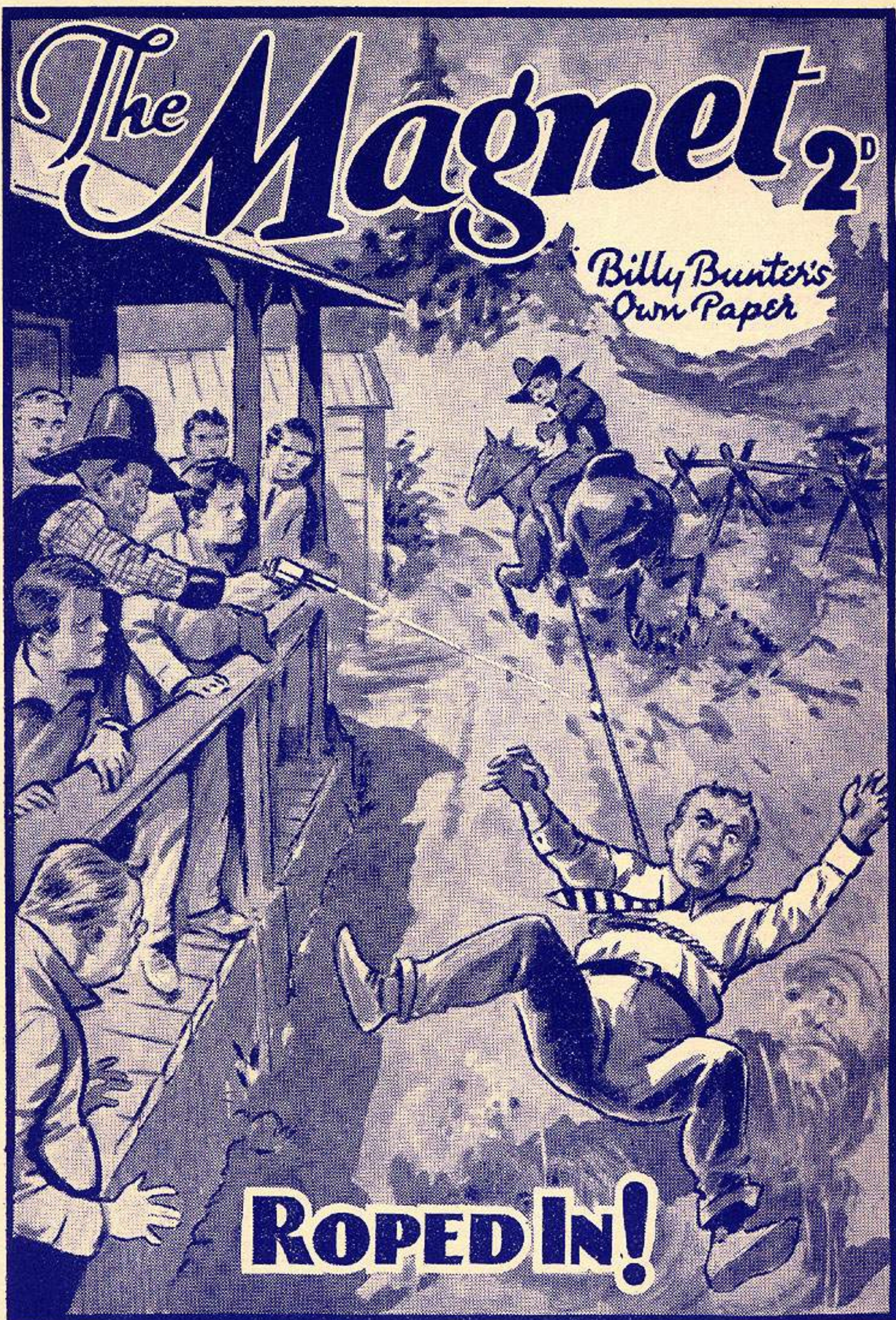


"HARRY WHARTON & Co. IN TEXAS!" Thrilling Schoolboy Yarn of Wild West Adventure

The Magnet 2^D

Billy Bunter's
Own Paper



ROPED IN!

If You Want to Know Who's Who and What's What, Consult—

The GREYFRIARS GUIDE



THE DAILY ROUND. 11 a.m. Form-work.

(1)

Now after we've been scarified at Latin
And properly transmogrified at maths,
The ordinary work's as smooth as satin,
No longer do we grope in thorny
paths.
And though perhaps we make mistakes
At every likely chance,
We know King Alfred burnt the cakes
And Paris is in France.

(2)

If you should ask why Attila was
dreaded,
Or what the Danube is, and where
and why,
Or what great English monarch was
beheaded,
We simply couldn't give you a reply;
But though our knowledge often takes
Some time to make advance,
We're sure King Alfred burnt the cakes
And Paris is in France.

(3)

With literature and art we're unac-
quainted,
We've never heard of Shakespeare in
our lives,
We cannot say what pictures he has
painted,
We do not even know who had six
wives!
We only know the stuff that makes
Real life, and not romance—
That Good King Alfred burnt the
cakes,
And Paris IS in France!

AFTER SCHOOL HOURS Tea with Quelch



No, you needn't shake and tremble
When you're bidden to assemble
In old Quelchy's room for tea.
It is certainly unnerving,
Though you know he will be serving
Just the grub you like to see.
But you have a nasty feeling
That he MIGHT be double-dealing.
With a cane beneath his chair,
So you're quite relieved at seeing
He's just like a human being,
And can even smile at times instead
of glare!

Here's a valuable suggestion.
You should ask a careful question
On the book he's writing now.
It's the "Greyfriars History," which is
Bound to bring him fame and riches,
And is probably a wow!
He will smile his approbation
And will talk without cessation
For an hour upon the theme.
Thus you'll gather in some knowledge
Of the history of your college
While you gather in the pastries and
the cream!

Hearing that it was Desmond's birth-
day yesterday, Loder gave him a
hundred lines.
Mr. Proat was heard to exclaim
"Unprecedented!" this morning. Well,
that wasn't unprecedented, anyway

Oliver Kipps, the Remove conjurer,
laid in a spread. But when he went to
his cupboard it had vanished. He
waved his magic wand over the cup-
board; but as that was no good he is
now waving it over Bunter—rather
hard!

THE GREYFRIARS ALPHABET

DICKY NUGENT,
The Scamp of the Second

N is for NUGENT—Dicky,
Exceedingly idle and tricky,
Weak-willed, often sulky, he never
Lets others imagine he's clever;
An idle young scamp, and his major
Now knows him much better, I wager!



Decidedly lack has been gallant,
For Dicky has plenty of talent,
In writing his tales of disaster,
St. Sam's and its frabjous headmaster.
He shows off a talent for writing,
And fancies the yarns are exciting!
No fellow so spoiled and so petted
Gets far; and it must be regretted
Each time his queer "shockers" we're
reading.
Less sulks and more manhood he's
needing!

A WEEKLY BUDGET OF FACT AND FUN

By
THE GREYFRIARS
RHYMESTER

GREYFRIARS GRINS

Vernon-Smith, in trouble with the
Greyfriars Scout Troup, has threatened
to form a Scout Movement of his own.
No doubt he will award himself the
Banker-and-Billiards Badge.

The school is going to put up notices
WHAT TO DO IN CASE OF FIRE! I
understand this will be: (1) Save the
school sports trophies; (2) save the
school record books; (3) save the school
flags; and (4), if there is any time left,
save yourselves!

The reason why Coker doesn't know
he is too dumb to see what is plain to
other people is because he is too dumb
to see what is plain to other people.

The road excavations in Friardale
Lane are believed to be caused by
Fisher T. Fish, who recently dropped a
penny down the drain.

PUZZLE PAR

Somewhere on this page the
names of three Greyfriars fellows
are hidden. All three are to-
gether. Can you find them?

Answer at foot of Column

North, of the Sixth, is so soft-hearted
he can't bear to see anyone suffering.
He always shuts his eyes when whop-
ping fags.

Wingate, feeling good-tempered and
humorous, gave Bob Cherry one line for
loitering on the Sixth Form green. If
the impot isn't handed in by tea-time,
however, it may be doubled.

The only thing to equal Nap Dupont's
skill in making omelettes is Bunter's
skill in getting them away from him.

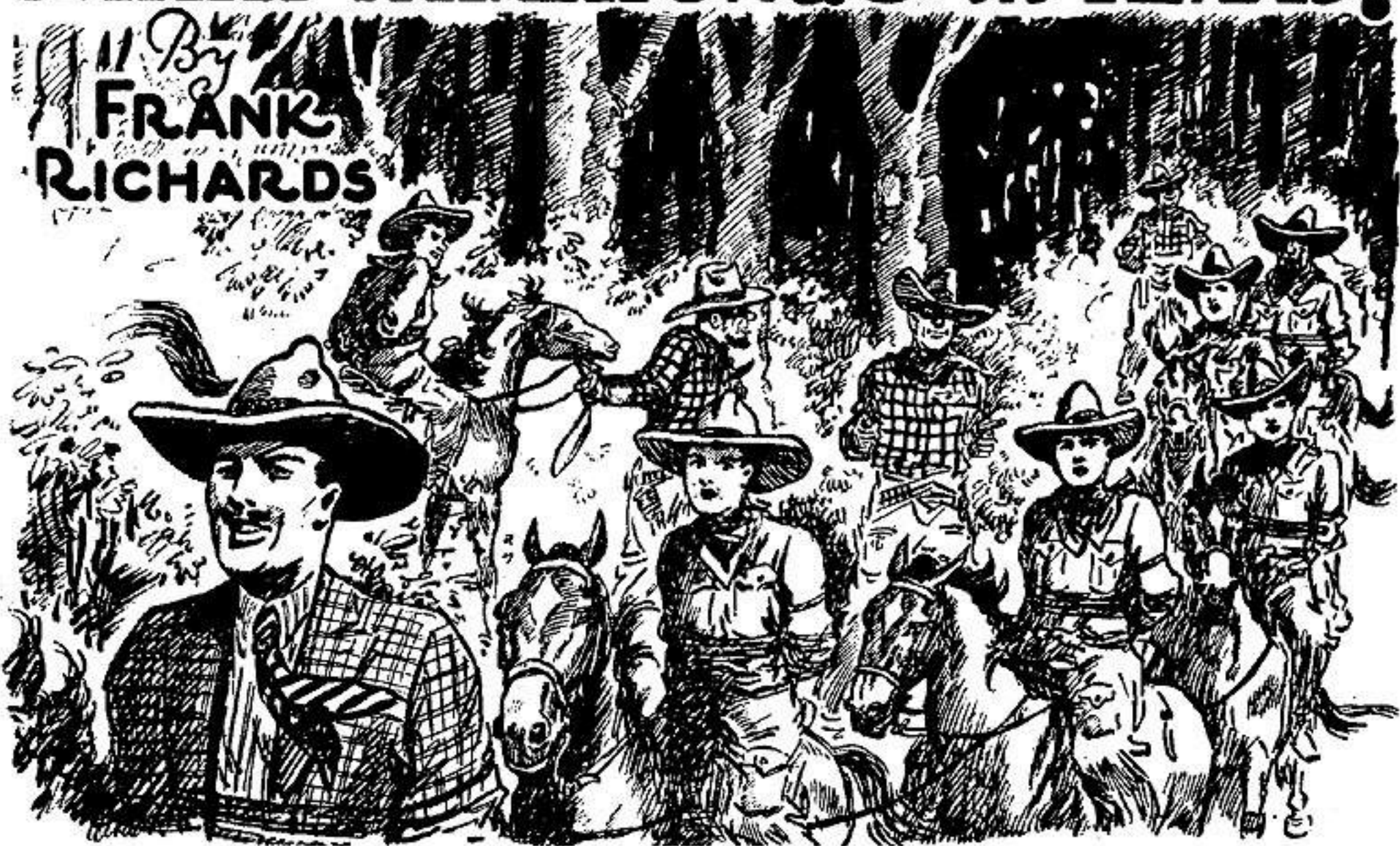
Bolsover minor, paying a public
tribute to his major, said that if he
grew into a decent man it would be due
entirely to his brother's splendid
example of what not to be like.

ANSWER to PUZZLE

The initial letters of each line of the
"Alphabet" poem, read downwards,
will give the names.

STRANGERS NOT WANTED! For some mysterious reason, Two-gun Sanders, who has "shot up" as many "guys" as he has fingers and toes, is determined to stop Vernon-Smith and his chums reaching Kicking Cayuse Ranch. But the Greyfriars party are not the ones to fight shy of danger—not even in Texas!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. in TEXAS!



The Greyfriars juniors were bound securely, and then a lariat was run from one bronco to another, securing the party in a string to the foreman of the ranch!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter Packs a Gun!

"WHAT on earth's that?"
"My gun!" said Billy Bunter.

"Your whatter?" yelled Bob Cherry.

"My six-gun!" said Bunter calmly.

Six fellows, on the piazza of the timber hotel at Prairie Bend, in Texas, stared at Billy Bunter.

They were surprised—and rather alarmed.

Billy Bunter did not often have an alarming effect on Greyfriars fellows. Often he caused hilarity, but seldom alarm.

But the boldest fellow might have taken alarm at the sight of the fat Owl of the Remove with a firearm in his hand. It spelled danger to anybody who happened to be within range of that firearm, if it were loaded.

Bunter was holding it in rather a gingerly manner. He did not, as a matter of fact, like firearms at close quarters. Still, so long as he held it by the butt, with the muzzle pointed away from him, Bunter felt safe. Fellows in front of him naturally did not feel so safe!

The Greyfriars party had landed at Prairie Bend, from the west-bound train, on their way to the Kicking Cayuse Ranch, in the valley of the Rib Frio.

At that spot they had to quit the railroad and take the hack that ran on the stage-trail to Packsaddle—Kicking

Cayuse being a great distance from the railroad.

As that hack ran only three times a week they had to wait for it.

Now the Famous Five, of the Greyfriars Remove, were sitting in a cheery row on the hotel piazza. Herbert Vernon-Smith was standing, leaning back against the rail.

So, as Billy Bunter came up the steps from the rugged street, he was behind the fat junior—and he grinned. But the row of fellows sitting in front of Bunter did not grin.

"Put that down, you fat ass!" said Harry Wharton.

"Eh? I'll watch it!" said Bunter.

Thrilling story of Wild West Adventure, featuring HARRY WHARTON & Co., of GREYFRIARS.

"I say, you fellows, now we're in Texas, you'll have to get used to guns, you know! Everybody here seems to pack a gun! A fellow ain't really safe without a gun—"

"You're not safe with one, you howling ass!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Is it loaded?" demanded Frank Nugent.

"Loaded! Of course! Fat lot of use it would be if it wasn't loaded!" said Billy Bunter. "I made the man at the

store load it for me, ready! Don't you fellows be nervous! There's a safety-catch on it! I forgot how it works—but I think it's all right."

"You—you think it's all right!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Point it some other way, you blithering idiot!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"My esteemed idiotic Bunter—" exclaimed Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "Don't be nervous, Inky! It won't go off unless I pull the trigger!" said Bunter reassuringly.

The Famous Five glared at Bunter. Only one consideration prevented them from hurling themselves at the fat junior, and jerking the revolver away from him—it would probably have gone off in the process. Nobody wanted to stop a bullet from Billy Bunter's gun.

Harry Wharton & Co. were not easily alarmed. There was a spot of danger in their holiday trip to Texas; which they did not mind at all. But they did mind Bunter with a gun in his fat hand! They minded very much.

Bunter had left them on the piazza and rolled down the street to the Prairie Bend store—apparently to buy himself a six-gun, now that he was in the land of six-guns. The other fellows had not known of his intention—neither would they have supposed that he was able to carry it out, if they had known, as he was, as usual, unprovided with cash. Six-guns were common enough in the cow country of Texas, but they cost money.

"We're taking the hack this afternoon," went on Bunter cheerily. "Sup-

pose we get held up by bandits, or something! You fellows will expect me to protect you. You'll be jolly glad I've got a gun then."

"Will you point it downwards?" hissed Bob Cherry.

"Don't be funky, old chap! Dash it all, you've handled a rifle on the range at Greyfriars! What are you afraid of?"

"Did they give you that gun at the store?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Not likely! Catch Americans giving anything away! This revolver cost fifty dollars!"

"Then you haven't paid for it?"

"Not yet," admitted Bunter. "The storekeeper's trusted me with it—he knows we're travelling with Bill Buck, and he knows Bill Buck. Of course, it will have to be paid for before we go."

"Are you expecting a postal order here?" asked Johnny Bull, with deep and intense sarcasm.

"I expect one of my friends to lend me the money!" answered Bunter, with dignity.

"Then you'd better take it straight back to the store!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Take it away from here, anyhow!" snorted Johnny Bull.

"I don't suppose the man would take it back, after I've bought it!" said Bunter. "Besides, I want it. We've been in danger more than once since we came to this country. Look how those gangsters collared Smithy in New York—and look how that ruffian Sanders stopped the train! Well, if I'd had a gun then—"

"Who's going to lend Bunter fifty dollars, for the pleasure of stopping his first shot?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I think it's up to Smithy!" said Bunter, blinking round at the grinning Bounder. "We've come out here to protect Smithy—at least, I have! You fellows know that that man Sanders is after him, trying to keep him away from the ranch for some reason. Suppose we meet Sanders again—"

"We shan't live long enough to meet him again if you handle that gun!" said Frank Nugent. "Will you take it away, you born idiot?"

"No fear!" Billy Bunter blinked at the Famous Five through his big spectacles. "I say, you fellows, if Smithy's too mean to lend me fifty dollars, it's up to you. This gun has got to be paid for."

"You blithering owl—" hissed Bob Cherry.

"You terrific ass!" exclaimed Herree Jamset Ram Singh.

"You dangerous maniac!" hooted Johnny Bull.

"You can call a fellow names!" said Billy Bunter disdainfully. "But you'll be jolly glad to have me around to protect you, if that villain Sanders turns up again! Now, which of you fellows is lending me fifty dollars? That storekeeper will kick up a row if he isn't paid! You know what Americans are like about money! You can whack it out, if you like—ten dollars each! See?"

Billy Bunter blinked inquiringly at the Famous Five.

The Bounder, leaning on the piazza rail, was just behind the fat Owl. To the relief of five extremely uneasy fellows they saw Smithy detach himself from the rail and step on tiptoe towards Bunter's fat back.

He reached round Bunter's extensive circumference and grabbed a fat wrist, forcing it suddenly down, in case the revolver exploded. It did!

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,575.

Bang!

There was a fat finger on the trigger. It pulled—unintentionally. The rear of the six-gun made Bunter utter a startled yell. That the gun was loaded was clear, for a bullet crashed through the wooden floor of the piazza, leaving a round hole in the plank.

"Ooooooh!" yelled Bunter. "I say, you fellows, what—Ooooooh!"

The next second the revolver was twirled from his hand, and was in the Bounder's. It was safe enough there—Herbert Vernon-Smith had often handled firearms, and was a practised shot.

"I—I—I say, you fellows, it—it went off!" gasped Bunter.

"And now you're going off!" roared Bob Cherry.

The gun being out of Bunter's fat hand at last, and half a dozen lives out of danger, Bob jumped up and grabbed the fat Owl. Billy Bunter spun round in his grasp, with a howl of apprehension.

"Ow! Leggo! If you kick me, you beast, I'll—Yarooooop!"

Thud!

A boot landed on the tightest trousers in Texas. Billy Bunter went off the piazza, yelling. He went off as suddenly as the six-gun. He rolled down the steps, and landed at the foot roaring. Herbert Vernon-Smith adjusted the safety-catch of the revolver, and slipped it into his pocket.

"I'll trot along to the store and pay for this!" he remarked. "It will have to be paid for!"

"You're not keeping it?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Why not? Quite a happy thought of Bunter's! But it will be safer in my hands than his!"

And the Bounder went down the steps and walked away to the Prairie Bend store, the revolver in his pocket.

Bunter, at the foot of the steps, sat and roared. For some time Bunter forgot all about the necessity of packing a gun on the Texas trails and seemed to be bent only on understudying the celebrated Bull of Bashan, who was famed for his roaring.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Sharp Shooting!

BILL BUCK came out into the piazza with a heavy tread that made the planks shake.

Harry Wharton & Co. glanced round at him and smiled.

The big cowpuncher from the Kicking Cayuse Ranch had changed "some" in his looks since the party had struck Prairie Bend.

On the steamer from England and on the railroad from New York to Texas Bill had sported "store" clothes. He hadn't looked, or felt, quite at home in store clothes. At Prairie Bend he had been glad to get back into his puncher's outfit. Now he was dressed in big, heavy, high-heeled riding boots, clinking spurs attached to the same, buckskin breeches tucked into them; flannel shirt, open at the neck; neck scarf of several brilliant colours; and a gigantic hat of the stetson variety. He wore a belt, with a holster attached, and in that holster was packed a big six-gun—which had hitherto been packed out of sight in a hip pocket. But at Prairie Bend, and beyond that point on the journey, there was no reason why a guy should be shy about displaying his hardware—and Bill liked to have his gun handy to his hand.

He shot a swift glance up and down

the timber piazza, noted the Famous Five sitting in a row, looking out over the cow town, and Billy Bunter at the foot of the steps, leaning thereon and gasping for breath; and he rapped out at once, as he missed Vernon-Smith from the party:

"Say, where's that young gink?"

"Smithy? Only walked down to the store," said Harry Wharton. He gave a nod towards the Prairie Bend store, which was only a short distance down the irregular street, on the opposite side.

Bill gave a grunt. Anyone going in and out of the store was in full view from the hotel piazza; but Bill, while he was "riding herd," liked to have his charges right under his eye—especially Smithy, the member of the Greyfriars party who was in danger from an unknown enemy.

"Gone into the store, has he?" grunted Bill. "You see him go in with your own two lookin' eyes, young Wharton?"

"Yes," answered Harry, smiling. "He's all right, Bill."

"Mebbe," grunted Bill, "and mebbe not. Ain't you wise to it that his popper, over the pond, trusted him to me to git him to Kicking Cayuse safe and sound, this side up with care? Don't you know that some galoot is honing to keep him away from the ranch, and has put up that scallawag Two-gun Sanders to rope him in? I guess I don't want that young gink breaking herd."

"Sanders wouldn't be likely to show up here, Bill," remarked Bob Cherry.

"Mebbe, and mebbe not," said Bill. "He's got a lot of side-kickers, that guy Sanders, and I guess you don't know their frontispieces if you saw them."

Bill cast a suspicious glance up and down the rugged street. He had a lot of responsibility on his hands, and he was very anxious to get Vernon-Smith safely landed at the ranch, where he would be under the care of Barney Stone, the foreman, and Bill's responsibility at an end.

Bill Buck had been sent over to England with documents and particulars of the ranch, which had been purchased by Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith. Quite unexpectedly, Mr. Vernon-Smith had decided to send his son out to see the ranch, and had, therefore, placed him in Bill's charge.

Probably he would not have done so had he been aware of the danger that awaited Smithy in America. That a man named Sanders had appeared at Greyfriars before the school broke up for the Easter holidays and warned Smithy not to visit Texas, he knew, but that was all. Certainly he had never foreseen that Sanders would hire a bunch of gangsters in New York to watch for Smithy, or that he would hold up a train on the Texas railroad and search it for him. But these things were known to Bill Buck, and they made him anxious.

In the bright sunlight of Texas the dust whirled in the street of Prairie Bend. A horseman was riding there—a puncher, on his looks, mounted on a wiry, shaggy cow pony. He was riding at a slow walk and swinging a coiled lasso in his hand idly. Bill gave him a searching look, which made the chums of the Greyfriars Remove grin. If Bill was going to suspect every cowpuncher he saw on a horse of having possible designs on Smithy he would have a large number of suspects to keep tabs on before they arrived at the ranch.

"Know that chap, Bill?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I guess I seen him afore," grunted Bill. "I seen him hanging about Diego's pulque joint at Packsaddle, the doggoned greaser. That's Mexican Joe—and I'll tell a man I ain't got a lot of use for greasers!"

