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THE RIVAL ENTERTAINERS.

By
**FRANK
RICHARDS**



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The Rival Entertainers

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of
Harry Wharton and Co.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Rival Notices.

HARRY WHARTON came down the stairs at Greyfriars with a serious expression upon his face and a paper in his hand. He stopped before the notice-board in the hall and looked for a clear spot to pin up his paper.

Two or three juniors immediately gathered round. Harry Wharton was captain of the Remove—the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars—and any notice he pinned up on the board naturally possessed interest for members of his Form.

"Hallo, anything on?" said two or three voices.

"You'll see in a minute."

Harry was looking for a clear spot on the board, holding the paper in his hand. There were a good many notices on the board already—two signed by the Head, one from Mr. Capper to the Upper Fourth, another from Mr. Quelch to the Remove, a First Eleven notice signed by Wingate, and one from the president of the Sixth Form Debating Society, and several others. Wharton found room, however, and stuck up his notice, securing it in its place by a couple of pins.

Then he stepped back, and surveyed it critically.

The notice was written out in Harry's clear, strong hand, and was very concise, like all the notices written by the Remove captain.

The number of fellows before the notice-board increased.

Hazeldene read the paper aloud for the benefit of those who could not get near enough to see.

"NOTICE!

"To members of the Wharton Operatic and Dramatic Society!

"A meeting of the above society is called for seven o'clock precisely, in No. 1 Study, to discuss some important matters in connection with the same.

"Signed,

HARRY WHARTON (President),
ROBERT CHERRY,
FRANK NUGENT,
HURREE JAMSET RAM SINGH,
(Vice-Presidents)."



By

FRANK RICHARDS.

"My hat!" said Skinner. "There must be a lot of vice in that society, to need so many presidents to look after it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, Wharton, isn't anybody but a member of the Operatic Society admitted to the meeting?" asked Stott.

"No; it's a business meeting, you see."

"Oh, what rot!" said Bulstrode. "I don't see why we shouldn't all come. We're all interested in the Operatic Society. We have to listen to the performances."

"I don't see how you would all get into the study," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "It will be a close fit for the members of the society."

And he walked away.

"Rot, I call it!" said Bulstrode, who opposed everything Harry Wharton said and did on principle. "I suppose this means that the Amateur Operatic Society is going on

the warpath again? You remember some time back they gave an opera in French, and a nice muck they made of it."

"We did our best," said Hazeldene, who was a member of the W.O.D.S., and naturally felt called upon to stand up for the Wharton Operatic and Dramatic Society.

"Jolly good best, too," said Bulstrode. "If you're going to start something like that again, all I say is—"

"Piffle!" said Micky Desmond. "Faith, and ye're right, Bulstrode darling. All ye say is howlin' piffle intirely!"

And Desmond walked away with Hazeldene. Some of the Removites giggled, and Bulstrode scowled, and looked inclined to follow the Irish junior with pugilistic intent. But just then a fat junior in an enormous pair of spectacles came along the passage from the junior common-room, and proceeded to select a spot on the board to stick up a paper.

"Hallo, more notices!" said Skinner. "We shall be getting fed up with notices soon. What is your rot about, Bunter?"

Billy Bunter turned his head, and blinked at the questioner through the big glasses which had earned him the nickname of the Owl in the Lower Fourth.

"You're quite mistaken, Skinner. This isn't rot. It's an awfully interesting matter. You'll see."

And he pinned up the notice, his paper overlapping Harry Wharton's, and then stepped back to admire it.

There was a general giggle among the crowd of juniors as they read the notice, written out in the sprawling hand of Billy Bunter.

"NOTICE!"

"A Grand Ventriloquial Entertainment will be given in No. 1 Study in the Remove at a quarter past seven this evening. Admission free to members of the Remove, also to members of other Forms."

"William George Bunter, Esquire, the famous Greyfriars Ventriloquist, will give a series of imitations in his well-known style, also a Grand Ventriloquial Display on the principles of Professor Balmicrumpett."

"Signed, WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER, as above."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bulstrode.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at in that notice," said Bunter, blinking round at the Removites. "You all know that I have been practising ventriloquism for a long time, and it's about time I gave a show, I think."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have kept up the ventriloquial drone till I am perfect, and I have practised throwing my voice till I can throw it about like—like a cricket-ball," said Bunter. "This entertainment will be a ripper, I can tell you."

"What about the other fellows in the study?" grinned Skinner. "Are they going to let you do it?"

"I haven't asked them. I suppose I can do as I like in my own study?"

"Ha, ha! Of course."

"We shall have finished tea, and prep. can be left till afterwards, if they don't do it before seven," said Bunter. "They usually get done before seven now the evenings are drawing in so much. I suppose they will stay to the entertainment?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What the dickens are you cackling about?"

"Oh, nothing," said Bulstrode, wiping his eyes. "Only we'll come to the entertainment, Billy. You can rely on that."

"Yes, rather," said Skinner. "If a fellow can't give a ventriloquial entertainment in his own study, whose study can he give it in?"

"Exactly."

"We'll all come."

"Very good," said Bunter modestly. "It's worth it, I can tell you that. It's not often you get a chance to go to a really first-class ventriloquial entertainment for nothing."

"Right-ho! We'll come!"

"There's no charge for admission; but if you fellows like to stand me a feed afterwards, there would be no objection."

"No need to tell us that, Billy."

"What I mean is, if you have a jolly good entertainment for nothing, it's up to you to stand a good feed for the performer," said Bunter. "It's taken me a long time to really master the famous Balmicrumpett principles, I can tell you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm sincerely sorry the study won't hold the whole Form," said Bunter. "Look here, I'll tell you what I'll do. If you all want to come, I'll ask Quelch to let me have the use of the Form-room for an hour."

"Not a bit of it," said Bulstrode. "We want to come and hear you in No. 1 Study."

"That's it," said Skinner. "That's the cream of the joke—I mean that's the greatest attraction—the fact that it's given in No. 1 Study."

"Blessed if I can see why," said Bunter, blinking in a puzzled way at the grinning Removites. "It's roomy for a study, but it won't hold many fellows, and some of you are not on good terms with Wharton, too. It would be better to have the Form-room."

"Stuff! All who can't get into the study can stand in the passage."

"Yes, certainly; but—"

"Mind, if it's not given in the study nobody will come," said Bulstrode; "that's the great point. It's got to be given in No. 1 Study."

"Certainly, that's all right, if you prefer it. But—"

"That's settled, then! I can answer for the Remove rolling up in its thousands," said Bulstrode. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Remove.

Billy Bunter blinked at them in perplexity.

"You fellows look as if you had a joke on," he said, "but I'm blessed if I can see it."

"That's all right, Billy. Don't bother! We'll come."

"Yes, rather."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mind you're ready at sharp time," said Bulstrode. "We shall be there."

"Oh, certainly."

And Billy Bunter, very pleased indeed with the enthusiastic reception his announcement had met with, but a little puzzled by the merriment of the Removites, toddled away. The juniors went off with a fresh yell of laughter.

"Oh, my only Aunt Sempronia!" gasped Bulstrode. "This will be rich! Bunter hasn't the faintest idea that Wharton is holding a meeting of the Dramatic Society in the study at the same time this evening."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He was drawing up his precious notice in the common-room while Wharton was drawing up his upstairs," grinned Skinner.

"We're going," said Bulstrode. "We've a right to accept Billy Bunter's invitation if we like. What?"

"Yes, rather."

"If it interferes with the harmony of the Amateur Operatic Society that's not our fault."

"Certainly not! Ha, ha!"

"We'll all go; and those that can't get in can stand in the passage and yell."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Removites yelled again over the idea. It was pretty certain that the meeting of the Wharton Amateur Dramatic and Operatic Society would be subject to interruptions that evening.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Cross-purposes.

BILLY BUNTER entered No. 1 Study, the room he shared with the Famous Four—Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Singh. The four chums of the Remove were there, busy with their preparation. Billy Bunter looked at them, and then at the fire, which was nearly out.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Don't interrupt, Billy, we're busy!"

"But I say, you fellows, what price tea?"

"Go and eat coke!" said Nugent.

"Yes, but—"

"Look here," said Harry Wharton, "we've got to get our prep. done before tea, so we shall have to mug it up as quickly as possible. Tea's got to be over by seven, so as to have the study clear for the fellows to come."

"Oh, that's all right," said Bunter, looking very pleased. As he was ignorant of the fact that a meeting of the Operatic Society had been called for that evening in the study, he could only imagine that Wharton was referring to the forthcoming ventriloquial entertainment. "I'm glad to see you are taking an interest in the matter."

Wharton stared at him.

"Eh—what?"

"I say I'm glad to see you taking an interest in the matter."

"Off your rocker?" said Harry pleasantly. "I suppose I should take as much interest in the matter as anybody else? What are you driving at?"

"Oh, keep your wool on, Wharton, and don't take me up so sharply," said Bunter. "You never took so much interest in the matter before."

"Oh, he's dotty," said Nugent. "Don't jaw, old chap, I want to get through."

"The jawfulness of the honourable Bunter is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The shutupfulness would be the boonful blessing."

"But I say, you fellows—"

"Quiet!" roared Bob Cherry. "Another word, and I'll brain you with a ruler!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

Bob Cherry jumped up and grasped an ebony ruler. Billy Bunter dodged round the table.

"I say, you fellows, I was only going to say that I've done my prep., and I'll get tea while you're finishing yours, if you like."

"Oh, then I won't brain you," said Bob Cherry, sitting down. "It's a good idea, but mind you don't jaw."

"Oh, really—"

"Not a word!" roared Bob Cherry. "Dry up, you young gramophone!"

And Billy Bunter dried up at last. He proceeded to get tea, making up the fire and jamming the kettle down upon it, warming the teapot, and cleaning out the fryingpan with the fly-leaf of a Latin grammar. Then he produced the provisions from the cupboard, and eyed them rather doubtfully.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up!"

"But, I say, this is rather important, you know. There's

only a few sausages here, and one gammon rasher; and that's not much between five fellows—"

"Go and eat coke, then, and leave only four."

"Don't be a beast, Cherry. I'm not thinking about myself. The gammon rasher and three of the sausages will be enough for me; but that will leave only two sausages for you fellows, and you'll be hungry."

"Are you going to shut up while we get our work done?" howled Bob Cherry.

Oh, really, Cherry! I'm only speaking for your sakes. If you like, I'll run down to the tuckshop now and get in some more grub. There's plenty of time."

"Silence, villain!"

"Yes, but—"

Bob Cherry felt for the ruler, and Billy Bunter hastily backed away.

"Oh, all right, it's just as you like. I was only thinking of you fellows. I'll cook these, and we'll make 'em do; but you'll be hungry. Don't say I didn't warn you."

And Bunter jammed the fryingpan on the fire with a righteous air.

The smell of cooking soon filled the study, and a very appetising smell it was to the chums of the Remove, who were very hungry. They had put off the usual tea-time to get their preparation finished first. The work was finished about the same time as the cooking, and the Famous Four put their books away.

"Well, that niffs all right," said Nugent. "Nearly ready, Billy?"

"Yes, it's quite done," said Bunter. "But I warned you that there wasn't enough to go round, you fellows."

"We'll make it do. Inky doesn't eat bacon or pork sausages."

"There's nothing for Inky but bread and jam—"

"The jamfulness is excellent," said Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh, "and the esteemed bread is the most excellent of profuseness."

"Glad you like it," said Bunter. "I like something solid myself. I'm not greedy, but I do like a lot. There you are, you fellows; it's done, and precious little it is. When I've had my whack there won't be much for you."

"Only we're going to have our whack first," chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Serve it up, you young cannibal. Why, where are the rest of the sausages? There were five, and now there are only three."

Billy Bunter assumed an injured expression.

"I suppose I was entitled to have a snack, as I was doing the cooking?" he said. "I have to keep up my strength. I've got a delicate constitution, and any sort of labour wears me down, unless I am kept up by nourishing food. It's a fortunate thing I like sausages."

"You young cormorant! What are you doing now?"

"Serving myself first. I don't mean to be rude, but in a case like this, where there isn't enough to go round, a fellow has to be careful. You see, if I don't get enough I may break down to-night."

And Billy Bunter served the whole of the bacon and one of the sausages upon his plate, and left two sausages for the three hungry juniors. Hurree Singh was already starting on bread-and-jam. The others glared at Billy Bunter with killing looks. Bob Cherry jerked his plate away just as he was going to start.

"Oh, I say, Cherry—"

Bob Cherry calmly removed the greater part of the provisions from the plate, and pushed it back to Bunter with a quarter of a sausage and a fragment of bacon on it.

Bunter blinked at it in dismay and indignation.

"There you are, you young cannibal," said Bob Cherry. "You've had your whack already, as a matter of fact. You want killing sometimes."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Another word, and I'll clear the lot off!" roared Bob.

Bunter relapsed into indignant silence. Bob Cherry served round the recovered provisions, and with the aid of bread the chums of the Remove made a pretty good meal. There was more bread and jam to follow, and the indignant Bunter came out pretty strong in that direction.

"Well, that was not so bad!" said Bob Cherry, as he set down his tea-cup.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Getting near time to clear up," said Nugent.

"I say, you fellows, I'm hungry."

"Go and eat tintacks, then."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Time's up!" said Bob Cherry. "You needn't mind leaving a ghost of a smell of a strawberry in the jampot, Billy; it will keep till to-morrow. Get the table cleared, and let's get the room tidy."

