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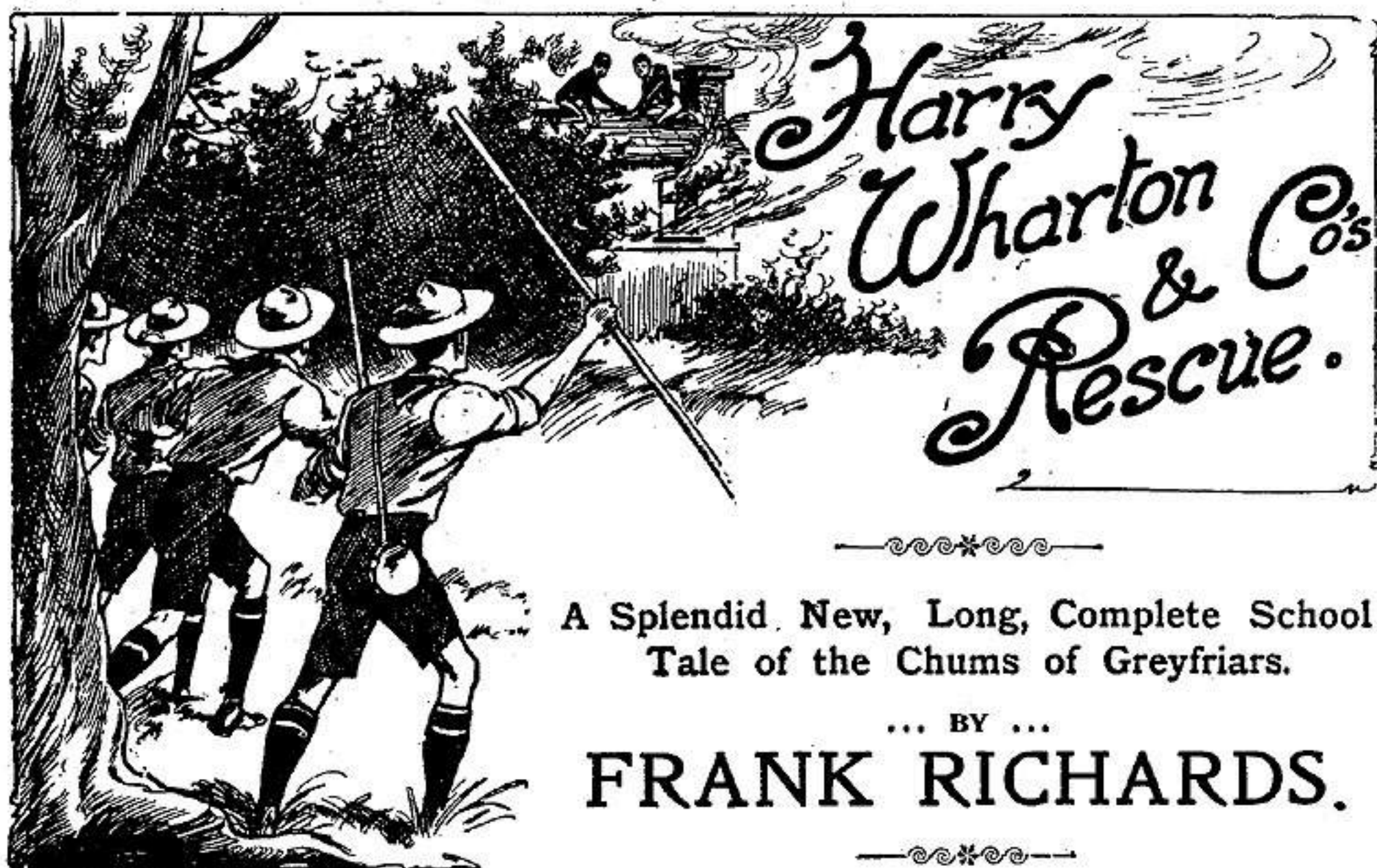
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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Harry Wharton's Idea.

COKER, of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars, turned into the Remove passage, and nearly collided with Harry Wharton. The captain of the Remove was attired in the neat uniform of a boy scout, and Coker looked him up and down.

"Well, what do you think you are?" he asked.

"I'm a Wolf," said Harry Wharton.

"You're a which?"

"A Wolf."

"Go hon!" said Coker. "I thought you were a donkey!"

Harry Wharton turned red.

"You silly ass!" he exclaimed. "I'm a Wolf! Can't you see it?"

Coker, of the Fifth, grinned.

"Blest if I can!" he said. "You look more like an escaped lunatic! What the dickens are you dressed up in those fatheaded duds for?"

"You frabjous chump, it's scouts' uniform!" roared Harry Wharton wrathfully. "I'm patrol-leader of the Wolves! We're going in for scouting in the Remove—

though it's too much to expect you to understand it! In a year or two, perhaps, you'll have enough sense to be admitted into a patrol—"

"You cheeky rotter!" said Coker. "Do you think I want to be a beastly Brussels sprout? It's a kids' game—just about right for you Remove babies!"

"Look here—"

"Rats!"

Coker walked away, and Harry Wharton turned into Study No. 1. The captain of the Remove soon recovered his good temper. It was evening, and he had just returned from a strenuous afternoon's scouting. The Lower Fourth—the Remove—had been going in for scouting rather strongly lately, and the juniors rather enjoyed it.

Temple, Dabney & Co., of the Upper Fourth, had taken up scouting, too, and there had been keen rivalry between them and Harry Wharton & Co. But the Removites had shown that they were the superior boy scouts, and Temple, Dabney & Co. had been forced to admit themselves beaten on more than one occasion.

Consequently the Remove was in high feather, and the scouts were enthusiastic. The Famous Five—Wharton, Frank Nugent, Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, and Hurree

Jamset Ram Singh—were the chief leaders in the movement, and just at present the patrol-leader of the Wolves was thinking of a new wheeze to liven things up.

Harry Wharton entered his study, and found it occupied by Frank Nugent, his study mate.

"Letter for you, Harry," said Nugent.

"Good! It may contain a remittance—"

"No such luck," interrupted Frank Nugent, shaking his head. "It's got the Courtfield postmark on it."

"By Jove, it's from old Biggs!"

"Old Biggs?"

"Yes; the landlord of that little shooting-box affair in the woods," said Harry Wharton, picking the letter up. "You remember, I wrote to him a day or two ago, Franky."

Wharton slit open the envelope and extracted the letter.

"Dear sir," he read out. "In reply to your inquiry I beg to say that the little shooting-box is to let, and that the rent for same would be ten shillings per month. I understand that you wish to use it as a kind of meeting-place when on scouting expeditions? I am quite willing to let you the place for this purpose, and should be obliged if you would send me a line stating your intentions.—Yours faithfully,
JAMES BIGGS."

Harry Wharton looked up.

"Good!" he exclaimed, with satisfaction.

"Rent's not killing, anyway," said Frank Nugent. "Half-a-crown a week."

"Jolly cheap," said Harry Wharton. "Of course, we should all contribute a bit, and make it practically nothing. I think the chaps will be pleased."

Frank Nugent poked the fire.

"I don't quite catch on yet," he exclaimed. "You didn't tell me much about this giddy idea when you wrote to Biggs the other day."

"It's nothing much," said Wharton; "but I thought it would be rather a good idea to have the little shooting-box affair and use it as a rendezvous—"

"As a which?" inquired Nugent.

"A rendezvous—a meeting-place, you know. Now that we're going in for scouting we could arrange our expeditions so that we all collected at the shooting-box, and met there again after the bizney's all over."

"I see," said Nugent thoughtfully. "It's a jolly good wheeze, Harry. As it is now we have to hang about in the cold, or else come back here. Suppose we go down to the common-room now and broach the subject? Most of the chaps will be there now."

"Right-ho!"

And Harry Wharton, with the letter in his hand, left the study, followed by Frank Nugent. They descended to the junior common-room, and found it occupied by a large proportion of the Remove, many of whom were in scouts' costume.

"Oh, here you are, Harry!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, coming towards the fresh arrivals. "I was just coming to look you up."

"What for?"

"To bring you a giddy invitation to tea," said Bob Cherry. "We're having rather a big spread in No. 13, and thought you'd come along and help to demolish it."

"Thanks," said Harry, "we will!"

"Rather!" said Nugent.

"There's a little matter I want to speak about, though," went on the captain of the Remove. "Most of the chaps are here now, so it's a good opportunity."

"Fire away, then," said Bob Cherry cheerfully.

Harry Wharton looked round the common-room. Most of the Removes were there. Mark Linley, Bulstrode, Tom Brown, and several others were talking round the fireplace, whilst Vernon-Smith & Co. were collected in a little group, conversing animatedly. Hazeldene was with them, and Harry Wharton frowned as he noticed it.

Hazeldene was not a bad fellow, although he was weak-

willed and easily led away. Hazeldene was, as a rule, fairly popular with the Greyfriars juniors, but this was not on account of his own good qualities. It was chiefly because he was the brother of Marjorie Hazeldene, of Cliff House School. This made up for a lot of Hazeldene's faults.

But lately he had been chumming up with Stott and Trevor, two of Vernon-Smith's cronies. Vernon-Smith & Co. were at present in great disfavour among the majority of the boys. The Bounder of Greyfriars was in no way disconcerted, however. He looked as cool as ever, and was possessed of any amount of bluster.

And Hazeldene was being drawn into a friendship which might prove disastrous to him. Being weak-willed, Hazel would readily comply with any scheme which Vernon-Smith might suggest. And Harry Wharton looked rather worried as he saw that Hazeldene was on very good terms with the Bounder.

"I shall have to warn the silly ass not to keep this game up," he murmured to himself. "But I've got to speak to the chaps about this other bizney."

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Bob Cherry, giving Wharton a slap on the shoulder. "What the dickens are you standing there muttering to yourself for? Do you call that addressing the chaps?"

Harry Wharton grimaced.

"It's all right," he said. "I was only thinking!"

"Well, think some other time, then. I'm waiting for my giddy tea."

Bob Cherry looked round.

"I say, you chaps," he bawled, "Wharton's got something to tell you!"

The Removes, and other juniors, turned and looked in Harry's direction.

"Silly ass!" exclaimed Bolsover. "What on earth did you want to yell like that for?"

"Only to draw your attention," grinned Bob Cherry. "I'm in a hurry!"

"I thought Wharton was going to speak," said Mark Linley.

"So I am," said Harry Wharton. "An idea has struck me, and I thought it would be a good opportunity to get the opinion of the Form as a whole."

"Get it off your chest, then," said Fisher T. Fish.

"Pile in!"

"The pile-fulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Singh.

"On the ball!"

"It's nothing much," said Harry Wharton, "but I thought you'd like to be consulted before I took any action in the matter."

"My hat!" said Johnny Bull. "Did you get that out of a book?"

"No, I jolly well didn't!" said Harry Wharton. "If you'll be quiet I'll get to the bizney. Most of you have seen, perhaps, a rather ramshackle cottage in Friardale Wood. It's an old shooting-box, I think, and it's been empty for months."

"Well, what of it?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Nothing," said Harry Wharton. "I'm not speaking to you, Smithy! This matter doesn't interest you in the least; it's not in your line. It's connected with scouting, if you want to know!"

"Oh," said Vernon-Smith, "then it's not in my line! Scouting's a kids' game!"

There was a howl from the scouts present.

"Shut up, Smithy!"

"Dry up, you rotter!"

The juniors glared at Vernon-Smith with aggressive eyes, but the Bounder only chuckled in his cynical way, and smiled. Vernon-Smith didn't believe in scouting, and did not object to his views being known.

"Well," said Mark Linley, returning to the subject, "what about the shooting-box? We've all seen it, of course, but it's private property. We couldn't think of taking up our headquarters there for a picnic, or—"

"Half a minute," interrupted Harry Wharton. "I'm not suggesting picnicking and that sort of rot. It struck me that the shooting-box would make a first-class headquarters for a scouting expedition. We could easily meet there after an afternoon's sport, and have a kind of feast to finish the day with. It would be better than coming back to the school, and having tea in our own studies. More like the thing, you know."

"It's a good idea," said Johnny Bull thoughtfully; "but what's up with camping out? That's more in scouting line."

Harry Wharton gave Bull a withering look.

"You chump!" he exclaimed. "You fathead!"

"Look here—"

"Do you think we can camp out in this weather—the beginning of February?" said Harry Wharton sarcastically. "Camping out's all right in the summer-time, but

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"I think you're a blessed sharper to let the place to Vernon-Smith without giving Wharton the first chance!" said Bob Cherry hotly. "You're a beastly fraud!" Mr. Biggs stuttered with fury. "You insulting young rascals!" he roared. "Get out of this office! How dare you speak to me in this manner?" (See Chapter 6.)

it would be out of the question in the winter. It might come on to rain, or snow, and it would be simply ripping to have tea in that jolly little shooting-box!"

The Removites looked at one another. The matter did not want much thinking about. It was a good idea, undoubtedly, and all the boy scouts present were immediately enthusiastic.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Vernon-Smith's Little Scheme.

HARRY WHARTON looked round the common-room. "Well," he asked, "how does the idea strike you?"

"Oh, ripping!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "I reckon it's a first-class wheeze, you chaps. It would be O.K. in that shooting-box on a cold night. There's a fire-place in it, and we could have a hot spread. After a hard afternoon's scouting it would be just the thing!"

"Exactly," said Johnny Bull. "But I want to know how we should get into the place? It's locked up, and it belongs to somebody! If we were copped in there we should be turned out as giddy trespassers!"

"Of course!"

"The idea won't work, Wharton!"

Harry Wharton looked round with a smile.

"Don't be in such a hurry," he said. "I've got a letter here from the landlord of the place—Mr. Biggs, the estate agent in Courtfield. He says we can have the shooting-box for half-a-crown a week."

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"Half-a-crown a week!" began Bulstrode. "Why, that's—"

"It's nothing!" said the captain of the Remove. "There will be about fifteen of us use it, and that'll work out at twopence a week each. Who's going to grumble at twopence a week? Why, we should never feel it!"

"Faith, and ye're right!" said Micky Desmond thoughtfully. "Wharton darlin', it's a jewel of an idea!"

"We can have some high old times there," said Vane enthusiastically. "We could get one or two chaps to do camping duty, and prepare the giddy feed while we were all out scouting. When we came back we should find everything prepared. I'm willing to pay my share."

"And so am I!"

"And I!"

Every scout in the room was of the same opinion. The idea struck them as being extremely good, and there wasn't a single scout who demurred.

"I—I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter!"

"I sha'n't shut up!" said Billy Bunter indignantly. The Owl of the Remove shoved his fat form through the crowd, and blinked round through his big spectacles. "I've got an idea, you know."

"We didn't know," said Bulstrode.

"And don't want to know!" added Tom Brown.

"Oh, really, you fellows, it's not fair!" complained Bunter. "I think you might give a chap a chance. I—I'm going to offer to do you a favour—"

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MONDAY:

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"Great Scott!"
 "You're not dreaming, Bunt, are you? Or walking in your sleep?"
 "Perhaps he's lost his memory again?" suggested Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Oh, really, Cherry, I think it's rotten of you to play the giddy ox like this!" said Billy Bunter indignantly. "I was going to suggest that it would be a good idea for me to join the scouts, you know. I'm a jolly active chap, and it would suit me down to the ground."

The Removites stared.
 "You," ejaculated Harry Wharton, "a scout!"
 "My only topper!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Bob Cherry.
 "Oh, really, Cherry, there's no need to cackle!" said Billy Bunter. "I mean it! I want to be a scout, and I don't see why you should laugh at me. I think this idea of Wharton's is ripping!"

"Thanks!" said Harry Wharton, grinning.
 "And, to prove that I am really in earnest, I'll undertake to stop at the shooting-box whenever we're out scouting, and prepare the grub. I'm not a very active chap—I mean I'm jolly nimble when I like; but as the best chef at Greyfriars I'll willingly sacrifice myself to the scouts. You ought to be jolly grateful to me!"

The Removites understood Bunter's little plan. The Owl of the Remove had no desire to be a scout—in fact, he had openly jeered at the Boy Scout movement only an hour or so before—but if he could obtain the post of chef he would be in his element. He knew that it would be impossible to gain the post without becoming a scout, so he had kindly offered to sacrifice himself. Harry Wharton & Co. roared. Bunter's dodge struck them as being distinctly humorous.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I—I say—"
 "Oh, Bunt, you'll be the death of us!" sobbed Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry! I don't see why you should laugh like that!"

"I do," chuckled Bob Cherry. "I think you're the funniest animal that ever lived. But it's time we went to our giddy study for tea, Harry."

And the Famous Five, chuckling heartily at Billy Bunter's expense, left the common-room. Other juniors followed them, and Bunter was left in the middle of the room alone.

"I say, you fellows," shouted Bunter, "what have you all buzzed off for? Ain't you going to adopt my suggestion?"

"No, we're not!" said Bulstrode flatly.

"You rotters!" shouted Bunter. "I should be able to do the cooking a dashed lot better than any other chap!"

"Very likely," grinned Fisher T. Fish; "but I guess you'd do the eating bizney a dashed lot better, too! You'd wolf the whole feed up before we got back, Bunter!"

"Yab, you rotten Yankee!" shouted Billy Bunter. "You—"

"Clear out!" roared Bulstrode. "We're fed up with you!"

Bunter cleared out, murmuring to himself that the Removites were all beasts, and deserved to be boiled in oil.

The common-room very soon cleared once Harry Wharton & Co. had made the first move. The shooting-box idea had struck everybody as being extremely good, and the subject was discussed in more than one study.

Vernon-Smith was looking very thoughtful as he entered his own study, followed by Bolsover, and Trevor, and Stott, and Hazeldene. The Bounder had invited the quartette to tea with him. Hazeldene had been rather doubtful about going, for Vernon-Smith's character at Greyfriars was very black at the moment. The Bounder was still in disgrace with the majority of the juniors, and Hazeldene did not want to chum up with Vernon-Smith, and lose the friendship of the rest of the juniors. But, although he didn't particularly wish to be intimate with Vernon-Smith & Co., he was drawn into it against his will. By now he was beginning to like the Bounder and his associates, and always flew into a rage when any of the fellows tried to bring him to his senses.

The Bounder closed the door of his study, and looked round.

"I've got an idea," he said slowly—"a really ripping idea!"

"Oh, dry up," growled Bolsover, "I want some tea! Let's hear the idea afterwards, Smithy!"

"No," said Vernon-Smith, "you'll hear it now. You've heard what Wharton's been saying about that old shooting-box?"

"Yes, a lot of rot," said Trevor.

"I agree with you there!" exclaimed the Bounder coolly. "To use that place as a rendezvous for boy scouts is kiddish. Now, my idea is this. Why shouldn't we have the shooting-

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box, and use it for our own purposes? In that way we should do ourselves a good turn, and take a rise out of Wharton."

"Yes, but—"

"Wait a minute," went on the Bounder. "Let me finish before you interrupt. At present we're not exactly popular at Greyfriars, and even the masters are keeping an alert eye upon us—myself especially. I don't like that sort of thing. If I want to do anything private, I find myself in a difficulty. It's practically impossible to have a cigarette in the study nowadays."

"Well, that's not a calamity," said Hazeldene.

"I don't say it is!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith. "I only say that I don't like to be spied upon. If we take that shooting-box we can use it as a kind of club-room, and go there to spend a few hours on the quiet."

"After locking up?" asked Stott.

"No; that would be too risky," replied the bounder. "But there's no reason why we shouldn't spend our half-holidays there, and take our grub with us. We could have a ripping game of cards, smoke, and all the rest of it. And about ten minutes before locking up it would be quite easy to leave the place, and return here like good little boys."

"By jingo," said Trevor, "it's not at all a bad idea, Smithy. I like a game of cards myself now and again, and if we had that place we should be as safe as eggs."

"Exactly!" said the Bounder coolly.

"It's a good wheeze right enough," said Bolsover; "but I don't exactly see how you're going to work it. It's all very well for you to say that it would be a ripping place for a club-room—but how could we take it? Old Biggs is going to let it to Wharton."

Vernon-Smith smiled.

"Is he?" he said calmly. "I've got an idea he'll let it to me. At any rate, I'll do my best to get the place to-morrow, and leave Harry Wharton in the lurch. What I want to know is—will you fellows back me up?"

"I'm game," said Bolsover.

"So am I," said Stott.

"Likewise me," added Trevor.

"And how about you, Hazel?" asked the Bounder.

Hazeldene hesitated.

"Well, it's a bit thick, you know. I'm not talking about taking the shooting-box away from Wharton, but about using it as a club-room. Suppose one of the masters came there and found us smoking, and playing cards? Why, it would mean the sack!"

"Rot!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith. "You're too nervous, Hazel. There's no possibility of the masters coming into the heart of Friardale Wood just to have a look at the old shooting-box. Besides, we could use the upper-room, and keep an eye open for visitors. The lower door would be locked, and before we opened it we could remove all traces of cards and cigarettes."

"Of course," agreed Bolsover. "It's a ripping idea! Personally, I can't see any danger in it at all. It's simply rotten here—there's not a place where we can have a decent smoke."

Hazeldene looked round.

"Well, I don't mind," he said. "I'm in it, if you fellows are. I reckon it will be decent out in the wood."

"Good!" said the Bounder. "That's settled, then. It now remains for us to whack Wharton in the eye, and rent the place over his head. But I don't think that'll be a difficult job. I'll go and see old Biggs to-morrow immediately after morning lessons."

"That's the idea!" said Bolsover.

"And now we'll get some tea," added Trevor, turning to the fireplace.

And a few minutes later Vernon-Smith & Co. were busily preparing their evening meal.

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THE THIRD CHAPTER. Marjorie is Anxious.

THE FAMOUS FIVE were standing just outside the Close, leaning against the entrance-gates. It was the following day, and morning lessons were just over. It was delightfully mild for early February, and the sun shone quite brilliantly.

Harry Wharton & Co. were standing at the gates, talking idly. The dinner-bell would not ring for about twenty minutes or more.

"When are you going to see about that little cottage?" inquired Johnny Bull.

"Oh, I wrote about it last night," said Harry Wharton. "I expect I shall get a reply from old Biggs in the morning. I didn't send any tin; but you never pay rent in advance."

"Well, if the old chap accepts us as tenants, we can take possession on Saturday," said Bob Cherry. "My hat, that'll be ripping! In fact, we can take a run over on Friday, and get it into shipshape."

"Of course," agreed Frank Nugent. "I—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" interrupted Bob Cherry, "who's this?"

"Who's which?"

"This solitary maiden wandering up the road from Friar-dale?" said Bob. "Why, I believe it's Marjorie Hazeldene from Cliff House!"

The juniors crowded out into the roadway.

"My hat, so it is!" said Harry Wharton quickly. "Come on!"

With one accord the Famous Five hurried down the road towards the new-comer. Marjorie Hazeldene found herself surrounded by Harry Wharton & Co. She was looking extremely neat in her dark serge costume, and her fresh young face was tinged with pink, owing to her sharp walk from Cliff House.

"Jolly glad you've come, Marjorie!" said Harry Wharton, taking off his cap.

"Yes, rather!" said Nugent.

"Hope you're quite well?" added Bob Cherry cheerfully.

"And feeling happy?" supplemented Johnny Bull.

"The honourable expressionfulness of my august chums is esteemfully reciprocated," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur, bowing low.

Marjorie laughed.

"Don't be silly," she said. "You can see I'm all right. How are you all?"

"All serene!" answered Harry Wharton.

"I came here especially to see you five boys," went on Marjorie, her face becoming serious. "It's about my brother."

"Oh!" exclaimed Wharton.