The juniors, looking more attentively at the horseman, noted his swarthy skin and sharp, black eyes and black moustache, and noted, too, that he wore a sombrero. He was a Mexican—a Spanish-American from the southern side of the Rio Grande. They noticed, too, that from under the brim of the immense sombrero he shot a flashing glance towards the piazza where they sat as he passed the timber hotel.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Smithy!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Herbert Vernon-Smith stepped out of the store on the opposite side of the street. Bill gave a grunt of satisfaction at the sight of him.

Smithy was about to cross the street to walk back to the hotel, when the Mexican suddenly gave his horse a touch of the spur. Hitherto he had been idling about aimlessly; now, all of a sudden, he shot into speed. The Bounder stepped back quickly to give the horseman room to pass.

What happened next passed like a flash.

The rider's arm swung, the lasso flew, uncoiling as it shot through the air, and the Famous Five bounded to their feet in amazement as they saw Vernon-Smith plucked from the ground as if by a giant's hand.

Stumbling and whirling and rolling, the Bounder went hurtling after the horseman at the end of the lasso.

He had been roped in—so suddenly, so unexpectedly that he did not know what was happening to him.

There was a roar of rage from Bill Buck.

He leaped forward and leaned over the piazza rail, his gun fairly flying from its holster into his hand.

Bang, bang, bang!

Harry Wharton & Co. stood almost spellbound. They could not have helped Smithy—they could never have reached him as he whirled through a cloud of dust behind the galloping horse.

But for Bill he would have vanished from their sight in a few seconds; the horseman was already spurring round a bend of the long, irregular street, and a shack cut him off from view.

Another few seconds and the Bounder would have vanished after him.

But in breathless amazement the juniors saw Smithy sprawling in the dust in the middle of the street, no longer dragged by the lasso; they saw a loose end of rope flying as he sprawled.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bob Cherry.

Bill, his smoking revolver in his hand, plunged down the steps and ran down the street towards the sprawling Bounder, who rolled in the dust, half-stunned and utterly dazed and dizzy.

It was a moment or two before the juniors realised how he had been saved; then it dawned on them that Bill had shot through the rope. The Mexican had been so swift that he was out of gunshot, beyond a shack, before Bill could fire—and the Kicking Cayuse puncher had fired at the rope and shot it in pieces.

Mexican Joe was riding on, with a rope dangling behind him, but no lassoed prisoner at the end of it. Vernon-Smith was sprawling, with the loop of a lasso still round him and an end lying loose.

"Oh gum!" gasped Johnny Bull.

"Bill can shoot—"

"The shootfulness is terrific!" gasped Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Come on!" exclaimed Harry.

The juniors ran down the steps after Bill.

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked Billy Bunter as they passed. "I say, what—" But they did not stop to listen to Bunter.

Bill had passed the Bounder, and was running on to the corner, gun in hand, evidently with the intention of firing on the Mexican if he sighted him again. But the Famous Five stopped as they reached Vernon-Smith.

The Bounder was still sprawling, dazed and breathless, the rope round him. The juniors grasped him and lifted him to his feet and released him from the remnant of the lasso.

Bang, bang! came from the corner.

Bill, standing by the shack there, was loosing off lead. But the Mexican, with trailing lasso, was riding for the open prairie, spurring on his bronco, and was already out of effective range. Bill snorted and came tramping back.

Vernon-Smith, panting for breath, leaned on Bob Cherry.

"What—what happened?" he gasped. "What the thump—" He was bruised and shaken and dizzy.

"You were lassoed, old chap," said Harry. "That Mexican—"

"Must have been watching for a chance at you, Smithy," said Harry Wharton. "It's one of Sanders' gang, of course!"

"Oh gad!" gasped the Bounder. He recovered his breath and rubbed his damaged limbs, with a painful grimace.

"The brute! The villain! He would have dragged me off at the end of a rope! Why, I might have broken my limbs, bumping along behind a horse! The hound!"

"I guess he'd have picked you up once you was round that corner," said Bill. "But he sure was not worrying if you was damaged a few—he surely was not!"

"But—but how did I get loose, if he lassoed me?" exclaimed the Bounder. "Did the rope break, or what?"

"It sure broke, with three lumps of lead to help it!" grunted Bill. "I guess if I hadn't been sly, with a gun handy, you'd be going for a ride with Mexican Joe this pesky minute, young Vernon-Smith. Say, ain't you got hoss-sense enough not to break herd, with a bunch of hoodlums watching for a chance at you? What'd I say to Barney Stone at the ranch if that Greaser had got by with it? Ain't I got to hand you over to Barney, you young gink?"

"You shot through that lasso!" gasped Smithy.

"I sure did, you pesky young geck! Now you hit that hotel, and you hit it quick!" growled Bill.

The Bounder leaned on Bob's strong arm as he tottered back to the timber hotel. His rough experience had shaken him badly. But for Bill's prompt aid he would have been a good deal more damaged, for evidently the Mexican, for his own safety, would have dragged him some distance before stopping to pick him up. It was a proof, if the Greyfriars fellows needed one, that the Bounder's secret enemy was not likely to stick at trifles in keeping him away from the ranch on the Rio Frio.

Smithy dropped into a chair on the piazza, aching, panting, and covered with dust. Far away on the prairie, glimpsed beyond the shacks and zinc roofs of Prairie Bend, a sombrero vanished in the distance. Mexican Joe was burning the wind for safety—with-out his prisoner!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

On the Prairie Trail!

ANDY JONES, who drove the thrice-weekly hack from Prairie Bend to Packsaddle, stood beside his horses, his whip under his arm, chewing tobacco.

Andy had seven passengers that day—an unusual number, for it was seldom more than three or four packed into the hack.

The Greyfriars party had it to themselves, as it happened—which was rather fortunate, for there was none too much room in the hack for seven fellows, especially when one of the seven was William George Bunter.

Baggage was piled on the roof—not a lot of it, for the Greyfriars fellows had travelled before, and knew how to travel light. Though in that line Billy Bunter outdid the most experienced traveller in the party, for he travelled lightest of all, with little more than he stood up in. When Billy Bunter wanted a change, some other fellow's supply had to provide that change; on which system it was really easy for a fellow to travel remarkably light.

When they saw the hack, the Famous Five rather wondered how Bill was going to pack his gigantic limbs into it along with themselves. But the answer to that one was easy. Bill wasn't! It transpired that Bill, on his outward journey, had left his "cayuse" at Prairie Bend, and now he collected the same, to follow the stage on horseback.

Vernon-Smith sat up beside the driver's seat, Harry Wharton & Co. got inside, and Billy Bunter stood by the door, eyeing the small available space through his big spectacles with a series of disparaging blinks. Bunter liked to travel in comfort. He did not see much prospect of comfort, packed into a narrow space on a hard, wooden seat. Bunter was dissatisfied at the prospect. When Bunter was dissatisfied he never hesitated to make the fact known.

"I say, you fellows, where am I going to sit?" he demanded.

"On this seat!" said Bob cheerily. "We'll try to make enough room for two, old fat man."

"There's no room on that seat for me, Bob Cherry."

"Gather up your feet, you fellows!" said Bob. "Bunter wants to sit on the floor! Roll in, Bunt! You can have all the floor, if you let us rest our feet on you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "Look here, why can't we have a car? If I were taking a party about on a holiday I should order a car. I say, Smithy—"

"Don't you like the hack?" asked Vernon-Smith, glancing down from his perch.

"No, I jolly well don't!"

"Well, if there's a car to be had at Prairie Bend you can order it."

"Will you pay for it if I do?"

"Oh, no! Leave that to you, partner."

"Look here, Smithy—"

"Say, you getting aboard?" inquired Andy Jones, giving Bunter a poke in his fat ribs with the butt end of his whip, as a hint that he was ready to start. "I guess we got to hit Packsaddle on time."

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. "I say, I can't travel in that—that thing! Aren't there cars to be had here?"

"Sure!" said Andy, staring at him. "There's a heap of cars at the railroad depot."

"I say, you fellows, you hear that?"

hooted Bunter. "We can get a car at the railway station, the driver says."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" hooted Bunter. "If you're too jolly mean to pay for a car, I'll pay for it. One of you fellows can lend me the money."

"We shouldn't get very near Kicking Cayuse in one of those cars, fathead!" chuckled Bob. "They call railway carriages cars here. Those cars will take you back to Arkansas, or on to New Mexico; but they won't take you out to the ranches."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh rot!" yapped Bunter. "The man says cars, so I suppose he means cars. I say, what sort of cars do you mean?"

"Railroad cars, sure!" said Andy. "I ain't wise to any other sort of car, mister."

"I mean a motor-car!" hooted Bunter.

"Oh, you mean an auto?" asked the stage-driver. "Carry me home to Eliza Jane! If you mean an automobile, mister, why don't you say automobile? Nope! I guess there ain't a lot of autos around here."

"Pack in, you!" called out Bill Buck. Bill was already in the saddle, and holding in a prancing bronco. "Say, you figure we got a heap o' time to burn? Andy, push that fat gink in!"

"You said it!" agreed Andy.

"I say, you fellows, I really can't—Yaroooh!" Bunter gave a howl as the driver pushed him in, and he landed on all fours among innumerable legs and feet. "Ow! Beast! Wow! I say—"

Andy slammed the door on him, leaving Bunter to sort himself out, and stepped up to his own seat. He gathered up his reins, cracked his whip, and the hack trundled out of the rugged street of Prairie Bend on to the still more rugged prairie trail.

Billy Bunter sorted himself out and wedged himself into a seat. He gave five grinning fellows a petrifying glare through his big spectacles—without, however, having the effect of petrifying them.

Harry Wharton & Co. were in cheery spirits that sunny, golden afternoon. The hack, jolting over a rough trail, could not be called comfortable, and it was rather closely packed. But it was rather an adventure to be travelling by stage-coach on a Wild Western trail, and rather exciting to be leaving the railroad—the link with civilisation—behind them, and plunging into the unknown, boundless spaces of the prairie lands. They had expected to rough it a little in the cow country of Texas, and if they had to rough it a lot they were not going to grouse. Grousing on their part, indeed, was unnecessary, as Billy Bunter was prepared to do enough grousing for the whole party.

Behind the hack, at a little distance, Bill Buck rode his bronco, with his eyes wary under the brim of his stetson, and the butt of his gun very near his hand. Buckskin Bill would not have been surprised to hit trouble before hitting Packsaddle, and if trouble accrued he was ready for it. Every now and then some of the juniors glanced back, and saw the big puncher trotting behind in a cloud of dust, still "riding herd" over the party.

The trail ran across rugged, rolling prairie, marked only by wheels and hoof-prints. There was no sign of what the juniors would have called a road.

The juniors knew that they would be passing a good many ranches before they

reached Packsaddle, and every now and then they sighted a cowman on a bronco in the inevitable stetson. Here and there clumps of timber barred the blue sky, and patches of scrubby thickets or chaparral; but, for the most part, the prairie was open and grassy, stretching seemingly to the horizon on all sides.

A mile out of Prairie Bend, Andy turned his eyes on Vernon-Smith at his side. Smithy had already noticed that the stage-driver seemed interested in him; possibly because he had heard that he was the son of the millionaire in the old country who had bought a ranch in Texas. Kicking Cayuse had cost Mr. Vernon-Smith a good many thousands of dollars, though it was probably a bargain, as most of Mr. Vernon-Smith's deals were.

"You're young Vernon-Smith, I hear!" remarked Andy.

"You said it!" answered Smithy, in the language of the country.

"I guess I've heard that your popper's bought the Kicking Cayuse?"

"Right in one!" agreed Smithy.

"Search me!" said Andy, and he turned to his horses again.

The Bounder looked at him. All through that trip out to Texas he had wondered about the strange mystery of the Kicking Cayuse. Bill Buck had been able to tell him nothing. He could not guess, any more than the Greyfriars juniors could, why some secret enemy was bent on keeping the millionaire's son away from the ranch. But Bill was a simple puncher. He knew all about horses and cows and lassoes, and six-guns; about fencing corrals and cutting alfalfa, rounding-up and branding; but that was the limit of Bill's knowledge. He was not the kind of guy to get wise to any gum-game going on behind the scenes, and that something was going on at the ranch, which the new owner's son was not wanted to discover, Smithy could hardly doubt. He was very keen to learn anything he could about that vast expanse of Texas prairie that now belonged to his father.

"You know Kicking Cayuse ranch?" he asked.

"I should smile," assented Andy. He paused, and then, apparently making up his mind, went on: "I hear that a Packsaddle guy roped you in, back in Prairie Bend, this morning."

"Yes; and that's not the first time somebody's tried to keep me away from the ranch," said the Bounder quietly. "A blighter called Two-gun Sanders has been trying it on ever since I started."

"He sure is bad medicine," said Andy. "Say, mister, I guess you got to hit Packsaddle, now you started in this here hearse. But—" He paused again a moment. "I'll mention that I drive back to-morrow. You can sure book a seat, if you want."

"Meaning that you'd advise a stranger to keep clear of the Kicking Cayuse?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Sort of!" admitted Andy. He grinned. "Say, I guess you got sand, feller, goin' on arter that Greaser got you like he did. But I'm telling you that your best guess is to go no farther than Packsaddle."

"Why?" asked Smithy.

Andy grinned again.

"There's spots in Texas that ain't healthy for strangers, especially from over the pond," he said. "I ain't spilling anything. I guess I ain't honing for trouble with any guy of the heft of Two-gun Sanders. No, sir! Not so's you'd notice it! But your best guess is to hit the home trail, and hit it sudden."

The Bounder's face was grim. He could see plainly enough that Andy Jones had at least a suspicion why he was not wanted on Kicking Cayuse. But it was equally plain that Andy was not going to "spill it." He had no idea of "horning" into another guy's trouble.

"Your popper bought that there ranch without seeing it," went on Andy, as Vernon-Smith did not speak.

"Yes; he has never been to Texas!" answered Smithy. "But he's not a man to be done; that ranch is worth what he paid for it, and very likely more."

"I should smile!" grinned Andy. "He ain't the first guy to buy the Kicking Cayuse, buddy. That ranch has changed owners a few since I been driving this hearse! Sure! It ain't never changed its foreman. Barney Stone has run that ranch for years, Barney has. But it sure has changed owners—and some of them owners have been mighty unlucky."

"There's something going on there that wouldn't please the owner, and that the owner's son isn't wanted to look into? That's it?"

"I guess," said Andy, "that I sure chewed the rag all I'm going to chew."

"Bill Buck doesn't know anything about it," said Smithy.

Andy chuckled.

"Bill is sure a mosshead," he answered. "He is a good man, Bill is—but I'll tell a man, he's some mosshead! Mebbe you'll be put wise when you hit the ranch—and mebbe not. But you sure would have a better guess if you booked a seat back in this hearse to-morrow and hit the cars again for the East."

The Bounder's eyes glinted.

"I'd not turn back from Kicking Cayuse if every roughneck in Texas stood in the way!" he said quietly. "The ranch belongs to my father, and I'm going to know what's going on there."

Andy shrugged his broad shoulders.

"You said it!" he remarked indifferently, and after that he gave his whole attention to his horses, and did not speak again.

The Bounder sat with a thoughtful brow.

Miles ran under the rolling wheels. At a distance from Prairie Bend the country grew more solitary; it was some time now since a rider had been sighted on the far-stretching plains.

He noticed that the driver gave a sudden start and stared very intently ahead where the trail ran between two straggling patches of thicket and post-oaks. Stetson hats bobbed into view ahead. Hitherto, Andy had driven at a steady speed; now he slacked down.

"What are you slowing for?" asked Smithy.

Andy jerked his head towards the figures of horsemen, half-seen on the trail ahead, where it ran through the scrub.

"I guess we got to pull in there!" he drawled. "I'm paid to drive this hearse, buddy, not to mix up in gun-play with a bunch of road-agents. It's a hold-up, buddy, and I'm telling you to put up your paws pronto when you hear the word, or mebbe you'll never hear anything else this side of Jordan."

The Bounder caught his breath.

"A hold-up?" he repeated.

"Sure! Mebbe some guys in this section have heard that a millionaire's son is around!" grinned Andy. "Say, what's got you?" he added, in a sort of startled yelp, staring at the Bounder of Greyfriars.

Smithy, with shut teeth and a set face, had thrust his hand into the pocket where he had packed the revolver Billy



Vernon-Smith's gun was lifted, and his eyes were blazing over it. Bang, bang, bang! A wounded man rolled off his bronco, crashing into the trail. Spattering shots from the other two flew wide, as the hack thundered down the trail!

Bunter had bought in Prairie Bend that morning. He whipped it out, and his finger was in the trigger. Andy gave a gasp of alarm.

"You young gink, pack that gun!" he stuttered. "Say, they'll riddle you—they'll riddle the hearse. Mebbe they'll get me! Pack that gun!"

"You'll take your choice of that, same as I do!" said Herbert Vernon-Smith, between his teeth. "Drive on!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Smithy Gets Through!

"DRIVE on!" repeated the Bounder, a snap in his voice.

He gave a swift glance back.

At a distance, behind the cloud of dust left by the rolling wheels of the hack, Bill Buck was riding his bronco. He had not yet seen the horsemen in the timber ahead.

Harry Wharton put out his head and glanced up at the Bounder.

"Anything up, Smithy?" he called.

"Yes; a hold-up ahead on the trail."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Get ready to duck!" added the Bounder coolly. "We're not stopping. We're going to take that hold-up at a rush!"

"Go it!" gasped Bob Cherry.

There was a terrified squeak from the hack.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"But I say——" yelled Bunter.

"Shut up!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Oh crikey!"

The sound of a bump was heard. Billy Bunter was hurriedly spreading his fat person over the floor of the jolting hack. Sitting up when the bullets began to fly, had no appeal for Bunter.

Neither had it, in point of fact, for the other fellows in the hack. But they were keeping cool.

They were cooler than Andy! Andy Jones was spluttering with rage and alarm. Andy was, as he said, paid to drive that hack, not to get mixed up in gun-play. Andy's rule, if bandits cropped up on the trail, as sometimes they did, in a lawless region like the Packsaddle country, was to pull in his horses and sit with his hands up, as meek as a lamb. Passengers, as a rule, were even meeker than Andy.

But he had a passenger beside him now who was anything but meek. There was a tough spot in the Bounder of Greyfriars, as Remove fellows were well aware. In a country where men packed guns, and relied upon them for safety, Smithy was quick to pick up the local manners and customs. So far from being scared, he had a sense of exhilaration, as well as a grim and determined resolve.

Had he supposed that the gang in the timber ahead were ordinary trail-thieves, with no object but robbery, Smithy might have followed the dictates of prudence. But he had little doubt, if any, that they were Two-gun Sanders and his gang; that their intention was not to "go through" the passengers in the hack, but to "rope in" the son of Mr. Vernon-Smith!

Sanders, who had failed in New York and missed his victim when he held up the west-bound train, had tried again at Prairie Bend, by the hands of Mexican Joe, and failed again; and now he was watching for the Packsaddle hack—the last throw of the dice, as it were. Smithy was sure of it, and it was not to defend his ample cash, but his liberty, and perhaps his life, that he was handling the "six-gun."

Andy made a clutch at his arm.

"You packing that gun?" he snarled.

"No."

"You young gink! They'll shoot, and——"

"So shall I," said Herbert Vernon-Smith grimly. "I said drive on, Andy Jones! Are you getting deaf? Don't slow down!"

"I guess I'm driving this here hearse!" snapped Andy. "I'll mention that I'm stopping at the word stop. And I'm telling you, if they see that gun, they won't call 'Halt!' they'll burn powder, and you'll get yours pronto."

"They won't see the gun!" said the Bounder, cool as ice. He leaned a little towards Andy and jammed the muzzle of the six-gun in the startled driver's ribs. "Now, listen to me——"

"You pesky young gink, take that gun away!" gasped Andy. "You aiming to let lead through me, dog-gone you?"

"I'll let lead through you, and pitch you off the hack, and take the reins myself if you don't obey orders, Mr. Jones!" said Herbert Vernon-Smith. "If you're afraid of gun-play, I'd advise you not to drive a hack on this trail—at least, when you've got me for a passenger. Don't let go those reins. Give a single kick, Andy Jones, and you go down into the trail, with a bullet through you."

Andy looked at him.

The Bounder's face was hard as iron, his eyes glinting like cold steel. He looked ten years older at that moment.

His words came snapping, with deadly determination in every syllable. It was as if a schoolboy had suddenly changed into a hardbitten gunman. He meant every word he said; and the

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muzzle of the revolver was grinding into the driver's ribs, Smithy's finger on the trigger.

"Search me!" gasped Andy Jones. "Don't play the fool!" snapped Vernon-Smith. Those blighters yonder are not after robbery; they're after me. They're not getting me! Now listen—"

"I guess—" stuttered Andy.

"Listen, you fool! Keep at this pace, as if you were going to stop when they give the word; but as soon as you reach them, whip up your horses, and take that timber at full gallop! Got that?"

"I—I reckon—"

"If you fail me, you get the first bullet!" said Vernon-Smith savagely. "I'll shoot you like a dog, Andy Jones!"

"You pesky young geck—"

"I'm going through," said the Bounder. "You're going to do exactly as I've told you, or you're going off that seat with a bullet through you! Don't say any more; you've said enough! Get to it!"

Andy Jones gave him a long, long look. Then he choked down his rage and alarm. There was danger from the desperadoes on the trail—but that danger was not so close as the danger from the passenger at his side. He had to jump to orders, or roll down from the driver's seat with a bullet through his body. His life hung on the merest thread, and he understood it, and he jumped to orders.

The hack rolled on towards the timber.

Five horsemen could be seen there now, halted under the thick branches that spread almost across the trail.

They sat in their saddles facing the oncoming hack, obviously with the intention of calling it to a halt.

Every face in the five was masked, under the stetson hat. But one of them, the Bounder had no doubt, was the face of the gunman Sanders.

His revolver, jammed in the driver's ribs, hidden by Andy's coat, was invisible to the men on the trail. It was going to remain invisible till the Bounder had to use it.

Within the hack, Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged startled looks. They heard every word that Smithy rapped out to the driver. They knew that hard, steely streak in the Bounder's character, and, like Andy, they knew that he meant every word. He was going to take his chance of going through, and they were prepared to take the same chance. Only from Bunter, crumpled on the floor, came a series of scared squeaks.

"Good old Smithy!" breathed Johnny Bull.

Looking out, the juniors could see the masked horsemen ahead now. They knew, as well as Smithy, that it was Sanders and some of his gang. Smithy's methods were desperate enough, but Greyfriars ways were of no use in the Packsaddle country. It was desperate methods, or tame surrender.

Had the gang ahead been aware of what was intended no doubt they would have stopped the hack with a hail of bullets, shooting the horses down. But assuredly they had no suspicion of what was in the mind of the schoolboy who sat up by the driver.

The hack rolled on at a moderate pace, looking as if Andy intended—as

a few minutes ago he had intended—to halt when he reached the hold-up. But Andy's grip now was hard on the "ribbons," his whip, in his other hand, was ready for sudden lashing. He had to take his chance of a bullet from the trail, to avoid the certainty of a bullet from the revolver jammed into his side.

It was the first time that the driver of the Packsaddle hack had been "bulldozed" by a passenger; but it was the first time that he had had the Bounder of Greyfriars for a passenger on his "hearse." Andy had to go through with it, and he had made up his mind to that.

The hack rolled under the shady branches.

Bill Buck, behind, was still out on the open plain, keeping clear of the dust from the rolling wheels. There was no doubt that he would come on, at a gallop, at the first shot, and no doubt, either, that the masked riders would be ready to greet him with whizzing bullets when he came. Bill's life, in all probability, depended on the Bounder now.

"Halt!"

One of the riders, facing the oncoming hack in the middle of the trail, raised his Colt, and shouted. Two of the others also lifted revolvers towards Andy.

