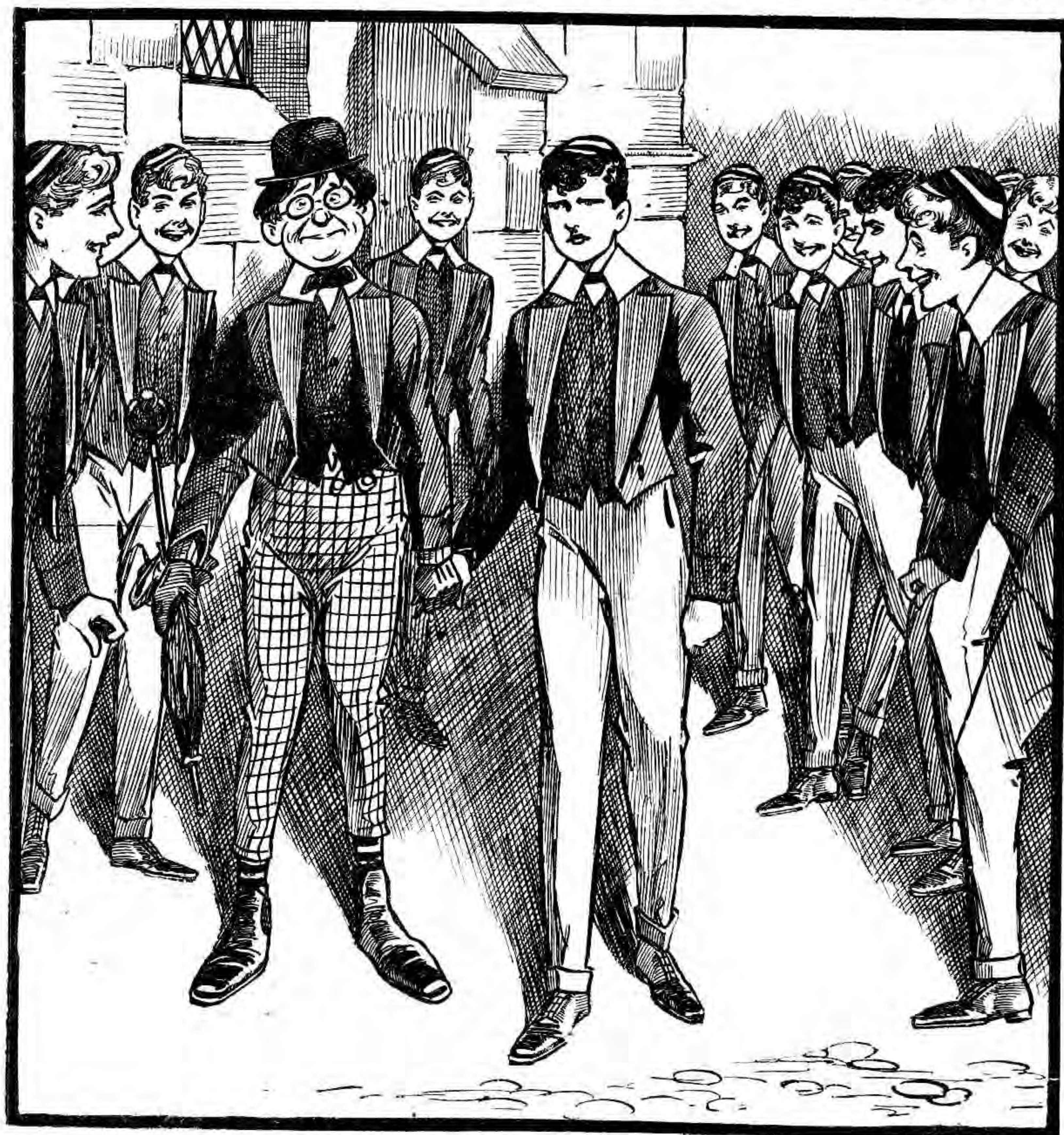




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THE WILES OF WIBLEY!



A NEW THING IN FREAKS!

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THE WILES OF WIBLEY!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

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



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Taking Shelter Together!

"AND just you hurry up, Wib!" With this final adjuration from the lips of Bob Cherry, the Famous Five of Greyfriars allowed William Wibley to go on his way.

Wibley was in high feather. There had just been a whip-round in aid of the Greyfriars Junior Amateur Dramatic Society, which was the very apple of Wibley's eye; and in Wib's pockets jingled quite a lot of silver coins, while there were currency-notes as well in his pocket-book.

His destination was the establishment of Mr. Lazarus at Courtfield. Mr. Lazarus sold theatrical props; and he also let them on hire. Wibley's business was to be done mainly on the hire system, too much being needed to allow of outright purchase.

Over his head, as he tramped towards Courtfield, heavy black clouds rolled up. But Wibley never noticed them. His mind was full of coming theatrical glories.

William Wibley was the actor-manager born. There was no doubt about his acting abilities; and the Remove had had plenty of evidence as to his managing capacity. In fact, they complained that he wanted to manage everything.

But that was only in the dramatic way. As Wib often said, he never tried to interfere with their running the cricket and footer as they thought fit.

He was so deep in thought now that he not only failed to note the signs of the approaching storm, but he did not see the boy who was coming along the road towards him till he heard his voice.

"Hallo, old bean! You'll get a headache if you think so jolly hard!" said the stranger.

He was quite a stranger to Wibley, and the budding Irving thought his familiar address rather cool cheek.

The fellow was of about Wib's own age and height, was dressed in Etons, and bore on lips and fingers the yellow stains that tell of excessive cigarette-smoking.

"Hallo, I didn't see you!" replied Wibley.

"I'm aware of that. You don't seem to have seen, either, that we shall get jolly wet if we don't make a move in about two ticks!" the stranger said, quite as if he had known Wib all his life, and there could be no question as to their taking shelter together.

He had rather a hard and deep voice for one of his apparent age. Somehow, Wibley did not like him very much. He would have liked him less had he guessed that what had impelled the fellow to accost him was the cheerful chinking of coin that had sounded from his pockets as he walked.

"It is going to rain, I fancy," said Wibley, looking up at the sky, and continuing, quite unconsciously, the chinking.

"If you ask me, it's raining now," replied the stranger drily.

He was right, too. Big drops had begun to fall.

"We'll cut across the fields to that old barn," said Wibley, indicating by a nod the building he meant.

"Ain't there anything nearer?"

Wibley failed to notice the slight uneasiness in the tone of the other fellow as he asked that question.

"Not a thing. Come along; we'll have to get a move on us if we're going to keep dry!"

They raced across the fields side by side, and the stranger began to blow rather hard.

"Too much smoking," said Wibley. "Are you a Highcliffe chap? You're not wearing their colours; but I know there are a lot of sneaky rotters there—if you don't mind my plain speaking."

And Wib said that as if he, for his part, did not mind whether his new acquaintance minded or not.

"No," puffed the other fellow. "I'm not—at any—school—yet. But I'm coming—to Greyfriars—on—Monday. You're—Greyfriars—I know."

They reached the shelter of the barn as he finished this panting speech. Wib was a trifle blown now, but not to anything like the same extent.

"Yes," he answered. "It's not a bad show, either, taking it all round, though I must say most of the fellows there are rather duffers in the acting line."

"Oh, acting! I don't think a fat lot of that game! Do you play cards at all? By the way, my name's Benson—Samuel Benson."

"And mine's Wibley—William Wibley. Yes, I've played cards a bit. Rather tame bizney, I think. Why?"

"Oh, I just wondered! I'm keen on it. Jolly interesting—especially when you win!"

"I never care much whether I win or lose when I play," returned Wib.

"I dare say not," said the future Greyfriars junior, with a glance at Wibley's bulging pockets.

Wibley quite failed to notice that glance, or to infer anything from the speech which accompanied it.

Wibley was thinking—hard.

Suddenly his eyes began to gleam. Anyone who knew him well—Rake or Kipps or Micky Desmond or Morgan, say—would have known that some great idea had just come into his head.

"Do you say you're not coming to our show till Monday?" he asked, with an only partially successful attempt to conceal his eagerness.

But the other fellow's eagerness in another direction caused him to observe as little as Wib.

"That's so," he said indifferently.

"And to-day's Wednesday," went on Wibley, as though that were a fact of importance. "I suppose nobody at Greyfriars knows you?"

"No, I haven't even seen the Head. My pater saw him yesterday, but he

didn't take me along. I'm only going to school to be kept out of mischief for a bit. Matter of fact, we're going to New Zealand as soon as we can book passages. But that's not so easily done these days."

"I see," said Wibley thoughtfully.

But he did not care twopence whether Benson was going to New Zealand or to Nova Zembla. He did not care twopence about Benson at all. What he cared about was the scheme that had flashed into his own erratic mind.

The rain was coming down hard now, pelting upon the corrugated iron roof of the barn. The sky had darkened until there was not light enough inside the barn to do more than tell an ace from a king; and Benson said nothing about cards for the moment.

But he took out a cigarette-case, and offered Wibley a smoke.

"No, thanks!" said Wib curtly.

"Don't you care about them? I thought chaps at big schools usually smoked a bit."

"We reckon the smokers at our show as rotters, on the whole!"

"I don't care much what you reckon me, as long as I can get a whiff on the quiet now and then."

Suddenly the clouds in front began to clear, though the rain continued to come down hard.

"Now for the pretty pictures!" said Benson, with a grin of satisfaction.

He pulled a pack of cards from his pocket.

"What's your game?" he inquired.

"Oh, I play anything—snap, old maid, beggar my neighbour," answered Wibley, without much interest.

He was gazing at the fast-clearing sky. Wib wanted to get on to Courtfield.

"Kids' games!" snorted the agreeable Benson. "No use to me. What do you say to banker?"

"As you like. I don't know it; but you can teach me."

The grin on Benson's face widened. This seemed almost too good to be true—a fellow who did not care whether he won or lost, and who wanted to be taught banker!

Benson won the cut for the bank, and shuffled the cards, smiling.

"Shilling points—what?" he said.

"What!" snapped Wibley.

It was not like an echo, for, though the word was the same, the tone was quite markedly different.

"Bob on each pile?"

"Oh, rot! I never play for money!"

"Don't play for money?" gasped Benson.

"No, you silly ass!"

But—but what on earth do you play for, then?"

"Counters—ants—anything. We leave playing for money to cardsharps and chaps of their kidney."

"Great jiminy!"

Benson seemed quite taken aback.

But before he could attempt argument or persuasion the sound of hurrying footsteps was heard.

An elderly, white-whiskered individual trotted in, shaking himself and his umbrella. He had a pink, perspiring face and lots of white hair, and he wore a long-tailed coat and gold-rimmed pince-nez, as well as other things.

"Hallo, dad!" said Benson affably.

The new arrival looked first at Wibley and then at his hopeful offspring.

"A Greyfriars fellow I happened to meet, dad—Wibley."

"How do you do, my dear boy? Pleased to make your acquaintance!" said the elderly gentleman fussily.

"I am quite well, thank you, sir," answered Wibley.

"It gives me pleasure to see you already on friendly terms with my son," said the old gentleman effusively. "I trust you are a lad of good principles, whose influence upon him will be for his benefit."

Wibley mumbled something in reply. He considered the elderly gentleman a cheeky old bounder; and he had no particular desire to influence Samuel's principles—if any—at all.

"Oh, we're getting on all serene, dad!" said Samuel, who had a very off-hand manner with his paternal relative.

"What have you in your hand, Samuel?" snapped Mr. Benson.

"Only a pack of cards—no harm in that, is there?"

"Haven't I objected again and again to that evil habit, Samuel?"

Wibley wondered why the old buffer had not objected in some practical form which would have forced Samuel to take notice.

Samuel put away the cards, and had his cigarette-case half out of his pocket before he suddenly thought better of it. But that action his father apparently failed to observe.

"I trust that you have no such—cr—vices as that?" said Mr. Benson to Wibley, glaring again at Samuel, who seemed quite indifferent to the paternal glares.

"Oh, I don't think so, sir," answered Wibley off-handedly. "I think I'll be going now—it's clearing up, I see."

And, with a nod to the Bensons, he passed out of the barn.

Nothing about the old gentleman's appearance at the barn had aroused his suspicions in the least. He thought the Bensons a very queer pair in some ways; but he had no notion that they were other than they seemed.

His mind was busy with his new scheme, which concerned Samuel Benson, in a way, though Samuel could hardly be said to come into it.

Half an hour later he was in a telephone-box at Courtfield, and had called up Greyfriars.

"Er—Dr. Locke," he began, with an excellent imitation of the tones of the elder Benson, "was it not arranged that my son should come to you on Monday?"

"Ah, I recognise your voice, Mr. Benson. Yes, that was so."

"Will it inconvenience you in any way if he arrives to-morrow?"

"Not in the least!"

"Thank you so much, sir! Samuel will arrive at Friardale by the 12.30 train. Perhaps you would be so very kind as to allow some trustworthy schoolfellow to meet him? Samuel is slightly nervous and highly-strung."

"Certainly! One of the juniors shall come, Mr. Benson!"

"Thank you ex-tremely, sir! Good-bye, sir!"

Wibley hung up the receiver and chuckled.

"So far so good!" he said. "Now for merry old Lazarus and the giddy togs!"



The Brigadier's Busby. (See Chapter 2.)

THE SECOND CHAPTER: The Star Actor!

"NOW, isn't this a ripping rig-out?" asked Wibley enthusiastically. Wibley had got back from Courtfield, and had taken the props he had bought or hired—but he had only bought what Mr. Lazarus had refused to let out on hire—straight to Study No. 1.

The Famous Five had not been the only contributors to the whip-round. But they had subscribed a considerable part of the money collected; and, after Wibley, they were quite the leading lights of the Greyfriars Junior Amateur Dramatic Society.

Wib displayed a gaudy costume and a glittering helmet before their eyes.

"Fine!" said Harry Wharton. "I suppose I'm to wear that as Mark Antony?"

"Or me—I'm Brutus!" Bob Cherry said eagerly.

But Wibley shook his head, sorrowfully but firmly.

"No," he said; and his tone was quite final. "That's for me. It's important above all things that the star actor should make a good appearance, you know, and I suppose you're not going to dispute at this time of day that I'm the star actor?"

"Well, no," growled Johnny Bull. "But there's a limit to things, you know, Wib!"

Wibley did not answer that—possibly because he was not so sure as Johnny of the existence of the limit. There was no limit whatever to the enthusiasm of Wib.

He dipped again into his well-filled bag.

This time it was a most resplendent uniform of the Napoleonic day and of French type that he brought forth.

"Ah! That's mine, I know!" cried Frank Nugent.

"Then you know all wrong!" snapped Wib. "Do have a little sense, Nugent! I'm going to play the part of Brigadier Gerard, in the little thing Wharton knocked up, in that."

"What I want to know," said Johnny Bull, in his most deliberate and determined manner, "is where we come in?"

"Yes, rather! Where do we come in, Wib?" echoed Bob Cherry.

It really did seem a question somewhat to the purpose, all things considered; but Wibley put it aside as if it were of no importance at all.

