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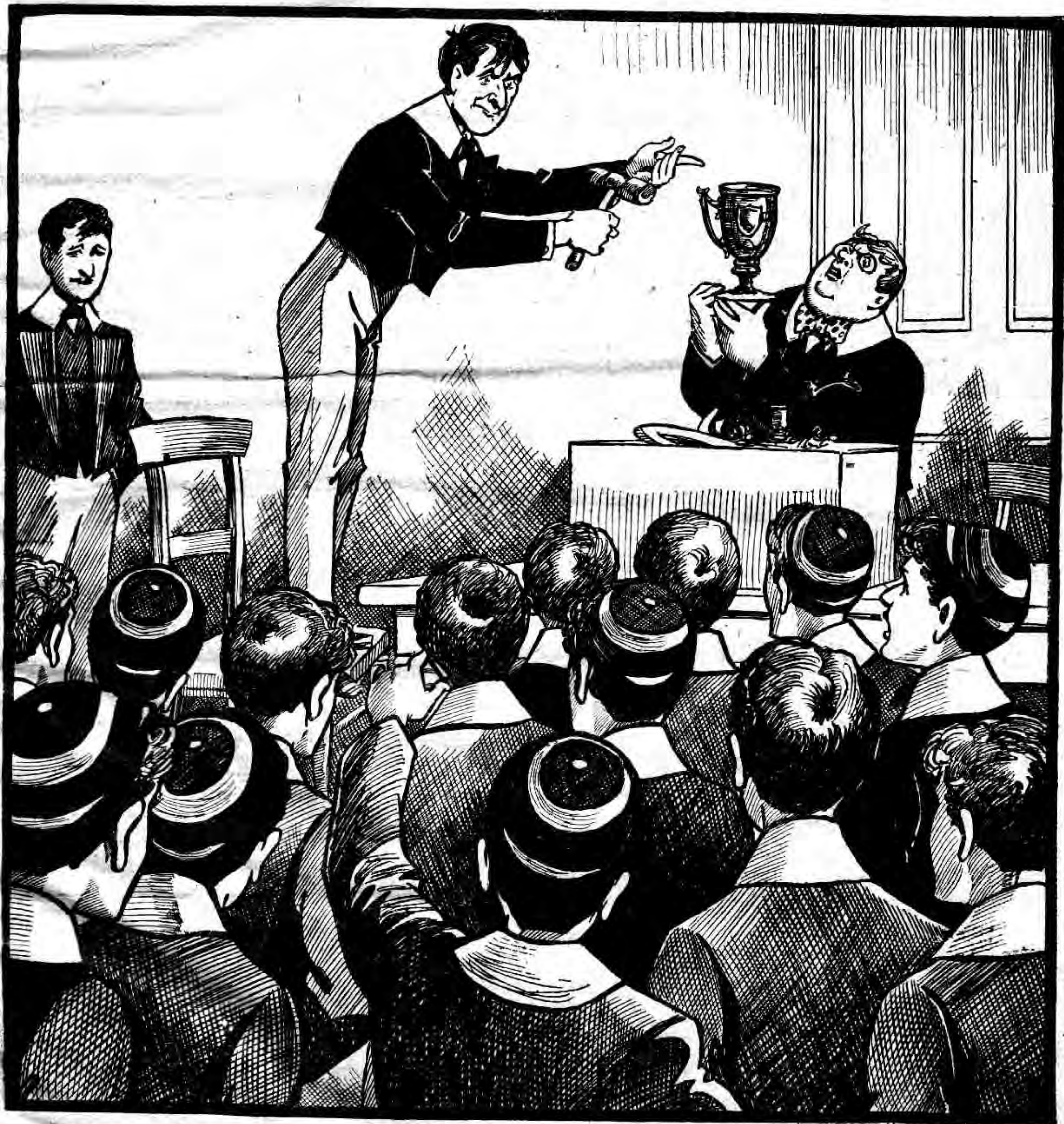
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BUNTER'S AUCTION!



DISPOSING OF BILLY BUNTER'S TREASURE!

(An Amusing Scene in the Magnificent Long Complete School Tale In this Number.) 31-5-19



Bunter's Auction

A Magnificent Long Complete School Story of
HARRY WHARTON & CO. AT GREYFRIARS.

BY FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Lots!

"FISH!"

Mr. Quelch's voice was not loud, but deep.

Several of the Remove fellows glanced round at Fisher T. Fish. But Fishy himself did not look up.

Fishy was apparently busy.

His eyes were glued upon a paper under his desk, on his bony knees, at which he was dabbing with a pencil.

He was too busy to hear, or heed, the Form-master's voice.

A few minutes before the Remove-master had been engaged with Billy Bunter; and the way Bunter did his construe was enough to make any Form-master weep. Fishy had taken advantage of Mr. Quelch's preoccupation to attend to his own affairs—whatever they were. And he was so deeply immersed in his own affairs that he was unaware that Mr. Quelch had finished with Bunter, and was calling upon him to construe.

"Fish!"

Mr. Quelch's voice was both louder and deeper now.

Bob Cherry tossed a paper pellet at Fishy's ear to draw his attention. It landed, unfortunately, upon Lord Mauleverer's nose, and drew a sharp yelp of surprise from his lordship. Peter Todd reached out to Fishy, more successfully, with his boot. His boot clumped on Fishy's bony leg, and Fishy awoke, as it were, with a howl:

"Ow!"

"Fish!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! Ah! Yep! Yes, sir?" stammered Fisher T. Fish, alive to his surroundings at last.

"I have spoken to you three times, Fish!"

"Have you really, sir?" gasped Fisher T. Fish. "I—I—I didn't hear you, sir!"

Mr. Quelch came among the desks, with a pointer in his hand and a dangerous glitter in his eye. Mr. Quelch held the view, common to Form-masters, that the Form-room was a place for work, and that all private affairs should be left outside the door. The Removevites did not all agree with him on that point, but they made it a rule to give the Form-master his head, so to speak. It was really necessary to do that.

"You were not giving me your attention, Fish!" said the Remove-master, towering over the dismayed Fishy.

"Oh, yep!" gasped Fisher T. Fish.

"Certainly, sir! Sure!"

"You have some paper there, Fish."

"Pip-pip-paper, sir?"

"Yes. I think you were writing something under your desk."

"W-a-as I, sir?"

"You were, Fish! Kindly hand me the paper at once!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "I desire to see what it is, Fish, that is so important that it leaves you no attention to devote to your lessons!"

There was a dutiful chuckle from the Remove fellows.

When a Form-master made a joke it was, of course, the duty of his Form to chuckle in a respectful way; and the Remove took Mr. Quelch's last remark for a little joke.

That appeared to be a misapprehension, however. Mr. Quelch's glittering glance swept round over the class, and the chuckle died away with startling suddenness.

"Silence!"

A pin might have been heard to drop in the Remove Form-room.

Evidently Mr. Quelch was not, after all, condescending to humour, as his class had supposed.

"Wharton!"

"Yes, sir?" mumbled the captain of the Remove.

"You were pleased to laugh at my observation to Fish, Wharton."

"Oh, sir!"

"Do you call that respectful, Wharton?"

"M-m-m-mum—" mumbled Wharton.

He could not explain that on other occasions Mr. Quelch appeared to expect a dutiful chuckle when he condescended to be humorous. It was no use explaining that. And he could not explain that Mr. Quelch's humour, being so very dry, it was a little difficult to detect whether he was joking or not, and so a fellow was liable to put his foot in it sometimes.

So Wharton mumbled, and was silent.

"Kindly be serious, Wharton!"

"Ye-e-es, sir!" stammered Harry.

"Certainly, sir!"

He was serious enough now, at all events.

Mr. Quelch gave him a very serious glance, and turned to Fisher T. Fish again. That youth had his paper crumpled in a bony hand now, out of sight, and he hoped that it would escape attention. But his hope was in vain.

"Fish! Hand me that paper at once!"

Very reluctantly Fisher T. Fish unclosed his bony fingers, and laid the crumpled paper on the desk.

Mr. Quelch took it up and smoothed

it out, with all eyes in the class upon him.

The juniors wondered what Fishy had been scribbling under his desk; probably some abstruse calculation connected with money-making, that being the entrancing subject that occupied Fishy's thoughts morning, noon, and night. From early morn till dewy eve the reflections of Fisher Tarleton Fish ran upon dollars.

A look of amazement came over Mr. Quelch's face as he glanced at the paper. He read aloud, with growing astonishment; while some of the Removevites grinned as they listened. It certainly was a most remarkable paper for a junior schoolboy to be scribbling in the Form-room:

"Lot 1.—Handsome Silver Goblet, chased, with crest."

Lot 2.—First-class Silver Tankard.

Lot 3.—Set of Silver Fish Knives and Forks, in Handsome Case, lined velvet.

Lot 4.—Antique Silver Drinking-Cup."

There was a good deal more in the same style, but Mr. Quelch did not trouble to read further.

He transferred his gimlet glance from the crumpled paper to the uneasy features of Fisher T. Fish.

"Fish!"

"Yep?" gasped Fishy.

"Are you out of your senses?"

"Nope."

"You have written this nonsense?"

"Sure!"

"And why?"

"Ahem!"

"It appears," said Mr. Quelch, "to be a copy of an auctioneer's list of goods. I fail to understand, Fish, why an auctioneer's list should be of any interest to a boy in my Form."

"I—I guess—" stammered Fisher T. Fish.

"What does this mean?" demanded the Form-master, as much puzzled as angry. "Why have you written out this nonsense, Fish?"

Fisher T. Fish stammered, and was silent. Bob Cherry chuckled softly, but he was as silent as a graven image when Mr. Quelch's gimlet eye turned in his direction. The rest of the Remove were as grave as a bench of judges—indeed, a good deal graver than a bench of modern judges.

Mr. Quelch fixed his eyes upon Fisher T. Fish again. But Fishy seemed to have no explanation to make. The Form-master raised his pointer,

"Hold out your hand, Fish!"

"Oh dear!"

Swish!

"Yow-ow-woop!"

"And now, Fish, you will perhaps have the goodness to pay some attention to your lessons!"

"Ow! Sure! Wow!" gasped Fisher T. Fish.

And he did!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Business Man!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were smiling when they came out of the Remove Form-room that morning.

Mysterious as Fishy's queer list was to Mr. Quelch, most of the Remove fellows knew all about it.

Mr. Quelch would have been very much astonished if he had known that an auction sale was to take place that afternoon in the Rag.

But such was the case.

William George Bunter was providing the goods, and Fisher T. Fish was providing the salesmanship and business knowledge—if any.

Fishy was very keen on his task. He had undertaken to sell those goods for W. G. Bunter, for a handsome "commish," as he called it—which, being interpreted, meant a commission. Naturally, a business deal crowded lesser matters out of Fishy's head. He had no attention to waste on lessons when it was a question of making money. But he was rubbing his bony hands rather ruefully as he came out of the Form-room with the Remove. Mr. Quelch's eye had been upon him continually that morning, and the pointer had come into play several times.

"Feeling bad?" Bob Cherry asked, with smiling sympathy, as the enterprising junior rubbed his knuckles in the passage.

"I guess I ain't enjoying life at the present moment," said Fisher T. Fish lugubriously. "I must say that that old guy is rather down on a galoot who hasn't time for fooling around with Latin and things. Ow!"

"We go into the class to fool around with Latin and things, you know," said Frank Nugent, laughing.

"I guess I've got something more important to put my thinker on. Don't you galoots forget that auction this afternoon," said Fisher T. Fish impressively. "I guess that auction is going with a bang. I'm doing it, you know!"

"We shall be at cricket!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"I guess you'll miss a lot of good chances if you don't turn up in the Rag. You'd better make up your minds to mosey in!" said Fisher T. Fish persuasively.

"Rats!"

"The ratfulness is terrific, my esteemed Fishy!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"If you guys waste your time playing cricket when I'm holding an auction——" began Fish warmly.

"I kinder reckon and guess and calculate we're going to, just a few!" grinned Bob Cherry.

And the Famous Five walked on, leaving Fisher T. Fish, snorting. How any fellow could think of cricket when there was a chance of bagging great bargains passed Fishy's comprehension. That wasn't the way he had been "raised"—as he described it, in the delightful city of "Noo Yark."

He joined Billy Bunter in the passage.

Bunter's fat face wore a doubtful and very serious expression—an expression which had hardly left it during the day.

Bunter had been looking forward to that great sale, under Fishy's hammer, very keenly—till that morning. Now he seemed to be troubled with strange doubts about the matter.

But Fisher T. Fish did not observe it. He was too busy with his own plans to take any note of Bunter's looks.

"I guess we begin early, Bunter," he remarked.

"Eh?"

"What do you say to three o'clock?"

"Oh!"

"As it's a half-holiday, all the fellows can come romping around," said Fish. "And there isn't a match on—only cricket-practice—so most likely those jays will mosey in, after all. We want a crowd."

"D-d-do we?" mumbled Bunter.

"Sure! The more the merrier! I guess I'm going to fix it up with Skinner to make dud bids, to put the jays on their mettle."

"Ah!"

"You don't seem so pesky keen about it, after all, fatty!" exclaimed Fisher

"After I've made out the list, and made all the arrangements, and got walloped by Quelch for working on it in the Form-room, too!" exclaimed Fish, in great exasperation. "Now you want to put it off! Why?"

"I—I——"

"Any reason?"

"Numno! B-b-but——"

"Give it a name!"

"You—you see——"

"Yep! I see, sure!" exclaimed Fish wrathfully. "You reckon you want to dish me out of my twenty per cent. on sales!"

"N-n-no!" stammered Bunter. "But it——"

"I guess that won't wash!" said Fisher T. Fish, pointing a lean forefinger at Bunter denunciatory. "You're a mean clam, Bunter! But you'll have to get up very early in the morning, I guess, to come it over a galoot what was raised in Noo Yark. Yep! That sale is going on, sir! You've asked a business man to take control. I've taken it! I guess I ain't sliding out at this hyer stage of



Crash! The two Bunters rolled on the floor, and Harry Wharton & Co. rushed to separate them. "Ha, ha, ha!" (See Chapter 4.)

