

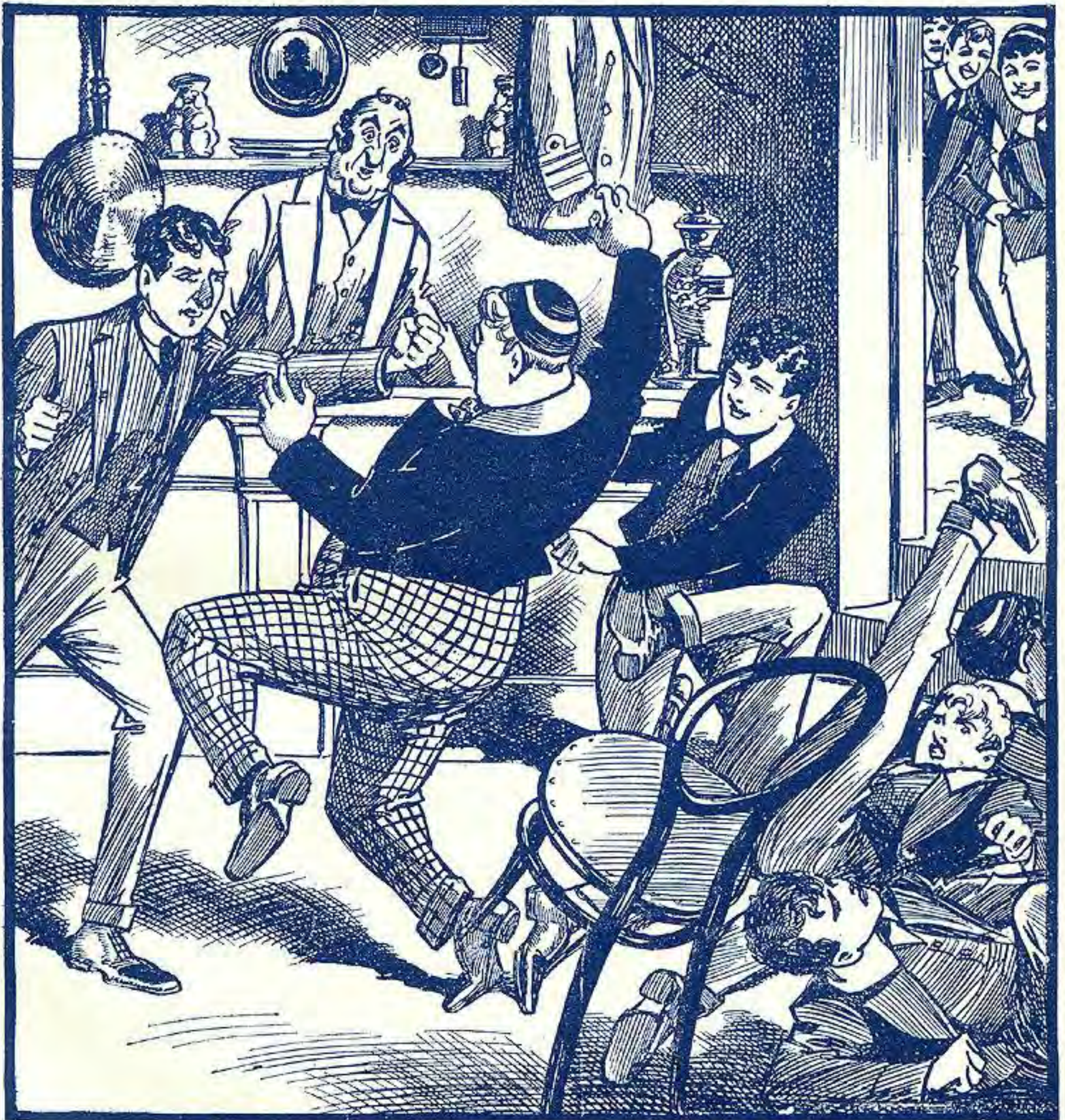


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THE AMAZING BUNTER!



BUNTER THE WARRIOR!

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THE AMAZING BUNTER!

By FRANK RICHARDS.



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Labour in Vain!

"H ALLO, Bunter!" It was Harold Skinner, of the Greyfriars Remove, standing by the School House steps with Snoop and Stott, his study-mates, who hailed Wally Bunter thus as he passed.

But Skinner did not know that it was Wally to whom he spoke.

No one at Greyfriars had yet found out that Billy Bunter had gone from their midst, to shed the effulgent light of his countenance upon St. Jim's, leaving his cousin Wally behind to fill his place.

Billy and Wally were as alike as two peas in face and figure.

But in every other respect that mattered they were totally different.

Billy Bunter did not love Skinner. But he had often been in Skinner's company. Chiefly fool, he was yet rogue enough to have much in common with that young scoundrel.

Wally Bunter also disliked Skinner. But Wally had nothing at all in common with the cad of the Remove. So, not fancying him, he steered clear of him.

"Hallo, yourself!" he growled now. And then he would have passed on, but that Skinner laid a hand on his sleeve to detain him.

"What do you want?" snapped Wally, shaking himself free from Skinner's grasp, but halting.

"We haven't seen much of you lately, old sport," said Skinner, winking at Stott and Snoop.

"And you're not likely to!" retorted Wally.

"Oh, come now, don't turn your back on old pals!" said Stott.

"I don't know that you were ever pals of mine," said Wally.

"Hear him!" giped Skinner, turning up the whites of his eyes. "Only hear him! Why, who are your pals if we're not, dear boy?"

"I haven't any pals," answered Wally gloomily. "But I should have to be jolly hard up for something in that way before I came to you three, I can tell you!"

"I say, do you want a postal-order cashing?" asked Stott, struck by a happy thought.

It was not that Stott had any intention of cashing in advance the postal-order which was now so little heard of, though in past terms scarcely a day had passed without a request to someone to cash it.

But Skinner & Co. had noticed of late something quite surprising about Bunter. He always had some cash now!

Billy Bunter had sometimes had cash, though the postal-order was, largely speaking, a myth.

But Billy had never been able to keep cash. He turned it into indigestion at once.

Wally, though he had a big appetite,

did not spend all his money in grub. He recognised the usefulness of having some in hand for emergencies.

So, to the three, it seemed that Billy Bunter had turned over a new leaf.

Skinner did not approve of that. Bunter with money in his pocket ought to be an easy mark for him, he considered. And as Skinner thought, so thought Stott. Snoop—well, no one knew quite what Snoop thought in these days. There was a change in the fellow, and it was not only on the surface.

Indeed, it was not much on the surface at all. Snoop still hung about with Skinner and Stott. He shared Study No. 11 with them, and he shared many of their little games. But he was dissatisfied with them, and still more with himself; and on several recent occasions he had taken a decided line which had surprised them greatly.

Stott fancied that the introduction of the subject of the postal-order might lead to a financial discussion, and that that might lead to profit for himself and his pals.

But he was disappointed.

"No; I don't want a postal-order cashed!" said Wally sharply. "And I can tell you another thing—if that's a joke—"

"A joke?" repeated Skinner, as if half dazed. "Why, it's the Greyfriars joke—has been for terms—"

"Ages, you might say," put in Stott.

But Snoop said nothing.

"Well, it's about time it was done with, then," replied Wally, trying to keep his temper.

Wally's temper was naturally good beyond the average. But it had been sorely tried lately.

He had little guessed when he agreed to take his cousin Billy's place at Greyfriars into what an inheritance of trouble he was stepping.

But he was learning—every day! There seemed no end to William George's liabilities, financial and moral.

The matter of the postal-order was quite a minor one. Wally did not try to cash postal-orders in advance, and no doubt before long the Remove would forget all about that habit of Billy's. But it annoyed Wally that these fellows would not let it drop.

"It will be done with when you've settled up all the debts you made by getting it cashed in advance, and not until then," growled Stott.

"Do I owe you anything?"

The question took Stott rather by surprise.

As a matter of fact, Billy Bunter did not owe Stott anything. It was not often he achieved the cashing of the postal-order; and when he did it was never one of these three who cashed it.

"Well, there might be a trifle outstanding; but I'm not going to make a fuss about that," Stott answered, rather confusedly.

Skinner's sharp elbow smote him in the ribs.

If Stott balked at the notion of taking cash not due to him, Skinner did not. Cash was cash to Skinner. No one had more faith than he in the cynical old Roman saying, "*Pecunia non olet*." To Skinner, though his nose was sharp enough, money never smelt.

"What do you call a trifle?" snapped Wally.

"Well, I fancy it's about half-a-crown," replied Stott sulkily.

"It's either half-a-crown or it isn't—'about' won't do for me!" said the fat junior resolutely.

The three stared at him. There was really a most surprising change in Bunter.

"Half-a-crown settles it," said Stott.

"And what do I owe you, Skinner?"

"I shall have to refer to my notebook for that, Bunt," answered Skinner airily. "Half-a-crown won't settle up with me."

Then Snoop surprised them all.

"Oh, don't be an ass, Bunter!" he said sourly. "You don't really owe those chaps a sou, and they know you don't!"

"Here, I say!" gasped Stott.

"You're wrong, Snoop!" said Skinner hotly.

"I'm not. I dare say Bunter has squeezed something out of us now and then—"

"I jolly well haven't!" roared Wally.

"You have, though! Not a fat lot, but some. We've had it all back—that's the point. Why, you idiot, haven't we rooked you over and over again when you've been in funds for once in a way? Your memory always was a rotten bad one; but I should have thought you could remember that much!"

"My hat!" gasped Skinner.

Stott stood speechless.

What could have come over Snoop?

Something had come over him, that was evident. Having given vent to these astonishing sentiments, he stuck his hands deeper into his trousers-pockets and slouched away.

He was not an attractive figure. He looked as moody and discontented and hopeless as he felt.

But somehow Wally Bunter saw him with other eyes than those of Skinner and Stott; somehow, Wally understood that Snoop was groping for the light, trying to be decent, and finding it a desperately hard task.

"I'm not going to pay you rotters a brass farthing!" said Wally, turning on the two left.

"Nobody ever thought you would," said Stott nastily.

"When did you ever cash up?" sneered Skinner.

"Always, you sweep!" roared Wally.

"Oh, by gad! Hark at him, Stott! The honourable Bunter!"

"If I wasn't more honourable than you

are, you measly cad, I'd buy a rope and hang myself!"

"If you're going to buy a rope and hang yourself, I don't mind cashing your postal-order. It would be worth while for that."

"Rather!" agreed Stott.

Then something like a miracle happened.

One fat hand seized the neck of Skinner, the other the neck of Stott, and the heads of those two worthy youths were brought together with a mighty thwack.

"Yooop!" howled Skinner.

"Yow-ow!" yelled Stott.

Wally released them.

"If you want any more," he said, breathing hard through his nose, "you've only to say so, you know. I'll oblige, with pleasure!"

Then he rolled away.

His gait was much the gait of Billy Bunter. His figure was exactly that of Billy Bunter. His words were different, and his ways were different; but the two cads had no suspicion that he was not Billy.

"My hat! What's bitten Bunter?" asked Skinner.

"And Snoop?" added Stott.

"Oh, Snoopey—we'll soon bring him round! Matter of that, it's no great odds if we can't! But Bunter—who could ever have dreamed that the fat slacker had all that strength in him?"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Without a Pal!

WALLY BUNTER caught up Snoop on his way to the gates. "Look here, Snoop, old bird!" he said cheerily.

Wally did not feel very cheery; but it struck him that Snoop wanted bucking up.

Sidney James Snoop turned upon him a drab face as long as a fiddle.

"Well?" he said dully.

"Oh, buck up!" said Wally. "Life's worth living, I suppose, even if things aren't exactly coming one's way in crowds?"

"Is it?"

"Don't you think so?"

"No; on the whole, I don't," said Snoop deliberately.

Wally looked at him hard. There was something here deeper than he could sound.

Naturally, Wally did not know so much about Snoop as did his cousin Billy. But Billy would have been even further off understanding Snoop just then than Wally.

For at least Wally had sympathy.

"That's all rot, you know, Snoop!" he said uneasily, feeling that it was a weak thing to say, but not knowing how to better it.

"Is it?"

"Of course it is!"

"Pretty nearly everything's rot, I think," said Snoop.

"No, you don't! You don't think being straight is rot."

Snoop laughed—a harsh, mirthless laugh.

From Billy Bunter to Sidney James Snoop that would have been rather a ludicrous speech.

But it did not come from Billy Bunter, and it was, in a sense, spoken to a Snoop other than him whom Billy Bunter knew.

Snoop could not know that. If he had known it he would perhaps have clutched at what he saw was being offered him.

For it was plain that Wally wanted to be friendly.

But Sidney James Snoop had no desire to be chummy with Billy Bunter, and did not regard Bunter's recent decent be-

haviour as anything more than a flash in the pan.

"Others would tell you a different tale!" he said morosely. "Matter of that, you know better yourself. I'm a rotter! I always was a rotter! And I always shall be a rotter!"

"I don't believe it! I don't see a bit why you should be!"

"Oh, don't cant, Bunter! Because you've gone straight for five minutes—"

"My hat! Gone straight for five minutes! Why, I've always gone straight, and I defy anybody to prove otherwise!" broke in Wally, quite incensed.

It really was rather rough on Wally.

"You always had a short memory, Bunter," said Snoop, with a wan smile that was not altogether unfriendly. "That may help you now. I'm not like that. I remember lots of things that I hate to think about!"

"But they don't matter, really—not if—"

"Yes, I know that's the way you look at it. But it's not my way."

ing stronger day by day. Snoop wanted to show himself his father's son.

But how could he? Nobody liked him—not even those who had been his pals. Fellows were sorry for him; but that was not what he wanted.

They saw the change in him. But just as he found it impossible to believe that the Owl of the Remove had really changed for good, so they felt about Snoop.

"See here, Snoop, are you coming to Courtfield with me?" asked Wally.

"What for?"

"Well, there's not much else to do."

"You don't really want me?"

"Shouldn't ask you if I didn't," replied Wally cheerily.

And yet, in a sense, Snoop was right. Wally did not care for going about alone; but he would not exactly have chosen Snoop as a comrade.

"Well, it's decent of you, I suppose," said Snoop slowly. "Tain't often you're decent, Bunter—"

Wally had to choke down something as he heard this. It cost him a constant



Whipping Behind! (See Chapter 3.)

Wally did not know quite what to say to that. It might have been easier for him if he had had any real impulse of friendship towards Snoop.

But it was pity rather than friendship that he felt.

Here was this fellow who had for so long been reckoned one of the blackest of Greyfriars black sheep, and had deserved to be so reckoned. Wally had heard enough about him to be sure of that.

Something had changed him. It was easy to guess what, too. His father, after being sentenced to penal servitude for a mean crime, had escaped from prison, joined the Army, played the man, and made good.

Sidney Snoop was of a cold and unaffectionate nature. It had taken a long time to bring about in him any proper feeling about the great change in his father. Fellows who did not care twopence for Snoop had done more at one time for that father than Snoop himself had been willing to risk.

