been.

The current had been harder and

swifter than Nugent had anticipated. He had had to fight hard to get across the stream at all. He was a good swimmer, but he lacked the hardy strength of the tinker's boy. By the time he landed Frank was fairly spent; and he stood on the grassy bank, dripping with water and panting for breath.

He leaned on the trunk of a tree that grew near the water, resting, the water running down and forming a pool at his feet.

He was rather surprised not to see Tatters. The tinker's boy had got ashore much farther up the stream, and he had called out that he would run along and lend Nugent a hand ashore. But he had not come.

For several minutes Frank leaned on the tree, gasping for breath. The swim had told on him. But he stirred at last, and looked round.

"Tatters!" he called.

There was no answer, and he could not see the tinker's boy. Frank was more and more surprised.

He had had a glimpse of Tatters after he had landed, standing on the bank near a thicket of brambles and willows that bordered the stream near the bridge end. But he had not looked again, he had needed all his attention for the swim. Why Tatters had not run down the bank to meet him was a mystery.

"Tatters! Cholmondeley!" he shouted.

But there was no answer, and Nugent started up the bank towards the thicket, concluding that Tatters was there, out of sight; though why he was silent Frank could not imagine.

He tramped into the thickets.

"Tatters!" he shouted. "Tatters!"

Only the echo of his voice answered him.

"What the thump—" ejaculated the amazed Nugent.

He stared round him blankly.

Across the stream, far across the opposite field, a good many of the pack were now in sight. Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry were leading—just behind them came Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, Vernon-Smith, and Tom Redwing, and Peter Todd. Farther back were others, strung out.

But Nugent did not heed the pack now. He was mystified by what had happened closer at hand.

He stared across the field, in the direction the hares had intended to take after crossing the stream. It was inconceivable that Tatters had resumed the run, leaving his comrade behind. Yet that seemed the only way of accounting for his absence. He was gone—that was clear! Wherever he was, he was nowhere near Nugent.

"My hat!" gasped Nugent.

No one was in sight as he stared across the rugged pasture-land. The field was dotted with clumps of bush, and here and there a hedge ran. Had Tatters taken the direct path onward, he could not have been out of sight; Nugent must have seen him. But if he had left the path, there was ample cover on all sides to hide him from view.

If he had gone on he had missed the path; clearly as it was marked across the meadows. That was unimaginable; it was unthinkable that he had gone on without Nugent, still more unthinkable that he had missed the plain path if he had gone on.

But what had become of him?

Nugent had seen nothing of him after that momentary glimpse on the bank near the patch of willows. He had been swept much farther down the stream before he had effected a landing.

But he knew from that glimpse and from Tatters' cheery call to him that the boy was safe out of the water. But

for that he might have feared that Tatters had been swept away. That, he knew, was not the case. Tatters had landed safely several minutes before Nugent. He could not have gone back into the water; he had not gone on by the path. It seemed as if he had vanished into thin air.

"My only hat!" gasped Nugent.

He had heard nothing—Tinker Wilson had taken care of that. He could see nothing of Tatters. Within fifty yards of him there was plenty of straggling growth to hide anyone who wished to keep out of his sight. But it did not even occur to Nugent that Tatters wished to keep out of his sight—that was unthinkable. The whole thing was beyond comprehension.

Ta-ra-ra-ra!

The note of the bugle rang across the stream.

"Tally-ho!"

The powerful voice of Bob Cherry boomed on the frosty air, reaching Nugent from the distance.

Nugent, in a state of helpless amazement, stared round him in the thicket. There was no sign of Tatters; Wilson had been careful to pick up his cap and to take the bag of scent. Possibly the Tinker had aimed to give the impression that the boy had run on, leaving his comrade; at all events, he had left no sign that Tatters had been handled by an enemy. Nugent was a Scout, and keen enough; but the frosty ground was like iron and bore no trace.

"What on earth—" stuttered Frank.

He was hopelessly bewildered.

Tatters was not there, that was certain. He had got out of the water and was safe, that was equally certain. As he could not have sunk into the earth or dissipated into the air, it was clear that he had left the spot. Nugent was driven to the conclusion that, for some utterly inexplicable reason, he had gone on without a word, leaving his comrade behind. It was unimaginable why he had done so, but it seemed clear that he had.

"The silly ass!" muttered Nugent.

"Tally-ho!"

Ta-a-ra-a-ra!

If he had followed the path across the meadows and got out of sight already he must have covered the ground with amazing swiftness. Nugent did not believe that he had. He must have left the path—for what reason it was useless to attempt to guess. Obviously he had left no paper trail behind him, wherever he had gone—there was no sign of that. Apparently he had simply "chucked" the paper-chase at that point and walked off. And when he was driven to that conclusion Nugent's eyes glinted with anger.

He realised that he had wasted six or seven minutes; and the hounds were coming whooping down to the stream now. That delay meant that Nugent had imperilled his chances of making the run home successfully.

That would not have mattered a straw to him had he known or suspected that



Tatters had fallen into the hands of an enemy. But such a suspicion never crossed his mind. He had not seen the tinker or anyone else on the spot, and there was no sign that anyone had been there.

He looked back across the stream.

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry were within twenty yards of the bank. Bob waved his bugle to him, with a grin.

Nugent started.

He had to give up the problem of Tatters; indeed, as he was now satisfied that Tatters had, for some unaccountable reason, walked off and left him in the lurch he was not troubling his mind about him further.

Dismissing Tatters from his mind, Frank Nugent raced across the meadow, dropping the paper trail as he ran.

The delay had, at least, given him a much needed rest, and he ran swiftly. At a good speed he scudded across the field and vanished through a gap in a hedge as Harry Wharton came panting down to the stream.

And a stubbly-faced ruffian crouching in a clump of willows beside a hand-cart, watching from deep cover, grinned as the junior disappeared in the distance.

Tinker Wilson was in luck.

What had become of the fat fellow he had left in the thicket, the tinker did not know, but he knew that Bunter had cleared off and was far away by that time. Now Nugent was gone. And the schoolboys coming on across the stream had no suspicion that anything had happened. The tinker was safe. It was, perhaps, just as well for Nugent that he had had no suspicion of the ruffian's proximity; for the tinker was prepared to knock him senseless if he intervened—as undoubtedly he would have done had he known how matters stood.

Keeping in close cover, the tinker

As Tatters started to hurry down the bank a sudden grasp was laid on him from behind, and he went with a crash to earth. The next moment a hand was clapped over his mouth!

watched the schoolboys as they came down to the stream. He could not hear their voices; but he saw the leaders pause and stare about them—obviously in search of the plank bridge that was no longer there. Then Wharton, whom the tinker knew well by sight, plunged into the water, leading the way across. Bob Cherry was in the next moment, and then Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The tinker, watching, entertained a charitable hope that they would be swept away and drowned. He recognised the cheery chums of the Remove as the fellows who had handled him so severely in Surrey in the holidays.

But the sturdy juniors got easily across, though the current swept them some distance downstream before they landed. Bob Cherry was the first out, and the others quickly followed.

Vernon-Smith and Redwing, Peter Todd and Tom Brown and Squiff arrived and plunged in one after another. The icy water was not inviting; but the paper trail led to the water and was visible on the farther side, and that was enough for the Remove pack. They plunged in and swam for it.

Harry Wharton halted on the bank. He did not want to lose time, but as captain of the Form he had to keep an eye on the rest. A poor swimmer might very easily have been swept away; and in the excitement of the chase a fellow might have taken on a swim beyond his powers.

Man after man scrambled out of the

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water, and man after man arrived at the opposite bank. The tail of the pack halted there.

"Don't try it, Hazel!" called out Wharton, as Hazeldene came panting to the water's edge.

"I fancy I could do it!" called back Hazel, but not very enthusiastically.

"Stop where you are, old chap, and tell the others when they come up to go round!" shouted Wharton. "There's enough of us across to do the trick!"

"Right-ho!"

Nine fellows took up the chase from the stream, the rest of the pack giving it up at that point and walking along the bank in search of a crossing. Led by Harry Wharton, they followed the paper trail at a rapid trot, passing within a dozen yards of the clump of willows where the tinker lay hidden with his hand-cart.

Glad enough was Tinker Wilson to see them pass and vanish across the meadows. Nugent he could—and would—have knocked out ruthlessly, but he could not have handled that bunch of sturdy fellows. On the other hand, they would have handled him unmercifully had they known what had happened.

He grunted with relief when they disappeared.

Then he left his cover, took the handles of the cart again, and wheeled it away, taking a direction at right angles from the path followed by the Greyfriars fellows. For half an hour he was wheeling the hand-cart over rugged meadow and frosty grass; then he emerged into a lane and found the going easier.

And at a swinging pace the tinker wheeled on; and Tatters, silent and helpless under the canvas that hid him from sight, bit on his gag in helpless despair, while the rolling hand-cart bore him farther and farther from Greyfriars and his friends.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The End of the Run!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. ran on swiftly.

The Seven Elms meadows were left behind now, and they were following a lane that led back to the Sark at a spot a considerable distance from the village bridge which they had crossed early in the chase.

Courtfield Bridge was the next crossing, and the paper trail ran on to the bridge. On the stone bridge they had a glimpse of Nugent before he disappeared on the other side. Several times already they had glimpsed him, and each time he had been alone.

Over the bridge came the pack at a trot, and cut into the lane that led by Popper Court and its extensive grounds to Courtfield common. They were getting near home now.

"Where on earth is Tatters?" gasped Bob Cherry, as he ran by Wharton's side down the lane by the park wall of Popper Court. "Franky seems to have dropped him somewhere."

"Blessed if I make it out," said Harry. "Frank's alone now—that's a cert. Tatters must have tailed off somewhere. But—"

"That's not the game!" grunted the Bounder. "He must have taken cover or we should have seen him. If he couldn't run it out it was up to him to be caught—not to sneak off."

"That's so," said Harry. "But—I can't make it out! Tatters is a good man on a run; I don't believe he crooked up."

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"Then where is he?"

"I give that one up! Anyhow, the pack wins, if the hares don't make good, wherever he is."

"Not much of the pack left!" grinned Bob.

Harry Wharton glanced back. The long and severe run had told heavily on the pack. Only nine fellows had continued the chase from the stream in Seven Elms meadows. Of the nine four were now dropping behind and were out of the running. Wharton and Bob Cherry and the Bounder were in the lead, and close behind came Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh. But the others had dropped far in the rear at Courtfield bridge. And Hurree Jamset Ram Singh met Wharton's backward glance with a rueful and apologetic grin.

"The runfulness is too terrific for my absurd self!" he gasped. "I leave the ridiculous hares to you."

"Right-ho, old bean; plenty of us left."

And the Nabob of Bhanipur dropped behind; and a few minutes later, Johnny Bull also put the brake on. Three juniors came out on Courtfield Common from Popper Lane still going strong. Far across the common, but running slowly now, Frank Nugent could be seen. And now Herbert Vernon-Smith, in spite of his efforts and his determination to be in at the death, fell to the rear. The Bounder set his teeth angrily and forced himself on; but it was no use. He dropped behind and Wharton and Cherry alone of the pack remained in the running.

From the open common, the hare was seen to disappear into a lane that led to the road by the gates of Greyfriars. Wharton and Bob dashed down the lane. But Bob Cherry found himself running alone.

He glanced back.

"Stick to it!" panted Wharton. "I'm done."

"What-ho!"

Wharton still ran; but he knew that he was out of it. Bob Cherry's long legs still covered the ground at a great rate. He was not ten yards behind Nugent now; and the ten had dropped to three by the time the panting hare emerged from the lane into the high-road.

At the school gates a good many fellows had gathered to see the finish. Hounds who had given up early had already walked back; and some who had given up later had got in by cutting direct across country. There were a dozen Removies at the gates; and they shouted encouragement as the hare and the last hound came panting up—encouragement impartially to both.

"Go it, Nugent!"

"Put it on, Bob!"

Nugent was panting, his face set, his teeth shut. He was at the very end of his tether; but still resolute. Bob Cherry, going all out, was not a yard behind him—his outstretched hand almost touched Nugent's shoulder.

Ten yards from home—six yards—three! But a hand dropped on Nugent's shoulder from behind.

"Caught, old bean!" gasped Bob.

Nugent staggered.

"Oh crumbs! Ooooooooh!"

He reeled against Bob. A second more and he would have been home; but a miss was as good—or as bad—as a mile! Bob's sturdy arm helped the captured hare to the gates.

Nugent staggered against the stone buttress by the gateway and pumped in breath, his face streaming with perspiration. He grinned faintly at Bob.

"Blow you! You've done it."

"Only just, old bean!" gasped Bob. "You've given us a jolly good run, and no mistake! Where's Tatters?"

"Blow Tatters! We'd have pulled through but for that silly ass!" gasped Nugent. "I wasted more than five minutes over the howling chump!"

"But where—"

"I don't know, and don't want to. He cleared off and left me looking for him, the silly idiot! Oh, my hat! I'm pumped."

Hare and hound went in at the gates and hurried to the House. They lost no time getting to the changing-room, where steaming hot water and a rough towelling made them feel better. Harry Wharton was in a few minutes later and then came the Bounder—not in a good temper. Smithy did not like being left; though he was glad to hear that the hare had been caught. One by one the runners came dropping into the changing-room, till the nine who had crossed the stream at Seven Elms were gathered there. The fellows who had stopped at the stream and gone round were not likely to be in till a good deal later.

Every fellow, as he arrived, wanted to know about Tatters. But Nugent could tell them nothing, except that his companion had cleared off and left him in the lurch.

Nugent was feeling, naturally, rather sore. He had been caught when he was practically home; he had wanted only a few seconds to beat the whole pack in one of the hardest cross-country runs of the term. And in Seven Elms meadow he had wasted more than five minutes looking for Tatters. Any one of those five minutes would have been sufficient to save him from defeat. It really was too thick! Tatters was a new fellow at Greyfriars, new to the school and its ways; but the most benighted ass ought to have known better than to desert his comrade on a run. Even Billy Bunter would have known better than that.

"Blessed if I understand it," said Bob. "Tatters knew jolly well he ought to stick to you, Franky. Besides, why shouldn't he?"

"Ask me another!" grunted Nugent. "I only know that he didn't."

"I—I suppose you're sure he got safely out of the water?" asked Peter Todd, with a startled look.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob. "Franky—"

"Don't be an ass, Toddy!" snapped Nugent. "Do you think I'd have gone on and left him in the water?"

"No; but—"

"He got out before I did—several minutes before I did."

"You saw him on the bank?" asked Redwing.

"Yes, ass!"

"Well, that settles that!" said the Bounder. "Didn't you see him afterwards?"

"No! I was washed down-stream—the current's frightfully strong there after the rains. I landed a long way farther down. He called out to me that he would come along and lend me a hand out—but he didn't come! Just walked off the other way, so far as I can make out."

"But why?" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

Nugent gave an angry snort.

"What's the good of asking me why? I don't know, unless the silly owl's off his silly rocker! All I know is that he did."

"Keep its ickle temper!" grinned the Bounder.

"Well, I hung about looking for him," snapped Nugent. "More than five

(Continued on page 12.)

"Half-Time" Gossip!



"Old Ref's" at the disposal of all MAGNETITES. Keep him busy with your footer queries. The more intricate they are the better he likes 'em!

THE road to Wembley—the place where Cup Finals are played—is already strewn with the "corpses" of many clubs which have fallen by the way. But the others jog along merrily, full of hope and ambition.

In connection with Cup-ties, an interesting question reaches me from Bradford. My correspondent says that he understands that the Bradford club tried to persuade Aldershot—against whom they were drawn in the Third Round—to play at Bradford instead of at Aldershot, and he wants to know if such changes of venue are now allowed by the F.A.

