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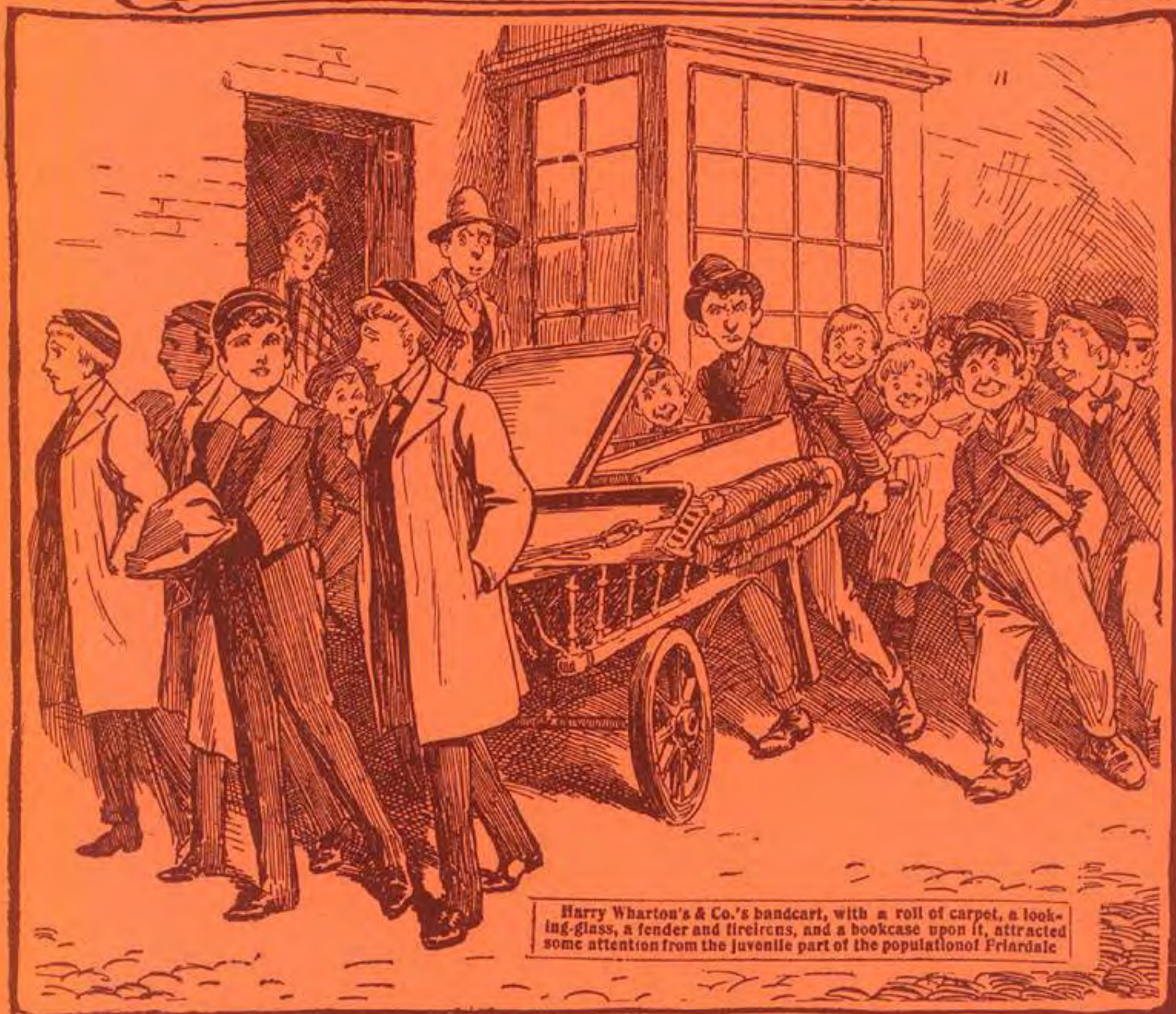
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By
FRANK
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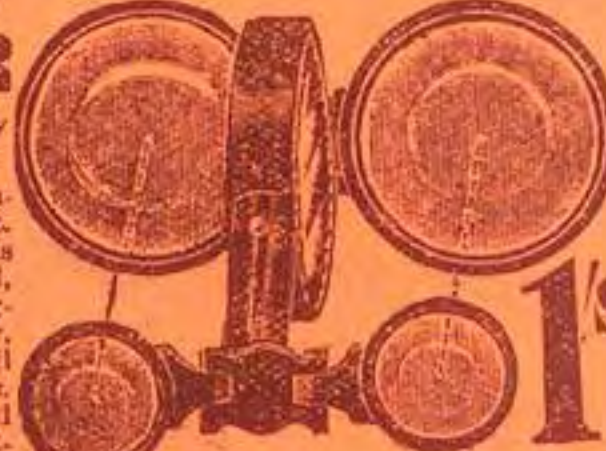
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Billy Bunter's House- warming



A Grand, Long, Complete
School Tale of
the Boys of Greyfriars,
BY
FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter Suggests a House-Warming.

"I LIKE the paint," said Harry Wharton, "and the paper's all right. But—"

"But the furniture," said Bob Cherry.

"Exactly—the furniture!"

"There's a table," remarked Frank Nugent, "and five chairs. They are provided by Greyfriars, free gratis and for nothing."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter! We're talking business—"

"Yes; but I say—"

"Cheese it! This question of furniture is a serious one, and we've got to take it seriously."

And the chums of the Greyfriars Remove looked serious. It was an important occasion.

At the beginning of the term the whole row of Remove, or Lower Fourth, studies had been destroyed by fire.

The rebuilding had been hurried on at express speed, and it was now completed, and the juniors were at liberty to take up their new quarters.

The famous Remove passage had come into existence again—a little cleaner and brighter than of old. The studies, in their fresh paper and paint, looked very clean and cheerful. The Famous Four—Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh—were standing in Study No. 1, making plans. They had a brand-new study in the place of the old one; but all their household accessories had been destroyed in the fire.

Hence arose the question of furnishing.

It was certainly a serious question, for the pocket-money of the juniors was limited, and it was no light matter to furnish a room for five fellows.

The school had provided a table and five chairs. That was all very well as a start, but, as Bob Cherry pointed out at once, they could not possibly live and move and have their being for ever in a room furnished only with a table and chairs.

"The table's all right," Wharton remarked. "It's made of deal, and I should have preferred Spanish mahogany. But it will do."

"And the chairs will do," said Nugent, "though they certainly are not real Chippendale."

"But we must have an easy chair," said Bob Cherry, "likewise a carpet. If it will run to a rug, we must have a rug."

"And a clock!"

"Yes, by Jove, a clock! And curtains."

"A room looks all the better for curtains," said Nugent thoughtfully. "A square of carpet will do, and we can paint the floor round it, or you can get some nobby linoleum to look like parquetry, you know. A parquetry floor would be stunning."

"I say, you fellows——"

"The best thing we can do is to raise all the tin we can, and pool it," said Harry Wharton. "We must stand in this together, you know. And it's a good idea to write home and get things from your people on an occasion like this. A square of carpet or a rug saves a chap a lot of money, and we really don't want 'em new."

"I say, you fellows——"

"I wish you wouldn't keep on jawing, Bunter," said Bob Cherry. "What is it you want? Say it quick, and take a little run."

Billy Bunter blinked at the chums of the Remove with suppressed indignation.

"Look here, you fellows, I don't think you ought to waste all the available cash on silly furniture. I can do without an easy chair for a time, and if I can, I'm jolly sure you can. And curtains are extravagant. What you really want on an occasion like this is a house-warming."

"A which?"

"A house-warming. The proper thing is to stand a feed and ask the fellows in, to celebrate getting a new study."

"My dear porpoise——"

"It's up to you, Wharton, as captain of the Remove, to give the biggest house-warming in the Form," said Billy Bunter emphatically. "I don't like to see you neglecting your duties."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"But my dear ass, we must get the place furnished before we give a house-warming."

"I don't see the necessity. You can borrow some chairs, and the chaps will bring their own knives and forks and plates. In fact, I've already asked Hazeldene and Russell."

"You cheeky young duffer!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "You mean to say you've invited guests here, when we haven't even got the place furnished."

"I don't think you ought to be mean, Cherry. I like to be hospitable, and if you fellows disapprove of hospitality——"

"You'd better jolly well put your visitors off for a bit," growled Bob Cherry. "We've got to get the sticks in."

"I don't see how I can very well do that, Cherry," said the fat junior, with a shake of the head. "You see, this study has got rather a reputation for hospitality, and the fellows naturally expect a house-warming. I've as good as promised it. Of course, I don't mean you chaps to pay for it all. I'm expecting a postal order to-morrow morning, and——"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! If we stand the house-warming this evening, of course you chaps will have to advance the money; but that won't hurt you, as I shall stand my whack as soon as the post gets in in the morning."

"Buzz off a bit, Billy, and let us think it out."

"Yes, but——"

"Will you bunk?" roared Bob Cherry.

"Certainly, but——"

Bob Cherry seized the fat junior by the shoulders and ran him to the door. Billy Bunter squirmed in vain in the junior's muscular grip.

"Ow! Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Buzz off!" exclaimed Bob; and he gave the fat junior a twist that sent him spinning down the passage.

There was a sudden shock as two bodies met, and Billy Bunter staggered in one direction, and Wun Lung, who was coming along the passage, in another.

Billy Bunter had met him in full career.

Wun Lung the Chinese was slim and light, and Bunter was a heavy-weight, and so the Chinese junior got decidedly the worst of the collision.

He went down with a bump on the linoleum, and Billy Bunter staggered against the wall. But he did not remain there a moment. He stumbled and rolled over, and plumped down fairly upon the Chinese.

There was an agonised gasp from Wun Lung.

"Oh! Savee me—clushee!"

But Billy Bunter seemed to be in no hurry to move.

He was breathless and rather dazed, and perhaps he found the Chinese soft and comfortable to sprawl upon.

Wun Lung gasped painfully under the weight.

"Help! Me clushee!"

Bob Cherry ran along the passage, laughing.

"Get off, Bunter, you ass! You're crushing him! Roll off, porpoise!"

"I'm winded!" moaned Bunter faintly. "I feel that I am seriously hurt. I forgive you, Cherry."

"Roll off, you ass!"

"I can't move. I'm knocked out. It was all your fault, but if I expire of internal injuries I forgive you—— Ow!"

Billy Bunter had said that he could not move, but he moved suddenly enough then. The Chinese had dug a pin into his fat leg, and Bunter found that he could move.

He jumped up with a wild yell, and Wun Lung slowly and breathlessly rose to his feet.

"You—you—you beast!" gasped Bunter. "You—you horrid heathen! I'm hurt!"

"Me too," gasped Wun Lung. "Me clushee—me squashee. What you tinkee?"

"I—I—I—I'll——"

"You'll take a little run," said Bob Cherry, taking Bunter by the collar. "Go and get a feed in the tuck-shop, and you'll be all right. Buzz!"

And Bunter "buzzed." Wun Lung followed Bob Cherry back to the study, and followed him in, with an expansive smile upon his yellow face.

"Letter for Wharton," he said, with his curious Oriental pronunciation in which many "r's" were turned into "l's."

"Me blingee letter."

"Thanks!" said Wharton, taking it carelessly. Then as he looked at the superscription he became suddenly interested. "Hallo! It's from my uncle. Will you excuse me, you fellows?"

He opened the letter, and as he read the first few lines the expression of his face became grave and serious.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Called Away.

BOB CHERRY gave a whistle.

"Bad news from home, Harry?"

Wharton looked up from the letter, his face very grave. He shook his head.

"Not bad news," he said, "but rather a trouble just at this time. My uncle wants me to go home for a week, and he says he has obtained the Head's permission. I'm to go with him to meet an old Army friend who is just coming home from India, and to stay a few days at his place. He's an old friend of my father's, and my uncle thinks I ought to go."

"Lucky beggar, to get a week's holiday!"

"Well, I don't know. I shall like the run, of course, but it will be a bit awkward leaving Greyfriars just now," said Wharton musingly. "There's the furnishing and the house-warming, and then there's the footer. With the Form match with the Upper Fourth coming off soon, the Remove eleven

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A Grand School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.

wants keeping to its work. There's plenty of work here for the Form captain."

"The workfulness is great for the honourable Form captain," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the substituteness will be the proper caper."

"That's right," said Bob Cherry. "You can appoint a deputy. We ought really to have elected a vice-captain, you know. The school has a vice-captain as well as a captain, so why shouldn't a Form?"

"Echo answers why," said Nugent.

Hurree Singh shook his head.

