

A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL READERS!

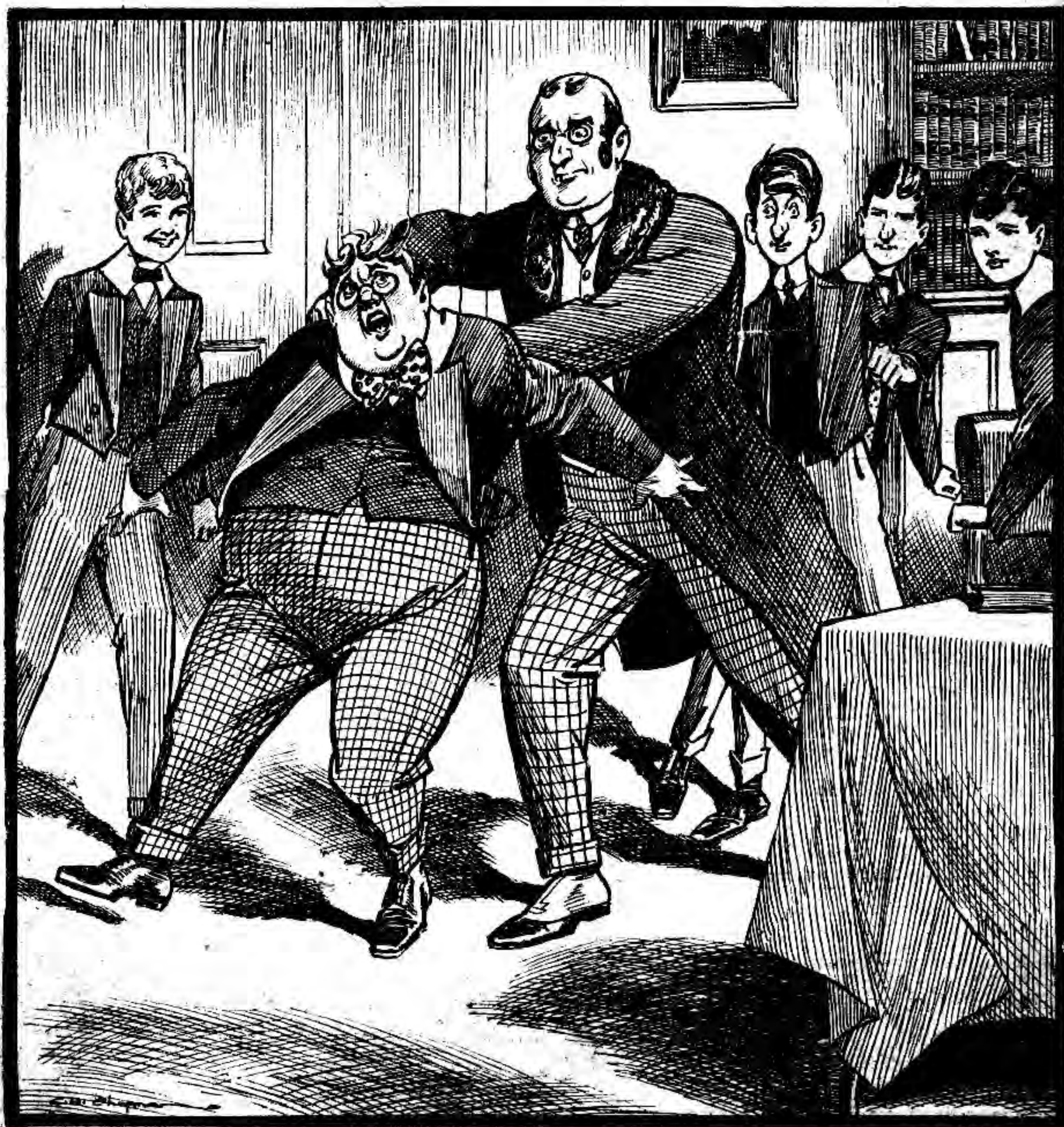
No. 621. Vol. XIII.

January 3rd, 1920.

The Magnet ^{1 1/2}

Library

20 PAGES.



A ROUGH TIME FOR BILLY BUNTER!

(An Amusing Incident In the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of Grayfriars.)



SOMETHING FOR 1920.

Yes, it looks a bit odd. It is always the way with a new year whenever it pops in. There is just that strange, unfamiliar look about it. It is a bit rough on the New Year, but the little circumstance does not prevent me saying, here and now, just what I said at Christmas—namely, “A Very Happy New Year” to all my chums everywhere.

The New Year gets tacked on to Christmas, but that matters nothing. You cannot have too many good wishes. January 1st marks in a particularly special way the new start. I hope these coming twelve months will be record ones. In the very old days the New Year always started on March 1st, when the winds blow, and this is the reason why September, October, November, and December were named seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth, and nobody seems to have thought it worth while to alter the hang of it.

But all that is neither here nor there. What I want to tell you is to remember the splendid calendar which is given away with this week's “Gem.”

A CALENDAR WORTH HAVING.

You must cut this feature out, paste it on card, and hang it up. It will be a pleasure for the whole year, to say nothing of being a cheery reminder of St. Jim's and Greyfriars. There are portraits of D'Arcy, and Bunter, and included in it will be found the Arms of the two schools, also pictures of the famous establishments. There must be no missing this splendid almanac.

THE NEW YEAR.

You know how it is people criticise a new suit, or the cut of a fellow's jib, and his style of nose, etc. It is just the same with a New Year. The little fellow jumps in meaning well to everybody, and yet the first thing folks do is to call him by the name of his predecessor. They say it is lapse of memory.

Just think of the number of letters you get after January 1st, which start with the old year crossed out. So it is each season. This is a direct slight on the new-comer. When your name happens to be Smith or Jones, you resent being called Robinson or Brown, simply because those two gentlemen have just left the room. This shows lack of courtesy.

Undoubtedly, a New Year has a lot to put up with. It gets a crowd of faults shoved on to it which it does not deserve. Prophesying individuals come along and declare it will bring a few earthquakes, wars, eclipses, bad crops, measles, rows in the political world, and so forth. When some of these things happen, how can we tell but that they are really the ugly backwash of the old year? It is more likely to be true than not.

THE BEST KIND OF YEAR.

To my thinking, the best kind of year is the one that is running. You very seldom hear anybody say he or she wants a certain year back again, so as to live through it again. Such things when they are said, that is, are uttered with a reservation. There is an “if” attached, and we cannot deal with “ifs.”

But talking about these things and calendars, there is always something rather appealing about the reading matter you find in such publications. Turnips may now be plucked; shake the tree for mangold-wurzels in February, but hold a sheet under the tree to prevent any bruising. We know the kind of reminders given in almanacs, neat, little historical facts such as “Queen Boadicea first did up her hair.” “Bobbing was introduced on this day, three hundred years since.” Or this: “Thin out your peaches and carrots.”

Oh, there is a rare lot to be learned from a calendar if you study the pages carefully, while, of course, the very ancient almanac has a quaint way of suggesting a crowd of things which happened to be momentarily forgotten—the old summers when the world seemed even more wonderful than now, days when the fellows of fifteen were toddlers, and the oldsters of the present were quite young men! But the proper way to take a calendar is not to regret overmuch. There is the morrow; and every day is a fresh beginning with grand new possibilities, and we can all of us be thankful for that grace.

THE COMPANION PAPERS.

One thing I am certain about is that during this New Year the old papers will win more and more readers. There is a bigger rally every week, and so it will go on. I also know there will be requests for the weeklies to become dailies, but, as things are, there is no meeting that demand.

The office-boy seized his hat, and said he was off the very first moment the notion was mooted. He was wise in his day and generation, and felt he had quite plenty of work to do. I shall likewise be told (1) that Bunter is too much to the fore; (2) that he is not; (3) that Monty Lowther makes too many puns; (4) that the said Lowther ought to have more of an innings because he always raises a laugh, and that he is clever—which he is. And, as a rule, the world wants clever people.

I hope to see the Todds, Peter and Alonzo, better recognised this year. The two are worth studying, for they are a brainy pair.

A QUESTION FROM SOUTH AFRICA.

“We, the undersigned, have decided unanimously to ask you a question which has long been the subject of conversation and argument between us. We would like to know why South Africa, which is no small and unimportant country, is represented in the MAGNET stories by only one boy—Piet Delarey. We think there should be at least two boys from the Sunny South.”

I am referring this matter to Mr. Frank Richards. I am quite certain he never intended to put any slight on the mighty Dominion.

HOME TROUBLES.

There are troubles of all sorts, home and otherwise, and I hear about them from my chums. The great duty is to stick it right through—easy advice, perhaps, but in later years the fellow who has had to put up with worry and bad treatment will be glad to think that he stood firm, and carried on despite of all.

It is worth while. Life is not an easy business. I know some chums of mine are having the hardest fight of it, but they will win through and come out into brighter days.

JUST A FEW QUESTIONS!

A Marylebone reader, who says some very friendly things about the Companion Papers, has a few questions to ask:

“What is the circulation of the MAGNET?”

“Do you like reading and answering readers' letters?”

“How often does Lord Mauleverer receive a remittance, and about how much?”

“Do you like being an editor?”

“When are Billy Bunter's check trousers going to wear out?”

“How old is Sammy Bunter?”

“Will Sir Jimmy Vivian ever learn to speak grammatically?”

“Did you like writing ‘Personal Recollections?’”

Question 1 unanswerable; 2, yes; 3, Manly draws a fifty from his own fortune when he wants it; 4, yes; 5, ask the wearer; 6, twelve; 7, I fancy he knows, but excitement makes him drop into mistakes; 8, yes. So that's that, and may the keen interest of this reader remain at its present admirable pitch.

Your Editor



THE TERROR IN BLACK!

A MAGNIFICENT LONG
COMPLETE STORY OF
HARRY WHARTON & CO.
AT GREYFRIARS SCHOOL

... By ...

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter Bags a Notion!

"IT'S time for prep, porpoise!" said Peter Todd severely.

Billy Bunter paid no heed.

"Do you hear me, you fat clam?" roared Peter.

Bunter ought to have heard, for Tom Dutton heard, and Tom was deaf, which Bunter was not, except when he chose to be.

But Bunter still went on reading, and paid no heed to Peter.

"Eh—what are you shouting about, Toddy?" asked Tom Dutton.

"Oh, it's not to your address!" snapped Peter.

"Want someone to confess? That would be Bunter, of course. But I don't know of anything in particular he has to confess. I don't think he's done anything to-day, anyway. He spent all the afternoon frowsting in front of the fire with that book."

Peter made a grab at the book referred to, but Bunter, with unusual agility, eluded him.

"Lemme be, Toddy, you beast!" he said. "I want to finish it!"

"If the book is of an improving nature, my dear cousin Peter," said the meek and mild Alonzo, "I think it would be as well to let Bunter proceed with it. He does not often show any disposition to literature of any kind, and when he does I consider that it might be encouraged."

"What about prep?" snapped Peter.

"Well, what's my prep got to do with you?" asked Bunter defiantly.

"It really seems to me that Bunter's preparation might be taken as negligible," said Alonzo. "Even when he does it he never shows any knowledge of the subject next morning!"

"It's a matter of principle to me," Peter said.

Bunter was deep in his book again, and paid no heed.

"Eh—principal what?" inquired Tom Dutton, who had caught one word.

"I'm not talking to you! I'm talking to Bunter!" roared Peter.

"Grunter? Well, he can't help that, you know. Pigs will grant!" Tom Dutton said.

"I thought you were talking to me, cousin Peter," said Alonzo.

Study No. 7 appeared to be getting a bit mixed.

Peter passed his fingers through his hair, still worn rather over-long, in a despairing way. Tom Dutton stared at him, and Alonzo goggled in mild-eyed wonder. Only Bunter paid no heed.

Bunter went on reading.

"Bunter, you fat toad!"

"Shurrup, Toddy!"

"Bunter, you animated lump of inferior blubber!"

"I do wish you'd dry up, Peter Todd! I've just come to the interesting part, and—"

Peter made another grab at the book, and this time he got it.

So seldom did Billy Bunter read anything that it was little to be wondered at that Peter should feel curious as to what the volume could be which so engrossed him.

Even Alonzo was curious. And Tom Dutton would have been so but that he knew. In fact, Tom had lent the book to Bunter formally, after Bunter had done him the honour of borrowing it informally.

"The Masked Bandit; or, Blackmail Up to Date!" read Peter, with a snort of contempt. "But there, I knew it would be some silly rot!"

"Tain't rot!" howled Bunter. "It's the best yarn anyone ever wrote!"

"Well, I must say you ought to be a judge!" said Peter. "You do know something about blackmail; it's one of the subjects you're well up in! Where did you get this drivel?"

Peter held the book over the blazing fire.

Bunter let out an ear-piercing yell, and grabbed at it. Tom Dutton also jumped up and grabbed.

"Why, you don't mean to tell me the thing's yours, do you, Dutton?" asked Peter, drawing the book back.

"I know the fat rotter is a glutton, but that's no reason why you should burn my books, is it?" demanded Tom hotly.

"Oh, if it's yours you can have it; or Bunter can have it, for that matter. I don't suppose there's much harm in it, though it has a rotten blood-and-thunder title. Here you are, Bunt! But remember the wrath of Quelchy in the morning!"

"Hang Quelchy!" mumbled Bunter, turning over the leaves feverishly to find his place.

"I don't know that I want to, and I'm pretty sure the Head wouldn't agree to it if I did," replied Peter. "Well, 'nuff said! I'm going to do my prep, anyway."

"You ought to read that book, Peter," said Tom Dutton. "It's a jolly ripping yarn!"

"The title sounds uncommonly jolly!" answered Peter, with a touch of sarcasm.

"Folly? Oh, you always think it's folly to read anything except your old dry-as-dust law-books!" retorted Dutton.

Peter grinned, and gave it up. Argument with the deaf Removite was difficult, because he always answered things one had not said. But Peter thought the book must be more decent than the title promised as it belonged to Tom Dutton. Tom did read sensational stuff, but his tastes were healthy enough.

But part of what one gets out of a book depends upon what one brings to the reading of it; and a book that was quite without harm to Tom Dutton might have a bad effect upon the mind—such as it was—of William George Bunter.

Bunter went on reading, with sundry snorts and grunts of excitement. When he had finished the last page he gave vent to a long-drawn:

"Ah-h-h-h-h!"

"Masked bandit hanged, porpoise?" asked Peter Todd cheerily.

"Don't be silly, Peter! There was nothing to hang him for. You see, he was really quite a good chap. Society had inflicted wrongs upon him, and

naturally he went all out to get his own back on Society."

"Oh, did he? What did he do to work that gadget?"

"You ought to read the book, Peter Todd, and then there would be no need for you to ask silly questions! By James, it reminds me of my own case!"

"By—whicher, tubby?"

"By James, Peter Todd! That was the oath which Conrad the Invincible, the hero of this story, always used."

"Well, don't you get using oaths here, or you and I will quarrel, porpoise!"

"My dear cousin Peter, though I deprecate anything in the nature of bad language, I really cannot perceive any essential difference between 'By James!' and 'My hat!' And the latter is an expression that I have often heard from your lips."

"Bunter says 'By James' is an oath, and, as long as I'm head of this study, I'm not going to have oaths used in it! I can say 'By James!' if I like, but nobody that calls it an oath is going to use it here! Hear me, fat clam?"

"So you think you are head of this study, do you, Peter Todd?" said Bunter darkly.

"No, my pippin! You've got it all wrong! I know I'm head of this study!"

"Ha, ha!"

Bunter gave what he fondly imagined to be a deep, sepulchral laugh, quite after the manner of Conrad the Invincible.

Alonzo stared at him. Even Tom Dutton looked up.

"Anything gone wrong with the works, tubby?" inquired Peter.

"Ha, ha! Nothing has gone wrong with the works, Peter Todd. But you will learn ere long how much your vain boasting is worth! Ha, ha!"

"If you make that noise again you'll get a thick ear!" snapped Peter. "And that isn't vain boasting—that's the frozen truth, and nothing but it!"

"Tyranny may endure for a day, but there cometh a morrow!" Bunter said impressively.

"Right there! And on the morrow dear old Quelch will want to know why Conrad the Invincible Porpoise hasn't done his blessed prep! And, as I'm not going to have him asking nasty things of the same sort about plain Peter Todd, I'll get on with mine!"