The answer which I should really give to this question—having a bit of Irish in my veins—is that they are and they are not. As such a reply cannot be considered very lucid, however, I should perhaps explain what I mean. The Football Association does not lay it down as an invariable rule that a Cup-tie shall be played on the ground of the club which comes first out of the "hat." What the Football Association does say, is that:

the venue can only be changed with their consent, and that such consent will not be given if it is merely a question of a money arrangement between the two clubs concerned.

Let me quote a case from the fourth round of last season which illustrates the point. In this case, Walsall were drawn to play at home against Aston Villa. Now, they have quite a small ground at Walsall, and it was perfectly obvious that it would not be capable of holding all the people who would want to see such an attractive game.

In the circumstances the Walsall officials asked permission to play the match at Villa Park, and this permission was immediately given. I may add that the action of the Walsall people was justified. Over seventy thousand people turned up to see the match at Villa Park, whereas, I doubt if twenty thousand could have seen the game in comfort on the Walsall ground.

IN the old days—not so very long ago, either!—things were different in connection with this luck of the draw business. There was nothing to prevent a strong and rich club, drawn to play away against a poorer combination, making a monetary offer to have the venue changed.

"Come and play on our ground, instead of your own, and we will pay you so much," was an offer often made and frequently accepted.

The most amusing case I recall in this connection was a match between Sheffield United and Blackpool. These clubs were drawn to play a Cup-tie at Blackpool, but the Sheffield United officials offered the seaside club a sum of money to play the game at Bramall Lane. The offer was accepted: Blackpool took the money, played the game at Bramall Lane, and actually beat Sheffield United. The whole football world laughed over that incident, because, of course, the idea of buying the right of ground in a Cup-tie appeals to very few people as a really sporting thing to do.

In a replayed Cup-tie which I witnessed the other day, the players made what might be called a very natural mistake, which may be explained for the benefit of my readers. As the score was still level at the end of ordinary time in this replayed Cup-tie it was necessary, according to rule, to play an extra half-hour. As soon as the referee blew for "time," the whole of the players, knowing they had to go on for the extra half-hour, immediately proceeded with the business of changing ends. This, as you may or may not know, was all wrong.

When extra-time is played in a match the captains toss again for choice of ends, just as they do at the beginning of every game.

SOME little time back, I had something to say in these notes concerning substitutes being allowed for injured players. On this subject I have received an interesting suggestion from a Newcastle reader. His idea is that, instead of substitutes being allowed for injured players, the member of the opposing side who was responsible for the injury should also go off until such time as the injured man is fit to resume.

Let me confess that there is a certain amount of ingenuity about such a suggestion, and my first thought was to agree that it would be a good idea. But I soon came to the conclusion, on thinking the matter over, that there are certain "snags" associated with it. In the first place, it cannot always be said with truth, that a member of the opposing side is responsible for a serious injury to an opponent. The injured player may, himself, be wholly to blame; may meet with the injury as the result of rash play on his part.

As a matter of fact, I believe that at one time there was a regulation on the lines suggested in force in the Paris League, but it has been dropped. I inquired the reason why it was found to be unworkable, and received the following explanation:

The rule that a player responsible for an injury to an opponent should also go off the field while the opponent recovered, was much abused.

If a particular player of a side was in brilliant form an opponent would run up against him, and then feign serious injury and leave the field. As the other player had, by rule, also to go off, this meant that the innocent party were deprived of the services of their star performer.

So you see, these novel ideas are not always so good, when tried, as they appear to be in theory.

A READER from Swansea doubts the possibility of the story which was in my notes some little time back concerning a player who scored two goals in the same match without any other player touching the ball. You will remember that the centre-forward did this by kicking off immediately after the interval, banging the ball a long way forward, and being fouled in his opponent's penalty area as he ran after it, took the penalty kick himself, and scored.

My good friend of Swansea suggests that when a match is started from the centre of the field, the player who kicks off must pass the ball straight to a colleague. I admit that this is the usual course adopted, but it is by no means compulsory. So long as the player kicking off from the centre of the field plays the ball forward, he can hit it just as hard or just as gently as he likes.

A letter from S. K., of Barking, raises a throw-in point—or rather, two. He wants to know in the first place:

Whether a player throwing in the ball from touch is allowed to raise both heels or only one?

The answer is that the rule in this connection is complied with so long as the thrower of the ball has a part of both feet, on the ground. He can thus raise both heels without breaking the rule.

The other point is whether, if a player throwing in the ball stands on the line the referee should tell him before he throws it, or wait until he has thrown, and then penalise? If I were linesman in a match, and such an incident occurred, I should tell the thrower before he threw the ball that he was not in the correct position. I might add, though, that in doing this I might be told that I had done something for which I had no authority. Perhaps so. Still, the referee or the linesman see that other things—such as free kicks—are not taken until the players are in proper position, and I think it logical that the same principle should be adopted regarding the throw-in.

"OLD REF."

THE MYSTERY OF THE PAPER-CHASE!

(Continued from page 10.)

minutes—and I didn't need five seconds to get in at the finish! I'm jolly well going to punch his head when he comes in."

"Hard cheese!" said Bob.

"The hardness of the esteemed cheese is terrific," said Hurreo Janset Ram Singh. "But the mysteriousness of the esteemed Tatters' amazing proceedings is also very great."

"It beats me hollow," said Wharton in wonder. "I suppose he'll explain when he comes in."

"He can explain after I've punched his head," said Nugent. And Frank left the changing-room with a clouded brow. Nugent was the best-tempered fellow in the Remove as a rule; but any fellow might have been excused for feeling sore in the circumstances.

After changing, the Famous Five gathered in Study No. 1 for tea. Arthur Cecil Cholmondeley was a member of that study; but Tatters—whatever might have been his reason for his strange conduct on the run—had not come in yet. Many fellows had tailed in by this time, but not Tatters.

"Shall we wait tea for him?" asked Harry.

Nugent grunted.

"I'm not going to wait."

And the Famous Five had their tea. As a matter of fact they were sharp set after the run and nobody wanted to wait. Tea was going strong—and under its genial influence Nugent's clouded brow had cleared a good deal—when the study door opened.

"Oh, you've got in at last, old bean!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Yes, old fellow." It was not Tatters. It was the fat voice of William George Bunter that answered.

"Oh, you—you fat duffer!" said Harry. "I thought it was Tatters."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Seen anything of Cholmondeley, Bunter?" asked Bob.

"Cholmondeley? Hasn't he come in?" Bunter blinked round the study.

"He, he! Did you get wet, Nugent?" Frank stared at the Owl of the Remove.

"Yes, ass! But I don't see how you know anything about it. You weren't running with the pack."

"He, he, he!"

"We all got jolly wet," said Bob, "the plank was gone at Seven Elms meadows, and we had to swim for it."

"He, he, he!"

"Well, where does the cackle come in fathead?" asked Johnny Bull.

"He, he, he! You were rather asses to swim it," said Bunter; "it's a bit deep for you men. As much as I could do, in fact."

"Oh, my hat!"

"You shouldn't have swam it," said Bunter, shaking his head. "It was a bit risky for fellows like you. You must have got jolly wet, though! He, he, he! Serve you jolly well right. You can't say I didn't warn you."

"Wha-a-at!"

"Your own fault," said Bunter, blinking at the astonished juniors. "You left me out—deliberately left me out. I offered to run as hare—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you fellows! You left me out—you can't deny that! I'd told you I'd make you sit up! He, he, he! Serve you jolly well right!"

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"Is the fat idiot wandering in his mind?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Has he any esteemed mind to wander in?" queried Hurreo Singh.

"Oh, really, Inky!"

"Well, what do you mean, Fatty?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Oh, nothing! I'm not telling you anything," said Bunter. "I may know how that plank got shifted, and I may not. That's telling."

The Famous Five jumped.

"Why, you fat scoundrel!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove. "Mean to say that you shifted that plank?"

"He, he, he!"

"What rot!" said Johnny Bull. "He couldn't! Blessed if I know how that plank got shifted, but Bunter couldn't have done it. Too jolly heavy for that fat slacker to shift."

"You born idiot! What do you mean, then?" demanded Wharton.

Bunter chuckled.

"You can't say I didn't warn you," he said. "I told you I'd make you sit up. Of course, I never supposed that ass Nugent, and that other ass Tatters would swim it. I thought they'd go round."

"Then you did cut across to Seven Elms and shift that plank?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"He, he, he!"

"You—you—you fat villain!" exclaimed Wharton. "You've butted into a Form run, and tried to muck it up! Why, I—I—I—I'll—"

"He, he, he! Did the hares get caught?" grinned Bunter.

"Nugent did!"

"I told you so! You wanted a man who could really run," said Bunter. "Next time, you may give a really good man a chance. What?"

Wharton rose to his feet.

"Look here, you burbling idiot! This is serious, though you don't seem to understand it. If you've interfered with a Form run—"

"He, he, he!"

"Hand me that fives bat, Franky."

"Oh, I—I say, you fellows, I—I never shifted that plank!" exclaimed Billy Bunter in alarm. "I say, I wasn't there! I never knew you were going Seven Elms way, and I never thought of cutting across and stopping you at the meadows! I haven't been out of gates at all. I—I've been doing lines in my study all the afternoon. I—I say—yaroooh!"

Whack!

The fives bat caught William George Bunter as he leaped for the passage. Wharton had time for only one lick. But to judge by the fearful yell that floated back, Bunter found that one lick enough—or more than enough.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Weary Walkers!

"MY dear Prout!"

"My dear Quelch!" Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, spoke in a slightly acid tone. The tone would have been more than slightly acid, had not Mr. Quelch been exercising considerable self-control.

Mr. Prout's deep, fruity voice had a touch of impatience in it. In fact, both the gentlemen were a little irritated.

On that fine, frosty half-holiday—which was a holiday for masters as well as boys at Greyfriars—Quelch and Prout had taken a little walk abroad.

Quelch, who was a thin, angular gentleman, was a good walker. Prout,

who was extremely convex in form, believed that he was a good walker, but had, as a matter of fact, too much weight to carry with comfort.

Quelch had to moderate his pace to accommodate himself to the tortoise-like progress of Prout. But what Prout's plump legs lacked in activity, was made up by the activity of his plump chin. Prout's legs might tire, but his chin never tired.

A dozen times, at least, since he had walked out of the gates of the school that afternoon, Quelch had regretted that he had hooked on to the Fifth Form master for a walk.

Really, he told himself twelve times at least, he might have known better. He knew Prout! He had walked with Prout before! It was always the same.

Prout was slow—he was portly and pompous—he was opinionated—he was, in fact, a bore. Still, Mr. Quelch wanted a walk, and he did not want to walk all on his lonesome own.

Prout, too, had rather regretted joining up with the Remove master. He knew Quelch! He had walked with Quelch before! It was always the same!

Quelch was not slow enough—he was thin and acid—he was opinionated—he was, in fact, a bore! Still, Mr. Prout wanted a walk, and he did not want to walk on his lonesome own!

Each of the two masters was, in fact, thinking of the other on much the same lines!

Quelch would not have minded so much if Prout had given him a fair show in the conversation, and not kept on interrupting him with observations lacking in interest, lacking in intelligence, and, indeed, practically asinine.

Prout, for his part, would not have minded so much if Quelch had given him a fair show in the conversation, and not kept on interrupting him with observations lacking in interest, lacking in intelligence, and, indeed, practically asinine!

Quelch felt that, in company with a really good and well-informed talker, Prout might have shut up a little more.

Prout felt that, in company with a brilliant conversationalist, Quelch might have shut up a little more!

It was a difference in the point of view that was hardly to be reconciled. Still, matters went fairly well, till the time came to turn back from the walk.

Quelch wondered how a man could be such a bore without knowing it.

Prout wondered how a man could be such a bore without knowing it!

But neither of them wondered aloud. Indeed, it would have caused mutual surprise had they compared notes on this subject.

But when they came to turn homeward, there was no doubt that Quelch had cause for complaint. They were five miles from the school. Quelch was good for five miles—or ten for that matter. Prout had slowed down to the pace of a very aged and fatigued snail.

Quelch had wondered a little how on earth Prout was going to get home at all. But Prout had his own ideas about that. His idea was to walk into the village of Seven Elms, and take the train back to Friardale.

Quelch would have preferred to walk, but he would not have preferred to walk at the pace of a fatigued snail, so he assented with alacrity to the suggestion of the train back.

Then Prout took a short cut to the village.

From the very start Quelch had his doubts about that short cut.

To tell the truth, his opinion of Prout's intelligence was not high.

By the road they were on it was a mile to the station. A mile was nothing to Quelch.

Prout, who had done five or more did not want another mile. By the short cut it was less than half a mile.

That is to say, it was less than half a mile in theory. In practice it worked out differently—like so many short cuts.

A fieldpath, a footpath through a wood, a track by a damp meadow, and a muddy lane, amounted to considerably more than half a mile; and so far from the station being reached, it was not even in sight—and Quelch had a secret but bitter suspicion that they were farther from it instead of nearer.

Several times Quelch had hinted that the way should be inquired of local inhabitants.

minute or two, he would sight some familiar landmark.

Familiar landmarks, however, were conspicuous by their absence. Prout blinked round in vain in search of one.

"My dear Prout!" Quelch's manners were unexceptionable, but he simply could not help acid creeping into his tone.

"My dear Quelch!" replied Prout.

"The fact is, Prout—"

"Ah! Here we are!" said Prout, in a tone of jovial confidence. "This way, Quelch! I was sure of it!"

Quelch did not stir.

He strongly suspected that Prout was picking on that footpath merely in the hope that it led to Seven Elms, simply because he would not admit that he was all at sea. The tone of jovial confidence

"By trackless pass and untrodden canyon—" said Prout.

A man who had never met Prout before might have been interested in his grizzly bears, his trackless passes, and his untrodden canyons. But every member of the Greyfriars staff had heard all about these, not once, but many times. Mr. Quelch really felt that he would shriek if Prout got on to grizzly bears, trackless passes, and untrodden canyons again.

"Mr. Prout, let us make sure of our route," interrupted Quelch. "The fact is, my dear fellow, I am convinced that that path leads, not towards Seven Elms, but directly away from it."

"My dear Quelch! A man who has blazed trails through the loneliest passes of the Rocky Mountains—"

"There is a building," said Mr. Quelch. "Let us knock at the door, and make an inquiry."

Prout snorted.

Mr. Quelch pointed to a cottage in the corner of the big field. It was a very lonely cottage, as lonely as any in the country. It stood on the edge of a narrow lane. It had a deserted look. Still, Mr. Quelch supposed that it must have an inhabitant—at least, he hoped so.

"I assure you, Quelch—" said Prout.

"Nevertheless, let us inquire!" said Quelch, and, without waiting for con-



Nugent was a few yards from home when a hand dropped on his shoulder. "Caught, old bean!" gasped Cherry. Another second and Nugent would have been home.

Prout declined to take such hints. He knew the way—he always knew ways, and everything else. Quelch was under his guidance in this matter—and Prout was the last man in the world to admit that he was not an infallible guide.

When at last they came to branching footpaths in a huge meadow, that was new country to Mr. Quelch—and apparently to Prout also—they stopped.

Prout was still obstinately determined not to admit that he had missed, or mistaken, the route. He knew by this time that Quelch suspected him of it, which, of course, made him more obstinate. Nothing would have induced him to admit that he had been wandering at random for some considerable time. He did not even admit it to himself. He was sure that, in the next

did not delude Mr. Quelch in the very least.

"Prout," said the Remove master firmly, "I think we had better inquire the way."