"Excuse me, my friend, but echo would naturally answer Form," he remarked. "The echo answers lastwordfully as a rule."

"Ha, ha! You see——"

"But perhaps the difference is idiotic," said the nabob. "I have often found it somewhat difficult to comprehend the idiots of this country."

"The—the which?"

"The idiots of this country. You see——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "He means the idioms."

The nabob shook his head gently.

"I think not, my worthy chum. I studied your beautiful language under the best native masters in Bhanipur, and I learned it with this thusfulness."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Well, to come back to our muttons," he said. "I've got to leave Greyfriars on Friday, for a week. We ought to have a vice-captain to take my place while I'm gone. I don't know whether the Form would agree to my appointing one."

"Oh, I don't know!" remarked Bob Cherry. "If you appointed the most suitable chap, the Remove might agree to it. I should be quite willing——"

"I should be quite willing——" began Nugent.

"The willingness of my honourable self would be terrific."

"Me tinkee, too," remarked Wun Lung—"me tinkee me good captain. What you tinkee?"

"Ha ha, ha!"

"Me tinkee me lippping captain."

"Oh, yes, you'd be ripping," said Bob Cherry. "But heathens are barred. I suppose, as a matter of fact, there'll have to be an election for Form vice-captain."

"Yes; and it had better be got through before I leave," said Harry. "Suppose we have the election after school to-morrow, and if we can rig up a house-warming, we'll have it after the election."

"Good!"

"And now about the furnishing. Let's make up the pool."

And a cap was passed round for contributions. Wun Lung, who was always rolling in money, pulled a couple of sovereigns out of his pocket and slapped them into the cap.

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Nugent. "You don't contribute here, you young ass! You've got your own study to furnish!"

"No savvy!"

"We can't take contributions from outsiders."

"No savvy!"

"Take your tin back."

"No savvy!"

"Take it back, Wun Lung," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "We can't let you help us in this matter, you know."

A word from Wharton was always enough for Wun Lung. He reluctantly put the two coins back in his pocket, and glided from the study with his usual noiseless step.

The contributions from the chums of the Remove did not come to anything like the single "whack" that had been declined.

Nugent found half-a-crown, Harry Wharton seven shillings, and the Nabob of Bhanipur a sovereign. Bob Cherry hunted through his jacket pockets without success, and then went into his waistcoat with the same result.

The others watched him as he dived into his trousers' pockets, still without any coins coming to light.

"Where did you put it?" asked Nugent.

Bob Cherry grunted.

"Where did I put what?"

"The money."

"What money?"

"The money you are looking for, of course."

"There isn't any. I was just looking in case there might be some I'd overlooked."

"Oh!"

"I haven't any," said Bob Cherry, ceasing the vain search at last. "You'll have to leave my whack over till I get some tin on Saturday."

"One pound nine-and-six," said Wharton. "Well, that's not so bad. We can make a beginning on that. Look here, suppose we get a pass to go down to Friardale after tea, and see what we can pick up at the secondhand furniture-shop. I prefer to deal at a secondhand shop when there's only a little bit of tin to spend. You get better value for

your money, and you sometimes pick up a really valuable article."

"Good! Wingate will give us a pass. And now about tea? There isn't much, but I suppose it's no good drawing on the cash to get in grub for tea."

"Not a bit of good. We must be awfully economical till the furnishing's done. Bread and cheese is all right. And Bunter is out, so we sha'n't want more than half as much as usual."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the chums of the Remove set about preparing their frugal meal.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The House-Warming is Enquired After!

IT was usual among the Greyfriars juniors to have tea in the studies, when their funds ran to it. The school tea, provided in the hall, was a substantial meal enough, but it could not by any stretch of the imagination be called luxurious.

The boys were at liberty to supplement it with articles purchased with their own money at the tuckshop. But it was much coster and more comfortable to have tea in their own studies, and if they could raise as much as a chunk of bread and a sardine, the juniors generally did so.

The Remove had been deprived of separate studies for so long, that tea in their own quarters was a luxury not to be dispensed with.

But pocket-money was at a low ebb as the week grew older, and most of the Removeites had got rid of the previous Saturday's pocket-money; and those who were not content with frugal meals in their rooms, went into hall to tea, or looked round for invitations to wealthier studies.

In this state of affairs, Billy Bunter's idea of a house-warming in Study No. 1 came like corn in Egypt in the lean years.

The whole Remove agreed cordially that the chums of Study No. 1 were bound to stand a really ripping house-warming.

Wharton was captain of the Form, and No. 1 Study was generally acknowledged to be top study. A chap could not take a high position in the Form without being called upon to pay for it somehow. The whole Remove agreed that the house-warming was a ripping idea, and that Wharton's house-warming should stand for the whole Form, as it were, and save the other fellows from the necessity of standing one. And the invitations Bunter recklessly lavished on all sides were accepted cheerfully.

Billy Bunter was not quite so stupid as he pretended to be in the matter. He had looked forward for a long time to the glorious feed that was to inaugurate the taking possession of the Remove's new quarters, and he did not mean to be disappointed if he could help it.

The general expectation of a whole Form would place the chums in an awkward position if the house-warming did not come off after all.

The pressure of public opinion being brought to bear, the house-warming would have to come off; and it was certain to be an extensive affair, and Billy Bunter revelled in imagination at the prospect.

"Another cup of tea?" asked Bob Cherry, straining the last drop from the kettle into the pot, and giving it a shake. "It's still got a colour."

"No, I think not," said Harry Wharton. "I'll have a bit of cheese, though."

"Pass the cheese, Nugent."

There was a knock at the door, and Hazeldene, of the Remove, looked into the study. The chums looked up.

"Is it ready?" asked Hazeldene.

"Eh? Is what ready?"

"The feed."

"What feed?"

"Why, the house-warming, of course. I understood that it was this evening."

"Then there's something wrong with your understanding apparatus," said Bob Cherry. "It isn't."

"But Bunter said——"

"Oh, never mind Bunter! Buzz off!"

Hazeldene, looking very puzzled, withdrew. A few minutes later Russell looked in.

"Hope I'm not late," he said.

"That's according to what you've come for," said Bob Cherry. "If you've come to tea, you're late; but if you've come to supper, you're early."

"I've come to the feed."

"What feed?"

"Why, the house-warming you know."

"I don't know."

"Look here——"

"Oh, go and eat tintacks!"

Russell glared, and banged the door after him as he went out. The chums of the Remove looked at one another.

"This is all that young ass, Bunter's, fault!" exclaimed Nugent wrathfully.

The door opened again. This time it was Bulstrode, the big, burly bully of the Remove, who walked in. But Bulstrode was looking very agreeable now.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry.

"Good-evening!" said Bulstrode. "I've come!"

"So I can see. Now we're waiting for you to go."

"Oh, you must have your little jokes!" said Bulstrode good-humouredly. "I suppose it's all right, Wharton. You and I haven't been on very good terms, but on an occasion like this, I think all personal differences ought to be sunk."

"On an occasion like which?"

"Why, a house-warming, you know. I understand that you fellows are giving a big house-warming to stand for the whole Form."

"You've got it wrong," said Nugent blandly. "We are waiting for the whole Form to stand us a house-warming."

"But Bunter said—"

"Never mind Bunter. He's always bunting. Good-bye!"

Bulstrode seemed on the verge of an explosion; but he stamped out and slammed the door instead. Wharton was beginning to look worried.

"I suppose this sort of thing will go on all the evening!" he exclaimed. "We'd better get out while we've got the chance."

"Good wheeze!"

And the chums took their caps, and sallied out. Micky Desmond was coming up the passage, and he grinned cordially at the sight of the chums.

"Arrah, and is it going out, ye are?" he exclaimed. "I'm not late!"

"No, you're early," said Bob Cherry, pushing the Irish junior into an alcove in the wall, where he sat down rather suddenly on a wooden seat. "You're all right, bedad!"

And the Famous Four hurried on, leaving Micky Desmond sitting there, looking dazed. They entered the Sixth-Form passage to go to Wingate's study to get a pass, and at the corner Skinner, of the Remove, came up, with an ingratiating smile, which showed at once that he was another of the invited guests.

"Jolly good of you to remember me," he said. "I'll come. Bunter didn't say exactly at what time."

"Better go and ask him, then," grunted Bob Cherry. "He knows more about it than we do."

And they left Skinner looking very perplexed.

Wingate, of the Sixth, was in his study. He listened patiently while Harry explained what he wanted the pass for, and then wrote it out. He knew that he could trust the captain of the Remove.

"There you are!" he said. "Be in before eight, that's all."

"Right. Thanks, very much."

The chums donned their coats. The February weather was very keen and cold. They reached the hall door, when Mark Linley met them. The lad from Lancashire stopped.

"I say, Wharton, is it right what young Bunter has been telling us?" he asked. "Are you standing a feed in No. 1 to-night?"

"No; it's Billy's gas," said Harry. "The house-warming may come off, if we can fix it. Bunter is trying to work it, but I don't know yet."

Mark Linley laughed.

"I suspected something of the sort. But the whole Form seems to be taken up with the idea."

The chums looked wrathful as they plunged into the windy Close. Bunter was preparing a peck of troubles for his long-suffering study-mates.

But just then they did not foresee all the troubles that Bunter's reckless issuing of invitations was to lead to, or that expedition in search of furniture would not have been made.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Furniture Hunting—and a Fight.

HARRY WHARTON & Co. were soon in Friardale. In the little old-fashioned place there was one second-hand furniture-dealer's, and, judging by the look of the furniture, it had been there a very long time.

The juniors were out for bargains, and one pound nine shillings and sixpence was really a very decent sum to spend. Bob Cherry said that of course they could not expect to furnish a room like a palace for that; and, indeed, their expectations did not run nearly so high.

A gentleman with an aquiline nose greeted the juniors amiably as they squeezed their way into the dusky, dusty shop crammed with articles of furniture of more or less value—rather less than more.

"Vat I do for you?" he asked. "You vish to raise der money, but dat is der next entrance."

The next entrance was that of a pawnbroker's establishment, evidently run in connection with the furniture-shop.

The chums reddened a little.

"We haven't come to raise money," said Harry Wharton, rather indignantly. "We want to buy some furniture."

"Ah, I see, my young frent!"

"We're newly furnishing a study, you see," explained Bob Cherry, with some little importance. "We want the thing done in pretty good style, you know."

"Neat, but not gaudy," said Nugent.

"The stylefulness should be terrific."

"I have shoost der articles you require," said Mr. Lazarus. "You vill vant a table and chairs, and an ottoman and bookcase."

"We have the table and chairs. We shall want a bookcase, certainly."

"Vat you tink of dis?"

"H'm! That's all right! What's it made of?"

"Real mahogany," said Mr. Lazarus. "Solid all through. I lets you have him dirt cheap."

"Well, I dare say that will be all right," said Harry. He had his doubts about the solidity of the mahogany, but he felt that he could not expect princely purchases on one pound nine shillings and sixpence. "Now for the carpet!"

"I have shoost der thing for you, young shentlemens."

The square of carpet that was unrolled before them was really just the thing. It was very worn in the centre, but Bob Cherry remarked that the table would cover that. It was frayed round the edges, but Nugent suggested that that could be improved in the tacking down. The pattern was almost obliterated all over it, but Wharton said he did not like a glaring pattern. As the carpet thus pleased all parties, it was decided upon.

A looking-glass was next selected, and then a screen. The clock the chums had decided to buy new. Second-hand clocks had a way of obstinately refusing to go, Bob Cherry said. Fireirons and curb were selected, and the question of dogs was seriously debated. It was finally decided that in a hearth exactly three feet long there was no room for dogs; and, besides, Mr. Lazarus had a fender with raised ends that served exactly the same purpose. Mr. Lazarus, in fact, appeared to have everything that was wanted, and the juniors felt that they were getting along swimmingly.

"I say, we'd better stop now," said Wharton. "We want to pay cash for these things, and the resources are limited, you know. We can come again for the rest of the things. These will be enough for the present."

"Good! Let's have the bill, please, Mr. Lazarus. You've got the tin, Harry."

Mr. Lazarus smiled oilily, and began to reckon.

"Let me shee. Der bookcase, three pound fifteen—"

"Eh?"

"Der carpet, vun pound ten—"

"What?"

"Der gilt mirror, two pound five—"

"Which?"

"Der screen, fifteen sheeling."

"Oh!"

"Der fire-brasses, vun pound seven-and-seex."

"By Jove!"

"Dat vill be—"

"Hold on!" said Wharton grimly, while his chums looked pictures of dismay. "I hadn't the faintest idea that we were running it up like that. I thought you were selling us these things cheap."