But the feeling was there now, grow-

effort to remember that to those he talked with he was Billy, not Wally. And he had learned by this time that his cousin Billy's flashes of decency had been very few and far between.

"But it's no go," went on Snoop, after a brief pause. "I don't know what's come over you; but you hardly seem the same fellow you were. I hope you'll stay the way you are now; it's a heap better. But being chummy with me won't help you. And if you're going to slide back into your old ways—"

"Not likely!" said Wally earnestly.

"You always have, so far. If you do, being chummy with you won't help me. In fact, if the fellows see us about together, what they'll think, even if they don't say it, will be that we're a well-matched pair. And they'll leave us to one another willingly enough. I know that's not your game, and I don't mind owning it isn't mine."

Wally stood and stared.

He would have been angry but for the
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obvious misery in Sidney Snoop's unattractive face.

As it was, he felt a queer mixture of emotions. He knew that it would make a heap of difference if he told Snoop all about himself. But he was under a solemn promise not to tell; and until that moment he would have reckoned Snoop as one of the very last fellows at Greyfriars to be trusted with a secret.

He held out his hand.

"I see," he said quietly. "You've given me it straight, Snoop; but I don't mind. And look here, old chap, if it's any good to you to feel that there's one fellow here, anyway, who wishes you well, and—believes in you, I'm that fellow!"

Snoop's hand was cold and moist when it was reluctantly extended; but Wally gave it a hearty grip before he passed through the gates on his way to Courtfield.

Snoop stood gazing after him. He brushed his hand across his eyes. The mist seemed to have clouded them.

"And that was Bunter!" he said wonderingly. "It wasn't a scrap like Bunter, though. He couldn't have meant it, and yet—and yet—I'm sure he did mean it! Why, Wharton couldn't have been more—more—oh, decent!"

It was sympathetic Snoop meant; but the word was outside his vocabulary. Skinner & Co. had always rather prided themselves on showing no feeling for anything but bodily pain.

"Hallo, Snoopey! You're on a new lay, aren't you?"

It was Skinner who spoke; and Snoop hated the very sound of his voice.

"Chuck it!" he said roughly. "I don't want to talk to you, Skinney!"

"But why not, old pal? We've forgiven you, y'know. After all, it ain't so very often you get these acute attacks of righteousness."

Snoop shuffled his feet uneasily. The gibes of Skinner did as much as anything to make his life miserable.

It was not so much that Skinner cared whether Snoop reformed or not as that he took the line that any such reform was impossible; and Snoop, badly lacking in moral courage and steadfastness, needing a strong, helping hand, was drawn back into the mire again by Skinner's unbelief.

He stood firm this time, though, vaguely aided by that grip of the hand, so unlike Billy Bunter's usual flaccid grasp.

"Coming along, old nut?" said Stott.

"Where to?" inquired Snoop.

But even as he asked he made up his mind not to go.

"Oh, to Highcliffe, to look Pon up, or p'raps to Courtfield," said Stott indifferently. "Anything to kill time."

"Thanks, but I won't come," Snoop replied.

"Oh, stay here an' reflect on your sins!" sneered Skinner. "Plenty of them to think about, by gad!"

"Yes, plenty. I sha'n't have to fill up time by thinking of yours, Skinney!"

"You can dashed well leave mine alone!"

"I think I'd better. It would have been better for me if I'd done that before!" Snoop said miserably, yet defiantly.

"Rotten, cantin' Pharisee!" snarled Skinner, as he and Stott disappeared in the mist.

"Oh, I don't know! I fancy he doesn't mean to cant. The chap's down on his luck," replied Stott, more charitably. "Needn't worry about him, Skinney. Let's go to Courtfield. I ain't sure we're going to get any change out of Pon. I know he had all mine last time we saw him!"

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THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Wally at Courtfield;

"HALLO, fatty!" A hand clutched Wally's cap from his head and threw it into the road.

Wally turned in surprise and wrath.

The voice was the voice of a stranger, and the hand was the hand of a stranger. Wally had been rolling peacefully down the High Street of Courtfield when this thing happened.

He turned, to see three grinning faces—all strange to him.

But Billy Bunter would have known those faces as the countenances of foemen, for the three faces belonged to Dicky Brown, Wayward, and Wickers, of the Courtfield Council School; and the feud, which was much more than half friendly as far as Harry Wharton and his set were concerned, was a good deal less than half friendly when the Courtfield boys ran against Skinner or any of the other bad eggs of the Remove; and Billy Bunter, with his extraordinary snobbishness, had never been a favourite of Dick Trumper and his schoolfellows.

Brown and Wayward and Wickers grinned. Wally glared.

"Pick that cap up!" he snapped.

"Yes—I think not!" answered Dicky Brown.

"Can't you stoop?" inquired Wayward jocosely.

"He's put on a bit in the holidays!" said Wickers.

"Then he's got new clobber," remarked Dicky. "If he'd put on another pound he'd have burst the old lot."

"The buttons will be flying now when he picks that cap up!" Wickers said.

"I'm not going to pick it up!" said Wally grimly. "I don't know which of you three kids threw it there. I don't know one of you from another, come to that."

"My word! Listen to him!" jeered Wickers. "His lordship doesn't know us now. Let me introduce me chum, the Dook Wayward. Duke; this is the Marquis de Puffface. Marquis, this is the Earl Brown. Earl, the Marquis Bunter-chump. And I'm—"

"You're the silliest ass of the three, I can see that!" snapped Wally. "So you may as well pick up my cap!"

And he seized Wickers by the neck.

It was plain to him that these fellows knew Billy. It seemed likely enough that they had something against Billy. Lots of people seemed to have. But Wally saw no reason why he should put up with their cheek.

A more utterly astounded person than was William Percival Wickers when the strong grip of that fat hand fell upon him it would be hard to imagine.

There was not one of Dick Trumper's chums who did not think himself considerably more than a match for Billy Bunter. Probably there was not one of them, from Trumper, their chief and champion, down to Dicky Brown, the smallest and youngest of them all, who was not so.

But this was Wally, not Billy; and none of the three who had caught a Tartar in Wally had the least chance of victory against him. Trumper himself would have had to go all out, and then might not have won.

For a moment or two Wickers writhed and struggled fiercely. Pride would not allow of his yelling for help when gripped by the despised Owl of the Greyfriars Remove.

Wayward and Dicky Brown looked on, grinning. They expected to see William Percival turn the tables upon William George in very short order.

But it was Walter Gilbert, not Wil-

ham George, who had gripped Wickers—a very different matter.

"Help, you silly asses!" spluttered Wickers.

Pride had given way before that strong grip.

Even then the other two failed to understand. Wickers' frantic grimaces seemed to them merely funny.

But the situation did not strike Wickers as humorous.

He was being forced out into the road towards the cap, while those two stood and grinned like Cheshire cats. Angry as he was with Bunter, Wickers was still more angry with his own chums.

"Hell-up!" he gurgled.

"Pick up that cap, or I'll rub your nose in the mud!" boomed Wally.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Dicky Brown and Jack Wayward.

It seemed to them excruciatingly funny to hear Billy Bunter, fank and slacker, talk like that.

"Yaroooooh!" howled Wickers. "I won't, so there!"

"That's where you slip up, my pippin!" said Wally, forcing Wickers downward in a manner that suggested he really meant to carry out that threat to his nose.

And Wally did mean it. The only way out for Wickers was compliance with the demand.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly idiots! You grinning chimpanzees!" howled Wickers. "Why don't you—Yooooop!"

"Oh, look out!" yelled Dicky Brown, while Wayward darted forward.

But Wally was quite equal to the danger which had caused the warning.

He dragged Wickers bodily from under the nose of a fast-moving horse, unobserved till that moment, and swung him clear of the wheels of the trap behind it with a strength that amazed the Courtfield boy.

The driver of the horse slashed at them with his whip. The lash missed Wally, but curled nicely around the legs of Wickers.

"Ow-yow!" yelled that unfortunate.

"See what you get through playing the giddy ox!" said Wally. "Now, are you going to be a decent infant and pick up that cap, or must I rub your snubby nose in the mud?"

Wickers stooped and picked up the cap. William Percival Wickers had had enough.

Next moment he wished that he had held out, for, just too late, Wayward and Brown hurled themselves upon Wally.

Billy Bunter would have cut and run. No, Billy would not have been there to bolt. He would have bolted long before this, with or without his cap.

Wally did not bolt. He had no desire for a brawl in the High Street of Courtfield, but this had been forced upon him, and he would not shrink it.

He hurled Wickers at Wayward, and the two went staggering down together. Dicky Brown paused.

"Best chuck it, kid!" said Wally good-humouredly. "You ain't up to my weight, you know."

"Not by three-quarters of it!" answered Dicky Brown.

But he went for Wally, nevertheless.

Then he got a big surprise. He had wondered to see Wickers so easily dealt with by the fat slacker. But Wally treated him with even worse indignity than he had treated Wickers.

He picked Dicky clean off his feet, held him struggling in his arms for a few seconds, and then dropped him on top of the other two.

"Yoop!" roared Dicky Brown.

Wally stood looking down on the prostrate three.

"Want any more?" he asked. "If so, you've only to speak the word, you know. Plenty on tap, my tulips!"

They scrambled to their feet, breathing wrath.

But just at that moment a stout form in blue appeared within twenty yards.

"Bobby!" said Wayward, and in a moment he and Wickers and Dicky Brown had vanished. They bolted down a narrow passage between two houses, clambered over a wall, and made their escape over a kitchen-garden or two.

Wally did not attempt to follow them. He stood there, breathing a trifle hard, when the constable came up.

"What's the matter here?" demanded the man in blue.

"Nothing!" replied Wally. "What do you think?"

The constable looked at him severely.

"I rather thought I saw—" he began.

"I can't help that," answered Wally. "Even if you'd really seen it I don't see how it could be my bizney. But if you only thought you did you may have been dreaming—or drinking. You're let off this time; but don't do it again, that's all!"

And Wally rolled on, leaving a fat member of the Kent County Constabulary blinking angrily after him.

At the shop of Mr. Lazarus Wally halted.

He failed to notice the three golden balls which indicated that Mr. Lazarus carried on the ancient trade of the Lombards—that he was a pawnbroker, in short. Like most pawnbrokers, Mr. Lazarus made quite an attractive window display; some of the things shown might be obviously second-hand, but many of them were good, and not too dear.

The window held Wally for fully five minutes. When he left it he entered the door. And just as he entered the door Skinner and Stott hove into sight along the street.

Wally did not see them; but they saw him.

"That explains it, by gad!" said Skinner.

"Explains what, old top?" asked Stott.

"That fat frog always having money lately, of course. He's been putting things up the spout!"

"But he's got nothing to pop!" objected Stott.

"Other people have, though!" replied Skinner darkly.

"I see. Yes, that's likely enough," said Stott.

Wally, meanwhile, was surprised to find himself greeted with a dark scowl by a gentleman plainly of the Hebrew persuasion.

Never having seen Mr. Lazarus before in his life, Wally naturally could not understand why Mr. Lazarus should scowl at him.

He had no objections to Jews, as such; but the scowl made him think that this Hebrew gentleman must have decided objections to—well, to rather plump people.

Although cousin Billy's clothes fitted cousin Wally, Wally did not consider himself really fat. Now, Billy was fat, if you liked! But he—plump was the right word to describe his condition.

But it was not to fat people Mr. Lazarus objected: it was to Billy Bunter. And, of course, he thought he saw that worthy before him.

"Well, Master Bunter, and what have you to say for yourself?" he asked, in what Wally thought quite a cheeky way.

"Nothing in particular that I know of. I just looked in to buy something I've seen in your window, that's all," Wally answered.

"First I see your monish, Master Bunter," said Mr. Lazarus.

Wally remembered that he was now in the boots of Billy Bunter, so to speak, and it occurred to him that there might have been dealings in the past which justified Mr. Lazarus in taking that precaution.

A slow smile spread over his face. Mr. Lazarus scowled more than ever, and dug his long nails into the palms of his hands.

Wally stuck a hand into a trousers-pocket and drew out some silver.

"That's more than enough to pay for what I want," he said. "It's only a tie-pin—that silver dog's-head one. I s'pose it is really silver?"

Mr. Lazarus leant forward over the counter. His dark eyes gleamed with a lurid light.

Wally made a step backwards. He thought the man must be mad.

But a long arm shot out, and a thin, yellow hand clutched him by the wrist, and clung like grim death.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Famous Five Butt In!

"HERE, I say, what are you after?" hooted Wally, surprised, and a trifle alarmed.

"I wonder at your impudence, you wicked young dog!" snapped Mr. Lazarus. "Indeed and truly, I wonder at your impudence, s'help me!"

"Well, come to that, I wonder a goodish bit at yours!" said Wally hotly.

He was trying hard to release his wrist from the grip of the pawnbroker. But the yellow, skinny hand held fast.

"You dare to come here, after—"

"Why shouldn't I dare to come here?"

said Wally sharply. "I came in to buy something you've got in the window for sale. There's nothing in that for you to get your wool off about, I should think. Just you let go of my wrist!"

"I have a ferry goot mind—"

"You seem to me to have a rotten bad mind!" broke in Wally, with a readiness of which Billy certainly would not have been capable. Wally's brain was not so fat as his cousin's, if his figure was.

"You dare—"

"Oh, come off! What do you fancy you've got against me? Matter of fact, I've never seen your ugly mug before, and I'm jolly sure I never want to see it again!"

In his wrath Wally was forgetting that Billy and Mr. Lazarus were no doubt old acquaintances.

"My ugly mug, do you say? And you have never seen me before, you tell me? But that is wicked lying, you bad young dog! Do you not remember bringing me the watchchain of Mr. Coker, and—"

"Me? Bring you someone else's watchchain?" howled Wally, wrenching his wrist away at last. "I'll come round the counter and pommel you if you don't take that back jolly sharp! What should I bring a watchchain to you for, anyway, you blithering old idiot?"

"To pop, of course!"

"To—er—wha-a-at? Why, you don't know what you're talking about! You're potty, I should think!"

"To deny it is no use—no use whatever, young Bunter! And if you threaten me I will call a policeman to you!"

"Call one, and be hanged!" roared Wally. "I'll give you in charge for slander, you old rotter!"

Wally overlooked the fact that no one can be given in charge for slander. He also seemed to have overlooked the fact that the calling in of a policeman was hardly likely to result in the hanging of Mr. Lazarus. But perhaps he did not quite expect that to happen.

"It is the truth. You popped the chain, and I had to give it up to Mr. Coker when he saw it in the window and claimed it as his. It is true that he paid me the pledge monish, but he talked to me in a way that I liked not one leetle bit—and all t'rough you, you wicked lad!"

The thing had happened. As was frequently the case with Billy Bunter, there were circumstances in connection with it which made it possible to regard it as a peccadillo rather than as a crime.

Bunter had not stolen the watchchain—he had found it.

He might have guessed that it was Coker's, or he might not—as he himself might have said. He knew at least that it was not his. But to his obtuse mind findings was keepings—or, as in this case, pawning, which came to much the same thing.

