

BILLY BUNTER'S BOLT!

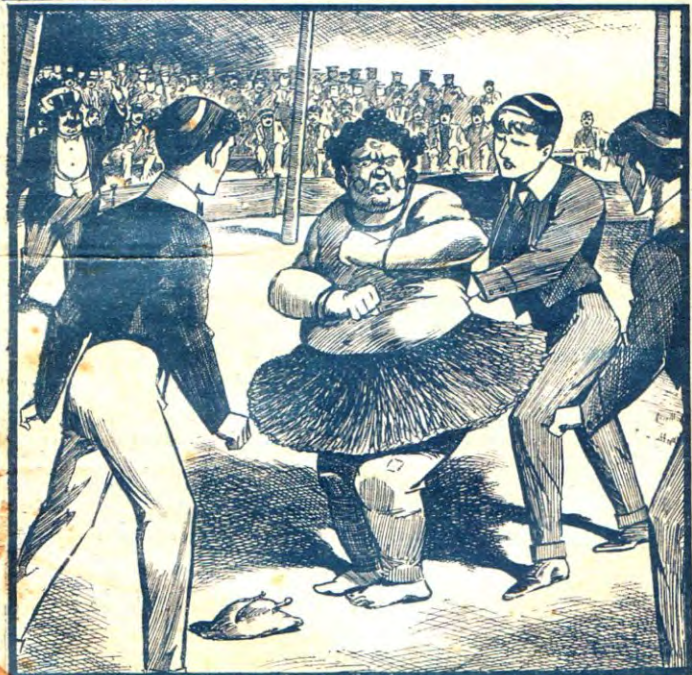
A Magnificent New Long Complete School Tale of the Boys of Greyfriars.



The Magnet¹ Library

No. 449. Vol. 10.

SEPTEMBER 10th, 1910



COLLARED IN THE CIRCUS!

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

MY READERS' PAGE

OUR COMPANION PAPERS: "THE BOYS' FRIEND," id., Every Monday, "THE GEM" LIBRARY, id., Every Wednesday, "THE BOYS' FRIEND" 3d., COMPLETE LIBRARY, "THE PENNY POPULAR," id., Every Friday, "CHUCKLES," Price 3d., 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:

"FOR D'ARCY'S SAKE!"

By Frank Richards.

Perhaps this title may suggest to a reader here and there that a "Gem" story has got by mistake into next week's "Magnet." But this is not the case. The fine story which will appear next week has the Famous Five and Mark Linley as its central characters. They go on a holiday visit to Eastwood, the ancestral home of the great Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Among the other guests are Tom Merry & Co., and Guss's special chums, Blake, Herries, and Digby. On the way the Greyfriars juniors meet a certain "Captain" Punter, who induces three of them to gamble with him, and rooks them unmercifully. Possibly old readers may be able to guess which three fall victims to the wiles of the tempter, and which hold firm to their principles. It would make quite an interesting little guessing competition. As some help in guessing, I may say that the three who fall are just the three I should have expected, for their lapse is due more to careless good-nature than to any real desire to gamble. This "Captain" Punter reappears at Eastwood, and is very nearly successful in bringing off a big scoop, of which the Greyfriars juniors would have been the victims had it succeeded, as it would have done but for the intervention of Lieutenant Larry Lascelles, home on leave from the front. Larry, of whom our readers will be pleased to hear again, I am sure, is himself the victim of an audacious trick played by his former pupils, and is more than a little angry with them; but he overlooks the offence, gives way on the matter which had caused the offenders to commit it, and consents to be silent about their folly, because he sees that their seeming weakness in yielding to the sharper's demands was due to really generous motives. It was all

"FOR D'ARCY'S SAKE!"

OUR CORRESPONDENTS.

The weather is very hot, and work is "too much with us, soon and late," as a poet said about something else; and really, I feel inclined to say, "Oh, dear—oh, dear!"—or something nearly as strong as that, anyway. For here, after all my warnings to my correspondents about giving their names and full addresses when writing, so that I may answer them by post, there rolls up "J. M." of Manchester—that is all the address he offers—who wants me to get for him from one of my readers a copy of the issue of the "Boys' Friend" 3d. Library, containing the story entitled "Under the Dragon," and apparently is unable to see that his name and address would have helped quite a bit in getting it for him. "If you can," he adds, "kindly put it in the 'Replies in Brief' in your wonderful paper." H'm! Quite a nice adjective, I must admit! But what is the use of adjectives when it is an address that is wanted? And does not our friend know yet that such requests as his are met by the "Notices," not by the "Replies in Brief"—a feature that I have regretfully had to hold up for a time? Now, don't send along copies of the book wanted by "J. M." I have not asked you to do that, and I don't want you to. I am simply holding him up to you as a shining example of how NOT to do it. All the same, if he sees this and will send along his name and address, I am ready not only to forgive him, but to insert his notice.

A MISSING READER.

If this should be seen by Charles Stanley Gibson, will he write at once to his sister and brother at No. 56, Jermyn Street, Hull? They ask for the insertion of this address as they have removed since he left them, and they are very anxious to hear from him. I am inserting this request in my "Chat" in order that it may have more prominence than an ordinary notice would afford it, and I hope that Gibson, who is a keen reader of my papers, as I understand, will see it and communicate with his friends.

NOTICES.

Back Numbers, etc., Wanted.

Private W. Edmondson, No. 0440, E Lines, Hut No. 10, B Company, 11th Battalion, West Riding Regiment, Brockton Camp, near Stafford, would be grateful to readers who would send him back numbers of the companion papers.

By H. Chapman, No. 22, Gilpin Street, Peterborough—Nos. 366, 367, and 400 of the "Magnet"; also the Nos. containing "Billy Bunter's Love Affair" and "Bob Cherry's Barring-Out." Double price offered.

Titelman F. Burgess, No. 3363, 5th Platoon, 21st London Regiment, B.E.F., France, would be very glad if some reader would let him have a mouth-organ.

By Gilbert Smith, No. 3, Claremont Place, Gateshead-on-Tyne—"Bob Cherry's Barring-Out," "Wagtail's Folly," "The Duffer's Return," "Against His Father's Wish," "By Order of the Form," "Tempted but True," "The Gem's" "Hero and Rascal," "The Hero of the Hour," and "The Schoolboy Adventurers." He also offers two shillings for twenty stories of Vernon-Smith in the days before his reform, and will pay postage on them.

Stoker Wm. Stammers, 411 Mess, R.N.B., Portsmouth, would be grateful to readers for back numbers of the "Boys' Friend" 3d. Library.

Private Albert W. Coote, No. 28863, E Company, 10th Battalion, Suffolk Bantams, B.E.F., France, would be glad of back numbers of books, and would also welcome correspondence with some of our boy readers.

Frank Chickland, No. 12, Lander Road, Bontle, Liverpool, who has been invalided out of the Army through wounds received at Mons, would be glad to have back numbers of the companion papers.

Private A. F. Cook, No. 335L, D Company, 1/5th East Surrey Regiment, Ghazal Spur, Murree Hills, North-West Frontier, India, would be grateful for back numbers of the companion papers.

T. H. Kimmersley, No. 4, Blaenau Gwent, Cwmillery, Mon., wants to buy a punching-ball and a set of boxing-gloves.

Private H. H. Stoneham, No. 61250, R.A.M.C., 31st Field Ambulance, 10th Division, Salonika Forces, Greece, would be glad of back numbers of the "Magnet" for himself and his chums.

By Norman Davies, No. 57, Victoria Road North, Southsea—"Kaiser or King?" "The Flying Armada," "The Conquest of London," and "With the Allies' Flag"—all "Boys' Friend" 3d. Library issues.

By T. Marshall, Hillsborough, 5, Princess Road, Evesham—Some numbers of the "Magnet," 3d. series, and of the "Greyfriars Herald."

By James Hayes, 16, East Hill, Queenstown, co. Cork—3d. issues of the "Magnet." Would also be obliged if any reader would lend him "The Boy Without a Name."

By A. Butler, 20, Leopold Road, Bexhill-on-Sea—"Bunter's Anti-Tuck Campaign."

By F. R. Fowles, 782, Fulham Road, Fulham, S.W.—Back numbers of both "Magnet" and "Gem" since July 10, 1911. Must be cheap.

By S. Emery, 44, Redgate Street, Bridgewater—"Bob Cherry's Challenge."

By W. Spinks, 14, Norfolk Road, Higham Hill, Walthamstow—Back numbers of both "Magnet" and "Gem" earlier than 350.

By R. Yaxley, 29, Chapel Street, Lazenby, Eston S.O., York—"The Punishment Policies," "Bob Cherry's Barring-Out," and "The Race to the Tuckshop." He would also like to correspond with a boy reader of about 14.

Yours Editor

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

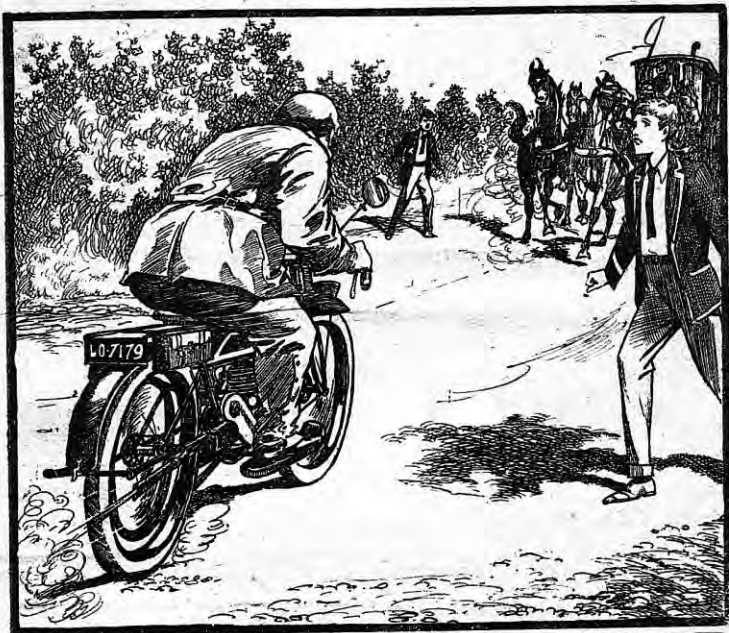


The Editor will be
obliged if you will
hand this book,
when finished with,
to a friend. . . .

BILLY BUNTER'S BOLT

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

By FRANK RICHARDS.



Regardless of the rearing horses, Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry leapt in front of them, and beckoned furiously to Mr. Prout. "Up into the hedge, sir!" shouted Harry Wharton. "It's your only chance!" (See Chapter 2.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Fast and Furious!

"GAMMON!" said Harry Wharton.
"Piffle!" said Bob Cherry.
"Stuff and nonsense!" scoffed Nugent.
"Utterly absurd!" was Hurree Singh's contri-
bution.

Johnny Bull, the other member of the Famous Five, merely snorted. But his snort was more expressive than any words could have been.

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Billy Bunter, the Peeping Tom of the Greyfriars Remove, had come to No. 1 Study with news. The fat junior usually had an unlimited supply of tittle-tattle, and his latest tit-bit of information was received in precisely the same way as its predecessors—namely, with amused incredulity.

"Go and invent something else, Buntz," said Harry Wharton. "I should apply for a job in Wolff's Bureau, if I were you. You can roll out fibs as fluently as Ananias and Sapphira and the Kaiser rolled into one!"

Billy Bunter blinked reproachfully through his big glasses.

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September 16th, 1918.

"Oh, really, Wharton, I'm telling the sober truth!"
 "Of course, the fat beast is romancing, as usual," said Frank Nugent.

Billy Bunter's latest certainly required some swallowing. He asserted that Mr. Prout, the learned and respected master of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars, had been careering through the streets of Courtfield on a motor-cycle. He—Bunter—had seen Mr. Prout with his own eyes.

Indeed, he had reason to know that Mr. Prout—was improving the shining hour by motor-cycling, for he had only just slipped out of the way in time to save his skin.

The Famous Five, knowing Bunter, regarded the story as a mere fable.

"If the motor-bike biznez took place at all, which I doubt," said Wharton, "it must have been a double of Prout's who was riding. You're short-sighted, Bunter, and jumped to conclusions."

"I tell you I saw him as plain as—as Hamlet's ghost!" shouted Bunter. "There's no mistaking old Prout. I could pick him out of a cup-tie crowd. There he was scorching along as if his life depended on it."

"Rats!" said Bob Cherry. "I'd as soon believe you if you said you'd seen Alonzo Todd up in an aeroplane! We're fed up with your confounded fibs, Bunter!"

"Listen to me! I—"

"Which exit?" asked Bob Cherry blandly. "The door or the window?"

"Oh, really, you know—"

The study door opened again, and Dick Penfold rushed in like a cyclone. He was bustling with news.

"Another Russian advance?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Blow the war! I say, you chapel. Old Prout's staggering humanity; he's been gadding about on a motor-bike!"

The Famous Five exchanged significant glances.

"It must be true, then!" said Harry Wharton, in amazement. "My hat! Wonders will never cease!"

It was certainly a startling piece of information.

Mr. Prout had gained a certain reputation—perhaps notoriety would be a better word—at rifle-shooting and at golf. Occasionally he made bad blunders in each of these two pursuits, and came in for a good deal of chaff in consequence; but in their hearts the juniors rather liked the master of the Fifth. He was tolerant, and kind, anyway.

But Mr. Prout and a motor-cycle! The two did not go together at all. If the owner and rider of the machine had been the athletic Wingate, the world would not have wondered; but Mr. Prout—

As Bob Cherry observed, it pranced off with the whole giddy biscuit factory.

The master of the Fifth was getting on in years. He belonged to that section of the male community known as the old-at-forty-one. Nobody would have suspected him of the desire to whiz along country lanes on a motor-cycle.

When Coker of the Fifth had taken to riding one of these extremely modern contrivances, Mr. Prout had waxed wroth, and had talked to Coker in no unmeasured terms. And, lo! here was Mr. Prout himself doing likewise!

"You ought to have seen him," Penfold went on. "He's taking motor-biking seriously, as he does everything else, and the blessed thing whizzed through Courtfield like a flash. People had to scoot for their lives. He must have been doing at least fifty miles an hour, and he flew past me in a jiffy. But there was no mistaking him. It was Prout, all serene."

"There you are, your fellows!" said Billy Bunter triumphantly. "You've got to believe it now! Old Prout on a motor-bike! He, he!"

"Let's go and see if there's anything doing," said Frank Nugent. "We may be able to get a bit of the latest casualties."

The Famous Five, followed by Penfold and Bunter, went out into the Close. There they found an animated crowd of fellows, mostly Remorities, chattering and laughing excitedly.

"Heard the latest?" asked Sniff. "Prout's out motor-bike record-breaking! Several fellows saw him in Courtfield, and they've come back full of it."

"Hain't he come back?" asked Harry Wharton.

"No. I expect his remains have been gathered together and put in a biscuit-tin."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He'll be along in a minute. I dare say," said Bob Cherry. "Let's stay and watch the entertainment. I always said Prout was a far better comedian than George Robey."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Geeling, the crusty old porter, came out of his lodge.

"Op it!" he said, shaking an admonishing forefinger at the crowd in the Close. "Clear off, you young warmates! Which Mr. Prout will be bang about long, an' we don't want no hambulance cases 'ere! Op it, I say!"

"Rats!"

"Get in your kennel, Gossy!"

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"My hey!" said the porter, working himself up to a pitch of fury. "I'll bring my broom to yer if I ain't lubeyed! I'll report yer, so there!"

While Geeling was speaking a familiar throbbing sound made itself heard, and there was a rustle to the gates. Many fellows clambered hastily on to the school wall to see the fun, though, once they had mounted they almost toppled off with laughter.

A weird and wonderful sight met their eyes. A motor-cycle was rushing along the road, and Mr. Prout, his face bathed in perspiration, was at the helm, so to speak. Behind him, clinging round his neck in a most undignified fashion, was P.-C. Tozer, of Friesland.

The worthy constable—was hanging on with a fixity of purpose and an expression of grimaces which showed that he was not regarding the affair as a joy-ride, but as a painful duty. He had seen Mr. Prout retreating from Courtfield in a manner which swept danger to pedestrians, and by means of a really wonderful acrobatic feat had contrived to leap on to the machine. Mr. Prout having decided to stop.

In this position P.-C. Tozer had been whirled along towards Greyfriars; and now, at the school gates, Mr. Prout stopped. He did it with such startling suddenness that the worthy Tozer relaxed his hold, and went sprawling in the roadway, which was wet and muddy with recent rain.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help! I've burst a boiler!"

"Carry me home to die, somebody!"

The watching juniors were almost in hysterics. The tears were actually streaming down Bob Cherry's sunny cheeks, and peal upon peal of laughter rang out unrestrainedly from the lips of his comrades.

It was a sight for gods and men and little fishes. P.-C. Tozer was unhurt, save for a few bruises, but the noise he made suggested that all the tortures of the Inquisition were being applied to him at once.

As for Mr. Prout, he cut a most ludicrous figure. His legs were encased in baggy brown trousers, and he sported the hunting-coat which, many years before, he had worn in the Rocky Mountains. His slightly-bald head was bare, and his expression was that of a lion seeking whom he might devour. He regarded the fallen Tozer with the glare of a basilisk.

