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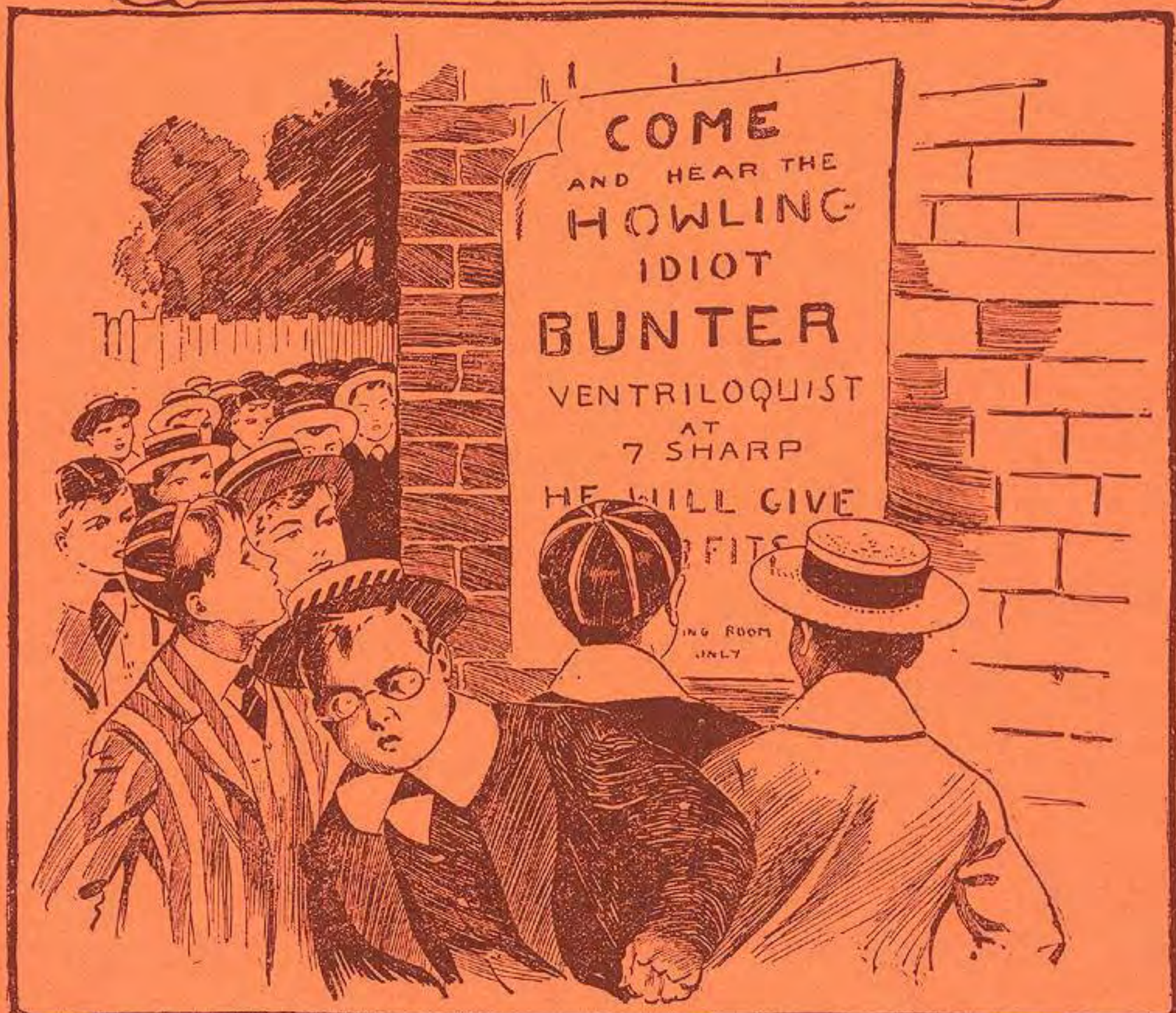
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Vol. 2.

COMPLETE
STORY
FOR ALL

THE GREYFRIARS VENTRILOQUIST.

By
FRANK
RICHARDS



BILLY GETS HIS LEG PULLED.



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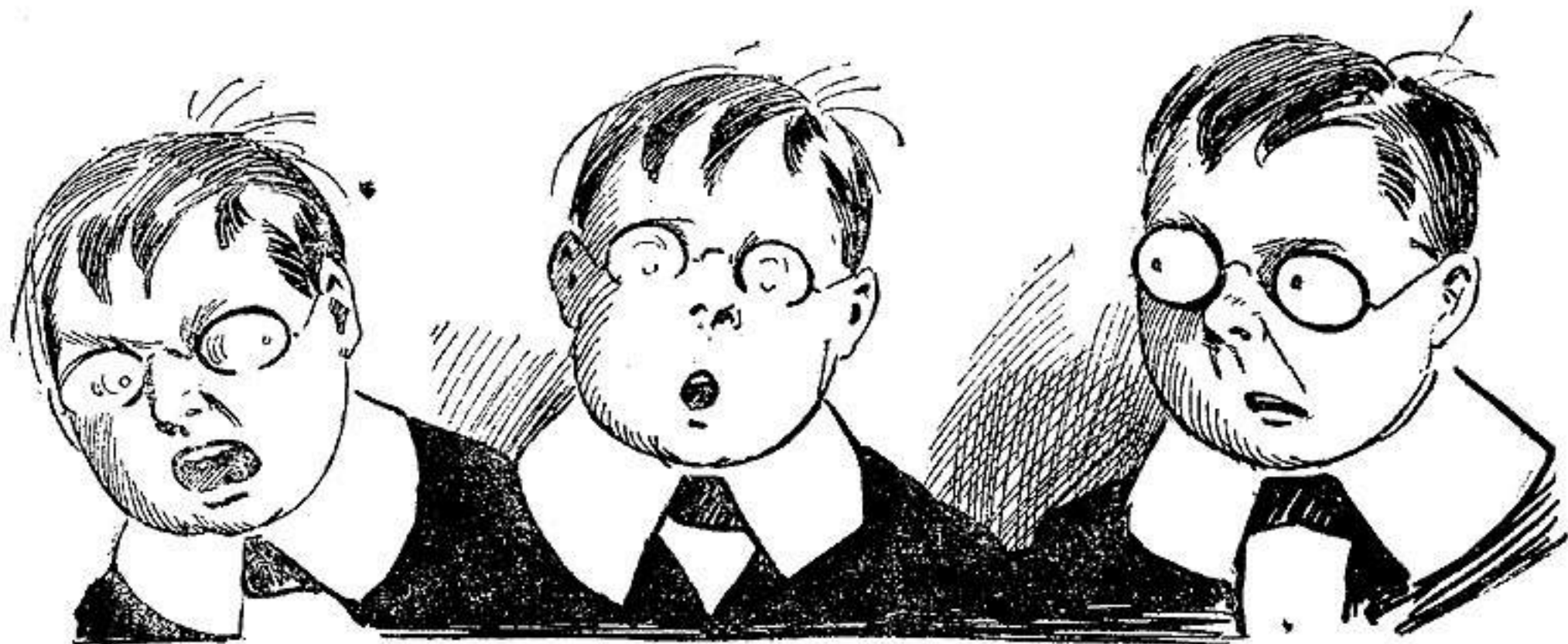


THE Magnet

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A Complete Story-Book,
attractive to all Readers.

ONE HALFPENNY



THE GREYFRIARS VENTRILOQUIST.

A School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter takes up Ventriloquism.

GROO—GROO—GERROOH!"

"What's that?"

"Groo—gerrooh!"

"My only hat," gasped Bob Cherry, "it's—it's somebody dying in the study!"

"Gerrooh—ger-r-r-rooh!"

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry both looked alarmed. They were coming up the Remove passage at Greyfriars when the mysterious sounds caught their ears, proceeding from Study No. 1. The study door was closed, but the curious sounds were quite audible in the passage.

"Groo—gerrooh—gerr-r-r-rooh!"

"It—it sounds like somebody suffocating!" muttered Bob Cherry. "It can't be Nugent or Inky—they're both out of doors."

"Bunter is there," said Wharton.

"Then it must be Bunter. But what—"

Harry Wharton ran on quickly towards the study, and threw the door open. The strange sounds continued without cessation.

"Ger-r-r-r-rooo-rrr-r-rooh!"

The chums of the Remove looked into the study. There was evidently something wrong with Billy Bunter to cause him to emit those remarkable grunts and gasps. They could only suppose that a tart had gone down the wrong way, or

that he had swallowed a plum-stone, or something of the sort.

"Gerrooooh!"

Bunter was seated in the easy-chair, with his fat little legs drawn up, and a book on his knees. His head was thrown back, and his mouth was wide open, and an uninterrupted series of gasps and grunts proceeded therefrom.

"He's choking!" gasped Bob Cherry. "It's a plum-stone, I expect. Thump him on the back, while I cut off and get some water to bring him to."

"Right you are! Buck up!"

Bob Cherry dashed off, and Harry Wharton stepped quickly towards Bunter. The fat junior did not move. His head remained at the same uncomfortable angle, and his mouth, wide open, continued to emit grunt after gasp, and gasp after grunt.

"Groo—gerrooh—ger-r-r-r—"

Wharton seized the fat junior, pulled him forward, and slapped him on the back with friendly energy.

Bunter gave a jump, dropped the book off his knees, and squirmed round.

"Oh! Ow! Hold on!" he yelled.

"Better now?" panted Wharton.

"Better? What do you mean? Leave off thumping my back, you beast! Oh! Ow!"

"Are you feeling all right?"

"How can I feel all right when you're thumping me on the back? Are you dotty? Leave off!"

Wharton desisted at last.

Billy Bunter put his spectacles straight on his fat little nose, and blinked at Wharton in almost speechless indignation.

"You—you—you—" he gasped. "What do you mean? What did you start thumping me for?"

"Glad you're better," said Wharton. "Was it a plum-stone?"

"A—a what?"

"A plum-stone, or a tart?"

"What the— Ow-w-w-w-w!"

Bob Cherry dashed into the study with a can of water in his hand. He did not stop to speak, but dashed the water in Bunter's face.

"There you are!" he gasped.

"Ow! Ugh! Gerrooh!" gurgled Bunter.

"Is he all right now, Wharton?"

"Ha, ha, ha! I think we must have made a mistake. And he wasn't choking at all!"

"Then what was he making that row in his throat for?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"Choking!" yelled Billy Bunter. "You utter idiots, of course I wasn't choking! What did you sling that water in my chivvy for, Cherry, you beast?"

"To bring you round, of course!"

"You—you—you—"

Words failed Bunter. He rubbed the water out of his eyes and ears and nose and hair, and tore off his dripping collar and tie. He wiped his spectacles with a force that all but snapped them, and put them on again.

The chums of the Remove watched him curiously. They realised by this time that they had been mistaken, and that Billy Bunter had not been in the throes of suffocation when they rescued him. The rescue had been superfluous.

"You—you shrieking idiots!" said Bunter at last. "You howling duffers! You dangerous lunatics!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Harry Wharton. "We thought you were suffocating!"

"You looked like it!" said Bob Cherry warmly. "And what were you making those unearthly noises for?"

"You dummies!"

"Well, if a chap opens his mouth as wide as a coal-mine, and makes a row like an engine getting up steam, he must expect people to think he's ill," said Bob Cherry. "Are you off your rocker?"

"I was practising—"

"Practising what? If you're going to practise making a row like that, you'll have to change your quarters, I warn you!"

Bunter mopped his face with his handkerchief. The rescue had very much disturbed him, but he was recovering from it now.

"I say, you fellows, I was practising my new art—"

"Your new what?"

"My new art. You know I took up physical culture, and hypnotism, and thought-reading, and—"

"I know you've been several varieties of a silly ass."

"Well, as a matter of fact, none of those things really suited me."

"I remember telling you so at the time."

"Yes; but I've found the right hobby at last. I've found my metier."

"Your what?"

"My metier. That's a French word. It means that I'm on the right thing at last. It was that entertainer chap coming to Friardale that put it into my head. You've heard of Monsieur Dupont, the ventriloquist?"

"He's giving a show in the village, I believe?"

"That's it. Well, that put it into my head, and it struck me all at once that I was a born ventriloquist."

"More like a born idiot!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I got a book on the subject—"

"Where did you borrow the tin?"

"I forget. The book I've got is the very latest thing—written by Professor Balmicrumpett, the famous ventriloquist, who has given ventriloquial performances to all the crowned heads of Europe."

"How do you know?"

"It says so in the book. I'm studying the subject now on the famous Balmicrumpett method, and I'm thinking of getting lessons from that chap in Friardale if I can raise the tin."

"But what has that to do with the row you were making when we came in?"

"That's the first practice."

"Oh, that's the first practice, is it?" said Bob Cherry. "It had better be the last, too, if it's all like that."

"I'll read you what Professor Balmicrumpett says on the subject," said Billy Bunter, picking up his book. "Here you are. 'The mouth open as in Fig. I—'"

Bunter opened his mouth wide.

"That's how you open your mouth, you fellows."

"A bit dangerous for anybody standing near you, isn't it?" said Bob Cherry. "Suppose somebody fell in?"

"Oh, really, Cherry! Now, listen to what Professor Balmicrumpett says. 'The first step is to learn to produce the ventriloquial drone—'"

"The ventriloquial what?"

