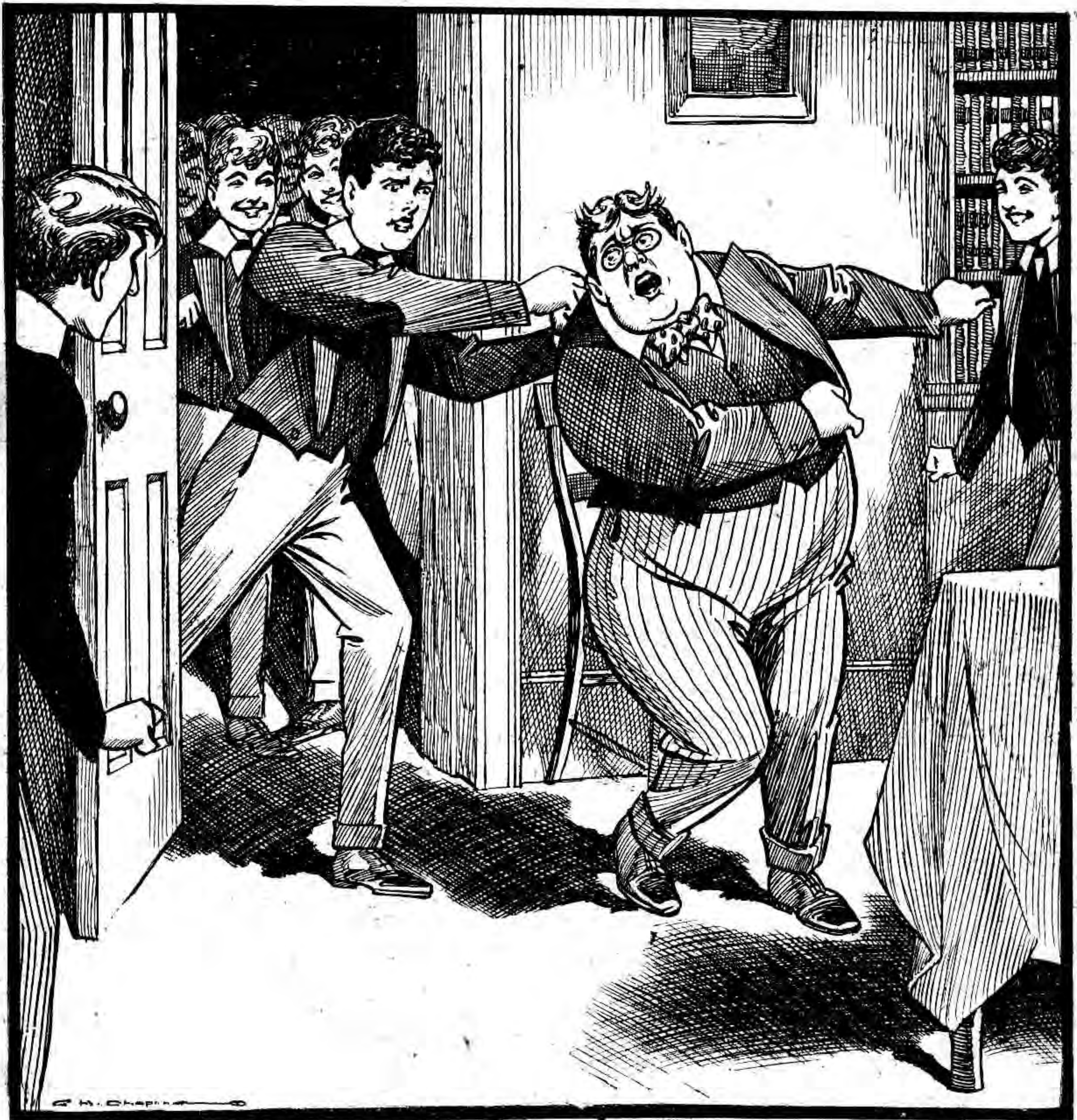


"THE SECRET OF THE SILENT CITY," OUR GRAND NEW SERIAL,
Commences in this Number. (See Page 17.)

No. 629. Vol. XVII.

February 28th, 1920.



TROUBLE IN STORE FOR BUNTER!

(An Amusing Scene in the Magnificent Long Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.)



THE SECRET OF THE SILENT CITY!

That is the title of our grand new serial story which commences in this number. I hope all my readers will read the first long instalment. There is no need for me to say that I hope you will like it, for I am certain that it will be the most popular serial that has ever appeared in the MAGNET.

All who read the opening chapters in this issue will like it so much that they will be certain to read the subsequent instalments.

It describes the adventures of a cinema party who are travelling to the Silent City, which has never before been entered, to obtain films which are going to be the most wonderful the world has ever seen.

They have many thrilling adventures, and great excitement is added by the fact that a rival party are on the same quest.

Do not fail to read the first instalment; and I know you will enjoy the rest.

TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

And this concerns a great number of my friends. The "Holiday Annual" may still be obtained at these offices. It was out of print, but a few copies have become available again, and a postal-order of 5s. 6d. to the publisher will bring the famous book per return. Any of my chums who missed the chance of getting the "Annual" on publication should make a note of this opportunity and act on it without delay. Anyway, it's a splendid birthday book!

SO THAT'S ALL RIGHT!

"This week's MAGNET is a ripper," says a Mirfield reader; and, Mirfield being in Yorkshire, I know he means what he says. I should have known it anyway, but it is always good to get the opinion of the county of the many acres.

"That Australian johnny should give up running down Gussy," I read. "After a hard day at school it cheers me up wonderfully to have one of your fine papers."

Just so! And is there anybody who does not want cheering up at times? I doubt it. That sort of depressed it's coming-on-to-rain feeling creeps on now and then, and you want to get away from all the old things which are bothering and bringing the blues.

I hope there will be no more weary days for my correspondent, but, if there are—well, he knows what to do about it.

And yet there must be worry. You never shake it off entirely. You can't when you have genial old "Cæsar's Commentaries" to manage; and "Cæsar Julius" was a trifle dry! And you can't later on, when the work of the world grips hold of you. But there is worry and worry. It can be overdone, as with the careful man who

"Never would wind up his watch at night,

For fear he might break the spring."

And there is the individual who shuts a door, and then goes back to see if he has really shut it, and even then wants to return just to make sure he has seen, etc. Some of these worriers get grey before their time. Their own fault!

A WINNING HAZARD.

There is nothing at all doubtful about a hazard if you spell it with two "Z's," and give it a capital letter.

Mr. Jack Hazzard, of Casino, New South Wales, will forgive me for taking liberties with his name. I like his name and his letter, and I wish I could oblige him by sending Harry Wharton and Bunter and Peter Todd, and—but I give up, and sha'n't try any more—out to Australia.

Bunter, as one of the big fellows of Greyfriars, might astonish the kangaroos.

"I don't know how these readers can grumble. Just fancy wanting better stories!"

That is what is in the letter. But haven't you all noticed the kind of fellow who growls? He always asks for something else. I read an article by one of his sort the other day. All the present-

day yarns were wrong. What he wished for was stories as they used to be. And if he could have trotted back into the old days, he would have sniffed contemptuously at the yarns current then, and sighed for those still further back.

You meet this type in all the ages. If you followed the wight back into the Stone Age, you would hear him complain about the tales being heavy, which they were, naturally, for the authors of that period had to write on slabs of rock, and make the best of it.

AN ODE TO THE MAGNET.

Mr. R. Steele, of Heathcote, Victoria, Australia, has taken a flying leap into poetry, and though he caught one or two of his rhymes against sharp corners he met in his descent, his attempt is good. I must give a few lines, and I know my chums in Australia will pardon me for adjusting matters a bit, for some of his words had suffered in transit. You never know. They may have got mixed in the mail-bag:

"Roll up! Roll up! Roll up!
And read of Bunter and his tuck;
Of Lancashire and Linley's luck,
As well as all the merry blades,
The barrings-out and festive raids,
Just think of Wingate, straight and true,
And give the praise which is their due,
To the Famous Five, so much alive."

Yes, it was a bold plunge into poetry. The writer has come out with all honours; but it is not only for his verse that I have to thank him. He is getting the merry Victorians to come in as readers, which effort on his part is a grand tribute to the MAGNET—none better!

Your Editor



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"CYCLONE SMITH."

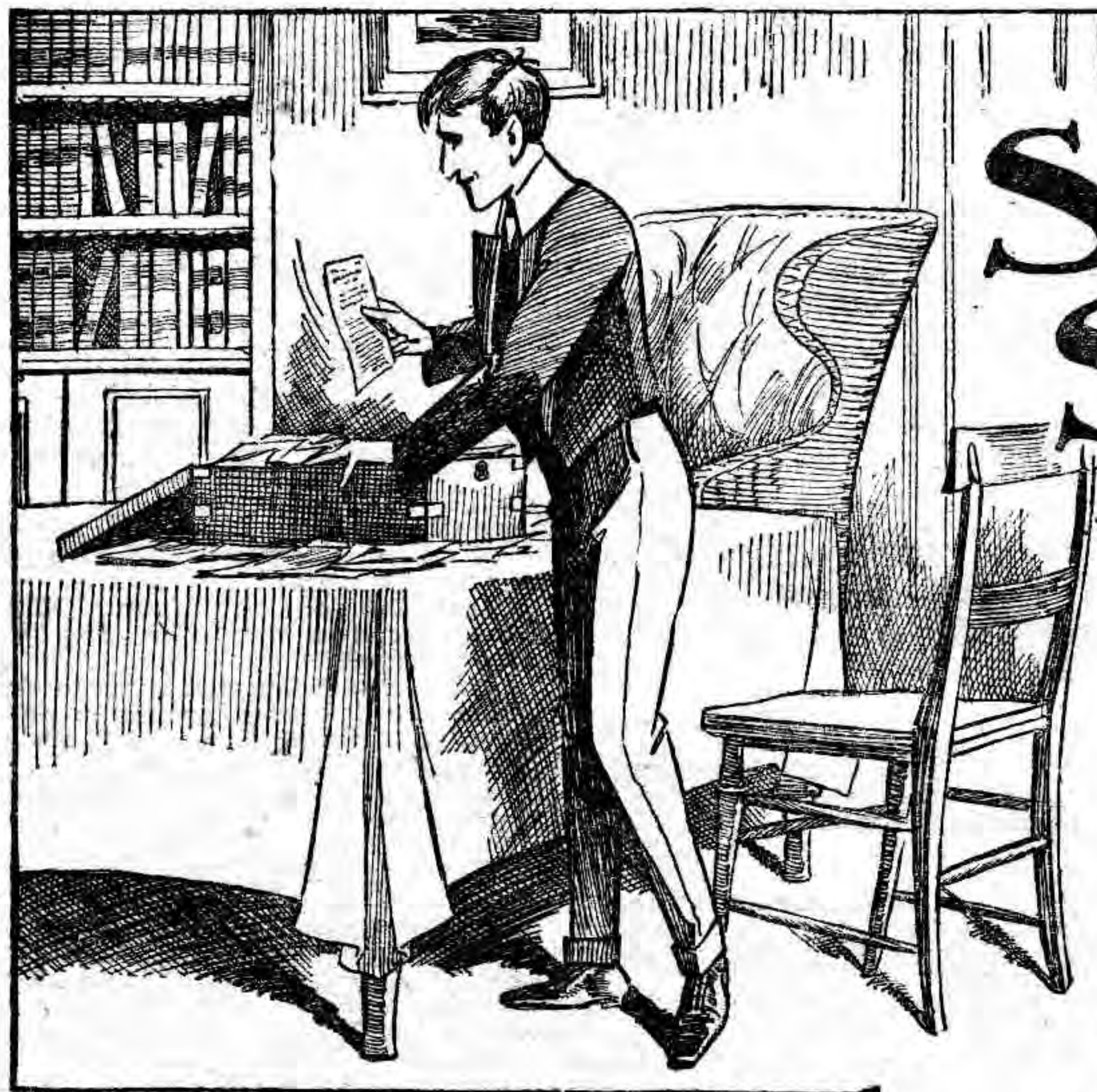
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12

The Great Adventure Story Paper.



Squiff's Secret!

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

... BY ...

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Something Wrong!

LOOK here, Wharton, I'm no end sorry, but I shall have to ask you to let me off this afternoon!"

It was Sampson Quincy Ifley Field—called "Squiff," on account of the proverbial brevity of life—who said this.

Harry Wharton, skipper of the Remove, looked disappointed and a trifle annoyed.

Wharton was the sort of fellow who has keenness for everything he takes in hand; but if there was one thing about which he was keener than anything else it was footer. The reputation of the Remove team was very dear to his heart.

And Squiff was a valuable man in the team—quite one of the best. He hardly ever had an off day.

"Don't look like that!" said Squiff sharply, before Wharton had found words wherewith to answer. "You can lick the Upper Fourth without me, and you know it. Play Russell—play Desmond—play Bunter, or Skinner, or any other wash-out, if you like—you can still lick Temple's little lot!"

The Famous Five stared at Squiff as one man. They could not remember ever having heard him speak in that tone before. He was always so good-tempered and genial with the fellows he liked, though he could give the wasters and rotters the rough side of his tongue.

But now he was talking to a fellow he counted among his best friends, yet he spoke like one with nerves all on edge, resenting even the look upon Wharton's face—which look Wharton really could not help.

Harry stiffened.

"Of course, if you don't care to play—" he began.

"It isn't that, and you might know it! Have I ever stood out because I wanted to do something else?"

"Never before, old top," said Bob Cherry. "But it looks as if you were

doing that now. I don't suppose that you're cutting footer in order to do nothing at all."

"It doesn't matter to me what you suppose, and I can't see that it's any bizney of yours what I'm doing!" retorted Squiff irritably.

"Sorry I spoke!" said Bob, in something of a huff.

Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Janset Ram Singh wisely kept silence after that. They waited for Wharton. But Wharton found it difficult to know what to say.

"Well?" snapped Squiff.

"Oh, I can't make you play, and I wouldn't if I could! But I had counted on you, and the Upper Fourth have bucked up a good deal lately."

At that Squiff's face softened a little.

"I'm really sorry, Wharton," he said. "But I simply can't play this afternoon, and if I did I should be no more use than the biggest dud in the blessed Form!"

And with that he strode out of Study No. 1 on the Remove passage.

He left behind him five rather anxious faces.

The Famous Five all thought a lot of Squiff.

"Something's wrong with him," said Johnny Bull.

"Took quite a lot of thinking out, that, didn't it?" Frank Nugent said, with a touch of sarcasm that put Johnny's back up at once.

"Rats to you!" snapped Johnny.

And he went out—after Squiff.

Of all the five he was nearest to the Australian junior, for they shared Study No. 14 with Fisher T. Fish, and, with many other things in common, shared also a rooted objection to that enterprising youth and all his ways and works. But Squiff's best chums were two more Colonials—Tom Brown, from New Zealand, and Piet Delarey, from South Africa. Johnny came after them with him, just as he came after the other members of the Famous Five with Johnny.

When Johnny reached No. 14 Squiff was talking to Fish.

"But I don't see how I'm going to pay you within a week," he said. "And if I could, ten bob for the loan of a quid for that time is no better than robbery! Why, it's two thousand six hundred per cent. per annum!"

"But I calculate we don't work out sums like that on the per annum basis—nope, sirree!" replied Fishy, rubbing his lean, bony hands together, while his eyes gleamed with cupidity. For two thousand six hundred per cent. per annum sounded like real music to Fisher Tarleton Fish. No angel choir could have sung a sweeter song to his ears.

"It's fifty per cent. for a week, anyway, Squiff, and don't you be such a mug as to borrow from that rotter!" growled Johnny. "If you want a quid you're welcome to it from me, for as long as you need it, and without a giddy sou by way of interest."

"Jerusalem crickets. Bull, what do you want to butt in like that for, spoiling a galoot's business deals?" howled Fish. "I could make it quite clear to Squiff in about a jiffy, I opine. You see, Squiff, a loan ain't like an investment. You can invest the spondulicks at eight or ten per cent., and reckon you're doing fairly well on the deal. But when you lend money you're trading in it, I calculate, and you've got to have more than that—yep, sirree!"

"You fancy you've got to be a millionaire, Fishy," said Johnny drily. "But you're not going to start in on it at Squiff's expense—not if he'll take my advice."

"I'll take your quid and be grateful, Bull," Squiff said. "You're a good chap, and I'd have asked you, only I felt that I was rather letting you fellows down over the match."