His third dip into the bag produced something quite equal to the first two, and he held it up to be admired. Wibley knew that he had made good use of the money entrusted to him, and he expected credit for it.

"What do you think of that, you chaps?" he asked.

"Good! Just my mark!" said Harry Wharton approvingly.

"Your mark? Oh, don't talk rot, Wharton! I'm going to wear this as Hamlet. I don't believe in playing the part all through in funeral clobber. That's all wrong. It might suit Irving. It doesn't suit William Wibley!"

The five stared at him. Three costumes had been produced thus far, but they were all for the star actor. There were others to come, but it hardly seemed likely that five more at all of the class of those three could have been hired with the money Wib had had.

"You fellows don't look too well satisfied," Wibley said, having, it seemed, just got on to the general feeling of disgruntlement.

"We're not!" snapped Johnny.

"The dissatisfaction is of the extreme, my esteemed and rapacious Wib," purred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, Nabob of Bhanipur, in his weird and wonderful English.

"I should jolly well think not!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Where do we come in?" demanded Harry.

"Yes, where do we come in?" said Frank Nugent.

"Oh, don't be unreasonable!" replied Wibley, a trifle hotly. "Hamlet can't be played in shirt-sleeves, you know."

"But jolly nearly everything else can, it seems to me!" growled Johnny.

"Not the star parts," replied Wibley.

"You see, as long as the leading actor is well-togged up it really doesn't matter a

lot about the rest. It's on him the eyes of the audience are fixed."

"Rats! There isn't any part anywhere that matters all that much," said Harry. "If you're Caesar you're dead jolly early in the piece. Mark Antony's part is really a heap more important than Caesar's."

"Then I think we'd better change parts," said Wibley at once. "I didn't think of that. There's some fine fat in the part of Caesar, but he is done and done with a bit soon. Yes, I'll take Mark Antony off your hands, Wharton. I might double the parts, perhaps, but I don't know about that."

"You silly ass!" roared Bob. "I dare say you'd like to be Brutus, too!"

"And Cassius!" chimed in Frank.

"Well, it would be better for the play, but it can't be done, I'm afraid," said Wibley, rather sadly.

"We're all mere supers—is that it?" asked Wharton grimly.

"Something like that. I shouldn't say you don't matter at all. Someone must take the parts, and you've some slight talent, Wharton; that's more than I can say for all of you."

"Oh, is it?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"It's no good arguing with the chap. He's so puffed up with conceit that he takes no notice," Bob said. "Get on with the washing, Wib. But, mind you, if there's nothing for me in that giddy bag—"

"But there is!" said Wib. "Don't you worry, dear boy. You're going to be all right. Look at this. Isn't it a knock-out?"

Bob's face was quite sunny again at the sight. The other four looked doubtful. If that was Bob's they could scarcely expect anything equal to it. The Famous Five seldom let jealousy enter their friendly circle, but the green-eyed monster was peeping round the corner just then.

There was no occasion for his appearance, however.

"Mine?" said Bob rapturously.

"Eh? Yours? Oh, no! That's—"

"Yours again?" howled four voices in chorus.

"My esteemed and—" began Inky.

"Again?" said Wibley, in a hurt way.

"Well, really, you chaps do have the most extraordinary ideas!"

"You're shaping for the best bumping of your life, whether you know it or not, Wib!" growled Johnny.

Wibley snorted as he dived into the bag again, and brought out something which clattered in a hollow and tinny fashion.

He held it up at arm's-length, and gazed upon it with well-simulated admiration. Wib really was an actor!

"What the merry dickens is that?" asked Bob.

"Your helmet, Bob, old son! What do you think of it?"

"Nothing at all!" hooted Bob. "Less than nothing! And even if I'd wear such a tinpot thing—which ain't a bit likely—what's to go with it?"

"With that helmet, dear boy, nothing else is necessary," said Wib solemnly.

"Though perhaps pyjamas might be decent," added Wharton drily.

"Laertes, you know, in 'Hamlet.' No reason why Laertes shouldn't have rather a rusty helmet, and I dare say the rust won't be noticed, anyway."

"You frabjous idiot! You silly chump!" howled Bob.

"Don't get your rag out. That's merely silly!" Wibley said soothingly.

"You can't expect much for twopence-halfpenny!" remarked Johnny.

"Wrong, Bull! It was sixpence. That's only the hiring price, you know. I don't suppose you could buy it outright much under a bob."

This statement had the effect of rendering Bob speechless for the moment. He snatched the helmet from Wibley's hand. He hurled it to the floor. He jumped upon it.

"Here, I say!" protested Wib.

"Hang the helmet, hang Laertes, and boil you!" yelled Bob, finding his voice at last.

Then he gave the remains of the helmet a kick which rendered it quite unrecognisable as a helmet, and stalked to the window. He stood there watching the rain dropping from the leafless elms, evidently fed up with William Wibley and all his ways and works.

"Well, I hope you fellows won't be so unreasonable as that chap!" said Wibley.

"Oh, you're welcome to hope!" replied Johnny Bull, with deep meaning.

"What's inside that brown-paper parcel?" asked Nugent.

"Oh, nothing much!" said Wibley hastily.

"For the star actor, I suppose?" was Harry's sarcastic inquiry.

"Well, in a way, it is," admitted Wibley.

"Look here, you utter ass, do you think we or the other fellows are going to let you take our cash and spend it all on clobber for your own parts like this?" demanded Johnny.

"They're the star parts, Bull."

"Rats! That may be true enough," said Harry, "but—"

"It is true," put in Frank. "Wibley always collars the star parts."

"The starfulness—"

"Well, what about it?" snapped Wibley. "I can act. Can any of you chaps? Well, Wharton can—a little. Nugent ain't so bad in 'girls' parts. As for the rest of you—"

"Oh, bump the silly ass!" hooted Johnny Bull.

Bob turned at that. The proceedings had now reached a stage at which his injured dignity allowed him to come into them again.

Five pairs of hands seized William Wibley.

"Stoppit, you chumps! Ow-yow! Don't be such silly maniacs!"

Wibley was well and truly bumped in the passage. Then his bag and all the gorgeous clobber was hurled out on top of him, and the door of No. 1 was slammed.

But the Famous Five did not in the least intend it to be understood that they gave up to the star actor all the gorgeous costumes that he had meant to appropriate. They only wanted to give a hint that for the present the discussion was adjourned.

Wibley picked up first himself, and then his bag. Then he put the bag down again to make fine dramatic gestures of scorn and vengeance at the closed door. After that he felt a trifle better.

But he was grumbling as he went away.

"The ungrateful bounders!" he muttered. "But I'll show them! I'll take them in as they were never taken in in all their young lives before! I'll do them brown, and all Greyfriars with them. Wait until Samuel Benson turns up, that's all!"

It really was not easy to guess how the appearance of Benson would help Wibley to vengeance upon the Famous Five. But Wibley must have meant something.

As a matter of fact, Wibley meant quite a lot!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Wibley Gets a Holiday—and No Tea!

THE Famous Five were in the Common-room that evening when Wibley strolled in.

They looked at him grimly.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Another bumping needed?" boomed the stentorian voice of Bob Cherry.

"Now, don't you be a bigger ass than you can help, Cherry!" said Wibley coolly. "Strikes me you fellows don't look at the stage in the proper light. Perhaps that's natural. You waste too much time on footer and cricket—all very well in their way, but—well, there, you know what I mean. What I really want is more rehearsals—for my own parts and for you duffers. But you never seem to have any time for things that really matter."

"Footer doesn't, I suppose?" said Harry warmly.

"Not really. By the way, I've news for you bounders. There's a new chap coming into the Remove."

Bob Cherry snorted disdainfully.

"I don't call that news," he said.

"What's it matter? We get the specimens, all sorts, but they make no odds."

"What's the new chap's name?" asked Wharton, always rather more disposed to be interested in new fellows than Bob.

"Benson—Samuel Benson. He will only be here for a few weeks, though. He and his pater are going abroad as soon as they can get passages to Timbuctoo or Shanghai, or somewhere."

"Good job!" said Bob. "What do we want any new asses for? Oh, I didn't mean you, Reddy, old chap"—Tom Redwing here looked round—"you're all right! But the common or garden new boy is a wash-out!"

Gatty of the Second thrust in his mop of tousled hair.

"The Head wants you in his study, Wibley!" he shouted.

"Well, don't whisper it like that—I might not hear!" replied Wib, with obvious sarcasm.

"Yah! It's a licking, I guess, and it serves you right!" shouted Gatty, as he made exit.

"Is it?" growled Johnny Bull.

"Been doing anything particularly particular, Wib?" inquired Rake. "I hadn't heard about it."

"Have you been making up as the Head, an' frightening the dear old man by appearin' as his double?" asked the Bounder.

"I know what it is," said Billy Bunter. "Wib's going to have a holiday."

Wibley stared at him in wrath.

"How do you know that, you putrid oyster?" he snapped.

"How does Bunter know things?" said Peter Todd meaningly.

"I saw your father, Wib," said Bunter. "You shut up, Toddy! You've no right to accuse me of things that I would scorn to do!"

"What things, Bunt?"

"Listening at doors, and all that."

"Well, you must have done a bit of it if you know that I'm to have a holiday," said Wibley. "Seeing my pater wouldn't tell all that."

"Has your pater been along, Wib?" asked Kipps.

"Bunter says so. I haven't seen the old bird. Still, I dare say it's all serene about the holiday. I've a kind of prophetic feeling in my bones that one's coming to me."

"You'll have another kind of feeling somewhere else that won't be prophetic if you keep the Head waiting much longer!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, he'll have that, anyway!" Frank Nugent said. "Sorry—more or less—Wib, but you're evidently in for a lick-

ing! Come and have tea with us when you've had it."

"Rats about the licking!" said Wibley, as he hurried off. "But I'll come to tea!"

But he knew that Nugent might be right. If things had gone well it was a holiday; but if they did not it was a licking—perhaps worse!

The Head had never met Wibley's father; and up to that day he knew that he had not. He still had not met him; but now he thought he had.

It was absolutely necessary to the carrying out of Wibley's plans to wangle a holiday for a few days. It was of no use to ask his father to work it for him—Wib knew that.

The only way he could think of was the one he had taken. William Wibley had done many audacious things during his career at Greyfriars; but his most audacious feat of all had been reserved for that day.

Had the Head found out?

The personage whom Bunter had seen was not Wibley's father at all; it was Wibley himself, made up to look fifty or so. Bunter had not twigged, of course; the Head had not seemed to. But had he caught on since?

He might have done that and have communicated with Mr. Wibley by telephone—in which case much more than the required holiday would be badly up the spout!

But Wibley would not have been the actor he was had he not possessed nerve beyond the common.

His hand did not tremble as he tapped at the door of the Head's study.

But he did feel a slight pang in his conscience as he faced the kindly old Head, and realised that Dr. Locke had been completely taken in. That pang only lasted a second, however. It was succeeded by a thrill of gratified vanity.

"Wibley," said Dr. Locke, "I have seen your father to-day. He was in the neighbourhood on business, it appears, and had time for a brief, friendly call. You did not see him, I understand, being out at the time?"

"No, sir, I didn't see my father," answered Wib.

"Ah, well, that is of little consequence, as you will be seeing him very shortly! He has asked for a holiday for you over the coming week-end. I consented, of course; I could not well do otherwise, though I am not in favour of too many of these breaks in the routine of the term."

"Thank you, sir!" said Wibley.

He was not called upon to argue the general question of holidays with the Head.

"Your father wishes you to meet him at Courtfield Station at one o'clock to-morrow, in time, as I gather, for the express to town. That will do, Wibley."

Wibley thought it would—quite excellently. The Head evidently had not as much as the merest ghost of a suspicion.

The Famous Five were not in the Common-room when he returned. In fact, the room had practically cleared. He rushed off to Study No. 1.

"Who's a giddy prophet now?" he said. "I've got the holiday I told you I should get!"

"Sacked as well as licked, Wib?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Oh, rats! Nothing of the sort. A holiday, chump—beginning to-morrow, and lasting over the week-end! What do you think of that, you bounders?"

"I think it's a jolly sight more than you deserve!" growled Johnny Bull.

"You think? Oh, rats, Bull! You can't think!"

"Lucky bargee!" said Harry, as Wibley pulled a chair up to the table.

He looked rather doubtfully at what was upon the festive board.

"Festive board" is a mere figure of speech. The tea-table in Study No. 1 presented anything but a festive appearance. There was the heel of a loaf of war bread, and there was a plate which had once held butter or margarine, and still looked—to the eye of faith—slightly greasy. There was a jam-pot; but, though a jam-pot may suggest jam, it does not prove its existence. That jam-pot, in its present condition, stopped short at the suggestion.

"I say, I was asked to tea, you know!" said Wib, in somewhat injured tones. "Where's my little lot?"

Bob rose with a thoughtful brow, and made his way slowly to the cupboard.

He came back with a fair-sized dish, upon which reposed a very small-sized sardine.

Wib glared at it.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Twopenn'orth," replied Harry. "Tin of sardines eighteenpence—nine in a tin—I've counted 'em. But, of course, they vary in size; that ain't exactly the biggest."

"And it was bought a bit before they got to that price, Harry," said Frank Nugent.

"It looks like it!" snorted Wib.

"Don't you think you'll like it?" asked Bob anxiously. "It's the one we keep for visitors—some visitors, that is—"

"Greedy visitors!" put in Johnny Bull.

"Who says I'm greedy?" howled Wibley.

"We do!" retorted Harry.

"Why, I don't eat any more than any of you—not half as much, come to that! You rotters, to ask a chap to tea, and then—"

"It's not so much in the grubbing line that you show your greed, Wib," explained Frank.

"That's the only way—"

"Oh, no, it's not! A chap can be no end greedy about other things. Care to hear a little story?"

"Look here, Wharton, I came here for tea, not—"

"Well, get on with it!" said Bob. "There's bread, and there's a sardine, and we can put some more water in the pot."

"That's a mouldy sardine!" hooted Wib.

"Only in places, Wib. About the head and the tail, perhaps," said Bob. "I'm almost sure the middle's good. Besides, it's such a very small one that it can't really hurt you, even if it is a bit off."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you listen to my story, Wib?"

"Hang your rotten story!"

"There was once an actor-manager sort of chap who thought himself no end of a star. And, to put it delicately, he was a bit of a—well, I'll spell it—h-o-g!"

"Oh, shut up!" howled Wibley. "I'm going! I won't put up with this! Call this tea? Why, you frauds, you bounders, I could get a better tea in Hall! I'm going!"

"Well, take the sardine with you," said Bob generously. "I think we've done with that now. Even Bunter turns up his nose at it!"

"Let's have a whip-round, and take Wib to the tuckshop," suggested Harry, with a sweet smile.

"Oh, that's better! I'll forgive you if you do that!" said Wibley, beaming again.

"Good notion, Harry, old top! I'll contribute all I have—it's only a farthing, though. Wib had the rest to take to Courtfield with him," said Bob.