"What's up with him?" asked Johnny Bull practically.

"I don't know," said Marjorie gravely; "but I've heard that he's been mixing a lot lately with Vernon-Smith—and I know what sort of a boy Vernon-Smith is!"

"A rank outsider!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, with gusto.

"Hush! Don't speak like that!" said Marjorie. "I've been wondering if you boys could help me. I—I mean, would you think it too much if I asked you to get my brother away from Vernon-Smith, and keep him—"

"Keep him apart from the rotter?" asked Wharton.

"Yes, that is it," said Marjorie eagerly.

"Would we think it too much, chaps?" asked Bob Cherry cheerfully.

"If any chap does think it too much he'll be treated to a first-class thick ear!" said Harry Wharton. "It's all right, Marjorie. We'll collar hold of Hazel, and knock some sense into his thick head! He's a bit of an ass, you know; but you can't help that!"

"Of course not!" agreed Nugent. "That's not your fault!"

Marjorie smiled.

"Suppose we went into the School House now?" she suggested. "If he is with Vernon-Smith now we might get him away, and then I could speak to him. I know he is a little obstinate; but if we talk to him seriously he will realise his folly in mixing with Vernon-Smith and his friends."

"If he doesn't realise it at once, we'll jolly soon make him!" said Harry Wharton.

"Rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific!"

Marjorie moved towards the gates, and the Famous Five went with her in a clump. They crossed the Close, and entered the School House.

They ascended to the Remove passage. Outside Vernon-Smith's study the Famous Five paused. Snoop, the sneak of the Remove, passed down the passage, and looked at the little crowd in surprise. Snoop was one of Vernon-Smith's allies; but lately the Bounder had not been very cordial to him.

"Paying a visit to Smithy?" he asked.

"Go and eat coke!" growled Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton tapped on the door.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 260.

EVERY
MONDAY,

The "Magnet"
LIBRARY.

ONE
PENNY.

"Come in!" said a voice.

The Famous Five and Marjorie Hazeldene passed into the study. There was a faint smell of cigarette-smoke in the air.

"Hallo, what do you lot want?" demanded Vernon-Smith. "What's the meaning— Oh, how are you, Miss Marjorie—"

"Miss Hazeldene, please!" said Marjorie stiffly.

The Bounder smiled coolly.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "You don't count me among your friends, do you? But as you have paid me a visit—"

"We haven't come to talk to you, Smithy!" said Wharton.

"We want Hazel!"

Hazeldene, who had been sitting near the fireplace, looked up at his sister rather aggressively.

"Hallo, Marjorie!" he said. "What do you want me for?"

"I want to speak to you privately," said Marjorie quietly.

"Sorry," said Hazeldene. "I can't come now!"

"You rotter!" said Harry Wharton wrathfully. "Do you mean to say you're going to stick here when Marjorie says she wants you outside?"

"Yes, I mean to say it!" said Hazeldene.

"Then you're a rotter!" said Bob Cherry vigorously.

"Rats!" growled Hazel. "Do you think I don't know what Marjorie wants? I'm blessed if I'm going to leave this room to be lectured! You simply want to drag me out, and then lecture me! I'm not coming, so you can all buzz off! I'm sorry, Marjorie, these silly asses have brought you up here!"

"You cad!" exclaimed Harry Wharton hotly.

Vernon-Smith smiled.

"You see, Hazel's quite chummy with me," he said coolly. "Hazel's a good sort, and knows where to find reliable friends. You're too wishy-washy for a chap like Hazel!"

"Too decent, you mean," Bob Cherry cut in wrathfully. "Hazeldene hasn't got enough sense to see that he's acting the fool!"

"Won't you come?" asked Marjorie gently.

"No!" said Hazeldene bluntly. "I won't!"

"I'm sorry," said Marjorie simply. She turned to Harry Wharton. "We might as well go," she said, walking towards the door.

"The go-fulness is terrific!" said Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh. "The obstinatefulness of the ludicrous Hazel is also terrific! The esteemed Bounder ought to be given the honourable bump!"

"Good-morning, Miss Hazeldene," said the Bounder coolly. "You can clear out, you fellows!"

"We sha'n't take long to do that!" growled Johnny Bull. "I think you're a measly cad, Smithy, to drag Hazeldene into your rotten tricks!"

"Rats!" said Vernon-Smith. "Hazel can do as he likes, I hope! I'm not forcing him to chum up with me!"

"Of course not!" said Hazeldene.

"Then you're a bigger fathead than I took you for!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "You jolly well don't deserve to be looked after, Hazel, blessed if you do!"

"I can look after myself, thanks!" said Hazeldene, with a sneer.

"Oh, come on!" growled Frank Nugent disgustedly.

And the Famous Five, with Marjorie in their midst, left the study and stood looking at one another in the passage.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Foretalled by the Bounder.

MARJORIE HAZELDENE looked worried.

"I'm awfully sorry to bother you like this—"

"Rats—I mean nonsense!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "It's no bother, Marjorie. I'm surprised at Hazel. I've never known such a changeable chap in my life. At one time he seems to be learning sense and acting quite decently, then he drops back into his old habits."

"It's Smithy's fault," said Bob Cherry, with a knowing nod. "The Bounder knows that Marjorie wants Hazel to run straight, and he's doing this just to annoy her all he can! I call it a beastly trick. He's a worm, and it's a pity he wasn't sacked from Greyfriars!"

"Oh, you mustn't talk like that," said Marjorie. "Come, we will get out into the Close. I'm very sorry that our trouble's been for nothing."

"I'm jolly wild!" growled Johnny Bull. "Hazel's a pig!"

"I know he is," said Marjorie, her eyes flashing, "and it's really too bad of me to ask you to look after him. But I know he's all right at heart. It's only his weak will that's against him. He allows himself to be led away."

He emerged into the Close and crossed over to the gates. "Well," said Bob Cherry, "what are we going to do?" "Do?" repeated Wharton. "Why, we'll promise Marjorie that we'll do our best to get Hazeldene out of Vernon-Smith's company. We can't do more than our best, anyhow."

"It's no good grabbing him by the shoulder and forcing him," said Nugent. "We shall have to bring him round by degrees, or not at all. Still, we're game to make the attempt!"

"Rather!" agreed Johnny Bull.

"The ratherfulness is terrific!"

Marjorie looked round with shining eyes.

"I don't know how to thank you," she said softly. "If you can indeed succeed in getting my brother away from Vernon-Smith I shall be more glad than I can say. He knows what a wicked boy Vernon-Smith is, but I believe he associates with him just because of his obstinate nature. He doesn't like being looked after!"

"Well, it's his own fault," said Cherry. "The silly ass shouldn't make it necessary for anyone to look after him." Marjorie smiled.

"Well, I shall have to be getting back," she said. "I shall feel anxious until I see you again. You'll really do your best, won't you?"

"We will," said Bob Cherry, "or die in the attempt!"

"The diefulness will be terrific, esteemed miss!" said Hurreo Singh calmly.

Marjorie laughed, and, after saying good-bye, she departed. The Famous Five watched her go thoughtfully. They knew that the girl worried a good deal about her brother, and it had the effect of making them indignant.

"I feel like going in and giving the silly chump a first-class bumping!" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "Hazel ought to have more sense!"

"Of course he ought," said Harry Wharton. "But a bumping wouldn't do him any good. In fact, it would only make him worse. If we're going to make him see the error of his ways we shall have to set to work gradually. He hasn't gone very far yet, but if he stays with the Bounder long it'll end up by him getting mixed up with some rotten bookie again!"

And the Famous Five continued talking about Hazeldene until the dinner-bell rang. Then they trooped into the School House looking thoughtful.

Immediately after dinner Vernon-Smith hurried up to his study, accompanied by Bolsover major and Trevor.

"We shall have to buck up if we're going to get back in time for afternoon lessons," said the Bounder, glancing at his watch. "We shall have to bike it. I meant to go before dinner, but it'll do just as well now if we hurry."

"Of course," said Trevor.

The Bounder put his cap on, picked up his gloves, and left the study. Trevor and Bolsover followed. They were to accompany Vernon-Smith to Courtfield, where he was going to interview Mr. James Biggs, the owner of the little shooting-box in Friardale Wood.

Vernon-Smith's scheme of renting the place over Harry Wharton's head was a dishonourable one. For, after all, Wharton had thought of the idea first, and had told it to the Removites without a thought of the Bounder taking advantage of it. But Vernon-Smith felt quite easy in his mind. He considered that if he succeeded in getting the place it would simply be taking a rise out of Wharton.

He, Bolsover, and Trevor were soon spinning along the Courtfield Road. Trevor chuckled as he pedalled along.

"My hat!" he grinned. "It'll be a smack in the eye for Wharton if we do get this place, Smithy!"

"Rather!" agreed Vernon-Smith.

"Personally, I don't see how it can be done," said Bolsover doubtfully. "It's all very well for you to be sanguine, and all that, Smithy, but Harry Wharton wrote to old Biggs last night."

"What of it?"

"Well, he'll naturally let the place to Wharton as he was first in the field, as it were."

"Don't you believe it," said the Bounder easily. "I think I can safely say that when we get back to Greyfriars we shall be the tenants of the shooting-box!"

Shortly after the three Removites cycled into Courtfield. The country town was looking somewhat sleepy at that time of day, and Vernon-Smith and his two companions dismounted from their machines in the High Street. The estate office of Mr. Biggs was situated there, and they leaned their cycles against the kerb. Mr. Biggs was not merely the agent; he owned the shooting-box himself, and therefore he was the right man to apply to.

"Shall we come in with you?" asked Bolsover.

"Rather!"

"Right-ho! Lead the way!"

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"THE GEM" LIBRARY,
Every Wednesday.

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR,"
Every Friday.

Vernon-Smith entered the office. A small boy sat behind the counter, and he looked up as the three juniors entered.

"Is Mr. Biggs in?" inquired Vernon-Smith.

"Yessir," said the office-boy. "Do you want to see 'im?"

"Do you think we came here to see you?" interrupted Trevor. "Cut off and find Mr. Biggs!"

The small boy disappeared, and for a few minutes the trio of Removites were left to themselves. Then the door opened, and a big man, with an aggressive-looking moustache, appeared. He raised his eyebrows as he saw the Greyfriars caps.

"You'll be Master Wharton, I take it?" he said.

"No; my name's Vernon-Smith," said the Bounder coolly. "I've come about that shooting-box in Friardale Wood."

Mr. Biggs elevated his eyebrows.

"What! Another of you after it?"

"Yes," said Vernon-Smith. "I want you to let it to me."

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Biggs, "but I don't see how it can be done. Master Wharton wrote to me last night about it, and I've already written to him stating that he can have the key of the cottage whenever he likes. It's let to him, young 'un, so it's no use your stopping here."

Vernon-Smith thought for a moment.

"Has the letter been posted?" he asked.

Mr. Biggs looked up.

"No, I don't think it has yet," he replied. "Still, that makes no difference. Wharton was the first to make an offer, and I cannot put him off because you come here and say you want to rent the place from me. Wharton was first, and—"

"That doesn't matter a jot!" exclaimed the Bounder coolly. "The main thing is this. I want to have the place for my own use. Of course, you realise that Wharton wants it for scouting purposes?"

"Yes, I know that," said Mr. Biggs impatiently.

"Look here, Master Smith, let me tell you that my time's valuable, and, without being impolite, I wish you to understand that this interview has continued long enough."

Vernon-Smith laid his arms on the counter.

"You don't quite seem to catch on," he said. "You've let this shooting-box to Wharton, but you haven't yet posted the letter agreeing to accept him as a tenant. Well, I see no reason why you shouldn't let the matter stop where it is, and—"

"Nothing of the kind," said Mr. Biggs testily. "I cannot change my decision now. It is ridiculous of you to suppose that I should disappoint Wharton simply because you come here and say that you, yourself, wish to hire the shooting-box."

"I told you so!" murmured Bolsover major. "It's no go, Smithy! We'd better buzz back to Greyfriars!"

"Rats!" said the Bounder. "Now, look here, Mr. Biggs, the rent you've asked of Wharton is ten shillings a month, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, suppose I offered to pay you fifteen shillings a month?" suggested the Bounder coolly. "I should pay you the first month's rent in advance, and should use the place simply as a kind of club-room. If you let it to Wharton it will be simply over-run with boy scouts, and you can guess the result!"

"The blessed place will be kicked to bits inside a week!" grinned Trevor.

"Now, if you accept my offer," went on Vernon-Smith, "there'll be no risks whatever. I shan't use the place except for a quiet gathering now and again. I shall also pay you half as much again as you've asked of Wharton, and pay rent in advance. Don't you think it would be best to let the shooting-box to me, Mr. Biggs?"

The estate agent twisted his moustache thoughtfully.

"You'll give me fifteen shillings a month?" he queried.

"Yes; and pay the first month's rent now."

"I should advise you to take Vernon-Smith's offer, Mr. Biggs," said Bolsover seriously. "If you allow Harry Wharton to have it, it'll simply mean that the place will be in a tumble-down condition before the end of the month. When the chaps are out scouting they're not very particular what they do—especially when they run short of wood to light fires with."

Mr. Biggs did not take long to decide. He knew none of the boys at Greyfriars, and it mattered nothing to him whether he let his shooting-box to Vernon-Smith or to Wharton. If he had posted the letter to Wharton he would not have been able to back out of his agreement. But as the letter was still unposted, and nothing had been settled, Mr. Biggs saw no reason why he should not accept another five shillings per month, with the extra privilege of having the rent in advance.



In less than ten seconds the eight juniors were struggling round the room in a fierce hand-to-hand fight. Harry Wharton hit out fiercely at Vernon-Smith, and the Bounder tottered and collided with the table. For a second the lamp swayed, and then, with a splintering crash, it fell clattering to the floor. "Look out!" yelled Hazeldene in alarm.—(See Chapter 13.)

Mr. Biggs was a man who believed in getting every penny possible, and it never entered his head that Harry Wharton was being badly treated if he agreed to the Bounder's proposal. No, five shillings extra a month was worth having. The shooting-box was a property which Mr. Biggs had expected to lie on his hands until it went to ruin. To be offered fifteen shillings a month for it was quite unexpected.

"What do you want to use the place for?" he asked cautiously.

"Merely to use as a club-room," said the Bounder. "Three or four fellows besides myself will use it on half-holidays. You can rely on us keeping it in good repair, and using it with every care."

Mr. Biggs adjusted his glasses.

"Very well, Master Smith," he said briskly. "you can consider the place let to you. If you'll just hand me the first month's rent, I'll make out a receipt for you. Of course, there is no necessity to make an agreement for such a small matter."

"Of course not," said Vernon-Smith. "You can trust us, I should think."

"Yes, I can trust you, young 'un."

Mr. Biggs knew that if any difficulty arose it would be instantly settled upon applying to Dr. Locke. So he did not hesitate. An agreement, in any case, would be useless, as Vernon-Smith was merely a boy.

"There you are, Master Smith," he said, handing a

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receipt across the counter. "Fifteen shillings, please. I expect you'll send the next month's rent on by post?"

"Either that, or I'll call and pay it personally," said Vernon-Smith, handing over a sovereign. "I'm sure you'll be pleased at having let the place to me. I don't want to say anything against Wharton, but I know for a fact that he and the other scouts would have overrun the shooting-box like rabbits. And you know what happens when a lot of excited boy scouts get together."

Mr. Biggs smiled.

"Yes, I'm glad you've called," he said. "I would certainly rather have the place used as a club-room. As you say, the boy scouts might get up to mischief. If you'll wait a minute I'll get you the key."

"Thanks!" said Vernon-Smith.

The key was soon forthcoming; then, having bid Mr. Biggs good morning, the Bounder and his two companions left the estate office. Vernon-Smith cast a look of triumph at Bolsover and Trevor.

"Well," he said, "was I right?"

"By George, you were!" exclaimed Bolsover, with satisfaction. "You're a wonder, Smithy! You've done Wharton in the eye beautifully!"

"Rather!" agreed Trevor, with a grin. "My hat, I wonder what he'll say when he learns that his giddy scouting headquarters have been let to Smithy? He'll go green with rage, I expect."

NEXT
MONDAY,

"SCORND BY GREYFRIARS!"

Another Splendid Complete Tale of
Harry Wharton & Co. Order Early.

Vernon-Smith chuckled.

"I don't care if he does," he said easily. "I've succeeded in my object, and that's all I care about. We've got the place to use for our own innocent purposes, and Wharton and his crew can go to the dickens!"

Vernon-Smith chuckled.

And the Bounder and his two precious companions mounted their bicycles, and hastened back to Greyfriars. They had succeeded in their object, and Harry Wharton & Co. were destined to receive an unpleasant surprise.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for the Famous Five.

VERNON-SMITH & Co. looked extremely pleased with themselves when they took their places in the Remove Form-room that afternoon. The Bounder, Bolsover, and Trevor had arrived back in time to relate the result of their expedition to Stott and Hazeldene. Stott had been delighted, and Hazeldene, because he knew that Harry Wharton & Co. had been commissioned to keep an eye on him, determined, out of sheer obstinacy, to fall in with the Bounder's plans, and join in the disgraceful proceedings at the shooting-box.

To do Hazeldene justice he really felt that he would rather not have been in the affair; but now that he had gone so far it would look childish if he backed out. In addition, Hazeldene was obstinate, and did not like the idea of Marjorie asking Harry Wharton & Co. to keep an eye on him.

"You're looking jolly pleased with yourself, Smithy," said Snoop, as the Bounder took his place in the Form-room. "Got a big remittance from home?"

"No," said Vernon-Smith; "but I've succeeded in taking a rise out of Wharton."

"My hat! How?" asked Snoop eagerly.

"I'll tell you—"

"Stop that murmuring instantly!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch sternly, rapping on his desk.

There was silence in the Form-room, and it was not until recess, after second lesson, that Snoop was able to hear what had occurred in Courtfield. The sneak of the Remove was delighted with the news, and he strolled over to a group of Removites in the Close, with a smug grin on his face. Bob Cherry was talking to Bulstrode, Tom Brown, and Mark Linley, the Lancashire lad.

"Heard the latest?" grinned Snoop.

"No," said Bob Cherry. "What is it? Your pater lost his licence for allowing gambling to go on in the pub?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Snoop glared.

"You silly fathead," he roared, "my pater doesn't keep a pub! You'll laugh on the other side of your face, Bob Cherry, in a minute!"

"I don't mind if I do," said Bob cheerfully. "As a matter of fact, I don't see how I can laugh one side without laughing the other at the same time. Suppose you have a try, Snoop, and show us how it's done?"

"Good idea!" chuckled Mark Linley.

"Oh, you can grin!" growled Snoop. "You won't grin soon, though! You think you're going to have that giddy shooting-box for scouting headquarters, don't you?"

"We don't think anything about it," said Tom Brown; "we know it. Wharton wrote to old Biggs last night, so it's bound to turn out all right."

"Is it?" giggled Snoop. "He, he, he!"

"Oh, shut up, you idiot!" said Bulstrode. "If you make that row here, Snoop, you'll get kicked!"

"I'm only laughing at you chaps," said Snoop unpleasantly. "You don't know what Vernon-Smith's done, do you?"

"And don't want to know," said Bob Cherry.

"Well, I'm going to tell you whether you want it or not!" exclaimed Snoop. "Vernon-Smith's rented that cottage in Friardale Wood, so there! He's been and seen the landlord, and arranged everything. While Wharton was messing about writing letters, Smithy went to work in a business-way, and saw old Biggs personally. You're diddled, my bucks—diddled properly!"

Bob Cherry looked at Snoop sharply.

"Are you swanking?" he demanded.

"Ask Smithy!" grinned Snoop, as he walked away.

Bob Cherry looked after him thoughtfully, then detached himself from his companions, and walked across to Harry Wharton, Nugent, and Bull. He told them what Snoop had said, and, although Harry Wharton looked rather alarmed, he scoffed at the idea.

"It's all bluff!" he declared. "Snoop's been trying to kid you, Bob!"

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"THE GEN" LIBRARY,
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Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR,"
Every Friday.

"I'm not so blessed sure of that!" said Bob Cherry anxiously.

"Well, suppose we ask Smithy about it?" suggested Johnny Bull.

"Good egg!"

Vernon-Smith was standing on the School House steps, and he looked up with a cool grin as Harry Wharton & Co. confronted him.

"We want to talk to you, Smithy," said Harry coldly.

"Fire away then!"

"Snoop's just been talking some rot about your having hired that shooting-box in Friardale Wood," went on the captain of the Remove. "Who's been telling him piffle of that kind?"

"My dear chap, it's not piffle; it's the perfect truth!" said the Bounder. "I went over to Courtfield immediately after dinner, and arranged it all with old Biggs. The shooting-box is mine now, and I've got the key in my pocket."

Harry Wharton & Co. stared.

"You're fibbing!" said Wharton contemptuously. "You must be!"

"Rather!"

"All right," said the Bounder coolly, "you can imagine what you like. The fact remains that the old cottage is mine, and that any of you chaps aren't going to be admitted at any price!"

"You're lying!" said Bob Cherry.

"As usual," added Nugent.

The Bounder felt in his pocket.

"Perhaps this'll convince you," he said, with a chuckle. "It's a receipt for rent from Mr. Biggs. I've paid for the first month in advance, so as to be sure of the thing."

Harry Wharton & Co. stared at the receipt in consternation. They could see immediately that Vernon-Smith was telling the truth.

"My only hat," gasped Bob Cherry. "it's true!"

"You—you rotten outsider?" shouted Johnny Bull. "Do you mean to say that you've had the rotten nerve to hire the place, when you knew that Harry Wharton was after it?"

"Nerve be hanged!" said the Bounder easily. "If Wharton chose to be half asleep that wasn't my fault. I went and saw old Biggs, and he was perfectly willing that I should have the place."

"That receipt's made out for fifteen bob?" said Harry Wharton, with blazing eyes.

"Exactly!" agreed the Bounder. "I offered Biggs fifteen bob a month so's to make him let your application slide. It's no good you getting wild about it. The shooting-box is mine now, and you can say what you like."

"I'll say what I think of you, anyhow!" shouted Harry Wharton furiously. "You're a worm, Smith—a mean, contemptible, crawling worm! I don't think I can ever remember a dirtier trick being played! You ought to be kicked out of Greyfriars, you scoundrel!"

"Thank you!" said the Bounder coolly. "Any more?"

Harry Wharton did not reply. Instead he bestowed a look of utter contempt upon the Bounder, then turned on his heel with curling lip.

"Are we going to let him off without a bumping?" said Nugent excitedly. "My hat, I feel like knocking the rotter down!"

"What's the good?" said Harry Wharton contemptuously. "He's no more to blame than Biggs. As soon as lessons are over, I'm going over to Courtfield, and ask what the dickens he means by such underhand methods. If we can we'll turn the tables on Smithy yet!"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Stormy Interview!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were looking angry as they took their seats in the Form-room for the next lesson. They had never dreamed that Vernon-Smith would forestall them. They did not pay much attention to lessons, and when they were released they hurried off to No. 1 Study to discuss the situation.

"I don't see what we can do," said Wharton. "If Biggs has let the place to Smithy it wouldn't be any good our applying to him. I've been thinking over the matter since recess, and I've been wondering if it wouldn't be a waste of time, after all, to go over to Courtfield."

"Waste of time be blowed!" exclaimed Bob Cherry

ANSWERS

indignantly. "Even if we can't make Biggs let us have the shooting-box we can tell him what we think of him. Besides, I think it's very likely that we shall be able to bring him round."

"That's my idea," said Nugent. "Smithy wants the place to use as a gambling-den, I expect, and if we let out one or two hints to that effect Biggs might realise it would be best to let us have the place. I vote we buzz off straight away."