The other two remained beside the trail, watching the plain—evidently aware that a horseman was following the hack, and ready for him.

Three lifted six-guns, in other circumstances, would have been more than enough for Andy Jones, and he would have pulled in his horses at a word. The trail-robbers had no doubt that he was going to do so. They knew Andy, and they knew that the passengers were all schoolboys. Only from Bill, when he arrived, did they anticipate trouble, and they were ready to greet Bill with whizzing lead when he rode under the branches.

For a second Andy hesitated. But the muzzle in his ribs jammed hard, and he felt, rather than saw, the deadly look that came over Herbert Vernon-Smith's face. In sheer desperation, Andy carried out the orders the Bounder had given him.

Crack, crack! rang his sudden whip on the backs of the horses, and they leaped to a gallop. The horseman in the middle of the trail was shouldered aside by the rushing horses, and his bronco fell against the bushes, pitching him from the saddle. That sudden leap forward of the hack, when he had expected it to stop, had taken him quite by surprise. He rolled off his horse, in tangled mesquite, yelling breathlessly.

The hack roared on.

Four startled horsemen swung round on it. But the Bounder's revolver was no longer jammed in Andy's ribs. It was lifted, and his eyes were blazing over it.

Bang, bang! it roared, and in two seconds two wounded men rolled off their broncos, crashing, yelling, into the trail. Spattering shots from the other two flew wide and wild as the hack thundered on down the trail through the timber. The Bounder, standing up, fired back over the baggage on the roof, while Andy, with his horses almost out of control, drove on at a mad speed, and dashed out of the timber on to the open prairie beyond. The Bounder had got through,

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THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Pack it Up.

"**D**OGGONE my cats!" gasped Bill Buck.

The shots ringing from the timber ahead warned Bill of the hold-up. He could see little or nothing in the cloud of prairie dust rolling from the wheels of the hack. But through the whirling dust came the bang of the Bounder's revolver, and the spattering fire of the trail gang.

Bill whipped out the gun from his holster, struck spurs to his bronco, and dashed on at a breathless gallop.

In less than a minute he was on the spot.

But for the Bounder he would have found the hack at a halt, the passengers "held up," and revolvers at a level to greet him with whizzing bullets. But that was not what Bill found now.

The hack was thundering on, almost out of sight; two riderless horses were careering; two wounded men lay groaning on the earth; another man was scrambling out of the bushes; two of the gang were firing wildly after the vanishing hack, forgetful of Bill.

He came on them like a thunderbolt.

Bang, bang, bang! roared Bill's six-gun. And the two roughnecks, with panting howls of alarm, turned their horses into the brush, and rode away, spurring, without even turning on Bill.

The dismounted man, scrambling out of the mesquite, scrambled back in a hurry, and disappeared into the brush.

"I'll tell a man!" gasped Bill.

Without a moment's halt he thundered on at a gallop after the hack.

How Andy had got through the hold-up was a mystery to Bill; but he saw that Andy had, and he galloped after the hack, urging his bronco to top speed.

In a few minutes he was past the clump of timber, pursuing the hack on the trail across the prairie beyond. But fast as he rode, it was not easy to overtake Andy. Andy's team lashed into desperate speed, frightened by the firing, were tearing on madly, the hack rocking and jolting wildly behind them, threatening every moment to overturn on the rugged trail.

Andy was making frantic efforts to pull in his horses. But he was two miles or more from the scene of the hold-up before he got them under control again, and the thundering, rocking hack slowed down.

Then Bill rode up beside it. He waved his revolver at Andy, and grinned at him gleefully.

"Bully for you, old-timer!" he roared. "Say, you sure got sand to go through a hold-up that-a-way, Andy!"

"Bully nothing!" howled Andy, spluttering with exertion and rage. "You figure that I was aiming to stop lead, you piecan? It was this dog-goned young gink that had a gun on me, goldarn him! And sure I'll break him up for it as soon as we hit Packsaddle! You hear me shout!"

Bill gasped.

"That young gink!" he exclaimed. "What you giving me, Andy?"

"I guess I'm going to strew him all over Packsaddle!" roared Andy. "You hear me toot? I'll sure hand him a few, and then some! Yep!"

The Bounder laughed.

"Keep cool, old bean!" he said.

"You've got through O.K. Bank it down."

"You wait till we hit Packsaddle!" hissed Andy. "I'll larn you whether you can bulldoze Andy Jones on his own hack! Yep!"

"I'll tell a man!" gasped Bill. "Say, there's two guys spread out back on the trail. Didn't you spread them out, Andy?"

"Aw, forget it!" snarled Andy.

"It was Smithy, Bill!" said Bob Cherry, from the window. "Smithy did the whole bag of tricks! Good old Smithy!"

"Carry me home to die!" gasped Bill. He stared up blankly at the Bounder. "I'll tell a man—I'll surely tell a man from Texas! You!"

"Little me!" grinned the Bounder. "One of that gang was Sanders; I think it was Sanders who went over under the horses. We got through all right, Bill. I had to persuade Mr. Jones to drive on."

"I'm going to mush you up for it when we hit Packsaddle!" growled Andy. "I sure am going to break you into a lot of pieces!"

"I don't think!" said the Bounder coolly.

"You jest watch out!" growled Andy.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. He had "put it through," and he did not care a boiled bean for the anger of the stage-driver.

"I say, you fellows," came a squeak from the interior of the hack—"I say, you might give a fellow a hand up! I'm bumped all over, and I'm all out of breath, and— Leggo my car, Bob Cherry, you beast!"

"Only helping you up, old fat man!"

"Beast! Leggo!"

Bill dropped behind the hack again as it rolled on to Packsaddle. Every now and then he glanced back over a brawny shoulder, but there was no sign of pursuit by the hold-up gang. A little later the cow town of Packsaddle came in sight—a sprawling collection of shacks, cabins, and a few frame-houses in a loop of the Frio River. Kicking Cayuse Ranch was some fifteen miles away to the west under the red glow of the sun that was setting behind Squaw Mountain. On the morrow the Greyfriars party were to ride there; horseflesh was the only means of transport to Kicking Cayuse.

Andy drove up the single street of Packsaddle, and drew his hack to a halt in front of the Pack Hotel—a timber building with a piazza.

Outside the Pack a crowd was gathered to watch the hack come in; the arrival of the "stage" was an event at the cow town.

Most of them were punchers, in big stetson hats, and most of them packed guns. The guns, probably, were packed rather for purposes of adornment and for old times' sake than for actual use, though occasionally there were shooting affrays at the Red Flare and other such resorts; and Two-gun Sanders was said at least to have "shot up" as many guys as he had fingers and toes!

Andy descended from his seat, his face still grim and hostile. Evidently he intended to carry out his threat of "breaking up" the schoolboy from the Old Country who had had the nerve to "bulldoze" him on his own hack.

Smithy, sturdy fellow as he was, had not the remotest chance in a shindy with the big, raw-boned stage-driver. But he was quite cool as he got down from the hack. His hand was in his pocket on the gun he had used on the stage trail; there was still one cartridge in the six-

shooter, and the iron-nerved Bounder was quite prepared to handle a gun against brawn and muscle if Andy attempted to carry out his threat.

Harry Wharton & Co. jumped out, and Billy Bunter rolled after them. Bill was exchanging greetings with punchers in the crowd, most of them, it appeared, his old friends and acquaintances. Andy Jones fixed a hostile glare on Vernon-Smith, and stepped towards him.

"Now, you young geck—" he said grimly.

"What's biting you, old bean?" asked Smithy coolly.

Harry Wharton & Co. gathered round rather anxiously. If the burly stage-driver laid a finger on Smithy, the whole Co. were ready to jump to his aid on the instant.

"Look here, Mr. Jones—" began Harry pacifically.

"You pack it up, bo!" said Andy. "I guess I got suthin' for that young geck! You figure that I'm letting that pesky little piecan bulldoze me? Not a heap!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said the Bounder.

"You got it coming!" yapped Andy; and he reached out at the Bounder, who did not retreat an inch.

His hand whipped out of his pocket, with the six-gun in it. The muzzle looked Andy Jones fairly in his astonished face.

"Stand back!" rapped the Bounder.

"Oh, Smithy—" gasped Bob.

"By the great horned toad!" gasped Andy. "Put up that gun, you young geck! You figure—"

"Stand back, you fool!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "If you put a finger on me, I'll shoot you like a rabbit!"

Andy stood glaring at him. There was a buzz in the crowd, and all eyes turned on the startling scene.

Bill Buck came striding swiftly towards Andy.

"Say, what's this game?" he demanded. "You, Vernon-Smith, stick that gun in your pants! You figure you've come here to play at being a gunman, you young gink! Andy, I'm telling you to pack it up! Say, you honing for trouble, I guess I'll give you all you want, and some over! Shoot!"

Andy was a burly man, but the Kicking Cayuse puncher towered nearly a foot over his head. Andy did not want trouble with Bill. He breathed wrath, but he decided to pack it up.

"Spill it!" snapped Bill.

"Aw, forget it, you big stiff!" grunted Andy; and he turned away to attend to his horses.

The Bounder, grinning, "packed" his gun, and walked cheerfully with the Greyfriars party into the Pack Hotel.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Foreman of Kicking Cayuse!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. turned out in the fresh morning in cheery spirits.

Billy Bunter was left snoring. Bob Cherry kindly gave him a call and a shake, but the fat Owl only woke up long enough to mumble "Beast!" and promptly went to sleep again. So he was left to snore in peace while the Famous Five went down the stairs—or, rather, the ladder, for it was merely a series of wooden steps, without even a hand-rail—with the Bounder.

Quarters at a timber hotel in the cow country were rough—in fact, very rough.

—but the clams of the Remove had no "kick" coming. They had slept soundly on wooden plank beds innocent of mattresses, rolled in blankets, sheets being apparently an unknown luxury at the only hotel in Packsaddle.

It was a bright, sunny morning, with a wind from Squaw Mountain, in the west, which scattered a good deal of dust over the cow town. After breakfast at a trestle-table, where they sat on long wooden benches, they walked out into the square, which they learned was called the "plaza"—many old Spanish names lingering in the country which had once been a part of Mexico.

Horsemen rode in the plaza and up and down the irregular street; only every now and then they saw a man on foot. Packsaddle was a "cow" town, and the business of the place was chiefly in connection with cows and supplies for ranch outfits. No true cowman ever went a lasso's length on foot if he could get on a "cayuse"—indeed, many of the cowmen they saw had a bow-legged look from constant riding.

Every now and then a rider would come in from the prairie trails at a gallop in a cloud of dust, with a jingle of stirrup and bridle, and a far-echoing "Hi-yi!" Nearly every head was under a stetson hat, though here and there a "Derby" was to be seen.

Through the gaps among the irregular buildings the juniors had wide glimpses of the rolling prairies beyond; of the Rio Frio, shining in the sun; and of the mighty mass of Squaw Mountain that barred the blue sky in the west. It was towards Squaw Mountain that their path lay when they set out for the ranch. Kicking Cayuse lay on the south of it, its pasturelands stretching for endless miles.

The juniors were keen to get going and arrive on the ranch. But Bill had told them that Barney Stone was riding into town that morning to meet them there, and that they would be riding back to the ranch with the foreman.

So they waited for Barney to "horn" in, rather curious to see the foreman of the Kicking Cayuse.

Barney, they had learned, had been foreman of the ranch for years and years, and had continued to manage it through several changes of ownership. They wondered whether he would be able to "put them wise" as to why Two-gun Sanders and his unknown employer had taken such desperate measures to keep the new owner's son away. Danger was over now—at least, so they concluded—when they were under the wing of the ranch foreman.

While the juniors strolled round the plaza and Billy Bunter snored, Bill Buck was sorting out horses for them to ride. Bill—if it were, as Andy Jones had declared, a "mosshhead" in some matters—knew all about horses. Seven cow-ponies, saddled and bridled, were ready at the hitching-rail of the Pack Hotel; and, as Barney Stone had not yet arrived, the juniors mounted and cantered round the plaza to kill time while they waited. They had all ridden at home, and they managed the cow-ponies well enough, though they had considerable doubts about what would happen when Billy Bunter proceeded to do likewise. They had seen Bunter's powers as an equestrian chiefly displayed in falling off a donkey at Margate.

"Hi-yi!" came a roar from Bill Buck, as he waved his stetson to the juniors; and they rode back to the hotel.

A man who had ridden in from the plain was hitching his horse to the rail, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,575.

and they guessed that it was Barney at last.

"Hyer they are!" said Bill, with a wave of his hand towards the Greyfriars fellows, as they dismounted. "This here is Barney Stone, you'uns."

The juniors looked rather curiously at the foreman of the Kicking Cayuse. He was of lean frame, dressed, not like a puncher, but in rather natty and well-cut riding clothes, though he wore the inevitable stetson. If he "packed" a gun, it was not to be seen.

His face, clean-shaven except for a slight monstache, was darkly tanned, hard as iron in outline, and his eyes, deep-set, keen, and quick in their glance.

Those keen, sharp eyes turned on the group of juniors, taking them all in with a single, searching glance, and then resting on Herbert Vernon-Smith.

"This here is young Vernon-Smith, the noo owner's boy!" said Bill Buck, indicating the Bounder; and Barney, with a faint smile on his hard, tanned face, stepped towards Smithy, and held out a hard hand.

"Glad to welcome you to Kicking Cayuse, sir!" he said, in a voice as hard as his features, but very civilly.

"Glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Stone!" answered Smithy, shaking hands with the foreman. "These fellows are friends of mine, coming to stay at the ranch—but I suppose my father has told you all about it in his letters."

"Sure!" said the ranch foreman. "You and your friends will find everything ready at the ranch—I guess I've done all I can to make things easy for strangers fresh from the Old Country."

"Oh, we can rough it, if it comes to that," said Smithy cheerily. "We don't expect lace curtains and down pillows in the Packsaddle country."

He introduced his friends one by one to Barney, and the ranch foreman shook hands with them, one after another. His manner was civil; but he did not give the Greyfriars fellows the impression that he was glad to see them.

That, however, did not surprise them; they had no doubt that Mr. Stone had been surprised, and probably not fearfully pleased when he heard from the new owner of the ranch that a party of schoolboys were coming out to stay at the Kicking Cayuse.

It was quite probable that he regarded a bunch of "tenderfeet" as a worry and a responsibility. But the juniors were prepared to show Barney, on better acquaintance, that they were not quite so tender as he doubtless considered them.

"That the whole bunch?" asked the ranch foreman.

"I guess there's a gink that ain't through his eats yet," said Bill. "I'll call him."

"We ain't got time to burn," said Barney curtly. "I got to get back to the ranch! You got to see Mr. Wash about the stores."

Bill nodded, and went into the hotel. Billy Bunter was down by that time, and was busily engaged in packing away several breakfasts, one after another.

Barney Stone turned to the Bounder.

"What's this Bill has been letting on about Two-gun Sanders?" he asked. "You been waking up trouble with that gun-slinger?"

"He woke up trouble with me," answered Smithy. "I've been wondering if you could tell me the reason."

"You can search me!" said Barney, staring. "What'd Sanders know about you, except that he's mebber heard that your popper's bought the ranch?"

"He's heard that, for a cert," said

Vernon-Smith, "and he took the trouble to cross over to England and warn me from coming here. He's tried to get hold of me three times—once in New York, once in the train in Texas, and yesterday by holding up the hack from Prairie Bend."

"You're telling me!" ejaculated Barney.

"There's somebody behind that scoundrel, who's put him up to keep me away from Kicking Cayuse!" said the Bounder. "There must be a reason for it, and I thought you might know what it was, Mr. Stone."

"Search me!" said Barney. "It's got me beat! I was sure beat to a frazzle when Bill told me—I reckoned mebber he was stringing me along. What the great horned toad would that gun-slinger Sanders want to rope you in for?"

"That's what I want to know," said Vernon-Smith quietly, "and I'm going to know, before I quit the ranch, too!"

"Waal, it beats me!" said the foreman. "But you'll be as safe as a bug in a rug when we hit Kicking Cayuse—I guess the bunch would fill Two-gun with lead if he came cavorting around after the boss' son. Sure!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Come on, Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry. "Waiting for you, old fat bean!"

Billy Bunter rolled out into the sunshine. He was not looking in the best of tempers. Bill Buck had interrupted him at his third breakfast, and Bunter was still hungry.

Barney Stone stared at Bunter. Judging by his look, he was not very favourably impressed by that plump member of the Greyfriars party. Bunter did not heed him. He blinked round irritably.

"I say, you fellows, I haven't finished brekker!" he grunted. "Look here, what's the hurry?"

"Mr. Stone's come to take us out to the ranch," said Harry Wharton. "Here's your horse, old fat-man—shall I help you up?"

"If you think I can't mount a horse without help, Wharton—"

"Well, get on, then, fathead!"

Billy Bunter gave a snort, and rolled over to the horse, which Bill was holding by the bridle. He blinked at the cow-pony rather uneasily. Billy Bunter fancied that he could ride, in fact, he fancied that he could do many things, until he actually came to do them. Bill had considerably picked out as quiet a cayuse as he could find, for Bunter's use; but no cayuse in the cow country was remarkable for quietness, and Bunter did not quite like the look of that cow-pony.

He looked at the cow-pony. The cow-pony twisted a head round and looked at him. Neither seemed to admire the other.

The Famous Five and Smithy were already in the saddle. Barney Stone remounted his bronco. Bunter paused.

"I—I say, you fellows—" he began.

"Are you coming or not?" rapped Vernon-Smith.

"Beast!"

"Well, we're starting!"

"Wait for me, you rotters—I don't know the way, do I?" howled Bunter. And he made up his mind to it, and scrambled into the saddle, as gracefully as if he were clambering up a tree.

To his great relief, the cow-pony stood still. Bunter's confidence returned. His feet were in the stirrups; the reins bunched in his left, and he gripped the whip with his right. Bunter, for the moment, was full of beans.

"Come on, you fellows!" he squeaked. "What are you hanging about for? Are you going to stick there all day?"

Bunter gave the cow-pony a smart cut with the whip, and started. The next moment he would have wished that he hadn't, had he retained sufficient possession of his fat wits to wish anything.

That cow-pony, at the cut of the whip, seemed suddenly to turn into a catherine-wheel. Bunter flew.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Stick on, Bunter!" yelled Johnny Bull.

"Search me!" ejaculated Barney Stone.

Bump!
"Yaroooh!"

Billy Bunter sat on Texas, with a bump that almost shook the Lone Star State, and roared.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Halt!

"**H**A, ha, ha!" Bunter roared—and the spectators roared. The spectators roared with laughter—Bunter did not.

"Ow! Oh! Oooop! Yaroop! Help! Whoo-hoop!" roared Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" bellowed Bill Buck. "That fat gink allowed that he could ride! Haw, haw, haw!"

"I say, you fellows—yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter sat on the dusty earth, groped for his spectacles, and jammed them on his fat little nose. He blinked round him in bewilderment. He seemed surprised to discover that he was sitting on the earth. He had a vague impression that Texas had got up suddenly and hit him.

"Oh crikey!" he gasped. "Oh crumbs! I say—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell up and down the street of Packsaddle. The juniors were laughing; Bill Buck was laughing; and two or three dozen citizens of Packsaddle were yelling with merriment. Even Barney Stone's hard-featured face relaxed into a grin.

Bob Cherry jumped down and ran to the fat Owl. He grasped him, and heaved him to his feet, Bunter sagging helplessly in his grasp.

"Ooogh!" spluttered Bunter. "I s-s-say, what—what's happened? W-w-w-was that an earthquake?"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bob.

"Was it an airthquake!" howled Bill Buck. "I'll tell a man! Haw, haw, haw!"

"I—I say, you fellows, I—I didn't know they had earthquakes in Texas!" gasped Bunter.

"You silly owl, you fell off that horse!" roared Johnny Bull. "For goodness' sake get on again and hold on! Tie him on with a bit of string, Bob!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

Earth and sky ceased to rock round Bunter; and he realised that it was not, after all, an earthquake! That cow-pony had bucked suddenly, and pitched him off—that was all! But it was enough! Untold gold would not have tempted Billy Bunter to climb on that cow-pony again.

"Come on!" chuckled Bob. "I'll give you a bunk up, old fat man."

"Leggo!" roared Bunter.

"Are you going to keep us waiting all day, you fat ass?" exclaimed the Bounder. He was annoyed by Bunter's antics, and irritated by Barney Stone's

sarcastic grin. This was not the sort of impression that he wanted the Greyfriars party to make on the Kicking Cayuse foreman.

"Get on, Bunter!" said Frank Nugent.

"Shan't!" roared Bunter. "I'm not getting on that brute again!"

"My esteemed Bunter—" exclaimed Harree Janset Ram Singh. "the ridefulness is the only possible way to get to Kicking Cayuse."

"Look here, I'm going!" snapped the Bounder.

"Go, and be blowed!" snorted Bunter. "I'm not getting on that savage brute again! I'm accustomed to a decent horse to ride, at home—not a buck-jumping beast like that!"

"Stay where you are then, you funky fathead!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "We're ready, Mr. Stone! You fellows coming?"

"I say, you fellows, don't you leave me here!" yelled Bunter.

"Are you coming or not?" howled Johnny Bull.

"I'm not getting on that brute! I can ride a decent horse—better than you fellows can! I ain't going to ride that beast!"

"Say, Bill, you fix up a buckboard for him!" said Barney Stone. "He sure can't ride. He can come on with the baggage."

"You said it, sir!" agreed Bill Buck.

"I say, you fellows—" yelled Bunter, as Barney Stone rode down the street, and the juniors rode after him.

But answer there came none! Bunter, evidently, had to go on wheels, if he went at all; and that was that.

Stone was evidently disinclined to wait longer, and he settled the matter by riding away. Harry Wharton & Co. rode after him, in a cheery bunch.

Bunter was left spluttering.

The trail from Packsaddle ran over open, rolling prairie, bearing away from the Rio Frio. Barney Stone rode by the side of Herbert Vernon-Smith, occasionally speaking to him, and pointing things out, objects of interest, with his quirt. He gave most, if not all of his attention to the son of the new owner of the ranch. The Famous Five rode on behind them.

Packsaddle dropped out of sight. The juniors were riding across the boundless plain of grass, barred in the west by the massive mountain; and dotted, here and there, by "timber-islands"—clumps of high timber that rose like islands in the sea of grass, whence their name.

Five or six miles from Packsaddle, the trail wound through one of the timber-islands.

On the open prairie, the sun was bright and hot; and the Greyfriars fellows were glad to ride under the spreading branches of tall timber.

Some of the trees were of immense size, rising to a height of seventy or eighty feet, with huge, massive branches that interlocked overhead, forming a roof of foliage.

Between the mighty trunks small timber grew; post-oaks, and mesquite, and tangled willows. It was like an aisle of greenery; and the shade was deep and dusky, and grateful after the glare of the sunshine.

"Thunder!" exclaimed Barney Stone suddenly.

He dragged in his bronco. The next moment, the Bounder followed his example; and the Famous Five pulled in their horses, in a prancing bunch behind. Across the trail in front of them was a taut-stretched rope—a lasso knotted from tree to tree to bar the way.

"What the dickens—" exclaimed Vernon-Smith.

But the next moment they understood.

From the thickets bordering the trail glimmering barrels were thrust, bearing on the halted riders; and a sharp voice rapped:

"Halt! Hands up!"
And the Greyfriars fellows felt their hearts jump, at the sound of the voice of Two-gun Sanders.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Clinched at Last!

"**S**ANDERS!" breathed the Bounder.

His eyes blazed.

It was an ambush; and the Greyfriars fellows had ridden fairly into it. On either side of the trail, three barrels glimmered from the thickets, thrust out to cover the riders. That fingers were on triggers, ready, they did not need telling.

From behind a tree, a figure stepped into the trail, a lifted revolver in his hand. The face was masked; but the juniors knew that it was Two-gun Sanders whose face was masked under the wide brim of a stetson.

