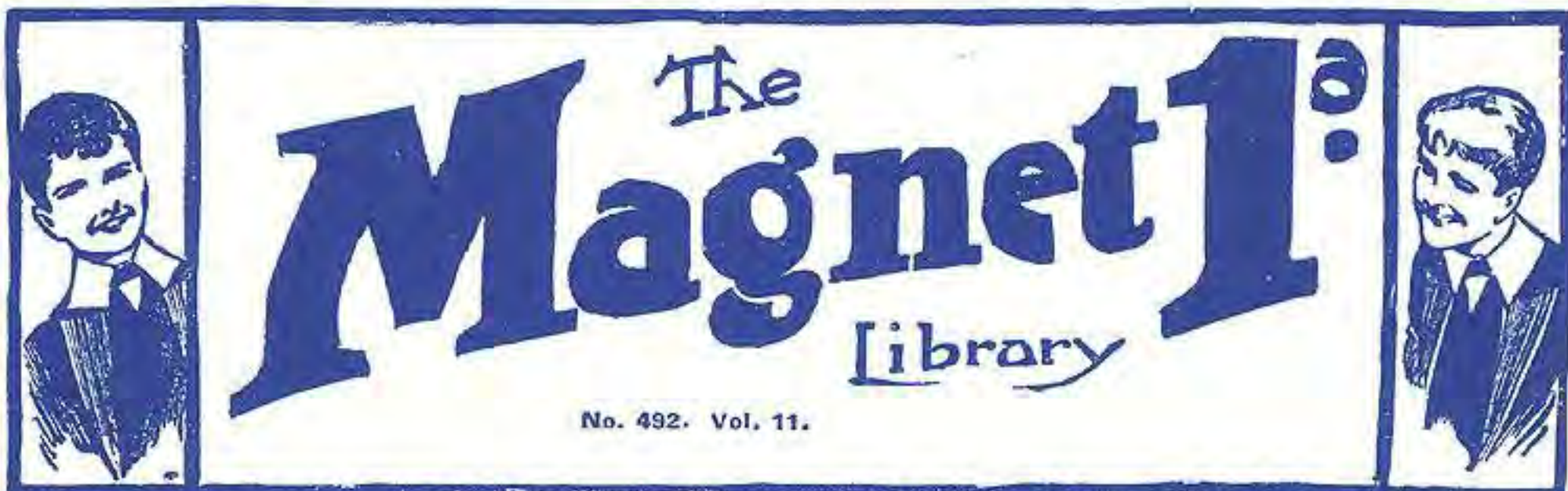
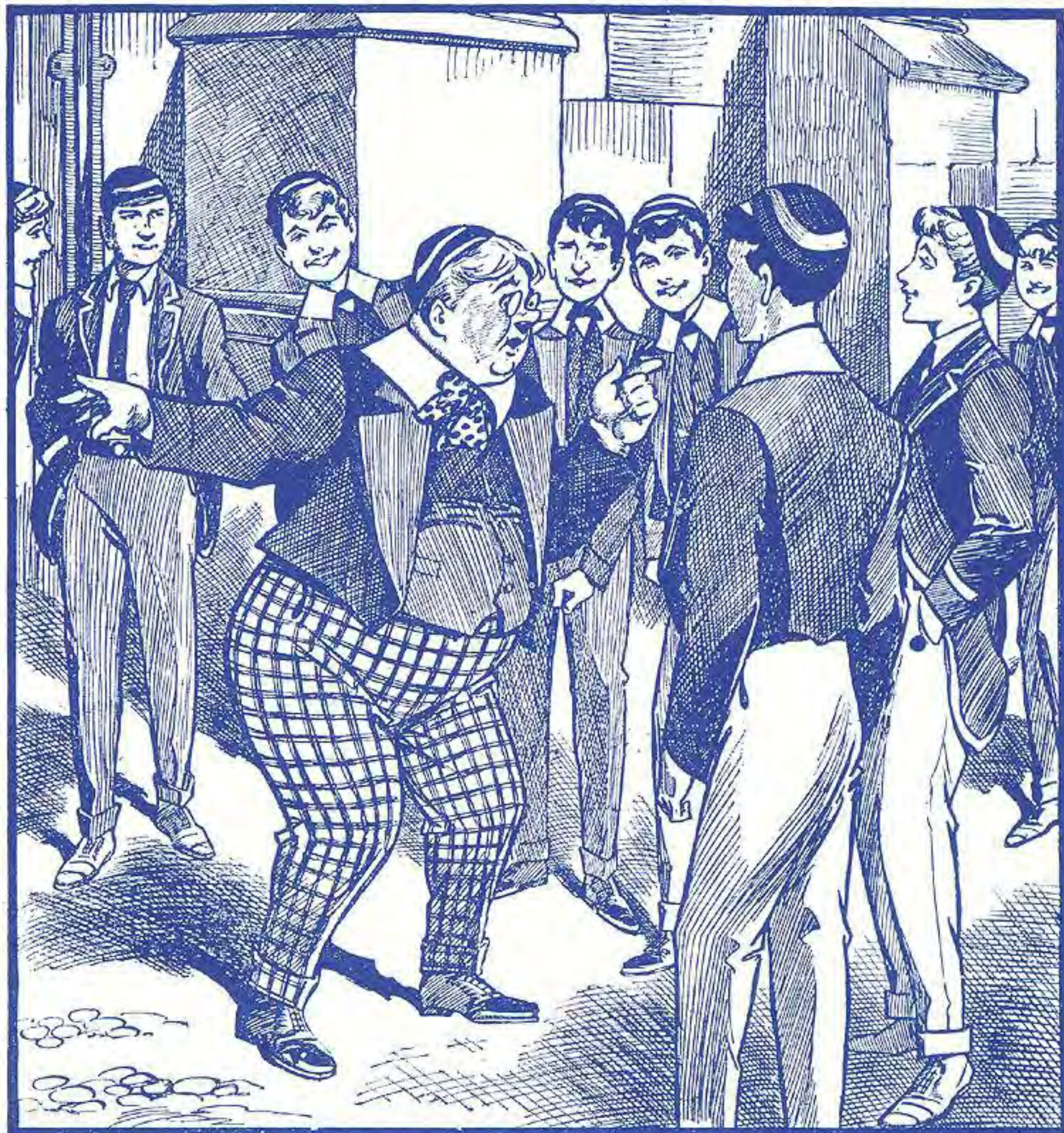


SHARING THE RISK!



No. 492. Vol. 11.



BUNTER TELLS HIS TALE OF WOE!

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

SHARING THE RISK!

By
Frank
Richards.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter, Too!

BOB CHERRY stood on the steps of the School House, with a big bag in his hand, whistling. Billy Bunter came out, and his big glasses turned upon the bag at once. Billy Bunter had been looking for Snoop of the Remove, who had had a remittance that day. But he forgot Snoop now, and rolled up to Bob Cherry with his most agreeable grin on his fat face.

"Going out, Bob, old fellow?" he asked affectionately.

"Yes, fatty."

"Like me to carry your bag?"

Bob Cherry did not look grateful for that obliging offer. He snorted.

"There's nothing in it, porpoise. We're not going out on a picnic. Picnics are off till the end of the war!"

Billy Bunter closed one eye knowingly. Why fellows should go out on a half-holiday with a big bag, unless it was for a picnic, was a mystery to Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove prided himself upon the fact that it was very difficult to pull the wool over his eyes, short-sighted as they were.

"Well, what are you blinking at?" demanded Bob warmly.

"Oh, come off it, you know!" said Bunter. "Keep that yarn for the Marines, old chap! Of course, I know picnics aren't allowed now, because of the grub rules! But I'll keep mum!"

"You fat duffer! It's not a picnic!" roared Bob. "This bag's empty!"

Bunter winked again—a fat and knowing wink.

"Rely on me, old chap," he said reassuringly. "I won't give you away. I like a feed as well as anybody. Look here, I'll carry the bag for you, and do any cooking you want done. That's a fair offer!"

"So you don't believe this bag's empty?" asked Bob.

Another fat wink.

"I'll show you that it is, Bunter."

"Go ahead!" grinned Bunter.

He expected Bob to open the bag to show that it was empty; but Bob Cherry had another method in view.

He swung up the big leather bag, and landed it on Bunter's head.

Crash!

The bag certainly was empty, as Bunter could tell by the feel of it. If it had been packed certainly Bunter would have been hurt. As it was, he sat down on the steps with a sudden jar.

"Yow!" he roared.

Bob Cherry glared down at him.

"Do you believe it's empty now?" he demanded.

"Yaroorh!"

"Shall I try again?" asked Bob, swinging up the bag.

Bunter squirmed down the steps like a very fat worm.

"Yow! Beast! Keep off! Yaroorh!"

"Hallo! What's the name of this

game?" asked Johnny Bull, as Bob's chums came out to join him. "Are you taking a rest, Bunter?"

"Yooop!"

Johnny Bull also had a bag in his hand. And Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh were also provided with bags. If the Famous Five of the Remove were surreptitiously planning a picnic, in spite of the food regulations, certainly it was to be a picnic on a very large scale!

Billy Bunter scrambled to his feet, crimson with the exertion, and blinked angrily at the Famous Five. He kept at a wary distance from Bob Cherry's bag, however.

"Yah! Food-hogs!" he snorted.

"What!" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

"Bunter thinks it's a picnic!" growled Bob. "I've just demonstrated to him that this bag is empty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fat duffer!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "These bags are all empty! Come here and try this one on your silly napper!"

Bunter dodged away.

"Keep off, you beast! I know your little game!"

"Oh, you know it, do you?" said Nugent.

"Yes, I do. You're going food-hogging!" said Bunter, with a snort of contempt. "I know the game! You're going round the shops buying up things for a feed, and sneaking them into the school, like Skinner! Yah!"

"You fat villain!" roared Johnny Bull, making a rush at Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove dodged again, taking refuge behind Wharton.

"I say, Harry, old chap, keep him off! No offence, you know—nothing to get into a wax about, is there?" roared Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Evidently Bunter did not think there was anything offensive in an accusation of food-hogging.

"Oh, come on!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows——"

The Famous Five started for the gates, swinging their bags. Billy Bunter blinked after them with deep suspicion.

Why should five fellows start out in the afternoon with five empty bags? What reason could they have except that of accumulating forbidden food by "going round the shops" getting in supplies?

Billy Bunter was quite sure of it. And Billy Bunter meant to have a whack in those supplies, or else bring the delinquents to justice. And he rolled after the juniors to the gates, his fat little legs going like clockwork.

"I say, you fellows!" he gasped, as he overtook the five. "I say, hold on! Don't walk so fast, you know! Look here, I'm not a sneak, of course, but I can't stand this. It's unpatriotic! If you treated me as a pal it would be

different; but, under the circumstances, I feel it my duty to speak to Mr. Quelch!"

"The esteemed Bunter is labouring under an absurd misapprehension," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh mildly. "There is to be no food-hogfulness!"

"Oh, rats!" said Bunter. "I know the game! I'm an obliging chap—if I'm treated as a pal. I'll carry the bags for you if you like; but——"

Bob Cherry halted outside the gates, and winked at his chums with the eye that was furthest from Bunter.

"Let's let Bunter into the game, you fellows?" he suggested.

"What!" ejaculated Johnny Bull.

"Bunter's jolly sharp, you know," said Bob. "No good trying to fool Bunter—is it, William George?"

"Not the slightest," said Bunter. "I'm fly, you know!"

"Exactly. Well, we're going out to get something in these bags——"

"He, he, he!"

"It may lead to plenty of grub, or it may not," said Bob. "We expect that it will!"

His chums stared at him for a moment, and then grinned. Billy Bunter grinned too.

"He, he! I expect it will!" he chuckled. "You can't spoof me, you know. Look here, I'm willing to be pally. I'm not going to give you away. I don't see why a fellow shouldn't have a feed!"

"You fat toad!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull——"

"Quite right," said Bob Cherry. "Considering the amount of work we've put into the potato-ground at Greyfriars, we're entitled to a feed—if we can get it. There'll be a ton of 'tatoes this autumn, all grown by our own fair hands. The labourer is worthy of his hire—what? Come on, Bunter, it's a go! You can carry the bags for us, and you can have as much as you can eat of what we bring home in them. That all right?"

"Done!" said Bunter.

"The donefulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Singh.

"Well, I agree," said Wharton. "Bunter carries the bags there, and we carry them back, and Bunter has all he can eat at one sitting!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I'm your man!" said Bunter. "You can't fool me, you know! But I'm all right if I'm treated as a pal!"

And the five juniors handed Bunter the bags. The Owl of the Remove was grinning with satisfaction now. He did not mind carrying five empty bags if the Co. carried them when they were full, and if he were allowed to eat all he could at one sitting of the supplies. Bunter's powers were great in that line, and he could deal with a very large quantity of provisions at one sitting.

Harry Wharton & Co. walked on cheerily, with their hands in their pockets, and the fat junior laboured behind with the bags.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Awful For Bunter!

I SAY, you fellows!" Billy Bunter was gasping. It was a warm summer's afternoon, and the lane was hot and dusty.

Empty bags seemed a simple proposition—at first. But Billy Bunter was finding them weighty at last.

Three of them were leather travelling-bags. One was a portmanteau of solid construction. Only one was a cloth bag, and even that was heavy.

With two bags in either hand, and one under his fat arm, Billy Bunter was pretty well loaded.

Moreover, he had a considerable amount of weight to carry in his own solid person. The food regulations had made no difference to Billy Bunter's circumference so far.

After half a mile, Billy Bunter was red as a turkey-cock, and streaming with perspiration.

A fly persisted in settling upon his fat little nose, and Bunter had no hand free to deal with the insect. He snorted and grimaced to drive it away, but the fly seemed to find some attraction in Bunter's nose, and stuck to its guns.

"I—I say, you fellows— Oh, dear!"

Bob Cherry looked back.

"Buck up, tubby!" he said. "You're lagging!"

"I say, I can't carry this lot much further!" gasped Bunter.

"Rats! We're going to carry them full."

"You might take one, Bob."

"Bow-wow!"

"Look here, I'm tired!" roared Bunter.

"Never mind."

"But I do mind!" howled Bunter.

"Well, we don't, so that's all right. Get a move on!"

"Oh, dear!" groaned Bunter, as he rolled on again. "I—I say, you fellows, brush that dashed fly off my nose, will you?"

"Certainly!" said Johnny Bull.

Biff!

"Yaroooh!" yelled Bunter, as he sat down in the road, and the bags went flying in all directions. "Yow-pw-ow! You silly ass! I didn't ask you to punch my nose! Yow-ow-ow!"

"The fly's gone," said Johnny Bull, inspecting Bunter's crimson face.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah! You rotter! Ow-ow!"

"Are you coming on?" demanded Wharton. "If we go without you, you don't get any of the cargo to feed on!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

The juniors picked up the bags. Billy Bunter jumped up like a jack-in-the-box. He did not mean to be left out of the feed.

"Hold on!" he gasped. "I—I'm coming! Oh, dear!"

"Buck up, then!"

Billy Bunter groaned as the bags were piled on him again. He was being kept strictly to his bargain. He gasped again, with relief this time, as the juniors turned out of the hot, dusty lane into the cool shade of the wood.

"Going to Courtfield?" he panted.

"Not so far as that."

"Where are you going, then?"

"You'll see."

"Oh, dear!" mumbled Bunter. He laboured on with the bags, an ache in every one of his fat limbs. Even the prospective feed was losing its attractions now. Bunter did not like exertion.

