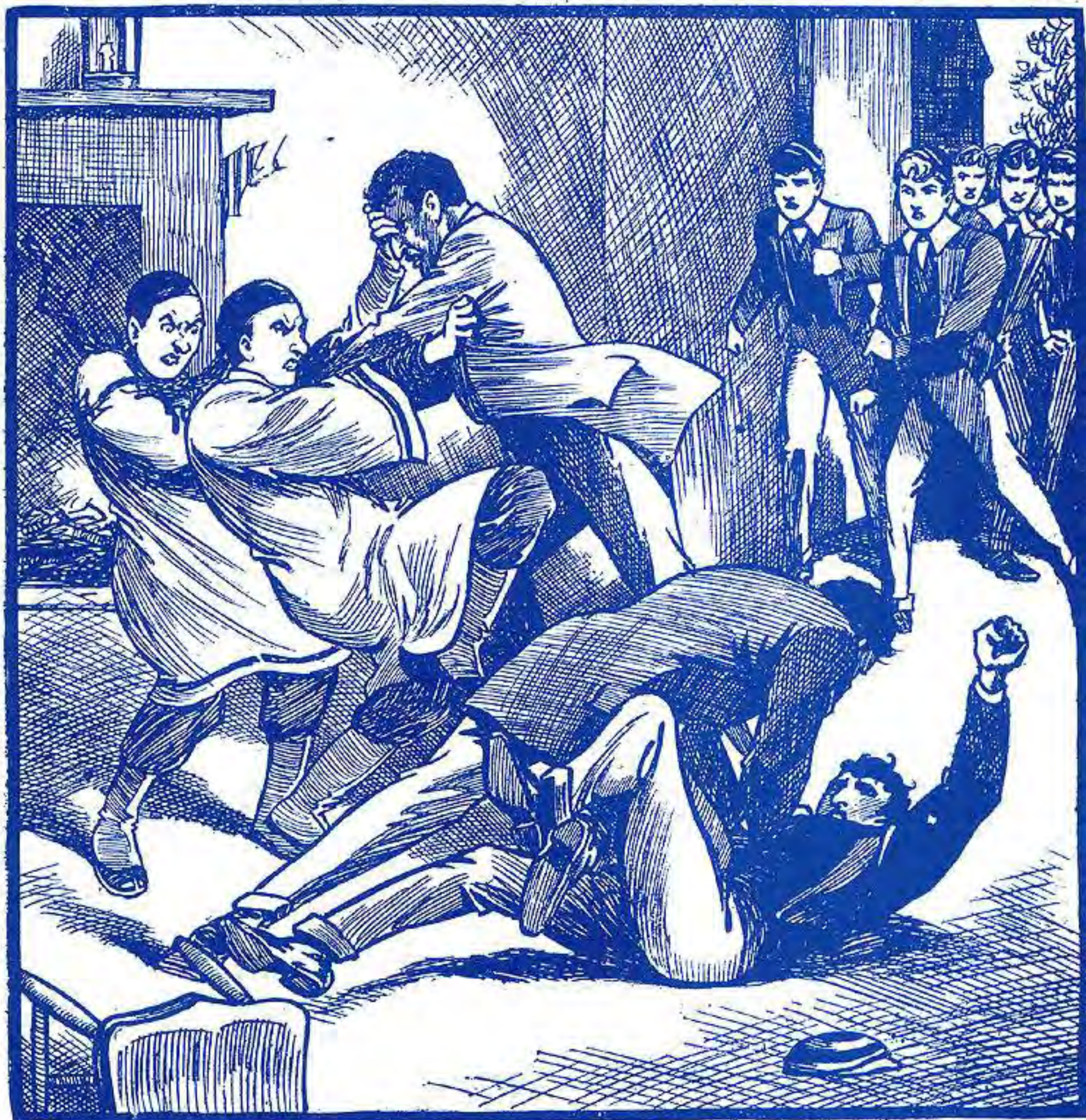
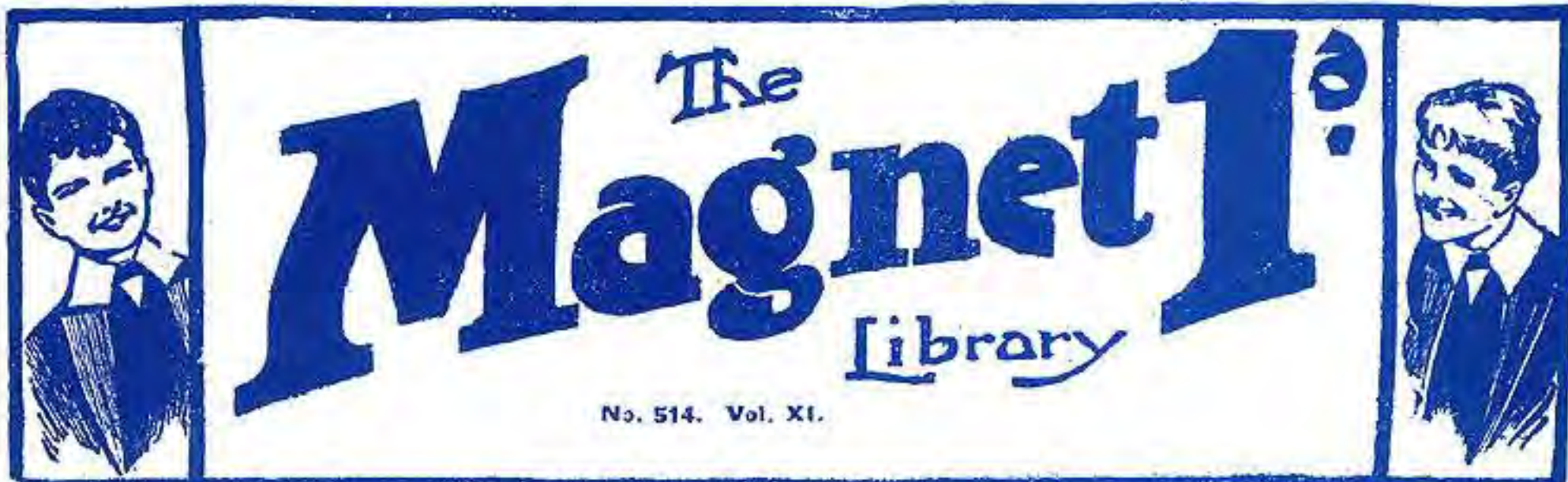


FOUR FROM THE EAST!

A Grand Long Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.



TO THE RESCUE!

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

FOUR FROM THE EAST!

By
Frank
Richards.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Buck Finn Goes Some!

"YOOOOP! Stoppit! Oooow!"
"Tis the voice of the
Bunter, I hear him com-
plain!" remarked Sampson
Quincy Ifley Field—called Squiff,
because life is short—to Harry Noble,
known as Kangaroo.

"Yes, he certainly is complaining,"
replied the St. Jim's junior, grinning.

"Yow! Stoppit! I won't stir another
step, I tell—Yarooogh!"

Squiff and Kangaroo turned a corner,
and saw what was going on.

But, though they saw, they did not for
the moment understand.

Buck Finn stood some ten yards from
the fat person of William George
Bunter, and between them a rope
stretched taut. Both were pulling upon
the rope, and at first glance it looked
rather like a very unequal tug-of-war.

As a tug-of-war it would have been
very unequal indeed, seeing that
Bunter weighed very nearly twice as
much as Buck.

But what inequality there was was
plainly upon the other side.

It was Buck, not Bunter, who dragged.
It was Bunter, not Buck, who frantically
protested.

And now the two Australian juniors
saw why.

A rope fastened Bunter's fat arms to
his sides. Thus pinioned, he was help-
less when Buck pulled. If he threw
back his weight, there was the danger
that Buck would suddenly relax and let
him go. Bunter knew all about that
danger, because Buck had once relaxed,
and Bunter had gone "ker-flop!" as
Fisher T. Fish expressed it. Fishy was
looking on with as much pleasure as
anything unconnected with dollars ever
gave that grasping son of New York.

"Buck's lassoed him!" said Kangaroo.

"Well, seeing it's Bunter, I can't say
I mind," replied Squiff.

"Yah! You ought to be ashamed of
yourself, Field! You claim to be
skipper, and let bullying like this go
on! And you—yarooogh! Don't,
Finn, don't!—ought to be ashamed, too,
Noble! Finn belongs to you!"

"Not on your life! I'm not claiming
Buck! Anyone may have Buck, for all
I care!" struck in Kangaroo.

"I was going to say to your school—I
suppose you don't—Yooooop!"

"No, I don't often yooooop," replied
the Australian. "I never learned how
to do it properly. Yooooop again.
Bunter, and perhaps I shall catch it, and
be able to."

"Deny that?" spluttered Bunter, in
continuation.

A number of the Greyfriars juniors
had had to stay at the school for the
holidays, in charge of Mr. Prout.
Squiff, Tom Brown, Delarey, Fish, Wun
Lung, Hop Hii, and Sylvester made up
the little party. Communications
between Dr. Locke and Dr. Holmes, of
St. Jim's, had resulted in the addition
to it of Harry Noble, Clifton Dane,
Koumi Rao, and Buck Finn, from the

Sussex school. Hurree Janset Ram
Singh had crooked himself so badly on
the day when he should have travelled
as a member of Harry Wharton's house-
party that he had had to be left behind.
Then Billy and Sammy Bunter had run
away from home and the tyranny of a
stern Aunt Rebecca to the school, and
their father had agreed to their staying
there—with a readiness that suggested
that they would not be missed at the
Christmas festivities chez Bunter.

So altogether there were fourteen of
them; and on the whole they had got
along very well so far, though the two
older Americans—little Sylvester was
also from across the Atlantic—had
plotted against the Chinese boys, and
had been caught in a trap of their own
contriving, and Billy Bunter and his
minor had not added much to the gaiety.

"Kim up, you galoot!" cried Buck
Finn, dragging at Bunter. "That's too
much lard in your make-up, I rather
guess an' calculate. Come out into the
quad, and I'll run you round an' round
till some of it drops off your derved
skeleton!"

"Jerusalem crickets! That's the
wheeze, Buck!" yelled Fishy.

"Yow! I won't! I ain't going to!
Why, you silly ass, it's raining!"

It was raining—hard. The snow and
frost had lasted just over Christmas, and
then had come a sudden thaw.

For the first time since breaking-up,
the little band found time hanging
rather heavily on their hands. Up to
now skating had claimed most of the
daylight hours, and most of them could
have done with another fortnight of that.
But there was no skating for anyone
to-day.

Hop Hii, Sylvester, and Sammy Bunter
were playing games of their own, not to
the added comfort of Sammy, if one
might judge by his occasional yells. In
Study No. 1, which Inky had taken over
and shared with Koumi Rao, three of
the Oriental juniors were bent together
over the table, upon which lay best part
of a pack of cards, with their faces
uppermost. Wun Lung was telling for-
tunes, and Inky and Koumi Rao were
listening as eagerly as if they believed
all he told. Perhaps they did. Hop Hii
had been there, but had cleared out.
Hop Hii certainly didn't believe. That
may have been because he knew his
brother so well.

Clifton Dane and Piet Delarey and
Tom Brown were "messing about with
chemicals"—as Squiff put it. In other
words, they were developing photo-
graphs—Dane's photographs. Piet and
Tom were not so keen on the art as the
Canadian, but they were keen enough to
help him. Squiff and Noble were not.

"Oh, gee-willikins! A drop of rain
won't hurt you any, you fat jay! You
ain't sugar!" yelled Buck.

"Christopher Columbus! Don't I
wish he was! I calculate that podgy
galoot would fetch as much as a hundred
dollars if he was!" said Fishy gloat-
ingly. "Wouldn't I sell him? Yep,
siree!"

"I— Oh, you beast, Fishy! The very
idea!" spluttered Bunter. "Yoop!
Stoppit, Finn, you cad! I ain't going.
I tell you! Make him stop it, you
chaps!"

"Waal, come to think of it, it wouldn't
be a hundred dollars—not quite. Say
sixteen stone—that's round about the
neighbourhood, I reckon," went on
Fishy. "Sixteen time fourteen is—
Hyee, I say, Squiff, old pard, what's
sixteen times fourteen pounds in
English weight?"

"Ask me another, Fishy, and make it
an easier one. Seven times is quite hard
enough for the holidays."

"What's sixteen time fourteen, Noble,
my bright boy?"

"Sixty-seven, at a guess, Fish, my
noble dollar-chaser."

"Rats! It's two hundred and twenty-
four! That many pounds at, say, six d.
per, would be one hundred and twelve of
the things you call shillings—"

"Except when we're being very pre-
cise, then we say bobs," put in Squiff.

"And that's about twenty-two dollars.
I guess! Bunter, what an all-frazzled
pity it is you ain't sugar, you useless,
puffing, blowing gormandiser!"

"Oh, really—Yooooop! Talking
about buying and selling me as if I were
a heathen slave!" bumbled Bunter,
frenziedly trying to extricate himself
from Buck's lasso.

"Cheer up, Bunt! No one would
ever buy you! There a limit to fool-
osity, I should say," said Squiff com-
fortingly.

"Better let him go, Buck!" suggested
Kangaroo. "He's perspiring big drops
all over the floor now! Someone will
be stepping on them and slipping up!"

"Waal, the galoot asked for it!"
growled Buck. He began to move in
towards Bunter; but at that Bunter
began to back away, with the result that
the lasso still remained tightly stretched.
"Stop, you silly jay! Hold up, I say!
I can't let you out if you don't stand
still, can I, you fat mugwump?"

"That ain't nice language to one of
your hosts, Buck!" said Noble.

"Hosts? Nix! Bunter's no host
here! He's Mr. Butt-in—that's what
Bunter is! And he dared me to throw
the lasso over him. Thought I was
jossing him, I reckon. Waal, we don't
reckon to lasso hogs much in Arizony;
but a hog's a sure good enough mark.
That you are, Bunter! And don't you
try on any more of your chin-music with
this galoot!"

Bunter's backward course had been
arrested by Squiff, and he was now set
free.

"I'll bet you what you like you daren't
lasso Pro—er—that is, someone I'll
mention to you in confidence, Finn,"
said Bunter, rubbing his fat arms, into
which the lasso had cut.

"Better not try any tricks with Prouty,
Finn," said Squiff warningly.

"Oh, holy smoke! Are you setting up
to be nursemaid to the old bounder?"
sneered Buck.

"On the whole, I think not. Mr.

Prout might be suspicious of anything in that line. I don't suppose it's an accident that he hasn't committed matrimony? And I don't fancy he needs much protecting."

"He's a bragging old galoot, sure!" said Buck. "That doesn't show that he can do anything. It's one thing to talk and another thing to do, by gee!"

"Found that out, Buck?" smiled Kangaroo. "There's still a little hope for you, then!"

"Prouty can do quite enough to warm you up, Finn," said Squiff.

"Gee-whiz! D'you think he'd dare to lay a cane around me? I don't belong to this hyer establishment, I reckon."

"But it depends rather more on what Prouty reckons; and I should say he reckons that for the present you do," Squiff answered.

"Hully-gee! We'll see about that, I calculate!"

"You're goin' some to-day, Buck!" remarked Fishy.

"I'm goin' some more yet, pard! You come along and watch out for the old jay with me. What do these jays take me for? I'm from old Arizony, I am!"

"Oh, forget it! Cut it out!" said Squiff.

"Why, I guess you're talkin' real Amurrican now, Field!" said Fishy.

"Am I? And you admire some, I calculate? Waal, now, it's dead easy. But I prefer English. We talk a kind of English in Australia, you know. Don't say I didn't warn you, Buck, when the American eagle begins to feel kinder painful in the region where his tail-feathers would be, if he had any!"

"Take it that Mr. Prout's a bad man from Badville, and leave him alone," added Kangaroo.

"Shucks! These hyer Cornstalks sure do talk some!" said Finn. "Come along, Fishy, an' see me lasso the galoot that killed buffaloes with his mouth!"

