

STICKING TO HIS GUNS !

A Magnificent New Long Complete School Tale of the Boys of Greyfriars.



The Magnet 1st Library

No. 442. Vol. 10.

JULY 29th 1916.



AS THE STUDY DOOR OPENED, BUNTER'S EYES ALMOST STARTED THROUGH HIS SPECTACLES AT THE SIGHT OF THE DREAD FIGURE THAT ENTERED.

"G-G-G-GOOD GRACIOUS!" STUTTERED THE OWL OF THE REMOVE.

(An Extraordinary Scene in the Splendid Long Complete Tale of School Life in this Issue.)

MY READERS' PAGE

OUR COMPANION PAPERS:

"THE BOYS' FRIEND," 1d., Every Monday. "THE GEM" LIBRARY, 1d., Every Wednesday. "THE BOYS' FRIEND" 3d., COMPLETE LIBRARY. "THE PENNY POPULAR," 1d., Every Friday. "CHUCKLES," Price 1d., Every Saturday.

The Editor is always pleased to hear from his chums, at home or abroad, and is only too willing to give his best advice to them if they are in difficulty or in trouble. . . . Whom to write to: Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.

For Next Monday:

"HIS OWN FAULT!"

By Frank Richards.

The grand, long, complete story which appears next week centres round Peter Hazeldene, the wayward and unreliable brother of charming Marjorie Hazeldene. Once a rotter of the Skinner type, Hazel has become, under Harry Wharton's influence, a far more decent fellow. But he still has a tendency to go back to the old ways when tempted, and he is particularly difficult to deal with because he resents strongly the least doubt cast upon him. How such doubts, apparently well justified, were cast you will read in next week's story, which contains a mystery not likely to be solved by many readers till the last page is reached, and Hazel is forced to confess that, though he may not really have deserved all the harsh judgments passed upon him, still it was essentially all

"HIS OWN FAULT!"

A WOUNDED READER.

Some little time ago I included among our notices one from Sapper R. Hart, asking for a football for the use of himself and his comrades. He saw the appeal in our pages, and the day after reading it was rather badly wounded. He is now in Charing Cross Hospital, and has been feeling rather concerned lest any reader who happened to comply with his request should be wondering that the football was returned—as it probably will have been, he thinks. So I am inserting this note in order that any such sender may understand. Sapper Hart tells me that the "Magnet" and "Gem" are much appreciated in his ward. I am glad of it.

HOW A SCOUT FIRST MET WITH THE "MAGNET."

A Kilburn correspondent sends me an interesting little story about the manner of his coming to know of my papers. He was living in Belgium at the time, and was scouting on the dunes, near Ostend, with a patrol of Belgian Scouts at night. He caught his foot on some dead branch, and fell. As he fell his hand touched part of some paper, and he put the leaves in his pocket. When he got back, he found that what he had picked up was an incomplete "Magnet." Though less than half of it was there, he devoured all that was, and, having made inquiries, was able to get later numbers sent over to him. He had never seen or heard of the paper before, but a very small sample seems to have been sufficient to convince him that it was O.K. "When I came over here a few months later," he adds, "I was not half an hour on British soil before I had the current 'Gem' and 'Magnet' in my pocket!"

A ROLLING STONE.

From a very determined reader, who at the time of writing was engaged as a cowboy in a circus in Australia, I have received an account of how he has stuck to my papers through all the vicissitudes of a career which he himself describes as that of a rolling stone.

"In my schoolboy days in Old England—they were few enough—I was a steadfast reader of both papers," he writes. "I ran away from England and a good home, and drifted to the United States. There I got the papers without much difficulty; but then I went to Mexico, and had to have them sent all the way from New York. I paid three times the English price, besides postage; but I guess they were well worth it!"

"I was in the fighting-line at Vera Cruz during the rising some time back, and got a bullet in my leg. Fed up with Mexico, I moved on to San Jose, California, where I had three years' ranching. All the time I was lucky enough to be able to get your papers. Now I am in my second year in Australia, and have a standing order with my newsagent

for the 'Magnet,' 'Gem,' and 'Boys' Friend' 2d. Library, as well as the 'Union Jack.' I could not get a copy of 'School and Sport' from the trade, but I managed to get one from a young fellow I ran across. He

would not part with it for less than sixpence; but I didn't grudge that, even before I had read it, much less after!"

"Some" reader this, I think!



NOTICES.

For Correspondence, Etc.

To R. E. Wood, Melbourne, Australia.—Frank C. Wood, 1, Albany Street, Hull, England, having seen a photo of above in the "Magnet," would be interested to know whether he is the son of either Charles (deceased), Tom, William, or Sidney Wood, all of Saltash, Cornwall, England, and; therefore, a nephew of F. C. Wood, who has lost sight of his brothers for many years.

G. H. Edwards, Office of Superintendent of the Line, Cambrian Railways, Oswestry, would be glad to correspond with an Australian or Canadian boy reader.

G. Simms and D. Collins, care of Captain of Dockyards Office (N.), Devonport, want more members for their "Gem" and "Magnet" League, open to anyone in the British Isles. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

Norman Harle, 25, Wolseley Street, Ferryhill Station, co. Durham, wants to form a local league for sending papers to the Front. Will be glad to hear from anyone interested.

E. W. Titcomb, 15, Dover Street, New Swindon, is starting a "Gem" and "Magnet" League, and will be pleased to forward particulars to anyone who will send a stamped and addressed envelope.

Private W. Waller (3rd East Surrey Regt.), 50 Buchanan Gardens, Willesden, N.W., would be glad to hear from Joe Fish, of Gainsborough; and to correspond with boy readers not under 17.

Miss B. Carter, Ashleigh House, Long Street; Miss E. Robinson, 22, Newgate End; Miss E. Boutter, 9, Central Avenue; and Miss A. Boothaway, Central Avenue, all of Wigston, near Leicester, would be glad to correspond with other girl readers.

J. L. Hinks, 45, Belmont Street, Swadlincote, Burton-on-Trent, wants a few more members for the Swadlincote Correspondence Club. Stamped and addressed envelope, please. He would also like to hear from other editors of amateur magazines with a view to exchange, and from other presidents of "Gem" and "Magnet" Leagues to compare notes.

W. H. Simpson, 8, Oakwell Terrace, Grove Hill, Middlesbrough, wants more readers for his Correspondence Club, open to anyone in the United Kingdom.

Hector Potts, P.O. Box 158, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, would like to correspond with some boy-readers in the United Kingdom.

Private G. Seabrook, 12172, A Coy., 12th East Surrey Regt., B.E.F., France, would be very glad to correspond with a girl reader.

Fred Hobbs, 154, Hackney Road, London, N.E., would be glad to correspond with another boy reader (15-16), as he is very lonely.

Will Private Charles Pike, of the 7th King's Liverpool Regiment, write to his friend at Plymouth who wrote to him from there, but fears the letter must have failed to reach him?

Rowland Kennedy, Kitchener Road, High Wycombe, would be pleased to correspond with boy readers in Buckinghamshire.

F. Barlow, of Royton, whose photo appeared in a recent issue of the "Magnet," is asked whether he would care to write to Willie Robb, 5, Portland Street, Newark, who would be pleased to hear from him.

Your Editor

A Complete School-
Story Book, attrac-
tive to all readers.

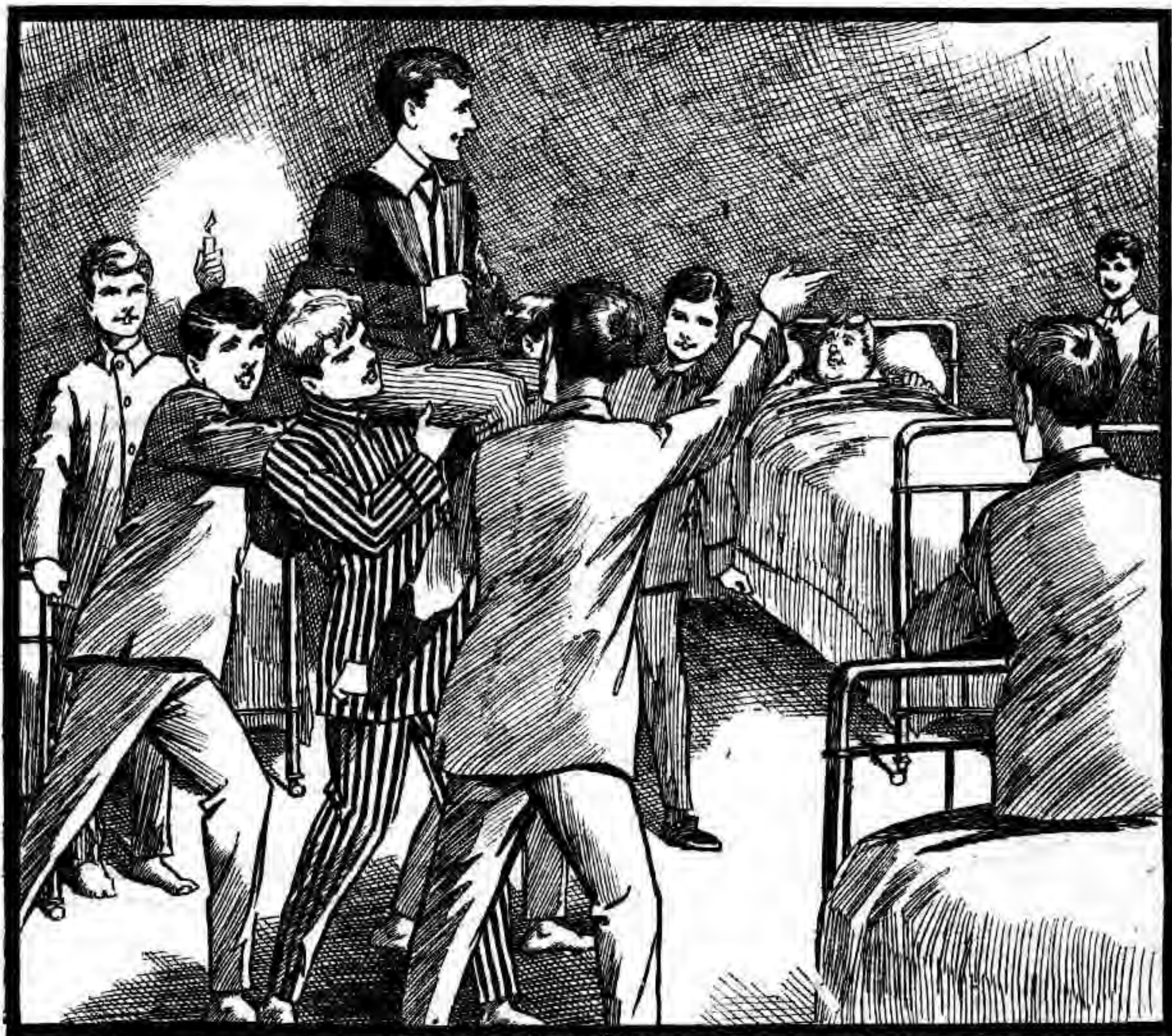


The Editor will be
obliged if you will
hand this book,
when finished with,
to a friend.

STICKING TO HIS GUNS

A Magnificent New Long Complete Tale of
Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School.

By FRANK RICHARDS.



Vernon-Smith was carried into the dormitory in great triumph. Billy Bunter was buried beneath his bedclothes, but he ventured to blink out as he heard the reassuring sound of the juniors' voices. (See Chapter 12.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Bounder's Bad Luck!

POP! "Oh, my hat!" Vernon-Smith of the Remove uttered that exclamation in tones of dismay. The flat tyre dragged on the dusty road, and the Bounder of Greyfriars jumped off his machine.

"Well"—the Greyfriars junior whistled softly—"this is a fix, and no mistake!" It was undoubtedly a fix.

It was nearly eleven o'clock. The white, moonlit road was silent and deserted.

For miles the Bounder had had the road to himself. He was still five miles from Greyfriars, and now his tyre had gone.

And he was already late. The Remove at Greyfriars went to bed at half-past nine. Vernon-Smith had had leave to ride over to Lantham to visit his father, who was there on business.

He had had leave till half-past nine; but, with his usual recklessness, he had overstayed his time. He had not quitted Lantham till half-past ten, and then he had set out for a record scorch home. So long as he arrived before Mr. Quelch went to bed, he would get only lines. But if he kept the Remove-master waiting up for him, there would be trouble with a vengeance.

He had ridden like the wind. Friardale Park, half-way to Greyfriars, had come into sight in a marvellously short time. But as the cyclist followed the road along the park wall there came that fatal "pop!" from the back tyre, and the Bounder of Greyfriars was stranded.

The junior looked at his watch.
"Ten to eleven! Oh, what rotten luck! I might just have done it, with a few minutes over! Quelch goes to bed at eleven! And now——"

Vernon-Smith whistled again, and looked along the white road glimmering in the moonlight.

A five-mile walk, with a bicycle to wheel—when was he likely to get in? He could picture Mr. Quelch's face if he arrived at half-past twelve. His palms tingled in anticipation.

But the Bounder did not waste time in repining. It was just bad luck, and he had to make the best of it. It was useless to think of walking the rest of the distance. He turned over the bicycle, and proceeded to remove the tyre. His lamp was nearly exhausted, and he blew it out to save the oil. The clear, bright moonlight gave him plenty of light.

His quick hands proceeded deftly with the work; but it was a bad puncture, and proved no easy task.

Round him all was silent. The park wall of greystone rose within a few feet of him, overhung by the branches of trees. Beyond the wall was the wide park, and a couple of hundred yards back from the road lay the house—the residence of General Griggs, a great local magnate. On the opposite side of the road pasture-land stretched for miles.

"Oh, blow the thing!" growled the Bounder.

His work was finished at last, and he waited for the solution to dry. He leaned against the park wall, and looked away over the moonlit fields.

Suddenly he gave a start.

From the silent park behind him came sudden shouting. There was a rustling and crashing among the trees.

The Bounder detached himself from the wall, and looked up.

On top of the wall, half a dozen yards from where he was standing, two hands appeared, evidently the hands of a climber from within.

Vernon-Smith stared at them in amazement.

The hands were followed by a head. A face rose into view, and an elbow was thrown on to the wall.

In the clear moonlight a white and startled face looked over into the road.

The Bounder noted the sharp nose, the keen, steely eyes. The rest of the face was hidden by a thick black beard.

Then a leg was thrown over the wall, and the man rolled over, held to the wall for a second, and dropped into the road.

He reeled there, panting.

From the park came a clamour of voices.

"This way!"

"Where is he?"

"Quick, the light!"

The fugitive—for such the black-bearded man evidently was—sped away down the road like a hare.

He had not even glanced towards the Bounder.

Vernon-Smith had made a step forward, but the fugitive was gone in a twinkling. For a moment the junior's eyes followed the fleeting form in the moonlight. Then it vanished through a gap in the hedge.

It was gone!

"Well, my hat!" murmured the Bounder, in astonishment. "Who the dickens—what the dickens——"

A light gleamed over the wall, and a face looked down and scanned the road.

"Here he is!"

A man in a keeper's garb tumbled over the wall, followed by a footman. They rushed at Vernon-Smith.

"Hallo!" said the Bounder coolly.

The keeper gritted his teeth.

"This ain't the man—it's a boy! What are you doing here?"

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"Mending a puncture," said the Bounder cheerfully.

The keeper's eyes gleamed on him suspiciously for a moment; but he saw the turned-up bicycle, and the junior's schoolboy clothes, and understood.

"Did you see anybody get over the wall?" he panted.

"Yes; a chap with a black beard."

"That's the man! Which way did he go?"

"Down the road, and through the hedge yonder," said the Bounder, pointing. "What's the row?"

"Burglary!"

With that one word the keeper dashed off, followed by the footman.

The Bounder made a movement to follow. He would willingly have joined in the chase of the fugitive cracksmen.

But he had Mr. Quelch to think of, and he paused.

His tyre was ready now, and he pumped it up. Then he mounted, and pedalled away towards Friardale. He had been delayed half an hour or more, and half-past eleven was chiming out as he rode through the sleeping village.

Greyfriars loomed up in the distance at last.

Vernon-Smith jumped down, and rang a peal on the bell. He had to wait five minutes before Gosling came grumbling down to the gate.

Gosling was half-dressed and in slippers, and his face was grim.

"Nice goings hon!" he said, as the gate rolled open. "Ere's me, a 'ard-working man, fetched out of bed, and Mr. Quelch a-waitin' up for you! Wot I says is this 'ere——"

"Bow-wow!" said the Bounder cheerfully.

He wheeled his bicycle in, and Gosling, with an emphatic snort, closed the gate.