"Yes. I should think it nearly paid for the helmet you jumped on!" retorted Wib sarcastically.

For Wib saw now that the seemingly noble offer was only another piece of spoof.

"Why, you silly ass, my whack was over half-a-guinea!"

"I'm going!" snapped Wibley. "You chaps won't take me in again, I'll bet! But look out for yourselves; you'll get it in the neck before long!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Meeting Samuel!

AFTER classes next morning Wibley departed. He went to Courtfield, and he took a bag with him. But he did not meet his paternal relative, and he did not take the express to town.

On the way to Courtfield he stopped at the barn in which he and Samuel Benson had taken shelter, and there he completely transformed his appearance.

He did not look in the least like William Wibley when he came out. He looked like nothing on earth.

A shock red wig, a pair of goggles, tight-fitting trousers much too short in the legs, and an Eton jacket which would have been an excellent fit for a boy two or three sizes smaller, were the chief items in his make-up.

In Courtfield he bought two or three more props. One was a parasol, another was a walking-stick, and a third—purchased cheaply at a second-hand shop—was an out-of-date and exceedingly ponderous tome dealing with ornithology. Wib, who knew precious little that had not to do with the stage, had fancied that ornithology was connected with shells; but a glance inside the book showed him that it had to do with birds. Well, birds would do as well as shells. The weight of the book was what had really attracted Wib.

He had the knob of the parasol cut off, and the walking-stick fastened to it, thus giving it an inordinately long handle. Why he wanted a parasol at all in winter was his secret. It was a warm, muggy day; but there was certainly not enough sun to render a parasol necessary, even for a lady of uncertain age, tender about the complexion which she had never had, and was afraid of losing. Wib had no real fear about his complexion. People who habitually use grease-paint have to reconcile themselves to the artificial variety.

Wib did not mind what sort of impression he made upon the populace of Courtfield. But he slipped hurriedly into a doorway when he saw Samuel Benson and his father approach, though next moment he remembered that there really was not the slightest danger of their recognising him.

They were talking very earnestly, and a word or two here and there of what they said reached Wibley. The street was a very quiet one, and a high garden wall ran near his place of refuge. Doubtless it seemed to the Bensons an excellent place for a private conversation.

If Wibley had heard all it would have struck him as a very private conversation indeed, and would have aroused grave doubts in his mind concerning the gay Samuel and his apparent father.

"There ought to be no difficulty about the wax impressions, Sam," said the old gentleman. "As for the cupboards and the safe, they will be child's play once our pals are inside."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Samuel. "You needn't gas as if I need instructions. I'm not satisfied about the arrangements. We're doing more than our whack, and we ought to have a bigger whack than the rest."

"Westy won't hear of it," was the reply.

Samuel said something lurid about the absent Westy.

"If we'd only the tools we might do the job on our own," said the other fellow. His tones now were quite unlike those of his speech as when figuring as Samuel's father. "But Westy has them, and we're helpless without him. That barn will be an excellent place for disposing of the swag."

They passed on.

If Wibley had heard all of that he would have had to be uncommonly dull to fail to suspect, at least, that it was not really to keep him out of mischief that Master Samuel Benson was coming for a short time to Greyfriars. It looked rather like his coming in order to get about very serious mischief.

But Wibley caught only a few words, and they were mixed up in his mind with thoughts of the enterprise upon which he had embarked. They did make him feel vaguely distrustful of both the Bensons; but at the time they went little further than that.

"What was that about the barn?" he muttered, as he made his way to the station. "I wish they'd keep out of that place. I fancied I could have it pretty much to myself. It's going to be a nuisance if Bensons and things are to be popping in there while I'm changing."

But he had forgotten all about that before the slow local train from Courtfield reached Friardale.

"My only hat!"

Harry Wharton, standing upon the platform, uttered that exclamation.

The Head had paid Harry the compliment of sending him to meet the supposed Samuel Benson. Harry would have sooner anyone else had had it. Even at the outset he felt like that; but he was fated to feel it much more strongly before he was through with his job.

The passenger who caused Wharton to ejaculate that reference to his headgear was a youth who, to Wharton's eyes, presented no resemblance whatever to Wibley—not that Harry was thinking of Wibley.

The youth's clothes were absurdly small, and his spectacles absurdly large. His socks, which made a great show in consequence of the brevity of his trousers, were the last thing in bad taste. His big and clumsy boots looked all the bigger for the glossy shine upon them.

He opened the gaudy parasol, and held it rigidly above his head. Mincing affectedly, and smiling broadly, he approached Wharton.

Harry felt horror-stricken. In his time at Greyfriars he had known some weird new boys, but this one really was the absolute outside edge. For a moment the captain of the Shell was able to entertain at least the shadow of a doubt as to whether this could be the fellow he had been sent to meet. But it was only for a moment. The doubt was dispelled when the weird object opened his mouth.

"Are you from Greyfriars?" he asked, in a high, squeaky voice.

"Yes," replied Harry.

He gave a wild glance around. There were few people about, luckily. The engine-driver was leaning out of his cab and grinning—possibly at the landscape. Two porters were saying things to one another. The stationmaster's back was turned, but it shook in a manner that suggested he might be crying—or laughing.

It was all bad enough, but it might have been worse. In fact, it was going to be worse—very much worse!

Harry held out his hand limply. Samuel was so eager to shake hands that he dropped on to his new friend's

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toes the heavy book he had been carrying.

"Oh! Ah! Ow-yow!" remarked Wharton.

The book had really hurt him, and he let go in a hurry of Samuel's hand, in order that he might get both of his hands to his injured foot.

"My dear friend," said Samuel, seeming to mistake his action, "there is really no need to bow to me."

"Bow to you be hanged! Do you think I'm bowing to you, fathead?" snapped Wharton. "I'm hurt!"

"You are hurt? But what can have hurt you, pray?"

Samuel looked inquiringly over the tops of his spectacles. He found it easier to see over the tops than through them. But he remembered, and blinked from behind the glasses after the Bunter fashion.

Wharton picked up the ornithological tome with a grunt.

"I'll carry this," he said. "It's safer."

Samuel made no protest. He was rather tired of carrying the volume himself.

"I—I'm simply horribly nervous about trains! he murmured in the ear of Wharton. "Pup-pup-please hold my hand!"

"Rats!" said Wharton sharply.

But he remembered what the Head had said to him about young Benson. It seemed to be true that the weird specimen had something like a nervous affection.

"Yes; about rats, too," replied Samuel meekly. "But there are no rats here, and I'm only afraid of them when I see them. But that train! Oh, oh! It might run over me and damage me severely!"

"Ass! It can't. It's on the rails."

"I know it can't; but yet, somehow, I think it can. Pup-pup-please do take hold of my hand!"

"Ho, ho, ho!" spluttered the engine-driver.

"I wonder what that silly-faced man with the dirty beard is laughing at? Do you know?" said Samuel.

"Look 'ere, young shaver—"

"Oh, never mind him!" said Harry, in haste. "He can't help it. You mustn't take any notice of what he says."

"It wasn't what he said. He laughed in a rude—"

"I wasn't talking to you, Benson. I spoke to the driver."

"You're 'is keeper, are you?" said the driver sympathetically. "Ah, you 'ad ought to be well paid!"

"Tut-tut-take hold of my hand, pup-pup-please!" bleated Samuel.

"Hanged if I will!" snorted Wharton.

But he weakened even as he spoke. Harry had lots of good nature. He had promised the Head to look after this kid, and it was to be supposed that the kid could not help his nervousness.

"Then I'm afraid I can't lul-lul-leave the stu-stu-station."

"Old 'is little 'and!" said the engine-driver, grinning more broadly than ever. "Don't be 'arsh with the pore softy, comrade!"

"Oh, hang you!" snapped Wharton.

And he gave Samuel his hand.

Samuel grasped it in a vice-like clutch.

"Dud-dud-do be careful!" he panted. "Dud-dud-don't get too near that awful engine and that ugly man!"

Harry glanced towards the engine-driver, whose face was now looking distinctly less amused. Samuel took the opportunity to push his guide nearer to a porter's barrow on the platform.

"Ow-yow!" howled Wharton, as a sudden thrust from Samuel sent him

plunging over the barrow. "You silly ass! You utter idiot!"

The guard's whistle blew; the engine-driver said "Pip, pip!"

The train began to move. Harry lay there, and glared up wrathfully at the apparently innocent Samuel.

He was really too angry to speak for a moment, though he believed his fall an accident. It was Samuel who broke the silence.

"Do you not find the platform somewhat cold and hard?" he murmured sympathetically.

Then Harry jumped up.

"I've a jolly good mind to give you a thick ear!" he snapped.

"Dear me! How kind of you! I never heard of a thick ear before; but I suppose it is something nice, for I am quite sure that you have a kind and generous heart," said Samuel pleasantly.

"You clumsy idiot!"

"I—Are you really cross with me? Pup-pup-please don't be cross—it is so very bad for my nerves, you know!"

"I'm sorry," said Harry shortly. "But you really are clumsy. Let's be going."

He picked up the big volume again, and prepared to lead the way.

But Samuel would not have that.

"I must ask you to hold my hand," he said firmly. "I might have a fit, you know."

"Crumbs! You don't have fits, surely?" gasped Harry. "What on earth were your people doing to let you come away from home?"

"They were tired of me," said Samuel pathetically. "I was such a nuisance to them with my nerves and my fits, they said. Anybody might have me, they said. What would you have done if your people had talked like that? It isn't very nice, is it?"

That was really too bad of Wib. He knew how soft and how big Harry's heart was, and he was taking advantage of that knowledge.

It worked out as he hoped.

Harry hated the job, but he meant to go through with it, for he had promised the Head, and he pitied the weird Samuel.

But he made up his mind to give Samuel a wide berth once he had got him to Greyfriars.

He screwed up all his resolution, and clutched Samuel's hand.

"I had two fits in the train," said that innocent youth. "I am afraid one of them rather frightened an old lady. She was still lying on the floor when I got out, and she moaned a good deal. Do you think I should have done anything to help her, my dear friend?"

"Great Scott!" said Harry, aghast.

But the train was only a moving speck far away in the distance now. And—though that he did not guess—the old lady really did not need aid, as she was a mere figment of the vivid imagination of William Wibley.

"When somebody takes hold of my hand and is kind to me," went on Samuel, "I very seldom have a fit. It gives me confidence, you know. By the way, what is your name? I do not think you have told me."

"Wharton," said Harry.

"Snorton? Oh! But you have another name, have you not? I should prefer to call you Charley or Jerry, or something like that—it seems more affectionate, does it not?"

"Wharton—not Snorton. And that will have to do for you. I don't want you to be affectionate, you know, and I won't be called either Charley or Jerry at any price!"

"Do not be cross with me, Snorton, my dear fellow! It may bring on another fit."

They were outside the station now. Samuel had said nothing about his luggage, and Harry was in such agitation of mind that he never thought of it at all.

Samuel put up his parasol.

"Oh, I say, you can't, you know!" protested Harry.

"But my physician has ordered it, my dear Snorton. He says my brain is peculiarly liable to be affected by the sun."

"There ain't any sun worth mentioning, and you haven't got a brain, and if you ever had it's gone to pot to such an extent that you couldn't get it hurt now in Central Africa, let alone in England in November!" said Harry gruffly.

"Now you are getting cross again, Snorton! Oh, pup-pup-please don't get cross with me!"

"Oh, my hat! Put that thing down!"

But Samuel would not put it down. The small boys of Friardale sniggered and pointed; but, though Harry's face was a burning red, Samuel seemed quite oblivious of their interest.

"Are the other little boys at Greyfriars at all like you, Snorton?" inquired Samuel, when they had got beyond the village.

"I'm not a little boy, you silly chump!" snapped the skipper of the Remove, his temper badly ruffled.

"Perhaps not in a physical sense," replied Samuel. "But intellectually I fear that you are quite a juvenile. You are so very easily put out, you know."

"Easily put out!" gasped Wharton. After all he had already borne, that was really too thick.

For a minute or so Samuel relapsed into silence. Wharton found it a blessed interval of relief, though rather spoiled by the new boy's moist, warm clutch upon his hand.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

On the Road from the Station!

"I BELIEVE I can recall having seen you before," said Samuel, ending the blessed interval. "Were you ever at Ourangoutangly?"

"Eh? No. Is there such a place? I never heard of it."

"That is strange. Perhaps it was a brother of yours I saw in the second cage on the right, going into the place."

Wharton glared at Samuel ferociously. Was his leg being pulled.

There was not even the spectre of a smile upon the serious face of Samuel, however.

"Look here——"

"I am sorry, Snorton! But you must admit that it is not my fault that you should remind me of a monkey."

"Being so rotten cheeky is your fault, though, you cheap idiot!"

"Cheeky? Oh, my dear friend, not at all! I was merely frank. I was always taught to be frank. Do you not like frankness?"

"You'll jolly soon find that that sort of frankness doesn't go down at Greyfriars, my boy!"

"But I do not suppose that everyone at Greyfriars will remind me of a monkey, Snorton. It may even be possible for me to say truthfully that I admire some of the faces. But I cannot say that about yours, much as I should like to."

Again the conversation languished. Wharton was content that it should languish.

"What—oh, what are those queer birds coming down the road?" suddenly shrilled Samuel, clasping more feverishly than ever the reluctant hand of his guide. "Let me see the book, quick! Let me

have a look, quick! Before they take their hook, quick! Oh, do make haste!"

"Ass! They're not birds—you know that! They're fellows—Highcliffe fellows!"

And Wharton tried to wrench his hand away. He would rather have had Samuel in a fit than be seen thus by Pon & Co.

Those sweet youths—four of them—were advancing towards the ill-matched pair. Ponsonby, Gadsby, Vavasour, and Monson minor each had a cigarette between his lips. All were dressed in the height of fashion, and all were regarding Wharton and his weird companion with supercilious amusement.

"Let go my hand, you chump!" hissed Wharton furiously.

"But I dare not! I shall certainly have a fit if I do!" bumbled Samuel.

"Oh, by gad!" chortled Ponsonby. "What is it?"

"Greyfriars chap, I fancy," said Gadsby. "They do have some weird objects there."

"Wharton's young brother—what?" said Monson.

"Oh, absolutely!" chimed in Vavasour, with a vacuous giggle.

Wharton fairly writhed. He despised the nuts utterly; but that did not make it more pleasant for him to be seen by them in this unlucky predicament.

"Ain't it lovely!" chuckled Monson.

"See Wharton holdin' its hand!" giggled Gadsby.

"What do you fellows say to a game of kiss-in-the-ring?" asked Pon, with a hateful leer. "Wharton looks ripe for it!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Let us form a ring, my dears!" roared Monson.

Harry's blood was fairly boiling. He did not guess that that of his strange companion was in very much the same state. William Wibley did not love the Highcliffe nuts a bit better than Harry Wharton did.

The two passed the four. The four whipped round at once to stare after them.

Then something happened.

As if by accident, Samuel let his sunshade slip down behind him. It alighted at the back of Ponsonby's head, the stout stem resting upon his shoulder.

