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No. 615. Vol. XIII.

November 22nd.
1919.



The Magnet ^{1 1/2} Library

20 PAGES.



BILLY BUNTER'S POUND NOTE!

(A Startling Incident in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.)



The Right Thing!

A Magnificent Long, Complete
School Story of Harry Wharton
& Co. at Greyfriars School.

By FRANK RICHARDS.



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Under Sentence.

"LOOK here, Wharton!"
It was Sunday morning at Greyfriars.

Harry Wharton & Co. were standing in a rather elegant group in the quadrangle, waiting for the chime that was to call them to morning service. Their elegance was due to the fact that it was Sunday, and that service was close at hand. The Famous Five of the Remove were in their best bibs and tuckers, so to speak.

Even Bob Cherry's tie was nearly straight, and his hair almost tidy.

Skinner of the Remove came up to them, with a scowling, worried expression on his thin face.

And the cheery chat of the Famous Five ceased at once. Skinner did not have an exhilarating effect on them.

They were sorry for Skinner in a way. He was under sentence of a flogging, to take place in Hall before lessons the following morning. In their opinion, he deserved it; but they felt a natural compassion for any fellow who was down on his luck. Skinner, too, was not the kind of fellow to "go through it" with fortitude. The Bounder had been flogged the previous week, and not a cry had left his lips to show that he was hurt. But Skinner was made of different stuff. It was pretty certain that Skinner's howls would ring through Hall from end to end. Somehow, that made it seem worse.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry as cordially as he could. Bob found it rather difficult to be cordial to Skinner.

But Skinner did not heed Bob's greeting. His shifty eyes were fixed upon Harry Wharton.

"Look here——" he muttered.

"Well!" said Harry.

"You're captain of the Remove," said Skinner.

"Well?"

"Head of the Form, and all that."

"Yes," said Wharton. "What about it, Skinner?"

"Well, it's up to you, then!" said Skinner sullenly.

Wharton looked puzzled.
"I'm down for a flogging in the morning," said Skinner. "They make out that I pinched old Quelch's fool manuscripts, and took them to my study to burn them——"

"Well, you did!" said Johnny Bull.

"I didn't!"

"H'm!"

"Hem!"

"The bemusement is terrific," murmured Hurree Janset Rain Singh.

The Famous Five looked very uncomfortable.

Skinner scowled at them.

"I didn't!" he repeated. "It's all rot! It's a plant!"

"A plant!" repeated Wharton.

"That's it! I never knew anything about Mr. Quelch's rotten manuscripts—— wouldn't have touched them with a barge-pole! It's a plant! Somebody's done this to get me into trouble!"

"Hem!"

"It's up to you, as head of the Form, to chip in, Wharton. You ought to do something. You ought to prevent it somehow. What's the good of being captain of the Remove? I'm going to be flogged to-morrow for nothing. You ought to interfere!"

"What can I do?"

"It's up to you to chip in, I tell you! I never did it! Don't you believe me!" broke out Skinner savagely.

Wharton shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Skinner, but I don't—I can't! It's proved plain enough for Mr. Quelch and the Head. Mr. Quelch's manuscripts were taken from his study while he was out. They were found in your room. One sheet was picked out of your grate, burnt. The rest were found in your desk. What's the good of talking? It's clear enough!"

"The clearness is terrible, my esteemed Skinner!"

"I don't think," said Johnny Bull, in his slow, deliberate way—"I don't think a fellow ought to tell lies on Sunday, even if he can't keep truthful on weekdays!"

"Hear, hear!" murmured Frank Nugent.

Skinner looked very bitter.

"I'm telling the truth!" he said.

"Ahem!"

"It's plain, as you say," resumed Skinner. "But can't you see it's a bit too plain to be true? If I'd taken Mr. Quelch's papers to my study to burn, I should have burned them!"

"You did burn some—they found a fragment in the ashes——"

"Am I the kind of fellow to leave a clue like that?"

"Well, no, not as a rule," said Harry Wharton, after some thought. "You are always playing some blessed trick, Skinner, but, as a rule, you're too careful to leave a track behind you. But——"

"The biggest rogues make blunders sometimes," remarked Johnny Bull.

"Then the other papers being found in my desk," said Skinner. "Why should I stick them into my desk if I was going to burn them?"

"Well, that's pretty clear. I suppose you were interrupted before you got through, and you stuck them in your desk till you had another chance. You wouldn't have dared to let even Snoot or Stot see you burning Mr. Quelch's manuscripts."

Skinner clenched his hands.

"I know it sounds like that!" he muttered. "But can't you see, it's exactly what would have happened if some cat had planted it all on me—leaving a burnt fragment in the grate, and putting the rest in my desk. I shouldn't have been so careless if I'd done it!"

Harry Wharton was silent.

There was something in what Skinner said; the end of the Remove was generally too keen and sharp to leave a clue behind him. But that was too slender a thread upon which to hang a theory of Skinner's innocence. As Johnny Bull put it, any rogue might make mistakes sometimes.

"It's a plant!" said Skinner. "It's got up to land me into trouble!"

"I can't believe that!"

"Oh, you wouldn't, of course!" sneered Skinner.

"If it's a plant, who did it?" exclaimed Harry Wharton abruptly. "One of your study-mates, do you mean?"

"No; Snoop and Stott wouldn't—no reason for."

"Who, then?"

"I suspect Smithy!"

"The Bounder? Oh, that's all rot!"

"It isn't all rot!" said Skinner, between his teeth. "He was as mad as a hatter, because he thought I gave his pal Redwing away for breaking bounds the other day!"

"You did give Redwing away!"

grunted Johnny Bull.

"Well, that's his motive, anyway! Smithy got a flogging for helping Redwing break bounds, and now he's landed me with one. That's what I think! Anyhow, I never touched old Quelch's rubbish. It's up to you, Wharton—you're captain of the Form, and I've a right to expect you to see fair play."

The captain of the Remove shook his head again.

"There's nothing I can do, Skinner! If I believed you—but I must say I don't! You're always playing some impish trick or other; it's exactly what you would do, anyhow!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's the Bounder!" murmured Bob Cherry.

Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, came out of the School House with his chums, Tom Redwing, Vernon-Smith was chatting cheerily, and seemed at great spirits. Redwing was very quiet and thoughtful, and did not look his usual contented self by any means. Skinner's eyes glittered at the Bounder.

Wharton followed his glance. He did not believe Skinner, but that bitter youth's words had made him feel uncomfortable. He called to the Bounder:

"Come this way, Smithy!"

Vernon-Smith came along with Redwing. He was smiling, and did not seem to notice Harold Skinner.

"Rippin' morning, isn't it?" he remarked.

"Yes, yes! Skinner says—"

"My dear man, you haven't called me up to hear what Skinner says, I suppose? I'm not interested in Skinner."

"Skinner says that Mr. Quelch's manuscripts were planted in his study yesterday, and he knows nothing about it," said Wharton abruptly.

The Bounder raised his eyebrows.

"Well, that's just what Skinner would say, isn't it?" he remarked.

"I—I suppose so. Do you know anything about it, Smithy?"

"What on earth should I know about it?"

"You know this much," snarled Skinner. "You know that you did it, to get me a flogging!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You deny it, of course, Smithy?" asked Wharton uneasily.

"I don't take the trouble," answered the Bounder coolly. "If Skinner thinks so, he's only got to tell the Head. Let him, and I'll answer then."

And the Bounder walked away with Redwing, who was looking more sombre than before.

"He won't own up, of course!" muttered Skinner. "Look here, Wharton, what am I going to do?"

"If you believe what you've told me, you ought to speak out to the Head and tell him the same thing."

"What's the good of that?" exclaimed Skinner savagely. "The Head wouldn't believe a word of it, would he, without any proof?"

"Naturally, he wouldn't."

"Then what's the good of telling him? It would only make things worse for me, not better."

Wharton did not answer.

"I want to know what to do!" said Skinner.

"You'll have to go through with it, that's all. You should have left Mr. Quelch's manuscripts alone."

"I never touched them!" shouted Skinner.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's the bell!" said Bob Cherry.

The chapel bells were ringing. Harry Wharton & Co. moved off and joined the stream of fellows heading for the grey old chapel, glad enough for the interview with Skinner to be interrupted.

Skinner stared after them, his eyes glaring, and drove his hands deep into his pockets and followed slowly.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Very Dutiful Brother!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Run away and play, Bunter!"

"But I say—"

"Buzz!"

It was after dinner, and Harry Wharton & Co. were heading for the gates. The Sunday afternoon was to be spent in a ramble on the cliffs with Marjorie & Co. of Cliff House School. It was just like William George Bunter to attach himself to the Co.—feeling fairly safe from a bumping on Sunday afternoon.

DON'T READ THIS!

If I were to ask you which is the best paper among the Companion Papers, you would probably say the *Magnet*. But I shouldn't agree with you, because I think they are all "the best!" Of course, you have heard that the *Greyfriars Herald* is our own paper. But have you heard that Tuck Hampers are being given away as prizes in connection with a competition, which is running in that wonderful new school journal?

You may win one if you go in for the competition, so be sure to get a current number of the *Greyfriars Herald*, and enter at once.

I said at the top, "Don't read this!" and you have read it. I knew you would!

"I say, you fellows, I've got something to say, you know," persisted Bunter, rolling after the chums to the gateway.

"You generally have!" grunted Bob Cherry. "Where you make your mistake is in thinking that anybody wants to hear it."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Roll away!"

"You fellows going to Cliff House?" asked Bunter, blinking inquisitively at the Famous Five through his big spectacles. "I'll come, if you like. I want to see my sister Bessie."

"Be-r-r-r!"

"The fact is, Wharton, I prefer to keep an eye open when you're around at Cliff House," said Bunter.

Wharton jumped.

"What—what for?"

"I don't blame you," said Bunter, as the captain of the Remove stared at him blankly. "Bessie's got the good looks of our family. Everybody says she's a good deal like me."

"As like as a barrel to a cask!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"What do you want to keep an eye on me for, you fat idiot?" demanded Harry Wharton.

"He, he, he! You can't pull the wool over my eyes, you know," said Billy Bunter, with a fat wink. "I repeat, I

don't blame you. But I can't have you casting sheep's eyes—"

"Sheep's eyes!" stuttered Wharton.

"At Bessie—"

"Bob-Bub-Bessie!"

"That's it! I don't blame you. But I'm bound to look after Bessie, you know. I don't approve of your giving Bessie the glad eye, Wharton."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry.

Wharton's face was a study.

If the captain of the Remove had been disposed to bestow the "glad eye" upon any damsel at Cliff House—which he certainly was not—most assuredly he would not have selected Bessie Bunter.

William George really had no cause for alarm.

"Oh, Wharton!" murmured Nugent.

"You—you—you silly fat idiot!"

gaped Wharton at last.

Bunter waved a fat hand at him.

"I've already said that I don't blame you," he said. "You can't help it—exactly! Fellows run after Bessie, just as girls run after me—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"It runs in our family," explained Bunter. "It's a sort of fascination."

"Great Scott!"

"Keep a respectful distance, and worship from afar, and all that, and I don't mind," said Bunter generously. "But when it comes to your making sheep's eyes at Bessie, Wharton, I feel it's time to put my foot down—See?"

"You—you—you—" stuttered Wharton. "Oh, come on, you fellows! What the hump are you sniggering at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dry up, for goodness' sake!" snapped Wharton.

He put on speed and strode out of the gates at a great rate, with his grinning chums following. Billy Bunter rolled on behind, puffing and blowing.

"I say, you fellows, don't hurry like that!" he gasped. "I can't keep up with you, you know."

"That's what we want!" explained Bob Cherry over his shoulder.

"Roll off, you fat chump!" growled Harry.

"Oh, really, Wharton!" Billy Bunter put on a spout, and joined the Famous Five again, breathing like a grampus.

"Look here, old chap, I don't want to be harsh."

"Oh—"

"Not exactly harsh," said Bunter. "You can talk to Bessie. You can call her 'Bessie,' if you like. But there's a limit. That's what I mean. See?"

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

The idea of Harry Wharton being "sneaky" in the direction of the fat and egregious Bessie was too much for them. But Billy Bunter evidently had the idea fixed in his fat mind.

"Oh, dry up cackling!" said Wharton crossly. "Look here, Bunter, you dummy, roll away! I shall kick you otherwise!"

"I am certainly coming with you!" answered Bunter, with dignity—as much dignity as his breathless state allowed.

"You can't expect me to let you call on Bessie without my being present."

"We're not going to call on Bessie!" shrieked Wharton.

Bunter winked.

"Come off!" he answered.

"You talk with Marjorie and Clara and Barbara."

"Yes, I know, they're to play gooseberry."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you getting waxy about, Wharton? I've said that I don't blame you, haven't I? I can make allowances."

"I shall burst that fat frog in a minute!" said Harry Wharton.

"You needn't be afraid of me," said Bunter reassuringly. "So long as I'm present, I'm satisfied. I shan't grumble, so long as there's a good tea—"

"We're not going to tea."

"Ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "We're going to meet the ladies near the school, and go for a walk—and coming back to tea at Greyfriars."

Billy Bunter halted. "You—you silly idiot!" he gasped. "Why couldn't you say that before?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" The Owl of the Remove stood in the road and blinked at the Famous Five as they went on their way, in great indignation. Apparently it was tea at Cliff House that he had been thinking of—not wholly the necessity of protecting Miss Bunter from the malign influence of glad-some eyes. Certainly he was not inclined to take a long walk for the latter object only.

But as the Famous Five stopped at the stile to cross into the fields, Bunter came bounding after them at breathless speed.

"I say, you fellows!" he gasped.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"I—I find I've got an engagement, and can't come."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I want one of you fellows to cash a postal-order for me. I'm rather hard-up to-day."

"Sheer off!"

"I suppose you can stand me half-a-crown till to-morrow morning, Wharton?"