"Drone. 'The first step is to learn to produce the ventriloquial drone. This is done by opening the mouth, and taking in a deep breath—'"

"Suppose you took in a deep breath without opening the mouth?"

"Oh, really, Cherry! 'This is done by opening the mouth and taking in a deep breath, then holding it, and making a retching sound at the back of the throat—'"

"Oh, I see now what was the matter with you!"

"Then you exhale slowly, forming the vowel 'Ah'—"

"Ah?"

"Yes. Ah! I will give you an example. Groo—groo—gerrooh—"

Bob Cherry stopped his ears.

"Oh, don't! Leave off!"

"I was giving you an example of the ventriloquial drone."

"Sounded to me more like an expiring frog."

"Of course, I can't expect to get it quite perfect at first. I haven't learned to throw my voice at all yet," said Billy Bunter modestly. "In a few days, however, I hope to be able to perform any ventriloquial tricks on the best Balmicrumpett principles."

"I suppose you will have to practise a lot?"

"Oh, yes; I shall keep on practising the ventriloquial drone at intervals all the time, you know, day and night."

"Have you insured your life?"

"What on earth has that to do with learning ventriloquism?"

"A jolly lot!" said Bob Cherry. "It would be only common prudence to insure your life before you start practising the ventriloquial drone in a study you share with other fellows. Something might happen to you."

"Oh, really, Cherry!"

"Besides, it's all rot! I suppose you'll make about as good a ventriloquist as you made a hypnotist and a thought-reader."

"With my remarkable powers of voice-throwing, I—"

"Why, you said you hadn't chucked your voice about yet!"

"Well, I haven't; but I feel within me the remarkable powers, and—"

"Keep 'em within you, then. Hallo, what on earth are you doing? Have you got a pain?"

"I am just going to practise the ventriloquial drone, that's all."

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Groo—groo—ger-r-rooh!"

"Hold on, I tell you! How can you expect anybody to stand that fearful row?"

"Groo—groo!"

"My hat! Give me the poker, Wharton!"

"Groo—gerrooh!"

"Look here, you young ass—"

Wharton laughingly caught Bob by the arm, and pulled him to the door.

"Give him a chance!" he said. "Let's get out. We'll get down to the gym. Hold on a tick till we're gone, Billy!"

"Groo—groo—groo!"

"The young ass!" growled Bob Cherry. "What a fearful row! Talk about expiring frogs!"

"Groo—gerrooh!"

"Look here, Billy Bunter—"

"Gerror-r-r-r-rooh!"

"Great Scott! Let's cut!" gasped Bob.

And they cut. Down the passage the ventriloquial drone followed them.

"Ger-r-r-r-r-rooh!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Sixty Thousand Per Cent. Per Annum.

"WHAT'S the matter?"

"Off his rocker, I suppose?"

"By Jove, he must be!"

"The off-fulness of the esteemed rocker is terrific!"

It was Billy Bunter who caused these remarks to be made, but he was oblivious to them, being far too busy to think of trifles. He had come out of the School House, and was walking towards the gymnasium, with his head thrown back, his mouth open, and a most remarkable series of spasmodic gasps proceeding from his throat.

"Mad as a hatter!" said Frank Nugent. "It's come at last. I always said that Bunter was rather weak in the top story."

"The weakfulness is great," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur. "My worthy Bunterful chum, what is the esteemed matter with your honourable fathead?"

"What on earth is he gasping for?" said Hazeldene. "Bunter, you ass, if you're not off your rooker, what's the wheeze?"

Micky Desmond stepped in Bunter's path, and gave him a gentle dig in his fat ribs. Bunter's gasping became very energetic all of a sudden. Micky's dig had caught him in the middle of a ventriloquial grunt, and for a moment he could not get his wind. He turned his spectacles upon the Irish junior indignantly.

"What did you do that for, you utter idiot?"

"Faith, and I want to know what ye're at intirely?"

"You've interrupted my practice. I was trying the effect of the Balmicrumpett drone in the open air, and now you've spoiled it."

The Removites stared.

"What on earth is the Balmicrumpett drone?" demanded Nugent.

"I've lately discovered that I have a remarkable gift for ventriloquism—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am giving up my other hobbies, and taking up ventriloquism. You can see that I'm on the high road to success."

"Is that grunting ventriloquism?"

"Ass! That's only the first practice. I'm doing the ventriloquial drone now."

"Is that a drone?"

"What do you think it is, then?"

"It sounded to me like a pig grunting."

"Well, of course, I can't get it perfect at first. Perfection will come later, when my remarkable powers are developed. I shall soon have the drone all right, and then I shall start on the voice-throwing."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to cackle at. Do let me alone, you fellows! I find that I can practise better in the open air."

And Billy Bunter marched on, with his mouth open, and grunting away in fine style, leaving the Removites shrieking with laughter.

Bunter entered the gym., where Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry were exercising. Bob was swinging himself over the parallel bars, when Bunter came blinking round in search of the chums of the Remove.

"I say, you fellows—"

Bob Cherry dropped to the ground, missing Bunter's feet by half an inch. The Owl of the Remove jumped back.

"Oh, I say, Wharton, you startled me!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "It's not Wharton, ass! It's I, duffer! What are you getting in the way for?"

"I want to speak to you fellows."

"Well, no harm in that. Come on, Wharton, and we'll —"

"But I want to speak—"

"Speak, then! I suppose we can go on while you're speaking?"

"You won't hear me—"

"Well, we don't want to!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I say, Wharton, it's a rather important matter—"

"Cut it short, Billy! Do you want any advice on the subject of ventriloquism?" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"No, Wharton. My wonderful powers in that line are developing very fast, and if I could have a few personal lessons—"

"Well, we can't give you any lessons in producing the ventriloquial grunt," said Bob Cherry. "Cut off!"

"Do wait a minute! I want to get some lessons of that chap Dupont in the village. I've been disappointed about a postal-order—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was expecting one by the first post this morning, and it hasn't come."

"I should write to the Postmaster-General about it. That chap gets a good salary, and he ought to see to it that you get your postal-orders. This isn't the first one you've been expecting that hasn't arrived, is it?"

"Oh, don't rot, Cherry! I was relying on getting this postal-order, and it's not coming places me in rather a fix. I am in want of ready-money."

"You always are."

"Well, I don't think you ought to gibe at a chap because he's down on his luck, Cherry. I stood you chaps a jolly good feed the other day when I was in funds."

"Yes, and Levison had to pay the piper."

"Well, you had the feed, so you can't complain; and Levison must have lots of money, or he couldn't have stood the ten bob."

"I believe it busted him."

"Well, I'm not speaking about Levison now. I don't want much—only a sovereign or so."

"My only hat! And where do you think we are going to get a sovereign from?" demanded Bob Cherry, in amazement.

"I thought you might get up a subscription in the Form," said Billy Bunter modestly. "You see, it will be lots of fun for all of us when I'm an expert ventriloquist."

"When!"

"With my wonderful powers, it won't take me long, but I feel that I require a few personal lessons. The Balmicrumpett method is good, but it takes time. That entertainer chap could put me up to it much quicker."

"Well, you'd better go round raising a subscription," said Bob Cherry. "You can put my name down for a French penny."

"But, I say, you fellows, I dare say I could do with a few bob to go on with. If my postal-order had come, I wouldn't have bothered you. Look here, I'll borrow the money at interest, same as I did before with Inky. I gave Inky twelve thousand per cent.—at least, it would have amounted to that for the year, you know."

"And if you had paid up!"

"Well, I had a disappointment about a postal-order, but with such a heavy rate of interest Inky ought to have expected to take some risks."

"You utter ass! Inky gave you the tin, and—"

"Oh, no! I expressly stated that I couldn't accept it as a gift. I may be poor, but I have pride," said Billy Bunter, with great dignity. "Now, suppose you lend me five bob on the present occasion, Cherry—"

"I haven't even five pence, fathead!"

"Suppose you lend me five bob on the present occasion, Wharton—"

"I have only four in the wide world," said Harry, laughing. "You really ought to be a little bit more reasonable, Billy."

"I hope you don't regard me as a cadger! If you think I'm asking you to give me money, this conversation may as well cease."

"Right-ho! Come on, Harry!"

"Hold on, Cherry! Don't be in such a beastly hurry! As I was saying, if Wharton can't stand five bob, I could make four do, and I will cash up the instant my postal-order comes. I'll give you back five bob."

"I can't—"

"Six, then."

"Look here—"

"Well, double," said Billy Bunter. "There you are, I've offered you cent. per cent. There's precious few fellows are able to lend out money at a hundred per cent."

"You young ass!"

"Well, I suppose it is a bit reckless of me to pay such a rate of interest for a small loan; but, you see, I'm in want of the ready-money," said Bunter. "My postal-order will be here to-morrow morning, so the loan will be repaid in, say, fifteen hours' time. How many hours are there in a year, Bob Cherry?"

"Is that a conundrum?"

"No, I'm making a calculation."

"Blessed if I know."

"Twenty-four multiplied by three hundred and sixty-five," said Billy Bunter. "I think I can do that in my head. Something under nine thousand, isn't it?"

"Shouldn't wonder."

"Well, call it nine thousand, to put it into round figures."

"You can call it anything you like, fathead!"

"Nine thousand, then. Divide nine thousand by fifteen —"

"What on earth for?"

"I wish you wouldn't interrupt my calculation. Is it six hundred, Wharton?"

"Nine thousand divided by fifteen is six hundred, certainly," said Harry, laughing.

"Well, then, if I give you a hundred per cent. for fifteen hours, I'm giving you six hundred times a hundred per cent., calculating by the year. What is six hundred times a hundred, Bob Cherry?"

"More than a dozen, I should say."

"Oh, don't be funny when I'm making an important calculation. How many is six hundred times a hundred, Wharton?"

"Sixty thousand."

"By Jove, is it really? Then if my calculations are correct—"

"If!" said Bob Cherry.

"I wish you wouldn't interrupt me, Cherry. If my calculations are correct, Wharton, I shall be paying you interest at the rate of sixty thousand per cent. per annum."

"I suppose Wharton will be buying a lot of casks to store it in," said Bob Cherry sarcastically.

"It's the fact. Cent. per cent. for fifteen hours is sixty

thousand per cent. per annum, or thereabouts. I don't see how Wharton can expect more. Am I to have the four bob at that rate, Wharton?"

"I can't spare it."

"I've never thought you a mean chap before. If sixty thousand per cent. doesn't satisfy you, how on earth much do you want?"

"You utter young ass!"

"It's no good calling me names because I object to being bled by a Shylock. I think sixty thousand per cent. is ample."

"Look here, you young ass," said Harry Wharton, half laughing and half vexed—"look here, I'm not going to lend you any money at interest. In the first place, you will never pay it; in the second place, if you weren't such an utter ass I should lick you for suggesting such a thing as interest on a loan to me."

"I think I've offered quite enough——"

"I'd give you the four shillings if I could, but——"

"But I don't want you to give them to me. I couldn't accept them as a gift. I want you to lend——"

"Oh, cheese it, and cut off!"

"But I say, Wharton, I really want to get some lessons from that chap in Friardale, you know, and it may save me from having to practise the ventriloquial drone so much——"

"If that's the case, I'd stand a bob towards it, if I had one," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Well, you can have three," said Wharton. "I'm blessed if I know why we always undertake to keep that young cormorant supplied with cash. It isn't as if he was careful with it."

"Bulstrode used to lend me money when he was in Study No. 1, before Cherry came——"

"Well, here's the three bob."

"Thank you! Of course, this is purely a loan, and I shall return you six bob for it when my postal-order comes to-morrow morning——"

"Oh, cut off!"

"That will be cent. per cent. for fifteen hours——"

"Cheese it!"

"Or sixty thousand per cent. per annum."

"Get out!" roared Wharton.

And Bunter, jingling the three shillings in his pocket, got out. Harry Wharton burst into a laugh.

"Curious how a chap comes to look on you as his banker if you once start lending him money," Bob Cherry remarked. "When he's had some, it never strikes him that you're left with less than you had before. He always seems to think that the more he has, the more you've got left. Well, in this case it's the price you pay for the privilege of having me in the study instead of Bulstrode."

"And it's worth it!" said Harry, laughing.

"Thanks awfully! Now, let's get on the bars, before any other ass comes and starts jawing!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Bulstrode Makes a Startling Discovery.

BILLY BUNTER paused for a moment as he passed the school tuck-shop on his way to the gates.

He had three shillings in his pocket, and three shillings would go a long way at Mrs. Mible's in the purchase of tarts, cream puffs, and jam sandwiches, and other delicacies dear to the heart of the fat junior.

As he halted and glanced towards Mrs. Mible's shop, it suddenly struck him that after all it wasn't a very good idea to spend the money as he at first intended.

"After all," he murmured argumentatively, "I can learn all right from the book, and I don't see why the chaps can't stand the ventriloquial drone as long as I like to keep it up. They'll have to stand it. Perhaps the Friardale chap wouldn't give me any lessons for so small a sum. And—and it's a long way to Friardale, and I don't like walking. Then I have my constitution to consider. I have to keep up my strength with plenty of nourishing food—that's the only thing that keeps me going. Perhaps, upon the whole, it would be better to have a feed at Mrs. Mible's, and learn the art of ventriloquism from the book on Balmicrumpett principles."

And the fat junior turned towards the tuck-shop.

Just as he did so, however, he received a tap on the shoulder, and turned round to see Price of the Remove.

"Going to Mrs. Mible's?" asked Price, in a friendly way.