Mr. Lazarus had suffered no hurt in pocket; but his feelings had been wounded. While Mr. Lazarus was a very sharp hand at a bargain, he was not a dishonest man. Perhaps he ought to have suspected that the chain was not Bunter's; but he could hardly have been expected to be sure of that.

By this time the noses of Skinner and Stott were pressed against the window of Mr. Lazarus. Those two sweet youths, somewhat puzzled but highly diverted, were seeing all that they could, with no intention whatever of interfering.

"Popped!" repeated Wally dazedly. "Why, you silly rotter, I hadn't the slightest notion that your silly shop was a pawnshop! If I had had you wouldn't have caught me inside it!"

Mr. Lazarus gasped in surprise. This was really a little too thick for anything, from his point of view. He had known Billy Bunter for a long time, and had more than once had dealings with him. And now the amazing fat fellow pretended not to know that he was a pawnbroker!

Wally felt that he had had enough of this. He took a step towards the door.

But Mr. Lazarus slipped round from behind the counter with surprising agility and barred his way.

"Look here, what are you after?" demanded Wally.

Now, Mr. Lazarus was by no means sure what he was after. He had allowed Coker to have his watchchain back on redeeming it, although Coker could not produce the ticket. He had, therefore, no case at all against Bunter; while, by the letter of the law, Bunter, if he could have produced the ticket—but, naturally, Wally couldn't—would have had a case against him.

But for all that the pawnbroker felt that Bunter could not be allowed to go like this.

Wally, on the other hand, saw no reason for staying. He had quite given up any idea of becoming a customer of Mr. Lazarus.

"I shall not allow you—"

"You won't allow me?" howled Wally. "Why, you old rotter, you'll get hurt if you lay your filthy paws on me again! So mind that!"

"The giddy plot's thickening!" said Skinner to Stott, with a spiteful grin. "There'll be ructions in a minute!"

"Give a fellow a chance!" growled Stott. "I can't see a thing with you crowding the blessed window like that."

"Old Lazarus is going for him! Oh, good!" chortled Skinner. "Here, stop that shoving, Stott, you bounder!"

"Let a chap have a squint, then, you pig!"

"Chuck it! I'll tell you about all what happens. Lazarus grabbed hold of his collar, but Bunter wriggled away. Now he's got Lazarus by the collar, and

he's shaking him! Oh, orrikey! Who'd have thought he was so strong!"

"Oh, do let a chap see, you rotter!" "Lazarus punched him! He'll get it now!"

But, to Skinner's intense surprise, Wally did not punch Mr. Lazarus. That was because his antagonist was an oldish man. But Skinner could not have understood such a feeling as that; and, indeed, Billy Bunter would not have had such a feeling. If he had not punched, it would have been only because courage failed him.

Wally did not punch; but he gripped the wrists of the pawnbroker and held them.

"Hurrah! Here, comes Solly!" said Skinner joyfully.

Into the shop, by way of the door in the rear, bounded an athletic lad of distinctly Jewish features. It was Solly Lazarus, one of the Courtfield School fellows, and, after Dick Trumper, quite their most redoubtable fighting-man. Indeed, it was not certain that Solly, whose dream was to become a famous pugilist, was not Trumper's superior.

"Here, I thay, Bunter, what are you doing to my old dad?" cried Solly angrily.

"You had better ask what the silly old ass is doing to me!" snapped Wally.

"Tithn't likely he can do much with you holding hith handth," replied Solly, not unreasonably. "Jutht you let him go! Now, then!"

"I'll let him go if he promises to keep his beastly yellow paws off me, all serene—not unless!"

"You'll let him go anyway—I'll thee about that!"

And next moment Wally had to let Mr. Lazarus go, for he could not hold that gentleman's wrists and deal with the irate Solly at the same time.

"Oh, good egg! Solly's going for the fat worm!" chorled Skinner.

"Do let a chap see, you pig!" pleaded Stott, shoving hard, but vainly.

"Chuck that, idiot! Oh, I say! Hanged if Bunter isn't standing up to Solly!"

Skinner was not more astonished than was Solly Lazarus. He knew Bunter so well; and he would never have dreamed that Bunter would dare to face him like this.

But Bunter was facing him, podgy fists up, guard all correct, and the gleam of battle in his eyes. It occurred to Solly, who was observant, that he had never seen Bunter's eyes before, and that they were brighter and bigger than he would have expected.

Wally had to wear glasses; but he preferred to look over rather than through them. It was not due to any failing in his sight that he wore them; it was only because he had to be Billy, so to speak.

Bunter not only faced Solly, but, as that hero came on, he surprised him still more by feinting with the left and getting in a really smart right-hander on the Hebrew youth's prominent nose.

"Yooop!" roared Solly. "My only Aunt Rebecca Rachel! Take that!"

Wally took it—but on his arm. Billy would have taken it on the nose, and would then have shown plainly that he had had enough. But Billy would hardly have got so far as this in any case.

Mr. Lazarus dodged nimbly behind the counter. He had every confidence in his son's ability to knock the stuffing out of Bunter, and he greatly desired to witness that gentle operation.

"Go it, Solly!" he howled. "Tap him on the kisser, my son!"

"Go it, Bunter!" breathed Skinner. "I never thought you had it in you, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 573.

you fat spoofer! Oh, by gad, he's tumbled Solly over!"

"Let me see, you rotter!" hooted Stott.

"Never mind—you're late now, anyway. Solly's up again, and going for him like a tiger! My aunt, though! Bunter's standing up to it! That knock-down blow must have been a fluke; but—but—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

It was Bob Cherry who uttered that greeting; and Skinner turned to see the Famous Five—Bob himself, Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Janset Ram Singh, Nabob of Bhanipur, usually called Inky.

Stott did not trouble about the Famous Five. He took advantage of Skinner's move to thrust himself into a place whence he could witness the proceedings inside the shop.

"Bunty's in there, fighting with Solly Lazarus!" announced Skinner.

"Wha-a-at?"

"Oh, rot!"

"It's a silly lie!"

"You're spoofing!"

"The spoof-fulness of the ludicrous and disgusting Skinner is terrific!"

"All serene! If you don't believe me, walk in and see for yourselves, that's all. Perhaps you'll think I'm lying when I tell you that the Owl knocked Solly down!"

"We don't think—we know you're lying!" growled Johnny Bull.

"May as well go in, Harry, eh?" said Bob, with his hand on the latch.

"Yes, of course. We were going in, anyway."

"Not this way, though," said Frank Nugent.

When the Removites visited Mr. Lazarus they made rather a point of not entering his establishment by the pawnshop door.

"Oh, push on!" snapped Johnny.

Harry shoved open the door. Then he staggered back before the sudden impact of a fat and heavy body.

He fell against Bob, who tumbled over Inky in his fall. Inky clutched at Frank, who came down with him. Johnny managed to skip back in time.

Four of the Famous Five lay on the ground together, in the doorway of the shop. Skinner and Stott grinned at them from the pavement.

Inside, Wally, saved from a fall by Wharton's entry, stood firm on his feet once more, fists up, eyes glaring at Solly. And Solly, with blood streaming from his nose, and a mouse under his left eye, glared back at Wally, and feinted for an opening. Behind the counter, Mr. Lazarus danced up and down in his excitement.

The Famous Five had come to the rescue of Bunter; but the manner of their coming was hardly such as they would have chosen.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Wally Needs No Aid!

"HERE, let me give you a hand up, Wharton, you chump!" said Johnny Bull.

"What in the world made all you chaps tumble over?" gibed Skinner.

"Get out of my way!" roared Wally. "Can't you see I've got a fight on, you silly asses?"

"Here, pax!" said Solly, dropping his fists. "We'd better thtop it, I fanthy."

"Had enough?" hooted Wally. "Because I haven't—not half enough!"

Harry and Bob, Inky and Frank, were struggling to their feet, with Johnny's aid. Skinner did not proffer help. He was disappointed. He would dearly

have loved to see Bunter despoised—hard—on top of those four. He felt quite aggrieved at Solly's suddenly developed pacific attitude.

But Solly Lazarus had some of his sire's keen business instinct.

Wharton & Co. were quite good customers. Moreover, they were quite good friends of Solly's. There was no snobbery about the Famous Five.

And Solly knew that they were in the way of helping Bunter out of his scrapes—of protecting him, little as he deserved it.

So, on the whole, Solly deemed it best to cry a halt. He had acquired a new respect for Bunter, and was promising himself a renewal of this interesting contest at some future date.

"What's it all about, Solly?" asked Wharton.

Mr. Lazarus came round the counter, and began fussily dusting down the four. Solly mopped his nose and grinned. Skinner and Stott looked extremely disgruntled.

But they were not so disgruntled as Wally Bunter.

"Look here," said Wally warmly, "what you fellows want to butt in like this for I can't understand a bit. Just you clear out, and let me go on knocking sense into this chap with the conk!"

"Thankth, but I've a little too much then the to want to go on jutht now," said Solly drily.

"Oh, come off! You're not a funk—I know that jolly well—but—"

"I should think you do know it jolly well, you fat lunatic!" said Frank Nugent. "You can't have forgotten how Solly whopped Bolsover major when we all reckoned that the hulking beggar carried too many guns for us!"

Wally had not forgotten it, for he had never heard of it. But he remembered in time that Billy must know all about it.

"If you're not game for any more, I'm off," he said.

"Here, hold on! We want to know what all this was about," Harry objected.

"Athk dad. I don't know," said Solly, grinning, as he mopped away at his nose.

"But you know what you were fighting about, surely?" said Bob, in surprise. "Here, come back, Bunter! We haven't finished with you yet!"

"But I've done with you," answered Wally. "I'm going!"

It was easier to say that than to get away, however.

Skinner and Stott were willing to help in barring his exit. They helped from the rear, beyond the range of those fat fists; but they helped.

Wally found himself penned in.

"I don't know," repeated Solly cheerily. "I found Bunter handling the old man, that'th all. I don't allow anybody to take libertieth with my old dad, you know."

"Quite right, Solomon, my son, quite right!" said the pawnbroker.

"Well, jutht explain it, old file; that'th the betht thing you can do, you know."

But Mr. Lazarus was not inclined to explain fully, even after this respectful filial adjuration so to do.

"Master Bunter and I had a little squabble, that's all, young shentlemens," he said, rubbing his lean hands together.

"That's all, is it?" said Wally hotly. "Why, he practically accused me of being a thief, you fellows!"

"Awful!" jeered Skinner. "Just fancy anyone daring to accuse our Bunter of not being the very pink of honesty!"

"Oh, you dry up!" growled Johnny Bull. "I'll say this for Bunter—he's as honest as you are, Skinner!"

"Nice testimonial. Aren't you pleased with it, Bunty?" Frank said.

"No, I'm jolly well not!" retorted Wally. "If I wasn't any more honest than Skinner I'd—"

"I do really believe he thinks he is!" said Bob, grinning.

"Of course I do, you silly idiot!" hooted Wally.

"Well, he is, really, because he's a so much bigger fool, and half the time he doesn't realise what he's doing," said Wharton charitably.

"Thank you for nothing, you bouncer!" snorted Wally.

"Better let the young shentleman go, my tears," said Mr. Lazarus wheedlingly. "He forgot himself in his temper, but I forgive him."

"He hasn't—I mean—I suppose there's nothing to settle up, Mr. Lazarus?" boggled Wharton, anxious that anything wrong should be put right, but hardly liking to ask point-blank what particular form Bunter's haziness about the laws of meum and tuum had taken this time.

"No, I haven't; and he jolly well knows I haven't, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself to suggest it, Wharton!" snapped Wally.

"Well, you know, Bunter, we have had to help you out of scrapes before now," Harry said quietly.

And all in a moment Wally's wrath subsided.

Yes, he knew that. It was not he who had been helped out of scrapes, in reality, for he was not Billy Bunter. But Harry and the rest supposed him to be Billy, and it was through his own act—in part, at least—that they supposed him so; and gratitude was due to them for what they had done in the past for the erring William George.

But gratitude in any form does not come quite easily to most people, and gratitude of this sort—once removed, so to speak—might well be found hard by anybody.

Wally found it hard, anyway.

He was no longer angry with anyone—not even with Solly Lazarus. But he felt no inclination to remain in the company of the Famous Five at that moment.

And, of course, they did not want him. One of the reasons which had caused Wally Bunter to prefer Greyfriars to St. Jim's was the very strong liking he felt for Harry Wharton and his chums.

But he had found that his metamorphosis into Billy made all the difference in the world as far as that was concerned.

The Famous Five liked Wally very much. They only tolerated Billy, and they often found it hard to do even that.

And now Wally was Billy—to them, and to all at Greyfriars.

"Er—well, yes, I suppose that's more or less true," Wally said slowly. "But I don't want helping out of anything here, thanks! I'm quite willing to go on with the fight if that Jew chap wants any more, or to stop if he owns up he's had enough. And as for that old rotter"—Wally glared at Mr. Lazarus over his glasses—"he'd better not let me catch him spreading slander about me again! Why, I didn't even know this place was a rotten pop-shop!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Bunty didn't know this was a pop-shop! Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Skinner.

"Easy does it!" growled Johnny Bull. "There's a limit, Bunter!"

Wally gave them all one glare of concentrated disdain, and rolled out. Skinner and Stott were in his way. He sent Stott reeling over the kerb, and Skinner staggering up against the shop window.

"Well, I never did—never in all my blethed life!" gasped Solly Lazarus. "Cherry, have you been teaching Bunter to box?"

Bob shook his head.

"Not lately," he said. "I've tried it in the past, but it's no go."

"Well, thomone hath," said Solly, with conviction. "He got me one on the nothe! Crumbs, it wathn't half a one, either! Tell you what, I don't mind betting that he could lick any of you except Cherry—and I'd not be too thure about Cherry—if he liked to go all out."

"Solly, my lad, you mustn't talk to the young shentlemens like that," said Mr. Lazarus reprovingly.

"Oh, you dry up, old file! Hear what I thay, you fellowth?"

"Yes. But it's rot!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Sheer rot!" said Nugent.

"The esteemed and honourable Solly has—"

"Has had a terrific knock on the smeller!" put in Bob. "Must have been an accident, seeing Bunter gave it to him. But he thinks if he can be tapped on the proboscis by the giddy Owl anyone else can be treated the same likewise—which isn't so!"

"All right, have it your own way," replied Solly good-humouredly. "But jutht, you wait and thee; that'th all—jutht you wait and thee!"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Forced to Fight!

WALLY BUNTER rolled away rather disconsolately.

He had nothing in particular to do in Courtfield, and he found the place dull.

Having nothing in particular to do would not have mattered very much if only he had had someone to do it with.

But there was no getting away from the fact that his company was at a discount in Greyfriars circles.

The Famous Five, as long as they believed him, Billy, would have about as much use for him as for a sore throat; he could see that plainly enough.

And as Harry Wharton & Co. felt, so felt practically every decent fellow in the Remove.

Skinner and Stott would have endured his company if he would have let them sponge upon him. But Wally had no use for Skinner and Stott.

Bolsover majof might have allowed him to hang on if he had been properly submissive and subservient. But that was not Wally's line.