"Never mind about that!" growled Johnny. "We can't get anyone else as good as you, but we could get half a dozen better than the average duffer in
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the Upper Fourth. Wharton worries too much. Here's the quid. If you want more—well, I can't do it just at the moment, but I shall be getting a remittance in a few days, I guess, and you're welcome then."

Squiff brightened.

"You're a real pal, Johnny," he said. "and I'll come to you if I do need more."

"Then the deal's off, I opine, Squiff?" said Fisher T. Fish, his long face grown visibly longer.

"Yep, I calculate so, Fishy," replied Squiff, with a grin that was much more like his old, cheery self.

He took out his pocket-book to place in it the note Johnny had handed to him, and Johnny noticed, with some surprise, that there was at least one other pound note there. It looked as though there were more; but quite certainly there was one.

But that was not Johnny's affair, and he said nothing about it.

He and Squiff both left No. 14, and Fishy sat himself down to check on paper Squiff's statement that ten bob interest on a quid for a week meant two thousand six hundred per cent. per annum. If that were true—as the calculations showed it to be—a fellow starting with a capital of a pound, lending that pound each week, and getting it back regularly, with ten shillings interest, ought to have two thousand six hundred pounds at the end of the year. But, as his interest would be only ten shillings per week, it was plain that he would only make twenty-six pounds, which was a long way short of the golden dreams that Fishy had conjured up.

For anyone so keen as he was on money, Fisher T. Fish was not really a first-class mathematician. But he worked it out at last, discovering that it was the "per cent." factor which had misled him. When you worked percentages you had to divide by a hundred, which took quite a lot of gilt off the financial gingerbread. Nevertheless, twenty-six pounds profit on a single pound in the course of a year was really not too bad, and if a fellow started with ten quid instead of a mere, measly single quid, it would be two hundred and sixty pounds, which would make quite a nice little capital for the next year's trading.

It might be done, too! There were plenty of fellows at Greyfriars always ready to borrow money.

Unfortunately, those who would borrow money on Fishy's terms were the sort who never paid up—Bunter, Skinner, Stott, and their like. Angel, of the Upper Fourth, was ready enough to borrow when he was stony; but when he was in funds again he was apt to assume arrogance, and offer the interest in kicks—a medium for which Fisher T. Fish had no use. He got kicks enough in his own Form, without lending cash outside it to get them.

Fishy sat and thought on—thought hard. There must be something in it—two thousand six hundred per cent. was too good not to be true. He really must find some way of touching it!

Meanwhile, Squiff had looked in at No. 13 to see Lord Mauleverer, had wakened that active member of the nobility from a midday nap, and had borrowed a fiver from him.

"Though I'm hanged if I know when I can pay you back, Mauly!" he said frankly.

"What's the odds, begad, dear boy?" yawned Mauly. "You're a pal, an' I'd say that I don't care whether I ever see it back at all, only I know your dashed pride. If a chap can't do a pal a good

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turn—well, then, a chap isn't worth callin' a chap, begad! Now, is he?"

And with that Mauly turned his face to the wall and sought slumber again.

"Oh, I shall pay up one day!" replied Squiff.

The only answer was a snore.

Squiff was very thoughtful as he added Mauly's fiver to the quid borrowed from Johnny Bull, the other quid from Tom Brown, and the two pounds which Delarey had lent him.

It was certain that there must be something wrong when Sampson Quincy Ifley Field borrowed money to be repaid he knew not when.

And there was something very seriously wrong!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Interest!

"FISHY! I say, Fishy!"

"Yep, Skinner? What is it?"

"Can you lend me a quid?"

"I reckon I can, but I calculate I'm not going to."

Skinner's face, which had begun to brighten at the first clause of that pronouncement, fell visibly at the second.

"Look here, don't be a cad!" he said irritably.

"I guess I'd rather be a cad than a fool—and I should be a fool if I lent you the spondulicks without security," replied Fish coolly.

"What security do you want?" inquired Skinner.

And again a shade of hopefulness was to be seen upon his lean and crafty face.

Harold Skinner was quite the worst bad egg in the Remove. He was worse than Fishy himself, though Fishy's greed often led him to walk on the windy side of strict honesty; worse than Billy Bunter, though Bunter had hardly a redeeming quality; worse than Stott, because he was more active in wrongdoing. Angel of the Upper Fourth was more utterly callous than Skinner, and possibly Loder of the Sixth was even more unprincipled, even harder. But these fellows were older than Skinner, who had certainly not wasted any time in becoming the creature he was.

"Hyer, don't you go too fast!" said Fisher T. Fish. "I guess I haven't said I'd lend yet. If I do, my terms are ten bob for the loan of a quid for a week, I reckon."

"That's reasonable enough," Skinner answered.

Fishy rubbed his bony hands together. He ought to have known Skinner better, but cupidity blinded him.

"Waal, I calculate that if you can bring me something worth, say, two quid, so as to leave a margin in case you default, I can let you have the spondulicks on those terms," he said.

Squiff, on his way from interviewing Mauly, passed them.

"Still trying to lend that quid, Fishy?" he asked. "Why not tackle Bunter? He's always on."

Fisher T. Fish did not reply, save by an unfriendly glance.

Squiff passed on.

"What's he mean?" asked Skinner.

"Oh, shucks! Nothing at all. He wanted to borrow a quid from me, and the deal was all but fixed up when that interfering galoot of a Bull came along and lent him one without any interest at all. That's the way some chaps hyer butt in on business—yep, sirree!"

"I shouldn't mind if Bull would come along now and butt in just the same way," said Skinner.

"Waal, I calculate he won't. Bull don't like you any, Skinney."

"That's a fact, Fishy. But he likes me

quite as much as I like him—and that's another fact. Well, I'll see what I can find as security for the loan. I say, though, what's the matter with Squiff? He looks rather down in the mouth, and they say he's not playing this afternoon against the Upper Fourth. It's not like him to stand out of a match."

"I reckon the galoot's got something on his mind. And he's borrowing right and left; I saw three or four more notes in his pocket-book when he put in the one Bull handed over, and he's just come away from Mauly."

"Wish I had some fellows' luck!" said Skinner. "Mauly wouldn't lend me five bob if it was to save my life."

"Nope, I reckon not," replied Fish. "But I will, Skinney. Just you bring me along the security, that's all. And if you know anybody else who wants to borrow a quid or two—"

"Lots of chaps!" said Skinner. "But I don't care about them as long as I get a look-in myself."

"Waal, I calculate I'm open to do business on the same terms with any galoot who's wanting an advance," Fishy replied.

"I might tell Stott," Skinner said thoughtfully.

"Good security, mind!"

William Stott was not exactly one of the fellows with whom Fishy was keenest on doing business. But it really did seem to the enterprising youth from the other side of the Atlantic that even Skinner and Stott might be trusted with such safeguards to keep them from letting him down.

If he could have read Skinner's mind as that junior walked briskly away he might have felt less sure of that.

For already Harold Skinner had hit upon a plan for doing down the amateur usurer. And Skinner was quite sure that it would serve Fishy right. How could the fellow be so soft as to think that so fly a bird as he would pay fifty per cent. per week interest?

Skinner's mind turned from his plan, fully shaped and only awaiting a chance to be put into execution, to Squiff.

The cad of the Remove did not like Squiff. He did not like any of the decent fellows in his Form. At one time or another he had been in collision with every one of them; and Skinner did not forgive or forget. Perhaps Vernon-Smith's cutting sarcasms got him on the raw more effectively than Squiff's more outspoken criticisms; but after the Bounder and Wharton there was possibly no fellow in the Remove whom Skinner disliked more intensely than the frank and breezy Australian.

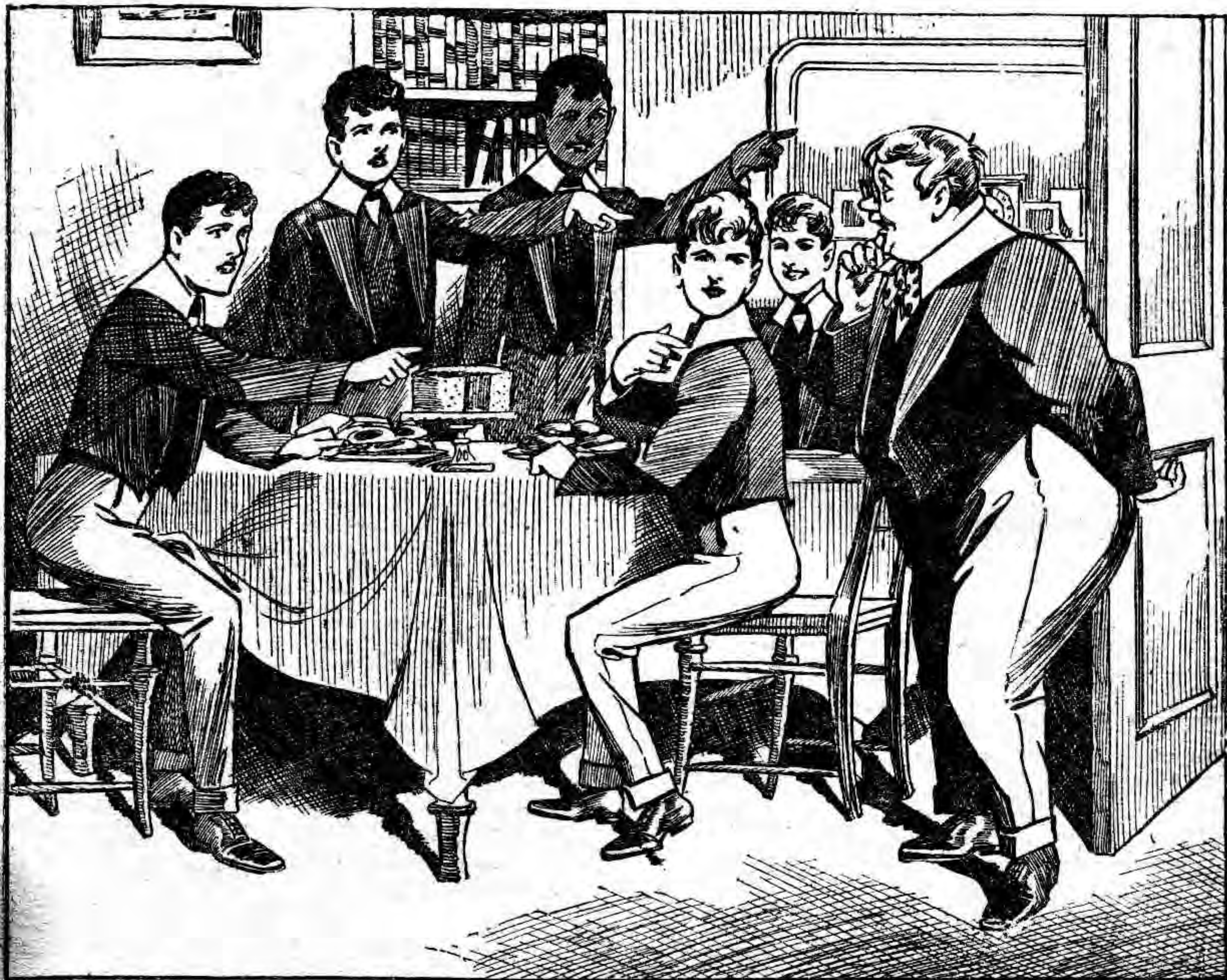
Skinner had no mind to pay the interest Fisher T. Fish demanded. But he was ready to pay any amount of interest—of a different kind—to Squiff and Squiff's affairs, in the charitable hope of discovering something that could be used against him.

It was after dinner that the two things got mixed up in Skinner's mind, in a manner that had results later on.

Naturally, a match between the Remove and the Upper Fourth was a matter of no importance to Skinner. It could only have become so by reason of his having bets upon it, and it chanced that he had no such bets.

Stott was away for the afternoon, some relatives having come to see him. Skinner was thus left to himself, and that suited him very well.

He hung about the passage. He saw Johnny Bull go off with the rest of the Famous Five, garbed for footer. He saw Squiff leave Study No. 14, obviously with the intention of going out of gates, for he wore bicycle-clips on his trousers. And then he saw Fisher T. Fish come



"I—look here, there's lots more I could tell you fellows!" said Bunter desperately. "Only I'm too faint with hunger to talk much. Move up, Bob, and let a chap sit down to the table!" But Bob Cherry sat tight, and five hands still pointed to the door. (See Chapter 4).

out, and Fishy had on his cap and overcoat.

Skinner took care that Fishy should not see him.

This was just the stroke of luck he had hoped for.

Study No. 14 was vacant, and the chances were that most of the other studies were also vacant.

Skinner's plan for giving Fish the security he demanded was crafty and yet simple. He meant to pledge someone else's property with the amateur usurer.

And, on the whole, he thought that something of Squiff's or of Johnny Bull's would be quite the most appropriate thing to pledge. That would mean keeping it in the family, as it were.

When the article pledged was missed by its owner it would very likely be discovered in Fishy's possession. If Fishy was supposed to have stolen it—well, Fishy had only himself to thank. He should have been more honest, and then no one would have thought him a thief!

But it was more probable that Squiff or Bull—whichever it might be—would believe Fishy's yarn. Well, what then? They could not prove it true; and if it came to the worst, Skinner could pass it off as a joke on Fishy—so he thought. He could pay back the loan and refuse to pay the unconscionable interest charged upon it. Squiff and Johnny Bull could not think any worse of him than they already did; and whatever his transaction with Fish might be called, the matter of the security for the loan

could not be taken seriously—so he thought.

What he was about to do was to steal in order that he might swindle. But never for one moment did he see it quite in that way, so warped had become his mind in all matters where honesty was concerned.

He stole into No. 14 and locked the door. It was improbable that any of the study's occupants would come along, and Skinner did not want anyone else to look in by chance and find him there.

Johnny Bull's desk was the first he tried. But the desk was a strong one, with a Yale lock, and Skinner soon gave it up as hopeless.

Squiff kept his smaller private belongings in an old writing-desk, which might well have been a family heirloom. There was no difficulty about opening that.

Skinner examined its contents pretty carefully. He glanced at some of the letters in it, but did not find much to interest him. Squiff's people wrote of what was going on in Australia—of the big cricket matches, of how Bardsley and Kellaway had made centuries against Victoria at Melbourne; of how the colts had shaped; of whether Felton would beat Barry on the Parramatta River; and all that kind of thing. Skinner saw no use in it all.

But right at the bottom of the desk he found something that made him open his eyes widely.

It was a pawn-ticket!

Squiff with a pawn-ticket! Who said the day of miracles had passed?

Skinner had gathered from Fishy that the Australian junior needed money badly, but he had not dreamed of Squiff's resorting to this way of getting cash.

But was the ticket really Squiff's?

It was made out in the name of "Henry Thompson," with an address at Courtfield. But it had not been issued by Lazarus, the Courtfield pawnbroker, but by a tradesman of the same kind at Lantham.

And was there a Rose Street at Courtfield?

Skinner could not remember one, and he knew practically every street in the little market town.

But Skinner also knew something about pawning. He was well aware that the fellow who was not used to that sort of thing very seldom gave his true name and address. And, of course, Squiff would not have gone to old Lazarus in any case.

"This will do!" muttered Skinner.

And he slipped the ticket into his pocket-book.

It might be a long time before Squiff missed it. When he got a remittance he would want to pay Mauly and Johnny Bull, and the rest of the fellows at Greyfriars, what he had borrowed from them. He would let the pawnbroker wait, because the debt to him was merely a matter of business. Perhaps that was not the way Skinner would have done

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things: but Skinner knew that Squiff and he were two very different persons.

He stole out of No. 14 and hurried to his own study.

"Wonder what he wants all that money for?" he muttered. "There must be something jolly serious in the wind!"

He wished now that he had followed Squiff. Skinner had the type of mind that connects a secret with something disgraceful, as a matter of course; and it would have pleased him hugely to discover something disgraceful about Squiff.

But it was too late now for shadowing the Australian junior. He had had half an hour's start.

Skinner could not stay indoors, however. If he had had that quid he might have gone along to Angel's study for a gamble; but Angel and his pal Kenny did not play with Removites on tick.

So Skinner wandered to the gates and out into the road, with some vague idea of meeting Stott, and finding out whether that bright youth had succeeded in touching his relatives for any appreciable amount of the needful.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Finding Out Something.

"HALLO, Skinner! What are you doin' about all on your lonesome, by gad?"

It was Ponsonby, of Highcliffe, who gave that greeting and asked that question. With him were Vavasour, Monson minor, and Gadsby.

Skinner was on fairly good terms with the Highcliffe nuts, as a rule, though he had got at odds with them now and then.

