

"BLACK MAGIC!" Amazing story of **FRANK RICHARDS.**
Harry Wharton & Co. by

The **MAGNET** 2^D

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**BUNTER'S
BASKET TRICK!**



Thrilling!

Mysterious!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Making the Punishment Fit the Crime!

I OWE you fellows a few trifling sums!"

"Eh?"

"I'm going to square!" said Billy Bunter.

Harry Wharton & Co. of the Greyfriars Remove gazed at Billy Bunter. They gazed in astonishment.

Bunter's statement was not merely astonishing. It was amazing. It was almost unnerving.

It was true that Bunter owed the Famous Five of the Remove a few trifling sums. There were few fellows in the Lower School at Greyfriars to whom Billy Bunter did not owe a few trifling sums. It was even rumoured that he owed a shilling to Fisher T. Fish, though how even Bunter had succeeded in borrowing a shilling from Fishy was a deep mystery.

These trifling sums, to Bunter, were trifles light as air, and sat very lightly indeed on his fat conscience. So his announcement that he was going to "square" naturally took the chums of the Remove by surprise. Often and often was Bunter known to borrow. Never, never was he known to square. It was a startling change in his manners and customs.

"You're going to whatter?" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Square!" answered Bunter.

"Time you did, if you ask me!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"The timefulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the squarefulness is a boot on the other leg."

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"I say, you fellows, I mean it!" said Bunter, blinking seriously at the juniors through his big spectacles. "The fact is, I don't believe in borrowing—"

"Fan me!" murmured Frank Nugent.

"Neither a borrower nor a lender be," as Spokeshave says—I mean, Shakespear. I'm going to square up all round," said Bunter. "And then if you fellows happen to be a bit short of tin at any time, all you've got to do is to come to me. One good turn deserves another, you know! I shall always be ready to oblige a pal who has obliged me in the past."

The Famous Five could only gaze.

Billy Bunter had taken their breath away.

It was after class at Greyfriars, and the Co., in the Rag, had been discussing a run over to Lantham on the morrow to see a League match there. But they forgot all about Lantham and the League match now. Their amazed attention was concentrated on the fat Owl of the Remove.

If this change in Bunter was genuine, it was the most surprising thing that had happened in the history of Greyfriars School. And the fat junior was looking intensely serious and earnest.

"Well, my only hat!" said Harry Wharton at last. "Nobody's ever expected you to square, Bunter—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"But if you mean it, wade in! We'll have half-crown seats at Lantham to-morrow, instead of standing with the jolly old mob."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry. "Go it, Bunter!"

"The old order changeth, giving place to the new!" quoted Frank Nugent.

"Hand it over, Bunter!"

"Gammon!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Oh, give Bunter a chance!" said Bob. "After all, why shouldn't Bunter square, like any other fellow?"

"The whyfulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the esteemed Bunter does not seem in a preposterous hurry to get on with the squarefulness."

That undoubtedly was the case. Billy Bunter had announced his astonishing intention to square. But he had not, so far, produced any cash.

"Shell out, Bunter—"

Billy Bunter had his fat hands in his pockets. He withdrew one of them. But it did not contain cash. It contained a cutting from a newspaper—apparently an advertisement of some sort.

"It's like this, you fellows," explained Bunter. "I haven't, at the present moment, any cash—"

"I thought not—" grunted Johnny Bull.

"But I'm expecting—"

"Why, you fat villain!" roared Bob Cherry. "If you say you're expecting a postal order we'll jolly well bump you!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I wasn't going to speak about my postal order—though, as a matter of fact, I'm expecting several from some of my titled relations. It's quite another thing. By the end of the week I shall have two pound ten."

"Whose?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Mine!" roared Bunter. "Look at this! It's an advert of the Pro Bono Publico Company. Pro Bono Publico means public benefit—"

"Go hon!" said Nugent sarcastically. "I think we could construe that without help!"

"And they jolly well mean it, too,"

said Bunter. "You send them a pound, and they send you a number of articles, which you sell among your friends for two pound ten! See? Easy as falling off a form! That worm Fishy thinks he's the only fellow in the Remove who knows anything about business. Fishy jolly well hasn't thought of this!" Bunter grinned complacently. "Look at it! I'm sending them a pound note, and I get the articles the next day! Next day I sell them, up and down the Remove! I make thirty shillings! Is that clear?"

"Oh, great Christopher Columbus!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Out of my profits," continued Bunter, "I square the few trifling sums I owe you fellows. I shall also repay the pound."

"What pound?"

"Well, you see, I have to send a pound to get the articles," explained Bunter. "Owing to being disappointed about a postal order I—I haven't a pound. That's where you fellows come in."

"That's where we come in?" ejaculated Harry Wharton blankly.

"Yes, old fellow! You lend me the pound—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"We—we—we lend you a pound!" articulated Johnny Bull. "So you're going to square by borrowing another pound?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Only temporarily," explained Bunter. "It's Tuesday now. I get the twenty articles on Wednesday. I sell them on Thursday for two pound ten. You're a bit of a fool, old chap, but surely that's clear to you?"

"And suppose you don't sell them?" gasped Bob.

"That's all right—I shall, of course! You see, they're all good, useful things, worth twice the money."

"How do you know?"

"It says so in the advertisement," explained Bunter.

"Oh crickey!"

"You can look for yourselves if you don't choose to take my word," said Billy Bunter, with dignity. "Here's the advert! You can read, I suppose?"

The Famous Five did not trouble to read the advertisement of the Pro Bono Publico Company. Without being unduly suspicious, they doubted whether that company really was run wholly and solely for the benefit of the public. Such things were, at least, rare.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Blessed if I didn't half believe that fat ass for a minute," he said. "Fancy Bunter squaring! Now, who's going to lend Bunter a pound? Don't all speak at once."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Co. did not all speak at once. They chortled all at once.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" said Bunter, blinking at them. "You fellows are a bit dense; but surely the thing is plain enough. I get twenty useful and valuable articles for a pound, I sell them for two pound ten, and—and there you are! I shall sell some of them to you fellows yourselves!"

"Will you?" gasped Bob.

"Certainly, old fellow! As my pals you'll have the first choice of the articles," said Bunter generously. "I believe in a fellow treating his friends well! Nothing mean about me, I hope! I wouldn't mind letting you fellows have the whole lot, in fact. Now, which of you men is going to lend me the pound?"

Bunter blinked inquiringly at the Famous Five.

"The whichfulness," remarked Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, "is terrific!"

"Not to say preposterous!" chuckled Bob.

"I'm waiting, you fellows," said Bunter. "I've got the letter all ready written to the Pro Bono Publico Company. Luckily Toddy had a stamp in his desk. All I need is a pound note to put in the letter."

"Gentlemen, chaps, and sportsmen," said Bob Cherry, "Bunter has raised our giddy hopes, only to dash them to the ground again. I suggest doing the same with Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I say, you fellows, no larks!" roared Bunter. "Here, leggo—wharrer you at—whoooooop!"

"We're making the punishment fit the crime!" explained Bob Cherry. "You've raised our hopes—so we're raising you—"

"Yaroooh!" roared the fat Owl, as he was swept off his feet.

"You've dashed them to the ground—so we're dashing you to the ground—"

"Wow!" roared Bunter in anticipation. "I say, you fellows— Wow!"

Bump!

He struck the hard floor with a sickening thud!

"Yaroooooooop!"

The Famous Five, with the exception of the exuberant Bob Cherry,

Queer things are happening to Jim Valentine, the new boy at Greyfriars—so queer, in fact, as to suggest that supernatural forces are at work!

moved towards the door of the Rag, leaving Billy Bunter, sitting in a breathless state, gasping.

The fat junior gasped still more when Bob Cherry grabbed up a half-filled wastepaper-basket and jammed it on his bullet head, completely bonneting him; so completely, in fact, that Bunter's head was forced through the bottom.

"You—you rotter!" wailed Bunter, trying to extricate himself from the basket. "I—I say, you fellows, lend a hand!"

"I don't think!" said Harry Wharton, waving a hand in farewell to the fat junior. "Ta-ta, my fat pippin!"

By the time Billy Bunter had succeeded in freeing himself of the basket the Famous Five had disappeared.

The letter to the Pro Bono Publico Company was in Bunter's pocket, with Toddy's stamp on it, all ready to post—only needing a pound note to be put inside! Only that was wanting—but it seemed probable that it would remain wanting!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Shadowed!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "Enjoying life?"

Jim Valentine smiled cheerily.

The new fellow in the Remove rather looked as if he was enjoying life.

There were Greyfriars fellows who did not consider that their lines were cast in specially pleasant places. But to Jim Valentine of the Remove, Greyfriars School was undoubtedly the most delectable spot on earth.

No doubt contrast with what he had previously known helped to brighten Greyfriars to the "boy with a past."

The fellow who had spent more than a year of his boyish life among crooks, who had been called "Dick the Penman" when he was in Nosey Clark's gang, hardly believed in his good luck in these changed days.

Many a time he woke in the morning at the clang of the rising-bell and wondered to find himself in the Remove dormitory, instead of the den where, under Nosey Clark's orders, he had exercised his strange and dangerous gift of penmanship.

The change was not one from poverty to wealth; for in Nosey Clark's gang he had had plenty of money, and all that he wanted that money could buy. Life at Greyfriars was hard in comparison. Mr. Quelch, his kind benefactor, made him an allowance of pocket-money; but it was not large, and he had to be careful with it; and in the old days he had flung pound notes about, as he could not now afford to fling pennies. His kind friend had given him a push-bike—a useful but far from expensive machine; and in the old days he had had a motor-bike of his own, of the best make. He was as well-dressed as most fellows in the Remove; but there had been a time when he had carelessly spent on his clothes as much as Vernon-Smith or Lord Maulverer.

Yet the change made him happy—and not only happy and contented, but brimming with satisfaction. Sometimes Mr. Quelch, the Remove master, glanced at his bright face and smiled with satisfaction himself, rewarded for his kindness to the boy by the sight of his happy contentment.

There had been a cloud—the shadow of the past. But that, to all appearance, was gone. Nosey Clark had tried again and again to get him back to the gang, and failed every time; and now the boy believed that he was done with the whole crew of them—Nosey, the master-crook, Barney, the "thug," Nutty, the cracksman, Kicky, the "pincher," and the rest—and from the bottom of his heart he hoped that he would never see any of them again. Nosey had given his word—and why should he break it?

More than a week had passed since he had seen the crook—and the thought, almost the certainty, that he was free of him, was like wine to him. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent found him always merry and bright in Study No. 1—even in the Form-room, when Quelch was grinding Latin irregular verbs into the reluctant brains of the Remove, Valentine always looked as if he considered himself in clover. Now, as Bob Cherry clapped him on the shoulder, after dinner on Wednesday, and bailed him in tones that Stentor of old might have envied, he hardly needed to ask whether Jim was enjoying life. It was only too evident that he was.

"It does a fellow good to see you, old bean!" grinned Bob. "I think we shall have to call you 'Sunny Jim.'"

Valentine laughed.

"Well, if you're ready, so are we," went on Bob. "We shall have to put it on a bit to get over to Lantham in time for the game. It's close on ten miles. This way to the bikeshed."

And grasping Valentine playfully by the arm, the exuberant Bob rushed him off at top speed. Bob Cherry was always exuberant on a half-holiday—and at most other times as well.

"I say, you fellows," Billy Bunter spotted them and rolled to intercept them. "I say—stop a minute—Oooh—look! Ooooooop!"

Bob Cherry did not stop; and as Bunter stepped in the way there was a collision. Bunter sat down and spluttered. Leaving him to splutter, Bob rushed the breathless Valentine onward.

They arrived panting at the bished; where Harry Wharton, Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Singh were taking their machines from the stands. "Here we are again!" gasped Bob. "Race you men to Lantham! You fellows coming?" he added, catching sight of Herbert Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing in the bished. "Good! The more the merrier!"

Eight machines were wheeled out. A fat and breathless Bunter came spluttering up.

"I say, you fellows, about that pound—"

But nobody stayed to hear anything about the pound—of which Billy Bunter was still in need. They ran the machines out to the road and mounted. Billy Bunter, from the gate, gave them a devastating blink through his big spectacles.

"Beasts!" he roared.

And as the cyclists went sailing merrily away, Billy Bunter rolled back into the quad—in search of somebody to lend him a pound. Bunter had been a long time in search of that somebody; but he had not found him yet!

"Jolly day, isn't it?" said Bob Cherry, as the bunch of cyclists swept past a car on the Courtfield road—a blue Napier that was moving along at a crawling pace. Every day, according to Bob, was a jolly day.

"The jolliffulness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Come on, Valentine!" roared Bob, glancing back over his shoulder. "Not getting pumped yet, what?"

Jim Valentine did not answer.

He had dropped behind the bunch of cyclists. His head was turned, and he was looking back at the Napier car.

The car was closed, and it was not easy to see the occupants. But as he passed it, it had seemed to Jim Valentine that he had caught a glimpse of a sallow face, a beaky nose, and glinting, black eyes, scanning him from the interior. Had the face of Nosey Clark looked at him from the interior of the closed car?

"This way, Valentine!" roared Bob.

The cyclists swept round a corner, to follow a track across Courtfield Common, which led into the Lantham road. Valentine put on speed, and came after them. Bob Cherry was setting the pace, and Bob covered the ground very quickly; and the other fellows had to grind at the pedals to keep up with him.

Something of the brightness had gone from Jim Valentine's face now. He wondered whether he had fancied that evil face in the car. It was a face that often haunted him in his dreams, and that he could not always succeed in driving from his waking thoughts. Surely he had fancied it! But as the bunch of riders swept along the track across the common, he looked back over his shoulder, and his heart beat faster. The blue Napier had been crawling in the direction of the school when the juniors passed it. Evidently it had turned round, for now it was coming from the Courtfield road, following the juniors across the common. Harry Wharton, catching Valentine's backward glance, followed it and stared at the car.

"Cars aren't supposed to use this path," he said. "Isn't that the car we passed on the road a mile back?"

"I—I think so," said Jim.

He rode on; but a few minutes later

glanced back again. He scanned the driver of the blue Napier; but the man's cap was pulled low, and the peak half-hid his face. Valentine could not recognise him, but he wondered if it was Barney Hayes, who generally drove for Nosey. He set his teeth hard.

That the car was following the Greyfriars party, he hardly doubted. When they turned into the high-road for Lantham, the car turned in the same direction. It was possible, of course, that the motorist was heading for that town for his own reasons. But the blue Napier did not pass the cyclists. Fast as they were riding, the car could have whipped by them easily and left them standing. But it kept a level pace, humming at a fair distance behind the party, never increasing or decreasing it.

By the time they were half-way to Lantham all the fellows were aware of the car in pursuit.

"What the dickens does that fellow want?" asked Vernon-Smith, staring back at it. "He's hung behind us ever since we started."

"Hold-up man waiting for a lonely spot?" suggested Redwing, laughing.

"Plenty of us to handle him, if it's that!" said the Bounder. "I'd like to see him try it on!"

"He's up to something," said Frank Nugent. "Look!"

On the slope of Redclyffe Hill, which was steep, the party dismounted to wheel their machines. Even a motorist who was not in a hurry might have been expected to pass them there. But the blue Napier did not pass. Its pace dropped to a crawl, and it kept the same distance behind.

For a mile the juniors pushed their machines uphill, and all the time the blue Napier crawled in the rear.

Valentine's face was set.

He could have no doubt now; he had not been mistaken in fancying he had glimpsed the face of Nosey Clark in the car. Yet even if the master-crook was breaking his pledge to leave him in peace, it was difficult to guess what his game could be.

He dared not attempt to kidnap the boy who had deserted the gang; and even had he had such a scheme he could hardly have chosen a time when the boy had seven sturdy schoolfellows with him. As the Bounder had said, there were plenty of them to handle the enemy, if it was a "hold-up" that was intended.

Harry Wharton & Co., puzzled by the pursuit, were a little enlightened by the look on Jim Valentine's face. They guessed what was in his mind; but they said nothing. Vernon-Smith and Redwing knew nothing about Valentine's past; and the less said about Nosey Clark the better when there were other ears to hear.

Down the further slope of the hill the juniors, mounted again, went at a rush, free-wheeling. Then the car picked up speed again. The Bounder, glancing back, gave an angry grunt.

"He's after us, whoever he is!" he snapped. "I've a jolly good mind to stop and ask him what he wants."

"Don't want to be late for the game, old man," said Redwing—not adding that they did not want trouble with strangers on the road, either.

The Bounder was rather a fellow to welcome trouble.

Still at the same distance behind, the car hummed on, all the way to Lantham. It was in sight when the Greyfriars fellows, at last, rode into that town, and they saw it pass when they put up their bicycles, and it was hovering at a distance when they went into the football ground.

There, of course, they lost sight of it; and all but one of the party soon forgot its existence, as they watched Lantham kick off and the game begin. But Jim Valentine did not forget. He stood with the rest of the fellows, in a thick throng of spectators, watching the football match, but, good game as it was, he hardly saw what passed.

Nosey Clark had followed him—Nosey Clark had been in the car watching the road by the school, and had followed him to Lantham! Why?

He could not begin to guess. But a sense of coming evil was heavy on his heart.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

An Old Acquaintance!

NOSEY CLARK smiled sourly. The man with the nose like a vulture's beak was sitting in the car, in a quiet street off the Market Square of Lantham. Beside him, in the car, was a small, slim, wiry man, with a cast in one eye. Had Jim Valentine seen him he would have recognised an old acquaintance—Kicky Judd, the "pincher" and pickpocket; a member of the gang of crooks whom he had not seen since he had fled from Nosey Clark, but whom he remembered well enough.

Many a time had he seen Kicky practising his peculiar craft at the headquarters of the crooks. Kicky had a hand of velvet, the stealthiness of a cat; it was Kicky's boast that he could have "pinched" the button off a man's waistcoat, without the owner being any the wiser. In his own peculiar line he was as skilful as Nutty in cracking a crib, or Dick the Penman in imitating hands.

A crowd on a football ground was a favourite place for Kicky to exercise his skill. But it was not merely for picking pockets that Mr. Judd was at Lantham that day.

"It's a chance at last!" Nosey Clark was saying. "It was bound to come, and here it is, Kicky. This time it's sure, if you don't fail like that fool Nutty."

"Leave it to me, gov'nor," said Mr. Judd.

Nosey knitted his brows.

It was not the first time he had thought that he was sure of succeeding in his dastardly schemes to drive Jim Valentine from Greyfriars, and force him back into his old life. Twice had he planned to fasten a suspicion of theft on the boy in the school, and every time he had failed. The car in their courses fought against Siser of old, and really they seemed to be treating Nosey in the same way! How he had failed he did not know; but he had failed. The treacherous attempts of the master-crook seemed to glide from the boy like hail from glass.

And his last blow had brought danger, not to Jim Valentine, but to himself. Nutty the crackman had been caught in the school, and Nutty was a "squealer"—had he passed into the hands of the police there would have been dire danger to the whole gang. Only by giving the boy his pledge to leave him in peace to keep clear of Greyfriars, had he prevailed on Jim to give him the chance to release Nutty before the handcuffs fastened on him. The boy had believed him—but a broken pledge cost Mr. Clark little.

But once more he had to change his plans. He was not trusting Nutty again to carry out his schemes, in the

dark hours, within the walls of Greyfriars. That, as Nosey would have expressed it, was a chicken that would not fight. But his determination was harder than ever to drive Jim from the school; to get Dick the Penman back into his hands.

All the bitterness and malice of Nosey's evil nature were roused by his defeats and the boy's scornful defiance. It was not only because the boy's strange gift with the pen meant profit to him if he could once force him back to his old work; it was a personal matter, too, with Mr. Compton Clark—he would not admit defeat.

He took a pocket-book from his coat

"He dare not!" answered Nosey Clark coolly. "It's checkmate on both sides, so far as that goes. If the police get you they get Dick the Penman along with you—Jim won't fancy that!"

Kicky Judd nodded.

"Looks all right!" he agreed.

"Get on with it!"

The pickpocket stepped from the car and shut the door. Nosey muttered a word to the driver, and Barney drove on.

Mr Judd, with his hands in his coat pockets, and a cigarette between his tobacco-stained teeth, strolled away to Lantham Football Ground

attack on the Lantham goal, and the Ramblers were defending gamely; and Harry Wharton & Co were thinking of anything but pickpockets in the crowd. Even the Bouncer, who was a very keen and wary fellow, was quite unaware that thievish fingers relieved him of his notecase—which, schoolboy as he was, was a valuable prize for any "pincher," Smithy being uncommonly well-supplied with money. The other fellows were hardly worth Kicky's while; but he relieved Harry Wharton of a couple of half-crowns, and Hurree Singh of a silver-handled penknife. He gave his professional attention to Jim Valentine last.



