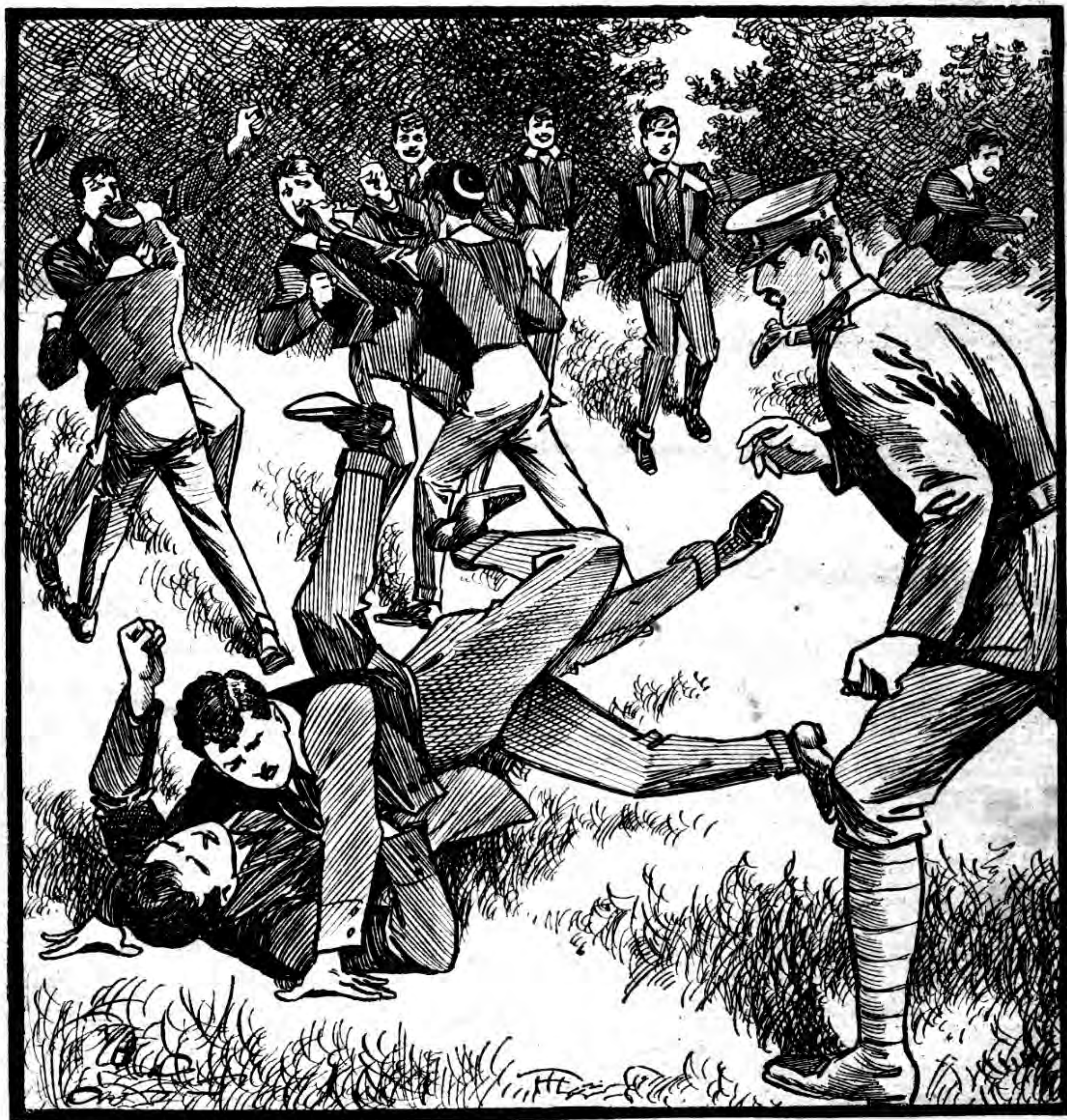


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HIS COUNTRY'S CALL!



A BATTLE ROYAL!

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HIS COUNTRY'S CALL!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

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



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Rather Mysterious!

"H ALLO, hallo, hallo! What's Bunter up to?"

Harry Wharton & Co. were chatting in the quadrangle at Greyfriars, near the entrance of the old Cloisters, when Bunter came along, and Bob Cherry made that remark.

Billy Bunter was blinking about him through his big spectacles with an air of extreme caution.

His manner, in fact, was more than cautious; it was stealthy.

The Famous Five grinned as they saw him.

They were not very far from Bunter, in the shadow of the Cloisters; but the fat junior did not see them, being too short-sighted to observe them against the grey old stones.

To see Bunter slinking past with such excessive caution, and in full view all the time, struck the chums of the Remove as comic.

"He's up to something," grinned Bob. "Two to one he's been raiding somebody's rations, and he's going into a quiet corner to devour them."

"Very likely!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"He's got a letter in his paw," remarked Nugent. "Perhaps it's his postal-order come at last!"

"The perhapsfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the likeliness is a boot on the other foot."

The juniors chuckled softly as Billy Bunter disappeared among the old stone pillars, evidently satisfied that he had not been observed.

"Follow your leader!" murmured Bob. "If he's bagged somebody's rations we'll jump on him suddenly as a warning. Quiet!"

The five juniors, entering into the joke, trod softly on Billy Bunter's trail.

Ahead of them, the Owl of the Remove rolled on among the stone pillars, the letter still clutched in his fat hand.

He blinked round once, still cautious; and Harry Wharton & Co. flattened themselves against the pillars near at hand, and the short-sighted Owl did not observe them.

Then onward rolled Bunter again.

But he stopped suddenly as he almost ran into a slim, good-looking junior, who was pacing in the Cloisters with his hands in his pockets and a moody frown upon his brow.

It was Dick Hilary, the new boy in the Remove.

Hilary was walking towards Bunter, his eyes on the ground. The Owl almost collided with him, and jumped back.

Hilary stopped, too, a little startled.

Bunter thrust his fat hand, holding the letter, into his pocket at once, a look of alarm on his face.

"You blessed Conchey, you made me jump!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "Why don't you look where you are going?"

"Sorry!" said Hilary mildly. "I did not see you, Bunter. I was thinking."

Bunter sniffed.

"Thinking about your conscientious pater!" he sneered. "How is he getting on at Dartmoor? He, he, he!"

Hilary made an angry movement; his "conscientious" pater was a very sore point with the new boy at Greyfriars.

Bunter jumped away in alarm. Bunter was not at all conscientious; but certainly he was not a hero.

"Here, keep off!" he exclaimed, putting up both fat hands, one of them with the letter in it. "Keep off, you beast!"

"I'm not going to touch you," said Hilary contemptuously. "You're not worth it, Bunter!"

"Yah!" was Billy Bunter's telling and elegant reply to that.

But feeling safer as Hilary turned away, he gave a loud and scornful sniff. Hilary turned back, and Bunter jumped again; but the new junior's intent was not hostile.

"You've dropped a letter," he said.

"What?"

Bunter looked more alarmed than ever as he observed that the letter had slipped from his fat hand. He blinked round in search of it almost frantically. It had fluttered a couple of yards from him, and was nearer Hilary, and the new boy good-naturedly stooped to pick it up for him. Before he could touch it, however, Bunter spotted it, jumped forward, and shoved him back. Then Bunter snapped up the letter, and jammed it into his pocket.

"You let my letter alone!" he gasped.

"You fat idiot!" exclaimed Hilary angrily. "I was going to pick it up for you, because you're as blind as an owl!"

"Well, you let it alone!" said Bunter. "I don't want Conchies to touch my property."

Hilary clenched his hand, and the Owl of the Remove rolled on hastily, disdaining to pursue the argument further.

The new boy walked moodily away, and a dozen paces farther on came on Harry Wharton & Co., who had been watching the scene with grinning faces.

"Join up, kid," said Bob Cherry.

"What?"

"We're tracking down Bunter! He hasn't seen us," chuckled Bob. "I fancy he's got hold of somebody's rations, and has skulked in here to scoff them. Join up and jump on him with us!"

Hilary smiled, but he did not join the Famous Five as they went on. He was not in a mood for a rag.

The five juniors continued to "track" Bunter, who halted at the iron gates at the extremity of the old Cloisters.

There he leaned against a pillar and began to open the letter.

Bob Cherry gave a grunt.

It was not a case of scoffed rations; after all; Bunter had evidently retired to that secluded spot merely to read his letter.

He was reading it with great interest, too, and grinning over it.

"What a sell!" growled Bob. "Let's bump him, anyway, on spec."

"Good idea!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "If he hasn't scoffed any rations to-day he did yesterday, and he will to-morrow."

"He, he, he!" came from Billy Bunter. "Oh, my hat! What a lark! He, he, he!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "Has your postal-order come at last, Bunter?"

Billy Bunter jumped again.

For the first time now he perceived the Famous Five, and he blinked at them with startled uneasiness, at the same time thrusting the letter into his pocket.

"I—I say, you fellows—" he stuttered.

"What are you so jolly mysterious about, Bunter?" demanded Harry Wharton. "We thought you'd been scoffing somebody's grub, and we came along to scalp you."

"Oh, really, Wharton, as—as if I'd do such a thing!" said Bunter. "Nothing of the sort, you know! There wasn't anything in your study cupboard—"

"What?"

"I—I mean, I never looked into your cupboard; I haven't been near the study for—weeks!" stammered Bunter. "I—I was just retiring here, you know, to—to admire the scenery."

"The scenery! Those old gates?"

"Ye-es—I—I mean no, of—of course not! I—I was going to meditate, I mean, in—in solitude," stuttered Bunter.

The chums of the Remove stared at him.

Billy Bunter's uneasiness was very evident, but it was equally unaccountable. There was nothing for him to be alarmed about, so far as they could see, as he had not been guilty of one of his periodical raids upon other fellows' provisions. But plainly he was alarmed. His unusually transparent whoppers were a proof of that.

"You came here to meditate in solitude!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Well, my hat! That takes the cake! Are you potty?"

"Yes—I—I mean, no! The—the fact is, I've had a letter from my—my uncle at the Front, and I—I want to read it quietly. Let a fellow alone! He's been killed, you know!" said Bunter reproachfully.

"And he's written to you afterwards?" yelled Bob.

"I—I mean wounded—severely wounded—"

"And you were grinning over the letter like a Cheshire cat!"

"That—that's because I was so pleased to hear that he'd got over it!" gasped Bunter. "You see, my cousin was—"

"Your what?"

"Cousin. He's been in the thick of it,

right in the front at the attack on Brussels—"

"Brussels!" ejaculated Wharton.

"I mean Cologne," said Bunter hastily. "That is to say, Berlin—I mean—or—Amsterdam. I say, you fellows, don't you worry a chap when he's reading a letter from his brother at the Front!"

"His brother!" howled Nugent. "Which is it—uncle or cousin or brother?"

"If any!" grinned Bob.

"The Kaiser's a fool to that chap, when it comes to lying," said Johnny Bull. "I'll bet you that's somebody else's letter he's got, and that's what he's scared about."

Bunter broke into a run, and vanished among the pillars.

"Come and give up that letter, you fat rascal!" shouted Bob Cherry wrathfully.

But Bunter had vanished.

Ten minutes later, hidden in a dusky corner of the old tower, Bunter sat down breathlessly to read the letter in peace. And the Famous Five would have been assured that Johnny Bull's surmise was correct if they could have seen the superscription on that letter, for it was addressed to Richard Hilary, the new boy at Greyfriars!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter Feels Justified!

MR. QUELCH, the master of the Remove, turned his severe glance expressively upon Bunter several times in class that afternoon.

The Owl was too short-sighted to observe it, however.

Billy Bunter seemed very pleased with himself that afternoon, to judge by the grins that wreathed his fat face—grins which, in the Remove-master's opinion, were quite out of place in the Form-room.

Once or twice William George Bunter drew a letter from his pocket, and blinked at it under his desk, and grinned again.

The Form-master's disapproving glances drew general attention to Bunter, and Tom Redwing nudged him as a warning. Bunter blinked round at him.

"Quelch's got his eye on you!" whispered Redwing.

"Dry up, Reddy, you ass!" whispered Vernon-Smith. "He's got his eye on you now!"

"Redwing!" rumbled Mr. Quelch.

"Ye-es, sir?"

"You were speaking to Bunter."

"Ahem!"

"Kindly refrain from talking in class, Redwing."

"Yes, sir!" stammered Tom, with a red face.

"Bunter!"

"I—I wasn't talking, sir," stammered Bunter. "Redwing spoke to me, sir—like his cheek, I thought, too!"

"Oh!" murmured Tom, quite overcome by that sample of Billy Bunter's gratitude for a good-natured tip.

"Bunter, I am aware that you were not talking. But you are not paying proper attention. For what reason, sir, are you grinning in class like a clown in a circus?" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, sir! Yes, sir! No, sir!" stammered Bunter.

"Do you regard the Form-room, Bunter, as a proper place for grinning like a clown in a circus?"

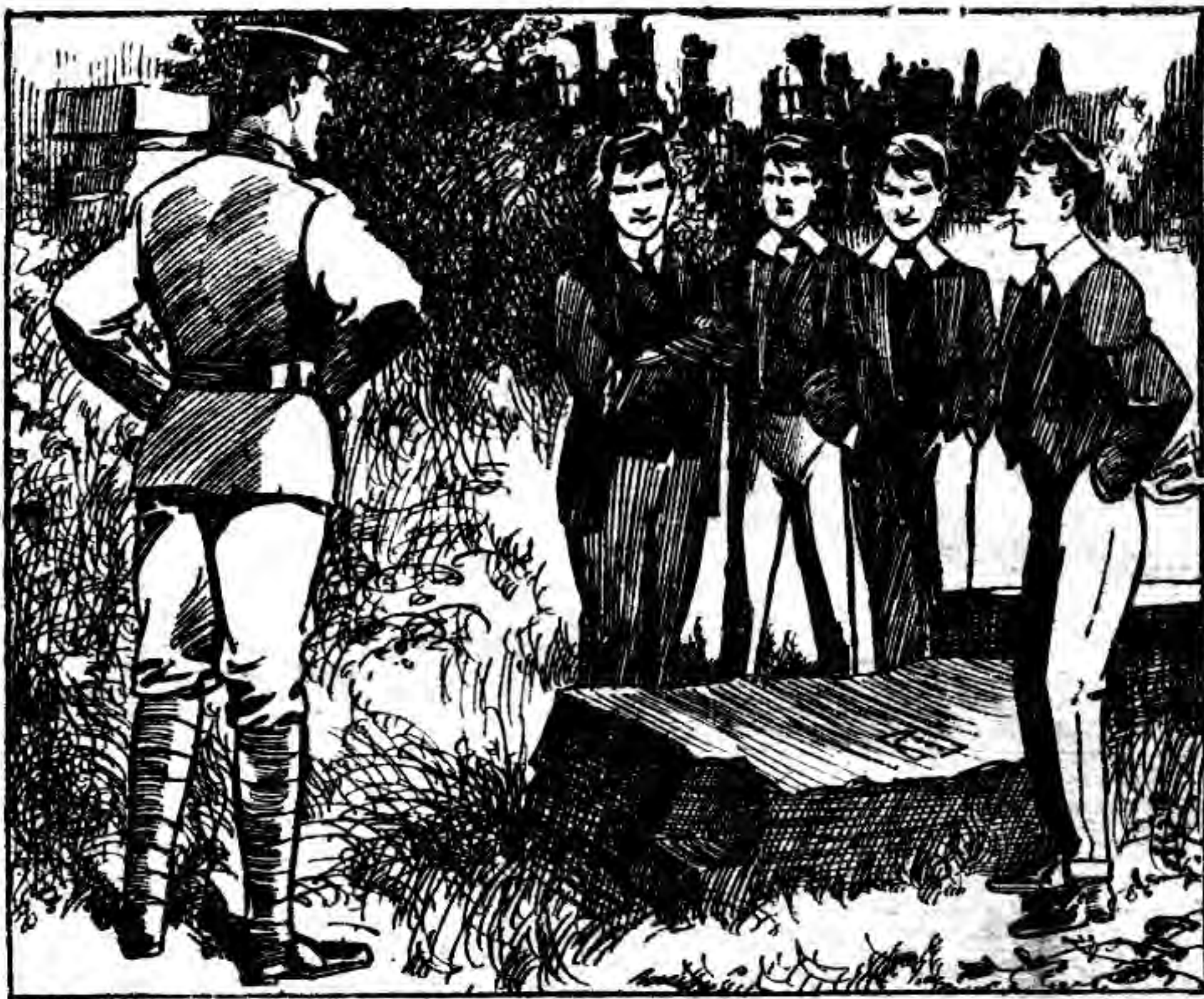
"Yes, sir—"

"What?"