"Isn't plain slightly understating the case, Toddy?" asked a cool voice from the doorway.

"Oh, I don't fancy either you or I would ever get first prize in a beauty-show, Smithy," replied Peter, quite unoffended. "Do you want anything? Because, if not, you may go. These are business-hours in Study No. 7."

"This looks like business—my word!" said Herbert Vernon-Smith, taking up the book from where Bunter had laid it. "But I really came to borrow a French dictionary, Toddy. Mine's gone astray."

"Right-ho! Here's mine!" returned Peter. "Now get!"

"Can't I borrow this delightful volume also?" asked the Bounder, with a grin.

"Certainly!" answered Peter politely.

"No, you jolly well can't!" howled Bunter.

"Study No. 7 speaks with two voices!" the Bounder gibed.

"If you wait you'll get two more. Dutton will answer things you never said, and Lonzy will preach you a sermon an hour long!" growled Peter.

"I'm going," said Vernon-Smith. "Thanks, Bunter; but I won't take the book. 'Fraid it might influence my innocent young mind to evil, you know. You're safe. You haven't a mind, an'—"

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if you had, it wouldn't be an innocent one. So long, everybody!"

And Smithy went, grinning in his sardonic way.

Bunter drew a sheet of paper before him, and began to write.

It looked as though he were getting on with his prep at last. But he was not.

Prep would not have called for frequent furtive glances into "The Masked Bandit." And Bunter peeped into that fascinating volume at least twenty times during the next half-hour.

He was busy with a problem. Conrad had done so many wonderful things that it really seemed to Bunter that there ought to be something useful and illuminating in the story of his activities.

But Conrad had never been up against the problem of a fellow who insisted on being head of a study when Conrad wanted to be. It seemed that there was no help in Conrad against Peter Todd.

Bunter's thoughts took another turn as he read over again an episode in the career of Conrad which had particularly appealed to him at the first reading.

"Toddy," he said suddenly, "the Bounder's pater has stacks and stacks of oof—hasn't he?"

"Yes! Shurrup!" growled Peter.

"I wish I had some of it!" Bunter sighed.

"I dare say you could do with a thousand or two. Pretty nearly keep you in grub for a term—wouldn't it? Why don't you do as Conrad did, and bag some? You think you're no end like Conrad, with wrongs against Society to avenge, and all that. Old Vernon-Smith's as much Society as anyone else, though I believe he's not in it to any great extent. Ha, ha!"

Peter laughed at his own little joke. He was only poking fun at Bunter in what he said. But Bunter took it quite seriously, since it chanced to chime with his thoughts at the moment.

So, while Peter Todd got on with his work, Bunter struck out what he had written and started again.

"Git holed of sun writch man and holed him to wransum," he wrote now. "Kweery—old Vernon-Smith? Kweery No. 2—howe to doe it?"

The second "kweery" was rather a puzzler. Bunter sat and meditated until the other three had finished their prep, while his remained still untouched. Then roast chestnuts took his mind off Conrad and the "kweeries" for a time. But he went back to their consideration after everything that could be eaten had been eaten.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Investment of a Loan!

"LONZY, old pal!"

Alonzo Todd was one of the most unsuspecting fellows who drew the breath of life; but even he had learned to beware of Bunter when Bunter began to talk affectionately.

"What do you want, Bunter?" he asked coldly.

"Oh, come, now! Can't I be pally without wanting anything?"

"As far as my observation goes, Bunter, your friendly advances generally preface a request for a loan."

"I say, though, Lonzy, you can talk!" Alonzo was not above flattery. He smiled at that.

"You're the most truly eloquent chap I ever met!" said Bunter, with fervour.

Again Alonzo smiled. And he began to waver in his resolution not to lend Billy Bunter anything.

"I could sit here listening to you all

day, you know, and—and enjoy it!" said Bunter.

That speech was a mistake on his part. Lonzy liked to hear his own jaw-tackle at work, and was never at a loss for material to keep it going.

"There is very much I should desire to say to you, Bunter, if you would only listen patiently," he said. "I regret to mention the fact that you seem to have deteriorated both in morals and in manners during my absence from Greyfriars. And I cannot pretend that I consider your standard in either respect was a high one before I left temporarily. You are——"

"I—I say, Lonzy, old fellow, I've got an appointment—a most important appointment!" burred Bunter, almost desperate.

If he once let Alonzo get fairly started he might have to give ear for an hour—or give up the loan. And if he was forced to give up the notion of borrowing from Alonzo he must give up much else.

There was really no one else from whom he could hope to extract the needed cash. Lord Manleverer had plenty, and Mauly's was easy money for most people to touch—but not for Bunter. Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh were seldom short of the needful; but they had long ago given up being sympathetic to Bunter's necessities.

In short, Billy Bunter's credit in the Remove stood as low as it had ever stood—which is saying quite a lot.

"Then, I will talk with you another time, my dear Bunter!" replied Alonzo sadly.

"That's it, Lonzy! You can jaw away at me as long as you like when—when I've got time, you know. Frightfully sorry that I haven't got time just now; but—but there's a person of importance waiting for me, and—and it might be almost fatal if I missed him!"

Alonzo shook his head.

"I fear that you are departing from the truth, Bunter!" he said.

No one else at Greyfriars would have thought of putting it just that way. It was really very near to being a compliment to Bunter—a quite undeserved compliment. To depart from anything you must be near it, there or thereabouts; and Billy Bunter's acquaintance with the truth was so distant an acquaintance that it hardly deserved the name at all.

"Oh, really, Lonzy, old pal! It pains me to hear you talk like that!" returned Bunter. "I don't expect that sort of thing from you. You're such a good-natured chap—not a bit like your cousin Peter, who is rather a beast, though he is your cousin!"

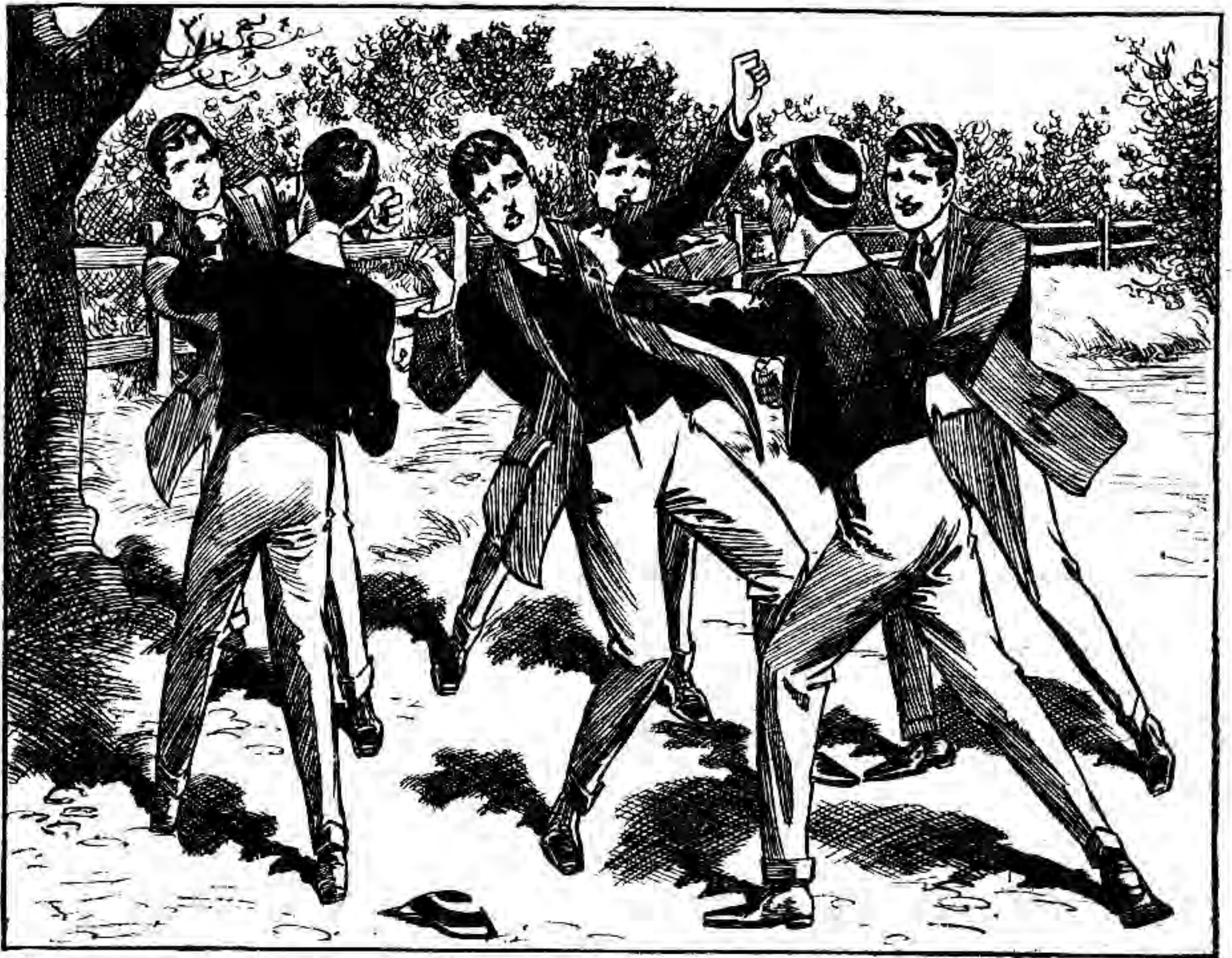
"I wish sometimes that I were more like my cousin Peter!" Alonzo replied sadly. "I regard Peter with admiration, and if I had only a moiety of his firmness of character——"

"Oh, yes, I know all that, old chap!" broke in Bunter. He did not know it quite all, for he was uncertain what "moiety" meant. But he saw that Alonzo was weakening; and he struck while the iron was hot. "I say, could you lend me a quid? You had a remittance from your Uncle Benjy this morning, I know, and——"

"My Uncle Benjamin would not approve of my lending money to you, my dear Bunter—I'm quite sure of that!"

"Well, he needn't know—need he? I'll promise I won't say anything about it to him. I'll keep it dark if you will, Lonzy!"

Alonzo sighed. This was only fresh evidence of the tortuousness of the Bun-



Vernon-Smith's left shot out, and the blow caught Ponsonby full in the face. Ponsonby staggered back. "Ow—yow!" he roared. (See Chapter 3.)

terian mind. Alonzo hated to do anything that he would have minded confessing to anybody.

But his generosity and his weakness moved him to consent.

"I cannot lend you a sovereign, Bunter—"

"Oh, really, Alonzo Todd! Don't be a mean beast!"

"But I will give you half that amount. I know that if it is termed a loan it will never be repaid; and I do not desire to be a party to a false arrangement."

"That's better! I knew you were a good pal, Lonzy!" exclaimed Bunter.

He fairly snatched the ten-shilling note from the hand of the soft Alonzo. When it was in his possession, however, his tone altered.

"You may talk about giving me this, Todd," he said, with a haughty sneer; "but let me inform you that my principles will not allow me to accept a gift from you! I'm proud, I hope and trust! Well, then! This shall be repaid when I get my postal-order!"

And Billy Bunter stalked out of Study No. 7 with his fat little nose in the air.

"What have you been doing, Lonzy? Lending that fat-boulder money?" asked Tom Dutton, who had been present all the time, but had heard nothing.

"No, my dear Dutton. It is true that he professes to regard it as a loan; but it was, in truth, a gift."

"Lift? I'd give the swizzling oyster a lift! I'd give him a lift with my boot!" snorted Tom.

"I said I gave it to him!"

Alonzo raised his voice. But Tom Dutton still understood what was said in his own way.

"Save him from what? I wouldn't shell out twopence to save him from being jolly well hanged! It's my opinion that it would be better for all of us if Bunter got the giddy sack!"

Lonzy gave it up. He always liked to have things clear and above-board. But, though Tom Dutton was as straight as any fellow at Greyfriars, there really was difficulty in getting them so with him.

Bunter went off to the bike-shed.

There were times when Bunter laid claim to something in the shape of a bike among the many machines in that shed. But he seldom cared to claim the terrible old creak that belonged to him when he really wanted to ride anywhere, for it was seldom in a rideable condition. At such times he preferred to borrow—without the formality of mentioning the fact to the person chiefly concerned.

On this occasion he borrowed from Squiff—otherwise Sampson Quincy Ifley Field, from far Australia.

Squiff had just got a new bike, to the envy of most of the fellows in the Remove, new bikes being anything but a drug in the market in these expensive days. Bunter was rather surprised that the machine was not in use, for he happened to know that Squiff and the Bounder had gone out of gates together. The Bounder's bike was also in evidence, so that it was plain they were walking.

So far Bunter's deductive powers, which were not too well developed, led

him. Anyone else might have gone a step farther, and have deduced that a fellow out of gates was more likely to be met out of gates than a fellow who was at home. Anyone else might have deduced that, but not Bunter.

He thought it quite smart of him to bag Squiff's bike. It was bright and new, too, and Bunter conceived it to be just the sort of thing to go with his noble figure.

So he took it, and wambled along the road to Courtfield.

He missed Squiff and the Bounder very narrowly. They were on their way to Highcliffe, and if Bunter had been five minutes earlier he could hardly have failed to catch them up. He would have ridden past them had he done so, in fatuous faith that Squiff would fail to recognise his own machine.

As it was, he got to Courtfield without any worse mishap than a sideslip, which took some of the bark off his right shin—a tragedy to Bunter at the moment—and some of the enamel off Squiff's machine—a matter of no importance whatever in his eyes.

He lumbered off at the shop of Mr. Solomon Lazarus.

Mr. Lazarus was a pawnbroker, but he was not only a pawnbroker—he also dabbled in the theatrical costumier line, and the Remove Dramatic Society often hired properties from him.

But Mr. Lazarus was not in at the moment. His hopeful son, Solomon junior, was keeping shop.

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"Hallo, Bunter, old thport!" said Solly, as the fat junior came in.

Solly was on the best of terms with many of the Remove. But Bunter was not really among the number of his friends.

"Don't be familiar, Lazarus!" said Bunter loftily. "I'm on a matter of business, you know."

"Bithneth?" said Solly, rubbing his hands. "I'm the boy for bithneth, Bunter, an' don't you forget it, my thon!"

"I would prefer to see your father," replied Bunter.

"Come to-morrow at nine o'clock, an' you can thee him all therene. But at prethent he'th out. You can't do him down, any more than you can me, you know, Bunter. The old bird'th fly, I'll thay that for him."

"I would scorn to do anyone down," answered Bunter.

"Unleth you got the chanth—eh?" retorted Solly, with a finger to his Hebraic nasal organ. "Let'th thee the colour of your money, Bunter, an' then we'll talk bithneth."

Bunter slapped the ten-shilling note down on the counter.

"There!" he said triumphantly.

Solly took up the note and examined it with care.

"It'th a good one," he said, as though surprised.

"Of course it's a good one!" howled Bunter.

"I'm not so dead thure that it'th so much a matter of courthe, not when it'th you, Bunter," said Solly. "I know you, you thee. Well, thir, and what can I have the pleathure of thowin' you?"

"I want a black cloak, a big beard, and whiskers—it doesn't matter what colour they are—and a false nose," replied Bunter. "Oh, and if you've an old revolver that you can throw in cheap, I'll take that, too! I don't care about one that would really go off, you know; I might shoot myself or something."

Solly murmured something that sounded to Bunter rather like "No such luck!" But Bunter was too much on his dignity—and too anxious to do business—to take any notice of that.

The pawnbroker's son produced a black cloak, a false nose built very much on the pattern of his own, and some face-fungus of a striking and terrifying appearance, black in hue and fuzzy in texture.

"The the do?" he asked, holding them up and looking at them as if he admired them hugely.

"I don't like the nose a bit," replied Bunter peevishly. "I don't want to be taken for a blessed Jew, you know!"

"You're in no danger of being taken for anything half ath good ath that!" retorted Solly, with some asperity. "It'th thith or none at all. Thith hath been a bad theathon for notheth."

"Where's the shooting-iron?" asked Bunter.

"That little lot doethn't cover a revolver," answered Solly, indicating the note.

"But I want to hire them, not to buy them!" howled Bunter.

"If you'd a fiver I thuppothe you'd think you could buy up all our blethed thtock in trade?" said Solly. "We can't thrutht you to hire anything, Bunter. The old bird hathn't a very high opinion of you, my thon!"