At present, however, there was no ill-feeling, or Skinner would have beaten a hasty retreat when he saw those four. He knew the nuts too well to trust them not to take the advantage of odds.

"I was lookin' for a fellow," he said. "Seen any of our chaps?"

"Saw Squiff," replied Gadsby.

"An' he saw us!" added Monson, grinning.

"Too soon!" said Ponsonby, with unmistakable regret for a missed opportunity. "We owe Squiff one."

"You won't get such a chance again very easily," replied Skinner. "He doesn't often go about alone. Which way did he go?"

"Want to keep out of his road—what?" inquired Vavasour.

"You may take it so if you like," answered Skinner, who had no mind to tell the nuts too much.

"Better not go towards Courtfield, then, by gad!" said Ponsonby.

And the four passed on.

Skinner wondered whether Squiff really had gone towards Courtfield. The plain inference was that he had; but Skinner's brain was too subtle to accept plain inferences at once when he was dealing with Cecil Ponsonby.

Pon was quite capable of doing him down. But there hardly seemed room for that here, on second thoughts, since there was a choice of more than one way besides that to Courtfield. And, as Skinner thought Squiff must have gone that way, he took it.

At a bend of the road he came suddenly in sight of the Australian, and drew back, tingling with excitement.

He had come upon Squiff's secret!

It looked like it, anyway. But it was so unlike anything Skinner had ever known or thought of Squiff, that, after feeling sure for a moment, he found himself staggered and doubtful.

For Squiff was talking to a girl. He stood in the middle of the road, holding his bike with his left hand, and his right hand was on the girl's shoulder.

Skinner did after his kind. He got over a stile, and dodged along behind the leafless hedgerows until he was level with the pair. He wanted very much to know what they were talking about.

But his curiosity was not gratified. At the very moment when he had drawn near enough to hear they moved on towards Courtfield, and he had to hang back, for the hedge just here was low, not affording sufficient cover for a spy.

Scurrying, with head down, as soon as he thought it safe, he was not long in getting level with them again, and with cover enough.

Somehow, he got the impression that the girl was crying, or had been crying, and that Squiff was trying to comfort her. But even of that he was only half sure.

They stopped some distance short of the town; and now Skinner, on his knees behind the hedge, caught some of their conversation.

"I'm ashamed of myself to give you so much trouble, Sam," the girl said in a broken voice.

"You mustn't think about that at all," replied Squiff. "It's surely up to me to do anything I can for you. We've always been pals."

Skinner's thin lips curled at that. "Pals!" he muttered to himself. Harold Skinner was not the fellow to believe the best of anyone.

"I know how difficult it must be for you to raise all that money for me," said the girl. "But there isn't anyone else I can ask—not anyone! I'm all alone here except for you, Sam."

Skinner had never heard Squiff called "Sam" before. If his mind had been slightly less suspicious it is possible that the name might have given him a hint of the truth. The only person likely to call Squiff "Sam" would be someone who knew his people.

"I haven't raised it all yet," Squiff answered, rather ruefully. "To do that I shall have to get you to let me off a promise I made to you. I wasn't to tell a single fellow at the school about you. But I can't get enough without telling one, and I'd rather tell two or three more. My pals trust me, but I hate keeping them in the dark."

"Tell them, then!" the girl said, lifting her face to his. "I haven't been quite fair to you, dear old boy. After all, you're only a boy, and I've given you a heavy load to carry."

Now Skinner saw that she was older than he had taken her to be at first, certainly some years older than Squiff. And again he might have made some guess at the truth. But perhaps it was not the truth that he wanted.

He guessed one thing—who the fellow was to whom Squiff would have to go for the rest of the money needed.

Vernon-Smith, of course!

The Bounder was fairly rolling in wealth, and he and Squiff had always got along pretty well together. Lately they had been more chummy.

Or it might be Mauly. He and Squiff were on the best of terms.

The other fellows he wanted to tell were, of course, Tom Brown and Piet Delarey, and possibly Johnny Bull.

Skinner was ready to sneer at that. He would not have wanted to tell a pal secrets. But then, Harold Skinner had never known what it was to have a real pal.

"Don't you worry about me, Norah! I'll be all right when I know that you are."

"But that won't be till I'm clear out of all this," the girl answered.

"Well, we'll work that before long. I must go now. Sure you're quite comfortable in those digs at Courtfield?"

"Oh, I'm comfortable enough, if that matters!" was the reply, accompanied by rather a petulant shrug of the shoulders. "But it makes me angry to think they should be charging so much for everything, and that you should have to keep on finding money to pay it."

"Oh, don't worry about me!" said Squiff. "You've enough trouble of your own."

She flung her arms round his neck and kissed him. And Squiff kissed her.

"On the public highway! Oh, my hat!" muttered the virtuous Skinner.

Next moment Squiff had mounted and ridden away, and the girl was hurrying towards Courtfield.

Skinner came out of his lurking-place, grinning spitefully.

Here was something that might be used against Squiff! He did not quite see yet how to use it, but there must be some way.

Billy Bunter, in Skinner's place, would have thought of blackmail.

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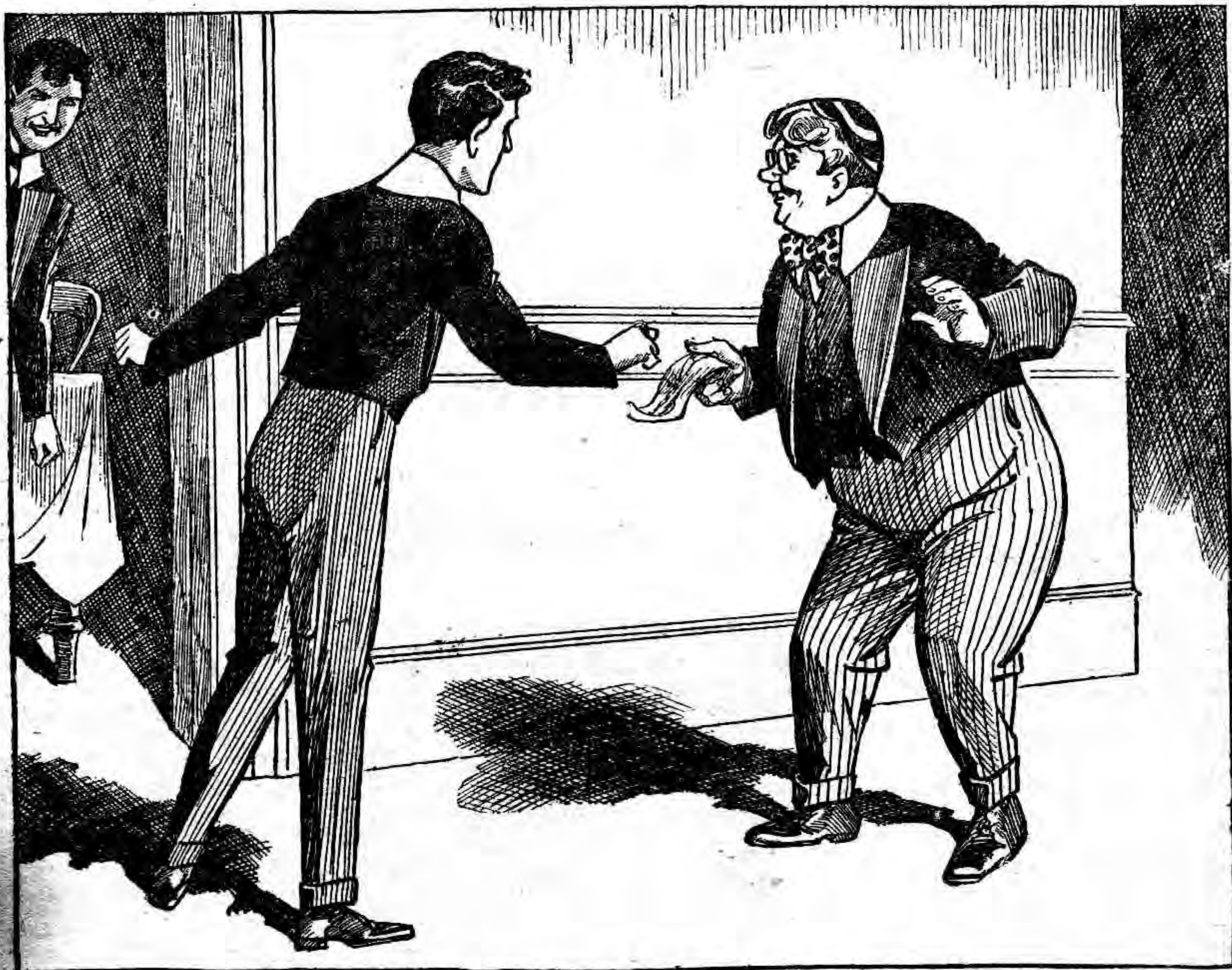
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A ten-shilling note was thrust into the fat junior's hand. He stared stupidly at it. "Sorry I kicked you," said Squiff. "You may have meant honestly, though it's hard to believe. You're welcome to that, anyhow." (See Chapter 7.)

But Skinner knew that Squiff was not the fellow to submit to that, and, moreover, Squiff needed all the money he could get for other purposes.

Skinner did not hurry back. He had a lot to think about.

He had almost forgotten the matter of the loan from Fishy. But just as he reached the gates he met that enterprising youth, and it came back to his mind at once.

"I'll trouble you to hand over a quid, Fishy," he said.

"What are you giving me?" returned Fisher T. Fish. "I'm not handing out quids so easily as all that, I calculate—nope, sirree!"

"Oh, I've got the security ready for you!" said Skinner.

He lugged out his pocket-book under Fishy's curious eyes.

"Hyer, I say, this is n.g., I reckon!" protested the amateur moneylender, as he gazed at the pawn-ticket.

"And why not?" asked Skinner coolly.

"You ain't 'Henry Thompson,' I guess."

"But I can be, or so can you if the pledge has to be redeemed!"

"I calculate I don't see it, Skinney."

"Thought you were up to snuff, Fishy! Get your wits to work, do! Did you ever know a chap pawn a thing in his real name, unless he was an old hand at the game and didn't care?"

"Nope, I guess not. Any old name and address will do. But this is for a

ticker, Skinney, and you haven't two chron-om-eters, I reckon."

"Only one—and uncle's taking care of that for me," replied Skinner.

"But you're wearing your chain, I see," objected Fish.

Skinner pulled the end of the chain from his pocket, and showed what held it there—a worthless medal. He had anticipated this objection, and had stowed his watch away. It was no great loss, for the thing was not going, and he could not afford to have it repaired.

"I see. You don't want every galoot about the place to know just all your bizney," said Fish, with a touch of reluctant admiration in his tone.

"Got it in once," said Skinner.

"But, I say, look hyer, if you don't cash up, I shall have to shell out five quid for your ticker, and I calculate that's all it's worth, and a bit over."

"Did you ever hear of a pawnbroker who did business on those lines, Fishy? They never advance much more than fifty per cent of a thing's real value. And silver's going up, you know; no telling what that watch may be worth in a few weeks' time!"

Skinner's watch was likely to be worth in a few weeks' time just about what it was worth then—which was something considerably short of five pounds. But as it was not Skinner's watch which the Lantham pawnbroker held, and as it happened that Fishy had no intimate knowledge of the timepiece which Skinner

had stowed away, that fact did not matter much.

"Waal, I guess I shall have to oblige you, Skinney," said Fisher T. Fish graciously.

And he put the pawn-ticket into his pocket-book, and handed over a pound note therefrom to Skinner.

"Thirty bob next week, mind!" he said warningly.

"Right-ho!" replied Skinner.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Eunter's Tidings!

"YOU don't mind, do you, Redwing?" said Squiff.

"Not a bit, old fellow!" replied Tom Redwing genially.

And he cleared out of Study No. 4 as requested. He went with a smiling face, too.

"That's a good chap!" said Squiff, to the Bounder.

"Somewhere near the best chap I know," Vernon-Smith answered.

"It isn't everyone who would go like that at a word. I'd not mind his knowing what I'm going to tell you, only it isn't exactly my own secret."

"Redwing isn't feeling hurt at not being told," said the Bounder. "He hasn't any vulgar curiosity. Queer that a mere sailorman's son should be a gentleman right through, isn't it, Squiff?"

Almost gives a fellow hopes that he'll be decent himself some day, even though he hasn't any blue blood in him."

"Blue blood, be hanged!" retorted Squiff. "We don't pay much attention to that sort of thing in Australia. There are some of our best people there who had convicts for ancestors—I don't mean crowds of convicts, of course, but one each. We judge a fellow by what he is, you know, Smithy."

Bunter heard the word "convicts," and it made him no end keen. He put a fat ear to the keyhole, and listened for all he was worth.

Tom Redwing had noted that Bunter was loafing about the passage when he left Study No. 4. A momentary suspicion occurred to him. Johnny Bull or Bob Cherry or Squiff himself would have given vent to that suspicion without any hesitation. But Redwing had more consideration for other fellows' feelings than they had, and he knew, too, that to warn Bunter off was only to suggest to the fat eavesdropper that there was something worth listening to in the study he had left.

"So he said nothing.

It was tea-time, but Bunter knew that there was no tea in Study No. 7 for him. He was in black disgrace there, and the sight of his podgy nose at the door would have caused Peter Todd to reach at once for a cricket-stump.

Bunter listened, and heard things which made him gasp.

Perhaps if he had heard everything he would not have understood the story, for William George Bunter really was not very brainy. But there were stages in the conversation when the voices of both speakers were lowered, and Billy Bunter had to fill up these gaps from his own imagination. Possibly it was as much what he imagined as what he heard that made him gasp.

"Thanks no end, Smithy! You are a friend in need!" said Squiff, after about a quarter of an hour's talk.

Bunter heard that quite clearly. Just before it he had taken his ear away in order to apply his eye to the keyhole, and he had seen Vernon-Smith hand over two or three notes—not mere quid notes, but rustling fivers!

The sight had made the Owl's mouth water. Did he not wish that he had such a friend in need as the Bounder? And he was sure that he deserved such a friend much better than Squiff, who, on his own showing, was a pretty bad lot—not much, if any, better than a criminal!

Now Bunter "vamooseed the ranch," as Fisher T. Fish would have said.

Squiff would be coming out at once, he was sure. Had he been in Squiff's place, he would have stood not upon the order of his going, but gone at once, lest Smithy might take a notion of asking for those fivers back.

Bunter rolled along the passage to Study No. 1, where he found the Famous Five at tea.

And at the sight of that tea Bunter's mouth watered more than ever.

Even fivers were minor things, compared with grub to the Owl. With fivers you could buy grub in heaps, of course; but they were, so to speak, only the road to the desired city, not that city itself.

And here were meat-pies and a mighty cake, raspberry-tarts and big, shiny buns, ham and tongue and cream-puffs—such things as the soul of Bunter yearned for—all the soul that Bunter had, that is, though it might have been called by another name without injustice to the Owl.

His first thought had been that Squiff

would have to pay for the keeping of those secrets. But that thought faded when he saw the spread in Study No. 1. Some share of that spread he must have, if to get it he was forced to tell all that he knew or could invent!

"I say, you fellows—" he began, blinking at the five from behind his big spectacles as he stood at the door.

"May I apologise for not asking you in when you tapped, Bunter?" said Frank Nugent, with sarcastic and ominous politeness.

"I didn't tap. I—"

"Go out and tap, then!" Bob Cherry said. "And don't wait for an answer. The answer isn't a lemon this time—it's 'Gway!'"

"Oh, don't be silly, Bob, old pal!"

"If I'm ever silly enough to be your old pal, I hope someone will kindly put me in what the Americans call 'the fool-"

No. 51.—WILLIAM WIBLEY



An amateur actor of quite unusual ability, famed for his many impersonations. Has carried out many brilliant japes, but has never used his talent in any shady pranks. He is a sound and decent fellow, and quite up to the average in other directions than acting. Shares Study No. 6 in the Remove with Rake, Desmond, and Morgan.

ish house," replied Bob, helping himself to a liberal slice of pie.

War-time restrictions had disappeared, and only plenty of cash was now needed to get all one wanted of most things. The Famous Five did not always fare thus royally; but Frank Nugent had had a whacking remittance that day.

"Outside, Bunter!" snapped Johnny Bull.

"You wouldn't say that if you knew what I've come to tell you, Bull," said Bunter darkly.

"We don't want to know anything you have to tell us," added Wharton.

"The interestfulness of the esteemed and degraded Bunter's newfulness is only equalled by the liefulness of that engaging and ludicrous person, which is—"

"Terrific—absolutely terrific!" finished Bob for Inky.