"There's still time to cut down to the tuckshop and get something."

"Well, who's preventing you? Cut off!"

"I should want some money. I've been disappointed about a postal order, and I'm out of cash."

"Then you'll be disappointed about a gorge, too. Take that teapot away!"

"Look here, you wouldn't like me to break down to-night, I suppose?"

"Can't see that it would matter much. You won't have much to do with the show, anyway."

Bunter blinked in indignant amazement at the speaker.

"What do you mean? I shall be the central figure, I suppose?"

"Then you suppose a jolly lot; and it will end in supposition," said Bob Cherry. "Seems to me you're getting a bigger ass than ever lately, Bunt."

"If I were to break down owing to physical exhaustion brought on by hunger, the results might be serious. I might have a fit—"

"If you start having fits in this study, you'll go out on your neck. I warn you of that in advance. Now shut up, and lend a hand clearing up the place."

"Come on, there's no time to lose," said Harry Wharton. "I'll open the window, too—can't have a meeting-room niffing of sausages and bacon."

"Good!" said Bunter. "I'm glad—very glad—to see you fellows taking such an interest in the matter. It shows that you are improving in intelligence."

"Blessed if I know what he's driving at," remarked Nugent. "It doesn't matter, anyway. Now the place looks a bit more tidy."

The tea-things had been cleared away into the cupboard, and all signs of the feed put out of sight. The open window let a cool draught of November air into the room. The table was pushed back to the wall, and Bob Cherry industriously swept up the crumbs, and dropped the hand-broom into a corner. Then he glanced round the study with considerable satisfaction.

"All right now, Wharton?"

"Yes, rather!" said Harry, glancing at his watch. "And it's time for them to come." It was just seven.

"Not quite," said Bunter, looking at his watch. "Another quarter of an hour yet, Wharton."

"Stuff! I put seven on the notice."

"Did you?" said Bunter, staring. "Like your jolly cheek, I must say."

"Eh—what?"

"I put a quarter-past seven—"

Wharton stared at the fat junior in amazement.

"Do you mean to say that you put a quarter-past seven on the notice calling the meeting?" he demanded.

"Certainly!"

"You cheeky young beggar—"

"I thought it would give ample time to get tea over, you see. I didn't know there was going to be such a measly feed," said Bunter disparagingly.

Wharton looked greatly inclined to take the fat junior by his fat ear. But just then there came a thump at the door.

"Here they are!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

The door opened, and the ruddy face of Micky Desmond presented itself, with Hazeldene just behind. They came into the study, and two or three other other fellows followed.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Slight Misunderstanding.

HARRY WHARTON gave the Removites a cheery smile and nod. Billy Bunter stared at them in astonishment.

"You're on time," said Wharton. "Glad to see you punctual. Come in, all of you!"

"I say, you fellows, you're early!" exclaimed Billy Bunter.

"Faith, and it's seven," said Desmond.

"One minute past," remarked Hazeldene.

"Yes, but the notice said a quarter-past—"

"Rats! The notice said seven o'clock."

"Faith, and it did intirely."

"Seven o'clock was on the notice," said Morgan; "plain as your face."

"Oh, that's rot, you know! I'm not ready yet."

"Not ready?" said Hazeldene.

"Not ready!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "What the dickens do you mean, you young ass? You're taking a back seat in this show!"

Billy Bunter blinked at him.

"Oh, really, Cherry, I don't see how you make that out. I suppose my services could hardly be dispensed with this evening, could they?"

"I don't see why not."

"Well, it would be a case of Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark left out, I rather think. An entertainment without the entertainer—"

"But this isn't going to be an entertainment," said Harry Wharton, in perplexity. "What are you driving at?"

"Oh, you can have your own opinion about that," said Billy Bunter, with dignity. "You may not consider it in the light of an entertainment. Other fellows do."

"Look here, Billy—"

"Anyway, just wait till it's fairly going before you pass opinions on it," said Billy Bunter. "I'm only asking for a fair show—a fair field and no favour."

"Off his rocker, I suppose!" remarked Hazeldene. "Is he often taken like that?"

"The effect of overfeeding, perhaps," suggested Elliott. "You know he had to be put in the sanatorium last Saturday as the result of overfeeding—"

"It wasn't!" yelled Bunter. "I had a cold—a fearful cold—and I couldn't feed it in time. If I had been able to feed my cold it would have been all right."

"I heard that it was overfeeding," said Elliott, with a shake of the head. "A lot of the fellows were saying so."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, this is where you take a back seat, Billy," said Bob Cherry. "Do shut up, old chap! We ought to be getting to business. Here come some more of the chaps!"

Trevor and Gaunt entered the study.

"Now we're all here—" began Harry Wharton.

"Nothing of the sort!" said Billy Bunter. "There's a jolly lot more to come, and all who can't come into the study can stand in the passage. I wish they hadn't come before time, though. I meant to borrow some chairs, and shove them in here. Now all the audience will have to stand."

"The—the audience!" said Harry Wharton, looking at Bunter.

"Yes. It would have been better to rig up seats. That's why I allowed a little more time. But it can't be helped now; and perhaps, after all, there will be more room standing. Stand close there, you fellows, in rows, and leave the door clear for the rest to come in."

The Removites exchanged glances. Billy Bunter had some funny ways, but it did really seem to them that he was "off his rocker" at last. Ignorant of the announcement he had put up of the forthcoming ventriloquial entertainment, the chums of the Remove naturally had not the faintest idea of what he was driving at. They could only stare at him in blank wonder.

"Is this a little joke?" asked Gaunt. "If not, what does it mean?"

"Oh, Billy's gone right off at last, that's all!" said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Then what do you mean, you young owl?"

"You know perfectly well what I mean, Cherry. Get closer, you chaps, and stand in a row, and leave the door free."

"Faith, and why should we stand in a row?"

"To take up less room, of course."

"And phwat for would we be taking up less room?"

"To give the other chaps a chance. Some of them will have to stand in the passage, but we must make room for as many as possible in the study."

Harry Wharton dropped his hand, kindly enough, on Billy Bunter's shoulder.

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"It's not Nugent," said Harry; "it's I. You had better go and sit down, Billy—"

"I really wish you wouldn't bother me now I'm busy, Wharton. We must make room for some of the other fellows."

"There are no other fellows to come."

"Yes, there are. Bulstrode told me he was coming, and Skinner, and Stott, and Russell, and, I think, Levison. Most of the Form will be here."

"But Bulstrode and his lot won't come. They don't belong to the Operatic Society."

"What about that? I'm not talking about the Operatic Society. We're going to fill the study as full as it will hold, and the rest can stand in the passage."

"We're going to do nothing of the sort! Look here, Billy—"

"Now, look here, Wharton—"

"I tell you—"

"I tell you, I must be allowed to run my own show my own way," said Bunter firmly. "I'm very glad of any assistance from you fellows, but I can't have you interfering. I want that understood once and for all."

Wharton could only stare. Bob Cherry tapped his forehead significantly.

"Fairly off his onion!" murmured Nugent.

"The off-fulness of his honourable onion is terrific!"

"Ah, here they come!" exclaimed Billy Bunter, as footsteps were heard in the passage. "It's nearly a quarter-past. Now, make room, you fellows!"

Bulstrode looked in at the open door. Behind him were Skinner and Stott, Russell and Levison, and a crowd of the Remove, all grinning hugely.

"Come in!" said Billy Bunter. "Crowd up there, you fellows. I say, make room. I'm not quite ready, Bulstrode, but you won't mind waiting a bit?"

"Certainly not!" said Bulstrode.

"Pleased!" grinned Skinner.

"Look here," exclaimed Harry Wharton sharply, "you fellows can't come in here! There's no room, for one thing, and it's a private meeting, for another!"

"Oh, really, Wharton, it's nothing of the sort!"

"Hold your tongue, Billy, you young ass!"

"I'm not going to hold my tongue! I know there's a lot of jealousy in this study, but I'm not going to be influenced by that. I can't help having more brains than any other fellow in the Remove, and I don't think it's nice of you fellows to get ratty about it."

"Clean off!" murmured Nugent.

"Quite right!" grinned Bulstrode. "It's a case of jealousy, and my advice to you, Bunter, is to go ahead."

"That's what I'm going to do, Bulstrode. Blessed if I can see why Wharton wants to keep fellows away from my entertainment—"

"Are you absolutely dotty, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"You can't come in here, Bulstrode," said Wharton. "This is a private meeting of the Operatic Society, and I've warned you that only members were admitted."

"Blow your old Operatic Society!" said Bulstrode.

"We haven't come to your meeting. We've come to Bunter's ventriloquial entertainment."

"To—to what?"

"Bunter's ventriloquial entertainment. Come in, you fellows!"

And the chuckling Removites crowded in. The occupants of the study were too amazed to make a movement to stop them.

"Bunter, do you mean to say that you are giving a ventriloquial entertainment?"

"Oh, I say, Wharton, don't pretend you didn't know! Haven't you fellows been helping me to clear up the study ready for the show?"

"My—my only hat!" gasped Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry.

Bunter blinked at the chums of the Remove in amazement.

"What the dickens are you cackling at now? Nothing surprising in my giving a ventriloquial entertainment, is there?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Famous Four, unable to restrain their merriment at the utter absurdity of the situation, yelled with laughter.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter is Given a Chance.

BILLY BUNTER blinked round him in surprise and indignation. He could see nothing to laugh at himself.

"Are you fellows off your silly rockers?" he inquired.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, you'll be the death of me!" sobbed Bob Cherry.

"The fact is, Billy—ha, ha, ha!—the fact is," said Nugent—

"the fact is— Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wharton. "The fact is, Billy, that the Wharton Operatic Society is meeting in this study at seven—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"And I put a notice up on the board to that effect, and—"

"Well, I can't help that. I put a notice up to the effect that I was going to give a ventriloquial entertainment at a quarter-past seven—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Your rotten old meeting is of no consequence! I am going to give a really instructive and entertaining ventriloquial show. I am going to give imitations, and also make my voice appear to come from various quarters, in the style of Professor Balmicrumpett. Of course, you fellows will be willing to give up your meeting?"

"Yes, I don't think!" remarked Nugent.

"But I can't very well put off my ventriloquial entertainment!" expostulated Billy Bunter. "Here's about half the Form come to see it."

This statement was quite correct. The study was crammed, the passage outside was blocked, and fresh footsteps could be heard up and down the corridor. More than half the Remove were backing up Bulstrode & Co. in this joke at the expense of the Famous Four.

"I can't disappoint all these fellows, now, can I?" said Billy Bunter. "You chaps will have to postpone your meeting."

"Oh, they can hold the meeting along with the ventriloquial entertainment," said Bulstrode, grinning.

"Good wheeze!" said Skinner heartily.

"Oh, really, Bulstrode—"

"Anyway, we're not going to miss the show we've come to see!"

"Not much!" roared twenty voices. "Get on with the entertainment!"

Harry Wharton looked vexed. He knew perfectly well that not a single member of the Remove wanted to hear Billy Bunter ventriloquise, and that they were only pulling the fat junior's leg.

"Look here, you fellows," he exclaimed, "a joke's a joke, and you've had your fun. Now clear out, and let us hold our meeting!"

"I say, you fellows, don't go; I'm just going to begin."

"Look here, Billy—"

"Now, look here, Wharton, don't you be so beastly selfish!" said Billy Bunter, in a tone of patient remonstrance. "Here's half a Form come to hear me give an entertainment, and with my wonderful abilities as a ventriloquist I can make them happy for an hour, and you want to spoil the whole show just for the sake of holding a rotten meeting. I must say, I'm surprised at you, Wharton—I am really!"

"You young ass—"

"It's no good calling me names; that won't alter facts. Gentlemen of the Remove, I am glad to see you in this study on the occasion of my first public performance as a ventriloquist—"

"Get out, you fellows!"

"Rats! Let Bunter go on! Bravo, Bunter!"

"Go it, Bunter!"

"On the ball, Porpoise!"

"Stick to it, Owl!"

"Gentlemen of the Remove—"

"Hear, hear!"

"I will now proceed to make my voice come from the chimney—"

"You will now proceed to shut up, or else you'll proceed out of this study on your neck, you young owl!" said Bob Cherry, shaking the amateur ventriloquist by the shoulder.

"Leggo, Cherry! You disturb my nerves when you shake me, and you might make my glasses fall off, and if they get broken you'll have to pay for them."

"Are you going to shut up?"

"Certainly not! I'm sincerely sorry, Cherry, but, under the circumstances, I can't very well give in, with twenty fellows eagerly expecting my splendid entertainment—"

Harry Wharton laughed. The Removites cheered Bunter. The members of the Operatic Society were half laughing, half vexed. The meeting and the important discussion certainly could not proceed under present conditions. Neither could the ventriloquial entertainment; but nobody besides the ventriloquist wanted that to proceed.

"Go it, Bunter!" said Skinner encouragingly. "You were going to make your voice proceed up the chimney—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, I said from the chimney, Skinner—"

"Bunter, old man, you're interrupting the meeting—"

"Wharton, old chap, you're spoiling the show—"

"I'll tell you what," said Wharton. "Go and give the ventriloquial show in one of the class-rooms. There's plenty of room there for all your audience."

"Well, I don't mind—"

"But I do!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "We've come here, and here we're going to stop. Bunter, we're waiting for you to begin."

"Faith, and sure we're waiting for him to leave off—"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Go it, Owl!"