Vernon-Smith put up his machine, and walked to the School House. He was prepared for a row, and prepared also to meet it with his usual coolness.

There was a light under Mr. Quelch's door, and the Bounder tapped. Midnight had rung out from the clock tower.

The Remove-master met him with a glance like a gimlet.

"So you have returned, Vernon-Smith?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have remained up an hour after my usual bed-time."

"I am sorry, sir. I—I had a puncture."

"You should take more care, Vernon-Smith. I suppose you do not think it a Form-master's business to lose his night's rest whenever you have a puncture?"

"Nunno, sir! But——"

"However, if your delay is wholly due to an accident——" said Mr. Quelch, in a somewhat mollified tone.

Vernon-Smith hesitated.

There had been a time when falsehoods came readily to the lips of the Bounder; but Vernon-Smith was not now the Bounder of old.

"It was not wholly due to the puncture, sir," he said. "I could not have got in before eleven, anyway."

"You overstayed your leave?"

"Yes, sir."

"You will take five hundred lines, Vernon-Smith, and stay in on Wednesday afternoon to write them out. You may go!"

"Yes, sir."

And the Bounder went.

Two or three sleepy voices greeted him as he turned the light on in the Remove dormitory.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here you are!" yawned Bob Cherry.

"Had an accident?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Had a good time at the Cross Keys?" sneered Skinner.

"Stayed late in Lantham, and had a puncture half-way home," said the Bounder. "Five hundred lines and a gating. Ripping, isn't it?"

"Lucky it wasn't a licking," said Bob.

The Bounder grinned.

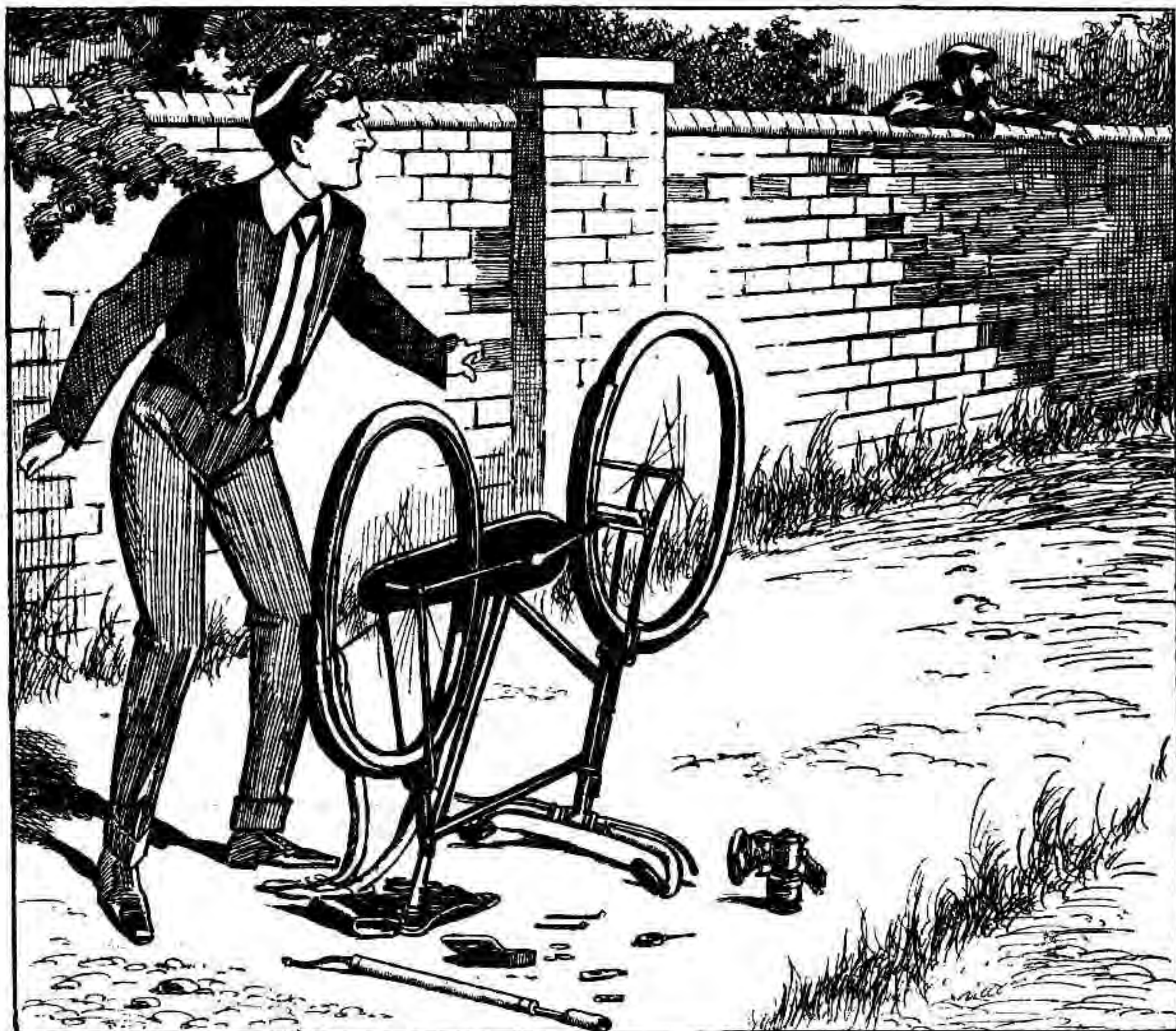
"I expected it would be; and I think it would have been, only Quelch was so surprised to hear me tell the truth——"

"What was the matter with you?" asked Skinner, in surprise.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Vernon-Smith did not reply to Skinner's humorous question. He put the light out and turned in.

But it was some time before he slept. He could not help thinking of the incident at Friardale Park, and wondering whether the man had been caught. But he slept at last, and did not open his eyes again till the rising-bell was ringing out over Greyfriars in the clear summer morning.



On top of the wall, half a dozen yards from where Vernon-Smith was standing, two hands appeared, evidently the hands of a climber from within. The hands were followed by a head, and a face rose into view. (See Chapter 1.)

THE SECOND CHAPTER. A Sudden Surprise!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter was quite excited.

Harry Wharton & Co. were chatting outside the School House after morning lessons, when the Owl of the Remove rolled up evidently with news.

"Well, what is it this time?" asked Bob Cherry. "Expecting another postal-order?"

"I say, there's news!" said Bunter. "I just heard the carrier telling Gosling. I say, where's Smithy? I wonder if Smithy knows anything about it. He must have been quite near Friardale Park at the time."

"About what?" asked Wharton.

"The burglary."

"Eh? What burglary?"

"More burglaries?" asked Nugent.

"There's been another, at Friardale Park," said Bunter. "Old Cripps told Gosling all about it. That's the third—there was one last week at Popper Court, and one the week before at Hardinge House. Now old Griggs has had his turn: but this time the fellow was spotted and chased through the park. Old Cripps says they nearly had him, but he got away over the fields."

Bob Cherry whistled.

"I wonder if it's the same chap?" he said. "It's getting exciting! The rotter may come to Greyfriars next."

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"Well, he might," said Bunter. "We've got a lot of valuables here—there's the school silver, and the Coker Cup, and my watch—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! My gold watch cost thirty guineas, and if the cracksmen knew about it—"

"And if he knew about your postal-orders, too!" grinned Johnny Bull. "That's enough to bring here all the cracksmen in the country. Better keep your postal-orders dark."

"Oh, really, Bull! Of course, I'm not afraid of burglars," said Bunter. "If he came here, I've no doubt I should deal with him pretty effectively. That's what they want—a really keen chap, with no end of pluck and determination—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Where's Smithy? I shouldn't wonder if Smithy saw something of it. Old Cripps says it happened some time before midnight, and that's when Smithy was mending his puncture there, from what he says. I say, Smithy!"

Vernon-Smith came out of the School House, and Billy Bunter hailed him eagerly. He poured out his exciting news in a breath, and the Boulder listened with interest.

"So the man got away?" he asked.

"Yes, old Cripps says so. He says the police think it was the same chap who burgled Sir Hilton Popper's and old Hardinge's. Mr. Tozer told him he heard Inspector Grimes tell the sergeant that he believed it was Slippery Jim—"

"Ye gods! What a name!" said Harry Wharton. "Who on earth is Slippery Jim?"

NEXT
MONDAY—

"HIS OWN FAULT!"

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

"He's a cracksmen," said Bunter, with an air of great knowledge. "I saw something about him in the paper at the time of the Popper Court burglary. I say, Smithy, did you see anything of it? You were there, you know. Skinner thinks you were really at the Cross Keys—"

"You fat idiot!" said the Bounder, frowning.

"Well, you said you were mending a puncture outside Friardale Park. Did you see anything of the cracksmen?" asked Bunter inquisitively. "I wish I'd been there—I'd have nailed him, I can tell you! I shouldn't wonder if he comes to Greyfriars next. Did you see—"

The Bounder nodded gravely.

"There was a chap there, when I was there," he said, slowly and thoughtfully. "He was just outside the park wall—just about the time—"

"And you saw him?" exclaimed Bunter.

"He was quite close. I could have touched him. He stayed under the park wall for nearly half an hour," said Vernon-Smith. "But he had a bike, so he couldn't have been the cracksmen."

"Very likely the cracksmen had a bike to get away on," said Bunter excitedly. "It's just what Jippery Slim—I mean Slippery Jim, would do. Did he go off on the bike?"

"Yes."

"Which way?"

"Through Friardale."

"Great Scott! That would be the way here!" exclaimed Bunter. "Did you see him anywhere near Greyfriars?"

"Yes, he came right up to the gates."

"My hat! He didn't come in?"

"Yes, he did."

"He—he—he came into the school?" stuttered Bunter.

"Yes."

"Good heavens! What did he do next?"

"He stayed here all night."

"How—how do you know?"

"Well, I do know," said the Bounder mysteriously, "and he isn't gone yet."

Billy Bunter's eyes almost started through his spectacles.

"Do you mean to say he's still here?" he gasped.

"Certainly."

"Inside the school?"

"Yes."

"Then he can be collared!" exclaimed Bunter. "Where is he?"

The Bounder tapped himself on the chest.

"Here he is," he said calmly.

Bunter jumped.

"Eh? You ass! What do you mean? I'm talking about the cracksmen."

"Oh, I'm speaking of the chap with the bike, who came here last night!" said the Bounder calmly. "It was myself, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

Billy Bunter blinked at the Bounder in utter disgust. He realised at last that the humorous Smithy had been pulling his fat leg.

"You—you—you silly ass!" snorted Bunter, and he rolled away in disgust and wrath, leaving the juniors chuckling.

"I suppose you didn't see anything of the affair, Smithy?" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"But I did," said the Bounder seriously. "The chap bolted over the wall while I was there, and I saw him go, and a keeper and a footman after him. I should know him again, too, if I saw him. Chap with a pointed nose and a black beard."

"You really saw him?" exclaimed Wharton.

"Yes, I tell you! I'd have lent a hand in running him down, only I had to get in. I don't know whether he's Slippery Jim or not, but he seems to have slipped away from them all right. And I really shouldn't be surprised if he's got Greyfriars on his list," said the Bounder. "He seems to be a Johnny who's doing this neighbourhood pretty thoroughly. Hallo! Who's that?"

The juniors glanced towards a man who had entered at the gates and was crossing towards the School House.

He was a stranger to them.

He was a man of middle age, with a hard, clear-cut face and very keen eyes. He wore the uniform of an inspector of police, but they knew that he did not belong to the local force.

He came up to the School House, glancing carelessly at the group of juniors. The Bounder's eyes were fixed on his face.

A startled look had leaped into Vernon-Smith's eyes. The stranger passed into the house, and Trotter came at his ring. The page showed him into the Head's study.

"Well, my hat!" murmured the Bounder.

Wharton looked at him curiously.

"Do you know the chap?" he asked.

"Some giddy detective after the burglar, most likely," said Johnny Bull. "I wonder what he's come here for, though."

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"It's extraordinary!" said the Bounder, in a low voice. "I'd swear that I knew that nose."

"You've met his nose before?" grinned Nugent. "Was it alone, or was the rest of him with it?"

The Bounder did not reply. He hurried into the house, leaving the chums of the Remove considerably astonished.

Vernon-Smith intercepted Trotter as he was coming back, after showing the visitor into the Head's study.

"Who's that chap, Trotter?" he asked.

"Visitor for the Head, sir," said Trotter.

"I mean, what's his name?"

"Inspector Flick, sir," said Trotter, surprised by the Bounder's inquisitiveness. "Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard. That's wot was on his card, Master Vernon-Smith."

"Oh!" said the Bounder.

Trotter went his way. Vernon-Smith thrust his hands deep into his pockets and walked away, his brows wrinkled in thought. Harry Wharton tapped him on the shoulder in the quadrangle, as Vernon-Smith, buried in thought, was passing him unseeing.

"What on earth's the matter with you, Smithy?" asked Harry, in surprise.

Vernon-Smith started.

"You saw that chap?" he said.

"Yes; what about him?"

"He's Inspector Flick, from Scotland Yard."

"Well?"

"But—but if he wasn't," said the Bounder slowly—"if he wasn't, I should think he was—was—"

He hesitated.

"Was what?"

The Bounder sank his voice.

"The cracksmen I saw scoot over the park wall last night," he said.

Wharton stared at him blankly.

"My hat! You're dreaming, Smithy!"

"Of course, it isn't possible," said Vernon-Smith. "But I saw his face in the moonlight as plain as I see yours now."

"But you said he had a black beard."

"Yes, so he had. But I dare say Slippery Jim wears a black beard when he goes burgling, for disguise. It would come off in the daytime. But—but his nose wouldn't come off. You spotted that chap's nose?"

"Not particularly."

"It was pointed—looked like a rat. I'd swear—" The Bounder paused. "But, of course, it's incredible."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"My dear chap, it's rot, and you'd better not say anything of the kind, either. It wouldn't exactly please Mr. Flick if he heard it."

"I sha'n't, of course; and don't you repeat what I've said. But—but it's queer—it's jolly queer!"

The Bounder walked away, his brows still wrinkled in thought. Harry Wharton smiled, and joined his chums on the cricket-field. Vernon-Smith should have been at the nets, too; but he was not thinking of cricket now.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Man From Scotland Yard!

DR. LOCKE rose courteously to greet his visitor, surprised as he was to see him. The Head of Greyfriars had no idea why Inspector Flick, of the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard, should be paying him a visit.

"You are probably surprised by this call, sir," said the inspector, with a smile. "But I will soon explain. You have doubtless heard of a series of daring robberies carried out in this neighbourhood during the past fortnight?"

"Yes; I have seen the reports in the papers," said the Head.

"The local police have been unable to deal with the matter so far, and I have been sent down from London to investigate. The work is supposed to be that of a certain Slippery Jim, a notorious cracksmen whose present whereabouts are unknown to the police. You may be aware that last night an attempt was made at General Griggs' house, Friardale Park."

"I was not aware of it."

"The man escaped, unfortunately, though it was a very narrow escape. He was, however, prevented from carrying out his purpose. It is possible, of course, that he has been scared away from the neighbourhood; but I do not think so myself. I may add, that I hope he is not gone."

"You—you hope so?" ejaculated the Head.

Inspector Flick smiled.

"Yes; because I hope to have the opportunity of laying the rascal by the heels."

"Ah, yes, I understand!"

"The man is a most dangerous character," continued the inspector. "His system is to take some place of concealment in a certain district, and perpetrate a series of robberies, and then disappear. After he has done with this neighbourhood, he may probably be heard of next in Ireland, or Scotland, or Cornwall. He is a very slippery customer, and though his work is well known to the police, his personal appearance is only known very vaguely, which, of course, adds to the difficulty of tracking him. I have hopes, however, of catching him in the very act, and that is why I am here. You have not yet been troubled by the man."

The Head started.

"I? Oh, no!"

"Yet it is very probable that he will not leave this district without paying Greyfriars a visit."

"Bless my soul!"

"There are, I understand, certain valuables kept on the premises here—"

"Undoubtedly," said the Head. "The old Greyfriars silver is worth upwards of two thousand pounds."

"That would be a very valuable haul for Slippery Jim," said Mr. Flick. "Melted down, of course, it would lose much of its value, but—"

"Melted down!" exclaimed the Head, aghast at the bare idea. "Those exceedingly rare antiques—"

"They would have no value as antiques to a cracksmen, sir. He could hardly venture to offer them to curio dealers."

"I suppose not."

"They would disappear into the melting-pot if once the clutches of Slippery Jim were laid upon them," said Mr. Flick. "You understand why I have called? Prevention is better than cure, and I hope that if the rascal intends to extend his operations to this place, to save your property."