"Oh, really! I suppose you fellows don't know that Squiff's grandfather was a convict?" burred Bunter.

They stared at him.

"Squiff's pedigree seems to begin where yours is fated to end, Bunter," said Frank solemnly.

"That's not original," growled Johnny.

"Never said it was, old top!"

"You're talking rot, both of you," said Bunter. "I don't think I shall call the fellow Squiff in future myself."

"He will be sorry!" giped Wharton.

"We'll have a whip round to buy him hankies when he knows that," chuckled Bob. "He'll weep some, you bet! But what's your objection to convicts' grandsons, porpoise? By the way, have you a grandfather? It ought to work both ways, so we should have to bar him."

"I don't consider that any of us who have proper pride and self-respect and all that kind of thing ought to be so familiar with a chap with such low ancestors," went on Bunter, unheeding their chaff. "But that ain't all. If you knew all, I could tell you about Squiff you'd never speak to me—I mean, to him—"

"Don't alter it!" broke in Frank. "We'll mortify ourselves by never speaking to you again, Bunter, and look over the desperate scandal of the unfortunate grandmother of Sampson Quincy Ifley Field."

"I didn't say 'grandmother,' fathead, I said 'grandfather'!" howled Bunter.

No one answered him, but five hands pointed to the door.

It was a plain hint; but Bunter would not take it. He could bear to leave the Famous Five, but not that well-spread board.

"I— Look here, there's lots more I could tell you fellows," he said desperately, "only I'm too faint with hunger to talk much! Move up, Bob, and let a chap sit down to the table!"

But Bob Cherry sat tight, and five hands still pointed to the door.

"I say—oh, really, you fellows—"

"We must deny ourselves the pleasure and honour of any further converse with you, Bunter," said Wharton gravely. "It is your own suggestion, and you have never made so good a one before. So fare thee well, and if for ever—"

"So much the better!" chipped in Bob.

"You mustn't speak to him, Cherry!" said Johnny reprovingly.

"I didn't. I spoke to Harry."

"Oh, really, you fellows, I never said anything of the kind! I wasn't—I mean, I didn't—I mean, it's all rot! Move up, Bob—do! I could eat a slice or two of ham, Harry, old fellow!"

But five hands still pointed to the door, and beyond that significant joint gesture only a stony silence answered the burblings of the Owl.

"Look here, Squiff's committed bigamy!" burst out Bunter.

"What?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Sure it wasn't trigonometry, Bunter?"

"Trigamy, you mean, Franky!"

"I don't, then. I mean what I said. We had trigonometry in maths, lesson this morning. Beastly stuff! Squiff committed himself pretty badly; too, if you could go by what Quelchey said to him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's nothing to laugh at," said Bunter reprovingly. "It's a jolly serious matter, I can tell you! Why, I believe you have to go to quod for it if you're found out!"

"That's nothing," Frank said. "You've done lots of things you'd have had to go to quod for if they'd been found out, Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The cachinnations of the Famous Five made Bunter feel fairly desperate. This

was no laughing matter to him. Bigamy he could forgive, but, to be kept out of a share of that spread was more than he knew how to bear.

"Who was Squiff's first wife, porpoise?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I know the answer to that one," said Frank. "We had it in Divinity the other day. It was Leah. Then he served seven years for Rachel. Come to think of it, they couldn't have sent people to quod for bigamy in those days, or else—why, that reminds me! It wasn't Squiff at all—it was Jacob!"

"Oh, really, you fellows! You won't like it when the police come for Squiff!"

"We sha'n't!" replied Bob. "But we sha'n't mind at all when they come for you, which is much more probable."

"Not on a bigamy charge, though," growled Johnny Bull. "There isn't a female in the world who would marry Bunter, though some of 'em are silly enough for almost anything. As for two—well, miracles of that size never did happen."

"If I liked to tell you what I could tell you," said Bunter, smirking, "you'd hear—"

"Hear some rotten lies!" snapped Wharton. "Thanks, but we're not taking any! The one thing we should like to hear is how you found out about Squiff?"

"Well, I don't mind telling you that. I happened to be tying—"

"A knot in your pigtail to remind you that to-morrow was Sunday week?"

"Don't be so silly, Cherry! My boot-lace came undone—"

Johnny Bull stooped.

"Button boots!" he said. "Bump him!"

"Stop it! I mean, I dropped a pin, and— Yaroooh! Lemme be, Bull, you beast!"

"Don't handle him, Johnny!" said Wharton contemptuously. "You don't want to have to go and wash your hands in the middle of tea."

"Outside!" cried Bob.

And he pointed to the door. The hands of the rest pointed also, and the voices of the rest added themselves to the stentorian voice of Bob in a cry of:

"Outside!"

But Bunter still lingered, casting eyes of anguish and of yearning upon the well-spread table.

"Open the door, Inky!" said Bob.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh politely complied.

Bob lifted his foot; Bunter edged nearer to the door.

"Swing him round, Johnny! The waistcoat isn't a proper place to kick anyone in!"

"I—oh, really, you fellows! Stop it, Bull, you beast! Yooooo!"

And Bunter fled, howling, Bob's big right foot following him out of the door.

Then the door was slammed, and Bunter stood outside like a very fat and very disconsolate peri at the gate of a very material paradise.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Squiff Gets Angry!

"MY hat! What's this mean?" The Famous Five had stopped in front of the notice-board, expecting to see thereon the team list for the next school match. It had been rumoured that Wingate was making several changes in the side.

But he had not yet posted the list. There was, however, something of even more interest.

It was a half-sheet of notepaper on which, in typewriting, were the words:

"Who is the girl that a certain member of the Remove, whose name suggests the cricket-field, meets on the Courtfield road?"

"Who the merry dickens does the sweep who put that up mean?" inquired Bob Cherry, rubbing his curly head.

"Fathead! That's plain enough; as plain as the nose on your face!" snorted Frank Nugent.

Bob rubbed the organ referred to, as though that might afford him inspiration. But apparently it failed to do so.

"I don't see it," he said. "There's no chap here named Bat or Ball or Bail or Wicket or—"

"But there's a chap named Field!" growled Johnny Bull. "And the cad means old Squiff!"

No. 52.—WILLIAM STOTT.



One of the cads of the Remove. Used to be the close follower of Snoop before that junior reformed. Now the associate of Skinner in despicable schemes. Is always on the wrong side, but never leads, and has seldom—if ever—been known to originate a piece of rascality. Has at times shown glimmerings of conscience. Shares Study No. 11 with Skinner and Snoop.

"I'll tear the thing down!" said Wharton, reaching out his hand.

But Johnny clutched his wrist.

"No, Harry!" he said. "I think Squiff ought to see it first. Some sweep's getting at him, you know. I'll go and find him."

And Johnny went off.

"Much better tear it down before anyone else sees it," Harry said. "It's only someone's silly joke, I suppose; but Squiff's not the kind of fellow to like a joke of this kind; and it isn't very decent at best."

"We don't know how many may have seen it already," replied Frank.

"I suppose it does mean Squiff?" said Bob. "You fellows seem jolly sure, but—"

"The meanfulness is beyond doubt, and it is truly meanfulness in a doubleful aspect," spoke Inky gravely.

Now others came crowding up—Morgan and Desmond, Russell and Ogilvy, Rake and Peter Todd, the

Bounder and Redwing, Stott and Bolsover major and Snoop.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bolsover. "So Squiff's been caught out spooning, has he?"

"Take me away and let me die!" moaned Bob. "I couldn't see it, and a chap with a head like Bolsy's has seen it at once! Am I going barmy on the crumpet?"

"Oh, not more than usual, Cherry!" said the Bounder soothingly. "You needn't worry. You've always been like that, and it never has seemed to hurt you yet."

But, though the Bounder chaffed Bob, he was frowning. And Tom Brown, coming up with Delarey at that moment, frowned, too, which surprised everyone, for the cheery New Zealander was as keen as most on a joke.

"I'm going to take that thing down," he said; "and if I can find the cad who put it up, I'll—"

"What are you getting your hair off about, Browney?" inquired Dick Rake. "Nothing so dreadful in the notion of Squiff's getting spoony, is there? Lots of other fellows have been taken the same way. Wharton, for instance—"

"Shut up, Rake!" snapped Harry, his face flaming. "Don't take it down, Browney! I was going to, but Bull thought Squiff ought to see it first."

"I should jolly well think so, too!" said Stott. "Why, there's nothing in it if Squiff doesn't see it."

A hand gripped Stott by the collar, and he squirmed round to see that the owner of the hand was Piet Delarey.

"Did you put it up, or do you know who did?" hissed Delarey.

"No, I didn't, and I don't know anything about it, so hands off!" squealed Stott.

Then Squiff came.

It was plain that Johnny had told him what was up. Indeed, it would never have occurred to outspoken Johnny Bull to make a mystery of it.

Squiff looked angrier than anyone there had ever seen him look before.

This hit him hard. He could take a joke. If his meeting with the girl on the Courtfield road had been part of a flirtation he might still have resented this; but he would not have resented it to the same extent. For he felt that the secret, which was more Norah's than his, was in danger, and he had been so set on keeping that secret from all but three or four fellows whom he knew he could trust.

"Enter Romeo!" said Dick Rake.

"If you want your dashed head knocked off your shoulders, Rake—"

"To tell you the truth, Field, I don't exactly long for that. Sorry if I was offensive. I assure you that I didn't mean to be."

"Funk!" muttered Stott.

But Squiff's face softened, though only for a moment. And no one else there thought Rake a funk, not even the blustering Bolsover. He had pluck enough to apologise when he saw that he had done what he did not intend to do.

Squiff took the paper down without tearing it, and folded it up deliberately.

"This is evidence," he said. "I mean to find the cad who's responsible, whatever trouble it may give me. Does anyone here know?"

No one answered for a moment. There had been several giggles at first, and two or three fellows were still grinning. But those who grinned were not Squiff's friends. Every one of them felt that behind this was something more serious than they had dreamed of at the outset.

Then Bob Cherry spoke.

"I don't like accusing a chap without proof," he said. "And I'm not going to say right out that Bunter did that. But I do think he must have been at the bottom of it."

"Bunter? Why Bunter?" snapped Squiff.

"He came to us with a wild yarn about you," replied Bob. "Said you were a bigamist, and— Why, what's the matter, Squiff?"

For Squiff's face had turned from red to white. His eyes met Vernon-Smith's, and the Bouncer gave ever so little a nod—hardly perceptible to anyone but Squiff. And Tom Redwing flushed almost guiltily. He wished now that he had moved Bunter on.

"Bigamy! Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bolsover. "Sense me, Squiff! I'm not afraid of having my head knocked off by anyone, and I really can't help chortling!"

"Bunter?" said Squiff, paying no heed at all to Bolsover. "Where is the fat cad?"

"Where's Bunter, Toddy?" asked Bob.

"Not in my pocket," replied Peter Todd. "But I can tell you one thing, Squiff, old chap. The Owl never typed that. Why, there isn't a word in it spelled wrongly, and, though the silly stuff about your name is cheap rot, it's clean above Bunter's capacity."

"But he was in it!" growled Johnny Bull. "Fetch him, someone!"

"I'm not going to talk to him before a crowd," said Squiff. "If you can find him, Bull, you might bring him along to our study—no, to Smithy's. You don't mind, do you, Smithy? Fish is in No. 14."

"I don't mind, old man," said the Bouncer gravely.

"Come along, Tom—come along, Piet!" said Squiff. "You fellows, too—Wharton and Nugent and Inky and Cherry. Oh, and you, Redwing!"

"Not unless you really want me, Field."

"I do. And Toddy—Bunter's more or less his affair."

"Less, rather than more, these days," said Peter. "But I'll come, of course, Squiff, and it isn't wholly out of mere curiosity."

"If there's to be a giddy crowd like that, I don't see why we shouldn't all hear," grumbled Bolsover.

"But I do!" snapped Squiff.

Some of the rest looked a trifle disgruntled. But most of them saw reason in Squiff's selection. He evidently took this matter very much to heart; and the fellows he had asked to come along were those who had always been among his best friends.

They went off. It was some little time before Bunter appeared, and there was a distinct sense of constraint and trouble in the air while they waited.

Then howls and bursts of laughter announced the coming of Bunter. The door was flung open, and he made his appearance, propelled by Johnny Bull's hand on his collar. Behind them were nearly all the Remove.

"The fat clam said he wouldn't come!" puffed Johnny. "I had no end of a job getting him here."

"There seems to have been plenty of help available," said the Bouncer drily. "Close the door, will you, Wharton? Sorry to be rude to you chaps, but this happens to be my study, y'know, an' this meetin' is private."

Wharton closed the door. From the other side of it came a howl of protest. Some of those shut out were very curious indeed.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 629.

"I—oh, really, you fellows, I don't know anything about anything at all, and I can't make out why Bull should drag me here!" bumbled Bunter.

"Don't incriminate yourself by rash statements, porpoise," said Peter Todd. "On the whole, I think you had better regard me as your counsel, and leave it to me to make what defence can be made for you—which probably won't be much."

"But I haven't done anything!" howled Bunter.

"Sing out as loudly as that when you get to confessing, and we sha'n't mind being on the wrong side of the door, fatty!" came a voice from the passage.

Squiff flung open the door.

"Haven't you fellows a shred of decency?" he snapped. "This is private—isn't it enough for you to know that?"

Some of them moved off. Rake went, and Russell and Ogilvy, and Desmond and Morgan and Snoop. Snoop had never quite gone back to his old ways; there was a sense of honour in the fellow now.

But Stott and Bolsover and some others—not all of them black sheep, by any means—stayed. And now Skinner joined the throng.

"What's up?" he asked, with every appearance of ignorance.

"Bunter's on trial for saying that Squiff's a bigamist," chortled Bolsover.

"Well, is it true?" returned Skinner, grinning.

Sir Jimmy Vivian looked hard at Skinner.

"It's my belief as you know something about this, Skinner," he said.

"If you believe that, you'd believe anything," replied Skinner lightly. "Perhaps you think I was best man at both Squiff's weddings?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar at that. But Sir Jimmy's face remained grave.

"It's all about a paper that was put on the notice-board, Skinner," said Wibley.

"To say that Squiff had been indulging in the fashionable pastime of bigamy?" inquired Skinner.

"No. Only to say that he had been meeting a girl on the Courtfield road."

"Oh! Precious little in that—might do it myself," answered Skinner.

"Much ado about nothing, I call this."

And he went off again, as if he really meant what he said. Sir Jimmy looked after him curiously.

— —

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Skinner is Suspected.

"I DON'T know anything about it—I don't know anything about anything at all!" bumbled Bunter within.

"As a description of what, for want of another word, must be called your mind, that may possibly be allowed to pass, prisoner," said Peter Todd. "But, as an answer to a specific charge, it won't wash. Better trust your counsel, and tell him exactly what you have been doing."

"Look here, Toddy, if I tell the truth you—"

"Ahem! It's a terribly big 'if.' But try—for once!"

"You won't let them do anything to me, will you?"

Peter looked round.

"If there's a chap here I can lick, and he wants to kill you, I'll tell him not to," he said. "That's as far as I can honestly undertake to go in your physical defence, tabby. But eloquence is cheap, and I don't mind using that. I always do like wagging my chin."

"No doubt about that!" snapped

Squiff. "We don't want your funniosities now, Todd. We want the truth out of Bunter."

"Who was it that hoped for figs from thistles?" murmured Peter.

"I— Oh, really, you fellows, it's nothing at all that matters! I'll tell you all about it, and then you'll see that. It was like this. I was passing this study a little while ago when—when—"

"Button boots!" growled Johnny Bull.

"And the pin's lost its point!" added Frank Nugent.

"When I dropped a half-crown," went on Bunter.

"Stop!" cried Peter. "That's too evidently a whopper. You couldn't have dropped a half-crown, because—"

"I did, then! I'd just borrowed it—from Fishy."

"It sounds fishy," said Peter. "But proceed!"

"The two-shilling-piece rolled away, and—"

"Losing sixpence in its flight!"

"Oh, do dry up, Toddy!"

"Right-ho, Squiff! But if it's the truth you want out of the Owl—"

"And I went down on my hands and knees to look for it."

"Wish I'd been behind you!" muttered Bob Cherry.

"Squiff was talking to Smithy. You shouldn't talk so loud, Squiff, really. It isn't a fellow's fault if he hears what he ain't intended to hear when a fellow shouts like you do. I heard you say that nearly everyone in Australia was descended from the convicts—I mean, the convicts—and didn't care a hang what they did. You said you'd committed bigamy yourself, and wouldn't think twice about doing it again. Of course, I knew that was only your joke—"

"Oh, you knew I was joking, did you?"