The stick of an ordinary parasol would never have stood the tug that Samuel gave then. But this was a walking-stick, and its junction with the original stem had been strongly made.

"Yaroooh!" howled Pon, as Samuel pulled.

Samuel tugged harder, and thrust out one of his eccentrically-trousered legs behind him.

Pon sprawled in the mud.

"Yooop!" he roared.

Samuel, digging the ferrule of the parasol hard into Pon, blinked up into the leafless branches of a tree, and said mildly:

"Did you hear anything, my dear Long'un—Shorton, I mean, of course? I thought I heard something like the cry of a bird!"

He was pressing with all his weight on the parasol now, and Pon found it impossible to rise without pain.

"Dash you! Take that thing out of my back! I'll slay you, by gad!" he hooted.

"There it is again!" said Samuel.

"Can you see it, Shorton? Oh, I do so love to hear the feathered songsters!"

"This isn't exactly a feathered one, though he's been tarred and feathered in his time!" said Harry, looking down with a grin at the discomfited Ponsonby.

Samuel's glance followed his.

"Dear me! I appear to have caught something without knowing it!" he said.

"What a very queer thing, Shorton! Is it alive? But of course it must be, or it would not wriggle so!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gadsby and Vavasour and Monson.

The nuts were not at all unwilling to enjoy a jape against one of their number, even when that one was the lordly Pon. At any time they preferred cackling to fighting.

Samuel removed his sunshade. Pon scrambled up, ejecting a mouthful of mud as he did so.

"Oh, really, Shorton! It eats mud—see!" cried Samuel.

"It's had to eat mud now and then!" replied Wharton grimly. "Its own words, you know! Oh, yes; Ponsonby eats mud all right, Benson!"

"Get out of my way, Wharton!" shouted Pon.

"Can't be done! This chap's nervous and timid, and I've got to protect him!" answered Harry.

"Oh, by gad! That chap's nervous and timid, is he?" chortled Gadsby.

"Oh, come on! Go for them, you lunks!" Pon howled.

But the other three did not feel quite like going for the Greyfriars couple, heavy as the odds were. Wharton they knew of old; and the fact that Samuel was an unknown quantity did not inspire them with any particular courage.

Samuel still grasped Wharton's hand affectionately; but for the moment Harry had forgotten all about that, and the Highcliffe nuts no longer found it so amusing—doubtless owing to the superior attractiveness of Pon as a humorous turn.

"I should advise you to cut, Ponsonby!" said Harry contemptuously. "This fellow may be a bit soft, but he seems one too many for you!"

Pon's teeth gritted. He was seething with rage. If only the other three could have been relied upon to back him up, he would have hurled himself upon Wharton.

But he knew that he could not rely upon them.

"Right-ho, Wharton!" he said viciously, his dark eyes glinting with an evil light. "My turn will come, an' I'll make you sorry for this!"

Wharton shrugged his shoulders. The threat left him unmoved. Cecil Ponsonby was, and always would be, his enemy, ready to do him an ill turn whenever possible; but he did not waste time worrying about Pon.

He and Samuel moved away, the new boy still clutching Harry's hand.

Pon glared savagely after them, then turned to use lurid language to Gadsby, Vavasour, and Monson for sniggering.

"They were smoking," remarked Samuel. "Did you observe that, Shorton? I do not like to see anyone smoke. Birds, you may have noticed, never smoke."

"I've certainly noticed that; but I don't see what it's got to do with the case," said Harry.

By this time they were nearing Greyfriars, and the skipper of the Remove saw that there was a small crowd of fellows at the gates. As yet they had not approached near enough for the clasped hands to be noted; but Harry did not feel easy on that score.

"Bedad! It's something quare Wharton's found this time!" said Micky Desmond, grinning.

"That the new chap? Oh, my hat!" guffawed Bolsover major.

"He, he, he!" giggled Bunter.

"Look, you fellows! I do believe they're holding hands, like two silly girls! Oh, crumbs!"

And Bunter rolled off to carry the glad tidings to the fellows in the quad.

The natural consequence was that the



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crowd at the gates began to swell at once.

Wharton saw this, and his face grew red and troubled. But he could not get his hand free.

"I say, Benson—"

But at that moment Samuel, disregarding Wharton entirely, began to warble.

"Oh, why wasn't I born a bird,
To sing unseen, but heard;
To fly up to the sky?
The thought doth make me cry!
Boo-hoo!"

"Oh, stop that rot!" snorted Wharton. "I never heard such wretched tripe in my life!"

"It is poetry—beautiful poetry!" replied Samuel ecstatically. "I fear, Shorton, that you really have no brain at all!"

And he continued his strain, which seemed to be more or less of an impromptu. As for the tune—if it could be said to have one—that was doubtless also impromptu.

"Instead of which I remain
Here with a chap insane;
A chap with the notion absurd
That a boy is better than a bird!
Boo-hoo!"

"Look here, you silly ass!" snapped Wharton.

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

"Let go of my hand, do!"

"It—it's coming on! I can feel it coming on!" said Samuel faintly.

"What's coming on, chump? You don't mean one of your rotten fits, do you?"

"Yes, Snorton! I—I— It's those strange faces! I can't bear them! They're as bad as yours—almost!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"I—I can't help it! I feel it coming over me! It's grasping, clutching, gripping—slowly but surely! Oh, dear!"

Wharton gave him a desperate look.

"For goodness' sake buck up! Hold out somehow till we get indoors!" he gasped.

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"You must hold my hand, then! I shall collapse the very instant you leave go! I shall tumble, and writhe on the ground, and froth at the mouth! I—"

"No, you won't! I'll hold your silly hand, you idiot!"

Harry Wharton had always had pluck; but he had never shown more than he showed then. Even Wibley admired it. But the worst of it was that no one else was likely to understand—not even Harry's chums.

"My hat! Why couldn't the Head have sent someone else—anyone!" he muttered between his clenched teeth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He, he, he!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

The crowd at the gates was quite hysterical by this time. Caps were flying. Some enthusiasts even hugged one another.

But the other four members of the Famous Five were not altogether pleased.

"Well, I'm dashed if I ever thought Wharton would play the silly goat like this!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Can't make it out!" said Bob Cherry, frowning. "There must be some explanation, I'm sure!"

"It will take a jolly lot of explanation, old top!" Squiff said. "I wouldn't be in Wharton's boots for a giddy pension!"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Triumphal Entry!

HARRY WHARTON'S face was crimson as he strode in at the gates with the hand of the bogus Samuel Benson closely grasped in his.

It was one of the worst ordeals of his life.

Yet what could he do?

He had Samuel's assurance that letting go of his hand would at once bring on a fit. And the new boy seemed so weirdly eccentric that it was easy to believe him liable to fits. Harry doubted whether he was quite sane.

There was but one redeeming feature to the circumstances. That awful parasol was furled. After having been used as a weapon against Ponsonby it had buckled up, and Samuel had not tried very hard to open it again. But he still carried it in his hand.

"Form up! Form up in double line!" roared Peter Todd. "The triumphal entry is the next item on the programme, gentlemen!"

Harry cast upon Peter a look of profound sadness. He had always regarded Toddy as a friend.

But even Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent, even Johnny Bull and the loyal Inky, were grinning. Even they fell into places in the two lines that stretched down the quad.

Down the aisle of hilarious juniors the two walked hand-in-hand.

It was a moment of triumph for Wibley.

But for Harry Wharton it meant the most bitter mortification. He had to go through with it, and to go through with it without explaining. He had promised the Head to look after Benson, who was nervous, and if he had attempted to stop and make it clear to the rest that he only held Benson's hand because Benson would have had a fit if he left go, it is not likely he would have got a hearing.

"Hurrah! Three cheers!" howled Dicky Nugent; and the fags roared their joy. For it was not only the Remove who witnessed Wharton's humiliation. The Third and Second had crowded out to see. The Upper Fourth were there—the great Cecil Reginald Temple, smiling disdainfully; Dabney and Fry and Scott

and the rest; Angel, with a bland, hateful grin on his face; Kenney with a smirk. Even the Fifth had turned out—Blundell and Bland, Hilton and Tomlinson, Coker and Potter and Greene. And two or three of the Sixth had made their appearance, drawn by the tumult in the quad.

"What's it all about?" asked Coker. "Of course, we all know Wharton's a silly young ass, but I'm hanged if I expected even Wharton to come down as low as this! New boy, you say, Potter? But what's he holding the new boy's hand like that for?"

"Blessed if I know!" sniffed Potter. "May be because he likes it. Queer taste, I must say! I always thought Wharton a rather sensible kid till now."

"And such a new boy!" added Greene. "He ought to be taken out and pole-axed, and his people ought to jolly well be sent to quod for sending him to any decent school like that! Still, it is funny, there's no denying that. Why don't you kiss him, young Wharton? Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry deigned no reply. If it had been possible for his face to go a deeper crimson it would have gone so now, for he saw Mr. Quelch at the window of his study, and George Wingate, skipper of Greyfriars, coming down the steps.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Wingate. Then he saw the look on Wharton's face, and his own face changed. "Why, what's the matter, Wharton?"

Harry did not answer. He could not. He was summoning up all his pluck and resolution to meet Mr. Quelch, and he felt that he must break down if he spoke to anyone else first. What was a screaming farce to most of Greyfriars was something like a tragedy to Harry Wharton.

He brushed past Wingate, into whose amazed face Samuel Benson smiled inanely, and in another half-minute had reached the haven of Mr. Quelch's study.

"Bless my soul, Wharton, what is all this?" asked the Remove-master.

"This is a new boy, sir," faltered Wharton. "The Head sent me to meet him. I—I—"

"But that does not explain all the tumult outside, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch, looking very curiously at Benson, who stood gazing around the room in a manner which did not suggest his possession of any more wits than he had use for.



"He—I really don't think he's quite sane, sir!" burst out Harry, spurred by the sense of injury within him. "He behaves like a maniac, anyway. He says he has fits, and they come on if someone doesn't hold his hand! That's what all the cackling was about—because I was holding the silly—the fellow's hand! I didn't want to, you may be sure, sir. But suppose he'd had a fit! And I promised the Head to look after him, and see—"

"Snorton was very kind to me, although some of the things he said were not really nice," said Samuel plaintively.

By this time Wib was feeling a little bit sorry for his victim. But it would never do for him to let Mr. Quelch ask too many questions, so he made a diversion at once.

"How do you do, sir?" he said effusively, seizing the master's right hand and pump-handling it up and down. "I trust I see you well, sir! I feel that already I have quite an affection for you, because you are so like my dear grandfather, and he was so like an adjutant bird. I love birds—don't you, sir? I wish we were birds, you and I! How we would fly, you and I, into the sky! We wouldn't take Snorton, sir; I don't think he likes me much. When I feel like having a fit I shall run to you at once, sir, and hold your hand!"

"You will do nothing—"

Mr. Quelch checked himself. He was half afraid that Samuel Benson might have a fit then and there.

Already he had made up his mind that the Remove Form at Greyfriars was no fit and proper place for Samuel Benson, and that if any representations of his could avail with the Head, Samuel's stay in it would be short indeed!

"You may go, Wharton," he said kindly. "I am sure the Head did not realise the difficulty of the task he set you. If it is any comfort to you to know that I honour you for the manner in which you carried it through, please accept my assurance of that."

It would have been a bigger comfort but for that last derisive round of cheering which rolled from the quad at that moment.

Wharton went. Not for anything would he have returned to the quad. His pride would have been in the way of explanations, even had it been likely that he could get a hearing for them.

He went to Study No. 1, and there Frank Nugent and Bob Cherry found him a few minutes later.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob. "Of all the—"

"Shut up!" shouted Harry fiercely. "And get out of here, unless you want my fist in your face!"

"My hat! I say, Harry, old scout, don't get your wool off—don't! It really was funny, you know. Ha, ha!"

"Will you go?" Wharton almost screamed.

Frank Nugent took Bob by the shoulders and fairly pushed him out of the door.

"I say, don't be such a chump, Nugent! There's nothing really wrong, is there? It was funny, you know. You can't deny—"

"Oh, get along, you funny ass!" snapped Frank.

Before he could close the door the sound of voices in the passage came to his ears and to Harry's. Squiff and Tom Brown, Delarey and Peter Todd, were passing, talking over what had happened, and chortling. The voice of Tom Dutton was heard, too. Tom had a fancy that his deafness had kept him out of the cream of the joke. But that was not so. He inquired now what none



Wharton lands with a wallop! (See Chapter 5.)

could tell him—what it was all about, and why Wharton—

Nugent slammed the door to at that.

Harry sat in the armchair, with his face turned from his chum.

Frank went up to him and put an arm across his shoulders. Perhaps of all the Remove Frank Nugent, himself highly sensitive, was the best fitted to understand something of what Wharton felt.

Harry shook off the arm petulantly, as in his old passionate days.

He might shake off Frank's arm, but he could not shake off Frank.

"What was it?" asked Nugent quietly.

"I know there was some reason, though; and if you don't care to tell me—"

"If you knew that you needn't have joined in with the rest to—"

"I didn't know then. Bob didn't tumble, or Johnny, or Inky. Lots of other chaps, too. Don't be an old ass, Harry! The Remove thinks a giddy heap of you. Are you going to sulk just because it laughed?"

"I— Well, it was pretty hard cheese for a fellow, Franky. I saw no way out of it. You wouldn't have, either, though some chaps might."

And Harry proceeded to explain.

"That rascal was spoofing you!" said Frank, when he had finished.

"Do you think so?"

"Jolly sure of it!"

"Oh, hang it all, that makes it worse than ever! To be taken in like that by a bounder that's half potty!"

"Not he! If he spoofed you, old scout, he's as wide awake as any of us!"

"But look at his get-up!"

"If it was a spoof that's all part of it."

Wibley would not have felt quite at ease had he heard Frank then. It is true that Nugent's suspicions of the new boy were as yet unconnected with William Wibley. But they had rather a tendency in that direction.

Vernon-Smith looked in.

"See here, Smithy, if you've come to chip a fellow—"

"Oh, that affair in the quad? My dear chap, no one's thinking any more about that. It did look funny, but there's nothing in it when once the reason's

known. That made us all seem fatheads for chortling so."

"But it isn't known, is it?" asked Harry.

"It is, dear man! Quelch sent for Bull to explain to him, so that he might put the rest of us wise. Bull's already given Skinner a thick ear for maintaining that it was funny, anyway. He is now spreading the light among the rest of the Gentiles, always with plenty of thick ears ready for anyone who won't see it his way. Some of us rather feel as though we owed you an apology, Wharton."

"Oh, there's no need of that," replied Harry, beaming now. "I don't even mind the fellows laughing as long as they know why I did it. But it was real decent of Quelchy."

"The Quelch-bird," remarked the Bounder solemnly, "has his decent moments. I've noticed that myself."

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Surprising Samuel!

"LOOK here, you chaps," said Johnny Bull, entering No. 1, with the ineffable Samuel behind him. "I've had this shoved on to me now—by Quelchy. I ain't going to be greedy, though: I can't keep it all to myself. So I've brought it along here."