"I—I mean, no, sir!" spluttered Bunter. "Not at all, sir. I—I wouldn't think of such a thing. I—I was as solemn as anything, sir."

There was a titter in the class.

"Silence! Bunter, kindly understand



The slackers and the soldier! (See Chapter 5.)

that in the Form-room you are expected to maintain an attitude of respectful attention!"

"Oh, certainly, sir!" gasped Bunter.

After that the Owl of the Remove ceased to grin. The terror of catching Mr. Quelch's gimlet eye was sufficient to reduce him to gravity.

When the Remove were dismissed Bob Cherry clapped Bunter on the shoulder in the corridor.

"What's the screaming joke?" he asked.

"J-j-joke?" stuttered Bunter.

"Yes. What were you grinning at in class?"

"Only your face, old chap," answered Bunter. "Couldn't help it!"

And Bunter rolled away hastily, leaving Bob Cherry to digest that explanation at his leisure.

"Why, I—I—I'll—" exclaimed Bob, in great wrath.

"You'll come down to the footer, old scout," said Harry Wharton, catching him by the arm, with a laugh; and Bob swallowed his wrath and went.

"Conchy!"

That unpleasant word was whispered in the passage as Dick Hilary went along from the Form-room.

Hilary's face flushed, and he looked round.

Skinner, Snoop, and Stott were grinning in a group near him, and they grinned all the more as they met his glance.

Hilary was about to speak, but he checked himself, and walked on. Squiff of the Remove gave Skinner & Co. a wrathful look, and joined Hilary as he was going out.

"Coming along to the footer, kid?" asked the Australian junior cheerily.

Hilary shook his head, without speaking.

"Oh, come on!" urged Squiff. "Surely you play footer?"

"I should like to. But—"

"Well, now's your chance to get some practice with the Form."

Hilary crimsoned.

"I'd like to," he repeated. "But—well, I know I'm not welcome there, Field, and I'll keep away."

"Rot!" answered Squiff. "Welcome as the flowers in May, my son!"

"I don't think the son of a Conscientious Objector is welcome anywhere," said Hilary, with a sigh. "I wish I'd never been sent to Greyfriars."

"Bosh! You can't help your father's faults."

Hilary drew himself up quickly.

"I stand by my father!" he said sharply.

"My mistake; of course you do," agreed Squiff good-naturedly. "Chap must stand by his pater through thick and thin. But don't be dramatic, old sport. Come along to the footer. It will do you good."

And the cheery Squiff took Hilary's arm and marched him off, and Dick Hilary went doubtfully; but he was glad to go. Skinner & Co. looked after them from the doorway with sneering faces.

"Field's making himself jolly civil to that outsider," said Skinner. "I don't speak to him myself."

"Except to call him a Conchy!" grinned Snoop.

"Pretty rotten to have such a fellow here!" said Skinner virtuously. "The chap doesn't seem to know we're at war. Suppose everybody was a Conscientious Objector, what would become of us?"

"What the thump does it matter what becomes of you, Skinner?" Bolsover major's growling voice chimed in. "If the Tommies hadn't anything better than you to fight for I'd advise 'em to go on strike!"

And Bolsover major glared aggressively at Skinner, who backed away a pace. He was not looking for trouble with the bully of the Remove.

"That chap's all right," went on Bolsover. "His father seems to be a bit of a worm, or a crank, but he can't help that! He didn't bring his father up, did he?"

"He's a chip of the old block, anyhow," said Snoop. "He says so himself. He doesn't make it a secret that he backs up his pater."

"Yes, and he needs a lot of nerve to do that here," said Bolsover major. "You wouldn't have nerve enough."

"I don't want that kind of nerve," sneered Snoop. "You were down on him more than I was a week or two ago, Bolsover."

"He's stood up to me since then, and taken a terrific hiding, and fought it out to a finish," said Bolsover major. "He learned a lot of rot at home, and tried to live up to it here, that's all. He's seen sense since then. I'd like to see one of you chaps stand up to me for half the rounds he did. Poof!"

"Well, I don't like Conchies, for one," said Skinner.

"It's his pater who's a Conchy, not Hilary. And if the military age were put down to fifteen I'll bet Hilary would go sooner than you would, Skinner."

"Oh, rats!" grunted Skinner uneasily. He could not help feeling the truth of that observation.

"And if the war goes on long enough for you to be called up, I know you'll be an objector, if not a giddy conscientious one," pursued Bolsover major surlily. "You let Hilary alone! His father's a crank, but that's not his fault, and it's plucky of him to back up his pater."

And Bolsover major snorted and strode away. Since his fight with Hilary Bolsover had had a great respect for the son of the objector, though his opinion of the father remained unchanged. Skinner cast a bitter look after him. He did not dare to quarrel with Bolsover, but he did not like being sat upon, and Bolsover's lecture only increased his bitterness towards Dick Hilary.

"Bolsover's backing him up now!" grinned Stott. "The fellow seems to be making friends, after all."

"He won't make a friend of me!" said Skinner, setting his teeth. "I'm down on him. I've got some patriotism. I won't let him forget what his father is so long as he stops at Greyfriars."

"He, he, he!"

Billy Bunter joined Skinner & Co. with a grin on his podgy features.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, go and eat coke, Bunter!" growled Skinner.

Bunter was a fellow who could be told to go and eat coke with impunity.

"I say, Skinner, old chap—"

"Buzz off!"

"But I say, I've got something to tell you!" grinned Bunter. "It's the joke of the season—he, he, he!"

"Oh, is that what you were grinning over in class?" said Snoop. "Well, what's the joke?"

"About that Conchy! He, he, he!" chortled Bunter.

Skinner became attentive.

"Something up against Hilary?" he asked.

"Yes, rather! I say, you fellows, his father's coming here!"

"What?" exclaimed the three together.

Bunter nodded and grinned.

"He wouldn't have the nerve!" exclaimed Stott. "Why, we'd hoot him out of the school if he showed up here!"

"Not to the school," explained Bunter. "He's going to meet Hilary outside—daren't show his face here, you know! He, he, he!"

"How do you know?" asked Skinner suspiciously.

"You come up to the study and I'll tell you," said Bunter, sinking his voice mysteriously.

Skinner & Co. promptly followed Bunter to the Remove passage. Their curiosity was keenly awakened now. They entered Skinner's study, and the door was closed.

"Now, then," said Skinner, "out with it all!"

Bunter took a letter from his pocket.

"You see," he said, rather haltingly, "under the circ—that chap being a

Conchy, and—and all that—I felt justified in looking at the letter."

"You spying worm!" said Stott.

"Oh, really, Stott—"

"Shut up, Stott!" said Skinner. "All's fair if it's up against a Conchy! Let's see the letter, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter handed over the letter, and the three juniors read it together—Stott looking over Skinner's shoulder to read, in spite of his remark to Bunter. They read eagerly, Billy Bunter grinning as he watched them. The Owl of the Remove had justified his action to his fat conscience in taking Hilary's letter from the rack before the new boy had even seen it; but Billy Bunter was the fortunate possessor of a very elastic conscience, which was warranted to stretch to any extent. Skinner & Co. had their own opinion about that; but they read the letter, all the same.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Skinner's Little Game!

"H E, he, he!"

That was Billy Bunter's comment while the letter was read.

Skinner & Co. did not heed the Owl. Their eyes were glued upon the letter, which was evidently from Dick Hilary's father. It ran:

"My dear Dick,—I hope you are by this time comfortably settled at Greyfriars. I received your letter, but you have told me very little. It was understood that the fact that you are a Conscientious Objector's son was not to be mentioned in the school, and I am sure you will have had the good sense not to refer to it yourself. While being very far from advising concealment on a matter of principle, I felt very unwilling to expose you to the sneers and taunts which would doubtless be your lot if the fact was generally known."

"No doubt about that!" remarked Stott. "The old johnny knew something!"

"Shurrup! You're interrupting, Stott!"

The letter continued:

"I want to see you, Dick, and have a talk with you; I have some things to tell you which may, I think, come as a surprise to you. Under the circumstances, I do not care to come to the school. Dr. Locke was kind enough to take you in as scholar, but in the present state of public prejudice it would be wiser for me not to visit you at Greyfriars. But I must see you; I have something very important to say, and to discuss with you, my dear son."

"I can get to Friardale on Saturday, and will meet you in the afternoon. That being a half-holiday at Greyfriars, you should be able to come and meet me. I know the surroundings of the school well, and you have probably learned your way about the countryside by this time. Within a few miles of the school is an old ruined Priory, in the midst of the wood, a somewhat solitary spot, and there I will wait for you at three o'clock on Saturday afternoon. Do not fail to come, if you possibly can, my dear, dear boy."

"Good-bye!"

"Your very affectionate father,
"PAUL HILARY."

"What do you think of that?" chortled Bunter, as Skinner & Co. grinned at one another. "A corker, ain't it? A giddy old Conscientious Objector hanging round Greyfriars!"

"My hat!" said Stott. "We'll go and

see him, and take a crowd and mob the rotter!"

"We'll pin that letter up in the Common-room, and all Greyfriars can go and tell him what they think of him!" exclaimed Sidney James Snoop.

"He, he, he!"

Skinner shook his head.

"Go slow, go slow!" he said chidingly. "This is too good to be wasted! Hilary hasn't seen this letter yet, Bunter?"

"No fear!" grinned Bunter. "I took it out of the rack, you know. As he's a blessed Conchy I thought I was justified—"

"Oh, cut that out!" said Skinner rudely. "You took the letter because you're a spying, prying fat rotter!"

"Look here, Skinner—"

"Shurrup!"

"You've jolly well read the letter, anyway!" hooted Bunter.

"That's because we're down on Conchies—"

"Because you're spying, prying rotters, if I am!" said Bunter. "I thought I was justified in taking it, being patriotic, but you ain't patriotic, Skinner!"

"Well, if sneaking a chap's letters is patriotic, leave me out!" said Skinner.

"Rot! The Censor does it," said Bunter. "I was simply acting as a censor—a school censor, in fact. I think the correspondence of Conchies ought to be censored, and I—I've done it. That's all! Sheer patriotism!"

"Better put it to the Head like that, if it comes out!" grinned Snoop.

"I—I dare say the Head wouldn't understand!" faltered Bunter. "He's not so patriotic as me, anyway!"

"Bunter's right," remarked Skinner. "Patriotism is like charity; it covers a multitude of sins. But stow chinwag; we've all read the letter, and we're in the same boat, as far as that goes. It's got to be kept dark, unless we want a thumping licking all round from the Head. He would look on a thing like this with a jolly serious eye!"

"He wouldn't comprehend my high motives in the matter," remarked Bunter, with a shake of the head.

"He would comprehend your motives too jolly well, my fat pippin!" answered Skinner. "Don't wag your chin, old chap. The question before the meeting is, are we going to make something out of this?"

"Tell all the fellows," said Bunter.

"And half of them would kick you for sneaking a chap's letter—Wharton would, and Cherry would, and Brown, and Squiff, and Toddy—"

"Unpatriotic beasts!" grunted Bunter. "We'll leave the dashed thing somewhere where the beast will find it, then. Nothing to connect us with it in that case!"

Skinner shook his head again.

"Better than that!" he said. "Look here! Hilary's Conchy father is going to wait for him at the old Priory on Saturday, at three. Hilary doesn't know, so he can't go."

"But he will know when he sees the letter," said Snoop.

"He's not going to see the letter," said Skinner coolly.

"But—but you can't keep back a chap's letter!" said Sidney James, rather scared at the idea.

Skinner's reply was to strike a match and apply it to the letter. It flared up in his hand.

Bunter gave a gasp of alarm.

"You—you ass!" he exclaimed.

"You've done it now!"

"I—I say, that's awfully serious!" said Snoop, who had turned quite pale; "burning another fellow's letter that he's never even seen—"

Skinner shrugged his shoulders.

"Safest, after we've read it," he answered. "We've only got to keep it dark and it'll be supposed that it's lost in the post. Lots of letters are in wartime."

"It's too jolly thick!" muttered Stott uneasily. "I—I think that was a dirty trick, Skinner!"

"Think again, old sport!" said Skinner affably. "With a brain like yours you need to think twice at least! Keep it dark, that's all. Now, old Hilary will stick at the Priory on Saturday, and young Hilary won't even know. We can have no end of a lark with him. We'll let some chaps into it—chaps we can trust—like Angel of the Fourth, and Kenney, and one or two more. We'll go there instead of Conchy junior."

"And rag him?" grinned Bunter. "We'll rag him bald-headed!" said Skinner. "Being a Conchy, he won't put up a fight; and even if he does there'll be enough of us to handle him. We'll take some of Gosling's tar and a bag of feathers—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Skinner's comrades.

"We'll tar and feather him, and let him loose to roam!" chortled Skinner. "That's the way to deal with Conchies. It'll make a regular sensation."

"What about the law?" asked Stott doubtfully. "It would be called assault and battery legally, you know."

Skinner laughed contemptuously. "Conchies don't get much law—they get justice," he answered. "Not much use a Conchy taking legal proceedings. That's rot. Besides, as a non-resisting too-good-for-this-earth Johnny, he couldn't prosecute anybody; it would be against his merry principles, and you can bet that a judge and jury would jolly soon point that out to him!"

Stott and Snoop nodded assent. Skinner's jape seemed as safe as it was entertaining, considering who the destined victim was; and that highly recommended it to the young rascals.

"It will be a bit of a distinction in the Remove to have tarred and fathered a Conchy!" said Snoop. "Jolly good wheeze!"

"We'll make him fairly sit up!" said Skinner. "After it's over, we'll tell Hilary. We needn't explain how we knew the man was there, or this letter would come out. That's got to be kept dark. Mind you don't jaw about it, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

Harold Skinner placed the last fragment of the letter in the fender and lighted it, and watched it consume to ashes. As the flame flickered out there was a tap at the study door, and Skinner jumped up with an exclamation of alarm.

It was Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, who looked into the study.

Three red faces were turned towards him, Skinner & Co. feeling a sense of guilt which was reflected plainly enough in their looks. Billy Bunter coughed.

"Hallo! What game's on?" asked the Bounder, in wonder.

"Nothing," answered Skinner.

"Been burning something?" asked Vernon-Smith, sniffing.

"Only some old paper."

"You needn't think it was a letter, Smithy," said Bunter, to make assurance doubly sure, as it were. "Nothing of the kind! Yow-ow-woop! What silly beast is treading on my foot?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Bounder. "So you've been burning a letter, and Bunter isn't to tell!"

"Find out!" retorted Skinner savagely. "What do you want here, anyhow, Smithy?"

"I came to bring the Latin die you asked me to lend you," said the Bounder,

laughing. "Here it is, if you want it. Catch!"

Skinner sulkily caught the volume.