They held in their horses, their hearts thumping. Since arriving at Packsaddle they had given hardly a thought to the gunman. They were now riding on the lands of the Kicking Cayuse ranch, in company with the ranch foreman; and the thought of danger had not been in their minds at all.

Bill Buck was no longer "riding herd." He had been left at Packsaddle with Bunter. Whether Bill would have put up his hands, at the word of command, they did not know; but there was no doubt about what Barney Stone was going to do. His hands went over his stetson immediately.

Smithy slid his hand into his pocket. But as he whipped out the gun Barney dropped one hand, grasped his arm, and gave it a twist, and the revolver dropped into the trail.

"Loco?" snarled the foreman. "You aim to pull, with rifles looking you in the face? Let up, you gink!"

"You cheeky fool!" roared the Bounder.

"Chuck it, Smithy!" exclaimed Harry Wharton breathlessly.

"I guess that's your best guess!" came the gunman's icy tones. "If you'd lifted that gun, Mr. Vernon Smith, you'd never have done anything else on this side of Jordan, you young geck! You sure did handle that gun on the Packsaddle trail yesterday—but I'm telling you—"

"Say, what's this game?" broke in Barney Stone roughly. "If you hoodlums are aiming to go through us, I guess I'll see you strung up at Packsaddle. You better guess agin."

"Keep your hands up, Barney Stone!" rapped the gunman. "I ain't honing to spill your juice, but you got it coming, if you don't reach for the sky!"

"I guess I ain't arguing with a gun on me!" growled Barney. "I'm asking you, what's this here game, with a bunch of schoolboys?"

"Keep your paws up, and don't chew the rag!" growled Sanders. "I ain't here for chin-wag, I'm telling you. Keep your hands up, the whole bunch of you, or you'll get hot lead, and get it quick!"

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth with rage.

His eyes gleamed at the foreman of

Kicking Cayuse. Still, he could hardly blame a man for putting up his hands, when he was covered by half a dozen rifles.

If the hidden gang pulled trigger, one volley would have emptied every saddle there. The Famous Five put up their hands, because there was no help for it; and the Bounder, savagely enraged as he was, did the same. His first thought had been desperate resistance; but it was fairly certain that a bullet would have struck him down, had not Barney deprived him of his weapon in time.

"You hound!" The Bounder's voice came hoarse with rage. "You've got me at last, Sanders, you scoundrel. How did you know we were riding this trail—and when we should be riding it? Who put you up to it, you villain?"

"I guess I been keeping tabs on you!" grinned the gunman, "and I sure got you by the short hairs this time. Don't you start anything, Mr. Vernon-Smith." His voice came with a savage snap. "I guess you laid-out two of my side-kickers when you burned powder yesterday—and I've sure got more'n half a mind to let you have yours, right now. You waggle as much as a finger, you young geck, and you'll never know what hit you. I guess I got you cinched, alive or dead."

The gunman's voice was a threatening hiss. It was clear that, ruffian as he was, he did not care to shoot down a schoolboy; but it was equally clear that he meant every savage word he uttered. He would have fired, at an attempt at resistance.

"Step out, you'uns!" rapped the gunman.

From the thickets beside the trail, two masked men stepped out. The other four remained in their cover, their rifles still levelled at the bunch of riders.

The two who had stepped out approached the bunch of riders, each with a coiled lasso in his hand. One of them grasped Barney Stone; the other proceeded to bind him to his horse.

The foreman of the Kicking Cayuse muttered curses. But he did not make any move to resist.

In a few minutes, his feet were tied under his horse, and his hands tied to his reins. That left him still able to guide the horse, but quite unable to dismount, or to release a limb.

Herbert Vernon-Smith came next.

The Bounder almost choked with rage, as he was grasped; and had the revolver been still in his hand, he might have made some desperate attempt. But he was powerless; and he too was tied to his horse, and his hands drawn behind him and secured to the back of his belt.

The Famous Five sat their horses in silence, waiting their turn. Under levelled firearms, and unarmed as they were, they could not think of resistance, and they could only take what was coming to them, as Barney Stone and the Bounder had done.

One of the ruffians, whom they had guessed from the black beard under his mask, to be Mexican Joe, the "Greaser" who had lassoed Vernon-Smith at Prairie Bend, cut lengths from a rope with his bowie-knife. With those lengths of rope, he bound the five schoolboys, one after another, in the same way that Vernon-Smith had been bound.

Then a lariat was run from one bronco to another, securing the Famous Five, in a string, to Barney Stone. The Bounder was not tied in the "string," however. The juniors realised that he was to be separated from the rest of the party.

Two-gun Sanders had no concern with

them. They and Barney were only taken in the ambush, because they were with the Bounder. Smithy was the gunman's game. He had got the fellow he wanted, now, and had no intention of burdening himself with the others, whom he did not want.

The black-bearded Mexican took the bridle of Vernon-Smith's horse, to lead it away in the timber.

Smithy looked back at his friends, his face white with rage. Again and again he had escaped his enemy: only to fall into his grip at last. Now he was a prisoner, evidently to be led away into the trackless spaces. He called to the Famous Five, as the Mexican led his horse from the trail.

"You fellows—get word to the sheriff at Packsaddle—"

"Can it, you!" snarled Two-gun Sanders.

"Rely on us, Smithy, if we get away!" called back Harry Wharton.

"Get going, you!" snapped Sanders to the Mexican, "Beat it with that gink, and don't draw rein this side of the border."

"Si, senior!" grinned Mexican Joe.

He disappeared into the timber with Vernon-Smith.

"You doggoned stiff!" growled Barney Stone. "You figure getting that young guy away into Mexico?"

"You said it!" answered the gunman. "I guess he'll be safe over the border, feller; and I reckon that the Kicking Cayuse bunch won't ride into Mexican territory to look for him."

"Forget it!" snapped Barney. "I guess as soon as I hit the ranch, I'm calling out the whole outfit to ride after him." "You won't hit the ranch in a hurry, Barney Stone! I reckon you'll do it at a walk, fixed up that-a-way."

Sanders stepped aside from the trail.

He holstered his revolver, and gave Barney's horse a flick. One of the gang had taken away the lasso stretched across the trail. The foreman's horse moved on, and the Famous Five followed, led by the lasso that connected the whole party.

Smithy was already out of sight, hidden by the timber.

His friends had no doubt that he was already riding southward, to cross the border into Mexico, in charge of the black-bearded ruffian. Their hearts were heavy as they rode on, strung out behind the foreman. This was not how they had expected to arrive on the Kicking Cayuse ranch.

Barney, with his hands tied on his reins, was able to guide his horse. The string of riders passed on, out of the timber, into the open prairie, and headed for the distant ranch. The hold-up gang disappeared from their sight in the timber.

On the sunny plain, Barney glanced back at the clouded faces of the Greyfriars fellows.

"I guess this has got me beat!" he said. "Ain't you young guys wise to it, why that firebug Sanders has got such a grouch again the owner's son?"

"We haven't the slightest idea," answered Harry. "Except that it's pretty plain that somebody else is putting him up to it, and that there's something going on here, that Smithy isn't wanted to see."

"You reckon?" asked Barney.

"There's no doubt about that!" said Bob Cherry.

"Wall, it's got me beat!" grunted the foreman. "But I reckon Two-gun won't get by with it, nohow. It's a long and a hard ride to the Mexican border, from this here ranch, and as soon as we hit Kicking Cayuse, I guess we'll be burn-

ing the trail after him. I'll tell all Texas, they won't get that young geck across the border, if I can put paid to it."

Which was some comfort to the juniors.

If no time was lost, there was still a chance—a good chance—of rescuing the Bounder, as they knew the direction in which his captors intended to carry him off.

Indeed, that chance was so good, that they wondered that Sanders had revealed his intention of taking his prisoner southward to Mexico. They were eager to arrive at the ranch, and get going, on the trail of rescue.

But the pace was slow. Bound as they were, the juniors would willingly have risked a swifter speed. But it was Barney who led the string, as he was the only one able to guide his horse—and he rode slowly.

There was danger of a fall, on the rugged prairie, holed here and there by gophers; and a fall would have been a serious matter, when none of the party could move hand or foot. They could not blame Barney for being careful; but their impatience grew almost to fever heat, as they trailed on over the prairie at little more than a walk; and it seemed an age to the Famous Five before the ranch buildings rose into view in the distance.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

No Hope!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH sat silent on his bronco as the black-bearded Mexican led him away into the timber, and his friends disappeared from his sight.

There was no fear in the Bounder's heart—only a deep and concentrated rage.

He was "cinched," as Sanders called it, at last. He had escaped the gangsters in New York, the hold-up on the train, the lassoer at Prairie Bend, the attack on the hack on the Packsaddle trail—only to fall into his enemy's hands almost within sight of his destination.

He could not blame himself for having fallen into this trap—but he laid a good deal of blame on Barney Stone. The Greyfriars fellows had taken it for granted that, once under the wing of the Kicking Cayuse foreman, they were safe from attack. That he would be ambushed, on the lands that belonged to his father, and in charge of his father's foreman, the Bounder had not supposed for a moment. But Barney Stone should have taken precautions, after he had been told of Smithy's danger—and it would have been easy enough for a bunch of the Kicking Cayuse punchers to ride with the party to the ranch, and see them safe through, had Barney thought of it.

It was too late to think about that now, however. He was a prisoner—booked, according to what Sanders had said, for a gallop across the plains to the Mexican border, to be held a prisoner in a foreign country, in some remote recess of the Mexican sierras.

But hope was by no means dead in his breast.

His friends would reach the ranch sooner or later—they would get word to the sheriff at Packsaddle—Barney would call up the outfit—there would be immediate pursuit. It was a long, long ride to Mexico—and most of the way lay by open plains. As likely as not, punchers would be sighted, riding with the herds—the gang would hardly hope to get away unseen, unless they travelled



"Come on, you fellows!" squeaked Billy Bunter, giving the cow pony a smart cut with the whip. The next moment the pony seemed to turn into a catherine-wheel. "Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Stick on, Bunter!" yelled Johnny Bull.

by night. The ranges of the Kicking Cayuse stretched far and wide, in all directions, constantly ridden by the cowmen. There was hope—surely there was ample hope—of rescue, before he disappeared into the wilds of Mexico.

The Mexican drew his horse to a halt in the heart of the thick timber.

Vernon-Smith gave him a stare of surprise.

He had expected the "Greaser" to lead him out of the timber, on the southern side, and "burn the wind" for Mexico. Sanders had told him not to draw rein till he reached the border.

But the Mexican halted, still in the timber, and still on foot. No doubt he had a horse concealed among the trees, but it did not appear to be his intention to mount it.

He jerked the mask from his swarthy face, and grinned at the Bounder. It was, as Smithy had guessed, the face of Mexican Joe, who had lassoed him at Prairie Bend.

The Mexican's next proceedings amazed the Bounder.

He cut the rope that fastened Smithy to the bronco, leaving his hands still bound behind him, and lifted the schoolboy down.

Evidently, it was not his intention to "burn the wind" for Mexico. He swung Vernon-Smith towards a tree, set his back to it, and ran a rope round him, binding him to the tree.

The Bounder gritted his teeth.

"What's this game?" he muttered.

"What are you sticking me here for?"

"Here you wait for the Senor Sanders, amigo!" grinned the Mexican.

He hitched Smithy's horse to a branch, and then disappeared in the timber, taking the direction back to the trail.

Vernon-Smith, hopelessly puzzled,

was left bound to the tree, his horse tethered a few yards from him.

From the distance he heard the sound of hoofbeats.

The ambushed gang had their horses hidden in the timber; and now they were riding away. Smithy had no doubt that they were a bunch of Pack-saddle roughnecks, hired by the gunman for the help he needed; and now that their work was done, they were clearing off, no longer masked, and probably heading back to the cow-town.

The hoofbeats died away.

But soon afterwards there was a sound of rustling and trampling, and Sanders—no longer masked—came through the timber, leading his horse.

The Bounder greeted him with a glare of deadly enmity.

Sanders hitched his horse near Smithy's. What his intentions were was a mystery to the Bounder.

He soon saw that the gunman had no intention of hitting the trail.

He stood leaning on a mossy trunk, rolling a cigarette. He lighted it and smoked, a faint grin on his hard face, as he watched the mystified Bounder. Smithy broke the silence at last.

"You're not keeping me here?"

"Yep!"

Sanders laughed as he saw the relief that leaped into Vernon-Smith's face.

"Forget it, bo'!" he drawled. "Your side-kickers sure ain't going to find you here. They won't hit Kicking Cayuse in a hurry, and when they do, I guess they'll be riding south to look for you."

"Oh!" exclaimed the Bounder.

He understood now. It had puzzled him that the gunman had revealed his plans in the hearing of the Greyfriars party. Now he knew why. It had

been a trick to send pursuit in the wrong direction.

Sanders laughed again.

"You figure I'd have put them wise if I'd been hitting for Mexico?" he asked. "Not in your lifetime! I guess the Kicking Cayuse bunch can ride hell-for-leather for the Rio Grande, and welcome. I reckon we hit north, buddy, when we pull out of this timber—and we ain't pulling yet!"

"Oh, you villain!" groaned the Bounder.

His hopes died away as he heard.

Barney Stone would call out the bunch—to ride for Mexico! Every leap of their horses would carry them farther and farther away from Vernon-Smith. He was a prisoner, within a quarter of a mile of the spot where he had been seized—hidden in the depths of the thick timber, and he was to remain there till it was safe for the gunman to remove him while pursuit went on a false scent.

"I guess," grinned Sanders, "that I'd never pull through, if I was to hit for the Mexican border, buddy! I'd sure run into too many hombres on that trip! I reckon you ain't putting so much as a nose outside this timber till dark. Nope! I ain't honing to run into gun-slinging punchers, with you along tied to your cayuse! You stick where you are till dark, Mr. Vernon-Smith, and then I reckon you're going on a leetle pascar with me."

The Bounder gritted his teeth with rage.

"Mebbe you've heard of the Staked Plain!" said Sanders. "It ain't what it was in the old days, but I guess there's a good many hide-outs, in the Llano Estacado where a guy about

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(Continued from page 13.)

your heft will be safe. Mebbe you know it lies north of the Kicking Cayuse—north of Squaw Mountain. That's the trail you're taking, Mr. Vernon-Smith—at sundown."

The Bounder was silent. There was something like despair in his heart now.

The hunt would soon be up—in the wrong direction. Not a rider would come within miles of the spot where the gunman watched his prisoner.

Chance passers might ride on the trail through the timber—a quarter of a mile away, beyond the sound of a call, if he had been able to call, under the gunman's watching eye. Bill Buck might be following that very trail—in the buckboard with Billy Bunter. A dozen horsemen might ride it. But it meant nothing to the Bounder—a hidden prisoner in the heart of the timber.

He was lost! A weary wait for nightfall—then a ride, bound to his horse, over the shadowed plains—and some hiding-place in the desert of the Staked Plain; that was what he had to look for, and there was no hope!

Sanders finished his cigarette, and smoked another and another. Save for the twittering of wild birds, and a breath of wind in the high branches, there was no sound in the timber-land.

Obviously, the gunman had no fear of danger there. He smoked and yawned, taking no further heed of the prisoner.

At length, in the semi-tropical heat of the afternoon, he stretched himself on a heap of Spanish moss and closed his eyes under his stetson.

Ten feet from the Bounder he slept, half-hidden by ferns and leaves and moss. Vernon-Smith, leaning wearily on the trunk to which he was bound, waited for the endless minutes to pass, with rage and despair and bitterness in his heart—and no hope.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Just Like Bunter!

"**H**OLD on!" ejaculated Billy Bunter.

He grabbed at his hat as it blew off.

There was a wind on the prairie, coming strong from Squaw Mountain. It blew dust into Billy Bunter's fat face and irritated him considerably. Several times his hat had had a narrow escape.

Now it had not escaped! It flew. Bill Buck gave a grunt and pulled in the buckboard.

Bill had fixed up a "lift" for Bunter to the ranch. The baggage belonging to the juniors who had gone on horse-back had been stacked into a "buckboard," along with a pile of stores which Barney Stone had directed Bill to collect at Wash's store in Packsaddle.

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Billy Bunter was wedged in with the rest of the cargo, and Bill drove out of Packsaddle, rattling and bumping on the rough trail, which Harry Wharton & Co. had ridden a couple of hours before.

Bunter was not enjoying that drive. His seat was wooden and hard; the buckboard jolted and jolted on the rugged prairie trail; it was sunny, it was hot, it was windy, and it was dusty. The fat Owl almost wished that he had risked it, after all, in the saddle.

Now his hat had blown off—and was spinning behind the rattling buckboard.

"Aw, carry me home to die!" granted Bill.

Bill Buck was a good-tempered "guy"; but there was no doubt that he found Billy Bunter more trouble than he was worth. He pulled in his horse, and the buckboard came to a stop in a cloud of dust.

"Hop out and rope in that doggoned hat!" granted Bill.

Bunter blinked back along the trail.

"Where is it?" he asked.

The hat was spinning before the playful wind at a little distance. It was rather out of the range of Bunter's limited vision. A whirl of the wind lifted it off the hoof-marked trail and spun it into a patch of bunch-grass.

Bill gave another grunt.

"Aw, hold the hoss while I get it!" he said, and he handed the reins to Bunter and jumped down.

His long legs covered the ground swiftly in pursuit of Bunter's hat. That hat had spun a good twenty yards behind the buckboard. Bill had almost reached it, when a twirl of the playful wind lifted it again and spun it away across the grass. Bill snorted and rushed after it.

Billy Bunter, sitting in the buckboard, turned his head to watch him.

He was anxious about his hat; the sun was rather too hot for a fellow to go bareheaded. He could see nothing of the hat; indeed, Bill Buck was little more than a blur, at the distance, to the shortsighted Owl. He waited and watched impatiently.

It was like Bunter to forget all about the horse he was holding, while he watched. There was a jerk as the buckboard moved on, the horse starting at a walk.

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Bunter, as the reins were jerked out of his fat hands by the movement of the horse.

He made a grab at them as they slid, just managed to grasp them, and dragged on them with all his strength.

That sudden and unexpected drag on the reins pulled the horse's head back and caused him to rear on his hind legs, forefeet in the air.

The next moment a toss of the horse's startled head dragged the reins from Bunter's grasp and very nearly dragged him over the horse's back.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. "Oh lor'!" He hung on to the buckboard as the startled horse clattered down the trail.

The reins dangled loosely over the animal's back, and the horse was quite well aware that he was uncontrolled. He went down the trail with a clatter, the buckboard clattering behind him.

"Oh crikey! Stop, you beast!" yelled Bunter, in alarm. "I say— Help! Come back, Buck, you beast! Oh lor'!"

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

If Bunter's frantic yell had any effect on the horse, it was only to startle it into greater speed. The buckboard rocked wildly, and Bunter held on for his fat life, emitting yell after yell.

There was a roar from the distance behind the vehicle.

Bill Buck had recaptured Bunter's hat at last. Now that he started back, it was only to behold the buckboard in rapid motion, the horse running away with Bunter.

"Hi-yi!" roared Bill, breaking into a rapid run in pursuit. "Stop! Hold in that hoss! Hi-yi! You goldarned, pesky gink, will you hold in that hoss?"

Billy Bunter would gladly have held in the horse had it been possible for him to do so. But that cayuse was fresh and full of beans, and even had Bunter had hold of the reins he would hardly have been able to pull the animal in once it had got going. And the reins were dangling far out of his reach. Certainly he could not pull the horse in by its tail, which was the only hold available.

He did not even hear Bill's angry roar. The thudding of hoofs and the clattering of wheels on the rough ground were all that Bunter heard—in addition to his own frightened howls.

Clatter, clatter! went the buckboard, gathering speed. It rocked wildly, and only by holding on with both fat hands did Bunter save himself from being shot out like a pip from an orange.

Bill Buck put on speed behind. But the cowpuncher, accustomed to the saddle, was no sprinter; neither were high-heeled riding boots useful for running. Bill did his best, but he had not the remotest chance of overtaking the runaway.

For full five minutes he kept up the chase, panting and puffing and blowing; then he came to a breathless halt and stood gasping as he watched the buckboard vanishing in the distance across the prairie.

"I'll tell a man!" gasped Bill, fanning his perspiring face with his stetson. "If that fat gink ain't the world's prize boob, and then some! Search me!"

Billy Bunter, clutching hold for his fat life, did not look back—but had he done so he would have seen no more of Bill!

Bill had dropped out of sight behind. As the horse knew the trail, Bill could only hope that he would keep to it and not wander off into the prairie. All that Bill could do was to tramp two miles back to Packsaddle for a mount. Following the buckboard on foot was a prospect no cowman could have contemplated with equanimity.

Bill, snorting, tramped back to the cow-town to get a cayuse and then to follow in pursuit—to the ranch, if the buckboard kept to the trail, or to pick up the tracks of the wheels in the grass if it wandered off into the open prairie.

His feelings were deep as he went. Two miles on foot worried the puncher more than twenty times the distance in the saddle.

Bunter, if he had thought of Bill at all, would have supposed that he was following.

But Bunter was not thinking of Bill! He was not thinking of anything, but of saving himself from being tossed out of the jolting, rocking buckboard.

The horse kept to the trail. Fresh as he was, and more disposed to take a run on his own than to be driven, that cayuse knew his way to the ranch and did not wander off into the rugged plains.

But he was going at a gallop, much faster than Bill had driven him when Bill had the reins. Bunter, hatless, with the perspiration streaming down his fat face, held on like grim death and squeaked with terror. At every jolt and every bump he expected the vehicle to pitch over and send him crashing. But it kept on its wheels, though it leaped and bounded.

The shade of thick branches dimmed

the glare of the noonday sun. The buckboard rocked on by the trail through the timber, where, two hours earlier, the Greyfriars party had been ambushed by Sanders and his gang.

Of that Billy Bunter knew nothing. Probably he would have been glad of an ambush, or anything else that would have stopped the runaway in his career. But the trail was deserted now; the gunman and his gang had long gone.

Bunter saw nothing but gigantic trees bordering the trail, laced with lianas and moss, interspersed with thickets, and a new dread was now added to his other terrors. On the prairie trail there had been plenty of room, at least, for the buckboard to rock behind the runaway, but on the trail through the timber it was in danger every moment of colliding with a jutting tree.

The fat junior clung to his seat, palpitating.

Crash!

It came suddenly.

A wheel caught on a sapling and the buckboard pitched sideways, and Billy Bunter, losing his hold, shot out.

He bumped into a bush and sprawled, spluttering.

The buckboard rocked on a single wheel, and for a moment looked like pitching bodily over. But it righted again, and the horse, scared by the terrific crash, raced on at a mad gallop.

The thudding of hoofs, the clattering of wheels, the jingle of harness, died away down the trail.

Billy Bunter crawled out of the bush, wondering whether he was still alive. He was bumped and shaken and breathless, but not otherwise damaged—and he was deeply, deeply thankful that he was off that buckboard. Where he was and how he was going to get to the Kicking Cayuse Ranch, Billy Bunter did not know—but for the moment he was happy and relieved to find his feet on the solid earth once more.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The High Hand!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. stood by their horses in front of the ranch-house at Kicking Cayuse and watched the riders gathering at the gate.

Barney Stone was shouting orders, which all the men within hearing were prompt to obey. The foreman of the Kicking Cayuse was losing no time in gathering a force for pursuit. In that pursuit the Famous Five intended to join, and they were going to ride when the punchers rode.

It had been a weary way from the timber island to the ranch. Two long hours had passed when they were sighted by a Kicking Cayuse puncher, who rode up and released them; after which they had ridden at a gallop to the ranch, where Barney Stone called the "bunch" together. Many of the bunch were out on the plains with the cattle, but a dozen men gathered at the foreman's orders—more than sufficient to deal with Sanders and his gang if they got in touch with them. Every man "packed" a gun—some of them two guns—and all were keen enough to take the trail. But the juniors, during the ride from the timber island, had had time to reflect, and they were feeling doubtful whether Barney and his men were going to hit the right trail. Barney Stone seemed to have no doubts, but the juniors did not feel so sure.