"I—I don't know," said Bunter guardedly. "Why?"

"Why, if you're in funds——"

"I sha'n't be in funds till my postal-order comes," said Bunter. "I've had a slight disappointment about that. There's been some delay."

Price grinned.

"Well, as you were going to the tuck-shop, I suppose you've

got some tin, and so you can cash up that half-crown you owe me."

Bunter started.

"Do I owe you a half-crown, Price?"

"Forgotten it, of course!" said Price unpleasantly. "Yes, you do owe me half-a-crown, though why I was ass enough to lend it you I'm blessed if I know."

"I hope I'm the kind of fellow to be trusted with a small loan," said Bunter, with dignity.

"Yes, you're the kind of fellow to be trusted not to pay it back," said Price. "Come on, hand it over."

"I'm sorry I can't, just at present, but when my postal-order comes——"

"Look here, you were going to the tuck-shop, so——"

"I might have been going to look in there," said Bunter; "but I haven't any money to spend there. I've a few shillings, but they were given to me—I mean lent to me, at a high interest, too—for a special purpose, and I should not be justified in blueing them at the tuck-shop."

"Hallo, what's that?" exclaimed Bulstrode, catching the words as he came up to speak to Price. "You've been borrowing money at interest, have you, you young rascal? Do you want to get expelled?"

"Oh, I say, you fellows, keep it dark, you know."

"That's all very well," said Bulstrode, assuming a magisterial air; "but, as head of the Remove, I'm bound to look after the morals of you youngsters."

"But you're not head of the Remove," said Bunter innocently. "Wharton is cock of the walk ever since he licked you, you know. Ow! Let go my ear!"

"Am I the head of the Remove, Bunter?"

"No—ow—yes! Let go my ear! What I really meant to say was, that you are head of the Form, and nobody cares for Wharton."

"Oh, that's all right, then," said the Remove bully, releasing Bunter's plump ear. "That's better. Now, then, what's this about borrowing money at interest? I heard something of the sort before."

"I'd rather keep it dark."

"I dare say you would, but I wouldn't. Is it Vaseline who has been lending out money at interest?"

"Oh, no!"

"Who is it, then?"

"I'd rather not tell you, Bulstrode."

The bully of the Remove caught his ear again. Bunter gave a dismal howl.

"I say, Bulstrode, let go—it hurts!"

"How curious!" grinned Bulstrode, compressing his grip till Bunter wriggled. "Does that hurt, too?"

"Ow, yes—yes! Ow!"

"Who has been lending you money at interest?"

"I—I—I——"

"Come, now, who is it?"

"Wharton!" gasped Billy Bunter. "Oh, don't! Ow!"

"Wharton?"

"Yes."

Bulstrode's eyes gleamed with an unholy joy. It seemed almost too good to be true—this chance, at last, of crushing his old enemy.

Wharton had been a thorn in his side ever since coming to Greyfriars. Wharton had licked him in fair combat, and ever since then the bully of the Remove had been forced to sing small. Many a rub had they had since, but defeat had always followed Bulstrode's attempts to get level. Now!

"You're not lying, you young rotter?" he said suspiciously.

"Really, Bulstrode——"

"How much did he lend you?"

"I—I—I——"

"How much?" roared Bulstrode threateningly.

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"Three bob!" gasped Billy Bunter. "I say—"

"And how much interest are you to pay him?"

"Cent. per cent."

"What?"

"He's to have six bob back for his three to-morrow morning."

"My aunt Jemima!" said Bulstrode. "He's taking up the business of a Shylock in good style. Cent. per cent., by Jove! I heard something like this about those chaps in Study No. 1 before, but I put it down to rotting. Cent. per cent.!"

"I say, Bulstrode, don't let Wharton know I told you—"

"H'm!"

"He'd be awfully waxy, you know."

"He ought to be expelled," said the virtuous Bulstrode.

"And you ought to be jolly well expelled, too."

"Oh, really, Bulstrode!"

"Lending money at interest! That chap, Vaseline, used to go in for getting tin from moneylenders, but even he drew a line at starting the Shylock business in Greyfriars. I've never liked Wharton, but I really never thought that of him. Did you, Price?"

"Never," said Price. "But you never know a fellow till you find him out, you know."

"Yes, you're right there, by Jove!"

"Perhaps the young rotter's lying, though," suggested Price. "He generally is."

"Oh, really, Price!"

"Well, he wouldn't have sense enough to make up a circumstantial yarn like that," said Bulstrode, with a shake of the head. "But we'll see. You say, Wharton lent you three bob, Bunter."

"Yes; keep it dark."

"When did he lend it you?"

"About ten minutes ago, in the gym. Don't let him know I told you."

"Then you've got it about you?"

"Look here, Bulstrode, I'm not going to give you—"

"Have you got it about you?"

"Ye-e-es."

"Show it to me. Don't be afraid, you young ass. I'm not going to take it. Do you think I want a few measly shillings?"

Only half assured on that point, but afraid to refuse, Bunter pulled out the three shillings, and Bulstrode's eyes snapped at the sight of them.

"I say, I'll have my half-crown out of that," said Price.

Bunter popped the three shillings quickly back into his pocket.

"I'm sorry, Price, but I'm paying a high interest for this loan, because I want the money for a special purpose. I'll settle with you later."

"It's right enough," said Bulstrode. "I know Bunter was broke an hour ago. I thought it was all right. I wouldn't touch that money, if I were you, Price. You don't want to get mixed up in any moneylending transactions. It means getting expelled if the Head got to know about it."

"My hat, you're right!" said Price, uneasily.

"You can cut off, Bunter."

"I say, you fellows!"

"Cut off!"

"But I say, you won't say anything about this, will you? Wharton would be in a fearful wax if he knew I had told you!"

Bulstrode chuckled.

"I dare say he would. I'm pretty certain he would."

"Then you'll keep it dark?"

"Oh, buzz off!"

"But, I say, you fellows—"

Bulstrode reached out, and Bunter scuttled off. His fat face wore a rather worried look as he went hastily out of the gates of Greyfriars.

"I hope Bulstrode won't talk about it," he murmured. "It may get Wharton into a fearful row if he does. He was rather close over the money, but I should be sincerely sorry if he were expelled."

Bulstrode and Price looked at one another expressively when the fat junior was gone. Price looked rather troubled, Bulstrode triumphant.

"Well, what do you think of that?" demanded Bulstrode.

"Blessed if I know what to think of it," said Price slowly.

"Wharton doesn't seem the kind of chap for that sort of thing."

"You never know those quiet chaps. When a fellow sets up to be better than other fellows, you can always be jolly certain there's something behind it."

"Well, that's so, sometimes, too."

"Not much doubt about it in this case. The question is, what ought we to do?"

Price started a little.

"Nothing," he said abruptly. "It's no business of ours."

"Isn't it? What will the other fellows say about the Remove when it gets out that there's moneylending going on in the Form? The Upper Fourth will chip us to death. Besides, consider the disgrace to the Form."

"We can't interfere."

"Wharton ought to be shown up before the thing goes any further. He ought to be stopped, if only for his own sake," said Bulstrode, feeling rather a sense of novelty in the role of virtuous youth—a strange role for him. "Don't you think so?"

"I know I'm jolly well not going to interfere," said Price emphatically; and he concluded the argument by walking away.

Bulstrode knitted his brows.

"Wharton ought to be shown up," he muttered. "Somebody ought to make it his duty to inform Quelch of what's going on. A Form master is the proper person to acquaint with a matter like this. I don't want to get mixed up in it myself, though. I wonder— Ah!" His eyes gleamed. "Of course, there's Levison! He's the chap! I'll speak to him!"

And Bulstrode went to look for Levison.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter Meets the Ventriloquist.

"CES!"

That word, in large letters, sprawled across the window of the village tuckshop, and it caught Billy Bunter's eye as he came in hot and tired from the dusty, country road.

He paused and looked at the shop, as he had paused and looked at the school shop at Greyfriars. But there was no Price to save him now.

"By Jove, I should like an ice!" murmured the perspiring junior. "They say they're not good for you when you're hot, but I've never found them do me any harm. Perhaps I've never had enough. Suppose I had a few ices out of the three bob, and—"

He was walking towards the door of the shop as he muttered to himself, and he finished the argument by entering.

He had escaped the Scylla of the school shop, only to fall a victim to the Charybdis of the village establishment, to use a classical simile.

Uncle Clegg blinked at him over his glasses, and Billy Bunter blinked back, and ordered an ice.

The ice disappeared in record time, and then he ordered another, and another. He was consuming the third ice when a stranger entered the shop.

He was a youngish man, with a big black moustache, that was evidently dyed, and black curly hair, that was still more evidently more artistic than natural. There was something in his face familiar to Bunter, though for the moment he could not remember where he had seen it before.

"I will have an ice, please," said the young man with the moustache, in a deep bass voice, that seemed rather out of place in so slim an individual.

"And I'll have another," said Bunter. "You may as well bring me two while you're about it, Uncle Clegg. It will save time. I'll have some jam-tarts to follow, and—let me see—have you any fresh cream-puffs?"

"Ya-a-as, zur."

"Good! You can give me half a dozen. I'll have some savoyes and ham, to start with, though, when I've finished this ice. And some tongue. And some cold beef. I'm awfully hungry. And some pickles."

The young man looked curiously at Billy Bunter.

The fat junior did not notice it. He proceeded to attack the comestibles that Uncle Clegg set before him, and travelled through them at a great rate.

"Which that will be two-and-tenpence, zur," said Uncle Clegg.

"Oh, rats! You mean a bob."

Uncle Clegg turned red.

"I say two-and-tenpence!" he exclaimed angrily.

"Eh? Did you say two-and-tenpence?" said Bunter.

"Ya-a-as, zur."

"All right."

Uncle Clegg looked at the fat junior suspiciously. Billy Bunter, unconscious of having given offence, went on eating. The young man with the moustache smiled. Bunter glanced at him, with his mouth full.

"By Jove, I've got it now!" he exclaimed.

The young man looked at him.

"Aren't you Monsieur Dupont?" asked Billy Bunter.

"I've seen your chivvy—I mean your portrait, sir, on the posters. You're giving a ventriloquial entertainment in the town-hall."

The young man smiled again.

"Quite correct!" he exclaimed. "Such is fame! The features of Monsieur Dupont—that's me—are known in the four corners of the kingdom, and throughout its length and breadth. You have a ticket for my entertainment this evening, of course?"

"Sorry I haven't—"

Monsieur Dupont drew a bunch from his pocket.

"Which will you have—a shilling seat, or a half-crown dress circle, or a five-shilling stall, or a half-sovereign box, young sir?"

"I'd like a box, sir, if it's all the same to you," said Bunter, highly flattered. "I could get leave to come, and bring some friends."

"Good! Here you are."

"Thank you!" said Bunter, taking the slip and stowing it into his pocket. "That's very kind of you, sir." And he went on eating.

"Well?" exclaimed Monsieur Dupont.

"Well?" said Billy Bunter, not quite understanding.

"Well?"

"The half-sovereign."

"The what?"

"The ten shillings for the ticket."

"Oh! Aren't you giving them away?"

"Giving them away! Giving them away! Giving away ten shilling boxes!" exclaimed Monsieur Dupont, aghast. "When the crowned heads of Europe have frequently jostled one another at my door, willing to pay anything for admission!"

"Have they really?" said Billy Bunter, much impressed.

"My dear lad, of course they have. See small bills for further particulars. As I rather like your appearance, however, I—er—I can let you have that box for five shillings."

Bunter made a long face.

"Well, well," said Mr. Dupont genially, "we will say half-a-crown; but that, mind, is giving it to you."

"I have only twopence left, and—"

"Then I will trouble you for my ticket," said Monsieur Dupont stiffly.

And Bunter reluctantly handed it back. He paid Uncle Clegg, and finished the cream-puffs. Then he thoughtfully regarded his last remaining twopence, while Monsieur Dupont consumed a second ice.

"I suppose I may as well have another ice," said Bunter.

"Ya-a-a-as, zur. That will be tuppence, zur."

"Oh, rats! You mean a ha'penny!"

"I mean tuppence!" said Uncle Clegg angrily.

"Eh?" said Bunter. "I didn't speak. I know it's a twopenny one."

"You said—"

"I didn't say anything," said Billy Bunter, bewildered.

"Here's your twopence."

Uncle Clegg grunted, and scooped the two pennies into his till.

"Ere, I zay, one of these 'ere is a French penny."

"That it isn't," said Bunter. "Why, it's the twopence change you gave me yourself out of the three bob."

"Eh?" said Uncle Clegg, staring at him.

"I say it's the twopence change you gave me out of the three bob," bawled Bunter.

"Ay, I know it is, zur."

"Then what do you mean by saying that one was a French penny?"

"Eh? I never said nawthin' of the sort, zur."

"Why, I heard you plainly. You said that one of those pennies was a French penny."

"I never said nawthin'."

"Oh, you're off your rocker!" muttered Billy Bunter.

"Why, he spoke as plainly as anything, didn't he, Mr. Dupont?"

Mr. Dupont grinned.

"E's a young vool, 'e is."

Bunter blinked at Uncle Clegg through his spectacles.

"Who are you calling a fool, you old duffer?" he exclaimed.

"Eh?"

"Who are you calling a fool?"

"Nawbody."