"I am very greatly obliged to you, inspector!" exclaimed the Head. "I had not thought of the matter, but I see that there is danger, as the man is still at large."

"Unless I am greatly mistaken, sir, Slippery Jim will make an attempt on the school one night this week."

"Bless my soul!" said Dr. Locke, startled and disturbed. "That is quite—quite alarming, Mr. Flick! However, since you have warned me, every precaution shall be taken."

"That is my object in calling, sir."

"But—but how can this man, a stranger to the neighbourhood, have any knowledge of valuables here?" asked Dr. Locke.

"A man in his peculiar line of business, sir, has many sources of information. The Greyfriars silver is famous."

"Yes, that is true."

"And doubtless he has accurate knowledge of other valuables here. You would, perhaps, not object to giving me some details of such things, so that I can judge better the probability of his paying you a visit."

"Certainly. I generally have a certain sum of ready money in the safe," said the Head. "About fifty pounds, as a rule. Then I have a number of shares and bonds—especially Anglo-French Loan. Would you advise me to transfer these to my banker for the present?"

Inspector Flick shook his head.

"That is not necessary, sir; and I think probably your safe is more secure than that of the local bank, with Slippery Jim in the neighbourhood."

"That is very probable," assented the Head.

"The bonds you speak of—are they of much value?"

"Two thousands pounds, sir," said Dr. Locke. "I doubt whether this—this disreputable person can be aware, however—"

"Of course, he may know nothing; but it is probable that he has received information. I should like to see the safe, and I can give you an opinion as to its security."

"Certainly. It is in this room."

Dr. Locke rose to his feet, and moved a screen. The iron safe was let into the solid wall of the study. The inspector examined it with keen interest.

"And the key?" he said.

"I keep it always on my watchchain, Mr. Flick."

"That is very wise. But the lock, of course, would present few difficulties to a cracksmen like Slippery Jim, and if he knows that the school silver and the bonds are there—" Inspector Flick paused. "This safe, I presume, contains all the valuables you have mentioned?"

"Yes."

Inspector Flick crossed to the window and looked out into the green quadrangle. He examined the window carefully.

Dr. Locke watched him with some interest. A detective at work was a somewhat new experience for the Head of Greyfriars.

"You think that a burglar would seek to enter that way, sir?" asked the Head.

"Very probably."

"The window is, of course, always fastened at night."

"Yes."

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"HIS OWN FAULT!"

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"It would be easy to cut out a section of the glass, and move the catch from outside, Dr. Locke."

"Ye-es, I suppose so."

The inspector rubbed his hands.

"Nothing could be better," he said.

"Eh? I do not quite understand—"

"I mean that if Slippery Jim makes an attempt here, he will make the attempt at this window, beyond a shadow of a doubt."

"You think he knows—"

"That would be quite easy for him. Is there not a history of the school in existence in which a plan of the building is given?"

"Quite so."

"He could learn all he wished from that, and doubtless he would also make observations, and obtain information from the servants."

"My servants are quite trustworthy, Mr. Flick."

"I do not suggest that they are not. Slippery Jim would not present himself to them as a cracksmen. He might get into conversation with your porter in the guise of a wounded soldier—"

"Bless my soul!"

"Or might talk to your maids as a gasfitter or plumber. The man is extremely cunning, and knows his business."

"Dear me! I certainly did not think of such things as that."

"You see, sir, that it is necessary to be careful."

"Undoubtedly. I cannot thank you sufficiently for putting me on my guard in this manner!" exclaimed the Head.

"What do you suggest I should do?"

"Nothing, personally," said Mr. Flick, with a smile.

"Now that I am posted, you may leave that to me. With your permission, I shall keep the school under observation, but, of course, in such a way that it will not be known. You would not care for your boys to have any inkling of such a thing."

"Very true."

"I have little doubt—or, rather, no doubt at all—that the man will make an attempt here during the week. You need have no alarm, however. I shall be on the watch. My intention is to post myself in the quadrangle at midnight, and keep the house under observation till near dawn. If he comes—I might rather say when he comes—I shall be ready to seize him."

"A very unpleasant task for you, sir."

"My duty, sir," said the inspector, with a shrug of the shoulders; "and if I could succeed in laying Slippery Jim by the heels, my trouble would be well rewarded. It would mean promotion for me, and a substantial reward in addition—apart from the benefit to society generally, which weighs more with me. Of course, you will mention the arrangement to no one, even to the local police. The matter cannot be kept too secret. Country policemen are likely to talk."

"Yes, I understand."

"As for getting access to the grounds at night, you would doubtless speak to your porter—"

"I will speak to Gosling; but perhaps it would be better for you to have a key to the side gate," said the Head. "then you can come and go as you wish."

"Excellent!"

"But in case of a meeting with such a desperate character, you will require help—"

"Naturally. I shall have three reliable men posted outside the school walls, who will come in if I whistle. Until they are required, they will keep their distance. I am aware that you would not desire anything in the nature of police business going on here, so far as it can be avoided."

"That is true, Mr. Flick, though, of course, I would not dream of putting any obstacle in the way of your duty."

"My dear sir, I am an old hand, and my duty will be carried out with the minimum of trouble to you. There will be no disturbance of any sort—I shall not incommode you in any way."

"Thank you very much!" said the Head gratefully.

He felt relieved by this delicacy and tact on the part of the inspector. Anxious as he was to preserve the school silver from danger, the Head had an inward shrinking from any disarrangement of the even tenor of his way, and he had thought with dismay of constables posted in the

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quadrangle, and the under-current of excitement it would cause. The inspector evidently knew how to handle his business tactfully.

When Mr. Flick took his leave, the Head walked to the lodge with him, and explained to Gosling, and handed the key of the side gate to the inspector. He returned to the house much relieved in his mind. If Slippery Jim paid Greyfriars a visit, the man from Scotland Yard would be on the spot.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Bouncer on the Watch!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Who's that?" murmured Bob Cherry sleepily.

It was past eleven o'clock, and the Remove dormitory was still and silent.

There had been a great deal of talk on the subject of the mysterious cracksman who was devoting his attention to the neighbourhood before the juniors went to sleep. Many of the fellows had an idea that Slippery Jim might favour Greyfriars with a visit, and some of the fellows had taken cricket-stumps to the dormitory, to be ready in case of need.

Certainly the cracksman, if he came, was not likely to burgle a junior dormitory; but, as Bolsover major remarked, the motto of the Boy Scouts was, "Be prepared!"—so there was no harm in being ready. Bunter, indeed, averred that the fellow would very likely come to that very dormitory, if he knew anything about William George Bunter's famous watch. That thirty-guinea gold ticker, according to Bunter, would have been worth any cracksman's while.

Billy Bunter had held forth at considerable length as to what he would do if the cracksman came. It appeared—according to Bunter—that he would stride up to him, and fell him to the earth with one fearful blow straight from the shoulder. After that it would be quite easy to secure him.

Skinner unkindly suggested that William George was much more likely to hide under the bed; and as for the thirty-guinea watch, Skinner's idea was that it might roll out of danger, being composed of rolled gold. To which Bunter replied with a snort, and an intimation that the unbelieving Skinner would see what he would see—if the cracksman came.

As a matter of fact, if the cracksman came, Billy Bunter was likely to remain in blissful ignorance of the fact, as he was a first-class sleeper, and nothing short of a Zeppelin attack would have awakened him.

Bob Cherry woke up suddenly when eleven o'clock tolled out. The talk on the subject of the cracksman was still running in his mind, and he sat up in bed as he heard a movement in the dormitory.

"Who's that?" he repeated, looking round him in the gloom. "Who's out of bed?"

"Don't make a row!" said a whispering voice.

"Smithy?"

"Yes. Dry up!"

Bob Cherry blinked at the Bouncer in the dimness. He could make out that Smithy was dressing himself.

"What's the little game?" asked Bob, in wonder. "You're not going out?"

"Yes."

Bob Cherry grunted.

"Not the old game again?" he asked.

"No, you ass!" growled the Bouncer. Vernon-Smith did not like being reminded of the times when he had stolen out of the school after dark to keep it up with the sporting set at the Cross Keys. "Nothing of the kind!"

"Then what—"

"I'm going to have a turn in the quad, that's all."

"Well, you must be a blithering ass!" said Bob Cherry.

"Pretty time of night to take a turn in the quad, I don't think!"

"I've got a reason."

"The giddy burglar?" yawned Bob. "Are you going to watch for him?"

"Exactly."

"Well, you must be a thumping ass! Suppose he comes, what are you going to do?" Bob chuckled. "Are you going to understudy Bunter—stride up to him, and fell him to the earth with one terrific blow, if he'll let you?"

"Oh, rats!"

The Bouncer finished dressing, and moved quietly to the door. Bob Cherry yawned, and put his head on the pillow again.

The remote chance that the burglar might come to Greyfriars did not seem to Bob a sufficient cause for remaining awake.

"What's that?" came a voice from Harry Wharton's bed.

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He had awakened, too. "Is that somebody gone out, Bob?"

"Yes; Smithy!" yawned Bob. "He's gone to look for the merry cracksman. I wish him luck. Must be off his rocker, I think."

"Well, of all the asses!" said Wharton. "There'll be a row if he's found outside the dorm at this time."

"And they'll think he's up to his old tricks," said Bob. "The Head wouldn't be a fat lot obliged to him if he knew."

"It's all rot!" said Harry. "It's pretty certain that that inspector chap who came to-day came about the cracksman. Most likely there's somebody on the watch already—a bobby or somebody."

"I shouldn't wonder. Well, I'm going to sleep. You can call me if you hear a terrific fight going on."

Wharton laughed, and settled down to sleep again.

Meanwhile, the Bouncer had gone to the lower box-room, and let himself out by the window.

He reached the ground, and hurried round the School House into the big quad.

Lights still glimmered from two or three windows in the great facade of the School House.

Mr. Quelch, Mr. Prout, and the Head were still up. The other windows were dark.

The Bouncer settled himself among the elms in the quad, concealed by the thick shadows of the trees, and watched the house.

Mr. Prout's light was soon extinguished, and then Mr. Quelch's. Only the light in the Head's study still glimmered out into the gloom.

At half-past eleven that light was also gone, and the house lay in unbroken blackness.

Quiet and still, the Bouncer waited patiently.

There were strange thoughts and suspicions at work in Vernon-Smith's mind. Never had he been more alert than he was when midnight sounded out from the old clock-tower of Greyfriars.

Often of old had the Bouncer of Greyfriars been wakeful while others slept. In the wild days of his first term he had sometimes crept back to the dormitory at three in the morning, and his iron constitution had enabled him to bear a strain that would have knocked out almost any other fellow in the Remove. He seemed to feel neither sleepiness nor fatigue as he watched now in the dark old shadowed quadrangle.

From where he stood he could see the window of the Head's study—a pale glimmer in the dimness of the summer night.

He watched patiently, tirelessly.

One, two had boomed out dully into the night. All Greyfriars had long been sleeping.

But the Bouncer started suddenly, and his eyes gleamed as he heard a soft and stealthy footstep in the silence.

He clenched his hands hard.

Guided by a strange suspicion—a suspicion so strange and almost incredible that he doubted it himself—he had taken up his watch. But that stealthy step banished doubt from his mind. There was someone in the quadrangle—someone who moved with creeping steps. Who was abroad in the quad at two o'clock in the morning? The blackest of black sheep of the Sixth would not have stayed out till that hour.

The Bouncer watched, with glinting eyes.

Against the darkness of the house, close to the Head's window, a darker patch of shadow appeared—it was a moving form.

It stopped below the window, and the pale glimmer of the glass was shut off by the interposing figure.

The Bouncer's heart beat hard.

His hand slid into his pocket, and closed upon a short, heavy life-preserver. He had not come unprepared. Few fellows would have cared to tackle the midnight marauder alone, unaided; but the Bouncer's nerves were of steel, and he did not feel the slightest doubt or hesitation. He only waited to make sure.

The Bouncer dearly loved the limelight, and certainly a junior who tackled the notorious cracksman "on his own" would come in for a liberal share of limelight. And the Bouncer hardly knew the meaning of the word fear.

There was a low scratching sound from the direction of the window.

Vernon-Smith knew what it meant as it reached his straining ears in the stillness. A diamond was cutting at a section of the glass, to enable the intruder to reach the catch within and open the window.

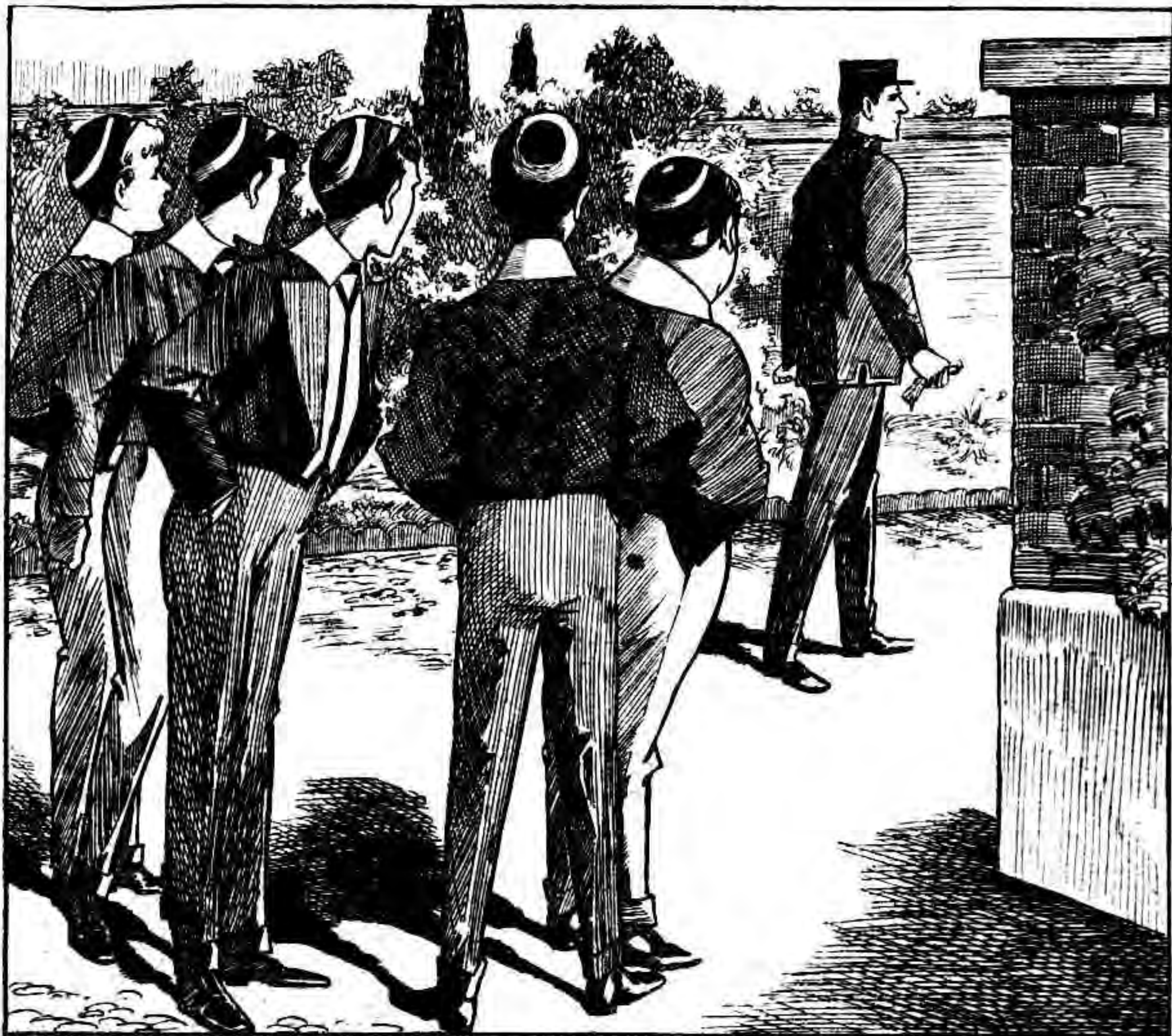
There was no doubt now.

The Bouncer left his shelter, and tiptoed towards the house. With unflinching determination he approached the dark figure crouched on the broad sill of the study window.

The scratching ceased suddenly.

The crouching man looked round sharply, suspiciously. A

DELICIOUS TUCK-HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1st.



The juniors glanced towards a man who had entered at the gates, and was crossing towards the School House. The man wore the uniform of an inspector of police, but they knew that he did not belong to the local force.
(See Chapter 2.)

glimmer of starlight fell on his face, and the Bouncer recognised the sharp features, the big, thick black beard of the man he had seen the previous night.