Johnny's breezy manner blew away the last shreds of sulkiness that had clung to Harry Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he laughed. "It is a bit too much for one fellow to stagger under. But perhaps three of us—"

"Four, my esteemed and honourable chum," said Inky, entering at that moment. "The wilfulness to the helpfulness is great, and the meatfulness is not feeble, as Poet Shakespeare remarks."

"Five!" said Bob Cherry behind him. "I'm in this, of course. Sorry, Harry, old man!"

"It's all right, Bob. I oughtn't to have cut up rusty. But I do hope that

merchant won't go having his blessed fits here!"

"I do not think a fit is a likely contingency, my dear Harry!"

Wharton snorted at that. Sammy was getting quite too familiar. But he allowed the new boy to continue, after a momentary pause, during which Samuel gave him a surprised and hurt look.

"I am almost sure I shall not have one. Our beloved Form-master says he will be compelled to cane me if I do; and I should be sorry to give him pain."

"You mean for him to give you pain, chump!" growled Johnny.

"Oh, no, Bullfinch! I could bear that with philosophy. But I am sure it would pain him to hurt me."

"I'm not so jolly sure myself," said Bob. "It wouldn't pain me to hurt you, I can tell you that! My opinion is that you're a rotten fraud, and never had a fit in your life!"

"Oh! I—I— If you talk like that— Oh, Snorton, I do believe that I have one coming on now! Oh, do please hold my hand!"

But that jape was out of date.

"Have it, hang you!" snapped Harry. "We'll put you out in the passage and fetch Quelchy to you if you do!"

"I—I don't think I feel quite so bad. No, it's passing, I find. I am getting used to your faces—even yours, Snorton, though it's a bit hard to get used to. And none of them are pretty, except his!"

He pointed to Frank Nugent, who blushed like a girl, and glared at him.

"I don't know your name yet, but I am going to be very friendly with you, for the sake of your sister," went on the egregious Samuel. "I should like to be your sister's sweetheart!"

"Hang you!" snapped Frank.

"Quelchy suggests that we might give this merchant some tea, if we've anything in stock," said Johnny. "It's a bit early. We shall miss footer altogether this afternoon if we're to hang about looking after this specimen. But he—"

"We can leave him to it," said Harry.

"Is it safe?" asked Bob doubtfully.

The Famous Five generally had tea together in No. 1, and at that moment there were in the cupboard the materials for a more than usually bountiful spread. Even in times which were neither quite those of peace nor those of war one did need a little extra on occasion.

"Oh, I think so," said Frank. "Look at his clobber! That jacket fits so tightly that he couldn't get outside very much with it on."

"But he might take it off," Bob said.

That was possible. Moreover, Samuel's waistcoat was as loose as his jacket was tight; and, after all, the waistcoat is the garment which counts for most in these cases.

"We'll risk it," Harry said. And he went to the cupboard.

He brought out therefrom a liberal one-man share of what was inside.

"There you are," he said. "The kettle will boil in a few minutes. I suppose you know how to make tea?"

"Oh, yes, my dear Harry! One takes the—"

"Look here, not so much of the 'dear Harry' bizney! I don't cotton to it."

"But is not that rather unkind? And when we're such friends, too!"

"We aren't anything of the sort!" snapped Harry. "Do you know how to make tea?"

"Oh, yes. When the kettle boils you simply empty the tea-caddy into it, and then pour out."

"Not our tea-caddy, you don't!"

howled Bob. "It ain't safe to leave him, Harry! Franky had better—"

"Rats!" snorted Nugent. "We must ration him, that's all. And 'tain't the kettle you put the tea into, you chump; it's the teapot!"

"And do you also put the water into the teapot?" inquired Samuel meekly.

"Oh, no!" replied Johnny Bull, with laboured sarcasm. "You leave that in the kettle, and just sit and wait."

"It does not sound a very good way of making tea," said Samuel thoughtfully.

"I shouldn't wonder if you found a better if you did a bit of hard thinking," Bob said. "Here's your ration of tea, anyway—two heaped up spoonfuls. I'll put the caddy away, Harry."

"Think you've enough there, Benson?" inquired Wharton civilly.

"Oh, yes, my dear fellow. And, if not, I know where the rest is."

"Forget it!" said Bob tersely.

But Samuel's grin as they went out seemed to signify that he had no intention of forgetting it.

A few minutes later he saw them cross the quad, all in footer garb. For an hour or so he would be left to his own devices.

He opened the door and looked out.

A fat, unwieldy form rolled down the passage.

Samuel—being William Wibley—saw the familiar figure of William George Bunter.

William George—being Bunter, and rather obtuse—saw Samuel Benson, the new boy, and scented a possible loan.

"Hallo!" he said, in his most ingratiating manner.

"How do you do?" returned Samuel, holding out his hand. "I trust that I see you well, and that the privations of the war have not tried you too hard?"

"I've lost flesh," said Bunter, with a groan of self-pity. "I used to be almost stout, but just look at me now! Worn to a shadow, almost!"

"You certainly do look in need of more sustenance," answered Samuel.

"Well, I must say you ain't so soft as you look," Bunter said, with a beaming grin. "What say to cutting over to the tuckshop together?"

"There is no need for that," replied Samuel. "Thanks to the liberality of my dear friend Snorton and his friends I am amply provided."

"I don't mind if I come and have a snack with you," said Bunter generously.

"Come to tea, my dear—er—what is your name? I shall be delighted."

"My name's Bunter."

"Come to tea, Cruncher!"

William George needed no further bidding. He rolled into No. 1.

But he contemplated the table with his fat little nose turned up disdainfully.

"There ain't much here," he said.

"But there is plenty in the larder, my dear Muncher, and I have the run of the larder."

Bunter rolled over to the cupboard, and his greedy little eyes glistened behind his big spectacles as he saw what was there.

"Salmon—sardines—jam—cake! Oh, I say, this is something like!" he said, with watering mouth.

For one brief moment the heart of Wibley-Benson smote him. In the ordinary way William Wibley despised Bunter's greedy spirit as heartily as did anyone.

But Wibley had a score to pay off against the Famous Five, and Benson was far too irresponsible to be troubled long or much by the prickings of conscience.

"May as well have the lot out, eh?" said Bunter.

"If you think we can finish it off, my dear Cruncher."

"Oh, really, you needn't have any doubt about that! Look here, if you haven't much of an appetite, don't you go eating stuff you don't want. Leave that to me. I like you, old fellow. I'd have an ache in the—ahem!—stomach before I'd let you have one, that's a fact. But that's me all over. When I really take a fancy to a chap there's nothing—simply nothing—I wouldn't do for him. I say, where's the tin-opener?"

It appeared as though Bunter had taken a great fancy to the Famous Five. In any case, there seemed no likelihood of their being afflicted with the pangs of indigestion in connection with these particular supplies.

"Don't stand there like a dummy!" said the Owl impatiently. "You can be making toast while I open these. War-bread's ever so much better toasted, you know. And the kettle will boil in a minute. Just see to that."

"What do I do with it when it boils?" inquired Samuel.

"Oh, put your silly mouth to the spout and drink it!" snapped Bunter.

He felt no necessity to go on being polite to Samuel. He estimated that it would take a dozen like Samuel to turn him out of No. 1 now that he had made good his footing there.

Wibley grinned as he made the tea. He enjoyed the thought of the coup he had planned.

But he had some difficulty in bringing it off. Bunter made it difficult.

Bunter wanted to clear up every scrap except the bread. War-bread was not a thing he was keen on, he said; he could get plenty of that, anyway. But the provision that Samuel proposed to make for the healthy appetites of the Famous Five was far from meeting with his approval.

"Look here, if you can't finish the lot off I can," he said. "What's the use of what you're doing, anyway? They won't thank you for it."

"You think not, Gunter? I really consider they should."

"Well, they won't. I know them better than you do. Look here, hand those over, and make me another slice of toast! I've a corner empty that wants filling."

"I am rather short-sighted, Gunter. Will you tell me whether those fellows crossing the—er—do you call it a quad-range?—are Snorton and the rest?"

Bunter was really short-sighted; but he was not so much so but that he could have told had he looked.

He did not wait to look, however, for he had no notion of being in No. 1 when Wharton & Co. returned.

Bunter rolled away.

Samuel Benson immediately put away the cup and saucer and the plate Bunter had used. After that he arranged the empty tins in alternate order—salmon, sardine, salmon, sardine, salmon—on the mantelshelf.

He did not hurry. No one was crossing the quad. The hint to that effect was only a ruse to get rid of Bunter.

"Long—short—long—short—long," murmured Samuel, looking at the tins on the mantelshelf.

Then he placed in the middle of the table a plate containing five very small sardines, and murmured:

"And short—jolly short!"

When the Famous Five reappeared, Samuel sat at the table with his head upon his hand, apparently studying intently the volume which he had brought with him. Wharton had dropped that outside the gates, but it had been recovered.

Samuel looked up.

"Dear me, this is very interesting!" he said. "Has it ever occurred to you, my dear Harry Snorton, that without wings a bird could not fly?"

"Takes a lot of thinking out, doesn't it, Sammy?" returned Wharton cheerily.

An hour's hard footer had driven away the last clouds from Harry's brow. He did not mind greatly now if fellows did chaff him about the triumphal entry, as long as it was done in the right spirit. The thing was funny. He saw that now. But he was not minded to put up with much of the sort of fun Skinner & Co. made out of it. The good-humoured gibes of his friends were another matter.

"Had a good tea, Sammy?" inquired Bob Cherry amiably.

"A very good tea, I thank you, Wherry," said Samuel sedately.

Then Bob's eyes fell upon the five sardines.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's this?" he demanded, not quite so amiably.

"He can't have—" began Frank.

"The goodness of the tea gorgefully disposed of by the ludicrous and disgusting Benson—"

Inky was interrupted by Johnny Bull.

"Look there!" roared Johnny.

And he pointed to the mantelshelf.

Five pairs of eyes were turned upon the five tins. That meant the turning them away from the ineffable Sammy.

And Sammy, with more discretion than might have been expected from one so flighty, took advantage of the opportunity to make his exit. He tucked the ornithological volume under his arm, and metaphorically—

"Folded his tent like the Arabs,
And as silently stole away."

"My hat! You rotter!" howled Bob, swinging round with vengeance in his eyes.

But Bob was too late.

"He can't have eaten it all," said Frank, going to the cupboard, with a brief flicker of hope in his breast.

"Great Scott! What a twist!" gasped Harry. "He'll burst!"

"Hope so!" growled Johnny Bull.

And Johnny seemed to mean it.

"Five measly sardines!" groaned Bob. "Oh, my only hat!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

More Surprises!

THEY found Samuel in the Common-room after tea.

By that time their wrath had calmed down somewhat. The Bouncer had nobly come to the rescue, and the Five had had quite a decent tea with him and Tom Redwing. It had not been all that their own spread would have been, but it served to help them to see the humorous side of Samuel's trick.

Bolsover major was talking to Samuel. Bolsover always talked to new boys, and always in the same manner—a distinctly hectoring manner. Sometimes Bolsover caught a Tartar; but it really did not seem possible that Samuel should turn out a Tartar. He looked so very innocent and helpless.

"Not going to stay here long—eh?" said Bolsover, as the Famous Five, with Smithy and Redwing, entered.

"Not very long, my dear associate," replied Samuel, in his high, squeaky voice.

"Your what?" roared Bolsover.

"Associate, I said. My dear—er—pardon me, we have not been introduced, and I do not know your name."

"My name's Bolsover!" howled the burly junior, much as one might say "My name's Tiberius," or "My name's Attila."

But Samuel apparently failed to deduce from the bullying tone the fact that he stood in the presence of a born tyrant.

"Er—a queer name; but most of the names here seem queer to me," he answered. "No, my dear Washalover, I am not staying—"

"None of your rotten cheek!" roared Bolsover.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared all the others who heard.

And a few beside the Famous Five began to suspect that Samuel was not so completely innocent as he looked.

"Cheek? But my cheek is quite healthy, I assure you, Boshlover!" Samuel said. "Look at it!"

And he turned his right cheek to Bolsover, who promptly smacked it.

For a second everyone thought that Samuel would go for Bolsover. It was really a near thing. William Wibley was nowhere near Percy Bolsover's fighting weight, but he would not have stood that had he stood there in propria persona.

WE'VE WON THE WAR

WE'VE WON THE WAR

WE'VE WON THE WAR

WE'VE WON THE WAR

WE'VE WON THE WAR

**BUT DON'T STOP
BUYING BONDS**

WE'VE WON THE WAR

WE'VE WON THE WAR

WE'VE WON THE WAR

WE'VE WON THE WAR

WE'VE WON THE WAR

But he remembered in time that he was soft Samuel Benson, and he offered Bolsover the other cheek.

Bolsover's hand was raised to smite. But it dropped—it had dropped before Harry Wharton said hotly:

"None of that, Bolsover!"

"All right," said Bolsover sulkily. "I don't want to knock the object about; but I'm not standing any of its cheek. You'll fag for me while you're here, Face!"

"I shall be pleased to be of service to you in any proper manner, my dear companion," replied Sammy. "But I should like to point out that my name is not Face."

"Right-ho, Features!" said Bolsover, with heavy pleasantry. "I'll call you Uglynug, if you prefer it."

"He won't fag for you unless he chooses, Bolsover," said Harry.

"Well, he does choose. He says so himself. I'll have the chump in my study, and he can fag for me and Nap,

too," answered the bully of the Remove. "You mind your own bizney, Wharton!"

"I say, professor," said Piet Delarey, addressing Benson, "wouldn't you like to make us a speech? I'm sure you're boiling over with all sorts of information."

"Hear, hear!" cried Squiff. "A speech from Professor Uglynug!"

"I should love it!" said Samuel, beaming upon them. "You appear to be sensible little boys, in spite of your resemblance to monkeys."

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

"If that was in the Upper Fourth," drawled the lordly Cecil Reginald Temple, "we'd lynch it!"

"Is the person with the watchchain anyone in particular, my dear Snorton?" inquired Samuel.

"No, not really, Sammy; he only thinks he is," replied Harry.

"Stand on this chair, professor," said Tom Brown.

"Thank you, my little lad! I am glad to see that your manners are better than—er—Shall I lend you my handkerchief, or will you wipe your own nose?"

Tom Brown was a very good-tempered fellow, but that was almost too much for him. He would have seized Sammy by the collar. But Squiff and Delarey held him back.

With infinite gravity Samuel mounted the chair.

"Look at his bulge!" said Bob Cherry. "That's where our tea went!"

"It didn't, though," said Peter Todd.

"My porpoise helped him. He bragged to me about it. Samuel called him in, and they cleared the decks between them. I'm not saying that Samuel hasn't a twist. But I do say that my porpoise can give him yards and a beating!"

"Where is the fat lout?" demanded Bob vengefully.

"Oh, never mind him just now! Plenty of time for Banty later. Sammy's going to orate."

"Dear little friends and companions," began Samuel Benson, blinking down upon the assembled members of the Upper and Lower Fourth, "I will endeavour to make myself plain—"

"No need!" snorted Johnny Bull. "You're a long way past that already!"