Fish was not at all the sort of person who suited Wally. Moreover, Fish did not worry about loneliness. He had always some scheme for making money to occupy his time.

Even Sidney James Snoop had no desire to be chummy with the lonely Bunter.

That seemed the last straw—the very nadir of desolation!

Wally paid no particular heed to where he was going. He had no notion that he was walking into the territory of the enemy.

The Council School stood on one side of Courtfield Common, and the boys played footer on the common.

Presently Wally found himself watching them.

It was not a match, only a pick-up game, and more than half the players were in their ordinary clothes—probably because, not being in the eleven, they possessed no footer rig.

But Wally paid little heed to anything like that.

It was form he looked at, and he was no bad judge of form.

These fellows shaped jolly well, he thought. There was a centre-forward on one side who was not far from being as good as Wharton.

That was Walter Grahame. Dick Trumper was not there, or Wally would

have seen something better than even Grahame could show him.

By-and-by Wally perceived among the players the three who had got into collision with him in the High Street.

He had no feeling against them, and it did not occur to him that they were likely to have any against him.

He forgot that he had had distinctly the best of the encounter, and that it is easier for the winner than for the vanquished to abstain from rancour.

Wickers did not strike him as anything great as a footballer. But Wayward was a really good back, and Dicky Brown a more than ordinarily smart half.

Wally moved round to the goal in front of which Wayward was playing.

At first no one took any notice of him. But after a while the snub-nosed, freckled youngster between the posts, having nothing to do while the play was in the other half, turned round and grinned at him.

"Hallo!" said Wally.

He very much wanted a game. There was nothing doing at Greyfriars that afternoon, for some reason; and, anyway, Wally had got rather tired of Greyfriars practice games, where everything good he did appeared to be regarded as a huge fluke, and where no one ever passed to him, or gave him a fair chance if he got the ball. He was an Ishmael there—every man's hand against him; and to him it seemed that they were all wilfully blind.

"Hallo, fatty!" said the snub-nosed youth. "I didn't know there was a show at Courtfield."

"I didn't know, either," replied Wally innocently. "Is there?"

"You ought to know," said snub-nose, whose name was Jim Pounds.

"I don't see why," answered Wally mildly.

"Don't you come from it?"

"Of course I don't, you silly young ass!"

Wally snapped out that; he considered that Master Pounds was becoming rude. Wayward's partner turned.

"Don't you know him, Jimmy?" he asked. "That's Bunter, from Greyfriars."

"Well, I ain't been at Courtfield long," said Jimmy. "You can't expect me to know every pig for miles round!"

"Look here, you cheeky kid—"

"Hallo, Wickers! Here's that fat lump making trouble again!"

It was Wayward who spoke. Wickers, playing on the left wing for the other side, had run the ball up to Wayward, and had then surrendered it to him in what struck the critical Wally as a very feeble way.

Wayward stood with the ball at his toes staring at Wally in hostile fashion. The game stopped.

"Like his blessed cheek to come along here!" snorted Wickers. "I vote we mob the fat beast!"

"Hold on!" Wayward said. "May as well find out what he's after first."

Grahame came up.

"There's no fun in mobbing a chap when we're a score to one," he said.

"But it can't be done when you're one to a score," objected Wickers.

"Nor when you're three to one!" flashed Wally, with a quick look from Wickers to Wayward and from Wayward to Brown.

None of the three liked that look. They had not told their comrades of that little affair in the High Street. In that little affair they had not scored, and it seemed as well not to talk about it.

"What's the fat beggar mean?" asked Montgomery.

"Oh, never mind what he means!"

said Grahame impatiently. "Let's get on with the game. It won't hurt us to have him looking on, and perhaps he may get a wrinkle or two."

"I could give some of you chaps a wrinkle or two!" said Wally.

Grahame stared at him.

"Crikey!" he said. "I don't know what we're coming to if you can!"

"Well, I can. I don't mind saying I could show you a thing or two, though you're nailing good now," Wally answered coolly. "As for that chap"—he pointed to Wickers—"I don't mind saying candidly that I consider him a dud. I won't say he funks—"

"You'd better not!" breathed Wickers, clenching his hands.

"But he might almost as well," went on Wally, unheeding. "He's got no dash—no go. He runs like a hen, and when he gets near a back or a half he seems to think the blessed gate's shut, and he can't get through anyway."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Most of the Courtfield fellows fairly howled with merriment at that. It was really a very fair description of the forward play of William Percival Wickers, which was distinctly tame.

But Wickers did not howl, and Wayward and Brown also refrained from joining the chorus of laughter.

"What do you want?" snorted Wayward, in warlike mood.

"A game," said Wally simply.

A few of those present had seen Billy Bunter on the field. But those who had not roared just as loudly as those who had. Wally certainly did not look like a footballer.

"Oh, you may cackle!" said Wally. "There's only one chap at all up to my form among you, though."

He nodded towards Grahame.

But Grahame had seen Billy Bunter at footer, and he did not take this as a compliment.

"If I wasn't a hundred miles ahead of you—" he began.

"Well, you're not," chipped in Wally.

"Just you leave that chap to me, Walter!" said Wickers hotly. "He says I run like a hen—a hen!"

"That's it—a hen," said Wally.

"Glad you've got it right, old son!"

"Do you see that?"

Wickers was close up to Wally now, and as he spoke he put his right fist under the nose of the fat youth.

The game was almost forgotten. The goalkeeper from the other end had just strolled up, and now both sides were crowded round the goal behind which Wally had been standing.

"Yes, I see it," said Wally.

He did not flinch, or step back, as those who know Billy naturally expected him to do. A fist under his nose always made Billy feel uncomfortable in the extreme.

"Well, what about it?" squealed Wickers.

"It's dirty," said Wally. "That's excusable, as you're playing footer. But I don't like it near my nose. And if you are spoiling for a row, all I can say is you're an ass, for you know you're not up to my weight. Better go back and do the hen act again. Do you mind if I play?"

The last sentence was addressed to Grahame, who seemed in some sort a leader among the Courtfield boys—as he was in Trumper's absence.

"You're not going to play—you're jolly well going to fight!" hooted Wickers.

"Oh, shut up, ass!" said Grahame.

"No use squabbling like that."

"You don't know everything, Walter,"

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Wayward said. "We owe this fat cove one."

Wally was surveying the crowd in a very cool and critical manner.

"I can't see anyone here who's at all likely to be able to stand up against me," he said. "Besides, fighting's rot, unless there's a good reason for it. I'd much rather play."

"I dare say you would," said Wayward, with what he thought bitter sarcasm.

To the fellows there who knew Billy Bunter well Wally's attitude of superiority seemed just the same thing as Billy's foolish swank.

It was not really the same thing at all. It was not even based on swank or snobishness.

To Wally it did not make a scrap of difference that these fellows were Council School boys. Billy would have regarded them as mere cads for that reason.

Wally knew himself a better footballer than any of them, though not so very much better than Grahame, their best man present. And Wally was quite justified in his notion that he could lick any of them in a stand-up fight. When science and activity are added to weight like Wally's, the fellow who has them is a pretty formidable opponent—as Solly Lazarus had discovered.

"Well, I would," Wally said amicably. "I didn't want to quarrel with you chaps half an hour or so ago. One of you snatched my cap off—"

"Hallo! What's this yarn?" struck in Grahame.

"Wickers wants to fight Bunter because he snatched Bunter's cap off," grinned Montgomery. "Now, if Bunter wanted to fight Wickers it would be—"

"A miracle!" shouted someone from the rear. "Bunter never wants to fight anyone, does he?"

"The fat rotter shoved me down in the road, and nearly got me run over!" said Wickers furiously.

"Your own fault, my pippin," observed Wally.

But Wally did not like the look of things now. He saw that he would not get the game he had been yearning for, and he had not the slightest wish to fight.

Though he was ready enough to put up his fists when there was need for it, Wally was really, in the main, quite a pacific individual.

From thirty or forty yards away Skinner and Stott contemplated the altercation with relish.

"Tubby in the wars again," said Skinner.

"Looks like it," agreed Stott. "Well, you won't catch this coon interfering."

"My good man, did anyone suggest that you should? But we may as well see the fun."

"Rather! Those cads haven't twigged us yet. Best not go too near them, Skinner."

Three Second-Formers chanced along at that moment. Pettifer and Marsden had allowed Sammy Bunter to fasten himself upon them for the afternoon. The fact that Sammy had wheedled half-a-crown out of his major that morning may have had something to do with that. Wally was Sammy's "major" now, of course; and Sammy, though puzzled about one or two things, had not yet begun to suspect the truth.

"There's my giddy major getting into a row with some of those Council School cads!" said the amiable Sammy. "What's it all about, Skinner?"

"I take it that it's your giddy major's nice, amiable manners, which cause everyone to love him," gibed Skinner.

"Well, his manners ain't my fault," squeaked Sammy.

"Good thing for you. You've enough

to do being responsible for your own, you dirty little scrub!" said Stott.

"Yah!" was Sammy's reply to that.

"Wrong, Stott," said Skinner solemnly. "Sammy hasn't any—never had."

"Manners, none; customs, nasty," quoted Marsden, who thought himself a humorist.

"Is that the Second Form motto, or merely a description of the Form?" Skinner inquired sweetly.

"Oh, chuck all that rot! They're starting!" cried Pettifer.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Imprisoned by the Enemy!

THEY were starting, indeed—or, at least, they were about to start.

Wickers had already removed his jacket. Wally was taking his off, very slowly.

"To-morrow's Sunday," said Skinner. "It's very wrong to fight on Sunday."

"But they're going to fight to-day!" squeaked Sammy.

"Not unless your major gets a move on him," replied Skinner. "He's got his waistcoat to take off yet, and it will be dark in an hour or two."

"Well, I hope he'll fight, though there ain't much chance. I like to see my major licked," said the brotherly Sammy.

"Why, you fat young rotter, he coughed up half-a-dollar for you this morning!" Pettifer said, in disgust.

"What about that, fathead?" snorted Sammy.

"It's off," said Stott. "Ten minutes, thirty-five seconds. Skinner, I'll have a bet with you. Will you give me two to one that he gets his waistcoat off inside a quarter of an hour?"

"Not giddy likely!" grinned Skinner.

Skinner was wise in his generation. Wally did not take his waistcoat off at all. He saw no need for that.

He was pretty sure that Wickers would not last a round.

And he was right.

Within ten seconds of the first blow Master William Percival Wickers lay on his back gasping, and not in the least inclined to get up and have some more, though Wally did extend to him a kindly invitation to that effect.

"My hat! This bangs Banagher!" said Skinner, in amazement. "The Owl knocking a chap out like that!"

"It was a fluke, of course," said Stott. "It couldn't have been anything else."

"Of course it was a fluke!" squeaked Sammy. "My major can't fight. He's too rotten fat!"

"Well, I dunno," remarked Pettifer. "That was a pretty hefty punch, any road."

"William the War Lord!" piped Marsden.

But, as usual, no one took any notice of Marsden.

Now there was a new development of the situation.

Wayward peeled, and came forward.

The Greyfriars onlookers saw that Wally was arguing with the crowd.

"Funks this chap," said Skinner briefly.

"I don't a bit believe he does," said Pettifer. "My notion is that there's more in Bunter than meets the eye."

"Yes, you bet! There's all the grub he can beg, borrow, or steal," Marsden put in—with the customary result.

But Marsden never seemed discouraged.

Wally did not funk Wayward in the very least. When it became plain that Wayward insisted upon trying to retrieve the downfall of Wickers the fat fists went up again.

Jack Wayward was a better fighting-man than his chum, but he was not up to the weight of Wally Bunter.

He got in a hefty punch or two which would have made Billy Bunter gasp and blow, but which Wally took quite unconcernedly. Then Wally got in one under the chin, and Wayward had finished.

"Any more of you?" asked Wally coolly.

"My only aunt! It's the most amazing thing I ever struck!" said Stott. "First Solly Lazarus, now these two chaps! What next, I wonder?"

"He can't go on fluking like this," grunted Sammy.

"You young cad, I believe you want to see your major licked!" said Pettifer hotly.

"Well, he always does get licked."

"No, he doesn't. He backs out before anyone gets the chance to lick him," put in Marsden.

"He's not backing out now," Skinner said, in wonderment. "What chump said the days of miracles had passed? This can't last—it can't!"

"Hanged if I don't think I'll go over and offer to second him!" said Stott, moved for once by something almost like a generous impulse.

"Don't be a dashed ass!" snarled Skinner. "We don't want to get mixed up in his squabbles, do we?"

"It's Grahame now," Stott said. "He can't lick Grahame. 'Tain't poss."

The Removs were very well aware that Grahame ranked third among the fighting-men of the Courtfield School, and at no very long distance behind Dick Trumper and Solly Lazarus.

Wally, of course, was unaware of this. But he fancied Grahame was hotter stuff than either Wickers or Wayward.

He liked the look of Grahame. He would far rather have made friends with him, and have joined the game, than have fought him.

But Grahame was obviously determined to fight. The Courtfield lads had a very natural feeling that the honour of the school would suffer if the supposedly incapable Bunter went off unlicked.

This time Bunter had a second—Montgomery. Someone brought out a watch, and trouble was taken to form a rough ring.

"They think this is going to be a real fight," said Skinner mockingly. "That's where they're off it. Who ever saw Bunt put up a real fight?"

"What about Solly Lazarus?" asked Stott.

"What is all this about Solly Lazarus?" demanded Sammy peevishly.

"It's all rot, you know. My major couldn't stand up to Solly Lazarus. Why, Solly licked Bolsover!"

"He can't. And therefore he couldn't. But he did," replied Skinner cryptically. "Hallo, they're at it!"

They were indeed at it.

Grahame came on with a rush. He was nothing if not a dasher.

Wally Bunter met the rush with cool science.

The small Greyfriars contingent could see little now, for the ring of Courtfielders blocked their view as the scattered crowd of a few minutes before had not done, and they had no relish for going closer.

But they did see Walter Grahame stagger back and go down with a crash.

"Oh, by gad!" ejaculated Skinner.

"Greyfriars bounders!" yelled Wayward at this moment; and a dozen or more of the Courtfield crew made a rush at the two Removs and the three fags.

Skinner and Stott stood not upon the order of their going, but went at once. No more than they did Sammy Bunter think of staying. Pettifer and Marsden

hesitated; but in the event they also thought it prudent to beat a retreat.

Meanwhile, Grahame had risen to his feet, his right cheek badly bruised, and his left eye closing.

"Go it, Walter! Give the fat beast socks!" shouted Pounds.

Grahame did his best to carry out the adjuration. He got home heavily upon Wally's chest, and also smote him hard under the chin. But he was not even shaken; he showed no sign of feeling the blows.

Making the pace hot, Grahame put in all he knew. He strove continually to get to close quarters, and at last he managed to clinch.

It was a bad move. He was far lighter than Wally. His strength and determination sufficed to drag the fat junior from his feet; but when they went down Wally was on top.

They went down in rather a confused heap, and as he smote the ground Grahame uttered a cry of pain.

Wally's knee had taken him in the stomach with considerable force, and he felt fairly sick with the agony of it.