"Look here, you're drunk; that's what's the matter with you. I— What are you laughing at?" asked Bunter indignantly, blinking at Mr. Dupont. "You jolly well won't get any more of my custom, Mr. Clegg, so I tell you."

And Bunter turned towards the door.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Mr. Dupont, laughing. "Excuse me—a little joke."

"Eh? What's a little joke?"

"My little bit of ventriloquism," explained Mr. Dupont blandly.

A light dawned on Bunter.

"My hat! Was it—was it you?"

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"Oh, it's all right, then. I beg your pardon, Clegg."

"Eh?" said Uncle Clegg, whose slow wits were far from comprehending "Eh, zur?"

"That was jolly good, and no mistake," said Bunter admiringly. "I wish I could come and see your show, sir,

only I'm stony. I've had a disappointment over a postal-order I was expecting, and—"

Mr. Dupont walked out of the shop with him. He selected a shilling ticket from the bunch in his pocket.

"Take that, my lad!" he said grandly.

"I say, that's jolly good of you, sir."

"Not at all," said Mr. Dupont. He spoke sincerely enough, too, for he knew that at least half the seats would be empty at the town-hall that evening when he gave his entertainment. Friardale was not a lively place for public entertainers. "Not at all, my lad. I make you a present of that ticket. If you can bring any of your friends to-night, who will pay for admission, I shall get my own back. Twig?"

Billy Bunter twigged.

"You'll tell them what a splendid show it is," said Mr. Dupont. "I suppose you come from the big school yonder, don't you?"

"Yes, rather; I belong to Greyfriars. I'm in the Remove."

"Oh, are you really?" said Mr. Dupont, who hadn't the faintest idea what the Remove was. "That must be very nice for you."

"Oh, yes!" said Bunter.

"And you take an interest in ventriloquism?"

"Yes, rather!" said Bunter emphatically. "I have lately discovered that I have wonderful powers in that direction, sir."

"Have you really?"

"Yes. I am studying the subject on the lines laid down by Professor Balmicrumpett, in his great book on ventriloquism. I can do the ventriloquial drone."

"Can you, indeed?"

"Yes," said Bunter. "I'll show you. Groo-groo-groo-gerrooooooh!"

Mr. Dupont stared.

"Is that the ventriloquial drone?" he asked.

"Well, perhaps it isn't much of a drone so far," said Bunter, rather discouraged. "Wharton says it is like a pig grunting."

Mr. Dupont laughed.

"Wharton is quite right. I dare say you will change the grunt for a drone later, however, if you persevere."

"I hope so, sir. As a matter of fact, I came to Friardale on purpose to see you, sir," said Bunter shyly.

"My entertainment is not till the evening."

"Yes, but I wanted to see you specially; I wanted to arrange about having some lessons in ventriloquism, if you would be so kind—"

Mr. Dupont beamed at once.

"Excellent idea!" he exclaimed. "Personal tuition is more necessary in the case of ventriloquism than in anything else. I could give you daily lessons during my stay in Friardale, on very moderate terms. Say, a guinea for the week, and a half-hour lesson every day."

"A—a guinea!"

"Oh, we shouldn't quarrel about terms! I could take half-a-guinea."

"Half-a-guinea?"

"Well, as you are an enthusiastic amateur— You are an enthusiastic amateur, are you not?"

"Oh, yes, rather!"

"Well, as you are an enthusiastic amateur, I could take you for five shillings," said Mr. Dupont generously.

"I borrowed three bob of Wharton," said Bunter disconsolately. "Only—only I felt so hungry when I got to the village that I blued it at Uncle Clegg's. I'm stony; and unless I get a postal order to-morrow, I sha'n't have any tin this week. And—and my postal orders are often delayed in the post."

Mr. Dupont reflected.

"Well, I want to help you if I can," he remarked thoughtfully. "Let's see. If you could bring a dozen fellows with you to-night for the entertainment, I dare say I could manage to give you the lessons for nothing."

Billy Bunter beamed.

"Oh, I say, sir, that's awfully kind of you!"

"Not at all. I'm always glad to help on an enthusiastic amateur. And you couldn't get a better instructor. I think I may say, without boasting, that I am the head of my profession. I have performed with great success to all the crowned heads of Europe. See small bills for further particulars."

"Have you really, sir?"

"I have, my boy," said Mr. Dupont impressively.

"Curious how kings and queens seem to be so fond of ventriloquial shows," Billy Bunter remarked thoughtfully. "Professor Balmicrumpett has performed to all the crowned heads of Europe, too."

Mr. Dupont darted a quick glance at his young friend, suspecting for a moment that Billy Bunter was "pulling his

leg." But the fat junior was quite serious, and Mr. Dupont coughed and changed the subject.

The ventriloquist, although he stated that he was at the head of his profession, and, of course, he ought to have known, was not accustomed to drawing large audiences. At the present time he was calculating whether his takings during a week in Friardale would be sufficient to pay his account at the Red Lion Inn. An influx of boys from the big school might be the saving of him. He knew that very well, and if through Billy Bunter he could attract the Greyfriars lads to his show, the time spent on the ventriloquial lessons would be well spent.

"Then I can depend upon your bringing a dozen companions?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, I think so! I'll try my hardest."

"Good! Then the lessons can begin."

"But I say, I'm only allowed as far as this on half-holidays."

"Oh, that is easily arranged. I go out for a stroll every afternoon, and I will meet you, if you like, near the school, and give you your lessons."

"I say, that's ripping! Can you give the lessons in the open air?"

"Easily."

"Then, suppose we fix the stile in the lane near Greyfriars?"

"Excellent! I will give you the first lesson now, if you like. Sit down on this bench," said Mr. Dupont.

"Oh, I say, thanks awfully!"

Bunter sat down eagerly. There was no one near the bench under the tree outside the village shop, and the ventriloquist proceeded to give the lesson.

"Now, show us what you can do."

"Groo-groo-gerroooooh!"

"You don't want to grunt like that. Take a deep breath—nod when you've got it."

Billy Bunter nodded.

"Now exhale slowly, making the vowel 'ah' as you do so."

"Ah-h-h-h-h!"

"That's better already. Mouth a little shutter—I mean, a little more shut, and don't roll your eyes as if you were seeing a ghost. No need to make such a tremendous effort about it, either; you don't want to burst a blood-vessel. Now, keep on with that, and in time you'll get a clear, steady drone, like the distant buzz of a bee. That's the ventriloquial drone; very different from the suffocating grunt you have been working off."

"I see."

"Well, try again."

Billy Bunter tried again, and again, and again, till at last Mr. Dupont pronounced that he was able to practise alone, and then they parted. Billy Bunter took the road back to Greyfriars in high spirits. He had succeeded beyond his hopes. At intervals on the road homeward he stopped to give vent to the ventriloquial drone, much to the amazement of passers-by.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

No Catspaw.

"LEVISON, old chap."

Levison was sitting on a low wall, mending a fishing-rod. He looked up as Bulstrode came along, and nodded—not very cordially. Bulstrode's manner was brimming over with friendliness.

"Hallo!" said Levison shortly.

"I say, I've got something to tell you; I've just found it out. It's a secret—and it's about Wharton."

Bulstrode expected Levison to look eager at once. Levison and Wharton had till lately been on the worst terms possible. But to his surprise, the junior only nodded, and turned to his fishing-rod again.

"I say, don't you want to hear it?" exclaimed Bulstrode.

"Not particularly."

"It's a serious matter. It may mean Wharton getting expelled," said Bulstrode impressively.

Levison started.

"What's that?"

"It may lead to Wharton getting expelled. I thought that would interest you in the matter," grinned Bulstrode.

"Go on; tell me about it, then."

"It's a case of money-lending. Wharton has been lending out money at interest in the Remove," said Bulstrode.

Levison sniffed.

"Rot!"

"It's not rot. It's true."

"How do you know?"

"Because I've had it from the chap he lent money to."

"Who was it?"

"Bunter."

"Oh, that young ass! He'd say anything."

"Yes, but he hasn't brains enough to invent a yarn like that. Besides, he showed me the three bob Wharton had lent him, and I know he was broke a few hours ago. He

was in an awful funk, too, in case Wharton got to hear that he'd given him away."

"I expect it's all rot," said Levison, in his unpleasant way. "Anyway, what are you telling me about it for?"

"It's a disgrace to the Form."

"As bad as smoking in the study, and drinking at the Green Man, in Friardale, and betting money on horses?" asked Levison caustically.

Bulstrode turned red.

"If you're going to start preaching at me, Levison, you'll get a thick ear, and jolly quick!" he exclaimed.

"I'm not preaching at you," said Levison, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Only don't talk any gammon to me about disgrace to the Form. I know exactly how much you care for anything like that."

"Well, perhaps I don't," said Bulstrode. "Never mind that. It is a disgrace, all the same, a fellow lending out money at interest like a giddy Shylock. But what I mean is, don't you see how this puts Wharton into our hands?"

"No, I don't."

"A fellow would be expelled for moneylending if it were known. This gives us a chance to show Wharton up. Of course, I don't believe in sneaking. But in a serious case like this, a fellow might think it his duty to acquaint the Form master with what was going on."

"He might," said Levison. "But I believe it's all rot. Wharton isn't that sort of a chap."

"You never know those quiet rotters. I know it's true, and that's enough. He ought to be shown up, and kicked out of Greyfriars."

"If it's true he ought, but I don't believe it. Bunter is making one of his usual bloomers," said Levison contemptuously.

"Nothing of the sort. It's perfectly true, and he ought to be shown up," said Bulstrode obstinately.

"Well, are you thinking of going to Quelch about the matter?"

"N-n-not exactly. You see, I—I'm known to be on rather bad terms with Wharton, and it might look like—like personal spite."

"Like what it is, you mean."

"You're in a confounded unpleasant humour this afternoon, Levison. What I was thinking was that you might

"I might pull your chestnuts out of the fire, and save you from burning your fingers," said Levison, with a sneer.

"That isn't exactly the way to put it, Levison. It would look much better coming from you than coming from me. You don't like Wharton any more than I do. And you can't say he oughtn't to be punished. We can do our duty, and get level with him at the same time. It's a ripping chance!"

"You'd better seize it, then. I'm not going to turn sneak."

"It wouldn't come under the head of sneaking. If you found out that a chap was going to steal something, I suppose you'd warn the masters, wouldn't you?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, lending money out at interest isn't much better than stealing, and it's just as much forbidden by the rules of the college."

Levison went on mending his rod. Bulstrode looked at him savagely, and waited for him to speak. But he did not speak.

"Well," said the bully of the Remove at last, "what have you got to say, Levison?"

"Nothing!"

"Don't you think that somebody ought to speak to Mr. Quelch?"

"I don't care a rap whether somebody does or doesn't!"

"Look here, what are you getting at?" exclaimed Bulstrode angrily. "You don't like Wharton any more than I do! You've always been against him!"

"He hasn't always been against me, though," said Levison, in a low voice. "Have you forgotten what happened only last week, Bulstrode? You know I was lost on the Black Pike, and Wharton found me—and probably saved my life."

"Oh, rot! You would have been all right!"

"He put his own coat round me, and stood the rain and the cold himself."

"Oh, that was for effect, of course!"

"Not much effect to be gained on the top of Black Pike in a rain-storm," said Levison. "He did it because he's a splendid fellow, and cads like you and I aren't fit to tie his shoe-laces."

Bulstrode forced a laugh.

"So you're turning into a follower of Wharton, are you?" he exclaimed. "Have you forgotten that he licked you before all the Form?"

"I haven't forgotten that I jolly well deserved it. And he could lick me again if he liked. I haven't forgotten that he

risked his life for me, after I had treated him like a cad all along."

Bulstrode gritted his teeth.

"So he's got round you, as he gets round everybody in the long run!" he said savagely. "I might have expected it! He twists most of the fellows round his finger. But I'm going to show him up, all the same."

The Remove bully strode away savagely. Levison's defection was a severe blow to him. Ever since his fall he had been trying to work up a party in the Remove against Harry Wharton, and on Levison, at least, he had always been able to rely for bitter enmity against the captain of the Form. Now his staunchest backer had gone over to the other side. He had felt almost certain of Levison to play the part of catpaw, but it was clear now that if he wanted Wharton "shown up," as he expressed it, he would have to do the showing up himself.

It was not an easy task. His dislike of Wharton was well-known, and that alone would make the position of accuser an invidious one. Information given to the Form master would come perilously near "sneaking." Whether he could make so keen and observant a master as Mr. Quelch believe that he spoke out from a sense of duty was extremely doubtful. Yet, if he allowed this chance to slide, another might never come.

For some time Bulstrode debated the matter in his mind. The sight of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, going into the House, decided him. He followed the Form master in, and knocked at the door of his study a minute after Mr. Quelch had entered it.

"Come in!"

The deep voice of the Remove master made Bulstrode hesitate for a moment. But it was only for a moment. Then, mustering up all his courage, he entered the study.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. Levison Gives a Warning.

"A-A-A-AH!"

"Hullo, hallo, hallo!"

"Ah—ah—aaaaah!"

"My hat, he's at it again!"

"Ah-a-a-a-a-a-h!"

Billy Bunter was certainly at it again. Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent and Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh, were coming into the study for tea, and they found the Owl of the Remove standing with his mouth open, his face as red as a lobster, and a long-drawn "Ah" proceeding from his throat.

"Tea ready?" asked Wharton.

"Ah-a-a-a-a-a-h!"

"Cheese it!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "You must be tired by this time; and if you're not, we are!"