"That's the idea," agreed Johnny Bull.

"Well, there's no need for all of us to go," said Harry Wharton. "Suppose Bob, Franky, and I go? While we're gone Johnny and Inky can get tea ready in this study. There's heaps of grub in the cupboard, and we can all feed together."

"The agreeableness is terrific," said the Indian junior.

"Off you go, then," said Johnny Bull. "By the time you're back we'll have everything ready. Buzz for all you're worth!"

And Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Frank Nugent left the study and descended to the bicycle shed.

They soon had their machines out, and hurried off to Courtfield. It was dark, but the night was clear and starlit. The streets of the town were illuminated when the three Removites rode in, and Mr. Biggs's establishment was still open to the public. Harry Wharton and his two chums walked in.

Mr. Biggs himself was behind the mahogany counter, and he looked up over his glasses.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "You are from Greyfriars?"

"Yes," said the captain of the Remove. "Are you Mr. Biggs?"

"That's my name," said the estate agent.

"Well, my name's Harry Wharton."

Mr. Biggs raised his eyebrows.

"The young gentleman who wrote to me with regard to the shooting-box in Friardale Wood?" he queried. "I'm sorry, my boy, but you're too late. The cottage is let to somebody else!"

Harry Wharton's eyes blazed.

"But I wasn't too late last night, was I? I wrote to you last night in reply to your letter, and I expected to hear from you to-day, saying that I could have the shooting-box. I now find that you've let it to Vernon-Smith."

"Exactly," agreed Mr. Biggs. "Master Vernon-Smith came to see me this morning."

"And offered you fifteen shillings a month instead of ten—which was your own price!" said Bob Cherry contemptuously. "Look here, Mr. Biggs, do you call that fair and square?"

"Certainly I do!" replied the landlord. "I was not in any way compelled to let my cottage to you boys. If you had particularly wanted it you could have come and seen me yourselves. But as the other young gentleman arrived first, I let him have the place."

"Do you know what he wants it for?" asked Frank Nugent grimly.

"Yes, to use as a kind of club-room," said Mr. Biggs. "But you will oblige me if you will take your departure," he added testily. "There is no reason for you to remain here. I'm sorry, but the matter is closed."

"A club-room—eh?" repeated Harry Wharton. "You don't know what sort of character Vernon-Smith bears at Greyfriars, Mr. Biggs, or you would have hesitated before letting your shooting-box to the Bounder."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Biggs.

"How would you like it if you found that the place was being used as a smoking-room, and for playing cards?" asked Bob Cherry.

Mr. Biggs laughed.

"How would I like it?" he repeated. "Well, I really do not think it necessary to consider the matter! Smoking and playing cards will not deteriorate my cottage in any way, and I should raise no objection to its being used for such a purpose."

"My hat!" ejaculated Nugent.

"On the other hand," went on Mr. Biggs, "if I had let the shooting-box to you, you would have used it for scouting purposes, and it would have been simply overrun with mischievous boys. I am glad that the other young gentleman put me in possession of the facts. He told me what to expect if I rented the place to you!"

Harry Wharton breathed hard.

"The rotter!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "Do you mean to say that you believed him, Mr. Biggs?"

"Certainly! I know what boy scouts are. Now, please run away. I have no further time to waste upon you!"

"Run away—eh?" gasped Bob Cherry. "You rotter!"

"What!" said Mr. Biggs angrily. "How dare you speak to me in that manner?"

"I'm going to say what I think, anyhow!" said Bob Cherry. "I think you're a blessed sharper to let the place to Vernon-Smith without giving Wharton the first chance. If you wanted fifteen bob a month, couldn't you have written to Wharton and asked him if he was willing to pay?"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 260.

NEXT
MONDAY:

"SCORNE BY GREYFRIARS!"

EVERY
MONDAY,

The "Magnet"

LIBRARY.

ONE
PENNY.

There was no necessity to simply ignore him! You're a beastly fraud!"

"Hear, hear!" said Frank Nugent heartily.

Mr. Biggs grew a fiery red.

"You insulting young rascals!" he roared furiously. "Get out of this office! By gad, I've never been so grossly insulted before!"

"About time someone told you a few home truths, then!" said Bob Cherry grimly.

"I think you might have had the decency to wait until you heard what I had to say," said Harry Wharton. "It was my idea in the first place. If I hadn't applied to you for the shooting-box it would never have been let at all! I think it's a rotten trick to push me out of it, and let it to Vernon-Smith!"

Mr. Biggs banged his fist on the counter.

"How dare you!" he muttered. "How—how dare you speak to me in this manner! The property is mine, and I can do what I like with it. If you do not instantly leave this office I shall have you thrown out!"

"Rats!"

"Piffle!"

"Bosh!"

Mr. Biggs stuttered with fury.

"It's all right; we're going," said Harry Wharton contemptuously. "I'm fed up with talking to you. If Vernon-Smith plays old Harry with your shooting-box it will jolly well serve you right! If he's found playing cards there, it'll mean a terrific row, and you'll catch it in the neck for letting it to him for that purpose!"

And Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, and Bob Cherry stamped out of the estate office with furious faces. They mounted their bicycles and rode back to Greyfriars.

"My hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, as they rode along. "We're absolutely diddled! Smith's done us this time!"

"Very likely," said Harry Wharton, "but I'll guarantee he won't get any peace! If he's going to use that cottage as a gambling-den we'll jolly well raid it, and chuck the Bounder out!"

"Rather!" agreed Nugent. "Under the circumstances, that's the only thing we can do now!"

They arrived at Greyfriars, and put their bicycles away. Then they crossed the Close and entered the School House. In the entrance hall they met Hazeldene, and they paused, looking at him curiously.

"What are you staying at?" demanded Hazeldene aggressively.

"A silly ass!" replied Bob Cherry promptly.

"Look here—"

"The silliest ass in Greyfriars!" went on Bob Cherry.

"And an ill-mannered cad!" added Wharton grimly. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Hazel, for the way you treated your sister!"

"Rats!" growled Hazeldene. "Mind your own bizney!"

"We are minding it," said Harry. "We've made it our business to look after you, whether you like it or not, and we're not going to see you led away by Smithy and his rotten set!"

Hazeldene scowled.

"You silly chumps!" he sneered. "Do you think I'm going to be lectured by you? I'll do as I jolly well please—"

Harry Wharton laid a hand on Hazeldene's shoulder.

"Now, look here, Hazel," he said quietly, "we know you're a decent chap at heart—"

"Thank you for nothing!" sneered Hazeldene.

"Any chap with a sister like Marjorie couldn't be a downright rotter!" went on Harry. "I don't want to lecture you, Hazel, but don't you think you're being a bit of an ass to mix up with Smithy so much? He's an out and out rotter, and if you don't break away from him jolly soon he'll lead you into serious trouble. I'm only speaking for your own good—"

Hazeldene shook Harry Wharton's hand away.

"Go and eat coke!" he growled.

"That's a nice way to treat a chap who's helped you out of more than one hole!" said Bob Cherry warmly. "If you want my opinion of you, Hazel, you're an obstinate worm! If you'd got the decency of a— a hooligan, you'd do as your sister wants!"

Hazeldene set his teeth.

"I'll do as I like!" he exclaimed obstinately. "I don't see what it's got to do with you fellows, anyhow! I'm blessed if I'm going to be ordered about by you!"

"We're not ordering you about at all," said Wharton quietly. "We're just telling you, in a friendly way, that we think you'd show more sense if you gave Vernon-Smith a wide berth!"

"Well, I'm not giving him a wide berth!" said Hazeldene. "The more you go on at me the worse I shall be;

so you'll be doing Marjorie a good turn if you leave me to myself. Understand that?"

"I understand that you're a silly ass!" said Harry Wharton angrily. "Did you have anything to do with that shooting-box bizney?"

"No."

"I suppose you're not going to make up one of the chaps who will attend Smithy's parties?" went on Harry. "That's what Smith's going to do, isn't it? Hold smoking concerts there, and card-parties, and all that rot?"

"Perhaps you'd like to come?" suggested Hazeldene.

"Perhaps we shall come!" said Bob Cherry grimly. "And we shall bring cricket stumps with us, and wreck the whole party! If you'll take a word of advice from your uncle, Hazel, you'll give that shooting-box a wide berth!"

"I'll do as I jolly well please!" said Hazeldene aggressively.

And he walked away and entered the common-room. Harry Wharton looked after him in silence. Then the captain of the Remove shrugged his shoulders, and led the way up to No. 1 Study.

They had done their best for Hazeldene, but so far they had not made much headway. He was a weak-willed but very obstinate youngster, and it looked as though he would cause Harry Wharton & Co. a good deal of trouble.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER. The Bermondsey Babe.

THE Bounder and his friends paid several visits to the little shooting-box in Friardale Wood before the Saturday half-holiday. Several curious juniors—Billy Bunter included, of course—paid a visit to the place in the hope of seeing what Vernon-Smith was up to. But the door was always kept locked, and nobody was admitted except the Bounder's friends.

The day was a beautiful one, clear and sunlit, and Harry Wharton sniffed at the crisp air with keen enjoyment when the Remove came out from dinner.

"Ripping afternoon for scouting!" he said.

"Rather!" said Mark Linley. "We'd better get into our togs immediately. We discussed all the plans for the afternoon's manoeuvres yesterday. I reckon we shall have a fine afternoon's sport."

In less than half an hour all the juniors who were to take part in the manoeuvres were dressed in the uniform of the scouts, and stood in neat rows in the Close. All the boys carried staffs. Each patrol could be distinguished by its neat little flag, and the Wolves—of which Harry Wharton was patrol-leader—looked the neatest and sprucest of them all.

The Greyfriars Scouts prided themselves that they carried out their scouting programmes with a military precision which few boy scouts could equal. They certainly were very keen, and this afternoon it looked as though they would spend a really enjoyable time.

The bugles sounded out, and the patrols left the Close, and marched out into the road. Vernon-Smith & Co. watched them go with sneering smiles on their faces.

"Silly kids!" said the Bounder disdainfully.

"Rather!" agreed Stott. "Blessed if I'd be seen out in the road wearing those duds! I've got a little more dignity!"

"I suppose they think they look neat!" sniggered Snoop.

"Well, they do, as a matter of fact!" exclaimed Hazeldene, looking at the departing scouts thoughtfully. "I tell you, Smithy, I'm a silly ass not to go with them! I reckon they'll have a ripping afternoon's sport!"

"Rats!" said the Bounder. "I can give you better sport than running about through damp woods, Hazel!"

"I'm not so sure of that," said Hazeldene slowly.

But when Vernon-Smith, Stott, Trevor, and Bolsover left the school buildings a few minutes later several juniors noticed that Hazeldene was with them.

Meanwhile, the scouts were busy.

They entered into their task heart and soul.

The afternoon wore itself out gradually, and at last the sun disappeared behind the hills over towards Pegg. Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry found themselves together, and both of them were flushed and warm with their recent exertions.

"We've had a first-class afternoon's sport, Bob!" said Harry.

"By Jove, rather! I reckon scouting's a fine thing!" said Bob Cherry enthusiastically. "I suppose we'd better be getting back towards Greyfriars now. Most of the chaps will be wandering back at this time of the afternoon."

"Yes," said Wharton. "What a pity we haven't got that shooting-box; it would be ripping to gather there and have a feed! Of course, I mean Remove chaps. There wouldn't be any room for Temple, Dabney, and their set."

"There's not room for us either!" growled Bob Cherry.

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"THE GEM" LIBRARY,
Every Wednesday.

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR,"
Every Friday.

"We've been nicely done over that affair, Harry. There's no mistake that—"

"Good-evening, young gentlemen!"

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry came to a stop. They had been strolling along one of the paths which led towards Friardale Wood, which lay about half a mile ahead. There was not a house in sight, although, close to the left, a small spinney hid the roofs of Friardale.

A man had suddenly appeared from behind a hedge—a huge, lumbering fellow, with a villainous-looking face. He was attired in extremely dirty garments, and he did not look at all a pleasant person to come in contact with.

"Good-evenin', young gentlemen!" he repeated.

"Good-evening!" said Harry Wharton, looking at the tramp. "Have you been watching us scouting?"

The big man grinned.

"Can't say as I 'ave," he replied. "I'm a Lunnion chap, you see, an' don't take no interest in that sort o' thing. Bermondsey's where I come from. Mebbe you've heard of it? It's a pretty spot."

"Bermondsey!" repeated Bob Cherry. "You're a good long way from there now."

"Yus; it ain't a matter o' five minutes walk, is it?" said the tramp genially. "My name's Bill, though I'm generally known as the Bermondsey Babe."

"My hat," grinned Bob Cherry, "that's jolly appropriate!"

"Yus, it is, mate, ain't it?" chuckled the tramp. "I was called the Babe, you see, 'cos I was just about the strongest an' biggest chap in the district. I reckon it 'ud need a mighty big feller to git the better o' me."

"Quite so," said Harry Wharton; "but what's that got to do with us? Good-evening, Mr. Bermondsey Babe; we've got to get back to school!"

"Not so fast, young shaver!" exclaimed the Babe quickly. "I was jest goin' to arst you young gentlemen if you'd such a thing as a spare copper or two on you? I ain't got a red cent to me name, strike me pink if I 'ave! You look nice, kind-hearted youngsters—"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Oh, here you are!" he said; and handed the man a sixpence. "That'll do for both of us."

The Bermondsey Babe looked at the little silver coin and scowled.

"Oh, do for the both of yer, will it? Look 'ere, you can spare more than a tanner, I'll bet a dollar! 'And over 'arf-a-crown, an' don't be so mighty close-fisted!"

Harry Wharton's eyes flashed.

"It's all I've got on me," he said. "I'm blessed sorry I gave it to you now, if that's the tone you use!"

"Come on," said Bob Cherry, "we'll leave the chap to himself!"

"You won't afore you've given me somethink more," said the Bermondsey Babe threateningly. "You little mean rascals, 'andin' out a tanner to a feller wot's got no 'ome! Come on, let's see the colour o' the rest o' yer money!"

Harry Wharton gave his chum a swift glance.

"You ruffian," he exclaimed angrily, "do you think we shall give you anything if you use that tone? Come on, Bob, we'll—"

"You ain't goin' yet!" said the tramp, thrusting his unshaven jaw out aggressively. "You'll jest turn yer pockets out, an' let me see wot's inside 'em! Come on, no swankin'! I ain't the chap who can be easily played about wiv!"

The two juniors, although possessed of plenty of pluck, could not help feeling rather alarmed at the Bermondsey Babe's attitude. They were no match for this hulking great ruffian, and, although it was certainly undignified, they both decided to make a bolt for it.

But the tramp divined their intention, and, with an oath, he thrust out a grimy hand and grabbed Bob Cherry by the shoulder.

"You ain't a-goin' yet, young shaver!" he said grimly.

"You—you scoundrel," panted Bob Cherry, "let me go!"

"Yes, leave him alone!" shouted Harry Wharton. "If you don't I'll bring this staff across your beastly head!"

The Bermondsey Babe grinned.

"Oh, would yer!" he said. "Well, I don't see as it would matter, much. That there blessed broomstick wouldn't do much 'arm! I ain't goin' to 'urt yer. All I want is a little more splosh. 'And it over quietly, an' you can sling yer 'ooks!"

"I tell you I haven't got any more," said Harry Wharton desperately. "Do you think we carry money about when we're scouting? And if I had a hundred quid, on me I shouldn't give it up to you! My hat, this is highway robbery!"

"Yus, something like that!" grinned the Babe coolly. "An' if you think I'm a-going' to believe your yarn you're mistook."



"On the ball School House!" There was a yell as Tom Merry broke through the New House defence cleverly. But the next moment Figgins dashed up and bowled Tom Merry over with a terrific charge. (For this grand incident see the grand, long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, entitled "The Head's Prize," by Martin Clifford, in this week's number of "The Gem" Library. Out on Wednesday. Price 1d.)

"What do you mean?"

"Why, that you ain't got any splosh on yer," said the tramp. "I reckon we've 'ad about enough o' this 'ere. I've kep' me temper so far, but hif you don't dub up mighty quick you'll wish you 'adn't never bin born!"

Harry Wharton thought quickly, and glanced round into the gathering darkness. Not a soul was within sight, and even if Wharton escaped it was practically impossible for Bob Cherry to escape the ruffian's clutches.

Harry decided upon a desperate course.

Suddenly, without warning, he rushed forward and raised his staff into the air. It descended with a terrific crack on the Bermondsey Babe's head, and the ruffian staggered back.

But the blow didn't have the effect Wharton had hoped for. The tramp still retained his hold on Bob Cherry's shoulder. And though Bob struggled, he could not possibly free himself. The position of the juniors was beginning to look desperate.

"By thunder," gasped the tramp—"by thunder! Try to 'it me, would yer? I'll lay you both hout for this 'ere!"

He grabbed Bob Cherry with his other hand, and Bob felt himself lifted off his feet. The Babe was in a tearing rage, and he hardly knew what he was doing. Bob let out a yell of alarm.

"Oh, you scoundrel," he roared, "let me down!"

"Yus, I'll let you down!" snarled the hulking brute savagely. "But it'll be wiv more force than you'll like! By thunder, I'll teach you to hact the fool wiv me!"

Harry Wharton could see that Bob Cherry was in peril; for in his present rage the Babe was hardly responsible for his actions. Wharton's blow had hurt him considerably, and his head still sang painfully.

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NEXT
MONDAY:

"SCORNE BY GREYFRIARS!"

But the captain of the Remove didn't lose his head. He knew that he was the only person who could render any assistance, and he saw his chance as the Babe lifted Bob Cherry high above his head.

With a cry of alarm Harry Wharton dashed forward, and charged into the tramp. His shoulder took the Bermondsey Babe in the pit of the stomach.

The tramp uttered a gasping cry. He staggered back, and seemed to crumple up.

Bob Cherry tumbled down, and landed on all-fours. By a sheer piece of luck the Babe tripped on a root, and the next second he rolled over backwards. The juniors heard a frightened gasp; then a terrific splash!

The Bermondsey Babe had crashed through the thin hedge, and alighted in the muddy ditch on the other side. Bob Cherry picked himself up.

"My hat," he gasped, "he's in the ditch!"

"Yes, come on!"

And, without waiting to make investigations, the Removites turned on their heel and dashed away towards Friardale Wood.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

No Admittance!

"MY only Aunt Matilda," panted Bob Cherry, coming to a halt in the dusky depths of the wood, "I thought that beastly scoundrel was going to do some damage!"

"So did I!" Harry Wharton ejaculated. "My hat, Bob, we're jolly lucky to get away without being injured. The chap was in earnest right enough."

Another 'Splendid Complete Tale of
Harry Wharton & Co. Order Early.

"I know that," said Bob Cherry. "If you hadn't have butted him I should have been chucked over the hedge myself. It was jolly plucky of you, Harry!"

"Rats! It was the only thing to do," said Wharton. "I — Hallo, who's this coming along here?"

Two forms looms up from among the trees, and when they came nearer it could be seen that they were Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull. Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry welcomed them warmly, and in a moment they were telling their chums what had just occurred.

"Phew!" whistled Johnny Bull seriously. "That was a bit too near to be comfortable, Bob. This Bermondsey chap seems to be a fighting-man. We seem to get a choice collection of tramps down this road, somehow."

"Well, he won't stop in the district long, I shouldn't think," said Harry Wharton grimly. "If he does we'll set old Tozer on his track."

"Fat lot of good that would be!" grinned Nugent. "Tozer would be frightened of him."

Bob Cherry and Harry Wharton soon recovered their usual spirits, and the chums of the Remove walked briskly along the woodland path in the direction of Greyfriars.

It was getting late, and they were anxious to get back to tea. There was still plenty of time before locking-up; but they were hungry.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry suddenly. "What's that giddy light?"

A bright light gleamed ahead.

"What is it?" growled Johnny Bull. "You ought to know that without asking, you ass!"

"By Jove, the shooting-box!"

"Of course!" said Johnny Bull.

"Smithy's soon taken possession," said Wharton, with a frown. "I wonder if that ass of a Hazeldene is in there?"

"Sure to be!"

"Well, if he is, it's up to us to try and get him out," said Wharton firmly. "I'm not a chap who believes in spying, but Marjorie asked us to keep an eye on Hazel. He was kept in check pretty well at the school, but out here, where the masters never come, there's no telling what tricks Hazel will be up to. Smithy will lead him into all sorts of rotten habits!"

"I consider it's our duty to wreck the place," said Bull. "The Bounder's bad enough at Greyfriars, but out here he'll be ten times worse. Why, before long I can see him dragging chaps out here who've always been decent. He'll get the school a rotten bad name before he's done."

"There's something in what you say, Johnny," exclaimed Harry Wharton. "But I don't think we'll do the wrecking bizney to-night. Still, we'll see if Hazel's here. My hat, though, there's no light in the lower windows! The rotters are in the top room!"

The four juniors stood still for a moment looking at the little shooting-box. It stood right in the middle of a clearing, with tall trees surrounding it on all sides. It was a very small place, but neat and attractive. It was of wood, and its walls had lately been tarred to protect them from the weather. There were two rooms only—one below and one up above. A small, ladder-like staircase, at the back of the lower room, gave access to the room in which Vernon-Smith & Co. were making merry. They were undoubtedly making merry, for their shouts could be heard quite distinctly.

"Suppose we get nearer?" suggested Harry Wharton.

"What's the good of that?" asked Nugent. "The light's in the upper room, and we can't see in. And it's jolly certain they won't come down and answer the door to us! They'll shove the window up and tell us to buzz off!"

"Half a minute," said Bob Cherry quickly. "I've got an idea. You see that tree, growing close to the cottage?"

"Well?"

"If one of us shinned up that he could see into the top room as easy as winking! Once we know if Hazeldene's there, we'll bash on the door and demand admittance. If Hazel isn't there, we'll clear off and leave the rotters to themselves!"

"Good egg!"

The four juniors moved forward until they were close to the shooting-box. The tree Bob Cherry mentioned was the only one which grew inside the clearing. It was a big elm, and its trunk protruded from the ground within six feet of one end of the cottage. In fact, several of the branches hung completely over the roof.

Therefore Harry Wharton, who rapidly shinned up the tree, found it necessary to climb only about half-way up. From there he obtained a clear view into the window. His chums below looked up curiously.

Harry Wharton pursed his lips as he saw what was happening in the shooting-box. The little upstairs room was certainly extremely cosy. A bright fire burned in the grate, and the bareness of the room was taken off by a short curtain

and a few articles of furniture. Vernon-Smith's toadies had raised no objection to helping to get the place into ship-shape order.

But what caused Harry Wharton to purse his lips was the fact that the Bounder and his companions were seated round the table playing cards. Beside each of them was a little pile of money, and Vernon-Smith, Bolsover, and Trevor were all smoking cigarettes.

"The fools!" muttered Harry Wharton, wrathfully. "Silly fools!"

Hazeldene was in the room, and he was playing cards with the others. Harry Wharton could not see with any amount of distinctness, but it seemed to him that Hazeldene was not enjoying the game. He sat back in his chair soberly. The rest, on the other hand, were noisy and laughing.

Harry Wharton slipped to the ground quickly, and his chums surrounded him.

"Could you see?" inquired Johnny Bull.

"Quite distinctly."

"Who's in there?" asked Bob Cherry curiously.

"The Bounder, Stott, Trevor, and Bolsover—the old set," replied Wharton.

"How about Hazel?"

"He's there, too."

"The silly ass!" said Nugent angrily. "What are they up to?"

Harry Wharton sniffed.

"They're up to a lot of tomfoolery," he said quietly.