Bunter gasped.

"What does it matter to me what a Jew pawnbroker thinks of me?" he demanded arrogantly.

"Not a lot, I dare thay. But it matterth quite a piethe to the Jew pawnbroker when he'th doin' bithneth with you!"

It was a new point of view for Bunter, though it should not have been. Vaguely he suspected that his credit in Courtfield was not very much better than his credit at Greyfriars. He moderated his tone.

"Solly, old chap," he said, "you oughtn't to be put out by a joke. Look here, if I take that nose, will you throw in an old pistol? You're sure to have something that's no good; you've got such a lot of useless old junk about this place."

"If it'th a Jewith nothe, it'th a better nothe than you ever had on your fat face, Bunter!" snapped Solly. "The thing you've got ain't a nothe at all, properly thpeaking. It'th a mere button, and a blethed ugly button at that!"

"Oh, really, Solly! Don't get your wool off!" pleaded the Owl of the Remove. "I didn't mean anything against Jews. Find me a revolver, there's a good chap!"

Solly dived under the counter, and came up with something that might have been taken as a revolver, if one did not look at it too closely, and had no considerable knowledge of revolvers. It was

plain even to Bunter, who was no judge, that it was not a first-class shooting-iron. But he thought it would do.

"I'll take it," he said. "Now, what shall we say for that little lot, Solly? Remember you're dealing with a pal. Four-and-six?"

"Rath! Ten-an'-thix ith my very loweht, price."

"I haven't got ten-and-six," protested Bunter.

"You've got ten bob, though I'm not tho thure that you have any blethed right to it!"

"But if I shell out all I've got, I sha'n't be able to get any grub before I go back, and I'm hungry!"

"Will you thell me your bike?" asked Solly.

He was only joking. But Bunter was too obtuse to grasp that fact.

Bunter wavered. If he could only have been quite sure that Squiff would not find out where the bike had gone!

Prudence prevailed.

"I can't!" he sighed. "Tain't really mine, you know."

"Oh, I know that all therene! It'th Field'th. But I didn't think that would keep you off thelling it, Bunter—though, of courthe, it would have kept me off buying it. You're honethter than I thought you were, an' I'll let you have that little lot for nine-an'-thix. You can go an' blow yourthelf out with the thix-penth change, you know."

Bunter went, with his purchases. But he did not go and blow himself out. Sixpence would not have gone far in that direction, even with anyone much less voracious than Billy Bunter.

"Now, I wonder what he wanted with thothe thingth?" murmured Solly, rubbing his prominent nose thoughtfully. "Highway robbery, perhapth? Never mind—he won't do a blethed lot of damage that way!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Bunter to the Rescue!

VERNON-SMITH and Squiff came away from Highcliffe rather disappointed. They had gone to see Ponsonby, but had only seen Derwent and Tunstall and Merton.

Now, the Bounder and the Australian junior, being themselves decent fellows, naturally preferred Flip Derwent & Co., who were also decent fellows, to Cecil Ponsonby or any of the Ponsonby crowd.

But they had gone over to see Pon, and Pon was not at home. No one else—least of all, anyone towards whom they felt friendly—would do instead of Pon. For that aristocratic youth had been saying things, and it was necessary to the Bounder's peace of mind to punch Pon's head as early and as hard as possible.

Squiff had gone with the Bounder to act as second, in case Pon showed fight.

"No end sorry!" said Derwent, grinning. "We'd have taken front seats for the little show. But I'm afraid that there's no chance of its coming off this afternoon—eh, Algy?"

"Not here, anyway," replied Merton. "Vernon-Smith may run against Pon out of gates. He has Vav an' Gaddy an' Monson with him, though."

"If there had been one or two more of the crowd it would have been strong enough to stand up to you two!" remarked Tunstall.

"Do you rate Highcliffe so low as that, dear boy?" giped the Bounder.

But his gibe left the three unruffled.

"My dear chap, Pon & Co. aren't Highcliffe," said Derwent. "They're only the nuts—and rotten nuts at that!"

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Billy Bunter locked the door of his study and produced the parcel of goods he had brought from Courtfield. He had difficulty with the false nose ; but he managed it somehow. (See Chapter 6.)

"Won't you fellows come in?" asked Merton hospitably.

But the Bounder and Squiff would not go in. As they had missed their quarry, they thought they might as well go back and get in some footer.

"We shall hear from Wharton about being absent, anyway," said the Bounder. "But he may forgive us if we turn up at half-time."

So they started back.

"Pity we didn't ride!" said Squiff.

"It is, rather. After all, your new jigger's got to get muddy sooner or later, y'know!"

"Hallo! There they are!"

Round a bend of the road came Ponsonby, Gadsby, Vavasour, and Monson. All four looked rather as if they were at a loss to know what to do with themselves.

The Bounder and Squiff strode up to them. Pon looked a trifle uneasy. He had heard a rumour that Vernon-Smith was on the war-path, and he knew that he had no chance of licking the Bounder—that even to stand up to him meant getting hurt. And Pon disliked getting hurt.

"I've a word or two to say to you, Ponsonby!" snapped the Bounder.

"Say on, then!" returned Pon, as indifferently as he could.

"Better take your hands out of your pockets first! I don't want you to swear afterwards that I hit you before you were ready!"

"Got it in once!" replied Squiff.

"It sounds like a word an' a blow!" said Gadsby.

"Oh, you want to pick a quarrel, do you?" asked Pon. "I'm ready, by gad!"

And he gave his pals a sidelong look; for it was essential to his programme that they also should be ready.

"You may pretend that you don't know what I have against you, Ponsonby!" said the Bounder, his face flushing darkly. "But it will only be a pretence. I'm goin' to call you to account for somethin' you said to Wharton a day or two ago."

"Really, I fail to see that anythin' I said to Wharton—or am reported to have said to him—is any concern whatever of yours!" drawled Pon. "I can't recall sayin' anythin', for that matter. Are you quite sure that your dear pal Wharton isn't tryin' to make bad blood between us?"

"I know that Wharton's dead straight, an' that you are a loathsome cad!" replied Vernon-Smith.

"And that's enough, if you've a spark of pluck, Ponsonby!" Squiff said.

"I'm talkin' to Vernon-Smith!" returned Pon.

"Do you want to argue the matter?" shouted the Bounder.

"I want to know what I'm reported to have said," answered Pon. "I'm not so dashed sure as you seem to be that Wharton can't lie!"

But that was not the true reason why he wanted his speech repeated. He wanted that because he knew it would hurt the Bounder to repeat it.

The strongest feeling Herbert Vernon-Smith had was affection for his father. Few people liked Samuel Vernon-Smith, but his son's loyalty to him knew no faltering. The Bounder might take coolly an insult to himself; but he was up in arms in an instant if an insult was offered to his sire.

"You said that I was the son of an ignorant, purse-proud, bumptious old swindler!" said the Bounder, his eyes gleaming, his face scarlet.

"Well, aren't you?" returned Ponsonby.

That sneer cost him nothing. He knew what he had to expect in any case.

"Take that!" cried Vernon-Smith.

And he dashed his fist full at Pon's face.

But Pon had taken his hands out of his pockets, and was ready for the blow.

He guarded it deftly enough. Pon was no duffer, and when his blood was up he was no funk, though there was a yellow streak in him.

"Come on, you fellows!" he howled.

Gadsby and Monson minor came on willingly enough. Vavasour came on reluctantly. Even with odds of two to one in his favour, Vavasour was not keen on a scrap.

Squiff piled in, of course. He had

anticipated having to do so from the moment he saw the quartette, and had anticipated it without any reluctance.

He found himself with his hands full, for Gadsby and Monson fell to his share. Vavasour hovered round Pon and the Bounder, doing nothing yet, but ready to get in a punch when he saw the chance without getting punched back.

Pon did not specially need his aid at the start. He and the Bounder were not so far off being a match then. The disparity would show a little later, when the superior fitness of the Bounder and his greater courage began to tell. Vernon-Smith took a lot of licking. Pon began to be licked as soon as he had bellows to mend and had sustained a few hard punches.

The Bounder went at him grimly, and did not appear to care how much he took in return for what he gave.

But Squiff, though he had his hands full, fought smiling. Squiff had no strong feeling against Gadsby and Monson; he took this combat as all in the day's work.

The Bounder got home hard on Pon's nose; but at the same moment Vavasour landed the Bounder quite a hard punch on the right temple. He staggered back. Then he came on in wrath. Pon's claret was tapped, and he was busy with his handkerchief.

"Ow-yow!" roared Vavasour.

Vernon-Smith had given him right and left, and Vavasour, lifted off his feet and deposited on his back in the mud, had no stomach for more. Vav did not like mud; but he preferred that to the Bounder's punches. And as long as he lay there he knew himself perfectly safe from being punched again, while the damage to his clothes was already done.

But Pon dropped his handkerchief and came on again, though his nose was streaming.

He was floored; but he struggled up and attacked once more. There was more fight in him than the Bounder had expected.

His left smote Vernon-Smith in the eye; his right got home on the Bounder's jaw. But that jaw only set harder, and the Bounder only punched harder.

Squiff had taken a bruise or two. But Gadsby had had nearly enough, and Monson alone was no match for the hefty Cornstalk.

"Stick to it, Gaddy!" panted Monson, sticking to it valiantly himself.

Then round the bend came Billy Bunter, on Squiff's machine.

He was upon them before they saw him.

"Hi! Get out of the way, or I shall be over you!" he howled.

Bunter was not good at dismounting in a hurry.

Gadsby dodged Squiff, and in dodging Squiff threw himself right in the way of Bunter.

The front wheel took Gadsby full in the back, and sent him flying.

Bunter went flying. The machine went flying. And at that identical second Pon smote the road with a thwack, while the second after Monson crashed down.

There they lay, Pon and Vavasour, Gadsby and Monson, Bunter and the bike; and the Bounder stood with arms akimbo, and a sardonic grin on his face, gazing down at them.

But Squiff had seen something that took all the pleasure out of the victory for him.

He had recognised his bike.

"You fat villain!" he roared.

"I—I— Oh, really, Squiff! When I've just come to your rescue like this!" bumbled the Owl.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 621.

"Come to our rescue, you idiotic clam! Who wanted rescuing, I'd like to know? And what are you doing with my bike?"

The four Higheliffians were picking themselves up, scowling. Pon, who had struck a big puddle, looked a pretty sight, with mud coating him from head to foot, and blood masking the lower part of his face.

"Had enough?" inquired the Bounder.

Not one of the four answered in words. They scowled and went.

"Might almost as well have used the jigger yourself, Squiff," remarked Vernon-Smith, not even deigning a backward glance at the discomfited foe.

"Better!" growled Squiff, contemplating ruefully the damage done to his new bike. "You vile toad! You fat impostor! You dishonest Daniel Lambert!"

Bunter looked really injured in mind,

butted in regardless of consequences, and saved us from a lickin'!" said the Bounder, in his most sarcastic tones.

Bunter heard the words, and failed entirely to grasp the sarcasm.

"That was just it," he said fatuously. "Smithy sees how it was, don't you, Smithy, old pal? I consider you're very ungrateful, Field, and that you owe me an apology!"

"I owe you a dashed good hiding, and I don't believe in owing anything long!" retorted Squiff.

"Oh, let the fat rascal off!" said the Bounder. "Gaddy will take it out of him next time he catches him alone!"

Bunter's bundle had fallen off the machine. Squiff gave it a kick, and burst the brown paper which formed the wrapper.

"Hallo! What's the depraved oyster got there?" he asked.

The fuzzy beard showed through the orifice, and there was also a glimpse of the butt of the rusty revolver.

Bunter snatched up the bundle, and grabbed it to his ample chest.

"I never met anyone so inquisitive as you are, Field!" he said, with virtuous indignation. "This parcel is my affair, let me tell you!"

"And my bike—"

"You can have your rotten old bike! I couldn't ride it like that, anyway!"

"I can't, either! No one could! But I'm not going to push it back! You're going to do that, my beamish boy!"

"Catch me at it—I don't think!"

But Bunter had to do it. The Bounder and Squiff got the buckled rim as nearly true as possible, and Bunter had to wheel the machine in front of them.

"You're going to have a very pretty black eye, Smithy," said the Cornstalk, as they went on their way.

The Bounder fingered the injured optic carefully.

"Yes," he said, "Pon did get in one there. I shouldn't mind, only my pater's coming to see me in a day or two, and I'd rather not have looked quite such an object."

"Well, it was taken in his cause," said Squiff.

"That may be so. But I couldn't tell him that," answered Vernon-Smith quietly.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Giving Himself Away!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter showed his fat face and his big specs. at the door of Study No. 1 on the Remove passage.

The Famous Five—Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, Bob Cherry, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, more commonly called Inky, were at tea, ruddy and hungry after their footer exertions.

Only two of them belonged to the study; but Johnny Bull, Inky, and Bob Cherry were usually to be found there at tea-time. There was often also to be found a rather better and more varied tea than No. 7 could boast. And it was likely that Billy Bunter was looking in on that account, rather than from any desire to see any of the five.

No. 7 had not done badly that evening. Alonzo was not mean, and would have spent more on a feed than his cousin Peter considered justifiable or necessary, though not as much as William George Bunter held a bare minimum. Peter, in making his calculations, multiplied his own appetite—not at all a bad one—by four. But Bunter knew that to be quite a wrong way of working out the sum. His own capacity alone exceeded Peter's multiplied by four.

No. 21.—ALONZO THEOPHILUS TODD.



Known as the Duffer. The most innocent fellow in the school. Obliging to a fault; soft-hearted, and soft-headed. Has the best of intentions, and is capable of making a mess of anything in the carrying them out. Transparently honest, and with really high principles. A duffer, but no coward. (Study No. 7—Remove).

as well as in body, though the spill had hurt him less than he deserved.

"I— Oh, really, Squiff, I never thought you could mind a pal borrowing your bike, when you didn't want it yourself!" he protested. "And if it hadn't been for me I shouldn't wonder if those Higheliffe cads would have wiped the floor with you. I bowled Gadsby over just as he was delivering a deadly blow. I rode straight at him. I never even thought about how much I might get hurt."

"You'd better think about it, then!" retorted Squiff angrily. "For you're jolly well going to get hurt now, I can tell you!"

"Oh dear! Don't let him, Smithy! Don't be a beast, Squiff! My backbone's pretty nearly busted as it is!"

"Look at my bike!" roared Squiff. "Half the enamel gone! Front rim wheel buckled—"

"That was when I hit Gaddy!" panted Bunter. "You can't blame me for that, you know."

"The fact of the matter is, Field, that Bunter, after his usual heroic fashion,

He had had all that he could get in No. 7, and had now come along to No. 1, more than ready to repeat the dose there.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "We thought you were dead, porpoise!"

"Well, you ought to be jolly glad to see that you were wrong!" snorted Bunter.

"Can't see why we should," said Johnny Bull, who was nothing if not candid.

"I'm not talking to you, Bull. I prefer not to talk to you," Bunter returned loftily.

"I'm glad to hear that, anyway," replied Johnny. "Don't ever talk to me again!"

"What made you think I was dead, Bob, old pal?" asked Bunter, with an ingratiating smirk.

"Bob, old pal," makes me jolly certain you soon will be if you're not careful!" snapped Bob.

"Oh, really! I—"

"We heard you'd borrowed Squiff's bike, Bunter," put in Frank Nugent.

"Without Squiff's knowing," added Harry Wharton.

"And that the irrefulness of the respected and disgusted Squiff was

"Terrific!" finished Bob for Inky.

"I did borrow Squiff's bike, and he was jolly grateful to me—at least, if he wasn't, the Bounder was," replied Bunter, with a sniff.

"He wasn't—that's a dead cert!" said Johnny Bull. "And I don't see why the Bounder should be. He and Squiff are chummy enough."

"You don't know what I did," said Bunter, throwing out his chest. "I say, I don't mind if I have a cup of tea and a mouthful of that cake! Then I'll tell you the whole story."

"We decline to bribe you to tell lies! You do enough of that free," said Wharton.

"Oh, really, Wharton! I don't call that being pally!" protested Bunter, gazing at the cake with longing eyes, his mouth visibly watering as he gazed.

"It wasn't intended to be. I don't want to be pally, you see, fatty."

"But you can tell us your yarn," said Frank Nugent.