The Remove roared encouragement. Wharton began to look worried. There certainly wasn't much chance of the operatic meeting getting to business. The Remove were enjoying the rag too much to leave it off.

"I will now proceed to make my voice proceed from—"

"The proceedfulness is terrific."

The Famous Four looked at one another. They were inclined to eject the intruders by main force, and the operatic society would willingly have backed them up. But half the Form or more were in it, and Bulstrode & Co. would have been glad of a chance to start wrecking the study. A brilliant idea flashed into Nugent's mind, and he whispered quickly to Wharton:

"HARRY WHARTON'S DAY OUT."

EVERY
TUESDAY, **The "Magnet"** ONE
LIBRARY. HALFPENNY.

"Let him go ahead; that will shift 'em!"

Wharton started. It was a simple plan—so simple that it had not occurred to him. It was certain that nothing short of wild horses would drag anybody in the Remove to a ventriloquial entertainment given by Billy Bunter. Bulstrode and his backers were only "rotting," and Wharton immediately realised that the quickest way to get rid of them was to give Bunter his head, so to speak.

"Very well," said Harry Wharton quietly, "the meeting of the Operatic Society is postponed till after the ventriloquial entertainment."

"Oh, really, Wharton, that's jolly decent of you! Of course, your old meeting doesn't amount to much, compared with my entertainment, but I never expected you to see it in that light. Gentlemen of the Remove—"

"Hear, hear!"

"I will now proceed with the ventriloquial entertainment. Wharton, if you care to act as chairman for the evening I shall be glad."

"Certainly!" said Harry, laughing. "I believe a chairman's duty is to introduce the performer. Gentlemen of the Remove, this fat animal is a fathead you know well—"

"Oh, really, Wharton!"

"At various times, when he is not eating—which is but seldom—he emits all sorts of curious grunts and wheezes from his throat, and these curious sounds he designates as ventriloquism—"

"I say, Wharton—"

"He is now about to proceed to make an ass of himself, as usual. Gentlemen are at liberty to laugh as much as they like, but they must not throw things. This is where you start, Bunter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I say, you fellows, it's no good taking any notice of what chaps in this study say. They are actuated by jealousy of my wonderful abilities. I will now proceed to make my voice proceed from the window. The first item is to hold a conversation with a chap supposed to be outside the window. Now, then, I begin, and the supposed chap answers. Bill! I say, Bill, are you there?"

Bunter paused, and then squeaked "Yes," which was supposed to be the reply of the supposed Bill outside the window. But as it was perfectly plain to everybody present that it was Bunter who squeaked, the experiment could not be called exactly a success.

"Having made the supposed person answer—"

"Well, why don't you?" asked Skinner.

"Why don't I what?"

"Make the supposed person answer."

"I have; I made him say 'Yes.'"

"But it was you who said 'Yes.'"

"Yes, I know I said 'Yes,' but I said it in a ventriloquial voice, and made it appear to come from outside the window."

"That you jolly well didn't," said Stott. "It came from you plain enough."

"I say, Stott, old man, you oughtn't to be so stupid as that. Any reasonable chap will admit that the voice appeared to come from the window."

"It appeared to come from a fat porpoise," said Bulstrode.

"I've had enough of this giddy entertainment."

"I say, Bulstrode, don't go yet. I—"

"Oh, rats!" said Bulstrode; and he left the study, followed by most of the others. Billy Bunter blinked round in dismay at his fast diminishing audience.

"Here, hold on, you fellows! I haven't started yet! I will now proceed to continue my conversation with the supposed person outside the window. Bill! I say, Bill, have you been there long?"

"I've been 'ere an hour!" squeaked the reply.

"There, I think that was pretty good," said Bunter. "The deception was splendid! Wouldn't you have sworn that the voice came from outside the window, Skinner?"

"Not much! I could see it was you squeaking."

"Oh, really, Skinner! I say, Wharton, wouldn't you have sworn it was Bill speaking outside the window?"

"No, I hardly think so," said Harry, laughing.

"Oh, really, Wharton! I say, Cherry, wouldn't you have sworn—"

"Certainly not!" said Bob Cherry. "I have been brought up very carefully, and I never swear."

"Oh, really, Cherry! I say, you fellows, where are you going? I haven't fairly started yet. Bless my boots, they're all gone! This is really too bad of you, Wharton!"

"Of me?" said Harry, staring.

"Yes, it was owing to the fuss you made that they haven't stayed to listen to my ventriloquial entertainment. It was really too bad!"

"You young ass!" said Nugent. "Couldn't you see that

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they were only rotting, and they came here only to rag the operatic meeting?"

"Of course, that's all rot! It was Wharton's fault!"

"Well, they're gone, anyway," said Harry Wharton, closing the door. "The ventriloquial entertainment is over, and we can get to business."

"I say, hold on, Wharton. I regard you fellows as being much more intellectual than the rest of the Remove—"

"Thank you! Now, to get to business—"

"Oh, do let me finish—"

"By Jove, I wish you would!"

"Well, then, I regard you fellows as being more intellectual than the rest of the Remove, and really as forming a select audience, and upon the whole I'd rather give you a ventriloquial entertainment by yourselves than with all that crowd."

"We couldn't think of troubling you, Billy—"

"No trouble at all. I was prepared to ventriloquise for an hour, and it won't hurt me to go on. I will now proceed to make my voice proceed from— What are you picking up that inkpot for, Bob Cherry?"

"It's to pour down your neck if you don't immediately shut up."

"But I'm going to give a ventriloquial—"

"No fear! Ventriloquism is off!"

"But I say, you fellows—"

"Are you going to shut up, or will you have the ink down the back of your silly neck?" roared Bob Cherry.

"Well, if you put it like that, Cherry," said Billy Bunter, dodging away in alarm, "I don't mind putting the ventriloquism off to another occasion."

"You'd better!" granted Bob Cherry. And the Amateur Operatic Society at last got to business.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Looking Ahead.

"GENTLEMEN of the Operatic Society—"

"Hear, hear!" said the Operatic Society, glad to get to business at last.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up! Keep that inkpot ready, Bob, and pour it over Bunter if he speaks again."

"Certainly! With great pleasure!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—ow—keep off—I'll shut up!"

"Gentlemen of the Operatic Society, you are called together to discuss a matter of some importance to the Society and the school in general—"

"Hear, hear!"

"The merry tide of Christmas is now approaching—"

"Is it?" said Hazeldene. "I thought we were in November. My mistake, I suppose."

"I suppose Christmas is approaching in November, isn't it?"

"Well, yes. I suppose it's approaching in January, if you come to that."

"Well, I don't come to that," said the president of the Operatic Society. "What I want to say is, that Christmas is approaching—"

"Faith, and you've said that before!"

"Order!"

"Christmas is approaching," said Harry Wharton. "It may be even a couple of months or so to Christmas, but what of that? We haven't had any snow yet, but the Christmas numbers are already beginning to come out—"

"Well, the Christmas numbers always come out just after midsummer!" granted Gaunt.

"Anyway, Christmas is approaching. That can't be denied."

"We'll take that for granted, look you," said Morgan. "Get on with the washing. I think the whole meeting agrees that Christmas is approaching."

"Passed unanimously!" said Trevor.

"Very well, then. The question is, with Christmas fast approaching—"

"Oh, come," said Elliott, "it isn't approaching any faster than it has been all through the year, you know."

"If the honourable member wants to argue about the speed with which Christmas is approaching," said the president, in a withering tone, "he can take my place, and I will step aside till he is finished."

"Oh, get on with the washing!" said Elliott.

"Christmas being admitted to be fast approaching, it behoves—"

"Good word, that!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"It behoves the Junior Operatic Society to be up and doing. The Sixth Form Dramatic Society is up and doing. They've got some rot they're going to act just before breaking-up for the Christmas holidays—"

"We know them," said Nugent. "Same old piffle! The

seniors all go and see it done out of politeness, and the fags go in case they should be licked for not going."

"Faith, and ye're right!"

"Still, the Sixth are up and doing," said the orator. "It behoves the Operatic Society to be up and doing, too. If we give a better entertainment than the Sixth—"

"Not much doubt on that point."

"Then all the more kudos to the Remove."

"The kudosfulness will be terrific."

"We have given entertainments before," said Harry Wharton, warming to his subject. "We have given an entertainment in a foreign language, which has never before been done at Greyfriars—"

"Oh, back-pedal!" said Morgan. "What about the Greek play the seniors give every year?"

"A whole act from Sophocles or Euripides," said Elliott.

"Yes, and enough to make Sophocles and Euripides turn in their graves," said Wharton. "I said entertainment. I suppose that the wildest stretch of the imagination could not regard a Greek play by the Sixth in the light of an entertainment."

"Ha, ha! No!"

"As for the act from a French comedy, I can only say that if Racine or Moliere saw it done, Racine or Moliere would have the pip."

"The pipfulness would be terrific."

"Therefore, we can regard ourselves as the only individuals who have given what can properly be called an entertainment in a foreign tongue," said Harry Wharton victoriously. "We gave a representation of 'Carmen,' the immortal opera by Georges Bizet. It was a jolly big undertaking for juniors."

"And it was very entertaining," said Bob Cherry.

"Well, it is true that something went wrong, and we had to make it a comic instead of a tragic entertainment," admitted Wharton. "But it was an ambitious scheme, and it reflected credit on the Operatic Society."

"Hear, hear!"

"I'm not thinking of giving anything quite so big as that again. Besides, what we want to give is something in the nature of a Christmas entertainment. It may be early yet to think of it, certainly, but there will be a lot of rehearsing wanted, if we're to be ready to give the show before breaking up."

"Good! Nothing like being early birds," said Elliott. "I agree with you."

"Hear, hear!"

"That point being settled," said Wharton. "We've got to discuss the matter, and decide what we're going to give. I think, for the present, we will leave grand opera alone."

"I don't know," said Nugent. "I was thinking that something in the Wagnerian line would be impressive. Of course, I don't mean to say that we could give a cycle of the Ring, or anything quite up to that. But one of Wagner's simple operas—'Lohengrin' or 'Tannhauser'—"

"Good!" exclaimed Trevor immediately. "I could do the 'Star of Eve' in 'Tannhauser,' a treat. My aunt says—"

"It would have to be in German," said Nugent loftily. "No grand opera in English for the Wharton Operatic Society."

"Oh, rot! We don't know enough German—"

"You learn the parts by heart, fathead."

"Well, then, the fellows don't know enough German to understand us."

"They don't understand the Greek play by the Sixth, as far as that goes."

"I suppose we want to be understood, though."

"I can't see that it's absolutely essential. Hazeldene's sister knows German, and she could take the part of Elizabeth. It would suit her, and I'm sure she'd come. Wouldn't she, Vaseline?"

"Oh, Marjorie would come!" said Hazeldene. "But I don't know about learning up a part in a German opera. That takes time."

"Oh, hold on!" said Harry Wharton. "I think we can agree to bar all operas in foreign tongues for the present. We'll leave that till later. We don't want the affair to end in another muck-up."

"Oh, very well!" said Nugent. "Perhaps it wouldn't be very Christmassy. Only I can do the 'Grand March' in 'Tannhauser' on the mouth-organ, you know."

"Ha, ha! That's a jolly good reason for setting a lot of chaps learning up difficult parts in German."

"Well, what's the next idea, then, anyway?"

"I want to receive suggestions from you chaps—"

"Well, then, I suggest a variety entertainment," said Trevor.

"Rats! No music-hall business here—"

"I mean an entertainment with varied items."

"Oh, I see!"

"Faith, and there's a lot of difference between a variety entertainment and an entertainment with varied items, intirely."

"Suppose each of us puts up a song, or a recitation, or an instrumental solo," went on Trevor. "I could do the 'Star of Eve' from 'Tannhauser.' My aunt says I sing that sweetly."

"By Jove, and I'd do a recitation!" said Gaunt. "There's a short piece from Shelley, I know. I don't quite know what it all means, but it's very impressivè, done in the right tone of voice. It goes——"

"Never mind how it goes."

"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings,
"Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair."

"I forget whether that's the beginning or the end," said Gaunt confidentially, "but I can look it out, you know, and get it off all right."

"What price having a concerted piece?" suggested Harry Wharton. "We aren't quite up to giving grand opera, but what price an oratorio?"

"Ripping!" exclaimed Nugent.

"You see, giving an oratorio, it's not necessary to make up for the parts, and there's no acting; you just stand up and sing your little bit," said Wharton. "And I must say that an oratorio is more suitable for Christmas time."

"Ripping!" repeated Nugent. "We'll give Handel's 'Saul.' I can play the 'Dead March' on my mouth-organ."

"Mouth-organs will have to be barred in an oratorio," said Hazeldene. "I put it to the meeting—is a mouth-organ a respectable thing to introduce into an oratorio?"

"Faith, and ye're right."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, you want some ink down your neck, I see!"

"Oh, really, Cherry, it's all right; I'll shut up, you beast!"

"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings," began Gaunt, again.

"Oh, let Ozymandias rest in his grave, please!" said Morgan. "I think that we ought to have a variety entertainment, as I should then be able to give you a song in Welsh. 'The Bells of Aberdovey,' in Welsh would go down."

"Yes, but——"

"The more variety you work in the better," said Morgan, "and as Welsh is the most musical language in the world——"

"Yes, but I was thinking of an oratorio——"

"I say, you fellows, I could suggest an idea——"

"Shut up!"

"Faith, and give him a chance! Out of the mouths of babes and silly duffers, you know—— What is it, Bunter?"