"Yes, of course! Really, Squiff, what do you take me for? You don't suppose I really thought that you'd married the girl you met on the Courtfield road, do you? Besides, even if you had—though I don't think you would be allowed to—that would only be one, wouldn't it? There's no crime in getting married once—it's only silly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But, though others might laugh, Squiff seemed unable to see any joke in Bunter's pronouncement. It was something else in Bunter's speech at which he caught.

"Whotold you anything about the girl on the Courtfield road?" he snapped.

"Oh, everybody's talking about it!" replied Bunter. "You must know that, yourself! Why, a thing like that—"

"I don't want your putrid opinions! I want to know who told you!"

"I— Really, Squiff, give a fellow a moment to think! It was Skinner, if I remember right."

"That would sound likely enough—if anyone but Bunter said it," remarked Peter Todd.

"Did you have anything to do with that rotten paper on the notice-board?" roared Squiff.

Those outside heard that.

"Couldn't have been Bunter," Wibley said. "Toddy's right there. The butter-tub can't spell."

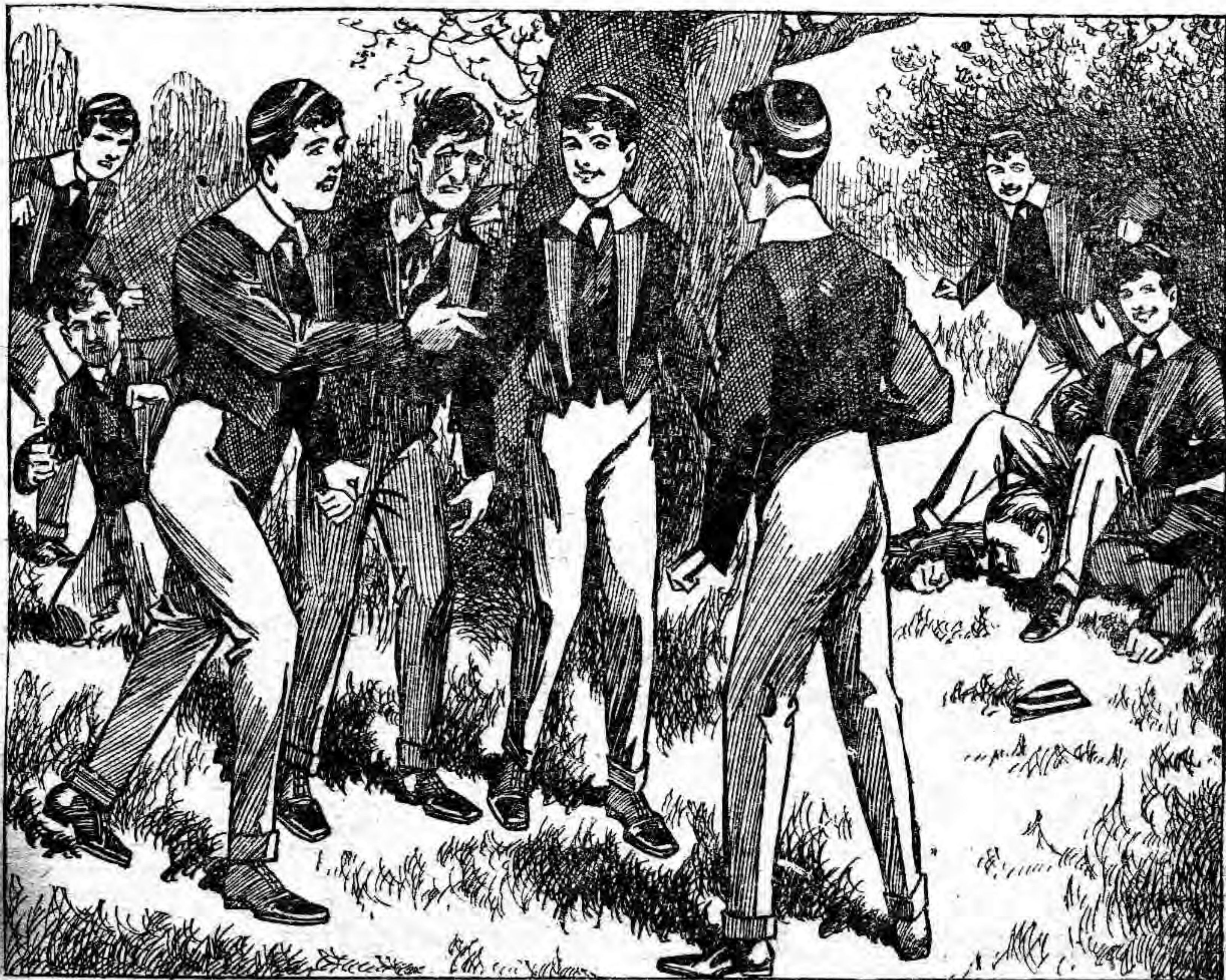
"No, it wasn't Bunter," said Jimmy Vivian.

"If you know who it was, you ought to say," Wibley said.

"I don't know, really," replied the schoolboy baronet.

"What paper? No, I didn't! Skinner did that. I saw him writing it!" Bunter answered inside.

"My hat!" gasped Nugent. "And Squiff expected to get the truth from Bunter!"



"I knew you were a cad, Skinner, but I'm hanged if I thought you were quite such a cad as this!" said Squiff. "You might reckon it a joke to spy upon me, but you fancied you were giving me away to these Highlife sweeps, and that was past a joke, anyway." (See Chapter 10.)

Bunter did not care whom he incriminated as long as he cleared himself. He had pitched upon Skinner as a likely person to be believed guilty.

"As it happens," said the Bounder, "the screed is typed."

"I know. I didn't mean that I saw Skinney writing it with a pen—you say typewriting, you know—it is writing, ain't it? Oh, really, you fellows, you do confuse a fellow so! What I mean is that it was done on Quelchy's typer—"

"And you saw it done, you abominable fat clam?" said Wharton disgustedly.

"Yes; that's what I mean."

"Porpoise, I regret to say that I cannot regard you as a Washington for the moment," said Peter Todd. "That Skinner may have been the guilty party I will not deny. Skinner is capable of many things; but he isn't capable of being such an ass as to trust you with a secret!"

"Not jolly well likely!" said Bob Cherry.

"How you do jump on a fellow, Toddy! I can't get a chance to tell a straight tale. I never said I saw Skinney typing that. I don't go sneaking into Quelchy's study. I've more respect for myself, I hope!"

"If you have any respect for yourself, it's badly misplaced, tubby," said Frank Nugent.

"Let's hear just exactly what you did see, you bloated whopper merchant!" Vernon-Smith said.

"I saw Skinney coming out of Quelchy's room with that paper in his hand," replied Bunter.

By this time he had almost persuaded himself that he had seen something, though he was not at all sure what, and was prepared to vary his story to please his auditors. Having, as it were, swooped upon Skinner, he meant to stick to that, at least. But he was ready to make any minor changes, just to oblige.

"What was the paper like?" snapped Squiff.

Bunter was almost the only fellow in the Remove who had not seen the screed. But he did not realise that. He plunged with characteristic fatuity.

"Foolscap," he replied, "with faint ruled lines, I think. But my eyes aren't very good, you know," he added, blinking pathetically.

"Was it at all like this?" asked Squiff, producing the paper.

"Why, that is it!" cried Bunter.

"You're sure?"

"Yes. I mean—nunno, I'm not sure! I'm very careful what I say—a fellow with my high principles always is. But that looks very like it."

"This isn't foolscap!" Squiff growled.

"But I said my eyes weren't very good, didn't I now, you fellows?" returned Bunter, quite pathetically.

"Foolscap, with faint ruled lines!" said the remorseless Squiff.

"I—I must have been thinking of some other paper!" bumbled Bunter.

"Well, there's one thing certain—what you say isn't any evidence against Skinner," Piet Delarey said.

He did not precisely like Skinner, but he had fancied more than once that he had seen signs of better things in the cad of the Remove, and he was rather inclined to stand up for the absent accused.

"It seems to me that my porpoise has succeeded in drawing a red herring across the trail," Peter Todd remarked drily. "Why did he go and spread false reports about Squiff?"

"Oh, that yarn!" said the Australian junior. "As a matter of fact, Bunter did hear me mention bigamy and convicts, though he had no right to be listening, and I'm going to take it out of his hide for prying as he did. I was telling Smithy the story of a frie—of a person I know, that is."

He glanced at Vernon-Smith as he spoke.

"That's so," said the Bounder off-handedly. "Only a story, though a much truer one than Bunter's."

"Nothing proved against Skinner, then?" asked Delarey.

"No," replied Squiff.

"Bunter, though anything but martial, is like the soldier in one respect," said Peter Todd. "What he said is not evidence."

"He's a fat, lying worm, and I think Skinner ought to know about it," said Johnny Bull. "If he's not guilty, it's

only an accident. It's just the kind of thing the sweep would do. What are you going to do about Bunter, Squiff?"

"What have you got that would help me to do something, Smithy?" Squiff inquired.

"This any good?" returned the Bounder, taking a springy walking-stick from a corner.

"Oh, really, Smithy! Squiff, you're not going to touch me, so there!"

"I'm not. This cane is, though. Will some of you fellows have the kindness to put Bunter over the table."

Johnny Bull, Bob Cherry, Tom Brown, and Delarey seized the Owl.

"Lemme be, you beasts! I—I'll tell Quelchy! I—I'll report you to the Head! I— Yooooop! Yaroooooh! Oh dear! Don't, Squiff—don't!"

But Squiff laid on hard. He was angry still, and Bunter deserved all he was getting, though his "red herring" had meant that Squiff had been able to pass lightly over a subject that he did not desire to discuss.

"Yow! Ow! Yowwww!"

Squiff held his hand, and the howls of the fat rascal died away in sobs.

The Bounder flung open the door, and pushed Bunter out.

"It's all over, you fellows," he said; "and here's the terrible result. The abominable Bunter has been found guilty of listening at doors and spreading false reports, and justice has been done upon him."

"But what about the girl on the Court-field road?" gibed Bolsover.

"Better clear out, and try to mind your own business," replied the Bounder. "What's the good of going for him, Squiff?"

Squiff had looked like doing that. But apparently he decided that it was not worth while.

"I'm not going for the silly ass!" he growled. "Suppose I did speak to a girl. That's not a crime, is it?"

"All serene. If you admit you did, I'm satisfied," said Bolsover.

"I don't care a rap whether you're satisfied or not!" retorted Squiff, as he moved off with Johnny Bull towards No. 14.

It was close on time for prep now.

"Come along, Jimmy boy," said Delarey to Vivian.

"I want to speak to Squiff first, Piet," answered the schoolboy baronet. "Sha'n't be long."

He went after the Australian and Johnny.

Fish was not at home, and Sir Jimmy had a chance to tell what he knew. He was well aware that Squiff would not mind Johnny's hearing.

"I say, Squiff!"

"Well, Jimmy?"

"I b'lieve Skinner was the chap who put that there notice up!"

"Have you been listening to Bunter?" Jimmy shook his head.

"No. But I 'eard the typer clickin' in Quelchy's room, an' I saw Skinner come out the minnit' after it 'ad stopped."

"Did he see you?" asked Johnny.

"I don't think 'e did. 'E turned the other way."

"Was Bunter about?"

"No, Squiff."

"Looks as if he must have been."

"Not a bit of it," said Johnny. "Bunter invents so many beastly lies that it would be almost a miracle if he didn't get on to the truth by accident once in a way. He put that job on to Skinner because that cad seemed the likeliest to have done it, that's all. Skinner doesn't love you, old top."

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Fishy came in just then, and he heard that.

"Thanks, Jimmy!" said Squiff.

"I thought I ought to tell you, Squiff."

"Quite right. We're pals, and I'd do as much for you."

Jimmy went off to his own quarters beaming. It pleased him that Squiff should say they were pals. Mauly and Delarey were his chums, of course; but Jimmy had hardly realised that Tom Brown and Squiff, who were often in No. 12, had also grown to think a good deal of the schoolboy baronet from the slums.

"What's that about Skinner?" asked Fisher T. Fish, who was nothing if not inquisitive.

"Skinner's a pal of yours, isn't he, Fishy?" said Johnny.

"Nope! I shouldn't call him a pal, I calculate. But he's one of my clients."

"Do you mean that you've been lending him money?"

"Yep."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Johnny Bull, and Squiff grinned.

It struck them both as funny that Fishy, who prided himself on his extreme astuteness, should lend any of his cherished cash to Skinner.

"Jerusalem crickets! What are you two galoots cackling at? I've good security, I guess—yep, I rather opine I've good security."

"Sure the security belongs to Skinner?" inquired Johnny shrewdly.

It was a shaft drawn at a venture, but it made Fishy very thoughtful.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Stroke of Luck.

"W E'LL watch out for Skinner, Squiff!" said Piet Delarey grimly.

It was the next day, and Squiff, Tom Brown, and Delarey had had a long talk together in a far corner of the playing-fields, beyond the reach of eavesdroppers.

Squiff had told these two good chums the same story he had told the Bounder. He felt that it was due to them that they should be told, though they would have done all that he could ask of them without that. The seal of silence had been taken from his lips, and he was glad to be able to explain to them.

"Rather!" said Tom Brown. "Nearly all the Form would be up in arms against him if they knew the rights of this. It would have been bad enough, his spying, even, if it had been as he naturally thought it was; but it seems the giddy limit in a case like this."

"He couldn't know it wasn't—well, just spooning," Delarey rejoined. "Let's be fair to the sweep!"

"You've been more than fair to him," Squiff said. "I don't think he'd have done this if it had been you. I'll say that for him. But he wouldn't have held his hand for any other fellow in the Form, I fancy."

"It's a pretty big job you've got on, Squiff," said Tom Brown. "I wish I could help, to call it really helping. But I'm practically stony."

"Mauly will have to shell out," Delarey said coolly.

Squiff stared at him.

"But why should Mauly shell out quids and quids, and more quids, for me?" he asked. "We're pals all right, but there's a limit."

"'Tisn't for you, fathead! It's for your cousin."

"But Mauly doesn't even know her."

"That's no odds. Tell him the yarn—

he's safe enough—and he'd pop his ticker to raise the needful, if he couldn't manage it any other way. But he's probably got enough on him at this very moment to do the trick."

Squiff's hand went to his waistcoat-pocket.

"I've popped my watch," he said. "May as well make full confession to you fellows while I'm about it."

"You could have mine, if it was worth popping," Tom Brown said.

"And mine, Squiff! But there's no need. Mauly will see you through."

"Piet, if you were in my shoes would you borrow from Mauly, knowing that it would be ever so long before there would be a chance to pay back?"

"Honest Injun, Squiff, I would!"

"Then, hang it all, I will! Norah is aching to get away, and I hate the notion of her being spied upon and talked about. I've had a fiver from old Mauly already, besides a whack from Smithy. But I suppose I must go the whole hog. Are you two coming along with me to tap him?"

"Do you want us?" asked Tom Brown.

"Yes."

"Then of course we'll come."

The three went along to Study No. 12.

"Wake up, Mauly, old boss!" said Delarey, shaking the slumberous sprig of the aristocracy without ceremony.

"Eh? Oh, begad, is anythin' the matter, Piet, dear boy?"

"Nothing that you'll consider of any importance. Squiff wants to borrow a hundred quid or so, that's all."

"It won't be so much as that, Piet," said Squiff.

"Won't be much less. You can't send her back steerage, and the fares have gone up to lots more than they used to be. Besides, she'll want some money at the other end. I suppose her people will shell out all serene?"

"Not sure about that. But if they don't mine will, though the pater may grouse a bit. You see, she's got to go against her folks when she married this fellow Annan. They were right. She never ought to have done. But she couldn't see him with their eyes."

"What the dooce are you fellows talkin' about?" asked Mauly, looking puzzled. "It's all Greek to me—worse than Greek, because Quelchy's made me learn a little of that, though no more than I could help learnin', by gad! Don't tell me if you don't want to, Squiff, of course. You can have whatever you want. Luckily, I've a fair whack by me just now. There's a pocket-book in that jacket over there, Piet. You might get it. There ought to be three fifties in it, I fancy. Or if it isn't there it's in the desk or the drawer, or somewhere. Must be somewhere, by gad!"

"It's in the pocket of the jacket you're wearing," replied Delarey.

"That's a pity, because it's a beastly fag luggin' it out. Would you mind gettin' it out an' helpin' yourself, Squiff, dear boy?"