T. Fish, observing Bunter's peculiar abstraction at last.

"Oh!"

"I'm going up to the study now to finish making up the list; there will have to be a list of the lots, you know, stuck up in the Rag for the galoots to read!"

"Um!"

"What's the matter with you, you prize jay?" demanded Fishy. "Can't you say anything except 'Ah!' and 'Oh!' and 'Um!'?"

Billy Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles with a very worried look.

"I—I say, Fishy——" he faltered.

"Waal?"

"I—I'm not sure I—I want to sell those goods——"

"What?"

"I—I think we—we'd better put off the auction a bit——"

"Waal, I swow!" exclaimed Fisher T. Fish, astonished and greatly aggrieved. "If that don't put the lid on! Why, you fat jay——"

"Look here——"

"You blithering mugwump——"

"I say——"

the proceedings, sir! Not me! Not Fisher T. Fish! I should smile!"

And with that Fisher T. Fish strode away—evidently to continue making his business arrangements for the auction sale, regardless of Bunter.

Billy Bunter blinked after him.

There was a tap on his elbow, and Peter Todd, his study-mate, looked at him inquiringly. Bunter avoided his eyes.

"Sale coming off to-day?" asked Todd.

"I—I suppose so."

"Look here, Bunter——"

"Oh, give a fellow a rest!" said Bunter irritably. And he rolled out into the quadrangle, leaving Peter Todd shaking his head very seriously.

Although the auction was coming off that afternoon, which was to supply William George Bunter with funds for unlimited tuck, the Owl of the Remove did not seem very happy, or easy in his mind. Which was very curious, to say the least of it, and might have excited the suspicions of Fisher T. Fish himself, if that business-like youth had not been so very enterprising and so very keen on the scent of the dollars.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Dark Doubts!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Wherefore that scowl, my Peter-bird?"

Bob Cherry asked that question as Peter Todd joined the Famous Five in the sunny quadrangle, where they were sauntering before dinner.

The Famous Five looked at peace with themselves and all the world that sunny afternoon—quite a contrast to Peter Todd, who was thoughtful and glum.

"The scowlfulness is terrific, my esteemed Peter," remarked Hurree Singh.

"Oh, draw it mild," remarked Nugent. "Two to one it's a thoughtful frown! Isn't it, Toddy?"

But Peter Todd did not smile.

"I want to consult with you fellows!" he announced.

"Go ahead!" said Harry Wharton. "When in doubt, always come to the old firm!"

"I'm afraid it's a serious matter," said Todd. "Bunter, you know."

"Oh, Bunter!" remarked Johnny Bull, with an expressive grunt.

"You know what a thumping ass Bunter is!" said Peter.

"We do—we does!"

"Terrific, as Inky would remark," said Bob Cherry. "The thumpfulness of the esteemed ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But what's the matter with Bunter now?" asked Harry Wharton.

The Famous Five had stopped and gathered round Peter Todd. Peter's brows were still knitted, and it was plain that he was troubled in mind.

"You fellows know how the matter stands," said Peter. "Bunter's come into possession of a lot of silver goods—"

"Real?" asked Bob.

"Real enough. I've seen them. Solid silver stuff, most of it. It's worth a lot of money."

"Bunter says hundreds of pounds!" remarked Harry Wharton, with a smile.

"And he's right!" said Peter. "The silver goods he's got in that box up in the box-room must be worth some hundreds!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The Famous Five stared.

"And he's holding an auction this afternoon in the Rag to sell them off," continued Peter. "Now, is it possible that Bunter could have come by that stuff honestly?"

"I should say—not!"

"He spun a yarn first about his father going in for gold plate, and giving him the family silver plate."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"When the crass ass found that that was too thin, he told a tale of a pawnbroker relation who had a lot of unredeemed pledges to sell."

"Much more likely," commented Nugent.

"Yes; but it's not likely that his pawnbroker relation would send the stuff here for a kid to sell at school."

"No fear!"

"Goodness only knows what a Bunter might do!" remarked Bob Cherry. "But that certainly doesn't seem probable. But the stuff did come here in a box addressed to Bunter, Toddy. We saw it arrive."

Peter nodded.

"Yes; that's what beats me hollow!" he admitted. "If the box didn't come from Bunter's people, where did it come from?"

"Give it up!"

"If it was cheap plated stuff I could suppose that some relation of Bunter's

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 590

had a wheeze of selling it among school-boys. But it isn't! It's all good stuff, so far as I can judge, anyway. It's marked with a crest, nearly all of it. Bunter says it's the Bunter crest. He's never sported anything here before with a crest on it."

"Blessed if I can make it out at all!" said Harry Wharton, shaking his head. "I know I don't intend to touch any of the stuff if it's going at ever so big a bargain. What does Fishy think? He's sharp."

Peter gave a snort.

"He's sharp in his way, but he's only thinking of his commission on the sale, and he's taken Bunter's yarn in whole. But—but—Blessed if I know what to make of it! I don't see where Bunter could have got the stuff from, unless it was from his people, as he says. And yet that sounds too steep for anything. And—" Peter paused.

"Well?" said Harry. He could see that there was something at the back of Peter's mind.

"You remember the other day Bunter was chased by some Highcliffe fellows, and he hid himself in the cottage off the Courtfield road to get away from Ponsonby—"

"And they left him stranded in the cellar!" grinned Bob Cherry. "He stayed there till he was found by the prefects! Poor old Bunter!"

"That's so. Well, you may remember that when he got back he began lying about where he'd been, trying to keep it dark?"

"He's always lying!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Ye-e-es. But why should he lie about that?" said Peter, wrinkling his brows in thought. "The next day he went out quietly, and he came back looking dusty and dirty."

"Did he?"

"And he was asking my advice, too—legal advice," said Peter. "He asked me whether a chap could keep a million pounds, or a gold watch, if he found them—whether findings were keepings, you know."

Wharton looked startled.

"Phew!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Taken altogether," continued Peter, "it looks to me as if Bunter must have found this silver stuff somewhere—perhaps in the cellar under the old cottage—and bagged it. If it was there, it must have been hidden there by a thief for safety. It was a safe place enough. Bunter rolled into it quite by accident. Do you think it's possible?"

Harry Wharton & Co. were grave enough now.

"Of course it's possible," said Harry. "Anybody heard of a burglary in this neighbourhood lately?"

There was a general shaking of heads.

"That doesn't amount to much," said Peter. "We naturally don't get much news of that sort. There might be a dozen burglaries without our being any the wiser."

"That's true enough!"

"Bunter's such a howling ass that he might think he was entitled to keep anything he found!" said Peter Todd. "But keeping a burglar's plunder is something like becoming accessory after the fact, and lands a chap in choky! Bunter wouldn't think of that. I don't know what to think about the matter; but I'm alarmed for the silly duffer. What do you fellows think?"

"I think we'd better question Bunter pretty severely!" said Harry Wharton. "If he's getting mixed up in something illegal, he's got to be saved from his own fatheadedness."

"I've asked him questions, and he's shuffled and told lies!" growled Peter.

"My esteemed chums—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Inky's got an idea."

The dusky nabob nodded.

"I have been thoughtfully reflecting while Peter has been wagging his esteemed chin!" he remarked. "I have a wheezy, good idea."

"Get it off your chest, then, and buck up!" suggested Peter. "You're too long-winded, Inky!"

"My excellent and ridiculous Peter, I was—"

"Cut it short!"

"Dinner bell in a minute!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"The shortfulness shall be terrific, my worthy chums! I was about to make a suggestive remark—"

"Oh!"

"That Bunter has an esteemed and disgusting brother in the Second Form."

"We all know that!" grunted Peter.

"You have not allowed me to finish—fully conclude my remarkable suggestion," said the nabob mildly. "My wheezy idea is that Sammy Bunter should be aware whether the silvery property has been sent to his esteemed major from home. He will know whether there are any estimable pawnbrokers in the family."

"Good old Inky!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Good egg!"

"Good!" said Harry Wharton.

Peter Todd brightened.

"Something in that!" he assented.

"We'll have both the blessed Bunters up to the study after dinner," said Harry Wharton. "We'll make them tell the truth. Hallo! There goes the bell!"

And the chums of the Remove proceeded towards the School House for dinner, Peter Todd looking much less worried. He felt his task easier now—his self-imposed and extremely difficult task of extracting the truth from William George Bunter!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Committee of Inquiry!

BILLY BUNTER wore a very thoughtful expression at dinner.

For once, however, his thoughts were not wholly fixed upon the meal before him, and the number of helpings he could secure.

Other thoughts were also in the fat mind of the Owl of the Remove, though they did not detract from his gastronomic powers, which were as remarkable as usual.

Certainly he did not look like a fellow who was expecting to roll in unlimited wealth that very afternoon. Some secret doubt and trouble was weighing upon Bunter's mind.

When he came out of the dining-room after dinner he made a movement towards Fisher T. Fish, who was starting for the Rag, to get that apartment ready for the function of the afternoon. But the Famous Five and Peter Todd closed round him. Bunter blinked at them in some alarm.

"I say, you fellows—" he began.

"We want you to come up to the study," said Harry Wharton.

Bunter grunted.

"I don't want to come!"

"You'd rather be rolled up the stairs?" asked Bob Cherry. "All serene! I'll take his ears, and you can take his hoofs, Johnny!"

"I—I say, you fellows, I'll come if you like," said Bunter hastily. "In—in fact, I'd like to!"

"Come on, then!" said Peter Todd.

Billy Bunter mounted the staircase with the Famous Five, Peter remaining below. Bunter blinked over the banisters, and started as he saw that Peter was

capturing his minor—Sammy of the Second. Toddy followed the rest of the party up the stairs with Sammy in tow.

"I say, you fellows——"

"This way, fatty."

Billy Bunter rolled unwillingly into Study No. 1. The Famous Five followed him in. Bunter blinked at them very uneasily. He never knew which of his sins was about to find him out.

"If you fellows are going to make a fuss about the toffee——" he began.

"So it was you who had the toffee?" exclaimed Nugent.

"Certainly not!" said Bunter promptly. "I never knew you had any, and I certainly did not take it out of the table drawer. I never knew it was there. Besides, it was only a sixpenny packet—not much to make a fuss about, that I can see."

Before the juniors could make any reply to that, Peter Todd came in with Sammy Bunter.

The two Bunters blinked at one another.

Billy was alarmed and uneasy, and Sammy was evidently very curious.

"Where is it?" he asked.

"Eh? Where's what?"

"Todd said there was some toffee here."

Peter Todd took a packet of toffee from his pocket.

"There you are, fatty," he said.

"You could have given me this downstairs."

"I wanted you here."

"Well, I'll stay till I've finished the toffee," said the fat fag, losing no time in beginning on it.

"You'll stay till we're finished with you, my fat pippin," answered Peter Todd, closing the door. "We're going to ask you some questions. Nothing to be afraid of."

"Oh, I'm not afraid!" said Sammy Bunter cheerfully. "If you begin any ragging, I'll yell for Loder. He would be glad of a chance at you."

"Dry up!" snapped Peter. "Now, you question him, Wharton, as head of the Form. Answer Wharton, Sammy."

"How can I answer him if I dry up?" queried Sammy Bunter, with his mouth full of toffee.

"There's a cricket-stump in this study for fags who are too funny," said Bob Cherry darkly.

"Rats!"

"Why, you cheeky, fat bounder——"

"Oh, come off!" said Sammy. "Get on with the washing. This toffee won't last me long, and I'm jolly well going when it's finished, I can tell you!"

Bob Cherry restrained his wrath, but he picked up a cricket-stump, as a visible warning to the Second-Former to mind his p's and q's.

"Now, Sammy, answer me," said the captain of the Remove. "I dare say you've heard that your major's holding an auction this afternoon."

Sammy chuckled. Evidently he had heard.

"He's got a lot of silver goods to sell—tankards and goblets and things, good silver stuff," said Harry.

"Gammon!"

"What?"

"As you've stood me this toffee, I'll give you a tip," said the fat fag. "Don't you buy any of Billy's rubbish. Some plated muck, worth nothing at all. He's taking you in."

"You cheeky young rotter——" began William George, in wrath.

"Bow-wow!" retorted Sammy.

"I've seen the stuff, Sammy," said Peter Todd quietly. "It's valuable silver-ware, and must be worth hundreds of pounds."

Sammy's eyes opened wide behind his glasses.

"Honest Injun?" he asked.

"Yes."

"My only aunt! Whom have you been burgling, Billy?"

"Why, I—I—I'll——" spluttered Bunter, and he made a rush towards Sammy. Bob Cherry caught him by the collar and jerked him back.

"Bunter says he had the stuff from home," said Peter. "He said first that your father was disposing of his silver plate, as he was going in for gold plate——"

"He, he, he!"

"Then he spun a yarn about a pawnbroker relation and unredeemed pledges. Have you any pawnbroker relations?"

"Of course not!" growled Sammy.

"Then where do you think Bunter got the stuff from?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Blessed if I know, unless he pinched it somewhere. He would if he had the chance—I know that," answered Sammy, with brotherly candour.

"Lemme gerrat him!" roared Billy Bunter.

"Any more toffee?" asked Sammy.

"No."

"Then I'm going."

"Hold on a bit. We want to know whether you can explain about Bunter getting this box of silver goods."

"Not a bit! 'Tain't his, of course," said Sammy cheerfully. "The only question is, where he pinched it. Here, I say, keep him off!"

Billy Bunter had suddenly jerked himself loose from Bob Cherry's hold. He rushed at his minor, his fat face aflame with wrath.

"Yaroooh!" roared Sammy.

Thump, thump!

"Yooop! Help! Oh!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Hold him!"

"Yarooooh!"

Crash!

The two Bunters rolled on the floor.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co. rushed to separate them. Hands were laid on Billy and Sammy, and they were wrenched apart.

"Yow-ow-ow!" howled Sammy.

"Beast! Yooop! I say, Billy stole those things—it's as plain as anything! Yow-ow! He's burgled somebody! Grooogh! He ought to be locked up! Ow! Wow!"

And Sammy tore open the study door and fled.

"Lemme gerrat him!" roared Bunter.