"I'm glad to see that everybody here isn't jealous of my abilities," said Bunter. "I really have two very good ideas. The first is, that instead of the Operatic Society giving a show, I should give a ripping ventriloquial entertainment."

"Scat!"

"You fellows could be in it, in a way; you could all sit on the platform in evening dress, you know——"

"Oh, ring off, Bunter!"

"Well, if you don't like that idea, I have another nearly as good. Suppose I gave a solo, with you fellows as chorus. We could pick out a thing with a lot of chorus in it, so as to give you a chance. With my fine baritone——"

"Ha, ha, ha! His fine baritone!"

"His froggy croak."

"Oh, really, Vaseline! With my fine baritone, and my great abilities as an actor, it would go down well, and the audience would be willing to stand anything you did."

"Have you any more ripping ideas, Bunter?"

"Not just now, but I could soon think of some, if I tried."

"Then think of some, and be quiet. Now, to get to business again——"

"I say, Wharton, aren't you going to adopt either of my ideas?"

"Not this time," said Wharton. "Perhaps some other time; we'll think about it on the thirty-first of November."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Ring off! Now, gentlemen——"

"My name is Ozymandias——"

"Oh, hang Ozymandias! Gentlemen, is it to be an oratorio, and if so, which?"

And the gentlemen put their heads together over the matter.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Discussion—With Specimens.

HARRY WHARTON was very much in favour of the Christmas entertainment taking the form of an oratorio. As president of the Operatic and Dramatic Society, he naturally wished the thing to take on as high a tone as possible. Probably he had not fully counted the difficulties. Like many an operatic society, the Greyfriars fellows wanted to do something considerable, but did not like hard work. To study and mug over the parts every evening for weeks together was not exactly attractive.

Morgan, the Welsh junior, was the only one who seemed to favour the idea at all. Like many a Welsh lad, he had sung sacred music since he was old enough to sing at all, and he would have been the mainstay of the Operatic Society in their difficult undertaking. But even Morgan did not "enthus" over it.

"Better have a variety entertainment," he remarked. "I'd give you the 'Bells of Aberdovey,' or the 'Ash Grove,' in Welsh, and the audience would be bound to like 'em."

"Good!" said Gaunt. "I don't know about singing in Welsh, but I'd give you a ripping recitation. 'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings——'"

"Recitations go down well, if they're recited all right," said Nugent. "It's when a chap gets up and starts mouth-ing that people begin to yawn. I could give you 'The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck' in a really effective way, though I say it. Or a recitation from 'The Song of Hiawatha' always goes down. Suppose I give you a specimen now? 'And at night, Kabibonokka, To the lodge came wild and wailing, Heaped the snow in drifts about it, Shouted down into the smoke-flue——'"

"Oh, cheese it, old chap!"

"I'm giving you a specimen——"

"Well, don't give us the whole blessed poem, then."

"It's a jolly good poem."

"Life's too short," said Trevor. "We'll take the free sample you've given us, and be satisfied. I rather agree with Morgan that a variety entertainment would be nearer our mark. I don't know about songs in Welsh, or any old recitations, but I could give you 'John Peel'——"

"Not now, old man."

"I don't see why I shouldn't give you a specimen, as it seems to be the fashion here. 'D'ye ken John Peel with his coat so gay? D'ye ken John Peel at the break of day? D'ye ken John Peel——'"

"Yes, we ken John Peel. We ken him well enough. Hold on!"

"'D'ye ken John Peel when he's far, far away, With his hounds and his horn——'"

"Ring off!"

"'With his hounds and his horn in the morning,'" concluded Trevor victoriously.

"That's not such a bad song, either," said Bob Cherry. "And I could give you 'Drinking,' you know. I like 'Drinkin'——"

"Well, you guzzler!"

"Asa! I mean I like the song. I can give it you in either English or German."

"Or both?" suggested Hazeldene.

"Oh, don't be funny! It seems to be en regle——"

"Well, that's a good word."

"It seems to be en regle to give specimens, so I may as well——"

"You mayn't."

"In kuhlen Keller sitz ich hier,
Auf einem Fass voll reben,
Bin guten——"

"Oh, hold on," said Harry Wharton; "this is a discussion of the programme, not a rehearsal! If we have everything at full length——"

"The lengthfulness would be terrific."

"Oh, all right!" said Bob Cherry. "I only wanted to be in the fashion."

"You don't like the idea of an oratorio, I see?" said Wharton, quite good-humouredly. "I myself think we ought to give something as good as possible, but it's for the majority to decide. We'll consider oratorio barred."

"Well, I really think it would be a bit above our weight."

"Oratorio is barred, as being above the heads of the audience," said Wharton; "to say nothing of our own heads. The next serious proposal is an act from Shakespeare."

"Too much like work," murmured Bob Cherry.

"It seems, however, that the Operatic Society prefers a variety entertainment——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good! Vox populi, vox Dei," said Harry Wharton gracefully. "I admit, I would rather have had oratorio or

ANSWERS

"HARRY WHARTON'S DAY OUT."

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Shakespeare, but the voice of the majority settles it. We'll make it a variety entertainment, and there's no reason why a variety entertainment cannot be made instructive, amusing, and elevating."

"Hear, hear!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up! Go on, Mr. President——"

"But I say, you fellows, I've got an idea. If you're going to give a variety entertainment, it would be a good wheeze to work in a ventriloquial turn——"

"Order!" roared half a dozen voices.

"I could give a ripping ventriloquial turn——"

"Shut up!"

"And as for the expense of getting up the entertainment, I should be prepared to stand my whack," said Billy Bunter, with dignity.

"Going to get a postal order?" asked Nugent sarcastically.

"I shall probably get several postal-orders between now and breaking-up, Nugent. But I was not thinking of that. I was thinking of the prize I am going to get in 'The Gem' football competition."

"Oh!"

"I have all the answers correct, so far——"

"How do you know?"

"My dear chap, with my wonderful abilities in guessing the answers, I am not likely to get any of them wrong. I shall get a pound a week for thirteen weeks, and I think you'll admit that that's a jolly lot of money."

"Only you won't get it, you ass!"

"I don't very well see how I can fail."

"Oh, cheese it! There's too much Bunter in this study," said Bob Cherry. "Just get it into your noddle that ventriloquial entertainments are barred——"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"And now don't jaw! We ought to discuss the programme a little before we adjourn the meeting, Wharton."

"Certainly. We—— My hat! What's that fearful row?"

A terrific din had become audible in the passage all of a sudden, close outside the door of Study No. 1. It was a sound of trampling feet and buzzing voices, and the members of the Operatic Society could not hear themselves speak. They looked at one another in amazement.

"What on earth is it?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton strode to the door and flung it open. A curious scene met his gaze.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Rival Meeting.

BULSTRODE had brought a chair out of his study, and placed it within a few feet of the door of Study No. 1, and was mounted upon it. A score of Removites surrounded him, cramming in the passage. Bulstrode was speaking, and his hearers cheered him at every word, adding to the effect by stamping their feet on the floor.

"What's all that row about?" demanded Harry Wharton angrily.

"Hurrah! Hip, pip!"

"Get further along, can't you?"

"Hurrah!"

Stamp, stamp, stamp!

"What I say is——" said Bulstrode.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"What's all that row about?" shouted Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hurrah!"

Bulstrode turned towards the captain of the Remove with a grin.

"Can't I address a meeting of the Form if I like?" he demanded.

"Is that a meeting of the Form?"

"Of course it is!"

"Then why can't you meet in your own study?"

"No room! I suppose the Remove passage is free to all members of the Remove, isn't it?" exclaimed Skinner, with an aggrieved look.

"Of course it is!" said Bulstrode. "Get on with the meeting. I have the honour of again putting the question to the honourable meeting——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Are we downhearted?"

"No! Hurrah!"

"Are we free to make as much row as we like in our own passage?"

"Yes, yes! Hurrah!"

Stamp, stamp, stamp!

Harry Wharton looked vexed, but he could hardly help laughing. The Operatic Society were decidedly wrathful. It was perfectly plain to all of them that Bulstrode & Co. were simply making a fearful noise in the passage to "muck

up" their meeting. The pretence of a Form meeting was evidently humbug. Bulstrode was not making a speech at all, only calling on his hearers to stamp and yell.

"Look here——" exclaimed Wharton.

"Hurrah! Go ahead, Bulstrode!"

"Gentlemen of the Remove——"

"Hear, hear!"

Stamp, stamp, stamp!

"Faith, and they'll have the prefects up if they don't draw it mild!" exclaimed Micky Desmond. "What price clearin' the passage of the spalpeens?"

"We can't hold a discussion while they're making that row!" exclaimed Hazeldene. "Let's go for the rotters!"

"Right you are!" said Wharton. "They're two to one, but there isn't much room for punching in the passage. Shoulder to shoulder!"

"We'll back you up, Wharton!"

"All together!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "And straight from the shoulder, mind!"

"Come on, kids!"

"Gentlemen of the Remove," repeated Bulstrode, "I say——what I say is—— Gentlemen of the Remove——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen of the Remove—— Oh! Ger-r-roroo!"

Bulstrode tumbled headlong off the chair as the Operatic Society made a sudden rush. The Study No. 1 phalanx broke right through the yelling and stamping crowd, and sent them flying. Half the rioters were knocked down, and the other half went reeling and running.

The victory was sudden, but, unfortunately, it was not complete. Bulstrode staggered to his feet, and yelled to his backers to rally.

And they rallied—they rallied and came back with a furious rush, hitting out right and left.

"Shoulder to shoulder!" shouted Wharton.

And his followers backed him up manfully, showing that they could easily have become as distinguished as a pugilistic and punching society as they could in the operatic and dramatic line.

But the odds were against them!

Fighting desperately, they were swept back to Study No. 1, and hurled in, sprawling across one another on the floor.

Wharton was the last, and he stood his ground in the doorway alone for a full minute, holding his own against the crowd, but finally a rush hurled him in, though he left many swelling and streaming noses behind him.

Round the doorway the Removites howled with glee.

The Operatic Society staggered up, looking decidedly the worse for wear. They lined up to resist an invasion of the study if it should be attempted, but the victorious rioters were not disposed to venture into the lions' den. They contented themselves with crowding outside the door and hooting and cat-calling.

"My only hat!" murmured Nugent. "I suppose this would be called an operatic meeting with variations."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come out!" roared Bulstrode. "Why don't you come out and clear the passage! Yah!"

"Yah! Come out!"

"What is all this dreadful noise?"

It was the voice of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, on the stairs. The shouting mob outside the door of Study No. 1 melted away like snow in the summer sun. Mr. Quelch reached the top of the stairs, and found the passage quite untenanted. He looked round him in surprise, and tapped at the door of Study No. 1 and looked in.

"Ah!" said Mr. Quelch grimly, as he noted the signs of combat in the faces of the Operatic Society. "I suppose this terrible din is due to you juniors? You have been fighting among yourselves?"

"Oh, no, sir!" said Harry Wharton.

Mr. Quelch looked at him searchingly.

"You certainly look as if you had been fighting, Wharton."

"Not among ourselves, sir."

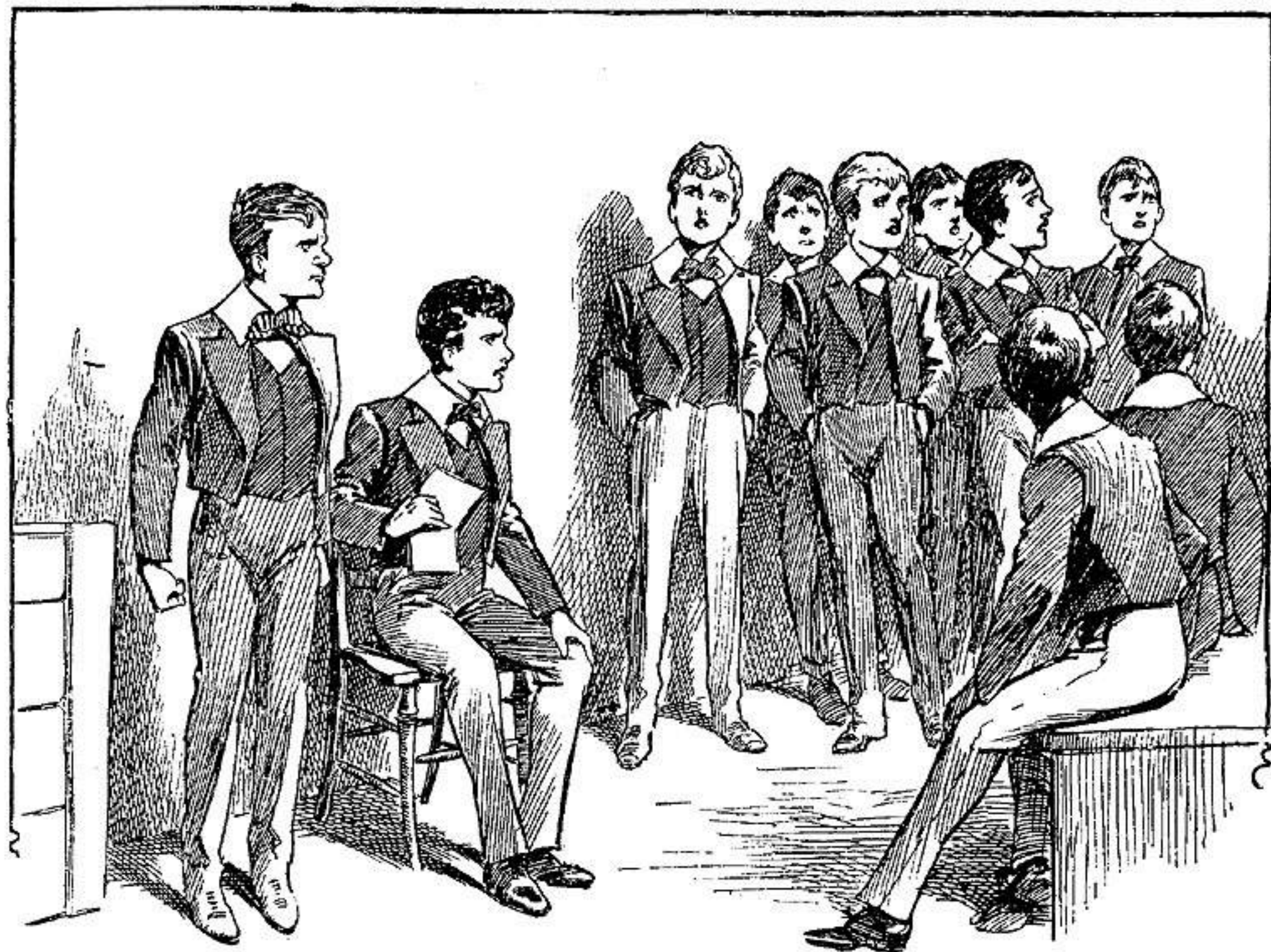
"Ah! You have been fighting some other party in the Lower School, I suppose? Well, don't let me hear any more noise this evening, my boys."