"If I'm not good enough to sit down with you," Bunter said firmly. "I'm not—"

"Bad enough to tell us whoppers—eh?" struck in Bob. "Oh, yes, you are, porpoise! You're always had enough for that! But here's a bit of cake!"

It was Bob's cake, and no one could fairly object to his letting Bunter have a piece, though Johnny Bull did have to suppress a growl.

Bob handed over a liberal slice, and Bunter stuffed his mouth full before he began to talk.

"It was pretty hot, I tell you!" he said. "I came round the corner on my bike—"

"Squiff's bike!" interjected Harry.

"Oh, it's all the same thing—"

"Squiff doesn't think so," said Frank.

"Squiff's an ungrateful beast!" said Bunter warmly. "If it hadn't been for me those Highcliffe chaps would have jolly nearly killed him and Smithy! There were about a dozen of them!"

"About a dozen of Squiff and Smithy?" queried Johnny.

"No, you silly fathead! About a dozen of the Highcliffe cads!"

"Names!" rapped out Bob Cherry.

"There was Pon—"

"Your dear old pal Pon!" put in Frank.

"He's no pal of mine. I hate the beast! There was Pon—"

"That's two," said Bob solemnly.

"Only one, thump! And Gadsby—"

"And what was the numberfulness of the disgusting Gadsby, my esteemed and degraded Bunter?" inquired Inky.

The Famous Five had heard the story of the fight from the Bounder and Squiff. Both carried marks that had inevitably meant questioning.

"Well, there were five or six, anyway, and Smithy and Squiff were just about done in when I came round the corner to the rescue."

"To the whatter?" asked Bob, with his hand to his ear.

"To the rescue! Are you deaf?"

"There's no pub of that name on the Courtfield road. Fact, there isn't a blessed pub at all. And you ought to know better than to visit such places, Bunter. You're getting rorty again!"

"I wasn't. I didn't. Oh, you are a silly idiot, Bob Cherry! I came to the rescue—r-e-s-k-e-w! Do you get that?"

No. 22.—FISHER TARLETON FISH.



From New York. An American with a great bent towards what he calls "business," and others call "swindling." Puts dollars before anything else, and has played many shady tricks, but is not such a rotter as Skinner. Squiff and Johnny Bull bear with him, but do not love him. It need hardly be said, perhaps, that he is not intended in any way to represent the typical American boy. (Study No. 14—Remove).

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

"I rode slap into Gaddy's back, and bowled him over!" went on Bunter.

"Too rotten! Not according to Queensbury rules," said Bob, shaking his head sadly.

"I bowled him over. Then I got off my bike—"

"So the Bounder said," remarked Johnny.

"The respected Smithy reportfully mentioned that the get-off-fulness was of the extremeful quickness, Bunter," added Inky.

"Oh, I'm not going to tell you silly asses any more!" snorted Bunter, thrusting the last scrap of cake into his capacious mouth. "You won't let a fellow tell a tale his own way. You always think you know best."

And he rolled towards the door.

"Hi! Come back, oyster! You've dropped something!" called Bob, picking up a letter from the floor.

He could not help seeing the address. It was that of Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith.

Bob was surprised. So was Bunter—annoyed also.

"Gimme my letter!" he howled. "You're a prying beast, Bob Cherry!"

"Here's your letter, you lump of bad lard! And if you aren't outside that door in a single second I'll use you for a football!" roared Bob.

Bunter grabbed his letter and bolted.

"What on earth is that fat fool writing to Smithy's pater for?" said Bob wonderingly.

"Was he writing to Smithy's pater?" asked Frank, in equal surprise.

"That letter was addressed to old Vernon-Smith, anyway."

"Perhaps Smithy asked Bunter to post it for him," suggested Harry.

"Likely, isn't it?" snorted Bob.

"Well, it's possible, old top."

"I suppose it's possible that Smithy got him to address it, too?"

That also was possible, but it was most highly improbable. And the suggestion that the astute and suspicious Bounder should have entrusted a letter to the tender mercies of Billy Bunter really was not a very likely one.

"It's not our bizney, anyway," Harry said.

"Not so sure," growled Bob. "You never know what rotten tricks that fat clam may get up to."

Johnny Bull stooped.

"Here's something else he dropped," he said, as he lifted another paper from the floor.

"I don't think we ought to look at it," said Harry.

"Then we can't be sure it is the porpoise's," objected Bob. "And I don't see handing over to him what might belong to one of us."

"I'm going to look, anyway," Johnny said, with his customary determination. "You can't treat Bunter as if he were straight and decent."

They all looked, though Harry and Frank did not feel quite easy about doing so.

"My only Sunday topper!" ejaculated Bob.

"The Owl's mad!" exclaimed Frank.

"Git holed of sum witch man, and holed him to wransum," read Johnny, aloud. "Kweery—old Vernon-Smith? Kweery No. 2—howe to doe it?"

"And that," said Bob, with a wide grin, "is a very big query indeed! Let the Owl try it, that's all!"

"Do you think he is going to try on anything as mad as that?" asked Harry, aghast.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" returned Johnny Bull coolly.

"We shall have to stop him. Tell Smithy, or something!"

"Am I my brother's keeper?" inquired Frank.

"And is Bunter our brother?" chimed in Bob. "Let him rip!"

"But you don't know what may come of it," Harry objected.

"You're too much in the way of being the keeper of chaps that you wouldn't own as brothers, Wharton," Johnny Bull said. "We might watch the porpoise. But old Vernon-Smith's far too fly to be done in the eye by him, and if we warned the Bounder he would only laugh at us."

And Harry had to admit that that was true. Nevertheless, he did not feel quite free from anxiety, on Bunter's account rather than upon that of Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Scheme!

IF the Famous Five could have seen what was inside that envelope addressed to the Boulder's pater they might have had a shock, or they might have chuckled over it. Wharton was the likeliest of the Five to have been shocked, and Bob Cherry was the least likely. Wharton persisted in feeling a sense of responsibility for the enormous Owl that Bob had long since ceased to share.

For the letter read thus:

"Dear Sir,—This is from a friend and well-wisher. It has come to my knowledge that you have a sun at Greyfriars, and that he is keeping very bad company.

"Moor shall be told you if you acceded to my suggestions.

"I find it necessary to ask you to come to Friardale, reaching there by the 5.53 train on Friday next, and bringing with you the sum of two thousand pounds (£20,000 sterling) in pound and half-sovereign notes.

"If you do this, according to instructions, the awful fate that hangs over the devoted head of your only son and heir may be averted. If not, tremble! The hand of the avenger will find you out, and I shall not strike twice. Their will be no need for that.

"You may prefer to send the cash in advance, in order to be safe. If so—well, I should strongly advise—please send it registered to the following address:

"George B. Williams, Esq.;

"Friardale Post Office,

"Courtfield,

"Kent.

"I sign myself,

"Yours faithfully,

"THE TERROR IN BLACK."

Part of that was Bunter's own, including most of the spelling. But he had lifted one or two effective bits from the Conrad volume. The nom de guerre was from that.

William George was quite unaware that Vernon-Smith was expecting a visit from his father. But he had no doubt that Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith would come along on Friday in response to his summons.

He hoped that the money would be sent in advance, however. In that case he would not trouble Mr. Vernon-Smith further. If it were not sent thus, he meant to meet him at the station in a disguise which he was quite sure could not be penetrated by anyone.

Bunter was not really asking for twenty thousand pounds. The four noughts in the sum in figures were due only to mathematical incapacity on his part.

This was quite the biggest brain-wave Bunter had ever had. He was sure of that.

He was not sure about holding Mr. Vernon-Smith to ransom. But he hoped that would be unnecessary. If it proved to be necessary, he trusted to have another brain-wave that would render its accomplishment possible. He might lure the millionaire into a box-room, and shut him up there until he gave in.

How to get through the long hours of class-work on the Friday morning Bunter did not know. Mr. Quelch helped to break the monotony of them by caning him twice; but there is reason to doubt whether Bunter was really grateful for this.

Twelve o'clock came at last, and he rolled off to the bike-shed. With the rosy prospect of fingering two thousand pounds within a very short time before him, it really did not occur to him that it

mattered whose bike he took—except his own, which, as usual, was not in going order.

It seemed prudent, however, to leave Squiff's alone.

He decided to take Johnny Bull's. The roads were as muddy as ever, and Johnny had not been at all friendly lately. Serve the beast right to get his machine into a state that would mean an hour or two's cleaning!

It was an unlucky choice, for it happened that Johnny wanted the bike also. He came in just as Bunter was wheeling it out.

"Hallo! Whose jigger have you got there, porpoise?" asked Johnny.

"My own," replied Bunter, with more dignity than truth.

The light in the bike-shed was not too good, and Johnny Bull's query had been prompted rather by general than by particular suspicion. But the suspicion, general or particular, was strong enough to induce him to look closely at the bike.

He seized Bunter by the collar.

"You fat Ananias!" he roared.

"That's my jigger!"

"Yaroooh! Lemme be! Bull, you beast! Ow-yow! If it is yours, I didn't know! I quite thought it was mine! It's just like it!"

"TRIMBLE MINOR!"

is the title of a splendid
long, complete story of
St. Jim's in this week's

"GEM."

DO NOT MISS IT!

Now, Johnny Bull rather prided himself on keeping his bike in first-class condition, and this excuse only increased his ire.

"You depraved hippopotamus! You — Oh, there isn't any name bad enough for you!" he yelled. "Take that — and that!"

He cuffed Bunter's head hard, and then twisted him round, and applied a substantial boot to his person.

"Yoooop! Yaroooh! You're killing me, you beast!" howled Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came the stentorian voice of Bob Cherry from outside. "Pig-sticking going on in there—what?"

"This blessed owl was just taking my bike out!" shouted Johnny.

"For a walk?" asked Bob. "I shouldn't agree to that if I were you, Johnny."

"To ride, you ass!" snapped Johnny.

"What, Bunt? Bunt can't ride a bike!"

Bob stepped inside as he spoke.

"Lead me yours, and see if I can't, Cherry!" said the Owl eagerly.

"Nunno! I won't go so far as that! Tell you what we'll do, though—we'll let you ride your own!"

"We'll jolly well make him!" snorted Johnny. "Here's the old crock. Trundle it out, porpoise!"

"I—I— Oh, look here, you fellows, I'd just as soon walk!" bumbled Bunter.

Most people would rather have walked than have attempted to ride that machine, for it really was in a most deplorable

condition. Both tyres were punctured, the chain was loose, and there was something wrong with the right pedal. Moreover, in what manner soever one held the thing, there was no getting the two wheels into proper lines. One of them appeared to have a terrible squint. Which one it was depended on the angle from which the machine was surveyed.

Johnny or Bob would have found difficulty in riding that machine more than a few yards. But neither had any notion of trying. They knew that Bunter could not ride it; but they were determined that he should take it.

And they made him. They walked him and the machine to the gates, and saw him mount, after several unsuccessful efforts. The eccentric behaviour of the wheels accounted for the lack of success.

But Bunter got into the saddle at last. He rode very nearly ten yards, and then he and the bike parted company. The bike stayed in the road, and Bunter shot into the hedge.

"Yoooop!" he roared.

"And that might have been my bike!" snorted Johnny.

"No, old top. Yours wouldn't have behaved quite like that—it isn't a buck-jumper, you know. Try again, porpoise! Remember Bruce and the ant, and try, try, try again!"

"The ant was a spider," said Johnny.

"And the Snark was a Boojum," replied Bob. "Bravo, oyster! I knew you wouldn't be done like that!"

Bunter had scrambled to his feet and reached for the bicycle.

But he had no notion of trying to remount. He jumped viciously upon the bike; he kicked it, and then he howled because it hurt his foot.

Bob and Johnny gasped. They had not the clue to Bunter's strange manner of dealing with his own property. Bunter had always claimed that his bike was really a valuable one, and no doubt it would still have been worth something if it had been put into repair.

But, with visions of wealth beyond the dream of avarice floating in his mind, what did Bunter care for that old crock? He was sure that in a few hours—perhaps in half an hour—he would be in a position to buy up every bike in the shed without feeling the outlay.

"That's done it!" said Bob.

Bunter picked up the machine—if it could any longer be regarded as a machine—and tried to hurl it over the hedge. His muscles were not quite equal to the feat, and it fell into the ditch.

He turned, and made a gesture unworthy of the dignity that he expected shortly to assume as permanent wear. "He put his thumb unto his nose and spread his fingers out," to quote the words of Ingoldsby.

"Yah! That's how much I care for any of your old bikes!" he howled.

Bob and Johnny were so taken by surprise that they did not even think of pursuing him to avenge the insult.

He rolled off down the Friardale road on his golden quest.

But at Friardale Post Office disappointment awaited him.

"Have you a letter—a registered letter—for George B. Williams, Esq.?" he asked impressively.

"No, Master Bunter," said the postmaster. "And if I had I couldn't hand it over to you, you know."

"Oh, really! I don't know anything of the sort! It's mine, ain't it?" howled Bunter.

"There is no letter, so that question doesn't arise," replied the official stiffly.

"I don't believe you! You're keeping back my letter, with pounds and pounds in it, and I shall report you to the Post-



The Famous Five saw a stout figure in a black cloak, with a big beard, and, though there was something vaguely familiar about the figure even in the gloom, it was fully thirty seconds before Johnny Bull exclaimed! "My hat! Bunter!" (See Chapter 6.)

master-General, and get your job taken away from you! Why, you ain't even a regular postmaster; you're only a beastly little tradesman! And I don't see why I should have to come to a place where they sell margarine and bacon and tallow-candles and things for my registered letters—and then not get them!"

"There is no letter for you, or it would be handed over to you. There is no letter for George B. Williams; but if there was such a letter I could not give it to you, because it is not your name."

"It is, then! I've taken it!"

"I'm afraid that it is not the first thing you have taken to which you have no right, Master Bunter. The regulations do not allow of the assuming of false names for letters to be held till called for."

"I don't care about the regulations! A blessed lot of rot, I call them! I'm going to have my letter! Gimme my letter!"

The postmaster stepped to the door. Through the window by his side he had just caught a glimpse of the portly form of P.-c. Tozer.

"Mr. Tozer! Constable!" he shouted.

Bunter pushed rudely past him, and bolted for dear life.

He was inclined to believe, on the whole, that there was no letter. In fact, he had to believe it, for it was plain that the postmaster was not to be threatened or cajoled, and to believe that the letter was there, but out of his reach, was really more than Bunter could bear.

In less than a hundred yards of the homeward way he felt himself once more being buoyed up by high hopes.

Mr. Vernon-Smith would bring the money with him. He was too cautious to trust so large a sum to the Post Office. And quite right of him! Bunter felt that the Post Office was a very untrustworthy institution, with silly rules specially designed to make things difficult for honest and industrious blackmailers.

Again he walked, as it were, upon air. Again he planned what he should do with the money when he got it.

Then there came a rude interruption of his golden dreams.

Down the road towards him came Pensonby and Gadsby.

Both looked a trifle the worse for wear. Pon's nose was still swollen, and Gaddy's face was distinctly picturesque.

They sighted Bunter even as he sighted them, and within the breast of Gadsby burned the fire of vengeance.

"There he is, Pon, by gad! There's the fat sweep who tumbled me over! Let's put him through it!"

Bunter turned to flee. P.-c. Tozer was not far away, and he thought of the fat policeman in that moment as of a harbour of refuge.

But Tozer had turned, and the Highcliffians were too quick for Bunter.

They ran him down. They laid violent hands upon him. They hurled him into the ditch. Then Gadsby jumped upon him hard, and with both feet.

The nuts of Highcliffe were unmitigated young ruffians; but that fact was not a new one to Bunter. He had suffered at their hands many times before, and would doubtless suffer many more times. Generally, he deserved to suffer; but that did not excuse the methods of the nuts.

"Yah!" he roared after them. "Wait till you see Squiff and Smithy again! They're pals of mine, and they'll put you through it for this, you beasts!"

Which, on the whole, seemed rather unlikely. The Famous Five did not exactly love Bunter; but he would have had a better chance of arousing their sympathy than of arousing that of the Bounder and Squiff.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

"The Terror in Black!"

IT was time Billy Bunter's luck changed; and it seemed to him that it had changed when the afternoon came.

He had been wondering how he should manage to don his disguise before going to the station to meet his victim.