But several pairs of hands were grasping the Owl of the Remove, and he was held back from pursuit. With a final howl of defiance Sammy Bunter disappeared. Peter Todd closed the door again, with Billy Bunter still inside the study.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Taken in Hand!

"NOW, you fat bounder——"

"Grooogh!"

"Bunter——"

"Ow!" gasped Bunter, struggling for breath. "Look here, you rotters, you lemme go out of this study!"

"Not just yet," said Harry Wharton. "We've got to inquire into this for your own good, Bunter."

"Oh, rats!"

"Don't you understand that the matter's serious?" exclaimed Frank Nugent. "If those things are not yours——"

"They are mine."

"Did you find them?" demanded Peter Todd.

"Find out!"

"If you've got a pawnbroker relation Sammy would know about it, and he says there isn't one."

"Sammy isn't truthful," said Billy Bunter, shaking his head. "I'm sorry to say it, but you can't rely on Sammy's word."

"Oh, my hat! What about yours?" gasped Peter.

"If you doubt my word, Peter Todd——" began Bunter, with a great deal of dignity.

"Cheese it! Do you still stick to the yarn that those silver goods are unredeemed pledges from a pawnbroker relation?"

"Certainly!"

"You didn't find them hidden, for instance——"

"Nunno."

"In the cellar of the old cottage you hid in the other day?"

Bunter jumped.

"N-n-no, certainly not!" he stammered. "Nothing of the sort! As for a burglary, I've never heard of one. If you fellows think I heard Wingate and Gwynne talking about a burglary you're mistaken."

"Oh!" ejaculated Wharton. "Then there has been a burglary somewhere?"

"Not that I know of."

"But you heard Wingate and Gwynne talking about one."

"I didn't. I've just said I didn't."

"Blessed if that chap oughtn't to be in a lunatic asylum!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull——"

"Bunter——"

"I really don't know what you fellows are jawing me like this for," said Bunter, in an injured tone. "I've done no harm. In fact, it's my intention to treat you well. I'm going to stand a big feed after the auction."

"But you can't sell things that don't belong to you!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Suppose they were stolen——"

"They weren't."

"How do you know they weren't?"

"Well, if they were, I shouldn't have any right to keep them, should I?" said Bunter sagaciously. "So—so they weren't, of course."

"Oh, great Scott!"

The juniors fairly blinked at the Owl of the Remove, quite astounded by this specimen of his logic.

"Then you did find them?" exclaimed Peter.

"Oh, no!"

"Then where did you get them?"

"Unredeemed pledges. My uncle's a pawnbroker——"

"Bosh!"

"Can't you see that that chicken won't fight, you thumping ass?" exclaimed Bob Cherry impatiently.

"Oh, really, you know, when I'm telling you the exact truth!" said Bunter, in a tone more of sorrow than of anger. "Some fellows won't admit that they had an uncle a pawnbroker, but I ain't snobbish. I tell you out quite plain, don't I?"

"Which shows it isn't true."

"Oh really, Nugent——"

Bunter rolled towards the door. The chums of the Remove looked at one another and then at Bunter. There seemed nothing more to be got out of the Owl of the Remove; but their doubts and suspicions were far from dissipated. They were strengthened.

There seemed little doubt now that Bunter had not come honestly by that store of silver-ware, which Fisher T. Fish was already arranging to sell for him, though he was too obtuse to acknowledge or even to realise it.

"Besides," said Bunter, as an after-

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 590.

thought, "I've asked Fishy to postpone the sale, after what I heard—"

"What did you hear?"

"Oh, nothing! I've asked Fishy to postpone the sale, and he won't! So he takes the responsibility, doesn't he? If Fishy chooses to sell the things after I've asked him not to, that's his look-out. See?"

"Oh, my hat!"

Billy Bunter opened the door and rolled out of the study.

"Well," said Harry Wharton, with a deep breath, "Bunter takes the cake and no mistake! He's really not safe outside a home for idiots."

"How on earth did he bag that plunder?" murmured Nugent. "Of course, it's not his."

"That's plain enough," said Bob.

"The plainfulness is terrific."

Peter Todd set his lips.

"I think I must have hit on it. He found it hidden somewhere—most likely in the old cottage," he said. "If that's the case, I should think there'll be some proof of it there—perhaps some of the stuff Bunter hasn't found, if a burglar has made it a hiding-place. I'll bike off to the cottage and see. And you, Wharton—"

"Well?"

"Suppose you take a spin as far as the police-station and ask them whether there's been a burglary in the neighbourhood lately. You can ask them that without telling them anything."

Wharton nodded.

"I'll do that," he said. "But Fishy's going ahead with his blessed auction—"

"Well, we can't stop that. It all looks jolly suspicious. But we've got no proof, so far, that there's anything wrong. The stuff, whose ever it is, is safe in the school, at any rate. Let's get off!"

And the chums of the Remove left the study. Peter Todd started for the cottage on the Courtfield road with rapid strides; and Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent wheeled out their bicycles for the spin down to Friardale. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull looked into Fishy's study to see how he was getting on before joining the other fellows at cricket practice.

Fishy was very busy.

He had pinned together a number of sheets of impot paper to make a large poster, and he was daubing a big announcement upon it with a brush and ink. His bony fingers were inky, too, and there was a splash of ink on his nose. He looked round sharply as the two juniors appeared in the doorway.

"Git!" he said laconically. "Busy!"

"When is the auction coming off?" grinned Bob.

"Three sharp."

"Hadn't you better put it off a bit—"

"Cut that out!" said Fisher T. Fish derisively. "I reckon that fat guy Bunter has put you up to that! He wants to postpone the auction to diddle me out of my commish. No, sirree! I ain't taking any—not this child, sir!"

"Do you know where Bunter got the goods?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Pawnbroker—uncle—unredeemed pledges."

"That's gammon. Bunter's taken you in."

Fisher T. Fish ceased his operations on the poster, turned upon Johnny Bull, and surveyed him with sovereign disdain.

"Taken me in!" he repeated.

"Yes."

"Do I look like a galoot that could be taken in?" demanded Fisher T. Fish. "Do you see any green in my optic? Are there any hayseeds growin' out of my hair? No, sirree! A galoot would have

to get up very early in the morning to take in a guy that was raised in Noo Yark! Git, do! You make me tired!"

"But—"

"Oh, git!"

Evidently there was no impression to be made upon Fisher T. Fish, who was so sharp that he could not see even when his Transatlantic leg was being pulled. So the juniors "got."

They went down to Little Side, leaving Fisher T. Fish to work.

Fishy gave a contemptuous snort as they went.

"Take me in!" he repeated. "Me, Fisher Tarleton Fish! I like that! I guess I do like it, some. Waal, search me! Poooff!"

And, with a sniff, Fishy dismissed the matter from his mind, and went on with his poster.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Painful for Peter!

"NICE-LOOKING merchant!" murmured Peter Todd.

Peter had reached the old cottage off the Courtfield road. The little building lay fifty yards back from the road, in what had once been a garden. An exploding bomb in the days of the air-raids had reduced it to its present state, and the shaky remains of the little building were none too safe to explore.

As Peter turned off the road, and crossed the grass towards the cottage, a face looked out for a moment from a thicket near at hand.

It was not a pleasant face.

It was that of a man of about fifty, with a square, bulldog jaw, stubbly and bristling, and a thick nose of the pug variety. Two sharp, deep-set eyes glinted at Peter for a moment, and then disappeared with the face.

Peter Todd paused for a moment, but the man had vanished behind the thicket, and did not reappear.

"Blessed if I should like to meet that cheery merchant here on a dark night!" murmured Peter, as he continued on his way to the cottage.

He concluded that the square-jawed man was a rather unpleasant tramp, who had been resting in the thicket when he was disturbed by footsteps approaching. Without giving him much thought, the junior went into the cottage.

He easily found the cellar-flap, and raised it. Below the trapdoor was a small cellar—a gloomy and somewhat smelly place, where, a few days before, Billy Bunter had taken refuge from the Highcliffe ragers.

Peter Todd was a lawyer's son, and he prided himself on his power of sifting evidence. And there was a good deal of evidence in favour of his theory concerning Bunter's treasure. Bunter had been shut up in the cellar, and had lied and shuffled on his return to Greyfriars to keep it secret, for no reason that could be adduced. He must have had some reason, however, Peter sagely opined. The following day he had gone out by himself, and returned tired and dusty. And, after all, the box of silver goods had arrived for him, with a label addressed in his own handwriting!

And his various accounts of how the silver-ware had come into his possession did not tally with one another, and all were improbable. Peter felt that he was not far wrong in tracing the whole affair back to Bunter's adventure in the cellar.

If that was the truth, he hoped to find some proof of it, in some sign that the silver goods had been hidden there—perhaps in some more plunder overlooked by the Owl of the Remove. Once

assured, beyond doubt, that Bunter had found the silver-ware, Peter knew what to do. He intended to make the fat Owl take it to the headmaster at once. But he could not take that step without proof positive.

He dropped lightly into the cellar. Billy Bunter had been a prisoner there, unable to climb out, but there was no difficulty for the lanky Peter.

There was a glimmering half-light in the cellar from the trap above, and Peter looked round him with keen, searching eyes.

He found a good many fragments of lumber in the cellar—broken pieces of the wreckage from above. Among the fragments was an empty sack.

Peter picked it up and examined it.

The sack was a little damp, but not nearly so damp as everything else in that earthy recess. It had evidently not been there many days.

The junior's eyes glinted.

This was a step towards proof, at any rate. The sack had been brought there for some reason—evidently containing something. Had it contained the silver Bunter had "found"?

Peter was about to extend his search, when the glimmering square of the trap above was suddenly darkened.

He started, and looked up.

A head and shoulders were framed in the opening—the head and shoulders of the square-jawed man who had glanced at him from the thicket on his arrival. There was a glint in the man's sharp eyes that Peter did not like.

But he was not alarmed. He supposed that the tramp had followed him into the cottage from curiosity.

But the man's first words undeceived him on that point.

"So you've come back!" he said.

"Come back!" repeated the junior.

"Yes. I thought you might."

Peter stared at him.

"I don't quite understand," he said. The square-jawed gentleman grinned in a surly, threatening way.

"I fancy I'll make you understand, my fine young gentleman!" he answered. "You've come back for more, as I reckoned you might. You young thief!"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Peter Todd, in amazement and anger. "How dare you call me a thief!"

"What are you, then?" sneered the man above. "If you wasn't a thief, you'd have taken the stuff to the perlice. But you ain't done it."

"The—the stuff!" stuttered Peter.

"Course, you don't understand!" said the ruffian sarcastically. "You wait till I come down to you, me lad. I'll make you understand. You've took it and kep' it, and you're a young thief. I'd 'ave 'eard of it if it had been taken back to Sir Hilton Popper."

"Sir Hilton Popper!" repeated the Greyfriars junior dazedly.

"Or the perlice. You haven't given it up—you've kep' it. And now you've come back to see if there's more. You reckoned it was safe to come back in the daytime—wot? Bless your 'eart, I've been a-watching the place every minute since I missed it last night."

Peter stared at him aghast.

He was beginning to understand now.

There was no further doubt as to how Bunter had come by the silver—Peter Todd had discovered more than he had bargained for. The stolen silver had been hidden in the cellar, and Bunter had found it by chance, and taken a cunning means of conveying it home. And the bulldog-jawed man had missed his plunder, and was watching the place for the possible return of the pilferer! That the discovered goods had not been given up to the owner or the authorities

he of course knew—it would have appeared in the papers.

Peter Todd breathed hard and fast.

He knew now that he was in the presence of the thief who had hidden the plunder in that secluded recess, and he realised that he was in a very tight corner!

The man was watching him from above with savage, surly eyes. Evidently he believed he was speaking to a thief as dishonest as himself—one who had found the stolen goods and kept them!

"You—you're making a mistake," said Peter Todd at last. "I—I haven't been here before."

A scoffing laugh was the answer to that.

"I've never set foot here before," said the junior.

"You're a liar, as well as a thief, then!" said the ruffian. "What 'ave you come for now, if you ain't been 'ere before? What are you looking for?"

Peter was silent.

The ruffian laughed again savagely.

"Do you think you can bamboozle me?" he demanded contemptuously.

"I've been on another lay, and I come back last night to get the stuff away, and—"

"What stuff?"

"You know well enough—the silver you've bagged," said the ruffian fiercely. "I found the sack empty, and the silver gone. If I'd found you 'ere then, my fine young feller, I reckon I should 'ave laid you out!" His eyes glittered down at the dismayed junior. "But I says to myself, says I, 'tain't the perlice that 'ave bagged it, and it ain't been took to them, or I'd 'ave 'eard about that. It's some thief, says I, that has bagged it from me. And I was right—wot?"

The junior did not speak.

"Then I figured it out," went on the bulldog gentleman, in the same savage, sneering tone. "Seeing it wasn't the perlice, it was safe enough for me to 'ang round and watch the place. I thinks to myself, the thief'll come back, like as not, in daytime, when he reckons it's safe, to see if there's anything more to be had. I'll give him a chance, anyhow, I thinks, and I reckons I'll 'ang round for a day or two and keep my peepers open. And so you walks into my 'ands like this 'ere, my fine young feller!"

And he laughed again, a laugh that was grim and menacing.

Peter Todd breathed hard. The conclusion the man had come to was natural enough—that it was Peter who had abstracted the silver hoard. He had been watching for the possible return of the pilferer—and he had seen Peter Todd enter the cottage and begin searching the cellar. That was enough for him.

And the bulky ruffian was between Peter Todd and safety!

"Right into my 'ands!" he repeated.

"And now, young feller-me-had, I ain't going to take you to the perlice for stealing—p'r'aps I might 'ave some trouble in provin' it was my property. But I didn't crack safes for your benefit, my boy. It ain't too safe for me to 'ang about 'ere, and I'll be obliged to you to 'and over my goods—sharp!"

"I—I've got nothing—"

"You ain't got it in your pockets, I know that," assented the ruffian. "But you've got it somewhere!"