"Boh!"

"I'm expecting a postal-order by the first post."

"Rats!"

The five juniors jumped over the stile. Billy Bunter leaned on it, and blinked after them.

"Wharton! I say, Wharton!"

"Oh, roll away!"

"Listen to me. It's important, really important!" spluttered Bunter.

Harry Wharton stopped impatiently, and turned back to the stile.

"Well, what is it?" he exclaimed.

"You lend me half-a-crown, and I'll—Bunter struck his voice to a confidential whisper—"I'll put a word for you with Bessie!"

Wharton stared at the fat junior for a moment blankly. Billy Bunter winked at him, a fat, sly, confidential wink.

It was the wink that did it! Wharton's patience suddenly collapsed. He reached over the stile and smote Billy Bunter on the top of his Sunday hat. There was a roar from the Owl.

"Yarcoooh!"

Wharton turned and hurried after his chums.

"Yoon! Yow! Beast! Oh!"

The Famous Five, grinning, disappeared across the field, leaving Billy Bunter making frantic exertions to extract his head from his hat.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Smithy Toes the Line!

"SMITHY!"

"Hallo, Tubby!" said the Bounder, good-humouredly.

Vernon-Smith was strolling in the quadrangle at Greyfriars that Sunday afternoon by himself. Tom Redwing was in the study digging into Milton—a taste which the Bounder was far from sharing with him. Smithy seemed to be in a cheery frame of mind as he strolled in the quad. He had not observed, or was determined not to observe, the constraint that had fallen upon Redwing; he did not know, or was resolved not to know, that he was resolved not to know.

know, that Milton in the study was a rather thin pretext on Redwing's part to be alone just then.

The Bounder gave Bunter a nod as the fat junior joined him. Billy Bunter's Sunday hat showed signs of damage. His fat face showed signs of wrath.

"I say, Smithy—"

"Yes, I know!" assented the Bounder cheerily. "Your postal-order didn't come yesterday; you're expecting it to-morrow morning; and I'm not going to lend you anything. Good-bye!"

"Oh, really, you know—"

"Besides, the tuckshop's closed on Sunday afternoon," said Vernon-Smith.

"Nothing doing, Bunter."

"I was thinking of asking you to come for a Sunday walk with me," said Bunter, with dignity.

"Thanks! I'm not on."

"We could get some ginger-pop and buns from Uncle Clegg's in Friar-dale."

"I don't want any."

"Well, I do!" said Bunter emphatically.

Vernon-Smith raised his eyebrows. There was a peculiar significance in Bunter's tone that struck him a little.

He looked very attentively at the Owl of the Remove.

"Skinner's going to be flogged in the morning," said Bunter, with a wink.

"What about it?"

"Oh, it serves him right," said Bunter.

"He did sneak about Redwing the other day with his knife, and I got you a flogging. I don't say I blame you. But, all the same, it's rather thick, Smithy."

"I don't understand you, Bunter," said the Bounder very quietly.

William George Bunter winked again.

"You don't catch on!" he asked.

"No, I don't."

"What were you doing in Skinner's study on Saturday afternoon, then?"

Vernon-Smith drew a deep breath.

"I saw you, you know," rattled on Bunter cheerily.

"You sneaked out of Skinner's study, looking as guilty as if you'd been stealing his watch. You flew into a temper when you saw me watching you, and pitched into me. I knew at the time you'd been playing some trick on Skinner. I told you so. Now I know what it was."

Vernon-Smith did not speak, but his eyes glittered at the cheerful Owl.

"I didn't quite tumble at first," went on Bunter.

"When Quelch's silly manuscripts were found in Skinner's desk, I thought he'd bagged them, just like the other fellows. But I remembered afterwards about your sneaking out of the study, which all the other fellows were on the cricket-ground. You can't fool me, Smithy! I know who took the manuscripts from Quelch's study and planted them on Skinner."

Still the Bounder was silent.

"Of course, I wouldn't give a pal away," said Bunter with a grin. "Not if he treats me like a pal, that is. It serves Skinner right. There's no doubt that he did sneak about you and got you licked. And he's a beast, anyway. He refused to cash a postal-order for me yesterday, and actually hinted that he didn't believe I would square. Suspicious beast, you know. Just like him!"

"I'm not going to interfere, so long as I'm treated like a pal."

The Bounder was breathing hard.

He did not take the trouble to deny the inference Bunter had drawn from his surreptitious visit to Skinner's study. A denial was not of much use. Bunter knew!

He had wondered whether the Owl of the Remove would put two and two together, and guess; but he had felt pretty safe in Bunter's obtuseness. But it was evident that that obtuseness had a limit. Possibly Bunter's fat wits had

been sharpened by the chance of getting a hold over the richest fellow at Greyfriars. He was blinking at Vernon-Smith through his big spectacles in a very knowing way, but rather nervously, too. He was very much afraid of Vernon-Smith, even if he had the Bounder under his fat thumb.

There was a short silence.

The Bounder was thinking. It was a relief, in one way, that the secret was known only to Bunter, a fellow who could be kept quiet. Bunter had an axe to grind. He could be kept quiet if it was made worth his while. Until after Skinner had had his flogging, at all events. After that Bunter would be an accessory to the deceit, and could not betray the Bounder without serious consequences to himself.

"Well, what about it, Smithy?" asked the Owl of the Remove, breaking the silence at last. "Coming out, old chap?"

"Not wish you?"

"Oh, all right! Have you seen Wingate?"

"Wingate?"

"Yes. As head prefect, I think Wingate would be able to advise me what to do in the matter," remarked Bunter thoughtfully. "Don't you think so?"

The Bounder's teeth came together hard.

"You're going to tell Wingate what you suspect—"

"What I know!" corrected Bunter.

Vernon-Smith's eyes glittered, and Bunter backed away a step or two.

"No larks, you know," he said. "If you play any tricks, Smithy, I shall yell for a prefect. But there's nothing to rag about. Why can't you be pally?"

"Pally!" The Bounder's lip curled. "How much do you want, you fat cad, to keep your mouth shut?"

Billy Bunter snorted angrily. Contempt, according to the old proverb, will pierce the shell of the tortoise; and even Bunter was not so well-protected as a tortoise. His little round eyes gleamed behind his glasses.

"If you put it like that, Smithy—" he began hotly.

"Well, I do."

"Then I've got nothing more to say to you," said Bunter defiantly. "I'm shocked at you, Smithy. I despise you. Don't speak to me. You're contemptible—that's what you are, Smithy. You've played a rotten trick, and made Quelch himself serve your turn in getting even with Skinner. I can't stand by and see my Form-master used like that. I'm going to do my duty!"

"You fat rotter!"

"That's enough!"

Billy Bunter gave the Bounder of Greyfriars a lofty and contemptuous blink, and rolled away.

The Bounder made a movement after him, and then paused.

He knew his danger—he knew what must follow if it was discovered that he had laid a cunning scheme against Skinner—using Mr. Quelch and the Head himself as instruments in his vengeance upon the sneak of the Remove. But his pride was strong. He would not call to Bunter.

Bunter blinked back at him from a little distance. He was wondering at the Bounder's nerve.

Vernon-Smith did not look at him.

The fat junior frowned wrathfully. He knew the secret—the secret that was worth a very great deal, from his peculiar point of view. He was ready to be bought, and the Bounder apparently did not intend to buy. Wrath and indignation swelled up in Bunter's fat bosom. He kicked round the quadrangle, and caught sight of Wingate and Gwynne



Wharton's patience suddenly collapsed. He reached over the stile and smote Billy Bunter on the top of his Sunday hat. There was a roar from the Owl. "Yaroooh! Yooop! Yow!" (See Chapter 2).

walking in the distance. He bestowed an angry blink on Vernon-Smith, and rolled away towards the two Sixth-Formers.

"I say, Wingate!"

His voice was quite audible to Smithy, as he called to the captain of Greyfriars. Smithy breathed hard.

"Well!" said Wingate, glancing down at Bunter. "What do you want?"

"I want to ask your advice, please, Wingate."

"Well!"

Vernon-Smith strode forward. He realised that Bunter meant business; that if the secret was worth nothing to him, he would not keep it.

And the Bounder put his pride in his pocket, as wrongdoers frequently have to do.

"Bunter!" he called out.

Billy Bunter blinked round at him.

"Hallo, Smithy!"

"Are you—are you coming for a walk?" gasped the Bounder.

Bunter grinned.

"Certainly, old chap!"

"Well, what is it you want to say to me, Bunter?" exclaimed Wingate of the Sixth impatiently.

"I—I—I'll speak to you to-morrow, if you don't mind, Wingate!" stammered Bunter.

"You young ass!"

The captain of Greyfriars walked on with Gwynne.

"Ready, Smithy?" asked Bunter cheerily.

"I'm ready!" muttered the Bounder, in a choked voice.

"Shall we go down to Friarsdale?"

"If you like."

"Might drop in at Uncle Clegg's—what?"

"Yes."

"Good! Come on!" said Bunter.

Vernon-Smith did not look very cordial; but he walked down to the gates quietly with Bunter.

Some of the Remove fellows stared after them as they went.

"Smithy—chomping with Bunter!" ejaculated Bolsover major. "I wonder what that means!"

The Bounder disappeared out of the gates, Billy Bunter rolling along cheerily by his side.

It was quite a happy afternoon for Bunter. It was not quite the same for Herbert Vernon-Smith. He was treading the way of the transgressor, and he was finding it hard.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 615.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Respite.

HAROLD SKINNER was looking pale and harassed when he turned out the following morning.

His punishment was to take place that Monday morning before lessons.

Up to the last moment, as it were, Skinner had hoped.

His hope was nearly gone now. His appeal to Wharton had been useless.

The captain of the Remove would have interfered, to the best of his ability, if he had believed in Skinner. But he did not believe in him.

Skinner was, in fact, paying the penalty of untruthfulness. It had been Bob Cherry, or Squiff, or Tom Brown, or Lord Maulverer, the matter would have been different. But Skinner was known to have no regard for the truth, where his own interests were concerned. It was his own fault if he was not believed when, for once, he was telling the truth.

Skinner realised that, to some extent, and he repented him that he had been so very sharp and so very clever on a good many occasions. His falsity was coming home to roost now.

He regarded the Bounder, in the dormitory, with eyes of bitter hatred, but Vernon-Smith seemed oblivious of his existence.

Skinner had worked it out in his mind that it was the Bounder who was at the bottom of the business.

There was no one else in the Remove, he was sure, who would have the iron nerve and the unscrupulousness to lay such a scheme. And it was the Bounder he had injured by his treachery at Highcliffe. This was Smith's tit-for-tat—a flogging for a flogging.

Skinner limped down from the dormitory, and at breakfast his face was pale and worried.

The craven spirit he was betraying disgusted a good many of his Form-fellows. A flogging was a serious matter enough, but there was no need to be knocked to pieces like this over it, the Removites thought. Bolsover major whispered to Skinner at the breakfast table.

"Pull yourself together, old chap!" Skinner looked at him.

"Don't show the white feather," said

Bolsover encouragingly. "You're making a guy of yourself with that mug!"

"I didn't do it!" muttered Skinner.

"Oh, don't keep that up!"

"But I didn't—"

"Boosh! Keep a stiff upper lip, and go through it smiling! Why, the blessed fags are grinning at your chivvy!" growled Bolsover.

Skinner granted.

He did not care for the opinion of the fags; he did not care for anything but the hope of escaping the punishment that hung over him.

After breakfast he joined his study-mates, Snoop and Stott, in the corridor. They were sympathetic, but inclined to grin at his woebegone countenance.

"Look here, you chap!" muttered Skinner. "You could help me out of this."

"How?" asked Stott.

"You were with me on Saturday afternoon, when somebody bagged Quelch's rubbish. Well, you can tell Quelch you were with me all the afternoon—"

"But we weren't!" said Snoop.

"You were, nearly all the time."

"I'm not going to tell lies to Quelch!" answered Sidney James Snoop, very decidedly. "I wouldn't, for one thing, and he's too jolly sharp, for another! He would be bound to catch a fellow out."

"Sore to," said Stott.

"You ought to stand by me. I never did it."

"Draw it mild, old scout! What's the good of telling us that?" asked Snoop, in an argumentative tone.

"Yes, what's the good?" said Stott. "We know you did it, you know."

"It was Smithy planted it on me, I'm sure."

"How do you know?"

"Well, I do know."

"That's not much good as evidence," said Snoop, shrugging his shoulders.

"Not much good telling Quelch that. I wouldn't! He would think it only a silly lie, and might be all the harder."

"But if you fellows swore you were with me all Saturday afternoon—"

"Nothing doing!" answered Snoop and Stott together.

Skinner gritted his teeth.

"It's rotten! Quelch's been down on me for telling fibs at times, and now he won't believe me when I'm telling the truth!" he muttered.

"The truth?" grinned Snoop. "Dash it all! Only a minute ago you were trying to get us to bear false witness—and now you talk about the truth! You're rather too funny, Skinner, old top! Keep a stiff upper lip and go through it; that's the best you can do!"

"That's my advice, too," said Stott, in his stolid way.

"Hang your advice, and you, too!" growled Skinner, and he walked away from his chums.

The time was drawing near now, and Skinner was feeling desperate. Had the wretched junior been guilty of the outrage upon his Form-master's precious manuscripts? But the unusual consciousness of innocence buoyed him up yet. With faltering footsteps, he made his way to Mr. Quelch's study, and found the Form-master there. Mr. Quelch greeted him with a very stern glance.

"What do you want, Skinner?" he asked, in a hard voice.

"I—I—I want—"

"Well!"

"I want to make an appeal to you, sir," gasped Skinner desperately.

Mr. Quelch held up his hand.

"The question of your punishment, Skinner, is settled."

"But, sir, I may go!"

"But, sir!" panted Skinner. "I'm innocent, sir!"