"I say, let's tell Smithy," said Bunter. "Smithy's our sort. Ain't you, old chap?"

"Ye gods, I hope not!" said the Bounder. "I'd walk into the nearest pond and stay there if I were, Bunter!"

"Look here, you cheeky rotter—"

"Bow-wow!"

The Bounder turned away; but his keen, penetrating glance swept over the flushing, uncomfortable party before he went. Smithy was suspicious; but it was no business of his, so he went his way.

"You fat idiot, keep your silly mouth closed!" growled Skinner. "Mind, you boned the letter, if it comes out! Don't jaw!"

"Oh, really—"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

Skinner left the study, followed by Snoop and Stott. Bunter rolled after them, in a rather disturbed frame of mind. Certainly he had purloined the letter, and now that it was burnt and could not be returned it amounted to having stolen it. It was necessary to keep that very secret, and Billy Bunter was not a good hand at keeping secrets.

As he rolled down the passage, with an unusually thoughtful brow, he was

DOES YOUR SOLDIER PAL WRITE TO YOU?

Notepaper is "some" price these days, but none of us would grudge Tommy all the paper he needs on which to write those cheery letters of his if paper were treble the price it is to-day. Still, it's no use simply "gassing" about it; it's up to each one to do his bit to pay the piper.

It costs the Y.M.C.A., who supply Tommy with free stationery, no less than £60,000 a year. Sixpence will supply your own or somebody else's pal with enough notepaper to write one letter each week for a year. Going to let him have it? Of course you are!

So send sixpence along to-day to Y.M.C.A. (Stationery Fund), Tottenham Court Road, London, W.C., mentioning that it comes from a reader of this paper.

clapped suddenly on the shoulder, and he jumped and gasped:

"I haven't got it, you Conchy beast!"

"Hallo! Whom are you calling a Conchy?" demanded Peter Todd, shaking him.

"Oh, is it you, Peter?" said Bunter, in relief. "I thought it was that beast after his letter!"

"What letter?"

"Eh? Oh, nothing!"

"Have you been pinching somebody's letters, you Owl?" demanded Todd sternly.

"Oh, really, Peter, I hope you know I'm incapable of anything of the kind! Of course, under certain circumstances, a fellow might feel justified—"

"Chuck it, and get along to the study!" snapped Peter. "Let me catch you pinching letters, and I'll justify you! There's a rabbit for tea, fathead!"

"Oh, good!"

Billy Bunter rolled into Study No. 7 at once, forgetting all about Conscientious Objectors, and everything but the rabbit.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Dark Doubts!

"STAND and deliver!"

Mr. Boggs, the Friardale postman, did not look alarmed, as he received that dramatic challenge.

He grinned.

The Famous Five lined up in Mr.

Boggs's path, and Bob Cherry presented a fountain-pen at the postman's head.

"Hand over the postal-orders, cheques, currency-notes, and banknotes!" said Bob. "Quick, or I fire!"

"What a merry young gent you are, Master Cherry!" answered Mr. Boggs. "Nothing to-day."

"Nothing for me?"

"No, sir."

"Nor for any of us?" demanded Nugent.

"Nothing er tall!" said Mr. Boggs.

"Shall we bump him, or skin him, or scalp him, or boil him in oil?" asked Bob.

Mr. Boggs chuckled, and trudged on with his bag. He was stopped the next minute by Dick Hilary, whose face was clouded—a contrast to the cheery visages of the Famous Five.

"Anything for me?" asked Hilary.

"I don't think I know your name, sir."

"Hilary—Richard Hilary."

"Nothing for that there name, sir," answered Mr. Boggs, and he went his way.

Hilary stood with a downcast expression on his face, and Bob Cherry gave him a clap on the shoulder—one of Bob's hearty claps, which was meant to cheer him up, but very nearly had the effect of knocking him down.

"Oh!" ejaculated Hilary.

"Cheerio, kid!" said Bob reassuringly. "It will come by the next post, or the post after, sure as a gun. My dear man, I've sometimes waited for a remittance for a whole week, till my hair was turning grey and growing thin on the temples."

Hilary smiled faintly.

"It wasn't a remittance I was looking for," he said. "I—I thought I should have had a letter yesterday, but it didn't come along."

Bob became grave at once.

"I understand," he said. "You've got an uncle out there—"

"My uncle doesn't write to me," said Hilary, flushing. "I wanted a letter from my father."

"Oh, I see!"

Bob's manner changed just a little, though it was quite unconscious on his part. He could understand—only too well—a fellow's anxiety about letters from the Front; but a letter from a Conscientious Objector at Dartmoor did not seem to him a matter to worry about.

Hilary seemed to shrink a little; his observation was very keen. He would have moved quickly away, but the Famous Five walked back with him towards the House. They did not come much into contact with Hilary, as a rule; but on chance occasions the Co. made it clear that they, at least, did not think of visiting the father's sins upon the son.

"I hope your pater's well?" said Harry Wharton.

"I—I hope so," said Hilary, in a low voice. "But men of his opinions are not treated gently. They die under it sometimes. It makes me uneasy when I don't hear from him."

"I suppose it would," agreed Bob. "I suppose they have a rather hard time. Not much easier than being in the ranks?"

"Harder," said Hilary quietly. "I'm afraid there are some who have dodged Service by professing such opinions; but those who are sincere feel their position very keenly."

There was a slight grunt from Johnny Bull.

"You mustn't think that my father is what they call an extremist," said Hilary, encouraged to speak by the civility of the juniors on the subject. "He isn't one of those cranks who believe in non-resistance under all circumstances. Of course, that's sheer lunacy—"

"Or hypocrisy!" grunted Johnny Bull. "One or the other," said Hilary. "But most objectors don't carry it to that silly extreme. But—but they believe in meeting evil with good, and in disarming an enemy by refusing to harm him. They believe in the brotherhood of all men, and it's not their fault that the world isn't civilised enough yet to live on that principle."

"But it isn't, all the same, and you have to deal with facts as they are," said Harry Wharton. "You tried that here, yourself; but you had to fight Bolsover major. You started by letting fellows punch your nose, but how long were you able to keep it up?"

Hilary sighed.

"I'm afraid my father will blame me for not keeping it up when I tell him," he answered. "But—but it's impossible—it's really impossible! A fellow who is determined not to fight can get on with decent people; but all people are not decent. He's sure to be persecuted by every cad and coward he comes across. I've found that out."

"And by all bullies," said Bob. "And the Huns are bullies; and the only way to deal with them is to hit them harder than they hit!"

"Surely your pater would agree with that, Hilary?" said Wharton.

"I don't think so. You—you see, this isn't the first war we've been in; and some of the others were wrong. Father lumps them all together, and says they are all wrong. When I was at home I quite agreed; he put it so clearly, and I never had any doubts. Since then—"

Hilary broke off abruptly.

The juniors understood.

It was pretty clear that poor Hilary's opinions were changing, though loyalty to his father made him strive hard to keep them unchanged.

"Blessed if I can see it all!" said Bob. "Your pater must know that the Huns started the war, and the beasts were all ready for it, and nobody else was. It's rot to say that this war is like the silly old wars in the history-books; this is a war of defence. By Jove, I'd like to ask your pater a question! I'd ask him what would happen to us if we laid down our arms, and trusted to Hun good-nature to let us alone!"

Hilary could not help smiling.

"I suppose they'd come over and mop us up!" he said.

"I rather think so!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Of course they would!" said Wharton. "But we were willing to let the Huns alone if they hadn't started. Lots of Germans believe that war is a good thing in itself; and nobody in this country is idiot enough to think that. I don't see how any reasonable man can doubt that justice is on our side. I suppose, in the old French wars, it was six of one and half a dozen of the other. But it's different now."

Hilary nodded.

"My father would have an answer to all that," he said. "But I don't know what he would say. But—but when I see him again I'm going to ask him some questions I never thought of before. I hope"—he crimsoned as he spoke—"I hope you fellows won't think he's a coward. He has the Humane Society's Medal for saving life at sea. And it needs some pluck, I can tell you, to do as he is doing; it's not an easy life."

Hilary left the juniors at the doorway, and Harry Wharton & Co. went their way in rather a thoughtful mood. Since knowing Hilary they had tried hard to understand the point of view of the Conscientious Objector; but they always came to the conclusion that the attitude could only be explained by

"crankism." It looked as if the same opinion was creeping into Hilary's own mind, and the Co. felt for him in the extreme discomfort it must cause him.

Skinner & Co. were in the doorway, and they had watched Hilary speaking to the postman, and exchanged grins. Hilary was anxious about the letter which had, in point of fact, arrived the previous day, and had been burnt in Skinner's study.

"Poor old Conchy!" chuckled Bunter. "He doesn't know where that letter is! He, he, he!"

"Shut up!" muttered Skinner, with an uneasy glance at the Co. as they passed. "Oh, really, Skinner, I'm not letting anything out!" said Bunter. "Funny Hilary doesn't know his pater's coming along on Saturday, ain't it?"

"Dry up, you fat burler!"

Billy Bunter sniffed, and rolled along after Hilary, who had stopped at the letter-rack, and was glancing over it. Perhaps he hoped to find a letter that had been overlooked.

"Looking for a letter—what?" grunted Bunter. "Nothing there for you, Conchy! He, he, he!"

Hilary turned away without replying. "Perhaps you think it's come already?" continued Bunter.

"What?" Hilary looked round quickly. "Have you seen anything of a letter for me, Bunter?"

"Oh, no; certainly not!" said Bunter, in alarm. "I shouldn't think of taking your letter, Hilary! Nothing of the sort! Skinner, you beast, let go my ear, will you? Wharrer at?"

"You're coming out for a walk," answered Skinner.

And he led Bunter away by one fat ear.

"Leggo!" howled Bunter.

Skinner shifted his grasp to Bunter's arm as a master came in sight in the corridor. He led Bunter out into the quad.

"Now, you fat idiot," he said savagely, "you're not to jaw about that letter! Understand?"

"The letter you burnt in your study?" snorted Bunter.

"The letter you stole from the rack!" hissed Skinner. "It means a flogging for you if it comes out!"

"I don't know anything about a letter being taken from the rack," answered the Owl of the Remove. "All I know about Hilary's letter is that I saw you burning a letter in your study, Skinner."

"What?" howled Skinner.

"And, in fact, I really think I ought to mention it to a prefect," said Billy Bunter. "It was a dirty trick!"

"You—you fat villain, you boned the letter!"

"Nothing of the sort! I simply took it to—to hand to Hilary, and it got open by accident. You took it from me and burnt it!"

"Why, you—you—"

"I begged you not to," said Bunter, pursuing his advantage, and blinking at Skinner triumphantly through his big glasses. "I entreated you, in fact. But you burnt it. I really think I ought to tell Wingate!"

"I—I—I—"

"The fact is, Skinner, you're a tricky beast!" said Bunter. "I don't approve of Conchies; but burning their correspondence is too thick. You did a dirty trick, Skinner, and you know it—taking that letter from me by force!"

"By force!" stuttered Skinner.

"By force," repeated Bunter firmly, "and burning it in the presence of witnesses. I think the Head would expel you if he knew that, Skinner—especially for your brutality in taking it from me by force, when I was just carrying it to—"

Hilary. You'd better be careful, Skinner! Don't you touch my ear again!"

Skinner clenched his hands hard.

"Not that I mean to round on you," said Bunter magnanimously. "Not at all! I rather despise you, Skinner, but I'm not going to round on you. I say, old chap, can you lend me sixpence?"

Biff!

Skinner smote the Owl of the Remove with a mighty smite, and Billy Bunter sat down with a roar. Harold Skinner stalked away, leaving him roaring.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Putting the Case!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

It was Saturday afternoon, and Harry Wharton & Co. were on their way to the football-ground when Billy Bunter rolled up.

Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing were with the Famous Five, both being in the Remove Eleven that afternoon.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Do you want to be rolled along?" asked Bob Cherry. "Take his other ear, Franky!"

"Don't play the goat, you duffers!" said Bunter, dodging. "I say, you fellows, I want to ask your advice."

"Go ahead!" said Harry Wharton. "Lots of advice on tap, Bunter! Give up grubbing after other fellows' rations! That's my advice!"

"Give up telling whoppers!" said Nugent. "That's mine!"

"Give up food-hogging!" said Bob Cherry.

"Give up dodging tubber!" said Johnny Bull.

"Give up all your esteemed manners and customs, my excellent and disgusting Bunter!" said Hurree Singh.

Billy Bunter blinked at the humorous juniors wrathfully. That was not the advice he wanted, though it was certainly good.

"Look here, you fellows, Skinner won't lend me a bob!" he said.

"Duffer if he did!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Well, considering what I know about him, I think it would be cheap at a bob," said Bunter, in an injured tone. "Suppose I was taking a letter to a chap, out of sheer good-nature—"

"Off-side!" said the Bounder. "You wouldn't!"

"But suppose I was—"

"What's the good of supposing the impossible?"

"Look here, let a chap speak, can't you?" howled Bunter. "Suppose I was taking a letter to a chap, out of pure kindness of heart, and Skinner took it away from me by sheer force, like a—like a Hun, you know; and suppose he burnt it in his study—"

"Did he?" asked Harry Wharton, frowning.

"Of course, I'm only supposing!" said Bunter hastily. "Well, suppose it was so, you know, then, Skinner would get flogged, wouldn't he?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, then, oughtn't he to lend me a bob when I ask him, especially as I'm going to return it when my postal-order comes?" said the Owl, in an aggrieved tone. "Don't you think so?"

"So that's what Skinner was burning in his study!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith, with a stare at the aggrieved Owl.

"My hat!" exclaimed Redwing. "Bunter, you've taken somebody else's letter, and Skinner has burnt it! Is that it?"

"Certainly not!" gasped Bunter, realising his danger. "Nothing of the sort. Just like you to suggest such a thing, Redwing! You've got low ideas."

"You silly ass! You've as good as said so!" exclaimed the Bounder.

"Not at all! I—I was only supposing, you know," said Bunter feebly. "A chap can suppose anything he likes, can't he? What I mean is this. Suppose Wharton speaks to Skinner about it?"

"I'll speak to him fast enough if he's done as you say!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove.

"I don't mean that! But—you see, he'll take notice of you, Wharton," said the Owl. "You point out to him that, if I let on, he'll get into a fearful row. Put it to him plainly, you know. He punches me when I mention it; but he won't punch you; he's afraid to. And, look here, make it half-a-crown," added Bunter, as if inspired by a brilliant thought. "Make him shell out half-a-crown, Wharton, and I'll let you keep a bob out of it!"

The juniors simply blinked at Bunter. William George was not famous for brains, but his present obtuseness was really a corker.

Apparently he wanted Wharton to help him in a scheme of blackmail against Skinner, at the same time without revealing the facts of the case.

"Well, my hat!" gasped Wharton, almost overcome. "You horrid, sneaking, fat-headed fat beast!"

"Oh, really, Wharton!"

"So you want to screw money out of Skinner because you stole a letter and he burned it!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Nothing of the sort! I was taking it to the chap out of sheer good-nature, and Skinner collared it. I put up a terrific fight," said Bunter. "Simply terrific!"

By that time Billy Bunter almost believed that Skinner had taken Hilary's letter from him by force.

"Whose letter was it?" demanded Vernon-Smith.

"Eh? Nobody's! I'm only supposing, you know," gasped Bunter. "Don't you fellows run away with the idea that there really was a letter! There wasn't! Nothing of the kind. I—I—I'm putting a case, you know!"

"You fat idiot! Whose letter was it—Hilary's?" asked Wharton, remembering the new junior's anxiety about a belated letter from his father.

"Oh, no! Certainly not! Of course, a chap might feel justified in opening a Conchy's letter!" said Bunter. "It's simply doing the censor's work for him, you're not very patriotic. I'm a patriotic fellow—more than some chaps I could name!"