"The cheapfulness is terrific."

Mr. Lazarus smiled benignly.

"I lets you have dem sheep," he said. "Dis is der sheep shop. I takes off discount for cash."

"Oh, but—"

"I also allows you someting off, as goot customers. Suppose we say nine pound for der lot?" said Mr. Lazarus generously.

"But we have only one pound nine-and-six," said Harry, a little crestfallen. "Come to think of it, the things would have to be awfully cheap to come inside that."

"Den I am sorry," said Mr. Lazarus, still good-humouredly. "But I do not keep shop to gif tings away."

"N-n-no, I suppose not."

"I lets you have dem sheep. Ve vill say seven pound te lot."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"Can't be did! We must get what we can for the cash we have, that's all."

"You not paye me in cash," suggested Mr. Lazarus. "I lets you have dem, and you pays me afterwards, a little and a little at der time."

Harry Wharton shook his head again, still more decidedly.

"No, thanks! Nothing on tick."
"It is mine hire-purchase system," said Mr. Lazarus persuasively. "You takes der goods, and pays me vun shilling, two shillings a week, and you not misses it."

"That's a jolly good idea!" said Bob Cherry. "I don't see why we shouldn't go in for the easy-payment system, Harry."

"I don't like the idea."

"Blessed if I see how we shall get the study furnished any other way," said Nugent. "It wants a fearful lot of money when you come to furnishing."

"I don't like running into debt."

"It is not debt, young shentlemans," explained Mr. Lazarus. "You see der furniture becomes your property, and you pays so much a week."

"Thanks, no. I say, you chaps, let me have my way this time," said Wharton earnestly. "However you put it, it is getting into debt, and I don't like the idea. I always feel horribly uncomfortable if I owe any money."

"The uncomfortablefulness is terrific."

"Oh, very well!" said Bob Cherry reluctantly. "But I'm blessed if I see what we shall get for one pound nine-and-six! That won't pay even for the carpet!"

"Perhaps Mr. Lazarus has some cheaper things?"

"I sells you dem tings sheep," said Mr. Lazarus discontentedly.

"Very well, we'll go somewhere else."

But Mr. Lazarus wouldn't have that. Perhaps one pound nine shillings and sixpence seemed better than nothing to him. He remembered that he had a cheaper "line," and requested the boys to follow him deeper into the recesses of the musty shop.

Nugent was explaining that they didn't want a line, supposing that Mr. Lazarus meant a clothesline, when Bob Cherry pinched his arm and stopped him.

The goods now displayed seemed, as far as Harry could see, quite the equal of those previously seen. There was a well-worn square of carpet for seven-and-sixpence, and for the life of him Harry could not see that it was worse than the other. A looking-glass was to be had for eight shillings, and fender and fireirons for ten.

They weren't very good, and they were far from new. But Harry could not see much difference between them and the rejected lot.

The bookcase had to be left over. Harry said that they couldn't do everything at once, and that was undoubtedly true. But Mr. Lazarus had a "lovely" bookcase for "vun pound," and he begged to be allowed to send it up to the school on approval. He was willing to take all risks, and only smiled when Bob Cherry suggested that a junior's study wasn't a safe place to leave a bookcase in. It seemed ungracious to refuse, and as the bookcase was to be on approval for a week, and funds were likely to come in before then, Wharton assented.

"When can we have the things?" Harry asked, as they were leaving the shop.

"I sends dem viz you now in handcart," said Mr. Lazarus.

"Thank you very much."

And the purchased articles were forthwith piled upon a handcart, and a lad with an aquiline nose took charge of it, and shoved away industriously after the juniors. It was very kind of Mr. Lazarus, considering the small amount of the purchases, but doubtless he was looking for further custom.

But the handcart, with a roll of carpet, a looking-glass, a fender and fireirons, and a bookcase upon it, attracted some attention from the juvenile part of the population of Friardale.

The village boys generally exchanged catcalls and yells of defiance with the Greyfriars fellows when they met, and the present opportunity was too good to be lost. The youthful villagers collected in a kind of procession to follow the handcart, calling out all sorts of rude things. The Greyfriars juniors turned very red, but for some time they walked on without appearing to take any notice.

But finding it impossible to exasperate the juniors to a row, the villagers adopted more forcible tactics. A rush was made, with the evident intention of oversetting the barrow, and the juniors turned back with clenched fists.

The crowd of urchins melted away at once, yelling derisively.

"This is getting warm," said Harry. "Look out, Bob!"

But Bob Cherry did not look out quickly enough. A cabbage-stump came sailing through the air, and it struck him on the back of the head with a whack that made him give utterance to a roar.

"Ow! What's that. Ow!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" yelled the urchins. "Haw, haw, haw!"

Bob Cherry glared around. He had a bump on the back of his head, and his temper was up. Without stopping to count the odds, he charged back at the enemy.

This was rather unexpected, and before they could scatter, the wrathful junior of Greyfriars was upon them.

Right at the leader Bob Cherry rushed, catching him under the chin with a right-hander that sent him spinning. Then the junior rushed on, and a couple more of the enemy went rolling over on the road.

There was a chorus of yells:

"At him!"

"Rush him!"

"Give him socks!"

And the village boys closed round him threateningly.

But Harry Wharton & Co. were rushing to the rescue now. Their charge sent the villagers scattering, and Bob Cherry was rescued, three or four of the enemy lying sprawling on the ground as the juniors turned once more to follow the furniture-laden handcart.

And though the villagers sent catcalls and yells after the juniors, they did not venture to come to close quarters again, and Harry Wharton & Co. arrived safely and in triumph at the gates of Greyfriars with their new purchases.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Getting Into Order.

NEARLY all Greyfriars turned out in the dusky February evening to see the handcart wheeled across the Close. The new purchases of Harry Wharton & Co. seemed to possess a boundless interest for all—seniors and juniors alike.

Even Wingate, of the Sixth, the school captain, looked at them from the House steps and grinned. Blundell and Bland, of the Fifth, stood with their hands in their pockets, laughing heartily. The chums of the Remove could not see anything to laugh at, and they were red with wrath, but their blushes only made the Fifth-Formers laugh the louder.

But worst of all were the Upper Fourth. The Upper Fourth Form was the natural rival of the Remove, and the two Forms took every opportunity of chipping one another. The Upper Fourth were not likely to let this one slip.

Temple, Dabney & Co. gathered round the Removites as the handcart was wheeled up, and cheered.

"Three cheers for Wharton's uncle!" sang out Temple.

And the Upper Fourth responded heartily:

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Generous old gentleman!" said Fry. "Fancy giving a lot of his stock-in-trade to his dear boy like this!"

"We've bought these things, you asses!" growled Bob Cherry. "They weren't given to us!"

"Rats! It was your uncle gave them to you. Three cheers for their uncle!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Oh, shut up, you duffers, and clear off!"

"Hurrah for the Remove uncle—hurrah!"

The Upper Fourth crowded round. Their evident intention was to hustle the handcart till it was upset, and the fate of the looking-glass and the bookcase would then be a hard one.

Harry Wharton shouted to the Remove:

"Buck up, Remove! Go for the rotters!"

The Removites were only too willing to obey the call. They were generally ready for a row, and just then they were in particularly good-humour with their young captain.

An impression had got about—due probably to Billy Bunter—that Wharton was furnishing his quarters with a distinct view to making things comfortable for the house-warming; and, of course, the whole Form took the matter to heart. There wasn't a member of the Remove who didn't intend to turn up at the house-warming, and so they had a personal interest in Wharton's new "props."

"Go for the cads!" exclaimed Trevor. "Buck up, there!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Bob Cherry. "Give 'em socks!"

"The sockfulness is terrific."

The Remove did not stand on ceremony. They rushed the Upper Fourth. And Temple, Dabney & Co. were not inclined to take that quietly. They hit out, and a scrimmage was soon raging round the handcart.

Two or three times excited combatants bumped on it, and it was in imminent danger of upsetting; but the catastrophe fortunately did not quite come about.

"Here, stop that row!" shouted Wingate from the steps.

"I'll be amongst you in a minute."

But the rival juniors were too excited to heed.

The scrimmage waxed furious, and the captain of Greyfriars descended the steps, and "waded in."

He cuffed right and left, and at last succeeded in restoring peace—or, at all events, a cessation of active hostilities.

Then he stared at the handcart, and the flushed and excited chums of the Remove as they clustered round it.

"You'd better get those things indoors," he remarked. "Take 'em in at the side door. Temple, you clear off, and you, too, Dabney."

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

The furniture was carried in at the side door, and conveyed to No. 1 Study. The handcart was dismissed, and the juniors set to work arranging the furniture. It was a labour of love. The carpet was first laid down. It wasn't a very large square, and it left a couple of feet of bare boards round its edges; but Bob Cherry said that he was going to stain the boards imitation mahogany.

Nugent shook his head at the suggestion.

"Better have some of that nobby parquetry linoleum," he said. "Parquetry will look ripping, and it will be rather a new thing in a Remove study."

"But lino costs money, old chap."

"So does paint, if you come to that."

"Yes; but not nearly as much as lino. I could do all the painting required on about two bob. Now, lino costs two bob a square yard, cheap."

"Still, I rather think parquetry—"

"Never mind the parquetry at present," said Wharton. "What about shoving up this looking-glass? It just about fits the mantelpiece."

"Yes, that's jolly lucky, isn't it? We ought really to have taken measurements."

"Better get it up first thing, now the carpet's down. It gives the room a finished appearance, don't you think so?"

"The finishfulness is terrific."

"It wants a couple of nails—one on each side. Anybody got a hammer?"

"Here you are!"

"Brass-headed nails!"

"Haven't any. Somebody ought to have thought of those in the village. You can get them at Jones's two a penny. Hallo, hallo, hallo! What do you want?"

The latter question was addressed to Stott, who had put in his head at the door. He grinned amiably at the chums of No. 1.

"Can I help you in any way?" he asked.

"Well, that's jolly decent!" said Bob Cherry. "Haven't you got your study to look after, Stotty?"

"Oh, that can wait. I'd like to lend a hand here. I suppose the house-warming isn't coming off till you've got the furniture fixed up?"

"Oh, blow the house-warming!"

"I say, you're not postponing it, are you?" exclaimed Stott, in alarm. "I should think that a bit rotten, you know!"

"There isn't any house-warming. It's only Bunter's rot."

"Oh, draw it mild, you know. You don't mean to say that you've blued all the money on furniture, and haven't any left for the feed?" said Stott, indignantly.

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"I jolly well warn you that there will be a row."

"Travel!"

Stott went out and slammed the door. The chums of No. 1 were too busy to care much what he did or said. The glass was fastened up with ordinary nails, to be changed as soon as they obtained some brass-headed ones, which Bob Cherry said would look more finished. Meanwhile, a touch of gold paint on the heads of the ordinary nails was quite enough to keep up appearances.

"It's beginning to look all right, grinned Bob Cherry. "I suppose the bookcase had better stand here, where the old one did. I hear that the governors are going to make the fellows a cash allowance for the things burnt at the time of the fire, and I suppose they'll have thought it out and decided by next Christmas or so. In the meantime, this will be ripping."

"It does look shipshape," said Wharton, with an admiring glance round the study. "I shall take the opportunity while I'm home to send down some little things, you know. There's lots of things at Wharton Lodge that won't be missed, that would make all the difference here. The new sets of books we've got will look ripping in the bookcase. The covers give the room quite a bright appearance when the light strikes them."

"So they do! I wish we had some paint, so that we could give the room the finishing touch," said Bob Cherry, regretfully.

"Better wait till we're in funds, old chap, and get some parquetry linoleum."

"Oh, blow your linoleum, Nugent! I tell you a coat of dark green paint will look ripping—just the final artistic touch the place wants."

"H'm!" said Nugent, doubtfully.

"The h'mfulness is terrific," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Better go and get a wash, now," said Harry, looking at his hands, which had become decidedly soiled in the process of arranging the furniture. "These things want a bit of cleaning. It will be ripping to do our prep. in here this evening instead of in the common-room. I've got the notice to write out, too, about the election of vice-captain. It will have to be posted up to-night."

And, a wash being voted the most advisable step next, the chums of the Remove adjourned to the nearest bath-room.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Remove Wax Wroth.

"SEEN the new notice up?" asked Skinner, as he met Bulstrode an hour or so later.

Bulstrode looked at him.

"No! What is it? A Remove notice?"

"Yes, signed by Wharton. It's a chance for you."

"How do you mean?"

"Wharton's going away for a bit. There's to be an election for vice-captain, and as you used to be captain of the Remove before Wharton came, it's a chance for you to get in again."