"Nonsense!"

"I swear it, sir!" stammered Skinner.

"These papers were planted on me in my study, and I know who did it!"

"What?"

"I—I mean, I suspect, sir—"

"That is very different. If you have anything to say to me that places the matter in doubt, you may certainly say it."

"I believe Smithy did it, sir!"

"Vernon-Smith! What reason have you for supposing so?"

"He—he hates me—"

"Nonsense!"

"I mean, he thinks I gave him and Redwing away the other day at Highcliffe, and—that is a trick—"

"I do not believe you for one moment, Skinner. You are bringing an accusation against your Form-fellow without a shadow of evidence. Was Vernon-Smith in your study at all on Saturday afternoon?"

"He must have been—as—"

"Did you see him there?"

"N-no. But—"

"Did anyone else see him there?"

"Not that I know of. But—"

"And you expect me to listen to a foolish and reckless accusation like this?" exclaimed the Remove-master angrily.

"You might as well bring such an accusation against any boy in your Form!"

Skinner groaned.

He knew that well enough. He knew that his statement sounded only like the last wretched attempt at falsehood to escape his sentence.

But the distress in his face caught the Form-master's attention, and he eyed Skinner very sharply.

Mr. Quelch's eyes were very sharp; the Removites compared them to gimlets for their piercing qualities. And there was something in Skinner's wretched face that struck him.

The cad of the Remove rather prided himself upon his power of deception; but it was some glimpse of truth in his face that riveted the Form-master's attention now.

Mr. Quelch paused.

His experience of boys was a long one, and he knew Skinner pretty well, as he knew all the fellows in his Form. More than once Skinner had stood before him and lied, and he had penetrated the screen.

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of falsehoods. But on those occasions Skinner had not looked quite like this. There was more than funk in Skinner's white face. There was something that Mr. Quelch noticed, and noted with surprise—a kind of helplessness, as of one caught in the toils.

The pause was a long one. Mr. Quelch spoke at last.

"The evidence against you, Skinner, is perfectly clear."

"I know it is," mumbled Skinner.

"Such a trick, too, is quite in accordance with what I know of you. You have done such things before."

"I know!" muttered Skinner wretchedly.

"Yet you tell me that you are innocent!"

"On my word of honour, sir!"

"Oh, sir!" gasped Skinner.

"I hold out no hope that you will be pardoned. But I shall make sure that not a vestige of doubt remains. You may go!"

"Thank you, sir!" stammered Skinner.

Scarcely able to believe in his good luck, he left the study. His face was bright when he came out into the quadrangle. The Bounder glanced at him with a puzzled expression. He had not expected to see Skinner looking so cheery that morning.

Skinner gave him a bitter look.

"You've failed, Smithy!" he said, under his breath.

"Might a fellow inquire what you are driving at, Skinner?" asked the Bounder blandly.

"I'm let off!"

the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The worthy and disgusting Skinner must be feeling as merry as a sandjack."

"Do you mean a sandboy, fathead?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"My esteemed Cherry——"

"Looks as if Skinner's let off," said Squiff, as he joined the Famous Five on their way to the Form-room. "Quelch's related! Queer, isn't it?"

"Jolly queer!" said Johnny Dull.

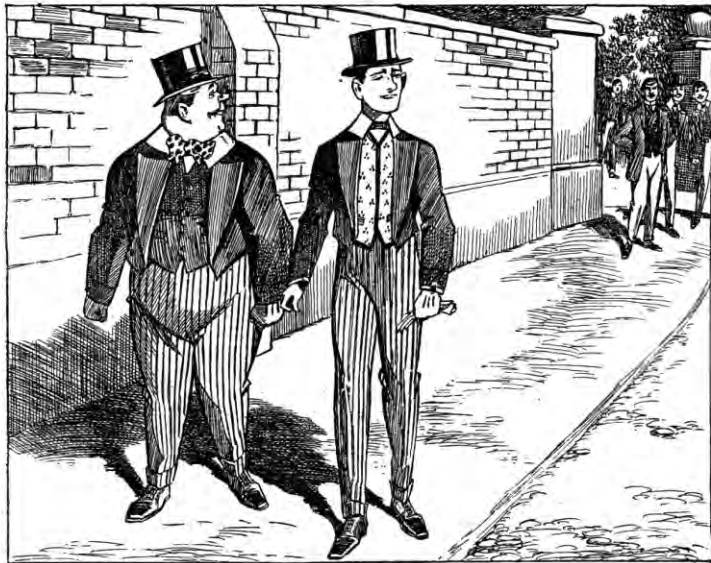
"Blessed if I catch on! There can't be any doubt that Skinner did it."

"Hardly!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Bunter! Bunter knows, of course! What has Skinner been let off for, Bunter?"

Billy Bunter blinked at the chums of the Remove in surprise.



Vernon-Smith did not look very cordial—but he walked down to the gates quietly with Bunter. Some of the Remove fellows stared after them as they went. "Smithy—chumming with Bunter!" ejaculated Bolsover major. "I wonder what that means?" (See Chapter 3.)

"Your word of honour is worth very little, I fear, Skinner. You have yourself rendered it worthless."

Skinner winced.

"I—I know I've been a fool!" he muttered. "But—but I'm telling the truth now, sir. Of course, you don't believe me!"

Mr. Quelch pursed his lips.

"There seems to be no doubt in the matter," he said. "But I should be very sorry to run the slightest risk of committing an injustice. Skinner, I shall speak to Dr. Locke, and request him to defer your punishment while further searching investigation is made."

"Wha-at?"

"So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, you plotting cad!" said Skinner. And he walked away, leaving the Bounder staring.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. Under a Fat Thumb.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! There's the giddy bell!"

"Then the flogging's off!"

said Harry Wharton.

"Looks like it!"

"I'm glad!" remarked Nugent.

"The gladfulness is terrific!" observed

"Has he been let off?" he ejaculated.

"Didn't you know?" roared Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha! Peeping Tom's got left for once! Paul Pry doesn't know! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—— But, I say, is Skinner really let off?" exclaimed Bunter.

"Well, he was to be licked before lessons, and now it's lessons," answered Squiff.

"My hat!" said Bunter. "Smithy can't have——" He paused in time.

"Nothing to do with Smithy, is it?" asked the Australian junior.

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"Nunno! Of—of course not! Besides, he's too jolly keen to own up!"

"Own up!" repeated Harry Wharton.

"I—I mean—that is—I meaner"

"Well, what did you mean to say?" demanded the Australian junior. "Are you wandering in your mind, Bunter?"

"Yes—no—I mean—"

"Skinner's got a yarn that Smithy planted it all on him," said Frank Nugent. "That's what the fat duffer's got in his noddle, I suppose."

"Yes, that's it!" gasped Bunter, in relief. "Yes—exactly! I say, this will give Smithy the pip! He wanted Skinner flogged for giving him away the other day."

"You silly ass!" said Squiff. "I suppose Quelch wasn't going to have him flogged to please the Bouncer, was he?"

"He, he, he!"

"What are you he-he-heing at?" exclaimed Squiff, in perplexity.

"He, he, I know what I know!" grinned Bunter.

"Precious little, I should think!" granted Sampson Quinny Ifley Field.

"I could tell you fellows some things, if I like," giggled Bunter.

"Well, what could you tell us, Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton quietly. The captain of the Remove was eyeing Bunter very sharply.

"Oh, nothing!" said Bunter hastily.

"I mean, I couldn't tell you anything. That's what I really meant to say, you know."

"Well, of all the thumping idiots—" said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"And you don't know why the Head has let Skinner off?" demanded Bob.

"Nunno!"

"What do you mean by it, then?"

"Eh?"

"Here's a chap," said Bob Cherry indignantly, "who always knows everything, and always will know everything so long as they make keyholes to doors. Now we're jolly curious he doesn't know! Do you call that playing the same, Bunter? Haven't you been listening at the Head's keyhole?"

"Then, I haven't!" roared Bunter.

"Then why haven't you?"

"You silly ass—"

"You've no right to drop your usual customs suddenly like this. Had you forgotten there was a keyhole in the Head's door?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—" spluttered Bunter.

"Call yourself a Peeping Tom!" exclaimed Bob indignantly. "Call yourself a Paul Pry! Call yourself an Inquisitive Jack! Why—"

"You silly chump!" howled Bunter.

"I don't call myself anything of the sort! I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Peeping Tom can't tell us the news!" said Bob. "I suggest kicking him all the way from here to the Form-room—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Stand there, Bunter, and— Why, he's off!"

Billy Bunter certainly was off—at top speed. He was first in the Form for lessons, for once. Harry Wharton & Co. followed him, chuckling.

There was a good deal of speculation among the juniors crowding to the Form-room on the subject of the flogging that had not come off. When Skinner came in he was surrounded by curious questioners. The Bouncer's brow was very dark as he went to his place; but his chum, Tom Redwing, seemed to be looking relieved.

The wretched suspicion haunted Redwing that it was his chum who had "planted" the affair upon

Skinner—and the postponement of the flogging was a very great relief to him. But to the Bouncer it meant the disconcerting of all his plans.

The entrance of Mr. Quelch stopped the buzz of discussion, and the Removites went to their places.

Mr. Quelch gave the Bouncer one swift, keen glance, but paid no further attention to him. But Vernon-Smith did not miss that glance. It sent a quick thrill of uneasiness through him. Was he suspected?

Why was Skinner's sentence postponed? If suspicion had turned into a new quarter—

The Bouncer had plenty of food for thought that morning, not wholly provided by the Form work.

He realised that he was treading on slippery ground, and that it behoved him to be very careful.

When the Removites were dismissed after morning lessons, Smithy half-expected the Remove-master to call him to his desk.

But Mr. Quelch paid him no heed; and the Bouncer quitted the Form-room with a feeling of relief.

He joined Tom Redwing in the passage; and at the same time Billy Bunter rolled up with a familiar nod and grin.

"Come and have a ginger-pop before dinner, Smithy," he said.

"Oh, no, thanks!"

"No, do come!" urged Bunter. "My treat, you know!"

"I won't come!"

"Is that what you call civil, Smithy?" demanded Billy Bunter, raising his voice. "After all that I've done for you!"

"Hallo! What have you been doing for Smithy?" chuckled Bolsover major.

"Saving him the trouble of spending his money—what?"

"Oh, really, Bolsover— Don't walk away while I'm talking to you, Smithy!" shouted Bunter. "Come back at once! Do you hear?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a chorale from the fellows in the passage at the idea of William George Bunter giving orders to the Bouncer.

But, to their astonishment, Vernon-Smith turned back.

It was only just in time; for in a minute more, the wrathful Owl would have poured out the whole story.

Smithy's face was almost pale with suppressed anger and chagrin, and its expression made the juniors stare.

"Come on, then!" Smithy almost gasped, taking Bunter by his fat arm.

He walked Bunter out into the quad. There was quite a rush of fellows after them. They headed for the ruckshop, Vernon-Smith endeavouring to compose his features, and Billy Bunter grinning with triumph.

Redwing stared after them, as astonished as the rest. The Bouncer had left him to obey Bunter's command.

Vernon-Smith came out of the schoolshop, leaving Bunter there gurgling. Smithy had paid for the guggle in advance. He had no other resource. If Skinner's flogging had taken place, Bunter might have held his tongue for his own sake—having become a party to the deception. But it had not taken place—and he was still under the fat thumb of the Owl of the Remove. Redwing joined him, with a look of wonder. He did not ask any questions, however, surprised as he was.

"Well!" said the Bouncer, looking at Tom Redwing from under his knitted brows. "Well, you're curious, of course."

"You've made the fellows stare, and

no mistake," said Redwing. "I don't see why you should—" He paused.

"You don't see why I should let Bunter dictate to me?"

"Well, no!"

"I shall ring his fat neck one of these days!" said the Bouncer gloomily. "The fat rotter!" He clenched his hands.

"Under his thumb—under Bunter's thumb! Oh, my hat!"

"How the thump can you be under Bunter's thumb!"

The Bouncer looked his chum full in the face.

"Because he knows what you only suspect!" he answered deliberately, and then he walked away, leaving Tom Redwing rooted to the ground.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Surprising Quid!

"A NYTHING for tea?"

Billy Bunter asked that question as he rolled into Study No. 7 in the Remove.

Peter Todd and Tom Dutton, his study-mates, were there. Dutton, the deaf junior, was slicing a loaf, Peter Todd was covering the slices with butter—butter being "off." There was a tin of sardines on the table, and Billy Bunter blinked at it with great content.

"My dear fat tulip," answered Peter Todd, "there's what you see—and do more. And if you turn up your pig nose at it you shan't have any!"

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"Wire in and get the kettle boiling!" suggested Peter Todd.

"Do you call that a tea?" asked Bunter, surveying the table.

"I've warned you!" said Peter. "Suppose, for a change, you stand your whack, and produce something better."

"Of course I'm going to stand my whack," said Bunter, with dignity. "I can't eat that stuff. You cut down to the licksup, Peter—"

"What?"

"I'll give you a list of things to get, say, up to a quid."

Peter Todd grinned.

"Better give me the quid!" he answered. "I can manage without the list, but not without the quid."

"There you are!"

Billy Bunter felt in his pocket. Toddy watched him, grinning, fully prepared to hear that Bunter had mislaid his money, or that he had forgotten that his postal-order hadn't arrived—prepared for anything, in fact, excepting the production of coin of the realm. He fairly jumped as Bunter extracted a pound note, and threw it carelessly on the table.

"Now cut off!" said Bunter.

"Whose is that?" asked Peter Todd.

"Mine, you ass!"

"Any new boys come to Greyfriars today?" inquired Peter.

"Not that I know of. Why?"

"Only a new boy would lend you a pound—the others know you too well!"

"You silly ass!" roared Bunter. "It's my postal-order—"

"It's a currency note!"