And Mr. Quelch went away. The juniors felt considerably relieved. They would not have been surprised at getting a hundred lines each. But the Remove master, though usually severe, was just. He knew that it would be impossible ever to get at the rights of the matter, and so he allowed it to drop.

The members of the Operatic Society looked at one another. There was not much likelihood of Bulstrode & Co. coming back, but they did not feel in much trim for an operatic discussion. Eyes and noses were swelling visibly.

"The meeting had better be adjourned, I think," said the president, looking round.

And, as every member of the Operatic and Dramatic Society assented, adjourned the meeting was forthwith.



"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings—" began Gaunt. "Rats!" The mysterious voice again interrupted the reciter, and there was a buzz of indignation in the room.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER. Plotting a Plot.

THE Greyfriars Remove looked somewhat the worse for hard usage when they appeared in the class-room the next morning. Almost every member of the Operatic and Dramatic Society had a bruise or a cut, some of them black eyes and swollen noses. Bulstrode and his friends were quite as plainly marked, and when Mr. Quelch came in, and saw half his class displaying the signs of recent combat, his expression grew grim for a moment. But he made no remark, and the lessons proceeded as usual.

Billy Bunter was not damaged, having carefully kept out of the scrimmage of the previous evening. The fat junior was wearing a thoughtful and aggrieved expression that morning. Why the chums of the Remove should refuse to admit a ventriloquial display among the items of their programme was a mystery to him, only explicable on the ground of jealousy. But Bunter could be obstinate when he liked. He was a member of the Operatic Society himself, and he didn't see why he should be left out of the entertainment.

Bulstrode didn't see it, either. Bulstrode was always willing to back up anybody in anything, so long as it was against Harry Wharton. And most of the Removites, though they liked Wharton better than Bulstrode, were ready enough for any mischief, and always ripe for a "rag."

Bulstrode tapped Billy Bunter on the shoulder as the Remove came out after morning school. The fat junior blinked round at him.

"Hallo, Skinner!"

"It isn't Skinner, Owl!"

"Oh, is that you, Bulstrode? Are you hungry?"

"I'm getting ready for dinner. Why?"

"I thought you might feel inclined to come along with me and have a snack at the school shop," said Bunter. "I'm feeling rather peckish myself."

"I don't mind if I do," said Bulstrode. "Are you in funds for once in your life, then?"

"Oh, really, Bulstrode—"

"Has that celebrated postal-order come at last?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, it hasn't, and I'm rather short of money, Bulstrode. I thought you wouldn't mind lending me half-a-crown till it came. I can promise it back for to-morrow morning for certain."

"I dare say you can promise it," assented Bulstrode, in a tone that implied that he had considerable doubts about the performance of the promise.

"Oh, it's all right, I assure you! I hope you don't think I'm the kind of fellow to run into debts I can't pay?"

Bulstrode grinned.

"Nobody who knows you would think that of you, Billy—I don't think!"

"Oh, really, Bulstrode! You know, even if the postal-order didn't come, I shall shortly be in funds, as I shall be getting that pound a week for thirteen weeks in 'The Gem' football competition."

"Oh, choose it, Billy! You make me tired!"

"Oh, very well, if you don't want to lend, I'm sure I don't want to borrow!" said Billy Bunter, with great dignity. "I think I'll run along and speak to Wun Lung."

"Oh, leave the Chinese alone!"

"He lent me a sovereign the other day," said Bunter impressively. "There are some fellows who can trust me, and Wun Lung is one of them."

"Did you pay it back?" asked Bulstrode sarcastically.

"I am letting it stand over till I get 'The Gem' prize. If you like to lend me a sovereign, Bulstrode—"

"Yes, I'm likely to stand you a fortnight's pocket-money," said Bulstrode. "I'll tell you what I'll do. Come along to Mrs. Mimble's, and I'll stand you some cream-puffs."

"Thanks, awfully, Bulstrode! Some cream-puffs now would just give me an appetite for my dinner! It's very thoughtful of you!"

"I say, Skinner, come this way—"

"No need to ask Skinner," muttered Bunter anxiously. "I can do with all the cream-puffs you can stand, Bulstrode, and—"

"Shut up! Come on, Skinny, and have some cream-puffs!"

"Well, rather!" said Skinner, joining them. The three juniors walked over to the tuckshop, which Mrs. Mimble, the gardener's wife, kept within the precincts of Greyfriars. Bulstrode was in funds, as he usually was. He ordered a dozen cream puffs with the air of an emperor. Billy Bunter's eyes glistened behind his spectacles. Skinner knew that Bulstrode must have some object in feeding up the cormorant of the Remove, and he wondered what it was.

"I say, you fellows, these puffs are ripping!" said Billy Bunter. "Are you going to have any ginger-pop, Bulstrode?"

"Three gingers, Mrs. Mimble, please!"

"Won't you want any for yourself?" asked Billy Bunter innocently.

Skinner chuckled, and Bulstrode glared at the fat junior.

"That's one each," said Bulstrode.

"Oh, I see! I can always manage three myself!"

"You'll manage one now."

"Oh, very well! I say, don't those jam-tarts look ripping?"

"I dare say they do! Now, about that ventriloquial entertainment, Billy—"

"Yes, wasn't that a sell?" said Bunter. "If you fellows hadn't buzzed off as you did, I should have given you a ripping entertainment!"

"Well, of course, that was due to Wharton's interruptions," said Bulstrode, with a wink at Skinner. "We felt we couldn't very well see it through."

"Did you really, Bulstrode? Bob Cherry was trying to make out that the fellows couldn't stand my ventriloquial entertainments at any price—"

"That's all rot on the face of it! Now, I put it to you, Bunter?"

"You're right there! With my wonderful abilities as a ventriloquist, I don't see how my entertainment could fail to be—be—"

"Entertaining," suggested Skinner.

"Appreciated," said Billy Bunter; "that's what I meant to say. I don't see, under the circumstances, how my entertainment could fail to be appreciated. My idea is, that it would give their show a leg-up if they included it in their programme."

"Oh, they're making up a programme, are they?"

"Yes. Wharton suggested an oratorio, but I didn't think much of that, so the idea was dropped. Then he brought forward an act from Shakespeare, but I had to bar that too. I felt that it wouldn't do, you know. A variety entertainment is the thing. Now, my idea would be to have a few songs, and then about an hour's ventriloquism, and then a few songs to finish up."

"And a jolly good idea, too!" said Bulstrode heartily, while Skinner giggled into his glass of ginger-beer.

"But the others don't care for it. I suppose it's jealousy at bottom. They don't care about me getting the bulk of the show, you know."

"Then the ventriloquism is going to be left out?"

"So they say. But I don't see why they should have their way about it. I don't want to be hard on them, but a fellow must think of himself sometimes. It came into my mind to bust up their show for them, just to give them a lesson."

"Could you do it?" exclaimed Bulstrode eagerly.

"How?"

"Oh, easily enough! I say, I'm jolly thirsty!"

"Another ginger, Mrs. Mimble, please! Now, then, Billy, how could you bust up the show?"

"Why, I was thinking that I would put up a notice on the board, announcing a ventriloquial entertainment for the same evening," said Billy Bunter modestly. "That would draw all their audience away, and they would be left to sing to an empty room."

Bulstrode and Skinner exchanged glances. The fat junior was in danger at that moment of having his ginger-beer poured down the back of his neck, but Bulstrode restrained himself.

"I suppose they're going to have some rehearsals?" he remarked.

"Oh, yes, they were talking about that this morning!"

"Last time, when they were doing an opera or something, they had a rehearsal in public, the Form being admitted," Bulstrode remarked carelessly. "Anything of that sort on this time?"

"Yes, that's the idea! They're going to rehearse in private at first, and when they are up to form, they're going to have a rehearsal in public—a sort of preliminary performance, just to a few select friends. Then if it goes all right, you see, they'll feel fit for the public performance on the day before breaking-up."

"A few select friends, eh?" said Bulstrode. "I suppose that means anybody in the Remove, Billy?"

"Well, I don't know. I don't suppose they'll ask you."

"Why shouldn't they ask me?" said Bulstrode, rather savagely.

"You might make a row, and interrupt. Of course, it wouldn't matter much if a rotten show like that was interrupted. Without my ventriloquism to give it a tone, I don't see how the Operatic Society's entertainment can amount to much."

"Certainly not. Now, where is the thing to be given, Billy; I suppose you know?"

"Yes. Wharton has decided on the box-room—the old one, you know, at the top of the house. There's plenty of room there if the lumber is cleared back, and not much chance of being interrupted."

Bulstrode's eyes glimmered.

"And when?"

"Oh, that isn't settled yet! Soon, I think—any evening."

"Of course you'll know in time to let us know?"

"Oh, yes! I say, those jam-tarts do look ripping!"

"Give Bunter a couple of tarts, Mrs. Mimble!"

"And not stale ones," said Billy Bunter. "I'm paying ready cash for these, Mrs. Mimble—or Bulstrode is, which amounts to the same thing—and I want 'em fresh."

"Of course, you'll let me know?" said Bulstrode. "I should like to be there."

"Oh, I'll let you know, never fear! It's not a secret. Wharton says that if there are any interruptions, the interrupters will go out on their necks."

"Now, Billy, I've thought of an idea for you to get your own back on those rotters—"

"Oh, I don't call them rotters, Bulstrode, though they do keep me rather short of grub, and show a lot of small jealousy over my ventriloquism!"

"What I mean is—"

"And I don't know that I exactly want to get my own back, either. All I want to do is to show them and all Greyfriars that I can give a jolly good entertainment, and that I can't be left off the programme without disadvantage to all concerned."

"That's exactly what I was thinking. Of course, you'll be at the show?"

"Yes, unless I'm giving a rival entertainment."

"Good! But why not give a rival entertainment on the spot?"

"Eh? Wharton says that all interrupters will go out on their necks. I shouldn't like to quarrel with Wharton; he's bigger than I am!"

"I was thinking of your ventriloquism. Suppose you mimic all the singers, and if you do it well, of course, they won't know that you are doing it. Wharton won't throw you out on your neck if he doesn't know what you're at."

"Oh, really, Bulstrode, there's something in that! But—"

"You see, you would be able to tell them afterwards, and prove to them what a ripping ventriloquist you were, and that they couldn't afford to leave you out of the show on December 18th," said Bulstrode blandly.

"Well, that's true enough!"

"Only keep it dark till it comes off, Dunty, or they'll scalp you."

"Of course, I shouldn't tell them what I was going to do. I shall certainly think it over, Bulstrode."

And the tarts and ginger-beer being finished, and no more forthcoming, Billy Bunter walked out of the tuckshop, his brows knitted in thought, showing that he was deeply pondering over the valuable suggestion he had received. Skinner looked at the Remove bully in amazement.

"Blessed if I can see what you're getting at, Bulstrode!" he remarked. "You know as well as I do that the young ass can't ventriloquise for toffee!"

"I know he can't!" grinned Bulstrode. "But I don't see why mysterious ventriloquial voices shouldn't interrupt the show, all the same!"

"How? I don't catch on!"

"The box-room is just the place—"

"Just the place for Wharton's purpose, but—"

"Just the place for us, too. The walls are all wooden, and it's easy enough to bore holes through them from the lumber-room on one side, and the staircase on the other. Then it would be quite easy, too, for fellows to be hidden in some of those old packing-cases that are stacked up there—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner went off into a roar as the possibilities of the scheme dawned upon him. Bulstrode grinned with satisfaction.

"I rather fancy we shall be able to muck up the rehearsal a treat," he remarked. "We sha'n't be invited, so if we're

not visible there, that won't make 'em suspect anything. It will be the joke of the season."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the two practical jokers of the Remove strolled out of the tuckshop quite satisfied with their idea, and chuckling over its possibilities as they discussed it.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Programme.

"HOW are you fellows getting along with your show?" Billy Bunter inquired, a few days later, as he came into Study No. 1 and found the Famous Four there, with several other members of the Wharton Operatic and Dramatic Society.