"I guess I'm your antelope, Buck!" replied Fish.

"So am I!" cried Bunter. "I'd like to see you chuck that thing round old Prouty's neck. I don't care if you throttle the old bounder! What's he want here for at all? We should get along much better without him."

"Holy smoke! You look like an antelope, don't you?" jeered Buck. "But you come along if you feel like it."

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Lassoing Mr. Prout!

PERHAPS Buck's heart might have failed him if he had had very long to wait for Mr. Prout. But the boy from Arizona was not quite the empty braggart that Fisher Tarleton Fish was. He had rather a way of attempting to justify his brags. And he certainly was expert with the lasso.

The three waited on the broad landing near the Remove passage, and within five minutes Mr. Prout appeared.

Squiff and Kangaroo, meanwhile, had gone to Study No. 1, where they found Wun Lung talking in low, impressive tones, while his almond eyes glistened, and his slim, yellow forefinger pointed first to one card and then to another.

"Hallo! What's the merry game here?" asked Squiff.

"Me tellee fortunes!" said Wun Lung impressively. "Tellee handsome Hullees Singh and handsome Koumi Lao what going happen to them."

"Well, and what is going to happen?" asked Noble, grinning.

But Inky and Koumi Rao did not grin. They may not have believed everything, but it was evident that they did not entirely disbelieve. In spite of all that English schools had done for them, their minds were still very Oriental in some

ways; and in the East the prophet, the soothsayer, and the fortune-teller have always had more honour than in Western lands.

"He tells us of evil drawing near; but it is to one of us, he says, and which he knows not," Koumi Rao answered softly.

Wun Lung frowned in a puzzled sort of way, and shifted three or four of the cards, as if some new arrangement might help him to solve the question. But apparently it did not.

"Do you have fortunes told by the cards in India, Inky?" asked Squiff.

"The wayfulnesses of fortune-telling are of the manyful, and it is not the wisefulness to hold any of them in despisefulness, Squiff Sahib," replied Inky. "Also, in the land of China are things manyful of which we have not the knowfulness."

"Wun Lung is our friend. He is of good blood. He would not deceive us," said Koumi Rao.

Squiff and Kangaroo both looked hard at the Chinese.

Kangaroo almost thought Koumi Rao was right. It seemed to him very nearly an impossibility that Wun Lung, whom he knew to be a very decent fellow in many ways, and whom he liked, should show no sign of shame if he were practising deceit. It was not like an ordinary spoof.

But Squiff, who knew Wun Lung so much better, was well aware that he would deceive anyone, and take no shame for it. One thing was certain, though, he would not trick a friend for the mere fun of the thing; it would be because in some way or other he designed to do his friend a service.

Did he mean that now?

But what possible purpose could this card-reading business serve?

"He would not deceive us!" repeated Koumi Rao, with his flashing eyes upon the impassive yellow face.

Wun Lung did not answer even then. He continued to shift the cards as if seeking some lost combination.

"What do you see there, Wun Lung?" asked Kangaroo, fascinated in spite of himself.

"Dangel!" said Wun Lung gravely. "To one—to the othel—that hides itself. It is that I tly to discover."

"You—you— Of all the abominable impudence— In all my life I never—"

"Are you sure the danger wasn't to Prouty, Wun Lung?" asked Squiff.

He and Kangaroo rushed off. It was the voice of Mr. Prout that had come to them along the corridor, and they guessed that Buck had not bragged of what he dared not do.

Neither Wun Lung nor Koumi Rao followed, and Inky could not. He was still unable to walk without help, though there was nothing wrong with him now beyond the injury to his leg.

"My hat!" ejaculated Squiff. "Kangy, old chap, this knocks it!"

Mr. Prout, Hop Hi, Sammy Bunter, and Sylvester were mixed up in a heap together on the stairs.

The game which the three youngsters were playing had led them into the wrong place at the wrong time. Just as the long lasso shot through the air, the loop falling beautifully around Mr. Prout's body, to be tightened at once by the eager Buck, Sammy, running like a frightened rabbit, had darted between Mr. Prout's legs.

He was too squashed even to yell for the moment, for the master's full weight had descended upon him. And he was frightened, too, for he had barged into Mr. Prout blindly, and may very likely have thought that a Hun aeroplane had dropped a bomb upon Greyfriars and got him.

Hop Hi and Sylvester saw, but could

not pull up in time, and fell all over the prostrate Mr. Prout and the squashed Sammy.

"How dare you! I— This is an outrage—a positive outrage!" roared Mr. Prout. "What? Eh? Oh, yes, Field—oh, yes! Dear me! Yes, I will get up—that is, if you will assist me! I was not aware that the object beneath me was human. I—er—trust that I have not— But, even if serious damage has been inflicted, I cannot regard myself as responsible. The crime is that—er—yes—pull hard, Squiff!"

"I think it is Bunter, sir!" said Squiff, with a twinkle in his eyes. "No one else here has quite the same taste in trousers as the Bunters. And other chaps' legs are different, too. No; it isn't killed dead, sir. I see it wriggle! It must be Bunter minor, because Bunter major is up above. Heave-ho, sir!"

Mr. Prout's elbows were fastened to his sides by the noose of the lasso. But Sylvester and the Chinese had now removed themselves, and when Squiff and Kangaroo each took a hand of the master they were able to drag him to his feet. Squiff tried to loosen the noose at once, but Mr. Prout had not the patience to stand still for that. He was, moreover, much concerned about the hapless Sammy.

Squiff was not. His theory was that there was no one else at Greyfriars whose bones were so well protected as those of the Bunters, so that a fracture was unlikely. And it really would not hurt Sammy much to have had the wind knocked out of him—painful for the moment, but not dangerous.

"Get up, my boy!" said Mr. Prout anxiously.

Sammy shut his eyes tightly and moaned.

"I can't, sir! I think you have ku-ku-killed me!"

"Don't be absurd! Get up! You are not killed!"

"I—I daren't try to get up, sir! I'm afraid I might fall to pieces!"

"Fetch a basket, Sylvester!" ordered Squiff.

"Right-ho!" answered the fag.

"Eh? What need is there for a basket?" asked Mr. Prout, writhing inside the lasso-loop.

"To put the pieces in, sir," answered Squiff, as he cut the cord.

Buck Finn howled at that.

"Eh? Oh, nonsense! Thank you, Squiff! You boys up there, come down this moment!"

"Please, sir, I had nothing to do with it!" protested Billy Bunter.

"Oh, Christopher Columbus, you had more to do with it than I had, Bunter!" snapped Fish. "Wasn't it you—?"

"No, it wasn't! And I don't know what you're talking about, Fish! And I didn't, anyway! I—I told them they ought not, sir! I said they ought to treat you with proper respect. And it ain't properly respectful to throw a lasso thing over your head, and tumble you over, and make you look a silly ass, sir!"

"Come down!" thundered Mr. Prout. "I am convinced that you were all in the plot!"

"There wasn't any plot, sir," Buck Finn said. "I did it on my own. These rot-galoo—these fellows only looked on."

Kangaroo and Squiff thought better of Buck for that speech. But Fishy and Bunter showed no sign of being grateful.

"Sammy," said Squiff softly, "could you eat a ham-sandwich—a big one—a fat one?"

At that Bunter minor sat up in a hurry, and did not fall to pieces in sitting up.

"Oh, rather, Squiff!" he said.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 514.

"Get up, then. I'm not going to bring it to you there!"

Sammy stood up, again without catastrophic consequences.

"Where's the sandwich, Squiff?" he asked.

"I don't think the pig's killed yet," replied the Australian junior. "Look in for it when the war's over, will you?"

"Come with me, you three!" commanded Mr. Prout. "Bunter minor, Hop Hi, and Sylvester, I shall not cane you. But it would be well if you exercised more care in future. This is a school, not a bear-garden!"

"Hyer, sir, I say, I guess you can't cane me!" said Buck.

"Can I not? And why cannot I, Finn?"

"Waal, I reckon as I don't belong to this outfit——"

"That you can behave to me with gross impertinence—eh? I differ, Finn! Put it to yourself now. You belong to a shrewd and logical race. If I failed to give you what you richly deserve, what would be your opinion of me? A played-out and effete old Britisher, with no 'get-up-an'-get-thar' in him. I presume? Something like that—eh?"

Buck saw it. But he did not want to be caned.

"Nope, siree!" he said. "I should think you were a right-down good sort, with a lot of hospitality about you, I calculate!"

Mr. Prout's eyes twinkled.

"I trust I am not lacking in the hospitable instinct," he said. "The truest hospitality is to make one's guests feel at home. When you have been caned, Finn, you will surely feel quite at home here—quite like one of ourselves!"

"But, hyer, I say, sir, I feel quite at home now! There ain't any need——"

"But there is a limit. When you cast that abominable noose over my head, I went so far as to suspect that you were feeling too much at home. We will make the necessary adjustment of your position. Come on!"

In mournful procession the three went. Bunter came back howling, and Fishy pressed his hands under his armpits, and grimaced dolefully. But Buck was cheery enough.

"Did he let you off easy, Buck?" asked Kangaroo.

"Nope, siree! He laid it on good and hard, I guess. Ratty couldn't have been hotter. But—waal, I ain't got any grouch against him; and I rather reckon thar ain't many flies on your old Prouty, Squiff!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Wun Lung is Mysterious, and Bunter is Warlike!

"HERE, you heathen Chinese, I want a word with you!" said Sampson Field, catching Wun Lung alone a little later.

"Velly pleased talkee handsome Squiffie," replied the Oriental blandly.

"None of your blarney, kid!"

"No savvy blarney, Squiffie."

"What was that fortune-telling gadget of yours?"

"No savvy gadget, Squiffie."

It was as though a mask had fallen over the yellow face. When Wun Lung did not want to discuss a matter, "No savvy" was his motto and his safeguard. He stuck to it like a leech.

Squiff knew that. He had little hope of getting anything out of the Chinese junior. But the grin on Kangaroo's face made him try again.

"Do you fancy there's really anything in this bizney about the Indian merchant

that Fishy says he saw? Do you think he was the same chap the Rebel spotted hanging round here?"

"No savvy," said Wun Lung.

"Were you trying to put those two on their guard by making out you read in the cards that danger threatened them?"

"No savvy."

The yellow face was as impassive as ever, and nothing could be read in the brown almond eyes.

"Did you think you were going to frighten them?"

"No flighten them at allee. Hullee Singh and Koumi Lao velly blave. Pool Chinese boy not think to flighten them?"

"You ain't very brave, are you, Wun Lung?" said Squiff.

But he did not mean it. In his own way the little Oriental was as brave as anyone. He could take risks that few of the Remove would take with equal coolness.

"Velly timid, Squiffie. Teliible affaid of dangel. Velly blave when no dangel, like Buntie!"

Squiff became aware that Billy Bunter was within earshot. Perhaps Wun Lung had meant him to become aware of that.

"What's that about me?" demanded the Owl.

"Wun Lung says you're very brave," said Kangaroo.

Bunter beamed.

"I'm as brave as a lion. Nothing ever daunts me," he said. "If I'd lived in the old days——"

"I wish you had!" sighed Squiff.

"Oh, really, Field, I always understood that it was rude to interrupt! But why——"

"Because, if you'd lived in the old days we shouldn't have been plagued with you now!"

"When there is no danger," said Noble blandly.

"Eh? I don't——"

"You interrupted me, which is rude!" Kangaroo replied. "Wun Lung said you were very brave when there was no danger."

"If you weren't a visitor, Noble——"

"But I am, Bunter, I am, so please don't eat me alive!"

"Better tackle Wun Lung, Buntie!" chuckled Squiff. "He admits being 'teliible affaid' of danger. If you begin to start——"

"Handsome Buntie not hult pool little Chinee!" cooed the wily one.

"Oh, won't he, then? I'm not jolly well going to have you sneering at me behind my back, and then thinking you can get round me by flattery!" said Bunter truculently. "Put your fists up!"

"Drop it, Bunter! He ain't anywhere near your fighting-weight!" said Kangaroo.

"Bunter hasn't a fighting weight," put in Squiff. "Conchies don't have fighting weights or fighting anythings, and Bunter's a Conchy—without a conscience."

"Well, there aren't many of them with one," Noble replied.

"I'm not a Conscientious Objector. I should be very pleased to be in the trenches."

"Yes, it would need more than one for your little body, Bunter!" chuckled Noble. "But it wouldn't do for you to go there. Any chap would think it a trifle to shoot you rather than dig a trench wide enough to let your waistcoat into."

"Rats! Did you hear what I said, Wun Lung? Put your fists up!"

"Handsome Buntie no killee pool little Chinee!" pleaded Wun Lung.

"I'm not going to kill you. But I'm

going to give you a thundering good hiding!"

"Easy there, Bunter!"

"Don't you interfere, Field! I've had enough of your meddling! Why, you're worse than Wharton!"

"I'm not going to interfere now. But if you injure Wun Lung seriously, it will be my duty to report you to Mr. Prout. The Head said I was to boss the show a bit, you know."

"We've only your word for that. He didn't tell us."

"Bunter, you're getting offensive!"

"Now, I thought he was rather shirking the offensive," remarked Kangaroo.

"I'm jolly well not! Hold my jacket, Noble! I'll give him beans!"

Very slowly the jacket began to come off. If Bunter had undressed at no greater speed in the dormitory he would not have reached the braces stage before lights were put out.

Wun Lung made no attempt to scuttle. It was very inconsiderate of him, for Bunter was giving him every chance.

"Death, or victory!" said Kangaroo, grinning.

"Hallo! What' the merry game?" asked Tom Brown, coming up with Delarey and Dane.

"Bunter's going to have a bath, I guess!" said the Canadian.

"I'm not!" howled Bunter. "Don't be such a silly ass, Dane!"

"Not in the winter, old scout," said the Rebel gravely. "Bunter is sewn up in that shirt and those—er—more private garments for the winter."

"Or is it for the duration of the war?" asked Squiff.

"Buntie velly eluel," said Wun Lung pathetically. "Buntie going to hit Chinee some day plesently. No hully!"

At that taunt Bunter's pace quickened up a little, and the jacket came off. He commenced on the waistcoat, but with fingers that fumbled a trifle.

"Don't take your shirt off, Buntie!" said the Rebel. "Remember what mamma said when she sewed you up in it!"

"It's a beastly lie, and you know it, Delarey!" burred Bunter. "But I needn't even take my waistcoat off to give that little yellow worm a good hiding! You see!"

And, screwing up all his resolution, he went for Wun Lung.

How it was done no one could quite see, though some there had a slight knowledge of the art of ju-jitsu, and most had seen Wun Lung perform before. His movements were too quick to follow.

But the resultant movements of Bunter were not.

And they were these.

Firstly, Bunter looped the loop within two feet of the floor.

Secondly, Bunter stood upon his head for the space of about a second and a half, his fat legs waving wildly in the air.

There was a concerted movement here, for the rest dodged to get out of the way of the Owl's plunging feet.

Thirdly, Bunter smote the floor with a thud—not a sickening thud, because none of those present was a newspaper reporter, and none of them minded Bunter's smiting the floor.

Fourthly, Bunter was twisted over Wun Lung's knee, as the Chinee sat on the linoleum.

Fifthly—but, no! The other movement was Wun Lung's. It was rather a succession of movements. For Wun Lung took off his slipper, and with it attacked the tightly-stretched seat of Bunter's trousers.

"Yarooogh! 'Fain't a fair way of—

yooop!—fighting!" roared Bunter. "Ow-yow! Stop it, you heathen beast!" "Queer notion that it's fighting at all!" remarked Clifford Dane. "Did you ever see anything less like fighting, Piet?"

"I've seen lambs. But I don't know that they weren't more warlike than Bunter, Dane. Phew! You are making the dust fly, Wun Lung!"

"Cleanse Bunter's little trowsers! Cleanse Bunter's little trowsers!" chanted Wun Lung, laying on the slipper.