"I mean, it was my postal-order—I changed it at the post-office—"

"When did it come?"

"This afternoon's post, fatted!"

"And you haven't been out of gates to-day," said Peter. "How did you manage to change it at the post-office without going out?"

"I—I mean—I—I asked a chap to change it for me."

"What chap?"

"What does that matter?" growled Bunter angrily and uneasily.

"Lots!" answered Peter Todd. "Before that pound note is changed, Bunt,

I want to know whether it's yours or somebody else's. I know your little ways with cash. You're not going to get your self sent to a reformatory while your Uncle Peter is looking after you!"

"You-you—you—" stuttered Bunter.

"The Borsal system is all right, I dare say, but I believe in a stump," said Peter Todd. "Where did you get that note? Sharp, before I begin with the cricket-stump!"

"I—I've told you—I asked a fellow to—"

"What fellow?"

"Coker of the Fifth," grunted Bunter. He felt rather safe in giving a senior's name—Peter could have asked any Removable. But he soon found that Peter could ask a Fifth Form fellow, too.

"Coker of the Fifth changed that postal-order for you at the post-office?" asked Peter quietly.

"Yes; he was going there, you know, so—so I—I asked him—"

"And I'll ask him, too! Come along!" said Peter, taking Bunter by one fat ear.

"Leggo! Where?"

"We're going to call on Coker!"

Bunter gasped.

"I—I—I mean—I forgot—it—it wasn't Coker! I—I changed the postal-order at the tuckshop; Mrs. Mimble changed it for me!"

"Then why didn't you bring the tuck in, if you were at the tuckshop?"

"I—I—I—"

"We'll go for it now," said Peter, "and before we buy any we'll ask Mrs. Mimble to substantiate your statement, old top!"

"She—she may have forgotten," stammered Bunter.

"Very likely, I think," grinned Peter.

"Look here, Peter Todd, you leggo! I'll go and get the tuck myself, and I don't want your company!"

"You're going to have it, my fat tulip, whether you want it or not, for a bit," answered Peter calmly. "I want to know where you stole that pound note."

"Do you think I'm a thief?" shrieked Bunter.

Peter shook his head.

"Oh no! I think you're such an idiot that you can bag a currency note without knowing you're stealing," he explained. "But it has to be returned to the owner, all the same."

"I'm the owner!" shouted Bunter.

"If you're the owner, all right. In that case you can explain how you came by the note."

"You've no right to ask me questions, Peter Todd," said Bunter, with an attempt at dignity. "Anybody would think that I wasn't the most upright and honourable fellow in the study!"

"Anybody who knew you would!" agreed Peter. "Now, where did you get this note?"

"It—it's a tip from one of my tified relations."

"Not a postal-order?"

"N-no."

"Then why did you say it was?"

"Because—because I—I—"

"Think out a good one," advised Peter Todd. "It will have to be a jolly good one to spoof me!"

"If you think I'm telling whoopers, Peter Todd—"

"Well, aren't you?"

"No!" roared Bunter. "This currency note came from—from my Uncle Rupert!"

"The duke or the baronet?" asked Peter.

"The—the baronet?"

"That does it!" observed Peter Todd.

"Your cousin, Wally Bunter, hasn't any titled relations, and I don't see how you can have them without him having any. We'll go and see Quelchly!"

Billy Bunter jumped.

"Quelchly! Wha-a-t for?"

"So that he can take charge of the loot, and return it to the proper person!"

"You—you—you—I'm the proper person, I—I—leggo!" howled Bunter,

as Peter, still keeping hold of his fat ear, opened the door with his disengaged hand.

"I—I won't go to Quelchly! There's nothing to go to Quelchly for. Why, he might find out—I—I mean—"

"Come on!" said Peter calmly.

"I—I'll explain, if you like!" gasped Bunter. "I borrowed it. There!"

"When the owner wasn't looking?"

HA, HA, HA!



"CAPTAIN OF THE REMOVE!"

There is a splendid story in this week's "PENNY POPULAR" about Billy Bunter as captain of his Form, entitled—

"FOR ONE WEEK ONLY!"

"No!" yelled Bunter.

"Then you didn't borrow it—you cadged it," said Peter. "But even Mauly wouldn't let you cadge a quid at a time. Won't wash, old top!"

"I tell you I borrowed it, you beast!"

"Name of the lender, then—sharp!"

"I'm not going to tell you. I—I—"

"Leggo!" roared Bunter. "Yow-ow-ow!"

"I'll tell you, if you like! It was old Smithy."

"Smithy lent you a quid?"

"Yes, you beast!"

"That's a bit steeper than all the rest," remarked Peter Todd. "If you stick to that yarn, we'll ask Smithy."

"You can ask him, if you like, you rotter." "Leggo my ear! I'll jolly well kick your shins!"

"Better not, old top. There would be a badly-injured porpoise lying about soon

afterwards. Come along, and see Smithy!"

"Look here, you interfering beast—"

"Kim on!"

Peter Todd started for Study No. 4, taking Bunter's ear with him. Needless to say, Bunter accompanied the ear. Peter tapped at Vernon-Smith's door, and three of them opened. Smithy and Tom Redwing were sitting down to tea, both very silent. The Bounder looked round with savage impatience at his visitors.

"What the thump do you want?" he snapped.

Peter Todd raised his eyebrows.

"Keep your wool on, old dicky-bird," he said cheerfully. "I've caught Bunter in possession of an unaccountable pound note, which he says you lent him. Before proceeding further to look for the owner, I want you to mention that you didn't lend it to him, as a matter of form."

Tom Redwing kept his eyes fixed on his plate. The Bounder's look grew darker.

"Tell him, Smithy!" grunted Bunter. "Mind, I wasn't going to mention it. You can hear that in mind. I wasn't going to say a word, but—"

"I lent it him!" said the Bounder abruptly.

Peter Todd stared.

"You lent Bunter a quid?" he ejaculated.

"Yes."

"Well, my only hat!"

Peter could only blink at the Bounder in astonishment. To lend Bunter a pound, with any expectation of repayment, required a degree of "softness" that was not to be found in the Greyfriars Remove. And the Bounder of Greyfriars, whatever he was, was not soft. He was the very reverse of "soft" in every possible way.

If the pound note came from him, he had not lent it to Bunter—he had given it to him. And Vernon Smith was a little likely to give anyone a pound for nothing as any fellow Peter could think of.

The Bounder watched his astounded face with darkening brows.

"What the thump is it to do with you?" he demanded. "I can lend Bunter a pound if I like, can't I?"

"Oh, certainly!" gasped Peter. "Certainly, old top! Fools and their money—"

"Oh, get off!"

Peter Todd released Bunter's ear at last.

"You've got me beat, Smithy!" he said. "I suppose there must be some reason for this, though I can't catch on to it. But if you gave Bunter the quid—all serene. I only wanted to know that he'd come by it honestly, as I'm his keeper."

And Peter Todd left Study No. 4 still in a great state of astonishment. Billy Bunter followed him out, his fat face red with wrath.

"Keep it! I'll give you keeper, you beast!" he howled. "I won't stand tea in the study now, Yah!"

And Bunter rolled away to the school shop, to have his tea there in solitary state. It was an ample tea, too, and there was not much left of Smithy's pound note when he had finished.

And when Bunter crawled out of the tuckshop he was looking very shiny, and jammy and smeary. But though he found some difficulty in breathing, he seemed very satisfied. In these days William George Bunter was like unto a pig in clover; and he was enjoying the experience.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Trouble in Study No. 4.

TOM REDWING sat very silent at the tea-table in Study No. 4 after Peter Todd and Bunter were gone.

The colour had crept into his sunburnt cheeks, and he could not keep back his look of distress and trouble.

He pushed his chair back a little. He seemed to have lost his generally healthy appetite.

Vernon-Smith went on with his tea in grim silence.

His eyes were glittering under his bent brows, and the expression on his rather hard face showed that he was quite in a humour for a quarrel.

It was the Bounder who broke the silence at last. He rose from the table, shoved his hands into his pockets, and stood looking at Redwing.

"Well!" he said abruptly.

"Well!" muttered Redwing.

"Shocked—what?"

"Yes."

"I thought so!" sneered the Bounder.

Tom Redwing rose also, and moved to the window. He stood for some minutes looking out into the dusk of the quadrangle, the Bounder watching him with a sneering, disagreeable smile.

"Well!" he said again, at last.

"There's nothing to say, Smithy! I suppose it's not my business," said Redwing heavily.

"Oh, yes, it's your bizney, you know!" replied the Bounder. "You're shocked, and isn't it up to you to go to Quelch and—"

"Smithy!"

"And tell him all the facts like good little sneaking Georgie in the story-book."

"I sha'n't do that, Smithy, and you know it."

"Why not?"

Redwing made an impatient movement.

"There's no need for us to row, Smithy," he said. "You've been too good a pal to me for me to think of—"

"Of what?"

"Well, we needn't quarrel," said Redwing. "But—but— Oh, old chap, why did you do such an awfully rotten thing? It was rotten, awfully rotten! And it was silly, too. You've put yourself under Bunter's thumb, and that fat fool is sure to blab out the whole thing sooner or later. It was silly, as well as rotten; not like you at all!"

"Was it rotten?"

"I suppose so. It was you—"

"It was I that nailed Quelch's fool manuscripts, and planted them in Skinner's study on Saturday afternoon," said the Bounder, with a cool nod. "You suspected it before, and now you know. I did it because Skinner sneaked about us, and got me a flogging. I'm getting him one. Tit for tat, you know, I don't call that rotten."

"Not if it were all fair and above-board. But—but—"

"Doesn't he cad deserve it?"

"No doubt he does. But—"

"Well, he's going to get what he deserves. In your character as Good Little Georgie, you ought to be pleased at a fellow getting what he deserves."

"It's too awfully rotten!" said Redwing, unheeding. "You've damaged Mr. Quelch's property—stuff he sets no end of store by—"

"Only his literary rot!" said the Bounder carelessly.

"It's a lot to him. And—Skinner's THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 615.

found guilty of doing it, when—when you did it! And—and Hunter knows—"

"That was a mischance, of course. I laid my scheme pretty well," said the Bounder coolly. "Everybody was out of doors while the football was going on. I had the Remove passage to myself. But that fat rotter was bound to come nosing round just when he wasn't wanted. He saw me come out of Skinner's study. The fat fool has put two and two together. It's a stroke of bad luck, that."

"You might have foreseen something of the kind. Tricks like that can't be played without being found out."

"Oh, Bunter's all right, so long as I make it worth his while to keep the secret," said the Bounder contemptuously.

"All the Remove will know pretty soon that Bunter is screwing money out of you. What happened just now—"

"Bunter won't be screwing money out of me for long."

"Then he will give you away."

"Not after Skinner's had his flogging," said the Bounder coolly. "After that Bunter will have to keep quiet for the sake of his own fat skin. He will be a party to it then. Imagine him telling Mr. Quelch that he knew the facts all the time, but let Skinner get his flogging all the same! It would mean another flogging for Bunter, and a jolly stiff one."

"I—I suppose so."

"It's all serene, when Skinner's been through it. I can't imagine why it has been postponed."

Read

"THE DISAPPEARING FOURTH!"

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

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

in

THE "GEM."

Out This Wednesday.



"I'm jolly glad it was postponed, Smithy. You can't let Skinner get that flogging."

"Can't I?" grinned the Bounder. "That what I've been planning."

"You can't!"

"And why not?" demanded Vernon-Smith angrily.

"Because it's too rotten, too mean and rotten and deceitful!" answered Tom Redwing steadily. "It's unworthy of you, Smithy."

The Bounder laughed.

"It's just such a rotten trick as Skinner might play himself," said Tom Redwing, in great distress. "You can't fall to Skinner's level."

"That's the only way of getting even with him, isn't it?"

"He's not worth getting even with. He's not worth your taking so much trouble, not worth your lowering yourself!"

"So I've lowered myself, have I?" said the Bounder, with a glitter in his eyes.

"You know you have."

"What do you want me to do?"

"The right thing," answered Tom.

"And that—"

"Tell Mr. Quelch the truth, and let Skinner alone."

"And get another flogging myself?" jeered the Bounder.

"I know it's hard! I wish I could take the flogging. I'd do it like a shot. But—but you'd be glad afterwards, Smithy. You won't always be feeling as bitter as you do now, and—afterwards you'll feel beastly mean and rotten! You'll wish you hadn't done it, and it will weigh on your mind. You're too decent a fellow to do a mean thing like this and not worry about it afterwards."

The Bounder made an impatient movement. Bunter's Redwing's quiet words woke an echo in his own mind.

But he was in no mood to listen to the voice of reason.

Redwing was looking at him very earnestly. He was shocked, deeply shocked and pained, by what his chum had done. More than once he had become aware that there was a strange twist in Smithy's nature that was beyond the comprehension of his own frank and simple mind. That did not make any difference to his friendship. Smithy had been too good and loyal a pal for Redwing to think of deserting him, whatever he had done. But he was anxious, almost painfully anxious, to see his chum do the right thing, and to prove that this act of bitter, revengeful malice was, after all, only the lusty outcome of resentment, for which he could be sorry and ashamed.

But for the Bounder's present irritable and cynical mood Redwing's words would probably have weighed with him. But now they seemed only to irritate him further.

There was a short silence, and Vernon-Smith's face seemed to grow harder and grimmer.

"So that's what you want me to do!" he said at last bitterly.

"It's the right thing!"