"They're playing cards for money! And most of them are smoking. The place looks like a rotten gambling-den. I thought the Bounder would stop short of games of this kind!"

"No beer there, I suppose?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Oh, dry up, Bob!" exclaimed Wharton. "This isn't a joking matter, you know. Hazel is in there, and it's up to us to get him out!"

"Rescue him from the villains' clutches, as it were?" grinned Bob.

"Yes, you chump, rescue him," said Wharton. "Hazeldene isn't a bad sort, and it's a rotten shame for Smithy to drag him into this bizney! I mean to get him out of this place before I leave!"

"How?"

"By telling him that if he won't come willingly we'll jolly well yank him out," said Wharton grimly. "It's no good taking half-measures. If Hazel won't learn sense he'll have to take the giddy consequences. Who's game to help me?"

"All of us, of course!" said Nugent.

"Good for you, Franky!" said Harry Wharton. "Come on!"

And the chums of the Remove approached the door of the little building and rapped loudly on the panels.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Fight.

"NOT a giddy word!" murmured Bob Cherry. "The silly fatheads are wondering who's knocking 'em up. Hammer again!"

This time the juniors used their scouts' staffs, and the building rattled.

Still there was no answer. Then there was a sound of movement from upstairs, and the light disappeared from the top room. The next minute it appeared in the lower apartment. This was a bare, cheerless sort of place, with a ramshackle old table in the centre. Through the window Harry Wharton & Co. saw Vernon-Smith and Bolsover descend the stairs. The Bounder set the lamp on the table, and then crossed to the door.

"Who's there?" he inquired.

"Wharton!" shouted the captain of the Remove.

"Open this door!"

"Wharton!" ejaculated the Bounder. "Do you mean to say it's you who's been kicking up all that din?"

"I kicked up some of it!" said Harry grimly.

"Open the door, Smithy!" shouted Bob Cherry.

"And smash you as well!"

"If you don't we'll smash it down!"

Vernon-Smith recovered his composure. For an instant he had thought that one of the masters was down below, but now that he found that it was merely Harry Wharton & Co. he was feeling himself again.

"Go away!" he shouted. "I'm not going to open the door!"

"We want Hazel!" called Harry Wharton. "If he won't come of his own accord we'll jolly well fetch him out!"

"Rather!"

"He's my guest!" shouted the Bounder.

"Your rotten victim, you mean!" said Wharton indignantly.

"Are you going to open this door?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"No, I'm not!"

And the Bounder picked up the lamp again, and Harry Wharton & Co. saw him ascend the stairs. They looked at one another in the gloom with determined expressions.

"Well, what's the next move?" asked Nugent.

"Bash the door down!" said Wharton firmly.

"And then what?"

"We'll face Smithy and make him swallow a few home truths!" said Wharton. "And we'll take Hazeldene away with us!"

"If we can," said Bob Cherry.

Without more ado the Removites commenced the attack upon the door. Three staffs thudded upon the portal with resounding bangs, and the door creaked and shivered. But it was fairly stout, and did not show signs of budging. The din was considerable.

"All make for the lock!" panted Harry Wharton.

The staffs thudded upon that part of the door.

Crash!

The door shook ominously.

"It's giving!" gasped Johnny Bull. "Keep it up!"

The juniors were feeling excited now. They were not at all opposed to a tussle with Vernon-Smith & Co., and felt in the right humour for it.

The window above them was suddenly flung open.

Vernon-Smith and Bolsover major leaned out angrily.

"You destructive rotters!" shouted the Bounder. "What are you doing?"

"Bashing the door in!"

"My hat, we'll scalp you alive if you come in here!" roared Bolsover.

"We'll take our chance of that!" panted Nugent.

And the trusty staves once more thudded upon the weakening door. Vernon-Smith, up above, looked down with an alarmed expression on his face. He could see that Harry Wharton & Co. were in earnest. But the Bounder was obstinate, and he determined not to let Hazeldene go. He would rather have the fight with Harry Wharton & Co. than admit himself beaten.

"If you don't stop acting the fool we'll chuck things at you!" roared the Bounder.

"Chuck away!"

"We're nearly in now, anyhow!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Vernon-Smith withdrew his head, and the window slammed down. A moment later the light reappeared in the lower room, and Bull, through the window, caught a glimpse of the Bounder and his followers descending the stairs.

"Buck up!" panted Johnny Bull. "If we're not quick they'll barricade the giddy door!"

But the door was on the point of giving, and just as Vernon-Smith set the lamp down on the table the lock gave.

Harry Wharton & Co. plunged into the little front room, panting and breathless. They were met by Vernon-Smith, Bolsover, Trevor, and Stott. Hazeldene was on the stairs, looking rather white. He was not afraid, but he considered that he hadn't a quarrel with Harry Wharton & Co. Therefore he hung back and looked on.

"You clear out of here!" shouted the Bounder furiously.

"Not before we've told you what we think of you!" declared Bob Cherry warmly. "And we've come to fetch Hazel out of here. Hazel's not a bad chap, but you're trying to turn him into a rotter like yourself!"

"Don't worry about me!" growled Hazeldene, from the stairs. "I can look after myself!"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Harry Wharton contemptuously. "Do you call it looking after yourself to come here and gamble and make yourself ill by smoking cigarettes? You're coming back with us, Hazel, and—"

"This is my place!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith darkly.

"If you're not out in two minutes, Wharton, we'll jolly well chuck you out!"

"You can start the chucking bizney as soon as you like!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully.

The Bounder glared round him: then, without waste of time, he sprang at Harry Wharton with a cry of rage. Vernon-Smith had imagined that he would be safe from interruption in the shooting-box, but now, on the very first occasion it was used, Harry Wharton & Co. had forced themselves in and created a disturbance. The Bounder was furious, and for once he let himself go.

He hurled himself at Harry Wharton, and in a moment the two were in a deadly embrace.

It was the signal for the others to follow suit. Bolsover hit out at Johnny Bull, and in less than ten seconds the eight juniors were struggling round the little room in a fierce hand-to-hand tussle.

There was not exactly any motive for the fight, for it was impossible for Vernon-Smith & Co. to throw the intruders out—especially without Hazeldene's assistance.

Harry Wharton and Vernon-Smith were struggling in a tight embrace: but suddenly Wharton freed himself and hit

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out. The blow caught the Bounder on the cheek, and he staggered back with a cry.

Crash!

He collided with the table. For a second the lamp tottered: then, with a splintering crash of glass, it fell clattering to the floor. A huge sheet of flame arose as the paraffin caught fire.

"Look out!" yelled Hazeldene, in alarm.

"Great Scott!"

"The place is on fire!"

"My only hat!"

"Put it out!"

"Good heavens, it'll burn the place down!" shouted Stott, in a frightened voice.

The fight stopped as if by magic. The juniors skipped out of the way of the flames, and for a moment they seemed unable to cope with the situation. The oil burned furiously, and the room was filled with a flickering, roddy glow.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Bermondsey Babe's Revenge.

"GREAT Scott!"

Vernon-Smith uttered the exclamation, and it broke the spell. In an instant the juniors were all shouting out, all thoughts of their enmity at an end.

"Put it out!" shouted Harry Wharton, recovering himself.

"Stamp the fire out!"

"Likely!" muttered Stott, with staring eyes. "Why, we should set ourselves on fire!"

And Stott almost started blubbing.

"Shut up, you kid!" said Vernon-Smith sharply. "Hazel, rush upstairs and get that sack from the corner!"

Hazeldene clattered up the stairs, and in a moment he returned with a big sack. It was hastily thrown on to the flames, which were all confined to one corner of the room. At first the sack had no effect; but by shifting its position and beating it about, the flames were extinguished.

The room was plunged into darkness, except for the smouldering woodwork, which had become charred in one or two places. All the juniors breathed with relief, for they had been afraid that the old building would take fire. It was only made of wood, and once the fire caught it would blaze up furiously.

Fortunately the flames had been put out in time. The floor was of brick, and, therefore, could not catch light. Had the floor been of wood, it would have been practically impossible to stem the flames in time to avert disaster.

"My hat," exclaimed Bob Cherry, "I'm glad it's out!"

"Rather!" agreed Wharton, with a sigh of relief. "For a minute the giddy place looked as though it was going to be burnt down."

Vernon-Smith uttered an exclamation.

"It was your fault, anyhow!" he said angrily. "If you hadn't have broken in this wouldn't have happened."

"And if you hadn't played a dirty trick on me, you'd never have been in the place at all!" retorted Harry Wharton quickly. "Hazeldene, I want to know if you're coming with us?"

Hazeldene hesitated.

"I'll go if you like," he said, in a low voice. "I'm a bit fed up with the Bounder, to tell the truth."

Vernon-Smith started forward in the dark room.

"You blessed turncoat!" he exclaimed. "Do you mean to say you're going away with Harry Wharton?"

"Yes, I am," said Hazeldene.

"Yah! Cad!" yelled Stott.

"I thought you said you could look after yourself!" sneered the Bounder.

"So I can," replied Hazeldene quickly. "I'm going because I want to go, not because I'm doing as Harry Wharton wishes. If I wanted to remain here I'd remain, whether he wanted me to go or not."

"But you're going?" the Bounder queried.

"Yes."

"Why?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Because I didn't bargain for being led into a gambling-den!" said Hazeldene bluntly. "You told me, Smithy, that we should simply come here to have a cigarette, and read before the fire. I don't see any harm in cigarettes; but I'm blessed if I'm going to gamble!"

"Of course, that's very different to betting on horses, isn't it?" sneered Trevor sarcastically. "It wasn't so very long ago that you were in trouble with Banks, the bookie."

Hazeldene turned red.

"It's a cad's trick to rake up that old episode now," he said. "I tell you, Smithy, I don't agree with playing cards for money—especially for the high stakes you've been playing."

If I kept it up I should be in your debt for a big amount before long. I'm clearing out with Wharton."

"Good for you, Hazel," said Wharton. "You've got some sense at last."

"So he has!" agreed Bob Cherry. "If he once got into debt with the Bounder, he'd never have any peace!"

Vernon-Smith laughed cynically.

"All right," he said, "you can go, if you choose. I don't care a jot! I was rather uncertain about you, Hazel. You'd better clear off, Wharton, before you do any more damage."

"I'm going to clear off," said Harry Wharton. "You can go upstairs again, and continue your precious card-playing."

"We shall," said the Bounder coolly. "We've got three or four candles, so we're all right for light. Just before you came we were going to prepare tea. Like to join in the feed with us?" he added sarcastically.

"I wouldn't feed at your expense, if I hadn't had a remittance for months!" said Harry Wharton coldly. "Come on, chaps!"

Harry Wharton & Co. filed out of the shooting-box, and Hazeldene followed them. The weak-willed youngster was feeling rather ashamed of himself. Harry Wharton had been very generous to Hazeldene on more than one occasion, and he felt that they deserved better treatment from him. The happenings of the evening had proved to Hazeldene that Harry Wharton & Co. were in earnest, and that it would be best, perhaps, for him to do as his sister requested, and have done with Vernon-Smith & Co. Inwardly, Hazeldene felt that the Bounder was a false friend, and he felt relieved as he walked away with Harry Wharton & Co.

"Glad you've learnt sense at last, Hazel," said Bob Cherry cheerfully.

"Oh, shut up!" growled Hazeldene. "No need to do the Eric bizney! If you think you're going to stop me having a cigarette now and again, you're jolly well mistaken! But when Vernon-Smith started playing cards for money, I felt it was time to ease off. I haven't come with you because I'm reforming. If I want to do a thing you don't like, I shall jolly well do it!"

Harry Wharton smiled to himself. But he didn't say anything. Hazeldene's obstinate nature would not allow him to admit himself in the wrong. They proceeded through the wood slowly, for the darkness prevented them from walking at an ordinary pace.

Meanwhile, Vernon-Smith & Co. had closed the door of the shooting-box, and faked the lock so that it would fasten. Then they ascended to the upper-room, feeling rather breathless and dishevelled.

"The interfering rotters!" said Vernon-Smith, savagely. "They might have had the place burnt down! A pretty pickle we should have been in then!"

"Oh, blow that!" growled Trevor. "let's get tea ready! There's an hour before locking-up yet, so we've got nice

time to have tea, and a cigarette after it. I'm jolly glad, for one, that Hazeldene's buzzed off!"

"And so am I," said Bolsover, poking the fire, and placing a kettle on it. "Hazel was too glum and miserable for me. The ass doesn't know the meaning of the word sport, if he can't enjoy a game of poker!"

And while Vernon-Smith & Co. were preparing tea in the cosy little upper-room, a dark, hulking form had approached the building from the trees. It had appeared almost as soon as Harry Wharton & Co. had departed, and it remained still for a short time, standing before the side wall of the cottage.

"They're in there, hang 'em!" muttered the Bermondsey Babe furiously. "By thunder, if I had them two by themselves I'd wring their necks! By thunder, I would!"

The big tramp was still wet from his ducking, and he breathed revenge as he stood outside the shooting-box. He had stood on the edge of the wood for some little time, and had distinctly heard Bob Cherry's and Harry Wharton's voices among the others. Being at the back of the building he was not aware that five of the juniors had departed, and was, therefore, under the impression that Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry were still in the little building.

"I'll teach 'em!" murmured the hooligan threateningly. "I'll show 'em that they don't thwart the Babe without feeling the consequences! By thunder, I was never more surprised in me life than when I went into that blamed ditch! But I'll pay 'em! They're 'ere, an' afore I go I'll show 'em as it don't do to play tricks wi' me! I'll—"

The Bermondsey Babe suddenly uttered an oath. "By thunder!" he muttered, with a chuckle of cruel delight. "I've got it! I've got the very idea! I'll teach the young shavers a lesson the won't forget in a hurry!"

And the Babe became instantly active. He slipped round to the back of the building, and carefully felt the tarred walls. Then he noticed a heap of old rubbish which had been flung on the ground close by. It was the stuff which had been swept out of the top room.

"Paper!" muttered the Babe. "The very thing!"

In a few moments the tramp had gathered together a quantity of dry paper from the heap. Then, with this and some old pieces of rotten wood in his hands, he again went to the rear wall of the shooting-box. There were no windows on this side, so he was quite to himself.

But he lost no time in carrying out his villainous design. The paper was rapidly placed close against the tarred boarding, and the pieces of rotted wood laid on top. Then, with a cautious glance round, the Bermondsey Babe struck a match and set fire to the paper.

He started back.

"Now to show the young shavers!" he muttered vindictively. "P'raps they'll guess who's done this 'ere! I don't care twopence if they do! In this 'ere weather I'd just as soon go to quod, as tramp the country 'air, starved, an' perishing o' cold!"

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No. 15.—GEORGE GATTY: DICKY NUGENT: TUBB.

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Vernon-Smith and Bolsover major looked out of the window above. "You destructive bounders!" roared Vernon-Smith. "What are you doing?" "Bashing the door in!" panted Johnny Bull. And once more the staves thudded upon the weakening door. (See Chapter 9)

The Babe watched the fire with fiendish delight, and actually warmed his hands at the blaze. As he stood there his clothes steamed, for they were still wet. The wood on top of the paper caught light rapidly, and the tarred wall began to sizzle and spit.

This was enough for the tramp. He turned on his heel and hurried towards the trees. When he looked back the flames were casting a ruddy glow around.

"It's caught 'old good an' quick, any'ow!" chuckled the Babe. "But I ain't a-goin' to stop an' see wot 'appens! I reckon I'd best clear off! Any'ow, that top winder's a sight too 'igh for 'em to jump out of, though it is a small

place! There's bricks below, an' it 'ud mean broken legs!"

The Bermondsey Babe disappeared.

And the fire he had started gained ground with lightning rapidity. The shooting-box was old, and the boards were dry and rotten under the covering of tar. The tar itself, too, blazed fiercely, and in less than two minutes the whole back of the building was a raging mass of flame for over six feet square. It cast a glow around which lit up the trees, and flickered eerily in the darkness.

The shooting-box was doomed; and Vernon-Smith & Co. were in the upper-room, unconscious of their peril.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Harry Wharton & Co.'s Rescue.

BOLSOVER looked up from the fire, and sniffed. "Those fags of yours are jolly nifty, Smithy!" he said. "My hat, you've filled the room with filthy smoke!"

"Rot!" said Vernon-Smith, looking up from the table where he and Trevor and Stott were having a hand at cards. Some sausages on the fire were sizzling loudly, and the juniors did not notice that a low kind of roar filled the air.

"It is a bit thick in here," said Trevor. "Smells like tar, too!"

"It's jolly warm, somehow or other!" said Stott. "I didn't notice the heat so much a little while ago. What have you been doing to the fire, Bolsover?"

"Nothing, you ass, except poking it up!" said Bolsover major. "I—Great Scott, the smoke's getting thicker!"

The Bouncer looked up quickly, then glanced at the door.

"My hat," he exclaimed, "I wonder—"

"Nothing, you ass, except poking it up!" said Bolsover pushed his chair back. Then he crossed the room, and flung open the door.

As he did so a tremendous cloud of thick, choking smoke burst into the room, and a ruddy glow showed on the stairway. Vernon-Smith, with great presence of mind, crashed the door to again, and turned a pale face towards his companions.

"Good heavens," he panted, "the place is on fire!"

"What?" shouted Bolsover, dropping the frying-pan, and allowing the sausages to roll over the floor. "Is—is this smoke c-coming—"

"The whole place is on fire!" repeated Vernon-Smith, between set teeth. "We couldn't have put it out, after all!"

"But we did!" stammered Stott fearfully. "There wasn't a single spark left when we came upstairs! Oh, what shall we do?"

"We shall be burnt to death!" wailed Trevor, trembling with fright. "Open the window! We'll jump out! We must get out of the place somehow!"

Trevor looked round in horror, and then hurried across to the window. The Bouncer caught him by the shoulder.

"You fool," he said sternly, "don't jump out of there! It may not be very far down; but it's all rough bricks below, and you might kill yourself!"

The juniors looked round them in terrified consternation.

"The—the s-stairs aren't a-alight, are they?" stammered Bolsover nervously. "Perhaps we can dash down, and be outside before the fire gets too big a hold!"

Vernon-Smith pointed to the door.

"Look for yourself!" he said curtly.

Bolsover gulped, and then stepped uncertainly towards the door. He opened it, and then uttered a scream of terror.

A lurid flame had curled in almost at his feet, and Bolsover slammed the door to with a crash. He had caught a vision of a white-hot, raging furnace where the stairs should have been, and his hair was singed by the intense heat.

"We're—we're c-cut off!" he gasped faintly. "Oh, heavens, we shall all be killed! The heat's getting tremendous in here! The floor'll be burnt in no time, and then we shall be chucked into the heart of the f-fire!"

"It's horrible—horrible!" shrieked Trevor, covering his face with his hands.

Stott was lying crouched up in the corner as white as a sheet, and sobbing convulsively. The only one of the four who kept his composure was the Bouncer. He knew that they were all in imminent peril, but he remained cool and collected.

The smoke in the room was getting thicker and thicker, and Vernon-Smith stepped across to the window, and flung it open. Then he turned, and cast a swift glance round the room. There wasn't a rope to be seen—not a single thing which would serve to lower the boys to the ground.

And to jump would probably mean a broken limb. The height was not so very great; but directly below the window the ground was strewn with huge cobbles, and to drop on these would certainly endanger their lives. If there was any other avenue of escape it would be best to consider it before they took such a jump.

To make matters worse, even as the Bouncer looked downwards the wooden wall beneath him cracked, and the flames shot through.

"That's done it!" murmured Vernon-Smith, white to the lips. "If we drop down there, we should set our clothes alight in no time, and—Great Scott, I wonder if we could climb into that tree over the roof? It's a chance, and we might as well take it!"

Vernon-Smith turned swiftly, and closed the window.

"You rotten set of cowards!" he shouted. "What's the good of wailing there? The only way to save ourselves is to get on the roof! There's a chance we can climb into that elm-tree which hangs over it!"

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"B-b-but s-s-suppose w-we can't?" stammered Bolsover. "We shall all be burnt to a cinder before help can come!"

"Shut up, you silly idiot!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "It's no good talking like that. There's a trap-door just over your head. Bunk up on to my shoulders, and open it! We shall be up on the roof in two ticks, and the cool air will make us feel heaps better. Trevor, Stott, pull yourselves together! You frightened babies!"

So far, the juniors were quite unhurt. The heat in the room was certainly great, but not sufficient to cause any injury. Trevor and Stott, when they realised there was a chance of escape, jumped to their feet, and eagerly assisted in getting the trap-door open. In two minutes Bolsover was on the roof, and he quickly assisted the others up beside him.

The cool air fanned their cheeks; but from beneath them flames curled up towards the rear of the shooting-box, and caused them to crouch near the front.

And, meanwhile—for the whole incident had not occupied ten minutes so far—Harry Wharton & Co. were making their way to Greyfriars.

"Well, I'm jolly glad we dug you out of that shooting-box, Hazel!" said Harry Wharton. "I don't want to lecture you, old man, but you must admit you've been a bit of an ass! If you take my advice you'll steer clear of Smithy in future."

"When I want advice, I'll ask for it!" growled Hazeldene sulkily.

"Well, that's polite, anyway!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Jolly nice night to-night!" said Johnny Bull inconsequently, looking round him at the stars. They had nearly arrived at Friardale Lane, and the lights of Greyfriars could just be seen. Johnny Bull looked round, and then his attention became riveted on a certain spot in the direction from which they had come.

"What's that giddy glow?" he asked, in a puzzled voice.

"That which?" asked Bob Cherry.

"That glow over there?" repeated Bull, pointing. "It seems to be in the direction of the shooting-box. Looks almost like a fire."

Harry Wharton started.

"Rot!" he exclaimed quickly. "Don't be an ass, Johnny!"

"Well, it does look like a fire!" repeated Johnny Bull flatly. "I'm not saying it's the shooting-box on fire, because we put that out."

"Did we?" asked Nugent excitedly. "My only hat! Do you think it possible that—"

"It can't be possible!" said Wharton. "It simply can't be!"

They stood in a group, and looked at the ruddy glow in the dark sky. It flickered now and again, plainly showing that it was not far distant.

Hazeldene stirred uneasily.

"It's jolly queer," he said. "Don't you think we'd better buzz back and see, just to make sure? There's a possibility you didn't shove that fire out, and—"

"Come on!" exclaimed Harry Wharton tensely.

The others were quite ready. They raced back along the way they had come, utterly heedless now of the darkness. On the top of a rise they caught a glimpse of the shooting-box through a break in the leafless trees.

And as they did so they gasped. For the little building was wreathed in flames, and smoke poured in volumes from the back portion of it.

"It is the shooting-box!" said Harry Wharton, with drawn lips. "How about Vernon-Smith & Co.?"

"Oh, they're all right!" said Bob Cherry quickly. "They must be!"

Harry Wharton & Co. felt a cold fear grip their hearts. It seemed quite evident that the fire had not really been put out, and that it had burst forth with renewed vigour immediately after their departure. With one accord they tucked their elbows into their sides and raced forward.

Johnny Bull, who carried a long coil of rope, unhitched it from his belt, and was on the point of throwing it down, to enable him to run easier. Then a thought struck him, and he left it where it was.

"If Smithy and the others haven't got out it may come in useful," he thought. "But they must have got out! They couldn't have remained in that upper-room without knowing about the giddy fire. Oh, my only topper, what a bust-up!"

Harry Wharton & Co. burst from the wood, and rushed into the clearing. They approached the shooting-box from the front, where there was no sign of flames so far. At present they were confined to the rear of the building, and the light from them lit up the surroundings in a lurid glare.

"Where's Smithy?" panted Wharton.