"Hully-gee, you ain't half squalling, Bunter!" remarked Buck Finn, appearing with Fishy.

Behind them came the three fags. From the other end of the passage Hurree Singh limped up, with Koumi Rao's arm for support.

The whole crowd thus witnessed Bunter's ignominious defeat. But it must be added—with regret—that there was no sympathy for the fallen warrior. Even the brotherly affection of Sammy failed.

"Serve you jolly well right, you fat lout!" said Samuel. "That'll teach you to steal a chap's money-box! I say, Squiff, I can eat that ham-sandwich now!"

"Well, why don't you, then?" asked Squiff pleasantly.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Fishy in the Plot!

"I'M fed up with you, Fishy, you durned galoot! Beat it! I've no use for you, I tell you!"

Buck Finn was the speaker, and he looked as if he meant what he said.

Fisher T. Fish stared at him in surprise.

"Waal, I swow!" he said. "You're some incomprehensible, Buck! Now, a feller would have calculated that you'd catch at a chance to put the kybosh on old Prout after the way he served you."

"He only gave me what I was asking for, by gosh! I don't reckon I owe Prout anything—not a thing, sree! And I don't mind letting you know that I opine Prout's a white man. He has been most uncommon decent to me since he caned me. I calculate that as long as he stays decent I can stay so too. Do you catch on?"

"Jerusalem crickets! Yep! It's easy enough to catch on to that!" sneered Fish. "Prouty's put fear into you, and you're quitting!"

"I'm what, you freak-faced mug-wump?"

"Quitting, I said!" repeated Fish.

He had approached Finn with a scheme for making Mr. Prout's next retirement to bed very unpleasant. It was not very judicious of Fish, for he and Buck had not scored heavily when they had tried a somewhat similar trick on the two Chinese juniors. In fact, the score had been decidedly on the other side.

But the memory of that worked less upon Buck Finn than Mr. Prout's behaviour to him. Buck was a bit of a tough; but he had sounder instincts than Fishy, and behind the pomposity and quick temper of Mr. Prout Buck had glimpsed a man. There was manhood enough in him to recognise and appreciate what he saw.

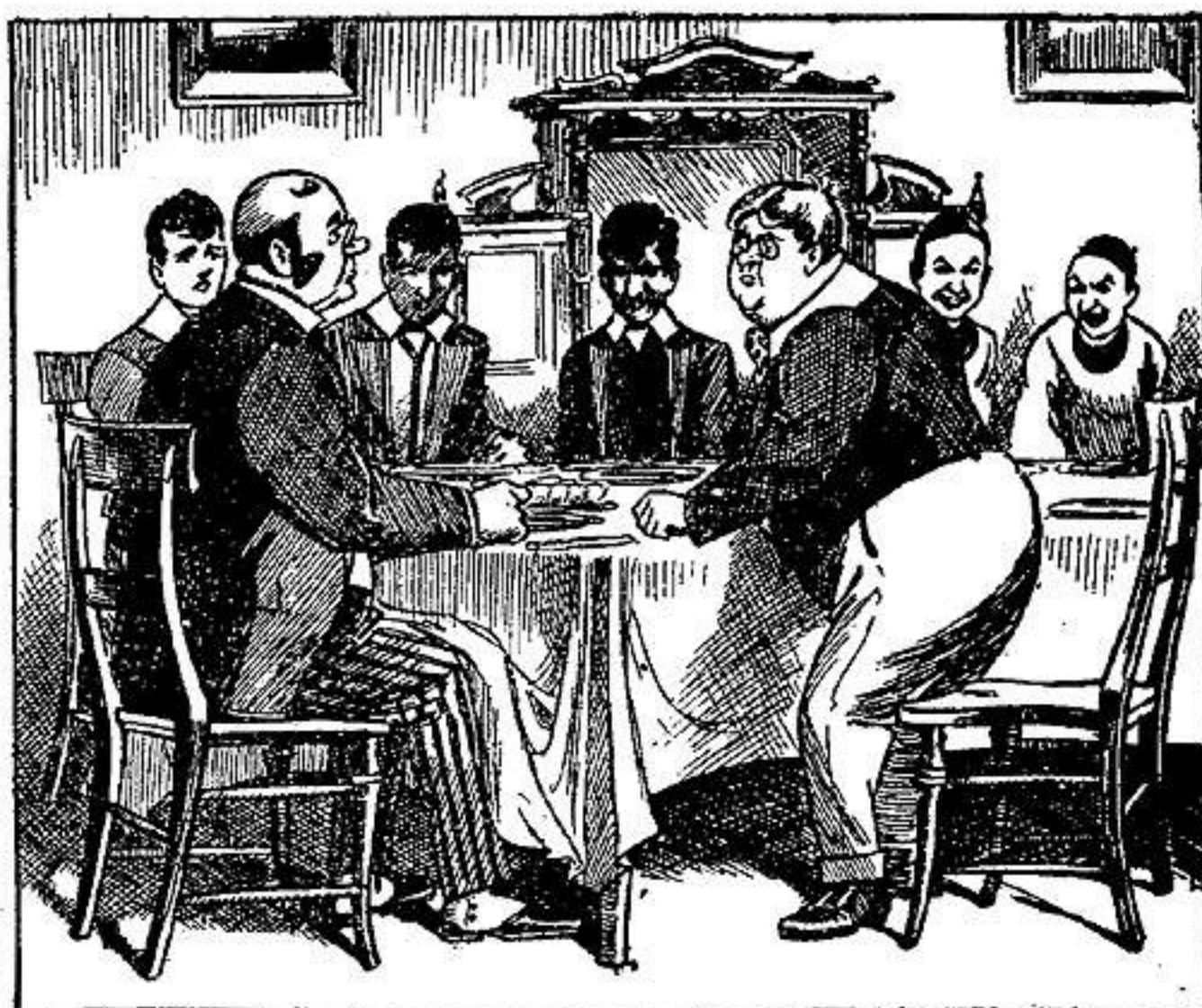
"You call me a quitter?" he snapped, putting a very businesslike fist within a fraction of an inch of Fishy's prominent nasal organ.

"Yep! You're a sure quitter!" returned Fishy indiscreetly.

It was Fishy who made the next remark—if "Yow!" is a remark.

Buck had promptly and scientifically knocked him down.

"Hallo! Anything happening?" asked



Bunter's protest! (See Chapter 5.)

Clifton Dane, rounding a corner, and coming upon them.

"I calculate all that's going to transpire has transpired, sree!" replied Buck, with a nasal twang more pronounced even than usual.

And it appeared that Buck was correct. Of course, it may have been that Fish did not like the notion of fighting a fellow-American. Or it may only have been that Fish did not like the notion of fighting. Anyway, in spite of plenty of encouragement from Dane, Fishy proved a non-combatant.

"The galoot's a visitor, I guess, and I calculate I know better'n to go wiping the floor with a visitor. I calculate if I had him outside somewhar—"

"Jumping Jehosaphat! I'll come fast enough!" snapped Buck.

"But you'd still be a visitor, you mug-wump, and I guess I know better than to go playing games like that with a visitor! What I mean is somewhar right clean away from hyer."

"Madagascar or Kamchatka, say!" grinned Dane.

"Any old place, I reckon, as long as it ain't Greyfriars."

"Look out for yourself when I catch you outside the walls, you tarnation funk!" sneered Buck.

"Are you going to pocket your pride and a nose like that, Fishy?" inquired Dane.

"I guess I ain't going to get myself hurt to please a rotten Canuck!" snarled Fish.

"That's just about what you will do if you say anything more in that style!" snapped Dane.

"Oh, I'll beat it! This is no place for me!" groaned Fish.

Buck howled "Quitter!" after him as he went. Clifton Dane grinned. He knew how hard it is for any American to swallow that particular taunt. But Fishy never even looked back. He went with speed, holding his nose sadly. He seemed to have more nose than usual, and he had enough at any time.

He went to keep an appointment. Harold Skinner had written to ask him to meet the genial Harold and his two agreeable cousins, Messrs. James and

Anthony Skinner, near Highcliffe, that afternoon at three.

Fish was there first, and the period of waiting did not improve his temper. It was a wretched day, thawing, but very cold. Fishy's nose, which Buck had swollen, glowed like a beacon when the Skinners came along.

"We're a bit late, Fishy," remarked Harold Skinner indifferently.

"Yep! Above a bit, I calculate!" snapped Fishy.

"Been waiting long?"

"Ages!"

"Of course he has—look at his giddy proboscis!" said Mr. James Skinner.

"Come off! I guess you'd better leave my nose alone!" snarled Fishy.

"But I guess you hadn't!" said Harold Skinner, grinning. "It wants wiping!"

Fishy took out his handkerchief. There were stains of blood upon it.

"Who's been lamming you?" the cad of the Remove asked.

"I had a little disagreement with Finn, I guess! He made my nose bleed some. I reckon he doesn't want any more than I gave him!" Fishy replied.

It might have been true, but it hardly conveyed a veracious impression. For Fishy had given Buck nothing but words.

"I didn't think that chap would be any good to us!" growled Mr. Anthony Skinner.

Both he and his brother James were very like their cousin, not only in appearance, but in mind and methods.

"Christopher Columbus! The galoot's no good to anyone, I calculate!" said Fish. "Prouty caned him, and now he's quite cottoned to Prouty—eats out of his hand, the quitter!"

"You're getting on all right with the rest of them, I suppose, though?"

"Then your supposer's all out of gear, Skinney! I'm fed up with the whole durned crowd!"

The Skinners looked at one another. This suited them very well indeed. To carry out their plot they needed a confederate inside the school. And they were very keen on carrying it out.

Koumi Rao had given Mr. Anthony a thrashing in the Priory Wood. None of them had made Mr. James feel affectionately disposed towards him; and, moreover the loss of the skating-race, which he had come very near winning, had annoyed him.

As for Harold Skinner, it was only necessary for a fellow to be decent all through and that sweet youth was sure to detest him.

"Did our little game the other night upset 'em much?" he asked.

"Gee-whiz! Was that you fellers? Snakes! You went pretty far, Skinner! The nigger says you tried to throttle him. Neck-squeezing that hard is a bit off, you know."

"Oh, I only squeezed hard enough to wake the bouncer up! Our game's not to hurt them—only to scare them out of their senses!"

"I calculate that ain't dead easy, Skinner! You can scare Bunter good and hard without much trouble, and his minor, too—that's about all. The rest don't seem to get scared worth a cent. And old Prouty's fairly in his glory. Fetches out his gun, and gets his tail up in jolly slick time! You chaps better look out for that gun if you try it on some more, I guess!"

"Oh, I know all about Prouty's gun! It may damage some of you fellows. It won't hurt us, because he will be aiming at us, you see! Look here, we want your help, Fishy!"

"Waal, I reckon that goes all right—for a consideration! Plank down the mazuma, and I'm willing to do anything that don't get me into any risk! I bar that!"

"Plank down the—er—which?" asked Anthony Skinner.

"The mazuma—the dollars—the spondulicks!"

"Oh, the cash! I see."

"What did you think it was, you jay? New kind of breakfast food—eh?"

"It sounded rather like it. But, I say, Fish, you surely don't want paying to help us?"

"I sure do! Bet your bottom dollar on that!"

"Fishy's a real business-man," said Harold Skinner.

Harold did not object to Fish's being bribed, for the bribe would not come out of his pocket. His cousins were better off than he—and not so mean.

"Why, I should think he'd be on this for the fun of it, and to get his own back with that crowd!" growled James.

"That sort of thing cuts no ice with me!" said Fishy promptly. "I'm for business, from the word 'Go!' Make it worth my while, and I calculate I'm in this. Otherwise—nope!"

"Would you do what we want for half-a-sov?" asked Anthony, who was keen on the plot.

"That's two-and-a-half dollars U.S.A. currency, or a bit less at the present rate of exchange," returned Fishy thoughtfully. "And you say you ain't out for doing those jays any real damage. Waal, make it three dollars, and tell me what you want done, and I'll think about it."

"We want a window left open for us," said Harold Skinner. "It was easy enough to get in last time; but I fancy they'll be a bit more careful after that."

"I calculate I'll do that for three dollars—cash in advance," said the business-man.

"That ain't all, though," said Anthony Skinner viciously. "You needn't fancy you're running this show, Harold! I want my revenge on that black beast who mauled me!"

"I'm sure I don't mind, dear boy. What's the notion?"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 514.

"Get him out alone. Tie him up. Put him in some outhouse for the night. I dare say you'll find him in the morning. He'll be rather a frozen nigger by that time. But he'll survive it. Those brutes are tough!" said Mr. Anthony viciously.

"I calculate there's going to be some risk for me in a game like that, gents!" said Fishy, pulling a long face.

"But you'll run it if we pay you for it, I suppose?" sneered Anthony.

For the moment Fisher T. Fish was strongly tempted to decline. He was not an absolute worm, and he resented Anthony's tone. He was not an absolute rotter, either; and the look on Anthony's face and the scheme proposed made him feel rather alarmed.

But there was a chance to make money, and he was not feeling well disposed towards any of his comrades at Greyfriars. Nearly all of them backed up Squiff when Squiff was down on him; and Squiff was often down on him, for the promises of good behaviour during the visit of the St. Jim's fellows which Fish had made had been broken again and again.

"It's worth another five or six dollars, I reckon," he said. "Say, two quid for the complete job, and I'm on it!"

"Done with you!" answered Anthony.

Fish wished he had asked more. It appeared that Skinner's cousins had money to burn, and were not so near as the dear Harold.

"Put up the spondulicks," he said.

"Here's a pound note. You get the rest when the thing's been carried out," replied his hirer.

"Waal, that's fair, too. How's it to be done? I ain't taking any risks, I calculate!"

"We shall have to think that out," said Harold Skinner. "The weather's too beastly to make to-night a good night for it. I'll drop you a line with your instructions, Fishy."

"That's all right, then!"

"I suppose you told them about the Hindu chap we saw at Courtfield?"

"Yep."

"What did they say?"

"They didn't wilt worth a cent. Didn't seem to take much stock of it."

Fish was about to add that something had happened since to which more importance was attached by the fellows. Piet Delarey had seen a mysterious man within the school walls, and the American junior knew that Squiff and the rest were inclined to think it possible that danger menaced one or the other of the two Indians.

He hardly knew why he did not tell Skinner that. Perhaps it may have been a vague dread that the pleasant trio would be alarmed—that the deal would be off, and that the pound note would be taken from him. It would have had to be taken, for he would not have given it up.

Afterwards he wished that he had told—even though he had lost the money by doing so!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Protests!

"WHAT'S the matter, Bunt?" asked Delarey at the dinner-table next day. "You look kind of disgruntled. Surely the grub ain't disagreeing with you already. It's bound to if you eat too much; but I thought the pains came on later."

"Eat too much?" repeated Bunter, in indignation. "Why, I've eaten hardly anything! I don't reckon we are getting a square deal, Rebel! Do you know how things are worked?"

"I don't understand you, porpoise. As how, do you mean?"

Mr. Prout had been called out of the room, and in the hum of voices that rose from the rest no one heard the colloquy between Bunter and the South African junior.

"Well, I suppose Prouty gets so much down for feeding the lot of us for so long. The Head would make his little whack out of that, of course, for he'd be sure to charge old Holmes at St. Jim's more than he handed over to Prouty for the keep of those four bounders—see?"

"Oh, yes; and of course Dr. Holmes would make his pile out of the difference between what he charged their folks and what he coughed up to our old man," said Delarey sarcastically. "All honourable men, porpoise!"

Bunter quite failed to perceive the sarcasm.

"I'm glad you agree with me that it's too bad, Delarey," he said.

"And I'm glad that you're glad, though I ain't so sure about the agreeing," replied the Rebel. "We are not exactly two hearts that beat as one, you and I, Bunt—not yet! But what's the precise trouble just now?"