"Come on!" said Harry, as he saw Barney Stone mount his horse; and the juniors remounted and joined the crowd in the gateway.

Most of the punchers stared at them, and some of them grinned. Probably they did not think that the schoolboys would be of much use in a hard ride over the prairie, with a possible gunfight at the end of it. Barney Stone gave them a sharp stare.

"You young guys aim to ride with this bunch?" he asked abruptly.

"We want to get after Smithy, Mr. Stone," answered Harry.

Barney shrugged his lean shoulders.

"Mebbe you'll be useful if there's a gunfight with a gang of roughnecks," he said sarcastically. "Ride if you like—but I guess I'm telling you that we're going all out for Mexico, and mebbe we'll be a day and a night in the saddle."

"You better guess agin, buddy!" said one of the punchers. "This ain't no trail for tenderfeet."

"We're coming!" said Bob Cherry.

"Come, if you want!" said Barney Stone. "I guess you'll be able to find your way back when you drop behind; we ain't waiting for any guy."

"Let me speak a word before you start, Mr. Stone," said Harry Wharton. "That villain Sanders said that he was taking Smithy away into Mexico—"

"Sure! And I ain't got no time for chewing the rag!" said the foreman.

"Hold on a minute!" exclaimed Wharton. "I tell you I can't help thinking that Sanders may have said that on purpose—why should he let you know which way he was going when he knew that you would be after him as soon as you could?"

Barney stared at the captain of the Greyfriars Remove, knitting his brows. Evidently he was not pleased by the suggestion that he had fallen blindly to a cunning trick.

"You come here to give me lessons?" he snapped.

Wharton coloured.

"Nothing of the kind," he said; "but Sanders must have expected pursuit, and if he said he was heading for Mexico, for us to hear him, doesn't it look as if he really meant to head in some other direction?"

The juniors all looked inquiringly at the foreman of Kicking Cayuse.

To their minds it seemed not only probable, but almost certain, that the gunman's object had been to send pursuit on a false trail.

A ride as far as the Mexican border was risky enough with a prisoner, without adding to the risk by revealing the direction he was going to take. It seemed to the juniors that in whatever direction the gunman conveyed his prisoner, it was least likely of all to be in the direction of Mexico.

"Say, Barney, that's hoss-sense!" said one of the punchers, as the foreman scowled at the juniors, evidently deeply irritated by Wharton's words.

Barney turned on the speaker with a snarl.

"You figure that a schoolboy tenderfoot has come here to give orders instead of your foreman, Yuba?" he snapped.

"Sure, nope, Barney; but—"

"Can it, you!" snarled the foreman. He turned to the juniors again, with a scowling brow. "Say, you young ginks! Mebbe you learned everything, and a little over, in that school of yours in the old country. Mebbe, and mebbe not. But I'm telling you, I ain't asking schoolboys for lessons."

Barney, doubtless, had his own opinion, and perhaps he was worried and disturbed by what had happened to the owner's son while in his charge. But his manner could not have been more unpleasant.

"Look here, Mr. Stone—" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Aw, can it!" snapped Barney. "If you want to ride with this bunch you're welcome till you drop off them cayuses, but don't chew the rag no more."

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath.

"We shall not ride with the bunch if you're riding the way Sanders as good as told you to ride," he said curtly. "I don't believe for a moment that Sanders headed for the border, after saying what he did."

"Neither do I," said Frank Nugent.

"But," said Bob, hesitating, "we don't want to stick at the ranch, old chap, while Smithy's in that scoundrel's hands."

"We're not going to stick at the ranch," answered Harry. "You fellows can please yourselves, of course; but my idea is to ride back to that timber where we lost Smithy—"

Barney Stone, about to ride out at the gate, checked his horse. He swung round towards Wharton, staring at him grimly.

"What's that?" he rapped.

"That's my idea, Mr. Stone," said the captain of the Greyfriars Remove quietly. "If you think that Sanders has taken Smithy towards the border you're right in getting after him; but I don't think so."

"You know a heap more than a ranch foreman who's ridden Texas trails afore you was born!" snapped Barney.

"Not at all; but I'm going to ride back to where we lost Smithy," answered Harry. "I'm as good as certain that Sanders has headed in some other direction with him—from his own words."

"It's jolly likely, anyhow!" said Johnny Bull.

"The likeliness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

All the juniors were of the same opinion. They could see, too, that some of the Kicking Cayuse punchers in the bunch inclined to the same opinion. The man called Yuba had said so.

"By the great horned toad!" snapped Barney Stone. "You figure you're going hunting a bunch of gunmen?"

"We're going hunting our pal," said Harry. "We're not going to sit idle while a friend of ours is kidnapped by a rascally scoundrel, and we're not going to ride on what we believe to be a false trail."

"So that's the big idea, is it?" said the foreman of the Kicking Cayuse. "Waal, you can forget it. Ride with this bunch if you like; but if not, you don't ride at all! Got that?"

"We can please ourselves, I suppose?" said Harry, staring at him.

"That's where you miss your guess," said Barney grimly. "You jest can't! I've got to find young Vernon-Smith, what's been roped in by hoodlums—you figure that when I come back I want to go hunting for you, too? I guess I'm responsible for you while you're at this here ranch, and you ain't going hunting trouble with no gunmen."

Harry Wharton set his lips.

"We're Smithy's guests here, Mr. Stone, and not under your orders," he said. "Come on, you fellows!"

Barney's face reddened with rage.

"Here, you, Lariat!" he roared.

A long-limbed man who was leaning on the corral wall came forward. He was, as the juniors learned afterwards, the horse-wrangler of Kicking Cayuse—the man in charge of the horses.

"Shoot!" he drawled.

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Barney pointed with his quirt at the juniors.

"Take them critters and turn them into the corral!" he rapped. "See that them young ginks don't get a mount till I hit the ranch ag'in."

"Sure!" said Lariat.

"Git off'n them cayuses!" rapped Barney, with a threatening glare at the schoolboys. "I guess I got trouble enough on my hands without you pesky young piecans putting on a heap more. I should smile! Get off'n them cayuses, I'm telling you! Pronto!"

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another. This was an unexpected development. Barney Stone was in authority at Kicking Cayuse, but this exercise of his authority was quite unexpected.

"Look here——" exclaimed Johnny Bull angrily.

"That's the lot!" snapped Barney. "Git off'n them cayuses afore you're helped off! I got no time to burn. I got to get after the boss' son. Light down, I'm telling you!"

Harry Wharton set his teeth.

"I shall do nothing of the sort!" he retorted. "Come on, you fellows! We're going back to look for Smithy."

He wheeled his horse and rode away, and his friends rode after him. There was a snort of rage from Barney Stone. He grasped the lasso at his saddlehorn, and the coiled rope whirled in the air.

The next instant Harry Wharton was plucked from the saddle and sprawling in the grass in the loop of the lasso. He had been roped in by the angry foreman.

He rolled in the grass, panting and dizzy. His chums reined in their horses at once. Frank Nugent was the first to jump down and run to his help.

Some of the punchers were grinning as Wharton staggered to his feet, and Nugent dropped off the loop of the lariat. Dazed by the shock, Wharton leaned on Nugent, gasping for breath.

"Git off'n them cayuses!" roared Barney Stone. "You hear me? By the great horned toad, if you don't git off'n them cayuses I'll have you quirted off!"

Lariat, grinning, caught Wharton's horse and led it to the corral. Harry Wharton panted for breath. He made a stride after the horse-wrangler, but the hopelessness of a tussle with the long-limbed Texan was obvious. Barney Stone rode towards the three juniors who were still in the saddle, brandishing his quirt.

"Light down!" he roared. "Here, you'uns, git them young ginks off'n them cayuses! Pronto!"

Some of the punchers gathered round. Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, and Hurreo Janset Ram Singh dismounted. There was no help for it. Lariat led the horses to the corral and turned them in. The Famous Five stood in an angry and dismayed group, Barney scowling at them.

"I guess you've wasted enough time!" he snapped. "You stick safe at the ranch till I horn in ag'in. I guess I ain't going hunting you all over the valley of the Frio when I ride in! Nope! You, Lariat, you see that them young ginks don't get a hoss."

"You said it, Barney!" answered the horse-wrangler.

Barney turned to his men.

"Ride!" he snapped.

He dashed away at a gallop to the southward. After him went the Kicking Cayuse bunch, galloping.

Harry Wharton & Co., with deep feel-

ings, stood by the ranch gate and watched the galloping horsemen disappear in the dust of the distant prairie.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Unexpected!

"O H crikey!" moaned Billy Bunter.

He came to a dismayed halt.

The thick, spreading branches overhead shut off the glare of the Texas sun, but it was hot in the timber—very hot—and the fat Owl of Greyfriars dabbed streams of perspiration from a burning fat face.

But that was not the worst.

The hapless Owl was lost—hopelessly lost. Towering trees and tangled thickets and underbrush encircled him. He could not see three yards from his fat little nose.

Bunter's first feeling on getting clear of the runaway buckboard was relief; but that feeling had soon passed. He was left on foot, how many miles from his destination he did not know; but, however many miles it was, he had to walk it. He started to walk.

It was like Bunter to miss the trail.

Had he kept on for about a quarter of a mile he would have emerged from the trees, and in the bright sunlight even the fat Owl could scarcely have missed the trail, marked by hoofprints and the ruts of wheels.

But under the heavy branches it was dusky and shadowy, and that trail was quite easy to miss. Bunter, of course, soon missed it. He was not, in point of fact, looking for "sign" at all. He tramped away in the direction in which the runaway had vanished with the buckboard. He tramped on, thinking chiefly of the heat, the flies, and the growing fatigue in his fat little legs.

Here and there wide spaces opened among the trees that bordered the trail. It was necessary for a stranger in the land to keep his eyes on the sign of the trail to keep from wandering. Billy Bunter did not even think of it. He plugged on and on and on wearily, till at last he came to a halt from sheer fatigue, and realised that he was lost.

He had, in fact, wandered off the trail, before he had covered a hundred yards. Since then, for an hour or more, he had been wandering at random.

Bewildering trees shut off his view on all sides.

Even a fellow with his wits about him would have found it difficult to find his way back to the trail, once he was lost in the timber. It was a quite hopeless task for Billy Bunter.

Had he kept on in a straight line in any direction for as much as half a mile, he would have got out of the trees; for the timber island was scarcely half a mile in extent from one limit to the other. But he was wandering at random, and all that he succeeded in doing was in penetrating deeper and deeper into the timber and losing himself more thoroughly.

He leaned on a tree, gasped for breath, and groaned.

Then he sank down at the foot of the tree, and sat resting. An hour of wandering had tired him out.

It was long past noon, and the heat in the close timber was almost baking. Bunter was hungry, as well as tired. And he was in the lowest of spirits.

It dawned on his fat mind that he was lost in the timber, and that only by the merest chance would he ever find his way out again. Even if Bill Buck followed on, as Bunter supposed that

he would, sooner or later, that would be no use to the hapless fat Owl; Bill would be on the trail, and he would pass on, never dreaming that he was passing a lost fat Owl!

Bunter mopped his perspiring face and groaned.

He was lost—and he had to stay lost till he was found! Sooner or later, if he did not arrive at the ranch, he would be searched for. That, now, was his only hope.

But that, it was fairly certain, would not be till late in the day; and even when the search started, the searchers would not know where to look for him. Nobody could possibly guess at what point he had been pitched out of the buckboard.

The thought of passing a night in those bewildering trees, alone in the darkness, made the hapless fat Owl shudder.

But it was many hours to night yet! And, meanwhile, it was hot, and the flies were an incessant trouble; and Bunter was hungry, and growing hungrier.

He heaved himself to his feet at last, to make a desperate effort to find his way back to the trail.

As he started with his back to it, his chances were not hopeful.

He wandered dismally on, mopping his fat brow, gasping for breath, and wishing from the bottom of his fat heart that he had never come out to Texas.

Trees and bushes cut off his view in every direction; but he listened with intent fat ears, hoping to hear the sound of some passing horseman, or vehicle, that would guide him to the trail.

And all at once he stopped; bent a fat ear to listen more intently, and gave a gurgle of relief.

A sound came to those fat ears through the timber. It was the sound of a horse stirring.

Faintly, but distinctly, came the sound of a restless animal stirring, rustling against some bush or thicket.

Bunter headed for the sound.

He had no doubt that it came from some rider who had halted on the trail. No rider could be in the thickness of the timber—a horse could only have moved at a walk among the trees. It did not occur to Bunter that anyone might be camped in the timber at a distance from the trail; he could not have imagined any motive for it.

He threaded his way among trees and thickets, listening.

The sound died away—the horse was still. But it was renewed a minute or two later. Doubtless that horse, like Bunter, was annoyed by the insects in the hot air. Suddenly the fat junior caught sight of the horse—of two horses, tethered close together to a tree.

There was no sign of the trail. There was no sign of a rider. The spot was, in fact, a good quarter of a mile off the trail. Billy Bunter was blinking into a little shady glade, where the two horses were tethered. Then suddenly he spotted a hat!

Under that hat, was a face. The rest of the wearer was hidden from his sight by the intervening bushes.

But he knew that face. His eyes almost popped through his spectacles at the sight of Herbert Vernon-Smith.

He stood dumb, staring.

He had not given Smithy a thought; but, had he thought of him at all, he would have supposed that the Bunder was at the ranch, long ago, with Harry Wharton & Co., and Barney Stone.

And here was Smithy—not ten feet from him—leaning against a tree, his



The sound of gasping breath told Vernon-Smith that Bunter was behind the tree to which he was tied. Then he heard another sound—that of a blunt knife-blade sawing on thick, strong rope. "Good man, Bunter!" he whispered.

face an eloquent picture of fatigue, misery, and rage.

Why he was there, how he was there, was an utter mystery to Billy Bunter. He could only stare in dumb amazement. Smithy seemed to be leaning on the tree—his face turned a little from Bunter, his eyes fixed on something on the ground, which Bunter could not see. Bunter's fat face, peering from the thickets, was ten feet from him—but he was not looking in Bunter's direction, and did not see him.

For long, long moments, the fat Owl stared at him, dumb with astonishment. Then, at last, he gasped out:

"Smithy!"

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Mouse and the Lion!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH gave a violent start.

Hours had passed since the Mexican had left him bound to the tree, in the heart of the timber.

Two-gun Sanders, half-hidden in the heap of leaves and Spanish moss, slept in the heat of the afternoon, his stetson over his face.

No sound broke the silence of the timber, save the buzzing of insects, a twittering of birds in the high branches, and occasionally a restless stirring of the tethered horses.

Hope was dead in the Bounder's heart.

That he was already hunted for, he had no doubt; but neither had he any doubt that the hunt was in the wrong direction; that Barney Stone was riding south to the Mexican border.

The fact that the gunman slept through the heat of the afternoon, his stetson over his face, told that there was no hope of discovery.

The trail through the timber was little

frequented; but anyone who used the trail, kept to it; no one was likely to penetrate into the thick depths of the timber. Obviously Sanders was sure of that; and the Bounder, in his turn, had to be sure of it also.

He had to wait there while weary, endless hours passed, till sundown, when it would be safe for his captor to ride him away under cover of night, across the prairie, to the desert of the Staked Plain. There was not a gleam of hope left to him.

And then, from the silence came that breathless gasp; and the Bounder started, and wondered whether he was dreaming, as he heard it.

His eyes had been resting on the slumbering gunman; now they shot round in the direction from which he had heard his name.

They fastened on a fat face and a big pair of spectacles, peering at him from the bushes.

Dumbfounded, the Bounder stared at Billy Bunter.

If Bunter was astonished to see Smithy there, he was not so astonished as Smithy was to see Bunter!

He really wondered if his senses were wandering, as he stared at the fat face and the glimmering spectacles.

"Bunter!" breathed the Bounder dazedly.

"I say, Smithy——"

"Quiet!"

Smithy collected his startled wits instantly. Already he dreaded that the sound of a voice had reached the gunman, and awakened him.

But Two-gun Sanders had not stirred.

He was ten feet from Smithy, to the right; Bunter was ten feet distant towards the left. Bunter's startled gasp would have covered the distance, and reached Sanders' ears, had he been awake. But he was sleeping soundly.

"Quiet!" breathed the Bounder.

"Danger! Keep quiet! Don't move—don't speak! Quiet!"

He had to whisper loudly enough for Bunter to hear. He dreaded that Sanders might hear also. He had to take that risk.

Bunter stared at him.

He was not quick on the uptake. He could see nothing of Sanders—he could not even see that Smithy was bound to the tree; he fancied that he was leaning on it, and wondered why he did not move.

"I say——" he began.

"Be silent!" hissed the Bounder. "Wait till I tell you! Silence—danger! Danger!" He hissed the word.

"Oh, all right! But——"

"Quiet!" breathed the Bounder, almost in agony. "Sanders will hear you! Quiet!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

After that gasp he was silent enough. The name of Sanders was enough for him. It dawned on his fat brain that the gunman was somewhere at hand.

His little round eyes blinked to and fro through his big round spectacles in terror. Vernon-Smith made a movement with his head, and the fat junior at length spotted the stetson that covered Sanders' face as he lay. He barely suppressed an alarmed squeak as he saw it.

"He's sleeping!" whispered Vernon-Smith.

Bunter nodded. He dared not speak now, even in a whisper.

"I'm tied to this tree!" breathed Smithy. Anyone but Bunter would have discerned that already; but even Bunter discerned it, now that he was told. "Don't make a sound!"

Bunter was not likely to make a sound now.

"Have you a pocket-knifer?"

The fat Owl gave another nod.

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"Creep round behind this tree! Cut the rope!"

Billy Bunter blinked at him, and then at the stetson hat on the heap of moss. Fear seemed to paralyse him.

But he gave another nod at last, and his fat face disappeared from view.

Vernon-Smith, his heart beating like hammer, gazed at the gunman. Sanders had not stirred.

There was a chance—if the gunman did not wake. He had been sleeping for an hour or more, and had not stirred. The whispering had not disturbed him, and if Bunter was quiet and cautious there was a chance. The Bounder gritted his teeth at the sound of a clumsy rustle in the thickets. But it was no more than the rustling made by the restless horses, which had not disturbed the sleeping gunman.

The Bounder waited, in an anxiety that was like torture. If only Bunter got him loose—

Minute followed minute—long, long minutes of anguish. Again and again there came a rustling sound as the clumsy Owl moved. But each rustle was nearer. Then at last the sound of gasping breath told the Bounder that Bunter was behind the tree to which he was tied.

And then he heard another sound—that of a blunt knife-blade sawing on thick, strong rope.

A long, long minute, which seemed an age to Herbert Vernon-Smith, and then a cut rope slithered down to his feet.

His hands were still tied to the back of his belt. But he could move from the tree-trunk now.

He gave Sanders one last look of bitter anxiety, but the gunman did not stir. Then he moved from the tree, moving round the trunk without a sound, and his eyes fell on the shaking fat Owl behind it. Bunter, the open pocket-knife in his hand, blinked at him.

"Cut my hands loose!" the Bounder breathed into a fat ear.

He turned his back to Bunter, and the pocket-knife sawed again. He gritted his teeth, but uttered no sound, as a slip of the blade gashed his wrist. His hands came free.

Billy Bunter grabbed his arm. He dared not utter a whisper, but he grabbed the Bounder with one hand and pointed with the other. Instant flight was Bunter's thought.

But it was not Smithy's.

He was deeply and intensely excited, but there was no fear in his excitement. Not to the remotest degree did he share Bunter's terrors.

Excited as he was, his head was cool. He was free for the moment, but he was well aware that that was only the beginning, not the end. Sanders might awake any minute and miss him; one glance would tell him that the prisoner was loose. There would be instant pursuit, and the desperado would not hesitate to shoot rather than allow his prisoner to escape. And to flee on foot from a mounted man was hopeless. The slightest noise in getting away through the tangled thickets might awaken the gunman. Bunter dared not remain, if he could help it; but the cool-headed Bounder dared not flee until he had dealt with his enemy.

And he had the upper hand now.

He leaned over, and whispered in Bunter's fat ear:

"Stick here, and keep quiet!"

Then he jerked his arm away from the clutching fat hand.

Billy Bunter watched him with pop-

ping eyes as he moved round the tree again. Then the fat junior leaned on the trunk, his fat knees almost refusing to support him. In what was to follow Smithy had no help to look for from Bunter. But the Bounder of Greyfriars did not want help now; he knew what he was going to do, and he was the fellow to do it.

Leaving Bunter behind the tree, he stepped, softly as a creeping puma, towards the spot where Two-gun Sanders lay, his teeth set, his eyes glinting. The gunman, deep in slumber, did not stir.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Turning the Tables!

TWO-GUN SANDERS lay on his left side, his arm under his head, his stetson shading his face, hiding it from sight. On his right side the butt of his six-gun jutted from the low-slung holster, and his right hand touched it as he slept.

He was sleeping soundly, but at a sound of alarm he would have leaped up, the gun instantly in his hand. His other gun—for Sanders packed two—was out of sight in his bed of Spanish moss. Herbert Vernon-Smith, without a sound, reached him, and bent over him.

His eyes were on that revolver which the sleeping man's fingers rested on. That was the Bounder's object.

He could not seize the six-gun without awakening the gunman. He cared nothing for that so long as the weapon was in his grip. He was more than ready to use it if the ruffian reached for his other gun.

Slowly, steadily, soundlessly, Vernon-Smith bent till his fingers touched the gun-butt, an inch from Sanders' fingers. Then, with a sudden grab, he grasped the butt of the revolver and wrenched it from the holster.

At the instant Sanders awakened.

He started up, the stetson falling from his face, and stared at the muzzle of his own revolver, held in a hand that was as steady as a rock, with the Bounder's eyes burning over it.

"Hands up!"

The Bounder snarled the words.

Sitting in the moss, Sanders stared at him in blank amazement and rage, and reached for his second gun.

But he stopped reaching in a split second. He stopped only in time to save his life, for the Bounder was already pressing the trigger. Had Sanders touched that butt, he would have rolled over on the moss, shot through the head. It was fortunate for him that his wild and lawless life had made him quick on the uptake.

Instantly he checked the instinctive movement towards the weapon and shot his hands into the air.

He was barely in time.

There was a grim ruthlessness in the Bounder's face equal to the gunman's own. To let the ruffian grasp a weapon was to throw his life away. He would have shot him down like a mad dog had he attempted to "draw."

Luckily, the gunman realised that quickly enough. He sat with his hands over his head, speechless with fury.

"Just in time, you scoundrel!" said the Bounder, between his teeth. "Keep your paws up, you hound, or I'll blow your rascally brains out as you sit!"

"Search me!" breathed Sanders. "You—you dog-goned young geek, how'd you get loose? Who—"

"Hold your tongue! Keep your hands over your head! I'm not giving

you a chance to shoot, you rascal! I'd as soon see a bullet through your head as not!" snapped the Bounder savagely.

Sanders sat still, his hands up.

"Bunter!" called out the Bounder.

"I—I say, Smithy—"

"Come here, you fat ass! I've got him safe under a gun!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "Safe as houses! Come here!"

"Oh crikey!"

Billy Bunter's spectacles glimmered round the tree. He blinked at the scene and gasped. The rage in the gunman's face scared the fat Owl to the marrow of his bones.

Vernon-Smith did not take his eyes off that furious face for a second. He did not need telling that the Packsaddle gunman was "quick on the draw." He watched Sanders like a cat, finger on trigger, the muzzle of the revolver not two feet from the enraged face.

"All safe, Bunter, you ass!" he rapped, without turning his head. "Come here, and take his other gun away while I keep him covered!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunter.

"Quick, you fool!"

Bunter did not come quickly. Though the gunman sat with his hands over his head, covered by the revolver, he had a terrifying effect on the fat Owl of Greyfriars.