"I wish I'd gone with Smithy now!" he panted. "Smithy was very keen for me to go out with him this afternoon—"



Playing Porter to the Famous Five! (See Chapter 2.)

"I heard Smithy tell you he'd kick you if you bothered him," grinned Nugent.

"Ahem! I might have gone with Snoop and Stott and Skinner. Snoop's had a remittance. Oh, dear! I wish I had!"

"So do I," smiled Bob Cherry.

"I—I say, Bob, old fellow, you might take one of these bags!"

"If you call me 'Bob, old fellow,' I'll squash you!"

"Oh, dear!"

The Co. walked on cheerily through the green, shady wood, with Bunter labouring behind. Bob Cherry uttered a sudden exclamation as they came out into a green, dusky glade.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

Under a big beech, four juniors were seated in the grass. They were Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, and Skinner, Snoop, and Stott. There were empty ginger-beer bottles in the grass, and crumbs of biscuits. The four young rascals were using a basket as a card-table, and enjoying themselves in the doggish manner that was their custom, when safe from observation or discovery.

"Your deal, Smithy!" Snoop said.

The Bounder was shuffling the cards when the Co. came on the scene. He paused, the colour creeping into his cheeks.

Skinner nodded coolly to the Famous Five.

"Hallo!" he said, taking a cigarette from his mouth. "Just in time to take a hand! Sit down, dear boys!"

And his companions chuckled.

"Rotters!" growled Johnny Bull.

"The rotterfulness is terrific!"

"Shocked, ain't you?" sneered Snoop.

Sidney James Snoop was in great feather that afternoon.

As a rule, Snoop of the Remove was hard up. A good many fellows at Greyfriars knew that Snoop's father had come to grief, having promoted companies in the City, not wisely, but too well. One of his companies had been of so exceedingly tricky a nature that after the crash came Snoop's father had retired from the public eye, being accom-

modated by the Government in a secluded establishment for the term of three years.

Snoop, who had been accustomed to putting on side, found that circumstance very hard to live down. A father in prison was a dreadfully difficult thing to explain away.

Most of the fellows had been very sorry for Snoop, who certainly was not to blame for his father's misdeeds, and the matter was never mentioned to him.

It had been fortunate for Snoop that an uncle in Canada had taken him up, and undertaken to see him through his school life.

It was from that kind uncle that Sidney James had received a remittance that morning, hence his unaccustomed wealth, and Snoop was making the money fly.

Snoop was not usually held of much account, even among his friends, but with five pounds in his pocket he was treated with more than usual respect by Skinner and Stott, at least.

Snoop was enjoying himself now, in his way. He was elated at being taken up by the Bounder, if only for the afternoon.

Harry Wharton frowned as he looked on at the scene.

It was no business of his, of course, how other fellows passed their half-holiday—he was no censor of morals; but the scene jarred on his nerves, and he was sorry to see the Bounder so engaged. There was much good in Vernon-Smith, if little enough in his companions.

"Come on!" said Nugent abruptly.

"Awfully shocked—what?" said Snoop vauntingly. "Dash it all, you're safe from the prefects here! Why not take a hand? They're welcome, ain't they, Smithy?"

Vernon-Smith did not reply. He was still shuffling the cards mechanically. Somehow or other, the Bounder did not seem to like being found at that occupation by Harry Wharton & Co.

"Have a smoke?" continued Snoop. "I'm standin' the smokes, and you're welcome. What do you say, Wharton?"

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"I say you're a silly, measly idiot!" said Wharton. "It would serve you right if Wingate or Gwynne came along and caught you."

"Are you going to sneak?" jeered Snoop.

"Oh, come on, you chaps!" said Wharton.

The Famous Five passed on their way, Bunter following with the cargo of bags. Snoop's shrill, mocking laugh died away behind them.

"I say, you fellows, we're off the foot-path!" said Bunter at last. "Is this a short cut?"

"Not exactly," said Bob, grinning.

"Where are we going, then?" exclaimed Bunter. "We sha'n't get to any shops in this direction."

"Shops! Who's going to shops?"

Billy Bunter halted, and fixed a basilisk glare upon Bob Cherry.

"Ain't you going shopping?" he demanded.

"Certainly not!"

"How are you going to get the grub, then?" shrieked Bunter.

"Grow it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Co., delighted at the expression upon Billy Bunter's fat features.

"Gug-gug-grow it!" stuttered Bunter, letting the bags fall into the grass.

"Exactly!"

"You—you—you silly ass! What have we come here for?" yelled Bunter.

"We've come to gather leaves——"

"Leaves!"

"And you've come to carry our bags. Awfully good of you, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter leaned against a tree and mopped his flaming brow. He was quite at a loss for words.

"Did you think we were going shopping?" asked Bob innocently. "By Jove, I remember now, you said something about food-hogging! My dear porpoise, we're not going food-hogging. We're working. We've brought these bags to fill with dead leaves——"

"D-d-dead l-l-leaves!"

"Certainly! To dig into the allotment at Greyfriars."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"It's the cheapest and best form of manure, you know," explained Wharton. "All amateur gardeners gather dead leaves. They're thick enough here in the wood. And you can eat as much as you like of what we carry home in the bags, Bunter. That was the agreement."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you said it would lead to—plenty of grub!" moaned Bunter faintly.

"I said we expected it would," said Bob. "If we dig the leaf-manure well in, we shall have a good second crop of potatoes in the autumn. I was alluding to the potato-ground at Greyfriars, dear boy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, dear!" groaned Bunter.

The thought that he had fagged for a mile and a half on a hot afternoon to enable the amateur gardeners of Greyfriars to provide themselves with leaf-mould almost overcame Bunter.

He could only gasp and glare.

If the Owl of the Remove had taken his fair share of work on the school allotments he would have known all about it. He was paying the penalty of shirking now.

The juniors picked up the bags and opened them.

"Are you going to help us, Bunt?" asked Bob cheerfully. "You'll have your whack in the taters when they're grown, you know. You see, we're going to get a fine crop of first early planted late in the season, after the main crop have been gathered in."

"You—you—you silly chump!" spluttered Bunter.

tered Bunter. "Blow your potatoes! Blow your allotment! Blow your leaf-mould! Blow you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I'd thrash you all round if I wasn't fagged out!" gasped Bunter, shaking a fat fist at the grinning juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah! Beasts!"

Billy Bunter rolled away in utter disgust. There was no feed for Bunter that afternoon. He was not to take the lion's share in an orgy of food-hogging. A howl of laughter from the Famous Five followed him.

Then the chums of the Remove set to work, taking different directions in the wood, patiently gathering up the fallen leaves and cramming the bags with them, for future use on the potato allotments at Greyfriars.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Broad Arrow!

"WHAT the dickens——"

Harry Wharton paused in surprise.

He had left his companions at some distance, and was moving along under the trees, bending as he went, and gathering up fallen leaves. The bag he carried was already half full.

Several times he had noticed a rustling in the thickets, but he put it down to a rabbit or stoat, and gave it no heed.

But as he turned aside from his path, and pushed through a clump of bushes to get to fresh ground, he caught sight of a leg disappearing among the underwood.

Then he stopped in astonishment.

Someone was dodging him in the bushes. Wharton put down the bag, and stared through the openings of the thick green.

"Hallo! What's that?" he called out.

There was no reply, and the rustle was not heard again. But as he stood in silence amid the green thickets, Wharton was conscious that he was being watched. As plainly as if he had seen them, he realised that eyes were upon him, scanning him from cover.

The Greyfriars junior was astounded. Unless he had come upon some lunatic, he could not imagine why the unknown individual should be dodging out of sight like this, and watching him covertly.

"What the merry thunder!" muttered Wharton, in perplexity.

Then he started back as a figure suddenly showed itself in the thickets.

Instinctively he clenched his hands.

For the man who so suddenly stood before him was dressed in a garb there was no mistaking.

The broad arrow marked the ragged clothes that covered him. The broad arrow was upon the rag of a cap on his tumbled head.

The face that looked at Wharton was thick with stubbly, unshaven beard; the eyes were hollow and haunted in their look.

"My hat!" muttered Wharton, wary, and on the defensive at once. "A convict!"

He understood now why the man had been keeping out of sight, though he could not understand why he had at last shown himself.

"You need have no fear!" exclaimed the man, in a hurried, husky voice, holding up his hand.

"I'm not afraid," said Wharton calmly, though his heart was beating a trifle faster than usual. But his chums were within call if he wanted them, and there was little cause for fear—even if he had been given to that weakness.

"You belong to Greyfriars?"

"Yes."

"I knew your cap," said the stranger,

in the same husky voice. "Are you not young Wharton?"

"Yes," said Harry, in astonishment; "that's my name. How the dickens did you know it?"

The man panted, and looked hurriedly round him.

Evidently he was in fear—the fear of the hunted animal.

"Are you alone here?" he muttered.

"My chums aren't far away," said Harry, with a slight smile. He did not know the purpose of that question.

"For Heaven's sake, keep it secret that you've seen me!" muttered the convict, shrinking into the cover of the bushes.

Wharton's brow grew a little grim.

He had no desire whatever to take part in hounding down a hunted man; but keeping it secret that he had seen an escaped convict in the wood might be a serious matter. Such a man's presence was a public danger—to others, if not to Wharton.

"You shouldn't have shown yourself!" said Harry curtly. "You could have kept out of sight. You can't expect me to keep it secret!"

He expected to see fury in the haggard face, perhaps to be attacked. He was on his guard. But the haggard face of the convict expressed only misery and fear, and it touched the junior's heart.

"I showed myself because I recognised the Greyfriars cap!" he muttered. "I have thrown myself on your mercy."

"What do you know about Greyfriars?" demanded Harry. He was not inclined to believe that a hunted convict could ever have had any connection with his school.

A bitter smile crossed the scrubby, worn face.

"You don't know me?"

"I? I've never seen you before!" exclaimed Harry, in astonishment.

"You have seen me."

"Where, then?"

"At Greyfriars."

"At Greyfriars!" exclaimed Wharton.

"You do not remember me? I have changed, of course. But I remembered you as soon as I saw your face."

Wharton scanned the man in amazement. He seemed about thirty-eight, or perhaps forty, though the stubbly beard and haggard expression gave his face an older look. There was nothing familiar in his features, though Wharton had some faint idea that he had seen that pointed nose and those close-set, sharp eyes before.

"I have a son at Greyfriars," the man went on. "I used to visit him there, before I—before I had misfortune. He pointed you out to me in a cricket-match once. That is how I know you."

Wharton recoiled with an exclamation.

"Are you Snoop's father?"

"I am Josiah Snoop."

"Good heavens!" muttered Wharton.

He thought of Sidney James Snoop of the Remove, playing cards in the wood less than a mile away, with the Bouncer and his set. And here was Snoop's father, whose swindling had landed him in a convict prison, lurking in the depths of the wood, a fugitive from the law! Wharton knew the story of Snoop's father, but he had almost forgotten it.

Snoop would not have been enjoying himself so much that sunny afternoon if he had known that his father was close by.

What would this weak and dingy black sheep of the Remove have thought and felt if he had known? Wharton wondered.

The man was watching his face eagerly. He read compassion there, and it brought a tinge of hope into his own face.

"You know me now?" he muttered.

"Yes," said Harry, looking at him. "I can see you're like Snoop now. But—but what have you come to me for?"

"I want you to help me. Stay—only a slight service—a very slight one. It is not much to ask. I am not asking you to help me to escape—to break the law. Only a slight service."

"You can go on," said Wharton uneasily.

He hardly knew what to say or to do. The sudden meeting had thrown him a little off his balance. He could not think of helping to hand Snoop's father back to a living death. But to afford aid to an escaped convict was impossible—it was against the law, for one thing. It was not as if there had been the slightest doubt of Josiah Snoop's guilt. That was only too well-established, as Wharton had known at the time.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked, as the man stood panting in the foliage, his eyes roving about like those of a hunted fox.

"Take a message to my son."

"Oh!"

"That is all—it is all I ask. Tell him—tell him I have escaped—that I have come here, that he may help me—he is my son, and he will not abandon his father in his hour of need! I have been at liberty a week—I have hidden by day and tramped by night—I have fed on roots torn up by my hands, when I have not starved—I have lurked and crept and skulked for a hundred miles to get near Greyfriars! And for two days I have lain hidden here, hoping to see my son—hoping to get word to him—but it was impossible. Then I saw you—and, as soon as I saw your face, I knew you—I thought you might help me—"

He broke off, panting. There was a step in the thick grass under the trees. The convict's eyes dilated as he shrank back into cover. But as he did so there was a light laugh, and a cool voice drawled:

"Too late, old scout—I've seen you!"

Wharton spun round towards the newcomer. It was the Bounder of Greyfriars!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Secret For Two!

VERNON-SMITH met Wharton's startled, uneasy eyes, and smiled. There was a cigarette between the Bounder's lips. He had left the card-party, and was strolling carelessly through the wood, when he had come upon the scene. He gave Wharton a cool nod, and his eyes gleamed mockingly as the convict, realising that it was too late for concealment, rose into view again, with a desperate expression upon his face.

"By gad!" said the Bounder, removing his cigarette. "This beats cock-fighting. Who's your merry friend, Wharton?"

"It's Snoop's father," said Harry curtly.

The Bounder started.

"Snoop's father! My only hat!"

He scanned the stubby face. The convict's hands were clenched hard, and his eyes were burning.

"By gad, I shouldn't have known you, sir!" said Vernon-Smith, with mocking respect. "I've just left Snoop—a quarter of an hour ago. He doesn't know the pater's here, I fancy. Quite a long time since you've visited us at Greyfriars, sir. Unavoidably detained—what?"

"Don't!" muttered Wharton. The cool irony of the Bounder jarred on his nerves.

"So you've got away, Mr. Snoop?" went on the Bounder coolly.

The man nodded.

"Some time yet to run, I believe?"

You should have stuck it out, and got away on ticket-on-leave," said Vernon-Smith with a shake of the head. "You haven't any chance of getting clear. You can't get abroad in war-time, you know—I suppose you know there's a war on? And we're all ticketed and numbered now, on a new system, since you went to chokey, sir. Even if you got a new rig-out, you would be asked for your registration card wherever you went—you have to give your name, age, form, and starting-price, you know." The Bounder laughed. "Better have stuck it out to the finish."

"You are Vernon-Smith?" muttered the wretched outcast. "I remember you now. You were a friend of my son."

"Hardly that," said the Bounder with a curl of the lip. "I knew him, that's all. I dare say you have seen us together at Greyfriars, in the old days. If you want to hear about dear Sidney, he's right as rain and cheery as a cricket. He's had a remittance to-day from his Uncle Huggins in Canada, and he's in high feather!"

"You will not mention that you have seen me?"

"Why should I?" said the Bounder shrugging his shoulders. "What was your crime, you poor wretch? You were found out. I suppose there are ten thousand like you, playing the same game in the City, who haven't been found out yet. If you'd had better luck, you might have been a great war-profiteer by this time, and a big gun. I don't see why I should help the bobbies do their work. I've my own affairs to attend to."

"That is all I ask!" muttered Josiah Snoop, with a sobbing breath.

"But there's Wharton," said the Bounder, with a sardonic glance at the silent captain of the Remove. "No good asking that of Wharton. Wharton is the model of virtue to all Greyfriars—the good boys model themselves according to him—"

"Don't be a fool, Smithy!" broke in Wharton savagely.