"My dear Quelch," said the Fifth Form master, "I know this country like a book! I may add that I have never lost my way in my life. In my youth—"

Quelch suppressed a groan. If Prout, like that tiresome old gentleman in the Iliad, was going to get on to the topic of his youth, Quelch felt that it was more than a man could be expected to bear. And Prout was!

"In my youth," said Prout, "I was, as you know, a hunter of big game! I have tracked grizzly bears in the Rocky Mountains, Quelch."

"Mr. Prout—"

sent, he whisked away towards the cottage. Prout, in deep annoyance, followed on. They reached the cottage, and Mr. Quelch knocked at the door. The sound of the knock echoed inside the solitary building, but there came no other reply. The Remove master knocked again, with the same result.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips. Prout smiled. Obviously, there was no one in the cottage to answer Mr. Quelch's intended inquiry.

"This is most annoying!" said the Remove master.

"I hardly see it, Quelch. As I am perfectly sure of the way—"

"I will knock again."

"Really, my dear Quelch—"

Knock, knock, knock!

Quelch not only knocked again, but

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THE MYSTERY OF THE PAPER-CHASE.

(Continued from page 13.)

he knocked again and again. His knocking rang through the cottage, and rang far and wide around the cottage. Prout waited with a sarcastic smile.

Knock, knock, knock!

There was a sound of wheels, and of tramping footsteps in the lane. A gruff and surly voice broke on the ears of the two masters.

"Burn my body and boots! What d'ye want 'ere? You let that blooming door alone, old covey! You 'ear me?"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER. Unpleasant!

TINKER WILSON scowled.

"Jest chuck it," he snapped, "and 'ook it!"

Mr. Quelch spun round from the door of the cottage. Mr. Prout revolved more slowly on his axis. Both the Greyfriars masters looked sharply at the roughly-dressed, surly-looking man who spoke.

Form masters at a school like Greyfriars were accustomed to being addressed with respect. There was no vestige of respect in the tinker's tone or manner. He scowled angrily and disrespectfully at the two gentlemen, evidently annoyed to find them there.

"Sir!" said Prout, in his fruity voice.

"Chuck it, old covey!" said the tinker. "What you banging at a man's door for? What you want? That's wot I'm asking you!"

Mr. Quelch gave him a steely look.

"Is this your cottage, my man?" he asked icily.

"It ain't nobody else's, and chance it!" grunted Tinker Wilson. "And I ain't looking for company, and you can lay to that!"

"I was knocking at your door——" began Mr. Quelch stiffly.

"I 'eard you," said the tinker. "I ain't deaf! Nor yet I ain't silly, old covey!" The tinker's manner was most unpleasant.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"It was my intention to inquire my route," he said. "There is no harm done, my good man."

"Who said there was?" snapped the tinker. "But you needn't bang at a man's door like that, all the same, old covey. 'Ook it!"

The Remove master coloured with vexation. Mr. Prout grow purple. The two gentlemen were accustomed to respect. They hardly knew how to deal with a ruffian like this.

Tinker Wilson pushed his hand-cart past them, into the yard behind the cottage. Then he came back to the front door. He eyed the two gentlemen surlily under his beetling brows.

"My good man——" boomed Prout.

"Not so much of your good man, old covey!" said Tinker Wilson. "If you ain't got any business 'ere, 'ook it!"

"Come, Quelch!" said Mr. Prout, breathing heavily. "Come! I assure you that I have no doubt of the way to——"

"I see no reason why this man should not give us directions," said Mr. Quelch. "My good man, we desire to reach Seven Elms Railway Station——"

"Well, you won't find it in this 'ere field!" said the tinker rudely. "You're a good milo from it!"

"Nonsense!" said Prout.

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"P'raps you know best, old fatty!" said the tinker. "If you does, it ain't no good asking me. 'Ook it!"

"What—what?" gasped Mr. Prout. "Fellow!" It was long since Mr. Prout had seen his knees; but it was not for this disreputable ruffian to address him as "old fatty." Prout's purple visage became more deeply empurpled. His eyes gleamed, as they had gleamed of old when he was tracking the elusive grizzly on the Rocky Mountains.

"Feller yourself!" retorted Tinker Wilson.

"You impudent rascal!" exclaimed Mr. Prout. "By Jove! I have a great mind to lay my walking-stick round your shoulders!"

The tinker stared at him, and burst into a gruff laugh.

"If I 'it you, old covey, you'll be a 'orspital case!" he said. "You keep your stick to yourself, and shut your mouth, and 'ook it! I come in tired arter a day's 'ard work, I 'ave, and I ain't standing 'ere jawin' to an old fool, I ain't! 'Ook it!"

"Come, Prout!" said Mr. Quelch, though his gimlet eyes gleamed at the ruffian. Dearly Mr. Quelch would have liked to lay his stick round the insolent hooligan's shoulders. But it was impossible, of course, for a dignified gentleman like Henry Samuel Quelch to get mixed up in such a shindy. Moreover, the sinewy ruffian looked as if he could have dealt with both the middle-aged gentleman without a great deal of difficulty.

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Prout. "Upon my soul! Such insolence——"

"It is useless to bandy words with such a character, sir," said Mr. Quelch. "Let us go."

"And the sooner the better!" grunted Tinker Wilson, eyeing them evilly. The tinker was thinking to himself that had he met these two old gents in as lonely a spot elsewhere, he would have made a good thing of it. Knocking them down and going through their pockets would have been a trifle to the tinker. But so near his own residence—temporary as it was—he dared not. When he was on the road, and could disappear from the scene with promptness and dispatch, it was a different matter.

But Tinker Wilson was not on the road at present. He had quite other business in Kent than his usual pilfering, thieving, and tinkering. So he reluctantly allowed this golden opportunity to pass, though it was impossible for him to restrain the surly, savage insolence of his nature.

Mr. Quelch stepped away from the cottage, into the lane by which the tinker had arrived. Mr. Prout rolled after him more slowly, casting an inimical glance at the tinker as he went. Quelch was annoyed, but Mr. Prout was deeply incensed. At Greyfriars, a whole senior Form hung on his words, and regarded him with awe and veneration; at least, he was persuaded that they did. In Common-room, a numerous staff listened with respect to his dominating voice, and Mr. Prout did not, of course, know that on such occasions they were simply waiting for him to leave off talking. And this fellow—this itinerant nondescript, this hooligan, stared at him jeeringly, and called him "old fatty." It needed all Prout's self-restraint to keep his stick away from Tinker Wilson's shoulders.

"I have great mind——" breathed Prout.

"Come!" said Quelch.

"Oh, 'ook it, old covey!" said the tinker. "Jest shut up your 'ead and

'ook it! Jest roll, Fat Jack of the Bonehouse."

Prout gurgled.

"What? What did you call me, you insolent knave?"

"Fat Jack of the Bonehouse," answered the tinker. Obviously this ruffian did not know that he was addressing a Public School master—a Greyfriars master—a Master of Arts of Oxford—a man of tremendous and, indeed, unlimited importance. He spoke to Prout as if Prout was an ordinary human being. Prout gasped.

"Fellow, if you knew whom you were addressing——" he articulated.

"I dessay I could guess," said the tinker. "I know a pork butcher when I see one, old covey."

"A—a pi-pip-pork butcher!" gurgled Prout. It was the last straw. If this uneducated, uncultured, ill-mannered ruffian did not know a Public school master, a Master of Arts, when he saw one, at least he must have known that Prout was not a pork butcher. Prout made a stride towards him with uplifted walking-stick.

Mr. Quelch caught him by the arm just in time.

"My dear Prout——" He dragged the Fifth Form master away.

"Release my arm, Quelch! I intend to chastise that ruffian's insolence!" gasped Prout.

"Come, come, come!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

The tinker, with an extremely ugly expression on his stubbly face, made a movement towards them. His gleaming eyes under beetling brows, his jutting chin and savage jaw, rather impressed Prout, and he allowed the Remove master to draw him into the road. It dawned on Prout that one punch from the ruffian's hefty arm would have made him, as the rascal had expressed it, a "hospital" case.

"Come!" repeated Quelch.

Mr. Prout submitted, and rolled off down the lane with the Remove master, a jeering snort from the tinker following.

The two masters walked on hastily, in uncomfortable silence. Prout was still purple. Mr. Quelch's lips were tightly compressed. Quelch wished now that he had not stopped at that lonely cottage to inquire the way, though he could not, of course, have foreseen anything like this unpleasant encounter. The bullying insolence of the ruffian rankled very deeply in his breast. Still it was one of those things that could not be helped, and Mr. Quelch was now only desirous of getting away from the disagreeable neighbourhood. His long legs whisked, and Prout was hard put to it to keep pace.

"Not so fast, Quelch, not so fast!" gasped Prout at last. "Really, there is no such hurry. We are a very short distance from Seven Elms—of that I am convinced."

"If you really have the slightest idea of the route, Prout——" Quelch's voice was quite acid now.

"I have not the slightest doubt of it!" said Prout, with dignity. "This way, Quelch."

He rolled on, and Mr. Quelch whisked after him—doubtful, but seeing nothing else to be done. Twice Mr. Prout turned corners—and each time Quelch had a bitter conviction that he was going blind—morely hoping that they would arrive somewhere. Quelch was determined, at least, to inquire the way of the first wayfarer they passed. But in

that lonely countryside there seemed few wayfarers.

Suddenly, to his great relief, Mr. Quelch spotted a signpost.

"Thank goodness!" he ejaculated. "We can now ascertain—"

"Quite unnecessary, my dear Quelch," panted Prout. "Quite! However, to satisfy you, we will look."

They halted under the signpost. The direction in which they were proceeding was indicated: "Courtfield, six miles."

"Oh!" said Prout.

There was fortunately another arm to the sign. It pointed in the direction from which they had been coming, and announced "Seven Elms, one mile."

Quelch gave Prout one look. They had been walking towards Courtfield, six miles off, with their backs to Seven Elms. One look was enough. Then Quelch spun round and started back. Prout rolled after him, silent. For once, Mr. Prout had nothing to say.

It was not until they were in sight of Seven Elms railway station that Prout broke the silence.

"These—these winding lanes are—are a little confusing!" he said.

"Quite!" said Quelch.

And they did not talk at all in the train home.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Missing!

"**C**HOLMONDELEY!"

Capper, the master of the Fourth, was taking the roll.

Mr. Capper waited a second for the usual "adsum," but it did not come. He peered in the direction of the Remove, and repeated the name.

"Cholmondeley!"

But there was no answer, and Cholmondeley was marked absent.

Every other man in the Remove answered to his name. The latest and weariest straggler had come in some time since; only Tatters was still absent. And his absence was beginning to puzzle the chums of the Remove.

They had been puzzled by his clearing off, as Nugent described it, during the run. They had intended to ask him for an explanation as soon as he came in. But they were still more puzzled by his not coming in.

When he missed roll-call, the Famous Five began to wonder what on earth could have happened to him. There was a thoughtful shade on Harry Wharton's face as the chums left Hall.

"What can be keeping Tatters out, you men?" he asked.

"Ask me another," said Bob.

"Well, nothing can have happened to him, if that's what you're thinking," said Nugent. "He walked off on his own accord."

"I can't see any reason why he doesn't come in if he's all right," said the captain of the Remove.

"Well, he's all right! He got out of the water all serene, if that's what you mean," said Nugent. "I tell you I saw him on the bank, and he called to me."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Yes, but—"

"Well, what?" asked Frank. Nugent was still a little "edge-wise" over poor Tatters having let him down in the run, as he regarded it.

"Well, if he doesn't trot in soon, I shall think something's happened," said Harry. "It was jolly queer his clearing off like that—and even if he's lost his way, being a new man here, he's got

a tongue in his head to ask it. I can't help thinking—"

Bob Cherry whistled.

"Tinker Wilson!" he ejaculated.

"Well, we know that brute was in this neighbourhood a week ago," said Harry. "We saw him on the first day of term, hanging about Courtfield common. You fellows remember?"

"The rememberfulness is terrific."

"That tinker was keen to get him back when he ran away from him before," said Harry. "Twice, at least, he bagged Tatters after he'd got away."

"But things are different now," said Johnny Bull, shaking his head. "Tatters was just a tinker's boy then, not even knowing his own name. But since his grandfather found him, and took him home, the tinker can't even pretend to have a claim on him. If he bags him now, it's legally kidnapping, and he could be sent to chokey for it. And you can bet that that fiery old bean, Sir George Cholmondeley, would make an example of him if he laid hands on his grandson."

"I know!" said Harry, with a nod. "I know—even if Tinker Wilson got

jump when we found him here. Tinker Wilson can't have known anything about old Sir George Cholmondeley's arrangements."

"I don't see how he could," confessed Wharton. "But it was a very queer coincidence the tinker being about here when Tatters was coming here. I suppose he would hardly dare to take the kid away if he saw him, but he may have pitched into him. You know what a savage brute he is."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob.

There was dismay in the faces of the Co. at that suggestion. Well they knew the brutal nature of Tinker Wilson, ruffian and thief and footpad; and well they knew how he had ill-used Tatters when the waif was at his mercy. The thought that Tatters might have fallen in with him and fallen a victim to his brutal violence was very disturbing.

"You—you think—" faltered Nugent.

"I know the brute would handle him if he had a chance," said Harry, "and Tatters would put up a fight. He may have been knocked out—he mayn't be able to get home."

"Oh crikey!"

"You never saw anything of the Tinker, Frank?"

Nugent shook his head.

"Nothing," he answered. "Tatters cleared off of his own accord, so far as I can make out. If he met Tinker Wilson, it must have been later. I suppose I should have seen the man if he had been in Seven Elms meadows."

"I suppose so."

"Besides, Tatters couldn't have been knocked out to the extent of not being able to get home, without a shindy," said Frank. "I should have heard him if I hadn't seen him."

"Well, that's so, certainly," said Harry. "Tatters would have yelled, I should imagine."

"It's all rot!" said Nugent. "If it was a thrashing I should have heard Tatters and seen him afterwards. It wasn't that. If the tinker handled him at all he must have bagged him and got him away."

"Looks like it," said Bob. "But even if he wants the kid, how could he take the risk, now the kid's people are known—rich and influential people, too. He couldn't tramp the road with the kid as he used to. He would have to keep him hidden somewhere permanently. And that—"

"That's impossible!" said Johnny Bull.

"Well, I wish he'd come in!" said Harry. "If he doesn't get in after prep I think I'd better go to Quelch."

The chums of the Remove went up to their studies to prep.

After prep, when they came down to the Rag, they found that Arthur Cecil Cholmondeley had not yet returned to Greyfriars.

A good many fellows, by this time, were wondering what could possibly have become of him. That something must have happened to the new junior was fairly certain by this time, whether Tinker Wilson had a hand in it or not. Only a mischance of some sort could have kept a Remove fellow out of gates so late.

Wingate of the Sixth looked into the Rag.

"Wharton here?"

"Here," said Harry.

"Cholmondeley hasn't come in," said the Greyfriars captain. "He was with you in the paper-chase to-day. Know anything about it?"

"I can't imagine what's become of him."

**DON'T WEAR
A
LONG FACE!**

Smile at this amusing joke, for which Victor Osborne, of Bagborough, near Taunton, Somerset, has been awarded A TOPPING POCKET KNIFE!



First Small Boy: "I wonder what keeps the moon from falling?"

Second Small Boy: "I 'spects it must be the beams!"

Now turn to page 7, then
THINK AWHILE—RAISE A SMILE,
and you may win a topping prize!

hold of him he could never make him a tinker's boy again, that's impossible. He couldn't possibly keep him. I can't make out why he ever wanted to keep the kid against his will—but we know he did! I suppose he wouldn't dare to touch him, now he's taken up by his grandfather, and is a Greyfriars man. But—why doesn't he come in?"