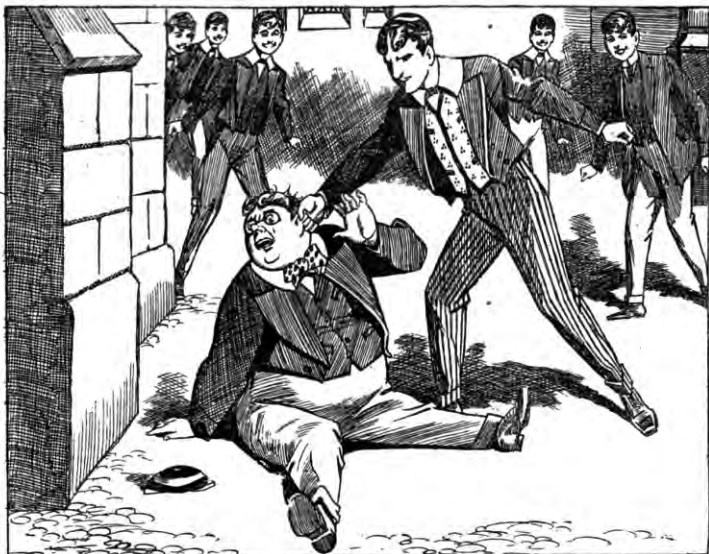
"Then it's up to you to do it!" sneered the Bounder. "You can go to Mr. Quelch as easily as I can. You can tell him the whole merry truth, if you like!"

"You know I can't, and I won't!"

"But you ought to, you know!" said the Bounder, in a tone of mockery. "Otherwise, you'll be standing by while a poor, poor, innocent chap is flogged for nothing. You'll be a party to my wickedness!"

Redwing winced.

"You know I can't interfere," he said. "But you know what you ought to do."



"What—why—Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as a finger and thumb that seemed made of iron closed on his fat ear.
 "Yow-ow-ow! Help! Fire! Yoop!" Bunter felt for a moment as if his ear was coming off. (See Chapter 11.)

By doing this wretched thing you're lowering yourself in your own eyes."

"And in yours, too!"

"Naturally."

The Bouncer set his lips.

"Then the less we have to say to one another the better!" he answered. "I've no use for sermons!"

He turned to the door and opened it.

"Smithy!" called out Redwing.

The Bouncer walked down the passage whistling.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

"His Master's Voice!"

THERE were many curious glances turned upon Herbert Vernon-Smith in the Common-room that evening.

In that little world the Bouncer always filled a prominent place in the public eye. It was an open question whether he could not have wrested the leadership of the Remove from Harry Wharton if he had set his mind seriously to the task.

His recklessness, his bitter tongue, and his somewhat uncertain temper made him perhaps more feared than liked; but he was admired, too, for his boundless courage, and for many sterling qualities. And the peculiar hardness of his character seemed to have melted a good deal of late under the influence of his friendship with Tom Redwing.

Since his old feud with Harry Wharton & Co. had died out he had been more

more popular in the Remove. But at all times he was a person of some consequence. Now that mysterious rumours were spreading about him, there was not a fellow in the Remove who was not interested in a more or less friendly way.

There had been a buzz of voices in the Common-room when Vernon-Smith came in, and it died away quite suddenly on his entrance. The Bouncer did not need telling that he had been the subject under discussion. His lip curled a little as he strolled to a vacant armchair by the fire, and sat down and took up a book. As he glanced over the pages he was quite aware that nearly every eye in the room was upon him, but it did not seem to disconcert him in any way.

Billy Bunter rolled in a few minutes later.

The Owl of the Remove stood and blinked round him through his big spectacles, evidently in search of someone. And there was a sudden exchanging of glances among the juniors.

They knew of whom Bunter was in search.

"There he is, Bunter!" called out Bolsover major, and there was a laugh.

"Eh? Who?" asked Bunter.

"Smithy!"

Vernon-Smith was almost hidden from Bunter by the high back of the chair, and the Owl had not spotted him.

"Oh, thanks!" said Bunter. "As a matter of fact, I was looking for Smithy."

"Oh, we know that!" grinned Russell.

"Blessed if I see how you knew it, Russell!"

"Smithy! Wake up, Smithy! Bunter's after your quids!" called out Snoot.

"Oh, really, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter gave a perplexed blink round, quite puzzled. It had not occurred to his obtuse mind that the Remove fellows had observed that he was now a pig wallowing in clover. He looked upon the Bouncer now as a goldmine, and that extraordinary state of affairs was not likely to pass unremarked for long in the Remove. As a matter of fact, it was in every fellow's mind.

The fat junior rolled along to Vernon-Smith's chair, met by a very dark look from under the Bouncer's knotted brows. In his role of amateur blackmailer Bunter certainly was lacking in discretion.

"I say, Smithy," he began, "I looked into your study for you, and found only that rotter Redwing there. He was quite personal. I say, old chap, give me that chair, will you?"

"What?"

"You know I always like an easy chair," said Bunter.

There was an almost breathless hush in the room.

Vernon-Smith's eyes burned at Bunter, but he was helpless. The whole story was ready to pour out at Bunter's fat lips at any moment. He rose quietly, and abandoned the armchair to Bunter.

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"You can have it," he said, as casually as he could. "I'm going up to the study."

"Don't run away, Smithy," said Bunter, as he settled himself comfortably. "I want to speak to you."

Vernon-Smith did not seem to hear; he was walking rather quickly towards the door.

"Smithy!" bawled Bunter. The Bouncer only quickened his pace. "Come back here, Smithy! Do you hear!" roared Bunter. "Confound your cheek! Come back when I tell you!"

The Bouncer, almost white with anger and chagrin, stopped.

"His Master's Voice!" murmured Snop.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Vernon-Smith walked back to Bunter, much to the satisfaction of that fat and famous individual. Billy Bunter found great satisfaction in thus calling to heel the imperious Bouncer; it gave him a sense of power and importance that was very gratifying. He did not pause to reflect that by so doing he was giving away to all the Remove the state of affairs.

"Well!" muttered Vernon-Smith, as he stood before the fat Owl, almost suffocating with chagrin.

"Sit down, old fellow. I want to speak to you."

The Bouncer sat down.

The eyes of every fellow present were on the scene. That Vernon-Smith was under Bunter's thumb in some mysterious manner was patent to all, and they marvelled to see him accepting the Owl's insolence so quietly.

"What's the Bouncer been doing," Bunter asked Bolsover major.

"Eh?"

"What do you know about him?"

"Oh, really, Bolsover—"

The Bouncer gave Bolsover major a look which caused the grin to die away on Bolsover's face.

"What do you want, Bunter?" asked Vernon-Smith, in a low voice.

"The fact is, old chap, I've been disappointed about a postal-order," said Bunter, blinking at him.

"Could you manage a quid till my postal-order comes, Smithy?"

The Bouncer almost choked.

The money Bunter was extracting from him mattered little; he had plenty of that. But the Owl's crazy fatuousness in enacting such a scene before fifty pairs of eyes was as exasperating as it was extraordinary. If this was the way in which the wretched secret was to be kept it was not likely to remain a secret for long.

Without a word, Vernon-Smith took a currency note from his pocket and handed it to Bunter.

"Thanks!" said the fat junior carelessly. "Will you have this back out of my postal-order, Smithy, or shall I leave it till my allowance comes?"

"It doesn't matter."

"I'd rather you said," explained Bunter. "If you can wait till the end of the week, so much the better. Can you?"

"Yes, yes!"

"All right, then. Don't go away, Smithy. I haven't finished talking to you yet. I understand you're having a run home next Saturday? Your pater's sending the big car—what?"

"Yes," muttered the Bouncer.

"I'll come with you," said Bunter affably. "I've never been home with you yet, Smithy—never had the time. I've so many engagements, you know. But I can find the time next Saturday. Count on me."

"Oh!"

"Only, I shu'n't want Redwing with us," said Bunter. "I can't stand that chap. I'm not particular, but I draw a line somewhere. You will have to leave Redwing behind if you want me, Smithy."

"If—I if I want you!" gasped Vernon-Smith.

"What, I suppose you do want me?" said Bunter triumphantly. "If you don't, you can say so, of course. Do you want me or not, Smithy?"

"Of—of course!" stammered the Bouncer.

"It's a go, then!"

Vernon-Smith escaped at last. His cheeks were burning as he left the Common-room.

What the fellows thought of the scene he could hardly imagine. It did not seem to occur to Bunter that they were thinking anything of it. But as soon as the Bouncer was gone a curious crowd surrounded the Owl of the Remove.

"Now, what's this game?" demanded Bolsover major.

"Eh?"

"What's Smithy giving you money for?" asked Hazeldene.

"Oh, really, Hazel, if you think I would accept money from anybody—" began Bunter in dignified wrath.

"Why, we saw Smithy give it to you, you fat idiot!"

"If you mean that quid, that was a loan."

"Well, what is Smithy lending you money for, if you prefer that?" explained Bunter.

"Because we're so pally," explained Bunter. "I rather like old Smithy, you know. Perhaps I've been rather down on him sometimes—not quite my class, you know. His people are in trade. But, on the whole, I've decided to take him up."

"Ti-take him up?" stammered Bolsover major.

"Ye gods!" murmured Squiff.

The idea of the Bouncer being "taken up" by Billy Bunter was too astounding.

The juniors could only stare blankly at the complacent Owl.

Bunter nodded cheerily.

"That's it—I've taken him up," he said. "He's not a bad sort, in his way. I'm going home with him on Saturday, as he's so pressing. Perhaps I may take him home some day to Bunter Court. That depends a good deal on what his people are like, of course!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fat clump!" roared Squiff.

"You're got some hold over Smithy, and he's giving you money to keep something dark!"

"Oh, really, Field—"

"What does all this mean, then?"

"You're jolly intuitive, Field! I may have done Smithy a good turn, or I may not. That's as it may be. I'm not going to tell you anything!"

"If I were Smithy," said Bolsover major. "I'd jolly well smash you up, instead of giving you currency notes!"

"I'd jolly well give him away if he did!" grinned Bunter.

"Give him away—how?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"Then you're keeping something dark for Smithy?" exclaimed Ogilvy.

"Not at all! What on earth put that idea into your head?" asked Bunter.

"The fact of the matter is, that Smithy and I are pals—real pals, you know!"

"(Cries raise)

"What do you think, Wharton?" asked Snop, turning to the captain of the Remove, who had been a perfectly silent spectator of the strange scene.

"I'd rather not say!" answered Wharton, abruptly, and he left the Common-room with a soubre look on his face.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The End of His Tether!

VERNON-SMITH opened the door of his study in the Remove passage—and then stopped abruptly. Tom Redwing was there at the table, with his books. The Bouncer made a backward step as Tom looked up.

"You needn't clear," said Redwing, colouring. "I'm just finished, and going down."

"Oh! All right!"

The Bouncer came in, and Redwing left the study with a troubled face. Not another word passed between the estranged chums.

As the door closed behind Redwing, the Bouncer threw himself into a chair with a gloomy brow.

He had a feeling that the toils were closing round him.

His dream of vengeance upon Skinner had seemed to him perfectly planned and sure of success—but it had missed fire, somehow. Harold Skinner was still enjoying his respite—the matter was in abeyance. And at least, until the flogging had been administered, Vernon-Smith was under Bunter's thumb—helplessly.

The whole success of his scheme depended upon the fat junior's silence—as well as his own escape from further punishment. It had seemed easy enough to keep Bunter silent by bribing him—and that was the case, in a way. But he had not calculated upon the fatuous insolence of the Owl of the Remove. He knew that he had left the whole Common-room in a buzz of wonder and speculation on the subject. Besides the bitter humiliation of being called to heel by Bunter, there was the danger of fellows drawing correct inferences from that amazing state of affairs.

And that was not all.

For somewhere, deep down in the Bouncer's breast there was a growing dissatisfaction with what he had done.

In the first vegeful bitterness, he had had to scruple—but, to his own surprise, scruples had followed. Redwing, indeed, knew him better than he knew himself. He was dissatisfied—troubled—and he wished from the bottom of his heart that he had never taken the trouble to revenge himself upon Skinner. After all, as Redwing had said, the fellow wasn't worth it. What did Skinner matter, anyway?

There was something unsatisfactory even in a successful revenge—it left a bitter taste in the mouth. Revenge, after all, was a mean gratification—there was something despicable in nursing malice, even for a real injury.

Tom Redwing was right; Smithy had lowered himself in his own eyes, and it gave him a feeling of haunting discomfort.

And now—he had not even been successful. Skinner's flogging was still a matter of doubt, if that was worth thinking about—and the Bouncer realised that it wasn't worth thinking about. And he himself—he was under Bunter's thumb, he was blackmailed and humiliated, and he had quarrelled with his best pal. The revenge he had so cunningly planned upon Skinner seemed to have fallen rather upon himself.

The Bouncer gave an angry start as a tap came at the door. He did not speak; but the door opened, and Harry Wharton came in. Vernon-Smith gave the captain of the Remove a far from welcoming look.

But Wharton had evidently come to say something, and black looks did not deter him. He shut the door, and turned towards the Bouncer.

"I was present in the Common-room

when you were talking to Bunter," said Wharton abruptly. "I dare say you didn't notice—"

"Don't see that it matters! The fact is, Wharton, I rather he alone now, if you don't mind!"

"Very likely! But what I have to say won't keep! No need to scowl at me, Smithy; I'm speaking as a friend," said Wharton quietly. "Every fellow in the Remove knows now that you are under Bunter's thumb in some way. I don't know whether the fat idiot meant to give it all away like that; but, anyhow, he's done it. I can't help thinking of this, Smithy, in connection with Skinner's affair."

The Bounder compressed his lips bitterly. It had come, then!

"Skinner maintains that he did not play the trick with Quelch's manuscripts. He is such an awful fibber that there's no taking his word, of course. But Quelch himself must have some doubt, as he's put the flogging off."

"No bizney of me, I suppose?"

"I don't know—yes! But Bunter has been babbling, more or less—though till now I took no notice of his blabber. He was babbling something to the effect that you had got Skinner a flogging, in return for the one you got owing to Skinner's sneaking. He's always talking some rot, I know. But—"

Wharton paused.

"Well!" said the Bounder mockingly.

"Look here, Smithy, you must know how it looks!"