"You fellows coming along?" called Squiff, from the direction of Little Side. "St. Jude's will be here in a minute."

"We'll see about that bizney after the match," said Wharton. And the footballers hurried on to Little Side.

Bunter trotted after them.

"I say, Wharton!" he howled. "Are you going to speak to Skinner for me?"

Wharton did not reply, and the Owl of the Remove caught hold of his sleeve. The next moment he found himself sitting on the hard, unsympathetic earth in a breathless state.

"Beasts!" gasped Bunter.

Evidently the captain of the Remove was not going to be of any use to him. The fat junior shook a podgy fist after the footballers, and went to look for Harold Skinner. Bunter was feeling very injured. He felt that his knowledge of what Skinner had done ought to be of some value to him; and it was really exasperating that Skinner could not see it, too.

Skinner, Snoop, and Stott were heading for the gates when Bunter found them. Angel and Kenney of the Fourth were with them. The two Fourth-formers had joined willingly in the scheme of ragging the "Conchy." Skinner carried a bag, and Snoop had a

parcel. These contained the tar and feathers destined for Hilary senior.

"I say, you fellows!" yelled Bunter, spotting them at the gates, and scuttling after them. "I say! Stop a minute!"

Skinner & Co. did not stop, and Bunter breathlessly pursued them into the road. There he overtook the merry party.

"So you're coming, Fatty?" grunted Stott.

"I want to speak to Skinner! About that bob, Skinner!"

"What bob?" asked Skinner, with a dangerous look.

"I've spoken to Wharton about it," said Bunter loftily. "As captain of the Remove, he thinks you ought to make it half-a-crown!"

Skinner's face was a study.

"You—you—you've told Wharton!" he stuttered.

"Not exactly! I simply put a case," explained Bunter, "and under the circumstances Wharton thinks a half-crown would be the fair thing. He's going to speak to you about it after the footer match. So you'd better shell out, Skinner, or you'll have Wharton to deal with!"

Skinner stood speechless for some moments. Snoop and Stott gave the obtuse Owl furious looks. The captain of the Remove was the last fellow they would have wished to know about the purloining of Hilary's letter.

"You—you—you fat idiot!" gasped Skinner at last.

"Well, of all the crass fools!" said Angel of the Fourth. "I'd jolly well slaughter the chatterin' idiot if I were you!"

"Here, hands off!" yelled Bunter, as the enraged Skinner advanced on him. "I—I say, old fellow, I—I'll make it a bob, after all— Oh, crikey!"

The next few minutes were like several earthquakes in one to the unfortunate Owl. When Skinner & Co. went on their way they left William George Bunter strewn in the dusty road, making frantic efforts to get his second wind. And he was still minus his bob.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Little Disappointing.

"NOW for the Conchy!" grinned Snoop.

Skinner & Co., after a tramp through the woods, had arrived at the Priory.

The ruins lay in the midst of the wood, most of the old fragments of walls and windows overgrown with bushes and creepers. The shattered old gateway was thick with ivy in great clusters. Outside the gateway the juniors halted to look round for a sign of the Conchy.

The ruined Priory seemed deserted, however.

"It's past three," said Angel of the Fourth, looking at his gold watch. "I suppose you had the right time, Skinner?"

"It said three in the letter."

"Then he ought to be here."

"Let's go in," said Stott. "We can have a smoke while we're waiting."

"And a game of nap," remarked Angel.

The five juniors went into the ruins looking about them, but the place was deserted.

There was little danger of being observed there by anyone connected with Greyfriars, unless it was some rambling junior. Skinner & Co. sat down round a big, flat-topped stone, and smokes and cards were produced.

In a few minutes the young rascals were deep in nap, and they had almost forgotten what they had come for.

A footstep on the stones startled them at last.

Skinner looked round, a cigarette in his mouth, and five cards in his thin fingers.

A man in khaki had come into the ruins, and stopped as he caught sight of the juniors.

He stood looking at them with surprise in his face, and something more than surprise, too. The juniors hastily thrust the cards out of sight.

"Needn't chuck the game!" said Angel, staring towards the soldier. "Never mind him! Only one of the men from Wapshot Camp, wandering round, I suppose."

"Might ask him to have a hand!" said Snoop.

"A dashed private!" said Angel, with a shrug of the shoulders.

Snoop looked rather annoyed. His father was a private; and it was one of the few things Sidney James Snoop had to be proud of, that his father was in khaki.

"Oh, don't be a dashed snob, Angel!" said Snoop tartly. "I suppose you haven't any relations in the ranks?"

"None!" yawned Angel.

"All indispensable, I suppose, and hiding behind something or other?" asked Snoop disagreeably. "My father's a private, Angel, and he's worth all your nobby relations in the Diplomatic Service, I can tell you! He doesn't get paid so much," added Snoop sarcastically. "You don't get paid so much for killing Germans as for sending notes tied up in red tape!"

"Order!" said Skinner. "Don't begin to rag, dear boys!"

"I'll rag fast enough if Angel can't be decent," said Snoop. "I'll bet you he wouldn't call that fellow yonder a dashed private in his hearing."

Angel shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. Sidney James Snoop's outburst was unusually spirited for him, and came rather as a surprise to the dandy of the Fourth.

"Shurrup!" said Skinner pacifically. "The man's coming this way. Looks as if he's going to speak to us."

"What the dickens can he want?" said Kenney. "Keep the cards out of sight while he's here, Angel, old chap. He might know somebody at Greyfriars."

"I dare say!" sneered Angel. "May be a chum of Snoop's father."

"And suppose he is?" exclaimed Snoop fiercely. "If you don't want a dot in the eye, Angel, you'd better take care. Where would you and your nobby relations be if my father wasn't defending you, with the rest? Hang your cheek! I've a jolly good mind to dot you in the eye as it is!"

Sidney James Snoop jumped up.

Angel eyed him with cold contempt.

"My own fault for comin' out with Remove fags!" he remarked.

"Stow it, Snoopey!" said Skinner.

"What the thump are you gettin' your rag out like this for? Angel didn't mean anythin'. Keep quiet, you ass! You're not a fightin' man, and Angel could make rings round you. I say, we'll ask that soldier chap whether he's seen the Conchy hangin' about. I dare say he'll lend us a hand raggin' the cad. He's bound to be down on Conchies!"

"Soldiers ain't so much down on them as civilians, as a rule," said Stott. "Better not talk too much."

"Rot! He's bound to be down on the fellow!" said Skinner. "Tommies have to do the fighting for the Conchies, don't they?"

"They have to do it for a lot of chaps as well as the Conchies," grunted Snoop. "Angel's brother in the Diplomatic Service, f'rinstance!"

"Shut up, I tell you, Snoop! Here he is!"

The man in khaki was coming slowly towards the group of juniors. He was a tall, well-set-up man, with a rather handsome face, of a thoughtful cast. There was something that struck them as familiar in his features, though they did not remember having seen him before. He was not a young man, although the khaki made him look young, as it generally does, but on a close scrutiny it could be seen that he was well over forty.

"One of the Methusiliers!" grinned Stott.

The soldier halted near the Priory, and Skinner raised his cap, half-civilly and half-impertinently.

"Good-afternoon, Tommy!" he said.

"Good-afternoon!" said the soldier curtly.

"Looking round the ruins—what?" said Skinner.

"Yes."

"Would you mind lookin' round some other ruins?" asked Aubrey Angel, with polite insolence. "We weren't expectin' visitors."

The soldier looked at him.

"I believe this place is open to the public," he said quietly.

"Angel, you cad, shut up!" broke out Snoop angrily. "The man has as much right here as you have, or more!"

"Dry up, the pair of you!" said Skinner. "I say, Tommy, have you seen a fellow hanging about here—a sneaking, cringing-looking sort of worm? We're looking for a Conchy."

The man in khaki stared at him.

"A what?" he ejaculated.

"A sneaking Conchy!" said Skinner with a grin. "We've got some tar and feathers for him. You can hold him while we tar and feather him, if you like, when he comes along."

"Thank you! Have you ever heard of such a thing as fair play, my boy?" asked the soldier. "Six to one is not my idea of fair play."

"Oh, rot! He's only a Conchy—a sneaking coward!" said Skinner. "But suit yourself. Have you seen a cowardly-looking cad hanging about?"

"Not until I came inside the ruins," said the man in khaki; "since then I have seen several!"

"Why, you—you cheeky sweep!" stammered Skinner. "What do you mean?"

"So you are waiting here for a Conchy?" asked the man in khaki.

"Yes," said Stott, as Skinner did not speak. "A relation of a chap at our school—his father, in fact! We're going to make an example of him!"

"Yes, rather!" said Snoop, with emphasis. "That's what we're here for, Tommy. My father's a soldier, and he's got to do old Hilary's work as well as his own, and I don't see it."

"Hilary!" repeated the soldier.

"That's the name of the sweep."

"You know the man?" asked Skinner, speaking at last.

"I know him."

"Isn't he a sneaking worm, then?"

"I think not," said the soldier quietly.

"I hope not. He is a man who has been very much mistaken."

"Jolly easy to make mistakes that keep a man out of the trenches!" said Snoop. "I call him a rotter!"

"So you are here to tar and feather a Conscientious Objector?" said the man in khaki, eyeing the juniors.

"That's it!" said Kenny.

"And whiling away the time by smoking and gambling?"

"That's not your business!" said Angel. "Will you be good enough to take a walk in another direction?"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 560.

"I am sorry I cannot oblige you, my boy," answered the soldier quietly. He seemed about to speak again, but checked himself, and walked away, keeping within the walls of the ruins, however.

"Let's get on with the game," said Angel.

Skinner shook his head.

"It's not safe, with people around," he said. "After all, we're here for the Conchy, not to play nap."

"What's the good of wastin' time?"

"Well, I'm not goin' to risk it. That Tommy is waitin' for somebody, too. There may be a crowd coming along."

"Confound the man! Why doesn't he clear?" exclaimed Angel angrily. "Confound that check to shove himself in among his betters!"

"He hasn't any betters here," said Snoop.

"Look here, let's run him out!" suggested Angel, unheeding Snoop. "There's five of us, and we could clear him out easily enough."

"The Slacker!"



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"Quite easily," agreed Kenney.

"He can go to some pub," continued Aubrey Angel. "That's his place. Let's go and tell him so, and hustle him out if he don't clear."

"Well, I agree," said Skinner, rather slowly.

"I don't!" said Snoop. "Let the man alone!"

"You can keep off, if you're a funk!" said Angel scornfully. "Four of us can run him out if he won't go."

"I'll show you whether I'm a funk!" said Snoop; and he ran at Angel with his hands up.

Kenney put his foot in the way, and Snoop stumbled over it, and fell headlong, with a crash, on the loose stones.

He lay dazed there, and Angel walked away with Kenney, leaving the Removites alone. The two Fourth-Formers quitted the Priory as Snoop sat up, blinking dizzily.

"Oh! The rotters!" he gasped. "I've bumped my head!"

"Serve you right!" growled Skinner. "What do you want to rag with Angel for? He's worth keeping in with."

"He's a sneaking cad!" said Snoop.

"Well, so are you, for that matter!" The soldier was pacing to and fro at a distance, unheeding the juniors. Skinner & Co. waited about aimlessly for a time, wondering why Mr. Hilary did not arrive. Angel and Kenney had long been gone, when Skinner announced at last that he was fed up.

"It's half-past four!" he said savagely. "The Conchy can't be coming. No good waiting any longer."

"Well, I'm getting a bit sick of it," agreed Stott. "Perhaps the fellow expected an answer to that letter to Hilary. Anyway, he's not coming."

"Doesn't look like it," said Snoop. "I'll stay a bit longer, if you fellows will."

"Oh, rot! I'm fed up!" said Skinner sulkily. "Let's get home."

And the disappointed raggers left the Priory. As they disappeared into the wood they saw the soldier still there, pacing steadily to and fro.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Form Inquiry!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. came in after the football match in cheery spirits, having beaten St. Jude's by three to one. The Famous Five gathered for tea in Study No. 1, and after the topic of the St. Jude's match was finished with they discussed the affair of Bunter and the burnt letter. It was agreed that that matter could not be left where it was.

"It's pretty clear that Bunter bagged a letter belonging to Hilary," said Wharton, "and Skinner burnt it. Now, Conchy or no Conchy, the chap can't have his letters stolen and destroyed, and it's time for a foot to be put down hard."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry.

And after tea word was passed in the Remove for a Form meeting in the Rag. Billy Bunter was brought along by Peter Todd, and Skinner & Co. were escorted to the Rag by several juniors. Having an idea of what the proceedings were about, Skinner & Co. were very reluctant to come; but they were given no choice in the matter, so they came.

Most of the Remove were gathered in the Rag. Lord Mauleverer was seated in a chair placed on the big table, evidently to act as judge. Skinner & Co. were marched up to the table. Dick Hilary was there with the rest of the juniors, looking rather perplexed. Bob Cherry had told him that he would be wanted, so he had come, without knowing what was on.

"All here?" said the captain of the Remove. "Gentlemen, this meeting has been called—"

"About time we knew what it's been called for!" said Bolsover major.

"What's the row, anyhow?"

"If you'll shut up for a minute you'll hear! It appears that a letter has been taken from the rack by a fellow it did not belong to, and destroyed by another fellow. The owner has not seen it at all. That is a matter for the Remove to inquire into."

"I should jolly well say so!" exclaimed Ogilvy. "Go ahead!"

"Hold on a minute!" interposed Lord Mauleverer.

"Silence for the judge!" said Bob Cherry. "What is it, Mauly?"

"Anybody got a cushion?"

"What?"

"I want a cushion for my head!" explained his lordship.

"You silly ass!" roared Bob.

"My dear man——"

"Here's a cushion for his head," said Russell, and there was a whiz as the article was delivered.

It reached Mauly's head, and then there was a wild howl. Lord Mauleverer's noble cranium was bumped against the high back of the chair as the cushion smote him on the nose.

"Yaroooh!" roared Mauleverer.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You asked for it!" grinned Bob.

"Now you've got it! Are you satisfied?"

"Yow-ow-ow!" said his lordship, ruefully rubbing his head.

"The first witness will come forward!" said Wharton. "Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Stand forward!"

"The—the fact is, I've got an engagement, you fellows!" stuttered Bunter.

"The—the Head's asked me to dinner, and——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll look in another time—— Yaroooh! Leggo my ear, Toddy, you beast!" wailed Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove was led forward.

"Go it, counsel for the prosecution!" said Bob. "On the ball, Wharton!"

"Look at me, witness!" thundered the captain of the Remove.

"Ow!"

"Did you purloin a letter from the rack?"

"Certainly not!" gasped Bunter.

"Was it addressed to Hilary?"

"Yes—I mean, no!"

"Did you give it to Skinner?"

"No; the beast took it from me by force. I put up a terrific fight——"

"You admit having taken the letter?"

"No! Certainly not! Nothing of the kind!" said Bunter promptly. "The fact is, I haven't been near the letter-rack for days—I mean, weeks—and I'd really forgotten there was one!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Look here, I'm missing my engagement to tea with Mr. Quelch——"

"How could Skinner have taken it from you, you crass duffer, if you hadn't got it?" demanded Wharton.

Bunter blinked at him, rather at a loss.

"You—you'd better ask Skinner!" he gasped at last. "I'm not responsible for what Skinner does, am I?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mr. Hacker will be waiting for me!" said Bunter. "I'm going for a walk with him, you know! I think I'll go now. Yow! Leggo my ear!"

"It is established that Bunter took the letter," said Wharton. "I appeal to the learned judge."

"Yaas!" said Lord Mauleverer. "Yaas, begad!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Have you any defence to offer for having taken the letter?" demanded Wharton.