"I should. Can't do things quite that way. And you've got to have the yarn, Mauly, however much it may bore you."

"It won't bore me, old fellow. It's talkin' that makes me tired. I can listen to anyone else like—like a Trojan."

"Or an Ephesian," put in Delarey, grinning.

"Eh? I don't quiet follow you, Piet."

"One of the Seven Sleepers. They were Ephesians, weren't they?"

"Oh, by gad! I sha'n't go to sleep while Squiff's yarnin'!"

"I don't believe you will," said Squiff, who knew how easily Mauly's soft heart

was stirred by any tale of misfortune. "See here, old chap, a cousin of mine, Norah Field, ran away from home to marry a fellow named Walter Annan, and he brought her to England. Then the war started, and he joined up. She'd found out by that time that he wasn't by long odds all that she'd thought him; but she didn't know what a very complete rotter he was. He went through a form of marriage in France with a nurse, and then deserted her when he got demobbed. Thought he was coming back to Norah as if nothing had happened; but she wasn't taking any. She'll have money some day, I suppose, though her people have cast her off now, and the nurse hadn't any. Norah dodged him, and came along here, to get me to help her back to Australia. Annan daren't go back there—wanted for something or other by the police, I fancy."

Squiff paused.

"By gad!" said Mauly. "Poor girl! Why doesn't she divorce the scoundrel? She can, y'know."

"Not without money, she can't. And her one notion is to get back to the old home. Perhaps later on she may get rid of the sweep; but all she wants now is just to get away from him."

"I'm dashed glad I'm not short, Squiff!" said Mauly simply. "You can take all I've got. I shall soon be havin' a remittance, an' your cousin mustn't want for anythin'. Where is she now?"

"At Courtfield, in digs I found for her. I say, Mauly, you are a pal!"

"Don't mench, dear boy! It's a pleasure."

"Ow! Yow! Lemme be, Vivian, you young cad! I don't care to be touched by rotters from the slums! I have my dignity to think of!"

The voice was the voice of Bunter, and it came from the passage.

Tom Brown opened the door.

"What's wrong, Jimmy?" he asked.

"Oh, really, Brown! You ought to ask me that question, I think!" said Bunter.

Sir Jimmy had got the Owl of the Remove by the collar, and plainly meant to hang on to him until help came.

"This 'ere fat, thievin' worm 'as got a registered letter addressed to Squiff!" Sir Jimmy said. "An' I ain't trustin' 'im with it. That's what's wrong, Brownney."

"No, I should say that that was right, Jimmy boy," said Delarey. "The porpoise isn't to be trusted."

"Oh, really! And that's all the thanks a fellow gets for being obliging!" said Bunter, tossing his head.

"You've been known to be too obliging with other fellows' letters before now, Bunt," said Squiff. "Hand over!"

"I think you ought to stand me something, Squiff!" bumbled Bunter, as he reluctantly gave up the registered letter.

"I will! Turn him round, Brownney!"

The New Zealand junior twisted Bunter round, and Squiff's foot shot out.

"Yooooop!" howled Bunter.

"I'll stand you that!" said Squiff.

"It's what you deserve. You and I aren't the best friends in the world just now, my bloated tulip!"

Then the door of No. 12 was shut again, and Bunter wandered forlornly away.

Squiff slit open the envelope and drew out what it held.

"My word! A cheque for two hundred pounds!" he gasped. "Am I dreaming? Have I gone mad? Kick me, someone! Kick me hard!"

"Why, it's that Sussex County Ballot affair for the Wounded Soldiers and Sailors!" cried Delarey. His quick

eyes had caught the heading of the letter Squiff held in his hand.

"But I never entered for it!" replied Squiff.

"You did, only you didn't know you had. Someone sent along papers about the scheme to Mauly some time ago, and he forwarded a fiver for twenty five-bob tickets. You remember, don't you, Jimmy? He took one each for us five, and one each for fifteen other chaps—Wharton and that crowd, Peter Todd and Alonzo and Dutton, Bulstrode, Russell, Ogilvy—oh, I can't remember them all, but it's no odds. We didn't bank on anything coming of it; but Mauly thought it would be a pleasant surprise for any fellow who might happen to win a trifle. And now a good, big chunk of the prize-money has come to you, Squiff, just when you wanted it! My word, I am glad!"

Delarey's eyes shone with joy, and not his alone. Sir Jimmy was so excited that he tried to stand on his head; and though Mauly naturally did not attempt anything of that kind, and Tom Brown was also able to restrain his feelings sufficiently to stay right end up, they were no less pleased.

Squiff astonished them. He went to the door and called down the passage:

"Bunter!"

The Owl came back, looking doubtful.

"Could you blow yourself out to a satisfactory state of tightness with ten bob?" asked Squiff.

"What? Oh, really, Squiff, I—I—"

"Here you are!"

A ten-shilling note was thrust into the fat junior's grubby hand. He stared stupidly at it.

"Sorry I kicked you," said Squiff. "You may have meant honestly, though it's hard to believe. You're welcome to that, anyway."

Then the door closed again, and Bunter was left in a state of complete bewilderment.

But within five minutes he was in the tuckshop, and when he emerged he was greasy and jammy about the mouth.

So far as money had been at the bottom of them, Squiff's troubles were at an end. He could send his cousin home to Australia, repay all he had borrowed, redeem his watch, and still have funds in hand.

It turned out that he was not the only fellow at Greyfriars who had profited by Mauly's generosity. Bob Cherry had received a tenner, and Bulstrode had a prize of a couple of pounds. Everyone knew of their windfalls within an hour, but the extent of Squiff's luck remained for the present a secret, shared only by five.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Fishy's Fishy Security.

"SOMEbody's been at my desk!" snapped Squiff.

Johnny Bull looked up from prep, and Fisher T. Fish did likewise.

"Well, I haven't!" said Johnny, with a suspicion of snap in his tone.

"Fathead! Do you suppose I should think you had?"

"Waal, I guess and calculate I haven't, either!" said Fishy.

"I'm not accusing you. I don't suppose for a moment it was you. But someone's been here, that's a dead cert!"

"What have you lost?" Johnny asked.

Squiff hesitated a moment.

But it was plain that he could not hope for any help in recovering the missing article if he would not say what it was. So he answered:

"A pawn-ticket!"

"Ugh!" growled Johnny Bull.

Fishy said nothing. It struck Squiff that he looked rather queer. But he did not suspect him of theft.

"You don't approve, Bull?" said Squiff drily.

"That's no odds. It's your bizney, not mine. Oh, hang it all, I knew that you wouldn't have gone to a pawnshop unless you had been jolly hard up, but—"

"But you don't approve all the same?"

Johnny took thought before replying.

"Well," he said, at length, "it's only because it's you, Squiff. If it had been a cad like Skinner, or a money-grabber like Fishy here, or a chap of Bolsover's sort, I shouldn't have thought anything of it. But you've got pals, and you ought to have gone to them before going to your uncle."

"I did, old man! To you and to Mauly, and to other fellows. I'll explain it all later—can't just now."

Another fellow was to be told the story. But Squiff had no notion of letting Fishy hear it.

In other circumstances, Fisher T. Fish might have felt considerable curiosity. As it was, he had too much to think about to be much concerned with this secret.

Though he sometimes "got left" through over-cunning, Fish was no fool, and he now saw through Skinner's game at once, helped by the fact that he knew Harold Skinner pretty thoroughly.

Fishy wanted to get rid of that pawn-ticket, and he wanted—badly—to get back the cash he had lent Skinner. He did not think that handing over the ticket to Squiff and explaining would accomplish the latter end. He might not be believed. It was best to see Skinner first.

He sought out that sweet youth directly prep was over.

"I guess I've got a word or two to say to Skinner, Stott, and I'd be obliged if you'd vamoose the ranch for a bit," he said.

"Right-ho!" replied Stott. "I say, though, what about that quid you're going to lend me, Fishy?"

The prospect of the loan explained Stott's readiness to oblige. Fishy perceived that, and was diplomatic.

"We'll talk about that later on, I reckon," he said; and Stott went.

Fisher T. Fish locked the door.

"What are you playing at?" asked Skinner.

Fishy threw the pawn-ticket on the table.

"This hyer scrap of paper belongs to Squiff, I calculate," he said.

"Does it?" returned Skinner. "Better hand it over to him, then!"

"Jerusalem crickets! That's some cool! You've sure got nerve, Skinner!"

"I rather guess and calculate I have, Fishy," replied Skinner, imitating the American junior's nasal tones.

"Do you deny that you handed me over that thing as collateral for—"

"I deny that I handed it over to you at all, and I reckon you're going to have some trouble to make anyone believe that I did, Shylock!"

"Snakes! Why—"

"You say yourself that that thing belongs to Squiff. What are you doing with it? I only ask the question in a friendly way. It's really no affair of mine. But I don't fancy Squiff will be very friendly if he finds out you've got it!"

Fisher T. Fish trembled with rage and fear.

"Do you owe me a quid and interest, or do you not?" he demanded.

"Of course I do! I'm not denying

anything that's true. Besides, you've got my acknowledgment of it."

"Yep, sirree! I have so. And that proves—"

"Nothing about that thing, Fishy, dear boy! Think for a moment! What use would a pawn-ticket that belongs to Squiff—I'm surprised to hear that he does anything so low as to pawn things, by the way—be as security for a loan from you to me?"

"No durned use at all! That's what I'm complaining about, I guess."

"You're a queer bird. Have you been dreaming, or is this one of your crafty little rigs? Anyway, it's no go. I don't know anything about that thing, and I don't want to!"

"Shell out the quid and five bob interest, or—"

"Couldn't do it to save my life, Fishy. I haven't as much as five d."

"Bub-bub-but—"

Fishy stammered with rage and baffled cupidity.

"It's n.g. Can't you see how things stand?" said Skinner.

"You—you—"

"Jevver git left, Fishy?" jeered Skinner.

That was too much for Fisher T. Fish. He went for Skinner.

The cad of the Remove was so utterly taken aback that Fishy's bony fists had inflicted some damage on his physiognomy before he even thought of defending himself.

But he hit out at length, and Fish staggered back, claspings his somewhat prominent nose, which was streaming blood.

"You—you rattlesnake, Skinner! You—you—"

"Get out of this!" howled Skinner, turning the key in the lock, and throwing open the door.

In swarmed a dozen or so of the Remove, Squiff and Johnny Bull among them.

"My hat! Skinney and Fishy putting their fists up! Who said that the days of miracles were passed?" cried Bob Cherry.

Squiff, forced against the table by the rush of those behind him, caught sight of the pawn-ticket, and grabbed it at once.

"What are you doing with this, Skinner?" he roared.

"Me? What should I be doing with it?" retorted Skinner, caressing his bruised face. "I don't know anything about your dealings with pawnbrokers. How should I?"

"Rummy thing you knew it was mine, then. For it hasn't my name on it!" answered Squiff.

The brief scrap, only remarkable on account of the fact that the participants in it were not fighting-men as a rule, was forgotten now.

Everybody stared at Squiff and Skinner, and Johnny Bull growled under his breath. This matter would not have become public property if Johnny could have helped it.

"You claimed it," said Skinner, shrugging his shoulders.

"How did it come here?" snapped Squiff.

"Fish brought it. Don't ask me why—I don't know!"

"Fishy, is that true?"

"Nope! I never saw the thing before!" howled Fish.

It was plain to all that either he or Skinner was lying. It seemed possible to most of those present that both were—as was actually the case.

"Well, it's mine," said Squiff. "I suppose no one denies that?"

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He looked round defiantly.

"I'm not claiming it, anyway," said Bolsover, with a guffaw. "I don't deal with uncle."

Squiff paid no heed to that, any more than he did to the many curious glances cast at him.

"I'm going to find out which of you two sweeps took that thing out of my desk, if I can't find out why you took it!" he said.

And with that he went, leaving both Fish and Skinner feeling anxious.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Friends and Foes!

"**T**HERE he goes!" said Tom Brown.

Skinner was on his way to the gates with his bike.

"The silly ass!" snapped Delarey. "Why can't he mind his own bizney? But we don't know that he's dogging Squiff."

"We shall jolly soon see," replied the New Zealander grimly. "Hallo, Mauly, old bird, what's bitten you that you've left the couch in No. 12?"

"Jimmy said that you two were watchin' Skinner, an' that Skinner was spyin' on Squiff, begad!" Lord Mauleverer answered. "So I thought I'd come along."

"My word! This is a surprise!" said Delarey.

"Squiff's a pal, dear boy. I thought you knew that I stood by my pals, dash it all!"

"Sorry, Mauly. You do—no one better. But do you think you've really enough energy to ride a bike as much as six or seven miles?"

"I don't mind tryin', though it's an awful fag, begad! Couldn't we have a motor-car or somethin', if there's so far to go?"

"No, we couldn't. We've got to play sleuths to Skinner, and that kind of thing doesn't go in a car," replied Delarey.

"Oh, well, I dare say I shall live through it. Come along!"

The three got out their bikes. They knew that Squiff was going to meet his cousin, and there seemed little reason to doubt that Skinner was dodging Squiff.

What he expected to gain by doing that it was difficult to guess—unless he intended to find out the Australian junior's secret, and employ his knowledge of it to force Squiff to go easy in the matter of the stolen pawn-ticket.

Squiff and most of his chums believed that Skinner was the thief. The thing had been found in his study. Fish's presence there was suspicious—hard to account for if he was innocent of all complicity, as he vowed that he was. But, with all his greed for money, Fisher T. Fish had never been caught out in actual theft, and Skinner had more than once dealt with property not his own in ways that were doubtful, to say the least of it.

Then, none of them had any real doubt now that it was Skinner who had posted on the notice-board the paper which had so aroused Squiff's ire, and his spite against the Australian junior was made evident by that.

So Tom Brown and Piet Delarey and Mauleverer were not surprised that Skinner should take the Courtfield road. He kept well behind Squiff, lest he should be seen. But Squiff never looked back; he trusted to his chums to attend to Skinner.

And Skinner, not imagining himself followed, only glanced over his shoulder casually once or twice. The trio in the rear did not betray their presence to

those casual glances. They were stalking Skinner with care.

"What's the plan of campaign, begad?" inquired Mauly, when they were more than half-way to Courtfield.

"Blessed if I'd thought about that!" replied Tom Brown.

"It is only a matter of collaring Skinner and sitting on him before he gets too near," said Delarey. "Squiff's to meet his cousin at the first milestone out of Courtfield. He wrote last night to tell her he had good news; so I should think she'd be punctual—if girls ever are."

"Sounds easy enough," replied Tom Brown. "And I've no personal objection to sitting on Skinner as long as is necessary. One way and another he's done his dirty best these last few days to muck things up for old Squiff, and he ought to get it in the neck for that. Hallo! He's getting off his bike! Oh, by Jove, he's met those Highcliffe cads!"

The three dismounted at once. Over the hedges they could see the heads of Skinner, Ponsonby, Vavasour, Monson minor, and Gadsby; but Skinner had turned a bend in the road just before the meeting, and by keeping their own heads low the three who were following him had a chance of not being spotted.

They waited. Skinner talked with the nuts for a minute or two. Then all five remounted, and rode towards Courtfield.

"The putrid traitor!" breathed Tom Brown. "He's taken those beastly outsiders into the secret, you bet! They'll all hide and watch Squiff and his cousin, and then spring out and surprise them. That's the game."

"They sha'n't bring it off, though!" said Delarey. "We'll stalk them, and jump on them when they aren't expecting it. Mauly, old hoss, it's odds of five to three—no; four, for Squiff will take a hand if necessary. Do you think you'll find it too fatiguing?"

"Don't try to be funny, Piet—it's painful, begad!" returned Mauly.

"You're on?"

"What do you dashed well think? I don't know much about stalkin'—I leave that to you. I'll just do what you tell me, an' be ready when it comes to the puichin' part. I don't mind that so much, seein' that it's Ponsonby an' that crew."

"Right-ho! I'll take the lead, if you've no objection, Browney."

"Lead on, MacDuffer!" replied the New Zealander.

"We'll have to ride for a bit, or we'll get too far behind the sweeps," said Delarey. "But don't go rushing round a corner slap into them, Mauly!"

"My dear man, do you think I want to go rushin' anywhere, begad?" returned Mauleverer almost plaintively.

They rode on with all due caution. Squiff would hate to have hidden witnesses to his meeting with his cousin, they knew—would hate it quite as much as if this had been the flirtation which Skinner and the nuts believed it. But it was likely that the girl would hate it even more than he; and these three, who knew her sad story, felt all the chivalry within them enlisted on her behalf, though to them she was only a name.