But the Owl of the Remove made the effort at last, and came. Sanders gritted his teeth, and the glitter in his eyes told that he was thinking of taking a desperate chance.

The Bounder did not speak, but his face hardened grimly. And Sanders did not take the chance. It was instant death, and he knew it, and he sat gritting his teeth with rage while Billy Bunter pulled the second gun out of its holster.

The gunman was disarmed now. Smithy made a gesture, and Bunter handed him the revolver, which he took in his left hand. Both the "two-gun" man's Colts were now levelled at him.

"I think we've got you all right, Mr. Sanders!" said the Bounder. "Give me a spot of trouble, and I'll riddle you with your own lead, you scoundrel!"

"I guess I'll get you for this!" breathed Sanders.

"Just now I've got you!" said Vernon-Smith. "And I'm keeping you. Keep your hands over your head! Bunter, get that rope and tie his wrists together."

"Oh crikey!"

"Buck up, you fat ass! Do you want to stick here all day?" snapped the Bounder irritably.

"Beast!"

The evident helplessness of the Packsaddle gunman reassured Bunter a little, and he recovered some of his courage, such as it was. He brought the rope he had cut away from the Bounder and proceeded to loop it round the gunman's uplifted wrists, and tie it there.

"Pull his paws down behind him, and tie them to the back of his belt!" said Vernon-Smith.

Billy Bunter obeyed. The gunman was trembling with rage, but he made no attempt at resistance, under the muzzles of his own guns.

"Make the knots safe," said Smithy. "Now, get on your feet, Sanders."

The gunman, his hands behind him, scrambled clumsily to his feet.

"Turn round!" snapped Smithy.

"Oh crikey!" breathed Bunter, as the ruffian obeyed the order like a lamb. Vernon-Smith slipped one of the guns into a pocket. With the other in his hand, ready for instant use, he

examined the rope on the gunman's wrists. The ruffian's wrists were safely tied behind his belt.

"All serene!" said Vernon-Smith. He pocketed the other revolver and laughed. "I fancy we've got you safe, Mr. Sanders! Don't give any trouble. I won't shoot you, now you're tied, but if you give me a spot of bother I'll give you a crack over the head that will keep you quiet!"

The gunman snarled without speaking.

"Oh crumbs!" said Banter. "I say, Smithy, old chap, we've got him! We've got him, all right, haven't we?"

"I have, at any rate!" answered the Bounder.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

Vernon-Smith stepped to the horses. From the saddle of Sanders' horse he took a coiled trail-rope. The end he

knotted round the gunman, securing his arms down to his sides. The other he kept in his hand. Sanders eyed him with deadly animosity.

"What you aim to do, you young geck?" he hissed.

"I've got you, and I'm going to keep you safe," answered Vernon-Smith coolly. "First of all, you're going to guide me to the trail—"

(Continued on next page.)

LEARN TO PLAY FOOTBALL!



LET us imagine that you have chosen, from among the fellows on your side, the one who is most likely to make a good captain from the point of view of being trusted and respected by all the other players. That, without a doubt, is the most important thing.

There are one or two other points to take into consideration, however. It is very important, for example, that the person chosen to be captain should be worth his place in the side as a player.

If a player is not worth his place, his colleagues will not look up to him, as they must look up to their skipper.

It is also worth while taking into consideration the position on the field which it is best for the captain to occupy. If you follow first-class football you may have noticed that the captain of a first-class team is nearly always a player who performs in one of three positions on the field.

It is not always easy to know which is the captain of a first-class team unless you are there to see the toss-up for choice of ends at the start of the match. The lists of teams which are announced before the games do not usually tell us which are the captains of the sides. But I would be willing to guarantee that if it were possible to make a list of the fellows who captained the various football teams on any particular day, the great majority of those captains would be players occupying the full-back, centre-half, or one of the inside-wing forward positions in their teams.

THE THICK OF THE FRAY

ICAN'T make a complete list of captains of all the first-class teams, I haven't space. Let us take, however, the last eight teams which were left in the Cup this year as being typical of all the others. Of these eight clubs, two of them have had an inside-wing forward as skipper, two of them were captained by a full-back, while the other four teams entrusted the captain's job to their centre-half. I think you can take it that these figures give a true picture of nearly all first-class teams.

I don't say, of course, that there are not captains in League football who occupy positions other than the three I have mentioned. There are, and have been, centre-forward captains—"Dixie"

In what position should the skipper of a football team play? Read what our special sporting contributor has to say concerning this important question.

Dean, of Everton, for example. I can't remember a case off-hand, but I have before now seen the unusual spectacle of a goalkeeper leaving his goal during the kicking-in period before a match to carry out the duty of a captain in tossing the coin. But, as I hope my figures show, most of the captains of League teams are full-backs, centre-halves, or inside-forwards.

From the instances I gave you of the last eight Cup teams, you see that four of them were captained by the centre-half. That is the position which I think, taking everything into account, is the best for the skipper of the side. Don't get me wrong. I am not suggesting that you choose your captain because he possesses all the qualities of a leader, and then stick him in the centre-half position. Nothing like that. I think, as the League teams obviously think, that the captain who is also a centre-half is the best.

Especially does this apply if the player is an attacking centre-half. He then operates almost exactly in the middle of the field. There is no player on the side whose play he cannot see clearly, or whom he cannot reach, for the purposes of passing on instructions, either by signs or word of mouth. He is in the thick of the fray all the time—affecting the play of both attackers and defenders.

EXPERIENCE COUNTS.

WHAT of the other two "favourite" positions for captains. An inside-wing forward is in the thick of it almost as much as a centre-half. He, too, operates both in defence and attack, and comes into contact with most of the players. The one difference is that the inside man, whether he is an inside-right or an inside-left, works mostly on one side of the field. Thus he doesn't have much personal contact with the

players on the other wing. You may call that a minor point; perhaps it is. But it does not allow the inside-forward to be looked upon as the centre of the wheel. That is how the centre-half is regarded.

I am not sure that I know why full-backs are considered to be well-suited for the job of skipper of a football side. One reason may be that in most teams one of the full-backs is a player with experience. It is unusual to find two youngsters occupying the full-back positions in a League side. As experienced players are obviously more likely to make good captains than youngsters, it may be just natural that many first-class captains occupy one of the full-back positions.

There may be a deeper reason than that, however. This is one I thought of, and when I asked one or two of my manager friends they agreed there was probably something in my idea. Full-backs don't usually have to go at it hammer and tongs all the time during a game. There are periods, when their side is attacking, when they have an opportunity to take a look round at the play in general, rather than worry solely about their own game.

I don't mean that full-backs can go to sleep every now and again. Even when the play is at the other end they must concentrate on every kick and movement. But they have time to make a survey of how things are going. From that survey, provided they have the right sort of football brains, they can see where mistakes are made and how the plans, made before the match, are working out. For brief periods they can look at the game as the manager in the stand is looking at it—more as a spectator than as a player. Thus they are able to carry out the dictating side of the captain's job better than anyone else on the side.

I have devoted a great deal of space to the question of choosing the captain of a football team, and I have done so purposely. If footballers in general could get back into the way of thinking that the skipper's job is an important one, the game would be considerably improved. Any fool can toss up a coin and choose which way his side will kick. But tossing-up is merely the technical beginning of captaincy, and any fool can't be a real skipper.

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"Guess agin!" snarled Sanders. Vernon-Smith picked up the gunman's quirt.

"I advise you to guess again," he said icily. "I'll thrash you like a dog if you don't jump to orders, you hound! I'd rather quirt you than not. Better not ask for it."

Sanders snarled.

"You got me dead to rights!" he muttered. "I guess I got to jump when you say jump! But I'll sure get you for—"

"Shut that up!" snapped Vernon-Smith; and Sanders was silent, breathing fury.

"Yes, shut up Sanders!" said Billy Bunter, full of beans now that the gunman was helpless. "You talk too much. Don't be cheeky! Shut up—see?"

Vernon-Smith laughed.

"Come on, fathead! Stick his hat on for him!"

"I say, Smithy, I think I'll have this hat!" said Bunter, picking up the gunman's stetson. "Mine blew off. I'm going to have this hat."

And Billy Bunter planted the stetson on his fat head.

Vernon-Smith cast the two horses loose. He bunched the reins in one hand, to lead them away, holding in the other the trail-rope knotted to the gunman.

"Lead the way, Sanders!" he rapped.

Two-gun Sanders gave him one long look; then, in silence, he tramped away through the trees. Vernon-Smith followed him, leaving the horses.

After them rolled Billy Bunter, with a cheery grin now adorning his fat face. Bunter's arrival on the scene had been a stroke of luck for the Bounder; but it had been quite as lucky for the fat Owl himself. He was no longer lost in the timber.

Through those bewildering trees, where there was no sign to guide Billy Bunter, Sanders tramped without a pause, and a quarter of an hour later they emerged into the trail through the timber.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for the Co.!

LARIAT, leaning on the gate of the corral at Kicking Cayuse, grinned. Hank, the cook, polishing a saucepan outside the cook-house, grinned also. Both of them looked at the group of schoolboys, as they grinned. In the veranda of the ranch-house, Chick, the choreman, leaned on the rail, chewed a straw, and he, too, grinned.

These three were all that the Famous Five could see about the ranch, at present. Many of the bunch were on the ranger and all the men available had been called on to ride for the border with Barney Stone.

The chums of Greyfriars were not looking merry or bright.

They were deeply troubled about Smithy, and still more troubled by having to remain inactive, without making an effort to help him.

It was true that they could hope to do little. In the opinion of the three men on the ranch Barney had been quite right to stop them from making any such attempt. It was extremely unlikely that they would see anything of Smithy or his captor, and if they did, they would be going into deadly danger.

They were willing to admit as much, but, at the same time, it was bitterly irksome to remain inactive while Smithy was in the hands of his enemy. In

the circumstances, they felt that anything was better than inaction.

Lariat, at the corral gate, was taking care that they did not get at the horses. To deal with him by force was hardly practicable. To start for the timber island on foot was a rather hopeless proposition. It was ten miles from the ranch—ten miles of rugged prairie. Their thoughts were centred now on Bill Buck.

Unaware of Billy Bunter's wild adventures in the buckboard, they expected Bill to appear at any minute, with the fat Owl and the baggage.

They gathered at the gateway, to watch the trail for Bill Buck. Bill was the man they wanted in this extremity, and they could not understand what was delaying him.

"Why the thump doesn't Bill blow in?" exclaimed Bob Cherry impatiently as he stared down the sunny, dusty trail towards distant Packsaddle.

"The whyfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh.

"Bill would get a move on, if he were here!" said Nugent. "I suppose a buckboard, or whatever they call it, travels more slowly than a horseman, but he ought to have been here long ago."

"He had to stop at the store, to get some things Stone told him about," said Johnny Bull. "But he's had lots of time—tons of time—to get in."

Harry Wharton set his lips.

"That villain would never have got Smithy if Bill had been with us," he said. "I feel sure of that. If only he would come—"

"He couldn't act against Barney Stone's orders, if he were here," said Nugent doubtfully. "That fellow Lariat will tell him what Stone said."

"He would go after Smithy—and he wouldn't be fooled into going in the wrong direction," said Harry. "Look here, it's no good sticking here doing nothing. We can't do much on foot, I know, and that fathead yonder won't let us have the horses, but we might meet Bill on the way—"

"Let's!" said Bob. "Anything's better than hanging about doing nothing. Goodness knows where that villain has got Smithy, by this time."

"I—I suppose Stone's right, to a certain extent," said Harry slowly. "We can't pick up trails like the men here, and we can't handle armed gunmen, if we come on them. But—"

"But we can't stick here," said Bob. "Let's get going. If we meet Bill on the trail he will get after Sanders, fast enough."

"Hi-yi!" roared Lariat, from the corral gate, as the juniors started. "Say, you young ginks, you hold in your hosses! You hear me!"

"Go and eat coke!" called back Bob Cherry, over his shoulder.

"How far you figure you'll get on the hoof?" roared Lariat.

Without answering that question the juniors walked on.

Lariat stared after them, and grinned at the cook. Probably his impression was that after a mile or two of rough going the juniors would tire out, and turn back.

The Famous Five tramped down the trail. There was little danger of losing themselves on the prairie, boundless as it was, so long as they kept to the trail; and it was plainly marked, trampled and trodden by our horsemen who came and went to and from the cow-town.

Half a mile from the ranch, a fold of the prairie hid it from their view, when they looked back.

Boundless, the vast prairie stretched

on all sides. Once or twice they spotted a stetson hat in the far distance—doubtless on the head of some puncher riding herd over the Kicking Cayuse cows.

They tramped on, in the hope every moment of seeing the buckboard, with Bill Buck and Billy Bunter in it.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry suddenly. "Look!"

The juniors were a couple of miles from the ranch, when Bob suddenly spotted a vehicle on the trail. They broke into a run at once.

To their astonishment, there was no one on the buckboard, though they could see a stack of baggage. The horse that drew it was coming on at a walk, stopping every now and then to graze at the herbage by the trail.

The runaway had stopped his wild flight, of his own accord, a few miles beyond the timber island. Since then, he had been at a walk. He had not wandered from the trail, but he was still two miles from the ranch when the Greyfriars fellows discovered him.

The animal was quiet enough now. And Bob, the first to reach him, took hold of the dangling reins.

"Now what the thump does this mean, you fellows?" asked Bob. "That's our baggage inside. Look at it!"

"No doubt about that," assented Harry. The suitcases, with the juniors' names on them, were recognised at a glance. "This must be the buckboard that Bill was going to drive Bunter in to the ranch. There's our baggage. But where the dickens is Bunter? And where the dickens is Bill?"

"It's a giddy mystery."

It was a complete puzzle to the juniors. The buckboard, with their baggage in it, had covered most of the distance from the cow town. Bunter was to have come on with the baggage, and Bill was to have driven him, yet there was no sign of either of them. Why they had got out and left the horse to wander was a riddle that the juniors could not begin to guess; but it was evident that they must have done so.

"Anyhow, we've got the jolly old go-cart," said Bob, "and it will save our legs. We can all pack into this."

"Yes, rather!"

Bob turned the horse round, and the juniors gladly packed into the vehicle. Two miles of rough going on foot on the prairie trail made them exceedingly glad of a lift.

Bob Cherry handled the reins, and he drove on back the way the horse had come, heading for the timber island.

Bob's way with a horse was rather different from Billy Bunter's. That "cayuse" gave no trouble with Bob Cherry's hands on the reins. Bob kept him at a rapid trot, covering the ground very much faster than the juniors had been covering it on foot. Far in the distance, against the blue sky, the tall summits of the cotton-wood-trees in the timber island loomed into view.

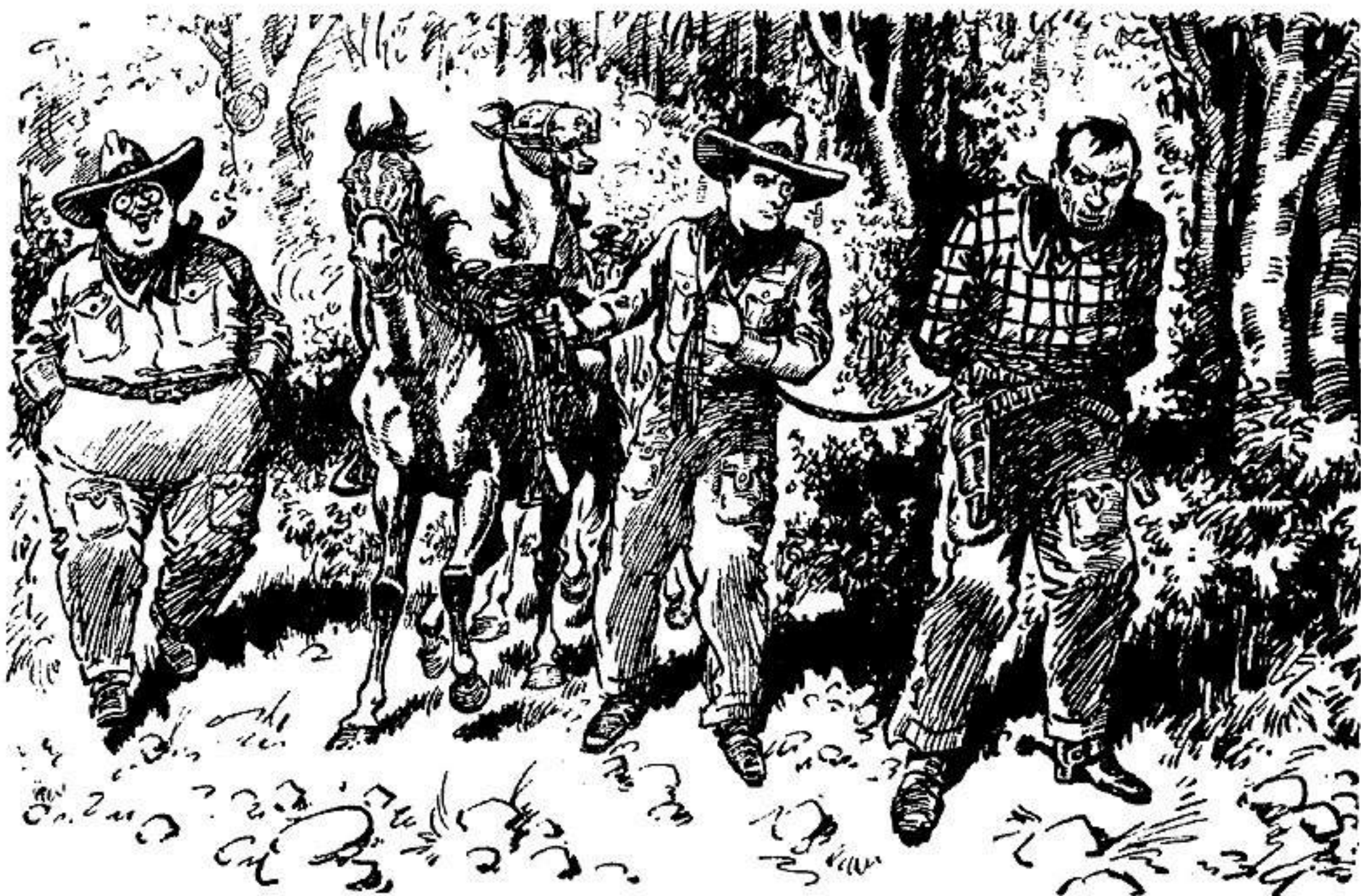
Bob Cherry pointed to it with the whip.

"That's the place," he said.

"That's it," agreed Harry Wharton. Bob cracked the whip, and the buckboard rattled on. The tall timber loomed nearer and nearer.

The buckboard at last rolled under the arching branches that blotted out the glare of the sun.

Bob slowed down. All eyes were on the trail to pick out the spot where



Vernon-Smith bunched the reins in one hand, holding in the other the trail-rope knotted to the gunman. "Lead the way, Sanders!" he rapped. Two-gun Sanders tramped away through the trees, the Bounder of Greyfriars following him, leading the horses. After them rolled Billy Bunter, a cheery grin on his face.

the ambush had been laid, and where Herbert Vernon-Smith had fallen into the hands of the gunman.

The juniors recognised the spot when they reached it. Bob Cherry drew in the horse, and they descended to the ground, and Bob tethered the reins to a tree.

They were on the spot now, in spite of Barney Stone and his opposition. But now that they were there, they realised very clearly the difficulty of the task they had set themselves. It was, in point of fact, a hopeless task, though they would not acknowledge it. Hopeless or not, they were going on with it, hoping against hope, as it were, that they might be able to help the junior who had fallen into hostile hands. To leave Smithy to his fate was not to be thought of.

"After all, we're Scouts," said Bob hopefully. "We can pick up signs. I don't see why we shouldn't pick up the way Smithy was taken. And if we can't handle guns like Sanders, we can cut ourselves a stick apiece—and, anyhow, we're jolly well sticking to Smithy!"

"Good man!" said an unexpected voice.

Bob Cherry jumped clear of the ground.

"Wha-a-t—" he stuttered. "Who the—"

The Famous Five spun round as if electrified. It was the Bounder's voice that had so unexpectedly answered. They wondered for a moment whether they were dreaming.

"I say, you fellows—" came a fat squeak.

"Smithy!" yelled Bob.

Herbert Vernon-Smith, with a grin on his face, emerged from the timber bordering of the trail.

Harry Wharton & Co. stared at him almost in stupefaction.

In one hand he held a rope, leading Two-gun Sanders, with his hands bound behind his back—in the other, the bridles of two horses. And Billy Bunter, in a stetson hat much too big for him, rolled on behind.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder Arrives!

"SEARCH me!" murmured Lariat, the horse-wrangler, at Kicking Cayuse.

Leaning on the gate, Lariat was looking up the dusty trail, red in the sunset.

He had been wondering, for a considerable time, what had become of the schoolboys. They had not, as the horse-wrangler had fully expected, come limping back, tired from the tramp on the rugged prairie. As likely as not, or more likely than not, that bunch of tenderfeet had lost themselves. And Barney Stone would get his "mad" up when he came back from his ride to the border, and found that they had to be searched for.

So what he saw on the trail, coming along to the ranch, surprised the horse-wrangler.

He sighted the buckboard first. He discerned that it was crammed. The five juniors who had left the ranch were packed in it, and there was an additional passenger—a fat fellow in spectacles.

But that was not all.

As the party drew nearer, he discerned that two horsemen were riding behind the buckboard.

One of them was tied on his horse,

roped to the vehicle—evidently a prisoner. The other was a schoolboy—a stranger to the horse-wrangler, and was, in fact, Herbert Vernon-Smith.

"Search me!" repeated Lariat.

The bound man, on closer inspection, he recognised as Two-gun Sanders. And the sight of the desperate gunman a prisoner with a party of schoolboys, made the horse-wrangler open his eyes wide.

"Here, you Hank!" he called out.

The cook came out of the cookhouse.

"Say?" he inquired.

"Look!" said the horse-wrangler.

"Give that bunch the once-over, Hank! Can you beat it?"

"Doggone my cats!" said Hank, staring.

"They got Two-gun Sanders—them schoolboys!" said Lariat. "Barney's gone after him to Mexico; and here he is, and they got him. I'll tell all Texas they got him."

The buckboard came on. Harry Wharton was driving at an easy pace—the horse had a good load to pull. Bob Cherry, grinning, waved his hat at the two faces staring over the gate. A cheery grin wreathed the dusky features of Hurreo Janset Ram Singh.

The Bounder gave his horse a touch of the quirt, and came on at a gallop, passing the buckboard. He arrived at the gate with a clatter of hoofs, and pulled in.

Lariat opened the gate, eyeing him curiously. He wondered whether this was the new owner's son, for whom Barney and his men had gone in search.

"Is Barney Stone here?" rapped the Bounder.

"He ain't," answered Lariat.

"Where is he?"

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Lariat waved his hand towards the southern horizon.

"Hittin' for the border," he answered. "I guess Barney won't be back to-day, nor yet to-night."

Vernon-Smith gave a grunt. The Greyfriars fellows had compared notes, after that unexpected meeting on the trail in the timber. And Smithy knew what had happened at the ranch. And he was far from pleased.

"Who might you happen to be?" added Lariat.

Smithy gave him a look.

"I happen to be Herbert Vernon-Smith, the son of the owner of this ranch," he answered curtly.

"I guess I'm sure pleased to see you safe home, sir!" said the horse-wrangler. "But Barney allowed that that firebug Sanders had got you, and was hittin' for Mexico—"

"He might have had more sense!" grunted the Bounder. "My friends had, anyhow. Never mind that. Who are you?"

"Pete Jenkins—but I guess I ain't never called anything but Lariat," answered the horse-wrangler.

Smithy pointed to the oncoming buckboard.

"I've got that scoundrel Sanders. I want him put in a safe place till he can be sent to the sheriff at Packsaddle."