It was Slippery Jim!

Cautious as Vernon-Smith had been, the keen ears of the thief had detected some slight sound, and he had taken the alarm.

There was a soft thud as he leaped down from the window-sill.

His glance swept round quickly, suspiciously, into the gloom.

The Bouncer was within six feet of him. He threw caution to the winds then, as he saw that the man was alarmed.

"Help!"

His voice rang out with startling clearness through the silence. And as he shouted he leaped forward and hurled himself upon the cracksman.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

No Limelight!

"HELP!"

That loud, ringing shout reached many startled ears in the house. In the Remove dormitory Bob Cherry started up in bed.

"Help!"

For a second time the shout rang out from the quadrangle.

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"HIS OWN FAULT!"

"Smithy!" he gasped. "Smithy's yelling for help! Come on, you fellows!"

Bob tore out of the dormitory in his pyjamas. There was a sound of opening doors and a buzz of voices.

In the quadrangle, Vernon-Smith had no time to shout again. He was grappling with the cracksman, and struggling for his life.

The man leaped back, and eluded the sweep of the life-preserver as Vernon-Smith struck at him. He muttered a curse between his teeth, and turned to run. But the Bouncer rushed on, and the cracksman grappled with him.

They struggled furiously.

The Bouncer needed all his strength now for the fight, but his voice had been heard. Doors and windows were opening, and lights gleamed out.

The cracksman had grasped the Bouncer with arms that seemed like iron, and, strong as he was, the junior realised that he was nothing like a match for the man. He tried to get his right arm free to use his weapon again. But he was locked in the grasp of the ruffian.

With savage strength the cracksman bore him to the ground, in spite of his furious resistance. In the struggle the black beard had come off and the slouch hat of the ruffian was trampled under foot.

The Bouncer crashed to the ground with a concussion that knocked the breath out of his body. The cracksman dragged

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himself away from Vernon-Smith's relaxing hands, and leaped panting to his feet.

As the Bouncer gasped on the ground, the cracksman fled across the quadrangle to the wall.

Vernon-Smith raised himself on his knees, the life-preserver still in his hand. With a steady hand, panting as he was, he lurched it.

There was a yell of pain from the fleeing man, and he reeled for a moment. The missile had found its billet, and it crashed to the ground as the running man staggered. But the rascal ran on, and as Vernon-Smith scrambled up he heard him at the school wall. He had reached the little gate set in the thick wall at a short distance from the big bronze gates of the school. But he paused there only a moment, and then ran along the wall and climbed it with desperate haste.

Vernon-Smith, guided by the sound, rushed after him, in time to hear him drop into the road.

He turned back with angry disappointment.

Slippery Jim had justified his name once more. He was gone. For a moment the junior heard the rapid patter of footsteps on the hard road outside, and then there was silence.

The big door of the School House had swung open. Wingate of the Sixth, half-dressed, was in the quadrangle, and after him came Bob Cherry and Mr. Quelch, the latter carrying a lamp. The Remove-master uttered an exclamation as Vernon-Smith came into the light.

"What has happened?" he exclaimed. "Was it you who called, Vernon-Smith?"

"Yes, sir."

"What—Why—"

"It was the burglar, sir!"

Mr. Quelch looked at him very sharply.

"What do you mean? Where is he?"

"He's gone, sir! I found him in the quad trying to get in at the Head's window," said Vernon-Smith quietly. "I went for him—"

"This is most extraordinary, Vernon-Smith! What were you doing out of your dormitory at such an hour?"

"I was keeping watch, sir."

"Bless my soul! How dare you do anything of the sort!" exclaimed the Remove-master irritably. "Probably you have been frightened by a shadow. There is no sign of a burglar here!"

"Look at this, sir," said Bob Cherry.

He picked up the thick, black beard from the ground and handed it to the Form-master.

"And this!" said Harry Wharton. It was the slouched hat the cracksman had worn. "Somebody has been here, sir."

"Looks like it, sir," said Wingate.

All eyes were turned on Vernon-Smith. There was a crowd in the quadrangle now. The Head came out, pale and startled, in his dressing-gown.

The Bouncer set his lips hard. He had failed in his self-imposed task, and now he had to face the music.

"Mr. Quelch, what is it? Is it possible—"

"A most extraordinary occurrence, sir," said the Remove-master, with compressed lips. "It appears that Vernon-Smith has taken it upon himself to keep watch in the quadrangle for burglars, and he has alarmed the house—whether with or without reason I am trying to ascertain."

Dr. Locke frowned.

"You should have done nothing of the sort, Vernon-Smith. You have very probably interfered seriously with the arrangements made by the police."

The Bouncer bit his lip.

Had the cracksman been captured, the Bouncer would certainly have been the cynosure of all eyes, and his cool proceeding in taking the task upon himself would have been excused. But the cracksman had not been captured, and the master was not at all convinced that the cracksman had been there at all.

"I am sorry, sir," said Vernon-Smith, colouring. "I—I fancied that the man was coming here to-night."

"I do not see any reason why you have fancied so," said the Head. "You should not allow your nerves to be affected in this way because a burglary took place at a house some miles distant."

The Bouncer flushed crimson, and some of the juniors grinned. If there was anything Vernon-Smith prided himself upon it was his nerve, and the fact that it was never shaken whatever happened. Instead of being regarded as bold, intrepid, or foolhardy, his vigil was put down to shaken nerves. The Bouncer could not speak for a moment.

"I doubt whether the burglar has been here at all," continued the Head, with asperity. "Probably you were frightened by some shadow—"

"Shadows do not wear black beards and slouch hats, sir," said the Bouncer, with ironic impertinence.

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"What! What do you mean? Bless my soul! Were these things found here, Mr. Quelch?" asked the Head, looking at the disguise left behind by the fugitive.

"Apparently so, sir."

"That beard was worn by the cracksman, sir," said Vernon-Smith. "It came off while I was struggling with him."

"You struggled with him? You had no right to run such a risk. I am very angry with you, Vernon-Smith. Suppose you had been injured—"

"I was willing to risk that, sir. I was not injured, but the cracksman was. I gave him a clump with a life-preserver."

"My hat!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Bless my soul!" said the Head.

Mr. Quelch was looking very sharply at the Bouncer. He was well acquainted with Vernon-Smith's character—he knew how the Bouncer loved to startle his Form-fellows by cool and reckless actions. That would account for Vernon-Smith's enterprise—it might also account for a "spoof" adventure in the shadows of the night. Mr. Quelch was not at all satisfied that the black beard and the slouch hat had been left behind by a fleeing malefactor.

"Then then it appears that the wretch has really been here?" said the Head, looking at Mr. Quelch.

"I am not at all sure," said the Remove-master. "I hope that Vernon-Smith is telling exactly what happened. But these articles could easily be obtained by a boy who wished to create a sensation to bring himself into prominence."

"Dear me!"

"Mr. Quelch!" exclaimed the Bouncer, starting.

He had not expected that.

"I am sorry to make such a suggestion, Vernon-Smith," said Mr. Quelch coldly; "but you have brought it upon yourself. It was an act of astounding impertinence upon your part to take it upon yourself to leave your dormitory without permission at midnight, and watch for a burglar who you had no real reason to suppose would come here. I cannot help suspecting that this whole matter is a foolish trick!"

"The man was trying to get in at the window of the Head's study, sir!" exclaimed the Bouncer hotly. "He was cutting the glass with a diamond when I tackled him."

"Indeed! That is how Inspector Flick expected the villain to act if he came," said the Head. "Pray bring your lamp to the window, Mr. Quelch!"

The light was flashed on the study window. A dozen eyes saw the mark of the diamond where it had already scored on the pane. There was no doubt that someone had attempted to cut through the glass.

"Are you satisfied now, sir?" exclaimed the Bouncer triumphantly.

"No; I am not satisfied!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "That mark could be made as easily as these theatrical things could be brought here, by a foolish and reckless boy who wished to make a sensation."

"Undoubtedly," said the Head. "You are liable to the very grave suspicion of having alarmed the school for a foolish trick, Vernon-Smith."

"Dr. Locke! I—I—"

"Enough! In any case, you have done serious wrong in leaving your dormitory and exposing yourself to danger, Vernon-Smith, even if your story is true. You will go back to bed at once, and if you leave the house at night on any future occasion I shall punish you severely—most severely. If, indeed, the burglar was here, you have probably prevented his capture by your foolish interference. In every way you have done harm by your reckless and impertinent action. My boys, go back to bed. I am sorry you have been disturbed owing to this reckless lad."

The Bouncer, with feelings too deep for words, strode into the house. The fellows made their way back to the dormitories, excitedly discussing the strange happening. Mr. Quelch carefully locked and chained the door before returning to bed. And in Greyfriars the general opinion was that Vernon-Smith of the Remove had played the "giddy ox" for the sake of getting into the limelight, and that the cracksman had never been near the school at all.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Doubting Thomases!

MR. QUELCH put the light out in the Remove dormitory after the juniors had turned in. All but Billy Bunter and Lord Mauleverer had gone down after the alarm. Billy Bunter had dived under the bedclothes, and remained there until the rest of the Form returned.

After Mr. Quelch had gone, there was a buzz of excited voices in the dormitory. All the Remove wanted to know

exactly what had happened. But the Bounder was in an uncommunicative mood, and for some time he refused to speak.

"Dash it all, let's know what happened, Smithy!" said Bob Cherry. "Was there really a burglar at all?"

"Jolly clever game," remarked Skinner; "but not quite clever enough for old Quelch. He's as sharp as a razor. Where did you get that black beard, Smithy?"

"Does it belong to the Remove Dramatic Society?" chuckled Snoop.

"I guess it was cute, but not cute enough," said Fisher T. Fish. "I calculate I could have worked the riddle better than that, Smithy."

"I say, you fellows, I knew it was spoof. That's why I didn't trouble to come down," said Bunter, with a fat chuckle.

"Was that why you hid under the bedclothes?" asked Peter Todd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Smithy's word is good enough for us. If he says there was a cracksman, there was a cracksman!"

"Thanks, Wharton!" said the Bounder, speaking for the first time.

"Tell us what happened, kid."

"I don't mind."

Vernon-Smith related his adventure, with detail, from beginning to end. The Remove fellows listened with deep attention, but a general chuckle followed the story.

"Pile it on!" said Skinner.

"Wasn't he masked?" asked Stott. "These bold, bad burglars are generally masked. And you haven't mentioned a revolver."

"Didn't he fire at you?" said Skinner, in an imploring voice. "Tell us that he fired at you, and missed you by a quarter of an inch. Then you rushed upon him with boundless pluck and felled him to the ground—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can believe me or not, as you choose!" said the Bounder savagely.

"Thanks. I choose not to."

"Same here!"

"I calculate you are romancing, Smithy!"

"The believableness is terrific!" said Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh. "I place the topmost relyfulness on the statements of the esteemed Smithy."

"So do I," said Wharton. "Shut up, you cackling duffers! Smithy is pitching a straight yarn. All the same, Smithy, you've put your foot in it. You can't expect the Head to like the idea of a junior in the Remove taking such a job on himself."

"There would have been a burglary if I hadn't been there."

"Ye-es; but suppose you had been injured? The Head would have been held responsible by your father. Even if the cracksman did come, it's only natural for the Head to be waxy."

"Quelch doesn't believe the man came," remarked Tom Brown.

"He will believe he has come when he has burgled the Head's safe!" said Vernon-Smith bitterly.

"Well, it's the Head's safe, not yours," said Bolsover major. "The Head hasn't asked you to look after it, has he?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"Besides, it's being looked after," said Nugent. "That inspector chap who was here to-day—he's up to something. You heard what the Head said—that if the chap was here, you've very likely prevented him from being caught. I shouldn't wonder if that Scotland Yard Man is on the watch somewhere."

"I'm sure he was," said the Bounder drily.

"Well, if you're sure of that—though I don't see how you can be sure—what did you want to chip in for?"

"What I specially like about it is the black beard," said Skinner humorously. "It was really an artistic touch, that. But Smithy hasn't explained yet where he got that black beard."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Bounder grunted, and refused to speak again. Evidently most of the Remove took Mr. Quelch's view—that the whole thing was a reckless trick to cause a sensation.

There was a regular fusillade of chaff directed towards the Bounder's bed; but as he did not answer a syllable further the Removites gave it up, and they were soon asleep again.

When the juniors turned out in the morning, the Bounder was looking gloomy, and he bathed and dressed to an accompaniment of merry remarks from the Removites. He left the dormitory without speaking a word.

Harry Wharton joined him in the quadrangle. Wharton fully believed the Bounder's statements, and he sympathised with him amid the general mockery of the Remove.

"Precious lot of silly asses!" growled the Bounder, referring

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to the Removites. "I didn't foresee anything of this kind. If I'd nailed the rotter, it would have been all right."

"It was a jolly reckless thing, Smithy," said the captain of the Remove. "I don't quite see, either, how you felt so sure that the fellow would come last night."

"I had my reasons."

"But what reasons?"

"What's the good of telling you?" said Vernon-Smith, with a grunt. "You'd only laugh at the idea. I'll tell you this—I believed the man was coming last night because he had been here yesterday surveying the ground and taking notes."

Wharton stared at him.

"You saw him?"

"I believe so."

"Then you ought to tell the Head."

"And be laughed at—licked, very likely!"

"But—but I don't understand. What was the man like?"

"Like a police-inspector from Scotland Yard."

The captain of the Remove fairly jumped.

"Why, you howling ass!" he exclaimed. "I remember you told me Mr. Flick was like that chap you saw at Friar-dale Park—something about his nose. But surely you're not ass enough to think—"

"There you go!" grinned the Bounder. "I was a fool to tell you anything! Don't mention it to anybody else, for goodness' sake!"

"I'm not likely to," said Harry, laughing. "The fellows would think you were off your rocker. For my sake, don't say anything of the kind to the Head. It might mean a licking."

"I don't mean to."

After breakfast Vernon-Smith was called into Mr. Quelch's study.

The Remove-master questioned him closely as to the happenings of the previous night, and he seemed somewhat impressed by the Bounder's statements.

"I hardly know what to say to you, Vernon-Smith," said Mr. Quelch, at last. "If you have been guilty of a foolish trick, you are worthy of the most exemplary punishment. But even if all you tell me is correct, you must see for yourself that you have acted in a most reprehensible manner. Certain precautions have been taken to guard the valuables here, and to effect the capture of the burglar if he should pay us a visit. It is very likely that your interference has had the most unfortunate results."

"May I ask one question, sir?" said the Bounder. "Is it Inspector Flick who is taking the precautions you speak of?"

Mr. Quelch raised his eyebrows.

"I do not see how you know anything about Inspector Flick, Vernon-Smith. However, I may tell you that the whole matter is in his hands. I trust you will see that help from a junior in the Lower Fourth is not required. I must ask you, Vernon-Smith, to give me your promise not to leave the house again at night. I am willing to credit you with disinterested motives, but you have done nothing but harm, and in any case your conduct was outrageously impertinent."

"I promise, sir," said the Bounder submissively.

"Very well! I shall now let the matter drop. You may go."

The Bounder went.

"I've promised not to go out of the house at night again burglar-hunting," he told Wharton, who asked him the result of the interview.

"That's good enough," said Harry. "Better leave it alone."

"But I haven't promised not to leave the dormitory," said the Bounder coolly.

"Does that mean that you're going to keep on?" exclaimed the captain of the Remove.

"If I see fit—yes."

"Well, you must be an ass! Quelch has let you off lightly this time, but next time it will be a flogging."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Well, why not chuck it up?" urged Wharton. "It isn't really your bizney, you know."

"It's my bizney to nail that scoundrel, if I can," said Vernon-Smith. "I'm not the chap to be beaten. Quelch will talk to a different tune when I nail him."

"Bow-wow!"

"And I've got an idea," said the Bounder, his eyes gleaming. "I've got a plan in my head. We'll see whether Slippery Jim will beat me in the end."

The Bounder walked away without further explanation. Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders. Vernon-Smith was obstinate, and intended to have his own way; and he would not escape so cheaply next time. But it was of no use arguing with the Bounder when his mind was made up.

NEXT
MONDAY—

"HIS OWN FAULT!"

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.



Wingate yanked Bunter along without an effort, and dragged him, wriggling, into No. 7 Study. Bob Cherry of the Remove was seated on the table, with his hands in his pockets, smiling. There was no sign of a burglar, and Billy Bunter blinked round the study in amazement. (See Chapter 9.)

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Hauled Over the Coals!

"H ALLO, hallo, hallo! Here's the inspector-bird again!"