Montgomery warded off the blow.

"We can't all set on him that way," he said. "It ain't fair play."

But a dozen more fists threatened Wally. Grahame was a general favourite, and one of their acknowledged leaders; and the Courtfield boys were seeing red.

Wally stood undaunted; but his face had changed from red to white. He saw how heavily appearances were against him. Nothing he could say would get a hearing from these furious lads.

"What shall we do with him?" asked Wayward, getting over his first wild spasm of ire, but full still of vengeful thoughts.

Grahame opened his eyes and murmured:

"Do nothing! Let the chap alone!"

But they paid no heed to that; and Grahame was far too much hurt to take the situation in hand.

"Let's lock him up in the cistern-room till we've made up our minds," said Montgomery.

"You're jolly well not going to lock me up anywhere!" snapped Wally.



Mr. Legge wants to know! (See Chapter 9.)

"Awfully sorry, old chap! I couldn't help it," apologised Wally.

It was a complete accident, of course. Wally Bunter was incapable of fighting foul.

But here again his cousin's reputation stood him in evil stead.

No one there could understand Billy Bunter's putting up a fight at all.

But Billy Bunter's fouling—that was quite easy to understand!

A howl of rage went up.

"Scrag the fat cad!" roared Wayward.

"Rag him bald-headed!" shouted Wally's own second, Montgomery.

"Take the clothes off him, and send him home stark!" was the kindly suggestion of Master Pounds.

"Look here, I'm not sure——"

Grahame was going to say that he was not sure that Bunter had meant to foul.

But he could not finish the sentence. He had lifted his head to speak; now it fell back, and he lay there deadly white, in a faint.

"You cowardly rotter!" hooted Wickers, striking at Wally.

"Your mistake, hippopotamus! We are!" retorted Wayward.

Wally glanced round in dismay.

There were a score or more of the Courtfield fellows, and there was no one else at all in sight on the common.

He would have welcomed a policeman at that moment. He might have been glad to see even Skinner and Stott, though he knew them well enough to realise that help was not likely to be forthcoming from those two heroic souls. But Skinner and Stott had disappeared. Wally had not known that they were there, though he did remember now hearing someone yell:

"Greyfriars bounders!"

To struggle seemed only to invite rough treatment. Nevertheless, Wally struggled. His spirit was too high to allow him to submit tamely.

It was all in vain, except for any satisfaction he got out of the punches he bestowed liberally before he went down.

For he went down in the long run, and was frog-marched off to the school building amidst a chorus of wrath.

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"Yow! The fat beast!" gasped Wickers, grasping his waistcoat. But even he could not contend that, in the circumstances, the damage Wally had done him could be considered fouling. Wally had used arms and feet regardless of anything except the desire to put up as big a fight as might be; but feet and knees had only been used after they had plucked his arms.

"Yopoop! He got me in the eye!" howled Jim Pounds.

"Never mind! We'll get even with him," said Montgomery, who had escaped damage, and felt quite philosophical about the damage done to his comrades.

The school was locked up; but Wayward and Montgomery forced open a window, and with some difficulty Wally was hoisted in through this.

Half a dozen fellows had got in ahead of him, to make matters safe. But they hardly made them as absolutely safe as they had hoped to do, for Wally broke away again when his feet touched the floor, and the half dozen had quite a warm time with him before the rest came pouring in to their aid.

"Can't you take it quietly?" snarled Wickers, caressing a swollen nose.

"I could. But I'm not going to as long as there's half a chance of taking it fighting!" gasped the breathless but undaunted Wally.

"Crums! Who'd have thought Bunter had it in him?" said Montgomery, looking at their captive with obvious respect.

"You've got to go upstairs," said Wayward.

"Then you've got to carry me there," answered Wally. "And I jolly well warn you that if I get a chance to use my boots I shall use them! I never saw such a set of cowards as you chaps! Let me free, and I'll fight any two of you! Is that a fair offer?"

"P'raps—p'raps not. Depends upon whether you fought fair," Jack Wayward replied.

"You're a jolly sight more likely to fight foul than I am!" snorted Wally.

"What did you do to Grabame?" giped Wickers.

"We shall have to tie him up," said Montgomery. "We shall never get him up those narrow stairs with his fat legs plunging about all over the show!"

So they tied Wally up, sustaining a casualty or two in the course of the tying, and, with many grunts, they carried him up a narrow flight of stairs to a dark room at the top, wherein was a cistern, and nothing else whatever.

There they dumped him on the floor, and loosened his bonds so that a little struggling would relieve him of them.

"But not till after you're locked in safety," said Montgomery.

A moment later the key turned in the lock outside, and the sound of many feet was heard on the stairs.

Then all was still, except for the fat prisoner striving with his bonds.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Snoop is Anxious!

"HALLO, Snoopey! Such a lark!" It was Sammy Bunter who spoke.

The three Second-Formers, on their way back to Greyfriars, had met Sidney James Snoop, mooching discontentedly along the Courtfield Road.

He had not made up his mind to go to Courtfield. He had not, in fact, made up his mind to anything. There seemed nothing in the world worth doing.

His reply to the ingenuous Sammy was not enthusiastic.

Snoop, in his present mood, felt that larks were dead off; and at no time

would he have expected Sammy Bunter's notion of a lark to appeal to him.

"What is it, you fat little worm?" he returned morosely.

"My major's been fighting about all over Courtfield—he, he, he!"

"Rats!"

"It's true. Ain't it, Petty? Ain't it, Mar?"

"He does seem to have been going it," agreed Pettifer.

"Some!" chimed in Marsden, grinning.

Snoop began to feel interested.

"Who's he been fighting with?" he inquired.

"Oh, Solly Lazarus and that fellow Grahame, and three or four more chaps," Sammy answered airily.

"Come off! None of your lies, young elephant!"

"All right! If you think I'm telling lies, ask these chaps," Sammy said sulkily. "P'raps you'll believe them!"

"Well, I'd sooner do that than believe you, you fat young frog!"

"It's partly true, anyway," said Pettifer. "He did fight with Solly, in old Lazarus' shop; and what licks us is that he didn't get the worst of it."

"Did you see the fight?"

"No. Skinner and Stott told us," said Marsden. "I don't know whether you'd believe Skinner or Stott, though, Snoop."

"I shouldn't be in a hurry to," replied Snoop bitterly. "What's the rest of the yarn?"

He heard the rest of the yarn, and failed to make much out of it—which may have been partly due to the fact that all three fags talked at once, and all talked very fast.

But he heard enough to cause him to make up his mind to go on to Courtfield.

"I'm more than half-way," he muttered, as he left the Second-Formers. "May as well go on, I think! Not that it matters to me what rows that fat fool's been getting into. He's always getting into some row or other."

Yet Snoop did feel vaguely anxious. Again he seemed to glimpse a new Bunter—a very different Bunter.

Who had ever heard before of Billy Bunter standing up to a young champion like Solly Lazarus? Why, a mere frown from Solly would have quelled him last term!

And yet—there were things. Bunter had bucked no end of late. He had shown an ability to hold his own against fellows to whom he had knuckled under readily in former days.

And in other ways he had been different. He had been different this afternoon, for instance. Peter Todd made no secret of the fact that he was behaving better. It is true that Peter also made no secret of his opinion that it was not likely to last.

Snoop rather agreed with Peter here. But he was not quite so sure as he had been.

"I might help him home if he's badly damaged," he thought. "Skinner and Stott won't, that's a cert; and I don't know of anyone else over at Courtfield this afternoon."

Just at this moment he saw the Famous Five come round a bend of the road. They had transacted their business with Mr. Lazarus—a matter of 'heatrical costumes, which it was held better not to leave to Wibley this time—and, after light refreshments, were on their way back.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Whither away, Snoopey?" boomed the stentorian voice of Bob Cherry.

"He looks rather as if he were," remarked Frank Nugent, with a critical glance at Snoop.

"Were what, fathead?" growled Johnny Bull.

"Withering away! Ha, ha!"

"What are you laughing at, ass?" demanded Johnny.

"Well, I made a joke," explained Frank.

"Nobody else laughed," said Bob.

"Nobody had the brains to understand it, I suppose!" snapped Frank.

"Did you understand it, Snoop?" asked Harry.

Snoop had halted. He contemplated the five with no very pleasant expression on his face.

Somehow, their good comradeship, their light chaff, made him feel more lonely and hopeless than ever.

"No," he said dully. "I don't care about the jokes you fellows make. They seem to me rotten—childish!"

"What's up, Snoop?" Harry asked, quite sympathetically.

"Nothing. What should be?"

"I don't know. But you don't seem very sweet-tempered, I must say."

"Am I ever?" snarled Snoop.

"Some ancient johnny said, 'Know thyself!'" murmured Frank. "Snoop has—"

But Snoop did not stop to hear the rest. He brushed past them, and took his way along the road, over which dusk had begun to fall.

"Badly under the weather," said Harry, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"The cheerfulness of the esteemed and degraded Snoop is truly of the minus quantiffulness," observed Inky.

"Poor beggar! He's feeling things a bit," Harry said. "But I don't see how a chap can help him when—"

"Just like you, Wharton!" growled Johnny. "I don't want to help the rotter!"

"Well, I'd be glad to, if I could. And I really don't believe he's half such a rotter as he used to be."

Snoop did not hear that, of course. Perhaps he would not have cared if he had heard.

He had not gone more than another couple of hundred yards or so before he met Skinner and Stott.

Those two festive young gentlemen grinned at the sight of his morose face.

"Hallo, Snoopey! Looking after your pal Bunter?" giped Skinner.

"Find out!"

"Snoopey will be in time to pick up the pieces," said Stott.

"Look here, is it true that the fellow's been getting into trouble at Courtfield?" asked Snoop.

"Find out!" said Skinner mockingly.

"No; but really? Be decent if you can!"

"Some trouble!" said Stott gloatingly.

"But what's it matter to you, old top?"

"It doesn't, of course. At least—No, it doesn't. But I think you chaps might have lent him a hand!"

"You would have done if you'd been there, of course?"

"Yes, I should, Skinner!"

"Oh, rats!"

Snoop checked an angry retort. After all, he could not blame Harold Skinner for not looking upon him as a hero.

"Where is he now?" he asked.

"Don't know, and don't care," replied Skinner callously. "What's it matter about the fat toad?"

"I should think that the Courtfield chaps have torn him into pieces and are keeping them as mementoes," said Stott, grinning more broadly.

"Oh, there will be a whacking great joint each for them. There weren't more than twenty or so!" Skinner jeered.

"Hi, Snoopey! That's not your way!" yelled Stott.

For Snoop, sure that nothing satisfactory was to be got out of those two, was pushing on again.

"He's as queer as Bunty," said Skinner. "But what's the odds to us?"

Snoop's heart beat faster as he reached the outskirts of the little town.

The feuds with Highcliffe and with Courtfield were joys to some of the Remove. They had never been so to Snoop.

He was aware that the Courtfield fellows who knew him disliked and despised him. They did not dislike or despise Bob Cherry, who had punched the heads of most of them at one time or another. The feud apart, they counted the genial Bob a friend. But Snoop, who had never been guilty of punching any of them if he could avoid it—or unless the Courtfielder were a very small and weak specimen—knew that they had no friendly feeling for him.

When in the lamp-lit dusk of the High Street he caught sight of Solly Lazarus, therefore, he felt for a moment inclined to dodge. Solly was not looking his way.

But he screwed up his courage, and approached the heir of the house of Lazarus.

"Hallo, Thnoop!" said Solly, in not at all a hostile manner.

"Hallo, Lazarus!" returned Snoop. "Have you seen that chap Bunter?"

Solly glared for a second, then smiled and tapped his swollen nose.

"Yeth, I have," he answered. "He gave me thith. Not all of it, you understand—there wath a foundation to work on. But he'th made it bigger. You'd never have thought it of Bunter, would you, Thnoop?"

"No, I shouldn't," replied Snoop. "But have you any notion where the fat ass is now?"

"At Greyfriarth by thith time, I should thay."

Snoop shook his head.

"He's not. I should have met him if he'd come back."

"I haven't the thlightetht idea, then," said Solly.

And he was plainly speaking the truth.

Snoop hesitated a moment. Then he blurted out:

"They say he's been fighting with some more of your chaps."

"Who thayth tho?"

"Some of our kids."

"Well, it'th very likoly. He wath full of beans. Never thaw Bunter like it before. Hi, young Poundth!"

A youngster dawdling along the opposite pavement halted.

"Hallo, Solly!" he said.

"Come over here, you young rathcal!"

"See any green in my eye?" demanded Jimmy Pounds.

"Don't be a young ath! What have you bounderth been doing with Bunter?"

"What! That fatty? Oh, I dunno. Better ask Grahame or Wayward. They know more about it than I do."

And, with a hop, skip, and jump, Master Pounds disappeared into the deepening dusk.

"Are you really anxioyth about Bunter, Thnoop?" asked Solly.

"Yes, I am."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know, but I am. Look here, Lazarus, Bunter ain't half the rotter he used to be."

Solly felt his nose.

"The same notion thruck me about the thame time that Bunter thruck me," he said drily. "Thee here, Thnoop, can you trutht yourthelf with me?"

"Oh, yes, of course," replied Snoop,

somewhat surprised at his own ready acquiescence.

"Well, come along, then. If the fat bounder ith anywhere in Courtfield we'll rout him out inthide an hour. I've more than half a notion that thomething may have happened to him. He wath rather looking for trouble, you know."

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Not a Sneak, Anyway!

BILLY BUNTER, in Wally's place, would have howled till the common rang with his cries.

Wally did not howl. He was not a fellow who stood particularly on his dignity, but he had too much dignity for that sort of thing.

Within five minutes he had got rid of his bonds.

It was no great achievement, for they had been loosened so that it should be easy for him to get them off.



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But it seemed to Wally a step—if but a short step—towards freedom.

He did not find that it really was that, however.

The place he was in was all but pitch-dark. It had a skylight, but the skylight was so dirty that it let in but little light.

There was absolutely nothing in it but a big tank, from which ran pipes, no doubt connected with the school's heating apparatus.

The tank was no use. Wally would have been no better off for getting into that, and it was too far from the skylight to help him in trying that way out.

So he thought at first. But after a while, waiting growing a bore, he reconsidered the matter.

Perhaps if he could get to the top of the tank he might find a way from there.

Billy could never have got to the top. Wally, agile for all the weight he carried, scrambled up somehow, though

when he was there he wondered how he had done it.

Being there, he found that he really was nearer getting out, for on the top of the tank lay a plank. It was a stout plank, or Wally would not have thought of trusting himself to it.

He could not see the opposite wall in the gloom, but when, lying at full length, he thrust the plank out into the gloom, it lodged somewhere.

"H'm! I suppose I shall have to!" mumbled Wally.

And he crept along the plank, not at all sure but that at any moment it might slip from its support and give him a nasty fall.

But it gave no sign of doing that, and when he found himself under the skylight the stout prisoner felt more confidence.

Now he had to stand up, and getting the skylight open proved no easy or simple task. His hands were bruised and some of his nails broken by the time he had managed it. But he kept on with dogged pertinacity, and in the long run he got the thing up.