"I can't see 'em!"

"They must be here!" gasped Bob Cherry, in horror.

"Smithy!" roared Wharton. "Smithy—Smithy!"

There was an answering shout from the shooting-box.

"Thank Heaven you've come!" shouted Vernon-Smith thankfully. "We can't get down! We're on the roof, and can't possibly get down without killing ourselves!"

"Good heavens!"

"Great Scott!"

Harry Wharton & Co. stared upwards with horrified expressions. Vernon-Smith and his three companions could clearly be seen against the firelit sky. They stood up against the parapet of the roof in a crouching group, and those below could hear Stott sobbing.

"You'll have to be jolly quick!" shouted the Bounder anxiously. "The flames are spreading like wildfire, and the blessed roof'll fall in in about five minutes!"

"Are you all uninjured?" called Harry Wharton anxiously.

"We're not singed yet!" replied the Bounder. "These cowards here haven't got the pluck to face the thing properly!"

Johnny Bull ran forward.

"I've got a rope here!" he roared. "If we chuck that up to you, Smithy, you'll be able to slip down it!"

Vernon-Smith shook his head vigorously.

"It's no good!" he shouted. "There's nothing to tie it to! The chimney was the only thing, and that's toppled over! You'll have to think of something else! We got up on the roof because we thought we could climb up into this tree. It's miles too far away, though!"

Harry Wharton looked up, and then let out a shout.

"My hat," he yelled, "I've got an idea! There's a whacking great branch hangs over the roof, and we could——" Wharton broke off, and looked up again. "Sit tight, you chaps!" he roared. "We'll have you safely down in three minutes!"

"How," panted Bob Cherry—"how?"

"What's the good of telling Smithy that?" added Bull, pale with horror. "You know it's no good, Harry! We can't possibly get the poor chaps down!"

Harry Wharton looked grim.

"Can't we?" he exclaimed. "Johnny, hand over that rope, and then follow me up into this tree! You'd better come as well, Bob! It'll need the three of us to do the trick!"

Without a word Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry followed Harry Wharton's instructions. There was no time to question. The loss of one minute might mean the loss of four lives, so Harry Wharton & Co. worked as they had seldom worked before.

The captain of the Remove grasped the long rope, and hurriedly climbed into the big elm-tree. Bob Cherry and Bull followed behind, whilst Frank Nugent and Hazeldene stood below, anxiously waiting to render assistance. They did not know yet what Harry Wharton's plan was.

The three climbers could see quite distinctly in the glow of the fire, and at last they sat astride, one behind the other, the great branch which hung almost directly over the fore part of the shooting-box.

The tree was of huge proportions, and the three Removites were a great distance from the ground. The roof of the cottage was below them, and they could see Vernon-Smith & Co.'s faces upturned.

The heat was considerable, and sparks floated up now and again. But there was fortunately no wind, so the building burnt slower than otherwise would have been the case.

"You see my idea now?" asked Harry Wharton briskly. "We're practically over the roof, and I can swing the rope over this fork here. Smithy can grab hold of it, swing into space, and then we'll lower him to the ground. The others can follow the same road. It's as simple as possible."

"By jingo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "What a ripping idea!"

Harry Wharton looked down to the Bounder's upturned face.

"Catch the rope, Smithy!" he roared.

"Right-ho!" shouted Vernon-Smith calmly.

Wharton swung the rope downwards. It was not thick, but of very great strength. It hung down, and the Bounder made a grab at it as it swung past. He caught it, and rapidly made a loop.

"I'd better send these chaps down first!" he shouted. "I don't think there's much danger now, Wharton. It's the back part of the building that's like a furnace!"

"Well, there's no time to dawdle!" roared Harry Wharton. "Buck up!"

Vernon-Smith did buck up, and half a minute later Stott, with a frightened cry, leapt from the roof of the burning building and swung into space.

"Lower away!" shouted Vernon-Smith.

Harry Wharton and his two companions up in the tree found it a comparatively easy task to lower Stott to the ground, where he was caught by Nugent and Hazeldene. The rope was untied, and it swung upwards again.

Trevor came next, and meanwhile the flames were making terrific headway. Already the roof on the other side of the building was blazing fiercely, and a deafening crash told that the floor of the upper room had given way. The whole build-

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ing shook, and even the Bounder looked alarmed. A shower of sparks shot up into the night air.

"Hurry up!" yelled Vernon-Smith. "The place is collapsing!"

Bolsover followed Trevor. Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Johnny Bull were working like niggers up in the tree, their faces red and perspiring from their exertions in the heated atmosphere.

They could scarcely help admiring the Bounder for his coolness in sending his terror-stricken companions down before he went himself. Vernon-Smith could certainly not be accused of being a coward, however many his other faults.

He swung himself out from the roof, and was lowered hurriedly to the ground. The strain on the rope had been considerable, and as though in protest, it snapped when Vernon-Smith was within four feet of the ground. Those below caught him, and prevented him from falling. But it made them realise that they had only just escaped by the skin of their teeth.

"By Jove!" panted the Bounder. "I thought it was all up just before you chaps arrived! I can tell you, I was jolly glad when I spotted you! These funks here were simply speechless!"

"Rot!" said Bolsover, turning red. "It was enough to startle anybody!"

Bolsover, Trevor, and Stott had rapidly recovered their composure now that they were safe and sound and unharmed. Except for being a trifle pale and trembling they were all right. The Bounder, too, was quite unhurt.

Harry Wharton and his two chums dropped down from the elm-tree.

"Jolly glad we got you down, Smithy!" panted Wharton gravely.

"So am I!" said the Bounder drily. "That was a ripping idea of yours, Wharton, I must say! If it hadn't been for you, we should have been left to jump down—at the risk of breaking our necks!"

The rescuers had thought that Vernon-Smith & Co. would shake them by the hand and thank them warmly for their timely assistance. But Vernon-Smith and his cronies did no such thing. In fact, Stott looked at Wharton very aggressively.

"It was all your rotten fault, in the first place!" he growled unsteadily. "If you hadn't knocked that beastly lamp over we shouldn't have been placed in such a rotten hole!"

Harry Wharton did not reply. Even Vernon-Smith did not agree with Stott's tone just at that moment. Even if Harry Wharton & Co. had not saved their lives, they had, at least, saved them from serious injury. Whatever the cause of the fire, there was no doubt that Harry Wharton & Co. had acted the part of real heroes.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Harry Wharton's Decision.

BOB CHERRY suddenly backed away from the shooting-box.

"Look out!" he shouted. "The giddy thing's going to collapse!"

The juniors hurried back, and the next second Bob Cherry's words proved themselves to be true. There was a crash, and the roof of the little building fell inwards, accompanied by a terrific shower of sparks. Flames shot up into the sky, and the place burned with fiercer intensity than ever.

"By Jove!" said Wharton. "It's a good thing you got off that roof when you did!"

"Rather!" agreed Bolsover shakily.

Fascinated, they stood watching the fire, all of them intensely relieved that no real harm had been done. At present they did not think of the consequences of the fire.

"It's a rummy thing!" said Johnny Bull, looking round. "There's not a soul here except ourselves! I should have thought that the glow from this fire would have been seen in the village!"

"Friardale's in a hollow," said Wharton; "and this cottage, remember, is right in the middle of the wood. Besides, people are not going to rush about because they see a glare in the sky at night. It might be a bonfire, for all they know. We came because we knew about that overturned lamp affair."

"And a jolly good thing you did come!" said the Bounder. "My hat, there'll be a nice old fuss about this affair! I expect the Head'll praise you chaps before the whole school."

Harry Wharton looked at the Bounder quickly.

"I don't see why," he exclaimed. "In fact, the Head needn't know anything about it at all. It's not as if a house had been burnt down. After all, it's only a shanty and of no importance to anyone in the village. Even when the villagers get to know of it, they won't talk about it much."

"That's true," admitted the Bounder.

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"I vote we hurry straight back to school and say nothing to anybody," went on Harry Wharton. "If we buzz we shall just manage to get in before locking-up, and save a row. Of course, the chaps'll have to know that the place has been burnt down, but there's no reason why they should know the details. We don't want the whole story to get about the school, and be exaggerated and added to."

"Rather not!" agreed Bob Cherry. "I reckon we'd better keep mum. At this time of the year there's hardly a single person comes into the wood during a whole month. It might not be known for weeks that this shooting-box has been burnt."

"But how about old Biggs?" said Nugent.

"Oh, bother him!" exclaimed Wharton. "We can't be responsible for accidents, can we? Besides, that's Smithy's bizney. He was the tenant of the place."

Vernon-Smith nodded.

"I reckon we shall have to discuss this matter another time. For the present we'd better rush off to the school. Come on!"

The juniors stood watching the fire for another minute. Now that the roof had fallen in, the fierceness of the flames was gradually abating, and the glow was now dying redly. The walls had burnt down, and there was nothing but a heap of burning ruins left.

The Removites turned at last, and hurried away through the wood. By the time they reached Friardale Lane they were all feeling very much better. The trot through the night air had done them good, and Trevor and Stott were almost looking themselves again. Bolsover had recovered rapidly, and actually joked about the fire as they neared Greyfriars.

"Now then, you chaps, pull yourselves together!" said Harry Wharton. "We don't want to give the show away by looking half scared to death!"

They arrived at the gates; and Gosling, who was just on the point of locking-up, looked at the Removites aggressively.

"Wot I says is this 'ere!" he exclaimed. "These is nice goings-hon!"

"Yes, aren't they!" agreed Bob Cherry.

Gosling glared.

"Young raskil!" he muttered. "My heye, it's lucky for you that I ain't locked hup! Wot I says is this 'ere——"

"We're not interested, Gossy!" said Harry Wharton.

The juniors passed into the Close, and hurried across to the School House. They found the passages deserted, and everything going on as usual. The juniors evidently knew nothing of the fire. Otherwise they would have been swarming in the Close, seeking information.

Vernon-Smith & Co. parted from Harry Wharton and his chums in the Remove passage. Bob Cherry opened the door of Study No. 13 and looked in. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh sat there by himself, doing his prep.

"Hallo, Inky!" said Bob. "Where are Marky and Wun Lung?"

"They are in the esteemed common-room, my ludicrous chum!" replied Inky.

"You chaps had better come in here and have tea," said Bob Cherry hospitably. "We can talk over the giddy events of the evening then. Inky'll have to know in any case. He's one of the Famous Five, and shares all our secrets. As one of the charmed circle he's privileged."

Harry Wharton, Nugent, and Bull entered the study, and Hurree Singh regarded them curiously.

"The latefulness is terrific!" he remarked. "Why are my honourable chums so extremefully behind the august time?"

"Because the august time wouldn't wait," replied Bob Cherry cheerfully. "We've been performing giddy rescues, and generally acting as a whole London fire-station."

"The puzzefulness is terrific!" said Hurree Singh. "I fail to understand the forcefulness of your esteemed remarks!"

In a few words as possible Harry Wharton explained to the Indian junior what had occurred. While he was doing so the others prepared tea. By the time Harry had done the tea was made and the table was set.

"My only honourable and esteemed hat!" ejaculated Hurree Singh. "I am extremefully regretful that I was unable to be on the esteemed scene, my ludicrous chums! I should have likefully have been of some august assistance."

"That's very probable," said Wharton. "But the facts are as I've just told you. It's rather a good thing that nobody from the village appeared on the scene. We don't want the Head to know anything about it."

"Tea's ready," announced Bob Cherry cheerfully.

The juniors sat down, and were soon busy. But Harry Wharton was looking serious and thoughtful. Bob Cherry clapped him on the back.

"Wherefore that worried look, my son?" he asked. "What causest thou to wear such an expression of gravity?"

"Oh, I'm thinking!" said Wharton.

"Go hon!"

"It's not a laughing matter, Bob!" said Harry Wharton.

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seriously. "I've been thinking about the fire. Although Vernon-Smith was the tenant of the place it was really due to our visit that the fire occurred. We were the cause of that rotten lamp overturning!"

"Rats!" said Bob. "Smithy shouldn't have bashed against the table!"

"How could he help it, ass, when I whacked him on the check? It strikes me that if Biggs comes on Smithy for damages it's up to us to pay 'em!"

The juniors stared.

"What?" ejaculated Nugent. "We pay damages? You're off your rocker!"

"No I'm not!" said Wharton. "I'm simply stating what I think. If you look at the affair in the right way you must think the same as I do. If we had left Smithy alone the fire wouldn't have happened, because the lamp wouldn't have been overturned."

"Well?"

"Well, because we overturned it, we're responsible for the consequences!" said Harry Wharton firmly. "It's no good trying to get out of it, because there is no way out of it!"

"But, my dear ass," said Bob Cherry, "if Smithy had let us in first of all the lamp wouldn't have been overturned. It was because of his obstinacy that we forced ourselves into the place."

"Very likely," said Wharton. "But that doesn't alter it. We did force ourselves into it, and because of it the lamp became overturned. You can't disguise the facts. Strictly speaking, we had no right to burst in, and, therefore, I consider it's up to us to pay any damages Biggs might claim!"

"I see your argument," said Nugent; "and perhaps you're right. But it's rotten, all the same!"

"It is," said the captain of the Remove—"decidedly rotten! Beastly rotten, in fact! Don't you see that if we don't offer to pay up Smithy will think we're an awful lot of rotters!"

Johnny Bull looked up with his mouth full of pastry.

"But, you chumps," he protested, "we shoved the giddy fire out!"

"You mean when the lamp went over?"

Johnny Bull nodded.

"Well, it's very evident that we couldn't have put it out," said Wharton. "You don't think Smithy set fire to the place himself, do you?"

"No; that's a bit too much to think," admitted Bob Cherry. "If Smithy had set fire to the place he would have cleared out before it was too late. It's as plain as anything that he and his pals went straight up into the upstairs room, and that the fire rekindled itself without their knowledge."

"Of course," Harry Wharton agreed. "That's the only explanation. And I've decided that we must look at the thing in the right light and agree to pay the damages. Under the circumstances it's the only thing we can do. It's perfectly rotten, I'll admit; but there you are!"

And the Famous Five agreed upon the matter then and there. They had been the direct cause of the fire—or thought they had—and, therefore, it was "up to them" to pay the damages. Vernon-Smith might be the tenant, but it was in no way his fault that the place had been burnt down.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Damages!

THE following day was Sunday, but Vernon-Smith had written to Biggs before post time the previous night, stating that there had been an accident with a lamp, and that the shooting-box had been burnt down in consequence. Vernon-Smith also stated that no one was to blame, as the affair was a pure accident.

And on Monday morning, when the Bounder came down, he found a letter waiting for him, and they entered the study and closed the door.

"Open the giddy thing!" said Bolsover. "I want to see what's inside!"

"You'll see in a minute," said Vernon-Smith.

He ripped open the envelope, and then read the letter out aloud.

"To Master H. Vernon-Smith,—I am greatly surprised to learn that my property has been burnt to the ground, and am sending a man over to look at the place on Monday morning. Of course, you will realise that, as tenant, you are responsible for the damage. As the place is apparently burnt to the ground it will be necessary for you to pay me damages to the extent of forty pounds. Of this amount I shall require the first half by the end of the week, and the balance in a few weeks' time. I consider this very lenient treatment, and trust that you will cause no bother. If you refuse to pay the money I shall be forced to unwillingly consult your Headmaster. I do not want matters to reach this point, and shall expect to see you some time on Monday.—Yours faithfully,

"JAMES BIGGS."

Vernon-Smith laid the letter down and grinned.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he inquired.
"I think it's rot!" said Bolsover. "What the dickens does he mean by wanting forty pounds damages? The place was worth more than that, I should think. He's either up to some game, or else he's extra generous."

"I'll bet he'll have to whistle for his forty quids!" chuckled Trevor.

"Well, it's nothing to do with us," said the Bounder coolly. "It's Harry Wharton's funeral, as Fisher T. Fish would say. He's the chap who's responsible for the fire, and he'll have to deal with the matter."

And the Bounder left his study to search for Harry Wharton. He found the captain of the Remove in the Close, waiting for the breakfast-bell to ring. Vernon-Smith handed the letter to him, and looked on calmly.

Harry Wharton read the letter, and then looked up.

"Pretty rotten, isn't it?" he said.

"What are you going to do about it?" asked the Bounder. "You don't expect I'll pay it, do you?"

Harry Wharton's lip curled.

"No, I don't expect that," he said quietly. "I suppose you're going to say, Smithy, that as I caused you to knock the lamp over, I'm responsible for the fire?"

"Exactly!" said the Bounder.

"Well, if you hadn't been in such a hurry, I was going to offer to pay the damages!" said Wharton. "But it makes no difference. I half expected that you would mention the subject first. The others and myself have agreed that we'll club together and do our best to satisfy Biggs."

"Well, it's only the right thing," said Vernon-Smith carelessly. "If you don't want to face the consequences, you shouldn't play the giddy ox! You, and you alone, were to blame for causing the fire, and it wouldn't be just for you to expect me to pay!"

"No, I don't say it would," said the captain of the Remove. "And I didn't expect you to be decent over it, either! You're a cad, and the less I have to do with you the better!"

"Thank you!" said Vernon-Smith calmly. "You're very polite!"

"This is rotten!" said Johnny Bull bluntly. "We've got to pay all this giddy money because Vernon-Smith holds a rotten gambling meeting in the shooting-box!"

"It's force of circumstances," said Harry Wharton. "We can't help ourselves, you ass! If the Bounder had been decent he would have refused to accept anything from us. He knows jolly well that the whole thing was his fault at the start, but he's taking up the line I expected he would—that we caused the fire, and must pay. Looking at it that way, he's right. If we don't pay, and the matter goes before the Head, it'll probably mean a terrific flogging all round for the Bounder and his set. Therefore, to uphold the honour of our own giddy names, we must dub up!"

"Dub up forty quid, eh?" exclaimed Frank Nugent. "It's out of the question. How the dickens are we to find the money?"

"We shall have to go round borrowing," replied Wharton. "It's the only thing for it. I expect if we give Biggs ten pounds, and promise the rest by instalments, he'll accept our terms. We must do anything rather than let the matter go before the Head. And, considering, forty pounds is jolly light! That shooting-box was a substantial building, all said and done."

"Perhaps he bought it by auction—cheap," suggested Bob Cherry, "and now he expects to make a giddy profit on it."

"The honourable affair is most sad," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "My ludicrous chums are opposed to the esteemed idea of paying august money for nothingfulness."

"We are," said Bob Cherry, "distinctly opposed to it, my worthy Inky!"

"Perhapsfully an esteemed fiver would help the honourable matters?" suggested the India junior. "I should like to contribute my esteemed share, and I trustfully hope the ludicrous fiver will be handyful. The rottenfulness of the parting with money for nothing is terrific!"

"By Jove, Inky, you're a brick!" said Harry Wharton, taking the five-pound note. "This will help matters a lot. Perhaps old Mauly will give us another leg over the stile. I've only got a few shillings myself, and it's no good offering Biggs loose change in a matter of this sort."

The breakfast bell clanged out, and the juniors trooped in to breakfast.

Harry Wharton & Co. were worried about the shooting-box affair, and wished to settle the matter as early as possible. Had they been more experienced in matters of that description they would not have been in such a hurry to settle up with Biggs.

They had no opportunity of speaking to Lord Mauleverer until after morning lessons. Then, Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Frank Nugent hurried up to the schoolboy earl's study. The dandy of the Remove had just arrived, and he looked up languidly.

"Begad, my dear fellows, can I do anything for you?" he asked.

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"Yes," replied Harry Wharton promptly. "Lend us a giddy fiver!"

"Certainly, my dear fellow!" replied Lord Mauleverer readily. "You have just come at the right moment. It is my last fiver for the time being, but you are perfectly welcome to it. I expect another remittance to hand to-morrow, but I have an odd sovereign or two to keep me going until then."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Well, you won't need to go to the giddy pawnshop to carry things on," he said.

"Begad, my dear fellow, pray don't talk of such a place!" exclaimed Lord Mauleverer, in horror.

"All right, Mauly, we'll consider your feelings!" grinned Wharton. "Thanks awfully for this fiver. You're a jolly good sort, old man! We'll pay you back in about—"

"Ten years!" said Bob Cherry blandly.

"Begad, my dear fellow, I sha'n't be here then!" ejaculated his lordship, in surprise.

"I don't expect I shall, either!" said Bob Cherry; "at least, I hope not. I'm not very fond of lessons, I admit, but I should draw the line at being at Greyfriars when I was a man!"

"Begad, you're rotting!" drawled Lord Mauleverer. "I shall be glad if you will leave me now, my dear fellows. I wish to have a nap before dinner. I always find that lessons weary me, and that a little nap livens me up considerably."

"I know what would liven you up more than that," said Bob Cherry.

"And what is that, my dear fellow?"

"A pin!" replied Bob. "A pin prodded into you jolly hard! That would be the thing to liven you up!"

"Begad!"

"Shall I try it?"

"Pray do not be so absurd, Cherry!" exclaimed his lordship.

"Come on, you ass!" grinned Harry Wharton.

Lord Mauleverer's visitors left him—much to his relief. Out in the passage Wharton fingered the two five-pound notes with satisfaction.

"Well, we've got ten quid, anyhow," he said. "We'll take that to old Biggs and see if it will satisfy him. If it doesn't, he'll have to jolly well go unsatisfied!"

Hazeldene came along the passage.

"I wanted to speak to you a minute, Wharton," he said, stopping. "I just wanted to say I'm sorry for acting the cad! It was Smithy who was responsible for it—partly, anyway. I had no idea he wanted me to go to the cottage to gamble. When I found that out I was fed up!"

"That's all right, Hazel," said Harry Wharton. "I'm glad you've learnt a bit of sense. If ever you want a friend, you know, you've only got to come to Study No. 1!"

"Thanks!" said Hazeldene, flushing. "You're a decent chap, Wharton, and I'm sorry I didn't take any notice of what you said before. I—I feel that I'm responsible, in a way, for what happened on Saturday night. You were coming into the cottage to fetch me out, so I'm to blame, really!"

"Rats!" laughed Harry Wharton. "You needn't worry yourself about that, Hazel. I admit that if you hadn't been there we shouldn't have gone at all; but it's no good talking now, is it? If you've done with Smithy and his crowd, it'll relieve me a lot. I told Marjorie I'd try and get you away from them."

"Well, the next time you see her, you can tell her you've succeeded," said Hazeldene. "After indirectly bringing you into this trouble, Wharton, I should be a rotten cad if I didn't do as you wanted. Besides that, I'm beginning to think that Smithy's crowd is a bit too thick!"

And Hazeldene, having unburdened himself walked down the passage, feeling considerably relieved. But even now he didn't feel exactly comfortable. He knew that Harry Wharton & Co. were practically forced to pay the damages for the burnt cottage, and the accident had come about solely owing to his own presence there. Hazeldene felt that he would be making some amends if he tried to do as his sister wanted.

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry and Nugent descended to the Close, and as they walked down the School House steps a junior suddenly came flying towards them. It was Johnny Bull, and he was looking unusually excited.

"I say, you chaps," he gasped, "I've just thought of something!"

"Wonderful!" said Bob Cherry. "What is it?"

"Don't be an ass, Bob!" said Bull quickly. "It's jolly important! I don't believe we set fire to that giddy place at all," he added, lowering his voice. "In fact, I'm nearly certain we didn't!"

The chums stared at him.

"What are you driving at, Johnny?" asked Wharton. "You know well enough that the fire was caused through the lamp being overturned."

"It wasn't!" said Bull quickly. "It couldn't have been!"

"And why not?"