"What's the trouble? Why, this rotten dinner!" answered the Owl indignantly. "Cold beef and pickles and potatoes! I like my grub hot, and I think a couple of turkeys, with plenty of sausages and lots of thick gravy, would have been nearer the thing!"

"You didn't do so badly with the cold beef, either, fatty."

"What? Oh, really, Delarey, I only had two small plates! Prouty said 'No' when I asked for a third, the mean old hunk! Said I should be exceeding the food rations most grossly! Such rot!"

"Well, it was right, you know. And nobody else wanted more than two plates—except your minor. And Sylvester wouldn't pass his plate up, so he chucked it. Sammy's a little worm, but he's got more sense than you have—I'll say that for him!"

"Food rations! What have they got to do with me?" snorted Bunter. "It's my belief that they were only intended for skinny chaps like you. A fellow like me must eat well. It's a duty he owes to himself and—er—to society generally. But I'll make up for it on the Christmas pudding, you see if I don't!"

Delarey grinned. He was not so certain as Bunter that plum-pudding was the second course. In fact, he knew it wasn't, for he happened to have been in the kitchen that morning, and had had a word or two with the cook. Quite a friendly word, of course. The Rebel had no objection to suet-pudding and treacle. Bunter did not dislike it, for that matter. But to see it when he was anticipating plum-pudding would not make him any more cheerful.

Now Mr. Prout returned, and resumed his seat; and Trotter brought in a mighty covered dish, under whose weight he fairly staggered. Steam came from beneath the cover. Bunter's eyes glistened, and his mouth watered.

"What have we here?" said Mr. Prout. "I am not sure that a second course is a real necessity; but I confess that I am not inclined to pass it. Ah! Suet-puddings! Very good! Excellent! And what goes with the pudding, Trotter?"

"Treacle, sir, please. Mrs. Kebble said as 'ow it was more plenty than jam. I like it better myself."

"So do I, Trotter—so do I! Suet-pudding and treacle! Lucullus might have disdained it, but an old hunter like Paul Pontifex Prout knows better!"

Koumi Rao, may I help you to suet-pudding?"

"If you please, sir," replied the Jam of Bundelore.

Then did Bunter arise from his seat. His podgy hands were tightly clenched, and upon his face there was an expression of utter disgust. Delarey could see that his legs were trembling. But he had screwed himself to the point of protest, and he meant to go through with it.

One glance of utter disdain he cast at Sammy.

Sammy was the only person there who could really be expected to be in sympathy with him.

But the low-minded, craven-spirited Sammy was actually gloating—gloating over mere suet-pudding, when his brother had confidently expected plum-pudding.

Sammy hadn't. He also had known beforehand. And he was keener on the particular dish provided than Billy, though he, too, preferred Christmas pudding.

"I—I—"

"Are you ill, Bunter?" asked Mr. Prout. "If so, my labour has been in vain. I choked you off over-indulgence in beef. Have you made up for the deprivation by gross wallowing in pickles?"

"Nothing of the sort, sir! I—I—"

"If you are not feeling well, you have my permission to retire, Bunter."

"Bub—bub—but I don't want to retire, sir! I don't mean to retire! I desire to protest!"

"Ah! Your conscience has awakened at last, my boy! I am glad to know it. But we shall not reach the end of the war sooner by semi-starvation of the rising generation. That sort of thing can be overdone, I consider."

"So do I!" howled Bunter. "And you're overdoing it!"

"What do you mean, Bunter?" thundered Mr. Prout.

The fellows were grinning. They could not help it.

Billy Bunter was very much in earnest, of course. He always was when food was concerned. And Mr. Prout was getting angry now. But it was a joke for everyone else—except perhaps Sammy, who was not good at seeing jokes. But for Sammy it may be said that at least he was not worried about anything that was likely to happen to his brother.

"I mean—well, sir— Oh, really, you must see what I mean! 'Tain't fair that you should make a profit out of starving us!"

"Make a profit out of—"

"Yes, sir! It's time someone spoke out, and nobody else has pluck enough. We're being starved, and—"

"Speak for yourself, Bunter!" rapped out Kangaroo. "We are not complaining. We're satisfied, and more than satisfied. Isn't that right, you chaps?"

There was a hum of assent. Only Sammy Bunter and Fisher T. Fish held aloof from it. Sammy thought that to say he was more than satisfied might be a dangerous admission, especially in view of the fact that there was suet-pudding with treacle to follow. And Fishy was feeling too disgruntled to agree with anyone.

"Thank you, Noble!" Mr. Prout put the cover over the suet-puddings as he spoke. Sammy's goggle eyes yearned wistfully. "Now, Bunter, explain yourself!"

"It's only that— Oh, really, sir, I think we ought to have more grub! And I consider suet-pudding low! I had quite expected plum-pudding—in fact, I think we've a right to it!"

"What did your remark concerning profits mean?" demanded Mr. Prout,

with a lowering brow. "Do you take me for a tradesman—eh? Answer me that! Do not work your face about in that highly absurd manner, but come to the point!"

"I—I— Well, sir, it's rather a delicate matter, and I should be sorry to hurt your feelings," burred the Owl.

"I am not at all sure that I shall feel the same regret about hurting yours, Bunter! They will certainly be hurt if you do not answer me at once, and plainly!"

"Well, sir, everyone knows—"

"Speak for yourself, Bunter!"

It was Squiff this time. Bunter could have cursed those two meddling Cornstalks. Why couldn't they keep silence at least when he was playing up for his side so nobly?

"What is it that everybody knows, Bunter?"

Mr. Prout's tone had changed from the heated to the icy.

"I— Well, as I haven't the support I had a right to look for, perhaps it would be as well if I—er—withdrew that remark, sir!"

"You have not yet made it, Bunter. But you are going to—you are going to!"

"Delarey agrees with me, anyway, sir!"

The rest looked in utter surprise at the Rebel. He only smiled, in the half-cynical way he had.

"Is that correct, Delarey?" demanded Mr. Prout.

"About as correct as most of the statements Bunter makes, sir," replied the South African junior coolly.

"It's jolly well not, then, for it's true!" howled Bunter.

"That, Bunter, is a confession of mendacity that I should be sorry to hear any other boy present make. Coming from you, it does not grieve me, for it may mean that you have perceived the fact that you are an abominable liar—that is, corrupter of the truth! I order you to make the charge that you appear to be formulating against me."

"I'd rather say no more about it, sir—really, I would."

"How many times—"

"The pudding's getting cold, sir!" blurted out Bunter desperately.

"The temperature of the pudding, Bunter, is not a thing that concerns you in the least. But as it concerns others, take the dish out, Trotter, and ask Mrs. Kebble to be kind enough to keep the puddings hot until I ring. This matter must be settled now!"

Desperation stirred in the breast of William George Bunter.

"Do you mean that I ain't to have any pudding, sir?" he howled.

"Of course you will not, Bunter! The only method of dealing with a boy who finds fault with wholesome and appetising food is to keep him short enough to induce in him a healthy appetite."

"Then it ain't fair, and I'm not going to stand it!" roared the Owl.

"I think you will find that you have to stand it, Bunter."

"I won't! It—it's worse than anything that's happening in Belgium!"

"Remember that I am in command here, and that—"

"That's just the trouble! That's where it all comes in! I've heard you go on about war-profiters, but I think you ought to see that you're worse than any of them! Cutting us short to put money in your pockets—it ain't honest! I've got my principles, and I feel—"

"Not half what you are going to feel, Bunter, I promise you!" roared the irate master. "Your absurd and revolting charge must proceed from a disordered mind. I have no more control of the commissariat here than you have. I do not seek such control, and I

would not accept it. Mrs. Kebble has the matter in hand. And you appear to be the only person dissatisfied with her very capable and generous catering."

There was a hum of pleasure. Mrs. Kebble had certainly done them well. She was careful, and the food was plain; but she was not stingy, and it was good.

"Oh, well, sir, if that is so—"

"The conditional mood will not do for me, Bunter!"

"Well, sir, as that is so, I—I really think the best plan will be to say no more about it," replied Bunter, with a weak attempt at an ingratiating smile upon his fat face.

"I do not agree with you! At half-past two precisely I shall have more to say to you about it, Bunter. You can go!"

"But I don't want to go, sir!"

"That is of no importance whatever. Leave the room at once!"

"But there's the pudding, sir!" wailed Bunter.

"I understood that you considered suet-puddings low!"

"Yes—I mean, no! I'm hungry—famished—almost fainting, sir!"

"Go and faint outside!" grinned Sammy, who had his fork and spoon ready for action, and felt impatient.

"Go! Whether you faint or not is hardly a matter that will concern us!" rapped out Mr. Prout, ringing the bell for the return of the pudding. "The danger does not seem to me great."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

With the derisive laughter of the rest ringing in his ears Bunter went, slowly and sadly. But a gleam of vengeance came into his eyes, almost cracking his spectacles, as he saw Trotter staggering along under the big dish.

"Take that, you cad!" he howled. And he charged at Trotter's helpless back.

Trotter's head thudded upon the door, and it burst open. Bunter gasped. If the puddings were spilled and spoiled it would not be at the hands of Mr. Prout alone that he would suffer!

But by an heroic effort Trotter saved the situation—for himself, for those who waited for their pudding, and for Bunter! Not that Trotter had any desire to help Bunter.

"Ketch 'old, sir!" gasped Trotter, and shoved the dish into the hands of Mr. Prout as he fell headlong.

Mr. Prout nearly fell, too. But Delarey and Tom Brown leaped to his aid. The puddings were saved!

Bunter rolled disconsolately away.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Afternoon!

BUT when he reached the hall Bunter's eyes gleamed, and he ceased to look so woebegone.

There was a letter lying on the table. It was addressed to Fish, and the address was in the handwriting of Harold Skinner.

Bunter's curiosity was roused at once, naturally, and in his curiosity he almost forgot his woes.

He turned the letter about in his hands, leaving finger-marks upon it.

He held it up to the light, vainly striving to read something through the envelope. But a message such as Skinner was sending to Fisher T. Fish is only put in transparent envelopes by schemers far below the calibre of Harold Skinner. Bunter could not see the writing at all, for Skinner had doubled the blank half of the sheet outwards.

Bunter tried to get a fat finger-end under the flap.

But Skinner had gummed the flap down too tightly for that.

"The rotter!" muttered Bunter. "I'll

bet there's something up between those two. And I shouldn't wonder if it wasn't something that the rest of us ought to know about. I think I ought to open the letter as a matter of principle. And the pigs inside there will be gorging for a long time yet, hang them! If it ain't anything that he ought not to have, there's no reason why Fishy shouldn't have it. But I think it will be for the good of all concerned if I act as Censor. Yes, that's it! If it's right for the giddy Censor, it can't be wrong for me. I suppose I'm as good as he is, anyway!"

Bunter walked off with the letter. He took it to No. 7, and boiled a kettle on Peter Todd's spirit-stove in order to get the flap up.

The steam did that all right, but cleaner hands would have been better for the purpose.

When Bunter had extracted the letter the envelope looked rather like a Bertillon chart of thumb-marks—only some of these were finger-marks. And the sheet of paper had still to be replaced.

"Oh, my hat! The rotters!" said Bunter warmly.

He had read the few lines in the letter almost at a glance. They told Fish that "it" was for the night of the next day; that the most convenient window would be one in the hall at the foot of the great staircase; and that he had better awaken Koumi Rao when the signal reached him, and induce the Indian to go downstairs to investigate. "Alone, of course!" Skinner added, "unless Fishy cared to come with him." That was a touch of Harold's sardonic humour, since Fishy would inevitably give the game away by accompanying Koumi Rao, and not backing him up at the critical moment. But Skinner knew that his ally was not that kind of durned mug, as Fishy might have put it.

There was a postscript. It puzzled Bunter, for it read:

"As I know there's a fat tramp at G., I have put this into a kind of parable for fear he may see it. But you will catch on."

"G., of course, was Greyfriars. That was easy guessing. Bunter thought the fat tramp must be Sammy—at least, he would have thought so if he had not known that "that beast Skinner" was quite capable of alluding to George William Bunter in this rude way.

But the parable! The word was naturally connected, in what passed for a mind in Bunter's case, with grains of mustard-seed and prodigal sons and talents hidden in napkins. It was a "Divinity" word. What could it mean in a letter from Harold Skinner to Fisher T. Fish?

The only parable that seemed to Bunter to fit the case at all was that which is perhaps the most famous of them all—the old yet ever-new story of him who ate husks with the swine.

But even that did not really fit. Bunter had no intention of going back home while Aunt Rebecca was still there, unless he had to. And he knew very well that if he did go the fatted calf would not stand in any great peril by reason of his return.

"Skinney is an ass! What can the silly idiot mean? He's potty!" groaned Bunter.

He thought for another minute or two. "It's just to throw dust in my eyes," he said, which was not a bad guess for Bunter. "Like his rotten cheek to suppose I should see the letter! I only opened it for—for the good of everyone. Practically I haven't seen it—not really. But I think I'd better make a copy of it before I put it back."

The kettle, set back on the spirit-stove, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 514.

was in danger of being burned through, unless the spirit failed before that happened.

But it did not matter to Bunter. It was Peter Todd's kettle, not his.

He sat down at the table, and scrawled a copy of Harold Skinner's letter, fully satisfied that only really high principles forced him to labour thus. Indeed, he felt so full of high principles and admiration for himself on account of his unselfish zeal for those who treated him so badly that, having put the letter back and fastened down the flap again, he found it borne in upon him that he ought to get something out of this affair.

While he still deliberated as to the likeliest means of realising some small profit, he heard the voices of some of the other fellows in the corridor, and he thrust the letter and the copy into his pocket, and left No. 7. He also left an abominable smell from the spirit-stove, which had now given up the ghost—that is to say, the spirit had gone out of it—and a kettle rather the worse for its experience. But to the great mind of William George Bunter trifles like these were naught.

In the hall he ran against Sammy. "Sammy," he said, "take this letter to Fishy."

Sammy rudely put out his tongue. Samuel Tuckless Bunter was not quite a nice child.

William George tried to chuck him



under the chin, with design to make him bite the pink object. But Sammy jabbed a pin into his major's fat arm.

"Yoop! You little rotter!" howled Billy.

"You shouldn't play your silly ass games on me, then!" grunted Sammy. "Serve you glad! I don't see why I should run your errands, either. Take the letter yourself!"

"Very well! I only offered you the job because I rather fancy there's something in it," replied Bunter major. "I happen to know that Fishy's keen on getting that letter. Besides, I've got to go and see that old beast Prout now."

"Oh, I'll take it!" said Sammy.

Seeing how much he knew of his brother's dislike for veracity and Fishy's meanness, Sammy might have known better. But he was covetous as well as cunning, and he caught at even so slender a chance of profit as the possible generosity of Fish offered.

"Don't tell him I handed it to you, Sammy!" said William George.

Then he rolled away, in two minds about keeping his appointment with Mr. Prout. It was now half-past two, and the irate master would not be more merciful for being kept waiting. On the other hand, there was just a chance that he might have forgotten by now.

Bunter submitted that chance to the judgment of Tom Brown, whom he happened to meet.

"Not likely!" said Tom. "But if there

is any danger of it I'll go and remind him. I wouldn't do that for just anyone, Bunt, but in your case the duty's a pleasure."

"You mean you think I'd better go?" "On the whole, I think you'd better not," answered the New Zealander.

"Yah! Talk sense! I can't make out a bit what you mean."

"Only that if you don't go now you'll get a double dose when you are sent for. And as I consider a double dose would be very appropriate to your complaint—"

"I haven't got any complaint, you potty ass!"

"Oh, you had at dinner, though. Hinc illae lachrymae!"

"If you're going to spout Greek—"

"Hebrew, Bunt—Hebrew!"

"Well, I'd sooner be caned!"

"That's good, because you're going to be!"

But Bunter, having got as far as the door of the Head's study, now occupied by Mr. Prout, could not screw up his resolution further.