"Well, how does it look?"

"It looks as if you had a hand in that affair of the manuscripts, and Bunter knows it!"

"Does it?"

"I only say it looks like it. But—now I come to think of it, there's a lot of things—trifles—" Wharton paused again. "You seem to have quarrelled with Redwing—several of the fellows have remarked on that. It looks as if Redwing knows."

"Really?"

"I know Redwing won't say a word, whatever he knows; but if it's a fact, what Skinner says, and—and Redwing knows it, you're putting him into a rotten position. You can see that!"

"Anything more?"

There was another pause. The captain of the Remove did not quite know how to deal with the Bounder in his present mood.

"Well, I don't know whether there's anything more," said Harry, at last. "You know best what you've got on your mind, Smithy. It's becoming a standing joke in the Form, the way Bunter orders you about, and you give him money. There's a reason for it, of course—and I can't help thinking that I see the reason—and that everybody else will see it soon. I'm not surprised that you were wild with Skinner, but—"

"Well?"

"But if you played that trick on him, it was too thick, and it does surprise me, I must say. I shouldn't have thought of it you!" said Harry frankly.

"Thank you!"

"Well, I ought to speak," said the captain of the Remove, rather discouraged. "I can't help seeing what it all looks like. But if you've got nothing on your conscience, Smithy, all the better. If you have, though—" Wharton hesitated.

"If you have—"

"Well, if I have—" repeated the Bounder, in the same mocking tone.

"Apart from what's right and what's wrong, it may pay you best to make a clean breast of it—that's all! It's all bound to come out, whatever the truth is—Bunter will make you talk of Greyfriars, at this rate, in a few days. If

Quelch gets to know that you're backing him—for that's what it amounts to—that will settle it. Once Bunter's up before the back, he will blab out everything, even if he doesn't mean to. There's an old saying, Smithy, that honesty is the best policy. It seems to me pretty clear in this case!"

And with that Harry Wharton quitted the study, without waiting for Vernon-Smith to reply.

Vernon-Smith kicked the door savagely shut after him.

But he was not angry with Wharton. He knew that Harry had only voiced what was in the other fellows' minds, or would soon be in their minds, and he had spoken from a friendly motive.

And he had given good advice—there was no doubt about that. Savage as the Bounder felt just then, he had not lost his keenness. Owing up to the truth meant severe punishment; but if the truth was discovered otherwise it meant something much more serious. Both the Head and Mr. Quelch had been made use of by the hardy, iron-nerved Bounder, and they were not likely to forgive that. A shadow seemed to loom before him, and in his gloomy thoughts he saw the gates of Greyfriars closing behind him for ever.

But he was quiet and self-possessed when he came into the Remove dormitory that night. Every fellow in the Remove glanced at him, and there was on Skinner's face a decisive grin which showed that the cad of the Remove was pretty well aware now how matters stood. Vernon-Smith noted it, though he hardly glanced at Skinner. There was danger in that quarter. Skinner was quite cunning enough to worm the truth out of Bunter now that he guessed the fat junior knew.

Vernon-Smith's face expressed nothing, but his mind was busy as he turned in; for it was clear to the Bounder of Greyfriars now that he was at the end of his tether.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Clean Breast of It!

"EXCUSE me, sir!"

"Well, Vernon-Smith?"

"May I speak to you for a few minutes, sir?"

"Really—"

"I have a confession to make, sir."

The Remove-master glanced sharply at Herbert Vernon-Smith. It was near time for morning lessons on the following day when Smithy stopped his Form-master in the passage.

"You may step into my study, Vernon-Smith!" said Mr. Quelch curtly.

"Thank you, sir."

Vernon-Smith followed the Remove-master in. With Skinner's accusation fresh in his mind, it is probable that Mr. Quelch guessed something of what was coming.

"Well, my boy?" he said, not unkindly.

"I want to confess, sir," said the Bounder, in a low, even tone. "It was I who meddled with your manuscripts the other day!"

"You?"

"Yes, sir!"

"This is rather surprising, Vernon-Smith. Skinner has already made that accusation against you, but, as he could not adduce a shadow of evidence, I declined to take heed of it. Now, you confess—"

"Yes, sir. I'm sorry!"

"You took the manuscripts from my study and damaged them?"

"I did not mean to damage them, sir."

I'm afraid I didn't think much about that. I did it on Skinner's account."

"You placed the papers in his desk, and burst one of them in his study grate, in order to throw suspicion upon him?"

"Yes, sir," said the Bounder, unmoved.

"Bless my soul! And why have you come to tell me so now, Vernon-Smith?"

"I've got several reasons, sir. One of them is that I'm sorry I did it, and I want you to know the truth."

Mr. Quelch looked fixedly at the Bounder. He was taken very considerably aback.

"That is very commendable, at all events," said the Remove-master drily. "And why did you do this wicked and treacherous action, Vernon-Smith?"

The Bounder winced. Somehow, it had not been plain to him before that that description could be applied to what he had done. The colour crept into his face.

"I was to punish Skinner, sir. He gave me away that day at Highcliffe, and I was flogged. I thought he ought to be flogged, too."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, almost breathless with indignation. "You—you—you actually laid a scheme, boy, to cause me—me—my Form-master, to commit an act of injustice! Bless my soul! This is too much!"

Mr. Quelch sank into his chair.

Vernon-Smith stood silent. He had expected vials of wrath to be poured out on his devoted head as soon as he made his confession. He was not to be disappointed.

"I hardly know what to say to you, Vernon-Smith! Such duplicity, such disrespect, such cunning—Bless my soul!"

"Oh, sir!"

"Vernon-Smith, if this knowledge had come to me from any other source I should have gone to the Head at once and demanded your immediate expulsion from the school!" exclaimed the Form-master.

The Bounder drew a deep breath.

"As you have confessed to me of your own accord, I can only suppose that you are not so bad as your conduct would imply. But—before you must be aware, Vernon-Smith, that your punishment for this action will be very severe!"

"I know it, sir."

"If the flogging had actually been administered to Skinner, you could not possibly have been allowed to stay in this school. You may be thankful, Vernon-Smith, that your wretched plot miscarried to that extent."

"I am thankful, sir."

"I confess that I hardly know how to deal with you, Vernon-Smith. It is a most extraordinary affair. I shall consult with Dr. Locke, and leave the matter in his hands. For the present you may go."

"Very well, sir."

The Bounder left the study, closing the door quietly after him. Tom Redwing was loitering in the passage, and he gave Smithy an anxious glance. He had heard the Bounder ask Mr. Quelch for permission to speak to him, and he was hoping for the best.

Vernon-Smith gave him rather a grim look, and would have passed on, but Tom touched him lightly on the arm.

"Smith?" he said.

"Well?"

"You—you've seen Mr. Quelch?"

The Bounder burst into a laugh.

"Yes. I've taken your advice, old scout. It was jolly good advice, and I got a second edition of it from Wharton last night. And I fancy I've acted only just in time, too."

"I feel sure of that," said Redwing, with a deep breath of relief. "What's happened?"

"I'm left for the Head to deal with."

"I'm afraid that means—"

"Another flogging," said the Bounder grimly. "Well, I can stand it. I'm not made of putty."

"I'm awfully sorry, Smithy!"

"Are you, after I've rowed with you about it?"

Redwing smiled.

"I don't mind that. You can row with me as much as you like, if it's any relief to your feelings."

"It isn't," grinned the Bounder. "It only makes matters worse. If you weren't the best-tempered chap at Greyfriars, you wouldn't speak to me again."

"Then I must be the best-tempered chap at Greyfriars, old fellow!"

Vernon-Smith slipped his arm through Redwing's, and they went into the quadrangle. Skinner was lounging on the steps, and he gave the Bounder a bitter look.

"You're looking pretty chippy, Smithy!" he said, with a sneer. "We have our ups and our downs, and I fancy you're booked for a down next!"

"Not really!" smiled the Bounder.

"You'll see presently!" said Skinner, in a significant tone.

"We shall see what we shall see, dear boy, if we live long enough!" assented the Bounder.

And he walked on with his chum.

Billy Bunter rolled up to them in the quad.

"Hallo, Smithy, dear boy!" he said affectionately.

"Hallo, my beloved porpoise!" said the Bounder.

"There's just time to have a ginger-pop before lessons," said Bunter, blinking at him. "Come into the tuckshop, Smithy! My treat, you know."

"Your treats come rather expensive to the chap you treat, Bunter! Leave me out!"

Billy Bunter frowned threateningly.

"You'd better come, Smithy!"

"Why?"

"Because it will be worse for you if you don't!" said the Owl of the Remove. "Don't give me any of your cheek, Vernon-Smith! You've got to toe the line!" You know that! Come along at once!"

Vernon-Smith laughed. His confession in Mr. Quelch's study had been a painful ordeal, and there was worse to follow; but, in all events, it had released him from his thralldom. He was no longer under Bunter's podgy thumb, though Bunter was not yet aware of that rather important fact.

His light laugh irritated the Owl of the Remove. Billy Bunter shook a fat forefinger at him.

"I've told you not to be cheeky, Smithy! I suppose you wouldn't like me to pull your ear, would you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Bounder. "Is that the next item on the programme? No, I wouldn't like it exactly, Bunter—But I'll pull your ear with pleasure!"

"What—why— Yaroooooh!" roared Bunter, as a finger and thumb that seemed made of iron closed on his fat ear. "Yow-ow-ow! Help! Fire! Yoop!"

Bunter felt for a moment or two as if his ear was coming off. It did not come off, fortunately. Vernon-Smith gave it a final jerk, and Bunter sat down in the quad with a bump. Then the Bounder walked cheerfully on, leaving Billy Bunter roaring, and a dozen fellows chuckling. It was evident to all that Billy Bunter's mysterious power was gone—

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the Bounder no longer answered to "his master's voice."

The Owl of the Remove was still rubbing his crimson ear and grunting and growling when the bell rang for classes. And Billy Bunter rolled away to the Form-room in a state of suppressed fury that was almost apoplectic.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Reward!

HAROLD SKINNER gave the Bounder a vaulting look as Mr. Quelch came into the Remove-room to take his class that morning. Vernon-Smith gave no sign, but his understood the look, and he was glad at that moment that his confession was made. It had not been made any too soon.

Skinner stood up.

"Mr. Quelch! If you please, sir—" he began.

"Well, Skinner?"

"It's come out, sir, that Bunter knows something about the manuscripts being put in my study the other day."

"Yes, sir," exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Bunter, sir, I believe he knows all about it, and has been keeping it dark. I thought I ought to mention this, sir, as he and Vernon-Smith between them have—"

"Quite so, Skinner. Bunter!"

"Ye-es, sir!"

"Stand out before the class."

"Waa-a-at for, sir?" mumbled Bunter.

"Obey me at once, boy!"

"On dear!"

Billy Bunter rolled out before the class. His fat ear was still smarting, and he had been turning it over in his mind whether to give the Bounder away to the Remove-master. He had not made up his mind—he was yearning to see Smithy flogged, but his thoughts still lingered hungrily on the leaves and fishes. He was in that state of indecision when, much to his astonishment, Skinner made his statement. How Skinner knew anything about it was a mystery to Bunter. He was quite sure that he hadn't said anything to put Skinner on the track.

"My boys," said Mr. Quelch, glancing over the class. "Vernon-Smith has made a confession to me this morning. He has confessed that he, and not Skinner, damaged my manuscripts, and Skinner is quite exonerated."

"Oh!" gasped Skinner.

"I am sorry, Skinner, that you were suspected, and that you have had so narrow an escape of punishment. I trust this will be a warning to you. Your statements could not be believed, because you are an untruthful boy. This lesson that you had knowledge of this affair!" Skinner received that in silence.

"But if it is true that Vernon-Smith's guilt was due to another boy, who could admit that is a very serious matter," said Mr. Quelch. "Bunter, is it a fact that you had knowledge of this affair?"

"Not at all, sir!" said Bunter promptly.

"You did not know that Vernon-Smith had placed my manuscripts in Skinner's study?"

"Certainly not, sir. I didn't see him coming out of the study on Saturday afternoon—"

"Oh, you did not?"

"No, sir! I wasn't in the Remove passage at all, sir, when I saw him coming out—"

"What?"

"It was all Wharton's fault, really, sir!" gasped Bunter. "If he had played me in the team that afternoon I shouldn't have gone indoors at all."

"Then you did go indoors?"

"Oh, no, sir! Certainly not!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "This boy's wretched equivocations are not a subject for merriment."

The Remove did not agree with Mr. Quelch on that point. But they suppressed their merriment.

"Now, Bunter, it seems that you saw Vernon-Smith coming out of Skinner's study on Saturday afternoon. Did you know why he had been there?"

"I hadn't any idea, sir. I thought he might have been there to—to tea. Besides, I didn't see him."

"Bless my soul!"

"As for lending me money, sir," said Bunter, bounding more happily than ever, "Smithy's lent me money simply because we're pals—jolly good pals. I'm going to pay him when my postal-orders come!"

"Bunter! Is it possible that you have obtained money from Vernon-Smith for keeping this disgraceful secret?" thundered Mr. Quelch.

Bunter jumped.

"Nunno, sir! I—I haven't kept it! How—how could Skinner know anything about it if I've kept it? And he knows all about it. He said so! Didn't you, Skinner, old chap?"

"I think I can see very clearly what has taken place," said Mr. Quelch in his grimmest tone. "You have acted in the basest possible manner, Bunter."

"I, sir," exclaimed Bunter, in astonishment. "You—you mean Smithy, sir, or—"

"Silence! Bunter, hold out your hand!"

"Waa-a-at for, sir?"

"I am going to cane you severely!"

"Oh crickey!"

Swish, swish, swish, swish!

"Yow-ow-wow!"