"Get up, you wretched groveller!" he snapped. "How dare you impede my progress, and imperil life and limb by leaping upon my machine whilst it was in motion! How dare you, I repeat!"

Mr. Tozer was just as angry as Mr. Prout—more so, if possible. He was very red in the face, and looked like plunging straightway into an apopleptic fit.

"You—you—" he spluttered. "It's you who's himperillin' life an' limb! I'll have the law on yer, I will, fer ridin' in a manner vot's menacin' to the public! You'll be doin' people to death if you ain't careful, an' it'll be my painful duty to give evidence agin yer at the Hazzies! Wot I says is this 'ere—"

"Silence!" roared Mr. Prout. "I will not tolerate this impudent interference! You, a common constable, dare to talk to me like this! It is heaping insult upon injury!"

Constable and schoolmaster glared at each other with deadly animosity.

"They'll come to blows in a minute," chuckled Nugent.

"Two to one on Prout!"

But matters never reached that exciting climax. There was the sudden rustle of a gown, and Dr. Locke, the respected Head of Greyfriars, swept on the scene.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "What—what is all this?"

"I have been insulted, sir," fumed Mr. Prout—"grossly and flagrantely insulted! This man, who, like the law he represents, is an ass, placed my life in jeopardy by jumping on my machine without taking into motion. Further, he has addressed me with the greatest disrespect!"

P.-C. Tozer, who had regained his feet by this time, waddled up to the Head.

"Which he was exceedin' the speed limit, sir!" he said. "I allorded to 'im to stop, but he never took no notice. Already he's bin responsible for the deaths of three chinking, er."

"Dear me!" gasped Dr. Locke. "I cannot help thinking, Mr. Prout, that the purchase of that machine was—ahem!—a mistake on your part. If you are not competent to control—"

"Competent!" barked Mr. Prout. "No man in the county, Dr. Locke, has a more thorough and exhaustive knowledge of mechanism than myself! I understand the machine, and the machine understands me, or I should now be lying in the mortuary."

The Head shivered a little.

"Is it your intention to prosecute, Tozer?" he said, in a low tone.



On and on they flew, until at last the master of the Fifth uttered a sharp, triumphant exclamation :
"There they are !" (See Chapter 11.)

"Dooty is dooty!" murmured the constable.
The Head placed, half-a-crown in P. J. Tozer's palm.
"Dooty" became something else then. It developed into booty.

"Thank'ee, sir!" said Tozer. Then, raising his voice, he added:

"I hope as 'ow you'll regard this incident, Mr. Prout, in the light of a warning. I won't take no steps this time, but if I see you transgressin' agin the law arter this date there ain't no tellin' what might happen."

And, with this dark-hail, Tozer turned and trudged off in the direction of Friarstable.

"Ring down the curtain," said Bob Cherry. "I thought we were going to witness something tragic."

"There'll be tragedies enough if Prout's going to carry on with his little games," chuckled Wharton.

The master of the Fifth pushed his machine in at the gates, and the Head walked by his side, apparently trying to bring him to reason. Then the grinning crowd in the Close dispersed, with the knowledge that there were lively times in store as a result of Mr. Prout's latest purchase.

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"FOR D'ARCY'S SAKE!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Terror by Day!

DURING the days that followed Mr. Prout's motor-bicycle formed almost the sole topic of conversation among the Greyfriars fellows.

Although the Fifth Form-master went out every day, he was never the central figure in a calas trophe. This was miraculous, for Mr. Prout was popularly reputed to flash along like streaked lightning.

Skinner of the Remove offered to wager a level shilling that Mr. Prout would not remain in one piece till the end of the week; but nobody relished the prospect of paying out money over Mr. Prout's corpse, and the offer fell flat.

"Prout can't be such a duffer as we take him for," said Bob Cherry, when three days had elapsed and Mr. Prout still remained sound in wind and limb. "He must understand his old gridiron pretty well, or there would have been a series of smashes by now."

"That's so," said Harry Wharton. "I expect the Head's jawing did him good, and he rides slow through traffic."

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

It was Wednesday, and a half-holiday. The Famous Five were in their flannels, but there was no cricket on that afternoon. The tail-end of the season was approaching, and the grand summer game had lost much of its charm.

Harry Wharton & Co. were standing in the old gateway, trying to make up their minds whether to go on the river, or in the river, or beside the river, when their train of thought was rudely interrupted by an ominous roaring sound, mingled with the babel of human voices.

"What the mercy dickens—" began Nugent.
"Sounds like a giddy meenagerie," said Johnny Bull. "If that wasn't a lion's roar I heard I'll eat my hat!"

"The fearfulness of the esteemed lionful creature is terrific!" murmured Hurree Singh. "It is drawing close-folly nearer, my worthy chums."

It was. A moment later a strange procession came into view round a bend in the road. Animals of all sorts—some in waggons, some led by men—came thundering past, shouted and stormed at by their keepers.

"A wild-beast show," said Harry Wharton.
"Can't be," said Bob Cherry. "Prout's not there."
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a travelling circus," said Johnny Bull. "Look! There's the clown Johnny, and there are tight-rope walkers, too!"

The foremost caravan was being drawn by no less than half a dozen sprightly horses, and a short, stout man, with a florid face and a cigar in his mouth, was lashing them into still further action. He desisted, however, on sighting the Greyfriars juniors, and said, rather apologetically:
"The brutes need warmin' up now and agen, young gents."

"What sort of show's this?" asked Harry Wharton.
"Harry Hawk's Circus," said the fat man, with a proud inclination of his head, I'm the proprietor. Every man and beast that you see behind is under my supreme control. We're makin' for Courtfield just now. Show starts at six to-night. Comin' along?"

"We'll think about it," said Wharton.
Suddenly Frank Nugent, whose eyes had wandered down the road, uttered a sharp exclamation. Unconsciously he uttered it in rhyme:

"Look out! Look out! Here comes old Prout!"
A motor-cycle came tearing along the road, swaying from side to side.

Mr. Prout, who was perched on the saddle, seemed to have lost all control of his machine. He was shouting and gesticulating wildly, and nearly fell off from their fright when he saw the oncoming circus.

"Oh, ye gods!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Now for the fireworks!"

The six sprightly horses, startled by the din of the motor-bike and the wild shouts of its rider, got up on their hind legs with one accord, pawing the air vigorously. Mr. Harry Hawk's cigar fell from his mouth, and, making a megaphone of his hands, he roared:

"Get out of the way, you confounded idiot!"
Mr. Prout came careering on, and a collision seemed inevitable, for the road was not particularly wide at that part. A skilled motor-cyclist could have passed the long line of caravans and waggons without difficulty; but, to judge from Mr. Prout's present behaviour, he was anything but skilled.

The Famous Five were grave now, but they did not mean to be the spectators of a serious accident.

Regardless of the rearing horses, Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry leapt in front of them, and beckoned furiously to Mr. Prout.

"Up into the hedge, sir!" shouted Harry Wharton. "It's your only chance!"

The hedge was by no means likely to be a bed of roses, and Mr. Prout was likely to get hurt in the process of pitching into it, but better that than he should collide with Harry Hawk's caravan.

Mr. Prout behaved very well, in the circumstances. He did not dash on to destruction, but shot off at a tangent, and disappeared, machine and all, into the hedge.

The juniors breathed freely again.

"Good!" said Bob Cherry. "No flowers, by request!"

Then the Famous Five rushed into the hedge to extricate the unfortunate motor-cyclist.

The Fates had been kind to Mr. Prout. Beyond a few scratches, he was undamaged, though the same could not be said of his machine. It looked as if it had been rescued from an old-iron heap.

The Fifth Form master felt himself all over to ascertain if he was still in one piece.

"Ah," he exclaimed breathlessly, "a close call!"

"It was, sir," said Harry Wharton. "The hedge was your salvation. If you had dashed into those horses—"

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The captain of the Remove left the sentence unfinished.

"What went wrong, sir?" asked Bob Cherry innocently.

"My brakes gave out," said Mr. Prout. "Why, I do not for the life of me know, for I have never put any undue strain upon them in the past. I—I thought this journey would be my last, and it undoubtedly would have been but for your timely advice, Wharton!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Harry.

He had not expected appreciation—rather the reverse. But Mr. Prout was so delighted at having got off with so little personal damage that his manner towards the juniors was most amiable.

He even went so far as to hand a florin to Mr. Harry Hawk, who bit it tenaciously to assure himself that it was good, and then touched his forehead.

"That is for the inconvenience and alarm I have caused you," explained Mr. Prout.

"I'm much obliged to you, sir!"

And the circus proprietor, who did not appear at all offended by the tip, whipped up his horses, and set the long stream of vehicles and animals in motion once more.

"Now's the time to ask Prout's permission to go to the circus," whispered Johnny Bull. "Quechly would probably be hard to persuade, but we can twist Prout round our little finger now we've gallantly saved his bacon!"

Harry Wharton nodded, and assisted the master of the Fifth to remove his battered machine from the hedge.

"Ahem!" he articulated.

Mr. Prout looked round.

"Ahem!" repeated Harry.

"You are troubled with a bad cough, Wharton?"

"No, sir. I—ahem!—would you grant us a favour, sir?"

"By all means, if it is within my power to do so."

A sudden inspiration came to Wharton just then.

"We should feel very honoured, sir," he said, "if you'd permit us to take your machine to the garage in Courtfield. It will need—er—a little repair."

Mr. Prout smiled graciously.

"That is indeed kind of you, Wharton!" he said.

"Not at all, sir. And while we are in Courtfield, sir, might we—the five of us—go and see the circus?"

"With pleasure," said Mr. Prout absently.

Harry Wharton nearly kept into the air for sheer joy. Certainly Mr. Quechly, the gimlet-eyed Remove-master, would have been more difficult to coax than Mr. Prout.

"Any luckfulness?" asked Hurree Singh, a moment later.

"Yes, rather!" replied Wharton. "Help me bring this old bus into the bike-shed. I've promised to take it into Courtfield for Prout to have it repaired. We'll have an early tea in the study, and then buzz off. We can go to the circus all serene!"

"Good!"

And the Famous Five betook themselves to No. 1 Study with the feeling that they had deserved well of their country.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Bunter in the Limelight!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

William George Bunter, his fat little legs going like clockwork, waddled after the Famous Five as they strolled down to the gates of Greyfriars after tea with Mr. Prout's machine.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry, turning his head.

"Sheer off, Bunter!"

The Owl of the Remove took no heed. He came up with a rush, and pulled up, panting and breathless, in front of the Famous Five.

"I—I say, you beasts, you might have waited for a chap!" he gasped. "I'm coming along to the circus!"

"Rats!" growled Johnny Bull. "You haven't got permission, for one thing, and we're not going to be saddled with the society of a blessed barrel for another! That's straight from the shoulder! Now you can varnosh, or we'll run this motor-bike over you!"

Billy Bunter, however, merely smiled a fat smile, and walked on abreast of the others.

That was Bunter's way. Whenever anything was on, he didn't mean to be left out in the cold. Having got wind of the fact that Harry Wharton & Co. were going to the circus, he calmly made up his mind to add himself to the party.

He had asked nobody's permission; but that, to Bunter's way of thinking, was a mere detail.

"Step it out!" muttered Frank Nugent. "He'll jolly soon get fagged out, and we shall leave him hopelessly behind by the time we get to Priardale, let alone Courtfield!"

The Famous Five put their best feet forward, so to speak.

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

Their steps developed into strides, and the strides became quicker.

Billy Bunter was not in the right condition for good, brisk walking.

He had a superfluous quantity of avoidpois to carry with him, whereas the Famous Five were supple of limb, and able to cover much ground with a minimum of effort.

But Bunter stuck to them like a leech. For once in a way they quite failed to shake him off. He was perspiring profusely long before Friardale was reached, and the juniors expected him to drop out at any moment.

"Shall we adopt the rufal tactics?" murmured Hurree Singh.

"No," said Wharton. "Blessed if Bunter doesn't deserve to come now! He's stuck it out like a hero!"

"It's a bob admission," hinted Nugent.

Billy Bunter smirked.

"I happen to be short of tin," he said. "It's only temporary, of course. You fellows won't mind having a whip-round on my behalf, I take it?"

"Well, of all the nerve!" growled Johnny Bull.

"You've tramped all this way, relying on us to pay for your ticket!" gasped Wharton.

"Of course!" You ought to regard it as a pal's privilege, Wharton!"

"Don't call me your pal, you fat wotter, or I'll wipe up the ground with you! You won't get a single cent out of us!"

"But I'm expecting a postal-order—"

"Tell me the old, old story!" hummed Bob Cherry softly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's no good, Bunt," said Nugent. "Better give it up as a bad job, and trot back to Greyfriars. We've got permission to be out after locking-up, but if you're not in there'll be the chickens to pay! Take your uncle's advice, and skeddaddle!"

But Bunter didn't skeddaddle. He merely grunted, and continued to keep pace with the Famous Five. He accompanied them to the motor-garage. There was no getting rid of him.

The circus was pitched on Courtfield Common, and was proving an immense attraction. Mr. Harry Hawk devoted half his profits—so said he did, which was not, perhaps, quite the same thing—to the Red Cross Fund. On this account, if on no other, the circus was freely patronised.

How Billy Bunter was going to get in was a mystery. There was only one entrance to the huge tent where the proceedings were taking place, and that was presided over by a couple of pompous individuals in brilliant attire.

Nothing daunted, Billy Bunter followed close on the heels of the Famous Five. Perhaps he was expecting one of them to open his heart at the last moment.

But, if that were the case, Bunter was disappointed. Wharton and Nugent put down a shilling each, and passed into the tent. Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry solemnly counted out their coppers, and laid the precise amount on the little table. Then Hurree Singh followed suit.

Billy Bunter braced himself up, though his knees were knocking together with fear.

"A shillin', please!" said one of the men tersely.

"Shilling be blowed!" retorted Bunter loftily. "I don't have to pay!"

"Oh, don't yer? Ow's that, young shaver?"

"I'm Mr. Harry Hawk's son!" said Bunter, with considerable dignity.

"Ho, ho, ho!" roared the man. "That's rich, that is, considerin' as 'ow Arty Awk ain't married, an' ain't never likely to do nothing so foolish! Don't you come them sort o' games wi' us!"

"Let's kick 'im out of it!" said the man who had spoken first.

Then he stopped short, as a fierce, snarling sound arose in the vicinity of his feet.

The snarl was repeated with vicious emphasis.

"A bloomin' dorg!" muttered the man, swinging round to ascertain the brute's exact whereabouts, so that he might give it a savage kick.

The next instant the snarling was heard at the feet of the other man; and both were soon busily engaged in searching for the mysterious creature which dared to come within snapping distance of their gorgeous striped trousers.

While they were engaged in lifting up the flap of the tent, and poking their respective noses underneath, Billy Bunter, with a low chuckle, scuttled past the unguarded entrance, and made his way calmly to the front seats.

He found the Famous Five there, enjoying the tight-rope walk.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "How in thunder did you work the oracle, Bunt?"

"Ventriiloquism!" grinned Bunter. "It's always a useful thing to fall back on when you've got no money in your pocket. What's the show like, you fellows?"

"I've seen heaps better, and heaps worse!" said Harry

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NEXT MONDAY—

"FOR D'ARCY'S SAKE!"

EVERY MONDAY, The "Magnet" LIBRARY, ONE PENNY.

Wharton. "The lion-tamer knows his bizney, and these tight-rope jobbies aren't bad, but the performing bears gave a putrid show. Hallo! What's on now?"

Harry Hawk, in company with several of his strongest men, was bringing on the scene a glass case, containing what, at first sight, appeared to be a shaggy sort of animal of doubtful identity.

"This, ladies and gentlemen," said Mr. Harry Hawk, breathing hard after his exertions with the glass case, "this is Professor Pawker, the man with the boundless appetite!"

Billy Bunter pricked up his ears.

"The professor has been fasting in this glass case for twelve days and twelve nights," continued Mr. Hawk, with great solemnity. "He will now dispose of a colossal quantity of food in record time. The usual sum of five pounds is offered to anyone who can equal his achievement!"

"I'm on to that!" muttered Bunter, his eyes gleaming behind his big spectacles.

"But you haven't been fasting!" said Johnny Bull.

"Haven't I, though? I only had half a dozen sausage rolls for tea, and—half a cherry cake. It's not enough to keep body and soul together!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Professor Pawker was a short, stout man, with an abundance of long black hair, hence the delusion of the crowd that he was an animal.

The circus proprietor touched a bell, and a liveried attendant appeared with a huge fowl on a dish. The bird was surrounded with vegetables, and an appetising odour came from it.

Billy Bunter, who was within easy range of the delicious smell, had to be forcibly held back by his schoolfellows.

The professor attacked that fowl with the greatest energy. It disappeared like magic into his snapping jaws, and the audience sat wrapped in wonder.

"It's a wheeze!" murmured Wharton. "No man living could polish off a big bird like that. The thing's hollow inside, you bet!"