"Ah-a-a-a-a-a-h!"

"Of all the fatheads!" said Nugent.

"A-a-a-a-a-h!"

"The fatheadedness is terrific."

"A-a-a-a-a-h!"

Bob Cherry seized the cheerful ventriloquist by the shoulder and shook him violently. Billy Bunter's "A-a-a-a-h!" ended in a choked gasp.

"I say, Cherry, hold on—I mean, let go! Groo—I wish you wouldn't shake me like that. You might make my spectacles fall off, you know, and if they broke you would have to pay for them."

"Shut up that row, then!"

"It's not a row. It's the ventriloquial drone."

"Well, this isn't a bee-hive. Blessed if it isn't worse than the ventriloquial grunt!" said Bob Cherry, in disgust.

"What are you going to have next?"

"I shall start voice-throwing shortly."

"I shall start Bunter-throwing out of the study if you don't keep a muzzle on that ventriloquial groan!" said Bob Cherry darkly.

"It's not the ventriloquial groan. It's the ventriloquial drone."

"I don't care whether it's a drone or a groan. Why isn't tea ready?"

"Tea! I'm sincerely sorry——"

"Where's the grub?"

"I'm sincerely sorry, but I forgot all about it!"

"You forgot all about it!" exclaimed Nugent. "You forgot all about a meal! Now, don't be funny, Billy!"

"Honour bright, Nugent! I was very busy with my experiments in producing the ventriloquial drone. I have had a lesson from Monsieur Dupont——"

"Monsieur Dupont will get scragged if he starts you making a row like that. What we want is our tea!"

"I'm sincerely sorry——"

"Let's go and have it in hall," said Harry Wharton. "It's close on the school teatime, and I don't mind, for one."

"Oh, I don't mind!" said Nugent. "But I gave Bunter some tin to get some things for tea with!"

"I've got them," said Billy. "They're in the cupboard. But you needn't worry about them. I can manage the lot easily."

"I dare say you could, you young cormorant, but you're not going to have the chance," said Nugent, opening the cupboard. "Good! Cold sausages and ham and jam. We can get our tea ourselves. This will be all right."

"I'll warm up the sausages in a few minutes," said Bunter. "I'll light the fire in a jiffy, and——"

"No, you won't! We'll make this do. Cherry can cut down to the shop and get some ginger-pop instead of tea."

"Right-ho!" said Bob Cherry. "Tin?"

"Give him some tin, somebody!"

"I shall have great pleasurefulness in standing the esteemed shilling," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Good! Cut off, Bob!"

"I'll be back in two ticks!" said Bob.

And he hastened away. Nugent and Wharton brought the eatables out upon the table. Billy Bunter watched them disapprovingly.

"I say, you fellows, much better have the sausages warmed up, with some bacon, and make a decent feed of it," he said.

"Rats!" said Nugent.

"Well, I suppose I may as well go on with my ventriloquial practice," said Bunter.

"I suppose you'd better not."

"Why not?"

"Because you'll very likely die suddenly if you do."

"I say, Nugent——"

"Shut up!"

"Look here, I'm anxious to get on with my lessons. I've had one lesson from Monsieur Dupont, and there's another coming to-morrow. I want to be prepared."

"Go and practise in the box-room, then."

"You chaps will scoff all the tommy while I'm gone, I expect."

"Then stay where you are, and shut up!"

"A-a-a-a-h!"

"Hold your row!"

"A-a-a-a-h!"

Bunter's mouth was open, his expression fixed. He was fairly going again. Nugent picked up a sausage from the dish, stepped quickly towards the amateur ventriloquist, and jammed it into his open mouth.

"A-a-a—ow-w-w-w-wow!"

Bunter gasped and spluttered, and spluttered and gasped.

"O-w-w-ow! What was that? You beast!"

"Only a sausage," grinned Nugent. "You're fond of them, too."

"You beast! You nearly cho-cho-choked me!"

"I'll quite cho-cho-choke you, if you don't stop that ventriloquial groan. We're getting fed up with your ventriloquism!"

"If I keep on I shall soon be able to throw my voice——"

"I wish you'd throw it away and get a new one."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Pass the ham, Inky. You don't eat it. Here's some bananas for you. I wonder how long that ass Cherry is going to be with that gingerbeer?"

"Here I am," said Cherry, entering the study as Nugent was speaking. "Just in time to hear that ass Nugent!"

"Well, you are an ass, you know. Keep an eye on Bunter, will you, and if he starts groaning again, give him something to groan for."

"You bet!"

"I suppose I may as well have tea, then," said Bunter sulkily. "I must say you fellows don't back a chap up much when he's trying to bring credit on the study. Pass the sausages. It will be awfully good fun when I am a full-blown ventriloquist. Pass the ham. I shall be able to make voices come from all sorts of unlikely places, and play all sorts of little games in the class-room. Pass the butter. Then there's the Upper Fourth fellows. I shall be able to get some fun out of Temple, Dabney, & Co. Pass the ginger-pop."

"Why don't you practise the thing in secret, and spring it on us as a sudden surprise?" said Bob Cherry, with a grin.

"That would be much better for all concerned."

"I say, you fellows, speaking of ventriloquism, I've seen that Dupont chap in Friardale, and he's given me a ticket for his performance to-night, as a brother ventriloquist."

"Good! You won't be at home this evening, then?"

"Really, Cherry, that's a rather ungracious way to put it. But, as a matter of fact, I want all you fellows to come."

"On the same ticket?"

"Oh, no!"

"Can you pass us in, on the strength of being a brother ventriloquist?"

"I'm afraid not. You will all have to pay, but you can go in the shilling seats if you like. I want a dozen fellows to come."



"By Jove, I should like an ice!" murmured the perspiring Billy Bunter.

"What for?"

"Well, it's a jolly good show, you know. I'm sure you'll enjoy it. Wingate will give you a pass out if you like."

"Not good enough!" said Nugent.

"But you really must come!" urged Bunter. "As a matter of fact, I've answered for you to Monsieur Dupong."

"Like your check!"

"The cheekfulness is terrific!"

"Well, the fact is, Monsieur Dupong is only giving me the lessons because I've promised to get him some support from Greyfriars," confessed Billy Bunter.

"Aren't you paying him?"

"You know jolly well that I haven't any money, and I can't afford to keep on borrowing it of Wharton at sixty thousand per cent. per annum."

"What about the three bob you had this afternoon?"

"I felt so hungry when I got to Friardale that I thought I had better have a snack. That swallowed up the three bob."

"If it costs you three bob for a snack, I'd like to know how much you'd give for a square meal, said Bob Cherry. "You ought to have brought the tin back to Wharton if

you didn't want it for the purpose he lent it for. I'm afraid you want a lesson in honesty, Billy."

"I'm paying Wharton a high interest——"

"Oh, cheese it. Hallo, Levison!"

Levison came into the study. Harry Wharton made room for him at the table, but he shook his head.

"No, I haven't come to tea. I want to speak to you, Wharton—I suppose I may as well speak before these chaps. Of course there's nothing in it."

"Nothing in what?" asked Harry, in amazement.

"Bulstrode has got hold of a yarn that you are starting in the money-lending line, and lending money out at interest in the Remove."

Harry laughed; but he looked very vexed all the same. "I owe that to you, Billy," he said.

"Oh, I say, Wharton, I tried to keep it a secret, but Bulstrode pulled my ear, you know; but he promised to keep it dark—at least, I asked him to."

"You young ass!" said Harry indignantly. "There's nothing to keep dark!"

"I suppose there's nothing in it, is there?" said Levison, looking surprised. "If I had thought there was, I shouldn't have come here."

"Of course there isn't!" said Harry. "I gave this young ass three shillings—"

"You lent it me, Wharton—"

"Shut up! I gave him three shillings, and he's worked up a yarn that he's going to pay me out of an apocryphal postal order—"

"My postal order that's coming to-morrow morning. I'm giving Wharton six bob out of it in return for the three he lent me—that's cent. per cent.—"

"Of course, it's all humbug about the postal order," said Harry. "I gave him the money. I'm not accountable for the rot he talks about the school."

"I say, Wharton—"

"Oh, I see," said Levison. "I thought it would work out something like that; but Bulstrode is quite certain that he's got something up against you."

Harry Wharton laughed carelessly.

"Well, let him make the most of it."

"I thought I'd drop you a hint—"

"Thank you, Levison. It's kind of you, especially as—"

"Especially as you never expected a decent action from me," said Levison coolly. "You are right. But I thought I'd warn you. I haven't forgotten yet what you did for me on the top of the Black Pike, you know. But that isn't all. Bulstrode is trying to fix it up for somebody to inform Mr. Quelch that you are practising usury."

"My only hat!" said Bob Cherry. "Bulstrode is going the right way to get a prize thick ear, and no mistake."

"I thought I'd tell you, in case anything comes of it," said Levison. "That's all. I fancy Bulstrode means mischief."

And with a nod to the chums of the Remove, he walked out of the study.

The famous four looked at one another, and then at Billy Bunter, very expressively.

"I suppose he ought to be killed," said Bob Cherry, reaching out for the bread-knife in an absent-minded sort of way.

Billy Bunter jumped up so quickly that he knocked his chair over backwards.

"I say, you fellows—I couldn't help Bulstrode knowing—and he said he'd keep it dark. I don't suppose Wharton will get expelled. Look here, Bob Cherry—"

"Hold him, Nugent! I've never killed a pig before, but—"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Catch him, Inky!"

"The catchfulness is terrific."

Billy Bunter dodged, and darted to the door.

"I say, you fellows—" he gasped.

"Collar him!" shouted Bob Cherry, brandishing the knife.

The fat junior gave one terrified blink round, and then scuttled away down the passage like a frightened rabbit. He left the chums of the Remove roaring with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The sound of the laughter echoed down the passage, and reached the ears of Billy Bunter as he paused and clung to the banisters to take breath. But it was some time before the fat junior was reassured.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Manages It.

"I SAY, Wingate!"

The captain of Greyfriars stopped, and looked down upon the fat junior.

"Well?" he said crisply.

"Can you let us have some passes to-night?"

"How many do you want?" asked Wingate, staring.

"Thirteen, please."

The Sixth-Former laughed.

"Why don't you say thirty, Bunter? Are you taking a party out to tea, or what?"

"No; we've had tea," said Bunter. "There's a show in Friardale—a ventriloquist chap is giving it, and I've got a ticket."

"Show up!" said the captain of Greyfriars concisely.

"Oh, really, Wingate; that's almost like doubting my word, you know."

"If you don't show me the ticket—"

"Here it is."

Wingate glanced at the ticket presented to the amateur ventriloquist by Monsieur Dupont, and nodded.

"That's all right! Come to my study, and you can have a pass. Of course, you'll have to be in by bedtime."

"Thanks awfully, Wingate; but I've promised to take a dozen fellows, and I thought you would let us all have passes."

"Well, I don't know about that," said Wingate. "Still,

it's a harmless entertainment enough, and if you're back by nine, I suppose I can stretch a point. Who are the fellows going with you?"

"Wharton, Cherry, Inky, Nugent—"

"Well, who else?"

"Lemme see—Hazeldene, Desmond, Skinner, Russell, Smith, Price—"

"That's only ten."

"And Hoffman and Meunier."

"Good! I suppose Wharton will be responsible for the lot of you; but I shall have to speak to your Form master. Wait for me in my study, and I'll ask Mr. Quelch."

"I say, that's awfully good of you, Wingate."

"Yes, I suppose it is," assented Wingate. "You're not worth the trouble. But it will be something to be rid of thirteen troublesome youngsters for the evening."

"Oh, really, Wingate—"

The captain of Greyfriars walked away.

Bunter stepped into his study, and waited for him rather anxiously.

Wingate came along in five minutes.

"It's all right," he said. "Mr. Quelch has given permission, and here's your pass, signed by both of us. Tell Wharton I hold him responsible for the party."

"Certainly, Wingate."

"And now cut along."

Bunter, who had effected his purpose, cut along willingly enough. He re-entered No. 1 Study, looking just a little nervous, but he was relieved to find that the chums of the Remove looked quite good-tempered, and that the bread-knife had been put away.

"I say, you fellows—"

Bob Cherry held up his hand.

"No more of your ventriloquism, Bunter. The bread-knife's handy."

"I wasn't going to ventriloquise—"

"What do you mean by yarning to Bulstrode about money-lending, you young ass?"

"I didn't yarn to him. He screwed it out of me. But that isn't what I was going to speak about. Are you fellows coming to Dupont's show to-night?"

"Yes, if you treat us," grinned Nugent.

"I'm sincerely sorry that I can't do that. I'm stony, and shall be till my postal order comes, and then that will have to go to Wharton to pay him principal and interest on that loan—"

"Will you get off that?"

"Certainly; but that's the fact, you know. I'm stony, or I'd be willing to treat the lot of you, but as it is, you will have to buy the tickets."

"Not good enough."

"It's a ripping good show—"

"How do you know?"

"Monsieur Dupont says so; and I suppose he ought to know, as he gives it. The fact is, I've promised for you."

"You were a little bit previous, my son."

"Well, of course you needn't come if you don't want to, but Wingate will feel a bit hurt, after all the trouble he's taken."

The famous four stared at Billy Bunter.

"Wingate!" said Harry Wharton. "What on earth has Wingate got to do with it, and how has he taken any trouble in the matter?"