"To your feeble and immature intellects," went on Samuel, unheeding Johnny. "You are very young and foolish; but is that your fault? Not at all! Then, why should I blame you? I do not blame you. I love you all, from Snorton, with his monkey face, to Boshlover, who is very like a hippopotamus."

Harry Wharton grinned; but it took all that Smithy, Redwing, and Peter Todd could do to hold back Bolsover.

"My object in coming to this aviary—er, I should say school, of course—more usual, though perhaps not more strictly correct—was to develop to its inmates a theory over which I have pondered long and deeply. My juvenile friends, I am convinced that the first of all studies is the study of ornithology."

"What's that? All about shells and things, ain't it?" asked Stott, who was not exactly a mine of all-round information.

"Birds!" said Skinner. "I would I were a bird, and all that sort of guff, you know—that's what the ass is driving at!"

"But you are a bird, my young friend," said Samuel. "With your scraggy neck and your eminently disagreeable features you remind me irresistibly of a vulture!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Thus far the crowd, with the exceptions of Bolsover and Skinner, was inclined to appreciate Samuel's speech.

"Darwin says that we are all descended from monkeys," Samuel con-

tinued. "But I think that is the rare exception rather than the rule. My friend Snorton is one of the exceptions. He is a living proof that Darwin was not entirely wrong. Observe the simian resemblance—"

"Easy does it, Benson!" snapped Harry. "Better get on with your birds!"

"I will do so, my dear Snorton! Far be it from me to cause you discomfort by dwelling upon your inferiority to the rest of us! Let me pass on. Our dusky friend there obviously had his origin from the blackbird tribe."

He pointed to Inky. Inky took it smilingly. After all, a blackbird was ahead of a crow, and Samuel might have labelled him crow.

"There"—Samuel pointed to Fisher Tarleton Fish—"is another vulture!"

"Waal, I swow!" gasped Fishy.

"And there is a cormorant," went on Samuel, pointing to Bunter.

"Oh, really—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The prophet errs," said Peter Todd. "That exhibit has long been labelled owl."

The eyes of Samuel now rested upon the face of Sidney James Snoop.

"Here my classification becomes difficult," he said, putting his hand to his chin. "Is that"—he took down his hand to point its forefinger at Snoop—"a mocking-bird? Is it a humming-bird? Or is it merely a gaolbird?"

Wibley realised next moment that his tongue had betrayed him, and that Snoop was sure to read into his speech some reference to his father.

And Wib really had not meant that. Like every decent fellow in the Remove, he counted Josiah Snoop as having washed off at the Front the stains of his conviction for fraud. Though Wibley had always disliked Snoop, and had not yet been able to conquer the feeling, he had been glad to see his spirit roused by his father's example, and had rejoiced at that most unexpected victory won by Snoop over Angel.

Angel's laugh rang out mockingly now. But very few others laughed.

Snoop's face was crimson as he advanced upon the orator.

"What did you say, you—you—"

He spluttered with rage. He could not find a name hard enough for the new fellow. Yet a moment's thought might have shown him that it was very unlikely that the taunt, coming from a new fellow, could have meant all that he took it to mean. And he certainly had no suspicion that the speaker was Wib.

"I apologise if I have unintentionally said—"

"Apologise be hanged!" roared Snoop. "You hound—you cur! Get down off that chair, and I'll lick you till you can't crawl!"

"Go it, Snoopey!" chirped Skinner. "Whop the insulting bounder!"

"I'll hold your jacket, Snoopey!" said Bunter eagerly. "That chap called me a cormorant! Rake says a cormorant is a beastly greedy bird. I ain't going to be—"

"Shut up!" howled Bolsover major. "Yes, give him a licking, Snoop! A chap with a dial like that is fairly asking for it!"

"Don't be an ass, Snoop!" said Harry Wharton. "Benson didn't mean anything. Half the time he doesn't know what he's saying."

But, though there was still something of the funk left in Snoop, one score there was on which he would fight, come what might. That was his father's honour.

And Benson did not look formidable. The fellow who had licked Aubrey Angel could surely lick this specimen.

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"Will you fight?" he snapped, putting a fist within an inch of Samuel's nose.

"If you will kindly excuse me, I would very much rather not," replied Samuel meekly.

The fighting spirit of Snoop was fanned into flame by that.

"You've got to!" he roared. "Fight, or take a hiding! Come down and put up your hands, you funk!"

"Bravo!" howled Skinner.

"Buck up, Sammy!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Yes, show him what you're made of, Benson!" urged Peter Todd.

Samuel got down from the chair.

"I regret that I must postpone the conclusion of my address," he said solemnly. "But as my beloved companions appear to wish me to indulge in fisticuffs, and as the gentleman before me will not accept my apology, I conceive it my duty—"

"Stop your chin-music, and come along to the gym!" hooted Bolsover.

"The gym! What is that, my dear Boshlover?"

"Oh, you ass! Just come along. You can't fight here."

"My dear Washalover, I assure you that you are mistaken—I can!"

"Well, you won't be allowed to," said Harry, laughing. "The gym's the place for a fight."

"Oh, I see! The arena, as it were. I will come, Snorton."

Skinner and Stott and Fish and Bunter surrounded Snoop, who threw out his chest, and assumed in advance all the airs of a victor. His swank did not commend itself to most of those who saw. Only the other day Snoop had been the worm who could not be made to turn; it was all too soon for him to be putting on frills.

So on the whole most of those who came along to the gym were prepared to see Samuel win without regret. But they had to confess that Samuel did not look a winner.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Samuel v. Snoop!

A ROUGH ring was formed around the two combatants. Snoop stood within it, his hands at his sides, expecting every moment to see his opponent show signs of funk. Now that it came to the pinch Snoop would have taken the glory of a victory without the trouble of fighting had he been offered it.

But Samuel showed no desire to cave in. It was difficult to guess what his feelings were. He looked around him interestedly, but without much appearance of understanding.

"Er—may I ask what is expected of me?" he said, looking round at the many faces.

"Do?" roared Bob Cherry. "Why, fight him, chump! Hit him, fathead!"

Bob meant when once the gloves were on, of course. But Samuel did not seem to know anything about the gloves.

He walked straight up to Snoop, and gave that astonished junior two resounding slaps, one on each side of his face.

"My hat! I'll—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

All round the ring the laughter rolled. For, having smacked Snoop, Samuel turned round and made tracks. He was trying to push his way out of the ring when the big hands of Bolsover grabbed him and slung him back.

"Dear me! You are very rude and rough, Boshlover!" he gasped.

"What are you doing, you image of dough? You can't run away like that!" growled Johnny Bull.

"But I can! I was doing so."

"You can't, I tell you!"

"I was told to hit him, and I did so. Everyone saw me. What else is there to be done?"

"Well, he might like to hit you, you know," observed the Bounder drily.

"Now, I never thought of that!" returned Samuel. "And yet it is more than likely. I should wish to act honourably, of course."

He stepped up to Snoop again, and tendered his cheek to be smacked.

That, it need hardly be said, was not quite what the Bounder had meant.

Snoop could not resist the temptation. He slapped Samuel hard—as hard as he could—and not once or twice, but thrice.

"Oh! He hit me much harder than I did him!" burred Samuel.

"Here, take the gloves!" said Harry, pushing a pair upon Samuel, while Skinner came forward with a pair for Snoop. "I'll second you."

"Does that mean that you will do the fighting?" inquired Samuel.

"Not much, it doesn't! You'll do that!"

"With these?"

Samuel took the gloves.

"Yes, of course."

"How very funny! I did not imagine that life at school would be so strange and so interesting! Like this, I suppose?"

And Samuel hurled one of the gloves straight into Snoop's face.

For such a rank duffer as Samuel looked it was a good shot, and a hard one.

Before Wharton could say or do anything to stop him, the eccentric new fellow hurled the other. It took Snoop fairly on the nose, and, though it could hardly have hurt him much, made him blink.

"Got him twice!" howled Samuel, doing a breakdown in sign of joy. "I will take cocoanuts, please—I do not like cigars. They make me ill."

"You—you—"

"Oh, you ain't hurt, Snoop!" said Squiff. "Put the gloves on, man, and paste him—if you can! But I'm not so sure of that."

"I rather fancy myself that Sammy ain't quite the innocent he looks," remarked Delarey.

"I don't believe he's innocent at all; it's my notion he's spoofing us left and right," said Tom Brown. "It's jolly queer—his mug's like nothing earthly, you'd say; and yet it reminds me of someone I know well, though I can't think who it is."

"Not a relative, I hope, Tom?" said the South African junior drily.

Wharton was helping Samuel on with the gloves now. Samuel smiled at them inanely when he had them on.

"Do I smack like that?" he inquired, bringing his open glove smartly against the face of his second.

"No, you utter idiot!" snapped Wharton.

It needed all his self-control to keep him from smacking Samuel in return. But he refrained from doing that, and he showed Samuel how to clench his fist—a demonstration of what appeared to strike the new boy as a new discovery in natural philosophy.

"That is not at all like a bird," he remarked mildly.

"Oh, you've got birds on the brain!" said Frank Nugent.

"Not likely!" said Bob. "Nor anything else. No brain, you know."

Samuel seemed disposed to stay and argue that point. But Snoop was waiting for him, and he was pushed into the middle of the ring.

"Wade in, Snoopey!" roared Bolsover.

"If you don't give him a jolly good hiding I'll give you one!"

"Now that is positively unkind of you, Boshlover!" bleated Samuel.

There did not appear to be much chance of Snoop's having to take a hiding for failing to give Samuel one.

Anything like the way Samuel shaped had never been seen at Greyfriars before.

He came on with his arms extended in front of him, rather as if he were holding an imaginary baby. Snoop, though his method of shaping up was a trifle stiff, looked quite the warrior compared with Samuel.

But before he got within reach of Snoop Samuel astonished everyone by letting out an ear-splitting yell. At the same instant he swiped round madly.

He did not hit Snoop; the fact that he was two yards from him was all against his doing that. But, swinging round with the weight of his own blow, he somehow managed to bring his right fist hard against the left ear of Bob Cherry.

"Oh, hang you, you silly ass!" roared Bob.

Bob was never afraid of being hurt; but the utter unexpectedness of that punch took him aback.

"Dear me! I believe I have hit the wrong person, after all!" said Samuel, blinking.

"I should rather think you have, you fatheaded maniac!" Bob howled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The rest seemed to think the accident—if it was an accident—funny. Somehow, Bob was not so dead sure that it was an accident.

He twisted Samuel round.

"There's your man!" he snapped.

"Go for him!"

"I—I think I would prefer to wait until he comes for me, my dear Berry," said Samuel mildly.

Snoop heard, and he came.

He sailed in, anticipating the easiest of victories. One punch would surely settle this combat.

And one punch settled it!

But it was not in the manner Snoop had expected.

For Samuel gave that punch. So utterly did it take everyone by surprise that of all there not a single one could be sure that it was not the flukiest of flukes—though some had their suspicions.

For it is strange indeed when a fellow who half a minute before had come on apparently dandling an imaginary baby puts in one straight from the shoulder upon the point of the jaw.

And that was what Samuel did.

Snoop dropped. He was counted out without making any effort to rise. But for that he could not fairly be blamed, for he was quite incapable of rising.

"Eight—nine—out!" said Smithy, and Harry Wharton clapped Samuel on the back.

"You've won, duffer!" he said.

"Dear me! Then—then he has lost?" spluttered Samuel, looking down at Snoop.

"That's the size of it."

"I—I must have hit him hard. I wonder whether it was painful? I fear that he is too angry with me to satisfy my natural curiosity; would you mind allowing me to hit you and then telling me whether it is painful, Snorton?"

"I should—a bit," replied Harry.

"These—er—instruments are so very unfamiliar to me," said Samuel, looking down at his gloves. "Perhaps my dear friend, whom I have had the misfortune to knock down, would like to start again with the—er—the naked—er—earls, or something of that sort, I believe they call them?"

But Snoop had not the slightest wish to

try the combat anew with the naked dukes, which was apparently what Samuel meant.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Samuel Does a Bunk!

THESE was a good deal in the way of chipping of Samuel in the dormitory that night, but nothing that caused real trouble to William Wibley, used as he was to the ways of his Form. Wibley was thoroughly enjoying his time at Greyfriars as Samuel Benson, and what might have been something like purgatory to a real new boy, raw and sensitive, meant nothing but fun to the case-hardened Wib.

That one straight-from-the-shoulder blow served to keep Skinner & Co. from going too far.

It might have been the merest accident, but Skinner & Co. were not inclined to chance another accident of that sort.

Sunday was more or less a quiet day at Greyfriars at any time. The chipping of Samuel went on; but that was nothing to worry about.

Some of the Remove were looking forward eagerly to Monday, and Sammy, as nearly everyone called him, showing his paces on the footer-field. But Sammy expressed no doubt in his ability to play footer if he chose. He never had played, he said; but it was only a matter of kicking wickets, or goals, or something, he understood.

He employed a good deal of time on Sunday in boring successive victims stiff with ornithology—or trying to do it. They usually made their escape in time to prevent his complete success.

What Wib did not know about ornithology would have filled quite a fair-sized library; but that did not matter. There was a good deal of ignorance in the Remove on the subject, in addition to Wib's, and Wib—or Sammy—had all the prestige to be obtained from the possession of a tremendous volume on that branch of natural history. He was credited with knowing that volume from cover to cover; and it was true in so far as he knew both covers—the outsides of them.

Knowledge of the ponderous tome was not needed to enable one to air a pretended theory that mankind was really descended from birds, varied with impolite hints that there were exceptions, such as Wharton, with his pretended monkey ancestry, and Bolsover, whom Sammy persisted in linking up with the hippopotami.

Sammy was assigned to the study which Bolsover and Dupont, the French junior, shared. But that study did not see much of him during Sunday.

As the day drew on Sammy seemed rather to fade away. He was—though that was not apparent to the others, of course—much less Samuel Benson and much more William Wibley than he had been earlier in the day. And as William Wibley in disguise he was not anxious to attract too much attention to himself.

Wib was getting worried.

Time was short. Before noon on Monday, at the latest, he must clear out as Samuel Benson, for there would be another claimant of that name at Greyfriars. Indeed, it might not be safe to wait until after morning classes. The real Benson might turn up earlier, and then!

But that was not all. Once out of his disguise Wibley would be safe from immediate detection as the false Benson. But would he be safe from eventual detection?

It had not occurred to him at the outset that the disappearance of the bogus

Benson would inevitably be a matter for inquiry.

But he saw it now.

Dr. Locke and Mr. Quelch would want to know where Samuel had gone. They would also want to know where he had come from.

If the double inquiry thus set on foot led to anything which formed a connecting link with the absence of Wibley at the time when Samuel was present, the fat would be in the fire with a vengeance.

And there was yet something else that was lying heavily on Wib's mind.

It had not troubled him at all at first. It was troubling him a good deal now.

The words he had caught here and there during the conversation of the two Bensons at Courtfield came back to him again and again with a new meaning.