The dormitory was not a safe place. Study No. 7 seemed almost impossible. Few juniors spent more time in their studies than Tom Dutton and Alonzo Todd. Tom's deafness kept him somewhat apart from many of the activities of his Form, and he did a lot of light

reading. Alonzo also read a good deal, though the books he perused could hardly be classed as light reading.

Bunter would have turned them out without the least compunction had he been able to do so. He might have put Alonzo out, perhaps; but Tom Dutton was quite a different proposition. Tom was sturdy, and by no means averse from a scrap.

The only thing possible seemed the smuggling of a looking-glass and a candle to one of the box-rooms. But there was real risk of discovery if he did that.

Then he learned, with immense relief, that Peter, Alonzo, and Tom had all received invitations to tea.

"You're not asked, Bunter," said Peter. "I did suggest to Russell and Ogilvy that there were four of us here. But Russell said that, for practical purposes, your inclusion would bring up the number to forty-four, and they hadn't provided for quite so many."

"I never did think much of Russell!" said Bunter loftily.

"He goes farther. He never did think anything of you!" replied Peter.

"I wouldn't go if I was asked!" Bunter said.

"You're not, so that's no odds! When did you ever refuse an invitation to tea, porpoise? Never mind! There's a sardine and several crumbs of cake you can have, besides a ginger-bread biscuit that's been on the floor two or three times, and that we don't fancy!"

"I don't want your rotten leavings, Peter Todd! You'll be sorry for this to-morrow, when I've got my two—"

Bunter pulled himself up suddenly. He had come very near to letting out too much.

"What! Two postal-orders coming at once?" gibed Peter.

"Never mind, Peter Todd! I know what I know!" replied Bunter darkly.

"Well, that's hardly enough to worry about—is it?" returned Peter cheerily. "Come along, Lony!"

Peter did not tell Tom Dutton to come along; he just pushed him towards the door. That expedient saved words and trouble.

Directly they had gone Bunter produced from the bottom of the cupboard the parcel he had brought from Courtfield.

With trembling fingers he unfastened it, and brought out the fuzzy black beard, the black cloak, the false nose, the dud revolver, and a crepe half-mask which he had made himself, and had added to the outfit.

Then he locked the door. He should have done that before. As it was, he was only just in time. Hardly had he turned the key before there sounded a tap.

Bunter kept silence. The tap was repeated. Then the handle of the door was tried.

"Are you there, Toddy?" asked the voice of Squiff.

"Todd's not here. You'll find him with Ogilvy and Russell if you want him," answered the Owl from within.

His fingers trembled worse than ever now, and his whole podgy frame shook like a jelly. Squiff had already had a glimpse of the contents of that parcel. If he had seen the articles laid out on the table he would most assuredly have smelt a rat. And he would have seen them had he been a moment earlier.

"What's the door locked for?" asked Squiff.

"That's my business, I consider!" answered Bunter.

"I hope Toddy hasn't left anything in the cupboard that he has any notion of applying to the uses of his own inner

man, that's all," said the Cornstalk as he went.

Then Bunter got to work. He had difficulty with the false nose; but he managed to fasten it on somehow. The beard was easy enough. The black mask would be left until later. The revolver he stuck into his breast-pocket, though he felt it a very bold and risky thing to do. Suppose the weapon went off? It was not loaded, and it was incapable of being fired even had it been; but Bunter did not know that it was unloaded, and he did not know how to find out whether it was.

At the last moment he remembered that he had not provided himself with a suitable hat. He fished out Peter's Boy Scout hat, and donned that—or, rather, perched it upon his head. The Owl's cranium was bigger than Peter Todd's.

The hat did not look quite the right thing in the glass; but it would be all

No. 23.—RICHARD PENFOLD.



The son of the Friardale cobbler, and one of Nature's gentlemen. A scholarship boy; and as is the case with most scholarship boys, had a very rough passage of it at the outset through the persecutions of the snobs. Good at cricket and footer; indeed, at all games. One of the three or four leaders in the Form-room. One of the very best. A keen and enthusiastic amateur photographer. (Study No. 9—Remove).

right on the dimly-lighted platform at Friardale, Bunter thought.

With bated breath he stole out of No. 7.

Only Billy Bunter would have been such a crass idiot as to go downstairs and through the quad in that brigandish garb. Anyone else would have put on the disguise somewhere out of gates.

But Fortune is said to favour fools, and it seemed that Fortune was favouring Bunter then.

Everybody indoors was at tea, and he found himself at the gates without having encountered anyone.

A light gleamed in the lodge, and the grumbling voice of Gosling could be heard within. Bunter slipped past and through the smaller gate.

Then only did he breathe freely. His pent-up anxiety found vent in something between a sigh and a groan, which might have been heard at least a hundred yards away.

It was dusk, very nearly dark, and the Owl was sure that no one meeting him on the road could recognise him.

But his certainty received a rude shock when, about half-way to the station, he walked almost into the arms of the Famous Five.

They did not recognise him at the moment. They saw a stout figure in a black cloak with a big beard; and, though there was something vaguely familiar about that figure, even in the gloom, it was fully thirty seconds before Johnny Bull exclaimed:

"My hat! Bunter!"

"My aunt! So it was!" said Bob Cherry.

"It couldn't have been!" Wharton said doubtfully.

"It was, though!" Frank Nugent said.

"The identifiableness of the claukful figure with the esteemed and absurd Bunter—"

"What's he after?" asked Bob wonderingly.

"I suppose it really was Bunter," said Harry. "But as to what he's up to—"

"I've got it!" cried Frank. "That letter to Smithy's pater—those silly-ass scribbles about holding him to ransom—that's what he's after, you bet!"

"But Mr. Vernon-Smith isn't coming till to-morrow," objected Harry. "Smithy's taking us into Courtfield to have tea with him!"

"I don't believe the Owl knows anything at all about his coming to see Smithy," said Johnny. "This is quite another affair, I'm sure. Shall we track the fat boulder?"

"We've had tea at Friardale to-night, thanks to Franky's being in funds," said Bob. "We're going to have tea at Courtfield to-morrow with Smithy's pater. There's plenty of time before prep. Altogether, as tea to-day is safely inside us, and tea to-morrow is provided for, I think we might do worse."

"What's tea to-morrow got to do with it?" growled Johnny.

"Only that, as Samuel Vernon-Smith, Esquire, is going to stand that, I feel that we ought to protect him against the wiles of the treacherous Owl!" replied Bob solemnly. "That's only gratitude in advance—which is said to be the only real gratitude there is. And it would be too bad to leave an innocent old buffer like Smithy's pater to the tender mercies of Billy the Bandit!"

"I don't half like it," Harry said. "Bunter may get himself into no end of a mess. Smithy's pater can be jolly hard when he likes. Don't you think that some of us ought to go on and give Smithy the tip, while the rest follow that silly fathead?"

"I think so if you think so," replied Johnny Bull. "But I'm not game for anything so slow as going to warn Smithy."

"Nor yet me," said Bob. "I feel that my duty is to protect Smithy's respected pater."

"Same here!" Frank said.

"I will proceedfully go with you to speak to the esteemed Smithy, my ridiculous pal!" volunteered good-natured Inky.

"Right-ho!" answered Harry. "I say, you fellows, if you can stop Bunter from making a fool of himself, do!"

"We will," said Bob. "But," he added to Frank and Johnny, as the other two turned away, "the thing's imposs! The Owl can't make a fool of himself. Nature did all that could be done for him in that way!"

"He's hurrying," said Johnny, a minute or two later. "We ought to have caught him up by now."

"I rather fancy I can perceive a slim form ahead—a sylph-like form in a black cloak," replied Frank, grinning. "There! Did you spot him when he passed that window?"

Bunter held on to the station, and the three shadowed him. But none of them had the least intention of tackling him until after the train had come in. It would be time enough for that when they were sure that Mr. Vernon-Smith had not turned up, they thought; and they did not believe he would turn up.

But the millionaire was actually in a first-class compartment of the train rumbling near to Friardale at that moment.

He had intended to come on Saturday, but Bunter's letter had aroused his curiosity. He felt sure that it came from some misguided boy at Greyfriars; but that did not keep it from annoying him. Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith did not like japes.

A boy who would play a trick of that sort had no right to be at the same school as his son. A most improper and unprincipled boy, quite unfit to associate with Herbert, so Mr. Vernon-Smith held.

He got out of the train, looking very disagreeable indeed. Bunter, lurking just outside the platform gate, saw him, and Bunter's heart almost failed him.

The black mask was a necessity; but even to the fatuous mind of William George Bunter it had occurred that the black mask could hardly be shown upon the platform without drawing notice. So Bunter lurked outside.

Again fortune seemed to favour him. Mr. Vernon-Smith came through the gate alone. Bunter plucked up all his courage, telling himself that the disagreeable expression on the face of the millionaire was the natural consequence of his dislike to part with the two thousand pounds in notes which he carried in his pocket.

"You are Mr. Vernon-Smith?" sounded a deep and hollow voice out of the gloom as the visitor passed through the gate.

"I am. And who are you?" demanded the millionaire.

"The Terror in Black!" replied Bunter, in sepulchral tones. "Give the alarm, and you are a dead man! I have you covered!"

Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, and Frank Nugent, hidden only a yard or two away, heard that, and Bob drove his elbow hard into Johnny's ribs, while Johnny clapped a hand over Frank's mouth. Had Harry Wharton been there, he would have sprung forward at that, and Johnny was rather afraid that Frank might act on some such impulse as would have moved Harry.

But Frank pushed the hand away.

"All right, chump!" he whispered. "Do you think I'm afraid fatty will shoot the old buffer?"

"I will go with you," said the millionaire.

And Bunter felt sure that there was fear in his voice.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Imprisoned for Ransom!

"I SAY, Smithy, is your pater coming this evening?" asked Harry Wharton, bursting with Inky into the study in which Vernon-Smith and his chum, Tom Redwing, were entertaining Squiff, Tom Brown, and Piet Delarey to tea.

"No. To-morrow morning," returned the Bounder, in surprise. "Why?"

"Because Bunter's gone to Friardale Station to meet him!"

"Bunter—gone to meet my governor? Are you potty, Wharton?"

"It does sound potty, I know," said Wharton, confronted by five incredulous faces, and sure that Inky was grinning in the rear. "But—"

"I don't mind Bunter going to Friardale to meet the old man," said Vernon-Smith. "It may amuse Bunter, an', as the pater won't be there, it can't hurt him. What's the game? Does he think that my governor's going to advance him a loan on the security of that postal-order of his?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The notion of Bunter's approaching such an astute financier as Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith with a proposition that was certain to be turned down cold by the biggest duffer in the Greyfriars Remove tickled the risible faculties of everyone there except Wharton.

Wharton still looked grave.

"You don't understand, Smithy," he said.

"Fraid I don't," replied the Bounder. "But I'm willin' to hear. Sit down and have some tea, both of you. The nabob, by the way, doesn't seem so agitated as you are."

No. 24.—HERBERT TUDOR VERNON-SMITH



Called the "Bounder," and fully deserved the name when he first came to Greyfriars. The spoiled son of a purse-proud millionaire. Hard and cynical, yet not as hard or as cynical as he fancies himself. Even at his worst had a cool resolution and a fearless spirit that one could not help admiring. Brains he has in plenty, and can play any games well. There is little he would not do for Harry Wharton. (Study No. 4—Remove).

"Inky's a hard-hearted heathen. He doesn't care what dreadful thing happens to your poor helpless old pater, Smithy!" said Delarey.

"My hard-heartedness is rather of the unconcernfulness as to what may happen to the absurd and ludicrous Owl!" Inky replied, smiling. "The rich and respected sahib can take the good-carefulness of himself."

"Hear, hear!" said the Bounder.

But Tom Redwing, seeing Wharton's worried face, spoke a word for him.

"Give Wharton a chance, Smithy," he said quietly. "It's all very well for us to laugh, but I'm sure there's some reason for his feeling worried about this affair."

"Reason enough!" said Harry. "That fat ass will get himself the sack! I wish I'd gone on to the station now, for I'm not at all sure that Frank and Johnny and Bob will try to stop him."

"You're worried because you think Bunter will get the sack?" said the Bounder coolly.

"Yes, I am!"

"Pass on! It doesn't worry me!"

"Nor me!" said Squiff.

"Nor yet me!" chimed in Delarey.

Inky grinned. Apparently it did not worry him much. But Tom Brown and Redwing were silent, and did not even grin. If they had no sympathy with Bunter, they had some for Wharton.

"Bunter's up to some silly game," said Harry gloomily. "The other evening, in our study, he dropped a letter addressed to Smithy's pater, and a scrap of paper with some silly-ass notes on it about holding him to ransom. Of course, he can't do that; but he's gone off to Friardale now toggled up in a black cloak and a bushy beard, with a blessed false nose on!"

"By gad! I wish the pater was comin' this evenin'!" cried the Bounder.

"Think he'd enjoy the jape?" asked Squiff.

"No. The old bird isn't really keen on jokes of any sort. But I think he'd make it no end warm for the sinful porpoise!"

"That's just what I'm afraid of," confessed Harry.

"But why worry? The Owl deserves all he gets!"

"If your pater reports it to the Head, Smithy, Bunter will be hoofed out! The Head would be simply bound to sack him."

Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"You don't think he will report?"

"Dashed sure he will, dear man, if he meets Bunter. But calm yourself! There won't be any meetin'. It's to-morrow the old man's comin'."

"But how can you tell that? He might—"

"You can't be sure, you know, Smithy," said Tom Brown. "It doesn't seem likely that your pater would take any notice of Bunter's silly tripe; but it's not imposs, is it?"

"As I see the thing, it is, an' I'm not goin' to stir hand or foot to stop what I feel sure can't happen."

"Not to save that silly fat ass from the sack, Smithy?" pleaded Harry.

"Not for that, Wharton! I don't consider that a truly worthy cause, y'know."

Harry looked at him reproachfully. There were times when the Bounder's cynical hardness revolted Wharton. There were times, too, when Wharton's softness of heart produced something like contempt in Vernon-Smith, who, with all his good points, was certainly not tender-hearted.

"You won't do anything?" asked the skipper of the Remove.

"Not a dashed thing!" replied the Bounder.

"Then I'll go and see Toddy. He will help me, I fancy."

"You'll find him with Russell and Ogilvy," said Squiff.

Wharton went.

Tom Redwing said:

"Are you so dead sure that your pater mayn't turn up, Smithy?"

"Oh, sure enough. What's it matter, anyway?"

"Wharton seems to think it matters," replied Redwing.

"Wharton's a conscientious ass. I'm neither an ass nor conscientious. But if the pater does come, it's too late for me to do anything now. The train must be in!"

And the Bounder dismissed the affair as not worth troubling about. He had no delusions as to the possibility of Bunter's victimising his father, at worst.

Harry Wharton, with a very grave brow, went along to the study of Russell and Ogilvy, and Inky, much less grave, followed him.

"Can I have a word with you, Toddy?" asked Harry.

"Don't have words here, you two!" protested Russell, grinning.

"Oh, it's in all amity, I'm sure!" said Peter. "You can have as many words as you like, old top, as long as you can finish before prep!"

"Do you mind coming outside?"

"Oh, if you like! Afraid Dutton will hear—eh?"

"There's nobody present that I wouldn't trust all right," replied Harry, looking uncomfortable. "But—well, it's rather more your affair and mine than anyone else's, Peter."

"I wouldn't stir for anyone but you, Wharton, and I wouldn't stir for you but that I've quite finished," said Peter. "As it is, however, I will come and confer. There will be no charge—unless you care to hand over six-and-eightpence of your own free will."

"Oh, don't rot!"

"Six-and-eightpence isn't rot!" answered Peter solemnly. "It is the very corner-stone of that majestic edifice, the English law."

Outside Wharton told his story.

"What do you want me to do?" inquired Peter, when he had finished.

"What can we do?"

"Nothing but sit tight and wait on events. Personally, I'm not at all inclined to interpose my meagre form between Smithy's pater and the Owl. I wasn't built to be a buffer state."

"If—if Bunter tries it on, he'll get sacked!"

"He will also get stamped!" said Peter. "He's a very naughty porpoise, and I shall feel it my bounden duty to stamp him—hard!"

"Look here, Toddy! Will you come along the road with me to see if anything's happened?"

"I'll do anything whatever for you, Wharton!" answered Peter; and he meant it. "But you mustn't expect me to do too much for the Owl. I use the stump still at times, for the good of his soul; but my bright dream of making a man of him some day has faded."