"I—I—"

"I want to know jest where it is, and 'ow I can lay my 'ands on it," went on the ruffian. "That's the game! And if I don't get it back, I warn you that you're as good as stiff!"

Peter gasped.

"I haven't touched the stuff—"

"Ring off those lies! Where is it?"

"It was another fellow!" gasped Peter.

"I—I was simply coming here to—to look—"

The ruffian eyed him suspiciously.

"Another bloke 'and-in-glove with you—wot?" he demanded.

"N-n-no! I—I—"

"Where's the stuff?"

"It—it's at Greyfriars—my school!" gasped Peter.

"Hidden away there?"

"N-n-no! All the fellows know—"

"I reckon you'd better spin me the truth, young man!" growled the ruffian.

"I'm arter that stuff, which is mine; and I wouldn't make no more bones about wringing your neck than a chicken's! Where have you hid it? Don't tell me you'd dare to take it to your school and let fellers see it—you wouldn't! That's too thick! You don't look such a fool as that!"

"It—it wasn't I—"

"I reckon that you've hid it—buried it, p'r'aps—somewhere close at 'and, to take it away a bit at a time and sell the things!" said the ruffian. "That's 'ow I work it out. You ain't taken it indoors nowhere! You wouldn't be

"I kinder guess that's O.K.!" he remarked.

There was a chuckle from some of the juniors who had gathered round.

Skinner had helped Fisher T. Fish to convey the "goods" to the auction-room, and had agreed to lend his aid in the sale. His aid was to consist in "dud" bids, to encourage the other bidders—it being understood that nothing was to be knocked down to him. Skinner was so obliging for a consideration of cash, to be paid after the sale.

Harry Wharton & Co. did not intend to turn up at the amateur auction, and Vernon-Smith and Squiff and some more of the leading spirits of the Remove were following their example. But a good many fellows were drawn there by curiosity—and a few to snatch bargains. Truth to tell, most of the fellows—though not so excessively sharp as Fishy—were very dubious about Bunter's right to sell such valuable property. Others took the view that it was imitation goods, which the fat junior wanted to palm off as real silver on his inexperienced schoolfellows.



The Famous Five walked out of the Rag, and the crowd dispersed after them. The stack of unsold goods remained—and Billy Bunter and the auctioneer, pommelling one another furiously on the floor! (See Chapter 10.)

such a fool as to show it, meanin' to stick to it. Where have you put it away? That's what I want to know!"

"I tell you—"

"The same yarn again?" sneered the ruffian.

"Yes, I—"

"That's enough! I'm coming down to yer!"

Peter Todd's heart almost ceased to beat as the ruffian grasped the sides of the opening and swung himself through. With a crash and a grunt he dropped to the floor of the cellar, and his powerful grasp closed upon the Greyfriars junior.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Auction!

"SALE now on!"

That announcement, in big, daubed letters on a home-made poster, was presented to the public eye on the door of the Rag.

Fisher T. Fish, having tacked his poster up, stepped back and surveyed it with satisfied eyes.

Fisher T. Fish glanced with satisfaction at the gathering crowd of fellows, who smiled at the notice that the "sale" was "now on." He was not yet aware that most of them had come from curiosity or idleness, and did not intend to touch his goods, how cheap soever they might prove to be.

Fishy flung wide open the door of the Rag.

"Hop in, gentlemen, galoots, and pilgrims," he said. "I reckon this hyer is the chance of a lifetime for a galoot with his eyes skinned. Real silver goods of—"

"Made in Germany!" remarked Sidney James Snoop.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, sir!" exclaimed Fisher T. Fish indignantly. "First-class quality—all wool and a yard wide—every picture tells a story—made in—in—"

"Brummagem?" asked Monty Newland.

"Gentlemen, I guess it doesn't matter where the goods were made so long as

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 590.

you're in line to rake in a bargain every time," said Fisher T. Fish. "These goods were handed to me by Bunter to sell on his behalf, for a small commish, and—"

"Twenty per cent.!" said Bolsover major, with a grin.

"The labourer's worthy of his hire, I guess," said Fisher T. Fish, with dignity. "I'm the only business man at Greyfriars—"

"Good thing for Greyfriars!" observed Ogilvy.

"Gents, the sale is now on!" said Fish. And he walked into the Rag.

A dozen juniors followed him in—and they were followed by others. Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Fourth came along, and some of the fags of the Third and Second swelled the crowd.

Billy Bunter was in the Rag, not looking quite happy.

Ever since he had heard Wingate and Gwynne of the Sixth make an allusion to a burglary at Popper Court Bunter had been uneasy.

He had tried to persuade himself that a burglary at Popper Court had nothing—nothing whatever—to do with a sack of silver-ware that he had discovered hidden under the old cottage.

Bunter had wonderful powers of self-suasion, and he generally succeeded in believing what he wanted to believe. But there was a limit. On this occasion he could not quite succeed.

He was determined to be convinced, because he wanted the proceeds of the sale to expend in tuck; but a secret feeling of doubt and uneasiness haunted him all the time.

For Bunter was not dishonest. He only had a wonderful way of thinking that whatever he wanted to do was honest.

Fisher T. Fish clapped him on the shoulder cheerily. He understood nothing of Bunter's doubts and fears. He accepted fully the story of the pawnbroker uncle and the unredeemed pledges. And—with all his wisdom—he knew little of the value of silver goods, and was not aware of the very large sum that Bunter's treasure represented.

"Just going to begin, Bunt," he said.

Billy Bunter blinked at him dubiously.

"I—I say, Fishy—"

"Waal?" exclaimed Fisher T. Fish impatiently.

"I—I think the sale had better be put off—"

"Beginning to sing that song again, are you?" exclaimed Fishy. "Do you think I've fixed it up to put it off? Go and chop chips!"

"Well, look here, Fishy, I've advised you not to sell the things to-day, haven't I—"

"Yep! Now ring off!"

"All right. If the sale goes on, it's on your responsibility!"

"Correct. As I'm auctioneer, I'm responsible for this hyer sale, I guess!" answered Fisher T. Fish. "Don't you worry. I'll see you through!"

Bunter brightened up.

According to his obtuse ideas, the responsibility was on Fisher T. Fish now, and if there was anything wrong, that was Fishy's look-out. Fishy had plainly stated that he took the responsibility, as Bunter would be prepared to swear if there was trouble. And the fat junior could not quite rid his mind of the fear that there might be trouble.

"You stand there to hand up the goods," said Fishy briskly. "Make yourself useful, you know, as you're not bidding."

"I—I'd rather not have a hand—"

"Make yourself useful, or thundered if

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 590.

"I hand you a cent out of the takings!" exclaimed Fisher T. Fish.

"Oh, really, Fishy—"

"I mean it, you lazy guy!"

"I—I—I'll help, of course, Fishy. I—I want to, you know!"

"You'd better!" growled Fishy.

He mounted upon a chair, by way of a rostrum, and rapped on the table with a mallet.

Rap, rap!

"Gentlemen, walk up, gentlemen! The sale commences now. Gentlemen, this is Lot 1. Handsome silver goblet, chased, with crest! What offers, gentlemen? Don't all speak at once! Gentlemen, you don't often have a chance to clinch a bargain like this! No reserve. Everything above-board. No deception, gentlemen! What offers for this very handsome silver goblet?"

The auction was "on."

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Stolen Goods!

THE police force of Friardale was sunning itself on the steps of the little police-station in the village High Street as Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent came pedalling along.

The police force seemed rather sleepy that sunny spring afternoon. There was only one of it—Mr. Tozer.

Police-constable Tozer glanced down the steps at the two Greyfriars juniors as they slowed down, and frowned a little.

Read

"RIDING TO WIN!"

A Wonderful Complete Story of TOM MERRY & CO. at St. Jim's,

By MARTIN CLIFFORD,

in

"THE GEM."

Out This Wednesday.



There had been occasional rubs between the chums of the Remove and the police force in the village. In winter weather it had not been unknown for the police force to have its helmet knocked off by a snowball. Such outrages on the majesty of the law naturally prejudiced Mr. Tozer against merry youths who did not know what respect was due to the great institution he represented. Mr. Tozer stood for law and order, State and strong-box, so to speak, in the village of Friardale, and knocking his helmet off was, in his eyes, little short of Bolshevism.

So he frowned, instead of returning the friendly smiles which the chums of the Remove bestowed upon him.

Undeterred by the majestic frown of the police force, Wharton and Nugent came up the steps.

"Inspector in, Mr. Tozer?" asked Wharton.

"Which he isn't," answered Mr. Tozer. "He's at Redelyffe to-day."

And he stared past Wharton with a determined stare, as a hint to the young gentleman to travel on his way.

But the captain of the Remove was there for information.

"I suppose you're rather busy, Mr. Tozer?" he remarked pleasantly.

Unfortunately, Mr. Tozer took that remark for sarcasm. He didn't look very busy, it was true.

He snorted.

The official snort of law and order ought to have driven the juniors, abashed, back to their bicycles. But it didn't.

"Have you caught the burglar, Mr. Tozer?" inquired Nugent, coming to his chum's rescue.

Nugent thought this rather masterly. Instead of asking Mr. Tozer whether there had been a burglary, he asked him whether he had caught the burglar—as if he knew all about it.

Snort!

"Not landed him yet?" asked Wharton, taking his cue from his chum.

"No!" snapped Mr. Tozer. "I ain't! It ain't on my beat!"

Wharton and Nugent exchanged a rather startled glance. They had learned what they had come to learn. Mr. Tozer's reply left no doubt that there had been a burglary—somewhere.

"Oh!" said Harry. "We really hadn't heard there was a burglary at all, Mr. Tozer. You see—"

Sniff!

"Young gents at public schools don't hear everything," remarked Mr. Tozer, in a satirical vein—"not heverything! There's some things that ain't knowed even at Greyfriars! Ho yes!"

"Yes, rather!" assented Wharton, trying the soft answer that is said to turn away wrath. "Lots of things, Mr. Tozer!"

"Burglary isn't in the curriculum," remarked Nugent.

Snort!

Mr. Tozer didn't know what a curriculum was, and his snort was intended to express contempt for it, whatever it was.

"So there has been a burglary, Mr. Tozer?" said Harry. "In this neighbourhood?"

"Sir Hilton Popper's ouse is in this neighbourhood, I believe," answered Mr. Tozer.

"At Popper Court?" exclaimed Nugent.

"Oh, my hat! When was it, Mr. Tozer?"

"Don't you read the papers, Master Nugent?"

"Well, we don't read that sort of news," said Harry, with a smile. "It's not in our line, you know. I wish you'd tell us about it, Mr. Tozer. When did the burglary take place?"

"Week ago," said Mr. Tozer. "Last Saturday."



A burly figure came in sight in the fields, from the direction of the common. Hidden in the tree, Nugent watched him.
(See Chapter 11.)

"Did they get away with anything?"
"Did they!" snorted Mr. Tozer, apparently implying that they did.

Wharton drew a deep breath.

"Any silver?" he asked.

"Ain't you seen the list in the paper?"
grunted Mr. Tozer. "All Sir Hilton's silver was took—'undreds of pounds' worth."

"Goblets and things?" asked Nugent.

"Goblets and tankards and knives and forks and spoons, and the 'ole biling!" answered Mr. Tozer. "Whoever he was, he knowed his game, that cracksman did. P'r'aps Inspector Grimes at Courtfield will ketch him. P'r'aps he won't! P'r'aps!"

Wharton and Nugent exchanged another look. They were discovering a good deal more than they had expected. True, it was a discovery they might have made from the newspaper reports any time during the past week, if their taste in literature had lain in that direction, which it did not!

"And the burglar—hasn't he been caught yet?" said Harry.

"He ain't."

"Nor the loot found?"

"No."

"Phew!"

"P'r'aps you young gents may 'ave seen somebody with a big collection of silver pots and things 'anging about?" suggested Mr. Tozer, with gentle sarcasm. "P'r'aps somebody with a silver ladle a-sticking out of his trousis-pocket? If so, the perlice is always glad of information."

The sarcastic Mr. Tozer little dreamed of the information the juniors could have given him!

"Well, suppose—suppose we saw a chap with the loot," said Wharton. "Is there any mark on it—a crest, for instance?"

"There's Sir Hilton's crest on the 'ole biling, of course," answered Mr. Tozer. "Sorter glove and a Latin motter."

"A gauntlet?" said Nugent.

"I dessay you'd call it a gauntlet, being a public school young gentleman. I calls it a glove!" answered Mr. Tozer stolidly. "I calls a spade a spade, likewise a glove a glove!"

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Tozer!"

The chums of the Remove went down the steps. Mr. Tozer called after them, still in a vein of gentle satire:

"Don't forget, sirs, this 'ere is the shop to come to if you fall in with that cove with silver pots in his trousis-pocket!"

"We won't forget," said Harry.

The juniors mounted their machines, and pedalled out of the village. They did not speak till they were in the lane.

"Well," said Wharton, breaking the silence, "that puts the lid on! Bunter's found the silver that was burgled at Popper Court a week ago. It's Sir Hilton Popper's crest on the things."

"And the fat villain told us it was the Bunter crest!"

"The Bunter crest would be a pork-pie or a jam-tart, I should think. Franky, old man, it's stolen property that fat idiot has at the school, and he and the

other idiot may be selling it at this blessed moment! It's enough to send them both to prison. What on earth are we going to do?"

Nugent whistled.

"Strictly speaking, we ought to have told Tozer what we know," said Harry. "But—but that fat fool doesn't know what he's done. He's not got sense enough to understand. The property's got to be given up, of course, at once!"

"I should say so."

"Let's get back," said Wharton abruptly. "That fat idiot's got to be yanked out of it, somehow. If he goes to the Head at once, and hands over the stuff, it may be all right. He's not a thief, though he's acting like one. He's a born idiot! Come on!"

"Right-ho!"

And the pedals fairly flew as the chums of the Remove sped home to Greyfriars.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Peter in Peril!