"My dear chap, I'm stating the facts. Some of us, Mr. Snoop, live in hopes of reaching the height of virtue Wharton was born to, but it's uphill work. I'm afraid Wharton will feel it his duty to give you away—and he always does his duty, right up to the hilt."

"I'm not going to give him away, Smithy," said Harry quietly. "I don't think I ought to. I don't know."

"You're improving," said the Bounder sarcastically. "Beware, my young friend, of the first step from the path of moral rectitude—"

"Oh, shut up!"

The Bounder laughed. He was in a sardonic mood that afternoon.

"You would have done better to stick in the stone jug, Mr. Snoop," he said, turning to the panting convict. "You get out of a lot of things there. You're not over forty, I believe?"

"No," said the man, staring at him.

"Well, then, you've got out of conscription by being a merry convict. If you'd been a free man you'd be in the trenches now."

"Better that than the stone walls!" muttered Josiah Snoop. "It is little to face death after what I have been through!"

The Bounder gave him a curious look.

"You'd better cut off, Smithy!" muttered Wharton. "You can keep this dark. I suppose? You needn't interfere."

The Bounder smiled, and lighted a fresh cigarette.

"I really didn't mean to interrupt your pleasant chat," he said. "I came along quite by chance. Good-afternoon,

Mr. Snoop! No good asking you to give me a look-in at Greyfriars, I suppose?"

And, with a light laugh, the Bounder sauntered on, and disappeared among the trees.

The convict looked at Wharton, trembling in every limb.

"He will keep my secret?" he muttered.

"I think so. Smithy doesn't care much about law and order at any time," said Wharton. "I fancy he's got more sympathy with you than with the police."

"I have suffered for what I have done," muttered Josiah Snoop. "If—if it were possible, I would make up for the past—I would ask nothing better than to take my place in the trenches. Wharton, you will take my message to my son, and—say nothing of having seen me?"

"I—I suppose so," said Harry.

"Tell him to come and see me here—as soon as he can," muttered Josiah Snoop. He knows this wood well, I suppose—he can come to this spot. There is a big, hollow oak-tree near here—do you know it?"

"Yes, it's well known," said Harry.

"Tell my son to come there, and he will see me. I only ask that of you. You will do that—and keep silence?"

"Yes," said Harry after a long pause.

Whether he was doing right or wrong he hardly knew. The man had sinned, but he had suffered for it. If he had been a brutal and desperate criminal, Wharton's duty would have been plain. But he was not that. He had been a smooth and soft-spoken swindler in his prosperous days—now he was a wretched outcast and fugitive; and, in spite of his disgust for the man's character, Wharton could not resist the compassion that came into his heart. A man so utterly down on his luck appealed to the frank, boyish nature.

No more was said. Harry Wharton picked up his bag and turned away, and the convict disappeared into the thickets.

Wharton hurried from the spot. He had said that he would say nothing of the meeting, and his word was his bond. His desire now was to keep his chums from making the discovery he had made. He did not want them to be burdened with such a secret to keep—and he was not sure that they would keep it. Bob Cherry and Nugent and the good-natured Inky, doubtless, would share his feelings of compassion, but he was not so sure of Johnny Bull. With Johnny, a stern sense of justice was liable to outweigh compassion.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry came upon him suddenly in the wood. Wharton started, and coloured a little.

"Got your bag full?" asked Bob.

"My—my bag?"

Wharton had almost forgotten the work that had brought the Famous Five to the wood that afternoon.

"Yes; we're loaded up, and I've been looking for you," said Bob. "Why, you're only half full, you slacker! You've been taking a rest!"

"Oh, that's enough!" said Harry. "Let's get back to Greyfriars."

"Plenty of time for tea," said Bob. "Let's fill your bag first; I'll help you. We want all we can get for the allotment."

The energetic Bob soon had the bag full, Wharton helping him, and they joined Nugent and Hurree Singh and Johnny Bull, who were resting in the grass while they waited.

Each of the juniors carrying a crammed bag, they started for the school. Four of the party were discussing potato-

growing with great zest as they went, but Harry Wharton was silent.

He was thinking of the hunted ewe-cast hidden in the wood, and of the message he was to take to Snoop of the Remove, and wondering whether he had done right or wrong in helping, to that extent, a man who was wanted by the law!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Snoop's Reply!

THE Bounder of Greyfriars was lounging on the School House steps when the Famous Five came in. He gave Wharton a curious look.

"Had a good time, you fellows?" he drawled.

"We've got lots of plunder," said Bob Cherry, with great satisfaction. "Must be jolly nearly a hundredweight of stuff in these bags."

"What on earth is it?"

"Old leaves from the wood."

The Bounder stared.

"In the name of all that's idiotic, what have you been gathering old leaves for?" he ejaculated.

"You'd know all about it if you weren't a slacker, Smithy," said Bob severely. "It's to dig into our allotment after we've taken up the cabbages. Don't you know that it improves the soil? When the cabbages are up, we can grow a second crop of potatoes on the same ground—first earlies, you know."

"First earlies—at this time of the year?"

"Yes, for a second crop," explained Bob. "First early potatoes are like a good bat at cricket—first in and not out, you know. You begin with 'em, and you end with 'em. Of course, you have to be careful of 'em. But we're pretty good gardeners."

"The good gardenfulness is terrific!" remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur. "We shall beat the submarine Huns potato-patchfully."

"If you feel keen about it, Smithy, you can come along to the allotment tomorrow and help us with the hoeing-up," said Bob. "We're still at work on the main crop, you know."

"Thanks; but I don't!" grinned the Bounder.

"Well, you're a slacker!"

Bob Cherry sniffed, and marched in with his chums. It was the rule at Greyfriars that every fellow should take his share in the work of the vegetable allotments, but some of them contrived to elude it. Bob himself did the work of two or three, being very keen—especially keen on helping to beat the Huns by so easy a method as growing vegetables.

Harry Wharton looked in at No. 11 Study in the Remove, which belonged to Snoop and Stott, but those two cheery youths were not in yet. He went along to his own study to tea with Nugent.

The message from Josiah Snoop was weighing on his mind, and he was anxious to see the convict's son, and get it over.

He was realising more clearly now that he had placed himself in a serious position by allowing his compassion for the wretched man to get the upper hand.

Nugent noticed his thoughtfulness, and looked at him oddly several times; but Wharton had no intention of mentioning the matter even to his best chum. It was quite possible, he knew, that the affair might have unpleasant consequences. He did not mean that anyone else should share in the consequences of his act if it came out.

After tea Nugent, who was secretary of the Remove Cricket Club, had accounts

to do, and Wharton took the opportunity to look for Snoop again.

This time he found Sidney James in his study with Stott. They were having tea—a rather more plentiful tea than the regulations allowed. Doubtless Snoop, being in funds for once, felt a desire to spread himself a little.

Snoop was looking a little pasty, probably the result of too many cigarettes in the wood, but otherwise quite cheerful.

He had been lucky at nap, and his five pounds, instead of disappearing, had increased to five pounds ten shillings.

The shillings had belonged to Skinner and Stott.

Snoop had a feeling of elation, and he was looking forward to more little games, and to relieving the Bounder of some of his superfluous wealth. Vernon-Smith was a very rich pigeon to pluck, if the plucking had been possible.

Snoop smiled in a sneering way as Wharton looked in. His usual rather fawning manner was quite gone; he was feeling of more consequence than usual, and, in fact, quite doggish and bucked.

"Hallo!" he said. "Is the merry sermon coming at last? Wait till I get a fag. I'll smoke while you preach, if you don't mind."

Stott chuckled.

Wharton did not look angry. He knew how Snoop's bravado would crumple up as soon as he knew what had to be told him. Wharton's feeling towards the wretched black sheep was of mingled compassion and contempt.

"I'd like to speak to you, Snoop," he said quietly. "Will you come for a stroll in the quad?"

"Thanks, no! You can speak here, I suppose?"

"I'd rather speak in private, if you don't mind."

"But I do mind," said Snoop coolly. "I'm not going to listen to a sermon on my own. Stott will see me through. Besides, it will do Stott as much good as it will do me. He's just as depraved as I am."

"Just!" grinned Stott. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"You don't understand," said Harry patiently. "I'm not going to speak about your silly blackguardism, Snoop."

"No? What is it, then? Do you want me for the Remove Eleven in the next Rookwood match?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Stott.

"If you won't see me alone, I'll leave it till another time," said Wharton. "I have a message for you, that's all."

"Oh! From whom?"

"I'll tell you that by yourself."

"You're jolly mysterious!" sneered Snoop. "You don't mean to say that Jerry Hawke, the bookie, has sent a message by you?"

"I shouldn't bring it if he wanted to send it," said Harry.

"Well, what is it all about, then? You can speak before Stott. I can't see anything to be mysterious about."

"Yes, go ahead!" said Stott. "I'm quite curious, you know. Get it off your chest, Wharton!"

Wharton turned to the door. He could not give the convict's message in the presence of Snoop's study-mate.

But the grave expression on his face struck Snoop a little.

"Look here, what is it?" he exclaimed. "You might buzz out for a minute or two, Stott, if you don't mind."

"Oh, all right! I'm going down to the Common-room," yawned Stott. And he lounged out the study.

Wharton watched him down the passage, and then closed the door carefully, and turned to Snoop. The latter watched

him with a sneer, but with a vague uneasiness, too.

"Well, what is it?" he exclaimed testily. "For goodness' sake get it out!"

"I met somebody in the wood this afternoon," said Harry, by way of breaking it gently. "A relation of yours, Snoop."

"What rot! What do you mean?"

"I mean your father!"

Snoop sprang to his feet.

"My—my father?"

"Yes, Snoop."

"You—you fool! You know where my father is!" panted Snoop. "You knew at the time, you rotter! So you've come here to throw that at me, have you? Yes, it's like you! Hang you!"

"Your father is in Friardale Wood," said Wharton, unheeding Snoop's weak anger. "He's got away somehow."

"Good heavens!" muttered Snoop, sinking into his chair, his face white as death, and his eyes dilating.

"I'm sorry to give you a shock," said Harry, his voice quite gentle. "I've never mentioned your father to you, Snoop, and I'd be the last fellow to blame you for anything he did. It's not my business, anyway. But I've met him, and he asked me to speak to you. I couldn't speak before Stott."

"For mercy's sake, don't let a word get out!" panted Snoop. "I—I say, look at the door! He—he may be listening."

Wharton opened the study door, but there was no one in the passage. He closed it again.

"That's all right, Snoop. Pull yourself together, old chap!"

Snoop panted helplessly.

"He's got away!" he said dazedly.

"Away from prison! And—and he's come here—here, near the school!"

"Yes. He saw me in the wood, and recognised me—he's seen me here, you know, before—and he asked me to speak to you," said Harry. "He wants you to go and see him."

Snoop gave a cry.

"To see him! Oh, he's mad!"

"He's hiding in the wood, and if you go to the old hollow oak—you know it, off the footpath?—you'll find him there."

"Oh, it's a shame—a shame!" stammered Snoop. "Why couldn't he stay where he was? He asked for it. What does he want to come here and disgrace me for, when the fellows have forgotten about it all? Oh, it's a rotten shame! I—I won't see him! I can't—I daren't!"

Wharton was silent.

He had wondered how Snoop would take his father's message. He was learning now.

"He's no right to come here!" went on Snoop furiously, with the passionate fury of a weak nature. "It's—it's infamous! Why, he may be collared near the school! Everybody will know; it'll be the talk of Greyfriars from one end to the other! I may have to clear out of the school. I wondered that the Head let me stay as it was. It's infamous! Haven't I suffered enough for what he did? Can't he leave me in peace now?"

"Hush!" said Harry warningly.

Snoop's voice was rising to an almost hysterical shriek.

The junior clenched his hands.

"I won't see him—I won't—I can't! Why, it's against the law! What does he want? Tell me that!"

"I think he wants you to help him, Snoop."

"Help him! How?" Snoop ground his teeth. "Oh, I know! He's in—in convict clothes, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"I know; he wants to dodge the police. I can't help him! Why, I might be sent to prison myself if I took him

clothes to escape in! It's against the law; you know it's against the law, Wharton."

Wharton nodded. He was not very clear as to the law on that subject, naturally, but he knew that it could not be lawful to help a convict to escape from the police. He might have said that a son's duty to his father came before everything else. And yet, that was a dangerous doctrine. It was hard enough to steer a straight course between right and wrong in such a matter. But Sidney James Snoop was not so much troubled by considerations of right and wrong as by fear for his own precious skin.

"You want me to go!" hissed Snoop, with a bitter look at the captain of the Remove. "You'd like to see me landed in awful trouble, wouldn't you?"

Wharton compressed his lips.

"I've brought you your father's message, Snoop, because he asked me," he replied. "That's all I have to do with the matter."

"You'd no right to!" hissed Snoop.

"What?"

"You know you'd no right to. You shouldn't have done it. Now you've put me in a horrible position. I can't go to him—I can't help him! You knew I couldn't. You ought to have refused."

"Oh!" said Harry, after a long pause.

"You can help him if you like," said Snoop savagely; "I can't! If you like to do as he wants, I'll give you the money—all the money I've got. I'm not going to see him. I can't! It's too frightfully risky!"

"He's your father, Snoop!" broke out Wharton at last.

"What sort of a father has he been to me?" snarled Snoop. "He's disgraced me in a way I shall never get over. The fellows never speak of it; but they haven't really forgotten it! I know that. It will cling to me all my life—having a father a convict! What did he want to promote rotten companies for, and then steal because he was ruined? Let him take the consequences himself. I'm not going to take them! I've suffered enough for him!"

"Well, it's your own business, Snoop," said Wharton. "I thought I was bound to give you your father's message."

"You'd no right to! Look here!" Snoop caught his breath. "You haven't mentioned this to anybody?"

"Of course not."

"Nobody else knows?"

"Only Vernon-Smith."

"You've told him—that sneering cad?" shrieked Snoop.

"I did not tell him. He saw your father in the wood. He came up while we were talking. But he's said he won't mention it."

"Nobody else—nobody but Smithy?"

"Nobody."

"That's good!" Snoop drew a deep breath. "It may be kept dark after all. He will clear off. He can't stay there long. He ought never to have come near. Just like him—selfish, always selfish! As if I'd dare to risk going to prison by helping him! I'm not going—I can't!"

Snoop spoke those words with savage emphasis. There was nothing more to be said, and Harry Wharton quitted the study. He left Snoop pacing to and fro in the study with a black brow, in a bitter mood. Wharton's brow was dark, too, as he went. Doubtless it was selfish, inconsiderate, of the escaped man to bring this new trouble upon his son. But he had turned for help to the only possible quarter. Wharton could not help thinking of the wretched man, skulking half famished in the wood, waiting for his son to come—the son who repudiated him, and would not come.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Left in the Lurch!

VERNON-SMITH gave Snoop a curious glance when the Remove fellows went into their dormitory that night.

Sidney James Snoop was pale and harassed-looking.

He had firmly made up his mind that he would not go. He dared not go. His one bitter hope was that the hunted man would leave the neighbourhood, and meet his fate elsewhere. A lad with firmly-fixed and high principles might have thought it his duty to refrain from interfering with the course of the law. But it was not a matter of high principle that moved Snoop. It was fear of the consequences to himself; consequences that were magnified, too, by his vague terrors. His feeling towards the hunted man was one of resentment and dread. His father had done him harm enough—he might at least leave him in peace now. That was Snoop's thought.