Not a very definite meaning, yet one with nasty possibilities in it.

And it seemed to him, too, as if he could remember more than he was conscious of having heard at the time.

That might be mere imagination. But Wibley did not think it was. Everything seemed to fit in.

Everything seemed to point to the theory that the real Samuel Benson was as false as the bogus one—that he was coming to Greyfriars with no honest intent.

Wibley was shrewd enough, though he lacked the all-round ability of such fellows as the Bounder and Peter Todd. His was only a grown-up head in one way—the actor's way.

He would have given a good deal to take either Peter or Smithy into his confidence now. But he dared not risk it.

"When I get back I shall have to keep a watch on that Benson chap," he muttered to himself, in the course of a solitary walk in the quad after dusk had begun to gather. "Directly I see anything suspicious I can call in the Bounder and one or two more to help. I needn't say how I came to get on to his dodges at first. They can think me a giddy Herlock Sholmes if they like—that won't hurt me!"

"Benson!" yelled someone at that moment.

Wibley heard without heeding. For the moment he was entirely William Wibley, with no thought of the part he must still sustain.

"And I must clear out after brekker to-morrow, not leave it till after classes. That would be too risky."

"Benson! Benson! Sammy, you idiot!"

Wib gave a start. "Sammy, you idiot!" brought him up to the scratch as "Benson" had no power to do.

"Yes, my dear friend?" he said, in Sammy's high-pitched voice. "What is it?"

Frank Nugent's slim form loomed up through the dusk.

"There's a visitor for you," he said.

"My hat!"

Frank started in surprise. The voice was not the voice of Sammy. But he did not recognise it as Wib's.

"Didn't you expect him?" he asked.

"No—er—that is, not exactly. Where is he?"

Wib was so far from expecting any visitor that the thought of meeting one filled him with dismay. For, of course, the visitor would be Samuel's, not Sammy's. He would not know Sammy, and what could Sammy say to him?

Ornithological theories would not work here!

"In the room just off the hall—right-hand side. That's where they usually send visitors, anyway, unless it's someone who wants to see one of the masters first, or

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who knows the place well enough to walk up to some chap's study."

Wibley still hesitated. If he could have got rid of Nugent he might have made an immediate bolt.

"I'll show you, if you like," said the good-natured Frank.

It was what Wib might have expected; but he had to stifle a groan.

"Thank you, my dear Nugent!" he said aloud; then "Blow the chap!" under his breath.

Frank led the way, and Wib followed, with his heart fairly in his mouth.

"Here you are!"

Wib passed in.

"Hallo, young Sam Benson!" said a rather flashily-dressed man with a sharp nose that went very ill with a bulldog jaw, but better with the close-set, cunning eyes that looked out from under bushy eyebrows.

Wibley hardly knew what to say. He had never set eyes upon this man before; yet the fellow hailed him as if they were old friends.

And, not knowing what to say, Wib said nothing.

The pause was not a marked one, however.

"Ha! You don't know me, do you?" said the stranger. "But you will when I tell you I'm Sim West, generally known as Westy."

Wib didn't even then, but he said, with as much confidence as he could muster:

"Oh, yes! How d'ye do, Mr. Westy?"

"I thought I'd look in and see if you were here yet," went on Mr. Sim West.

"No danger in that, is there?"

"Not a bit of it!" returned Wib, wondering how there possibly could be. But he was beginning to tumble to something now, and his wits were on the alert.

The stranger's next speech gave him a clue.

"Your brother said you were as smart as he is," said Mr. West, in rather a disappointed tone. "I hope you are; but I'm dashed if you look it!"

"Oh, it pays to look soft sometimes!" said Wib.

Mr. West slapped him on the back.

"I twig!" he said. "Keep down suspicion here—all that—eh, what? Dashed if I believe you could have played the heavy father as young George did, though!"

It was on the tip of Wib's tongue to say that he could play anything whatever better than anyone else whatever. That was Wib's simple creed, and Mr. West's remark wounded his tenderest feelings. It cost him a real effort to remember that to the visitor he was not William Wibley, the greatest schoolboy actor of this or any other age, but merely a shifty and probably dishonest young scamp named Samuel Benson.

But the check he put upon his tongue gave his brain time.

Of course! The old gentleman with the white whiskers in the barn was one of the gang—probably a mere youth—made up as Samuel's father so as to arrange for his temporary sojourn at Greyfriars!

Wib recalled now two or three things that ought to have put him on the track of that impersonation.

"George did do it a treat!" he said.

"He did that! Well, you're here! So far, so good! You've got your instructions, and talkin' things over here wouldn't be very safe. But you might meet me near the Cross Keys at Friar-dale to-morrow at about five o'clock, to make sure of everything."

"It's safe enough to talk here," said Wib, who wanted to know more. "Nobody's about."

"Just you lay in a new stock of ideas about what's safe and what ain't safe, my son!" said Westy in a voice that had almost a threatening note in it. "I don't think much of them you've got in hand. I dare say you'd walk out with me and talk it all over in the road outside—eh?"

"Oh, yes, if you like!" said Wib.

"Then you're a dashed young fool, and not half as smart as George fancies you, my buck! Put that in your pipe

and smoke it! And mind—if you bungle this I've done with you!"

"Oh, I sha'n't bungle it!" Wib replied confidently.

"Mind you don't! Now ring! The buttons shall be fetched to let me out in proper fashion. I know what belongs to a visitor here, if you don't!"

Wibley rang. Trotter came. The stranger went.

Wib was glad to see him go. He fancied himself quite a match for Samuel Benson; but Mr. Sim West was rather a different matter.

"My hat!" muttered Wib. "This ain't half a go! Sammy must do a bunk before dawn—that's a sure thing! And Wibley must be back before Samuel turns up—that specimen will need an eye on him from the start!"

Sammy was not in Form that evening. He complained of a splitting headache, was left to himself in common decency, and retired to rest early.

And when the Remove awoke next morning Sammy's bed was empty!

Just before classes began Wibley came in, leaving little time for any to inquire why he had been duffer enough to hurry back from his holiday. But he did not attract much attention, for by that time Sammy's absence had aroused suspicion. And a little later there appeared another Samuel Benson, not at all like the first one.

The Remove fairly seethed with excitement. Mr. Quelch was staggered. No one knew what to make of it all—except William Wibley. And he kept his own counsel—for the time being.

But what Samuel Benson the Second came to Greyfriars for, and what was done about the mysterious disappearance of Samuel Benson the First, and how Wib came out of it at the finish—these things another story must tell.

(Don't miss "SAMUEL AND SAMMY!"—next Monday's Grand Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)

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

BUNTER'S QUARTER-MILE.

By RICHARD RAKE.

WE fellows at Greyfriars, as you know, have heard quite a lot about Bunter's numerous swagger relations—a jolly sight too much, in fact. So that when a real live Bunter de Bunter did condescend to visit the school the event caused quite a mild sensation.

Wharton, Cherry, and Skinner had the privilege of meeting the old chap at the station, though they certainly never went there for that purpose.

Skinner may be said to have served as a means of introduction. Bob Cherry wanted to see Skinner. Skinner did not want to see Bob Cherry. He bolted, Bob pursued, and Skinner biffed right into the Bunter de Bunter as he got out of the train.

"Ow, ow! You young scoundrel!" yelled the B. de B., as he sat on the platform rubbing his waistcoat. "Ow! You—you—I'll—"

Then the old buffer grabbed Skinner wrathfully. But just as everyone thought he was going to lam him a startling change took place.

As he spotted the school cap his anger vanished, and he positively beamed upon the trio. Skinner, who was about to scoot, stopped as the old gentleman patted him gently on the back.

"Don't run away, dear boy! Forgive my hasty words!" he cried, in a funny, piping voice. "You're from Greyfriars, aren't you?"

Skinner, who evidently thought the old chap was barmy, simply grinned and winked at Wharton and Cherry.

"Just so. I knew you were!" cried the old chap heartily, though Skinner hadn't answered. "Then, of course, you know my nephew, William George Bunter. I'm his uncle from London. Perhaps you've heard him speak of me, eh?"

"Of course," answered Skinner solemnly, scenting fun. "Why, he's always talking about you, sir."

"Is he now?" cried Mr. Jeremiah Bunter happily. "And yet it's years since he last saw me! But perhaps you'll be so good as to direct me to the school. I'm only paying a brief visit—quite a flying visit, I assure you, dear boys!"

"Certainly, sir," chimed in Wharton politely. "We're going back there now. Perhaps you'd like to walk there with us?"

"Delighted, I assure you," said Bunter's uncle, as he followed the three off the platform.

As they passed through the wicket-gate Harry Wharton gripped Skinner by the arm and held him back.

"Look here, Skinner, none of your beastly ragging! It's rotten form ragging a visitor."

"Go and eat coke!" said Skinner. "I'm having some fun out of the old jossier!"

Wharton knew from experience that it was useless to argue with Skinner. So he gave it up.

"And now," said Uncle Jeremiah, when out in the road, "tell me all about my nephew. I'm sure you're great friends of his. Eh, now?"

"Friends!" said Skinner scornfully. "Why, we're like brothers! We think the world of Bunter—I don't think!"—under his breath. "He's awfully good to us—considering he's so much above us, of course."

"Above you? Why?" began Uncle Jeremiah wonderingly.

"Well, you see, you cannot expect a fellow who is captain of footer, and the best boxer in the school, besides being the finest athlete, to treat us as equals. Can you now?"

"What?" gasped Uncle Jeremiah delightedly. "Is William all that? You may not believe me, but as far as I recollect his only accomplishment was an abnormal capacity for assimilating jam-tarts. But an athlete? Why, my dear boys, I am delighted to hear of such an improvement!"

"You don't say?" said Skinner. "But then, one can understand your being surprised. To look at Bunter, now, no one would take him for an athlete. But then, appearances are deceptive."

"Quite so," agreed Mr. Bunter. "But tell me. Is my nephew a runner? Now, I was the best runner in the school when a boy. Football and boxing are all very well in their way, but give me running!"

"Ah! Now, I'm afraid he isn't that," said Skinner, evidently thinking it as well not to lay it on too thick. "You see, sir, he isn't exactly built for a runner."

"Then I must talk to William. I must persuade him to take up the fascinating sport of— Good gracious! Who is this extraordinary individual?"

A portly form had just emerged from the tuckshop ahead of them. All three boys grinned as they recognised the familiar figure of William George Bunter.

Bunter's face was, as usual, very jammy, and he wore a satisfied if somewhat vacant smile. He blinked at the approaching four curiously. Skinner chuckled.

"Why, this is your nephew?" he said, in a surprised voice. "Don't you recognise him, sir?"

"Good gracious! Is this William? There is certainly a vague resemblance. But— Good gracious!"

Bunter stared open-mouthed at his uncle, evidently not recognising him in the least.

"Don't you know me, William? I'm your Uncle Jeremiah. As I was passing through Friardale I thought I would brak the journey and come and see you. But, my dear boy, how you have grown!"

Bunter's face suddenly brightened. Visions of a good feed and a substantial tip floated in his mind. He held out a jammy hand to his relative.

Skinner thought it just as well to make himself scarce while greetings were being exchanged. Wharton and Cherry also decided to leave the members of the Bunter family together.

"Ah, your chums have gone! I had quite an interesting chat with them. I must say, William, how delighted I was to hear how well you are getting on at school."

Bunter grinned sheepishly. He knew of certain persons in authority at Greyfriars who held a different view of his progress at school.

"I was especially delighted," proceeded the old chap, "to hear what a fine athlete you are, William, as I am particularly interested in all healthy sports. At the same time I am disappointed to hear that you are not keen about my favourite sport, which is running. But I will talk that over with you later, dear boy. And now, shall we proceed to the school?"

"Oh, but really, uncle, won't you require some refreshments after your long journey?" protested Billy, with a longing eye on the shop window.

"Certainly not, William. I do not approve of eating between meals, and especially in the case of an athlete like yourself, dear boy, who should always be in training."

Billy sniffed.

"But what about tea, uncle? I must order something for tea. I would never dream of letting any guest of mine depart without insisting upon his having refreshment," said Billy, with a dignified look on his fat, jammy face.

"My dear boy, how very good of you!" observed Uncle Jeremiah, not knowing that Billy Bunter would not dream of paying for the tea, either. "But I really must not stay to tea, as I must catch the 5.40 train, and I particularly wish to look over your school."

Bunter snorted disgustedly. All his hopes of a gorgeous feed vanished. But he brightened up at the thought of the certain tip to come. With a last regretful glance at the tuckshop window he waddled after his uncle.

Bunter had swaggered so much about his titled relations that we all took the greatest interest in Uncle Jeremiah on his arrival at Greyfriars. But Bunter ignored us com-

pletely as he conducted his uncle with dignity round the school. It was plain to be seen, though, that the old chap was delighted with everything—including his nephew. For the fat boulder had improved upon Skinner's remarks as to his athletic prowess by telling some wondrous tales of his doings on footer-field and in the gym.

"And now," said Uncle Jeremiah, when they had been round the school, "about your taking up the running, William. Now, tell me your average time for the quarter-mile?"

"Oh—er—ten minutes!" said Bunter vaguely.

"What!" exclaimed Uncle Jeremiah. "Ten minutes? Why, my dear boy, my own average was fifty-nine seconds! You really must do better than that, William. Now, I have been thinking over things, and as a little encouragement I have decided to give you five pounds—"

"Oh, really, uncle!" broke in Bunter, his fat face wreathed in smiles.

"On the day I hear you have done the quarter-mile in, say, seventy seconds," proceeded Uncle Jeremiah.

Bunter's face fell disconsolately. Only for a moment, though. Then his eyes lit up cunningly. Uncle Jeremiah could not expect him to do it then and there, and—well, sports results can be wangled on paper! But his uncle's next words squashed that idea at once.

"Now, whom could I appoint as judge? Ah, here are your chums! I am sure they would only be too delighted," he said, as Wharton and Cherry approached along the corridor. The two boys came up as Uncle Jeremiah beckoned to them. And a moment later both were listening in amazement whilst Uncle Jeremiah expounded his scheme with no little enthusiasm.

"My hat!" gasped Bob Cherry, stifling a desire to yell with laughter. The idea of the Owl doing the quarter-mile in seventy seconds was too screamingly funny for words. Wharton, with difficulty, kept a straight face.

"Certainly, sir," he said solemnly, "if you'll give us your address. Only too pleased!"

"Thanks, my dear boys! Many thanks! Here is my card. And now, William, I must be going, or I shall miss my train. Good-bye, boys! Good-bye!"

"What? You aren't going to walk?" protested Bunter. "Let me phone for a cab for you."

"Certainly not, William. The walk will do us both good. Come!"

With a snort of disgust Bunter followed his uncle. He was hungry, tired, and inwardly seething with indignation. And that walk to Friardale Station did not improve his temper. But he hid his feelings, and consoled himself with the prospect of a handsome tip and a gorgeous feed to follow.