He clutched the frame of it, and tried to pull himself on to the roof. As he did so he felt the plank slipping. He hung on. It fell with a resounding thud.

At a pinch he might have dropped to the floor of the room, but it was far enough to make dropping risky. Wally did not mean to drop till he had explored the roof, anyway.

With many a grunt, he pulled himself up.

"Glad I'm not so fat as Billy!" he muttered, as he scrambled breathlessly on to the slates.

He might also have congratulated himself, with greater reason, upon being pluckier than his cousin.

What to Billy would have seemed a position of horrible danger had no terrors at all for Wally.

He scrambled over the roof like a great fat cat. But the only sign he could find of another way down was a second skylight, some distance from the first.

"Got to try this," he said. "The door below may not be locked."

With great care he extracted his pen-knife from his trousers-pocket. Extraction is the right word, for Wally's trousers were tighter than those of most fellows, and in his position it was difficult to get a hand into a pocket.

Within two minutes he had broken a blade and done a bit more damage to his luckless paws. But within five minutes he had raised that skylight, though to do so he had had to force back an inside catch.

He peered down into the gloom below. He could only just see the floor. It looked a nasty drop.

But he dropped unhesitatingly. So did the skylight, with such speed that it caught him a thwack on the head as he went down.

He landed all in a heap.

"Groooh!" remarked Wally.

Then he sat up and rubbed his head. After that he rose rather unsteadily to his feet.

A search through his pockets resulted in the discovery of one match. He lighted it with great care, and pounced joyfully upon a candle which stood upon a table close to him.

The candle alight, he looked around. This was an improvement upon the tank-room at least. It had a look of being inhabited at times, in spite of the fact that it possessed no window.

There were rows of shelves, with books and stationery upon them. There was

a chair drawn up to the table, and a pipe lay on one of the shelves hard by.

"Master's den, I suppose," murmured Wally.

He had guessed correctly. This was the one place under the roof of the school which Mr. Legge, the headmaster, kept to himself. No boy ever came here except to fetch something at his bidding. Probably Mr. Legge had a large family and a small house, and could appreciate even such an apology for a study as this seemed to Wally.

Wally looked round. His eyes gleamed as they fell upon a tin of biscuits.

Billy Bunter's disregard of the laws of meum and tuum was not shared by his cousin. But it did seem to Wally that these biscuits were lawful spoil—at least, he tried hard to persuade himself they were, and with success.

"I'm jolly empty," he said slowly. "I could do with a pound or two of biscuits to be going on with. Of course, they belong to the master, if this is his den. But he wouldn't grudge a few to a chap. Anyway, he ought not to. He didn't shut me in, but he really ought to keep his rotters in better order. And I don't know how many hours it may be before I get any proper grub. Here goes!"

And Wally pitched into the biscuits.

He looked round as he ate, and discovered among the other furnishings of Mr. Legge's den a small spirit-stove and a tin of cocoa. There was also a carafe of water.

"It's better made with milk," said Wally to Wally. "But this is better than nothing at all."

He made himself a cup of cocoa—Mr. Legge's effects included a cup and saucer—and sat down to a rather scratchy but quite enjoyable meal.

It was here that the Bunter showed in Wally. Not so much in regaling himself with biscuits and cocoa that did not belong to him—in his position any fellow might have done that. But almost any other fellow would have tried the door first. In his curiosity and his keenness for grub Wally forgot all about that!

The bottom of the biscuit-tin was in sight, and the last drop of water had become cocoa, when he heard footsteps on the stairs.

He started up guiltily, and rushed for the door. It opened outwards, and his rush carried him right through the doorway and over the body of Mr. Benjamin Legge.

It should be added that before rushing over Mr. Legge he had bowled him over; and that neither the bowling over nor the passage across the prostrate body of the Council School master was so much wickedness as accident due to flurry.

He could not pull himself up. He plunged head-foremost down a dozen of the narrow stairs, with a succession of bumps that knocked nearly all the wind out of his stout body.

"Yooop! Yow-ow!" roared Wally.

"Yow-ow! Yooop!" howled Mr. Legge.

He was up before Wally could rise.

"Boy, how dare you! What are you doing here?" he shouted, in very excusable wrath.

"Well, I like that—blessed if I don't!" said Wally warmly.

It was certainly not his fault that he was there. But Mr. Legge did not know that.

Wally got to his feet. He had been going to say more; but it suddenly occurred to him that to say more would be very distinctly off.

If he explained, Mr. Legge's boys would come in for a hot time of it, he felt sure. The man seemed a very bad-tempered man. Wally did not allow

sufficiently for the very considerable shock he had administered to Mr. Legge.

Wally did not want to get any of the Courtfield fellows into a row. They had not behaved at all nicely to him; but he felt no rancour against them. He knew that the injury to Grahame must have looked like a foul. He knew it was nothing of the sort; but how could those fellows know?

Probably they knew Billy. Yes, certainly they knew Billy. And no one was likely to think of him as above fouling.

"I'd better do a bunk!" muttered Wally.

There was a door close to the foot of the flight of stairs, which was not the same flight up which he had been carried. He turned the handle. If he could but get a couple of yards' start he did not fancy Mr. Legge would catch him.

But the door was locked. He found the key; but before he could turn it the hand of Mr. Legge was upon his collar.

"Now, boy, explain your presence here!" said Mr. Legge sternly.

"I—I can't!" gasped Wally.

That was how he felt about it.

It was a moral impossibility, not a mental or a physical one. But, again, Mr. Legge could hardly be expected to make such nice distinctions as that.

"Is your name Bunter?" the master snapped.

"Yes, sir."

"I know you by sight and by report—unless I am at fault in my memory, I have had to do with you before. You are a boy with a by no means pleasant reputation, Bunter!"

"Here, drop that!" returned Wally irefully. "My reputation's as good as yours, I know!"

"What?" roared Mr. Legge. "Come with me!"

He could not have forced Wally up the stairs again. But Wally went. Dolefully he felt that it was out of the question for him to justify the bagging of biscuits and cocoa. But he had bagged them; and he must face the consequences.

Mr. Legge breathed hard through his nose as he contemplated the state of his den.

"I must say that you have made yourself at home, Bunter!" he remarked sarcastically.

"I—I suppose it does look like that," admitted Wally.

"But it is in keeping with your character."

"It's nothing of the sort!" protested Wally hotly.

And, in a way, that was true. He had done it; and yet it was far more in keeping with his cousin's character than with his—that is, from the standpoint Mr. Legge naturally took. For to the Council School master Bunter was an intruder, not a prisoner. Wally would never have intruded and bagged biscuits and cocoa; Billy might have done. Wally had merely made free in circumstances which seemed to him to justify him doing so.

"We will see what view your headmaster takes of that, Bunter!" Mr. Legge said sternly.

This looked healthy! Wally knew very well what view Dr. Locke would take—unless he explained. And he still considered that it was up to him not to give his captors away.

"Follow me downstairs!" snapped Mr. Legge.

Wally followed him.

When they reached the foot of the narrow staircase the master pushed open sharply a door that barred their way.

The opening of that door was the signal for an instant scuttering of feet.

"Come back! Wayward—Montgomery—all of you—come back at once!" roared the master.

Half a dozen or more fellows came

trooping back, looking rather sheepish. There had been more; but those ahead had made good their escape.

"Now, then, what does all this mean?" snapped Mr. Legge, thoroughly exasperated.

His pupils shuffled their feet, and made no reply.

"Montgomery, you have a tongue in your head, I believe—I have often had to punish you for babbling in class, I know! Speak!"

"Well, sir, we saw the light on, and came in to see what was up," replied Montgomery guardedly.

It was the truth, no doubt; but most certainly it was not the whole truth.

Mr. Legge scanned them angrily. Perhaps he hoped for a confession; he had always done his best to set a standard of honour among them.

No confession came. He turned to Wally.

"Bunter, you will be good enough to explain, perhaps?"

Wally held his peace.

"Were you put where I found you by these boys, or by any of my boys?" demanded Mr. Legge.

"No, sir. And that's all I've got to say about it," replied Wally.

"Very well! In that case, the only inference is that you made a semi-burglarious entrance. I shall escort you to Greyfriars, and lay the matter before Dr. Locke!"

The Courtfield boys, at a snapped word of command, filed out. When the master and Wally came out together, Wally saw a dark group of them standing by the edge of the road. And he caught what one of them said—he fancied it was Wickers.

"Well, that chap Bunter ain't a sneak, anyway!"

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Confession in Time!

"HALLO, Walter, old thon! Can you tell Thnoop what'th happened to lish pal Bunter?" asked Solly Lazarus, catching Walter Grahame by the arm not far from the Common.

"Haven't they let him out yet?" asked Grahame, in surprise.

"Out of where, you thilly ath?" demanded Solly.

Grahame proceeded to explain.

"I went off home. I was feeling jolly queer," he finished. "But I didn't more than half believe Bunter meant to foul, even then; and I'm pretty sure now that he didn't. Here, look! There he is, and Shanks has got him!"

Mr. Legge and Wally passed the trio without seeing them.

"Whew! Here'th a pretty go!" said Solly.

"I don't understand, even now. What's happened?" said Snoop.

"Can't tell you, not knowing myself," replied Grahame. "But if we go along here it's poss we may find someone who can."

Next moment they found themselves in the middle of a small crowd.

"You rotter'th!" stormed Solly Lazarus, when the story had been told.

"Why didn't you own up?"

"That's all very well," said Wickers sullenly, "but—"

"You ought to have owned up!" said Grahame sharply. "Greyfriars will point the finger at us about this, you bet! But I can't make out Bunter not splitting. Can you, Snoop?"

"No," said Snoop. He would much rather have answered otherwise; but he could not do so truthfully, and for once in a way he did not feel inclined to lie.

All through that afternoon Bunter had

been a source of amazement to him. But this was the most amazing thing of all. Billy Bunter was ever ready to accuse anybody in order to excuse himself; and this was more than Snoop could fathom!

"He fouled you," said Wayward.

"I don't believe he did, really—not on purpose, anyway," Grahame said. "But there's no doubt that you've let him down in a way that's equal to a foul. Now, which of you are going after them to make it clear?"

A few seconds of silence succeeded that question. Then Wayward said:

"Look here, Walter, you and Solly go!"

"Idiot! We can't go confessing what other chaps did! That's more sneaking!"

"Well, I'm not going, for one," said Wickers.

"I will, though!" said Dicky Brown.

"I can't go alone; I don't s'pose they'd believe me. But I'll be one!"

There was another brief silence.

"Bunter's nothing to us," grunted Wickers, breaking it.

"Here's a Greyfriars chap," said Grahame. "Tell these silly asses what you fellows will think of them if they let Bunter down like this, Snoop!"

Never in his life had Sidney Snoop felt in a more utterly false position.

His natural tendency, placed as these fellows were, would have been to do as they seemed inclined to do. He had no right to speak for the Remove; there was hardly a fellow in it who would not have poured scorn upon his dreaming of doing so.

But he had to speak. And what made it worse was that most of those to whom he spoke knew his reputation.

Something stirred in him then, and he said the right thing. He said it timidly, feeling it weak, yet it was the strongest argument he could have used.

"I'm not saying what I'd do. I dare say I'd do the wrong thing. But I know this. Wharton, or any of his set—Peter Todd, or the Bounder, or Field—they wouldn't let any of you fellows down like this!"

A curious buzz followed that speech. Snoop had no idea how they were taking it till Solly slapped him on the back.

"That's the thyle, Thnoop!" said Solly heartily.

"I'll go!" said Wayward.

"So will I," said Montgomery.

"Well, Snoop's right," Wickers said grudgingly. "I'll own that. And I'll go with the other chaps."

Snoop had rather expected that the feeling towards him would be hostile. But there he had done these fellows an injustice. They had the sense of fair play that had never been strong in him, and they liked him far better for what he had said. Perhaps the modesty of it made appeal; certainly they would have scoffed at Snoop had he taken up a self-righteous attitude.

He found himself walking with Solly Lazarus and Grahame and Montgomery, Wayward and Wickers and Dicky Brown following, in all amity.

In the High Street they met Dick Trumper, come over from Pegg for the evening.

And from Dick they heard news that did not please them. "Shanks"—as they irreverently called Mr. Legge—was hardly living up to his nickname. He had hired a trap, and he and Wally were already bowling out of Courtfield towards Greyfriars.

"Bikes!" said Grahame.

But it was fully a quarter of an hour before all of them had fetched machines. Some had to borrow, and Snoop found

that they had also managed to borrow one for him. When he found that Dick Trumper, Solly Lazarus, and Walter Grahame—none of them really implicated—meant to come along and make sure that Bunter had justice, he began to feel that his previous idea of these fellows as low, quarrelsome cads needed putting right.

Meanwhile, the luckless Wally and the iredful Mr. Legge, talking not at all, were on their way.

Wally had time to think over his position now. But it made no difference. He did not mean to split.

The Courtfield fellows had misjudged him. They had handled him roughly. Wickers—if not Wayward—had been prompted by something very like spite. There would be a row if he kept silence—probably a big row. Dr. Locke could hardly believe him guilty of even semi-burglary. Wally did not know all that Billy had done at Greyfriars, or he might have been less confident about that. So he would not be expelled, he thought. But he must take the risk even of that, while hoping for the best.

Anyway, he was not going to split. To that he held fast.

He had a chance of putting himself right. As they drew near Greyfriars Mr. Legge seemed to cool down a little.

"Bunter," he said, "I believe there is more in this than I have yet heard, and it is possible that you are less guilty than I think you. If so, you have an opportunity of telling your tale now. I can promise nothing; but I really have no wish to get you into heavy trouble."

"I've nothing to say, sir," replied Wally heavily.

"Then Dr. Locke must judge! I shall merely tell him what I know, and wash my hands of you!"

"Very well, sir."

The Famous Five were in the dusky quad when Wally came through it, in charge. They had no chance to speak to him, but they found a good deal to say to one another.

"Bunty seems to have been out looking for trouble with a vengeance to-day," said Bob Cherry.

"But—but this must be serious," Wharton said anxiously. "Old Legge wouldn't have come over for nothing."

"Let's go to the gates," suggested Johnny Bull. "Snoop hasn't come in yet. I know. He may have heard something. He was in Courtfield, you know."

They were joined at the gates within ten minutes by Peter Todd, the Bounder, Squiff, Tom Brown, Delarey, and a dozen others. The Second-Formers had been talking, and Toddy had a story to tell which added to their knowledge of Bunter's doings of that afternoon, though it did not explain his present plight.

A bicycle-bell clanged through the darkness, and a lamp showed its beam of light. First of the crowd, Dick Trumper jumped from his saddle.

"What's up, Trumper?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Lots! My word! That Bunter is a most amazing chap! After all the time I've known him, I should have said that it was totally impossible for him to break out in a fresh place. But he has!"

Trumper started to explain; but before he had got out twenty words Solly Lazarus and Wayward and Grahame rode up, and in the babel that followed no one got any very clear idea of what had happened—except that, in addition to showing fighting powers hitherto very much hidden from view, Bunter had refused to sneak when he might have got out of a scrape by sneaking.