"I say, you fellows, I'm going to challenge Professor What's-his-name to an eating contest, and bag that five quid!" said Bunter.

"You're going to do nothing of the kind!" was Harry Wharton's retort. "We don't want you disgracing Greyfriars by making a beast of yourself here!"

Professor Pawker's exhibition was soon over. He was ushered back into the glass case for another period of alleged fasting, and then other turns succeeded.

On the whole, the performance was a very fair success, and when the afternoon was merging into evening the Famous Five deemed it time to return to school.

But Billy Bunter lingered. The others spoke to him, but he took no heed. He sat like one fascinated, with his eyes riveted on the scene in front of him, and wild horses would not have dragged him away from the circus at that juncture.

"Poor old Bunt!" said Bob Cherry. "He's got it bad. He's still thinking of that fowl which had such a ripping smell!"

"Are you coming along, you fat idiot?" hissed Nugent, shaking Bunter violently by the shoulders.

"Ow! Lemme alone!"

Nugent took the Owl of the Remove at his word.

"Come along, you fellows!" he said. "If the silly ass wants to sit it out half the night, and finish up with a jolly good licking from the Head for breaking bounds, it's his own bizney. He can't say we didn't warn him!"

And the Famous Five, leaving Billy Bunter to his own devices, set out at a brisk pace for Greyfriars.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

After the Feast, the Reekoning!

"BUNTER! Has anyone here seen Bunter?"

Wingate of the Sixth put his head in at the door of the Rag a few minutes before bedtime.

He was looking exasperated, and Billy Bunter scarcely seemed to be booked for a good time on his return from Courtfield.

"We left him at the circus, Wingate," said Wharton, who saw no sense in concealing the fact, since Wingate was bound to find out for himself in the course of the evening.

"At the circus?" exclaimed Wingate. "Had he permission to go?"

"I don't think so."

The captain of Greyfriars looked grim.

"He'll find he's walked into a hornet's-nest when he gets back!" he said. "I never heard of such colossal nerve in all my life!"

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Bed-time came, but not Bunter. Lights out followed, but the familiar snore of the Owl of the Remove was lacking. The dormitory seemed strange without his presence.

"What's happened to him?" asked Vernon-Smith. "Surely he's not staying on at the circus till it finishes?"

"Looks like it!" said Wharton. "And then he's got the walk back. I shouldn't think he'd reach Greyfriars this side of midnight."

"Great Scott!"

The juniors were anxious on Bunter's account. As a rule, they didn't care a rap what pains and penalties overtook the Owl of the Remove. But on this occasion Bunter was laying himself open to such severe punishment that he had the sympathy of his schoolfellows in advance.

An hour passed, during which most of the Removes rolled over and went to sleep. Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry, however, remained awake. They were anxious to learn from Bunter's lips what manner of fate had befallen him as a result of his escapade.

"Some long time coming," murmured Bob Cherry, propping himself up afresh on the pillow. "A s'pose he hasn't taking a trip down the jaws of the man-eating lion?"

"No such luck!" yawned Harry Wharton.

Midnight had chimed out from the old clock-tower when the door of the dormitory opened, and a fat figure came lumbering through the darkness.

"Is that you, Bunter?" muttered Bob Cherry.

"Yes. Don't make a row, for goodness' sake, Cherry! I shall get nailed."

"You're nailed already, you fat clump!"

"El? I don't think so!" chuckled the Owl of the Remove, groping his way to his bed and starting to undress. "I haven't met a soul all the way from Courtfield."

"Wasn't anybody waiting up for you?" asked Wharton.

"No fear!"

"Then the chopper will come down in the morning. Don't delude yourself that you've got off scot-free, because you haven't. Old Wingate's been raising Cain about you."

"Oh, crumple!"

"Did you imagine you were safe, fathead?" demanded Bob Cherry. "You weren't here, as calling over."

Then why didn't one of you chaps do the decent thing, and answer in my name?"

"Do you think we can imitate your rat's squeak?" growled Bob. "We're awfully sorry for you, Bunter, but your number's up. Wingate'll come down on you like a thousand of bricks in the morning."

"Ow!"

Billy Bunter got into bed feeling very dispirited. He had congratulated himself that all was well, and that his evening's adventure was unknown save to the Famous Five. This was a rude awakening.

"W-was Wingate very rattly?" he faltered.

"He looked as wrathly as Jove," said Harry Wharton. "You might get off with a couple of cuts on each hand, but I shouldn't think so. Good-night, Bunter. Pleasant dreams!"

"Grooh!"

For a long, long time Billy Bunter remained awake, shivering between the sheets. He was trying to devise some plausible story which would account for his absence from the school.

The grey dawn was creeping in at the windows of the Remove dormitory when Bunter sank into a troubled and uneasy slumber.

His awakening, a few hours later, was both sudden and dramatic. Looking up with a startled face, he saw Wingate of the Sixth, who was shaking him vigorously.

"Turn out, you fat rascal!" roared Wingate. "What do you mean by breaking bounds last night? You were at the circus in Courtfield, I understand!"

Billy Bunter sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes.

"The—the circus, Wingate?"

"Yes. Don't attempt to prevaricate, or it will be the worse for you!"

"Oh, really, you know! I—I don't know what a circus is, Wingate! Is it good to eat?"

"Ye, ha, ha!"

"Snack!"

Wingate's open palm came with a sounding report upon Bunter's round head.

"Ow-ow-ow!"

"No more crammies!" snapped the captain of Greyfriars. "Now, then, were you or were you not at the circus?"

"Not!" said Bunter promptly.

Wingate looked grim.

"Then I shall be glad to know how you occupied your time between tea and lights out."

Bunter was in a desperate corner; but he had wriggled out of desperate corners before, and hoped to do so this time.

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"I—I— Quetchly happened to be ill, and he sent me into Friardale for Dr. Short."

"And it took you five or six hours to get to the village and back?" asked Wingate ominously.

"Ahem! I—I mean, it wasn't Dr. Short I went to fetch. Quetchly said he was a quack, and wasn't an ornament to his profession, or something. So I had to go all the way to Wapshot for the military doctor."

Wingate stared hard at Bunter for a moment; then he stepped out on to the landing. Mr. Quetchly happened to be passing down the stairs.

"Good-morning, Wingate!" he said.

"Good-morning, sir! Excuse me, but Bunter informs me that you were indisposed last night, and that you sent him to Wapshot for a doctor. Would you mind confirming his statement, sir?"

The Remove-master looked flabbergasted.

"The whole thing is a sheer fable!" he exclaimed. "I was not ill, neither did I instruct Bunter to go for a doctor."

"Then he has lied to me, sir," said Wingate. "He was absent from the school for several hours last night, and, so far as I can gather, he went to the circus at Courtfield. But when I questioned him on the subject he denied it, and said he went out for you."

"He shall be made to suffer severely for his conduct!" said Mr. Quetchly angrily. "Would you be good enough to take him before Dr. Locke, Wingate, and explain his transgressions?"

"Certainly, sir."

Bunter was still cowering in his bed when Wingate returned to the dormitory.

The stalwart Sixth-Former did not stand on ceremony. The bedclothes were flung, and the Owl of the Remove descended to the floor with a crash that shook the dormitory.

"Back up and dress, you confounded young Ananias!" roared Wingate. "I have just been told by Mr. Quetchly that he has not been ill at all, and has not had to call in the services of a doctor. You've been telling me a pack of falsehoods, and I'm going to take you before the Head!"

"Ow-ow-ow!"

Mournfully, but quickly, for Wingate's boot was behind him, Bunter got into his clothes. Then, like a condemned felon being escorted to execution, he left the dormitory in Wingate's custody.

Dr. Locke's anger was, as Hatteree Sligh would have said, terrific. Bunter's amazing nerve in breaking bounds and staying out half the night under the Head's fairytale. He ordered a general assembly in Big Hall, and Gosling, the porter, was summoned for the purpose of bearing the bulky person of William George Bunter on his shoulders.

It was no light flogging that Bunter received. The Head laid on the heavy birch-rod with terrific vim, and the victim's yells awakened the echoes.

Bunter was discovering—by no means for the first time in his school career—that the way of the transgressor is hard.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Worthy of His Hire!

BILLY BUNTER kept very quiet for the remainder of that day. According to Bob Cherry, he had made such a row while being flogged by the Head that he was practising a sort of vocal economy.

But although Bunter spoke little, he thought a good deal. His mind was full of the many alluring scenes he had witnessed at Harry Hawk's Circus, and he found himself bitten very badly by the craze to become a circus star.

"Why shouldn't I follow in the footsteps of Professor Pawker?" he reasoned with himself. "I'm better than he is, any day, and could put away a fowl, hot or cold, in half the time it takes him. I wonder—"

A sudden idea occurred to Bunter. He would go and see the proprietor of the circus with a view to obtaining a berth there.

The chance appealed with great force to the greedy, grasping Owl of the Remove.

To begin with, his pay was sure to be good—far in excess of his present allowance of pocket-money, at any rate—and then, if he could only give a turn similar to Professor Pawker's, what gorgeous feeds would be his! The prospect fairly set his mouth watering.

"I'm hanged if I don't go and try and fix things up!" he declared to himself. "This school's getting nothing more or less than a beastly reformatory! Just because I overshoot the mark a bit last night the Head lammed me without mercy! It's beastly! The sooner I say good-bye to Greyfriars the better! None of the fellows are at all to my liking. They're too much eaten up with jealousy, and all that sort of thing. I'll bunk!"



Tom Jenkins gave Billy Bunter a helping hand, owing to the fat junior's inability to mount into the dog cart. (See Chapter 7)

The wild idea of throwing in his lot with the members of Harry Hawk's Circus had taken deep root in Bunter's brain. He had come, he told himself, to the parting of the ways—Greyfriars and tyranny, or Hawk's Circus and freedom.

Mr. Quelch found Bunter a very trying pupil that day, and lines fell as thick and fast upon the Owl of the Remove as leaves in Vallombrosa. But for once in a way Bunter accepted this big batch of impositions without whining. He actually smiled.

"Ha! They little know!" he chuckled to himself, like the villain in a play. "I shan't see another sunrise at Greyfriars. They'll search for me, and some of 'em might mourn my loss, but it will be in vain."

Bunter was presumptuous enough to suppose that there would be no difficulty in securing an engagement at the hands of Harry Hawk.

Harry Wharton & Co. were puzzled at Bunter's behaviour; but there was a cricket match on against the Upper Fourth after lessons, and their anxiety to send Temple & Co. off the field with their tails between their legs, as Bob Cherry expressed it, temporarily drove all thoughts of Bunter into the background.

The Owl of the Remove, instead of remaining under detention in order to commence his gigantic mass of lines, proceeded to Study No. 7, where he made himself scrupulously tidy, and executed a perfect parting in the centre of his hair.

"Hallo!" said Peter Todd. "Wherefore this thousness? Have you fallen in love, porpoise?"

"I decline to say," said Bunter, with dignity.

Peter Todd grunted.

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"FOR D'ARCY'S SAKE!"

"Must be something the matter, for you to take a pride in your appearance," he said. "Is Cora Quelch coming on the scene?"

"Oh, really, Todd! It's high time some fellows were cured of their inquisitiveness!"

"What?" roared Peter. "You, the quizziest, noisiest fellow in all Greyfriars, dare talk to me like that! My hat! I—I'll jolly well sculp you!"

And Peter swung a cricket-bat through the air with much vigour.

The fat junior did not wait to face his outrageous study-mate. He promptly fled.

"No more bullying from the beast Todd after to-day!" he reflected, as he waddled along the road to Courtfield.

Bunter, unprincipled and shallow-minded as he was, could be very determined on occasions, and this was one of them. The future loomed up before him like a golden vision of glory. He saw himself accumulating fame and riches hand over hand. Why, he might even fill the shoes of Harry Hawk one day, and be able to smoke choice cigars, do no work save that of overseeing others, and eat, drink, and be merry to his heart's content.

Bunter's ambition was not of a very lofty order.

When he reached Harry Hawk's circus the performance had not begun. Horses were grazing at will on the common, and caravans, ropes, and sheets of tarpaulin were scattered about in disorder.

"Got yer, you young rascal!"

Billy Bunter leapt nearly a foot from the ground and squealed with fright as a heavy hand descended upon his shoulder. Looking up, he recognised one of the circus

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attendants whom he had victimised with his ventriloquism the night before.

"Ow! Lemme go!" howled the terrified junior.
 "Not so fast, my precious roly-poly! You got in last night without payin'. Played a trick me, yer did. An' Tom Jorkins ain't a man to play tricks on with impunity! Take that!"

"That" was a cuff on the side of the head which caused Bunter to emit a most unearthly yell.

Harry Hawk, with the eternal cigar between his teeth, came striding upon the scene.

"Here, what's all this?" he exclaimed angrily. "Jorkins, I won't stand this infernal bullying! I won't stand it, I say! Keep your hands off that young gentleman, or, by jiminy, I'll make things warm for you!"

"Bow-wow!" said Jorkins insolently.
 "Take a month's notice!" snapped the incensed Harry Hawk.

"That's the fifth month's notice I've had this week. Go away, guv'nor, or I shall be a-leavin' of yer!"

The circus proprietor pranced about like a cat on hot bricks.

"D'you want me to bring the Strong Man out to you?" he demanded.

This threat had the desired effect. Tom Jorkins stood in terror of the Strong Man, who could lay any other member of the circus on his back well inside two minutes.

Jorkins let go of Bunter as if he had been red-hot, and the fat junior gave a gasp of relief.

"Th-thanks, awfully, sir!" he said, raising his cap respectfully to Mr. Harry Hawk.

"Don't mention it, kid! Only too pleased to be of service!"

Bunter brightened up. The man's genial attitude gave him the opening he wanted.

"May I have a word with you, sir?" he asked.

"Wite if you like! Fire away!"

"I should like to—ahem!—to join your circus," said Bunter, taking the plunge.

Harry Hawk eyed the fat junior like a farmer sizing up his cattle at market.

"What line?" he asked shortly.

"Eating," said Bunter promptly.

The circus proprietor smiled indulgently.

"Sorry, young 'un!" he said. "Professor Pawker's our man. There ain't nobody in the land—in the whole world, come to that—as can polish off the quantity of food he puts away twice nightly."

"But I thought he fasted?" said Bunter in astonishment.

Harry Hawk winked solemnly with his right eye.

"A good many people," he said, "would like to fast in the way he does. They'd get fattened up wunnerful quick. He, ha, ha!"

"He can beat Pawker at his own game," said Bunter, throwing up his waistcoat and speaking with profound self-assurance.

"Ganmon!"

"I tell you it's a fact, sir! Let me show you."

At this juncture Jorkins came running up. He looked as if he had lost a shilling and found ninepence.

"What's the matter?" barked the proprietor.

"We shan't never clap eyes on 'im no more!"

Harry Hawk reached out his hand, caught the attendant by the scruff of the neck, and shook him.

"Explain yourself, imbecile!" he raved.

"I will give me 'alf a chance! Pawker's bin an' put 'is foot in it proper. It's a case for the Hassies!" said Jorkins dismally.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, he was arrested in the town this afternoon for 'elpin' 'isself to an 'am. Not only that, but he violently insulted the two policemen as took 'im to the lock-up. It'll be three months 'ard, at least!"

"Confound the idiot!" said Mr. Harry Hawk. "He's brought ruin to himself, and the circus as well! The place will be too hot to hold us now. We must push off at once to another district."

Billy Bunter heard these words with intense delight. Fate could not have been more generous. He saw his chance, and took it.

"Now, sir," he said, to the fuming proprietor, "p'raps you'll give me a trial? There'll be no harm in that. Let me show you what I can do in the gurgin' line."

Harry Hawk hesitated; then, struck by Bunter's enthusiasm, he consented.

"Come this way," he said. "But if you're fooling me, I'll have you pitched neck-and-crop out of the place. I'm in a most despit' mood just at present."

The proprietor mounted the steps of his caravan, and entered. The Greyfriars junior followed suit, while the

wretched Jorkins clouched off to drown his sorrows in a tankard of ale.

Harry Hawk brought forth a fowl similar in size to that which Professor Pawker had demolished the previous evening. He then backed off a hunk of bread, and bade Bunter begin.

The Owl of the Remove needed no second bidding. He attacked that fowl as though he owed it a grievance. It was cold, but had been well cooked, and Bunter was in his element.

The circus proprietor seated himself, and at the outset viewed the proceedings without much interest. Presently, however, he gave a gasp at the rapidity with which that fowl was disappearing. Bunter's jaws clamped away like clock-work and, like the brook in the poem, he seemed capable of going on for ever.

"My eye!" gasped Harry Hawk. "My eye!"

That was all he could say just then.

The minutes sped; so did the fowl. Bunter was feeling just a shade uncomfortable below the belt as he neared the end of his orgy; but he stuck to his guns, and when he laid down his knife and fork only a collection of bones remained on his plate.

"How's that?" he said, with a triumphant grin.

"Why," said Harry Hawk, "it's amazin'—simply amazin'! Pawker can go to prison and be blowed, after this! He need never show his face again at this circus! Grunter—is your name Grunter?"

"Bunter," corrected the fat junior.