"He's given me a pass for a dozen fellows to go down to the village with me this evening, and if you don't go he'll think you're jolly ungrateful, that's all, and you won't get a pass again in a hurry. He had to go and ask Mr. Quelch for it."

"You—you young villain! Have you asked him for a pass in our names?" exclaimed Nugent.

"Of course I have, or you couldn't have come. Here it is, and if you don't use it Wingate will feel hurt."

Harry Wharton glanced at the pass.

"This is for thirteen fellows."

"Yes, I'm going to take a dozen."

"Have all the others agreed to come?"

"I haven't asked them yet, but I suppose they'll come. If any of them can't afford the bob admission, Inky can treat them, as he has lots of money. That will make it quite simple."

"The simplefulness is terrific."

"You young ass!"

"I don't see why you should call me names for arranging an evening's harmless amusement for you."

ANSWERS

"Well, most of the chaps will be glad to have an evening out, I suppose, but precious few of them will stand a shilling for the show, I imagine."

"I don't think meanness ought to be encouraged—"

"We're not all so rich as you, Billy," remarked Nugent drily. "A shilling is a week's pocket-money to some of us, and we can't all draw ad lib. on Wharton and Inky."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"I suppose we may as well go," said Harry thoughtfully. "Wingate would feel a little bit hurt if we declined his pass, after he's taken so much trouble, and we couldn't explain that it was that young ass making a duffer of himself as usual. It's jolly good of Wingate. Billy ought to have a licking—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"But what about these other fellows—I don't suppose they'll all go—"

"I should have the great pleasurefulness in standing the esteemed treat to my honourable Form-fellows," said the Nabob of Bhanipur. "At the present moment I have received the excellent remittance, and the cashfulness is terrific."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"That will make a difference, I suppose, Inky. Billy had better go round and collect his recruits—"

"Wouldn't it be better for you to do that, Wharton?" suggested Bunter. "The fellows would be more likely to accept your invite than mine. I forgot to mention that Wingate told me to tell you that he regarded you as responsible for the party."

"Anything else you forgot to mention?"

"No, I think not. As you are responsible for the lot, and Inky is going to pay for the admission, I think you fellows might see to the rest of it, while I get in a little ventriloquial practice. A-a-a-a-h!"

"Cheese it!"

"A-a-a-a-a-h!"

"If you a-a-a-a-a again," shouted Bob Cherry, "I'll—"

"Well, the next exercise is to do the ventriloquial drone on a different vowel," said Billy Bunter. "I'll 'oh' next. O-o-o-o-o-h!"

"That's as bad as the other."

"E-e-e-e-e-e!"

"My only hat! Let's get out of this. I shall commit Buntericide if I stay here!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. And the chums of the Remove went out, leaving the victorious ventriloquist in possession of the study, and droning to his heart's content.

It did not take Harry Wharton long to make up the party for Friardale. When the Removites learned that Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was willing to stand the admission, they had no objection to going. In fact, they were delighted. An evening out was not common to members of the Lower Fourth at Greyfriars.

The juniors prepared to leave in good time to allow for the walk to Friardale, and to be early at the ventriloquial entertainment. Billy Bunter was interrupted in the midst of his ventriloquial droning, and dragged away, and the party set out for the village.

"It's a rather long walk," Billy Bunter remarked, as they left the gates of Greyfriars and went down the dusky lane.

"Why didn't you remind me to whistle for a cab?" said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry! I was thinking—"

"Would you like me to carry you?"

"Oh, really—"

"I'll take you by your ankles if you like, and sling you over my back."

Billy Bunter dodged round the other side of the procession, in case Bob Cherry should carry out his obliging offer.

"I don't mean that, Cherry. What I mean is, that we shall be awfully thirsty when we get to the village, and we shall pass Uncle Clegg's shop—"

"Of course we shall pass it," said Skinner. "We sha'n't have time to go in."

"I was thinking that if Inky had any money left, he might stand some ginger-pop."

"Then you'd better leave off thinking," said Harry Wharton. "Shut up, and come on."

"But really, Wharton—"

"Shut up!"

And Bunter did, at last.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bulstrode the Accuser.

"WELL, Bulstrode?"

Mr. Quelch's look was rather disconcerting as he jerked out the words. The master of the Remove had keen eyes, which someone had compared to gimlets, and certainly they seemed to Bulstrode at that moment to go right through him.

The bully of the Remove hesitated, and coloured uneasily.

For the moment he wished that he had not come. But it was too late to retreat now.

"If you please, sir, I have something of very great importance to say—"

"Very well, say it."

"I hope you will do me justice."

"You may depend upon that, Bulstrode."

"It's a rather curious matter, sir. I'm speaking from a sense of duty, but I know that some of the fellows might look on it as sneaking, so—"

"One moment," said Mr. Quelch, interrupting him. "If you are about to tell me some tale about your Form-fellows, Bulstrode, I should prefer not to hear it. I would rather that some fault went unpunished, than that a boy was encouraged in the mean and cowardly pursuits of a tell-tale."

Bulstrode went crimson.

"Oh, if you put it like that, sir—"

"Let me finish. If you are about to tell a tale of that kind, go now with it untold. If you have a matter of any real consequence to speak to me about, I am ready to listen."

"I don't know whether you'd regard lending out money at interest in the Remove as a matter of any consequence."

"What?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, with a start.

"I won't go on, sir, if you think—"

"You must go on now, Bulstrode," said Mr. Quelch sternly. "If any case of that kind has come to your notice, you are doing quite right in acquainting me with it. Tell me the particulars."

And Mr. Quelch laid down his pen, and prepared to listen with evident attention.

"The fact is, sir—"

"Don't beat about the bush, Bulstrode. Come to the point at once. What is the name of the boy who has been borrowing money at interest?"

"Bunter."

"Ah, I am not surprised. And the lender—who must be much worse than the borrower, in a case like this?"

"Wharton."

The Form master started.

"Wharton?"

"Yes, sir."

"Impossible!"

Bulstrode bit his lip.

"Very well, sir, if you think it's impossible, I've no more to say about the matter," he replied, and he turned towards the door.

"Stop! I must hear this out. I must repeat that it seems to me absolutely incredible that a boy of Wharton's character should start such a practice as lending money at interest among his schoolfellows. But the matter will have to be sifted to the bottom now that it has been brought to my notice. I cannot forget, Bulstrode, that it is well known in the school that you are on terms of enmity with Wharton."

"I hope you will do me justice enough, sir, to believe that that is not my reason for speaking to you."

"I hope not, Bulstrode. But the charge seems to me incredible. I should require the strongest proofs. What proofs have you?"

"Bunter told me all about it. He borrowed three shillings of Wharton, and I saw the money. I know he hadn't any an hour before."

"There is nothing in that. Bunter is in the habit, I believe, of borrowing money, and I have punished him for his laxity in such matters already. What reason have you to suppose that Wharton is exacting interest for the loan of the money?"

"I have Bunter's word for it, sir."

"Did Bunter tell you, in so many words, that he was paying Wharton interest for the loan of the three shillings?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the amount of the interest?"

"Cent. per cent."

"I really cannot credit this, Bulstrode. Where could Bunter obtain the money to pay so exorbitant an interest?"

"His people are sending him some money to-morrow, sir. He is to pay six shillings for the three shillings to-morrow morning."

Mr. Quelch's brow darkened.

"If this is true, Bulstrode, Wharton has greatly deceived me, and is not at all the boy I believed him to be. But I shall not believe that without sifting the matter thoroughly. I must hear what both Wharton and Bunter have to say. Bring them to my study at once."

Bulstrode looked dismayed.

"But, sir, I—I—"

"Well, what? Speak out!"

"I thought you'd keep it secret that I had spoken to you, sir."

"How is that possible? I must examine Wharton and Bunter on the matter, or else I cannot get to the truth with any certainty."

"The fellows will call it sneaking. You say yourself that I was right in speaking to you if the thing is true, but whether it's true or not, the chaps in the Remove will call it sneaking, and I shall be sent to Coventry if it gets out."

Mr. Quelch pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"I suppose you are right, Bulstrode. If you have acted from a sense of duty, I should be sorry for any punishment to fall upon you."

"It would be hard on me, sir, when I only spoke out for the—the honour of the Form, sir," said Bulstrode.

"H'm! Yes. Yet I must sift this matter thoroughly."

"Couldn't you do it without mentioning my name, sir? You could have Wharton and Bunter up before you, and —"

"Then surely Bunter will guess that you be—that you gave me the information."

"Well, Bunter will chatter it to everybody in the Form, sir, and he won't be able to guess who gave him away. I know he's told Price already."

"I wish to do you justice, Bulstrode, and I hope it will prove that you have not been actuated by malice towards Wharton in telling me this," said Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, sir!"

"If the charge is true, you have done the whole Form a good service. Such a practice should be stamped out without delay. If it had been any boy but Wharton—but no matter. I shall investigate it thoroughly, you may be sure of that."

Bulstrode was feeling a little scared by this time.

"I—I hope, sir, if it proves to be a mistake, you won't think I—I put it up," he stammered. "I have only Bunter's word to go upon, of course, but I had a circumstantial account from him, and I believed him."

"Perhaps you were very ready to believe anything against Wharton."

"Bunter couldn't have made up a yarn like that, sir. He hasn't sense enough. He always misunderstands and exaggerates, but he never tells outright lies. Any fellow in the Form could tell you that."

Mr. Quelch nodded.

"I have not the slightest doubt that I shall be able to extract the truth from Bunter," he said. "He is not likely to be able to keep a secret from me. If the charge is true, Bunter will be flogged, and Wharton expelled. If it is not true, I shall be guided by circumstances in judging whether you have spoken from a sense of duty, Bulstrode, or whether you have made a false and malicious accusation against a boy whom you dislike."

"If you please, sir, I—"

"Enough now. I will see Wharton and Bunter a little later, so as not to mix your name up in the matter if you are innocent of intending harm. You may go now, Bulstrode."

"Very good, sir."

And the bully of the Remove left the study.

He left Mr. Quelch frowning darkly, with a very worried look on his face. The bully of the Remove caught it as he closed the door, and he grinned savagely as he went down the passage. He quite understood what was passing in the Remove master's mind.

"He doesn't like to find this out about his favourite," murmured Bulstrode. "But it's true—he can't get out of that—it's true. Even if Bunter made up the yarn, he can't blame me for believing it; Price believes it, too. They can't hurt me, however it turns out; and if it turns out as I expect, Wharton will be expelled. Serve him jolly well right, too!"

The worried look deepened on Mr. Quelch's face when he was alone. He took up his pen and dipped it in the ink, and then laid it down again without putting it to paper. His brows were darkly contracted.

"It is impossible," he muttered. "If it is true, I have been greatly deceived in Wharton. I had come to regard him with absolute confidence; to feel that I could rely upon him more than upon any other boy in the Form. If this is true— But I will not allow myself to think so for a moment until I have absolute proof. It would be a great blow to find that I had been deceived in that boy."

And Mr. Quelch strove to dismiss the matter from his mind, but without much success.

"ALIENS AGAINST GREYFRIARS."

THE NINTH CHAPTER

Billy Bunter Improves Monsieur Dupont's Entertainment.

"**H**ERE we are!" said Bob Cherry. The party from Greyfriars halted. The little red-brick building, dignified by the title of Town Hall, was before them. It was lighted up, and several large posters on boards outside notified the public of Friardale that Monsieur Dupont, the famous ventriloquist, who had performed before all the crowned heads of Europe, was giving a marvellous ventriloquial entertainment there for six nights only.

"Doesn't seem to be much of a crowd," said Nugent.

He was right. Besides themselves, there were only two boys and a little girl going in. Friardale folk did not seem to admire ventriloquial entertainments so much as, according to Monsieur Dupont, the Royalties of Europe did.

"I suppose we shall be most of the audience," said Bob Cherry. "Never mind; we'll cheer as if we were on the footer field, and give him a leg up."

"Good idea!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Come in, then," said Skinner. "Inky goes first, as he's doing the paying."

"The pleasuredness of the honourable payfulness is great!"

"Both sides equally pleased, then," grinned Skinner.

"Cut on!"

"I say, you fellows, are you going in the five-shilling seats—"

"You young ass! Do you think Inky is going to spring a small fortune on this show?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Shilling seats are good enough for us, and too good for you!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Cheese it, and come on!"

"But I say, you fellows, Dupont is giving me lessons free of charge because I'm bringing him customers, you know, and the more you pay the better he'll treat me in the matter of the lessons, you know."

"Tat is vat I calls cool," remarked Fritz Hoffmann.

"Inky pays to money, and Punter takes te lessons, ain't it?"

"Well, you see, Hoffy—"

"I zink zat Buntair take ze cake for sheek!" observed Adolphe Meunier. "I agree for vunce viz zat Sherman rottair!"

"Vat you calls me, ain't it?"

"Sherman rottair!"

"I tink tat I gife you te licking—"

"I zink zat no Sherman rottair could lick me!"

"I tink—"

"I zink—"

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry seized the French and German youths just in time to prevent them from closing in deadly combat.

"Cheese it, you foreign fatheads!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Can't you keep from rowing even on a festive occasion like this?"

"I tink—"

"I zink—"

"Oh, shut up with your tinking and zinking!" exclaimed Nugent. "Knock their heads together, you chaps!"

"Right-ho!" said Bob Cherry heartily.

And Hoffmann's head was knocked against Meunier's with a force that elicited a loud howl from both of them.

"Will you shut up now, you asses?"