"I've got to go through it!" he muttered desperately. "But—"

Trotter passed him, grinning. Trotter tapped at Mr. Prout's door.

"Come in!" called the Fifth-Form master.

"It's only Master Bunter waitin' 'ere, sir, an' don't like to disturb you," said the kindly Trotter.

"Come in, Bunter!" said Mr. Prout acidly.

With a glare that no basilisk could have beaten at Trotter, Bunter went in.

Meanwhile, Sammy had sought out Fish.

"Here's a letter for you, Fishy!" he said.

Fishy took it without thanks.

"You dirty little grub!" he snorted. "I calculate that's about a million marks of your beastly fingers on this!"

"They ain't mine! They're—the post-man's, I suppose!" said the untruthful Sammy.

"Jerusalem crickets! You've opened this!" roared Fish, going almost green.

"I didn't—I swear I didn't! If—if anyone did, it was Billy!" burred Samuel.

"Oh! That galoot's been monkeying with it, has he? Gee-whiz! I shall have to look slippy, or—"

"Billy said I was to have something for bringing it, Fishy," whined Bunter minor.

"I calculate he's right that about that. And this is what is coming to you!" answered Fisher T. Fish.

He seized Sammy by the scruff of the neck, and smacked his head with vigour.

Sammy went, howling. In the passage he encountered his brother. William was also howling.

"Is this a concert?" asked the unfeeling Squiff.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter the Blackmaller!

"BUNTEE no lookee velly chip-pee!" remarked Hop Hi.

"Oh, you dry up, you little heathen beast! It's enough to put up with your rotter of a brother without standing cheek from you!"

"Wun Lung no lottel. Wun Lung velly fondee handsome Billee Buntsee," said Hop Hi, in his most bland and insinuating manner.

"I wish he'd show it, then!" grunted the Owl.

"He wantee showee."

"Well, it's easy enough. He's only got to lend me some cash."

"That velly likely," replied the small Chinese.

Bunter looked at him hard. But it was of no use. He could not tell whether

Squiff had just scored the ninth goal for Greyfriars, while the St. Jim's score stood at seven.

The footer had no attraction whatever for Bunter. But the sight of Fishy, coupled with the recent talk in Wun Lung's study, made him reflect that he held a secret of Fishy's, and that it was no good holding it unless he was paid to do so.

He had stuck to it when Wun Lung had tried to pump him. That ought to make it worth more, he thought.

He rolled downstairs, and pursued Fishy across the quad.

And Hop Hi, gliding out of the next study, pursued him.

But Bunter's pursuit was open and clumsy. Hop Hi's was quite otherwise. The little Chinese took care that the Owl should not see him.

"Oh, beat it, Bunter!" said Fish irritably. "I've got no use for any palaver with you, I guess!"

"That's where you're dead off it, Fishy," answered the Owl coolly.

Dusk was gathering. On the footer-field the game finished, and the ruddy and muddy players came away, arguing good-temperedly as to what could be held to constitute offside when there were only four men in each team.

Koumi Rao had come with a rush at the finish, and the score had been made nine all—or ten all, or eight all, no one was quite sure which, though everyone knew that it was level except Buck, who claimed a victory by five goals at least for St. Jim's.

It did not matter much; and all were agreed that it had been an uncommonly jolly game, and that the rest were asses to miss it.

Neither Fishy nor Bunter saw the dark-skinned man who was standing under the trees within a hundred yards of the gates. He drew back as they stopped, and hid himself behind a holly-tree. He was near enough to hear every word they said—and he did hear every word!

If Fishy had seen him he might have recognised him as the same man he had seen in Courtfield a week or so earlier. If Piet Delarey had seen him he might have suspected him of being the same man who had prowled about the school and had made exit over the wall. He could not have been sure of it, for the darkness had not allowed him to see the fellow's face. But he would have been right.

If Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, Nabob of Bhanipur, had seen him he would scarcely have suspected evil, for the man's face would have awakened no echo in his memory. If Koumi Rao, Jam of Bundelpore, had seen him he, too, would have set him down as a stranger. But it was as certain as anything could be that his business at Greyfriars was with either Inky or Koumi Rao, and that his intent was not good.

And if Bunter had seen him he would, of course, have set him down as "a nigger." But he was no more a nigger than Bunter. He was a Hindu of fighting race and high caste.

Hop Hi did see him, but only as a vague shape. And Hop Hi also heard the conversation between the traitor and the blackmailer.

"Hyer, what d'ye mean?" demanded Fish.

"It's only right, Fishy. I ain't going to tell anyone if you treat me fairly. I only want halves. I don't ask for more than that."

"Christopher Columbus! You've got me guessing! Halves of what, you fat jay?"

"What you're getting from Skinney!" replied Bunter boldly.

The American junior laughed harshly. "You mugwump! Jevver hear of any-one getting anything from that skin-fint?" he asked.

"Well, you ain't doing it for nothing, I'll bet!" said Bunter.

"Doing what, you hoodlum?" But Fishy was weakening. Even the obtuse Bunter could see that.

"Letting the Skinners in by the window near the great staircase to-night!"

"Gee-whiz! You're sure barmy, Bunter!"

"I'm not! I saw the letter!"

"I've a durned good mind to give you a thundering hiding!"

"You may have the mind—you haven't the body, though," replied Bunter. "It's no good getting waxy. I know all about it, and how you are going to chisel the nigger into going down, so that they can nab him, I suppose. I don't know whether my conscience will let me keep it dark. In fact, I'm sure it won't, unless—well, halves is the only fair thing!"

"Of all the goldurned rattlesnakes—"

"None of that, Fishy! I'm not going to stand it!"

"I ain't making a red cent out of the schemozzle. It's just a joke I've got up with Skinney and his cousins."

"That," said Bunter coolly, "is a beastly lie!"

"See hyer, pard!" Fishy had Bunter by the arm quite affectionately now, and they moved away together. Neither Hop Hi nor the man who lurked in the shadows heard more.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

What Fishy Did Not Know!

"WIRE for Master Inky—I means Master 'Urree Jam Ram Singer," said Trotter, appearing to the small crowd of footballers, who, having bathed and changed, were entertaining Inky with a full, true, and particular account of the great match of the afternoon.

"Hand it over, Trotter," said Squiff. "I say, are we going to have any tea to-night?"

"It ain't time yet. Master Squ—I mean, Master Field. But it's being got ready. Hot scones—there ain't no currants in them, because Greece, or one of them places, has been an' gone an' messed up things shockin'—but there's raspberry-jam to have with 'em, an' I reckon that goes all right!"

"I hope you'll get some yourself, Trotter."

"Thankee kindly. I'll see as I do! We ain't 'avin' no bad time in the kitchen, for all bein' careful about rations an' such!"

Trotter withdrew. Inky had opened his telegram, but there was not light enough to read the pencil scrawl. They had been sitting in the firelight.

Now Tom Brown drew the curtains, and Squiff switched on the light.

Inky read, and his face lit up. Then its expression changed.

"Good news, I hope, old scout?" said Kangaroo.

"The newfulness has in it both of the goodfulness and the badfulness," answered Inky. "The esteemed wire is from the honourable Wharton, and its purportfulness is to the effect that they are coming to fetchfully take me away to-morrow. I shall be glad to see again my friends' most honourable and affectionate faces; but it will be to me the wringfulness of the esteemed heart to leave behindfully the friends now gatherfully around me, who are each and allfully of the true topnotchfulness."

"I say, Inky, we can't spare you!" said Clifton Dane.

"Not likely!" added Delarey. St. Jim's and Greyfriars were in full agreement on that point.

Though Inky had been obliged to lie on his couch nearly all the time, yet he had counted for a whole lot in the little community. He had taken his accident with the greatest cheerfulness; he was always ready to listen when anyone wanted to talk—Bunters barred, however; and his weird and wonderful English was a constant source of amusement to the visitors.

But they knew that Wharton & Co. must have missed him, and they knew that Inky had missed his own special chums. Now that he was fit to travel, it was only to be expected that he should want to join the Wharton Lodge party. Nothing short of war would keep them from taking Inky, too; and war was scarcely the correct card.

"What can we do?" asked Squiff, almost mournfully.

"Kidnap those chaps, and make them stay here. They can't take Inky away if they ain't allowed to get away themselves," replied Tom Brown promptly.

Fish came in just then, and he caught one word of Tom's speech. That word made him feel quite alarmed. He was fresh from his affectionate talk with Bunter, who had now in his pocket an I O U for 10s. bearing the illustrious signature of Fisher T. Fish. Fishy had not thought it necessary to mention the sovereign of which he had relieved Mr. Anthony Skinner in advance.

"Oh, crikey! Who's talking about kidnapping?" he asked.

Wun Lung shot a keen look at him. But Fishy did not see. And a moment later Hop Hi appeared at the door like a spectre, beckoned to his brother, and glided away unseen by anyone else.

The Chinese Removite arose, and stole softly from the room.

"We were talking about Inky," explained Dane. "His chums are coming to take him away. Brownie thinks it would be the correct caper to kidnap them. There are difficulties, though."

"Oh!" said Fishy. And he stooped to warm his lean hands at the fire.

"Are they coming by rail, Inky?" asked Delarey. "Pretty expensive for five of them these days, all the way from Wharton What-is-it—eh?"

"The esteemed wire does not make mentionful remark of their wayfulness of travelling," answered Inky. "But the padfulness of the ludicrous hoof would scarcely be the absurd caper."

"Not for you, old sport, anyway," said Kangaroo.

"It can't be by motor—that's off now," remarked Squiff. "I guess they will drive. Where was the wire handed in, Inky?"

"I did not observefully remark. Now I perceivefully see that it comes from the honourable post-office at Petworth. So the drivefulness would no doubt be the caper."

"They can't be hyer to-day, I guess, if they've only got as far as Petworth," remarked Fishy. "That's quite some miles away. I calculate."

"They are coming to-morrow, my absurd and esteemed Fishy."

"Oh!" said Fish. He was wondering whether Inky's going would make any difference to the Skinners' plot, and he hardly knew whether he wanted it to or not. It would only mean a loss of ten shillings to him if the scheme fell through—unless he could cheat Bunter, the idea of which was rather comforting to him. For in any case Fishy had no notion of returning Mr. Anthony Skinner's sovereign.

Hurree Singh and Koumi Rao played chess together that evening. The St. Jim's junior was very quiet. He would miss Inky even more than the rest. And there were other things which may have made him thoughtful. But if he was thinking of the danger which Wun Lung had foretold, it is certain that there was no dread in his mind of facing it alone. And there was no regret that Inky should escape it, either.

Wun Lung and Hop Hi were also very quiet, and both of them kept a close watch on Fisher T. Fish. Astute as the two Chinese boys were, they felt just a little out of their depth in this affair.

The Skinner plot was only a joke, though a rotten one.

But behind the Skinner plot—and unknown to the plotters—they dreaded something else—some real peril to the two Indian juniors whom they counted friends. And it was their uncertainty as to the exact nature of that peril which troubled them.

They were sure of one thing, however—that what they did must be done on their own. Hurree Singh and Koumi Rao would be likely to resent the idea of two guardian angels in the Chinese form, though they counted Wun Lung and Hop Hi as good chums.

It ought to be easy enough to defeat the Skinner scheme; and to defeat it with the aid of no one but his minor was the kind of thing to appeal to Wun Lung.

He stayed awake that night, even after the bed got comfortably warm. When he felt drowsiness creeping over him he fought against it.

Fishy also was wakeful. He was not quite easy in his mind now that the critical moment drew so near.

He would have been still more uneasy if he had even guessed how much more than the wheeze the Skinners had planned hung on his treachery.

Outside the walls of Greyfriars, in the shadow of the trees, waited a light trap, with a fast horse between the shafts. Beside it, wrapped up to the eyes against the wind, were two men of Hurree Singh's race.

There were those in Bhanipur who were in no mind to submit to a ruler reared in England; and there were those of Hurree Singh's own kindred who wanted him dead. And those two men were their emissaries. Neither of them knew Inky, and he did not know them. But their task had seemed an easy one, as far as recognition went, for the nabob was the only Hindu among the Greyfriars boys. The presence at the school of Koumi Rao had made confusion for a time. Any description, unless very close indeed, of one of the two boys would have served for the other. But now Achmet Lal and Nana Sewani knew—or believed they knew.

It would be a long story to tell how these two had reached Greyfriars at a time when either getting into England or getting out of it, once in, had become so difficult for anyone without proper credentials. But craft had been at work. Hurree Singh was a ward of the India Office. Achmet Lal and Nana Sewani were persons trusted by that department. They had come over in the train of a very big man indeed, who had no suspicion of their real mission.

Now that mission was to be carried out.

For what came afterwards they recked little. Wealth was to be theirs if they succeeded and escaped. If they did not escape, that was Fate. And who were they that they should fight with Fate?

So, in the gloom they waited, and the shadow over Greyfriars darkened!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Skinners Caught!

FISHY got out of bed.

Sitting on the edge, shivering, he asked:

"Hyer, I say, are any of you galoots awake?"

There was no answer. Wun Lung did not consider himself a galoot, it seemed, for certainly he was not asleep.

Fishy drew on his clothes. He did not feel keen. But he could hardly back out now.

He stole out of the door and downstairs.

Wun Lung did not follow him. There was no need for that yet.

Having unlatched the window fixed upon, Fishy returned. He disrobed hurriedly. He still had to awaken Koumi Rao at the critical moment. And the St. Jim's fellows would be likely to smell a rat if he appeared clothed. Moreover, having carried out his contract by rousing the Indian, Fishy proposed to retire from the game.

It was a beastly night, cold and dark. Perhaps the Skinners would not come. Fishy rather hoped they would fail.

But the trio were already on the way. The anger of Anthony still burned hotly against Koumi Rao; James had a spite of his own against the band of chums generally; and Harold Skinner was as spiteful as either of them. He had old slights to avenge. Besides, this was a joke to him—and the cad of the Remove dearly loved a joke of this kind, which meant suffering for someone he did not dearly love.

Twelve boomed from the clock in the tower. The wind brought the sound.

"The witching hour of night, when churchyards yawn, and graves give up their dead!" quoted Harold Skinner.

"Rats!" replied his cousin Anthony, who was no student of Shakespeare. "Who believes in witches and ghosts, and all that bunkum?"

Harold Skinner didn't. There was not much he did believe in—as is often the way with a fellow in whom others cannot believe.

But he gave a start as he passed the patient horse and motionless cart under the trees. The two men from the East were no longer there. The horse was in charge of a half-witted lad from the neighbourhood.

"W-w-what's that?" quavered Harold.

"What? Where?" asked Anthony.

"There—under the trees! It looks like a hearse!"

"Well, it ain't our funeral, anyway!" said James, with a nervous giggle.

"It's all fancy!" Anthony said. "I don't see anythin' at all."

They passed with all speed.

Meanwhile, their plot had had a result that quite certainly they had never anticipated.

It had enabled Achmet Lal and Nana Sewani to get within the School House without trouble or risk.

Achmet Lal, watching his chance, had heard the talk between Fish and Bunter that afternoon. He may not have understood all, but he understood enough to see how well this apparently aimless jape chimed in with the mission he and his comrade had in hand.

Through the unlatched window they had made their way. Then, with electric torches, treading catlike through passages strange to them, they had made out the lie of the land.

They had found a side door which could be unbolted. This they left ready; it would be more convenient for their purpose than the window. Everything else was prepared. If only "the nigger," as Bunter called him, was induced to come down by Fish, they could act at once, and

have him out of the house before any alarm was given.

In the darkness and the silence they waited, patient with the patience of the East, which is hard for the West to understand. There was murder in their hearts; yet they waited as though time was nothing.

But it was not long they had to wait. There came a sound from outside—the sound of a whispering voice.

Then the window-sash was pushed up, and three vague figures climbed through, one after another.