The Bounder was curious.

He was aware that Wharton had brought a message from the skulking man to his son at Greyfriars, and that it could only be to ask for help. He wondered what Snoop was going to do.

Other fellows noted Snoop's looks, too. None but the Bounder and Harry Wharton knew the cause. Fellows who knew that Snoop had been blowing his remittance on a "razzle" that afternoon put it down to too many cigarettes. Billy Bunter emitted a fat chuckle as he blinked at Snoop's haggard face through his big glasses.

"Didn't the smokes agree with you, Snoopey?" he asked.

Snoop glanced at him vaguely without replying.

"Feel rather queer inside—what?" chortled Bunter. "He, he, he!"

"Well, you do look a queer fish, Snoopey!" remarked Skinner. "You didn't have such a dashed lot of smokes, either. What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing!" muttered Snoop.

"Bit sea-sick?" grinned Bob Cherry. "Who wouldn't be a giddy blade on the merry downward path?"

"The sea-sickness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Singh. "I suggestfully advise turning over a new and esteemed leaf, my worthy Snoop. The stitch in time goes longest to the well."

"Oh, shut up!" growled Snoop.

He fumbled at the stud in his collar with nerveless fingers. The Bounder came towards him.

"Let me help you, Snoopey," he said.

Snoop stared vaguely at the Bounder, as the latter unfastened the stud for him. He knew that Vernon-Smith was making that a pretext for coming near to speak so that the others should not hear. The Bounder sank his voice to a whisper, and went on:

"Are you going out of bounds to-night?"

"No!" muttered Snoop.

"I'll help you out if you like."

Snoop's eyes glittered.

"I'm not going!" he muttered sullenly.

"But you haven't been already?"

"No!"

The Bounder looked puzzled.

"But, you know, Wharton told you

"Yes, yes. Shut up! Skinner's listening!"

"Hallo! What are you two confabbing about?" said Skinner inquisitively.

"Let a fellow into it!"

"Nothing!" grunted Snoop.

The Bounder went back towards his bed without answering Skinner. Snoop's reply had taken him aback. Cynical as he was, and profoundly as he despised Snoop, the Bounder had not expected

that. He realised that the junior meant to leave the matter where it was—that the hapless man's appeal for help was to pass unanswered. His lip curled.

Snoop did not look at him again. He turned in sullenly, and lay silent while the usual buzz of chat ran from bed to bed after lights-out. But it was long before Snoop slept.

It had been easy to decide upon his course of action, but it was not easy to dismiss the matter from his mind. The thought of the helpless, hopeless man lurking in the shadows of the wood haunted him. Still more darkly the fear haunted him that worse might come of it—that Josiah Snoop might be run down so near the school that all Greyfriars would ring with the story. And, if it did not come to that, there was no telling what might happen.

Josiah Snoop had revealed his presence to Wharton, to get a message to his son. Wharton could be trusted to keep silent. But if nothing came of it, what step might not the wretched man take next? Greyfriars fellows were in the wood often enough. Suppose the wretched man tried to send a message by another junior—some fellow like Skinner or Bunter? What he had tried once he might try again.

Other fellows might not be so discreet as Wharton. Bunter, for example, would acquaint the whole school with the matter at once, if he knew. Skinner or Stott, perhaps, would keep it dark, but they would make Snoop writhe under their sneers. Other fellows might go straight to the police-station with information, or to the Head! Snoop turned cold with horror at the thought of what might happen.

It was past midnight when he slept—a troubled sleep, broken by dreams, in which convicts and police and warders were mingled. Snoop was in a deep sleep when the rising-bell rang out in the sunny morning, and he was awakened by a heavy shake. He started up, and blinked dazedly at the good-humoured face of Bob Cherry bending over him.

"Rising-bell, slacker!" said Bob.

"Let me alone, confound you!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! You've woke up in a sweet temper, dear boy," said Bob. "I'll help you out, shall I?"

He rolled Snoop out of bed on to the floor. The junior gave a yell as he landed, and, springing up, he rushed at Bob Cherry like a tiger, hitting out furiously. The surprised Bob received a savage blow full in the face before he knew the attack was coming, and he sat down with a bump on the floor of the dormitory.

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter.

"Mum-mum-my hat!" gasped Bob. "My word! Why, I'll mop up the school with you, you blessed wild-cat!"

He scrambled to his feet in great wrath. Snoop, already scared by what he had done, backed away.

Harry Wharton caught Bob by the arm, and stopped him.

"Hold on, Bob!"

"Leggo!" roared Bob. "Look at my nose!"

Wharton tightened his grasp.

"Hold on!" he said, in a low voice. "Let him alone, Bob. There's something up with Snoop. Don't touch him, old chap!"

Bob stared at him, and then at Snoop. Then his anger died away. It was only too plain from Snoop's looks that something was up with him. Such a sudden outbreak of savage temper was very uncommon in the funk of the Remove. At any other time Snoop would as soon have thought of tackling a wild Hun as of attacking Bob Cherry.

"Oh, all serene!" said Bob. "You'd better not take any more liberties with my nose, though, Snoop, or you will get hurt. What's the matter with you this morning, you Hun?"

Snoop did not answer, and Bob turned away. Snoop made haste to get out of the dormitory. He wanted to be alone, out of sight of the fellows. He hurried out into the quadrangle as soon as he could. But the bright sunshine in the quad had no cheering effect upon him.

He scowled, and turned away as he saw Vernon-Smith coming towards him. But the Bounder was not to be eluded. He joined Snoop under the elms.

"Cheer-ho, Snoopey!" said the Bounder, with a half-mocking grin. "You look as if you're enjoying life this nice morning, by gad!"

"Let me alone!" muttered Snoop sullenly.

"With pleasure!" smiled the Bounder. "I'm not seeking your society because it's agreeable, dear boy. But what about your pater?"

"Hush!"

"The elms can't hear us," said the Bounder, laughing. "Look here, Wharton brought you a message from your pater yesterday!"

"What about it, hang you?"

"He's in the wood."

"I know he is!"

"I suppose his message meant that he wants you to help him?"

"That's my business!"

"Quite so. Are you going to do anything?"

"No, I'm not!"

"Going to leave him to stew in his own juice—what?" smiled the Bounder.

"You needn't worry about it, anyway."

"I don't intend to." The Bounder laughed. "My hat! He must be proud of a son like you, Sidney! You'd be a credit to any proud parent—I don't think! But, I say, he's in rather a bad way, you know."

Snoop gave him a bitter look.

"That bothers you, does it?" he sneered. "You care a lot for others, don't you, Smithy?"

"Not a rap for anybody in the wide world, excepting my pater," said the Bounder coolly. "But a chap's father is his father, hang it! If you wanted to do the poor wretch a good turn, I'd help you!"

"You'd like to land me in an awful fix, you mean!"

The Bounder looked at him curiously. His own hard and reckless nature was so utterly unlike Snoop's that it was not easy for him to understand the weak-nerved junior.

"You're not going to risk it?" he said at last.

"No; I'm not!"

"But you mayn't have any choice," said the Bounder. "Suppose he nails another fellow to send with a message, if you don't come? Suppose it's a tattling duffer like Bunter, for instance?"

Snoop shuddered.

But he did not speak, and the Bounder strolled away, whistling. He met Wharton when he went in to breakfast, and gave him a grin.

"You know what Snoop's decided?" he asked.

Wharton nodded.

"That poor wretch in the wood is going to be left in the lurch?"

"I suppose so."

"You going to do anything in the matter?" asked the Bounder.

Wharton started.

"I? What can I do?"

"Well, you could take the matter in hand, you know, and give the merry old

gent the help he needs, and make yourself liable for a stretch in a reformatory." The Bounder chuckled.

"I'm not likely to do anything of the sort!" said Wharton sharply. "I can't help thinking I'm doing wrong in keeping it secret that he's there. As for helping him to escape justice, that would be wrong, as well as against the law. It might be justifiable in Snoop—not in me."

"Exactly! It's pretty cool of the chap to come hanging about Greyfriars, anyway; and he might have known our dear Sidney James better than to expect anything of him. I wonder how it will turn out?" And the Bounder laughed, and went in to breakfast.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Second Message!

"SEEN Snoop?"

Hazeldene of the Remove asked that question as he came in at the gates as the summer dusk was falling. Harry Wharton was wheeling in his bicycle after a visit to Highcliffe, and it was to him that Hazel spoke.

"No," said Harry; "I've been out since lessons. How are they at Cliff House? You've been there?"

"Yes," said Hazel, as he walked in beside Wharton. "I've asked Marjorie about coming over to see the Rockwood match when it comes off. They're coming."

"Good!"

"I took a short cut through the wood coming home," said Hazel, colouring a little. "I— He paused. "I want to see Snoop. Where is he, I wonder?"

He went on towards the School House, while Wharton wheeled his bike away to the shed.

Wharton's brow was sombre.

Hazel had taken a short cut through the wood. He had asked for Snoop immediately he came in. And he was looking confused and uncomfortable. Wharton could not help suspecting what had happened. Josiah Snoop had waited twenty-four hours since Wharton had seen him, and he had waited in vain for his son to come.

Wharton guessed that he had taken the risk of showing himself again, in order to send another message to Snoop. The wretched man's only hope of escape lay in getting help from his son. Probably he felt himself bound to take the risk; possibly he did not care if Snoop suffered fresh disgrace if the junior refused to help him in his extremity.

Wharton wondered how it would all end. When the fugitive realised that his son did not mean to come to his aid, it was quite possible that he would take some desperate step.

Hazeldene asked for Snoop up and down the House, but Sidney James was not there.

"Bless the fellow! Where's he got to?" exclaimed Hazel irritably. "Have you seen Snoop, Smithy?"

"Want him particularly?" asked the Bounder.

"I've got a message for him."

"Oh!" said Vernon-Smith. "I wasn't aware that Snoopey had friends at Cliff House!"

"It's not from Cliff House; it's—it's something else! Where the dickens has he got to?"

And Hazel turned away.

"Did you come home through the wood?" asked the Bounder.

"Eh? Yes."

"Meet anybody there?"

Hazel gave a jump.

"Smithy! You—you know, then?" he stammered.

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"You've seen him?" breathed Hazel. "Yesterday."

"It's rotten!" muttered Hazel uneasily. "I—I was startled—scared at first—but when he said he was Snoop's father, I—I said I'd bring a message. I said I wouldn't give him away. What could I do? Like his cheek to speak to me, but—but what could I do, Smithy?"

"Give Snoopey the message, and keep your mouth shut, that's all," said the Bounder, smiling.

Hazel, in a very uneasy mood, hurried away in search of Snoop. But it was not till calling-over that he saw him. Snoop came in to roll-call with a sullen, moody brow. He had been tramping in the Cloisters by himself, alone with his miserable thoughts. Hazel joined him in the corridor when the juniors came out of Hall.

"Come into my study, Snoop!" he said abruptly. "I've got something to say to you!"

Snoop gave one startled look, and followed him without a word. Hazel closed the door of No. 2 Study when they were within. Tom Brown and Bustrade fortunately not being there.

"Well?" said Snoop huskily.

"I came home from Cliff House through the wood," said Hazel. "I met a man there. You know your father's there, Snoop? He said you knew!"

"Yes," muttered Snoop, licking his dry lips.

"He said he'd sent you a message yesterday, and expected you, and you hadn't come."

"Yes?"

"He wants you to go to him at the hollow oak—that's all," said Hazel. "I'm dashed if I like being mixed up in it, but—but I couldn't refuse him. I suppose I ought to have."

"Did he say anything else?" asked Snoop, in a dry, hard voice.

"He said he'd expected you, and you hadn't come, and that it was your duty to go, and you'd better do it."

"That's a threat, I suppose?"

"I don't know. That's what he said, anyway."

Hazel opened the door as a hint to Snoop that the interview was over. Snoop went out unsteadily into the passage. Hazel shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

He was bitterly annoyed at being mixed up in such an affair, and he had some dread of possible consequences. He had done with the matter now, however, at all events. He had given the message he had promised to give, and Snoop could do as he liked about it.

"Hallo, here you are!" said Skinner, meeting Snoop in the passage. "Where have you been all the time? What about a little game? Stott's ready!"

"Let me alone!"

"Oh, come on!" said Skinner. "Up in the box-room, you know—safe as houses!"

"Let me alone!"

"You won our money yesterday," said Skinner disagreeably. "Don't you want to risk losing it again?"

Snoop burst into a bitter, jarring laugh. His exploits as a sport and a blade were as nothing to him now, in the presence of the dreadful trouble that had come upon him. Skinner eyed him oddly.

"What's the matter with you, Snoop?" he asked. "You've been jolly queer all day. I saw Quelchy looking at you in the Form-room!"

"Nothing. Let me alone!"

He brushed past Skinner, and went to his own study. He locked the door, in case Stott should come, and flung himself into a chair. He wanted to think

out the situation, but he could not think clearly.

What was he to do? That question hammered incessantly in his brain. He understood the implied threat in the message Hazel had brought. Hopeless of escape, the convict intended to remain where he was; and when he understood that he was abandoned by his son, he would grow more reckless. More messages would come, till the matter became the talk of the school.

Sooner or later it must end—in the arrest of the hunted man, and a scandal that would cling to Snoop! It would probably come sooner, rather than later. Josiah Snoop was very likely famished, and a hungry man would be desperate and implacable. What was to be done? Snoop groaned in misery as he tried to think it out.

There was an impatient rattle at the door-handle.

"Here, let me in!" It was Stott's voice. "Let me in, you ass! What have you got the blessed door locked for?"

Snoop dragged himself to his feet, and unlocked the door. Stott gave him a surly look as he entered.

"What did you lock me out for, fat-head? What's the game?"

Snoop left the study without replying. His problem was still unsolved, and, think as he would, he could come to no solution.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

What Bunter Saw!

THUD, thud, thud!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry looked out of the gates as he heard that hurried beat of footsteps upon the dusty road.

It was the sound of someone who was running, as if for his life. And as the sun was streaming down upon the road in a blaze of heat, it was remarkable that anyone should be running at such a rate, unless he had a wild bull on his track.

"Bunter!" ejaculated Bob.

He stared blankly at the approaching junior. Billy Bunter was not given to any exertion that he could possibly avoid. That day, after lessons, Bob Cherry had marched him down to the juniors' potato-ground to help in the hoeing, and Billy Bunter had dodged away at the first opportunity, risking a ragging afterwards, to get out of the work. He had scuttled out of gates to escape compulsory service.

Yet here he was tearing along the dusty road towards the school gates, his fat face crimson and streaming with perspiration, his spectacles half-way down his fat little nose, and covered with dust from head to foot.

Even from a distance Bob could hear his heavy gasping and panting as he thudded on. Bob stood rooted to the ground. His eyes swept the stretch of sunlit road behind Bunter, but there was no trace of a pursuer. Unless Billy Bunter had gone out of his senses, there seemed no explanation.

The Owl of the Remove thudded breathlessly up to the gates, and without seeing Bob there rushed right into him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Where are you barging to?" roared Bob Cherry, catching the fat junior by the shoulder and swinging him to a halt.

"Help!"

"What?"

"He's after me! Help!"

"You fat duffer!" said Bob, shaking him. "There's nobody after you!"

"Help!"

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Harry Wharton, hurrying up from the quad. "What the merry dickens—"

"Bunter's gone potty," said Bob. "Sunstroke or something!"

"Help!"

Billy Bunter reeled against the gate, pumping in breath.