"Yes, rather," chimed in Stott, "and once in as captain, you may be able to keep Wharton off the grass for good when he does come back."

Bulstrode's eyes glistened.

He had never quite got over being left aside by the Remove, when Harry Wharton was chosen captain of the Form.

Any chance to take up his old place was welcome to him; and if he could accomplish his object by any kind of trickery, he was not likely to hesitate.

He nodded to Skinner and Stott, and strolled into the hall, where the notice-board was that bore the paper signed by Wharton. There were a good many notices on the board, but only one that was of any great interest to the Remove. There was a crowd of Lower Fourth boys standing there reading it when Bulstrode came up. The burly junior could read it over their heads easily enough.

"NOTICE!"

"H. Wharton, captain of the Remove, being called away for a time, there will be an election for a vice-captain, to take his place during his absence. The vice-captain will have the full powers of Form captain during the absence of H. Wharton, and all fellows taking part in the election will be expected to give their word to accept him as captain on the same terms as H. Wharton. The election will take place to-morrow, Thursday, at seven sharp, in the Form-room. Any member of the Remove Form is eligible for election."

"Signed, H. WHARTON, Captain of the Remove."

"Good!" said Trevor. "I rather think I should make a pretty good vice-captain. What do you think, Bulstrode?"

"I think you're talking out of your hat, Trevor. Of course, I'm the fellow for the place!"

"I expect one of Wharton's chums will get it," said Hazeldene. "This house-warming business is making them very popular."

"There's something fishy about that house-warming, though," said Ogilvy. "Bunter is gassing a lot about it, but I've noticed that Wharton doesn't say anything."

"Well, Bunter's in the study with them. I suppose he knows."

"Besides," said Lacy, "it's up to the captain of the Form to stand the house-warming."

"And faith, there ought to be a house-warmin', intirely," exclaimed Desmond.

"You're right there."

"Oh, it's coming off right enough."

"Wharton isn't the sort of chap to leave the Form in the lurch after making so much fuss about the house-warming."

"It's mostly Bunter—"

"Well, of course Bunter knows, as he's in that study."

"I'm not so sure about it," said Bulstrode. "It looks to me as if Wharton's spent his tin on furnishing the study, and hasn't any left for a feed."

"That would be pretty rotten. I don't think we ought to stand it. It's playing it low down on the Form."

"Oh, give him a chance!" exclaimed Hazeldene. "I'm pretty certain it will be all right, only they don't like being bothered when they're busy. If they're getting ready for a big feed, they must have plenty on their hands."

"Well," said Ogilvy, "my opinion is that there's something fishy about the whole thing. I may be right or I may be wrong."

"Probably wrong," said Hazeldene, cheerfully. "But it's easy enough to go up to No. 1 and ask."

"I've done it," said Bulstrode, "and they showed jolly plainly that they didn't intend any house-warming to come off."

"Well, let's go and see."

Hazeldene's suggestion was adopted. A crowd of Removites followed Bulstrode upstairs to No. 1 Study to inquire after that house-warming.

The Famous Four were at their prep., and Billy Bunter was sitting on the end of the fender. Bunter wore an injured expression. He missed the easy chair which had belonged to the old study. He said that Wharton knew very well how he liked an easy chair, and that he ought to have got one first of all when he started shopping. In lieu of an easy chair he sat on the end of the fender, and toasted one side of his fat face.

Otherwise, he was feeling very comfortable. Several fellows had ingratiated themselves with Bunter, to make sure of invitations to the house-warming—and there was only one way to Billy's good graces—a feed at the tuck-shop. Bunter had had several feeds, and he felt that he could not manage more than two or three more before bedtime. But after several good meals, closely following one another, he wanted an easy chair more than ever.

Bulstrode kicked open the door, in his polite way, and Harry Wharton dropped a blot on his paper, and looked up angrily.

But the bully of the Remove was too well backed up by the Form on this occasion to care anything for an angry look.

He marched into the study with a truculent air, and the Removites crowded behind him. There wasn't room for a quarter of them in the study, and the superfluous ones had to remain in the passage, craning their necks to look in at the door.

The chums of No. 1 looked surprised at this sudden and unexpected invasion. They did not know what to make of it at first.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "Anything wrong? Is there another fire?"

"We've come," said Bulstrode.

"That's it," said Hazeldene. "We've come. Is it ready?"

"Is what ready?"

"The house-warming."

"Looks like it, doesn't it? If you can eat a Latin dictionary, or drink red or black ink, you can start right away. Otherwise, not."

"Look here!"

"Oh, buzz off!"

Bulstrode brought his fist down on the table with a thump that made the papers flutter, and brought a spurt of ink from the inkpot.

"Look here, we want to have this straight!" he exclaimed.

"Is there to be a house-warming, or is there not? Bunter said—"

"Yes, Bunter said—"

"You can explain all that to Bunter," said Harry Wharton. "I suppose we're not responsible for all the gas you get from Bunter."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"You can't crawl out of it that way," said Bulstrode roughly. "I suppose you don't want to carry out the idea now. The Remove isn't going to stand it. Why, a lot of fellows have been filling that young pig up with jam-tarts and sandwiches because of the invitations he gave them."

"Well, it's a dead loss in jam-tarts and sandwiches," said Bob Cherry. "There may be a house-warming yet. But not just now."

Bulstrode turned to his followers.

"You see how it is, you chaps! They're rotting us."

There was a yell of wrath.

"They've been japing the whole Form!" exclaimed Ogilvy. "I told you there was something fishy about the affair."

Another yell.

"When fellows jape the whole Form," said Bulstrode, "a Form ragging about meets the case. What do you say to wrecking the study?"

There was a shout of approval, and the excited Removites pressed on. Bob Cherry sprang to his feet.

"Don't be asses! I tell you, we never—"

"Give 'em socks!"

"Listen to me!" shouted Harry Wharton. "We—"

"Go for 'em!"

And there was a rush.

"Line up!" shouted Harry.

And the chums of No. 1 lined up promptly enough, and they hit out straight from the shoulder as the Removites came on.

Bulstrode went down in a heap, and Skinner and Stott went sprawling across him. But the rush was too much for them. The Famous Four hit out right and left, but in the close quarters they were overwhelmed, and they went down at last under the excited crowd.

And then the ragging began. The Remove commenced it

simply in a spirit of mischief, without intending it to go too far, but there were one or two ill-natured fellows present who were determined that it should not stop short of absolute wreck.

The table went over, and books and papers and ink were mingled on the carpet. It was Bulstrode who shoved over the bookcase, with a crash that broke all the glass in it and split the door. It was Stott who hurled the fireirons into the centre of the looking-glass, and smashed it to fragments.

The destruction of their property excited the Famous Four to fury, and they fought like heroes. But it was of no use against the odds.

The study was wrecked.

Then, satisfied with the damage they had done, the Remove crowded off, grinning and chuckling, leaving the hapless chums in the midst of the wreckage.

Harry Wharton staggered up, looking and feeling very dazed.

Bob Cherry sat up, with ink streaming down his face, and liquid glue tangling his hair. Nugent was gasping amid the wreck. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was lying with his head in the ashes of the grate, too breathless to move.

Wharton's face was very angry as he looked round the devastated room. Billy Bunter had prudently made himself scarce.

Bob Cherry grinned through the streaming ink on his face.

"Well, this is a rag, and no mistake."

"It's all through that young villain Bunter!" gasped Nugent. "Let's go and look for him, and massacre him."

"The massacrfulness should be terrific," groaned the Nabob of Bhanipur, raising his ashy head. "The knock-outfulness of my worthy self is great."

And the chums of No. 1 Study did look for Bunter. But the Owl of the Remove was not to be found; and he prudently kept out of sight until bedtime.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Many Candidates.

THE next day the Remove were still chuckling over the wreck of No. 1 Study. The indignant explanations of the Famous Four that they had planned no house-warming—that it was only Bunter's idea from first to last—provoked only smiles. If that was so, it was "hard cheese," but the joke was all the greater. That was how the Remove looked at it. Besides, they ought to have stood a house-warming, Skinner said. If a Form-captain couldn't stand a house-warming to his own Form, what the dickens was the good of having a Form-captain?

And the explanations of the chums were listened to with derisive smiles.

Billy Bunter, having kept out of sight until the first excitement had worn off, had escaped reprisals, but the chums were not in good humour with him, and they were less inclined to stand him a feed than ever.

But Bunter was quite irrepressible. After breakfast the following morning, as the chums came out, he twitched Harry by the sleeve, and blinked up at him as he looked round.

"I say, Wharton—"

"Oh, cut off!" said Harry curtly.

"Oh, really, Wharton, I hope you don't blame me for what happened last night! I warned you that something would happen if you fellows persisted in being mean about the matter."

"Buzz off, you young ass!"

"Yes; but what about the house-warming?"

"You—you—you're starting that again? Do you want a prize thick ear?"

"N-n-n-no, Wharton, certainly not!"

"Then you'd better get off that subject, and keep off."

"But I say, you fellows—"

But the fellows walked off.

The house-warming seemed to have been given up, as an idea, by all but Billy Bunter. But Bunter could be obstinate when there was a feed in question. It was pretty certain that he would leave no stone unturned to secure that house-warming.

Meanwhile, there was another matter of great interest occupying the attention of the Remove.

Wharton's intended departure made it necessary for a fresh captain to be elected for the Remove, and the idea was to elect a permanent vice-captain, who could always take the Form captain's place when he was away.

A good many fellows were ambitious to fill the post.

At any other time, one of Wharton's chums would have been pretty certain to get it, but just now the disappointment over the house-warming had rather put No. 1 Study into the shade.

The other candidates had high hopes, and there were plenty of them, too. There were only about forty votes to be had altogether, and there were three candidates outside No. 1 Study.

One of them, of course, was Bulstrode, who was pretty sure of a following. He had his own set in the Remove, and if the rest of the voting was greatly divided, there was a chance that six or seven votes would carry the day. Hence it was to Bulstrode's interest for the number of candidates to mount up, and he encouraged everybody who felt inclined to put up for vice-captain.

Micky Desmond was another candidate. The Irish junior had friends who would vote for him, and he had announced his intention of voting for himself, so that he was sure of, at least, one vote.

But the third candidate came as rather a surprise to the Form.

It was Wun Lung, the Chinese! When the list of the candidates was put up, Wun Lung's name figured with the rest, much to the amusement of the Remove.

No one had the faintest idea, of course, that the Chinese might possibly be elected vice-captain. A Chinese Form captain would be too funny; but Wun Lung had many friends who had made up their minds to give him a lift by way of a joke.

The subject of the election was seriously discussed in No. 1 Study after dinner that day. Bob Cherry and Nugent both thought of putting up, but it was clear that it would not be politic to divide forces.

"Let Wharton decide," said Bob cheerily. "I don't mind Harry having the casting vote."

"Right-ho!" said Nugent.

But Harry Wharton shook his head.

"Better toss up for it," he said. "Unless——"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Oh, shut up a minute, Billy!"

"But, I say, it's important." Bunter had just come into the study with a big notebook in one hand, and a pencil in the other. "I say, you fellows——"

"Buzz off!"

"I'm electioneering. I only want to take your names down!"

"Oh, rats! Who are you electioneering for?"

"Who? Myself, of course."

The juniors stared at him blankly. Bob Cherry went off into a roar.

"You? You're putting up for Form captain? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums seemed to be on the verge of hysterics. Billy Bunter blinked at them indignantly.

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!" he exclaimed. "Why shouldn't I put up for election as well as anybody else?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here! Are you chaps going to vote for me?" demanded Bunter wrathfully. "I think you might stand by a fellow in your own study."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, stop that yelling, for goodness' sake. Skinner's promised me his vote, and Stott says I can have his if the house-warming comes off. If you four chaps vote for me that will make six, and six may carry it."

"Bunty, you're too funny to live! We can't vote for you, but I'll tell you what," said Bob Cherry seriously. "I don't want to disappoint you, you shall vote for us."

"Oh, really, Cherry!"

"Here, head or tail, Franky!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, tossing up a penny and catching it.

"Head!" said Nugent.

Bob Cherry grinned, and showed the figure of Britannia.

"Wrong! I'm captain—candidate, at any rate! You vote for me!"

"Ye-e-es, I suppose so. Rotten luck!"

"Now, Bunter, are you going to vote for me?"

"No, I'm jolly well not!" exclaimed Billy Bunter indignantly. "I'm surprised at your asking such a thing. Cherry, after your conduct over the house-warming, and when I'm a candidate for election myself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you're going to keep on cackling I'm done. I'm jolly well not going to vote for anybody but myself, anyway."

And Billy Bunter sniffed and left the study.