That was a question to which no member of the Co. could find an answer. They could only shake their puzzled heads and give it up.

Harry Wharton's face was troubled. "If the tinker is still hanging about here he may have come on Tatters," he said. "He turned up here when we came back to school; we saw him. It looks as if he was after the kid."

"But he couldn't know that Tatters was coming to Greyfriars," said Nugent. "We never knew; it made us

"Well, Mr. Quelch wants to know. Go to his study."

"Right-ho!"

Wharton and Nugent proceeded to the Remove master's study. They found Mr. Quelch looking rather grim. Perhaps he had not quite recovered yet from his walk with Prout. Undoubtedly he was annoyed by a member of his Form staying so late out of gates.

"Where is Cholmondeley, Wharton?" asked Mr. Quelch sharply.

Really, Mr. Quelch's manner implied that he expected the head boy of his Form to produce any Remove man on demand, like a conjurer producing a rabbit out of a hat.

"I don't know, sir," answered Wharton.

"He was with you in the paper-chase to-day," said Mr. Quelch.

"That is so, sir."

"You know where he left you, I presume?"

"He was a hare, sir, with Nugent."

"Then Nugent knows, I presume?" rapped Mr. Quelch.

Frank Nugent explained how Tatters had disappeared at Seven Elms meadows. Mr. Quelch listened with a frowning face.

"It is unusual for a—a—a hare, as you term it, to leave his companion while engaged in a paper-chase, is it not?" asked the Form master.

"Yes, rather, sir! I couldn't make it out!"

"You do not know where he went?"

"No, sir."

"This is very extraordinary!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "I fear that some accident may have happened to the boy. His absence is unaccountable otherwise." Mr. Quelch knitted his brows. "Have you any suggestion to offer?"

"Yes, sir," said Harry. "I can't help thinking that Tinker Wilson may have had something to do with it."

Mr. Quelch stared.

"Tinker Wilson! Who is Tinker Wilson, Wharton?"

"The tinker that Tatters—I mean, Cholmondeley, was with before he found his grandfather, sir."

"Oh! Yes—yes, I remember the name. I think I have heard it before; Cholmondeley mentioned it to me. But he has no connection with this—this itinerant person, Wharton, now that he has been reclaimed by his relations and sent to school. The man can have no further interest in him, I suppose."

"He was seen about here last week, sir—"

"Such a person probably travels all over the country," said Mr. Quelch. "Have you any reason to suppose that this—this tinker, feels any further interest in Cholmondeley, now that the boy is with his own people?"

"I know he felt very bitter towards Tatters, sir, and would be pretty certain to pitch into him, if he found him in a lonely place."

Mr. Quelch pursed his lips.

"Possibly—possibly, though it seems to me improbable that even a vicious man would recklessly break the law," he said. "He must know that he would be prosecuted for an assault on a Greyfriars boy. You do not suppose that he may have injured the boy so severely that Cholmondeley cannot return to the school?"

Wharton did not answer that. The fear was in his mind, but he could not help realising how unlikely it was.

"He may have taken him away again, sir," he said.

Mr. Quelch stared.

"He could not expect to keep a Grey-

friars boy with him, Wharton, now that Cholmondeley's circumstances are so changed. Do you mean that Cholmondeley may have gone willingly back to his old life?"

"Oh, no, sir! I'm sure not!"

"Did you see anything of this tinker, Nugent?"

"No, sir."

"Have you any reason to suppose that he was at hand when Cholmondeley left you?"

"No, sir."

"Have you seen him in this neighbourhood since last week?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Quelch made an impatient gesture.

"Then I see no reason to connect this man Wilson with Cholmondeley's absence. It is almost inconceivable that he would dare to kidnap a Greyfriars boy. Neither do I see any motive he can have had."

"Only Tatters hasn't come in, sir!" said Harry.

"No doubt he will come in later. It is very perplexing, but wild and unfounded suggestions are of no use," said Mr. Quelch, and with that he dismissed the two juniors.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Unknown!

TATTERS panted for breath.

He stared round him in the glimmer of a dirty oil lamp.

The early winter dusk had fallen. The room in which Tatters found himself was a brick-floored kitchen, with sloping roof. There was one small window, and it was covered with sacking carefully nailed down. The door was bolted and barred.

Where he was Tatters had not the faintest idea. It seemed to him that hours and hours had passed while he lay under the canvas in the hand-cart, trundled along over ruddy roads.

Again and again Tatters had struggled to rid himself of the gag and to cry out for help. But Tinker Wilson had been too careful for that. No sound had come from the hapless schoolboy in the hand-cart, as the tinker trundled it along. Probably many people had passed it on the roads and lanes—Tatters had heard rolling wheels, several times; and once the honking of a car. But there was nothing in the hand-cart to excite suspicion, to a casual eye. Tatters, trussed like a turkey, lay in the bottom of the cart, carefully covered from view by the folds of the tattered canvas tent. Many glances might have fallen on the tinker and his cart; but certainly no one would have been likely to suspect that the frowsy heap of canvas covered a kidnapped schoolboy.

When the cart had halted at last, Tatters, silent himself, had heard the sound of voices close at hand. Through the canvas he heard them, muffled and faint; yet one of the voices seemed familiar to him. It seemed to him that it was the sharp, tart voice of Mr. Quelch, his own Form master, that he heard; and there was a wild hope in his breast that the Remove master had found him. But the voices died away; and the hope died away also.

The hand-cart trundled again, this time into a building. Then the canvas was dragged off, and Tatters blinked in the light.

Tinker Wilson grasped him, and jerked him bodily out of the cart. He removed the gag from the boy's mouth. Tatters panted, and licked his dry lips, numbed by the gag. There was fear in his eyes, as they fixed on the stubbly

face of Tinker Wilson. Tatters was no coward; but his heart was like lead, when he found himself in the hands of his old tyrant again. And the grim, sardonic grin on Wilson's face was not reassuring.

The tinker sat at a bench, and cut bread-and-cheese, and poured out beer from a bottle. Tatters, his limbs still bound, leaned on the wall, and watched him in silence.

"Well, I got you agin, Tatters!" said Tinker Wilson, wiping his stubbly mouth after a deep draught of beer.

Tatters made no answer. It was only too evident that his old enemy had "got" him.

"Precious smart we are now, ain't we?" jeered the tinker. "Public school bloke, and heir to a blooming baronet, what? 'Igh and mighty these days, and nothing to say to an old friend."

"You can't keep me!" said Tatters. "You can't take me on the road again. My grandfather will send you to prison for this."

"Who's going to tell 'im?" grinned the tinker.

"You think I shan't be looked for?" exclaimed Tatters. "I'm not the ragged kid you used to bully and beat, now, tinker. If I don't go back to my school soon, I shall be searched for. The police will be looking for you. You think you can make me push that barrer like I used? Why, we'll be found before midday to-morrow, and they'll take me away from you again."

The tinker laughed hoarsely.

"You think I've took you back to be a tinker's boy again?" he asked. "You young fool, you! Think I don't know you'd be took away from me?"

Tatters stared.

"Then it ain't that?" he asked.

"'Course it ain't, you young idjit."

"Then what have you took me for?" demanded Tatters. "If you know you can't keep me, what 'ave you took me for, Tinker?"

"Mebbe there's somebody else that can keep you!" grinned the tinker. "Mebbe there's somebody that will see that you don't go back to your nobby noo school, or to Cholmondeley Castle, neither. Mebbe there's a safe place got all ready for you, 'undreds of miles from this 'ere."

"Gammon!" said Tatters. "Who'd do it?"

But he stared hard at the tinker, with a sinking heart. It was impossible, as he knew, for the ruffian to force him back into his old life as a tinker's boy. When the law was set in motion, the tinker would be run down in a very short time; and the boy taken away from him. But if that was not the tinker's intention, why had he risked severe punishment by seizing him? It came into Tatters' mind that there was someone else behind this; though who, and why he could not begin to imagine.

"You won't never know that," said the tinker. "But he'll do it all right, and you can lay to that. You're in somebody's way, you are; and you got to be kep' out of it. Not that I'd tell you even that much, blow you; only you'll know that much when the car comes for you."

"The car!" repeated Tatters.

"Think I'm going to trundle you 'undreds of miles in a hand-cart?" jeered the tinker. "I'd be stopped afore I'd done fifty. This 'ere place was got ready for you, and I been looking for a chance to get 'old of you. Now I got 'old of you. But you ain't stopping 'ere—not more'n five miles from the school! No blooming fear! You're going to a safe place, Tatters."

Tatters only stared at him, his heart

like lead. He knew that it must be so. This place—some lonely cottage—had evidently been prepared for this; and it must have cost money. Tinker Wilson, he knew, was often in possession of money, from some unknown source. But the tinker's money always went the same way, on gambling and drink; and often he was reduced to petty pilfering, and even to labouring at his trade, to provide for the passing hour. That the tinker himself had spent a sum of money on this kidnaping, was impossible. The man behind the scenes, whoever and whatever he was, had provided the money. And that unknown man was coming in a car, to take Tatters away hundreds of miles, to a "safe place." He was to be hidden in this lonely cottage till the tinker could send word to his employer that he had succeeded; that was all.

"But who—who—why—" breathed Tatters.

"Don't you ask any questions, and you won't get no lies told you," grinned the tinker. "You're for it, you are; and that's enough for you. You done with your noo school, like you done with the tinker's trade. There ain't another cottage within a mile of this 'ere—think you'll be found, while I'm gone to telephone to the gov'nor?"

The ruffian chuckled. "I'm goin' to leave you safe, Tatters! You can lay to that! I got to walk miles to phone to the gov'nor! But when he gets the tip, you bet he will be along in his car pretty quick. You'll 'ear him about midnight, I reckon. You'll stop 'ere till then."

"Who is he, tinker?" faltered Tatters. "How am I in somebody's way, tinker?"

"You young limb!" grunted the tinker. "What you fancy I kep' you for years along of me for, when I hated the sight of your long face? Ain't you got sense enough to know that I was keeping you out of the gov'nor's way? Not that I'd tell you, only you got to know about the gov'nor now—seeing that he's taking you in 'and himself. Don't you fancy you'll ever see your noo school ag'in. You won't! Nor yet Cholmondeley Castle! You can lay to that! And where you're going, I dessay you'll be glad if you could get on the road again with Tinker Wilson."

Tatters leaned on the wall, breathing hard. The tinker, evidently in a state of satisfaction at his success, finished his meal, and rose from the bench.

He picked up the boy as if Tatters had been an infant, and carried him into an inner room. From this room, a rickety staircase ascended to a small upper room. The tinker struck a match and lighted a candle.

The candle-light glimmered on a bare floor, a rough bed, and a window covered with nailed sacking. The kidnapped schoolboy was flung on to the bed, and the tinker fastened him there.

Then the gag was replaced in his mouth, and secured with cruel care. Tinker Wilson grinned down at him.

"You're safe now, till the gov'nor comes!" he remarked. "He won't be more'n a few hours—you bet he's ready when he gets word I've got you. You can lay to that, Tatters. You'll be 'arf across the next county by morning. Mebbe you'll wish you'd stayed with Tinker Wilson arter all, you young limb."

The tinker blew out the candle, left the room and locked the door after him, and Tatters heard him tramping down the rickety stair. Then there was a sound below of a door slamming, and the click of a key in a lock. Tinker Wilson was gone.

Tatters remained alone, in deep silence and darkness, his eyes staring into the gloom. Helpless to stir a limb, helpless to utter a sound, the hapless waif could only lie there, with aching limbs, and wait—wait till his unknown enemy arrived with the car, to take him

Smithy; and even the Bounder would have hesitated to stay out till this hour. Tatters, the juniors were certain, would have come back at call-over at the latest, had he been able to come back. Something had happened to Tatters—and the chums could not help suspecting that his old enemy, Tinker Wilson, had a hand in it somehow. True, it was a week or more since they had seen the ruffian hanging about Court-field Common; equally true, there seemed no grounds for supposing that the tinker had any reason for taking Tatters away, now that it was beyond doubt that he could not possibly turn him into a tinker's boy again. But something had happened; and the evil face of the tinker was in all their minds.

Billy Bunter blinked in at the study doorway. He had seen the chums of the Remove leave the Rag, and trailed them to Study No. 1. Bunter, of course, supposed that this meant a



Having secured Tatters to the bed and replaced the gag in his mouth, the tinker grinned with satisfaction. "You're safe now till the gov'nor comes," he said. "You'll be 'arf across the next county by morning."

away, far beyond the ken of his friends—far beyond the hope of rescue. In utter misery and despair the unhappy boy lay and waited in the darkness.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

What Bunter Knew!

"I SAY, you fellows!"
 "Oh, cheese it, Bunter!"
 "But I say—"
 "Buzz off, you fat frog!"

roared Bob Cherry. The Famous Five of the Remove were in no mood for Billy Bunter. They were deeply worried.

It was turned nine o'clock now! In half an hour more, it was bed-time for the Remove. And Tatters had not come in.

That something must have happened to the waif was a certainty now. He was no reckless breaker of bounds like

study supper. That the juniors had retired to the study to discuss the strange absence of Tatters, naturally, did not occur to his fat brain. Bunter had noticed that Cholmondeley did not answer to his name at call-over; but he had not given him a thought since. Bunter's fat thoughts were fixed on far more important matters.

Supper in Hall, or supper in a study—that was the question! Supper in Hall did not appeal to Bunter, if there was supper going in a study. So he blinked into No. 1 in search of the supper.

No sign of supper was to be seen. Five troubled faces met Bunter's view—that was all. Why they were troubled, Bunter could not guess—unless, indeed, something had happened to the supper! That might have made any fellow look troubled.

Five voices, in unison, invited
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Bunter to buzz off. Instead of buzzing off the fat junior blinked round the study.

"Where is it?" he asked.

"Fathead!"

"Is it in the cupboard?" asked Bunter, puzzled.

"You silly chump—bunk!"

"Look here, I'll get it ready for you, if you like," said Bunter. "I never was a slacker—always ready to oblige a pal!"

Bunter rolled across to the study cupboard. He blinked into the cupboard, through his big spectacles, in surprise and dismay. No supply of foodstuffs was to be seen there.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Will you dry up?" hooted Wharton. "If you're after tuck, there isn't any. Now, roll away!"

Bunter blinked at him.

"Then what are you fellows doing here?" he asked. "What's up?"

"Tatters hasn't come in!" growled Bob Cherry. "Now, shut up!"

"Tatters! Hasn't he come in?" said Bunter. "Well, what does that matter?"

"You fat idiot!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Clear off, Bunter!" said Frank Nugent. "We're bothered about Tatters—but I suppose it doesn't worry you?"

"Eh! No! Why should it?" asked Bunter, in surprise. "Pity you didn't let me run as hare after all, what? I suppose you're feeling rather rotten about being caught, Nugent? Well, if I'd been with you, to set you an example of sticking it, and give you a helping hand now and then, you'd have got through all right. I must say you asked for it."

"You silly owl!"

Frank was looking more worried than the other members of the Co. Now that it was becoming clear that something must have happened to poor Tatters, Nugent was feeling it rather on his conscience that he had intended to punch Cholmondeley's head when he came in. True, there was still no explanation of why Tatters had walked off and left him, as he supposed, in Seven Elms meadows. But since then,

if appeared, some accident must have occurred, and the thought of poor Tatters in serious trouble wiped out all offences.

"I say, you fellows, you'll know better next time," said Bunter cheerfully. "Now, I shouldn't worry about Tatters, if I were you. Never mind him! I was going to stand a spread after the paper-chase, but I've been disappointed about a postal order. In the circumstances—"

"Oh, kill him, somebody!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull! I suppose you fellows want supper?" said Bunter, blinking at them. "Look here, you fellows stand supper this evening, and I'll stand it to-morrow, when my postal order comes. That's fair."