It was just before morning lessons when the Scotland Yard gentleman was seen crossing the quad to the School House. The juniors regarded him curiously as he went in, and was shown to the Head's study. Inspector Flick was looking somewhat grim, and they wondered whether he had heard of Vernon-Smith's attempt to capture his crackman.

Dr. Locke was about to go to the Sixth Form room, when Mr. Flick was shown in. He politely bade the gentleman from Scotland Yard to be seated.

"I am afraid I am interrupting you, sir," said Mr. Flick. "I shall detain you only a few minutes. I have a complaint to make."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. Someone belonging to this school has very seriously interfered with my plans," said the inspector tersely. "I was on the watch last night with my men, outside the school walls. One of my men observed a man climbing the school wall after midnight."

"Bless my soul!"

"It was undoubtedly the crackman. Word was passed round to my men, and I was about to enter by the gate—when the man would have been captured beyond the shadow of a doubt—but all at once there was some disturbance, and the man leaped from the wall and fled. We sighted him as he did so, and pursued him, but he gave us the slip in the darkness."

"Then the man was really here?" exclaimed the Head.

"Undoubtedly he was, and undoubtedly I should have laid

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hands upon him had he not taken the alarm at that unlucky moment. Someone must have been stirring, to give him the alarm."

"I am more sorry than I can say," said the Head, biting his lip. "A foolish boy in a junior Form had the wild idea of keeping watch for the burglar. Of course, this was quite without my knowledge, or that of any of the masters. He gave the alarm, but as the man was not to be seen, I concluded that he had been the victim of a nervous fancy."

The inspector granted.

"It is very unfortunate, sir," he remarked. "The man was all but in our hands, if the alarm had not been given at that moment. Three minutes more and my men would have been within the walls, and his escape would have been cut off. The boy you speak of saved him from arrest."

"I can only apologise, Mr. Flick, and assure you that nothing of the kind will be allowed to happen again," said Dr. Locke. "I quite understand how you feel in the matter. It must be a great disappointment to you, as, indeed, it is to me also. The foolish boy is deserving of the greatest blame."

"I trust he will be adequately punished for his escapade!" growled the inspector.

Dr. Locke coughed.

"He has been spoken to very severely. Indeed, if I had known

the harm he had done, I should have caned him," he said. "At the time I regarded it only as a false alarm. Perhaps there may be another opportunity of arresting that nefarious rascal."

The inspector shrugged his shoulders.

"It is very unlikely that he will return here for some nights at least," he said. "This means that I shall be compelled to watch night after night, possibly for a week, with perhaps nothing to come of it after all. It is very hard upon me; my duty is not an easy matter in any case."

"I fully understand that. I can hardly say how I regret this unfortunate happening. I shall speak to the boy myself," said the Head. "You may rest assured that there shall be no repetition of his action."

"If you assure me on that point, sir—"

"I do, absolutely."

"Then I must be satisfied, sir. I am sorry to have troubled you; but, you see, I have a difficult duty to perform in any case, without having my task made harder by foolish and irresponsible schoolboys."

"Quite so—quite so!"

Mr. Flick, still looking grim, took his leave.

The Head rang for Trotter, and sent him for the Bounder. The Remove were just going into their Form-room when Vernon-Smith was called to the Head's study.

He found Dr. Locke with a grim frown upon his brow.

"Vernon-Smith, I have sent for you to tell you precisely what harm you did by your reckless escapade last night," said the Head angrily. "As Mr. Queeb has dealt with you, I do not feel justified in inflicting punishment. But I warn you that in case of any repetition of your action I shall administer a flogging."

"Has Inspector Flick complained, sir?" asked Vernon-Smith, with great humility.

"He has, very seriously, and placed me in a most awkward position. It appears that the housebreaker was really here last night, and, owing to your giving him the alarm, the inspector was prevented from carrying out his measures for effecting the man's capture. You understand now the harm you have done."

"I am sorry, sir."

"Well, if you are sorry, there is nothing more to be said. I suppose your motives were good, though there is little excuse to be made for you. But understand that any further action of the same kind will be followed by the severest punishment."

"I have already promised Mr. Quelch not to leave the house at night, sir," said Vernon-Smith.

"Very well. You may go."

The Bounder returned to his Form-room.

He was looking very thoughtful during morning lessons. After morning school the news spread that the alarm of the previous night had not been, after all, a false one. Billy Bunter learned that Inspector Flick had been "nosing" round the school during the morning, and that he had taken away the black beard and the slouch hat left by the baffled burglar. The juniors ceased to clip the Bounder on the subject of the supposed "spoof."

But most of them agreed to attribute the cracksman's escape to Vernon-Smith's interference.

"Silly ass!" said Skinner. "If he'd stayed in bed the inspector would have had the cracksman safe as houses. I wonder old Flick didn't ask the Head to flog him!"

"But what an awful ass to let the man get away!" said Billy Bunter, in great disgust. "I suppose he hadn't the pluck to tackle him. Now, if I'd been there—"

"Well, what would you have done, fatty?" growled Bob Cherry.

"I should have strode up to him—"

"Rolled up, you mean."

"Oh, really, Cherry! I should have strode up to him and felled him to the earth with one terrific blow—"

"Fathead!"

"Then I should have held him till help came, and handed him over," said Bunter calmly. "What's wanted for a job like that is pluck—pluck and determination, you know. Smithy was no good."

"Why, you fat idiot—" exclaimed Vernon-Smith angrily.

Bunter wagged a fat forefinger at him.

"My dear Smithy, the job was too big for you!" he said.

"You ought to have kept quiet, and called me."

"Called you, you fat oyster?"

"Yes, called me! I could have dealt with him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I jolly well wish he'd come again!" said Bunter regretfully. "Then you'd see what you'd see. I shouldn't wonder if he does come again, too. These burglars get lots of information, you know, and I dare say he's heard about my watch."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A thirty-guinea watch would be worth his while," said



The man was struggling madly to withdraw his hand, but it was dragged down over the sash ruthlessly, with such force as almost to break the wrist. (See Chapter 10.)

Bunter. "Then there's my diamond pin. That's worth—"

"Fourpence!" said Ogilvy.

"Oh, really, Ogilvy! That diamond pin cost forty pounds!"

"Not forty thousand pounds?" asked Hazeldene sarcastically.

"No; forty pounds—I mean, guineas. It was a present from one of my titled relations," said Bunter. "And that, added to a fifty-guinea watch—"

"Fifty guineas now!" grinned Peter Todd. "The price is going up."

"Better pop them for safety," suggested Nugent. "Old Lazarus would lend you ninepence on the two."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm jolly well going to lock 'em up carefully!" said Bunter. "But if I'd been in Smithy's place last night—"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Of course, a chap can't help being a funk—"

"A funk?" yelled the Bounder.

Bunter nodded calmly.

"Yes, I suppose it was funk, or you'd have had the cracksman when he was here. You had the chance."

Vernon-Smith clenched his hand, and unclenched it again.

"You're not worth licking, you fat idiot!" he growled, and stalked away.

Billy Bunter gave a fat chuckle.

"Smithy don't like being called a funk," he remarked.

"He isn't a funk!" snapped Squiff. "He tackled the burglar all right, but the man was too much for him."

"He wouldn't have been too much for me!" sneered Bunter. "It was pluck that was wanted—pluck and determination. That's where I should have come in strong."

And Bunter rolled away with a self-satisfied smirk. When there was no danger William George Bunter was as brave as a lion, and as it was unlikely that he would ever come into

contact with the enterprising burglar it was safe to gas to his heart's content. But Skinner, who was of a humorous disposition, had his own ideas about that. He dropped into the Form-room that afternoon, where the Bouncer was detained and grinding out lines.

"You've heard what Bunter's going to do if he meets the burglar?" Skinner remarked.

The Bouncer grunted.

"Fat idiot!" he said.

"Why shouldn't he have a chance?" suggested Skinner. "Suppose the burglar came here after his watch—"

"Eh? His watch isn't worth ten bob."

"I know that. But a burglar might think it was worth fifty guineas, and come for it," said Skinner.

"What the dickens—"

"We've got masks and black cloaks and things in the dramatic society's property-box," said Skinner; "and I can arrange for Bunter to be alone in his study this evening. Toddy will help—"

The Bouncer grinned.

"Good egg!"

During that afternoon Billy Bunter held forth to all who would listen to him on the subject of what he would have done if he had encountered the midnight marauder. The Owl of the Remove did not suspect that he was shortly to be put to the test.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Awful for Bunter!

PETER TODD finished his preparation and rose and yawned.

Alonzo Todd and Tom Dutton had finished, too, and Billy Bunter, who never troubled much about prep, had "chucked it," and was reposing in the armchair. Peter Todd looked at the fat junior with a grin.

"I'm going down," he remarked. "You coming, Lonzy?"

"My dear Peter, I had intended to peruse the latest report of the missionary society at the Gooby-Booby Islands until bed-time," said Alonzo mildly. "You would hardly believe, my dear Peter, that even during the excitement and stress of the war the supply of tracts and trousers to those unfortunate islanders had been undiminished."

"You don't say so!" said Peter sarcastically.

"Indeed I do, my dear Peter!" said Alonzo, beaming. "The knowledge of that is more than a full recompense for having contributed my pocket-money for several weeks to the society, and enabled the good, kind Mr. Spoofer to carry on his noble work. If you like I will read you the reports of Mr. Spoofer and Mr. Walker—"

"No, you won't!" said Peter cheerfully. "You'll come down to the Common-room. Come on, Dutton!"

Billy Bunter rose from the armchair. Peter glanced at him.

"If you're going to stay in the study, Bunter—"

"I'm not!"

"Oh, all right! But if you do, mind, you're not to scoff the tarts I've put in the cupboard."

Bunter's eyes glistened behind his spectacles.

"I—I'm rather tired," he remarked sinking back into the armchair. "I think I'll take a rest here till bed-time."

The three juniors left the study, Peter closing the door behind him. Billy Bunter waited till their footsteps had died away, and then he made a run for the study cupboard. Three large and juicy jam-tarts reposed on a dish within.

"Beast!" murmured Bunter. "He never even told me there were any tarts here till he just let it out by accident! I'll jolly well show him whether I'm not going to have some! I'll take one, anyway!"

Gobble, gobble!

As a member of Study No. 7 Billy Bunter felt entitled to one tart at least. But one tart did not last him long. It did not take him many minutes, however, to decide to his own satisfaction that he was entitled to another. The second one disappeared. By that time Bunter concluded that it wasn't much use leaving a single tart for his study-mates, and the third followed the first two.

He had finished the third tart when there was a sound at the door. Billy Bunter started back from the cupboard with a guilty look. It had surprised him a little that Peter should leave the tarts there at his mercy, and he supposed that Toddy had come back to lock the cupboard door.

But it was not Toddy who came in.

As the study door opened, Bunter's eyes almost started through his spectacles at the sight of the dread figure that entered.

"G-g-g-good gracious!" stuttered Bunter.

It was a figure draped in a long black cloak, with a black mask covering the whole of his face, and a black, slouched hat pulled down over his head. A black-gloved hand rose in a menacing gesture, and two eyes, glittering through the holes in the mask, were fixed upon Bunter.

"Silence!" hissed a voice.

The Owl of the Remove staggered back, and collapsed into the armchair. His little round eyes grew almost like saucers behind his glasses.

The terrible visitor closed the door softly, and turned the key in the lock.

Click!

Then he turned upon Bunter, who watched him as if mesmerised with terror.

"Silence! A word, and you die!" hissed the deep, awe-inspiring voice. "Tremble!"

The command was not needed. Billy Bunter was already trembling like a jelly.

"You know who I am!" went on the deep voice. "You have heard of Slippery Jim!"

"Oh, dear!" groaned Bunter.

"Attempt to raise an alarm and a bullet finds your heart!" There was a click under the black cloak that sounded like the cocking of a pistol. It might have been made by a penknife closing sharply; but Billy Bunter was not thinking about penknives. "Mind, I am a desperate man! These hands are already deeply imbrued with gore. My revolver is ready. Are you prepared to die?"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"The watch!" hissed Slippery Jim. "The diamond pin!"

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**ONE
PENNY.**

13

strode in, and levelled his revolver at me, and said 'Hands up!'

"Did he?" murmured Bob Cherry.

"He—he had heard all about my thirty-guinea watch and the forty-pound pin. He demanded them, and I defied him."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Then he levelled his revolver, but before he could pull the trigger I struck him a fearful blow."

"Where?" asked Bob.

"On the—the nose. The blood spurted out—it was a fearful blow. He fell with a crash."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then I went out quite calmly, to call for help to seize him."

"Yes! you looked calm when you bolted out!" chuckled Skinner.

"Well, of all the blessed Prussians!" said Peter Todd. "The Kaiser is a fool to Bunter, when it comes to real, solid lying!"

"Oh, really, Toddy? It happened just as I said. I can't imagine how the villain's got away, unless he went up the chimney. He's got a black eye, I know that. I gave it him—a terrific blow."

"A black eye and a squashed nose," said Bob Cherry. "You're quite sure about that, Bunter?"

"Of course I am! I struck him—"

Billy Bunter stopped suddenly.

Bob Cherry had opened the cupboard door, and from the cupboard he took a black cloak, a black mask, and a slouched hat.

Bunter's eyes almost started through his spectacles at the sight of them. He recognised the awe-inspiring paraphernalia of Slippery Jim. The expression on his face made the Removotes yell with laughter.

"I—I say, you fellows, the—the villain must have left those behind when he—he escaped!" stuttered Bunter. "I—I suppose you'll believe that he's been here now?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly oyster, it was Bob all the time!" roared Peter Todd. "And we were outside the door, and heard you owning up about the watch and the pin. So you gave a bob for the forty-pound pin, did you?"

"And the watch is rolled-gold!" chortled Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter's jaw dropped.

"You—you rotters!" he stuttered.

"Six feet six!" yelled Rake. "Bob must have grown like the beanstalk in the fairy-tale while he was in the study."

"And a black eye and a squashed nose!" gurgled Bob Cherry. "Oh, Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I say, you fellows!" For once even William George Bunter was taken aback. But he quickly recovered. "I—I say, I knew it was Bob all the time, you know."

"What?"

"I—I knew it was a jape, so—so I pretended to be scared, just to draw him out," said Bunter. "I'll bet Bob thought I was really frightened! He, he, he!"

"You bet I did!" grinned Bob Cherry. "And so you were, you fat fraud! You were trembling like a jelly!"

"That was my acting," said Bunter calmly. "I'm a good actor. I say, you fellows, now you've seen what a good actor I am, perhaps you'll let me have Hamlet's part when the play comes off?"

"Well, my hat!"

"Of all the esteemed whoppers—"

"If it had really been Slippery Jim, I should have strode up to him," said Bunter calmly, "and—"

"What?" yelled Peter Todd.

"And felled him with a blow!"

"It's no good talking to that fat Prussian!" said Peter Todd. "The only thing Bunter understands is a bumping. Collar him!"

"Here, I say— Yaroooh! Yoooop!"

Bump!

The juniors streamed out of the study, leaving William George Bunter on the hearthrug, gurgling, and trying to get his second wind.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Catching the Cracksman!

HARRY WHARTON remained awake for some time after the rest of the Remove had fallen asleep that night. The captain of the Remove was uneasy in his mind.

He knew that Vernon-Smith had not abandoned his scheme of going for the mysterious cracksman, and he was uneasy on the Bounder's account. The old ill-feeling between the Bounder and the captain of the Remove was quite at an end, and though they were not exactly pally, Wharton had come to have a friendly regard for his old rival. He was concerned about Vernon-Smith now. The Bounder believed that he had a clue to the cracksman, and Wharton knew well his obstinate and determined nature.

The Bounder had set himself a task, and he would not draw back from it whatever the consequences might be. And the risk was great. There was risk, of course, in an encounter with the cracksman, if he should come, but it was not that Wharton was thinking of. But if he took a hand in the affair again, after the stern warnings from Mr. Quech and the Head, his punishment would be very severe. It was quite probable that the intervention of the reckless junior might disarrange plans laid by the police for dealing with the malefactor. If such a thing should happen, especially a second time, a flogging in Hall would be the least result.

Wharton was anxious, and he did not sleep. He was still awake when twelve o'clock sounded dully through the night.

Then he heard a slight movement in the dormitory. He sat up in bed, peering through the gloom.

"Is that you, Smithy?" he whispered.

"Yes. Quiet!"

"You're going out?"

The Bounder laughed softly.

"Not out of the house," he said.

"But—but where, then?"

"Only downstairs," said the Bounder calmly. "I've promised not to go out of the house, and you know I keep my word."