PETER TODD'S heart thumped as the ruffian's grasp close on him in the dusky cellar under the cottage. Peter had plenty of courage, but the position he was in was a terrifying one. The ruined cottage was a good distance from the road, and farther still from any other habitation, and he knew that a cry for help could not be heard. And he was shut up in the earthy cellar with a square-jawed ruffian in whose brawny hands he was little more than an

infant. Peter was lanky and loose-jointed, but he was strong for his age. But his strength against that of the cracksman was a negligible quantity. For that reason he did not offer to struggle.

The ill-favoured, stubbly face glowered over him as the sinewy hands gripped his shoulders. But Peter faced the ruffian with all the coolness he could muster, though his heart thumped and throbbed.

"Now, then," said the ruffian, between his teeth, "I reckon, my lad, that you'd better talk—sharp! Where's the silver?"

"I've told you—Oh!" gasped Peter, as the cracksman shook him savagely. His teeth knocked together as he was shaken like a rat in the jaws of a terrier.

"That's enough!" said the cracksman, glowering at him. "Don't you tell me any more lies. You've took the silver. You've come back for more. There wasn't any other reason for you to come back. What 'ave you done with it?"

"I—I—"

"Jest think a minute!" continued the ruffian, his eyes glittering at the junior's dismayed face. "I've risked a seven years' stretch for that swag. Now it's gone! Why, my fine feller, sooner'n lose it I'd wring your neck like it was a rooster's. You won't get out of this cellar alive without I lay my 'ands on the swag agin!"

Peter shivered.

The ferocity in the stubbly face before him struck a chill to his heart. He could understand the savage rage of the cracksman, who had found his plunder removed from what he had regarded as a safe hiding-place. With penal servitude hanging over his head for the crime he had committed, he found himself deprived of the proceeds of the crime, and it was no wonder that he was enraged to the point of ferocity.

"I give you one more chance," he said, in a low, threatening tone. "You've hidden the silver somewhere, and come back for more! Well, tell me where you've put it. I'll leave you 'ere while I go and 'andle it, and I promise you I'll come back for you if I find it fair and square. On my davy! But if you don't tell me where to look for it I'll wring your neck, 'ere and now!"

"Let go!" panted the junior, as the ruffian's savage hands neared his throat. For an awful moment it seemed that the man was about to carry out his threat.

"Where's the silver?"

The junior breathed quickly.

He had told the ruffian where the silver was, but the man did not believe him. It was natural enough for him to suppose that the junior had taken away the loot, and returned to look for further booty. That was the most natural explanation to the cracksman's mind. It was clear, too, that he looked upon the schoolboy as a thief no better than himself.

Peter's brain was working actively, in spite of his peril—or, rather, because of his peril. The thick, grimy fingers were on his throat, and the cracksman seemed quite savage enough to put his threat into execution.

"Hold on!" panted Peter. "I—I'll tell you—"

"You'd better!" growled the ruffian. "And I ain't no time to waste, either. Where's the silver?"

"It—it's not far away."

"I reckoned as it wasn't," nodded the ruffian. "Buried, I fancy. Put under the ground to 'ide it, I reckon. You tell me where to look for it and you're safe, my lad. I don't know as I won't stand you a share in it when it's in my 'ands agin. Where 'ave you put it?"

"You know the plantation across Courtfield Common—"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 590.

"I know it."

"There's an hollow tree—an oak!" gasped Peter.

"I dessay there is," said the ruffian, watching his face suspiciously. "Wot about it?"

"I'll show you the way there."

The ruffian grinned sourly.

"And yell out to the first passer-by—wot?" he jeered. "You don't pull my leg as easy as that, my lad. You ain't steppin' out of this 'ere cellar till I've laid my 'ands on the silver."

"But you won't leave me here, shut up, will you?" exclaimed Peter.

"You can just bet I will!"

"But—but—"

"I'll come back and let you out when I've got my 'ands on the swag. I give you my davy on that!"

Peter hesitated, and his hesitation was a piece of acting worthy of the Remove Dramatic Society's best member. As a matter of fact, he was only hoping that the ruffian would leave him there while he went on a wild-goose chase after the "swag."

Harry Wharton & Co. knew that Peter was at the lonely cottage. If he did not return they would know where to look for him.

That was the thought in Peter's mind.

His object was to gain time—to save himself from the ruffian's brutality at the present terrible moment. If once he was rid of the man, he could at least hope that help would come before the man returned.

That was his only hope, and that was what he was playing for now. But it was very necessary not to let the ruffian suspect what was in his mind.

His hesitation was cut short by another savage shake from the cracksman.

"Now, then—"

"Oh, stop!" gasped Peter. "Look here, I—I—I'd better guide you to the hollow tree—"

"Nuff of that! You ain't leaving this 'ere cellar. You tell me exactly where to find the place—"

"But—but—"

"I'll come back and let you out," said the cracksman. "I give you my davy on that. I wouldn't let you starve 'ere. Blow you, do you think I want to put a rope round my own neck? I'll come back fast enough when I've got my 'ands on the swag."

"You—you promise me that?" gasped Peter.

"On me davy, I tell you!"

"Then—then I'll tell you. You cross the common to the plantation, and follow the footpath about twenty yards."

The ruffian nodded, listening attentively.

"Then you'll see the oak-tree, standing a bit by itself. You'll pick it out easily enough," said Peter. "Go round it, and you'll find an opening in the trunk, and if you reach down inside you'll find it's hollow. But—but you'll come back?"

"I'll come back, 'ang you!" said the ruffian. "A lot of trouble you're giving me, stealing a man's swag! Is it all there—all of it, mind?"

"I haven't sold any of it, so far—I couldn't."

"I reckon not, or I'd 'ave 'eard something about it. Well, you wait 'ere, my lad, till I come back."

"You—you might let me go, now I've told you."

"Not till I've got my 'ands on the swag, my boy."

The ruffian took a whipcord from his pocket. Peter eyed him rather apprehensively.

"Wha-at are you going to do?" he stammered.

"I reckon I'm going to see that you don't get away, my boy, till I've found the swag."

"But—but—"

"Nuff said. Shut your jaw!"

Peter shut his "jaw." Resistance was impossible, and he submitted while the ruffian bound his hands together, and then his ankles, and pitched him to the floor. Then a dirty handkerchief was stuffed into his mouth. The cracksman was taking no chances.

Leaving the bound and gagged junior lying on the floor, the cracksman reached up, and pulled himself out of the cellar. The trapdoor was replaced, and Peter was in complete darkness. With beating heart he listened to the ruffian piling lumber on the trap, to make assurance doubly sure.

Then there was silence.

Peter Todd was alone.

He struggled to his feet, and propped himself against the wall of the cellar, in a very unenviable mood.

He had sent the ruffian on a wild-goose chase. He had not actually said that the swag was hidden in the hollow oak, but certainly the ruffian concluded so from his words. The fear he had expressed of being left in the cellar had been designed to prevent the cracksman from suspecting that he looked for help to arrive, and in that he had been successful. He had gained time; it was all that he could do. But—

There was a "but."

Certainly his chums at Greyfriars would come to look for him if he did not return, and they knew where to look. But if they came late—

The cracksman would be some hours, at least, in finding the hollow oak in the plantation across the common, and in discovering that there was nothing hidden in the tree. Then he would return, knowing that he had been fooled, and Peter could guess the murderous mood in which he would return. If help had not arrived by then—

Courageous as he was, Peter Todd trembled at that thought. It had been his only chance, but it was a chance fraught with fearful peril. As he stood, bound and helpless, in the black cellar, he could only hope and pray to hear the footsteps of the Greyfriars chums above. But silence reigned—deep, deadly silence—broken only by the occasional scampering of a rat.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Sale Now On—And Off!

"H ANDSOME silver goblet, worth pounds. What offers, gentlemen?"

"Twopence!"

"Threepence!"

"Threepence—ha'penny!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent found the "sale now on" as they entered the Rag after their return from interviewing Mr. Tozer at Friardale. Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Singh followed them into the Rag, having joined them from the cricket-field when they came in.

The Famous Five found Fisher T. Fish, the amateur auctioneer, still engaged on "Lot 1."

Contrary to Fishy's sanguine expectations, the handsome silver goods were not going like hot cakes.

The auction, in fact, did not look like being a striking success.

It was not for want of eloquence on the part of the auctioneer. Fisher T. Fish had a really fine, and certainly inexhaustible, flow of language. If "chim-

wag." could have sold the goods, certainly they would have gone like the hottest of hot cakes.

And there was plenty of audience, too. Crowds of fellows had come in to see the sale; but, unfortunately for Bunter's auction, they had only come in to see it, not to participate.

Fisher T. Fish rapped with his hammer, and poured out his eloquence, but still Lot 1 was hanging on his hands.

"Handsome silver goblet," repeated Fisher T. Fish persuasively. "Look at it, gentlemen—only look at it! This is your chance to pick up silver goods at a terrific discount for cash! Unredeemed pledges, from Bunter's uncle's pop-shop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Fishy—"

"Did I see you nod, Bolsover?"

"You didn't!" answered Bolsover major.

"Gentlemen, this handsome silver goblet is going cheap. Skinner, what did you say?"

"Ten bob!" said Skinner generously. "I'll give you a start, anyhow."

Sidney James Snoop indulged in a grin. He had a strong suspicion that Skinner was engaged to give "dud" bids to start the sale. He knew his study-mate. Harold Skinner was a good deal too keen to land himself with goods of which the ownership was, to say the least, dubious.

"Gentlemen, I am offered ten shillings for this handsome silver goblet, worth at least ten pounds. Gentlemen, what advance on ten shillings?"

No answer.

"Did you say ten-and-six, Russell?"

"No, I didn't!"

"Ogilvy, I think you said—"

"I said nothing, old top," answered Ogilvy. "I'd like to know whose it is before I make a bid for it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fisher T. Fish indulged in an exasperated snort.

"It's Bunter's!" he roared. "Don't you know I'm conducting this sale for Bunter?"

"Where did Bunter burgle the stuff?" inquired Kipps; and there was another laugh.

"It's unredeemed pledges."

"Unredeemed rats!" said Temple of the Fourth. "This is the first we've heard of Bunter's pop-shop uncle."

"Oh, really, Temple!" murmured Bunter.

Billy Bunter was standing by the table, all ready to hand up the "lots" to the auctioneer as they were required. But it looked as if they wouldn't be required. Lot 1 was still hanging fire.

"We've got Bunter's word for it, haven't we?" demanded Fishy.

"What's that worth?" asked Ogilvy.

"Put it up to auction, and see?" suggested Monty Newland. "What offers for Bunter's word?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Waal, I swow!" exclaimed Fisher T. Fish. "I never saw such a crowd of unbusiness-like jays! Here's a handsome silver goblet going for ten bob, and not a galoot to offer ten-and-six! Gentlemen—"

"Knock it down to Skinner!" suggested Snoop, with a chuckle.

"Ahem! The reserve price on this goblet is more than ten shillings," said the auctioneer hastily.

It was no use knocking it down to Skinner, who certainly would have repudiated the bargain on the spot.

"No reserve!" exclaimed Snoop. "That's in the announcement! No reserve prices!"

"Knock it down to Skinner!"

"It's yours, Skinner!"

"No, it jolly well isn't!" exclaimed Skinner, in alarm.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lot 1 is put aside for the present," said the auctioneer hurriedly. "Hand up Lot 2, Bunter!"

"Here you are, Fishy!"

Billy Bunter handed up Lot 2, a silver tankard. It certainly was a very valuable tankard, and might have tempted considerable bids—if the juniors had been quite certain that William George Bunter had a legal right to dispose of it. But they weren't!

"Gentlemen, look at this handsome silver tankard—a handsome antique, worth a hundred dollars of anybody's money. This tankard is going cheap—sinful cheap! What offers, gentlemen, for this lot?"

"Ha'penny!" said Tubb of the Third.

"Gentlemen, I ain't hyer to listen to little jokes. I'm hyer on business—cold business, sir. What offers?"

"Five bob!" said Skinner.

"Five shillings I am offered for this handsome silver tankard—a gem of antique workmanship! What improvement on five shillings, gentlemen?"

"Knock it down to Skinner!" grinned Snoop.

"Going—going—"

Fisher T. Fish's eye fell on the Famous Five as they came forward from the door and joined the grinning crowd. Perhaps he hoped that the new arrivals would give a fillip to the business—not very progressive so far.

"Glad to see you here, gentlemen!" said the auctioneer. "You've got room for a handsome silver tankard, Bob Cherry—"

"Lots!" answered Bob.

Fishy brightened up.

"Five shillings I'm offered! What advance on five shillings? What did you say, Cherry?"

"Rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wharton, I guess you know a good thing when you see it. What are you offering for this handsome tankard? It would make a top-notch cricket cup. You could offer it to your uncle's regiment—"

"That's a really good idea, Wharton," said Skinner.

"Did you say two pounds, Wharton?"

"No!"

"Ahem! What are you offering, Bull?"

"Nothing!"

"Oh, holy smoke!" exclaimed the auctioneer, almost in despair. "Ain't any of you galoots got any go in you? Ain't you got any dollars or cents? Going—going at five shillings—this handsome silver tankard—Nugent, what will you offer for this tankard?"

"I know what you'll get if you sell it," answered Nugent.

"Eh? What?"

"Two years' hard labour!"

"Wha-a-at?"

Harry Wharton came towards the auctioneer's table.

"You've sold nothing so far, Fishy?" he asked.

"Nope!" groaned the auctioneer. "The galoots haven't any go in them! They don't know bargains when they see 'em."

"All the better for you, I think. It's time to stop this rot."

"Eh?"

"None of these things belongs to Bunter!" said Harry Wharton, quietly. "I never believed his silly yarns—and now I know they're not true. Bunter found these things somewhere—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"He found them where they had been hidden by the burglar who stole

them from Sir Hilton Popper's house last week!" continued Wharton.

There was a general gasp.

Billy Bunter's fat face was a study.

"S-s-stole them!" stuttered Fisher T. Fish.

"Yes."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bolsover major. "We'd better send for the police!"

"Oh, really, Bolsover—"

"We've just seen the bobby at Friar-dale," went on Wharton. "Popper Court was burgled last week, and the silver taken away. It's all marked with Sir Hilton Popper's crest. The burglar must have hidden the stuff somewhere, and Bunter's found it—and stuck to it! This is the stuff! It's got to be taken back to the police at once!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"Great Scott!" yelled Russell.