"You said it, sir," said the horse-wrangler, still eyeing the Bounder very curiously. "I guess we can pack him away safe till Barney comes back."

"I shall send him to Packsaddle in the morning," answered Vernon-Smith curtly. "He will have to go under guard. Show me where he can be put safely."

He dismounted from his horse and threw the reins to Hank, the cook.

The long-limbed horse-wrangler and the cook both eyed him. Vernon-Smith was the owner's son, but it was Barney Stone who "ran" the Kicking Cayuse, and the "bunch" were unaccustomed to obeying any orders but Barney's. Taking curt orders from this schoolboy from England did not please either Lariat or Hank.

However, they said nothing. Hank

led the horse away, and Lariat turned from the gateway in silence, breathing rather hard, and Vernon-Smith followed him.

"I guess the kerosene-shed will fill the bill," said the horse-wrangler.

He opened the door of a hut near the bunkhouse.

Smithy looked into it.

Kerosene-cans were stacked there—some full and some empty. There was a small window, too small for the passage of a man. The door was strong, and had a strong lock on it.

"That will do," said Vernon-Smith.

He walked back to the gateway.

The buckboard was coming in now. Its numerous passengers alighted.

Billy Bunter blinked round him through his big spectacles. He had arrived at last at Kicking Cayuse after his wild adventures.

"I say, you fellows—" squeaked Bunter. "I say, I'm fearfully hungry, and—"

"I've heard that one," said Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Lend me a hand with this rascal, you fellows," said the Bounder; and the scowling gunman was unbound and taken from the horse.

Two-gun Sanders' face was set and hard, almost pale with bitter rage. He was a prisoner in the hands of schoolboys, and the humiliation of it "got his goat" sorely. He had had to trail after the buckboard, tied on his own horse—there was no help for it. But the fury in his face did not worry the Greyfriars fellows, least of all the Bounder.

"This way!" said Smithy.

In the midst of the juniors, the gunman was led to the kerosene-shed. Now that he was unbound, his hands were clenched, and his fierce look told what was in his mind. Smithy jerked a revolver from his pocket.

"Don't trouble to hold him, you fellows," he said coolly. "Walk on, Sanders. I'd as soon send a bullet through you as not! Lift a finger, and you get it!"

Sanders walked on without lifting a finger.

He entered the kerosene-shed gritting his teeth. Lariat was staring at him in silence; the cook and the choreman, Chick, watching him curiously. He gave them no heed; fixing his eyes on the Bounder in the doorway with a deadly look.

"You figure that you're corralling me here?" he muttered.

"I'm locking you in here till you can be handed over to the sheriff at Packsaddle," answered Vernon-Smith. "Make the best of it."

He shut the door, locked it, and put the key in his pocket.

Lariat, the cook, and the choreman exchanged glances.

"Has Bill Buck turned up yet?" asked the Bounder, addressing the horse-wrangler.

"Ain't seed the guy," answered Lariat shortly.

"Tell him to come up to the house when he comes in. This way, you fellows," said Vernon-Smith.

The Famous Five smiled a little as they followed the Bounder to the ranch-house. The reluctance of the Kicking Cayuse men to take orders from him was fairly clear, but the Bounder had dropped immediately into his rightful position at the ranch. There was no shyness and no want of assurance about the Bounder of Greyfriars.

The ranch-house was deserted, but Chick followed the Greyfriars party in. Chick, the choreman, was a plump, good-natured-looking "guy," and there was a grin lurking on his face. Chick was thinking that when Barney Stone "horned" in there would be a spot of trouble for the masterful youth from over the pond. He was rather amused by the prospect. Barney Stone ran the Kicking Cayuse with a high hand, and he was not likely to "jump" to the orders of a schoolboy—even his owner's son.

"You in charge here?" asked the Bounder.

"I guess I do the chores, sir," answered Chick civilly. "There ain't nobody as a rule in the shebang, 'cept Barney Stone. The bunch park themselves in the bunkhouse."

"Stone told me in Packsaddle that the place had been got ready for us," said Vernon-Smith. "Show us the rooms, and then get a meal."

"You said it, sir."

A quarter of an hour later the Greyfriars party were sitting at a table in the veranda, with Chick supplying their wants; and Billy Bunter, at long last, was able to devote his whole, sole, and undivided attention to the foodstuffs—which he packed away at a rate that caused Chick to gaze at him in wonder and admiration.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Jump to Orders!

"**B**ILL!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. He waved his hand to the dusty puncher, who dismounted at the gate of Kicking Cayuse. Bill Buck stared round.

Then he came across to the ranch-house. He looked dusty, he looked tired, and he did not look good tempered. The Greyfriars fellows had been an hour at the ranch when Bill "hit" the Kicking Cayuse.

"I'll tell a man!" snorted Bill as he came up the steps of the veranda, which creaked under his heavy tramp. "I'll surely tell a man!"

He glared at Bunter.

Billy Bunter did not heed his glare

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Bunter was still sailing. With that important occupation on hand, Bunter was not likely to heed glares from a cowpuncher. Bunter, heedless, went on masticating.

"Where have you been all this time, Bill?" asked Vernon-Smith. "Bunter's told us that you started a couple of hours after we did, and the buckboard ran away with him when you got out for his hat. But—"

"I'll tell a man!" hooted Bill. "I had to hoof it two-three miles back to Packsaddle to rustle a cayuse, and since then I've been rubbering after that dog-goned buckboard. I guess I had to watch out all the way in case that gold-darned buckboard wandered off the trail. I'll tell a man!"

Billy Bunter blinked round. "Did you pick up my hat?" he asked. "Doggone your hat!" roared Bill. "Well, I want it," said Bunter. "I can't keep that hat of Sanders; it's too big for me."

Bill hurled a crumpled hat on the table; he had, after all, fielded Bunter's lost hat. Bunter blinked at it.

"You've crumpled it!" he said crossly.

"Search me!" gasped Bill. "Did you figure that I was going to rustle a hand-box in Packsaddle for that hat?"

"Well, you needn't have crumpled it like that!"

Bill gave him a concentrated glare.

"I guess," he said, "that if you wasn't a locoed stiff and the world's prize boob I'd sure give you a taste of my quirt along with that pesky hat! Yep! I surely would!"

And Bill snorted.

It was not surprising that Bill had arrived with his "mad" up. At any point on the long trail from Packsaddle the runaway buckboard might have wandered off into the prairie. Bill had had to follow the rail at a walk, watching for the tracks of the wheels to track down the vehicle if it wandered.

Not till he arrived at the ranch did he learn that the buckboard had arrived there an hour ahead of him. That long and weary trail had naturally got Bill's goat.

"Squat down, old bean, and take a rest," said the Bounder soothingly; and Bill squatted down, and Chick brought fresh supplies out of the house into the veranda.

But Bill forgot that his "goat" had been "got" as he heard from the juniors what had happened while they had been parted from him.

"I'll tell a man!" he ejaculated about a dozen times, as he heard the tale. "I'll tell all Texas! I'll tell the world! You telling me that that fat gink got you away from Two-gun Sanders—and you got Two-gun by the short hairs! I'll surely tell a man!"

"We've got Two-gun Sanders locked up in a shed!" said the Bounder, laughing. "And I've got his guns—and I'm sticking to them—spoils of war! You fellows feel like a ride round the ranch before dark?"

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

Billy Bunter was not disposed for a ride round the ranch. His brief experience of riding a cow-pony, that morning, at Packsaddle, was enough for Bunter. Moreover, there were still foodstuffs on the table, and Bunter was not the man to leave them there. Bunter went on munching contentedly, while the other fellows went out with Bill.

Lariat, lounging by the corral gate, eyed them as they came.

"Get out the horses, Jenkins!" said Vernon-Smith.

Lariat did not move.

"I'll say that Mr. Stone allowed that them kids wasn't to go round riding promiscuous, while he's away from the ranch!" he drawled.

"Aw, can it, you gink!" said Bill Buck. "This here young guy is the owner's son."

"I guess I take my orders from Barney Stone!" drawled the horse-wrangler.

Vernon-Smith's eyes gleamed.

"That's enough from you, Lariat!" he rapped. "You'll take orders from me, as well as from Barney Stone, or you'll get off this ranch."

"Sez you!" drawled Lariat.

"It's all right, Lariat!" said Harry Wharton pacifically. "Mr. Stone only meant to stop us from going after that gang in the timber. All we want now is horses to ride round the ranch."

"I guess that cuts no ice!" said Lariat coolly. "Mr. Stone allowed that you wasn't to take out the horses till he horned in agin; and that goes!"

"I'm telling you, Lariat!" roared Bill.

"Aw, can it, Bill Buck!"

"Leave this to me, Bill!" said Vernon-Smith. "Jenkins, are you going to get those horses out, or not?"

"Not so's you'd notice it!" drawled Lariat. Evidently in the hour that had elapsed since he had taken Vernon-Smith's first order, the horse-wrangler had made up his mind that he was taking no more.

The Famous Five stood silent. It was not for them to intervene; neither did they quite see how the Bounder was going to enforce his authority, in the absence of the foreman to back him up.

Bill gave a snort of wrath.

"You say the word, Mr. Vernon-Smith, and I'll sure heave that big stiff over the corral-fence!" he exclaimed.

"I guess I've got a gun that says you won't, Bill Buck!" retorted Lariat.

"Leave it to me, Bill!" said the Bounder. He was cool as ice, and there was a glint in his eyes that his comrades did not quite like.

He fixed those glinting eyes on the horse-wrangler—who towered seven or eight inches over him. Lariat looked down on him with a derisive grin.

"You getting those horses out?" asked Smithy quietly.

"Nope!"

"Get out your own, then, and ride off this ranch!"

"Sez you!" grinned Lariat.

"You're sacked," said the Bounder, "or fired, as you call it here! Get off this ranch, and stay off!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Lariat. He seemed amused at the idea of being "fired" by a schoolboy he could have picked up in one hand.

"Are you going?" snapped Vernon-Smith.

"I guess not!" roared Lariat. "Nope! I'll whisper that I ain't! Not by a jugful, and then some!"

The Bounder's hand was in his pocket. He had left one of Sanders' guns in his room at the ranch-house; the other was under his hand. He whipped it out, and aimed it at the grinning horse-wrangler.

"Get out!" he snapped.

"Smithy!" breathed Bob.

"Smithy, old man—" murmured Nugent.

The Bounder did not heed. His eyes glinted at the horse-wrangler, over the levelled revolver.

Lariat had ceased to grin now. He stared at the Bounder, in blank astonishment and wrath.

"Say! You putting a gun on me?" he gasped. "Why, if you was growed

up, you pesky little gink, I guess I'd pull, and fill you so full of holes that cooky could use you for a colander!"

"Don't try it on!" said Vernon-Smith, in a voice as cool as ice. "I'll shoot you where you stand, if you reach for your gun, Lariat!"

"Carry me home to die!" gasped the horse-wrangler.

"You're fired!" said Vernon-Smith. "Get off this ranch! You can see Barney Stone later about your pay! Just now, you're clearing off! Get going!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob.

"I guess," said the horse-wrangler, his voice husky with rage, "that a guy can't pull on a schoolboy! Or else—"

"Pack all that up!" interrupted the Bounder. "I don't want any back-chat!"

"By the great horned toad—" gasped Lariat.

"You fool!" snapped the Bounder contemptuously. "Do you think I've come here to take orders from men drawing my father's pay? I've not come here to take orders—I've come here to give them! I'll give you one more chance, Jenkins—get out those horses and saddle them up, or I'll drive you off the ranch at the muzzle of this gun, and shoot you in your tracks if you lift a finger!"

"I'll tell a man!" breathed Bill. "Lariat, old timer, I'll say you've woke up a gunman instead of the tenderfoot you was looking for! Jump to it, big boy!"

Lariat gave the Bounder a long, long look. In the set, grim face he read inflexible determination. Smithy, as he had said, had not come to the Kicking Cayuse to take orders from the bunch.

The horse-wrangler breathed hard. This was how Barney Stone would have handled a man on the ranch who kicked against orders. Lariat had never dreamed of getting it from a school-boy fresh from the old country. He was getting what he had not dreamed of!

"Get to it, one way or the other!" snapped Vernon-Smith.

"I guess," said Lariat, "that I'll git out them hosses!"

And he got them out.

When the juniors rode out with Bill Buck, to give the ranch the "once over," in the glowing sunset, Lariat stood staring after them, a rather extraordinary expression on his face. He looked round at the cook, who was watching him with a grin.

"I guess that young gink is all wool, and a yard wide, Hank!" said the horse-wrangler slowly. "I guess Barney ain't going to find him easy to handle, now he's got here!"

"You're telling me!" agreed Hank.

"He sure does handle a gun, like he was born to it!" said Lariat. "Nope—I'll say that Barney ain't going to find him easy to handle."

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

News for Barney Stone!

BARNEY STONE rode through the high grass, in the fresh morning—dusty and weary. Behind him rode the Kicking Cayuse punchers, as dusty and weary as Barney.

It was high in the morning when the bunch sighted the ranch buildings in the distance—and they were returning unsuccessful. They had ridden long, and they had ridden hard; but they had found no trace of Two-gun Sanders, or Mexican Joe, or the kidnapped son of
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the new owner of Kicking Cayuse; and at dawn Barney had given it up and turned back.

But tired and dusty as he looked after that hard ride, Barney's face did not indicate that he was dissatisfied or disappointed. Once or twice, indeed, a faint grin flickered over his lean, bronzed, hard face.

"Hi-yi!" came a shout across the waving grass, and a horseman spurred from the direction of the ranch.

"That's Bill Buck!" remarked Yuba. Barney glanced carelessly at the approaching rider.

Bill waved his stetson as he galloped up. There was a cheery grin on Bill's rugged face.

"Mornin', fellers!" roared Bill. "Say, Mr. Stone, I sure been watching out for you. I got noos."

"Spill it!" said Barney, as the puncher wheeled his horse, and rode by his side.

"You sure ain't roped in them hoodlums what cinched the young boss, sir!" grinned Bill.

"We ain't!" grunted Barney. "We done our best, hombre! There ain't a guy in the valley of Frio what can say that we ain't done our best to get that young geek safe back. But they sure got him across into Mexico, I reckon."

"You reckon?" grinned Bill.

"Sure!" grunted Barney gruffly. "They had a long start, and they beat us to it!"

Bill chuckled. "I guess Two-gun never lit out for Mexico with young Vernon-Smith, Barney," he said.

"He sure did—if it was Sanders!" snapped Barney. "And there ain't no proof that it was Two-gun Sanders—we was held up by a guy with a mask on his face, and I reckon we can't see through a mask. Them young geeks allow that it was Sanders—but I guess the Packsaddle will want proof."

"The sheriff will sure get all the proof he wants, Barney!" grinned Bill. "They got Sanders at the ranch now."

"Aw, what you giving me?" snarled Barney, staring at him.

"The goods!" grinned Bill. "I'm telling you, sir, that while you was leading the bunch away for the border, you was turning your backs on Sanders. Surest thing you know, Young Vernon-Smith was parked in that timber all the while."

"How'd you know that, you big stiff!" snapped Barney. His eyes glittered at the Kicking Cayuse puncher.

"Sure thing," grinned Bill. "Because the young boss got away, Barney, and he's sure at the ranch now. And he's got that gunman locked up in the kerosene shed, all ready to hand over to the sheriff—"

"You doggoned bonehead, what you giving me?" yelled Barney Stone, turning a face so furious on the puncher that Bill blinked at him in astonishment.

Bill had expected his foreman to be delighted with this good news. For the moment, at least, Barney Stone looked anything but delighted.

"Say, Barney!" gasped Bill.

"You goldarned mosshead, you come here to string me along that-a-way!" roared the foreman. "What you mean?"

"Jest what I'm spilling, Barney!" gasped Bill Buck. "It's sure the goods! The young boss is at the ranch now—"

"He ain't!" yelled Barney.

"Surest thing you know, Barney; and he's got Sanders—"

Bill broke off as the foreman, with a black brow, struck spurs to his horse, and dashed away across the prairie towards the ranch. With quirt and spur Barney Stone urged on his weary bronco, driving the animal to a furious gallop.

Bill Buck stared after him, bemused with astonishment. Then he stared round at the bunch of riders.

"Say, what's got Barney?" he asked. "I reckoned he'd sure be glad to hear that the noo boss' son was safe at the ranch."

"Mebbe," said Yuba, with a grin, "and mebbe not. I guess Barney ain't honing for a schoolboy to come byer and ride herd over him, Bill."

"Ain't he been riding all night, looking for him?" exclaimed Bill.

"Mebbe," said Yuba. "But he was sure looking for him where he wasn't likely to find him. Them young ginks said that Sanders was fooling, allowing that he was heading for the border, and I guess they wasn't no wiser than Barney."

"Aw, can it!" grunted Bill.

He rode on with the weary bunch, puzzled by that savage outbreak of temper from his foreman. Yuba shrugged his shoulders.

There was more than one man in the bunch who would not have put it past Barney to lead the rescuers in a direction where the kidnapped son of the owner was not to be found. But no such suspicion was in Bill's mind, and he was puzzled.

Barney had disappeared from sight, galloping at a mad speed towards the ranch. With a set face and set teeth the foreman of the Kicking Cayuse drove on his bronco, and his men were left far behind when he arrived at the ranch, with a clatter of hoofs, in a cloud of dust.

He threw himself from his saddle, and shouted to the horse-wrangler, the first man he saw.

"You, Lariat!"

"You got back, Barney," said Lariat. "I guess Bill's watching out for you with the noos—"

"Is that young gink here?" demanded Barney hoarsely.

Lariat pointed to the ranch-house.

A group of fellows could be seen in the veranda. Barney's eyes seemed almost to start from his head as he discerned Herbert Vernon-Smith among the rest.

"Then—he's here!" he breathed.

"He sure is," said the horse-wrangler. "And they got Two-gun Sanders parked in the kerosene shed, if you want him, Barney." And Mr. Jenkins grinned.

Barney spat out an oath.

"They got him—they got Sanders?" he breathed.

"Sure! And young Vernon-Smith has got the key in his pocket. I guess they're chewing the rag about riding him over to Packsaddle."

Barney Stone stood silent for a few moments. He seemed to be pulling himself together, after the shock of this unexpected news. Lariat watched him with a covert grin on his face.

"The doggoned stiff!" muttered Barney at last. "Two-gun—a guy of that left, letting a schoolboy put it across him! And they're aiming to tote him over to the sheriff at Packsaddle!"

He turned his back on the horse-wrangler, and tramped away to the steps of the ranch-house veranda. His hard, lean face was quite composed by the time he arrived there.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Mr. Stone!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Mornin', gents!" said Barney.

There was no trace of anger or annoyance in his lean, brown face now.

"I'm sure powerful glad to see you safe at your ranch, Mr. Vernon-Smith, sir," went on Barney. "Me, I've been riding all night hunting for you! I'll say I was surprised when Bill Buck let on that you was here. How come?"

The Bouncer told him, in a few words, Barney listening attentively.

His eyes turned very curiously on Billy Bunter, when he heard of the part the fat Owl had played in Smithy's rescue.

Harry Wharton & Co. regarded the foreman a little dubiously. But he seemed to have forgotten the altercation of the previous day.

If Barney had forgotten it, the juniors were more than willing to forget it, also. They did not exactly like Mr. Stone, but certainly they had not come to Kicking Cayuse to look for trouble with Mr. Vernon-Smith's foreman.

Barney's manner was civil enough now.

"I'll say you had some luck, sir," he commented. "You sure did have some luck in getting away from the fire-bug. I guess I doubted whether Sanders was the man; but if you got him—"

"We've got him all right," said Vernon-Smith, "and when he's handed over to the sheriff, the rest of the gang can be looked for. I can identify one of them, at least, the Mexican."

"Sure!" said Barney. "I guess I'll ride that scallawag over to Packsaddle personal, and hand him over to Sheriff Lick. That hold-up means three—four years in the pen for him. And I reckon he won't worry you no more, sir, while you're on your holiday here. I'll tell a man, it beats me to a frazzle why he's got such a grouch agin you."

Barney shook his head with a puzzled look, and clattered down the steps. He went over to the cookhouse for breakfast.

An hour later the juniors watched him ride away from the ranch on the Packsaddle trail. And Two-gun Sanders, bound to a horse, went behind him at the end of a trail-rope.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

A Meeting on the Prairie!

"JOLLY!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Terrifically jolly!" declared Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Hear, hear!" said Johnny Bull.

Six faces were merry and bright. Smithy and his guests looked as if they were enjoying life that sunny morning.

And they were. The six were in the saddle, riding knee-deep in rich grass, over boundless plains, wide-brimmed stetsons shading their cheery faces from the glare of the Texas sun.

Billy Bunter also was enjoying life—in his own way. While the other fellows were riding the plains, Billy Bunter was disposing of a third breakfast in the ranch-house veranda.

Bunter preferred that to "cavorting" around on a bronco.

But the other fellows preferred cavorting on their broncos. They were many miles from the ranch now, riding towards the Rio Frio. The vast pastures of Kicking Cayuse extended as far as the banks of the Frio, and the juniors were going to give that river the "once-over." Chick had packed lunch for them, which they carried in their saddle-bags. They were making a day of it, and it was going to be a jolly day.

But it was not only lunch that they had packed for the ride. On each horse was strapped a leather case containing a rifle. And the Bouncer had a holster on his belt, with one of Two-gun Sanders' guns in it. Thus equipped, the chums of Greyfriars had no doubt of being able to take care of themselves, if need arose. Sanders, they had no doubt, had been safely landed in the calaboose at Packsaddle by the ranch foreman. But Smithy did not think that he was done with the man behind the scenes—the mysterious enemy who had employed the gunman to play his game for him.

Who that enemy was, and why he wanted to keep the owner's son away from the ranch, was still a mystery—but it was a mystery that the Bouncer was determined to elucidate. In the meantime, he was on his guard. But a spot of danger in the air did not worry the cheery juniors. They were thoroughly enjoying the gallop across the prairie.

Vernon-Smith pointed with his quirt. "There's the river," he said.

Glimmering between wide banks, the Rio Frio rolled in the sun in the distance ahead. The town of Packsaddle was out of sight, farther up the river. Down the river, a good deal farther away, was Hard Tack, another cow town. But no sign of either place was to be seen, and the schoolboys might almost have fancied that they had Texas to themselves as they looked round over the immense expanse of waving grass.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, there's somebody!" remarked Bob Cherry, as a stetson hat bobbed in sight from the grass, between the juniors and the river.

Since leaving the vicinity of the ranch, they had sighted nobody, till that stetson bobbed into view.

It was on the head of a horseman who was riding southward, from the direction of the Packsaddle trail—some guy heading for Hard Tack, or the places beyond. As the juniors were riding due east, towards the Frio, the horseman was crossing directly in front of them, at a distance.

They glanced at him, without giving him any special attention; only noting that he was riding hard.

But the Bouncer's glance, careless at first, became fixed. His brows knitted, and his eyes glinted.

"By gum!" he breathed.

"Seen that chap before, Smithy?" asked Bob.

"I think so! Put it on!"

The Bouncer gave his horse a touch of the spur, and dashed on, at a wild gallop. The Famous Five put on speed, and dashed on, wondering what was in Smithy's mind. Lonely as the prairie was, it was not surprising to see a man in a stetson riding the plains, and so far as the juniors had noticed, the man in front of them was like dozens of others they had seen.

But as they rode on at full speed, the man became nearer and clearer, and something familiar in the spare

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

I MUST say that I get some very ticklish questions to answer at times. One fired at me this week, by John Cobb, of Hove, beats 'em all.