"Yes, rather!" retorted Bunter. "You give me a chance, you know! I can explain everything—every single thing. Give a chap a chance!"

"Go ahead!"

"Well, in the first place, I never took the letter," said Bunter cautiously. "I want that clearly understood; I never took the letter at all, and in fact didn't know there was a letter. In the—the second place, I thought I was justified in taking a Conchy's letter from patriotic motives. It was simply acting as censor. The Censor opens people's letters and reads them. It may be mean, but they do those things in war-time. It's really the fault of the Huns for going to war at all! I hope I've made that clear."

"You burbling idiot!" gasped Peter Todd.



Mr. Justice Mauleverer! (See Chapter 9.)

"Well, my only hat!" said Wharton. "So you never took the letter at all, and you took it from patriotic motives! Is that it?"

"Exactly!" gasped Bunter. "You've got it! I think I'd better go now! I've promised to call on Mr. Capper for a chat in his study."

"The witness can stand down!" said Wharton. "Silence in court, please! This really isn't a laughing matter!"

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

Bunter's evidence had been too much for the gravity of the court, and even the learned judge was grinning.

"I say, you fellows, I've got to go!" exclaimed Bunter. "I really must, you know; I've got an engagement to—to see Mrs. Locke, and advise her about the gas ration——"

"Keep hold of his ear, Toddy!"

"Yaroooh!"

"Skinner, Snoop, and Stott stand forward!"

"Oh, rats!" said Skinner.

"Help them this way!"

"Yooooop!"

Skinner & Co. came bounding forward breathlessly. With red and angry faces they stood facing the counsel for the prosecution.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Evidence!

"SILENCE in court!"

"Accused, look me in the face!" thundered the counsel for the prosecution.

"Can't!" said Skinner.

"What? Why not?"

"Your face worries me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence in court! Prisoner, you will not improve your position by impertinence in this court! You are accused, on the evidence of William George Bunter, of taking a letter belonging to your Form-fellow, Richard Hilary. Did you or did you not take that letter?"

"No!"

"Do you all say the same?"

"Yes, we do!" growled Snoop and Stott uneasily.

"I say, you fellows, they're telling

crams! They are, you know! Smithy knows they were burning a letter in the study——"

"Shut up, Bunter! Vernon Smith will stand forward!"

The Bunder louped out of the crowd.

"Vernon Smith, kindly tell the court what you know of this affair!"

"I dropped into Skinner's study the other day to lend him a dic he'd asked me for," said the Bunder. "Those four blighters were there, looking as guilty as a gang of politicians drawing up a secret treaty. Something had just been burnt in the grate. That's all!"

"You did not see the letter?"

"No; but Bunter as good as blabbed out that a letter had been burnt, and that it was a dirty trick of some kind. I thought——"

"What the witness thinks isn't evidence!" said Lord Mauleverer, suddenly waking up, as it were, to make that remark.

"Quite so! Smithy, you can stand down!"

The Bunder stood down.

"Do you still deny having taken the letter from Bunter and burned it, Skinner?"

"Yes, I do!"

"Bunter!"

"Ow! Yes?"

"Describe the circumstances under which Skinner deprived you of the letter."

"I didn't notice any circumstances at——"

"What?"

"There weren't any circumstances there, that I can remember."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tell us how the letter was taken, Owl!" said Wharton.

"Oh, I see! Well, it was like this!" said Bunter. "Being a kind-hearted and good-natured chap, always thinking of others——"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"I took the letter from the rack to take it up to Hilary's study. I thought perhaps his pater had been hanged, or something, and he would like to know at once!"

"You silly Owl! Go on!"

"As I was passing Skinner's door, he suddenly rushed out on me like a wild beast—in fact, like a lion from his lair," said Bunter. "Exactly like a lion from his lair, in fact. I remembering noticing, at the very time, that he rushed on me like a lion from his lair. Seizing me by the throat, he hissed—"

"Whu-a-at?"

"Seizing me by the throat, he hissed 'Give up the letter, or you die!' " said Bunter, his fertile imagination growing more and more brilliant as he proceeded.

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

"I felled him to the earth—" continued Bunter.

"Oh, my hat! Where did this happen?"

"In the Remove passage."

"That's a good forty feet from the earth."

"I—I mean, I felled him to the floor. The floor, of course. It couldn't have been the earth, in the Remove passage, could it?"

"Not quite. Go on with your lies!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you fellows! Of course, I'm stating the exact truth. There are some fellows who scorn to tell a lie. That's me, all over! Well, I felled him to the floor—I mean, I felled him to the floor, and then Snoop and Stott rushed on me like—like—"

"Like lions from their lairs?"

"Yes, just like lions—I mean, lions from their lair. Seizing me, they hurled me into the study, and I fell with a sickening thud."

"Did the floor give way?"

"Eh? No."

"Then you couldn't have fallen on it. Go on!"

"Then they seized me," continued Bunter eloquently. "I begged and entreated Skinner not to touch the letter. Skinner will bear me out in that."

"You lying worm!" growled Skinner.

"I begged him, with tears in my eyes, not to touch the letter or to burn it," went on the fat junior. "In fact, I beseeched him—beseeched is really the word. It would have moved a heart of stone. But, with mocking laughter—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Removites.

Even Skinner & Co. were grinning.

Billy Bunter appeared to be drawing upon his recollections of the latest thrilling melodrama at the Courtfield Theatre.

"With a mocking laugh," said Bunter firmly, "he seized the letter, and hurled it into the blazing coals—"

"Off-side!" said Bob Cherry. "Fires ain't allowed in the studies yet!"

"I—I mean, he set a match to it. Just then Smithy looked in, and I'm sure he heard me beseeching Skinner to spare the letter."

"I didn't!" said the Bounder briefly.

"Well, I'm not answerable for Smithy being deaf. That's all, you fellows; the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. I—I say, I'd better go now, or I shall be late for my appointment with Loder of the Sixth."

"Begad!" said Lord Mauleverer. "I find the prisoner guilty of perjury in the first degree, and sentence him to be hanged, drawn, and quartered!"

"Gentlemen of the jury!" said Wharton. "Bunter's lying beats the Kaiser into a cocked hat; but it's clear that the letter was burnt in Skinner's study. Whether he gave it to Skinner, or Skinner took it, isn't clear—"

"Haven't I just told you?" howled Bunter.

"Keen that Owl quiet! Hilary, stand forward!"

Dick Hilary came forward with a troubled brow. He understood now why

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he had not received the expected letter from his father.

"You were expecting a letter from your pater, Hilary?"

"Yes," said the new junior, in a low voice.

"You didn't get one?"

"No."

"Are you satisfied that the letter referred to was the one you were expecting and didn't receive?"

"It looks like it."

"No doubt about that," said Bob Cherry. "The facts have come out right enough! This is where the learned judge hops in!"

"Go it, Mauly! Judgment! Wake him up, somebody!"

"Oh!" ejaculated the judge, opening his eyes. "I wasn't asleep. I heard all you fellows were saying. Is it over?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Judgment, you ass!"

"All of 'em sentenced to be bumped and frog-marched!" said the judge, rubbing his eyes.



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"You silly ass, you haven't been listening!"

Squiff pulled away a leg of his lordship's chair, and Lord Mauleverer sat on the table. He sat there and yelled.

"Leave it to the jury," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Now, then, you fellows, guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty!"

"Anything to say, Skinner?"

Skinner scowled blackly.

"I didn't take the letter from Bunter," he said. "He gave it to me. We all burnt it together. I don't see why we shouldn't, as it was a letter from a Conchy to a Conchy. I'm down on Conchies."

"Hear, hear!" came several voices.

"A chap can be down on Conchies without stealing their letters," said Wharton. "A dirty trick is a dirty trick, all the world over. If Hilary complained to the Head you'd get a flogging, and you know it!"

"Hilary can sneak if he likes!"

"I must know what was in the letter!" exclaimed Hilary. "I shall not complain about it, but I must know what was in the letter!"

Skinner shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll tell you fast enough, if it comes to that. Your pater said he was coming to see you. He hadn't the nerve to show up here, so he asked you to meet him at the old Priory. We went there this afternoon to tar and feather him."

"You dared touch my father!" exclaimed Hilary, striding towards Skinner with his hands clenched.

"We'd have touched him fast enough if he'd been there!" sneered Skinner. "But for some reason he didn't come. There was nobody there but a soldier, all the time I waited there. Otherwise he'd have got the tar and feathers, and you can bet on that!"

"And serve him jolly well right!" said Hazeldene.

"I say, you fellows, I really must go now; Wingate will be waiting for me!" squeaked Billy Bunter. "He's asked me to tea, you know!"

"I'm sorry you've lost your letter, Hilary," said the captain of the Remove. "You are entitled to take the matter before the Head, if you choose."

"I shall not do that."

"That's as you please. If it goes before the Head, we leave it to him."

"No, no!"

"Very well; then it's for the Remove to deal with," said Wharton. "Gentlemen of the Remove, here are four fellows who have sneaked another chap's letter, opened it, and read it, and then destroyed it. That kind of thing isn't good enough for the Remove. What's the verdict?"

"Twenty of the best!" said Bob Cherry.

"Hear, hear!"

"That's a Form licking!" said Wharton. "You hear, you sneaking worms? You can take it, or go before the Head, which you please."

"All for being down on a Conchy!" sneered Skinner.

"Nothing of the sort! Most people are down on Conchies; but decent people don't spy into letters. That's what you're going to be punished for, and you know it! You're at liberty to take your punishment here or to go before the beaks!"

Skinner & Co. were not likely to choose to go before the beaks. They elected to take their punishment there, fully conscious that they deserved it.

And they took it!

For quite a long time the Rag rang to the sound of thwack, thwack, thwack! It rang also to a series of fiendish yells from the victims.

When it was over the Form meeting broke up. Skinner & Co. limped away to their study gritting their teeth. Billy Bunter followed them in with a grin on his fat face. Bunter's yells had been the loudest in the Rag; but the Owl was not looking severely hurt now.

"I say, you fellows, you look blue!" grinned Bunter. "You haven't any sense, you know! I put a couple of exercise books in my bags ready, in case it turned out to be a licking. He, he, he!"

Skinner & Co. gave him deadly looks.

"And now," continued Bunter, "what about that bob, Skinner? Under the circumstances, I think you'll admit that you ought to hand over that bob."

Skinner did not hand over the bob. He handed over a Latin grammar, with a whiz, and followed it up with Euclid, and then Virgil; and Billy Bunter fled, roaring!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

News of the Conchy!

"**H**OW does my tie look?"

Bob Cherry asked that important question, with becoming solemnity, on the following morning after service. It was Sunday morning, and the Famous Five were going out for the usual Sunday walk.

Bob's chums looked at the tie and smiled.

"Well, how does it look?" demanded Bob, who never was successful with neckties.

As the chums expected to meet the Cliff House girls during that morning's walk, the question of the tie was an important one.

"My dear man, it looks much the same as usual," said Frank Nugent.

"The sameness is terrific, my esteemed Bob," remarked the Nabob of Banipur.

"And how's that?"

"As if you'd been trying to hang yourself, old chap!" said Nugent affably.

Bob Cherry snorted.

"It's a bit too far to the left," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Give it a bit of a pull to starboard."

Bob tugged at the tie.

"That all right?"

"Ha, ha! Now it's going up round your right ear!"

"Oh, crumbs!" growled Bob. "I don't see anything to grin at. I can't tie a tie like Angel of the Fourth, and I don't want to. There! Is that right?"

"Too much of a list to port," grinned Johnny Bull.

"Blow it! I'll get the dashed thing right somehow! There!"

Bob gave another tug, and there was a rending sound.

"Now you've done it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on!" said Nugent. "We shall miss Marjorie if we're late."

"Can I come out with a tie in two bits?" howled Bob. "Wait till I change it, can't you? What are you cackling at?"

Bob rushed into the House in search of another tie, and his grinning chums waited for him at the door. Dick Hilary came out by himself, with a moody expression on his face.

Wharton glanced quickly at his chums, and they nodded, guessing his thought. The Conchy's son was lonely, and feeling down, and the Co. nobly came to the rescue.

"Going out, Hilary?" asked Wharton.

"Ye-es."

"Like to come along to the cliffs? We're going for a ramble."

Hilary hesitated, and flushed. He understood the kind thought, but his sensitive nature shrank from taking advantage of it.

"Thanks, I—I don't think I'll come," he said. "I'm feeling rather rotten, to tell the truth, and I shouldn't be cheerful company."

"About that letter?" said Nugent. "You'll get another letter from your pater, old scout."

"I can't understand it," said Hilary, in deep perplexity. "I haven't heard from him, you see, for some time now, and—and I supposed he was still at Dartmoor. I can't understand how he's got leave to come here. I don't think they're given much leave, if any. Something must be wrong. It's a shame that I was prevented from going out to meet him yesterday."

"According to Skinner, though, he didn't turn up, after all," said Nugent.

"I know, and that worries me, too. I've asked Snoop about it, and he says they saw a soldier there who said he

knew my father. It looks as if the soldier may have been there instead of him, and may have had some message for me. I can't understand what's happened. I—I'm afraid there's something wrong, somehow. But no need to bother you fellows about it," added Hilary, flushing. And he nodded to the juniors and walked away to the gates.

"Poor beast!" commented Johnny Bull. "It must be a worry to have Conchies in the family. Looks as if old Hilary has bolted from the Conchy camp, and that means bad trouble for him when he's caught."

"I hope not," said Wharton uneasily. "It does look like it, though. Those rotters ought to be boiled for stealing his letter! Hallo! Here's Bob!"

Bob Cherry came out with a resplendent new necktie. It was the property of Lord Mauleverer, the dandy of the Remove, evidently borrowed for the important occasion.

"That all right?" asked Bob, plainly pleased with his appearance.

"Gorgeous, old chap!" said Nugent solemnly. "Sunflowers and orchids ain't in it with that tie. That will dazzle the ladies, if anything will."

"Look here, you ass——"

"Come on!" said Wharton; and the Famous Five started.

As they turned out at the gates Hilary was disappearing in the direction of Courtfield. He was walking slowly, his eyes on the ground, evidently dispirited. The juniors turned in the other direction, towards Friardale.

"Cut through the wood," said Wharton. "We're late already, owing to Bob being such a dandy."

"Rats!" grunted Bob.

They crossed the fields, and turned into the footpath through the wood, tramping over thickly-fallen leaves.

Ahead of them on the footpath they caught sight of a figure in khaki. A man in private's uniform was pacing along slowly. He turned, and came pacing back towards them, his eyes on the fallen leaves, without seeing the juniors. He was about to turn again when he caught sight of them, being close upon them, and stopped.

The juniors glanced at him. They could see that he wished to speak.

"Excuse me," said the soldier, saluting. "You belong to Greyfriars School, I think, young gentlemen?"

"Yes," said Harry.

"The belongfulness is terrific, my esteemed and ridiculous Tommy!" said the Nabob of Bhanipur politely.

The soldier stared for a moment, and then smiled. Hurree Jamsat Singh's weird English was often ~~pleasant~~ of smiles among those who were not used to it.

"If you belong to Greyfriars, very likely you know a lad named Hilary?" said the man in khaki.

"Yes, certainly," said Wharton, remembering Hilary's mention of a soldier at the Priory the previous day. "He's in our Form."

"I wanted to see him. Perhaps——" The soldier hesitated. "I've no right to ask you, of course; but—but would you be kind enough to take him a message—when you return to the school, of course?"

"We'll give him a message, certainly," said Harry at once. "We shall see him at dinner."

"Thank you very much! Will you tell him that"—the soldier hesitated again—"that his father is in this neighbourhood, and wishes to see him?"

"I'd better tell him where, then," said Harry, with a smile.