"You benighted chump, blow supper, and blow you!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, exasperated. "Can't you get it into your fat head that we're not thinking about supper, but about Tatters?"

"Not thinking about supper!" ejaculated Bunter. "But it's supper-time! What's the good of thinking about Tatters at supper-time? You can't eat him, even if he was here."

"Amazing as it is," said Bob, with crushing sarcasm, "we are thinking about poor old Tatters, so shut up and roll away. We're actually thinking about Tatters instead of supper. You can't understand it, of course; but take my word for it."

"Well, of course, I can't understand such rot as that!" said Bunter. "If you're pulling my leg, and you've got the tuck hidden out of sight till I go, I can tell you it's jolly mean."

"My esteemed and idiotic Bunter!"

"I dare say Tatters is all right," went on Bunter. "That tinker wouldn't kill him. I suppose. He'd be hanged if he did, wouldn't he? I dare say he gave him a thrashing. Well, very likely a thrashing would do him good—he's been cheeky to me more than once. I dare say he's thrashed him lots of times before to-day. Once more doesn't matter, so far as I can see. Now, look here, you fellows, never mind Tatters!"

The Famous Five stared hard at Bunter.

"What do you mean you fat dummy?" asked Johnny Bull. "You haven't seen anything of the tinker, have you?"

"My esteemed and fatheaded chums," ejaculated Hurree Janset Ram Singh, "the worthy and idiotic Bunter was in Seven Elms meadows this afternoon. He admitfully let out that he shifted the plank."

"I didn't!" exclaimed Bunter, in a great hurry. "Nothing of the kind! I never went anywhere near Seven Elms; and I never even thought of mucking up the run by shifting that plank bridge. Besides, I warned you. You can't deny that. Last night, in the Rag—"

"You were in the meadows," said Harry. "You've owned up to that, you fat chump! Were you there when Nugent and Tatters swam across?"

"I wasn't there at all!" explained Bunter. "Never went near the place. Besides, how was I to know they'd be fools enough to swim it? I wouldn't have, and I'm a better swimmer than Nugent or Tatters, and chance it. I thought they'd go round and get caught!"

"You shifted that plank!" roared Wharton.

"Nothing of the kind! I wouldn't have, even if I'd thought of it, which I didn't do. Besides, it was too heavy to shift."

"Then you were there?"

"Oh, no! Nowhere near the place! I—I was out walking with Toddy!"

"You fat idiot, Toddy was in the pack!"

"I—I mean, I was out walking with a Fourth Form man—Angel of the Fourth, to be exact. I say, you fellows, if there isn't any supper here I'll go along and see Smithy."

Billy Bunter rolled to the door.

Harry Wharton slammed the door, and put his back to it. Billy Bunter was not leaving Study No. 1 just yet. That Bunter knew something of the shifting of the plank in Seven Elms meadows was pretty clear; it was evident that he had been on the spot some time during the paper-chase. And it occurred to Wharton, and to his friends, that the fat Owl might have been there at the time of Tatters' strange disappearance. If that was the case, the fat and fatuous Owl might be able to shed some light on the mystery.

"I—I say, you let a fellow get out, Wharton!" exclaimed Bunter indignantly. "I want to see Smithy—"

"Never mind Smithy now!"

"But he'll have finished supper, you ass—I mean, I'm going to help him with his lines."

"You were at the plank bridge in the meadows this afternoon?"

"No!" roared Bunter. "Nowhere near the place."

Wharton grasped him by the collar. Bang!

Billy Bunter's bullet head smote the study wall. There was a fiondish howl from William George Bunter.

"Yaroooh!"

"Now, were you at the meadows?"

"Owl! No! Wow!"

Bang!

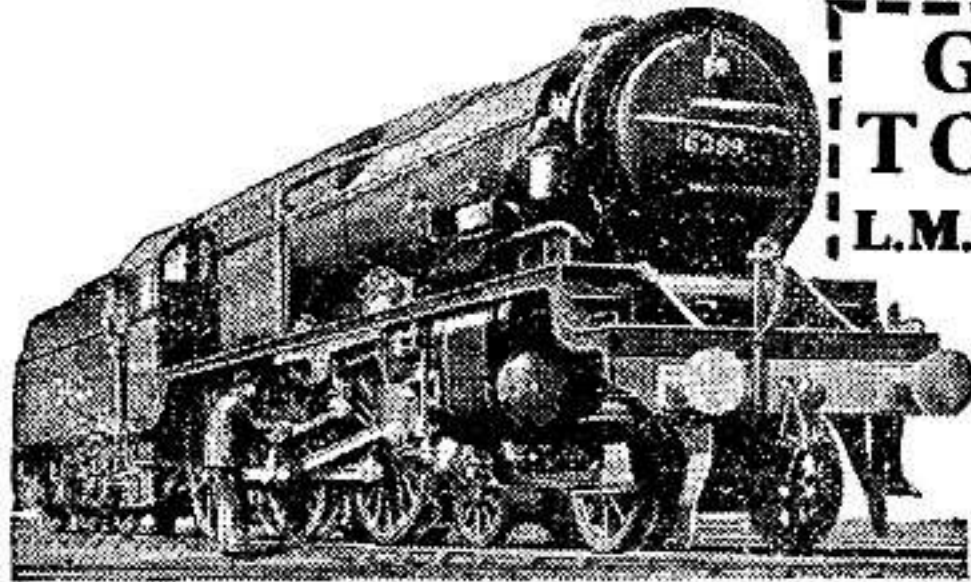
"Wow! I mean yes!" roared Bunter. "Yes! Yes rather! Yaroooh!"

"Were you there when Nugent and Tatters swam across?"

"Owl! Beast! Leggo! Yes! Whoop!"

"Then you saw what became of Tatters?" roared Bob Cherry.

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"Ow! No! Leggo! I didn't see him land," howled Bunter. "How could I, when I had cleared off?"

"You cleared off before they landed?" "Ow! Yes! Beast!" gasped Bunter. "Think I was going to stop there after I got a chance to get away? Of course, I bunked as soon as that beastly tinker turned his back! Wow!"

There was a yell from the Co. "The tinker! Was Tinker Wilson there?"

"Ow! Yes! Wow!" Wharton, staring, released the fat Owl's collar. Billy Bunter stood rubbing his head and glaring at the Famous Five with a glare that almost cracked his spectacles.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Quelch Remembers!

HENRY SAMUEL QUELCH turned from the telephone with an angry grant. It was a quarter past nine; and one member of Mr. Quelch's Form was absent from Greyfriars. And almost convinced by this time that some accident must have happened, Mr. Quelch had rung up Courtfield police station, to inquire whether any accident had been reported. But from Inspector Grimes, at Courtfield, he could only learn that nothing of the kind had come to his knowledge. The Remove master hung up the receiver, frowning. If there had been no accident, the boy must be staying out of gates of his own accord; in which case he was booked for a severe reckoning when at last he chose to present himself.

Tap! "Come in!" rapped out Mr. Quelch. He turned a hopeful eye on the door, expecting to see either Arthur Cecil Cholmondeley, or someone to announce that the truant had returned.

He raised his eyebrows at the sight of Billy Bunter, under the escort of five other members of his Form.

"What does this mean, Wharton?" he exclaimed. "Is there any news of Cholmondeley, or what?"

"I think so, sir," said Wharton. "Bunter has something to tell you, sir."

"I fail to see why six members of my Form should come here, in that case," said Mr. Quelch frostily. "However, if you know anything about this matter, Bunter, acquaint me with it at once."

"I—I never meant to muck up the run, sir," gasped Bunter. "Besides, I told these fellows to look out when they left me out—"

"Wharton! Explain what this stupid boy means, if he means anything," snapped the Remove master.

"The run to-day, sir, was home by the plank bridge in Seven Elms meadows," said Harry. "That fat idiot—"

"What?" "I—I mean Bunter, sir—" stammered the captain of the Remove.

"You had better say what you mean, when you are addressing your Form master, Wharton."

"Oh! Yes, sir! That—I mean, Bunter—Bunter cut across the meadows, to shift the plank, for a silly lark. He was there when Nugent and Tatters—I mean, Cholmondeley—swam across, the plank being gone, and he saw Tinker Wilson there, sir."

Mr. Quelch started. "Bunter! Why did you not mention this before?"

"Nobody asked me about it, sir." "You stupid boy! What were you thinking of?" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"Supper, sir." "What! What! Upon my word!

Bunter, if you desire me to administer a severe caning—"

"Oh lor'!" "Answer me sensibly, if you can. You say you saw this—this tinker, on the

spot, at the time that Cholmondeley parted company with Nugent?"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Bunter. "Give me a full account of the matter immediately."

Billy Bunter proceeded to gasp out a full account. Mr. Quelch listened attentively, now and then interrupting the fat Owl with a sharp question. His face grew graver and graver.

"This certainly lets in a new light on the matter," said the Remove master. "It appears unmistakable that the man Bunter saw was the tinker who once had Cholmondeley in his hands. It is unfortunate that the foolish boy ran away and did not witness the tinker's subsequent proceedings." He turned to Frank. "You say nothing of the tinker, Nugent?"

"No, sir. He was gone before I got ashore. I never knew anybody had been there," said Nugent.

"Bunter has explained that he was hiding in the bushes, and forced Bunter also to hide. As Cholmondeley landed before you, and according to Bunter, Wilson was watching for him, the ruffian obviously had an opportunity to seize the boy. But—"

"That's what must have happened, sir," said Frank dismally. "I thought poor old Tatters had cleared off, and left me—"

"The matter is far from clear," snapped Mr. Quelch. "Bunter can tell us nothing of what occurred after he ran away—"

"I didn't exactly run away, sir! I—"

"Silence! And you can tell me nothing of what happened before you got ashore, Nugent. It was a matter only of minutes. It is possible that Cholmondeley was forced away from the spot by Wilson. It is possible that he was struck a blow that may have silenced him. But it is almost inconceivable to me, that a boy can have been forced, or carried, over the countryside, without anyone interfering—"

"But the cart, sir—" said Harry. "The what?"

"Tinker Wilson always travels with a hand-cart, sir, with his things in it—a tinker's outfit, and a tent, and so on. Every time we've seen him, he has had the hand-cart with him."

Mr. Quelch gave a sudden jump. The mention of a hand-cart brought back to his mind a certain encounter, that afternoon, in the Seven Elms neighbourhood.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at him curiously. Evidently something had leaped into their Form master's mind, of which they had no knowledge.

"Bunter!" rapped out Mr. Quelch. "Oh dear! I mean, yes, sir," gasped Bunter.

"Was there a hand-cart in the hands of the tinker when you saw him?"

"There was when I first saw him, sir—"

"What?" "But he put it in the bushes afterwards, sir."

"You obtuse boy! He had a hand-cart with him?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"I feel certain, sir, that he knocked Tatters out, and took him away in the cart," said Harry Wharton earnestly. "If Nugent had known that Tinker Wilson had been there, he would have thought so on the spot—"

"If I'd only seen him—" said Frank.

"He took jolly good care you didn't!" said Bunter. "I'd have called out to you, only—only—"

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PUT YOUR THINKING CAP ON and win a DANDY LEATHER POCKET WALLET like James Plowes, of Hamilton Stud, Newmarket, who has sent in the Greyfriars limerick illustrated below.



A FAT BOY, BY NAME WILLIAM GEORGE,



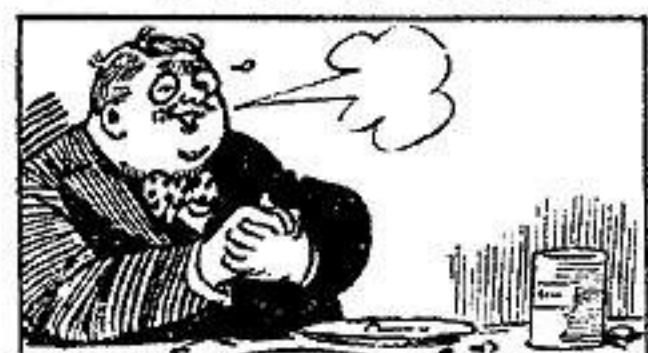
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"Only you were too funky!" snapped Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Silence!" hooted Mr. Quelch. Wharton! Give me a description of this man, Wilson—a description in every detail—"

Harry Wharton described the tinker, his Form master listening with the keenest attention. There was a glint in Mr. Quelch's eyes as he listened. The description of the tinker tallied in every respect, with the man he had seen at the lonely cottage that afternoon—the ruffian with the hand-cart, whose insolence still rankled in the Form master's memory.

Mr. Quelch drew a deep, deep breath. "There can be little doubt!" he said, at last. "It is the same man—the same rascal! There can be no doubt!"

The juniors exchanged glances. "You've seen the man, sir?" ventured Wharton.

"I think so, Wharton! I am sure so!" Mr. Quelch set his lips. "I have little doubt that I know where to lay my hands on Cholmondeley at this moment! If that incredibly stupid boy, Bunter, had reported this to me before—"

"Oh, really, sir—"

"I am very much obliged to you for acquainting me with this, Wharton. You may have been the means of saving Cholmondeley from the hands of a brutal ruffian. You may go now, my boys."

Harry Wharton & Co. left the Form master's study. As the door closed on them, Mr. Quelch almost jumped to the telephone. A minute more and he was in earnest talk with Inspector Grimes at Courtfield.

In the corridor the Famous Five looked at one another.

"What on earth has Quelch got in his noddle?" asked Frank Nugent. "What the thump does he know about the tinker?"

"I give that one up!" said Bob. "But Quelch knows something! Quelch's a downy bird."

"I say, you fellows, I think—"

"Well, what do you think, fatty?"

"I think there's still time for supper before dorm. If you fellows have got anything in the study—"

"You—you—you—"

"For goodness' sake, don't waste time jawing. Wharton! It's only five minutes to dorm now! If you've got anything for supper— Yaroooh!"

The Famous Five walked on, leaving Billy Bunter rubbing the place where a foot had landed.

door and windows. Mr. Grimes knocked, and knocked again.

Only the dull echoing from within the cottage answered.

The Courtfield inspector's expression was dubious. But there was no doubt in Mr. Quelch's face. He was keen and quite decided.

"Nobody at home, it would seem, sir!" said Mr. Grimes. The inspector could not know that the knocking at the door reached the ears of one within who was unable to answer, unable even to stir a limb; but to whose heart the sound brought new hope.

"Apparently not, Mr. Grimes," said the Remove master. "Yet I am convinced that the boy is either here, or has been here. That the cottage was occupied to-day is an assured fact."

"If you are sure of the man—"

"On that point there is no doubt. The description given by the boys is exact. The man seen here to-day, by Mr. Prout and myself, was undoubtedly the man called Tinker Wilson."

"You are sure he entered the cottage?"

"I have, at least, no doubt of it," said Mr. Quelch. "He stated that the place was his; he wheeled his cart into the back garden; and he displayed the most surly insolence towards Mr. Prout and myself. I see now that he was probably disconcerted at finding us here—if the kidnapped boy was actually concealed, at the moment, in his cart, he must have been very disconcerted and indeed alarmed."

"No doubt!" murmured Mr. Grimes. Knock! Knock! Knock!

"At all events, he does not seem to be here now, sir," said the inspector. "And in the circumstances, it would be scarcely justifiable to force an entrance."

There was a pause.