"Wait here!" said Harold Skinner to his cousins. "I must go up to the dorm and give Fishy the signal to get the nigger down here. He'll awaken him first, you see, and the nigger will think he's going on to wake the rest. But, if Fishy's right about his pluck, he'll come down on his own without waiting for them."

"You'll come straight back, I suppose?" asked James Skinner. "We're a bit lost in a strange place in the dark, you know, and—"

"Oh, you needn't funk it, Jimmy! I'll come down. If we are to handle him without giving him a chance to squall, all three of us will be wanted!"

Harold Skinner stole upstairs. He was on familiar ground, and that gave him a confidence that his cousin failed to feel. They were more than a trifle nervous. But they would have been far more nervous if they had guessed that, within a few yards of them, two assassins waited!

Outside the Remove dormitory Skinner whistled a bar of "Tipperary."

Fishy heard it, and Wun Lung. So did Hop Hi, whom his brother had now aroused.

Fishy got out of bed. In the gloom the two Chinese boys waited to hear the treacherous warning given.

Then Koumi Rao awoke. Someone was shaking his shoulder. Someone—he hardly recognised the tremulous voice—was whispering in his ear:

"Danger—Inky—down below!"

In an instant Koumi Rao was out of bed. The warning conveyed more to him than its speaker had meant it to convey. What he thought was that Inky was below, and threatened by danger—the danger that Wun Lung had read, or pretended to read, in the cards.

"Wake the rest!" he hissed.

And, not stopping to switch on a light, he threw some clothes over him and went.

It was the action of one absolutely fearless, and not too wise. It would have been far better to wait for the rest. It would have been the merest common sense to have looked to see whether Inky was still in his bed.

But the courage of Koumi Rao was far in excess of his prudence. He had no suspicion of Fishy's treachery, either. He did not doubt that others would follow.

And he did not go unarmed. Koumi Rao was not the wild, half-savage fellow he had been when St. Jim's first knew him. But he was of the East still. And now there was a keen-edged dagger in his hand as he made his way downstairs.

Any of the Greyfriars fellows would have known where to put hand on a switch and flood the staircase with light. Koumi Rao felt for one as he passed down, but did not find it.

Behind him he heard voices. Fishy had awakened the rest, he supposed.

But it was Wun Lung who had done that.

"Oh, I say, Harold, there's someone back there in the passage! I'm sure of it!"

It was James Skinner who spoke. Koumi Rao did not recognise his voice.

But he heard the answer, and the

manner of it caused him to drop the weapon he held.

"Rats!" said Harold Skinner sharply.

That was what made Koumi Rao drop the dagger. This was a matter for fists, not for steel. What these fellows were after with Inky—how they had come there—he did not know. But he guessed who they were, and he saw in this no more than a spiteful schoolboy plot.

They did not hear him come, his step was so light. They did not see him in the gloom. But others saw. Achmet Lal and Nana Sewani had watched until the gloom was to them no longer darkness.

He was close upon the Skinners before they were aware of him. He spoke:

"What—Ah!"

That was all they heard. The "Ah!" was the unmistakable exclamation of one surprised by a sudden attack.

A cloth had been flung over the face of Koumi Rao; a strong arm had twined about his neck, exercising a deadly pressure upon his throat. He smelt something sweetish and sickly, and then everything faded from him, and he knew no more.

With yells of fear the Skinners made a bolt for the stairs. They forgot the open window. Instinct drew them towards where there was help.

What had happened they did not know—could not even guess. But they knew that something had happened there in the darkness, so close that had they but stretched out their hands they might almost have touched—what? Ah, what?

That they could not tell. Only in their first panic they were sure of its horror—sure of nothing else. Not even that it had been Koumi Rao who had uttered that cry as it seized him!

Past them in the darkness slipped Wun Lung. Above sounded voices and the pad of slippers feet.

"I say, we—we're running right into them!" panted Anthony Skinner.

All three stopped. Full of alarm though they were, they were taken with a sudden dread of being discovered by those above.

If anything had happened—and something must have happened—it would be of small use for them to maintain that they had meant nothing worse than a jape.

They would have been to blame for the opportunity given for that deadly night-work. But for the window left unlatched it might never have been done.

Something brushed past them on the stairs, and they drew back, shuddering.

But it was only Hop Hi going after his brother.

"Cut back!" hissed Harold Skinner. "Through the window—over the wall! Let's clear out of this!"

But it was too late!

In front of them someone switched on a light. And behind them another suddenly lit the hall. And up above the fellows were rushing to capture them.

There still seemed a chance. They were disguised as Hindus, and the disguises, easily to be seen through at close quarters, might serve them if but barely seen as they made their exit.

No one was visible below. The hand of Wun Lung had switched on that light, and Hop Hi had just been in time to discern his brother's fleeting form. Out into the darkness and the danger the two little Chinese had gone without a moment's hesitation.

The Skinners fled. But they were too late!

"Got you, you varmint!" sung out Buck Finn, and a lasso whizzed through the air.

It was a clever throw.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 514.

Harold Skinner was leading the retreat. The hide lariat passed over the head of James in the rear, over the head of Anthony in the middle, to fall about the shoulders of Harold, to tighten with a jerk, to bring him down on the stairs, with the other two sprawling on top of him!

"Bravo, Buck!" yelled Squiff. "That's bonza! Got the brutes!"

Heedless of danger, they rushed down. Before the two on top could scramble up, Squiff and Kangaroo, Delarey and Dane, Tom Brown and Buck Finn were upon them.

Someone's foot sent flying the dagger that Koumi Rao had dropped.

Hurree Singh came limping up, with little Sylvester. But Fishy and the Bunters preferred the safe shelter of the dormitory, where Billy and Sammy cowered under the bedclothes, and Fisher T. Fish wished he had never been born.

But Mr. Prout still lagged. All knew why. It could only be because he had not heard.

They seized the three pretended Indians. They hauled them to their feet, surprised to find them offering so little resistance.

"Holy smoke! It's that durned critter Skinner!" howled Buck Finn.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Three Missing!

"AND his two crawlers of cousins!" snapped Delarey.

"My hat! This is too thick!" said Tom Brown disgustedly.

"It was only a jape!" whined Harold Skinner. "You chaps needn't get on your ears about it!"

"No, of course not! We ought to be pleased at being roused like this for your rotten japes!" said Clifton Dane.

"Well, I've as good a right here as you have! You're an outsider, come to that!" the cad of the Remove sneered.

"Oh, we're not worrying about your rights! You'd better stand on them!" Squiff said. "You aren't likely to get out of here in a hurry when Prouty sees —"

"May I observe that—er—Prouty already sees them, Field!"

Squiff almost blushed. Skinner did not almost groan—he groaned outright.

Mr. Prout had his gun. But that formidable weapon was not needed. He could not very well shoot the Skinners, though for a moment he felt greatly inclined to.

"What is the meaning of this disgraceful and preposterous—er—masquerade?" he bellowed.

"It was only a joke, sir," said Anthony Skinner. "Dash it all, I shouldn't have thought anyone here would make such a fuss about a mere jape!"

"That's all, sir—a mere jape!" echoed James.

"A—a sort of Christmas mummies bizney, sir!" chimed in Harold.

But that did not go. Everyone but Buck Finn was looking very grim. Buck tried to look grim, too; but he was so pleased with himself that it was not easy for him to feel properly annoyed with the Skinners.

"I think we must put them in the punishment-room for the night," said Mr. Prout. "In the morning—"

"Why, sir, it's freezing hard!" protested Harold Skinner. "We should be dead before morning!"

"Good job, too!" growled Kangaroo. "Not if you're well warmed up with a cane before we take you there!"

"Quite a good notion, Squiff—a happy thought!" said Mr. Prout.

"If you try to cane me—"

Mr. Prout cut in on Anthony Skinner's speech of protest.

"I shall not try, you worthless and intruding puppy!" he snapped. "I shall do it!"

"Then you'll get an action for assault brought—"

"Where is Koumi Rao?"

It was Hurree Singh who spoke, and there was acute anxiety in his tones. He forgot his weird and wonderful English, too—a sure sign of distress in him.

He had limped back to the dormitory, wondering that his fellow-countryman, usually so light a sleeper, should have failed to be awakened.

As for the rest, in the excitement they had not thought of Koumi Rao at all.

He was not in the dormitory, of course. Fish and the two Bunters were there—that was all.

The shadow of a great dread lay upon Hurree Singh. Fear clutched at his heart.

"Then— Oh, I say, if he's gone, these rotters must know something about it!" said Squiff.

"Look here!" cried Delarey. His eye had caught the glint of the dagger as it lay on the carpet.

The three Skinners had exchanged glances. Each of them read plainly the message the others sent.

Deny everything! Brazen it out! Nothing seen—nothing heard!

After all, they were prepared to swear that it was no fault of theirs. The window had been unlatched by Fishy—let Fishy bear the blame! If their "mere jape" had had tragic consequences, why should they shoulder responsibility for what they had never meant—what had never entered their wildest dreams?

The rest were staring at them. An expression of horror was upon the face of Mr. Prout. It seemed impossible that these boys had meant what the dagger seemed to say—and yet there it was!

None of the juniors took so black a view. They did not read as many shilling shockers as Mr. Prout!

They looked upon the dagger as a mere property article.

But little Sylvester threw a new light upon it.

"That is Koumi Rao's," he said. "I saw it once when he opened his box. There is an emerald in the hilt."

"Where can the lad be?" asked Mr. Prout, wrinkling his forehead in perplexity. He also did queer things with his gun in his agitation—things that made it prudent to give him plenty of room.

"I say, where's Wun Lung?" said Delarey. "Needn't ask where Fishy and Bunter are. That's easy guessing. But Wun Lung doesn't funk things."

"His minor, too," said Squiff. "Hang it all, has someone kidnapped all three of them? Did you fellows hear anything, or see anything?"

He turned so sharply upon the Skinners that they were almost surprised into telling the truth. James had his mouth open to speak, but he shut it again without actually being guilty of anything so contrary to the Skinner principles.

"Not a thing!" replied Harold sulkily. "How could we? It was dark. You can't shove this on to us! Whatever has happened to them—if anything has—we weren't in it."

But his voice was very shaky.

Harold Skinner was a hard case. But he was not so bad as to take this affair quite coolly, even apart from his fear for himself.

"We must make a search at once," said Mr. Prout. "Arm yourselves, all of you! Poker, tongs, cricket-bat—anything! As for these wretched young

scoundrels, they must go to the punishment-room at once. Field and Noble, will you see them there, and bring the key to me?"

The two marched the three off. No one thought it queer that the three went meekly. Squiff and Kangaroo were over the weight of that cowardly trio.

The search was begun at once. And within about two minutes Clifton Dane had found the unbolted door. That it should not have been unbolted Mr. Prout knew, for he had made a tour of inspection before going to bed.

It was Dane, too who found the tracks. In a patch of mud were the imprints of the feet of two men, and the Canadian junior, well up in scoutcraft, was certain that they had been carrying a burden between them.

Then Squiff and Kangaroo joined up again, and the search went on.

Electric torches made glimmers of light in the quad. Mr. Prout paced up and down with his rifle over his shoulder. Fish came creeping downstairs, with a haggard look on his hatchet face. By-and-by, when they were quite sure that there could be no danger for them, Billy and Sammy Bunter also appeared. They said that they had only just woke up.

But for some time no clue rewarded the searchers.

Half an hour must have passed before Squiff and Buck Finn, at the same moment, discovered spots of blood near the wall.

"I guess someone's been sloshed hyer!" said Buck gravely.

"Looks like it," returned Squiff. My hat! What a thing it is not to have a clue! We can't follow! There's no telling which way—"

"I calculate I've gotten a clue!" Buck said. "See hyer, some galoots have carried off Koumi Rao, sure! Waal, then, where air Wun Lung and Hop Hi? If you ask me, sircce, they're jest followin' up them galoots! And they were hot on the track, too, you bet! So one of the galoots turned and sloshed 'em hard—see?"

"Looks as if he might be right," said Dane.

"But the sloshfulness could not have —"

"Inky, old chap, you oughtn't to be out!"

"Rats! How can I stayfully remain within doors when—"

"That slosh didn't put 'em off it, though," went on Buck Finn, taking no notice of the fact that Squiff and Inky were talking. "I don't care who says what agin them Chinks, they're stickers! They're white men, though they do have yaller skins!"

"I don't know that anyone but you ever said anything against them, Buck," remarked Kangaroo.

"Waal, I take it all back! I'll ask their pardon! And thar ain't anyone keener than I am to find them leame tell you that!"

Some were quicker at starting on it, however, though Buck meant every word he said.

Delarey and Tom Brown were already over the wall. Squiff and Kangaroo and Clifton Dane followed them. Buck Finn was held back by Inky.

"May I politely request that the esteemed Buck will give me of his great kindness the necessitful bunkfulness?" said Inky.

"Eh? Gee-whiz! You talk some queer! Bunk you up—eh? But your bad leg won't—"

"It is not for the honour of a Nabob of Bhanipur to stand idle while his friends are in peril," said Inky. And Buck stared at him harder, for it might have been Koumi Rao talking.

Somehow or other, with the help of

the junior from Arizona, Inky got over the wall. He could not walk without pain; but he could walk, and that was enough for him.

Now Gosling appeared from his lodge, grumbling.

"Wot I says is this 'ere——"

Mr. Prout cut him short.

"Open the gates, Gosling! There has been black work here to-night!"

"Which it ain't——"

"No one is blaming you, man! Obey me at once!"

They were questing along the road now, the Colonial juniors and Inky. Even Fish had joined them. But Billy and Sammy Bunter kept close to Mr. Prout. It made them feel easier to be near a gun, even though it was more likely to injure them than anyone else if it was fired.

The place where the cart had stood under the trees was found. They made something out of that, for there were keen scouts among them.

"You don't mind if we follow up, sir?" said Squiff.

"My dear boy! Really, I cannot consent! The uncertainty, the danger, your people——"

"My governor would call me a rotten young funk if I wasn't on!" said Squiff.

"Same here!" Delarey said.

"Koumi Rao and the other two are in more danger, sir," was Tom Brown's plea.

Kangaroo said nothing at all. He meant to go, anyway.

"Quit the chin-waggin'!" said Buck Finn. "I reckon it's 'Quick march!' for mine, any road!"

Into the darkness they faded away, but down the road the gleam of their electric torches was seen now and then.

"Fish! Bunter!" said Mr. Prout.

"Fishy's gone, sir," said Billy Bunter meekly. "I—I felt that I couldn't disobey you, sir."

"Ha, hum! Hum, ha!" replied Mr. Prout.

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THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

To the Rescue!

MUCH might be told of the doings of that night. How they searched and found and lost tracks again; how at long last they had to give it up and return, the trail hopelessly lost; how stalwart Kangaroo carried Inky on his broad back for miles; how Buck Finn stuck to it like a good American, and even Fishy displayed surprising endurance; how little Sylvester finished the course in a dead faint, and in Tom Brown's arms; how the cheery pluck of Squiff and the cool contempt of fatigue and difficulties that Delarey and Dane showed helped to keep them all going. But at the end it was a record of failure!

Some of them would not go to bed even when they got back. They ate and rested for a while, and then six of them started out again.

Nothing had been seen of any of the three missing juniors. But other things had happened.

Bunter's copy of Skinner's letter had come into Mr. Prout's hands. It had been picked up by Trotter, who had thought it part of some spoof of the Owl's, and had not taken it seriously—until things happened.

Now Bunter was in the punishment-room with the three Skinners; and Fish would have had to go there, too, but for the fact that bed was so plainly the only place for him. He made a clean breast of the whole affair before he turned in. Fishy's heart was a small and flinty organ, but for once it was really moved, and he was most sincerely repentant.

"My hat! Did you hear that?"

In the clear air of a sunny, frosty morning, a dogcart, with a strong black horse between the shafts, was moving at a good pace along the Sussex lanes. Vernon-Smith drove, and Harry Wharton sat beside him. Behind, slung Frank Nugent was tucked in between Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry, warm as a toast.