Bob Cherry made a quick mental calculation.

"That's five candidates," he remarked. "That makes roughly eight votes to each candidate. The chap who can rope in ten or eleven votes will be vice-captain."

"I should think you ought to be certain of a dozen, Bob."

Bob Cherry wrinkled his eyebrows thoughtfully.

"I don't know! That house-warming business has knocked some of my chances on the head. The fellows have got their

backs up over it. Of course, it's all Bunter's fault. That young porpoise wants suffocating."

"The only thing is to do some electioneering," said Wharton, contracting his brows a little. "I shall be away a week, and somebody will have to do the captain's duties for the Form. I shouldn't like Bulstrode to get it. The football practice would slack down all the time, for one thing."

"And if Billy Bunter got in?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Not much danger of that. The fellows who have promised him votes are rotting him, only he can't see it. The dangerous rival is Bulstrode; but we'd better go and do a little electioneering, and make sure."

And they did.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Electioneers!

ELECTIONEERING on such occasions as this, at Greyfriars, was always an exciting business, especially in the lower Forms.

The fellows never made any bones about speaking out their views plainly. Bob Cherry was greeted in various ways by the juniors, whose votes he wished to secure for the election that afternoon.

"Vote for you, is it?" said Micky Desmond. "Faith, and I'm a candidate meself. Besides, what good would you be, intirely?"

"I suppose I should make as good a vice-captain as the next chap," said Bob Cherry, rather warmly.

Desmond shook his head.

"Faith, and it's meself that the Remove really want, if the traytures knew it," he said. "I know who I'm going to vote for, anyway—Michael Desmond, Esquire."

"Oh, you can go and eat coke!"

"Faith, and I——"

But Bob Cherry walked on. He looked into Russell's study, where Russell, Lacy, and Wun Lung, the Chinaman, and Mark Linley, the new boy, were all together. The four occupants of the study were all there, and Russell and Lacy were yelling with laughter. Mark Linley was smiling, and Wun Lung sat with a very grave expression upon his face.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Any joke going on?"

"The joke of the season!" gasped Lacy. "Here's this heathen Chinese telling us he's put up for vice-captain."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why laffee?" asked Wun Lung mildly. "Me makee good captain."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Me standee tleat at tuckee shop."

"My word!" said Russell. "There's something in that. You can rope in Billy Bunter's vote, I should think, at any rate."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, come off, you know," said Bob Cherry. "I'm standing for vice-captain."

"Me standee, too."

"I've looked in here to see if you fellows are going to vote for me. What do you say, Russell?"

Russell and Lacy glared at him.

"I say that I'm jolly well not going to vote for a chap who disappoints the Form about a house-warming," said Russell.

"Same here!" said Lacy.

"Oh, that was that ass Bunter! You see——"

"Yes, you've explained it already, and I don't care whether it was Bunter or not. I know jolly well the house-warming never came off."

"And look here," said Lacy. "If you're the rival candidate, I'm jolly well going to vote for Wun Lung."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Russell. "That's a good wheeze. Vote for the Chinese!"

Wun Lung grinned amiably.

"Me standee house-warming."

"Ha, ha, ha! Wun Lung's our candidate!"

The two juniors roared over the joke. But Wun Lung was businesslike. He whipped out a notebook, and presented Russell with a pencil.

"Hallo! What are you up to?"

The Celestial smiled blandly.

"Writee down namee!"

Russell hesitated for a second, then he laughed, and wrote down his name. Lacy followed his example. The two were pledged to vote for Wun Lung now.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Don't be such silly asses, you chaps!"

"It's settled now," grinned Russell. "Wun Lung's our candidate."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lacy.



Right at the leader of the villagers Bob Cherry rushed, catching him under the chin with a right-hander that sent him spinning.

"What about you, Linley?" asked Bob Cherry, turning to the lad from Lancashire.

Mark shook his head.

"I'm not going to vote."

"Rot! You've got a vote."

"Ye-es; but some of the fellows have been objecting to me voting, as a new boy. I am going to keep out of the election."

"Rats! You ought to vote as a duty," said Bob Cherry warmly.

But Mark Linley only smiled and shook his head.

Bob Cherry, without a single promise so far, went further on his way. But votes were not to be had. Other electioneering was going on. Bulstrode and his friends were making great efforts, and so was Micky Desmond. There were several Irish juniors in the Form, and, of course, they thought that an Irish captain was exactly what the Remove wanted, and they plumped for Micky.

Then Morgan was convinced that what was really needed was a Welsh captain, and he announced his intention of voting for himself, and he had persuaded Evans to do likewise.

Billy Bunter was electioneering, too, but the Owl of the Remove did not meet with any marked success.

Some of the fellows gave him solemn promises, so solemn that they would not have deceived anybody but Bunter, and the fat junior proudly showed round a list marked with seven or eight names.

But it was pretty certain that when the election came round, there would be only one vote recorded for the fat junior, and that would be the vote of William George Bunter.

During afternoon lessons there was much suppressed excitement in the Remove, and Mr. Quelch, the Form-master, came down heavily once or twice.

Glad enough were master and pupils when classes were dismissed, and the boys were free to busy themselves about the election.

The election had been fixed for seven o'clock, after tea; but in the interval the juniors did not bother themselves much about tea.

They contented themselves for the most part with snacks, and gave up all their time to electioneering, or to be electioneered.

Excitement ran high, owing to the number of candidates, an unusual number for a Form election.

Desmond, Morgan, Bulstrode, Wun Lung, and Bob Cherry made five candidates in all, not counting Billy Bunter, who was very much in earnest.

Nugent made a calculation that the number of candidates allowed about six fellows and a half to vote for each, if all fared equally well.

Bob Cherry was certain of three votes, and he hoped for more. Desmond was equally certain of three, and had high hopes also. Morgan had one he could depend upon, and Bulstrode five. Wun Lung was the dark horse. Several

fellows, like Russell and Lacy, had promised to vote for him as a "oner" for No. 1 Study, over the house-warming disappointment. It had not occurred to these unreflecting jokers that it was a serious business, and that their little jokes might lead to the little Chinese being elected Form captain with full powers.

Harry Wharton had obtained permission to use the Form-room for the purposes of the election, and towards the hour of seven the juniors began to crowd into it.

The Upper Fourth fellows, of course, wanted to crowd in, too, to hoot and catcall, and interrupt the proceedings generally, but it was not likely the Remove would stand that.

Whenever an Upper Fourth chap showed himself near the door, there was a scuffle at once, and not one of that obnoxious Form succeeded in getting into the room.

The fiat had gone forth that all juniors not in the room by seven sharp would be locked out, and that the door could not be unfastened in the middle of the proceedings for the convenience of late comers.

Harry Wharton had suggested the rule, and Bulstrode and the other candidates had heartily agreed to it.

It was evident that once the proceedings had started, a late-comer's participation would throw them into confusion.

But while Harry had only in his mind the despatch of business, Bulstrode was thinking of other matters.

At half-past six, when most of the Remove were bending their steps in the direction of the Form-room, Bulstrode was holding a hurried council with Skinner and Stott in a corner of the passage.

"I've been sounding the fellows," he said. "Most of them are up against Bob Cherry, on account of that house-warming fizzle. Otherwise, he would have a bumping majority—about twenty."

"Yes, this has come luckily for you, Bulstrode."

"It has, and I'm going to make sure of it," said the Remove bully significantly. "I have got it down pretty fine now about Cherry's chances. The fellows in his own study are voting for him, of course, excepting Bunter. So are Trevor and Ogilvy, and Smith and Hazeldene—chaps who think more about the footer than anything else. That young cad Hazeldene ought to be voting for me, but he's very thick with Wharton now. But that gives Cherry seven votes for certain, and I'm pretty sure that he'll get three or four more."

"Then you'll be done!"

"Not if I can help it. I can count on eight votes, including you fellows, and I'm going to vote for myself. It's allowed, and I don't see why I shouldn't do it if I choose. Cherry won't, but more fool he."

"Of course!"

"That's nine, and Cherry's biggest possible number, in my opinion, is eleven. We only want two to tie, three to win."

"Good! But where are they to come from? I don't believe there's a single chap more in the Form to give you a leg-up, Bulstrode."

"No; but some of Bob Cherry's leggers-up may be induced to keep off the grass when the election comes off."

Stott shook his head.

"It's no good talking to them, I've tried."

"I'm not thinking of talking to them, ass. What's the matter with getting Inky into the bicycle shed and shutting him up there?"

"My hat!"

"You know what a soft goat he is. He would walk into a trap like that like a baby."

Skinner chuckled.

"Good! I rather think I could manage it."

"Then there's Ogilvy."

"You couldn't shut him up anywhere; he's a canny Scot," said Skinner decidedly. "I shouldn't like to try it on him, either."

"I'm not thinking of that. But suppose you were to persuade him that the proper caper is to have a Scotch captain for the Remove. Morgan is plumping for Wales, and Desmond for Ireland. If the election's to be run on national lines, I don't see why there shouldn't be a Scotch candidate; and if Ogilvy starts a Scotch party, Macdonald will stick to him. You know how deuced close Scotchman stick to one another; and Mac's one of the supporters I've counted for Cherry. Get rid of the three, and Bob Cherry's done for!"

"Good! We'll try, at any rate."

"And I tell you what. If I get in, I'm standing a stunning feed to all who vote for me."

"Tell Bunter so, and he'll drop his candidature and vote for you instead," grinned Stott.

"I'm thinking of that, too. Buck up, now, there's no time to lose!"

And the three worthies separated.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Election.

THE crowd was growing thicker in the Form-room. It was close on seven, and nearly all the Remove were there.

Harry Wharton had taken the most prominent place near the master's desk, as master of the ceremonies on the present occasion. As captain of the Remove, he naturally took the lead in the matter.

His chums were with him, Bob Cherry looking a little nervous, and Frank Nugent and Harry Wharton were cheering him up. The Nabob of Bhanipur was not to be seen. Bulstrode and Stott were there, grinning over some topic they were discussing, but Skinner was not yet to be seen. The joker of the Remove was doubtless busy elsewhere. Trevor, Hazeldene, and Smith were near the chums of No. 1 Study; but Ogilvy and Macdonald were standing apart, talking in low tones.

Several fellows were with Wun Lung, the Chinese, who was smiling blandly. He looked quite confident, and his air of confidence made the fellows roar. The idea of Wun Lung as captain of the Remove was too funny.

Billy Bunter was standing with his hands in his pockets, looking very discontented.

As the hour of the election drew nigh, Bunter gradually discovered that all his supporters had only been "rotting."

When asked to come up to the scratch, as it were, some of them affected to have changed their minds, while others burst out laughing.

Added to that discomfiture, Bunter had had practically no tea.

Tea in No. 1 Study was a hurried snack, and tea in Hall was a mere bagatelle to Billy Bunter.

He was still hungry, or imagined he was, and he was in a state of glowering indignation, of which nobody chose to take any notice.

Bob Cherry, however, observed him at last, and good-naturedly came towards him, and gave him a tremendous slap on the back that made his spectacles slide down his nose.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he exclaimed. "What's the matter with you, Owl?"

"Ow! I wish you wouldn't thump me like that, Cherry; you disturb my nerves, and you might make my glasses fall off. If you broke them you would have to pay for them."

"But wherefore that pensive brow?"

"I'm hungry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!" growled Bunter. "Besides, the fellows who were going to vote for me have changed their minds. Blessed if he isn't cackling again! I say, Cherry, I've had a disappointment about that postal-order I told you about. It hasn't come."

"It never does come, does it?" said Bob Cherry sympathetically.

"Oh, really, Cherry! But, as I was saying, I'm quite stony, and I've been thinking of withdrawing my candidature and voting for you instead."

"Good! You couldn't do better!" said Bob Cherry cheerily.

And he turned to walk away. Bunter grasped him by the sleeve.

"I say, Cherry, hold on! Will you be standing a feed to all the chaps who vote for you, as Bulstrode's going to do?"

"Not much!"

"H'm! In that case I shall have to reconsider—"

"Oh, go and cat o'ke!" said Bob Cherry unceremoniously. Bunter blinked after him, and then turned to Bulstrode.

"I say, Bulstrode, I hear that you are standing a feed after the election—"

"Yes, rather!" said Bulstrode immediately. "Sort of celebration, you know."

"Good! I've been thinking of giving up my candidature, and I can't very well vote for Cherry. I'd like to back up a chap in the same study, but a fellow must be conscientious in a matter of this kind, and I don't approve of Cherry's ideas."

"Right-ho! You stick to me!" said Bulstrode. "I'm pretty certain to get in, and if I do the feed will be a record."