"None the better for being interrupted by a silly ass!" said Trevor crossly. Trevor was just asking the general opinion upon his rendering of "Star of Eve" from "Tannhauser," and Bunter had stopped him on a high note.

"Oh, really, Trevor—"

"Shut up, ass! I'll try that little bit over again, you chaps."

"Certainly," said the chaps politely.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Kill him, somebody!"

Bob Cherry picked up an ebony ruler. Billy Bunter dodged away, and remained quiet for a little bit, with an indignant blink round the study to show that it was under protest.

"Oh, star of eve, thy tender beam

Shines o'er my spirit's troubled dream—"

"How's that?" asked Trevor.

"Out!" said Nugent.

"Eh?"

"I mean you were off your stroke on the 'star.' Try it again, and don't get so flat."

"Oh, star of eve, thy tender beam—"

"Good! That hit it fairly in the centre!"

"Think it will do?"

"Quite! We can consider the 'Star of Eve' passed!" said Harry Wharton. "It's a rather ambitious song for a kid, but all the better if it's done well. Only, if you get nervous before an audience and muck it up, we shall look bigger asses than if we had contented ourselves with smaller fry!"

"Well, there's the rehearsal in the box-room before a select audience," said Trevor. "If you can stand an audience of personal friends, you can stand anything!"

"Well, yes, that's quite true."

"Now, what about that bass song that Elliott was going to do?"

"The People that Walked—"

"Oh, no! We're leaving sacred music out of it, and the fellows wouldn't understand—"

"They would in Wales," said Morgan.

"Well, we're not in Wales now, old chap. Leave Handel alone for a bit. We may bring him up again some other time—say at Easter. You were thinking of doing an operatic song, Elliott—one of the songs from Wagner's 'Lohengrin,' I think."

"Good. 'The King's prayer,'" said Elliott. "It suits me down to the ground."

"You have to get nearly down to the ground to get the bottom notes," grinned Bob Cherry.

"Oh, I don't know that! I can manage F, you know. I wish I could get up to the E flat as easily," said Elliott. "Now, just see how I manage the F."

The Operatic Society prepared to listen. Nugent held on to the table, but as he was standing behind Elliott, the bass did not see that playful action.

"Dass Trug und Wahrheit klar erweist," sang Elliott. On "klar" he seemed to be on the point of expiring, that being the F. He brought it out with a croak like a frog, and there was a general gasp.

"How was that?" he asked.

"Out," replied the Operatic Society, with one voice.

"Oh, I say!"

Elliott tried again, and the result was a more ghastly croak than the first. Nugent stopped his ears.

"I say, that wasn't flat, was it?" said Elliott anxiously.

"Ha, ha! No, it wasn't flat, certainly, old man. It was sharp, though, and it was a ghastly row."

"Look here, Nugent—"

"You'll have to transpose the song a bit higher if you're going to sing it," said Nugent. "You can't go on the stage creaking like a giddy feghorn."

"Can't be did," said Elliott ruefully. "That's the worst of Wagner—the boulder catches you at the top as well as at the bottom. I can only just do the E flat now, and if we shoved it any higher, I should bust there."

"Then you'd better let Wagner alone for a bit, old man, and take something a bit more simple," said Harry Wharton. "I must say I can't stand your F."

EVERY
TUESDAY, The "Magnet" ONE
LIBRARY. HALFPENNY.

"I'll try it once more," said Elliott. "I can do it, you know."

"Worse than ever," said Nugent, as Elliott, gathering all his powers, brought out a croak from the depths of his chest that would have done credit to a raven with a severe cold in the throat. "Better chuck it. I'll tell you what—you can sing a Border song—something they sing in Teviotdale, or wherever it is you come from. That will give variety to the show."

"Good. I'll look out for one. I'll have another go at that F, though, presently."

"So far, we've only got the 'Star of Eve' settled," said Trevor. "I really think that will go down all right. My aunt says I sing that sweetly."

"Bless your aunt! Stick that down, Harry. What's next?"

"What price my recitation?" said Gaunt. "'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings! Look on my works, ye mighty'—"

"Well, I don't know—"

"Look on my works'—"

"Oh, blow your works! What works are you talking about?"

"Ass! I mean Ozymandias's works!"

"Then what do you mean by saying your works?"

"Dummy! This is how it goes—"

"Oh, never mind how it goes!" said Bob Cherry.

"I'm explaining to that dense ass, Nugent. 'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings'—"

"Ring off!"

"Look on my works'—Ozymandias's works—'ye mighty, and despair!'"

"That doesn't explain what the works were," said Hazeldene. "If you mean the works of a watch—"

"I don't mean anything of the sort."

"The fellows will want to know what you are talking about—I mean, they will expect even a recitation to have some sense in it. You ought to make it clear what works you mean."

"Of all the idiots—"

"Oh, we'll pass Ozymandias!" said Harry Wharton, interrupting the argument, which was growing warm. "It's short, anyway, and that is a recommendation. If the audience don't make out what it's about, they'll think it's something awfully deep, and the name of Shelley on the programme will bear it out."

"Well, there's something in that."

"Faith, and ye're right. Now, are ye ready to put down my item, darling?"

"What's your item?"

"Sure, I'm thinkin' of doin' 'The Widow Malone.'"

"Who's she?" asked Gaunt.

"Have ye heard of the Widow Malone?"

"No, I haven't."

"Have you heard of the Widow Malone, ochone?"

"Don't I keep telling you I haven't?"

"Ye howling gossoon, that's the recitation!"

"Oh, I see! Why couldn't you say so at first?"

"Have you heard of the Widow Malone, ochone,

Who lived in the town of Athlone, all alone?"

"Good," said Harry Wharton. "That's comic, and it suits Micky. But you can't have two recitations next to one another—something else must go between."

"What price an instrumental solo?" asked Nugent.

"Good! That would make variety."

"Then shove down the 'Prelude to the Third Act of Lohengrin.' Everybody knows that by heart, and it's a ripping lively thing."

"My dear chap, we haven't an orchestra. You want flutes, oboes, clarionets, bassoons, horns, trumpets, trombones, tuba, drums, triangle, and the dickens knows what else, for that, and we have my flute to represent the wind instruments, and Hazeldene's violin for the strings. I don't see how a flute and a violin—"

"My dear ass, I wasn't thinking of an orchestra. I was thinking of playing it on my mouth-organ."

"Oh!"

"Rats!" said Hazeldene. "You were thinking of playing a Wagner March on a mouth-organ. Why don't you try the 'Moonlight Sonata' on a tin whistle?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean what I say," said Nugent obstinately. "I can do it. Of course, you have to pick up the dominant melody, and shove that in strong. I'll give you a specimen—"

"No, you won't!"

"Yes, I will," said Nugent, taking out his mouth-organ. "You've got to imagine that my mouth-organ is the trumpets, bassoons, and tuba—"

"Ha, ha! You want a big imagination for that."

"Well, anyway, an orchestra would make too much row

for the box-room, if we had one. Now just you listen to this."

And Nugent blew away. As a matter of fact, his performance was a very creditable one, and the juniors listened to it with pleasure. Harry Wharton nodded as Nugent finished blowing out his faint reproduction of the blare of that famous prelude.

"That will do," he said. "We'll shove it in. I'll put 'Organ solo' on the programme—that will sound better than 'mouth-organ solo.'"

"Ha, ha! Right!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Don't interrupt, Billy. Now, about Hazeldene."

"I was thinking of doing a duet with Marjorie," said Hazeldene. "There's a good one we know pretty well, and I'll write to Marjorie to look out her part fresh. It's the duet between Elsie and Point in the 'Yeomen of the Guard,' you know. I know it's a jolly hackneyed thing, but it will be fresh enough to the Greyfriars fellows. And it's simple, and musical, too—real music."

"Good," said Harry Wharton. "I shouldn't wonder if that goes down the best of the lot. Anything from Gilbert and Sullivan is bound to be appreciated."

"It goes like this—"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up! 'I have a Song to Sing, oh!'"

"I dare say you have, Vaseline, but—"

"'I have a Song to Sing, oh!' Then Marjorie says, 'Sing me Your Song, oh!' And then—"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Choke that porpoise, somebody!"

"Yes; but I say—"

"Will you ring off?" bawled Bob Cherry. "We don't want any ventriloquism. We don't want you to improve the show by giving an hour's entertainment in the middle of it. We don't want anything. Shut up!"

"Yes; but—"

"My only Aunt Maria! Isn't that plain enough? Then I shall have to use the ruler."

"Hold on, Cherry! I—I say, you fellows, I don't want to interrupt, but—"

"Quick, then, what is it?"

"It's—it's tea-time!"

"Oh!"

"It's tea-time," said Billy Bunter. "I don't think we ought to keep tea late. I've got a rather delicate constitution, and if I have my meals late, it has a very bad effect upon it. As a matter of fact, I only keep myself going by taking plenty of nourishing food, though owing to the meanness of some people, I can't always have as much as I really need."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle at in that. It's tea-time—"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"So it is," he agreed. "We'd better have tea, and leave the rest of the discussion till after. Will all you fellows stay to tea? We've got rather a decent feed on."

"Faith, and it's a pleasure it will be."

"Yes, rather."

And the whole Operatic Society accepted cordially. There was a crowded tea-table in Study No. 1 that evening.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter Talks.

"I SAY, Bulstrode."

The Remove bully stopped as Bunter spoke to him. It was a few days later, and the Owl of the Remove was looking as if he had something to communicate.

"Well, what is it?" said Bulstrode. "Any news about the Operatic Society?"

"I—I'm feeling rather faint, Bulstrode."

"Have you stopped me to tell me that?" asked Bulstrode, with a rather ugly look upon his face.

"Oh, no!" said Billy Bunter hastily. "I—I haven't exactly stopped you to tell you that, Bulstrode, you know. I've got some news about the Operatic Society, but—but I feel so faint, that I don't know whether I shall be able to tell you."

"Oh, don't be a young pig, if you can help it!" said Bulstrode. "Have they fixed the time for the rehearsal to a few select friends?"

"Yes, that's it."

Bulstrode's eyes glimmered with satisfaction.

"Good! When is it?"

"I—I'm feeling so faint—"

"Is it to-night?"

"I'm so jolly hungry that—"

"Oh, come to Mrs. Mimble's," said Bulstrode, with a growl. It was pretty plain that he would get nothing out of Billy Bunter unpaid for, and he could not try his usual resource of bullying, as in that case Bunter would be certain

to tell the whole matter to Harry Wharton, and the scheme would be spoiled. "Blessed if you're not a regular shark, Bunter."

"Oh, really, Bulstrode—"

"Oh, come and be fed!"

"If you put it like that, Bulstrode, I shall have to refuse to accept a treat from you," said Bunter, without slackening pace, however. "I don't want you to imagine that I'm telling you Wharton's affairs for the sake of getting a feed out of you."

"Oh, come on!"

"I should regard such a line of action as utterly mean, and I hope you don't think me capable of it, Bulstrode."

Bulstrode grunted.

"I'm telling you these things as a friend," said Bunter, with dignity, as they entered the tuck-shop. "If you like to stand me a feed as a friend, too, there's nothing to be objected to in that. Jam-tarts, please!"

"Give this young pig half a dozen tarts, please, Mrs. Mimble."

"Oh, really, Bulstrode!"

"Wire in, and tell us the news."

"If you put it like that, I shall refuse the feed, so I warn you," said Bunter, with his mouth full. "If you think I'm eager for a few tarts—"

"What's the news?"

"I really don't know whether I can tell you," said Bunter, as he was travelling through the tarts. "You have such a brutal, mercenary way of putting things—"

"Have some lemonade?" said Bulstrode more graciously.

"And some more tarts. I like to see you feed, Bunter. It's as good as paying for admission at the Zoo!"

"Oh, really, Bulstrode—"

"Go ahead! Tuck in! Now, what's the news from Study No. 1, old chap?"

"They're giving the rehearsal to a select circle this evening, after tea," said Billy Bunter. "They've asked about a dozen fellows in the Remove."

"They've forgotten me, somehow," said Bulstrode, with a grin.

"They think you'd make a row—"

"Quite right; I probably should. Now, Billy, it's settled about the programme, isn't it?"

"Yes; they've drawn it up—"

"Ass! I mean about our programme. You are going to do the ventriloquist business, and make your voice appear to come from the boxes, and the walls, and the roof, and so on?"

"Yes, rather!"

"It will be a splendid proof to them that you can really do as you say, and that it's not all gas."

"That's what I was thinking, Bulstrode. I'm sorry you can't be there to see it," said Bunter. "Perhaps if you asked Wharton—"

"I'm not going to ask Wharton for anything!"

"But you'd like to be there?"

"Never mind me; I've got an engagement for this evening, as it happens. Don't forget the ventriloquist business, Billy. You're such a marvel, you know. So-long!"

"I say, I'm still hungry—"

But Bulstrode was gone. Billy Bunter blinked after him, and then blinked at Mrs. Mimble. He eyed the jam-tarts lovingly.

"I say, Mrs. Mimble—"

"Well, Master Bunter?"

"I suppose you wouldn't care to trust me with a few jam-tarts till Saturday?"

"You are quite right, Master Bunter; I should not!"

"Oh, really, Mrs. Mimble! I don't want you to put it to the old account, you know. This is to be an entirely fresh account, to be settled up in cash on Saturday."