While Harry Wharton & Co. were watching the League team making a hot attack on the Lantham goal, Mr. Judd sidled up to them and his slim, velvety fingers got to work. Even Vernon-Smith, who was a very keen and wary fellow, was quite unaware that thievish fingers relieved him of his notecase—a valuable prize for any thief!

and examined the contents, Kicky watching him with a grin.

From the pocket-book he selected a number of currency notes and a number of silver coins.

Those currency notes, and those coins, would have passed muster in many shops; but not at the Bank of England. Nosey's chief line of business was the passing of counterfeit money.

"Help yourself!" he said, with a sour grin.

Kicky picked out several notes and coins. He slipped them into a pocket. Clark opened the door of the car.

"You know what to do" he said. "We've fixed all that up. Don't bungle it like Nutty!"

The crook's black eyes glistened.

"It's a pie, guv'nor!" answered Mr. Judd. "But—if Jim cuts up rusty, and hands a cove over to the coppers—"

He was soon mingling with the crowd there.

The match had been going on some time. Some hundreds of spectators were watching Lantham Ramblers in their tussle with the visiting League team. The crowd was fairly thick, but not thick enough to impede Mr Judd. He moved about carelessly, looking for a little crowd of schoolboys in Greyfriars caps.

He was not long in spotting them.

Close to the little group, behind them, Mr. Judd's eyes rested on Jim Valentine for some time, the boy unaware of his presence. Mr. Judd did not, for the moment, make his presence known.

In a leisurely way—Kicky never hurried his work—his slim, velvety fingers were at their accustomed business. The attention of the juniors, with one exception, was riveted on the game. The League men were making a hot

"Bravo!" roared Bob Cherry, as the pill went in. "Goal! Good man! Goal!"

"Goal! Goal!"

Mr. Judd waited till Lantham kicked off again, and the game restarted. Then he gently deprived Jim Valentine of a little cheap notecase, in which were a pound note and a half-crown, all the money the boy had. Mr. Judd slipped them into a roomy pocket with his other plunder.

It would have been easy for Mr. Judd to slip away undetected. But that was not his game. He pushed against Jim Valentine, and shoved a hand clumsily into his coat pocket. Valentine gave a start and grasped at the wrist and caught it. It was Mr. Judd's object to be caught—and now he was caught!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry saw the action and spun round.

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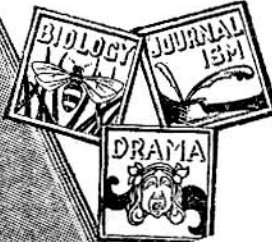
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"What's that game—picking pockets, what?"

Valentine turned on Kicky Judd, still grasping his wrist.

But as he saw the impudent, leering face, with its slanting eyes, he gave a low exclamation and released the man.

Kicky grinned at him.

Valentine's face paled. He knew the man at once, and he knew, too, that Judd wanted to be seen. A fierce anger burned in his heart.

"Collar him!" exclaimed Bob. "He's a pickpocket. He had his paw in your pocket, Valentine—"

"I saw him!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

All the juniors were looking round now. The Bounder made a movement towards the thief. Kicky Judd leered at Valentine.

With his clenched fist lifted, the boy made a swift stride at him. Before Judd knew what was happening, Valentine drove that fist full into his impudent, leering face.

Judd gave a startled yell and rolled over, sprawling among many feet, Valentine's eyes blazed down at him.

"Get up, you cur!" he muttered.

"Get up and—"

Kicky Judd got up, but he squirmed away as he did so. With a stream of red running from his nose, he dodged away in the crowd and vanished.

Valentine stood panting for breath. "Did he get anything from you?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"I—I don't know. I think not," stammered Valentine. He was not thinking of that.

"Well, you got him fair and square," grinned the Bounder.

"Goal!" came a roar.

Lantham Ramblers had scored, and attention was at once turned on the field again. Jim Valentine stood with beating heart. Why was Kicky there? What had he intended? Not merely pocket-picking, or he need not have revealed his presence. Had he been in the car with Nosey Clark, following the schoolboys to Lantham? Jim had no doubt of it. But what was the game? If it had been Kicky's intention to claim him as an acquaintance before the Greyfriars fellows, it had been nipped in the bud. Several times, while his companions watched the game, Valentine glanced round. But he saw no more of Kicky Judd. And he was glad that he had hit hard, and rather wished that he had hit harder.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder Means Business!

"ROBBED!"

"What?"

"My pocket's been picked!" said Herbert Vernon-Smith between his teeth.

It was not till the match was over and the crowd coming out of Lantham ground that the Bounder made that discovery.

The Greyfriars party came cheerily out with the swarming crowd and headed for the High Street, where they intended to tea at the Pagoda.

It was then that Vernon-Smith discovered that his notecase was gone, and came to a dead stop.

His eyes glittered savagely. Smithy had plenty of money, and had only to ask his father, the millionaire financier, when he wanted more. But he did not like losing it, all the same.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "That man in the football ground—he had it, then!"

"I was a fool not to think of it at the time," growled the Bounder. "But—well, it's gone."

He ran his hands through his pockets. "Much?" asked Harry Wharton. "Fifteen pounds!" snapped the Bounder.

"Oh, my hat!" "Better go through our pockets and see if we've lost anything," said Frank Nugent.

"Somebody's been through mine already!" said Harry ruefully. "Only a couple of half-crowns. Luckily, I wasn't rolling in oof, like Smithy."

"I seem to have lost a small and esteemed penknife," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, groping in his pockets.

"You lost anything, Valentine?" Jim Valentine had already discovered that his cheap little notecase, with his pound note and his half-crown, had vanished. He nodded.

"Not much, only all I had," he answered.

The juniors stood in a rather dismayed group. It was obvious that the man with the cast in his eye, in the crowd, had picked their pockets. They could hardly have a doubt about that. The "spread" at the Pagoda was "off."

Vernon-Smith stared round, over the crowd in the High Street, with glinting eyes. But he was not likely to see anything of the light-fingered man there.

"Better go to the police station, I suppose," said Nugent.

Jim Valentine caught his breath. To the other fellows it was a natural proceeding to report the theft to the police. To the boy who had associated with the crooks the matter was different. Gladly enough he would have seen Kicky Judd with the handcuffs on his rascally wrists, but he dared not think of it.

"Come on!" said Vernon-Smith; and he tramped savagely up the street in the direction of the police station in the market square.

The other fellows followed him. Valentine dropped a little behind. He could not prevent Smithy from taking action, neither did he desire to do so. But he could take no action against Kicky himself. He had more to fear than Kicky if the truce was broken. Harry Wharton looked round.

"Come on, Valentine!" he said. Then, as he caught the pale, strained look on Jim's face, he dropped behind and joined him. "What's up?" he asked tersely.

"No use my reporting this to the police," said Valentine. "My little notecase, that I gave a bob for, couldn't be identified, and a pound note and a half-crown—"

"Smithy's gorgeous outfit can be identified if the bobbies get a sight of the thief," said Harry, with a smile. "It would be known anywhere."

"Yes, that's all right. Leave it to Smithy."

Wharton gave him a sharp look. "But if they get the man, you want to claim your property," he said. "They won't get him."

"Well, I suppose there isn't a lot of chance; he's most likely miles away. But they might. You want your money if they do."

Valentine shook his head. "Never mind that," he said. Wharton's look became graver. "Look here, Valentine, I don't catch on."

"It's simple enough," said Jim in a low, bitter voice. "The man knew me, and I knew him. I fancy he was in that car following us, with Nosey."

"Oh!" exclaimed Wharton.

"You remember once we had Nosey in our hands. We—we had to let him go. You know why?"

Wharton was silent. He understood now that Valentine had recognised the pickpocket as a member of Nosey Clark's gang, which meant that it was in the rascal's power to betray Dick the Penman.

"Leave it to Smithy," muttered Valentine. "Leave me out. I—I'll clear off and wait for you where we left the bikes."

"Right-ho!" It was easy for Valentine to slip away unnoticed in the crowd passing along the High Street after the football match. Only Wharton knew that he was gone till the juniors arrived at the police station.

"Where's Valentine?" asked Vernon-Smith, looking round at the entrance to that building. "He ought to be here. He was robbed, too."

"The wherfulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, glancing round. "He does not seem to be here."

The Bounder grunted and went into the station. There a sympathetic inspector listened, and took a description of Smithy's notecase and its contents. The juniors left the station, with little hope that that valuable article would ever be seen again. Vernon-Smith was scowling blackly.

"Bit late for tea at the Pagoda now," remarked Bob Cherry. "I dare say we could raise enough—"

"Oh, let's get back!" growled the Bounder.

Smithy was in a bad temper, and when Smithy was annoyed he was not a very agreeable fellow. The juniors went for their machines, and there they found Valentine, waiting for them. In rather glum silence they mounted and rode out of Lantham.

That the pickpocket was far enough away with his plunder none of the party doubted. Jim Valentine could not help feeling glad that his companions were not likely to see Kicky again. As a matter of fact, his own loss was more serious than Smithy's, though it was so much smaller. His pocket-money was limited, and he had lost all he had. He was going to be "stony" till his next allowance was due.

But it was the unexpected that was destined to happen. A mile out of Lantham Herbert Vernon-Smith suddenly clapped on his brakes and uttered a glad and vengeful exclamation.

"My hat! There he is! Hold on, you men!"

In sheer amazement the cyclists stared at the man who was louncing in the middle of the road ahead of them. It was a rather solitary road, and there was no one else to be seen. The man with the cast in his eye, his nose red and raw from Jim Valentine's punch, was quite conspicuous. It might almost have been suspected that he wanted to be found, if any motive on his part could have been imagined; for certainly he could have kept out of sight had he liked. He did not seem to recognise the cyclists who were sweeping down on him, which was odd enough, for Kicky's shifty eyes were very watchful and keen.

"Oh, what a bit of luck!" sang out Bob Cherry gleefully.

"The luckfulness is terrific!" clucked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Collar him!"

The bunch of cyclists opened out and surrounded Kicky before they jumped down. Vernon-Smith let his bike go spinning as he ran at the man and grasped him by the collar.

"Here, hands off, you!" cried Mr. Judd. "What's this game?" "You rascal, I've got you!" exclaimed the Bounder. "Hand it over!"

Mr. Judd stared round at eight faces that surrounded him. Jim Valentine felt a sickness at his heart.

He fully expected Kicky's eyes to turn on him; he dreaded to hear what might fall from the rascal's lips. But to his surprise Mr. Judd took no special notice of him.

The man had recognised him at Lantham; he knew that. He must know him now. Yet Judd gave no sign of recognition.

His stare passed over Valentine's face without a sign.

"Look 'ere, gents, what's this game?" demanded Mr. Judd. "Collaring a man on the King's 'ighway! This 'ere one of our larks, what?"

"Cut it out, you rogue!" said Harry Wharton in disgust. "You picked our pockets at Lantham."

"Never seen you afore, sir," said Mr. Judd coolly.

"That won't wash," said Herbert Vernon-Smith. "We've got him, you men, and we'll walk him back to Lantham and give him in charge."

"What'ho!" agreed Johnny Bull. "It's worth the walk."

"Yes, rather!"

"Hook him along!" said Redwing.

"Old on, young gents," said Mr. Judd. "I own up! I may 'ave took a few things. Go easy with a cove, gents! I'll 'and the lot back, so 'elp me!"

"You can hand them over to the police," said the Bounder sourly. "You'll get three mouths for this, you rascal!"

"If he hands the things back—"

said Valentine huskily.

"Rot!" snapped the Bounder. "He's a thief, and he's going to chokey!"

"Don't be an ass, Valentine," said Johnny Bull. "The proper place for a thief is in the stone jug. I dare say he's been there before."

"Many a time, sir," said Kicky, with cool impudence. "But I ain't never liked it. Go easy with a cove, gents! I'll 'and back every copper, s'elp me!"

Wharton's eyes were on Valentine for a moment. He was the only fellow there who knew what was in the boy's tormented mind.

"Look here, let the man hand the money back and kick him out!" said the captain of the Remove. "Hand it over you rascal, and sharp!"

"Appy to oblige, sir!" said Kicky, and he groped in his pockets.

Vernon-Smith received back his fat notecase and examined the contents. They were intact, and had evidently not been touched by the thief. Hurree Singh smiled a dusky smile as he received his silver-handled penknife. Wharton took his two half-crowns and slipped them into his pocket. Then Jim Valentine's cheap little notecase was produced.

"Ere you are, sir!" said Kicky. "That's yourn, I believe."

Valentine took it mechanically. Kicky treated him exactly as he treated the others, still without a sign of recognition. The relief was great, but it puzzled him. Was Nosey Clark, after all, keeping his word? Had he given his orders to the gang to leave the boy in peace? It looked like it.

But that Kicky had to be left free was certain. So far, he was ignoring the boy who had once been with the crooks. But if he was given into custody of the police it was certain that his tongue would wag. Nothing

could be said; but it was unnecessary for anything to be said. For his own sake Jim Valentine had to see somehow that Kicky was not marched back to Lantham and charged. Somehow he had to contrive that, or take the consequences.

He was slipping the little notecase in his pocket when Redwing tapped his arm.

"Look into it, old chap," said Redwing. "See if it's all right."

"Oh, yes!" stammered Valentine, and he glanced into the notecase. It contained a pound note and a half-crown. "It—it's all right."

He slipped it into his pocket. "Now, gents, you got it all back," pleaded Kicky. "Go easy with a cove what's down on his luck."

"Take his other arm, Reddy!" said the Bounder grimly.

"Look here—" began Wharton, hesitating.

The Bounder cut him short. "You fellows can please yourselves! I'm going to charge this man with theft and see him locked up. Clear off if you choose; Reddy will lend me a hand with him!"

"Look here, why not, Wharton?" demanded Johnny Bull. "The fellow's a rotten thief—what do you want to let him go for?"

"Oh, let him rip!" said the good-natured Bob. "We'll kick him as a warning to be a good boy in future."

"The kickfulness is the proper caper," said Hurree Janset Ram Singh, with a nod. "We shall be late for esteemed call-over if we walk back to Lantham."

"Hang call-over!" said Vernon-Smith. "I'm going back to Lantham and taking this scoundrel with me!"

"Oh, give it a miss, Smithy!" said Nugent.

"I won't!" "I'd rather you did, Smithy," said Harry Wharton.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. "Lend me a hand with him, Reddy," he said, unheeding.

"Well, look here, I'm not going back," said Harry.

"Please yourself; I am."

The Co. regarded Wharton with some surprise. But they were used to following his lead, and they followed it now. Valentine's face was growing whiter. For the first time Kicky's eyes fixed on his with a significant look. It was a brief look, but Jim read the threat in it. If Kicky Judd went to Lantham Police Station, Dick the Penman was going along with him.

"Oh, chuck it, Smithy!" said Johnny Bull. "If Wharton thinks—"

"Wharton can think what he likes; I'm thinking of a fellow's duty to the public!" said the Bounder.

"You mean you're in a rotten temper," said Bob.

"Put it how you like; this thief is going to chokey, and I'm going to see that he does."

The Bounder was in savage earnest. Again Kicky's eyes glinted at the boy with a past.

Jim Valentine stepped forward.

"Let him go, Smithy!" he said in a low voice.

"I shall do nothing of the kind."

"You've got your money back—"

"Mind your own business, Valentine!" snapped the Bounder. "Why—what—your cheeky rotter!" he yelled, as Valentine dragged his grasp from Kicky's arm.

Kicky Judd did not lose the opportunity. The instant his arm was free he dodged out of the circle of school-boys and took to his heels. Almost in

twinkling he had scrambled up the bank beside the road and vanished into the woodland.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bitter Blood I

"BY gad!" The Bounder, with a cry of rage, leaped after the fleeing pickpocket. But he was too late. Swift as a hunted hare Kicky Judd vanished into the dusky woodland and was lost to sight.

Vernon-Smith scrambled up the bank after him, but there was no chance of getting hold of the man again, and he knew it.

Harry Wharton & Co. stared on in silence. Valentine's face was white. What the other fellows would think of his action, he had had no time to consider. He had acted in sheer desperation.

In less than a minute Herbert Vernon-Smith came back. His face was pale with rage, and his eyes flashed at Valentine. The headstrong, arrogant Bounder liked to have his own way. To have the matter taken out of his hands like this roused his deepest anger. And he had been in the right, so far as that went, the man was a thief, and should have been handed over to the law. Smithy was almost stuttering with rage as he strode up to Valentine.

"You cheeky rotter!" he shouted. "What did you mean by that?"

The other fellows stood silent. Wharton understood; the only fellow who did. Redwing was staring at Valentine in blank amazement.

"You've let him go!" roared Vernon-Smith. "Let that thief go when we found the plunder on him!"

"You got it back," said Valentine.

"What bizney is that of yours? Are you going to dictate to me?" shouted the enraged Bounder. "By gad! Put up your hands, you cheeky rotter!"

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Wharton.

Vernon-Smith, too passionately angry to heed, rushed at Valentine, hitting out. He had cause for anger, there was no doubt about that. So far as he could see, he was in the right and Valentine in the wrong. And even had he been in the wrong the Bounder was not a fellow to be dictated to.

Valentine's hands shot up in self-defence, but he did not hit back. He backed away across the road, stalling off the Bounder's furious attack.

"Smithy!" exclaimed Redwing.

"Hold on, Smithy!"

"For goodness sake!"

"Stop them!" snapped Wharton, and he rushed after the Bounder, who was following up Valentine with fierce blow after blow, and grasped him by the shoulders.

"Let go, you fool!" roared the Bounder.

Wharton spun him away from Valentine with such force that the Bounder staggered, and would have fallen had not Redwing caught him.

"Now chuck it!" snapped the captain of the Remove. "Keep your temper, you silly ass!"

The Bounder panted with rage.

"Dash it all, Valentine had no right to do what he did!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Still, punching noses won't mend matters."

Redwing held his chum's arm as the infuriated Bounder would have turned on Wharton.

"For goodness' sake, keep cool, Smithy!" he whispered. "What's the good of scrapping with your friends?"

"The scrappfulness is not the proper caper, my esteemed and ridiculous Smithy," urged Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Let go my arm!" hissed Vernon-Smith. "Let go my arm, Reddy, you fool!"

But Redwing tightened his grasp instead.

"No good scrapping, old chap!" he said.

Vernon-Smith looked, for a moment, as if he would turn his fury on his chum. But he controlled himself with an effort.

"Oh, let go!" he snapped. "The cheeky rotter will keep!"

"I'm sorry, Smithy," said Valentine, with a grimace. "But—but—"

The Bounder gave him a black and bitter look.

"What did you do it for?" he asked, between his teeth. "What? Can you answer that question, you cheeky rotter?"

Valentine did not speak.

"Who is he?" went on Vernon-Smith, in the same tone. "Do you know him—and does he know you?"

Valentine's crimson face paled. He gave the Bounder a startled look and then, without a word, turned away to his bicycle and picked it up.

"Shut up, Smithy!" breathed Redwing. "What could Valentine know of that rotter? Don't be a mad ass!"

"Isn't it plain enough for even a fool like you to see?" sneered the Bounder.

"Bunter was tattling a lot of things about Valentine at the beginning of the term. I never took any notice then. I know what to think now."

The Famous Five exchanged startled glances. The Co. had been puzzled; but now, in a flash, they guessed what Wharton already knew. And it was evident that suspicion was working in the Bounder's angry mind.

"Let's get back to Greyfriars, for goodness' sake!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Let's!" said Nugent.

Valentine had already started. The Famous Five remounted their machines and rode after him.

Behind them came the Bounder and Redwing, but not riding with them. Smithy, apparently, did not want any more of their company.

Hardly a word was exchanged between Valentine and his friends during the ride back to the school.

Accustomed to look on Jim as a Greyfriars fellow, like themselves, the chums of the Remove had almost forgotten his past strange connections—at least, they had ceased to think about them. It came as a shock to their minds to realise that the underworld still had a grip of Valentine of the Remove.

Jim's heart was heavy enough.

He had made no enemies at Greyfriars, hitherto; but he had made one now. The Bounder was the last fellow in the world to forgive his high-handed action. And it had plainly started a train of suspicion in his mind—a keen and wary mind, of a naturally suspicious cast.

Billy Bunter had long ago forgotten what he knew about Valentine, and forgotten that he had tattled about it at the beginning of the term. That was like Bunter. Nobody had taken any notice of Bunter's tattling; but the Bounder forgot nothing, and Jim's action had recalled it to his mind.

Indeed, it could hardly have failed to do so.

Jim had had little to do with Vernon-Smith, but he knew what he was like—hard, suspicious, unforgiving—a fellow with many good qualities, but not a



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small number of bad ones. He had made an enemy—and a dangerous one. And, so far as the cause of the quarrel went, that enemy had right on his side.

The Bounder rode in silence, by Redwing's side, at a distance behind the chains of the Remove. But if he said nothing his thoughts were busy.

He did not break silence till Greyfriars was in sight in the dusk.