Mr. Quelch had no doubt whatever what had occurred. He did not know, and could not guess, what the tinker's motive might be for seizing on the boy; but of the fact he had no doubt. The fact that Tinker Wilson had been on the spot, hiding in cover, when Tatters so strangely vanished seemed to Mr. Quelch to clinch the matter. He had not the slightest doubt that the kidnapped schoolboy had been concealed in the hand-cart that Tinker Wilson had wheeled past him and Mr. Prout—that poor Tatters had passed under his very eyes that day, though hidden from sight. The surly insolence of the ruffian had been caused, in part, by his natural uneasiness at finding strangers on the spot with the kidnapped schoolboy in his hands. It was all certain in Mr. Quelch's mind; but not in that of the inspector.

Mr. Grimes had lost no time in accompanying the Remove master to the place in a car with a constable. But he was by no means sure that he had to deal with a case of kidnapping. He could not help thinking that perhaps the tinker's insolence had helped to make Mr. Quelch so certain that he was guilty of crime. Certainly he was not disposed to incur the responsibility of forcing an entrance, without a warrant, on what seemed to him a somewhat shadowy suspicion.

He ceased to knock at the door. Either the cottage was untenanted, or Wilson, if he was there, did not choose to answer.

Mr. Grimes left the Remove master and went round the cottage. He exchanged a few whispered words with the constable at the back.

There was no sign of life about the place. It looked deserted and unoccupied.

"Nobody here, sir, I fancy!" murmured the constable.

Mr. Grimes nodded.

He rejoined the Form master at the front door.

"Well, sir—" he murmured.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"It is certain, Mr. Grimes, that the man lives here," he said, "and as he does not belong to this neighbourhood, or indeed to this county at all, it is very singular that he should be in occupation of a building. He is a travelling tinker by trade; and even if he had decided to settle down, this is the last spot he would choose for honest reasons. He could do no work here. The cottage is a mile from any other building. It has been selected, sir, for its solitude. I have no doubt—"

"But the man's motive, sir—" murmured Mr. Grimes.

"That I cannot guess; but the facts speak for themselves. The boy is in his hands."

"If your surmise is correct, sir, it is probable that he did not remain if he was aware that you were a Greyfriars master—"

"He cannot have been aware of that," said Mr. Quelch. "Certainly, if he had known that, he might have been frightened away, having a Greyfriars boy in his hands. But to his eyes both Mr. Prout and myself were simply ordinary members of the public who had stopped to inquire their way."

Mr. Grimes nodded.

"Well, sir, either he is not there now, or he refuses to answer," he said. "We can scarcely venture to force the door. If you do not object to waiting I will remain with you and we will keep the place under observation for a time—"

The inspector coughed.

"Mr. Grimes," said the Remove master, "I am prepared to remain here and watch this cottage all night if necessary. The boy, sir, is in my Form, and I have my duty to do. I shall remain here, if I remain alone."

"You shall not do that, sir!" said Mr. Grimes, with a smile. "It is possible that this man Wilson is absent—probably at a public-house—and may return. We shall see."

There was a bench in the little wooden porch before the cottage, and the inspector sat down, Mr. Quelch following his example. It was cold and misty, dank and dismal, and Mr. Quelch could not help thinking of his cosy fire and comfortable armchair in his study at Greyfriars. But he had, as he had said, his duty to consider; and Mr. Quelch was a "whale" on duty. Sometimes his Form found him rather too dutiful. But in the present case, it was much to Mr. Quelch's credit; for he had reached a time of life when this sort of adventure failed to appeal. The cold and the damp mist threatened rheumatism; a serious matter for Henry Samuel Quelch. But in the pursuit of duty, Mr. Quelch defied rheumatism, as boldly as Ajax defied the lightning.

It was about a quarter of an hour later that the inspector gave a start and bent his head to listen. There was a sound of footsteps in the lane from the direction of the distant village of Seven Elms.

"Someone is coming!" breathed Mr. Quelch.

"Hush, sir! If it is the man we want he need not know that we are here—until he sees us."

"Quite so!"

The footsteps approached. The gate on the lane was heard to creak, and the footsteps came in the darkness up the path to the cottage. Obviously, it was the tenant of the cottage who was

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Tinker Wilson!

KNOCK! knock! Knock! The knocking on the door of the lonely cottage in Seven Elms Lane rang through the silent building.

Darkness lay thick on the cottage, on the unkempt field that surrounded it, on the narrow, muddy lane. A mist from the sea had rolled over the fields. The place might have been in the heart of a desert, so silent and solitary and desolate was its aspect.

Knock! Knock! In the narrow lane, where motors seldom penetrated, a car stood at a little distance from the cottage, the lights shut off. At the door of the cottage stood the portly figure of Inspector Grimes, of Courtfield; at his elbow, Mr. Quelch, master of the Greyfriars Remove. A constable was in the rear of the cottage watching the back



Frantically Tatters struggled to cry out, but the gag choked back every sound. Crash! The door flew open under the impact of a heavy shoulder, and the kidnapped schoolboy discerned two shadowy figures.

returning, and in the winter gloom he saw nothing of the two men sitting in the little, dark porch, and the constable was out of sight behind the cottage.

A burly figure loomed up in the shadows. There was an unpleasant aroma of mingled tobacco and spirits on the frosty air.

"Burn my body and boots!" came a sudden, startled ejaculation, as the newcomer perceived the two figures in the porch.

"That is the man!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

Tinker Wilson jumped back.

The inspector rose and stepped out of the porch. The tinker, backing away, eyed him evilly and uneasily.

"That is the man!" repeated the Remove master.

"Oh, you're 'ere agin, are you, old covey?" jeered the tinker. "Wot do you want this time? Lost your way again, you old fool, you?"

"That's enough, my man!" interrupted Inspector Grimes, while Mr. Quelch crimsoned with anger. "You're named Wilson, I think?"

"Name of Smith, sir, if you want to know," said the tinker, "and I'd like to know what you're up to 'ere, too, 'anging about a man's place and making 'im jump!"

"What have you done with Arthur Cholmondeley, you scoundrel?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch sternly.

Tinker Wilson started violently.

"What's that?" he gasped.

"We are here to make an investigation, my man!" said Inspector Grimes. "Have you any objection to my entering your cottage?"

Tinker Wilson eyed him for some moments before he replied. The constable came round the cottage. If the ruffian had been thinking of violent measures, he gave up that idea at the sight of the odds against him.

"Let's 'ear what you're arter, sir," said the tinker, after a long pause. "What you got ag'in a bloke?"

"I am here to search this cottage," said Mr. Grimes. "If you do not object, it will take only a few minutes. If you object—"

"And s'pose I object to a cove meddling in my 'ouse?" demanded the tinker.

"In that case," said Mr. Grimes, "I shall take you into custody on suspicion, on this gentleman's charge!"

The tinker breathed hard. He realised that the game was up, and he was already thinking, not of attempting to get Tatters away, but of stopping the man who was even then on his way to the lonely cottage in a swift car. But the ruffian had his wits about him.

He burst into a hoarse laugh.

"Search the blooming place as much as you like," he said, "and 'ere's the key to 'elp you!"

He drew a key from his pocket, and unlocked the door, and threw it open. Then he stepped back. At a sign from the inspector the constable drew nearer to the tinker. Mr. Grimes entered the cottage, and struck a match. The Remove master followed him in.

"There's a blinking candle on the table!" called out the tinker. "Make yourselves at 'ome!"

Mr. Grimes found the candle and lighted it. As he took up the candlestick, there was a sudden shout, and a sound of running feet outside. The inspector dropped the candlestick, and jumped for the door.

The Courtfield constable was picking himself up from the ground. The flying footsteps of the tinker were dying away in the mist across the field.

"He's gone, sir!" gasped the constable.

"After him!" snapped Mr. Grimes.

There was little hope of capturing the fleeing man. He had already vanished in the clinging mist. Mr. Grimes grunted, and turned back into the cottage. The flight of the tinker was as good as proof that Mr. Quelch's suspicions were well founded.

"The boy is here!" said Mr. Quelch, with conviction.

Mr. Grimes took up the candle.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

"Prime!"

TATTERS listened.

The sound of knocking at the cottage door below had brought hope to the heart of the prisoner in the lonely cottage. It could not be the tinker, or his unknown employer, who was knocking at the door. Tatters, aching in his bonds, his mouth numbed by the gag, shivering with cold, listened, and when the knocking ceased at last, and there was silence, black despair settled on him. He lay in misery that was all the keener for that brief hope that had now died away.

Silence, as of the tomb, was round him now. The hapless boy's thoughts were of his friends at Greyfriars, who would gladly have helped him, had they only known. He thought, too, of the brutal tinker, and of the unknown, mysterious enemy whose tool the ruffian was. The last shred of hope was gone now, and the wail's heart was like lead.

When, after what seemed an age, he heard a sound of moving footsteps below, it brought him no hope. He supposed that Tinker Wilson had returned. He listened dully to the sound, and to the creaking of the rickety staircase, as steps ascended.

They stopped at the door of the garret.

"Locked!" said a voice, and Tatters started convulsively. It was not the voice of Tinker Wilson.

"Then the boy is here!" said another voice, and Tatters wondered whether he was dreaming. For the second voice was that of his Form master at Greyfriars, Mr. Quelch.

Frantically he struggled to speak, to

(Continued on page 28.)

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By **STANTON HOPE.**

The ISLAND SLAVES!

A Rakish Dhow!

"STAND by the for'ard gun!" The voice of Captain Knox, D.S.O., R.N., boomed through the megaphone, and young Lieutenant Guy Easton and the gun crew nipped into their stations at the six-pounder in the Falcon's bows.

Flash, flicker, flash! The heliograph on the warship's bridge caught the tropic sun and sent the reflected light flashing in Morse code across the blue sea.

There was no likelihood of the rakish-looking dhow, heading southward out of the Red Sea, understanding Morse; but, obviously, the repeated signals and the course of the gunboat were warning enough that she was to heave-to.

Still the dhow crammed on more sail and stood her course.

The captain of H.M.S. Falcon removed his white sun helmet, picked round the pugaree with a thin silken band of navy blue, and mopped his head. There was a following breeze blowing from the Abyssinian coast, and the eighteen knots of the gunboat created no head-wind to alleviate the oven-like heat.

"Hallo!" he ejaculated. "She's beginning to turn her nose shoreward."

Again he took up the metal megaphone, hot to the touch despite the double bridge awnings.

"Put a shot across her bows, Mr. Easton!" he commanded.

In turn, Guy Easton rapped an order to his gun crew. The gunlayer, with his eye to the hair-sights, pressed the trigger, and the six-pounder spat flame

and steel over the sea to an ear-splitting bark.

Through his glasses Guy saw urgent movements on the decks of the distant dhow, and the great sails came down with a run.

"Old Sinbad & Co. savvy that signal all right!" he chuckled.

Still the Falcon kept on her course, but at a reduced speed, toward the Arab craft now hove-to.

A sailor in the chains swung the lead and called the marks, for there were treacherous shallows off the Arabian coast here in the straits at the extreme southerly end of the Red Sea—the

"Would you like to buy a slave? Come with me to Arabia, or to Somaliland or Abyssinia. There, even to-day, human beings are offered for sale" Extract from daily newspaper.

straits called by the Arabs, Babel-Mandeb, which means the Gate of Tears.

"By the mark, three!" sung out the voice of the seaman taking soundings.

Three fathoms under the Falcon's keel, and the water becoming shallower with every passing minute! The skipper decided to heave-to, and he summoned Guy to the bridge, and ordered him to don belt and sword and go away in the cutter.

"The dhow is sitting deep with cargo," the skipper said, "and you had better take half an hour or so on board to get some of that cargo shifted. There was another signal from the flagship this morning that guns are being run from the African coast and put ashore in Arabia and Persia."

Guy saluted.

"Very good, sir! May I take Sub-lieutenant Dunn, sir?"

The captain nodded.

"Yes, you had better take another officer, and at least four white ratings. As usual, Chotajee will go away with you as interpreter."

Hurrying down from the bridge, Guy superintended the lowering of the cutter into the water. Like the other officers of the gunboat, he was used to these ordinary patrol jobs of stopping and examining dhows in the Red Sea, the straits, and the Gulf of Aden.

Once or twice small consignments of rifles or ammunition, illegally exported from Abyssinia or Somaliland, had been discovered in native craft. As a general rule, it was only a matter of routine, which resulted in nothing more exciting than a verbal argument with an Arab crew which

objected to the boarding of their craft by the Royal Navy.

Running down the companion-ladder that led below, Guy thrust his head into the ward-room, and, as he expected, found Tony Dunn occupying two arm-chairs. Tony had been keeping watch on the bridge, and, after an overdose of curry at lunch, was idling about watching flies get themselves caught in the patent revolving fly-trap.

"Ahoy! Shake a leg there, you young firebrand!" Guy called to him. "The owner says you can come away with me on a boarding stunt!"

Immediately Tony swung his long legs to the deck. He had not been east of Suez long, and the prospect of boarding a dhow always raised in him wild enthusiasm, although, so far, his

optimistic hope of excitement had not been realised.

"Good hunting!" he exclaimed. "I'll gird the old loins with a pig-sticker and be right with you!"

"Drop an automatic in your tunic pocket," Guy advised, with a grin. "That is, if you didn't use up all the ship's ammunition potting jelly fishes in Keba Bay the other afternoon!"

Tony's eyes sparkled.

"Think there'll be a scrap?" he asked.

"Not while you're there, old son!" Guy chaffed. "The way you wear a sword and trip over it every other step keeps the giddy cut-throats in too good a humour. They can't both laugh and fight at the same time!"

"Bosh!"

Still chaffing, they secured their swords, went up on deck, and clambered down into the waiting cutter. The native kolassies, who formed the majority of the Falcon's crew, gave way on the oars, and the boat shot away from the warship's side and headed toward the waiting dhow.

The young officers sat in the stern-sheets, Guy at the tiller. Both wore the white uniform, with gold buttons and black-and-gold shoulder-straps of the Navy in the tropics, and wore at their sides the gold-hilted sword used for guard duty, boarding, and other official occasions when a display of pomp and ceremony was considered necessary.

In the bows were four white seamen armed with rifles, and next to Guy was Chotajee, the Bengali interpreter, who knew a brand of Arabic which, strangely enough, was as effective as it was weird.

Little Chotajee was of the babu class, the type who works almost exclusively as clerk in Indian offices, and, having got into some trouble in Calcutta, he had got across to Bombay, and come to sea with the Navy in the capacity of kassab, a storekeeper.

To his regret he had been given no uniform, and so presented a small and burlesque figure, half in Mussulman and half in European dress. His white pantaloons and black alpaca coat were so tight that he seemed to be about to burst through them, and on his head was set an embossed cap. For the rest, he wore red turned-up shoes, a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles, and a badge marked "Kassab," round which he had embroidered gold oak-leaves, in imitation of those worn on the peak of the skipper's cap.

Chotajee was extremely proud of this badge of office, and at night wore a duplicate on the left breast of his pyjama jacket. His English was nearly, but not quite, as weird as his Arabic.

Apparently with intention, the dhow had brought up in shallow water not more than a mile from the Arabian coast, with its tawny hills smoking with dust. Nearer and nearer drew the cutter to the rhythmical plash of oars, while the dhow kept a sullen silence.

"Some dhow!" Tony murmured. "Her counter reminds me of those giddy galleons that used to sweep the Spanish Main!"

"Before my time," Guy smiled. "The worst of picturesque things in the East is that they're generally so beastly dirty!"

The stern of the dhow raked up from the water, towering high above the cutter as it

approached. In it were a number of oblong ports not unlike those of the galleons of old. Carved in the ancient brown woodwork were quotations from the Koran—which were Greek to the chums—and above the poop was a great lantern of tarnished brass. Forward of the poop-deck was a filthy reed awning; then there was a low stretch of deck from which the two masts reared themselves at acute forward angles, and the prow lifted to a height almost equal with the stern.