"Come along, then! Where's Inky?"

But Hurree Jamset Ram Singh seemed to have faded out. In point of fact, he had already gone off alone to see whether anything had happened.

Not very far from the gates he passed Mr. Vernon-Smith and a companion. The companion was short and stout. He wore a Boy Scout hat and a black cloak; and he had a fuzzy black beard, and a most unlikable nose.

Inky slipped past without being seen, and found his three comrades not thirty yards behind the bandit and his victim.

"Though I'm not so dead sure which is the victim," chuckled Frank Nugent. "strikes me Bunter's caught a Tartar!"

"The old boy had got his hand on Bunter's shoulder as if he loved him," said Bob. "But he can't—it's Bunter! No one could love Bunter—his mother must have been fonder of babies than anyone else in all the world to keep him alive!"

"Smithy senior has taken him in charge—that's about the size of it," growled Johnny Bull.

It was not quite that way. Bunter felt uneasy; but he had not given up hope, and he did not in the least believe that Mr. Vernon-Smith had any suspicion of his identity.

The millionaire had told him to lead on to some place where they could discuss the matter mentioned in his letter; and Bunter, unable to think of any other place, was taking him to Greyfriars.

Before they reached the gates Harry and Peter Todd had slipped past them

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in the gloom, and had joined the four in the rear.

"You fellows might have stopped the silly fat ass!" said Harry.

"We couldn't!" replied Frank.

"And we didn't mean to!" growled Johnny.

"It was too funny to be stopped, old sport!" said Bob.

"Suppose he's sacked?"

"Then he'll have to go!" said Johnny.

"I sha'n't mind, for one!"

"Oh, he won't be sacked, Harry!" Bob said soothingly. "Everyone knows that he's such a fat-headed ass that he isn't really responsible!"

"Do you think Smithy's pater will agree to that?"

"Smithy can get round the old buffer," Bob replied.

"Yes, very likely! But will Smithy? I've told him, and he's as hard as nails about it."

Bunter and his victim had passed through the gates now. Gosling gaped with amazement as he saw the black-cloaked figure, and would most certainly have stopped the Owl, had not Mr. Vernon-Smith been with him. Gosling had no end of respect for millionaires.

"I consider that the best thing you can do, sir, is to hand over to me at once the sum demanded of you," said Bunter, in a voice which, between agitation and his attempt to disguise it, was quite unearthly.

"But you have done nothing to earn that sum!" replied Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"That is not the point. Have you no fear for your life?"

"You would hardly dare to attempt that here, I think, however desperate a villain you may be!"

"I would dare anything!" replied Bunter.

But his voice did not sound quite so daring as that.

Mr. Vernon-Smith walked on, and Bunter walked with him. Bunter had to. He was beginning to feel uneasy about that grip on his shoulder.

But he was sure that he had frightened the millionaire at the outset, and he hoped to be able to renew his fears.

The brilliant idea that he wanted did not come to him. He could think of nothing better than to shut Mr. Vernon-Smith up in Study No. 7, and refuse to let him out until he had cashed up. The dread of being kept a prisoner in a Greyfriars study was not likely alone to work upon the millionaire—even Bunter's absurd mind realised that. But the Owl thought that a word or two in season about the supposed danger in which the millionaire's son stood might induce him to shell out after a few moments' reflection.

Peter Todd and Alonzo and Tom Dutton would probably be still with Russell and Ogilvy, Bunter thought. If anyone was met on the stairs, it would naturally be supposed that Mr. Vernon-Smith, who was well known at Greyfriars, had brought a friend with him.

They passed in. As they went up the staircase Piet Delarey, Tom Brown, and Squiff came down. Bunter shivered. Suppose Squiff guessed?

But Squiff did not appear even to look at him. Tom Brown looked hard, and Delarey actually winked. At least, it seemed to Bunter as though he winked, but how could that be? What could the Afrikaner know about it?

"My revolver is pointed straight at your heart!" hissed Bunter, as they drew near Study No. 7.

"Quite unnecessary, I assure you!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith coolly.

It was also quite untrue, and the millionaire knew it. They were walking side by side, and it was physically impos-

sible that Bunter should have the weapon pointed at his companion's breast.

The door of Study No. 7 stood slightly open, and only the flickering firelight illuminated the room.

Bunter pushed the door open wider.

"Pass in, sir!" he said, in deep tones. Mr. Vernon-Smith passed in. Bunter followed, but took care not to move far inside.

With his hand behind him, he extracted the key. Then he pointed the revolver at Mr. Vernon-Smith's head.

"One cry for aid, and you die!" he hissed. "I will give you five minutes to think it over. At the end of that time I shall return, and if you do not at once hand over to me the two thousand pounds you have brought with you, your son will pay the penalty! I shall show no mercy!"

From a hiss his voice had changed to a rumble, and from a rumble it had become a squeak. Never in all his life had Billy Bunter been through anything that taxed his nerves like this enterprise. But he felt himself too near success now to give way.

Mr. Vernon-Smith, who had indulged him thus far with a kind of grim amusement, thought that the farce had gone far enough. As Bunter stepped backwards through the door, he rushed forward to grab the fat rascal.

But he stumbled over a chair, and came a cropper. Bunter slipped out, and the key grated in the lock, after the approved fashion of keys which are turned upon prisoners.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bowled Out!

THUMP, thump thump!

"That must be the governor!" said Vernon-Smith coolly.

Squiff had slipped back to him with the news that his father and Bunter were actually on their way upstairs.

Now from along the passage came the sounds of thumping at a door.

"Think Bunter's shut himself in No. 7 with your old man?" asked Squiff.

"Bad for Bunter if he has! It would be the Owl that would be getting thumped, in that event, not the door," replied the Bounder, grinning.

"You don't seem much worried about it," Squiff said.

"Why should I worry? The pater is comin' out of this right end up, you bet! An' I really can't work up any anxiety about Bunter. I'm not Wharton, y'know, old man."

"That fat idiot will get sacked, for a dead cert!" said Tom Redwing.

"Well, he's no friend of yours, is he? Hallo, Cherry! What's the game now?"

"Can't you hear that thumping, Smithy?"

"Oh, I'm not deaf!"

The Bounder would have had to be very deaf indeed not to have heard. His father was enraged by the fall, which had hurt him, and was no longer getting any amusement out of the situation.

Thump, thump, thump!

All along the passage heads showed at study doors, and inquiries were being made.

But Johnny Bull, Frank Nugent, and Inky were answering those inquiries, with the result that the other fellows were standing by to watch for what might happen.

"Aren't you going to let him out?" asked Bob.

"My dear man, I haven't the key of No. 7, have I? Where's the fat villain of the piece?"

"Gone to the box-room, to get out of his clobber. But Harry and Toddy have gone after him."

"Thinks he's going to prove an alibi," said Squiff, grinning.

Piet Delarey and Tom Brown came back. Russell and Ogilvy followed them, and behind those two came Bulstrode and Hazeldene and Mark Linley, all full of curiosity. The explanations they had received left much still dark to them.

"What's up, Smithy?" asked Bulstrode.

"As far as I can make out, Bunter's locked up my governor in No. 7, and is holdin' the old bird to ransom, dear boy."

"You're taking it jolly coolly," said Mark Linley.

"Which is more than his pater is," Hazeldene said. "Just listen to that thumping! We shall have Quelch on the scene before long if it goes on."

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"I can't stop it," he said. "I hope the old boy won't begin to shout, that's all. He can yell some when he does start."

"But where's the key?" inquired Russell.

"Bunter has it, I suppose."

"But where's Bunter?" asked Ogilvy.

"Wharton knows, I take it."

"Oh, you're the limit, Smithy! something got to be done!" snapped Tom Brown.

"Go and do it, then, old top! I'm quite helpless."

"I don't think it's fun at all," said Tom Dutton, who had just come along with Alonzo. "We're locked out of our study."

"Are you aware, my dear Vernon-Smith, that it is said that your father is a prisoner in No. 7?" asked Alonzo politely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear schoolfellows, this is no laughing matter," Alonzo protested. "My uncle Benjamin would be shocked—nay, disgusted—at such an outrage upon a visitor to Greyfriars."

"Tain't your Uncle Benjy, fathhead!" shouted Dutton. "It's Smithy's pater, they say, and the Owl has locked him up there!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Alonzo wrung his hands in distress. Three or four of those present looked very serious. The Bounder seemed almost alone in regarding the situation quite coolly.

Then suddenly Peter Todd appeared.

"To your tents, O Israel!" he cried.

"Get to your studies, and don't show any more than your noses, if you want to see the last act in this great drama. Bunt's coming to collect the spoils!"

At that they scattered. All along the passage doors were slightly ajar, and glimpses of noses and gleaming eyes might have been seen by anyone who had normal sight and powers of observation. But Billy Bunter, blinking behind his big spectacles, saw only an empty passage, and told himself that once more fortune was favouring the brave.

He had gone to the box-room, and had hastily got rid of his disguise; while outside the door, in the gloom, Harry Wharton and Peter Todd waited his coming forth. When cloak and false nose and fuzzy beard and crepe mask had all been bundled into the nearest empty box, there still remained the revolver, and the fatuous Owl found it hard to make up his mind to part with this.

If he held the door of No. 7 ever so little open, and introduced the revolver through the opening, Mr. Vernon-Smith would feel terror, he was sure. Only Bunter's hand needed to be introduced, and Bunter forgot that that podgy member had not its like at Greyfriars.

The millionaire would come to the door. Perhaps he would grab at the revolver. Bunter thought not. But even if that happened he felt that he could rely upon his own exceptional quickness.

More likely his victim would deliver up the ransom.

If that was done, Bunter's subsequent course was quite plain. It seemed to him easy.

He would thrust the bundle of notes into a pocket, and slip into another study at once. There, by acting superbly—and Bunter had no doubt of his ability to do that when put to it—a part of cool bonhomie, by seeming just his ordinary genial self, he would disarm all suspicion.

That practically all the Remove already knew something of his absurd scheme never even occurred to his mind. He imagined that thus far he had carried it through with complete success, and without arousing suspicion on anyone's part.

For fully five minutes he deliberated as to whether he should take the revolver along. Then it occurred to him that it would be rather a damaging bit of evidence if by any chance it were found upon him, and he left it behind.

When he moved towards the door, Peter Todd darted off noiselessly to herald his coming. But Wharton stayed behind.

As Bunter came out of the box-room Harry clutched him by the arm.

"Bunter, you idiot, you've got yourself into a pretty scrape now!" he said.

For a second Bunter's heart stood still. But two thousand pounds—as he believed—hung upon his promptness and decision, and he acted with a speed that amazed his would-be saviour.

"Lemme alone, Wharton!" he grunted, and he thrust a fat leg in front of Harry.

Trying to hold him back, Harry stumbled over that fat leg, and came to ground heavily.

"That will teach you to lemme alone another time!" burred Bunter as he bolted.

Harry picked himself up and followed.

But he was not in time to hinder the crowning act of Bunter's folly, and no one else made any attempt to prevent it. To do so would have been pretty useless, for Bunter had already given himself away very completely to Samuel Vernon-Smith.

Up and down the passage Bunter blinked, and saw no one. He put the key into the lock and turned it.

The thumping had ceased for the moment. Mr. Vernon-Smith was waiting behind the door.

It opened slightly, and a voice that alternated between rumble and squeak spoke.

"Hand over the two thousand pounds at once, and no harm will be done either to you or your son!" said the voice.

"Refuse, and—Ow-yow! Leggo, you beast! Leggo, I tell you, or—or I'll shoot!"

A hand had shot out. That hand had gripped Bunter by the collar. Next moment he was dragged bodily into the study, and Harry Wharton, Peter Todd, the Bounder, and Bob Cherry rushed in after him.

Then the door was slammed in the faces of Johnny Bull, Squiff, Piet Delarey, and a dozen others, eager to see and hear what was about to happen; and Mr. Vernon-Smith put his broad back against it.

"Herbert," he snorted, "see that no one else comes in!"

He moved away, pushing Bunter before him; and the Bounder, with a

sardonic grin on his lean face, stuck a chair under the handle of the door.

"Now, you young villain, you fat rascal, you depraved scoundrel, what do you mean by all this?" demanded the millionaire, shaking Bunter with fury.

"I—I— You're making a mistake! You'll be sorry for this, you know! Oh, really, I—I haven't done anything! Wharrer shaking me for?"

"I'll shake you until the teeth drop out of your wicked young head, if you don't tell me at once who put you up to this folly!"

"I—I— Nobody! I—I haven't done anything! I never had a revolver, and—and it wasn't me with a beard. And my nose— Now, I ask you, is my nose anything like that one?"

The Bounder beckoned to Peter Todd, and spoke a word or two in his ear, and Peter grinned, and spoke in turn to Bob Cherry.

Then the Bounder took the chair from under the door-handle.

"That's right, Herbert! Fetch What's-his-name—Squelch—fetch Dr. Locke!" howled the furious millionaire.

But the Bounder had no notion of fetching either the Head or the Remove Form-master.

He and Peter slipped out together, and Bob replaced the chair after they had gone.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

To Save Bunter!

"WHAT are you going to do, Smithy?" asked Squiff.

"He's horribly wild, isn't he?" said Mark Linley.

"Poor old Bunt's number is up!" remarked Frank Nugent.

And he spoke almost sadly. Now that it came to the pinch quite a number of the fellows present felt that they did not really want the Owl to be sacked. After all, Greyfriars would hardly be Greyfriars without the egregious William George Bunter.

"He's wilder than ever I saw him before in all my life," confessed the Bounder. "I knew japes weren't in his line, but I thought he could take one a bit better than this."

"You see, he can't look at it as a jape," said Johnny Bull. "I don't wonder. It wasn't, really. That potty porpoise was out for plunder. I—I wish we hadn't let it go so far. We might have stopped it on the way from the station."

"What are you going to do, Smithy?" repeated Squiff.

It was plain that Squiff regarded it as up to Smithy to do something.

"You'll see presently," replied the Bounder. "Come along, Toddy!"

"Stand back! No one else allowed!" said Peter.

And he and the Bounder went off in the direction of the box-room.

"I pretended I knew, but I don't, Smithy," said Peter.

"My old man's got to be made to believe that it was a jape, and that I was in it," replied Vernon-Smith. "I've got to lie Bunter out of it—that's what it comes to. I've no doubt Wharton's moral susceptibilities will be shocked, but I can't help that."

And yet, in spite of that sneer, what the Bounder was doing was far more for Harry Wharton's sake than for Billy Bunter's. He cared but little, if at all, about the Owl's fate, but he cared a great deal more than he would ever own about Harry.

"Good for you, Smithy!" said Peter.

"I'm more or less a truth-teller from motives of policy, being rather a bad

har, but I wouldn't mind a little one or two to save my wicked porpoise. Oh, won't I stump him for this?"

"Where are the wretched rags that fat beast wore?" asked the Bounder, as they entered the box-room.

"In one of these boxes, I guess. Yes, here they are."

Vernon-Smith snatched them up.

"Help me to get them on," he said. "There's no time to be lost. Quelchy or Wingate may turn up at any moment, and I don't want to have to lie to them."

"Bunter's fault if they do," Peter answered, giving him aid. "He's doing all the squealing now. My word, I shall have to be careful what I let the porpoise read in future! I'm certain he got this rotten scheme out of that Conrad tripe of Dutton's."

The beard was fixed. The hideous false nose was put on. The cloak and mask were donned. Mutterings of wrath came from the Bounder during the process of disguising. Then he picked up the revolver, and the things he said ought to have made the Owl's ears tingle.

"Oh, that thing was past going off fifty years ago!" said Peter. "It's only a property gun, old top!"

"Come on!" growled the Bounder.

His heart did not fail him, though he hated what he had to do. When Herbert Vernon-Smith made up his mind to a course he usually went through with it unflinching.

"I say, the old boy won't disinherit you, will he, Smithy?" asked Peter.

"Dashed if I know! Let him, if he's fool enough!" growled the Bounder. "Come on! But don't show up too much in the next scene; there's no need for the pater to think you were in the plot."

"My hat!"

"It's Smithy!"

"What on earth is he up to?"

A chorus of exclamations and queries greeted the Bounder's reappearance in the passage.