"Quech would be just as ratty at your going out of the dorm," said Harry. "I wish you'd chuck up the idea, Smithy. It means an awful row if you're found out. Suppose the man comes again, and you give the alarm, and he gets away? It's pretty certain that the police are watching the place, you know, and they may put it down to you if he gets clear."

"The police are not watching the place."

"But Inspector Flick—"

"We shall see," said the Bounder coolly. "You know it's no good talking to me, Wharton. I'm an obstinate beast, you know."

"You are, and no mistake," said Harry. "The Head's told you to keep out of the matter, and it's the Head's business. It's awful cheek of you to chip in again after that."

"Even if I know that the cracksman is coming, and that he will clear out the safe unless I stop him?"

"Ahem! If you know that, it makes a difference, of course. But you don't know anything of the sort, you know."

"We shall see," said Vernon-Smith quietly.

"Well, I suppose you'll have your way. I hope it won't mean a flogging in the morning," said Wharton. "I'm afraid it will, though."

"I'm chancing that."

Vernon-Smith had been dressing while the whispered talk went on. He did not put on his boots, however. In his socks he crept quietly to the door, and opened it almost without a sound.

Wharton impatiently laid his head on the pillow again. Vernon-Smith closed the door and stepped cautiously and quietly down the passage.

At that hour all Greyfriars was sleeping.

The last light had been extinguished, the last door had closed. Vernon-Smith trod very lightly as he stepped past Mr. Quech's door on his way to the stairs. He knew only too well the storm of wrath that would have burst upon his devoted head if the Remove-master had awakened and discovered him out of his dormitory.

He descended the stairs without a sound, and crept along the wide corridor upon which the Head's study opened.

All was darkness.

The windows were all covered with thick, dark hangings, and not a gleam of starlight penetrated. The Bounder groped his way along, and stopped at the door of the study. Silently

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he turned the handle, after a pause to make sure that the study was dark and untenanted.

Blackness reigned within the room.

Even the iron-nerved Bounder's heart beat a little faster as he entered that sacred apartment. But he did not falter. He closed the door quietly behind him, and stood for some minutes motionless in the darkness peering about him.

If the Head should chance to come down—

The Bounder knew what that would mean. But it was not likely to happen; and he was there to take risks.

The big window looking on the Close was covered with dark hangings, which prevented light from escaping when the study was lighted. Vernon-Smith drew a corner of the thick hanging aside and peered into the Close.

It was past midnight now. On the wide old quadrangle a faint glimmer of starlight fell. The big elms loomed up dim and ghostly. The Bounder scanned the starlit quad. There was no sign of living being there. But he knew that if the intruder came he would not come yet. The cracksman would wait till it was absolutely certain that all the inmates of the building were asleep.

Vernon-Smith groped in his pocket. He drew out a thick, strong cord, the end of which was fashioned in a slip-noose.

Then he flattened himself against the wall close to the side of the window, with the hangings concealing him. There he waited, with the looped cord in his hand, his eyes gleaming in the dark, and his heart beating fast.

It was not a pleasant vigil.

The minutes passed slowly on leaden wings, and it seemed an age before he heard the dull stroke of one from the clock-tower.

One o'clock. The house was deeply silent and still. In all the vast building only the Bounder of Greyfriars was awake—watchful as a cat in the dark.

Was the man coming?

After the failure and the alarm of the previous night, had he, perhaps, taken the alarm, and put off his intended visit to the school?

The Bounder did not think so. If his belief was correct, Slippery Jim had no time to lose. The game he was playing was a risky and desperate one, and he would secure the plunder as soon as he could, and depart for safer quarters. Besides, where was the risk, so far as the cracksman could see? If the Bounder's strange suspicion was well-founded, Slippery Jim had nothing to fear from Inspector Flick, of Scotland Yard, who was supposed to be watching for him. He would come—the Bounder was certain that he would come! Only the junior's intervention the previous night had prevented him from carrying out the robbery. And Inspector Flick had taken measures to prevent the intervention of the junior a second time. Yes, he would come!

Two o'clock!

The Bounder was tired, and his eyes grew heavy, but he did not relax his vigilance. There were pins and needles in his cramped limbs as he stood motionless between the dark hangings and the wall, beside the window. But he bore his discomfort with grim determination.

A sudden shadow darkened the glimmer of the starlight on the panes.

The Bounder drew a quick, silent breath, a thrill running through him from head to foot.

Outside the glass a figure, crouching on the broad window-sill, was silhouetted against the starlight.

The Bounder did not move, he did not utter a sound. The slightest sound would have alarmed the man without.

Scratch, scratch, scratch!

Faintly in the silence of the night the sound came in to the straining ears of the hidden junior.

It was the scratch of a diamond on the glass.

The Bounder, wrapped in darkness, concealed by the thick hangings that swathed him, was invisible from without. But the figure of the man on the sill was clear to his eyes, backed by the starlight.

He watched and waited.

Scratch, scratch, scratch!

Faint, but steady, unceasing, the diamond cut its way through the thick glass. Not a tremor did the Bounder feel now, though every moment the desperate cracksman was nearer to his entrance—every fleeting second brought the crisis closer. The Bounder of Greyfriars might have been made of iron at that moment.

Scratch, scratch, scratch, scratch!

The scratching sound suddenly ceased. Silence fell, and then there was a movement without. A breath of keen, cool air came upon the face of the junior within.

A section of the glass had been removed, close to the fastening of the sash. A few moments more, and the fastening would be pushed back, the window opened, and the cracksman would be within the room!

The Bounder watched tensely.

A hand came through the opening—a strong, sinewy hand, groping for the catch.

Then the Bounder moved.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 442.

NEXT
MONDAY—

"HIS OWN FAULT!"

EVERY
MONDAY,

The "Magnet"
LIBRARY.

ONE
PENNY.

With the quickness of a flash he snatched at the hand, and grasped it, dragging it further through the opening.

There was a startled, stifled cry without.

The Bounder's other hand closed on the wrist, dragging it down. Outside, the man was struggling madly to withdraw his hand. But it was dragged down over the sash ruthlessly, with such force as almost to break the wrist. And a second later the slip-noose was slipped over the hand to the wrist and drawn tight. Then, with both hands the Bounder grasped the cord and dragged on it hard, and the whole arm of the trapped cracksman came crashing through the shivered glass.

Vernon-Smith pushed through the hangings, still dragging with all his force upon the cord, and he took a turn of the cord round the handle of the door as he dragged it open, and knotted it there with steady fingers.

Then he stepped into the passage.

"Help!"

His voice rang through the startled House.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Caught!

"HELP!"

In every corner of the building rang the Bounder's cry.

Outside, on the broad sill, the imprisoned cracksman was struggling furiously. His arm was drawn through the window, held at length by the taut cord, and he was a helpless prisoner. Savage curses came from his lips. There was a loud crash of breaking glass as his left hand smashed through a pane in a frantic endeavour to reach his right and release it from the thrall.

But the Bounder had leaped back to the window.

As the left hand clutched at the imprisoned right, Vernon-Smith grasped at it by the wrist, and he held on to it with both hands, dragging it down.

Through the smashed pane a furious, black-bearded face glared at him with eyes that seemed to burn with rage.

The Bounder held on grimly.

"Help!" he shouted again.

There was a clattering of footsteps in the silent house—a buzz of voices. A light gleamed in the passage without—the electric light had been turned on.

Mr. Quelch, in his dressing-gown and slippers, with an angry face, strode into the study.

"Vernon-Smith! Is that you again? How dare you! Why—what—"

The Remove-master almost staggered.

He had switched on the light in the study as he entered.

The sudden illumination revealed a startling sight. Two panes had been smashed through the window. Outside, a dark figure was writhing and struggling, and a maddened, black-bearded face glared in. Across the study was stretched a taut cord, one end fast to the handle of the wide-open door, the other to the right wrist of the cracksman. And to the rascal's other wrist Vernon-Smith was holding on with both hands.

The Remove-master stood thunderstruck.

"What—what—" he stammered.

"I've got him, sir!"

"Bless my soul!"

"It's the cracksman, sir," said Vernon-Smith quietly. "He can't get away. I've got him. But somebody had better go round—"

"Good heavens!" stammered Mr. Quelch.

Wingate and Courtney and Loder of the Sixth hurried into the study with pokers in their hands. They gasped at the strange sight at the window.

"Well, by Jove!" ejaculated Wingate. "Vernon-Smith—"

"A burglar!" exclaimed Loder.

Mr. Quelch recovered himself.

"Follow me!" he exclaimed. "The man must be secured at once. Undoubtedly it is the burglar! Follow me!"

Mr. Quelch hurried out of the study, followed by the three Sixth-Formers. Mr. Prout and Mr. Capper joined them in the passage, and Coker and Blundell of the Fifth. Mr. Quelch hurriedly unfastened the door, and the whole party rushed out into the quadrangle.

Harry Wharton & Co. were already down. The School House was alarmed from end to end, and nearly every fellow was out of bed. Lights gleamed on all sides, and voices buzzed and called. Some of the Removites rushed out after Mr. Quelch and his companions. Harry Wharton hurried to the Head's study.

Vernon-Smith, still gripping the arm of the infuriated cracksman, grinned at him.

"Smithy!" gasped Wharton.

"Got him!" grinned the Bounder. "What do you think now?"

"My hat!"

"The gotfulness is terrific!" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, following Wharton into the study. "Can I lend you an esteemed helpful hand?"

"Hang on if you like," smiled the Bounder. "I've got him safe, though."

Wharton and Hurree Singh laid their grasp upon the struggling cracksmen's arms. It was hardly necessary, however, for Slippery Jim was already secure. The cracksmen was almost foaming at the mouth with fury. There was blood upon his hands and wrists, where the broken glass had cut. Savage curses poured in an unceasing torrent from his snarling lips.

Outside, Mr. Quelch and his companions gathered round the window. The escape of the cracksmen was cut off now, even if he had been able to get loose from the cord in the study.

"We've got him, sir!" said Wingate cheerily. "Now, my man, the game's up! Better take it quietly!"

"Secure him!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Let me bind his hands first, sir," said the Bounder, through the window. "He's most likely got a revolver in his pocket."

"Quite so—quite so!"

"Hold on to his paws, you fellows!"

"We've got him," said Harry.

"The holdfulness is terrific, my ludicrous Smithy," assured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "He cannot get awayfully unless he leaves an esteemed arm here behindfully."

The Bounder dragged a whipcord from his pocket, and coolly slipped it round the wrists of the cracksmen. With a hard and steady hand he drew it tight and knotted it.

Slippery Jim was a helpless prisoner now.

Then the Bounder cast off the cord that held the ruffian to the study door. Outside, Wingate and Courtney and Loder grasped him, and hauled him down off the window-sill, with a bump, to the ground.

"Bring him into the house!" said Mr. Quelch.

The cracksmen was struggling. But with the grip of the three big Sixth-Formers on him, and his hands tightly bound, his struggles were of no avail. He was marched into the house, and the three prefects brought him into the Head's study, followed by Mr. Quelch. The Head had now arrived on the scene, in a state of great agitation. He stared at the sullen, savage-faced ruffian, and at the captors, and at the Bounder of Greyfriars.

"That—that—that is the burglar!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Quelch. "He is captured, owing to Vernon-Smith. It was Vernon-Smith who gave the alarm."

"Indeed! What were you doing out of your dormitory, Vernon-Smith?"

"I was waiting for him to come, sir. When he put his hand through the glass to open the catch, I slipped a slip-knot over it, and held him. Otherwise he would have got away."

"And you—you—you faced that desperate man alone, Vernon-Smith?"

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"He couldn't hurt me, sir. I took him by surprise."

"Vernon-Smith, you have disobeyed my commands, but—"

"Not at all, sir," said the Bounder calmly. "I was ordered not to go out of the house. I didn't go out. I waited for him here, and it was a better dodge, too."

"Good old Smithy!" murmured Bob Cherry, from the passage.

"Really, Vernon-Smith, you are an extraordinary boy!" exclaimed the Head. "You have once again been guilty of recklessness and disobedience, but in the circumstances I do not see how I can punish you. You have certainly acted with great courage. This rascal must be handed over to Inspector Flick at once. Wingate, perhaps you will be kind enough to seek him. He is somewhere about the school, keeping watch—"

The Bounder burst into a laugh.

"Vernon-Smith!" said the Head sternly.

"Wingate won't be able to find Inspector Flick, sir," said Vernon-Smith coolly. "No good looking for him!"

"Really, Vernon-Smith, this is too much impertinence, though you have performed a great service as it happens!" exclaimed the Head. "Wingate, kindly go and look for Inspector Flick. He is somewhere outside the school walls, with several constables, watching the place. Tell him that the burglar is captured. Otherwise, he will be very naturally annoyed at this intervention in his business."

"Yes, sir," said Wingate; and he quitted the study.

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"Your merriment is quite misplaced, Vernon-Smith," said the Head sternly. "I hardly know how to deal with you. Kindly explain to me at once how you came to be here, and how you were aware, as you seem to have been, that the burglar would attempt to enter by my study window this night."

"Vernon-Smith can hardly have known—" said Mr. Quelch.

"I did know," said Vernon-Smith coolly.

"Then you will kindly explain."

"Certainly, sir!"

All eyes were on the Bounder. He undoubtedly had his full share of the limelight now.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Vernon-Smith's Triumph!

"GO it, Smithy!" murmured Bob Cherry.

The Bounder smiled. He was in a position that he enjoyed. And he enjoyed more than anything else the startling tableau that was to come. All eyes were fixed upon him; the sullen cracksmen, held fast by Loder and Courtney, watched him with a deadly glare in his eyes. Had his hands been free, it was evident that the baffled rascal would have hurled himself upon the junior who had defeated him. But the rage and hatred in his face did not disconcert the Bounder.

"I saw the man first on Monday night, sir," said Vernon-Smith. "I was coming home late from Lantham, and I had a puncture, and had to stop and mend it outside Friardale Park. The man bolted over the park wall, and I saw his face clearly—I knew that I should know him again if I saw him."

"I was not aware of this," said Mr. Quelch, with a sharp look at the Bounder.

"Smithy told us, sir," said Harry Wharton.

"When I saw the man again, I knew him," resumed Vernon-Smith, "and it was the next day—yesterday—that I saw him again. He came here—"

"Here!" exclaimed the Head.

"Yes, sir. He was in a different rig, but I knew his face. And when I saw him, I knew that he was after the school silver. He came to spy out the lay of the land, of course."

"You should have spoken to me at once."

"You would not have believed me, sir. I hinted at it to Wharton, and he laughed at the idea. You would most likely have caused me for suggesting such a thing, and if you had mentioned it to the man himself, he would have been put on his guard."

"What are you saying, Smith? Do you mean to imply that this burglar came here in broad daylight and held conversation with me?"

"Yes, sir. And I think it most likely he found out from you where the valuables were kept," said Vernon-Smith coolly. "That was what he came for. That was why I watched in the quadrangle last night, and why I watched in your study to-night. I knew he could not keep up such a game for long, and that he had no time to lose."

"Oh, you infernal young hound!" muttered the cracksmen, grinding his teeth. "Beaten by a boy!"

Vernon-Smith laughed.

"You are speaking in riddles, Vernon-Smith!" said the Head angrily. "Yesterday, as it happens, I had only one caller."

"I know that, sir."

"And that caller was Inspector Flick, of Scotland Yard."

"Quite so, sir."

"Then what do you mean? What—"

"Smithy!" murmured Wharton.

"Look!"

Vernon-Smith stepped to the cracksmen and caught the thick black beard with his hand. It came off in his grasp, revealing a hard, clear-cut, clean-shaven face.

The Head uttered a cry of amazement.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

Bob Cherry gave a yell.

"Inspector Flick! Oh, my only aunt!"

"The inspectorfulness is terrific!" gasped Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Oh, my only esteemed hat!"

"Inspector Flick!" murmured the Head dazedly. "What—what—"

"He is no more Inspector Flick than I am Inspector Grimes," said Vernon-Smith coolly. "He is Slippery Jim, the cracksmen. He came here in a police-inspector's uniform to get information about the crib he was going to crack!"

"Good heavens!"

"I knew his face," continued the Bounder, enjoying the sensation he had caused. "It was the same face I saw over

"This is—is—is astounding!" gasped the Head. "I—I suppose it—it is as you say, Vernon-Smith! Certainly I should not have believed you if you had told me that you recognised the—the inspector as—as a burglar! Really, it is very astounding! Even now I can scarcely credit such effrontery!"