"It's plain enough, Reddy," he said. "What is, Smuthy?" asked Tom Redwing.

"About that cur, Valentine!" said the Bounder, between his teeth. "You remember Bunter was babbling about him—"

"I'd forgotten," said Redwing uncasily. "For goodness' sake, don't rake up Bunter's babble, because you've rowed with the chap!"

"Bunter knew something about him," said the Bounder, unheeding. "I took no notice then. It was no bizney of mine. But now—" He gritted his teeth. "You noticed that he never came into the station with us to report about his pocket being picked? I wondered why then. I know now—now that the rotter's laid hands on me, to get the thief away! Bunter wasn't talking out of his hat, as he usually does—"

"Oh, rot!" said Redwing. "You think it's rot, do you?" jeered Smuthy. "Then why was he so keen on letting that thief escape?"

"Well we got the stuff back," said Redwing. "and—the other fellows were willing to let him go, too, and—and—"

"And—and—" sneered the Bounder. "You know it's fishy, as well as I do. By gad, I'll make him sorry for having laid hands on me!"

"Look here, Smuthy, it was rather

cheeky of him; but he's not a bad chap. Wash it all out—"

"Rats to you!" said the Bounder. And no more was said as they rode on to Greyfriars.

The Famous Five were in first. They put up their bicycles and hurried over to the House for call-over. Jim Valentine dropped out of the group as they went.

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged a glance. They knew what was in the boy's mind. Quietly they gathered round him again. Wharton linked arms on one side, Frank Nugent on the other.

"Don't be an ass, Valentine!" grunted Johnny Bull.

Valentine coloured, and then smiled faintly. The Co. were making it clear that they were sticking to him. In the midst of his friends, Jim Valentine walked into Hall for calling over. They were sticking to him—his friends were his friends still! And he did not notice the black look the Bounder gave him as he joined the Remove in Hall.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

False Money!

"DEAR old chap!" said Billy Bunter.

Valentine grinned. He was going into the school shop, after class the following day, when Billy Bunter hooked on and addressed him in endearing accents.

"I've been looking for you, dear old fellow!" purred Bunter.

"Look for somebody else, instead!" suggested Jim.

"Oh, really, Valentine—"

"Anyhow, don't bother!"

"Beast!"

Valentine laughed, and went into the tuckshop. Billy Bunter rolled in after him. Any fellow going into the tuckshop with money to spend was sure of Billy Bunter's kindest regards. But it was not only tuck that Bunter was thinking of. He was still minus a pound.

That generous offer from the Pro Bono Publico Company was still open, and Billy Bunter had been unable to close on it. A pound—a mere pound—a paltry pound—stood between Billy Bunter and a really handsome and profitable stroke of business.

Fisher T. Fish, the American junior, guessed and reckoned and calculated that he was the only business man at Greyfriars School. But Billy Bunter flattered himself that, given a chance, he could teach Fishy business. Buying twenty useful and valuable articles for a pound and selling them for fifty shillings was a stroke of business of the most profitable nature—but, of course, a fellow needed capital! Without the preliminary pound the keenest business man could not have brought off that stroke of business.

And nobody would lend Bunter a pound! Even Lord Mauleverer declined to part with a pound. The Bounder had kicked Bunter merely for asking him. Monty Newland had listened to him politely, but had not parted with a pound, and had pulled Bunter's fat ear when the Owl of the Remove told him he was a mean beast. Bunter had gone up and down the Remove in quest of a pound,

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and those who possessed one did not seem to want to give it to Bunter!

Valentine was one of the few fellows he had not yet tackled, and he hoped for the best. Valentine was a good-natured fellow, and a little careless with money, though he did not possess much of that useful article. And Bunter knew that he had a pound note, having heard talk about the episode at Lantham.

The fat Owl rolled into the school shop after Valentine, and joined him at Mrs. Mimble's counter. Jim was shopping for tea in Study No. 1, and was not in need of Billy Bunter's assistance.

"I say, old fellow—dear old fellow!" said Bunter.

"Shut up, old fat man!" said Valentine; and he ran over a little list to Mrs. Mimble, to the amount of three shillings and threepence.

"It's rather important, old fellow," urged Bunter, in a first pause.

"Three-and-three!" said Jim Valentine, laying a half-crown, a sixpence, and three pence on the counter.

"Some fellows who were buying tarts would stand a pal a tart," remarked Billy Bunter reproachfully.

Valentine passed one of the jam tarts he had purchased across to Bunter. The fat Owl grabbed it at once, and transferred it to his capacious mouth. For the moment he was too busy to pursue the topic of the pound.

Jim gathered up his parcel, and turned to leave the tuckshop. Billy Bunter bolted the last of the tart, and jumped after him.

"I say, Valentine!"

"Bow-wow!"

Valentine walked out, and Bunter trotted after him. Three fellows came in at the same moment, and one of them, Herbert Vernon-Smith, shoved Bunter unceremoniously out of his way.

"Ow! Beast!" gasped Bunter. "Look here, Ogilvy—Oh, is it you, Smithy? All right, old fellow, I can take a joke."

Vernon-Smith passed on without wasting an answer on Bunter, with Redwing and Squiff. Billy Bunter blinked after Valentine, and then blinked at the Bounder. Smithy was going to shop for tea, and Smithy's shopping was always on a lavish scale—very different from Valentine's. Bunter sagely decided to let Valentine stand over, and devote his fat attention to Smithy for the present. Bunter had a hungry eye for the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table.

"I was awfully glad you got your money back yesterday, Smithy," said the fat Owl affably, joining the juniors at the counter.

All Greyfriars had heard about the pocket-picking at Lantham. Smithy had had to ask Quelch's permission to use his telephone to tell the police at Lantham that he had recovered his property. It was not specially necessary for Smithy to tell the whole Form about the matter. But talking about money was rather one of Smithy's weaknesses, and he was not unwilling to let the fellows hear that fifteen pounds had been "pinched" from his pocket on the Ramblers' ground. Perhaps, too, he realised, maliciously, that the subject was a disagreeable one to Jim Valentine.

He stared at the Owl of the Remove. "What are you glad about?" he asked coolly. "I'm not going to give you any."

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Ring off, fathead!"

Smithy rattled off a munificent order. But Mrs. Mimble did not give him the immediate and flattering attention she generally bestowed on that excellent

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customer. The good dame was standing with a half-crown between her fingers, and had rung it on the counter twice, with a doubtful expression on her plump face.

"Somebody landed a dud on you, ma'am?" asked Squiff.

"Well, Master Field, I'm not sure this half-crown is a good one," said Mrs. Mimble. "It doesn't seem to ring right."

"Let's look at it," said the Bounder; and he took the half-crown from Mrs. Mimble, and rang it hard on the counter.

The dull, leaden ring of the coin told its own tale.

"Dud!" said Vernon-Smith. "You've been done! If you don't know where you got it, I'll take it off your hands, ma'am."

That was sheer good nature on the Bounder's part, though with a slight touch of swank. A half-crown, more or less, was nothing to him; but it was a consideration to Mrs. Mimble.

"Thank you, Master Vernon-Smith!" said Mrs. Mimble. "That's very kind of you, but I just took it from Master Valentine, and I am sure he will take it back at once when I tell him it is a bad one."

The Bounder gave a slight start. "Valentine!" he repeated. "I passed him going out! Has Valentine been landing spoof half-crowns on you?"

"Dash it all, Smithy, that's a rather rotten way to put it," exclaimed Squiff warmly, while Redwing coloured with vexation. "The chap couldn't have known it was bad."

"Think not?" asked Vernon-Smith coolly.

"Do you think he would give it to Mrs. Mimble if he knew?" exclaimed Squiff angrily.

Smithy shrugged his shoulders.

"Smithy!" muttered Redwing.

Squiff gave the Bounder a rather grim look.

"I hear you had a row with Valentine yesterday, Smithy," he said. "I'd advise you not to hint things like that about a fellow you've rowed with. It's not good enough for Greyfriars, I can tell you."

"I'll ask for your advice when I want it, thanks!" said Smithy, unmoved.

Squiff breathed rather hard.

"I've changed my mind about teasing with you, Vernon-Smith," he said curtly. "Leave me out."

And the Australian junior walked to the door and left the tuckshop.

"I say, Smithy, you don't want Squiff!" remarked Billy Bunter. "I'll come, if you like. Shall I carry some things for you, old chap?"

"If you touch any of those things, you'll get kicked!" snapped Vernon-Smith.

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter rolled out. Smithy was in one of his unpleasant tempers. And evidently there were no crumbs from the rich man's table for Bunter.

The Bounder was scowling. He had not been able to still his malicious tongue, but he was hurt and offended by Squiff turning him down so promptly. And he understood, too, the expression on Redwing's face, though Tom said nothing. Mrs. Mimble, too, was looking at him with a far from approving eye. She liked Jim Valentine, as almost everyone at Greyfriars did. And Smithy's very plain hint that Valentine had knowingly passed false money on her seemed to her ill-natured and absurd. Counterfeit half-crowns were not uncommon, and any unwary fellow might have got landed with one, and passed it on without having noticed it.

"I am sure Master Valentine will

take this back when I tell him," said Mrs. Mimble, in a very marked tone. "I am certain that he never knew it was a bad one."

"Of course, he couldn't have known," said Redwing.

"No bizney of mine!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "I'd know fast enough if anyone tried landing a dud half-crown on me."

Mrs. Mimble smiled faintly—a smile that irritated the Bounder. He knew what she was thinking—that Valentine was not so wary and suspicious as he was, and, therefore, more likely to be taken in by a rogue. Scowling, the Bounder gathered up his purchases, and paid for them with a couple of currency notes, and left the shop with Redwing.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Working the Oracle!

BOO-HOO!" Jim Valentine started.

It was some time after tea, and Valentine had been in the gym with his friends. He had left them there, and come back to the House, and up to the Remove passage. He had some work to do, and was going to get it done in Study No. 1 before prep.

As he approached Study No. 1 he was surprised by the sound of "blubbing" going on within that celebrated apartment.

Blubbing was extremely uncommon, if not entirely unknown, in the Greyfriars Remove. Even fags in the Second did not blub.

So Valentine was naturally astonished.

He was not aware that a fat youth had been watching from the doorway of the study, had seen his head rise into view on the Remove staircase, and had then backed into the study, and commenced the sound of woe and lamentation that so startled him. Valentine was not so accustomed as the other fellows to the wiles of William George Bunter.

"What the dickens—!" he exclaimed. He stared into his study.

Billy Bunter was seated in the arm-chair there, with his fat face buried in his podgy hands.

"Boo-hoo! Boo-hoo!" wailed Bunter.

"You silly owl!" roared Valentine.

Billy Bunter removed the podgy hands from the fat face and blinked at Valentine. Tears were running down his fat cheeks. They were real tears. Bunter had thrown a slice of onion out of the window just before Valentine entered. The tears were plainly visible—the cause of them had disappeared.

Valentine stared at him.

"What on earth's the matter?" he asked.

The sight of tears disarmed him, as he had no suspicion of the onion.

"Boo-hoo! I—I— Boo-hoo!" wept Bunter. "Shut the door, old chap! I—I don't want anybody to see me blubbing! I—I can't help it! Boo-hoo! My poor sister Bessie! Boo-hoo!"

Valentine shut the door, his face grave. Bunter's grief seemed to indicate a serious bereavement.

Valentine had never heard of Bessie Bunter before. Neither was he aware how extremely frail was the thread of family affection in the Bunter tribe. He was prepared to be sympathetic if the fat Owl had suffered some heavy loss.

"Your sister Bessie," he asked—"what's happened to her?"

"Pip-pip-pip-pip—" moaned Bunter.

"What?"

"Pip-pip-pip-poor Bessie! She's at Cliff House School, you know!" groaned

Bunter. "I've been going to take you over there and introduce you, Valentine, old chap; you'd like to see Bessie. She's awfully pretty! We're all alike in our family, you know! She's j-j-just like me!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Valentine involuntarily.

If Bessie Bunter of Cliff House School was just like her brother Billy, he did not quite see how she could be awfully pretty. However, he did not say so.

"And she's ill!" groaned Bunter. "Sorry, old chap!" said Valentine. His opinion of Bunter rose a little. A fellow who was reduced to tears because his sister was ill could not be a bad chap. "I hope it's not bad."

"Double plumbago!" groaned Bunter. Valentine started.

"Double what?" "Plumbago. It runs in our family," said Bunter. "My grandfather had it bad. My uncle, who was killed in the War, died of plumbago."

"Wha-a-at!" gasped Valentine. "I—I—I mean, my—my uncle who wasn't killed in the War," gasped Bunter—"that is, he would have died of plumbago if he hadn't been killed in the War! That's what I really meant to say—galloping plumbago!"

"Do you mean lumbago?" asked Valentine.

"Eh—yes! Anyhow, it's double—I—I think treble! And—and there's a touch of celluloid arthritis, too!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Valentine. "I've heard of rheumatoid arthritis, I think—"

"That's what I mean," said Bunter hastily. "I—I'm so broken-hearted, I don't know what I'm saying! Pi-pip-pip poor Bib-Bib-Bib-Bessie! Boo-hoo!"

Bunter removed his spectacles and rubbed his eyes. They were red with grief—or onion!

"Lying on a sick-bed, you know!" said Bunter. "And—and I've been disappointed about a postal order—"

"Oh!" "And—and I can't send her anything!" groaned Bunter. "If I had a pound, I'd send her some nice things, you know. She's practically starved at Cliff House—same as I am here! If a fellow only had a pound!"

Bunter wept again. "But—but is it serious?" asked Valentine dubiously. "I believe lumbago is painful, but I didn't think it was dangerous."

"She's got pneumonia as well," explained Bunter—"pneumonia in both arms and the left leg—"

"Oh, great Scott!" "Boo-hoo! Boo-hoo!" Bunter dropped his grief-stricken face in his fat hands again and blubbed. "And—and a fellow can't do anything! Boo-hoo! I know you'd lend me a pound if you had one, old fellow. I'm not blaming you because you can't. I know you're short of money. Boo-hoo! If I could only cut down to Chunkley's and order a few nice things to be sent to her! Boo-hoo!"

Valentine regarded him doubtfully. Bunter, it was clear, was not well up in the list of diseases that afflicted Miss Bunter. But there was no doubt about his emotion—real tears rolled down his plump cheeks. Valentine had hitherto regarded Billy Bunter as a fat, fatuous, greedy, and rather unscrupulous young rascal. Now he thought a great deal better of him.

"Look here, Bunter, if ten bob's any good—" he began. "No; it's a pound, you see," said Bunter. "They—"

He broke off quite suddenly before he mentioned the Pro Bono Publico Company.

"What's a pound?" asked Valentine, puzzled.

"I—I—I mean, I—I've made up a—a list of—of nice things—the—the things pip-pip-poor Bessie likes—and—and it comes to exactly a pound. I—I was expecting a postal order for a pound, and now—now— Boo-hoo!"

Valentine took out his little cheap notecase. It contained a single pound note—all he had. His small change had gone in the tuckshop at tea-time. It cost him rather an effort, but he had a kind and generous heart.

Billy Bunter, with his fat hands over his weeping countenance, watched him through his podgy fingers.

SCOTTISH READER SCORES A "BULLSEYE" AND WINS A USEFUL POCKET KNIFE WITH THE FOLLOWING AMUSING STORYETTE:



Paddy was seeking to work his passage from America on a tramp steamer.

"And have you been to sea before?" asked the skipper. "Shure now," Paddy answered, "and do you think I came over from Oireland in a cab?"

One of our useful prizes has been sent to Duncan MacPherson, 2, Mearns Street, Greenock, Scotland.

His plump heart beat with hope. He had doubted whether it would be any use to tell Valentine about the Pro Bono Publico Company and their magnificent offer. He had tried that up and down the Remove without success.

Hence his present stunt—which seemed to be working! Fortunately for Bunter, Jim Valentine was a new fellow, and did not know him so well as the rest of the Remove did.

Valentine detached the pound note from the cheap little case.

"Look here, Bunter, here you are!" he said.

Bunter fairly grabbed the pound note. He left off weeping immediately. There was nothing more to weep for.

"Oh, I say, thanks, old chap!" exclaimed the fat Owl. "I say, that's awfully decent of you! I'll let you have this back out of the two-pound-ten."

"Eh—what two-pound-ten?" asked Valentine.

"I—I—I mean, I—I'm expecting a postal order for two-pound-ten," said Bunter hastily. "I—I'll cut off now, old fellow! I haven't too much time to catch the post."

"You're sending the order to Chunkley's by post?" asked Valentine.

"Eh? Oh, yes, exactly!"

Bunter dodged out of the study. Jim Valentine stood, looking more dubious than ever. However, it was done now, and he dismissed the matter from his mind. He took out his books, and sat down to work at the study table.

Bunter had shut the study door after him—which he did not always take the trouble to do when he left a fellow's study. The shut door prevented Valentine from observing that, in the Remove passage, Billy Bunter drew an envelope from his pocket, ready stamped and addressed. There was a letter inside that envelope, and into the letter Bunter crammed the pound note. He dabbed the envelope with his mouth, stuck it down, and rolled away to the stairs. Three minutes later, that letter was dropped into the school box—in time for the collection.

Billy Bunter was still rather red-eyed—that was the inevitable effect of the onion that had produced the tears; but he was grinning with satisfaction as he rolled back to the House.

His letter to the Pro Bono Publico Company was posted now. Twenty useful and valuable articles would come in return, which he was going to sell for fifty shillings! Generously, he made up his fat mind to let Valentine have his pound back out of these handsome profits. That would leave Bunter thirty shillings to the good. It was a happy prospect. Fisher T. Fish looked like having his transatlantic nose put out of joint as the business man of the Remove.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Too Late!

HARRY WHARTON and Frank Nugent came into Study No. 1, with smiling faces. Valentine was finishing a Latin exercise at the table. He looked up inquiringly at his study-mates.

"Was it you?" asked Harry. "What, and which?" inquired Valentine.

"Somebody caught Hacker with a slice of onion from one of the study windows," said the captain of the Remove, laughing. "I suppose it was an accident; some silly ass just chucked it out without thinking. But Hacker was meandering along the path, and it dropped on his napper."

Jim Valentine laughed. "Not guilty!" he answered.

"Hacker's rather cross," grinned Nugent. "He was telling Quelch. It seems that he was looking up to see whether it looked like rain, and the onion caught him on the nose. It came from one of the Remove studies, he told Quelch—one of the first two or three." "Not this study," said Valentine—"unless it was Bunter. He was here when I came in a quarter of an hour ago."

"Why, that's just when it happened!" exclaimed Wharton. "Has that fat ass been larking again? He played a trick like that on Coker of the Fifth from this very window once. Hacker's not safe to lark with."

"I don't think Bunter was feeling much like larking," said Valentine. "His sister's ill at Cliff House, and he was rather cut up about it."

"Was he?" exclaimed Frank, in astonishment. "He's jolly soon got over it, then. We passed him in the passage just now, grinning like a Cheshire cat."

"Oh!" said Valentine.
"I haven't heard of Bessie being ill," said Wharton. "I remember he told Mauly she was ill last term; he wanted to borrow ten bob to send her a bunch of grapes. Mauly fell to it—and Bunter had a spread in his study."

Valentine jumped.
He had been feeling a little dubious. But after this he did not feel dubious; he could hardly doubt that he had been "done" by the wily and astute Owl of the Remove.

"Did Bunter touch you for a loan?" chuckled Nugent.

"Well, you see—" stammered Valentine.

"You don't know jolly old Bunter so well as we do!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "I noticed he looked jolly pleased about something."

"The fat, puffing spoofer!" exclaimed Valentine indignantly. "But—but he really looked cut up! I don't think he could have put it all on! He was blubbing over it."

"He isn't blubbing now—he's chortling," said Nugent. "You've been spoofed, you ass! How much did Bunter touch you for?"

Valentine rose to his feet. His face was rather grim. It was not really a light matter to part with his only pound note, and leave himself "stony" for days to come. To lend it to a grief-stricken fellow who was worried about a sick sister was one thing. To be done out of it by a spoofing young rascal was quite another.

"I think I'll speak to Bunter," he said. "If the fat bouncer was pulling my leg—"

"Of course he was, fathead!"
"But he was really blubbing—tears on his cheeks," said Valentine. "A fellow can't cry to order, I suppose?"

"Well, I shouldn't think so," said Wharton, puzzled. "I know I jolly well couldn't! Suro of the jolly old tears?"

"Yes, quite!"
"Well, that looks genuine—but you say it was only a quarter of an hour ago, and we passed him a few minutes ago looking as pleased as Punch. Your loan must have cured his grief, and dried his tears. But Bunter's such a spoofing twister—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—" A fat face and a large pair of spectacles looked in at the door of Study No. 1.

"Oh, here he is! Roll in, barrel!" said Wharton. "How's Bessie?"