"Are you—are you sure he's not after me?" he panted.

"Nobody's after you, you fat funk!"

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Groogh! Oh, dear!" spluttered Bunter.

"What's happened?" demanded Bol-sover major. A crowd of curious fellows were gathering around now. "The Highcliffe cads been after you?"

"Yow! No! Yow!"

"Been ragging with the Courtfield chaps?" asked Peter Todd.

"Groogh! No!"

"Have the Germans landed?" chortled Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I say, you fellows— Oh, dear! Sure he's not following me, Bob Cherry?"

"Who?" roared Bob.

"Groogh! The convict!"

"The what?" shrieked Bob Cherry.

me to do some hoeing, and he was after me with a hoe."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I laid down in the wood for a rest," said Bunter, gasping. "I—I never knew anybody was there. I—I fell asleep."

"That's nothing new!" grinned Skinner. "You're generally asleep when you're not eating. Hard lines on you when they appoint a Sleep Controller as well as a Grub Controller!"

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

"And you dreamed you saw a convict?" asked Skinner.

"No, I didn't, you ass! I woke up, and there he was!" panted Bunter. "A horrible ruffian in broad arrows, you know, looking half-starved and—awfully ferocious. I just stared at him at first—"

"Did it blind him?"

"You silly ass! I—I was taken aback, you know. Then he spoke to me—asked me if I was a Greyfriars chap—and I—I bolted!" gasped Bunter. "I knew he was going to murder me! I



"Who's your merry friend, Wharton?" (See Chapter 4.)

"Oh, dear! The murderous ruffian!" panted Bunter. "The convict! Yowow! I've been nearly murdered! Oh, dear!"

"Fairly off his blessed chump!" said Bob, in wonder. "Sunstroke, I suppose. Better go and lie down for a bit, Bunter, and sleep it off."

"It's a convict!" yelled Bunter. "He was in convict clothes, same as they wear in plays, you know—a horrible, bearded ruffian!"

"Bow-wow!"

Harry Wharton's face became sombre. The Bounder, who had joined the crowd at the gates, gave him a quick look, and Hazeldene, who had just come up, coloured. The three understood who it was Bunter had seen.

But to the other juniors Bunter's statement seemed even more incredible than most of Bunter's statements, which is saying a lot.

"I say, you fellows, it's true!" gasped Bunter. "I—I went down to the wood, you know. That beast Cherry wanted

heard him coming through the wood after me, and I ran for my life."

"Your life ain't worth the trouble," remarked Skinner.

"Beast! I—I thought he was after me all the time, and I never stopped till I got to the gates here. I'm exhausted! I—I wasn't frightened, of course—not exactly frightened—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But he was a desperate villain! Oh, dear! I—I might be lying in the wood at this very moment—"

"Instead of lying here!" said Peter Todd. "Why don't you chuck lying?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's true!" shrieked Bunter. "It was a convict! I'm going to Quelch to tell him, so that he can telephone to the police. The awful ruffian ought to be arrested! Oh, dear! I was awfully scared—I mean, I wasn't scared—"

"He wouldn't have hurt you, you fat ass!" growled Hazel.

"Do you believe there was a merry convict, Hazel?" grinned Bob Cherry.

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"It's only one of Bunter's dreams, after eating too much."

"The dreamfulness was terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter. You had better not go to Mr. Quelch with such a yarn," said the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"I tell you I saw him!"

"Bow-wow!"

"Tell us an easier one, Buntly," suggested Squiff. "That one's too big. Give us something we can digest."

"I saw him as plain as anything!"

"As plain as your face?" asked Skinner.

"Yes."

"Well, that's jolly plain!"

"Oh, really, you beast, Skinner! This isn't a joking matter!" roared Bunter.

"My mistake! I thought it was!"

"I'm going to Quelch, anyway!" gasped Bunter, and he started across the quadrangle.

"My hat! Quelch will jaw him if he goes in with a tall story like that!" said Bob Cherry. "I say, Bunter! Make it a German spy instead of a convict!"

Billy Bunter did not heed. He rolled on, and a crowd of grinning juniors followed him, to see whether he would really go to Mr. Quelch with such a yarn. Billy Bunter tapped at the Remove-master's door, and went in.

"My hat! He's done it!" said Nugent.

"The donfulness is terrific! The next proceeding will be the jawfulness," remarked Hurree Singh.

But the dusky nabob was mistaken. Through the open study doorway they heard Bunter gasping out his amazing story, and the cool, quiet voice of the Form-master putting in questions. And in amazement the juniors heard Mr. Quelch say at the finish:

"Very well, Bunter. You did quite right to come to me, although it appears to me probable that you have made a mistake. I shall telephone at once to Inspector Grimes, and acquaint him with your statement. You may go."

Billy Bunter came rolling out of the study, still in a breathless condition. He blinked triumphantly at the Remove-masters.

"Quelch's 'phoning to Courtiel," he said. "What do you think now?"

"I think Quelch's nearly as big a donkey as you are," said Bolsover major. "There wasn't any convict outside your fat head!"

"Let's go to the wood and have a look for him," suggested Tom Brown.

"Better not," said Wharton uneasily.

"Why not?" asked the New Zealand junior. "If there's a giddy convict, we could run him down."

"No business of ours," said the Bounder. "The poor brute's got enough against him, without amateur policemen joining in."

"Well, that's so," said Tom. "But if he's a dangerous character—"

"If he's a dangerous character, I don't want to meet him, for one," said Skinner.

Mr. Quelch came out of his study.

"Wharton!"

"Yes, sir?" said Harry.

"School bounds will be restricted for the rest of to-day to the gates," said Mr. Quelch. "Kindly pass the word round in the Lower School."

"Very well, sir."

The word was passed round, and naturally the restriction of bounds caused Billy Bunter's discovery to be much discussed. It looked as if Mr. Quelch believed in the existence of the convict in the wood. The possibility of such a character being in the vicinity was sufficient cause for drawing in school bounds, of course. But evidently the

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Remove-master was taking the matter seriously.

The Remove-masters discussed the affair with great excitement, and Billy Bunter was called upon a dozen times to relate the particulars of his thrilling encounter. Bunter's fertile imagination had had time to get to work, and each description became more thrilling than the last, and ere long it came out that the convict was a six-foot ruffian, armed with a revolver, and that Bunter felled him with a blow before he fled—or, rather, retired from the scene after felling him. And the Owl of the Remove-snorted with wrath when he found that the added particulars merely made the juniors more disbelieving than ever.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder Takes a Hand!

"WHARTON! You—you know —" Snoop's voice died away in a gasp.

Harry Wharton had gone to his study, and Snoop had followed him there. The wretched junior's stricken look showed that he had heard the news.

His eyes were fixed upon Wharton's face in anguish.

"Yes," said Harry quietly. "There's no doubt that Bunter saw your father in the wood, Snoop. He was bound to be seen there sooner or later."

Snoop groaned.

"He's sent you a message twice, I think," said Harry. "As you didn't go, he was looking for somebody to give another message to. It's unlucky he found Bunter. I dare say he's pretty reckless by this time. He must feel sure that you won't go to him."

"He's trying to frighten me into going!" moaned Snoop. "I—I suppose he doesn't dare to leave the wood. He's got nowhere to go, and—and if I don't help him he will be arrested there. He may be starving, and it might be the best thing for him to be taken. What can I do, Wharton? They say that Quelch has telephoned to the police already—"

"That's true."

"Grimes will know there's something in it. I heard some talk to-day about food being stolen from a farm at night," said Snoop. "I guessed what that meant at the time. And I dare say Grimes has heard about a man getting away from prison. He will put two and two together. He's likely to make a search in the wood—don't you think so?"

"I suppose he's sure to," said Wharton gravely.

"What's to be done? He'll be arrested near here! All the fellows will know—"

Wharton's lip curled involuntarily. Even at that moment Snoop was thinking only of himself, not of the wretched man who was, after all, his father! Snoop did not heed his expression.

"If he could be warned, he might clear off!" he muttered. "I—I don't want him to be taken. He's my father. If—if he could be warned—"

"You might chance it," said Harry slowly. "Grimes can't be on the scene till later, even if he moves in the matter this evening at all. He may not."

Snoop shuddered.

"I can't go! I dare not! I—I was thinking that you—" He broke off. Even Snoop had a dim sense of the impudence of such a request.

Harry flushed.

"You're not asking me to go to him, Snoop?"

"I—I suppose you won't!" muttered Snoop. "You've got more nerve than I

have, Wharton. I daren't go. He—he would want me to help him, and I can't! Oh, what shall I do?"

Harry Wharton moved uncomfortably. It was an outrageous request, yet he felt pity and concern for the wretched, cowardly fellow. He felt vaguely that it was up to one who had courage to help a weaker fellow somehow. But Snoop was asking him deliberately to intervene between the police and the criminal they sought. It was impossible!

"You won't help me?" groaned Snoop.

"I can't, Snoop. I've no right to act as you ask," said Wharton uneasily.

There was a tap at the door.

The Bounder of Greyfriars looked in.

"Snoop here?" he asked. "Oh, here you are, Sidney James, my merry pippin!" Vernon-Smith stepped into the study and closed the door. "It's all out about your pater, Snoop."

"They don't know it's my pater?" gasped the junior.

"Not yet. But they will when he's lagged," said Vernon-Smith. "It's a bit too late for you to look after him, as you ought to have done at first."

"I—I oughtn't! It's—it's against the law!"

"Oh, blow the law!" said the Bounder coolly. "After all, what's the law made for? Chiefly to fill the pockets of lawyers, I suppose."

"Smithy!" said Wharton.

"Well, the poor rotter's down on his luck," said the Bounder. "I've always had a fellow-feeling for anybody who was up against everything and everybody. Look here, Snoop, I'm going to give you some advice. The man's your father. Put the rest out of your mind, and think only of that. Do you think I'd be counting up the risks if my pater were in trouble? You're not thinking of the right or wrong of it, either—only of your dashed skin! What's that worth?"

"Go easy, Smithy!" said Harry.

"Well, my advice is, go and help your father now he's on his beam-ends," said the Bounder. "He's your father, isn't he? If you want money, I'll lend you some. If you're afraid to go alone, I'll go with you. Is it a go?"

Wharton looked at the Bounder in wonder. Why did the hard-natured, cynical Bounder concern himself about Snoop, whom he despised, and Snoop's father, whom he hardly knew? Perhaps there was something in the convict's position that appealed to the lawlessness in the Bounder's own nature. Perhaps it was only his keen taste for reckless and lawless adventure. But Wharton believed that a real generosity was at the bottom of it.

Vernon-Smith looked inquiringly at Snoop, but the latter gave no sign of assent. He leaned heavily on the table without speaking.

"Haven't you anything to say?" demanded the Bounder sharply.

"I can't go!" The words seemed to be wrung from Snoop. "Smithy, you've got more nerve than I have—you go!"

The Bounder laughed.

"That's cool, I must say. Do you know what a cheeky ass you are, Snoop? Why should I do anything of the kind?"

Snoop sunk weakly into a chair.

"Let me alone, then!" he muttered. "I—I'll run away from Greyfriars! I couldn't stand that awful disgrace over again!"

"Still thinking of your precious self?" sneered the Bounder.

"I—I'm thinking of him, too!" muttered Snoop. "I've been haunted by the thought of him. But he oughtn't to have come here. You know that. It was rotten to drag me into his troubles again! He's done me enough harm. Suppose—"

suppose the police came while I was there with him?"

"You've just asked me to risk that!"

Snoop only replied with a groan. He was overcome, and he let his head fall into his hands upon the table, the tears trickling through his fingers.

The Bounder eyed him with a strange mingling of compassion and contempt for some moments. Then he turned to Wharton, with an ironical smile.

"You don't see any reason for interfering?" he asked.

"How can I?" said Harry uneasily. "It's easy enough to sneer, Smithy, and it's like you. But the man's guilty. He went to a just sentence, and he ought to be taken back."

"Right on the wicket! But he might have repented. People do repent, you know, when they get found out," said the Bounder sarcastically. "You don't think you ought to help him get away from the bobbies?"

"No, I don't!"

"Well, I don't agree with you," said the Bounder coolly. "I'll leave you here to comfort Snoopey with your high morality, while I chance it with the police, and go and help that poor rotter out of danger. Ta-ta!"

And, with a sneering laugh, the Bounder strode out of the study, leaving Wharton crimson to the ears. The Bounder's taunt had struck home. Wharton knew that he was right—he knew it—and yet—

The Bounder was going into danger—for there was danger. If he were found helping the convict he might be arrested with him. Undoubtedly he would be expelled from the school for such an action, if nothing else came of it. The Bounder was risking that. And Wharton was left, with his high morality, as Vernon-Smith sarcastically expressed it. It was only for a moment that the captain of the Remove stopped to think, and then he ran from the study after the Bounder.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Chance of a Lifetime!

"SMITHY!"

The Bounder was already out of the House, and sauntering towards the school wall at a distance from the gates when Wharton overtook him. He looked back, and stopped.

"Well?" he said.

"You're going to help that man?"

"Yes."

"I'll come with you!" said Harry.

The sneer left the Bounder's face. He shook his head.

"Don't!" he said. "Don't mind what I said, Wharton. You're quite right. The man deserves all he got, and more, I dare say."

"Yet you're going to help him," said Harry.

"I've been thinking it over," said the Bounder quietly. "I think there's a way for him to escape, and at the same time without any wrong being done. If he chooses to take my advice, I think I can save him; and if he doesn't, I shall leave him to take his chance."

"I don't quite see—"

"No time for talk now," said Vernon-Smith, "and none to waste. It's pretty certain that Grimes knows of a convict being loose, and knows it's a man with a relation at Greyfriars. As soon as he got Quelchy's telephone message, you can bet that Grimes jumped to it who the man is, and why he's in this neighbourhood. There's no time to lose. Ta-ta!"

"I'm coming with you!" said Wharton stubbornly.

"Look here, it's a big risk! We may be caught on the spot—"

"I'm going to share the risk with you!"

The Bounder gave him one quick look.

"If you mean that—"

"You say that the man can be helped to escape without wrong being done?"

"Yes."

"Let it go at that, then," said Harry. "I'll come with you!"

"All serene, then," said Vernon Smith.

"We can't go out at the gates. Godling's there, and the whole Lower School's gated. We've got to get over the wall."

"Easy enough."

The two juniors strolled carelessly behind the big elms close to the school wall. Screened from sight of the buildings by the trees, the Bounder helped Wharton up, and Harry leaned down and gave him a hand to the top. In less than a minute they had dropped into the road.

From the road they cut across the fields, making for the wood by the shortest cut.

"I suppose he's still near where we saw him before?" the Bounder remarked, as they hurried on. "It's the safest place in the wood."

"I know where to find him. He's keeping near the hollow oak, to see Snoop, if he comes."

"Ha, ha! Not much use, that!"

They hurried on over the sunny meadows, and reached the wood on the Courtfield side. Wharton asked no questions, but he was wondering what the Bounder had in his mind. He had taken Vernon-Smith's statement on trust; and it surprised him, too, to find himself trusting the Bounder.

At a good pace they penetrated the dusky shadows of the wood. They passed the spot where Wharton had met the hunted man two days before. In a few minutes more they reached the hollow oak—a gigantic tree that towered above the elms and beeches in the wood. Save for the twittering of the birds and the occasional rustle of a rabbit in the underbrush, silence reigned round them.