John's question is rather a personal one, to say the least, but I'm pleased to answer it, nevertheless. "Is the lot of an Editor a hard one?" I am asked. Well, John, naturally enough, I can only speak for myself. As far as the MAGNET is concerned, there is always plenty to do. New plots for stories have to be thought out, artists have to be kept up to scratch, forthcoming programmes have to be arranged, and a hundred-and-one other jobs. But for my part, it is all pleasant work, especially when I think of the vast number of friends I have made since I have been "in office." Week in and week out, appreciative letters reach me from every corner of the earth. My task is made much lighter, however, by the co-operation of all loyal "Magnetites," and my thanks go out to every one of you. My aim has always been to please everybody to the best of my ability. Every week new readers are swelling our vast circle, which is clear proof that the Old Paper is marching triumphantly on.

THE OPEN ROAD!

Why not cycle to school, fellows—it's grand fun—saves fares and

form struck their eyes. Of his face, they could see little, under the stetson; but that little was also familiar.

"Great pip!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "It can't be—"

"Sanders!" breathed Harry Wharton.

"But he's at Packsaddle before this!" exclaimed Nugent. "He was tied on his horse—he can't have got away from Barney Stone."

"Looks as if he has!" said Johnny Bull. "I'll bet you that's Sanders! Smithy spotted him at once!"

"The Sanderfulness is terrific!" declared Hurree Janiset Ram Singh.

The Bouncer, evidently, had no doubt—and so far from seeking to avoid a meeting with the gunman, he was riding like the wind to intercept him. The Famous Five spurred hotly after the Bouncer.

How the gunman could have escaped from Barney was an utter mystery—but clearly he had done so. Now that he was wanted on a hold-up charge, he dared not show up at his old haunts in Packsaddle; and he was riding to the south, away from the cow-town trail.

"It's Sanders, Smithy!" panted Bob, as he dashed up beside the galloping Bouncer. "He's got away from Mr. Stone—"

"Yes!" said the Bouncer, between his teeth. "But he's not getting away from me! Get hold of your rifle—you'll want it!"

pushing on and off buses and trams—though I hope you don't push, anyway! If you are considering it, go to your local cycle dealer, and he will give you full particulars of Hercules Cycles, which, you will soon agree, have a superior finish, and run easily. And they are very reasonably priced. You can get models from 24 7s. 6d., or about 2s. a week.

Anxious to know something about next week's splendid programme? I'll bet you are! The piece-de-resistance is

"THE SCHOOLBOY RANGE- RIDERS!"

By Frank Richards.

which tells of the further exciting holiday adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. out in the Wild West. That something is going on detrimental to his millionaire father's interest is only too obvious to Vernon-Smith, and as yet neither he nor his school-fellows—Harry Wharton & Co.—have been able to put their fingers on the spot. But they are treading on dangerous ground. On no account miss next Saturday's thrilling yarn, chums. In addition to this special treat, there will be another sparkling issue of the "Greyfriars Herald," and an interesting sporting article by our International coach.

"Before closing down, I must thank the following readers who have written me, and whose letters need no reply: Fred Oates (Plymouth); Jack Cass (British Columbia); W. Bentley (Leeds), and Allan Beer (Hove.)

All the best till next Saturday,

YOUR EDITOR.

"He seems——" exclaimed Nugent. "Come on!"

The horseman ahead had seen the bunch bearing down on him. He had swerved off, as if to seek avoiding a meeting—then, clearly, he had recognised the Greyfriars party, and charged his intention.

Now he wheeled his horse to face them, and they saw the glint of a revolver in his hand.

Vernon-Smith had a rifle in his hands. And the Famous Five lost no time in whipping the rifles out of the leather scabbards.

The gunman's dark face was plain enough now, under the stetson. His glinting eyes were fixed on them as he rode towards them.

They could read a puzzled look on that dark face. He did not understand why the schoolboys were riding him down. He would have expected them to wheel their horses and ride for their lives at the sight of him. Had they been unarmed, they would have done so, for with empty hands they could have had no chance against an armed desperado. But they were armed now; and every advantage was on their side. So far from fleeing, the Bouncer was determined to recapture the desperado; and the Famous Five were not likely to fail in backing him up.

The gunman could see the rifles now, and understood that it was an attack—
THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,575.

and they saw a grim, savage smile come over the dark face.

It was plain that he was glad of this chance meeting, which gave him an opportunity—as he believed at last—to “cinch” the schoolboy who had so far escaped him. As for the others, he fully expected them to gallop off at the first crack of firearms; and if they did not, the ruthless scoundrel was prepared to fire on them.

His arm suddenly went up.

Crack!

Simultaneously with the crack of the gunman's Colt, came a shrill squeal from Vernon-Smith's horse.

The range was long for pistol-practice; but Sanders' aim was good, and the bullet had grazed the bronco's flank.

His intention was clear enough; to shoot down the Bounder's horse, and thus cut off his escape; and then drive off the others and secure him. He came on at a gallop, his gun up.

Another shot would have followed, in a few seconds; and as the distance was lessening, it would probably have taken effect.

But Two-gun Sanders did not fire again. The Bounder, riding with his knees, snapped his rifle to his shoulder, and blazed away bullets.

Crack, crack, crack, crack!

It was long range for a Colt; but easy range for a rifle. And the Bounder was a good shot. His first bullet missed by an inch; his second spun the stetson on the gunman's head; his third crashed into Two-gun Sanders' shoulder, and sent him spinning from the saddle; the fourth whizzed over the gunman's head as he crashed. Two-gun Sanders was down; and the Bounder, with gleaming eyes, dashed on, his smoking rifle ready; and the Famous Five dashed after him.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

O.K.!

TWO-GUN SANDERS staggered from the grass.

His right arm hung helplessly at his side, the blood streaming down it from his shoulder. His face was white; his eyes blazing with rage. Staggering in the grass, he changed his Colt from his helpless right hand to his left, as the schoolboy riders dashed up, and circled round him, with ready rifles.

“Drop that!” shouted Vernon-Smith.

His rifle would have spat a bullet the next second. Two-gun Sanders could handle a gun with his left as well as with his right; and life or death were in the balance. There was no choice but to shoot, if the gunman lifted his weapon; and had he done so, he would have fallen, riddled by bullets. Fortunately that was clear enough to the wounded ruffian; and though he spat with rage, he kept the gun down.

“Doggone you!” he hissed. “You goldarned gecks, you've sure got me—by the great horned toad—”

“Keep that gun down!” snapped the Bounder. “I'll shoot you like a mad dog if you lift it an inch, you scoundrel!”

There were six rifles round the gunman ready to fire; but it seemed for a moment, that in his fury he would rush to his fate. His left hand made a movement, and the Bounder's eye gleamed along his rifle with a deadly gleam. Just in time, Sanders dropped the Colt into the grass.

“Get down, you fellows, and bag him!” said Vernon-Smith. “I'll keep him covered.”

Sanders, almost overcome with the pain of his wound, and the loss of blood, stood staggering; but he snarled with rage as the Famous Five dismounted and surrounded him. Nugent held the horses while the other four secured the gunman. A length cut from a trail-rope was knotted round his left wrist, securing it to his belt.

Then the Bounder packed his rifle, rode after Sanders' horse, and led it back by the reins.

“Stick him on his horse!” said Vernon-Smith. “We're taking the brute to Packsaddle—and he won't get away from us, as he did from Barney Stone.”

“I guess—” hissed Sanders.

“Pack that up! Stick him on that horse, you fellows!”

“Better bind up his wound first!” said Harry. “We want to land him at Packsaddle alive, Smithy!”

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. “I'm not particular about that, so long as we land him there!” he answered.

“Rats!” said Bob Cherry. “Chuck that, Smithy! You're a Greyfriars man, old bean, not a Texas gunman.”

The Bounder laughed. Really, he seemed a little in danger of forgetting that he was a Greyfriars man in his new life on the Texas prairies.

“Go it, then!” he said.

With Sanders' own neck-scarf, the wound in his shoulder was bound up as well as the juniors were able to do it.

Having done all they could for the gunman, the juniors heaved him into his saddle.

Vernon-Smith held the reins as they rode away, turning northward up the river to ride to the cow town.

It was a ride of a dozen miles or more; and with the wounded man sagging in his saddle, they could not put on speed. During that ride, Two-gun Sanders sat with shut teeth—only, every now and then, opening his lips to spit out an oath, or a threat, to which the Greyfriars fellows turned deaf ears.

They rode, at last, into the cow town, where a crowd gathered at once to “rubber” at the party, and to watch them hand over the captured desperado to an astonished sheriff.

Billy Bunter met the juniors at the gateway when they rode back to Kicking Cayuse in the golden sunset.

“I say, you fellows!” squeaked Bunter.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!” roared Bob Cherry. “Finished your brekker yet, Bunter?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, really, Cherry! I say, you fellows, what do you think?” exclaimed the fat Owl. “I say, I'm going to make you jump!”

“Is the jumpfulness going to be terrific?” inquired Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Oh, really, Inky! I say, you fellows, that gunman—”

“Which?” asked Bob, laughing.

“That villain Sanders!” said Bunter. “He's got away!”

“You don't say so!” ejaculated Johnny Bull.

“I jolly well do!” declared Bunter. “Barney Stone came back about an hour after you fellows went out. I heard him swearing at Lariat for not tying the man safely on his horse. Everybody heard him. He was in a fearful temper. I say, you fellows, he said that Sanders got loose on the way to Packsaddle, and snatched his gun away—fancy that!”

Barney Stone came riding from the direction of the corral. At the corral gate, Lariat stood with a grin on his face; but the foreman's face was grave and serious as he came up to the Greyfriars fellows.

“I reckon I've got some bad news for you, Mr. Vernon-Smith, sir!” said the Kicking Cayuse foreman. “That firebug Sanders—”

“Bunter's just told us!” said the Bounder. “He didn't get very far, Mr. Stone!”

The foreman started.

“I guess he was burning the wind last time I saw him,” he said. “What you mean, Mr. Vernon-Smith?”

“We met him on the prairie,” said Harry Wharton, with a smile.

“Search me!” ejaculated Barney.

“We roped him in!” said Bob.

“You roped him in!” said Barney Stone, staring. “You allow you roped in that firebug Sanders, and him with a gat in his grip?”

“Sure thing,” said the Bounder cheerfully, “and he's got an ounce of lead in him, Mr. Stone, and won't bother us, or anybody else, for some months to come. We're through with Two-gun Sanders!”

“Oh erikay!” ejaculated Billy Bunter.

Barney Stone did not speak. He only stared at the Bounder of Greyfriars, with strange changing expressions in his lean brown face. He was still staring like a man petrified as the Greyfriars fellows walked on to the ranch-house.

THE END.

(Enjoying this exciting series, chums? I'll bet you are! Next week's yarn, "THE SCHOOLBOY RANGERS-RIDERS!" is better than ever. You'll find fun and thrills galore in it. Be sure and order your copy early!)

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BIRCHEMALL THE YES-MAN!

Another Laughable Instalment of
"THE SWELL WHO HAD TO SWOT!"

By DICKY NUGENT

"Bust Doctor Birchmall!"

Jack Jolly made this remark. And Merry and Bright and Fearless responded with a hearty "Hear, hear!"

The Honorable Guy de Vere, their hollerday host at Fitzboodle Castle, added a languid "Heah, heah!" in his own particular accent!

"If only the old buffer would buzz off and leave us to ourselves, we could have a topping hollerday here," went on the kaptin of the St. Sam's Fourth. "But he won't ludge—in spite of all the broad hints I've given him!"

"He's ruining the vack for us," sighed Fearless. "It wouldn't be so bad if there were guests of his own age for him to pal up with. But while there aren't, he sticks to us like glue. And I can't stick it much longer!"

"What about me, then?" groaned Jack Jolly. "I have to spend most of my time dressed up as De Vere's pater, Lord Fitzboodle; and while I'm present the Head hangs about my heels like a faithful lapdog! He seems farly hypnotised while he fancies he's talking to a real, live lord. He agrees with everything I say. In fact, he's a proper yes-man!"

"There's only one thing to do," said Frank Fearless. "If he won't take broad hints, we must jape the old buffer till he finds Fitzboodle Castle too hot to hold him."

"Cave!" whispered Bright, as a bearded figger appeared on the terrace where the juniors were having their little confab. And Fearless hurriedly stopped.

Doctor Birchmall trotted across to the

and cheerfully piloted him off towards the front door of the castle. Jack Jolly & Co. grinned refully, as they watched the pair vannah through the grate portal.

"Twig the difference when he thinks Lord Fitzboodle isn't about?"

"While you're dressed up as his lordship, Jolly, he boughs and scrapes to the Honorable Guy for all he's worth; but it's a different story when you're just yourself."

Jack Jolly larked.

"I suppose I'd better put on my glad rags and reskew De Vere, you chaps. While I'm gone, see if you can't fix up a few japes for the Head's bennyfit."

"Right-ho, old chap! We'll do our best!"

The kaptin of the

Fourth hurried indoors and ran upstairs to put on his disguise.

Five minnits later, when Jack Jolly returned to the grate hall of Fitzboodle Castle, Herlock Sholmes himself would never have reck-ernised him as the same person. With his gleaming monocle and shining coronet and hovy mistosh and dazzling Court dress, he looked every inch a lord.

Jack Jolly went straight to the ante-room where Doctor Birchmall was giving De Vere his lesson.

Sure enuff, when Jack Jolly opened the door, it was to find the Head holding De Vere by the scruff of the neck and wacking away at him as though he was beating a carpet!

"I'll nock some sense into you, my boy, if I have to birch you black and blue to do it!" he cried. "And you needn't think your honnered father will stop me, either. If you complain, I shall simply deny—"

"BIRCHEMALL!"

"Ow!" gasped the Head. "Oh crums!"

His grip on the Honorable Guy relaxed. The birch dropped from

his nee less hand. That refined, aristocratic voice from the doorway changed Doctor Birchmall in a single instant from a bootlying tirant to a graveling meenial!

"Birchemall! Sir!" roared the bogus Lord Fitzboodle. "How dare you birch my son, what, what? Are you hurt, my dear Guy?"

"Ow! Yaas! Yow-ow! Oh, gad! Yoooop!"

"In that case, my dear boy, have a bit of your own back! Pick up that birch an' give him a taste of his own medicine! What's sawee for the gooso is sawee for the gander. That's so, Birchemall, isn't it, what, what?"

"Oh, yes, your honnered and noble lordship!" wined Doctor Birchmall. "What's fair for your lordship's honnered son is fair for your lordship's humble servant! Yes, rather!"

"Bai Jove!" grinned the Honorable Guy de Vere. "In that case, heah goes!"

And the swell of St. Sam's seized the Head's birch and started wacking him as though for a wager!

Like all boobies, the Head was a proper cow-herd at hart, and it was not long before he was hopping and diving about all over the room to escape De Vere's lashing birch.

"Yarooooo! Help! Stoppit! Woooooop!" he shrieked.

But his pleas fell on deff ears. Not till the swell of St. Sam's had eggshasted his strength did he desist. By that time Doctor Birchmall had larned to regret very much that he had ever been so misguided as to bring his birch to Fitzboodle Castle.

"Haw! I hoap that (this will teach you not

to start birchin' my son again, Birchemall!" said the bogus lord, severely, as the Head stood before him, tenderly rubbing his injured anattermy. "I mite mention, my good man, that it is not my usual practice to treat my guests in this fashion.

really was, and nothing that happened was going to disturb him for the rest of the vac!..

At the end of the day our heroes had to kon-tes that Birchemall the yes-man was one up on them. He seemed destined to stay on at the Castle and spoil the rest of their hollerday for them—unless something very uneggspected happened.

Forchuntly, that un-eggspected happening was on the way!

(Don't miss the concluding instalment of Dicky Nugent's serial in next week's number!)

But you must admit that you asked for it, what, what?"

"Oh, yes, your lordship—begged and preyed for it, in fact!" gasped the Head. "I—I hoap, your lordship, that this little incident will make no difference to the gracious hospitality your lordship has so far egg-tended to me?"

The disguised Jolly smothered a groan. He had been hoaping after this that Doctor Birchmall would be anxious to hop off; but instead of that he seemed more anxious than ever to stop on!

"Haw! You're welcome, my good Birchemall!" he said gruffly. "But mind your P's and Q's in future, that's all!"

"I certainly will—and thanks awfully your lordship!" smirked the Head.

And that ended the first unplezzant shock Doctor Birchmall had had at Fitzboodle Castle. But it was by no means the last. Fearless and Merry and Bright took good care of that.

Japes galore were prepared for the Head that day and he fell for them all like a lamb.

But Doctor Birchmall came up smiling every time. He had made up his mind to show Lord Fitzboodle what a good-tempered old solo he

Take Redwing and Wibley, for instance. Redwing is sailing round the coast with a small party in a motor-launch, while Wib is going on tour with a theatrical company and taking a small part in the play in which his pater is starring. Wib and Redwing are certainly as the poles asunder in their holiday ideas!

Russell and Ogilvy are fishing in Scotland, while Desmond is hoping to spend quite a lot of time following the hounds in his native Ireland. Linloy, after a brief stay in Black-pool, is serving the rest of his holiday as a clerk in a cotton-mill.

Bolsover major is helping on his uncle's farm in Essex. Skinner and Stott are amongst the bright lights in London, and Sir Jimmy Vivian and Delarey are hoping to learn something about flying at a provincial aerodrome near which they are staying.

You can hardly imagine a more varied mixture of holidays than this little lot, can you? Yet they will probably all be equally enjoyable to the fellows concerned.

It goes without saying, of course, that wherever we are and whatever we do, my pals and I will get our measure of fun out of the vac!

Meet you all again next week, chums!

DICK RAKE.

ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENT

"GOSSIPER" (Remove). "Hilton of the fifth has bought a monocle, so you'll soon find he has a pane in the eye."

He's a "pane" in the neck to us, anyway.

MASS-OBSERVATION A JOLLY HOLIDAY GAME

Says MONTY NEWLAND

Dick Penfold has introduced me to an awfully jolly holiday game—mass-observation.

Sounds a bit of a mouthful, that, but it's really very simple. All you have to do is to make notes on how people behave when they think nobody is looking at them. You send up the notes at intervals to the mass-observation centre in London. There they are classified with crowds of other chaps' notes. The brainy johnnies who run the thing then pore over the results and are able to study the human race in a scientific way just like they study monkeys or rabbits.

There is no charge and anyone can join in the fun. Penfold thought he would have a go himself.

"We'll trot along to the fairground and observe the crowd there," he said. "The results ought to be jolly good."

So off we went. Penfold took a large note-

book and a pencil with him. When we reached the fairground his eyes scanned the crowd with a hawk-like look till they came to rest on a beefy-looking chap in a cloth cap and a red muller.

"There's our man!" he snapped. And Penfold's first spot of mass-observing started. What he saw can best be described from Penfold's notebook.

"Man tested strength with sledge-hammer for a penny. Rang bell and won bag of nuts. Laughed. Paid another penny. Pushed back cap. Spat on hands. Had another hit. Missed and hit own foot. Did a dance on other foot, making queer noises. Hobbled away."

"Man went to refreshment tent and had a ginger-pop. Drank first half slowly.



observation ceased then. The chap came across to Penfold, tweaked his nose and said: "Wot do you think you are, eh? A bloomin' split, or wot?"

And Penfold decided to transfer his observations to someone else!

Incidentally, I took a few notes of my own on Penfold while Penfold was doing his stuff. Here they are:

"P. watched man with sledge-hammer. Whistled when bell rang. Grinned. Frowned fiercely when man had second go. Laughed loudly when man hit foot.

"Watched man drinking ginger-pop; mouth watered. Screwed up face when man wiped mouth. Raised eyebrows when man went on roundabout. Did 'that's-him-that-was' movements with neck as man went round and round. Watched man at coconut-shy.

Chucked twice at misses. Said 'Ah!' when nut fell. Licked lips when man drank milk. Said 'Leggo by dose!' when man tweaked nose. Walked away, grunting."

I have offered to send along my contribution along with his. But for some reason Penfold doesn't want the scientific study of human behaviour applied to himself.

Anyway, it's a jolly little holiday game and quite exciting when the chap you're observing observes that he's being observed.

Take my tip and have a go at it yourselves!

GREYFRIARS FROM FRESH ANGLES

9. In the Vac. It's a Flop!

Says FISHER T. FISH

I'll say this school's a sleepy show even in mid-term. But when it comes to holiday time, boy, what a flop!

I surely am an unlucky guy. Raised in li'l old New York—a live wire to the finger-tips—pulsating with pep, punch and personality—and yet I have to spend my holidays in this mouldering mausoleum. I guess my popper felt he owed me a grudge, the day he sent me here!

Not a sound to break the silence anywhere. Not a hot dog in the place, nor an ice-cream sundae, nor even a bag of peanuts. No loud-speakers, no neon signs,

no smart guys to pull wisecracks. Just plain nothing, no time, no how! I'll say this place will give a guy the heebie-jeebies!

As I mosey round the moth-eaten old shack, I can't help thinking what a swell dump I could make off if they'd let a smart business guy like myself lorn in with a few suggestions.

I got a hunch I'd make this place a paying proposition. I'd give the building a coat of bright red paint to brighten them up during the day. I'd have neon lighting and floodlighting at night. I'd have a snappy swing time band in the

quad and amusements and snack bars all over the show. I'll say this school would make an ideal setting for a second Coney Island if only they'd let me get going.

But what's the use of yawping? Nobody in this sleepy old place is likely to let me. So I just got to keep on moseying round, watching Gosling squatting outside his lodgo, smoking, and Mimble mowing the grass and mumbling, and Mrs. Kobblo sitting at her window, sewing. Can you wonder, folks, that I defy contradiction when I say that Greyfriars in the vac is one big flop?

GREYFRIARS GOSSIP

"They've stopped grinding corn at the Sark watermill and somebody's buying it for a week-end cottago. Don't you think it's a scandal?"

When we hear such news it goes "right against the grain" with us!

HIKING OR BIKING?

Varied Views on a Vexed Question.

To hike or to bike? That (writes our Open-air Correspondent) is the question in many chaps' minds at this time of the year.

Most fellows to whom I put the problem just before Easter seemed to have quite decided views on the matter. And the hikers were just as keen on hiking as the bikers were on biking!

Bolsover major, for instance, said that nothing on earth would change him from a hiker to a biker.

"Give me the by-ways and footpaths every time," he said. "I like fresh air without petrol fumes and dust. Hiking gets my vote, I can tell you, and I'm quite willing to argue it out with anyone who disagrees. Do you disagree?"

Bolsover started peeling off his coat, as he asked this question.

So I hurriedly assured him that I was on his side entirely and hopped it!

Napoleon Dupont, Bolsy's study-mate, held quite the opposite view.

"Ze bike, he is, as you say, ze goods for seeing ze world," he said, with a wave of his hands. "Eef I travel, as you put it, on Shanks' donkey, I go only ze leetle way, n'est-ce pas? But on ze bike, I go 'undred, zousand, million mile! For me, ze bike, ah, oui!"

Squiff plumped for hiking, though for a different reason from that of Bolsover.

"Safety first" is my motto, old bean," he said. "The life of a cyclist isn't worth tap-pence in these days. Cyclists are just chick-on-food for motor-ists—that's all. I'm going to keep on hiking

and live to a ripe old age!"

On the other hand, Piet Delarey had a new angle to give me on this aspect of the problem.

"I like cycling because it's such a lark annoying the motor-ists," he said, cheerfully. "It makes a chap feel no end important to have people continually sounding their horns at him and yelling and shaking their fists at him!"

I collected many other weird and wonderful views from both sides, but these four are all I can crowd into the space the Editor has given me.

In conclusion, I should say that I did find one thing in common between the opposing sides. Both hikers and bikers seem to get unlimited fun out of their hobby!



DICK RAKE CALLING!

Three cheers for the holidays! That's what we're all saying now. Greyfriars is a tip-top school and I wouldn't swap it for any other on earth: but hurrah for the holidays all the same!

Next term we shall return with plenty of zest for cricket, tennis and the school sports. There are also the annual exams, but we won't dwell too much on those. In the meantime, we're free to enjoy ourselves according to individual tastes.

Individual tastes vary widely, of course; how widely they do vary can be seen from the different things that different Remove men are doing this vac.