"Why, the fat idiot may be locked up for this!"

"Very likely."

Fisher T. Fish's jaw dropped.

He turned on Bunter in a fury.

"You fat clam!" he roared.

"Oh! Ah! Ow! I say, you fellows—" babbled Bunter.

"You fat mugwump! You told me these goods were unredeemed pledges from your pop-shop uncle!" howled Fisher T. Fish.

"I—I didn't—"

"What?"

"You asked me if they were, and I said yes," answered Bunter. "That's quite a different matter."

"Why, you—you—"

"Besides, I asked you to put the sale off, after I heard Wingate and Gwynne talking about the burglary," said Bunter. "You can't deny it, Fishy! I asked you before witnesses! You said you'd carry on the sale on your own responsibility. I call all the fellows to witness—"

"You—you—you—"

"Mind, I don't believe the things were stolen," went on Bunter, cautiously. "I found them, fair and square—and findings are keepings!"

"The policeman will find you soon, and keep you!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Ow!"

"The keepfulness will be terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The unfortunate and idiotic Bunter will be attending to the turnfulness of the esteemed treadmill."

"Ow! You beast—"

"Stolen goods!" gasped Fisher T. Fish. "I've been taken in! Me—a galoot raised in Noo Yark, where we cut our eye-teeth airly! Taken in! Spoofed—and by that fat clam! Oh, Jerusalem crickets! Why, I guess I'll—I'll—I guess I'll—"

Without stopping to guess further, the enraged auctioneer rushed upon Billy Bunter.

There was a roar and a crash as Bunter and his auctioneer rolled on the floor in a deadly embrace.

"Go it!" chirruped Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly lucky we didn't buy any of that stuff!" yawned Temple of the Fourth. "Let's all see Bunter off, when the bobbies come for him! It will be rather a relief to see him go—what?"

"Oh, rather!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five walked out of the Rag—and the crowd dispersed after them. The stack of unsold goods remained, and Billy Bunter and the auctioneer, pommelling one another furiously on the floor.

The sale was "now off!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 580.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Laying the Trap!

"SEEN Toddy?"

Harry Wharton asked that question as he came out of the Rag with his chums.

"He hasn't come in yet," answered Bob Cherry.

"He ought to be back by this time, if he's only gone to the cottage," said Harry. "Not much use his looking for giddy proofs there, as it turns out—we've settled that matter! May as well go and look for him—we don't want him to go on routing in the cellar for nothing."

"Well, it would be only kind!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"But the silver—" began Nugent.

"Bunter ought to take that to the Head at once," said Harry. "Blessed if I know what will happen to him! The less said about the auction the better—luckily, the Head doesn't know about that. How the fat idiot will be able to explain keeping it, instead of giving it up at once, I'm blessed if I know!"

"He can tell the Head that findings are keepings!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"My hat! He'd better not!"

"Peter can give him some legal advice on the subject," said Bob Cherry. "Peter's a merry lawyer, you know. Let's go and find him."

The Famous Five started for the cottage on the Courtfield road.

Now that the ownership of the silver was settled beyond a doubt, Peter's investigations there were to no purpose—and it was true that the schoolboy lawyer's sage advice might be useful in getting Bunter out of the terrible scrape he had landed himself in. For the Co. agreed that Bunter, as usual, had been more fool than rogue—he was really not aware of the rascality of his actions. But they feared very much that the Head would take the view that the Owl was more rogue than fool—in which case Bunter's fate was likely to be very unenviable.

There was no sign of Peter Todd in the old cottage when the five juniors arrived there.

Harry Wharton glanced round the wrecked building in some perplexity.

"He's not here," he said. "I understood that he was coming back as soon as he'd looked round here. But he's not come back, either."

"He can't be in the cellar," said Johnny Bull, pointing to the heap of lumber piled on the trapdoor.

Wharton looked at it.

"He can't have been down," he said.

"He wouldn't take the trouble to stack all that stuff over the cellar after going down, would he?"

"I suppose not."

"Little did the juniors dream, as they moved round the cottage, that their footsteps were heard from below with a hope and anguish beyond words—if Peter Todd had been capable of words at that moment. But the gag was fast between his teeth, and the hapless junior could utter no cry.

In the cellar the sound of footsteps above brought mingled hope and fear to Peter's heart.

He could not tell whether it was the cracksmen returning, or whether it was his friends who had come to look for him. The latter seemed most probable, as the ruffian had been gone only a short time. But the doubt was terrible.

But as there was no sound of the lumber being moved from the trapdoor, Peter felt his hopes out-balance his fears. The cracksmen certainly would have descended into the cellar at once.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 590.

But another fear entered his heart. If the juniors had arrived, and they found the trapdoor blocked, would they—could they—guess that he was below, a prisoner? They knew nothing of the cracksmen.

Peter uttered an inaudible groan.

He made a fearful effort to cry out in spite of the gag, but hardly a whisper came from his numbed lips.

The footsteps still moved above. It seemed to him that they were moving away.

He was desperate now.

He moved away from the wall on which he had propped himself, and rolled on the floor among the fragments of lumber in the cellar. It was the only possible way of making a noise to attract the attention of those above.

There was a rumbling and a crashing as he rolled among the rubbish, receiving a good many unpleasant knocks in the process.

"Hark!"

He heard that exclamation from above, and it was like music to his ears.

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"What on earth's that?" exclaimed Wharton, listening.

"There's somebody in the cellar—"

"But there can't be!" exclaimed Nugent. "Look at the flap—it's blocked up—"

"Somebody's shut in there," said Harry decidedly. "Listen to the row. It's Peter—"

"But how the merry thunder—"

"Perhaps the Highcliffe cads caught him here," said Harry. "You remember they shut up Bunter in the cellar—"

"I don't see why he can't call out—"

Tumble, rumble, came from below.

Harry Wharton dragged at the lumber over the cellar-flap. His chums helped him, and in a few minutes the trapdoor was clear. Wharton threw it up, and looked into the gloom below.

"Are you there, Peter?" he called out.

There was no answer, but the rumbling continued.

"There's something moving," said Bob, looking over Wharton's shoulder.

"My hat! It's a chap tied up—it's Peter—"

"Jump down!"

In a twinkling Harry Wharton had dropped into the cellar.

"Toddy!" he exclaimed. "Tied up—by Jove!"

A second more and the gag was jerked from Peter's mouth, and Harry was feeling for his pocket-knife to cut the whipcord.

Peter gasped for breath.

"Oh! Ow! Groooooogh!" were his first remarks.

"How on earth—"

"Groooooogh!"

Wharton cut through the cords, and Peter Todd was free. For some minutes he stood gasping painfully, and rubbing his limbs. The Famous Five dropped into the cellar one after another, and surrounded him, in great amazement. But Peter was able to explain at last.

The Co. listened to his explanation in amazed silence.

"Well, my only hat!" exclaimed Wharton, at last. "Bunter found the loot, and you've found the crackman, Toddy!"

"He found me, you mean!" grunted Peter.

"And he's coming back here!" exclaimed Bob.

"Yes—as soon as he's found that there isn't any swag hidden in the hollow oak!"

"Phew!"

"He can't get back yet, I think," said Peter. "But—but if he'd come back and found me, after I'd fooled him—" Peter broke off, with a shiver.

"By Jove!" said Wharton, with a deep breath. "It's jolly lucky we came along for you, Toddy!"

"The luckfulness is terrific!"

Wharton knitted his brows in thought.

"So he's coming back here!" he said.

"What a chance to nab the brute! If you fellows are game—"

"We're game enough," said Bob.

"But what—"

"The gamefulness is terrific, my esteemed chum! We can collarfully seize the estimable and disgusting rotter—"

"That's what I was thinking of," said Harry quietly. "There's enough of us to handle him, however strong he is—six chaps are enough for him, I suppose."

"Quite!" said Bob. "But, my dear man, he won't come too near, when he sees that we are here. He will mizzle, old chap!"

"He needn't see us," Wharton thought rapidly. "Look here! He will come back raging, of course; and he will drop in here to deal with Toddy—if he doesn't know we're here. Then we can nail him before he knows what's happening. One of us will have to get out and close the trap, and cover it up as we found it—"

"Oh, good!"

"Frank can do that," continued Wharton eagerly. "Then you can clear off, Frank, and get into a tree and watch—mind you're not seen, of course. And as soon as you see the brute come into the cottage, buzz off to Courtfield as fast as you can go and fetch the bobbies here."

Nugent nodded.

"I could do that," he said. "But you—"

"Five of us can handle the man. You feel up to handle him, Toddy?"

"Let me get a chance, that's all!" answered Peter.

"We can get some billets of wood, among the lumber here, in case we want them—we needn't stand on ceremony with a ruffian like that!"

"He wouldn't with us!" grinned Bob.

"Well, is it a go?" asked Harry.

"We shall have to fix it up at once—he may be back soon."

And the Co. answered, with one voice: "It's a go!"

Then no time was lost in making the arrangements. It was easy to find a stick apiece among the wreckage in the old building. Frank Nugent was hoisted out, and he closed the trapdoor, and piled the lumber on it again as the chums of the Remove had found it. Then, after a cautious look round, he quitted the cottage and hurried back to the road. He "shinned" up a big tree by the roadside, and, hidden by the branches, watched the fields.

He had a good while to wait. It was more than an hour before a burly figure came in sight in the fields from the direction of the common.

Hidden in the tree, Nugent watched him.

The bulldog jaw and lowering face of the new arrival answered to Peter's description of the cracksman. And the man's manner was furtive as he approached the ruined cottage. And as he came nearer Nugent could see that his brutal face was lowering and savage with suppressed rage. Evidently the cracksman had discovered that the "swag" was not hidden in the hollow tree, and was returning to wring information from the prisoner in the cellar—and to take vengeance upon him. He disappeared into the cottage with a furtive step. And, as soon as he had disappeared, Nugent slid down quietly from the tree.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Catching the Cracksman!

HARRY WHARTON & CO., in the darkness of the cellar, nudged one another as they heard the sound of heavy footsteps above, followed by the rumble of the lumber as it was dragged away from the cellar-flap.

Four of the juniors were squeezed back into the dark corners of the cellar, gripping their cudgels hard. Peter Todd remained where the cracksman could see him when the flap was up, keeping his hands and feet together to give an impression that he was still bound. The ruffian was to suspect nothing till he was fairly in the trap.

With a crash the trapdoor was flung up, and the savage face and bulldog jaw loomed over the opening.

"You wait a moment for me, my fine bird!" came a muttering, enraged voice. "Fooling me—wot? I'll make you pay for it! I'll limb yer! I'll wring yer neck like a fowl's! You wait a minute!"

The ruffian swung himself into the cellar.

He dropped to the floor a few feet from Peter Todd.

He made one savage stride towards the junior, and the ferocious brutality in his stubby face was not to be mistaken.

But he did not reach the junior.

Whiz!

From the darkness a cudgel came flying, and it struck the ruffian on the side of the head and sent him staggering.

The next second Harry Wharton & Co. were rushing on him.

The cracksman, dazed with amazement, spun round savagely on them, but in a moment he went down under the rush.

Peter Todd joined the four at once, and five juniors sprawled on the ruffian as he squirmed on the floor.

There were gasping ejaculations and curses from the cracksman as he struggled under the juniors.

He made a furious effort to get his hand into his coat—and if he had succeeded there might have been a terrible tragedy in the cellar under the ruined

cottage, for he had a deadly weapon there. But he did not succeed. A crashing blow from Bob Cherry's cudgel on his right arm numbed that limb, and then his wrists were seized and held. He still struggled, and so furiously that the five juniors had plenty to do to hold him.

A face looked down from above. It was Frank Nugent's.

"Got him?" he panted.

He jumped into the cellar and joined in the struggle.

The juniors hardly needed the reinforcement. The ruffian was weakening. But Nugent's arrival gave him the finishing touch. He was pinned down by the six, and Harry Wharton bound his wrists together with the remains of the whipcord that had been used on Peter Todd.

Then the juniors rose, panting. The ruffian gasped on the floor.

"Got him!" gasped Bob.

"The gotfulness is terrific!"

"Hurrah for us!" gasped Johnny Bull breathlessly. "Franky, you 'ass, you were to go for the bobbies."

"I came to lend a hand, fathead! I'll cut off now," said Nugent.

And he climbed out and started.

A torrent of abuse poured from the ruffian on the floor.

"We may as well leave the brute here," said Harry. "The police can fish him out for themselves. Let's get out of this."

Leaving the ruffian where he was, the juniors quitted the cellar. They did not quit the cottage, however. They waited and watched round the trapdoor, ready to knock the ruffian back if he got his hands free and made any attempt to clamber out. But his hands were safe, and nothing but a string of curses came from below.

Nugent's voice was heard at last.

"Here we are!"

Inspector Grimes, of Courtfield, came into the cottage with Nugent, followed by a constable. Mr. Grimes' expression was quite extraordinary. He glanced down into the cellar, and smiled as he saw the stubby, brutal face below in the shadows.

"There's your man, Mr. Grimes!" said Harry.

"I fancy I've seen him before," remarked Mr. Grimes. "I'm much obliged to you young gentlemen. Master Nugent tells me that the swag—I mean the silver——"

"Safe as houses!" said Peter Todd.

There was a savage exclamation from below.

"That feller's got the swag, inspector—I tell yer he's got it, and hidden it!"

"It's at Greyfriars, Mr. Grimes," explained Peter Todd. "It wasn't I that found it—another Greyfriars chap found it here, and took it to the school. It's waiting for you there."

"I'll come along to Greyfriars later," said Mr. Grimes. "Just at present I'll see this dear man put away safe."

Harry Wharton & Co. left the inspector to his task, and hurried back to Greyfriars. There was no time to be lost now if Billy Bunter was to be saved from the consequences of his stupidity.

Half an hour later William George Bunter was knocking at the door of the Head's study at Greyfriars. The Famous Five and Peter Todd had talked to the obtuse Owl—not measuring their words by any means. And even upon Bunter's obtuse brain it had been borne that his only chance was to take the swag to his headmaster and make a clean breast of it before Mr. Grimes arrived.