But all this was so mixed up with a

story of a foul in a fight and a raid upon Mr. Legge's provisions that no one felt sure whether Bunter was a criminal, a hero, or somewhere between the two. The general notion inclined to the third theory, with a leaning to the criminal rather than to the hero side.

Harry Wharton escorted Wayward, Montgomery, and Dicky Brown to the Head's study. Wickers hung back at the last moment; and the three who went did not ask Dick Trumper and Solly Lazarus and Grahame to go with them. Now that their pride was aroused they meant to carry this thing through in decent style, though they dreaded the frowns of both headmasters.

Harry's tap at the Head's study door was answered by a voice that sounded unusually impatient and vexed.

The Head was very angry with Bunter. Wally did not lie as Billy would have done. Billy's volubility and inconsistency generally gave him away; but to a master Wally's apparently sulky refusal to explain anything was even worse.

"Unless you think better of this contemptuous and disrespectful conduct, Bunter, I shall have to consider seriously the question of your expulsion," said the Head, a few seconds before that tap came. "With that in mind, just ask yourself whether you are not behaving very foolishly, in your own interests, apart from any other aspect of the matter. Mr. Legge could do no other-wise than report you; and your apparent sulky resentment of his action is grossly wrong."

"I'm not sulky with Mr. Legge, sir, really," said Wally earnestly. "He has been very decent to me. But there isn't anything I can say—"

Tap!

"Oh, come in!" snapped the Head.

"Some fellows to see you, sir, on business of importance—about Bunter," said Harry. "Some of your boys, sir," he added, turning to Mr. Legge.

"Good gracious!" said the Council School master. "Dr. Locke, I—really I fear that we may have done Bunter an injustice! I cannot doubt that my boys have come to—er—to confess what they should have confessed earlier."

"You have nothing to reproach yourself with, Mr. Legge, even if that is the case," returned Dr. Locke. "You have stated Bunter's offence, as it appeared to you, with scrupulous fairness. Let the boys come in, Wharton!"

Wayward, Montgomery, and Dicky Brown marched in, with hearts beating a trifle faster than usual; but with chins up; and Wharton went, though he would dearly have liked to stay.

Montgomery was the spokesman-in-chief. As he told his story the Head's frown relaxed, but Mr. Legge's grew blacker. In spite of their belated confession—or, rather, because of its belatedness—Bunter's persecutors were likely to get it hot from their master.

But they were not thinking about that now. They only wanted to clear Bunter.

And they did it very effectively. It was made plain to both masters that nothing but a disinclination to speak had kept Bunter silent.

The Head looked at the fellow whom he took—like everyone else—for Billy Bunter in very real surprise. To him, as to others, Bunter's latest change was amazing.

Not a word was said about the supposed foul. That had been given up once for all, and these three were rather ashamed of their belief in it earlier.

"I understand," said the Head, when Montgomery had finished. "Bunter, I cannot wholly approve your attitude;

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but I cannot wholly blame it. It is a distinct advance on your behaviour when trouble has fallen upon you before, at any rate. We will say no more about it. Mr. Legge, I earnestly ask you not to punish these boys too heavily. If I were you, I should be proud of the manner in which they have made amends. Good-night, my boys! Keep to the path of honour always; if you left it for a little while to-day, at least you soon found your way back."

He shook hands with all three, and they went, blushing.

Wally went with them, his head in a whirl.

Mr. Legge drove home alone. It was

late for tea, but an impromptu meal in Study No. 1 was offered to the seven Courtfielders, and they accepted it like a shot. Wally was also a guest, and the seven would have made much of him if he would have let them.

But out of all the talk no very lucid version of the story became current at Greyfriars. It was too mixed for understanding. Some things in it were so like Billy Bunter, and others were so unlike him; and it seemed impossible to sort them out.

All that the Remove could find where-with to sum up the matter was that "you never knew when you had Bunter; he was a most amazing chap."

No one guessed at the truth—not even Snoop.

Had Snoop known it, he might have been glad of Wally's proffered comradeship. But as it was no intimacy developed between them at present, Snoop was as moody as ever, and every day growing less fond of the society of Stott and Skinner. That, at least, was to the good for Snoop; but it made no difference to Wally—the Amazing Bunter!

(Don't miss "BRAVO, BUNTER!"—next Monday's grand complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., by Frank Richards.)

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

THE SECRET OF THE SNOW-HOUSE!

By HARRY WHARTON.

"H ALLO, hallo, hallo! Another fall of snow!" Bob Cherry fairly bounded out of bed as he voiced that poetical remark.

"More snow? Good biz!" And I followed Bob's example, cold as it was.

In fact, the news was sufficient to bring all the fellows out of their warm beds, save for one or two of the slackers.

William George Bunter, of course, continued to honour the dorm with his unmusical snores—muffled ones, however, for his head was buried in the clothes.

Skinner & Co. merely turned over and slumbered on.

But on the whole I might say that the Remove turned out with one accord to pay respects to the snow.

All the previous day Greyfriars had been mantled in white. But we had been afraid of a change during the night. But there had been a good deal of snow, and snow was still falling from a thick grey sky.

"Wonder if we'll be first out?" grunted Johnny Bull, as he dragged on his things.

"Hardly!" said Bob, who had finished dressing, and peered through the window. "There's a lot of fags scurrying about over by the elms. But come on!"

Bob took the lead, and we were quickly in the sharp, cold air of the quad, the crisp snow yielding pleasantly beneath our feet.

"We'll give those fags a few snowballs—what?" remarked Bob, looking critically at the handful of fags, who were sliding furiously.

"Just a minute!" said Nugent, his eyes beginning to twinkle. "Better way than that to teach the little beggars a lesson! See that snow-house of theirs?"

"What about it?" grunted Bob, looking with great disfavour upon that ephemeral edifice, which was constructed near the wall of the school.

"Suppose we invite those fags in there—"

"Eh?"

"And then speak sternly to them?" went on Nugent. "Make them admit that they're cheeky little beggars, and promise to respect their elders in future?"

"Ass! And they're sliding, and haven't any idea of going into their snow-house!"

"Unless human nature has altered considerably during the night," said Frank easily, "we'll have them in their house in a couple of twos."

Whereupon he explained how.

"Hallo, you old fogies!" yelled Dicky Nugent. "Have you come out of your shells to play marbles?"

"Not at all, Richard!" responded Bob, beaming benignantly. "We are merely repairing to our winter seat for a little quiet study and meditation."

"Yah! Go and gorge dictionaries!" hooted

Franky's minor. "You ain't swallowed enough yet!"

"I repeat, Richard, our winter seat! My schoolfellows, follow me!"

Robert's schoolfellows, grinning broadly, followed.

We followed him to the door of the snow-house, when there came a yell.

"Hi! Come out of that, you rotters!"

"That's our snow-house, you bounders!"

"Your mistake, my children," replied Bob blandly. "Our winter seat now."

To call a spade a spade is much to be recommended, but to call a child a child is a very different thing.

All the ire of the fag fraternity was aroused.

"Smash the cheeky rotters!"

"Snowball 'em!"

"Hurrah!"

Snowballs manufactured by fags and hurled by fags are incapable of doing very much damage. We got a few against our chivvies, but our greatest trouble lay in making ourselves believe they weren't snowflakes.

Nevertheless, we retreated with the rapidity of a Hindenburg line.

By the way, I must make it clear here that the rest of the Remove weren't in this little comedy. The majority were having a battle in the Close, and a few of the less vigorous were trundling a huge snowball about.

Only the five of us were in the engagement with the faglets.

"We're whacking 'em!" yelled Gatty hysterically. "The rotters are giving way! Another volley, you fellows!"

"Hurrah!"

Inspired, though rather surprised, by such an easy victory, the fags sailed in.

But we put up a stand a little farther away, and the fags deemed it prudent to hold up a little.

"Conquered 'em!" exclaimed Dicky triumphantly. "Who says the Second can't fight?"

"Nobody!" came the roar.

"Tried to bag our snow-house, by gum!" went on Dicky. "We'll show 'em! Let 'em try it again, that's all! Come on!"

And the fags scrambled into their cherished snow-house as happy as larks, forgetful of the fact that their specific programme had been to slide all the morning.

Nugent looked at us in the "told-you-so" manner, and we returned the deferential look which is the only proper answer.

Then we strolled up to the snow-house.

"Brethren within!" spoke Bob.

Grunts of anger came from the "brethren within."

"Those rotters again!"

Bob beamed into the interior, and tossed a snowball in.

"Yaroooooh!"

"You beast, Cherry!"

"Call me not a beast, Richard!" said Bob, benignantly but sternly, discharging a snow-

ball at Dicky. "I take my present attitude purely for your own improvement. You need a lesson."

Whiz! Another snowball went inside, and "Yarooooohs!" of appreciation emanated therefrom.

"Do you promise to treat your elders and betters more respectfully in future, Richard?" asked Bob, in a deep voice. "I take it you speak for the lot."

Richard did not speak for the lot. The lot spoke for Richard, on account of that worthy's mouth being too full of snow.

"No, you rotters!"

"No, you beasts!"

Bob despatched another couple of snowballs.

"Sure you don't mean yes?"

But by now the little doorway became the common target for all our snowballs.

"Ow! Oh, crumbs! Yoop!"

"Any 'Yesses' yet?" inquired Bob sweetly.

"No! Yoop! Ow! Yes! Yes!"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

The "Yesses" came now as rapidly as falling monarchies.

"I am satisfied," said Bob. "We leave you now, Richard, to dwell upon your sins."

With that we sailed magnanimously towards the gates.

But that Richard did not intend to dwell upon his sins became evident precisely three-quarters of a minute later.

Richard's furious face showed round the door.

"You—you—you Huns! Take that!"

Whiz!

"Look out, Bob!"

Bob ducked, and the missile passed over his head.

But it found a billet, as was testified by a howl of anguish. The next instant we were presented with the sad but interesting spectacle of a uniformed person spluttering snow.

"Inspector Skeat!"

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Dicky dismally.

"That's done it! I'm in for it now!"

II.

"YOU—you—you—"

Mr. Skeat checked himself suddenly.

We looked at him curiously. Inspector Skeat was not the person to restrain himself in the use of strong epithets on an occasion like this.

But we quickly saw that he intended making himself agreeable.

Dicky came up shamefacedly.

"I—I'm sorry!" he muttered apologetically.

"That's all right, my boy! I—"

Mr. Skeat coughed. "Be a little more careful in future. Ahem! I should like a word with you boys before I call on your headmaster—not on this unhappy matter. Ahem!"

"Go it, sir!"

"There was a burglary last evening at the jeweller's in Friardale," said Inspector Skeat impressively. "Jewels were stolen worth a big sum. And, though the thief was surprised by the police, he managed to get clear away with the spoils. He was pursued as far as this school—"

"This school?" echoed Nugent.

"Not into the grounds, of course!" said the inspector snappishly. "But one of our men distinctly saw him running by the wall. Then a little farther along a suspicious-looking fellow was arrested, and detained at the station. None of the stolen property was found upon him, however, and we were obliged to let him go this morning. But—"

Here the inspector paused and looked at us meaningly.

"I have my suspicions of that man. He is being shadowed constantly. Now, my boys, what I want of you is this. Should you see any stranger lurking near here, and suspect him of being connected with last night's business—I can rely on your discretion—"

We tried not to grin, for Mr. Skeat's soft sawder was very obvious.

"In that case bring me to the spot. Me, personally. I—ahem!—don't place over-much confidence in the rest of the Force down here."

We saw no reason why we shouldn't give the inspector our promise, and he passed on, satisfied.

He was thinking, of course, more about his chances for further promotion than our ability in the burglar-bagging line.

Before lessons each master cautioned his class against coming into contact with the burglar, proving that Skeat had come to the school thus early on no other business.

Quelch, however, advised us to return to the school at once on observing a suspect; whereas Skeat practically told us to jump on him.

But we expected to hear nothing more of the burglar after that.

It was well into the evening when Billy Bunter rolled into the study with a very important mien.

"I say, you fellows!"

"Buzz off, tubby! No grub going here!"

"But I know where there is," said Bunter mysteriously. "I've just had the tip from my minor. The Second won't have him at the feed, because they say the snow-house won't hold enough tommy to fill both him and them."

"The snow-house?" I asked curiously. "They're going to scoff grub in the snow-house?"

"You seem to know a jolly lot about it!" said Bunter suspiciously. "Are you going down after lights-out as well?"

"What? Those young bounders are going out feeding when they ought to be in bed?"

"Who says they are?"

"You did, you fat chump!"

"Look here—"

"We've got to stop this," I said firmly. "What's the feed for, anyway, Bunt?"

"Sammy says it's a peace feed."

"Peace feed, now!" chortled Bob. "They've already had a victory feed, an armistice feed, a feed in memory of our fallen, a feed for the home-comers—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you're going to raid it—" began Bunter.

"Who says we are?"

"As you're going to raid it," said the Owl, as if that were settled. "I rely on you to bring me in a cake or two."

"Why not come with us, then, and help yourself?"

"Too jolly cold!" shivered Bunter.

"Ain't it cold for us, too, porpoise?"

"There isn't as much of you skinny rotters to get cold as there is of me!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Hardly!"

"Anyway, I expect a cake in the morning, or I—I'll report you to Quelch for leaving the dorm. Yah!"

And Bunter rolled away—not too soon.

"I say," said Johnny, "are we going to raid those fags' feed? Rather infra dig. for the Remove!"

"Better," I said, "to nip them in the bud—stop them at it."

"The betterfulness is terrific, sahls!"

"But I mean to go one better!" broke in Bob jubilantly. "You know what a don I am at disguises—"

"Do we?"

"Yes, you do!" roared Bob. "It's that burgling Johnny who's suggested the idea. You remember the time when Skinner made up as a daylight robber, and I collared his

disguise, and took in his pals completely—did 'em brown—"

"Cut it short!"

"Well, I'll make myself up as this chap that Skeat's going potty about. I'll make my face like that of a ferocious hooligan."

"No need to disguise it!" grinned Nugent.

"Shut up! I'll push it in at the door of the snow-house, while you chaps hide behind trees. The fags will take me for the burglar. They'll come bounding out, and I'll vanish among the elms."

"Sure the elms will vanish?" put in Johnny anxiously.

"Chump! Don't interrupt! That will be the signal for you to shy snowballs at some given part of the wall. The fags will think it's the burglar, climbing. And when they've scrambled over the wall after their imaginary quarry, we take possession of the snow-house, and have late supper—theirs! If we've time we'll leave a few snowballs behind, and a note advising them not to eat too many."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good man, Bob!" I said approvingly.

"We'll act on that!"

The resolve to act upon it was passed unanimously; but we little realised what would be the result of acting upon it.

III.

"NO noise, you know," I whispered warningly, as we stealthily crossed the quad.

"Good job the quad's covered with snow," murmured Nugent. "Bob's footsteps can't be heard many yards away now."

"Chump!" roared Bob.

"Shurrup, Bob, you ass!" muttered Johnny. "There's the snow-house, where the light shows."