But he made no answer. He tapped at the door of Study No. 7, and Bob moved the chair. The Bounder and Peter passed in, but only Johnny Bull and Squiff managed to squeeze in behind them.

A howl of disappointment came from the rest.

Mr. Vernon-Smith's back was to the door, and he was talking to Bunter, who cowered in the armchair with his fat hands before his fat face.

But the millionaire turned at that howl and saw his son.

He did not recognise the masked and cloaked figure as that of his son, however.

"What, another of you? This goes beyond all bounds!" he roared.

"Don't you recognise me, father?" asked the Bounder meekly.

"You, Herbert? You, in that absurd masquerade?" gasped Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"I thought you would have twigged me in a moment. But you didn't frighten him, Bunter! You've lost your bet, my boy!"

A gleam of hope came into Bunter's eyes as he took his hands away from his face and gazed at the Bounder. But the eyes of the Bounder's sire were full of fury.

Wharton, pale-faced and anxious, stared. Like Bunter, he vaguely understood that the Bounder was playing a desperate game to save the fat rascal.

"You mean to tell me, Herbert, that—that this was a plot between you and Bunter to scare me?" thundered the millionaire.

"Well, you see, dad——"

"I see only that my son is wanting in all respect and consideration for his father!" roared the millionaire. "That he should make bets upon such a matter—that he should league with this fat young impostor to——"

"Well, dad, it was only a jape, and you weren't scared. So what's the odds?"

The Bounder was keeping up his end well, with even more than his customary coolness and audacity. But he hated it; it seemed a loathsome thing to him to deceive his father thus to save Bunter, who was not worth saving. Only the sight of Wharton reconciled him to his imposture.

"A jape? It was insulting, disrespectful, abominable! It will be a long time before I forgive you for this, Herbert!"

Harry Wharton caught Bunter by the shoulders and shook him. To him it seemed that Bunter must not be saved at the Bounder's expense.

Mr. Vernon-Smith saw the action, but failed to understand it.

"Leave that fat young imbecile alone, Wharton!" he said roughly. "Have you not the sense to see that he was merely the tool of my unfilial son? To bet on the likelihood of my being terrified by a blackmailer—it is beyond all words! I shall go back to town to-night, Herbert!"

"I'm sorry, sir! I can only say that I regret this thing should have been done!" muttered the Bounder.

He felt that he could not carry it much farther. He had a wild longing to throw the Owl down and stamp upon him.

Mr. Vernon-Smith stalked out.

"Go after him, Smithy!" said Harry earnestly. "Tell him that you only lied to save Bunter! You can't let him go like that! Bunter, you fat cad, go and confess! Even if you're sacked——"

"He wouldn't believe me!" wailed Bunter. "Besides, how do you know Smithy's lying, Wharton? You heard what he said about the bet! Ain't that

good enough? You owe me a quid, Smithy! Your pater was scared!"

"You unspeakable worm!" snapped the Bounder.

"I'd see the Owl hanged first!" chimed in Bob.

"It's done now," said the Bounder. "He's off back already. Oh, he'll get over it in time! I'm the only son he happens to have, you see."

Then the crowd poured in, and the Bounder bolted for his own study.

"This is where the stumping comes in!" said Peter.

"Yow! You can't do that, Toddy. you beast! You can't touch me! S'pose I did have a bet with Smithy——"

"I'm not going to suppose anything of the sort, because I know you didn't!" snapped Peter.

"I did, then! I—— Yaroooooh!"

"Execution deferred, Toddy!" said Piet Delarey, catching Peter by the arm.

"What's Smithy done? And why has his old man gone off like that?"

"Smithy lied to save that fat cad!" cried Wharton. "Oh, I'm not blaming him for lying—it was jolly fine of him! But Bunter—— Oh, you worm!"

"Smithy told the old bird that he and Bunter had a bet on as to whether the old bird could be scared," explained Peter. "And Bunter had to take the villain's part, because the old bird would have twigged his precious Herbert! That's all—except that, whatever the porpoise may say, there wasn't a word of truth in it, and I'm going to stump him good and hard!"

"Stretch him over the table, some of you!"

Willing hands seized the Owl, and he was stretched upon the table. Then the cricket-stump rose and fell, and Bunter squirmed and howled.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Ow! Yow! Yooooop! You're killing me, Toddy! Stop him! Oh, stop him!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yooooooooop!"

"I think that will do," said Peter Todd. "Gentlemen all, my best thanks!"

It was a full week before Vernon-Smith heard that his father had forgiven him. But it was not twenty-four hours before Bunter tried to collect that quid from him.

Bunter wished he had not tried. He told Alonzo later that he had no idea Smithy could be such a brute.

But he still has a vague conviction that Smithy's father owes him two thousand pounds!

(Another grand long complete school story of Harry Wharton & Co. next week, entitled: "The Bounder's Farewell!" Order your copy of the MAGNET in advance!)



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To-day!**

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Holiday
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Are you giving a party during the holidays? If so, why not send out the invitations on these dainty "Playtime" COLOURED invitation cards—you can have a supply absolutely free. All particulars appear in this week's issue of PLAYTIME, which is the jolliest COLOURED picture and story paper you could possibly desire. YOU should read it EVERY WEEK. Ask for

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PAPERGRAPHY.

HOW AN EXCELLENT ENTERTAINMENT MAY BE GIVEN WITH A SHEET OF PAPER.



THE greatest attraction wielded by papergraphy is, perhaps, the extreme simplicity of the apparatus required.

At first sight it seems utterly impracticable that a first-class entertainment, of almost a quarter of an hour's duration, can be given with a sheet of paper. Moreover, very little practice is necessary.

Cartridge-paper is the kind usually employed by professional entertainers, and a suitable size is 54 inches by 36. A sheet of these dimensions may be purchased from any stationer's or dealer in artists' requisites.

The paper must be marked out lengthwise into five parts, the central section

Close up the pleated paper, and pull round the corners of each until they meet.

TABLE MAT (Fig. 4).—Keeping hold of

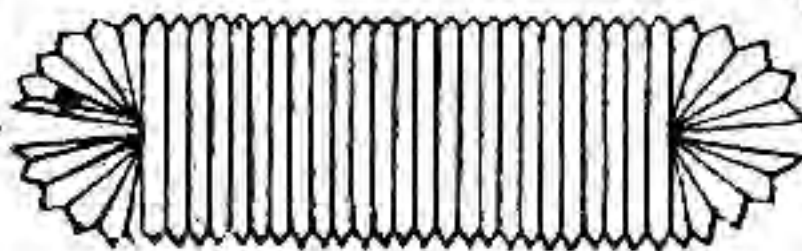


Fig. 4.—Table-Mat.

the ends of the rosette, stretch out the pleats as far as possible.

A PRIMITIVE BOAT (Fig. 5).—With the pleats still fully extended, turn each end up, almost at right angles.

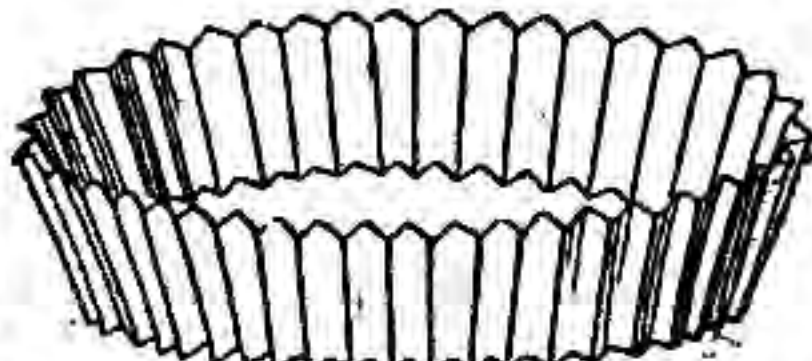


Fig. 5.—Primitive Boat.

CHURCH WINDOW (Fig. 6).—This is formed very similarly to the table-mat, the difference being that one end is allowed to hang straight down.

FAN (Fig. 7).—Close up the pleats, and



Fig. 6.—Church Window.

spread out one end in the form of a semi-circle.

For the next series of transformations, the first fold (A, Fig. 1) must be opened.

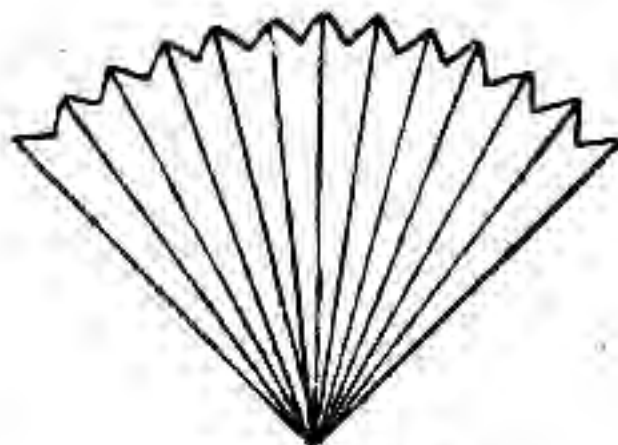


Fig. 7.—Fan.

MUSHROOM (Fig. 8).—Pull both ends round to form a cylinder, with the open fold at the top.

CANDLESTICK (Fig. 9).—This is made by

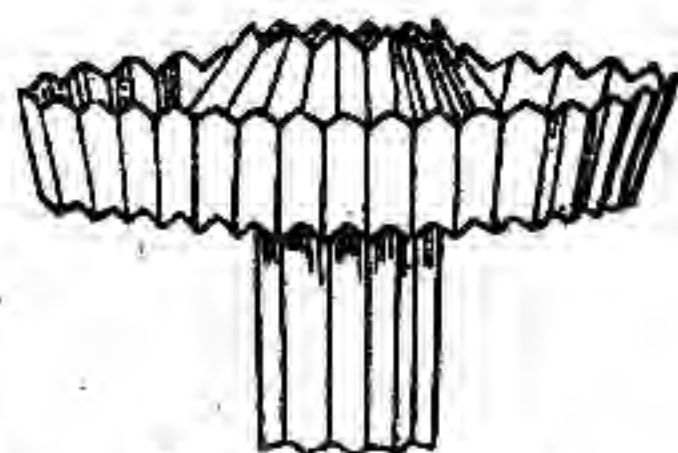


Fig. 8.—Mushroom.

simply turning the mushroom upside-down.

WELSH HAT (Fig. 10).—Press the top of the candlestick together, making it as pointed as possible, and place upon the

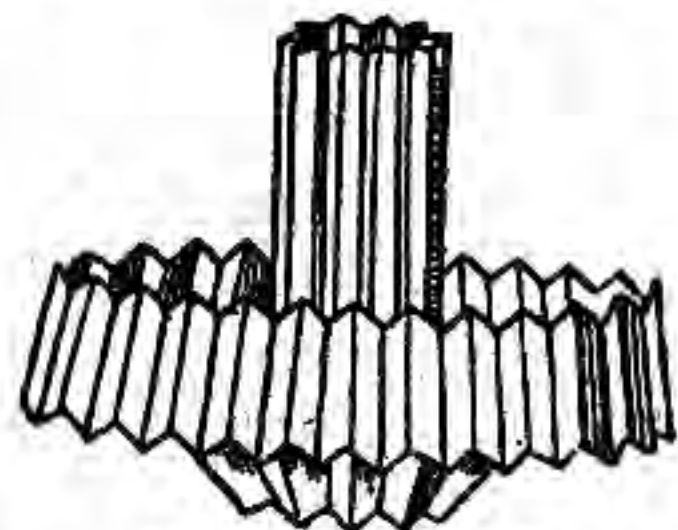


Fig. 9.—Candlestick.

head, with the folded bottom acting as a brim.



Fig. 10.—Welsh Hat.

There is no limit to the number of interesting things which may be made from a sheet of paper. When you have followed out the directions on this page and made the Welsh Hat shown in Fig. 10, put it aside in a safe place until next week. In the next issue of the MAGNET, we shall give further instructions as to how many other articles can be made, and you will start straight away from the Welsh Hat, which you will turn into a Flower Vase.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 621.

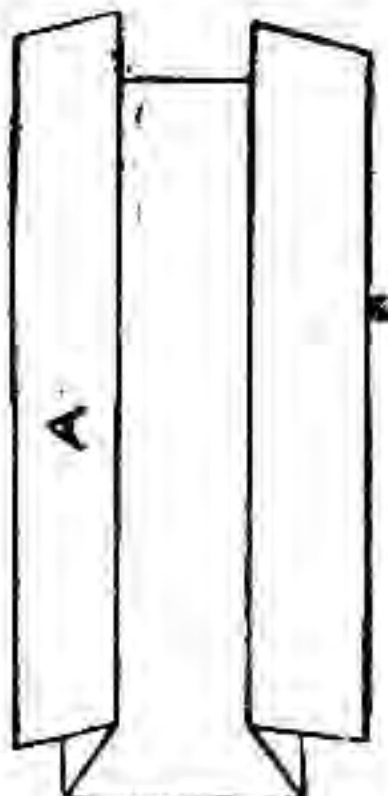


Fig. 1.—Paper Folded.

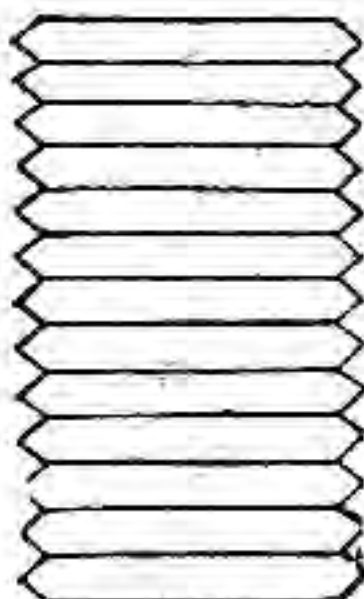


Fig. 2.—Paper Pleated.

being 12 inches wide, and the two on each side 6 inches in width. The paper should next be folded along these lines (Fig. 1), and once again folded into a series of pleats, as depicted in Fig. 2. A convenient width for these pleats is 1 inch.

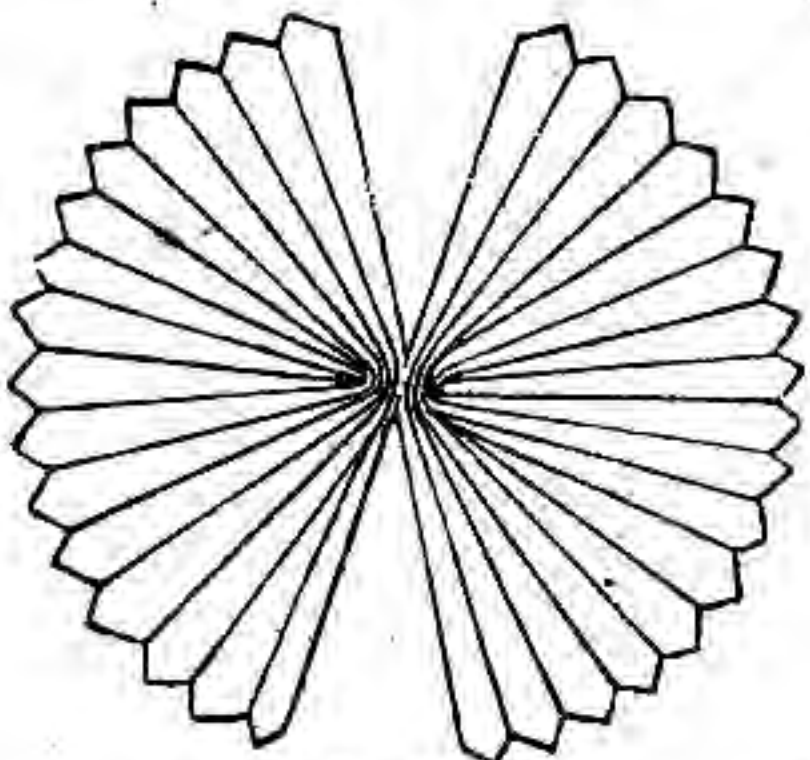


Fig. 3.—Rosette.

All being now ready for the first demonstration in papergraphy, commence by forming a Rosette (Fig. 3).



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

SYNOPSIS.

Harry Rhodes, a miner and amateur boxer, of Loxborough, 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 Loxborough 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.

Hanna, who is a thorough scoundrel, becomes Harry's sworn enemy.

A strike at the pit where Harry works is settled by means of a boxing contest between Harry and Bob Durham, the mine-owner's son.