Ranged along the side was an array of dark brown Arab faces, some scarred and pock-marked, and all dirty and intensely evil-looking.

As the cutter slipped alongside and tied up to a hempen rope, the owners of the faces emitted guttural groans.

"The beauty chorus greets us!" Tony chirped. "They're according us three hearty boo's!"

"Clew up your jaw tackle, old son," Guy frowned, "and follow me aboard. You too, Chota."

He also ordered two of the white ratings and a couple of the kolasses out of the boat to mount guard in the dhow, while he carried out his inspection of the craft.

The cut-throat looking crew of the dhow fell back as he stumbled over the side followed by Tony, Chotajee, and the four men.

"Greetings!" he said, putting his sword hand to his hilt. "Who's the skipper?"

He gazed round at the motley crew, as piratical a lot of rascals as he had ever clapped eyes on. Most only wore a loose garment from the waist downward, and the chests and arms of the men presented that muscular appearance of the sea-faring Arab.

Apart from the rest, was a man almost jet-black instead of the mahogany colour of the remainder, and because of his deep-tinted skin, monster brass ear-rings and greater muscular build than the others, Guy's attention was attracted particularly to him. The lips of this man were thick, like the

typical negro's, the whites of his eyes slightly bloodshot, and his teeth discoloured pink with the chewing of betel-nut.

While Chotajee repeated the officer's query in Arabic, Guy temporarily forgot all else in the contemplation of this giant negro. He wore common robes, but there was a kingly dignity about him which was not to be denied. But the man's eyes had a hypnotic power which made Guy feel as though a small piece of ice was trickling down his spine.

They were eyes such as he had never seen in his life before—pale amber in colour, but with no more human warmth in them than in a topaz. Eyes, horrible and inhuman.

A bearded ruffian wearing the Arab head-dress with rings of camel-hair, stepped forward, and Guy dragged his eyes away.

"Salaam!" the Arab grunted, without using the word "sahib." "Me boss of dhow!"

"Oh, you're the skipper, are you?" Guy said. "Who's the black fellow, then? Does he speak English?"

The bearded Arab shook his head. "He sailor—no speak English. Me long time stay Aden—speak English plenty good. What you want?"

"Just to take a look-see over the old hooker," Guy answered. "Sorry to trouble you and all that sort of thing. There's a few things we want to find out about you. Sorry to have had to poop off that gun, but the skipper got slightly annoyed when you kept running."

While Chotajee stood by, his services unneeded, Guy rapped out a few questions. The dhow, the Arab said, was bound from Tajura to Muscat with a cargo of hides, tobacco, and cotton.

"Slightly off your course, old son," Guy commented. "Now, what's your name?"

"Hassan."

"H'm! About as popular as 'Smith' at home."

Guy ordered Tony, one of the white ratings, and a kolassie to remain on guard, and the other two men from the Falcon to follow him below, together with the bearded Arab.

Obligingly, a lantern was lighted for him by a member of the dhow's crew, and he clambered down through a filthy hatchway aft into the hold.

It was by no means the first time that Guy had examined cargo, but this hold was several degrees worse than any he had hitherto encountered. The stench of tanned hides and moist tobacco almost knocked him flat, and his entry disturbed a buzzing swarm of flies, wasps, and other insects.

The cargo in bales, sacks, and bundles, was stacked in compartments divided by heavy timbers to prevent them from shifting in heavy seas, and all that Guy could hope to do in the brief time allotted to him by his captain, was to get a little of the stuff shifted. To see the full contents of that hold and what was stored under the bales would need two or three hours, solid work with a derrick. Even if arms were stowed aboard this dhow, he was not likely to find them by the only kind of rough search possible at sea.

"Get some of your men," Guy ordered the bearded Arab, "and shift those stacks of hides. I



GUY EASTON, who makes his bow in this story of a thousand thrills.

want to see under them. By the way, what's beyond that bulkhead?"

He rapped with his knuckles on the stout wooden wall athwartships, and the Arab said the forward hold was beyond, but that there was no entry to it from below.

"Right-ho!" said Guy. "If your forward hatch is battened down, get it opened. I'll look in there next."

Although sullen, the Arab made no objection, and within a few minutes the work of shifting some of the cargo was proceeding.

Already Guy's immaculate white uniform had become soiled; then, what with the dirt, dust, and flies as the cargo was shifted, he became almost as filthy as on a day coaling in Perim port.

At the expiration of half an hour, when he was almost in a state of collapse with the stifling heat, the stench, and the choking dust, he heard Tony's voice hailing him from the hatch.

"Ahoy, sir! The Falcon's hoisted the recall pennant!"

The recall!

Only some matter of urgency would have made the gunboat order him back when obviously he had had no time to make any sort of reasonable search. Abruptly, Guy told his men to get on deck, and he hurriedly swung up the greasy ladder after them.

As he blinked painfully in the tropic sunshine, he heard Tony address him:

"Dirty weather blowing up by the look of it, sir!" Tony said. In the interests of discipline, he always used the formal "sir," when on duty, or before the men. "The sky to southward is the colour of a rotten plum!"

"Tumble back into the boat!" Guy commanded. "What signal is the Falcon making?"

He had missed the first part of the signal by heliograph from the gunboat, but one of the seamen read the flashing Morse.

"Dhow to be allowed to proceed, sir!" the man informed him.

By this time Guy had recovered normal sight after his internment in the dark and filthy hold.

"The skipper reckons we're in for bad weather," he grunted, "and he's got to give the dhow a chance to run for it. By Jove, we'd better sheer off—and quick!"

The Black Tiger!

THE ratings and Tony tumbled back into the cutter, and Guy took a final glance round the dhow. The forward hatch had been opened—Tony had heard his order and had seen that it was carried out. By the raking mainmast of the dhow was that burly negro, his lips slightly parted and showing his pink teeth. The pale amber eyes were inscrutable as the Sphinx.

"Who did you say that fellow is?" Guy inquired of the bearded Arab. "The Abyssinian, I mean."

His gaze was on the negro giant, and he saw the thick lips twist and fiendish hatred come into the jet-black face; while, uncannily, the eyes remained with no more expression than two discs of amber.

In that moment, although the Arab reiterated that the negro served under him, Guy knew that the man with the amber eyes was not a mere member of the dhow's crew. He had understood that remark in English, knew that he

had been referred to, and had taken exception to something.

To what? Having been out East for some time, Guy knew that the word "Abyssinian" was like a red rag to a bull to anyone from that land. The native of that part of North Africa calls himself by the old dignified name of Ethiopian.

In the same manner as a python fascinates even people who loathe snakes, so this Abyssinian drew Guy's attention by some sinister magnetism.

There was no time for delay, however, and Guy swung over the dhow's side and back into the cutter.

"Shove off!"

As the bowman pushed off from the dhow's side, Guy glanced towards the warship a mile away, silhouetted against the sky, now a dull, leaden colour on the horizon.

He knew what that sky portended. A hurricane was brewing off the African coast, but at present only a hot breeze was blowing. This was from a direction that made it useless to hoist the cutter's sails. A fierce tropical storm sometimes developed out of a clear sky in an amazingly short time, and to be caught out in one in an open boat was death!

"Give way!" he cried; and for the benefit of the kolassies he yelled "juldi"—Hindustani for "get a move on!"

Aboard the dhow, the half-naked Arabs were heaving together on the ropes, the sun glinting on the rippling muscles of their brown backs. In a series of jerks the great sails were creeping up on the masts, to take advantage of that breeze which was like a furnace blast. Those sails, however, would have to come down with a run if the dhow had not found shelter before the hurricane burst.

Then, above the creak of the cutter's oars in the rowlocks and the clatter of blocks and tackle in the dhow, there sounded a terrified human cry.

Startled, Guy and Tony looked sharply up towards the dhow, and saw a negro, garbed only in a filthy cloth round his waist, leap on to the bulwark of the Arab craft.

The metallic clang of a chain accompanied the leap.

The chums also became aware suddenly that he had a broken and rusty shackle on his left ankle. The yellow-eyed Abyssinian who had attracted Guy's attention swung up his arm, and a small object glinted blue-black in the tropic sun.

Poof!

A tongue of flame whipped out from the object, and the negro, to a gurgling cry, plunged head foremost into the blue sea.

"Good Heavens!" Guy exclaimed, leaping up. "He's been shot!"

No time was there to wonder at the fact that that black barbarian with the amber eyes had been armed with an ultra-modern automatic, fitted with a silencer! No time was there to heed the bearded Arab and the cut-throat crew, who were crowding with guttural shouts to the side of the dhow!

Guy's gaze was upon the spot where the negro had plunged into the water. The sea had closed over the man, and there was an ominous swirl of pink in the eddies.

"Stay aboard, Tony!" Guy yelled.

His junior paused, and, flinging his sun helmet into the sternsheets of the

boat, Guy launched himself into the water.

"Give way!" Tony ordered.

The kolassies pulled on the oars, and the sub brought the boat round ready to take Guy and the negro on board.

"Belay!" he thundered.

The cutter's crew rested on the oars, and the boat, with sufficient way on her, swung round.

The negro broke surface, and feebly clawed the water with one hand; his right arm had been shattered by the Abyssinian's bullet. His appearance was the signal for a fresh babel of yells from the dhow's crew and knives and Mauser rifles appeared in the hands of some with the dexterity of a cleverly performed conjuring trick.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Shots were fired in rapid succession, and bullets splashed and ricocheted in the sea round the heads of Guy and the negro. Wicked, curved knives whanged through the air, but the dhow was rolling to the shore swell and swung away as the breeze bellied her sails; and, in consequence, good aiming was difficult.

In protection of his chum and the dusky victim of the Abyssinian's bullet, Tony whipped out his Webley-Scott pistol.

"Let 'em have it, lads!" he yelled.

Crack!

A bullet from his automatic shattered the right wrist of the bearded Arab who had called himself the skipper of the dhow as he lifted up his right arm to fling a knife. The white ratings ripped a volley aboard the rakish craft, zipping the splinters from the wooden rail and sending two of the cut-throats hurtling back wounded to the deck.

The remaining Arabs turned their guns on the cutter, and a kolassie pitched head-foremost into the bottom of the boat. One of the white ratings omitted a grunt, the rifle slipped from his fingers, and was snapped up by one of the dusky oarsmen.

The slashing stream of bullets from the Navy men drove the Arabs down from the rail so that there were no more human targets for their guns. Something that sounded like an invisible express train screeched overhead—a shell from the Falcon, which had seen that something was wrong. The projectile roared through the dhow's rigging, and to an ear-shattering explosion, lifted a column of white water out of the blue sea ahead of her.

To the rising wind, the dhow was fast gathering way, leaving a swirling wake astern of her gaunt, carved quarter. There was no ghost of a chance of the cutter boarding her again, and Tony turned his attention to picking up Guy, who had clutched the now-unconscious negro.

In this southern sea there were great sharks and the horrible whip-like sea-snakes, more venomous than any land reptiles. At any moment death might rise swiftly from those crystal depths—a great torpedo-shaped terror with gaping and serrated jaws!

"Keep your weather-eye open for sharks!" Tony called to the bowman. "Shoot at once if one rises!"

Meantime, Guy had turned on his back, and, with his hands under the negro's armpits, was swimming with the fellow towards the boat. His white uniform in the water might well attract sharks, and one or two of the kolassies

splashed with their oars to frighten away any such marauder of the sea.

A couple of boat-lengths away a black triangle cut through the surface and approached rapidly. The alert bowman saw the shark's fin and took hasty aim.

Crack!

The bullet slashed into the water just ahead of the fin, and for a moment a mighty axe-like tail lifted from the sea. Then, in a swirl of water, the shark dived deep into the liquid depths.

"Here, take a hold of him!" Guy panted.

The negro was dragged into the boat, and Guy crooked his arm over the gunwale.

"My hat!" gasped Tony, the blood draining beneath the tan of his face. "Haul him in!"

Deep in the sea, which was clear as an aquamarine, he saw a dark form, which suddenly revealed a lighter gleam. Either it was the first shark which had been alarmed, or another of the species making an attack and spinning over on its side to bring its great jaws, underneath its body, into action.

The cutter listed sharply as willing hands hauled Guy over the gunwale, while Tony rapped three shots down into the sea. Then there was a terrific thump, which flung them all in a heap, as the sea-tiger thudded against the hull of the boat.

"All right, Guy?" gulped Tony anxiously, scrambling up.

"All serene, chummy!" Guy answered.

"Sufferin' wars! There's no more chance for a fight!" Tony mumbled. "Things are getting a bit too hectic, old son—sir, I mean. They're frantically signalling from the old hooker for us to return judi!"

Fully aware that the Arabs had proved themselves enemies, the Falcon plugged in two shells in swift succession, and after that first ranging shot, got home two direct hits. One was a high-explosive shell, which slashed through the big mainsail; and the second a shrapnel which burst thirty feet over the dhow's stern and raked the decks with pellets of lead. The dust spread a yellow pall over the sea and completely hid the Falcon from view; nor could the warship approach nearer for fear of grounding in the shallows. The luck of the Navy was out, and behind the dust-screen the dhow had a free run for it!

"Look after the negro, Tony!" Guy snapped.

He flung himself aft, and shoved the tiller hard over, and as the kolassies gave way on the oars, he steered a compass course for where he had last seen the gunboat.

Two of the ratings were giving first-aid to their wounded comrade. The kolassie who had been hit had been killed instantly.

For his part, Tony was putting a rough tourniquet on the negro's arm; but he saw that the man was in a terribly bad state from loss of blood and from a bad wound in the ribs which seemed to have been sustained earlier.



Pool! A tongue of flame whipped out from the small object in the Abyssinian's hand, and the negro gave a gurgling cry and plunged forward into the sea. "Good Heavens!" cried Guy. "He's been shot!"

"The back of this poor chap is covered with weals," he said, looking aft toward Guy.

"A slave from the out of his jib," his clam returned. "By Heaven, I'd have given my ears to have stopped that dhow! I believe she had black cargo aboard."

Tony whistled.

"Slaves?"

"Ay. Black ivory, as they call the cargo in Africa. She may have had guns, too."

"When this stuff that's coming up from s'uth'ard blows itself out," Tony remarked, "we'll be able to get on the track of those swabs again."

Knowing the vagaries of the weather in these treacherous parts, Guy was fully aware that at any minute that hot breath which appeared to be coming up from the open doors of a blast furnace, might rise screaming to hurricane force. In that event the sea would be lashed to fury in a few minutes and the open cutter would stand as much chance as a tin can in a mill-race.

A rhythmical, chugging sound came to their ears, and Tony uttered a joyful cry.

"The Old Man's lowered the picket-

boat and sent it for us," he exclaimed. "May he hoist his flag as an admiral one day!"

Captain Knox, of the Falcon, had willingly taken the risk of sending the steam picket to give the cutter a tow, realising it was their only chance of getting back to the ship before the storm burst in full force. In doing this, he saddled himself with the added responsibility for his picket-boat and crew, who had all been eager to volunteer for the hazardous trip.

The picket-boat came steaming swiftly through the dust clouds. A line was flung aboard the cutter and made fast in the bows. In a few moments the picket-boat was towing the cutter at six knots through the water.

"We may just do it!" Guy muttered. "How's that patient of yours, Tony?"

"Barely breathing," Tony answered. "and the sooner we get him in the hands of the ship's surgeon the better. You know, Guy, as soon as I clapped eyes on that black brute with the brass car-rings aboard the dhow, I knew there was something fishy about the craft—felt it in my bones."

"You noticed him, too, old chap?"

"Noticed him! Great snakes, he sort of forced himself on a fellow; and made me go creepy all over. Those eyes of his!"

"Horrible eyes!" Guy granted. "Somehow there was something about them that made me think I'd seen 'em before!"