"You are an extraordinary boy, Vernon-Smith! It appears that you have saved me from a very serious loss. The house is not, as I supposed, under the observation of the police. Bless my soul! I even gave that wretched man a key to the side gate!" exclaimed the Head, in agitated tones. "And—and actually pointed out the safe to him, and—and gave him a list of the valuables! Bless my soul!"

"This rascal had, in fact, cleared the ground of any possible danger to himself by coming here as a detective, and being allowed to make what arrangements he pleased," said the Remove-master.

Wingate came back into the study.
"I've looked everywhere, sir, but I can't find anything of Inspector Flick or his men," he said. "Why—— My hat!" yelled Wingate, as his eyes fell upon the now beardless face of the prisoner.

**EVERY
MONDAY.**

The "Magnet" LIBRARY.

**ONE
PENNY.**

"By Jove!" said Wingate.

The sullen cracksmán had not spoken a word; but his look, as it dwelt on Herbert Vernon-Smith, showed what his feelings were.

"Mr. Quelch, will you see that man placed in security while I telephone to the police-station?" said the Head.

"Certainly, sir!"

"My boys, you may go back to bed. Vernon-Smith, you have done very well indeed, and saved me from a serious loss. I excuse you for having taken the matter into your own hands, and I thank you! You may return to your dormitory!"

"Yes, sir."

The Bounder walked out of the study in great spirits. He had been justified at last, and it was the hour of his triumph. Perhaps there was a suspicion of swank in his manner as he walked out with the other juniors; but, in the circumstances, a little swank could be forgiven.

Bob Cherry clapped him on the back in the passage.

"Good old Smithy!" he exclaimed. "Here, shoulder-high, you fellows!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Oh, don't play the giddy ox!" said Vernon Smith.

"Bow-wow! Shoulder-high!"

The grinning juniors closed round the Bounder of Greyfriars, and he was hoisted into the air. On the shoulders of Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Squiff he was borne up the staircase and back to the Remove dormitory. He was carried into the dormitory in great triumph.



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**CAN YOU READ THIS
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OF THE BALD HUNTSMAN?**

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 442.

NEXT MONDAY—

"HIS OWN FAULT!"

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

Billy Bunter was buried beneath his bedclothes, but he ventured to blink out as he heard the reassuring sound of the juniors' voices.

"I—I say, you fellows, was—was it the burglar?" stammered the Owl of the Remove.

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

"Is he—is he gone?"

"No fear!"

"Not gone!" yelled Bunter.

"Still here!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "But he's caught! Tied up like a turkey, my fat tulip, so you can be as brave as a lion!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I—I see!" said Bunter. "Of course, I wasn't at all nervous!"

"Of course not!" said Peter Todd. "You were hiding under the bedclothes because you were bursting with courage!"

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"I guess I was just coming down," remarked Fisher T. Fish. "I just stayed to look for a poker—I mean, a cricket-stump—but I couldn't find it, somehow!"

"Well, you can find it now," said Bob Cherry. "It's safe as houses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Smithy captured the giddy burglar!" said Harry Wharton. "Three cheers for Smithy!"

"Hip, hip, hooray!"

The Remove dormitory rang with it. It died away suddenly as Wingate of the Sixth looked in. But the captain of Greyfriars only grinned.

"Tumble in!" he said.

And the Removites tumbled in; but it was a long time before they slept again.

By that time Inspector Grimes had arrived from Court-field, and in the small hours of the morning Slippery Jim—slippery no longer—was borne away with handcuffs clinking on his wrists, and his nefarious activity stopped for a very considerable time to come.

The next day the Bouncer was called into the Head's study, but it was not for a "wiggling."

The Head chided him gently for the reckless hardihood with which he had faced what might have been a terrible danger; but he complimented him on the keenness and courage he had shown, and thanked him with great sincerity for the service he had rendered. But for the Bouncer's intervention the safe would have been at the cracksman's mercy, and the savings of a lifetime would have disappeared, along with the famous Greyfriars silver. The Head was almost overcome as he thought of the narrowness of the escape, and he acknowledged how much he owed to the junior.

The Bouncer smiled as he left the study. If he had failed in his self-imposed enterprise, he would have been hoisted in that apartment on Gosling's shoulders to receive a flogging; but all was well that ended well, and the Bouncer of Greyfriars fully enjoyed his triumph!

THE END.

(Do not miss "HIS OWN FAULT!"—next Monday's Grand Story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)

BRIEF NOTICES

To Readers of THE "MAGNET" LIBRARY.

Re Leagues.

More members are required by the United Kingdom "Gem" and "Magnet" League, the main object of which is to send parcels of the papers to men at the Front. Hon. Sec., 6, Brewery Street, Preston, Lancs. London representative, G. Bennett, 14, Noel Terrace, Forest Hill, S.E.

A. W. Willshere, 59, Skelton's Lane, High Road, Leyton, N.E., is forming a "Gem" and "Magnet" League in his district. Will anyone who thinks of joining please write, enclosing stamped and addressed envelope, or call any evening after seven?

G. Mitchell, 3, Neely Street, Belfast, wants more members for his "Gem" and "Magnet" League (open to anyone in the U.K.), the main object of which is the sending parcels of the Companion Papers to men at the Front.

J. W. Smith and H. E. Ballard, 6, Stonefield Mansions, Cloudeley Square, Islington, N., wish to form a "Gem" THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 442.

and "Magnet" League in the North London district, and hope to be able to run a cricket club in connection with it.

E. Watts, 33, St. Edmund's Road, Northampton, is the Secretary of a "Magnet" League (local) and would be glad to hear from any readers under 15 who would care to join.

Miss E. Booker, 60, Albert Road, Heeley, Sheffield, would be glad to hear of any "Gem" or "Magnet" League, with members up to 18, on the Heeley side of Sheffield.

R. De Negri, 63, Newington Green Road, Islington, N., wishes to form a "Gem" and "Magnet" League. Will those interested enclose stamped and addressed envelope when writing, or call?

Woolf Alexander, 122, Old Montague Street, Whitechapel, London, E., wants to start a local "Magnet" League, and would be glad to hear from readers interested.

Norman Wilkinson, 14, Remuel Street, Gateshead-on-Tyne, is forming a "Gem" and "Magnet" League, with the main object of sending parcels of papers to men at the Front, and will be glad to hear from any readers interested.

George Hicks, 27, Comus Place, Old Kent Road, S.E., would be glad to hear of any "Gem" or "Magnet" League near him which he could join.

Alec Williams, 29, New Dorset Street, Brighton, and R. Stanford, 22, Spring Street, Brighton, would be glad to hear of a "Magnet" or "Gem" League in their neighbourhood which they might join.

J. Vickers, 26, Canonbury Square, Islington, N., is forming a "Gem" and "Magnet" League in his neighbourhood, and would be glad to hear from anyone interested.

For Back Numbers, etc.

(In all cases where the request comes from a reader in the Services, the Editor hopes that fellow-readers will supply the requirements free of charge.)

Gunner W. J. Colliver, R.G.A., wishes to express his hearty thanks to the many readers who answered his request for copies of the Companion Papers.

Private W. W. Brown, of the Loyal North Lancashires, wishes to thank all the readers who replied to his appeal for correspondents, and to offer his apologies to those whom he has been unable to answer.

Private Walter Weil, F Company, 18th Battalion, Royal Welsh Fusiliers, 2nd London Welsh, No. 20 Camp, Kinnel Park, Rhyl, would be glad to receive back numbers of the Companion Papers.

Private W. J. Dean, 2nd City of London Regiment, begs to thank the many readers who kindly responded to his request for correspondents, and to apologise to those whom he has been unable to answer.

Thos. Soakell, 43, Cowpen Road, Haverton Hill, near Middlesbrough, is starting an amateur magazine, and will be glad to hear from readers who would like to contribute, or from anyone else interested.

G. Drake, Waiuku, Auckland, New Zealand, would be pleased to hear from readers who have back numbers of the "Magnet" and "Gem" for sale.

J. Huddart, 38, Anchor Road, Barrow-in-Furness, particularly wants a copy of the "Magnet" containing "The Fags' Agency."

R. Swain, Tristford Lodge, Harberton, near Totnes, wants to buy "Through Thick and Thin," and also the numbers of the "Dreadnought" in which the Harry Wharton stories appeared.

T. R. Brend, 18, Russell Street, Exeter, would be glad to have back numbers of the "Magnet," "Gem," "Chuckles," and "Union Jack," to send to his soldier cousin.

G. Smith, Kambilla, 1, Russell Street, Woollahra, Sydney, Australia, would be glad to hear from readers who have copies of the "Magnet" or "Gem," earlier than 300, for sale.

A. D. Whitehead, 45, Ringford Road, West Hill, Wandsworth, S.W., wants early numbers of the "Magnet," and also "Through Thick and Thin!" and other 3d. stories dealing with St. Jim's and Greyfriars.

W. J. Dalton, 37, Victoria Road, Hendon, London, N.W., wants to buy "School and Sport!" and the "Magnet" containing "Billy Bunter's Love Affair!"

K. Dolan, 77, Eton Street, Walton, Liverpool, wants the number containing "The Bully's Chance!"

T. McRae, 12, City Road, Dundee, wants to buy "The Boy Without a Name!" "Through Thick and Thin!" "The School Under Canvas!" and "Birds of Prey!"

Stuart Worboys, Steam Bakery, Clay Cross, Derbyshire, will pay price for Nos. 1—250 of the "Magnet."

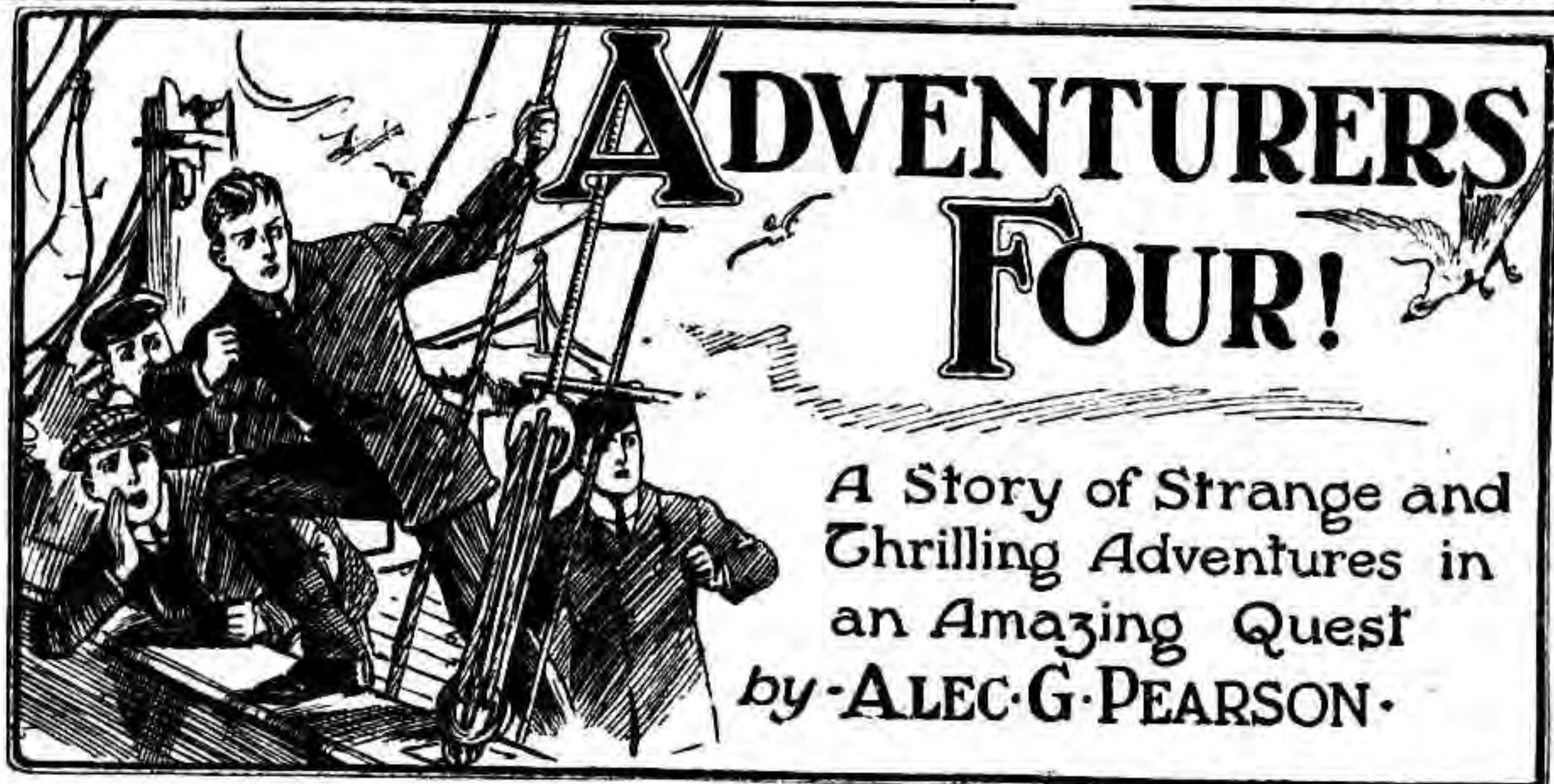
A. Cook, Station Terrace, Newton, Alfreton, wants to buy the following issues of the "B. F." 3d. Library: "Sealed Orders," "The Middles in Morocco," "The Honour of a Scout," and "Pete's World-Wide Quest."

(Readers will find a further List of Notices on cover, page ii.)

DELICIOUS TUCK-HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1d.

Our Magnificent Adventure Serial Story.

START TO-DAY!



PREVIOUS INSTALMENTS BRIEFLY TOLD.

Hal Mackenzie receives a mysterious message urging him to come out to the Southern Andes and learn the secret of the Tower of the Golden Star. He sets out upon the voyage accompanied by his chums, Jim Holdsworth, Bob Sigsbee, and Pat O'Hara.

After exciting experiences in the hands of the treacherous captain, they arrive at Buenos Ayres.

They proceed upon their journey into the mountains, where they experience a sharp encounter with a band of brigands, from whom they rescue Aymara, the daughter of a native chief.

She tells them of a shorter route to their destination, and leads them through a tunnel in the mountain-side known as the Cave of the Kings. They emerge upon a broad plateau, where she leaves them. Later, Hal is trapped in a heathen temple near by their camp by snake-worshippers. He is rescued by his chums in the nick of time from a terrible end, the inhabitants of the temple being about to sacrifice him to a number of venomous snakes. A free fight ensues, and the adventurers finally succeed in getting clear and returning to the camp. They continue their journey next day without mishap, when, towards evening, they arrive at a break in the mountain path. Below them stretches a great valley. They decide to settle down for the night a little way back on the mountain road. Before retiring to rest they climb up on to a high rock to have another look at the valley in the moonlight, when they see on the crest of a distant mountain the figure of a huge man cut in the rock.

"The Black Sentinel!" exclaims Hal.

Spied Upon.

"Eh?" Jim looked at him in surprise. "Did you know about it? There was nothing about a Black Sentinel in Martin Travers' letter to you."

"I know there wasn't," replied Hal. "It was Aymara who mentioned it to me, though at the time I didn't clearly understand what she meant. Her words were: 'When you have passed the Black Sentinel, prepare for greater dangers than any you have yet encountered.' I was going to ask her for an explanation, when some interruption occurred, and then the matter slipped out of my mind."

"What'll the gentleman be standing sintry over?" asked O'Hara.

"I don't know," replied Hal. "The Tower of the Golden Star, perhaps; though I thought that would be some days' journey further on than this."

"Will it be a figure carved out of the living rock by human hands, do you think?" asked Jim.

"We shall find that out when we get close up to it," said Hal. "But from what I've heard and read about the Incas,

they had wonderful skill in that sort of work. Something like the ancient Egyptians."

Sigsbee had been staring at the monstrous figure as though fascinated by it. Presently he exclaimed:

"I don't like the look of it! The blamed thing's eyes seem to be glaring at us as though they were alive!"

It was as he said. The eyes seemed to be gleaming fiercely as with the fire of hate. Of course, it may have been the effect of the moonlight; but it was uncanny, to say the least of it.

"He's the broth of a bhoys!" said O'Hara. "An' bigger nor Shamus O'Neale, who was king av some part av Oireland a few centuries ago."

"I've heard something of those old kings of Ireland!" laughed Jim. "How big was Shamus O'Neale supposed to be?"

"Tis said that seven tall men standin' on each other's shoulders couldn't reach the top av his head," replied O'Hara. "An' he was that strong he could pick up a bullock an' toss it over a house. No less. Meself don't know how much is truth an' how much is fairy-tales."

"If we're to swallow all we hear, they were great men in Ireland in those days," observed Sigsbee, grinning.