"Bunter, you're a youthful prodigy, that's what you are! Pawker can't hold a candle to you as a first-rate gorger. And you don't lose no time in puttin' it away, neither. The marvel of it is that the bird you've just got down your neck was solid. Them that Pawker ate was hollow, more or less. I was always afraid the public might twig."

"Then you'll give me an engagement, sir?" asked Bunter eagerly.

"Like a shot! We'll pad you out a bit, an' you'll fill the bill to a T! We've already got some novelties in our show. There's a woman without arms, an' a man who was born with ears overlappin' his eyes! But the public's beginnin' to get just a little tired of 'em. You'll wake things up again!"

"And my salary?" asked Bunter cautiously.

"Hoi! Lemme see. Two quid a week suit you, for a start."

"Two quid a week!"

Bunter's eyes were gleaming. He seemed to be swimming in a sea of sovereigns. A hundred pounds a year! Why, he would be almost as wealthy as his father, who dealt with bulls, bears, and other weird things on the London Stock Exchange. So he thought.

"That'll suit me down to the ground," he said.

Harry Hawk pulled out a cigar, and lit it from the stump of the torpedo-shaped horror he had just been smoking.

"You intend to run away from school, I take it?" he said.

"Certainly!" said Bunter. "I'm fed up with Greyfriars. It's like a confounded prison. Dartmoor couldn't be worse!"

Harry Hawk nodded sympathetically.

"In that case, it'll be necessary for you to get a quick change of clothing," he said. "P'raps some of Pawker's cast-off things will fit you. We'll see. And now you'd better trot along to the school. We're shiftin' from this place to-night, an' I shall expect you to join us to-morrow!"

"Where will you be?" asked Bunter.

"At a place called Burchester, fifteen miles away. Ever heard of it?"

"Yes," said Bunter.

"Well, you'd better walk. It'll excite suspicion if you go by train. No! Half a jiffy! I'll send one of the men as far as Friarfield with a dogcart to meet you, at seven to-morrow night, say. How'll that do?"

"Capital!" said Bunter.

"Then, it's a go!" said Harry Hawk.

He extended his hand, and gripped Bunter's flabby paw by way of compact.

Billy Bunter left the circus with his head almost hitting the sky.

It was the greatest bargain he had ever entered upon in his life.

Good-bye to his career would be a bed of roses.

Good-bye to Latin and Greek! Good-bye to Quelch's formidable cane and portentous frown!

A new life opened out before William George Bunter, and he saw himself, in his mind's eye, rising to be a distinguished and substantial man of the world, and the idol of the great British public.

But the fulfilment of his dreams was farther off than he so confidently anticipated!

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

IF Greyfriars had marvelled at Billy Bunter's demeanour before, they marvelled still more next day, for the Owl of the Remove behaved in a most mysterious manner, causing considerable comment in the ranks of the Remove.

The Famous Five were discussing their fat schoolfellow in Study No. 1 after cricket practice, when the door suddenly opened, and Bunter himself walked in.

"Hallo, hallo; hallo, fatty!" said Bob Cherry. "What's the latest news from the Associated Keyhole Bureau?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" said Bunter, in a serious voice, as he coolly appropriated Frank Nugent's chair and sat down at the table. "I've come to have tea with you fellows. You won't have the pleasure of entertaining me any more."

"What do you mean?" asked Wharton, his astonishment overcoming his anger at Bunter's colossal cheek.

"You'll see what I mean to-night," said Bunter, very mysteriously.

"You've been sacked from the school?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Rats!"
"One of your titled relations taking you for a holiday trip on the Riviera?" grinned Bob Cherry.

Bunter snorted—a most expressive snort.

"He is taking out of his neck backfully!" said Hurree Singh.

"Wait and see!" said Bunter dramatically, as he dived a spoon into six inches of strawberry jam.

"Look here," said Nugent, "you've lagged my seat, but I shan't mind so long as you tell us what all this blessed mystery's about."

"Aha! Wouldn't you like to know?" said Bunter. "I can only give you a hint, and leave you to form your own conclusions. A certain chap might be leaving Greyfriars school."

"Ola!" said the Famous Five together.

"And his absence will be sorely felt!" said Bunter, brashly away a wasp which had sailed in through the open window.

"Is Wingate leaving, then?" asked Harry Wharton, with a look of concern.

"Not that I know of."

"Who is it, then—Courtney, Walker, Blundell?"

"P'raps it's someone in the Remove," said Johnny Bull.

"Vernon-Smith, or Mauly, or Toddy."

"Has the fellow—if there is such a fellow—been sacked?" asked Wharton.

"Not exactly. He's sacking himself!"

"What!"

"He's giving himself notice to quit," said Bunter, with a queer sort of chuckle.

Johnny Bull sprang to his feet, and his hand closed affectionately upon the poker.

"I don't know how you fellows feel about it, but I'm fed up with all this confounded mystery," he said. "I like things to be straight and above-board. Out you get, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Johnny, old fellow—"

"Don't 'Johnny, old fellow' me!" roared Johnny Bull, in tones of thunder. "Get clear of this study, or I'll bust this poker over your napper!"

The expression of ferocity on the speaker's face was so terrible that Bunter didn't think twice about obeying. He leapt to his feet with an alacrity that sent his cup of tea flying, and streaked out into the passage like a champion of the cinder-path.

"Beasts!" he yelled back at the Famous Five. "You'll be sorry for this before many hours are over!"

"Blessed if I can make head or tail of Bunter to-day!" said Harry Wharton. "I've known him to behave queerly, but never quite so queerly as this. I wonder what's made him like it?"

"The heat of the sun," said Bob Cherry. "It's a touch of madness—a little milder than the Kaiser's, but madness, all the same. We'll petition the Head for a padded cell when he gets really dangerous."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five went on with their tea, and for the time forgot Bunter and his extraordinary behaviour.

He was brought into their minds again a couple of hours later, when Mr. Quelch accosted them on the cricket-field.

"Have you boys seen anything of Bunter?" asked the Remove-master, with a worried frown.

"He was in our study to tea two hours ago, sir," said Wharton. "Where he went afterwards I haven't the remotest idea."

"He is probably in the esteemed tuckshop, honoured sahib," said Hurree Singh.

"Mr. Quelch shook his head.

"I have made inquiries at Mrs. Mumble's and elsewhere,"

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NEXT

MONDAY—

"FOR D'ARCY'S SAKE!"

he said, "but the young rascal cannot be found. He has a number of impositions to complete for me, and up to this present has not presented a single line."

"Well, rout him out, if you like, sir," said Bob Cherry obligingly.

"I should be very grateful if you would, Cherry."

The Famous Five got off in search of Bunter.

They made no aliphoid job of it. All the studies were ransacked, and all the corridors were searched. The domestic regions, whereunto Bunter did frequently resort, were visited, but the search, though vigorously conducted, was barren of result.

Peter Todd encountered Harry Wharton & Co. in the Remove passage.

"Seen anything of the one-and-only?" he asked.

"Bunter, d'you mean?" said Nugent.

"Yes."

"We're hunting for him ourselves. Quelch wants him."

"He hasn't been in the study to tea," said Peter Todd.

"If that isn't a miracle, I don't know what is."

"He had some grub in No. 1," said Wharton. "We kicked him out, and he hasn't been seen since."

"That's queer!" said Peter. "I suppose we haven't the great good fortune of being rid of his company for ever?"

"No such luckfulness!" said Hurree Singh, shaking his dusky head. "The esteemed Bunter lives on the fatfulness of the land here, and he wouldn't give it up chuckfully!"

"No fear!" said Bob Cherry. "We shall come across his fat carcass presently, and give him the lumping of his life, too, for putting us to all this trouble!"

But the evening drew on and William George Bunter did not honour Greyfriars with his presence. He was nowhere within the school precincts. That was certain.

The first piece of information relative to Bunter's movements came to hand just before locking-up time. Skinner of the Remove swore to having seen Bunter in company with his minor, Sammy, leave the school gates shortly after six o'clock.

"He was logged up in some things that looked suspiciously like Mauly's," said Skinner. "and I'll bet my boots it was Smithy's gladstone-bag he was carrying!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith.

"Yes, he probably had that, too," answered the humbriat,

"though I didn't notice it."

"That's the absolute giddy limit!" said Bob Cherry.

"There's only one conclusion we can come to now—Bunter's run away!"

"Run away?" came in a startled gasp from the other fellows.

"Yes. He's been talking a lot of mysterious twaddle to-day about a certain chap who would shortly be leaving. Some mud isn't it's come into his cranbun, and he's sloped off."

"But where?" asked Wharton.

"Give it up! Sammy's better informed on that point than anybody. Let's come along and have a jaw with him."

Sammy Bunter was discovered in the Second Form classroom, one side of his face distorted by a huge slat of toffee.

"Wharrer marrer?" he managed to jerk out.

Bob Cherry gripped Sammy by the superfluous flesh at the back of his neck, and shook him with such violence that the wretched fag's teeth became firmly embedded in the toffee, so that he was unable to speak for some moments.

"Ow-ow-ow!" he gurgled, at length.

"Where's your blessed cormorant of a brother?" roared Bob Cherry.

"Dunno," he managed to articulate.

"Rats!" said Harry Wharton sternly. "You were seen to go out of the gates with him a few hours ago. Tell us where he went, or you'll get the licking of your life!"

"Right now!" supplemented Bob Cherry, with another violent shake.

"I don't know where he went!" said Sammy, whose podgy face had gone pale with fright. "He's left Greyfriars for good, that's all I know!"

"Where has he gone?"

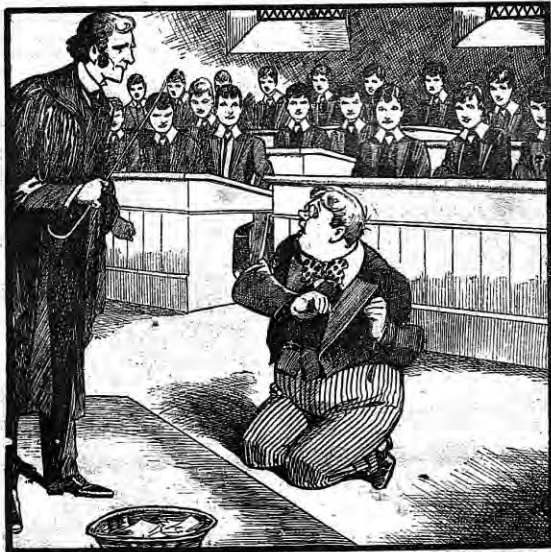
"Goodness knows! He said good-bye to me in Friardale, and I haven't seen him since. I turned round and came straight back."

There was a pause. The Removites eyed one another grimly.

"Of course, he's telling whoppers!" said Nugent. "But

ANSWERS

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



"I shall not, however, take such a step," the Head went on. "But you will be subjected to a severe flogging, here and now!" "Yow! Spare me, Sir!" yelled Billy Bunter, trembling with fright. (See Chapter 12.)

the more we question him the more fibs he'll pile up. We'd better chuck it and report to Quelch!"

It was an excited procession which lined up outside the Form-master's study. Mr. Quelch opened the door, and his expression was anxious.

"Has Bunter been found, my boys?"

"No, sir," said Wharton. "It appears that he's run away."

Bless my soul!"

Mr. Quelch looked as if he could have been knocked down with a feather. Everybody at Greyfriars had regarded Billy Bunter as much too chicken-hearted an individual to take such a desperate step.

But Bunter had gone; and although he had been absent but a few hours, the school was not the same place. The fellows missed his high-pitched voice, his shrill demands for money, to be refunded out of fictitious postal-orders, and, most of all, his insatiable appetite.

"Have you any idea where he has gone?" asked Mr. Quelch, at length.

"No, sir," said Harry Wharton.

"Then I must report the matter to Dr. Locke, and send a wire to Bunter's father. The whole thing is most alarming and inexplicable. Thank you, my boys!"

And Mr. Quelch rustled away along the passage in the direction of the Head's study.

There was only one topic of conversation at Greyfriars that evening—Billy Bunter's disappearance. It had come as a bombshell to most of the fellows, and the Removites cast expectant glances at Bunter's bed as if in anticipation of seeing him there.

But the bed was vacant, and Courtney of the Sixth, seeing fights out, found there was no need for him to conform to his usual practice and tell Bunter to buck up and turn in, for the simple reason that there was no Bunter!

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THE 7th CHAPTER.

Bunter's Paradise!

SAMMY BUNTER had lied, of course.

He knew exactly where his major was, and what he was doing. Sammy had been the only person Billy Bunter had taken into his confidence, and he had done so rather reluctantly. Still, he had let Sammy into a great many of his little secrets in the past, and felt that it would be unbrotierly not to do so on this occasion.

Billy and Sammy had discussed the future at great length on the walk to Friarford.

"Why can't I come with you?" Sammy had asked grumblingly.

"Because you'd take away a lot of the lime-light from me, for one thing," was the reply. "And there isn't a vacancy, for another. You'll have to hang on at Greyfriars, Sammy, until I've made enough tin to go into retirement, and take you with me."

This was a "big talk," and Sammy took it for exactly what it was worth.

"Of course, I sha'n't keep your secret for nothing," said Sammy.

Billy Bunter's minor had a keen eye to business. He did not mean to let the Owl of the Remove slope off and have the time of his life without catching some of the spray from Billy Bunter's sea of prosperity.

"What do you mean?" demanded Billy indignantly.

"Why, that you'll have to make it worth my while to keep my mouth shut," was Sammy's prompt retort. "A word to the other fellows, and they'll be on your track like greased lightning, and you'll be brought back to the school and flogged."

Billy Bunter's knees almost knocked together.

"You wouldn't dare," he said.

"Wouldn't I, by Jove!"

Sammy Bunter's little round eyes twinkled wickedly.

"You ought to know me well enough by now, Billy, to understand my feelings in matters like these. Make it five bob a week and I'll keep as mum as the grave."

"But—"

"Oh, stop bating! You're not a blessed nanny-goat. You'll find it advisable to agree to my terms at once, or I'll go back to the school this minute and make things warm for you! And look here, I want the first instalment now!"

If looks could have killed, Sammy Bunter's carcass would most certainly have blocked up the roadway at this juncture. But he had nothing to fear from Billy, and smirked triumphantly.

Saying all sorts of harsh and uncomplimentary things, Billy Bunter counted out five shillings—borrowed the day before from an unsuspecting new boy—and placed the sum in Sammy's greedy palm.

"There you are, you rotten blackmailer!" he growled.

"Oh, come, Billy! Brothers ought not to part with such ugly words as that! Pay and look pleasant, old fellow! Hello! What's this contraption coming up?"

Billy Bunter's eyes lit up with sudden pleasure. It was the logcart which Harry Hawk had promised to send; and

the circus attendant, now dressed in clothes of a somewhat racy pattern, was driving.

"Here we are!" said Billy. "This is going to take me to Burchester. I reckon they'll send a search-party out from the school, but nobody will dream of going so far afield as Burchester. Good-bye, Sammy! You shall have your five bob a week, and some grub, too, whenever I can manage to send it."

"Now you're talking!" said Sammy. "That's the true Bunter spirit. Good-bye, Billy, old man, and good luck!"

"Keep mum!" was Billy Bunter's parting admonishment.

Sammy Bunter put his forefinger to his nose, and nodded.

Some little delay ensued owing to Billy Bunter's inability to mount into the dog-cart. Tom Jorkins gave him a helping hand, nearly overbalancing himself in the process, and at last, the conveyance started off.

Billy Bunter waved his hand to his minor, and breathed freely. He felt as elated and satisfied as an interned Hun. The world lay at his feet, for him to conquer. And what boundless possibilities there were for the successor of Professor Pawker!

"Am I going too fast, sir?" asked Jorkins respectfully. Bunter's chest swelled visibly. To be addressed as "sir" was a glowing tribute to his importance.

"No, not at all," he replied. "The quicker you go the better, my man. Some of those beasts up at the school may be on my track soon, and I'm anxious to give 'em the slip."

"Yesser; suitably, sir!"

Jorkins whipped up the horse, and the vehicle rattled along at a spanking pace through Friarale and along the country road which led by way of sundry hamlets, to the little country town of Burchester.

The circus attendant was affability itself. He offered Bunter a cigarette, which the fat junior, having taken with the air of a confirmed smoker, contrived to drop into the roadway at the first opportunity.

"I 'ope you'll find circus life to yer likin', sir," said Jorkins. "Arty 'Awk's all right, perrived you rubs 'im up the right way; an' the gals is a lively lot."

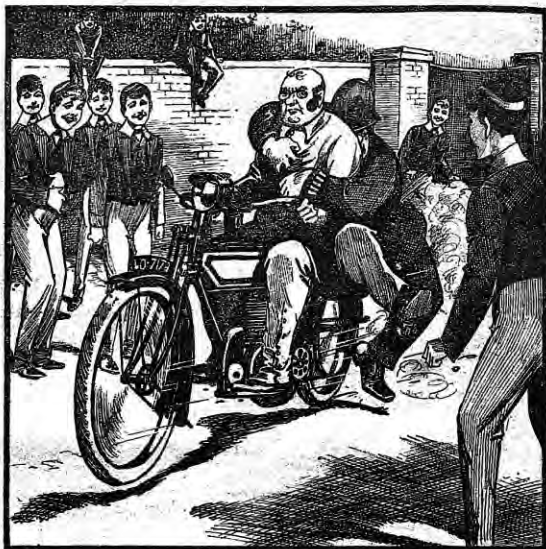
"I'm glad to hear that," said Bunter. "I'm famous with the ladies, you know. They think I'm an adorable chap."