"Ach! I tink I shute up, ain't it?"

"Ceil! I zink so auss!"

"Come on!" said Harry Wharton. "Got the tickets, Inky?"

"I have the honourfulness to have taken the esteemed tickets."

"Good! I'll settle about ours later. Let's get on, and get good seats."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Don't say anything. I wish you'd learn to throw your voice, and throw it away! Come on, and don't jaw!"

There was no difficulty in getting good seats. The building was small, but the audience by no means sufficed to fill it. The Greyfriars fellows filled up a front row, and made the place look quite lively.

The dull silence of the room was broken by footfalls at intervals, as some young villager came quietly in, and by subdued voices; but the Greyfriars fellows set up a buzz of conversation that enlivened the place a little.

Then the improvised stage was lighted up, and Monsieur Dupont appeared. There was an audience of about fifty or sixty persons, and of these about a dozen were in the expensive seats, and had the indescribable air of people who had come in "on the nod." The rows of sixpenny seats were pretty well patronised.

Monsieur Dupont was in evening-dress, a trifle shiny in

Another School Tale
By FRANK RICHARDS.

NEXT
TUESDAY.

places, evidently having seen good service in its time. His hair was curlier, his moustache blacker, than when Billy Bunter had seen him in the tuckshop.

He had three ventriloquial figures, representing an old man, an old woman, and a child, and he went through the usual ventriloquial entertainment, and greatly entertained the Friardale folk, who were soon in ecstasies over the squeaky remarks of the old woman and the absurd replies of the old man.

"Funny, isn't it?" said Skinner. "As funny as any funeral I've ever been to!"

"Never mind; give him a cackle!" said the good-natured Bob Cherry.

And he set the example by bursting into a formidable roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Greyfriars fellows played up finely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monsieur Dupont cast a quick glance towards the audience, much gratified by that roar of laughter which had followed a little joke which the boys had not observed. Billy Bunter was looking thoughtful.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Don't interrupt the show, Billy!"

"I say, Cherry, I was thinking that it isn't very funny, and that I might be able to help him on a bit. I have been doing some voice-throwing experiments, and I think I could chip in here all right."

"Don't try!"

"But look here, it would be awfully funny, you know, if I made one of the dolls say something the chap didn't mean it to say."

"Now, look here, Billy, you're harmless so long as you're quiet. Keep quiet."

"But really, Cherry——"

"Shut up!"

Billy Bunter shut up, but he did not give up his idea. Like most beginners in any art, he was impatient to get to the end before he had mastered the beginning, and after a day's practice at the ventriloquial drone, he wanted to start throwing his voice.

He had tried several times in the study, and believed that he had succeeded in making his voice come from different parts of the room. He might never have a chance like this again of performing in public. It was evidently a chance not to be lost, in spite of discouragement from envious companions.

"I'll make a bee buzz behind Dupont first, and make him turn round," Bunter muttered to himself; and, getting his vocal chords into the proper position, as near as he could with so little practice, he started.

He certainly made a buzz like a bee, but, to his surprise, the people sitting near him, all looked round, and fixed their eyes on him.

"Stop that row!" said a gentleman in the row behind, leaning over and tapping Billy Bunter on the shoulder. "You're spoiling the show!"

"Eh?"

"Stop that row, I say!"

"What row?"

"That buzzing row!"

Bunter subsided. Even he was feeling a little discouraged. The people near him evidently traced the buzzing to its source.

Bob Cherry gave him a withering look.

"You utter ass! Cheese it, will you?"

"But really, Cherry——"

"If you start again, I'll pinch a lump out of you, so look out!"

"I say, Hoffmann, will you change places with me?"

"I tink tat I do noting of to sort."

"Will you change places with me, Mcunier?"

"I zink not!"

"Quiet there!" said a dozen voices.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up!"

The stout gentleman in the row behind leaned over again, and gave Bunter another tap on the shoulder. Bunter looked round.

"If you don't keep quiet, my lad, I shall have you turned out!" he said warningly. "Just you shut up, and don't spile the show for other folk!"

Under this general discouragement, Bunter was silent for a time, and the entertainment progressed, and approached its conclusion. But Bunter was not repressible for long. As the ventriloquist was completing the entertainment by making the old woman sing a song in a high, falsetto voice, it occurred to Bunter that it would be simply ripping to make the old man sing seconds, and no sooner was the idea in his head than it was acted upon.

"Won't you come home, Bill Bailey?" trilled the old woman. "Won't you come home?"

"Won't you come home?" came in a bass growl from Bunter.

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Unfortunately, it was perfectly evident to everybody that the growl came from the fat junior.

The stout gentleman behind leaned forward, and caught hold of his plump ear. Bunter yelled and scowled.

"Shut up!"

"Turn him out!"

"Silence!"

"Go home!"

"Ow! Leggo—leggo! Ow—wow!"

"You young rip," panted the stout gentleman, "c-makin' of a row and a-spilin' of other folks' pleasure! Young rip!"

Bunter rubbed his ear ruefully.

"Will you keep quiet, now?" muttered Bob Cherry, clapping a hand over his mouth. "Don't move, or I'll warn you!"

"Goo—goo—groo——"

"Quiet!"

"You're—you're—cho-cho-choking me!"

"Well, choke quietly, you unreasonable animal!"

Bob Cherry took a grip on Bunter with his finger and thumb. It only needed a compression to make it a terrible pinch; and Bunter thought he had better keep quiet, and he did.

The entertainment concluded, and Bob Cherry released the fat junior.

"Now you can make a row if you like!" he said.

"Really, Cherry——"

"Oh, cheer, and don't jaw!"

"Bravo! Ha, ha, ha! Bravo!"

The Greyfriars lads yelled and clapped, and made Monsieur Dupont come before the curtain three times before they were satisfied. Then they marched out of the Town Hall, quite pleased with themselves, and leaving Monsieur Dupont very pleased with himself.

"Jolly good!" said Harry Wharton. "Not bad, anyway."

"I say, Wharton, I should have improved the show a lot if I had had a chance——"

"Ah, there you are," said the stout gentleman, stopping and scowling at Billy as he came out, "young rip! What you want is spanking—yes, sir, spanking!"

And he marched on indignantly.

"Shall we spank him?" said Bob Cherry, looking round

"Oh, really, Cherry!"

And Bunter was unusually silent during the walk home to Greyfriars. And even on his arrival his troubles did not end, for a roar of laughter at his expense went up as a crowd of chaps gathered round a bill posted on the playground wall. "Come and hear the howling idiot Bunter ventriloquise at seven sharp," ran the notice. Poor Billy slunk off in high dudgeon.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Bulstrode does not Score.

"WHARTON!"

"Yes, sir."

"Come into my study before you go up to the dormitory."

"Certainly, sir."

"And bring Bunter with you."

Mr. Quelch walked away. Harry Wharton gazed after him, and then looked round at the other Removites.

"Anybody know what's wrong?" he asked.

"Blessed if I do," said Bob Cherry. "The pass was all right, or Gosling wouldn't have let us in without reporting us. But Quelch has his back up over something."

"The upfulness of his honourable back is terrific."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Oh, I know!" exclaimed Nugent. "You remember what Levison said. Quelch is on the track of that mare's nest."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Harry Wharton. "Bulstrode must have given the thing away to him, out of spite."

"I say, you fellows——"

"You fatheaded, ventriloquial chump, you ought to be boiled in oil!" said Bob Cherry wrathfully. "See the mischief you've done with your stupidity."

"It wasn't my fault. If Wharton starts lending money out at interest, he expects to take some risks, I suppose."

"Oh, it's no good talking to him," said Harry, laughing. "I'd better go and speak to Mr. Quelch. Come on, Billy; you're in it, too."

"I say, you fellows, couldn't one of you go instead of me? Quelch is an awfully unreasonable chap, and——"

"Come on!" said Wharton; and, linking his arm in Billy Bunter's, he marched the fat junior off to the Form master's study. He found Mr. Quelch there, waiting for him, with a hard and severe face.

"I am here, sir," said Harry Wharton quietly.
 "A very serious charge has been made against you, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch, coming to the point at once. "If it is true, you will have to leave Greyfriars, and the truth will have to be sifted out."

Harry Wharton's face set a little.
 "I have done nothing to be ashamed of, sir, that I can remember," he said quietly. "I am not afraid of an inquiry."

Mr. Quelch's face cleared a little.
 "I am glad to hear you say so, Wharton, and I may add that I should be very slow indeed to believe such a charge against you. It is altogether foreign to your character, unless I have been strangely deceived in you."

"Thank you, sir. What am I accused of?"
 "Of lending money at interest among the juniors."

Wharton smiled scornfully.
 "If I had done anything of the sort, sir, I should deserve to be expelled from Greyfriars. But I have not."

"From the information that has been given me, it appears that Bunter borrowed three shillings of you, at a high rate of interest. Is that the case, Bunter?"

"I—I—I—"

"Speak to the point, boy."

"I—I don't want to give Wharton away, sir," stammered Billy Bunter.

Mr. Quelch's brow grew very stern.
 "If you do not explain the whole matter instantly, Bunter, I shall send you up to the Head. Now, then!"

"Oh, I—I say—Wharton—"

"Speak out, Billy," said Wharton, half smiling; "I don't mind. Tell Mr. Quelch everything, and don't keep anything back."

"Oh, very well, if you tell me to," said Billy Bunter, much relieved. "You see, sir, I wanted three shillings very badly—I really wanted five, but—"

"Did you borrow three shillings of Wharton?"

"Yes, sir. I—"

"Did you agree to pay him interest for the use of the money?"

"Yes, sir."

"What rate of interest?"

"Sixty thousand per cent. per annum, sir."

"What?"

"Sixty thousand per cent. per annum, sir."

"Bunter, how dare you trifle with me?"

"I—I am not trifling, sir. I—I agreed to pay Wharton interest at the rate of sixty thousand per cent. per annum."

Mr. Quelch turned to Wharton.

"What folly is this, Wharton? Is the whole affair a joke, or did it originate in this boy's incredible stupidity?"

Harry Wharton smiled.

"The latter, sir. If you will allow me to explain—"

"Go on."

"Bunter was in want of money, as he always is—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Another interruption, Bunter, and I shall cane you. Go on, Wharton."

"He asked me to lend him some money. He never pays back a loan—"

"Oh, re— I beg your pardon, sir."

"He never repays a loan, and whenever we give him any money, we know it's not a loan, and that we shall never see it again. That's how it was this time. He always refuses to take the money as a gift, but at the same time he never thinks of repaying it, and more than once he has gassed this silly stuff about paying interest. He doesn't understand, somehow, that a fellow may be short of money, and if a chap is unwilling to lend, he offers interest. But, as a matter of fact, he has never paid interest on a loan in his life—and has never repaid a loan, either, for that matter."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"As for his sixty thousand per cent., that's all rot. He offered me six shillings for the three, in fifteen hours' time."

"That's at the rate of sixty thousand per cent. per annum, sir," ventured Billy Bunter. "I've worked it out, sir."

"Silence!" said Mr. Quelch, who was smiling now.

"Continue, please, Wharton."

"The loan was to be repaid with the interest when his postal-order comes to-morrow morning. Of course I should have refused any interest, if he ever wanted to pay the debt; but, as a matter of fact, I knew he had no postal-order

coming. His postal-order is a standing joke in the Form. That's all, sir. I gave him the money, and this yarn about interest is only his nonsense. He is so stupid that it didn't seem worth while arguing the point with him; but of course I didn't foresee that he would spread such absolute idiocy about the school."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"That is all, sir."

"I need hardly say that I believe every word," said Mr. Quelch. "The case is quite clear. I have learned something lately of Bunter's ways. Now, Bunter, did Wharton agree in actual words to accept interest?"

"Well, no, sir."

"Did he say that he would not accept it?"

"Well, yes."

"Cannot you see what a ludicrous mistake you have made, due entirely to your own obstinate stupidity?"

"Oh, really, sir—"

"I am afraid that, as Wharton says, it is useless to argue with you," said Mr. Quelch. "You may go, Bunter."

"Yes, sir; but—"

"But what?"

"Am I to pay Wharton the sixty thousand per cent.—"

"Leave my study at once!"

And Billy Bunter, feeling rather injured at not having his question answered, left it. Mr. Quelch smiled.

"I am sorry this matter ever arose, Wharton. I see exactly how it was."

"If you require any proof, sir, Bob Cherry was present at the time, and he—"

"I require none. I am sorry that I allowed the absurd matter to occupy my attention for a moment. I rely absolutely upon your word, Wharton."

And Mr. Quelch shook hands cordially with the junior, and Wharton left the study.

A few minutes later Bulstrode was called into the room. The Remove bully came in in an exultant mood, half expecting to hear that Wharton was to be expelled from Greyfriars. He was met by a stern glance that sent his heart into his boots.

"Bulstrode," said Mr. Quelch, "I have questioned Wharton and Bunter, and I find that the whole matter is mere absurd nonsense, due entirely to Bunter's crass stupidity. Wharton has not lent any money at interest, and has never thought of doing such a thing. You were utterly mistaken from beginning to end."

"I—I—I—" stammered Bulstrode.

"I only hope," said Mr. Quelch severely, "that you were honestly mistaken, and not actuated by petty spite and malice. I fear that you are a boy of a jealous and suspicious disposition, Bulstrode. You may go; but I shall remember this."

And Bulstrode went.