"Frightfully ill," said Bunter. "I told Valentine—he's sympathetic, not hard-hearted, like you fellows. He's got a soft heart."

"A soft head, you mean," said Frank. Bunter grinned for a moment. As a matter of fact, that was his own opinion, and that was why he had worked the blubbing stunt on the new fellow.

"Is your sister really ill, you fat villain?" asked Valentine.

"Practically at death's door," said Bunter cheerfully. "Double plumbago in both arms, and celluloid what-do-you-call-it in the feet."

"Oh crickey!"
"But that isn't what I came to speak about," said Bunter. "I hear that old Hacker caught the onion with his silly boko, and he's complained to Quelch."

"What about it?" asked Harry, staring.
"Well, what I mean is, Quelch may look into it," explained Bunter. "I don't want Valentine to mention that I

was in this study at the time, if he's asked about it."

"You fat chump! Have you been bungling onions from this window at the Shell beak?" exclaimed Wharton.

"Of course not!" said Bunter irritably. "What do I care about Hacker? He makes Hobson and Hoskins, and that crew sit up in the Shell, but I don't have anything to do with him. It was a sheer accident, of course. How was I to know that old Hacker was meandering along under the window?"

"Then what did you chuck the onion out for?"

"I didn't!" said Bunter promptly. "Don't you get making out that I did it, Wharton! I call that mean!"

"You frabjous ass!" roared the captain of the Remove. "You've just said that you did it!"

"Nothing of the kind!" said Bunter warmly. "I said it was an accident, and so it was! A sheer accident! Hacker just happened to be there. But Quelch mightn't believe that it was an accident, if he knew—he's suspicious. So's Hacker. So if there's any fuss, I'd rather it wasn't mentioned that I was in this study at the time. See?"

The three Removites gazed at Bunter. "And what on earth were you doing with an onion here, anyhow?" asked Frank.

"I didn't—I mean, I wasn't! I never

had an onion! Besides, it wasn't an onion—only a slice of one!" said Bunter. "I never chucked it out of the window! Why should I? Only as it happened to hit old Hacker on his silly nose, I'd rather it wasn't mentioned—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wharton, as a sudden light broke on his mind. "That's where the tears came from! The jolly old onion!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Nugent.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Jim Valentine.

"Bunter, you spoofing scoundrel, hand me back that pound note, sharp! I'll jolly well burst you!"
"A pound note!" shrieked Wharton. "Oh crumbs! He did Mauly for ten bob with the same stunt last term! But a quid! Oh, my hat!"

"I—I say, you fellows," stammered Bunter, "I—I wasn't spoofing, you know. I never rubbed my eyes with that onion, and I never chucked it out of the window when I saw Valentine coming up—"

"You saw me coming?" yelled Valentine.

"Certainly not, old fellow. I never knew you were coming, till you startled me by stepping into the study. I—I was too cut up over pip-pip-poor old Bessie, you know! She—she's ill."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"She's lying at Cliff House now—"

went on Bunter sorrowfully.

"While you're lying at Greyfriars," suggested Nugent. "Lying runs in the Bunter family."

Harry Wharton crossed to the door and slammed it. He put his back to it. "Now, you fat brigand," he said,

"you've spoofed Valentine out of his pound note. You can't have spent it yet. Cough it up."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Sort out a five's bat, Franky."

"Here you are!"

"I—I say, you fellows, Bessie's really ill, you know!" gasped Bunter.

"Cough up that pound, you fat fibber."

"It's all right about the pound," said Bunter. "Valentine needn't worry about his pound. I'm letting him have it back out of the two-pound-ten, see?"

"Oh!" gasped Wharton. "Is that it? Pro Bono Publico—"

"I'm getting the twenty articles on Saturday, at the latest," said Bunter. "I shall sell them all by Saturday evening. Then I shall square Valentine, and also some few trifling sums I owe you fellows. I caught the post with the letter, so that's all right."

"You've posted Valentine's quid?" roared Wharton.

"Oh! No! Not at all! I—I spent that on—on some little luxuries for Bessie, because—because she's fearfully ill, you know," said Bunter hastily. "My pip-pip-poor dear sister, you know—"

"Well, my hat!"

Valentine burst into a laugh.

"Well, the quid's gone," he said. "Kick him!"

"Oh, really, Valentine! Your quid's safe enough, when I've sold the twenty articles— Yaroooh! Leggo, Wharton, you beast!" roared Bunter, as the captain of the Remove grasped his collar. "Wharrer you at? I think you might be a bit sympathetic, when a fellow's twenty articles are lying at death's door—I mean, a fellow's twenty sisters—that is, a fellow's sister— Whooop!"

Billy Bunter roared frantically as a five's bat came into contact with the tightest trousers at Greyfriars. Once more there was woe and lamentation in that study—but this time it was genuine.

"Ow! Leggo! Wow! Leave off! Whooop! Beast! I won't pay the pound now! Wow! Yaroooh! Oh crickey! Oh lor!"

Whack, whack, whack!
Wharton threw open the study door.

"Now, all kick together!" he said.

Billy Bunter travelled out of Study No. 1 at about 60 m.p.h.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Scene in the Tuckshop!

"MASTER VALENTINE!"

"Yes, ma'am?" said Valentine cheerily.

In break, the following morning, a number of Remove fellows came into the school shop, among them the Famous Five and Jim Valentine. Mrs. Mimble immediately sorted out a special half-crown. The good dame was quite amiable; but she wanted, of course, the bad half-crown changed for a good one.

"You paid me this yesterday, Master Valentine," said Mrs. Mimble.

"Did I?" asked Valentine. "What about it?"

"It's a bad one."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Somebody been spoofing you, old bean?" said Bob Cherry.

Valentine, looking puzzled, picked up the half-crown. It was quite a good imitation, likely to deceive a careless eye, though not likely to deceive a shop-keeper who rang it on the counter.

"It's a bad one, sir," said Mrs. Mimble.

"Yes, I can see it is," agreed Valentine. "But are you sure it's the one I gave you, ma'am?"

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"Boo-hoo! Pi-pip-pip-poor Bib-bib-lib-Bessie!" groaned Bunter. "She's got galloping plumbago. And—and there's a touch of celluloid arthritis, too!" "Oh, my hat!" gasped Valentine. "I've heard of rheumatoid arthritis. I think——" "That's what I mean," said Bunter hastily. "I'm so broken-hearted, I don't know what I'm saying. Pip-pip-pip-poor Bessie! Boo-hoo!"

"Oh, yes, quite!" said Mrs. Mimble, a trifle less amiably. "I noticed it the minute you had gone out."

"Well, it's up to you, then," said Valentine. "You gave me the half-crown yourself, ma'am, on Tuesday. I changed a ten-shilling note here, and that was part of the change."

Mrs. Mimble shook her head. "It can't be, Master Valentine." There was a touch of asperity in her manner now. "I should have noticed it. I remember changing the ten-shilling note, and there was a half-crown in the change—but not this one."

"If this is the one I gave you yesterday, it certainly was this one you gave me, Mrs. Mimble," said Valentine quietly. "I haven't done any shopping out of gates—and it was the only half-crown I had."

A hard look came over Mrs. Mimble's amiable, plump face. She was perfectly certain that the bad half-crown had not passed through her hands before. She had not kept a shop for a quarter of a century without knowing bad silver from good. What Valentine stated was, in fact, impossible, and Mrs. Mimble knew it.

There was a rather awkward pause. A good many fellows were in the school shop; and all attention was drawn to Valentine now. His cheeks coloured.

"I must really ask you to take back this half-crown, sir," said Mrs. Mimble, at last. "I cannot afford to lose money."

"Certainly I would take it back if I had given it to you," said Jim. "But it is the same half-crown you gave me on Tuesday, ma'am."

"It is not!" snapped Mrs. Mimble,

"I tell you that I have had no other half-crown this week!"

"You may tell me what you like, Master Valentine," said Mrs. Mimble. "But that is not the half-crown I gave you on Tuesday—it is a bad one. If you receive bad money it is wicked to try to pass it on an old woman."

Valentine crimsoned. Mrs. Mimble was losing her temper now. Knowing that she had not given out that coin, she could only conclude that she had to deal with an unscrupulous young rascal. Valentine believed every word of his own statement; but Mrs. Mimble, of course, could not. That his half-crown had been changed for another, without his knowledge, naturally did not occur for a moment to the boy's mind. He was quite unaware of the true meaning of the pocket-picking episode at Lantham a couple of days ago.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked red and uncomfortable. Vernon-Smith had come in, and he was listening with a pronounced sneer on his face.

"That cannot be the half-crown I gave you yesterday, Mrs. Mimble, if it is not the one you handed me on Tuesday," said Valentine, at last.

"Oh, yes, it is," said the Bounder, breaking in. "I was here at the time, and Mrs. Mimble spotted it at once."

Valentine gave him a glance. "You can mind your own business, Vernon-Smith!" he snapped.

"It's every fellow's business to see that an old lady isn't swindled," retorted the Bounder contemptuously.

"You rotter! You dare to say——" exclaimed Valentine fiercely.

"Please don't quarrel here, young gentlemen!" said Mrs. Mimble. "I am

sure Master Valentine will take the half-crown back."

"I would, if it was mine," said Valentine. "But it isn't!"

Wharton nudged him. "There's a mistake somewhere, old chap," he whispered. "I think I'd take it back—it's not a lot of money—only a half-crown."

"So I would," answered Valentine. "But I haven't another! I'm stony!"

"I'll lend you one, with pleasure," Valentine hesitated. He was generous, and even careless, with money,

as the incident of the pound-note and Bunter had shown. He would willingly have taken the bad half-crown off Mrs. Mimble's hands, to save the old lady a loss. But to do so now was as good as admitting that the bad half-crown had been his, and that he had tried to pass it on and failed. He shook his head.

"I can't do that, Wharton," he said. "The half-crown was given me in this shop on Tuesday. Mrs. Mimble never noticed it, of course, but that is the fact."

Mrs. Mimble gave a sound resembling a snort.

"As if I should not have noticed it!" she exclaimed. "There is a lot of bad money passing in this neighbourhood lately—all over Friar-dale and Court-field and Pegg and Woodend. It's been going on for weeks, and I've been as careful as anything with the money. I look at every coin."

"Well, that's how it is," said Valentine. "I had the half-crown here, and now you've got it back again. It's the same half-crown."

"It is not!" snapped Mrs. Mimble. (Continued on page 16.)



(Continued from page 13.)

"And if you do not change it, Master Valentine, I shall have to speak to Mr. Quelch."

Jim Valentine drew a deep breath. "You may speak to Mr. Quelch as soon as you like," he answered. "I shall tell him what I have told you—that that half-crown was given me here." "Then you will tell him a wicked untruth!" exclaimed Mrs. Mible, almost in tears. "And I am sure that Mr. Quelch will take my word."

There was a murmur from some of the fellows in the tuckshop. The Bounder's lip curled with scorn. He, at least, had no doubt that Mrs. Mible was right; and that Valentine had attempted to pass false money on the old dame. Jim's flushed face paled. The fellows were giving him odd looks—even his own friends were silent and discomfited. The disputed half-crown lay on the counter.

"Look here, it's a rotten shame to diddle an old lady!" said Temple of the Fourth.

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney. "You fool!" snapped Jim Valentine. "I tell you that coin is not mine."

"Oh, chuck it!" grunted Hobson of the Shell. "Mrs. Mible knows whether she had a bad half-crown or not—and I'd take her word against yours any day."

"Thank you, Master Hobson," said Mrs. Mible. "I'm sure all the young gentlemen know me well, and know that I would not give out a bad coin if one was passed on me."

"I am sure of that, ma'am," said Valentine. "It just happened that you did not notice it, that's all."

Sniff, from Mrs. Mible. "Look here, I never noticed that it was bad, and you may have overlooked it just in the same way!" exclaimed Valentine.

"That's so," said Harry Wharton. "Everybody makes mistakes, you know."

Mrs. Mible sniffed again. She drew the disputed half-crown back to her own side of the counter.

"I shall take this to Mr. Quelch," she said. "He will decide the matter. I am very much surprised at this, Master Valentine. I thought you were an honourable young gentleman."

"You've no right to say that, Mrs. Mible," said Valentine, his face very pale. "You've made a mistake—"

Another sniff. "I give you my word, ma'am," said Valentine.

"Please don't say any more," said Mrs. Mible. "I can't bear to hear a boy telling untruths like that. You did not get the half-crown here, and you cannot fancy that you did. It's nonsense!"

And leaving it at that, Mrs. Mible turned away, to serve her waiting customers. Valentine stood with a white, harassed face. All the fellows

in the shop were looking at him curiously, some contemptuously. He looked at the Famous Five, and saw them standing silent, troubled, and dismayed. He gave them one quiet look, and turned and left the tuckshop by himself.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Johnny Bull Takes a Hand!

HENRY SAMUEL QUELCH, the master of the Remove, was giving his Form valuable instruction in Roman history in third school that morning. But there were a good many fellows in the Remove whose thoughts wandered, and who did not acquire so much knowledge of ancient Rome as they might have done.

The incident in the tuckshop worried the Famous Five deeply, and Jim Valentine still more. It puzzled a good many other fellows. The Bounder several times turned his eyes on Valentine with a sneer. What had happened had confirmed and intensified Vernon-Smith's suspicions of the new fellow; and he fancied he saw much more in the incident than any other fellow dreamed of seeing.

The fellow who had laid hands on him to set free a pickpocket—the fellow whose antecedents were unknown and dubious—was a fellow to distrust, in the Bounder's opinion. The thoughts that passed through Smithy's mind in third school would have surprised Mr. Quelch had he guessed them—and they certainly had little to do with Roman history.

Vernon-Smith joined the Famous Five when the Remove came out—and Valentine went out alone. There was a subdued grin on Smithy's face. What worried and distressed the chums of the Remove, did not distress Smithy—rather it was like meat and drink to him.

"Just a word with you men," he said, as he went into the quad with Harry Wharton & Co. "You've taken up that man Valentine this term—"

"He's a friend of ours!" said Wharton curtly.

"Do you know a lot about him?" Wharton did not answer that.

"There was some talk about him at the beginning of the term," went on Smithy. "It came from Bunter—"

"Bunter's a cackling ass!" growled Bob Cherry.

"Oh, quite! But from what I heard, he saw something of Valentine before the fellow came here, and so did you fellows. You don't know his people?"

"He's an orphan," said Harry.

"No people at all?" persisted Smithy. "He has an uncle in South America, I believe, whom he hasn't heard of for a long time."

"How did he wedge into Greyfriars?"

"Better ask him!"

The Bounder laughed. "No need to get shirty," he said.

"I'm giving you men the tip! You've taken up a bad hat."

"Oh, rot!"

"The other day he let loose that pickpocket that I wanted to take to the police station. He knew the man. Don't you think so?"

The chums of the Remove were silent. "It's plain enough," said the Bounder.

"Well, now he's passing false money."

"Oh, don't be a silly ass!" exclaimed Wharton angrily. "Any fellow might get landed with a bad coin and pass it on without noticing it. It's happened to me, for that matter."

"I fancy it's happened to nearly everybody," said Nugent. "A fellow

can't always be squinting at a coin to make sure it's good."

"That's not the point, and you know it," sneered the Bounder. "That might happen to Valentine, or any fellow. But he stood it out that he got the half-crown from Mrs. Mible—and she says he didn't."

"Well, as he says so, he did," said Harry, after a pause. "Mrs. Mible didn't happen to notice it."

"She noticed it fast enough when she got it from Valentine," grinned Smithy. "And she'd have noticed it fast enough if it had been passed on her before."

"Look here, what are you getting at, Smithy?" demanded the captain of the Remove restively. "I've told you that Valentine is a friend of ours."

"And I've told you that you've taken up a bad hat, and the sooner you chuck him, the better for you. I suppose you've heard that this neighbourhood has been swamped with bad money lately—bad silver and counterfeit currency notes."

"What about it?" growled Bob. "That accounts for a bad half-crown being here, if you come to that."

"Or it may be accounted for by a supply of bad money being here," said the Bounder coolly. "Somebody's working the neighbourhood with the stuff—perhaps working from Greyfriars as a centre."

The juniors stared blankly at Smithy. "Why, you utter ass!" exclaimed Wharton. "Do you mean—"

"I mean exactly that!" assented Vernon-Smith, with a nod. A fellow who is hand in glove with a pickpocket, and who tells lies about having a bad half-crown in his possession—"

"Valentine hasn't told lies!" snapped Wharton.

"He has—and you know he has!" answered Vernon-Smith. "He said he had got that half-crown from Mrs. Mible—and it was a lie! And—"

"Leave it at that!" interrupted Wharton. "You've said quite enough, Herbert Vernon-Smith. Take the rest to some fellow who wants to hear it."

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders and walked away. He left the chums of the Remove in a dismal group, worried and uncomfortable. As soon as Vernon-Smith was gone Valentine came up. His face was set.

"We'd better know where we stand, you fellows," he said quietly. "If you think I knew I was passing a bad coin on Mrs. Mible, and was telling lies on the subject—"

"We don't!" said Harry.

"The don'tfulness is terrific, my esteemed and ridiculous Valentine," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I give you my word," said Jim, "that I was telling the exact truth. I can't understand the old lady being so positive about it when it's clear that she has made a mistake."

Johnny Bull shook his head.

"Mrs. Mible hasn't made a mistake, Valentine," he said. "She's as sharp as a needle. That half-crown had never been in her hands before you handed it to her."

Valentine breathed hard.

"Then you think—"

"I think you've made the mistake, not Mrs. Mible. You got the coin somewhere else, and you've forgotten all about it. That's all."

"Yes, that's it," said Bob.

"Of course!" said Nugent.

"That is not it," said Jim. "I tell you, as I told her, that I've had only one half-crown in my hands this week, and that was the one Mrs. Mible gave me in change on Tuesday."

"And I tell you that you're making a

mistake, and you got that half-crown out of gates," said Johnny Bull. "And that being the case—"

"That is not the case!"

"That being the case," repeated Johnny stolidly, "you're bound to take it off her hands, the mistake being yours!"

"Do you think I shouldn't know whether I'd changed a note out of gates or not?" exclaimed Valentine angrily. "I'm not loaded up with notes like Smithy or Mauleverer. How often do I have currency notes to change?"

"Well, that's how it is!" said Johnny Bull.

"Rubbish! I could not have made a mistake—and what I said to Mrs. Mimble is either true or untrue!" exclaimed Valentine.

"It was untrue," said Johnny Bull

calmly; "but it was, as I've said, a mistake. You made the mistake."

"I did not!"

"You did, old bean!" said Johnny. "And that being so, go and take the dud off her hands before she goes to Quelch. No good having a row over it."

"I would do that much, with pleasure, but it would look as if I had lied and backed down afterwards."

"Rot! Own up you've made a mistake—"

"I haven't!"

Johnny Bull gave a grunt. "If you don't believe me—" said Valentine.

"I believe you're a silly ass!" said Johnny Bull coolly. "If I'd thought you were a liar I should never have palled with you. You never got that half-crown from Mrs. Mimble—"

"I say I did!"

"And I say you didn't! You're a silly ass, making a silly mistake, and sticking to it because you're an obstinate ass as well."

Valentine breathed hard.

"Do you want me to punch your cheeky head, Bull?" he asked.

"Go it, if you like! I dare say I could punch yours just as hard!" said Johnny cheerfully. "Lots of time for a scrap before dinner, if you're keen on it."

"Chuck it, you duffers!" said Harry Wharton. "Look here, Valentine, I think Johnny's right, and you're making some fatheaded mistake—"

"Rubbish!" snapped Valentine, his eyes flaming

"Well, if what I say is rubbish, we'd better drop the subject," said the

(Continued on next page.)

DAVIDS v. GOLIATHS!

THIS season's Cup struggle has been remarkable, to an even greater extent than usual, for its surprise results. Third Division teams have beaten First Division teams: and the most staggering result of all, of course, was the victory gained by Walsall over Arsenal. In transfer fees the Walsall team cost about seventy pounds. In transfer fees the Arsenal playing staff must have cost about forty thousand pounds.

Probably this one result was responsible for several letters which have reached me asking for some sort of explanation of these things. How is it that a seemingly ordinary Third Division team can beat the best teams in the First Division in Cup ties? It is an interesting question, and there are several ways in which it might be answered.

One obvious way of replying is to say that reputations count for little or nothing on the football field; that it is the things which the players do on any particular day which decide the issue.

A team doesn't necessarily win because it has some star men in the side; the team can only win if they score goals in each match. Possibly, too, there may be something in the idea that the gap between the best players—the First Division players, that is—and the Third Division players is not so wide as we sometimes think.

Knowing quite a lot, however, of the way in which the minds of footballers run. I think the explanation of the victories of these "Davids" over the "Goliaths" of football goes deeper than that. Take a lowly side playing a set of men with big reputations. The "minnows," as we might call them, are, in a sense, in a happy position. They are in the position of having everything to gain and nothing to lose. If they are heavily defeated, nobody is surprised; there is no sort of disgrace attached to defeat for them. Being able to play carefree football, the players of the small club often play good—surprisingly good—football.