"Jest so, sir," said Jorkins, turning a laugh into a cough. The journey was long and the way rough, and dusk had descended upon the silent countryside when the dim lights of Burchester came into view.

The circus was pitched on the outskirts of the town, but there was nothing doing that evening. Jorkins explained to Bunter that next day the place would be placarded from end to end, and that the first performance would take place on the morrow evening.

"Arty 'Awk's got up to rather a cunning' wheeze concernin' you, sir," said Jorkins. "He ain't a-goin' to advertise you as Master Bunter, secin' as 'ow it would put the authorities of that there school on yer track."

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A motor-cycle came rushing in at the gates, Mr. Prout was at the helm, so to speak, and behind him, clinging round his neck in a most undignified fashion, was P.-c. Tozer, of Friarale. (See Chapter 1.)

"Oh!" said Bunter. "What's he going to do, then?"

"Why, you're going to be made a sort of copper colour, to represent a cannibal from the South Sea Islands. You're goin' to be billed as 'Golly-Wolly, the Man-eatin' Savidge.'"

"Oh, my hat!"

"It's a nutty idea, 'cos it'll clear away all suspicion as to yer real identity," said Jorkins. "Ere we are! 'Op out, sir; but go careful like, 'cos there's some wild cats an' things awavin' around."

"Oh!"

Billy Bunter managed the descent all right, and Harry approached him with a cheery smile.

"What cheer, my merry friend!" he said. "So you worked the oricle all serene—what?"

"Like a charm," said Bunter.

"An' you're feelin' in good health and spirits?"

Bunter shook his head doubtfully.

"I—I've got an empty, sinking sensation at the pit of the stomach," he explained. "It must be lack of nourishment."

Harry Hawk grinned.

"We'll soon remedy that," he said. "Come along to my caravan an' have a blow-out. But don't go stuffin' and cramm'in' too much, else you won't be fit for the cannibal bouch to-morrow night."

"Trust me!" said Bunter.

In the proprietor's caravan he was given the feed of his life.

There could be no question as to the attitude of the circus people towards Billy Bunter. They welcomed him with open arms. Professor Pawker had disgraced himself to the extent of getting arrested, and just as things looked their blackest for the travelling circus, lo! Billy Bunter had stepped into the breach!

And what mattered most, in Harry Hawk's opinion, was the fact that Bunter out-Pawkered Pawker at his own game. With his ravenous appetite, and his speedy disposal of all sorts and conditions of food, he would pass for a cannibal anywhere, provided his skin was coloured in accordance with requirements.

His feed over, Billy Bunter began to yawn. The exciting events of the past few hours and the food he had just demolished caused him to be sleepy.

"I'll show you to your own caravan, which no other member of the circus has permission to enter," said Harry Hawk. "To-night you will retire as Dick Grunter, or whatever your name is. To-morrow you will arise as Golly-Wolly, the Min-eatin' Marvel. Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir!" said Bunter cheerily.

Tired though he was, it was a long time before Bunter sank into the arms of Morpheus that night.

He was not afraid of a possible search-party. Burchester was far enough away for him to be comfortable in his mind on that score. And then, no one but Sammy knew that he had joined Harry Hawk's celebrated circus. And Sammy wouldn't split.

Everything seemed so wonderfully strange and fascinating and romantic that Billy Bunter was happier than he had ever been in his life.

"This is heaven!" he murmured.

And then, curling himself up like a huge, fat cat, he fell asleep.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER. So Near and Yet So Far!

MR. PROUT was still going strong with his motor-cycle, which had been thoroughly overhauled. He employed it as a means of killing time—and chickens! Indeed, the number of casualties inflicted upon the feathered tribe in the district was really alarming; but so long as no human beings were included in his list of victims the gallant Mr. Prout pursued the even tenor of his way in blissful enjoyment.

The motor-cycle was a valuable asset to Mr. Prout, and his only regret was that he had been so biased against it in the past. A bicycle entailed too much hard work, especially in mounting hills; whereas a motor-cycle required no pedalling, neither did it call for any high standard of athletic ability.

Whilst the rest of Greyfriars concerned itself almost solely with the mysterious disappearance of William George Bunter, Mr. Prout flashed along the country lanes, and began to feel twenty years younger.

He was returning from Courtfield on the day after Bunter's precipitate departure, when the Famous Five, who were walking along the road arm-in-arm, heard his hooter, and skipped blithely into the hedge. They had no desire that the roadway should be beset with small pieces of schoolboy.

Mr. Prout stopped when he came up with them, and re-adjusted his cap more firmly on his head, for it had been in imminent danger of blowing off.

"Good-afternoon, my boys!" he said.

"Good-afternoon, sir!"

"Any fatalities, sir?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Do not be impertinent, Cherry! I trust I am sufficiently advanced to be able to comport myself properly on a motor-

toy of this kind. Has any news come to hand concerning Bunter?"

"None, sir," said Harry Wharton. "I understand that Wingate and some more of the seniors formed a search-party last night, but they could find no trace of him."

"Dear me! This is most remarkable. His father was wired to. Do you know if he replied to the telegram?"

"Yes, sir. He wired the Head to say that Bunter had not arrived home. That means that he's probably still in the district. We've just been round making inquiries, but nobody seems to have seen anything of him."

Mr. Prout packed his brows in thought.

"Is it not a fact that Bunter, shortly before leaving, visited a travelling circus at Courtfield, and became so fascinated that he failed to return to Greyfriars until late at night?"

"That's so, sir," said Johnny Bull.

A gleam came into the Fifth Form master's eye.

"Then I think I can surmise what has happened," he said. "The wretched boy, fascinated by the glamour of circus life, has probably thrown in his lot with the concern."

The Famous Five gasped, looked at each other, and gasped again.

"My hat!" exclaimed Nugent. "There's something in that, you fellows. Now I come to think of it, I remember Bunter saying how keenly he'd relish Professor Pawker's job."

"You've about hit it, sir, I reckon," said Harry Wharton. "At any rate, it would be well worth while paying a visit to the circus to see if Bunter's there."

"But the show's gone," said Johnny Bull. "They packed up their traps yesterday, and went off to some place a good many miles away—Burchester, I believe."

"A matter of minutes, if I go there on my machine," said Mr. Prout, half to himself. "Upon my soul, I will go at once! Thank you, my boys!"

And, before the Famous Five could divine what had happened, Mr. Prout had set his machine in motion and gone speeding back in the direction of Courtfield, through which town he would have to pass.

"Well, I'm staggered!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Old Prout's hot on the trail, and no error. Why on earth didn't we think of the circus before? That's where Bunter is, as sure as eggs are eggs!"

"Prout'll make a sensational capture," said Harry Wharton. "And I'm hanged if he doesn't deserve it!"

"Hear, hear!"

"May his efforts be attended with the esteemed usefulness," said Hurree Singh.

In many respects Mr. Prout was not quite such a duffer as some of the fellows supposed. He was quite able to put two and two together.

Nobody had given the circus a thought save Mr. Prout, and that gentleman was now scorching away for all he was worth, hoping to make a dramatic discovery when he reached Burchester.

Mr. Prout's merry antics caused the little groups of pedestrians he encountered to flee for their lives. But he reached Burchester without mishap, and gave a triumphant exclamation as he caught sight of the caravans and varied paraphernalia of the circus.

The performance was about to commence, to judge by the crowd of people which poured into the big tent.

"Ha!" murmured Mr. Prout. "I will not divulge my

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identity at present, but will enter like an ordinary member of the public."

"Look after yer machine, sir?" said one of the attendants, running up.

"Er—yes, please! How much does one have to pay for admission?"

"A bob, sir."

Mr. Prout procured a ticket, and entered the tent.

The Greyfriars master watched turn after turn without any enthusiasm. The tight-rope walking did not cause him to hold his breath by reason of the amazing dexterity and skill which was displayed; the comicalities of the circus clown were completely lost upon him; and the dancing ladies, who positively reeked with powder and paint, disgusted Mr. Prout.

Nevertheless, the master of the Fifth kept his eyes glued on the ring, waiting for the appearance of William George Bunter.

But the hours passed, and the runaway did not appear. The nearest to him was Golly-Wolly, the notorious man-eating cannibal from the South Sea Islands, whose exhibition of fowl-eating filled the soul of Mr. Prout with profound disgust. Such bestial sights were not at all to his liking.

When the fifth-rate orchestra struck up "God Save the King," and the audience commenced to stream out, Mr. Prout's face fell.

He was on the wrong track, after all! He had succeeded in getting to Burchester; he had penetrated to the circus; but he had not got Bunter! And that was the main object of his mission.

It was a defeat, and it was humiliating to a man of Mr. Prout's temperament; but he had not quite abandoned all hope yet. He would see what Mr. Harry Hawk had to say on the subject.

When the attendant who had taken charge of Mr. Prout's motor-cycle brought it forward, the master of the Fifth pressed a shilling into the man's horny palm.

"Thank you kindly, sir!"

"I shall be glad to see the proprietor," said Mr. Prout.

"Yesir! Alf a jiffy, sir!"

A few minutes later Mr. Harry Hawk, agreeably delighted with the success of the evening's performance, came bustling up. He was smiling, but there was a cautious look in his eye as he glanced at Mr. Prout.

"Good-evenin', sir! What can I do for you?"

Mr. Prout stared hard at the circus proprietor.

"I have reason to believe," he said, "that a hoy named Bunter has applied to you for a situation."

"Bunter!" said Harry Hawk, stroking his chin. "Ain't never heard of the name."

Mr. Prout's next words were sternly spoken.

"I will have no prevarication," he said. "It is a most singular thing that the boy Bunter should have left Greyfriars School on the same evening as your circus left Courtfield. I must persist in asking you to acquaint me with the facts!"

"Look here, mister!" blustered Harry Hawk rudely. "I ain't in a witness-box, an' you've no right to cross-examine me like this here!"

"I have every right to do so! I shall refuse to leave these premises until I have satisfied myself that Bunter is not here!"

Harry Hawk laughed sarcastically.

"All right, guv'nor!" he said. "You shall satisfy yourself, bless yer heart! I'll parade the whole blinkin' shoot in front of you right now!"

He blew a shrill blast on the whistle he carried, and an animated scene followed.

Men and women leapt forward, apparently from nowhere, and lined up before Mr. Prout and the circus proprietor.

"Now," said Harry Hawk, "every hand's present! Run yer eye over 'em, Mr. Schoolmaster, an' I'll wager you a bottle of 'e best burgundy you don't see no Master Shunter, or whatever his name is, among 'em!"

Mr. Prout had no intention of being thrown off his balance by the proprietor's insolent self-assurance. He was in real earnest, and, passing along the line, carefully scrutinised the face of every performer and attendant who belonged to Harry Hawk's Travelling Circus.

He paused when he came to the copper-complexioned cannibal.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"Me Golly-Wolly, from South Sea Islands. Me eat white man before me tamed."

Mr. Prout gave an involuntary shudder.

This was not Bunter, any more than Harry Hawk was the headmaster of Greyfriars. The savage had Bunter's stature, but that was where the resemblance began and ended.

Mr. Prout turned away in deep disgust.

"Satisfied?" said Harry Hawk derisively.

Mr. Prout nodded.

"The boy is not here," he said, a trifle wearily. "I must have been mistaken. I am sorry to have spoken to you—ahem!—somewhat harshly."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY—No. 449.

NEXT MONDAY—

"FOR DARCY'S SAKE!"

EVERY MONDAY.

The "Magnet" LIBRARY.

ONE PENNY.

"Don't mence, sir!" said the circus proprietor cheerfully. Mr. Prout, after going through a lot of antics, succeeded in setting his motor-bicycle in motion, and was soon speeding away towards Greyfriars.

No sooner was he out of sight than Mr. Harry Hawk seized his alleged man-eating cannibal round the waist, and waltzed him vigorously to and fro.

"Bunter, my cherub," he chorled, "it was the happiest inspiration of my life when I coloured your chivvy and christened you Golly-Wolly!"

And Billy Bunter, scant of breath, but glad beyond measure that Mr. Prout had been thrown off the scent, heartily agreed.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Wharton Makes a Discovery!

DAYS passed, and Greyfriars jogged along without the doubtful benefit of Bunter's presence.

Searchers had been active, but the nearest approach to a capture had been made by Mr. Prout, though that gentleman was blissfully ignorant of the fact.

Skinner and several others said it would be a jolly good thing for everybody concerned if Bunter was never found, and exhorted the searchers not to put themselves out to any great extent.

But Harry Wharton & Co. took no heed of this entreaty. They scanned high and low, in all the numerous nooks and crannies of the surrounding countryside, in the hope of bringing William George Bunter to light. The Famous Five didn't like to be beaten by Bunter.

But time sped on, and the possibility of finding the runaway became more and more remote.

The Head had wired to Mr. Bunter repeatedly for information, but there was nothing doing. Bunter's pater was just as much in the dark over the business as everybody else.

Harry Wharton & Co., seated in solemn conclave in No. 1 Study, discussed the situation in all its bearings.

"I still think that young boulder Sammy knows where his major's sloped off to," said Nugent. "If we yank him in here, and put him through all the tortures of the Inquisition, it ought to make him open his mouth!"

Harry Wharton shook his head doubtfully.

"I rather think it's like trying to get blood out of a stone," he said. "Still, we'll try. Every effort's going to be made to trace the whereabouts of that porpoise!"

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull rose from their chairs and quitted the study. They went in search of Sammy Bunter.

That young gentleman was engaged in the pleasurable occupation of cooking herrings by the gas-stove in the Second Form class-room.

Dicky Nugent and Tubb and Gatty and Myers were present, hoping to share in the feast; but the greedy expression on Sammy Bunter's countenance clearly indicated that no one else would get a look in with the herrings.

"What do you Remove bounders want?" demanded Dicky Nugent aggressively.

"Our worthy friend Samuel," said Bob Cherry, taking Sammy Bunter by the scruff of the neck as he spoke.

"Ow! Lemme alone, Cherry, you beast! You'll ruin these herrings! Get away!"

But Bob Cherry was adamant. With Johnny Bull's aid he marched the youthful counterpart of Billy Bunter out of the room. The rest of the lads, hugely delighted, swarmed like bees round the herrings which Sammy Bunter had been compelled to abandon.

"Leggo, I tell you! What have I done?"

Sammy Bunter's voice rose in a pitiful wail as he was yanked along the passage.

"You're going to tell us where we shall find that precious major of yours!" growled Johnny Bull. "And no whoppers this time, or you'll catch it confoundedly hot!"

Before Sammy could open his lips to reply he was hustled into No. 1 Study, where Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent and Hurree Singh sat in grim state, after the manner of a special jury.

"Now, then," said Harry Wharton sternly, "we're not going to have any bunkum! We want to know where your major is, and you're not going to leave this study till you tell us!"

"Oh, really, how should I know?" whined Sammy. "I haven't seen or heard from Billy since the day he disappeared!"

"The esteemed Bunter is telling the liefulness!"

Hurree Singh was on his feet, his dark eyes gleaming with excitement.

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

"Have you discovered anything, Inky?" asked Bob Cherry eagerly.

The nabob nodded.
"Only this morning I saw the ludicrous Sammy take a letter out of the rack. I suspect strongly it was from his brother!"

"Oh!"
"My hat!"
"Let's search the young rotter!" roared Johnny Bull. Sammy Bunter's fat face had grown quite pale.

"You won't do anything of the sort!" he screamed hysterically. "I'll tell Quelch! I'll tell the Head! Bull, you beast, leggo!"

But Johnny Bull was engaged in systematically going through the pockets of the wretched Sammy, whose struggles were quite unavailing.

The rest of the Famous Five looked on in silence. They were grimly awaiting some sort of a revelation.

Suddenly Johnny Bull gave a shout. From Sammy Bunter's breast-pocket he drew forth a number of letters, and the first that met his gaze was addressed in the familiar scrawl of William George Bunter!

"Put those letters back! Put 'em back, Bull, you inquisitive rotter!" Sammy Bunter yelled at the top of his lungs, hoping against hope that somebody would come to his rescue in time.

But nobody did.
"We're on the giddy track now, with a vengeance!" said Johnny Bull. "This letter's from Billy Bunter! Read it out, Harry!"

Wharton took the envelope, and drew out the epistle. Simultaneously a postal-order fluttered to the floor of the study.

Frank Nugent picked it up.
"It's for five bob," he said. "What the merry dickens—"

"Listen!" said Wharton.
And he proceeded to read:

"Dear Sammy.—I am sending you the usual five bob for keeping your mouth shut, and hope nothing has leaked out about my movements at Greyfriars."

"I am having a topping time, and as much to eat as I can possibly manage. Of course, I don't go by my proper name, or some of those Greyfriars beasts would have twigged by now."