Bunter looked alarmed.

"But suppose you don't—will that make any difference to the feed?"

"Of course it will, ass!"

"Oh!" said Bunter.

He turned away, looking very thoughtful. A few minutes later he was pulling at Wun Lung's sleeve, and the little Chinese turned round with his bland and agreeable smile.

"You speakee to me?" he said.

"Yes. I say, Wun Lung, I hear you are standing a feed to celebrate the affair if you get in as Form captain."

"Me standee big feed."
"I've been thinking of voting for you. I can't very well back up Cherry or Bulstrode, as I don't approve of either of them, and I'm not standing myself, after all. I suppose it won't make any difference to the feed whether you get in or not?"

Wun Lung shook his head.

"No; me standee big feed, anyway."

"Good! Come to think of it, I don't see why you shouldn't make a jolly good captain for the Remove. I shall back you up, anyway."

"Puttee name down!"

"Certainly!"

And Bunter wrote his name down on Wun Lung's list. The little Chinese's almond eyes twinkled. It was one more supporter, and he was beginning to feel assured of success. And Wun Lung—chiefly from a spirit of mischief—was very desirous of becoming vice-captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

Harry Wharton glanced up at the clock. It wanted a couple of minutes to seven.

Skinner came hastily into the room, looking somewhat excited. Bulstrode met his eyes, and the glance they exchanged was enough.

"Time to get to business!" Bulstrode exclaimed. "Just on seven!"

"Shut the door!" said Stott.

"Hurree Singh isn't here yet," said Nugent. "Where on earth has Inky got to?"

"Never mind where he's got to; we've got to stick to the rules!" said Bulstrode. "You proposed them yourselves."

"Yes; but—"

"There goes seven from the tower!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "Shut the door!"

"Wait for the last stroke," said Wharton quietly.

Bulstrode shrugged his shoulders, but he waited. The last stroke of seven died away, and one or two late-comers bolted into the room. But Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was not with them.

The chums of No. 1 Study looked at one another.

The nabob had not come, and it was impossible to wait longer. It was one of Bob Cherry's supporters gone.

"Can't be helped!" muttered Bob. "I'll dot Inky on the boko for this! The door will have to be shut now."

Bulstrode was already shutting it. He locked the door, and hardly had the key clicked when there was a bump on the panels outside.

"Here, let me in!"

"Too late!"

"Rats! I'm coming in!"

"You can come in if you can get through oak panels," said Bulstrode. "The election was for seven sharp, and it's turned seven. Go and eat coke!"

And the disappointed Removite outside growled, kicked the door, and retired. But it was not Hurree Singh, and there was no sign of the nabob.

"Now, let's get to business!" said Trevor.

"Candidates forward!" said Wharton.

The candidates came forward, and there were certainly sufficient of them. Bob Cherry, Micky Desmond, Bulstrode, Morgan, and Wun Lung—and then Ogilvy. Bob Cherry stared at the latter.

"I thought you were voting for me," he said.

Ogilvy grinned.

"I was thinking of it, old chap; but it's been pointed out to me that a Scotsman would make a much better captain for the Remove."

"Bosh!"

"You may call it bosh if you like," said Ogilvy tartly; "but a thing of this kind wants a chap with a clear business head, and that's me! I'm a candidate!"

"I've a jolly good mind to punch your nose!" said Bob wrathfully.

"You can start as soon as you like!"

"I'll jolly well—"

"Hold on!" said Harry Wharton. "No rowing among the candidates! Gentlemen, the election for vice-captain of the Remove is now about to take place. There are six candidates."

"Hear, hear!"

"The voting will go by show of hands, and the candidates will be taken in alphabetical order. Is that agreeable?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Go it!"

"On the ball!"

"Then the first candidate is Bulstrode. Hands up for Bulstrode."

Nine hands went into the air. One of them was Bulstrode's own; he did not mean to lose a point by any undue modesty.

Wharton counted the hands, with a slight wrinkle on his brow.

Considering the number of candidates and the number of electors, Bulstrode's number of votes was a large one, and would certainly be hard to beat.

"Cherry next! Hands up for Cherry!"

Bulstrode's number was written down by Wharton, and checked by Bulstrode. Then the hands went up for Bob Cherry. There were seven, including Harry Wharton's.

Bob Cherry's face fell a little.

He was not particularly set on becoming vice-captain, but it was a disappointment, and, besides, he knew how much Harry wanted him to get in. He knew, too, the harm that might be done by the success of Bulstrode.

Bulstrode grinned.

Bob Cherry was the rival he most feared—or, rather, the only one he feared—and as he had beaten him easily, he no longer had any doubts.

The rest of the proceedings he regarded as a mere formality, preliminary to his being declared vice-captain of the Remove.

Wharton's face hardened a little, but he went on calmly enough.

"Desmond next! Hands up for Desmond!"

Four hands went up.

"Four for Desmond! Now for Morgan!"

Three hands.

The numbers were going down. The extra candidates had no chance whatever of getting in, but by splitting up the votes they made the success of Bulstrode a certainty—at least, it seemed so. Bulstrode was talking loudly and confidently to his friends. They all regarded the election now as a foregone conclusion.

"Ogilvy! Hands up for Ogilvy!"

Again three hands were elevated in the air.

"Three! Now—"

"It's settled!" said Bulstrode. "I'm vice-captain of the Remove! You needn't go any further, Wharton!"

"There is one more candidate!"

"Rats! It's only the Chinese!"

"We must finish. Hands up for Wun Lung!"

Quite a little crowd of hands went up, amid a general burst of laughter.

Wharton stared as he counted them.

"Twelve!"

"Twelve!" yelled Bulstrode. "It's a lie—a mistake! Don't be an ass! Twelve!"

"There are twelve votes for Wun Lung," said Harry Wharton quietly, entering the number. "Wun Lung is vice-captain of the Remove!"

THE TENTH CHAPTER

The New Vice-Captain.

THERE was a buzz of amazement in the room. Wun Lung was elected.

The joke of it seemed to appeal very much to the fellows who had voted for him, for they were roaring with laughter.

The little Chinese looked very pleased when the result of the election was made known. He seemed to be hugging himself in an ecstasy of silent mirth.

Wharton looked grave, and Bulstrode furious.

"It's all rot!" he exclaimed savagely. "You all know we can't have a Chinese for Form captain. It can't be allowed."

"It must be allowed," said Wharton. "Wun Lung has been elected by a majority of votes, and he is vice-captain."

"It's all rot!"

"Me captain—me makee good captain! Me standee feed!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"There are other duties required of a Form captain besides standing feeds, kid," he remarked. "I hardly think you're fit to carry them out."

Wun Lung's face fell.

Wharton was the one fellow in the Form who had any real influence over the little Celestial.

Good-natured and good-tempered as the little Chinese was, he went on his own way without much regard for anybody's opinion but his own, with the single exception of Harry Wharton's. But Harry's word was a law to him.

The happy grin vanished from his curious little Oriental face, and an anxious look took its place.

"You not likee," he said, in a low voice. "Me no savvy. Me letile."

"Retire!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "I should think so! You ought to be ragged bald-headed for putting up for election at all."

"He had every right to do so, Bulstrode."

"Oh, of course you say so! But as he proposes to retire—"

"No talkee to you, Bulstrode. Me letile if Wharton say so."

Harry Wharton was silent and perplexed. A Chinese

aptain for the Remove would be farcical, no doubt; yet even Wun Lung was preferable to Bulstrode. And if Wun Lung resigned, Bulstrode was next on the list, and the vice-captaincy would fall to him.

Had Bob Cherry been second, Harry would doubtless have advised the Celestial to retire; but that was not the case.

"What you tinkee?" asked Wun Lung anxiously. "Me letile if you sayee wold."

Wharton shook his head.

"I don't advise you to retire, Wun Lung."

The little Chinese brightened up.

"You tinkee me good captain?"

"I don't know about that," said Harry, laughing; "but you'll make as good a captain as Bulstrode, I suppose."

"Thank you," said Bulstrode furiously; "I don't agree with you. I demand that Wun Lung resigns."

"You are talking bosh, Bulstrode. Wun Lung has a right to please himself entirely about the matter."

"Do you think I shall make a worse captain for the Form than a heathen Chinaman?"

"Yes, I rather think you would."

There was a thumping at the door.

As the election was now over, Trevor opened the door, and Hurree Jameet Ram Singh, looking very excited, burst into the room.

The Nabob of Bhanipur was covered with dust, and seemed altogether to have been through a very rough time.

"Am I late for the esteemed election?" he exclaimed.

"You are, you inky duffer!" growled Bob Cherry. "Not that it matters. One vote more or less wouldn't have made any difference, as it turns out."

"I have been detained foulplayfully."

"Eh! What's that?"

"The esteemed, beastly rotter Skinner enticed me into the wood-shed, and then fastened the door lockfully," sputtered the excited nabob. "I have been detained prisonfully in the wood-shed, and finally escapefully departed by the little window, painfully and dustfully."

"Yes, you look rather dustful," grinned Bob Cherry.

But Harry Wharton's brow was darkening.

"Did you say Skinner shut you up in the wood-shed?" he exclaimed.

"Yes; it was that honourable and esteemed beast."

"It was only a joke," said Skinner, looking rather uneasy. "I thought it would be fun to make Inky miss the election. Some other fellows have missed it."

"You did it to secure Bulstrode's election," said Wharton.

"It was a mean, caddish trick, and if it made any difference to the election, I should insist upon having it tried over again. As it is, however, it wouldn't make any difference, but—"

"If you think I had any hand in this—" began Bulstrode.

"I know you did!" said Wharton scornfully.

Bulstrode turned red and swung away on his heel. He was savagely disappointed at the result of the election, and his deep-laid plans had not helped him much. He had prevented Bob Cherry from getting the majority, but the "dark horse" had romped home, to use a sporting term; and Bulstrode was as much out of it as ever.

But the Remove bully had not given up hope.

"Wharton's going to-morrow," he said to Stott, as they left the room. "When he's gone, we'll see how long the Chinese captaincy will last. I'll make Wun Lung glad to get out of the position before long, you'll see."

"Easy enough, I should think!" agreed Stott.

But they did not yet quite know Wun Lung.

Wun Lung accompanied the Famous Four to their study when the meeting broke up.

Harry Wharton, with the idea of making the best of a bad job, intended to give him as much instruction as possible in the duties of Form captain.

Wun Lung was very docile. He was willing to learn, but it seemed as if his Oriental brain had not the necessary grasp of the matters Wharton explained to him.

"The image won't have the faintest idea what to do now that he's vice-captain," growled Bob Cherry.

Wun Lung smiled sweetly.

"Me standee feed," he said.

"Yes, but after that?"

The little Chinese reflected.

"Standee another feed."

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes, but you can't fulfil the whole duty of a Form captain by standing a series of feeds."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"I sha'n't shut up, Cherry! I think Wun Lung's idea is a ripping one. If he stands a feed every day, I know I shall be jolly well satisfied with the Form captain."

"You would, porpoise. When you've done standing feeds, Wun Lung—"

"Me savvy."

"Well, what will you do next?"

"Standee picnic."

"Ha, ha, ha! The Remove is booked for a jolly time, at all events, as long as Wun Lung's money lasts."

"Velly jollie, first chop!" said Wun Lung, beaming.

And Billy Bunter's beatific smile showed that he, at least, fully appreciated the excellence of the new programme, as outlined by Wun Lung.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter is Generous.

"LETTER for you, Wharton."

"Shove it on the table," said Wharton, without looking up. He was busy with his last exercise, and wanted to get it finished.

"But it's a registered one."

"Oh, hand it over!"

Wharton opened the letter. It was from his uncle, Colonel Wharton, and a crisp five-pound note rustled out of it.

"My hat," said Bob Cherry, "a fiver!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Billy, while I read the letter."

"I'll go and get the note changed for you, if you like, Wharton, while you're reading the letter. I could change it in the tuckshop."

"Let it alone, Owl!"

Wharton read the letter and put it into his pocket.

"This is all right!" he remarked. "My uncle must have been a boy himself at some time in his career. He knows about the new study, of course, and he suggests that we might like a house-warming before I leave, and he's sent me the fiver."

"Good egg!"

Billy Bunter's fat face simply shone.

"I say, Wharton, that's really ripping, you know! Your uncle is a brick. We can get a splendid house-warming for a fiver."

"We can pay for the bookcase out of it," said Wharton, "and have enough left for a good house-warming. Mr. Lazarus has sent in the bill for the bookcase, as it hasn't been returned. We couldn't send it back smashed up."

"I have been thinking of repairing it," Nugent remarked.