"On this footpath, this afternoon," said the soldier. "I—I mean, his father

will wait here for him. He is free this afternoon, I suppose?"

"Yes, till calling-over. He'll come at once, of course," said Harry. "He's rather anxious about his father. He missed seeing him yesterday, I think, owing to a letter being destroyed. Is Mr. Hilary well?"

"Quite well—better than he has ever been in his life before," said the soldier.

"He'll be glad to hear that."

"I am very much obliged to you, sir."

"Not at all," answered Wharton.

The soldier saluted and stepped back, and the Famous Five went on their way. They left the soldier pacing on the leaf-strewn path.

"One of the old johnnies who've joined up lately," said Johnny Bull. "I rather like that chap's looks. Relation of Hilary's, I expect."

"He looks a bit like Hilary," said Wharton. "I know Hilary's got an uncle in khaki. He may be back on leave. Rather queer that he doesn't come up to the school to see him, though."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There they are!" ejaculated Bob.

There was a glimpse of pretty hats at the end of the path, and the juniors hurried their steps to join Marjorie & Co.

In the ramble over the cliffs that morning the Co. speedily forgot all about the soldier in the wood. But when they came in to dinner at Greyfriars Wharton looked for Dick Hilary at once.

He found him in the quadrangle. He had come in from a long walk, and looked rather tired, and was going to the House, unheeding the sneering grins that were turned upon him by Skinner & Co. lounging in the doorway. Wharton tapped the Conchy's son on the arm, and Hilary started and looked up.

"News for you, kid," said the captain of the Remove, with a smile.

"A letter?"

"Oh, no; a message!"

Wharton explained, and Hilary's expression brightened, though he looked very puzzled.

"I'm glad to hear my father's well," he said. "I can't understand how he comes to be in this quarter, though. It beats me how he's on such good terms with a soldier, too."

"I thought he might be your uncle," said Harry. "You told us once you had an uncle in khaki. He looked rather like you in features, too."

Hilary shook his head.

"My uncle's at the Front," he said, "and—and he's not on very good terms with my father; their opinions about the war are so different. Thank you no end for bringing the message, Wharton. I'll cut out immediately after dinner."

They went into the House together, and Skinner & Co. exchanged looks. They had stretched their ears to hear what was said.

"So old Conchy is really hanging about somewhere to see young Conchy!" remarked Skinner. "So he's going to cut out immediately after dinner, is he? I fancy we are going to cut out, too—what?"

"Good wheeze!" agreed Stott.

"We've got a Form licking to pay that cad for!" said Skinner viciously. "We'll take it out of him and his precious pater!"

"Tar and feathers?" grinned Stott.

"Yes, rather!"

"Hold on, though!" said Snoop. "Conchies are queer cattle, and he may put up a fight. We don't want to get the tar and feathers ourselves."

"Angel would have come if you hadn't rowed with him yesterday!" growled

Skinner. "Now he's keeping his distance."

"Hang him! Let him keep it!"

"Ask Bolsover major," said Stott. "He's backing up Hilary, for some reason, the ass; but he's potty on Conchies. He'll enjoy it!"

"Good! We'll see!"

Bolsover major, as soon as he was approached on the subject, entered heartily into the scheme. He had rather a regard for Hilary, since the latter had stood up to him; but for Hilary's father he had only fierce contempt. And with the burly bully of the Remove to help, Skinner & Co. had no doubt of being able to handle the Conchy with ease.

After dinner Dick Hilary left the School House as quickly as possible, and started at a good pace for the wood. And after him, with subdued chuckles, went Skinner & Co., feeling sure of their game at last.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Something Like a Surprise!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

The Famous Five were sauntering in a leisurely way down the lane when Bob Cherry stopped and stared through a gap in the hedge.

"Anything up?" asked Nugent.

"Look!"

Through the gap the juniors had a wide view of the green fields towards the woods. Heading for the wood was Dick Hilary, walking fast, and on his track, keeping pace with him, a couple of dozen yards behind, were Skinner & Co.

Hilary was evidently unaware that he was pursued; he was thinking only of the coming meeting with his father, and did not glance behind once. But the pursuit was very evident to the eyes of the Famous Five.

Harry Wharton knitted his brows.

"What's their game?" he said. "Is it a rag on Hilary?"

"More likely on his pater," said Bob. "He's going to meet his pater, you know. You see that bag in Skinner's paw?—and Snoop's got a bundle. That's the tar and feathers!"

"Let 'em rip!" said Johnny Bull. "Tar and feathers ain't a bad thing for Conchies."

"Dash it all, it's too bad, when the man's come here to see his son!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Rags are barred on Sundays, too. They're not going to rag the man while he's with Hilary. It's too rotten!"

"Well, perhaps that is rather rotten," admitted Johnny Bull reflectively.

"We'll chip in, if you like!"

"Come on, then!"

The five juniors clambered through the hedge, and cut across the field to intercept the pursuers of Hilary.

They covered the ground at a good rate, and Skinner & Co. soon sighted them. Skinner gave them a savage look, and Bolsover major a glare of defiance. The five came panting into the footpath ahead of the raggers, still at a little distance from the wood.

"Well, what do you want here?" snapped Skinner.

"The question is, what do you want?" said Wharton.

"Can't we go for a walk if we like?"

"If you're only going for a walk—"

"Well, we are! Get out of the way!"

"Don't tell lies, Skinner!" boomed Bolsover major. "I'm not afraid to tell them, or anybody else, what I'm going to do! I'm going to mop up a Conchy!"

"I thought so," said Wharton drily.

"Well, Conchy or not, you're not going

to mop up Mr. Hilary just now! Let the man alone!"

"Rats!"

"Line up!" said Harry.

The Famous Five lined up across the path. Skinner, Snoop, and Stott halted irresolutely. But Bolsover major was made of sterner stuff.

"Let us pass!" he roared.

Dick Hilary heard the shout behind, and he looked round. His face changed as he saw what was happening. After a moment's hesitation he turned back, and came running towards the group.

"What's the row?" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Don't you bother!" said Bob Cherry. "You run on and look for your pater, Hilary. We'll look after these cads!"

"We're after the Conchy!" said Snoop bitterly. "We're going to nail him this time!"

"My father?"

"Yes, your precious pater! These rotters won't stop us!"

Hilary's eyes blazed.

"I'll stop you fast enough!" he exclaimed.

"We'll back you up, kid!" said Wharton. "Now, then, chuck that rubbish down, Skinner, and clear!"

"I won't!"

"I won't let him!" roared Bolsover major furiously. "I'm going on! Anybody who gets in the way will get hurt!"

Bolsover major strode forward, and the next moment was hotly engaged with Harry Wharton.

Hilary started on Skinner, and, in spite of his professed contempt for the Conchy, it was Skinner who gave ground. He dropped the bag of feathers, and backed away in haste.

Hilary kicked the bag into the grass, and it burst with the kick, the feathers flying on the wind.

"Now, then, Stott, I'm your man!" grinned Bob Cherry; but Stott, too, had a fancy for backing away instead of coming on.

"The esteemed Snoop will oblige me," said Hurree Singh, putting up his dusky fists.

To the surprise of the Co., Sidney James Snoop did not back out. He dropped the bundle containing the can of tar, and put up his hands.

"You're not going to stop me!" he said.

"Come on fully, my esteemed Snoop!"

Nugent and Johnny Bull looked on with their hands in their pockets. It was one to one, and only Wharton had anything like a handful to deal with. But Wharton had enough to do, for Bolsover major was in savage earnest, and he had plenty of pluck.

On the edge of the wood a figure in khaki appeared in sight, looking across the field towards the scrimmage.

It was the soldier who had waited at the old Priory the previous day, and who had met the Co. in the wood that morning.

He stared at the exciting scene for some minutes, evidently in great surprise, and then started along the footpath towards the juniors.

By that time Stott had quite backed out, having had enough of Bob Cherry's hard hitting, and he was in full retreat across the fields.

Skinner would have followed his example gladly, but his head was in chancery, and he could not. Hilary was pommelling Skinner's features, and the cad of the Remove was kicking and scratching like a wild animal.

Bolsover major had gone down on his back, but he was up again at once like a jack-in-the-box, and coming on furiously.

All the juniors had forgotten what day it was by that time. It was a rigid rule at Greyfriars that scraps and rags were

barred on Sunday; but they were not thinking of that now.

Bolsover major closed with Wharton, and they struggled hard, both of them angry and excited.

Sidney James Snoop was putting up a losing fight, but he was sticking to it. Sidney James had shown much more character, in many ways, since his father had become a soldier. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, always a considerate youth, dealt lightly with him, contenting himself with keeping Snoop at arm's-length, with an occasional tap to remind him that a fight was on.

Meanwhile, the man in khaki was striding towards the scene.

Harry Wharton and Bolsover major went rolling over in the grassy path, still pommelling.

The soldier stopped in time to avoid stumbling over them as they rolled almost at his feet.

He stooped, and grasped both the juniors, and lifted them up, dragging them apart at the same moment, which required a considerable exertion of strength.

The two breathless and astonished juniors blinked at him.

"Stop this!" said the soldier quietly.

"Let go!" said Wharton. "It's all right, Tommy!"

"Leggo!" roared Bolsover major. "I'll jolly well punch you if you hold me, you cheeky ass!"

The soldier smiled, and, lifting Bolsover major clear of the ground, weighty as the burly Removite was, he sat him down in the grass.

Bolsover major sat there gasping. After that exhibition of physical strength he wisely decided not to punch the man in khaki.

Hurree Singh and Snoop ceased their combat; but Hilary and Skinner were still fighting. Skinner was yelling to his adversary to let him go, but Hilary's temper was up, and he was still pommelling. The soldier strode towards them, and caught Dick Hilary by the shoulder.

"Stop that, Dick!" he said politely. "Have you forgotten that it is Sunday? Stop it, I say!"

Hilary let go Skinner as if the latter had suddenly become red-hot. Skinner staggered away, dabbing at his nose, and blinking.

Hilary did not look at him. His eyes were fixed upon the soldier in blank amazement.

His amazement, almost stupefaction, struck the other fellows, and they all stared at him. A slight smile was on the soldier's face. For some moments Dick Hilary could not find his voice as he stared at the man in khaki.

Then he gasped:

"Father!"

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Call of His Country!

"FATHER!"

Hilary repeated the word in tones of wonder.

He had at last seen his father taken away by the police, a determined and unrepentant Conscientious Objector. He saw him now in the King's khaki, as soldierly-looking a man as one could wish to see. It was no wonder that Dick Hilary could scarcely believe his eyes.

Bolsover major staggered up.

"Is that your father, Hilary?" he stammered.

"Yes!" gasped Hilary.

"You said he was a Conchy!"

"The Conchiffulness does not seem to be terrific!" remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The excellent and ridiculous gentleman has heard his country's call,

and joined up fully. The congratulation is terrific!"

"Well, my hat!" said Bob Cherry.

"Father!" repeated Hilary dazedly.

"Then you—you—you—"

"Yes, my boy," said Mr. Hilary quietly. "I am a soldier now. I have found, my dear lad, that I was mistaken on some points, and I could not allow a false pride to keep me from admitting it. I was afraid that this would be a shock to you, Dick; but to judge by what I have seen you also have undergone some change of view."

Hilary crimsoned.

"I—I—" he stammered.

"Don't blame him, sir," said Bolsover major, quite respectfully now. "Hilary was standing up for you."

"For me?"

"We—we thought his pater was a Conchy, and we were going to rag him," said Bolsover, flushing. "Hilary was trying to stop us."

"I see!" said the soldier quietly. "I don't think you would have found the ragging very easy, my boy."

"I—I don't think so, either," said Bolsover major, whose shoulder was still aching from the soldier's iron grasp. "Still, if you'd been a Conchy you couldn't have put up a fight, could you? You'd have been bound to let us tar and feather you, if we wanted to, without resisting, according to your giddy principles."

"I—I suppose so!" said Mr. Hilary, with a start. "I am not sure, however, that I should have followed out my recent principles to that extent. It would not have been quite safe for you to put it to the test, I think. However, I presume you have now abandoned that kindly intention?"

"Oh, of course!" said Bolsover major shamefacedly. "I—I'm sorry, sir!"

And with that Bolsover major walked away, followed by Skinner and Snoop. The ragging was off—very much off!

"This is where we clear!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Jolly glad to have met you, Mr. Hilary, especially under these circumstances."

"The gladfulness is terrific, my esteemed Tommy!" said the Nabob of

Bhanipur. "It is a day worthy to be marked with a white stone!"

"Thank you very much!" said the soldier gravely. "Come, Dick!"

Hilary gave the juniors a happy smile as he walked away with his father.

It was easy to see that the junior was overjoyed at the change that had come over the Conchy.

The doubts and misgivings that had grown up in his own mind had evidently taken root in his father's mind also, and produced the same change of view.

At Greyfriars Hilary had discovered that the turning of the other cheek was not a practical policy in a world not yet sufficiently civilised; and the same discovery had dawned upon Mr. Hilary in the Conchy camp—where probably his surroundings had helped to modify his opinions.

It had amazed Hilary at the first glance; but it was not so very surprising, after all.

Harry Wharton & Co. glanced after the well-set-up figure in khaki and the junior walking proudly by his father's side with very kindly looks.

"Well, this is jolly good!" said Bob Cherry. "Hilary's as proud as Punch of his pater now! Blessed if I'd have guessed that Tommy was Hilary's pater—and we noticed he looked like Hilary in the phiz, too. But who'd have expected to see a Conchy turn up in khaki?"

"He was an absent-minded beggar, but he heard his country's call!" sang Nugent, and the juniors laughed.

And the Co. were feeling quite elated as they went on their way. Hilary's troubles were over, and they had ended in a way that could not fail to please all concerned—unless it was Mr. Hilary's lank and long-haired former friends.

Father and son walked on in silence for some time. In the footpath in the wood Mr. Hilary stopped and glanced down at Dick's bright face.

"You're glad, Dick?" he asked.

Hilary coloured.

"I'm sure you've done right, father," he answered.

"What I have done is very different from what I have taught you, Dick," said the soldier. "I was right, in a way; but—but the real world is very different.

Dick, from the world of thinkers and dreamers. I still believe that the time will come when all men will live in brotherhood, and war will be as forgotten and regarded with as much horror as cannibalism. But—but that time is not yet. And if universal peace is to come, it can only come by breaking the power of the war-mongers—the Prussian bullies who would set the world on fire for their own base ends. And—and when that was clear to me, Dick, I knew there was only one place for me—in the trenches with the rest."

He paused a moment.

"And—and you agree with me, Dick?" he asked.

"Yes, father! I—I tried at school to do as you'd always taught me—I meant to—and I tried hard. But—but I was afraid you would be angry with me when I told you it couldn't be done."

The soldier smiled.

"We've both been rather mistaken, Dick," he said. "Both mistaken, and both very much misunderstood. That's all over now."

Dick Hilary's face was very cheerful when he came back to Greyfriars.

He found all the Remove in possession of the news, and everybody very friendly and cordial, with the exception of Skinner, who did not matter.

A weight had gone from the junior's mind; and, indeed, until it was gone he did not realise how heavy it had been.

Doubts and misgivings were things of the past: the Conchy camp was an unpleasant picture that faded from his mind. The one-time Conscientious Objector was forming fours now, no longer turning a deaf ear to his country's call—preparing to take his part in the great struggle that was to mark the end, perhaps for ever, of brutal militarism.

Hilary was happy, and his friends were glad; and, indeed, as Hurree Janset Ram Singh remarked, the happy gladfulness was terrific!

(Don't miss "COKER'S LATEST!"—next Monday's grand complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Monday:

"COKER'S LATEST!"

By Frank Richards.

"One man in his time plays many parts," says Shakespeare. Seven, Shakespeare gives the man on the stage of human life. But Horace James Coker has played many more than that on the stage of Greyfriars.