The silver, packed in a big cricket-bag, was carried to the Head's study by the Co. in the wake of Billy Bunter.

"Come in!" called out Dr. Locke.

Billy Bunter marched in, followed by the Co. with the laden bag.

The Head blinked at them.

"What—what——" he ejaculated.

"We've brought this here, sir," said Harry Wharton. "Bunter will explain. It's the silver that was stolen from Sir Hilton Popper's house, sir. Bunter found it."

"Bless my soul!" said the astonished Head.

The chums of the Remove left the study, leaving Billy Bunter to explain as best he could. They had done their best for him.

They waited at the corner of the passage, and a good many fellows joined them there, awaiting the result of Bunter's interview with the Head. The Head's door opened at last, and the Owl of the Remove came forth. To the amazement of the juniors he looked quite satisfied with himself—in fact, his manner was quite jaunty as he rolled down the passage.

"Well?" exclaimed Wharton.

"What's happened?" demanded Peter Todd.

Bunter blinked at them.

"It's all right," he said. "I say, you fellows, do you think old Popper will stand me a reward?"

"A—a—reward!" howled Bob Cherry.

"Well, he ought to, you know," said the fat junior. "Considering what I've done, you know!"

"Haven't you been licked?" shouted Johnny Bull.

"Licked? Certainly not!"

"But—but for keeping the silver——"

"I explained that to the Head, of course."

"You explained it!" repeated Wharton. "You told him you were idiot enough to think that findings were keepings?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then what did you tell him?" demanded Harry.

"I told him the facts, of course—I brought the silver to Greyfriars to keep it safe. That was true, wasn't it?"

"Well, you meant to keep it, safe enough—that's true!" grinned Nugent.

"The Head thought I ought to have brought it to him, or taken it to the police, at once," said Bunter calmly.

"But I explained that it was kept dark so that the cracksman could be trapped."

"Wha-a-at?"

"So that the cracksman could be trapped at the cottage, you know," said Bunter. "And he was trapped, wasn't he? Fairly caught—owing to my keeping it dark that I'd found the silver. It was entirely due to me that the cracksman was caught, and I think I ought to have a reward."

Harry Wharton & Co. stared at the fat junior blankly. They had hoped that Bunter would get clear, somehow. But certainly they hadn't expected him to emerge from the affair with credit.

Bunter's auction was apparently forgotten by the fat junior—obliterated from his fat mind entirely. He was thinking about a reward for his valuable services!

"What do we think?" gasped Bob Cherry. "Oh, yes, we think you ought to have a reward—yes, rather! Bump him!"

Billy Bunter had his reward on the spot!

(Don't miss "WEGGIE" OF THE REMOVE!"—next Monday's grand complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)



Goggs, Grammarian

By Richard Randolph

SYNOPSIS.

Johnny Goggs,—ventriloquist, ju-jitsu expert, and all-round sportsman—comes to Rylcombe Grammar School from Franklingnam, which has been burnt down.

At a cricket match with the St. Jim's fellows, Goggs goes in disguise as Phelim O'Hoggarty, an Irish boy.

Larking, Carpenter, and Snipe, of the Grammar School, are seeking an opportunity of exposing Goggs; and the latter warns the St. Jim's juniors that they are in the woodshed planning a jape on Tom Merry & Co.

(Now read on.)

Goggs, the Trapper!

"BUT that's not the yarn," said Durrance. "It can't be even a good synopsis of it."

"Synopsis?" repeated Herries. "That's a Jewish church, isn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is he right, Julian?"

"He means 'synagogue'—at least, that's what he must be thinking of," answered Julian. "Near enough for old Herries."

"Oh, rats to you!" growled Herries. "Try O'Hog for the rest of the yarn. The bounder knows more about it than I do."

"Now then, O'Pig! Buck up and—"

"Me name's O'Hoggarty, if yez please, Bake!"

"And mine's not Bake, you red-headed image!"

"Sure, thin, it's sorry I am for my mistake, Cake, entirely!"

"Who are the Grammar School chaps in the woodshed?" asked Lumley-Lumley.

"Larking and the other two," said Tompkins. "Carpenter, isn't it, and that pimply, knock-kneed bounder?"

"Oh, Snipe, you mean! Those three are always about together."

"Middlin' good cheek for Larking to show up 'ere after what 'e did on Saturday!" remarked Hammond.

"They came to get at old Grundy, I fancy," said Herries. "But O'Hog knows more about that than I do."

"Now we're hearing things!" said Blake. "What possessed you fatheads to rush to Grundy's rescue?"

"Might have left him to it," said Roylance. "Is not the great George Alfred equal to anything whatever all on his lonesome?"

"Gwunday was there," said Arthur Augustus. "So were Wilkins an' Gunn an' Gore."

"Was Cardew?" inquired Levison sharply.

"Oh, yass! Didn't I say so at first?"

"No, fathead! Where is he now?"

"I do not know in the vewy least where Cardew is, Levison. An' I decline to be called a fathead," said Gussy frigidly.

"Look here, you fellows, there's some mystery about this!"

"Why, we all thought you knew where Cardew was, Levison!" said Blake.

"I'm not responsible for what a set of silly idiots think! I don't know. But I'm jolly well going to find out!"

And Levison got out of bed.

"I'll come along, old chap," said Clive, also getting out.

"Do as you like!"

"So will I," said Durrance.

"No need for that!" snapped Levison.

Durrance stayed in bed. But three got out, though the rest of the dormitory only knew of Levison and Clive.

Goggs realised at once that it would never do to let those two go on search unfollowed. The case seemed almost desperate.

He was expecting Gordon Gay & Co., of course. The Grammar School scheme included a night-raid upon the School House, and it was to let in the raiders that Phelim O'Hoggarty had come along to St. Jim's as a new boy.

But Goggs did not expect Gordon Gay and the rest till midnight at the earliest. That meant that a couple of hours or so had still to pass before they appeared.

If Levison and Clive found Cardew, it looked as though all the carefully-laid plans would end in failure.

Cardew knew now who O'Hoggarty was, and the passing on of that knowledge to the rest would spoil everything for the other side.

"Forewarned is forearmed," says the old adage.

Tom Merry and Blake and the rest must not be forewarned!

"John, my boy," said Goggs to himself, as he stole downstairs behind Clive and Levison, "you are up against a decidedly tough proposition. But never say die, John. And, if the worst comes to the worst, it may be better for your delicate constitution to be outside, free to vanish when disclosure comes."

The moon was up now; and, when once the three were outside, to follow the two Fourth-Formers without being seen by them was not the easiest of tasks. Levison and Clive looked round several times; it was necessary to be careful. But Goggs stole along in the shadow, and they did not perceive him.

Now they halted, and held counsel together. Greatly daring, Goggs stole up near enough to listen.

"It licks me," said Clive. "Don't know that it's really much use looking for the bounder. There's no telling where he may be."

"I've a notion, though," replied Levison.

"Out with it, then! I simply haven't the ghost of one."

"I suspect that chap O'Hoggarty!"

"I say—you don't mean—but, of course, that's impossible!"

"What's impossible?" snapped Levison.

"That he should have done Ralph any harm—that—"

"Oh, rats! I don't mean anything melodramatic. But the fellow's a schemer and a japer—I'm sure of that. And I know Ralph was on to him. But the silly bounder wanted to bowl him out on his own, and he didn't say much to us about it because of that."

"But that doesn't tell us where Ralph is," said Clive.

"Can't you guess?"

"Blessed if I can!"

"Chump! In the woodshed, of course!"

"But—oh, hang it all, he can't be, Ernest! Why, the fellows say that the Grammarians are locked up there."

"I know they do. And my notion is that Ralph's locked up with them!"

And Levison chuckled.

After a moment's pause for consideration, Clive also chuckled.

"It's a hefty score against the bounder if

it really is so," said Levison. "We won't let him hear the last of it for some time."

"Rather not! But I can't think how it was done."

"I can't explain exactly. I don't know, though I've a kind of glimmering. That red-headed O'Hog is a downy bird, and the chaps who were with him aren't an over and above bright crowd. Gussy, Herries, Mulvaney, Tompkins, Grundy, Gunn, Wilkins, Gore—easy enough to pull the wool over the eyes of most of them!"

"Easier than to pull it over Ralph's, old man. Yet it was he—"

"Because it was he who twigged something, fathead! So he had to be got out of the way for the time being, and redpoll got him out of the way—and jolly smart red-poll must have been to do it, I say!"

"Well, let's go to the woodshed," said Clive. "I wonder those chaps haven't kicked up such a shindy before this that someone has come along and let them out."

"Chump! They can't—they don't dare! They'd get into no end of a row if they were caught there."

The two moved on towards the back of the School House, and Goggs followed.

Goggs admired Levison's acuteness, and could guess how he must be gloating over the notion of how very nicely the over-clever Cardew had been trapped.

But it would be even a bigger score to trap Levison in the midst of his chortling, and that was the scheme now in the mind of Goggs.

He was very far from having given up hope.

There was a chance—quite a chance. The affair needed handling, but Goggs liked enterprises that called for the exercise of all his craft.

As they neared the woodshed they heard sounds proceeding therefrom.

The four prisoners knew that they could not afford to yell for help and release.

But they could talk. The woodshed was far enough from any other building to make that safe.

And they were talking.

It was not exactly a friendly conversation.

"You mucked the whole bizney up by trapping us like this!" said Larking furiously.

"I didn't trap you, idiot! I knew nothin' about it until three minutes or so before you did your unique flyin' act off the wall," returned Cardew.

It was evident to Goggs that his impersonation of Cardew to lure the Grammarian traitors into the trap was only just coming out.

"But we heard you!" said Carpenter. "You jawed to us for about an hour and a half, and said you were going to fetch Merry and some of the other bounders."

"I did nothin' of the sort!"

"Don't you see, fatheads?" piped Snipe. "It wasn't Cardew at all!"

"Who was it, then?"

"That sweep Goggs, of course!"

"My hat! Goggs! What's he mean?" gasped Clive.

"I begin to see it all," said Levison.

"Excuse my failure to punch your head for that, Snipe!" said Cardew politely. "It's so dark that I might punch someone else's by mistake—not that it would be wasted even in that case, by gad! If anyone will be kind enough to light a match—"

"What do you want to punch my head for, you silly chump?"

"For callin' my pal Goggs a sweep, of course!"

"His pal Goggs!" sneered Larking. "My hat! His pal! Why, the fellow—"

"Oh, I can guess what the fellow was goin' to do—an' what he will do yet, in spite of you an' all your knavish tricks! He was out to take our number down. Well, that's fair enough."

"Glad you think so!" said Snipe unpleasantly.

"I do, an' any decent chap would. There's a big difference between his game an' yours, my pippins! You're givin' your side away, an' that's a game only fit for dashed crawlin' worms!"

Levison, Clive, and Goggs all heard every word of that conversation. The window was not big enough to allow anyone to get out of it; but the voices came clearly enough.

There could be no harm in listening. They were all of one mind as to that. Neither Goggs nor Cardew's chums could regard that conversation as private so far as they were concerned.

Now affairs took the turn that might have been expected.

"Oh, go for the sneering ass, you fellows!" booted Larking.

From the woodshed came the sounds of scuffling feet and panting breath. Then—

"Yowwwwww!" came from Snipe.

"Yoooooop!" howled Carpenter.

"Get off me, idiot!" yelled Larking.

"I suppose you must punch one another's dear little heads. But I should advise a little less row in the process!" said Cardew blandly.

Goggs grinned. Levison and Clive chuckled. It was easy to understand what had happened.

The three had meant to attack Cardew together. But he had been too wily for them, and they had collided with one another.

Now Levison turned the key, which had been left in the lock.

"Hallo, there!" he said.

"A rescue, by gad!" cried Cardew. "Is that you, Levison, old gun?"

"Yes, of course!"

"Well may you say 'of course'! Who but you an' the devoted Sidney would trouble themselves about me in misfortune? Is Sidney there, too? I shall be dashed disappointed if he isn't!"

"I'm here all serene!" said Clive. "But we didn't know you were in misfortune. We thought you were up to some deep dodge of your own, as usual!"

"Woe is me! No more for me the deep dodges! I have been done down, dear boys—diddled—dished—completely circumvented by a deeper dodger than myself! Henceforth me for the simple life an' the childlike, ingenuous innocence of the dear Sidney!"

"Rats!" growled Clive.

Levison had opened the door a few inches—it opened outwards—and he and Clive were standing by to prevent a rush by the Grammarians.

Cardew must come out, of course. But they had no intention of letting out Larking & Co. And to get out their chum and keep in the rest of the captives was not an easy job.

Goggs was faced with a somewhat similar problem. Clive and Levison were now as dangerous to his schemes as Cardew. All three must be kept out of the School House for the next hour or two.

"I will defer my penitential weepin' till to-morrow," went on Cardew. "My present object is to get out of this place. The enter-tainin' society of Larking, Carpenter, an' Snipe begins to pall upon me. Even when punchin' one another's nappers they are not truly genial!"

"It was Goggs who spoofed you, then?" said Clive. "We didn't know that the japing bouncer was anywhere about."

"It was Goggs. An' Goggs is not only about, but he has a positively uncanny way of bein' on the right spot at the right time. In the words of the Prophet Ezekiel, or Mark Twain, or somebody, I reckoned myself some pumpkin, but Goggs fairly lays over me, an' gets me guessin' all the time, by gad!"

"You're coming out, of course," Levison said. "But I'm blessed if we're going to let those three rotters out! It's not jolly well good enough!"

"Well, I'm hanged!" gasped Carpenter. "After we've come along to warn you that that red-headed sweep O'Hoggarty is Goggs, you—"

"And what did you do it for?" snapped Clive. "We twig that—don't you worry! Because you've a down on Goggs, a chap who's

(Continued on page 16.)

The Editor's Chat.

The Companion Papers are:

THE MAGNET. THE GEM. THE BOYS' FRIEND. CHUCKLES. THE PENNY POPULAR.
Every Monday. Every Wed. Every Monday. Every Friday. Every Friday.