"I have taken up carpentry, and I think I could make a good job of it."

"Good! And you could get it done about the time Bob gets the painting done round the carpet."

"If that's meant for sarcasm—"

"I say, you fellows, I think the bookcase might be left over."

"Rats! I'm going to start mending it to-night—or to-morrow, at any rate."

"I mean the paying for it. Mr. Lazarus is a jolly good fellow that way. He's letting Hazeldene have a lot of things on really easy terms."

"More fool Hazeldene."

"Oh, Vaseline will look out for himself, you know. He's furnishing his study in a really ripping style, and he said he'd like you fellows to give him a look-in, and see how it's going on."

"We will; and we'll give him some advice, too," said Wharton. "As for the bookcase, I'm going to send Mr. Lazarus a postal-order for that first thing in the morning. I feel worried when I'm in debt."

"So do I," said Billy Bunter pathetically, "and I'm always in debt to somebody. I suppose it's my careful way of keeping accounts does it. I never overlook any loan. I always put it down in the account, and it—"

"Stays there," grinned Bob Cherry.

"I am going to settle up all round when I have a bit of luck. Anyway, it doesn't hurt Wharton to lend me a trifle now and then. He always has plenty of money."

"But the more you borrow the less he has left."

"Oh, you're talking bosh now, you know! He must have plenty, or he couldn't afford to lend."

"Never mind that now, Billy," said Wharton, laughing.

"But I must mind it now, Wharton, because I was thinking that if you don't pay for the bookcase just now, you will be able to stand the house-warming, and let me have five bob as well. I shall put it down to the account."

Wharton sorted five shillings out of his pockets.

"There's the five, Billy. I shall be in funds for a bit, anyway, now. But I'm going to pay for the bookcase."

ANSWERS

"Then there will be only three pounds for the house-warming."

"Two pounds fifteen," said Wharton.

"You are jolly close about money, Wharton, and no mistake," said Bunter, putting the five shillings into his pocket. "I'll let you have this back out of the first remittance I get from home. Blessed if you're the kind of chap I should care to remain in debt to."

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

"Blessed if I can see what Cherry's cackling about, either. But do let us get to business, for goodness' sake. I can manage the house-warming on two pounds fifteen, cutting it pretty fine—"

"You can!" said Wharton, staring.

"Yes. I suppose it's in my hands—it was my idea from the start. I'm really giving the house-warming. You are only finding the money."

Wharton laughed.

"All right; go ahead."

"Well, as I was saying, I can manage the house-warming on two pounds fifteen. Better hand me the money at once, and I'll start on the shopping. The school shop will be closed soon, and then we sha'n't get the grub to-night."

"We'll go down to Mrs. Mimble's and change the bank-note," said Harry Wharton, rising from the table. "You can come with us to do the shopping, Bunter."

Billy Bunter blinked at him.

"If you can't trust me with a five-pound note, Wharton—"

"Well, I can't, so ring off, and come along."

And Bunter sniffed indignantly, and came along.

But his ill-humour vanished in the tuck-shop.

Two pounds fifteen was really a goodly little sum to lay out in eatables, and the fat face of the Owl grew more and more shining as he proceeded to select the good things.

"Blessed if I don't blue five bob on it myself!" he exclaimed, in a burst of generosity. "I was going to pay Skinner that five bob I owe him, but I don't see why he can't wait till to-morrow, when my postal order comes. After all, it's only fair for me to stand my whack!"

And the borrowed five shillings came to light.

"The generousfulness of the honourable Bunter is great," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Well, the fact is, it's my intention to be generous," said Bunter.

"But the esteemed Bunter's asininefulness is terrific."

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"Hallo! Anybody come into a fortune?" asked Lacy, coming into the tuck-shop. "What are you getting those things piled up for, Bunter?"

"They're for the house-warming."

"Phew! You don't mean to say it's coming off after all?"

"Yes, I do. I'm sincerely sorry that there should have been any doubt on the subject. I did my best. I've only just brought these fellows up to the scratch."

"Oh, draw it mild, Bunt!"

"I don't see how you can contradict that, Cherry. But it's all right now, Lacy. Wharton and I are making contributions, and there will be enough to go round. Blessed if I can see what you are cackling at, Bob Cherry."

"Oh, come along!" said Bob. "You're enough to make an Egyptian mummy cackle, I think. Let's get the grub home."

"I say, Mrs. Mimble, will you lend us a basket to carry this in," said Billy Bunter. "Wharton and Cherry can carry it between them. It's heavy."

"But where's the feed to be held?" asked Lacy.

"No. 1 Study."

"Not much room there for the whole Form."

"What about the common-room, then—"

"The Upper Fourth will crowd in and mess up the feed."

"The Form-room—"

"Can't have it without getting permission beforehand," said Nugent. "We've had it once this evening, and the bug-hunters are having it now."

The bug-hunters were the junior naturalist club.

Wharton looked perplexed.

"Suppose we put it off till after bedtime, and make it a dormitory feed?" suggested Lacy.

"No good. Suppose some beastly prefect swooped down on us and confiscated the lot? It wouldn't matter so much with an ordinary twopenny-halfpenny feed, but on an occasion like this—"

"You can't be too careful," said Bob Cherry.

"Exactly."

"I should think so," said Bunter, almost turning pale.

"If the feed should be confiscated, I think I should be very ill."

"You'll be ill, anyway, when you've done your whack. But suppose we have No. 1 Study and the Remove passage? There's room for all the fellows there—and come to think of it, a house-warming ought to be held in the house that's to be warmed."

"Something in that!"

"Yes, rather! That's settled," said Wharton. "Bring the grub along!"

The basket kindly lent by Mrs. Mimble was crammed. It weighed a great deal, and Wharton and Cherry took it between them, and found it quite enough to carry.

They marched out of the tuck-shop, and as they entered the shadowy Close, there was a sudden muttering of voices and a patter of feet.

"Collar it!"

Shadowy figures started up round the Removites—Wharton and Bob Cherry went staggering—the basket was grabbed by shadowy hands, and rushed off into the darkness.

The juniors were too taken by surprise to speak for a moment.

Then there was a yell.

"The Upper Fourth!"

"They've got the grub!"

"After them!"

And the Removites rushed frantically in pursuit.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER. The House-Warming at Last.

"GET it in—quick!"

Temple, Dabney, and Fry had hold of the basket, and with five or six more of the Upper Fourth they rushed it upstairs at express speed.

The basket was pretty full, and the way the juniors bumped it about was very violent, and the consequence was that comestibles were shed at almost every step.

Tins of salmon and sardines, pots of jam, bags of oranges and tarts, rolled on the stairs, and were recklessly trampled over.

Little cared the Upper Fourth fellows, so long as they secured the major portion of their booty.

They were making for Temple's study, but swift as they were, the Removites were swift in pursuit.

As Temple, Dabney & Co. reached the upper passage, the footsteps of the pursuers were already on the lower stairs.

"Buck up!" gasped Temple.

"Oh, rather!"

"Here we are!"

They rushed into Temple's study. Temple dropped the basket and slammed the door. There was a clatter of boots along the passage, and Harry Wharton hurled himself at the door.

Bump!

Temple had not been able to lock it in time. It burst open, but the Upper Fourth fellows jammed themselves on it, and shoved it shut again.

"Hold it!" gasped Temple. "I'll turn the key in a jiffy!"

Bump!

Click!

The key was turned!

"It's locked!"

And the breathless fellows of the Upper Fourth reeled away from the door.

Bump!

The stout oak door shook and groaned, but the lock held it fast.

In a few seconds Harry Wharton's comrades were on the scene, and united shoulders bumped on the door.

But it did not budge.

Harry Wharton reeled back with an aching shoulder, and a fierce glint in his eyes.

"It's no good," he said. "They've locked it."

"The lockfulness is terrific."

The Removites crowded in the passage. They could hear the sounds within of the basket being unpacked.

Billy Bunter was groping on the stairs for the fallen articles. He collected up a good armful, and retired to a quiet corner to begin.

But the rest of the Removites were not thinking of feasting just then.

They wanted vengeance, and they wanted it hot and strong. But a locked oak door was between them and their adversaries.

The news of the intended house-warming, and of the Upper Fourth raid, had spread, and ere long nearly the whole Remove was crammed in the Fourth Form passage.

Upper Fourth-Formers, who came along to see what the row was about, found no room for them in their own passage, and were roughly elbowed away.

Outside the door of Temple's study the Famous Four stood baffled.

Wharton wrinkled his brows in thought.

As captain of the Remove, he was expected to do some-

thing; but how he was to negotiate with a locked oaken door he did not quite see.

Nugent was thumping on the panels, and Bob Cherry kicking. Russell and Trevor bawled insults through the keyhole. But Temple, Dabney & Co. only chuckled.

"Well, what are we going to do, Wharton?" Bulstrode demanded.

"Blessed if I know."

"Send for Wun Lung," grinned Skinner. "If the captain is incapacitated, the vice-captain takes his place."

"Good! If Wharton's no good, we may as well try the Chinese," said Bulstrode, only too glad of a chance of sowing jealousy if possible between the two friends. "He can't be much worse, anyway. Where's Wun Lung?"

"Me here."

"Come here, you rotten heathen! You're vice-captain of the Remove. How are we going to get into that room?"

"Through the door."

"We can't get through the door, idiot—it's locked!"

"Me savvy!"

"Got any suggestion to make, kid?" asked Harry Wharton, without the slightest trace of the jealous spirit Bulstrode had hoped to see. "I'm done!"

"Clowbar!"

"My only haf!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "What on earth does he mean by a clowbar? Is it a Chinese word?"

"Galdener usee clowbar in galden."

"Eh? What!"

"He means a crowbar!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "The crowbar the gardener uses in the garden. And it's not a bad wheeze."

"My word! There'll be damages to pay if you force a study door with a crowbar."

"Hang the damages!" said Wharton. "We're not going to be done by the Upper Fourth. It's a good wheeze, and we'll do it. Some of you cut off and get a crowbar."

"Faith, and I'll go in a jiffy, darling!"

And Micky Desmond rushed off.

He was back in a few minutes, with a short, stout crowbar in his hand, and a gleeful grin on his face.

"Here you are, darling!"

Wharton took the crowbar, and banged it on the door.

"Temple!"

"Hallo!"

"Are you going to open this door?"

"Yes, when we've finished this feed. Not before."

"We shall force it with a crowbar."

"Rats!"

"Well, it's your own look-out! Here goes!"

And Wharton jammed the crowbar with a powerful drive between the door and the post, and two or three of the Remove dragged on it.

Creak!

There was a shout of alarm inside the study.

"Stop that, you lunatics!"

"You'll have to pay for the damages."

"There'll be a row."

But the Removites did not trouble to reply. They had made up their minds to risk the consequences.

Creak, cre-e-e-e-e-eak!

Then a long, sounding crack, a snap, and the door burst open, the lock starting from the wood under the irresistible pressure.

The door flew open so suddenly that the Removites tumbled in, and Bob Cherry gave a roar as the crowbar dropped on his boot.

The eatables in the basket had been turned out on the study table, and the raiders had just commenced the purloined feast.

It was suddenly interrupted by the invasion. The Removites rushed, and rolled, and tumbled into the study, and the Upper Fourth fellows jumped up in alarm.

"Line up!" yelled Temple.

The Upper Fourth party might as well have lined up against the breakers on the rocks of Pegg Bay.

The Remove hustled and hustled them over in a second or two, and the raiders occupied all sorts of uncomfortable attitudes on the floor, with the juniors swarming over them.

The raided eatables were slung back into the basket at express speed.

Temple, Dabney & Co. were yelling for rescue, but rescue was impossible, for the Upper Fourth could not even get into the passage blocked up by Removites.

In a couple of minutes the raided feast was recovered, with the exception of the little that had already been eaten by the raiders. That, of course, was past recovery; but it was very little.

"It's all right!" gasped Bob Cherry. "I say, don't shove that opened bottle of currant-wine into the basket. You'll upset it on the buns."

"Let 'em have it, as they've opened it," grinned Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good wheeze!"

Bob Cherry inverted the bottle of currant-wine, and the contents spurted out in a stream over the faces of the Upper Fourth fellows, as they squirmed on the floor in the grip of their captors.

Temple yelled as he received the first dose, and Dabney shrieked, and Fry bellowed. They made many audible objections—so audible that they might have been heard on the other side of the Close; but there was no escape for them.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "They've wined now, if they haven't dined. Do you feel all right, Temple?"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Aro you feeling better, Dab?"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Blessed if I can understand the language they talk in the Upper Fourth. It sounds to me like Esperanto, or Esquimo, or something. But I suppose they're all right, or they would say so. I think we've finished here."