The parallel is not exact, for Shakespeare was telling us of the various ages of man, from babyhood—"the infant, mewling and puking"—to decrepit old age—"sans teeth, sans eyes, sans everything." And Coker's many parts have been compressed into one age. If he goes on as he has begun his seven ages will provide seventy times seven parts.

Coker has been captain of Greyfriars—a prefect—a hypnotist—a special constable—a detective—a kind of professional optimist, with carefully-prepared jokes—an organiser of National Service—an amateur recruiting agent—and lots of other things—but always an ass, and always, in spite of his folly, a good fellow at heart.

What is Coker's latest? That you will learn next week. But I will give you a clue. Billy Hunter plays quite an important part in connection with it. Can you think that out?

ANOTHER LITTLE SERMON.

Thinking things out is not half a bad exercise, you know—even little things. Very few

of us do enough of it. To look all round everything is not easy, of course; it calls for more knowledge and more judgment than the average man or boy possesses. But it is always worth while to remember that there are two sides to everything. In some cases only a glance at the other side is needed—it may be not even a glance. When you are up against a question of absolute right or wrong, or one of fair play—which comes to much the same thing—you need not bother yourself about the other side. There is something in you—call it conscience, call it instinct, call it what you like—whatever you call it, it's there—which speaks to you then.

But there are so many other matters in which looking at both sides—thinking a thing out—pays. We used to be accused before the war by some people of being a nation of slackers. It was not true, or, at worst, it was not wholly true. I don't think the average Briton is a slacker as regards bodily work, though, of course, we have plenty of bone-lazy people among us. But I think the average Briton is rather inclined to avoid hard thinking. He fancies it is going to make his head ache. So it may when the head is unaccustomed to it. But you can get your head accustomed to thinking; and that's partly what it's for, you know.

What is the commonest excuse of all among boys and girls in schools and offices? "I didn't think." There are others; but I fancy that is the most frequent.

It really is not a good one, is it? I won't say you are paid to think at school; but it's hardly worth while that you should attend if you don't think. And to put your brains into your work makes the work more interesting. But when you have got a job you are being paid to think. You may not be paid much;

but remember the less you think the lower your wages are likely to be.

Some of you may imagine that what you are getting now is a standard of value. It is not; it is a mere matter of price. I did what I could to explain this to you last week.

A business man must have—or imagines he must have—an office-boy. Three years ago he could have got one easy enough for under fifteen shillings a week. Now he will have to pay twice or thrice as much.

Part of that increase is due to the greater cost of living, but most of it merely to a shortage of boys. Even if the cost of living keeps up, the standard of wages will fall directly there are more boys available than are needed.

Think about that! I don't mean worry about it. There is no need to worry if you will only think on proper lines. For, presuming that you have even average brains, thinking will fit you for better things.

Argument is a good thing, too, if it is only reasonable and civil. I don't mean bickering, taking a certain attitude and maintaining that your attitude must be right; I mean finding out what the other fellow thinks—if he can and does think—and whether there isn't, after all, something in his ideas, even if they differ from yours. Argument can easily be carried too far. I have known men who would argue at any time on either side of any question. That's pretty useless. Unless you are expressing your own thoughts you had better dry up. But your own thoughts are not necessarily right; and so the other fellow may teach you something. And even if he is wholly wrong, what he has to say may not be without its uses for you.

YOUR EDITOR.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 560.

Extracts from "THE GREYFRIARS HERALD" and "TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY."

THE SCAPEGOAT. By ERNEST LEVISON.

FATHEAD!"

"Chump!"

"Silly cuckoo!"

"Look here, young Frayne—"

"Oh, rats, Wally!"

That's the way they were talking. How do I know when I wasn't there? Do you suppose I don't know how the Third talk? Frank wasn't there, either, so he did not tell me; he had gone out for the afternoon with Clive and Cardew and me.

"My only aunt! If you chaps don't shut up I'll give you a licking all round—the licking of your lives!" snapped Wally D'Arcy.

"I say kippers, so what's the use of anyone else saying bloaters?"

"Well, I like that!" gasped Reggie Manners. "Do you jolly well think that you're going to settle what we shall eat?"

"I'm going to settle what I shall eat, anyway; and any silly ass who wants something different can go somewhere else to cook it!" said Wally.

"It's my cash, an' I suppose I've got a right to say what's jolly well goin' to be done with it, ain't I?" yelled Joe Frayne.

"Oh, you! You're sure to say the same as Wally; you always do. So does young Levison," said the exasperated Reggie.

"Where is young Levison?" asked Hobbs.

"Gone out with his major, so never you mind about young Levison!" growled Wally.

"Don't get your shirt out, old sport! I say kippers, too!"

"But I say bloaters!" howled Curly Gibson.

"What do you say, Jimmy?" asked Frayne.

"Oh, bloaters!" answered Jameson.

The voting was even. The fact that Frayne was providing the cash for the fish really made no difference to Third Form feeling. Those seven, though there are lots of ways in which they don't resemble the Early Christians, are a bit like them about the community of good bizney. The oof might be admitted to be Frayne's, but all the rest would consider that they had as big a right as Frayne in the disposal of it.

"Three to three!" said Reggie exultantly.

"We shall have to toss for it."

"Not likely! It's four to three, really," replied Wally confidently.

Reggie stared at him.

"How do you make that out?" he yelled.

"Franky's vote will have to be counted—that's how."

"But he ain't here! How do we know which way he would vote?"

"Why, you said yourself that he would be sure to say the same as I did, ass!"

"So you did, Reggie, an' you can't deny it," put in Joe Frayne.

"Levison's vote will have to count," said Hobbs.

"It jolly well won't, and we jolly well won't have kippers!" howled Reggie furiously.

"All right, my son, don't have kippers! That's what we're going to get, and if you chaps stick to bloaters, you can go and get them yourselves, that's all about it," said Wally.

Curly Gibson and Jameson looked at one another.

"I don't mind much, really," said Curly.

"After all, there are points about a kipper."

"I'd as soon have a kipper as a bloater, and they don't take so long to cook," Jameson said.

"You rotters!" howled Reggie. "I might have known you'd give in!"

But Reggie had to give in, too, or go without. And as kippers really suited Reggie quite as well as bloaters, he gave in. He is a contrary young rascal, but he does not carry his contrariness to the length of standing out of a feed.

They had started operations when Cutts looked in.

"I don't know what Cutts was after. The

lordly members of the Fifth are not often seen in the Third Form-room. When they do go there it is seldom upon anything in the way of a friendly mission. I should guess that something in the ragging line had happened to Cutts, and that he was seeking vengeance. I cannot say for certain, because I could not find out, and I rather think that if one is to tell a story about the Third Form without any gaps of this sort in it one has to be a member of that distinguished band. They bar letting outsiders know everything; there are things that even Frank won't tell me.

But I am sure that, whatever had chanced to Cutts, Frank had not been in it. Oh, no; not because he is too good and gentle for that sort of thing, but simply because he says he wasn't, and young Frank's word is good enough for me.

The cooking was going on cheerily when Cutts appeared. Wally had a kipper on two pens, and Frayne had another on a knife, and Hobbs was cutting up a loaf of bread, and Jameson and Curly Gibson were sniffing at something that was alleged to be butter, and Reggie was sniffing at things in general—he's rather a sniffing young beast at times.

There certainly was some smell, and it was not of the most odorous, I dare say. Third Form cookery seems to me to run chiefly to smells—not very nice ones, either.

But the smell was not Cutts' affair.

"Whew!" said Cutts. "You nasty little bounders! Who's going to be poisoned with that muck?"

"You're not, anyway, Cutts!" snapped Wally.

"I should say not!" added Reggie. "We don't ask Fifth Form louts to our kipper feeds!"

"Fifth Form louts" was off. It was not likely that Cutts would stand that. On the other hand, if he had wanted anything in the Third Form-room he should have said so; it was not for him to criticise the manners and customs of the fag tribe. Of course, it's different when a fellow like myself, or D'Arcy major or Manners major, with a young brother in the Third, put in a word in season.

And, anyway, it was Reggie who had cheeked Cutts, not Wally.

But Cutts at best never was a discriminating chap. He grabbed Wally roughly by the collar. Reggie had skipped behind a form, and Wally was handier for vengeance, I suppose.

"Want a kipper, do you, Cutts? Here you are!" yelled Wally.

And he smote Cutts full in the face with the hot and odorous kipper.

Then there was a mix-up. I cannot give exact details, but I understand that when all was over, and Cutts, recognising the fact that he had bitten off more than he could chew, beat a retreat, the only thing in the way of kippers left was the smell. The rest, according to Wally & Co., had been rammed down the back of Cutts' neck.

II.

HAVE you seen your minor, Levison?"

It was Wally who asked that question, sticking his head into No. 9. Cardew and Clive and I were all there, just finishing prep.

"Yes. Saw him this afternoon," I answered. "Do you mean to say—"

"Nobody in our Form's seen anything of him since just after dinner!"

"My hat! He came in with us soon after tea-time all serene," said Clive. "Didn't he answer to his name at calling-over?"

"No, I answered for him, though. And he wasn't missed at prep. Old Selby's away, you know, and that chap Smith doesn't notice

much. But it's a lick to me what's become of the kid!"

Wally was evidently anxious. So was I. It was very unlike Frank to do anything mysterious.

"Franky's eloped," said Cardew, who doesn't always know the right time for being funny.

"Oh, shut up!" I growled.

"Let's go and look for the kid," said Clive.

"Right-ho! Oh don't you bother to come, Cardew!" I said.

"Am I not also Franky's uncle?" said that silly chump solemnly.

In the passage we ran against Trimble.

"He, he, he!" chortled the fat rotter.

"Are you looking for young Levison?"

"Do you know where he is?" snapped Clive.

Clive can't stand Trimble at any price—none of us can, for that matter; but Clive bars him especially, just as Kangaroo does. Sometimes I fancy that they never get that sort out in the Colonies, and don't know what to make of them when they find them here.

But I don't know.

"I might know, and I might not!" replied Baggy, in that silly, fat, smirking way he has.

Clive caught him by the collar, and shook him hard.

"You do know, you fat sweep, and you're jolly well going to tell!" he said.

"Yow-ow! Gurrig! Lemme be, Clive! He's in Cutts' study. 'Tain't my fault! I didn't—"

Wally bolted off at once. We did not guess at the moment what for; but we knew later.

Clive released Baggy.

"I can't make this out," I said, puzzled.

"Frank wouldn't have anything to do with Cutts."

Cutts has taken up kids before and done his best to make young rotters of them. He did Reggie Manners no good. But Frank isn't that sort of kid.

"Ugh! You've choked me, Clive, you rotter!" mumbled Baggy. "If you want to know, the kid's in the cupboard—been there ever so long! I heard him calling when I went in to see if Cutts had any jam—I mean, of course, I wasn't after Cutts' jam. I should scorn such an action, I hope; but—"

"And you didn't let him out?" I snorted in disgust.

"An'-you-didn't-let-him-out?" echoed Cardew, with a kick after each word by way of punctuation.

"Yaroooooh! Stoppl! Cardew! Of course I didn't! Nice thing it would have been if Cutts had caught me there! Besides, what bizney was it of mine? Yow-ow! That hurts!"

Clive and I had darted off. Durrance joined us with Cardew a moment later. Pretty hefty chap, Durrance, and always on the spot when wanted.

We could have turned out the Fourth and the Shell, too, for a job like this. Everybody likes young Frank, and no one is keen on Cutts. But we did not wait for any more. Four would be enough, we fancied, even if Gilmore and St. Leger were with him.

But Cutts was not in his study. Directly we opened the door, however, we could hear Frank.

He was making a sort of moaning noise, and the kid looked really queer when we got him out. He had been tied up for hours; and you know how a rope tied tightly affects you—stops the circulation of the blood, and all that. He had been gagged, too; but the gag had worked partly out, so that he had been able to speak to Baggy when that honest youth looked into Cutts' cupboard just to see whether there was jam there. He would not have touched it if there had been, of course; anyway, he didn't touch Frank. Not sure that that proves the point about the jam, though.

The kid could hardly speak at first. I tell

you were mad, all of us—Clive and Cardew and Durrance as much as myself.

"What did he do it for?" I asked hotly.

"I don't know—I don't know a bit!" answered Frank hoarsely. "I told him I hadn't done anything, and he said I was a young liar. I hadn't a chance. I wish now I'd kicked the brute's shins; but I bar kicking. He told me he wanted me to take a note somewhere, and got me up here, and then—"

"Hallo! I wasn't expectin' visitors, by Jove!"

It was Cutts who spoke, and we faced round. Gilmore and St. Leger were with him, and it looked for a moment as if we should have our work cut out.

But next moment there was a rush of feet up the stairs. The Third war-crier sounded, and the wolf-pack was upon Cutts!

He went down under them, with a howl for help. Gilmore stepped forward, and next instant was swung over on to the couch, where Cardew and Durrance sat upon him to keep him quiet.

Clive and I dealt with St. Leger.

The kids did not need our help. They were seven—the usual crowd—a bit heftier than Billy Wordsworth's seven, I should say.

I have seen some raggings in my time. I may say I have assisted at quite a few, and put some through on my own. But I never saw a more complete and thorough ragging than that.

They didn't pommel or kick Cutts. They had him helpless, and they worked their own sweet will with him without brutality.

Cutts had some jam. Reggie found it. They did not take it away; Cutts still had it when they had finished. The ink was his—or St. Leger's or Gilmore's; that was no odds—Cutts had that, too. He had the soot from the chimney, and the vinegar and oil, and something that smelt rather like whisky, though it was labelled otherwise, and—well, he had everything they could find that was pourable. They ripped open a sofa-cushion, and smothered his face with feathers. They did lots of other things, but all in a fair way; I must say that for them.

My hat! I shouldn't think Cutts would be wanting a third Third ragging—yes, "third Third's" quite correct; that was his second of the afternoon—for quite some time.

We enjoyed it all. The bullying rotter had deserved it. Even if Frank had been among the kipper party, it would have been too thick, the way Cutts had treated him.

But he hadn't been one of the kipper raggers. No doubt Cutts thought he had; but that's not quite good enough. The kid wasn't to be made a scapegoat of in that rotten way.

We sat it out to the end, and neither St. Leger nor Gilmore cut up roughly when we got off their waistcoats and legs. I am not dead sure that they hadn't got a certain amount of enjoyment out of the ragging.

But I'm dead sure Cutts had not. He was done to the wide at the finish. He only gasped when we went.

When he wants a scapegoat again I fancy he will think twice before he jumps on one of those seven!

THE END.

TAKING UP MUSIC!

By ROBERT DONALD OGILVY.

WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER, the Owl of the Remove, cautiously and quietly opened the door of Study No. 5 in the Shell passage—that shared by Hoskins and Hobson.

It was Hoskins, the musical genius of Greyfriars, whom Bunter sought. The fat junior first put his snub nose and one eye round the edge of the slightly-open door to ascertain if the youthful musician was alone.

He was. Seated at the table, propping up his head with his left hand and grasping a pen in his right, he was poring over a sheet of music-paper.

Bunter immediately straightened himself, and, trying to look at once cordial and dignified, advanced into the study. He made more noise than usual to give the impression, in case it were necessary, that he had come straight to the door and entered without any preliminary manoeuvring.

He needn't have troubled, however, for even now Hoskins was quite unaware of his presence, so engrossed was he on the work in hand.

"Good-afternoon, Hoskins, old fellow!" began Bunter affably.

Hoskins turned his head, and looked upon the fat junior with an expression which could not by any stretch of imagination have been mistaken for one of welcome.

Bunter was not dismayed, however. With his most winning smile he continued:

"Er—I just dropped in to see how you're getting on with that—er—now, what ever did you call it? Something like tomato, only I can't think of the exact word."