"Well, here we are!" said Vernon-Smith. "I wonder—"

"He must be somewhere about," said Wharton. "He was going to keep watch at this spot for Snoop to come."

The Bounder raised his voice, calling: "Hallo, hallo! Show up, man, if you're here!"

His voice echoed among the trees. Wharton started as he caught sight of two glittering, furtive eyes that peered at him from the underwood.

"He's here, Smithy!"

There was a rustle, and the man came into sight. He had concealed himself in the thickest bushes at the sound of footsteps. He came shivering out into view—more stubbly, ragged, and haggard than when Wharton had seen him before.

"My son?" he muttered.

The Bounder smiled.

"Snoop can't come!" he said. "We've come instead, sir."

The haggard eyes watched the Bounder's face.

"You are going to help me?" muttered Josiah Snoop.

Harry Wharton was silent. He left the talking to the Bounder. The matter was for Vernon-Smith to deal with.

"We're going to help you—on conditions," said Vernon-Smith.

Josiah Snoop made a gesture.

"Conditions! I can give you nothing! I am friendless, penniless, hunted—even my own son has deserted me"—his voice quivered—"I deserve it! I have not been a good father to him! Yet I never thought that he would abandon me in my extremity." He broke off miserably.

"On conditions," repeated the Bounder calmly. "You earned the sentence you got, Mr. Snoop, and you've no right to

ask anybody—even your son—to come between you and the law. But—if you've found time in prison to feel sorry for what you did—and to want to make up for it—"

"Do you want to hear me talk repentance?" muttered the outcast. "Would you believe me if I did?"

"Yes, if you proved it."

"How can I prove it?"

"Listen to me," said the Bounder steadily. "You're in pretty bad condition now; but feeding and training would make a heap of difference to you. You're not to old to serve in the Army. If you want to make a fresh start, there's work for you to do—good and honest work. I don't suppose you've heard much news in chokey; but you've heard of the War, and I suppose you know that men are being bowled over every day like rabbits? Tens of thousands have fallen, and tens of thousands will fall. Every man who can handle a gun is wanted in the line. That's what you can do. There's a recruiting-office in Courtfield."

The man stared at him blankly.

"A recruiting-office!" he muttered.

"Yes. Do you want to join up? If you do, I'll do my best to give you a chance. A man in the fighting-line is better than a man in prison, any day. I don't know what the law would say about it, but I'm settling this off my own bat," said the Bounder coolly.

Wharton's face brightened. He understood now.

"Good man, Smithy!" he murmured.

"That's the idea," said the Bounder, with a grin. "It's up to Mr. Snoop to take it or leave it!"

Wharton looked anxiously at the haggard, bearded face before him. Surely, he thought, there could be nothing wrong in that—in giving the wretched man a chance to serve his country? What was the use of his grinding away dull years behind prison walls when the Hun was at the gate?

It seemed some moments before Josiah Snoop could fully realise the Bounder's meaning. But as he realised it a new light came into his worn face, a new light into his hollow eyes. Unconsciously his crouching form drew more erect.

He drew a deep, deep breath.

"If I only had a chance!" he muttered.

"If you had a chance, you'd take it?"

The outcast laughed bitterly.

"Take it? I would jump at it! But what's the use of thinking of it? I've thought of it already. It was in my mind when I broke from prison. How can I get into khaki? They wouldn't take a gaol-bird—a man hunted by the police! It's madness!"

"You needn't hand in your visiting-card at the recruiting-office," grinned the Bounder. "What's the matter with Private Smith or Thompson?"

"But—look at me!"

"Well, you can't exactly go to join up in the broad-arrow rig. But I can manage all that for you. You want a razor, and a wash, and new clothes, and there you are. By the time the bobbies are looking for you'll have vanished, and a decent soldier will have come into existence instead of a sneaking convict. It's a chance of a lifetime—if you choose to take it."

Josiah Snoop was silent for some moments. His face was working. The Bounder's look softened as he saw tears glistening in the hollow eyes.

"Heaven bless you!" said Josiah Snoop at last. "I will try. If I succeed, I shall wipe out the past; if I fail, I shall for ever bless you for having given me the chance."

There was no doubting the man's

earnestness. Somewhere in this swindler's breast there was a spark of good. The thought of standing once more, with upright head, among his fellow-men seemed to have given him new life. Even the convict was not insensible to the call of duty—the call to take arms against his country's foes. Even the convict had a country, and was ready to strike a blow for its freedom and honour.

"Good man!" said the Bounder. "It's a go! I'll get you all you want. But you can't remain here. The alarm's been given. You've shown yourself once too often!"

The convict shivered.

"You're going to lend a hand, Wharton?"

"Yes," said Harry quietly.

"Get him away from here, then, while I out off to Courtfield and get the things he wants," said the Bounder. "I'll come to the old Priory, and meet you there, as soon as I can get back. That all right?"

"I'll stand half, Smithy," said Harry, in a low voice.

"Rot! I've plenty of tin! This is my game," said the Bounder.

And with that he hurried away.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Private Smith!

"WHERE the dickens is Harry?" Bob Cherry was asking that question as the dusk fell upon Greyfriars School.

It was nearly time for the calling-over, and Harry Wharton's chums had missed him.

"Must have gone out of bounds," said Johnny Bull. "Asking for trouble! Quelch will be in a wax if he comes out."

"I say, you fellows, he's gone out with Smithy," chimed in Billy Bunter.

"Rats!" said Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent! I saw them," said Bunter. "I happened to have an eye on them, you know. They sneaked over the wall together, hours ago."

"Bosh!" said Bob. "What should he go out with the Bounder for? By the way, is the Bounder out, you chaps?"

"Not at all. He's here," said the Bounder's cool voice.

Bob turned.

"Oh, here you are! Seen Wharton?"

"I think he's in the quad somewhere," said Vernon-Smith; and he went on into the house.

"There's the bell," said Nugent.

Harry Wharton joined his chums as they were heading for Hall. The Co. looked at him very curiously.

"You've been out of bounds?" asked Bob.

"Yes; but I'm back in time," said Harry. "It was a close thing. All serene, though. I'll tell you about it presently."

The juniors went on into Hall, and answered to their names as Mr. Quelch called the roll. Sidney James Snoop came in with the rest, looking pale and sickly. After roll-call, Snoop joined Wharton in the passage.

"You've seen him?" he muttered.

"Yes. It's all right."

"Is he gone?"

"Yes."

"And—and the police—"

Wharton smiled slightly.

"We saw Inspector Grimes in the lane, with a couple of bobbies," he said. "They were heading for the wood. They didn't see us—we kept out of sight."

Snoop drew a deep, sobbing breath.

"You think he's safe?" he muttered.

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"I hope so," said Harry. "That's all I can say. Smithy gave him some good advice, and he's taken it. He's got all he wants. I hope he'll pull through all right."

"I—I'm glad," Snoop's lips quivered. "I—I'm really not—not so selfish as you thought. I've thought of him, too, Wharton; but—but I haven't nerve like you—I can't help it! I hope he'll get clear—goodness knows, I hope he will. It's horrible for me; you haven't had a father a convict—it's an awful thing for any chap."

Wharton nodded.

"All serene," he said. "Smithy's idea may work out all right for him—if it does, it will mean a big change for the better for your pater. He might even earn a pardon, if all goes well, and get back into a decent position again, and wipe out the past."

"I don't understand! What's he going to do, then?" asked Snoop. Then, as Wharton hesitated, he went on: "Never mind—you needn't tell me anything—I only wanted to know that he was gone—I mean that he was safe."

In Study No. 1, a little later, Harry Wharton explained to the Co. He did not want to keep a secret from his chums, and he knew their discretion could be relied upon. The chums of the Remove listened in astonishment, and Bob and Nugent and Hurree Singh expressed approval. Only Johnny Bull gave a grunt.

"Nice kind of man to plant on the Army!" he said.

"He seemed pretty keen on a chance to play up," said Harry. "It might be the making of him. Training does a lot for a man like that. Besides, he would have been conscripted when his sentence was up, so it comes to the same thing as far as that goes."

"It was an excellent idea of the esteemed Smithy," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But it had better be kept very darkly. Let us hopefully wish that the worthy rotter will make the most of his chance."

"Snoop doesn't know," said Harry. "Smithy thought it better to keep it quiet till we see how it turns out. It's Smithy's business. I hope it will be a success; though whether we've done quite right, I can't say. But helping a lame dog over a stile can't be very wrong, I think."

And the subject dropped.

The Co., as well as Snoop, were very anxious for news the next morning. Inspector Grimes was sure to let Mr. Quelch know whether he had made a capture on the information furnished by the Remove-master. As a matter of fact, the portly inspector dropped in at Greyfriars after morning lessons, and asked for Billy Bunter. The Owl of the Remove swelled with importance as he interviewed the inspector, who drew from him full details of his meeting with the convict in the wood—and so many details in addition, that were evidently exaggerated or imagined, that Mr. Grimes was left in very considerable doubt as to whether Bunter had really seen the convict at all.

The visit, however, showed that no capture had yet been made. That much was satisfactory to the chums of the Remove.

"I say, you fellows," said Bunter, in tones of indignation, as he joined the Famous Five after the inspector was gone, "that silly ass Grimes doesn't half believe that there was a convict at all!"

"Go hon!" said Bob sarcastically. "Did you tell him how you felled the fearful ruffian with a blow?"

"Yes, of course—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle

at!" said Bunter warmly. "I explained to him fully how the murderous ruffian sprang upon me like a tiger—"

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

"Like a tiger!" roared Bunter. "Like a savage tiger, I tell you! I hit him right between the eyes, and he rolled over like—like—like anything. I lost him lying in the wood!"

"Did he catch it from you?" said Johnny Bull.

"Eh? Did he catch what?"

"Lying?"

"You silly ass, I'm telling you exactly what occurred! I gave him a drive straight from the shoulder, fairly on the nose—"

"As well as the one between the eyes?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"I—I mean the same one, you know. He went down like a—felled ox, you know, and never stirred again—"

"Not even when he rolled over?" asked Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, if you fellows don't believe me—"

"The believfulness is not terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter."

Billy Bunter snorted, and rolled away to look for a more credulous audience. Bob Cherry chuckled.

"That silly ass has made Grimes believe it was whoppers from start to finish," he said. "I fancy Grimey won't waste much more time looking for Bunter's convict. All the better for Snoop's pater."

For a few days Sidney James Snoop was anxious for news, but no news came. It was certain that the escaped man had not been captured, and Snoop breathed more freely. There was little doubt that, after his personal interview with William George Bunter, Inspector Grimes had let the matter drop.

Snoop was a good deal more cheerful now. He did not seem particularly anxious to know what had become of the fugitive; the heavier part of the burden was off his mind now that he himself was comparatively safe.

On the following Saturday afternoon Harry Wharton and the Bounder joined Snoop in the quad after dinner. Wharton looked very cheerful, and the Bounder's face wore a grin.

"Coming for a trot this afternoon, Snoopey?" he asked.

"Yes, if you like," said Snoop, with a very doubtful glance at Wharton. The Bounder laughed.

"It's not cards or smokes," he said. "Wharton's coming! Just a pleasant little prom, with light and entertaining conversation."

"Look here, what are you getting at?" demanded Snoop somewhat surlily.

"We're going to meet a friend."

"Somebody I know?" asked Snoop, perplexed.

"A soldier chap," said the Bounder. "I've had a word from him that he can get off for an hour this afternoon—he's in training at Wapshot, and he's coming along to Friardale. Come on, Snoop!"

"Look here, I don't want to waste a half-holiday going to see a soldier," growled Snoop, as the Bounder took his arm and led him away to the gates. Snoop was becoming very much his old self again now.

"But it won't be waste," said the Bounder. "You'll find the chap very entertaining."

"Yes, come on, Snoop!" said Wharton.

Puzzled, and somewhat irritated, Snoop left the school gates with the two juniors.

He was thinking of a little smoking-party arranged with Skinner and Stott and some of the Highcliffe fellows, and he did not want that walk. But he

allowed himself to be led by the masterful Bounder.

The three juniors turned from the road into the old spinney a mile from the school.

"You're meeting the soldier chap here?" asked Snoop.

"Yes; in the spinney."

"What on earth for?"

"To give you a treat, dear boy—you'll be pleased to make his acquaintance," smiled the Bounder.

"Who on earth is it—what's his name?"

"Private Smith."

"I don't know him."

The Bounder chuckled, and led Snoop on into the spinney. A man in khaki, seated upon a log, rose to his feet as the Greyfriars juniors came in sight. Both Wharton and Vernon-Smith looked at him curiously. The outcast of Friardale Wood looked very different now. The

stubbly beard was gone. The ragged moustache was trimmed and neat. The man looked ten years younger. The haggard face was already filling out, and there was colour, and a touch of sunburn, in the cheeks. The crouch was gone—as he stood before them, the one-time outcast was sturdy and erect. Even a week in training had made a wonderful difference to him—and that even more in manner than in appearance. There was strong self-reliance in the place of lurking fear.

"By gad!" said the Bounder, in admiration. "It's a success! I rather think I've scored this time, Wharton."

"I think so," said Harry.

Snoop was staring at the man with wide-open, dilated eyes. And the man was looking at Snoop.

"Sidney!" he said.

Snoop found his voice.

"Father!"

"God bless you both!" said Private Smith, as Wharton and the Bounder moved away, leaving Sidney James Snoop alone with his father.

The two juniors returned to Greyfriars together. At the gates of the school they parted.

"Not coming along to cricket, Smithy?" asked Harry.

"No. I'm due at Highcliffe—Ponsonby's expecting me," said the Bounder lightly. "You don't feel inclined to come along and have a hand at nap in Pon's study—what?"

"Thanks, no!" said Wharton drily.

"Ha, ha!"

The Bounder laughed, and went his way.

(Don't miss "AGAINST HIS OWN SIDE!"—next Monday's grand story of Harry Wharton & Co., by Frank Richards.)

THE GREYFRIARS GALLERY.

No. 28.—DICK RAKE.

HE signs himself Richard, of course. That is his name. But one thinks of him as "Dick." The name is one of those good, hearty English ones that are never stale. Tom, Dick, Harry, Jack, Bob, Bill—other names may be higher-sounding, more picturesque in their associations, but these are always good enough. And Dick is one of the best of them all, and it just fits Rake.

He is all there, this Dick Rake. Sound in body and brain, quick enough with hand and tongue, plucky and fun-loving. There is no swank about him, though you do not catch him regarding himself as a worm. He has plenty of independence, and, while on excellent terms with the Famous Five, has never become, and is never likely to become, a mere hanger-on of theirs, any more than Squiff or Tom Brown or Piet Delarey or Peter Todd.

Such fellows as these are ready to take a line of their own when they think it necessary. If they agree with Wharton in most matters, it is only because in most matters Wharton's is the view that a decent fellow would take, Harry Wharton himself being as decent and straightforward a fellow as one might find anywhere.

Rake has been up against the Famous Five before now. A keen athlete, he naturally wanted a place in the Form footer team, and when he found he was cast for the part of reserve, owing to the fact that there were more than eleven good players to be considered, and that he was not quite one of the top-notchers, he organised opposition.

Peter Todd did the same thing in connection with the Coker Cup. Vernon-Smith, with different motives, did it in the case of the Greyfriars Crusaders. The Crusaders—Toddy's team—and Rake's Rebels were all made up in very much the same way. They included several fellows quite good enough for the Remove regular side, who were only out of it because there is room on a side for no more than eleven players. But they also included, quite inevitably, several who were not good enough, and whom Wharton would not have played in a match of importance. And this doubtful element let down the opposition sides, in spite of all that their crack players, spurred on by ambition, could do.