"Halt!" said Delarey at a turn of the road.

They dismounted.

"The milestone's in sight when we get round here," said the Afrikaner.

"What a head you have for details, Piet, begad!" Mauleverer said. "Now, I wasn't even aware that there were milestones on this road."

"You wouldn't be, not having a head for anything but snoozing, which doesn't need much," answered Delarey. "Let's

scout a bit. Put the bikes behind this hedge—they'll be safe enough."

The machines were left, and they crept along in the lee of hedges towards the rendezvous.

"Thought so!" said Delarey. "No doubt now what they're up to!"

The three had come upon five bikes, stood against a hedge at right angles with the road, in a field.

"Let the tyres down!" ordered the Afrikaner.

Within two minutes ten tyres were deflated satisfactorily.

"If they bolt they'll reach their bikes before we get to ours," said Delarey.

"But I don't think they'll escape us, all the same."

Then the three resumed their checked scout. But in a minute or two Piet called another halt.

"Lie low, you two!" he said.

And he himself stood up, screened by a tree.

"I can see the sweeps!" he said.

"They're within twenty yards of old Squiff, crouching behind a hedge. And there's a girl coming down the road—must be Squiff's cousin Norah. Yes, he's waving to her! Oh, my only aunt, here's luck! Wharton and his crowd! If only we can tip them the wink before Skinner & Co. see them! Here goes to try, though I'm afraid that blundering ass of a Cherry will give the game away!"

But Bob Cherry was not such a blundering ass as all that came to. Like his comrades, he was amazed when Delarey, still keeping the trunk of the tree between him and the enemy, stood up in full sight of the newcomers, and made signs to them to stop. But, like them, Bob stopped, and next moment the Famous Five had drawn in close to the hedge, where they could not be seen by the spies.

"Squiff's meeting a girl—she's his cousin," explained Delarey. "Can't tell you all about it now. But Skinner's been dogging him again, and he's got four of the Highcliffe cads with him. They're in ambush close to the appointed place of meeting. We three were going to rush them. That would have meant a scrap, of course. But if you fellows will help, and we can come upon them unawares, we can just turn the sweeps over, ram their giddy faces into the turf, and sit on their backs, and Squiff's cousin need never know that there are any such animals about. Are you on?"

"Rather!" replied Wharton—the last fellow at Greyfriars to refuse his aid in such a cause.

Squiff and Norah Annan were not twenty yards apart when the eight threw themselves upon the five.

The attack was so sudden and so utterly unexpected that there was scarcely anything worth calling resistance.

Piet Delarey led his men right up to the spot, but he did not take actual part in the attack. He jumped the hedge, and was by Squiff's side before the girl came up.

"Take her towards Courtfield, Squiff!" he said. "Don't stop here. Spies behind the hedge! But we'll see to them. Needn't say anything at all to her."

"Right-ho!" answered Squiff.

The South African junior vaulted a gate some little distance away before Norah came up.

"Who was that, Sam?" she asked.

"Chum of mine. It's all right, Norah, my dear. And I've the very best of good news for you! By an amazing stroke of luck I've got the money for your passage, and you can go directly you can get it!"

"Oh, Sam! Oh!" panted the girl, clinging to his arm. The tears were

running down her face, but they were tears of joy.

If the spies heard what Squiff said they may have begun to entertain doubts as to whether they had really caught him spooning.

But it is unlikely that they heard. They were very busily occupied at the moment.

Maully had gone for Ponsonby, the most dangerous antagonist of the five; and Bob Cherry, who had intended taking Pon himself, fairly gasped as he saw how vigorously and scientifically Maully dealt with the leader of the nuts.

Tom Brown collared Skinner, getting in just ahead of Johnny Bull, who had marked that youth for his prey. Wharton pulled down Gadsby. Inky took Vavasour. Frank Nugent grabbed Monson.

Johnny and Bob, perhaps the heftiest of the seven for such a job as was this, were left without victims—a sure testimony to the speed and certainty of the onslaught, for it was not with their good-will they were so left. It was merely that Maully and Tom Brown had got ahead of them.

"But there's room for another there, Maully!" cried Bob.

And he seated himself upon the back of Cecil Ponsonby.

Johnny took the hint, and joined Tom Brown in keeping down Skinner.

He was not really needed. Plunging and groaning, the spies were helpless. Not one of them could make any real resistance.

"What's to be done with them, Piet?" asked Tom Brown, as Delarey came back.

"Keep them there till Squiff comes!" replied Delarey.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Bowled Out!

SQUIFF came striding back, his face glowing. Seldom in all his life had anything pleased him more than the chance so unexpectedly come to him to relieve his cousin of the worst of her troubles. He and Norah had always been good chums, and there was nothing he would not do for her.

But his face changed as he passed into the field and saw what the hedge had hidden from him. It hardened, and his lips tightened. With all his frank, honest heart Sampson Quincy Iffley Field hated spies and traitors; and he would have been more or less than human if he had felt that he could forgive Harold Skinner then.

"What's it mean, Piet?" he asked. "Aren't those some of the Highcliffe crowd?"

"Yes, old sport—your dear pals Ponsonby, Vavasour, Gadsby, and Monson."

"But what were they doing in this?"

"Skinner enticed them, and they harkened unto his enticement," replied Delarey. "We were following Skinner, as arranged, and we saw them join up. Then we got reinforcements, too; these fellows happened along in the very nick of time. We rushed them, and here they are!"

"I'm no end obliged to all of you," said Squiff. "You don't understand all this—at least, some of you don't. Bull knows. You shall all know later on; but I don't propose to tell these rotters my private affairs. Let Skinner up, will you, you fellows?"

Tom Brown and Johnny Bull got off Skinner's back, and the traitor scrambled to his feet, and stood with hanging head and burning eyes. He could not look Squiff in the face.

"I knew you were a cad, Skinner, but I'm hanged if I thought you were quite such a cad as this!" said Squiff. "You might reckon it a joke to spy upon me, but you fancied you were giving me away to these Highcliffe sweeps, and that was past a joke, anyway. I won't touch you now; I rather think I have another account to settle with you, and we may as well attend to it all at once. But I'm going to give Ponsonby a dashed good hiding."

He turned from Skinner, and Maully and Bob let Pon get up.

"If you can, Field!" hissed the leader of the nuts.

"Oh, I can!" replied Squiff.

And he started in to demonstrate the fact.

The other nuts were allowed to get to their feet. They did not look pretty. Vavasour, the greatest dandy of them all, chanced to have been tumbled over in a wetter spot than any of the rest, and his face was plastered with mud.

"I'll take Gaddy!" said Delarey.

"No, you won't! Gaddy's mine!" snapped Harry Wharton.

"Monson, then!" the Afrikaner cried.

"I bagged Monson!" retorted Frank Nugent.

Piet looked at Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry in comical dismay.

"There isn't even a little one each for us!" he said.

"You can have Vav," said Bob.

"Vav doesn't count. You can't fight with Vav; you can only kick him out of the way. Start running, Vav; I'm going to start kicking!"

Vavasour bolted. Piet shot out his foot and gave him one hearty kick as he went, but would not trouble to chase him.

Monson was down, and refused to rise. He was capable of putting up a fight against Frank Nugent; but he had no zest for doing it. He was just a trifle ashamed of himself, and would have preferred Skinner as an opponent. Skinner had led him into this.

Gadsby kept going a little longer, but when Wharton had tapped his claret he admitted that he had had enough.

But Ponsonby fought fiercely. From the first he had little chance; but he gave some punishment, and took a good deal, before he went down and lay gasping, plainly licked.

"I'll be even with you for this, Field!" he snarled.

Squiff turned away without answering. The Greyfriars fellows proceeded towards where they had left their bikes, Squiff having to fetch his from the road.

"Oh, I say, you fellows!" he shouted. "Some rotter's slashed my back tyre!"

"That was Vav, I'll bet!" said Delarey. "Skinner didn't go into the road. Never mind; they're paid in advance for that, though I only had their jiggers seen to in case they made a bolt."

But Squiff did mind, considerably. The damaged machine was quite unfit to be ridden back.

"I'll lend you Skinner's," said Delarey, with a cheerful grin.

"Skinner's? He's half-way back by now!" growled Squiff, who had not heard Piet's earlier speech.

"Bet you he's not!" returned the South African.

Skinner and Vavasour were found gazing helplessly at the five bikes. Squiff collared Vavasour, and cuffed him soundly. There was no doubt that he had played that trick on Squiff's machine.

"We've taken out the valve rubbers," said Delarey. "You can have them by making application at Study No. 12, Remove passage, at any time between half-past four and twenty to five to-morrow. But you can't have them now; they're in my pocket. Oh, and I say, Skinner, you'll lend your jigger to Squiff!"

"Hanged if I will!" snarled Skinner.

"Fraid you'll be hanged sooner or later whether you do or not," replied Delarey, shaking his head. "But you're going to."

And Skinner had to. He and the Highcliffe nuts were all condemned to tramp back; but Skinner had farthest to go.

Delarey wheeled Squiff's bike in the rear of the rest, while its owner told Wharton and Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent and Inky briefly the story of his cousin's trouble.

"So that explains the pawn-ticket!" said Harry Wharton, when Squiff had made an end. "You are a chump, Squiff! There isn't one of us that wouldn't have lent you all he had rather than have you doing a thing like that—a thing you hated! And we could have raised a bit more than your ticker fetched. You'll have to let us help to get it out for you."

"No need for that now," said Squiff, smiling. "Bob, you had a tanner yesterday, didn't you? Well, my little lot from the same lucky-bag was twenty tenners, that's all, and the way's clear for Norah to go home and for me to cash up everything I owe!"

"Hurrah!" cried Bob.

"So everything's all right," said Frank Nugent.

"Not likely! We've got to find out yet which of those two rotters stole that ticket," growled Johnny Bull.

"My hat! That reminds me of something," said Squiff. "Do you remember, Johnny, when Fishy told us that he had lent Skinner a quid, and had security for it?"

"He didn't say a quid, Squiff. He didn't say how much it was. But I remember it all right. I asked him whether he was sure that the security belonged to Skinner, didn't I?"

"But Fishy denies that he had ever seen the thing before," said Harry Wharton.

"When did Fishy ever shy at telling a whacker if it suited him?" answered Tom Brown.

"What do you think, Manly?" asked Delarey.

"Dear man, don't ask me to think! It's too fatiguing, begad!"

"It's Skinner, for a cert!" said Bob Cherry. "Fishy's a liar and a swindler, but he's not a thief."

"I don't see how we're going to prove it, though, if he sticks to his yarn," Squiff said doubtfully.

"Let's have him up before a tribunal, like we did the Owl, and scare the truth out of him," suggested Bob.

"Good notion!" said Johnny Bull. "Toddy and Smithy will get it out of the bounder, you bet!"

And even so was it done. But it might not have been done so easily but that Fisher T. Fish, having had time to think the matter over, had arrived at the

conclusion that it was better to tell the truth than to lie under suspicion of being a thief. He was acute enough to perceive that many would say that his chances of rifling Squiff's desk were bigger than Skinner's.

So, after a little verbal sparring, he confessed; and when Skinner got back to Greyfriars he was faced with fresh trouble.

He tried to represent the fraud upon Fishy as a joke—stuck to it that he had found the ticket lying on the floor in No. 14—and did all that might be done to brazen the affair out.

But it was no go. He was found guilty, and sentenced, and Tom Brown and Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry shared the role of executioner. Skinner was sore and smarting, if not contrite, when they had done with him. And for a few days thereafter even Stott shunned him.

Squiff's cousin got her passage to Australia in quicker time than had been expected, and Squiff hopes before long to hear that everything is all right with her at the old home. When she lands she will get news of her freedom, for the man from whom she had fled was shot in a public-house row in London a few days after she sailed, and died within twenty-four hours. Squiff cabled the news; he had a big enough balance out of his windfall for that, and to settle up everything and give a bountiful spread to all his friends in the Remove, "and then some," as Fishy might have said.

THE END.

(Another grand long story of Harry Wharton & Co. next week. Make a point of ordering your copy early!)

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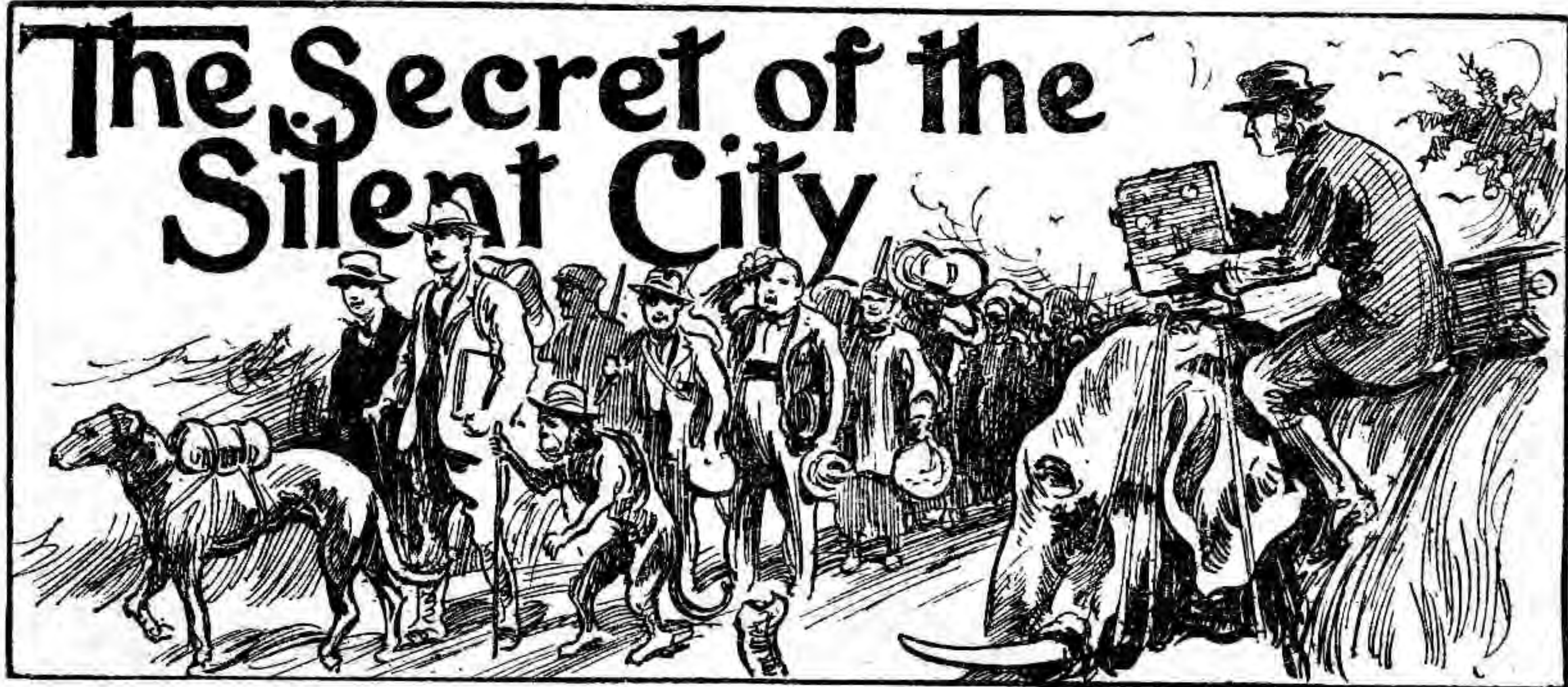
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This is a small line drawing of the Plate to be Given Free. Actual size of Plate with engraving is 7½ inches by 10 inches. The title of the picture is "Boy, 1st Class, JOHN TRAVERS CORNWELL, V.C. The Battle of Jutland, May 31st—June 1st, 1916. From the Picture by F. O. Salisbury, painted for the Admiralty on board H.M.S. Chester." The closing date of this offer will be published in this paper in a week or so. No application will be accepted after that date.

THE FIRST LONG INSTALMENT OF OUR GRAND NEW SERIAL!



Into Untrodden Lands.

"**A** WAY to the west, there," cried Mr. Sherwell, producer of the great Southern Film Company, and pointing with his hand towards what seemed to be an infinity of jungle one side and rolling plain the other, "lies the wonderful Silent City, of which we are in search, and which, if we find—and we mean to find it—will yield the greatest screen picture ever taken!"

A loud "Hurrah!" greeted this little speech.

For a moment Mr. Sherwell, prince of film-makers, paused and looked round at the eager faces near him.

"If it's there, we will explore and film it, or we'll know the reason why," said Dick Grainger, a bright, merry boy of fifteen.