Billy Bunter crawled back to his seat, squeezing his fat hands in anguish. Why he was punished was a mystery to William George Bunter. So far as he could see, he had acted throughout in a high-minded manner which reflected credit on himself and all Greyfriars. But he was punished—there was no doubt about that. His fat palms were still aching when the morning's lessons were over.

Vernon-Smith was called into the Remove-master's study after lessons that day. He went with outward calmness, but his heart was beating.

"I have consulted with the Head, Vernon-Smith," said Mr. Quelch. "Dr. Locke has decided to leave the matter in my hands. How to deal with you I scarcely know. But the fact that you confessed your very serious fault freely to me gives me reason to hope and to believe that you have sincerely repented of what you have done. In these circumstances—" Mr. Quelch paused and coughed.

"I'm not asking to be let off, sir," said the Bounder steadily. "I know what I deserve, and I'm ready."

"I am glad you know what you deserve, Vernon-Smith. But I have decided to pardon you—"

"Oh, sir!"

"And I trust that my leniency will not prove to be misplaced, Vernon-Smith. You have had a narrow escape; let it be a warning to you. You may go."

Aid the Bounder went!

THE END.

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A Stirring New Tale of the Ring.
By PERCY LONGHURST.

SYNOPSIS.

Harry Rhodes, a miner and amateur boxer, of Leshborough, a mining village, meets Joshua Martin, the manager and principal backer of Anthony Hanna—"Cast-Iron Tony"—a wonderful Scottish light-weight boxer, who has come to Leshborough to train. Harry lives with an uncle, James Rhodes, who has trained him, and who had himself been a boxer years before. He had left the ring through some tragedy of which Joshua Martin knows the facts, much to James Rhodes' alarm.

At a small gymnasium one night Harry Rhodes issues a challenge to anyone in the place to three rounds. The challenge is accepted by a stranger, who proves to be Tony Hanna.

After a thrilling contest the famous Scottish boxer is defeated by Harry. Hanna hates Harry Rhodes for this, and makes an attempt upon the life of the amateur boxer. It is unsuccessful, however, and Harry gives Hanna a severe thrashing.

Later, a meeting is held between the miners and the mine-owner to settle a strike which has lasted for some time at the pit where Harry works. After some time no settlement has been reached, when Harry suggests a fight for £1—Mr. Durham, the mine-owner, to put up a man, and the miners to choose one from their number to meet him.

Harry Rhodes is chosen as the miner's man, and Bob Durham for the mine-owner. The contest takes place in the open air, under Bertram Godfrey's arrangements, and after a long struggle, Harry goes to the boards.

(Now read on.)

A Dramatic Recovery!

"THAT'S done it!" muttered Bertram Godfrey, as he saw Harry fall. And he felt genuinely sorry.

Bob Durham was one of his best men; yet, seeing Harry on the ground, dead to the world, his first impulse was to regret his friend's success.

With better reason the pitmen about the ring sent up a shout of dismay as they saw their champion overthrown. They had not expected it; he had been doing so well. Perfectly still he lay; they had no hope of recovery. The battle was finished.

In absolute silence the men listened to the counting of Harwood.

"Tad done his best, but he was over-weighted."

Such was the comment of Ben Moseley, and it expressed the feeling of the rest. None had fault to find with Harry Rhodes.

By the ring, one hand on the ropes, stood James Rhodes, his face grey, while into his eyes crept the dullness of bitter disappointment. Whatever others had hoped, though he had said nothing of it, James Rhodes had believed that his nephew would win. Each sound of Harwood's voice, as he told off the passing seconds, was like a fresh stab in the heart. During those brief seconds there was

not a thought for the victory; even Mr. Durham and Godfrey had their eyes bent fixedly on the form a-spawl on the boards.

"Eight!"

"Nine!"

A yell rent the air.

The fatal word was already forming on Harwood's lips when, with a single spring, Harry Rhodes was on his feet, not only willing, but able to continue the battle.

He was feeling little the worse. The truth was that the presumed knock-out had not been a hard blow; his head had been going backwards as Durham's glove landed, hard enough to daze him for the moment and to topple him over. And, once on the boards, Harry had stayed there to the full limit permitted him, alive, and on the alert, but wasting no strength in premature movement. He was entitled to take nine seconds' rest, and he took it.

More surprised, perhaps, than any, Bob Durham stared at the figure facing him, making no effort to continue. Then:

"Let us get on with it," he heard Harry say quietly.

But it was with a slow and dragging step that Bob Durham walked to his chair when the timekeeper notified the termination of this dramatic round.

"Never seen such a recovery. It's uncanny!" said Godfrey to him.

But Durham made no reply. He had been so sure that he had finished the battle, and to see his opponent come to life again, as it were, ready to go on fighting, had thoroughly disconcerted him. There was creeping into his consciousness the conviction that he had no chance—no boxer could have a chance—against an opponent who flatly refused to be beaten.

The next round saw him at work but half-hearted. The vim had gone from him. He was manifestly slow. The sting had gone from his blows. He boxed like a man who has come to the conclusion that defeat may not be avoided.

"My boy—my boy, how did you do it?" James Rhodes was saying, in a trembling voice, as he pined sponge and towel. And Harry smiled back at him.

"I can go on for an hour yet!" he replied confidently.

And when he resumed it was with a vigour that gave evidence that such confidence was not without foundation.

In the next round there was only one in it—Harry Rhodes. He took the fight to his opponent, and the latter's showing was that of a third-rater. Bob Durham was not at fault. It was his will to win that had weakened, overcome by the stronger character of the young pit-worker.

The Ending of the Lock-out.

SO excellent, however, was his boxing skill, so perfect the mechanical precision of his hitting and stopping, that he was able to carry the battle yet a few further rounds.

"The game's yours, Harry," said James Rhodes, with quiet confidence, at the end of the twelfth round.

And Harry thought the same.

Once, and then only for a brief period of the following round—the unlucky thirteenth—did Bob Durham get the better of the blight that had fallen upon him. A heavy lacer, following a sharp upper-cut, sent him reeling backwards, and for the instant the young man, who had never known defeat, saw defeat staring him in the face. Flinging himself into a hard rally, for a half-minute he battled with all the vim and determination of his earlier self. Meeting Harry half-way, he fought like one possessed, and from around the ring, where the change in him had not passed unnoticed, rose an irrepressible cheer, an honest tribute of his gallant spirit.

Into that minute was crowded the wildest excitement, and men stood on their legs, awakening the echoes with their shouts of encouragement. Strong and confident as he was, Harry had all his work cut out to hold his own.

Then Durham's effort died away. His bolt was shot.

Under an avalanche of blows he retreated to the ropes, from which dangerous position he made no effort to escape. A severe body blow all but dropped him. His knees loosened, and, although he kept his arms up, his body was swaying helplessly. His guard was broken down, and a right-hander on the jaw sent him to the boards.

At "Three" he was up again, but so helpless that Harry withheld the finishing stroke. It seemed unchivalrous to beat down an opponent incapable of defence, much less retaliation.

Then he stepped forward and laid his left glove on the other's chest—a push rather than a blow. But it was enough, Bob Durham slowly dropped.

He was still on the ground when the fatal "Out!" was pronounced, and Mr. Cory, coming forward, took Harry by the arm and held his glove aloft.

From all sides of the ring came a roar expressive of delight.

Two minutes later Harry crossed the ring to the corner where Durham still kept his chair, to shake his gallant opponent by the hand.

"There was a time when I thought it'd be the other way about," he said a little shyly.

Durham regarded him with a curious smile.

"I think you were bound to win, anyhow," he said slowly. Then, after a pause, added, "I think you're the kind of fellow who never could be beaten." It was a good fight," murmured Harry.

"So I thought—at one time."

Another handgrip, and Harry turned away, to find himself face to face with Durham's father. For five seconds the colliery-owner steadfastly regarded the lad.

"You're a good fighter, my lad—a clean fighter!" he said slowly.

Chagrined as he was by his son's unexpected defeat, the man was a good sportsman, and he would not withhold his tribute to the victor.

"Your side ought to be proud of you," he went on. "I'm sorry it ended this way—for my son's sake, not because of the matter that was at stake. I'd sooner be congratulating him. And, by the Lord Harry, if he had licked you, he'd have earned congratulations! As it is, I congratulate you. Your name's Harry Rhodes. Well, I want to tell you, Harry Rhodes, that while John Durham's alive, you're one friend in Yorkshire. Ay, and if you think of taking to this game for keeps, not only a friend, but a backer, and for all the money in my pocket, no matter who the other fellow may be. I congratulate you!"

And he took Harry's hand in a warm grip.

From the listeners who filled the crowded ring rose a buzz of commendation at this speech, and led by Ben Moseley, came a demand for "Three cheers for John Durham!" And when that had died away, in response to Harry's call for "Three cheers for the loser!" followed a still more rousing yell.

If the delighted miners had had their way, it would have been an hour before Harry could have escaped from the ring, but James Rhodes, shoving his way through the press, every man anxious to add his words of approval, would have none of it.

"Come, lads!" he said. "The boy's won what ye wanted, now let him go! Master Durham's blows were no fly-flaps, and the sooner Harry's in a hot bath, the better it'll be for him! Come along, lad!"

But outside the ropes the pair were pounced upon by Bertram Godfrey.

"Hop into my car, and I'll have you down into the village before you know where you are!" he said briskly. "It's no time for looting about!"

Nor would he take denial. There were wraps in the car to keep Harry from taking cold. Himself driving, the big car slipped away from the battle-ground, from which the spectators were slowly moving away in loudly-talking groups.

"And now what d'you say, Rhodes?" Godfrey called over his shoulder, as the car tore along.

"What about, sir?" asked James Rhodes.

"Why, what I put to you a month ago. After what you've seen to-day, are you still going to keep this boy of yours from the path he was made to travel along? Surely, man, you haven't the heart, with boxers from the United States, from France, and heavens knows where, all making themselves bantam of claiming to the world what champions they are, and that there isn't an English boxer who can hold a candle to 'em! If ever there was a champion ready-made, it's this boy of yours here. You're an Englishman, aren't you?"

"Never supposed I was anything else," returned James Rhodes.

"Then, for your country's sake, man, chuck over this obstinate idea you have of keeping Harry from the job that was made for him, and let him take his place where he belongs!" cried Godfrey enthusiastically. "I'm sick to death of listening to people who tell everybody that old England is played out so far as producing a champion boxer goes. Heavens, it makes me tired listening to 'em! I wish some of 'em had been here to-day! They'd've gone away with something to think about!"

"Maybe, sir, but—"

"To Jericho with your buts, man! It's just pure selfishness on your part!"

James Rhodes' eyes suddenly sparkled, and he opened his lips for a reply, but was cut short by the car coming to a standstill.

"Confounded idiot!" roared Godfrey angrily. "Why can't you see where you're going?"

Harry, glancing over the side of the car, realized that a pedestrian had been all but run over.

And then the car jumped into its stride again, not to slacken until it pulled

up outside the cottage in the village street.

"Here you are!" said Godfrey. "And mind, I'm coming to talk to you again, Rhodes! So long!"

As the cottage door closed behind them Harry turned to his relative.

"I wonder what Tony Hannas is doing here!" he said quietly.

"Hanna?"

His uncle stared at him.

"Yes, if it wasn't Hanna who was nearly run down by the car just now I'm making a very big mistake!"

James Rhodes said nothing.

Harry was right. The slouching figure of which he had caught a glimpse was that of Tony Hannas.

James Rhodes Gives Way.

TONY HANNA wanted revenge—he wanted it so badly that he was not caring what risks he ran so long as he got what he wanted. Somehow or other, he meant making Harry Rhodes suffer.

When a big man takes a bad thrashing in the ring, his career is finished, as a rule. He is never again the man that he was. He seems to lose something that is impossible ever to get back. The history of boxing is full of examples of this peculiar fact.

The little man, the light-weight, however, appears to be differently constituted. Many a good light-weight, at some time or other, has taken a severe beating, and yet fought again just as well as ever.

To this class, although a light-weight, Tony Hannas did not belong. When Harry Rhodes hammered him into defeat in the road beside the moor, he effectually destroyed for all time Cast-Iron Tony's claim to further consideration as a fighter.

The Scotsman's confidence in himself had been destroyed. And it was his supreme self-confidence that had been Hannas' chief asset.

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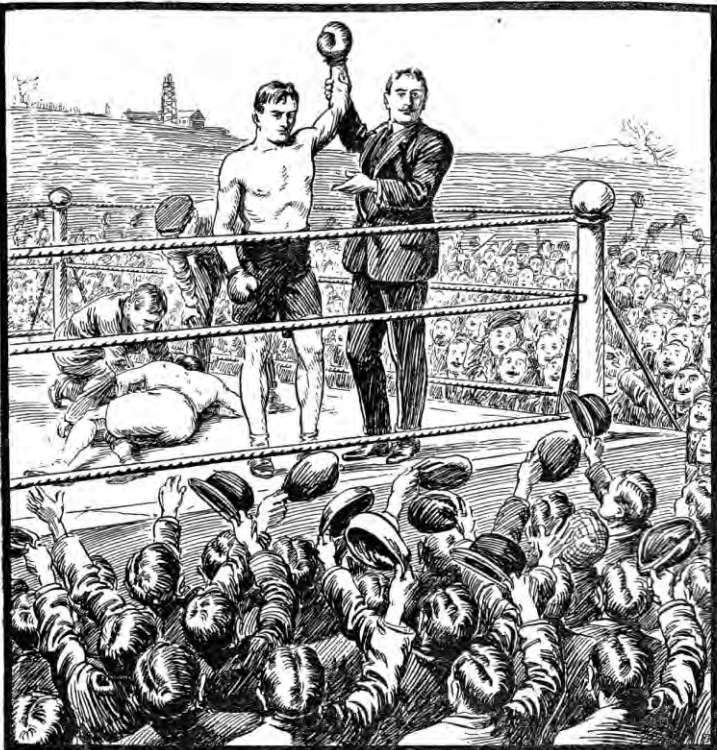
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Durham was still on the boards when the fatal "Out!" was pronounced, and Mr. Cory, coming forward, took Harry by the arm and held his glove aloft.

about the Scot's whirlwind attacks, his mighty punching power, but had not seen him perform, were first puzzled, and then made indignant, by his wretched display. They declared they had been victimized. One or two roundly asserted that the nervous, frightened individual they beheld offering himself as a chopping-block to the champion was not the redoubtable Scotsman at all.