"Ye may say that," agreed O'Hara. "Now, if I don't misremember, there was—"

"I thought we had started talking about the Black Sentinel, not the kings of Ireland," interrupted Hal in his quiet, dry way.

"Indade so," replied O'Hara. "Well, we'll dhrop the kings, they being dead an' gone, an' see what can be done wid the Sintinel. 'Tis his eyes that I don't loike meself. There's a nasty look in them." He regarded the distant figure critically. "Afther all," he added, "'twill be aisy to spoil him."

"How?" asked Jim.

"Wid dynamite," explained the Irishman. "We've eleven shticks av it still. If so be we have the fancy that black image will work us harm, when we get close up to him we'll just blow him into little bits."

There was a burst of laughter at O'Hara's suggestion, and the laughter came as a relief. For the grim figure with the strangely-gleaming eyes, keeping its ceaseless vigil over the mystic solitudes which lay beyond the valley, was enough to rouse feelings of superstition which were far better kept under in the task that lay before them.

"We've got to get across the valley first," remarked Sigsbee, "and that's likely to take a bit of doing. As for blowing up that graven image—well, that'll take some thinking over. I guess we're not yearning to butt into more trouble than we can properly handle."

They returned to the camp-fire, and "bedded down" for the night, which passed tranquilly enough. On the following morning, after breakfast, Jim and Sigsbee started out to find

NEXT
MONDAY—

"HIS OWN FAULT!"

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

a way down into the valley. They were gone about two hours, and on their return announced that they had been successful.

"It doesn't amount to a path," said Jim, "and we shall be doing toboggan acts most of the way. Rough on our pants that'll be, and next camp, if we want to appear respectable, we shall have to spend some time putting on patches."

"What made to bother about your clothes," demanded O'Hara, "in a haythin country loike this? So long as mine hould together, I'm contint; an' whin they fall apart I'll wear skins. We can reach the valley all right, you're sayin'?"

"Oh, we'll get there, sure enough!" replied Jim. "But I think we'd better send the mules down ahead of us, so as we'll have something soft to fall on in case we do some acrobatic feats."

"Sounds cheerful," murmured Hal. "I'm beginning to wonder whether I shall reach the Tower of the Golden Star all in one piece!"

The descent into the valley by the only available route—unless they went miles out of their way—was certainly a "tough proposition," but it was accomplished with no more damage to themselves than a few cuts and bruises. Even the mules couldn't keep their feet in some places, but had to "toboggan" like their masters.

The performance would have been more amusing to an onlooker than to those who took part in it. The valley was five miles across, but there was not the semblance of a path in it. They had to twist and turn to avoid huge boulders of rock; they had to negotiate rough hillocks, cross streams, and force their way through thick undergrowth in the woods. The consequence was that in crossing the valley they covered nearly ten miles, instead of five, the going was slow, and it was late in the afternoon before they reached the other side.

From the crest of the ridge, a thousand feet above them, the Black Sentinel kept his lonely watch.

"Shall we camp right here," asked Sigsbee, "or climb up to the top while we've got daylight? We can scale this cliff middlin' easy. It ain't near so steep as the one we came down back yonder."

"May as well stay where we are until to-morrow morning, I think," said Hal.

"I say," exclaimed Jim suddenly, "we are being watched! I'm certain I saw someone moving along the edge of the cliff. He stood for a few moments flattened against that big boulder of rock just this side of the sentinel. Then he disappeared."

"Being watched! Are you quite certain, Jim?"

"Absolutely!" replied Jim. "I couldn't make out what the fellow was like, as against the background of rock he didn't show up at all plainly. And, of course, he's a good height above us."

"Then that settles it," said Hal. "We don't remain down here if there's a spy on top watching us. We'll go up and find out who the watcher is."

"That's the sure thing to do," agreed Sigsbee. "We've always got to be on the alert against attacks from enemies we don't know anything about; and it would be too dead easy for them to roll rocks on top of us where we are now."

"Come on, then," said O'Hara. "Tis best to be where we can do the rock-rolling ourselves."

New and Dreadful Foes.

When they reached the cliff-head there was no one visible; but on a patch of soft ground they came upon some clearly-defined footprints, which must have been quite recently made.

"That guy who was spying on us is no great shakes as a scout," commented Sigsbee, "else he'd have covered up his trail. Tain't like an Indian, nohow. But these tracks—"

He bent down and examined them attentively.

"What do you make of them?" asked Jim.

"A guy with middlin' big feet, who wore sandals," replied Sigsbee. "But that might fit a white man as well as a native."

"It isn't usual for a white man to wear sandals."

"I guess we're not dealing with usual things on this bit of the map. Say, I'll just follow this trail and see if I can locate the chap that's spying around on us. I reckon he won't be far away."

"He isn't," said Jim.

"Eh?"

"You needn't trouble to follow his trail," went on Jim, "as he's over by that clump of trees watching us. And unless my eyes are playing me tricks, it's our old acquaintance, the chief of the snake-worshippers."

It was that individual, sure enough. He had just emerged from among the trees, about three hundred yards away, and

was advancing slowly towards them. They held up their hands, palms outwards, in token that he could come in safety. The signal was a sort of flag of truce.

"I suppose he knew the route we took," said Jim; "but he couldn't have followed the same road himself, or he wouldn't have got here ahead of us."

"Indians can travel very quickly over country they're used to," replied Hal; "and he'd know the short cuts. But the question is—why is he here? And what does he want with us?"

When the chief was within a dozen paces of them he placed both hands on his forehead and bowed almost to the ground, in token of submission.

Jim signed to him to come forward.

"Well, old top," he said pleasantly, "what's to do? Come to have tea with us?"

Naturally, the chief had no idea what he meant, and, on the other hand, they had no idea what the chief was talking about when he held forth at great length, with many dramatic gestures.

They had, at length, to resort to the sign language, and then they got along much better. The chief made them understand that it would be well for them to put their camp in a good state of defence that night, though for the life of them they couldn't make out what sort of attack they were to guard against.

"I don't know whether he means we're to guard ourselves against men or wild animals!" exclaimed Hal, after watching the chief's contortions for some minutes.

"The way he's cawing about," remarked Sigsbee, "it looks 'most as if he was trying to imitate a monkey."

"Faith, it matters little what we've got to defend ourselves against," said O'Hara, "seeing that we're bound to be fighting something or somebody 'most av the toime we're on this pleasure tour!"

"We'll leave it at that," laughed Jim, "and see if we can understand anything else our friend has to tell us. I feel as if I was acting in a wordless play, like 'L'Enfant Prodigue,' or something of that sort."

But for the moment the chief had ceased his pantomime, and now walked up to the base of the gigantic figure of the Black Sentinel.

It was wonderfully carved out of a natural shaft of black rock, which rose up straight for a hundred feet at least. They could see the dull glow in the eyes of the statue, though as it was still daylight it did not show with the intensity that rendered the gleaming orbs visible miles away in the darkness.

"I don't understand that light in the eyes," muttered Hal. "How is it produced? It isn't electricity, for it hasn't at all the appearance of the electric light that we're accustomed to."

"Give it up," said Jim. "No use addling our brains trying to guess riddles—so many of them crop up. What's our snake-charmer trying to call our attention to?"

The chief was standing in front of the figure and pointing up to its chest. They joined him, and saw then what he was pointing at.

A golden star!

It was set right in the centre of the Sentinel's chest, showing with startling distinctness against the ebony blackness of the carved figure. They hadn't noticed it before, as they had been viewing the image from the side since they had reached the cliff summit.

"That's mighty queer!" exclaimed Sigsbee. "What are we up against? I said once before I didn't like the look of this black fellow, and I like him less now. That golden star kind of brings him in too close a connection with our business."

"Yes, it's something more than a mere rock carving, interesting because of its age," said Hal. "Judging by that sign, I should say that we have at last set foot in the country of the half-breeds, or the Golden Star, whichever you like to call it. We've stepped over the border, and—" He hesitated for a moment, and then continued: "I've a feeling that something's going to happen."

"Going to?" Jim ejaculated. "Seems to me things have been happening most of the time since we left England. Now the snake-man's talking to us again. What is he saying?"

He was talking with his hands more than with his tongue, and after pointing to the star, then waving his hand vaguely to the north-west, he indicated Hal and his companions by another gesture of his hands.

"Evidently wants to know if we're going in search of the Golden Star," said Hal. "I suppose we can trust him, as he seems anxious to do us a good turn, to make amends for the acts of his late followers, perhaps."

"And he remembers that we saved his life," Jim chimed

(Continued on page iv of cover.)



JOHN GLATT,
Maida Vale, London.



A KEEN READER,
Boston.



H. L. JACKSON,
Wallasey.



A LOYAL SUPPORTER,
Widnes.



ARTHUR MARSHALL,
Wolverhampton.



A. MORRIS,
Portsmouth.



A LOYAL "MAGNET"
READER, Plymouth.



L. H. BUTLER,
Ipswich.



A SOLDIER CHUM,
A Keen Reader.



A. H. BROWN,
Sydney.



H. POLLITT,
A Cadet Reader.



JOHN ROCKS,
Barrow.



A SWANSEA
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W. F. SWIFT,
Oxford.



A. SMITH,
Sydenham.



FREDK. GLADWIN,
A Staunch Reader.

ADVENTURERS FOUR.

(Continued from page 20.)

in. "Give him the glad eye, so's he'll know he's guessed right."

Hal intimated by signs and some rough drawings with a pointed stick on the ground that their mission was not only to reach the Tower of the Golden Star, but to find out if a white comrade was alive and a captive, or whether he had been killed.

Then ensued a lot of animated sign-talk, from which they gathered that the chief had heard of a white captive several "moons" ago, but did not know what had become of him; that it would be better for them to turn back while they were able to do so, and that they were threatened by some imminent danger which might come upon them that very night.

As to what the danger would be they could not make out. Somehow, the sign-language seemed to fail at this point, and the chief's attempt at drawing on the earth with a stick only left them in a worse state of bewilderment.

"Musha! What is it?" exclaimed O'Hara, gazing at the astonishing-looking thing that the chief had drawn. "If we're going to be attacked by things like that, 'tis better we'd be wid blinkers on, so as we wouldn't take fright. 'Tis fearsome craythurs they are!"

The suggestion that the Irishman could be frightened by any living thing amused his comrades, and raised a laugh.

But it was time that they pitched camp, and the chief, understanding their intention, pointed to a low, circular hill, which had a natural barricade of rocks all round its upper edge, the centre being slightly depressed. The top of the hill was, in fact, very like a saucer, with a high rim, in shape.

"It's as good a position as we can find anywhere about here," said Hal, "for it gives us cover on every side. And if we are in for a fight, we shall have to stand our ground. There can be no retreat."

"Say! I'm jest wondering whether it's the half-breeds we've heard so much about that this snake chap is trying to warn us against," put in Sigshoe.

"I don't think so," replied Hal. "Anyway, the only thing we can do is to prepare for any foe that may chance to turn up."

So they camped on top of the low hill, the chief remaining with them, and sharing their evening meal. After the cooking operations were over, the fire was allowed to die out, as had they kept it going it would have given away their position.

It was very cold without it, but that was only a small hardship, which did not trouble the quartette in the least. They were toughened by constant exposure to all sorts and conditions of weather.

They took it in turns to keep watch, and it was noticed that the chief was on the alert the whole night, getting up every now and then to have a look round, but particularly in the direction of the thick timber half a mile away.

It was within an hour of daybreak, which is supposed to be the darkest hour of the twenty-four, when the first alarm came.

Hal and Pat O'Hara were on watch. Presently they were joined by the chief. He climbed on to a flat boulder, and stood erect, gazing towards the wood. The weapon which he carried was a short spear, which he swung to and fro, muttering to himself all the while.

"What'll he be after seeing?" asked O'Hara. "Sorra bit av a living thing can I make out, savin' only ourselves."

Suddenly the chief turned, and held up his hand warningly. Then he bent forward in a listening attitude. For several minutes he remained thus; then he turned his head, and said something in sharp tones of warning.

The words he used were unintelligible, but there was no mistaking the fact that they conveyed a warning. Neither Hal nor the Irishman had heard anything more than the usual night sounds such as the rustling of leaves in the light wind, and the soft movements of creeping things through the undergrowth.

But all at once they became aware of another sound, the like of which they had never heard before. It was not to be described. Gradually it became louder. It drew nearer, coming through the wood. Now they could make it out to be a sort of chattering murmur, with which was mingled the snapping of dry sticks. There was no mistaking the best-named sounds; it was caused by dead branches being trodden underfoot.

"Jim! Sigshoe!" shouted Hal. "Rouse-up! Arm yourselves!"

They were up in an instant, rifles in hand. As they ran to Hal's side, a number of strange-looking figures emerged from the wood, like black, moving shadows in the darkness. Others followed; scores of them.

"What in blazes are they?" exclaimed O'Hara. "Indians?"

"Far worse than Indians," replied Hal. "They're giant apes! Gad! I never reckoned on such beast as these!"

Sigshoe closed the breech of his rifle with a snap.

"This is going to be the fight of our lives," he said.

A Battle Royal.

"Gosh! There must be a hundred of 'em at the very least!" exclaimed Jim, as the apes came leaping and bounding out into the open from the screen of trees. "Look at that big fellow. He's surely the leader."

The animal that he referred to must have been close on eight feet in height, and towered above the others. He had grey whiskers and a broad face, all wrinkles. He looked, in the semi-darkness, like a stalwart and very ugly old man; and his actions were curiously, almost startlingly human, as he waved his arms, pointed here and there, marshalling his forces, and uttering loud cries like words of command.

Indeed, the whole troop of apes might at a distance have been mistaken for a crowd of naked savages.

"'Tis the missing link, he is, sure enough, at long last!" declared Pat O'Hara. "Well, it's glad I am I've lived to see it!"

"I guess you won't live long if they rush us," Sigshoe growled. "Get busy with the rifles, boys. Mayhap the noise'll scare them."

He took aim at the leader, and fired. But the big fellow made a leap at the same moment, and although Sigshoe scored a hit, it was not in a vital part. The ape leader let out a howl of pain and rage, and his right arm dropped uselessly to his side.

Evidently he couldn't at all understand what had happened, for he stared at the wounded member, tried to raise it twice, felt it with his left hand, and then let himself loose in an appalling paroxysm of fury.

He screamed and howled, and the rest of the tribe, not to be outdone in that respect, joined in chorus. Never was there such a din. It was deafening.

"Bedad! It's cursing us they are!" exclaimed O'Hara.

"Very likely," replied Hal. "And if they'll confine themselves to cursing there won't be much harm done. But I'm afraid— Look out! Here they come! Give 'em a volley!"

The four rifles rang out together, and as they fired into the thick of the advancing crowd the bullets were bound to take effect. Four of the apes went down, but the others swarmed on, trampling over their fallen mates in their headlong rush.

Many of them picked up large stones, which they flung with fairly accurate aim at the defenders of the "hill fort," as Jim named their camp on the circular hillock.

The stones rattled against the barricade of rocks, but several came over, and a nule was struck. The animal kicked and squealed, and would have credited no end of confusion in the confined space if the snake chief, who at present had to be a mere spectator of the fray, had not leaped down and collared it.

He knew how to handle nules, for he quieted them, and then made them lie down where they would be fairly well sheltered from the missiles which came flying over pretty thickly.

"Good for you, chief!" exclaimed Sigshoe. "You're not a bad sort, after all. I'm middlin' glad we saved you from them blamed snakes of yours."

The battle continued, and the great apes made a terrific rush at the hill, some of them succeeding in clambering up the sides to the breastwork of rocks. The snake-chief was able to get to work then with his spear, which he used with considerable skill, thrusting at the eyes of the animals, so that the point of the spear penetrated the brain. He despatched three in that way.

And the four comrades kept up such a hot fire that their strange adversaries were driven back. Again they made a rush, and one of them leaped right over the barricade, plump on top of O'Hara. The pair of them rolled on the ground.

But the Irishman was on his feet again in an instant.

"Ye hairy savage!" he spluttered. "Would yez be after rowling your dirty carcass on top av me?"

With that he seized the ape in his powerful arms, and hurled it clean over the parapet. It fell on its head, and lay still. Its neck was broken. It was a terrific feat of strength, which very few men could have accomplished.

"Well done, Pat!" cried Jim. "But I wouldn't try it again, for if one of those fellows chewed your face there wouldn't be much of it left!"

"Blaze away!" urged Hal. "We must kill as many as we can. If they force a way over the parapet, they'll tear us to pieces!"

(There will be another grand instalment of this exciting story in next Monday's issue of THE "MAGNET" LIBRARY. Order your copy in advance.)