So far Uncle Jeremiah had not mentioned the tip, and it was not until he had entered the station and boarded the train that Billy began to have any serious misgivings. But poor Billy didn't get an opportunity to drop even a hint, for just then the guard blew his whistle.

"Good-bye, William!" cried Mr. Bunter, leaning out of the window. "Good-bye, dear boy! Directly your chum writes to say you've won the prize I'll post a fiver on to you!"

"But—but," spluttered Bunter desperately, just as the train was beginning to move, "aren't you going to—to—"

"Sorry, dear boy!" cried Uncle Jeremiah, grasping his nephew's hand in a hearty grasp. "Glad you reminded me. I quite forgot to shake hands. Good-bye, dear boy—good-bye!"

Next moment Bunter was staring at the swiftly vanishing face of his relative, with feelings too deep for words. Then, nearly weeping with rage and disappointment, he shook his fist at the departing train.

II.

"I SAY, you fellows! Anyone got any choc or toffee?"

Bunter came in just as the Remove were trooping into Big Hall for call-over. His face was red and angry, while he was puffing and blowing like a grampus.

"Hallo! You've got back then, Bunter," said Harry Wharton, with an amused smile on his face. "You're only just in time for call-over."

"He's been training for the quarter-mile," said Bob Cherry, with a grin.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's nothing to laugh at!" groaned Billy Bunter. "I've had an awful time! I've had no tea, and I've run all the way from the station. And Mrs. Mimble wouldn't give me tick for even a jam-tart! I'm simply fainting for food! Hasn't anyone got any grub?" he ended plaintively.

"What about your uncle? Didn't he tip you?" asked Wharton in surprise.

"No, not a penny, the howling, mingy rotter!" cried Billy angrily. "And I'm starving! I haven't had a bite since three o'clock!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Poor Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry. "Who's got some toffee, before he faints away?"

None of the fellows could help laughing at Bunter's wretchedly miserable face. Fortunately, Mauley found a cake of chocolate, while Bull rooted out some treacle-toffee. And Bunter only had time to scoff these when the bell rang for silence.

After prep poor Bunter wandered about like a lost soul. He tried to touch every fellow in the Remove for cash or tuck. But the chaps weren't having any, though the expression that hung on his face was enough to move a heart of stone.

It wasn't often the fellows were at all anxious to satisfy Bunter's voracious appetite. But that night in the dorm they would have fed him at any cost could they have got him to sleep. Bunter never can sleep when hungry. And he must have been ravenous if his sighs and groans and moans were anything to go by. We bombarded him with slippers and pillows. But it was not until the whole dorm threatened to fall upon him and slay him that he was reduced to silence.

But Bunter could not sleep.

He lay tossing on his bed till long after the other fellows had dropped off. And just as eleven chimed from the old tower he slipped out of bed, felt for his slippers, and crept cautiously to the door. Outside in the corridor all was silent. Billy, after listening for a minute, tiptoed to the head of the stairs and began to descend. At the bottom he stood listening again. Then he crept towards the kitchen, an anxious expression on his fat face.

Billy Bunter's anxiety was not so much the fear of being caught, but the fear that the pantry door would be locked. But when he reached the pantry his fears vanished, and he grinned expansively. The pantry door was wide open.

Billy Bunter indulged in a fat chuckle, entered, and got busy. And having had practically nothing to eat since three o'clock he made up for lost time. A plate of jam-tarts melted away like mist before the sun. A rabbit-pie that would have stumped any ordinary mortal disappeared just as quickly. Then Billy passed on to mince-pies.

At the end of half an hour Bunter had cleared the bottom shelf, and was still going strong. He would doubtless have cleared the second shelf, too, had not the sound of the hall door opening and a feminine voice caused him to stop when half-way through his third apple-dumpling. Then, as footsteps approached the kitchen, he looked about wildly for a hiding-place.

Luckily for Billy, there was a deep cupboard at the far end of the pantry. He stepped inside and pulled the door to. Then he crouched, with heart beating beneath its folds of flesh, as he heard the striking of a match and Mrs. Kebble's well-known voice.

"Laws, Alice, I feel that tired I could fair drop asleep standing!"

"That's the worst of whist-drives and them things. They— Gracious, Mrs. Kebble, we never locked the pantry door! Suppose Master Bunter had come down? I'd better lock it now, hadn't I?"

Bunter held his breath as he heard a step approach the pantry. Then he gasped in alarm as the cupboard door was banged and locked. Evidently Alice had noticed that open, too. But before he had time to cry out he heard the pantry door being locked, and then—silence.

Poor Bunter could never remember clearly what happened after that. He got tired after a while of standing crouched, and began to feel about in the darkness.

Crash, crash, crash! Billy nearly jumped out of his skin. His hands, wandering about in the darkness, had swept a shelf of its contents. After that he went more cautiously. The floor of the cupboard was bare, save for a sack standing in one corner. Bunter did not trouble about what the sack contained. It felt soft to the touch, and would, so Bunter thought, be better than lying on the hard, cold floor. Pulling it over,

he flattened it out as well as he could, and lay down upon it.

Poor Bunter will remember that awful night as long as he lives. Clad only in his thin pyjamas, he tossed about, cold and sleepless, on his uncomfortable couch. But he fell asleep at last, and dreamed an awful dream, in which he was locked up, doomed to die of starvation, in a dark, damp dungeon.

His awakening was sudden and unpleasant. For a time he really thought his dream was true, for he felt ravenously hungry, he ached in every limb, and was shivering with cold. Then he heard movements in the pantry, and sat up, just as the cupboard door opened and a flood of light shot in.

Bunter blinked through his glasses and recognised Mrs. Kebble. But it was only a glimpse of her that he got, for, giving a wild shriek, the cook turned and fled. Bunter was startled, but he saw a desperate chance of escape, and took it.

It was quite early yet, and the gas was lit. Billy shot through the kitchen, and scudded after the flying figure of the cook. At the bottom of the stairs stood the boot-boy, with his arms full of boots. He stared in blank amazement at Mrs. Kebble as she shot past him, screaming.

Then he saw Bunter coming, and he dropped the boots, with a wild yell, and shot after the cook through the hall door. Bunter, with surprising agility considering his bulk, flew up the stairs and made for his dormitory.

But his luck was dead out. He reached Mr. Quelch's door just as Quelch emerged to see what all the noise was about. Bunter tried to pull up, but too late. And the next moment the two were rolling over on the corridor floor.

Then every door in the corridor flew open, and seniors and juniors flooded the passage. First they stared in blank amazement, then burst into roars of laughter.

Mr. Quelch and Bunter, gasping for breath, sat facing each other on the floor. But it was Bunter the boys were laughing at. He was a picture! Not only was he covered from head to foot with flour, but he looked as if he had been bathing in jam and treacle, too. No wonder the cook and boots had taken him for a ghost!

"What—what is it? Who is it?" gasped Quelch faintly. "Good gracious, Bunter, can it possibly be you? How dare you, sir!"

Billy blinked through his goggles as Quelch rose to his feet and glowered at him savagely.

"I'll—I will see you later about this, Bunter!" cried Quelch, almost stuttering with rage. "Get off to the bath-room now, and wash that filth off! You boys can get back to bed until rising-bell."

And as poor Bunter rolled past the rows of grinning faces, his face the picture of misery, he registered a mental vow never to raid a pantry again as long as he lived!

III.

AFTER what had happened it was hardly likely that Billy Bunter would entertain very kindly thoughts of his Uncle Jeremiah, and especially after the swishing he got from Quelch that morning. So it was certainly with no intention of pleasing his uncle that Bunter took kindly to the quarter-mile business and decided to rake in that five-pound prize.

After dinner he entered Study No. 1, a determined look on his fat face.

"I say, you fellows, I've—"

"Nothing doing, Buntie," observed Bob Cherry cheerfully. "You'll have to wait until that postal-order of yours comes."

Billy Bunter snorted.

"I haven't come to borrow any of your rotten money!" he answered with dignity. "I shall have plenty of my own when my uncle sends that five-pound note! And I'll jolly well see that none of you fellows get any of it!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Are you really going to have a try for it?" roared Cherry. "When do you go into training?"

"Training? Pooh!" said Bunter scornfully. "A fellow like me is always fit! Besides, the last time I went into training—"

"Let's see—for a fishing-match, wasn't it?" chuckled Merry.

"The last time I went into training," proceeded Bunter, ignoring Cherry's frivolous interruption, "I lost two stone, and nearly jolly well starved! And I'm blessed if I do it again! So, as I'm rather short of tin just now, I want you chaps to be on Little

Side at two o'clock, and I'll run it off then. You can write to-night, and I'll get the note the day after to-morrow."

Bunter's sublime faith in his ability to win the five pounds made the Famous Five stare and yell with laughter. But Bunter evidently saw nothing to laugh at. He scowled at the other fellows angrily.

"You fellows seem to think I can't run! But I'll jolly well show you this afternoon—that is, if you chaps intend to keep your word. But you promised my uncle you'd time me. You know you did!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "We'll be there; don't worry, Billy. Won't we, you chaps?"

"Rather!" came the chorus, with conviction. And as the dinner-bell went just then, Bunter made a dignified if somewhat hurried exit.

Bunter must have felt himself quite an important personage when he made his appearance on Little Side that afternoon. Word of the proposed run had gone round, and besides the Famous Five, a merry crowd of the fellows had gathered in joyous anticipation of seeing Bunter in the role of runner. The ironical cheer that greeted him changed to a yell of laughter as the Owl of the Remove shed his overcoat. For Billy was clad for the occasion in a scarlet zephyr and bright blue running shorts, which showed up his dainty figure in all its beauty of outline.

Cherry, watch in hand, took his place with Bunter at the starting-point, while Harry Wharton, with a crowd of fellows eager to see the finish, cut off to where the quarter-mile point had been marked out.

"Now," said Bob Cherry, when all was ready, "you've simply got to think of nothing but the gorgeous feeds you'll be able to have out of that five pounds—and you'll win!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the fellows, who never expected Bunter to last a hundred yards, much less do the quarter-mile in seventy seconds. Bunter, his fat face set with determination, stared ahead through his gig-lamps as he toed the line.

"I'll call 'One—two—three!'—then 'Go!'" said Bob Cherry. "Are you ready? One—two—three! Go!"

Billy Bunter got away well, amid the laughter and cheers of the fellows.

"Go it, Billy!" yelled Nugent. "Oh, well run! Hallo, what's that ass Skinner up to? Jerusalem!"

Nugent broke off with a gasp of alarm. A little way down the meadow Skinner had opened a gate. And next moment the fellows gave a shout as a big, ugly-looking bull trotted into the meadow, just as Bunter was waddling past.

Bunter and the bull spotted each other just at the same time. Bunter yelped in alarm, and it was amazing how he put on speed. The bull, with an angry bellow, lowered its horns and set off in pursuit.

Bunter gave just one more yelp on hearing the thudding hoofs behind him. After that he saved his breath for running—and he needed it! With head well back and arms pumping like pistons, he flew along, his fat legs twinkling—scarcely seeming to touch the ground. He cut such a ludicrous figure that we fellows simply couldn't help laughing, though we were rather concerned about Bunter's safety.

Half-way down the course Bunter was leading by several yards. But the bull was gaining rapidly. He was only a couple of yards behind Bunter two-thirds of the way down. Then Bunter put on a last desperate spurt.

At first sight of the bull the fellows at the finishing-post had hunked at once. All, that is, with the exception of Wharton. But he now wisely decided to watch the finish from the other side of the hedge. Hardly had he swarmed the gate in the corner of the field when Bunter, with eyes staring out of his head with fright and the bull snorting at his heels, came scudding along.

Instead of making for the gate Wharton held open for him, poor Bunter made a dive for the hedge. But he was just a second too late. Something like a battering-ram struck him in the rear. Then his wail of terror as he crashed through the prickly hedge was cut short by a dismal splash.

Undoubtedly the bull had done its best to lift Bunter clear of the hedge. But the animal certainly hadn't bargained for Bunter's weight. Shaking its head angrily, it trotted back up the meadow, a sadder and a wiser bull!

The fellows rushed up just as Bunter was climbing out of the ditch. When they saw he was not much hurt everyone fairly shouted with laughter. But Bunter ignored their

hilarity. Looking as dignified as his dripping and slimy condition would allow, he waddled up to Harry Wharton.

"What was my time, Wharton?" he gasped anxiously, as soon as he could get his breath.

Bunter never was the fellow to lose sight of the main chance. But, considering what had happened, his imperturbability made the fellows laugh more than ever.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wharton. "You've done it, Billy. Just sixty-nine seconds! Well done, Billy! I'll write and tell your uncle to-night. You deserve it."

"Ha, ha, ha! Three cheers for Bunter!" yelled Todd wildly. "Who says Bunter can't run after this?"

Bunter jammed his huge glasses more firmly on his nose, and blinked round triumphantly at the laughing, cheering crowd. He ached in every limb, and felt cold and wet and decidedly uncomfortable. But he didn't mind that now. Visions of the glorious feeds to come floated in his mind's eye. Then, with a final triumphant blink round, followed by the ironical cheers of the Remove, he made for Greyfriars—and a much-needed bath.

THE END.

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Monday :

"SAMUEL AND SAMMY!"

By Frank Richards.

This week's story must obviously have its sequel. We have got a lot of fun out of Wibley's assumption of the part of Samuel Benson. But the real Samuel Benson—if there is a real one, for that may not be the name of the young scoundrel who is coming to Greyfriars—is now due, and the false one has had to clear out.

It failed to occur to Wibley when he planned his impersonation that, unless he was bowled out, the disappearance of Sammy would trouble Greyfriars. The fellow might be an impostor; but to prove that would not settle things. Search would certainly be made for him. Nothing could come of that search, for once Wib was Wib again Sammy would have vanished off the face of the earth. But inquiries would also be made, and something might come of these.

And meanwhile the other Samuel Benson would be at Greyfriars, waiting his chance to carry out designs to which Wibley has now a clue.

The situation is an interesting and exciting one. I am sure you will all look forward to its clearing-up next week.

NOW THAT THE WAR IS OVER.

One must take it that it is over, though the trouble is not, and it may be a year or more before things have settled down. By the time this appears in print the armistice will be nearing its end, and at its end, no doubt, something in the nature of a peace treaty will be signed. The armistice itself was neither an armistice—as the word has always been understood—nor peace. It was not an armistice in the ordinary sense, because in all previous wars an armistice meant a truce, and after the truce the opposing forces could start again. If the terms of this armistice is kept, the Germans simply cannot do that; they will have given up the means of doing it. On the other hand, what we have as yet is something short of peace, for no peace treaty has been signed.

But the war is really over. That fact is going to make lots of difference everywhere. If the end had come a little sooner it would possibly have enabled us to have Christmas-Double Numbers. As it is, we must do without them this year. A disappointment to many of you, I know. I myself am sorry it should be so. But it can't be helped.

No drastic immediate change is likely in either the Magnet or the "Gem." For a time, no doubt, the war-time price must continue. Not yet shall we be able to increase the size. But the papers will be just as good as ever—better, if possible—and that is the main thing.

YOUR EDITOR.

14-12-18