The fags had evidently provided themselves with candles, for a glimmer showed from the doorway.

"You chaps mizzle behind the elms," said Bob, who was already disguised; "and I'll begin!"

"Right-ho!"

The "brethren within," as Bob had called them earlier, were having the time of their lives. A mound of snow constituted the festive board, and small stools were the seats.

"Pass the ham, Gatty!" said Dicky Nugent.

"Going to gorge the lot, you young pig?"

"Ain't had a slice yet, fathead!"

"Blow the ham, you asses!" exclaimed Myers. "Do you want to hear how I bagged that burglar, or don't you?"

"We don't, as a matter of fact," grunted Dicky. "You've been gassing about it for the last twenty minutes. But get on with it!"

"Well, I was seated by myself in my little room at home, one snowy, winter's night. I was in an armchair, half asleep, gazing with semi-closed eyes into the glowing fire. Suddenly I started!"

"Mind if I take a pinch of salt, Myers?" asked Gatty.

"Eh? No, ass!"

"The ham goes down much better with this—and your yarn does, too," explained Gatty, taking his pinch.

"You—do you think I'm telling whoppers?" shouted Myers.

"Not at all, old man!" said Gatty hastily.

"Pass the salt again, Dicky! I want another pinch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Brrrrrrrr! Suddenly I started."

"Wish you'd finish suddenly!" grumbled Dicky.

"I listened, trembling. Ah! What was that?"

"Didn't hear anything!"

"May have been the wind!"

"Or an owl!"

"Or—"

"You—you chumps!" roared Myers, in exasperation. "I'm telling you the story!"

"But you asked—"

"Shut up! I listened intently. There was nothing. If sound there was, it was not repeated. I lapsed into my former condition."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Presently I shivered. I felt cold. Cold air was blowing upon me. I turned in my seat, expecting all kinds of things. To my horror, the window was slowly opening! A long, skinny hand appeared, with evil nails like talons—"

"Grooh!"

"Then a swarthy face was pushed through. How well I recollect it! Those jagged, yellow teeth, those unnatural eyes that glowed green—"

"Ow! I—I think we'd better get back to

the dorm!" muttered Gatty, pushing away his plate. "It's getting late!"

"Just a minute!" said Myers tensely. "I seized the poker, staggered across the room, raised it frantically to strike, when—"

"Look!"

"Go on!" muttered Nugent minor huskily.

"What—what did you do then?"

"Look! Look!" almost shrieked Myers.

"At—the door!"

The fags fairly screamed.

A fearsome face appeared at the aperture and leered round the snow-house.

The fags shrank back with one accord, trembling.

Bob was rather at a loss. He had not expected this, having had no foreknowledge of Edwin Myers' creepy narrative.

His only course was to vanish precipitately—which he did.

"W-w-what was that?" gasped Gatty.

"I know! I've got it! That beastly burglar!" howled Dicky excitedly.

"I—I thought it was something from another world!" quavered Gatty.

"Come on!" exclaimed Nugent minor. "We've got to bag that burglar! You remember what old Skeat said? Follow me!"

"Did he say follow you?"

"Less jaw! Come on!" retorted Dicky, making for the exit.

The fags were so relieved now that bagging a burglar seemed mere child's play.

They peered about them rather uncertainly when they gained the open.

The sky was like velvet sprinkled with myriads of stars. But the chief light was that from the snow on the ground.

The burglar, however, was not to be seen. "Where is the rotter?"

"Skulking among the elms most likely. Hallo! Listen!"

Patter, patter, patter!

We had begun shying our snowballs now, and the result was remarkably like the sound of someone clambering up the wall, especially as that was the sound expected.

The fags came to that conclusion in an instant.

"He's climbing the wall!"

"After him!"

They darted off like rabbits, and vanished over the wall.

"Safe now!" I remarked.

We came out from behind our trees, and strolled easily towards the snow-house. A small shaft of light shone through the doorway.

"I'll tell you what!" remarked Johnny, when we were inside. "The light from this shanty can be seen from the School House, even when the ice is in front. I vote we shove something against it!"

"My jacket will do," observed Bob, doffing that article of attire. "It's quite warm in here."

The fags had provided themselves with quite a fine spread, to do them justice—and to do it justice. There was hot tea in thermos flasks, cakes, tarts, and doughnuts galore, and two kinds of cold meat.

In a few minutes we had taken the edges off our appetites, and began to feel quite amiably towards the departed fags.

Whether they would feel amiably towards us when they returned and discovered the trick we had many doubts. Truth to tell, we were already bracing ourselves up for the coming tussle, which we knew couldn't be far ahead now.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob suddenly. "What on earth's that? Listen, you chaps!"

Scrape, scrape, scrape!

The scraping sounds came from over our heads. Someone was evidently engaged scraping the snow from the roof of the house.

"Those fags back again!" I muttered.

"What's their game, I wonder?"

Scrape, scrape, scrape!

"There'll be the roof in on top of us in a minute!" exclaimed Bob. "Up and at 'em, me hearties!"

We hastily dashed down the door and its covering and crawled out.

An oath came from the person scraping, and it didn't sound like a fag.

"W-w-what the—how—" stammered Bob, rising first.

IV.

WE and the burglar stood confronting each other for some moments, each party as surprised as the other.

"By—by Jove!" exclaimed Bob.

"At him, you fellows!"

The burglar snarled, and seemed about to fling himself at us. Then he darted off with

surprising swiftness, and vanished among the elms.

"Come on!" grunted Johnny, setting the pace. "We'll collar him before he climbs the wall!"

We scattered a little when we gained the elms.

"Hear anything?" called Nugent softly.

"Listen!" whispered Bob excitedly.

"Listen to that!"

From one part of the wall came the unmistakable sounds of somebody climbing—or so we thought.

"We'll get him now!" I muttered determinedly. "All together!"

As we rushed the sounds ceased. The man was evidently over the wall.

"I say, Harry," murmured Bob to me, "I can't go into the road in this rig-out! Skeat's sure to be hanging about if this man is the fellow they're shadowing. And if I'm taken for the burglar, that other rotter may get clean away in the confusion."

"Right-ho, Bob!" I had just time to return, and dropped over into the road almost simultaneously with the other chaps.

Bob leaned against an elm, and seemed uncertain what to do.

His eyes wandered in the direction of the snow-house.

"By Jove! Jolly lucky I did stay! There's that light glaring through the doorway! I'll nip across and block it up!"

He was about to act on this when he saw another figure "nipping across."

"That burgling beast!" he muttered.

"Why, he must have done exactly the same as we did before—thrown snowballs at the wall to make the sound of climbing. What's he up to now, I wonder?"

Scrape, scrape, scrape!

"At it again! My only hat! He must be off his rocker!"

Scrape, scrape, scrape!

The sounds grew louder, and seemed more feverish.

Bob ran silently over the soft snow. Then he sprang.

"Goouch!" came from the burglar, and a torrent of lurid language followed.

"Help!" cried Bob as loudly as he dared, at the same time clinging on to the burglar like grim death. "Wharton! Nugent!"

"Hallo!" I called from the other side of the wall in close proximity to the snow-house.

"What's the matter, Bob?"

"That burglar!" gasped Bob hoarsely.

"I've got him! Rescue—quick!"

"My hat! Over here, you fellows! Bob's bagged the burglar!"

We topped the wall in time to witness a thrilling struggle between Bob and the burglar. They were both excessively ferocious in appearance, and each seemed bent on slinging the other over the wall.

As we jumped to the ground and bounded to the rescue the burglar succeeded in throwing poor old Bob some yards away. The carpet of snow, however, saved him from being really hurt.

Then the man drew something like a short, thick stick, and stood snarling.

"Come on!" growled Johnny. "Blow his bludgeon, or whatever he calls it!"

And Johnny sailed in. He knows about as much of fear as a bulldog does.

"Look out, Johnny!" I cried, in alarm.

Like good King Wenceslaus in the carol, Johnny looked out.

It was lucky for him he did. He ducked, and the stick, descending with vicious force, missed him by inches.

That held us back a little, and even Johnny hesitated.

The burglar took his chance, and bolted, once again towards the elms.

But before he reached them several little figures darted out from among them.

"Those fags!" exclaimed Bob.

"He—he'll injure them!" gasped Frank. "That little ass Dicky is sure to go straight for him!"

Go for him the fags did, but hardly in the manner we—and the burglar—expected.

For, when but a few yards from him, they dived, like so many goalkeepers, at his legs.

The astonished burglar went clean over like a bulky ninepin.

"Hurrah!" chortled Bob ecstatically.

"Three cheers for the Second!"

"Hallo! Who's here now?"

Three figures which were certainly not those of fags emerged from the elms and approached the turbulent scene.

"Good for you, my boys!" sounded the deep voice of Inspector Skeat. "Robinson, Brown, lend a hand here!"

Several hands were lent, shortly added to by our own, and the poor old burglar became about as belligerent as a pancake.

"A splendid night's work!" observed Mr. Skeat complacently, nodding approvingly at the fags, who had evidently met him down the road and brought him to the scene.

"Splendid! Now, how did you get on to him, my boys?"

He looked at us as he said this.

"Go it, Bob!" I said encouragingly. "How did you bag him? What was he up to?"

Bob rubbed his head ruefully.

"I think he's potty, you know!" he said, in a comical way. "You'd hardly bunked over the wall than he came out from the elms there and began scraping at the roof of the snow-house."

"Yes?" jerked in Mr. Skeat quickly.

"Well, I simply jumped at him, and you know the rest."

"H'm!" Mr. Skeat rubbed his chin thoughtfully, and then glanced at the prostrate burglar. "Why were you scraping the snow from the roof of the house, my man?"

"Curse you, you—"

And he honoured the inspector with an assortment of fancy names which are seldom seen in print.

"That will do, my man!" said Mr. Skeat hastily. And then he brightened considerably.

"By the way, Robinson, in what part of the road did you see this fellow skulking last night?"

"Let me see, sir! I—I think it would have

been just about opposite to that snow-house yonder."

"Good! I expected as much. Just come along with me, and drag that fellow along!"

Reaching the snow-house, Mr. Skeat began scraping the snow from various parts of the roof.

Peculiar sounds came from the interior of the snow-house, but we were too excited to notice them at the time.

Presently the inspector gave a grunt of satisfaction, and drew forth a paper parcel, from which he shook the snow.

"The stolen property!" he announced briskly. "I see everything plainly now! Last evening, when this fellow found he was being pursued, he tossed the parcel over the school wall, evidently taking careful note of the part of the road he was in. He intended, of course, to return during the night, but was detained at the station until to-day. Fortunately for him, a layer of snow fell before morning, and the parcel was thus concealed. And now—"

The inspector broke off suddenly.

"What is that?"

"Someone inside the snow-house!" muttered Bob excitedly.

"An accomplice, most probably! Be careful, boys; he may be dangerous!"

We stooped with one accord, and, with every nerve tense, peered into the lighted interior.

William George Bunter was within!

He grinned at us broadly—broadly, because each side of his face was stuffed with provender.

He seemed to be wearing two or three overcoats, and a thick muffler enclosed his neck and head.

"You fellows bagged that burglar?" he mumbled.

"Bunter, you gormandising young rotter!"

"Oh, really, you know! I say, you fellows," said Bunter reproachfully, "all the grub seems to be gone!"

We glared at him quite ferociously.

"Of course it has, now you've scoffed it all!"

I exclaimed. "Let's roll the fat rotter in the snow!"

"Just a minute!" said Dicky Nugent, grinning. "Look here!"

He lifted the lid of a box, which had been used as a seat, and a second edition of the spread consumed was revealed.

"We intended to do ourselves well, you know," he explained. "I say, Mr. Skeat!"

"Yes, my boy?"

"You might do us a favour after this little business of this evening."

"Willingly, if it is anything in my power."

"Honour bright?"

"Honour bright!" smiled the inspector.

"Then have a cup of tea with us!"

"What?"

"And a sandwich!" added Dicky cheerfully.

"Ahem! If you had not taken my promise I should certainly not—Robinson, Brown, we will break a rule for once, and—er—our fast as well!"

THE END.

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Monday:

"BRAVO, BUNTER!"

By Frank Richards.

Wally Bunter—whom everyone still takes for his cousin Billy, surprises a good many people in this week's story. He shows combative powers beyond anything that could have been expected of him, even after his encounter with Angel; and he will not sneak. But much of all this hardly gets home to Greyfriars, so to speak; the Courtfield boys are more impressed than the Remove. In next week's story Greyfriars gets a sample of what Wally is capable of, and there is another stock of surprise in rather a different quarter. What he does is plucky enough to have been very creditable to anyone; but it would not have amazed anyone if they had known that it was Wally who did it. Harry Wharton is very grateful to him, and offers him a reward; and Wally takes it—in a manner that makes him seem to the other fellows more like Billy than ever—no, that is hardly the way to put it, for of course he is Billy to them. But to us, who know the secret, what Wally asks for is quite reason-

able and legitimate, though to the Remove it seems the very limit in cool cheek.

Can any of you guess what it is?

AMATEUR JOURNALISM.

Another very interesting letter on this subject has reached me. The writer is Mr. B. Winskill, of Buxted, Sussex, who is the President of the International Amateur Press Club, which has some 150 members. I have not space for it all; but I must give a few quotations.

"It is usual," says Mr. Winskill, "for a newcomer, if he be fresh from school, to imitate the methods of professional publications, even to embarking upon a chase for pennies. He soon finds, however, that people only pay for value; but by that time the fascination has got hold of him; and he continues as an amateur editor should, purely for the enjoyment of writing, the opportunity of expressing his ideas, and for the numerous friendships he contracts with those of similar tastes."

"To publish an amateur magazine at all a boy must possess a fair degree of intelligence, and he speedily finds others similarly endowed. For my own part, I issued my first amateur magazine in 1888, and I still maintain a number of strong friendships with those who were my contemporaries in that far-off time."

"The Amateur Press Club was intended as a temporary means of carrying on during war-time, as nearly all the members of the British

Amateur Press Association were serving in France or elsewhere. This old association had been in a more or less active state for nearly thirty years."

"Curiously enough, the temporary substitute has outstripped the original, and has found a permanent place as a link between the amateur writers of Great Britain and those of the United States, where amateur journalism is a recognised institution."

"I enclose you a few copies of recent printed magazines. They are war-time productions, and are therefore very small indeed, having strictly limited circulations."

"There are some fifty manuscript magazines issued in the club, and they range from a penny exercise-book filled with crude stories to 100-page volumes, embellished with drawings and paintings, and containing really high-class literature. I am sorry I cannot send you one such to show you something of the better side of the game. I can say, however, that anything you can do to encourage the issue of these things by the boys will bear fruit in their after life for which they will thank you sincerely."

Mr. Winskill enclosed with his letter several copies of "Rosemary," a little 4-page paper, which had reached No. 12 in April of last year, two copies of "The Fairy," a paper in the same style, which was at No. 8 at the same date, and one issue of "Vanity Fair," a rather more ambitious production, which had arrived at No. 10 in August.

YOUR EDITOR.