"Mr. Harry Hawk is kindness itself. He says that when you get as big and as beefy as me he'll be pleased to give you an engagement."

"I expect Greyfriars is pretty well going to pot without me, isn't it? A fellow's good influence is never properly appreciated until he has gone."

"Wharton and his set would go down on their knees to get me back, I expect, but there's nothing doing. I know which side my bread's buttered."

"Keep mum about me, won't you, old Sammy? We expect to leave Burchester soon, but I will let you know our next stop.—Yours with all affectshunn,

"W. G. BUNTER.
"On tour with Harry Hawk's Travelling Circus."

"My only Aunt Sempronius!" gasped Bob Cherry. "This beats the band!"

"It gracefully walks off with the esteemed biscuit factory!" said Hurree Singh.

"The whole thing's as plain as a pikestaff now!" said Nugent. "Bunter went to the circus, got the craze to become a performer, and persuaded Hawk to take him on. He's been paying this worm here—the speaker indicated Sammy—five bob a week to keep his mouth shut."

Harry Wharton nodded.
"I fancy this letter ends the bimzy," he said. "We've simply got to go to the circus and haul Bunter back by the scruff of his neck. I feel rather sorry for him, in a way. But it's for his own good that he should come back."

"It won't be such an easy matter as you seem to think, Harry," said Bob Cherry. "Supposing the circus had packed up its traps and gone from Burchester?"

"We must find out where they've gone, of course!"

"What beats me," said Johnny Bull thoughtfully, "is that old Prout never spotted Bunter when he went over and saw the show at Burchester!"

"That's neither here nor there," said Wharton. "We all know Prout's as blind as a bat. And he's not exactly a Sherlock Holmes, either. Bunter was there, you bet, but Prout didn't twig him."

"What shall we do with this young rotter?" asked Nugent, glaring at Sammy Bunter as if he would eat him.

"He'll have to come before the Head," said Wharton. "It's the only way. The affair's too serious to hush up."

Sammy Bunter sank to his knees. He was shaking like an aspen-leaf from sheer fright.

"Don't!" he wailed. "I shall get sacked from the school! Oh, don't split on me! You fellows can whack that five-bob postal-order out among yourselves if you keep mum."

But the Famous Five resolutely closed their eyes to the quality of mercy. With grim faces, they dragged the protesting Sammy out of the study and into the Head's presence.

Dr. Locke was writing at his study table when the procession entered. He looked up with a startled frown.

"Wharton, how dare you burst in upon me like this!"

"It's important, sir," said Harry. "We've found out all about Bunter!"

"Bless my soul!"

The Head was handed Billy Bunter's letter. He could hardly credit the evidence of his own eyes, but he was glad—immensely glad—for Bunter senior had been growing excited, and threatening Dr. Locke with all sorts of terrible things if his son was not found.

"I am amazed!" gasped the Head at length. "Did you find this letter in Bunter minor's possession, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir!"

Dr. Locke fixed so stern a glance upon the quaking Sammy that the latter prayed fervently for the floor to open and swallow him up.

"Bunter!"

"Ye-o-es, sir?"

"You have deliberately aided and abetted your brother in his wild scheme of joining a circus?"

"No, sir! Not at all, sir! Billy—ahem!—my major did it entirely off his own bat, sir!"

"Do you dare to stand there and tell me that you were in ignorance of your brother's intentions?"

"Yes, sir."

Sammy Bunter was too obtuse to notice the storm-signals in the Head's voice.

"Then, why," thundered Dr. Locke, "has your brother been sending you money to keep mum, as he vulgarly calls it?"

"I—I—"

"You are a wicked and untruthful boy, Bunter minor! I shall flog you most severely, here and now!"

"Ow-ow-ow!"

"Cease making that ridiculous noise, and hold out your hand!"

Very reluctantly Sammy Bunter did as he was bid. The Head dealt out four stinging cuts, and then the victim's other hand came in for a similar dose. Sammy Bunter yelled as if he were being slowly murdered at the hands of the Emperor Nero.

The Famous Five looked on grimly at the chastisement, and when it was over, and the Head had thrown the cane into a corner, Harry Wharton spoke.

"May we go to Burchester in search of Bunter, sir?" he asked.

The Head pondered a moment.

"Certainly, Wharton!" he said at length. "Since you have been instrumental in bringing these facts to light, it is only fair that you should be allowed to see the thing through. But pray do not run any unnecessary risks."

"That's all right, sir," said Wharton cheerfully. "We'll go over to Burchester at once, and report to you on our return this evening."

"Very good, Wharton!"

The Famous Five left the Head's study feeling very elated. "How shall we get to Burchester?" said Johnny Bull.

"Train!" said Wharton promptly. "Back up!"

And a few minutes later the Famous Five swung out of the gates with radiant faces, but with a firm purpose in their hearts.

Billy Bunter's day of reckoning was at hand!



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THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Exposed!

BURCHESTER was an awkward place to get to from Greyfriars. The journey entailed a change at Courtfield Junction, and another change further up the line; and the Famous Five had lost their radiant looks and were feeling rather fed up when they at last stepped out at their destination.

"This is Burchester all right," said Nugent. "Now we've got to find that giddy circus."

But this did not take long.

The evening performance was about to begin. An eager stream of people was pouring into the tent.

"Better go in with the rest of the public!" muttered Bob Cherry. "And keep your eyes skinned for Bunter, you fellows! It would be too rotten to go back empty-handed after all this beastly fog."

The others agreed.

Harry Wharton put down five shillings, and the Greyfriars juniors passed in with the rest.

The performance was scarcely as interesting, seen a second time.

Johnny Bull was yawning, and the Nabob of Bhanipur nearly nodded off to sleep.

But the other three had their eyes glued to the arena throughout. They did not mean to let Bunter escape them. The tight-rope walkers came and went, returned again at the loud-mouthed request of the audience, and gave a brief encore. Then the trick cyclists put in an appearance.

Then Harry Hawk announced, in impressive tones:

"Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to introduce you to Golly-Wolly, a man-eating savage shipped straight from the South Sea Islands!"

There was a murmur of anticipation from the audience, and then Billy Bunter, little dreaming of the danger which menaced him, came on the scene.

"Our coloured friend, ladies and gentlemen, will cause that fowl sponder to do the vanishing trick," continued Harry Hawk. "Watch him!"

All eyes were fixed upon Billy Bunter as he opened the attack. Bob Cherry's eyes were gleaming with an excitement he could scarcely repress.

Suddenly Bob drew forth his peashooter, and, taking careful aim, let fly at the South Sea Island savage.

The first shot took full effect. The pea crashed fairly and squarely upon the performer's nose, and he gave a wild yell.

"Yaroooooh!"

Bob Cherry faced round triumphantly upon his chums.

"That's Bunter," he exclaimed. "Or I'll eat my hat!"

"Bunter!" gasped Harry Wharton. "But how—what—"

"This South Sea Island cannibal binner is so much tomy-rot," said Bob Cherry. "That's Bunter, as large as life and twice as natural. They've coloured his cinnry, and fattened him out, and changed his name, but it's Bunter, all the same!"

"Dr Jove! I believe you're right, Bob!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

His deep voice boomed through the tent.

"Shall we rush up and collar him?"

"Yes," said Wharton, with set teeth.

Instantly the Famous Five leapt to their feet, and, before the audience could divine what was happening, made a concerted rush towards the arena.

Harry Hawk came rushing on the scene. His face was livid.

"How dare you!" he roared. "Leave the tent at once, you impudent young rascals, or I'll have you put out on your necks!"

"Rats!" retorted Bob Cherry, in ringing tones. "We know jolly well that this freak now performing is no South Sea Island savage!"

"Then I should like to know his real identity!" sneered the proprietor.

"It's Bunter—Billy Bunter, of Greyfriars! Let him deny it!" shouted Bob Cherry.

And, seizing the hapless gormandiser, Bob shook him after the manner of a terrier shaking a rat.

"Ow, ow, ow!" squealed Bunter. "Cherry, you beast!"

"There! That's conclusive proof," said Nugent. "We've got our man at last, you fellows!"

Anger and rage and chagrin caused the veins to stand out prominently on Mr. Harry Hawk's temples.

"Get out of it!" he raved, seizing a heavy stock-whip.

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"Hi, Jorkins! Billings! Scott! Help me shift these young scoundrels!"

The men came running to the spot, armed with anything they could snatch up.

The audience cheered and stamped in wild excitement. This was quite to their taste.

"Fight for it!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Greyfriars for ever! We're not going back without Bunter!"

"No giddy fear!"

The Famous Five dashed into the fray.

Johnny Bull snatched the whip from Hawk's grasp, and sent it lashing about his legs, making the circus proprietor yell furiously with rage and pain.

Bob Cherry tackled Jorkins, and Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Singh each had his hands full.

Billy Bunter crouched in a corner, hugging his half-eaten fowl, and shaking all over with fright. He realised that he was not out of the wood yet—not by a very long way.

What if the Famous Five should win the day? He would be dragged back to Greyfriars—back to the Form-work that his soul loathed, to continue plotting and planning for securing too much to eat, and to a terrific flogging at the hands of the Head!

Harry Hawk's circus was, to Bunter, a land flowing with milk and honey. He didn't want to leave it.

The Famous Five had looked like getting the upper hand, but at this juncture several more circus-hands came on the scene, including the Strong Man, and the tide turned in favour of Harry Hawk's vanguard.

"Take that, you confounded puppy!"

The Strong Man sent Harry Wharton spinning, and the captain of the Remove, the back of his head striking the ground, was dazed and half stunned.

Why didn't the audience intervene? he wondered. They were cowards—craven cowards! But the audience, though they shouted and stormed at the top of their lungs, fought shy of fighting.

"It's all up!" muttered Wharton. "We haven't the ghost of a chance against all these brutes!"

The din of the fighting around him smote on his ear like the booming of breakers. Everything seemed to revolve before his gaze. He groped wildly at the air, uttered a low cry, and then fell back to the floor in a state of unconsciousness.

The Strong Man certainly knew how to lift straight from the shoulder.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Chase by Moonlight!

HARRY WHARTON opened his eyes, and struggled into a sitting posture. His head was reeling horribly, and he could not recall for a moment where he was.

"Harry, old man!"

It was Bob Cherry's voice. With difficulty the captain of the Remove struggled to his feet.

"Bob, what has happened?"

"You were struck down," said Bob Cherry. "by a man twice your size. My hat! They call that fair play! Harry Hawk and all the rest of 'em ought to be packed off to Prussia!"

"Where are they now?"

"Outside, having an argument with the police."

"And Bunter?"

"He's gone."

"Gone!"

Wharton gripped his chum by the arm.

"How did he go?" he demanded breathlessly.

"Motor-bike, a minute ago," replied Bob. "One of the attendants shoved him into the side-car, and rode off with him."

"Then why in the world didn't you stop them?"

"Stopping motor-bikes isn't quite so dead easy as all that. They were away almost before I knew it, and naturally I wasn't going to stand in front of the blessed thing and get cut to smithereens!"

Harry Wharton's face was pale with tension.

"Bunter mustn't escape!" he muttered. "We must do something. Which direction did they take?"

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"Main road for London," said Bob Cherry tersely.

Wharton hurried out of the tent with his chum at his heels. A heated discussion was being carried on outside, but Wharton took no heed. He sped on till he reached the roadway.

There, after all the disappointments of the past hour, Fortune smiled upon him, though it was a moot point whether her smile had not arrived too late.

A motor-bike came dashing along the road, and Wharton hailed it with a cry of delight.

"Mr. Prout! Stop, sir—stop!"

It seemed at first glance that the master of the Fifth was going too fast to do anything of the sort. But he managed it somehow, and threw a swift glance of astonishment at Wharton's pallid, excited face.

"Wharton, how came you here? What does this mean? I demand—"

Harry Wharton cut short Mr. Prout's string of questions.

"Bunter was here, sir," he said quickly. "He's gone on ahead on a motor-bike, with one of the circus attendants driving. Will you give chase?"

The light of battle leapt into Mr. Prout's eyes.

"Yes, yes!" he exclaimed.

"May I jump on, sir?"

"By all means!"

Harry Wharton seated himself on the carrier at the back of the machine. He waved his hand to Bob Cherry.

"See you soon!" he shouted. "And we'll bring Bunter with us, I hope!"

"Good luck!" said Bob. And he went off to find his chums and acquaint them with the dramatic happenings of the last few moments.

Mr. Prout sped through Burchester like a flash. He entered into the spirit of the chase, and Harry Wharton, watching him, felt a thrill of intense delight surging up within him.

Wharton marvelled at Mr. Prout's amazing dexterity. He wasn't such an incompetent boob on a motor-cycle as had been thought. Indeed, the way he dodged the traffic called for the greatest admiration.

"How long ago did they start, Wharton?" he asked over his shoulder.

"About five minutes, sir, I think. They'll stick to the main road, most likely," shouted the junior.

Once out in the open country, with the wild west wind blowing about their ears, Mr. Prout fairly let his machine rip, utterly regardless of possible police-traps.

"You must be doing forty an hour, sir!" said Wharton breathlessly.

Mr. Prout laughed grimly.

"It is much nearer sixty, my boy."

"Great Scott!"

On and on they flew, until at last the master of the Fifth uttered a sharp, triumphant exclamation:

"There they are!"

Ahead, going at a good pace, was the other machine. As it rounded a bend in the road Billy Bunter looked round from the side-car, and was seen to urge the driver on to greater speed.

"We shall have all our work cut out, after all," said Mr. Prout. "Did you get a good glimpse of their machine, Wharton? It was a Douglas. They are the last word in speed. My machine may possibly be more strongly made, but its horse-power is only two and a half."

"Put the pace on, sir!" said Harry exultantly.

The captain of the Remove was enjoying himself immensely. The cool night air and the rush of wind freshened and revived him, and the pain in his head had completely vanished. The moon came out from behind a bank of clouds, illuminating the scene with splendour.

"You are not afraid, Wharton?" asked Mr. Prout.

"Afraid of what, Harry laughed. "I never felt finer in my life, sir," he said. "And I certainly don't think you were such a clever driver!"

"One gets very little credit for one's accomplishments nowadays," said Mr. Prout. "Because I made a few blunders at first, as every novice must do, people concluded that I was merely playing with fire by going in for motor-cycling."

"Gee you see the chap ahead, sir?"

"Yes. We are gaining, but not very fast. He knows he is being pursued, and is making every effort to shake us off. We shall have to keep the machine in sight, or they will give us the slip by taking a side-turning."

No word was spoken for some time after this. Mr. Prout strained every nerve to catch up to the swift-rising machine ahead. But its pace seemed too much for him.

Harry Wharton was just thinking that London could not be very far off, for they had been on the move over an hour, when suddenly a loud report, like the sudden firing of a gun, sounded in front.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 449.

"Got them!" panted Mr. Prout, as gleefully as a school-boy. "The fellow is punctured! See, he is trying to struggle on a little way; but it is hopeless!"

Harry Wharton could not restrain a cheer. Mr. Prout's machine made up the leeway in next to no time, and came up with the fugitives just as Billy Bunter was endeavouring to scramble out of the side-car.

"See that he does not get away, Wharton!" cried Mr. Prout.

"Right you are, sir!" answered Harry cheerfully.

Then Mr. Prout dismounted, and surveyed the man he had conquered with a grim look of triumph.

"I give you best, guv'nor," said the fellow from the circus, who was no other than Jorkins. "You beat me fair an square, blowed if you didn't! If it hadn't bin for my con-founded tyre—"

"Help!" wailed Billy Bunter. "Jorkins, you rotter! Ain't you going to make a fight for it? You can knock old Prout out of time in a jiffy."

"How dare you refer to me in that grossly disrespectful manner, Bunter!" thundered the master of the Fifth. "You will return with me at once to Greyfriars, where you will pay the penalty for your wrongdoing! As for you, sir"—Mr. Prout turned to the perspiring Jorkins—"since you have taken your defeat in so sportsmanlike a manner, I shall not hand you over to the police, as it was my intention to do. You may go on your way; but please understand that a recurrence of this affair will not end so satisfactorily for you!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Jorkins sincerely. "You're one o' the best!" And he set to work to repair his damaged tyre.

"Would you object to returning to the school by train, Wharton?" asked Mr. Prout. "Bunter shall accompany me on my machine."

The Owl of the Remove stared wildly around him.

"You want me to ride on that beastly carrier!" he whimpered. "Why, I shall break my neck!"

"Be silent, sir! Do not add impertinence to your long list of misdemeanours!"

Billy Bunter darted a savage look at Jorkins, then he perched himself up on the carrier as best he could, and Mr. Prout started off on the homeward journey.

"Good-night, Wharton!" he called out. "I trust you will arrive back safely."

"I shall be all serene, sir," said Harry. "Good-night!"

And he strode off in search of the nearest railway-station, while the retreating throb of Mr. Prout's motor-cycle grew fainter and fainter in the distance.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER. The Return of the Wanderer!

BILLY BUNTER had a nightmare journey on Mr. Prout's machine. He was not of the stuff of which heroes are made, and the fears of a collision or a breakdown at any moment kept him in a state of wobbly tremor.