The players with the big reputations may start the game by treating their opponents lightly. Those opponents show surprisingly good form. The men with the reputations then begin to worry. They begin to think of the laugh which will be against them if they are beaten. As the game goes on the Davids get more and more courageous. The thought comes to them that their opponents are only ordinary, anyway, and they put forward superhuman efforts which probably surprise themselves, and which certainly surprise their opponents.

OUR SOCCER FANS' CORNER!

"LINESMAN CALLING!"



"Linesman," whose cheery chat is always full of interesting football facts, will be pleased to hear from MAGNET readers who have problems to solve. Write to him at The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

STAGE-FRIGHT!

CARRYING on a little further with this question, we now come to the question of why the "Davids," having done one or two good things, don't keep on doing them and thus win the Cup. Here, again, it is a question of outlook. I have told you that in the early stages of the competition the little clubs have everything to gain and nothing to lose. Suppose, however, that some club in a lowly state manages to go through several rounds of the Cup. The players then begin to dream their dreams. The day passes when they have nothing to lose. And as the Cup competition progresses the "Davids" get more and more nervous.

In this connection I shall never forget the Swansea Town team as they played in 1926. Swansea Town were, in the first season, in the Second Division. They were playing good football and quite deservedly got to the semi-final, a stage which they had not reached before and which they had probably never dreamt of reaching. Naturally, the players then began to think that they might win the Cup. In the semi-final against Bolton Wanderers, however, Swansea were badly beaten, not so much by Bolton Wanderers as by themselves.

I have never seen a whole team of footballers so nervous as were the Swansea players on that occasion. For the first half-hour there was scarcely a player among them who could kick the ball anything like accurately, and before the men had got over their stage-fright they were three goals down—goals due more to mistakes by the Swansea players than to excellence of their opponents.

And in that case you have the reason why, although the minnows often do well in the early stages, it is usually the clubs with the big reputations and the clubs in

the top class which stay to the end of the Cup race.

SPEED OFF THE MARK!

AMONG the queer football questions which have reached me recently is one from a Clacton reader, who wants to know which players in the team should be the fastest runners. The players who are usually the fastest runners in the average football team are the extreme wing men: the outside-right and the outside-left. It can be said that these players, having more or less a free field and plenty of scope, are best able to make use of speed. I should say that Joe Hulme, of the Arsenal, is the fastest wing man in football to-day; perhaps the fastest footballer over a fairly long distance.

On the other hand, it is not absolutely necessary for even a wing man to be a fast runner. Dimmock, the one-time Tottenham player who was capped for England, was never a fast runner. He relied on trickery rather than pace.

What I would impress on my young football readers on this speed question, however, is that pace, so long as it is allied to ball control, is useful, no matter in what position a player plays. In other words, speed is useful on occasions to every player.

In regard to speed, however, the most important point is often overlooked; that it is not the speed at which a player can do fifty or a hundred yards which matters, but the pace of the first few yards of the sprint. Speed off the mark tells in football. It is the quick-starting player who can dart between the backs.

Some players who have reached the top of the football tree have not been fast runners in the generally accepted sense. But they have been quick starters. In your training give a fair amount of time to starting.

"LINESMAN."
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captain of the Remove dryly. "What about a trot round before dinner, you men?"

And the Famous Five trotted round, leaving Jim Valentine standing on the path, with a flushed and angry face.

When they passed the school shop Johnny Bull halted.

"Come in here," he said.

His friends followed him in.

"Mrs. Mimble," called out Johnny Bull, "about that jolly old half-crown, it turns out that our pal made a mistake—he got it out of gates. He'd forgotten all about it when he was here in break."

"Oh, Master Bull," said Mrs. Mimble, "I'm so glad to hear you say that! I always thought so much of Master Valentine, and it was dreadful to hear him saying what I knew was not true!"

"He's rather a fathead in some things," said Johnny. "Here's the half-crown, Mrs. Mimble. Give me that dud, and I'll drop it into a drain before it goes on another round."

"Here it is, Master Bull! And please tell Master Valentine that I'm sorry I spoke so crossly, now he remembers!"

"That's all right," said Johnny Bull. And he picked up the dud half-crown, and the juniors left the shop.

The spurious coin was promptly dropped down a grating.

"That's that!" said Johnny Bull, with stolid satisfaction.

His chums gazed at him.

"Valentine will be waxy about this!" said Nugent.

"I don't mind!" said Johnny.

"Well, after all, he must have made a mistake," said Harry Wharton. "I can't understand his being so jolly obstinate about it. anyhow, there's an end to it."

The chums of the Remove little dreamed how far the affair was from being at an end.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Fight in the Changing-Room!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Bow-wow!"

"It hasn't come yet!" said Billy Bunter.

"Your jolly old postal order?" asked Bob Cherry sympathetically. "Now, I wonder why it hasn't come! Perhaps it's because it never does come, old fat bean."

"Oh, really, Cherry! I mean, my parcel of articles from the Pro Bono Publico Company," explained Bunter. "It ought to have been here to-day, but it hasn't come yet. I was going to sell the articles this afternoon, and now—"

"Now you're sold yourself?"

"What I mean is, I was going to let you have the very best article in the lot for half-a-crown," said Billy Bunter. "As the parcel hasn't come yet, would you mind letting me have the half crown now, and taking the article when it does come?"

"Would I?" asked Bob, with a grin. "Yes, I rather think I would mind a little, old fat man! In fact, I should mind quite a lot."

It was Saturday afternoon, and the Famous Five were going into the changing-room when Billy Bunter hooked on. They had almost forgotten by that time about Billy Bunter's "articles" that were coming from the Pro Bono Publico Company. But the Owl of the Remove, of course, had not forgotten.

His fat thoughts were continually dwelling on those expected articles, which he was buying for a shilling each,

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and was going to sell for two-and-six each, perhaps! As it was plainly stated in the advertisement that every article was worth half-a-crown, Bunter saw no difficulty ahead in disposing of them. Still, he couldn't dispose of them till they arrived; and there seemed to be some little delay in their arrival.

"I say, Wharton, you're not so mean in money matters as Cherry," said the fat Owl, catching the captain of the Remove by the sleeve. "You'll let me have the two-and-six now, and take the article when it comes—"

"I'm meaner than Bob," said Wharton, solemnly. "Much meaner! Bob's meanness in money matters, compared with mine, is as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, Inky—"

"My esteemed and ridiculous Bunter, I also am frightfully mean," said the Nabob of Bhanipur. "My own esteemed meanness is terrific!"

"Nugent, old man—"

"I'm the meanest of the lot," said Frank, shaking his head. "As mean as they make 'em, or more so!"

"Beasts!" hooted Bunter.

The Famous Five, chuckling, went into the changing-room. Billy Bunter, grunting discontentedly, hung about the door till Jim Valentine came along.

"I say, Valentine, hold on a minute, old chap!" said Bunter, digging a fat knuckle into Valentine's ribs. "I say, old fellow, as you lent me the pound to send for my articles, I'm keeping the best of the lot for you. I'm letting you have it for half-a-crown, old chap!"

Valentine laughed.

"You'd better keep it for somebody else," he said. "I haven't half-a-crown."

"Well, look here, you could get it from Quelch," said Bunter. "Quelch is a beast, I know; but he's got his good points. If a fellow's really hard pressed he can get something from Quelch. Tell him about that dud half-crown, for instance, and he will let you have two-and-six off your next allowance. See? You can make out that you're going to pay Mrs. Mimble—that will do for Quelch."

"You fat villain!"

"Oh, really, Valentine! I think you might be a bit grateful when I'm telling you how to raise money when you're hard up!" said Bunter warmly. "You'll get by with it all right. Quelch thinks a lot of you—goodness knows why! Then you can let me have the half-crown, and I will—Yarooooooop!"

Having tapped Bunter's head on the door, Valentine walked into the changing-room.

Bunter was left rubbing his head. His little round eyes glittered with wrath behind his big spectacles. Having rubbed his head, he next inserted it into the doorway of the changing-room, blinked round for Valentine, and shouted to him.

"Beast! I say, Valentine, you beast! I don't want your half-crown! You can keep your dud half-crowns to spoof old ladies with—see!"

Some of the fellows in the changing-room laughed, and Valentine's handsome face flushed with anger. He made a stride towards the door, caught Billy Bunter by the collar, and gave his bullet head a second tap.

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter. "Beast! Leggo! I say, you fellows, make him leggo! Whooooooop!"

Vernon-Smith was in the room, putting on his football boots. He stepped

quickly across, caught Valentine by the arm, and jerked him away from the Owl of the Remove.

"Chuck that!" he said curtly.

Valentine turned on him with a blaze in his eyes.

"Hands off, you cheeky rotter!" he shouted. "Take your hand off my arm, Vernon-Smith, or I'll knock you spinning!"

"Will you?" said the Bounder grimly. "Get on with it then! Why, you rotter— Oh, my hat!"

Valentine was as good as his word. As the Bounder did not release his arm he hit out, and Smithy staggered back, and fell at full length on the floor.

There were exclamations on all sides as the Bounder went down.

"Stop that!" shouted Harry Wharton. "Is that how you get ready for footer? Stop it!"

Vernon-Smith bounded to his feet.

Heedless of the captain of the Remove, he leaped at Jim Valentine like a tiger.

In a second they were fighting fiercely. "Stop it!" roared Wharton.

But neither heeded him.

The Bounder was almost foaming with rage. And Valentine, good-tempered fellow as he was, was intensely angry.

Ever since the affair at Lantham, the Bounder had been his enemy, and had made the fact plain enough. In intervening between Valentine and Bunter, Smithy had simply been hunting trouble, for certainly he did not care two straws whether Bunter's obtuse head was tapped or not. Now he had got the trouble he was hunting for, and he found that his hands were full.

Good fighting man as Smithy was, he realised in a very few moments that he had met his match in Jim Valentine.

His fierce and savage attack was stalled off, and again he went down on his back with a crash.

"My hat, that fellow can punch!" said Bob Cherry.

Tom Redwing ran to help the Bounder up.

Wharton pushed Valentine back.

"Stop it!" he snapped. "We're playing the Shell in a quarter of an hour! Is this a time for scrapping, you fat-head?"

"Smithy, old man!" said Redwing, as he helped the Bounder to his feet. "Chuck it, old chap! Remember the footer—"

The Bounder panted with rage.

"Hang the footer! Let go, you fool! Let me get at that cad!"

He tore himself away from Redwing, and rushed at Valentine again. Harry Wharton stood in his way.

"Stand back, Vernon-Smith!" he rapped.

"Get aside, Wharton!"

"Don't be a fool! You're here to change for footer—"

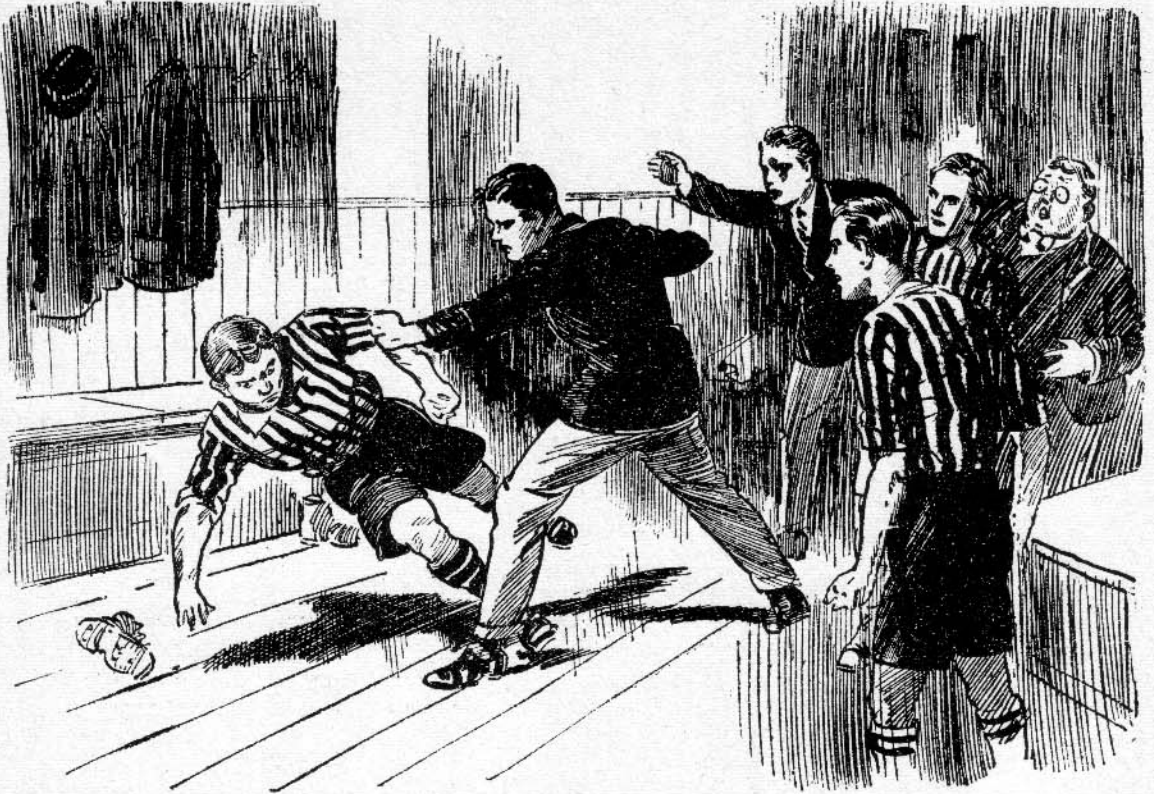
"Footer be hanged! I'm going to thrash that cad Valentine!" roared Vernon-Smith, red with fury. "Stand aside, I tell you, or I'll shift you!"

And, without waiting for an answer, the Bounder gave the captain of the Remove a violent shove, that sent him staggering. The next instant he had reached Valentine, and they were fighting again.

This time they closed in a fierce grapple, staggering to and fro in the changing-room, pommelling furiously.

"Separate them!" snapped Wharton. He was as angry as the Bounder now.

Half a dozen fellows grasped the two fighting juniors, and dragged them apart by main force.



"Take your hand off my arm, Vernon-Smith!" shouted Valentine, "or I'll knock you spinning!" "Get on with it then!" said the Bounder. "Why, you rotter——" Biff! As the Bounder did not release his arm, Valentine hit out, and Smithy crashed backwards, full length on the floor.

Vernon-Smith struggled and panted. "Will you let me go?" he yelled. "You silly ass!" exclaimed Wharton, out of patience. "Are we going to keep the Shell waiting while you scrap here with Valentine?"

"Hang the Shell! Hang the footer! I tell you——" "That's enough! Get changed at once!"

"I won't!" roared the Bounder. "Then you'll be left out of the footer!" "Leave me out and be hanged to you! Now let me get at that cad!"

"You'll do nothing of the kind," answered Wharton coolly. "Valentine's going to play footer, if you're not! Will you keep quiet?"

"No, I won't!" "Then you'll go out on your neck! Turn him out, you fellows!"

The Bounder had utterly lost control of his temper. But the other fellows were not likely to keep a football match waiting while the infuriated Bounder wreaked his wrath on his enemy.

Struggling and kicking, Smithy was tossed out of the doorway.

He turned back, with clenched fists and burning eyes. Harry Wharton faced him in the doorway, cool and contemptuous.

"Wash it out, Smithy, and come in and change for footer! You can scrap with Valentine after the match if you want to. Have a little sense!"

"Go and eat coke!" snarled the Bounder.

And he stamped savagely away. Wharton shrugged his shoulders. He did not want to lose a forward like Smithy in a game with the Shell, but there was no help for it. Russell was called on to take the Bounder's place,

and the Remove footballers went down to the field, leaving Herbert Vernon-Smith to his own devices.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Grimes Looks In!

MR. QUELCH knitted his brows a little, as, glancing from his study window, his eyes fell on the portly figure of Inspector Grimes of Courtfield.

Mr. Grimes was a keen and capable officer of the law, and Mr. Quelch respected him; but he had seen Mr. Grimes too much and too often of late, and he wished from the bottom of his heart that Henry Grimes would forget that there was such a place as Greyfriars School in existence.

He turned from the window and waited for Trotter to show the inspector in—guessing easily enough whom Mr. Grimes had called to see. In a few minutes Mr. Grimes was shown into his study, where he found a rather chilly atmosphere. The Remove master was fed-up with Mr. Grimes' suspicions of Valentine of the Remove, and he had no doubt that it was upon this subject that the Courtfield inspector had called.

"Well, sir, what is it now?" asked Mr. Quelch, rather stressing the last word, when he had asked the inspector to be seated.

Mr. Grimes did not fail to sense the latent hostility in the Form master's manner.

"I have my duty to do, sir," he answered tartly.

"Quite so," assented Mr. Quelch.

"But——" "The matter is a serious one, sir. You have taken into this school a boy who

was once, on his own confession, a member of an association of crooks. If inconvenience to yourself is the result, the blame is not mine."

Mr. Quelch waited for more. "It may be a coincidence, sir, that a series of robberies have taken place in the neighbourhood since the boy has been here, but such coincidences appear to me at least somewhat remarkable. It may be another coincidence that during the past few weeks this vicinity has been flooded with counterfeit coin and notes. But I do not believe in such coincidences, sir."

"Have you any direct charge to make against the boy whom I have taken under my protection, Mr. Grimes?"

"I have not, sir." "Then perhaps you will have the kindness to explain your meaning."

"I have said, sir, as you have doubtless already heard, that for some time past this neighbourhood has been selected for the operations of a gang of crooks handling false money. None of these rascals has been arrested, but I have received descriptions of several, and one of these descriptions, sir, is unmistakable—that of the man called Nosey Clark."

"Indeed, sir!" "The man, sir, who appears to be the leader of the gang of crooks of which the boy Valentine was once a member!" said Mr. Grimes, with emphasis.

"Of which he was once the victim, perhaps," said Mr. Quelch coldly. "If the man Clark is in this neighbourhood, I am sure that it is without Valentine's knowledge."

"Possibly, sir." "Certainly, sir, you mean," said Mr. Quelch warmly. "It is now a considerable time since you informed me that THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,305.

you were keeping the boy under surveillance. Have you during that time found him on a single occasion in communication with those reprobates, sir?"

"I have not," admitted the inspector. "But that does not prove—"

"It proves enough for me, sir," said Mr. Quelch. "I have every faith in the boy—an upright and very honourable lad. He has now been in my hands for several weeks. And do you think, sir, that in that time I should not have discerned his true character had he been deceiving me?"

"I have to ask you a direct question, Mr. Quelch," said the inspector abruptly. "You may ask it, sir."

"Has there been any case of counterfeit money being passed, or seen, or heard of in the school?"

"None whatever, sir."

"You can answer for that, Mr. Quelch?"

"I can only speak so far as my knowledge extends, of course," said the Remove master. "I certainly have heard of nothing of the kind."

"Probably he would be too wary," murmured the inspector, half to himself. "Yet in a careless moment, and feeling himself safe—"

"Really, Mr. Grimes—"

"Well, sir, I was bound to put the question," said Mr. Grimes, rising. "It is a certainty that the man with whom Valentine was once associated is concerned in passing false money in the vicinity of the school. Whether he is in touch with the boy I am not prepared to say, but—"

"But I, sir, am prepared to say that most certainly he is not!" snapped the Remove master. "The man you speak of has been seen hanging about the school, evidently seeking to get into touch with the boy who loathes the

sight of him. Valentine, however, has nothing whatever to do with him. Of that I am assured."

The atmosphere was chillier than ever as the inspector took his leave after a very brief stay. He walked slowly down to the gates in a thoughtful and rather irritated mood. He heard, without heeding, the shouting from the direction of the football ground. Mr. Grimes was not much interested in Soccer. A junior who was loafing in the quad, with his hands in his pockets and a scowl on his face, glanced curiously at the inspector, and strolled after him when he passed out at the gates. It was Smithy, in one of his bitterest tempers.

The match with the Shell was going on, Valentine playing half-back for the Remove. The Bounder was out of the game, by his own fault.

He could hardly deny that that was the case, but he was savagely bitter and resentful. Valentine was playing for the Form, and he, Herbert Vernon-Smith, one of the mighty men in the team, had been chucked out of the changing-room and left out of the football. His savage temper had driven Redwing away, and he was left on his own. He was loafing in the quad, with black and bitter thoughts in his mind, when he saw Mr. Grimes, and the sight of the Courtfield inspector caused his thoughts to take a new turn. There was a glitter in his eyes as he followed the portly officer out of gates.