They had slept overnight at an hotel some fifteen miles from Greyfriars, and now, fortified within by a good breakfast, were hoping to reach the school by the middle of the morning.

The driving scheme was the Boulder's, and he had insisted on defraying all expenses. A motor-car being out of the question, the dogcart and a horse capable of a long distance if driven properly had been obtained; and the five had enjoyed the trip no end thus far.

Harry Wharton's exclamation broke in upon an argument between Johnny and Bob.

"What?" growled Johnny.

"A shout! And—of course, it's absurd—but it sounded to me like Wun Lung's voice!"

"It can't be! Oh, I say! Look!"

Next moment the horse was left to himself in the road. All five had jumped down, and were rushing for a lonely cottage fifty yards away, and off the road.

For they had seen Wun Lung, or Hop Hi—which, they could not tell.

He disappeared next moment. The five ran as if for their lives.

As they neared the cottage the sound of a voice they knew came to them. It was the voice of Koumi Rao. But it spoke strange things.

"Ah, you pariah dogs!" it said. "I am he whom you sought! I am Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh, Nabob of Bhanipur!"

It rang proudly and clearly—that splendid lie; and—for none of the five were slow of wit—they who heard understood—in part, at least.

"Din! Din!" cried a fierce voice.

Not one of the five knew that word, and yet there was not one of them who failed to know what it meant—"Kill!" There was that in the savage tone which told.

They burst in at the door. One Hindu had Koumi Rao on the ground, striving to throttle him. The two Chinese were waging an unequal fight with the other.

"Greyfriars to the rescue!" yelled Bob.

No one else gave tongue. But the Boulder and Harry Wharton harled themselves like tigers at the would-be murderer, and Bob's weight helped them to send him crashing over, with all three on top of him.

Johnny and Frank sprang at the other dusky-skinned scoundrel. Round his neck went Johnny's strong arms, pulling him backwards. Frank pulled, too. Wun Lung, with a ferocious howl, hurled himself at him in front, scratching, kicking—biting, for all they knew. But they could forgive him even for that.

The odds were too big for Achmet Lal and Nana Sewani. Within five minutes they were securely tied up, and explanations were being asked, but not given.

Koumi Rao was as grateful as anyone could be, but not communicative. Wun Lung was at his worst—mysterious, elusive. Little Hop Hi was in no case to talk, and would not have talked if he had been.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" cried Bob. "Here come some of the chaps, just in time to miss the fun!"

Perhaps Bob had not really found it funny. But Bob was not the fellow to talk tragically when once the danger was over.

Squiff and Tom Brown and Delarey, Kangaroo and Dane and Buck Finn, in a

market-cart, with a big grey between the shafts, drove up. Somehow they had hit the track, and had followed it up. But they would have been too late.

It was some time before the whole story was pieced together. Wun Lung was very loth to explain anything, and it seemed no use asking Koumi Rao questions.

But it came out by degrees—how the two Chinese juniors had reached the wall just as Koumi Rao, quite insensible, was being lifted over it; how one of the kidnappers had turned and struck, felling Wun Lung; and how, helped by his brother, who had not been perceived by Achmet Lal in the gloom, Wun Lung, bleeding from a wound in the head, had yet struggled over the wall and held to the trail.

It seemed little short of a miracle that those two should have done what they did, for they must have clung behind the cart unperceived, unsuspected, all those weary miles through the cold, dark night. But Greyfriars knew how silent they could be, and the world knows how a Chinese can bear pain like a Stoic.

They were utterly tired out when the cart stopped, and they must have fallen into a ditch. Probably they lay unconscious for some time. But, still, they were not done—and one of them was hardly more than a child!

How hard they strove to gain an entrance into that silent house, where he whom they counted a friend lay im-

prisoned, one can only guess. What their feelings were they never tried to tell. But they must have feared that they would never see Koumi Rao alive again.

Probably they would not have done, but that some doubt had arisen in the minds of Achmet Lal and Nana Sewani as to whether, after all, they had not captured the wrong prince. That was what had caused Koumi Rao to lie to them. He had been told that his friend lay upstairs insensible, and they had demanded that he should tell them which of the two he truly was.

And he had told them. But he had not told them truly. He had lied to save Inky's life!

Just before that, Wun Lung and Hop Hi, who had been concealed close to the door since dawn, had contrived to slip in behind one of the kidnappers. From the window Wun Lung had seen the dog-cart, and had rushed out and shouted. Then came the rescue.

That was about all. Bunter or Fish would have made a novel in three volumes of it, and it would have been mostly lies. Those Orientals told little—they seemed to have a queer kind of feeling that these Asiatic games would not bear to be talked about too much in England—but the little they told was true, though Koumi Rao had lied in the face of death, and neither Wun Lung nor Hop Hi was quite a model of veracity, as a rule.

What Hurree Singh said to Koumi Rao when he knew, none other heard. But

when Inky left two days later—for the five who had come to fetch him stayed at the school till then—the words he said to him at parting were:

"Farewell, my brother!"

And Harry Wharton saw tears in Inky's eyes as he spoke.

The two kidnappers were delivered into the hands of the police. But high authority stepped in. There was no trial—at least, no public trial—in England. They were deported to India, where doubtless they paid the penalty of their attempted crime.

As for the Skinners and Bunter and Fish, they also paid the evildoers' penalty. Mr. Prout's arm ached when he had finished with them. He said many things, too, and if the Skinner trio did not go properly repentant, they went very sore and subdued. The Bunters were sent home, and Fishy developed quite a surprising amount of decency for the remainder of the holidays.

But Buck Finn would have no more to do with Fishy. He did his level best to chum up with Wun Lung and Hop Hi. Buck admitted that he had had a grouch against Asiatics generally; but that had gone, and he reckoned those four from the East—Koumi Rao, Hurree Singh, Wun Lung, and Hop Hi—were as white men as he had ever met!

(Don't miss "FLAP'S BROTHER!"

—next Monday's grand complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)

THE GREYFRIARS GALLERY.

No. 50.—ARTHUR CARNE:

CARNE is a pretty complete rotter.

One really finds it hard to say in what respect he is less black than Loder, though one thinks the votes of those who have followed their knavish tricks—on the printed page, that is, for one hopes that no reader would think of following them in the literal sense—would give the palm for villainy to Loder.

But when Carne shies at anything rascally proposed by Loder it is usually from funk.

Walker, or even Valence, may find a scheme quite too steep for him. But one could imagine Carne picking pockets if only he could see a way to do it with absolute safety!

It is rather a misfortune when a fellow of the Carne type is good at games. He almost invariably causes trouble for his captain by his ways. Carne is quite a good cricketer and footballer; but he will not be bothered to keep fit, and Wingate got fed up with him some time ago. He caught Carne smoking, and then there was more trouble through the black sheep's bullying tactics: and Carne refused to play in an important cricket-match, believing himself indispensable. He was not; Wingate put Harry Wharton in his place, and Harry helped to win the game, and the skipper vowed that Carne should never play again while he held the reins.

Carne was "act and part," as the law term goes, in Loder's attempt to bring over Coker to the black sheep brigade—for the sake of Aunt Judith's lavish tips, of course. But Horace, though not so wise as he thinks himself, is not a fool. It was n.g.

There was fresh trouble a little later over the footer eleven, in which Carne still held a place. Wingate kicked him out for refusing to practise. Some of the fellows thought that Wingate ought to give way when Carne's shady chums backed him up by resigning their places; but staunch Wingate would not cave in—he preferred to give up his office. That let in Coker as captain, for the school would not have Loder, and Courtney refused to stand. But King Horace had but a brief reign, and Wingate came back.

Arthur Carne is not a prefect. He held that dignity once, but lost it most deservedly. His luck was not as good as Loder's.



Arthur Carne

He was with Loder, Walker, and Ionides in bagging the supper which belonged to the Remove during the brief time when a prefect occupied a study on the Remove passage for disciplinary purposes. And he was in the flashlight photo of the Sixth Form beauties at cards in Loder's study which Ogilvy got after the supper had been eaten!

He was at that tea-party of Loder's when Wun Lung—who hates them all—was forced to do the cooking. Thereafter the little Chinese told them all that they had taken "velly strong Chinese poison" and might anticipate speedy demise "in great agony." They didn't die; but they had a rare fright.

But, though Loder and Carne are "pals," it is not in their line to take risks for one another's sake. When the trainer Sawyer, seeking to kidnap Mr. Lascelles, got hold of Loder instead, Walker and Carne found out next morning that Loder's bed had not been slept in. They jumped to the very reasonable conclusion that there was something or other that was disgraceful connected with his absence. They would have lied with glibness—but lies might have been found out. They were too much in the dark for lying. So Carne ruffled Loder's bed to make it look as if it had been slept in. It was not a great thing to do for an old chum; but it was as far as Carne's friendship would carry him in the circumstances.

Of course, Carne hates Wingate. The sort of fellow Carne is just naturally hates the sort of fellow Wingate is. And once Carne was quite sure that he had got the upper hand of the Greyfriars captain. The story was called "The Upper Hand," and it appeared not so very far back but that most of you will remember it. Carne spied on Wingate, found him giving succour to a convict in the caves by the seashore, practically blackmailed him, exulted like the cad he is in his power over a fellow worth ten thousand of him, and humbled Wingate's pride.

And after all the convict turned out to be—Carne's own father!

If there had been a scrap of good in Carne that experience should have converted him to paths of decency.

It did not!

When Carne is next prominent again, we find him in a plot with Pensonby of Highcliffe to drug the drink of the first eleven footer players in order that they may lose a match, and Pon and Carne may win their rascally bets. Carne worked the dodge under the cloak of hospitality. He asked the fellows he meant to drug to supper. If anything could have made his conduct seem blacker, it was just that. Even the savages have higher conceptions of what hospitality means!

But Bunter had heard, and Bunter told. Discredited at first, the tale came to be believed at length. Harry Wharton warned Wingate, and there was more doubt. But Wingate acted in the long run, and Carne was forced to drink some of the doctored stuff, and was completely howled out.

That, too, might have been a lesson, one would think. But lessons are wasted on this rotter!

TAKING COVER!

By SIDNEY DREW.

The Flight!

MR. BENJAMIN MADDOCK removed a short clay pipe from his mouth. To look at Mr. Maddock was like a breath of sea air. He was salty from the top of his bristly head to the soles of his ample boots—pickled by the sea.

He blew out a cloud of smoke, and nodded to his friend, Barry O'Rooney, Esq., very late of Ballybunion Castle, Ireland. They were both of the best, these two mariners, built of the best hemp ever grown, with a core of solid copper underneath, though they were not oil-paintings to look at. In fact, any person who was not totally blind would have buried their portraits if such a misfortune had placed them in his possession.

"Read it again, souse me!" said Mr. Benjamin Maddock, late of the famous steam-yacht with the high-sounding title, Lord of the Deep. "I ain't got a proper grip of it yet. Spin it again, souse me!"

Barry O'Rooney, Esq., refreshed himself from a tumbler which may or may not have contained ginger-ale.

"Bedad, Ben, Oi read every loine of ut as clare as print!" he said. "So fwat d'ye mane, rade ut agin? Oi'll give ye the gist of ut. Here's ould Tom Prout axin' us to go down for Christmas. He's in the country, is Tom. Ut's in a dug-out is Tom—in a dug-out, Oi tell ye."

"You don't mean to tell me, souse me, Barry, that ould Tom Prout is afraid of silly air-raids?" asked Maddock, glaring. "You don't dare to tell me that? He don't say that in his letter, does he?"

"Bedad, Oi've half a mind to pick up the table and bash ye wid ut!" said Barry O'Rooney. "Is ut ould Tom Prout that wud care the stump of a penny cigar for air-raids? Ut's a peaceful Christmas he wants. Ut's gentleness and joy he's axing fur wid his ould pals. Ut's me and you he wants to go down, d'ye see?"

A light of intelligence began to dawn in the eyes of the bo'sun. They were in luxurious surroundings, and sat in leather-covered chairs stuffed with horsehair. They had only to touch the bell to command the appearance of a liveried attendant, who would produce anything they wished for, from five-shilling cigars to priceless champagne, all free, gratis, and for nothing.

The room, the cigars, the champagne, the attendant, and everything else were the personal property of his Imperial Highness Prince Ching-Lung of Kwai-hai, China. The prince was a millionaire, and Mr. Barry O'Rooney and Mr. Thomas Prout respected him and admired him. Ching-Lung's skin was yellow, but he had been educated in England, and his heart was British to the very last drain of blood in it. With Ching-Lung and his friend Ferrers Lord, who was their employer and master, the two salty sea-dogs had roamed the wide world over and met with many adventures. And here they were in Ching-Lung's princely London home to spend Christmas.

It would have been a gorgeous Christmas; even the war could not have spoiled that. Mr. Thomas Prout had also been invited, but he was not there. Ben Maddock's next remark explained why.

"It's that Eskimo—that Gan-Waga, souse me!"

"Bedad, ye've got ut, Ben!" said Barry O'Rooney. "It's that baste of an Eskimo Moind ye, ut's not that Oi'm not fond o' the rogue. All Oi'd do to him, Oi'd break him into small pieces and make a necklace wid him. The trouble is that the prince is beholdin' him all the toime. We've suffered enough, bhoy, to understand that. And the spalpeen knows ut. Av Oi'd known ut, Oi'd niver have left swate Ballybunion, me choildhood's home, to go to say. Av Oi'd known—"

The door opened. Mr. Barry O'Rooney shut down with promptitude. A gentleman whose build was short and very wide waddled into the room. His eyes were like little glass beads, and he had no nose worth speaking about. His hair was of the blackest jet, and hung in little tallowy wisps. He was fat, and his mouth was vast. He smiled, displaying his full set of thirty-two teeth, white and gleaming, perhaps as fine a set of natural teeth as ever existed in the head of any human being. It was Gan-Waga, the Eskimo.

"Hallo, Haddicks! Hallo, Barry O'Loona-

ties!" said Gan-Waga. "Ho-ho-hoo-hoo! How you waxes, my butterfuls boys, hunk? I feel just sweetness to sees yo'. Shakes hands, yo' uglifuls ole rascals!"

Ben and Mr. Barry O'Rooney shook hands with Mr. Gan-Waga. They were very glad to see him after a separation of some months, but they were not easy in their minds. Gan beamed on them, and then took out a splendid cigar-case with gold mounts. It belonged to Prince Ching-Lung, but as Gan-Waga helped himself as he chose to any of Ching-Lung's belongings, and the prince did not object, that did not matter.

"We're smoking pipes, Gan," said the bo'sun hastily and distrustfully, "so you needn't offer us one."

"Don't yo' worries, ole stick-in-the-mud-ness," said Gan-Waga, opening the case. "These cigars a lots too much butterfulness fo' yo'. Ho, ho, ho, ho, hoo! I notted had lunches yetness. This my lunches, ole dears."

The case did not contain any of Ching-Lung's rare and expensive cigars. It contained twelve tallow candles, six on each side. Gan took out one. It vanished into his mouth, and, grasping the wick, he jerked it clean away, and munched the tallow, smacking his lips and patting himself over the watch-pocket.

"Hilp!" said Barry O'Rooney faintly. "Oi mane— Fwat do Oi mane? Ut's Christmas, isn't ut, Ben?"

He fixed a nervous eye on the Eskimo. Gan-Waga gulped down the first candle, and took a second. The bo'sun, who detested fat in every shape and form except that of fresh butter, shuddered.

"I think I'll run out and buy a new pipe or two," he said hastily. "This one is getting a bit strong, souse me!"

"Ut's the very thing Oi want meself," said Barry, with equal haste. "Oi'll come wid ye, Ben, ould darlint."

They made for the door. Gan-Waga munched and blinked his little black eyes, listening intently. Suddenly came a clatter and a terrific howl. It was gloomy on the landing. Mr. Benjamin Maddock placed one boot on the top stair, and extended the second one to find the next stair. He stepped on a massive tea-tray, and the result was a violent skid. The next moment, quite against his will, he sat down hard on the tray, and had a cheap ride without having to trouble to ring for the lift.