"Because if you'll only use your rotten memories you'll remember that the lamp overturned close against the window—in the corner opposite from the staircase!" said Johnny Bull quickly. "Hazeldeane knows that, because he was standing on the stairs at the time. We all stamped the flames out, and there wasn't a spark left. You know how carefully we looked!"

"Yes, that's the funny part of it," said Nugent.

"Look here," exclaimed Bull, "can't you see what I mean? When we arrived at the shooting-box we found that the whole back part was alight, staircase and all, making it impossible for Smithy & Co. to come down. How in the name of all that's wonderful could the staircase catch alight, when the lamp overturned on the opposite side of the room?"

"My hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"You see what I mean?" exclaimed Bull quickly. "It's as plain as A B C. The cottage must have been set alight from some other cause, quite separate from the lamp-overturning bizney. You must remember that when we got there the front part of the building was untouched. Now, if it had been set alight by that lamp, the front would have caught first. The back, being outside the radius of the oil, simply couldn't have caught!"

"Then—then it wasn't us at all who caused the fire?" gasped Wharton.

"Of course it wasn't!" shouted Johnny Bull triumphantly. "We couldn't have had anything to do with it!"

Harry Wharton & Co. stared at one another.

"My only Aunt Maria!" ejaculated Frank Nugent. "I hadn't thought of that before! Of course, Johnny's right. When you come to remember it, the front part of the house wasn't even scorched. It looks to me as if Vernon Smith & Co. must have caused the fire themselves in some manner."

Harry Wharton set his teeth.

"Come on!" he said briskly.

"Where to?" demanded the others.

"To interview the Bounder!" said Harry Wharton grimly. "We'll tell him that he can pay the costs of the fire himself!"

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER. The Bermondsey Babe Owns Up!

RAP!

Harry Wharton rapped on the door of Vernon-Smith's study.

"Come in!" called out the Bounder from within.

Harry Wharton & Co. accepted the invitation, and marched into the study. Vernon-Smith looked at them in surprise.

"Paying me a friendly call?" he inquired. "It is not often you do this sort of thing, Wharton."

"It's not exactly a friendly call, Smithy," said Harry Wharton grimly. "I've come to talk to you about that fire. We didn't cause it at all!"

"Really?" said Vernon-Smith coolly. "Who did, then?"

"We don't know, but—"

"Well, that's rich!" sneered the Bounder. "You say you didn't do it yourself, but you don't know who did! Is this some faked-up yarn to try and get out of paying the damages?"

Harry Wharton flushed.

"No, it isn't," he said. "I'm just going to explain to you that we simply couldn't have caused the fire. I mean the fire couldn't have been caused by the lamp overturning."

"Who did it, then?" inquired the Bounder. "A ghost?"

"That's more than I can say," replied Wharton; "but it's plain enough that we didn't!"

And the captain of the Remove told Vernon-Smith of Johnny Bull's idea. The Bounder looked thoughtful as he listened. He was undoubtedly impressed.

"Well, it seems all right," he said slowly; "but if the fire wasn't caused by the overturned lamp, what was it caused by?"

"You ought to know that," said Bob Cherry.

"Ought I? Why?"

"Well, you were there, and we weren't," said Bob. "When you come to look at the thing squarely, you'll realise that it would be impossible for the fire to break out against the stairs, when the lamp was overturned on the other side of the room. Nobody with a grain of sense could make out anything else."

"Well, I make out something else!" said the Bounder grimly.

"Then you haven't got a grain of sense!" retorted Bob Cherry.

"Don't be a fool!" snapped the Bounder. "You're pitching this yarn to me in the hope that I'll swallow it. You want to make me believe that you weren't responsible for the fire. Well, I know you were!"

"And I know we were not!" said Wharton wrathfully.

"Look here, Smithy," put in Frank Nugent, "we're not trying to make out that you know how the fire did start, and that you're deliberately keeping it back. We're only stating the facts as we know them. If you'd an ounce of decency in you, you'd admit that we are right. After we had gone, did you, or one of the others, strike a match on the stairs?"

The Bounder thought for a moment.

"No," he answered, "we didn't light the candles until we got into the upper room. You'll try and suggest next, I suppose, that somebody came along and set fire to the place as a joke?"

"Well, it's jolly queer," said Harry Wharton, "and before we pay any money to Biggs we're going to make investigations. As soon as dinner's over, chaps, we'll rush off to the wood and look for clues!"

"Good egg!"

"We're with you, Harry!"

"A lot of good looking for clues!" sneered Vernon-Smith. "Still, you can do as you like. If you find out that you didn't set fire to the place, I'll pay the damages myself. But I imagine you'll have a job to bring me satisfactory proof!"

Harry Wharton & Co. left the Bounder's study, and when they went in to dinner they were agog with excitement. The almost certain knowledge that they had not caused the fire made them greatly elated, and eager to find a clue which would lead to the discovery of the real cause.

As soon as dinner was over, the Famous Five hurried across the Close, and made their way down the road. There was need for hurry, for afternoon lessons would start in an hour's time.

They turned into the footpath which led to the wood, and almost the first thing they saw was the imposing figure of P.-c. Tozer, the Friardale constable. Mr. Tozer was looking extremely important. At last he had succeeded in making a capture!

He had his hand upon the arm of a big tramp, and a burly farm labourer was assisting him to propel the prisoner along. The tramp was handcuffed, but he didn't look at all miserable. A grin of amusement was on his unshaven face, and his eyes lit up as he saw the Removes.

"My hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "It's the Bloomsbury Burglar—I mean the Bermondsey Babe!"

The five juniors came to a standstill.

"What's he been doing, Tozey?" asked Harry Wharton curiously. "The rotter went for us on Saturday, but we managed to turn the tables on him!"

"E's bin breakin' the lor!" said P.-c. Tozer heavily. "This scoundrel was found burglin' Farmer Barlow's 'ouse, an' I'm takin' 'im to the lock-up! My heye, I ain't seed sich a ruffian afore!"

"He deserves to be locked up," said Harry Wharton. "He tried to commit highway robbery on Saturday, but we proved one too many for him!"

"Ho, did yer!" sneered the Bermondsey Babe. "You may 'ave given me a duckin', but I sooner 'ave a duckin' any day than a roastin'! It's lucky for you, young shaver, that you're 'ere to speak to me!"

"What do you mean?" asked Harry Wharton. "What—"

"The fire!" yelled Bob Cherry excitedly. "Great pip, can't you see? The rotter set fire to the shooting-box because we gave him a ducking! He must have thought we were in there—"

"Why, wasn't yer?" asked the Babe blankly.

"No, we weren't!" said Harry Wharton. "But we had been there a little time before! My only topper, do you mean to say you deliberately set fire to the place?"

The Bermondsey Babe chuckled.

"Yus, I do mean to say it!" he replied. "As I'm booked for quod in any case, it don't matter now if I owns up. I thort you young swabs was in that there little 'ouse, an' so I jest set it afire so's you'd 'ave a warm time! Seems as 'ow my plan didn't carry right!"

P.-c. Tozer looked round.

"What's hall this?" he demanded. "If you want to confess hanything, my man, you'd better confess it to me!"

"Well, ain't I?" said the Babe. "You ain't deaf, are yer? Do you want me ter speak to yer 'Ighness all on yer own? I says I set fire to the little 'ouse in the wood, an' real proud of it I am, too! I never seed a finer blaze in all my life!"

"He's talking about that little shooting-box in the wood."

Tozey," explained Harry Wharton quickly. "We ducked him in the pond, and he set fire to the place because he thought we were in there! As we weren't, no harm was done."

"The murderous villain!" gasped Mr. Tozer. "My boys, an' I never guessed wot was hup! I saw a glare in the sky on Saturday night, but I never thought it was the shooting-box in the wood! An' this feller 'as the haudacity to hown hup!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were looking excited. They allowed P.-c. Tozer and the cheerful Bermondsey Bahe to continue their way to Friardale. The tramp was evidently one of those happy-go-lucky persons who is happier in prison than at liberty.

"This is simply ripping!" exclaimed Wharton, with sparkling eyes. "We never expected to get at the truth so quickly as this! Why, it's proved as plain as anything now that neither Smithy nor we had anything to do with the fire. Old Biggs'll have to whistle for his compensation!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five were feeling light-hearted.

"Fancy the rotter being villain enough to set fire to that place deliberately!" said Nugent wrathfully. "Why, it might have ended in manslaughter!"

"Look here," said Wharton, glancing at his watch, "suppose we rush back to the school and fetch our bikes? We can be in Courtfield in no time, and see old Biggs! If we're quick we can easily be back in time for afternoon lessons! And even if we're late it'll only mean a few lines each!"

"Right-ho!" agreed the others.

"The right-hofulness is terrific!"

The Famous Five ran back along the road to Greyfriars. They dashed into the Close and made for the cycle shed. In two minutes they were out again, pedalling down the road for all they were worth.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

All Serene.

"HERE we are!"

Harry Wharton & Co. dismounted from their bicycles in Courtfield High Street. Then they all crowded into Mr. James Biggs's estate office. There was no one there, and Wharton rapped loudly upon the counter.

After a short delay Mr. Biggs appeared, wiping his mouth. Evidently he had been disturbed in the middle of his dinner, and he did not look at all amiable. He gazed at the Removites over the tops of his glasses.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said testily.

"What have you come here for?"

"About the shooting-box that was, but now isn't," said Bob Cherry.

"Do you mean in regard to the fire?"

"Yes," said Wharton.

"Well, it is useless your coming to me," said Mr. Biggs. "I let the cottage to Master Vernon-Smith, and he is not amongst you. I shall take good care never to act so foolishly again! I might have guessed what would happen if I let the place to a parcel of schoolboys!"

"Oh, dry up!" said Harry Wharton impatiently. "We've come about the damages! You can take it that we're acting for Vernon-Smith. You say that you want forty pounds?"

"Yes, and—"

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Biggs—sorry for you, I mean—but I'm afraid you'll get no damages," said Harry Wharton calmly.

Mr. Biggs glared.

"What do you mean?" he said sharply. "Explain yourself, boy!"

"Well, we've just learnt that the place was set on fire by a tramp," said Harry Wharton. "We ducked him in a ditch, and he set fire to the place because he thought we were in there. Of course, it wasn't our fault, so we can't be responsible!"

Mr. Biggs was speechless for a moment.

"You young rascals," he broke out, at last, "what do you mean by coming to me with this cock-and-bull story? How dare you tell me these barefaced lies? You and your friends have set fire to the place, and you must take the consequences. If you do not choose to pay for your folly, I shall communicate with your Headmaster. I want no more lies, understand!"

The Removites breathed hard.

"You'd better be careful what you say, Mr. Biggs," said THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 260.

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Harry Wharton grimly. "We're not in the habit of being called liars. We've told you the perfect truth, and if you don't believe it, you can go over to Friardale and interview the tramp yourself."

Mr. Biggs fumed.

"I shall do no such thing!" he shouted angrily. "Do you imagine I'm going to be deceived by this ridiculous story? If the tramp does persist in such a statement, I can only conclude that you have bribed him for the purpose of escaping from your liabilities."

"You bounder!" shouted Harry Wharton.

"Insulting beast!"

"By Jove, rather!"

Mr. Biggs brought his fist down on the counter with a resounding bang.

"How dare you?" he thundered. "How dare you come into this office and insult me in this gross fashion?"

"Insult you be hanged!" said Harry Wharton indignantly.

"Do you think we're going to be called a set of liars without saying what we think of you? You're a cad, Mr. Biggs! And if you say much more we'll drag you over the counter, and give you a jolly good bumping!"

"Hear, hear!" chorussed the excited juniors.

"I say bump him, in any case!" said Bob Cherry.

Mr. Biggs nearly foamed at the mouth.

"You shall pay for this!" he hissed, between his teeth. "By gad, you shall! I will pay a personal visit to your Headmaster, and explain all. I've never been so grossly insulted in my life! If you do not immediately leave my shop I will call in the assistance of the police!"

"Rats!"

"Tosh!"

"Piffle!"

"And you'd better not go to Dr. Locke, either!" said Harry Wharton threateningly. "The Head won't sympathise with you—I can tell you that! If you go to him in this blustering way, he'll have you kicked out of the school grounds!"

"And serve you jolly well right, too!" said Bob Cherry heartily.

The door opened, and a keen-faced man entered. He looked round in surprise as he saw the crowd of excited and flushed juniors.

"Hallo!" he said. "You seem to be busy, Mr. Biggs!"

The estate agent looked confused.

"Er—please go away, Mr. Tarrant!" he exclaimed hastily. "I will see you another time! Please go away!"

Mr. Tarrant elevated his eyebrows.

"You're rather brusque, Mr. Biggs," he said, with a shade of annoyance in his tone. "Will you be kind enough to explain yourself? I shall certainly not go away until you do!"

Mr. Biggs waved his hand.

"I cannot discuss matters with you before these boys," he said, in a fluster. "I shall have done with them in a few moments, so, until they have gone, will you kindly step into my private room?"

"There's really no necessity to, Mr. Biggs," said the stranger, who was rather nettled at this surprising treatment. "I merely came in to say that the origin of the fire has been discovered. A tramp, now under arrest, has confessed that he is guilty of the outrage. I just received the news by telephone from Friardale."

"Indeed?" said Mr. Biggs faintly.

"So you've come about the fire, too?" said Bob Cherry, turning to Mr. Tarrant.

"Yes, my boy, I have. I'm an insurance agent, and I've come down to look into this fire affair," said Mr. Tarrant. "It appears that the place was set on fire by this tramp for purposes of revenge. It will, of course, not affect the insurance. Mr. Biggs will receive the full amount of the benefit."

"Will you please go, sir?" shouted Mr. Biggs desperately.

Bob Cherry uttered a roar of indignation.

"My only hat," he shouted, "no wonder Biggs didn't want this gentleman to come in! He's an insurance agent from London, and the blessed cottage is insured all the time! Well, of all the rotten swankers!"

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another wrathfully.

"Why, I've never heard of such a thing!" said Frank Nugent indignantly. "The rotter ought to be shoved into prison! It's swindling!"

"Oh, let him alone!" said Harry Wharton disgustedly.

"We're all right now. The best thing we can do is to clear out! I'll warrant we sha'n't hear from Biggs again!"

And Harry Wharton stamped out of the office in high dudgeon, followed by his chums. Mr. Biggs was left to explain the uproar to the insurance agent. How he managed it, the juniors never knew. It was no concern of theirs, anyhow. Now that the affair had been cleared up they were feeling intensely relieved.

But they had a right to be indignant at Mr. Biggs's contemptible trick. The shooting-box was insured all the time, but he had demanded forty pounds compensation from Vernon-Smith. It was an unheard-of proceeding, and one which might have ended in very serious trouble for Mr. Biggs if the juniors had liked to take up the matter.

But it suited their purpose best to let the whole thing drop. After all, the fire had been the means of bringing Hazeldene

to his senses, and Harry Wharton & Co. were of the opinion that Hazeldene wouldn't associate with Vernon-Smith & Co. so freely in the future as he had been doing lately.

With regard to Mr. Biggs, the Famous Five were quite sure that they would hear no more of him—at least, in connection with the fire.

And they were right.

News of the fire got about amongst the fellows; but nobody ever knew the exact details of the affair. It was generally supposed that Vernon-Smith & Co. had left the place long before they were in danger from the flames. Not a soul dreamed of the extremity of the Bounder's and his cronies' peril, and the real truth was never known with regard to Harry Wharton & Co.'s Rescue.

THE END.

(Next Monday "SCORNE BY GREYFRIARS," by Frank Richards. Order your copy of "The Magnet" Library in advance. Price One Penny.)

❖ TALES TO TELL. ❖

ONCE BIT—

Down upon the window-panes and upon the pavement came the fierce hail with a threatening sound, and little Willie was struck with terror.

"O-oh, I'm so frightened, mamma!" he cried. And his fond mother tried hard to comfort him.

"There is no danger, dear," she said. "Nature sends the storm to wash the dry earth, and to soften it, so that the sweet little spring flowers may push themselves through."

But the little boy was still incredulous, and no amount of logic on his mother's part could convince him.

"No, mamma," he said; "I know something is going to happen. You talk exactly like you did last week when you took me to the dentist!"

THE ONE MAN WHO COULD.

It was at a public meeting, and the local M.P. was talking in his usual fiery manner. The proceedings threatened to be stormy.

A friend expostulated with the speaker, saying it was "hardly a place for such a discussion."

"Please don't talk so much," he said.

It irritated the truculent M.P.

"Talk!" he shouted. "I'll talk whenever and wherever I please! I would like to see the man who would keep me from talking!"

"I can!" came a voice from the crowd.

The other turned and glared about him. Then his eye caught the speaker, and he quailed, for the man who had hurled the defiant "I can!" was the local dentist.

A PRIVILEGE OF GREATNESS.

He was the manager of a large firm, and had the reputation among his clerks of being a "terror"—by which they meant a hot-tempered individual, with a tendency to grumble, for otherwise there was little that was terrible about him.

On this particular morning the youngest of the junior clerks was in a great state of fear. He had made a trifling mistake, and had been summoned to the manager's presence. He lamely attempted to explain, but the great man cut him short brusquely.

"Look here," he exclaimed, "are you the manager here, or am I?"

"Well, certainly I'm not," said the clerk.

"Then—then, if you're not the manager," spluttered the other, "why are you talking like an idiot?"

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"THE GEM" LIBRARY,
Every Wednesday.

VERY GOOD EXPERIENCE.

Up the stairs of the great hospital walked a young and attractive girl with a confident step, and asked to see the head nurse.

"And how may I assist you?" inquired the lady.

"I want to become a nurse," answered the applicant. "I want to begin learning as soon as possible."

The head nurse looked interested.

"Do you think you would like nursing?" she asked.

"Oh, yes! I'm sure I would!" was the enthusiastic answer.

"But," asked the other woman reflectively, "have you any experience at all?"

"Oh, ever so much!" exclaimed the girl, with a bright smile. "Two of my brothers play football, and father has a motor-car!"

A DIFFICULT FEAT.

Bobby's father is not a brilliant sort of man; it has been said, in fact, that he errs decidedly in the other direction.

He took Bobby the other day on a short visit to some friends, and, thinking to make a good impression, he started a conversation.

"I had quite an adventure the other evening," he said. "At the corner of a dark street a man suddenly sprang out on me, and said that if I didn't give him my watch he'd knock my brains out. Fortunately, a policeman came along, and the man took to his heels!"

"And weren't you afraid?" asked his hostess.

"Afraid!" echoed Bobby's papa modestly. "Well, I hope not."

"But," went on the lady, "if he had carried out his threat?"

"Well," answered the visitor, "if he had——" And then the loyal little Bobby struck in:

"I'll bet there's nobody who could knock any brains out of father!" he said proudly.

CHIPS OF THE OLD BLOCK.

He rejoiced in the euphonious name of Wood, and he prided himself on his jokes and smart repartee. Few of his friends had escaped the lash of his tongue, and he had victimised many by his practical jokes—in fact, he never lost an opportunity of being funny. One day he met a friend whose name was Stone, and naturally a name like that was too good a chance to miss.

"Good-morning, Mr. Stone!" he said. "And how is Mrs. Stone and all the little pebbles?"

"Oh, quite well, Mr. Wood!" was the reply. "How is Mrs. Wood and all the little splinters?"

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR,"
Every Friday.

OUR THRILLING NEW SERIAL STORY. START THIS WEEK!

TWICE ROUND THE GLOBE!

THE STORY OF THE
GREAT MAN-HUNT
BY SIDNEY DREW



Ferrers Lord, millionaire, and owner of the Lord of the Deep.



Prince Ching-Lung, adventurer, conjurer, and ventriloquist.



Nathan Gore, jewel collector and multi-millionaire, Ferrers Lord's terrible rival.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

"BY FOUL MEANS OR FAIR, I'LL WIN."

Whilst crossing the Atlantic on his way to England—where the costly diamond, "The World's Wonder," is to be put up for auction—Nathan Gore, the American millionaire and jewel-collector, receives a message from his agent in London to say that the diamond has been bought by his hated rival, Ferrers Lord, who is the owner and inventor of the wonderful submarine, the Lord of the Deep.

Nathan Gore swears he will obtain possession of the diamond, and on the night of his arrival in London he goes to his rival's house, and taking the stone, leaves in its place the message: "To Ferrers Lord,—Knowing you would not sell 'The World's Wonder' I have taken it. Do your worst! I defy you! The stone is mine!—Nathan Gore." The millionaire accepts the challenge, and a few hours after the robbery the chase is started. For five months, accompanied by his two friends, Ching-Lung, a Chinese prince, and Rupert Thurston, he pursues Nathan Gore, travelling once round the world, but never being able to overtake him. At last he hears that Gore has bought an island in the South Seas, and is fortifying it. Ferrers Lord follows the mad millionaire to the place in his submarine, and, on arrival, divides his force into two parts, leaving Rupert Thurston with Prout and most of the crew on board the Lord of the Deep, and taking with him Ching-Lung and one or two men in the launch, which the Lord of the Deep carries stored away. This vessel is wrecked, and the crew are stranded on Goreland—Nathan Gore's island—and are eventually sighted by a cruiser belonging to the American millionaire. Barry O'Rooney, one of the crew, catches the fever, and they are forced to hide in a cave while Ferrers Lord goes to get help. Barry, when the fever is at its height, escapes from the cave and swims out to sea, to be eventually picked up by the Lord of the Deep. The crew of the submarine, who had been painfully anxious about the fate of their comrades, are overjoyed to hear that they are still alive. Barry, who has recovered from the fever, describes the channel by which Ferrers Lord's hiding-place is approached, and Rupert Thurston makes instant preparations to go to the rescue of his friend.

(Now go on with the story.)

More Mischief.

They were too anxious to waste any time. A cruiser was coming up from the south, but the submarine was not afraid of fifty cruisers. Prout headed her for the channel. They had only one boat, and it would carry six men. It was launched and manned the moment they reached smooth water.

"Luk out—luk out!" roared Barry. "Oi say the inimy!" Gan uttered a terrific yell. Four figures were running across the shingle. They stopped, and then continued to run.

"There they are! There they are!" cried Rupert. A crowd of men swarmed to the top of the sandy ridge behind. Rifles cracked noisily. Prout was struggling with the submarine's four-pounder gun. He trained it, and fired. There was a boom, a hissing shriek, and a roar as the shell burst above the ridge. The crowd scattered. The pursued had taken to the water, and were swimming for their lives.

Boom! A shell from the cruiser came sheer over the cliffs, and dumped into the shingle. It exploded thunderously. The swimmers were close alongside. With every ounce of steam her boilers could carry to urge her forward, the cruiser was racing for the channel. She fired three times in quick succession, and one of the projectiles went clipping over the water in a fashion that made Barry's hair curl. But loud above the deep-throated report of the guns rang three swelling cheers.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!" The swimmers were hauled up, and hurried into the wheel-house. Spitting out smoke, and hurling the white water

from her bows, the cruiser churned on. Rifle bullets rattled round the submarine from sea and shore.

"Down with her, Prout!" cried Ferrers Lord.

The Lord of the Deep dropped into the glassy depths.

All were wild with delight. A band, consisting of two whistles and a teatray, escorted Joe and Maddock to the fore-castle. Yard-of-Tape followed with a sirloin of beef, bread, potatoes, and beer. Barry had told almost all there was to be told. They had searched for the missing Irishman in vain, and then attempted to reach the cave. They nearly ran into the arms of the picket, and were forced to go inland, where they hid in a wood.

Making a second attempt to reach the cave, they were seen and pursued. When hard pressed, they had descried the Lord of the Deep. That was all, but they had good reason for self-congratulation. Gan recovered his appetite, and polished off two pounds of butter and a dozen candles, and Ching-Lung kept the crew in roars of laughter when he told them what Barry O'Rooney had said during his brief attack of fever.