Harry Wharton rejoined his chums. He found them looking rather anxious. An interview with an angry Form master was always an uncertain business, and there was no telling exactly how it might turn out. But Harry's look relieved them.

"All right?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Yes, it's all cleared up," said Harry, laughing. "But out of my next week's allowance I think I shall buy a muzzie for Billy."

"I say, you fellows, Quelch says I'm not to pay Wharton that exorbitant interest, and so when my postal-order comes to-morrow I shall be able to stand a feed, followed by a ventriloquial entertainment."

"And the ventriloquial entertainment will be followed by a funeral, if you start giving it in Study No. 1," said Bob Cherry darkly.

That feed did not come off. There was a fresh disappointment about the postal-order; but the chums of the Remove could hardly be said to be disappointed. Bunter proposed giving the ventriloquial entertainment all the same, but the proposition was negatived in the most emphatic manner. Four pairs of hands seized the amateur ventriloquist, and four boots at the same moment helped him along the passage; and Billy Bunter, feeling rather hurt—in a double sense—went up to the box-room to practise the ventriloquial drone.

THE END.

(Another grand tale of Harry Wharton & Co. next week. Order your copy of the "Magnet" Library in advance. One Halfpenny.)

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"ALIENS AGAINST GREYFRIARS."

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GRAND TALE OF ARMY LIFE.



READ THIS FIRST.

On the death of his father (Colonel Sir Harry Dashwood), Jack Dashwood finds to his astonishment that he has been practically disinherited in favour of his Uncle Dominic and Cousin Leonard. He consequently enlists in the 25th Hussars, under the name of Tom Howard, and soon becomes a corporal. Unfortunately for Jack, however, his Cousin Leonard is attached to the 25th as second lieutenant, and, with the aid of a bullying trooper named Sligo, succeeds in getting Jack deprived of his stripes. By the death of his father (Dominic), Lieutenant Dashwood is at first prevented from accompanying the 25th to India; but he subsequently joins the troopship at Port Said, having travelled there overland. While at Port Said he bribes a Greek gambler named Constantinidi to kidnap Trooper Howard, whom he sends ashore on a false errand. Our hero is attacked and stunned, and wakes to find himself a prisoner. The daughter of his captor, however, procures for him a disguise and unlocks his prison door. Having darkened his skin, and donned the disguise, Jack arms himself with a chair-leg, and creeps out on to the stairs, where he pauses to survey the busy scene in the entrance hall below. (Now go on with the story.)

Failure!

Jack hesitated a moment. The outer door was closed, but unguarded; and drawing a deep breath, and keeping his strange weapon behind him, he stepped from his concealment and boldly descended towards freedom.

From the curtained door on the right hand, behind which many people were evidently assembled, from the murmur of voices, Mustapha the Arab came noiselessly forth, and was about to cross into the apartment on the other side.

Jack Dashwood overcame his sudden desire to stop, and continued to descend the stairs. In another moment Mustapha would have passed out of sight, and he have gained the door. When Mustapha looked at him, Jack knew that the critical moment had come. The disguise was a good one, and he had only three more steps to accomplish, when the two yellow trouser stripes which ornamented his Hussar overalls caught the Arab's eye, and Mustapha—a tall, powerful man—swung round and stared hard at him. He gave a hoarse shout in Arabic. Fortunately he was not armed, and though he received a terrific blow from the chair leg, which would have knocked him senseless if he had not put his wrist up to save himself, he tripped Jack up, and, pitching forward, our hero fell heavily to the ground, his head striking against the outer door. In an instant Selim, the Nubian, and half a dozen assistants—some of them French, some of them natives—surrounded the prostrate figure; and though Jack sprang to his feet at a bound, he was surrounded and held by superior force.

Disturbances were too frequent in that den of iniquity for a slight scuffle to disturb Constantinidi, but a second exclamation from Mustapha brought the Greek hurrying out, drawing his revolver as he came.

"What did I tell you?" said Mustapha, in a low voice, with a flash of his black eyes.

And, picking our hero up in his sinewy arms, the Arab ran swiftly upstairs with him, followed by the master of the gambling-house.

Jack could not cry aloud, even if it brought him any succour, for Mustapha compressed his throat in a terrific grip. But he saw the startled face of Irene peering round the curtain of an upper doorway, as the Arab mounted higher and higher until he came to the top landing once more. The whole posse of the domestics streamed up the stairs after them, to Mustapha's great disgust. And, tossing Jack ruthlessly on to the floor, the Arab turned fiercely on the Greek.

"Thrice accursed fool, do you not see that my plan was better than yours?" said Mustapha, his face pale with anger. "My yataghan is below. Besides, we must not do it before these onlookers. But I tell you, Constantinidi, when morning comes I shall kill him!"

And leaving Jack to gather himself up as best he could—for he had been flung with great force upon the floor—the Arab dragged Constantinidi from the room, and shot the heavy bolts on the outer side into their great sockets.

"You cannot even be trusted to fasten the door when you leave it," said the Arab, his beard bristling with fury. "Down, you dogs!" he shouted to the gaping servants.

And then, drawing a heavy curtain over the door, he sat down, cross-legged, with his back against it.

"I swear that door was locked with my own hand!" said Constantinidi, his face as pale as ashes.

"And I swear you lie!" retorted the Arab. "But no matter. Here am I, and here I will stay until morning, and then my knife shall let the life out of this young English boy, who came so near to betraying us!"

Constantinidi knew Mustapha of old, and as the Arab took out a cigarette and lit it, the Greek, with a heavy scowl on his face, went downstairs to continue his interrupted game, in a condition of mind better to be imagined than described.

He knew in his heart that the Arab was right, and that the prisoner must die; but it was very hard to lose the chance of those thousands that he had hoped to draw from the captive's relatives.

Jack, bruised and heartsick, sat once more on the edge of the bed, and buried his face in his hands, all hope having left him. How long he sat there, he never knew; but he was suddenly conscious of a draught of air blowing down upon him, and, looking up to the dome-shaped window in the centre of the ceiling, he was aware of one star shining very brightly indeed.

By daylight the sky had looked dingy enough, for the glass was grim with the dirt of ages; but he knew that the window must be open, and as he rose and came beneath it with a beating heart, looking upwards, Irene's voice again whispered "Hush!"

Jack's hand trembled as he again felt for his matches, and struck one noiselessly on the leg of his overalls, and, holding it up at arm's length, he saw the girl's face peering down at him, very white and set.

"Listen!" she whispered. "They are to kill you in the morning! You must come up here, and lower yourself into the garden. It is your only chance."

And then she began to pay out a knotted cord slowly, until one end of it touched the floor of the room.

Jack thanked her with his eyes and a wave of the hand, not daring to speak, with that terrible janitor only separated from him by the thickness of the door; and then, when she had made the other end fast, without a moment's hesitation our hero went up hand over hand, grasped the ornamental woodwork of the dome, and hung there for a moment to recover his breath. Her lips were close to his ear now, and she could speak without fear.

"Wait until I have broken the glass away. If the smallest piece falls to the floor there, you are undone."

And so well did she accomplish her task that in the space of two minutes Jack's head and shoulders protruded through the glass, and he scrambled on to the roof of the dwelling-house. It was a wide, flat roof, with a parapet running right round. Without wasting a moment on idle words, the girl took him by the arm and led him to the edge.

"There is cord sufficient here. You must get down into

the garden. Mustapha keeps watch outside the door, and there is not a moment to lose, for he will certainly look in upon you from time to time!"

"How can I ever thank you?" said Jack, almost roughly.

"By escaping, and remembering your promise," said the Greek girl, turning away to hide a sigh that broke from her lips. "See, there is a ring here. Make the end of the rope fast, and the rest is easy. I have also brought you this."

And she slipped a beautifully-ornamented dagger into his hand. Jack thrust it between the buttons of his frock-coat, and, tying the rope tightly round the ring, he lowered it over the parapet into the garden below.

It was hazardous work, and a dizzy height; but he clambered over, and began to lower himself down hand over hand, and, looking upwards, the last thing he saw was the beautiful Greek, with her wave of farewell, as she stood there outlined against the star-spangled night.

Before he had gone many yards his foot caught one of the green-painted shutters, and it flapped heavily against the wall with something of a crash. He waited breathlessly, and then continued his descent. Down below him was the silent garden, the kiosque gaily lit with coloured lamps, and from the doorway on the ground floor of the house a bright light streamed down the path.

There was danger there, for the rope would bring him within a yard of the door, and he could hear the tail of it rustling among the shrubs. Still, the garden seemed deserted, and he went on again until, as he reached the last knot but one, and hung some twelve feet above the garden level, a sudden clamour of voices came through the door, and, headed by Constantinidi himself, a party of half a dozen figures passed out and went towards the kiosque.

So afraid was Jack that the light might shine upon his face, and thus betray him, he turned it to the wall, and waited, hanging motionless until their footsteps had died away. Then he slid down the remainder of the rope, and, crouching behind a low bush, drew the dagger from his coat, and grasped it with a determined hand.

The gloom in the garden was so great that he had been unable to take any bearings, but only knew that the canal side was opposite to the back of the house, and that he must make his way across the garden to gain the wall.

What lay between the wall and the canal he could not tell, and Irene had given him no further directions. Perhaps he could find a door. He hoped it might be so, and, crouching down, he stole away, making a wide circuit to avoid the kiosque.

Several times he found himself amongst a thick growth of bushes, and once he stumbled and almost fell down a short flight of stone steps; but at last he reached the boundary wall, looked up, and saw that it was of a great height, and his heart failed him.

There was nothing for it but to try every inch of it with his hands, and this he did, feeling nothing but the plaster with which it had been originally ornamented, and which surface had crumbled and worn away in several places; but nothing like a doorway did he encounter, and his progress brought him nearer and nearer to the gaily-lit kiosque.

From one of those cafe-chantants, some little distance beyond the wall, a barbaric chant arose, and a woman's high-pitched, strident voice singing some popular French ditty. The clash of cymbals and the monotonous beat of a tom-tom drowned the voices in the kiosque, and a dog howled somewhere in the darkness.

Jack had traversed one side of the garden, and had nearly completed the second side. There remained but one length of wall, and then, if he found no opening, he would be at his wit's-end.

He had heard too much of the gambling dens of Port Said to think of approaching the kiosque itself and throwing himself on the mercy of any of its

inmates. That he was more than a match for Constantinidi he did not doubt for a moment; but among the riff-raff that he might find around the octagonal table he would not dare to trust himself, knowing full well that the Greek and the Arab would never let him leave the place alive.

The frockcoat, by its exceeding tightness, hampered him, and he took it off. Then, crouching lower than ever as he came near the kiosque, he continued his groping.

Very dainty was the little ornamental temple in which the gamblers sat. From its domed roof hung a handsome lamp of chased metalwork, burning perfumed oil, and little fairy-lights glowed in little nooks and niches.

A magnificent pink oleander was in full blossom near the doorway, and inside the kiosque itself the visitors reclined on cushions so soft that when once sat down upon, what with the lights and the wine and the soft persuasiveness of Ionides Constantinidi, one was in no hurry to get up again.

Night after night the house was filled with rogues and vagabonds, who brought their pigeons there and plucked them in fine style; but the kiosque in the garden was reserved for special occasions. Thither the Greek had conducted a party of choice spirits, all of them, I am sorry to say, of British nationality.

It is the custom when your vessel lies at Port Said to go ashore and see what are commonly called "the sights." It is always an expensive process, and sometimes one is lucky to get off with one's life; for, in spite of the English occupation of Egypt and the police of the Khedive, Port Said is the very head and centre of lawlessness and rascality.

Now, that excellent troopship the Ganges had set sail from Portsmouth Harbour exactly one week after the departure of the Himalaya. The latter vessel had made a very slow passage, and the Ganges had exceeded all her previous records, so that the trooper that conveyed the 25th Hussars and the other various details had not cleared the Suez when the Ganges came to a full-stop in the basin of Port Said.

But, the pace having been too fast to last, the engine of the Ganges had barely ceased vibrating, when the chief engineer discovered that a very important piston-rod had elected to "go sick," and he proclaimed, moreover, with a rueful face, that it could not be repaired under two days.

The Ganges carried the 1st Battalion of the Ploughshire Regiment, nine hundred and fifty strong, and it was only to be expected when the news of the delay reached the smoking-room that the officers of the Ploughshires elected to go ashore.

They broke up into little parties on the quay, roamed about among the picturesque hubbub of the Franco-Oriental town, dined at the Grand Hotel Continental, and as night came down broke up into smaller parties, and strayed off in quest of adventure.

Constantinidi had encountered one of these little parties, and, aided by several of his villainous touts, had not found it difficult to inveigle them into his den.

There sat on this particular night in the kiosque three young subalterns and a certain Captain Montgomery, who was a born gambler. The wine circulated—rich red wine—and the smoke of their cigarettes curled up in blue wreaths, and floated out into the garden.

They played faro, and lost; they played banker, and lost; they changed the game to poker, and lost very heavily. The three subalterns were disposed to return to the ship, but Captain Montgomery, his mouth shut very hard and a gleam in his blue eyes, was determined to have his revenge, and when he suggested nap, the obliging Mr. Constantinidi immediately fell in with the suggestion.

The beautiful Irene, with a glitter of sequins in her hair, had glided to the door of the kiosque, and stood there looking on, and the three subalterns had risen and bowed to her.

(Another long instalment of this splendid story next week. Please order your copy of the "Magnet" Library in advance.

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