What did old Grimey want at Greyfriars? The Bounder had given the matter no thought before. Now it came into his mind in a flash that all through the term Mr. Grimes had seemed to haunt the school. Twice he had been on the spot at night. Dozens of times fellows had remarked on seeing him "mooching" about in the precincts. What did

he want? In a flash the Bounder knew. He was not the only one that suspected Valentine of wrong-doing. His suspicions were shared by the police, who knew something of the fellow. Smithy's keen mind jumped to it instantly. It was the presence of Valentine that caused Mr. Grimes to take this incessant and extraordinary interest in Greyfriars.

Mr. Grimes walked away slowly towards Courtfield, ruminating as he went. The Bounder followed him at the same pace till he was out of sight of the school, then he quickened his pace and overtook Mr. Grimes.

The inspector glanced round at the sound of running feet. Vernon-Smith came up a little breathlessly.

"Well, Master Vernon-Smith," said the inspector, "what is it? Have you a message for me, or what?"

"I want to speak to you, Mr. Grimes," said the Bounder. "I'm going to ask you a question, and you can answer it or not, as you like. Are you after Jim Valentine of my Form at Greyfriars?"

"Good gad!" ejaculated Mr. Grimes, in astonishment. And, instead of answering, he stared blankly at the Bounder.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Information Received!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH waited.

He was sure of his ground, so far as that went. At the same time he hardly imagined that a police-officer would confide his business to a schoolboy. It was a long minute before Mr. Grimes answered.

"That is a very extraordinary question, Master Vernon-Smith. What reason can you possibly have for asking it?"

The Bounder smiled sourly. Mr. Grimes was going to tell him nothing. At the same time he was willing to hear anything that Vernon-Smith had to say. That, however, was good enough for the Bounder.

"Isn't it every fellow's duty to help the police in the execution of their duty, Mr. Grimes?" he said.

"Certainly," assented the inspector. "That is the duty of every citizen."

"A fellow comes to my school—a nobody from nobody knows where," went on the Bounder. "Things that never happened before begin to happen after he's at Greyfriars. It looks fishy to me."

Mr. Grimes scanned the Bounder's face. He did not fail to note a swelling on the nose and a bruise on the chin. And Mr. Grimes did not need telling that Vernon-Smith had had trouble with the boy of whom he was speaking. That, however, made no difference to Mr. Grimes. His business was to pick up information wherever he could get it. And he realised at once that if the former associate of crooks had succeeded in deceiving his Form master, he would find it much more difficult to deceive boys with whom he was in daily and hourly contact. Vernon-Smith must know something. He was not speaking to Mr. Grimes simply because another Remove fellow had punched his nose!

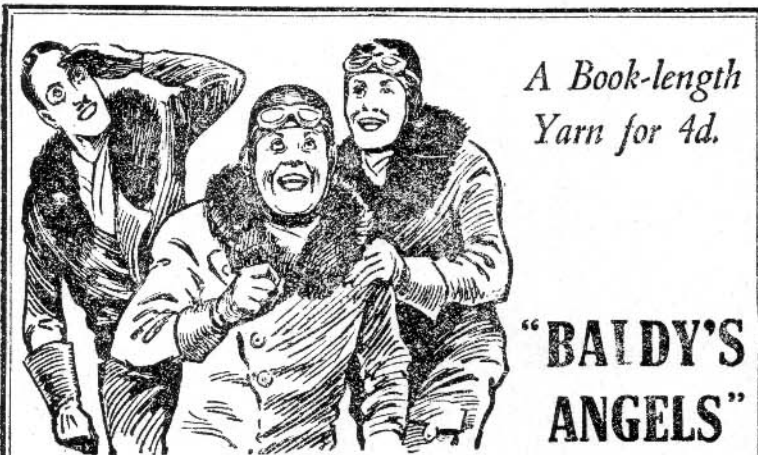
"If you have anything of a definite nature to tell me, I am bound to listen to it," said Mr. Grimes.

"Would you call it definite if my pocket was picked and I got hold of the thief and Valentine clawed me off to give the man a chance to get away?"

Mr. Grimes eyes glinted.

"Has that happened, Master Vernon-Smith?"

"It happened on the Lantham road on Wednesday."



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"You are sure of what you say?"

"Half a dozen fellows were present and can tell you the same. I tell you the fellow laid hands on me and clawed me off that thief when I wanted to take him to the police station. That's why I'm up against him. I'd never taken any special notice of him before. I wasn't standing that."

"I can hardly blame you, sir, if the matter is as you say," said Mr. Grimes, quite interested now. "How did Valentine explain his action?"

"He didn't trouble to explain it. He just did it, and that was that."

"But the other boys present. What did they think of his action?"

"The same as I did—that he knew the thief and wanted to get him clear. Only they stand by the rotter. Why, I don't know. He seems to have Wharton and his pals feeding from his hand," said the Bouncer bitterly. "Even when it comes to passing dud money in the school, they won't hear anything against him."

Inspector Grimes started.

Mr. Quelch had had no knowledge of false money having been passed in the school. Evidently there were members of his Form who knew more than the Remove master knew.

"What is that?" exclaimed Mr. Grimes sharply. "If counterfeit money has been seen at Greyfriars, I shall be very glad to hear about it."

"I thought so," said Vernon-Smith sourly. "It was only a half-crown—but it was a dud, and Valentine passed it in the school shop. He told barefaced lies about it afterwards. All the fellows knew he was lying."

"Please give me the details of this occurrence!" Mr. Grimes was no longer affecting to be non-committal. He was keenly interested, and the alert expression on his face told as much.

Vernon-Smith gave a clear and concise account of the scene in the tuckshop at Greyfriars. Mr. Grimes listened very attentively. Vernon-Smith did not intentionally exaggerate; but his bitterness made him colour the story as darkly as possible. But the experienced police officer was easily able to sift the exact facts from the colourings of prejudice.

Mr. Grimes' plump jaw set hard. It was as he suspected.

The boy was still acting in collusion with the crooks; he had deceived his Form master and his school-fellows—except one whose eyes were sharpened by enmity. But Mr. Grimes had no intention of confiding his thoughts to a schoolboy.

"What do you think of that, sir?" the Bouncer concluded.

"A great deal of counterfeit money has been passing in this vicinity of late," said Mr. Grimes. "It is very probable that a dud half-crown may have come into Valentine's hands by chance."

"Why should he tell lies about it, then?" sneered the Bouncer.

"There may be a mistake in the matter—either on the boy's part, or on Mrs. Mumble's. But—if there should be any recurrence of such a thing—"

"You'd like to know?"

Mr. Grimes paused.

"Certainly, in that case, I should like to know," he said, with a nod. "One false coin may have come into anyone's hands by chance, and he may have passed it on in all innocence. Such a thing could scarcely happen twice. If a spurious coin, or note, should be heard of again—"

"No if' about it," sneered the Bouncer. "I'll bet that wasn't the only dud coin he had about him."

The inspector was silent. He was extremely unwilling to appear to be

speaking on confidential matters to a schoolboy. But he was extremely keen to hear if any false money was traced to Valentine again. The incident of the half-crown was too vague, and too trivial for him to act upon—though it strongly confirmed his suspicions of the boy. But a second happening of the same kind would be enough for him. From Mr. Quelch he was not likely to receive help. Vernon-Smith had turned up very usefully for him. Yet he could hardly say that he wished the junior to keep an eye on his schoolfellow, and report results.

But the Bouncer quite understood the difficulty of Mr. Grimes' position. He was keen to make matters easy for that official gentleman.

"Leave it at that," he said. "You needn't tell me anything—I know you won't, anyhow. But the next time Valentine passes spoof cash in the school, you will get a ring on the telephone, Mr. Grimes. That's that!"

And the Bouncer, with that, turned and walked back to Greyfriars, leaving Mr. Grimes to pursue his way, his brow more thoughtful than ever.

Vernon-Smith walked down to the football ground as soon as he reached the school. Convinced, in his own mind,

CAN YOU RHYME ?

For submitting the following Greyfriars limerick Miss Elsie James, of Fern Cottage, The Common, Buckley, Flints, North Wales, has been awarded a

USEFUL LEATHER POCKET WALLET!

Smithy, the Bouncer, once baited Old Quelch, whose methods he hated.

Till at length, so 'tis said, It came to a "Head," And the "seat" of the trouble located.

Note.—All efforts to be sent to: Limericks and Jokes Editor, c/o MAGNET, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

that Jim Valentine was the confederate of crooks, who would sooner or later bring disgrace upon the school, Smithy had no remorse or compunction. The sooner the young rascal was shown up in his true colours, and kicked out of Greyfriars, the better. A fellow lending a hand to bring about that desirable end was only doing his duty! Smithy was not, as a rule, a "whale" on duty; but on this particular duty he was very keen indeed.

He stood among the crowd of fellows watching the finish of the football match, a sarcastic and malicious smile on his face, as his eyes followed Jim Valentine. He gave a jump, as a fat thumb poked him in the ribs, and scowled round at William George Bunter.

Bunter blinked at him in a friendly way. Smithy had intervened when Valentine was tapping his bullet head; which seemed to Bunter, pally! If Smithy was feeling pally, Bunter did not see why Smithy should not become a purchaser of one of his "articles." What was a pal for, except to be made use of?

"I say, Smithy, they haven't come yet," said Bunter, blinking at him.

"Eh! Who, fathead?"

"I mean my articles!" explained Bunter. "They haven't come yet—but

that needn't make any difference to you, Smithy, old chap—"

"Why should it, ass?"

"What I mean is, that I'm keeping the best of the lot for you, old fellow," explained Bunter. "After the way you stood up for me, when that beast Valentine was pitching into a chap, I couldn't do less. See? One good turn deserves another, you know. It will be half-a-crown—"

"You fat Owl!"

"Only the articles haven't come yet. Still, as I said, that needn't make any difference to you. You hand me the half-crown this afternoon, Smithy, and I hand you the article on Monday—they'll be here on Monday at the latest. Will that suit you?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"I say, Smithy, old chap— Wow! Leggo my ear, you beast— Wow! Wharrior you lugging at my ear for?" yelled Bunter, in indignant surprise. "Yow! If you pull my ear again, I'll jolly well— Whoooop!"

Vernon-Smith moved off in the crowd, leaving Smithy Bunter rubbing his fat ear. In the changing-room, Smithy had been, Bunter thought, pally; but this could not be called pally at all!

"Beast!" gasped Bunter.

Smithy, it seemed, was not going to purchase one of those "articles," though Bunter was reserving the best of the lot for him! But hope springs eternal in the human breast. Billy Bunter spotted Lord Mauleverer in the distance, and bore down on that noble youth.

"I say, Mauly—" began Bunter.

"Oh dear!" groaned Lord Mauleverer, Bunter blinked at him.

"Anything the matter, old chap?" he asked.

"Yaas."

"What's the matter then?" asked Bunter.

"You?"

"Oh, really, Mauly! Look here, old fellow, I've told you that I'm getting a packet of articles from the Pro Bono Publico Company. I'm keeping the best of the lot for you, Mauly. We've always been pals, haven't we?"

"Have we?" asked Mauly in surprise.

"If you'll let me have the half-crown now, old chap—" said Bunter. "You see—I say, Mauly, where are you going?"

Lord Mauleverer did not stop to say where he was going. He went.

"Beast!" grunted Bunter.

"Goal!" came a roar from the Remove fellows round the field.

Harry Wharton had put in the ball, from a pass from Jim Valentine. It was the last goal in the game; the whistle went, and the players came off.

Vernon-Smith watched Valentine walk away with the Famous Five a sneering, sarcastic smile on his face. Harry Wharton & Co. had declined to pay heed to his "tip," and they were as friendly as ever with the "boy with a past." The Bouncer wondered sourly how they would like it when Jim Valentine was marched out of Greyfriars School with a constable's hand on his shoulder! To that, Smithy was convinced, it was coming; and that prospect seemed to please him far more than he was pleased by the circumstance that the Remove had won the match with the Shell without his assistance!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Sword of Damocles!

"MASTER VALENTINE!"

It was Sunday morning; and the Famous Five and Jim Valentine were out of gates on a Sunday walk. It was a THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,305.

pleasant sunny morning, and the green of early spring was glimmering in the hedges along Friardale Lane. A village boy was loitering in the lane, and as the juniors came along he scanned them and came up, and extended a grubby hand with a letter in it.

"I'm Valentine," said Jim. "Is that for me?"

The lad nodded.

"Gent asked me to give Master Valentine this here note," he said.

And having handed it over, the boy departed whistling, leaving Valentine with the letter in his hand and a surprised expression on his face. That expression gave place to a dark frown. He guessed from whom the note must have come.

He hesitated to open it.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, what are you up to?" asked Bob Cherry, as Valentine took the letter in both hands, with the evident intention of tearing it across unread. "Aren't you going to look at it?"

"I don't think I need!" said Jim. "Nobody's likely to send me a message except Nosey Clark—and I don't want to hear from him."

"Better look at it, though," said Johnny Bull.

Valentine hesitated again, but he nodded, and slit the envelope. He glanced at the letter inside and set his lips.

"From that rotter?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Yes, I can't make it out. Look at it!" said Valentine.

The juniors looked at the letter.

It was brief, and it puzzled them as much as it seemed to have puzzled Jim Valentine. It ran:

"Dear Jim,—If you're in trouble, you know where to find a friend. I'll be waiting at the place you know of every afternoon from five to six.—N."

"What's the jolly old place you know of?" asked Bob.

"The old oak, in Friardale Wood," answered Valentine. "But why Nosey is going to wait for me there, I can't make out. I'm certainly not going there, and he knows it jolly well."

"He seems to think you may be in some trouble," said Harry Wharton, in wonder. "Why?"

"Goodness knows!"

"The troublesomeness is not terrific, is it, my esteemed and idiotic Valentine?" asked Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

Valentine laughed.

"Not that I know of," he answered. "There's no trouble on my hands that I know anything about, except my row with Smithy, and he seems to have let that drop."

"Then what the dickens does the man mean?" asked Nugent.

"Ask me another."

"He can't be just talking out of his hat," said Johnny Bull. "He must mean something. Why should he suppose you're in trouble at the school?"

"I give it up," answered Valentine.

"You've not seen him lately?"

"Not since I spotted him in that car, the day we biked over to Lantham."

"Then it's a giddy mystery."

Valentine took the note again, tore it into small pieces, and scattered the fragments on the wind.

"That's that!" he said, shrugging his shoulders.

The chums of the Remove strolled on in a puzzled and thoughtful mood. It was clear, from his note, that Nosey Clark supposed that Jim Valentine might be in some trouble at Greyfriars, which might cause him to leave the

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school. Why he should suppose so they could not guess. Nothing, so far as they knew, had occurred to give him such an idea. The Famous Five dismissed the matter from their minds, but it lingered in Jim Valentine's.

Nosey Clark was "up" to something. But what? Jim had pondered a good many times over the incident at Lantham the Wednesday before. It was not by chance that Nosey Clark had been there—not by chance that Kicky Judd had selected the Greyfriars party for his attentions. Yet if that episode was some part of a cunning scheme on the part of the master-crook, what was the scheme, and what did it mean?

It had done him no harm, except that it had earned him the enmity of the Bounder; a trifling result that Nosey Clark certainly could not have foreseen, or known anything about.

But there was an uneasy feeling in the boy's heart. Something was going on behind the scenes. He felt it, though he could not guess what it was. Nosey worked like a mole in the dark. Why was it the crook fancied that he might be leaving the school, and ready, at last, to take refuge with the gang?—for that was what Nosey's letter implied. Was there something that impended over him, unknown to him, like the sword over the head of Damocles of old?

One thing was clear to his mind—Nosey Clark had no intention of keeping his pledge to leave him in peace. Promises to Nosey were like pie-crusts—made to be broken. Not if he could help it would the master-crook allow Dick the Penman to escape from his clutches.

Valentine's handsome face hardened as he thought of that. The crook had deceived him—laughed at his simplicity

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—Next Week

in trusting him. And he was still counting on the boy returning to him—and apparently, to judge by his note, counting on his returning of his own accord. The thought was in the boy's mind of keeping the appointment the crook had made, and planting a clenched fist upon Mr. Clark's beaky nose as a warning to keep clear.

Why was the crook going to wait every day at the old oak in the wood, in the expectation that Valentine would come—why? What could he imagine had happened, or was going to happen, at the school to drive the boy out into the world, friendless?

That question hammered in Jim's troubled mind. He was silent during the remainder of that morning walk. And when the juniors came back to the school, he half-expected to hear that something—he could not guess what—might have happened in their absence.

But Greyfriars was pursuing the even tenor of its way. Nothing had happened. In the quad Mr. Quelch gave his protegee a kind smile and a nod. There was nothing wrong in that quarter. The Bounder gave him a sneering glance when he came into the House; but that was nothing new. The day passed peacefully and quietly, like any other Sunday at Greyfriars. But when bed-time came, Jim still had the lingering feeling that the sword of Damocles was over his head.

He woke in the morning at the clang of the rising-bell with a feeling of oppression on his heart, which puzzled him for a few moments till he remembered.

His face was grave and set when he went down with the Remove.

What was it that he feared?

He did not know.

But as in a glass, darkly, he seemed to see the hand of the crook working his destruction.

That very afternoon Nosey Clark would be waiting at the place of appointment—waiting for him. Why? What was it that he reckoned on?

He could not begin to guess.

But there was something—he felt it, and he knew it. In the Remove Form-room that morning he was thinking of it, and his feelings were very like those of the ancient Damocles, who looked up to see the sword suspended over his head by a single thread. Nosey Clark had struck in the dark. But when, and how, was the blow to fall?

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

An Unexpected Blow!

"ROTTER!"

"What?"

"Spoof!"

"Eh?"

"Swindler! Beast!"

"Potty?" asked Jim Valentine, in utter wonder.

"The pottiffulness of the esteemed Bunter seems to be terrific," remarked Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

Billy Bunter was almost stuttering with wrath.

Something evidently had occurred to stir William George Bunter to the very depths of his fat being.

His face was crimson; his eyes glistened behind his big spectacles.

Harry Wharton & Co. were in the quad in break with Valentine when the Owl of the Remove came out of the House, blinked round him through his big spectacles, and ran them down.

In Bunter's fat paw was a crumpled letter. His other fat paw he pointed accusingly at Valentine, while he ran through a string of uncomplimentary epithets.

Valentine gazed at him blankly. What was the matter with Bunter was a deep mystery.

"Beast!" gasped Bunter. "Spoof! Rotter! Swindler! Yah! Pulling a fellow's leg! Worm!"

"What on earth have I done?" asked Valentine, too astonished to be angry.

"Yah! Cad! Making out that you were lending a fellow a pound!" hooted Bunter. "Spoofing a fellow! Ah!"

"You howling ass, I did lend you a pound—or, rather, you diddle me out of a pound!" exclaimed Valentine. "Is this how you give thanks?"

"Who wants your dud quids?" roared Bunter. "Think the Pro Bono Publico Company are going to send me twenty useful and valuable articles for a dud pound note? Yah!"

Valentine jumped.

"You potty ass!" he gasped. "What do you mean?"

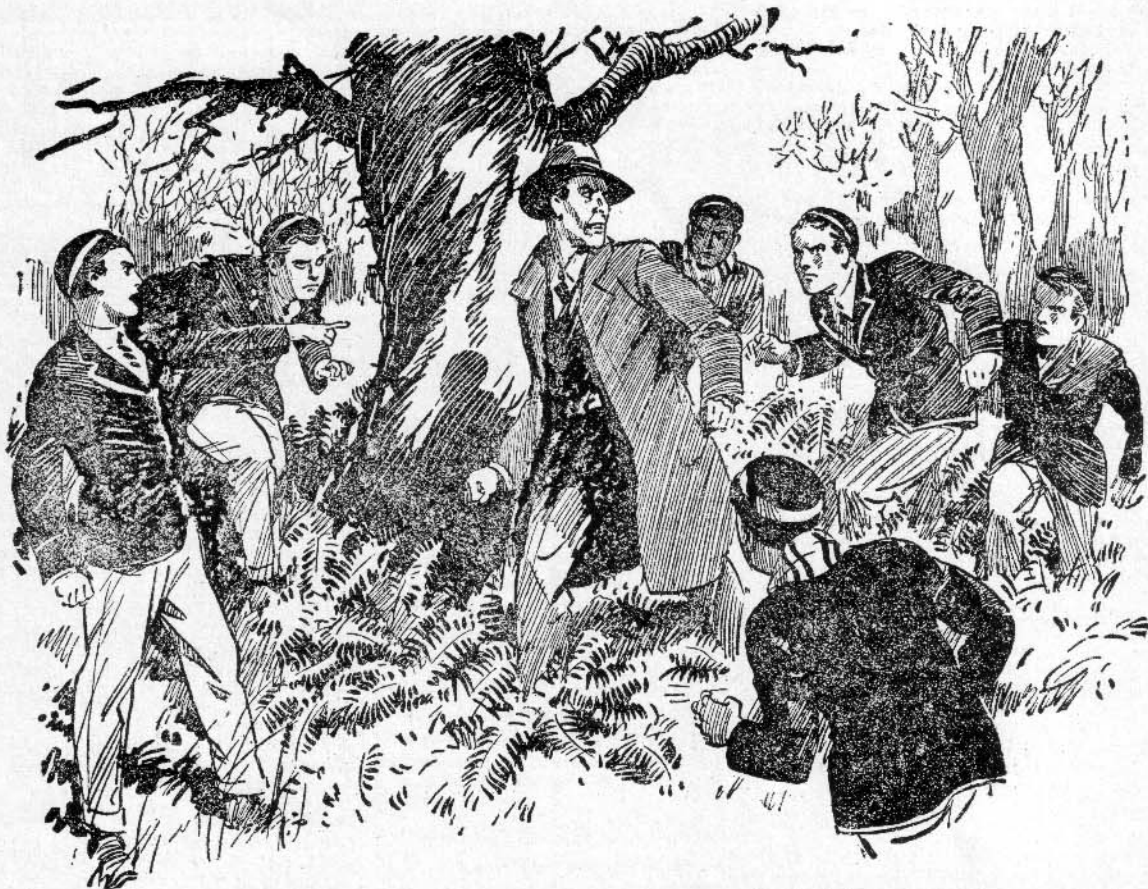
"I tell you—" roared Bunter.