Mrs. Mimble walked into her little parlour without replying, and Billy Bunter sighed deeply, and drifted out of the tuckshop. A youth with a quaint face and a pigtail was passing, and Billy Bunter poked him in the ribs. Wun Lung the Chinese gasped, and turned round.

"I say, Wun Lung, if you're having tea in your study—"

"Mo havee tea allee light."

"I don't mind coming to tea with you," said Bunter.

"Velly good!"

"What have you got for tea?"

"Nicee-nicee lats!"

"Lats! Do you mean rats?"

The Chinese junior rodded.

"Nicee-nicee stow. Lats!"

Billy Bunter made a grimace of disgust.

"Then you can keep it!" he said.

The Chinese junior walked away grinning. Bunter blinked at him doubtfully. He knew that cat soups and dog stews were regarded as appetising by the Celestial, but he had imagined that even Wun Lung would draw a line at

rats. He could not help suspecting that the heathen had been "pulling his leg." It was quite probable that Wun Lung was not particularly anxious to entertain the cormorant of the Remove to tea. But Bunter felt that he could not risk it. He had not forgotten the Fido stew yet.

He found the Famous Four busy when he came into Study No. 1. Bunter set about getting tea with an air of suppressed but superior knowledge that drew attention to him at last. Bob Cherry gave him a playful dig in the ribs.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"What's the matter with you?" asked Bob Cherry. "Have you discovered a new wheeze instead of ventriloquism, or found some unexpected grub in the cupboard, or are you simply looking forward to the show to-night?"

"Oh, I'm looking forward to the show!" said Bunter, with a grin. "I have no doubt that it will be very entertaining."

"What is the image grinning about?"

"Oh, nothing! We shall see what we shall see!"

"Did you work that out in your head, Billy?"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"We shall probably see what we shall see," agreed Bob Cherry. "We often do. But that isn't such an astounding discovery, you know, Billy, that it's worth while bursting with suppressed glee over it."

"Well, that's all right, then," said Bunter. "We shall see what we shall see!"

"Go hon! What's all right?"

"Never mind," said Bunter mysteriously. "Ha, ha! Never mind!"

The Famous Four stared at him rather anxiously.

"Not off your rocker, I hope?" said Bob Cherry, with solicitude.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Then what's the matter with you?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"The matterfulness is great, and is only equalled by the asininefulness of the esteemed rotten Bunter."

"Well," said Bunter, "we shall see what we shall see!"

"We're getting to know that. Hand over the eggs, and don't jaw, Billy."

"Why, you were asking me—"

"Oh, don't argue! Let's have some tea."

And they had tea.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

An Interrupted Entertainment.

HARRY WHARTON rose from the tea-table in Study No. 1, glancing at his watch. It was a quarter to seven, and the entertainment in the box-room had been fixed for seven. It was high time for the chums to be on the ground, as Bob Cherry expressed it.

"You fellows all ready?" asked Wharton.

"Yes, rather!"

"Then come on!"

And Harry Wharton led the way to the narrow staircase at the end of the passage, and up to the disused box-room. They overtook several juniors on the way, some of them belonging to the Operatic and Dramatic Society, and others being members of the select audience invited to witness the final rehearsal of the variety show.

The box-room was a large apartment. It was a room in the old building of Greyfriars, and had been disused since additions had been made to the school. The narrow staircase made it very inconvenient to approach, and it was very suitable for the purpose of the operatic juniors.

There was a gas jet in the room. This had been provided with an incandescent burner for the occasion, and the light was excellent, and penetrated every corner of the room. The box-room had been swept and garnished, so to speak. Although it was disused, a good deal of lumber was packed in it, including a number of old packing-cases. Some of the old boxes had been arranged as seats for the audience. Of the latter there were only a dozen. The audience was select.

The box-room looked very clean and cheerful. There was no stage, but a ribbon was tied across the floor from two nails to mark off the supposed line of the footlights. In front of this were ranged the more or less comfortable seats for the select audience.

Before seven struck from the school tower, the audience were all in their places. Whether they were looking forward joyfully to the entertainment we cannot say, but they certainly appreciated the compliment of being regarded as select. They were on their best behaviour, and some of them had put on clean collars. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, who was not on the list of performers on this occasion, took his seat among the audience, next to Wun Lung the Chinese. There was a friendship between the two Orientals, and they frequently talked to one another in an Asiatic jargon incomprehensible to the Remove fellows.

The Operatic Society were seated in a row on a long form on the stage—the stage being the portion of the floor marked off by a ribbon. There were no scenes for them to get

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behind. They were to sit there and rise in turn to "do their little bit," as Bob Cherry put it. Harry Wharton, as President of the Society, spoke a few words to the select audience.

"Gentlemen of the Remove—"

"Hear, hear!" said the select audience.

"Gentlemen, we are about to submit to you the main features of an entertainment arranged by the Wharton Dramatic and Operatic Society, to be given the day before the school breaks up for the Christmas holidays."

"Hear, hear!"

"You are all aware that on that day the upper Forms give a concert, and it has occurred to us that the junior Forms ought not to be left out, especially the Remove, which may be regarded as the most important of the junior Forms."

"Good old Remove!"

"This present show is merely a rehearsal of what will be given on the date I have mentioned. As the Operatic Society is wholly composed of amateurs, we solicit your kind indulgence."

"Hear, hear!"

"Go ahead!"

"On the bawl!"

Billy Bunter rose in his place in the audience. There was a roar.

"Sit down!"

"I want to speak one word to the President of the Operatic Society."

"Sit down!"

"I want to speak—"

"It is not in order," said the President of the Operatic Society. "But you may say it. Buck up, though."

"Would the Society care for me to improve the programme by introducing a splendid ventriloquist turn?"

"No; certainly not!"

"Put it to the audience."

"Gentlemen, would you care for a ventriloquial turn by Bunter to be introduced into the programme?" asked Wharton, with a smile.

There was a roar.

"No! Turn him out!"

"Is that plain enough for you, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Shut up and sit down."

"Very well! I think this show will not be a success, that's all," said Bunter; and he sat down.

Trevor was first on the programme with the "Star of Eve," from "Tannhauser." The song suited Trevor very well, and he expected to make a hit. He coughed a little. It was a disadvantage to sing without any accompaniment, and, of course, getting a piano into the box-room had been out of the question. Nugent's kind offer to accompany the singers on his mouth-organ had been unanimously refused. However, there would be a piano when the great performance was given on the 18th, and this was only a preliminary canter, so to speak. Trevor started.

He sang pretty well, though not in the correct key, but all of a sudden there was an interruption.

He had just reached "Oh, star of eve, thy tender beam," when a curiously strained and painful voice proceeded from the audience.

"Draw it mild!"

Trevor started, and stopped. Harry Wharton rose to his feet. Of course, he had immediately recognised Bunter's ventriloquial voice, though poor Billy imagined that he had made the words proceed from Russell.

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"Bunter!"

"Eh? Did you speak to me, Wharton?"

"Yes, I did; got out!"

"Eh? What am I to get out for?"

"For interrupting the singer."

"I—I—I—"

"You young ass! Do you think anybody would imagine that squeak came from anybody but you?" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Get out at once!"

"I—I—I—"

"Do you want me to come and chuck you out?" roared Trevor.

Bunter made a rush for the door. His ventriloquial efforts were over for the evening. The voice-throwing had not been such a howling success as he had anticipated. He could not make it out, but finally came to the conclusion that there was something wrong with the acoustics of the box-room, which rendered that apartment unfavourable for the exercise of the ventriloquial art.

He darted out of the door, just escaping a cushion hurled after him by Bob Cherry, and Trevor was requested to "get on with the washing."

He did so, and the song was finished to great applause. Then came Gaunt with his recitation. All went well until he came to—

"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings—"

"Rats!"

The voice interrupted the reciter, and there was a buzz of indignation in the room.

"It's that ass Bunter!"

"No, it isn't; he's gone."

"Then who is it?"

"Blessed if I know."

"Really, gentlemen," said the president of the Operatic Society, "I appeal to you to keep silence for the reciter."

"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings."

Look on my works—"

"More rats!"

Wharton rose to his feet, scarlet with anger.

"I call upon the interrupter to clear out."

"Clear out yourself!"

"Who said that?"

"Yah!"

"Was that you, Russell?"

"No, it wasn't!" said Russell, looking amazed. "The voice seemed to come from this box behind me, but of course that's impossible. There isn't a giddy ventriloquist in the room."

"Well, get on with the recit., Gaunt, old man."

"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings."

Look on my works—"

"Cheese it!"

"Who said that?"

"Chuck the rotter out!"

"It was Russell!"

"It wasn't! I—"

"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings."

Look on my works, ye mighty—"

"Oh, ring off!"

"It was Russell that time," yelled Bob Cherry; "I saw his lips move."

"I was sucking a lozenge."

"Chuck him out!"

"Hold on! I—"

"Chuck him out!"

Harry Wharton and two or three other members of the Operatic Society rushed at Russell. The latter, amazed and indignant, struggled fiercely. Three or four pairs of hands grasped him, and he went reeling against a packing-case behind his seat.

"Hold on! I tell you I— Oh!"

Crash! Russell and his assailants crashed on the packing-case, and it went over.

Then there was a startled yell, and a roar.

"Bulstrode!"

It was Bulstrode who had given that startled yell, as his hiding-place was knocked over. The audience roared his name in amazement. But in a moment they understood.

"The cad! He was hidden here all the time!"

"Sorry, Russell," muttered Harry Wharton. "Lead a hand here."

"Oh, it's all right!" grinned Russell. "I almost thought it was myself, the voice was so near me. Chuck him out!"

"Leggo!" roared Bulstrode, as a dozen hands grasped him. "I—leggo—hold on!"

"Open the door."

The door was quickly opened. Bulstrode went out of the box-room "on his neck." He came charging back, blind with fury, and was hurled forth again, and this time he rolled down the stairs. Then the Removites looked through the packing-cases for more. They found Skinner and Stott; and the two jokers, in spite of their struggles and exposures, were dragged to the door and hurled forth. They rolled down the stairs after Bulstrode, and the victorious Operatic Society and their audience re-entered the box-room, closed the door, and rested from their labours.

"Gentlemen," said the president—"gentlemen of the Remove—"

"Hear, hear!"

"The Wharton Operatic Society greatly regrets this unseemly interruption. The intruders having been ejected, the proceedings will now proceed."

"Hear, hear!"

And the proceedings proceeded; and as there were no more interruptions, they proceeded without a hitch. And when the entertainment came to a close, the applause was hearty and unanimous, and the Wharton Operatic and Dramatic Society felt justly that they had scored a success.

THE END.

(Another splendid tale of Harry Wharton & Co. next Tuesday, entitled "Harry Wharton's Day Out." Please order your MAGNET LIBRARY in advance. Price One Halfpenny.)

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NEXT
TUESDAY.

BY FRANK RICHARDS.

GRAND TALE OF ARMY LIFE.



READ THIS FIRST.

On the death of his father, 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, and he then hears that he has been transferred to the Ploughshares—an infantry regiment. Jack is soon reinstated favourite, and becomes once more full corporal. A frontier war breaks out, and the 25th receive orders to mobilise for the front. On their way to the scene of war the 25th are continually "sniped" by the rebels, and Tom has many exciting adventures, in one of which he becomes possessed of a ring. Sligo is bribed by Dashwood to drug Tom Howard one night while the young corporal is on picket duty. Tom falls asleep at his post and is carried off by the enemy during a skirmish. With a fellow captive—a Sikh of the 45th Regiment, named Sundar Singh, Tom is about to be put to death by the tribesmen when the chief, Jamra Khan, recognises Tom's ring and questions him about it. Tom says that he killed the tribesman it belonged to, whereupon the chief hails him as a friend, saying that the former owner of the ring was his bitterest enemy. Through Tom's intervention Sundar Singh's life is also spared. (Now go on with the story.)

"About the Setting of the Moon!"

The tribesmen were quick to recognise bravery, even in a foe; and the whole tribe being now under great personal obligations to our hero, according to their particular code of honour, their admiration was all the more sincere.

Sundar Singh put aside the bowl of broken meats which one of the men handed to him, and, with a quick glance from his intelligent eyes at Tom, the Sikh went away down the valley, looking neither to the right nor to the left, but walking swiftly, as a man who has made up his mind what he is going to do, and intends to do it.

He had not gone very far, when Jamra Khan raised his hand to his mouth and sent a wild cry after him, and Sundar Singh, looking round, the chief beckoned him back again.

"Tell my brother," said Jamra Khan, pointing to the corporal—"tell him in his own tongue—that he must stay with us a while. The path to this valley from the plain below is a secret, and a secret it must remain."

"Why, then, do they let you go?" queried Tom. "Do they mean treachery?"

"I know not, neither do I care," said Sundar Singh. "But to-night, about the setting of the moon, be awake, and be watchful. When you hear the mewing of a cat thrice repeated, you will know that I am close at hand."

Then Sundar Singh went away again, and Tom was alone with the wild tribesmen of the Swat. A strange feeling of solitude and hopelessness came over our hero when the lithe form of the Sikh had disappeared for the last time. He could make nothing of the strange jargon of the tribesmen, who sat cross-legged, regarding him with glittering eyes.

Wild, handsome fellows were some of them, with shaven crowns; others as ugly as monkeys; and in every waist-shawl glittered a perfect arsenal of weapons.

"I don't know what Sundar Singh's little game is," thought Tom, "but the sooner I am out of this the better. In spite of their ancestral feud, which I seem to have

settled for them, I would not trust one of the beggars further than I could see him."