Mr. Prout, however, had acquired pretty considerable skill in his latest pursuit, and the gates of Greyfriars were reached without mishap.

The hour was late, and Mr. Prout did not arouse Dr. Locke. That good gentleman should learn of his subordinate's thrilling capture in the morning.

"Come with me, Bunter!" said Mr. Prout, after he had seen his trusty machine safely into the bicycle-shed.

"Where to, sir?"

"I am going to lock you in the punishment-room for the rest of the night. You are not fit to associate with your schoolfellows until justice has been done."

"Ow!"

Mr. Prout led the way to the dreaded apartment, and Billy Bunter followed in fear and trembling.

Having bundled his captive into the room, Mr. Prout turned the key on the outside of the door, and retreated.

The wretched Bunter threw himself down upon the bed in utter despair.

Circus life, which he had grown to love, was at an end. Through the persistency of Mr. Prout and the Famous Five he had been captured just when his star was in the ascendant.

"Sammy must have given me away somehow!" he muttered. "The wretched little worm! So he wasn't satisfied with the five bob a week I sent him! My hat! I'll make things jolly warm for him before I've finished!"

Not a wink of sleep did Billy Bunter get that night.

When the rising-bell rang out on the morning air, the fellows in the Remove dormitory at once turned to Harry Wharton, who had not arrived home till 2 a.m.

"What news, old scout?" asked Bob Cherry eagerly.

"Bunter's found!"

"Go on!" came in a chorus from the rest of the fellows.

"It's a fact!" said Wharton. "He was collared last night, dozens of miles from here—almost in London, in fact!"

"Bravo!"

"Well played, Wharton!"

"Go easy with your congratulations," said Harry. "They belong to old Prout. We've been ruckin' and suiggerin' at old Prout and his motor-bike, but I'm hanged if they didn't both come in jolly useful last night!"

"Tell us all about it!" said Vernon-Smith. "We're dying to know!"

And Wharton plunged into his narrative, which was listened to with breathless interest by the occupants of the Remove dormitory.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Dick Penfold, when Wharton had finished. "Who ever would have thought Bunter had such nerve? Fancy running away to join a travelling circus!"

"The news spread through the school like wildfire. Bunter was back, and there was to be a general assembly in Big Hall. It was not difficult to guess what was about to take place.

When the school was assembled, Dr. Locke swept into the hall with rustling gown.

"Wingate!" he said, as he mounted the raised platform.

"Sir!"

"Kindly go to the punishment-room and find Bunter."

The captain of Greyfriars departed, to return in a few moments with the terrified Owl of the Remove.

Bunter's eyes were heavy from lack of sleep, and his limbs were trembling.

"Bunter," rapped out the Head sternly, "you have to answer to a most serious charge, almost without parallel in the history of this school!"

"Ow!"

"Your action in running away and joining a circus was disgraceful in the extreme. You have given untold anxiety to your father, and to the school authorities. Have you anything to say in extenuation of your heinous conduct?"

"I didn't mean any harm, sir! Honour bright! I—I'm awfully glad to get back to Greyfriars, sir!"

"He looks it!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" thundered the Head. "This is far from being a laughing matter! I am strongly inclined to expel you from this school in disgrace, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter brightened up a little. He felt that he could bear expulsion, since it involved no physical pain.

"I shall not, however, take such a step," the Head went on. "But you will be subjected to a severe flogging, here and now!"

"Yow! Spare me, sir!"

But the Head was deaf to the victim's entreaties and expostulations. He straightway summoned Gosling, the porter, and bade him take William George Bunter on his shoulders.

Gosling complied, and the school looked on in silence while the Head took up the birch and dealt out the strokes.

They fell with relentless severity, and Billy Bunter's yells of anguish were heartrending.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

"Yaroooooh! Help! Fire! Murder!"

A full two minutes had elapsed ere the Head desisted, and Billy Bunter rolled to the floor, twisting and twining like a wounded snake.

"There!" said the Head. "Let that be a lesson to you never to transgress in this way again!"

"Ow-ow-ow!"

"You will rejoin your schoolfellows, and will be kept under strict supervision for a month. The school will now dismiss!"

The fellows filed out of Big Hall. Bunter had fully deserved his punishment; but, now that the circus episode was over, his Form-fellows felt constrained to deal leniently with him.

"We'll give the poor beast a good feed this afternoon," said Harry Wharton, "just to show that we're not hating him when he's down!"

"Good egg!"

Billy Bunter was duly invited to No. 1 Study, and he came in looking as if he had all the worries of the world on his shoulders. But by degrees his expression changed, and when he had made a big inroad into the familiar pastries of Mrs. Mimble, he was behaving like the same old Bunter, and was forced to admit that Greyfriars was far from being a reformatory after all.

The whole affair was a nice day's wonder at the school; but the bulk of the laurels in connection with the dramatic capture of the fat junior went to Mr. Prout, who, aided by his valuable motor-bike, had played the leading part in the thrilling sequel to Billy Bunter's Bolt!

THE END.

(Do not miss "FOR D'ARCY'S SAKE!"—next Monday's grand story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 449.

NEXT MONDAY—

"FOR D'ARCY'S SAKE!"

EVERY MONDAY, The "Magnet" LIBRARY. ONE PENNY.

BRIEF NOTICES

To Readers of THE "MAGNET" LIBRARY.

For Correspondence, Etc.

Will A. Evans (Crewe) send S. G. Jessop (Macclesfield) his address, which has been mislaid?

George G. Gough, Rectapham Road, Old Catton, Norwich, would like to hear from readers in his locality (age from 14 to 17) who would join him in starting a small amateur magazine.

A friend of Victor Cogan, formerly of Richmond Hill, Dublin, would be glad if he would send his present address to the Editor.

Horace Marsh, 9, Fitzarthur Street, Tong Road, Armley, Leeds, thinks of starting a small amateur magazine, and would be glad to hear from readers interested. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

The International Correspondence-Exchange wants members. Stamped addressed envelope for particulars. Victor W. Hurley, care of G.P.O., Woodburn Green, Bucks.

R. Cleaver, 61, Alexandra Road, West Ealing, and E. Tiseman, 84, Adelaide Street, South Shields, are starting an amateur magazine, and would be glad to hear from readers interested.

A. W. Small, 59, Mysore Road, Clapham Junction, S.W., would like to correspond with readers anywhere who are interested in the cinema shows from any point of view.

B. W. Mitchinson, Woodbine Cottage, Durham, would be glad to correspond with an Australian boy reader of about seventeen.

The Mersey Correspondence Exchange, devoted to the exchange of picture-postcards, stamps, correspondence, etc., with members in many parts of the world. For particulars write to C. L. Haynes, 12, River View, New Ferry, Cheshire. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

Private W. B. Ambrose, 2322, 1st Co., 27th Batt. (R.) Royal Fusiliers, King's Park Camp, Edinburgh, would be glad to correspond with boy readers.

Re Leagues.

R. G. Archer and W. Barnsley, 8, Jesse Road, Francis Road, Leyton, N.E., are forming an athletic club or up-to-date lines for N.E. district. Full particulars of Hon. Sec. at address given above.

L. Simpson, 27, Norton Lees Road, Sheffield, is forming a "Gem" and "Magnet" League, and would be glad if anyone interested would write him, enclosing stamped and addressed envelope.

Clifford Dixon, 25, Victoria Road, St. Anne-on-Sea, Lancs., is forming a "Gem" and "Magnet" League, open to readers throughout the British Empire. Stamped and addressed envelopes, please.

R. E. Coyne, 155, Ravenhurst Road, Harborne, Birmingham, is the local representative of a "Gem" and "Magnet" League, and would be glad to hear from readers in the Birmingham district who would care to join.

Bert Haines, c/o Mr. F. Chedey, 84, Lawford Street, St. Philip's, Bristol, wants to form a "Gem" and "Magnet" League, open to readers in the United Kingdom.

R. Milam, 51, Rosebery Road, Fulham, S.W., would like to hear from anyone wishing to join a "Gem" and "Magnet" League.

Henry Higgins, 230, Thistle Street, Glasgow, wishes to start a local "Gem" and "Magnet" League. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

John Hodson, 10, Picton Terrace, Mount Pleasant, Swansea, would like to correspond with readers interested in stamp-collecting.

Laurence T. Murphy, 142, Stanley Road, Kirkdale, Liverpool, would like to hear from the secretary of any "Gem" or "Magnet" Social League in his locality.

J. Ratcliffe, 51, Alexandra Street, Southend-on-Sea, wants to form a "Gem" and "Magnet" League for the purpose of sending back numbers to men at the Front. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

George Lewis, 54, North Ellen Street, Dundee, wants to form a league for sending the companion papers to the Front. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

C. H. Noyce, 18, Corona Road, New Road, Battersea, S.W., wants more members for his "Gem" and "Magnet" League, open to anyone in the United Kingdom.

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

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

Our Magnificent Adventure Serial Story. **START TO-DAY!**

A Story of Strange and Thrilling Adventures in an Amazing Quest
by **ALEC G. PEARSON.**

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, accompanied by his chums, Jim Holdsworth, Bob Sigbee, and Pat O'Hara.

After many strange and exciting experiences, they arrive at the tower, in which they are trapped by an old witch who calls herself Karola, the Priestess of the Star. Here they find Hal's friend, Martin Travers, who had been a prisoner in the tower for over a year, and who had sent the message.

He tells them of his plans for escape, by means of a submarine boat—which he has nearly completed—along an underground river, which commences deep down beneath the tower, and runs out on to a great plain many miles away.

The secret of the Tower of the Golden Star is a wonderful composition—which is obtained from a mine far down under the building—which supplies the marvellous golden light which fills the place, and the explosive which is used in the curious weapons of the half-breeds who guard the tower.

Later, Sigbee, who wanders off alone, is grabbed by the half-breeds through a trapdoor above his head. His companions and Travers, who knows a way out of the tower, set out to rescue him, when they meet Aymara, the daughter of a native chief, who had previously helped them. She leads them to a point from which the half-breeds' camp is visible.

(Now read on.)

An Old Instrument of Torture!

There were several stone huts, and a number of tents made of the skins of animals. Between forty and fifty breeds were moving to and fro, or lounging about the campfires. Two sentries were stationed on the ridge surrounding the hollow, one of them being not more than a dozen paces from where the party of adventurers had halted. But they were screened from the sight of both sentinels by an outcrop of rock which formed a sort of natural wall on one side of them.

"Captain Garotte never posted those sentinels," Hal whispered, "or he would surely have had one where we are standing."

"Very likely," replied Jim absently.

He was not thinking of the sentries, for his eyes were fixed on a curious-looking object at the far side of the camp. It was a clumsy-looking erection, made up of a wooden platform, on which was fastened a stool, with a post about six feet in height at the back of it. On the post there was a hinged iron ring, about the height of a man's neck if he was seated on the stool. There were several spikes on the inner side of the iron ring, and a screw worked by a lever closed or opened it as required.

"What's that contrivance?" asked Jim, in a low voice.

"They were all looking at it now. It was Travers who answered the question."

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"It's an old implement of torture," he said, "from which I've a notion the captain of the breeds has taken his assumed name. Very likely he has a partiality for the use of it. It's called the garotte; the victim is pinioned and placed on the stool, the iron ring is clamped round his neck, and the lever turned. He can be strangled at once, or just sufficient pressure exercised to cause the worst kind of agony. A relic of the Spanish Inquisition, though how it got here I can't guess, nor does it much matter."

"The brutes have got it ready for Sigbee," whispered Hal.

Martin Travers nodded.

"I want to find out which but he's imprisoned in," he said, "before we get to business."

"There's that thafe av the world, Garotte!" said O'Hara.

"H'sh! Not so loud, Pat, or the sentry will hear you," cautioned Hal.

The captain of the breeds had come out of one of the stone huts, and after examining the machine, issued some orders to his followers. Two of them immediately ran to another of the huts, from which Sigbee was dragged forth. His arms were pinioned to his sides by a band of steel, which was completely round his body. Captain Garotte bowed mockingly to him.

"You are about to play the principal part in our evening's entertainment," he said. "The stage is set all ready." With a wave of his yellow hand he indicated the machine. "To begin with, you take your seat upon that stool."

"I know all about it," interrupted Sigbee, cool and defiant, with no trace of fear about him. "I reckon you gingerbread beasts take a delight in killing, same as other wild animals."

For an instant Captain Garotte's face was distorted with fury, but he quickly resumed his former manner. For he prided himself on his mockingly polite bearing either towards a foe or to any of his followers who had earned his displeasure.

"You mistake," he replied. "You are not going to be killed—to-night. The performance will extend over two or three evenings. And I hope before long to secure your comrades for a similar entertainment."

"I guess we're made you sit up and snort since the first night you batted into our party!" retorted Sigbee. "And if you're bustin' for entertainment, I can give you all you want if you set my hands free. If I can't fight my way clear from such a crowd of mongrels, with the first weapon I can lay my hands on, I'll deserve to be garotted!"

"That will be your fate in any case," said Captain Garotte; "but this entertainment will be run as I order, not as you wish."

He gave some directions, and the two men who were on guard over Sigbee dragged him to the machine and sat him on the stool. He was powerless to offer any resistance. After binding him to the stool with rawhide ropes, they

DELICIOUS TUCK-HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 10.

chased the iron collar about his neck. All the other breeds had risen to their feet, and were looking on with great interest. There were some brutal jokes and hoarse laughter at the prisoner's expense.

The two sentinels were also watching the scene intently, and for the time being had relaxed their vigilance.

"Now is our time," whispered Travers. "Those lumps of the grey explosive are to be thrown into the camp-fires. Who can aim straight? We don't want a miss."

It was eventually arranged that Hal and Jim should throw the stuff, while Travers and O'Hara stood ready with their rifles, to shoot, if necessary.

"You take the right-hand fire, Jim," said Hal, "and I'll take the left-hand one. Ready?"

"Yes."
"Then let fly!"

The four lumps of grey substance, each about a pound in weight, went flying through the air in quick succession. The aim was true. Two lumps fell into the right-hand camp-fire, and two into the left. Captain Garotte was on the point of giving some further instructions, when, hearing the thud, thud of the missiles, he and most of his men turned round sharply.

A moment later there were four explosions, and the blazing embers of the camp-fires were hurled in all directions. Also, the breeds who were standing nearest to the fires, were flung violently to the ground, some killed outright, and some wounded. The result was all the remainder were thrown into a panic. Travers and O'Hara now opened fire with their rifles, sending in half a dozen quick shots, which served to complete the confusion. The sentries had disappeared.

"Hurroo!" shouted O'Hara. "Glory be! We've broken up the meetin'! Will we charge now?"

"Yes," replied Travers. "Go for 'em!"

With a cheer the quartette rushed down the slope and dashed in among the breeds. But the latter did not put up much of a fight. A third of their number were out of action, and they had a very wholesome dread of the mysterious grey explosive. In addition, they had had some experience of close quarter fighting with these "white devils"—as they called them—and had no stomach for a fresh instalment.

In a few minutes, such was the vigour of the attack, they broke and fled. The camp was in the possession of the adventurers.

Jim was the first to reach Sigsbee, and he quickly had him released from the garotte.

"Glad we were in time, old top," said Jim cheerfully. "This is a beastly unpleasant sort of contrivance to be fixed up in. How does this steel band work that's round your arms and legs? Oh, I see!"

He pressed back a spring, and the steel band fell to the ground. Sigsbee flung his arms wide and stretched himself, to relieve the cramp in his limbs.

"I guessed you'd be around," he said; "though what I feared was they'd maim me with this torture racket before you could chip in. Where's Captain Garotte? I'd like to get even with that skunk! He ain't one of those that was bowled over by the explosion?"

"Seems to have done a bunk," observed Jim. "Like a wise general, he always leaves the way open for retreat—for himself. He doesn't seem to trouble much about his followers."

"He wouldn't!" replied Sigsbee scornfully. "It's a pity he's slipped through our fingers again. Well, I reckon we'll bust this machine up before we go, anyway."

They did. O'Hara, Sigsbee, and Jim hammered it to fragments, while Travers and Hal made a search through the huts and tents. When both these tasks were finished, Aymara rejoined them. Naturally, she had taken no part in the fighting.

"It will be well not to remain here too long," she said to Hal. "Captain Garotte has escaped, and he is cunning—very cunning. It will be quite easy for him to collect plenty more of the breeds, and he will surely try to lay a trap for you."

"Aymara is right," said Hal, turning to his comrades. "We certainly don't want to remain here any longer than we can help, so the sooner we clear out the better."

"You must come back with us to the tower, Aymara," said Travers. "There are plenty of spare rooms in the place, and we can make you comfortable."

The girl agreed without hesitation. For however much at home she might be in the mountains, here in the ravine, with all the breeds on the alert, she would have been in considerable peril—alone.

It was midnight when they set out on their return journey, and that they were watched by many of their foes none of them doubted for an instant. Hal, who was a few yards in rear of the others, believed that they were being followed, and in that surmise he was right.

For they had covered no more than a third of the distance when, on turning round suddenly, he caught sight of a shadowy figure about two hundred yards behind him.

Whipping his rifle to his shoulder, he pressed the trigger. THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 449.