"Hold on!" said Harry Wharton quietly. "Don't yell!" His face was a little pale. "What's happened, Bunter? Cough it up!"

"Valentine knows," snorted Bunter. "Jolly generous of him to lend a fellow a quid, when it ain't worth anything! I dare say he's got lots. Spoof quids as well as spoof half-crowns. Yah!"

The chums of the Remove looked at one another. They looked at Jim Valentine, and were relieved to see that his face expressed nothing but surprise and indignation. Certainly there was no sign of guilt.

"You benighted idiot!" said Valentine, in measured tones. "What aro



"Show up, you fellows!" called out Jim Valentine. Nosey Clark gave a violent start as five juniors came crashing through the thickets and surrounded him with a rush. "Jim, you young fool," gasped the crook, "if I go to the police you go along with me!" "Collar him!" said Harry Wharton, tersely.

you driving at, if you're driving at anything? I gave you my pound note—the only one I had—because you spun me a yarn about your sister being ill." "The only one?" jeered Bunter. "I'll bet you've got dozens—they're cheap enough, as they only cost the paper they're printed on! Yah!"

"Do you mean to say that Valentine's pound note was a wrong 'un, Bunter?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Don't be a fool, Cherry!" exclaimed Valentine, with unusual sharpness. "I had that pound note from Mr. Quelch?" "Well, of all the fibbers!" gasped Bunter. "Talk about George Washington! As if Quelch would give you a counterfeit note!"

"It was nothing of the kind, you dummy!"

"It jolly well was, and you know it!" roared Bunter. "Spoofering a fellow with your dud money! Yah! I say, you fellows, you know, I was wondering why my twenty articles never came on Saturday. You know that beast Valentine lent me a pound to send for them, and—"

"I know you diddle him out of a pound, you fat spoofer!" growled Johnny Bull.

"I thought they'd come to-day!" gasped Bunter. "And instead of a pound, there's a blessed letter—and the note back! I asked Valentine to lend me a pound to send for my twenty sisters—I mean, for my sick articles—that is—"

"They've sent the note back?" exclaimed Wharton.

"Look at it!" hooted Bunter.

He jerked a pound note from the

letter in his podgy paw, and flung it at Jim Valentine. Valentine caught it in his hand.

"That the note was a 'dud' needed no more proving! Certainly William George Bunter would not have parted with it otherwise.

Valentine stood like a fellow turned to stone, the note in his hand. His face was white as chalk. By what black magic was this happening to him?

"Let's see the letter," said Wharton quietly.

Bunter handed over the letter from the Pro Bono Publico Company. He stood snorting with wrath, while the juniors, with pale and almost scared faces, read it together. It was brief, but very much to the point:

"Sir,—Referring to your esteemed order, we regret to say that the Treasury note enclosed therewith is not a genuine one, this being doubtless due to inadvertence on your part.

"We return the Treasury note herewith, and recommend you to hand the same over to the police authorities, with information as to whom you received it from.—Yours faithfully,
"THE PRO BONO PUBLICO COMPANY."

The words seemed to dance before Jim Valentine's eyes as he looked at them. What did it mean? What could it mean? He had received that pound note from his Form master—as he had received the half-crown from Mrs. Mimble. If Mrs. Mimble had made a mistake, Mr. Quelch had not. What could it mean? If it was not black magic, what was it?

"I say, you fellows, I'm not getting my articles, after all," wailed Bunter, "after waiting all this time, you know! That beast Valentine knew he was spoofering me all the time!"

"I never knew!" Valentine's voice was halting, uncertain. "I can't make it out! I—I suppose the note must be a dud, as they say so, and send it back. But—"

"Where did you get it?" asked Johnny Bull.

"I've told you—from Quelch!"

"That's impossible!"

Valentine's lips opened for an angry retort, but he did not utter it. If it was not impossible, it was next door to impossible. Mr. Quelch was not the man to be spoofered with a dud note, and to pass it on unknowingly. It was, at least, highly improbable.

"I say, you fellows, I'll jolly well take their advice, and hand over that note to the police!" said Bunter. "I'm not going to be done like this!"

"Who's done you, you fat piffler?" growled Johnny Bull. "You diddle that note out of Valentine, and you've only got what you deserve, as far as that goes!"

"Why, you beast—"

"You—you fellows can't think that I know!" panted Valentine. "Even if I were passing false money, as that fool Smithy thinks, you can't imagine that I should give it away. Why should I?"

"You did!" roared Bunter. "You were going to get a good quid back for it, you spoofering rotter—"

"Oh, dry up! I never expected it

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back! I know you too well for that, at any rate!" snapped Valentine.

"I say, you fellows, I'm going to old Grimes with it!"

"My esteemed Bunter," said Hurrec Jamset Ram Singh quietly, "there has been an idiotic and ludicrous mistake, and the changefulness of the bad note for a good one is the proper caper. Take that, and shut up, my esteemed and babbling Bunter!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter, as the Nabob of Bhanipur put a pound note into his fat hand. "Oh! All right, Inky! If you think—I mean to say, I dare say it was a mistake. But, I say, I hope you didn't get this note from Valentine, old chap! I don't want it sent back again, you know!"

Valentine clenched his hand, and the fat junior jumped back.

"That esteemed currency note is absurdly good, my idiotic and gabbling Bunter!" said Hurrec Singh. "Cut off!"

Billy Bunter rolled away, with the nabob's note in his hand. His wrath had evaporated at once. He had a pound—a good pound—and he was going to get his twenty useful and valuable articles, after all, and sell them for two-pound-ten—perhaps! So all was calm and bright, so far as Billy Bunter was concerned. Bunter occupied the remainder of break in writing another letter to the Pro Bono Publico Company—this time with a genuine pound note enclosed in it.

In the quad, under the old elms, the chums of the Remove stood in a silent and troubled group. The dud pound note was still in Valentine's hand.

Johnny Bull broke the silence. "What have you chucked away a quid for, Inky?"

"To keep the babbling tongue of the esteemed Bunter quiet," answered the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The lessfulness that is said about this the betterfulness."

"That won't do! That dud note's going to the police, whether Bunter takes it to them or not!"

The nabob shook his dusky head. "Have you remembered yet where you got it, Valentine?" asked Johnny Bull grimly.

"I got it from Quelch!" answered Valentine in a husky voice.

"That's rot! You fancied you'd got that half-crown from Mrs. Mimbble, and I believed that you'd made a mistake. Now you fancy you got a dud note from Quelch, but you can't expect fellows to believe in another mistake."

"No," said Valentine in a low, almost broken voice; "I can't! I know what you believe, and I can't blame you. It's no good telling you that I don't understand this any more than you do. It seems like black magic to me."

The Famous Five stood silent.

"That isn't the note you got from Quelch!" said Harry Wharton at last. "I—I suppose it can't be! But—but it must be! I put it in my notecase when Quelch gave it to me, and never took it out till I gave it to Bunter that day in the study."

The juniors made no reply to that. There seemed to be no reply to be made. They did not believe in magic, and only the blackest of black magic could have accounted for that.

"You can't remember?" repeated Johnny Bull.

"I tell you the note's never been out of my hands."

"You said the same about that half-crown."

"That was true, too!"

"Well, that's rot!" said Johnny Bull.

And, having delivered that opinion, Johnny walked away to the House.

Valentine's face was haggard.

"You fellows think——" he faltered.

They were silent. What were they to think—except that the keen, suspicious Bunter was right, and that the boy who had once been in the gang of crooks was still a crook at heart, and that he was working hand-in-glove with the old gang? What would Mr. Quelch have thought? What would Inspector Grimes have thought? They knew only too well. And yet——

The bell for third school rang out across the quad. Harry Wharton spoke at last.

"No," he said; "I don't believe anything of the kind. I can't understand this. We've got to sift it out somehow. But I believe you're straight, Valentine, and I'm sticking to that. Let's get in."

They joined the Remove fellows going to the Form-room for third school. Mr. Quelch glanced at Valentine as he came

brows knitted, thinking—or trying to think.

It seemed to the unhappy boy that he was caught in a net—snared like a bird. He was in the toils, and he did not know how. Again and again he had examined the currency note, and keen scrutiny showed him that it was not a genuine one, though it was a good imitation—such an imitation as Nosey Clark & Co. were accustomed to palming off on the unwary.

Was it the same note that Mr. Quelch had given him? It seemed that it must be. And yet he knew in his bones that it was not! Yet that note had not been out of his possession, and he had tried to think, to remember, whether he had left his notecase out of his pocket at any time during the past week. He could not remember doing so. And even had he done so he knew that it was absurd to suppose that any fellow at Greyfriars could have changed the good note for a bad one.

And then, like a flash, it came! The notecase had been out of his hands once, and once only, when it had been picked from his pocket at Lantham by Kicky Judd! And as soon as that flashed into his mind he knew!

"The villain!" he panted.

That was why Nosey had followed the party to Lantham. He had been watching for such a chance! That was why Kicky, after getting away with his plunder, had been found by the school-boys on their road home. He had wanted to be found, and to have his plunder taken from him, because he had changed the pound note and the half-crown in Jim's notecase for counterfeit money!

It was as clear as daylight, as soon as he thought of it! The whole scheme became clear to his mind.

Kicky had not meddled with the Bunder's money, or Wharton's—only with Valentine's. That was the scheme! It was Valentine who was to be made guilty of passing false money in the school—only Valentine! Blindly he had fallen into the trap.

Mrs. Mimbble had been right; the "dud" half-crown was not the one she had paid out to Valentine, as he had declared and believed. Kicky had changed it while the notecase was in his possession. And he had changed the pound note also!

That was Nosey Clark's scheme. That was why the crook was waiting for him, expecting him to leave Greyfriars! That was the blow that had impended over him like the sword of Damocles!

Valentine shivered.

The incident of the half-crown had attracted plenty of attention; but it had died away. Johnny Bull's action had washed it out. Valentine, at the time, had been irritated by that action; now he was deeply thankful for it. Johnny had been right; it was his mistake, not Mrs. Mimbble's. Had that incident been followed by the passing of a counterfeit note, what would have happened? And, but for Bunter's trickery, he would have changed the pound note at the tuckshop. That was a certainty. He had been "stony" for days, because he had let Bunter have it. He would have changed it, and the counterfeit would have been discovered. And what could he have said?

Bunter, with his fatuous spoofing, had saved him from that. The false note was still in his possession! From the bottom of his heart Jim was glad to feel it under his hand, in his pocket.

His escape was narrower than he

(Continued on page 28.)

STAR ITEMS IN—

NEXT WEEK'S "MAGNET."

A top-notch yarn by Frank Richards which will make you laugh till your sides ache, entitled:

"BILLY BUNTER'S BARAINS!"

It's one of the finest tales of Jim Valentine and the chums of Greyfriars I have had the pleasure of reading. Then follows another sparkling edition of

THE "GREYFRIARS HERALD,"

further chapters of our thrilling footer and 'tec serial:

"NOBBY, the 'SHOOTING STAR'!"

an interesting Soccer talk by "Linesman," more winning jokes and Greyfriars limericks, and

SIX MORE FREE PICTURE STAMPS!

DON'T MISS THIS BUMPER PROGRAMME, BOYS!—Ed.

in, and started. The boy's face was almost ghastly.

"Valentine, are you ill?" exclaimed the Remove master, with kind concern.

"I—I don't feel—quite—well, sir!" stammered Valentine.

"You may stay out for this lesson, Valentine."

"Thank you, sir!"

It was a relief to be free of classes, at least. Valentine went back unsteadily into the quadrangle, while the Remove settled down to work. And the Famous Five, while they still clung to their faith in him, could not help wondering whether they would ever see him again. If he was guilty, surely he would go while the going was good. And if he was not guilty, what did it—what could it all mean?

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

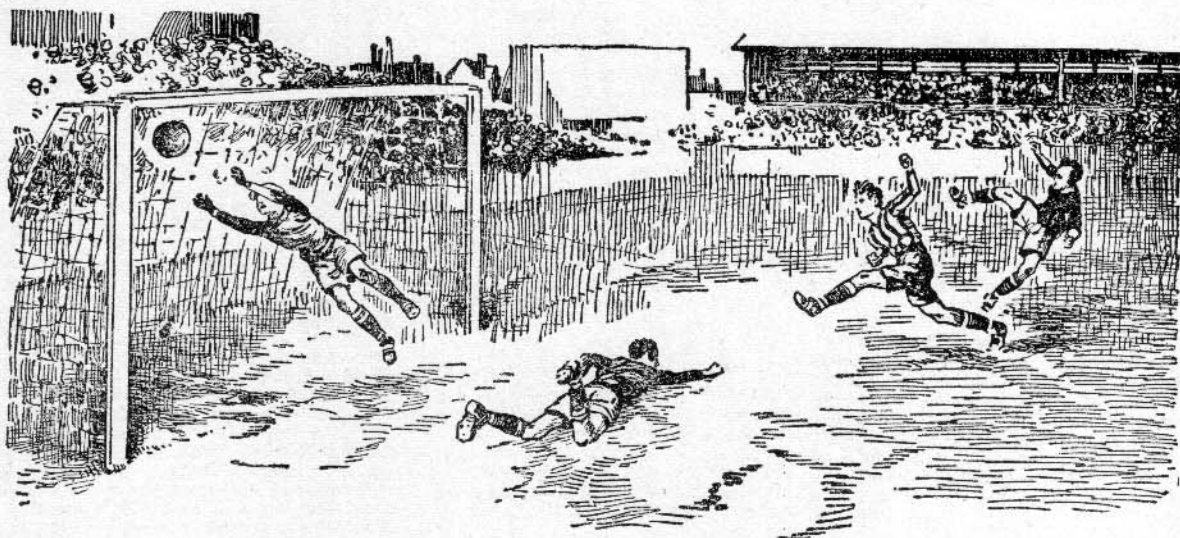
A Lesson for Nosey Clark!

"THE—the villain!" panted Jim Valentine.

Like a flash of illumination it had come to him.

For an hour or more he had been pacing on the path under the elms, his

NOBBY, the 'Shooting Star'!



HOW THE STORY STARTED.

Having run away from Don Carlos' circus, Nobby, a sixteen-year-old wait, meets Ferrers Locke, the detective, who introduces him to Lord Douglas Weatherstone, chairman of the Perriton Rovers F.C. From ground-boy, Nobby very soon becomes a full-blown professional. Later, he falls foul of Lord Douglas' rascally nephew, Daniel Willoughby Thundersley, the famous amateur forward of the Rovers, who, in league with the Don, determines to bring about his downfall. Just when his chance comes to play for the Rovers, Nobby is kidnapped by four onion-sellers, handed over to the Don, and taken in a grey saloon car to a desolate bungalow miles from anywhere. Learning that the car had been seen proceeding along the Portsmouth road, Locke, in company with Drake, his boy assistant, and Sandy Macfarland, the Rovers' trainer, makes all speed in that direction.

(Now read on.)

The Lark's Nest!

LOOK here, Locke," Sandy Macfarland growled, "something will have to be done—I want Nobby for this afternoon's match."

Locke's face set grimly as he glanced at his watch.

"We've got two hours left in which to find him," he said quietly. "With luck we will pull it off. Hallo—" He broke off suddenly as his keen eyes spotted two men entering a tavern which went by the name of the Goose and Feathers. "And here, if I am not mistaken, is our next clue."

Drake and Sandy glanced in the direction of the tavern. At the same moment the man with the broken teeth and his companion, Bill, caught sight of the party.

"Streuth! It's Ferrers Locke! Quick, Bill! Let's 'op it!"

And, with noticeable haste, the precious pair entered the swing doors and passed from sight.

The man with the broken teeth was terror personified. He clutched Bill by the arm as the double doors swung heedlessly backwards and forwards behind them, and literally jerked him towards another door at the other end of the smoky bar.

"That lean-faced bloke in the car," he whispered hoarsely, "was Ferrers Locke! I knew somethin' would appen as soon as the Don told us his nibs was a friend of the youngster's. Come on, 'op it!"

And "hop it" the precious pair did. Before Locke and his companions had passed through the swing doors Bill and his terrified pal were out of the far exit and speeding along a side turning like frightened rabbits. Their one purpose at the moment was to put as many miles between Locke and themselves as was humanly possible: so much so that Bill, seeing a small sports two-seater car standing at the roadside, what time its owner murmured gallantries into the ear of a particularly pretty young girl, calmly stepped into it, slipped in the gears, barely waited for his companion to clamber in, and jammed a clumsy foot down hard on the accelerator.

By the time the gallant young gentleman had realised that his car had been stolen from under his very nose that little two-seater sports was snorting along at an ever-increasing pace. In the space of sixty seconds it was lost to sight round a bend in the road.

Meantime, Ferrers Locke was eagerly searching the faces of the patrons of the Goose and Feathers.

A bald-bearded, rubicund gentleman, with an air of proprietorship, leaned over the bar counter and challenged him.

"Lookin' for someone, mate?"

"Yes," replied Locke briefly. "But the two birds I wanted seem to have made themselves pretty scarce."

"You mean the two blokes what buzzed in 'ere a moment ago, mate?" queried the landlord affably. "Oh, they

beat it out of the other door. First time I've known 'em to come into my 'ouse and leave without aving one."

Ferrers Locke, who was about to depart by the farther door, paused at the last titbit of information.

"You know those two men?" he asked casually. "One of them is rather distinguishable by his broken teeth."

The landlord grinned.

"I'll say he is, mate. I knows 'em all right. They've only been 'ere a couple of days, but they look like being my best customers!"

"Indeed," said Locke; "perhaps they are employed here—in this locality, I mean?"

The landlord winked.

"Don't know about being employed," he confided, "for they allus seem to have a deal of time on their 'ands; but they told me confidentially that they was up at the Lark's Nest—"

"And where might that be?"

'Bout three-quarters of a mile from 'ere. Take the north road, and when you come to a wide turn on your left—don't take it, mate," said the landlord, closing his eyes to assist him in this great mental effort. "Don't take it, see? But when you comes to a muddy lane, 'bout 'undred yards farther on—you take it, if your car ain't too particular"—this was meant for a joke—"and a 'undred and fifty yards along it you'll find the Lark's Nest. 'Tain't 'alf a lark, too, mate. Nobody's ever lived in it—much more than a week—terribly lonely—"

He broke off as he suddenly became aware of the fact that Locke and his two companions had departed.

"Lumme!" ejaculated the talkative landlord to all and sundry. "Ain't 'alf in a bloomin' urry, eh?"

In the meantime, Locke had stepped into his car. Old Sandy and Jack Drake were not a split second behind him. Then the big Rolls moved off, following

the route the landlord had detailed, with silent ease and power.

"We don't take this turning, guv'nor," grinned Drake, as the car drew near the broad sweep to the left, which the landlord had mentioned; but Locke had no intention of taking it. His keen eyes were gazing ahead, seeking the "muddy lane."

It hove in sight at last, and proved to be nothing more than a cart track, barely wide enough to admit the passage of the Rolls.

"Now we shan't be long, Sandy!" smiled Locke grimly, as with steady hands he nursed the car along the narrow track and saw at the end of it a solitary, dismal-looking bungalow. "Hop out!"

The car slid to a standstill. Its occupants clambered out, and Locke, taking the lead, stepped boldly forward to the front door.

"Our friends who scuttled away back yonder won't have had time to get back here—that is, if ever they intended coming back here," said Locke. "So put on a bold front."

Old Sandy was shaking like a leaf with excitement as the detective pushed against the door bell. The sound of the ringing came plainly to the ears of the three outside, but no sound of movement accompanied it. Again and again Locke thumbed the bell-push. Still no one appeared to demand their business.