But it was Tony Hanna all right, although a very different man from him who in blind rage and jealousy had attempted the life of one who had proved himself a better man with his hands than Hanna, and had taken a just vengeance for the treacherous attempt.

Cast off by Joshua Martin, shunned by those who had once been his friends, Tony Hanna had gone North again, with the fixed intent to find Harry Rhodes.

The unsuspected recognition of Hanna

in Loxboro' wasn't seriously exercising Harry's mind. A shower followed the hot bath, and then Harry made himself ready for the appearance at the Crown Hotel that Bertram Godfrey's insistence had made him promise.

That hustling enthusiast wasn't going to be satisfied without some kind of a celebration. A tip-top fight in the ring, all fair and square and exciting—the end of the lock-out. Surely these were worth celebrating? What about a banquet? The committee said it was a good idea—thought it was quite possible.

And a banquet it was. Harry Rhodes and his uncle had found themselves sitting down to the best that Joe Clayton, of the Crown, had been able to do at such short notice. There were chickens and ham, great joints of beef, meat-pies, vegetables, fruit-pies, cakes and pastries galore—a genuine Yorkshire feast.

Godfrey had prevailed upon Mr. Durham to take the chair, and with him was his son, his face a trifle discoloured and one-sided, but full of good spirits and good-humour. The show he had made in the ring had already established him in the favour of the miners, and there was a big cheer when, seeing Harry enter the long room, he at once walked forward, and gripped his hand with much heartiness.

"Very glad you've come, sir," he said, with genuine cordiality. "We didn't know much about each other until this afternoon; but after what has passed between us we ought to be good friends."

"I'm pleased to hear you say so, Mr. Durham," returned Harry frankly. "And, win or lose, I hope I'll never be anything but friendly with an opponent."

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who puts up such a grand fight as you did. There's only one thing—"

"And what's that?"

"Why, I only hope, if I ever go into the ring again, I never meet a man who fights more skillfully, or hits harder, than you do!"

There was a big laugh and much applause.

Bob Durham laughed.

"Is that all?" he said. "Well, I'm better off than you, then. I hope to have many a bout after to-day, but while you're content to come across better men than myself, I'm sure that I'll never have the gloves on with a better fighter than you. If I do, I'll borrow a sledge-hammer!"

"Not if I'm the third man in the ring you won't," put in Mr. Cory, who had been prevailed upon to stay for the evening's amusement. He turned to Harry. "I don't seem to know you. What name do you box under?"

"To-day's was the first real fight—" He suddenly caught Godfrey's eyes fixed on him, and stopped. "The first proper ring contest," he amended, "that I've appeared in."

"Eh—what? A novice?" asked the celebrated referee incredulously, staring at Harry as one puzzled.

Harry nodded.

"Pretty warm novice—eh, Cory?" put in Godfrey.

"He is that!" was the emphatic answer. "And no more than a boy! Why, I've seen fighters with ten years of experience who haven't shown such skill and ringcraft as you did this afternoon. Who taught you?"

"Here's the person responsible."

And Godfrey caught James Rhodes by the arm and dragged him forward.

For a half minute the referee looked into the hard, care-lined face, then he broke out:

"If that's not Jimmy Rhodes, it's his ghost or twin-brother!"

"Neither, sir; the man himself!" said Rhodes in a low voice.

"Well, well!" And Cory, seized Rhodes by the hand. "Why, everyone said you were dead, Rhodes, or gone abroad. Nothing's been seen of you since the night when you and—"

James Rhodes came a half-step forward, lifting a trembling hand. Harry, glancing quickly at him, saw that his face had gone suddenly grey.

"If you please, sir—" he said, in a low and shaky voice.

Cory frowned; then his face cleared, as though enlightenment had come to him, and he went on quickly.

"That's a fairly long time ago, but I haven't forgotten the position you occu-

pied then. We couldn't understand why you relinquished it. There was a fortune awaiting you. Was it that you might pass it on to your nephew?"

"Meaning I say, sir, that old Jim've taught his nevy enough to make a champion of him?" put in Joe Harwood, before Rhodes could answer.

"Well, yes, that's near enough," replied Cory. "I've seen champions make a far worse show than Harry did this afternoon."

"An' us never thought nowt on Harry as a fighter, not even though we knowed Jim was coaching of him, not until that night wi' Tony Hanna," went on the old man.

"Hanna?"

And then half a dozen tried all at once to relate the bout in Moseley's gymnasium.

"Ah, well, Hanna's down and out now," said the referee. "I saw him in his last fight. He was unrecognisable. Anyone would think his fighting will had been paralysed."

"And if you'd been through what Tony Hanna had, Bill, maybe you'd feel the same," struck in Godfrey grimly.

And then, everybody in the room crowding around to listen, Godfrey gave a graphic account of the fight of which he had been the sole witness.

By the time he had finished all eyes were turned upon Harry, and with a greater admiration and respect than before.

"Then there was some truth in that rumour," said Cory.

Godfrey turned towards Bob Durham, whose voice had broken in sharply.

"Well, old sport?"

"You knew Mr. Rhodes had whipped Tony Hanna? And, having seen that, you beguile me into entering the ring against him?"

"Well, you see, Bob—"

"I see this," declared young Durham, very emphatically, "that my next fight will be with you, Mr. Bertram Godfrey, and, by the Lord Harry, you'll be a sorry man by the time I've finished with you! Why, had I known that Harry Rhodes had licked Tony Hanna in a fair, stand-up fight, I'd—I'd—"

"You'd have done just what you did this afternoon, Mr. Durham," cried Harry quickly, only too glad to turn the attention of the room from himself.

"I believe I would," grinned Durham.

"You'd have had a bad time with me, my son, if you hadn't," put in his father. "And now, lads, Joe Clayton says supper's ready, so let us get on with it. When it's over there'll be a piece of news to give you. Lexboro's had tried more than once to turn out a champion.

This time, I believe, we're going to succeed. But Mr. James Rhodes will tell you more after our meal."

James Rhodes did. Both John Durham and Bertram Godfrey had had much to say to him during the evening, and before their influence and their arguments the man's resolution weakened.

"What's all that row up above there?" curiously demanded a dirty, slouching fellow, looting about the hotel yard of one of the stablemen whom he had persuaded into giving him a lodging for the night in an empty stall.

"Whint, that cheering!" said the ostler.

"Yes; they're making noise enough."

"Happen you would, too, my lad, if you'd as good cause," was the answer.

"Lexboro's found a fighter, a real champion, at last. An' he's going up to Lunnion to-morrow to fight an' lick 't best man there. An' by gum, if that's seen, Harry Rhodes fight this afternoon that'd know it'd be waste o' time looking any further for a world-beater."

Tony Hanna turned away with a muttered oath.

"Harry Rhodes the champion. Nay, not while I'm above ground!" he whispered viciously.

A Miraculous Escape.

EVERYBODY knew Ben Hurst, whose burly form was to be seen about Lexboro' or its neighbourhood during the daytime; and there was a legend in the village that another officer performed similar duty during the night; but no one had ever been known to see the night officer when on duty. That he existed might be a fact, but what became of him after night fell it was impossible to say.

His name was Sam Fazackerley, and he regularly drew a week's pay, the same as Hurst, but how he earned it was a mystery.

Whatever Fazackerley did with himself, wherever he might be, he certainly wasn't in the village street at two o'clock of the morning following the very successful banquet at the Crown Hotel.

Tony Hanna had the whole of the wide, dark thoroughfare to himself. Yes, he moved with caution, being careful to make no noise as he slipped along in the black shadow of the dwellings.

What he was anxious to do and intended doing, he wanted to get over, but for all that he moved with no great haste.

(There will be another splendid instalment of this grand boxing story in next Monday's issue of the MAGNET. Order your copy in advance.)



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Automaton—or Man?

IT has previously been said that ventriloquism largely partakes of the nature of an illusion, and this effect is produced by the performer uttering sounds without giving visible indications of the fact. Consequently, when the audience have before them two figures, a live and a dummy one, and the mouth of the "dummy" opens and shuts to correspond with the words used, whilst the face of the ventriloquist remains mask-like and passive, the illusion that it is the "automaton," and not the man, who is speaking is complete.

So important is the ability to do this properly that speaking without facial movement ranks of equal importance with the placing of the vocal cords in such a position that "distant" effect is given to sound. In fact, one might almost say that a most amusing entertainment can be given without this latter power at all. Many ventriloquists—or polyphonists, as they more correctly designate themselves—rely solely for their entertainment on a "knee" figure and speech without facial expression.

Those who do not aspire to become really first-class and proficient ventriloquists may conclude their instruction at this point, and rest quite assured that they have learnt sufficient, at any rate, to give a creditable drawing-room performance.

Naturally, the beginner would like to have some idea of the time it would take to gain a practical working knowledge of ventriloquism. Well, the student who would take the trouble and devote sufficient time to the initial and most difficult stages of the work would be in a position to give a very creditable performance as fast as he seems to be getting on, will find he has to go back again and again over the early ground.

However, after devoting, say a week, to the elementary stages, a "knee" figure might be purchased, and within a very few days a private entertainment might safely be entered upon. As, however, the course herewith outlined will take in several different kind of "voices" for automata, together with the various modifications of the "distant" voice, the student should not expect to gain proficiency under a month. Of course, to give a really finished entertainment, consisting of an exhibition of the "near" and "distant" voices, together with instrumental and vocal mimicry equal in skill to the average product of the professional entertainer, many months' practice are required.

Two Kinds of Ventriloquism.

A study of the alphabet reveals that difficulties lie in the path of pronouncing certain letters. A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, N, Q, R, S, T, X, and Z, issue from the mouth quite easily; but B, C, D, M, P, V, W, Y, all make a demand upon the muscles of the lips and cheeks. Unfortunately, these letters often occur in important

speech, and as it is almost impossible to speak them distinctly without facial movement, appropriate substitutes have to be made.

On the border line is "b," which is generally pronounced by bringing the upper row of teeth down to the under lip and forcing the breath out between the lip and teeth; by giving greater force to the exhalation and opening the mouth it will be found that almost identically the same sound can be gained, and it is words commencing with "c" and "b." Thus the word "brother" is really pronounced ventriloquially as "cruther," in the hurry of conversation the substitution passes notice, and the audience hear only the correct word.

For "r" an accentuated aspirate makes a very passable substitution—i.e., "fool" becomes "hoel," "feel" becomes "heel," and so on.

"M" will be found rather more difficult; but if the lips are formed into an orifice, and the breath drawn sharply in, the sound of an "n" can be made inside the mouth instead of by the lips.

As it is almost an impossibility to sound the initial "p" unless the lips come together, words commencing with it should be studiously avoided. Another plan is to drop the first letter altogether, but the former is the better.

"W" is amenable to a little tongue-twisting, and it is accomplished by moving the tongue twice in quick succession to the roof of the mouth, making the sound at the back of the throat. This as regards the letter itself, but words commencing with "w" are quite easy. Practise on "which," "when," and "what."

"Y" however, is a fairly certain test, and if you can comfortably manage this without betraying the fact to the looking-glass—before which you should carry out your practice—then you have mastered a great difficulty. A quick exhalation should take place while words commencing with it are being uttered.

Speaking with Still Lips.

Ventriloquism may be divided into two classes. The first and more easy of attainment known as "near"—i.e., including all those vocal illusions produced with the aid of automata and "distant," which takes in various illusions achieved by what is known as "throwing the voice."

The most finished exponent of both these branches of this or any other art, was the great Lieutenant Walter Cole, and he introduced into his entertainment such an exquisite blending of the two styles that his example might well be imitated by other followers of the art.

When carrying on an animated conversation with the "lay" figures placed at near quarters the proceedings would suddenly be interrupted by the low sound of voices coming from afar, and this would gradually increase in volume as the speakers were supposed to draw near,

until at last they would be heard outside the very room in which the entertainment was taking place.

This is alluded to now as showing the latitude which ventriloquism allows its exponents.

Of the two branches, "near" ventriloquism is much the simpler to acquire, although some might hold that, in order to justify the title, "distant" sounds should be first mastered.

For the purpose of adding interest to the work, students are recommended to give precedence to the "near" efforts. Briefly, the "near" voices come from the mouth, the "distant" from the throat.

For the former five modified voices are generally used. These are, "the old man," "the old woman," "the little boy," "the little girl," and "the nigger," or "the coster."

The first is a foundation for the last two. It has been spoken of as the "grunt," because, being the vocal production of an aged and uneducated man, in its initial stages it much resembles the familiar grunting of a pig.

And here it should be noted that the speech of ventriloquial figures is always harsh and toneless because the efforts to produce the sound in the mouth without using the lips rob them of that modulations and modulation invariably associated with the speech of educated persons.

Do not attempt to speak ventriloquially as you would naturally, but stir the endings of your words. Grunt and drag them out slowly, just as do many countrymen and those unacquainted with the rules of proper speech.

To give the sound the necessary depth and loudness, keep the lips slightly apart, the tongue lying loosely in the mouth, then make the grunt, using some vowel sound like "ah" fairly far back. To a certain extent the vocal chords will have to be contracted and the chin brought slightly down into the chest.

At first only a spasmodic jerkiness of the breath will come, but after a little practice "air" can be said quite easily, and then other and longer words follow as a matter of course.

(Another of these interesting articles will appear next Monday.)

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