"Fwat are ye doin' at all, at all, ye son of a gun? Is ut laving me, ye are?" roared Barry from above.

From the darkness below came a howl and a thud. The lights went up. Mr. Maddock had reached the mat at the foot of the staircase with great swiftness. Barry glanced behind him apprehensively, and then, forgetting all dignity, he slid down the banisters like a schoolboy.

"Ha, ha, ha-a-a-h! Oh, ha-a-a-h! Oh, ha-a-a-a-hoo!" laughed a voice.

Mr. Benjamin Maddock had risen. He was not hurt, nor was he scared; he was merely uneasy.

"Souse me, I'm going, Barry!" he said. "I'm hopping it and heating it. You've got Tom Prout's address?"

"Am Oi loikely to forget ut?" said Barry. "Oi'm loike ould Tom, and ut's pace Oi'm wishin' fur—swate, beautiful pace! There'll be no peaceful Christmas wid this spalpeen of an Eskimo. The Bungalow, Little Gimpsford, that's the address. And Oi've the letter in me pocket. Harrk at him, the spalpeen! Just harrk, Ben!"

"Ha, ha, ha-a-a-h! Oh-ooh! Ha-a-a-hah! Oh, ha-a-a-a-hah-a-hoo-oo-coh!" laughed Gan-Waga. "Oh, dears, dears! Somebody's fopped bumpity-bumpitdnesses! Oh, my! Ho, ho, ho, ho-ooh!"

Barry clutched Maddock's arm, and they went out together into the cold, dark street.

Christmas with Prince Ching-Lung would have been glorious; but where Ching-Lung was there was nearly always to be found that fat and pampered Eskimo, Gan-Waga. And Gan-Waga was the uttermost limit.

"Bedad, ut's beginning to snow, bad luck to ut!" said Barry O'Rooney. "But av ut snowed fifty million blizzards we're off to Tom. We'll get the car out of the garage, Ben, darlint, and sloide. Oi'm fed up!"

Barry had made no mistake about Tom Prout's address. The mistake he made was to leave that mariner's letter behind him.

Mr. Prout's Dug-out!

MR. THOMAS PROUT was as hard as flint physically, and as bald as an ostrich-egg. Prout had purchased the bungalow at Little Gimpsford for a mere song, for it happened to lie in one of the hottest corners of the raid area. When a bomb from a Gotha had blown his pretty little home off the map, Mr. Thomas Prout, luckily for the good of his health, had happened to be away. Such trifles as that did not upset the gallant mariner. Finding the bungalow very much down and very badly out, he had at once set to work to make a more secure home in the back garden.

A cold moru looked down on a white, snow-clad earth as a motor-car came along the road and drew up beside the ruins of Mr. Thomas Prout's abode. Two goggled, blue-nosed gentlemen alighted, and clapped their gloved hands together and stamped their chilly feet.

"Tom, ye spalpeen, where art ye, at all, at all?" roared the voice of Barry O'Rooney. "A Merry Christmas, Tom!"

From the interior of what appeared to be an overgrown white mushroom shone a welcome beam of light.

"The same to you, and many of 'em!" growled an answering voice. "By honey, I was just thinking you were selling me a pup and not coming at all! How are you? Come below, boys! Nobody'll touch the car."

Barry and Ben Maddock followed Prout down the steps of his dug-out. It was filled with warmth and light, an appetizing smell and a sizzling sound. A bright fire was burning in the grate. In a frying-pan a splendid beefsteak sizzled, surrounded by onions that were rapidly turning brown. On one hob a saucepan bubbled, on the other a kettle steamed. Lifting the kettle, Prout poured some of the boiling water into a bowl. From that bowl arose fragrance. The owner of the dug-out filled three glasses with amber-coloured liquor.

"Rum-punch, bedad, and nigh as good as me Uncle Dennis used to make in the ould days," said Barry. "Ut's snug quarters ye have in this funk-hole, Tom. Faith, and a mistletoe-bough and sprigs of holly, and a rale Christmas-three! Oi'm glad we came, Ben. There's no danger of a shortage of ateables and drinkables, ould bhoy!"

"By honey, I've enough for ten people!" said Prout. "The prince invited me like he did you, but I remembered that blubberbiting Eskimo. It's more peaceful here, even with bombs dropping, and I wanted to be quiet. There's no peace and quiet where that candle-chewing, oil-swallowing Eskimo is. Boys, we'll be happy!"

He closed the iron door, and they clinked glasses. Prout and Barry had had a long and cold journey. Prout dished up the steak and onions, and added potatoes piping-hot from the saucepan and bursting out of their skins.

"There's mince-pies in the oven to follow," said Prout; "and for to-morrow, by honey, I've got a turkey that'll make your mouths water to look at! I tell you, we'll have a jolly time!"

Then came a silence, broken alone by the clatter of knives and forks and the pleasant crackling of the fire. At last Barry O'Rooney heard a contented sigh, and lifted the bowl of punch out of the fender where it had been keeping warm.

"Sure, Oi could wroite a poem about this place," he said. "Oi'd startt ut loike this. 'No more Oi wish to roam, Oi love this peaceful home, Beneath a bomb-proof dome. This swate dug-out, of Thomas Prout, Where the steak is noise and tender and Gan-Waga ain't about.' Bedad, Oi could kape on in that stoile for hours!"

"You'd better not, souse me!" said Maddock warningly. "I don't want to have to kill you on Christmas Eve, Barry, but I'd sooner have Gan-Waga and bombs than the ghastly stuff you call poetry, so cut it out, souse me! Good-ealth, boys, and the compliments of the season! What's the old chanty, souse me?"

"And to me!" sang Barry, with upraised glass.

"Ay!" roared the bo'sun and the proprietor of the dug-out.

"And we'll furl!" chanted Barry.

"Ay, and we'll pay Daddy Doyle for his

(Continued on page 16.)

TAKING COVER!

(Continued from page 15.)

boots!" chimed in Maddock and Prout, with vigour.

After this delightful little musical effort the three mariners drained their glasses and shook hands. They refilled their glasses, lighted their pipes, and drew their chairs up to the fire.

"Ut'll be Christmas morn in foive minutes," said Barry, glancing at the clock. "Soon the merry bells will be ringin' out their message of peace over the cowlid, whoite snow. And isn't ut pace? Plain and simple ut is compared wid the gilded hall's of Ching-Lung, but Oi love ut. Troth, Oi'm glad we came!"

Maddock put another slice of lemon in his glass. Presently the clock chimed the birth of another Christmas Day. Down the snowy road a second motor-car came gliding. It stopped, and two men stepped down—Ching-Lung and his shadow, Gan-Waga. They stole forward to the steps of the dug-out and vanished below.

"Oi'll open the dure an inch, Tom," said Barry, rising. "Ut's a beautiful dug-out intirely, but wid such a roarin' fire ut gets a throille hot, ould bhoys. Oi'll let in a happy, peaceful Christmas and a hatful of fresh air at the same toime. Arrah, that's moiles better!" he added. "Chunks of ut!"

The Raid!

HIS HIGHNESS PRINCE CHING-LUNG lay in the snow on one side of the steps, and Gan-Waga lay prone on the other side. Gan struck a match. Below him he could see the light from the open door. A round object went rolling down the steps, emitting a few sparks in its descent. Something had happened to the garden. Except where the heat from the chimney had caused a thaw, the dome of the dug-out remained white, but the garden itself was almost bare of snow. The snow was not lost, but had merely altered its shape and shifted its position. It now stood at the head of the steps in the form of an enormous snowball.

"He gonaded, Chingy!" gurgled the voice of Gan-Waga. "Dears, dears! I think that fetches them out all rightness, Chingy."

The fizzing-ball bounded out of sight. It rolled into the dug-out. Barry was the first to see it.

"Great snakes and scorpions!" he yelled, "Ut's a raid! The Huns are dhropping bombs, and Oi've left the dure—"

Then the bomb exploded. It did not make a terrific noise, or blow the dug-out and its occupants into the next parish but one. It gave a hideous, swishing sound, and began to hop round with great agility, emitting streams of sparks and clouds of choking smoke. Maddock smote at it wildly with a chair, and hit it. He drove it clean through the face of the clock. The clock struck twenty-seven, but they did not linger to count the silvery chimes. Choked and gasping, and with bulging eyes, they made for the door.

"Help and murder, but ut's gassed Oi am!" wailed Barry. "Whoy did Oi lave swate Ballybunion, me childhood's home, widout me gas-mask? Ough, ough! Oi'm strangled!"

"Souse me, take your great hoof away!" shouted Maddock, as they struggled up the steps. "You're treadin' on my hand! I'll make your face look uglier than any gas-mask after I've done with you!"

Ching-Lung and Gan-Waga smiled two happy smiles as they listened to the scuffling and anguished howls. Their shoulders were pressed against the snowball.

"I thinks we better let them haves this butterfuls Christmas presents now, Chingy, old dears," said the Eskimo sweetly. "They must be hots, Chingy, and they'll be glad to get coolness."

"Heave!" said Ching-Lung. "It's a good thing, blubberbiter, so push it along."

The snowball descended. Barry's ascent had been a good deal retarded by the ungenerous conduct of Benjamin Maddock, who was clinging to his ankle. Though Barry had experienced some difficulty in going up, he found it the easiest thing in the world to go down when the snowball hit him. He fell heavily against Maddock, carrying that astonished and startled gentleman away with him. For a second or two Prout sturdily

endeavoured to withstand the strain of holding them both up.

It was too much even for Prout's iron muscles.

"By honey," he shouted, "don't push! Don't push, I tell you! Ow! It can't be done! I'm—by honey, I'm scuttled!"

Prout tumbled backwards into the dug-out, with Maddock on top of him and Barry following so closely that it was almost a dead-heat. Then came the triumphant avalanche of snow, burying them completely, and hiding their grief and sorrows beneath a cool, white canopy.

The smoke had almost cleared away. The snow heaved up, and clawing hands and kicking feet protruded. Then three flushed and angry faces emerged from the feecy heap. The clock had finished striking by this time. Only sports and heavy breathing disturbed the placid calm for a few moments.

"Souse me, it ain't an air-raid!" said Maddock, in a hoarse voice. "It's them!"

"The blubberbiter!" groaned Barry wildly. "We're thracked down! Oh, whoy did Oi lave me swate home in—"

Someone was singing a carol, and well, only too well, they knew that sweet and tuneful voice, though they did not recognize the carol, as it was an original composition of Gan-Waga's.

"We wishes yo' Merry Christmas.

Yo' uglifil bounders down theres—

Ole Prouts, Loonatic, and Maddock!

And how yo' likes yo' presents, hunk?"

The owner of the dug-out rose and shook himself.

"Oh, come down, by honey," he cried, "and shake hands, and help to clean up this mess! We'll have a good time yet, after all. A Merry Christmas!"

THE END.

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THE BALLOON WRECK!

By BOB CHERRY.

"HERE'S Wapshot!" said Harry, as we arrived at the military camp. "Look out for Lieutenant Ladey!"

We found the Lieutenant—he was an old acquaintance of Wharton's, and much more of a man than his name suggested—standing by his balloon. He was going up for a trial trip, and had promised to take Harry and Frank with him. The important part of the programme allotted to me and Johnny and Inky was to watch and cheer.

"Just in time!" the lieutenant greeted us. "In you get!"

"Keep your eyes open for Hollesohn, the escaped Hun, you know!" I told Harry and Franky, as they boarded the basket-like car. "You might run across him up there!"

"In a Zepp—what! Not likely! So long, Bob!" laughed Harry. "In case we never come down, we'll say good-bye!"

Lieutenant Ladey stood by me and Johnny for a minute or two fastening the belt which girded his rain-coat—a ripping belt which had been presented to him for capturing a beastly Hun sniper.

We watched him curiously, and none of us noticed that same beastly Hun sniper Hollesohn—who had been escaped some time—creep up to the balloon and sever the ropes which held it to earth as coolly as you please.

We fairly staggered as it rushed aloft. Up, up it went, diminishing swiftly, till it seemed only the size of a football. Johnny and I looked agape at each other.

"Oh, gad! Look!" roared Ladey.

Horror of horrors! Tongues of flame began to shoot out of it, accompanied by dense volumes of smoke. The balloon was on fire!

It formed a cloud of its own in the clear blue sky. The basket swayed horribly, just like a pendulum, but the smoke grew so thick that it was almost lost to sight.

Only for a few moments. Then out of the far-away cloud a small black speck became visible. It got bigger and bigger at every instant. It was the basket, descending at a sickening speed!

We saw it with uncanny distinctness. Objects—we knew not what—hurtled out of it as it turned completely over, but it beat them to the ground, and crashed into fragments on the crags a furlong from where we were standing.

Imagine how quickly we rushed to the spot!

Ladey had ordered a few men to pursue

Hollesohn, but there was no need. He was lying not far from the mangled wreckage, struck down practically by his own hand. A heavy spanner from the car had crushed in his skull as he was making his escape.

He flickered a smile up at us when we came up, muttered that he wished Ladey had been in the balloon, and then lay back.

When it was all over I turned to Wharton and whispered—by the way, I forgot to mention that Wharton and Nugent had stepped out of the car before the Hun cut the ropes!—I whispered—

[Never mind what you whispered! You've said enough!—H. W.]

THE END.

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Monday:

"FLAP'S BROTHER!"

By Frank Richards.

This fine story introduces to the MAGNET Philip and Philippa Derwent, the Twins from Tasmania, one of them at Highcliffe, the other at Cliff House. The serial now running in the "Gem," in which they play the principal parts, is immensely popular; and I feel sure that the MAGNET readers who have not yet made the acquaintance of Flip and Flap will like those two fine samples of Colonial youth even as the readers of our companion paper do. I am not going to give away the plot; the yarn is quite one of Mr. Richards' best, and I don't want to take any of the edge off next week's appetite. But I may say that Cocky comes into it, and Bunter plays a ventriloquist part, and Frank Courtenay and the Caterpillar are in evidence.

AN EXPLANATION.

Call it an apology if you like—I am not too proud to apologise!

Among the attractions listed for last week's great number were stories which, after all, you are not getting till this week. Couldn't be helped—miscalculations of space will occur at times. Mr. Richards' Christmas yarn ran out a bit longer than I had expected it to do; and the "Magnet Who's Who" took up somewhat more space than the "Gem Who's Who" did. But you have not really lost anything—you are getting Mr. Drew's yarn in this number, and Squiff's wild effort of the imagination will appear next week.

BACK NUMBERS, Etc., WANTED.

By Percy Digby, St. Girons, Arlege, France. —Second-hand bicycle tyre, 10 by 35.

By Harold Hildersley, 61, Oldpark Road, Belfast.—"School and Sport," and stories dealing with Bob Cherry prominently—before No. 414.

By James Gilmore, 13, Cullingtree Street, Belfast.—A good fretwork outfit.—State lowest price.

By R. Levy, 174, Linthorpe Road, Middlesbrough.—"Fisky's Fag Agency," "Figgins' Fig-Pudding," "Wun Lung's Secret," "Tom Merry Minor," "Postal Order Conspiracy," "Figgins' Folly," "Two of the Sixth."

By Alfred Walmsley, Taieri Beach, Dunedin, New Zealand.—"School and Sport" and "The School on Strike."

By J. R. Thomas, 1, Sherwood Road, Keynsham, Somerset.—Any numbers of MAGNET with the old orange cover.

By W. Martin, 5, High Cross Cottages, Tottenham, N.—MAGNET and "Gem," Nos. 1-300, with a few exceptions.—Please write before sending.—2d. each for those earlier than 150; 1d. later. Also MAGNET, No. 344; "Gem," Nos. 302, 305, 310, 314, 324, 325, 335, and 379—2d. each offered.

Your Editor