"I'm going to take a chance," said the detective grimly. "I'm going to break in."

Old Sandy nearly had a fit.

"But you can't do that, Mr. Locke. Why, it's burglary—"

Locke smiled.

"Burglary? Well, perhaps you're right, but I'm taking the chance all the same. It's good enough for me to know that two gaoled birds—they haven't been out a week yet, I'll warrant—are employed here. If their game is within the law, why did they bunk when I spotted them?"

"But, mon," continued the outraged Sandy, "ye canna break in!"

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the door opened in response to Locke's manipulation of a bunch of skeleton keys. Calmly, coolly—just as if he were entering his own suite of rooms—the detective strolled in, Drake closely behind him.

Old Sandy, however, who was a thoroughly law-abiding individual, remained outside. To him it was a heinous offence, despite the reasons Locke had given him justifying it, to break into another person's house.

And while Sandy cooled his heels on the doorstep, fearful lest at any moment the owner of the bungalow should return, Locke and Drake made a thorough search of the premises.

It was Drake who suggested that the one cellar the place boasted should be visited when he and Locke had drawn a blank elsewhere. The outer door was soon opened, and quietly the pair of them trod down the small flight of steps beyond. These halted outside another door which was securely bolted. While Locke drew the top bolt, Drake stooped and slipped the lower. Then—

Biff!

That door swung open, something charged out like a rocket, bowling both Locke and Drake sideways, and a dim, youthful form dashed past them and up the steps.

"Hi!" yelled Locke. "Nobby—"

But Nobby, who had waited patiently for that burst of freedom, did not stop. Ever since his captors had left him he had wriggled and wriggled to shed his bonds, awaiting the opportunity to escape when the cell door should be opened.

With never a glance behind him now, he pelted through the short corridor and charged out of the main door with head well down. Someone with his back to Nobby stood just outside that doorway.

It was old Sandy. But Nobby, in his excitement, was not to know that. His red-cropped head smote poor old Sandy fairly amidships, so to speak, and with a squeak like a punctured balloon, Sandy collapsed. Yet even as he sprawled on the ground he reached out with a long, bony hand, clutched hold of a fleeing leg, and jerked at it—hard!

Nobby had to stop then. He was just about to kick out when he caught sight of old Sandy's startled face.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "Sandy—"

"And Sandy it is, ye red-haired coon!" snapped the manager-trainer, releasing Nobby's leg and scrambling to his feet. "Now, where the devil did ye come fra, laddie?"

Nobby had no time to explain, as at that moment Ferrers Locke and Drake put in an appearance. Both of them were smiling, albeit somewhat sheepishly.

Nobby scratched his tousled hair, and shook himself to make sure that he wasn't dreaming. Then came explanations, but these were exchanged in the comfort of the big Rolls.

"Who's behind this, Mr. Locke?" asked Nobby at length.

The detective shook his head.

"Ask me another," he said non-committally. "Naturally, you would say the Don. But what proof have we?" He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, some day, maybe, we'll have all the proof we want. Meantime, lad, just compose yourself. Old Sandy here is dying to tell you that he wants you to turn out for the Rovers this afternoon."

"Ay," grunted Sandy. "Ye'll be fit to play, laddie, of course?"

Nobby's eyes were shining. This indeed was an unexpected climax to the day's events. He assured Sandy that he was none the worse for the adventure, that he had been offered no violence, and that the effects of the chloroform had long since worn off. He promised Sandy that he would play the game of his life.

"Good for ye, lad!" said Sandy sourly. "But there's one thing we haven't taken into account. The match starts in twenty-five minutes, ye ken."

"Oh, we shall reach the ground long before that!" said Locke, with a chuckle, giving a little pressure to the accelerator, which immediately sent the speedometer needle flickering up to another ten miles an hour.

"I'm na' so sure," said Sandy doubtfully. "These cars are all right, ye ken, when they go. But gi' me an honest-to-goodness bicycle every time."

Having said which, the sour-faced old man settled himself back on the cushions and actually enjoyed, for the first time in his life, an exhilarating car ride all the way to the Perriton Rovers' ground.

First Blood to Nobby!

SOMETHING like commotion reigned in the dressing-room.

Old Sandy had never been known to absent himself from the dressing-room before an important match. Rumour had it that he had gone to Horley. That same rumour caused it to be known that young Nobby, who had been chosen to play in place of the injured David Jones, was also at Horley.

Mrs. Sullivan had supplied that information. And here it was ten minutes before the match was due to start, and neither Sandy nor Nobby had put in an appearance.

Only one member of the team, now already changed and ready for the fray, seemed pleased. That was Daniel Thundersley. He had every reason to feel elated, for only an hour previously he had been in telephonic communication with the Don, who had assured him that everything had gone smoothly, that Nobby would never trouble him again, and that within a short time the wail would be smuggled out of the country.

Thundersley, on the surface, appeared to be as anxious as his team-mates, but inwardly he gloated. It was a heaven-sent opportunity which had thrown him against the rascally ingenious Don. True, it had cost him a hundred pounds, for that was the money the Don had demanded in advance. But what was a hundred pounds when Lord Douglas Weatherstone was always ready to oblige him with any cash he needed?

Then Daniel Willoughby Thundersley got the greatest shock of his life.

The dressing-room door swung open, and in walked Sandy Macfarland. In walked young Nobby, smiling, and looking as fit as the proverbial fiddle.

Thundersley's face turned to a sickly pallor; but he quickly took himself in hand and pushed forward, apparently just as eager to know what exactly had happened, like the rest of the team.

But old Sandy was not a bit communicative.

"Jest you think about the game, ye ken," he cautioned sourly. "It's football that should be in your minds. You changed yet, Nobby? You're not? Well, look slippy!"

Nobby "looked slippy." He was out of his everyday clothes and scrambling into shorts and striped jersey like a music hall quick-change artist. The referee poked his head round the door, intimated that it was time the teams emerged, and withdrew. Old Sandy signalled to the team to get moving, but detained young Nobby just as he was about to follow them.

"Ye got your shin-guards on? Ye haven't? 'Twill never do, laddie. Without shin-guards your legs wouldn't be worth twopence to Perriton after a First Division match. Sorry I have to say it, but it's true. That's why all the boys wear 'em, ye ken."

Nobby rolled down his stockings what time the old trainer adjusted the shin-guards. Then he rushed out on to the pitch, to the accompaniment of the greatest volume of sound he had ever heard.

The news had travelled round the stand that Nobby was playing. It had coursed through the densely packed terraces like a prairie fire that he had met with foul play, and the crowd's sympathy was with him on the instant.

For a moment Nobby stood stock still

and trembled. Then from behind came old Sandy's reassuring words:

"Go on, laddie! The crowd's taken a fancy to ye. Make the most of it. I purposely told our gatekeeper that ye had met with trouble."

"But—but what for?"

"Cause Jenkins is a gasbag. I knew it would be all round the ground inside three minutes. That's publicity, laddie."

Nobby conquered his nervousness and joined the players who were shooting at the goal, the while the crowd in that particular corner of the field shouted words of encouragement to him.

"Let's hear from you, Ginger!"

"Good old Nobby!"

"We want Nobby!"—this in a long sustained shout. "And goals!"

"Up, the Rovers!"

The feeling of stage-fright was coming over Nobby again. He almost jumped clear of the ground when he felt a hand on his shoulder.

Looking round, he saw the smiling face of Dixie Toddin, the captain and inside-right of the Perriton Rovers.

"Feeling nervy, Nobby?" he asked kindly. "You'll soon get over it, directly the whistle goes. Keep your head, young 'un. You won't get another chance like this if you don't make old Sandy smile to-day."

And then he was gone.

Oblivious that Dixie Toddin had won the toss—for his head was still whirling giddily, Nobby found himself lined up with his colleagues. Dimly he saw the referee, whistle to his mouth, watch in hand. Just ahead of him, eager, alert, and grim of face, stood the rival centre-forward, the ball at his feet. Then—

Pheep!

The game was in motion.

Even as Dixie had said, at the first sound of the whistle Nobby's attack of nerves vanished like a bad dream. With the litheness of a panther he sprang forward to engage the Blampton Wednesday centre-forward. But the Blampton Wednesday man was a veteran. The ball was passed back to his centre-half, Nobby was charged out of the way just as if he had been a skittle, and the ball went sailing out to the visitors' right-wing, where it was snapped up and lobbed along the touchline.

"Up, the Rovers!"

"Come on, the Wednesday!"

The rival factions were yelling with great gusto now, calling upon individual players to "wake up," or encouraging them with a "Well played, sir!"

Out of a scrambling heap of players the ball suddenly shot straight ahead of Nobby, who was already on the run. Converging upon him came three Wednesday men, and each one at that moment looked like a mountain bearing down upon him. But Nobby never faltered. He controlled the ball, darted away at a tangent, and, with a beautiful low pass, flashed the ball to Thundersley.

The amateur was still feeling sore at the way things had gone. For once he was slow to avail himself of the opportunity his centre-forward had given him. Like a streak, an opposing half-back jumped at him, snapped the ball, and swerved it across to his own inside-forward.

The crowd was disappointed. Great things were always expected of Thundersley, and usually they "came off." In this case, however, he was obviously at fault. Nobby's pass to him had been flawless, and the crowd told him so in their own language, and abused him for not having made more of it. All of which increased the unreasoning hatred the amateur bore towards young Nobby.

He flashed him a sour and sulky look, which Nobby affected not to see, and

promised himself there and then that Nobby would receive no more passes or "gift" goals from Daniel Willoughby Thundersley in that match.

The home defence was having a thrilling time of it hereabouts; for the Wednesday were a vigorous side, famed for their thrustful, forceful methods. But the defence lived up to its reputation, and once again the leather whizzed across to where Nobby was waiting.

The Wednesday centre-half, who had shadowed the young centre-forward with the closeness of a fond parent, though without a parent's gentleness, leapt at Nobby. Thirteen stones of flesh and bone were levelled at the Rovers' centre-forward in a vigorous charge. But Nobby wriggled away like an eel, spurted, caught the ball on the rebound, and continued on his way goalwards like a human rocket.

The crowd began to clamour.

"Shooo-ooot!"

A swift glance about him told Nobby that he was travelling "alone." His inside forwards and wing men were too far away to attempt a pass.

"Shooo-ooot!" implored the crowd.

Still Nobby continued on his way. The Wednesday left-back came at him like a charging bull. Nobby zigzagged round him with as pretty a piece of footwork as had ever been seen on the ground that season.

Over came the right-back to his beaten colleague's aid. He rushed in with a sliding tackle, grassed himself, and, looking round, was able to tell his team mates afterwards just how Nobby, the new centre-forward, scored his first goal in professional football.

With both full-backs safely negotiated, Nobby swerved for a goal-scoring position. In the net the Wednesday custodian, looking ferocious in a red jersey, danced and jiggered about as if to put the marksman off his stroke. But he didn't know the quality of the marksman.

Booomph!

Came a dull thud as Nobby's boot met the leather, then an awesome gasp from that great multitude of spectators as they tried to follow its progress. With cannon ball like speed and velocity the leathern sphere hurtled towards the net, its peculiar, curving flight sending the despairing goalkeeper sprawling in a suicidal dive to the wrong corner of the net. Up at the back rigging the ball was rasping and singing a triumphant note. Up in the grand stand the fans were shouting crazily; on the terraces the dense throngs were hoarsely singing their praises, the while the referee sounded a long, exulting blast on his whistle.

"Goal!"

Nobby felt himself surrounded by his fellow-players, who thumped him heartily on the back, or wrung his hands, according to their fancy. And Dixie Toddin, the Rovers' captain, was the first to congratulate the newcomer to the side. Only Thundersley held aloof. Inwardly he was seething with rage. Far from getting rid of this meddling, red-headed cub for keeps, he was a helpless spectator of his initial triumph as a professional footballer.

That Thundersley's play suffered was no surprising circumstance. In addition to his personal feelings of hatred towards the new centre-forward, Thundersley was feeling the effects of his hard living. Football and over-indulgence did not go hand-in-hand, and, despite his fine constitution, Thundersley's weakness for late hours, unhealthy excitement, and unwise consumption of liquor were beginning to tell. For the rest of the W.C.S.A. day he

was nothing more nor less than a passenger, and his helplessness became more noticeable as the crowd urged him to "do something."

Thundersley did not like football crowds—except when they cheered him. Now it was a case of jeering at him. He sulked, like the bad sportsman he was, and the crowd were quick to fasten on every sign of it. Three times he muffed chances which the unselfish Nobby put at his feet, and three times Master Daniel Willoughby Thundersley was given a rest from the first team.

But old Sandy cheered as he reflected that his choice of Nobby in the centre position was justified by results. Why, the boy was playing like a master. Even as Sandy turned his attention to the game he saw Dixie Toddin set a scheming trap, into which the Wednesday half-backs fell, with both feet, as it were; saw him draw the defence, and then send away his outside-right with a flashing pass which was snappily sent back to Nobby, who was waiting in the position which this scheme necessitated. Once again Nobby was prepared to pass to Daniel Thundersley, but the amateur was out of position.

Nobby decided to go on himself. He easily side-tracked a black-shirted opponent who charged at him, forged ahead, drew the defence away again from the outside-right, and promptly passed the ball back to him.

Campbell, the outside right, was speedy. He cut in on the goal, lunged out terrifically with his right foot, and sent in a shot that would have beaten the goalkeeper all ends up, for the Wednesday custodian was unsuspected. But, just inside the penalty area up flashed a big, fair head, which belonged to the Wednesday left-back.

The thud of the ball meeting that bullet head could be heard all over the ground. It was a grand attempt to frustrate a goal, but it went astray. The ball swerved diagonally, instead of thumping forward yards up the field, and Nobby, who was nearest to it, was on it like a flash.

Once again the remaining back tried to tackle him. Once again he failed, for Nobby streaked round him, and prepared to shoot.

This time, the red-jerseyed goalkeeper told himself, he would save that "kid's" shot or break his neck in the attempt. He would shoot with his right foot again, of course.

Yes, that goalie had got things all cut and dried. But he underestimated Nobby's abilities. Up flashed the youngster's right foot, even as it had done before, and away flew the goalie to that far corner of the net in anticipation of the shot that was to come. Instead, however, Nobby shot with his left foot, changing feet in that last second, and placing the ball yards clear of the helpless, crestfallen goalkeeper.

"Goal!"

"Good old Ginger!"

The roars were deafening. Wednesday enthusiasts, as well as the home team's supporters, shouted their acknowledgment of that brilliant piece of work. And the cheers were still rocking the heavens in the vicinity of Perriton Rovers' Football Club when the referee, glancing at his stopwatch, blew lustily on his whistle for half-time.

(Nobby looks like making a name for himself with the Rovers if only he can steer clear of Thundersley. Look out for more exciting chapters of this grand story in next Saturday's MAGNET, which will also contain six more FREE picture-stamps.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,305.

BLACK MAGIC!

(Continued from page 24.)

knew; for he knew nothing of the Bouncer's watch, or the Bouncer's intention to ring up Inspector Grimes at the first sign of more counterfeit money in Valentine's possession. Had he changed that note at the tuckshop, the outcome would have been certain. That malicious vision of Smithy's, of the boy with a past marched off under the hand of a constable, would have come true.

Bitter anger welled up in his heart as he realised, at last, the cunning scheme of the master-crook, a scheme defeated only by chance, and by the faith his friends had in him. He paced to and fro under the elms, his lips set and his eyes glinting.

The Remove came out at last. Valentine hurried to join the Famous Five. They gave his excited face curious looks.

"I've found it out, you fellows!" said Valentine breathlessly.

"What?"
"You remember that pickpocket at Lantham? He had my notecase for a couple of hours. He changed the note and the coin in it."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry blankly.

"But—" exclaimed Nugent.
"I'm sure of it. It's the only explanation, unless—unless you fellows believe that—that—"

Valentine's voice faltered.

"My only hat!" Harry Wharton drew a deep breath. "If that's it—"

"It must be it!" said Valentine eagerly. "It was a trick to land me in trouble here—trouble I should never have got out of. That's why Nosey sent me that letter yesterday by the village kid. He fancied that I had already passed the coin and the note and been spotted, and—"

"That's it!" said Johnny Bull, with a nod. "He never meddled with Smithy's money, or Wharton's, so we never thought— But what an awful villain! And you made Smithy let him go, you ass!"

"I—I had no choice about that—"
"Thank goodness that idiot, Bunter, bagged the note!" said Harry. "If you'd changed it in the school, after the half-crown—"

"I should have been done for. It wouldn't have been much good telling Inspector Grimes what I'm telling you fellows. But—but you believe me?"

"Every word! I knew you were all right, old bean," said the captain of the Remove. "I couldn't make it out, but I told you I was sticking to that. And—and that villain, thinking you're in the soup through passing false money, is waiting for you to go back to him?"

"That's the game!" Valentine set his teeth. "If you fellows believe me—if you back me up—"

"The backupfulness is terrific!"
"Not to say preposterous!" said Bob Cherry solemnly.

"Then will you come with me after class, to see Nosey Clark?" asked Valentine.

"What on earth for?"

"To give him the thrashing of his life," said Valentine, between his teeth. "I shall be on my guard against another trick like this, of course! Nosey won't try this one again. But he may try on something else. I want to warn him off."

"Good egg!" said Wharton heartily. Bob Cherry's eyes danced.

"Fine! We'll all go—and take a five's bat! By the time we've finished with Nosey Clark he will wish he had poked his nose somewhere else! It's a jolly old go!"

And a "go" it was!
Harry Wharton & Co. looked forward to the end of lessons that day. According to his letter, Nosey Clark would be waiting in Friardale Wood, from five o'clock. He little guessed for what he was waiting!

After class the chums of the Remove strolled out of gates, Bob Cherry with a five's bat concealed under his coat.

The six juniors walked down Friardale Lane, and turned into the footpath through the wood. The old oak stood at a distance from the footpath, and Jim threaded his way through the trees and thickets, his comrades following at a little distance behind. Mr. Clark was not to see them all at once.

It was only a few minutes after five when Jim arrived under the spreading branches of the big oak. But Mr. Clark was already there. His black eyes snapped at the sight of the boy. It was success at last—or so Mr. Clark, for the moment, believed.

"You've come, Jim!"
"I've come!" answered Valentine quietly. "You expected me, Nosey?"

Nosey smiled.
"I did not find out the trick that Kicky played on me at Lantham till today," went on Valentine.

"Too late to be of use!" grinned Nosey. "Make up your mind to it, Jim. You're one of us, and you're coming back to us—we can't spare Dick the Penman."

Valentine winced. His friends were within hearing, and they would know now what they could only have suspected before. But his voice was calm and quiet as he answered the crook.

"I'm not coming back, Nosey! You promised to let me alone—and this is how you keep your word. I'd hand you over to the police if—if I could! I

can't do that—I'm as much in your power as you are in mine. But you're going to let me alone after this, Nosey. Show up, you fellows!"

Nosey Clark gave a violent start as the five juniors came through the thickets. They surrounded him with a rush.

"Jim, you young fool, what does this mean?" gasped the crook. "If you're giving me away— Are you mad? If I go to the police you go along with me. You know that!"

"Collar him!" said Harry Wharton tersely.

"Hands off!" screamed Nosey, livid with rage.

The next moment he was struggling in the grasp of the Famous Five.

His struggles did not avail him much. The juniors swung him off his feet and landed him in the grass with a heavy bump. Nosey Clark spluttered as his vulture's beak ground into the earth.

"Jim!" he yelled. "You—"
"Leave him to me!" grinned Bob Cherry, wielding the five's bat.

It crashed on Nosey again and again, with all the vigour of Bob's powerful arm, and every swipe brought a howl of anguish from the crook.

Whack, whack, whack, whack, whack!

Struggling and yelling, spitting like a cat in his fury, the crook went through it. Not till Bob's arm was tired did he cease to swipe. By that time Mr. Clark was more than tired.

"Think that will do?" gasped Bob at last. "If not, one of you fellows take a turn! I feel as if I've been beating a carpet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fancy that will do," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Take that as a tip, Mr. Clark, and keep clear of Greyfriars. If we see you again, you'll get some more of the same!"

Bob tucked the five's bat under his coat again, and the Greyfriars fellows walked away. They left Nosey Clark squirming and gasping in the grass, his eyes glittering after them like a snake's. It was a long time before the crook crawled to his feet and limped away, groaning, through the wood.

Valentine walked back to Greyfriars, with his friends, with a smiling face. He was done with Nosey Clark—for the present, at least. Was he done with him for good? That was a question that only the future could answer.

THE END.

(Next week's MAGNET will contain another grand long yarn of Jim Valentine and the chums of Greyfriars, entitled: "BILLY BUNTER'S BARGAINS!" There are plenty of laughs and thrills, and big surprises, too! Order your copy early and so make sure of the six picture-stamps given FREE with this fine issue.)

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