The Lord of the Deep travelled at high speed for nearly two hours. Only Prout and the millionaire knew her latitude and longitude. Barry's prisoner—a Malay youth—was handed over to the cook, and christened "Beeswax," his complexion resembling that article to some extent. He seemed to have taken a great liking to Barry, but he had no visible affection for the chef. All the same, Yard-of-Tape made him useful by threatening him with a dog-whip or a carving-knife.

It leaked out that Ferrers Lord had tapped the cable, and

NEXT
MONDAY:

"SCORND BY GREYFRIARS!"

Another Splendid Complete Tale of
Harry Wharton & Co. Order Early.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 260.

received some startling news. Ching-Lung heard it from Rupert when they were taking their morning swim.

"It's a caution," said the prince.

"But it's true, old chap. The United States have sent two ironclads. Gore has complained, and the British Government have ordered a boat along to make inquiries. I saw it in black and white, just as the chief took it down off the machine. I never knew him laugh more. There's trouble coming along."

"Then I'm sure to be in it," grinned Ching-Lung. "Mind your eyebrows! Allez!"

He plunged off the diving-board, and swam round the bath, emerged glowing, to be rubbed down by the faithful Can. The millionaire was waiting to begin breakfast.

"Hallo, my pirate chief!" said Ching-Lung. "How many people have you made walk the plank to-day?"

Ferrers Lord sipped his coffee and smiled.

"That is an absurd question from an absurd person," he answered. "We modern pirates are above such pleasantries. There is a nasty breakdown in the engine-room."

"Anything very bad?"

"Fairly. We shall have to put in some fresh machinery, and waste a valuable day."

"Can we help?" asked Thurston.

"No; you would only be in the way. My agent sent me some news that will grieve you deeply, Ching. The fair lady the empress wished you to wed has been married to the Governor of Whang-tsei-how!"

Ching-Lung staggered in his chair; then, burying his face in his serviette, he burst into tears. There was a crash outside.

"Great Scott! What's that?" cried Rupert.

"Only m-m-my h-heart b-b-breaking!" sobbed Ching-Lung. "Oh, pip! What a bit of luck! That was the girl I left my happy home for. What a bit of joy!"

"Yes," said Ferrers Lord quietly; "and it is rumoured that the governor received the province of Kwai-hai with her as a wedding-present."

"Great Caesar's Sunday scissors!" gasped Ching-Lung. "My province!"

"So the story goes."

"Impossible!" said Rupert. "It can't be true."

Ching-Lung put his hands in his pockets and whistled dolefully.

"Look here, old chap," he said, "if you have any more sweet news like this don't keep it back. I got something like seven thousand a year out of that little lot for my private purse. Methinks I'd better take the next tram for China, where the crackers come from. Is it a joke? If not, why not? And where do I laugh?"

"It's a rumour, my boy," said Ferrers Lord. "The empress dare not do it. All the same, you ought to go back. You have been away too long."

"That's so!" growled the prince. "Get that chap Gore finished with, and then take me along. This goes well with a fellow's breakfast. You bet, though, I can't take the word of a common, low pirate chief for anything. I scorn you, sir! I prefer Blackbeard and Captain Kidd. Pirates? Poof! Bah! Avaunt! Go and patch up your gas-pipe engines. You tire me!"

"We are going afloat?" inquired Thurston.

"It depends upon the weather. If it is blowing, we can work better below the surface. You have put us in a hole by using up our oil. We have only enough to last a week."

"What will we do?"

"Oh, that need not trouble us, old chap!" said Ferrers Lord. "We are getting run out of many things, but I have arranged it all. Stores have been sent out, and I expect we shall find the ship in a day or two, and get all the stuff we need."

The breakdown in the engine-room was more serious than the millionaire had anticipated. Only three men could work at it at one time. It promised to be a lazy day for the others. The weather was perfectly fine, and the Lord of the Deep did not roll an inch as she lay on the surface.

Fishing-lines were dropped overboard, and the vessel was visited by several sharks. One monster was hooked by Barry and hauled aboard after a hard tussle. Barry slew him with a sledge-hammer, stood proudly on the corpse, and told everybody that he was Napoleon Bonaparte crossing the Alps.

"By hokey, you look it!" said Prout. "Can you stick up one leg and say, 'The slosh slosheth sloppily and maketh a slippery slush' four times?"

"What is it? Stand on wan too and say that? Oi cud do ut wid both fate in my pockets, and my goold albert dogchain in pawn! Watch me, gints, and listhen. Troth, ut isn't ivry man that can perch hisself on a woid shark, caught sthraight from the ocean, and dance a jig on his brain-box! Say ut agen, my son!"

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"THE GEM" LIBRARY,
Every Wednesday.

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR,"
Every Friday.

"The slosh sloppeth sloshily and maketh a slippery slush," said Prout slowly.

"The slosh shlish—the slish sloppeth—no; the slop slisheth—the slush shoosheth— Here, drat ut all! Say ut wance more, Tommy. What did the slish-slosh do at all, at all?"

Prout repeated the tuneful statement, and Barry, balancing himself gingerly, had another attempt.

"Oi'll do ut this time," he remarked, "or Oi'll have my nixt lot of new socks embroidered wid pink winkles! The slosh slosheth sloppily and maketh a slippery, sloshily— Bedad, Oi think Oi'm gettin' a bit twisted! Niver say doic. The slosh slippeth—slosh—slash—the sloth slisheth and—the slusheth slops slasheth—maketh a lushery—sh-sloppery slishes— Bedad, Oi'll put me bottom jaw in hospital for noinety years!"

"Say it slowly; think about it," said Joe encouragingly. "I could say it muzzled."

Barry fanned himself. He was getting hot.

"Take a long breath fust," advised Maddock.

"Buck up, buck up, and pull up your socks!" cried Ching-Lung.

"Whew!" said Barry. "Oi niver let anythin' bate me. Oi'll make rings round ut this toime. Oi lift wan lig—so. Now Oi'll slash up. Here goes. The slish slosheth sloppily and maketh slappery slish. Well, that don't same roight. The slap slisheth and sloosheth a slobbery slipe. No, no! The slipe slappeth slishethy and sloosheth a slashety—slash—sloppily and sloosheth a— Wow! Foire!"

The shark had more life in him than anyone imagined. He gave the deck a "slishery slap with his sloshy" tail that sounded like a pistol-shot. This unexpected movement upset Barry's equilibrium. His legs sprawled outwards, and he sat down on the shark's dorsal fin before anyone could have said "Slush!" The fish snapped his jaws together, and as the astounded Irishman was scrambling to his feet, he let out with his tail a second time. Barry was in the light. He took a flight through the air.

Joe, the carpenter, was perched on the rail about five feet away, and he did not move in time. Barry arrived, clasped Joe round the neck, and they went overboard together. They were fished out, amid yells of laughter. Barry moaned and rubbed himself, but Joe said not a word. There was a thunder-cloud on Joseph's face. He cut a long, stout strip of hide out of that shark, and hung it on the galley stove to dry.

Ching-Lung dozed in a deck-chair, the sun being very hot, a fishing-line tied to his foot, and a jug of iced lemonade close at hand. Under a large Japanese umbrella, Rupert snored over a book. The men found shade where they could, and yarned, smoked, or slept, as they thought fit. The lazy morning passed into a lazier afternoon, until the slumberous silence was broken by a cry from Gan-Waga.

"Dere she blowses—dere she blowses!"

The shout roused them all. A whale was spouting away to leeward. Gan was all excitement. He had harpooned many a whale before, and he expected a pursuit. But Gan was disappointed; the leviathan was allowed to roam unmolested.

"No blubber for you, Can, my Trojan!" said Ching-Lung. "You'll have to take it out in candles this trip!"

"Blubbers grands, lovely, butterfuls!" sighed Gan mournfully. "Most deliciousest nices! Yard-of-Tape cook haire, and I eat haire, and I likes haire!"

"Why don't you chaso haire, then?"

"I nots gots boat," said the Eskimo, looking down into the clear water. "Never minds: I have some shark. Here anothers sharks, Chingy, winking at me with him ugly eyeses!"

"So there is," said Ching-Lung. "Ain't he the very image of Prout about the back hair?"

"Got Tom's smile, Chingy."

"And the same sort of twinkle in its liquid orbs," said Ching-Lung. "Get a harpoon and a chunk of his pai, and let's see if we can tickle haire."

Gan tied the defunct shark's liver to a rope, and lowered it into the water. The harpoon-gun was fixed on its tripod, loaded, and capped. Prout gave the drum a little oil, and saw that the line was free.

"He nots taking nones," said Gan. "He nots comes up at all."

"It's yer face that skeers him!" said Joe.

The shark fanned the water, blinked at the bait, but refused to be tempted to the surface. He was a huge fellow, and he had already a white scar on his back, probably the result of a fight with a swordfish.

"Smile at him, Barry," chuckled the prince, "and kill him dead!"

"By hokey, no, not that!" said Prout. "I'm a member of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Fish, and I won't allow it."

"Whoy don't yez sing to him, and parreloize him, thin,

Tom?" inquired Barry sweetly. "Or avin purtind yez wants to kiss him. Ayther wud be fatal."

"Give him one of yer pomes, Barry, and put him out of his misery!" remarked Maddock.

Barry's eyes grew stern. He dipped a mop into the water, and twirled it round. Maddock wisely got into the back-ground.

"Minds—minds!" yelled Gan-Waga. "Minds! Ho comings!"

Barry shot forward, wondering what had happened, and hit his chin on the rail with a violence that filled the air with stars. Though the shark drew the line at cannibalism, it had been unable to resist the attraction of the mop in motion.

Barry let go the mop. The net saved him from going overboard. His howl started Prout, who had hold of the trigger-cord, and he unconsciously pulled. Down went the hammer on the capped nipples, and the old harpoon-gun roared like an eighty-tonner.

The gun was tilted rather high, and as the harpoon whizzed away into space, the drum absolutely screamed as the line reeled off. It had an old-fashioned brake, and Ching-Lung made a snatch at it; but he got a rap over the knuckles for his pains that made him roar. Then the line snapped, but the drum was going faster than ever. The line peeled off in a kind of nightmare vision of loops and curls and twists, and in the fourth of a second Ching-Lung and Prout were rolling on the deck, wrapped up together, until they resembled a gigantic stick of sailor's plug.

Maddock whipped out a knife and severed the line nono too soon. Its end was fast to the drum, and the sudden shock would probably have flung both men into the sea. The drum held several hundreds of fathoms of line, for, even when deeply harpooned from a gun, a whale will often rush away an enormous distance.

Then they had time to survey the uncanny-looking object which lay before them. They were all deathly white. One twist round the neck would be enough to strangle the men. But the strange sounds that came out of the string-bound package turned fear into laughter. At one end appeared Ching-Lung's head and extended arms, at the other the wild, red visage of Thomas Prout.

Rupert Thurston lay back in his chair and screamed with mirth. Barry forgot his loosened teeth and his sore chin. The men turned purple with laughter.

"Where's this parcel for?" said Joe. "I can't see no label on it."

"Faith, label is ut," grinned Barry. "What shud ut want a label for at all, at all? Ut's the say-sarpint wid a head at aich end and no tail."

"I wills tickle haire, thens," said Gan-Waga, prodding the object with an oar.

"Cut us loose, can't ye, ye gibbering rogues?" thundered Prout.

"Tush! Whisht!" said Barry. "Bhoys of this noble ship, our fortins is made! We'll sell ut to the British Museum, and stharrt a poie-shop wid the proceeds. Harrk to the craythur's curious voice. Tickle ut again—tickle ut agen!"

Gan obeyed.

"By hokey, I'll murder ye when I'm out!" shrieked the steersman, as Gan placed a tin saucepan over his bald head.

"Tickle ut agen," said Barry. "Bedad, Oi luv to hear ut squeal!"

"Oh, how I loves to tickle haire!" grinned the Eskimo. "Let us alls tickle haire. Shalls we all tickle haire? Oh, do let us alls tickle haire! It is so good 'nough butterfuls when we alls tickle haire. We musts all tickle haire, and make haire squeals. There is no charge to tickle haire. I will tickle haire a lot."

"Bedad, thin, we will all tickle haire," said Barry. "Bhoys, shall we all tickle haire?"

"Yes," answered the men, in chorus; "we would all like to tickle haire."

"I'll tickle yer ribs wi' a marlinspike, ye swabs!" roared Prout, whose voice was muffled by the saucepan.

"Shall we make haire squeals, bhoys?"

"We would love to make haire squeals!" chimed in the men.

Ching-Lung saved his breath. Prout's heels were firmly lashed behind his ears. He could move his arms and head, but no more. Rupert was utterly helpless from laughter. He had seen many funny things, but nothing funnier than this extraordinary double-headed monster.

"Let me out," bellowed the steersman, "or I'll be the death of every one of ye!"

"We ought to have them on a string," said Barry thoughtfully. "Now, whoy did they do that? Oi axes yez, whoy?"

"Must be some new kind of overcoat," said Maddock.

"I'll pound ye to jelly!" snarled Prout savagely.

"If she is rudes I shall tickle haire agains," said Gan-Waga. "Oh, how I loves—"

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EVERY MONDAY, The "Magnet" LIBRARY. ONE PENNY.

"I'll scalp you!" roared Prout.

"Come away—come away!" said Barry. "Oi'm shocked. The language the craytur uses wud shock a prize pig. Come away, and lave the blayguardly thing! Ut's toime for tay. Floy from such wurrds us yez wud floy from your tailor whin he wants the money for his last suit. Away, away, away! Ut makes me wape. List to the poet!"

"Whin wicked men uses nasty wurrds,

Oh, do not think it fun;

But fly away loike little birds

Whin bang goes off a gun;

Don't sthoph to harrk to this strango brute.

Take my advice, and do a scoot!"

Barry walked away, wiping his eyes on his sleeve, and the grinning men trooped after him.

"The beasts!" hissed Ching-Lung. "Are you there, Ru?" There was no reply. Thurston's chair was vacant.

"Tom," said Ching-Lung.

"By hokey, yes!" snarled Prout.

"Can you get at your knife?"

"No, I can't."

"Are your hands free?"

"Yes!" snapped the wrathful steersman. "I'll kill 'em! I'll slaughter 'em! I'll slay 'em!"

"You get out of this first, sonny," said Ching-Lung. "Look here, there's always a knife in the chart-table drawer. Do you think you can scrape along?"

"Yes," grunted Prout.

"Shift, then. I'll lead the way."

Ching-Lung rose upon his hands, and Prout followed suit. The fearsome, four-legged, black-bodied, two-headed monster began to crawl towards the wheel-house. It was growing dusk. The monster grunted as it moved, and its progress consisted of writhes and flops.

Just as it neared the door, a fierce and angry voice rose from the depths of the vessel. It was the voice of the cook.

"A-r-r-r, soundr-r-el! I will have ze murder-r-r of you on ze soul of me! Oh, t'ief! Oh, villain! Oh, rogue! To steal ze raisins of ze duff! Oh, miserable chien-dog, to steal ze currants I have for mine spotted pudding! I vill strike you! I vill lash you! A-r-r-r! Ma belle France! Zat such curs shall live! I vill slay you at ze feet of me! Come back, son of a pig—come back!"

Beeswax, the Malay, his mouth and hands full of raisins, bolted out of the wheelhouse. He dived clean over the monster, and rolled, shrieking, into the scuppers. Behind him, brandishing a wooden spoon, and in hot pursuit, came Yard-of-Tape.

The light was dim; the monster was ghastly.

Yard-of-Tape stopped dead, and yelled. His legs would not hold him. He sank back into a sitting position, his eyes as big as crown-pieces.

"G-r-r-r-r-r-oosh!" hissed the monster.

Yard-of-Tape went down the ladder with a succession of humps, and lay at the botom, uttering hollow groans.

"Oh, let us tickle haire!" lisped the voice of Gan-Waga.

And muffled laughter sounded through the dimness of the corridor.

The Mutiny that was Quelled.

The Lord of the Deep and a swift merchant-steamer had been lying close together for several hours. Chains were clanking, cranes were rattling, and hoarse voices were bellowing orders. Bales, kegs, bundles, and boxes in huge variety were swept into the maw of the submarine. She was for all the world like a greedy monster of the deep with an insatiable appetite. But it was clean work, for she wanted no coal, except a few tons of the smokeless composition used in the galley and state-rooms. The millionaire's labour-saving machinery, too, made the task a lot lighter, and the stores were gathered in smoothly and rapidly.

A cheer from below announced that the last bale was in its place. To celebrate the event, Gan, who was perched on the steamer's shrouds, let fly with an orange at the group round the submarine's wheelhouse. The orange was not in a fit condition to eat, or Gan would not have wasted it. It was old and soft. It broke into a million atoms against the glass as Prout took off his cap to polish his heated brow.

Prout received the full charge. His bald head turned a

beautiful golden colour. He jumped as if a lively hornet had sat down on his neck, and howled hideously. Then he scooped the pulp out of his eyes, and saw the grins on the faces of the men.

The sight added fuel to his wrath. He seized a fathom of stiff, tarry rope, and the men melted away like butter before a hot fire.

"Dat's not so dusty, hunk, Chingy?" tittered Gan-Waga, as Ching-Lung swung himself upwards.

"More juicy than dusty, my son," said the prince. "You gilded the figure-head that time. Twig Barry down there, peeping round at him? Watch for a bullseye."

Ching-Lung took aim with a piece of elastic and a strip of orange-peel. Barry was seen to grab wildly at his left ear. With a look of blank wonder on his features, he stared about him. Ching-Lung lay flat on the yard, hidden by a clewed-up sail, and a second strip of peel smote the astonished Irishman exactly on the tip of the nose.

"Down, dawg! Lie low, Ganny!" said Ching-Lung.

"Yo' gotted him bullseyes dens!" chuckled the Eskimo. "Ho, ho, ho! He nots knows where de fruitses come from. He catching hold of him faces. Smackses him again, Chingy!"

Barry was saying something that they could not hear. On the foredeck a chase was taking place, where several fowls had escaped from a hen-coop. Before Ching-Lung could get in another shot, Barry dropped on his hands and knees and began to crawl round the wheelhouse to discover his foe. At that moment Prout appeared, and Ching-Lung fired.

Prout clutched at his neck. He caught a glimpse of Barry's vanishing boot-soles.

"By hokey!" hissed Prout. "I ought to know them trotter-cases, by the size of 'em! So it's you, is it, you murderin' Irishman? You'll chuck some more decayed oranges at me, by hokey, will you? Thunder and gum! I'll scrape some of the paint off yer timbers this cruise! By hokey—yes!"

Prout tied an extra knot in the rope to give it a sting, and, crouching down, waited for the arrival of the enemy. Out through the open door came Yard-of-Tape, with a couple of ducks in his hand. Yard-of-Tape sat down on the rail, and commenced to pluck the birds, flinging the feathers overboard.

Ching-Lung could not resist the temptation. He missed the Frenchman by inches the first time, but the second attempt was successful. Yard-of-Tape hissed out a startled "A-r-r-r!" sprang to his feet, holding his chin with both hands, trod upon the orange-peel, whirled round like a human top, and sat down violently on a duck.

Though the duck broke his fall, Yard-of-Tape was breathless and dazed.

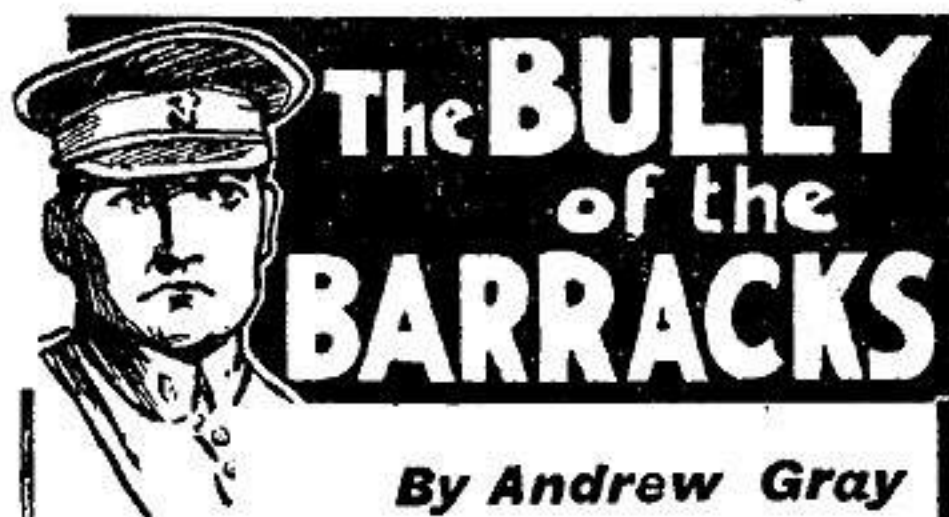
"Death of ze life of me!" he gasped. "Zis is of some vicked tr-raitor ze vile wor-rk! I haf from behind been stab! Ah, scoundr-r-rel! Ah, villain of ze deepest dye! Ah, cowa-r-r-rd! To smite at ze defenceless ven he shall not look. A-r-r-r! Ze blood of me shall boil vit great rage! Vere shall hide ze chien, ze dog—ze—ze assassin? Vat! Death of ze bones of me, but I shall see him at last! Fire and spar-r-rks of ze blue colour! A-r-r-r-r!"

Barry had not yet completed the circle; but Yard-of-Tape saw Prout. The steersman's attitude was suspicious. Only a man with an evil conscience would be kneeling down trying to conceal himself. Yard-of-Tape held his breath, and swung back the duck.

"A-r-r-r-r!" he hissed. Tr-r-raitor-r-r! I str-r-rike you zus for France!"

Yard-of-Tape struck his hardest and best. It was an excellent smite, but it had its weakness. The first weakness was in the neck of the bird. Nature had not intended it to be used as a club. The head remained in the Frenchman's hands, but the carcass, instead of striking Prout, flew backwards.

(Another instalment of this amusing and exciting serial story next Monday.)



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ever written and easily surpasses any story Andrew Gray has yet produced. It shows this popular author at his very best. Opening chapters this week in



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"SCORNEO BY GREYFRIARS!"

By Frank Richards.

The splendid complete tale of the chums of Greyfriars, which will appear under the above title in next week's issue of "The Magnet" Library, deals with the unusual circumstances under which a new boy arrives at the school, and of the reception that is accorded him upon his joining the ranks of the Removites.

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For genuine schoolboy interest and humour,

"SCORNEO BY GREYFRIARS"

will be hard to beat, and my readers are urged to make a special point of ordering next Monday's "Magnet" Library IN ADVANCE!

GOOD NEWS.

I have this week some specially good tidings for all Magnetites who are also readers of the now-famous "Penny Popular." Ever since this new companion-paper to "The Magnet" Library first came out, I have been inundated with letters from Magnetites, urging me to introduce Harry Wharton & Co.—their favourite schoolboy characters—into the new story-paper. Gemites, they argue, have the pleasure of reading more about their favourites, the famous Tom Merry & Co., every Friday—so why should not the same privilege be extended to followers of Harry Wharton & Co.? I have all along, of course, seen the justice of my readers' claim, but the difficulty has been to find room for an extra story in the packed pages of "The Penny Popular."

However, I have found a way out of this difficulty at last, and in

NEXT FRIDAY WEEK'S

issue of "The Penny Popular," Harry Wharton & Co. will positively appear! Thus, the one thing needed to make "The Penny Popular" quite perfect in the eyes of all Magnetites has been added to the list of contents of our famous companion-paper. So hurry up, my readers, and give your newsagent the order now for

FRIDAY WEEK'S "PENNY POPULAR."