"Our pictures will be the greatest things ever thrown on the screen!" shouted Mike Rafferty, whose sixteen summers had moulded into a keen Irish adventurer, with a sense of humour that made him popular with everyone.

"What about three cheers for Tom Rackett?" put in Larry, the youngest of the three boys, who, although only fourteen, had the pluck and dash of one a good deal older.

"Sure and bedad, three cheers for Tom Rackett it is!" cried Mike; and, as he spoke, he led with a "Hip, hip, hurrah!" that the whole of Mr. Sherwell's exploration party took up, so that the echoes of it went rolling on towards the trackless forests, prairies, and hills of the vast South American continent that held so much peril and adventure for the young explorers.

Tom Rackett, a rather lean fellow, with cadaverous cheeks, but with very bright, alert eyes, the film operator, looked extremely shy and uncomfortable as he received the honour, and, as if for protection, edged nearer to Augustus, a splendid specimen of the largest species of Indian elephant.

"Thanks, thanks!" murmured Tom Rackett, when the cheers had subsided. "Now, then, Augustus," he added to that animal, "up with your trunk and reply!"

The great beast slowly raised his trunk in salutation and acknowledgment, at the same time emitting a series of trumpeting sounds that made the big boarhound,

Boris, leap forward, barking loudly, as he thought there was danger ahead.

"Quiet, Boris!" said Larry, patting him on the head.

The dog gave one short, joyful bark, and then made a playful dash at an exceptionally large chimpanzee who had scrambled down the trunk of Augustus, carrying a metal cup, from which he had been drinking to the success of the expedition.

His favourite resting-place, when not otherwise engaged in mischief, was the firm, broad head of Augustus.

"Good old Wonga!" shouted Dick, exploding with laughter as the chimpanzee made a face that would have frightened even the elephant, had he seen it.

"Why," exclaimed Mike, in a burst of merriment, "sure and bedad Wonga's got a mug of cocoa!"

And as he spoke the monkey solemnly raised the cup to his lips, imitated very cleverly the noise of a popping cork, and was about to swallow the beverage, when Boris put his cold, wet nozzle on the ape's mouth. The next instant the dog received the contents of the cup full in his face. Like lightning the chimpanzee bolted for Augustus, swarmed up his trunk, and remained on the big beast's head, chattering and grimacing.

When the laughter at this episode had died down a loud altercation was heard between a very fat and portly gentleman who had long since lost all sight of his feet, and a lean Chinaman with a pigtail up which Wonga loved to climb.

"You should look after Wonga better!" wailed the fat man, whose double chin also spoke in dumb show. "He's stolen my cocoa!"

"Me velly solly," replied the Chinaman. "But you no drinke cocoa, Wonga no stealee samee."

"Now then, now then," put in Mr. Sherwell, "what's all this nonsense about a cup of cocoa, Tubby Bouncer?" he asked of the film company's comic fat man with all the elastic fixtures.

"I told Tung Wu to keep an eye on Wonga whilst I had a drink," replied Tubby Bouncer, with woe depicted on every line of his fat, jolly face, "and when I wasn't looking Wonga snatched it from me."

"I no tellee when Wonga wantee drinke," expostulated Tung Wu, with a bland smile at Tubby, "and you drinkee

allee day with big paunchee like that, and—"

Biff! The fat arm of Tubby Bouncer flashed out, and the Chinaman lay full length on the ground.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed all the boys together.

"He, he, he! Hi, hi, hi!" or something like it came from Wonga, and again the ape slid down the elephant's trunk, flourishing a long stick. With mischievous intent he scuttled to where the Chinaman had just got on his legs, dealt him a blow on the back of the head, climbed up his pigtail, and sat on the Oriental's shoulders.

Good-naturedly Tubby Bouncer steadied Tung Wu, and when the shrieks of merriment had died down Mr. Sherwell put up his hand to demand silence.

He looked with approval at the three boys, gave an encouraging nod at Tom Rackett, smiled at Tubby Bouncer, and cast a critical eye on Wonga, Boris, and Augustus, the finest of all their respective species he could get for his purposes. All these animals were to figure in certain films, and he knew they would be useful.

He gave a special look at Augustus, on whose broad back rested some of the very heavy baggage, and, most important of all, the cameras, boxes of films, and all the necessary apparatus for a big filming scheme. As he glanced at Augustus, he keenly approved of the elephant's custodian, a huge giant of a negro rejoicing in the name of Quambo, whose duty it was to care for the wants of Augustus.

Then Mr. Sherwell's gaze travelled down the long line of mules, donkeys, and natives, carrying more of the heavy baggage, food, arms, ammunition, etc. And when he looked at the perfect equipment, and thought of all the care and money expended to ensure success of his enterprise, he saw no reason why he and his gallant little band of fellow-workers should not achieve a real triumph. But he knew that dangers and surprises lurked ahead.

"Boys, and everyone in my company," he cried, for a sudden hush had fallen on all, "we are about to start into the heart of unexplored regions! It's not many days since we landed at the coast and prepared our expedition, as you all see it now. Nothing has been left to chance. Everything, down to the most minute detail, has been thought of."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 629.

In Tom Rackett we have one of the most experienced and daring operators of which any film company could boast. He will film all our adventures and everything worthy of note.

"You know the most important thing of which we are in search? Yes; the wonderful Silent City which, report says, lies hundreds of miles from here, through trackless forests, over plains and mountains and rivers. I have a map of the spot on which that city is said to be built. Or perhaps I had better call it a chart. It only indicates quite roughly where the city is supposed to lie.

"This map or chart is incomplete. Somewhere or other is the missing part which, when read with the portion in my possession, will give us the complete clue to the whereabouts of the hidden Silent City.

"There is a mystery about the missing portion of the map. I have a secret theory about it, and I also believe we shall discover it. But this can only be done by going through the utmost hardships and perilous adventures. But if we win through—and I believe we shall—we shall take the whole film world by storm.

"And now," concluded the leader of the expedition, looking keenly at the long line of faithful henchmen, baggage-men, and mules, "if anyone wishes to turn back, let him do so now!"

For a moment there was silence. Then another cheer rent the air, in which Augustus and Wonga joined. There was no one in all that gallant band who would not follow their leader.

"Won't you tell us something more about the missing part of the map?" asked Larry, when silence reigned once more.

"That will wait," replied Mr. Sherwell, with a smile.

"It will make a jolly good yarn round our camp-fire at nights," suggested Dick.

"We shall have other things to do besides spinning yarns," returned Mr. Sherwell.

"Sure and bedad," cried Mike, "if we don't share your secret, what's the good of it at all, at all?"

"Perhaps a time will come when you three boys will have to know it, and when that time comes you shall, I hope, hear it from my own lips."

"Do you know what the Silent City is like?" inquired Dick.

"I haven't the least idea," replied the leader. "I have heard only rumours which were quite sufficient to whet my imagination. The best thing is to get there and see for ourselves."

"As long as I can get some record films I shall be satisfied," chimed in Tom Rackett from the top of Augustus' back, for he was busy with his apparatus for filming the start of the expedition.

"You will have plenty of chances for taking startling pictures, I'll warrant," was his leader's answer, "for we shall pass through untrodden tracts, and we may discover some unknown tribes and animals, besides coming across some wonderful scenery. We shall have to hack our way through dense forests, where Augustus will be very useful; and, should we encounter any hostile natives, I think, if we became friendly, you could astorish and subdue them with a really good picture show, Mr. Rackett."

"That would be stunning!" cried Dick. "Fancy a native chief seeing himself on the screen, just as he actually is in ordinary life! He'd think us the greatest witch-doctors that ever lived."

"Perhaps he'd want to cut our heads off!" wailed Tubby Bouncer, who thought with dismay what a dish he'd make for a cannibal king.

"Begorra!" shouted Mike. "I wouldn't part with me head to save me loife!"

"Bravo, Mike!" yelled Larry with delight, as the others rocked with laughter at this Irish sally. "Next time you say anything, just hold your tongue!"

"Now, then, Rackett!" shouted Mr. Sherwell, interrupting the boys. "Are you ready?"

"Get a move on, and I'll start. I'll film the whole cavalcade, and I'll put Augustus to the double-shuffle afterwards and catch you up. Down with you, Wonga!" he cried. "You've got to be in this show!"

The ape sprang from the elephant's head, scrambled down his trunk, and joined Mr. Sherwell and the boys in

selves on the screen shall we know what we actually look like now. It will be an eye-opener for you boys to see yourselves as others do."

"Sure and bedad," cried Mike, "there's nothing like a new experience, as the Irishman said when he bayoneted a Hun!"

Then the boys looked ahead, and saw stretching before them a scene of wild and splendid beauty such as only South America can show.

The Troublesome Augustus.

THE track they were to follow left the rolling plain behind them and plunged at once deep into the jungle which covered the sides of some low foothills. Farther on these foothills turned into forest-clad mountains, and beyond them, again, so far as they knew at present, lay the



Tubby still kept hold of Tung Wu's pigtail. Consequently, when Augustus hoisted the fat man, the Chinaman was lifted bodily by his hair some six feet from the ground. (See page 19.)

front. The chimpanzee looked very business-like carrying a coil of rope round his neck, and a stout stick, with which he was somewhat too playful when he encountered Boris. He had been taught to carry and use a rope when climbing trees, and sometimes he threw it over high branches, climbed down it, and then swung to another tree.

This feat delighted the boys, and evidently gave Wonga extreme satisfaction.

Mr. Sherwell gave the signal, and the next instant the long line of followers and baggage-mules were in motion.

The boys heard the click-click of Rackett's camera, and knew that the first film of the great expedition was being taken.

"One of these days," said Larry to Dick, "this film now being taken will be seen in London."

"Yes, and many others, too," put in Mr. Sherwell. "Not until we see our-

object of their search—the mysterious Silent City.

Click-click! went the camera as the long procession trailed past! Augustus turned his little pink eyes hither and thither, and lashed his funny stump of a tail. He felt he ought to be in the show, and that he was being done out of his rights.

"Nebber you mind, 'Gustus," said Quambo, the nigger, who treated the huge creature as his twin brother. "You and me make big picture off our own one ob dese days. We beat dat silly Chink and Wonga to a frazzle!"

Augustus quite understood. He lifted his trunk, and trumpeted until the forest rang again with the echoes.

"There's the first film taken," said Tom Rackett, as the last of the native convoy filed past. "If they are none of them worse than that, this'll be the finest

picture stunt ever done. Come along, Augustus! Give a hoist up!"

There was no need to teach Augustus his duty. Twirling round his little trunk, he caught Tom about the waist and lifted him on his back as though he had been a child. Then he picked up the camera, and, lifting it ever so carefully, he passed it up to Tom, who received it and packed it away in the specially-prepared box, from which he could take it out at a moment's notice.

Quambo was the next to be "taken aboard," and, when all his crew was complete, Augustus gave a snort of satisfaction, and set off at a smart trot after the expedition.

Meanwhile, at the head of the party, Mr. Sherwell and the three boys were leading the way along the jungle path.

"And phwat's that box thing ye've got in your hands, Mr. Sherwell?" asked Mike suddenly, after he had been watching the producer for some time.

"It's a compass, Mike. You see that piece of card? Well, that always points to the north, and as we want to keep bearing almost due west, I have only got to look at that to see whether we are keeping in the right direction."

Mike scratched his head.

"It seems to me like me grandmother's ould clock, sorr," he said, with a wink at the others. "When the hand pointed to half-past nine, and the ould crayture struck fourteen, the ould lady knew it was half-past foive in the evening."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the others.

"Has anyone ever been on this track before," asked Larry presently, "or are we the first white men to visit this country?"

"Two hundred years ago a French missionary visited the place," said Mr. Sherwell. "He brought back the story

of the Silent City, and the sketch I have is an exact copy of a map he made."

"Why hasn't anyone tried to find it before us?" said Dick.

"For two reasons. First of all, he said that there was no treasure there, and in olden days no one would make a journey of this sort unless there was some big treasure to find; and, secondly, because the chart he made is incomplete."

"Then how can we find it?" asked the boys in a breath.

"Because I have an idea which has struck no one else," said Mr. Sherwell triumphantly. "On the back of his incomplete chart the Frenchman wrote: 'Sur le dos du negre on trouve—' The remainder is torn away, but I have a notion. Larry, what does that mean?"

Larry, who prided himself on his knowledge of French, translated the words literally:

"On the back of the negro one finds a—' But that does not help much," he added.

"I think you are wrong," said the producer. "I am sure that is the key to the whole puzzle. An old sailor once told me that he had seen a rough map of the Amazon—or, rather, a sketch of that huge river—tattooed on the back of a native. Now, it is my belief—"

"Phwat a notion!" cried Mike excitedly. "He's only got to turn his head and look at his own back to see which way he's facing!"

Mr. Sherwell laughed.

"You've got the idea, after an Irish fashion," he said. "We have got to find a native with the missing portion of our chart tattooed on his back. I know enough of the people of these parts to feel sure that they will have continued to transfer this chart from father to son. Of course, it is only a chance—"

"But a sporting one!" cried Dick. "Three cheers for Mr. Sherwell and the Silent City! Come on, chaps!"

Away at the tail of the party Augustus heard the cheers, and flapped his huge ears knowingly.

Crash, crash, crash! He stumped through the jungle.

Suddenly the sound of voices raised in loud quarrelling was heard. The next moment they came upon the scene of the trouble. Tubby Bouncer, gasping and groaning with heat, was sitting on a tree-trunk, holding tight to the pigtail of Tung Wu. The Chinaman, unable to move, was nearly bursting with anger.

"You gleat lazy lump of fat!" Tung Wu was screaming. "Why not gettee up and walkee allee samce as me?"

"So I will if you will pull me up!" gasped the fat comedian. "Whatever did I come to this place for? I know I shall die. No one cares about me!"

The comic man was so sorry for himself that he nearly wept.

"You lettee go at once!" screamed Tung Wu. "You beaste! Oh, yar!"

This last yell was Augustus' fault. He solved the difficulty at once by catching Tubby up with his trunk and placing him on his head. Unluckily for Tung Wu, Tubby still kept hold of the pigtail. Consequently, when Augustus hoisted the fat man, the Chinaman was lifted bodily by his hair some six feet from the ground.

"Me gettee own back!" shrieked the Celestial. "You be solly one day!"

"Not so sorry as you are now!" grinned Tubby. "Ta-ta, you funny Chink! I'll see you again some day!"

And he waved his fat paw cheerily at Tung Wu as Augustus started off again.

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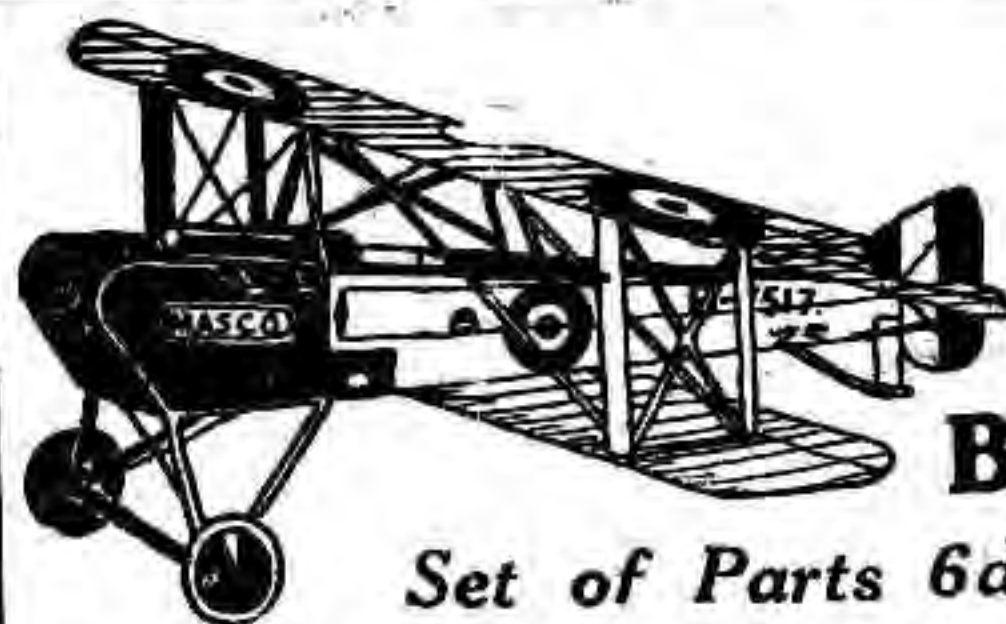
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