"I suppose you mean my sonata, you fat duffer!" replied Hoskins contemptuously.

"Ah, yes, that's it!" replied Bunter agreeably. "How's it getting on?"

"Don't come in here inquiring after my composition in that absurd fashion!" snapped Hoskins. "Anybody'd think it was a corn or a boil, or something!"

Hoskins was not disposed to be agreeable to the Owl, for he knew that these unusually friendly visits generally foreshadowed a request for a small loan pending the arrival of a postal-order, which, as a rule, didn't materialise.

"Oh, really, Hoskins, I'm awfully sorry!" Bunter hastened to apologise. "But you must put it down to my—er—total lack of knowledge of—er—musical subjects."

"Humph! That's what we have to do with most subjects where you're concerned!" muttered the musician drily.

Bunter ignored this comment, and continued pleasantly:

"When do you expect to finish your—er—"

He broke off, faltering and frowning. He had forgotten the form of the composition again already.

"Sonata!" roared Hoskins impatiently.

"Ah, yes, sonata!" repeated Bunter, making a gesture of annoyance at having forgotten.

"When do you think it will be finished?"

"Well, at the present rate, I should say it will be a jolly long time yet!" replied Hoskins, not concealing his irritation at the Owl's persistence.

Bunter didn't see the hint, however; or, if he did, he ignored it, for he leaned forward slightly to glance over the sheet of music-paper upon which Hoskins was working, as

though he were most interested in the progress of the composition.

"It's no earthly good your looking at that!" snapped Hoskins. "A fellow with a mind like yours can't grasp the idea of a work of art like my sonata!"

"But really, Hoskins, old pal, I'm most keen to get an insight into this sort of thing," persisted Bunter, not to be put off.

"Well, I'm writing the second movement now, which is adagio," explained Hoskins. It was easy to get him talking about his great works.

"A what?"

"Not 'a' anything, fathead! 'Adagio' is one word, and it means 'slow.' An adagio movement is a slow movement."

"Oh, I see!" exclaimed Bunter, as though the sudden light of great knowledge had burst upon him. "Well, you know, that's a funny thing you should just happen to be doing that, because I'm awfully keen on slow movements."

"Are you really?" said Hoskins. "Then perhaps you'd like to make a slow movement towards the door?"

"Oh, really!" groaned the Owl, with an injured look. "It's rather a bit off to take advantage of a fellow's enthusiasm to make a rotten joke like that! And besides, I haven't got to what I really came in to ask you."

"You'd better get to it pretty quickly, then, you fat ass," said Hoskins threateningly, "or you won't get the chance! The time I've wasted on you already is equivalent to about half a page of what is going to turn out an immortal work."

"I'm jolly sure it will!" said Bunter, with conviction. "I know what a jolly clever chap you are, Hosky. And—and I say, Hosky, will you play over to me what you've already done of it?"

At this request all sign of impatience immediately disappeared from Hoskins' countenance. He spent all the time which was not occupied in writing his compositions in vainly endeavouring to get fellows to listen to his rendering of them on the piano. The average Greyfriars fellow could not have been dragged to the music-room for that purpose by wild horses.

Therefore this sign of the dawn of interest even in such a duffer as the Owl was welcomed by Hoskins with delight, and he pulled out his watch.

"The music-room will be free for about a quarter of an hour," he said eagerly, "so we'll go along there at once."

He gathered up the sheets of manuscript, while Bunter, behind his back, contorted his face into a weird expression of resignation. Then together they made their way to the music-room.

Needless to say, there was a very strong motive for Bunter's noble self-sacrifice; but he had not yet played his trump card.

He had a proposition to make to Hoskins, as a result of which he hoped to raise an unlimited number of small loans.

He had grown tired of going round the Remove for assistance when he was suffering from financial stringency, and he had visions of being able to appeal to Hoskins when necessary, and having his wants supplied.

He was completely lost in a contemplation of this delightful prospect when Hoskins struck the opening chord of his sonata.

It so startled the Owl that he jumped as though a pin had been stuck into him, and only just choked back an exclamation.

There was now a dead silence, for a few beats' rest followed.

Bunter stared at Hoskins, thinking that something had gone wrong.

"Er—is anything the matter?" he queried anxiously.

"Sssh!" hissed Hoskins. "It's only two bars' rest, fathead!"

And before Bunter had time to make any further comment the musician's two hands fell upon the piano with a heavy crash. Then, with a suddenness which quite frightened the Owl, they commenced running up and down the keyboard, a most extraordinary medley of sounds pouring forth from the instrument.

A dazed expression crept over Bunter's countenance, and he felt as though he were going off his head. He put his hand to his forehead and stared about him. Then he glanced at Hoskins' wild face.

Understanding broke upon him immediately. It was not he who was going off his head. It was Hoskins!

He stood up, but his legs shook in a most alarming manner. Whether it was the effects of the sonata or the shock of discovering Hoskins had gone potty he did not know.

He began to stagger over to the door to inform someone of the catastrophe that had befallen the musician; but when he had got about half-way the performance ceased as suddenly as it had begun.

Hoskins swung round, and beheld Bunter in the act of taking his departure.

"Here, where are you off to, you fat young ass?" demanded Hoskins fiercely. "I don't believe you've been listening at all!"

"Oh, really I have!" declared Bunter, walking back to the piano again, now that the seeming paroxysm was over. "The fact is, I suddenly came over very dizzy, and I felt—oh, really something awful for a minute! I was just going out quietly so as not to interrupt your beautiful playing."

Hoskins looked doubtfully at the Owl of the Remove; but he accepted the explanation.

"I fancy this is about the biggest thing I've ever done," he said enthusiastically.

"Yes—er—I should say it was!" agreed Bunter.

"I particularly like that bit just here," went on Hoskins, pointing to a line of the manuscript.

"Yes, I specially noticed that," interposed Bunter nervously, fearing that it was going to be played over again. "That bit moved me very much."

Hoskins glanced at Bunter with an expression almost of admiration. He had never imagined before that there was so much in the Owl.

"Well, I think there'll be just about time to play it through again," he said, glancing at his watch.

"Half a minute!" said Bunter quickly. "There's something else I want to ask you and there won't be time if you play that again, because I've got my prep to do."

"If you want to borrow any money, it's no good, old son!" remarked Hoskins.

"Oh, really, you know, I had no idea of doing such a thing!" declared Bunter, as though he'd never asked anyone for a loan in his life.

"And I haven't got any grub, either," added Hoskins. "So that's off!"

"It wasn't grub," said the Owl. "Though, as a matter of fact, I'm feeling decidedly peckish at the moment. The thing is, I want to ask you if you will give me some music lessons."

"Eh?" ejaculated Hoskins, staring at Bunter in amazement.

"Give me some music lessons," repeated Bunter. "It's suddenly dawned on me what a great thing music is; and I should awfully like to be able to play some of your compositions."

"I'll give you lessons with pleasure," said Hoskins; and he meant it, too.

"But, of course, you know," he continued, "you'll learn a lot through listening to me."

"Oh, yes; exactly!" responded Bunter. "I've learnt quite a lot already!"

"Well, I'll give you the first lesson to-morrow between classes and dinner-time," said Hoskins. "And for a start-off I'll play you the first movement of my sonata again."

Bunter groaned quite loudly.

"What's the matter?" demanded Hoskins suspiciously.

"Oh, nothing, really!" replied the Owl, with a faint smile. "I've got a bit of a pain through being so empty, that's all."

"If it's as bad as all that I might be able to do something for you," said Hoskins. "Just come along to the study with me, and I'll see if I can borrow a slab of Hobson's cake."

Bunter's eyes gleamed with a light that the music had failed to kindle; and it dawned on Hoskins, for the first time, that he had other motives than the desire to become a musician.

However, he kept his suspicions to himself, and Bunter, with a grin on his fat face and a chunk of cake in his fat right hand, left him with the understanding that his musical studies were to commence the next day.

During the next morning's lessons Bunter turned over in his mind the question of abandoning his scheme, for the prospect of having to listen to Hoskins' compositions whenever that worthy felt inclined to render them to him fairly made him shudder.

He had practically decided to disappear after classes; but when that time came he didn't have the chance, for Hoskins sought him out at once, and carted him off to the music-room.

He tried to palm him off with the excuse that he was feeling rather seedy, but that wasn't good enough. Hoskins said he'd be sure to be all right by the time he had listened to the first movement of his sonata.

Bunter didn't think so, but he could see that he had to go through with it.

He tried to minimise the deteriorating effect of the performance by thinking of all the splendid feeds he would have when the war was over, and that certainly did help.

Then Hoskins started Bunter on the five-finger exercises, and before five minutes had passed the fat junior came to the definite conclusion that it would be impossible to go on with such a business, even if he could have his pockets replenished afresh each morning.

The lesson, which was about as painful a mental ordeal as any through which Bunter had ever passed, was only brought to an end by the bell for dinner; and the Owl was more grateful for the sound of that bell than he had ever been before.

"Then I'll see you again the day after to-morrow," said Hoskins.

"Er—yes, all being well!" replied Bunter; though he determined that all would not be well.

However, when the time came he was collared by Hoskins. And this sort of thing continued till at last the Owl was driven almost to desperation. He had raised a few loans and had a few snacks; but music had no charms for his breast, and he felt that the game was not worth the candle.

"Oh, dear!" he groaned one evening, when he was alone in the study with Alonzo. "It's really something awful!"

He passed his hand wearily across his forehead as he spoke, and Alonzo looked at him in alarm.

"What can be the matter, my dear Bunter?" he inquired anxiously. "Do you feel ill? Shall I get you some water?"

"Water!" moaned Bunter. "That's no good—not unless you get me enough to drown myself in!"

"But, my dear fellow," expostulated Alonzo, "what can have happened to drive you to such a terrible state of dejection?"

"Oh, dry up your rotten drivel!" snapped Bunter impatiently. "It's this rotten music, of course!"

"Oh, your music lessons!" said Alonzo. "I see! But if they upset you like this, surely you can give them up?"

"Easier said than done!" remarked Bunter hopelessly. "And besides—"

"Besides what?" asked Alonzo, his sympathy going out to Bunter in his difficulty.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I want to ask Hoskins for the loan of five shillings on Friday until my postal-order arrives," explained Bunter; "and if I go and chuck up this beastly music now I shan't stand an earthly chance of getting it."

"Oh, but I'm sure if Hoskins knew that the musical study was undermining your health he would agree that it must be better for you to give it up!" said Alonzo. "And, furthermore, I'm sure he wouldn't let that stand in the way of giving you a little—er—financial assistance."

"Oh, wouldn't he?" growled Bunter. "That shows what a lot you know about it!"

So Alonzo dropped the subject for the time being, but he thought a great deal about it after Bunter had ambled out of the study.

"If the poor fellow goes on like that," he muttered to himself, "he will soon be breaking down altogether. I think I ought to go and see Hoskins myself upon the matter."

He sat for some time thinking this project over, and then he rose and made his way to the shell passage in search of the musician.

He found Hoskins and Hobson in their study, the former at work laboriously on his sonata.

"Oh, Hoskins," he began, "I've just come to see you for a moment about Bunter! He seems to be in a very low state."

"In a low state?" repeated Hoskins. "What's up with him? I suppose he's been filling you up with yarns about not being able to get enough to eat!"

"Oh, no, it's not that at all!" Alonzo hastily explained. "But these—er—music lessons seem to be having a very detrimental effect upon him."

"What do you mean?" asked Hoskins sharply.

"Well, you know, he keeps putting his hands to his head and saying 'It's awful' and all that sort of thing; and it really looks to me as though he's been working too hard at it."

"Well, there's no sign of it in the results, anyway," growled Hoskins, "because he doesn't seem to know which is his first finger yet!"

"I've advised him, if he finds it too much, to tell you so frankly and chuck it up at once," went on Alonzo. "But—this is just between ourselves, of course—he wants to borrow a trifling sum from you at the end of the week, and he seems to think that if he gives up the music now you won't do it for him. But I told him that I was sure you would understand, and wouldn't let such a thing stand in the way of helping him if you could."

"Exactly!" muttered Hoskins. But Alonzo didn't note the expression on his face as he said it. Alonzo—quite unintentionally, of course—had confirmed the suspicions of Hoskins.

"If he wants to turn it up, let him come and tell me so himself," he went on.

"Very well," said Alonzo; "I will persuade him to do so. Don't let him know I've seen you about it, though, please."

"Oh, no; quite so!" agreed Hoskins.

Bunter, however, didn't go to Hoskins about the matter, but turned up at the music-room next day for his lesson.

He was surprised when he entered the room to see Hobson slip out from behind the door and turn the key in the lock. But his surprise turned to alarm when Hoskins advanced across the room with an angry scowl and seized him by the lapels of his coat.

"You're a beastly, deceitful, fat young worm!" hissed Hoskins into his face. "You've been filling me up with yarns about your keenness for music just because you thought you'd be able to sponge on me for cash and grub!"

"Oh, really, Hoskins, I am quite incapable of such conduct!" retorted Bunter, in injured tones. "It licks me how you can imagine that I'd do such a thing as that!"

"Oh, it licks you, does it?" snapped Hoskins. "Well, I'm going to lick you, too! You've been wasting my valuable time and grinning at me behind my back, you rotter! Just catch hold of him a minute, old man!"

Hobson, smiling broadly, complied.

"Yarrocch! Ow-yow! Stoppit!" howled Bunter, as the sharp edge of the folio in which Hoskins kept his compositions smote him again and again.

But, in spite of all, when he was finally thrown out of the room, he couldn't help feeling a sense of relief that his musical studies had come to a conclusion. But how Hoskins had come to see through his scheme he could not imagine. And perhaps it was just as well for Alonzo that he could not!

THE END

A BALLAD OF BUNTER.

By Tom Brown.

A chap stood on his study floor,
And none but him was there.
The table groaned beneath the weight
Of heaped-up goodly fare.
His postal-order had arrived!
(Can you believe that tale?)
And he had bought up everything
The tuckshop had for sale!

The youth (his name I need not state—
You surely can provide it!)
No dallying made, went at the grub,
Started to get outside it;
Stopped not at all to think "What next?"
But stretched his greedy hand
To what came first, and hurled it down—
Raw, baked, or boiled, or canned!

His cheeks grew shiny. Jammy smears
Appeared upon his face.
Fierce gleamed his eyes behind his specs,
But never slackened his pace!
Tighter and tighter pressed his vest;
A button shot away.
He paid no heed. He kept right on
As though he'd eat all day.

Alas! He could not stick the pace;
He slackened down perforce.
"Yea!" said the spirit. Flesh said "Nay!"
The flesh had it, of course.
A hero's soul the struggler had;
He took another tart.
But that last straw—I'm mixing 'em—
Upset the apple-cart!

His throat felt really jolly queer,
As though 'twas stuffed with cake;
And then, some distance lower down,
He did begin to ache.
But, worst of all, he could not stoop
To ease his awful pain.
If he'd have stopped he'd have gone bust—
He nearly went insane!

His face was of a pea-green hue.
As, slow, he turned away.
He went up to his little bed,
And on that bed he lay.
His eyes he closed. A groan he gave
Of anguish, sore and deep.
And then, at last, the youth lay still—
A podgy, painful heap!

The hours passed. Roll-call he missed,
And Quelchby's brow was grim.
Not till his Form trooped up to bed
Did they discover him.
He went to sanny for the night.
He stayed next day as well.
That suited him. He had no need
To heed the rising-bell!

That solace lasted but short time—
Perhaps an hour or two.
The nauseous dose he had to neck
Made him vow he'd eschew
Gorging—for all that term, at least.
Temptation should be vain.
He swore. What matters what he swore?
He's just the same again!

NOTICES.

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