The night had come—the wonderful, silent night of these high altitudes. The moon, just at its full, rose in indescribable grandeur over the mountain-peaks, and lit up every blade of grass and every boulder that strewed the valley's sides. Tom lay on a heap of rugs in the chief's house.

"If I get back alive," he thought, "what on earth am I going to say to the colonel? I must have slept at my post, and Heaven only knows what that'll mean to me! I am afraid Leonard is going to score this time."

Then, in spite of all his efforts, his eyes closed, and for several hours he slept soundly. When he awoke, it was to find Sundar Singh bending over him.

"Quick, sahib, put on these things! There is not a moment to lose! Ask no questions until we are out of ear-shot. It is sufficient for you to know that two men are lying dead yonder. We must be far away before they are discovered!"

With hands trembling with excitement, Tom muffled himself in a ragged robe, the breast of which was discoloured by a dark stain, which was still wet. There was no disguising its origin, but it was no time for sentiment, and soon the corporal was disguised as a very presentable tribesman—turban on head, and his breeches and puttees concealed by the loose linen trousers. When he was ready, Sundar Singh placed his lips to his ear.

"I will return to the well for a little space," he said. "Go you down the valley until you reach an opening on the left, into which you must turn. The road lies from thence straight up the mountain-side for a long way, and then winds down into the plain, where the river flows. Before you are at the top I will join you."

And, stepping back with extreme caution, the Sikh seated himself on the parapet of the well again. Stealing along on tip-toe until he was clear of the village, Tom strode out, and soon reached the little pass which the Sikh had indicated. As he turned to look back, he saw a white speck behind him, and knew that it was Sundar Singh following in his wake. Tom had examined the weapons in the sash round his waist, and found them to consist of a murderous-looking knife and an old flint-lock pistol, the grip of which was handsomely chased with silver. He waited, and in a few minutes the Sikh joined him, a delighted smile on his face.

"So far we are safe, sahib," said Sundar Singh. "But the dogs will soon awake, and then they will pursue us. Now we must climb like cats!"

And away they went, clambering up the steep, winding gulleys in the hillside, higher up and higher, until they drew out of the shadow and came out into the moonlight.

For two miles they toiled, cutting their hands against the sharp boulders, and more than once coming to a halt to take breath; but Sundar Singh always urged expedition, and seemed incapable of fatigue, in spite of the fact that he had eaten nothing for forty-eight hours.

He plucked a handful of grass and chewed it as he went along; and then they gained the summit of the mountain as the moon sank, and their way was shrouded in gloom.

The track became very difficult, and at every step they sent stones rolling down.

There might be other tribesmen afoot, and Sundar Singh proceeded, with his head set forward and his sharp ears very wide open. After a time they heard the brawling of

"HARRY WHARTON'S DAY OUT."

NEXT
TUESDAY.

BY FRANK RICHARDS.

a mountain stream, and knew that they must be approaching the foot of the mountain.

Stumbling on a slab of rock, Tom fell, and slipped several yards, and so tired was he by that time that he lay for a moment stretched full length, with Sundar Singh crouching beside him.

"The sahib is not hurt?" inquired the Sikh anxiously. "We have yet far to go!"

"I am not hurt, old man," said Tom, "but I must rest a bit."

And there they stayed, Tom, with his hands under his head, looking out into the darkness, and listening to the gurgle of the water as it flowed in its rocky bed.

"Hark!" said Sundar Singh, placing his hand on his companion's shoulder. "Do you hear that?"

Away up the mountain above them, a boulder, dislodged they knew not how, came thundering down, bounding and splitting in its descent, and landing with a mighty thud in the valley at their feet.

"If that had come our way, oh, Sundar Singh," said Tom, "our troubles must have been over."

"Hush!" said the Sikh, still listening. "This is not the time of the avalanches. I think the tribesmen are coming down the path."

Tom sprang to his feet, and far away overhead in the silence of the morning he heard the rattle of more stones, and knew that Sundar Singh was right. The tribesmen were on their track.

"What is to be done?" said Tom. "If those chaps were North American Indians, I would not give a dog-biscuit for our chances. Can they see in the dark?"

"Wait!" said Sundar Singh. "Come this way, and tread the grass down with your feet." He led Tom in a direct line from the foot of the track to the bank of the stream, and, stooping down, took off his right shoe, which he placed on the bank, with its tow in the water. "Now, like as a bird!" he whispered, and stole away along the bank to a great limestone rock, behind which he cowered and waited.

The stones came rolling thick and fast, and they could hear voices calling. It was so dark that nothing could be seen. They knew by the sound that many men were coming down the path they had just left, and that they were now in the valley. They could hear the swish of their feet in the tangled herbage, and then there was a cry of delight.

"They have found it!" whispered Sundar Singh. "In a moment we shall hear them ford the stream!"

Jamra Khan, groping with his hands, had discovered the Sikh's shoe, precisely as Sundar Singh had intended he should, and there was a great splashing as the tribesmen struggled knee-deep in the roaring torrent.

For half an hour the two fugitives lay listening with all their ears, and then Sundar Singh, rising from his knees, said:

"Come, we have led them on a false scent. At the other end of the valley there is an opening in the hills, and there we shall be safe."

The dawn was breaking greyly as they forded the stream a mile below the spot where the tribesmen had crossed, and as Tom looked round he could see nothing but precipitous mountain-sides, rising on either hand.

"We have lost our way!" he said quickly.

"Let the sahib have patience," said Sundar Singh. "Follow me!"

Having torn a great strip from his upper garment, he wrapped it round his naked foot, and took Tom by the hand. Hidden away in one corner, the Sikh pointed to a goat-track leading up the face of the rock, and clambering almost on hands and knees, they had soon placed several hundred feet between them and the valley below.

The track led them into a little gorge, where there was barely room for two men to walk abreast, and the climb had been so steep, Tom began to lose his wind.

"A little further, sahib. We are almost at the top!" said the Sikh. "I have been this way with my company when we came to punish the tribes."

And Tom struggling manfully on, they reached the head of the gorge, to find themselves on a species of razor-edged crest, beyond which the track plunged down into the Khor Plain at their feet.

The light was still very faint, for the dawn was long in coming; but they thought they were safe now, and Sundar Singh laughed aloud with delight.

The laughter died away on his lips, and he pointed downwards. Round an angle in the track, not fifty yards beneath them, there came a turbaned figure, followed by a dozen more.

Both parties saw each other simultaneously, and a wild yell of triumph rose from the throats of the tribesmen.

"Allah is good!" said Jamra Khan, pointing upwards with his lean, brown hand.

And, plucking his sword from his girdle, he leapt towards them with the agility of a wild cat.

"We have got to die, Sundar Singh!" said Tom, drawing out the Pathan knife and squaring his jaw.

"True, oh, sahib!" said the Sikh, with a glitter in his eyes. "But we shall die shoulder to shoulder, like soldiers of the great white King!"

A Desperate Fight.

As Tom Howard looked down at the climbing tribesmen, and saw the lust of slaughter in their eyes, he realised that a well-nigh hopeless struggle for their lives was before them.

A few short hours before he had been the honoured guest of Jamra Khan, and now that amiable gentleman had no wish but to carve the life out of him, and possibly afterwards to mutilate his corpse in the dreadful fashion of these mountaineers.

"We shall make a good fight of it, Sundar Singh!" said the corporal through his set teeth. "For every thrust a life, and for every life a better chance for us. Take you that little man with the shaven crown, and leave the chief to me!"

And the Sikh, tossing the long hair out of his eyes, nodded and bent forward, with his matchlock at the charge.

As Tom settled himself firmly on the razor-backed ridge, he dislodged a pebble, which rolled down, and Jamra Khan, setting his foot upon it inadvertently, fell heavily forward upon all-fours.

The little tribesman with the shaven crown, his round shield on his arm, and a glittering sword in his hand, sprang over the prostrate body of his leader with a wild shout, and received the muzzle of the Sikh's matchlock full in his right eye.

He uttered a piercing scream, and rolled backwards, Jamra Khan pushing him away with his elbow as he rose to his feet.

Then Tom's long knife and the tulwar of Jamra Khan met, and for a moment the chief filled the track from side to side, preventing his followers from coming to the front.

"I don't suppose you ever heard of the Pass of Thermopylae, Sundar Singh," laughed Tom; "but it seems to me we are going to have a marvellous imitation of it here!"

Tom drew his right leg back hastily as he spoke, for the chief, disengaging his weapon, made a cut at the corporal's knee, and Tom retaliated by bringing his knife down on the tribesman, and severing his third finger.

The active Sikh sprang forward, and, lunging out with his matchlock, set Jamra Khan rolling several yards down the declivity, where before he could recover his balance four of his men slipped past him with a loud chorus of yells.

(To be continued next Tuesday.)

(A grand war story starts in this week's number of the "Gem Library," entitled "Britain Invaded." Don't miss it!)

"BRITAIN INVADED!" A War Story in "THE GEM" LIBRARY.

For Next Week

The Editor, "MAGNET" Library, 23-29, Bouverie Street, Fleet Street, London, will be glad to hear from you.

"HARRY WHARTON'S DAY OUT."

Our next tale of Greyfriars will deal with the chums' adventures at Aldershot, the famous military camp. A football match is the real attraction, but Billy Bunter unwillingly becomes the centre of attention.

P.S.—Note the contents of the "Gem Library" out this week. It's a fine Double Number!

THE EDITOR.



ABSOLUTELY FREE



We are anxious to get our Special 1908 Sale Price List of Jewellery, etc., into every home in the United Kingdom, and we make the following remarkable offer to all readers of this paper.

FREE! FREE!! FREE!!!

You Can Choose from the following. A Ladies' or Gent's **REAL DIAMOND RING**, a Ladies' **FASHIONABLE BROOCH** set with a **REAL DIAMOND, RACE, MARINE, or FIELD GLASSES** (all as illustrated), or a Beautifully Carved **WALNUT** stained Wooden **CLOCK**, suitable for Dining Room, Drawing Room, or Hall, will be given **ABSOLUTELY FREE** to every **FIFTH** Person who sends for our Special Sale Price List, and to **EVERYONE** who sends for a Price List, but who is not entitled to a Clock, Brooch, Glasses, or Ring, we will send with Price List, and **ABSOLUTELY FREE**, a beautiful Gold-cased Gem-set **BROOCH** if the applicant is a Lady, or a Handsome and Useful **FOUNTAIN PEN** if a Gentleman. If you are entitled to a **FREE DIAMOND RING, GLASSES, BROOCH, or CLOCK**, our only condition is that you purchase goods from our Price List (either for Cash or Weekly Payments of 6d. or upwards) to the value of no less than 4/6. **REMEMBER**, even if you do not get a Diamond Ring, Glasses, Brooch, or a Clock you are sure of getting a Gem-set Brooch or Fountain Pen for your **Halfpenny** (the cost of sending) **Even if You Buy Nothing.**

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As this offer may not be repeated. Anyone sending more than ONE application will be disqualified.

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A Splendid Instrument.



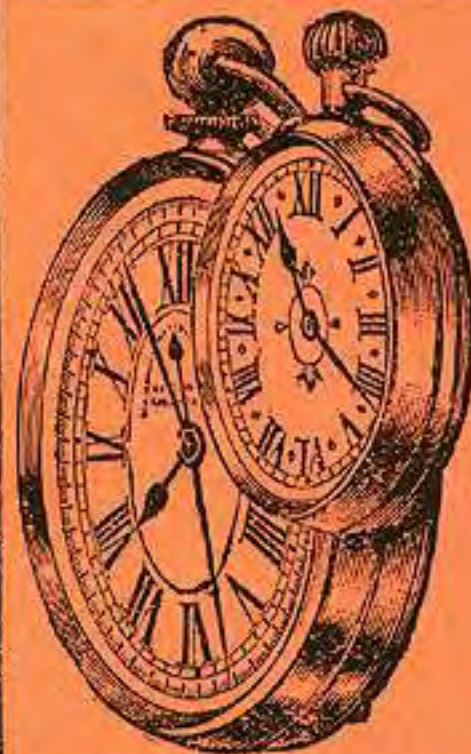
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June 9, 1904.

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Lodge Farm, Chicheley, Newport Pagnell.

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(Mrs.) A. CLARKE.

Cheshunt Locks, River Lee, Cheshunt, Herts.

Jan. 3, 1905.

Dear Sir,—I received the Field Glasses, Clock, and Studs, for which I am pleased. They are good value for the money. I have shown them to several friends, who say they are good and cheap. You can make what use you like of this testimonial. I have had Glasses at sea, costing about £6, no better than the ones you sent me.—I remain, yours truly,

THOMAS B. HOLDSWORTH.

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Yours truly, WILLIAM EVANS.

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Write plainly, giving full name and address. Cut out and enclose Coupon in unsealed envelope and stamp with 3d. stamp. If envelope is sealed or anything besides your name and address is written, 1d. stamp must be used. **POST TO-NIGHT to KEW TRADING ASSOCIATION, LTD., Dept. G, KEW, LONDON.**

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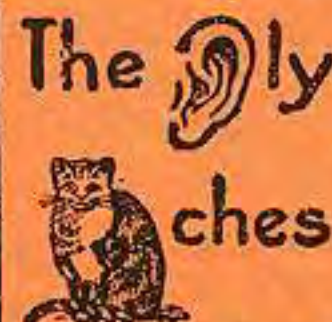
3	15	18	11
8	21	12	12

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