YOUR EDITOR IS ALWAYS GLAD TO HEAR FROM HIS READERS.

For Next Monday:

"WEGGIE" OF THE REMOVE!"

By Frank Richards.

Not for some time have we had a new boy at Greyfriars; and never in the history of the old school have we had such an extraordinary new boy as Reginald Aubrey Pye-Smith. Innocent as the babe unborn, Reggie turns up at Greyfriars, and is promptly taken in hand by the Famous Five—and others! The amazing gullibility of the new boy causes him to fall an easy prey to the wiles of Skinner & Co., and although Reggie's career at Greyfriars comes to a full stop very suddenly, the most amusing and exciting episodes take place during his brief reign as

"WEGGIE" OF THE REMOVE!"

"SPORTSMEN OF SURREY!"

The above is the title of the magnificent, long, complete story of Harry Wharton & Co. appearing in this Friday's issue of the "Penny Popular."

It would be more correct, perhaps, to style it a story of Vernon-Smith & Co., for it is the Bouncer who leads a party of Removites into action against a team of Surrey school-boys.

Last week the scene of Mr. Frank Richards' fine story was Blackpool. This week it is Guildford. And, in case the Surrey boys buy up every available copy of the "Penny Popular," it will be advisable for the boys and girls resident in other counties to make sure of a copy at once by the time-honoured method of ordering in advance!

SMILE, BOYS, SMILE!

"Weep, and the world weeps with you; laugh, and you're put in a Home."

That is the whimsical complaint of Dennis R., of Southsea.

"Everywhere I go," writes Dennis, "I meet fellows with hang-dog expressions and sullen, Ratty-like frowns. They look as if they've swallowed their tooth-stoppings, or something. They make no attempt to be bright and cheerful. If you talk to them, they just grunt. If you slap them on the back in a playful manner, they bark at you like an unmuzzled bull-pup. I never saw such a set of moping, moony asses in my life. And they call this 'Sunny Southsea'!"

Well, Dennis, it is some years since I was in Southsea, so I am unable to confirm your remarks regarding the youthful inhabitants of that famous resort.

I rather fancy your summing-up errs a little on the side of severity; but if it is indeed true that Southsea boys never smile, then I am sorry for Southsea; for a cheery and a sunny temperament is one of the most valuable assets in life.

There are times, of course, when you find it hard to be cheerful. The world seems upside-down. Another member of the family gets down to brekker before you and scoffs all the jam. The bacon's cold; the tea ditto. You go to school, and get slanged for nothing. You play cricket, and muff unlimited catches. You go to the cinema, and find they're showing the same film that you saw at Brighton in 1914.

Oh, yes, I know it's often hard to smile! But, as a certain Air-Force poet hath it:

"When the road seems long and dreary, and you're sick and stale and weary,
And you're sighing for the things that are sublime;

Don't go flying in a paddy, but be up and doing, laddie,

And you'll find you're on the target every time!"

Long faces are an abomination. We don't want them in this country. Our Continental friends tell us that we take our pleasures sadly. I'm afraid some of us take our misfortunes sadly, also.

A certain amount of depression was, in war-time, unavoidable; but there is no excuse for it now. It has become rather fashionable in certain quarters to bark and bite, and to wear an expression of gloom. But it is not a nice fashion. We don't want it to spread, like rabies. No boy has a right to be continually giving way to the "blues"; and I sympathise with my Southsea chum if, as he asserts, his fellow-townsmen are "a set of moping, moony asses."

Surely it is not so very difficult to be merry and bright in a place like Southsea? My sub-editor tells me he wouldn't mind a fortnight down there, anyway! If he were spoken to, he would smile; and if he were slapped on the back, he would grin like a Cheshire cat!

I think I shall have to persuade Mr. Frank Richards to send Billy Bunter down to Southsea. Perhaps his ridiculous antics might cheer the inhabitants up a bit.

Away with melancholy, my chums, and when troubles come—as they inevitably must do—remember that they will only have a short innings. You know what the old Psalmist said? "Heaviness may endure for a night; but joy cometh in the morning." These words ring true to-day. Down with depression, and let happiness and high good-humour prevail on every side!

A SPECIAL NOTE!

Will Mrs. Lillian Carlton, of Dublin, kindly accept my best thanks for the many helpful letters and suggestions which she has submitted during the past few years?

Mrs. Carlton is, in fact, one of my most regular correspondents, and the assistance she has rendered in connection with the Companion Papers is much appreciated.

Mrs. Carlton will note that, in response to her request, a new boy appears at Greyfriars in next week's story. All Dublin will laugh over the merry antics of "Weggie" of the Remove!

NOTICES.

Back Numbers Wanted.

H. Moore, 57, Darnley Road, Gravesend.—"Son of a Sailor," and "Six on the Scent." 3d. each offered. Write first.

W. A. Sayers, 18, Spring Grove, Chiswick, W.—"Penny Populars," "The Making of Harry Wharton" and "The Taming of Harry Wharton"; MAGNETS, "Schoolboys Never Shall Be Slaves" and "The Midnight Marauders." Write first, stating price.

Bernard Charles, 7, Wenban Road, Worthing, Sussex, wants back numbers of the Companion Papers for his invalid sister. Please write first.

William Roberts, 395, Madras Street, Christchurch, New Zealand—"Bob Cherry's Barring-Out," "Figgins' Fig-Pudding," "The Boy Without a Name," "The Postal-Order Conspiracy." 2d. and 4d. offered.

Correspondence, etc., Wanted.

Miss Eunice Wytqn, 120, Lancaster Street, Birmingham—with girl readers anywhere, 16.

Miss R. Walker, 20, Redmayne Street, Preston, Lanes—with girl readers, 15-16, interested in photography.

H. Smith, 71, Cromwell Road, Peterborough, Northants, wants members for the Empire Correspondence Club for readers in the British Empire and the States.

W. A. Foster, 85, Victoria Road, Romford, Essex, wants members for club. Magazine monthly.

H. A. H. (YOUR EDITOR).

worth a hundred of the three of you all rolled together. Not out of any good will to us!"

"John, my boy, this is sad—truly sad!" murmured Goggs. "Cardew has been complimentary enough to call you his pal. Now Clive says the nicest things. It only remains for Levison to contribute his unsolicited testimonial, and you will feel grieved to the heart that they must be incarcerated. But the thing must be done, John—it must be done!"

"Goggs is all right—one of the best!" said Levison, almost as though he were answering what he certainly did not hear. "But the scheming bounder will jolly well get it where the chicken got the chopper when we lay hands on him!"

"You hear that, John?" Goggs murmured. "Levison is also complimentary, but at the same time he threatens direful things. Harden your heart, John, like Pharaoh of old, lest worse befall you!"

"We're coming out!" hooted Larking. He pushed hard at the door. "Shove, you fellows!"

"We'll barge you over if you don't stand clear!" cried Carpenter.

"Barge away!" snapped Levison.

"Here, I'll keep Cardew back!" volunteered Carpenter. "You get out, Lark! You, too, Snipe! When you're there I'll bet I won't be long after you!"

It was plain to Goggs that Cardew, inside, was seconding the efforts of Levison and Clive outside. He wanted to get past the three Grammarians; they saw that once he was past the door would be thrust to again immediately.

Again came the scuffling of feet, and with it the sound of blows.

"Yow! That was my nose!" yelled Carpenter.

"I had an idea it might be, dear boy. In fact, that was a reason, in a way, for my punchin' it. If you'll put it in the light again I shall be pleased to give it another blow, by gad! But perhaps you'd rather blow it yourself?"

"Take that!" howled Carpenter.

"Thanks, no!" replied Cardew.

"Yooooop!"

Carpenter's fist had hit something—apparently something rather harder than the head of Ralph Reckness Cardew.

It was high time for Goggs to cut in.

"Look out, Clive!" panted Levison, shoving hard.

Then the voice of Mr. Lathom—proceeding from the mouth of Goggs, of course—was heard.

"I am quite sure that I heard noises, Railton, and that they came from somewhere in this direction!" said the voice.

"My hat!" gasped Clive. "Railton—Lathom!"

"Let us inside, you idiots! We're all in the soup if one of us is spotted!" hissed Levison.

The Grammarians saw that. Larking and Snipe would quite have welcomed the chance to get the two outside into a row; but they would not have cared for sharing it.

Suddenly they gave way. Levison and Clive popped into cover.

"I hear something now, Lathom!" spoke the voice of Mr. Railton.

The door was pulled to. Steps sounded outside.

Then the key turned in the lock, and the cool, quiet voice of Goggs was heard.

"I rather fancy, my dear fellows, that you are all fairly trapped!" it said. "I regret extremely any inconvenience to which Levison, Clive, and Cardew may be put, and I trust that it will not disturb the friendly relations between them and myself in the

future. As to the other captives, I must candidly admit that I feel no regret whatever, and, since our relations have never been friendly, the future may take care of itself as far as they are concerned."

"You spoofer!" howled Levison.

"I fear—I fear greatly—that I am developing a tendency to what might be called spoof. A sad pity, is it not? But it is not given to all of us to be as silly as we look. Au revoir, dear boys!"

The Raid!

"HERE we are!" said Gordon Gay.

Quite a small crowd of the Grammarians had just reached the wall of St. Jim's.

Gay and Monk were there, and the two Woottons, Carboy and Lane and Mont Blanc, O'Donnell and Donaldson and Morgan, with Blount and Trickett and Waters, of course.

"Where's Goggles, though?" asked Carboy.

"Oh, you bet he's on hand!" replied Bags promptly.

"Rather!" chimed in Tricks.

"Quite impossible that he should slip up—eh?" said Jack Wootton.

"If it's not impossible it's jolly unlikely," answered Wagtail.

"Friends, Romans, countrymen,—I thank you all for your good opinion!" spoke the voice of Goggs from the top of the wall.

"How did it go off, Goggles?" inquired Bags eagerly.

"Are you referring to Larking, my dear Bagshaw? The manner in which he went off the top of the wall equalled my fullest expectations, even when two such competent workmen as you and the dear Trickett were concerned. But if we are to discuss matters before proceeding to action, it would be best that you should come inside. No one could well pass by without suspecting that there was someone about."

And with that gentle sarcasm—for the presence of over a dozen fellows in the road could hardly have failed to be noticed by any passer-by—Goggs slipped down from the wall.

Up came Gordon Gay, and dropped inside. In quick succession the rest followed him.

They gathered under the old slanting oak, and Gay said:

"We don't want to discuss matters, old top, but it would be just as well we should know just how things should stand before we start."

"Larking & Co. haven't come back; we know that," said Monk.

"Larking & Co. are at the present moment locked up in the woodshed," replied Goggs.

"For company they have Cardew, Levison, and Clive."

"My hat! There will be some squabbling!" said Harry Wootton.

"There has already been some squabbling—some!" answered Goggs.

"But how on earth did you—"

"Let us defer explanations until later, my dear Joyful. Are we ready?"

"We are!" replied Gordon Gay.

"It's an old wheeze, but I think it ought to work," said Frank Monk.

"Will you—er—operate first upon the Shell or the Fourth?" Goggs asked.

"Which do you think would be best?"

"If I am to choose, I should say the Fourth. I believe there is no suspicion whatever in Shell circles that I am not Phelim O'Hoggarty. Poor Phelim! To-morrow I may have to mourn you as one departed, for never again will you revisit the glimpses of the moon. But I cannot mourn you to-night, for this is my busy night."

"You don't think the Fourth have twigged, do you?" asked Lane.

"Do not be alarmed, my dear Road! I do not think the Fourth have—er—twigged. But the absence of Cardew at first, and now that of Levison and Clive, all this is rather calculated to awaken suspicion. When I last left the dormitory the Fourth slept the sleep of the just, having apparently left to Clive and Levison the matter of looking after Cardew. But if any of them should wake and find that four beds are empty, and miss O'Hoggarty—alas! they must for ever miss him now—well, then—"

"Does it ever run down, Blount?" asked Wootton minor, breaking in upon Goggs.

"Never! But it sometimes stops."

"Let's get on!" said Gay.

Goggs led them to the window by which he had made his own exit. It was the box-room window, and in order to reach it the leads of the building below had to be reached first.

But that was an easy enough task for this crowd.

The box-room window was on the shadowed side of the School House. But in any case it was hardly to be dreaded that anyone should be looking out into the quad at midnight.

Up they went, and in they went. In single file they made their way noiselessly through the passages to the door of the Fourth Form dormitory.

Goggs opened the door.

"Sure, an' is annywan awake?" he inquired.

It was the last utterance of Phelim O'Hoggarty. The pince-nez had been discarded when its wearer went to bed. He had kept on the wig then, of course, but that also had gone now. And when the Fourth next saw him it would be as Johnny Goggs!

No one answered.

"It's all serene!" said Gay. "Get to work quickly, or we'll never put it through. There ought really to have been more of us. I'll take Blake."

"Herries for mine!" said Frank Monk.

"I bag Julian!" said Carboy.

"And I'll have that ass D'Arcy!" Wootton minor proclaimed.

The moon shone in through the windows when they pulled up the blinds. There was no need of any other light.

What had to be done must be done with all speed. There were not enough of the Grammarians to allow of one to each bed, and the notion was to deal with the more formidable members of the Fourth to start with, and take the rest afterwards. Then the turn of the Shell would come.

But if operations in the Fourth Form dormitory resulted in too much noise, that turn would not come at all. In their keenness to make a thorough job of it, Gordon Gay & Co. had almost forgotten that the wager was really more a Shell affair than the business of the Fourth.

"Now then!" said the Grammarian leader; and the work began.

Each of the raiders carried four or five rough gags, and twice as many short lengths of rope, with loops in each length.

At the signal each moved to the bed of the fellow he had chosen as a victim, thrust the gag into the mouth of the defenceless sleeper, and threw down the bedclothes.

Some went first for the legs of their special mark, some for the arms. There was kicking and struggling; there were a few gurgles, and one or two quickly stifled exclamations; but on the whole nothing could have been more thoroughly successful than this beginning of operations.

(Another grand long instalment of this magnificent school serial will appear in next Monday's issue. Order early.)



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