The story of how Rake's Rebels were beaten will be remembered by many readers. They wanted matches, and one offered itself. It was with a school they had never heard of before; but that did not matter. What did matter was that when the visitors turned up they were—girls! At least, they appeared to be girls. But there was nothing girlish about their play—a fact not surprising when one knows that Miss B. Sharp and the rest of them were really the Remove team in disguise, Inky standing out as too difficult to



Richard Rake

transform into even a weird specimen of British girlhood.

Rake was in hot water for being such an ass as to make a match with a girls' school. His supporters were no better pleased when the supposed girls' school made rings round them. And they were not even satisfied when they knew the truth.

So Rake gave up the rebel role, though since then we have seen him joining Peter Todd in opposition to Wharton, and there is no guarantee that he may not some day try another fall with Wharton on his own account. If he does, it will be in a spirit of chivalrous and manly rivalry. One is sure of that.

When Dick Rake arrived at Greyfriars he was no mere timid new boy, raw from home. He had had earlier experience of the rough-and-tumble of school-life, and he took his place in the Remove with cool resolution and readiness to fight his way if necessary. Coker, Potter, and Greene were the first Greyfriars fellows he met. The magnificent Horace considered him too cheeky for anything, and they were piling on him when the Famous Five came to the rescue.

The Famous Five thought him rather too cool and self-assured. Johnny Bull held this opinion to an extent even greater than his chums. Rake argued with him, and Johnny considered that rather cheeky in a new boy. It was Johnny who sent the new-comer into Wingate's study to have a wash and brush-up, carefully misleading him as to whose the study was.

Later, Rake and Bull fought. There was no actual decision, as the combat was interrupted; but Johnny realised that he had met

a fellow who was at least his equal with the gloves, and that made him like Rake better.

Rake was put into No. 14 with him and Fish. The Yankee tried bluff, but was soon set in his proper place. Rake liked his money-grubbing schemes as little as Johnny Bull did, and when trouble arose in consequence of them those two always stood together. Once Fish had the nerve to put up a pawnbroker's sign outside the door of the study. They soon had that down. Rake held the struggling, would-be Uncle Fish while Johnny did the smashing.

A prominent incident in Dick Rake's early days at the school was his accidental discovery of Loder's rascally plot to keep Wingate out of a cricket match by means of a faked telegram. Rake went to work to thwart that scheme in a very cool and able manner. He told the Famous Five, realising that the warning he had to give the skipper would carry more weight with names such as Wharton's attached than if it bore only the signature of a new fellow. And Loder was checkmated. So, without the necessity for seeking private vengeance, Rake got some of his own back on Loder, who had treated him brutally for a mere accident.

Dick Rake knows how to stand by a friend in trouble, and believes in the old adage that blood is thicker than water. He showed that when he helped his cousin, who had bolted under suspicion of embezzlement. The story is told in "Rake's Rival." Dick's rival—and enemy—was a new fellow, one Arthur Carthew, a good cricketer, between whom and Rake the last place in the Remove Eleven was in dispute.

Carthew learned Rake's secret by spying, and used it to put pressure upon him to give up his place. In terror for another's sake, divided between his loyalty to his cousin and his loyalty to his Form, Rake wavered, yet, in the long run, showed himself the staunch, plucky fellow he is. And all came right, and Carthew, whose own father had been the real embezzler, had to quit Greyfriars.

More recently Dick Rake had been up against the Bounder in his blackest mood. Not even yet is Rake, fine though his form has been at times, a regular member of the cricket team. But the necessity of dropping the Bounder gave him a place. After all, he did not play, however. Vernon-Smith picked a quarrel with him, and thrashed him so effectively that he was quite unfit. And Vernon-Smith played, and won the match for his side; and it was mainly through what Rake said that Wharton, at the last minute, offered the Bounder a place.

The fellow who could thus sink his own resentment for the good of his side—the side for a place in which he had struggled so hard and gallantly—is the best kind of a sportsman. No doubt about that!

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 492.

A RAG AT ROOKWOOD!

By JIMMY SILVER.

"SHOCKING!" said Tommy Dodd.
"Awful!" said Tommy Cook.
"Iniquitous!" chimed in Tommy Doyle. "Iniquitous, bedad!"
The three Tommies of the Rookwood Fourth Form were really shocked.

It was indeed a shocking sight.
Old Mack, the porter, was fast asleep. He had chosen a sheltered spot by the stables, under a beech-tree. The three juniors came on him quite suddenly, and stopped.

Old Mack was snoring. He did not move when Tommy Dodd tickled his nose with the toe of his boot. That showed how fast asleep he was. So the three Tommies were not surprised to see a flask lying close by him.

Of course, old Mack wasn't tipsy. He was a teetotaler; at least, he said he was. Perhaps there had been only water or ginger-beer in the flask. It was empty now. If so, the water or ginger-beer had had a very soporific effect on old Mack, for he was sleeping so soundly that a "Jack Johnson" wouldn't have awakened him.

"Shocking!" repeated Tommy Dodd. "I greatly fear, my young friends, that old Mack has been wasting the food of the people in war-time in the form of intoxicating liquor. We are called upon to take notice of such unpatriotic conduct. I dare say it comes under the Offence to the Realm Act. You fellows stand guard over him and see that he comes to no harm till I get back."

"Phwat's the game?" demanded Doyle.
"Wait and see, dear boy!"
And Tommy Dodd cut off to Mr. Manders' House, to his study.

He was back in about five minutes, and he brought several things with him. Among them was a brush and a tube of crimson paint, and a cardboard box full of soot.

"Oh, my hat!" said Tommy Cook. "You're not going—"

"I am!" said Tommy Dodd.

And he did.
Zeppelins or thunder would not have awakened old Mack just then. He slept on peacefully while Tommy Dodd attended to him.

Tommy carefully rubbed the soot into old Mack's red face till it was as black as the ace of spades. Cook and Doyle looked on, grinning. Mack's best pal would not have known him when Tommy Dodd had finished with the soot.

Then Tommy painted his mouth red, making it look about three sizes larger than nature had made it—which was quite large enough, anyway.

After that he put white circles round his eyes with chalk. Then he stepped back to survey his handiwork, and seemed very proud of it.

"How's that for high?" inquired Tommy Dodd.

"Ripping!"

"Lovely, bedad!"

"Now he ought to be woke up," said Tommy Dodd thoughtfully. "Anybody might come by and see him, and they'd think he'd been drinking—which would be hard and unjust on a strict teetotaler like Mack."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three Tommies shook old Mack, and shook him again and again; and he woke up at last and blinked at them. He looked so queer that they yelled with laughter as they shook him.

"Groogh!" said old Mack. "Lemme alone! I'm sleepy! 'Tain't seven o'clock yet, drat yer! Groogh! I ain't going to ring the rising-bell yet, so I tell yer! Groogh! And I ain't 'ad a drop—not a little drop! Not me!"

"A big drop, though, I should think!" grinned Tommy Dodd.

"Ain't touched it to-day," said old Mack

sleepily. "Oh, my heye! My 'ead's queer! Lemme alone!"

Old Mack scrambled up rather unsteadily. Tommy Dodd caught him to steady him, and Mack at once grasped him. He seemed to have woke up in a bad temper.

"You blinking German!" said old Mack. Perhaps Mack had been dreaming about Huns. Tommy Dodd gave a fearful yell as old Mack smote him.

Mack squared up.
"Come on!" he roared. "Come on, you 'Un!"

"My hat! He's dangerous!" ejaculated Tommy Cook. "We'd better clear."

And the three Tommies cleared.
But they waited at a distance to see what old Mack would do. They were certain he would cause a sensation when he appeared in public looking as he did.

They were right.
Old Mack stood grumbling to himself for some time without the least idea of the way his features had been improved while he was asleep. Then he started for his lodge.

Sergeant Kettle spotted him in the quadrangle, and bore down on him at once.

"Outside!" said the sergeant, taking him by the shoulder, never dreaming of recognising Mack in his war-paint. He took him for a nigger minstrel who'd had the cheek to come into Rookwood.

"Wot?" said Mack.
"Outside! Think you can give a performance 'ere?" said the sergeant, with a sniff.
"You travel off!"

"Wotcher mean?"
"I mean that if you don't get hout I shall help you hout!" said the sergeant. "Understand that, darkey?"

"Who are you calling a darkey?" yelled old Mack, in astonishment. "You're drunk!"

"My eye! Are you going out?" roared the sergeant.

"No, I ain't!"

"Then I'll put you!"

Old Mack wondered whether he was still dreaming when the sergeant collared him and waltzed him away towards the gates. But Mack's fighting-blood was up, and he did not go quietly. He landed out, and the sergeant caught his knuckles with his nose, and collapsed. Mack gave him a glare, and stalked on, leaving Sergeant Kettle trying to get his second wind.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Tommy Dodd. "What next?"

"Here comes Knowles!"

Knowles of the Sixth came running up. He had seen the nigger, as he supposed, knock the sergeant down.

"Here, out of this, my man!" he exclaimed.

"Out of what?" yelled Mack.

Knowles pointed to the gates.

"Clear off, or I'll call in the police!" he said.

"My heye! Are you drunk, too?" gasped old Mack. "I'll report this 'ere to the 'Ead!"

"I order you out!" said Knowles.

"Well, I ain't going!"

Knowles measured him with his eye. He did not know Mack—nobody would have known him—but he thought he could handle a fat nigger, and he tried. He took Mack with both hands and ran him down to the gates.

Mack roared and struggled.

"Lemme go! You 'orrid young ruffian! Lemme go!"

The three Tommies were almost weeping. The big Sixth-Former was quite able to handle Mack, and the poor old porter hadn't a chance. But he got away from Knowles near the gate, and made a bee-line for the School House.

"Come back, you ruffian!" shouted Knowles.

But Mack did not come back. He was heading for the School House for protection. His head was still rather dizzy from sleep—and other causes—and he believed that the sergeant was drunk, and that Knowles was mad. He rushed on at top speed, and Knowles and the sergeant rushed after him.

There was a whoop in the quad as a lot of fellows caught sight of them. The Rookwooders had never seen a nigger streaking across the quad before with a prefect and the sergeant on his track.

"Join up!" yelled Lovell of the Fourth. "Come on!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Quite an army of fellows joined in the chase.

Old Mack stopped on the steps, panting, and looked back. His eyes almost started from his head as he saw half Rookwood in hot pursuit.

"My heye!" he gasped. "They're all gone potty—fairly off their chumps! What's come over this 'ere blessed school?"

"Collar him!"

"Seize him!"

"Tackle him!"

"Oh, jiminey!" stuttered old Mack. And he dodged into the House as the crowd rushed down on him.

He headed for Mr. Bootles' study for protection. He didn't stop to knock at the door; there was no time for that. He burst the door open and rushed in, panting.

"Elp!" he gasped.

Mr. Bootles was busy with exam. papers that afternoon; but he forgot all about exam. papers as that dreadful vision dawned upon him. He jumped up, and stood almost frozen with terror as a nigger, with black face and huge, red mouth and rolling eyes, burst upon him.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Bootles. "What—what—"

"After him!" came in a roar from the passage. "He'll attack Mr. Bootles! Rescue!"

Mack slammed the door of the study, and felt for the key. He didn't know what to make of all Rookwood running him down in this way, but he was so alarmed and scared he hardly knew what he was doing.

"Good heavens!" panted Mr. Bootles.

He was almost numb with horror at finding himself shut up alone in the study with this wild nigger.

The window was open, and Mr. Bootles made a rush for it. It wasn't very dignified for a Form-master to scoot out of a window like a fag; but it wasn't a time to consider dignity. Mr. Bootles was thinking of life and limb, not dignity. He went through the window like an acrobat, and rolled in the quad outside, tangled up in his gown.

There was a crash on the study door. Mack hadn't had time to turn the key. The door burst open again.

"Here he is!"

"Collar him!"

Mack backed away as the crowd rushed in. There was only one way of escape for him, and he took it, jumping out of the window with wonderful activity considering his age.

He landed within a yard of Mr. Bootles, who had scrambled up.

"Yow! Help!" yelled Mr. Bootles, fully believing that a maniac was in pursuit of him. "Yah! Oh! Help! Police!"

He dashed off, with his gown flying behind him. Mack rushed after him. He expected to be safe with Mr. Bootles; but Mr. Bootles didn't feel safe with him.

"Stop!" he gasped. "I say, stop!"

Mr. Bootles wasn't likely to stop. Neither

(Continued on page 15.)

was Mack, for he could see the whole crowd pouring out of the study window after him.

Mr. Bootles whisked into the House again by the big doorway, and Mack whisked in only a couple of yards behind him, and after Mack came the whooping crowd.

Mr. Bootles rushed for the Head's study. Mack rushed after him.

Fortunately, Bootles got home first. He tore open the Head's door, and dashed in, slammed the door, and locked it.

Dr. Chisholm jumped up.

"Mr. Bootles!"

The Form-master collapsed into a chair.

"Bless my soul, Mr. Bootles! What has happened?" exclaimed the Head, in alarm.

"Why have you locked the door?"

"Secure the window!" panted Mr. Bootles.

"What?"

"He may come round to the window! Secure it!"

"He? Who—what—?"

"A dreadful negro—a fearful maniac!" shrieked Mr. Bootles. "I have narrowly escaped with my life! Oh, dear! Telephone for the police, sir! Telephone to Latham for the Territorials! Telephone for the soldiers! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

Mr. Bootles would have called the Army home from Flanders at that moment if it had been possible.

"Mr. Bootles—"

The Head was interrupted by the sound of a terrible struggle outside his door. Mack had been fairly cornered at the locked door, and Knowles and an army of fellows were swarming over him.

"Got him!"

"Down him!"

"Sit on his head!"

"Hurrah!"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Dr. Chisholm, rushing to the door.

"Do not open the door!" shrieked Mr. Bootles. "A dreadful negro—a most alarming madman—"

But the Head did not heed him. He unlocked the door, and threw it open. The scene that met his gaze was extraordinary.

Old Mack was there, but he couldn't be seen. The fellows were simply swamping him.

"All right, sir!" gasped Knowles. "We've got the ruffian, sir!"

"We've got him!" chortled Hansom of the Fifth. "I'm sitting on his head, sir! Yarrah! Yoop! Whooop!" yelled Hansom, jumping up.

"Hansom! What—?"

"Yarrah! I'm bitten! Yow!"

"Sit on him, Hansom!" panted Lovell.

"Sit—"

"Yow-ow! You sit on him! Yooop!"

"Silence!" thundered the Head majestically.

"This excitement is most unseemly! Who is this man?"

"A mad nigger, sir!" gasped Knowles. "I spotted him in the quad! He assaulted Sergeant Kettle, and assaulted me, and then went for Mr. Bootles!"

"I narrowly escaped with my life!" stammered Mr. Bootles. "Hold him securely! Do not let him escape! He is dangerous!"

"We've got him, sir!"

"Yow-ow-ow!" came in muffled accents from underneath the Rookwood fellows. "Yow-ow-woop! 'Elp! Tell 'em to get off, sir! I'm bein' suffocated! I ain't done nothing, sir! I'm Mack, sir! I'm your porter, sir, and I ain't a nigger! They're all mad, sir! 'Elp!"

"Mack!" shouted the Head.

"Mack!" stuttered Mr. Bootles.