A TREAT IN STORE FOR MY READERS.

I am, at the present time, busily engaged in preparing

A GRAND NEW COMPETITION

for readers of the three grand companion papers—"The Gem," and "Magnet" Libraries, and "The Penny Popular." I am determined that this new competition shall be an absolutely "new departure" for my three popular story-papers, and really handsome Cash Prizes will be awarded

EVERY WEEK

for a number of weeks during the competition. I hope in my Chat Page next week to give full details of this grand new scheme; but in the meantime I must ask my readers to exercise their patience, and to look out for something good!

A "MAGNET" LIBRARY RAMBLING CLUB PROPOSED.

One of my Leeds readers—Charles A. Boley—makes a novel suggestion. He proposes the formation of a "Magnet" Library Rambling Club in the district in which he resides. Country rambling is a favourite pastime in the summer months, and can be pursued in its pleasantest form in company with a number of kindred spirits: while in the winter the members of a rambling club have the advantage of being able to meet and discuss interesting topics connected with the pastime.

My Leeds reader's suggestion seems to me a very excellent one, and he proves himself to be an enthusiast on the subject by offering to provide a club-room in Leeds for ramblers. I should advise any of my readers, whether living in Leeds or elsewhere, who are interested in the matter, to communicate with Mr. Boley, particularly as he expresses himself willing to supply any reader with particulars of how to form a Rambling Club in any district.

My Leeds reader is a strong advocate of the clean and healthy type of reading matter contained in "The Magnet" Library, and its companion papers, and, of course, assumes that membership of the proposed Rambling Club, or Clubs, will be confined to readers of "The Magnet" Library.

Mr. Boley's address is 9A, Canal Wharf, Water Lane, Leeds.

THE NAVY FOR BOYS.

The Royal Navy offers many attractions for boys who wish to travel about the world, and, at the same time, advance themselves in an honourable profession. For one thing, it affords a continuous service at a fairly good rate of pay, with, in many cases, chances of distinction and promotion to higher ranks, and, consequently, higher rates of pay. There are many further advantages offered to sailors which people in other classes of employment miss, including free rations during service, and free kit, or an allowance towards the purchase of it, on entry. In certain instances pensions for life after a service of twenty-two years are given. For well-behaved, intelligent men and boys, the Navy is hard to beat. Sailors are paid weekly when serving at home, and monthly when on foreign service. In connection with sailors' pay there is a small bank established on all his Majesty's ships, and the money saved by sailors can, if desired, be transferred, on arrival home, to either a dockyard or post-office bank.

For training as

Seamen,

boys are admitted into the Service between the ages of 15½ and 16½. To be accepted, boys must, of course, be of good character, and must have their parents' written consent. Especially desirable boys are sometimes entered if they are slightly under the following physical standards, provided they are in good health and are fairly well educated.

Age, 15½ to 16; height, 5ft. 1½in.; chest measurement, 32in. Age, 16 to 16½; height, 5ft. 2in.; chest measurement, 32in. Age, 16½ to 16¾; height, 5ft. 2½in.; chest measurement, 33in.

Boys are provided with a free outfit and rations whilst they are serving in the training establishment.

Boys between the ages of 16½ and 18 are also entered for training as seamen, if they are of very good character. Those under the age of 17 have to obtain their parents' or guardian's written consent. The standards for these youths are:

Age, 16½ to 17; height, 5ft. 2in.; chest measurement, 32½in. Age, 17 to 17½; height, 5ft. 2½in.; chest measurement, 33in. Age, 17½ to 18; height, 5ft. 3in.; chest measurement, 33½in.

Youths of this age have to join the training establishment at Shotley, and are paid 3s. 6d. per week, with free rations and kit.

After a short training here they are sent aboard a ship, where they have to undergo another four months' training. And then, after three months in the regular service, they are rated as first-class boys, and are paid accordingly—4s. 1d. per week. On completing their 18th year, if they have been in the regular service six months or more, they are termed seamen, and are paid at the seamen's rate—i.e., 8s. 9d. per week.

(Next week's article will deal with the various special branches of the Service open to boys who join the Navy.)

THE EDITOR.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 260.

Another Splendid Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. Order Early.

NEXT
MONDAY:

"SCORNEO BY GREYFRIARS!"

THE "MAGNET" LIBRARY SPLENDID COMIC SUPPLEMENT.

A TRICK WORTH REMEMBERING!



1. "Why are you putting your mackintosh on that tree, Walter?" said Maud. "You wait," said Walter. "Just lend me your umbrella, will you?"



2. And he rigged this contraption up, and when Maudie's mamma came along she said, "Oh, I see Aunt Susan is acting as chaperon!" And off she went.



3. And our young couple were left in peace for the rest of the afternoon.

AN AWKWARD UNCERTAINTY.



"Wot's she cryin' for?"
"I don't know whether it's joy or grief. I just proposed to her!"

A FAMILY COMPLAINT.



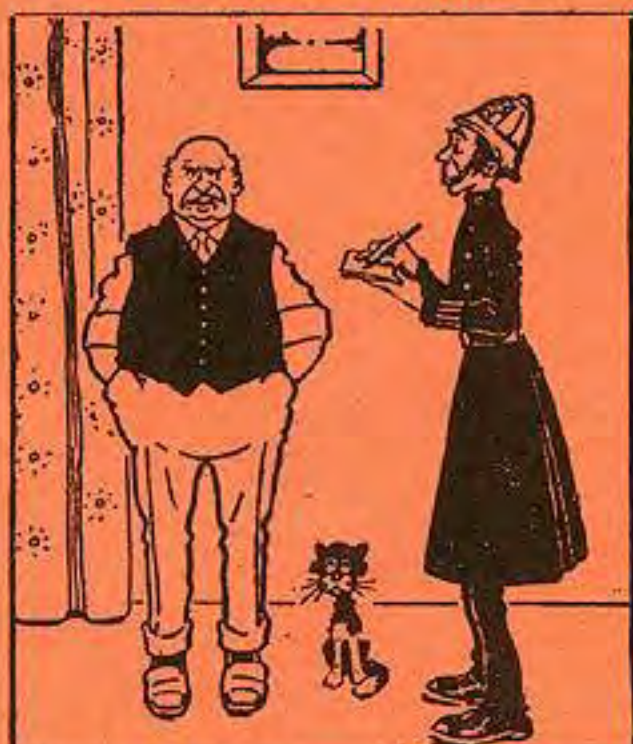
Employer: "I have been ringing for you quite ten minutes! How is it you are never here when wanted?"
Boy: "Runs in the family I expect, sir."
Employer: "What do you mean?"
Boy: "Father's a policeman."

NOT SO IDIOTIC.



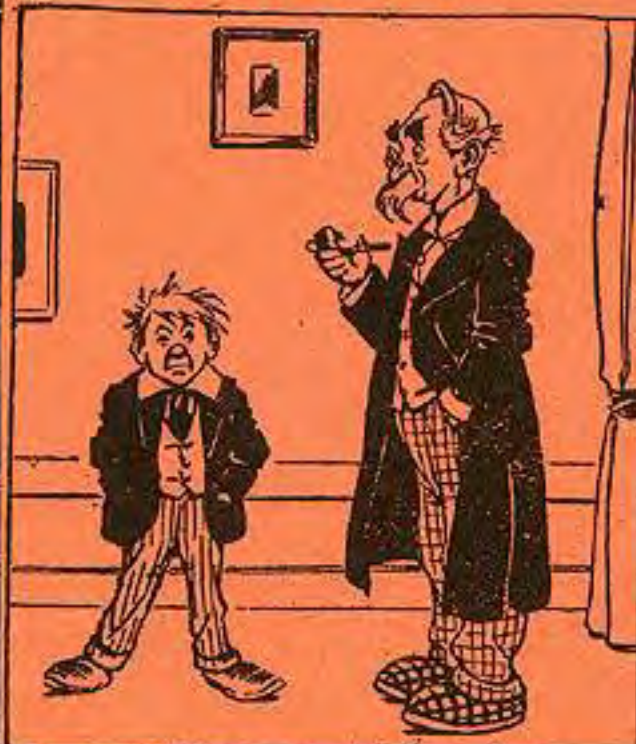
Village Police-
man: "Why do
yer stand about
with your mouth
open like that?"
Village Idiot:
"To catch flies."
Village Police-
man: "Is that
all? I thought
p'raps you was
goin' to eat me."
Village Idiot:
"I said flies, not
worms!"

THE CORRECT THING.



P.-c. XXX (after burglary): "Is there anything—er—not gone off?"
The Victim: "Yes; the burglar-alarm!"

PA MAKES A HIT.



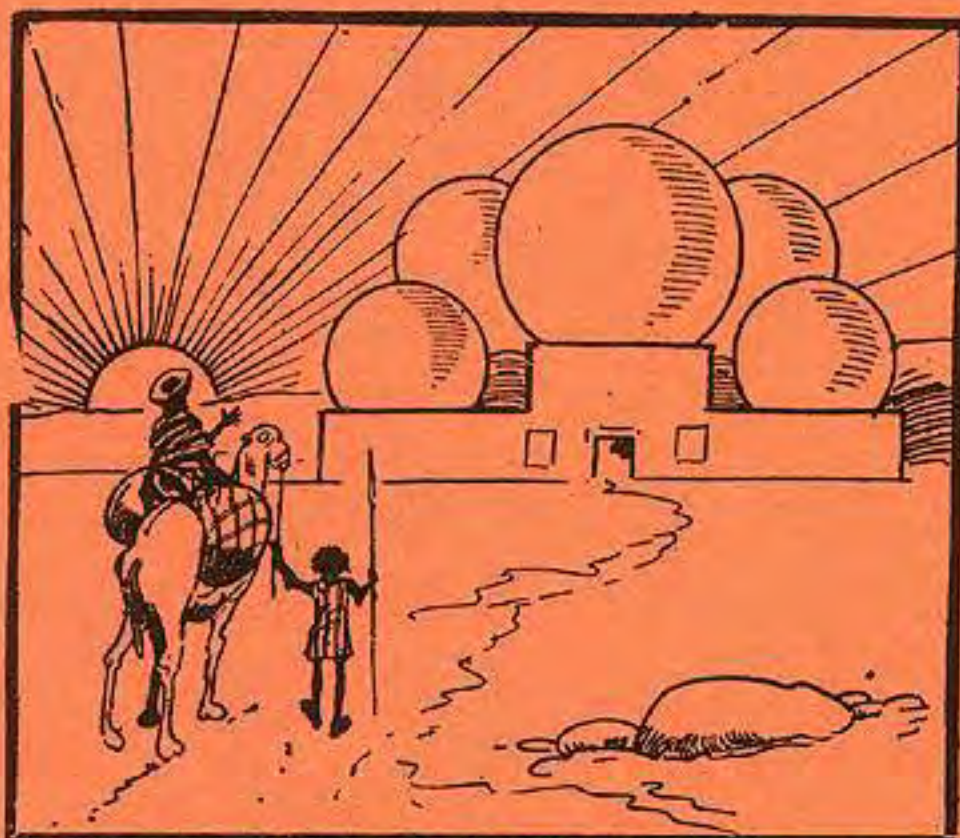
"Pa, what will you give me if I get a good report from school this term?"
"Don't know, my boy. But I know what I'll give you if you get a bad one!"

THE DECEITFUL TRUTH.

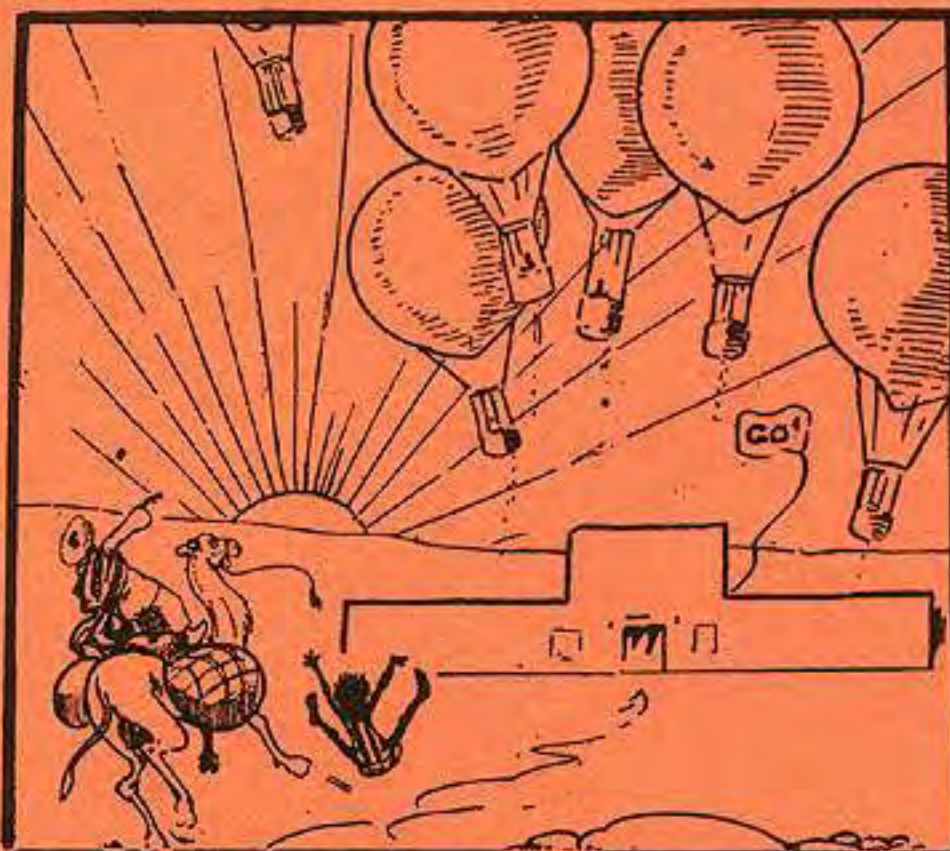


"Dear Lady Stuffem,—I regret that a large gathering at my rooms—domestic affair—prevents my accepting your kind invitation.—Yours sincerely, Gerald Swelby."

A SORT OF CASTLE IN THE AIR.

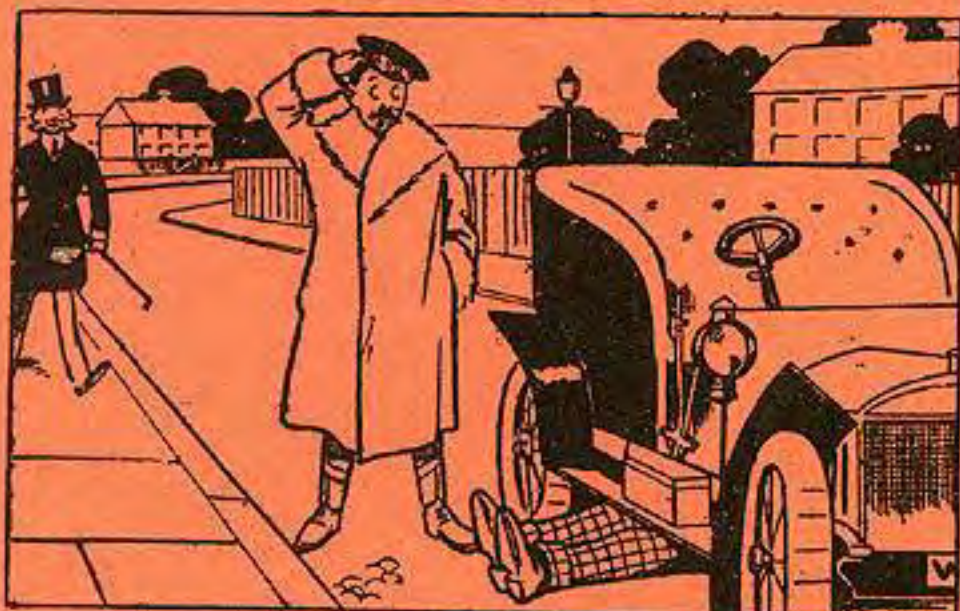


1. "Bismillah! The Sultan hath built himself a palace of great splendour, Hassan!" quoth Ali the Bedouin. "Look at yon splendid domes and—"



2. Then the merchant stopped, for the domes suddenly went up like this. Yes, it was the local balloon club's race. But the Bedouin got sorely taken back!

A WOEFUL TAIL—OR.



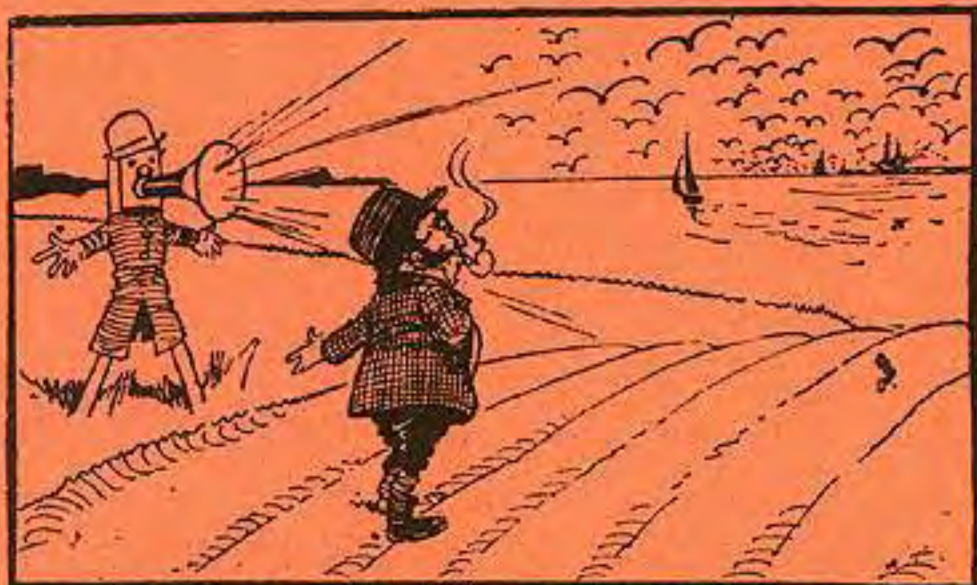
Motorist (to stranger who has dived underneath car):
"Hallo, you, sir. What are you up to there?"
Stranger (in a whisper): "Sh! That's my tailor coming. Keep still till he's passed!"

MATRIMONEY.



"Now, little man, what will you do with that halfpenny I gave you?"
"Why, sir, I'll marry Sally here an' start housekeeping at once!"

SOLD AGAIN!



1. "Ha, ha! That'll keep the birds away!" smiled Farmer Hayseed, as he fixed up his automatic scarecrow. "My word, here comes a merry little flock! However, they won't stop long!"

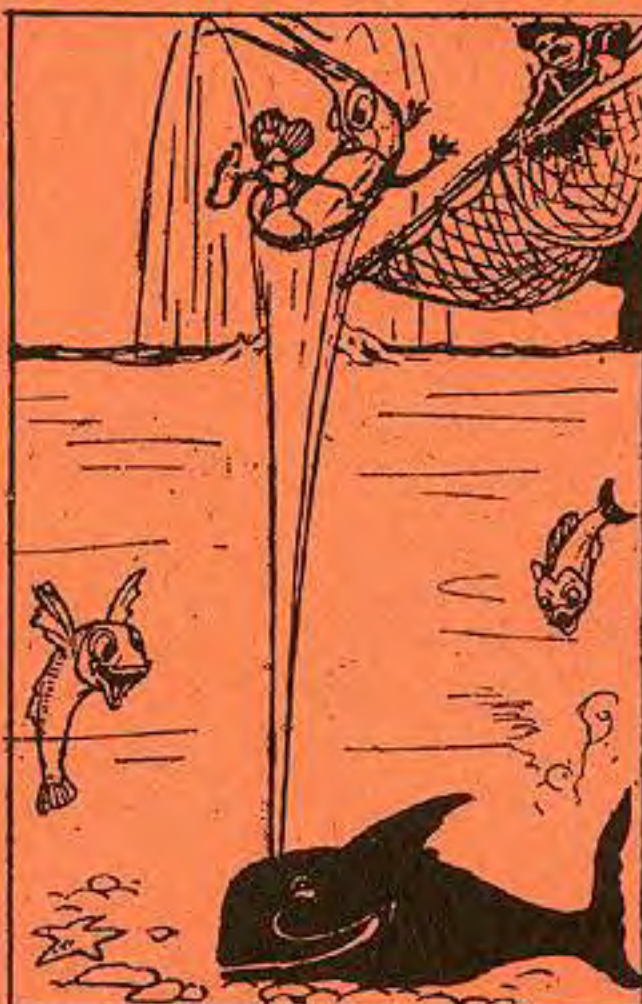


2 "But, my word, wasn't Farmer Hayseed surprised when the birds turned out to be a French flying club out for their weekly run. "Oo-er!" he gasped. "What are things coming to?"

UPS AND DOWNS OF SEA LIFE.



1. "Ah!" said Percy Prawn, as he sat on what he thought was a rock, "nobody will ever catch me. I shall get my old age pension if I live till next Monday."



2. The Whale: "Then you won't get it that's a cert! Mistook me for a rock, did you! I'll teach you! Up you go!" And up Percy went!

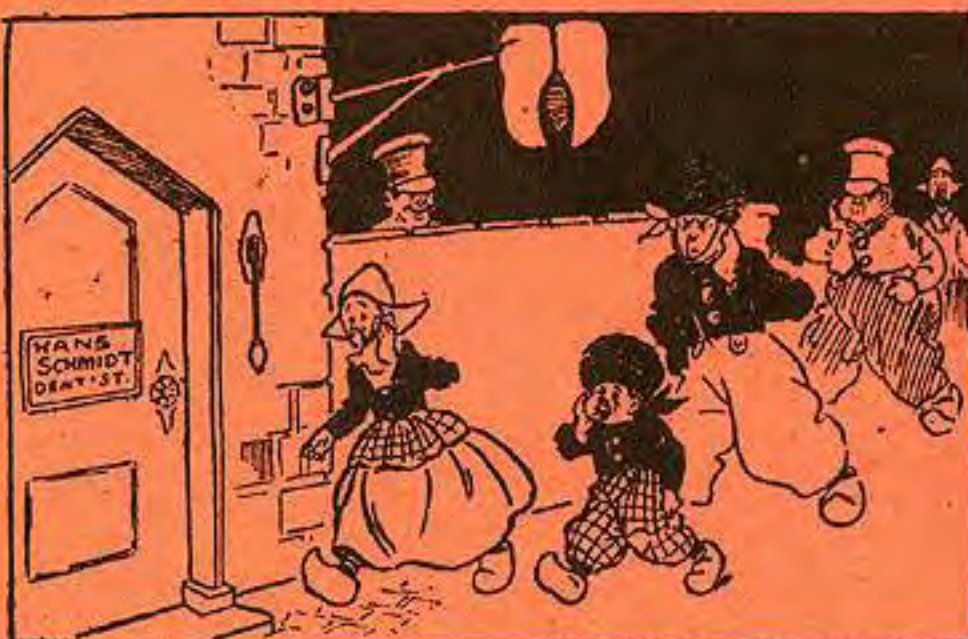


3. But those fishermen were looking for bigger game. "Yah!" jeered Percy, "they threw me back again, 'cos I'm too small, see? Sold again, bottle-nose!"

A SIGN OF PROSPERITY!



1. "Things vos bad mit me!" croaked the Dutch dentist. "I gets me no patients. I must design make to hang outside de door—yes!" And he set to work with some old sabots that were lying handy—



2. And rigged up a splendid model of a massive three-fanged molar. In less than no time all the martyrs to toothache were rushing up to the old chap to have their teeth seen to!