"Come on," said Harry, laughing.

The Remove crowded out of the study.

They left it in a wonderful state of disorder, and the occupants feeling as if life were not worth living.

Temple, Dabney, & Co. sat up, looking dusty, dirty, dishevelled, wet and sticky. They looked at one another with sickly expressions.

"Let's raise the fellows, and go after the beasts!" growled Fry.

Temple grunted.

"You can go after them if you like. I'm going to look for a bath-room."

And he went. And, on second thoughts, the others followed his example.

The victorious Remove crowded into their own quarters. They had recovered nearly everything, and there was quite enough for a really ripping house-warming for the whole Form.

As it was impossible, of course, for a single study to accommodate a fifth part of the guests, the suggestion of having the feed in the passage was adopted.

The gas was alight, and all the chairs and rugs that could be begged, borrowed, or raided, were brought out into the passage. There the house-warming was held royally.

Fellows brought their own knives and forks, and spoons and cups, and plates, and saucers, and took their feed on their knees cheerfully enough.

There was plenty to go round, and the juniors all seemed to have specially good appetites for the occasion, so the feed was a huge success.

Billy Bunter had been taking snacks ever since the shopping was completed, but that did not appear to make any difference to his appetite. At all events, he was distinguished at the feast, as he usually was on such occasions. Where many were really good, Bunter was easily first.

And when it was over, it was agreed on all hands that one of the most successful social functions of the term was Billy Bunter's House-warming.

THE END.

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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. Dominic Dashwood's death occurs just as the 25th are sailing for India. On their arrival there, Leonard joins the Ploughshares. A frontier war breaks out, and the 25th receive orders to mobilise for the front. A trooper named 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 told that in due time he will be court-martialled. One day Sligo has a letter from his wife, describing how, while cleaning out a certain set of offices in Lincoln's Inn Fields, she discovered a dusty document under a safe, relating to Tom Howard's affairs, and that Sergeant Hogan, a former servant of Colonel Dashwood's, with whom Mrs. Sligo was acquainted, had joyfully affirmed that it established Jack Dashwood's claim to the Colonel's estates. This letter Sligo maliciously shows to Leonard Dashwood, who manages to destroy it, together with one from Sergeant Hogan to Tom Howard, who has been promoted to sergeant. An IOU for £95, which Dashwood had given to Sligo as hush-money, falls into Colonel Greville's hands.

A general advance is now ordered, and the column moves into the difficult Mamund country. Lieutenant Blennerhassett and the Hon. Algy, with a handful of men, are attacked by tribesmen, and take refuge in a rocky dell. At nightfall they manage to beat the enemy off, but then ammunition is exhausted. Sergeant Howard and the Hon. Algy start off on a desperate expedition to bring ammunition from the enemy's village leaving Lieutenant Blennerhassett in a state of great anxiety.

(Now go on with the story.)

A Near Thing.

Two hours went by, and then a low whistle came up through the darkness.

"They are coming back," said the lieutenant, adding "Thank Heaven!" under his breath.

But the night was so dark that they could see nothing; only pebbles rolled down the slope, and the whistle was repeated, this time much nearer.

At last a figure loomed up, right under their very noses and Tom Howard grasped the breastwork, panting heavily for a moment before he could find his voice.

"It's all right, sir," he said at last, as Bill Sloggett handed him his canteen. "We got there safely, and I've brought some ammunition to go on with. Mr. Armstrong has twisted his foot and sprained it rather badly, and we thought it better that I should come up with this, and bring a man down to give him a hand and help us with the rest."

And as he spoke, the sergeant unburdened himself of two haversacks of ball cartridges, no light weight for that steep climb.

"I should like Corporal Sloggett to come, sir, if you have no objection," said Tom Howard.

And almost before the words were out of his mouth Bill had vaulted over the breastwork, and stood beside the sergeant.

"I can't think why those beggars haven't gone for those rifles themselves," said Mr. Blennerhassett. "Is the village empty?"

"No, sir. There are about twenty round a fire in a hollow not fifty yards from the khan's house. You can't see the light from here because the shoulder of the mountain hides it. If I had only known their dialect we might have got some useful information, for we had to pass quite close to them."

Now, sir, we will slip down again, for it will be daylight in about a couple of hours."

"Very well, sergeant, I shall represent this to the proper quarters, and if you don't get a V.C. for to-night's work it will be a howling shame!"

There was a hum of approval from the men, and several of them stretched out their arms to shake hands with the sergeant; but Tom and his companion had already flitted away once more into the darkness; and by the light of a wax match Mr. Blennerhassett proceeded to divide the cartridges amongst the party, which worked out at about forty-eight rounds per man.

Silence had now fallen on the bivouac of the enemy, and the light of their fires had died down to a faint glow; but their watchman still sat on a rock, with his face turned in the direction of the cave.

Tom and the corporal had been gone for about an hour, and Mr. Blennerhassett, feeling suddenly very weary, had turned from the breastwork, intending to lie down on a shelf of rock close by, and snatch a little sleep before the three men should return, when a distant cry rose from the valley, followed by two shots, and a moment after the unmistakable crack of an Army revolver.

"By Jove, they've been spotted!" cried the lieutenant. "Heaven help them now!"

And the Hussars sprang to their feet, and grasped their Martinis.

"We will go down if you like, sir," said a voice from the darkness.

"No, no, the risk is too great," said the lieutenant. "I can't risk twenty lives to save three!"

But they knew from the ring in his voice the agony it cost him to remain in the cave in terrible ignorance of what was happening below there.

Now, what had taken place was this: Tom and Sloggett had reached the bottom of the slope without accident, and crept into the ravine, through which the stream flowed. They went along as noiselessly as possible where the way lay, now in the water itself, now on the slippery rocks, and amid darkness so profound that Bill Sloggett could not see his comrade, though Tom was only one pace ahead of him.

"Give me your hand," whispered Tom. "There's a very tricky bit just here."

And then, creeping inch by inch, as it seemed, the sergeant led Sloggett forward, whispering to him every now and again to step out here, and to mind an awkward place there, or for Heaven's sake to lift his feet clear of a jagged rock on their left against which he, the sergeant, had collided on his first trip.

"Now, keep your wits about you," whispered Tom, by way of final instructions. "As soon as we get round the point ahead, we are in the valley, and you will see the bivouac fire. They were all jabbering when I passed them just now, but in all probability they will be dropping off to sleep, and that is just the time when they are most likely to spot us. You will have to crawl on hands and knees, and if you lose touch of me we are done. Above all, mind your sword. The sand is full of pebbles, and if you clank that scabbard against one of them it will be all U P with the pair of us. Now, do you see them?"

And Tom, still holding Sloggett's hand, sank down on his knees, and they found themselves in the presence of the enemy.

Sloggett could just make out the jagged blurr of the stone

hovels, and of something standing up higher against the sky, which he knew must be the tower of the khan's house; but so close as to be absolutely alarming was the glow of the camp-fire, with a ring of huddled-up figures around it, apparently sunk in repose.

"Keep your helmet over your eyes. It is less likely to show than the bare skin. Now, come on! We are going to make a bee-line for that building ahead."

And the two lads began to crawl slowly through the sand.

All would have gone well but for one circumstance. The men round the fire belonged to a tribe having a blood feud with the natives of that particular village, and as their companions dozed off in the early hours of the morning, it occurred to two of them more wakeful than the rest that it would not be a bad opportunity for them to investigate their enemy's stronghold, and possibly steal a surreptitious march upon them by looting the khan's house of any hidden valuables, he and his followers being at that time under the banner of the Mad Mullah. Consequently, with their long guns in their hands, they rose from the circle of sleepers, had a whispered colloquy, and stole away towards the closed door, behind which the Hon. Algy waited impatiently for Tom's return.

The Hon. Algy, as the sergeant said, had sprained his ankle pretty badly, and he stood on one leg, listening at the grating with which the door was furnished, his face writhing with pain in the darkness, and his cigarette unlighted between his lips. Suddenly he heard shuffling footsteps approaching the door, and his hand went to the bolt instinctively. In another moment he would have said "is that you, Howard?" had not the guttural voice of a man outside muttered something to which his companion made an equally guttural reply.

"The dickens!" muttered the Hon. Algy to himself. "I am going to have visitors. But what about poor Howard, if he comes up while these two fellows are here? He is overdue now, unless something has happened to him."

Not far away the Hon. Algy could see the camp-fire dying down, and by its glow he was able to distinguish the aquiline profiles and fantastic headgear of the two Mamunds. Both looked over their shoulders as though they expected something, and for a moment the lieutenant thought that it was an ambush for his companion, and, taking his sword gingerly from a corner in which he had stood it, he laid his hand on the stout bolt, ready to dart out, hurt as he was, to Tom's assistance. But he soon found that plunder was the motive that brought the tribesmen there, and he smiled at their fruitless efforts to push the door open as they fumbled and tampered with the lock, inserting the points of their knives through the keyhole, but always looking furtively back, as though they were afraid of being disturbed.

The Hon. Algy's face was not six inches away from them, divided only by the panels of the door, and he could hear them breathing, and every word they said, if he had only been able to understand them. Then one of the pair suddenly stepped back, laying his hand on his sword, and looking away round the corner of the house. With a heart fluttering with excitement, and a horrible nervous fear raising his hair and making the perspiration pour like rain from his face, the future Earl of Snowden saw the unmistakable form of the sergeant, followed by another man, silhouetted against the camp-fire, and knew that the tribesmen saw it, too. They crouched like two wild cats, waiting to spring, and the unconscious sergeant and his companion, having now passed the fire, and being very anxious to find themselves within the shelter of stone walls after their heavy progress, quickened their pace.

Three strides would bring them within reach of those razor-edged swords to say nothing of the long jessais which the tribesmen grasped. Something must be done, and that with the rapidity

of thought; and, suddenly placing his lips to the wicket, the Hon. Algy cried as loudly as he could bellow:

"Look-out! There are two pathans there! Bowl them over, and make straight for the door!"

The two lurkers, astonished, as well they might be, by the voice that rang almost in their ears, pressed their triggers simultaneously, one of the bullets falling into the circle of men round the fire, and very effectually waking them; and, understanding the situation in a moment, Tom Howard fired Mr. Blennerhassett's last cartridge, dropping one of the ruffians in his tracks, while Bill Sloggett whipped out his sword in a twinkling. The second man, raising a scream of alarm, darted out of the doorway; but Bill was too quick for him, and, with one furious sweep of his sword hamstringing the Mamund, and he fell upon the sand with a piercing shriek.

"Quick!" cried the Hon. Algy, pulling the heavy door open.

And before the astonished enemy knew what was going forward, the two Hussars had sprung inside, and the door closed behind them with a clang.

"By gad, that was sharp work!" said the lieutenant. "I gave you up for lost when I saw those beggars. Everything all right up yonder?"

"Yes, they have heard nothing. And now, if they are attacked, they have plenty of ammunition to stay another rush. But how, in the name of goodness, are we going to get out of this beastly mess?"

There was no furniture in the Khan's house save rugs and camel-hair blankets, and odds and ends of cooking-pots, so the door would have to stand on its own merits. If it gave before a rush of the enemy, then there was nothing for it but to die like Britons. Still, they were fortified by the hope that help would come before many hours had passed, and, mounting to the upper storey, each selected a rifle, and filling their haversacks with cartridges, they went out on to the platform on the top of the tower.

Meanwhile, the three shots had been heard by Ali Khan and his brother chieftains at their camp a quarter of a mile away, and flying figures came through the night, or rather, early morning, to find out the cause.

When Ali Khan heard the news there was wrath in his heart, and he swore a vow to Allah to neither sleep nor eat until they had put the whites to the sword. He cursed Ackbar volubly for leaving the other side of the cave unguarded, for he feared that the whole of the garrison had escaped. But when he and twenty of his followers crept up the path towards the western entrance to reconnoitre, he was speedily undeceived by a terrific volley, and of the twenty men, Ali Khan and three others alone reached their bivouac alive.

Meanwhile, on the principle that the more noise they made the more they were likely to be heard, the three imprisoned Hussars opened an independent fire on the jabbering mob of Mamunds who clustered about the doorway, causing them to seek shelter behind the stone hovels, from whence they replied with such firearms as they possessed; and all the rest of that night until the morning broke, the valleys and gorges echoed and re-echoed to the sound of the Martinis.

A large piece of black rye-bread still remained in the Khan's house, and this they divided between them, munching slowly as they lay behind the parapet, taking an occasional shot whenever an enemy showed himself; and the continued firing caused much anxiety to the little garrison in the Cave of the Winds.

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