"Tain't Mack!" shouted Lovell. "It's a nigger—a wild nigger!"

"A dangerous lunatic, sir!"

"Mad as a hatter, sir!"

"Black as the ace of spades, sir!" chimed in Tommy Dodd. "How could he be Mack, with a complexion like that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Cook and Doyle.

"Silence!" thundered the Head. "Release that man immediately!"

"He ain't safe, sir!"

"He's dangerous, sir!"

"Silence! Release him!"

The Head had to be obeyed. The fellows released old Mack, and he scrambled up. Dr. Chisholm's eyes almost bulged through his glasses as he saw Mack's face.

"'Elp!" moaned old Mack. "I ain't done nothing, sir! They all got arter me—"

"Mack! Is that you, Mack?" gasped the Head.

"Course it is, sir! Don't you know an old, faithful servant, what has been with you thirty years?" stuttered old Mack.

"Bless my soul! If it is you, Mack, for what reason have you painted your face in that extraordinary manner?"

"Eh? I ain't!"

"Look in the glass, man!"

Old Mack stepped into the study and looked in the glass. Mr. Bootles still eyed him very nervously, and backed round the Head's desk.

"My heye!" gasped Mack, as he saw his reflection in the glass. "My honly 'at! Is—is—is that there me, sir?"

"What a curious idea for Mack to paint

himself up like that!" murmured Tommy Dodd. "Who'd have thought it was Mack?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Disperse at once!" rapped out the Head; and he closed the door sharply on the astounded crowd. "Now, Mack, what does this absurd masquerade mean? Explain yourself at once!"

"I—I—I dunno!" moaned Mack, still gazing helplessly at his astonishing reflection in the glass. "I knows I took a nap by the stables, I was that tired with 'ard work, and I woke up, and the sergeant he rushes at me, and he says, says he—"

"Someone has played a trick upon you while you were asleep," said the Head, understanding now. "Go away at once and clean yourself!"

"Oh, my 'at!" said Mack.

"This matter shall be inquired into!" said the Head sternly. "I do not approve of such practical jokes—it is most unseemly! Go at once!"

Old Mack limped away. A big crowd followed him to his lodge, admiring his complexion, and Mack was glad to get inside and lock the door. The Head inquired after the practical joker, but nobody seemed to know anything about him, and the matter remained a mystery at Rookwood.

BUNTER'S LITTLE DISAPPOINTMENT.

By Bob Cherry.

The sun was hot as hot could be,

And Bunter dry as dry;

And all the roads were white as white,

And blue as blue the sky.

"Oh, that I had"—here Bunter sighed—

"A thumping gooseberry-pie!"

And as he ambled round the Close,

He looked in at the shop.

He wept like anything to see

Such quantities of pop.

"Oh, that I had"—he sighed some more—

"Even a little drop!"

"Oh, Mrs. Mimble, give me tick!"

"Twas thus the porpoise pled,

"A currant cake, a piece of steak;

We're all so undered!

A little less, and I should be

Starved—done for—perished—dead!"

But Mrs. Mimble looked at him,

And knowing was that look!

And Mrs. Mimble rapped out "No!"

As forcibly she shook

Her head. And Bunter turned away,

And sadly took his hook!

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Monday:

"AGAINST HIS OWN SIDE!"

By Frank Richards.

The Bounder is again to the fore in this story. Ponsonby and the rest of the nutty brigade also figure prominently. To the amazement alike of Highlife and of the Greyfriars Remove, the nuts take seriously to cricket! They want a match with the Remove, and they get what they want. But Ponsonby has something up his sleeve, as usual. What that something was you will learn next week—if you have not guessed it before. Bolsover major also comes into the picture. He thinks he can force Wharton's hand in the matter of choosing the eleven, and circumstances conspire to make it appear that he has done so. Then Billy Bunter plucks up courage, and he also attempts methods of terrorism with the skipper of the Remove. A capital story in every way, and a story which I am certain you will all enjoy.

AN ANSWER TO AN OFT-REPEATED QUERY.

Hardly a day passes but a letter reaches me asking why the MAGNET and "Gem" cannot return to their old sizes at double price.

The answer is that we cannot afford to use the paper which would be necessary to allow of this.

The use of paper simply must be cut down. If this is not done, the day may come when the papers will be stopped altogether.

No one knows how long the war may last, and for some time even after it is over

supplies of paper are likely to be short, as storage space in ships will be needed for food and other vital necessities.

It is quite possible that to charge 2d. might cause such a drop in circulation as would entail no bigger draft upon the paper supply. But have you who ask for this considered fully what it would mean?

You have the twopences to spare, no doubt. But what of those who have not? Would it be fair that you should have more to read at the cost to them of going without?

But they can borrow or club together, you may say.

But would this be fair to us?

A penny is undoubtedly the standard price for a boys' paper. There have been half-penny papers. There may be again. But I doubt it.

I don't think any boys' paper has ever been published at 2d. To bring out our papers at such a price would be a risky experiment. Papers for grown-up people at 2d. have seldom proved really popular for long. With boys the result would be, in all likelihood, a great deal of clubbing together and passing round. In this way the circulation might be brought down to a point at which the papers ceased to be profitable. Then they would stop.

We must economise in paper, but not at the expense of losing money. We don't pretend to give away our papers. We sell as good value for the money as we can—less now than formerly, because paper is dearer by far, and much harder to get.

But, you may say again, if the experiment of a paper at 2d. is not a success we can go back to the old price.

Not so easily as you might think, and not under the old conditions.

Why?

Because many of those who had got into the way of paying for a share of a 2d. paper would still continue to pay for a share of a 1d. one. Frankly, too much of this sort of thing inevitably spells death for any paper.

We do not merely want readers; we want supporters—fellows who think the paper worth the price charged for it, and realise that, in fairness, they should pay that price if they want to read it.

It is better to have a hundred thousand readers who all buy their copies than half a million readers and only fifty thousand buyers.

I have not a word to say against the practice of sending copies, after read, to our gallant soldiers and sailors. That is all right. And if you have a chum who cannot afford to buy—and I know that everyone is not lucky enough to have much pocket-money—I would not be so churlish as to suggest that you should refuse to lend to him. But I cannot see any reason why you should lend every week to fellows who can afford to buy it. It is not for the good of the paper or for yours, and I doubt whether, in the long run, it is for theirs. One gets far more enjoyment out of a thing paid for than out of one edged.

Perhaps I have rather run away from my first subject; but I am sure that publication at 2d. would not, as things are, be a popular move. If we ever do raise the price to that figure, it will be because the change is inevitable. Sixteen pages at one penny and thirty-two at twopence may look like the same thing; but the appearance is deceptive, for here comes in the question of paper supply on the one hand, and on the other the risk of destroying a popularity built up through several years by giving the best possible value at a price within the reach of most would-be readers.

Your Editor

IN A LAND OF PERIL!

By BEVERLEY KENT,

Author of "Officer and Trooper," "Cornstalk Bob," "A Son of the Sea," etc., etc.

Conclusion.

Kampa was ranging his warriors in battle order. Then they waited until sunset. When the sun had sunk there was less than half an hour left until complete darkness should set in. In the quickly-gathering gloom they advanced, and halted two hundred yards from the enemy's camp, as arranged, without being detected. There they waited for the signal from the advanced division.

Lights in the camp showed that Orme and his gang were cooking the evening meal. The evening hush had fallen over the veldt. Suddenly a melancholy hoot came down the wind. The warriors gripped their battleaxes tighter and looked at Kampa.

Bob stepped forward. "I lead the charge," he said. "And I command that you spare all who throw down their arms!"

He stepped to the front. He waved his arm in encouragement, and dashed ahead.

Across the plain the warriors rushed in serried ranks, Bob well in front. But they had only crossed half the intervening distance when a yell rang forth. The advance party had been seen by Orme.

On the moment rifle-shots rang out, and in answer came the terrifying battle-cry of the Inrobi. Amid the hail of bullets and the appalling din Bob raced the harder. He rushed into the thick of the fight. The rifles were still going, and around him men were falling. Almost naked figures swayed in the red light of the fire like demons; axes gleamed. He saw bloodshot eyes and faces twisted with excitement; he heard dull groans, and now and then a heavy crash. Fighting desperately, he was forced almost off his feet.

And then came a pause. It was followed by a ringing shout of triumph, and then silence, and he got breathing space.

The Inrobi had triumphed. They were dancing round the fires, and chanting their war-song, flinging up their axes and catching them again and again. Bob looked around. All Orme's men were on the ground. Some were wounded, and some had thrown themselves down to avoid death, and thus had escaped. And he saw one burly form and one sullen face, with eyes still savage, though life was ebbing fast.

His cousin, Jasper Orme!

He walked towards him to offer what help he could. And Orme recognised him. Even in that terrible moment the villain's heart was still full of malice and thwarted greed. By a desperate effort he raised himself on one elbow, and his voice rang with hatred.

"I die as I have lived!" he shouted. "And my one sorrow is that I cannot drag you with me!"

He fell back and lay still.

Ted and MacGregor hurried up.

"He is dead," Bob said. "Some are wounded, but he is the only one who has lost his life. He hated me to the end, and I never did him any harm."

"Had he lived he would have endured life-long imprisonment," MacGregor replied. "Perhaps, therefore, it is as well he has gone. He was one of those men, and I'm glad to think there are very few like him, who detest all that is honourable and straightforward. He hated ye, Bob, because ye are so different from him. And I think there was another reason, too. I fancy that in some way or another you stood in his light."

"How could that be?" Bob asked.

"Well, I'm going to find out. We've not done with Faik yet. He said something the other day."

He called to the scoundrel, who came forward.

"You said you knew something about Bob," MacGregor began. "I warn you that you had better speak the truth. We have not yet decided how we are going to deal with you."

Faik looked down at Orme. He drew a deep breath.

"I told you that that man had me in his

power," he said. "That is true. He knew enough about my past to settle me, and he traded on the knowledge. He was the only one in the world I feared. I had to do whatever he commanded, and he wanted to get rid of Robert Musters."

"Why?" MacGregor demanded.

"Because Musters stood between him and a fortune."

"How?" Bob asked.

"You and Orme had a cousin in England," Faik said.

"Yes. And when my father died that cousin wouldn't do anything for my poor mother or myself," Bob replied. "That is why I came out here to make my fortune."

"And while you were on the way out your cousin died, and the news was cabled to Orme," Faik went on, "and he at once took steps to hide the knowledge from you and to get rid of you, for you are your cousin's heir. That is why he sent you at once out of Cape Town. And he told me to— Well, you know the rest."

Bob stood dumbfounded.

"He wanted what belonged to me," he said at last. "I would gladly have helped him if he had treated me as a friend. And my mother! She has been in poverty all this time, and she doesn't know where I am or what may have happened to me. My poor mother! Oh, this was cruel, cruel!"

He turned away for a moment. Ted stepped to his side.

"It's all right now, old chap," Ted said. "It won't be long before you can wire to her. We'll press on with all speed to Cape Town. And either you can go home or you can bring her out here. We're rich men, the three of us, with this gold; and on top of it you have your fortune in the Old Country."

"Yes, everything has turned out well," MacGregor agreed. "But there's just one business that ye seem to forget, Ted. Bob is the chief of the Inrobi tribe, and it's no likely they're going to part with him."

Ted's face grew long.

"Great Scott!" he gasped. "I'd forgotten that, and it's no end of a pickle. But what ever is to be done?"

But Bob only smiled.

"If you had forgotten it, I never did, for, good as these fellows have been, it's not likely that I could look forward with pleasure to living amongst them for ever, hundreds of miles from civilisation," he replied. "I've a proposal to make."

He called to Kampa.

"Great Kampa, summon the braves, for I would speak!" he commanded.

The warriors clustered around in a wide circle, holding their axes aloft. Bob walked into the centre of the circle.

"Kampa, wise medicine-man and sooth-sayer, and ye, oh warriors of the Inrobi tribe," he began, "hearken unto me! For this day, thanks to ye, all our troubles are over, and now, in joy, we wend our steps to our own homes. And what of me? Who am I?"

"Thou art our chief!" many cried.

"And I, too, have my home far away, and beyond where ye live," Bob continued. "And there my thoughts often turn. And cannot the chief have a heart also, and long for his people? And who would gainsay him?"

A deep silence followed. It was broken by Kampa.

"What do these words portend?" he asked.

"That I would ask the good will and generosity of my people," Bob replied. "For I am thy chief, and so will I be for such time as all wish. But I am not as ye. Much can I do for thee and the great race in the council-halls of my people, and many grievances thou hast can I amend, but not if I stay always with thee. Is not this truth? Therefore, for thy sake, will I go south, and often will I return, and always will my ears be open that you may speak what you need. Thus shall I bring great good to thee. And there is more."

He stopped for a moment.

"And of myself I also speak, for I would not that you should think I ask only for ye, for that would not be all the truth," he went on. "For I have, too, a mother, and ye would not that I left her lonely in her age? Nor can I see her if I stay with thee. But often I will come back, and always will I have at heart your welfare. Do I speak fair?"

"Oh, chief," Kampa cried, "thy honour has been proven, and thy word is as a bond! Yet does this sadden us?"

"Tis for the best in all ways, great Kampa."

"But who rules when thou art absent?"

"Him whom I appoint," Bob replied, and again he smiled in a way that had puzzled Ted. "For I know of one fleet as the wind and brave as a lion; one who is of my mind and will do as I direct; one who hath travelled and hath been in bondage, and out of sorrow has learnt much. Ay, one fit to guide, for knowledge is with him, and his worth is proven."

"And who is he?"

Bob turned and pointed to Mendi.

"That is he!" he said.

Ted flung up his hat and cheered. MacGregor quickly came forward.

"Kampa, the young white chief has chosen well, to that I can testify. And have ye not always said that wisdom is with me?" he urged. "Mendi is young. If fighting should come, who is braver or knows better how to lead? In thy councils who would better approve thy words?"

Kampa stood in thought. He raised his head.

"Mendi, thou art chosen!" he said. "Walk with the young white chief, and lead the way home."

Three months later the three Britishers stood together on the veranda of an hotel in Cape Town. Bob's eyes were dancing.

"There comes the ship! I go to meet my mother!" he said.

"Ted and I will wait here," MacGregor replied. "I have ordered dinner. What a jolly evening we will have! Hurry along, my lad!"

Bob ran down the steps. Ted looked after him.

"Good old Bob!" he murmured.

"Ay, lad—ay! I know but one to equal him, and that's yourself," said the old Scot, his aged eyes glistening. "And it's joy to me to ken that I'll be spending the remnant of my days with two such tried comrades!"

THE END.

NOTICES.

Leagues, Etc.

D. Macfarlane, 26, Albert Street, Dundee, wants to join a "Gem" or "Magnet" League in Dundee which runs an amateur magazine.

F. Stratford, 56, Redhill Street, Regent's Park, N.W., wants to join a "Gem" and "Magnet" League in his district.

"Magnet" and "Gem" Universal Correspondence League, open to readers in any part of the world.—Apply A. Burns, 27, Lyell Street, Melbourne, Australia; or at headquarters, H. J. Thomas, 18, Downs Road, Walmer, Kent, England.

More members wanted by International Correspondence Exchange, devoted to exchange of stamps, picture postcards, coins, books, and correspondence, and to cultivate friendship among readers. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.—Frederick H. Edginton, 29, Pitcairn Road, Mitcham, Surrey.

More members wanted for club. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.—S. Brown, 63, Camberwell Grove, London, S.E.