NEXT MONDAY—**"FOR D'ARCY'S SAKE!"**

EVERY MONDAY, The "Magnet" LIBRARY. ONE PENNY.

It was a snapshot, but he scored a hit, for the report was followed by a sharp cry. The figure disappeared.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Sigsbee, while the rest of the party came to a halt. "Some of them trailin' us!"

"I saw one," replied Hal. "And if the yell he let out counts for anything, I've stopped his game."

"Counts a bulleye," said Jim. "What'll you have—a cocoanut or a packet of fags?"

"Dry up!" replied Hal, grinning. "Keep your eyes open and your mouth shut, then you won't swallow any wind."

"Will we go back, and see if there's any more at the spyglass?" asked O'Hara, who hadn't had quite enough fighting to satisfy him.

"No, we may walk into a trap," said Travers. "Forward!"

If there were any more of the breeds on their trail they took care now to keep out of sight. Hal's lucky shot had warned them that the white men were not to be caught napping. There were no more interruptions, and in due course they reached the tower—hungry, thirsty, and tired.

"That old croon has been shut up here all this time," said Hal, when they were in the courtyard. "We'd better give her some food and turn her adrift."

For a wonder the priestess had nothing to say when she was let out of the room in which she had been locked up. She stared at Sigsbee as though she couldn't believe her eyes, for she knew he had been captured, and it was clear she never expected he would be rescued.

The others she regarded with a new-born fear, as men who must surely possess some magic powers. When she had received a parcel of food, which she made no attempt to eat then, and was told to go, she paused at the gates, and shook her skinny fingers at Aymara.

"You are on the side of the white wizards!" she croaked. "A time will come when you will be sorry, for they will go away and forget you."

"We never forget our friends," said Hal. "Go!"

She passed out of the gates, and they clanked to behind her.

No More Food!

Five days passed, and during that time they were all hard at work finishing off the submarine boat. Aymara prepared their meals for them. She was an expert cook, and knew how to make the most of the materials at her command. Some of her dishes were strange to British tastes, but they were all good and palatable.

Sigsbee declared that if she started a restaurant on new lines, with her special dishes, in any big American city, she would soon make a fortune. At which Aymara laughed.

"I have been in a great city," she replied, she referred to Valparaiso—"and I did not like it. One could not breathe, because of the many houses, all so close together. I love the mountains, where there is freedom, and always I must live among them."

"But it's so lonely," objected Jim. "You meet no other women, and the few men you meet are not nice."

"Have I not met you and your comrades?" asked Aymara, with a smile.

"I wasn't thinking of our lot," replied Jim. "And we shall be going away soon. Won't you come with us in the under-water boat?"

The girl shook her head sadly.

"It cannot be," she said. "I know something of the ways of white people. They have customs and ideas which must be right when many people live together in cities, but to me they are strange. I am not your sister, nor the sister of any one of you, my comrades. Therefore, in your country I could not remain with you. I should have to go to strangers."

Jim could find not answer to this statement. It occurred to him that if he were a few years older—say, twenty-seven instead of seventeen—he might fall in love with Aymara, and ask her to be his wife. But at present, and for years to come, thoughts of love and marriage would not be likely to disturb him. He liked Aymara very much, as they all did, but it was purely a brotherly affection.

So the discussion on that particular subject dropped, and they fell to talking of their forthcoming adventurous journey through the subterranean river. It would be a veritable plunge into the unknown.

"Well, the boat will be finished this afternoon," said Travers, "and I think we ought to celebrate the occasion with a bit of a feast. It's the fashion, both in civilised and savage lands. In the former, people celebrate an event with a big dinner at a swaggar hotel; in the latter—as savages don't run hotels—they sit round their camp-fires, and feast."

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on whatever they like best, or what they're able to get. The idea's the same in both cases."

"Except in the small matter of the food, and the way it's cooked," laughed Jim. "Some savages, for instance, eat their enemies when they celebrate a victory."

"What does Aymara say about it?" asked Hal.

"About eating our enemies!" exclaimed Jim, in pretended horror.

"Shut up, fathead!" retorted Hal. "If you spring any more of your weird jokes on us we'll put you on half rations until your brain stops simmoring! I mean, what does Aymara say about our proposed feast? Can it be done?"

He explained matters to the girl in Spanish. "For to-night there is plenty of food," she replied; "but there will be little left for to-morrow."

"Arrah now! Let to-morrow look after itself!" exclaimed Pat O'Hara. "We'll have some toime on our hands this to go out an' shoot some game." For once they were all inclined to agree with the Irishman's easy-going, careless methods, and the axiom, "Let to-morrow take care of itself," was held to be a good one for that occasion only.

So they all helped Aymara in the preparations, and, incidentally, got in her way a great deal, and soon after sunset everything was ready.

It was a wonderful spread, and a joyous feast. Aymara excelled herself in the concoction of new and surprising dishes, all of which were done full justice to—which was a tribute to their excellence.

As a finish-off there was coffee—the very last. For Hal had saved a few handfuls of beans for just such an occasion as this.

"Tis a dinner that couldn't be bate anywhere!" declared O'Hara, as he beamed genially on his comrades. "An' if we'd a dirap at the craythur—the least taste in loife—to settle it, I wouldn't want to change places wiv the Imperor at China!"

"Why the Imperor of China in particular?" asked Traversa, laughing.

"Ain't I don't know!" replied O'Hara. "He just happened to come into me mind. Or maybe it was because me old grandmother had a donkey which she used to say was as obstinate as the Imperor at China; though if a person's little she could have known about him, seein' she's never been out at Oireland, and had no book learnin'."

There was a roar of laughter at Pat O'Hara's explanation, and then the others started telling yarns, which, for Aymara's benefit, were translated into Spanish by Hal or Sigbee.

Hal sang, in his rich, baritone voice, a Spanish smuggling song, and after that Sigbee gave them some sea chanties, in which all could join in the choruses. It was as happy an evening as they had spent for many a long day—letting "to-morrow take care of itself."

They all slept soundly that night, for no watch was necessary in the tower. It was secure against a surprise attack. And when they roused up the next morning, the remnants of the feast served them for breakfast. But that was the last of the provisions.

"I'll go out and get a shot at an antelope," said Traversa. "There are pretty sure to be some up on the ridge, as I haven't disturbed them lately. But first I must go up to my look-out perch, to see if any of the breeds are hanging about near at hand."

He went up to the roof of the tower, but he wasn't long absent. When he came down again his face was grave. Hal glanced at him inquiringly.

"You don't look as though you had good news to tell us," he said.

"I haven't," said Traversa. "The breeds have surrounded the tower! I saw at least a hundred of them. They're all about a mile away—out of the effective range of our rifles—though in any case it would be no use shooting at them, as they have plenty of cover."

"That means we can't bag any game," said Hal.

"Unless a flock of wild duck or geese happen to fly past close to us," replied Traversa, "and we might have to wait a week or more for that. The breeds mean to starve us out."

"Have we nothing left?"

"We finished the last of our stock at breakfast. We have no more food!"

This was serious news; but Jim, as usual, looked on the bright side of the affair.

"Then we must put our faith in the geese," he said. "A goose, I believe, on a certain historic occasion, saved Rome, so a whole wedge of them may surely save us!"

O'Hara backed him up.

"This little I know about Rome," he said, "nor how the geese saved it; but this much I know, that after the feed we had last night we can last out till to-morrow aye."

"Then we've got to go again on the principle, 'to-morrow can take care of itself.'"

"No less," replied O'Hara.

There was nothing for it, then, but to make the best of the situation, and, to begin with, it was arranged that a ceaseless watch should be kept on the breeds from the roof of the tower.

It would only need one look-out at a time, and Aymara offered to take a turn when the situation was explained to her.

For her offer was gladly accepted, for she had remarkably keen eyesight, she knew the habits of the breeds better than any of them, and she lived a life in which she had accustomed to be on the alert against foes.

So the day passed, and the following night, and then the next day. If they relaxed no vigilance themselves, neither did their enemies. Both sides kept a ceaseless eye, each on the other.

But the advantage was with the breeds. They had all the food they wanted, whereas each hour brought the dwindled little band slung up in the tower nearer to possible starvation. By the evening of the second day they were suffering the pangs of hunger. There was a tightening of their belts. Happily, the supply of water could not be cut off, as they had not to suffer the additional torture of thirst.

No word of complaint was uttered, though occasionally an uncomplimentary remark was passed on an order who dared not face them in open fight, even with the odds at twenty to one, but always adopted sneaking, underhand methods of attack.

And there's no doubt that their hatred of the breeds was intensified by the knowledge that Aymara was forced to suffer equally with themselves. There was no help for it; they could do nothing for her. But she bore it all with a quiet courage that won for her tributes of admiration from them.

Sunset, Jim had climbed up to the tower roof to salute Sigbee, whose two hours' spell had just finished.

"Sorry I can't greet you with the announcement that 'Tis a ready' or something equally pleasant," said Jim, with a rather twisted smile. "Dinner doesn't look as though there were much comfort as much. Are the breeds still on the alert?"

(Continued on page 31 of next vol.)

£100 IN ONE PRIZE.

This marvellous prize, which is well worth winning, may be yours if you care to try for it.

You are asked to perform no difficult task, but only to exercise a little patience and spend just a little while piecing together a most ingenious

Fig.

DOG PUZZLE.

It will prove a most fascinating pastime, and one well worth troubling about.

Full particulars regarding the prize, together with the puzzle, will be found in this week's

Family Journal.

Everywhere. One Penny.



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W. TURNER.
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A. ASKEW.
A Keen Reader.



F. NAPPER,
Chichester.



D. ASPINALL,
Wigan.



WILLIE HARDY,
St. Helens.



F. AIREY,
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RICHARD HARDY,
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A LOYAL READER,
Leith.



W. WALBANK,
Derby.



"PIP,"
Birmingham.



DAN BATTEN,
A Keen Reader.



A STAUNCH MAGNETITE,
Manchester.



J. T. JOHNSON,
Manchester.

ADVENTURERS FOUR.

(Continued from page 20.)

"Very much so," replied Sigbee. "But just now I ain't troubling so much about those galoats. Look yonder!" He pointed to the west.

"Against the crimson afterglow of the setting sun Jim saw a wedge of wild geese flying up the ravine. There were perhaps a score of them, and they were heading towards the tower.

"Good egg!" exclaimed Jim. "They're coming this way, too. Lucky I brought my shot-gun up as well as my rifle. They should pass within range."

"I hope so," replied Sigbee. "I've got my shot-gun up here, too. No time to tell the others. Get ready!"

The birds came in, flying straight, and very fast. Nearer and nearer they came.

"They'll pass almost overhead," said Jim.

"Sure!" agreed Sigbee.

"There was a minutes' pause.

"Now! Into the thick of 'em!"

They both blazed away as fast as they could press trigger. The birds scattered, but five came whirling downwards. One fell on to the tower roof, a plump chap, weighing every bit of twelve pounds.

"If they're all like that," exclaimed Jim, "we've made a good bag!"

He ran down the stairs, yelling like mad:

"Turn out, you chaps. Supper to-night!"

But they had heard the sound of the shots, and had already turned out. Two of the geese had fallen into the moat, and two a little way beyond it. All four birds were soon retrieved.

"Five altogether," said Jim. "That'll ration us for three days."

"Five days, if we're careful," corrected Travers. "You know, it won't do for half-starved people to tuck into a big feed of baked goose. We must all go easy at first."

Well, the plumpest of those geese was plucked and drawn in record time, and the hungry little garrison could hardly summon patience to wait until it was properly cooked.

Hal carved, and served out only a moderate portion to each, so there could be no temptation to eat too much. Jim took Sigbee's portion up to him on the tower roof.

"The breeds are on the move," said the American to him.

"You can report to Travers that they are closing in on us."

Jim gave this information to the others when he got down below again.

"Closing in on us, are they!" exclaimed Travers. "The more fools they. We needn't let the fact spoil our appetites nor interfere with our supper."

The Scarlet Fire.

"Well, as you take the affair so easily," said Hal, with a laugh, "we can't do better than follow your example. After two days without food, supper certainly seems to be the most important thing in the universe. So I'm glad we sha'n't have to interrupt it to attend to the breeds."

"Them's my sentiments entirely!" agreed Pat O'Hara heartily. "Let the yellow-hided bastards wait. We'll fight better with a good meal inside us, and we can give them all the attention they want when we're ready. They can bide our time!"

"You've put the case very clearly, O'Hara," laughed Travers. "They're closing in on us, but they can't break into the tower, and they haven't any guns to start a bombardment. Even if they had, their superstitions regarding the Tower of the Golden Star would prevent them damaging it in any way."

"I shouldn't have thought Captain Garotte was in that boat," said Jim. "He surely wouldn't be troubled by superstitious fears, but I can understand him nursing a very savage and bitter hatred against us."

"The breeds fear El Capitán Garotte," put in Aymara; "and it is true they can only be ruled by fear. But there is one order which even he would not dare to give to them, and that is to destroy this tower!"

"Could they do it if he gave them the order?" asked Travers.

"If they were inside it would be in their power to do so, even as it is in yours," was the reply.

Hal and Jim glanced inquiringly at Travers, but he said nothing in answer to Aymara's statement. In his power to destroy the massive Tower of the Star, which had braved the storms of centuries! He had never told them of this, and they wondered why. A rather strained silence fell on the little gathering.

It was broken by Travers himself, as he finished his supper and rose to his feet.

"I don't quite understand the object of these breeds in this latest move of theirs," he said. "They have surely mustered in considerable numbers, or they would not have ventured on it, for as soon as they come within range we can open fire on them, and they can do nothing in return."

"They can open the main gates of the tower from the outside!" Hal suggested. "Then they can swarm in—"

He shrugged his shoulders, leaving his sentence unfinished.

"Urged on by Garotte, they might try to effect an entrance," admitted Travers, "either to kill or capture us, provided this sacred edifice was not so damaged. But we have an advantage—a terrible advantage—and, with half their number wiped out, I doubt—"

"Whether they'll face the music," said Jim.

"That's it!" replied Travers. "The music for the dance of death!"

"Is a tune they don't like!" said O'Hara.

"No! They prefer to do the killing themselves, with as little risk as possible," was Travers' rejoinder. "But if they light the Scarlet Fire they fight with savage recklessness. I've had one experience of that, but luck favoured me on that occasion. As for Garotte, he never cares how many men he sacrifices to gain his own ends. We'll go up on to the roof of the tower now, and see how far off they are. Bring your rifles, and plenty of ammunition."

They climbed the circular stairs to the roof, where Sigbee was keeping his lonely vigil. Night had fallen, but the darkness all around the tower was dissolved by the splendid light from the Golden Star, which blazed over their heads.

Sigbee swept an arm around every point of the compass.

"There's a couple of hundred of them, at least," he said.

"They're creeping in slowly and silently. That's their way. Red Indians has the same method, until they rush in to close quarters, then they yell. These chaps don't. They're silent right through. Say! This star-light is good for us. Shows 'em up plain. You can see 'em not more'n half a mile away. They're in range, and we can open out on 'em just as soon as you like!"

"Let them come a little closer," advised Travers. "At five hundred yards we'll open the ball. Every shot must tell!"

There was scarcely any cover within a half-mile radius of the tower, and they could see the dark ring of creeping figures quite plainly. Suddenly all movement among them ceased.

"Get ready!" said Travers.

As he spoke the words a strange thing happened. For behind the ring of crouching breeds, at six different points close to the walls of rock that formed the barriers of the ravine, there leaped up, as though out of the earth, great wavering flames of the brightest scarlet.

The exclamations of astonishment from the group on the tower-roof found a curious echo from the ranks of their enemies. No exclamations from them, however, but a deep, hoarse murmur, which swelled and then died away to silence.

"The Scarlet Fire!" exclaimed Travers. "This is to be a fight to the finish; and it will be the last fight of all with the breeds." And again he said: "Get ready!"

The attackers leaped to their feet, and came on with a rush now.

"Let 'em have it!"

The rifles rang out. First a volley, then shot succeeding shot in rapid succession. Every shot told. Dark forms lay motionless, or writhing on the ground, behind the line of the advancing foe. Others fell. Still the breeds rushed on, closing in all the time. Already they had lost at least thirty of their number. There were some spare rifles, and Aymara loaded them up with fresh clips of cartridges, handing them over to the defenders, and receiving empty rifles in return.

Then all at once the breeds, as though at a given signal, swept round and concentrated at one point. That was at the entrance to the tunnel which led under the moat. Here a deadly fire was poured into the thick of them, as they were all bunched up in a mass.

"They're going to attack the main gates!" exclaimed Hal.

"Then we've got to lay out all we can while we've the chance!" declared Sigbee. "Soon as they're all in the tunnel we're done!"

While the foremost of the breeds crowded into the tunnel entrance, those in the rear poured in a ceaseless fusillade of their metal bars, though without doing any damage. For the defenders were now lying down flat on the roof, and firing through loopholes in the parapet. The consequence was that the bullets either hit the masonry or flew harmlessly over their heads.

At length all the breeds were in the tunnel—all the living ones, that is—but there were a number of their dead on the ground outside. The firing ceased.

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