Bertram Godfrey, a friend of Mr. Durham's, interests himself in Harry Rhodes.

Harry learns that James Rhodes is his father, and that he was responsible for the death of a boxer some years previously.

Harry, his father, and Bertram Godfrey go to London, where Harry defeats Jules Meunier, Parisian light-weight champion, in a private contest, which is witnessed by a Royal Prince.

An attempt to kidnap the Prince is frustrated by Harry.

(Now read on.)

The Prince's Gratitude.

IT was a brief narration, Harry contenting himself with the bare facts, and leaving the details to the imagination of his serious-faced listeners. And when he had finished more than one sincere "Thank Heaven!" fell from the crowd.

"But don't let your gratitude stay there, gentlemen," Godfrey said crisply. "This lad here is responsible for the failure of this dastardly and incomprehensible outrage, and some of our thankfulness is due to him."

"Yes, yes, Godfrey! Of course!" cried half a dozen voices.

And then descended an avalanche of questions:

"Who were the men?"

"From where had they come?"

"What had they done?"

"What did they look like?"

A tall, distinguished, military-looking man of middle age did his best to restrain the excitement. A practical man, he concerned himself with the things that actually were.

"Don't deafen us, gentlemen!" he begged. "Mr. Rhodes, you say there were four men in addition to the driver, and you exchanged blows with them. What became of these men? Did they all get away? If we can lay our hands on one of the scoundrels we shall be doing more good than by a year's theorising."

Harry turned to him with some relief.

"One of the men is already captured," he explained. "The chauffeur of the other car caught and held him. I shouldn't think he got away. The driver fell into the forepart of the car when I hit him, another one dropped into the roadway, and I believe you'll still find him there. Of the three men who were inside with the—the prince, one got away, the second I believe I knocked out, and the third is the man whom the chauffeur collared."

"Right!" said the soldier. "Come along, two or three of you!"

And without waiting further he darted from the hall into the street, a number following.

While they were absent Harry was the recipient of heartfelt, if a trifle boisterous, congratulations. Elderly men and young men all wanted to shake hands with him at once. This led to the discovery of the injury to his shoulder, which James Rhodes promptly proceeded to examine and deal with. He shook his head over it, saying he feared the bone was injured.

"We'll have Sir Harvey Fisher examine it as soon as he has finished in the next room," one man declared. "Let us hope that no permanent injury has resulted."

At that moment the celebrated surgeon himself came into the room, his arm supporting the young prince, and every face was turned towards them with anxious expectancy.

The young man's skin was pallid, and he walked with slow, hesitating steps, but he contrived to call up a smile.

"I am all right, gentlemen!" he said weakly.

The surgeon glanced at him and nodded.

"No need to worry, I'm thankful to say," he declared in a bluff, hearty voice.

"Beyond administering a mild dose of chloroform to his Highness the miscreants haven't done any damage. The effects are already wearing off. What they intended only Heaven and their rascally selves know. Who and where is the man who so effectually frustrated them? His Highness wants to know."

Half a dozen hands helped to push Harry to the front; the other men fell back; and as the prince's wandering eyes alighted upon him standing alone a spark of pleasure shot into them, his cheeks reddened.

"You!" he exclaimed, and came towards him with both hands held out. "It is in your everlasting debt, Mr. Rhodes, that I am! Well, I am glad—very glad!

And a more doughty champion surely no one ever could have. Perhaps you will forget having rendered me this service, but I can assure you I shall never forget it. I cannot thank you adequately. But how came it that you were able to do what you did?"

Harry laughed.

"I think, sir, it was just an accident. I didn't know rightly what was happening. I wasn't aware who it was the men were after. But it seemed to me they couldn't be up to much good, and so I—well, I tried to stop them."

"And succeeded very well. But what made you think of—of doing it?"

"I believe I didn't think at all. It seemed the proper thing to do, sir."

"And you did it without hesitating. And all I can say in return is, thank you—which is poor enough. I wish there was more I could say. Perhaps another time— But I'm not feeling quite well. My head—" He swayed, but with an effort recovered himself as Sir Harvey Fisher came quickly to him. "Again I thank you, Mr. Rhodes. Later—something more definite, I hope, a more tangible recognition—"

And then the young man very quietly fainted into the surgeon's arms.

It was then that those who had gone out to seek the assailants came hurrying into the hall, four of them carrying between them two limp and motionless bodies. In the rear was to be heard the voice of the chauffeur, explaining how it was that the man he had captured had escaped from him after tripping him.

"Two of the scoundrels!" called out the soldier who had headed the expedition. "The chap who put them out did his work thoroughly!"

In the resulting confusion James Rhodes pushed through to Harry.

"What now?" he asked.

"Let us get away as quick as we can," Harry answered. "Get hold of that chattering chauffeur while I just go and tell Mr. Godfrey."

"Right you are, Harry; I think you're wise," the latter said, when Harry told him he was going to slip off. "The dickens only knows how this business is going to finish up, or when we'll get away. But if you're waked up after you get to bed don't be surprised. Sir Harvey Fisher's just told me he means seeing to your arm. The prince—he's pulling round all right—has said that he is to do all he can for you. Bye-bye! And I say, Harry—"

"Yes?"

"You've done a fine thing for yourself! No need to worry now about

getting a chance. You're made. Won't I be interested in seeing old Bowman's face in about forty-eight hours' time? It'll be worth a journey. Take care you don't fall into any more adventures.

A Royal Gift.

GREATLY to Harry's satisfaction, the injury to his shoulder proved less serious than his father had feared. Before eight o'clock the next morning Sir Harvey Fisher had motored over to Highgate, meeting Harry in the garden as he walked up to the house.

"Not much the worse for last night's excitement, that's evident," said the great surgeon, smiling genially. "Most men would have been glad of a few extra hours sleep. Sorry I couldn't get over as soon as I'd intended, but my other patient, you know——" He shook his head suggestively.

"Is he feeling bad?" Harry asked quickly. "I'm sorry."

"Oh, it's nothing serious!" Sir Harvey reassured him. "Feeling a bit knocked up. Shock, you know; and effects of the chloroform. Hasn't the cast-iron nerves you seem to be blessed with. Result of a sound body and an easy mind, I suppose. How's the arm?"

"Stiff, but not as bad as last night. My father bathed it with hot water before I went to bed, and then put on a cold bandage."

The surgeon nodded approvingly. "We'll go inside and have a look at it," he suggested.

Having waxed enthusiastic over the splendid muscular development revealed when Harry removed his shirt, Sir Harvey made an examination of the damaged shoulder. A very few minutes convinced him there was nothing to worry about.

"No permanent injury, you think, sir?" asked James Rhodes, who had been watching him anxiously.

"No, no. Glad to say there isn't. You can rest assured of that," was the answer.

And Rhodes' face cleared.

He had been apprehensive otherwise. He had feared some serious if not complete interference in Harry's career; and, now that his consent had been given to Harry's formal entry into "the game," he was as keen as Harry himself. It was his hope that the final triumph, the winning and wearing of the laurel wreath of the champion, which had been denied to himself, should be accomplished by his son. And so far as himself was concerned, no stone was to be left unturned to effect this.

"You're a lucky chap, though," went on the surgeon. "Born that way. I should say, after what happened last night. An inch forward, and that loaded stick would have alighted on the bone and perhaps splintered it. Good-bye, if that had happened, to your doing any further boxing. As it is, only the muscle is hurt, and we can soon put that right. In a fortnight's time your arm ought to be perfectly right again. Don't attempt any violent exercise, however, in the meantime."

Sir Harvey stayed to breakfast, at which they were joined by Bertram Godfrey. The contest with Meunier was the chief topic of conversation, only the barest reference being made to the other event of the night.

Before he left the house, however, which was soon after the meal, Godfrey had a brief conversation with Harry.

"Don't think I'm trying to put the wind up you, Harry, if that's possible"—and here he grinned—"but I think it's

only right to give you a warning. I didn't get back until four this morning. General Allworthy, you saw him—and I had no end of a lively time after you'd gone, going around to Scotland Yard, and so on. What was the meaning of last night's business, of course, there isn't going to be any public mention of it—no one seems quite able to make up his mind. It may have some political cause—Anarchists, or some rot like that, you know; or it may be just only a private job engineered by some gang of criminals. Anyway, I take it you don't want to get further mixed up in it any more than you can help."

"Not I," returned Harry. "I think I have quite enough to keep me interested without that."

"Just so. Though I'm not going to promise that you've heard the last of it," Godfrey said. "In fact, I know you haven't in one way. But it was distinctly unlucky that we didn't bag the entire bunch of ruffians, especially after the way you'd handled them first of all. The fellows we have in custody just shut

you'd rather more kind friends interested in your welfare than you imagine. You get me?"

"I think I see what you mean," Harry said slowly.

"Well, that's what I mean by saying that a word of warning is not wholly out of place. Keep a good watch out for your own safety. It won't do you any harm even if my theorising is all moonshine."

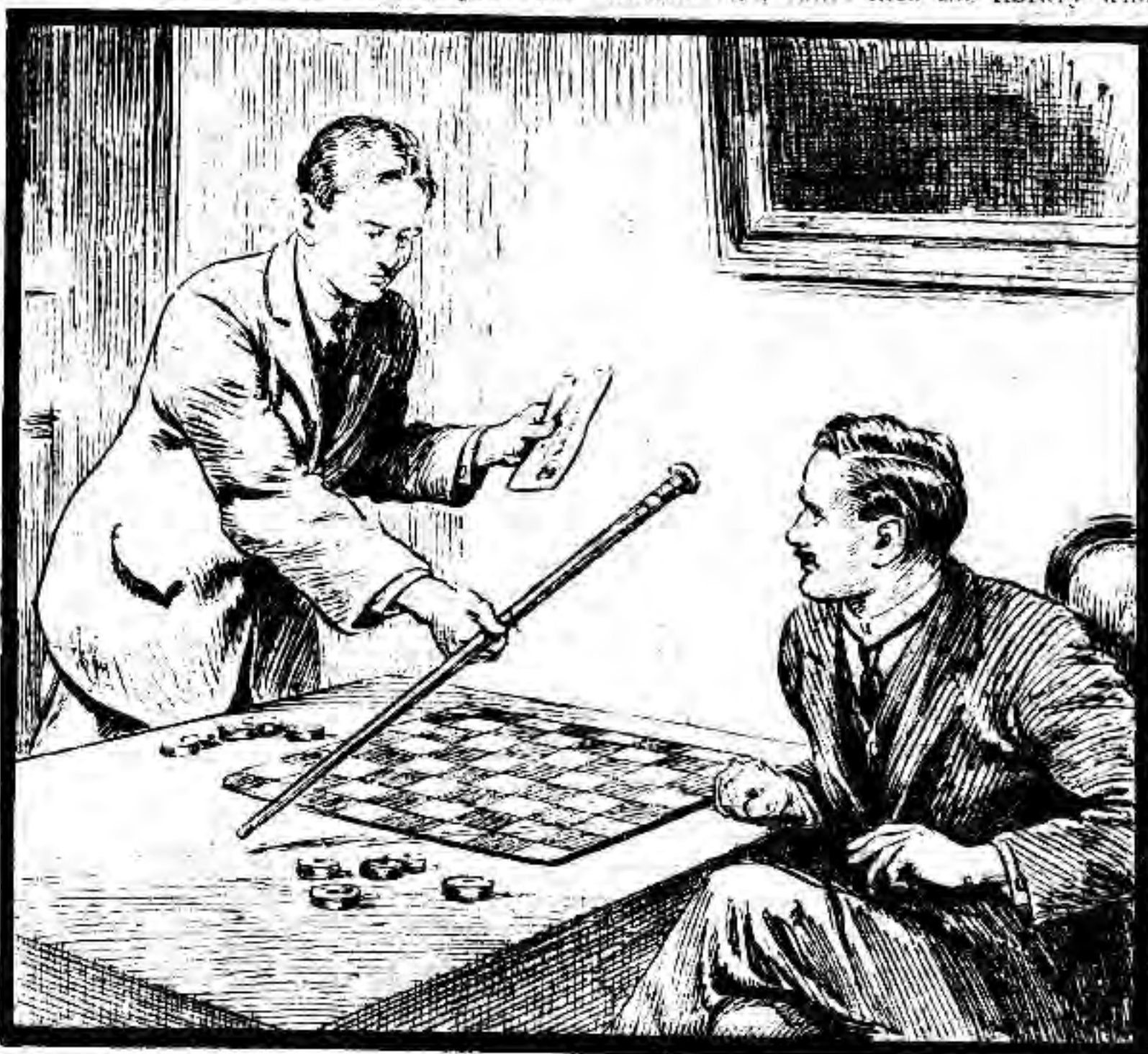
"I'll not forget."

"Right-oh! And now I'll be off. I don't know when I'll get back; but you'll carry on just as you feel inclined, won't you? Rotten thing, I know, getting you up here, and then bolting off and leaving you to yourself. I apologise. But I don't see how I'm to help it."

"Don't you worry about us, Mr. Godfrey," Harry said heartily. "I'm already more in your debt—"

"Rubbish!" the other interrupted.

It was still early in the forenoon when Collier, Mr. Godfrey's valet and general factotum, a slim, hard-faced man of middle age, came into the library where



Harry Rhodes handed over for inspection a walking stick of somewhat remarkable appearance. "From the Prince, dad!" he exclaimed. "Just a little gift, he says, to remind me of last night." (See Page 20.)

their mouths and say nothing. Can't get 'em to say a word—so far, anyhow. D'you think any of the brutes recognised you, Harry?"

Harry shook his head.

"Can't tell," he answered. "Nothing was said to suggest it; but, of course, I don't know. There doesn't seem any reason why they should. They were all strangers to me."

"So far as the darkness enabled you to see them, would you know them again?"

"Don't feel sure."

"No; I suppose you couldn't be expected to. What I'm thinking is that, supposing you had been recognised—it's a big assumption, I grant—well, you'll soon be, if I'm not mistaken, something of a public character—boxing champions can't help becoming so—and, therefore, not difficult to get hold of or get at. You might, at some critical moment, find

Harry and his father were deep in a game of draughts, to say that a visitor had called.

"He inquired for Mr. Godfrey first, and when I told him Mr. Godfrey had left home, he asked if he might see you, sir," the valet explained, addressing Harry.

"Say what he wanted?" asked James Rhodes quickly.

Godfrey's warning, which Harry had imparted to his father, had made a strong impression on James Rhodes. He was inclined to believe in the possibility of Harry's personal safety being endangered, though his private opinion was that such would be more likely to proceed from professional motives rather than from the causes Godfrey had suggested. He had not forgotten Joshua Martin and his threats; nor Tony Hanna's midnight visit at Lexboro'. His own experiences had been gained in a rough school, and he knew that attempts

at "nabbling" a boxer had not wholly died out with the extinction of the prize ring.

"No, sir," Collier answered. "But the gentleman's word—"

Harry glanced at the bit of pasteboard handed him. It bore the name of Lieutenant Ronald Howe, R.N., and was good enough for Harry.

"I'll come along," he said.

A quarter of an hour later he rejoined his father. His manner suggested the interview had been an agreeable one.

"What d'you think, dad?" he burst out. "From the prince. Just a little gift, he says, to remind me of last night. Isn't it jolly good of him?"

And he handed over for inspection a walking-stick of somewhat remarkable appearance. It was of rolled rhinoceros

hide, with a gold band and gold head, flexible almost as indiarubber, strong and unbendable—a stick of most noticeable appearance, and, in the hands of a muscular man, a weapon of deadly use.

"Isn't it a jolly fine gift?" cried the lad enthusiastically. "One lick with it ought to satisfy anyone, I should say. There was a letter, too. Read it, dad. That's something worth getting and keeping."

It was a letter such as might have been expected from the writer, written with sincerity; frank, almost boyish, and concluding with the wish that Harry would before long attain the realisation of his professional hope. "I wish I were able to do something towards it that would be really serviceable; but I am afraid my influence with boxing promoters doesn't

amount to a great deal. But whatever happens, I'm quite sure you will not get one half of all you deserve," were the closing words.

"A nice young gentleman!" was James Rhodes' comment. "And it's a really useful stick."

And then the telephone-bell demanded his attention.

"That Barton Godfrey?" came over the wire.

"It's his house, but he's not here just now," Rhodes answered.

"Harry Rhodes there?"

"Yes."

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