"I, too, had the same feeling," admitted Tony. "I once saw a pair of eyes like 'em, and I've never forgotten it. A couple of years back, when the Kelpie was on her way home from the China Station, we were ordered to call at Chicacole on the Golconda coast of India, where there was a bit of trouble—I was only a snotty at the time. When things quietened, one or two of us got in a bit of shooting in the jungle, and I had got a bit adrift one day, from the native boaters, when the bamboo's parted and two eyes were looking at me. My hat, they gave me a feeling, old son, as though I'd swallowed a great chunk of ice—yellow eyes they were, as if carved out of some kind of stone and polished."

"Huh!"

"Those eyes were like that black fellow's aboard the dhow," Tony said, "but they belonged to a tiger!"

Guy himself had tried mentally to compare those eyes of the Abyssinian, and he realised now why they had given him that ghastly chilled feeling. The burly, black was fashioned outwardly in the form of a human being, but, back of his eyes was the soul of a wild beast!

When his thoughts reverted from the mysterious Abyssinian, it was to the contemplation of a fresh and urgent peril. From the southward there was a faint, whistling sound almost like the distant trill of the ho'son's pipe.

The chums, and all others in the two boats, knew the meaning of that whistling sound, rising slowly in crescendo. From over Africa the hurricane was speeding, raising its voice like a great angry beast which had got off the leash!

Through the swirling, yellow dust the form of the gunboat took shape. Still the stout picket-boat thumped on her way, towing the cutter and her crew and the dying negro.

Now the Falcon was only a couple of boat-lengths' distant, but the voice of the oncoming hurricane was rising to a fierce shriek of triumph. Could the boats reach the warship in time? Guy gripped the tiller till his knuckles showed white through the brown skin of his hand. Could they do it? It would be touch and go!

(Now look out for the second instalment of this powerful serial, chums. You'll find it in next week's MAGNET. Meanwhile, introduce Guy and Tony to your pals; they'll be thrilled with their exciting adventures!)

THE MYSTERY OF THE PAPER-CHASE!

(Continued from page 23.)

cry out. But the gag choked back every sound.

Crash!

The flimsy door flew open under the impact of a heavy shoulder. A candle glimmered into the dark room.

Tatters' starting eyes were fixed on the two shadowy figures in the candle-light. There was a sharp exclamation.

"He is here!"

"By gad!" said Mr. Grimes.

The candlelight glimmered on the boy who was stretched on the bed, bound there with knotted ropes.

"Cholmondeley!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

A moment more, and the gag was torn away. Tatters panted.

"Oh, sir! You've found me, sir!"

"Yes, my poor boy!"

Inspector Grimes produced a pocket-knife, and cut through the ropes. Mr. Quelch's hand helped Tatters to his feet.

He staggered, and the Remove master's arm supported him. The boy was almost crying with relief.

"You are safe now, Cholmondeley," said Mr. Quelch softly. "Thank Heaven we have found you, my boy!"

"Oh, sir!" panted Tatters. "Oh, sir! I never 'oped nobody would find me, sir, and get me away from that brute, sir! Oh, sir!"

He clung to the Form master's arm. Mr. Quelch's face was very kind.

"Well, you were right, sir," said Mr. Grimes; "the boy was here, and we have found him. And that scoundrel Wilson will soon be laid by the heels; no doubt about that. It was Tinker Wilson brought you here, young man?"

"Yes, sir," said Tatters. "And the other man's coming to take me away in a car to-night, so Wilson said, sir."

Inspector Grimes started and fixed keen eyes on the boy.

"What's that? What other man?"

Tatters repeated what the tinker had said. Mr. Grimes eyed him very keenly and curiously, and exchanged a glance with Mr. Quelch.

"There's more in this affair than meets the eye, sir," said the inspector.

"It's a pity that ruffian got away; he may warn the other rascal in time. But there's a chance that he may not be able to warn him; we may get the man. I shall stay here, sir, if you will take the boy back to the school in the car."

"Certainly!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Come, Cholmondeley!"

Tatters' face was very bright as he followed Mr. Quelch. It was beaming when he sat in the car beside his Form master, speeding away through the winter night for Greyfriars.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry uttered that exclamation. The light had switched on in the Remove dormitory. At half-past ten every fellow in that dormitory ought to have been fast asleep. As a matter of fact, a good many fellows were still wide awake—among them the Famous Five.

They were aware that Mr. Quelch had left the school, and they wondered and surmised what he might be doing, and whether it meant that Tatters was going to be found. And when they heard a car drive up to the House they guessed that their Form master had returned; and they were sitting up in bed, eagerly listening, when the dormitory door opened and the light flashed on.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Tatters!" roared Wharton.

"The Tatterfulness is terrific!"

"Hurrah!"

Tatters grinned as he came in. He was as pleased to see his friends again as they could possibly be to see him.

"Ere I am, old coveys!" he said cheerily.

"Please be quiet, my boys," said Mr. Quelch. "Cholmondeley has, fortunately, been found, but there is no need to wake all Greyfriars."

"Sorry, sir!" gasped Bob. "But we're jolly glad to see Tatters again, sir."

"The gladfulness is terrific."

Every fellow in the dormitory was wide awake now, with one exception. The snore of William George Bunter continued uninterrupted. Even Bob Cherry's powerful voice did not disturb the balmy slumbers of the Owl of the Remove.

"I will return in five minutes to put out the light, Cholmondeley," said Mr. Quelch. "Lose no time."

"Yes, sir," said Tatters.

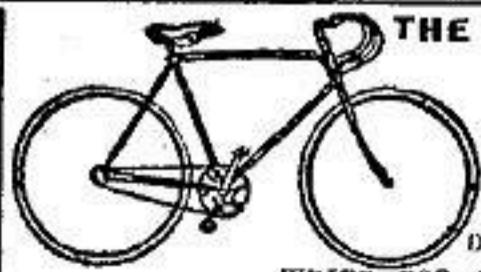
There was a buzz of voices in the dormitory. So many questions were asked that Tatters had no time to reply to them. He was soon in bed; and Mr. Quelch returned and extinguished the light, leaving the Lower Fourth to repose—perhaps!

As a matter of fact, there was no repose for the Remove for a long time. Tatters had to give a history of his adventures that afternoon, and of his rescue, before he was allowed to go to sleep.

But slumber supervened at last, and the Romovites closed their eyes, and did not open them again till the rising-bell was clanging out in the winter morning.

THE END.

(Whatever you do, chums, don't miss the next yarn in this ripping series: "TATTERS" OF THE REMOVE! It's a real peach!)



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No. 29.

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A record crowd rolled up to the Court to hear the fun when Miss Sally Lunum, of the Courtfield bunshop, brought an action for breach of promise against the Earl Mauleverer, of Mauleverer Towers and Study No. 12, Remove Passage, Mr. Justice Nugent and a special jury heard the case, which opened with a song by the Second Form Choir, "Men Were Deceivers



Ever." After this little item, the plaintiff entered, dressed in deep mourning, and created an immediate sensation by hurling a mustard tart with unerring aim at Mauleverer's nose. Plaintiff: "I shall teach you to trifle with my affections, you breaker of hearts! Defendant (gouging custard out of his eyes): Oh, gad! Well, recognition. She realised at once

GREYFRIARS on the ETHER

Listeners, Lend Us Your Ears

Arrangements are now well in hand for a B.B.C. broadcast of Lido at Greyfriars, and if the Head and, of course, the B.B.C., are agreeable, the proposed feature should prove one of the most interesting items ever thrown out on the ether. The listener's impression of Greyfriars, as picked up by the microphone, should be something like this:

Mr. STRANGE: A jingling of keys and the crashing of heavy iron gates. A crusty voice speaks: "Wot I'll report you! Young rips! Wot I says is this one: all boys ought to be drowned at birth!" It is the Portor's Lodge, and William Gosling is doing his usual light-hearted stuff! Mr. STRANGE: A voice: "Got out of my way, Wharton—and the rest of you cheeky fags, too! Eh? Why, I'll mop up the floor with the lot of you! Ow! Ow-wow! Heilmp! Whoooooop!" This is a typical interlude in the quad, when Coker takes a walk! Mr. STRANGE: Trump! Trump! Thud! Thud!

that the heartless creature had abandoned her. (Hisses from the public gallery.) She could only assume that he considered himself too "poor" for her—that she had been cast aside because she was only a bunshop girl! Weeping hysterically, plaintiff was led from the witness-box, while the Court sobbed noisily in sympathy.

Mr. Vernon-Smith (dramatically): No words of mine are needed to emphasise the cruel wrong defendant has done to my client! She has told you the whole story, from the happy time when he chucked her under the chin to the day when he chucked her altogether. I ask for £10,000 damages!

Justice: Where's the defendant? After a short delay, Lord Mauleverer was found fast asleep at the back of the Court, and rushed into the witness-box. Clerk of the Court: What's your defence? Quick!

Lord Mauleverer: Begged! The whole thing is a misunderstanding, and that you know. I'll soon clear it up. Defendant then explained that he was an absent-minded bogger, and that on the occasion when he called in at the bunshop, his reason for leaving his grab was that he forgot all about it! As to closing his eyes in ecstasy, the truth was that he closed them in sleep, that being his object in entering the shop first of all.

Dealing with Miss Lunum's further allegations, he said that his reason for handing over the ring was that he found he had run short of money, and therefore paid in kind instead. Judgment: Is there any truth in the allegation that you were seen smooching with another member of the female tribe? Mauleverer: Yes, I seem to recollect taking someone or other to the pictures once. But I remember is that I fell asleep as soon as the show started! Mr. H. Vernon-Smith: I will now proceed to cross-examine defendant. To begin with, what proof have you, Mauleverer, of the truth of the extraordinary news you have told the Court? No answer was returned, defendant having again fallen asleep beyond the possibility of being questioned. Mr. Vernon-Smith remarked that he had to cross-examine the defendant, and this jury in the middle of the game, and get away with the ball. There is a shortage of equipment in the divines, and little incidents of this kind must be expected. What they do crop up, send a message to one of the higher forms to buy a silk topper—preferably without the owner's permission! A topper is an excellent substitute for a football, and for minor reasons, always brings a lot more vigour and hard kicking into the game. Finally, a ref. in a fag game not

PITY THE POOR REF

Fierce Fights on Fag Footer Field

WELCOME DIVERSION FOR SPECTATORS

The chap who is called on to referee a footer match on the Fag Ground must be prepared, whatever his verdict is, to interpret the rules of the game in a broad and lenient way. For instance, if the general excitement leads to one or two of the players starting a scrap, the best thing to do is to take time off and let them settle it in a three-round contest with the gloves on, in the middle of the field. A little interlude like this, besides relieving the youthful players' monotony, also provides a welcome diversion for the spectators!

Handling the ball, of course, must be dealt with leniently in fag matches. A good way is to keep a score of the number of times the ball is touched and award a goal or two to the side that offend most. Better still, ignore the whole thing, and let the game be played under mixed Soccer and Rugby rules!



When a player is found to be carrying white mice or guinea-pigs in his jersey, a penalty-stroke should be awarded to the other side. This is the only effective way to deal with one of the biggest nuisances in the fag footer world. Never be surprised, Mr. Referee, if a crowd swarms on the field in the middle of the game, and get away with the ball. There is a shortage of equipment in the divines, and little incidents of this kind must be expected. What they do crop up, send a message to one of the higher forms to buy a silk topper—preferably without the owner's permission! A topper is an excellent substitute for a football, and for minor reasons, always brings a lot more vigour and hard kicking into the game. Finally, a ref. in a fag game not

SPEED COPS CHASE COKER

Amazing Sequel

FOOTPAD FOLLED

Coker of the Fifth has soon bid for freedom and drive through become acquainted with the new speed cops that have made their appearance on the roads in the Courtfield district. He was trying out the new bike Aunt Judy has just awarded him. The "out" was a terrific success so far as H. J. C. was concerned, though what the owners of the dead chickens he left behind thought about it is another matter!

Suddenly, the great man became aware of a man in blue on another motor-bike, making frantic efforts to catch him up. He decided that the best thing to do was to shake off the speed-cop, and get back to Greyfriars. He shut his lips and opened one the throttle, and for a long time you could see Coker for dust. Coker himself says that he drove along with the skill of a dirt-track rider. Spectators' accounts are a little different. From various sources we gather that in the course of a mile he slaughtered innumerable chickens. When he sailed down again, he had a dozen miscellaneous vehicles, and by a strange chance he had arrived at the exact moment when through hedges under the impression that they were side-turnings. Neighbour Greyfriars, he discovered that the original pursuing force had trebled and three determined speed-cops were now roaring away behind him. Coker thought he would make a bold



But hark to the sequel, ye who imagine that Coker can ever be unhilly for two minutes on end! When he sailed down again, he was on the other side of the wall! A considerable time. In fact, the speed-cops had arrived and taken him under their wing before he had found breath enough to say what his opinion of Coker was! Of course, Coker had to pay for a fine. But under the circumstances, Coker always was a fellow to come down heavy. He came down heavy, this time—on the neck of the intruder! (Continued in next col.)

RESERVED FOR BARGAIN HUNTERS

WANTED.—Greyfriars Relict lion stamps, Tuckshop "Isan" State lowest prices.—"Writon" "Memo," Somewhere in Greyfriars.

FOR SALE.—Pre-historic post age stamps, dug up near Greyfriars. Average weight: 10 tons. Guaranteed genuine!—A.P.P.I., "Ex Cavalor," c/o. "Greyfriars Herald."

REALISE ON YOUR COLLECTIONS! Spot Cash paid for unused stamps; 1d. given for 10 unused, and 1d. for 2d. ones! Any quantity taken!—Fisher "I. Fish" Study No. 14.

NOTICE.—If the Gentleman who gave me a stamp on my corn under the table at breakfast will look me up any time, I shall be delighted to present him with a prize collection of similar stamps. Free, gratis, and for nothing!—PERCY BOLSOVER, Remove Passage.

STAMP COLLECTING Quick Way to Fortune
In response to numerous requests, we are devoting a small article to the hobby of stamp-collecting. Now, stamp-collecting is a hobby that is gaining many a man has found that by talking it up he has had the rough edges rubbed off him. In fact, talking it all round, stamp-collecting can't be licked!

Think of the thrill when you discover in some odd corner a rare prize of the collecting world! Why, only the other day, while nosing round the dustbins at the back of the House, I came across an excellent specimen of the Gambian Islands 1845 issue, worth at least fifty thousand pounds. That's what it would have been worth if it had been genuine, anyway! On offering it to a dealer for a mere thirty thousand, however, I discovered that it was only a trade-mark from a jam-jar label, after all! Still, there's no telling what your luck may be; never refuse to delve among the refuse if you want to find a quick way to fortune in stamp-collecting!

A beginner has written to me, asking how he can tell whether a stamp is genuine or not. The first thing to do is to examine it under a microscope. If it looks genuine, it probably isn't, and may be thrown away without any more worry. If on the other hand, it looks an obvious forgery, go further into the matter, and look at its watermark. If there isn't a watermark, there'll probably be a ginger-beer stain or something equally good. When you have satisfied yourself that you have a genuine stamp, show it to a dealer, and you'll soon earn otherwise!

A practised eye, of course, will soon detect a forgery which would pass muster with the public. A forger usually makes one or two trifling slips, and the keen philatelist keeps a sharp eye out for them. Sometimes, for instance, a forger will fall into the error of putting Henry VIII's head on an Edward VII. stamp; occasionally, owing to ignorance of languages, he will put German words on a French stamp and French words on an English stamp. These are the little smugs the wise collector looks for.

Well, that's enough for this week, I think! Good-bye, stamp fans, till we meet again—if ever!